

My Job Does Not Require me to be Creative

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“But my job does not require me to be creative. I am not sure why I need to attend this workshop”, was the statement we received recently from a participant of one of our [Innovation and Productivity](#) workshops. This was not the first time.

Innovative work behaviour of their employees is on top of the wish list of almost all managers nowadays. And, just sending employees for creativity and innovation workshops is hardly enough to accomplish their innovative job behaviour. So, what exactly drives your staff to

- **Explore opportunities** for innovation, i.e. actively look for the need for an innovative change,
- **Generate creative ideas** for satisfying this need,
- **Champion these ideas**, i.e. promote them to colleagues and managers and
- **Implement these ideas**, i.e. turn them into solutions and help implementing them, either directly or as member of a team.

[An ongoing study](#) with about 700 participants from private (49%) and government (51%) organisations has been showing the following picture consistently (Figure 1):

1. The strongest driver for employees' innovative work behaviour is their creative role-identity, i.e. the understanding whether their job needs creativity. This factor is supported by their perception on their own creativity and its use for their work ($\beta = 0.79$). This applies especially on the steps “exploring opportunities” and “generating ideas”.
2. The second strongest relationship with Innovative Work Behaviour is shown by employees' perception on the Leadership Behaviour of their managers.
3. Another significantly related driver is employees' Psychological Capital.
4. These drivers explain 70% of the variation in Innovative Work Behaviour, i.e. show a reasonably good relationship with employees' Innovative Behaviour.
5. Whilst Psychological Capital shows a high average rating (5.3 on a scale from 1 to 7), Individual Creativity and Leadership Practice are rated significantly lower with 4.9 and 5.0, respectively. Hence, it makes sense to focus on these two drivers when working on improving the Innovative Work Behaviour within an organisation.

Let's start with Individual Creativity.

My Role Does Not Require Me to be Creative

Our conversations with course participants as well as follow up interviews revealed an interesting fact. More often than not, employees do not see creativity and innovation as part of their role. Many do not even associate continuous improvement or creative problem solving with their job if the job is not of some sort of creative character.

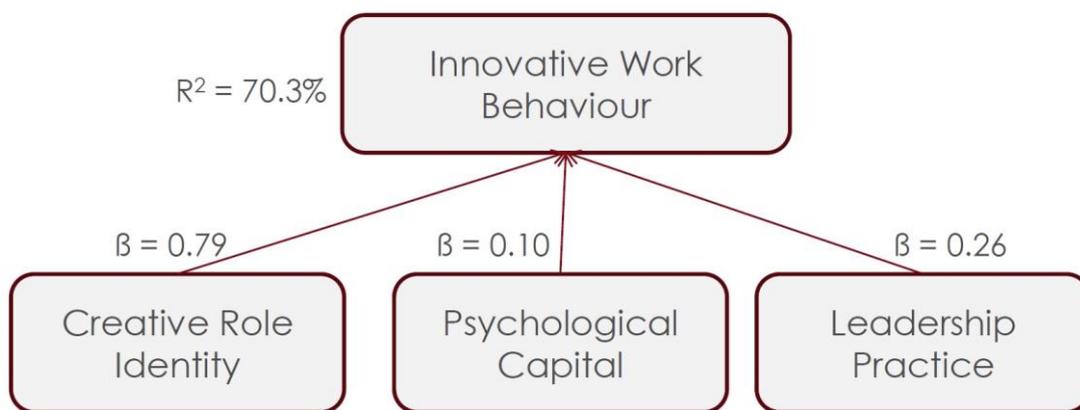


Figure 1: Drivers for Innovative Work Behaviour (n = 678, Singapore private and public organisations)

Employees in Finance, HR and many other admin functions share the same sentiments. They ask themselves what their job has to do with creativity. Even most operations people do not get very excited when they are requested to participate in changing the way they do their work.

They may participate, get some results and then go back to "their work". They do not see reviewing their own processes as part of their job. Innovative work behaviour is not on their agenda.

Finance staff asks themselves what their job has to do with creativity. Employees in HR and many other admin functions share the same sentiments. Even most operations people do not get very excited when they are requested to perform "additional tasks" to analyse, improve or reinvent the way they do their work.

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Why is this so?

How often do we tell our staff that part of their job is to innovate? We keep talking about the need for innovation in our organisation. Do we really make clear that this involves everyone?

Take a look at your job description. Does this job description say anything about creativity and innovation as part of the job, let alone as an essential one? Chances are, there is nothing written about that. Think about it. The job description is most likely the document that you refer to when explaining the job to newcomers.

If the job description does not carry a Key Results Area like “Continuously Reinventing Own Work Processes”, chances are that there is no work performance target that spells out objectives for this important task. So, how can we expect Innovation and Creativity being on people’s mind?

They aim to do their job and meet their targets, of course.

Simple Steps Towards Innovative Work Behaviour

1. Establish an Innovation Performance Expectation: Provide the Motivation

To encourage innovation among the workforce, organisations need to start evaluating employees against performance goals and competencies that focus on innovation. This is a way to reinforce innovative behaviour at the workplace. Before sending employees to the next best Innovation and Creativity workshop and them wondering why they need to be there, we must make sure the purpose is pretty clear.

From organisational strategy over departmental workplans to individual targets, there must be a clearly visible line-of-sight of the need for innovation. Only then, performance objectives driving innovative work behaviour will be set and accepted by all employees.

2. Train to Cultivate Innovation Behaviours: Sharpen the Skills

Organisations can develop entrepreneurial and creative behaviours within the workforce by providing training and coaching in innovation processes and skills. However, innovation training is only effective if employees are given the freedom to apply the new knowledge and skills they have acquired. Innovation requires a set of analytical and business skills that differ from traditional, tactical skills.

In order to encourage these skills, some organisations provide training on topics such as analytical thinking, business case development and presentation, and collaboration with colleagues. For example, the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) as well as the Design Thinking framework are flexible and eclectic systems that guide employees to apply a variety of thinking skills, principles and tools.

3. Encourage a Risk Tolerant Climate: Provide Opportunities

You can foster a culture of risk-taking by giving employees a chance to recover from failures and providing them with encouragement to create new ventures.

The former CEO of General Electric encourages risk-taking: “You can make mistakes! But, make sure you and the organisation learn from these mistakes to avoid them next time!”

Conclusion

If Innovative Work Behaviour should become integral part of an organisation, it should first be seen as an important part of the organisational system. Only then, individual development plans including behaviour building activities on topics like Innovation and Creativity will be developed, accepted and implemented. If your employees have the motivation, possess the means and feel the encouragement, they will certainly show innovative work behaviour.