



Linking transformational leadership and employee creativity in the hospitality industry: The influences of creative role identity, creative self-efficacy, and job complexity



Chung-Jen Wang^{a,*}, Huei-Ting Tsai^a, Ming-Tien Tsai^b

^a Department of Business Administration, National Cheng Kung University, No. 1, University Road, Tainan City 70100, Taiwan

^b College of Commerce, Wuyi University, No. 16, Wuyi Road, Wuyishan, Fujian 354300, China

H I G H L I G H T S

- A model links leadership and creativity in the hospitality industry.
- Based on 395 supervisor–employee dyadic data from international tourist hotels in Taiwan.
- Transformational leadership has positive influences on employee creativity.
- Creative role identity and creative self-efficacy are mediators in the proposed model.
- Job complexity is a moderator in the proposed model.

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Integrating transformational leadership, creativity and social cognitive theories, we explore the relationships among transformational leadership, creative role identity, creative self-efficacy, job complexity and creativity. Structural equation modeling (SEM) with bootstrapping estimation was conducted using data from 395 supervisor–employee dyads from international tourist hotels in Taiwan. The results show that supervisors' transformational leadership positively influenced employee creative self-efficacy and creativity. Moreover, creative role identity was found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creative self-efficacy, while both creative role identity and creative self-efficacy were found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity. Specifically, job complexity was found to moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creative role identity, the relationship between employee creative role identity and creative self-efficacy, and the relationship between employee creative self-efficacy and creativity. We discuss the implications of these results for research and practice in hospitality context.

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1. Introduction

As people spend more time to improve their leisure lives, firms in the hospitality industry are now immersed in a highly competitive environment and need a more creative work-force to provide high quality services (Claver-Cortes, Molina-Azorin, & Pereira-Moliner, 2006). Therefore, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to exploring the antecedents of employee creativity, which is required to generate novel ideas for new products, services and process, especially in the field of hospitality

research (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Horng & Lee, 2009; Robinson & Beesley, 2010; Wong & Ladkin, 2008; Wong & Pang, 2003). For example, leadership behavior, such as that highlighted in transformational leadership theory, has been examined for its links with employee creativity (Shin & Zhou, 2003). Transformational supervisors motivate employees to achieve goals by higher-level self-reinforcement, instead of by developing reciprocal exchange relationships with them (Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, 1987; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). In contrast to a focus on external rewards, transformational leadership adopts approaches consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), and supports the view that self-regulation is the main motivator to foster specific employee behaviors. As a result, the first objective of this study was to integrate the theories of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +886 6 2757575x53321; fax: +886 6 2080179.
E-mail address: wchungzen@gmail.com (C.-J. Wang).

transformational leadership and creativity in the context of the hospitality industry.

In addition to investigating the contribution of transformational leadership to employee creativity, a review of the literature shows that few recent studies have emphasized the importance of the critical mediators between these two variables. Using a social cognitive theory perspective (Bandura, 1986; Bandura & Locke, 2003), Tierney and Farmer (2011) demonstrated that creative role identity and creative self-efficacy are positively related to employee creativity. Creative role identity reflects whether an individual views himself/herself as a creative person (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003), and creative self-efficacy reflects to what degree an individual believe he/she has the ability to produce creative outcomes (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Based on these earlier works, we adopted creative role identity and creative self-efficacy as two mediators between transformational leadership and individual creativity in a three-path mediation model. Meanwhile, we also further developed an integrated theory by testing this long mediating chain. According to the results based on data from 395 supervisor–employee dyads from international tourist hotels in Taiwan, transformational leadership has significant direct influences on employee creative self-efficacy and creativity, and at the same time, has a significant indirect influence on employee creative self-efficacy via the mediator of creative role identity, as well as has a significant indirect influence on employee creativity via the mediators of both creative role identity and creative self-efficacy.

Moreover, as job complexity is an important contextual factor that influences employee creativity (Oldham & Cummings, 1996), employees in complex jobs tend to express greater intrinsic motivation to foster creativity than those in routine and simple jobs (Amabile, 1988; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). The results of our empirical study indicate that there are stronger relationships between transformational leadership and creative role identity for front line group than for back office group, as well as between creative role identity and creative self-efficacy, and between creative self-efficacy and creativity. In other words, employees in complex jobs, such as front line work, can have more recognition of their creative role identity, more confidence in their creative self-efficacy, and a better focus on creative ideas, while those in routine jobs, such as back office work, may have less recognition of their creative role identity, less confidence in their creative self-efficacy, and have more constraints with regard to the development of creativity.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by conceptually and empirically linking transformational leadership, creativity and social cognitive theories using the variables of transformational leadership, creative role identity, creative self-efficacy, creativity, and job complexity in an integrated model. The results of this research also add to a more comprehensive understanding of transformational leadership as it relates to employee creative outcomes in the context of hospitality.

2. Theory and hypotheses

This section first examines the direct effects of transformational leadership on employee creative self-efficacy and creativity. It then examines the linkages and indirect influences among transformational leadership, creative role identity, creative self-efficacy, and employee creativity. Finally, it investigates the moderating roles of job complexity in the relationships between transformational leadership and creative role identity, between creative role identity and creative self-efficacy, and between creative self-efficacy and creativity. The hypothesized model is illustrated in Fig. 1.

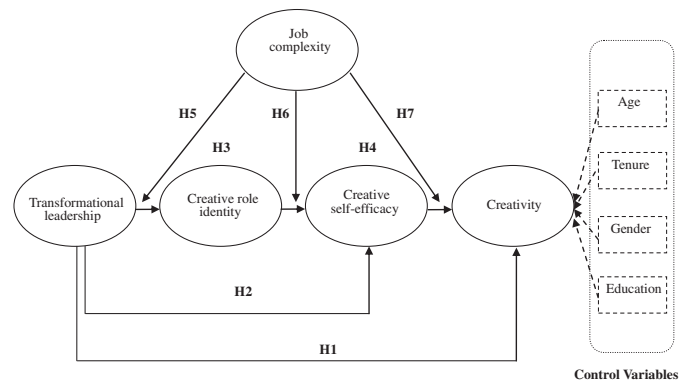


Fig. 1. The hypothesized model.

2.1. Transformational leadership and creativity

Creativity means the capability to produce novel ideas or effective solutions to problems (Amabile, 1983, 1988), and organizations with creative employees can thus create extra value and maintain competition advantages in a dynamic business environment (Amabile et al., 2005; Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; George, 2007). Since the field of hospitality is labor intensive, it is necessary to have a more creative work-force to deliver better knowledge-intensive business services to travelers and achieve high levels of customer satisfaction (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010; Robinson & Beesley, 2010; Wong & Pang, 2003). In addition, recent studies suggest that work environment factors, such as styles of leadership, may influence the creative behaviors of employees (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Burns (1978) proposed that leadership can be transactional or transformational leadership. Supervisors with transactional leadership can influence their employees by establishing clear goals and providing valuable rewards in a reciprocal exchange relationship, while supervisors with transformational leadership can influence their employees by broadening established goals and helping to boost their confidence at work (Bass, 1990; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). Moreover, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) theorized that transformational leadership is composed of four behaviors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. *Idealized influence*, or charisma, refers to a leader being a charismatic role model for employees, positively affecting their perceptions and behaviors. *Inspirational motivation* refers to a leader fostering employees' desire to work cooperatively to accomplish a collective goal. *Intellectual stimulation* refers to a leader inspiring the questioning of assumptions, reframing problems, and stimulating employees by raising their intellectual curiosity and encouraging the adoption of novel approaches. Finally, *individualized consideration* involves understanding and appreciating the development and needs of different employees (Bass et al., 1987; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Sosik, Avolio, & Kahai, 1997).

The transformational leadership style can thus provide employees with useful feedback, encourage them to make additional efforts to achieve novel solutions, and boost their intrinsic motivation to think creatively (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Sosik et al., 1997). Most important of all, supervisors with a transformational leadership style can motivate employees to achieve goals by higher-level self-reinforcement, instead of by developing reciprocal exchange relationships with them (Bass et al., 1987; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Accordingly, Amabile et al. (2004) proposed that leader behavior is a key feature of the work environment for creativity, while these definitions imply that transformational

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