

Innovation and Creativity Management for reframing a work culture

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ABSTRACT

Innovation and creativity management is an interdisciplinary movement which tries to optimize and exploit the untapped potential of creative ideas. This paper investigates the work culture of a construction equipment company, Volvo CE, and studies how creativity tools can affect the creativity in groups while trying to answer the question of how to reframe a work culture in a company with innovation management in an organisation. Volvo CE has always successfully reinvented its creativity management through years helping them to stay as the best in industry around the world. The creativity tool experiment was done with the help of a creativity game to study how much impact it can have on players to shift their perspective about working in groups and contributing to the team and how that can help in reframing the work culture.

KEYWORDS

Innovation, Creativity management, Creativity tools, Work Culture, Group behaviour, Interdisciplinary collaboration, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Creativity management as a term started floating around the world around the 1980s. Since its inception the principles of creativity management has gone through radical changes as the company priorities changed through time. Yet its significance has never been reduced. When every company in the industry strives to lead the market in their own ways, it is important for a company to be always open and ready to make use of their resources to be innovative.

Innovation has become an inevitable factor for a company's existence. Since a lot of capital and human resources is at stake, different companies develop their own methods or take inspiration from existing models to cater innovation to their needs. Providing a structure for the process of innovation can be a puzzling task since it requires an open environment for organic growth and development of products as well as have an uncompromising set of rules to follow for desired goals to be achieved.

BACKGROUND

Every company has an existing process of working and it is difficult to convince every employee to change the routine. There is always a possible way to better the organisation to be more productive and ensure more successful results. There is no way to predict the success of an innovation project at the beginning. Researchers and scholars have tried laboriously to find a common ground for successful innovations to predict the success. They have tried to classify innovation projects based on how the innovation progresses through a series of stages and based on complex system theories that articulates the randomness of an innovation journey (Van den ven, 2008). But since innovation requires the team to be more agile the team needs to create more space for new ideas and take a unique journey in new unexplored directions to make a successful innovation. At the same time, the team should have a flexible process of functioning to guarantee the end goal of producing something novel and suitable for the market. Striking a balance between the rigidity and the flexibility of a process plays a big role in setting up a desirable environment for innovation.

This report is an investigative study of how a company can enable successful innovations through innovation management. The chosen company is Volvo CE, one of the nine subsidiaries of AB Volvo. They are a major international company that develops, manufactures and markets equipment for construction and related industries. The company was founded in 1832 when Eskilstuna city commissioned the founder, Johan Theofron Munktell to develop the local mechanical industry and then later purchased by Volvo in 1950. The company has since then grown and has spread out to 145 countries with more than 14,000 employees. With more than 180 years of service in the industry, the company has strived to stay in the forefront of

developing technologies with innovation as their core principle. The company already has a separate department for innovation, but they have realised that limiting innovation to one department is an outdated formula and is currently trying to include all the departments into innovating in their own ways. The company has already taken a few starting steps towards building an inter-department innovation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Volvo CE created the Innovation department to look for opportunities and it has helped them to achieve new heights. But coming up with new ideas from a set of people in one department can exhaust after a period. Hence Volvo CE is trying to push innovation into every department and produce new entrepreneurs from different backgrounds. They motivate and enable employees to be innovative and take up entrepreneurship. Sharing ideas from every angle is more desired since it expands the scope of innovation and generates more vibrant ideas. Although it might look like a brilliant idea from the company's perspective, the case might look very challenging for an employee. For employees who have been working in the company and have followed a routine for a long time, it is strenuous for them to change. The solution the company has brought to this problem is creating a more inviting environment for regular employees to think creatively and come up with new ideas. But the communication gap and lack of effective management structure has made it an unrewarding strategy. Therefore an investigation on how a good management strategy can rebuild an existing culture is worth a closer look.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims at investigating the innovation and creativity management in Volvo CE and make suggestions to improve the process and also look into the roles played by leadership and creativity tools in facilitating innovation.

Research Question :

How to reframe a work culture with innovation management in an organisation?

METHODS

This paper tries to answer the research question by using the Triangle of Analysis method from the lecture (Lindhult.E ,2019). Beginning with studies and research papers on relevant topics, the paper then moves on to discuss the case study of the case company, Volvo CE, and tries to

combine it with the theories from the previous section. The impact of creativity methods and tools is discussed to understand how these simple activities help in forming group mentality. It then gives analysis of how the theoretical findings can be implemented in the practical world by articulation of the case study of Volvo CE.

Qualitative analysis was chosen to comprehend the case of Volvo CE. Multiple interviews were done with an employee in the Innovation Department who provided valuable insights and information regarding the company and its pursuit for innovation. The case study of Volvo CE provides us with a real life situation of how a company who has been a leading innovation company can better their strategies to reinforce the employees to shift towards a more innovative culture.

THEORY

Every human organisation forms its own unique culture. Be it a small family business in a small village or a major international corporate company, each organisation has its own culture build on their beliefs, assumptions, presumptions, thoughts and feelings. Since culture is a human made concept built on beliefs, it is possible to design a more efficient and effective culture to cater to our needs. It can also be implied that culture will further reflect on the behaviour and function of an individual (Alhusban, Safa & Alhusban, Ahmad & Betawi, 2018). The traditional approach towards work focusing on individual performance has been the culture in the majority of companies worldwide. The positive impact of teamwork and collaboration can be seen in the work environment leading to a climate of trust, leadership and structure and various other rewards (Sanyal, Shouvik & Hisam, Mohammed, 2018). Innovation is a complex process and collaborating individuals can find better solutions for complex situations more often (Rubenson & Runco, 1995). Focusing on group productivity and balancing individual productivity is a key factor in creating synergic results. Same is the case when it comes to the case of creativity, when a group sits down to create solutions, the empirical research shows that the end result is more in quantity and more novel than all individuals added (T. Backström, 2018). Hence we can say that innovation is better achieved in a team rather than an individual pursuing it. Companies are guaranteed more ideas and novelty with a collaboration of team members from different backgrounds whereas the limiting innovation to a few members or individuals in one department can lead to stagnation.

DATA

From the interviews and discussions conducted with the representative of Volvo CE Innovation department, the in-depth knowledge of the structure and functioning of the current strategy was

shared with interesting insights from a practical perspective. The company aims at encouraging innovation in every employee and sharing their ideas within the organisation and developing it further to a level of successfully implementing it in the market. The company understands that innovation requires a cultural shift in the way that enables an open environment for employees to accept that they have the opportunity and capability to be more creative and develop entrepreneurship skills.

Reframing an existing culture and shifting the internal dynamics is a gradual process and it requires a tremendous amount of effort from everyone in the organisation. Hence they have made sure that no extreme radical decisions are made so that the employees get demotivated or get wrong notions about how innovation works. They have introduced innovation as an annual workshop done in the office space. These workshops are conducted by iCoaches. iCoaches are members of the Innovation Department who lead these workshops to slowly introduce employees from all departments and encourage them to collaborate. The company has built a basic structure for how this will be conducted. 5 Innovation managers, who lead this task of encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship are the decision makers. The iCoaches work with them to facilitate innovation workshops. As of now, they have 35 iCoaches who dedicate 10% of their daily work-time towards this cause.

35 iCoaches for more than 14,000 employees in a very low ratio and hence the ability to reach out to more branches across the globe is limited. This idea of every employee getting an opportunity to showcase their creativity and entrepreneurship is rather new to the current corporate environment. And hence the possibility and risks of going in this direction is rather unpredictable. But with the proper structure of executing this grand idea backed with creative and leadership mindset could bring about the desired results.

The company has come up with a very basic form of a start-up incubator. The projects that employees generate individually through the workshops are further developed with the help of iCoaches. The employee is motivated to work more on this project with even better facilities in an innovation LAB. Here the employees get advanced technical and infrastructure support and can even get to discuss the project with experts from the relevant fields. This work is then pitched to the Innovation Managers, who if finds the potential of a project worthy of pursuing and is convinced on how this project can generate additional revenue for the company, will give more facilities and a starting capital to execute the project on a large scale. This process challenges the entrepreneur in the employee. It requires creativity, dedication and good communications skills to pitch a good idea. After clearing this stage, the individual employee can form a team and lead the project team to execute it with their skills. The employee is also given an option to opt out of the project at this stage if he/she thinks it is not their call. In that case the project is taken by a different set of team who are eager to work on this project.

The challenges faced by an employee in an innovation journey is unique in each stage and this requires leadership skills. Leadership from a broad perspective demands the employee(leader) to understand what impact he/she creates in the work culture and how they are changing the culture of the company and also balance it with dealing with the development and execution of the project. The time taken for an innovation to successfully launch is purely dependent on the type of the project. Sometimes this extends to years. The employees who are motivated to go further with the project have little resources at the beginning from this perspective.

One key role in establishing a new culture is team dynamics. The team of Innovation Managers, iCoaches and employees have to approach the task of shifting the culture by building deeper relationships with each other. Communication and group activities help to strengthen this bonding. As a part of this course, we proposed a creativity tool in INL 2.1. From the reviews and data collected it proved that even a simple game like 1-2-4-All can make a huge impact on how well the team can bond in a short period. The game was to solve a given task individually and then form groups of two and exchange the solutions from the previous stage and discuss a better solution and then move to form a bigger group of 4 and discuss the solution and then combine everyone in the team to decide on the best solution. It is a very dynamic process that requires every member's involvement and hence creates a dialogue of ideas within a short period. The game is easy to grasp and can be done without limitations for the number of participants.

ANALYSIS

Innovation is a process that can extend to months or years of continuous effort can lead to gradual loss of motivation in the employees. The ongoing process of innovation culture shift has not addressed this issue. This has reflected in the results as well. Only one project has come out from the LAB to the implementation stage after 2 years of establishing the basic incubator structure. One solution to this can be adding more iCoaches and Innovation Managers, but this can take a long period and more resources to train them in a way to cater to the company's needs. The limited resource problem can be solved by using an untapped resource, team work. The theoretical part of this paper analysed the impact generated by a collaboration. This can help the individual stay motivated emotionally and also gather resources from sources the individual was ignorant about. Forming groups at the beginning or even encouraging more involvement from other employees form a synergy which can tackle the trouble of time and limited amount of workshops by limited amount of iCoaches

From the case of 1-2-4-All, we understood how a creativity tool enables processes of collaborative knowledge creation and innovation. We can further extend these creativity tools to

artifacts or creativity enabling spaces. These can include cognitive, emotional, social, organisational, architectural and technological dimensions to it. These broad spectrum of activities can challenge social processes and hence clear the path for more collaboration (Peschl, Markus & Fundneider, Thomas, 2014).

DISCUSSION

Throughout its history Volvo CE has led the construction and mechanical industry by keeping innovation at its core. But innovation can never be called as a static process or defined and structured through one process since each project requires novel approaches with changing time. Hence the companies need to understand the demands of the present day challenges. The companies need to tap into unexplored resources to better facilitate innovation and this is the only way forward for a company to stay competitive in any future market scenario. Volvo CE has identified how it will be changing the way it innovates and brought up an innovative idea for innovation. Although many companies have tried to shift their work culture, the years of experience of working in a particular way for the employees will make them reluctant to shift. Many companies adopt new work culture and fail due to incoherence of the principles with the type of industry they are in. So it is important to choose the most suitable method to implement such a work culture shift.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical part discussed above shows us why it is necessary for forming human relationships for achieving an innovation culture. In the case of Volvo CE, the driving actors in this change of innovation culture is the Innovation Managers, iCoaches and employees. So we can conclude that the company is on the right direction for changing their innovation culture but the speed at which they progress is limited by the resources provided to an employee at the starting stage. But at the beginning of the paper we have discussed how radical shifts can be an ineffective way to approach a grand idea like changing innovation culture. So a more frequent data analysis of the progress of this shift can give more insight to what speed such a change should be promoted. The creativity game experiment shows us how much impact it has on the players for boosting their confidence to involve more by encouraging every member to participate in a very healthy way. The after game reviews showed how much easier it was for them to communicate different ideas in a group and their openness to shift their work to a more engaging and collaborative environment.

Introducing a new concept of way of working by encouraging simple and engaging creative games can help the employees to shift their current workplace culture.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research can be further extended towards an even more in-depth understanding of group dynamics of Innovation managers, iCoaches and employees. This can show us more valuable insights on how the dynamics between them can enable a cultural shift for the work culture in a company that strives to keep its name in the forefront of innovation. Therefore we can understand what roles each driving actor plays and help them in the required way to see how their involvement in this changes the way the company works. The primary focus being enabling innovation culture, we can understand the role of leadership and team dynamics with a more focused study on innovation.

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