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A Framework for Employee Creative and Innovative Behaviour Idea Journey

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Abstract

This paper aims to propose an employee idea journey that addresses the theoretical conceptual challenge between creative behaviour and innovative behaviour. An integrative literature review approach was adopted by examining past literature related to creative and innovative behaviour which revealed that the employee idea journey begins with idea exploration and idea generation to mark creative behaviour efforts. The process proceeds to idea championing and idea implementation to mark innovative behaviour efforts. The proposed idea journey model captures these components which enable leaders to correctly demarcate creative behaviours and innovative behaviours through a step-by-step approach. Future studies should observe more on the separation between creative and innovative behaviour concept and illustrate how the two are related and are impacted by leadership, individual and organisational factors.

Keywords

Idea Journey, Employee Creative Behaviour, Employee Innovative Behaviour

1. Introduction

Creative behaviour and innovative behaviour are terms that have been used interchangeably by past researchers and scholars (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Janssen, 2000; Yuan & Woodman, 2010) leading to serious conceptual challenges (Fredyan, 2017; Naqvi et al., 2017). This paper offers a framework that separates these two distinct yet related concepts to address this theoretical and empirical challenge. The separation bears similarities to the studies of Hussain and Wahab (2021), Naqvi et al. (2017), Slåtten and Mehmetoglu (2011), and Slåtten (2014) that align with the componential theory of creativity and innova-

tion (Amabile, 1988), which represented a sequence to convert a new idea into an execution method.

The first and second phases of the idea journey considered the exploration and generation of novel and executable ideas, to introduce a new process, technique, or method to an organization (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Past literature also compared creativity to the concept of innovative behaviour as broader and more systemic since it covers not only the generation of new ideas but also the promotion and implementation of ideas thereof (Dixon & Pusparini, 2020; Ye et al. 2022). However, Slåtten and Mehmetoglu (2011) included creativity as a sub-set of innovative behaviour. This contradicts Scott and Bruce's (1994) assertion that innovative behaviour is the execution of creative ideas and the implementation of a solution to a problem at the job or organizational level. Furthermore, Slåtten (2014) also argued that creative engagement and its nature are more essential to input to the application of novel ideas on the job.

Yet, researchers remain unclear on the difference between creative and innovative behaviour. The two are related and their uniqueness is important to note so that it is measured correctly. The definitions of creative and innovative behaviour are clear in that creative behaviour is idea generation and innovative behaviour is idea implementation (Cheng et al., 2019) and therefore, the two concepts should be differentiated empirically. However, several studies treated innovative behaviour and creative behaviour alike when building hypotheses (Kao et al., 2015).

One important tenet of this paper is the idea journey framework that separates creative behaviour dimensions and innovative creative dimensions after the literature review findings above. The paper goes further to show the idea journey path which starts with idea exploration where ideas are conceptualised and end with idea implementation where ideas are turned into innovations. Whilst creativity and innovation researchers have acknowledged the existence of idea exploration, generation, championing and implementation, the separation and conceptualisation have not been clear.

The framework is explicit to show that to harness creative behaviour, idea exploration and idea generation are a facet of creative behaviour and idea championing is a facet of innovative behaviour. The idea journey framework thus helps to conceptualise creative behaviour as a separate construct from innovative behaviour. However, the framework shows that creative behaviour and innovative behaviour work hand in hand.

The next sections present the method, the framework and subsequently outline the step-by-step continuum useful for practice and implementation, as supported in the literature.

2. Method

An integrative literature review approach was adopted with the aim to assess, critique and synthesize the literature on creative behaviour and innovative beha-

viour in a way that enabled a new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge (Snyder, 2019). The purpose of the integrative process was to overview the knowledge base, to critically review and potentially re-conceptualise, and to expand on the theoretical foundation of the creative and innovative behaviour concept. Instead of reviewing all past articles that cover innovative behaviour and creative behaviour concept, articles were specifically selected that has perspectives and insights that come from different research viewpoints.

The key search word method was used to search for relevant articles using English keywords such as "employee creative behaviour", "employee innovative behaviour", "innovation", "creativity", "idea exploration", "idea championing", "idea generation", and "idea implementation". The keywords were used in both title and abstract in selecting most relevant and appropriate articles.

The search was conducted from academic and management databases such as Web of Science, PubMed, IEEE Xplore, Sciencedirect, Emerald, and JSTOR. These databases were used as supplementary publishers with peer reviewed articles. 105 articles were initially selected, and these were trimmed to 63 articles that dealt with the concepts under review in depth quantitatively and excluded the purely qualitative papers. The literature search was done over a period of five months.

3. Creative and Innovative Behaviour Idea Journey Framework

Figure 1 depicts the separate and combined dimensions of the idea journey within an employee's creative and innovative behaviour.
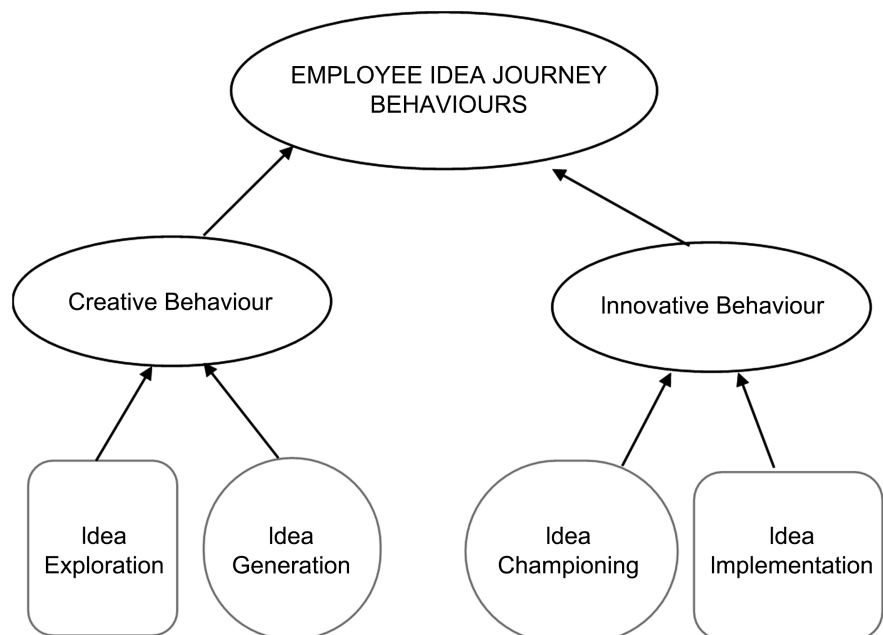

Figure 1. The creative and innovative idea journey framework. Source: Researcher's compilation.

The framework in **Figure 1** assists in unmasking the idea phases an individual goes through when behaving creatively and innovatively. The conceptual challenge is invariably eliminated with a clear separation of the creative and innovative behaviour constructs. However, this is in the background of past studies which tested leadership style relationships using a single-scale construct of innovative behaviour (Choi et al., 2021; Janssen, 2000; Ramamoorthy et al., 2005), two dimensions of innovative behaviour (Hammond et al., 2011; Shin, Lee, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2019; Yeoh et al., 2013; Scott & Bruce, 1994) three dimensions of innovative behavior (Amir, 2015; Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007; Janssen, 2003; Kleysen & Street, 2001; Odoardi et al., 2019; Vandavasi et al., 2020), four dimensions of innovative behaviour (Bos-Henles et al., 2017; Gkontelos et al., 2022; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010).

The creative behaviour construct is measured by idea exploration and idea generation and innovative behaviour is measured by idea championing and idea implementation. This unmasking makes visible creative and innovative behaviour dimensions. In this way, the sub-factors can be examined separately to gain more understanding of each factor and evoke the necessary management interventions. Past studies of Atitumpong and Badir (2018), De Spiegelaere et al. (2014) and Niesen et al. (2018). Lukes and Stephan (2017) used these four dimensions but did not validate the variable. The framework thus reveals four measurable and validated idea journey measurable constructs which is a departure from past measurements of innovative behaviour using directly immeasurable multidimensional latent variables (Wyrwa, 2020). A study by Lin and Lee (2017) also validated the four-idea journey scales. However, studies by Steyn and de Bruin in 2019 (Steyn & de Bruin, 2019) failed to substantiate the existence of four dimensions within the Employee Innovative behaviour scale by De Jong and Den Hartog in 2010.

Therefore, this framework proposes a four dimensional idea journey that captures innovative behaviour and creative behaviour De Jong and De Hartog in 2010. This framework shows a departure from the past conceptual models and measurements with different dimensions as highlighted above in past studies. The model effectively unmasks creative behaviour which comprise of idea exploration and idea generation, and unmask innovative behaviour which comprises of idea exploration and idea implementation. The framework also shows that the creative behaviour and innovative behaviour combine to form idea journey of an individual.

4. Steps of an Employee's Creative and Innovative Behaviour's Idea Journey

The following steps are essential in practice to ensure a systematic process exists to facilitate and stimulate creative and innovative behaviours.

4.1. Creative Behaviour Steps

Creative behaviour comprises the following critical steps:

4.1.1. Idea Exploration Phase

The realization of something new begins with a person identifying new opportunities (Chen & Hou, 2016). The start of a creative process is often determined by chance—the discovery of an opportunity, a problem arising or a puzzle that needs to be solved (Mainemelis et al., 2015). Such a trigger may be a chance to improve conditions or a threat requiring an immediate response. An opportunity is often a serendipitous event and intentionally discovering such events may seem a logical impossibility (Anderson et al., 2014). However, some people do appear to be consistently "lucky", implying that their exploration behaviour is different (Dhanpat et al., 2018). Opportunity exploration includes looking for ways to improve current services or delivery processes or trying to think about work processes, products or services in alternative ways (O'Reilly & Binns, 2019). Therefore, leaders and managers in organisations must be wary of their employees to discover something new and solve problems, improve conditions and deal with threats.

4.1.2. Idea Generation Phase

The generation of new, applicable, and potentially useful ideas that address identified opportunities for creative behaviour is referred to as idea generation (Messmann & Mulder, 2014). This behaviour necessitates the individual's ability to see problems and critically examine them in search of newer solutions or to scan existing processes for improvements.

Additionally, idea generation is understood to be a creative behaviour element that forms a first step in the exploitation of opportunities (Lacerda, 2015). Gabriel and Politis (2012) argue that ultimately, the individual is the source of any new idea. To be able to innovate, besides being aware of a need or an opportunity, the ability to construct new ways to address the need is also crucial (Dereli, 2015). Idea generation refers to generating concepts for improvement (Haiba et al., 2015). Thus, the generation of ideas may relate to new products, services or processes, the entry of new markets, improvements in current work processes, or general terms, solutions to identified problems (O'Reilly & Binns, 2019). Similarly, Dhanpat et al. (2018) argue that the key to idea generation appears to be the combination and reorganization of information and existing concepts to solve problems or improve performance. Thus, good idea generators are individuals who can approach problems or performance gaps from different angles (Lacerda, 2015). Anderson et al. (2014) speak of 'kaleidoscopic thinking' and in a kaleidoscope, a set of fragments from a pattern but when shaken or twisted, the same fragments form an entirely new pattern. Idea generation often involves rearranging already existing pieces into a new whole (Dereli, 2015). A study by O'Reilly and Binns (2019) found that these new combinations often provide a basis for advances in science. Similarly, Chen and Hou (Chen & Hou, 2016) found that the skill of combining and reorganizing concepts is one of the best predictors of creative achievement.

The ideas generated are new, novel, original, useful or applicable to the or-

ganization context produced through the engagement of a series of problem-solving or solutioning processes (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). However, according to Naqvi et al. (2017), to be creative is not only being able to invent something out of nothing but creating new, ones and being capable of re-adjusting, changing or combining ideas. While creativity can be bright and amazing, it can be just simple and straightforward, or great implementable ideas that no one has yet thought of (Chen & Hou, 2016). The creative ideas must bring solutions that are sustainable bringing quality or output improvements and eliminating waste (Javed et al., 2017).

In particular, scholars have recognized customer-facing employees as an important source of innovation, as integrating information from customers with other sources within the firm can lead to highly original ideas (Zhou et al., 2021). Ahmad et al. (2021) give examples of Singapore Airlines which encourages idea generation from employees across departments such as ground and in-flight services, and Starbucks' first ice cream coffee drink (Frappuccino) originated as an idea from one of the employees.

4.2. Innovative Behaviour Steps

Innovative behaviour consists of the following critical steps:

4.2.1. Idea Championing Phase

Idea championing is a relevant aspect of creative behaviour once an idea is generated (Perry-Smith & Manucci, 2017). Bos-Henles et al. (2017) argue that most ideas need to be sold. Although ideas may have some legitimacy and appear to fill a performance gap, for most ideas it is uncertain whether their benefits will exceed the cost of developing and implementing them, and resistance to change is to be expected (Kolzow, 2014). Coalition building is often needed to implement a creative idea, which involves acquiring power by selling an idea to potential allies. In many cases, the prospective users of a proposed creative idea such as colleagues, leaders or customers may feel uncertain about its value and such creative ideas will often need to be "sold" to users (Perry-Smith & Manucci, 2017). The creative individual who takes prime responsibility for the introduction of creative ideas is often not formally appointed but rather someone who feels a strong personal commitment to a particular idea and can "sell" it to others (Fetrati & Nielsen, 2018). A champion has been described as someone in an informal role that pushes a creative idea beyond roadblocks within the organization or as someone who emerges to put efforts into realizing creative ideas and bringing them to life (Kolzow, 2014). This can involve the champion's own or other people's ideas. Such championing includes behaviours related to finding support and building coalitions, such as persuading and influencing other employees or management and pushing and negotiating (Ceausu et al., 2017).

4.2.2. Idea Implementation Phase

Idea implementation is primarily a socio-political process that follows from idea

promotion. This stage is characterised primarily by a high degree of instrumentality for idea realisation, for which the strong ties formed in the previous stage may provide the necessary energy. The motivations for maintaining the networks and the necessary abilities are based on pro-social motivation as well as the thriving aspect with which the idea was conceived (Yuan & Woodman, 2010).

The supported idea needs to be implemented and put into practice (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010). Idea implementation behaviour can mean improving existing products or procedures or developing new ones (Fetrati & Nielsen, 2018). Considerable effort and a results-oriented attitude are needed from employees to make ideas happen (Bos-Henles et al., 2017). Application behaviour relates to the efforts that individuals must put forth to develop an idea selected for implementation into a practical proposition (Briggs & Morgan, 2013). Application often implies making creative behaviours a regular part of work processes and includes behaviours like developing new products or work processes, and testing and modifying them (Kolzow, 2014).

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), 2019) argues that creative behaviour can be started by middle or frontline managers when trying to find solutions as they face internal challenges. The drive for such creative behaviours can be initiated through personality and motivation factors (Zacher & Rosing, 2015). However, creative behaviour is unique, where a worker gets to challenge existing processes well beyond their formal job description (Chughtai, 2016). It is also important to note that the generation of new ideas does not always yield guaranteed success or positive results; some situations lead to ethical conflict or idea implementation (Tu & Lu, 2013). Nevertheless, leaders are duty-bound to use their attributes to encourage useful workplace employee innovative behaviours (Briggs & Morgan, 2013).

Ideas emanating from employee creative and innovative behaviour must be productive to yield a better way or cost-effective way of doing business to achieve process improvements, better performance, and a competitive edge (Zhang, Zhou, & Mao, 2018). Additionally, creative ideas must be sustainable and feasible, leading to improvements in quality or output and eliminating waste (Pulapa, 2020).

5. Employee Creative and Innovative Idea Journey Continuum

The following summarises the steps and forms a continuum of employee creative and innovative idea journeys which forms a path that practice can manage to foster creativity and innovation (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Creative and innovative idea journey step-by-step continuum. Source: Researcher's compilation.

Leaders can effectively stimulate creativity and innovation when employees religiously and continuously follow the idea journey continuum. Leaders that constantly focus on fostering, developing and sustaining a culture of creative and innovative behaviour are regarded as key in driving this culture (Asif et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion, Limitations and Implications for Future Research

An idea journey framework was proposed as necessary for the correction of the creative and innovative behaviour conceptual challenge. In addition, an idea path that results in an idea journey continuum useful for practice was offered. This study was limited to a literature search conducted, carried out by using the keyword search in academic and management databases such as Web of Science, PubMed, IEEE Xplore, ScienceDirect, Emerald, and JSTOR using the keywords such as "employee creative behaviour", "employee innovative behaviour", "innovation", "creativity", "idea exploration", "idea championing", "idea generation", and "idea implementation". The paper is critical to practise as a tool to use to foster creative and innovative behaviour necessary for creativity and innovative desired outcomes. Further studies can explore further how the path and continuum can be analysed in terms of organisation and individual factors.

Future studies should observe more on the separation between creative and innovative behaviour concept and illustrate how the two are related and are impacted by leadership, individual and organisational factors. Future studies can further validate these constructs with large samples and longitudinal studies.

Management and policymakers should pay attention to the creative and innovative behaviour and its sub-factors separately to effectively address the challenge of creativity and innovation in organisations. The proposed idea journey framework, permits organisations to glean on each separate employee's creative and innovative behaviour component such as idea exploration, idea generation, idea championing and idea implementation to map effective strategies that improve creative and innovative behaviour output.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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