Chapter 4
Towards a Theoretical Framework for Creative Participation:
How Personal Characteristics Influence Employees’ Willingness to Contribute Ideas

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ABSTRACT
To retain competitiveness, succeed and flourish, organizations are forced to continuously innovate. This drive for innovation is not solely limited to product/process innovation but more profoundly relates to a continuous process of improving how organizations work internally, requiring a constant stream of ideas and suggestions from motivated employees. This chapter investigates some recent developments and proposes a conceptual framework for creative participation as a personality driven interface between creativity and innovation. Under the assumption that employees’ intrinsic willingness to contribute novel ideas and solutions requires a set of personal characteristics and necessary skills that might well be unique to each organizational unit, the chapter then explores personal characteristics associated with creativity, innovation and innovative behavior. Various studies on the correlation between creativity and personality types are also reviewed. The chapter provides a discussion of solutions and future development together with recommendations for the future research.

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INTRODUCTION

Changing and continuously evolving conditions force the vast majority of organizations to proactively seek new and improved solutions in order to retain their positions. The proportion of top innovative companies among hundred biggest companies in the world has almost tripled (from 11 to 30) and their part of capitalization in total capitalization has almost doubled (from 20 to 39%) in the period between 2005 and 2009. Whether we are willing to admit this or not, continuous improvement is an indispensable process for any such proactive organization requiring highly motivated and participative employees. Most such advanced organizations are finding it challenging to effectively encourage employees to participate in the ever more innovative continuous improvement process. This demands fundamental structural shifts in organizations that would lead employees to be more willing to accept change, embrace new ideas or problem solutions, and develop necessary skills and capabilities. It is therefore not an issue whether employees are creative or not and even innovation process per se may already be well established. The main problem is that although individual employees may generate plenty of creative ideas they may not be willing to contribute some of these ideas due to not yet well understood circumstances on the interface between idea generation and implementation (defined here as creative participation). These circumstances may well be influenced by individual personalities and/or organizational and social settings. According to our concept, creative participation is influenced by personal characteristics including knowledge, motivation, self-confidence, personality, etc. and organizational factors like rewards, encouragement, organizational culture, etc. Although arising from separate sources organizational factors and personal characteristics are interdependent (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993), human creativity is based on intrinsic personal characteristics and organization can only help to recognize, develop and implement ideas but it is an individual who generates ideas. It is therefore of scientific interest to isolate the influence of personal characteristics from organizational factors before studying their interdependencies and as a result we have focused on personal characteristics in order to investigate their influence on creative participation.

The chapter is structured in several sections. The first section presents a review of past work on creativity examining the influence of personal characteristics including studies on the correlation between creativity and personality types. In the second section we examine the relevant studies on innovation with a particular interest in the influence of personal characteristics on the innovative process. This is then followed by a critical review of studies on the correlation between creativity and innovation identifying additional stages between the two. From this information a new theoretical framework for creative participation as an overlapping interface between creativity and innovation is derived. Some applications of this concept in organizational and management practices are given. This chapter also provides further discussion of possible solutions, recommendations and insights for future research. Finally, all thoughts and discussions are summarized in the conclusion.

BACKGROUND

On its way to the viable innovation, creative idea must be transferred from the concept to the reality (Roffe, 1999). Individuals generate ideas through various different ways and once generated, these ideas could potentially be translated into practical actions, processes or products. The process of innovation can be considered as a two-stage process including ideas generation and their implementation (Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973; West, 2001). Recently, some studies have identified additional stages in this process (Dorenbosch, Van Engen, & Verhagen, 2005; Janssen,
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