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The creativity level of Taiwan hospitality undergraduate students

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Abstract

It is believed that the ability to think creatively has been recognized as an important competency for success in business and many other fields. The purpose of this study is to explore the hospitality students' creative level and to understand how student characteristics that affect creativity. The results showed the variables of gender, difference universities, location of universities, and type of high school graduated were associated with hospitality students' overall creative performance.

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1. Introduction

It is no longer sufficient merely to have excellent knowledge and skills in today's rapidly changing environment. Especially many new marvelous technologies may become obsolete tomorrow and some specific skills and knowledge may rapidly become outdated. As a result, employers are seeking university graduates who have problem solving skills, and the ability to generate new ideas to meet the challenges of knowledge-based economies environment. It is believed that the ability to be creative has been recognized as an important for success in business and many other fields (Craft, 2006; Fryer, 2006; Jackson & Shaw, 2006; Sternberg & Lubart, 1996; Tas, LaBrecque, & Clayton, 1996). From the perspective of many practitioners and educators in hospitality, creative thinking ability is one of the competencies required to work in the hospitality industry (Ashley et al., 1995; Horng & Hu, 2008; Horng & Lee, 2006; Horng & Lee, 2009). Therefore, the ability to think creatively is an important competency that

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should be cultivated in hospitality management education in the twenty-first century. However, little research has conducted to investigate the creativity level of hospitality undergraduate students in Taiwan. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the hospitality students' creative level and to understand how student characteristics that affect creativity.

Taiwan is now moving ahead with the development of its tourism and hospitality industry. The number of foreign visitor arrivals has been increasing annually, from 3.8 million in 2008 to 7.3 million in 2012 (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, 2013a). In addition, according to the Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, Taiwan's tourism receipts accounted for 4.40% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012 (Tourism Bureau of Taiwan, 2013b). Therefore, tourism has thus been identified as one of the major forms of economic activity in Taiwan. This rapid growth of the hospitality and tourism industry has created an increasing demand for labor in the industry; as a result, many educational institutions have established programs related to the field of tourism and hospitality. The findings of this study can help students to understand their creative abilities and whether they will be able to demonstrate their creativity in their future career. In addition, based on the results of this study, students can gain a better understanding of what can be done to develop their unique creativity before they graduate. Another contribution of this study is that its results could be of benefit to hospitality industry practitioners in the development of training programs to enhance employees' creativity.

2. Literature Review

The word "create" was used as early as 1393 by the English poet Chaucer. In the eighteenth century, science and scientific thinking became the tools of discovery for thinking about the physical world. Furthermore, ideas on creativity and on genius, originality, talent, and education were discussed throughout the eighteenth century (Albert & Runco, 1999). As Sternberg (1999) pointed out that creativity has been discussed from many aspects such as psychometric approach (Guilford, 1950; Torrance, 1974), psychological approach (Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992), biographical approach (Simonton, 1999; Gruber & Wallace, 1999), biological approach (Martindale, 1999), computational approach (Boden, 1999), and contextual approach (Amabile, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999).

Among these six approaches, psychometric research was one of the most frequently used approaches that Guilford (1950) trumpeted 50 years ago, and psychometric studies conducted in the past few decades are the foundation of our current understanding of creativity. This approach shows that creativity consists of measurable, stable traits or factors that differentiate creative individuals from others. Guilford emphasized the role of divergent thinking in the development of new ideas, and this was the starting point for all psychometric measures of creativity. Based on Guilford's work, Torrance (1966, 1974) later developed the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT), and this has become the most widely used approach to studying creativity (Plucker & Renzulli, 1999). The TTCT consists of several verbal and figural tasks involving divergent thinking to assess the quantity and quality of creative ideas produced by the test taker. Four divergent thinking abilities are used to measure an individual's divergent thinking level: (a) fluency—the number of relevant responses; (b) flexibility—the number of different categories of response or shifts in thinking; (c) originality—the number of unusual yet relevant ideas as determined by statistical infrequency; and (d) elaboration—the number of details used to extend a response (Torrance, 1966, 1974).

3. Methodology

Year four undergraduate students in academic universities which offered hospitality management related programs in Taiwan were selected as sampling population for this study. The convenience sampling method was used to select the sample in this study. The Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults (ATTA) (Goff & Torrance, 2002) was used to measure the creative thinking ability of the respondents. This test requires respondents to apply their imagination and thinking ability to think of new ideas, define problems, and solve problems through three activities related to verbal response and figural tasks. The ATTA assesses four components of divergent thinking: Fluency, Originality, Elaboration, and Flexibility.

The booklets of creativity test (ATTA) were returned to the authorized test provider in Taiwan, Psychological Publishing Co., Ltd., and scored by professionals in the company. SPSS version 21.0 for Windows was used for all data analyses. Descriptive analyses were conducted to show the overall characteristics of the respondents based on

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