

ATTRIBUTES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CREATIVE CLIMATE: A PERCEPTUAL ASSESSMENT OF INDIVIDUALS

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ABSTRACT

Organizations today are constantly focusing on increasing their competitiveness. One of the ways of increasing competitiveness is by tapping the creative potential of the employees. One of the best ways in which organizations' can capture their employees' creativity is by creating a climate that nurtures creativity. Having a creative working climate nourishes and creates a suitable working culture that enhances the creative spark of the employees. Based on this premise, the study attempted to determine the attributes that facilitate the development of a creative climate and to examine the difference between the present state and the desired state of organization creative climate attributes. A sample of 78 marketing professionals were taken from media and advertising firms and quadrant analysis was employed for analysis. The results highlighted the attributes that require increased attention from organizations to enhance employee creativity. The paper also discusses the managerial implications and directions for future research.

Keywords: *creative climate, employee creativity, perceptual assessment*

INTRODUCTION

Creativity is one of the most important pillars of existence in today's competitive world for every organization. Managers realize that creativity does not happen in an intellectual vacuum or in the emotional icebergs, but it is a process that can be developed only with the help of a prevailing creative climate.

Research around the globe has shown that creative culture and general climate has led to the identification of key areas on which companies can focus to develop an effective climate in which people are not only creative, but where they are motivated to develop these ideas into value-adding contributions to the success of the whole organization. Organizations today are constantly focusing on increasing their competitiveness which can be easily done by apprehending the creative potential of the employees. A suitable organizational culture enhances the creative spark in an individual and increases the belongingness to the organization and typically consists of attributes such as freedom and autonomy, goal clarity, management practices, non-controlling supervision, information

sharing among co-workers, participative safety, resources, diverse perspectives, pioneering and venturous attitude, as well as the overall organizational systems and processes.

This paper intends to assess the creative climate attributes of the firms under study and suggest mechanisms or ways to tap the creative potential of their employees. The researchers aim to test the creative climate framework developed by Axelsson and Sardari (2011) in the context of the region and the organizations under study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creativity, organizational creativity, and creative climate

Creativity in its organic form can be defined as the ability to produce work that is both novel and useful and mainly revolves around generation and expression of ideas, which are new, original and actionable in addressing a specific problem, (Amabile, 1996; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). A psychological orientation of creativity by Ekvall (1997) describes it as a new structure of the mind, a new configuration or a new formulation of meaning. Organizational creativity emerges as a result of the interaction among individuals in the domain of their expertise. It has been defined as the creation of valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure or process by individuals working together in a complex social system (Woodman et al., 1993).

Although creativity is an output of an individual's psychological process relying mainly on individual capabilities and traits, several contextual attributes exist within the organization that influence the creative potential

of the employees (Oldham & Cumings, 1997; Ekvall 1997). Watkin and Hubbard (2003) have mentioned that the climate as a measure of what employees perceive from the environment regarding how work should be done. Schneider (1987) has also addressed climate as the way by which members of the organization understand what is important for a creative organization. The climate often conveys expectations about acceptable behaviours and attitudes of employees. A creative climate is one that facilitates outcomes that are creative. The following section describes the creative climate attributes considered for the study.

Work characteristics

Work characteristics in the context of a creative climate attribute refer to an employee's work such as knowledge and skills, mental and physical demands and working conditions, that can be recognized, defined and assessed. Researchers have found that among the various work characteristics, the ones which are core in the context of creative contribution of employees comprises of challenge, freedom and goals (as depicted in the table below).

Amabile (1998) and Ekvall (1996) are of the view that an effective way to influence the creative potential of employees is by matching the people with the right jobs. According to Cumings and Oldham (1997) and Farr (1990), a challenging job requires variety of skills and talents and thus broadens the horizon for individuals in using their expertise and creative thinking abilities in their work. Another important work characteristic influencing creativity is autonomy (freedom) at work. Cumings (1965), Amabile (1998), Ekvall (1996), Feurer (1996), Cumings &

Oldham (1997) emphasize on the importance of autonomy in contributing to creativity. Contextually, autonomy refers to the liberty enjoyed by employees to determine the way work is carried out. Gray (2007), Anderson et al. (1992), Amabile (1998) highlight the importance of shared goals, involvement in goal setting, as well as the existence of a sense of mutual purpose which are considered central in enhancing the creative appetite of employees.

Management support

This category mainly consists of all those activities/responsibilities of managers that influence organizational creativity. By extending the adequate level of support and encouragement managers can greatly influence their employee's creativity (Williams, 2001). According to Amabile (1998) by maintaining a supportive attitude towards their employees, managers/supervisors help in nourishing their intrinsic motivation which in turn affects their creative behaviour. Cumings and Oldham (1997), Gray (2007) emphasize on the importance of non-controlling supervision as well as positive and informational feedback to assist the employees in developing their skills.

Co-worker support

Co-worker support refers to the support and cooperation among coworkers in creating an environment conducive for creativity. Cumings & Oldham (1997), Zhou and George (2001), Ekvall (1996) highlighted the role of stimulating co-workers in creating a constructive atmosphere for creative behaviour by extending the required help and support towards various creative activities. Cumings (1965), however identified secrecy among co-

workers to as a hindering attribute towards organizational creativity.

Safety

Safety comprises of the features in the organization that promote a safe physical and psychological space for the employees to express their ideas. Ekvall (1996), Dutton (1996), George (2007) recognizes the importance of emotional safety for the employees to indulge in creative pursuits. They argue that the importance of a climate that encourages and accepts mistakes made of employees as well as motivate them to assume the risk of exploring creative ideas and testing new ways. Safety has been found to have a positive effect on the level of ideas suggested, through a non-threatening climate (West, 1990; Anderson et al., 1992; Roffe, 1999). Another important attribute of a creative climate is considered to be playfulness and humour (Ekvall, 1996).

Resources

Resources are the required amount of time and money available or allowed to the employee to enhance their creative results. Several researches such as Amabile (1998), Cumings (1965), Ekvall (1996), Dutton (1996) underline the importance of sufficiency and feasibility of the resource allocations.

Diversity

Amabile (1998) views the importance of diversity in outlooks and backgrounds as an essential contributing feature in initiating creativity. For generating creative ideas, it is important to divert beyond the established patterns, and clearly, diverse opinions and perspectives help in achieving the desired status (Cumings, 1965; Roffe, 1999; Ekvall 1996)

Table 1. Literature review (Adapted from: Axelsson and Sardari, 2011).

Sl. No.	Attribute	Sub-elements	Author(s)
1	Work characteristics	Challenging work	Farr (1990), Ekvall (1996), Cumings (1965), Cumings and Oldham (1997), Amabile (1998), Feurer (1996), Anderson et al. (1992), Gray (2007).
		Autonomy (freedom) at work	
		Goals	
2	Management support	Employee support (Supervision)	Williams (2001), Amabile (1998), Cumings and Oldham (1997), Gray (2007).
		Involvement & idea support	
		Management practices	
3	Co-worker support	Co-worker attitude	Cumings & Oldham (1997), Zhou and George (2001), Ekvall (1996), Cumings (1965), Dutton (1996),
		Information sharing	
4	Safety	Safe idea expression	Ekvall (1996), Dutton (1996), George (2007), West, 1990; Anderson et al., (1992), Roffe (1999)
		Safe relations	
5	Resources	Time	Amabile (1998), Cumings (1965), Ekvall (1996), Dutton (1996)
		Money	
6	Diversity	People	Amabile (1998), Cumings, (1965), Roffe (1999), Ekvall (1996).
		Opinions	
7	Dynamism and Risk Taking	Pioneering and venturous attitude	Anderson (1992), Ekvall, (1996), Dutton (1996), Roffe (1999), Egan (2005).
8	Organizational Systems & Processes	Methods & Mechanisms	Amabile (1997), Dutton (1996) & Gordon (1985), Williams (2001) & Cumings (1965), Andriopoulous (2001) and Feurer et al. (1996)
		Evaluation & rewards	
		Structure	

Dynamism/Risk Taking

A dynamic environment is one that is characterized by eventful, excited and a non-routine work atmosphere. Members of a dynamic environment strive for continuous improvement in their work activities, which leads to the emergence of creative ideas and challenging of the status quo (Anderson, 1992). Risk taking environment view creativity as a

value exhibits a more tolerant climate, conveyed mainly through their organizational processes and practices (Ekvall, 1996; Dutton, 1996; Roffe, 1999; Egan, 2005).

Organizational systems and processes

Amabile (1997) stresses the role of appropriate systems and processes that foster creativity. Dutton (1996) & Gordon (1985) underscores the importance of Human Resource Management

(HRD) in enabling the employees to realize and increase their creative output. Williams (2001) & Cumings (1965) also highlight the importance of organizational systems and procedures (intrinsic and extrinsic rewards) to evaluate creative performance of the employees. Further the advantage of a flexible (flat) structure in promoting creativity has been recommended by Andriopoulous (2001) and Feurer et al. (1996).

OBJECTIVES

After considering the review of literature the following objectives for this research paper were set-

1. To determine the high and low attributes of Organizational Creative Environment with respect to media and advertising firms.
2. To examine the differences between present and desired state of Organizational Creative Environment attributes through Quadrant Analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The sample consisted of 78 marketing professionals from the media and advertising firms of Guwahati region. Initially, a total of 100 questionnaires were distributed out of which 78 completed questionnaires were returned (78% response rate).

Measures

The questionnaire to assess the creative climate attributes was based on the framework designed by Axelsson and Sardari (2011). The creative climate attributes measured were work characteristics, management support, co-worker support, safety, resources, diversity, risk-taking,

organizational systems and processes. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 58 items measuring the creative climate attributes. Out of these 58 items, 29 items measured the level of creative climate attributes in the current state and other 29 items measured the level of creative climate attributes in the desired state.

Procedure and data analysis

A self-report questionnaire was designed and completed by marketing professionals in Guwahati region of Assam. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and its confidentiality. The analyses were conducted using MS-Excel using quadrant analysis. The following section describes the analysis and findings of the study.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of respondents

A sample of 78 marketing professionals from media and advertising firms in Guwahati region were considered for the study. Table I summarizes the demographic variables of the respondents.

Out of the total 78 respondents, 36 per cent of the respondents were in the age group of 20-30 years, 24 per cent were in the age group of 31-40 years, 26 per cent were in the age group of 41-50 years and 14 per cent were above 51 years. With respect to gender, 58 per cent of the respondents were males whereas 42 per cent were females. Moreover, 37 per cent of the total respondents were married whereas a significant majority of the respondents (63 per cent) were unmarried. With respect to level of education, a significant proportion of respondents (44 per cent) were postgraduates, whereas 24 per cent

were graduates. On the other hand, 32 per cent of the respondents were neither graduates nor postgraduates but possessed certifications. In terms of experience, 32 per cent of the respondents had less than 1 year of experience,

21 per cent had an experience of 1-3 years, 15 per cent possessed experience ranging between 3-6 years, 14 per cent had experience between 6-9 years, and 18 per cent had more than 9 years of experience.

Table 2: Demographic variables.

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
Age	20-30 years	28	36
	31-40 years	19	24
	41-50 years	20	26
	51 years and above	11	14
Gender	Male	45	58
	Female	33	42
Marital Status	Married	29	37
	Unmarried	49	63
Education	Graduate	19	24
	Post Graduate	34	44
	Others	25	32
Experience	Less than 1 year	25	32
	1-3 years	16	21
	3-6 years	12	15
	6-9 years	11	14
	More than 9 years	14	18

Scale reliability

Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results. In order to establish the reliability of the scale Cronbach's alpha score was calculated which is the most frequently used measure of reliability. Cronbach's alpha score was found to be 0.737 which indicates high internal consistency.

Table 3: Reliability statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.737	58

Organizational Creative Climate

The objective of this study is to determine the attributes that facilitate the development of a creative climate and to examine the difference between the present state and the desired state of organization creative climate attributes. In order to determine the level of the attributes facilitating the development of creative climate, mean score of each attribute was calculated for the current state and the desired state. Table 4 reflects the mean scores the current state and the desired state of the attributes.

Table 4: Mean score of creative climate attributes.

Attributes and sub attributes	Current State	Desired State
Challenge	3.018	4.828
Freedom	1.854	4.876
Goals	2.113	4.789
Work Characteristics	2.328	4.831
Supervision	1.894	3.345
Idea Support	2.012	4.139
Management Practices	2.086	3.234
Management Support	1.997	3.573
Coworker Attitude	4.543	4.734
Information Sharing	1.557	2.675
Coworker Support	2.202	2.111
Safe Idea Expression	2.987	3.045
Safe Relation	2.534	2.21
Safety	2.760	2.627
Time	4.688	1.765
Money	4.878	1.945
Resources	4.783	1.855
Diversity of People	4.012	2.001
Diversity of Opinions	4.018	1.987
Diversity	4.015	1.994
Risk Taking	4.569	4.827
Rewards	1.265	4.5

Structure	1.091	3.529
Methods and Mechanisms	1.158	4.252
Organization System and Processes	1.171	4.093

From the table it can be observed that in the current state the attributes organizational system and processes had the least mean score (1.171) followed by management support (1.997), coworker support (2.202), work characteristics (2.328), and safety (2.7605). Resources (4.783), diversity (4.015) and risk taking (4.569) attributes had a higher mean score. From this it can be inferred that in the current state respondents perceive a higher level of resources, diversity, and risk taking, and a lower level of support from management and coworker, lesser challenging work characteristics, and a lesser level of safety.

It can also be observed that in the desired state resources (1.855) had the least mean score, followed by diversity (1.994), coworker support (2.111), and safety (2.627). Work characteristic (4.831) attribute had the highest mean score in the desired state, followed by risk taking (4.827), and organization system and processes (4.093). The mean score for management support (3.573) was found to be on the neutral range for the desired state. We can therefore infer that respondents place a lot of importance on work characteristics, risk taking attitude and a good organizational process and system in order for them to be creative while placing lesser emphasis on diversity, coworker support and safety.

Quadrant analysis

Respondents indicated their perception of the current state of creative climate attributes in their respective organizations. Respondents also

indicated their perception of the desired level of creative climate attributes. The respondents' perception of their current state was plotted against the X-axis and the desired state was plotted against the Y-axis. Four quadrants emerged from this plotting. Quadrant A on the grid represents the attributes which are rated low by the respondents in the current state but has received a higher rating for the desired state, thereby representing factors that need immediate attention. Quadrant B lists all the factors rated highly by respondents for both the current state as well as the desired state, representing factors that are adequately present and needs to be maintained at the same levels. Quadrant C contains those attributes which have received a lower rating by the respondents for both the current as well as the desired state, representing factors which are of low priority. Whereas, Quadrant D covers those attributes which have received a higher rating in the current state but a lower rating in the desired state, representing factors which are overemphasized. The quadrant analysis is represented below.

It is evident from the figure that respondents attach high degree of importance to work characteristics, which includes factors such as challenge, freedom, and goal clarity, in being creative. Another factor considered important by the respondents is organizational system and processes to facilitate their creative pursuits. Organizational systems and processes refer to a facilitating team structure, proper methods and

mechanisms, and a reward culture. Lastly, the respondents indicated management support, which includes factors such as supervision, idea support, and management practices, as another important factor that promotes creativity. Though respondents attach high degree of importance to these three attributes, the current level of these are less in their respective organizations.

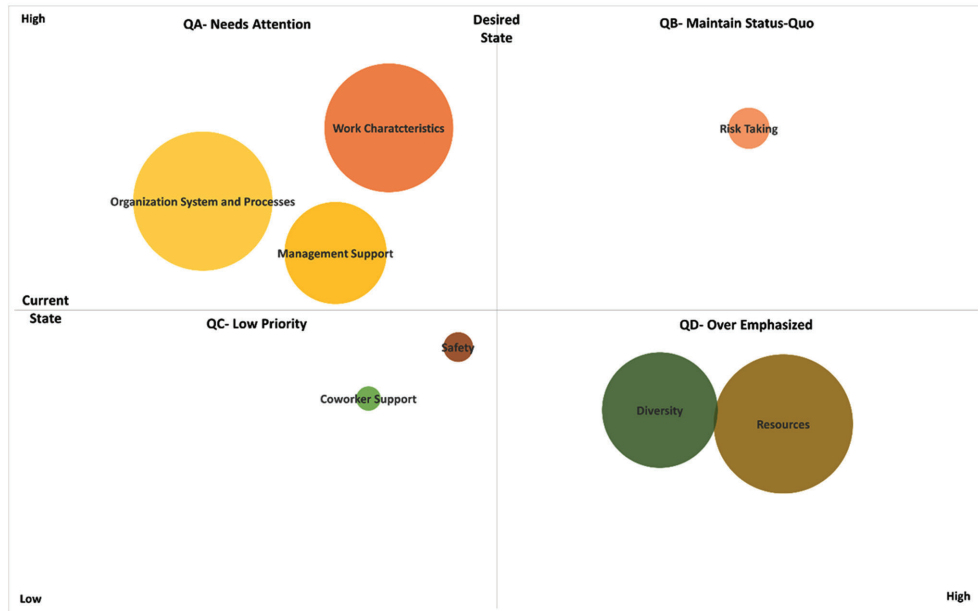


Figure 1. Quadrant Analysis

It can also be observed from the figure that respondents perceive the risk-taking level of their organizations and supervisors is satisfactory for the current state and the same needs to be maintained in the future. Respondents do not attach a lot of importance to coworker support and safety attributes of organizational creative climate for both the current as well as the desired state. This indicates the fact that respondents do not consider these two attributes to contribute to their creativity levels. In addition to this, the respondents indicated that in the current state their organizations focus on resources and diversity to increase creative levels of their employees. However, respondents do not share the same view and indicate that these two

attributes are over emphasized in their current systems.

DISCUSSION

This paper attempted to assess the creative climate attributes of the firms under study and suggest mechanisms or ways to tap the creative potential of their employees. The study also attempted to test the creative climate framework developed by Axelsson and Sardari (2011) in the context of the region and the organizations under study. The findings of the study revealed that in the current state respondents perceive a higher level of resources, diversity, and risk taking, and a lower level

of support from management and coworker, lesser challenging work characteristics, and a lesser level of safety. It was also found that in the desired state respondents place a lot of importance on work characteristics, risk taking attitude and a good organizational process and system in order for them to be creative while placing lesser emphasis on diversity, coworker support and safety.

The results of the quadrant analysis indicated that work characteristics, organizational systems and processes, and management support required immediate attention from the firms under study as respondents reported a higher discrepancy in these parameters with respect to their current state versus the desired state. The risk-taking element showed the least deviation and hence adequate efforts should be undertaken by the firms to maintain its status-quo. Co-worker support and safety were considered to be of a lower priority in terms of enhancing their creativity. And lastly, resources

and diversity were found to be over emphasized by firms as indicated by the respondents.

The creative climate framework proposed by Axelsson and Sardari (2011) considers eight attributes which enhance creative potential of the employees. However, managers can carry out an assessment of their organizational climates to highlight the relative importance of each attribute in the light of their respective area of operations. All eight attributes may not hold the same level of importance across all sectors or industries and hence managers need to be vigilant in exploring the relative importance of each attribute.

Future directions of research could focus on an inter-industry comparison of the attributes and how they vary across different sectors or industries. As the current framework mainly considered the underlying factors in the organizational context only, researchers can attempt to assess the impact of personal and psychological characteristics of the employees in addition to the organizational attributes that may enhance their creative output.

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