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The study of factors influencing on SMEs entrepreneurs' creative construction for export-import in Iran

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Abstract

This independent study, a survey research, aimed to study (1) the creative thinking method (2) the creative constructing influent factors and (3) the applying creative idea to business and the outcomes after applying SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran. The study result showed that the entrepreneurs had ideas which affected positive way on creative thinking, whereas they also had ideas which effected negative way too. In the factor that effected creatively, it revealed that the entrepreneurs, who had different gender, age, education level, and work position status, had statistically significant difference at 0.05 from others. From the factor analysis, it could reduce all factors to remain six main factors, including enriching outside- book knowledge, using an idea, practicing for seeking new knowledge, characteristic belonging to creative thinking theory, bravery for differentiating, and emotional esthetics. Besides, most of the entrepreneurs used creativity to apply for sale and marketing aspect, development and design aspect, and problem solving aspect. Therefore, the revenue, the product and service's quality, and the product and service's price were increased. Consequently, those made the incomes increased, too.

Keywords: Small and Medium Enterprises, entrepreneur, export, import.

Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have been playing an important role on the business sectors. SMEs tendency in Iran has been expanding, especially entrepreneurship. The shutdown, however, also exists due to certain major reasons. One is that SMEs lack competitive development in terms of marketing, profit, management system, finance, product and service development, and staff's skill development. Another is that currently business environment has been changing so swiftly, so new SMEs have to encounter with barriers that they need to find strategies to survive. If SMEs cannot adjust themselves to the tough situations, they might end up closing down (e.g.Office of Small and Medium Enterprises promotion, 2001). Nowadays, product and service manufacture has changed from standard and mass production to customization in order to meet with the satisfaction of the consumers and better well-being according to the development plan (e.g.Ariyakhajohn, 2013). Many economic leading countries, as a result, has been focusing on promoting creative economic policy in order to develop new products and services and avoid ones that mainly compete on the prices. Creative economy refers to a range of economy which comprises culture, economy and technology. Whenever Iran can change from the growth by factors of productions and natural resources to the drive by knowledge and creativity, chances are that economic development will be sustainably expanded. There are several major reasons that the country should be forced to the age of creative economy. Obviously, many countries that have turned into creative economic system are high-income countries, for instance, the US, Japan, England, Italy, France, Germany and Scandinavian countries. In addition, the expansion which is based on creativity assists to reduce quantitative limitation since the creativity is infinite (e.g. Iran Creative & Design Center, 2009).

As a result, this study aims at the concept of creativity, the factors which have a great influence on building ideas, the way to apply the creativity to the business and the outcome of the creativity utilized by

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Thai SMEs entrepreneurs concerning exportation and importation. The findings will guide entrepreneurs and people to create the plan for developing business, products and services and help them realize creative economic philosophy. They, therefore, will be able to not only increase their competence to compete with the opponents but also create their own opportunity. Lastly, the research findings can be used as guidance for the related research in the future.

Specific Definitions

The creative thinking method means a creative idea or practice that shows how creativity of SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran is. It depends on personal belief, social value, culture, experience, and environment of each person. In this case, it means administrative creativity of entrepreneur.

The SMEs entrepreneur for export-import in Iran is a small and medium enterprise in Iran which run an export-import business by referred from exporter lists in a website of Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce. Herein, it includes all members in those enterprises such as owners, company consultants, managers, and all employees, etc.

The creative constructing influent factors are habits, characteristics, or actions that effected to lateral thinking and originality, which can develop to new innovation, differentiation, and quality upgrade. They are referred to books and academic papers that mentioned to characteristics of creative people.

Goods and services are products and services in export-import business that made from creative thinking development by knowledge process which leads to design of producing new innovation, goods or services that has increased value.

Literature Review

Research on creativity has been discussed over various disciplines, for example, psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, information system, business management, and the humanities (e.g.Styhre & Sundgren, 2005). May (1959) defined creativity as "the process of bringing something new into birth". The meaning of creativity later tended to relate more with business. For example, Amabile (1998) agreed that "in business, originality isn't enough. To be creative, an idea must also be appropriate – useful and actionable". At the organizational level, creativity had been admitted as "the creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system" (e.g. Woodman *et al.*, 1993). Also, DeGraff & Lawrence (2002) designed creativity as a purposeful activity that generates valuable and new (or better) products, services, processes, or ideas. Currently, creativity has been playing an essential role in driving the economy where it is called "creative economy", and Howkins (2009) defined it as the value created by human's ideas.

Every human possesses creativity which originates from two sources. One is heredity transmitted genetic character from parents to offspring, i.e. born to be creative. Another is environment and development such as training and learning. Therefore, "the creative process is perceived as taking place within the context of a particular environment rather than in a vacuum" (e.g. Williams & Yang, 1999). This issue is also appeared in the study of Somprasong (2003) on the development of thinking and creativity which claimed that many researchers claimed that developing both left brain and right brain in terms of positive thinking results in creativity and imagination. In addition, thinking system can be transmitted by integrated language. It is, moreover, obvious that environment, upbringing from family, education from school and experience from society have a great influence on increasing and reducing creativity. It is undeniable that creativity is also resulted from the brain power and development. Therefore, the level of creativity clearly varies from person to person due to attitude, characteristic, intelligence, knowledge (e.g. Amabile, 1988), thinking system (e.g. Wallach & Kogan, 1965; Guilford, 1967; Guilford, 1983; Plucker & Renzulli, 1999), achievement motive and personality (e.g. Panjamawat, 2005) and environment. Famous examples are tests of divergent thinking as offered by Guilford (1956), the study of biographical and historical background of creative persons (e.g. Galton, 1869; Simonoton, 1975), the study of understanding creativity in business (e.g. Huang, 2002), the study of factors affecting creative thinking of undergraduate students of Chulalongkorn University (e.g. Panjamawat, 2005), the study of self-directed learning: a case study of undergraduate students at Srinakharinwirot University (e.g. Songtiang & Charoenwongrayab, 2007), and the study of the extra-curriculum development enhancing creativity thinking in second-level students (e.g. Limcharoen, 2009).

Guilford (1984) indicated that creative thinking is related to divergent thinking which has various directions, aspects and distances. This thinking system comprising of originality, fluency, flexibility and elaboration has led to the new breakthroughs and solutions to solve a problem. Apparently, divergent thinking en-

courages people to think differently both in quantity and quality and lead to practical ideas. The products of creativity is shown in the set of new meaning which is free from the previous one, and it may be the form of ideas or inventions which can be either concrete or abstract. In terms of the quality of creative thinking products, Taylor (1964) pointed out that it is not necessary that creativity be the most excellent breakthrough since it provides innumerable advantages. However, the benefits can be divided into two major groups. The former is that it contributes to the welfare of humankind, and the latter is that it meets the needs of individuals. Obviously, it is important to learn to possess creativity which requires the drills and the development of creative and positive thinking. It is suggested that an organization possess the knowledge management and transfer the creativity to the next generation in order to maintain such knowledge sustainably. Somprasong (2003) claimed that if the knowledge management is integrated with the appropriate development process, it will be able to create a large number of people who have creative and positive thinking. The development, thus, should be visible to contribute not only to the individual but the community also.

In relation to the concept of competition, it is currently referred to productivity, the capacity to create products or offer services more efficiently and more excellently than opponents. Not only is the competition on cost but creative economy or creativity-based economy also plays an essential part to increase the competence of business in the competition. Through the integration of creativity and new invention which have various styles, quality and options, the business sector can increase the value of products and create their unique which can be developed to the strength. In addition, it assists to prevent the ideas from copyright infringement by intellectual property right, so the business has the proprietary right by law. Creativity, moreover, plays an important role to find the effective solutions for the projects. Terrance (1965) explained that creative thinking system is the sensitivity of feelings to the problem or impairment. Then information is gathered to propose and test hypothesis and finally write a report for a new theory or finding. Therefore, creative thinking system is clearly a scientific method which Terrance called "The method of creative problem solving". It corresponds to the theory of De Bono saying that lateral thinking involves with creative thinking. While creative thinking is the product of thinking, lateral thinking refers to the process and system of thinking. De Bono (2010), furthermore, conducted the research used 44 businessmen as the subject. The study requested them to use creative thinking to invent the tools to solve the problems visibly concerning his theories provided. The findings showed that most of the participants chose the theory related to the technique of lateral thinking. As mentioned above, to develop and improve products and services, it is clear that quality, value, style, reliability, price, innovation and unique are the key to support the economy grow sustainably and the must to provide for the business. Dr. Seidel (2009) found that the dynamics of business processes can be described as highly dependent on creativity, interdependent, client-focused, complex, but also repetitive. The interesting strategy for the competition that is recommended is Diamond Model by Dr. Porter (1990) and the combination of business group to increase the capacity in competition (Cluster). For instance, the study of economic value of creative industries in Iran by Kenan Institute Asia and Fiscal Policy Research Institute Foundation (2009) revealed that in 2008 creative industries in the study created value for Thai economy over one trillion baht (32 billion US dollar) or nearly 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Creative industries had quite high export value at 13 million US dollar which led Iran to rank no. 20 as the country that exported most creative products. Essentially, the value of creative product export has been increasing every year at the average of over five percent a year. It showed that there was a large supply of creative products from overseas market.

Methodology

This study was a survey research. The sample of this study is SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran who was referred from the exporter lists in a website of Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce (2012). By random sampling which calculated from Taro Yamane formula, it showed that a number of 400 samples were suitable for data collection. The tool for this study was questionnaire that created from creative thinking concept, theory, and other related researches. The researcher had done fieldwork by using convenience sampling for survey and collecting data in Bangkok International Fashion Fair and Bangkok International Leather Fair 2013 (e.g. BIFF & BIL 2013) in Bangkok, Iran International Furniture Fair 2013 (BIFF&BIL 2013) in Bangkok, The small and medium enterprise (SMEs) in Chiang Mai District in Chiang Mai Province, and Export-Sale Exhibition 2013 in Khon Kaen Province.

Results and Discussion

General Information of Respondents

From the questionnaires, most of respondents are female and have age between 30 - 39 years old. Their education level is bachelor degree, and their transaction experiences are around 1 - 5 years. Also, most of them are owners.

Creative Thinking Idea of Respondents

Information about creative thinking idea of respondents consisted of questions about creatively original thinking process, or behaviors which express to being creative person of SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran. Herein, it means the entrepreneurs' management creative thinking. This information was divided into two parts for analysis which are ideas which effected positive way and ideas which effected negative way on creative thinking. The result are shown at tables 1 below:

Table 1. Ideas Which Affected Positive Way of Respondents

Creative Thinking Idea	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
1) Learning from mistakes	4.47	.600
2) Developing for producing new innovations	4.36	.583
3) Continuously seeking for knowledge	4.35	.630
4) Never stop to look up for new things	4.33	.615
5) Ceaseless doubtfulness	4.32	.610

From table 1, the total mean for ideas which affected positive way of respondents is 4.17, and it interprets in "agree" level. The top three ideas which effected positive way are that learning from mistakes, developing for producing new innovations, and continuously seeking for knowledge.

Table 2. Ideas Which Affected Negative Way of Respondents

Creative Thinking Idea	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
1) Sticking to the truth only	3.95	.923
2) Resolving problem by the same ways	3.90	.812
3) Being too serious, lacking of humour	3.87	.919
4) Too strict, no flexible	3.81	.832
5) Sticking to rules, no divergent thinking or applied thinking	3.80	.863

From table 2, the total mean for ideas which effected negative way of respondents is 3.25, and it is interpreted in "undecided" level. The top three ideas which effected negative way are that sticking to the truth only, resolving problem by the same ways, and being too serious, lacking of humour.

The Creative Constructing Influent Factors of Respondents

The Creative Constructing Influent Factors

Table 3. The Creative Constructing Influent Factors of Respondents

The creative constructing influent factors	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Habit		
1) Independent thinking	4.36	.697
2) Inspiration / Impression	4.32	.699
3) Courage to try new things	4.27	.684
4) Positive thinking	4.22	.745
5) Originality	4.21	.751
6) Self-confidence	4.16	.715
7) Observation	4.16	.705
8) Relaxation	4.05	.756
9) Leadership	4.03	.735
10) Imagination	4.02	.897
11) Curiousness	4.01	.827
12) Sense of humour	3.89	.863
Action		
1) Openness to new experiences / new ideas	4.26	.725
2) Flexible thinking	4.17	.758
3) Design / Development / Improvement	4.16	.758
4) Adaptation / Application	4.16	.743
5) Divergent thinking	4.06	.864
6) Always asking questions and finding answers	4.16	.743
7) Perception	4.06	.864
8) Travel	4.06	.754
9) Recognition	3.95	.777
10) Skill practice	3.89	.805
11) Listening to music	3.89	.836
12) Reading books	3.83	.918
13) Ability to concentrate	3.61	.954

From table 3, the top five habit factors which influence creative construction of respondents are independent thinking, independent thinking, courage to try new things, positive thinking, and originality. Also, the top five action factors which influence creative construction of respondents are openness to new experiences / new ideas, flexible thinking, design / development / improvement, adaptation / application, and divergent thinking.

Statistical Hypothesis Testing

Table 4: Result of the Study's Hypothesis Testing

Respondents' different idea level about creative constructing influent factors that divided by personal information	Testing Result	Interpretation
Gender	Difference	Reject
Age	Difference	Reject
Education level	Difference	Reject
Transaction experiences	No Difference	Accept
Work position status	Difference	Reject

From table 4, it is revealed that the respondents, who have had different gender, age, education level, and work position status, have had statistically significant difference at 0.05 from others. In the other hand, the respondents, who have had different transaction experiences, have not had statistically significant difference at 0.05 from others.

Factor Analysis

From factor analysis by using principle components analysis (PCA), it showed that Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin (KMO), which uses for measure information's suitability to use factor analysis, was 0.908. It meant this information was suitable for using factor analysis technique, and it could explain information 90.8%. Moreover, according to Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, it presented that Sig. value had statistically significant ($x^2(300) = 4397.483$, Sig. = 0.000). It identified that variables had relation, so it could use factor analysis technique straightly.

Components reduction by Varimax rotation could reduce factors from the factors variables which influence creative construction to remain six main factors. After, cutting off the factor variables which cross-loading - there were flexible thinking, travel, divergent thinking, independent thinking, and courage to try new things. Information followed at table 5.

It could classify all factors variables to be six main creative constructing influent factors. Follow below:

The first factor: Enriching outside-book knowledge including adaptation / application, always asking questions and finding answers, design / development / improvement, perception, openness to new experiences / new ideas, and recognition.

The second factor: Using an idea including imagination, originality, positive thinking, and inspiration / impression.

The third factor: Practicing for seeking new knowledge including reading books, ability to concentrate, and skill practice.

The forth factor: Characteristic belonging to creative thinking theory including curiousness, observation, and relaxation.

The fifth factor: Bravery for differentiating including leadership and self-confidence.

The sixth factor: Emotional esthetics including listening to music and sense of humour.

The six reduced factors could explain 65.267% of Variance for all 20 variables - the first to six factors could explain 16.373%, 11.865%, 10.315%, 9.786%, 8.876%, and 8.051%, respectively.

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

Applying Creative Idea to Business and the Outcomes after Applying Respondents

From the study, it reported that most of respondents have experiences for applying creative idea to business. However, applied experience has not statistically significant relation at 0.05 with gender and education level, yet it has statistically significant relation at 0.05 with age, transaction experience, and work position status.

The applying creative idea to their own business and the outcomes after applying respondents was collected only the respondents who used to apply amount 330 samples. The result is represented bellow in table 6 and table 7:

From table 6, it presented top three applying that most of respondents apply creative idea for sale and marketing aspect. Next, they apply for development and design aspect, and for problem solution aspect.

From table 7, it is showed top three outcomes that the respondents gained were increased revenue, increased product and service's quality, and increased product and service's price.

Conclusions

The SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran mostly had ideas which affected positive way on creative thinking, whereas they also had ideas which effected negative way too. What is effective on creative entrepreneurs were 2 factors; habit and action. From the factor analysis, it could divide into six main factors which influence creative construction. There were enriching outside-book knowledge, using an idea, practicing for seeking new knowledge, characteristic belonging to creative thinking theory, bravery for differentiating, and emotional esthetics. These factors have statistically significant difference at 0.05 in gender, age, education level, and work position status. Moreover, the entrepreneurs used creativity

to apply for sale and marketing aspect, development and design aspect, and problem solution aspect. Therefore, the revenue, the product and service's quality, and the product and service's price were increased. The study found that creativity can be developed under suitable circumstances. According to the results, mean score of SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran's ideas which positively affect creativity is 4.17 (agree). It can be interpreted that SMEs entrepreneurs are quite creative and their creativity which might be genetically derived or environmentally enhanced tend to be developed over time. Meanwhile, mean score of SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran's ideas which negatively affect creativity is 3.25 (undecided) which means that a number of SMEs entrepreneurs still have low creativity. It can be assumed that social value, personal belief, experience, or culture play a major role. The results are concordance with Huang (2002)'s work, "Understanding creativity in business," which also found that two social influences encouraging and discouraging creativity were scientific attitudes and religious attitudes. Also found in Somprasong (2003)'s work, positive ideas in creativity and imagination can be developed through parents and school nurture and life experience.

Table 5. Rotated Component Matrix[a]

Variables	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1) Adaptation / Application	.729					
2) Always asking questions and finding answers	.707					
3) Design / Development / Improvement	.703					
4) Perception	.629					
5) Openness to new experiences / new ideas	.616					
6) Recognition	.542					
7) Imagination		.756				
8) Originality		.645				
9) Positive thinking		.565				
10) Inspiration / Impression		.539				
11) Reading books			.770			
12) Ability to concentrate			.738			
13) Skill practice			.701			
14) Curiousness				.785		
15) Observation				.694		
16) Relaxation				.595		
17) Leadership					.846	
18) Self-confidence					.787	
19) Listening to music						.803
20) Sense of humour						.647

Table 6. How to Apply Creative Idea for Business

How to apply creative idea for business	$\bar{x}$	S.D.
1) Applying for sale and marketing	4.12	.710
2) Applying for development and design	4.12	.805
3) Applying for problem solution	4.09	.730
4) Applying for manufacturing process	3.98	.756
5) Applying for service	3.90	.806
6) Applying for strategic planning	3.90	.672
7) Applying for general administration	3.78	.747
8) Applying for human resource	3.62	.775

Factors influencing creativity construction Limcharoen (2009) received the elements of creativity promoting students had the creativity consisting of quality in two dimensions which were 1) thinking dimension such as fluency, flexibility, and originality and 2) mental and personality such as curiosity and confidence. These dimensions were in line with the quality of divergent thinking of Guilford (1984) and corresponded with the factors influencing creativity construction which the researcher used for study in both habit and action when testing the hypothesis. As a result, it was found that the

factors influencing creativity construction of SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran were different with statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This finding corresponded with Panchamawat (2005) in point of being different of study program which average score of creativity, fluency thinking, originality thinking, and flexibility thinking were different with statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This also agreed with the study result of Songtiang and Jarernvongrayab (2007) studying on "Self-Directed Learning: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students at Srinakharinwirot University" concluded that year, field, and gender interacted with explanation in the difference of self-directed in every element; self-management, self-check, and self-change.

Table 7. Outcome after Applying Creative Idea for Business

Outcome after applying creative idea for business	$\bar{x}$	S.D.
1) Revenue increases	4.00	.671
2) product and service's quality increases	4.00	.671
3) product and service's price increases	3.92	.727
4) Income increase	3.91	.691
5) Market Share increase	3.87	.702
6) Capacity increase	3.72	.721
7) Material using increase	3.67	.742
8) Global warming decrease	3.64	.868
9) Cost decrease	3.62	.782

After considering six main factors such as knowledge increasing apart from textbooks, thinking, practice for gaining knowledge, theoretical characteristics for creativity, dare to be different, and emotional esthetic, these could not relate to the point that personalities were the factors affecting creative thinking of undergraduate students of Chulalongkorn University of Panchamawat (2005) supposing that it was possible that sample groups and variables were different causing the study irrelative. For first-third creativity applications that SMEs entrepreneurs for export-import in Iran used were sale and marketing, development and design, and solutions. It could be inferred that creativity was suitable for those points concerning with the study of De Bono (2010) studying 44 businessmen using creativity in inventing a device for concrete solutions. As a result, the concept was chosen for solutions was the concept of thinking outside the box. It obviously shown that creativity was useful for solutions and related to the study of Dr. Stephan explaining that business driving highly depended on creativity, interdependence, attention to the customers, tactics, and repetition. The results after applying the creativity were growing income, higher efficiency of products and services, higher price of products and services, and increasing profit relating to the study of Kenan Institute Asia and Fiscal Policy Research Institute (2009) studying on economic value from Iran. It indicated that creative industry work gave quite high return, and the important thing was that value of export creative products continuously grown up on the average more than 5% per year. This can show more demand to Iran creative products from export market.

Recommendation from the Finding

To support export-import SMEs entrepreneurs in Iran who use the concept of creativity in running their business by holding training program for newcomer SME groups.

To support the practice of stimulating or building creativity by themselves is by first considering themselves whether they have the factors that influences building creativity, or not and then use the concept of creativity to help in the practical implementation.

To support the knowledge management (KM) of creativity via Internet and social media by telling the experiences about applying creativity to business, practicing thinking skill, exchanging the ideas and sharing knowledge among the network members.

Government should make groups of people who have high potential and people who don't have each sector together and then join the creative exchange activities in order to share knowledge and experiences or hold the workshop for learning new things from other groups of people in both same sector and different sectors such as marketing group, professional group, etc.

Recommendation for Future Studies

Changing the group of sampling in order to confirm the finding would be much useful to the study.

Studying about the problems and barriers of bringing creative economic principle applied to business and offering the solutions to promote the creative economy

Studying training process, cultivating creativity and implementation in real world of business in order to introduce the new innovation and knowledge which continually come out since thinking is endless process.

Studying policies, prohibits, and laws related to international trade whether there are any impacts to creative economy and what side. Both the benefits and obstacles and preparing the approaches in dealing with the probable impacts in order to open new channel and chance. Ultimately, it will raise competitiveness higher and higher.

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