

Enhancing Academic's Creativity Through Psychological Capital and Leadership Support: A Perspective of a Public University in Malaysia

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Abstract - Organizations critically require their employees to be creative. In education context, creative academics set foundation to the innovation of the institution not only in teaching but also in research and commercialization. Being creative entails an ability to produce work that is both novel and useful which is highly imperative in educating future leaders of the nation. This study explores the influence of psychological capital and leadership support on academics' creativity. Data were collected from 160 academics of a public institution of higher education in Malaysia. Statistical results obtained revealed that self-efficacy, a dimension of psychological capital and leadership support were found to be related to academics' creativity. Detail of results, implications of study, and future research are discussed.

Keywords - Academics Creativity; Psychological Capital, Leadership support, Institutions of higher education.

I. INTRODUCTION

As Malaysia's goal is towards becoming an economic power, the nation needs to build an education system that nurtures and cultivates creativity among students. In the context of higher education, academics highly influence how students are being developed. For example, if academics employ creative form of teaching, they develop thinkers who are capable to explore their various interest based on their own strengths. This will expose the students in preparing for life beyond classroom – to be creative, knowledgeable and critical thinkers. Thus, the role of academics in this context is far reaching and crucial. As a result, academics who are creative are widely seen as an asset for innovation, growth, and societal development of the higher institutions of education. Organization as a whole can benefit from creative individuals through effective work practices which will subsequently lead to organizational competitiveness [1] [2].

Creativity has become core competencies and proper actions in addressing the challenges in the organization [3]. Specifically, creativity is seen as a crucial mean for organizations in facing the external environment; respond to unforeseen challenges and developing new capabilities. In fact, creativity is encouraged to gain competitive advantage and innovative advantages in the organization [1]. Therefore, many organizations search for ways to drive creativity as a strategy for competitive advantage.

Positive individual strengths are often been associated with higher work behaviour outcomes such as creativity [1]. Psychological capital (hereinafter PsyCap) in particular is like the positive psychological capacity of the person that can be shaped, which consisted of hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy [4]. In addition, leaders are significant in driving creativity by providing support to be more creative. Employees who generate new ideas can be motivated through reward and recognition [5].

To date, only a few studies focusing on both psychological capital and leadership support in fostering employee creativity, especially among academics of institutions of higher education. Specifically, there is still limited evidence on the influence of PsyCap on employee creativity, especially in linking the four dimensions of PsyCap [1] [6]. Moreover, although many studies have studied the link between leadership and on employee creativity, more insights are needed in explaining the relationship [5]. Therefore, this study attempts to: 1) Determine the relationship between PsyCap (hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy) and academic's creativity; 2) Determine the relationship between leadership support and academic's creativity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Employee Creativity

In the context of an organization, creativity means as an outcome where products, services, business models, work methods or management processes that are novel and proper [7]. Creativity is when employees are intrinsically motivated to perform tasks, accept challenges at work, propose excellent ideas or solutions, and then become creative. Those who make constructive change are normally employees with a proactive personality [8]. In fact, everyone can develop creative thinking when they are put in the right environment. Creative people are extremely important in an organization to develop. When an employer recruits and employs creative people, the organization can get a more imaginative approach to their business problems. Creative thinking will make the organization's business apart from all the others which these lead to consumer desire to have their products and services over others. When employees can choose which work methods they prefer, that is the time when employees are in most creative. Employees' creativity is crucial because, in order

to retain and sustain in the industry, organizations need to take full advantage of their employees' creative potentials so that the process of innovation, changes, learning, performance, and competitiveness can be sustained [3].

B. Psychological Capital and Employee Creativity

PsyCap has emerged as vital to construct the behavior of organization and has been connected to positive attitudes such as job satisfaction, subjective performance, self-perceptions of capabilities and growth psychological well-being [9] and as well as positive behaviors. PsyCap is consisted of four dimensions namely hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy.

Hope can be explained with the individual motivational state to preserve something which is based on an interactively acquired sense of success that have goal-directed and planning towards the goals. A high hope employee has a psychological state of development in terms of persevering towards goal and also redirecting their path to those goals in order to succeed [10]. Generally, people with high hope will give more effort to accomplish their goals because they are goal-oriented. The employees that have this kind of hope will act proactively and tend to be risk-takers when they performing their work. On the other hand, self-efficacy is having the confidence to accomplish a challenging task [4]. In other words, self-efficacy is the employee's faith or confidence about their abilities to organized the motivation, cognitive resources or courses of action needed to successfully carry a specific task that has been given [4]. The individual that has higher self-efficacy is considered to develop well on hard challenges, continual efforts, and a strong belief that their abilities will help them to succeed.

Resilience is how the individual sustains and bounce back to achieve success after they have gone through the unsuccessful situation. In other words, resilience is the ability to sustain and gain strength, and even beyond after there were some problems and adversity [4]. Specifically, resilience such as a combination of intellectual and emotional aspects, and employees who pose high resilience are likely to definitely employ their applicable assets to reduce the impact of risk factors. Optimism refers to the level of employees' positive psychological state for success in the future by building a positive characteristic [10]. The individual that has optimism characteristic is naturally related to confidence in their strength. The optimism thought about the future event will rise as well as the individual confidence [11]. Optimistic employees exhibit positive emotions regarding future expectations.

Literatures on PsyCap highlighted its effect on employees' positive behavior, mainly because positive behavior leads to positive affect and cognition that stimulates creativity [12]. However, it is important to note that not all characteristics of PsyCap are equally important for influencing the creativity of individual employees [1]. The next section shall review each dimension of PsyCap on

employee creativity. The previous research findings revealed that hopeful employees highly related with creative behaviors in the organization [4]. Most hopeful employees enjoy goal pursuit, being more intrinsically motivated and looking for creative ways [3]. People with the high hope tend to incorporate a more motivated effort and generate pathways regarding the mental strategies of creative problem solving and in directly increase their potential for creative performance.

Employees in high resilience can be more easily to cope with stressful incidents and do not experience negative consequences as strongly as compared to employees with low resilience. As a result, tend to proactively prepare for hardships and minimize the impact of stressful events on themselves by using their psychological resources effectively [1]. Employees high in resilience, compared to those low in resilience will respond more favourably to change by using their resilience as a psychological resource. On the other hand, optimist employees showed positive emotions regarding future expectations. Besides, optimism person are less likely to give up and more likely to have a positive impact on stressful situations, to experience positive emotions, to keep going when facing difficulties, and to look for creative methods to solve problems and take opportunities [13]. As for self-efficacy, previous studies highlighted that employee with high self-efficacy are likely to seek new ideas to achieve specific goals and self-efficacious employees are probably to be creative [14]. In other words, employees who has high self-efficacy have motivational and cognitive resources which to be expected engage in a greater degree creativity in workplace than employees who possess in low self-efficacy. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁ Psychological capital is positively related to employee creativity

H_{1a} Hope is positively related to employee creativity

H_{1b} Resilience is positively related to employee creativity

H_{1c} Optimism is positively related to employee creativity

H_{1d} Self-efficacy is positively related to employee creativity

C. Leadership Support and Employee Creativity

Supportive leadership can be referred to as leaders' concerns for their employees' needs and well-being [15]. In the context of employee creativity, leadership support explains the responsibilities of leaders for increasing employee creativity by include terms of providing a suitable environment. An increasing literature highlighted those leaders can supports creativity by displaying and supportive leadership behaviour where subsequently will encourage employees to try being more creative [5]. In fact, employees will be more motivated to generate new ideas if they are accordingly rewarded, appreciated and their efforts are being recognized.

A study conducted among 299 employees from eight private and public organizations in Kuwait found link between leadership support and employee creativity. The study emphasizes the role of leaders in providing an appropriate environment in increasing creativity among employees [5]. Similarly, several researchers added that creative supervisors can foster employees' creativity through their novel and new ways in defining problems and in setting creative goals for them. Therefore, leadership behaviors likely are key antecedents of creative behavior. Thus, it is proposed that:

H₂ Leadership support positively related to employee creativity

The research framework is in Fig. 1.

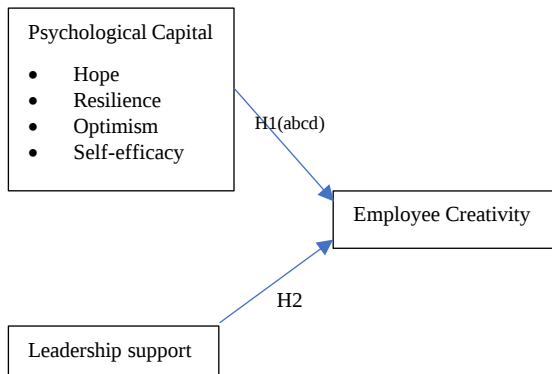


Fig. 1. Research Framework

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional and quantitative approach using personally administered questionnaire survey as a mean for data collection. Data were collected from academics of various faculties in a campus of one of the largest universities in Malaysia using purposive sampling technique. The survey administered in a few buildings that accommodate the academics using 'drop off and collect' method. This method was chosen due to the fact that respondents were given a selected time to complete the survey before returning it back to the researchers. Data collection phase took almost three weeks to complete.

Before data collection commenced, instruments used in the study were validated from a group of academics consisted of a professor and two senior lecturers. Pilot study was conducted among 30 academics with acceptable results of reliability values. In measuring employee creativity, this study adopted five items of employee creativity from [16]. Among the items used in the study are "I always suggest new ways to achieve goals" and "I come up with new and practical ideas to improve performance".

As for psychological capital, the variable and its dimensions were measured using 24 items developed by

[4]. Known as Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ), the instruments consisted of six items for each of the four dimensions of, hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy. Sample of items used were "If I should find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it," (hope), "When I have a setback at work, I have trouble recovering from it, moving on," (resilience), and "When things are uncertain for me at work, I usually expect the best," (optimism), "I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution," (self-efficacy). To measure leadership support, five items from [16] were adopted in this study. Among the items were "The management of the faculty encourages and emphasizes or reinforces creativity by learners," and "The management of the faculty respects learners' ability to function creatively,". All items for all three variables were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Data was analysed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS).

IV. RESULTS

The survey questionnaires were distributed to 300 respondents, however only 162 were returned, yielding a response rate of 54 percent. The response rate is considered high in the context of Malaysia as usually, it was around 20 to 40 percent response rate.

A. Demographics Profile

Majority of the respondents were female which is 70.4 percent. Only 29.6 percent of the respondents were male. In terms of age, most of the respondents were in the range of 31-40 years of age (59.9%). This is followed by 29.6 percent of respondents in the range of 41-50 years old. The highest number of respondents came from Faculty of Pharmacy (17.3%), followed by Faculty of Business and Management (16%), Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management (13%), Faculty of Accountancy (12.3%), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying (11.7%), Faculty of Health Science (11.7%), Faculty of Education (10.5%), Faculty of Art and Design (3.7%) and others (3.7%). 50 percent of the respondents were senior lecturers and 50 percent have a tenure of 6 to 10 years working with the university. Lastly, majority of the respondents (70.4%) were attached with the faculty with no administrative and related post.

B. Reliability Analysis

To ensure the goodness of data, reliability analysis was conducted on the variables. All variables showed an acceptable value which are in the range of .65 to .84.

C. Descriptive Analysis

Next, descriptive analysis was conducted among the variables. All variables showed a mean value between 3.99

and 4.25. Specifically, employee creativity has a mean of 4.16 (SD=0.4). For the dimensions of psychological capital, self-efficacy has the highest mean of 4.25 (SD=0.46), followed by hope with 4.16 (SD=0.33), optimism 4.12 (SD=0.32) and resilience 3.99 (SD=0.32). in addition, leadership support has a mean of 4.06 (SD=0.4).

C. Multiple Regression Analysis

Next, multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses of the study. Based on the result, it was found that only one dimensions of psychological capital namely self-efficacy was found to have relationship with employee creativity. Specifically, self-efficacy has the highest *B* value of 0.51 ($p < 0.01$) which indicate its influence on employee creativity. No relationships were found between hope, resilience and optimism on employee creativity. Thus, only H_{1d} is supported. In addition, leadership support was also found to have a relationship with employee creativity ($B = .32$, $p < 0.05$). This show support for H_2 . The overall model has a R^2 value of 0.38 which indicates 42 percent of variance in explaining employee creativity. The model also has a good fit which reflected in the *F* value.

TABLE I. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Independent Variables	Employee Creativity (<i>B</i>)
Psychological Capital	
• Hope	0.14
• Resilience	0.12
• Optimism	-0.03
• Self-efficacy	0.51**
Leadership Support	0.32**
<i>F</i> value	20.55*
R^2	0.42
Adjusted R^2	0.42

*Note : $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

V. DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTION

The first objective of the study is to determine the relationship between PsyCap (hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy) and academic's creativity. In other words, this study explores different dimensions of PsyCap in a specific employee outcome such as employee creativity. Previous studies revealed positive PsyCap dimensions consisted of hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy that make up the comprehensive PsyCap psychological resources as a whole. However, findings of this study reveal that only one of the psychological capital dimensions namely self-efficacy that influence employee creativity. In other words, the higher the self-efficacy in an individual, the higher their level of creativity. Self-efficacy is referred to as employees' confidence on their abilities to in utilizing their cognitive, motivation and action in order to perform well in their task [17]. Thus, employee with self-efficacy is likely to seek new ideas in achieving their goals and get more creative compared to those who have less self-efficacy. In fact, employees with self-efficacy

would normally choose more challenging task and would put their motivation and effort in fulfilling the goals and providing improvement continuously. This definitely new ideas and perspective which would lead them to be creative [1]. In the context of the institutions of higher education, academics that have self-efficacy are playing more active role in teaching, publication and innovation. This requires them to be creative in delivering the key performance indicators required by the faculty. The findings of the study contrary to previous study conducted in Taiwan [1]. In their study, self-efficacy did not contribute employee creativity. Indeed, hope was found to have the highest influence on employee creativity, alongside with resilience and optimism.

The second objective of the study is to determine the relationship between leadership support and employee creativity. The findings revealed that leadership support contributes to employee creativity. This can be explained by imperative roles of leaders in creating new products and ensuring the competitiveness of the organization. Leaders can develop creativity among employees through facilitating appropriate environment [5] such as providing facilities, equipment and processes that support employees' performance. Similarly, this study also supports previous studies on the significance of leadership support in its contribution on employee creativity. However, it is important to note that limitation of time, inflexible rules and systems routine daily tasks and standardized workplace may hinder lecturer's creativity at the workplace [18].

Theoretically, this study provided a different perspective of PsyCap in explaining employee creativity in the context of human resource management. Previous studies concentrated on a general concept of PsyCap in explaining creativity [1]. Specifically, this study explores four dimensions of PsyCap in the contribution of employee creativity. Among the four dimensions of PsyCap, this study provided a new insight on the importance of self-efficacy in the development of employee creativity. Thus, the results add to the existing literature of PsyCap, especially in the context of higher institutions of education. In addition, this study provides a consistent result on the role of leaders in facilitating creativity in the organization.

Some practical implications is worth highlighting. Firstly, self-efficacy is an important psychological resource for academics in the development of creativity. When academics believed that their abilities are able to put them effectively in executing and accomplishing certain task, they tend to be more creative. This is because, individuals with high self-efficacy continuously improve their ability in accomplishing their goals. Thus, institutions of higher education may need to consider designing workshops and training programs that would improve academics level of self-efficacy. Secondly, leaders play an important role in the contribution of academics' creativity. To establish creative, innovative organizations, leaders must be conscientious and recognize their role and

contributions to creative, innovation processes [5]. Leaders in the institutions of higher education may need to practice transformational leadership styles in order to motivate and inspire the employees in thinking out of the box [5]. In line with that, environment of the organization has to be effective in order to generate creativity among the academics.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has a few potential limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, this study only concentrates on direct relationships between the variables. Future study should include moderating or mediating variable such as employee engagement in order to get a more comprehensive insights of employee creativity. Secondly, this study is a cross-sectional study that collects data based on one period. Future study should consider adopting a longitudinal approach where data will be collected a few times in order to get a better view of the issue. Lastly, it is suggested that the sample of the study is extended to public and private higher learning institutions nationwide.

Overall, this study is able to provide a new perspective on PsyCap and employee creativity among academics. Among the four dimensions of PsyCap, only self-efficacy was found to contribute to employee creativity. In addition, leaders of the institutions of higher education need to provide support in facilitating creativity element among the academics.

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