Work environment and atmosphere: The role of organizational support in the creativity performance of tourism and hospitality organizations

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

In this study, we developed and tested a new model of how organizational support affects the organizational work environment and atmosphere that facilitates creativity. A field study of 320 employees showed that organizational support was positively related to the work environment for knowledge sharing, motivation, procedural justice, and promotion. Further, the work environment plays a mediating role between organizational support and employee creativity. These measures of an organization's environment of procedural justice are related to employees' motivation and knowledge sharing, which predict employees' promotion.

1. Introduction

Organizations' survival and growth are widely believed to be highly dependent on employees' effort, behavior, and creativity as they perform service or product innovations (Enz, 2012; Horng et al., 2013; Wong and Ladkin, 2008). Organizational scholars have argued that companies can effectively encourage creativity, behavior, and motivation among employees through the work environment (Amabile and Conti, 1999). Various attributes of the work environment have been considered in the literature, including those related to the physical environment, such as physical elements, challenge, freedom, support, coherence, threats in the work environment, and the effect of status quo (Ceylan et al., 2008; Hon, 2011; Hon et al., 2013), and those related to the social climate, such as employee participation, knowledge sharing, and procedural justice (Schepers and Van den Berg, 2007). Both types of attributes enhance and inhibit creativity. Thus, a central issue that organizations must resolve involves identifying and implementing the attributes of the work environment that facilitate organizational survival and success.

To that end, a growing body of studies suggests that social climate is more relevant to organizational performance than the physical work environment. For example, researchers have found a positive relationship between the quality of the work environment and creativity in campus-based departments and non-university companies (Stokols et al., 2002), in IT and telecommunications service providers (Rice, 2006), and in civil engineering divisions (Schepers and Van den Berg, 2007). Although the studied attributes of the work environment vary in the literature, little research has been conducted to examine the different roles of the work environment in the service industry by studying tourism and hospitality organizations. Some initial research has investigated the importance of creativity in the tourism and hospitality industry (Horng et al., 2013; Richards, 2011) and has shown that the workplace atmosphere may affect employees' creative behavior (Hon, 2013; Wang et al., 2014). For instance, Chiang and Hsieh (2012) found that when employees perceive organizational support, they experience positive feedback at work and feel confident that they can finish their work by themselves. Employees also perceive the importance of their work and may further influence organizational survival and growth. Additionally, organizational support enhances employees' capabilities and improves their task performance, so there is a need to examine how organizational support influences the broader social context, such as an organization's workplace climate. This study attempts to address this issue by investigating the effect of different aspects of the work environment as mediators and the effect of different work environment structures and processes,

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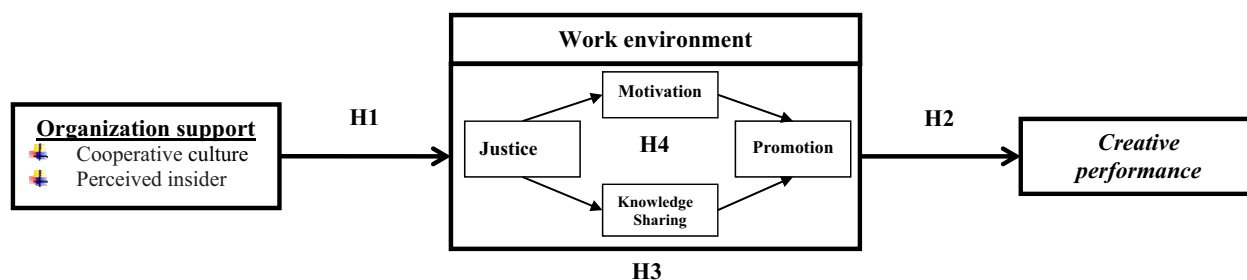
Fig. 1. Model linking cooperative culture and work environment to employee creativity.

such as motivation, procedural justice, knowledge sharing, and promotion, on employee creativity in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Researchers have suggested that care must be taken when examining mediated models because the work environment or social climate within a workplace may drive organizational performance given the different situations that companies face (Collins and Smith, 2006; Fulmer et al., 2003). Previous studies on the work environment have focused on organizations with relatively stable environments and manufacturing processes (Oldham and Cummings, 1996). However, these studies provide little guidance regarding the role of the work environment in the service industry, such as the tourism and hospitality industry, which has a more dynamic environment than other industries. Importantly, organizations that face rapidly changing customer demands derive their primary competitive advantage by encouraging employees' creativity to develop new services or products (Merlo et al., 2006). Thus, there is a need to understand the role of the work environment to facilitate the exchange and combination of ideas and knowledge and to enhance employees' creativity (Amabile et al., 1996; Lukersmith and Burgess-Limerick, 2013). Our second goal was to examine how the work environment affects employee creativity in the rapidly changing environment of the tourism and hospitality industry.

Most of the research on the work environment has focused on knowledge workers (e.g., consultants, marketers, controllers, and designers), ignoring the effect of the work environment on other types of employees (Dul and Ceylan, 2011). This is an important issue because organizations comprise multiple types of employees who have different backgrounds and who may generate novel ideas in different ways (Lepak and Snell, 1999). All employees can create value in an organization, especially in dynamic industries that need lower-level employees to generate different thinking or diverse information to create and combine information in new ways (Lepak and Snell, 2002). Therefore, another objective of this study was to examine how the work environment mediates organizational support and creativity through different employee groups in the tourism, leisure, and hospitality industry.

To preview our arguments and highlight the theoretical and empirical contributions of this study, we elaborate a model of how organizational support affects employee creativity through the work environment and examine the structure of the work environment. Fig. 1 presents this model. We begin by defining organizational support and by theoretically linking it to the work environment. Next, we draw on theory from the work environment literature to theoretically connect the relationship between organizational support and employee creativity. Finally, we extend the application of a new structure of the work environment by examining the effects of these attributes of the work environment on a sample of 320 tourism and hospitality employees.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Perceptions of organizational support and the work environment

This study follows the studies by Cameron and Quinn (1999) and Stamper and Masterson (2002) to measure organizational support. Cameron and Quinn (1999) asserted that cooperation requires common goals, social interaction, and collective gains. Organizational support is necessary to strengthen social ties and to enhance communication and organizational commitment. Cooperative perceptions are relevant in organizational citizenship behavior because they create mutual trust among employees, which is required for knowledge sharing (Schepers and Van den Berg, 2007). When organizational values are shared, trust is produced, and opportunities for interpersonal cooperation increase, allowing teamwork and other organizational competences to flourish (Kull et al., 2012). Doolen et al. (2003) found that fostering communication, knowledge sharing, and cooperation among employees in organizations positively affects employees' effectiveness and satisfaction. Cooperative cultures are therefore an important part of organizational support and are positively related to a pleasant work environment.

According to inducements-contributions theory (March and Simon, 1958), insider employees should be expected to contribute more work and effort to an organization. However, these employees also receive more benefits, training, promotion opportunities, and support from their organizations than outsider workers (Hipple, 1998). Having different expectations on insider and outsider employees and treating them differently allow organizations to evaluate which employees are valuable and worth investing in through training or promotion in order to provide returns on such investments for organizations (Stamper and Masterson, 2002). Thus, when employees perceive insider signals, they will expect to obtain more organizational support through rewards, training, and promotions. Consequently, these employees are more likely to work harder, apply more effort, and motivate themselves to obtain the knowledge and experience that are necessary to belong to the "in-group" in the organization. In summary, employees' perceptions of their insider status will positively influence employees' behavior and the organizational work environment.

Hypothesis 1. Organizational support is positively related to an organization's work environment.

2.2. Attributes of the work environment and creativity

Various definitions of creativity have been proposed in the literature. Richards (2011) noted that while creativity has been recognized as a critical attribute for the development of the tourism industry, determining a standard definition of creativity remains problematic for tourism researchers and managers. The lack of a