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The link between organisational citizenship behaviours and open innovation: A case of Malaysian high-tech sector

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Abstract We examine the role of organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) in two types of open innovation—inbound and outbound. Data were collected using the questionnaire survey technique from middle and top managers working in high-tech industries in Malaysia. Results show that OCBs positively predict both inbound and outbound open innovation. A closer look reveals that OCBs relate positively to out-bound open innovation in aggregate and in isolation. However, OCBs relate to in-bound open innovation in aggregate only. The implications of these results are discussed and limitations of the study are highlighted.

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Introduction

The shift of organisations from the closed to the open innovation paradigm has received considerable attention in the past 10 years. This mostly seems to be due to the benefits that open innovation entails. As against the case in closed innovation—a model that involves limited interaction with external sources of knowledge and assumes that the innovation processes need to be controlled by the firm—boundaries

of a firm in the open innovation model are porous and there is more interaction with partner firms (Chesbrough, 2003a; West, Vanhaverbeke, & Chesbrough, 2006a). Greater interaction results in greater acquisition and exploitation of technology, and important strategic innovations provide firms with a competitive advantage and several other benefits (Chesbrough, 2003a).

Research has highlighted many open innovation success stories. For instance, the success of Cisco Systems in adopting an external knowledge strategy and embracing open innovation is often highlighted (Chesbrough, 2003a). However, while examples of success in the open innovation paradigm exist, failures have also been reported (Lindgaard, 2013a, 2013b). Failures in the open innovation paradigm could be due to several factors that may be firm- or individual-level, or a combination of both (Chesbrough & Crowther, 2006; van de Vrande, de Jong, Vanhaverbeke, & de Rochemont, 2009).

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A look at the emerging open innovation literature shows that barring some exceptions (Deegahawature, 2014; Naqshbandi & Kaur, 2014), the focus has mainly been on studying open innovation at the firm level (Fey & Birkinshaw, 2005; Laursen & Salter, 2006). The individual-level factors affecting open innovation have thus received less or no attention (Deegahawature, 2014). One such unstudied individual-level factor, organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs), shown by the employees can play a crucial role in the success of open innovation projects (Naqshbandi & Kaur, 2011a). Organisational citizenship behaviours are known to have a beneficial impact on organisational operations and effectiveness (Organ, 1988), and can enhance the ability of an organisation to adjust to environmental changes (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997). As embarking on the open innovation paradigm involves adapting to new external environment changes and conditions, OCBs are likely to facilitate open innovation (Naqshbandi & Kaur, 2011b). Beginning from such considerations, we study the effect of OCBs on open innovation. Specifically, the objective is to explore whether OCBs promote or impede open innovation.

The data for this empirical study were collected in 2012 from Malaysian high-tech companies. We chose the high-tech sector because despite the significant contribution of this sector to Malaysia's economy, not much is documented about open innovation in this sector (Lindgaard, 2012). Besides, high-tech industries are primarily knowledge-driven industries (Hatzichronoglou, 1997), and the incidence and adoption of open innovation is anticipated to be stronger in such industries, thus meriting immediate attention (van de Vrande, de Jong, Vanhaverbeke, & de Rochemont, 2009).

This study fills an important gap by exploring an individual-level determinant of open innovation. As a result, the study is expected to serve as a precursor and shift the focus of future research to individual-level determinants of open innovation. In addition, most of the previous open innovation research has focussed on the U.S. Therefore, examining open innovation in a non-Western context is important as it can help in clearly identifying the prerequisites and limits of open innovation (West et al., 2006a). The study adds to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence about open innovation in the Asian context, and widens the scope of the open innovation debate with this new evidence. Practitioners can benefit from the findings of this study as well, by promoting the relevant OCBs in their organisations to facilitate open innovation.

Explication of constructs

Open innovation

Open innovation as a paradigm has a fairly recent history in innovation literature. Henry Chesbrough, who is credited with coining this term, called open innovation a new approach to innovation based on a different knowledge landscape, with a different logic about the sources and uses of ideas (Chesbrough, 2003b). Chesbrough defined open innovation as "the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation, respectively" (Chesbrough, 2006, p. 1).

Embracing the open innovation model can result in important strategic innovations, providing firms with competitive advantage (Chesbrough, 2003a). In the open innovation model, boundaries of a firm become porous and there is more interaction between partner firms that results in greater technology acquisition and exploitation (West et al., 2006a). Consequently, there is a greater amount of resources and expertise at hand than expected in the closed innovation model.

The current literature highlights two main types of open innovation: in-bound and out-bound open innovations. In-bound open innovation, sometimes also called outside-in open innovation, is the use of discoveries that others make. It involves firms opening up and establishing relationships with external firms so as to access their competencies to improve firm innovation performance. In-bound open innovation thus implies purposive inflows of knowledge or technology exploration relating to innovation activities that aim at capturing and benefitting from external sources of knowledge to improve current technological developments. Out-bound or inside-out open innovation implies that firms can search for external players that have better fitting business models to exploit and commercialise a particular technology than just depend on internal paths to market (Vanhaverbeke, 2006). Thus, out-bound innovation refers to the purposive outflows of knowledge, or technology exploitation, meant to leverage existing technological capabilities outside the boundaries of the organisation. The exploitation of external knowledge and technology can be pursued in several ways, such as by selling intellectual property rights and multiplying technology by diverting ideas to the external environment (Gassmann & Enkel, 2004).

Organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs)

Organisational citizenship behaviours are positive, voluntary employee behaviours often revealed by activities of employees aimed towards other employees in the office or in the organisation, such as helping co-workers, being conscientious towards the work environment, and communicating new and critical information (Yen, Li, & Niehoff, 2008). Organisational citizenship behaviours exhibited by the employees of a firm surpass the minimum job requirements anticipated by the employer, thus advancing the well-being of the co-workers and the organisation or work groups in general. Organisations rely on the employees' practice of OCBs to encourage a positive work atmosphere, to assist other employees with any problems, to be more tolerant of any inconveniences, and to protect the resources of the firm (Witt, 1991). Consequently, OCBs result in high organisational effectiveness (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Organ (1988) argued that good citizenship behaviours are characterised by traits of altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, and courtesy among the employees. These discretionary and unrewarded behaviours, though insignificant when isolated, contribute collectively to the operations and effectiveness of an organisation. Graham (1991) argued that organisational citizenship can be conceived of as a global concept which involves all positive, organisationally relevant behaviours of employees, regardless of whether they are in-role, extra-role, or political behaviours.

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