

FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY IN TAIWAN'S HAKKA CLOTHING INDUSTRY

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I investigated the relationship among employee creativity, personal characteristics, and work environment characteristics in Taiwan's Hakka cultural and creative industries, specifically the clothing industry. I used snowball sampling to find participants who completed a questionnaire that was either self-administered or administered through telephone interviews, from which I obtained 86 responses for the analysis. I then performed analysis of variance, correlation analysis, and *t* test. The results reveal that employee creativity was significantly correlated to both personal cognitive style and work environment characteristics. However, the results do not reveal any significant differences in employee creativity with regard to demographic factors.

Keywords: creativity, personal characteristics, contextual characteristics, Hakka culture, cultural and creative industries, clothing industry, Taiwan.

Creativity has become the lifeblood of many successful organizations (Diliello, Houghton, & Dawley, 2011). Many researchers suggest that enhancing employee creativity is necessary for organizations to maintain or improve their competitive positions (Amabile, 1988a; Devanna & Tichy, 1990; Randel, Jaussi, & Wu, 2011; Shalley, 1995). Many factors influence individual creativity, including personal characteristics and environmental characteristics (Amabile, 1997; Jawecki, Füller, & Gebauer, 2011). In the rapidly changing workplace, managers need to ensure that employees have the creative knowledge and skills to perform their tasks (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Many researchers have recently investigated

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employee creativity, focusing on the personal and contextual characteristics that enhance or restrict creativity (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004).

The concept of creative industries is said to have originated in Australia in the 1990s (Bilton, 2007). The UK government's Creative Industries Task Force defined *creative industries* as *those that rely on "individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property"* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998). The term *cultural and creative industries*, as defined by the Taiwanese government, refers to *organizations that utilize accumulated creativity and culture to create usable intellectual property that has the capacity to generate wealth and employment opportunities* (Su, 2011). In Taiwan, the cultural traits of the different tribes have become an important element in the country's cultural and creative industries.

Hakka is a subculture of Taiwan that originated from mainland China over 300 years ago (Hsu, 2006). The Hakka people constitute about one fifth of the Taiwanese population of around 23 million (Hwang, 2012), and usually live in or near the hills in southern, northern, central, and eastern Taiwan. Among the Chinese ethnic groups, the Hakka people are the most conservative, endeavoring, hardworking, and enduring, in keeping with the traditional Chinese culture ("Hakka", 2004).

By the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), Chinese clothing had already developed a distinct form. Chinese clothing has changed significantly over time owing to the disruptions within the nation and a series of invasions by foreign tribes (Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission [OCAC], n.d.a). The traditional Hakka clothing has inherited the characteristics of Chinese clothing from the Han culture and, to this day, is characterized by practicality and thrift, as indicated by the high degree of simplicity and lack of adornments (Fan, Peng, Huang, Lin, & Zhang, 2000). Although Hakka creations (which include clothing, food, architecture, and entertainment, such as music and theater) reflect characteristics of the traditional Chinese culture, they also reflect the subculture's own special characteristics, for example the Hakka upper garment and pants for women known as the "blue shan" or "long shan" (OCAC, n.d.b).

The Taiwanese cultural and creative industries have grown significantly in the past decade and have become an important contributor to national income. From 2002 to 2007, the industries' output grew from US\$132 million to US\$192 million, and their employees increased from 162,000 to 211,000 (Chung-Hua Institute for Economic Research, as cited in Chen, Wang, & Sun, 2012). Recently, however, the vicissitudes of culture and increasing consumerism have negatively impacted the Hakka clothing industry, endangering its sustainability. A study by Hsu (2006) revealed that the industry is small scale and enterprises often take the form of artistic clothing studios that produce custom clothing based

on the traditional Hakka style. Hsu also found that Hakka artistic clothing studio owners run their businesses with the aim of promoting the Hakka culture, but are somewhat pessimistic about the financial sustainability of the industry. Thus, even though the Taiwanese government has made significant attempts to develop and promote the Hakka culture in order to ensure the survival of the industry, there is still a need to find effective and efficient ways to ensure the sustainability of the industry. Since the industry relies significantly on creativity, improving creativity can lead to better financial outcomes. For the Hakka industry, it is thus important to examine creativity and how it can be improved.

Although creativity has been extensively studied in the context of Western countries, it has only recently been studied in the context of Taiwan (Tseng & Liu, 2011). Furthermore, most existing studies on creativity in Taiwan have focused on the development of high-tech industry (Fang, 2004) and have overlooked other industries such as the cultural and creative industries, which combine design, entertainment, and high output value. Research on the Hakka clothing industry is similarly scarce. Because very few studies have been conducted on the cultural and creative industries in Taiwan, little is known about the conditions that promote employee's creative performance in these industries. If the potential of these industries is to be realized, then ways of improving employee creativity, and consequently sales, need to be developed. By conducting this study, I hoped to contribute to the development of such solutions by providing insights for those working in the industries, academics, and policy makers. As a result of the discussion above, my aim was to determine the correlation between creativity and employees' personal characteristics, contextual (work environment) characteristics, and demographic characteristics.

Literature Review

Although various fields of study have their own definitions of creativity (Runco, 2004), most agree that *creativity is a process of creative thinking or the product of a creative thought* (Amabile, 1983, 1988a; Eysenck, 1994; Shalley, 1991; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993; Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973), and involves an interaction between personal and contextual characteristics (e.g., Amabile, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). According to Amabile (1988b), personal creativity is connected to organizational factors, such as organizational encouragement, resources, and challenging work; this connection provides a clear framework for how both the individual and the organization affect the organization's innovation (e.g., Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Shalley & Gilson, 2004).

A number of researchers have investigated the influence of creativity through various personal characteristics such as demographic or biographic variables (e.g.,

Rodan & Galunic, 2004). The influence that personal characteristics (particularly cognitive style and personality) have on creativity has been extensively studied; in these studies it was found that cognitive style and personality could be major predictors of creativity (e.g., Eysenck, 1994; Matthews, 2011). Moreover, Scott, Leritz, and Mumford's (2004) meta-analysis of 70 studies revealed that personal creativity is most effectively developed using a cognitive framework rather than a social, personality, or motivational framework. In contrast, findings in existing studies on creativity indicate that demographic variables are not significantly related to creativity (e.g., Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011; Rodan & Galunic, 2004; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). In this study, I focused on cognitive style and demographic characteristics in order to examine the influence of personal characteristics on employee creativity in the Hakka clothing industry in Taiwan.

Kirton's (1976, 1994) adaption-innovation theory (KAI) has become the most popular measure (e.g., Isaksen, Lauer, & Wilson, 2003; Kwang et al., 2005) for predicting individual creativity. KAI was developed by Kirton in 1976 to examine the relationship between organizational behavior and personal performance. Kirton (1976) posited that any individual may be positioned on a continuum in terms of cognitive style, ranging from having a very adaptive approach to having a very innovative approach to decision making, problem solving, and creativity. Whereas an adaptor's cognitive style focuses on "doing things better," (Kirton, 1976, p. 622) an innovator's cognitive style focuses on "doing things differently" (Kirton, 1976, p. 622). Several researchers who have investigated the relationship between personal cognitive style and creative consequence have found that individuals who have an innovative cognitive style tend to be more creative than those who have an adaptive cognitive style (e.g., Baer, Oldham, & Cummings, 2003; Isaksen, Lauer, & Wilson, 2003; Kwang et al., 2005).

In addition to the relationship between personal characteristics and creativity, researchers are increasingly paying attention to the relationship between contextual characteristics and creativity in organizations. Amabile (1997) has extensively researched creativity and innovative environments, and along with colleagues (Amabile et al., 1996) developed KEYS: Assessing the Climate for Creativity (formerly, Work Environment Inventory), an instrument for assessing the influence of eight factors on creativity in five dimensions of work environments. According to KEYS, organizational encouragement, supervisory encouragement, work group support, freedom, sufficient resources, and challenging work all enhance creativity, whereas workload pressure and organizational impediments hinder creativity (e.g., Amabile, 1997; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Tseng & Liu, 2011). The KEYS scale has been widely applied and examined by researchers around the world including, for example, Hsu and Fan (2010), and Tseng and Liu (2011) in Taiwan.

Accordingly, I formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant correlation between personal cognitive style and employee creativity in the Hakka clothing industry.

Hypothesis 2: There will be significant correlations between the various contextual characteristics (organizational encouragement, supervisory encouragement, work group support, freedom, sufficient resources, challenging work, workload pressure, and organizational impediments) and employee creativity in the Hakka clothing industry.

Hypothesis 3: There will be significant differences in the level of creativity brought about by differences in demographic variables (gender, work area, age, education level, and occupation category) in the Hakka clothing industry.

Method

Measure

The questionnaire used to collect data for this study consisted of four sections: a section that evaluates personal cognitive style (based on the KAI; Kirton, 1976), a section on contextual characteristics (based on the KEYS; Amabile, 1997), a section that evaluates personal creativity (based on the Individual Creativity Scale [ICS]; Zhou & George, 2001), and a section on demographic characteristics. Except for the last section, all of the questions measured the participants' personal views on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The three scales used in the questionnaire were translated from the original English versions and adapted for the Chinese context. The Chinese versions were then back translated into English. The purpose of back translation was to check for clarity and equivalency in meaning in the original and adapted versions. To ensure the face validity of the questionnaire, all of the items were examined by three professional experts (professors in the field of management) and were pretested on 13 employees in the Hakka clothing industry. The pretesting was conducted to determine whether or not the wording in the questionnaire needed to be simplified and modernized.

Participants and Data Collection

The participants in the study were employees in the Hakka clothing industry in Taiwan. Because of the difficulty in recruiting participants, I used snowball sampling. I collected the data using a questionnaire, which was either self-administered by the participants or administered through telephone interviews. The reason for using self-administered and telephone surveys is explained as follows. I first sent the self-administered questionnaires to participants by mail, along with prepaid reply envelopes. I requested the participants to complete and return the questionnaires within one week of receipt. However, if I received no response

from a participant after one week, I called and interviewed the participant over the telephone, using the same questions from the self-administered questionnaire. Thus, the same questionnaire was used in both the self-administered and telephone surveys. Both the self-administered and telephone surveys could be completed within 10 to 20 minutes. I sent out 245 questionnaires, of which 133 were completed (either through self-administration or over the telephone), a response rate of 54%. After screening the completed questionnaires, I determined that 86 of the completed questionnaires were eligible for analysis; 77 from female participants and 9 from male participants. Most of these participants worked as designers (44%) and marketers (38%), and lived in the northern (36%) and southern (43%) regions of Taiwan. All of the participants have been educated beyond high school level.

Data Analysis

I performed factor, reliability, validity, correlation, and regression analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and *t* test. The Cronbach's α coefficient for the KAI, which was used to evaluate personal cognitive style, was .918, which indicated high reliability. For the KEYS, which evaluated the contextual characteristics, the factor loadings were above .599, the factors' cumulative percentage of variance was 71.07%, and the Keiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) measure was .781, all of which indicated primary construct validity. The Cronbach's α coefficient for this scale was .922, which indicated that the scale has high reliability. For the Individual Creativity Scale, which was used to evaluate personal creativity, the factor loadings were above .508, the factors' cumulative percentage of variance was 61.62%, and the KMO was .918, all of which showed that the scale has primary construct validity. The Cronbach's α coefficient for this scale was .952, which indicates that the scale has high reliability.

Results

I used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PCC) to examine Hypothesis 1 and found that there was a significant correlation between personal cognitive style and creativity ($r = .762^{**}$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Likewise, the results of the regression analysis indicate that there was a significant correlation between personal cognitive style and creativity. The effective prediction was 57.6%. In addition, the results indicate that the higher the personal cognitive style, the greater the creativity (see Table 1).

The results of the analysis also indicated that there was a significant correlation between contextual characteristics and employee creativity ($r = .771$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported. Furthermore, the results show that six of the contextual characteristics (organizational encouragement, $r = .748^{**}$; supervisory

encouragement, $r = .526^{**}$; work group support, $r = .674^{**}$; freedom, $r = .726^{**}$; sufficient resources, $r = .562^{**}$; and challenging work, $r = .744^{**}$) were all significantly and positively correlated to creativity. Contrary to expectations and the existing literature, the results showed that two of the contextual characteristics (workload pressure, $r = .243^{**}$; and organizational impediments, $r = .290^{**}$) were significantly and positively correlated to creativity. To examine the relationship between the contextual characteristics and creativity more closely, I conducted a stepwise regression analysis. Only five of the contextual characteristics were accepted ($p < .05$) in the analysis (see Table 2); the effective prediction for each of these variables was 55.5% for challenging work, 13.0% for organizational encouragement, 2.2% for organizational impediments, 1.7% for supervisory encouragement, and 1.6% for freedom.

Table 1. *Regression Analysis of Personal Cognitive Style and Creativity*

Variables	β	t	Sig.
Constant	–	-.237	.813
Personal cognitive style	.762	10.537	.000*
R	.762		
R^2	.581		
Adj- R^2	.576		
F	111.029**		
D-W	1.712		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. *Stepwise Regression Analysis of Contextual Characteristics and Creativity*

Variables	β	t	Sig.	VIF
Challenging work	.253	2.343	.022*	.045
Organizational encouragement	.625	5.866	.000**	.023
Organizational impediments	.166	2.525	.014*	.017
Supervisory encouragement	-.245	-2.510	.014*	.008
Freedom	2.090	2.090	.040*	.005
R	.860			
R^2	.740			
Adj- R^2	.722			
F	41.028**			
D-W	1.831			

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The results of the t test show that there was no significant difference in level of creativity between genders (see Table 3).

Table 3. Results of *t* test of Gender and Creativity

Variable	Male			Female			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>		
Creativity	5.39	1.05	9	5.49	.99	72	-.278	.787

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The results of the one-way ANOVA show that significant differences in the level of creativity were found only with regard to work area and age; no significant differences in the level of creativity were found with regard to the other demographic variables (education, occupation category). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported (see Table 4).

Table 4. ANOVA of Demographic Variables and Creativity

Variables	Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Work area	Between	21.773	8	2.722	3.401*
	Within	55.216	69	0.800	
	Total	76.988	77		
Age	Between	11.075	5	2.215	2.405*
	Within	68.152	74	0.921	
	Total	79.227	79		
Education	Between	3.349	4	0.837	0.841
	Within	76.629	77	0.995	
	Total	79.978	81		
Occupation category	Between	2.377	6	0.396	0.391
	Within	70.890	70	1.013	
	Total	73.267	76		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

Ways of improving employee creativity, and consequently sales, need to be developed if the Hakka clothing industry is to reach its full potential. For this industry, it is thus important to examine creativity and how it can be improved. The results of this study show that personal cognitive style and contextual characteristics are both significantly correlated to creativity in the Hakka clothing industry. This finding is consistent with those of previous studies (Amabile et al., 1996; Baer et al., 2003; Kwang et al., 2005; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Tseng & Liu, 2011). However, contrary to my expectations and the existing literature (Amabile et al., 1996; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Tseng & Liu, 2011), the results showed that two of the contextual characteristics (workload pressure and organizational

impediments) were significantly and positively correlated to creativity. These contrasting results may be attributed to cultural differences. Workload pressure and organizational impediments may be viewed as hindrances to creativity in Western countries, whereas they may be viewed as facilitators of creativity in Taiwan, where many people still adhere to the Confucian values of hard work and loyalty to one's family and company (Kim, Lee, Chae, Anderson, & Laurence, 2011). Furthermore, the levels of creativity did not differ significantly with regard to the demographic variables in the Hakka clothing industry. This finding is also consistent with the results of previous studies (Bell et al., 2011; Rodan & Galunic, 2004; Tierney & Farmer, 2002). However, the demographic variables used in this study differed from those in previous studies. In most previous studies the focus was on demographic variables relating to educational background or job position, not on variables such as gender, age, work area, or job category as in this study.

Conclusion

Owing to the rapid changes in the global market, creativity has become a central element in firms' competitive strategy (Galunic & Eisenhardt, 2001). In this research, I sought to provide insights useful to practitioners, researchers, and policy makers for improving creativity, and consequently financial outcomes, in the Hakka clothing industry in Taiwan. To reach this goal, I investigated the correlation of employee creativity to personal cognitive style and work environment.

The results of this study show that personal cognitive style and contextual characteristics were both significantly correlated to creativity in the Hakka clothing industry, a fact that has theoretical implications. The results indicate that employee creativity in the Taiwanese Hakka clothing industry is not affected by demographic factors, but rather by personal and contextual characteristics. For policy makers, this suggests that they should consider developing and implementing training programs that nurture employee creativity in the Taiwanese cultural and creative industries. For managers or marketers, this suggests the need to improve work environment in the Taiwanese cultural and creative industries, specifically, by providing challenging work and organizational encouragement to employees.

The purpose in this study was to examine factors affecting employee creativity in Taiwan's Hakka clothing industry. Thus, the results of this study are limited to Taiwan's Hakka clothing industry and cannot be interpreted as reflecting other cultural and creative industries or other countries. In future studies, researchers could examine other personal and contextual characteristics in the context of other industries, other cultural and creative subindustries, or other countries to

determine the generalizability of this study's results. In addition, the study was limited because of difficulty in recruiting participants. As nonrandom sampling was used in this study, the findings should not be generalized to other industries. Future researchers could, therefore, also consider different research designs, such as qualitative and experimental research methods, for more comprehensive studies.

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