

INFORMAL GROUP: AN INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING BLOCK FOR INNOVATION IN WORK ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Individuals in the workplace often engage in informal activities or personal endeavours that lead to both deliberate and serendipitous disruptive innovation and industry change. Informal group and their activities dominate most organizational setting. They are a no-do-without group despite they are not formally structured in the workplace. However, it is important to note that informal group plays a great role in driving for innovation in the organization as long as the informality is high. Thus, this chapter dissects on informal group and its possible tendency of promoting innovation in work organization.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations need to be innovative to be able to face the complexity and turbulence of the environmental forces and factors surrounding them (Shah et al., 2022). Thus, an obvious fact about innovation in work organizations is that organizational publics, subsystems or elements within organizations must be suitably linked. It is also well known that organization do not exist in a vacuum. This is because; work organizations are subject to the influences of their external environment, whose influence changes as their environment changes (Rama et al. 2022). Most often, impulse towards work organizations appear without external environmental influence. Hence work organizations, such as human beings often engage in campaign for self-improvement through constant stream of generating new ideas.

One major unanswered question about Nigerian work organizations therefore, is the question of how informal groups serve as an institutional construction block for innovations. It is our believe that the role played by informal groups in work control and co-ordination, including the pattern they adopted in bringing about changes do shape their ability to serve as effective institutional building block. In this chapter therefore, we shall focus on the means adopted by informal groups in generating new ideas in Nigerian work organizations.

INFORMAL GROUPS IN NIGERIAN WORK ORGANISATIONS

In our study, reported elsewhere (Chukuigwe, 1994) we found that 59.38% of our respondents are of the view that the means by which informal groups generate new ideas in work organization, is through their influence on work control and co-ordination systems. The informal groups were also found to play significant role in organizational growth and development through their tacit involvement in most organizational activities. They are therefore:

1. giving financial assistance and helping members get promotion outside the criteria provided by management;
2. assisting higher officers who are members of a given informal group to do their work better;
3. assisting members having social problems such as aiding them in financing marriages, child birth and burial which are not provided by management of the organization; and
4. assisting members who come in conflict with management decision to escape the wrought of management

INFORMAL GROUPS AND NEW IDEA GENERATION: IN WORK ORGANISATIONS

Innovation and change processes can only be initiated by reference to the way in which it is expected to satisfy the interests of some or all organizational members, and of groups outside work organization as well. It is well known that formal groups are the vehicles for accomplishing various objectives of work organizations (Qelland & King in Martinus, 2018), But evidence is emerging which tend to support informal groups in Nigeria work organizations in discharging some of these functions, though in an uninstitutionalised basis, This lend support to Child and Kiesser's in Kelley (2016) argument that, "this satisfies the criterion of general social investment in complex institutional fabric of modern societies,"

One method adopted by informal groups in generating new ideas in Nigeria work organizations is through work control and coordination. The idea of the informal groups discharging this function, including those of serving as work commitment, work organization linking-pin and conflict resolution machinery are all new to the pattern of work practices in Nigeria work organizations (Shah et al., 2022). However, organizations are continually changing movements in external conditions such as competition, innovation, meeting public demand, and in compliance with work organizations, not only because such objectives have become more prominent in recent times, but because emphasis has previously been laid upon the desire for organization growth as the driving force behind innovation processes (Hedberg in Kickul & Bacq 2012). It is therefore not surprising, that the motive behind the involvement of informal groups in work organizational activities is for organizational growth and development. This is not to suggest that, we are ignorant of Galbraith's (1974) views that pressures toward innovation can be derived from a desire for maintenance as well as for growth, though growth may itself be innovation strategy selected as a means for ensuring work organizational survival. Notwithstanding that informal groups are the most effective agents for generating new' ideas in Nigerian work organizations in recent times,, it is well known that the survival of an organization depends upon exchange with individuals or organizations in its environment; in particular, on a balance of exchange which provides resources for its future activities, This provision may derive from a favourable balance of commercial exchange in die case of business organizations, from renewed membership subscription in the case of a voluntary organization, or from securing continued governmental sponsorship in the case of a public agency (Child & Kieser 1981).

Rehenman (1973), Starbuck (1963), and Cyert and March (1963) categorized motives for the selection of growth as a strategy for innovation. These include: growth of work organization makes it easier to achieve quasi-resolution of conflict which is the satisfaction of the demands of all organizational beneficiaries; growth can reduce work organizational dependence, especially if it is growth relative to other work organizations and growth may result as a by-product of other strategies including the success of work organization in meeting demand for its services (Starbuck 1965; Martinus, 2018). Obviously, as Child and Kieser (1981) noted that, given that there are so many pressures for organizational growth, it is not surprising that most organizations do grow over time and that growth has been given prominence in models and death of work organizations, various crises may occur which represent significant turning points in their organizational life cycle. The authors concluded by contending that, crises indicate that the strategies which an organization has pursued are no longer successful and that certain fundamental decisions have to be made which establish many of the parameters for future innovation and change in work organizations (Shah et al., 2022).

Informal groups by their innovative actions: encourage their members to participate in organization's activities such as in-service training, seminars, conferences, meetings and other organizational activities; encourage members to take their work seriously; help in resolving conflict among members; project the products of the organization for public acceptance; encourage organization to adhere to demands of technological changes such as the introduction of some working gadgets, computers and other forms of information technologies; and impressing on management, the need to introduce or improve training and development

programmes for workers. Thinking along this line, we accept Hymowitz (1983) observations that innovation is usually associated only with the human side of work organizations, This implies that innovation deals with planned change. As human beings are eventually affected by innovational activities, this is where the association between innovation and informal group behaviour, the other facet of human actions in work organizations come into play.

Four broad areas: technological change, the knowledge explosion, product and service obsolescence, and social change are forces that render innovation in organizations inevitable (ITellriegel et al 1983; Hall 1969, Davis and Blomstrom 1975). But, it is our belief that stimulating organizational creativity is a phenomenon which is both essential and desirable for innovation in Nigerian work organizations brought about by informal groups. It is well known and Fox (1968) explained, that the creative process is any thinking process which solves a problem in an original and useful way. Seidel (1968) notes that, through the ability to relate and to connect is receptiveness, and flexibility are included among the intellectual components of the creative personality.

Many of the characteristics found in highly creative organizations may be seen as matching those of highly creative individuals. Randsepp (1978), Steiner (1962) and Cummings et al (1975) refer to the need of creativity in work organizations as a basis for innovation. Prince (1968) notes that a widely accepted theory of the mind is that most of it is unconscious. Moreover, this unconscious portion to which we can gain access through a process called "free association" has contents that are irrational and frightening. But it is the part of our mind from which comes much of our creative ideas and feelings. Writing on the significance of human effort in innovation and change processes in work organizations, Kolasa (1969:348) observe that "we may not recognize it or otherwise be cognizant of it; we may oppose it or we may even try to accelerate it."

CONCLUSION

Innovation efforts are rooted in wider society and they seem to have some potential for individual carrier development. It serves to close value gap in managing the human being in modern work organizations. This is because: there is now more concern about values per se, not just different values; action is more important, merely talking about values is not enough. One's values must be backed by action; values such as integrity, honesty, openness, and realness are more important; in general values are more humanistic as there are; different motivating factors; there is increased concern for the ultimate social value of one's work; and (6) authority based on expertise, personal style, and convictions or accomplishments is more legitimate than authority based on age or position. (Hall, 1971).

It is pertinent to highlight at this point that, work group norms community management, the informal groups have acquired the spirit of contributing to the growth and development of Nigerian work organizations as a result of the practice whereby they contribute to societal effectiveness through their involvement in community activities. It is arguable and rightly too, that the informal groups like the formal groups perform both management and operative functions. By this, they set a pattern for the functioning and behaviour of their work organizations. Hence, the informal groups existing in Nigerian work organizations were found to be generating new ideas and change where necessary at the workplace. This again is a habit they acquired from the wider African society.

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