DEMOGRAPHIC, INDIVIDUAL, JOB DIVERSITIES AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING: A STUDY OF ENTERPRISING FAMILY BUSINESSES

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Abstract: Employees' knowledge sharing intention in a firm is recognized as a key positive factor of business sustainability and longevity. Yet, the diverse nature of firms has made a difficulty to make general conclusions about employees' knowledge sharing intentions, which is dependent on individual characteristics. Therefore, focusing on family businesses in Sri Lanka, this study investigates the influence of employees' demographics, individuality and job diversity on knowledge sharing intentions. 132 employees who serve in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka were randomly selected for the survey and each was given a questionnaire. The influence of employee demographics, individuality and job diversity regarding knowledge sharing was then analyzed using a multiple regression model. Out of eight factors, only employee's age, level of education and job orientation have significantly influenced the knowledge sharing intentions of employees in family businesses. These findings highlight the importance of the level of employee's age, education and job orientation on individual knowledge sharing behavior in family businesses.

Keywords: family business, knowledge sharing, knowledge management, Sri Lanka.

JEL: M1, M12.

1 Introduction

Employee's behavior, a key determinant of family business performance has been addressed adequately by previous research that focused upon organizational, behavioral and human resource management studies.

Current behavioral studies in knowledge management are trying to find common factors in the case of performance. Specifically recognized as critical to business performance is employee behavior in the respect of knowledge creation, protection and sharing in a competitive environment.

Knowledge sharing among employees in any business leads to the generation of innovations, which confirms the sustainability and longevity of the business (Lin, 2007). Knowledge sharing is simply defined as offering or making the knowledge accessible to a broader audience to use as their necessity (Lin, 2007). In the ever changing competitive business era, this places emphasis on the requirement of knowledge sharing, which gives competitive advantages through the employee's intellectual resources.

Proving this concept, the literature has already confirmed the positive relationship between knowledge sharing of employees and the superior performance of the business (McKeen, et al., 2006; Mogotsi, et al., 2011).

There is no doubt that scholarly research into the influencing factors of knowledge sharing behavior is growing due to its critical importance to the practice.

However, studies that conceptualize the influence of the demographics, individuality and job diversity of employees regarding knowledge sharing are limited (Mogotsi, et al., 2011). Moreover, the research studies to date have provided either inconsistent or mixed results regarding the influence of demographic, individuality, job characteristics and knowledge sharing behavior of employees in businesses.

For instance, Bordia, et al. (2006) and Lin (2007) identified demographic and individual characteristics as critical influencing factors to knowledge sharing, whilst Ismail and Yusof (2009) and Pangil and Nasrudin (2008) concluded that there are no relationships amongst these factors. These inconsistences become more apparent with mixed study findings (Mogotsi, et al., 2011).

When theoretical underpinnings of individual employee's knowledge sharing in the firm are concerned, social exchange (Blau, 1964) and social cognitive (Bandura, 1986) theories have provided clear descriptions about individual behavior. Social exchange theory confirms the 'give and take' behavior of employees working in the firm.

The theory views that employees are so keen on what they get from the firm and what they return to the firm. This is a clear interpretation of exchange between an employee and a firm.

Accordingly, it is not unfair to argue that gaining or receiving a required knowledge by an employee of a firm at a time would possibly encourage that employee also to share the knowledge with the firm. In addition, social cognitive theory also indicates behavioral aspects of employees in a firm.

The theory says that individual behavior of a person in community depends on self-motivation and cognition (Lin and Huang, 2008). Accordingly, the key driving factors of individual behavior arise by themselves depending on relevant characteristics. As highlighted by both theories, knowledge sharing behavior of employees is dependent on societal and individual characteristics, which would support the creation of knowledge sharing culture in the firm.

In this context, to our knowledge, no previous study has guaranteed two aspects about knowledge sharing of employees in a firm. First, every employee shares the knowledge comparably in a firm and, second, diverse firms experience the same knowledge sharing practices.

Addressing this gap of the knowledge, treating family businesses as different type of business (Chrisman, Chua and Litz, 2003), this study analyses about what demographic, individual and job diversity of employees determine knowledge sharing behavior in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka.

This study strives to enhance the knowledge base of human capital by addressing two sub-questions of this study.

First, are demographic, individual and job diversity of employees equally valued for knowledge sharing intentions? Second, in what ways are these demographic, individual and job diversity of employees prone to share knowledge with other employees, who are working in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka?

Further, in response to Seba, et al. (2012), this study is also an attempt to investigate the influencing factors of knowledge sharing behavior of employees in family businesses. Seba, et al. (2012) investigated the same phenomena in different context.

The remaining part of the paper is divided into four sections. Part 1 is a literature enquiry, part 2 explains this papers research methodology, part 3 presents a discussion based upon data analysis and the final part offers the conclusion, limitations and suggestions for future studies.

2 Literature review

This section focuses on reviewing the literature related to this study. It reviews the empirical evidence in the areas of family businesses and knowledge sharing and includes demographics, individuality and job diversity.

This section supports and emphasizes the previous study findings, which highlight the influence of demographics, individuality and job characteristics on employees' knowledge sharing in family businesses.

2.1 Family businesses

Current organizational development, business, management and behavioral studies are increasingly observing developments in the practices of family businesses due to the dominance of family businesses in most economies in the world (Sharma, 2004).

This economic dominance has encouraged scholars to analyze significant features of family businesses (Kuruppuge and Gregar, 2017). Business literature clearly recognizes that family businesses are a particular type of business in reference to the business functions and objectives (Chrisman, Chua and Litz, 2003).

Employees' behavior has also been identified as a significant feature, which differentiates family businesses from non-family businesses (De Alwis, 2016). Despite the fact that there are a large number of definitions for family business reported in the literature, Kellemarnns, et al. (2012) defines family businesses as entities, which are partly or fully managed by people appointed based on blood or relative relationship.

At the same time, Chrisman, Chua and Sharma (2005) state that all family firms cannot be considered as homogeneous entities, as the nature of the business depends on business interactions of owning family, influence of individual family members and society at large (Habbershon and Williams, 1999).

Based on distinctive characteristics, family businesses have been divided into two categories – Lifestyle and Enterprising (Chrisman, Chua and Litz, 2003). Lifestyle – describes a pattern of business operations mainly for family objectives rather than businesses. Entrepreneurs of such businesses mostly promote the family and the family name whilst targeting financial activities.

Enterprising – promotes wealth creation through entrepreneurial activities in the business and professional handling of business activities. Challenging similar businesses and making innovations are identified as practices of enterprising family firms in comparison to non-family businesses.

2.2 Knowledge sharing

Amongst all other different types of intellectual properties, knowledge management literature emphasizes two kinds of knowledge – tacit and explicit (Cyr and Choo, 2010; Liu, 2008; Chang, 2006; Paavola, et al., 2004; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

Tacit or implicit knowledge is defined predominantly as a skill that is born through experiences and practices. This knowledge is not easy to codify as words, as it resides in an individual's minds (Whelan and Carcary, 2011; Arling and Chun, 2011). In contrast, explicit knowledge can simply be documented and transferred among others. Scholars have found significant differences in the sharing of these two types of knowledge (Whelan and Carcary, 2011; Marouf, 2007).

The dissemination of knowledge among employees in organizations has been addressed by many researchers and they reach the common conclusion that disseminating explicit knowledge is easier than tacit knowledge (Ipe, 2003).

As explicit knowledge is shared through books, manuals, leaflets, systems and procedures, no extra effort is needed in order to make the knowledge available for others. Only the intrinsic motivation of individuals to share the knowledge is adequate. However, tacit knowledge sharing is the result of interaction amongst individuals who meet face-to-face (Fernie, et al., 2003).

Organizations are believed to promote meta-abilities amongst individuals, which will encourage the sharing of knowledge. In that sense, a lot more effort and determination is required by business managers to promote tacit knowledge sharing rather than its explicit counterpart.

2.3 Demographic, individual and job diversities and knowledge sharing

Useful knowledge sharing among employees in a business is critical to successful operation of the business. Studies have identified numerous factors – related to individuals, teams and organizations as determinants of knowledge sharing; these conceptualize differing motives, which can facilitate or ham-

per knowledge sharing. Ardichvili (2008) identified personal rewards, societal recognition and normative aspects as motives and cultural, technological and system related aspects as barriers. Their study identified a supportive business culture, trustworthiness and team spirit played a role as enabling knowledge sharing among employees.

In addition to the determinants of knowledge sharing in general, the specific variables of individuality and demographics have been studied by Bordia, et al. (2006) and Lin (2007). These studies have found significant differences between men and women in relation to knowledge sharing. Lin (2009) concluded these correlating factors. Instrumental ties with regard to knowledge sharing is higher for females, whilst expressive ties are higher for males.

Research conducted by Miller and Karakowsky (2005) concluded that gender is a distinctive feature of knowledge seeking and sharing. Similarly, Pangil and Nasrudin (2008) identified a disparity of tacit knowledge sharing behavior based on gender.

A study by Riege (2005) compared the knowledge sharing of individuals based on different age groups, he concluded that age related to barriers regarding the sharing of knowledge.

However, a study by Watson and Hewett (2006) found that the age of the reference group has no influence to knowledge sharing. Collins (2004) study concerning the behavior and age of engineers and knowledge sharing in project related activities concluded that gaining more experience is possible once the employees become older. Aging in a position has positively influenced the supervising subordinates effectively and sharing knowledge and experience with subordinates.

Generally, most of the studies concerning knowledge sharing, individuality and organizational characteristics have concluded organization tenure (the time period for which employees are engaged in the firm) as a best determinant of knowledge sharing (Watson and Hewett, 2006). However, Ojha (2003) had contradictory finding than other studies and identified a negative influence between the variables of organizational tenure and knowledge sharing.

Another study by Ojha (2003) regarded the impact of an employee's level of education. With marital status or level of education bearing no influence on knowledge sharing among colleagues, Mogotsi, et al. (2011) concluded no relationship between demographics and individuality or characteristics such as gender, age and organization to knowledge sharing. Interestingly, work experiences or the service in years has shown a negative influence to knowledge sharing behavior of employees.

Researching about knowledge sharing behavior of a team of research and development, Ismail and Yusof (2009) identified that there is no influence of demographics, individuality or job characteristics of employees to knowledge sharing behavior.

Fig. 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study as a summary of the literature review

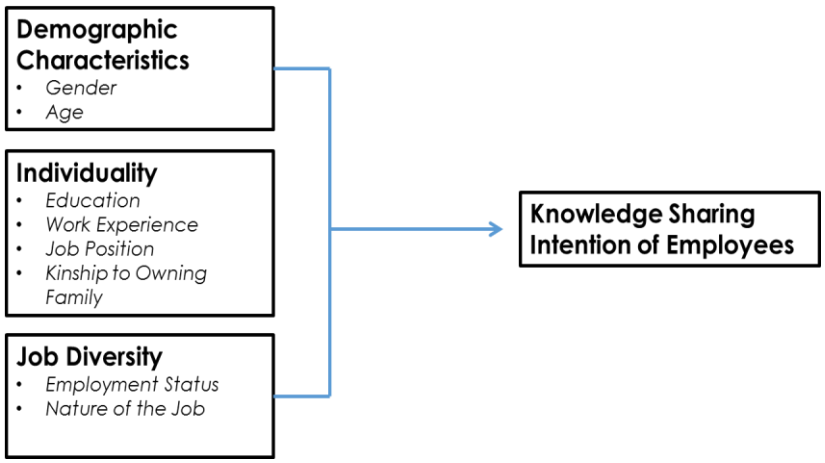

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study
(*Source:* Developed by researchers based on literature)

3 Material and methods

This section reviews methods and methodology of the study.

Sri Lanka is an Island of 21.1 million people covering the area of 65,600 km^2 approximately. The country is identified as lower middle-income generating country having GDP per capita $3,835 in 2016 (World Bank, 2017).

The current status of the economy of Sri Lanka reports 6.2 percent average economic growth per year after 2009, when the civil war ended. The transitioning from rural to urbanized economy orientation has made manufacturing and services sectors stronger than agricultural sector in the country.

In the recent history, from 1505 till 1948, Portuguese, Dutch and British colonists ruled Sri Lanka (Jayawardena, 2000). The Dutch initiated the formal business practices in Sri Lanka with the establishment of the Dutch-East India Company. The Dutch were followed by the British who established the present administration, health, education and specifically business systems that Sri Lanka is having today.

The British converted Sri Lankan subsistence agricultural economy to a trading economy based on tea, natural rubber, coconut and spices. Majority of family businesses in Sri Lanka commenced the operations in the end of 19^{th} or in the beginning of 20^{th} centuries, when the British ruled the country. As a result, around 80 percent of these firms are currently governed by 2^{nd} or 3^{rd} generation of the founder (STAX Report, 2017).

The business continuation of family businesses through generations being in the lower middle-income economy even with transitioning from rural to urbanized economy orientation has created the feasible background to select Sri Lanka as population for this study.

This study concerns employees who are working in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka. To test the proposed model, data were collected by way of a survey.

A questionnaire with measurements based around knowledge sharing, demographic, individuality and job characteristics was developed to collect data from the respondents. Measurements of knowledge sharing for both tacit and explicit knowledge sharing was adapted from Bock, et al. (2005).

Table 1 shows the knowledge sharing measurements, their descriptive statistics and item loading.

Table 1. The measurements, their descriptive statistics and Item loading
(*Source:* Literature review and sample survey, 2016)

Construct	Measurement Item	Mean	SD	Item loading
Knowledge Sharing, Mean = 0.467, SD = 0.495	I intend to share my experience or knowledge on how to work with my organizational members more frequently in the future.	4.74	0.472	0.760
	I will always provide my knowledge on where or know-whom at the request of my organizational members	4.66	0.590	0.941
	I will try to share my expertise from my education or training with my organizational members in a more effective way.	4.62	0.599	0.874
	1 will share my work reports and official documents with members of my organization more frequently in the future.	4.60	0.578	0.820
	1 will always provide my manuals, methodologies and models for members of my organization	4.62	0.607	0.884

Demographics, individual and job characteristics such as gender (male/female), age (21–30 years, 31–40 years, 41–50 years, 51–60 years), education (Up to Ordinary Level, Up to Advanced level, Diploma, Bachelor's, Master's), work experience (< 6 years, 7–12 years, > 13 years), job position (managerial, non-managerial), kinship to the owning family (relative, non-relative), employment status (permanent, temporary) and the nature of the job (labor, machine, mixed) were also included in the questionnaire as questions.

The survey included 132 employees who were selected randomly from 15 enterprising family businesses. The average number of employees who were working in the businesses at the time the survey took place in 2016 was 50.

Family businesses for the survey were selected based on the list of family businesses provided by the Chamber of Commerce in Sri Lanka. All these enterprising family businesses are located in the Western Province (Colombo, Gampha and Kalutara Districts) in Sri Lanka. Data analysis was performed using a multiple regression model.

Demographics, individuality and job diversity served as independent variables and knowledge sharing served as the dependent variable of the model.

KS = C + gender (xa) age (xb) educational qualification (xc) work experience (xd), link to owning family (xe) + job position (xf) + nature of the job (xg) + employee status (xh), where C represents the constant, and xa, xb, xc, xd, xe, xf, xg and xh serve as the independent variables of the model.

Almost all the independent variables were categorical variables. Enabling smooth running of the model, dummies for independent variables were created. Male is used as the reference point for gender and the 18–27 years old group served as a reference point for age. Less than six years of experience; education up to diploma; job position in a managerial level; relatives of owning family; temporary basis employees and employees oriented to labor work were used as reference points for each respective variable.

4 Data analysis and discussion

The discussion about the influence of demographics, individuality and job characteristics in relation to the knowledge sharing behavior of employees in family businesses starts with a brief overview of the sample. Table 2 shows a summary of all the demographics, individuality and job diversities with their mean value with Standard Deviation.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the sample
(*Source:* Sample survey, 2016)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male/female	132	1	2	1.36	.483
Age of the employee		18	48	27.45	6.390
Education level of the employee		1	5	2.29	.912
Number of years in the position		1	3	1.58	.711
Link to owning family		1	2	1.70	.552
Job position in the firm		1	2	1.71	.454
Nature of the job		1	3	2.59	.617
Employee status in the firm		1	2	1.40	.522

A detailed overview of 132 respondents' demographics, individuality and job diversity is given in Table 3. According to this Table, 64 per cent of respondents are male. In addition, 93 per cent of respondents are represented by the age groups of 18–27 years and 28–37 years. And no respondent appears in the age group of 48–57 years. Half of the respondents (47 per cent) have studied up to Advanced Level Examination.

Most of the respondents (55 per cent) have less than six years work experience in the job. The representation for the survey as respondents who have managerial positions is 29 per cent. 26 per cent have shown that they are relatives of the owning family of the business and 39 per cent are working on a temporary basis. Finally, the job orientation of respondents is reported mostly as labor and machines, and accounts for around 66 per cent in this study.

Table 3. Demographic, individual and job diversities of respondents
(*Source:* Sample survey, 2016)

Variable	Content	Count	Per cent (%)
Gender	Male	84	64
	Female	48	36
Age	18–27 years	76	55
	28–37 years	47	38
	38–47 years	09	07
	48–57 years	00	00
Education	Up to Ordinary Level	24	18
	Up to Advanced level	62	47
	Diploma	31	24
	Bachelor's	14	11
	Master's	01	01
Work experience	< 6 years	73	55
	7–12 years	42	32
	> 13 years	17	13
Job position	Managerial	38	29
	Non-managerial	94	71
Kinship to owning family	Relative	34	26
	Non-relative	98	74
Employment status	Temporary	51	39
	Permanent	81	61
Nature of the job	Labor	09	07
	Machines	39	29
	Labor and machines	84	64

The test results of the regression model (Table 4) depicts that the model can explain only 24 per cent variation of knowledge sharing by the independent variables such as the demographics, individuality and job diversity of employees.

Table 4. The test results of the model (*Source:* Own elaboration)

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard error of the estimate	F-Statistics	Significance
0.491	0.241	0.142	0.439	2.435	0.004

However, the model has shown the ability to establish the relationship between these independent and dependent variables (F = 2.435, probability = 0.004 < 0.01).

Further, a linear regression equation is derived based on the results of independent and dependent variables of the model. This equation represents the influence of demographics, individuality and job diversity on the knowledge sharing (KS) of employees of family businesses in Sri Lanka.

$$Y = 4.951 - 0.004x_1 - 0.354\ x_2 - 0.954\ x_3 - 0.415\ x_4 - 0.086\ x_5 - 0.111\ x_6 + 0.031\ x_7 - 1.604\ x_8 + 0.071\ x_9 + 0.310\ x_{10} + 0.048\ x_{11} - 0.674\ x_{12} - 0.036\ x_{13} - 0.100\ x_{14} - 0.289\ x_{15}$$

Table 5**.** Relationship between knowledge sharing and demographics, individuality and job diversity (*Source:* Sample survey, 2016)

Predictor variables	Description	B
	Constant	4.951 (.194) *
X_1	Dummy gender female	-.004 (.091)
X_2	Dummy age 28–37 years	-.354 (.145) *
X_3	Dummy age 38–47 years	-.954 (.397) *
X_4	Dummy age 48–57 years	-.415 (.286)
X_5	Dummy education Primary level	-.086 (.130)
X_6	Dummy education Secondary level	-.111 (.104)
X_7	Dummy education Bachelor's Degree	.031 (.158)
X_8	Dummy education Master's Degree	-1.604 (.515) *
X_9	Dummy work-experience 7–12 years	.071 (.075)
X_{10}	Dummy work-experience less than 6 years	.310 (.232)
X_{11}	Dummy non-relative to owning family	.048 (.157)
X_{12}	Dummy position non-managerial	-.674 (.467)
X_{13}	Dummy base of the contract temporary	-.036 (.102)
X_{14}	Dummy job orientation machine	-.100 (.098)
X_{15}	Dummy job orientation labor and machine	-.289 (.134) *
* $p < 0.05$		

In the analysis of the total of eight diversities as demographic, individual or job (Table 5), only age (demographic characteristic), education (individual characteristic) and job orientation (job characteristic) of employees tended to have a significant influence on knowledge sharing in enterprising family businesses. Similar to the study conducted by Mogotsi, et al. (2011), all other factors are not shown to have any significant influence on employee's knowledge sharing in enterprising family businesses.

According to Table 5, the age group of 28–37 years has an influence on knowledge sharing (probability: 0.016 < 0.05).

The variation of employees' knowledge sharing between the two age groups of 28–37 years and 18–27 years is reported as -0.354.

This indicates that employees who represent their age in the level of 28–37 years share their knowledge more than the employees who are in the 18–27 years age group.

In addition, the employees in the age group 38–47 years also share their knowledge more than the age group of 18–27 years (ß = -0.954, probability = 0 .018 < 0.05).

It can be concluded that employees in the age bracket of 28–47 years are very important regarding knowledge sharing in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka.

Where the level of employees' education is concerned, the test results indicate that employees educated to a Master's level share the knowledge more than employees educated to a diploma level (ß = -1.604, probability = 0.002 < 0.05). This is a clear indication that employees who are educated to a higher level tend to share their knowledge in family businesses in Sri Lanka.

Job orientation in both labor and machines was also shown to be an influencing factor in knowledge sharing (ß = -0.289, probability = 0.033 < 0.05). This reveals that employees who are oriented both in labor and machines are sharing more knowledge than employees who are oriented only in labor in the enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka.

However, out of 8 demographics, only three (age, education and job orientation) are recognized as the influencing factors to the knowledge sharing of employees in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka.

The results of this model show that only 24 per cent of variation in knowledge sharing is explained by these three demographic, individual and job diversities (Table 5).

This indicates that another 76 per cent of influence is caused by the other factors that are not considered in this model. Accordingly, the findings of this study conclude that demographics, individuality and job diversity only partially influence an employee's knowledge sharing in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka.

5 Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the employee's age, level of education and job orientation significantly influence the knowledge sharing of employees in enterprising family businesses. However, this study shows that none of the other factors in the model such as gender, experience, position, kinship to owning family and the contractual basis of employees are statistically significant.

Firstly, this finding, which is related to the first question of this study, has proven that demographic, individual and job diversity of employees equally valued for knowledge sharing intentions of employees who are working in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka.

Secondly, findings indicate results related to the second question of this study. Demonstrating the direction of the influence by demographic, individual and job diversity of employees, who are prone to share knowledge with other employees working in enterprising family businesses in Sri Lanka.

Findings of this study are also inconsistent with the previous studies (Mogotsi, et al., 2011). Accordingly, analysis of the study could address both research questions revealing some important aspects related to employees knowledge sharing behavior in the family businesses.

In addition, this research specifically confirms that employees in the age bracket of 28–47 years share knowledge more than employees in the age group of 17–27 years. When the education level of em-

ployees are concerned, having a higher level of education is a significant factor in knowledge sharing.

The nature of job has also been found to be an influencing characteristic of knowledge sharing between employees. More knowledge is shared between employees if their job is oriented in both labor and machine, as opposed to employees only oriented in labor.

The implications of these findings are of specific importance to family businesses. As family businesses in general are suffering from long term survival problem, knowing the determinants of knowledge sharing between their employees would make decision making easier by the managers in business and strengthen the sustainability of family businesses.

Accordingly, the management of family businesses would be able to strengthen their workforce and get ready for future challenges through these knowledge resources. Knowing the age level, education level and nature of jobs, which influence knowledge sharing more, would make it easier for the policy maker to make decisions in these enterprising family businesses.

This study is limited by addressing only the enterprising family businesses and as such the lifestyle family businesses are not addressed by this study. Additionally, the sample size is also a limitation of this study as the number of employees working in family firms in Sri Lanka is a comparatively higher amount.

Further, the position of respondents is mostly reported as non-managerial (71 per cent) and sharing knowledge would have mostly taken place in managerial positions. However, this study acknowledges these limitations and future research can focus on the elimination of these limitations, whilst retaining the focus of this original study

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