



Emotional intelligence and creative performance: Looking through the lens of environmental uncertainty and cultural intelligence



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ABSTRACT

Despite the need to better understand the relationship between employee creativity and emotional intelligence, research remains scant and ambiguous. We examine the effect of emotional intelligence (EI) on frontline employees' creativity and the mediating role of environmental uncertainty (EU) as an explanatory mechanism to understand the EI and creative performance (CP) relationship. In addition, we test for the interaction effect of EI and CI on frontline employees' creativity. Using a sample of 283 frontline employees (FEs) from four and five star hotels, structural equation modeling is employed to test the proposed hypotheses. Results reveal that EI has a positive impact on FEs' creative performance. The findings also confirm the mediating role of EU in the relationship between EI and CP. Moderating regression analyses show that CI strengthens the impact of EI on CP, albeit with a marginal increment in explanatory power. Important theoretical and managerial implications flow from our findings.

1. Introduction

Supporting employee creativity is one of the major human resource challenges for organizations in the 21st century hospitality industry (Chang and Teng, 2017). This makes the need to understand the relationship between employees' personal ability – emotional and cultural intelligences – and creative performance, acute, especially taking into account the mediating role of environmental uncertainty. The purpose of our study is to address this need. Whilst supporting efforts from organizations in improving employee creativity are widely documented, given our purpose, it is worth emphasizing that recent research highlights that managers in the hospitality industry “face several internal barriers which slow down the proper implementation of creativity principles and make it complicated to grasp the perspective of employees in this context” (Kattara and El-Said, 2014, p. 140). Hence, the purpose of our research endeavor, and its employee personal ability and environment perspectives, are most opportune and timely.

Employees with the ability to “think out of the box” can create a competitive edge for the organization and better deal with the complex challenges and fast changing environment of the modern world (Jafri et al., 2016). Due to increasing competition in the hospitality industry, organizations place greater emphasis on creative performance (CP) to maximize customer service quality and satisfaction (Tsai and Lee,

2014). Creativity leads to the generation of novel and innovative ideas resulting in new product and service development (Tajeddini et al., 2017). The new products and services developed through creative ideas enable hospitality organizations to respond to the changing needs and wants of the customers and remain highly competitive (Chang and Teng, 2017).

Given the established significance of employee creativity, it is not surprising that scholars have stressed the need for more in-depth research into the concept of creativity, its association with organizationally desired variables and also the personal and contextual factors which enhance or reduce it (e.g., Kim et al., 2012; State and Iorgulescu, 2014; Tsai and Lee, 2014). A close examination of the relevant literature delineates a number of potential factors which foster creativity such as ethical leadership and intrinsic motivation (Feng et al., 2016), transformational leadership and creative self-efficacy (Mittal and Dhar, 2015), proactive personality and responsibility for change (Jiang and Gu, 2015), and a high level of generosity and vigor (Carmeli et al., 2014). Related literature recognizes several personal characteristics positively related to creativity (Joseph and Newman, 2010; State and Iorgulescu, 2014), but the antecedents of creativity remain under-researched.

Recently, a handful of studies have focused on the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and creativity (Jafri et al., 2016; Tsai

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and Lee, 2014; Vratskikh et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the notion of EI is relatively new among hospitality researchers, even though scholars such as Prentice and King (2013) and Sigala and Chalkiti (2015) state that emotional intelligence leads to organizational creativity and better organizational performance. EI refers to the individual’s potential for achieving the skills of self-consciousness, self-management, social consciousness, and social management (Goleman, 1998). Despite its importance and relevance, to the authors’ knowledge there appears to exist limited research investigating the relationship between EI and the creativity of frontline employees (FEs) in the hospitality industry (Vratskikh et al., 2016). This gap is important because as noted by Coelho et al. (2011, p. 31), “creative frontline service employees may be crucial in ensuring organizational performance.” As a first step to fulfill this gap, this study focused on the effect of EI on FEs’ creativity in the hospitality industry.

Existing studies on the relation between EI and creativity have focused more on the direct effect (Tsai and Lee, 2014), rather than seeking to understand the mechanisms by which EI enhances creative performance or investigating the personality traits which strengthen the above relationship (Vratskikh et al., 2016). Thus, to overcome this gap, we take environmental uncertainty (EU) as an expository mechanism to understand how EI affects frontline employees creativity. Furthermore, this research aims to test the role of cultural intelligence (CI) as a personal ability to moderate the relationship in question. Therefore, the study uses creative performance as the final outcome variable and tests the dynamic relations amongst the study variables.

This study has three objectives. Firstly, it examines the effect of EI on the creativity of frontline employees. Secondly, it explores EU as an explanatory mechanism to understand the mentioned relationship. Finally, it tests the interaction effect of EI and CI on frontline employees’ creativity (see Fig. 1). The results of the study strengthen our understanding of the effect of personal variables (EI and CI) on frontline employees’ creativity in the hospitality industry. Moreover, understanding moderation and mediation effects of the chosen constructs on the EI and CP relationship extends our existing knowledge of personal resource and performance outcomes.

This study is one of the few studies in the field of hospitality investigating creative performance. Its importance and novel contribution, lies in demonstrating the link between emotional intelligence and creative performance as emotional intelligence and the management of skills of self-consciousness, self-management, social consciousness, and social management, are crucial for creativity in hospitality organizations (Prentice and King, 2013). The study also recognizes the dynamic environment in which hospitality organizations operate in their attempts to boost up their creative performance. We are able to explain

the relationship between emotional intelligence and creative performance through the lens of environmental uncertainty, a research avenue identified by Tajeddini et al. (2017) in their study of service innovativeness in hospitality organizations. Investigation of the cultural intelligence as a moderator is one additional distinctive innovation and unique contribution of the present study. The hospitality industry is one of the most diverse industries in the world with a highly heterogeneous workforce and customers and cross-cultural interactions among them (Nazarian et al., 2017). This study is one of the first studies in hospitality research investigating how individuals’ cultural ability and knowledge to adapt their interactions with people of other cultures affect the relationship between emotional intelligence and creative performance.

2. Theoretical review

2.1. Emotional intelligence

The primary concept of emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the individual’s ability to consider one’s own and others’ emotions, discriminating between them and using this information to control one’s own and others’ thoughts and actions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1998) describes EI as a complex form of intelligence, comprising perceptual and cognitive abilities, and a main determinant of staff performance and positive organizational outcomes. Mayer and Salovey (1997) refined the definition of EI with the “four branch” model. This model consists of four abilities: the ability to understand their own and others’ emotions; the ability to apply emotions for cognitive facilitation; the ability to perceive emotional information; and, finally, the ability to control their own and others’ emotions. Another definition of EI, which is used to evaluate EI in the present study, is that by Wong and Law (2002), who argued that EI consists of four components: self-emotional evaluation, evaluation of others’ emotions, adjustment of emotions, and using emotions. They also emphasized that EI is a significant predictor of work performance outcomes (e.g., creative performance and voluntary tasks). Since its introduction, the notion of emotional intelligence has emerged as a significant and effective antecedent of job-related attitudes, like organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), job satisfaction, safety behavior and deviant workplace behavior (Vratskikh et al., 2016). It also affects work related outcomes, such as innovation, service recovery performance, profitability and creativity (Kim et al., 2012; Prentice, 2016; Tsai and Lee, 2014; Vratskikh et al., 2016). According to the above description, EI is a key factor for employees, especially frontline employees who are in direct contact with customers. These employees require this ability to manage

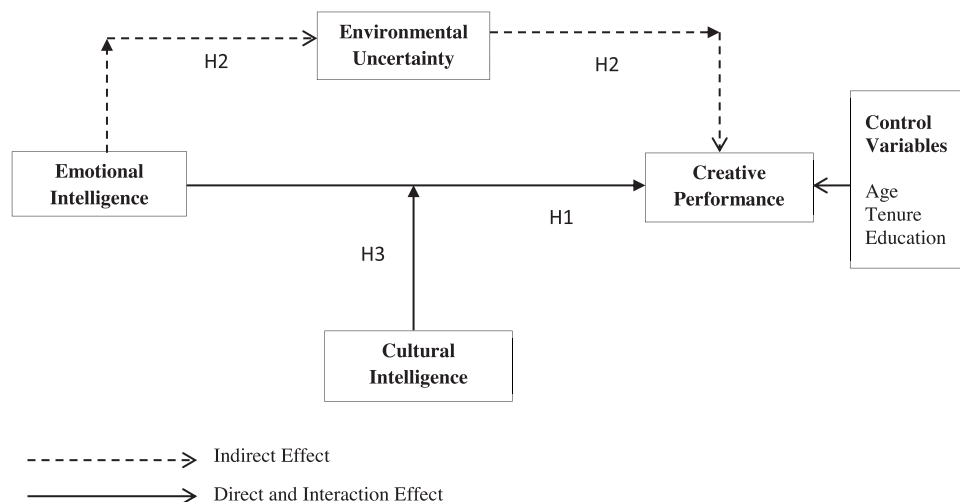


Fig. 1. Research Model.

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