



# Intrinsic or extrinsic motivations for hospitality employees' creativity: The moderating role of organization-level regulatory focus



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## ABSTRACT

This study predicts that the intrinsic (creative personality) and extrinsic motivators (transformational leadership) reinforce employee creativity and job performance in the hospitality industry. More importantly, the positive moderating effects of organizational regulatory focus (promotion and prevention) on employee creativity are included in proposed model. To test the model, data (339 employees and 72 supervisors) was collected from 62 Taiwan international hotels in the summer of 2014. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) were conducted to examine measurement model and hypotheses. The HLM results confirmed the effects of individual-level factors. However, an organizational promotion focus only enhances the extrinsic creative motivator. The intrinsic creative motivator was reinforced by an organizational prevention focus. The research findings suggest that hospitality managers should consider both individual- and organizational-level factors simultaneously. Indeed, the organizational goals could be set depending on the features of the department. Further discussions and implications are elucidated.

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## 1. Introduction

Creativity is typically regarded as the generation of novel and useful ideas (Amabile, 1983, 1996; Amabile et al., 1996). Creativity, which is usually manifested in an overall firm strategy and is a source of competitive advantage, is related to an individual employee's efficiency and job performance (Amabile et al., 2004; Gong et al., 2009; Hon, 2013). The importance of employee creativity has been noted by many scholars and practitioners across the sectors (Borovskaia and Dedova, 2014; Kattara and El-Said, 2014; Lin and Wong, 2014; Wong and Ladkin, 2008). The hospitality industry has also focused on employee creativity because firms in this industry are currently facing a highly competitive and changing environment that requires a creative and innovative workforce to deliver quality service and even to delight customers (Hon, 2013; Hon and Lui, 2016; Kim and Lee, 2013; Wang et al., 2014). For example, restaurants rely on innovative menus and new products

to satisfy customers; and hotel firms need creative ideas and innovation to improve service processes and service quality (Li and Hsu, 2016).

Prior research has indicated that employee creativity is motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. For instance, Gough (1979) developed a creative personality scale (CPS) that measures an individual's creative abilities. Oldham and Cummings (1996), who applied the CPS, demonstrated that when employees' characteristics are creativity-relevant, their production of creative works exceeded that of their less creative colleagues. Conversely, in terms of the extrinsic motivator for creativity, a supervisor's leadership style may play a key role in fostering employee creativity (Gong et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2014). Transformational leadership, a contemporary leadership theory, has been studied intensively (Bass, 1991; Liao and Chuang, 2007; Lowe et al., 1996; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Wang et al., 2014). Transformational supervisors motivate followers to achieve goals by inspiring confidence and self-reinforcement (Bass et al., 1987; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Dvir et al., 2002). Furthermore, several scholars suggest that employees become more creative when they are motivated to achieve goals with self-reinforcement rather than by a reciprocal relationship which focused on external rewards (Amabile et al., 2004; Bass, 1985; Shalley and Gilson, 2004; Shin and Zhou, 2003).

However, ignoring the effects of organizational factors might result in overstating the effects of individual-level motivators.

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For example, recruiting employees with creative personalities or fostering their creativity are good ways to inspire creativity; however, the organizational context, such as atmosphere, culture and regulation might reinforce or reduce the effects of creative personality and leadership. It has been noted that many creativity studies tend to focus either on individual creativity while ignoring the contextual influence of the group or on group creativity while ignoring individual factors within the group (Hon and Lui, 2016). Numerous hospitality studies investigating employee creativity simply focus on the effect of individual-level factors (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2011; Tracey and Hinkin, 1994; Wang et al., 2014; Wong and Pang, 2003; Wong and Ladkin, 2008) rather than looking into organizational-level factors simultaneously. The current study, therefore, argues that the individual-level intrinsic and extrinsic creative motivators are affected by organizational goals.

Higgins (1997) applied his regulatory focus theory to identify the processes by which people align themselves with appropriate goals and standards (Brockner and Higgins, 2001; Higgins, 1997, 1998; Higgins et al., 2001). Specifically, people may engage in self-regulation with a promotion or prevention focus depending on how they approach pleasure and avoid pain. People with a promotion focus typically pursue their ideal selves, dreams and aspirations, thereby heightening the importance of potential gains. In contrast, people with a prevention focus emphasize their sense of duty and responsibility, thereby increasing the importance of avoiding losses. Indeed, regulatory focus theory not only applies to individual but also to organizational goals (Higgins, 1997, 1998). When an organization set its goal on promotion or prevention focus, as individuals do, it will change its organizational culture or climate. An organization's regulatory focus on promotion or prevention would likely lead employees to care more about positive outcomes or the absence of negative outcomes. This study, therefore, argues that an organizational regulatory focus is a critical organizational moderator of individual employee creativity.

Finally, the relationship between employee creativity and job performance in the hospitality industry is examined directly in this research. As mentioned above, creativity has been identified a source of corporate competitive advantage; however, little research in hospitality employee creativity has confirmed the relationship between creativity and job performance. The current empirical study is thus expected to fill this gap in the hospitality literature.

To sum up, this study attempted to contribute to the hospitality literature by integrating individual- and organizational-level factors into employee creative performance. Specifically, this study intended to confirm the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic creative motivators on hospitality employee creativity and job performance. More importantly, this study is the first research to examine the moderating effect of organizational-level goals on employee creativity. The results of this study can provide insights into leadership and human resource management for hospitality managers to improve employee creativity and job performance. On the following section, the related studies would be reviewed to develop the hypothetical model. Next, on the methodology section, the processes of data collection, measurement of two-level variables, and data analyses are described. Finally, theoretical contributions, practical implications and limitations of this study are provided at the last three sections.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Effects of employee creativity

Creativity, as mentioned, could be defined as the production of novel solutions to problems related to any human activity

(Amabile, 1983, 1996). In the past, creativity was usually associated with artistic industries such as film, painting, music, and poetry; however, it has also been recognized as a factor critical to an organization's survival and competitiveness (George and Zhou, 2001; Gong et al., 2009; Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Zhou, 1998). In the hospitality industry, employee creativity has been considered as a critical factor to the success of an organization. There have been numerous studies focusing on external motivators or factors influencing employee creativity in the hospitality industry. For instance, Wong and Pang (2003) identified 5 job-related motivators to creativity in the hotel industry from perspectives of employees and supervisors through in-depth interviews and a dichotomous selection test. Wang et al. (2014) identified that transformational leadership positively affects employee creativity *via* creative role identity and creative self-efficacy. Kattara and El-Said (2014) found several internal barriers of the company that could slow down the implementation of creativity in the Egyptian hotel market. Wong and Ladkin (2008) also indicated that job-related motivators are positively related to employee creativity in the Hong Kong hotel industry.

Additionally, intrinsic motivators to the effect of creativity have been widely discussed in previous studies. Oldham and Cummings (1996) argued that people who are creativity-relevant perform a better creative outcome. Similarly, Coelho and Augusto (2010) investigated frontline service employees and found that both job complexity and work relationship influence employee creativity through factors such as intrinsic motivation and role stress. In Kim and Lee's (2013) study, the orientation toward learning goals and knowledge collection are identified significantly enhancing service employees' creative behavior. In the context of hospitality higher education, Lin and Wong (2014) confirmed the mediating effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on the relationship between classroom learning environment and creativity among hospitality students. According to the results of previous studies, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are recognized as critical antecedents of employee creativity.

### 2.2. Creative personality, TFL and employee creativity

Creative personality is defined as the core personal traits and dispositions correlate with creativity (Gough, 1979; Oldham and Cummings, 1996). Intrinsic motivators are defined as persons who engage in activities that are congruent with their interests or personal sense of satisfaction and fulfillment (Hennessey and Amabile, 1988). Putting together, this study argues that creative personality be regarded as an intrinsic motivator for creativity. A large body of literature has indicated that identifying a set of personal characteristics and attributes are positively associated with creative achievement, such as attraction to complexity, intuition, aesthetic sensitivity, toleration of ambiguity, and self-confidence (Barron and Harrington, 1981; Davis, 1989; Oldham and Cummings, 1996). To identify personal creative characteristics, Gough (1979) developed a creative personality scale (CPS). Moreover, Oldham and Cummings (1996) demonstrated that the CPS score was strongly related to creative performance. Accordingly, the extent research predicts that having an inherent creative personality leads to task-related creativity for hospitality employees. After reviewing the prior literature, the following hypothesis would be tested.

**H1.** Employees' creative personalities significantly increase employee creativity.

Extrinsic motivators are defined as persons who engage in activities to achieve a goal external to task engagement (Hennessey and Amabile, 1988). However, some of extrinsic goals or motivators, such as job wages and job advancement, generally produce less creative outcomes than those from intrinsic motivators (Amabile, 1985). Wong and Pang (2003) suggested that hospitality employee

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