

Topic 10 Creativity, Innovation, and Leadership

Introduction

This topic covers the creative problem-solving which is an important requirement for effective leadership at every organizational level. The role of a creative leader is to bring into existence ideas and things that did not exist previously or that existed in a different form.

Innovation refers to creating new ideas and their implementation or commercialisation.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the steps in the creative process.
- Identify characteristics of creative problem solvers.
- Be prepared to overcome traditional thinking in order to become more creative.
- Describe both organizational and individual approaches to enhance creative problem solving.
- Explain how the leader and the organization can establish a climate that fosters creativity.
- Identify several leadership practices that contribute to organizational innovation.

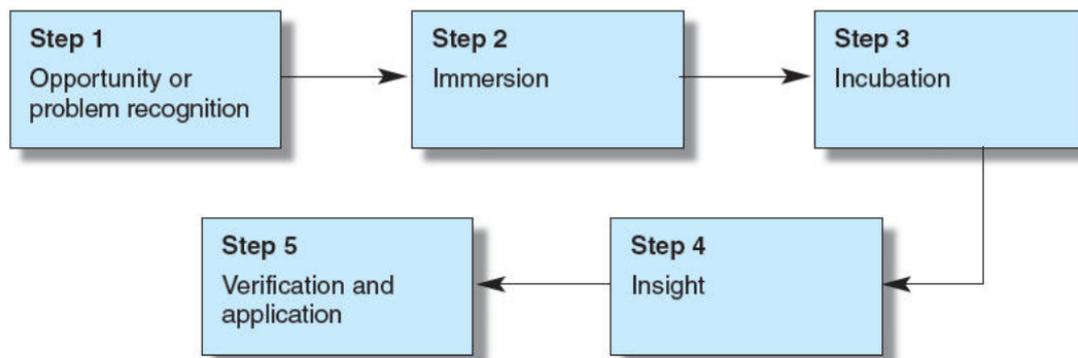
Creativity and Innovation

- **Creativity** is the production of novel and useful ideas.
- **Innovation** refers to the creation of new ideas and their implementation.
- **Organizational Creativity** is the creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure or process by individuals working together in a complex social system.

An important part of becoming more creative involves understanding the stages involved in **creativity** and the production of novel and useful ideas.

Step one in creativity is *opportunity or problem recognition*, in which the person discovers that a new opportunity exists or a problem needs resolution. Step two is *immersion*, in which the individual concentrates on the problem and becomes immersed in it. Step three is *incubation*, in which the person keeps the assembled information in the back of their mind for a while. Step four is *insight*, when the problem-conquering solution flashes into the mind at an unexpected time. The 'aha' moment usually arrives after hours of thought and study. Step five is *verification and application*, when the individual sets out to prove that the creative solution has merit.

Steps in the Creative Process



Source: DuBrin A J (2013) Leadership (7th Ed) South-Western Cenage Learning, Ohio, p340

Characteristics of Creative Leaders

1. Knowledge

- Knowledgeable about a wide range of information.

Creative problem solving requires a broad background of information, including facts and observations. Being creative often involves combining two or more things in a new and different way.

2. Cognitive Abilities

- Highly intelligent; Intellectually curious; Able to think divergently.

Creative problem solvers tend to be bright rather than brilliant. (Yet when the creativity centers on highly technical matters, the creative person is often brilliant.) They maintain a youthful curiosity throughout their lives, within and outside their fields. Creative people are good at divergent thinking but also know when to narrow the choices. Creative business persons are good at spotting opportunities others might overlook. Creativity in business requires a blend of left-brain and right-brain thinking.

3. Personality

- Nonconformist; Self-confident; Thrill-seeking; Energetic; Persistent.

Creative people tend to have a positive self-image without being blindly self-confident. They also have the ability to tolerate the isolation necessary for developing ideas. Creative people are frequently nonconformists, not needing strong group approval. Nonconformity can also mean being a maverick. Creative people are also intellectual thrill seekers, they are persistent and they enjoy dealing with ambiguity and chaos. Creative people also tend to have an internal locus of control.

4. Passion for the task and the experience of flow

- Passion for their work, or high intrinsic motivation.

Creative people have a passion for the task and high intrinsic motivation that contribute to a total absorption in the work and intense concentration, the **experience of flow**.

Certain personal characteristics may facilitate a leader being creative, but the right environment is necessary to trigger creative behaviour.

Overcoming Traditional Thinking as a Creative Strategy

Creative problem solving requires an ability to overcome traditional thinking. Traditional thinking generally refers to a standard and frequent way of finding a solution to a problem. The creative person often looks at problems in a new light and transcends conventional thinking about them. The central task in becoming creative is to break down rigid thinking that blocks new ideas. The process of overcoming traditional thinking has been characterized in several ways. The most familiar is that a *creative person thinks outside the box*. A caution about thinking outside the box is that workers still need some constraints as to how far outside the box they are permitted to think. Group members need to know just how far they can venture from routine thinking otherwise they quickly become overwhelmed by the unlimited scope of the task. An effective leader establishes parameters even for their creative thinkers.

Organizational Methods to Enhance Creativity

The following lists several creativity-enhancing methods, including brainstorming, which enhance leadership effectiveness. The leader plays a dual role in implementing creative problem-solving techniques, facilitating group interaction and providing a fair share of creative output.

- *Systematically Collecting Fresh Ideas*: Employees furnish ideas into a company database
- *Brainstorming*: Generate Quantity – Avoid Criticism – Combine and Improve on Previous Ideas
- *Using the Pet-Peeve Technique*: Identifying all potential complaints from anyone who interacts with the group - Value comes from helping the group improve its work processes
- *Equipping a Kitchen for the Mind*: Allocating and stocking a specific space designed to nurture creativity – “a creativity room”
- *Morality of Enhancing Creativity*: Imagine all the possible misuses of an innovation and then take steps to limit the damage from the misuses.

Self-Help Techniques to Enhance Creative Problem

All creative problem-solving techniques aim to increase mental flexibility. The six strategies and techniques reported here supplement the organizational programs described previously. *Practicing Creativity-Enhancing Exercises* establishes that a way of sharpening creative thinking is to engage regularly in activities that encourage flexible thinking. Among such activities are creative photography, puzzles, joke writing and learning a second language. *Staying Alert to Opportunities* refers to the ability to spot opportunities that other people overlook that characterizes creative leaders. Opportunity seeking is associated with entrepreneurial leadership because the entrepreneur might build an organization around an unmet consumer need.

Maintaining an Enthusiastic Attitude Including Being Happy strongly suggests that creative thinking calls for a positive attitude. Yet a leader must sometimes be judicial (or judgmental) rather than imaginative. The leader is advised to attempt to think positively even about judicial tasks. Being in the right mood facilitates creativity. An analysis of diaries showed that workers are more likely to have a breakthrough idea if they were happy the day before.

Maintaining and Using a Systematic Place for Recording Your Ideas is when creative ideas can lead to breakthroughs for your group and your career, so they deserve the dignity of a separate notebook, computer file or entry on your personal digital assistant. Sending the idea to oneself by e-mail can also be effective. It is recommended to keep two copies of the ideas, one at home and one in the office.

Playing the Roles of Explorer, Artist, Judge and Lawyer opens the leader up to be an *explorer* by getting ideas from people in different fields. Be an *artist* by stretching your imagination, which includes asking what-if questions. Be a *judge* by critically evaluating ideas. Play the role of a *lawyer* by negotiating and finding ways to implement your ideas within your field or place of work.

Engage in Appropriate Physical Exercise is a well-accepted method of stimulating creativity. The surfacing of creative thoughts while exercising relates to the steps of immersion and incubation. Also, physical exercise pumps more blood and oxygen into the brain.

Establishing a Climate and Culture for the Creative

In addition to being a creative individual, a leader must establish a climate conducive to creative problem solving. A foundation step for fostering organizational creativity is to establish a vision and mission that includes creativity.

Leadership Practices for Enhancing Creativity

Nine leadership and managerial practices are particularly helpful in fostering creative thinking.

1. *Hiring creative people from the outside and identifying creative people from within.* If you want an innovative environment, hire innovative people. .
2. *Intellectual challenge.* Stretch people intellectually without overwhelming them. Moderate time pressures can sometimes bring about the right amount of challenge.
3. *Empowerment Including the Freedom to choose the method.* An empowering style of leadership facilitates worker creativity. Workers tend to be more creative when they are granted the freedom to choose which method is best for attaining a work goal.
4. *Ample supply of the right resources.* Time and money are the most important resources for enhancing creativity. Under some circumstances, setting a time deadline will trigger creative thinking because it represents a favorable challenge.
5. *Effective design of work groups.* Work groups are most likely to be creative when they are mutually supportive and when they have a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives.
6. *Supervisory encouragement and linking innovation to performance.* Developing a permissive atmosphere that encourages people to think freely is the most important step for bringing about creative problem solving. Supervisory leaders should promote the idea that innovative thinking improves performance.
7. *Organizational support.* The entire organization, as well as the immediate manager, should support creativity, including a reward system with recognition and financial incentives.
8. *Have favorable exchanges with creative workers.*
9. *Give financial rewards for innovation.* Creativity is self-rewarding to some extent because it is so exciting. Nevertheless, financial rewards for contributions to innovation help sustain a climate of innovation. Financial rewards for creativity are widespread in industry and universities.

Methods of Managing Creative Workers

Choosing effective methods for managing creative workers is also important. As is establishing a climate and culture for creative thinking. Suggestions are as follows:

- Give creative people tools and resources that allow their work to stand out.
- Give creative people flexibility and a minimum amount of structure.
- Give gentle feedback when turning down an idea.
- Employ creative people to manage and evaluate creative workers.

Additional Leadership Practices That Enhance Innovation

All leadership and management practices that enhance creative problem solving enhance innovation. Consider also the following:

- Emphasize transformational leadership if possible.
- Continually pursue innovation.
- Take risks and encourage risk taking.
- Emphasize collaboration among employees.
- Avoid innovation for its own sake.
- Use loose-tight leadership.
- Integrate development and production.
- Recognize the hidden opportunities when products and ideas flop.

Summary

Establishing a climate conducive to creative problem solving is a requirement of effective leadership as is having the right characteristics which improves the chances of a person being a creative problem solver and a creative leader. Importantly, creativity requires overcoming traditional thinking and can be enhanced by systematically collecting fresh ideas and brainstorming. A simple yet effective creative process involves five steps: opportunity or problem recognition, immersion, incubation, insight and verification and application.