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Joanna M. Moczydłowska, *Motivating employees to creative behaviours in the practice of polish small and medium enterprises*, [in:] *Human Potential Management in a Company. Communication*, S. Borkowski, R. Bobák (ed.) Tomas Bata University in Zlin, 2011, s. 52-61, ISBN: 978-80-7454-088-2

## **MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES TO CREATIVE BEHAVIOURS IN THE PRACTICE OF POLISH SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES**

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**Abstract**

Presented in the article results of the research are supposed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Are employees of micro and small enterprises feel encouraged to submit ideas for new products, services, marketing actions and the work organization?
2. What a type of motivation is used by supervisors in order to encourage employees to put forward new ideas?

On the basis of the analysis of 146 questionnaire forms from an opinion poll conducted in fifty enterprises it has been stated that most respondents did not feel motivated to put forward their ideas for new products, services, the work organization or the manner of conducting the customer service. Subjective feelings of the workers regarding the lack of incentive activities of the supervisors may result from the actual absence of such actions on the part of managers, but also from the tendency of respondents to hold managers and employees responsible for their inactivity and conformity. Enterprises that motivate their workers to innovativeness create a peculiar innovative climate which rarely transforms into an additional income of a worker, but refers to such values as a sense of usefulness, occupational professionalism, self-realization, delegation of authority and referring to a sense of agency.

**Keywords:** creativity, motivating, innovation

### **INTRODUCTION**

We advance a thesis that one of the most valuable traits of the employees of contemporary organizations is creativity. It constitutes unquestionable source of creative and innovative behaviours. However, the sole creativity as the potentiality of a human being may turn out to be insufficient if there is a lack of pro-innovative organizational culture encouraging employees to creative behaviours, and within that culture a motivation system which would act as a particular operator converting creative possibilities into specific behaviours.

The article comprises results of the studies conducted by the author in fifty enterprises operating in the north-eastern part of Poland. The main research issue undertaken in this publication is: whether and in what manner do managers and entrepreneurs of small and medium enterprises motivate their employees to conduct creative and valuable behaviours from the viewpoint of a business?

### **1. EMPLOYEES' CREATIVITY AS A SOURCE OF INNOVATION**

Creativity is inextricably linked with creation, yet the question remains open whether these two terms are semantically identical. In the English-language literature the term *creativity* stands for both, the creativity itself and the creation (Baer, Leenders, Oldham, Vadera, 2010, pp. 827-845). In the assessment of the author it is more accurate to assume that creativity is a psychological predisposition, the trait of individual's personality, indicating the natural tendency (possibility) of a human being to the widely understood creation. What distinguishes creativity from creation is, precisely, the result of an action. The expression of creativity is the activity that has a productive value, but it is not necessarily the sole product

since the creativity constitutes the determinant of production in the potential sense, and as any potentiality requires activation in the form of motivation.

Creativity constitutes a prerequisite for the emergence of an innovation. Innovation is a term variously defined and interpreted; however, there is a strong agreement about the fact that its essence is a way of thinking and finding creative solutions to the problems occurring inside the company and during its relations with the environment. Hence, in the process of formation of the innovation as a crucial should be considered the human factor. Universally known is the psychological regularity which says that a human being undertakes an action intentionally, that is for a particular purpose. Although, the purpose or purposes are not always fully consciously recognized, it is important to search for the answer to the question: "Why?" Why does somebody undertake this and not the other activity? How is it possible to have an influence on this activity and simultaneously shape in the management process particularly desirable attitudes and behaviours? This question is fully justified also in relation to the innovation.

Sources of innovative ideas and motives which cause that people report them and have aspirations for their implementation are important research issues (e.g. Baj, Pietucha, 2005). Various conditions of generating the innovations in the enterprises are constantly being discovered. This is an extremely important issue on utilitarian grounds since the development of innovations and novelty are often sources of competitive advantages of the organizations. Furthermore, innovations of enterprises may constitute important ways for rationalization and cost savings, and may indirectly activate market forces favourable to the development of economy, and therefore improve the quality of life in the society.

The classification of factors stimulating the formation of innovations in the enterprise takes into account their division into the internal and external ones. The internal factors are: social elements of the enterprise (individual and collective), tangible, legal, organizational and strategic factors. To the external factors belong the market factors, the socio-cultural aspect, the country's economic policy, thus the elements of the micro- and macro-environments of enterprises. Among the internal factors having the strongest significance are the factors which motivate the employees of the enterprises for creating innovations (Sosnowska, Poznańska, Łobejko, Brdulak, Chinowska, 2003).

A. Żoźnierski (2005) treats the internal innovative potential of the enterprise as a result of:

- the capabilities of staff (knowledge, experience, skills, qualifications and the way of the available resources management, including information management);
- the research and development (separated units of R and D, works carried out by R and D, works ordered, etc.);
- the technology (computers, information and communication technology – ICT, machinery and equipment, and the degree of their modernity).

Available in the literature of the issue (cf. Strychalska-Rudzewicz, 2005, pp. 77-85) research results show that in the assessment of entrepreneurs the effective generation of innovations by employees is determined mainly by their knowledge resulting from their experience. Other elements appreciated by the respondents are the ability of the workers to deal with stressful situations and the ability to cooperate with the company's management team. Cited here the research results lead to the conclusion that the majority of entrepreneurs limit the role of employees in the innovative process to carrying out tasks given by managers. They do not treat their subordinates in terms of partners. Unfortunately, this means underestimation of the creativity of their employees and their role in generating innovations. Entrepreneurs see the role of employees in the creation of the company's image as an innovative enterprise, but it is mainly associated with marketing factors and work discipline.

Most entrepreneurs do not attach importance to raising the qualifications of subordinates, to their skills upgrades during the trainings, to seeking by the staff innovative solutions. The practice is therefore in opposition to the postulates of theoreticians of the management science who assign bigger, or sometimes even essential, significance to the organizational culture for business innovation, and emphasize the necessity of the innovative process management. As B. Mertens writes (2011): “The company must provide for itself the innovation control system, or even the ideas management, so the new ideas and their implementation have not been a heroic achievement, but the programmed activity.”

## **2. THE METHODOLOGY OF SELF-STUDY**

The analysis of the literature of the issue allows to adopt the following research assumptions:

- the starting point for the innovation is an invention, idea, creative thinking,
- the employees of the enterprise may be an important source of ideas,
- using the ideas of employees is particularly justified in small enterprises in which the resources for the development and research sphere or the acquisition of patents are not sufficient,
- in order to put forward ideas for new products, services, organizational and marketing changes by the employees in the company must exist a organizational culture favourable to such behaviours,
- active creativity expressed through the ingenuity, innovativeness of employees should be reflected in the incentive system used in the enterprise.

The subject of presented here studies are opinions of employees of small (including micro) and medium enterprises operating in the Podlasie and Varmia-Mazuria provinces about actions taken by their employers and supervisors in the sphere of motivation for the innovation. The survey is supposed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Do the employees of small and medium enterprises feel encouraged to submit ideas concerning new products, services, marketing actions or the work organization?
2. What a type of motivation do the supervisors apply in order to encourage employees to put forward new ideas?

A questionnaire form was used as a tool for conducting the research. A group of three hundred employees from fifty enterprises were surveyed. They were chosen on the condition that the company employs at least three workers. This selection results from the research subject from which the processes of auto-motivation of the entrepreneur were excluded. For the further analysis 146 questionnaire forms were used. Respondents represented a diverse group with regard to the age, gender, education, place of residence. Owners of the companies, their spouses, parents, siblings and children were excluded from the surveyed group. It was regarded that the close relationship is a variable hindering the unequivocal determination of the roles performed in the company. Formal roles and positions may be (and frequently are) divergent to the actual division of the power in the enterprise. It also concerns the rights of shaping the motivation system and using the privileges included in this system. The exclusion from the surveyed group members of the close family of the entrepreneur does not entirely reduce the indicated problem, but minimizes it.

## **3. MOTIVATION FOR CREATIVITY IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

The majority of respondents (92 employees, that is 63% of the examined group) expressed their opinions that their supervisors and employers do not encourage them to

submit any innovative ideas. The rest of respondents feel motivated to put forward their ideas for new products, services, the work organization or the manner of conducting the customer service. Incentives used for this purpose are shown in the table.

Table No 1: Incentives used in the process of motivating employees for innovativeness.

| Measures used in the process of motivating employees to submit innovative ideas   | Surveyed people (N=54) |      |
|---|------------------------|------|
|   | Number*                | %    |
| verbal influences: conversations, asking questions, encouraging to participation in discussions, brainstorming, developing new solutions during meetings and trainings, public approvals and acknowledgements | 31                     | 57.4 |
| taking into account inventions, ingenuity and creativity of employees in the reward system; financial prizes  | 18                     | 33.3 |
| innovativeness of the employee as a condition of promotion, taking into account this element in the employee evaluation system  | 6                      | 11.1 |
| delegation of authority, using the rule of responsibility and the sense of agency   | 6                      | 11.1 |
| negative treatment: “blackmail” (the exemplary statement of the respondent: if you want to have the job invent something that would increase the sales volume)  | 3                      | 5.5  |
| respondent does not know how to motivate him or her to suggest new ideas  | 5                      | 9.3  |

The number of responses in the table does not sum up to 100% because some respondents gave complex responses.

Source: self-elaboration based on the surveyed poll

In companies where employees are encouraged to submit innovative and creative solutions are used not only financial incentives but also incentives of other kinds. Employees have the opportunity to propose their ideas during conversations, discussions, brainstorming or training sessions. It can be assumed that these companies create a peculiar innovative climate that does not always transfer into an additional income of a worker, but refers to the psychological values such as a sense of helpfulness, occupational professionalism or self-realization. The employee whose idea is adopted and implemented experiences satisfaction, estimates this fact in terms of his or her personal career achievement.

Also delegation of authority helps to express the creativity of employees. As a form of an incentive it is mentioned by around 11% of respondents. The value of such supervisors' behaviours finds its justification in the contemporary knowledge of management and psychology sciences. The way of thinking about the particular subject – both the thinking of individuals and of entire social groups – depends in a large part on *the sense of agency*. It can be defined as the human's conviction in participation of undertaking and implementing the decision, the conviction that he or she is not just a performer of a plan, but also the “author” of the decision. The agency strongly correlates with a sense of responsibility for the decision, event, situation, when a person perceives oneself as an agent. Thus, if an employee feels responsible for that section of the work, for the particular customer service, or for the value of a particular product will also have the motivation to introduce organizational, marketing, and even, service or product innovations. This situation is perceived by the six employees as a positive challenge, but at the same time three other respondents define the issue in terms of coercion and blackmail used by the employer. It is possible therefore to dare say that the same incentive action will be differently interpreted by the workers depending on the specific culture of the given organization, and especially on the quality of interpersonal communication between supervisors and subordinates.

Unfortunately, only about 33% of workers from the sub-group, which in the survey declared that are encouraged to put forward their ideas, answered that their satisfactions on the purely emotional ground are strengthened by the financial incentives (taking into account the ingenuity and creativity of an employee in the reward system).

The fact that 63% of the surveyed workers declared that their supervisors do not motivate them to submit ideas, to undertake innovative actions, cannot be interpreted as a clear confirmation that such interactions from the side of supervisors do not really exist. The inference based on these data requires taking into consideration certain psychological mechanisms. It should be assumed that some part (difficult to estimate how big) of this group are not very creative people, conformist people, professing the principle that the best and safest way is not to stand out. These individuals are those employees who do not display the creativity, suggestions, innovativeness not due to the lack of adequate incentives in the enterprise, but because of their limited resources of creativity as personality traits. They are not innovative, not because they are not motivated to it, but, for example, due to the low intellectual capacity, shyness or self-underestimation. On the other hand, evident is, in the ongoing studies, the inclination of respondents to burden the managers and employers with responsibility for their inactivity which can be interpreted as a defence mechanism helping to maintain the self-esteem of such people (more on the subject: Kuc, Moczyłowska, 2009).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Results presented in this paper should be treated carefully due to a relatively small number of companies in which the studies were conducted. However, on the basis of these results, it is possible to describe certain regularities and verify their authenticity in the course of further research. These regularities are as follows:

- most respondents do not feel motivated to put forward their ideas for new products, services, the work organization in a company or the manner of conducting the customer service;
- subjective feelings of the workers concerning the shortage of incentive activities carried out by the supervisors can not be interpreted unambiguously. It may result from the actual absence of such actions conducted by the executives, but also from the tendency of respondents to hold managers and employers responsible for employees' inactivity, lack of creative abilities and conformity;
- the companies that motivate to innovativeness create a peculiar innovative climate which not always converts into an additional income of a employee, but rather refers to the psychological values such as a sense of usefulness, occupational professionalism and self-realization;
- delegation of authority and referring to a sense of agency encourage employees' creativity, activity and inventiveness;
- owners of small and medium enterprises rarely use financial incentives for employees as a reward for submitting new ideas and their implementation (only 4 out of 50 surveyed companies).

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