

# **Delighting the customer: Creativity-oriented high-performance work system, frontline employee creative performance, and customer satisfaction**

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Adapting the service delivery to meet the diverse needs and expectations of customers is increasingly recognized as a way to enhance such customer-related outcomes as customer satisfaction and retention. Critical to the required adaptive behaviours is frontline employees' service creativity which describes the generation of new ideas and novel behaviours that they (frontline employees) demonstrate in the service delivery process. Anchored in self-determination theory (SDT), this study proposes and tests a cross-level model of the processes through which perceived creativity-oriented HPWS relates to creative service performance that in turn, leads to unit-level customer satisfaction.

## FINDINGS

- ▶ Psychological need satisfaction but not creative process engagement mediates the relationship between perceived creativity-oriented HPWS and creative service performance at the individual level
- ▶ Average creativity-oriented HPWS positively relates to average creative process engagement but not average need satisfaction while average creativity-oriented HPWS relates to average creative service performance at the unit level
- ▶ The hypothesized mediational mechanisms of need satisfaction and creative process engagement at the unit level did not receive support
- ▶ Average creative service performance relates to branch customer satisfaction

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings illuminate our understanding of how organizations can create a facilitative context to develop the internal capability needed to promote creative service performance and ultimately customer satisfaction. Specifically, the findings underscore the utility of developing a strategically-focused HPWS to provide the nutrients that satisfy employees' basic psychological needs which, as an internal capability, can be leveraged to promote enhanced levels of creative service performance. However, our finding that the influence of creativity-oriented HPWS on customer satisfaction at the unit level operates through creative service performance but not need satisfaction suggests a need to further probe the mediating mechanisms at the unit level. Considering the growing importance of competing through customisation of the service delivery, the creativity-oriented HPWS scale that we develop and report constitutes a tool for building these strategic capabilities. Additionally, and considering the importance of creating a work context that satisfies the basic psychological needs of employees (and the implications for enhancing employees' optimal functioning) our findings underscore the importance of mutuality in the employment relationship.



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