

An Introduction to Organizational Creativity: Definition, Mechanism, and it's Different Approaches

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Creativity is a fabulous and very noticeable topic and it captures interest of a great number of people in all spheres. It is a very important theme and is of great significance in educational achievement, vocational success, and many other areas of life. It is certainly among the most important and pervasive of all human activities. Teachers expect their students to display some creativity in their science projects; executives at high-tech firms expect their research and development units to devise new products and their marketing units to conceive novel strategies to promote those products; and at a more personal level, creativity is often seen as a sign of mental health and emotional well-being¹.

The term Creativity is derived from the Latin word 'Creatus' or 'Creare' i.e., to make. The Greek word 'Krainein' - to accomplish, and the Sanskrit 'Kar' - to make, also have similar connections. Therefore, creativity refers to the creative ability to originate or to produce new ideas. The most widespread conception of creativity in the scholarly literature is that creativity is manifested in the production of a creative work (for example, a new work of art or a scientific hypothesis) that is both novel and useful.

The concept of creativity came into prominence in the first two

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decades after the Second World War, when the space and nuclear research projects presented a wide variety of theoretical and technical problems which required imagination for their solutions². At that point, creativity emerged as new concept with two distinguishable variations. First, creativity was taken as to be the capacity to resolve solutions of problematic problems – those problems with no adequate responses available in term of existing knowledge, methods, and techniques. The second version identified creativity with getting novel ideas and making something of them.

Defining creativity, Sternberg and Lubart proposed that novelty must be coupled with appropriateness for something to be considered creative³. Novelty can be the coalescence of any two or more different things or thoughts. Weisberg proposed that creativity can be defined by the novel use of tools to solve problems or novel problem solving⁴. Ward, Finke, and Smith defined creativity in the products made, the differences in people, the pressures that motivate, and the processes behind creativity⁵. The products made are new and fresh which is the clearest example of creativity. However, there are defining subtleties in people; for example, some people are considered to be more creative than others, and in addition to inherent differences in people, there are different motivations for creativity (e.g., some people are driven to create). Finally, the process for creativity can be different. Some people seclude themselves while others seek guidance and dialogue.

While there is debate over the guidelines for judging creativity, two things remain: novelty and appropriateness. These two things may be viewed in the product, the tools, the people, the motivation, and/or the processes, but these are the two necessary ingredients for creativity.

Creativity in Organizations:

Creativity is now spanning between several core sub-disciplines of psychology, one of them is in organizational psychology. In today's

highly competitive marketplace, one of the key components of a company's survival is its ability to generate new ideas or better ways of doing things. It may be the most important tool in a manager's arsenal. Without creativity, the firm may become predictable, and predictable firm may be at a competitive disadvantage⁶. Creativity goes further when creative managers seek new solutions to product related problems. It can lead to new and better solutions to business as well as customer problems. Thus, creativity may be the key to market success and improved operating efficiencies⁷.

Researches began to actively formulate in this area during the late 1980's when Professor Amabile proposed a theory-based componential framework to understand what factors can facilitate or inhibit employee creativity. She used the interview study which was conducted by herself (with Gyskiewicz in 1987) in development of this model⁸. In the early 1990's, Woodman and associates proposed that creativity is affected by the interaction of personal and organizational factors⁹. They also pointed out many individual, group, and organizational factors that could interact to influence employee creativity. These two conceptual frameworks, in the form of model, represent the importance of individual as well as contextual factors in employee creativity. So, it has been considered that importance of creativity in organization came in the light with the conceptual framework presented by Amabile in 1988.

As more researches were conducted in this area, different researchers defined and interpreted organizational creativity differently. Researchers, instructors, and consultants often explain it by referring to one or more of a variety of factors, including attributes, conceptual skills, behaviours, abilities, technologies, empowerment, or the process of experiences. However, if organizations want to encourage creativity, they must explore the range of identifying factors. This will permit managers to focus on the manifestations of creativity they believe are appropriate to their specific problems or situations¹⁰.

Definitions of Organizational Creativity:

Creativity can be described as both an outcome and a process. Specifically, in order to produce creative outcomes, individuals need to first engage in certain processes that can help them to become potentially more creative. For example, they may examine unknown areas to find better or unique approaches to a problem, or seek out novel ways to performing a task, and link ideas from multiple sources. As a process, creativity can involve continuously finding and solving problems and implementing new solutions^{11, 12}. Also, it is an interactive process, involving reflection and action, seeking feedback, experimenting, and discussing new ways to do things in contrast to just relying on habit or automatic behaviour¹³.

In general, creativity as an outcome has been defined as something that is viewed as novel. Beyond the point of novelty, there are some differences in some of the ways to define creative outcomes between the psychological and organizational literatures. In the psychological literature, some researchers define creative outcomes usually generated in a brainstorming session in terms of fluency, flexibility, and originality, with these three concepts being highly correlated (Fluency is the number of ideas generated; Flexibility is the number of categories of ideas referenced; and Originality is the production of ideas that are unique from all other ideas generated for a group of individuals).

Other definitions in both Psychology and organizational behaviour consider creativity to be novel and useful or involve appropriate ideas, processes, or procedures^{14, 15}. For example, Rogers defined creativity as the emergence of a novel relational product coming out of the uniqueness of an individual and the context of their existence at that time¹⁶. Ford regarded creativity in organizations strictly as outcome. He defined creativity as 'it is domain-specific, subjective judgment of the novelty and value of an outcome of a particular action'¹⁷. Amabile stated that creativity is the production of novel and appropriate ideas

by either an individual or small working group¹⁸. Similarly, Kao suggests that creativity may be defined as “a human process leading to a result which is novel (new), useful (solves an existing problem or satisfies an existing need), and understandable (can be reproduced)”¹⁹. These novel ideas are those that are unique compared to other ideas currently available. Useful or appropriate ideas are those that have the potential to add value in either the short or long term. Therefore, creative outcomes can range from suggestions for incremental changes in procedures to major, radical breakthroughs. Woodman and associates defined creativity in organizations as ‘it is the creation of valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working in a complex social system’²⁰.

Creativity vs. Innovation:

The concepts of creativity and innovation are often used interchangeably in the literature. Consequently, it is important to analyze these concepts to understand differences between these two concepts. There is diversity in the use of the terms “creativity” and “innovation”. Some researchers and theorists define creativity according to personal characteristics of individuals. For example, in a theoretical analysis of creativity and innovation, Findlay and Lumsden say, “We will use the term creativity to refer to the constellation of personality and intellectual traits shown by individuals who, when given a measure of free rein, spend significant amounts of time engaged in the creative process”²¹. Others have defined creativity according to the process itself: “Creativity is the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other”²². Creativity has been the province of psychology, with its emphasis on individuals and small groups, while innovation has been the focus of sociologists, economists, and others who take a larger, systems perspective.

Innovation is built on creative ideas as the basic elements. Organizational innovation is the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization. Definitions of innovation found in the literature vary according to the level of analysis which is used. The more macro the approach (e.g. social, cultural), the more varied the definitions seem to be²³. Some definitions are general and broad, while others focus on specific innovations like the implementation of an idea for a new product or service. In an organizational environment, examples of innovation are the implementation of ideas for restructuring, or saving of costs, improved communication, new technology for production processes, new organizational structures and new personnel plans or programmes²⁴.

Innovation is often associated with change²⁵; it is regarded as something new which leads to change. However, change cannot always be regarded as innovation since it does not always involve new ideas or does not always lead to improvement in an organization²⁶. In order to discriminate these two concepts, Ford mentioned that innovation has been the purview of disciplines such as sociology, economics, engineering, and organizational theories, but creativity has been examined almost exclusively within Psychology²⁷. So, as a final comment, it can be said that the concept of creativity refers to generation of a relatively new idea, so forth, produced at the individual level, whereas innovation refers to the successful implementation of new idea (whether newly generated or adopted from previous experiences or inspired by different organizations).

Different Approaches of Creativity :

1. Attribute Approach:

The attribute approach of creativity holds that specific characteristics and traits predispose an individual to be perceived as "creative". Proponents of this theory believe that most creative people have common attributes, such as openness, independence, autonomy,

intuitiveness, and spontaneity. This theory believes in that creativity is more dependent on the individual than on the organization and its conditions. This strategy assumes that certain individuals are motivated to learn, then share and apply this learning to work.

2. Behavioural Approach:

The behavioural view of creativity centres on the actions and activities that bring something new into being, in other words, this views creativity as outcome. Teresa Amabile, in her book 'The Social Psychology of Creativity', suggests that a product or outcome is creative to the extent that it signifies a novel and useful behavioural response to a problem or situation²⁸. Amabile believes that creative tasks are heuristic in nature, rather than algorithmic, meaning that there is typically no clear way to solve the given problem, so the problem-solver must learn a new path that will lead to a solution. She further contends that most creative behaviours are based on problem discovery.

The behavioural perspective is probably the most familiar to managers, since behaviours are more easily observable and recognizable than the characteristics of creativity cited in the other theories. In addition, the behavioural view implies the need to reinforce desired creative actions. Managers can use expectations and rewards to let employees know which behaviours are desirable and to communicate the company's underlying views on creativity.

3. Process Approach:

This approach holds that creativity is a highly complex, multifaceted phenomenon that relies on individual talents, skills, and actions, as well as organizational conditions. The combination of these factors, according to this theory, will allow something new to be brought into existence. Kao offers the view that creativity is a result of the interplay among the person, the task, and the organizational context, and each of these elements can be managed²⁹. Managing the person, he says, means understanding his or her unique talent and relationship with the manager;

managing the task involves framing or structuring the problem and alternating between flexible and rigid styles of control; and managing the organizational context means engineering the organization's design, communications, physical environment, and social relations.

4. Investment Approach to Creativity:

To describe the nature of creativity and its assessment, Sternberg and Lubart proposed the investment approach to creative work³⁰. According to this approach creativity involves six resources: intelligence, knowledge, thinking style, personality, motivation, and environmental contexts. This approach seems to explain creativity in the terms of its different types. It explains both, artistic as well as organizational creativity. Prof. Amabile, which considered as pioneer of organizational creativity, her work on organizational creativity has also consistent with this approach. So, let it describe this approach in details:

I. Intelligence: Three intellectual skills are particularly important in creativity: (a) the synthetic skill - to see problems in new ways and to escape the bounds of conventional thinking, (b) the analytic skill - to recognize which of one's ideas are worth pursuing and which are not, and (c) the practical - contextual skill - to know how to persuade others. The confluence of these three skills is also important. Analytic skills used in the absence of the other two skills results in powerful critical, but not creative thinking. Synthetic skill used in the absence of the other two skills results in new ideas that are not subjected to the scrutiny required to improve them and make them work. Practical - contextual skill in the absence of the other two skills may result in societal acceptance of ideas not because the ideas are good, but rather, because the ideas have been well and powerfully presented.

II. Knowledge: In order to make creative contributions to a field of knowledge, person must have knowledge of that field. Without knowledge of the field, it is difficult for an individual to assess the problems in the field and to judge which problems are important. But,

increased expertise in term of knowledge in a given domain often comes at the expense of flexibility in that domain³¹. Because creativity requires one to view things flexibly, there is a danger that, with increasing knowledge, one will lose creativity by losing the ability to think flexibly about the domain in which one work. So, it is also important to know, how flexibly persons can use their knowledge³².

III. Thinking Style: Thinking styles are ways in which people choose to use or exploit their intelligence as well as their knowledge, thus, intellectual styles concern not abilities, but how these abilities and the knowledge acquired through them are used in day-to-day interactions with the environment³³. Creative people are likely to be those with a 'legislative' style. A legislative individual is someone who enjoys formulating problems and creating new systems of rules and new ways of seeing things. Such a person is in contrast to an individual with an executive style, someone who likes implementing systems, rules and tasks of others. Both differ from an individual with a judicial style, someone who enjoys evaluating people, things, and rules. Thus, the creative person not only has the ability to see things in new way but likes to do so. The creative person is also likely to have a global perspective on problems³⁴.

IV. Personality: Creative people seem to share certain personality attributes. Although one can probably be creative in the short term without these attributes, long-term creativity requires most of them. The attributes are tolerance of ambiguity, willingness to overcome obstacles and perseverance, willingness to grow, willingness to take risks, and the courage of one's convictions³⁵.

V. Motivation: Motivation plays an important role in creative endeavors. The kind of motivation that is most essential to creative work is intrinsic and task-focused motivation. According to Amabile, person will show more creativity in his work when he is motivated to perform a task for its own sake, rather than for external reward, and the

motivation is focused upon the task rather than on the outcomes that may derive from it³⁶.

VI. Environmental Context: Changing with context, creative ideas also changed by its nature. One idea could be very novel and useful in one context but may not be such important in another. According to investment approach, the role of context is relevant to the creative enterprise in at least three different ways. First, a context needs to help foster creativity by sparking new, high-quality ideas. Second, the context needs to help foster creativity by rewarding these ideas when they are produced. Finally, the context needs to be one that values the kinds of creative ideas one has³⁷.

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