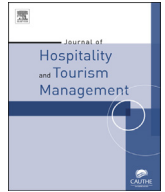




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Perceived organizational support, employee creativity and proactive personality: The mediating effect of meaning of work



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of perceived organizational support (POS) and proactive personality on meaning of work and employee creativity in hotel businesses. Data was collected through a survey of 274 hotel employees, and structural equation model (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. The results indicate that both POS and proactive personality have positive effects on the meaning of work and employee creativity. While the mediating effect of meaning of work on the relationship between proactive personality and employee creativity is fully supported, the mediating effect of meaning of work on the relationship between POS and employee creativity is only partially supported.

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1. Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, supporting creativity and creating perceived support helps to improve creativity in many organizations (Diliello, Houghton, & Dawley, 2011; Ibrahim, Isab, & Shahbudin, 2016) while also increasing job satisfaction and reducing turnover intention (Cheng, Yang, Wanc, & Chu, 2013). Specifically, creativity involves the generation of new and useful ideas while innovation involves the application of these ideas to new products and processes. The process by which creative ideas are transformed into new products and services is significantly influenced by changes in the external environment (Saroghi, Libaers, & Burkemper, 2015). Organizations view employee creativity as a source of competitive advantage because it enables employees to increase organizational performance and investigate new processes, techniques or products (Ibrahim et al., 2016).

Because a supportive environment for creativity is an important determinant of organizational performance (King, Chermont, West, Dawson, & Hebl, 2007), organizations have to attach importance to creativity. Therefore creativity is an important variable in order to increase organizational performance. However, there is a lack of research about creativity in business environments because

creativity is often associated with artistic activities, such as film making, acting, painting, composing music or writing novels and poetry, which are recreational rather than business activities. Empirical research also usually focuses on routine operational tasks and meeting the needs of tourists in hotel organizations (Wong & Ladkin, 2008). However, in order to develop employees' creative and innovative behaviours in hotel businesses, where communication with customers is essential, the antecedents of these behaviours need to be determined.

The dependent and independent variables of this research are as follows: employee creativity, proactive personality, perceived organizational support and meaning of work. Proactive personalities are defined as those who identify and use opportunities and take initiative until a meaningful change is achieved (Crant, 1995). They are also referred to as those who use initiative to improve existing conditions or create new conditions (Crant, 1995). Businesses support innovation to create new conditions, which increases the importance of encouraging, valuing and rewarding businesses for promoting creativity and innovation. Recruiting creative personalities or improving the creativity of employees are two ways of promoting creativity in the workplace (Kandampully, Bilgihan, & Zhang, 2016: 158; Chang & Teng, 2017: 134). Meaning of work is defined as the balance or harmony between the characteristics of the employees and expectations of the employees (Morin & Dassa, 2006), which happens when employees dedicate themselves to a valuable and meaningful job (Steger, 2012). Perceived organizational support is the general belief that the

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organization care for the contributions and welfare of its employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In other words, employees feel secure in their organizations and use the support they have. Many studies in the literature (e.g. Diliello et al., 2011; Ibrahim et al., 2016; Zhou & George, 2001) have shown that high perceived organizational support enhances employee creativity. Joo, Hahn, and Peterson (2015) also found that employees state that they will continue to work in their organizations as long as their organizations care about their well-being and give them important operational tasks (Joo et al., 2015).

According to Arefin, Raqui, and Ari (2015), organizational concern for their welfare encourages employees to show proactive behaviours. However, employees with proactive personalities also change the work environment and encourage positive organizational outcomes, such as supervisory support (Li, Fay, Freze, Harms, & Gao, 2014). Such individual differences can be explained through personality traits, which conceptualize how people are psychologically different from each other (Uppal & Mishra, 2014). Proactive personality is an important factor for increasing personal creativity in organizations (Kim, Hon, & Lee, 2010) so organizations that wish to emphasize creativity and innovation may be more successful if they attract people with these traits (Kim, Hon, & Crant, 2009). In the hospitality sector, services are produced through employees' personal interactions with customers, which highlights the importance of employee personality in this sector. That is, employee personality traits are the main variables determining the quality of their relationships with customers and the level of customer satisfaction (Ekinici & Dawes, 2009). In the hospitality industry, meaning of work increases employees' organizational commitment (Jung & Yoon, 2016) so offering employees' work that is meaningful to them and consistent with their personal preferences improves their work performance (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015).

Given this background, this study has three objectives: (1) to investigate the effects of perceived organizational support and proactive personality on meaning of work; (2) examine the impacts of perceived organizational support, proactive personality and meaning of work on employee creativity; (3) determine whether meaning of work mediates these relationships. This study contributes to existing knowledge by filling several gaps in the literature on employee creativity and meaning of work. First, only a handful of empirical studies of the hospitality sector have examined the antecedents and/or consequences of meaning of work. Second, a literature search revealed a lack of studies into the relationship between meaning of work and creativity. The present study therefore focuses on employee creativity as one of the outcomes of meaning of work. Third, from a human resource management perspective, employee creativity is an important outcome of perceived organizational support. Given the need for employee creativity in the tourism sector to provide customer satisfaction by responding to customer requests as effectively as possible, it is important to encourage administrative practices that ensure employee creativity. Lastly, this study investigates meaning of work's role as a mediator because organizations have more chance to attract talented employees if they offer meaningful work that leads to employee creativity.

2. Theoretical foundations and hypothesis formulation

2.1. Perceived organizational support

Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by Blau (1964), explains social changes in societies and human behaviours. It also explains the contributions of employees to their organizations and their expectations as a result of their interactions. According to SET,

when a person does a favour to someone, s/he expects that the favour will be returned in the future (Demir, 2009). Accordingly, employees display positive behaviours (Ibrahim et al., 2016) and contribute to their organizations (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) with the expectation that their favours will be rewarded (Demir, 2009). This suggests that if organizations satisfy employee needs, value their contributions and pay attention to their interests then employees will experience job satisfaction, which in turn will benefit the organization and increase perceived organizational support.

The increased job satisfaction resulting from these behaviours on the part of the organization also stimulate reciprocal emotions. As organizations value their employees more so the employees engage in more positive organizational behaviours (Çakar & Yıldız, 2009). According to perceived organizational support theory, employees attribute personality traits to their organizations and they attach importance to their contributions to their organization and the level of organizational well-being.

Eisenberger et al. (1986) applied SET to explaining employees' belief in and commitment to their organization. They found that employees with a strong social exchange ideology show greater organizational commitment, want to contribute to the organization, experience higher perceived organizational support and have low absenteeism. As employees' perceived organizational support increases, they feel more obliged to contribute to the organization's prosperity and help their organization to achieve its goals.

The social exchange theory change includes the external benefits, psychological needs, advice and information sharing between both parties (either the employee or the employer). According to this theory, developing and maintaining relationships among individuals are based on utility and finance. Individuals want to maintain the benefits and financial relationships they perceive in mutual relationships (Park et al., 2016). Social exchange theory argues that people compare their achievements with those of other people or institutions. If a person perceives that organizational support is high then s/he contributes more to the organization (Demir, 2009). According to the organizational support theory of perception, when employees feel that they are supported by their organizations, their sense of responsibility for the welfare and goals of organization improves (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

They also report that when employees get help from their colleagues within the organization, they feel more responsible for them. According to the theory, when somebody displays a positive behaviour, employees feel obliged to respond to this behaviour positively. Thus, employees try to help those who previously helped them and display positive behaviours towards them (Gouldner, 1960). According to Yu and Frenkel (2013), perceived organizational support has positive consequences for both employees (e.g. increased job satisfaction and positive mood) and organizations (e.g. increased employee emotional commitment, improved performance and reduced unwanted behaviour). Employees with high perceived organizational support show greater creativity (Shantz, Alfes, & Latham, 2014), commitment (Gupta, Agarwal, & Khatri, 2016), work performance (Vatankhah, Javid, & Raoofi, 2017) and reduced turnover intention (Park, Newman, Zhang, Wu, & Hooke, 2016; Torre-Ruiz, Vidal-Salazar, & Cordón-Pozo, 2017) or undesirable behaviours (Pomirleanu & John Mariadoss, 2015).

2.1.1. Perceived organizational support and meaning of work

According to SET (Blau, 1964), if employees perceive that they are supported by their organization, they contribute more to organizational outcomes as a way to respond to that organizational support. Employees are empowered by knowledge, support, resources and opportunities like formal and informal power provided by their organization (Tolay, Sürgevil, & Topoyan, 2012).

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