

Paradigm Conflicts and their Management in Organizational Creativity

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Abstract

Defining and solving problems collectively is an integral part of organizational creativity. Organisational creativity viewed from the perspective of collective creativity require individuals to come together to define and solve problems through dialogue and discussion. Since individual and group creativity implies originality that calls for breaking the status quo the process of organizational creativity is often met with conflicts both constructive and negative. Constructive conflicts take the process of organizational creativity forward while destructive tension quells it. Scholars opine that management of competing perspectives is fundamental to the generation of organizational creativity and innovation. Bland consensus is often a block to organizational creativity and exploring opposing opinions cooperatively brings in the requisite variety which is quintessential for creativity. Constructive controversy in a cooperative mode furthers creativity while a destructive conflict in a competitive mode quashes it. This paper discusses the various aspects of constructive and destructive conflicts that affect organizational creativity and offers insights as to how conflicts can be leveraged constructively to foster organizational creativity.

Key words: Organizational creativity, collective creativity, destructive conflicts, Constructive controversy.

Introduction

Intellectual capital of an organization is enhanced through collective creativity which in turn promotes the growth of competencies and capabilities of individuals. Organisations need a fitting environment to foster the augmentation of creativity and it is imperative to provide challenges that encourage creativity rather than deter creativity. The focus of this paper is to examine the effect of constructive conflicts and destructive conflicts on creativity and cultures that encourage and discourage creativity.

Objective

Almost every organization wants to be creative and offer something that another doesn't have. Consultants are hired for imparting creativity training to foster ingenuity. Individual creativity is often found to be latent, becoming apparent in certain environments and conditions. Is creativity fostered by the individual or by the environment and culture of the organization? Do conflicts positive and negative influence the flow of creativity? The objective of the paper is to

analyze the effects of :

- Positive conflicts on organizational creativity,
- Destructive conflicts on organizational creativity

Hypothesis

Organizations that encourage positive conflicts will have a higher degree of creativity.

Methodology

The data has been gathered from secondary sources such as journals, books and web resources on organizational creativity.

Positive Challenge and Creativity

Constructive conflicts posed ensure that creativity is enhanced through chaotic situations that energize individuals and groups to perceive every project as a new creative challenge thus urging them to come up with innovative solutions. Scholars have opined that the management of competing perspectives is fundamental to the generation of organizational creativity. However it is the task related conflict

and information related conflicts in moderate levels that enhance the frequency of creativity. Conflicts related to task are related to the quality of task performance with regard to shared objectives and information conflicts are characterized by the group appraisal of the task processes and performance.

Dean Tjosvold(2000) has presented cogent arguments and supportive evidence that cooperative conflict improves the quality of decision making and organizational creativity. He refers to conflict as a rich complex experience that stimulates one's thinking and generates strong emotions.

Teresa Amabile (1997) termed positive challenge as one of the six environmental stimulants to organizational creativity. The propensity to take risk and to turn a problem on its head to get a new perspective is instrumental in promoting creativity. "The desire to do something because you find it deeply satisfying and personally challenging inspires the highest levels of creativity, whether it's in the arts, sciences, or business," she says.

Constantine Andriopoulose (2000) proposed the perpetual challenging theory which brings in elements of constructive conflicts in creative decision making. It brings in four variables namely adventuring, overt confronting, portfolioing and opportunising

Adventuring is the process through which individuals are encouraged to explore uncertainty, so that they can generate innovative solutions. The employee's goal here is the generation of new ideas. Overt confronting refers to the deliberate set of work-related debates among employees encouraging them to utilize their creative thinking. Portfolioing is where creative employees are encouraged to get involved in a diverse range of projects or teams related to these projects. Opportunising refers to

the process through which creative employees identify and get involved in projects, which are considered as commercially or creatively interesting and therefore need to be cultivated.

Landau et al (2001) speak of creative contention and opines that an effective organization is one that generates conflict of the good variety. Here people's energies are directed towards working together rather than sniping at each other and diversity of opinions become an invaluable asset.

Stan Gryskiewicz (1999) speaks of positive turbulence which is characterized by an energizing climate that upsets the status quo and takes the organization towards renewal. It entails creation of task forces and cross functional teams to solve problems and stimulate new ideas.

S Ramachander (2006) opines that asking challenging questions is one of the facets of creativity. If the trodden path and the status quo were not challenged very little new things would happen.

An instance of organizational creativity triggered by positive challenges is Apple's innovation which comes from people meeting up in the hallways or calling each other at night with a new idea because they realized something that shoots holes in a problem they have been thinking about. According to Steve Jobs it comes from saying no to 1000 things to make sure they don't get on the wrong track.

Competitive Conflicts and Creativity.

Amabile (1998) writes that creativity is truly enhanced when an entire organization supports it. Senior people, therefore, must put in place appropriate structures and systems that confer a top priority to creative efforts within the organization.

She proposes that organizations that endeavor to support creativity should consistently reward it, taking care to avoid using money to pay people to come up with innovative ideas. She also suggests

that organizational leaders need to minimise infighting, politicking, and gossip as they are particularly damaging to creativity. She argues that this sort of negativity can have severe consequences for creative contribution.

Amabile has identified two environmental obstacles to creativity

1. Organizational impediments namely conservatism and internal strife

2. Excessive workload pressure.

Amabile opines that an environment characterized by internal discord quashes creativity and time pressures too often inhibit creativity.

She also identified specific leader behaviors that hindered creativity.

One was giving people either too little guidance or too much guidance. The second one is monitoring in a negative form—that is, checking on assigned work too often or not often enough. Or, checking on it for too long, like hanging around and going too much into the details of what people are doing, and giving

unconstructive feedback.

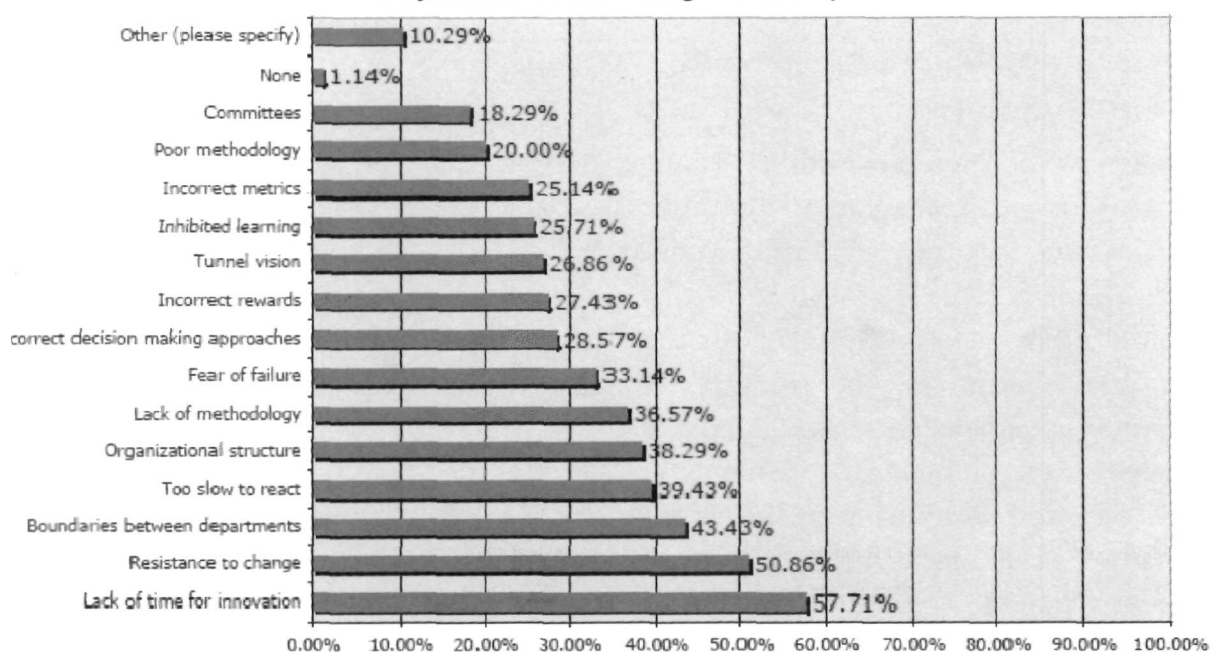
The third negative has to do with problem solving—either avoiding solving problems that crop up in the team or the project, or creating problems.

She notes that seemingly trivial things leaders say and do can have an enormous impact on creativity and this is particularly true of the negative behaviors.

Jiddu Krishnamurti relates conflict to comparison. The constant comparisons of oneself with another, with what one is, with what one should be or with someone who is more fortunate triggers conflict thus killing creativity. Comparisons breed competitiveness and create an urge to be something one is not and creativity manifests only when one naturally takes to a task or problem.

In the 2007 survey conducted by Innovation labs, lack of time for innovation and boundaries between departments are stated as major obstacles to creativity. The survey consisted of 17 questions pertaining to innovation practices and results in companies. The figure below shows the response regarding major obstacles to creativity.

Figure 1 :
Major Factors contributing to creativity



Organizational Culture and Creativity.

An organization's culture is determined by the beliefs, values, and traditions of the organization. Culture is good or bad depending on how it supports the achievement of organizational goals. It is 'good' if it enables the organisation to achieve its objectives and goals or adapt appropriately to its external environment. If an organisation needs to be creative and innovative it must design its culture accordingly.

Constantine Andriopoulou (2001) has put forward the following dimensions of organisational culture with regard to creativity.

- 1) Organisational culture
 - a) Open flow of communication
 - b) Risk taking
 - c) Self initiated activity
 - d) Participative safety
 - e) Trust and respect for the individual

Edgar Schein suggests that organisational culture is what a group learns over a period of time as the group solves its problems of survival. He argues that a culture is a pattern of basic assumptions that have been or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration.

His model exists at three levels – artifacts, values and basic assumptions. Artifacts are the visible organisational structure and processes. Values are the social principles, goals and standards held within the culture to have intrinsic worth and underlying assumptions are beliefs and habits of perception, thought and feeling that are taken for granted. He also observes that cultural elements determine strategy, goals and models of operating.

Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) suggest that the challenge for organisations is to create cultures that direct internal creativity (i.e. technology, structures, staff and individuals)

towards external creativity (which includes customers, competitors, suppliers and governments) resulting in increased market share and customer satisfaction. They suggest that although creativity at the internal level is no guarantee of business success, it is a prerequisite.

According to Damanpour (1995) organizations require a flexible structure and climate conducive to innovation where self and peer controls replace hierarchical control. In practice this means that the leadership in each organisation must be clear about the requirement for creativity and the types of creativity that best suits organizational goals.

Kanter (1996) supports Damanpour's view by suggesting that innovation is most likely to flourish in conditions that allow flexibility, quick action, intensive care, coalition formation and connectedness.

Uday Pareek's (2007) OCTAPACE model of organizational culture would further throw light on the relationship between an organizations culture and its creativity. The acronym OCTAPACE stands for

- Openness – independent work culture where everyone is encouraged to voice their thoughts and ideas
- Competitive - a culture that cherishes challenges and brings out the best in an individual and from the organization as a whole
- Trust – confidentiality of client and consultant information
- Authentic – congruence between what one feels, says and does
- Proactive – a culture that acts in advance to counter an expected difficulty
- Academic – a culture that promotes continuing education and updating of skills
- Creative - experimentation and utilization

of new concepts

Emerging - a culture of learning and growth

An open, proactive and emergent culture is instrumental in promoting a creative organizational culture.

There appears, however, a general consensus among researchers in this field that:

- Creativity is impeded by cultures that emphasise formal rules, respect for traditional ways of doing things, and clearly demarcated roles,
- Creativity is encouraged by climates which are playful about ideas, supportive of risk taking, challenging and tolerant of ambiguity,
- Democratic, participative leadership styles facilitate creativity while authoritarian styles inhibit it,
- Creativity is enhanced by organisational structures and systems that are adaptable and flexible,
- Access to, and effectively using, resources can be a stimulus for creativity and change.

Amabile also proposed a model of small team creativity consisting of 3 components – the person's expertise, their creative thinking skills and motivation. She suggests that a manager can influence all three but the greatest impact is to be had from affecting intrinsic motivation. She suggests six management practices that might influence the level of intrinsic motivation – providing challenges, greater freedom, adequate resources, support, encouragement, and paying attention to team design. To be effective across an organisation these behaviours must be imbedded in the structure and systems of an organization.

Toyota (2007) the world's most innovative car manufacturer boasts of one of the longest established and most effective idea management

systems around. It has not only created a culture that encourages ideas but also gets people to think about the right kind of ideas for the company. While developing their Tundra, a small team went out to observe how different kinds of people used trucks in different ways. They aimed the truck at five different groups of truck users – outdoors hunters and fishermen and women, home improvement types, NASCAR fans, motorcycle enthusiasts and country-music listeners. The team even went to the extent of digging through scrape yards to see which parts of rusting pickups lasted over the years.

Ed Catmull, a cofounder of filmmaker Pixar and the president of Pixar and Disney Animation Studios observes that in complex product development, like filmmaking, "creativity involves a large number of people from different disciplines working effectively together to solve a great many problems." Consequently, at Pixar, the focus has been on principles and practices for fostering collective creativity. These include: giving project leaders creative authority for product development; building a culture that encourage people to share their work-in-progress and support one another and removing those barriers that divide disciplines. Moreover, having been deeply affected by the rise and fall of so many computer companies led by "phenomenal groups of people who produced great products," Catmull has also sought ways for Pixar to continually and objectively analyze itself. Postmortems and infusions of new blood are two methods. He says, "We do not want people to assume that because we are successful, everything we do is right,"

The BCG – Business week 2009 innovation survey has ranked companies on the basis of their survey responses, three year TSR, three year revenue growth and three year margin growth. The criteria for selection was break

through products, unique customer experiences, innovative processes and new and differentiated business models. The top ten among them are:

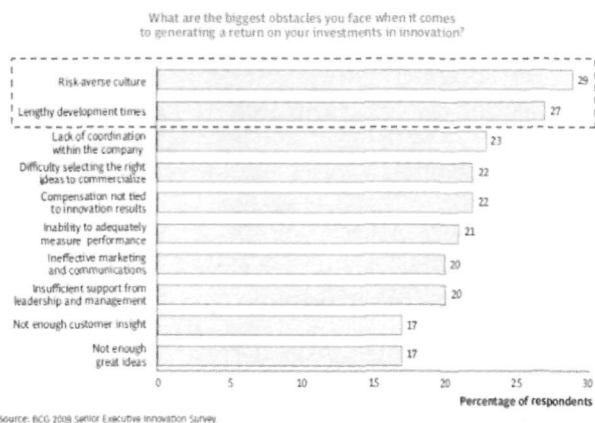
In the BCG innovation survey regarding a question as to what is the biggest obstacle faced

Table - 1

Which Global Companies do you consider the most innovative and why ?	
Rank Company	Primary Reason for selection
1. Apple	Breakthrough products
2. Google	Unique Customer experiences
3. Toyota Motor Corporation	Innovative processes
4. Microsoft Corporation	Innovative processes
5. Nintendo	Breakthrough products
6. IBM Corporation	Innovative processes
7. HP Development Co.	Innovative processes
8. Research in Motion	Breakthrough products
9. Nokia Corporation	Breakthrough products
10. Wal-Mart Stores	Innovative processes

when it comes to generating a return on investments in innovation, majority of the respondents quoted a risk averse culture in organizations as the primary hurdle. The survey also locates insufficient support from leadership and management as one of the reasons for low levels of innovation.

Figure - 2 : Obstacles for creativity



It can be concluded that while certain organizational cultures inhibit creativity and innovation, others foster it. Some organizations are better at identifying problems, generating and selecting valuable ideas and developing and commercializing them. Organizational culture, which supports creativity, needs to promote resourceful ways of solving problems through positive and constructive challenges.

Organizational Climate and Creativity

Climate affects organizational creativity by influencing organizational processes such as communicating, decision making, coordinating, individual learning, motivation and commitment. While culture is deep seated and slow to change, climate refers to the daily interactions of individuals in an organization. The concept of climate is divided into two distinct but complementary units: Psychological climate which refers to the meaning an individual assigns to the organizational environment and organizational climate, which is the aggregate of the individual appraisals of the organization. Isaksen (2002) has derived nine dimensions that support creativity:

Challenge and involvement – This refers to the extent to which team members are involved in the daily activities, long term goals and vision of the organization: Freedom, idea time playfulness and humour, trust and openness, conflict, idea support, debate and risk taking.

Amabile (1999) and colleagues studied the work environments surrounding project teams in a large company to determine whether and how the work environments of highly creative projects differed from the work environments of less creative projects using the research tool called KEYS: Assessing the Climate for Creativity.

It consists of 78 items that constitute

- Eight scales addressing different aspects of the work environment,
- Two scales assessing the work outcomes of creativity and productivity.

Of the eight environmental scales, six focus on Environmental Stimulants to Creativity-

- Freedom,
- Positive challenge,
- Supervisory encouragement,

4. Work group supports,
5. Organizational encouragement, and
6. Sufficient resources.

Amabile has further identified two environmental obstacles to creativity

1. Organizational impediments namely conservatism and internal strife
2. Excessive workload pressure.

Data on KEYS gathered over a 12-year period, with over 12,000 individual employees from 26 different companies, have established the reliability and validity of this instrument.

In a study conducted by Amabile et al on identifying the effect of downsizing on organizational creativity using KEYS, it was found that organizational creativity is hampered during a period of downsizing and suggests managers to resort to downsizing with great caution.

One of the key reasons for Google's success is a conviction that good ideas can and should come from anywhere. The founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brinn insist that all engineers in the company have one day a week to work on their own projects. An ideas mailing list is open to anyone at Google who wants to post a suggestion.

Thus it can be concluded that a climate that offers encouragements and resources encourages creativity and a climate of fear and distrust quashes creativity.

Findings

The study reveals that organisational creativity flourishes in positively challenging and supportive environments and takes a backseat in environments fraught with negativity and strife. Constructive conflicts that are task oriented will encourage diversity of opinions and thus enhance creativity.

Suggestions and Recommendations.

From the above study it can be said that:

- Organizations need to bring in a climate and culture that fosters creativity
- Freedom of expression is to be encouraged to bring forth collective creativity
- Constructive conflicts or positive challenges are to be a part of organizational processes to promote collective creativity
- Conflicts are to be task oriented rather than interpersonal because conflicts in relationships are bound to hamper creativity.

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