



Exploring the relationship between proactive personality, work environment and employee creativity among tourism and hospitality employees

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 October 2014

Received in revised form

28 December 2015

Accepted 11 January 2016

Available online 21 January 2016

ABSTRACT

This study explores the effect of proactive personality on creativity and intrinsic motivation enhancement within the tourism and hospitality industry. Using a questionnaire survey, this study generated 283 valid questionnaires. Background variables and moderating effects were analyzed, and causal path relationships were confirmed with structural equation modeling. Proactive personality fosters a positive moderating effect of creativity-supporting physical work environments on intrinsic motivation. In the hospitality and tourism industry, creativity can be practically fostered by recruiting passionate talents, supporting new ideas, and providing creativity-supporting physical environments.

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1. Introduction

The key to success for company performance in the competitive tourism and hospitality industry is satisfying diverse customer demands by providing creative products and services. Because employee creativity contributes to organizations' competitive advantages through, for instance, innovation and market establishment (Amabile, 1997; Kim et al., 2010; Shalley, 1995), organizations must increase employee creativity to gain a competitive edge (Amabile et al., 1996a,b; Woodman et al., 1993).

Creativity-related research results have found that factors such as an individual's personality, cognitive style, problem-solving abilities, intrinsic motivation, family background, educational background, organizational culture context and physical environment can play important roles in the cultivation of creativity (Amabile et al., 1996a,b; Sternberg and Lubart, 1995). Earlier studies began with one-dimensional approaches to exploring sources of creativity, such as personalities, products or processes, and more recent studies have explored how place and situational pressures affect creativity. However, creativity cannot simply be understood

through a single dimension, as it relies on the integration of various factors (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999). Accordingly, recent studies that have taken an integrated approach have developed relevant theories to support this view.

These creativity studies have suggested that domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and task motivation are related to employee creative abilities and performances (Amabile, 1988). Amabile (1996a,b) developed a componential creativity framework, proposing that these elements should interact with one another during the individual creativity revealing process and suggesting that an individual can be more creative when these three components share their best combinations. The interactionist model proposed by Woodman and Schoenfeldt (1990) has been accepted and verified by most studies (Hon, 2012a; Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Tierney et al., 1999; Woodman et al., 1993). This model states that an individual's creative behavior results from the interaction between one's own condition, cognitive style, personality, motivation and knowledge and that these personal factors are influenced by social context and background.

Studies in the tourism and hospitality industry such as Wong and Pang (2003) and Wong and Ladkin (2008), have discussed the link between employee motivation and creativity in international hotels in Hong Kong. Recent studies by Hon (2012a,b) targeted the industry in Hong Kong and discussed the influence of personal traits and contextual elements on employee creativity. Therefore, the link between specific personalities and creative

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behaviors may be explained (Hochwarter et al., 2006). While Burch et al. (2006) believed that divergent thinking and examinations of creativity must be included in personality models and considerations of multidimensional creativity, it has also been noted that multidimensional creativity and divergent thinking have become synonymous in terms of their critical importance in the study of employee creative behavior; in addition, multidimensional creativity is only one aspect of creative thinking, which has been suggested to be an examination generated by both personality and environment in terms of its importance (Horng et al., 2015a,b). Thus, other attributes must be taken into account when considering the different relationships and impacts with creativity (Li and Liu, 2016). To extend existing research, the current study thus aimed to investigate the relationship between proactive personality, intrinsic motivation and physical organizational work environment by investigating the moderation and moderation models of these variables, which were expected to positively correlate with creativity.

Creativity-related studies in the tourism and hospitality industry that discuss the causal relationship between personality traits and creativity are sparse, and proactive personality is rarely used as an independent variable. Of these studies, few validate the mediation effect of intrinsic motivation. This study examines whether industry employees with proactive personality will be affected by social-organizational work and physical environments and whether an environmental shift will generate intrinsic motivation and increase employee creativity. The study also investigates whether individuals who have high proactive personality ratings possess higher intrinsic motivation and more creativity than their counterparts do. Therefore, this study seeks to explain the connection between intrinsic motivation and proactive personality and creative behaviors and to prove that creativity is activated by high intrinsic motivation; specifically, we are interested in whether high intrinsic motivation results in highly creative behavior in intrinsically motivated individuals with proactive personality. This study may be used as a basis for recruitment in practical management. Accordingly, companies may recruit proactive individuals and provide creativity-supporting social and physical work environments at the work site that increase employees' intrinsic motivation and creative behaviors, thus contributing to their competitive advantage and sustainable development in the fierce red-ocean market.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Creativity results from interaction between an individual and his environment; personality traits vary among individuals and have a major influence on the results. Understanding which traits are beneficial for generating creativity has become a major research issue in recent years and it is used as an index for human resource professionals in practical talent recruitment in the tourism and hospitality industry. Research has proven that “nature” factors contribute more to creative behavior than nurture factors (Dul et al., 2011). However, limited research has been dedicated to the subject of proactive personality; thus, it is a worthy topic for our study.

2.1. Proactive personality

Individuals with proactive personality are less likely to be restricted by situational pressures, can challenge the status quo, and can even influence the environment to create change (Bateman and Crant, 1993). They are also better at identifying opportunities, showing initiative and taking action; furthermore, they possess unyielding determination to realize significant change (Crant, 1995). Therefore, proactive personality may be regarded as a complex and diverse interaction between an individual and

an organization (Crant, 2000). Conversely, research on organizational behavior argues that behavior is the result of intrinsic and extrinsic control and that individuals with proactive personality are more intent on directly influencing their context; therefore they more easily achieve successful work performances (Crant, 1996). Empirical research has proven the link between proactive personality and behavior; Fuller and Marler (2009) conducted a meta-analysis on relevant proactive personality research and found that proactive personality is positively correlated with proactive behaviors, leader-member exchange (LMX), work motivation, and work performance. Kim et al. (2009) examined the relationship between proactive personality, new employees' creativity, and job performance; the results showed that newcomers with proactive personality were associated with creativity and that employee creativity fully mediated the relationship between proactive traits, career satisfaction and perceived insider status. Other research results have found that proactive personality is positively correlated with charismatic leadership (Crant and Bateman, 2000), entrepreneurship (Zampetakis, 2008), creativity (Kim et al., 2010), learning motivation (Major et al., 2006) and career success (Seibert et al., 2001).

2.1.1. Trait activation

Trait activation theory can conceptualize the personality-performance relationship, which can explain how particular personality traits will evoke specific performance in particular jobs (Tett and Burnett, 2003). The principle of trait activation emphasizes that a specific trait requires a relevant context to reveal behavior. In other words, the characteristic of a particular behavior need trait-relevant situational clues to awake its expression (Tett and Gutterman, 2000). This concept can be traced to Murray (1938), who suggested that situations exert “press” on individuals to express trait-related behaviors. The concepts of “alpha press” and “beta press” relate to the physical and psychological environment, respectively.

Tett and Burnett (2003) argued that trait activation theory could predict a particular job performance based on a specific personality. The research showed whether personality traits or situational cues had an impact on behavior forecasting. With respect to the activation process, the three trait-relevant cues or sources (the task itself, organization climate and social relationship) played trait-releasing roles, leading particular personalities to specific work behaviors and job performances. Intrinsic motivation can be regarded as a kind of intrinsic value of personality expression, and it is thus considered a need, a driving force or a sense of satisfaction. Therefore, this demand will reveal behaviors when individuals lack satisfaction.

2.1.2. Proactive personality and motivation

Amabile et al. (1994) noted that motivation inclinations might be partly cultivated by environmental factors, such as the characteristics of the organization, socializing behaviors, and specific features of each job. However, other studies have proven motivation is a stable inherent trait and have found that individuals with strong intrinsic motivation choose tasks that activate them to develop new skills and creativity. They invest more in and even enjoy their work; thus, motivation is derived from elements of both nurture and nature (Amabile, 1996a,b).

Joo and Lim (2009) tested the relationship between proactive personality and intrinsic motivation, finding that when employees have high proactive personality ratings and are aware of higher organization commitment, they will normally show higher intrinsic motivation. Thus, proactive personality is described as taking the initiative to realize improvements in the current environment. Individuals do not always react passively to environmental constraints; instead, they can directly change their circumstances.

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