HOW AND WHEN DO JOB-KNOWLEDGE CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY? COGNITIVE EVALUATION AND SOCIAL EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVES

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How and When Do Job-Knowledge Characteristics and Transformational Leadership Influence Employee Creativity? Cognitive Evaluation and Social Exchange Perspectives

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Abstract

Creativity refers to the production of new and useful ideas concerning products, services, processes, and procedures (Amabile, 1996; Oldham & Cumming, 1996). The concept of creativity has drawn attention from both researchers and practitioners because it has been considered an essential driving force for improving managerial effectiveness and efficiency. Researchers have explored individual and organizational creativity, as well as proposed several influential models, such as componential model (Amabile, 1988) and interactionist model of creativity (Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993). Based on these models, numerous contextual factors have been identified that influence employee creativity. Among these factors, the effects of job-related characteristics (e.g., feedback, autonomy, and job complexity) (George & Zhou, 2001; Tierney & Farmer, 2002; Zhou 1998) and leadership styles and behaviors (e.g., leader member exchange, transformational and transactional leadership, and empowering leadership) (Liao, Liu, & Loi, 2010; Pieterse, Van Knippenberg, Schippers, & Stam, 2010; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Zhang & Bartol, 2010a) on employee creativity have been widely demonstrated.

Considering that new contextual factors (e.g., creative job requirements) have emerged in the workplace, the present study first expanded job characteristics to include knowledge characteristics (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) to examine their effects on employee creativity. Second, previous studies concerning the psychological processes of employee creativity have focused more on motivational processes (e.g., intrinsic motivation embedded in creative process engagement) and less on cognitive and affective ones (e.g., cognitive skills, positive, or negative affective states). The
present study extended previous research by examining cognitive and affective processes as reflected in the psychological ownership construct. Drawing on cognitive evaluation and social exchange theories, this study particularly proposed and tested a model in which creative process engagement and promotive psychological ownership mediated the relationships between job and knowledge characteristics, transformational leadership and employee creativity.

Finally, researchers have called for identifying the interactive effects of contextual factors and individual differences on employee creativity (Zhou & Shalley, 2011; Woodman, et al., 1993) because the employees’ personal characteristics (e.g., personality traits, cognitive style) influence the way they respond to contextual factors (Shally, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). Learning goal orientation is one such personal characteristic, which is important to the relationships between contextual factors and the proposed mediators (creative process engagement and psychological ownership) of employee creativity from two theoretical perspectives. First, from a cognitive evaluation perspective, learning goal-oriented employees may internalize the job requirements and obtain external support from transformational leaders, seeking out challenging tasks and engaging in risky creative behaviors (Hirst, Van Knippenberg, Chen, & Sacramento, 2011). Therefore, learning goal orientation was proposed to moderate the relationship between job and knowledge characteristics, transformational leadership, and creative process engagement. Second, employees with learning goal orientation may increase their cognitive skills and abilities through learning (Vande Walle, 1997), performing effectively in different activities, and increasing self-efficacy. From the social exchange perspective, employees may also perceive transformational
leadership behaviors as social exchange resources (Basu & Green, 1997) to facilitate the improvement of their capabilities. By identifying with the leader, employees may disregard personal gain and express a sense of belongingness to the organization (Avey, Avolio, Crossley, & Luthans; 2009). Given that self-efficacy and belongingness are the main dimensions of promotive psychological ownership, learning goal orientation was proposed as a moderator of the relationship between job and knowledge characteristics, transformational leadership, and promotive psychological ownership.

Data for this study were collected through a questionnaire survey among 350 employees and 78 immediate supervisors from 6 companies in the manufacturing industry and 11 companies in the service industry, all of which are located in northern China. The completed questionnaires were received from 139 employees and 33 supervisors in the manufacturing industry and 166 employees and 39 supervisors in the service industry; with a response rate of 87%. Following Baron and Kenny’s (1986) procedure, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was employed to test the mediation and moderation hypotheses because of the nested nature of the data in this survey. The Monte Carlo bootstrapping method (Selig, & Preacher, 2008) was also used to assess the indirect effects in the mediating process.

The results indicated that the relationship between job and knowledge characteristics and employee creativity was mediated by creative process engagement and promotive psychological ownership. The results further showed that creative process engagement did not mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity, whereas promotive psychological ownership mediated this relationship. Additionally, the results obtained from the moderated
regression analysis indicated that the interactive effects of transformational leadership and learning goal orientation were supported in a way that the association between transformational leadership and promotive psychological ownership was stronger when the learning goal orientation was high. However, the moderating role of learning goal orientation in the relationship between transformational leadership and creative process engagement was not supported. Furthermore, the interactive effects of job and knowledge characteristics and learning goal orientation on creative process engagement and promotive psychological ownership were not supported. Both theoretical contributions to the field of employee creativity and the practical implications of the findings are discussed.
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