



## Transformational Leadership on Employee Creativity in Five-Star Hotels in Sri Lanka: Moderating Role of Personal Initiatives

D.S.P. Chandika Karunasekara<sup>1</sup>, R.A.I.C. Karunarathne<sup>2</sup>, and C.N.Wickramsinghe<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Department of Hospitality Management, University College of Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.*

<sup>2</sup> *Department of Human Resource Management, University of Kelaniya Sri Lanka*

<sup>3</sup> *Department of Commerce and Financial Management, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

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### Abstract

*The study focused on the moderating role of personal initiative in projecting employees' creativity through transformational leadership in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. The data was collected from a sample of 312 employees and their immediate supervisors were collected and analyzed. The outcomes reveal that the transformational leadership style enhances creativity among their followers. Besides, a significant moderating role of the personal initiative was found in the association between transformational leadership and employee creativity. The outcomes highlighted the influence of employees' creativity working under transformational leaders when they perceive high personal initiative.*

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Employee Creativity, Personal Initiative, Hotel, Sri Lanka

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [chandika50@yahoo.com](mailto:chandika50@yahoo.com)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9589-4750>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last few decades, scholars and practitioners have continually emphasized the importance of employee creativity to gain a competitive advantage and also for business survival. There are many examples in the history of the collapse of corporate giants due to not being creative. The extant research on employee creativity mainly focused on how employee personality, facilitating employee creativity through a specific leadership style had been focused by empirical researches (Gupta et al., 2012; Mumford et al., 2002; Reiter-Palmon and Illies, 2004). Further, those empirical studies stated that transformational leadership (TL) is a strong predictor of employees' creativity (Gong et al., 2009; Gumusluoglu and Ilsev, 2009; Wang and Rode, 2010; Wang et al., 2013; Jaiswal and Dhar, 2015). For example, TL causes to have a conducive work climate (Jung et al., 2003) and mobilizes the required contextual resources for employees to apply their creativity (Jung, 2001). It is noted in the literature that transformational leaders support employees to think in a new way providing required knowledge and ideas (Jyoti and Dev, 2015; Prasad and Junni 2016). Further, transformational leaders help employees to engage in their routine work creatively. By idealized impact, the leaders inspire the staff and gain respect and loyalty. Transformational leaders with individual consideration pay attention to employees to fulfill their needs (Ng, 2017). The latest researches on transformational leadership confirmed that transformational leadership has a significant impact on employees' creativity (Mittal and Dhar, 2016).

It was noted in the previous researches stated that personal initiative has a positive impact on employees' creativity (Beghetto, 2006; Lemons, 2010; Tierney and Farmer, 2002). Further, Lemons (2010) explained the key role of personal initiative on employees' creativity. Bandura (1997) explained that personal initiative evaluates the resources of the organization to execute the assigned tasks. Therefore, the creativity of employees could be boosted by the leaders fruitfully utilizing the personal initiative characteristic of employees to achieve the goals of the organization.

Having been focused on transformational leadership style, it is noted this leadership style supports followers to enhance their confidence, set high performance, and to be more creative (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders encourage employee creativity to turn ideas into new products and achieve competitiveness in the market (Kremer et al., 2019). In addition, employee

creativity is concerned as one of the essential factors of organizational success and efficiency. Transformational leaders positively influence employees' creativity which supports high performance in organizations (Mohsin et al., 2020). In addition, even though Bandura (1997) explained the inverse relationship between creative behavior and personal initiative, it is difficult to find any evidence that related impact of personal initiative in deciding the creativity of employees. Richter et al. (2012) further explained the necessity of the related impact of personal initiative. They are firm with the view of self-creativity enhances people to get advice and guidance at the time of implementation of employee creativity in the workplace. Richter et al. (2012) examined the moderating effect of personal initiative in determining the creativity of employees in a transformational leadership working environment. Moreover, Lopez-Cabarcos et al. (2015) found that transformational leadership style influenced employees' creativity rather than other contemporary leadership styles. Further TL explains how the leader describes the employees' vision and gains trust and admiration via individual supports. Transformational leaders divert employees' cognition of challenges into a novel way of achieving higher expectations (Markus et al., 2018; Uddin et al., 2017).

TL theory highlights that the contextual help from the leader drives out the psychological fear of social alienation and disintegration of the employees by displaying their trust in them that, in turn, pushes them to engage in the creative process. The literature stated that contextual assistance from Transformational Leadership ties employees with a mutual relationship that motivates them to participate in positive behaviors, including creative activities within the workplace (Jaiswal and Dhar, 2015). The personal initiative supports to have a positive outcome by enhancing their well-being and task performance with the presence of Transformational Leadership (Mensmann and Frese, 2019). It is the addition of transformational leadership (TL), defined as a set of observable and learnable practices used by leaders to influence employees' creativity and build their commitment to the mission of the organization (Kouzes and Posner, 2003) that elevates employees in five-star hotels. Five-star hotels have been selected in the study due to three reasons. Firstly, five-star hotels are one of the fastest-growing star category hotels where rapid changes in products are being observed that has triggered competition, therefore, employee creativity is necessary to develop new ideas to create new products as well as improve the existing products. Secondly, it is a growing and large hotel that requires creativity to accomplish its goals and capture the market.

Further, employees' creativity may not owe their lack of personal initiative, thus, five-star hotels require capable leaders to encourage creativity and handle the rapid changes to keep pace with global challenges. Thirdly, the literature on the effects of leadership, particularly Transformational Leadership in Sri Lankan context, especially on five-star hotels, is scarce. Moreover, no study has been conducted in Sri Lanka on the impact of transformational leadership on employee creativity in five-star hotels with the moderating role of personal initiatives. However, little attention had been paid to how leadership style influences employee creativity and how this relationship varies across employee personal initiatives. Thus, this study is designed to address these unanswered questions in the literature.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Transformational Leadership and Employee Creativity**

Transformational Leadership refers to the ability to encourage, push, and motivate the followers to a higher level of epitome and goals (Markus et al., 2018). It was found transformational leadership as a multidimensional concept which is mixed with charismatic role-modeling, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Avolio et al., 1999). It is noted that transformational leaders get the inspiration of their followers and respect, admiration, and loyalty through their charismatic power. Transformational leaders can fulfill the needs of their followers by paying individual attention. These leaders express their vision and show a clear goal to their followers with their inspirational motivation characteristics. Further, transformational leaders motivate their followers according to their cognitive capabilities with the intellectual stimulation of the leaders (Avolio et al., 1999). It was identified employee creativity as an individual phenomenon which means novel productions and value ideas for the organizations (Amabile, 1995; Runco et al., 2005), recognized as a tenable, important or motivated by a group (Runco and Jaeger, 2012). Further, transformational leaders are very good at identifying employees' creativity (Mittal and Dhar, 2015; Wang et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2014). Further, as per the empirical studies, transformational leaders get the maximum outcome making their individuals more creative (Jung et al., 2003; Moghimi and Subramaniam, 2013). Accordingly;

- H1: there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka.

## **Role of Personal Initiative as a Moderator**

The tendency of a person believes in someone's capability to bring a creative outcome is called personal initiative (Tierney and Farmer, 2002). Further, Bandura (1997) pointed out that personal initiative is based on a view on individuals' capabilities in terms of their knowledge, skills, and ability essential for creative work. Having studied on role of personal initiative on employees' creativity, Tierney and Farmer (2002) brought the attention of many empirical studies about the personal initiative (Diliello et al., 2011; Lemons, 2010; Simmons et al., 2014; Tierney and Farmer, 2011; Wang et al., 2014) found to be a key factor of employee creativity, which motivates the role of personal initiative in mobilizing their creative efforts.

Personal resourcefulness is one form of initiative and personal initiative is one form of proactivity. Tierney and Farmer (2011) explained proactivity as a set of self-starting, action-oriented behaviors aimed at modifying the situation or oneself to achieve greater personal or organizational effectiveness. Crant (2000) explained proactivity as 'taking initiative in improving the prevailing situation or creating new ones; it involves challenging the current situation rather than passively adapting to present conditions'. Theoretical assumptions with various labels link to proactive behaviours such as taking charge (Morrison and Phelps, 1999), task revision (Staw and Boettger, 1990), voice (VanDyne and LePine, 1998), and personal initiative (Frese et al., 1996, 1997).

Frese et al. (1996) explained personal initiative as 'an individual level behaviour syndrome (a set of co-occurring behaviours) giving outcomes in an individual's taking an active and self-starting approach to work and going beyond what is formally needed in a given job'. There is a disparity with traditional non-active performance views that are taking into account considering employee–job matching, defining tasks, and assessing employees' performance against goals evolved by the organisation (Frese and Fay, 2001) employees with high personal initiative go beyond their job description and adopt a self-starting manner in par with organisational missions and objectives (Redfern et al. 2010; Stroppa and Spieb, 2011). The personal initiative was initially classified based on five facets by Frese et al. (1996) namely: 'persistent with organisational missions, long-term orientation, goal-directed and action-oriented, consistent in the face of barriers and problems, proactive and self-starting'. Then, Frese and Fay (2001) discussed in their study that personal initiative depends on three principal aspects: being self-starting, proactive, and

persistent. Self-starting means, employees set goals that go beyond their role requirements; proactive is having a long-term orientation in expecting upcoming opportunities and threats, and persistence refers to diligently following targets in the face of problems.

Employees with high personal initiative are active and have a persistent approach rather than being passive and conformist toward organisational objectives (Baer and Frese, 2003; Hakanen et al., 2008; Stroppa and Spieb, 2011; Thomas et al., 2010), employees' social job satisfaction (Gamboa et al., 2009), and psychological well-being (Wang and Li, 2015). Stroppa and Spieb (2011), using a mixed-method research design consisting of exploratory interviews and online surveys of expatriates working for German organisations in different destinations (e.g. China, Thailand, and Japan), discovered that the personal initiative of expatriates favorably impact their job satisfaction and performance, and unfavorably impact job stress. The study showed that features of the personal initiative are related to working situations that are challenging, vague, and debatable.

It seems that the concepts of personal initiative and innovation are related (Unsworth and Parker, 2003), and several writers have pointed out that personal initiative impact creativity and innovation practices (Binnewies et al., 2007; Hakanen et al., 2008; Miron et al., 2004; Ohly et al., 2006; Unsworth and Parker, 2003), and change orientation (Frese and Fay, 2001). Binnewies et al. (2007) examined the impact of personal initiative on Amabile's (1988) creativity model including four stages: problem identification, preparation, idea generation, and idea validation. Using both interview and survey data collection with a sample of 52 nurses, this study revealed that personal initiative acts as a 'motivational promoter' and restrains the association between problem identification and the preparation stage, and directly impacts creativity. The personal initiative was also noticed to be connected to the implementation of novel ideas. Miron et al. (2004), using 22 unstructured interviews and 349 surveys of engineers and technicians from organisations developing and manufacturing advanced technologies, revealed that creativity is not sufficient to achieve innovation outcomes: initiative is needed to convert new ideas into practices.

Under componential theory and the interactionist model (Amabile et al., 1996; Woodman et al., 1993), creativity and innovation are the complex results of person-situation combination and stress the pivotal role of personal

characteristics and organisational contextual factors. Even though the theory explained that environmental factors such as leadership are imperative determinants of employees' creativity and innovation, in service industries such as the hotel industry, where employees are in charge of offering services and answering customers' problems and inquiries, the concept of the personal initiative seems particularly important (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2015). For example, the features of extra-role behaviour have been noticed to impact the perceptions of service quality (Morrison, 1996), and proactive customer service performance (Rank et al., 2007), and the flexibility to reply to customers' demands (Crant, 2000; Sonnentag, 2003). Using a survey of 321 employees from four-star and above Portuguese hotels, Lopez-Cabarcos et al. (2015) emphasized that personal initiative is vital in employees at the frontline because it impacts on the quality of service on offer and affective organisational devotion. Having considered the suitability of personal initiative and innovative behaviour, this recommends that personal initiative may improve the impact of leadership on employees' creativity and innovation of workers.

It was found in the literature that employees who possess high personal initiative are more interested to get the maximum creative outcomes by mobilizing it (Diliello et al., 2011). Also, personal initiative intensifies employee creativity in the working place (Wang et al., 2014) and some empirical studies past research has investigated it as a moderating variable. Nevertheless, it is hard to find empirical studies on the mediating role of personal initiative, especially in the hospitality industry. The researcher has unable to find any study on the moderating effect of personal initiative on the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' creativity.

The dynamics of personal initiative theory predicts that individuals with certain personal attributes are influenced by the office environment and their behavior. This is related to developing initiatives (Frese et al., 1996). Personal initiative (Frese and Fay, 2001) is based on the basic idea that human beings are not only affected by their environment but also impact themselves (Frese and Gielnik, 2014) One of the debates for the moderating role of personal initiative is that although, in an organizational setting, individual behavior is subjected to contextual factors yet an individual's view on creative self-caters positive confidence and zeal to exert creativity of employees (Tierney and Farmer, 2011).

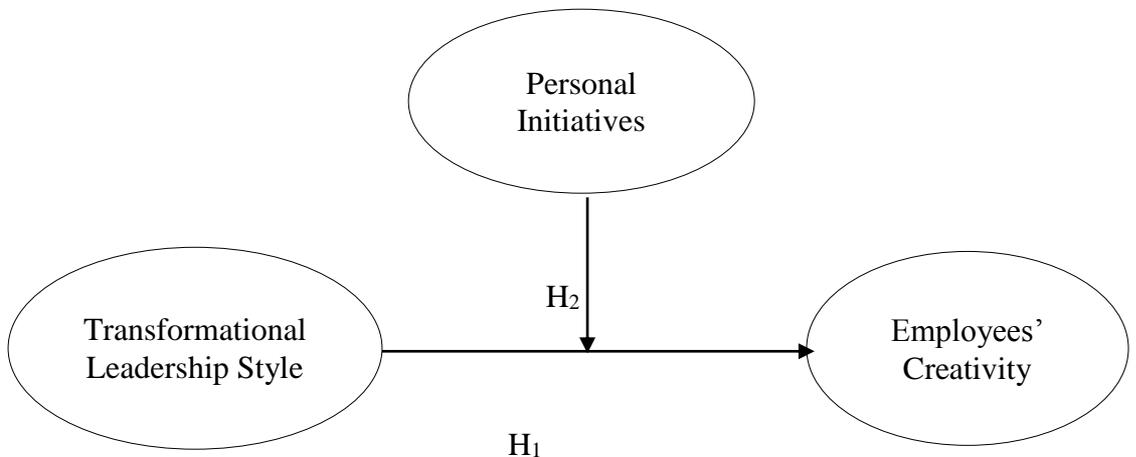
In addition, Herrmann and Felfe (2013) highlighted the importance of investing in moderating variables in predicting creativity. Thus, the researcher proposes that high personal initiative strengthens the effects that transformational leadership has on employee creativity (see Figure 1).

- Hypothesis 2: Personal initiative moderates the impact that TL has on employee creativity in Hotels in Sri Lanka.

**METHODOLOGY**

To test the hypotheses (the conceptual model is shown in Figure 1 below), data were collected from 312 middle-level employees who are working in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. The researcher distributed around 500 surveys among the selected sample with the support of the students who are undertaking on-the-job training in a University college. Moreover, it has sent two reminders; first a week after the survey distributed and the second one week after the first reminder. However, only 312 surveys were returned. Therefore, the response rate is 62.4%.

It is noted that most of the employees are young and possess a sound educational level, and the majority of the respondents are Male. It was found that as compared to females (39.4%), males are dominant (60.6%). Further, the majority of the participants have passed G.C.E (A/L), and most of them are young (30 years or less, 57.6%). The engagement of young and educated staff in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka infers the high rate of participation of new and skilled people that assist in generating new ideas and help in innovation.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model.

## **Measures**

Transformational leadership was measured using the scale developed by Avolio et al. (1999). The anchor ranges from 1 to 5 strongly disagree to strongly agree. The sample items are; the hotel's management is always on the lookout for new opportunities for the organization, the hotel's management has a clear view of its final aims, the hotel's management succeeds in motivating the rest of the company, the hotel's management always acts as the organization's leading force and the hotel's management always acts as the organization's leading force. The reliability of the scale is 0.886.

## **Personal Initiatives**

The personal initiative was tested by a three-item scale of Tierney and Farmer (2002). The items of the scale were rated on a five-point Likert scale, and a score of 1 for each statement indicates "strongly disagree" and a higher score of 5 indicates "strongly agree". The reliability of the scale is 0.949.

## **Employee Creativity**

The research is done using a four-item scale by Tierney and Farmer (2011) to measure employee creativity. The items of the scale were rated on a five-point Likert scale, and a score of 1 for each statement indicates "strongly disagree" and a higher score of 5 indicates "strongly agree". The reliability of the scale is 0.903.

## **Control Variables**

Considering the previous research (Gong et al., 2009; Ma et al., 2020), it was included employee age, gender, education, and experience as control variables. Age and experience were counted by years. One dummy variable controlled for gender (i.e. 0 = male, 1 = female). Education level was measured on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 for below G.C.E (O/L) to 5 for Postgraduate qualifications.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The researchers analyzed the data for outliers, missing data, linearity, and multicollinearity to avoid any bias or invalid results before testing the hypothesis. In the study, reliable scales were adopted that have been validated and used in previous research. Moreover, researchers used the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to find the fit of the proposed model before testing the hypothesis. The proposed model indicates an acceptable fit,  $\chi^2(208) = 387.498$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , GFI = 0.930, CFI = 0.976, NFI = 0.950, RMSEA = 0.045. It was noted all the factor loadings were significant at 0.001 levels, showing a convergent validity. In the study, the three-factor model was compared with four alternative models, three two-factor models, and one one-factor model in order to check the discriminant validity. The outcomes of the alternative models (see Table 1) revealed a weaker fit than the proposed three-factor model.

**Table 1:** Model Comparison

Model	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	RMSEA
Three-factor model	387.50	208	.930	.045
Two-factor model	1401.40	210	.757	.116
TL and personal initiative were blended				
Employee creativity and personal initiative were blended	663.14	210	.865	.071
TL and employee creativity were blended	2226.88	210	.712	.151
One-factor model				
TL, employee creativity, and personal initiative were blended	2903.07	211	.569	.176

df = Degree of Freedom, CFI = Confirmatory Fit Indices, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

Further, Harman's one-factor test was used to examine the common method bias. The findings proved that the first factors in the model explained 46.87% of the variance. Therefore, common method bias was not an issue. Table 2 shows correlations, means, and standard deviations.

**Table 2:** Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations

N= 312	M	SD	Correlation							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Age	2.20	.70								
Gender	1.15	.36	.078							
Education	2.60	1.06	.286**	.054						
Experience	2.20	.81	.297**	.032	.207**					
TL	3.10	1.87	.198**	-.036	.176**	.387**	<b>.519</b>			
Personal initiative	2.94	1.79	.171**	-.010	.272**	.086	.189**	<b>.721</b>		
Employee Creativity	2.43	1.78	.243**	-.032	.203**	.151**	.281**	.790**	<b>.809</b>	

Note: \*\*p < 0.01. AVEs are marked with Bold Numbers.

The researcher used a hierarchical regression analysis to test hypotheses (see Table 3). Hypothesis 1 proposed that TL is positively related to employee creativity. As discussed, TL is positively related with employee creativity ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , Step 2), accepting Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 forecasted that personal initiatives moderates the relationship between TL and employee creativity. The outcomes proved that personal initiatives had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between TL and employee creativity ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ), accepting Hypothesis 2. The researcher found the nature of the interaction that was obtained by plotting values plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean of personal initiatives to represent high versus low personal initiatives.

According to the findings of Preacher et al. (2007) simple slope analysis was performed by the researcher to locate TL on employee creativity within high and low personal initiatives. The findings revealed that when the personal initiative is low, TL has less influence on employee creativity and when the personal initiative is high, the relationship is strengthened.

**Table 3:** Hierarchical Regression

Independent		Dependent			
		Employee Creativity			
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control Variables	Age	.27***	.24**	.14*	.11*
	Gender	-.16	-.12	-.07	-.07
	Education	.13**	.11*	-.05	-.05
	Experience	.08	-.01	.02	.03
Independent Variable	Transformational Leadership		.23***	.12***	.10**
Moderator	Personal initiative			.76***	.75***
Interaction	TL × Personal initiative				.17***
F-value		9.84***	12.46***	131.07***	128.60***
R <sup>2</sup>		.09	.13	.65	.68
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.08	.12	.65	.68
Change R <sup>2</sup>			.04	.00	.00

**Note:** \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

## DISCUSSION

The researcher found a consistent literary gap on what constitutes a severe impact on the process of assuming employee creativity via different antecedents. This study delves into the process of promoting employee creativity through TL, and the moderating role of personal initiatives in examining the strength of the association. The study empirically helps an employee's perception of his or her leader's transformational style of leading and views about his/her capacity to act creatively impact on his or her creativity. In par with recent studies, Wang et al. (2014) explained that transformational leaders promote creativity among their followers. Having proved the findings of Gupta et al. (2012), the researcher found a positive relationship between TL and subordinates' creativity conducting the study in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. Further, it was noted that the findings, which are in line with the outcomes of Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009), of the study proposed that a

transformational leadership style provides necessary resources to uplift creativity.

Kahil (2018) pointed out that the interaction impact revealed that Transformational leadership was positively and significantly related to employees' creativity under high levels of personal initiative than low levels. Since high personal initiative makes employee creativity strengthen, the outcomes of the study revealed that an individual's perception on TL predicts a substantial improvement in employee creativity only when an individual's belief on his or her ability to produce creative results is higher, rather than lower in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. This study found that an individual is required to have a personal initiative to pursue creative endeavors. Tierney and Farmer (2011) highlighted that employee creativity is easily influenced by personal initiative and social context confirming the finding of the study in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka.

Even though recent studies have found a moderating effect of personal initiatives on employee creative performance (Wang et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2012) yet empirical studies on creativity have seldom been done on the interactive role of personal initiative. Therefore, extending the existing knowledge on personal initiatives (Bandura, 1997; Tierney and Farmer, 2002), the study contributed to the moderating role of personal initiatives in predicting employee creativity in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. The study findings suggested that this research stream integration supports to give a better insight on what business leaders can do to foster and enhance employees' creativity in the workplace. The results reflect that employees who have a good social connection with their leaders, as well as have high levels of personal initiative, are more creative and innovative in their work

For practical implications, the outcomes highlight that transformational leadership alone is positive for the creativity of employees, but this influence can be amplified by employees with high levels of personal initiative. Further, employees with greater personal initiative are self-starter, proactive, and persistent in facing problems and difficulties (Frese and Fay, 2001). Having employees who have high levels of personal initiative is not only beneficial for creativity as examined in the study, but also has been connected with organizational commitment (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2015). Thus, with rapidly changing business environments these days, it becomes more important for five-star hotels to have a workforce who seek the generation and

implementation of new and fresh ideas. Leaders of five-star hotels are acknowledged to be one of the most prominent factors for creativity. This study suggests that five-star hotels should adopt an interactional approach by taking both leadership issues and other personal factors (i.e., personal initiative) into consideration in order to nurture and enhance the creativity of employees. These results show the fact that researchers and practitioners are required to integrate various research streams to better comprehend what is indispensable for employees to be creative and innovative at work.

## **CONCLUSION**

The researcher contributed an important theoretical and managerial implication in this study. This study is the first to examine the interactive role of personal initiative in predicting employee creativity through TL in five-star hotels in Sri Lanka. The evidence on the moderating role of personal initiative is practically important for two reasons. First, organizational strategies for promoting employee creativity may not last if an employee has weak ideologies on him or her. Second, enhanced personal initiative plays as a multiplier for various antecedents of individuals' creativity. Therefore, this study has contributed a relevant strategy for managers who are interested in maximizing creativity in their followers' work, to exhibit transformational leadership style and improve the personal initiative of their staff. To validate the outcomes of the research, it needs to be replicated in other industries and cultural settings. Future studies might be conducted to identify other factors that would support to motivate employees to indulge in creativity. In addition, to investigate the reasons for the impact on employees' creativity, it would be more unique to examine the reasons and outcomes of employees' creativity. The researcher gives evidence in this study about the moderating role of personal initiative in predicting creativity. Therefore, the researcher shows a light for a potential argument on the viable moderating role of personal initiative to decide the impact of various contextual factors in examining employees' creativity.

## **LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study has a few limitations that have to be addressed. The researchers in this study adopted a follower centered perspective for the evaluation of the quality of transformational leadership association. In order to have a clear picture of the transformational-employees' creativity relationships, future studies should think about the leader-centered perspective as well. In this

research study, the researchers explored the moderating role of the personal initiative since it has been recognized as a vital factor for creativity (Binnewies and Gromer, 2012; Herrmann and Felfe, 2012).

Future research should do on these results and evaluate if other personal factors also play an important role in transformational leadership on employees' creativity relationships. This study is a cross-sectional study and therefore its design is a limitation. The use of longitudinal research would better discuss the direction of connections between the constructs of the present study by collecting data at different times.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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