

# FROM INTRINSIC MOTIVATION TO EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY: THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION AND TEAM PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

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## Abstract

Although numerous researchers believe that intrinsic motivation drives creativity, research has offered ambiguous results. Considering componential theory of creativity, we suggest that employee intrinsic motivation moderates the relationship between knowledge integration and creativity. Additionally, we argued that there is a three-way interaction between the knowledge integration, intrinsic motivation and team psychological safety; the level of employee creativity is highest when all three dimensions are high.

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**Keywords:** Employee creativity, motivation, psychological safety

## Introduction

There is a mounting interest in comprehending how to boost creativity in organizations (for reviews, see Zhou & Shalley, 2008; Shalley et al., 2004), defined as the production of ideas that are both novel and useful (Amabile, 1996), which has been regarded as a foundation for achieving sustained competitive advantage (George, 2007). No surprisingly then, scholars have invested much effort seeking for the relevant psychological forces. Intrinsic motivation has emerged as such a core antecedent, which could stimulate employees to expend relatively enduring levels of involvement due to interest, curiosity, and a desire to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Consequently, intrinsic motivation theory has been heavily relied on (Amabile, 1996) in extant creativity study.

Examination of the link intrinsic motivation to creativity, however, has yielded equivocal results (George, 2007). The bulk of study demonstrates intrinsic motivation triggers higher levels of creativity (Amabile, 1985; Janssen & van Yperen, 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2003), just as what psychologists

and organizational scholars have long expected. Meanwhile, evidence has accumulated showing intrinsic motivation is not significantly associated with creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006; Shalley & Perry-Smith, 2001). More recently, scholars have begun to tackle this theorized linkage by considering potential mediators, such as creative process (Zhang & Bartorl, 2010), interpersonal relations (Mueller & Kamdar, 2011), or moderators like prosocial motivation (Grant & Berry, 2011).

Despite their valuable contribution, many of these investigations have ignored key tenets of componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1983), the theoretical foundation of much work in this stream—describing any creative response requires a confluence of all components in and outside of the individuals (Amabile, 2012). In particular, this theory implies that intrinsic motivation may inspire individual creativity, provided the employee engages in creativity-relevant processes and supportive social environment. In comparison with too much emphasis on motivational component in previous research, little is known about the cognitive process that employees use and how this process may relate to actual creative performance (De Stobbeleir et al, 2011).

Hence, we propose one of emergent theme of creative process, namely, knowledge integration, and expand previous study from two folds. First, we argue that employee intrinsic motivation moderates the relationship between knowledge integration and creativity. In contrast, extant research has typically assumed intrinsic motivation as an independent precursor (Janssen & van Yperen, 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2003; Mueller & Kamdar, 2011). Second, we further examined the moderation role of intrinsic motivation is contingent on team psychology safety. Most of prior studies maintain that linkages between work contexts and creativity should be via intrinsic motivation. By combining interactional model of creativity (Woodman et al., 1993), and componential theory of creativity, in parallel, our study shed light on the interactions of these individual components and contextual one.

## **Creativity**

Employee creativity has been introduced as the foundation for organizational innovation in order to attain competitive advantage (George, 2007; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). In the present century, it is essential for companies that strive to lead or adapt to change to foster the competencies of creativity and innovation (Amabile, 1988; Woodman, Sawyer & Griffen, 1993). Frequently described as a critical element for encouraging organizational innovation (Amabile, 1988; Woodman, Sawyer & Griffen, 1993), individual creativity generally denotes the implementation of ideas which are creative and is essential for the organization to survive and

succeed in the long-term (Kanter, 1983; Utterback, 1994; Amabile et al., 1996; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1997). Yet, creativity is a complex construct which makes it rather difficult to define. There is not a general consensus about its definition, however, consistent concepts can be found across existing definitions. Guilford (1950) argued that 'the creative person has novel ideas' and will submit 'uncommon, yet acceptable, responses' (p. 452). Similarly, Sternberg and Lubart (1999) stated that creativity is 'the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints)' (p. 3). Likewise Barron and Harrington (1981) employed the terms 'novel', 'originality', and 'far-reachingness' to offer their definition of creativity (p. 442). And finally, Martindale (1989) opined that creativity 'must be original, it must be useful or appropriate for the situation and it must actually be put to some use' (p. 211). In light of the common themes in these definitions, it seems that the value of creativity in organizations may pertain to an ability to exploit new yet suitable ideas to the end of improving organizational efficiency, solving complicated problems and increasing overall effectiveness.

There are various methods to measure individual creativity ranging from the evaluation of the qualities and traits of very creative individuals to the assessment of creative goods and accomplishments. Furthermore, there are various models and studies based on comprehensive reviews of creativity that describe individual creativity dimensions (For example, Amabile, 1988; Woodman and Schoenfeldt, 1989; Ford, 1996). Among very common factors in these models are knowledge, divergent thinking (cognitive style), personality, autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Research findings, especially indicate that domain-specific knowledge is an essential prerequisite to ensure effective creative functioning (Weisberg, 1999). Social networks are often the hubs of the required knowledge and information that are vital elements in encouraging individual creativity (Kijkuit & van den Ende, 2007; Leenders, van Engelen & Kratzer, 2007). Direct measures such as intelligence tests (Brown, 1989) and indirect factors such as years of education (Simonton, 1992) have been used to assess the knowledge aspect of creativity. Similarly, Hocevar and Bachelor (1989) take into account divergent thinking (cognitive style) and personality inventories as two of the eight categories that they employed to index over 100 measures of creativity. The concept of creativity has been primarily studied in the context of work environment evaluations (for example, Amabile et al., 1996; Cummings & Oldham, 1997; Shalley, Gilson & Blum, 2000). Another important concept which may be associated with creativity is intrinsic motivation (for example, Maslow, 1970; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Amabile et al., 1994; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 2003). Some studies have suggested that creativity may positively contribute to intrinsic motivation and negatively to

extrinsic motivation (for example, Amabile et al., 1994). Some important factors that could affect intrinsic motivation include self-determination (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985), competence (e.g., Bandura, 1997), autonomy (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Cummings & Oldham, 1997; Shalley, Gilson & Blum, 2000), challenge (e.g., Locke et al., 1984; Bandura, 1997; Shalley, Gilson & Blum, 2000), task involvement (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and interest (e.g., Bandura, 1997). Moreover, according to Tierney and Farmer (2002), creative self-efficacy, defined as ‘the belief one has the ability to produce creative outcomes’ (p. 1138), is another important factor that impacts intrinsic motivation and creativity.

The literature on organizational creativity deals mostly with two theoretical views: the componential model and the interactionist model. The componential theory of creativity introduced by Amabile (1996) underscores the role of motivation in enhancing or reducing individuals’ creativity. Based on this theory, an individual could display higher levels of creativity when three components are present: (1) the individual needs to have pertinent knowledge and skills; (2) he/she should have relevant creativity skills and strategies, (3) h/she should be intrinsically driven to work on the task. Amabile (1996) defined intrinsic motivation as the kind of motivation that originates from individuals’ interest and involvement in the task itself. The third component, intrinsic motivation is argued to be crucial for creativity, since it helps engage and persist in creative activities. The componential theory provides the ground for studying employee creativity using a motivational approach and highlighting the value of intrinsic motivation.

### **Team Psychological Safety**

Team psychological safety refers to a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. Largely, this belief tends to be implicit and the individuals or the team as a whole often fail to appreciate it or pay direct attention to it. While implicit beliefs about interpersonal norms are at times discussed directly in a team, this does not change the nature of team psychological safety. This construct stems from early research by Schein and Bennis (1966) on organizational change who reflected on the need to create psychological safety for individuals, in case they are to feel secure and have the ability to change. This term is not intended to indicate a casual sense of permissiveness or an unyielding positive affect but a sense of confidence that the team would not humiliate, reject, or punish anyone for expressing their opinions. This confidence is rooted in mutual respect and trust among team members. Researchers have long stressed the important of trust in groups and organizations (for example, Golembiewski and Mc-Conkie, 1975; Kramer, 1999). Trust involves the expectation that the future actions others will be beneficial to one's interests such that one approves to be susceptible to those

actions (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 1995; Robinson, 1996). Team psychological safety encompasses interpersonal trust and more; it suggests a team climate distinguished by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which individuals are comfortable being and take risks.

### **Intrinsic Motivation**

Many researchers have reflected on an intrinsic motivational orientation as an important factor in creativity (Amabile, 1990; Barron & Harrington, 1981). Simon (1967) suggested that the main function of motivation was to control attention. Assuredly, much of the present research about motivation in industry revolves around attentional self-regulation (Kanfer, 1990). Moreover, many researchers have postulated that goals affect motivation through their effect on self-regulatory mechanisms (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). As motivational interventions such as evaluations and reward systems redirect attention away from heuristic aspects of the creative activities and toward the technical or rule-bound features of task performance, they are likely to negatively affect intrinsic motivation toward a creative task. Amabile (1979) showed that expectation of evaluation reduced creative performance while technical merits appeared unaltered. Although one may expect that actual positive evaluation improve creativity as a result of positive impacts on self-efficacy, such evaluation may negatively influence ensuing creative performance, for it conduces to expectations of future evaluation (Amabile, 1983). An individual's extrinsic reward has an interaction with his choice. Pecuniary reward that is offered in return for performance on a given task for which a person has no choice could improve creativity, however, when the person is given a reward for agreeing to perform the task, creativity may actually be reduced.

### **Componential Theory of Creativity**

The literature on organizational creativity deals mostly with two theoretical views: the componential model and the interactionist model. According to the componential model of organizational creativity, individual creativity increases as a result of simultaneous increases in domain-relevant skills and knowledge, intrinsic motivation, and creativity relevant skills and processes (Amabile, 1988, 1996). Employee creativity can be improved owing to the work environment through incremental increases in these three major components. Domain-relevant skills are defined as an individual's expertise and knowledge in a given area. In the work environment, the domain-relevant knowledge may be recognized through the clarity of understanding of the processes on utilizes at work (Amabile, 1988; Sawyer, 1992). Intrinsic motivation springs from a "positive reaction to qualities of the task itself" (Amabile, 1996, p. 115). Therefore, an employee who is

intrinsically motivated is likely to be interested and enjoy his/her work on account of the inherent aspects of the work s/he performs. Creativity-relevant skills and processes are defined as a person’s abilities, both innate and developed, to generate creative ideas and to creatively identify, explore, and solve problems. Processes related to creativity involve the ability to attend to creative thought and participation in prior creative experiences (involving creativity training).

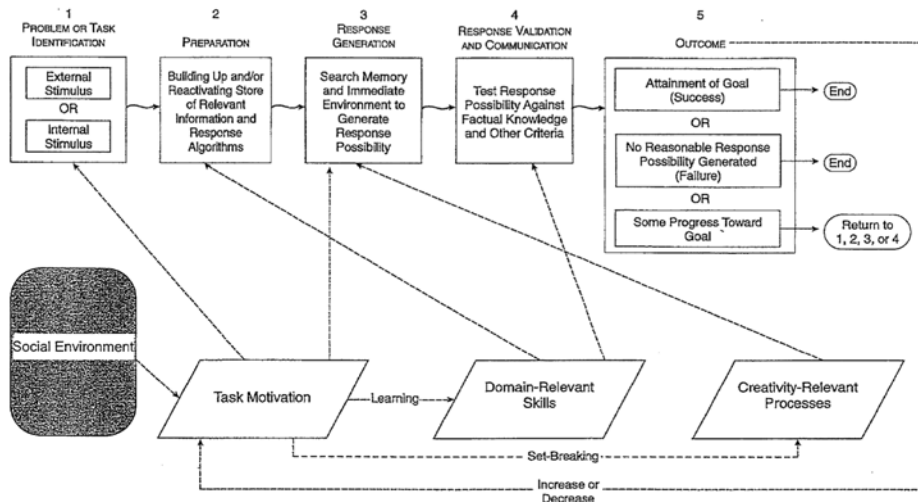


Figure 1 – Componential Theory of Creativity (adopted from Amabile,2012)

According to Amabile (2012) the creativity process is constitutes of five sub processes. 1) *Problem identification* in which the relevant problem is found, 2) *preparation*, which is made of building up of relevant information 3) *response generation*, which is made of searching memory and immediate environment to generate response possibility, 4) *response validation and communication*, which constitutes of test response possibility against factual knowledge or some other criteria, and in the end the 5) *outcome* can be success, failure, or some progress which leads to redoing the whole process.

**Theory Building**

Based on aforementioned framework the following theoretical model was developed. Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model.

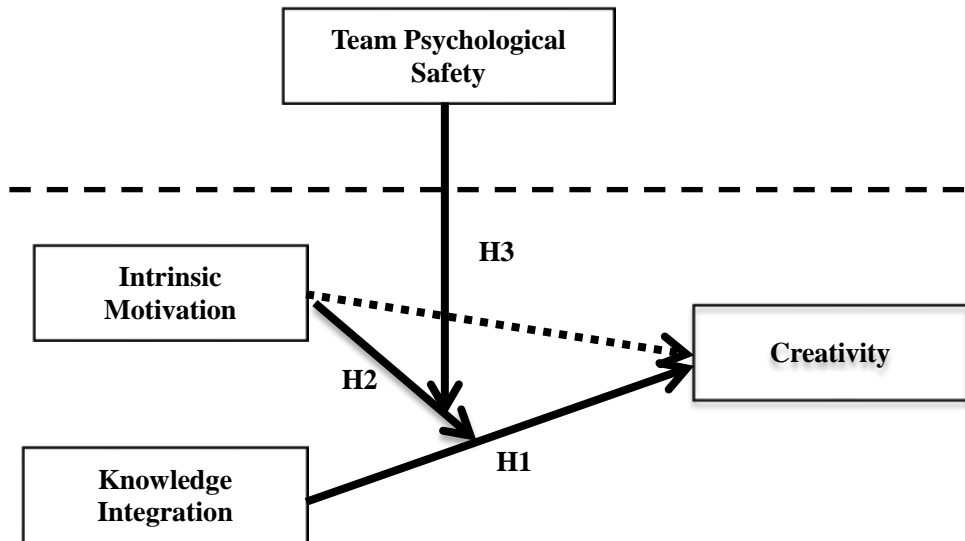


Figure 2 – Theoretical Model

Knowledge integration is individual self efficacy in combining knowledge from different sources (Tiwana, 2008). According to Amobile (2013) the creativity relevant process include the ability to use wide, flexible categories for integration information. So knowledge integration is a form of creativity relevant process. Creativity relevant process increases response generation, which in turn increases the creativity generation process. Therefore, knowledge integration increases the response generation step, which will increase the creativity as a result. So we can proposed:

*Proposition 1: Knowledge integration is positively associated with the employee creativity.*

Intrinsic task motivation is passion: the motivation to undertake a task or solve a problem because it is interesting, involving, personally challenging, or satisfying – rather than undertaking it out of the extrinsic motivation arising from contract for rewards, surveillance, competition, evaluation, or requirements to do something in a certain way. Increase in task motivation increases the response generation step in creativity process. We already mentioned that knowledge integration is positivity associated with response generation step. Therefore, increase in task motivation strengthens the relationship between knowledge integration and response generation step of creativity generation process.

There is another evidence, which roots in interactionist theory of creativity. Woodman and Schoenfeldt (1989, 1990) have proposed an interactionist model of creative behavior at the individual level. In this

model, they suggest that creativity is the complex product of a person's behavior in a given situation. According to this model there is interaction between different elements of creativity, such as intrinsic motivation and personality factors. Personality factor refers to personal trait such as broad interests, attraction to complexity, high energy, independence of judgment, self-confidence. Self-confidence is the belief that one has the knowledge and skills to produce creative outcomes (e.g., Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Lim & Choi, 2009; Tierney & Farmer, 2002, 2004, 2011).

On the other hand knowledge integration ability is define as individual self-efficacy in combining knowledge from different sources, therefore knowledge integration ability can be viewed as personality factor in interactionist theory. This provides another evidence for interaction of intrinsic motivation and knowledge integration. So we can proposed:

*Proposition 2: The positive association between knowledge integration and employee creativity is strengthened when the employee has high intrinsic motivation.*

Interactionist model of creativity is not limited to knowledge integration and intrinsic motivation, another important element in this interaction is social environment. Psychological safety is an important factor in social environment that affects the intrinsic motivation. According to Edmondson (1999) team psychological safety a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Schein and Bennis, 1966). Increase in psychological safety increases the intrinsic motivation, which in turn moderates the relationship between knowledge integration and creativity. Therefore, there is a three-way integration between these three constructs.

On the other hand interactionist theory argue that social factors like psychological safety interact with personality factors like knowledge integration and intrinsic motivation, this provide another evidence on three way interaction among the main elements of creativity:

*Proposition 3: There is a three-way interaction between the knowledge integration, intrinsic motivation and team psychological safety: the level of employee creativity is highest when all three dimensions are high.*

## **Conclusion**

This conceptual study conceptualizes a new relational view of creativity. A number of researchers have studied how structural and behavioral dimensions of interpersonal relationships, such as social networks (e.g., Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003) and communication styles (e.g., Amabile, 1979; Koestner et al., 1984; Shalley & Perry-Smith, 2001), influence creativity. This study complements these structural and behavioral approaches by documenting the importance of knowledge



integration and psychological safety in fueling creativity. We argued that there is a three-way interaction between the knowledge integration, intrinsic motivation and team psychological safety; the level of employee creativity is highest when all three dimensions are high.

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