

Creative staff lead to satisfied customers says study

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Organisations in the service sector that have more creative employees enjoy higher levels of customer satisfaction, according to new research led by the University of East Anglia (UEA).

The study looked at how creativity-orientated HR practices influence customer satisfaction. The authors recommend that businesses should invest in developing the creative capabilities of their customer service employees by implementing a system of HR practices tailored towards creativity.

These could include workshops to help staff increase their creative confidence and training to provide creative thinking and problem solving techniques. Training could be provided for managers to help enable employee creativity, while rewards for individual and team ideas could also encourage creativity, though these would not necessarily need to be financial.

Despite the potential influence of employees' creative performance on customer outcomes and ultimately, organisational performance, creative performance in frontline service roles has received little research attention. Sales and customer service roles are also usually associated with more scripted rather creative behaviour.

However the findings of this study, published in the *Journal of Management*, show that in retail companies, branches that on average were more creative as rated by their managers received higher satisfaction evaluations from their customers.

The researchers also found that in branches where employees perceived there to be more HR practices in place for creativity, staff expressed higher levels of their needs being satisfied - for example having control in their work, feeling competent, feeling connected to people in their team - which was in turn positively related to creative performance.

Lead author Dr Ieva Martinaityte, a lecturer in business and management at UEA's Norwich Business School, said: "We are living in a constantly changing environment and companies need to adapt to changes in technology and customer needs. Customers want a more personal service and we show that a more creative approach is a way to enhance their experience. Delighting the customer will increasingly stem from frontline employees' creative rather than scripted role performance.

"Service organisations must aim to understand the drivers of creative performance. Our findings suggest that this may be supported by adopting a set of HR practices that are geared towards the environments and skills necessary to motivate creative performance. By helping employees to be more confident and enabling them to have control over their own work they will engage in creative efforts."

The study, conducted with researchers at Aston University and King's College London, involved frontline employees and their managers employed in 53 branches of two international companies operating in retail banking (31 branches) and cosmetics (22) in Lithuania.

Questionnaires on creativity-orientated HPWS, need satisfaction, creative process engagement and demographics were completed by 329 employees. Fifty-one branch managers rated their employees' creative performance, as well as the extent to which creativity orientated HR practices had been implemented at their respective branches. Data on customer [satisfaction](#) was collected from company records for the six months before to six months after the quarter of survey data collection.

More information: I. Martinaityte et al. Delighting the Customer: Creativity-Oriented High-Performance Work Systems, Frontline Employee

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