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Organizational Support and Creativity: The Role of Developmental Experiences as a Moderator

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Abstract

The study focuses on employees' creativity as a source for organizational competitiveness in a highly globalized business environment. The study also proposes that creativity can only be achieved with support from the organization. Support comes in the form of developmental experiences provided by the organization for the employees. Perceived organizational support for creativity is the independent variable to creativity's dependent variable with developmental experiences as the moderator. Respondents for the study are 100 employees from the electrical/electronic manufacturing sector in Penang, Malaysia. The study found that the IV predicts the DV and developmental experiences' role as a moderator is significant. The result indicates that support provided by the organization is a significant factor in generating creativity among their employees.

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1. Introduction

In a dynamic business environment, employees' creativity is perceived to be a possible source of competitive advantage to their organizations. Creativity enables employees to enhance their organization's performance, where, creativity is utilized to seek out new technologies, processes, techniques or product ideas. Furthermore, creativity is

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considered as a good source of creative ideas and often has a fresh approach to problems. When organizations are bogged down by issues regarding technological changes or management structure, employees' views are sought in order for the organizations to arrive at the correct solutions. However, employees are hesitant in contributing their ideas, when they worry that their ideas may not be considered seriously or that an ill-conceived idea could be a hindrance for their career progress. Obviously in most organizations, a suitable system is required to allow employees to express their creativity. Thus, organizational support plays a major role in enhancing the creativity of employees where they will be motivated to upgrade the organization's performance and productivity. In reality, there are organizations that give insufficient support to their employees in terms of empowering employees and knowledge sharing.

Apart from organizational support for creativity, developmental experience is another important element in developing employees' capability and skills. Developmental experience consists of an organization's planned efforts to help employees acquire job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours with the goal of applying the knowledge and experience gained for their job performance. The rapid changes taking place in the modern business environment makes training more important today than it ever has been. Developmental experience can benefit the organization when it is linked to organizational needs and to provide motivation for employees. The problem arises when the employee is not ready from the aspect of physically and mentally and thus, it creates an assumption whether the developmental experience will lead to the increment of the level of creativity amongst employee. Employees may learn more from training programs when they are highly motivated to learn which means if only they are deeply interested in the training content. Employees tend to feel this way if they believe they are able to learn, see potential benefits from the training program, are aware of their need to learn, see a fit between the training and their career goals and have the basic skills needed for participating in the program. In fact, there is little acceptance by learners of the need to take responsibility for their own development. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of perceived organizational support on employees' creativity and whether development experiences may moderate this relationship.

Based on the norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005) argued that organizational treatment creates a sense of felt obligation which motivates employees to put effort toward helping the organization achieve its goal. Pertaining to this, perceived organizational support (POS) is considered as construction of motivation (Liao et al., 2009). Employees who are motivated become physically involved in tasks, and emphatically connect to people as required by their job in ways that display what they feel (Kahn, 1990). According to social exchange theory, employees tend to respond back to the treatment which is beneficial that they receive with positive work-related behaviours. For example, research findings suggest that positive, beneficial actions directed at employees by the organization contribute to the establishment of high-quality exchange relationships (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994), which create obligations for employees to reciprocate in a positive and beneficial way to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Researchers have argued that when employees perceive a high level of organizational support, they may use behaviours valued by the organizations to reciprocate the benevolent treatment from the organization (Lambert, 2000). In customer facing occupations, prone to high levels of emotional labour, these organizationally valued behaviours may be manifested through the internalization of expected emotions as employees have a good faith intention to help the organization.

According to Majdar, Oldham and Pratt (2002) and Shalley et al. (2004) creativity is the prerequisite for an organization's innovation, effectiveness, and long-term survival and facilitates an organization's adjustment to shifting environmental conditions and to take advantage of emerging opportunities. Moreover, Warr (1994) identifies creativity as a form of active mental health which encompasses five types of active mental health: positive self-regard (e.g. high self-esteem), competence (e.g. effective coping), aspiration (e.g. goal directedness), autonomy/independence (e.g. proactivity), and integrated functioning (i.e. states involving balance and harmony). Since creativity and proactivity are closely related behaviours (Unsworth & Parker, 2003) and because individuals can gain positive self-regard, a feeling of competence, and a sense of independence by solving work problems in a creative way, creativity can be regarded as one form of active mental health (Warr, 1994).

Creativity at the individual employee level is considered to be the first step toward innovation at the organizational level (Amabile, 1988; West & Farr, 1990; Woodman et al., 1993). As creativity has been recognized as a key contributor to organizations' innovation, growth, and competitiveness, researchers in the field of organizational behaviour have devoted considerable effort to identifying personal and contextual factors, as well as factors related to employees' work environment, that promote creativity.

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