



Core self-evaluation and workplace creativity



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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the approach and avoidance framework in the core self-evaluation literature, this study proposes that core self-evaluation may not only prompt a person to acquire more job-related knowledge but may also inspire employees' intrinsic motivation for their jobs and indirectly help the person think of creative ideas at work. Surveying time-lagged data from workers in Taiwanese firms, this study finds support for the mediating effects of domain knowledge and intrinsic motivation. Although previous research has demonstrated the positive effect of core self-evaluation on overall work performance, scholars argue that creativity is a separate dimension of work performance and that factors conducive to overall work performance are not the same as factors that can stimulate creative ideas. Thus, findings from this study may expand scholarly knowledge about the consequences of core self-evaluation and complement the creativity literature by validating an individual-level antecedent to creativity yet unexamined in the creativity research.

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1. Introduction

Core self-evaluation (CSE) is an individual's fundamental and enduring assessment of one's own worth and competence (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). Research indicates that CSE is a higher-order construct encompassing the common and overlapping portions of four well-studied personal variables: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control (see Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012 for a review). In the past decade, CSE has received much research attention (Chang et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2011) and scholars find that CSE is related to the phenomena of the person's satisfaction (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998), engagement (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010), and popularity (Scott & Judge, 2009).

This study complements the research into CSE by examining CSE's consequences for creativity, which refers to a person's thinking of new and useful ideas at work (Amabile, 1983). Since creativity is important for organizational innovations and increased competitiveness (Shalley, Zho, & Oldham, 2004; Wang & Wu, 2012; Wu, 2007; Wu, 2010a, b), much research has examined the personal and contextual factors that may stimulate creative ideas in the workplace (see Shalley et al., 2004 for a review).

This study draws on the approach and avoidance framework (Chang et al., 2012; Elliot & Thrash, 2002) in the CSE literature to argue that since persons with high CSE want to perform well at work and tend to acquire job-related competence and skills (Ferris et al., 2011), CSE can prompt a person to attain job-related knowledge. In this way, high

CSE persons will possess higher levels of domain knowledge, which refers to an individual's familiarity with the factual knowledge of their job domain (Schank & Abelson, 1977).

This study further argues that high CSE persons will also possess high intrinsic motivation for their job. Since a component of CSE is generalized self-efficacy, which refers to a person's estimate of their own ability to perform well in a broad range of situations (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003), and that CSE may prompt a person to actively pursue positive outcomes at work (Ferris et al., 2011), high CSE persons are more likely to feel competent and autonomous on their work post. According to the cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), feelings of competence and autonomy are important for intrinsic motivation, which refers to individual performance of an activity because he or she finds the activity interesting and derives satisfaction from performing that activity itself (Amabile, 1983). Therefore, according to the cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), high CSE persons will also possess higher intrinsic motivation for their job.

This study then draws on the componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1983) to derive hypotheses about CSE's relationship to creativity. The componential theory of creativity argues that domain relevant skills, creativity relevant skills, and task motivation are conducive to creativity (Amabile, 1983, 1988). An important constituent of domain relevant skill is the person's domain knowledge, which concerns a person's familiarity with the factual knowledge of the task at hand (Schank & Abelson, 1977). Task motivation involves intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, the latter refers to a person's motivation for performance of a task not for the satisfaction coming from performing the activity itself but from the external rewards (Porter & Lawler, 1968). The componential theory of creativity argues that only intrinsic motivation, but not extrinsic motivation, can enhance creativity (Amabile, 1983, p366).

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Since this study proposes that CSE may increase a person's intrinsic motivation and domain knowledge for one's job, this study further draws on the componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1983, 1988) to argue that enhanced intrinsic motivation and domain knowledge will, in turn, stimulate creative ideas at work. To empirically test these hypotheses, the authors collect survey data from research and development (R&D) personnel in Taiwanese firms and find support for their arguments.

Findings from this study can expand scholarly knowledge about the consequences of CSE. Although previous research has demonstrated that CSE is positively related to work performance (Chang et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2011; Kacmar, Collins, Harris, & Judge, 2009), research finds that creativity constitutes a separate dimension of work performance (Madjar, Greenberg, & Chen, 2011, p731). Management scholars have long acknowledged that factors conducive to the performance of routine work differ from those that are helpful to the generation of innovative ideas (Thompson, 1965). For instance, to facilitate the execution of routine work, organizations need to impose rules and procedures to regulate employee behaviors (Burns & Stalker, 1961). However, bureaucratic management practices such as rules and procedures are known to stifle creativity (Hirst, Knipenber, Chen, & Sacramento, 2011; Thompson, 1965). Although CSE has been found to positively affect work performance in previous research (Chang et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2011; Kacmar et al., 2009), such finding cannot be extrapolated to predict how CSE may stimulate creativity at work. Extant scholarship also cannot inform managers whether they should recruit workers with high CSE to fill posts that regularly require creative solutions.

Drawing on the approach/avoidance framework in the CSE literature, this study spells out the reasons why CSE may enhance workplace creativity. Findings from this study can thus expand scholarly knowledge on the consequences of CSE by demonstrating the relationship between CSE and a meaningful work outcome that has received much research attention in recent years (Shalley et al., 2004) but up to now remains underexplored by CSE scholars.

This study also contributes to the creativity literature. Extant research into creativity finds that personality factors such as having an open to experience personality and innovative cognitive style may help a person think of new ideas (see Shalley et al., 2004 for a review). This study contributes to the relevant literature by identifying an individual-level factor that may promote a person's creativity but has not yet been systematically examined by creativity scholars. In this way, this study can not only expand scholarly knowledge on the personal factors that may promote creativity but also help managers identify workers with the proper potential to fill posts that require the generation of creative solutions. Last but not the least, by arguing that CSE can heighten a person's intrinsic motivation and prompt one to acquire job-related knowledge, this study explicates the paths through which CSE stimulates new thoughts.

Fig. 1 contains the research model of this study. The relevant variables and related theories are explicated in the next section. The

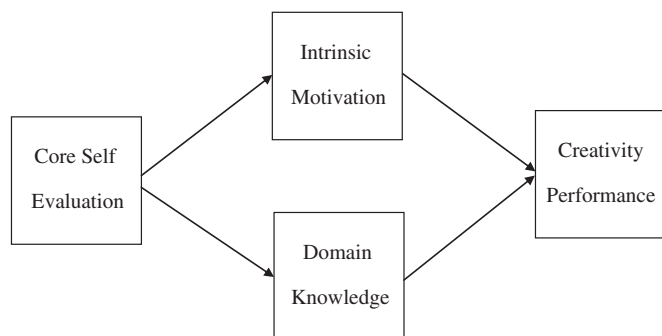


Fig. 1. Proposed model.

hypotheses, research method, and findings are then reported. The implications of the results are discussed in the final section.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Core self-evaluation

Core self-evaluation (CSE) is a person's fundamental appraisal of oneself (Judge & Bono, 2001). Research finds that CSE encompasses the common and overlapping portions of four well-studied personal variables: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control (Judge et al., 2003). Self-esteem is a person's overall appraisal of their own self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Generalized self-efficacy is a person's estimate of their ability to perform under a wide range of circumstances (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001). Emotional stability is a person's propensity to feel calm (Eysenck, 1990), and locus of control is a person's belief that desired effects result from their own behaviors rather than from outside influences (Rotter, 1966).

CSE is also found to positively relate to job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, engagement, and work performance (Bono & Colbert, 2005; Chen et al., 2001; Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005).

2.2. The approach/avoidance framework

To explain why CSE may influence outcomes, Chang and colleagues point to the approach/avoidance framework (Chang et al., 2012, p. 84; Elliot & Thrash, 2002), which argues that many kinds of human experience can be classified in terms of people's sensitivity to positive or negative information (Elliot, 1999). The difference in sensitivities to positive (the approach) and negative (the avoidance) information influences how a person evaluates situations as favorable or unfavorable (Ferguson & Bargh, 2008) and adopt goals directed toward pursuing positive or avoiding negative outcomes accordingly (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Research demonstrates that high CSE persons possess both high approach temperaments such as an extroverted personality, and high levels of learning goal orientation, which refers to a person's desire to develop competence and mastery of a task to pursue positive outcomes (Ferris et al., 2011). Research also finds that CSE is positively related to work performance through the person's approach motivation, which refers to an individual goal setting to fulfill the individual's full potential on the job (Ferris et al., 2011, p151).

3. Hypotheses

3.1. CSE and intrinsic motivation

The approach/avoidance framework (Chang et al., 2012; Elliot & Thrash, 2002) argues that high CSE persons are sensitive to positive stimuli and are inclined to adopt approach goals to pursue positive outcomes (Judge et al., 2005). Since scholars find that CSE is related to better work performance through the approach motivation orientation, which refers to a person's setting goals to actively pursue positive outcomes at work (Ferris et al., 2011), high CSE persons are more active and autonomous at work in pursuing positive results.

In addition, the components of CSE encompass generalized self-efficacy, a person's estimate of their own ability to perform and cope successfully with an extensive range of situations (Chen et al., 2001). Such finding indicates that high CSE workers will also feel more competent on their job.

The cognitive evaluation theory argues that feelings of competence and autonomy are important conditions for intrinsic motivation (Zuckerman, Porac, Lathin, Smith, & Deci, 1978). Since persons with high CSE are more likely to feel autonomous in pursuing positive outcomes at work and feel more competent than their counterpart workers with low CSE, this study proposes that CSE will be positively related to

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