University Students’ Creativity and Career Self-management:
The Moderating Role of Personality Trait

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Abstract. Fostering creativity needs a twofold policy that should focus on both the education situation and individual factor of students. Although many scholars and policy makers devote their attention to the first issue, it is equally important to map out the individual factors. The purpose of this paper is to fill this void by analyzing the impacts of creativity on career self-management of university students. A quantitative survey methodology was adopted to collect data from a university in China. A sample of 151 university students was used. Data were analyzed using SPSS 19.0 to determine the interactions between the various factors. Empirical findings confirmed that university students’ creativity had a positive direct effect on career self-management. Among the relationship, personality trait played the moderating role. When the students are more sensitive, creativity had a less significant positive effect on career self-management, when the students are more realistic, creativity had a more significant positive effect on career self-management.

Introduction

Global competition and rapid increasingly demanding environment has made creativity been identified as a crucial factor in making organizational successful today. Creativity also became very important to university students’ long-term career success. The increase in creativity has in turn resulted in more research on the university education for creativity. As McCorkle, Payan, Reardon, & Kling (2007) indicated that both business and marketing students perceived creativity as important to their careers. They also found creativity to be as important to marketing students’ careers as other important skills (e.g., writing, oral presentation, teamwork, etc). Michaela (2001) also indicated the dimensions of creativity training, such as providing time and rewards for creativity, diversity of thinking and so on.

The job market is undergoing global competition, declining job security, which requires employees to show more self-management than before. University students are the “end user” in the supply chain of the labor market. Academics and educators are more and more concerned in students’ career self-management before entering corporations. As The American Psychological Association has affirmed the importance of career planning and development in undergraduate psychology education (Prehar and Ignezi, 2012). In the light of this issue, this research is undertaken to determine the undergraduate students’ career self-management, evidence is from Zhejiang Business University, China. This paper will examine the relationship between creativity and career self-management.

Creativity

When informally asked, what is creativity? Many university students can respond quickly that creativity is novel outcomes, but designing a consistent and perfect definition, which especially every student can understand and accept, is not very easy. As early as 1960’s, Rhodes (1961) found there were more than 40 definitions of creativity in previous research. Gurteen (2012) agreed creativity is simply seen as part of the process by which knowledge is developed and transformed into business value. Creativity concerns the process of creating and applying new knowledge. As such, they are at the very heart of knowledge management. Moreover, creativity was viewed as a form of active mental health (Warr, 1994).
Creativity is often described both novel outcomes and novel processes simultaneously. Although related, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) explained that a creative process (e.g., creation of new ideas) should be differentiated from a creative output (e.g., the actual innovation) because using a creative process sometimes can not gain a creative outcome. Creative outputs may include a novel painting by an art student, a novel human resource strategy by a management student, or a novel marketing plan by a marketing student, whereas the creative process is the methodology used (e.g., brainstorming) to develop new ideas to solve particular problems in a student’s applied domain (e.g., marketing) that improves the likelihood that a novel outcome will be achieved. For pedagogical reasons, this article focuses on the perspective of creativity associated with the process (e.g., creation of new ideas).

Creativity is an important topic in psychology research because creativity is closely related behaviors. Accordingly, researchers were highly interested in identifying the factors that foster employees’ creativity in order to directly stimulate an organization’s effectiveness and promote employee’s active mental health. Walsh, et. al.(2013)demonstrated that young researchers have a complex range of perceptions of creativity, and that negative attitudes towards it are common in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics environment. Three key environmental facilitators of creativity are: a positive research environment; sufficient constructive communication; and time and space to be creative. Many research has focused on the factors of creativity occurs As argued by Awwad and Ali (2012), organizational climate had a positive direct effect on employees’ creativity. Carlos M.P. Sousa, Filipe Coelho (2011) examined how personal values and the way employees respond to the organization and the job impact on employee creativity.

There is a relationship between functional supervisor behavior and employee creativity in a project matrix organization (McElvaney, 2006). Binnewies (2008) found job control and support for creativity as well as age were unrelated to idea creativity. However, job control and support for creativity moderated the relationship between age and idea creativity.

There is a common complaint among employers is that university students are often lack of sound creative thinking. To better prepare students for their career, many researchers worked hard to design the good way to foster students’ creativity. As Michaela (2001) found classroom environments could indeed encourage students to exhibit more creative behaviors.

However, research into the relationship between creativity and career self-management is very limited.

Career Self-Management

The counterpart to organizational career management is career self-management—the personal policies taken by individuals to achieve their own career goals which should coincide with those their organizations set for them. The notion of joint responsibility assumes that individual efforts are needed for career success, as well as an appropriate career management program on the part of the employer. Employees make efforts to satisfy their own career goals, and it is the task of employers to ensure this process helps the organization achieve its goals.

Most of organizations are undergoing flattening, declining job security, so employees should take more responsibility in career self-management than before if they want to succeed. Individuals’ capabilities can effectively influence their environment and regulate their behavior, which may be critical to career success (Converse, 2012). Therefore, undergraduate students should take responsibility in planning and controlling their own careers before entering an organization.

Previous study have shown that the link from career self-management to subjective success. As argued by Abele and Wiese (2008), individual career success required self-management, such as self-set career goals and goal-pursuing behavior. Orpen (1994) were conducted to analyze career self-management was positively associated with career effectiveness.

Undergraduate students’ career self-management refers to career planning, the process of identifying what one wants from his or her majors education, assessing his or her strengths and
weaknesses in relation to one’s goals, and deciding what steps need to be taken to realize the career dream.

As far as the above is concerned, the following hypotheses are developed:

H1: Creativity will be positively related to career self-management.

H2: Personality trait will moderate the relationship between creativity and career self-management such that the relationship will be stronger for realistic students than for sensitive students.

Method

Sample and Procedures

Data for this research were collected by questionnaire. We asked 151 undergraduate students to voluntarily participate in this research. Participants administered a self-administered questionnaire that stated the purpose of the research. They answered questions regarding age, majors, gender and so on.

The samples for the study was drawn from undergraduate students in Hangzhou and approximately half were female (67.5%, n=102). Some of them academic performance is A(42%, n=63). Mean age was 21.94 (SD=2.01) years. They are studying in various majors, such as finance, business, art, information technology, math, economics, foreign language and so on.

Measures

The major measures for this present research were creative, career self-management and personality trait. Unless stated otherwise, participants responded to all questionnaire items for measures using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

According to Alvino’s (1990) definition of creative thinking, creativity was measured using Yang’s (2007) scales, comprising four items for each of the fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration component. These questions designed to measure students’ perceptions of the creativity and the work actually being done in classrooms or in spare time.

Career self-management was measured by a five-item scale, designed to assess each of the main aspects of career planning and exploring tactics identified by Hall in his psychological success model.

Personality trait was measured by 16PF, using 12 items. When the score is high, the personality trait is sensitive, when the score is low, the personality trait is realistic. There are 74 students are sensitive, 77 students are realistic.

Control Variables

We controlled one variable, academic performance that may be a significant predictor of career self-management. Academic performance was assessed also by 5-point scale (coded5= A, coded4= B, coded3= C).

Result

Table I presents the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the study variables. On the average, respondents reported experiencing a level of creativity of 3.55, and a level of career self-management of 3.83. Respondents reported a level of sensitive of 11.82, measured by 16 PF scale, above 10 means sensitive personality trait, below 10 means realistic personality trait. In the sample, there are 74 students are sensitive, 77 students are realistic.

Creativity, sensitive, and the control variable were significantly correlated with the career management. The strongest correlations were found between creativity and career self-management. The moderating variable is one that has a strong contingent effect on the independent variable and dependent variable relationship. That is the presence of a third variable modifies the original
relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. In this study, we guess personality trait modifies the relationship between independent and the dependent variables.

The first hypothesis, that creativity should be positively associated with career self-management, was confirmed by the findings. Creativity was significantly correlated (p < 0.05) correlated with career self-management.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables (N=151).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>21.94</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic Performance</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>336**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Creativity</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personality Trait</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>236*</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>088</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Career self-management</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>236*</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>088</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Eans, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables (N=151).

The study used hierarchical multiple regression to test the hypotheses, entering the control variable, academic performance first, the main effect variable, creativity second, and the interaction term last. The interaction term was transformed by the raw scores of the predictor and moderator variable into deviation scores with means equal to zero. Such transformation was regarded to eliminate the potential problem of multicollinearity with the interaction term due to scaling (Poon, 2004; Aiken and West, 1991).

Table 2. Hierarchical regression results for the effect of creativity and sensitive on career self-management (N=151).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity*Sensitive</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.337</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² at each step</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multiple regression analyses testing a main effects model yielding a significant and positive regression for creativity on career self-management (β=.23) suggesting support for the hypotheses. As expected, sensitive was not significantly related to career self-management after creativity and the control variable were taken into consideration. Thus, sensitive was not found to be an antecedent of career self-management. As shown in model 3 (Table II), there is a significant interaction between creativity and sensitive for career self-management that explained variance in the model beyond that due to the main effects (ΔR²=0.05). Similarly, the interaction term between sensitive and creativity for career self-management shown in model 3 (Table 2) is significant and positive and explained variance in the model beyond that due to the main effects (ΔR²=0.09).

Thus, H1 are supported. As Yu C.(2013)argued that creative self-efficacy and creative ability predicted undergraduate students’ career self-management.

We performed simple difference analyses taking into consideration high (above 10) and low (below 10) levels of the moderator. Analyses showed that for those students are realistic, creativity more predict career self-management (β=.432), whereas for those with high sensitive, creativity was less positively related to career self-management (β=.378). These results provided support for H2.

Discussion

In current job market, careers require a new set of support structures, including self-planning or self-management. With the complex and rapidly changing work environment, university students’ career performance needs self-planning, self-set career goals, goal-pursuing behavior and so on. Those who have higher creativity will be more likely to make good strategies to manage their
career. The findings support the research hypotheses, creativity predicts the students’ career self-management.

During these decades, creativity has received more and more attention in studies of the education, organizational behaviors or psychology. Because there is widespread agreement among researchers and practitioners that creativity has important implications for organizational or individual behaviors and work performance.

The findings also indicated that personality trait moderated the positive effects of creativity on career self-management. More specifically, the findings suggest that there is a relationship between creativity and career self-management. Furthermore, personality trait moderates the relationship. When the students are realistic, practical, matter-of-fact, creativity had more effects on career self-management. Career self-management is based on fact, students need make career plan, set career goal according to their own personality, skill and other realistic base. Creativity can predict career self-management, realistic personality trait more are able to strengthen this effects.

The study also empirically examined the moderating role that realistic played in facilitating the effects of creativity on career self-management. This suggests that individuals having strong realistic personality trait would enjoy high career self-management.

In modern time, individuals’ capabilities, such as creativity can effectively influence their behavior and performance, which may be important to career success (Converse, 2012). Therefore, university students should take responsibility in planning and managing their own careers before and after entering an organization.

Implications of the Results

Career success is the aim of university education, on the other hand, latter organizations are unable to provide career progression to the same degree as before. Universities should teach the students to manage their individual career, so educators can benefit from an understanding of the relationship between creativity and career self-management. Creativity is a vital antecedent of behavior and performance, enhancing creativity should become the core of any university courses.

In this knowledge age, fostering the undergraduate students’ most valuable creativity is very critical for education. Creativity can lead to many different methods to resolve any kinds of problems. A full display of creativity is indispensable, not only for developing new products and innovation, but also for managing a business, even doing any job. In a word, those undergraduate students with higher creativity will be more easily to gain career success.

This article has attempted to offer a deep insight into how to help students achieve career success.

Conclusion

This research is to examine the relationship between university students’ creativity and career self-management.

Undergraduate students who fulfill high levels of creative self-efficacy will report greater career self-management than those who do not (Yu, 2013). Universities can potentially enhance students’ creativity by developing students’ course and education activity.

The paper makes a valuable contribution to creativity and career management literatures by being one of exploration of the relationship between creativity and career management.

References


