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Creativity: The Self-determination Perspective

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Abstract: Creativity is considered as the seed of innovation whereby, innovativeness has been considered as one of the fundamentals for organizational competitiveness. Acknowledging the importance of creative behavior on innovation, this paper aimed to discuss creativity from the self-determination perspective. Self-determination theory (SDT) is a meta-theory introduced to offer an explanation on creativity. From a self-determined perspective, creative related behavior is considered autonomous in nature and is the result of energy and direction that is linked to human motivation. The discussion on the needs fulfilment, that is the main psychological process described by SDT is also included in this paper. Finally, the discussion on the strengths and limitations of the theory in explaining creativity is also presented in this paper.

Keywords: Creativity, Self-determination Theory, Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management

INTRODUCTION

Increasing global competitiveness is exerting extra pressures on organizations to creatively address issues, solve problems and generate new ideas. The increasing global competition has been affected by factors such as rapidly changing technology, shortening of product's life-cycle and the fluctuating business environment. These situation combined are making organizations more vulnerable to competition and increasing their probability of failures (Dehnavieh, Hasanzadeh, Mehralhasani, Pour, Shahheidari & Hekmat, 2010). As most of today's organizations are knowledge-based, their success largely depends on creativity, innovation, discovery and inventiveness. A successful reaction to the pressure imposed upon organizations to remain competitive could be changes in individuals and their behaviors and also innovative changes in organizations to ensure survival and existence (Martins & Terblanche, 2003).

The extent to which an organization is able to innovate and sustain its competitive advantage is determined by multiple factors, and innovation is often rooted in the creative ideas of individual employees

(George & Zhou, 2001; Mumford, 2000). The agenda of creating, sustaining, and improving competitive advantage through people motivates organizations to discover various alternatives to employ the full potential of their employees. One of the alternatives is through enhancing employees' creativity. Enhancing employees' creativity is considered a necessity for any organization to succeed (Amabile, 1988; Kanter, 1983; Kim, Murrmann & Lee, 2009; Shalley, 1995). Employees who are highly creative and innovative are the most invaluable resources that can help organizations generate new ideas and produce useful outcomes as well as implementing them (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Kim 2000; Buch & Kuvaas, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Creativity?

Scholars and researchers at most times are at the disagreement of what creativity is. As a result, creativity yields various meanings and the definition of creativity varies from one author to another. Researchers too, have defined creativity differently based on how they contemplate the subject of creativity in their studies. Some researchers believe that creativity is to come up with something 'totally novel' while there are scholars who think that creativity is something that has to do with incremental introduction of new ways of doing things. Some scholars would look at creativity as something that is unpredictable. Yet for others, creativity lies behind longevity and endurance or results only from lengthy and painstaking work (Amabile, 1996). Basadur (1995) described creativity as an inborn faculty in human being, thus considered as inherent ability that discriminates creative geniuses from the general population. On the other hand, social scientists propose that creativity although an element of human factor, still could be nourished, cultivated and raised to extraordinary heights in virtually any attempt taking by human (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner, 1994).

Levitt (2002) and Sajid (2011) both agreed that creativity is thinking up new things. Sternberg and Lubart (1996) focused on the process of producing something that is both original and worthwhile, while Shalley (1991) described creativity as developing novel and appropriate alternatives to address job-related issues in a given situation. Over the course of the last decade, creativity seems to have reached a general agreement that leads to the definition of creativity as the production of novel and useful products Mumford (2003). Mumford's definition is consistent with the conceptualization of creativity as proposed by Bilton (2006). Using the psychological perspective, Bilton (2006) offered a two components conceptualization of creativity that are: 1) novelty- the thinking component, that is making or thinking of something new, or a new combination of existing elements; and 2) usefulness of the idea (Bilton, 2006).

Researchers such as Kapur, Subramanyam and Shah (1997) and Sik (2016) claimed that novelty in itself however, is not enough to be labeled as creativity. Human mind is marvelously complex. At a time, there are several ideas and there will be mental processes to link these ideas into association. These processes may be termed as generative rules. Creativity occurs when there is a fundamental newness in the generative rules (Boden, 1992). Furthermore, Koestler (1989) argued that as human grow up, they become creatures of habit. Their thinking, perception, emotions and actions in response to any given stimuli follow some predictable and repetitive patterns known as matrices. When two previously unrelated matrices are connected, a tension builds up. This is the process known as bisociation. The resolution of tension and the emergence of new meaning that follows the bisociation is referred to as creativity (Koestler, 1989; Paletz & Peng, 2008; Zwick, Frosch, Hoisl, & Harhoff, 2017).

From the above discussions it can be seen that some definitions of creativity focus on the nature of thought processes and intellectual activity used to generate new insights to problems. Other definitions focus on the personal characteristics and intellectual abilities of individuals and still others focus on the product with regard to the different qualities and outcomes of creative attempts (Dehnavieh *et al.,* 2010). In fact, the term creativity used in a workplace context has many definitions and interpretations. Researchers, instructors and consultants often explain it by referring to one or more of a variety of factors including attributes, conceptual skills, behaviors, abilities, technologies, empowerment, and the process of experience or external influences. This lack of consensus is really not surprising; perhaps, attempts to reach consensus are at odds with the very notion of creativity. However if organizations want to encourage creativity and find out what transforms the creative harnessing into abundant energetic efforts at action and implementation, organizations must explore the range of identifying factors that is different in a creative person.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a meta-theory first introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985) to offer explanation on energy and direction of certain type of behavior that is autonomous in nature. This perspective supports the "organismic view" of a person whereby the person is seen as playing an active role in their own development and behavior. Accoding to SDT, autonomous behavior such as creative behavior or prosocial behavior is the result of high level of motivation experienced by an individual after the needs have been fulfilled.The three innate needs refer to competence, autonomy and relatedness are "essential for on-going psychological growth, integrity and well-being" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229). The need for competence is concerned about a person's need to be effective in one's interaction with the environment. The need for autonomy refers to the need an individual has to experience choice and be in control of his or her action. The need for relatedness, on the other hand, accounts for an individual's need to feel accepted and respected by others. It is posited that once these psychological needs are fulfilled, work motivation is enhanced and consequently, individual positive outcome such as creative behavior, prosocial behavior or organizational citizenship behavior is manifested (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagne & Deci, 2005).

SDT sets a framework that emphasizes on the importance of stimulants in the environment that are important to trigger motivation and in this study work motivation within a person. The active-organism perspective views both psychological needs and external environmental stimuli as affordances or opportunities the person can utilize in meeting the person's basic needs. Work motivation is triggered when these stimulants act as feeder to fulfill the specific psychological needs of a person. An accepted paradigm

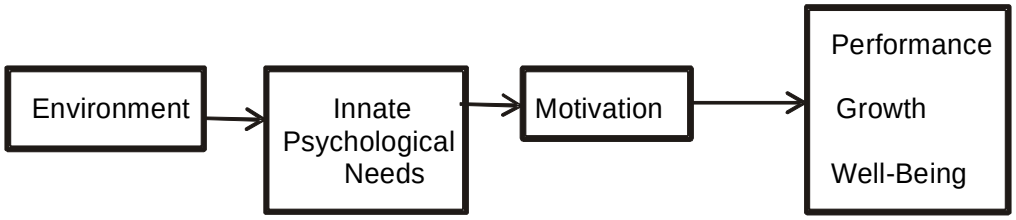

Figure 1: Self-Determination Theory

of motivation throughout the fields of Psychology and Social Psychology is that motivation can be conceptualized as comprised of two conflicting elements, intrinsic vs. extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation deals with the excitement in engaging in any activity e.g. a job for the sake of enjoyment and satisfaction derived from performing the job itself. Contradictory, extrinsic motivation refers to performing certain tasks not because of the inherent interest gained by performing that tasks rather due to the expectation to gain an external reward for performing the task. Another important aspect of this conventional paradigm is the aspect of reward contigencies. This notion is well supported by early research on motivation. The reward contigencies perspective proposes that extrinsic motivation has detrimental effect on intrinsic motivation. In the introduction of reward, individual who initially perform the tasks purely for the inherent interest, enjoyment and satisfaction in performing the taks will cease to do so because he or she now will perform the task in expectation of obtaining the reward (Amabile, 1996; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan, Mims & Koestner, 1983).

The undermining effect of extrinsic contingent reward on intrinsic inherent interest could be explained using the locus of causality reasoning. Deci and Ryan (1985) and Ryan, Mims and Koestner (1983) suggested that there is a change in the locus of causality from internal to external when the decrement effect occurs to intrinsic motivation after the introduction of rewards for interesting tasks and activities. The internal locus of causality will lead to autonomous behavior that is self determined whereas the external locus of causality will lead to controlled non-autonomous behavior. This is the most important aspect of SDT.

Creativity: The Self-Determination Perspective

The consideration of innate psychological needs and the degree to which people are able to satisfy these basic needs as they pursue and attain their valued goals is the core of SDT. Being an organismic-dialectical meta-theory, SDT is detailed, comprehensive and applicable to a wide variety of issues and phenomena. SDT with its emphasis on needs, drives and orientations, provides a welcome shift of focus away from cognitively based explanations and a reliance on the concept of goals. By focusing on the innate psychological needs as the dominant motivational force and later influence positive work and personal outcomes, it is much easier to understand how the motivation of an individual would be affected by environmental or contextual factors. These environmental factors could either facilitate or undermine motivation and later affect creativity.

There are many factors in the environment that could potentially affect motivation and creativity. SDT explains creativity by providing a framework for integrating the effects of various environmental factors on motivation that later facilitate or undermine creativity. Environmental factors such as the introduction of reward, evaluation, feedback, competition and autonomy are among the factors that have been studied in creativity research and postulated to influence motivation and later, creativity. As explained by Amabile's (1983, 1996) Intrinsic Motivation Principle of Creativity: Intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity, and extrinsic motivation is almost always detrimental. Reward presented to an individual would increase extrinsic motivation and hence undermine intrinsic motivation and creativity. However, reward does not always have the undermining effect. In a study that crossed the expectation of reward with choice about task engagement, participants who perceived their receipt of a reward as a kind of "bonus" were the most creative and most intrinsically motivated of any of the design groups, including a no-reward "control" condition (Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986). In the case of evaluation, Cheek and Stahl (1986)

offered data that suggests that the effects of evaluation may be driven by certain personality characteristics such as shyness. Conti, Collins, and Picariello (1995) found that the detrimental effects of competitive evaluation held for girls but not for boys. Other research carried out over the past several years has also uncovered some evidence that expected reward or evaluation could have positive influence on motivation and creativity. In a study of commissioned and noncommissioned works done by professional artists, some artists viewed the extrinsic incentive of a commission as a highly controlling constraint and thus, their creativity plummeted. However, for those who viewed at the commission as an opportunity to achieve recognition or a confirmation of their competence by respected others, creativity of their work was enhanced (Amabile, Phillips, & Collins, 1994). In other study, the prospect of impending, critical evaluation often influences low levels of intrinsic motivation and creativity (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987). However, when employees in the same study were asked to describe the circumstances surrounding high-creativity events, it was found that informative evaluation that conveyed positive recognition of creative work often contributed to highly creative performance.

The important element highlighted above seems to be the preservation of a sense of self-determination. SDT explains that intrinsic factors in the environment are necessary to trigger and fulfill the innate psychological needs that could positively influence intrinsic motivation and enhance creativity while extrinsic factors could have the undermining influence on intrinsic motivation and creativity. Some factors, although extrinsic in nature, support a sense of competence without undermining self-determination and hence positively contribute to intrinsic motivation and the demonstration of creative performance. Within SDT, extrinsic motivation is not viewed as the simple absence of intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985;2000) differentiate among a variety of types of extrinsic motivation and contend that extrinsically motivated behaviors can vary in the degree to which they are self-determined. SDT's portrayal of the internalization of extrinsic motivation as a central part of the socialization process helps explain how the highly competent and passionate R & D scientist might experience heightened levels of intrinsic interest and creativity in a competitive situation or how a well-known artist might thrive when asked to work for a substantial commission.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

SDT is a theory of human motivation that integrates elements from a variety of existing motivational models and extends beyond the usual motivational frameworks. SDT sets the framework to understanding creative behavior. It proposes that environmental factors are important in determining creative behavior. This theory emphasizes the importance of stimulants in the environment or the context in triggering motivation and, hence, enhancing individual positive outcome such as creative behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory offers an important and insightful explanation on how the innate psychological needs particularly competence and autonomy fit with creative pursuits. Furthermore, the further refinement of motivation not to be viewed as dichotomy or intrinsic versus extrinsic has been discussed effectively. Rather, motivation is a complex and multilayered continuum. In addition, this theory also has the practical value and has been applied in many several domains such health and medical, business context and education.

As a meta-theory, SDT only provides the general framework to help explain the role of motivation on creativity. SDT however, does not explicitly specify what the factors in the environment that should be

considered when observing the relationship between environmental factors and motivation. Therefore, effort such as combining SDT with other theories such as organizational support theory (OST) should be invoked in order to help identify the relevant environmental factors. The identification of relevant factors is viewed as critical since this could contribute in developing an integrated framework that could help explain creativity comprehensively.

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