

BAM 2023 CONFERENCE



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How Organizational Design Affects Employee Creativity: The Pivotal Role of Work Curiosity

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ABSTRACT

Employee creativity has been an integral part of firm innovation, which relies heavily on the journey of creative ideas within organizational processes. Specifically, organizational contingencies and task design are the essential extrinsic factors that affect employee's motivation to engage in creative processes. Individuals' intrinsic attributes also determine their cognitive ability to creative thinking. Every company is characterized by unique intra-organizational institutions that not only affect how employees perform the tasks but also their willingness to learn and embrace uncertainty. From a micro point of view, the heart of organizational learning is rooted in employees work curiosity, which embodies the motivational drive for handling uncertainty and exploring the unknown. We use self-determination theory (SDT) and cognitive evaluation theory (CET) to explore the cognitive processes through which personnel identify task-related problems, seek new information, test novel ideas, and implement them to improve routine operations and introduce innovative solutions. With a systematic literature review, this study integrates the existing research on cognitive psychology and organizational behavior, proposing a research framework that elaborates how organization environments affect employees' creative process engagement through stimulating or curbing their work engagement and work curiosity. Moreover, we adopt the interactionist view of organizational creativity to investigate the moderating role of individual differences. Over the three decades, organizational creativity has emerged as a part of mainstream areas in applied psychology and human resource management, and yet little attention was given to understand the role of work curiosity and how it interacts with organizational context and other individual attributes to determine the personnel's willingness to engage in creative activities. This study, therefore, develops theoretical propositions that point to the avenue for future research that attempts to disentangle the dynamics between organization-motivation-ideation in the work settings.

1. Introduction

The creative process is a crucial aspect of generating novel, unique, and useful ideas through non-linear thinking and diversifying cognitive latitude (Amabile et al., 2005). Prior research (Martin & Wilson, 2017; McKerracher, 2016) on creativity has focused on the personality traits of employees, which play a significant role in their cognitive ability to absorb new information, combine different ideas, and converge on a useful new idea to solve problems in their professional areas (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). However, this approach overlooks the impact of the organizational context on an individual's capacity to work creatively. Engaging employees in creative processes, which involves identifying problems, finding and encoding new knowledge and ideas, is a critical foundation for fostering creativity in the workplace (Anderson et al., 2014; Gilson and Shalley 2004).

Despite the development and adoption of new technologies, the adoption of these technologies presents challenges for businesses, and making decisions under risk and uncertainty is becoming increasingly difficult (Durney & Donnelly, 2015). This raises the question of whether the knowledge economy still exists. Although modern technologies have made information more accessible, research shows that knowledge economy activities are still concentrated in conventional financial centers, driving employees to seek better solutions that improve efficiency and reduce risk. To foster a competitive environment, companies need to push their employees' emotional and physical power towards a curious environment, making work more innovative and creative (Bacevice & Spreitzer, 2020). This requires continuous learning and strenuous exploration. Hence this article not only aims to provide guidelines for organizational managers to use their workers' curiosity to build a creative workforce but also to serve as a foundation for the creation of future theories on creativity and the link between creativity and curiosity.

1.1 Curiosity in the workplace

Curiosity is an essential psychological strength that can greatly benefit individuals in the modern workplace, where rapid learning is crucial to keeping up with trends. However, despite its importance, there has been limited research on the role of curiosity in the workplace. Previous studies on working adults have indicated that curiosity is positively associated with idea generation (Hardy, Ness, & Mecca, 2017), job performance (Reio & Callahn, 2004) and commitment to organizations (Mussel & Spengler, 2015). Curious workers tend to proactively seek feedback, ask open-ended questions, and effectively cope with ambivalent feedback from coworkers and supervisors, which ultimately leads to improved work performance (Harrison & Dossinger, 2017). While there is a lack of empirical research on the link between curiosity and creativity, theories suggest that curiosity could act as a precursor and facilitate the ability to handle the uncertainty that comes with encountering original ideas, products, and processes in the workplace (Spencer, 2016).

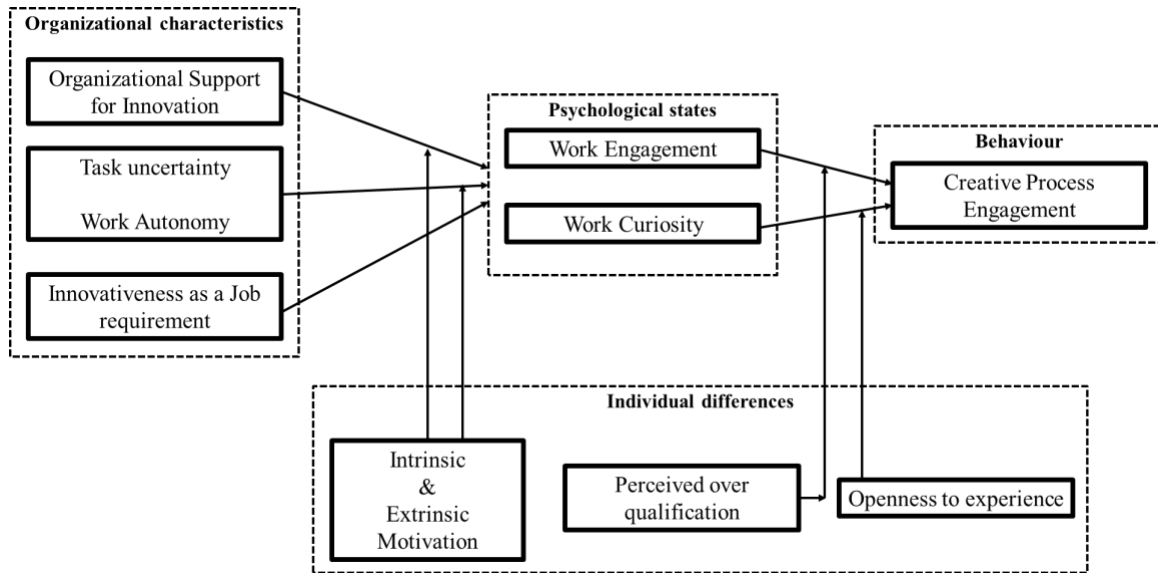


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2. Theoretical Background

Curiosity has been defined as a cognitive need resulting from a lack of knowledge or understanding, and is associated with a desire to explore and learn about new, complex, and uncertain situations (Loewenstein, 1994). This concept has been studied in various fields such as education, healthcare, and social psychology, and has been linked to positive outcomes in the workplace such as employee engagement, creativity, and adaptability Berlyne (1966). The impact of psychological states on organizational characteristics and attitudes towards work in order to create a more conducive environment for creativity is discussed in this section (Müceldili et al., 2020; Hagtvedt et al., 2019; Mussel, 2013; Litman 2005).

2.1 Theories on Motivation and Work curiosity

Motivation is a key factor in the success of employees within an organization. The self-determination theory (SDT) by Deci et al. (1989) provides a useful framework for understanding controlled and autonomous motivation in the workplace (Olafsen et al., 2017), as well as for studying personality traits and psychology. SDT explains the principles of proper motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic causes, and the role of socioeconomic and emotional factors, as well as personality traits, in motivating individuals. However, SDT also considers the impact of social and cultural factors on an individual's sense of initiative and performance.

In the workplace, curiosity plays a crucial role in motivating employees and enhancing cognitive orientation. Chang and Shih (2019) argue that both autonomous and controlled motivation can affect work curiosity. According to Deci et al. (1989), distinctions in personality traits arise from varying degrees of satisfaction or frustration with different demands. To understand the motivating factors of interest, it is essential to analyze the cognitive evaluation theory (CET), which emphasizes the importance of workplace culture (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the resolution of cognitive problems in promoting positive changes in comprehending internal and external settings. CET also posits that an underlying desire for individuals to feel skilled and self-

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determined in interacting with their circumstances drives intrinsically motivated behavior. Another study with a meta-analysis by Liu et al. (2020) with 17,692 samples suggests a negative relationship between growth and psychological stress, as predicted by CET, which explains the impact of external consequences on intrinsic motivation.

In response, working conditions that meet the fundamental psychological requirements of employees were shown to lead to more interest in the work (Deci et al., 2017), which determines the curiosity of an employee. This will influence the feeling of autonomy, competence and relatedness through job curiosity that affects the organizational culture. In the part below we examine the research which deals with the important dimensions of organizational characteristics, including organization support for innovation, task uncertainty, work autonomy and innovativeness as a job requirement.

2.2 Organizational characteristics

2.2.1 Organization support for innovation (OSI)

Organizations can promote the acceptance of new programs by changing the behavior of their participants and understanding their comprehension maps. Moreover, new approaches can empower individuals to think and search for novel solutions and enhance their creative thinking abilities (Strom & Storm, 2002). Organizational socialization information (OSI) is a significant contextual factor that shapes cognitive and behavioral assumptions and potential outcomes (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). OSI provides comprehensive principles and standards that influence the possible benefits and concerns associated with employees' creative behavior. For example, encouraging innovation through employees may not necessarily lead to performance gains but can positively shape their behavior towards innovation. Hansen et al. (2017) suggest that promoting innovation requires appropriate management practices that enhance employee performance and understand why some organizations have more innovative capacity than others. Therefore, engaging management can increase employees' perceived skills and autonomy, resulting in high levels of enthusiasm and job interest.

Previous research (Mitchell et al., 2012) has shown that organizational socialization information (OSI) improves employee intrinsic motivation. The impact of OSI on employee motivation is influenced by various factors, including organizational engagement, compensation, promotions, and influence, which are all used by organizations to communicate the value of their employees (Duan et al., 2020; Richer & Vallerand, 1995). However, no studies have explicitly examined the relationship between OSI and work motivation. Our perspective is that OSI promotes psychological needs fulfillment, which positively affects employee engagement and fosters their confidence in seeking emotional or resource support when needed. We suggest that mutual understanding can enhance employee engagement if they feel that their organization can provide them with valuable assistance and support. Based on our theories and current research, we propose that OSI plays a crucial role in moderating intrinsic motivation and promoting employee engagement and curiosity.

Proposition 1a. Organizational support for innovation is positively related to employees' work engagement.

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Proposition 1b. Intrinsic motivation moderates the relationship between organizational support for innovation and work curiosity, such that the positive relationship between organizational support for innovation and work curiosity is stronger when intrinsic motivation is at high levels.

2.2.2 Task uncertainty and work autonomy

Task uncertainty (Wall et al., 1995) and work autonomy (Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000) are important factors in employee job curiosity. Job curiosity (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) refers to the desire to learn new things and explore different aspects of one's job. Employees who are curious about their work are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and productive. Research (Pearce and Ravlin, 1987) has shown that the link between task uncertainty and work autonomy is related to employees' job curiosity, which is moderated positively by intrinsic motivation (Deng, 2020; Harris & Kirkman, 2016). Intrinsic motivation (Cordery et al., 2010) refers to the internal drive to perform a task for the inherent satisfaction of doing it. When employees are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to see the value in exploring new and uncertain tasks and taking on greater levels of work autonomy. The relationship between work autonomy and task uncertainty (Fang & Gerhart, 2012; Pearce & Ravlin, 1987) is most congruent when employees are highly intrinsically motivated. The more motivated employees are, the greater their interest in exploring new and uncertain tasks, and the greater their desire for autonomy in their work. This congruence can lead to increased job curiosity, which can lead to higher levels of engagement and productivity in the workplace. Organizations can promote job curiosity by providing opportunities for employees to engage in uncertain and autonomous tasks, and by fostering a culture of intrinsic motivation. This can lead to a more engaged and motivated workforce, which can ultimately lead to higher levels of productivity and success for the organization.

Proposition 2. The link between task uncertainty and work autonomy is related to employees' job curiosity, which is moderated positively by intrinsic motivation, the more the motivation, the greater the congruence of the relationship between work autonomy and task uncertainty.

2.2.3 Innovativeness as a job requirement

Innovation and creativity (Yuan and Woodman, 2010) are crucial components of organizational success in the modern business environment. This has led many organizations to make innovativeness a job requirement for employees. However, simply being innovative is not enough to guarantee success in the creative process. Recent research suggests that work curiosity plays an important role in mediating the relationship between innovativeness and creative process engagement. Work curiosity (Hagtvedt et al., 2019) is defined as a desire to learn, explore, and understand new things in the workplace. When combined with high levels of innovativeness, work curiosity can lead to increased engagement in the creative process. This is because curious employees are more likely to actively seek out new ideas and approaches, which can help to stimulate innovation and creativity. Studies (Zhou & Su, 2010) have found that employees who score high in both innovativeness and work curiosity are more likely to engage in creative activities such as brainstorming, experimentation, and idea generation. They are also more likely to contribute to the development of new products and services, and to identify opportunities for innovation within their organizations. Overall, the research (Hunter et al., 2007) suggests that

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organizations should consider both innovativeness and work curiosity when hiring and developing employees. By fostering a culture of curiosity and providing opportunities for employees to engage in the creative process, organizations can increase their chances of achieving innovation and competitive success in the workplace.

Proposition 3. Innovativeness as a job requirement when mediated by work curiosity is positively significant to creative process engagement, as higher levels of employee innovativeness show how curious an employee will be who will engage in a successful creative process.

2.3 Psychological states and work Attitude

2.3.1 Work engagement and employee creativity (Perceived overqualification moderating)

Employees who work more persistently are also cognitively flexible, which makes work engagement relate to creativity. Research (Koch et al., 2018; Eldor & Harpaz, 2016) has suggested that an employee's perception of being overqualified for their job may have a positive impact on their creative process engagement, especially when it comes to their work engagement. Work engagement (Shalley et al., 2004) refers to an employee's level of dedication, energy, and enthusiasm for their work, while creative process engagement relates to their ability to engage in novel and creative thinking. Several studies (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Oldham & Cummings, 1996) have found that employees who perceive themselves as overqualified for their job are more likely to experience boredom, which can lead to disengagement from work. However, research (Harari et al., 2017; Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009) also suggests that this sense of overqualification can increase an employee's motivation to engage in more creative and challenging tasks. Furthermore, higher levels of work engagement have been linked to increased creativity, and when an employee perceives themselves as overqualified, they may be more likely to experience higher levels of work engagement. Therefore, the perceived overqualification of an employee may positively moderate the relationship between work engagement and creative process engagement. Overall, this research suggests that organizations should consider the benefits of hiring overqualified employees and providing them with opportunities to engage in challenging and creative tasks. By doing so, they may be able to foster a more engaged and creative workforce, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance (Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016; Shalley et al., 2004).

Proposition 4. Perceived over qualification of an employee will positively moderate the relationship between work engagement and creative process engagement, so higher an employee is qualified (positive) higher is the relationship between engagement and creativity.

3. The bridge between work curiosity and creativity

3.1 Creative process engagement:

Individual creativity is accomplished from creative process engagement, which is not just restricted to the area of knowledge and ideas, but it is an activity that produces output, which is believed to be innovative and beneficial (Liu et al., 2020). Since creativity contains ideas or concepts, it allows people to employ these conceptions to tackle issues or situations (Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000).

3.2 How curiosity is explained in psychology and linked to employee creativity

Curiosity is analytical and about ambitious thinking that can be observed in the involvement of people in creative behavior and certain psychological conditions (Hagtvedt et al., 2019). Existing research (Gao et al., 2021; Chang and Chen, 2020; De Stobbeleir et al., 2011) reveals that creativity depends on four distinct features - originality, utility, adaptability, and fluency. One explanation is that curiosity motivates individuals to engage in exploratory behaviors, which allow them to gather information and generate new ideas. Whereas curious employees (Murayama et al., 2019) are more likely to take risks, experiment with new approaches, and challenge existing assumptions, all of which can lead to creative problem-solving and innovation. Moreover, curiosity can help individuals overcome obstacles and persist in the face of challenges, leading to a greater ability to adapt and adjust to changing circumstances. This flexibility and openness to new experiences can enable employees to generate creative solutions to complex problems and seize new opportunities. Overall, cultivating curiosity in employees can be a powerful tool for enhancing creativity and innovation in the workplace. Organizations can promote curiosity by fostering a culture of learning, encouraging exploration and experimentation, and providing opportunities for employees to engage in diverse experiences and perspectives.

3.2.1 Openness to experience and curiosity

Openness to experience is based on the Big Five model of personality (Barrick et al. 2001), which symbolizes the imagination, curiosity, and comprehensive thinking of an employee, since McCrae's (1987) study openness to experience has been an essential individual characteristic in creative processes. In addition, researchers propose that personal and contextual variables affect the creative process proactively (Shanker et al., 2017; Zhou & Hoever, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995;). However, there is no strong consensus on the influence of openness in the creative process (Coelho et al., 2011; Shalley et al., 2004). Some researchers have shown that open knowledge can be associated with the creative process (Caniëls et al. 2014; Joo et al., 2013). Others (Zhang et al., 2020; Simmons, 2011; George & Zhou, 2001) have suggested that workers with openness can only express their creative skills under certain working conditions, such as the opportunity to receive positive feedback.

Employees with high degrees of openness to experiences might quickly get bored (Cummings et al., 2016) in their work with repetitive processes, who become excited intrinsically to take new tasks or to adapt present procedures to improve their performance. In particular, they tend to find difficult tasks to fulfill their inherent curiosity. These personnel, therefore, have significant potential for bringing major improvements via creativity to present work practices. Furthermore, modest adjustments might also be appealing to workers who are open to curious work, furthermore modest adjustments might be appealing to employees who are open to do curious work, provided this modification doesn't affect their creative process. Hence with the above rationale, we propose the following.

Proposition 5. Openness to experience in an employee positively moderates the relationship between work curiosity and employees' perception of their creative process in the workplace.

Conclusion

In recent decades, psychological and educational research has increasingly focused on curiosity; many studies have found that curiosity is a critical motivator of inquisitive engagement and cognitive orientation. In today's highly competitive global marketplace, organizations (high potential and turbulent industries) that are facing multiple challenges and opportunities rely on the psychological qualities of employees associated with knowledge in the workplace, including acquisition, generation, and interpretation, to continue their growth. Finally, knowledge-based and high-tech businesses tend to suffer from uncertainties, which drives them to rely more on the connection between curiosity and creative thinking.

This review work highlights the importance of employee curiosity in the workplace and the benefits it can have to organizational innovation performance and industrial competitiveness. When it comes to identifying problems and gathering information, curiosity can be a powerful motivator for action based on contextual and individual factors of the employee to enhance the creative process. Creativity makes an employee think in an ingenious way to tackle complex problems, makes him intrinsically motivated, and opens his imagination for better insights. Even though the link between curiosity and creativity has been the subject of numerous theoretical discussions, there is very little empirical evidence to support it. Even though research on each concept reveals causal links, further study is needed to establish how the individual parts of these two constructs are connected.

This article motivates readers to know more about work curiosity as it extends its scope with the literature review which is discussed in multiple directions. The current lack of experimental and quantitative studies leaves many additional viable avenues for linking curiosity to creativity and leaves many possibilities, which also leads this article to discuss not only curiosity, but also the links with organizational characteristics, psychological states, and work attitudes, which leads to there being a viable link to engagement in the creative process. The proposed research model and detailed explanation of the literature lead to a future study that should attempt to discover the overlap between the mechanisms underlying the various features of these two immensely broad and multidimensional entities, based on the proposed research model and literature review.

To date, we have limited understanding of the relationship between curiosity and creativity within an organization, but there are a number of intriguing ways in which a methodological limitation in certain studies can be utilized to its fullest form. On the other hand, addressing in those research shortages and studying when distinct relationship patterns occur, our evaluation suggests another potential research option. It's important to pay attention to the sociocultural setting in which innovation occurs. In the future, experimentally investigating how or if it is even possible to increase creativity through curiosity will undoubtedly open up many more interesting avenues for study and help us to better understand how to realize its full potential.

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