

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE IN RWANDA: CASE OF IMBARAGA FARMER MAIZE SHELLER PROJECT

Uwineza Carine

JomoKenyattaUniversityofAgricultureandTechnology,
Kigali,Rwanda.
Email:ucarrine@gmail.com

Dr. Jaya Shukla.

JomoKenyattaUniversityofAgricultureandTechnology,
Kigali,Rwanda.
Email : js.jayashukla@gmail.com

Joseph Oduor

JomoKenyattaUniversityofAgricultureandTechnology,
Kigali,Rwanda.
Email:joekoduor@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Creative employees are crucial in ensuring project performance. However, scant research has investigated the importance of employee creativity on project performance. Projects need creative employees to initiate project innovation and achieve its goals. Employee creativity is recognized as key for generating a competitive advantage. In order to answer the research questions, a quantitative approach was used. The target population was all the 150 members of the Imbaraga maize Sheller project. Sample size of 90 members of the project who had been in the project for not less than two years, were purposively selected for the study. Primary data was collected using self-administered questionnaire. Data collected was coded edited and analyzed using SPSS to generate results. The findings revealed that the level of creativity among the employees was low. Most of the project members were not educated. Creativity was seen to be helpful in project performance more so in maze processing and marketing. The study concluded that creativity of employees is an important factor to consider in addressing project performance. The study recommended that Project supervisors should keep a supportive behavior with the employees that directly influence employee creative achievements. For the success of the project, Managers should keep supportive supervision for employees that is more likely to enhance creative achievements; in contrast to a controlling supervision that is likely to diminish creative achievements. Imbaraga project should develop a culture of motivating its employees to reap their full potential and productivity

Key words:project performance Employee creativity, Imbaraga maize Sheller project

1. Introduction

Since the industrial revolution, organizations focus on productivity: maximization of output at minimum cost. To support this objective, management principles and instruments have been developed and used in manufacturing and services companies all over the world. As a result, labor is divided into small specialized tasks, processes are standardized allowing mechanization and automation, and workers are specialized to do remaining tasks, many times resulting in repetitive and monotonic work in standard workplaces. The manager's role is to control whether the worker performs the task according to a predetermined plan, and the worker's payment is partly based on realizing predicted output (Shalley et al., 2004).

A company that needs to compete on innovation needs its employees not only for reaching productivity goals, but also for generating new business ideas. Employee creativity is the production of novel and potentially useful ideas for solving problems, and for developing new products, services, processes, systems, work methods, etc. (Amabile, 1999). It is a vital resource for an organization's innovation, and employees at any level in the organization can contribute to this goal.

Because creative performance of employees depends on individual characteristics such as personality traits (e.g. openness to experience), cognitive style, and creativity relevant skills, practices for enhancing employee creativity have traditionally focused on recruitment and selection of creative talents, and on creativity training of the workforce (Scott et al., 2004).

However, creative employees that are placed in traditional productivity driven organizations with formal structures, time constraints, strict regulations, daily similar tasks, standardized workplaces, etc., may not be stimulated to show the desired creative behavior. The extent to which a person generates new and useful ideas depends on the support that is received from the work environment. (Woodman, 2010).

This paper addresses the question of how the day-to-day work environment can be designed to foster creativity at work. In modern business, creativity and innovation are important indicators of an organization's performance, and creative work environment can advance employees' well-being in terms of job satisfaction and lower intentions to leave (Shalley et al. 2000).

1.1 Imbaraga farmer association

The mission of the Imbaraga Farmer Federation is the professionalization of the farming profession to improve the welfare of farmers in rural areas and to change perceptions of the people. The association was founded in 1992 by Rwandan farmers, Imbaraga is a peasant organization comprises of 94,324 farmer members today and located throughout 5 provinces in Rwanda that brings farmers together to share best practices and resources. The organization runs on member fees (about USD 2 annually) and contributions from non-governmental organizations.

Imbaraga operates three overarching programs, including training farmers in the latest agronomic practices, linking farmers with viable markets (either through identification of markets or assistance with physical transpiration), and assisting farmers as they adapt to new agricultural technologies to lighten their workload. The organization is structured at the regional level, whereby farmer groups of 30 farmers organize themselves into regional groups for the election of the federation's representatives.

Imbaraga operates a full training center in Musanze, in northern Rwanda, that has the capacity to train 200 farmers each day. With a staff of 22 full-time and 50 part-time agronomists, they work to improve the technical capacity of their member farmers. Imbaraga has a long record of connecting farmers with partners such as research centers like the International Potato Center (CIP) or the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Rwandan government's Ministry of Agriculture and other farmer federations such as the East African Farmers Federation (EAFF).

2. Statement of the problem

In business today, firms must innovate on a continuous basis to stay competitive and to survive in the long run. Many practitioners and scientists suggest that the extent to which any firm can continuously innovate is linked to innovation and creativity by individual employees. Employees can be creative either because it is part of their job description or by expressing voluntary innovative behavior. (Hon R, 2012).

(Kovach, K.A. 1987) claims that “an organization which depends solely upon its blue-prints of prescribed behavior is a very fragile social system” and that organizations rely on voluntary innovative and spontaneous behavior (i.e., actions that are not specified by role prescriptions), which facilitates the accomplishment of organizational goals. Creative work behavior refers to behaviors that encompass both the generation and introduction of new ideas (either by oneself or adopted from others) and the realization or implementation of new ideas at work.

In western countries, employees' creative and innovative work behavior is crucial in many management principles to ensure continuous improvement (Kaizen 1986). Innovative firms consider their employees to be an important source of innovation and are constantly looking for ways to encourage employee-driven creativity. For example, the Swiss head of strategy and innovation at Swiss-com, Stéphane Dufour, stated (Swisscom, 2011): “Employees can and should contribute creative ideas. The challenge is to enable every employee to also make a contribution toward improving operational processes.”

In Africa, due to its macroeconomic situations, creativity is considered as a pillar for accelerated industrialization and economic growth. However, according to Hester (2006), the poor employee motivation and the lack of creativity promotion system, developing countries do not capitalize the creativity in employees. To overcome those challenges, Africa has put in place strategies such as the NEPAD through which knowledge sharing is promoted across countries.

In Rwanda, one of the strategic directions of Vision 2020 is to promote creativity by leveraging creativity and innovation. According to MIFOTRA (2013) employee's performance considers the creativity initiated by employees. In that context, Rwanda regulates the creativity and innovation camps where employees and young entrepreneurs are mentored in promoting creativity.

Despite its general consideration as a key factor towards successful businesses, few scientists have conducted research on how creativity impacts the project performance. Thus, driven by the assumption that employees' creative work behavior is beneficial for project performance, we have chosen to carry a deep analysis on the effect of employee creativity on projects performance.

This study was conducted on the case of IMBARAGA farmer Federation, one of the strong local organizations promoting employee creativity in meeting farmer's needs estimated at 86.7% of total Rwanda population. The employees of IMBARAGA Association have initiated 4 different projects: potato chips project, high Iron beans packaging, water harvesting and Maize intensification project. Considering its relevancy in the context of Rwanda where the agriculture policy promotes maize intensification, this study will assess the effect of maize Sheller technology created in 2013 by IMBARAGA employees on the performance of Maize intensification project.

3. Research objectives

3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study was to determine the relationship between the determinants of employee's creativity and project performance

3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To find out the relationship between employee relevant skills and project performance.
2. To explore the relationship between employees relevant creativity process and project performance.
3. To investigate the relationship between motivation and project performance

4. Research Questions

1. To what extent does employee relevant skills influence project performance?
2. What is the relationship between creativity processes and performance?
3. To what extent does motivation influence project performance?

5. Research Design

In order to answer the research questions, a quantitative approach was used. Quantitative research methods attempt to maximize objectivity, explicability, and generalizability of findings, and are typically interested in prediction (Creswell, 2008). Descriptive research determines and reports the way things are and also helps a researcher to describe a phenomenon in terms of attitude, values and characteristics. An advantage of this study design as argued by is that the researcher can acquire a lot of information cheaply in terms of time and financial resources (Creswell, 2008).

6. Target population

According to Bolg and Gall (1989) target population is all the members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events, or objects which the researcher wishes to generalize the research study. The target population for this study was all the 150 members who have been working with Imbaraga maize Sheller project for over two years.

7. Sampling Technique

This study used purposive sampling technique also called judgment sampling. According to Bernard (2002) this technique involves deliberate choice of a respondent due to the qualities he possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a representative set number of respondents (Bernard 2002). Only the members of the project who had been in the project for two or more years were involved in the study. The two or more year's membership ensured that the respondents were conversant with the activities and performance of the project and were best fitted to answer questions on creativity.

8. Data collection

8.1 Data collection instrument

The study relied on primary data that was collected using questionnaire. Questionnaires were selected for this study because they are easy to use even with a large population.

8.2 Reliability of instrument

Reliability is referring to the trustworthiness and the consistency of the research findings and whether the findings can be reproducible by other researchers at another time, or if the interviewees will give different answers to different researching interviewers (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009). Reliability is therefore concerned with whether the findings have been established by and are ensuring that they are supported by sufficient and compelling evidence (Somekh&Lewin, 2005).

In order to secure the reliability of a qualitative study, the steps of the procedures during the research process should be documented. To increase the reliability, the transcripts will be checked several times in order to find potential mistakes during the transcription(Bryman, 2008).

8.3 Validity

Validity refers to whether the study measures what it is intended to measure (Nachmias&Nachmias, 1996). It is concerned with the degree to which the observations reflect what is in interest of being studied (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009) and the credibility and authenticity of the findings. A potential problem in qualitative research is that the researcher's background, beliefs, culture etc may shape the interpretations of the data that is formed during the research process (Creswell, 2009).

8.4 Data analysis

The completed questionnaires were edited for completeness and consistency before analyzing. Data editing was done in order to determine inaccurate or incomplete data and then improve the quality through correction of detected errors. After data cleaning, the data was coded and entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of data were presented using frequency distribution tables.

9. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

9.1 Demographic Information

Table1 shows that 23% of the respondents aged less than thirty years, 37% were within the age of 31-40 years while 25% aged between 41-50 years. This shows that both the youth and the old people were actively involved in the Imbaraga maize project. A large percentage of the respondents 48% did not have any education, 34% had primary education, 16% had secondary education and only 2% had tertiary education. This shows that the illiteracy level among the project member is fairly high. This may affect the creativity of the employees and hence the performance of the project. Sternberg &Lubart, 1992 argues that illiteracy and lack of skills affects individual creativity.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age		
less than 30	18	23
31-40	37	46
41-50	25	31
Total	80	100
Gender		
Male	33	41
Female	47	59
Total	80	100
Marital status		
Married	52	65
Single	28	35
Total	80	100
Level of education		
None	38	48
Primary	27	34
Secondary	13	16
University/college	2	2
Years of membership		
2-5 years	58	72
Above 5 years	22	28
Total	80	100

Source :(Primary date 2015)

Majority of the participants 72% had been in the project for 2-5 years while those who had been in the project for more than five years were 28 %.

9.2 Distribution of respondent's responses

Table 2 below indicates that motivation was one of the determinants of creativity. Majority of the respondent (78%) indicated that motivation influenced employee's creativity. This implies that employees who received any form of motivation were more creative and hence more productive compared to those who were not motivated. This response agrees with Hennessey & Teresa (1998) who argued that motivation is one of the potential determinants of creative behavior. Employees who enjoy intrinsic motivation are more probable to experience greater risks and taking up new ways of doing things hence helping to improve project performance (Shalley et al., 2004).

Table 2: Distribution of respondent's responses

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Do you think motivation would enhance employee's creativity?	78	22
Does expertise determine creativeness of employees	84	16
Are there trainings conducted to promote skills of employee	74	26
Does creativity of employees help in establishing market for the harvested maize	69	31
Would you consider creativity helpful in ensuring maize is grown throughout the year?	72	28
Is creativity helpful in maize processing?	94	6
Employee creativity has a positive influence on performance of your project	84	16
There is a creative environment that allow employees to be creative	9	91
Education background of employees influence their creativity and performance	11	89
Does skills enhancement determine creativeness of employees?	91	9
Does satisfaction determine creativeness of employees?	82	18

Trainings were being conducted to promote skills of employee which is a determinant of creativity. 74% of the respondents reported that trainings were being conducted to promote skills of employee. This indicates that the employees were equipped with skills needed for innovation and creativity for better performance of the project. Amabile (1983) argues that employees with relevant skills are likely to be more creative and better performers compared to those without skills and knowledge.

Expertise was reported by 84% of the respondents to determine the creativity of employees. Employees who are experts in given areas creatively solve certain problems within the project improving its performance. Expertises in various fields are likely to be more creative compared to those without any expertise. Expertise includes special talents in the target work domain, technical proficiency and memory for factual knowledge (Amabile, 1997).

Satisfaction was stated to determine the employees' creativity by 82% of the respondents. Employees who are satisfied in the project are more creative and perform better compared to those who are not satisfied.

Majority of the participants (91%) said that the environment within the project was didn't allow employees creativeness. Lack of support from the supervisors was seen as a hindrance to employee creativity. This indicates that the project environment limited the creativity and potential of the employees to perform by not being fully supportive. According to Lichtenstein et al., (2010) supportive supervisors show concern for employees' well-being by considering their needs, giving importance to their opinions and providing them with timely feedback to improve their skills and creativity.

Employee creativity was found to positively influence the project performance as stated by 84% of the respondents. Creativeness of the employees was reported to improve the project performance through market establishment and maize processing. 69% of the respondents indicated that creativity of employees helped in establishing market for their product. This indicated that creative employees are likely to market the products better than those who are not creative. Majority of the participants stated that creativity helped them to grow maize throughout the year. Activities such as establishment of various irrigation methods and water harvesting enabled them to grow maize in all seasons. This helps to increase the yields and to improve project performance.

9.3 Respondent responses on creativity relevant skills

Table 3, shows that expertise has been considered to be the major determinant of creativity relevant skills that highly affected the processing of maize at a rate of 82%.

Table 3: respondent responses on creativity relevant skills

Which of the following employee relevant skills affect the processing of maize on time?	
Creativity Relevant	Percentage (%)
Expertise	82
Knowledge	18

According to responses from respondent, 82% mentioned that expertise is what mostly affects the processing of maize on time. This was emphasized on because most employees who are involved in maze processing have been working with Imbaraga dot more than two years. They mentioned that before, although they had some knowledge on how maize processing is done, it was very difficult for them to put it into action as the process that was used was more traditional whereby they took most of their time sited and using their own hand to peel off the maize from the corn. This could give less production at the end of the day. But as time went by, they became experts and even developed new ideas of how they could process maize in the quick way possible where they developed an electronic system of peeling maize off the corn which was way faster and at the end of the day, they could produce large quantity of maize.

Eighteen percent (18%) of the respondents mentioned that knowledge affected the processing of maize as they applied what they were trained on and applied it in real action. Respondents mentioned that knowledge sharing was also a factor that led to maize processing on time.

Although many respondents said that expertise leads to maize to be processed on time, the determinants go hand in hand and they are an important factor that leads to maize processing on time.

9.4 Respondent responses on creativity relevant processes

Table 4 below explains how skills in generating ideas as a determinant of creativity relevant processes affect the productivity of maize.

Table 4: respondent responses on creativity relevant processes

Which of the following employee creativity relevant processes affect lead to productivity?

Creativity Relevant Processes	Percentage (%)
Risk taking	14
Disciplined work style	40
Skills in generating ideas	46

Table 4 mentions that 14% of respondents are more productive whenever they decide to take risk. This is because even though the employees had developed an electronic system of maize shelling, they also faced with challenges like lack of electricity which could affect the production negatively. Most employees especially women could spend most of their time using traditional method of maize shelling and could ignore the pain they usually suffered from because of sitting for a very long time.

40% mentioned that the disciplined work style helped them to increase their production. They said that they receive a lot of training which keeps them learning and working together to the best of their association. According to the statistics from Imabraga association, there is a big difference in terms of increased production from year to year. This means that the more training they get, the more disciplined work style and hence an increase in production.

46% of the respondent's mentioned that having skills in generating new and unique ideas is an important factor that leads to increased productivity. They also emphasized that they trainings that they get opens up their mind and helps them to be more creative. This is shown by how employees have managed to come up with the best solution for women who normally use the traditional system of shelling off maize from the corn and innovated a tool whereby it has a sitting chair to help them reduce their fatigue and backbone pain.

9.5 Respondent responses on task motivation

Table 5 below indicates that motivation factors, most especially giving incentives to employees play a vital role to the increase of productivity.

Table 5: respondent responses on task motivation

Which of the following task motivation determinants lead to project productivity?

Determinants that lead to project productivity	Percentage (%)
Interest	10
Enjoyment	32
Satisfaction	11
Challenge of the work itself	3
Incentives	44

From table 5, 44% of respondents emphasized on incentives as the factor that leads to increased production. This is so because the association has a policy of rewarding any employee who brings a unique idea for the best of Imbaraga association. 32% mentioned that they enjoy what they do. This is so because most employees of imbaraga farmer association are farmers or have been involved in a certain agriculture activity. This makes them enjoy what they do. 11% mentioned that they feel satisfied with what they do. The emphasis was also that they have been involved more in agricultural activities for many years. 10% of respondents feel interested because not only they apply what they learn from the Association at work, but they also in their homes and this has increased their health standards. Only 3% mentioned that challenge of the work itself makes them feel motivated. This is so because whenever a challenge comes up and they find a solution to it, they feel they own part of the results that have come out of the challenge and this gives them courage and motivation to go forward.

9.6 Correlations

Table 6: Correlations

		Expertise	Knowledge	level of education
Expertise	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	80		
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.296		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008		
	N	80	80	
level of education	Pearson Correlation	.190	.090	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.091	.090	
	N	80	80	80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results from table 6 show that expertise, knowledge and level of education positively relates to performance of Imbaraga maize project. Expertise and knowledge had a significant correlation with project performance ($r = 0.296$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that improving employees 'expertise and knowledge will result into an increase in project performance. Although there was a positive relationship between level of education and knowledge, the relationship was not significant to influence project performance

10. Conclusions And Recommendations

10.1 Conclusions

Creativity of the employees is important for overall project performance. Employees should be equipped with knowledge, expertise and technical skills to enhance their innovation and hence boost project performance. Creativity-relevant processes which include personality characteristics that are conducive to independence, risk-taking, and taking new perspectives on problems, as well as a disciplined work style and skills in generating ideas are critical in ensuring creativity.

Supervisors need to be supportive to the employees and give them the guidance they need for better performance. Motivated employees are more creative and perform better compared to those who are not. Developing a culture of motivating employees is likely to boost project performance. Imbaraga maize Sheller project requires creative employees in order to improve the performance.

10.2 Recommendations

Employees should be exposed to more relevant training that can enhance their creativity and innovation. Project supervisors should keep a supportive behavior with the employees that directly influence employee creative achievements. For the success of the project. Managers should keep supportive supervision for employees that is more likely to enhance creative achievements; in contrast to a controlling supervision that is likely to diminish creative achievements. Imbaraga project should develop a culture of motivating its employees to reap their full potential and productivity

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