

HOW EMOTIONAL LEADERSHIP CAN IMPROVE EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY IN KOREAN ICT COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

This study suggests emotional leadership, team-member exchange, and employee intrinsic motivation as antecedents that can improve employee creativity in an organization. Existing literature on emotional leadership focuses on a leader's understanding, empathy, and consideration for and deal with factors that can improve organizational performance by improving his/her social awareness. This study attempted to verify through what mechanism the influence of such emotional leadership can improve the employee creativity in ICT companies requiring sophisticated entrepreneurship. Using PLS-SEM (partial least square-structural equation model), the hypothesis was examined with 241 respondents working in the R&D and support departments of ICT companies. As a result, all hypotheses were supported to improve the creativity of employees in ICT companies.

Keywords: Emotional Leadership, Employee Intrinsic Motivation, Team-Member Exchange, Employee Creativity

INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly changing environment of information and globalization, Information and Communication Technology Companies (ICTs) take the lead in the global market. Knowledge-based companies place importance on accumulating information and knowledge and the combination of new information and knowledge. Creativity is one of the core competencies for ICTs facing globalization and rapid technological change to meet the needs of customers and sustainable growth beyond survival (Jo et al., 2015). The creative contribution of the organization members is creating the value of ICTs by discovering unique and practical ideas and solutions (Amabile, 1983). Therefore, it is more important than ever to explore the influencing factors that influence the creativity of members in ICTs and understand the mechanisms that affect creativity (Amabile, 1988).

Existing studies on factors influencing creativity can be broadly divided into individual and environmental factors. The main research areas at the individual level can be explored as personality factors, cognitive factors, attitudes, and knowledge, among which the most important variables are intrinsic motivation and cognition of creativity (Woodman et al., 1993). Environmental factors include job-related factors, organizational atmosphere, leadership and managerial direction, and compensation. Although Amabile (1996) argued that the encouragement of the working group and support from the organization are factors that enhance creativity, studies on the effect of leadership on creativity in ICTs are insufficient (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Therefore, we intend to verify the effects of Emotional Leadership (EL), Team-Member Exchange

(TMX), and Employee Intrinsic Motivation (EIM) as antecedent variables for Employee Creativity (EC) in ICTs.

The support of working groups and organizations strengthens the creativity of members, but research on how to increase EC through what kind of process is insufficient. Nevertheless, EIM is being studied as a psychological mechanism to explain the effects of work and social context on creativity (Barczak et al., 2010; Bock et al., 2005). One of the important factors that induce individual creativity in an organization is the support of teammates and the support of the organization and its leaders. For example, Hirst, et al., (2009) found that a strong sense of belonging to a team of members makes an effort to perform work more creatively. Baer and Oldham (2006) found that social support for creativity induces encouragement and support for creativity and conveys the expectations of colleagues. Therefore, the high interest and support for the creativity of coworkers make the motivation to develop creativity stronger. In particular, TMX is indispensable in ICTs with many short-term team-specific projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Employee Creativity in ICTs

Amabile (1988) defined creativity as the ability to combine ideas in a unique way or as the ability to connect ideas uniquely. Existing research focusing on creativity at the individual level has recently been seeking various ways to raise it to the collective and organizational level as creativity becomes vital in an uncertain business environment. Ng & Feldman (2012) argued that intrinsic motivation among personal factors and TMX among contextual factors have a positive relationship with creativity through meta-analysis of creativity. Amabile (1996) found that organizational support for working groups is the factor that enhances creativity. The positive organizational atmosphere, such as the formation of a cooperative atmosphere in the uncertain environment of ICTs, contributes to enhancing the creativity of ICTs by sharing knowledge among members and creating a flexible working environment.

EL means that a leader who is excellent in self-management ability, self-awareness ability, relationship management ability, and social awareness ability understands and considers the feelings of members of the organization. Existing literature has placed weight on the analysis that EL and understanding of TMX positively influence work performance and EC. According to Rego, et al., (2007), empathetic leaders can positively impact creativity by managing their emotions when faced with a task that requires EC and encouraging them to approach work in new and varied ways. Thompson, et al., (1999) regarded the effect of EL as supporting members to harmonize their home and work life and shared the value of this (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Therefore, EL and TMX have an extended meaning to support members' personal time and family time, and managers are also interested in the needs of members' families.

Organizational members in ICTs are likely to be psychologically unstable due to the rapidly changing internet or technological environment. If an organization member has a cooperative belief in a team, it means that the organization has the ability to respond to changes to some extent actively or that the organizational stability is high (Riggs & Knight, 1994). When an organization gives a sufficient sense of trust to its members, most of the organizational members' follow-up actions can result in immersion in work or high acceptance of the organization's strategic direction; thus, the psychological basis becomes self-motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation affects the achievement of a member's goal and is regarded as a driving force for the member's actions, such as effort, intention, and persistence for work. EIM has been a factor that drives EC and influences the behavior of members of the organization that lead to EC. Zhou & George (2001) found that

EIM has a positive effect on the creativity of their members in ICTs. Dewett (2007) argued that EIM increases the willingness to take risks, which will play an important role in increasing EC (Prabhu et al., 2008; Tierney & Farmer, 2002).

H1: Emotional leadership has a positive relationship with employee creativity.

H2: Team-member exchange has a positive relationship with employee creativity.

H3: Employee intrinsic motivation has a positive relationship with employee creativity.

Emotional Leadership and Team-Member Exchange

Since many of the tasks that occur in ICTs are related to R&D, the leader's instructions may be regarded as numerical targets that the members of the organization must achieve. On the other hand, a leader's work order and flexible attitude reflecting the emotions can generate the attitude toward the work and respect for the leader (Mahsud et al., 2010). In other words, through the proper operation of EL in ICTs, members of the organization can increase their expectations for TXM due to the psychological stability that follows the leader. Because TXM focuses on social exchange in a teamwork environment (Liden et al., 2000), it will increase each employee's perception of the exchange relationship with the whole team.

According to Seers (1989), TMX shows how voluntarily employees help other members, how easily they can share ideas and feedback with them, and how easily they can receive information, help, and recognition from other members. Members who receive more information and support from their teammates are influential in developing creativity. In particular, the innovation process of ICTs requires cooperation between departments or colleagues within departments (Jo et al., 2015). In other words, a network between teammates and colleagues is needed to share, transfer, and spread knowledge to develop new business specifications and discuss solutions to problems.

H4: Emotional leadership has a positive relationship with team-member exchange.

Team-Member Exchange and Employee Intrinsic Motivation

The supportive and helpful behavior of teammates in the organization boosts creativity because it reinforces EIM. Conversely, unsupported or competitive teammates reduce EIM and creativity. For example, Amabile (1996); Zhou & George (2001) found that supportive actions, encouragement, and information feedback of teammates positively affected the creativity of members. In an organization, EIM is a psychological driver in which members of the organization try to exert their maximum efforts to achieve the goals required by the organization, and it acts as a lubricant that promotes action, effort, willingness, and continuity necessary for work to achieve the goal (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Thompson et al., 1999).

The ability of the person to achieve a given task is determined by the person's ability to accomplish the task, but it is through a sense of goal or motivation that actually makes the task work. The background of motivation is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic (Dewett, 2007; Kremen et al., 2016). Extrinsic motivation refers to a reward given from the outside, such as money, whereas intrinsic motivation refers to a case in which one becomes immersed in a task through the pleasure of performing a task itself without any other clear reward. In other words, intrinsic motivation is what arises from the relationship between a member and a task and refers to a state in which effort is triggered through a sense of accomplishment, a sense of challenge, and a sense of

trust obtained while performing a task (Prabhu et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In determining whether the cause of action is due to a voluntary decision made internally or by an external factor, intrinsic motivation can be regarded as the premise of a voluntary choice because the degree of self-determination desire is realized.

Taking the working environment of ICTs as an example, IT developers have to live under the severe stress of updating applications or solutions in near real-time. Since developers are well aware of each other’s capabilities, helping someone with a bit of margin can increase work efficiency at a magical speed in ICTs, although each has a task assigned by the leader (Jo et al., 2015; Nyhan & Marlowe Jr, 1997). Such mutual collaboration through TMX may gradually raise the confidence in the work and the willingness to upgrade to the next level for developers.

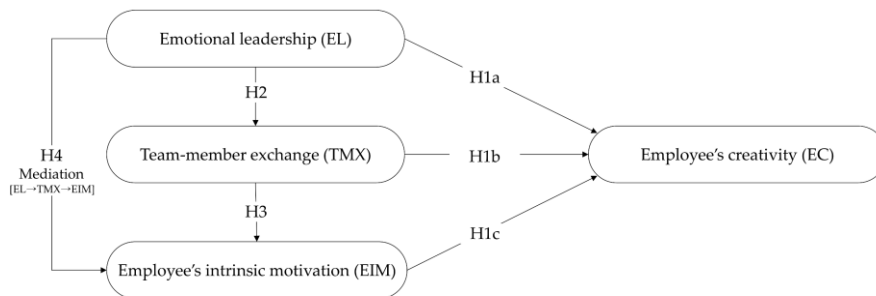
H5: Team-member exchange has a positive relationship with employee intrinsic motivation.

The Mediating Role of Team-Member Exchange

Members of teams with high trust in EL prefer to express problems within the organization or give positive comments to other organization members and tend to conform to the team (Jeong et al., 2020). Organizational trust creates an atmosphere in which members can become more immersed in the team and propose a variety of opinions, so the deeper their trust in organizational cooperation through TMX, leading to a positive EIM.

In shaping a cooperative atmosphere, TMX role of the organization in ICTs is inevitably large. Even if a member of the organization is on a software team, understanding the hardware team requires a common platform of understanding in which team emotional intelligence can be implemented (Kirrane et al., 2019). For example, an atmosphere where the software and hardware teams respect and understand each other can be established only when the emotional leader properly activates TMX. It is difficult for R&D based on trust to occur simply by contacting individuals or departments, and fragmented performance and egoism may rather dampen the motivation of employees (Bock et al., 2005). Thus, authentic motivation will be activated in the process of forming a TMX culture where members of ICTs fully trust in EL to negotiate work.

H6: Team-member exchange mediates the positive relationship between emotional leadership and employee intrinsic motivation.



**FIGURE 1
PROPOSED RESEARCH MODEL**

SAMPLE AND MEASUREMENTS

In order to empirically analyze the proposed model, this study visited ICTs located in Seoul and Gyeonggi-do for one month and conducted a questionnaire for employees. A total of 300 copies were distributed to the R&D, technical staff, and support departments of KT, Samsung SDS, NAVER, and LG, and valid 234 copies were collected (response rate=78%). These four companies are Korea's representative ICTs. The hypothesis test was analyzed using the PLS-SEM model.

As a measurement tool in this study, EC measured eight items of creativity developed by Zhou & George (2001) on a 5-point scale. To measure EIM, five questions were composed on a 5-point scale based on the questionnaire questions developed by Tierney, et al., (1999). To measure EL, the emotional intelligence scale of Wong & Law (2002) was used, and ten items were used as a 5-point scale. To measure TMX, eight questionnaires were used as a 5-point Likert scale using items developed by Seers (1989).

All questionnaires were reorganized by translating them into Korean for the subjects of the questionnaire. In Table 1, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) as the first step to verify with PLS-SEM was performed based on the factor loading threshold of 0.7 (Hair Jr et al., 2016). All 31 observed variables passed the verification.

Table 1
ITEM, DESCRIPTIVE STATISTIC AND FACTOR LOADING

Item	Factor loading	Mean	SD	Item	Factor loading	Mean	SD
EC1	0.767	3.461	0.713	EIM1	0.806	3.502	0.748
EC2	0.780	3.515	0.690	EIM2	0.831	3.544	0.718
EC3	0.732	3.517	0.666	EIM3	0.729	3.718	0.692
EC4	0.735	3.413	0.744	EIM4	0.830	3.598	0.707
EC5	0.709	3.261	0.737	EIM5	0.844	3.693	0.643
EC6	0.793	3.396	0.677	EL1	0.768	3.456	0.706
EC7	0.838	3.471	0.702	EL2	0.762	3.494	0.759
EC8	0.818	3.475	0.720	EL3	0.770	3.544	0.846
TMX1	0.759	3.631	0.702	EL4	0.815	3.494	0.854
TMX2	0.729	3.432	0.710	EL5	0.788	3.473	0.899
TMX3	0.765	3.506	0.696	EL6	0.797	3.556	0.898
TMX4	0.739	3.531	0.633	EL7	0.803	3.671	0.688
TMX5	0.707	3.643	0.662	EL8	0.728	3.697	0.686
TMX6	0.715	3.822	0.662	EL9	0.720	3.680	0.759
TMX7	0.735	3.834	0.637	EL10	0.736	3.751	0.733
TMX8	0.833	3.759	0.689				

Note: All factor loadings are significant at $p < 0.001$.

When Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability is 0.7 or more, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is 0.5 or more, the reliability and the fitness for convergence validity are suitable (Hair Jr et al., 2016). Table 1 shows the correlation analysis between the latent variables and the square root of the AVE of the latent variables. When the AVE square root of the latent variable is greater than the correlation coefficient between the latent variables, it means that the individual latent variable is well distinguished from other latent variables. Therefore, the latent variable in this study can be considered to have high discriminant validity. As a result of analyzing the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), the value ranges from 1.0 to 1.412. Since it is not greater than 3.3, multicollinearity is not problematic. When the multicollinearity is lower than 3.3 in PLS-SEM, there is no risk of common method bias (CMB) (Kock & Lynn, 2012).

Construct	EC	TMX	EIM	EL
EC	1			
TMX	0.283	1		
EIM	0.434	0.428	1	
EL	0.289	0.444	0.304	1
Cronbach's alpha	0.903	0.852	0.868	0.923
Composite reliability	0.922	0.885	0.904	0.935
rho_A	0.907	0.866	0.882	0.925
AVE	0.597	0.494	0.654	0.592
sqrt(AVE)	0.773	0.703	0.809	0.769

Notes: EC=employee creativity, TMX=team-member exchange, EIM=employee intrinsic motivation, EL=emotional leadership, rho_A=Dijkstra and Henseler's composite reliability, AVE=average variance extracted

RESULTS

Figure 2 shows the result of verifying the hypothesis through PLS-SEM. We suggest that EL, TMX, and EIM positively affect EC for H1a, H1b, and H1c, respectively. The hypotheses H1a and H1c that EL and EIM affect EC ($\beta_{EL \rightarrow EC} = 0.152$, $\beta_{EIM \rightarrow EC} = 0.361$) were supported ($p < 0.05$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). On the other hand, H1b regarding the effect of TMX on EC was rejected ($\beta_{TMX \rightarrow EC} = 0.152$, $p > 0.05$).

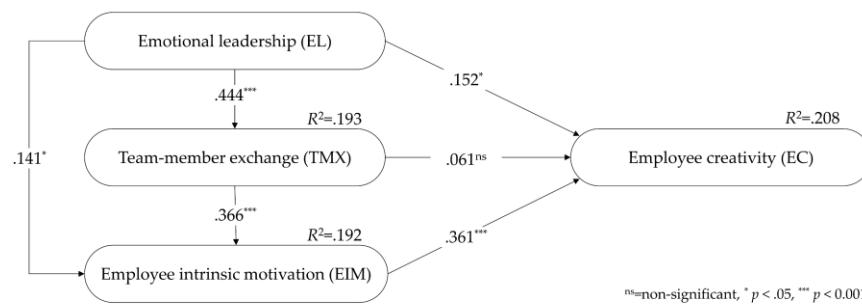


FIGURE 2
RESULTS OF PLS-SEM

H2, H3, and H4 are hypotheses for the sequential effects of EL on TMX and TMX on EIM within an organization. The effects of EL on TMX and TMX on EIM were both significant, and H2 ($\beta_{EL \rightarrow TMX} = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$) and H3 ($\beta_{TMX \rightarrow EIM} = 0.366$, $p < 0.001$) were supported. We hypothesize that H4 is the direct effect of EL on EIM and that TMX mediates the relationship between EL and EIM. First, the effect of EL on EIM was significant ($\beta_{EL \rightarrow EIM} = 0.141$, $p < 0.05$), and the first stage was verified in the mediating effect. In order to verify the mediating effect, we verified using methodologies such as Sobel, Delta, and Bootstrap in Table 3 and found that the mediating effect of TMX was significant in all methods ($p < 0.001$) (Zhao et al., 2010). Variance-explained R² for endogenous latents was acceptable (EC=20.8%, TMX=19.3%, and EIM=19.2%). In summary, all hypotheses except H1b were supported in our hypothesis. The interpretation of the rejected hypothesis will be discussed in conclusion.

Table 3
TESTS ON MEDIATION ROLE OF TMX

Statistics	Sobel	Delta	Bootstrap
Indirect effect	0.162	0.162	0.162
Standard error	0.036	0.036	0.040
Z statistic	4.478	4.478	4.029
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.000
Conf. interval	(0.091, 0.233)	(0.091, 0.233)	(0.097, 0.234)

Notes: 95% confidence level, 2000 bootstrap replications.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on examining the influence of emotional leaders with empathy ability on creativity through TMX and EIM, and verified the mediating role of TMX in the relationship between EL and EC. First, EL and EIM had a positive effect on EC. In ICTs, empathy is the core quality of a leader, and it cooperatively develops the relationship between the leader and the member by empathizing with the feelings of the member. It is interpreted that the attention through the leader's emotional ability can continue to establish EC by forming a sense of trust in both the leader and the organization (Mayer et al., 1999; Rego et al., 2007). Second, it was found that TMX had a positive effect on EIM. TMX allows members to have confidence and trust in the organization to have intrinsic motivation for work and organization. EIM generated through TMX was found to be directly connected to EC. From this point of view, EIM has been shown to have a positive effect on EC. EIM is a crucial factor in being creative and promotes the actions that members of the organization strive to do and continue to do, making them more immersed in their work. These intrinsic motives generate the willingness of members to take risks in ICTs, leading to those members of the organization exhibit high creativity in performing their work (Jo et al., 2015; Seers, 1989). Third, TMX did not significantly affect EC. Since a high level of trust in the organization of the members improves EC within a cooperative culture, TMX encourages the members to propose creative and high-quality ideas. However, there is a limit to increasing creativity only by continuing ties between teams and team members in ICTs. Unlike the situation in which the leader's continuous monitoring or the team members themselves are motivated, cooperation through dialogue and understanding alone is unreasonable to reach the EC (Amabile, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Jeong et al., 2020). In other words, EC can operate well when EL or EIM intertwined with TMX is involved.

The implication of this study is that we expanded the understanding of the relationship between emotional leadership and creativity by emphasizing that TMX and EIM are closely connected and have a positive effect on creativity. Leadership in ICTs raises EC when efforts to understand better the socio-emotional status rather than focusing on mandates, commands, or outcomes induce unity, loyalty to voluntary organizations, and motivation among team members (Pescosolido, 2002). For example, in Samsung SDS, the program development department directly introduced a work innovation called Design Thinking (*i.e.*, mentor-mentee of all employees), absorbing new thoughts and gaining an opportunity to seek creative ways as a member of ICTs.

This study verified the hypothesis suggested through the review of the existing leadership and organizational theory in ICTs. Future research needs to take a more comprehensive approach

when sampling and overcome various firm sizes from small to large. Future research is also required to present a hypothesis that can control nonverbal behavior that is may important in ICTs.

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