

Information Technology and Quantitative Management (ITQM 2017)

Employee Ability to Innovate: How Can Organizations Recognize It

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Abstract

Searching through the relevant literature, this paper identifies and explains the process behind many of the available instruments that may predict one's personality for producing innovation. Based on the research and scholarly journal entries, the types of personalities that are more prone to be innovative are also introduced. The qualities of an innovative person are then compared with the results from these various tests so that the foundational question of this paper is answered: what type of person is most innovative? In the end, while the merit and certitude of these tests will be called into question, this paper, at the very least, explains the current rationale and processes behind assessing which type of personality is best suitable for innovation.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the scientific committee of the 5th International Conference on Information Technology and Quantitative Management, ITQM 2017.

Keywords: Ability to innovate; personality; innovation

1. Introduction

Psychological and personality characteristics are shown to be the major determinants that predict how well people work together [1], a trait that is a requisite for successful innovation initiatives. This is especially important for knowledge work teams because their success heavily depends on emotional support, along with expertise and organizing skills. Hence, it becomes important for organizations to know what makes an employee a success at bringing innovation. It is beneficial to make a right mix of personalities, skills and motivators for successful completion of a knowledge task. For example, from a study of 132 federal workers, Frick & Drucker [2] gives that the factors that play most influential part in motivating knowledge workers are emotion-based, intrinsic, and intangible. Furthermore, other factors that foretell success at knowledge work are if one finds the work one is

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assigned *meaningful*, and is one able to build relationship with coworkers. Gardner [3], from a study conducted on 72 audit and consulting teams at global Big Four accounting firms, supported the hypothesis that, while pressure to perform increases motivation, performance becomes suboptimal because workers may not be equipped or be cut out to handle pressure. Thus, the ability to cope with the pressure, resulting in one's cognitive ability to continue under stress—a constituent of personality—makes personality a determinant of performance on knowledge work, and, therefore, makes the personality type an important factor in assessing the suitability of a worker for innovation work.

To be able to create an ideal profile of someone who has the potential to be innovative, it is necessary that we define the concept of innovation. Innovation introduces novelty in an organization. Broadly, it is bringing the difference in the form, quality, or state of organizational outcomes and activities in an unprecedented manner [4]. In process engineering, it is so unique because it involves a completely new way of doing things. The ways of the past are either altered or erased entirely as a new era of change is ushered in. Therefore, since individuals observe problems and opportunities, they put forth innovation to address them, and champion their implementation or adoption [4], companies need and should look for the right employees for innovation.

Contemporary competitions are developed based on rivalries that are fought on innovativeness. The rivals become quite conscious of each other's innovations and get on innovative "collision" between engineers, scientists, and managers, that they believe will lead to collaboration and best ideas" [5]. In short, the intermingling of various types of people and occupations will give way to a mixture of good ideas that are pieced together from multiple outlets. Thus, employers have to know how to create a workforce that would enable it to succeed in these contemporary competitions.

The importance of innovation is very well accepted throughout the world. There is no need to convince anyone on this. The question is how to innovate [6]. Is collision the first step to successful innovation [5]? Companies need to get a bunch of different people together to discuss their ideas and come up with a new and novel solution or concept. A more obvious answer, however, is that companies simply need to seek out innovative people to drive the innovative goals of the business. If someone is an innovative person, companies can pair one with other innovative people, and together, through their synergy, they can come up with creative and innovative ideas to help supply the lifeblood of the company. This rational and practical explanation is definitely easier said than done. However, it is a very simple answer to a rather complex question. How do companies innovate? By hiring innovative people!

2. Common Qualities of Innovators

2.1. Setting Standards for Traits and Skills

2.1.1. Does Leadership Matter

We move on to the logical area of interest when we are looking for innovative people. What are some qualities of an innovative person? Mumford et al. [7] identifies the claim that leadership has often not been viewed as an important quality for innovators. Quoting Swiss Psychiatrist Carl Jung, he points out that leadership, at least traditionally, has not been given a significant influence for getting creativity or innovation. In fact, Amar and Hlupic [8] have argued that strong leadership qualities go directly against the possibility for innovation to occur. The reason behind this school of thought is that some people view innovation as an act of a singular person. Often, people view the scientists, researchers, or people with technical/specific skill in an organization to be the real individuals behind innovation, not those who manage or lead them. Some believe that a symbiotic environment is the best for innovation [9]. As a result, it is not uncommon for people to believe that leadership plays a very little role in the innovation process. Conversely, people who subscribe to this school of thought may also believe that leadership skills can detract from innovation by controlling and slowing down their creativity [10]. An innovator or underling may come up with an idea but the leader may deny putting that idea into action.

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