

Creativity and Innovation in Organizations

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Organizations are becoming increasingly interested in creativity and innovation, in part as a response to the pressures associated with globalization, competition, economic factors and technology changes. Many organizations see creativity as an opportunity to maintain a competitive advantage and most organizations and researchers alike, evaluate creativity in terms of an original or innovative result (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). Originality, however, is only one aspect of creativity. An outcome or result is interpreted as creative if it is both novel and appropriate (Amabile, 1996).

Early research on creativity focused on major breakthroughs or radical ideas in science and art (referred to as “Big C”), but these types of creative activities are not always functional in organizations. Organizations need creative output to fit within their vision and goals, so the opportunity to be creative is different, and presents itself in less extreme ways, such as the adaptation of a process or a solution to a problem (known as “Little c”).

A helpful way to think about the “magic” that occurs when people are being creative is to focus on the processes that facilitate creativity and, more specifically, the processes that should take place in creative problem solving. The creative process is very similar to the problem-solving process. Creativity, however, will most likely occur when situations present the need for innovative ideas and when people are presented with ill-defined or novel situations (Dillion, 1982; Mumford, Mobley, Uhlman, Reiter-Palmon & Doares, 1991). These ill-defined problems generally have multiple—and sometimes competing—goals, as well as various means of solving the problem. Furthermore, there is rarely one correct answer to these types of issues.

In addition to situational characteristics that allow creativity to occur, there needs to be a successful application of the problem-solving process. Though there are multiple creative problem-

solving process models that have been developed, we will use the framework developed by Michael Mumford and colleagues. The framework includes the following processes:

1. Problem identification and construction
2. Information search
3. Idea generation
4. Idea evaluation and selection
5. Implementation planning and monitoring

Common conceptualizations of creative problem solving include the idea generation and selection processes. There is often, however, no explicit realization of problem identification and construction, information search or implementation planning and monitoring processes—even though implementation planning and monitoring is vital to a successful idea. The implementation planning and monitoring phase is also referred to as innovation. Though there are multiple definitions of innovation, they all include the implementation of an idea, process or product (Reiter-Palmon, Herman & Yurkovich, 2006).

The first three processes (i.e., problem identification and construction information search and idea generation) are generally considered part of the Idea Generation phase, while the latter two are part of the Implementation phase. Problem identification and construction is the realization that a problem exists, as well as the definition of the problem in terms of goals and constraints or factors (Basadur, Ellspermann & Evans, 1994; Mumford, Reiter-Palmon & Redmond, 1994). Problem identification and construction provides the framework for the subsequent processes when solving the problem, and, as such, has a strong influence on not only the latter stages, but on the outcome.

Information search involves finding the necessary information to solve the problem. This information can come from internal sources (e.g., information already available to the problem solver), or external

sources (e.g., books, other people). Idea generation is the process of coming up with possible solutions to a problem—recall that ill-defined situations rarely have just one possible solution. This allows multiple ideas to be generated in an attempt to respond to the problem at hand. Once possible solutions have been generated, one must then evaluate the ideas against a standard or set of standards.

Furthermore, the idea evaluation process will result in ideas being revised, rejected or chosen for implementation. The final process is the implementation and subsequent monitoring of the application of the solution. As mentioned before, implementing a solution, process or new product in an organization is often what people remember—if the implementation is poor, the solution, process or product will more than likely be undervalued. ■

About the Author

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Anne E. Herman, Ph.D., serves as a research consultant for the Kenexa Research Institute. Dr. Herman worked previously for two years as a research consultant for Kenexa's survey team. She has extensive consulting experience in performance management, organizational assessment and change, creativity and innovation, employee selection and promotion, organizational strategy, program evaluation and statistical methodology. Her research interests include problem solving and decision making, creativity and innovation, leadership, organizational motivation, survey design and program effectiveness. Dr. Herman has spoken at many conferences and her research has appeared in several publications. She has taught graduate and undergraduate courses in leadership, business strategy, organizational behavior and behavioral statistics.

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