

THE INCONGRUENT INFLUENCE OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive environment, businesses must rely on innovative ideas to build their core competencies and gain a competitive advantage, or suffer great market share losses. It is for this reason that many studies have explored employee creativity and empowering leadership. Previous studies have focused on empowering leadership as a managerial behavior that fosters employee creativity. However, since such studies implicitly assumed that work environments are congruent with employee creativity, they overlooked contextual factors that are not necessarily ideal for employee creativity. This study theoretically examines how contextual factors, specifically those that potentially hinder employee creativity, affect the relationship between empowering leadership and creative process engagement, with the help of the interactionist perspective and the social information processing theory. Following the theoretical review, we provide a theoretical model that implies that beyond well-meaning empowering efforts by leaders, there are other factors, such as social effects and mismatches between management's messages and their behaviors, that impede employee creativity. This, in effect, implies that managers should not only look to empowering leadership as a sure way to improve employee creativity within the organization, but that they must also evaluate employee perceptions about the contextual factors toward the efforts of their supervisors.

INTRODUCTION

To accommodate rapidly changing markets, many firms now need to continually develop new products or services. In such a business climate, many firms regard employee creativity as one of the most critical managerial resources (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014). Employee creativity refers to "the production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together" (Amabile, 1988, p.126). Therefore, the demand for employee creativity is no longer limited to businesses or workplaces that are typically innovation-intensive, such as product development departments or corporate planning offices; there is a growing need for management strategies that foster employee creativity in areas that did not require it before.

Reflecting these practical demands, employee creativity has also attracted attention among academic studies (Mumford, Hester, & Robledo, 2012). In particular, employee creativity has been portrayed as the first step to innovation (Amabile, 1988) and many studies have continuously explored mechanisms through which employee creativity is encouraged and factors that influence employee creativity (Anderson et al., 2014). For instance, some of these factors include individual personalities, job characteristics, and supervisory styles (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Among them, the influence of leadership on employee creativity has been the