

Examining Perception of Organizational Creativity in Turkish Public Organizations

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Abstract

Creative thinking has gained importance both at the individual and organizational levels in times of rapid change and progress. In order for the individuals to think creatively, it is necessary to provide an environment which promotes creativity. This study was conducted in a public organization in Istanbul with the aim to give a chance to the individuals to evaluate the creativity of the organization for which they work. The data obtained from the study were analyzed using the SPSS software. According to the findings, it has been concluded that the public organization is not very efficient in supporting creativity and providing a creative environment.

Keywords: Creativity, Innovation, Organizational Creativity, Public Sector, Demographic Characteristics.

1. Introduction

In today's world, science and technology are in continuous progress and organizations are under pressure to keeping up with this progress. This progress may have a significant impact on the life within the organizations and organizations develop new tendencies in order to keep up with this transformation in the society. At this point, human resources departments of the organizations gain a strategic significance. Each transformation and innovation bears the signature of creative employees. By developing new ideas, these creative employees lead the transformation and innovation within the organization. However, it is not enough that only the employees are creative, the organization should also support and promote creativity. If creativity remains only an idea, it is impossible for novelties to emerge. However, in a rapidly changing business environment, only organizations that can keep up with the transformation and introduce innovations can survive and grow. The driving force behind the change is the ability to put creative thinking into practice and organizations achieving this crucial step always run ahead of their competitors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Creativity

The concept of creativity originates from the Latin verb "*creare*", which means "to create" or "to make" (Balay, 2010: 45). According to the dictionary published by Turkish Language Society, creativity is defined as "*the state of being creative, the talent to create, and the imaginary tendency to create something which is assumed to be inherent to every individual*" (www.tdk.gov.tr).

Since there was no consensus on the definition of creativity for a long time, various definitions were suggested for the creative process, creative person and creative product (Amabile, 1983: 358).

In the most general sense, the definition of creativity is "to generate new and useful ideas in all spheres" (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby & Herron, 1996: 1155). The word creativity is also defined as "the ability to visualize, generate and implement new ideas or concepts or to generate new and useful ideas relating to the existing ideas or concepts with each other" (Helligel & Slocum, 2011: 431).

According to Levitt (2002), creativity is to suggest important and original ideas for the majority of the people, while Mumford (2000) defines it as "creating meaningful solutions which can be applied to some emergent problems as well as generating new ideas". Creativity plays a part in the definition of problem solving decision making as well as in identifying the alternatives and determining how to evaluate each one. Furthermore, creativity may help discover new ways of thinking in problem solving or decision making (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014: 224). Creativity is to generate new and appropriate ideas to be used in all spheres of life from human activities to science, art, education and business world (Amabile, 1997: 40).

In the concept of creativity which is defined as generating new and useful ideas, new ideas are represented by new ways of thinking. And useful ideas are described as ideas which have the potential to contribute to performance, the well-being of individuals, to the groups and the organization (George & Jones, 2011: 143). In order for an idea to be regarded as creative, it should be both original and new, and provide versatile benefits when put into practice.

In the literature, creativity is defined as an activity, process or program (Bharadwaj & Menon, 2000: 425). As an activity, creativity is to generate new, useful and practicable ideas never thought before. As a process, creative thinking is described as the stages to be followed from the generation of the idea to its implementation. The stages of the creative process are presented in Figure 1.

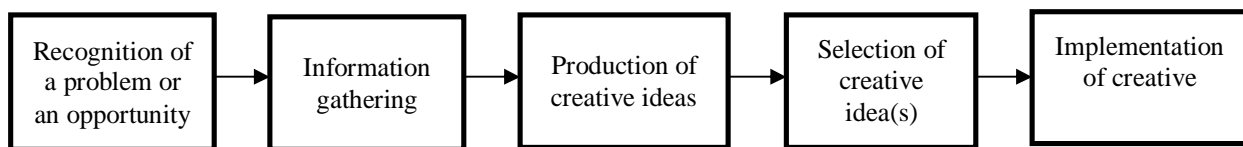


Figure 1: The Creative Process

Resource: George & Jones, 2011: 143.

In order to generate creative ideas, the primary step is to be aware of the opportunities and identify the existing problems. Creative thinking is activated by the data collected to identify the opportunities and solve the problems. Among the ideas generated, the beneficial and feasible ones should be selected and put into practice. Creativity must be a continuing process and not a consequence (Rice, 2006: 233).

Creativity is based on creative thinking. Creative ideas should not only be original, but also be feasible and useful for individuals and organizations. Creative thinking should possess the following attributes (Samen, 2008: 365):

- It is the first. It should create something which has never been implemented before.
- It should generate a new product or service.
- It should be generated by using insight and imagination.
- It is the culmination of what previously existed, a value added.
- It should result from curiosity and questioning: What is it and how and why is it so?
- It is indispensable. It is necessary to keep up with the change.
- It is a need. When existing solutions fail to work, creative ideas are required.
- It should be teachable.
- It requires free thinking and a free working environment.

Creativity is a function of three components including expertise, ability to think creatively and motivation (Amabile, 1998: 78). Expertise, a component of creativity, is formed by technical, procedural and intellectual knowledge. The ability to think creatively is related with the individual's characteristics such as independence, self-discipline, risk-taking and tolerance of uncertainty; and it indicates how the individual approaches problems and opportunities flexibly and imaginatively. The motivation of people for their work is a component nurturing creativity and intrinsic motivation and rewards promote creativity more than the extrinsic motivation and rewards (Amabile, 1997: 43-44; Amabile, 1998: 78).

Creativity, novelty and innovation are concepts considered as synonyms or confused with each other. These concepts are not synonyms and born from each other. Generating new and original knowledge based on existing knowledge is defined as creativity, while putting the new knowledge into practice is defined as innovation (Özçer, 2005: 14). While creativity is divergent thinking and innovation is convergent thinking, creativity is generating ideas and innovation is putting these ideas into practice (Gurteen, 1998: 6). Innovation is defined as the implementation or adaptation of new or useful ideas by people in organizations and it is dependent on creativity (Amabile & Conti, 1999: 630). Innovation is related with change and it is the transformation achieved through the implementation of the original ideas created as a result of creative thinking (Martins & Terblanche, 2003: 68).

2.2. Organizational Creativity

The competition in the business world forces the organizations to generate new, useful and practical products and services. The ability of organizations to gain competitive advantage depends on their creativity. A climate of creativity is established in organizations as a result of the individuals' creative thinking, and thus, creativity is evaluated at the organizational level. Creativity in organizations is defined as generating new, useful and valuable ideas for the products, processes, services and procedures by individuals and groups (Martins & Terblanche, 2003: 67). Organizational creativity is the formation of a valuable and useful new product, service, idea, procedure or process by individuals collaborating in a complex social system (Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993: 293). The leadership styles adopted by organization, organizational culture, organizational climate, organizational structure and systems, and the resources and skills are shown in Figure 2 as factors influencing organizational creativity.

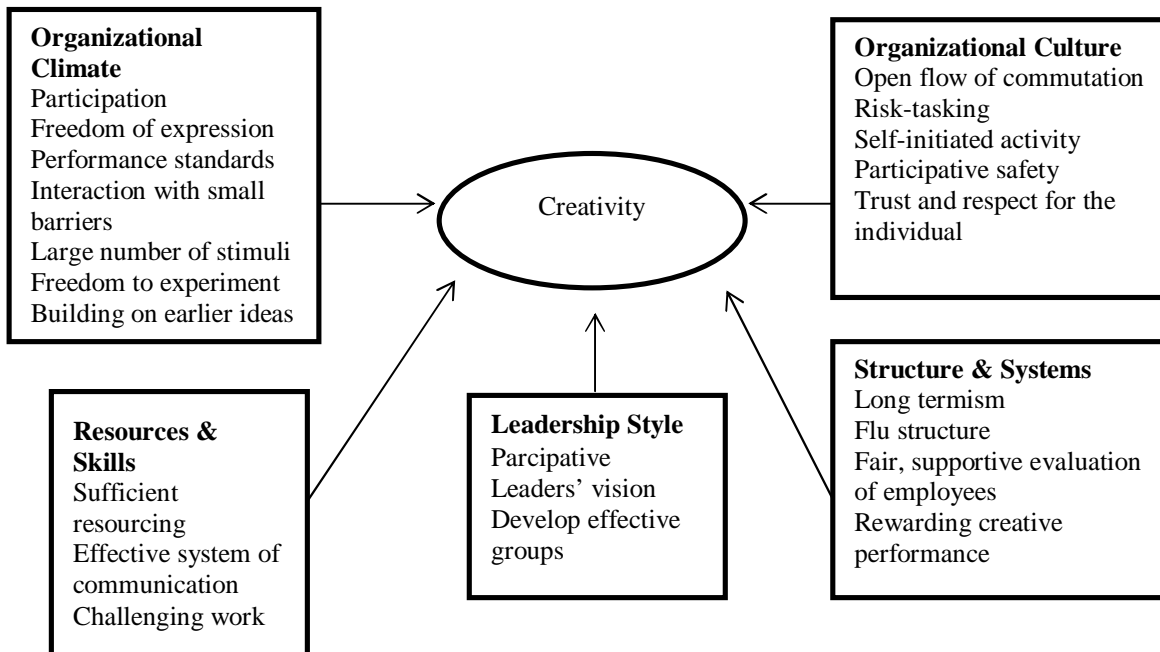


Figure 2: Influencing Factors on Organizational Creativity

Resource: Andriopoulos, 2001: 835.

A dynamic working environment with established trust and performance standards where the employees are involved in decision making and everyone can express their ideas freely nurtures creativity and innovation (Andriopoulos, 2001: 834; Sharman & Johnson, 1997: 86). Bharadwaj and Menon (2002) have shown in their study that a working environment nurturing creativity makes it possible to benefit more from the creative employees.

Organizational structures and systems include formal and informal processes and the reward, recognition and career systems within the organization (Cook, 1998: 180-181). The structure and the competencies of the organization influence creativity in rendering the organization innovative, adapting it to the external environment, and sharing and developing new ideas (Williams, 2001: 65).

According to Brand (1998), creative organizations have a flat, i.e. a horizontal structure that gives the opportunity to the employees from all levels to make important decisions. The study conducted by Brand (1998) on 3M, which is one of the most important creative companies in the world, suggests that the organizational structure tends to be flexible and there is a high level of autonomy within the organization with a few rules and regulations and reduced job definitions. It is also observed that a long-term organizational commitment was achieved by focusing on the careers of employees and it is a rule for the employees to devote 15% of their working time to creativity, while life-long employment and promotion are an important policy of 3M.

While flexible values, autonomy and communication between the work groups within the organization promote creativity, principles such as strict values, control and preserving the status quo tether creativity (Martins & Terblanche, 2003: 70). In an organizational structure, regular performance evaluations of the employees and rewarding creative performances through an efficient and fair rewarding system can help organizational creativity improve. According to Amabile (1988), office gossip harms creativity since it distances the employees from work. Therefore, it can be claimed that it is important to detect any gossip within the organization and to disarm the gossip mechanism.

Extrinsic motivation and reward or punishment may not be a long-term source of creativity (Özçer, 2005: 22). An individual can attain more creative results when s/he performs highly intrinsically motivated behaviors willingly and voluntarily without expecting an external reward (Chang & Chiang, 2007: 6). In addition to these characteristics of the employees, a free working environment where the employees have a say about their own tasks and receive feedback in return, as well as a fair rewarding system and the feeling that the employees' own duties actually make a difference for the organization are the basic factors of organizational creativity.

In a study conducted in 1997, Amabile concluded that intrinsic motivation is a factor providing creativity. It is further stated that a controlling extrinsic motivation damages creativity, while an informative extrinsic rewarding system providing opportunities allows for creativity when the intrinsic levels of the individuals are high. Amabile et al. (1996) and Amabile and Gryskiewicz (1987) state that extrinsic motivators support creative success. For example, rewarding and recognizing creative ideas through a permanent and continuous feedback system enhances creative success.

The ground for organizational creativity can be established by encouraging and supporting employees to take risks without criticizing and punishing them for their creative ideas (Andriopoulos, 2001: 836). Creativity is teachable and can benefit from various training programs improving the employees' creative performances (Williams, 2001: 64).

Important roles fall to managers and leaders in maintaining a working environment suitable for creativity. Amabile et al. (1996) have shown that leaders actually support creative ideas. The study by Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta and Kramer (2004) has demonstrated that the support of the leader is of great importance in establishing a creative working environment. In the organizations where the leader's support is obtained, a supportive atmosphere is created giving free ride to the employees' thinking and nourishing creative ideas. Leaders can support creativity by promoting information exchange and collaboration, and minimizing the policies within the organization (Andriopoulos, 2001: 838).

For a higher level of organizational creativity, the conditions shown in Figure 3 should be fulfilled.

Organizational encouragement	An organizational culture that encourages creativity through the fair, constructive judgement of ideas, reward and recognition for creative work, mechanism for developing new ideas, an active flow of ideas and a shared vision of what the organization is trying to do.
Supervisory encouragement	A supervisor, who serves as a good work model, sets goals appropriately, supports the work group, values individual contributions and shows confidence in the work group.
Work group supports	Diversely skilled work groups, in which people communicate well, are open to new ideas, constructively challenge each other's work, trust and help each other, and feel committed to the work they are doing.
Sufficient resources	Access to appropriate resources, including funds, materials, facilities and information.
Challenging work	A sense of having to work hard on challenging tasks and important projects.
Freedom	Freedom in deciding what work to do or how to do it; a sense of control over one's work.

Figure 3: The Conditions for Higher Level of Organizational Creativity

Resource: Amabile, 1997: 48.

Organizations need creative ideas in order to compete with their rivals in a dynamic business environment. Creative ideas depend upon individuals and a supportive environment is vital for them to emerge. In order for an organization to be creative, all systems forming the organization should function in harmony and support creative thinking since creative ideas trapped within individuals' mind do not contribute to the system.

3. Research Methodology and Data Collection

3.1. The Aim of the Study

Since the competition is rapidly increasing worldwide, supporting creative thinking has become vital in order to keep pace with this competition. To assure this, organizations should create an environment which promotes creative thinking. The aim of this study is to investigate whether the public sector allows for the emergence of creative thinking. For this purpose, it was observed whether public employees are provided with a working environment in which they can reveal their creativity.

3.2. Method, Sample and Data Collection

Survey method was used for data collection in this study. Daft's (2008: 372) "Is Your Company Creative" scale was used during the preparation of the survey. The survey consists of two sections. The first section included 7 questions to measure the demographical characteristics of the participants. The second section contains 10 questions using five-point Likert scales (1= Strongly disagree...5=Strongly agree), which are intended to evaluate the creativity of the participants' organizations. The survey was conducted face to face with 77 people who work in a tax office in Istanbul.

3.3. Analytic Procedure (Statistical Analysis)

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 22) was used to analyze the data. First of all reliability analysis was used for reliability rate (Chronbach's Alfa) of questionnaire items. Reliability rate of questionnaire was found (Cronbach's Alpha) as 0, 94. Next descriptive statistical method was used to indicate the respondents' demographic characteristics and respondents' perceptions for each nepotism questionnaire items. Mann Whitney-U and Kruskal Wallis tests were used for relationship between demographic characteristics and employees' perception of organizational creativity

3.4. Findings of the Study

3.4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Age	F	(%)	Education Level	F	(%)
21-29 years	41	53,2	Primary school	1	1,3
30-39 years	27	35,1	High school	3	3,9
40-49 years	8	10,4	Undergraduate	6	7,8
+50 years	1	1,3	Total	77	100
Total	77	100			
Gender	F	(%)	Marital Status	F	(%)
Female	21	27,3	Married	34	44,2
Male	56	72,7	Single	43	55,8
Total	77	100	Total	77	100

According to Table 1, 77 subjects have participated in the survey, among which 21 are female and 56 are male. Among the participants, 44.2% are married, while 55.8% are single. About 88.3% of the civil servants are between the ages of 21 and 39, and 11.7% of them are age 40 or above. In terms of education, 87% of the participants held graduate or postgraduate titles.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Income (Turkish Lira)	F	(%)	Working position	F	(%)
1001-1500 TL	1	1,3	Civil servant	30	38,9
1501-2000 TL	6	7,8	Revenue specialists	11	31,2
+2001 TL	70	90,9	Assistant revenue specialists	24	14,3
Total	77	100	Tax inspector	3	3,9
Organizational Tenure	F	(%)	Servant, security officer, driver	4	5,2
0-5 years	62	80,5	Others (Data preparation and control operator, assistant manager, legal advisor, project manager)	5	6,5
6-10 years	7	9,1			
11-15 years	2	2,6			
16-20 years	2	2,6			
+21 years	4	5,2			
Total	77	100	Total	77	100

According to Table 2, the great majority equal to 85% of the participants are civil servants, revenue specialists and assistant revenue specialists. Among the employees, 80.5% are working in the organization for 5 years or less, while 5.2% are employed for more than 21 years. In terms of income, 90.0% of the employees have an income of TL 2001 or above.

3.4.2. Evaluations of Organizational Creativity

The results of the frequency analysis of the responses using the Likert scale to the questions aimed to determine whether or not the organization supports creative ideas have given the results presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Mean, Std. Deviation and Frequencies of Questionnaire Items

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	1		2		3		4		5	
			(never)		(rarely)		(sometimes)		(often)		(always)	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
C1. We are encouraged to look for new ideas about our own unit of work in or out of the organization.	2,35	1,244	24	31,2	26	33,8	5	6,5	20	26,0	2	2,6
C2. We are supported for the development of ideas to make suggestions to the management.	2,57	1,282	21	27,3	21	27,3	7	9,1	26	33,8	2	2,6
C3. Risks, creative efforts, ideas and practice are supported in our performance meetings.	2,51	1,199	18	23,4	27	35,1	9	11,7	21	27,3	2	2,6
C4. We are encouraged to take part in various activities (professional meetings, trade fairs, customer visit etc.) and obtain new information.	2,30	1,257	27	35,1	23	29,9	6	7,8	19	24,7	2	2,6

Table 4: Mean, Std. Deviation and Frequencies of Questionnaire Items (Continue)

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	1		2		3		4 (often)		5	
			(never)		(rarely)		(sometimes)				(always)	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
C5. Our meetings are designed as allowing brain storming, discussing and generating new ideas.	2,17	1,129	26	33,8	26	33,8	14	18,2	8	10,4	3	3,9
C6. We contribute to meeting with our new ideas.	2,36	1,169	19	24,7	30	39,0	14	18,2	9	11,7	5	6,5
C7. The meetings happen spontaneously and are satisfactory.	2,19	1,077	23	29,9	29	37,7	14	18,2	9	11,7	2	2,6
C8. We discuss about our organizational structure and how our activities in work groups support or harm creativity.	2,23	1,146	24	31,2	27	35,1	13	16,9	10	13,0	3	3,9
C9. The chair of the meeting is elected amongst the employees.	2,14	1,167	27	35,1	29	37,7	7	9,1	11	14,3	3	3,9
C10. All employees in work groups agree to learn creative techniques and maintain creativity climate.	2,40	1,150	20	26,0	25	32,5	15	19,5	15	19,5	2	2,6

- About 65% of the participants stated that they are never encouraged to look for new ideas about their own unit of work in or out of the organization or they are rarely encouraged, and about 29% of them responded that they are always encouraged.
- About 28% think that there is no support for the development of ideas to make suggestions to the management; 28% think that the support is rarely provided and about 34% of them think that they are often supported. As little as 3% responded that they are always supported.
- 23.4% stated that in their performance meetings the risks, creative efforts, ideas and practices are never supported; while about 35% think that they are rarely supported and about 30% responded that they are often or always supported.
- 35% of the employees think that they are never encouraged to take part in various activities and obtaining new information, while about 30% feel that they are rarely encouraged and 28% stated that they are often or always encouraged.
- Approximately 15% think that the meetings are frequently or always held so that they allow employees to generate new ideas, while the percentage of those who think that the meetings are never held in this manner is 34%.
- Approximately 64% never or rarely contributes to the meeting with their ideas. Approximately 18% of them stated that they frequently or always make contributions during the meetings.
- Among them, 68% think that meetings never happen spontaneously, are never satisfactory, or rarely happen spontaneously or are satisfactorily. Approximately 14% think that meetings frequently or always happen spontaneously and are satisfactory.
- About 67% of the employees stated that the way the organizational structure and the activities of the employees support or harm creativity is never or rarely discussed at the meetings.

- About 73% of the employees stated that the person to chair the meeting is never or rarely elected from amongst the employees, while approximately 18% stated that the chairperson at the meetings is frequently or always elected from the employees.
- Among the participating employees, 26% never agree to learn creative techniques and maintain the creative climate within the organization, while approximately 33% rarely; 19% sometimes or frequently, and 3% always agree to do so.

3.4.3. The Relationships between Employees' Demographic Characteristics and Employees' Opinions of Organizational Creativity

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test and the Kruskal Wallis test were applied to the data set to observe whether the demographic characteristics of the participants affect their evaluation of the creativity of the organization.

Table 5: Results of Mann-Whitney U Tests by Gender and Marital Status

Variables	C1 Sig.	C2 Sig.	C3 Sig.	C4 Sig.	C5 Sig.	C6 Sig.	C7 Sig.	C8 Sig.	C9 Sig.	C10 Sig.
Gender	,227	,297	,309	,229	,924	,299	,338	,962	,664	,850
Marital Status	,466	,109	,030	,321	,167	,026	,009	,138	,112	,120

According to the results of the Mann-Whitney U test shown in Table 5, it is observed that the genders of the employees have no effect on their evaluation of the organizational creativity. A significant difference was observed between the marital status of the employees and the responses to C3, C6 and C7 since a result of $p < 0.05$ was found. According to this, single employees have a more positive view towards the statements "the performance meetings support the risks, creative efforts, ideas and practices" and "the employees contribute to the meetings with their ideas" and "the meetings often happen spontaneously and are satisfactory" than their married employees. Based on this, it can be concluded that compared to the married employees, single employees think that the meetings held in the organization are helpful in terms of supporting creativity; that they are more willing to attend to the meetings, and are conscious about improving themselves.

Table 6: Results of Kruskal Wallis Tests by Age, Education Level, Organizational Tenure, Work Position and Income

Variables	C1 Sig.	C2 Sig.	C3 Sig.	C4 Sig.	C5 Sig.	C6 Sig.	C7 Sig.	C8 Sig.	C9 Sig.	C10 Sig.
Age	,455	,279	,307	,297	,118	,241	,352	,415	,232	,215
Education Background	,580	,355	,207	,052	,308	,262	,222	,555	,165	,711
Organizational Tenure	,371	,287	,650	,452	,111	,237	,240	,225	,225	,313
Work position	,349	,636	,483	,083	,359	,345	,428	,155	,133	,273
Income	,414	,484	,809	,149	,563	,413	,365	,433	,293	,153

According to the results of Kruskal Wallis test shown in Table 6, there is no significant difference between the ages, educational background, positions, working time and income of the employees and their evaluation of the organization in terms of creativity.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

While creative thinking is the first step in generating and implementing new ideas, innovation may be regarded as a significant factor which is able to improve an organization much further. Innovation depends upon supporting creativity. This study was aimed to determine whether creativity is supported in the organization in the public sector. The results from the analysis of the data collected within the scope of the study are not so optimistic. Factors such as demographic characteristics, position, working hours and income do not seem to make a difference in the employees' evaluation of their organizations. A great majority of the employees stated that they are never or rarely encouraged in searching or acquiring new ideas. Cengiz, Acuner and Baki (2007) have observed in their study that organizational creativity is affected mostly by the management's support and open policies.

It is clearly obvious that the employees are rarely supported in making suggestions to the management or putting forward new ideas at meetings while creative efforts, ideas and practices are never or rarely supported at the performance meetings. An organizational culture supporting a confidential, open and transparent communication nurtures creativity and innovation (Martins & Terblanche, 2003: 72-73). In their study conducted on creative organizations, Kratzer et al. (2004) have found that frequent communication and central communication weaken creativity. It can be claimed that communication by means of multidirectional, transparent and open channels only when needed supports creativity.

On the one hand, it is observed that creativity is not prioritized at the meetings or interviews within the organization. On the other, although the organization does not have any activity giving a chance to the creativity of its employees, only a small part of the employees are open to creativity in the first place. About 74% of the employees rarely agree to learning creative techniques and maintaining a creative climate in the organization. Mathisen, Einarsen and Mykletun (2012) have observed in their study that the more a climate of creativity develops within the organization, the more creative behaviors are exhibited, resulting in creative products res.

It can be claimed that the organization the survey was conducted in is not one which gives a strong support to creativity. The low importance attributed to creativity in this organization may be associated with its structure as a non-profit organization without competition and with heavy bureaucracy and a strict chain of command. According to previous studies, organizations with a low level of bureaucracy and without strict chain of command support creativity, while democratic, participatory and supporting leadership styles also nourish creativity (Andriopoulos, 2001; Cook, 1998; Williams, 2001). Oldham and Cumming (1996) also found that a controlling leadership style diminishes creativity while a supporting leadership style improves it.

Whether private or public, creative thinking and new ideas in organizations may contribute to a more effective and productive functioning. Therefore, the suggestions and opinions of the employees should always be valued in any environment. While the awareness of the managers in this respect is vital, when the managers' mentality is based on the idea that the employees will do their job and get their money regardless of any creative thinking, this will only cause the organization to run in circles instead of progressing.

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