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## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, COOPERATION AND GLOBAL INTEGRATION IN THE NEW NORMAL



FINANCIAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

# TABLE OF CONTENT

## APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND BIG DATA IN THE FIELDS OF FINANCE, ACCOUNTING AND AUDITING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION


BANK RUN AND SILICON VALLEY BANK ..... 1

Lam Dang Xuan Hoa, Ho Minh Khoa, Huynh Vo Nhat Linh ..... 1

BIG DATA AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS ..... 14

Le Thi Minh, Vo Trung Hau ..... 14

THE EFFICIENCY OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM IN RISK MANAGEMENT AT THE NAM A COMMERCIAL JOINT STOCK BANK ..... 23

Truong Thanh Loc, Tran Ngoc Thanh ..... 23

VIETNAM - AUSTRALIA ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION IN THE NEW NORMAL: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAMESE INVESTORS ..... 30

Nhu Nguyen Phuc Quynh*, Anh Nguyen Thi Nguyet, Duy Nguyen Anh ..... 30

IMPACTS OF CREDIT GROWTH AND CREDIT RISK ON THE PROFIT OF VIETNAM JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS ..... 43

Dao Le Kieu Oanh*, Tran Thi Huong Ngan ..... 43

FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMERS' DECISIONS TO USE E-BANKING AT JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY ..... 57

Nguyen Duy Khanh[1], Pham Quoc Tham[2] ..... 57

HOW CHINA_USA POLITICAL TENSIONS AFFECT STOCK MARKET RETURN OF CHINA AND THE USA? A QUANTILE VAR CONNECTEDNESS APPROACH ..... 70

Hao Wen Chang[1], Tsangyao Chang[2]and Mei-Chih Wang[3] ..... 70

BANKING HUMAN RESOURCES BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AI ..... 92

Nguyen Huynh Chi ..... 92

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TRAINING THROUGH IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENT TESTING AND ASSESSMENT – CASE IN ACCOUNTING BRANCH, UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE ..... 102

Thuy Thi Ha ..... 102

ACTIVITIES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN VIETNAMESE COMMERCIAL BANKS: AN OVERVIEW DURING THE COVID-19 RECOVERY PERIOD ..... 109

Nguyễn Thị Quỳnh Châu, Đào Lê Kiều Oanh ..... 109

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAM IN ATTRACTIVE FDI IN GLOBAL MINIMUM CORPORATE TAX IMPLEMENTATION ..... 117

Ngo Hoang Thong ..... 117

**DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM, TRENDS AND POTENTIABILITY**

DEVELOPING SMART HOME MODEL FOR APARTMENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY BASED ON INTERNET OF THINGS (IoT) TECHNOLOGY ....182

Dang Thanh Thuy[1], Nguyen Thanh Dien[2] ....182

TRANSPARENCY OF ACCOUNTING INFORMATION OF CONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY – CASE STUDY OF APPLICATION OF ACCRUAL ACCOUNTING....193

Truong Thanh Loc[1]*, Pham Thi Yen Nhi[2]....193

FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY ....207

Truong Thanh Loc*, Dang Nguyen Tuong Han, Nguyen Ngoc Mai Phuong, Nguyen Thi Quynh Huong....207

THE CRITICAL FACTORS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' INTENTION TO USE METAVERSE TECHNOLOGY FOR SUBJECTS RELATED TO IMPORT-EXPORT LEARNING....221

Van Thuy Nguyen Ho, Chau The Huu, Luan Thanh Nguyen*....221

CONSUMER PERCEPTION ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT OF LUXURY BRANDS IN VIETNAM AND CHINA MARKETS....233

Tran Minh Tu[1]....233

INFLUENCE OF WOM AND EWOM IN MAKING DECISION BUYING GOODS ....247

Doan Anh Tu[1], Kim Phi Rum[2], Nguyen Pham Hai Ha[3]....247

DIGITAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL IN VIETNAM....257

Hoang Thi Chinh, Nguyen Hoang Phan ....257

BLOCKCHAIN APPLICATION IN MODERN LOGISTICS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM ....266

Nguyen Nu Tuong Vi....266

FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM ....272

Vo Tien Si ....272

LEGAL FRAME FOR THE OPERATION OF THE REAL ESTATE BUSINESS UTILIZING THE BLOCKCHAIN PLATFORM IN VIETNAM....284

Le Thi Khanh Linh....284

**DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION – COOPERATION – GLOBAL INTEGRATION IN BUSINESS**

FACTORS INFLUENCING BUSINESS ACCEPTANCE OF INDUSTRY 4.0 TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS IN DONG NAI PROVINCE ..... 291

Thanh-Thu Vo*, Minh-Huong Tang ..... 291

DIGITAL ORIENTATION, INNOVATION CAPABILITY AND FIRM PERFORMANCE: A PROPOSAL RESEARCH MODEL ..... 298

Nguyen Van Hau ..... 298

PREDICTION OF STUDENT'S BEHAVIORAL INTENTION TO USE SMART LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A COMBINED MODEL OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE ..... 309

Nguyen Thi Hai Binh[1], Dao Y Nhi[2], Nguyen Thanh Luan[3], Dang Quan Tri[4] ..... 309

THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPACT OF GRAMMARLY ON EFL WRITING COMPETENCY: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT. ..... 323

Nguyen Thi Hong Lien[1], Nguyen Truong Gia Minh[2], Nguyen Ngoc Vu[3]* ..... 323

FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASING DECISION OF THE YOUTH ON TIKTOK ..... 336

Ngoc Pham[1], Thanh Cong Tran* ..... 336

FACTORS AFFECTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY BEHAVIORS OF WORKERS DIRECT PRODUCTION AT CU CHI POWER COMPANY ..... 345

Minh Luan Le, Thi Trang Tran ..... 345

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPLOYEES' ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHOP BEHAVIOUR ..... 355

Nguyen Xuan Hung[1], Ha Le Thu Hoai[1], Nguyen Huu My Truc[2&3], Pham Tan Nhat[2&3] ..... 355

THE INNOVATION CAPACITY - THE ROLE OF LEADERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM ..... 365

Huynh Nhut Nghia ..... 365

PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ON THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON BUSINESS ..... 376

Ton Nguyen Trong Hien, Bui Tuyet Anh ..... 376

FACTORS AFFECTING BRAND SWITCHING INTENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM ..... 382

Ly Dan Thanh, Nguyen Phu Quoi, Tran Hoang Nam, Vo Hong Son, Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Tien ..... 382

ENHANCE THE DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS ..... 398

Tran Quang Canh, Hoang Thi Chinh ..... 398

ASSESSING PATIENT SATISFACTION (BRAND) AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT THU DUC CITY HOSPITAL.....408

Nguyen Hoang Dung [1*], Nguyen Huynh Bao An [2], Van Phuong Trang [2] .....408

INDUSTRIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES FORM THE FOUNDATION FOR BINH DUONG'S SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.....408

Hoang-An Nguyen .....417

IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL FAIRNESS ON THE EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY .....426

Le Thi Nhu Quynh[1,2], Le Thi Giang[2], Truong Quang Dung[1] .....426

THE EFFECT OF PERSONAL MOTIVATION ON THE TACIT KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR OF 5-STAR HOTELS' EMPLOYEES IN HO CHI MINH CITY.....440

Le Thi Giang, Nguyen Bach Hoang Phung.....440

DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF ENTERPRISES IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE CASE OF VIETNAMESE ENTERPRISES .....453

Diep Nguyen Thi Ngoc[1*], Canh Quang Tran[2], Anh Bach Hoang Ngoc[1].....453

FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' SELECTION OF PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS IN THU DUC CITY .....466

Thi-Trang Tran[1], Thi-My-Dung Pham[2], Thi-Bich-Diep Le[1*] .....466

**RECOVERY COMMUNICATIONS IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

DEVELOPING A SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE MEASUREMENT SCALE OF AN GIANG ..... 474

Nguyen Vuong Hoai Thao[1], Nguyen Quyet Thang[2] ..... 474

PROSPECTS OF VIRTUAL REALITY TOURISM APPLICATION IN VIETNAM TOURISM PROMOTION ..... 487

Nguyen Thi Hong Ha, Pham Thi Huong Giang ..... 487

PERSONALIZATION TRAVEL TRENDING IN HO CHI MINH CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POST COVID-19 ..... 497

Duong Bao Trung ..... 497

IMPACTS OF MEDIA ON CUSTOMERS' DECISION TO CHOOSE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICES POST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ..... 511

Nguyen Thi Bich Van ..... 511

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION APPLICATION TO PROMOTE THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF INBOUND TOURISM IN HO CHI MINH CITY ..... 521

Tran Trong Thanh ..... 521

VIETNAM TOURISM AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC ..... 527

Nguyen Hoang Phan[1], Hoang Thi Chinh[2] ..... 527

NAVIGATING THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DATA MINING AND PRIVACY ..... 537

Pham Thai Hien ..... 537

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENT SELF-REPORTED GENERAL WELL-BEING AND PERCEIVED SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS, TEACHERS, AND UNIVERSITY ..... 545

Virginia Kelsey[1], Đặng Thị Mai Ly[2*], Nguyễn Anh Khoa[2], Nguyễn Văn Tường[2] ..... 545

**DIGITAL VERSUS NON- DIGITAL**

PROVIDING CONVENIENCE TO CUSTOMERS IN THE DIGITAL MARKETING ERA: OBSERVATIONS FROM COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY .....556

Nguyen Quang Trung .....556

VIRTUAL REALITY: AN INNOVATIVE TOOL IN TOURISM EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING .....564

Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le[1], Khuong Thanh Nguyen[2] .....564

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING FOR PLACE BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF DONG THAP PROVINCE .....580

Phan Bao Giang.....580

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON VIETNAM'S SMALL AND THE MEDIUM BUSINESS ENTERPRISES (SMEs) .....587

Lê Kim Nguyên[*] .....587

**CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN NON-TRADITIONAL EDUCATION**

PROPOSE AN ONLINE TEACHING COMPETENCE SCALE FOR UNIVERSITY LECTURERS .....596

Duong Thi Kim Oanh*, Dang Thi Dieu Hien .....596

EXAMINE USAGE OF LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMSS) BY FACULTY STAFF AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS (UEF) AND FINANCE WITH EXPANDED TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM).....608

Ha Truong Minh Hieu, Ngo Minh Hai*, Mach Tran Huy.....608

**DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**
**AN INDISPENSABLE EVOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATES**

FACTORS AFFECTING THE APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING AT MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE .....618

Truong Thanh Loc[1]*, Nguyen Thi Thanh Truc[2] .....618

HRM DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: TAKING A ROAD OF SUCCESSION PLANNING ..629

Trương Phan Hoàng Anh, Giang Ngọc Anh.....629

THE IMPLICATION OF CONTACLESS SERVICE AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER REVISIT INTENTION .....640

Linh, Nguyen Duy Yen*.....640

TOURISM BRAND LOVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLE OF ONLINE TOURIST EXPERIENCES, TOURIST-BRAND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY .....651

Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le .....651

CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS IN CROSS-CULTURAL SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (SoTL): A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY .....662

Punithan Moganathas[1], Jenny Hill[2], Andy V.-M. Kok[2], Matt Barr[2], Ruffin Relja[2]*, Philippa Ward[2], Duong Tran Quang Hoang[3], Quynh Phuong Tran[3] .....662

LEVERAGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATE EVOLUTION IN VIETNAM .....677

Nguyen,Tan Dat[1], Le,Dinh Thang[2].....677

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND APPLICATIONS

FB-PROPHET MODEL FOR TIME SERIES FORECASTING IN SALES ..... 691
Thanh Cong Tran ..... 691
USING AI CODE IN C# PROGRAMMING ..... 698
Nguyen Ha Giang ..... 698
DETERMINANTS OF CONTINUANCE USAGE INTENTION OF MOBILE FOOD ORDERING APPLICATIONS (MFOAS) AMONG VIETNAMESE USERS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF E-SATISFACTION ..... 705
Lam Hoang Phuong[1*], Nguyen Thi Kim Lien[2], Tien Hung Nguyen[3], Vinh Long Nguyen[4] ..... 705
DECODING MARKETING INSIGHT: INSIGHT FROM OUTSIDE ..... 718
Hoàng Thị Hằng, Trần Thành Công[*] ..... 718
DIGITAL DISRUPTION AND DATA SECURITY: HOW FINTECH IS RESHAPING BANKING ..... 724
Hoàng Văn Hiếu, Trần Ngọc Thiên Ngân ..... 724

**TRENDS AND ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH**

EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNICATIVE GAME-BASED GRAMMAR TEACHING ..... 736

Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen[1], Tran Quoc Thao[2] ..... 736

APPROACHES TO TEACHING L2 LISTENING: ..... 749

CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN REAL-LIFE AND CLASSROOM-BASED LISTENING ..... 749

Luu Thi Mai Vy ..... 749

DEFINING ROLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ..... 755

Ho Xuan Tien, Duong My Tham ..... 755

EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING INVESTMENT IN PORTFOLIO - BASED ENGLISH WRITING LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 763

Ly Gia Huy[1], Tran Quoc Thao[2] ..... 763

EXPLORING EFL LEARNER IDENTITIES IN PROJECT-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN AN GIANG PROVINCE ..... 774

Nguyen Hong Thien[1], Tran Quoc Thao[2] ..... 774

THE VALUES OF SYNTACTIC COMPLEXITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 791

THE ISSUE OF AMBIGUITY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ..... 801

Nguyen Dinh Tuan ..... 801

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EFL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ..... 812

Huynh Thanh Nhon[1], Tran Quoc Thao[2] ..... 812

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF WRITING ANXIETY ON VIETNAMESE ESL UNDERGRADUATES' WRITING PERFORMANCE: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY ..... 821

Nguyen Ngoc Nguyen, Nguyen Hoang Phan ..... 821

THE APPLICATION OF THE "FLIPPED CLASSROOM" MODEL IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE VIETNAMESE UNIVIVERSITY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT ..... 838

THE USE OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN EFLFLIPPED CLASSROOMS ..... 847

Nguyen Quynh Thao Vy[1,*], Duong My Tham[2] ..... 847

INSIGHTS INTO ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' USE OF PHRASAL VERBS IN ACADEMIC WRITING ..... 860

Do Thi Thanh Thuy, Tran Quoc Thao ..... 860

## LAW IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION

LEGALISING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INFRINGEMENTS IN RUSSIA – A WAR TACTIC IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE ..... 869

Bui Thi Hong Ninh* ..... 869

MODEL OF ASSET REGISTRATION WORLDWIDE AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM IN IMPROVING ASSET REGISTRATION LAWS ..... 880

Vu Anh Sao[1,2], Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai[2] ..... 880

LEGAL ISSUES ARISING FROM THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) - INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM ..... 887

Le Hoang Minh Huy*, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, Dao Trong Duc, Ky Dieu Linh, Bui Thi Thuy Linh, Nguyen Nam Trung ..... 887

SOUTH KOREA'S EXPERIENCES ON PROPERTY REGISTRATION LAW - LESSONS FOR VIETNAM ..... 896

Vu Anh Sao, Pham Huynh Bao Oanh ..... 896

THE RISE OF REMOTE WORK: LEGAL CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT LAW IN VIETNAM ..... 903

Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai[1], Nguyen Thi Ngoc Loan[2] ..... 903

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN THE EMERGING AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ..... 910

Nguyen Thi Thu Trang ..... 910

THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) CORPORATIONS IN VIETNAM ..... 921

Trần Ngọc Thanh[1] ..... 921

CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES AND TAX MANAGEMENT ISSUES ..... 933

Le Huynh Phuong Chinh, Ngo Thi Khanh Linh, Pham Ngoc Lan Anh ..... 933

EXPERIENCE IN KOREA AND CHINA ON TAX MANAGEMENT FOR CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES ..... 941

Duong Anh Son[1], Tran Vang Phu[2] ..... 941

LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON REGULATIONS RALATED TO PERSONAL INCOME TAX WHEN EARNING INCOME THROUGH E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS IN VIETNAM, TAKING THE CASE OF INDIVIDUALS DOING BUSINESS THROUGH TIKTOK APPLICATION ..... 946

Nguyen Duc Tri [1], Hoang Minh Châu[2] ..... 946

THE COMPATIBILITY ON THE SCOPE OF MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE (MLA) IN CRIMINAL MATTERS AND THE CONDITIONS OF REFUSAL MLA IN CRIMINAL MATTERS BETWEEN VIETNAMESE LAW AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES WHICH VIETNAM HAS SIGNED. ..... 956

Pham Huynh Bao Oanh ..... 956

TAX POLICY FOR E-COMMERCE OF COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO VIETNAM ..... 967

Nguyen Thanh Minh Chanh, Ha Thi Van Anh, Pham Lam Tam Nhu ..... 967

LEGAL REGULATIONS FOR ENTERPRISE OBLIGATIONS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON E-COMMERCE PLATFORM ..... 974

Truong Kim Phung*, Nguyen Hoang Chuong ..... 974

"ROBOT TAX" – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM ..... 981

Gian Thi Le Na, Pham Phuong Doanh ..... 981

WTO APPELLATE BODY REFORM IN THE CONTEXT OF ESCALATING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS ..... 988

Nguyen Nam Trung ..... 988

IMPACTS OF STATE OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS ON TAX AVOIDANCE: EVIDENCE IN VIETNAM....128
Huyen Ngoc Nguyen, Thanh Dan Bui ....128
RUSSIA'S IMPACTS AND SCENES ON BEING BANNED FROM SWIFT....143
Lam Dang Xuan Hoa [1] , Phan Ngoc Anh [2] ....143
THE ROLE OF ACCESS TO FINANCE AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION OF YOUNGERS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCE, VIETNAM....151
Vu Truc Phuc*, Nguyen Dang Hat, Nguyen An Phu, Dao Le Kieu Oanh ....151

# THE INNOVATION CAPACITY - THE ROLE OF LEADERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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***Abstract***

*The objective of this research investigates the factors affecting the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. The result of research indicated that there are five factors affect the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. They are Leadership, Organizational structures, Exploitation of external knowledge, Organizational Culture and Individual innovation capability. The results also suggest that Leadership competence (B = .317) is the most important variable in explaining innovation capability. This indicates that the managers encourage initiatives, give positive feedback, pass employees' ideas to the upper levels of the organization and participate in ideation and development are most essential in bringing about innovation capability in SMEs.*

***Keywords:*** *Innovation, Innovation capability, SMEs*

**Introduction**

Small and medium scale enterprises constitute essential ingredients in the lubrication and development of any economy. Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) have been recognized as main sustenance of the national development because of their capacity in enhancing the economy output and enhancing human welfare (Akingunola, 2011). Muritala, Awolaja, and Bako (2012), posit that there is the greater probability that SMEs will utilize labor-intensive technologies thereby reducing unemployment particularly in developing countries and thus, have an immediate impact on employment generation. The role of small and medium scale enterprises in the economic and social development of the country is well established. The sector is a nursery of entrepreneurship, often driven by individual creativity and innovation (Ayozie& Latinwo2010). However, unlike large firms, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with limited financial resources and insufficient managerial infrastructure, tend to rely less on costly research and development (R&D) investment for innovation activities (Lim & Klobas, 2000); (Jones & Craven, 2000). Consequently, to be able to improve its position in the global business, SMEs need to the increasing of firm innovation which involves all internal firm components. Because of globalization of markets with a higher rivalry environment, rapid technological changes and shorter product and technology lifecycles, many firms especially the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are focusing on making innovation which is the key driver for sustainable competitive advantage (Dadfar, Dahlgaard, Brege & Alamirhoor 2013).

Innovation is an important tool that provides opportunities to new inventions and building of new markets (Kuhn & Marisck, 2010). Moreover, there is a remarkable increasing interest trade and industry growth based on innovation and creation of competitive advantage (Birkinshaw, Bouquet& Barsoux, 2011).Firm innovation capability can be achieved when there is a total process of participation to sharing knowledge among individuals in the organization to improve their innovation capability (Rahab, Sulistyandari, & Sudjono, 2011).The process of knowledge sharing becomes the media in creating the spirit

to innovate by transferring knowledge among individuals to increase individual's competence in making beneficial innovation in supporting the value creation of the corporation (Marr, 2004). The process of taking and giving, improving, and doing innovation of each individual will finally affect the improvement of the firm innovation capability (Plessis, 2007). Other studies of innovation claim that the firm's absorptive capacity has a significant influence on the ability to innovate (Knudsen & Roman, 2004).

Therefore, the objective of this research investigates the factors affecting the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. And then, makes suggestions to help these small and medium-sized enterprises enhancing their innovation capability.

**Innovation capability**

The organizational capability view of innovation holds that firms do not merely compete with new products or services, but rather with their own unique capabilities underlying their product market activities (Liao, Kickul, & Ma, 2009). Compared to resources, routines and capabilities are embedded in the dynamic interaction of multiple knowledge sources and are more firm specific and less transferable, thus leading to competitiveness (Peng, Schroeder, & Shah, 2008). A capability can be defined as "the proficiency of a bundle of interrelated routines within firms for performing specific tasks" (Ngo & O'Cass, 2013). Capabilities do not reside in individual routines but emerge from the integration of multiple interrelated routines and processes. This implies that capabilities are built through managerial choices in identifying, developing, and integrating routines and processes to undertake specific functionally oriented behaviors (Ngo & O'Cass, 2013).

Lawson & Samson(2001) define innovation capability as "the ability to continuously transform knowledge and ideas into new products, processes and systems for the benefit of the firm and its stakeholders." Hogan, Soutar, McColl-Kennedy, & Sweeney(2011) define innovation capability as "a firm's ability, relative to its competitors, to apply the collective knowledge, skills, and resources to innovation activities related to new products, processes, services, or management, marketing or work organization systems, in order to create added value for the firm or its stakeholders." According to (Bullinger, Bannert, & Brunswicker, 2007), innovation capability is a holistic, corporate-wide potential of a firm to generate new and unique values. Innovation capability relates to a variety of areas and is influenced by different factors inside and outside the organization. Similarly, (Ngo & O'Cass, 2013) conclude that innovation capability is embedded within the application of knowledge and skills embedded within the routines and processes of the firm to perform innovation pertaining to technical innovations (develop new services, service operations, and technology) and non-technical innovations (managerial, market, and marketing).

Also in this present research, a broader conceptualization of innovation capability is adopted. Thus, innovation capability may relate to creating a new product or service, a new production process technology, a new structure or administrative system, or a new plan or program. This study adopts the view of (Ngo & O'Cass, 2013) that suggests that innovation capability is manifested in innovation-related business processes (technical and non-technical), is something beyond resources, and is a valuable input for firms to develop and maintain competitiveness. On the basis of earlier definitions of (Bullinger, Bannert, & Brunswicker, 2007) and (Ngo & O'Cass, 2013), innovation capability is defined in this study as organizational routines and processes affecting an organization's ability to perform innovation. It consists of determinants that influence an organization's ability to perform innovation, and innovation capability is thus a predictor of innovation, both process and outcome.

Based on prior literature of innovation capability in SMEs, it can be stated that there is a wide range of determinants that affect an organization's ability to perform innovation, both with external and internal focus. Innovation capability may not be a homogenous collection of determinants, but different kinds of innovations (Francis & Bessant, 2005) and different kinds of firms (Silva, Simões, Moreira, & Sousa, 2012); (Kallio, Kujansivu, & Parjanen, 2012)may require utilizing and developing different determinants. However, in the context of SMEs, these determinants have not been clearly defined.

**The propose research model**

Skarzynski & Gibson, R., (2008) divide innovation capability into four parts: leadership and organization, people and skills, process and tools, and culture and values. The first part stresses that the leaders and organization share a common vision of innovation. The second part includes a disciplined approach to building innovation capabilities across the organization. The third part includes, for example, supporting tools to enable an idea generation pipeline and portfolio management. Innovation capability also requires a collaborative, open culture and incentives that reward challenging current actions, which forms the fourth part. (Tura, Harmaakorpi, & Pekkola, 2008) define innovative capability through three subcategories: openness/creativity, knowledge/expertise, and operationalization capability. The first subcategory comprises the capabilities needed to exceed the existing solutions and search for new possibilities. The second subcategory covers the capabilities to acquire the knowledge needed to build innovation. The third subcategory describes the capabilities to find and introduce applications, so that the organization exploits the achievable knowledge base. Tidd, Bessant, & Pavitt, (2005) list the following components of an innovative organization: shared vision, leadership and the will to innovate the appropriate structure, key individuals, effective team working, continuing and stretching individual development, extensive communication, high involvement in innovation, external focus, creative climate, and learning organization. These different approaches and findings have been combined to a conceptual framework of dimensions of innovation capability developed by (Paalanen, Kujansivu, & Parjanen, 2009) and further refined by the authors. In this study, innovation capability is divided into five dimensions. The dimensions are presented in Fig. 1 and discussed in detail below.

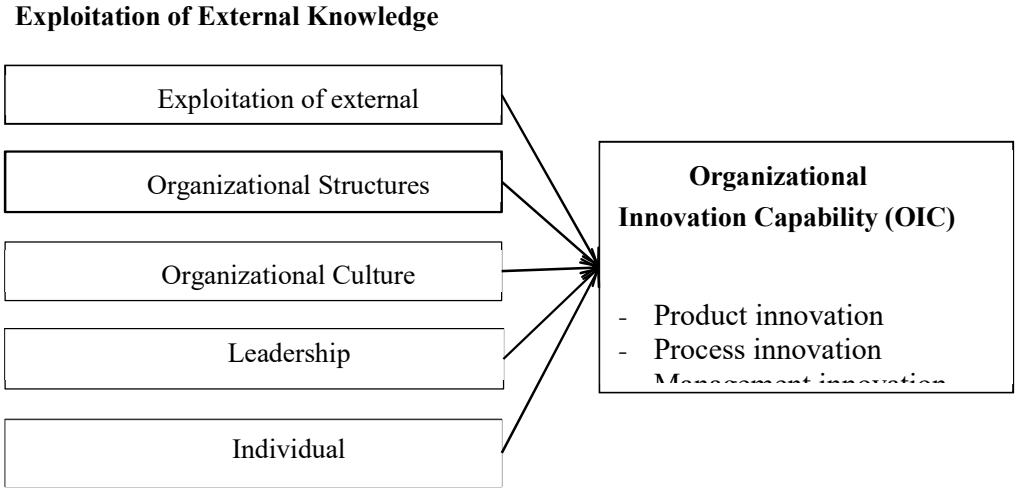


**Figure 1: The propose research model adapted on the basis of (Paalanen, Kujansivu, & Parjanen, 2009)**

According to Granovetter, (2005), innovations are created in networks in social interaction of actors. Interaction with suppliers, customers, public assistance agencies, industry associations, foundations and the like can provide missing inputs into the learning process, which the firm itself cannot provide

(Lawson & Samson, 2001); (Romijn & Albaladejo, 2002). According to Panayides, (2006), an organization oriented towards a client relationship can enhance its innovation capability as it will become more creative in its methods of operation, will seek new ways for doing things and trying out new ideas, and will be the first to market with new products and services. People across organizations have more alternative ways of thinking. These structural holes give them more options to select between new ideas (Burt, 2004).

**Organizational Structures**

There is a common agreement on the necessity of flexible structures for innovation (Dobni, 2008). According to Dobni, (2008), decentralized and informal organizational structures facilitate innovations. They also propose that the flexibility and openness of structures help to encourage new idea generation. In the dynamic environment, the organizational structure will need to be more open than precisely defined, more emotionally-inclusive than rationally-inclusive, more interactive than integrative, more temporal, more flexible, and trust- and informality-based (Wang & Ahmed, 2003). Communication channels facilitate knowledge sharing by exchanging experiences. It requires tight social dealings to transfer tacit knowledge. Reward systems are powerful motivators and foster creative behavior (Lawson & Samson, 2001). Bringing innovation to every workstation requires practical tools, processes, and mechanisms that the employees can use day by day to turn innovation into the organization's capability (Skarzynski & Gibson, R., 2008).

**Organizational Culture**

Every organization has its own culture, also known as style, character, or way of action. For organizations, culture is like personality for individuals. It is hard to change, but it can be developed. Innovative organizations tolerate ambiguity, but they do not take unnecessary risks (Lawson & Samson, 2001). Organizations need to be tolerant of the mistakes that will occur and allow for recovery and learning from failures (Wan, Ong, & Lee, 2005). Innovation is more likely in a situation where people attribute high levels of integrity, competence, reliability, loyalty and openness to others, and view others as equals. Creating this environment requires the employees to understand their roles, and then develop their creative and independent sides further (Dobni, 2008). Knowledge transfer requires tight social dealings. Social capital is situated in relationships between individuals. Organizations with high innovation capability often have a learning-by-doing effect, which makes it hard for competitors to imitate and buy this know-how (Cavusgil, Calantone, & Zhao, 2003). For employees to be motivated to innovate there must be a culture that both supports and rewards innovation (Wan, Ong, & Lee, 2005). Mutual trust and respect create an atmosphere that encourages individuals to try new ideas without fear of failure and its consequences (Wan, Ong, & Lee, 2005).

**Leadership**

Building a successful, independent capability for innovation is basically a leader- ship challenge. Building an innovation infrastructure means breaking the boundaries that usually separate people, ideas and resources, and creating cross- boundary conversation and collaboration (Skarzynski & Gibson, R., 2008). Today, leadership is seen as a skill to direct the employees' energy towards the right direction instead of giving orders and instructions. The management must strike a balance that allows employees to act on good ideas (Dobni, 2008). A participative and consultative management style is crucial for innovation. The responsibility for innovation needs to be widened to the people who need it to complete their tasks and spread throughout the organization's businesses and functions. Decentralization allows quick action and flexibility (Wan, Ong, & Lee, 2005). The managers' active investment in increasing the employees' possibilities to participate in the development of the organization facilitates innovation capability.

Participative leadership boosts the employees' trust, commitment and appreciation of the managers. They are also more motivated to do their tasks(Wan, Ong, & Lee, 2005).

**Individual Innovation Capability**

According to Skarzynski & Gibson, R., (2008), innovation is a skill that can be taught. For example, empowerment affects the execution of innovation, as it drives employees to go above and beyond what is normally expected of them (Dobni, 2008). (Yang & Choi, 2009) present four dimensions of empowerment: autonomy, responsibility, information, and creativity. Empowerment reflects the fact that the individual can affect the outcome of his work. So, as business realities change, the employee's behavior and actions need to be adjusted accordingly. The very essence of innovation is to get the employees to think creatively, become adventurous, and take managed risks (Dobni, 2008). Creative thinking includes the following points: the individual has new perspectives on problems, is willing to take risks, and has tolerance for ambiguity.

**Organizational Innovation Capability (OIC)**

The organizational innovation capability is defined as including product innovation, process innovation, and managerial innovation (Tsai, Huang, & Kao, 2001).

**Product innovation** is that a firm can provide differentiated or new products/services in the market and obtain satisfaction from customers. In this definition, product improvement and new product development which can satisfy customers is the basis of product innovation. This product innovation may include three categories: radical innovation, incremental innovation and system innovation in the new product development process.

**Process innovation** is a process in which a firm can provide a better manufacture or service process than current operation in order to achieve better performance. (Tsai, Huang, & Kao, 2001) describe how a method of generating modification or a new process in a current operational step or procedure can offer a capability for innovative process. By doing so, a new process may reduce operational costs or generate more production for a firm. In the same vein, process innovation belongs to the area of technical innovation.

**Management innovation** is a capability that improves a firm's performance by implementing new managerial regulations, systems, and methods etc. Therefore, knowing how to increase a firm's managerial functions and mechanisms in terms of improving managerial efficiency becomes an innovative capability.

***Research Method***

The purpose of this research is mainly descriptive and explanatory. It is descriptive because descriptive data has been collected through questionnaire survey and it is also explanatory since in this study will explain the factors influencing the innovation capacity in the small and medium enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City and how these dimensions affect innovation capacity. Therefore, a combination of descriptive and explanatory (co relational research) is chosen for this research.

Based on previous studies that were discussed in the literature review, measurement scales used to measure the research concept in this study were generated. All items of the measurement scale are modified to be suitable to objects of the present study. In order to measure the constructs in the study, multi-item scales are employed and existing measures present in the literature are used. All items are measured on a five-point Likert type scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree.

The preliminary study was conducted by qualitative approach with focus group discussion technique. The purpose of the preliminary test was to explore, adjust and supplement model of cleaning innovation capability as well as variables to measure its dimensions, it also was to refine the questionnaire to help respondents to avoid problems in answering questions and to increase the quality of data recorded for the

main survey. After being refined, the measures of constructs were used to finalize the questionnaire in the main survey (Both the Vietnamese version and English of these measures are included in Appendix 1).

The participants of the study were mainly workers, employees, top or middle managers working in small and medium enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The members of the study population were invited to complete a survey by face to face.

Data from completed surveys were imported into SPSS 23 software. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the scales of the questionnaire.

Results and discussions

Firstly, respondents were divided into two groups based on gender and marital demographics. 187 (equal to 46.8%) are male, 213 (53.3%) are female and 127 (31.8%) are married, 273 (68.3%)are single. The following graph depicts the profile of respondents by gender and marital. The age of the respondents were also considered. 16 (4.0%) are under 20 years old, 283 (70.8%) are from 21 – 30 years old, 79 (19.8%) are from 31 – 40 years old, 11 (2.8%) are from 41 – 50 years old and 11 (2.8%) are upper 50 years old. This information indicates that most of the respondents are from 21 - 30 years old; so they are matured in thinking and in answering the questionnaire. This study was conducted education background of respondents. 44 (11.0%) out of 400 respondents have high school diploma, 74 (18.5%) are vocational certificates, 262 (65.5%) are university/college graduates and 20 (5.0%) have master's degree. The figures demonstrate that respondents have high education qualification.

In order to identify the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, this study adapted on the basis of (Paalanen, Kujansivu, & Parjanen, 2009) innovation model. The research question for this objective is *what factors affect the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City?*

In order to make sure the data were consistent and free from error, in this research ascertained the reliability of this instrument by conducting Levene's test for equality of variance. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .70 or greater indicates that the data are reliable, from .60 to under .70 is acceptable (Hair, Babin, Money, & Samuel, 2003).

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics**

| SCALE | Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|---|
| Exploitation of external knowledge | .726 | 3 |
| Organizational structures | .617 | 4 |
| Organizational Culture | .698 | 4 |
| Leadership | .910 | 4 |
| Individual innovation capability | .675 | 3 |
| Product Innovation | .786 | 6 |
| Process Innovation | .770 | 5 |
| Management Innovation | .873 | 7 |

Cronbach's alpha values for each innovation cluster as well as for the whole instrument were all above .60, which indicates a high degree of internal consistency among the data collected. The lowest Cronbach's alpha values in this research are Innovation structures (.617) and the highest Cronbach's alpha values Leadership (.910).

After testing measurement scale by Cronbach's alpha, 36 variables retained of cleaning innovation capability scales were put into the exploratory factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis was applied to assess dimensionality and validity. Statisticians KMO of 0.94 and Bartlett's sphericity test ($p< .01$) support the idea of the validity of the implementation of factorial analysis and allow to check whether there were significant correlations between variables(Hair, Babin, Money, & Samuel, 2003). As a result of the EFA showed that there were 5 factors affect the innovation capability of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. Also, the result indicated that there were some changes in observation variables of cleaning innovation capability scales in theoretical model. In detail, variablesPC4, PD5, PD4, PD6, OC1 had loading factor <0.5. Hence, this variable was eliminated. All retained variables met requirement and can be used for the next analysis.

Thus, after assessment measurement scales of cleaning innovation capability includes 5 dimensions and 31 observation variables. In detail, Exploitation of external knowledge, Organizational Culture, Innovation Structures and Individual Innovation Capability dimensionswere measured with 3 variables; Leadership dimension was measured by 4 variables. The organization innovation capability dimensionwas measured by 14 variables.

The research hypotheses were tested by using multiple regression models. The main statistics (i.e., mean scores and SDs) and the correlation matrix of key variables considered in the study. The correlation among the independent variables are all less than r = .50, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a serious problem in the regression analyses (Hair, Babin, Money, & Samuel, 2003).

**Table 2: Adjusted R Square of Multi-Regression Model Summary**

**Model Summary**

| | Model |
|---|---|
| R | .631[a] |
| R Square | .398 |
| Adjusted R Square | .391 |
| Std. Error of the Estimate | .43314 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), IS Innovation structures, OC Organizational Culture, EK Exploitation of external knowledge, LEA Leadership, IC Individual innovation capability
b. Dependent Variable: OIC Organizational innovation capability

The first multivariate regression results showed that the Adjusted R Square was 0.391, indicating that the model can explain 39.1% of the model's implications (Table 2). In other words, 39.1% of the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City can be explained by the factors (Leaderships; Exploitation of external knowledge; individual innovation capability; Organizational Culture; Innovation structures) of the model.

**Table 3: Result of multiple regression model**

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Co linearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| (Constant) | ,753 | ,172 | | 4,373 | ,000 | | |
| Leadership | ,217 | ,029 | ,317 | 7,486 | ,000 | ,850 | 1,177 |
| Exploitation of external knowledge | ,069 | ,033 | ,084 | 2,090 | ,037 | ,943 | 1,060 |
| Individual innovation capability | ,178 | ,033 | ,231 | 5,392 | ,000 | ,831 | 1,204 |
| Organizational Culture | ,177 | ,036 | ,215 | 4,854 | ,000 | ,775 | 1,290 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Innovation structures | ,150 | ,048 | ,126 | 3,103 | ,002 | ,932 | 1,073 |

a. Dependent Variable: OIC Organizational innovation capability

Multicollinearity phenomenon of forecasting variables are shown on the right side (columns) in Table 3. In the regression model, VIF coefficients of the independent variables were located in the range 1.060 to 1.290 and from 0.775 coefficients Tolerance to 0.943, means the level of independent of these variables is high. All values are much less than 10 VIF. Thus, there is no multicollinearity phenomenon in the model (Hoàng Trọng & Chu Nguyễn Mộng Ngọc, 2008).

**Table 4: ANOVA analysis result**

**ANOVA[s]**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 48,897 | 5 | 9,779 | 52,127 | ,000[b] |
| | Residual | 73,917 | 394 | ,188 | | |
| | Total | 122,814 | 399 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: OIC Organizational innovation capability

b. Predictors: (Constant), IS Innovation structures, OC Organizational Culture, EK Exploitation of external knowledge, LEA Leadership, IC Individual innovation capability

Table 4 shows that, in the test of analysis of variance (ANOVA), F = 52.127 with significance level statistically significant (Sig. p <0.001). Thus, pure theory of non-linear relationship is rejected, suggesting a multiple regression model in the model is suitable for studying the innovation capacity.

As shown in Table 3, results indicate that innovation capability in SMEs in Ho Chi Minh City is significantly influenced by Exploitation of external knowledge, Innovation structures, Organizational Culture, Leadership and Individual innovation capability. Moreover, the results indicate that adjusted R2 shows that 39.1% of the variance in innovation capability can be explained by the 5 dimensions of cleaning independent variables. The coefficients show that all 5 independent variables (Exploitation of external knowledge, Innovation structures, Organizational Culture, Leadership and Individual innovation capability) are positively related to innovation capability (B = .084, .126, .215, .317 and .231 respectively). The results also suggest that Leadership competence (B = .317) is the most important variable in explaining innovation capability. This indicates that the managers encourage initiatives, give positive feedback, pass employees' ideas to the upper levels of the organization and participate in ideation and development are most essential in bringing about innovation capability in SMEs.

The results of multiple regression models are presented in table 2 showed that the regression coefficient R square (adjusted) is .391, F value of 52.127 at sig. = .000. These results allowed rejecting the null hypothesis that there are no other factors affecting the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City Vietnam. However, the adjusted R square value is rather low, indicating that the model's goodness of fit for the population is not so high.

***Conclusion***

Small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the industrialization process of many countries and play a crucial role in increasing a country's economy (Yusuff, Hashmi, & Chek, 2005). However, unlike large firms, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with limited financial resources and insufficient managerial infrastructure, tend to rely less on costly research and development (R&D) investment for innovation activities (Lim & Klobas, 2000); (Jones & Craven, 2000). Consequently, to be able to improve its position in the global business, SMEs need to the increasing of firm innovation which involves all internal firm components.

The research on factors affecting the innovation capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City as follow: Leadership, Innovation structures, Exploitation of external knowledge, Organizational Culture and Individual innovation capability. The results also suggest that Leadership competence (B = .317) is the most important variable in explaining innovation capability.

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