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**THE INFLUENCE OF GOAL ORIENTATIONS  
IN THE CREATIVITY OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES**

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## **The influence of goal orientations in the creativity of frontline employees**

### ABSTRACT

Innovation is requiring for companies to compete, grow and lead. However, in order to achieve innovation, a precondition is required: creativity. Given that importance of the frontline employees, and thus are in a privileged position to collect market information, as well as help their employer to develop better solutions to customer problems, it is important to understand the determinants of their creativity.

Analysis of studies about goal orientations, leads to the conclusion that there is a gap in the literature regarding the influence of goal orientations on the creativity of individuals. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate how goal orientations drive frontline employees' creativity.

To investigate this issue, we considered a sample of 1098 frontline employees in the centre region of Portugal, and obtained a response rate of 27.0%. Data analysis was conducted with a qualitative and quantitative methodological area, with structural equations modelling.

The results of this investigation contain a number of innovative contributions that enlighten the mechanisms that foster individual creativity, particularly of the frontline employees. Additionally, this investigation might stimulate others to pursue related lines of investigation.

*Keywords:* goal orientations, creativity, employees, performance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Being a thematic approach with enough in science, creativity is presented as a research area with broad potential applicability in business sciences (Oldham and Cummings, 1996; Shalley, Gilson, and Blum, 2000; Shalley, Zhou and Oldham, 2004; Goncalo and Staw, 2006). The interest in the theme is strongly supported by the view that creativity is very conducive to business innovation, according Shalley, Zhou and Oldham (2004, p. 934). Furthermore, the tourism activity work and compete with the international market. It's important consider that the foremost objective of international travellers is novelty (Yuan and McDonald, 1990). The appeal to the creativity of staff can contribute substantially to innovation, efficiency and even survival of organizations (Nonaka, 1991). In this sense, that a company can achieve competitive advantage, will necessarily have to boost creativity in the various officials who constitute the organization (Shalley, 1995).

Thus, there is already a wide range of work that presents itself grounded in various disciplines in an attempt to brave the explanatory factors of employees' creativity.

In situations where employees of an organization are required to generate a creative performance, these same officials tend to present proposals to a greater or lesser interest to organizations. The proposals based on creativity focus on various areas such as the suggestion of new products or services and even procedures that could benefit the organization's operations. These suggestions are often framed with effective organizational needs, as it is presented as a result of certain shortcomings identified by the organization's own employees. The information provided is presented as a component of high importance to the organization's strategic decisions, particularly where improvements conducive to

organizational development (Woodman, Sawyer and Griffin, 1993). Creativity is thus presented as an extremely important component to be analyzed in order to be investigated various factors, such as for example, conditions that promote creative performance in employees belonging to a particular organization.

Otherwise, today the creativity and the creative industries promote a discussion around the way to take advantages in the production of tourism products. The tourism product development takes particular interest in the integration between the creativity and the knowledge around the tourism industries (Mossberg, 2007).

Shalley, Zhou and Oldham (2004, p. 953) highlighted the need of developing more complete models that analyze the creativity of employees, particularly on the determinants that precede the same creativity. Thus, this research is developed in order to assess the incidence of creativity in employees, trying to understand new precedents that may be inherent in the best creative performance of employees.

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

As noted above, the creativity of employees has sparked growing interest in the scientific community, mainly because of the potential associated with the innovation that can be generated based on employees' creativity (Amabile 1997, Oldham and Cummings 1996; Shalley, Zhou and Oldham , 2004). Given that contact employees, including frontline employees, made to work in an extremely important position - setting a primordial link between the organization and customers - must be taken into consideration that these employees may collect information directly from the market. Thus, this information to be

collected directly from customers' data may indicate the organization as important as changes in customer behaviour or even changes in the wider market (Wang and Netemeyer, 2004), which can be a major contribution to creativity and innovation within organizations.

Oldham and Cummings (1996, p. 608) defined the performance as a creative product ideas or procedures that satisfy two conditions: a) must be new or original and b) have to be potentially relevant or useful for the organization.

Following this reasoning, were also recognized distinctions between organizational innovation and creative performance (Oldham and Cummings, 1996). Specifically, the creative performance refers to products or ideas that are produced at the individual level, while innovation refers to the successful implementation of those products at an organizational level. The present work focuses mainly on the level of creativity in the generation of elements of a particular organization and not both at the organizational implementation of those ideas generated.

Thus it is intended primarily to contribute to the advancement of knowledge around this particular topic. Thus, this research will examine the creativity of the frontline employees and will focus on issues where the literature has yet to provide systematic responses such as, for example:

- What is the effect of goal orientations on the creativity of frontline employees?
- What is the effect of creativity on the job performance of frontline employees?
- What is the effect of goal orientations on the self-efficacy?

These are questions that require a scientific research that can contribute to the advancement of knowledge in relation to creativity. In particular, this paper analyzes the influences that cultural values may have on the creativity of the frontline employees so that we can arrive at useful conclusions for the business in general and particularly for commercial directors who have charge of its teams with several frontline employees. Thus, an objective of this research relates to the presentation of results that may lead to higher job performance of frontline employees, especially through the influence of goal orientations on the individual creative process. Given this reality, the research will clarify the determinants of creativity at the individual level.

To investigate this issue was considered a sample of 1098 frontline employees of the centre of Portugal, with a response rate of 27.0%, comparing favourably with other investigations around the frontline employees, including 28.3% (Thakor and Joshi, 2005) 27.0% (Yilmaz and Hunt, 2001) and 16.9% (Siguaw, Brown and Widing, 1994). For data analysis we used structural equation models using the AMOS program.

In summary, the aim of the research will be to contribute to the advancement of knowledge but also that this same advancement of knowledge possible to obtain favourable results at its applicability in the business. It is also intended to contribute to the development of future research that considers the present investigation, regarding the impact of cultural values on the creativity of frontline employees.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Random sampling is recommended in most research, however random sampling is generally not due to functional constraints on the time and resources. Given the difficulties associated with random sampling, I chose this work because of convenience sampling.

The central region stands out in a national context, with a range of activities which have a relatively large weight in the Portuguese business frame, including tourism activity. Was defined a priori that consider themselves eligible for the study companies with more than 100 workers, to ensure some level of consolidation to management practices. From this database, the analysis was restricted to companies based in the coastal zone / centre north of Lisbon and south of Coimbra.

Companies were contacted via telephone, contact was established with most of the time with the director or, in some cases, the supervisor of the frontline employees. This prior contact aimed to identify the total number of frontline employees that the company had, as well as probe the company's willingness to collaborate with this study.

For the process of data collection was subsequently established a second contact with the supervisor if the frontline employees. Scheduled the meeting proceeded to a brief explanation about the objectives of the investigation. It was also shown to guarantee the anonymity of respondents and the anonymity of the company. In order to encourage collaboration, it was proposed to send back a summary of the main conclusions reached in the investigation.

The distribution of questionnaires took place from February to April 2009, 1,098 questionnaires were distributed, a set of 122 companies. The questionnaires were personally delivered by hand to the frontline employees.

359 questionnaires were received, represented 32.7% of total questionnaires distributed. In all of the questionnaires received, had some errors in the completion and therefore not considered valid. For example, did not consider the respondents whose questionnaires repeatedly used the same values for their answers, thereby following the instructions suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003, p. 882).

Thus, after elimination of questionnaires that had some type of irregularity in the filling, were considered valid for the processing of 296 questionnaires, representing a response rate of 27.0%.

## 6. RESULTS

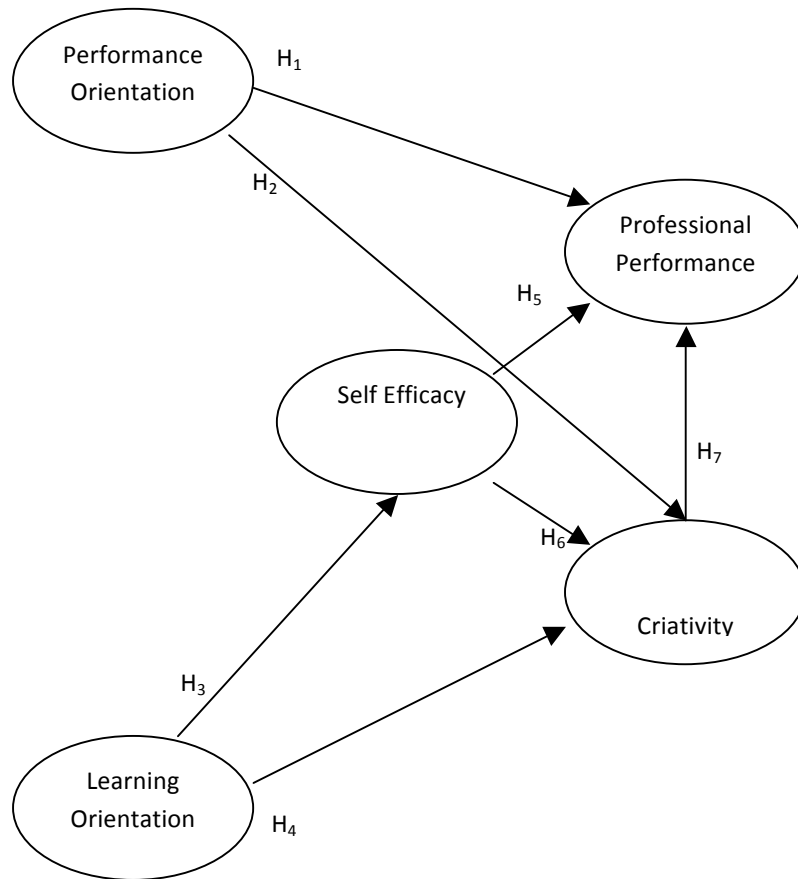
TABLE 1: STANDARD DEVIATION, CORRELATION MATRIX, CRONBACH'S ALPHA, RELIABILITY AND COMPOSITE AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED.

	SD	X <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>3</sub>	X <sub>4</sub>	X <sub>5</sub>	CR	AVE
Performance Orientation (X <sub>1</sub> )	0.75	<b>0.81</b>					0.81	0.48
Learning Orientation (X <sub>2</sub> )	0.62	0.27	<b>0.90</b>				0.81	0.61
Self-Efficacy (X <sub>3</sub> )	0.66	0.13	0.39	<b>0.85</b>			0.86	0.50
Creativity (X <sub>4</sub> )	0.61	0.24	0.56	0.53	<b>0.88</b>		0.89	0.61
Professional Performance (X <sub>5</sub> )	0.93	0.29	0.36	0.46	0.42	<b>0.90</b>	0.91	0.66

Notes: SD – Standard Deviation; Diagonal Bolt – Cronbach's Alpha; CR – Composite Reliability; AVE – Average Variance Extracted.



Figure 1: Final Model



## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Creativity is presented as a major component for organizational innovation (Gumusluoglu and Ilsev, 2009). The creativity of the frontline employees is presented as one of the most important facets in the work of officials of contact, particularly because these employees are exposed to highly competitive environments, and its decisive role in the success of business organizations. Despite this evidence, the literature has not thoroughly examined this issue, therefore, contributions should be added to explain the influences exerted on the creativity of frontline employees.

The learning orientation stimulates the exchange of ideas among employees, thus facilitating their own learning developed by each employee. This generates more support for creativity on the part of those responsible for sales to the extent that the results are easily noticeable through performance. In other words, managers can further develop techniques to encourage frontline employees to adopt a learning orientation with the objective of increasing the creativity of individuals.

Surprisingly, the results indicated a positive relationship between performance orientation and creativity, contrary to the literature that supported a negative relationship between these variables (Hennessey and Amabile, 1988). This may be considered an opportunity for future studies to examine particularly the relationship established between performance orientation and creativity.

Additionally, the results show that the frontline employees with more performance orientation tend to have higher levels of performance leading to favourable results in later for the organization. Another important factor relates to the fact that the performance orientation exerts direct and indirect influence on job performance. Noted that the indirect influence is exercised through creativity, i.e. the performance orientation influences the creativity to further influence in a positive, professional performance from frontline employees.

The pressing put in the frontline employees is associated with a high in the pursuit of independence. By being independent when carrying out their activities, frontline employees need to self-efficacy to carry out their functions properly and to deliver solutions using creativity. The results demonstrated that individuals with self-efficacy have higher levels of

creativity. Managers will be important to implement measures that encourage self-efficacy of the sellers so they may be possible to enhance individual creativity. This result helps to consolidate as yet little evidence in the literature between self-efficacy and creativity.

People who have a high self-efficacy have better levels of professional performance, which goes against the results presented in several studies (Bandura, 1986; Redmond, Mumford and Teach, 1993; Sujan, Weitz and Kumar, 1994).

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the guidance provides an objective set of positive influences on the creativity of the vendors. Through the performance orientation frontline employees are developing their activities with the specific objective of achieving better results. To this end, develop the creative ability to positively influence their professional performance. That is, the orientation influences performance in different contexts (Wei and Atuahene-Gima, 2009), so it is very important to note the prominent role assumed by the guidance in the specific case of the sellers. One of the most important conclusions of this research is due to the fact that the results corroborate a positive relationship exerted by the creativity of the performance of vendors. This data presents a particular interest because frontline employees often work in highly competitive environments and it required a high performance.

Individual differences concerning personality are one of the factors that influence the orientation objectives. It is important to note that had been previously proposed an influence of the personality of the individual objectives and orientation (Harris, Mowen and Brown, 2005). One area of research that is attracting increasing attention from the academic community refers to the identification of factors that influence the orientation objectives.

Thus, the present investigation is consistent with the importance given to the antecedents of guidance objectives, highlighting the cultural values of individuals as one of the background. That is, the history of orientation for objectives is presented as a subject that matters to investigate.

The future investigations will need to take into account that the current recession is that the country may affect the results presented. Often, direct contact with the frontline employees give the perception of a sharp dismay with the current business, precisely the result of sharp declines in sales. This data can of course limit condition and an assessment of the scenario creativity of frontline employees, according to the warnings of bias suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003, p. 882).

Otherwise, when we analyse some complex factors like personality we need consider in future research the issue of online customer needs. Analysing the literature in the tourism and hospitality context, we could conclude that the online personality is a relatively unexplored field (Leung and Law, 2010).

On the other hand, considering that some organizations are more receptive to implementing programs that encourage creativity, should be taken into consideration that such programs may have influence on the results when compared with results obtained from organizations that do not have programs to encourage creativity. It is often little formalized processes that may result in spontaneous meetings between frontline employees but which result in fleeting exchange of ideas which may subsequently be improved by each individual frontline employees. Thus, future research may try to analyze what type of mechanism that is used within organizations to develop the creative capacity of individuals. This situation should be

analyzed on the impact of such mechanisms as the regulation exercised by the supervisors may have interference on the motivation of individuals committing their results (Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996).

This investigation considered as the basis of a sample set of frontline employees assigned to organizations based in the central region of Portugal, so it would be interesting to extend this type of investigation to other regions in order to ascertain any discrepancies around creativity.

Following the previous suggestion, considering that frontline employees are often dispersed throughout the country, this confrontation will be more appropriate if the research is replicated in different countries. The suggestion to extend the study to different European Union countries is the increased relevance of creativity to be considered frontline employees assigned to the same industry but located in different countries and therefore exposed to different European cultures.

Additionally, one of the opportunities faced by future research will evaluate the mechanisms that organizations have to facilitate, develop and disseminate the creative ideas of employees.

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