

# **The Role of Informal Leadership Feedback on Employee Creativity Within Organizational Innovation**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the role of informal leadership on employee's creativity within organizational innovation. Leaders play a key role in setting innovative strategy, non-executive employees play a significant role in identifying efficiencies and product enhancement that can offer competitive advantage to organizations. As organizations compete in a technically advanced, global environment, innovation is an area that can set organizations apart from competitors (de Jong, Shalley & Gilson, 2004). There is an underlying necessity for organizations to motivate employees to be creative in daily work to enable organizations to solve complex problems and maintain a competitive advantage (Shalley & Gilson, 2004; de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). In the absence of financial motivations, the leader plays a role in encouraging innovation by providing specific coaching, mentoring and feedback, while considering all aspects related to or impacted by the potential solution. The Basadur's 4-Stage Creative Process, where the problem is determined prior to the solution (Basadur, 2004), was utilized as the research framework. The study participants provided IRB approved verbal consent and were interviewed via virtual video conference. The interview protocol consisted of demographic information followed by twelve structured questions and follow-up questions that involved the employee's experience with creativity and leadership feedback. The recorded interview occurred over a 30-40 minutes time period. Qualitative interview questions included leader feedback environment, coaching for innovation, and problem identification from validated survey instruments (Konczak, et al., 2000; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Steelman, et al., 2004). Four central themes emerged that impacted creativity: psychological safety, culture, collaboration and persistence. Informal leadership feedback had an impact on how psychologically safe the employee felt in voicing and refining the problem space (theme 1). In addition, most participants identified that collaboration with other colleagues (theme 2) was critical. Organizational culture also impacted how the leader provided informal feedback based on the feedback environment or sometimes based on the amount of pressure and work needed to be completed to meet organizational goals (theme 3). Lastly, persistence (theme 4) surfaced for those individuals who may have not had positive leadership feedback experience. Research suggested that creative non-executive employees were intrinsically motivated to look for opportunities to solve daily work problems (Reiter-Palon & Illies, 2014), in spite of the lack of rewards or monetary compensation for doing so. These participants were inspired to find better ways of working to help others and to help future employees.

Keywords: Leadership, Creativity, Feedback, Innovation

## **INTRODUCTION**

As organizations compete in a technically advanced, global environment, innovation is an area that can set organizations apart from competitors. There is an underlying necessity for organizations to motivate employees to be creative in daily work to enable organizations to solve complex problems and maintain a competitive advantage (Shalley & Gilson, 2004; de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). While innovation is at the forefront of organizational challenges, in most organizational settings, employees are rewarded annually based on pay-for-performance compensation schemes. This may be a result of publicly traded companies' reliance on short-term earnings expectations for stakeholder interests (Manso, 2011; Manso, 2017). However, as employees have first-hand experience to daily opportunities for innovation, they may feel time spent on problem solving is at odds with the productivity based annual compensation scheme. In most cases, employees are not motivated by their employer compensation model to innovate; and time spent on innovative tasks may put productivity at risk. These expectations do not inherently motivate employees to take risk or time toward innovative activities at the cost of impacting immediate productivity (Ederer & Manso, 2013). The need for organizations to meet short-term earnings in order to satisfy shareholders comes into direct conflict with a need to be experimental and innovative. If experimenting and learning from mistakes, which are critical to innovation slows down the projected performance forecasts, shareholders will not see the value of the company investment. Although innovation is a requirement for organizational viability, it sometimes is secondary to performance output of employees. Despite this dichotomy, leaders may have a key role to encourage innovative behaviors in employees- (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The goal of this study was to examine the effect of the role of informal leadership on employee's creativity within organizational innovation.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

1. What impact does informal leadership feedback have on the non-executive employees' creativity and subsequent definition of the problem statement?

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research has shown that leaders play an important role in supporting and empowering employees to be creative (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Mumford et al, 2002; Amabile et. al., 2004). Leaders provide support by mentoring, coaching, removing barriers or organizational constraints to facilitate employee productivity and creativity, and these management practices are important to establish an organizational environment for creativity (Amabile et. al., 1996). Leaders who provide non-controlling support have been shown to motivate employee ideation (Amabile et. al., 2004). Because of the importance of innovation to organizational viability in a complex environment, the aim of this research was to evaluate the impact leaders may have on motivating and supporting employees to create novel solutions to non-routine complex problems. Employee creativity has many facets, including identifying problems, generating ideas and implementing

improvements (Shalley, et. al. 2004). In addition, employees who complete a thorough assessment of the problem, find a more rich and creative solution for that problem (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004).

### **The importance and challenge of organizational innovation**

The expectations of competition setting organizations apart (Shalley & Gilson, 2004; de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007) and pay-for-performance compensation (Manso, 2011; Manso, 2017) do not inherently motivate employees to take risk or time toward innovative activities at the cost of impacting immediate productivity (Ederer & Manso, 2013). The need for organizations to meet short-term earnings to satisfy shareholders comes into direct conflict with a need to be experimental and innovative.

The nature of innovation is uncertain, and corporations who are risk averse may forego long-term opportunities for short term business certainty. Inherently, innovation includes risk, and the opportunity to experience and learn from failure. Although innovation is a requirement for organizational viability, it sometimes is secondary to performance output of employees. Despite this dichotomy, leaders may have a key role to encourage innovative behaviors in employees. (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007).

Compensation including golden parachutes and long-term stock options (Ederer & Manso, 2013) motivates executives for innovative strategies, but that same may not be true for non-executive employees. There is built in conflict between the incentive model for productivity versus the loss of incentive for non-compensation based innovative activity, making it difficult to plan and appropriately compensate for innovative work (Hellman and Theile, 2011). Research shows that in higher risk scenarios, non-executive employees played it safe to ensure their pay was not at risk, resulting in a potential impact to the balance of planned tasks (productivity) versus unplanned (innovation) tasks (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Those in fixed wage or pay-for-performance schemes were not shown to be motivated to try new tactics for potential fear of lost performance (Manso, 2017). Ederer and Manso (2013) concluded there was a causal relationship between incentive schemes and innovation performance, but inherently, innovation activities are difficult to plan for within contracts and performance-based compensation systems (Hellman & Theile, 2011).

### **The role of employees as agents**

Organizational innovation begins with creativity (Amabile et. al., 1996; Shalley et. al., 2004). Creativity has been defined as the creation of a novel, useful idea that impacts daily work opportunities (Amabile et al 1996; Shalley, et. al., 2004; Ozaralli, 2015). The employee's ability to generate innovative ideas is critical to organization's long-term success and ultimate survival (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Shalley, et. al., 2004). Although executives are incentivized to be strategically innovative, it is the non-executive employee who has daily exposure to non-routine problems leading to the potential for innovation.

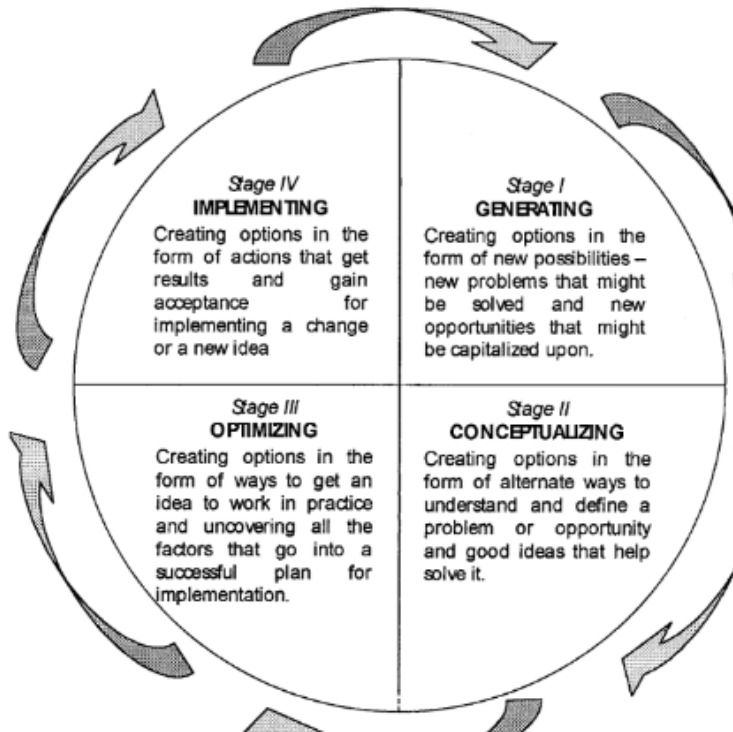
The study of creativity has been defined by the 4 'P's (Product, Person, Press (environment) and Process) (Basadur et. al., 2000). Research associated with creative people, output and environments exist to suggest certain factors increase the opportunity for improved creativity. According to Amabile (1983), employees require certain key elements for creative production, including knowledge/expertise, task motivation and creativity-relevant processes.

While creativity is impacted by personality characteristics of the employee (Basadur, 2000; Amabile 1983), it can also be influenced by organizational factors such as the environment, including leadership support on creativity-relevant processes.

Specifically related to the “Person” in Basadur’s 4 ‘P’s of creativity, employee creativity is also impacted by each individual’s intrinsic motivation (Shalley, et. al., 2004). Even in areas where production is critical to performance, creative individuals will be inherently motivated to find better ways of working which lead to long-term benefits.

By the nature of daily work, employees may have the best opportunity to experience complex problems (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). Unlike routine problems, creative, ill-defined problems by nature are typically ambiguous, complex problems, including aspects which will be impacted during the solution phase (Mumford, et. al., 1996).

Basadur (2004), has defined creativity as a four-stage process:



The conceptualizing step (stage II) (Basadur et al, 2000) focuses on the problem identification including defining the problem from multiple points of view. This includes “how might we...” statements.

In order to derive appropriate solutions, research has shown that spending sufficient effort in establishing the problem opportunity may yield a more effective solution (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). This is an opportunity where subordinates use domain experience to identify non-routine problems for improvement, in addition, to break down the issue into important components to understand the problem situation (Mumford, et. al, 1996). Research suggests that leader support and empowerment is essential to individuals who are intrinsically motivated to address creative opportunities, including thorough problem identification (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004), resisting the temptation to jump to solutions (Basadur, 2004). The focus of this research was on this problem construction phase of creativity.

## **The role of leadership support and encouragement**

### **Setting an innovative environment**

Hellmann and Theile (2011) discuss the manager's role in helping to motivate employees to work on assigned tasks and pursue innovation for the company's benefit. Internal innovative efforts are usually in competition with current processes for productivity. It is important to determine how employees, who see opportunities for innovation daily, are motivated to go beyond the narrow scope of their roles. Yanadori and Cui (2013) suggest that the organizational pursuit of innovation is directly impacted by this organizational compensation and incentive practices.

As mentioned above, pay-for-performance and other compensation schema related to short-term productivity goals, may not encourage creativity, but research has shown that leadership support and empowerment can motivate employee creativity. Furthermore, leaders have an impact on employee idea generation and innovative behavior (Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Basadur, 2004; de Jong & Den Hartog 2007; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; and Ozaralli, 2015) as well as contributing to creating a climate and culture for creativity (Mumford et. al., 2002; Amabile et. al., 2004).

Amabile's componential theory, suggests that the environment including leader behavior (of direct supervisor and other leaders) impacts employee creativity. Leader support should include task related and socio-emotional actions, including constructive feedback and openness to new ideas in a non-controlling and supportive manner (Amabile, et. al., 2004), and should be frequent, perhaps daily to guide the creative work. By increasing the frequency of interactions, the supportive and non-controlling leader creates a safe environment where creativity is encouraged (Amabile, et. al., 2004; Shalley, et. al., 2004)

This creative environment provides an atmosphere for leaders to guide, mentor and coach to remove constraints and provide resources to enable employees to engage in creative activities. An empowering leader guides the employee to understand the importance of the creativity within the larger organizational context and builds upon the employee intrinsic motivation by creating an environment of shared power and autonomy (Zang & Bartol, 2010; Ozaralli, 2015). By doing so, the leaders provide an environment to encourage employees to take risks and challenge the status quo with daily management practices (Shalley, C.E. & Gilson, L.L., 2004).

### **Leadership Feedback**

Leaders also play a critical role for input during the problem construction phase of creativity, as they have greater organizational expertise and insight (Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). With the risk that is inherent with creative problem construction, consistent feedback and guidance provide a safe environment for exploration. Effective leaders will also adjust their support as situationally required for employees and situations (de Villeiers, 2013). They help align the employee defined opportunities with the greater organizational goals (Basadur, 2004).

Feedback has been defined as a organizational tool leaders can use to instruct, motivate and direct employee performance (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Leadership behaviors such as consulting and feedback were identified as significant areas for leaders to support creative employees during idea generation and application stages (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). It can

be postulated that both are important aspects of employee leadership during the problem construction stage.

While leader feedback has been an essential part of the annual performance review process, daily feedback is an important element towards employee learning, motivation and job performance (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Traditionally, supervisor feedback was an important resource for organizations to clarify performance expectations, but consistent guidance and feedback is essential to address the complex nature of ill-defined problem construction, above and beyond annual performance appraisal cycle (Mumford, 2000).

Feedback has evolved to provide more insight beyond job performance, including developmental feedback. In this way, Ashford and Cummings (1983) defined that motivated individuals embody feedback seeking behaviors for other important job aspect and navigation within the organizational environment. Konczak, et. al., (2000) suggest that “coaching for innovative performance” is a critical aspect of empowering leadership, including the element of performance feedback, encouraging risk taking and learning from mistakes.

Differences in leadership style and feedback has a potential important impact on employee creativity. And based on the value to the organization, the ability to provide informal, frequent feedback should be considered as part of management training (Basadur, 2004; de Villeiers, 2013).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH**

### **Research Focus**

The research focused upon leadership support for individual creative opportunities for employees. Since the leader has an organizational strategic view, he/she will be able to offer strategic insight for the creative employee. In the absence of financial motivations, the leader plays a role of providing specific coaching, mentoring and feedback in helping the employee define the problem statement, while considering all aspects related to or impacted by the potential solution. By providing open, frequent and timely feedback, the leader creates an environment where feedback is informal and conversational between leader and employee (items in blue will be scope – Figure 1).

Creativity includes aspects such as people, environment (press), product and process (Badasar, 2004). Furthermore, within the creative process, there are important aspects related to problem construction, idea generation and idea implementation (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). This research focused on the problem construction part of the creative process, specifically on the importance of the leader feedback to the employee.

## Research Framework

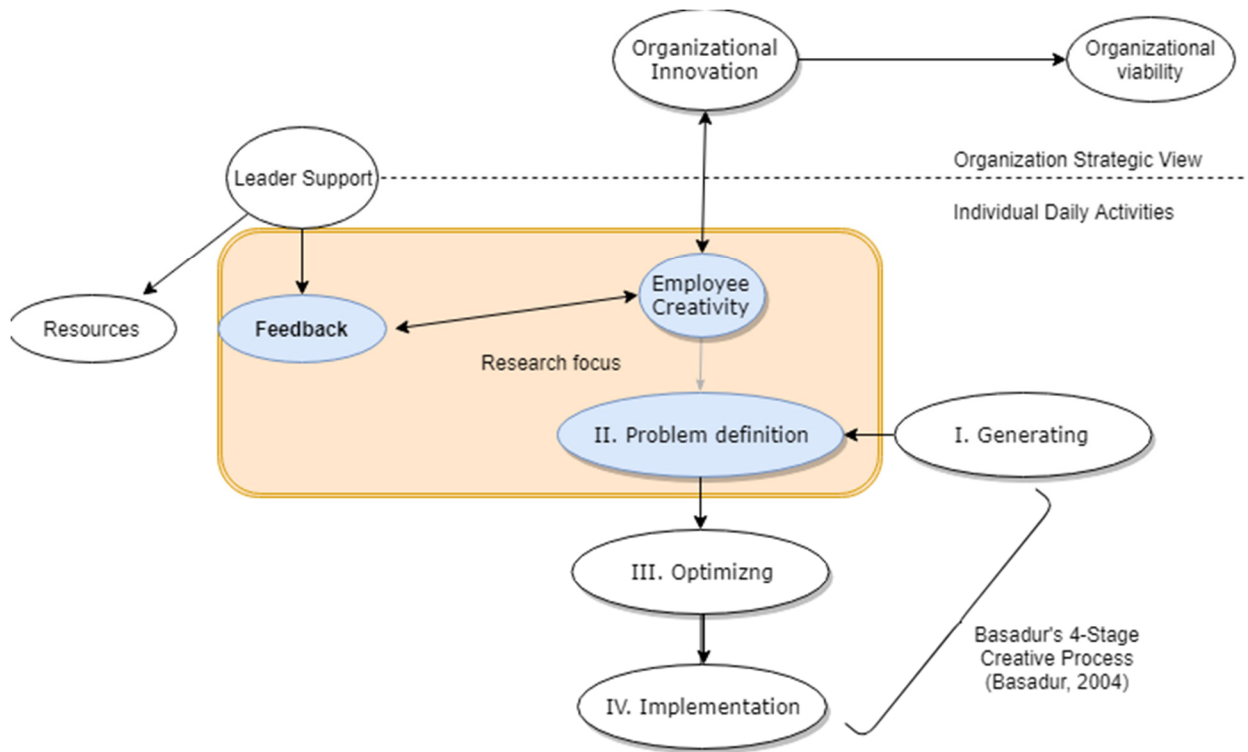


Figure 1. Research framework

## Assumptions

**Innovation:** The innovation focus will be on smaller, incremental opportunities impacting the organization experienced by the non-executive employees' daily work. Larger, radical innovation will not be assessed.

**Feedback:** The feedback assessed will be informal, constructive and frequent feedback from leader to employee, rather than annual performance related feedback or feedback received from coworkers. Feedback may be positive, negative or neutral; solicited or unsolicited.

**Creativity:** The focus will be on the creative process, and specifically the context of problem definition and construction. While there may be environmental and personality that impact creativity, this research will not be evaluating those aspects.

## Limitations

The limitations for this study include the small participant pool, in addition to more than half of the participants were employed within the R & D -biopharmaceutical industry. It is possible that participants in other departments within the biopharmaceutical industry (such as marketing or sales) may have responded differently.

An additional limitation included an omission of compensation relevant questions which may have aligned with previous literature on pay-for-performance impact on innovation. This was not specifically discussed as a factor for participant daily creativity.

**Setting, Population/Participants**

The eleven study participants were employed by the same company and provided IRB approved verbal consent. All were interviewed via virtual video conference. The interview protocol consisted of demographic information followed by twelve structured questions and follow-up questions involved the employee’s experience with creativity and leadership feedback. The recorded interview occurred over 30-40 minutes. Qualitative interview questions were created combining questions regarding leader feedback environment, coaching for innovation, and problem identification from validated survey instruments (Konczak, et al., 2000; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Steelman, et al., 2004).

The research questions focused on three main elements: The experience of the participant identifying opportunities for creativity in their daily work life, the behaviors leaders exhibited when providing feedback, and the feedback experience for the participant.

**Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis**

Each interview was transcribed by Otter (Otter.ai). Once transcribed, each interview was highlighted for insightful quotes, followed by coding each paragraph to minimize reviewer bias (O’Leary 2010).

All major quotes were summarized and categorized for thematic analysis based on patterns in responses across quotes. After identifying four main themes, these individual quotes were analyzed within an Opportunity Solution Tree (Figure 2) to visualize and further refine the themes based on the individual quote groupings.

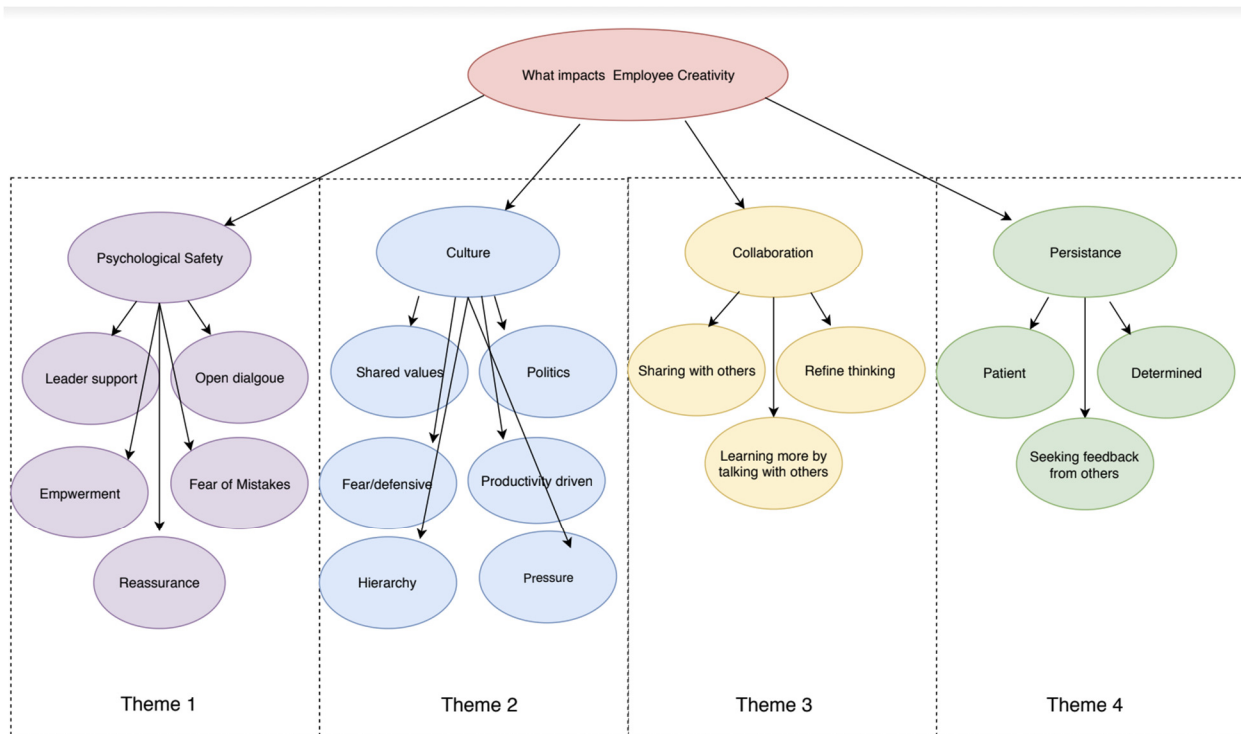


Figure 2. Opportunity Solution Tree



## RESULTS

### Introduction

The focus of this research was to evaluate the impact of leadership feedback on the employee construction of the complex problem statement. The research may provide insight of the future role of leaders to motivate employee creativity in the daily work environment, lending itself to overall organizational innovation.

### Implications

From the lens of the employee, is important to understand the potential impact that leaders have in motivating employees on problem construction for non-routine problems that are inherently complex and ambiguous. In order to offer more rich, creative solutions, it is important for employees to understand the problem context, organizational goals and impacts, and to feel supported during this time of conceptualization. The leader, with greater organizational visibility may guide the employee to understand the problem more deeply, while creating a safe environment for risk taking and learning from mistakes.

Organizations, particularly human resource leaders may benefit from the output of this research in an effort to inform business practices related to leadership training programs. Inclusion of creative problem construction can provide a perspective to guide employees who may experience these problems during daily activities. The effort in guiding problem construction may lead to more thorough problem assessment and richer solutions. In addition, particular training could be focused on providing informal, credible and frequent feedback to creative employees.

### Participants

#### Participant profiles:

	Age	Gender	Industry	Tenure in industry (years)	Organizational Tenure (years)	Title
#1	45	female	biopharmaceutics	0.5	0.5	Project manager
#2	44	female	construction manufacturing	23	15	Project manager
#3	25	male	biopharmaceutics	3	3	Data science associate II
#4	48	male	biopharmaceutics	17	15	Senior manager
#5	35	female	biopharmaceutics	11	3	Study management associate III
#6	59	female	insurance	34	34	Sr. strategy and operations manager

#7	55	male	Consumer packaged goods	10	7.5	Associate manager
#8	25	female	biopharmaceutics	3	3	Study management associate II
#9	50	female	consumer packaged goods	30	0.8	Change management lead
#10	39	female	higher education	11	0.8	Assistant director
#11	50	female	biopharmaceutics	20	11	Study project manager

### Emergent Themes

The overall analysis resulted in four main themes surrounding informal leadership feedback on daily employee work and problem statement construction. Informal leadership feedback had an impact on how psychologically safe the employee felt in voicing and refining the problem space (theme 1). In addition, most participants identified that collaboration with other colleagues (theme 2) was critical to further refining the problem and understanding the problem from different points of view. Organizational culture also impacted how the leader provided informal feedback based on the feedback environment or sometimes based on the amount of pressure and work needed to be completed to meet organizational goals (theme 3). Lastly, persistence (theme 4) surfaced for those individuals who may have not had positive leadership feedback experience.

### Psychological Safety

The theme of psychological safety emerged from the interviews noting that feedback created an open environment -supported by leader reassurance, empowerment and open dialogue to help the employee work through the complex problem. But for some participants, the lack of psychological safety impacted their next steps.

#### Statements that suggested the presence of psychological safety include:

Presence of psychological safety	Absence of psychological safety
“So, their support really enabled me to take charge”	“It would be nice to have feedback....to course correct or know if I’m going off the rails”
“She would make sure the person she was talking to always felt good. But, she got the outcome she wanted.”	“You can see how folks react to that when don’t have that. It seems like it’s harder to do the work they need to do”
“I feel way more safe and way more secure”	“Like one mistake, and the new manager told me the whole thing was incomprehensible”

“And there’s room to make mistakes and try new things”	“So, I get it now. The whole team is driving to perfection on everything”
“It was anxiety reducing, I could go out on a limb, and if I’m wrong, I won’t get my wrist slapped”	“You can know how folks react when they don’t have that. It’s harder for them to do the work they need to do.”
“Sometimes I just need to hear I’m not crazy”	

## Collaboration

Many participants felt that in order to understand the complex problem correctly, it was important to talk through the opportunity space with others to refine their thinking. It was through sharing with and learning from others that they were able to dissect and refine the problem statement. Statements included:

- “I share drafts of my work with everyone around me. We are all in this together”
- “It’s understood that we help each other out”
- “I want to talk through ideas”
- “It’s helpful to be aligned with other leaders on a problem”
- “Our conversation sparked more conversation”
- “I waded through that and figure out who to ask those questions, since there are different ways based on their role”
- “You can leverage other people to solve our problems”
- “Working through that, talking through what our plan was going to be, what we could feasibly do and we couldn’t”
- “I’d like to get him on the playing field with us instead of on the sideline with the clipboard”
- “It makes it hard, I want to talk through problems. I want to tease them out.”
- “I try and drive conversations to help people refine their thinking”
- “Dialogue helps to refine the problem”

## Culture

While culture is a very vast theme, participants commented that perhaps the leadership feedback received was highly impacted by the organizational culture and espoused values. This was a theme composed of politics, hierarchy, shared values and productivity-driven sectors. Statements included:

- “Let’s get things done. There is a lot of money at stake.”
- “I had a boss tell me once that we are for profit business. It’s never not about the money.”
- “And so there is a lot of scrutiny on my business and their business. And those tensions rise.”
- “Time was of the essence, so the feedback was direct and targeted”
- “The team was overwhelmed, and they could not fathom spending 2 more weeks to redo their timelines”
- “The culture they are setting is doing the solutions, not the problem”

- “He’s been pretty hesitant to take it on, primarily because it is outside of his area of responsibility”
- “The feedback was coming from the right place, but I felt it was the result of the politics I was referencing”
- “It’s hard for her to admit when she’s wrong, and I think it’s part of the broader culture thing here”
- “I see him engaging with the male managers. A good ole boys bonding.”
- “Because of my lower experience level it’s hard for me to have that credibility when speaking with some of the leaders.”
- “I felt like he was really listening to me and taking me seriously, rather than seeing a recent college graduate.”
- “We’ve had some fantastic ideas from some peers, but they are lower level, and they won’t go anywhere.”
- “I am engaging leaders for help in this space, because of second guessing myself to avoid finger pointing.”
- “Are some of these leaders really living the stated culture?”
- “I don’t have to ask for feedback. I think we have a shared sense of what we’re doing and sharing information.”

## **Persistence**

Previous cited literature did not speak to the persistence of these creative employees in the face of potential obstacles. If participants did seek leadership feedback that was not positive, most persisted to gain feedback and input from other sources. The theme of persistence was a surprising, unexpected finding. When asked about the impact of negative or absent leader feedback, most participants were not initially discouraged. Statements included:

- “It’s just being patient and giving it time.”
- “Being able to allow time for that response to settle a little bit before we engage in dialogue.”
- “It needed to get done. I made it happen.”
- “I am not as discouraged as most people. So I kind of continued to push along.”
- “It didn’t affect me at all. But, I could see someone else. That affecting them.”
- “It’s possible if someone else they could have given up and just said, it doesn’t appear my boss values the work I do.”
- “When someone says to me that’s not possible, I don’t take that answer.”
- “That feedback won’t stop me from prototyping”
- “When I brought it up again, and this time, I did it in the open, leveraging the open leader forum. It was much different.”
- “I was not likely to seek feedback from my supervisor, but I would still seek feedback from other sources.”

## INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Interpretation

Research suggested that creative non-executive employees were intrinsically motivated to look for opportunities to solve daily work problems (Reiter-Palon & Illies, 2014), in spite of the lack of rewards or monetary compensation for doing so. In fact, this study found that many participants are actually motivated by altruism. These participants were inspired to find better ways of working to help others and to help future employees. Deductive theories suggest that leaders who provided frequent and constructive feedback to encourage creative employee behavior also provided employees with empowerment, engagement and further idea exploration (Konczak, et al., 2000;- Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Steelman, et al., 2004). This study confirms these findings. In addition, the qualitative nature of this study further explored the impact of psychological safety, culture, and collaboration in this process, as well as a new employee characteristic of persistence to pursue creative opportunities.

The theme of psychological safety appeared as a condition that drove *empowerment, open dialogue* and *reassurance*. In this category, employees felt there was “*room for mistakes to try new things*” and “*I’m not fearful of how things might turn out*”. They were willing to explore riskier opportunities if leaders provided an environment that felt safer. Employees within this supportive environment also needed frequent reassurance that they were heading in the right direction “*sometimes I just need to hear that I’m not crazy*”. For those who were not in the psychologically safe environment, there was a fear of making mistakes or an unwillingness to try to be creative. For some employees, this may result in leaving the company or leaving the unsupportive boss.

The lack of psychological safety could be attributed to the organizational culture. Although innovation appears as a corporate value for many organizations, participants felt that these values were not espoused by all leaders. They felt that culture heavily influenced the leaders support or lack of support. Aspects such as *fear, hierarchy, politics, and pressure to produce* impacted if and how leaders were willing to provide input on creative solutions. Participants indicated “*how can we do things differently without all the finger pointing*”, “*we’ve had some really great ideas here from some peers, but they are lower level and they don’t go anywhere*” and “*let’s get things done. There was a lot of money at stake. Go do*”.

Despite these barriers, these participants had a desire to collaborate with others to enable a better, more refined opportunity. *Sharing with others, learning more by talking with others and refined thinking* were benefits of this collaboration. Quotes included, “*I want to talk through the ideas*”, “*I want to talk more about problems, to tease them out*” and “*I try and drive conversation to help us refine our thinking*”. The participants openly acknowledge that interactions with their leaders or others who had different expertise and points of view helped to refine the problem. While this was not only directly linked to leader feedback, leaders did contribute to creating an environment for open collaboration.

Regardless of the potential cultural impacts or lack of direct leader feedback, most participants exhibited a persistence and determination to seek out opportunities for creativity including *patience* and *seeking feedback from others*. While psychological safety, collaboration and culture heavily influenced the feedback environment, participants were resilient to find alternative solutions, mostly fueled by an altruistic motivation to help others and to add value to their organizations. The study participants were all motivated to identify opportunities to enable more efficient work in their daily lives. Quotes such as “*I am not as discouraged by most*

*people, so I kind of continued to push it along”, “It’s possible if someone else they could have given up an just said, it doesn’t appear my boss values the work I do”, and “I want not likely to seek feedback from my supervisor, but I would still seek feedback from other sources”.*

While the role of compensation was not included within the study protocol, not one participant specifically mentioned the potential loss of productivity-based compensation as a deterrent from being creative.

The strong impact of the culture and feedback environment appeared to impact some leader’s ability to provide informal feedback to help employees refine the problem statement. This was the most prominent theme. When resourcing, financial and time pressures were apparent, leaders were less willing to provide frequent feedback for creative ideas. These leaders appeared to drive toward productivity and solutions, rather than problem identification.

Lastly, the study participants were primarily at the manager to associate level - meaning most had impact on daily work activities. It’s very likely that while senior executives were focused on organizational innovation to remain relevant, this message is being lost to leaders who directly manage productivity-based employees, and their organizational output.

## **Recommendations**

In this paradox of short-term productivity versus efficiency, the overall long-term goal of innovation may be at risk. For most productivity-based organizations with pay for performance compensation schemes, this may very well work against the goal of becoming innovative. Innovation is an area that can set organizations apart from competitors in a technically advanced, global environment. In these settings, there is very little direct motivation nor reward associated with leaders or employees finding ways to improve daily work. It is here that the role of direct leaders can motivate and create a safe environment for employees.

How might we engage employees to collaborate and find efficient solutions to daily work? A result of this research, a framework called S.T.A.R.C. has been developed to guide people leaders to help them effectively construct weekly one-on-one meetings with all employees. This can be the foundation to creating an environment which fosters creativity and collaboration (Figure 3).

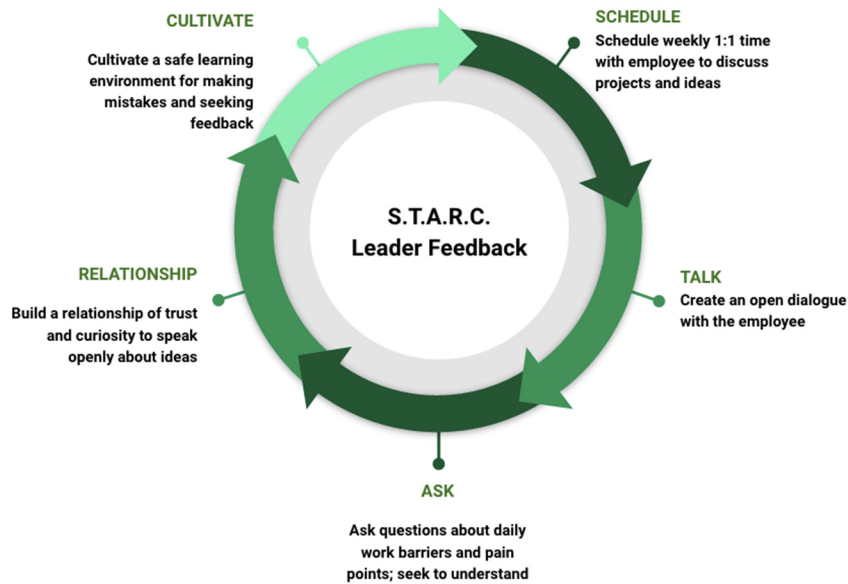


Figure 3. S.T.A.R.C. Leader Feedback

These authors recommend that leaders build and cultivate relationships with integrity, allow and encourage employees to take risks and be vulnerable. In addition, implement systems for two-way open communication, and purposeful planning in order to ensure the time needed to successfully provide the feedback needed where employees will not only feel comfortable sharing ideas but will find the passion to create innovatively.

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