

Antecedents of Employee Creativity Management Capability: Empirical Evidence from Furniture Exporting Businesses in Thailand

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Abstract

Employee creativity management capability is an organization's ability to encourage employees to generate critical thinking, develop behavioral patterns, improve functional task performance, and effectively solve problems which are considered the most important driving forces of business success. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among vision for proactive operations, top management support, organizational learning culture, continuous environmental change and employee creativity management capability. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 139 managing directors or managing partners of furniture exporting businesses in Thailand. The multiple regression analysis was used to verify hypotheses. The results highlight that top management support, organizational learning culture, and vision for proactive operations had a positive and significant effect on employee creativity management capability, respectively. Theoretical and managerial contributions, conclusion and suggestions for future research are provided in details.

Keywords: Employee Creativity Management Capability, Vision for Proactive Operations, Top Management Support, Organizational Learning Culture, Continuous Environmental Change

Introduction

In today's dynamic and competitive business environment, many organizations confront both internal and external environments that are radically changing. In order to survive under such circumstances, one of the important factors in running a business is managing employees' creativity (Yang, Lee and Cheng, 2016). Employee creativity can help an organization create unique business strategies as well as distinctive organizational capabilities which play a vital role in response to increasing effectiveness and efficiency to develop new product and service to build or sustain a competitive advantage (Amabile and Pillemer, 2012). Building employee creativity in an organization requires a strong support factor of vision, top management, culture, and environment to ensure that creative ideas are geared towards helping organization to respond to customer demands and business goals. The role of employee creativity

management capability is regarded as a new concept in the administration of creative which originates from an employee's ability, knowledge, and skills in an organization. It is due to the combination of an employee's creativity and an organization's management capabilities to generate new ideas, products, and processes that can bring the greatest benefit to an organization (Gelhard and Delft, 2016). Therefore, organizations need to emphasize the management of employee creativity that is not only a core capability, but also a useful thing to building business success and innovation (Mach-Król, 2015).

The conceptual framework proposed in this study is based on the contingency theory which emphasizes the appropriate adoptions of a resource (i.e. employee creativity management capability) which allows an organization to improve, develop, and create its resource for the promotion and generation of crucial competencies corresponding to customer demand and rapid market changes (Drazin, and Van de Ven, 1985). Employee creativity management capability provides a firm with management appropriate to the employee's abilities and developing skills that not only focus on building superior creativity value, but also fostering a process which can lead to the stimulation of employee creativity in quickly adapting to changes in business environments. Previous studies shows that the internal factors (i.e. vision for proactive operations, top management support, and organizational learning culture) and external factors (i.e. continuous environmental change) play a vital role in supporting the potential of employee creativity management capability in corresponding to a rapidly changing environment which is considered essential to create sustainable business in the future (Gelhard and Delft, 2016). Based on the contingency theory, firms with employee creativity management capability can achieve competitive advantage and gain superior performance over rivals.

Furniture exporting business is one of the most important industries that stimulates economic growth in Thailand. Such business growth increases adaptability and responsiveness of firms which are considered an effort to maintain a market share (Kasikorn Research Center, 2016). The current condition of the furniture exporting businesses in Thailand under the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) brings about a competitive advantage to expand investment using preferential taxes, raw materials quality control, and better design (The Federation of Thai Industries, 2015).

Based on the literature of employee creativity research, there are little empirical studies which aim to investigate the effect of antecedents on employee creativity management capability. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this research gap by exploring the role of antecedents of employee creativity management capability in furniture exporting businesses in Thailand. Given that there is little empirical research, particularly in the context of furniture exporting businesses, the present study contributes to the existing literature on employee creativity.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

A conceptual framework of this study is based on literature review which proposes the relationships among vision for proactive operations, top management support, organizational learning culture, continuous environmental change, and employee creativity management capability. Therefore, a conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

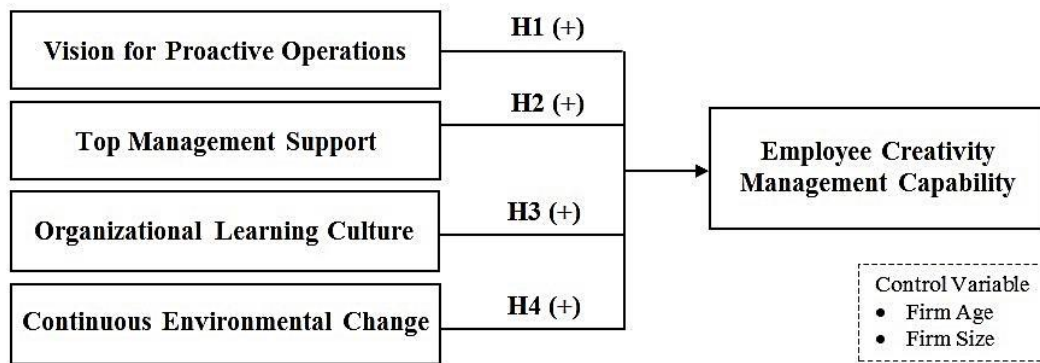


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Vision for Proactive Operations (VPO)

Vision for proactive operations is defined as the direction and goals of the organization in coping with changes in the future associated with the objective of the organization by analyzing an opportunity and the threat of concept change which help improve the current situation and develop efficiency (Elenkov, Judge, and Wright, 2005). Proactivity deals specifically with the preparation of environment through initiative and change that are considered a reaction to the requirements of surrounding circumstances. It is managing the complex and high dynamic that supports learning constantly in adapting to a rapidly changing and competitive environment which increases market opportunities (Hughes and Morgan, 2007).

Proactive vision is related to the implementation of the working practice and behavior of creativity employee to generate innovation which, is born of learning goals for the organization, and an environment conducive to employee creativity (Montani, Odoardi, and Battistelli, 2014). The vision for proactive operations is positively associated with innovation through employee creativity which is considered important to new idea generation and creative solutions with new ways to solve organizational problems (Haeckel, 2004). The importance of proactive operations vision is not only that it facilitates employee creativity, but also supports a great work environment for employees in order to encourage creativity in the workplace (Moore, Konrad, and Hunt, 2010). Therefore, vision for proactive operations is a potential factor for the increase of employee creativity management capability. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: *Vision for proactive operations has a positive influence on employee creativity management capability.*

Top Management Support (TMS)

Top management support refers to the emphasis on executives' implementation of time, cost and resources to operate activities within the organization to achieve its objectives (Khan, Lederer, and Mirchandani, 2013). Top management support has a key executive role in boosting employee performance that is considered important in determining the use of an enterprise resource planning system for responding to complex environmental challenges

(Elbanna, 2013). The role of top management in supporting for employees can bring benefit by communicating the objectives and the working practice for employees. It is also used as an authority to overcome various obstacles. It can also promote the competence and potential of employee creativity to achieve operational excellence and optimum performance (Al Shaar et. al., 2015).

Empirical research suggests that top management support serves as the driving mechanism which provides a change in an organization that can influence employee creativity by encouraging skills and the ability of the firm and its employees to respond to a competitive environment (Santhosh and Baral, 2015). Top management support is the prime factor which enhances an employee creativity to create both product innovation and process innovation, and is also a significant tool that affects organizational structure and information technology. The support of top management is considered essential to performance which demonstrates a management predilection for planning over improvisation, and adaptation in response to searching creative solutions to firm problems (Al Shaar et. al., 2015) . Therefore, top management support is likely to promote and facilitate employee creativity management capability. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H2: *Top management support has a positive influence on employee creativity management capability.*

Organizational Learning Culture (OLC)

Organizational learning culture is defined as the generating of values, norms, and beliefs for the employees in the organization, and is encouraging behavior and the common sense of learning, obtaining continual learning, and creating new knowledge and knowledge utilization for the benefit of the organization (Hung et al., 2010). The generation of learning culture within an organization reflects the relationships among culture, capacity, and performance, which are associated with organizational practices and values (Škerlavaj, Song, and Lee, 2010) . Organizational learning culture is described in terms of organizational climate which is highly regarded as the mechanism in creating learning environments that response to opportunities and challenging situations for renewal, change, and adaptation in a rapidly changing environment. Learning culture within an organization identifies the prime role of communication and collaboration, and also can be used to collect data and information which is considered as the crucial driving force of creative employee to achieve a novel operational efficiency (Hung et al., 2010). The benefits of implementing learning culture is a core requirement for the modification of employees' behaviors; is a mechanism for acquisition, transfer, and generation of knowledge that provide an implementation of effective knowledge; and is regarded as the foremost factor of new idea generation in business competitiveness (Hahn, Lee, and Lee, 2015).

Creating a learning culture has a significant positive relationship with technical and administrative innovation, which originates from creativity within organizations. Moreover, the concept of an organizational learning culture is supporting knowledge-sharing of employees which can increase optimum performance. Effective learning culture brings a great advance in the value of employee creativity that also helps promote individual and organizational performance (Škerlavaj, Song, and Lee, 2010) . An organizational learning

culture affects increased performance which is the outcome of an organization. While dynamic capability originates from organizational learning, it enables an organization to remain competitive in a rapidly-changing marketplace. An organizational learning culture is related to a firm's dynamic capabilities which are driven by depending upon employee creativity (Hung et al., 2010). Therefore, organizational learning culture is a potential factor for the promotion of employee creativity management capability. Hence, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H3: *Organizational learning culture has a positive influence on employee creativity management capability.*

Continuous Environmental Change (CEC)

Continuous environmental change refers to the ongoing increase of differences, diversity, and uncertainty in the external environment of the organization. It is both short and long-term which cannot be predicted (Giedraitis, 2014). Continuous environmental change brings both opportunities and threats for an organization. Many organizations assess that their environmental change is a prime tool in a competition. It is a major influence on the performance of the organization affecting the employee creativity in an organization. It also increases or decreases competitiveness (Sirmon, Hitt, and Ireland, 2007). The environmental volatility of competition results in many organizations' adaption to changes due to the increase of pressure with particular reference to a short product life cycle, changing consumer demands, or manufacturing complexity. These are the factors critical to the adaptation of the organization that can promote employee creativity in response to problems (Hamood, Omar, and Sulaiman, 2011). Environments are changing rapidly; as a result, an organization enhances its action for adaptation in the context of environmental stresses. The effectiveness of the ability of an organization to adapt employee creativity is the basis of good performance for building a competitive advantage (Sirmon, Hitt, and Ireland, 2007). The economy, technology, society, and politics are external factors of an environment that affect employee creativity; as a result, an organization must realize the importance of new ideas generation to finding operational methods which are the foremost factors in response to a dynamically-changing environment (Giedraitis, 2014). Therefore, continuous environmental change is likely to enhance and develop employee creativity management capability. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H4: Continuous environmental change has a positive influence on employee creativity management capability.

Employee Creativity Management Capability (ECM)

Employee creativity management capability is defines as an organization's ability to encourage employees to produce ideas, utilize behavioral patterns in routine activity, improve a task or activity performance, perform the basic functional activities of the firm, and effectively solve problems which bring the foremost benefit to an organization (Mach-Król, 2015). The dynamics and competition of the business environment are rapidly changing. Organizations must understand and adapt themselves to meet with these challenges. Employee creativity management capability is one of the most necessary factors for an organization to

develop long-term competitiveness and high performance (Gelhard and Delft, 2016). Employee's creativity and an organization's management capabilities are directly related to profitability, organizational success and business goal achievements.

The basic concept of connecting employee creativity and management capability has been studied over the last decade. The foremost role of employee creativity management capability is due to encouraging and developing skills, attitudes, and behaviors of employees in an organization. It can help boost an organization's management capabilities. It can also bring the creative thinking skills to the organization by creating an employee motivation and inspiration (Pan, Sun, and Chow, 2012). These roles not only encourage employee creativity management capability to make a better business performance than competitors, but also lead to achieving competitive success and sustaining competitive advantage for organizations (Amabile and Pillemer, 2012). The characteristic of employee creativity management capability was described as an organization's management capabilities in its various aspects such as new ideas generation, working practice implementation, novel operational method, job improvement, and creative solution. Employee creativity management capability is a source of an organization's sustainable competitive advantage in order to quickly adapt to changing business environment and competition. Employee creativity management capability deals specifically with adapting and changing abilities, experiences and skill in order to respond to organizational environmental uncertainty which is considered essential to generate a long-term competitive advantage.

Research Methodology

Sample selection and data collection procedure

The population in this research was furniture exporting businesses in Thailand, a total of 740 firms from the website of the Department of International Trade Promotion Ministry of Commerce in Thailand (2016). The key informants were the managing directors or managing partners of 740 firms. Furniture exporting businesses have played a crucial role in business processes and operations for the managerial ability in enhancing and accelerating employee creativity (Robb, Xie, and Arthanari, 2008). A mail survey procedure was sent to managing directors or managing partners of each firm. A total number of 144 questionnaires were received. However, only 139 questionnaires were usable for this study. The effective response rate is 20.68 %. In order to verify the test of non-response bias, the comparison between early and late respondents was not significantly different between groups, which presumed that this study is without the problem of non-response bias. Multi-item scales for construct measurement are the development of the scales from definitions and literature review to measure each of the constructs in the models. Each of these variables is measured by a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree.

Variable Measurement

Multi-item scales for construct measurement are the development of the scales from definitions and literature review to measure each of the constructs in the models. Each of these variables is measured by a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree. The variable measurements of dependent and independent and the control variable are clarified as follows:

Dependent variables

Employee Creativity Management Capability (ECM) is measured by a four-item scale which involves the new notion of employee, understanding and utilizing working practice, increasing operational efficiency and effectiveness, changing the behavior of the employee value, and the variety of a way to a problem-solving of an organization.

Independent variables

Vision for Proactive Operations (VPO) is measured by determining direction and goals of the organization in coping with changes in the future.

Top Management Support (TMS) is measured by the perceptions of support personnel from executives in agreeing to time, cost and resource to operate activities within the organization.

Organizational Learning Culture (OLC) is measured by the participation of continuous learning, knowledge transfer and sharing, knowledge creation and development, and knowledge implementation.

Continuous Environmental Change (CEC) is measured by an ability of the firm in planning, adapting, and creating the strategy to manage unpredictable and rapid changes of the firm's surroundings.

Control variables

Firm age (FA) is measured by the number of years that the firm has been conducting business. *Firm size (FS)* is evaluated by the number of full-time employees working in an organization.

Reliability and Validity

The factor loadings range from 0.415 to 0.809. All factor loadings are greater than the cut-off score of 0.4, which indicate acceptable construct validity (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1999). Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from 0.711 to 0.868. These values are greater than 0.70, which indicate acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 1: Results of Measure Validation

Constructs	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Vision for Proactive Operations (VPO)	0.640 - 0.809	0.716
Top Management Support (TMS)	0.714 - 0.775	0.722
Organizational Learning Culture (OLC)	0.684 - 0.785	0.711
Continuous Environmental Change (CEC)	0.710 - 0.757	0.711
Employee creativity management capability (ECM)	0.415 - 0.618	0.868

Statistical Techniques

Multiple regression analysis was used to test and examine all hypotheses following the conceptual framework. It is considered an appropriate approach to examine the hypothesized relationships. All dependent variables, independent variables, and control variables in this

study were categorical and interval data. The equation relationship of the regression models were demonstrated as follows:

$$\text{Equation 1: } ECMC = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 VPO + \beta_2 TMS + \beta_3 OLC + \beta_4 CEC + \beta_5 FAG + \beta_6 FSI + \varepsilon_1$$

Results and Discussion

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for all variables. The results of correlations in this study are less than 0.80. The maximum value of variance inflation factors (VIF) is 1.912, which was below the cut-off value of 10. Therefore, the results of regression analysis in this research indicate that multicollinearity is not a serious problem.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variables	EMC	VPO	TMS	OLC	CEC
Mean	4.43	4.61	4.44	4.46	4.49
S.D.	.29	.37	.40	.40	.38
EMC	1				
VPO	.446**	1			
TMS	.453**	.400**	1		
OLC	.436**	.370**	.318**	1	
CEC	.443**	.438**	.466**	.636**	1
FA	.087	.024	.006	-.155	-.055
FS	.154	.140	.062	.083	.118

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05

Table 2 indicates the results of regression analysis. Firstly, the results indicate that vision for proactive operations has a significant positive effect on employee creativity management capability (H1: $\beta_1 = 0.213$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H1 is supported. The results of this research that are consistent with Montani, Odoardi, and Battistelli (2014) demonstrate that proactive goal generation has a direct effect on the creativity of employees since creativity is considered crucial for a firm to gain success or failure in a business competitive environment.

Secondly, top management support has a significant positive effect on employee creativity management capability (H2: $\beta_2 = 0.250$, $p < 0.01$). Hence, H2 is supported. The results of this research that are consistent with Al Shaar, et al. (2015) indicate the importance of top management through facilitating and fostering employee creativity which can lead an organization to gain competitive advantages.

Thirdly, organizational learning culture has a significant positive effect on employee creativity management capability (H3: $\beta_3 = 0.239$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, H3 is supported. The results of this research that are consistent with Hahn, Lee, and Lee (2015) propose that the firms need to understand about learning culture since it benefits individual creativity by encouraging employee's learning potential in the workplace.

Finally, continuous environmental change has no significant positive effect on employee creativity management capability (H4: $\beta_4 = .082$, $p > 0.10$). Thus, H4 is not supported. The results of this research that are consistent with Bradley et al. (2011) suggest continuous environmental change as an obstacle to managing employee creativity for the organization due to adaptation to the external environment of an organization. An organization needs to understand and respond appropriately to social, political and economic change. It is possible to mention that continuous environmental change is not a basic mechanism for managing employee creativity.

Table 2: Result of Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
	ECM
	Equation1
Vision for Proactive Operations (VPO : H1)	.213*** (.081)
Top Management Support (TMS : H2)	.250*** (.081)
Organizational Learning Culture (OLC : H3)	.239** (.092)
Continuous Environmental Change (CEC : H4)	.082 (.098)
Firm age (FA)	.250 (.174)
Firm size (FS)	.087 (.150)
Adjusted R ²	.336
Maximum VIF	1.912

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, Beta coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis

Contributions

This study provided both theoretical and managerial contributions as follows. Firstly, this study proposed an antecedent of employee creativity management capability which includes: vision for proactive operations, top management support, organizational learning culture, and continuous environmental change. Secondly, this study provided an empirical evidence for the understanding of the relationships among vision for proactive operations, top management support, and organizational learning culture. Finally, this study brought about managerial implications for practitioners. Top management support played a crucial role in promoting and facilitating employees to generate new ideas and creativity for effectively solving problems. Organizational learning culture can stimulate and improve the workplace environment. When firms have to change the strategic direction and goals to respond to competitive business

scenario, vision for proactive operations is considered the most potential factor which increases employee creativity. Therefore, furniture exporting businesses in Thailand should concentrate on these factors since they can encourage greater employee creativity management capability.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among vision for proactive operations, top management support, organizational learning culture, continuous environmental change and employee creativity management capability in furniture exporting businesses in Thailand. Four hypotheses were proposed for testing. Multiple regression analysis was also used to analyze data. Data collected from 139 furniture exporting businesses in Thailand indicated that vision for proactive operations, top management support, and organizational learning culture had a significant positive effect on employee creativity management capability. On the other hand, continuous environmental change had no a significant positive effect on employee creativity management capability. Moreover, continuous environmental change had no significant impact on employee creativity management capability. For future research, data should be collected from different samples of other industries so as to expand the generalizability of the results. Different qualitative methods should be employed to verify the potential utility of the results.

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