CREATIVITY AND MOTIVATION: DOES LEADERSHIP STYLE MATTER?

Veena P. Prabhu
California State University Los Angeles
5151 State University Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90032
vprabhu@calstatela.edu

ABSTRACT

Given the fierce competition in today’s world the importance of creativity, which touches every field can hardly be overemphasized. Research has found that transformational leadership has a positive relationship with intrinsic motivation. Analysis of the definition of transactional leadership and extrinsic motivation suggests a positive relationship between the two constructs. This paper proposes that depending on the type of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic or both) exhibited by an employee, a supervisor can increase the employee’s creativity by using an appropriate leadership style. Additionally the effect of socialized and personalized charismatic leadership on creativity via intrinsic motivation is discussed. Finally a few research questions are suggested pertaining to the relationship between creativity, leadership style and motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Creativity is indispensable for progress in any given field. Imagine life without novelty and originality which form the basis of creativity (Amabile, 1983). The words of Simonton (2000) seem quite appropriate:

The only way to escape this phenomenon (creativity) is to walk stark naked deep within some primeval forest, and even then a person must take care not to hum a single tune, not to recall even one line of poetry, or not even to look up into the sky for fear of seeing some jet or its contrail. (p. 151)

From the time of Galton (1883), psychology has evidenced an abiding interest in the creative act. Creative contribution is not only useful to the organization but also the individual as the ability to come up with novel ideas should help him or her to stand out from the crowd (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).

Creativity represents a highly complex and diffuse construct (Sternberg, 1985) and hence lacks a sound general definition (Mumford & Gusafson, 1988). Researchers have defined creativity in terms of production of ideas (Guilford, 1950, 1967; Kris, 1952); recognition of possibilities (Tyler, 1978); an attribute of personality (Mackinnon, 1962) and a form of problem-solving ability (Cattell, 1971). However, over the years the only consensus among several researchers is that creativity should be defined in terms of its characteristics rather than in terms of processes. (Amabile, 1983; Ghiselin, 1963; Harmon, 1963).

Past research has found that the two important characteristics of creativity are novelty and usefulness (Stein, 1974; Lubart, 1994; Ochse, 1990; Sternberg & Lubart, 1991). For this paper
creativity is, therefore, defined as the production of novel, appropriate ideas in any given field, from science, to everyday life. The ideas must be unique, original and unexpected—different from what’s been done before--must be appropriate, have merit, quality and significance to the problem or opportunity presented (Stein, 1974; Amabile, 1997).

For years researchers have studied and found that motivation plays an important role in creativity (Amabile, 1983; Golann, 1963; Nicholls, 1972). Leaders are also an important facet of the work context for creativity (e.g., Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987). It has been asserted that "leadership is employed to give people the opportunity and challenge of innovation and change…” (Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1992, p.228)

Leader expression of enthusiasm or acceptance for innovation is one of the noted factors necessary for employee's motivation to be creative (Amabile, 1988; Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996). There have been innumerable studies researching the effect of leadership (Howell & Avolio, 1993; Redmond, Mumford, Michael, & Teach, 1993) and motivation (Hennessey & Amabile, 1988; Amabile 1990) on creativity. However, few studies have researched the combined effect of both leadership and motivation on creativity. The purpose of this paper is to bridge this gap in literature by studying the role of leadership and motivation on creativity. First, leadership styles and types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) are discussed followed by certain propositions illustrated by a model (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proposed Model—Effect of Supervisor’s Leadership Style and Employee’s Motivation on the Employee’s Creativity.
LEADERSHIP STYLES AND MOTIVATION

Burns (1978) who was the first to introduce the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership vividly describes the difference between the two:

I will identify two basic types of leadership: the transactional and the transforming. The relations of most leaders and followers are transactional—leaders approach followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another: jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions. Such transactions comprise the bulk of the relationships among leaders and followers, especially in groups, legislatures, and parties. Transforming leadership, while more complex, is more potent. The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (p.4)

For more than two decades now research in these two types of leadership has increased immensely (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass, 1985; Bass, 1999; Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

In their review article, Ambrose and Kulik (1999) state that, “individual-level creativity is closely linked to the motivational process and research on creativity has either implicitly or explicitly used motivation as an invisible, internal, hypothetical construct directing employee behavior” (p. 266). Deci (1971) suggested that there are two motivational subsystems: an extrinsic subsystem and intrinsic subsystem. Intrinsic motivation is driven by deep interest and involvement in the work, by curiosity, enjoyment, or a personal sense of challenge while extrinsic motivation is driven by the desire to attain some goal that is apart from the work itself—such as achieving a promised reward or meeting a deadline or winning a competition (Amabile, 1997).

Although Crutchfield (1962) admits the possibility of each type of motivation yielding creative activity several researchers considered intrinsic motivation to be more effective than extrinsic motivation with respect to the creativity of the individual (Amabile, 1983, 1990; Deci, 1975; Hennessey & Amabile, 1988). Some even claimed that under certain conditions extrinsic motivation may have a negative impact on intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971).

The words of Nickerson (1999) seem appropriate while attempting to understand the effect of extrinsic motivation on creativity, “The question of exactly how external motivators should be used is a continuing challenge for research. I know of no one who claims they should never be used... I want to argue that, used with discretion; external motivators (enticements, recognition, rewards) can be effective in evoking and maintaining creative behavior.” (p. 413). Reward, an extrinsic motivator, was found to have a positive relationship with creativity (Eisenberger & Rhoades, 2001). Eisenberger and Rhoades (2001) carried out several studies to empirically test the incremental effects of reward on creativity and found that extrinsic motivation increased creativity when the reward was specifically contingent on creativity.
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Bass (1985) proposed a more detailed definition for transformational leadership. He defined it in terms of the leader’s effect on followers (i.e. such leaders transform followers by making them more aware of the importance and values of task outcomes, by activating their higher-order needs, and by inducing them to transcend self-interest for the sake of the organization). As a result of this influence, followers feel trust and respect toward the leader; and they are motivated to do more than they were originally expected to do.

Leader behavior influences follower creativity (Redmond, et al, 1993). Past research has found that transformational leaders motivate followers to perform at higher levels, to exert greater effort, and to show more commitment than other types of leadership styles (e.g. Bass & Avolio, 1990; Yammarino & Bass 1990). Transformational leaders are claimed to motivate their people on the basis of values such as justice and equality (Burns, 1978).

In order to examine transformational leadership Bass (1985) developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). In a later version of the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1996), which consisted of fours factors, two factors are relevant to this study: inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. Inspirational motivation refers to the ways by which transformational leaders motivate and inspire those around them, mostly by providing meaning and challenge. Specifically, they do so by displaying enthusiasm and optimism, by involving the followers in envisioning attractive future states, by communicating high expectations, and by demonstrating commitment to the shared goals. Intellectual stimulation, on the other hand represents the leader's effort to stimulate the followers to be innovative and creative as well as the leader's effort to encourage followers to question assumptions or to reframe problems and approach them in new ways.

These two factors along with the definition of intrinsic motivation suggest that transformational leadership is positively related to intrinsic motivation which as seen earlier enhances creativity. This leads us to the following proposition (See Figure 1).

**Proposition 1**: Creativity of employees, who report higher levels of intrinsic motivation, will increase with a supervisor’s use of transformational leadership.

Employees with high intrinsic motivation need task challenge, meaningful work, and freedom from external constraints in order to capitalize on their creative potential (Amabile, 1988). As mentioned before inspirational motivation, one of the factors associated with transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1996), refers to the ways by which transformational leaders motivate and inspire those around them, mostly by providing meaning and challenge. The above discussion suggests that (a) transformational leadership is positively related to follower creativity via intrinsic motivation and (b) intrinsic motivation is positively related to creativity. Thus the relationship between creativity, transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation leads us to the following research question:

**Research Question 1**: Does intrinsic motivation mediate (partially or completely) the relationship between transformational leadership and creativity?
TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Some researchers have long recognized that creativity can be externally motivated (Lubart & Sternberg, 1995; Ochse, 1990; Osborn, 1963; Torrance, 1965). The use of rewards to promote creativity has been advocated for business (Farr & Ford, 1990). Additionally, research in business organizations has uncovered several extrinsic motivators operating as supports to creativity: reward and recognition for creative ideas, clearly defined overall project goals, and frequent constructive feedback on the work (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987; Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1989). In a number of studies that have shown positive effects of reward on various aspects of creativity, participants were told how to succeed or “be creative” on a particular type of task and were rewarded for increasing these behaviors (e.g., Eisenberger & Selbst, 1994; Amabile, 1996). This suggests that in addition to rewarding, providing information about how to get the work done aids extrinsic motivation which can be achieved by the use of transactional style of leadership.

Transactional leadership includes not only the use of incentives to influence effort, but also clarification of the work needed to obtain rewards (Bass, 1985). Bass finds that transactional leaders have a cost-benefit orientation towards leadership whereby they concentrate on rewarding effort appropriately and ensuring that behavior conforms to expectations (Bass, 1994). A growing body of work has begun to report the benefits of extrinsic motivation for even heuristic tasks (Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986). In the workplace, evaluation or feedback that is informative or constructive or that which recognizes creative accomplishment can also be considered conducive to creativity (Amabile et al., 1996; Amabile & N. Gryskiewicz, 1989; Amabile & S.Gryskiewicz, 1987). Transactional leaders exert influence by setting goals, clarifying desired outcomes, providing feedback, and exchanging rewards and recognition for accomplishments (Bass, 1985).

The above discussion suggests that transactional style leadership should be used when an individual is extrinsically motivated in order to increase his or her creativity (See Figure 1).

Proposition 2: Creativity of employees who report higher levels of extrinsic motivation will increase with a supervisor’s use transactional leadership.

Oldham and Cummings (1996) report that leader style interacts with a follower’s personality to predict creativity. For example: a supervisor showing transactional style of leadership interacts with an employee who exhibits extrinsic motivation and thereby affects creativity. Gibson, Fiedler, and Barrett, (1993) found that leader traits affect employee’s creativity. This suggests that certain traits of a transactional leader will affect an employee’s creativity. The relationship between transactional and extrinsic motivation leads to the following research question.

Research Question 2: Does extrinsic motivation mediate (partially or completely) the relation between transactional leadership and creativity?

BOTH FORMS OF LEADERSHIP AND MOTIVATION
The proposed model (see Figure 1) revolves around three main parameters, creativity, motivation, and leadership. An employee may be extrinsically motivated or intrinsically motivated or he or she may exhibit both forms of motivation. There is considerable evidence from field research that, under certain conditions, some forms of extrinsic motivation may combine synergistically with intrinsic motivation, enhancing (or at least not undermining) the positive effects of intrinsic motivation on creativity (Amabile, 1993). Some creativity theorists have suggested that some types of extrinsic motivation may coexist with intrinsic motives in the creative person (Rubenson & Runco, 1992; Sternberg, 1988).

A supervisor may show either transformational leadership or transactional leadership or even both. Transformational and transactional leadership are distinct but not mutually exclusive processes and the same leader may use both types of process at different types and in different situations (Bass, 1985). Bass (1985) further argued that the best leaders are both transformational and transactional.

Mansfield and Busse’s (1981) model of scientific creativity recognized that different motives act on different parts of the creative process. They proposed that problem selection is influenced by the creator’s intrinsic need to be original as well as the creator’s extrinsic desire to attain professional recognition. In particularly, highly creative individuals, particularly scientists, are thought to have a strong desire for recognition that coexists with their deep intrinsic commitment to their work (Mansfield & Busse, 1981). In such cases where an individual demonstrates both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation using both transformational and transactional leadership will help in increasing the creativity of the individual.

Proposition 3: Creativity of employees who report high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will increase when a supervisor uses both transformational and transactional style of leadership.

DISCUSSION

In the 1950 American Psychological Association Presidential Address, Guilford (1950) challenged psychologists to do more research in the then neglected field of creativity. Even after decades Wehner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Magyari-Beck (1991) used a fable of the blind men and the elephant to describe the situation in creativity research: “We touch different parts of the same beast and derive distorted pictures of the whole from what we know: ‘The elephant is like a snake,’ says the one the holds his tail; ‘The elephant is like a wall,’ says the one who touches his flanks” (p.270) The present research may not have framed the entire elephant but surely managed more than one part of the animal as the paper researched the effect of leadership style and motivation on creativity—very few researchers have studied the combined effect of leadership and motivation on creativity (e.g. Shin & Zhou, 2003). Even if employees have the ability to be creative at work, they may not necessarily be inclined to do so. Supervisors must nurture their employees’ creative motivation thereby helping them to make the best use of their ability.

The propositions made in this study stems from the fact that there are interactive effects between leaders and follower as stated by Tierney, Farmer and Graen (1999). Leader style interacts with
follower personality to predict creativity (Oldham & Cummings, 1996) and leader traits affect follower’s creativity (Gibson, Fiedler, & Barrett, 1993). Based on definitions and past literature, the present study proposed that a supervisor can achieve an increase in the employee’s creativity by using an appropriate style of leadership—transformational or transactional or both depending on the type of motivation—intrinsic or extrinsic or both exhibited by the employee.

Nickerson (1999) stated that “a clear, unequivocal, and incontestable answer to the question of how creativity can be enhanced is not to be found in the psychological literature.” This paper has taken one small step towards answering that question—use of an appropriate leadership style on the part of the supervisor given the type of motivation exhibited by the employee, will result in increasing the employee’s creativity.

The propositions of this study along with the research questions posed can be empirically validated in future research. The present study has both theoretical and practical implications as the present paper adds to the literature in three fields of research creativity, leadership and motivation. The concepts described in this study can be helpful to managers especially as it suggests some ways of nurturing creativity in their employees.

References upon request.