



EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS OF NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM THE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Creativity is a basic tool for progress in any country which stressed its importance. Tertiary educational institutions uniquely have vastly professionalized employees with high knowledge as such the need to effectively and efficiently harness the creativity of its employees for national development. The aim of this paper was to examine the importance as well as challenges of harnessing and developing employees' creativity in public educational tertiary institutions of Nigeria through the details conceptual investigation. In this study quantitative and explanatory, as well as sample survey design was adopted as the research design method, data was sourced from brainstorming via WhatsApp Application group chat created by the researcher which contains 210 employees randomly selected from tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. Based on the finding of this study, employee creativity in public tertiary institution has not been efficiently harnessed due to administrative and leadership inadequacies. The main challenges of enhancing creativity of employees are internal politics, new bread versus old bread syndrome and rough criticism of ideas. This paper recommends that the management of tertiary institutions should foster a creative climate which refers to a friendly atmosphere promoting the development of new ideas, incite positive behavior in their employees by motivating them and equally.

Keywords: *Creativity, Employee, Innovation, Tertiary institutions, Leadership.*

Introduction

The conditions of modern day economy which is characterised by complexity and interdependence, as well as advance in technological and communication call for increased need for creativity among the working class of any country. In today's dynamic working environment, employees' creativity is vital to the growth and development of any country. Public tertiary institutions in Nigeria are uniquely endowed with a lot of professional in various fields of study, therefore the need harness the creativity of this professional employees to ensuring survival, growth and development of the country technologically.

More so, employees' creativity is considered an essential foundation of competitive strength for any tertiary institution educational or not, this is significantly appreciated across various professions (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). In addition, tertiary educational institutions that are devoted to innovation and adaptation consider creative employees as precious resource to the organisation.

Creativity is view as the development of a novel, unique, and distinctive ideas about a products, services, policy, strategy, practices or procedures that are potentially useful and add value to the institutions' output. Scholars such Berman & Kim, (2010) stressed that institutions that promote creativity among their employees are able to deal with the novel, chaotic, and vigorously altering work surroundings making a vital difference in organizations.

Currently, public tertiary institutions are characterized with insufficient and inefficient use of employees' creativity due to the lack of adequate management systems despite it vital role in training manpower to the country. Rangarajan (2008) stated that unlike private tertiary institutions, harnessing employee creativity has been ignored in the public tertiary institution over time. According to Grell (2013), the main reason for this is the nature of public tertiary institutions, which are characterized as rule-based institution with limited opportunity for individual creativity not been politicized or even ignored. Although scholars such Ahmad, (1998) point out the inadequacy of the administrative structure of tertiary institution to fully support employees creative and government inability to fully fund this institutions.

Recently, this trend has changed and several public tertiary institutions have focused on creativity with the emergence of Intellectual Property Technology Transfer Offices (IPTTOs) in Universities, Polytechnics and Research

Institutions in Nigeria, and Institution Based Research (IBR) funded by Tertiary Educational Trust Fund (TETFUND) with the aim of building research capacity in Tertiary Education Institutions (TEI's). It focuses on the basic research in all field of academic endeavor.

Although one may argue that IPTTOs and TETFUND mostly benefit academic staff of these institutions. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund is virtually the only source of funds creative research projects, but its resources are limited and its operations are slow, highly selective and sometimes politicized. Nevertheless, some institution such as Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, Federal Polytechnic Ado Ekiti, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and University of Maiduguri just to mention a few, had developed internal measure of promoting employee creativity, but unfortunate change in leadership had made sustainability of the programmes unfeasible.

Mack, Green and Vedlitz (2008) stated that along with efficiency and innovation, creativity has been advocated as a technique for public bureaucracies, governmental and non-governmental, to transform into flexible, reactive units that perform more efficiently and work more effectively for their constituencies (and taxpayers).

Statement of the Problem

Indisputably, tertiary educational institutions are vital to the growth and development of any country, the performance of these institutions largely depends on the employees. Regrettably, the creativity of employees in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been neglected and relegated to the background over the years, despite having 95 public university, 72 public polytechnics, and 69 public college of education in Nigeria. Also according to the Nigerian University system statistical digests of 2017, Universities in Nigeria had 189258 employees among which 9459 are professors yet the country is still described as a technologically backward country, suggesting that creativity and innovation had been greatly undermined in tertiary institutions. This raises the question as to whether the importance of employees creativity is embedded in tertiary institutions of Nigeria, and whether the structure and programs as well as policies area adequate.

Among the key challenges is the question have the leadership of these tertiary institutions understand and promote creativity of their employees, despite

accumulating significant professional experience on management of tertiary institutions.

The paradox focuses on stressing the importance of harnessing employees' creativity in public tertiary Institutions. This paper discusses the importance as well as challenges of harnessing and developing employees' creativity. It suggests approaches to develop and optimize employees' creativity more effectively in public tertiary institution of Nigeria.

The main determination of this paper is to show the operational inadequately of tertiary educational institutions both internal and external in promoting creativity among its employees through the conceptual analysis. However to guide the researcher the following research question were formulated.

1. Does the administrative structure in tertiary educational institution promote employees creativity?
2. Does the leadership and policies of tertiary institution promote employees creativity?
3. What are the challenges of harnessing employee creativity in tertiary educational institutions?
4. What is the importance of harnessing employee creativity?

Conceptual Clarification

One of the important resources of any tertiary institution is the creative abilities of it employees, individual employees with creative ability produce original and novel ideas. Hennessey and Amabile, (2010) stated that creativity is the production of a novel and appropriate response or solution to a problem. The response must be new, valuable, and fitting to a particular goal. The terms creativity and innovation are also often stated in tandem in practice although there are some variations in meaning (Hunter, Bedell, & Mumford, 2007). The main distinction between the two is that creativity is the generation of creative ideas while innovation is the implementation of these ideas (Heye, 2006). Mador (2010) citing Cox (2005) see creativity as the generation of new ideas, in their view creativity is something of a multi-dimensional process that required a combination of thinking styles and a tolerance for contradiction and paradox, Etuk (1992) sees creative individual as those people who have managed to retain and express a substantial portion of the innate potentialities with which all humans are born and equipped, or whose life experience at home and at work have not totally suppressed such

potentials. In which case, creativity is not just a useful or desirable component of librarianship but a central feature of the profession.

The role of individual creativity in fostering institutional creativity and innovation is an essential ingredient for long term success and survival of any country (Amabile, Burnside, & Gyskiewicz, 1999; Pitta, 2009).

Creativity, considered in the context of an institutions (organisational creativity), is understood as the generation of ideas which are simultaneously new (original) and potentially useful (valuable). Creativity and innovation can occur at the level of the individual, work team, organization, or at more than one of these levels combined, but will invariably result in identifiable benefits at one or more of these levels of analysis.

Required Attitudes and Skills for Creativity

It is a fact that attitudes affect human behavior to an important extent and that creative thinking requires attitudes and skills. Yildirim (1998) states the attitudes necessary for the development of creative thinking in the following way. 23These; F) Self-confidence is high, g) Perfectionism, h) everything is black-and-white, White, i) having sense of humor, i) Using imagination.

Along with these attitudes, creativity also requires some skills. Perkins (1991), Aktan Doganay, (2002) stated, Creativity requires intense desire and effort b) Creativity requires intrinsic motivation rather than externally motivated c) Creativity requires reshaping of thoughts d) Creativity can sometimes occur at the end of intense work, at the moment when the mind is free e) Creativity is the center of mind It requires working at the very tip.

The Creativity Measurement

In the management literature, the creativity is usually measured by three techniques. First method is self-rating in which employees are asked to rate their own creativity. The second method is consensual assessment technique, in which two or more knowledgeable experts with relevant backgrounds, experience and education; provide independent ratings regarding the creativity of each outcome. And the third method is supervisor ratings of creativity which involves asking supervisors to rate their employees' creativity. Since the first method, self-reported creativity can contain a certain level of bias. The second one, consensual assessment is usually available for workers in creative professions like R&D workers or scientists and requires

at least two experienced observers. As the third method, supervisor-rating, has been identified as effective measure of creative performance.

Theoretical Framework

Amabile's (1983, 1988, and 1996) componential theory of creativity is one prominent approach to study creativity in working settings. This approach, which was partially based on the componential model of a social psychology of creativity, represented one of the first comprehensive and grounded theories of employee creativity. The theory posits that employee creativity depends on the type and amount of skills one has that are specific to the domain of practice (i.e. domain-relevant skills) along with the type and amount of motivation one has in developing a task, and with the creative process itself (creativity relevant processes). According to this theory the elements of the work environment will affect an individuals' creativity (depicted by the solid arrow) and suggests that the creativity which is produced by individuals and teams serves as a primary source for innovation within the organization (depicted by the dotted arrow). Theory argues that the work environment affects creativity by affecting the individual components. The environment can have an influence on any of the components, but the impact on task motivation is more direct and immediate than the others

Organizational motivation component consists of the basic orientation of the organization toward innovation and supports for creativity and innovation throughout the organization. The most important elements of the innovation orientation are: a value placed on creativity and innovation in general, an orientation toward risk, a sense of pride in the organizations members and enthusiasm about what they are capable of doing, and an offensive strategy of taking the lead toward the future.

Amabile,(1996) states that the orientation toward innovation must come, primarily, from the highest levels of management. Resources are everything that the organization owns which are available to assist work in the domain targeted for innovation. Resources can be summarized as: enough time for producing novel work, people with necessary expertise, designated funds for this domain, material resources, systems and processes, relevant information, and the availability of training. Management practices include management at all levels, especially the level of individual departments and projects.

Management practices for creativity contain the ability to form effective work groups that represent a diversity of skills. They are made up of individuals who have trust on each other, have a good communication, challenge each other's ideas in a constructive way, support each other mutually, and have a commitment to work they are doing.

Amabile's (1996) componential theory of creativity is the only theory that specifies creativity features that have a contribution to the perceived work environment for creativity. The justification for adaption of componential theory is because it focuses on creativity in an organisational perspective, but at an individual level, which is in line with the objective of the present research.

Methodology

This paper is descriptive in nature that conceptually deliberates on the importance and challenges of harnessing employees' creativity in public tertiary institutions of Nigeria. To examine the importance and challenges of harnessing employees' creativity in public tertiary institutions, data has been sourced from both secondary and primary source. Many literatures background help to find the gist information that meet up with the study conceptuality. The primary data was sourced from brainstorming via Whats Application group chat created by the researcher; the group contains 210 employees randomly selected from tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria, while secondary source of data is from published articles, books and websites.

The data collected from the brainstorming sessions was analysed using simple percentage method, presented using a bar chart which was compliment with literature review.

Conceptual Findings

The study is quantitative and explanatory, as well as sample survey design was adopted as the research design method. However, the data collected from brainstorming sessions was via Whats Application group chat where series of question was presented to 210 employees of tertiary educational institution that participated.

Research questions one

1. Does the administrative structure in tertiary educational institution support employees' creativity?

A look at the deliberations from the research participants shows that 197(94%) of the respondents consent that the administrative structure of tertiary educational institution does not efficiently support employees' creativity, citing that the structure lacks factors that will enhance creativity of employees when compared with other countries such as Ghana Gambia Malaysia etc.

The following literatures explained the factors that enhance creativity of employees which do not form part of administrative structure of most public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Isaksen, Lauer, Ekvall, and Britz (2001) observed how the work atmosphere in companies influenced employees' participation in the creation of a "Creative Climate". According to the findings of this research, nine dimensions of the organizational climate are essential to enhance creativity: challenge and involvement, freedom, trust/openness, playfulness/humor, conflict, idea support, debate and risk taking. All of these dimensions with the exception of conflict have been proven to positively influence creativity.

Andriopolous (2001) who stated that the dimensions that enhance or obstruct creativity in the work environment can be classified under five organizational dimensions: organizational climate, organizational culture, organizational structure and systems, leadership style, and resources and skills. Amabile and Mueller (2008) proposed five conceptual constructs for creativity, namely: encouragement, autonomy or freedom, resources, pressures, and organizational impediments.

Hamlin and Sawyer (2007) asserted that the work environment almost certainly affects the creativity of individuals and groups, but maybe less directly and strongly than some of the other factors. Ismail (2005) state that successful organizations should provide a bond between creativity and innovation in their management practices. Strong organizational missions can help employees find meaning in their work and motivate them by tapping into task significance (Aycan et al., 2000; Cappelli et al., 2010; Katz, 2004). Carmeli, Cohen-Meitar and Elizur (2007) provided evidence that creative employees search for job challenges; hence, organisations should provide them with a positive work context that helps them perform better.

Research questions two

2. Does the leadership and policies of tertiary institution promote employees creativity?

Responses from the participants indicates the urgent need for change of policies and leadership commitment in tertiary institution mostly in the polytechnic sector to promote creativity among employees, this is affirm by 185 (88%) respondents.

However, many scholars have stressed the role of leadership in promoting creativity, which includes: Halbesleben, et al (2003) maintained that unconventional leadership behaviors play an important role in promoting and activating creativity in employees. These leaders act as models and encourage employees to think differently and creatively like themselves. Furthermore, Zhou, Hirst, and Shipton (2012) found that leadership style and managerial encouragement spur employees to participate and share their ideas

Pitta (2009) proposed that one of the key drivers of organizational creativity is the strong support of individual creativity. Coelho, Augusto, and Lages (2011) emphasized the need for an organizational culture that supports individual creativity and innovation. Increased interactions between leaders and employee will lead to greater understanding of the problem and finding creative solutions to the problem (Hoegl et al., 2004).

A leader who is involved in identification of the work-related problems and in solving them is more likely to enhance his/her subordinate's motivation, self-confidence and enthusiasm (Mumford et al., 2002). Competent leaders use their technical competence to evaluate and select among ideas, walk a tightrope between over-control and too much autonomy, make subtle changes in priorities and sequences, and ensure professional challenge in the work (McCall, 1988).

Hennessey and Amabile (2010) clarified that competent leaders formulate good policies that promote employees' creativity.

Research questions three

3. What are the challenges of harnessing employee creativity in tertiary educational institutions?

The discussions of the respondents identified the following as the major challenges of harnessing employees' creativity in tertiary institutions

Internal politics the competition for power and dominance in contest for elective position has made creative ideas of employees not to see the light of the day. Also, internal politics if not well checked result to "new bread versus old bread syndrome" where good ideas from younger energetic and

enthusiastic employees are ignored because they are perceived as new in the environment with little experience, and not part of the cycle.

Rough criticism of ideas 'too forward syndrome' this unguided misconception has made many creative employees to lie low without making any significant contributions in order not to be misinterpreted

Rigid management structures where routing system of work is maintained with little appreciation for changes. However, the key challenge is the question of how organizations structure the work of their employees to obtain the most creative outcomes.

Research questions four

4. What is the importance of harnessing employee creativity?

All the participants were unanimous in agreeing that the importance of harnessing creativity of employees are key to institutional as well as national development in modern day economics. More so, scholars such as Basset-Jones (2005), state that the important resource of an educational institution is the creative abilities of its employees. Ramazan (1998) is of the view that creativity is a prerequisite for a successful innovation work, creativity is the first step in innovation that successfully implements new ideas and innovation is vital for long-term company success.

According to Egan (2005), creativity helps organisations react to improving technology, change work atmospheres, adjust organisational forms or strategies, defeat competitors, fulfill client wishes and evolve societies increasingly affected by global concerns.

According to McLean (2005), creativity is a helpful tool to develop a positive quality of life in educational institution. Indeed, Mack, Green and Vedlitz (2008) clarified that creativity is a useful tool for public-sector organisations to transform into flexible, more responsive units that run efficiently and service constituencies more effectively. Faiz, (2016) also note that future organizations will be highly dependent on employee creativity, as creativity is needed to conceive and generate new working methods that are made.

Conclusion

The maintenance of healthy working environment for creativity represents the most important way to develop employees' creativity, also the maintenance of the 'continuous creativity' strategy, it is necessary to create a

favourable organisational and psychological climate for creativity, not only for 'creative employees' (such as inventors, managers and engineers) but also for all workers.

Motivation is a critical ingredient for fostering and sustaining creativity among individual employees, highly motivated people push themselves to overachieve, stretching their thinking and working arduously to accomplish considerably more than brighter and even more competent peers.

The management of tertiary institutions should be noted that while seeking to promote creativity of employees, they should not expect or require all employees to create new ideas; some may choose not to, and others may not have new ideas. There are limited new initiatives that the institutions can implement at a point in time, and so it may not be necessary that everyone puts forth new ideas

Recommendations

Most of the employees of tertiary institutions are professionals seek autonomy and have high levels of expertise as such leaders of such employees should empower them to take work related decisions and give room for creativity, also by making creativity a precondition for employment in tertiary institution, employee creativity can be reinforced.

In tertiary educational institution setting creativity can also be improved by showing positive response and rewards to employees when they accomplish creative outcomes, employees in this setting can be motivated to be creative through psychological empowerment and work engagement, relation-oriented, empowering, team building and leading by example behaviors should also be used.

Management of tertiary institutions should foster creative climate which refers to a friendly atmosphere promoting the development of new ideas, and incite positive behavior in their employees by motivating them.

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