



Creativity cognitive style, conflict, and career success for creative entrepreneurs[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Creativity cognitive style refers to individual differences in perceiving, behaving, solving problems, taking decisions, and relating to others in the creative process, whereas conflict handling style depicts individuals' behavior in response to interpersonal conflicts. Leaders' conflict management has profound impacts on group outcomes, though little work has been done to examine the relationship between entrepreneurs' creativity cognitive style, conflict handling style, and career success in creative industry sectors. Structural equation modeling is used to examine the hypotheses on a sample of 251 creative entrepreneurs in Taiwan. Results indicate that creative entrepreneurs' cognitive style influences entrepreneurial success through affecting conflict handling style. Based on the theories of cognitive psychology and conflict management, this paper sheds light on the missing link between entrepreneurial cognition and conflict handling in the entrepreneurship domain.

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1. Introduction

Creative industries are driving forces in the global economic development (Henry & De Bruin, 2011). Creative industries include a wide range of sectors as art, craft, design, fashion, filming, advertising, architecture, publishing, media, and cultural heritage (DCMS, 2001). The United Nations has highlighted the contribution of creative industries towards job creation, regional innovation, and social inclusion, suggesting that these industries stimulate economic diversification, revenues, and trade by producing economic and employment benefits in related services and manufacturing sectors (United Nations, 2010).

Despite its growing importance, entrepreneurship in creative industries is still under-researched (Chaston & Sadler-Smith, 2012). Creative entrepreneurs in this paper are defined as the founders who establish and remain in charge of a business in a creative industry. Through integrating theories of cognitive psychology, conflict management, and entrepreneurship literature, this paper explores how creativity cognitive styles of entrepreneurs determine career success in creative industries through affecting the way these entrepreneurs handle internal conflicts with subordinates.

Entrepreneurial cognition focuses on the entrepreneurs' mental models and how their psychological traits link to the entrepreneurial

process and outcome. According to studies of organizational psychologists, cognitive style is a determinant of individual behavior at work (Allinson, Chell, & Hayes, 2000; Armstrong, Cools, & Sadler-Smith, 2012). Cognitive style refers to consistent individual differences in perceiving, behaving, solving problems, taking decisions and relating to others (Armstrong et al., 2012). Investigating entrepreneurial cognition provides a basis for identifying those who have the potential to act as successful entrepreneurs (Allinson et al., 2000). Creative entrepreneurs are notable for a distinctive management style that is based on intuition, informality and rapid decision making, whereas the more conventional thinking styles are not in accord with the unique attributes of creative entrepreneurs (Powell, 2008). Researchers may better understand the creative industries by focusing attention on the unique attributes of creative entrepreneurs and their effects on organizational process (Chaston & Sadler-Smith, 2012).

Conflict management relates to the creative thinking process (Tekleab & Quigley, 2014). Conflict is an inevitable social process within every organization (Gelfand, Leslie, & Keller, 2008) and usually occurs when individuals encounter disagreements with other actors over task or interpersonal issues. The way entrepreneurs manage conflicts is of extraordinary importance to micro-enterprises, such as small firms in creative industries (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Four salient styles of handling interpersonal conflict are identified, such as integrating style, avoiding style, dominating style, and obliging style (Gelfand et al., 2008; Rahim & Magner, 1995). Entrepreneurial conflict handling style may have important implications for new venture creation (Liu, Fu, & Liu, 2009; Tjosvold, Law, & Sun, 2006). For instance, Tjosvold et al. (2006) find that team leaders' integrative approach to manage conflict enhances team effectiveness. Moreover, Liu et al. (2009) report that appropriate conflict handling of leaders is an effective mechanism

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benefiting venture performance through reducing the detrimental effects of the conflicts between CEOs and other stakeholders.

We use creativity cognitive style as the theoretical lens to explain how creative entrepreneurs can properly deal with intra-firm conflicts to accomplish desirable venture outcomes. Entrepreneurs' conflict management has a strong impact on their firm performance, but not many empirical studies have specifically linked cognitive style to conflict handling style, leaving the unanswered question on what mental traits of entrepreneurs bring about the ability to properly manage conflicts inside the organization. The present study attempts to fill this gap by adopting the creativity cognitive style characterized by two distinct mental models, namely divergent thinking and convergent thinking (Basadur & Hausdorf, 1996).

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Creativity cognitive style

Creativity cognitive style reflects individuals' two habitual mental models in idea generation (Basadur & Hausdorf, 1996). Divergent thinking refers to the positive attitude towards generating many diverse ideas for one problem by perceiving the world beyond the conventional viewpoints. In contrast, convergent thinking represents the preference to clarify the nature and facts pertaining to a problem in order to narrow down the various possibilities and reach a definite solution. Creative entrepreneurs embrace creative ideation to generate customer value through the products or services they provide. The perspective of creativity cognitive style is adopted in this paper since the style reflects individuals' thinking preference in the context where creative ideation is at the heart of individual behavior (Basadur & Hausdorf, 1996; Cropley, 2006).

Research suggests that the entrepreneurial cognition represents many important implications for new venture outcomes (Baron, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2007). However, most entrepreneurial cognition studies focus on the strategic aspects of entrepreneurship (i.e. cognition for identifying and exploiting opportunities), but how entrepreneurial cognition affects social process within organization is still neglected (Mitchell et al., 2007).

2.2. Conflict handling style

In organizations, conflict is an inevitable social process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance between individuals over interpersonal or task-related affairs (Tekleab & Quigley, 2014). The way entrepreneurs manage conflicts inside the organization is a determinant of venture performance since leaders' conflict management substantially influences company members' affection, morale, loyalty, and cohesiveness (Liu et al., 2009).

Prior research identifies four styles of handling interpersonal conflict, namely integrating style, avoiding style, dominating style, and obliging style (Gelfand et al., 2008). Rahim and Magner (1995) provide descriptions. *Integrating style* involves openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach a solution acceptable to both parties; *avoiding style* is associated with withdrawal and sidestepping conflict situation; *dominating style* represents win-lose orientation or forcing behavior to win one's position; and *obliging style* is associated with attempting to play down the difference and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party.

2.3. Creativity cognitive style and conflict handling style

Conflict handling style is a reflection of behavioral posture, and research has found that cognitive style can be of help to predict how an individual responds to and deals with interpersonal conflicts (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, Jarvis, & Blair, 1996; Cerni, Curtis, & Colmar, 2012).

The literature suggests that divergent thinking and convergent thinking can lead to different behavioral tendencies (Basadur & Hausdorf, 1996), and divergent thinkers may generate more ideas with their richness of sentiment, sensitivity, imagination, and non-linear thought (Basadur & Hausdorf, 1996). Nevertheless, no empirical evidence proves how creative entrepreneurs' conflict management is affected by the influence of creativity cognitive style. As an initial exploration, this study investigates how creative entrepreneurs' divergent thinking links to the way they handle intra-firm conflicts. Therefore, H1: Creative entrepreneurs' divergent thinking style has different impacts on their conflict handling styles including integrating, avoiding, dominating, and obliging.

Compared with those with divergent thinking, individuals who have a high level of convergent thinking tend to identify one or few feasible ideas based on fact, logic, prudence, accuracy, dispassion, and linear thought (Cropley, 2006). Convergent thinking is embodied in logical, analytical, and unprejudiced reasoning, which influences how individuals behave and relate to others (Armstrong et al., 2012). A variety of theories imply that the rational and objective nature of convergent thinking is likely to exert different effects across creative entrepreneurs' tendencies in handling conflicts (Cacioppo et al., 1996; Cerni et al., 2012). Therefore, H2: Creative entrepreneurs' convergent thinking style has various impacts on their conflict handling styles including integrating, avoiding, dominating, and obliging.

2.4. Entrepreneurial success

Career success of entrepreneurs is the positive psychological or work-related outcomes that an entrepreneur has accumulated as a result of new venture creation (Lau, Shaffer, & Au, 2007). Entrepreneurs in different sectors may judge their career success in different ways, and the literature has acknowledged the necessity of using entrepreneurial success indicators according to the specific contexts in which new venture processes occur (Lau et al., 2007). Creative entrepreneurs are concerned more with self-actualization in their creative professions than with the monetary return from economic transactions (Paige & Littrell, 2002). Thus, two indicators embody the career success perceived by creative entrepreneurs, namely social reputation and career achievement.

2.5. Conflict handling style and entrepreneurial success

How leaders manage conflicts within the organization has direct impacts on their members' affection, morale, loyalty, and cohesiveness (Liu et al., 2009). The degree of entrepreneurs' conflict management may be even more dominant within companies of creative industries since the collective creative ideation emerges only when internal conflicts are managed effectively and settled with appropriate handling strategies. Accordingly, Hypothesis 3: Creative entrepreneurs' conflict handling styles, including integrating, avoiding, dominating, and obliging, have different effects on the entrepreneurs' social reputation. Hypothesis 4: Creative entrepreneurs' conflict handling styles including integrating, avoiding, dominating, and obliging have different effects on their career achievement.

3. Methods

3.1. Research setting and participants

This research adopts the definition of creative industries made by the United Kingdom's Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS, 2001), and entrepreneurs whose firms engage in the following creative businesses are chosen as the target sample: art, craft, design, fashion, filming, advertising, architecture, publishing, media and cultural heritage. Participants in this study are entrepreneurs who are founders and are still in charge of creative businesses in Taiwan. A total of 954 entrepreneurs in creative industries were included. Questionnaires were sent through postal mail with a cover letter indicating the purpose of this study as well as providing an instruction for filling in the

questionnaire, addressed to CEOs, general managers or owners who were the leading founder of each creative firm. After three waves of survey, 251 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in a response rate of 26%. Twenty respondents (8%) were less than 30 years old, 50 (19.9%) are between 31 and 35 years old, 44 (17.5%) are between 36 and 40, 59 (23.5%) are between 41 and 45, and 78 (31.1%) are more than 46 years old. One hundred and seventy-six (70%) respondents are male, and 75 (30%) are female. By specialization, 58 respondents are in the humanities (24.6%), 52 in design (22%), 50 in business or management (21.2%), 44 (18.6%) in engineering, 19 in science (8.1%), 3 (1.3%) in agriculture, and 2 in (0.8%) medicine, and 23 in others (9.4%). In terms of educational background, 56 (22.3%) respondents have a high school degree, 87 (34.7%) have a bachelor's degree, 100 (39.8%) have a master's degree, and 8 (3.2%) have a doctorate.

3.2. Variable measures

3.2.1. Creativity cognitive style

Creativity cognitive style is measured by a six-item scale developed in the previous research (Basadur & Hausdorf, 1996; Cropley, 2006). This six-item measure has two subscales of three items each for divergent thinking (Cronbach's alpha = .68) and convergent thinking (Cronbach's alpha = .79). These items are measured on a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, “completely disagree”, to 6, “completely agree”.

3.2.2. Conflict handling style

A total of twelve items extracted from the Rahim Organization Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II) are adopted to measure the four styles of handling interpersonal conflict (Rahim & Magner, 1995). The ROCI-II measures creative entrepreneurs' four distinct preferences of conflict management, namely integrating style, avoiding style, dominating style, and obliging style. The Cronbach's alphas for these four types are .79, .75, .83, and .77 respectively. The items are measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, “strongly disagree”, to 5, “strongly agree”.

3.2.3. Entrepreneurial success

This study uses social reputation and career achievement to manifest entrepreneurial success in the context of creative industries

(Lau et al., 2007; Paige & Littrell, 2002). Specifically, the social reputation scale contains three items (Cronbach's alpha = .93), and the career achievement scale contains four items (Cronbach's alpha = .87). Respondents answer on both scales ranging from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 5, “strongly agree”.

3.3. Reliability and validity

Confirmatory factor analysis is conducted to examine the reliability and validity of the variables included in this study. According to Kline (1998), all latent variables' composite reliability (CR) should be above 0.6 and the average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5 in order to meet the suggested theoretical threshold of convergent validity. Based on the results shown in Table 1, this criterion is met.

3.4. Analysis

The measurement model is first tested using confirmatory factor analysis. Then structural equation modeling is performed based on the measurement model to estimate the fit of the hypothesized model to the empirical data as well as testing the proposed hypotheses.

To alleviate and assess the magnitude of common method bias, we adopt the procedural remedies and statistical methods that Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) suggest. During the survey, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to reduce evaluation apprehension. We conducted a Harman's one-factor test, extracting seven distinct factors that account for 70% of the total variance, with the first factor explaining 22%. The findings indicate no single factor emerges, nor does one factor account for most of the variance, suggesting little possibility of common method bias and providing support for the validity of our measures.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the variables in this study.

Table 1
Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

Construct	Item	Factor loading	AVE	CR
Divergent thinking	1. I enjoy stretching my imagination to produce many ideas.	0.77	0.46	0.71
	2. I easily come out unique ideas.	0.54		
	3. I favor to look at thing from a non-traditional view.	0.70		
Convergent thinking	1. I like to take the time to clarify the problem.	0.74	0.57	0.80
	2. I like to identify the data and fact related to the problem.	0.85		
	3. I like to focus on the precise description of the problem.	0.67		
Integrating style	1. I exchange accurate information with my subordinates to solve a problem together.	0.72	0.56	0.80
	2. I try to work with my subordinates for a proper understanding of a problem.	0.81		
	3. I try to work with my subordinates to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations.	0.71		
Avoiding style	1. I try to keep my disagreement with my subordinates to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.	0.63	0.51	0.75
	2. I attempt to avoid being “put on the spot” and try to keep my conflict with my subordinates to myself.	0.83		
	3. I try to stay away from disagreement with my subordinates.	0.66		
Dominating style	1. I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.	0.75	0.63	0.83
	2. I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.	0.86		
	3. I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation.	0.76		
Obliging style	1. I try to satisfy the expectations of my subordinates.	0.53	0.55	0.78
	2. I give in to the wishes of my subordinates.	0.87		
	3. I usually accommodate the wishes of my subordinates.	0.79		
Social reputation	1. I have a good reputation in creative industries.	0.89	0.82	0.93
	2. In my field of creative industries, a lot of people know me.	0.94		
	3. Most people from creative industries think that I am an excellent creative practitioner.	0.89		
Career achievement	1. The firm I create has provided cultural value to the society.	0.75	0.64	0.87
	2. The firm I create has fulfilled some goals that I want to achieve.	0.88		
	3. I have achieved some dreams from the business I create.	0.84		
	4. I get a sense of achievement from the business I create.	0.71		

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Divergent thinking	5.2	0.73	–							
2. Convergent thinking	5.3	0.67	0.37**	–						
3. Integrating style	4.2	0.62	0.3**	0.28**	–					
4. Avoiding style	3.2	0.92	0.02	–0.04	0.04	–				
5. Dominating style	3.1	0.95	0.08	–0.03	–0.21**	0.28**	–			
6. Obliging style	3.4	0.73	0.08	–0.08	0.03	0.36**	0.32**	–		
7. Social reputation	3.2	1.02	0.21**	0.09	0.16*	0.12	0.14*	0.14*	–	
8. Career achievement	3.7	0.89	0.33**	0.19**	0.29**	0.07	0.16*	0.11	0.63**	–

N = 251.

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed test).** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test).

4.2. Measurement model

The measurement model results indicate a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 370.11$; GFI = 0.90; AGFI = 0.87; IFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.05), as presented in Table 3. The indexes justify further examination of the structural model.

4.3. Structural model

Table 3 shows the model fit indexes of the structural model. The results of the structural model suggest that the hypothesized model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 461.12$; GFI = 0.87; AGFI = 0.84; IFI = 0.93; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.06).

Fig. 1 shows the overall structural model with path coefficients. H1, which suggests that divergent cognitive style has different effects on conflict handling style, is partially supported, since divergent thinking positively relates to integrating style ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$), dominating style ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.1$), and obliging style ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$). H2, which posits that convergent thinking has different effects on conflict handling style, and is also partially supported, since convergent thinking negatively relates to dominating style ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.1$) and obliging style ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.01$).

The results of the test on H3, which proposes the significant relationship between creative entrepreneurs' conflict handling style and social reputation, suggest that creative entrepreneurs' integrating style ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$) and dominating style ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$) are positively related to social reputation. The results of the test for Hypothesis 4, which postulates the significant relationship between creative entrepreneurs' conflict handling style and career achievement, suggest that creative entrepreneurs' integrating style ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) and dominating style ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) are positively related to career achievement.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Entrepreneurial cognition is an integral part of the entrepreneurial process (Mitchell et al., 2007), and scholars have also widely acknowledged the importance of entrepreneurs' conflict handling style to new venture performance (Liu et al., 2009). However, little work has been done to investigate how cognitive antecedents determine individual behavior towards handling conflicts (e.g. Bouckennooghe, Vanderheyden, Mestdagh, & Van Laethem, 2007; Cerni et al., 2012; Rognes & Schei,

2010). Through integrating the theories of conflict management and cognitive psychology, this paper sheds light on the existing literature by proposing a theoretical model that explains how creative entrepreneurs' cognitive style influences their career success through affecting how they handle intra-firm conflicts.

Our findings suggest that creativity cognitive style could predict creative entrepreneurs' behavioral tendency in managing conflicts. The results also suggest that creative entrepreneurs with a higher level of divergent thinking are more active and positive in response to the interpersonal conflicts they meet by adopting integrating, dominating, and obliging styles. In contrast, the results also reveal the negative effect of convergent thinking on creative entrepreneurs' conflict handling in dominating style and obliging style. In other words, creative entrepreneurs with a higher level of convergent thinking tend to identify a focal problem based on facts and information (Cropley, 2006), which might lead creative entrepreneurs to have a more rational attitude towards handling interpersonal disagreements, rather than using their authority to win subordinates' obedience or trying to accommodate different opinions. Linking creativity cognitive style and conflict handling style has the merit of informing creative entrepreneurs how divergent thinking and convergent thinking influence their predisposition towards handling conflicts across a wide range of situations, such as perceiving, behaving, solving problems, taking decisions, and relating to others.

Creative entrepreneurs tend to define their career success as what they have accomplished in the creative profession rather than how much money they have earned (Paige & Littrell, 2002). Accordingly, social reputation and career achievement are chosen to reflect creative entrepreneurs' career success in this paper. Our findings suggest that conflict handling in integrating style and dominating style have significantly positive effects on social reputation and career achievement. Both integrating style and dominating style are considered as active approaches to handle conflicts (Gelfand et al., 2008), and our findings suggest that the active tendency in managing conflicts may serve creative entrepreneurs better to achieve higher social reputation and career achievement.

6. Limitation and future research

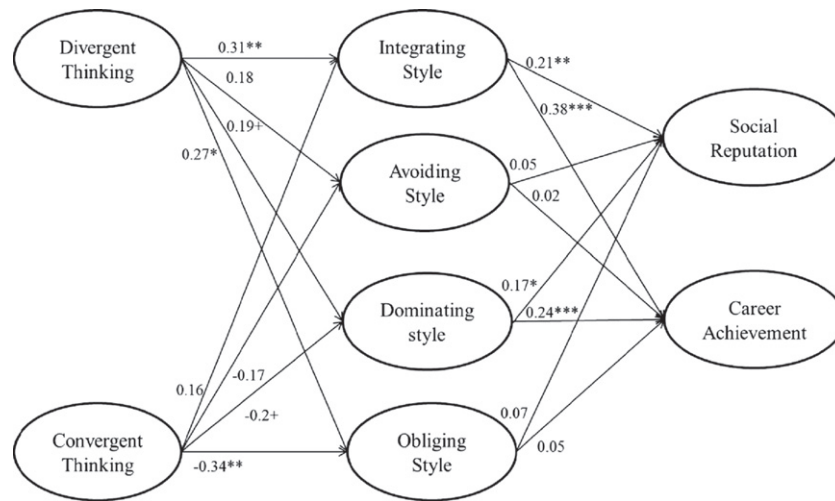
This study has some limitations. Constructs incorporated in this study are entrepreneurs' cognitive styles, behavioral styles in conflict handling, and self-perceived career success and collected data are based on entrepreneurs' self-report information. More in-depth interviews to these creative entrepreneurs could enrich this study by providing more viewpoints, justification, and implications to the research findings. Furthermore, the lack of an existing theoretical basis is also a limitation. Our study only focuses on investigating creative entrepreneurs' creativity cognitive style, conflict handling approaches, and career success. Future research is encouraged to explore creative entrepreneurs' behavior more deeply by using different business models to achieve better career success. Moreover, using new research approaches may be helpful to shed new light on this situation. As an

Table 3
Summary of model fit indexes.

Model test	χ^2	DF	CFI	GFI	IFI	AGFI	RMSEA
1. Independence model	3139.94	300					
2. Measurement model	370.114	247	0.96	0.90	0.96	0.87	0.05
3. Structural model	461.12	257	0.93	0.87	0.93	0.84	0.06

χ^2 -values for the measurement and structural models are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Results of Structural Equation Modeling



N=251

Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ Fig. 1. Results of structural equation modeling. Note: + $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

emerging analytic technique for theory testing (Woodside, 2013), qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) can serve as a useful tool to identify the combinations of creative entrepreneurs' attributes in cognitive styles, behaviors, and strategic postures that may lead to positive new venture outcomes in creative industries.

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