
**Creative Workplace: A support for creativity
Case of a Pakistani Private Sector University**

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Abstract

The paper aims at working environment conducive to creativity in universities of Pakistan. Using interviews for data collection, this paper qualitatively finds the impact of organizational encouragement, supervisory support, freedom, resource allocation, time pressure and team work on creative work place that ultimately enhance the creativity of the employees and the performance of the organization. Limitations and suggestions for future research are presented at the end.

Key Words: Creativity, Organizational Encouragement, Supervisory Support, Freedom, Resource Allocation, Time Pressure and Team Work.

Due to globalization and today's dynamic development in technology drives change as an important component of education. At this time, when international borders are open and everyone has information and access to resources from around the world, every nation is able to measure its capabilities and its contribution into world's resources, culture and experience. For the purpose to compete these challenges, every nation needs a high level of competencies in every field of life (Slahova, Savvina, Cacka, & Volonte, 2007).

Innovation has now taken its place as basic determining factor for organizations' existence and to remain competitive in the market. It is, therefore, very important for the organizations to

make analysis of factors and management procedures to make them conducive to promote innovative activities in the organizations.

According to Higher Education Commission report 2002-08, Education sector in Pakistan is growing rapidly since 2002 when Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan came into the existence with an aim to evaluate, improve and promote higher education research and development. Right after its establishment, HEC starts imposing extra ordinary efforts for the improvement and quality of the higher education. The vision of HEC is;

“Transformation of our institutions of higher education into world class seats of learning, equipped to foster high quality education, scholarship and research, to produce enlightened citizens with strong moral and ethical values that build a tolerant and pluralistic society rooted in the culture of Pakistan” (HEC, 2010).

As a result universities’ operating in Pakistan strives for the better ranking/survival and focusing on quality and development of their students as well as on their faculties to meet today’s challenges. Universities in Pakistan are now focusing more on the research and development so that their students may compete on international level. For the purpose, under the instructions of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, universities are facilitating and encouraging their faculties and students for creative research work in different areas.

The culture and work conditions in Pakistan are totally different than other developed countries. There is need to understand different measures to enhance creativity in Pakistani universities. In their study to explore the affect relates to creativity at work, Amabile, Barsade, Mueller and Staw 2005 suggested that the concept of creativity relationship is still at the early stages of the development. Moreover in Pakistan, innovative/creative

workplace in universities has not yet been studied in depth to date. The present study focuses on the creative workplace environment and its support for creative output in private sector universities of Pakistan.

Literature Review

The word “creativity” originates from Latin language that means to beget, to form and to create (Slahova *et al*, 2007). Creativity has received numerous definitions in the literature but the most commonly accepted one defines creativity as some useful novelty that can be applied and can add value to the organizations’ products or services (Oldham and cummings, 1996). Creativity includes alternatives, possibilities and generation of new ideas (Smith, 1998), new directions of work, different point of views, unique approaches, breaking from traditional patterns and contributing something new into their areas of specialization. These definitions explore that it is still difficult to measure creativity because of its subjectivity.

It is very difficult and complex process/task to understand creativity. As creativity is considered as human process therefore it may not be studied scientifically or captured in a single theory.

Creative behavior in today’s organizations is the foundation of their high achievements. According to Amabile (1983), creativity is a subjective assessment for a product’s novelty and value. She also suggested that to facilitate future organizational creativity research, it is better to define creativity with respect to creative actions and outcomes as it has conceptual and methodological advantages. On the other hand, Ford (2000) also defined creativity as a person’s psychological engagement into the creative activities. Supporters of this school of thought argue that the creative acts should be defined in context of social and historical situations. Further they suggest that it is pointless to

define people or process as creative because such definitions ultimately need to make references of creative acts.

Corpley (1999) suggested that to be recognizing as creative, a product must be original and purposeful. If something/outcome is original but serves no purpose is useless also if something may be purposive but has no originality is of no use. A creative out put should fulfill both the conditions of originality and purposive.

Most of the previous literature put its primary focus on psychological characteristics of a creative person (Hunter *et al.*, 2005). There is a long debate in literature about the creativity like some researchers argue it as personal trait while the other school of thought support the environmental factors as the base of creativity. Everyone has tendency/potential to do the creative work and innovative ideas may come from anywhere in an organization (Amabile *et al.*, 1996) and but there are certain/proper conditions required for creativity to be expressed (Peterson, 2004). That makes the study of what influence employees' creative behavior in an organization fundamental.

Creative workplaces are the spaces and places that supports for peoples working on their creative ideas and work (Martens, 2011). Sun, Zhao and Chen (2011) suggested that creative workplace can help people/employees to get better understanding of their job, to use their creativity/innovative abilities and problem solving skills to produce creative work. According to Shalley and Gilson (2004) organizations' climate for innovation is a productive indication for its development and or improvement efforts. According to Chiou (2002), creative workplace influence creative performance of the teachers at their campus. Hence creative climate is an important factor for understanding of organizational performance (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2007).

To be successful in development of employees, it is important to establish supportive organizational environment. In organizations where employees perceive creative climate, they are more likely engage in a higher level motivation in their work that positively impact their perceptions about organizational innovation that ultimately enhance creativity in the organization (Ekvall and Ryhammar, 1999). Glover (1980), suggested for creativity, its originality and purpose are two prime conditions that must have to be satisfied.

It is essential to understand how to create an organizations' environment so that it may simulate and encourage creativity. Organizations providing a supportive climate shows tendency to get greater benefits from innately creative employees (Lale and Arzu, 2009; Lapierre and Giroux, 2003). Innovative climate is describes how dynamic organizations encourage employees to be creative with the use of correct tools, methods and provision of appropriate resources (Shalley and Gilson, 2004).

There are different points of views in literature for converting an organizations' environment into the creative environment. Research emphasize on Managers who can play significant role in the development/progress of the organization. They can influence creativity on their work place by instilling strong values, beliefs and assumptions (Meyers, 1982), free exchange of information, open questioning, diversity of opinions and challenging of assumptions (Nonoka, 1991) guiding careers, providing challenging jobs/tasks/assignments and maintain group diversity (Roberts, 1997). Within organizational policies, practices and managerial behaviors, job design and human resource policies plays important role in employees' creativity (Judith H. Heerwagen).

Sun, Zhao and chen (2011) measure creative environment on the basis of working environmental support, innovative vision,

leader support, team support, resources supply, learning and growth and knowledge and skills.

The most widely cited models in studies of organizations are the Amabile's model for organizational creativity. Amabile (1996) assessed and measure climate for creativity with the help of following parameters were reported as the dimensions that stimulated creativity at the workplace; organizational encouragement, supervisory encouragement, work group support, freedom and autonomy, resources, challenging work, pressure and organizational impediments. Technology available to employees can aid the ability to switch perspective (Schrage, 1995).

Methodology

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that qualitative data can supplement, explain, reinterpret or can validate quantitative data. Fink (1998), suggest that the qualitative studies tend to be more valuable and are useful for understanding the activities of organizations also qualitative approach explores the context more precisely (Langley, 1999; Pettigrew, 1997; Yin, 1994). There are some quantitative studies which explore the effects of creative environment but no one used qualitative methodology. In this study we used Amabile's model for assessing the effect of creative workplace on employees/subordinates of a private sector university in Pakistan by using qualitative techniques.

We selected a private sector university in Islamabad as our sample. We selected this particular university as our sample because;

1. We can get access to our target informants conveniently.
2. The subject university is one of the renowned chartered universities among the private sector universities in Pakistan and is growing rapidly.

3. Every chartered university operating under the guidelines of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan which focus on the change and innovation in Pakistani higher education sector. That is the reason every university strives for innovation and changes its conventional practices to improve the quality of education.

The university started a welfare project in an orphanage. The purpose of this project was two folded. In one way they are helping people by educating and providing them necessary equipments and medical care while on the other hand they are trying to develop different professional skills like management, leadership and personality of their students by their mandatory practical involvement in the project. At the end of each semester they assess changes in the students' attitude with the help of a number of assignments and examination. Due to above mention reasons we believed that this university fulfills our study requirements.

Data Collection

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the right informants. The study used grounded theory approach for collection, analyzing and interpreting the qualitative data. Grounded theory was used as it is suitable for the study of behaviors having element of interaction (Goulding, 2005).

Our data set consisted of four interviews and their follow ups from the selected university. Respondents/informants were two deans of the faculties and two faculty members with a focus on how to bring creativity in the organization and to cope with the challenges/hurdles. All the four interviews were carried out within a week time at the offices of the informants and lasted between 20 and 80 minutes. At the completion of interviewing process, the names of all participants were replaced with their pseudonyms before the coding process.

Data Analysis

To validate our research we used investigator triangulation by using three researchers for coding of data. All the interviews were audio taped, transcribed and read over by the two researchers independently to find the different themes. After completion of individual coding process all the three researchers get together and discussed their findings which were almost identical and finalized their identified themes. After being agreed on the findings interpretive analysis was performed on data in order to get the rich details and outcomes of the themes. At the end themes derived from the data were connected and endowed by prior research.

Table 1

Conceptual Definitions

Conceptual definitions of the themes	
Supervisory Support	Encouragement and support of the boss at the work place
Team Work	Helping, sharing and discussing creative ideas with group members
Organizational Encouragement	Organizations' encouragement and support for creative ideas at the work place
Freedom	Liberty or having of one's' own to go about accomplishing the project or task
Resource Allocation	Provision of sufficient resources to accomplish some project or task
Time Pressure	Tight deadlines for completion of a project or task

Results

After careful scrutiny we extract six themes (Supervisory Support, Team Work, Organizational Encouragement, Freedom, Resources and Work Pressure) from the collected data.

Supervisory Support

All participants talked about the encouraging role of their bosses for their motivation to bring and present creative ideas.

Their feedback showed that their bosses motivate them by highly encouraging their ideas. Moreover even if they present idea in raw form their bosses, looking at the feasibility/importance, give suggestions and make necessary changes that enhance its usability. For example Sajjad reported that whenever he go to his boss he come up with some new idea that may be beneficial for students, university or his personal development. Bashir expressed his feelings that he enjoys very friendly relations with his boss as he considers his boss is as a source of motivation. Shabbir expressed his feelings for his bosses:

I report to vice chancellor and he reports to pro chancellor. Both of them are supportive to not only to this project but all of the creative and innovative ideas we have in the past few years..... all ideas were put forward and been getting lots of support from the higher management which includes vice chancellor and pro chancellor.

Khalid said that he reports to vice chancellor and he is a gentleman. His Vice Chancellor is a world renowned scholar and whenever he has time we discuss different administrative and various topics of interest to improve the quality of education and our university.

Team Work

All the participants gave positive remarks about the team work in the university. Faculty members get together in their rooms or in faculty meetings and share and discuss their ideas in groups. Different faculty members are engaged in different projects but when needed they help each other. While expressing his feelings, Sajjad described the role of his colleagues and their supportive roles that whenever he needs their help they tell him how to tackle different problems and in his absence they handle his

students and their problems related to his project. According to him in this way, with the support of his colleagues, he feels confident. Bashir shared his views about team work and said that success always lies in the team work; they hold frequent meetings to discuss every issue. On the other hand deans were very satisfied with their teams. Mr. Khalid reported:

I never give impression to my juniors or my subordinates. We all are living like the family members and in this situation we are closer to each other and therefore we can discuss different problems with different topics and the topics, the things which have been taught and now this have been the new situation how they should be taught and what should be deleted and what should be increased in it. So we often sit together and talk.....teachers have mutual discussions and their interaction of ideas where you find clues and the glimpses and the rays for the research and for the creativity.

While discussing his Mr. Shabbir commented that he feels that he had been blessed with a very good team and they often discuss ideas in their faculty meetings and closed groups and as a result get lots of feedbacks and encouragement on creative ideas and as a result they had lots of success and creative ideas in action.

Organizational Encouragement

All respondents reported their experience in the organization and appreciated its role in providing them a nice creative atmosphere. While talking in the support of the university Shabbir reported:

we are very fortunate that we are working in an organization which is open to many ideas is very progressive and is supported to any creative ideas as long as we can as long as its benefits and merits are clear to both of us and the management this lots of support for development and creativity.

Khalid commented that university highly encourage creative ideas from its employees and for this purpose university acknowledge their efforts in the forms of prizes, certificates and giving them opportunities to go to abroad to present their creative work though Higher Education Commission also give funding to university employees but this university has a lot of efforts to promote and motivate its employees for such activities.

Confirming these statements Sajjad added that university also conducts different kind of personality development, professional skills and teaching skills development workshop to equip their employees to compete with other universities operating in Pakistan

Freedom

All the four respondents expressed their views about their freedom during projects and tasks assigned by the organization. Shabbir expressed his feelings about autonomy in the organization and said that they have lots of liberty and choices at their work even in the tasks that had been assigned by the university. Further he said that they have liberty to discuss and convene the higher authorities about the importance and appropriateness. Sajjad described two types of tasks one the routine jobs that were totally administrated by the university rule like Khalid mentioned as guided democracy where university has proper guidelines to perform such tasks while in the case of specific creative tasks performer has liberty to perform his task at his own but incase

Sajjad finds some problem he contacts his boss who may suggest some answers to his problem to complete his job. Bashir mentioned that he enjoys a lot of freedom at his work and the higher management fully supports his actions taken on his own. He also consults with his other team members to find the solution of the problem that make his decisions more reliable and acceptable by the organization.

Resource Allocation

In their interviews talking about the resources allocated by the university three respondents expressed their views. Khalid said that the resource allocation process is very slow in the university. Mostly their department use their own human resources (Faculty members and the students) but for financial resources they have to look for finance department where processing of approval of bills is very slow. Proceeding in the same lines Sajjad said that he learned from his past experiences and arrange finance from different resources in advance because he knew that he will get funds from university later while Shabbir justified the reasons for slow resource allocation process as follows;

Being a private university we have limited resources.....we have to fight for the resources.....creative projects have high risk factor associated to it so routine budget matters get relatively easily funded but because we always have limited resources we don't always get the sufficient resources which might be required and which is understandable for a private sector organization.

Time Pressure

All the respondents speak about the time deadlines given to them while talking about project or tasks assignment. Bashir described that they have to follow the schedule because of limited semester time. According to him, all the schedules are prepared keeping in view the availability of all the team members associated with the task. If they could not finish their assigned job well in time their next project would suffer by the shortage of time. Sajjad commented that any project that is not finished well in time is a fail project and they work hard to complete the assigned task or project. Khalid also reported that they give timeline to their employees to complete the assigned task and if they failed to give completion report, he sends a reminder to complete it well in time while Shabbir criticized the weak project management of the university and said that although time deadlines are assigned for every task or project but for highly critical tasks these time deadlines are strictly followed and sometimes due to weak project management time and cost slip through primarily.

Discussion

For assessing the work environment Amabile *et al* (1996) presented their model known as KEYS. They suggested that there are six different possible stimulants for creativity in the organization by using quantitative analysis techniques. This study employed these suggestions by using qualitative techniques in a Pakistani private sector university. Most of the data we received from our respondents confirmed the findings of the Amabile *et al* (1996).

When we approached our respondents, they were slightly hesitant when they got to know that their conversation will be recorded. They were a bit conscious while sharing their feelings and sometimes their expressions shows that they are not willing to answer specific questions and by probing we got answers of some

questions. Especially they were not willing to answer policy matters.

Consistent with the findings of Sun, Zhao and chen 2011; Amabile 1996; Nonaka, 1991 and Meyers, 1982 the results of our study confirmed the six factors that can influence the creativity in the organizations. Lin and Liu 2012 concluded that organizational encouragement, supervisory support, team support, time pressure and resources are important stimulants for creativity in the organization. Mikdashi 1999 find the significant effect of team work support and time pressure on creativity. Our study also determined the same factors including their freedom at work that also supports creativity in the organization. Williams 2001 suggested that creativity can be taught and if the organizations support their employees by using training programs creativity can be brought in. Our respondents told that their university also conducts different training programs to increase the productivity and creative skills of its employees.

Creativity is an integral part of the educational institutions because these institutions provides basis for the future generations and the progress of the country. Although higher education sector is in developing phase in Pakistan and our selected university is a young university, this study will help the Pakistani institutions and universities in other developing countries to make corrective measures at the early stage that can help their future growth. The model that derived from our data set is (see figure 1) gives the relationship of the themes with the creative environment in the organizations.

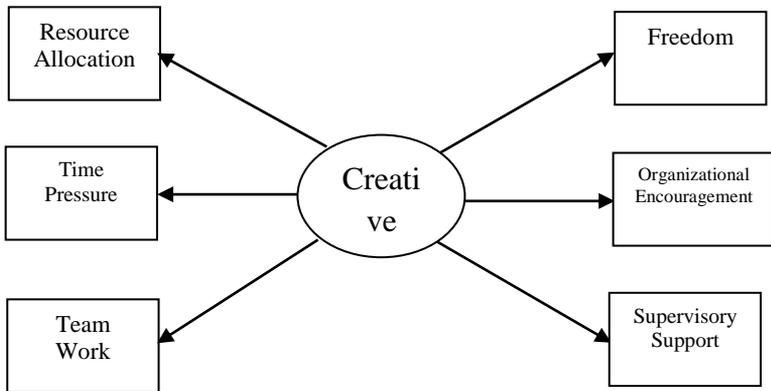


Figure 1. Research Model

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