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From the Technical Know-How to the Free Flow of Ideas: Exploring the Effects of Leader, Peer, and Team Communication on Employee Creativity

Leah M. Omilion-Hodges & Crystal D. Ackerman

Creativity is the lifeblood of a successful organization, as creative employees drive companies to be innovative and competitive. While studies have examined how leaders foster creativity, researchers have overlooked how communication between workgroup peers and teams cultivate creative output. Interviews were conducted to determine the effects of leader, peer, and team communication on employee creativity within the national video game industry. Results indicate communication exchanges uniquely influence employee creativity, with peer associations being most crucial. Informal mentoring, or "creativity coaches," were vital lifelines within creatively driven organizations. Additional findings highlight the importance of structure, support, and trust in creatively supportive organizations.

Keywords: Contextualized Workgroup; Creativity; Leadership; Organizational Communication; Workgroup Relationships

Creativity is arguably the lifeblood of a successful organization, as creative employees drive companies to be innovative, adaptive, and competitive (Uhl-Bien, Marion, &

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McKelvey, 2007). Within the United States exists a general consensus that organizations that support creativity are most likely to provide better customer experiences, have more satisfied customers and happier employees, and be more financially stable (Adobe, 2016). Despite the plethora of associated positive outcomes, research (Adobe, 2016) has revealed that the majority of employees feel that they are not reaching their creative potential, which begs the question of what can be done within communication research to rectify this intensifying problem.

Conceptualized as "the ability to produce work that is both novel and useful" (Lee, Lee, & Jo, 2012, p. 48), creativity has largely been researched with a focus heavily on relevant antecedents of innovation such as followers' intrinsic motivation and leader support (e.g., Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 2006; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), as the presence or lack thereof are salient to the implementation of a successful creativity-driven culture (Cerne, Jaklic, & Skerlavaj, 2013). Creativity is not workplace exclusive, and social influences on creativity can spark at any time or any place, such as a casual conversation with family or non-work friends. For the purpose of expanding upon extent organizational research, however, this study focuses on the intersection of workplace relationships and creativity. Much of this research has been explored through leader–follower relationships (e.g., Tierney et al.), but additional attempts to understand this impactful area have recognized the need for supportive cultures and rewarding behavior known to lead to creative output (Choi, Anderson, & Veillette, 2008; Egan, 2005).

Recent scholarship (e.g., Chen, Takeuchi, & Shum, 2013; Elsbach, 2009) found that creativity is affected by workplace contexts, including employee social encounters and professional interactions with leaders and peers. In other words, the leader–member relationship is only one indicator of employee creativity; the personal and professional communicative relationships employees share with their leaders, peers, and team combine to influence an associate's creative output. Moreover, studying merely the culture and leader undermines scores of literature that make cases for employee exchange relationships as the crux that defines the workplace for employees (e.g., Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013) and thus makes examining coworker and team creative influences vital. Consequently, while research indicates that leaders may enhance or diminish employee creativity, to date there are no studies that simultaneously consider how leader, peer, and team communication relationships coalesce to spark or fizzle innovation. Moreover, since talk embeds and enacts organizational norms, examining how leader, peer, and team communication enhances creativity will yield important insight into the ways that creative talk shapes and is shaped by the structure of workgroups (Boden, 1994). As a means to alleviate this fissure, the current study employs in-depth interviews to examine the driving role of communication and workgroup relationships in inducing employee creativity.

As one concrete means of extending extant literature, this study examines employees in the video game industry; an inherently creative sample was purposively selected for study for several reasons. Firstly, the decisive shift in recent years towards knowledge-based societies has "turned creativity into a source of strategic advantage," emphasizing the importance of understanding how to organize teams and manage creative employees to foster this enigmatic asset (DeFillippi, Grabher, & Jones, 2007, p. 511). While some creative professions

such as sculptors or musicians may create individually, in the video game industry, every organizational member contributes to the innovative processes necessary for video game developers to remain competitive in the electronic entertainment industry (Academy of the Arts, 2016). Thus in this particular industry, where both innovation and collaboration reign, research may be particularly helpful in understanding how employees perceive that leader, peer, and team relationships allow them to navigate and accomplish both analytic and creative objectives (Moeran, 2009). Finally, in this industry, like virtually all other creative-based positions, not only is creativity a key asset required to be hired, but it raises interesting questions about how to motivate and lead creatives to even greater levels of creativity. Before reviewing how video game industry professionals think and talk about how communication with leaders, peers, and teams impacts their creative output, we introduce and discuss the contextualized workgroup and then narrow our focus to review extant literature on the intersection of leader, coworker, and team communication and creativity.

The Contextualized Workgroup

Scholars have argued that leader–member, coworker, and team relationships serve distinct yet related purposes in the workgroup (Omilion-Hodges, Ptacek, & Zerilli, 2015). Though these relationships can exist independently, the rise of collaborative work and the sheer amount of time employees spend in the workplace emphasizes their interdependence (Sias, 2009). Examining these relationships in isolation obscures the rich communicative processes that occur in workgroups as employees work to satisfy individual and collaborative goals, develop and maintain relationships, navigate conflict, and establish boundaries (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). Similarly, communication research reveals that the quality of one's leader–member relationship drives, in large part, the relationships they will share with peers (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013). This has prompted scholars to move away from examining leader–member, peer, and team relationships as independent points of a triangle (reference Figure 1) to instead consider these symbiotic relationships as the foundations of a tent, where each relationship represents a different stake offering a more sophisticated view of the contextualized workgroup. Therefore, rather than attempting to silo the impact of one workgroup relationship, the contextualized workgroup accounts for the dynamic and complex entanglement of leader, peer, and team associations. In doing so, we can holistically consider not just how these pivotal relationships may impact organizational life for any individual employee but also how an employees' associations may subsequently impact others' leader, peer, and team relationships. We now turn to review extant literature regarding leader, peer, and team influences on employee creativity, specifically highlighting the current siloed state of this research in addition to fleshing out research questions.

Leader–Member Communication and Creativity

Leader–member exchange (LMX; Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975) is a dyadic and relational approach to exploring leadership through individual leader–follower couplings.

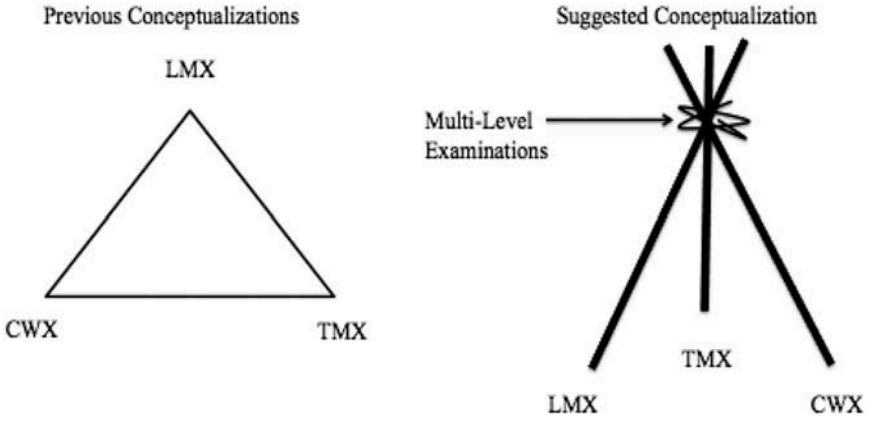

Figure 1. Previous and suggested conceptualizations of leader, peer, and team communication relationships. *Note*. Adapted from Omilion-Hodges et al. (2015), p. 345.

LMX suggests that leaders develop unique communicative relationships with each individual member through a series of communicative exchanges during role taking, making, and routinization phases. Because leader–member relationships are produced through and are a byproduct of communication, there has been a steep incline in communication scholars employing this particular approach to exploring the special dyadic relationship (e.g., Bakar & Sheer, 2013; Meiners & Boster, 2012; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017; Sheer, 2014). More specifically, Sheer (2014) suggested that work and social communication are the two most pivotal components of the leader–member relationship, and Omilion-Hodges and Baker (2017) created leader communication exchange scales that center on the give-and-take of communication-based goods between leaders and members. Thus more recent uses of LMX account for contextual factors, allowing for a richer, more nuanced understanding of leadership and member agency within the modern organization (Omilion-Hodges et al., 2015).

Literature frequently summarizes leaders' ability to influence creative productivity by increasing employee sense of responsibility, providing balance between restrictions and freedom for creative activities, and providing resources for tasks and idea development (Egan, 2005; Gumuslouglu & Ilsev, 2009). More specifically, Volmer and colleagues (2012) advise leaders to build relationships that communicate social comfort, trust, and responsibility, such as holding employees accountable with managing tasks and end results. Relatedly, others (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004) contend that it is crucial that leaders allocate proper time for employees to engage in creative communication, including problem solving and ideation sessions.

Communication is particularly effective for both employee productivity and satisfaction if it is high quality or vital information being shared (Sias, 2005). In other words, if leaders want to push an employee to their full potential, they need to communicate through sharing useful and relevant information. Sias suggests that the quality of information can have greater bearing on job satisfaction and commitment than the relationship with the leader on its own, stressing the importance of

communication in the relationship. Simply put, the personal connection between leaders and their employees (Hemlin & Olsson, 2011) cannot be understated.

Another important role of leadership is to construct a workplace culture that values creativity. Leaders are representatives of the organization, thereby serving as messengers of organizational goals and culture (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). The atmosphere of the workplace is created and defined by how the leader communicates with his/her employees and what behaviors the leader rewards (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Shalley & Gilson, 2004), suggesting that leaders are responsible for fostering a culture supportive of creativity (e.g., Tesluk, Farr, & Klein, 2011). Leaders can develop a creative culture by being supportive of ingenuity and building relationships based on employee needs (Tesluk et al., 2011). These relationships can be further amplified by leaders helping employees to build social channels and networks within organizations to better facilitate creativity (McLean, 2005).

Taken together, employees who have high quality relationships with their leader often enjoy a multitude of benefits, which may include increased latitude and decision-making power that can increase employee creativity (Hemlin & Olsson, 2011; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). However, despite all that is known about leaders' ability to inspire creativity among employees, we still lack a definitive understanding of the explicit and multifaceted role that leader communication plays on member creative output. For example, while the quality of information being communicated (Sias, 2005) can enhance the relationship, to what degree does this information enhance employee creativity? To that end, the following research question is forwarded:

RQ1: According to employees, how does leader communication enhance creativity?

While there are decades of leader–follower literature (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975) touting its benefits, this area of inquiry has been critiqued for being overly leader focused, acknowledging that the role of the employee and other workgroup members has been peripheral. However, recent research (e.g., Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013) has reiterated the pivotal role peers play in the employee experience. Thus, we now turn our attention to the intersection of the peer relationships, communication, and creativity.

Peer Communication and Creativity

Peers offer insight and feedback that enhances individual creativity by bringing unique perspectives and experiences (Ohly, Kase, & Skerlavaj, 2010) to the table for discussion. Like leaders, peer relationships impact performance behaviors, beliefs, and work attitudes (Chen et al., 2013) where peer support is strongly related to employee work output and the organizational commitment (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Ohly et al., 2010). In regards to creativity and prompting innovation, coworkers can use feedback and support to encourage innovative thinking. In fact, a recent study (Choi, 2012) found that peer support may be more creatively influential than leader encouragement. However, it is not likely that all peers may serve as creative muses, and existing literature stresses the need for understanding context within the workplace (Choi, 2012). For example, creative

employees often share certain attributes such as intrinsic motivation and a high internal locus of control (Cerne et al., 2013; Choi, 2012). Likewise, just as creative employees may possess commonalities, employees who are less creatively inclined may feel more comfortable communicating with peers of the same creative output (Choi et al., 2008), which implies that having high- and low-performing creatives within the same workgroup may not necessarily enhance but potentially hinder the low-performing creatives' performance. Moreover, employees are more disposed to act creatively if they perceive supportive peer relationships and creative solutions that are feasible (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), which corroborates research that suggests peer feedback is based upon experience and the context of the interactions, ultimately influencing one's proclivity to volunteer innovative ideas (Choi, 2012).

In summary, peers' impact on creativity remains dependent upon contributions from both parties in the dyadic relationship (e.g., Chen et al., 2013; Choi, 2012; Choi et al., 2008). Some suggest (Baker & Omilion-Hodges, 2013; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008) coworkers are arguably as influential as leaders and in some cases, such as resource allocation (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013), and regarding access to quantity and quality of information (Sias, 2005), even more so. This study aims to examine whether or not this degree of influence poses the same benefits for creativity as well. Taken together, the following research question is forwarded:

RQ2: According to employees, how does coworker communication enhance peer creativity?

Team Communication and Creativity

Teams offer empirical findings that transcend leader and coworker outcomes, where the sum of workgroup relationships help to explain how communication functions to overcome creative barriers and leads to reciprocated participation (Martins & Shalley, 2011; Muñoz-Doyague & Nieto, 2012). Team communication is central to creative studies because high quality relationships can lead to enhanced team outcomes as a result of multiple perspectives converging to examine a particular problem (Martins & Shalley, 2011). For instance, employees with higher self-efficacy can have a greater inclination to participate and contribute to team creativity (Muñoz-Doyague & Nieto, 2012). However, studies of team communication and creativity are not as clear-cut because team relationships may potentially impede creativity if team conflict is high, yet if conflict is minimized, creativity can be heightened. This allows teams to reap the benefits of creative interaction, which may include shared access of resources and creative support (Muñoz-Doyague & Nieto, 2012). Successful teams have recognized that involvement and responsibility is reciprocated, suggesting teams function best when there is an interdependence of responsibilities and collective goal achievement. However, complications can arise as team creativity is contextual, meaning involvement and feedback is not always desired and teams must learn to negotiate, when to engage, and when to offer feedback (Lee et al., 2012). To better understand team creative influences, Egan (2005) advised

that future researchers should consider how work environments affect team culture and creativity. Considering this, the following research question is posed:

RQ3: According to employees, how does team communication enhance creativity?

Methods

Participants and Procedures

In-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 30 full-time working adults currently employed within the video game industry (see Table 1 for participant demographics). Interviews were completed to explore how the culmination of leader, peer, and team interactions influence employee creativity. Participants were obtained via a snowball sample where interviewees were asked to provide names of colleagues in the industry. Participants' positions ranged from graphic artistic to modeler and programmer. The authors intentionally recruited for participant differences in regard to age, industry, organizational tenure, position, etc., in an effort to uncover perceptions of creativity and relationship dynamics that transcend tenure or position boundaries. The authors began to notice redundancy in responses around participant 20. However, we had already scheduled the remaining 10 interviews and the researchers were sensitive to Wray and colleagues' (2007) stance that every life is unique and therefore there may also be additional nuances to discover.

Procedure and Analysis

After securing IRB approval, participants engaged in dialogue in response to a semi-structured interview guide geared toward exploring the intersection of workgroup

Table 1 Participant Demographics

	n (%) if applicable	Mean (SD) if applicable
Age	30	33.21 (*SD* = 4.52)
Sex		
Male	18 (60%)	
Female	12 (40%)	
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	20 (66%)	
Black/African American	5 (16%)	
Asian	2 (> 1%)	
No response	3 (1%)	
Workgroup Size		11 members, (*SD* = 6.39)
Years in Organization		5.65 years, (*SD* = 2.39)
Years in Position		2.44 years, (*SD* = 1.39)
Years in Industry		7.45 years, (*SD* = 2.79)

relationships, communication, and creativity. Interviews began with "grand tour" (Spradley, 1979) questions such as "Why don't you start by telling me about your work?" and "What is your role in the development or production of video games?" We also asked additional contextualizing questions such as "What is it that you like most about this work?," "When you do feel most creative at work?," "What can hinder your creativity at work?," and "Can you tell me about your creative process?" After establishing an understanding of a participant's role and responsibilities, we then asked more specific questions regarding how communication from their leader, peers, or team as a whole worked to enhance creativity. More specifically, we asked participants who they seek feedback or guidance from when encountering a roadblock on a project and then asked them directed questions about how leaders, coworkers, and teams were functioned into the creative process. For all of these items, we probed participants to understand the intersection of workgroup relationships and creativity, particularly in regard to comparing and contrasting the unique roles played by leaders, peers, and teams in the creation process.

All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted 65 min on average, with interviews ranging from 45 to 90 min and equalizing 2,047 min total, or just over 34 hr of interview data. Notes were taken during the interviews in addition to audio-recording the sessions. After the interviews were concluded, the researchers transcribed the recordings verbatim and combined them with the notes taken during each interview resulting in 219 pages of single-spaced data.

Analysis

Responses from each interview were examined independently and then explored cumulatively to look for overarching themes. Constant comparative analysis (CCA; Fram, 2013) guided data analysis. CCA has been recommended outside of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as a way to maintain both the emic and etic perspectives, while also assuring that data are systematically compared to all other data in the set. In contrast to traditional grounded theory, CCA "assures that all data produced are analyzed rather than potentially disregarded on thematic grounds" (O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008, p. 41). Moreover, CCT has been recommended when the purpose of inquiry is to identify and confirm a concept, such as creativity within the video game industry, instead of identifying an emerging substantive theory (Fram, 2013).

The researchers reviewed all interview transcripts and interview notes before returning to the transcripts to identify emergent themes or highlight other key components of the text. Data were initially categorized in conceptual theories in an interactive, inductive process where themes were continually challenged throughout the coding process. At the first level of analysis, CCA helped the authors identify instances of creativity and workplace relationships. We also enacted procedures for theoretic sensitivity including questioning and member checks. In review of the transcripts and interview notes, the authors examined data in order to unitize, open, and axial code data (Tracy, 2013). Open codes were formed in a comparative fashion where similarity and difference assessments were made, where

transcripts were reviewed line by line. Open coding continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. During axial coding, the authors were able to look specifically at tensions and relational practices associated with enhancing or hindering creativity in the workplace in order to organize data into subcategories (Creswell, 2012). Ultimately, four major themes emerged including the prominent role played by creativity coaches and the need for structure, support, and trust. In the following, we introduce and discuss these themes whereas in the discussion we explore how these relational and structural needs are reminiscent of traditional leadership dialectics (Fleishman, 1953; Hemphill, 1950) such as initiating structure (goal attainment)–consideration (relationships).

Findings and Interpretation

The four emergent themes were paramount in fostering an understanding of how various workplace relationships influence employee creativity.

Creativity Coaches

Analysis suggests that formal and informal leadership and mentoring from experienced and trusted others is a chief requirement for fostering creativity in the workplace. Creativity coaches can be an employee's leader, but are most commonly a peer, and are distinguished as catalysts of creativity due to their seniority, expertise, and ability to provide the helpful guidance. Participant insight on the role of the leader as a creative coach in fostering creativity is explored first, followed by the ways in which peers and teams as a whole influence creativity.

Leader Creativity Coaches

Creativity coaches communicated in a way that clearly articulated their expertise but also allowed for two-way dialogue involving information and idea exchange. In general, leaders are often regarded as having the highest degree of experience, thus their proficiency breeds a natural sense of respect and reverence from employees. For instance, Rochelle, a 31-year-old environmental artist, has a deep respect for her manager's seniority acknowledging, "…my mind is a sponge to any sort of creative influence that he has, ideas or suggestions because he has many more years of experience than I do." Similarly, Dean, a 2D artist in his late 20s, sees his leader as a coach who can "guide him" in his creative endeavors because of his industry experience. Moreover, interviewees who saw themselves as inherently creative each shared comfortable and supportive relationships with their leaders. One participant, Ashley, a 28-year-old game tester, describes her relationship with her manager in terms similar to those describing a relationship with a parent:

> He's [her manager] really helped me learn and grow…he's someone I can confide in and can look up to. He will also tell me, "Hey, you're not doing what you're supposed to, you need to shape up," or "you're doing a great job and I'm going to give you more responsibility."

In regard to a leader's impact on workplace creativity, by and large participants suggested that their leader's experience was the largest contributor to individual creativity, followed by a supportive, honest communicative approach. The next theme—structure—examines additional leader communication behavior that behooves creativity; however, the role of peers and teams as creativity coaches is explored first.

Peer Creativity Coaches

Of participants, 75% (n = 15) acknowledged that they routinely sought advice, guidance, and feedback from their peers. Moreover, the majority of participants acknowledged that they would be most likely to approach a peer or several peers for guidance before attempting to access information from their leaders. This showcases the importance of peer communication as often being the preferred channel over that of the leader. Increased in-role knowledge, ease of access, fewer critiques, more comfortable setting, less fear of rejection, and deeper and more innovative solutions were common reasons employees preferred to seek out peers for ideation session or creative guidance. For example, Tim a 34-year old designer, said:

> He's [his peer] the first stop. We have coffee in the morning and we chat and I'm energized and excited to work and the second one of us hits a wall we're there to listen and to riff off of each other's idea. It's like when you get stuck in the snow in the winter, you just need a little traction and you're off—that's what my buddy does for me.

Vivid metaphors were commonly used to describe peers' role in helping participants' to effectively channel creativity. For instance, when asked about the ways her peers help her on creative assignment, Rochelle, a 31-year-old 2D environmental artist, suggested:

> It's like we all get to go to a pool party and play in the pool party and splash around! I can't describe it as any other way, but extremely fun. There may be something I don't know how to do that they do in a different technique or there's an easier way to do something, or I can do things faster because they have ten other assets I need for the same thing.

In regard to approaching peers for creative stimulation, participants also acknowledged the "consistent willingness" of colleagues to drop their own work to engage in ideation, in part due to the pleasure, satisfaction, and joy found in the informal and formal brainstorming sessions and also the fact that peers understood the importance of taking a break from their work settings (i.e., cubicles, desks) to walk or even briefly leave the premises to get "a fresh perspective." Mark, a 25-year-old game programmer, revealed that many of his team's most creative ideas were born at the local Pizza Hut restaurant because of "the casual, relaxed atmosphere." Moreover, within this theme virtually all participants admitted feeling as though they were in a state of "flow" or that they could "lose complete track of time" when engaging in creative conversations with peers. Tim even referred to the ideation with peer as "riffing," which is reminiscent of Eisenberg's (1990) notion of jamming transcendence within communicative exchanges.

It is also important to note that in some instances where participants acknowledged a peer or their workgroup as an essential catalyst for their personal creativity, it was when the employee perceived their leader or the organization's leadership to be ineffective. By illustration, Mason suggested that because his manager was unkind and difficult to work with, he began to see his more experienced peer, Ron, as his leader. Mason suggested that not only did he approach Ron for technical information to successfully do his job but also for his "experience with the politics in the area." Participants echoed similar anecdotes noting that when the leader lacked experience, patience, or a supportive communication style, they would find a "surrogate" to bounce ideas off of or to approach when they need inspiration.

Creative Constraints: Providing Structure

Structure also played a role in the sense that employees needed parameters communicated by their leader in order to successfully complete their creative tasks. This included access to requisite resources: direction, time, financial and human resources, as well as being provided with a stimulating, collaborative environment that allowed for frequent peer and team interactions.

Once leaders communicated clear parameters, including explicit deadlines, guidelines, and budget needs, employees felt "free to create" because they were fully aware of project expectations and parameters. In fact, Ashley, a 28-year-old game tester, suggested that the only hindrances to her ability to be creative and generate new, innovate ideas is if "I'm not clear on a project's timeline, cost, or available resources." Due to the complexity imbued within developing video games, coordinating various departments can be the most challenging aspect—particularly if the organization does not have a policy or structure in place. Mitchell, a programmer in his early 30s, illuminated this aspect of organizational structure in suggesting that, "When you don't have direction, the game fails. When everyone does their own thing, it won't work out. Once you decide on a direction, it's more fun. You're making progress towards the goal, but still being creative about it." Thus, once there is structure that clearly articulates the terms of who and what is necessary to successfully complete a project, leaders have helped to create a supportive environment conducive to collaboration and creativity.

Creative Community: Importance of Formal and Informal Communication

After creative constraints are clearly articulated, it is important to have positive support from coworkers and teams. Support was paramount in creating a sense of comfort in the form of a positive, enjoyable working environment, and a willingness share novel ideas with peers, teams, and leaders. This was observed when Alan, a 26-year-old freelance developer, acknowledged that because there can be disappointments and failures "everyone has to look out for each other to foster community growth and enrichment."

Support came in many different styles, including expressing simple interest in another's work, or championing a creative cause because of promise or shared

goals. Jenny, a game administrator, suggested that fun was mandatory in the creative environment and video game industry because "without it you just become another corporate monkey in a suit." Other participants reiterated the idea that because the video game industry is distinct from so many others that leader, peer, and team support is essential where employees were encouraged to "hold onto that [peer] friendship and cherish it," and without a supportive environment in place, there likely would not be any "melding of the minds."

Another prevalent theme within support was having ample support to engage in both formal and informal ideation sessions. Several participants reiterated that in order to be consistently creative, they needed the time and latitude to "kick it" with peers during work hours. Without exception, each participant acknowledged the importance of unstructured peer and team communication in prompting new ideas and general creativity. Moreover, in these informal exchanges, employees sought to determine the level of dedication and motivation of peers. In fact, common in this theme was participant acknowledgement of the importance of having leaders and peers who "wanted to be there as badly as you." For illustration, Alan suggested that "I find the most creative situation is when you're in a room full of people who want to be there, who enjoy being there, who want nothing more than to produce a really excellent project." Relatedly, when asked what leaders could do to increase employee creativity, participants suggested encouraging informal and formal communication with followers, among peers, and the group as a whole. In this vein, several participants acknowledged the "return on investment" on group meals and gathering informally for refreshments outside of the office. Tabatha reveled that her manager, a former developer, would:

> Send us [the workgroup] to the bar down the street with his credit card so we could get out of there [the office] and really come up with some unique ideas. He'd often join us after an hour or so and he'd help us refine these ideas. It took me years to realize the genius in this.

Tabatha acknowledged exceedingly high quality relationships with her leader, peers, and team as a whole, also revealing the many regional and national awards her workgroup has helped their organization to secure. While Tabatha's manager was clearly aware of the benefit of information communication, other participants openly expressed wishing that all leaders were as aware that it was in these conversations that some of their best ideas sprang and that it was not "idle time" but rather where "golden eggs" were laid.

Trust: Importance of Communicating Support

In addition to fostering a supportive and structured environment, participants reiterated the importance of trusting relationships with leaders, peers, and teams. Trust was the one theme in this study that did not occur without the influence of another theme. It was often accompanied by leadership support and was highly influential in making individuals feel more creative and innovative because oftentimes it supplemented

perceived support from the organization to try new ideas. More so, trust was a sort of "by-product" that resulted in participants having either creativity coaches, structure, and or a supportive environment in place. The importance of trust being communicated was most evident in the fluidity of the work environment. Oftentimes, trust alone was enough to encourage the individual to take charge with their ideas. Other times, trust was equated with more responsibility and higher expectations, or greater autonomy to do as they wish, which in turn, made the individual feel more dedicated to their position.

Trust could also be as simple as increased satisfaction with work. For example, Mason, a regional manager in his late 20s, explained, "…right now is the best time it's ever been for me because I basically have free reign to do anything I want. They trust me now, they understand I'm all for the benefit of the company and I want to excel at my job." In this case, trust is equated with increased satisfaction with one's work as well as the sense of freedom to explore and be creative. Another example of the importance of trust comes from Renee, a 24-year-old freelance game writer, who suggested that:

> [My manager] gives me a lot of free reign so it's nice to be able to ask him any questions or if he says "I need you to write this week" or "write whatever you feel" one way or the other, cuz it's nice to be creative and decide what you want to write. I've demonstrated my creativity and competence and now they trust me.

In the case of Renee, trust can have multiple benefits for both the employee and the leader, as this allows for not just increased satisfaction with work but also makes the employee more likely to approach the leader and other organizational members with questions or ideas. The latter frames how trust breeds productive communication, which, in turn, prompts more ideation sessions.

Mark, a game programmer, acknowledged the deep trust that exists between himself and his peers. Because of this trust, Mark notes that it allows him and his colleagues to develop high-quality products because they can be honest with each other. Frequently, he said there would be conversations such as, "You know, I've been thinking about this idea and I'm not sure if it's a good as we thought it was at first," recognizing that just as they pass ideas back and forth that they also "pass our arguments [critiques of ideas] back and forth until we come to some conclusion." One final example of trust comes from Peter, an artist, who explained, "to define concepts, to have an open mind when approving the work helps fosters creativity really well. I appreciate when we're given the freedom to use our own ideas." Trust has the ability to help the leader and relevant others to empower the employee. It also increases the employee's sense of respect and connection to their leader by recognizing that the leader is placing responsibility in their hands and letting the employee live up to the potential they desire to express.

Discussion

In today's information-based society, there is a strong desire within organizations to understand how to cultivate creativity in individuals and teams (DeFillippi et al., 2007). The present research pragmatically answers this call by: (a) fleshing out specific relational

and structural needs, and (b) highlighting the unequivocal role of communication in cultivating creativity, from the sharing of technical know-how to the free-flow of ideas. Additionally, the data also indicate some interesting tensions that may emerge in working to induce a creativity-rich workplace. Evocative of classic dualistic approaches to understanding leadership—such as the tension fraught between satisfying tasks and maintain relationships with followers—in this context, the dialectics of creative constraints (structure) and creative freedom (support, trust) were driving catalysts of creative production. While traditional approaches to explaining workgroup dynamics suggested that leaders tended to dichotomize tasks and relationships, contemporary scholarship (Omilion-Hodges & Wieland, 2015; Yukl, 2010) highlights the benefits of seeing formal and informal leadership as communicative. As was demonstrated in the current study, structure and support/trust emerged as interdependent needs for fostering employee creativity. In this sense, managers must provide clear project constraints in terms of deadlines, financial resources, and project scope while simultaneously facilitate supportive communication through formal channels such as individual meetings and informally channels as was exemplified through team ideation sessions at the bar. Similarly, focus on developing communicative competencies will better prepare employees as they work on creative projects and ebb and flow between seeking advice from their leader, peers, and teams.

In sum, creativity is an intricate process that involves the generation of ideas between peers and groups (Paulus & Yang, 2000). This can come, as the results of this study have found, from supportive interaction from leaders, peers, and teams, with participants suggesting their peers are the most valuable pillars of support due to a variety of factors that leaders and teams are not capable of offering. Our findings align with others (Joo, McLean, & Yang, 2013) who stress the importance of context such as the effects of the employee, workplace environment, and social relationships in nuancing our view of workplace phenomena.

Theoretical Implications

This study serves as an extension of existing communication research by showing how communication can positively influence workplace innovation, especially in regard to communicative relationships.

Impact of Peers

In line with Chiaburu and Harrison (2008), peers truly do make the workplace, especially if that workplace is fueled by creative engagement among employees. Specifically, employees reported strategies for why they would often choose to consult with peers over teams and leaders such as the comfort of familiar light-hearted banter to knowing that they needed a peer's expertise. Peers could also take the place of leaders as a creativity coach meaning that when employees needed a second opinion or a sounding board, they did not always assume that person was the leader. It appears that in this industry, experts are recognized at all levels of the hierarchy, possibly due to the unique talents and wide array

of skills require to complete the task of developing the video game. This alone mandates a familiarity with one's peers in order to learn how to best accomplish goal achievement, meaning that while employees will be required at various points in times to interact with teams and leaders, they also appear to learn individually who to best consult. The theoretical implication is that what was once deemed a solid line between leaders and peers is perhaps more interwoven than researchers have thus far recognized. These "experts" that creatives seek advice from hints at a broader, more fluid concept of who is truly guiding creative projects and would be ripe for future exploration.

Impact of Leaders and Teams

The data also illuminate the substantive contribution leaders and teams have in nurturing creativity. Specifically, participants who were most creative and satisfied in their work were also those who had high quality relationships with their leader and team. This in part relates to Sias (2005), who recognized the importance of high quality information exchange among leaders and workgroup members.

Similarly, leaders may be most apt to inspire creativity in members simply by being available for advice and to grant permission. This coincides with those who (Zhang & Bartol, 2010) see leader–follower relationships as a transactional social process of leader empowerment and employee creative engagement. Many participants reported the need for structure and, in particular, once trust was established, they were willing to follow directions and support what they saw as the right decision, which often came from the leader. This contributes to research by showcasing examples of how leader–follower relationships are just as much a part of building a strong relationship with employees as they are about knowing how to cater to the needs of the employee. Specifically, employees relied on leaders for establishing goals, providing feedback, keeping employees on track, providing conscientious deadlines, offering their expertise, and granting permission. While these tasks might seem like common roles for leaders, the importance of this fundamental constraints clearly impacts the performance of the team. These results also corroborate recent research (Harter, Leeman, Norander, Young, & Rawlins, 2008) which supports our findings by acknowledging creative and artistic behavior can increase insight, enrich interactions, and encourage associates to personally invest in their work. Our results also substantiate extant research that highlights how leader communication that is supportive of a creative culture can serve as a catalyst for employee creative output (Liu et al., 2012; Shalley & Gilson, 2004). In short, it is the quality, not the quantity, of how leaders communicate with their employees that has true bearing on employees' ability to create.

Likewise, findings suggest that teams can provide vital interaction that can yield more substantial and productive creative results (Paulus & Yang, 2000) but still serve to supplement individual employees rather than supersede them. Teams were most highly associated with developing ideas, which substantiates other research findings that teams are meant to be sources of support (e.g., Martins & Shalley, 2011; Muñoz-Doyague & Nieto, 2012). Moreover, the current research has helped to minimize the

dearth of research that examines the task and social aspects of the team as a whole. Team communication and their clout over creativity is highly contextual. As each team's experiences and creative drive bring something new to the table, scholars should consider what other factors or implications might be affecting team communication, in particular with their ability to negotiate and create. As noted, at their best, teams can provide unique sources of support, which as the results show can be unique contributing sources of idea generation and creativity for individual members. At the very least, teams are the sum of all individual members and account for the collective set of complex workgroup relationships, which implicate employees' organizational experiences and therefore must be considered.

Although this study has considered critical areas for future exploration and raised questions to challenge scholars to further pursue creative research, it should be of note that beyond the scope of scholarly application, there are numerous practical implications to this research that should be considered by employees, teams, and leaders alike. These implications will now be explored.

Pragmatic Implications

The overall relevance to this study and creatively driven organizations is that leaders need to be conscious of all interactions amongst members and facilitate supportive and trusting relationships, in particular amongst coworkers. While Shalley and Gilson (2004) have recognized leaders as the voice of organizational culture, it is important to consider the subtleties of interactions among coworkers in order to ascertain whether or not employees are contributing or detracting from creativity. Pragmatically, coworkers should be encouraged to become acquainted with one another for the sake of being aware of knowledge and resources, as well as personal and professional interests for the sake of an expanded social network and more fluid creative social interactions. We suggest that leaders in creative industries oversee the development of relationships, whether it be through interactions on collaborative projects or matters of proximity, such as distance between desks or offices. Leaders may also consider how to encourage more face-to-face conversations that allow for immediate interaction rather than being mediated through e-mail or phone calls. The same recommendation is made for teams, as a richer connection will form more organic and productive creative communication. The social interaction among teams is integral as it is the involvement of teams, possibly even the close comfort of familiarity with teams, that can allow for the most productive creative sessions (Joo et al., 2013; Paulus & Yang, 2000). Organizations should accommodate for team brainstorming sessions to enhance success, in particular providing time, resources, and rewards for productive sessions to occur.

A final note regarding communication between peers, teams, and other small groups: Their communication is the crux of effective creativity, and in that regard, their communication does not have to directly focus on the project at hand. From the interviews, statements have been documented that cannot overstress the benefit of free-flowing communication of any kind between coworkers. In regards to employees who are innately creative, having the liberty to discuss any and all thoughts with peers

at the very least strengthens the bonds of comfort. These connections are invaluable when it comes time to fuse ideas and create.

Leaders are important but mostly for the sake of providing structure for employees. The interview data stresses how employees turn to leaders for directions and instructions on how to proceed with a project, meaning employees acknowledge leaders' authority, but beyond that, prefer to do most of their social interaction with coworkers. Participants recognized increased satisfaction with their work when they felt a personal connection among coworkers. To allow for this, leaders are encouraged to allocate time for interaction among coworkers. There are a mixture of overt and more subtle tactics on how to achieve this, including requiring more face-to-face communication with coworkers who require frequent work together, moving desks closer together for coworkers who could benefit from more frequent interaction, and always being conscientious of whether or not, as a leader, they are communicating the proper structure and making known all resources required to create. Employees perceive leaders as the voice and guidelines of acceptable workplace behavior and the voice of authority to grant permission and determine how employee should best budget their time. Leaders' opinions are highly valued due to expertise and having a position of power in the organizational hierarchy, and for this, leaders should act in a way that shows they cater to the needs of employees, providing them with responsibility that is a precise fit of what each employee is capable of and knowing when to intervene. The leaders should view an employee and their coworkers as creative resources, seeing that peers are equipped with the proper expertise and ability to contribute to the project at hand.

Limitations and Future Research

A possible limitation of the study was its focus on one industry, as numerous creative industries exist, however due to the desire to perform interviews with members of the same industry, this study needed to be exclusive. Future studies should try to compare these results with interviews of similar themes conducted with similar industries. Nonetheless, the video game industry was selected purposively as a paragon of creativity in the workplace; however, future researchers may seek to explore how creativity and communication can be used to complement one another in other organizations.

This study sought to explore and uncover positive sources of employee creativity from a communicative standpoint, and therefore the research suggest that future researchers focus on factors that may hinder employee idea generation and creativity. Similarly, conducting participation observations is likely to yield a plethora of communication-centered findings privileging a deeper understanding of the role of communication in inducing creativity.

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