Employee Creativity: A compulsory Factor in Organizations

Malikeh Beheshtifar
Management Department, Rafsanjan Branch, Islamic AZAD University, Iran

Elaheh Zare
Management Department, Rafsanjan Branch, Islamic AZAD University, Iran

Abstract
Creativity research has a long history in psychology, focusing on individual differences in personality, cognitive abilities, and problem-solving styles. Creativity is considered to be a personal characteristic with features that include broad areas of interest and high energy levels. Considerable evidence indicates that employee creativity can fundamentally contribute to organizational innovation, effectiveness, and survival. So, creativity is important to organizations because creative contributions can not only help organizations become more efficient and more responsive to opportunities, but also help organizations adapt to change, grow and compete in the global market. Organizations could develop creativity by selecting individuals that are potentially creative, for instance based on assessment tools like Gough’s Creative Personality Scale, or by training workers in cognitive skills like divergent thinking. We consider employee creativity as an ongoing process, not limited in time and space, and we envision a role for ergonomics to foster the creativity of all workers. For creativity to occur in organizations, managers need to support and promote it.

Keywords: creativity, employee creativity, organization

Introduction
A major challenge confronting managers in the 21st century is how to use the potential capabilities of employees to enhance and accelerate organizational innovation. To achieve this goal, employees can use their intellectual capabilities to activate positive organizational changes by using their knowledge and creativity to empower such changes (Alirezaei & Tavalaei, 2008).

Creativity research has a long history in psychology, focusing on individual differences in personality, cognitive abilities, and problem-solving styles. However, recent theoretical and empirical work has looked at creativity as something the brain does naturally. That is, creativity is an adaptive feature of normal cognitive functioning that evolved to aid problem solving under conditions of uncertainty. Under such circumstances, novel approaches and invention are highly advantageous (Simonton, 2000).

Creativity is derived from an individual’s accumulated creative thinking skills and expertise based on their formal educations and past experiences (Gong et al., 2009). In some studies, creativity is considered to be a personal characteristic with features that include broad areas of interest and high energy levels (King & Gurland, 2007). An understanding of organizational creativity will necessarily involve understanding (a) the creative process, (b) the creative product, (c) the creative person, (d) the creative situation, and (e) the way in which each of these components interacts with the others (Harrington, 1990).

Creativity is important to organizations because creative contributions can not only help organizations become more efficient and more responsive to opportunities, but also help organizations adapt to change, grow and compete in the global market. Researchers have mentioned that some level of creativity is needed in almost any job (Unsworth, 2001).

Given the important role of employee creativity in the organization, researchers have become increasingly interested in identifying the conditions that predict creativity of individual employees, including personal characteristics and contextual factors (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). It is obvious that many organizations do not consider creativity, especially in
developing countries. So, it is needed to study nature of creativity and employees' creativity in organizations.

**Nature of creativity**

Due to its undisputable relevance to individual, groups and organizations, the concept of creativity has been widely discussed over the last decades in a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, and IS (Styhre and Sundgren, 2005). Probably the most often-used structure for creative studies is that suggested by Rhodes (1987).

It is an alliterative scheme that divides creative studies into the following categories: person, process, press, and product. The person category includes research on personal characteristics. These may reflect personality, for example, and there has been copious research on the traits that characterize creative persons (Runco, 2004). Even so, environmental changes have forced organizations to think creatively to help ensure their survival (Sadegi-Mal-Amiri and Raeisi, 2010).

Creativity has been defined as a judgment of the novelty and usefulness (or value) of something (Pirola-Merlo and Mann, 2004). Creativity can be defined as the ability to discern new relationships, examine subjects from new perspectives, and form new concepts from existing information (Forgionne and Newman, 2007). In general, creativity in the workplace is defined as the production of novel and useful ideas or solutions (Zhou & George, 2001).

According to Boden (1998), there are three main types of creativity, involving different ways of generating the novel ideas:

a) The “combinational” creativity that involves new combinations of familiar ideas.
b) The “exploratory” creativity that involves the generation of new ideas by the exploration of structured concepts.
c) The “transformational” creativity that involves the transformation of some dimension of the structure, so that new structures can be generated.

Also, Ekvall (1996) appoints 10 dimensions of climate which are characteristics of climate in a way they reflect the possibility for certain, creative behavior that enables change/innovation:

1. Challenge (How emotionally involved, and committed are employees to the work).
2. Freedom (How free employees are to decide how to do their job).
3. Idea time (The amount of time employees have to elaborate ideas).
4. Trust and openness (Do employees feel safe speaking their minds and offering different points of view).
5. Dynamism (The eventfulness of life in the organization).
6. Playfulness (How relaxed is the workplace).
7. Debates (To what degree do people engage in lively debates about the issues)
8. Conflicts (To what degree do people engage in interpersonal conflicts).

Developing creativity involves the following four elements:

1. Understanding the process of creative thinking
2. Identifying blocks to creative thinking and the skills individuals can use, and managers can foster, to increase creative responses
3. Using methods to get fresher ideas and solutions more often
4. Allowing a personal creative drive and life-long creative vision that will help individu-als, including managers, to achieve their personal and professional goals (Mauzy, 2006).

In an overview of creativity and what it entailed, Rhodes (1961) described four overlapping themes:

- Characteristics for personal creativity (e.g. curiosity, openness),
- Creative process (e.g., properly defining problem or opportunity),
• Outcomes or products (e.g., focus on clients’, donors’, ultimate users’ needs),
• Context or climate (e.g., workplace that encourages individual, group, and organizational creativity) (Barrett, et al. 2005).

Employee creativity

According to conventional wisdom, creativity is something that creative people have or do (Amabile, 1997). Creative individuals have several features that distinguish them from their less creative peers, that is, they have a rich body of domain-relevant knowledge and well-developed skills; they find their work intrinsically motivating; they tend to be independent, unconventional, and greater risk takers; and they have wide interests and a greater openness to new experiences (Simonton, 2000).

Many studies have identified creativity as an outcome that focuses on new and useful ideas (Shalley and Gilson, 2004). Individual creativity consists of:

1) Need for achievement;
2) Locus of control;
3) Encounter to ambiguity conditions; and
4) Creativity-related skills (Shilling, 2008).

According to Amabile (1998), individual creativity is classified by three components: expertise, creative-thinking skills, and motivation. Managers can influence these components—better and worse-through workplace practices and conditions. Expertise and creative-thinking skills are more difficult and time consuming to achieve than motivation. Intrinsic motivation stimulates high level of persistence and creative effort in work contexts where creativity is clearly valued.

Creative individuals have several features that distinguish them from their less creative peers, that is, they have a rich body of domain-relevant knowledge and well-developed skills; they find their work intrinsically motivating; they tend to be independent, unconventional, and greater risk takers; and they have wide interests and a greater openness to new experiences (Simonton, 2000).

Several recent studies of leadership have examined the influence of leaders on employees’ creative behaviors. Followers’ creativity achievement is likely to be mediated primarily by their degrees of psychological involvement in creative processes (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007).

Considerable evidence indicates that employee creativity can fundamentally contribute to organizational innovation, effectiveness, and survival (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). Several studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between support from supervisors and employee creativity. For example, Oldham and Cummings (1996) found that supportive supervision made a significant contribution to the number of patent disclosures employees wrote over a two-year period.

However, creative employees that are placed in traditional productivity driven organizations with formal structures, time constraints, strict regulations, daily similar tasks, standardized workplaces, etc., may not be stimulated to show the desired creative behavior. The extent to which a person generates new and useful ideas depends on the support that is received from the work environment (Woodman et al., 1993).

Piccolo and Colquitt (2006) concluded that there were four dimensions of leader’s influence on employee creativity, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Also, George and Zhou (2007) considered three alternative ways in which supervisors could enhance employee creativity: through providing developmental feedback, through displaying interactional justice, and through being trustworthy. More specifically, developmental feedback instills a learning/improvement orientation that is vital for creativity; interactional
justice ensures that subordinates will have the knowledge and information they need to be creative and will be treated with respect even if their ideas do not pan out; and trust reassures them that their hard work and risk taking are well worth the effort because supervisors have the competence and professionalism to follow through on creative ideas. Therefore, it is important for all organizations to improve their employees’ creativity, so managers must focus on identifying, understanding, and utilizing techniques and approaches that promote the creativity of their people.

Conclusion
Nowadays, understanding the dynamics of creativity in organizations is a high priority in organizational behavior research (Zhou & Shalley, 2008). In modern business, creativity and innovation are important indicators of an organization’s performance, and creative work environment can advance employees’ well-being in terms of job satisfaction and lower intentions to leave (Shalley et al. 2000). Organizations are increasingly seeking to foster creativity, because it is an important source of organizational innovation as well as competitive advantage (Oldham and Cummings, 1996). Many researchers believe that creativity is very important for the long-term survival of organizations because it enables organizations to remain competitive in a rapidly changing environment and to achieve a competitive advantage (Beheshtifar & Kamani-Fard, 2013). Organizations could develop creativity by selecting individuals that are potentially creative, for instance based on assessment tools like Gough’s Creative Personality Scale, or by training workers in cognitive skills like divergent thinking (Scott et al., 2004). So, the organization must understanding the behavior of the employees and creates a culture to drive employee’s creativity in the organization. We consider employee creativity as an ongoing process, not limited in time and space, and we envision a role for ergonomics to foster the creativity of all workers. For creativity to occur in organizations, managers need to support and promote it.
References


