

MARKETING CREATIVITY: THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL AND PROXIMAL WORK FACTORS ON CREATIVE ACTIVITY

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Marketing strategy creativity is critical for product differentiation and positioning as meaningful differentiation can affect the profitability of a firm's offerings by offering something unique and useful to the consumer. Thus, examining the variables that impact creative decision-making by marketing managers is important. A greater understanding of these variables will clarify those conditions under which creative individuals are most likely to come up with creative ideas. However, the marketing literature reflects remarkably little effort in the domain of marketing creativity. The author draws on and synthesizes literature from the fields of psychology, management, and marketing to propose a model of managerial level creativity and its determinants. The proposed model suggests that creativity is directly related to personality characteristics and that this relationship is moderated by proximal work factors such as autonomy, time pressure, and job complexity. Also, it is suggested that the personality-creativity relationship is moderated by attribution for past performance. Theoretical and managerial implications of this research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing strategy creativity is critical for product differentiation and positioning. Martindale (1989) defines creativity as a product or idea that is deemed by others in a particular field to be both original and useful. Therefore, marketing strategy creativity can be thought of as a strategy for marketing a product that is considered original and useful. Andrews and Smith (1996) suggest that creative marketing strategy is a special case of product innovation. Beyond creating innovative products, creative marketing strategies involve many other marketing issues including packaging, promotion, and positioning. The implementation of innovative solutions can enhance a firm's ability to adapt and grow with changes in its environment and the changing demands of its customers (Oldham and Cummings 1996).

In addition to enhancing a firm's ability to adapt to changes in its environment, creative

marketing strategies can lead to meaningful product differentiation. Meaningful differentiation can affect the profitability of a firm's offerings by offering something unique and useful to the consumer. Without differentiation, products risk becoming little more than commodities in the eyes of consumers. Given the importance of product differentiation to firm profitability and growth, it is interesting to note that many established firms are lacking in the creativity of their marketing programs. This has led to criticism from senior management stating that marketing managers are unable to generate new methods for promoting products and rely on traditional methods for conducting business (Andrews and Smith 1996).

Interestingly, Amabile (1988) suggests that organizations tend to seek out and hire people with innate creative abilities; however, there is still variance in the creative performance of these firms. This variance is likely the result of the influence of contextual factors on creative personality characteristics. Research in psychology has shown that creativity is the result of a combination of both personal and situational factors (Amabile 1996; Andrews and

Smith 1996). Understanding these personal and situational determinants and how they interact will enable managers to effectively create environments that are prone to innovative behavior, an important component in the profitability of the firm.

Traditionally research on creativity has primarily been confined to the disciplines of psychology and management. In marketing, most creativity research has borrowed from management and looked at organizational characteristics that may affect a firm's creative output and innovative behavior such as interdepartmental interaction and diversification of team members (Moorman and Miner 1997; Sethi, Smith and Park, 2001). Little research on creativity in marketing has been conducted at the individual level. Given the importance placed on the output of managers and their influence within the firm and the emergence of managerial decision making as an important stream of research in marketing, it is important that we understand creativity from the managerial perspective. In addition, since innovation is generally seen as a desirable firm activity, it is important to understand what characteristics are necessary in order to ensure an innovative organization (Andrews and Smith 1996). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to develop a model of creative marketing decision-making that incorporates the personal and contextual factors that may inhibit or promote its existence.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Creativity

Although research in the domain of creativity is quite diverse, most theorists agree that creativity is more than simply an individual possessing creative traits. Vernon (1989) describes creativity as a person's capacity to produce new and original ideas or products that are accepted by experts in a particular field as being of some value. Mednick (1962) states that it is the forming of previously known associative elements into new combinations that are in some way useful. Martindale (1989)

states that a creative idea is comprised of three components. First you must have a product or idea that is original. Second, this product or idea must be useful in some way or appropriate for the situation that it is intended. Finally, the product or idea must be put to use. Martindale (1989) further states that creativity in art and science is essentially the same thing as both domains involve the combination of existing elements in new and useful ways. The primary difference is the product of the creative process. For instance, in poetry a creative product involves the arrangement of currently existing words and concepts into a new story, while in business a creative product may involve the combination of currently existing product attributes into a new product.

What all of the above definitions of creativity share is the idea that creativity is not solely a quality that a person carries but that it is an outcome that is deemed original and useful by others. A person may have a novel idea but unless that idea has some relevance to a field, it remains simply a novel idea. This is an important point to make as it exemplifies the influence that environment and related social groups play in the generation of creative ideas. In the present study, creativity is defined along the lines of Andrews and Smith (1996), who describe marketing program creativity as the extent to which actions invoked to market a product are seen as significantly different from those generally used in the product category. Thus, this definition encompasses not only creative product design but also other aspects of marketing a product such as promotion, packaging, distribution, etc.

I now turn to identifying those factors that are expected to affect marketing creativity. These factors can be broken down into two primary categories. First, there are personal characteristics that are unique to the marketing manager such as innate personality traits. Second, there are factors associated with the work environment itself. Work environment factors can include those aspects that define the job (i.e., autonomy), as well those work-driven

factors that can impact performance (i.e., history of past success).

Creativity Components

Creative output depends on both personal and situational inputs (Amabile 1996; Andrews and Smith 1996). In an organizational setting this would include characteristics about the source of the creative product (i.e., the manager) and the dynamics of the work environment. In order for individuals to generate creative ideas, it is necessary that they possess some level of personal creative characteristics. Contextual factors, such as work environment and past performance, are expected to affect creativity by fostering an environment in which creative individuals feel compelled to use their innate creative skills.

Creativity-relevant Skills. With regard to the personal sources of creativity, many researchers tend to converge toward three general elements: task motivation, domain-relevant skills and abilities, and creativity-relevant skills (Martindale 1989; Shalley 1991; Amabile 1996; Csikszentmihalyi 1996). These components range on a continuum of specificity with task motivation being very task-specific while creativity-relevant skills are quite general in nature and tend to exist in an individual regardless of the task they are faced with (Amabile 1996).

Creativity-relevant skills are skills specific to an individual that enable the individual to generate responses surpassing previous responses in novelty and usefulness. Creativity-relevant skills are a necessary but insufficient component for creativity to exist. A high level of creativity is more likely to occur under the condition of high domain-relevant skill (i.e., domain knowledge), high task motivation, and high creativity-relevant skill. Amabile (1997) refers to this interaction of skills and motivation as the “creativity intersection.”

Creativity-relevant skills have been discussed as consisting of two categories (Jones 1964; Montgomery, Bull and Baloché 1993; Amabile

1996; James and Asmus 2000). For instance, Jones (1964) analyzed 53 test variables used to describe creative individuals and found nine to be valid with four of these aptitudinal or cognitive in nature and five attitudinal in nature. The first category consists of cognitive skills and includes such things as an ability to understand complexities, use of divergent and critical thinking, and an ability to concentrate effort and attention for long periods of time (Jones 1964; Montgomery, Bull and Baloché 1993; Amabile 1996). Although cognitive skills are specific to the individual, it is thought that these skills can be enhanced through training and experience (Vernon 1989).

The second category is comprised of personality characteristics. Personality characteristics are qualities that the individual possesses, which are fairly predictive of behavior and tend to be enduring. As such, these characteristics distinguish those individuals that are more likely to generate creative output from those that are not. Some of the more consistent personal qualities identified in past research are persistence, independence, tolerance for ambiguity, confidence, reflection, egotism, willingness to take risk, self-discipline, openness to experience, imagination, insight, curiosity, and behavioral flexibility (Harrington 1975; Gough 1979; Barron and Harrington 1981; Martindale 1989; Montgomery, Bull and Baloché 1993; Amabile 1996; James and Asmus 2000).

Organizational Characteristics. Work environment has been shown to relate with creativity (Amabile et al. 1996). Woodman, Sawyer and Griffin (1993) categorized environmental aspects into two distinct groups: (1) Group characteristics, which include group norms, diversity, cohesiveness, roles, and group size. (2) Organizational characteristics, which include resources, organizational structure, and rewards. These characteristics can also be broken down according to their degree of proximity to the daily work of employees (Shalley, Gilson and Blum 2000). Proximal characteristics are those aspects of the work environment that affect an employee on a daily

basis such as autonomy, job complexity, and time pressure. On the other hand, distal characteristics are those aspects of the job that do not affect an employee on a daily basis, such as supervisor support, encouragement, and management-subordinate interaction.

In this study, I restrict my investigation of job characteristics to proximal job characteristics. The reason for this restriction is two-fold: (1) Proximal characteristics are more closely related to job design as opposed to providing a supportive environment in which to work; (2) Although both distal and proximal characteristics are expected to have an effect on creativity, proximal characteristics are likely to have a stronger effect since they are more apparent to the employee on an on-going basis (Shalley, Gilson and Blum 2000). There are many proximal aspects of a job that may affect creativity. However, autonomy, job complexity, and time pressure have been consistently shown to account for the majority of variance in individual creativity (Amabile et al. 1996; Oldham and Cummings 1996; Amabile 1997; Shalley, Gilson and Blum 2000).

Performance History. Past performance has been shown to affect decision-making within the firm through its impact on the risk-aversion held by decision-makers (Lant, Milliken and Batra 1992; Bolton 1993; Krueger and Dickson 1994; Miller 1994; Lee 1997). According to Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory, decision makers simplify their decision making via the use of reference points. If past performance is below the reference point (i.e., failure), they are more likely to adopt risk-seeking behavior. If past performance is above the reference point (i.e., success), they are more likely to adopt risk-averse behavior. Prospect theory suggests that risk seeking is likely to be adopted under situations of past failure since losses loom larger than relative gains.

Alternatively, according to Thaler and Johnson's (1990) house money effect, the opposite process is expected. The house money effect suggests that under certain conditions, prior gains are likely to result in an increase in

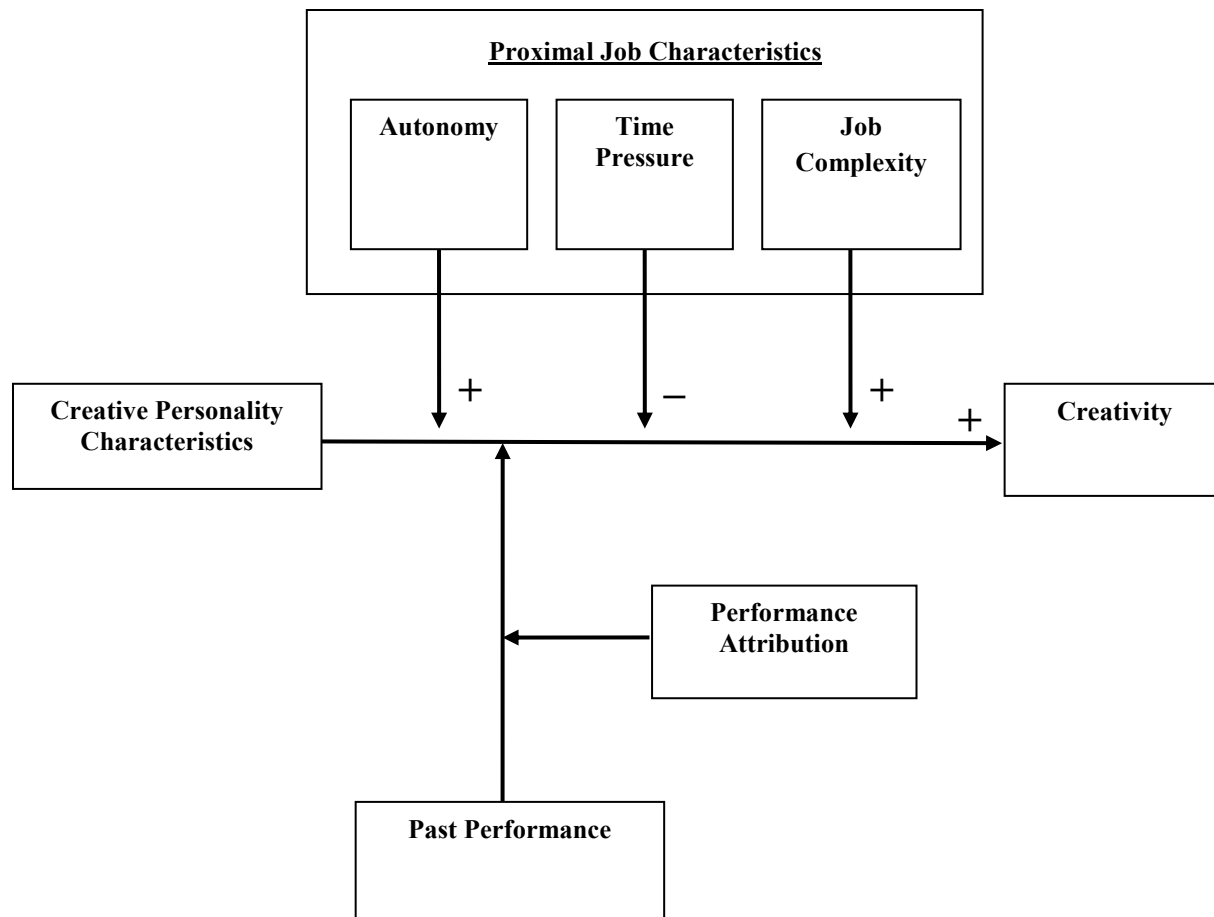
risky decision-making, while prior losses are likely to result in a decrease in risky decision-making. The notion behind this phenomenon is the idea of gambling with house money. As long as the possibility of failure does not return the firm below the position it held prior to past successful performance, individuals will be willing to gamble for possible gains.

In summary, knowledge of personality is important as personality traits are expected to have a direct impact on marketing creativity. Amabile (1988) suggests that organizations tend to seek out and hire people with these innate abilities; however, there is still variance in the creative performance of these firms. This variance is likely to be the result of the influence of contextual factors on personality characteristics. Some of the variance associated with the creative output of these firms can be explained by work environment characteristics and their impact on task motivation (Amabile 1988). It is my contention that past performance will also influence creative activity via its affect on risk-taking behavior.

THEORY AND PROPOSITIONS

Figure 1 is a conceptual framework for the following discussion. Briefly the model is comprised of four sets of factors: (1) Personal creativity characteristics, which can be measured via an individual's score on a personal creativity inventory, such as Gough's 30-item Creativity Personality Scale (Gough 1979); (2) Creativity; (3) Proximal job characteristics (autonomy, time pressure, and job complexity), which are expected to moderate the relationship between personality and creativity; (4) A past performance measure, which is also expected to moderate the relationship between personality and creativity. In addition, attribution for past performance is expected to moderate the effect of past performance on the personality-creativity relationship. The next section discusses each set of factors and develops propositions regarding their relationships in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1:
Work-Related Factors Affecting Creativity



Antecedent to Creativity

Extant literature considers individual personality characteristics important in predicting creativity. Individual personality characteristics have been studied using several scales such as Harrington's Composite Creative Personality Scale and Gough's Adjective Check List (Barron and Harrington 1981). One of the more popular personality scales is Gough's 30-item Creative Personality Scale (CPS), which was derived from Gough's Adjective Check List (Gough 1979). The Adjective Check List was administered to 1,701 subjects and the results were compared with individual creativity assessments conducted by experts, interviewers, and faculty members. The correlations between the Adjective Check List items and the assessed ratings were used to create a 30-item scale (See Table 1).

Composite CPS scores can be used as a measure of the innate personality characteristics that are typical of individuals that enable them to be creative. A high score on this scale indicates that a person possesses more of the qualities conducive to creative activity than is typical of individuals scoring low on this scale. Oldham and Cummings (1996) found the CPS to correlate positively with the number of patent disclosures written. Patents were used to measure creative activity as patent disclosures are often requested when an employee develops an idea or process that is considered original by superiors. Since creativity-relevant skills are considered a necessary but insufficient component for creativity it is expected that trait creativity will have a positive direct relationship on creative activity.

P₁: The greater the level of trait creativity, the higher the level of creative activity.

TABLE 1:
Gough's Creative Personality Scale

<i>Positive items</i>	<i>Negative items</i>
Capable	Affected
Clever	Cautious
Confident	Commonplace
Egotistical	Conservative
Humorous	Conventional
Individualistic	Dissatisfied
Informal	Honest
Insightful	Interests Narrow
Intelligent	Mannerly
Interests Wide	Sincere
Inventive	Submissive
Original	Suspicious
Reflective	
Resourceful	
Self-confident	
Sexy	
Snobbish	
Unconventional	

Proximal Work Environment Moderators

The work environment has been shown to have an effect on creativity (Oldham and Cummings 1996; Andrews and Smith 1996; Amabile 1997). Shalley, Gilson and Blum (2000) have found that characteristics of an individual's work environment moderate the relationship between job-required creativity and psychosocial outcomes. In addition, they found that proximal characteristics had a greater impact on this relationship than distal characteristics. As suggested previously, three proximal work environment factors that have been shown to consistently impact creativity are autonomy, time pressure, and job complexity (Amabile et al. 1996; Oldham and Cummings 1996; Amabile 1997; Shalley, Gilson and Blum 2000).

Autonomy. Autonomy involves the amount of freedom an individual has to perform a task. Hence, managers with high autonomy have less direct supervision and more discretion in how they conduct their daily routine. Shalley, Gilson and Blum (2000) found a positive relationship between autonomy and the creativity requirements of a job. When autonomy is high, an individual is less constrained by rigid rules

and regulations. Thus, there is more opportunity for the individual to use divergent thinking when making decisions. Divergent thinking involves the application of great flexibility (variety) and fluency (amount) of information in solving a given problem and is characteristic of creative thought (Brown 1989; Haensly and Reynolds 1989; Titus 2000).

This effect is likely to hold only under moderate conditions. Oldham and Cummings (1996) found that noncontrolling supervision had a positive effect on creativity. This would indicate that a moderate amount of freedom is more conducive to creativity. High levels of autonomy provide managers with little feedback and guidance regarding their performance and the goals of the task. This limits the managers' ability to generate solutions that are relevant to the firm, which is a necessary condition for a decision to be considered creative. Moderate amounts of autonomy provide managers with enough freedom to explore various decision processes while providing guidance to ensure that the task is directed toward a productive end. Thus, ensuring that time is not wasted investigating the limitless paths to creative solutions that are characteristic of creative thought.

P₂: The effect of trait creativity on creative activity will be greater under conditions of moderate autonomy.

Job Complexity. Job complexity has been shown to have a positive effect on creativity (Amabile et al. 1996; Oldham and Cummings 1996; Shalley, Gilson and Blum 2000). Issues that cannot be resolved with simple, routine solutions characterise jobs that are high in complexity. These jobs require the use of heuristic task processing, as there are likely to be many possible solutions. As tasks become more complex, the number of solutions is likely to increase as is the uncertainty surrounding what solutions are available. This requires an individual to engage in more divergent thinking in generating possible ideas. Thus, an individual high in CPS is likely to generate more creative thoughts as a result of their innate insightfulness, inventiveness, and resourcefulness. Additionally, it has been suggested that people are creatures of habit and as such will rely on habitual practices whenever possible (Ford 1996). This is less likely to occur when the job is complex as there is less certainty that familiar procedures will accomplish the task.

P₃: The effect of trait creativity on creative activity will be greater as the job becomes more complex.

Time Pressure. Andrews and Smith (1996) found that time pressure can have a detrimental effect on creativity. Creative thought can be a time intensive process relative to non-creative thought. Thinking in heuristic terms involves considerable fluency and flexibility (Amabile 1996). Under time constraints, a manager is likely to engage in more algorithmic thinking in order to accomplish a task. In other words, a manager is likely to adopt solutions used in the past; therefore, creativity is likely to suffer.

P₄: The effect of trait creativity on creative activity will be weaker as time pressure increases.

Performance Moderator

Krueger and Dickson (1994) found that performance feedback was significantly positively related to perceived self-efficacy, which in turn was correlated with greater risk taking. The change in risk taking was related to perceived opportunities and threats. Subjects with greater perceived self-efficacy were more likely to view risky choices as opportunities and were more likely to take risks on these choices than those who had low perceived self-efficacy. Similarly, Martins and Kambil (1999) found that managers who had experienced greater benefits from the use of existing information technology were more likely to perceive new information technologies as opportunities and had greater confidence in their ability to respond to new technologies. This argument lends support to Thaler and Johnson's (1990) house money effect, which states that prior gains are likely to be met with greater risk-taking behavior. Creativity can be thought of as a risky process since it involves investing a considerable amount of time and energy in order to generate an outcome that may not be embraced by those relevant in the field. Under these conditions, it seems reasonable to assume that performance feedback should have a moderating effect on the personality-creativity relationship.

If prior creative output has been met with success, feedback should increase the individual's confidence in their creative abilities, which should, at the very least, maintain the prior level of creative activity. If prior creative output has been met with failure, feedback should have a detrimental effect on future creative output. In this case, the negative feedback should lower an individual's self-confidence, which in turn will increase their level of risk-aversion. Future creative activity will be seen as a threat and the employee will be more likely to adopt standard organizational operating procedures. Standard operating procedures are more in line with algorithmic decision processes as opposed to heuristics, which are more likely to be used in creative thought. Algorithmic tasks are those tasks for

which there is one clear path to the solution, while heuristic tasks involve uncertainty and an unknown number of paths to the solution (Amabile 1996).

Although this same process is expected to happen at lower levels of trait creativity, the relationship is not expected to be as strong. Since creative personality characteristics are a necessary but insufficient condition for creativity, individuals with lower levels of trait creativity are not expected to generate high levels of creative output. Therefore, individuals possessing low levels of trait creativity are expected to use standard operating procedures, both prior to and after performance feedback. In addition, there is likely to be little change in creative activity when past performance is attributed to external sources, as individuals will perceive no relationship between success or failure and their creative output.

P_{5a}: The effect of trait creativity on creative activity will be greater under conditions of successful past performance.

P_{5b}: The effect of trait creativity on creative activity will be moderated by attributions for past performance such that creative activity will be more positive when success is attributed to a manager's previous creative decision.

P_{5c}: The effect of trait creativity on creative activity will be moderated by attributions for past performance such that creative activity will be more negative when failure is attributed to a manager's previous creative decision.

In summary, creative personality characteristics are expected to have a positive effect on an individual's creativity. This relationship is expected to be moderated by two sets of factors: (1) Proximal work characteristics are expected to have both positive and negative moderating effects. Both autonomy and job complexity are expected to have a positive impact while time pressure is expected to have a negative effect on the creative personality-creativity relationship. (2) Attributions for past performance are expected to moderate the relationship between personal creativity

characteristics and creativity. The effect of perceived performance is further moderated by attributions for performance such that under conditions when past performance is attributed to an internal source, success will generate further creativity while failure will generate the adoption of standard operating procedures. Under conditions where past performance is attributed to an external source, the effect of past performance is expected to be non-existent.

DISCUSSION

Testing the Model

A test of the proposed model would involve a six-factor experiment. The factors to be tested include CPS, autonomy, time pressure, job complexity, attribution for past success, and attribution for past failure. Testing the model would prove difficult due to the large number of factors, thus a fractional factorial design would be required.

Personality would be measured using Gough's 30-item creative personality scale (CPS). The study would involve administering the CPS to a randomly selected sample of subjects. Based on the results of a median split, individuals would be placed in either a high or low CPS group. Manipulations of proximal work characteristics would include autonomy (high, moderate, low), time pressure (high, low), and job complexity (high, low). Past performance would consist of attribution for past success (external, internal) and attribution for past failure (external, internal). The dependent variable (creativity) would be a measure of the subject's performance on a creativity task. A typical creativity task used in past research involves the use of word associations to check for fluency and flexibility, as creativity involves the ability to generate a large amount of information with high variety (McCrae 1987). Independent observers would judge each subject's creativity.

Implications

From a managerial perspective, the proposed model suggests that work environment and performance are important factors that affect a creatively endowed manager's motivation to generate creative output. Having a creative personality will not lead to creativity on its own. This is important from the perspective of job design. For firms that desire creative decision making, it is important to provide managers with ideal levels of autonomy and job complexity that are free of limiting time constraints. This is necessary to ensure that managers have the intrinsic motivation to perform the tasks that are expected of them. Additionally, monitoring manager performance is necessary to ensure that managers are aware of the source of past performance. For firms that are pro-creativity, past success that can be attributed to a manager should be emphasised. At the same time past failure should be downplayed and attributed to more external sources, regardless of its cause, otherwise creativity may be stifled.

On a theoretical level, the proposed model opens up a new area in marketing. The marketing literature reflects remarkably little effort in the domain of marketing creativity, particularly as it applies to marketing strategy. Marketing strategy creativity is critical for product differentiation since the goal of differentiation is to offer the consumer something unique and useful. Thus, examining the variables that impact creative decision-making by marketing managers is important. The proposed model links three important areas that impact marketing strategy creativity, namely personality, work environment, and performance.

Future research directions for the proposed model of marketing strategy creativity at the managerial level should involve empirical testing of the model. In addition, further refinement of the moderating relationships in the model is warranted. In its current form, the model represents a general conceptualization of the process involved in creative decision-

making. Given the dynamic environments of organizations, there are probably many more variables that may impact the relationship between personality and creativity. Also, the proposed model uses a composite CPS score to represent creative personality. This score is comprised of several personality characteristics that may play more or less dominant roles in the model. Determining which aspects of personality are more dominant and when they are likely to be so, would add greater sophistication to the model

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