IMPACT OF TRAINING SUPPORT ON INNOVATION IN MARKET AND SOCIAL RESEARCH FIRMS (MSRFs) IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to find out the impact of training support on innovation in Market and Social Research Firms (MSRFs) in Kenya. This was motivated by inconsistent empirical findings of the previous scholars on the effect of training on innovation. The study used cross-sectional research design. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study found that the effect of training support on EPE and innovation was insignificant. The result could be helpful to human resources practitioners and policy makers when deciding on a mix of organizational climate factors to promote innovation in institutions. Consideration of multiple organisational factors as opposed to a single factor to enhance innovation at micro level in their work place is hinted.

Key Words: *Training, Innovation*

Introduction

The 21st century global business environment is bedeviled with fast changing technology, growing volatility, global competition, organization change, social conflicts, environmental degradation and high rate of unemployment among others (George, 2007; Runco, 2004).

To overcome these challenges, nations and organizations need to hire creative and innovative employees (Zhou & Oldham, 2004; Eustace & Martins, 2014). This is because innovation has been found to be one of the most critical tool in today's fast changing environment that can enable nations, organizations, change managers, employees and society to overcome the many challenges and enhance the common good of the society (George, 2007; Batey,2012).

This growing importance of creativity and innovation therefore, has portended the need for identifying those factors that promote or demote innovation to solve the many global and organizational challenges experienced in this century (Eustace & Martins, 2014).This fact among others, has resulted to organizations considering innovation majorly from a financial perspective and at a macro level, neglecting other factors at micro level which too have impact on the innovation. This has resulted to many studies proliferating focusing on different interests and approaches in trying to identify those factors that influence creativity and innovation as well as understanding more about the two constructs (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010). Some scholars have therefore, separated the two terms with creativity to the generation of meaningful, useful and new ideas while innovation has been taken to mean commercialization of the generated ideas, although it has been reported to be a degenerating research field (Glover, Ronning & Rynolds, 1989; Nayak, 2008)). Some of the scholars interested in this area of innovation, have focused on person, process, product and work environment (press) using different approaches like Psychoanalytic, psychometric, cognitive, social, psychological, scientific and neurobiological (Batey, 2012) in trying to identify those factors that influence creativity. Those focusing on innovation have majorly focused on the problem solving ability of the generated ideas (Govindarajan &Trimble, 2010). In all the studies, researchers have concurred that innovation is very critical for solving the global and organizational challenges sustainably (Dul & Ceylun, 2011; Nystrom, Ramamurthy & Wilson, 2002).

Problem Statement

The 21st century global business environment is bedeviled with many challenges like fast changing technology, growing volatility, global competition, organization change, social conflicts, environmental degradation and high rate of unemployment among others (George, 2007; Runco, 2004). To overcome these challenges organizations need to have a pool of creative and innovative employees (Zhou & Oldham, 2004; Eustace & Martins, 2014). Innovation has been found to be one of the most critical tool in today's fast changing environment that can enable organizations, change managers, employees to overcome the many challenges (George, 2007; Batey,2012). ESOMAR ,(2011) reported that failure to respond to the growing need of innovation has resulted to less innovative African organizations to stagnate and meagerly contributing only 5% of the global market research revenue leaving firms from more creative economies of USA, Europe and Asia to dominate the sector's revenue at 95%.

African organizations therefore, must pursue innovation by all means for without it, there cannot be competitive and national economy can hardly be competitive too (George, 2007; Batey, 2012).

The growing importance of creativity and innovation has forth with continued to discern a need for identifying those factors that promote innovation to solve the many global and organizational challenges experienced in this century *(*Eustace & Martins, 2014*).*This growing need to solve the many emerging problems have resulted to organizations considering innovation majorly from a financial perspective and at a strategic level, neglecting other factors at the macro level which too have impact on innovation. This innovational strategy myopia, has left organizations challenged to cultivate high level of employee innovations as assets they hold (Shalley et al., 2009; Shalley et.al. 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2003).

To delve deeper in area of training support influence, other scholars have tried to test its impact on employee innovations using different measurements in their studies. Some based on outcomes, others based on levels of operations, others on different rating styles and different models, different techniques of data analyses but they all produced varied results (Furnham et al., 2008; Amabile, Gryskiewicz, 1989; Sylvia, 2008 Kaufaman, Plucker and Baer, 2008; Mumford, 2003, Runco.2004; Alice, 2011 and Hunter et.al. ;2004).The common analytical methodologies applied in most of those previous studies were correlation and regression (Alice, 2011)which did not resolve the inconsistency either. Other recently documented results on effect of organizational climate on innovation, include inverted U-shape relationship (Fenlin, 2007), significant positive relationship (Ndanuko, 2012) and negative influence (Prohit & Wadhwa, 2012 and Haque, 2014).Some of differing results have also been reported on link between empowerment and innovation with some scholars reporting positive relations ion (Çakar and Ertürk, 2010; Ertürk, 2012; Helms, 2006; Muindi, 2011) while others found a negative relationship or instead no significant link between the two variable. Kmieciak et al. (2012), in his study concluded that empowerment did not affect the company's ability to innovate.

Such outcomes caused some scholars to unanimously agree that the inconsistency is due to something else unknown yet, given that the models used have been found to have internal consistency (Mathsen and Einasen, 2004; Boso, 2013; Mumford and Hunter, 2004 and Hunter et.al. 2007). This motivated the researcher, with reference to the findings by Wenberge and Banas (2000) that certain organizational climate factors combined with other macro factors can resolve this inconsistency. The researcher's motivation was further strengthened by Alice et.al. 2011; Furnham, &Batey 2006 who had found that focusing on employee psychological empowerment stimulate innovation when leaders provide employees with social, emotional and technical support. Given that such insight has not attracted many scholars, and those who attempted focused on managers alone, leaving out the lower cadre staff (Nijstand and Stroebe, 2006 ;Thomison and Choi, 2006),this portended a gap for the researcher to fill. Given that the debate on inconsistency have left the scholars divided on the influences of training to innovation, organizations still remain unaware of critical training support variables to focus on if they want to yield high levels of innovations (Muturi, Ochieng & Douglas, 2015). It is on this premise that the researcher considered finding out the influence of training on innovation. This study therefore, considered the impact of training support on innovation in Market and Social Research Firms *(*MSRFs) in Kenya

Research Objective

To determine the effect of training support on innovation in MSRFs in Kenya.

Hypothesis

H01. Training support has insignificant effect on innovation in MSRFs in Kenya.

Literature Review

Concept of Employee psychological empowerment

Empowerment is a continuous variable; people can be viewed as more or less empowered, rather than empowered or not empowered. Psychological empowerment is the motivational concept of self-efficacy. It is an intrinsic task motivation exemplified by four cognitive elements. These include meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Meaning describes the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in regard to an employee's own ideals or standards (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Meaning is the fit between the work requirements, role, beliefs, values, and behaviors (Brief & Nord, 1990; Hackman & Oldham, 1980) as cited in Spreitzer (1995). Competence refers to employee's self-efficacy in regard to belief and capability to perform activities with skill he/she has (Gist, 1987). It is the personal mastery, or effort-performance expectancy (Bandura, 1989). Self-determination on its part is the individual's sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). Self-determination reflects freedom in the initiation and continuation of work behaviors and processes about work methods, pace, and effort (Bell & Staw. 1989; Spector, 1986) as cited Spreitzer (1995).Impact is the degree to which an employee can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at workplace (Ashforth. 1989).The four dimensions are argued to combine additively to create an overall construct of psychological empowerment which further enhance creativity and innovation. If one the variables is missing, less empowerment is felt, though not completely eliminated. Empowerment is not an enduring personality trait generalizable across situations, but rather, a set of cognitions shaped by a work environment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Empowerment reflects people's perceptions about themselves in relation to their work environments (Bandura, 1989). Finally empowerment is not a global construct generalizable across different life situations and roles but rather, specific to the work and specific meaning unique across organizations.

When employees enjoy support of their organizational members they develop a sense of positive psychological conditions ideal for innovation. This emerging psychological condition has further attracted scholars to study the area focusing on employee empowerment with a view to improve innovations at workplace as it has been found to have a positive effect on trust, innovation and organizational performance (Berraies, Chaher Yahia, 2014).

The concept of innovation

Creativity and innovation constructs are reported to be closely related and significantly overlap in terms of characteristics (Angle, 1989). In contrast, creativity is the generation of novel and useful ideas, primarily at the macro level (Amabile et al., 1996). Innovation on its part is the process by which these ideas are captured, filtered, funded, developed, modified, clarified, and eventually commercialized and/or implemented. Creativity is the precursor of innovation. In order for an organization to remain relevant and competitive in pursuit of its purpose, leadership must pay attention to both ends of the process, generating creative ideas frequently and utilizing its innovation process to realize the potential value of those ideas.

This growing importance of creativity and innovation portends the need for identifying those factors that promote or stifle creativity and innovation to solve the many global and organizational challenges experienced in this century (Eustace & Martins, 2014).This has resulted to many studies proliferating focusing on different interests and approaches in trying to identify those factors that influence creativity and innovation as

well as understanding more about the two constructs(Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010). Some scholars interested in this area, have focused on innovation on the premise of problem solving ability of the generated ideas (Govindarajan &Trimble, 2010). In all the studies, researchers have concurred that innovation is very critical for solving the global and organizational challenges sustainably (Dul & Ceylun, 2011; Nystrom, Ramamurthy & Wilson, 2002).

Although researchers have concurred that innovation is very critical for any organization, nations, society ,change managers, scholars , individual development and change, organizations on their part have found it difficult to maintain high level of employee innovation in organizations (Shalley et al., 2009; Shalley et.al., 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2003). To address the issue of low level of employee innovation in organizations, scholars have identified several factors that may influence innovation (Amabile & Khaire, 2008).Among the factors identified that can stimulate innovation is the perception or feeling employees form about the working environment (organizational climate) and characteristics of certain employees within the environment such as supervisors and leaders (Amabile, 1996; Dul &Ceylun, 2011). If these organizational climate factors and individual characteristics are assessed, they can help estimate the level of innovation existing and propose interventions to improve it (Dodd, Smith and Wards, 2002; and Moss, 2007).

Theoretical Review

Intrinsic motivation theory was evaluated in the context of employee empowerment to deliver innovation and majorly explained the constructs of training support in the organizational climate among other variables. The componential theory of creativity proposed by Amabile (1983) is founded on social and psychological components critical for individual to produce creative products or solution. Leadership theories on the same breath emerged to explain and demonstrate the influence of leadership has on various business outcomes among them creativity and innovation. This research, particularly focused on transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978) to explain the leadership influence as an organizational climate factor on employee empowerment and innovation in businesses.

Intrinsic Motivation Theories

The theory states that, an individual is intrinsically motivated to behave in a certain way when he feels internally rewarded by the behavior chosen, (Deci, 1975), Deci and Ryan,1985). To be creative and innovative on products, processes and services, individuals must feel internally motivated and rewarded. Intrinsic motivation is driven by competence, relatedness and autonomy. It is also shaped externally by recognition, reward, co-operation, autonomy and curiosity. The challenge now is how the owners of the business can create an ideal climate to intrinsically promote continuous innovation which is rewarding, challenging and interesting to all individuals (Brown, 2007 and Elsevier, 2014). The two authors looks at the leader as the person responsible for this kind of climate.

Theorists of intrinsic motivation have identified and generalized the factors that may increase intrinsic motivation for innovation, to include recognition, challenges, curiosity, rewards and fun but have not assessed the extent of increment at an industry and employee specific level. This study used training support as climate variable to find out their effect on innovation in Market research industry in Kenya which has not been done in the past.

Empirical Literature Review

The componential theory postulates that creativity and innovation is dependent on the level of

expertise (skills, training and knowledge).Training and teaching help individuals to discover and hone their creative potentials. Complimentary training provided when studying a certain discipline encourages creativity and innovation. According to Indian National council of Colleges of Education (N.C.C.E) (2005), experiential learning increases the chances of innovation where the real world projects, internships, case studies and business planning are applied. Literature has shown that continuous training result to more effective and sustainable creativity and innovation and should not be stopped irrespective of budgets. Instead, alternative training like virtual training, e-learning and digital readers should be applied to reduce cost. Empirically, offering training opportunities to workers reduces misunderstandings which may stifle creativity and innovation (Sieczka, 2011). Employees' willingness to train and acquire knowledge was found to enable companies to improve innovation capabilities (Patterson, West, Shackleton & Dawson, 2005). Empowerment and organizational climate was found to significant negative relationship with innovation while transformational leadership was found to have significant and positive relationship with innovation and empowerment (Montes, Moreno & Farnandez, 2006).

While wide training result to personal transformational and skills building, Meander (2005) argues that sometimes formal education can be barrier that confines individuals to a single way of thinking and limits creativity and innovation. He sites that the likes of Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs and David Darwin were renowned creators and innovators yet had little higher education. Literature has reported that the correlation between individual formal educations is an inverted U meaning formal education increases the probability of being creativity before reaching to an optimal level and later decline (NCCE, 2005). Fenlin (2007) found in Taiwan, that individual knowledge efficacy and enjoyment to help others together with the top management support significantly influence knowledge sharing process.

Firms that invest in Research and development (R&D) and workers skills (on-the-job training) are hoped to be successful in innovation. However, from research it is less evident the extent to which these investments enhance the impact of one another on innovation. It is generally believed that R&D is more effective when firms have more skilled personnel due to investment in worker training (González, Miles and Pazó, 2013). This study focuses on innovation generated (measured by innovations ideas generation, and execution using a sample of Kenyan market Research firms. Training is believed to reinforce the effect of R&D on the likelihood of innovating, and it may even increase likelihood of some firms to become innovative. It is also opined that the impact of training varies according to firm size and industry and that complementarity is more applicable in large firms in the high-tech sector (González, Miles and Pazó, 2013). Training for innovation cut across all types of organizations and departments.

Future prosperity for Africa realizable if skills and potentials of employees are enhanced irrespective of the industry they are operating in. Critical skills to inculcate to workers include investigative, analytical and practical skills if innovation is to be realized. Available literature have reported that CEOs leadership training, management coaching and networking have immediately impacted on economic growth through innovation and job creation. It has found that poverty bedeviling Africa can be addressed through leadership and practical innovation in the private sector (Hamilton, 2016).

Training for innovation entailed acquiring skills that are needed for innovation that enhances imagination, curiosity, behavior change, building

self-confidence, eliciting energy, passion, leadership, corroborations and persuasions. Introduction of critical math in a curricular is taken to enhance innovation by virtue of its complexity (OECD report, critical math for innovative society, 2014).High education plays a pivotal role in providing skills for innovations but challenge is reported on what kind of teaching will deliver this innovation. Problem based learning is reported can be an effective way to develop different disciplines specific and transferable skills for innovation(Prompting skills for innovation in higher education report,2014).The current wave is in the investment in intangible assets(skills and competencies) which is overtaking investment in tangible assets. Human capital is the basic innovation input (Corrado, Hunter and Sichel, 2006)

Continuous training enhances knowledge which further increases an organization's propensity to innovate. A highly skilled workforce is the most crucial factor to a firm's performance in a turbulent environment while firms in a stable environment benefit more from training investment (Elservier, 2005). Most human capital focuses formal education for innovation which is independent from on the job training (Bauemschuster & Falck, 2009).These researchers argued that training and innovation have a causal effect. They found a strong association between lagged training and innovation. Their findings concurred with that of Damanpour (1991) who also found that there is a statistically significant association between organization innovation and technical knowledge resources and specialization. This study will look at both formal or on the job trainings, age, education level and experience of employee for innovation which have not greatly received prominence in past studies (Forbes insights, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Marketing and Social Research Association (MSRA) firms in Kenya. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design because it facilitated the collection of data from the employees of many different firms in one industry at one point in time (Kerlinger, 2007). The population of the study consisted of all the employees in the marketing research firms in Nairobi because most of these MSRA firms were domiciled in Nairobi. The population for this study was all the employees, supervisors and the top managers of the MSRA firms. Therefore, the target population for this study was all the employees, supervisors and the top managers of all the fifteen MSRA firms. The sampling procedure used to select 770 respondents from the target population of this study was probability sampling.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was administered to each of the 770 employees in all the fifteen MSRA firms situated within Nairobi. Out of these, 387 questionnaires were returned which made up to 50.26% response rate. On the gender of the respondents, majority were male (57.1%) while the female were slightly lower to male constituting of 42.9 % of the respondents. Most of the employees interviewed were aged below 45years with the majority of them (72.4%) aged between 18-31 years indicating that MSRFs are youthful, male inclined organizations.

Effect of Training on Innovation

The study objective was to determine the relationship between training support and innovation of employees of MSRFs in Kenya.

Training support had insignificant effect on innovation which agreed with the hypothesis **(HO1)"That training had insignificant effect on innovation in MSRFs in Kenya"** The findings implied that adequacy of training budget, the cost of

training per employee and frequency of trainings in MSRFs showed insignificant influence on employee feeling that training makes their job meaningful and important to the organization they work for. Besides, the training offered to the employees did not make them feel self-determined to generate new ideas or technique in work methods. This might be the quality and quantity of training offered to the employees of MSRFs could be low standard. Moreover, the training could not match the requirements or expectations of the employees. On the other hand, the training offered could not be able to help them to have adequate knowledge, skills, abilities and interest to develop new ideas, methods and approaches to make their work easy. Employee in this industry felt that they did not have autonomy and independence to set their own work schedules or have their co-workers support them to execute new ideas. This had left them disinterested with departmental activities and achievements which could further affect innovations at MSRFs negatively. If training at MSRFs was to have any positive and significant effect on employee psychological empowerment, it needed to be accompanied by employee autonomy and independence on their job as well as on departmental budget, size of the training budget, frequency of the trainings and application of the learned skills. Any focus on training in isolation would not yield employee empowerment in the Market research industry. MSRFs must therefore support training of employees and ensure they give them autonomy, freedom and independence to apply the skills and be involved in departmental decisions.

Consequently, training had insignificant impact on innovation. The findings was inconsistent with the componential theory that postulate that creativity and innovation is dependent on the level of expertise (skills, training and knowledge), environment he/she is operating, particularly social environment (Personality) and the intrinsic motivation (Bass,1983). Our findings also differed with that of Sieczka, (2011) who found that offering training opportunities to workers reduces misunderstandings which may stifle creativity and innovation. Our findings did not harmonize with that of Patterson, West, Shackleton & Dawson, 2005 who found that employees' willingness to train and acquire knowledge enable companies to improve innovation capabilities. Therefore, the insignificant result in this study could be due to low standard of training, inadequate manifest of training, or lack of autonomy and independence at MSRFs which according to a previous study by Jafari and Iranzadeh, (2013) found critical for training support to result to innovation. Our findings on training support concurs with González, Miles and Pazó, 2013 that Firms that invest in Research and development (R&D) and workers skills (on-the-job training) are hoped to be successful in innovation but it is less evident the extent to which of these investments enhance the impact of one another on innovation. Other studies found Training to be an occasional driver of other organizational climate variables like debate (Porzse, 2012).This concurred with the findings by Hsiang, 2014 that negative effect of training was stronger with low employee psychological empowerment. Our research concurred with other empirical findings that training facilitate bringing staff together (teambuilding) to innovate through the interdependence self-construal principal (Asfar, 2014) but not directly empowering employees to innovate. It is also in tandem with a call for manager to train their employees on how to respond to novel thinking (Isaksen and Akerman's, 2007).

The result revealed insignificant effect of training on both employee empowerment and innovations. The result showed that training has statistically significant effect on innovation (P = 0.035) but it has insignificant effect on psychological empowerment

(p = 0.105). However, under the direct effect, training has significant effect on innovation ((p = 0.027). The findings agree with the previous findings by Zhang &.Begley (2011) that knowledge transfer predicted innovation. This also agrees with previous findings by Porzse et.al (2012) who found that innovation emerges out of different knowledges and expertise.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined the influence of training support on innovation. The results indicated that training support was empirically indicated by cost, frequency and size of the budget. However, it had insignificant effect on both psychological empowerment and innovation in MSRFs in Kenya just as we hypothesized. This was consistent with the findings of an earlier study by Linden *et* al.,(2000)which found that training employees does not increase their cognitive perception about power and autonomy(empowerment). However, the findings were inconsistent with the findings by (Luoh, Tsaur and Tang, 2013)that training help employees to innovate while still understanding the meaning of work, enhancing self-efficacy, self-determination and impact of decision making which are the measures validated for measuring employee empowerment. The results also contrasted with componential theory which holds that skills, training and knowledge determine innovativeness of employees. This made us suspect why training support might have been left out as a variable in many studies of organizational climate and innovation. This may therefore call for incorporation of more indicators of training support to verify the true position of the impact of training support on innovation. The size of the Training budget, frequency of training and cost of training may need not work in isolation with other factors like autonomy, task clarity and trust which were found to collectively influence empowerment to yield innovation (Hsian, 2014).

Amid the above finding on training, other researches need to be done to explore more on the effect of training in organizational development given that some scholars like Isaksen and Ackerman's,(2007) fronted that training was found to be a precursor of idea support which is one of the key organizational climate variable. (Porzse, 2012, also found training to be an occasional driver of other organizational climate variables like debate. MSRAFs therefore, may be required not focus on training in isolation of other variables if they intend to pursue employee empowerment at the work place. Nevertheless, our research concurred with other empirical findings that training facilitate bringing staff together (teambuilding) to innovate through the interdependence self-construal principal (Asfar, 2014) but may not directly empower employees to innovate. This was also in tandem with a call for managers to train their employees on how to respond to novel thinking (innovation) (Isaksen and Akerman's, 2007).

Future studies therefore, Human Resources practitioners and Researchers may consider incorporating other variables like autonomy task clarity, trust and independence which previous scholars found critical to influence training outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Although training support empirically measured by cost, frequency and size of the budget, it had insignificant effect on both psychological empowerment and innovation in MSRFs in Kenya just as we hypothesized. This contrasted with componential theory which holds that skills, training and knowledge determine innovativeness of employees. This made us suspect why training might have been left out in many studies of

organizational climate and innovation. This may call for incorporation of more indicators of training support to verify the true position of the impact of training support on innovation. Scholars and researchers may incorporate other variables like autonomy and independence which other scholars in the past had found critical to influence training outcomes.

Policy implications

The results support an earlier finding that if MSRAFs focus on employee training by examining the impact of learning and development on organizational and individual performance outcomes, innovation will permeate true value of Human resources development.

Further Research Recommendations

Future studies should be done to test other organizational climate variables' that effect on innovation mediated by psychological empowerment of the employees.

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