



“Conscientiousness and creativity of accounting employees: The role of intrinsic motivation”

AUTHORS	Nguyen Thi Hang Nga 
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Nguyen Thi Hang Nga, Ph.D., Head
of the Division of Management
Accounting, Faculty of Accounting and
Auditing, Ho Chi Minh University of
Banking, Vietnam.



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Nguyen Thi Hang Nga (Vietnam)

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND CREATIVITY OF ACCOUNTING EMPLOYEES: THE ROLE OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Abstract

Creativity is one of the key activities aimed at enhancing the competitive advantage of organizations. Therefore, the topic of how to foster creativity has recently become of interest to many researchers. Accountants often possess unique characteristics related to motivation and creativity. Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship between conscientiousness, intrinsic motivation, and creativity of accounting employees. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire administered to a sample of 283 accountants of private organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The SPSS and AMOS 20 software were used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses through structural equation modeling. The results show that conscientiousness positively influences intrinsic motivation (standardized $\beta = 0.387$), and intrinsic motivation positively influences creativity (standardized $\beta = 0.474$). Additionally, although conscientiousness does not directly affect creativity, it indirectly influences it through the mediating role of intrinsic motivation (standardized $\beta = 0.183$). In other words, intrinsic motivation fully mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and individual creativity. A highly conscientious individual, although not directly enhancing creativity, can still foster personal creativity if he/she possesses high intrinsic motivation. This result offers significant contributions both theoretically and practically.

Keywords

personality traits, conscientiousness, accounting, creativity, motivation

JEL Classification

M30, M40

INTRODUCTION

Creativity attracts the interest of both organizations and researchers, as it is a crucial factor in promoting organizational development and enhancing competitive capability. Employee creativity within an organization plays a vital role in creating and maintaining a competitive advantage (Anderson et al., 2014). Therefore, how to foster employee creativity is a question that researchers are keen to explore and address.

In accounting, certain qualities are often required of employees, such as carefulness, meticulousness, and honesty, which are essential traits for an accountant. These qualities depend on their personality traits. Meanwhile, researchers have various approaches to fostering employee creativity, with some focusing on how personality traits influence individual creativity. Personality traits are commonly studied using the Five-Factor model (Goldberg, 1990). In this model, the trait of conscientiousness is considered suitable for those in the accounting profession. The relationship between conscientiousness and creativity has been explored in several prior studies. However, the results of this relationship are inconsistent, indicating a need for further research in diverse contexts to generalize the findings (Hirst et al., 2009; Sears et al., 2018).

The componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1996) emphasizes that motivation is a crucial component for fostering individual creativity, particularly highlighting the role of intrinsic motivation. The relationship between personality traits and motivation has also been explored in several prior studies worldwide (Puryear et al., 2017; Yao & Li, 2021). The relationship between personality traits, intrinsic motivation, and creativity among accounting employees in Vietnam has not yet been thoroughly explored. This study suggests the relationship between conscientiousness and employee creativity depends on the field. For instance, in accounting, conscientiousness does not directly foster creativity but can enhance it through the factor of intrinsic motivation.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Studies on personality traits often rely on the Big Five model (Goldberg, 1990). The Big Five model, also known as the Five-Factor model, identifies five major personality traits. Various authors have widely used this model to predict attitudes and behaviors across different cultural contexts (Shahreki et al., 2020). Generally, the model is utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the structural mechanisms of personality. Researchers posit that personality traits significantly reflect an individual's thoughts, behaviors, and characteristic emotions (Goldberg, 1992). The Five-Factor model encompasses five major personality traits: conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, openness to experience, and neuroticism. These traits influence individual motivation and creativity. This finding has been corroborated by numerous previous studies. For example, Sung and Choi (2009) examined the relationship between five personality traits and creativity, revealing that only two traits, extraversion and openness to experience, had statistically significant effects. The remaining three traits – conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism – did not show statistical significance. Similarly, both Stock et al. (2016) and Kaspi-Baruch (2019) found no statistically significant relationship between conscientiousness and creativity. However, Jirásek and Sudzina (2020) reported a significant result regarding the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity.

The componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1996) addresses the elements that drive individual creativity, emphasizing the role of motivation. However, in this model, motivation includes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, all of which influence individual creativity, with intrinsic motivation being more crucial for fostering creativity. Amabile (2012) asserts that intrinsic motivation is central to

the componential theory because people are most creative when they feel motivated. Therefore, the relationship between personality traits, intrinsic motivation, and individual creativity can be explained through the Five-Factor model and the componential theory of creativity. Prabhu et al. (2008) suggested that individuals may possess certain traits and abilities conducive to creativity, but whether these result in creative outcomes depends on their intrinsic motivation. Individual creativity is closely related to the process of motivation. Although Prabhu et al. (2008) examined the relationship between personality traits and creativity through the mediating role of intrinsic motivation, they did not address the trait of conscientiousness.

Zare and Flinchbaugh (2019) state that people with conscientious personalities are characterized by being responsible, organized, persistent, reliable, and focused on achieving their goals. Conscientious individuals often exhibit a strong sense of purpose, self-discipline, responsibility, duty, perseverance, carefulness, meticulousness, and neatness, leading to diligent work habits (Barrick et al., 2002; Kumar & Bakhshi, 2010; Shahreki et al., 2020). Generally, the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity has shown mixed evidence. For instance, a positive relationship between conscientiousness and creativity has been found by Rothmann and Coetzer (2003), Karwowski et al. (2013), Silvia et al. (2014), and Zare and Flinchbaugh (2019). Conversely, some studies have indicated that the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity is not statistically significant (Sung & Choi, 2009). However, a negative relationship has been reported by Batey et al. (2010) and Jirásek and Sudzina (2020).

Jirásek and Sudzina (2020) hypothesized that there is no relationship between conscientiousness and creativity. However, the research findings contradicted this hypothesis, revealing a moderate negative rela-

relationship between conscientiousness and creativity. Jirásek and Sudzina (2020) explained this by suggesting that it may be due to the measurement of the conscientiousness trait; that is, certain specific characteristics within conscientiousness may not be related to creativity. In this study, considering the accounting profession, which requires meticulousness, precision, and diligence, it is less likely for such individuals to generate new and creative ideas. Therefore, this study hypothesizes a negative relationship between conscientiousness and creativity.

Many previous researchers have suggested that different individuals may possess varying traits and conducive conditions for creativity, but these outcomes depend on the nature of motivation (Prabhu et al., 2008). Consequently, Prabhu et al. (2008) recommend further empirical research to elucidate the mechanisms through which personality traits are related to creativity via motivational factors. Barrick (2005) suggested that personality can influence motivation either in terms of behavioral direction or the intensity of behavior. Penney et al. (2011) also assert that motivation is the primary mechanism through which personality influences outcomes. Prabhu et al. (2008) indicate a relationship between certain personality traits and intrinsic motivation. An individual possesses intrinsic motivation when they engage in a task because of its inherent appeal rather than merely its outcomes, and intrinsic motivation is closely related to both personality traits and creativity. A conscientious person is responsible, organized, disciplined, and persistent (Zare & Flinchbaugh, 2019) and, therefore, may be related to intrinsic motivation. With a sense of responsibility and organization, such individuals tend to work out of passion rather than for outcomes. Thus, conscientious individuals may be associated with intrinsic motivation.

Motivation drives employees to exert high levels of effort to accomplish tasks and achieve goals (Amabile et al., 1994). Amabile and Pillemer (2012) distinguish between two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation primarily arises from the work itself, while extrinsic motivation pertains to achieving something through the work process (Shahreki et al., 2020). Motivation can prompt specific actions as it is seen as a force that stimulates eagerness and perseverance (Saleh et al., 2018). Conscientious individuals tend to be persistent and do not easily give up when facing difficult problems

(Prabhu et al., 2008). Hence, intrinsic motivation may serve as a mediator in the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity. The findings of Prabhu et al. (2008) indicate that intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between the personality traits of persistence and creativity.

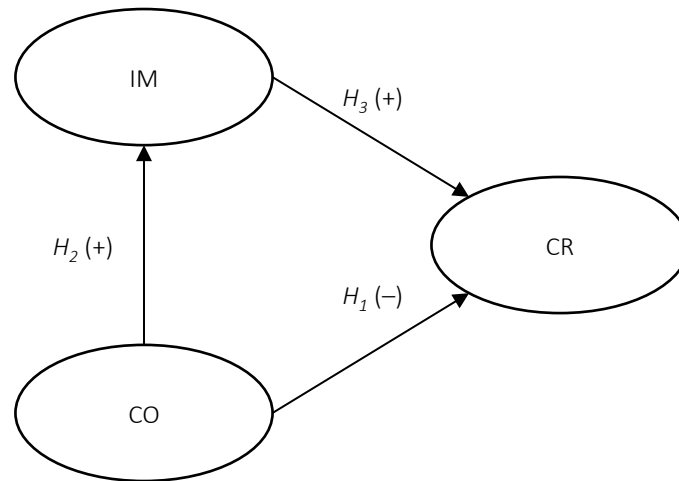
Motivation can foster individual creativity, especially intrinsic motivation, which is driven by internal factors and involves engaging in activities for their own sake or deriving joy and satisfaction from performing the work. Therefore, employees with high intrinsic motivation are more likely to accept tasks they find interesting. Prabhu et al. (2008), de Jesus et al. (2013), Fischer et al. (2019), Hur et al. (2018), Malik et al. (2015), and Zhu et al. (2018) demonstrate that intrinsic motivation positively affects individual creativity. Choi (2004) demonstrated the relationship between both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and creativity. Intrinsic motivation is considered a crucial component for fostering individual creativity (Amabile et al., 1994). Additionally, intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between personality traits and individual creativity (Prabhu et al., 2008).

Thus, the literature review indicates that the relationship between conscientiousness, intrinsic motivation, and individual creativity has not been fully explored, particularly in the context of accounting employees. Additionally, the relationship between conscientiousness and individual creativity remains inconsistent across previous studies. While intrinsic motivation serves as a mediator in the relationship between personality traits and creativity, whether intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity has yet to be examined.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the impact of conscientiousness on intrinsic motivation and creativity, with a focus on the mediating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity among accounting employees. This study proposes the research model shown in Figure 1. Based on the aforementioned reasoning, the paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Conscientiousness negatively affects the creativity of accounting employees.

H2: Conscientiousness positively affects the intrinsic motivation of accounting employees.



Note: CO = Conscientiousness; IM = Intrinsic motivation; CR = Creativity.

Figure 1. Proposed research model

H3: Intrinsic motivation (a) positively affects the creativity of accounting employees and (b) mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and the creativity of accounting employees.

items in the scales are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “Strongly Disagree” to (5) “Strongly Agree.” Specifically, Table 1 shows the description of scales.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Instrument

The study employs items derived from previous research. These items are taken from validated scales used in various contexts. Specifically, the conscientiousness scale consists of four items adapted and refined from Goldberg (1992) and Sung and Choi (2009). The creativity scale is based on the study by Soda et al. (2019) and includes four items. The intrinsic motivation scale comprises four items derived from Shahreki et al. (2020). All

2.2. Sample and data analysis

The data were collected through a convenience sampling method. The survey respondents were accountants working in private organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh City is a dynamic economic region in southern Vietnam, home to numerous enterprises in the private sector. The selected enterprises operate in various sectors, including services, commerce, and manufacturing. The formal sample size used in this analysis was 283 observations. To obtain the desired sample size, the study administered 350 questionnaires and received 312 responses, resulting in a response rate of 89%. After screening out the questionnaires that did not meet

Table 1. Description of scales

Variable	Items
Conscientiousness scale	(CO1) Organized (CO2) Efficient (CO3) Careful (CO4) Conscientious
Creativity scale	(CR1) New ideas to improve performance (CR2) New ways to optimize (CR3) New ways to enhance quality (CR4) Creative solutions
Intrinsic motivation scale	(IM1) Enjoy solving complex problems (IM2) The more difficult the problem, the more I enjoy solving it (IM3) Feel comfortable setting my own goals (IM4) It is important to do things I enjoy

the requirements, the final sample size used for this study was 283. The SPSS and AMOS 20 software were used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses through structural equation modeling. The study employed analytical techniques such as Cronbach's alpha reliability test, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis. Finally, a linear structural equation model was utilized to test the research hypotheses.

Regarding gender distribution, the study sample consisted of 35.7% males and 64.3% females. The age group of 26 to 35 years predominates in the study sample, accounting for 74.2% (see Table 2).

Table 2. Description of the study sample

	Criteria	Percentage
Gender	Male	35.7%
	Female	64.3%
Age	20-25 years	6.4%
	26-30 years	32.2%
	31-35 years	42%
	36-40 years	12%
	Over 40 years	7.4%
Education	Undergraduate	81.7%
	Postgraduate	18.3%

3. RESULTS

3.1. Measurement model testing

To assess the reliability of the scales, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed. The results of the scale reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha in-

dicated that all scales met the reliability criteria as proposed by Hair et al. (2014). Table 3 presents the reliability values of the scales calculated using Cronbach's alpha, factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extract (AVE). The CR indices of all the scales are above 0.8, and the AVE values are all greater than 0.5. Specifically, the conscientiousness scale has a CR of 0.824 and an AVE of 0.541; the intrinsic motivation scale has a CR of 0.876 and an AVE of 0.638; and the creativity scale has a CR of 0.801 and an AVE of 0.501.

All scales achieved reliability. Thus, the study proceeded with exploratory factor analysis. The results of the exploratory factor analysis revealed the extraction of three factors with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.821 and explained variance of 67.43%. The specific factors identified were (1) conscientiousness, (2) intrinsic motivation, and (3) creativity. Factor loadings exceeded 0.5, and the discrepancies between factor loadings were greater than 0.3, meeting the criteria for convergence and discriminant validity as per Hair et al. (2014). Additionally, the examination of common method bias using Harman's single-factor test indicated that the variance explained by the first factor in the EFA was 36.04%, below the 50% threshold suggested by Harman (1976), indicating no significant common method bias issue in this study. The results of the correlation analysis and the mean indicators are detailed in Table 4.

In the first step, the study conducted an assessment of the measurement model through con-

Table 3. Results of the measurement model

Construct	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extract
Conscientiousness (CO)		0.82	0.824	0.541
CO1	0.770			
CO2	0.778			
CO3	0.714			
CO4	0.674			
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)		0.87	0.876	0.638
IM1	0.776			
IM2	0.752			
IM3	0.824			
IM4	0.841			
Creativity (CR)		0.80	0.801	0.501
CR1	0.746			
CR2	0.716			
CR3	0.663			
CR4	0.705			

Table 4. Means, correlations for study variables

Constructs	Mean	1	2	3
Conscientiousness	4.029	1		
Intrinsic Motivation	3.667	0.338**	1	
Creativity	3.758	0.123*	0.400**	1

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

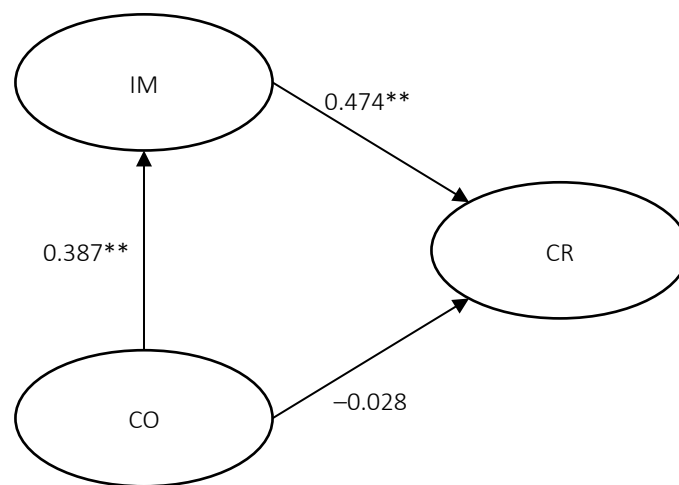
firmatory factor analysis. The confirmatory factor analysis results showed that the measurement model satisfied the criteria outlined by Hair et al. (2014). Specifically, the values CMIN = 139.075; $df = 51$; CFI = 0.939; IFI = 0.939; TLI = 0.921; RMSEA = 0.078; P-value = 0.000 were obtained. Thus, the measurement model fits the data well according to the study's findings.

3.2. Structural model and hypothesis testing

In the next step, the study evaluated the structural model's fit and tested the research hypotheses using structural equation modeling. The analysis results of the structural model revealed the following indices: CMIN = 121.478, $df = 50$; IFI = 0.951, CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.934; RMSEA = 0.071, P-value = 0.000. These indices suggest that the model fits well in accordance with the standards set by Hair et al. (2014). Furthermore, all composite reliability indices exceeded 0.8, and all average variance extracted values were above 0.5. According to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2014), the CR values of the scales should be greater than 0.7, and the AVE should exceed 0.5. As a result, all the findings

are satisfactory and fall within the recommended criteria, confirming the measurement model. Therefore, the research analysis can confidently advance to the structural model. The results of the structural model analysis and hypothesis testing are presented in Figure 2.

The structural model is considered appropriate according to the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2014). The results of hypothesis testing indicate that out of the three hypotheses tested, two hypotheses were supported while one hypothesis was rejected. Specifically, H1, testing the effect of conscientiousness on creativity with a β value of -0.026 and a Sig. value of 0.707, was rejected because the significance level (Sig.) exceeded 5%. H2, testing the effect of conscientiousness on intrinsic motivation with a β value of 0.453 and a Sig. value of 0.000, was supported because the significance level (Sig.) was less than 5%. This result indicates that conscientiousness has a positive direct effect on intrinsic motivation. Moreover, H3a (the influence of intrinsic motivation on creativity with $\beta = 0.380$) (Sig. = 0.000) was accepted, and H3b (the indirect influence of conscientiousness on creativity) (standardized $\beta = 0.183$ and Sig. = 0.000) was also ac-



Note: CO = Conscientiousness; IM = Intrinsic motivation; CR = Creativity. ** $p < 1\%$.

Figure 2. Results of the structural model (Standardized)

cepted. This result shows that intrinsic motivation has a positive direct effect on creativity. Although conscientiousness does not have a direct effect on creativity, it indirectly affects creativity through intrinsic motivation. Thus, intrinsic motivation is considered a full mediator in the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of hypothesis testing

Path	β	p-value	Hypothesis
CO → CR	-0.026	0.707	Rejected
CO → IM	0.453	0.000	Accepted
IM → CR	0.380	0.000	Accepted
CO → IM → CR	0.172	0.000	Accepted

Note: CO = Conscientiousness; IM = Intrinsic motivation; CR = Creativity.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that conscientiousness traits have a statistically insignificant influence on creativity (β coefficient = -0.026 , Sig. = 0.707). Therefore, with the current sample of accounting professionals, there appears to be no significant relationship between conscientiousness and creativity. The results regarding the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity remain contradictory (Chen, 2011; Chang et al., 2011; Bakker et al., 2006; Judge et al., 2002; Matzler et al., 2011; Yesil & Sozbilir, 2013; Nam & Nga, 2024). However, this result aligns with Sung and Choi (2009), Stock et al. (2016), Hirst et al. (2009), Malik et al. (2015), Sears et al. (2018), Karimi et al. (2022), and Kaspi-Baruch (2019). Employees with high conscientiousness tend to be more satisfied and may not feel the need to seek alternative opportunities. They are likely to prefer task completion through established methods rather than exploring new approaches (Zare & Flinchbaugh, 2019). Hence, conscientiousness may not necessarily correlate with creativity. Some research suggests that conscientiousness may hinder creative

ability or the generation of new ideas due to tendencies toward control and adherence to rules (Kaspi-Baruch, 2019). Average statistical findings indicate that accounting professionals rate their conscientiousness traits relatively high, which enhances their adherence to accounting rules and potentially limits innovative idea generation. This result contrasts with the findings of Nam and Nga (2024) on banking sector employees. In the banking field, Nam and Nga (2024) identified a positive relationship between employees' conscientiousness and creativity. This can be explained by the fact that the banking industry requires dynamism to quickly adapt to a highly competitive environment, necessitating employees to be more dynamic and creative.

However, the study results support H2 (β coefficient = 0.453 , Sig. = 0.000), indicating that individuals with high conscientiousness also exhibit high levels of intrinsic motivation. The result is consistent with Shahreki et al. (2020). As discussed earlier, conscientious individuals tend to be satisfied with their work, meticulous, careful, and responsible (Prabhu et al., 2008). Consequently, they are more likely to accept tasks perceived as interesting and derive satisfaction and enjoyment from their work. The results also support a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and creativity (β coefficient = 0.380 , Sig. = 0.000). This relationship is strongly established in componential theory (Amabile, 1996) and has been confirmed in numerous subsequent studies (Kaspi-Baruch, 2019; Karimi et al., 2022). Intrinsic motivation is closely associated with personality traits and creative abilities (Amabile, 1996). The mediation analysis results indicate that intrinsic motivation plays an intermediary role in the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity (standardized β coefficient = 0.183 , Sig. = 0.000). In other words, while conscientiousness does not directly influence creativity, it exerts an indirect influence through intrinsic motivation.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the influence of conscientiousness on intrinsic motivation and creativity and investigate the mediating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity among accounting employees. The analysis results indicate that conscientiousness positively influences intrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation, in turn, positively influences the

creativity of accounting employees. Furthermore, conscientiousness does not directly impact creativity but exerts an indirect influence through the mediating role of intrinsic motivation.

The findings of this study make significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Specifically, from a theoretical standpoint, the paper provides evidence for the positive relationships between conscientiousness and intrinsic motivation, as well as between intrinsic motivation and creativity among employees. Additionally, this study reveals that the relationship between conscientiousness and creativity is quite complex and context-dependent. For accounting employees, who typically exhibit high conscientiousness traits, generating new ideas may pose challenges. However, those with high intrinsic motivation can still foster creativity effectively.

The analysis demonstrates that individuals with conscientious traits can stimulate intrinsic motivation and enhance creative outcomes. Therefore, paying attention to the personality traits of accounting employees to reinforce strong intrinsic motivation is the most effective way to promote their creative activities. Although highly conscientious accounting employees tend to be meticulous and cautious, thus less likely to generate innovative ideas, managers should focus on creating or stimulating intrinsic motivation as a wise strategy to enhance their creative endeavors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Data curation: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Formal analysis: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Investigation: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Methodology: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Resources: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Software: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Supervision: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Visualization: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Writing – original draft: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

Writing – review & editing: Nguyen Thi Hang Nga.

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