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## Stewardship Behavior and Creativity\*\*

Despite the importance and popularity of the stewardship concept in the current management literature, antecedents and the role of the surrounding framework of stewardship remains poorly understood. Similarly, relatively little is known about the outcomes of stewardship. In this study I set out to examine 1) how relational, motivational, and contextual support influences the establishment of stewardship and 2) what the role of managerial stewardship is in employee creativity. Drawing on a sample of 191 senior and middle managers, I demonstrate that relational and motivational support have a positive influence and contextual support has no influence on stewardship. Additionally I confirm that managerial stewardship has a positive relationship with employees' creativity.

**Key words:** agency theory, creativity, leadership, stewardship  
(JEL: M00, M10, M14)

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## Introduction

Stewardship has been the focus of increasing research in recent years (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997; Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Hernandez, 2008; Wasserman, 2006). Stewards demonstrate a responsibility to the future and therefore to the company (Hernandez, 2008). Unlike agency theory, stewardship theory posits a tight alignment between the values of the organization and the values of managers (Deckop, Mangel, & Cirka, 1999). Trust and intrinsic motivation form the foundation for the work environment in steward driven organizations (Wasserman, 2006). Thus, the need for supervision of the steward is reduced and, indeed, would be unnecessary in terms of the best interests of the company (Tosi, Brownlee, Silva, & Katz, 2003).

One stream of research that stewardship scholars have recently pursued is family-run businesses (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007; Harris & Ogbonna, 2007; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006; Miller, Le Breton-Miller, & Scholnick, 2008; Zahra, Hayton, Neubaum, Dibrell, & Craig, 2008), as family managers tend to more closely identify themselves with the company than do non-family managers (Miller, et al., 2008). Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2005) find three forms of stewardship in family-run businesses: (1) emphasis on research and the development of new products (see also Weber, Lavelle, Lowry, Zellner, & Barrett, 2003), (2) attention to boosting the business's reputation, and (3) emphasis on broadening the market or market share. Managers of family-run businesses are more likely to be concerned with the continuity of the company than driven by quarterly earnings' success (Gallo & Vilaseca, 1996).

Another stream of the literature examines stewardship in start-up companies (Arthurs & Busenitz, 2003; Wasserman, 2006). Like family managers, entrepreneurs tend to identify with the organizations they create (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001), and are committed to their companies (Dobrev & Barnett, 2005). With such an intrinsic motivation, entrepreneurs are more likely to behave as stewards than as self-interested agents (Arthurs & Busenitz, 2003).

A further stream of literature recently pursued is the influence of the stewardship construct on company boards. A few scholars use stewardship to examine compensation of company board members (Thorgren, Wincent, & Anokhin, 2010), board structure (Elsayed, 2010; Muth & Donaldson, 1998) or board effectiveness (Minichilli, Zattoni, & Zona, 2009; Roberts, McNulty, & Stiles, 2005). In most of this literature, the stewardship construct has been used either to explain board members' behavior or to build a research model or both. In contrast, I focus solely on the stewardship construct and examine three antecedents as well as one possible outcome (creativity).

Stewardship theory focuses on intrinsic motivation and rewards (Davis, et al., 1997). Stewards are motivated to make decisions that are in the firm's best interest. On the one hand, the best interest of the firm is to retain or expand market share and make a profit. However, long-term profits can only be achieved if a service company continuously innovates (de Brentani, 1989; Kelly & Storey, 2000). The new development rate of a company has been linked to both performance and survival over the long term (Banbury & Mitchell, 1995; Soni, Lilien, & Wilson, 1993). Intrinsic motivation is one of the most important sources of creativity and innovation (Amabile, 1998; Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999).

Therefore, I argue that a relationship between stewardship and creativity exists. I explain this relationship in more depth by proposing a stewardship model with its antecedents and then linking this model to creativity. I conducted a survey in German service companies to prove this model. I chose these service companies because the pressure for creativity and innovation in it is very high compared with other industries (de Jong & Kemp, 2003; de Jong & Vermeulen, 2006; Freel, 2006; Hipp, Tether, & Miles, 2000; Kuusisto & Meyer, 2003; Miles, 2003, 2005). Accordingly, both the need for and the use – either conscious or unconscious – of stewardship behavior are more highly marked in service companies than in other industries. My research adds to the existing leadership literature by applying the stewardship concept in service companies and demonstrates that a positive relationship between stewardship and creativity exists. Additionally three different antecedents – contextual, motivational, and relational support – are examined. Except of contextual support, all relationships are found to be positively linked with stewardship.

## Theory and hypotheses

### *Stewardship*

Stewardship theory offers a different perspective on motivation and control in business organizations, based on the limitations of agency theory (Davis, et al., 1997; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006). The basis of agency theory is the divergence of goals between the agent and the owner (Tosi, et al., 2003; Zahra, et al., 2008). The free rider problem occurs when a manager exploits business resources that would usually provide returns or benefit the owner (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006). These agency costs are based on differing incentives and information of the agent and the owner (Ang, Cole, & Lin, 2000). Consequently, control and incentive mechanisms must be installed to overcome these divergent goals.

In contrast, stewardship theory highlights the possibility of congruent goals of the actors (Davis, et al., 1997), extending the goals of agents beyond their own self-interest and toward the organization's welfare. Good stewards work collectively rather than individually and are not instrumentally motivated, as are agents who subscribe to agency theory. Corbetta and Salvato (2004, p. 357) state: 'The steward's pro-organizational behavior, aimed at maximizing organizational performance, will in turn benefit the steward's principals.' Stewards therefore act not in a self-serving manner, but rather they act altruistically for the good of the organization and its stakeholders (Davis, et al., 1997; Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Fox & Hamilton, 1994; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2006; Muth & Donaldson, 1998). They identify with the organization and are committed to it even to the extent of making personal sacrifices (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000). Stewardship theory basically argues that a steward recognizes that individualistic, opportunistic, and self-serving goals will be met if work is done for the greater good of the organization (Davis, et al., 1997). The steward should then 'desire a viable, successful enterprise' (Davis, et al., 1997, p. 25) and work in the company's best interest. The 'capacity to see the contextual fit of choices and their consequences... the systems and relationships that interplay, and an historical insight that connects the past to the future' (Caldwell, Bischoff, & Karri, 2002, p. 157) is determining the best interest of others, including the company's interest. Thus, the

company's best interest is often reduced to maximizing organizational performance, either aiming at financial or non-financial goals (see Corbetta & Salvato, 2004).

Contrariwise, Tosi et al. (2003) argue that stewards have a personal reward agenda that they achieve through meeting organizational goals. Having said this, one should keep in mind that both agency and stewardship theory focus on maximizing the shareholders wealth (Davis, et al., 1997), but discuss divergent goals of the principal and the manager. Tosi et al.'s (2003) research implies that stewards work towards organizational ends because they are motivated to meet their personal goals. This logic is more in line with agency theory, in which employee alignment can be achieved by developing organizational structures and 'bonding mechanisms' (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). This suggests that employees will work towards organizational ends if they know that this will help them achieve their personal goals as well (Tosi, et al., 2003). The steward discovers that, in doing so, such behavior might lead to positive personal outcomes, such as growth or income (Tosi, et al., 2003).

The proposed view of stewardship described herein goes along with Hernandez (2008), for example, who uses the phrase 'stewardship behavior.' Stewardship theory is purely descriptive (Davis, et al., 1997) and, therefore, cannot be used as a leadership model on its own. It tries to explain managerial behavior (Davis, et al., 1997; Muth & Donaldson, 1998), and common leadership models are therefore a result of agency or stewardship behavior. Behavioral orientation, i.e. stewardship behavior vs. agency behavior, determines specific actions someone undertakes to further the goals of the organization. With regard to transactional and transformational leadership style, Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) point out that leadership behavior depends on the individual's personal experiences. The resulting leadership model can therefore differ between individual stewards. For example, one model could lead toward a more transformational approach, while another model could lead toward a more transactional approach. In other words, stewardship deals with managerial motives.

Agency theory and stewardship theory differ in their motivational aspects. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation have been examined in various studies (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Lin, 2007; Vallerand, 2000). In agency theory, the motivation for the agent lies in measureable values. As (Davis, et al., 1997, p. 28) notes, 'These extrinsic rewards form the basis for the reward systems that represent the control mechanisms of agency theory.' As stewards are more organizational-centric and subordinate personal goals to organizational goals, their focus turns toward intangible rewards, such as opportunities for growth, well-being, achievement, and affiliation (Muth & Donaldson, 1998).

Another argument for the existence of intrinsic motivation in stewardship theory is personal affect. Affective states are like emotions, but less focal; they tend to lack an obvious object and do not disrupt ongoing activities (Kraiger, Billings, & Isen, 1989). In a simulated managerial situation, Kraiger, Billings and Isen (1989) demonstrate that positive personal affect leads to increased satisfaction and valuation of tasks. This should increase intrinsic motivation (Isen & Reeve, 2005). Positive affect seems to be a core element of intrinsic motivation (Seo, Barrett, & Bartunek, 2004; Zapata-Phelan, Colquitt, Scott, & Livingston, 2009). Activities that advance 'the development of personal potentials and the attainment of personally salient goals' (Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008: 48) should be seen as intrinsically motivated. Thus, as the steward

strives to reach personal goals and in turn positive affect, intrinsic motivation will arise.

Stewards understand that by reaching the organization's goals, their goals are reached as well. This intrinsic work motivation leads to higher performance as well as satisfaction with work and is consistent with stewardship theory (Davis, et al., 1997; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Motivational support is needed to foster intrinsic motivation, and I propose as my first hypothesis:

H1: Motivational support is positively linked to stewardship behavior.

Two other constructs are necessary for stewardship to emerge from motivational support: contextual support and relational support (Hernandez, 2008). As Hernandez (Hernandez, 2008: 123) explains, 'Relational support is grounded in the interpersonal relationship between the leader and follower, and contextual support is created through the institutional relationship between the leader and the followers embedded within the organizational network.'

The interpersonal relationship within the stewardship concept builds mutual trust between the leader and the follower through relational leadership behaviors. However, trust is the willingness to be vulnerable to another party (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007) and has been found to be important in highly committed or highly involved management philosophies (Walton, 1985). In another definition of trust, the emotional bond is highlighted. Trust is 'the extent to which a person ... [is willing] to act on the basis of the words, actions, and decisions of another' (McAllister, 1995, p. 25). More recently, this form of trust has come to be known as identification-based trust (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006). In this form of trust, the participants understand and appreciate each other's needs (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008); every member believes in the protection of his or her interests and that no surveillance of the other parties is needed (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). In stewardship theory, stewards take responsibility for their work and decisions, but act under the restrictions of the company or the owners. Therefore, trust between the leader and the follower is built. Relational support arises when concern and respect for the steward in the degree of vulnerability is shown, because stewardship outcomes are characterized by high involvement and high commitment (Davis, et al., 1997). From this follows my second hypothesis:

H2: Relational support is positively linked to stewardship behavior.

For stewardship behavior to emerge, a trusting relationship is necessary. Thus, relational support is necessary for motivating the steward. This leads to my third hypothesis:

H3: Relational support is positively linked to motivational support.

Contextual support creates sense out of natural, confusing complexity. As Hernandez (Hernandez, 2008, p. 123) explains, 'By communicating the broader organizational mission to followers and thus creating a sense of coherence, leaders convey clarity regarding the organizational context to their followers, thereby creating contextual support.' Individual need and motivation is therefore seen in an organizational context

(Caldwell, et al., 2002). This is known as institution-based trust, which supports trust within the social context or culture (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Against the background of stewardship theory, institution-based trust changes the perspective from a self-interested form of trust to a broader, group-oriented view, providing contextual support.

Because stewardship theory changes the perspective from a self-centered agency position to an organizational, group-centric position, contextual support appears to be important. The organization is considered in the underlying framework for leadership. Stewardship behavior needs an adopted framework to be installed (Davis, et al., 1997). Additionally, assuring clarity in the organizational context supports motivational support (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). Therefore, I propose my fourth and fifth hypotheses:

H4: Contextual support is positively linked to stewardship behavior.

H5: Contextual support is positively linked to motivational support.

### ***Creativity and innovation***

Innovation is the successful implementation of new and creative ideas within the organization (Amabile, 1998; Amabile, et al., 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; van de Ven, 1986). In the literature, confusion about creativity and innovation can be seen. Some authors use creativity to mean innovation, while others use innovation to mean creativity. Creativity is the generation of ideas, and it is likely to be evident in the first stages of innovation (Gilley, Dixon, & Gilley, 2008; West, 2002). Innovation is the introduction of new or improved ways of doing work (West, 2002). Creativity thus is more likely to emerge on the individual level, whereas innovation is more likely to emerge on the organizational level (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). West (2002, p. 358) proposes that creativity is evident 'when those in teams are required to develop or offer ideas in response to a perceived need for innovation.' Therefore, the individual is the source of any new idea (Redmond, Mumford, & Teach, 1993) and the basis for innovation (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). In other words, the employee provides the foundation for any innovative behavior of the company (Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

A few studies have shown a positive effect of climate on innovation (Abbey & Dickson, 1983; Siegel & Kaemmerer, 1978; Susanj, 2000). Zhou and George (2001) find that 'the extent to which an employee perceives that the organization encourages, respects, rewards, and recognizes employees who exhibit creativity' (Zhou & George, 2001, p. 686) is important in the creativity of employees (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

To sum up, the link between creativity and stewardship is threefold. First, intrinsic motivation of the steward is necessary for both. One of the most important sources of creativity and innovation is intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1998; Amabile, et al., 1996; Tierney, et al., 1999; West, 2002). Intrinsic motivation is also important for stewardship behavior (Davis, et al., 1997). Without intrinsic motivation, stewardship cannot emerge, as the individual does not discover that subordinating personal goals to those of the organization can produce personal rewards. In doing so, the individual will then follow the goals of the organization in order to fulfill his or her goals. Second, as mentioned before, creativity and innovation are necessary for a

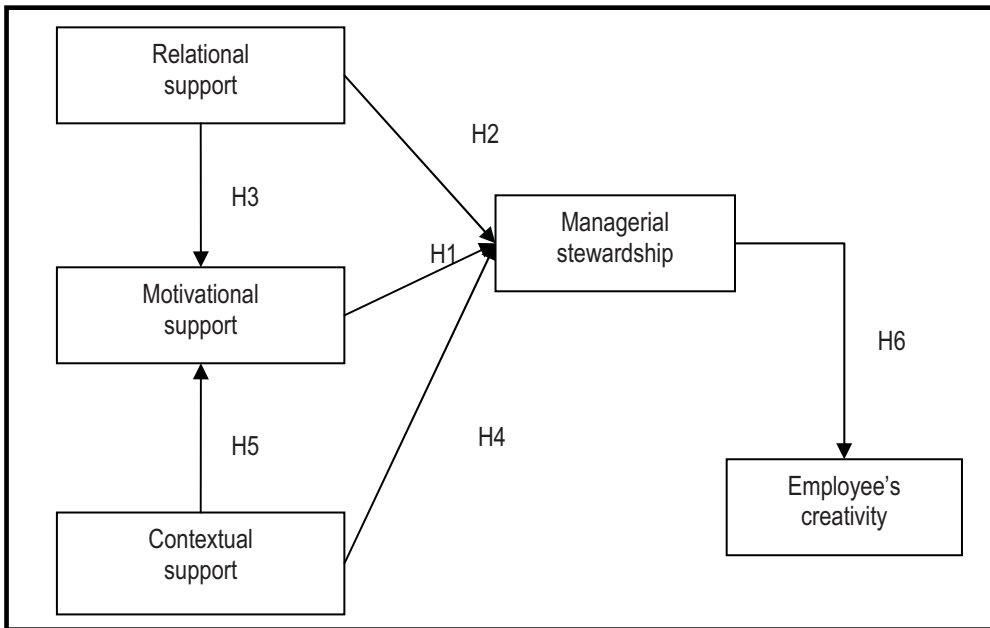


company to succeed in competitive markets (Booms, Davis, & Guseman, 1983). Third, service companies, especially, have to work hard to remain in the market. They must continuously develop new and value-adding services for their customers. For a lasting, positive effect on the company, organizational goals rather than individuals' self-interests must be pursued. Based on these three arguments, I propose my sixth hypothesis:

H6: Managerial stewardship behavior enhances employee creativity.

Figure 1 summarizes my proposed hypotheses.

**Figure 1: Research model**



## Methods

### *Research context and survey data*

To answer the research question, a survey was conducted among middle and senior managers of German service companies. Service companies are highly under market pressure to deliver value-added services to the customer, and they are forced to re-think their services in innovative and creative ways (de Jong & Kemp, 2003; de Jong & Vermeulen, 2006; Freel, 2006; Hipp, et al., 2000; Kuusisto & Meyer, 2003; Miles, 2003, 2005).

For many years, research on creativity and innovation was dominated by a product-based view. Because of the characteristics of services – intangibility heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability (Edvardsson, Gustafsson, & Roos, 2005; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004) – I find several implications for innovative behavior of service companies. One consequence arising from intangibility is the ease with which new

services can be imitated (Atuahene-Gima, 1996), as innovative services cannot easily be patented (Hull, 2004). As a consequence, the development of innovations carries greater and, particularly other risks than the development of material goods. This may explain why the majority of service companies do not have an R&D department and develop service innovations primarily reactively (Gallouj & Weinstein, 1997; Kelly & Storey, 2000; Martin & Horne, 1993; Sundbo, 1997).

Employees are crucial for innovations and creativity in service companies. Because employees *are* the service (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009), they have the most contact with customers, they know the customers' needs and they understand the delivery process (de Brentani, 1989). They are therefore well positioned to recognize opportunities for innovation (de Brentani, 2001) or find a creative way to overcome a lack of quality in the service encounter. Thus, managers need to be committed to the possibility of innovation and the resulting innovative processes (Cooper, 1999), and managers should be aware of this valuable resource.

I measured managers' perception of stewardship and creativity of their employees through a survey of Germany service companies. An anonymous questionnaire regarding their perceptions of both managerial stewardship and the creativity of their direct employees was sent to 1,702 middle and general managers of different service companies in five major cities in Germany, drawn from a nationwide business-to-business database. 219 questionnaires were sent back, representing a response rate of 12.9 %. After missing value analysis, i.e. a deletion of cases which had missing values above 12 % in their responses, and an additional deletion of 4 managers who did not lead any employee, 191 cases were used for analysis. The average age of the managers was 44.8 years with an average work experience of 21 years. 27.7 percent of the respondents were female and the average manager had 4.7 employees to lead.

### ***Measurement***

Hernandez (2007) provides a basic approach to measuring stewardship. Based on her work, the items were translated into German, adapted where necessary to cover language issues, and put on a clustered item list. To validate the items, they were discussed with three middle managers from three different companies. The managers evaluated whether the items were clearly understandable, and were asked to select items that they felt would best describe the associated construct. The items that had a majority in the managers' evaluation were then included in the questionnaire: relational support was measured with four items covering concern, respect and fairness (Cronbach-alpha = .92); contextual support was measured with three items covering coherence (Cronbach-alpha = .88); and motivational support was measured with four items covering self-determination and efficacy (Cronbach-alpha = .91).

Stewardship theory was then briefly explained to the managers. They were then asked to choose out of the item list which wording of the items they deemed most appropriate. Alternatively to the wording of the item provided, they could adapt it if they felt it more appropriate. This resulted in four items measuring stewardship behavior (Cronbach-alpha = .88).



For the creativity scale, four items of Scott and Bruce (1994) were used. These items were translated into German and were validated using the same procedure outlined above (Cronbach-alpha = .87). All questionnaire items are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Measurement instruments**

| Items   | Stand. loads |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Motivational Support</b>   |              |
| Encourages a 'can do' attitude.   | .85          |
| Works to help us correct our weaknesses.  | .86          |
| Conveys confidence in our ability even when we have self-doubt.   | .86          |
| Works to build others' self-confidence.   | .88          |
| <b>Contextual Support</b>   |              |
| Promotes a shared understanding about complex issues.   | .89          |
| Cuts through complex or ambiguous problems to make them easier to understand.   | .82          |
| Explains why things are being done a particular way.  | .82          |
| <b>Relational Support</b>   |              |
| Deals fairly with those he/she leads.   | .90          |
| Can be trusted to be fair.  | .92          |
| Is sensitive to the needs of those he/she leads.  | .79          |
| Takes the time to explain decisions.  | .78          |
| <b>Stewardship</b>  |              |
| Is willing to accept personal challenges if they serve the long-term interests of the organization.                       | .80          |
| Is always willing to accept personal challenges if they serve the long-term interests of his/her team.                    | .81          |
| Helps others to see the need to balance their responsibilities to the organization and to those outside the organization. | .80          |
| Uses the leadership role appropriately to raise important issues.   | .80          |
| <b>Creativity</b>   |              |
| Develops adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas.  | .87          |
| Promotes and champions ideas to others.   | .68          |
| Searches out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.   | .85          |
| Generates creative ideas.   | .75          |

## Results

### *Reliability*

First, the reliability of each scale was assessed using Cronbach-alpha. As outlined above, the  $\alpha$  values are higher than .7 for all constructs, indicating an acceptable reliability for the scales used (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, Black, & Babin, 2010). This suggests that the scale reliabilities have adequate and stable measurement properties.

Second, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. With the exception of one item, all standardized loadings were above .7. The construct average variance extracted (AVE) was above .5 for all constructs, indicating adequate convergent validity. All reliabilities of the constructs were above .8 indicating convergence or internal consistency. Discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell-Larcker criterion

(Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For this, the squared interconstruct correlation estimates (SIC) were calculated. All construct AVE estimates were larger than the corresponding SIC estimates. This indicates the measured items have more in common with the construct with which they are associated than they do with other constructs.

In order to assess nomological validity, correlations between the constructs were examined. All correlations were significant and consistent with theoretical expectations. This provides support for nomological validity. Tables 1 and 2 provide the details of descriptive statistics.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations<sup>a</sup>**

| Variables               | Mean | s.d. | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5     |
|-------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| 1. Motivational support | 3.18 | 1.20 | (.75)  |        |        |        |       |
| 2. Contextual support   | 3.31 | 1.06 | .76*** | (.71)  |        |        |       |
| 3. Relational support   | 3.49 | 1.29 | .81*** | .84*** | (.72)  |        |       |
| 4. Stewardship          | 3.68 | .98  | .76*** | .68*** | .76*** | (.65)  |       |
| 5. Creativity           | 3.74 | .79  | .28*** | .23**  | .28*** | .33*** | (.65) |

<sup>a</sup> n = 191. Correlations based on two-tailed tests. Values shown in parentheses are average variance extracted (AVE).

\*\*\* p < 0.001

\*\* p < 0.01

### *Common method variance*

Based on the work of Podsakoff et al. (2003), several steps were taken to reduce the impact of common method bias in this survey. Several reports agree that common method bias influences results in behavioral research (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991; Podsakoff, et al., 2003). It is stated that common method bias arises out of the process of the survey, not out of the survey itself (Bagozzi & Yi, 1990). Others report that the discussion of common method biases is mainly overestimated. Spector (2006, p. 230) remarks, 'Common method variance as often conceptualized may be a legend, but biases are real and endemic to our research.' In addition, some authors found that even at high method variance the level of bias does not invalidate results (Doty & Glick, 1998; Harrison, McLaughlin, & Coalter, 1996; Rindfleisch, Malter, Ganesan, & Moorman, 2008). Furthermore, Crampton and Wagner (1994) showed that percept-percept inflation influences research on bivariate relationships but has not a broad and comprehensive effect. Nevertheless, I summarize my efforts to limit the influence of possible common method bias.

First, I employed the Harman single factor test (Podsakoff, et al., 2003), whether a single factor would account for a large part of the variance of all items in our model. This model yielded a chi-square of 617.85 (df = 152). Next, I calculated a measurement model with all constructs of my theoretical framework. Results show that the fit of the single factor model is significantly worse ( $\Delta$  chi-square (7 df) = 385.72,  $p \leq .01$ ).

Second, a CFA with marker construct was calculated as proposed by Williams, Edwards and Vandenberg (2003). They suggest a four step testing process. In step 1, a marker construct was identified. For the model presented here, customer orientation was selected because customer orientation is theoretically uncorrelated to stewardship

and creativity. Therefore, three items developed by Homburg, Hoyer and Fassnacht (2002) were used to measure customer orientation (Cronbach-alpha = .85). The selection of the customer orientation construct was based on the relative view these three items provide, e.g. ‘Relative to our competitors, our store is committed to customers’ and the theoretically distant focus to the relationship between customer orientation and stewardship or between customer orientation and creativity. In step 2, I conducted a CFA with paths from the marker construct to all other items in the model. This CFA yielded a chi-square of 447.63 (df =180). Step 3 consisted out of a further CFA in which these paths were forced to 0 (chi-square = 347.44, df = 195). A comparison of these two models in step 4 show that the fit of the second CFA is significantly better ( $\Delta$  chi-square (15df) = 100.19,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Third, Williams, Hartmann and Cavazotte (2010) recently suggested a calculation to detect method variance using a marker construct. This approach tries to summarize different efforts suggested in literature to control for method biases (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Richardson, Simmering, & Sturman, 2009). Thus, this calculation process is based on four different models, called the baseline model for investing method effects, the Method-C (constrained) model, which constrains the method factor loadings to have equal values, the Method-U (unconstrained) model, which unconstrains the method factor loadings and the Method-R (restricted) model, which uses restricted parameters to test for bias (see for further details Williams, et al., 2010). As a result I found that a comparison of the Baseline model and the Method-C model rejected the null hypotheses that the method factor loadings associated with the customer orientation were not related to each of the substantive indicators of the model. Specifically as shown in Table 3, the comparison yields a chi-square difference of 11.57 with one degree of freedom which exceeds the .05 chi-square critical value for one degree of freedom of 3.84.

**Table 3: Chi-square, goodness-of-fit values and model comparison tests**

| Model                             | chi-square | df                  | CFI         |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 1. CFA                            | 338.02     | 194                 | .935        |
| 2. Baseline                       | 352.50     | 201                 | .932        |
| 3. Method-C                       | 340.93     | 200                 | .937        |
| 4. Method-U                       | 326.00     | 182                 | .935        |
| 5. Method-R                       | 351.16     | 210                 | .937        |
| chi-square-Model Comparison Tests |            | $\Delta$ chi-square | $\Delta$ df |
| 1. Baseline vs. Method-C          | 11.57*     | 1                   | 3.84        |
| 2. Method-C vs. Method-U          | 14.93      | 18                  | 28.87       |
| 3. Method-C vs. Method-R          | 10.23      | 10                  | 18.31       |

\*  $p < .05$ , df = Degrees of Freedom, CFI = Comparative Fit Index

The next model comparison between Method-C and Method-U in order to detect if the impact of the method marker variable was equal for all of the substantive items preferred the Method-C model. This indicates that the impact of customer orientation on all substantive items is equal by accepting the restrictions of the Method-C model.

Specifically, the comparison yielded a chi-square difference of 14.93 with 18 degree of freedom which not exceeds the .05 chi-square critical value for one degree of freedom of 28.87. In addition, a third comparison between the Method-C model and the Method-R model was conducted. This comparison provides a statistical test for whether the correlations between the constructs were significantly biased by marker variable method effects. The chi-square difference test resulted in a nonsignificant difference of 13.74 at 18 degrees of freedom. As a result there was not a significant difference between the Baseline model factor correlations and the Method-C factor correlations.

Based on the model comparisons above, reliabilities for the used constructs were assessed. Table 4 reports the obtained reliability information for the constructs used in this study. This table shows the overall reliability values based on the estimates of the Baseline Model and values obtained with the decomposition of the reliabilities using the Method-C values. All reliabilities are higher than .7 indicating acceptable reliability. Method components therefore accounted for 4 to 7 percent of the reliability values for the used constructs.

Overall, all the results of the accomplished tests suggest that common method bias is not a serious threat in this research.

**Table 4: Reliability Decomposition**

| Latent Variable      | Reliability Baseline Model | Decomposed Reliability Method-C Model |                    |                               |
|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
|                      | Total Reliability          | Substantive Reliability               | Method Reliability | % Reliability Marker Variable |
| Relational Support   | .89                        | .84                                   | .05                | 5.28                          |
| Contextual Support   | .87                        | .82                                   | .05                | 6.16                          |
| Motivational Support | .90                        | .86                                   | .04                | 4.84                          |
| Stewardship          | .87                        | .81                                   | .06                | 7.16                          |
| Creativity           | .87                        | .81                                   | .06                | 7.26                          |
| Marker variable      | .78                        | .78                                   |                    |                               |

### *Model Analysis*

Based on these results, the correlations between the constructs were examined using a structural equation model (SEM). The fit indices for the SEM were good; specifically, for the proposed model, chi-square/degrees of freedom = 1.64, the comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, the goodness-of-fit-index (GFI) = .89, and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) = .058. The 90 percent confidence interval for the RMSEA was between .044 and .071. Thus, even the upper bound was not close to .1, indicating a good fit.

### *Hypotheses Testing*

The standardized path coefficients of the estimated model are shown in Table 6 and schematically in Figure 2. Five of the six proposed hypotheses were supported by the model. The hypothesized positive relationship between contextual support and stewardship was not significant (H4,  $\beta = .01$ ,  $p > .1$ ). However, the standardized path coefficient between contextual support and motivational support was found to be

positive and significant (H5,  $\beta = .3$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For relational support, both standardized path coefficients were found to be remarkably positive and significant: for the path between relational support and motivational support (H3), the coefficient was .56 with  $p < .001$ , while the relationship between relational support and stewardship (H2) had a coefficient of .43 with  $p < .01$ . A further highly significant positive relationship was found between motivational support and stewardship (H1,  $\beta = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Figure 2: Integrative model results

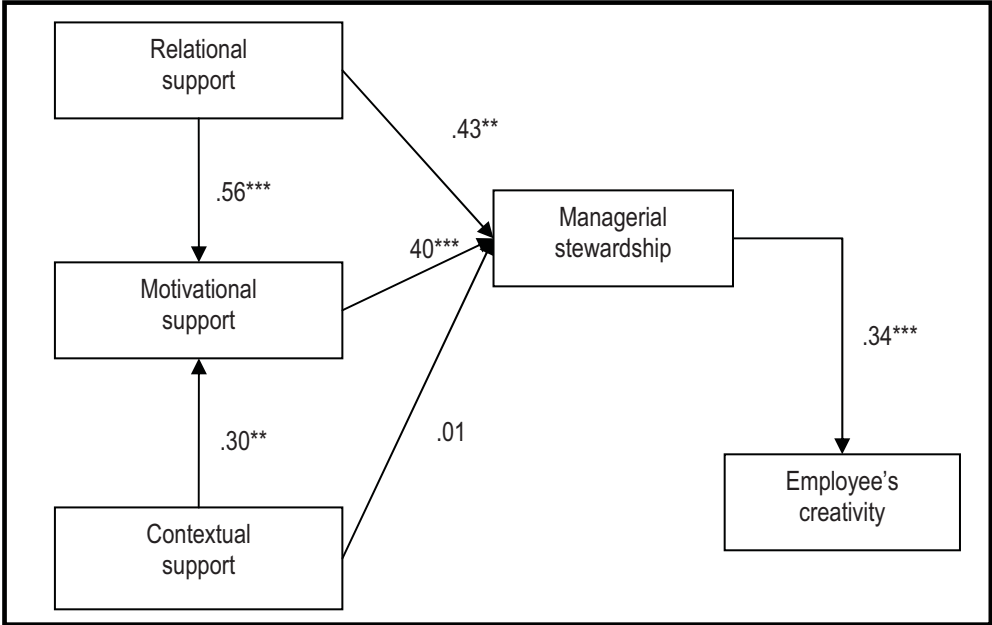


Table 5: Regression weights<sup>a</sup>

|    |                      |      |                      | Standardized estimate | p    |
|----|----------------------|------|----------------------|-----------------------|------|
| H1 | Stewardship          | <--- | Motivational Support | .40                   | ***  |
| H2 | Stewardship          | <--- | Relational Support   | .43                   | **   |
| H3 | Motivational Support | <--- | Relational Support   | .56                   | ***  |
| H4 | Stewardship          | <--- | Contextual Support   | .01                   | .924 |
| H5 | Motivational Support | <--- | Contextual Support   | .30                   | **   |
| H6 | Creativity           | <--- | Stewardship          | .34                   | ***  |

<sup>a</sup> n = 191, Significances based on two-tailed tests, \*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01

The main hypothesis of whether stewardship behavior fosters creativity (H6) was found to be positive and highly significant ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ).<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion

This study proposed a stewardship behavior model with its antecedents and linked this to creativity. A stewardship behavior has not previously been considered in a genuine service setting. This is the first study to attempt to measure stewardship behavior. The data showed that managerial stewardship behavior is linked to employee behavior. Nevertheless, a few comments on the results should be made.

First, contextual support did not significantly load on stewardship behavior, but had a positive relationship with motivational support. Contextual support was defined as coherence. It was unexpected that coherence did not support stewardship behavior, as coherence supports trust by the social context or culture of the service company. Actions that give employees work coherence by building a shared understanding of the goals and issues are likely to decrease misunderstanding and will remove some powerful threats to trust (Sitkin, 1995). As stewardship behavior is not a leadership model, it seems that removing threats to trust in this context is not necessary. As discussed, a manager can be a steward as well as a leader in a transactional way. Transactional leadership is not seen as trust building and supportive for creativity. Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) argue that transformational or transactional leadership styles depend on the individual's goals and experiences and on the situation itself. Because behaving as an agent or as a steward is a personal decision, it could also very well depend on individual experiences and personal contexts. However, this non-significant result is still surprising. The reason may be that managers do not allow coherence to play a vital role in stewardship behavior, as they understand their role and personal network differently.

Nevertheless, coherence seems to be important for managers in terms of their motivation. They need simplification and support from their organization to be motivated to make decisions and to follow goals that are in the firm's best interest. Additionally, managers need contextual support in order to give their employees a broader sense and understanding of the organizational context. To summarize, based on the results, managers likely need contextual support for their own motivation, but they do differentiate between their own motivation and stewardship behavior.

Second, relational support was significant and high loading on motivational support. As outlined, personal relationships are necessary for stewards, because stewardship behavior is built on trust and commitment. This supports the theory that relational support identifies a means whereby both parties' needs are appreciated (Lewicki, et al., 2006; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008). In other words, the owners of the service company must trust the steward not to harm them, and vice versa. This is essential for the motivation to act as a steward and to follow the company's goals. This conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Although mediation is not focused in this paper, Sobel-tests (Sobel, 1982) for the mediating role of the stewardship construct were calculated. The results showed that stewardship significantly ( $p < .05$ ) mediates all relationships between the independent variables and creativity.



is supported by the positive and significant coefficients between relationship support, motivational support, and stewardship, respectively.

Third, motivational support was significant and high loading on stewardship. This was expected, as stewardship depends on the motivation of the steward to subordinate personal agency goals to organizational goals. This goes along with more intangible rewards for the steward. Therefore, motivational support seems to be the important factor for stewardship behavior to emerge.

Last, this study found a highly significant positive relationship between stewardship and creativity. Stewardship as behavior and not as a leadership style provides a different view on ways to foster creativity. As proposed here, stewardship behavior provides the leader's main direction, not the leadership style. This underlying stewardship is transmitted to and reflected by the employees. Employees who perceive stewardship qualities in their manager alter their behavior. Stewardship behavior therefore is inspirational and motivates employees to be creative, and the manager becomes a model for employees to emulate. In leadership theory, managers need to exemplify values and behaviors for their employees. Leadership models use this as a necessary attribute for their specific framework. This study focuses on these values and behaviors, and implies that leadership style is important for giving employees guidelines, but stewardship behavior seems to influence employee behavior on a more fundamental level. In other words, the main direction the leader takes or whether the leader acts as an agent or as a steward influences people's behavior much more than leadership theory implies. This does not necessarily mean that leadership style should be viewed independently from employee creativity, but the influence of specific leadership styles may be overestimated, as these studies do not usually ask which behavior—stewardship or agency—a particular manager demonstrates. Additionally, as proposed by Hernandez (2008), stewardship behavior instills trust in employees.

### ***Limitations and further research***

This study has several limitations. First, it introduces the use of items in a service setting. Although Hernandez (2007) provides a useful start, it appears that not all antecedents of stewardship have been found. For example, Hernandez (2007, 2008) lists moral hazard as an antecedent of stewardship behavior, but she does not find moral hazard and stewardship to be separate in her work. In this study, however, it was not found to be a factor for service companies.

Second, this study uses data collected from a single source. This creates the potential for method bias (Podsakoff, et al., 2003). The topic of this survey was very sensitive for most of the respondents. They may have feared negative consequences if the questionnaires were not treated anonymously. In a multi-source survey, a matching variable is needed, making it easy to link supposedly anonymous responses back to the individual's identity. Such managerial apprehension can easily influence responses positively and response rates negatively. Additionally, a multi-source survey does not necessarily produce better or more reliable results (Kumar, Stern, & Anderson, 1993). Therefore, this study should be repeated in a different setting, such as within a company and with the additional agreement of the managers to link their responses.

Additionally, this study has shown that coherence seems to foster motivation but does not support stewardship behavior. This indicates that contextual support is not about coherence exclusively. Hernandez (2007, 2008) also proposes coordination for contextual support. This study did not offer support for any additional factors of contextual support, but it is hoped they will be found in further research.

Furthermore, stewardship theory needs to be further refined. The differences between it and other leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, must to be worked out. This paper suggests that either stewardship or agency behavior underlies every leadership style. This view has not been articulated in the literature, although various hints can be found (e.g. Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

In addition, the examined antecedents of stewardship seem quite similar to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). In effect, most of the arguments leading up to the hypotheses could also have been conceptualized from the perspective of OCB or social identity models. Given the nature of the stewardship construct and the use of stewardship and agency theory as a basis of OCB, this is not surprising. Further research should therefore try to emphasize the construct of stewardship behavior and the differences between similar constructs such as OCB, supportive behaviors, and social/organizational identity or try to link the antecedents and focal processes associated with this constructs.

Finally, the proposed model and the relationship between stewardship behavior and creativity both appear simple. In the literature on creativity and innovation, more constructs can be found that support creativity and innovation (Soni, et al., 1993; Tierney, et al., 1999; Vermeulen, De Jong, & O'Shaughnessy, 2005; Zhou & George, 2001). E.g., Scott and Bruce (1994) identify climate, leadership and work groups as determinants for innovative behavior. In work groups, Isaksen and Lauer (2002) identified trust, team spirit, unified commitment, principled leadership, an elevating goal, a results-driven structure, standards of excellence, participation in decision-making, external support and recognition and an aptitude to adjust roles and behaviors to accommodate new emergent values as key factors contributing to creativity. This paper is intended to examine stewardship behavior as a predictor of creativity. Therefore, in future research, different antecedents of creativity in addition to the suggested stewardship model should be examined.

### *Managerial implications*

Beside the relationship between stewardship and creativity, this study demonstrated the antecedents of stewardship behavior. This can provide company owners with a better idea as to what framework they can establish to encourage their managers to act as company stewards. Although contextual support did not have a positive relationship with stewardship, it was necessary for motivational support of stewardship. Additionally, it was shown that relational support is necessary, and owners should strongly stimulate this antecedent of stewardship.

Furthermore, stewards must be given opportunities to experience intangible rewards. If stewards do not experience a reward, intrinsic motivation will decline. As a result, motivational support for stewardship would recede. In order to support long-

lasting decisions and an enduring company, creativity is critical. This allows the company to remain a step ahead of other competitors, especially in services.

Employee creativity could be fostered through managerial stewardship. This managerial behavior seems to be very important for employees to enhance their good feelings and perceptions about the company over the long term. Literature in different disciplines suggests leadership and often the behavior of the leader to be one factor in employees' creativity (see, e.g. Isaksen & Lauer, 2002). Managerial stewardship behavior should offer employees a sense of trust in the company and a sense of security about their role and position within it. Thus, based on the results in this paper, stewardship is able to support employees' creativity.

Although stewardship is not a leadership style, its behavioral outcomes may foster social responsibility. Stewards work in the best interest of the company and the stakeholders (Davis, et al., 1997), combining internal and external factors and demands. Thus, when maximizing organizational performance is defined as the core goal, sustainability and ethic behavior could act as a (sub-)goal and therefore will be aimed at by the steward. Working collectively and being not instrumentally motivated could lead to a social responsible and ethical outcome – not only for the steward but also for the company and the society.

In turn, the increasing pressure on social responsible behavior may also lead to a more 'stewardian' behavior, based on the more altruistically efforts that have to be made in order to meet the claims of the society. Having said this, it must be noted that stewardship behavior is not limited to the executive levels. Although I focus on managers' stewardship in this paper, every employee can be a steward and act altruistically for the good of the organization and its stakeholders. The society as one of the company's stakeholders has recently focused on sustainability. Following the literature, leadership style seems to be an important factor in aiming for sustainability (see, e.g. Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Szekely & Knirsch, 2005). Although a lot of parallels can be drawn between stewardship behavior and transformational leadership, this paper does not argue for stewardship being a leadership style. Stewardship is rather an underlying, attitude-like notion, whereas leadership style is more an actual behavior. If leadership style and stewardship behavior complement each other, financial, ecological and social effects could be amplified, including sustainability.

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