

CREATIVITY - FUEL OF INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

Market-levelled changes occurring in the health care industry require new and creative models of organization, management, and service delivery. One of today's primary management challenges is the development of organizational cultures that value innovation, change, and creativity. The adoption of an ethic of innovativeness allows the organization to stretch the limits of individual and collective knowledge, skill, and ability to meet complex consumer needs. Creativity within organizations is influenced by management practices in conjunction with creativity-relevant work group skills. A common wisdom exists that professional nurses are creative in finding solutions for complex patient care needs. The expansion of this creativity within organizational systems will allow for the evolution of professional nursing practice, improvement in care delivery, and organizational performance leadership.

KEYWORDS: Creativity, Innovation, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Articles is featured topics such as opportunity identification and presented process and service innovations for nursing care delivery. Each article suggested strategies or techniques that nurses in management positions and practice settings could use to meet the service delivery challenges of the day. In the 16 years since that NAQ issue first appeared, professional nurses have witnessed immense change in financing mechanisms, organizational structures, practice environments, nursing delivery systems, and innovations used in the pursuit of health care service delivery. Each of these changes is an innovation in its own right—a creative solution to a problem was recognized and implemented with some measure of success. Thinking in a new or different way about health care service sparked each of these developments. When the first NAQ issue on creativity and innovation ran, organizations in industry and in health care were facing competitive changes. Issues of organizational effectiveness were at the forefront of theory and practice discussions. Innovation and its management emerged as viable concepts to improve organizational performance in increasingly competitive times. Given the immense challenges and opportunities that face professional nurses in today's environment of health care service delivery, creativity and innovation are necessary for the evolution of professional practice and organizational success in the next service era.

Woodman and colleagues comment on the benefit of studying creativity in complex social systems. They state, "Creativity for individuals and organizations—doing something for the first time anywhere or creating new knowledge—represents a dramatic aspect of organizational change that may provide a key to understanding change phenomena and, ultimately, organizational effectiveness and survival." (pp.293–294) In rapidly changing environments, creative problem solving and the new idea generation are thought to be powerful stabilizing forces. In today's health care market

environment, organizations will succeed if they are adaptive, innovative, and consumer centered. In turn, innovation capability is a driving factor in the health care industry's ability to meet the dual goals of consumer health care need and improved economic efficiency.

Market-levelled transformations occurring within the current health care environment require new and creative models of organization, management, and service production. Tapping individual and collective creativity, along with the development of supportive organizational contexts for creativity, is one of today's primary management and leadership challenges. Innovation begins with individual creativity in conjunction with opportunity identification. It is achieved through the astute social and financial management of new ideas. The cultivation of an ethic of change, innovation, and creativity can be used to guide the evolution of professional nursing practice and ultimately advance patient care service.

Organizational Creativity: Tapping the Innovation Potential

Organizational conceptions have shifted to highlight the value of individual and collective knowledge, creativity, and experience in service production and organizational improvement. In the two decades since creativity and innovation management emerged in the organizational science literature much work has been done to understand the complex phenomena of individual and collective creativity. Creativity has been studied by scholars in the fields of sociology, psychology, social psychology, organizational science, and, to a lesser extent, nursing. The current state-of-the-art of science has merged these diverse fields of study to increase understanding of individual, group, and organizational creativity.

Creativity is one of those concepts that has pervaded our daily vocabulary, yet it lacks a precise meaning. For this discussion, *creativity* is a process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies; identifying the difficulty; and searching for solutions. Within an organizational context, creativity is the production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together in any realm of human activity. Creativity is the basic building block of invention and thus innovation. In turn, organizational innovation is the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization, used for long-term organizational success.

Emerging theories of organizational creativity are interactive in nature. These conceptions consider the complexity of the individual's interaction within the equally complex social environment to achieve the organization's strategic goals. Therefore, one must understand the creative person, the creative process, the creative product, the creative situation, and the interaction of each component to understand organizational creativity. Teresa Amabile, a leading organizational creativity scholar, postulates that organizational creativity occurs at the intersection of personal motivation, organizational resources, and creativity-relevant management techniques.

Organizational Creativity begins with Creative People

Organizational creativity begins with creative people. Although some level of creativity exists in each of us, some individuals are more adept at creativity than others. The dominant path in creativity research has been to look at individual differences in highly creative people to identify a core set of personal creativity attributes. To this end, personal creativity is thought to consist of a core set of personal characteristics that includes broad interests, attraction to complexity, intuition, aesthetic sensitivity, toleration for ambiguity, and self-confidence. In addition to these core personal characteristics, an individual's creative potential is increased by expertise in his or her work domain, creative- thinking skills, and an intrinsic motivation for creativity.

Amabile places work domain expertise as the foundation of all creative work. In the service professions expertise and a large foundation of disciplinary knowledge are of prime importance. *Professional service* is the transfer of a specialized knowledge or skill from a practitioner to a client to meet a particular need, where the client does not have the skill or expertise to carry it out for himself or herself. Quinn and coworkers argue that creativity has a specific role in service production. However, they emphasize the precision, skill, and accuracy of professional knowledge rather than creativity for consistent service production. Creativity and innovation flow from a core set of knowledge and skill cultivated within the organization. It is from this professional knowledgebase that the firm's knowledge, and thus its products or services, originates.

Knowledge and expertise are thought to influence personal creativity in the areas of domain-relevant skill and creativity-relevant skill. Domain-relevant skills include the knowledge, technical skills, and talent needed to produce a product or service. Creativity-relevant skills are those cognitive pathways in which an individual is able to explore new ways of looking at problems by using a set of heuristics to generate novel ideas.⁸ Individual and small group creativity are influenced by the degree to which individuals are able to engage these skills during the process of carrying out organizational work.

The notion of creativity used to frame this discussion reasons that personal creativity relies on the identification of gaps in knowledge and the disharmony of experience. The creative person is adept at approaching problem solving in a way that varies from the norm of experience. Creativity skills enable the individual to

- Identify his or her normal perceptual frame of reference for a given problem;
- Break his or her cognitive set by exploring new pathways of problem solving;
- Keep all potential response solutions open for as long as possible;
- Exercise judgment as to the best solution;
- Use wide categories to store information;
- Remember the decision frame accurately;
- Break from prior habits of problem solving to formulate a creative response.

In addition to having a large base of knowledge, expertise, and creativity-relevant skills, the creative individual must also be motivated to approach work in a new manner. The motivation to work on something because it is interesting, involving, exciting, satisfying, and personally challenging is the basis of creativity in any work domain. Within the organizational context, work design and job satisfaction studies show that people will be most creative and most satisfied in their jobs when they are primarily intrinsically motivated, rather than extrinsically motivated by expected evaluation, surveillance, competition with peers, dictates from supervisors, or promises for rewards.

Organizational innovation is the collective creativity of the individuals and small groups working within a complex social system. The end-product of this creativity is an innovation that is both valuable and useful to the organization or its consumers. Organizational creativity must occur in a complex social environment that is set up to preserve the status quo of work experience. This social phenomenon makes the challenge of creativity production a daunting task for both managers and employees within any organization. Creativity and innovation research suggests that

creativity is stimulated in a work environment in which risk taking and idea exchange are encouraged, where the employee has autonomy over work and information flow, and in conjunction with creativity training and rewards for innovative behavior.

Creativity is one component of organizational innovation. A variety of internal and external organizational factors and characteristics is thought to both support and hinder the organizational creativity process. These factors include such things as the social environment, resource allocation, individual and collective knowledge, cognitive and behavioural patterns of individuals and work groups, and motivation for creativity and change. The interdependent nature of these elements requires that each be balanced and focused toward a stated agenda of organizational innovation. Strategically, organizational creative behavior and innovation are stimulated when the firm engages in opportunity identification, evaluates performance in relation to goals, and is aware of environmental conditions.

Nursing and Creativity

Within the nursing profession, a common wisdom exists that nurses are creative when it comes to finding solutions for patient care and service problems. Historically, nursing service has been delivered in bureaucratic structures in which conformity and regimentation were maintained to support large-scale production efficiency. In this environment, large-scale innovative efforts carried out by organizational employees were suppressed. In the new era of knowledge-based organizations, responsive strategic actions are driven by imaginative, yet feasible, solutions generated by those who carry out the organization's primary work.¹⁶ Social complexity and patterns of behavior are key factors in the development or restriction of creativity within an organization.

Strong professional service requires that practitioners have command of their disciplinary knowledge and continually update that knowledge. Professional service relies on the advancement of disciplinary knowledge, in conjunction with the precision and skill in which the knowledge is delivered to the client. Organizational innovation begins with a defined core skill and expertise arising from the professional, organizational, and industrial knowledge contained within the organization. In the knowledge based view of the firm, creative problem solving flows from a core of knowledge and expertise; it is the discontinuity in the current knowledge or experience that brings about creative solutions.

Benner and associates examined the evolution of clinical nursing practice along the trajectory of novice to expert. For them, clinical nursing practice blossoms within the individual when past experiences of a given clinical situation are recalled, compared with topical or experiential knowledge, and acted upon within the context of the presented situation. The tacit knowledge of past experiences and the nurse's ability to recognize patterns in new arenas are the basis of expert professional practice. In organizational settings, Benner and colleagues advocate the creation of practice environments in which expert nursing practice is recognized and supported to advance patient care service delivery.

Within health care, professional nurses are in a unique position to contribute their knowledge and disciplinary perspective of patient care service delivery for the development of a variety of service innovations and strategic decisions. The call for creativity in our practice, education, and research has surfaced many times. Critics have argued that, as a group, the nursing discipline rewards conformity and punishes innovation and creativity. Proponents argue that creativity and innovation are not only parts of the art and practice of nursing, but also key factors in the advancement of nursing science and service to society.

In her article on nursing and the concept of creativity, Jones echoes the argument of Quinn and associates. She

postulates that nursing practice relies on a strong base of professional skill, knowledge, and precision to meet complex patient care needs effectively. She questions the role of creativity in basic nursing practice and education. Instead, she advocates the development of technically competent nursing practitioners at the basic level and calls for divergent thinking and increased professional autonomy for experienced practitioners. The latter recommendation is seen as a means both to promote creativity within the professional culture and to expand the professional nursing role.

On the other hand, Ferguson discusses the need for creativity and innovation within nursing curricula. For Ferguson, an ethic of creativity and innovation in the early phases of professional socialization will enable the nursing practitioner to both advance nursing practice and cope with rapidly changing practice environments. Kuhn echoes this philosophy in her presidential address to the American Association of Critical Care Nurses. Although this address was delivered 12 years ago, the topics and themes she discussed are consistent with today's health care practice environment. Kuhn emphasized the unique skills and abilities of professional nursing in improving patient care service and organizational performance. She also challenged nurses in a variety of critical care practice roles to advance the state-of-the-art of practice through the use of creativity in skill development, research, and education. Her address also emphasized the contributions of nurse creativity on individual patients, organizational performance, and service arena changes.

Levine considers the "practical and beneficial art" of nursing. She describes nursing practice as a poetical art—an art in which reason and imagination mingle to create a uniquely human experience. She states that "the act of creativity is one in which the individual invests [himself or herself], leaving a portion there to be recognized by others." Nursing care is the silent language of human exchange in which the nurse and patient share a certain creative and artful moment. At the conclusion of that interaction, the moment can only exist as a reflection in the memory of the participants. Excellence in nursing practice acknowledges the circular nature of recall and sharing of these past creative experiences with successive clients and professional colleagues to enrich the practical art.

Nursing Care is the Silent Language of Human Exchange in which the Nurse and Patient Share a Certain Creative and Artful Moment

Innovation within economic systems is described as creative destruction. Creative destruction is a dynamic and adaptive force in which organizations strive to develop new products, services, or technologies to create a revolution within an industry. The organization's success at innovation is gauged by its ability to generate a revolution that simultaneously demands new skills or technology for production and effectively sets a new competitive standard within the industry. A new social system of health care is fuelled with nursing knowledge, experience, and creative energy leading to the goal of excellence in nursing practice and innovation in service delivery.

Managing Creativity and Innovation

The primary management and leadership task of the nurse leader is to forge an environment in which creativity can flourish. Innovation occurs in a continuous process of organizational learning, knowledge development, divergent problem solving, and investment. Innovation is a calculated process through which the knowledge, skill, and ability of all organizational members are focused on meeting their consumers' needs in a new way.

Peters and Waterman helped to support the axiom "people are the most important asset of the organization" in their contemporary management classic, *In Search of Excellence*. In their examination of Fortune 500 corporations, they focused on the relationship of creativity, innovation, and adaptive organizational change as a marker of excellent

management practice and organizational performance. Following this same research tradition, the *magnet hospital* study explored the attributes of those hospitals known to be good places to practice nursing. These studies concluded that organizational excellence stems from the value placed on and investments made in employees to carry out the organization's work. The lessons learned from these now classic studies provide a wealth of information to develop creative and enduring organizations.

Amabile states that organizational creativity stems from the ability to "do what you love and love what you do." When this state of gratification is achieved, the potential for innovation and creativity is at a maximum. Within complex organizational systems, managers and leaders must create an environment in which all employees are able to love their work. Such an environment begins with five key management practices:

- The individual is allowed considerable degree of freedom or autonomy in the conduct of work.
- Individuals are appropriately matched to their work assignments on the basis of skill and interest to maximize a positive sense of challenge in the work.
- Projects are managed effectively by setting and communicating the overall work goals while maintaining procedural autonomy within the work group.
- Clear planning, communication, and feedback loops between the supervisor, work group, and individuals are maintained.
- Work groups consist of individuals with diverse skills who communicate effectively; challenge, support, and constructively critique each other; and are committed to the work at hand.

A love for one's work stems from an internal motivation to engage in challenging, rewarding, and mind-expanding work. A creative work environment begins with management. If they are able to cultivate these ideals within their own practice, a creative work environment for all organizational members can be created. The successful organization is the one that can stretch the limits of individual and collective knowledge, skill, and ability to meet complex consumer needs.

Within the nursing profession, an ethic of creativity and innovation has been promoted by leaders in a variety of disciplinary domains for more than 30 years. In today's practice environment the cultivation of this professional ethic is necessary for the development of new and more appropriate ways of meeting the nation's health care service needs. Professional nurses do have the expertise, knowledge, and potential to bring an equitable and humanistic approach to health care service delivery. The development of this professional ethic begins with openness to the idea of creativity and change, the development of creativity-relevant skills, and the management of these professional values within complex social systems.

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