ISSUES OF LEADERSHIP INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

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Abstract: In the competitive conditions of entrepreneurship, recruitment of employees with creative abilities and their motivation is extremely coming important. Leaders are trying to find ways to develop employee creativity and how to support creative work style among employees. The article presents the authors' interpretations of creativity, simultaneously revealing the features of management of behavioral appearances of creativity of employees.

Keywords: leadership, employee creativity, encouraging employees, definition of creativity

JEL code: M51

Research goal: to explore *"How can leaders foster the creativity of their followers?" by* examining factors that influence employee creativity and by pinpointing practical tips for leaders to foster the creativity of their team members.

Research novelty: the factors, that encourage organizational creativity have been identified and presenting the features of management of creativity.

Introduction

The world's rapid transformation in the social, economic, and technological arenas suggests global competition and business challenges (Florida, 2011) in every field. It forces organizations to transform, offer value to both clients and employees, become attractive, and develop advanced services and products (Amabile, 1996). That is exactly why creativity became key to organizational success (Mumford et al.,1997). Practically all jobs require a creative mindset and solutions as nearly every organization endeavours to maximize the creativity of employees (Zhou & Shalley, 2003) to survive in the innovative business world (Mumford et al., 2002). And it is not surprising that a huge wave of research has focused on examining creativity. And it has been defined in various ways, but the general understanding is that it is the creation of both useful and not before done solutions and ideas (Amabile, 1988; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). There can be various levels of creativity ranging from genius implementation of a minor task to universal discovery and exceptional creation. But most importantly the research needed to answer the question *Who is considered creative?* Some would say, Leonardo da Vinci and the like. Thus, first, the scholars' task

was to explore the human capacity for idea generation (Kaufman, 2016) from the individual perspective to help companies to find creative minds. In general, producing something new, or coming up with new ideas for improvement is a natural characteristic of a human being (Ellsworth, 2002). Human nature would have not been able to develop without creative minds (Zhou, 2003). But it turned out that creativity is a social construct which can potentially be born in a sociocultural context (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). And the research wave shifted from the individual to organizational perspective, to the conditions that can give rise to creative minds. And among many identified determinants, leadership is thought to be the one which can significantly influence employee creativity (Anderson et al., 2014). Leaders are believed to ignite employee creativity and play a critical role in transforming ideas into useful products (Mumford et al., 2002). Hence, this paper is designed to have a close look into creative organizations and examine creativity from the perspective of employees and leaders.

Combining these two disciplines: creativity and leadership can help us in understanding how to enhance organisational creativity and help employees to become more creative (Mumford et al., 2002). Accordingly, this paper attempts to reveal the factors that encourage organisational creativity and hence need to be considered by leaders while managing creativity. The aspiration is to develop practical propositions to support organizations in promoting creativity in their working environments.

Research results and finding

The qualitative research method has been chosen for this research to examine creativity and leadership from multiple perspectives (Bryman, 2004). It is considered one of the best methods to add depth and details to the existing literature (Klenke, 2008). 22 semi-structured interviews with 1 2 employees and 10 leaders of 8 top Armenian companies were implemented to gather rich data about employee creativity in a real-life organizational setting. Interviewees were encouraged to share their lived experiences (Madill & Gough, 2008), beliefs and thoughts with the help of open and personal conversations.

Qualitatively examining the perspectives of both leaders and followers allowed us to collect data both on factors influencing creativity and specific steps/ tactics that leaders practice to enhance employee creativity. The interviews have been transcribed and analyzed with the help of the iterative process of data interpretation. All specific actions, behaviors, conditions, or contexts that interviewees perceived as a trigger, promoters and restrictors of creativity have been identified and developed into themes.

The research findings suggest that creativity can be affected by various personal and organizational factors and in accordance with their characteristics, findings were categorized into three main groups: individual factors, work environmental factors, and leadership factors which present the key determinants of employee creativity. Three main research themes with their appropriate sub-themes are presented below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes of the Research

Individual Factors

The research findings brought forth the idea that individual factors of each employee play role in their ability to think creatively. These factors have been classified in two directions: personality and knowledge of employees *(Figure 2)*. Several **personality** factors are believed to affect creativity such as personality traits, openness to new experiences (George & Zhou, 2002) and willingness to take risks. Additionally, **knowledge** of followers, specifically their cognitive abilities and expertise are considered major preconditions of creative thinking (Zaccaro et al., 2000). Employees who are knowledgeable, open, and ready to take risks are believed to be potentially prone to creativity.
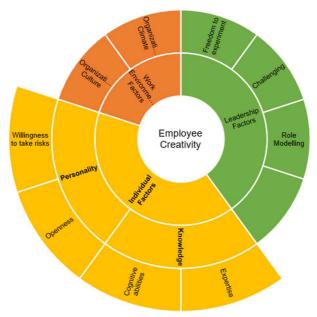
Figure 2. Individual factors

Work Environmental Factors

The research findings suggest that in addition to individual factors various work environmental factors can influence employee creativity. Particularly organizational climate and organizational culture are considered to play a huge role in the creative thinking of employees *(Figure 3)*. The **organizational climate** which is the general mood in the company (Morgan, 1991) can become a determinant of creativity when preconditions of an encouraging attitude to build new ideas, the possibility to freely communicate at all levels of the organization, and an atmosphere for employees to feel secure are provided (Andriopoulos, 2001). The next environmental factor influencing employee creativity according to

this research is **organizational culture**. It represents shared beliefs, assumptions, values, and collective norms in the organization (Locke and Kirkpatrick, 1995). Adoption of supportive and innovative values can inspire employees to be more creative (Brand, 1998). Organizational supporting for new ideas and encouraging innovation can boost creativity.

Figure 3. Work Environmental Factors

Leadership Factors

Leadership is considered another strong determinant of creativity (Amabile et al., 2004). Team leader's actions can possibly foster employee creativity. As a result of this study leadership

factors have been collected into four main sub-themes: giving freedom to experiment, building trust, challenging, and role modelling. These sub-themes are presented with all the characteristics that had been associated with each of them (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Leadership Factors

The study results suggest that employees' **freedom to experiment** can potentially promote their creativity. Supporting experimentation and focusing on the importance of learning from mistakes is believed to foster creativity (Mumford & Helmin, 2017). Participants' creativity was boosted as they were given an opportunity to implement their ideas and try new ways of doing

things. But most importantly they valued their leader's ability to eliminate the fear of failure in the team. When followers felt support for their mistakes and instead of punishment, they experienced open discussion and encouragement to learn and gained knowledge from their failures they tend to shift their mindset to creative thinking (Van Velsor, McCauley, & Moxley, 1998).

The current study argues that mutual **trust** between leaders and team members helps in idea generation. Trust can develop an atmosphere for employees to expose their creative side (Carmeli and Spreitzer, 2009). The team leader's, open communication style, honesty and support are highly associated with trust. Employees felt trust for their leaders when the letters showed support, shared information openly and have been honest with them. And trust in its turn is widely believed to foster creativity (Losada and Heaphy, 2004).

According to the research findings, the leader's ability to **challenge** is another solid determinant of creativity. Employees became eager to open their creative potential when they were engaged in challenging and complex tasks (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). When followers were asked questions and encouraged to ask questions themselves, they felt in a safe environment to discuss their ideas and were more open to receiving feedback from the leader (Mumford & Hemlin, 2017).

And finally, this research showed that those who had a **role model** performed more creatively. Employees that have a role model to show them by their own example can change their way of doing and generate new ideas. When team members see their

leader's knowledge and creative ideas, they become more encouraged to do the same (Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

Practical implications for Leaders

This combined research in creativity and leadership focused on highlighting factors influencing employee creativity from various perspectives including individual factors, work environmental factors and leadership factors. These underlined factors should be of interest to organizations and leaders within the framework of how leaders can foster the creativity of their followers. As leadership plays a central role in crafting a context where employees' creativity will be nourished (Amabile, 2004). The practical implications of this paper for the management of creative employees should be emphasized. Based on the determinants of creativity and experiences reported by employees and leaders, the focus of the study has been on developing tips on what leaders practically can do in their day-to-day work to foster creativity. Below are presented six practical steps for leaders that can potentially help them to foster follower creativity:

✓ *Choose the right people for the right task*

Consider individual factors of employees before assigning them to a particular task. Both personality and knowledge can become preconditions for an employee to succeed in a particular creative task. Creativity is at its best when the right minds are engaged in creative work and the leader works with them to adjust their work in accordance with their personality and cognitive abilities (Amabile and Khaire, 2008).

✓ *Create a safe environment that values and supports creativity*

Consider environmental factors, and create a place for employees to feel safe and to be able to communicate freely on all organizational levels (Feurer et al., 1996). It will help them to share their ideas openly. Adopt supportive culture and cultivate innovative values, it will encourage people to open their full potential and strive for creativity (Brand, 1998).

✓ *Build mutual trust*

Be frank, share information with the team, and promote open communication and let employees feel your support (Lau & Liden, 2008). Trust can be a strong connection in relationships that nurtures emotional safety and can potentially affect creative behaviour (Barczak, Lassk, Mulki, 2010).

✓ *Become a role model*

Creativity requires daily attention and work with the team (Amabile et al., 2004). Show by your example, be the one to encourage, and be a real-life role model for your team. Share your enthusiasm for generating new ideas and become a source for your followers to learn from and get inspired.

✓ *Make the work challenging*

Engage your followers in complex tasks, ask them questions, moreover, encourage asking questions. Create an environment where they will not be afraid to question each other, criticize and challenge ideas. The positive sense of challenge is considered one of the strong predictors of creativity, let them feel it (Amabile, 1997).

✓ *Give freedom to experiment*

Encourage experimentation and let your team members be free in testing new ideas. Give followers the freedom to try new things

without fear of failure. Share your own examples of failing and concentrate on learning from new experiences rather than punishing for mistakes. Communicate the urge of learning from failures (Mumford & Helmin, 2017).

Conclusion

Although there is a great stream of research on both leadership and creativity and the link between these domains is widely recognized, this study offers insights from real-world leaders and employees engaged with creative work on daily bases. Organizations and their leaders can considerably benefit from this paper by closely looking into the creativity of employees. And as leadership is key to nurturing a creative environment there are various preconditions that need to be considered but still, the suggested recommendations can be a starting point for those who regularly seek applicable steps to boost employee creativity.

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ԱՌԱՋՆՈՐԴՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՆԵՐԱԶԴԵՑՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԻՄՆԱԽՆԴԻՐՆԵՐԸ ԱՇԽԱՏԱԿԻՑՆԵՐԻ ՍՏԵՂԾԱՐԱՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՎՐԱ

Սոնա Մատինյան
«CREO Project Solutions»
համահիմնադիր

Հասմիկ Սահակյան
«Հաշվապահության Ուսուցման Միջազգային Կենտրոն»
կրթական հիմնադրամ, գործադիր տնօրեն

Բանալի բառեր - առաջնորդություն, աշխատակիցների ստեղծարարություն, աշխատակիցների խրախուսում, ստեղծարարության սահմանում

Իրականում բոլոր գործատուները պահանջում են ստեղծագործ մտածելակերպ և լուծումներ, քանի որ գրեթե յուրաքանչյուր կազմակերպություն ձգտում է առավելագույնի հասցնել աշխատակիցների ստեղծարար ունակությունները՝ նպատակ ունենալով նորարական մրցակցային դիրքեր ապահովել գործարար աշխարհում: Այդ տեսանկյունից զարմանալի չէ, որ ներկայումս հետազոտությունների հսկայական ալիք է կենտրոնացել է ստեղծարար հմտությունների ուսումնասիրության վրա: Կարող են լինել ստեղծարարության տարբեր մակարդակներ՝ սկսած փոքր առաջադրանքի հանճարեղ իրականացումից՝ մինչև համընդհանուր բացահայտում և բացառիկ գյուտարարություն:

Այստեղ կարևորվում է գտնել այն հարցի պատասխանը, թե ով է ընդհանրապես համարվում ստեղծարար: Ստեղծարարության և առաջնորդության համադրումը կարող է օգնել հասկանալու, թե ինչպես բարձրացնել կազմակերպչական ստեղծարարությունը որպես այդպիսին և միևնույն ժամանակ օգնել աշխատակիցներին դառնալ ավելի ստեղծագործ:

Հոդվածում փորձ է կատարվում բացահայտել այն գործոնները, որոնք խրախուսում են կազմակերպչական ստեղծարարությունը և որ կարևոր է, մեկնաբանել ղեկավարների կողմից ստեղծարար գործունեության կատավարումը: Հոդվածի նպատակն է մշակել գործնական ռաջարկներ՝ աջակցելու կազմակերպությունններին իրենց աշխատանքային միջավայրում ստեղծարարությունը խթանելու համար:

Հեղինակներն իրենց աջն նպատակ են դնում նաև ուսումնասիրել, թե ինչպե՞ս կարող են առաջնորդներն խթանել իրենց հետևորդների / աշխատակիցների ստեղծարարությունը, ուսումնասիրելով աշխատողների ստեղծարար վարքագծի վրա ազդող գործոնները և առաջարկել գործնական խորհուրդներ: