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Determinants of Employee Creativity, Leadership, and Employee Capabilities in Driving Frugal Innovation: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the roles of employee creativity, leadership, and employee capabilities in driving frugal innovation, based on a systematic literature review. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach via the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method—covering 30 reputable scholarly articles published between 2021 and 2026—the analysis was conducted through four key stages: identification, selection, extraction, and narrative synthesis. The findings indicate that: 1) Employee creativity plays a role in generating ideas and alternative solutions when organizations face resource constraints; 2) Leadership contributes by establishing a vision, supporting experimentation, granting autonomy, and fostering a conducive work environment; and 3) Employee capabilities provide the foundation of knowledge and technical skills that enable organizations to develop solutions that are simple, affordable, and efficient, while maintaining the product's core functionality. Additionally, innovation capabilities, organizational culture, and entrepreneurial orientation were identified as further driving variables. This research offers a theoretical contribution to the integration of human resource management and strategic management, while providing practical guidance for organizations seeking to optimize internal potential amidst budget constraints.

Keywords: Frugal Innovation, Employee Creativity, Leadership, Employee Capabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of the current global business environment are characterized by economic uncertainty, limited material resources, and increasingly high demands for sustainability. These conditions require companies to look beyond relying solely on costly research and development and instead seek alternative approaches that are more efficient and have a broad impact (Mustika, 2024). In this context, frugal innovation emerges as a strategic paradigm focused on creating high value by minimizing resource usage, reducing production costs, and delivering affordable products or services without compromising core quality (F. Nugroho & Ali, 2022). In developing countries like Indonesia, implementing efficient business innovations represents both a major challenge and an urgent necessity for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises as well as large corporations (A. W. Nugroho & Susilo, 2025).

Based on data regarding business innovation indicators and industrial research activities released by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and the Ministry of Industry, the proportion of domestic businesses engaging in product and business process innovation continues to face cost-efficiency constraints (Aristyanto & Edi, 2025). The following provides an overview of trends in intellectual property rights registration and the adoption of efficient business innovations in Indonesia, based on integrated data from BPS and the Ministry of Research/Ministry of Industry:

Table 1. Adoption Rates and Efficiency of Business Innovation in Indonesia (2021–2025)

Year	Percentage of Business Operators by Orientation	Operational Cost Efficiency
2021	32,4%	14,2%
2022	35,8%	18,5%
2023	41,2%	22,1%
2024	46,5%	27,8%
2025	52,1%	33,4%

Source: Processed data from BPS and the Ministry of Industry (2025)

The supporting data above indicates that the rise in business innovation activity goes hand in hand with an urgent need for operational cost efficiency. This phenomenon underscores the importance of frugal innovation practices within organizations. The key to successfully implementing frugal innovation lies in an organization's internal potential, particularly its human resources (Salsabila et al., 2024). Employee creativity serves as the primary driver for discovering new ways to overcome constraints related to capital or material shortages. However, creativity alone is insufficient without the guidance and support of adaptive and transformative leadership capable of fostering motivation and autonomy, while encouraging the courage to take calculated risks (Sari et al., 2026).

Although attention toward frugal innovation has grown in recent years, the majority of existing literature still focuses on the macro-level perspective of emerging markets, engineering design aspects, or purely technical manufacturing factors (Sari et al., 2026). There remains a lack of studies that comprehensively integrate organizational micro-factors and Human Resource Management specifically by combining employee creativity, leadership style, and employee capabilities within a qualitative synthesis framework (Selvi et al., 2026). Most studies examine these variables in isolation, leaving a research gap regarding how these three individual and organizational constructs simultaneously and continuously shape the key determinants of frugal innovation amidst resource constraints.

Based on the background and research gap outlined above, the research questions are formulated as follows: 1) What is the role and influence of employee creativity in driving frugal innovation within organizations?; 2) What is the role and influence of leadership in guiding and reinforcing frugal innovation?; and 3) What is the role and influence of employee capabilities in shaping and realizing frugal innovation?

The objective of this study is to examine and understand: 1) The role and influence of employee creativity on frugal innovation; 2) The role and influence of leadership on frugal innovation; and 3) The role and influence of employee capabilities on frugal innovation.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. The SLR method is utilized to systematically identify, evaluate, categorize, and synthesize findings from prior research, thereby fostering a more structured understanding of the determinants of frugal innovation. The use of SLR is particularly relevant given the nature of frugal innovation research, which encompasses multidisciplinary literature and draws upon diverse theoretical perspectives. Previous studies have also utilized SLR to

map the sources, theories, drivers, barriers, and outcomes associated with frugal innovation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The data used are secondary data derived from scientific articles relevant to the research constructs. Literature sources were obtained through scientific databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. A total of 30 scientific articles were used as references, with publication dates ranging from 2021 to 2026. (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The analysis was conducted in four main stages: 1) Identification, identifying articles based on key terms such as frugal innovation, employee creativity, leadership, and employee capability; 2) Selection, screening articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, including title, abstract, keywords, journal reputation, and topical relevance; 3) Extraction, recording key information such as author names, publication year, industry context, research variables, supporting theories, analytical methods, and main findings; and 4) Synthesis, narratively grouping findings into themes specifically employee creativity, leadership, employee capability, and other organizational factors to identify patterns of relationships, similarities, differences, and research gaps across publications (Hennink, M. M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the problem formulation and research objectives outlined above, the results of this study are as follows:

Frugal Innovation

Frugal innovation is an innovation approach that focuses on developing products, services, processes, or business models with lower costs and reduced resource consumption, while still delivering the core functions and value required by users or customers. It emphasizes simplicity, resource efficiency, and affordability, as well as an organization's ability to generate valuable solutions under conditions of resource constraints (Escudero-Cipriani et al., 2024).

The dimensions or indicators of the frugal innovation variable include: 1) Cost reduction: An organization's ability to produce products, services, processes, or solutions at a significantly lower cost than existing alternatives, without sacrificing the core functions required by users; 2) Focus on core functions: An organization's ability to concentrate innovation on key customer functions or needs by eliminating features, complexities, or components that do not provide significant value to users; 3) Performance optimization: An organization's ability to produce solutions that are simple and resource-efficient yet still deliver levels of performance, quality, and benefits that meet user needs (De Marchi et al., 2022).

The frugal innovation variable has been investigated and is relevant to research conducted by: (Dabić et al., 2022), (Hindocha et al., 2021), (Levänen et al., 2022).

Employee Creativity

Employee creativity is the ability of individuals within an organization to generate new and useful ideas or solutions for completing tasks and addressing organizational challenges. It serves as a vital source of innovation, enabling organizations to discover alternative ways to improve work processes, conserve resources, and create more effective and efficient products or services (S. M. Khan & Abbas, 2022).

The dimensions or indicators of the frugal innovation variable include: 1) New Ideas: Employees' ability to generate various new ideas, alternatives, or approaches for completing tasks and addressing organizational issues; 2) Creative Problem-Solving: Employees' ability to devise distinct, flexible, and unconventional solutions when facing problems or resource constraints; and 3) Implementation of Ideas: Employees' ability to develop and translate

creative ideas into actions, work methods, products, services, or processes that benefit the organization (F. A. Khan et al., 2022).

The frugal innovation variable has been investigated and is relevant to research conducted by: (Khan, S. M., & Abbas, 2022), (Utama & Sholahuddin, 2025), (Baharsyah & Nugrohoseno, 2021).

Leadership

Leadership is a leader's ability to direct, influence, motivate, and coordinate individuals or groups in achieving organizational goals. In the context of frugal innovation, leadership plays a role in creating an environment that fosters creativity, encourages the courage to generate and implement new ideas, and guides the effective use of resources when the organization faces constraints (Bastari et al., 2020).

The dimensions or indicators of the leadership variable include: 1) Innovation Vision and Direction: A leader's ability to provide clear direction, goals, and a vision for innovation development, while encouraging employees to seek more effective and efficient solutions; 2) Support for Creativity: A leader's ability to create a work environment that gives employees opportunities to share ideas, experiment with new approaches, take initiative, and learn from mistakes; and 3) Employee Empowerment: A leader's ability to provide employees with the trust, authority, resources, and opportunities to make decisions and contribute to the innovation process (Saputra, Ali, et al., 2024).

Leadership variables have been researched and are relevant to research conducted by: (Sudiantini & Saputra, 2022), (Wasserbauer & Saputra, 2024).

Employee Capabilities

Employee capability refers to the attributes possessed by an individual—such as knowledge, skills, experience, competencies, and problem-solving abilities—that enable them to perform tasks and contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. Employee capability is crucial in frugal innovation, as capable employees can optimize limited resources, devise alternative solutions, and develop work methods that are simpler, more efficient, and value-adding (Kasman & Ali, 2022).

The dimensions or indicators of the employee capability variable include: 1) Knowledge and competence: The level of mastery regarding the knowledge, skills, and competencies possessed by employees to perform their work and understand organizational needs and issues; 2) Problem-solving skills: The ability of employees to analyze problems, identify causes, evaluate various alternatives, and determine appropriate solutions using available resources; 3) Adaptability: The ability of employees to adjust to changes in the environment, technology, and customer needs, as well as resource limitations, and to modify work methods when necessary (Hasan et al., 2023).

The employee capability variable has been researched and is relevant to research conducted by: (Solikhin & Parasetya, 2023), (Octavia et al., 2020), (Sholichudin et al., 2025).

Previous Research

Based on the research findings above, the following table presents previous studies relevant to this research:

Table 2. Results of Relevant Previous Studies

No	Author, Year	Research result	Similarities with this study	Differences from this study	Hypothesis
1	(Harahap, 2024)	Employee Creativity and Entrepreneurial	This study shares similarities regarding the independent variable	The difference regarding this study lies in another	H1

		Success Influence Frugal Innovation	Employee Creativity and the dependent variable Frugal Innovation.	independent variable: Entrepreneurial Success.	
2	(Devina & Herachwati, 2024)	Leadership and Competitive Advantage influence Frugal Innovation.	The similarity between this study and the present one lies in the independent variable Leadership and the dependent variable Frugal Innovation.	The difference between this study and the others lies in the independent variable of Competitive Advantage.	H2
3	(Maulana, 2023)	Employee capabilities and employee experience influence frugal innovation behavior and employee performance.	The similarity between this study and the present one lies in the independent variable Employee Capability and the dependent variable Frugal Innovation.	The difference between this study and others lies in the other independent variable Employee Experience and the dependent variable, Employee Performance.	H3

Discussion

Based on the problem formulation, research objectives, and findings, the discussion of this study is as follows:

The influence of employee creativity on frugal innovation

Based on the literature review and prior research, employee creativity is shown to have a positive influence on frugal innovation, driven by an individual's ability to generate original ideas, solve problems creatively, and implement concepts as tangible solutions within resource-constrained environments.

To enhance frugal innovation, management or organizational leaders must focus on three indicators of employee creativity: 1) Novel ideas: The employee's ability to initiate original and efficient thoughts, concepts, or alternative approaches when the organization faces limitations in capital, raw materials, or operational facilities; 2) Creative problem-solving: The employee's analytical proficiency in identifying obstacles, overcoming resource constraints, and discovering new perspectives to resolve issues without compromising quality; 3) Idea implementation: The employee's expertise and commitment to transforming abstract efficiency-oriented ideas into concrete actions, practical solutions, or operational workflow improvements.

If management or company leaders consistently attend to and implement these three indicators of employee creativity, it will positively impact frugal innovation in the following ways: 1) Cost reduction: Achieving significant budgetary efficiency in production and operations by eliminating redundant workflows and utilizing raw materials more economically; 2) Focus on core functions: Producing goods or services that prioritize the utility and primary benefits genuinely required by consumers, avoiding the addition of complex, high-cost features; 3) Performance optimization: Enhancing the productivity, reliability, and overall effectiveness of work systems, thereby generating maximum added value despite resource constraints.

The results of this study are in line with previous research conducted by (Harahap, 2024), which states that there is an influence of employee creativity on frugal innovation.

The Influence of Leadership on Frugal Innovation

Based on a literature review and relevant prior research, it is evident that leadership influences employee frugal innovation.

To enhance frugal innovation, management or organizational leaders must focus on three leadership indicators: 1) Vision and innovation direction: Strategic clarity and leadership encouragement in prioritizing efficiency, ensuring all organizational members deeply understand the importance of innovation amidst resource constraints; 2) Support for creativity: An open attitude, facilitation, and appreciation from leaders regarding cost-effective new ideas, alongside providing space for employees to conduct experiments with calculated risks; 3) Employee empowerment: Granting autonomy, authority, and trust to employees to make operational decisions and independently discover practical solutions in the field.

If management or company leaders consistently attend to and implement these three leadership indicators, it will positively impact employee frugal innovation in the following ways: 1) Cost reduction: A decrease in operational costs and overall efficient capital allocation, resulting from a culture of frugality modeled and encouraged by leadership; 2) Focus on core functions: Directing product and service development toward effectiveness and the primary benefits truly needed by consumers, avoiding wasteful, excessive features; 3) Performance optimization: Enhanced effectiveness, agility, and sustained achievement of organizational targets through the wise utilization of all internal potential and available resources.

The results of this study align with prior research conducted by (Devina & Herachwati, 2024), which states that there is an influence of leadership on frugal innovation.

The Influence of Employee Capabilities on Frugal Innovation

Based on a literature review and relevant prior research, it is evident that employee capabilities influence frugal innovation.

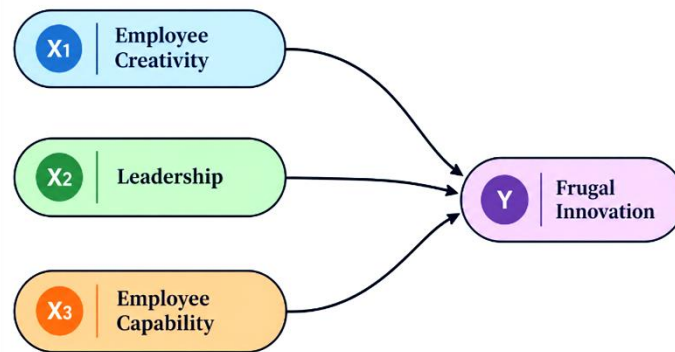
To enhance frugal innovation, management or organizational leaders must focus on three indicators of employee capability: 1) Knowledge and competence: Employees' deep technical understanding, academic expertise, and operational mastery, enabling them to identify workflow segments that can be simplified without compromising quality standards; 2) Problem-solving skills: Employees' analytical proficiency in identifying operational bottlenecks, uncovering the root causes of inefficiencies, and rapidly formulating effective, low-cost tactical solutions; 3) Adaptability: Employees' flexibility and readiness to adjust to technological changes, limited work resources, and dynamic market demands requiring high efficiency.

If management or company leaders consistently attend to and implement these three capability indicators, it will positively impact employee-driven frugal innovation, resulting in: 1) Cost reduction: Significant budgetary efficiency in production and operations achieved by eliminating resource waste and optimizing available raw materials; 2) Focus on core functions: The creation of products or services that retain the essential benefits and primary functionality most valued by consumers, free from the burden of ineffective, superfluous features; 3) Performance optimization: Enhanced productivity, resilience, and reliability of the organization's overall work systems, enabling the generation of maximum value despite resource constraints.

These research findings align with prior studies conducted by (Maulana, 2023), which states that there is an influence of employee capabilities on frugal innovation.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the problem formulation, research objectives, results, and discussion above, the conceptual framework for this study is determined as follows:



Source: Author, 2026

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Based on figure 1 above, employee creativity, leadership, and employee capabilities influence frugal innovation. However, in addition to these variables, there are other factors that influence frugal innovation, including:

1. Innovation Capability: (Wang et al., 2020), (Borah et al., 2023), (Marlina, 2022).
2. Organizational Culture: (Saputra, Putri, et al., 2024), (Ali et al., 2022), (Putri et al., 2023).
3. Entrepreneurial Orientation: (Prasannath et al., 2024), (Kyal et al., 2022), (Sukardi et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion above, the conclusions of this study are as follows: 1) Employee creativity plays a vital role in driving frugal innovation, as it enables employees to generate new ideas, alternatives, and solutions when faced with resource constraints; 2) Leadership plays a role in providing the direction, support, autonomy, and organizational environment that allow creativity and experimentation to flourish; it also fosters a culture that transforms constraints into opportunities for innovation; 3) Employee capabilities serve as a crucial foundation, as frugal innovation requires the knowledge, skills, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities needed to produce solutions that are simple and affordable while retaining core functionality.

Conceptually, these findings indicate that frugal innovation can be understood as the outcome of the interaction between individual capabilities, organizational mechanisms, and strategic capabilities. Therefore, the development of frugal innovation should not merely be the agenda of an innovation department but should instead be integrated into the organization's overall human resource development and strategic planning.

Recommendation

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are offered: 1) Future research could conduct a broader Systematic Literature Review using the PRISMA protocol and databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, thereby ensuring the replicability of the article identification, screening, and selection processes; 2) Future research could test an empirical model integrating employee creativity, leadership, employee capabilities, organizational culture, and innovation capabilities in relation to frugal innovation; 3) Future research could examine innovation capabilities or organizational learning as mediating variables between human resource factors and frugal innovation; and 4) Empirical studies could be conducted on MSMEs, manufacturing firms, technology companies, the health and education sectors, or public organizations facing resource constraints.

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