Creativity, Innovation and Innovative Behaviour at Work: Clearing the Conceptual Confusion

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Abstract
Creativity and innovation is crucial for organizations, especially for business organizations, to survive in a dynamic, changing environment. For established as well entrepreneurial organizations, long term sustainability and success demands continuous innovation in order to provide a distinct competitive advantage in a rapidly changing market characterized by uncertainty and complexity. However, there is still a lack of conceptual clarity about the differences between creativity and innovation. Going beyond creativity, the process of innovation is complex and involves various stages proceeding from a search for novel ideas to the final implementation of ideas. Besides, firms that innovate constantly look for ways to tap the employee potential in driving firm innovation - both as a source of new ideas as well as for their successful implementation. Thus, the study of what motivates an individual to engage in innovative work behaviour becomes vital for any organization. Yet, innovative behaviour may be mixed up with innovation. In this paper, we clarify the confusion between creativity, innovation and innovative behaviour at work.

Introduction
Creativity and innovation have become increasingly important for sustained organizational success. Firms must innovate continuously in order to stay competitive in a dynamic, changing environment and to survive in the long run. Organizations that innovate tap the latent creative potential of employees and provide them the necessary support and infrastructure to introduce new products and services in the market or to improve the quality of existing products and services (Van der Panne et al, 2003). The process of idea generation and implementation can thus become a source of distinct competitive advantage.

An interesting example of innovation is Pitney Bowes Credit Corporation wanting to increase the idea generation among the employees by improving communication. The company redesigned interior office space in order to resemble it with a peaceful village. This resulted in a relaxed workplace and the company successfully launched new products because of better communication among the workers. 3M’s Post-it notes is a prominent example of innovative work behavior where a researcher came out with a brilliant idea of unusual adhesive that was not very sticky. Amazon got the idea of free shipping from one of the software engineer at Amazon though internal website. It was a turning point for Amazon.

Yet, creativity and innovation and innovative work behavior are complex phenomena and the terms are often mixed with each other when describing a phenomena. Research has often used these terms, especially creativity and innovation, interchangeably. It also happens that oftentimes, innovative work behavior, which involves employees engaging in behaviours that lead to innovation, is confused with innovation. This paper seeks to clarify the conceptual confusion surrounding, creativity, innovation and innovative work behavior.

Creativity vs Innovation
Creativity is regarded as the ability to conceive something original and unique. A person looks for new ideas which may emerge from intuition or exercises such as brainstorming. Innovation, on the other hand, is
considered to be an act of application of new ideas and can create value for the organization or society. Thus innovation can include the introduction of new techniques or better ways of doing things. However, there is no clear agreement between researchers on the exact boundary between creativity and innovation. The difference may be more of emphasis than of substance (West & Farr, 1990).

Creativity is often framed as "doing something for the first time anywhere or creating new knowledge" (Woodman et al, 1993: 293), yet innovation also involves the adaptation of products or processes from outside an organization. Again, while creativity has been conceived of as generation of novel and useful ideas, innovation has been generally regarded as both production and implementation of creative ideas (Amabile, 1996). Baer (2012) contends that innovation is a process that includes both the generation of new ideas and also the proper implementation of those ideas. Some scholars (e.g. Rank et al, 2004) advocate a strong conceptual differentiation between creativity and innovation, others (e.g., Paulus, 2002) suggest that idea generation and implementation is a cyclical, recursive process and, hence, creativity cannot be said to occur only in the early stages of innovation process. Innovation process often involves taking a few steps forward and then backward again plus several side steps (King, 1992). Others argue that innovation can include totally radical and new ideas as also ideas that are incremental in nature and newness (Zaltman et al, 1973).

In general, there is some agreement that creativity deals with the creation of novel and useful ideas (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988), and innovation involves the production or adoption of useful ideas and their implementation (Kanter, 1988; Van de Ven, 1986). Innovation researchers accept that idea generation is only one stage in a process having multiple stages that is affected by various social factors (Kanter, 1988).

In order to understand what is innovation, it is important to examine the various definitions of innovation. Van de Ven (1986) gave a very popular definition of individual innovation as the "development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage with others within an institutional context" (p. 591). According to De Massis et al (2013), innovation can be understood as a process, which can be disintegrated into innovation input (e.g. R&D expenditures), and output (e.g. new products, services or the process). The important aspects that need to be present for individual innovation to occur and include (i) the ability to identify, interpret and explore the opportunity (ii) skills and abilities to evaluate the opportunity (iii) willingness and ability to develop that specific opportunity (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

The above discussions suggest that the process of innovation is complex and involves various stages proceeding from the exploration of novel ideas till the final implementation in the organization and that people are central towards the process of innovation as they are the ones who come up with an idea and also who "develop, carry, react to, and modify ideas" (Van de Ven, 1986: 592). An employee is said to engage in innovation as long as he or she intentionally introduces and applies a new idea, method, or practice (Anderson et al, 2004). At the individual level of analysis, terms such as role innovation (West & Farr, 1990) and innovative behavior (Yuan & Woodman, 2010) have also been used when examining innovation or the implementation of ideas. Thus the study of what motivates or makes an individual to engage innovative behavior at the workplace becomes critical.

**Concept of Innovative Work Behaviour**

Individual innovation begins when a problem is recognized and ideas or solutions, either novel or adapted, are generated. The individual then attempts to seek support or sponsorship for his idea and tries to build a coalition of supporters. Finally, the individual produces a prototype or model for use. West and Farr (1989) note that "there has been scant attention paid to innovation at the individual and group levels" (1989: 17). At the individual and group levels, the major problem in the management of innovation is attention in an employee, which becomes very challenging with the time as the employees get more and more involved in their daily routine (Van de Ven,1986). Innovative work behavior represents the voluntary introduction of new ways of doing things within a role, a group or an organization (West and Farr 1990; Basu and Green 1997).
encompasses a broad set of behaviors related to the generation of ideas, creating support for them, and helping
their implementation (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Jansen, 2000).

Innovative work behavior is very closely related to employee creativity, yet some very important differences
exist between the two. Creativity is defined as the production of novel and useful ideas related to products,
services, processes and procedures (e.g. Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Amabile, 1988). However, Innovative
work behavior has a clearer applied component and becomes crucial for the innovative output. According to
West (2002), creativity can be seen as a crucial component of innovative work behaviour, which is very
evident at the beginning of the innovation process, when opportunity is explored and the gaps are identified
and ideas are generated in response to an apparent need for innovation (West, 2002). Even though there is a
difference between innovative work and creativity, the overlap is clear.

Some other terms and concepts that can be subsumed under the notion of innovative work behavior are on-
the-job innovation, innovative job performance, innovative behaviour(s) in the workplace and employee
innovativeness and innovation-related behaviours.

Innovative work behavior can span an entire range of behaviours, extending from incremental improvements
to developing radically novel ideas that can impact the processes and systems throughout organization and
also lead to new product development (Axtell et al. 2000). While radically novel ideas are rare and generally
limited to employees working in the research and development domain, incremental improvements and
smaller-scale suggestions are much more common and emerge from the employees from all areas. Such
incremental improvements can include a wide range of behaviours such as improving appraisal systems for
easier implementation, a search for improving the production processes, reorganization of the shop floor,
lateral thinking for new ways to accomplish tasks, adapting new technologies, resourcefulness to implement
creative ideas, etc.

West and Farr’s (1990) defined Innovative work behavior as “the intentional introduction and application,
within a role, group or organization of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of
adoption, designed to significantly benefit the individual, the group, organization or wider society” has three
important elements: This definition of innovation has three important elements. First, West & Farr (1990)
explicitly refer to the relative newness of innovations. Innovations should be new to the relevant unit of
adoption and don’t need to be absolutely new inventions or discoveries. Second, they focus the attention not
only on the introduction of an innovation, but also on the actual application. Third, innovations are only
innovations when they are successful in significantly benefitting the relevant unit of adoption. This makes the
definition of innovation rather result-dependent. Depending on its effect, something new is labeled as an
innovation or is not. Copying this definition of innovation and using it for the IWB concept has the advantage
that it clearly distinguishes IWB from workplace creativity, which refers to ‘absolutely new’ ideas and
practices. Yet, it also faces some problems. A first problem is the result-dependent character of the West
& Farr’s (1990) definition which is difficult to apply when focusing on employee behavior. The moment an
employee is developing and proposing an innovation in the workplace, it is generally unclear whether the idea
will be successful and actually benefit the relevant unit of the adoption. The behavior leading to a successful
or an unsuccessful novelty in the workplace cannot be distinguished and should both be considered as IWB.
Second, the reference to the ‘introduction and application’ is troublesome as regularly employees don’t have
the capacities of taking charge of all these different phases of the innovation process. Employees proposing
ideas or developing workable innovations are mostly not the employees that take the decision on the actual
implementation and application of the innovation. Yet, if the West & Farr (1990) definition is strictly applied,
all these employees would not engage in IWB as they do not implement and apply the innovation. These
employees should anyway be considered as participating in innovation. Several studies have found that
employees are not equally engaged in the different stages of the innovation process (de Jong and Den Hartog
2010; Krause 2004; Tuominen and Toivonen 2011).
Dimensions of Innovative Work Behaviour

Research on innovative work behaviour (Kanter 1988; Scott and Bruce 1994; West and Farr 1990) recognizes that there are four stages in the process of innovation development: opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea promotion and idea implementation:

(a) Opportunity exploration refers to the identification of problems and needs in one’s work context that generates an opportunity for improvement.

(b) Idea generation contains the stimulation of innovation development by suggesting ideas for products or processes that are new and actually useful in order to approach the opportunity that has been identified.

(c) Idea championing is about championing the ideas by convincing other employees and building a partnership of associates who can take over responsibility and provide necessary support.

(d) Idea implementation involves experimenting with one’s ideas, creating a physical or intellectual prototype of the innovation and planning its strategic incorporation into organization.

Some researchers (Messmann and Mulder, 2011) have added one more stage in the process of innovative work behaviour and have termed this as reflection. The process of innovation development can be improved by reflecting on ideas, strategies, activities and outcomes. Moreover, by reflecting on work activities and outcomes, employees can help in improving the future activities. In the similar manner past experiences can be used by reflecting on past activities (Van Woerkom 2004).

Drivers of Creativity and Innovation

In this section we give some theoretical models driving creativity and innovation in the workplace as identified by Anderson et al (2004):

(a) Model of Individual Creative Action: This proposes that employees choose between two different possibilities – one taking care of routine actions, and the other being creative and innovative (Ford 1996).

(b) Componential Theory: This emphasizes that work environment affects the components that drive creativity and innovation. Expertise, creative-thinking skill and intrinsic motivation of employees are the three major components at the individual level. Providing resources and support is the main component in the wider work environment (Amabile & Conti, 1999).

(c) Interactional Perspective: Creativity and innovation is a consequence of a complex interaction between the individual (e.g. personality, self-esteem) and the contextual variables (e.g. physical environment, group characteristics, culture).

(d) Theoretical Cultural Differences and Creativity: At the individual level, theorizing has focused that the cultural values (e.g. power distance, uncertainty avoidance) and creativity of an individual are moderated by the task and social contexts (Erez & Nouri, 2010).

(e) Four-Factor Theory of Team Climate for Innovation: Four team climate factors enhance the process of individual innovation: task orientation, vision, participative safety and support for innovation (West, 1990).

(f) Ambidexterity Theory: The term ambidexterity refers to “the ability of a complex and adaptive system to manage and meet conflicting demands by engaging in fundamentally different activities” (Bledow et al., 2009a: 320). In organization design literature, ambidexterity implies structures and processes that are designed to manage both the exploration (e.g., invention of new products) and exploitation (e.g., manufacturing of new products on a large scale). Organizations having ambidextrous structures can focus on both the innovation as well as routine production.

Concluding Remarks
In a dynamic, ever changing and complex environment, organizations need to innovate in order to survive and grow. The roots of success in organizational innovation lie in the hearts and minds of employees, and only when employees come out with novel ideas and are provided the support and resources to implement those ideas will the efforts at innovation bear fruit. Although innovativeness is a complex issue, creativity and innovation are not random concepts. This paper has highlighted the discussions and arguments to resolve the confusion in the appreciation of creativity, of innovation, and of innovative work behaviour.

References


