

Individual values, Organizational Context, and self-perceptions of employee creativity: Evidence from Egyptian organizations

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Abstract

Responses from Egyptian employees to a questionnaire incorporating the Schwartz Value Survey, reveal that individuals for whom Self-direction is a relatively important value type perceive themselves to be more creative in the workplace than individuals with Conformity or Power as preferred value types. Results regarding Organizational Context support earlier studies that emphasize the salience of supportive supervision and a caring, consultative work environment in fostering creativity. However, theories implying that employee creativity is hindered by a controlling, hierarchical environment are not corroborated.

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1. Introduction

Miron et al. (2004) identify two streams of creativity research: one at the individual level, examining personal characteristics that enhance and inhibit creativity; and the other at the organizational level, identifying organizational factors that affect creativity. Some researchers combine these two streams (Amabile, 1996; Bharadwaj and Menon, 2000; Shalley et al., 2004) as does the present research. First, this research focuses on individual values and creative behavior in the workplace by integrating individual value structure theory (Schwartz, 1994) with theory on employee creativity. The goal is to learn how individual values might influence a person's creative behavior in the workplace, in order to provide guidance on the kinds of people who might be recruited for situations where creativity is particularly desired. Second, the study investigates the association between organizational characteristics and employee creativity, testing findings reported by, among others, Amabile and Gryskiewicz (1989), Ford et al. (2004), Oldham and Cummings (1996), and Zhou (2003).

Researchers who report on creativity-building practices in countries other than the United States generally concentrate on

the advanced economies of Japan and Europe, and not developing countries. Notable exceptions include China (Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996), Bulgaria (Madjar et al., 2002), Mexico (Gomez and Ranft, 2003) and Taiwan (Farmer et al., 2003). Some of the results obtained by these studies parallel those obtained in earlier US studies, thus supporting the generalizability of creativity theories cross-culturally. Using a sample of Egyptian employees, this study tests employee creativity theories in another culture. First, based on a literature review, hypotheses are developed relating employee creative behavior to individual values and Organizational Context. The next section describes the study's methodology. Following this is a presentation and discussion of the findings, and finally, recommendations for managers and researchers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Employee creative behavior

Creativity involves the production of novel and useful ideas (Amabile, 1988). Creativity in the workplace is not confined to jobs traditionally viewed as necessitating creativity (Madjar et al., 2002); rather, creative work can be generated by employees in any job at any level of any organization. Also, creativity is an ongoing process rather than an outcome (Amabile, 1988; Drazin et al., 1999).

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Table 1
Value types

Value type	Defining goal	Value items ^a
Self-direction	Independent thought and action — choosing, creating, exploring	<i>Creativity</i> , Freedom, <i>Choosing own goals</i> , <i>Curious</i> , <i>Independent</i>
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, challenge in life	<i>A varied life</i> , <i>An exciting life</i> , <i>Daring</i>
Hedonism	Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself	Pleasure, Enjoying life, Self-indulgent
Achievement	Personal success though demonstrating competence according to social standards	<i>Ambitious</i> , <i>Successful</i> , <i>Capable</i> , Influential
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	<i>Authority</i> , <i>Wealth</i> , <i>Social power</i>
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships and of self	Social order, Family security, National security, Clean, Reciprocation of favors, Healthy
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms	<i>Obedient</i> , <i>Self-discipline</i> , <i>Politeness</i> , <i>Honoring parents and elders</i>
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides	Respect for tradition, Humble, Devout, Accepting my portion in life, Moderate
Benevolence	Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent contact ("in-group")	Helpful, Honest, Forgiving, Responsible, Loyal, True friendship, Mature love
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of <i>all</i> people and for nature	Broadminded, Social justice, Equality, World at peace, World of beauty, Unity with nature, Protecting the environment

^a Italicized value items are those included in the indices of the value types hypothesized to be related to creativity. See Section 3 Methodology for details.

Empirical studies (Amabile et al., 1994, 1996) have shown that intrinsic motivation is conducive to creativity. Amabile and Gryskiewicz (1987) found that for R&D scientists, the single most frequently mentioned feature characterizing creative behavior was intrinsic motivation, defined as being self-driven, excited by the work itself, enthusiastic, attracted by the challenge of the problem and not being motivated only by money, recognition or external directives. Creative behavior also reflects a person's domain-relevant skills (factual knowledge and technical skills in a particular knowledge domain) and creativity-related skills (cognitive style and work style) (Amabile, 1996).

Employee creative behavior (ECB) is operationalized as an employee's perceptions and beliefs about his/her creativity-related behavior in the workplace. For example, ECB includes the belief that work is so rewarding that a person is indifferent to special incentives provided by management.

2.2. Values

Schwartz (1999) defines values as desirable trans-situational goals that guide the way social actors choose actions, evaluate

people, and justify their actions and evaluations. Values also represent responses to the universal requirements of the functioning of societies. Schwartz (2004) lists three universal requirements: (1) the needs of individuals as biological organisms, (2) the requisites of coordinated societal interaction, and (3) the survival and welfare needs of groups. Thus value theory can address creativity as a social as well as an individual process.

Schwartz's (1994) individual value structure theory includes ten motivationally distinct value types derived from the three universal requirements. These value types are listed in Table 1. A central feature of Schwartz's theory is the hypothesized structure of values which describes value types in a circle (see Fig. 1), with compatible value types in close proximity and competing value types on opposing sides of the circle. Tradition and Conformity are located on the same circle segment because they share a single motivational goal: subordination of the self in favor of socially imposed elements (Ros et al., 1999). Also shown on Fig. 1 are four higher-order value domains, two of which are in opposition to the remaining two. Self-enhancement is in opposition to Self-transcendence and Openness to change opposes Conservation. The theory has been tested in 210 samples collected between 1988 and 2002 from 67 countries; on average, the data strongly support the theory, but specific samples exhibit variation around this average (Schwartz, 2004).

The literature suggests particular value types should be related to employee creative behavior. These value types are Self-direction, Stimulation, Achievement, Conformity, and Power.

According to Mills and Cameron (1993), curiosity and persistent interest are two of the best markers of individual creative potential. It is hypothesized that, assuming the domain-relevant skills are present for an employee, the value types, Self-direction and Stimulation are positively related to ECB. Self-

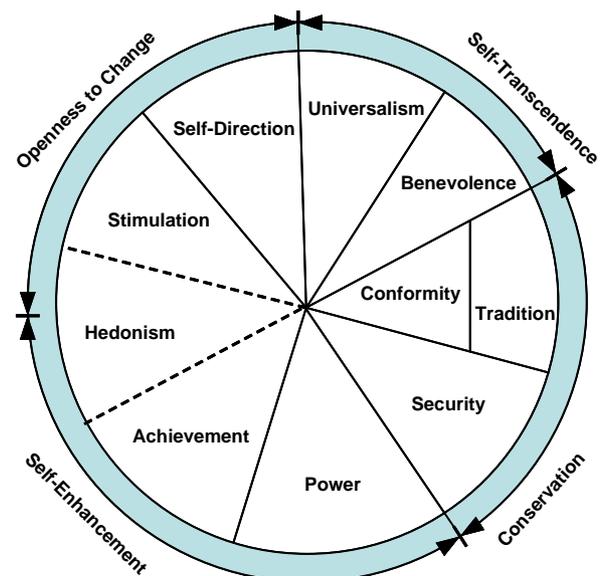


Fig. 1. The structure of values according to Schwartz's theory. Source: Schwartz (1994).

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