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Understanding the Importance of Creativity Towards Psychological Safety in the Library Workplace

Jennifer Hopwood Ed.D.

San José State University, jennifer.hopwood@sjsu.edu

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Understanding the Importance of Creativity Towards Psychological Safety in the Library Workplace

Abstract

Employee Engagement is one of the leading factors toward organizational success. Happier employees are engaged employees. However, employees cannot reach engagement unless there are feelings of psychological safety. One tool that libraries can utilize to increase the engagement of their staff is to invest in opportunities for workplace creativity.

Keywords

Employee Engagement, Psychological Safety, Happiness, Creativity

About Author

Dr. Jennifer L. Hopwood is the Training and Development Specialist for the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association as well as a lecturer for the San Jose State University iSchool. Hopwood holds a Master of Science degree in library and information studies from Florida State University and a Doctor of Education degree in educational leadership and management with a concentration on creativity and innovation from Drexel University.

The most important resource of any organization is the people within the organization. Unfortunately, over half of workers are reporting they are more stressed than ever (Gallup, 2022). Workers attribute this stress to be connected back to their workplaces because of issues such as lack of support for ideas, unreasonable time pressures, unclear communication, and unreasonable workloads. However, the biggest factors workers cite are the environment and culture of the workplace, which are directly impacted by management. Library workers are no different. In fact, many library workers are reporting symptoms of low morale and burnout (Corrado, 2022). In addition to the stressors listed above, library staff also listed shifting priorities and a lack of recognition as contributing factors to their negative experiences in the workplace. Many library staff are experiencing job creep and feelings of vocational awe where libraries are everything for everyone (Dixon, 2022). Unfortunately, this can result in disengagement, burned-out staff, and resignations.

According to a Gallup (2022) poll, 69% of America's workforce is not engaged in the work they are doing. Post-pandemic reporting has brought to light the term "quiet quitting," people who do the minimum amount of work required (Harter, 2022). Many of these people qualify as what Gallup terms "not engaged." This lack of engagement can lead to high turnover, negativity, and decreased productivity. This, in turn, can have caustic effects on the organizations' competitiveness and longevity. However, research shows that happier employees are engaged employees (Gallup, 2017). Workers need to feel that they belong and are making contributions to the organization. To achieve this state, workplace creativity can be utilized to foster positive work environments that can lead to an increase in employee engagement.

Defining Workplace Creativity

When most people think of creativity in the workplace, they may think of roles related to creative outputs like advertisements and promotional materials. Creativity has become a bit of a buzzword in our society and can be seen almost exclusively related to those fields involved in the creative economy: media, entertainment, and arts-related activities that generate income from intellectual property (Bilton, 2007). However, creativity also exists in organizations beyond just creative outputs. Creativity is defined as the combination of novelty and usefulness (Bilton, 2007), though this can be a subjective categorization when it comes to looking at creativity through the lens of culture. Also, what is new to the individual may not necessarily be new to the organization. Additionally, according to Maslow's definition of creativity, it is part of a process that can be used in problem solving (Bilton, 2007). When it comes to defining creativity in an organization, it depends on the culture of the organization and the goals that motivate the people in that organization.

Often creativity will involve a lengthy process and hard work to reach the skills needed to produce acknowledged creative outputs (Bilton, 2007). However, creativity in the workplace is not always planned nor does it always involve an obvious output. According to Robinson & Stern (1998), "[i]t is impossible to predict *what* [creative acts] will be, *who* will be involved in them, and *when* and *how* they will happen" (pg. 1). Creativity often is the result of the unexpected,

serendipitous moments that may solve a problem within the organization or create new opportunities for growth. Successful and sustainable organizations are the ones that recognize the potential of creativity and not only seek it out, but also invest in it.

Investing in Creativity

As stated, many successful organizations recognize that there is a need to invest in creativity. Maslow (1971) asked, “[w]hat will happen to the automobile manufacturers if someone comes out with a cheap, personal-travel technique of some kind, one which could sell at half the price of an automobile?” (p. 93). This was the reason that automobile manufacturers invested heavily into research and development as a way to find new and innovative products as well as improvements to existing one. In this way, the automobile manufacturers could remain relevant. Sometimes an unexpected result when trying to solve a problem can also lead to new opportunities. Successful brands such as Teflon, GoreTex, Kevlar, and Nylon all resulted out of serendipitous moments (Robinson & Stern, 1998; Tanner & Reisman, 2014). However, these research and development projects are only one part of the creativity in organizations. It is just as important to invest in individual creativity within organizations as it is to invest in creative projects.

The Individual’s Role in Workplace Creativity

Robinson & Stern (1998) define this workplace or corporate creativity as “when employees do something new and potentially useful without being directly shown or taught” (pg. 11). In other words, this is when employees are given autonomy to veer away from protocol or the standardized way of doing things. It is important in an organizational culture that employees have opportunities and freedom to be creative because this is part of what keeps organizations competitive (Williams & Yang, 1999).

Additionally, Bilton (2007) states that current theories are moving away from the idea of the individual creative genius and more towards a systems perspective. A team made up of different thinking styles can be important when it comes to generating creative ideas. They should be encouraged to build upon the ideas of others as well. Sometimes negativity can also play a role here because the team can think of concerns before they become an issue. However, too much negativity might hinder employees from feeling like they can share openly (“Ground rules”, n.d.).

Innovation Champions at Work

According to Tanner and Reisman (2014), it is important to give freedom and space for innovation champions in organizations. The role of an innovation champion is to identify high priority needs within the organization. Tanner and Reisman (2014) give a list of eight characteristics that creative innovation champions exhibit. The first is discontent with the status quo or questioning the way things have always been done. The second is to have an open mind. As stated above, this would not mean jumping on the first idea, but instead investigating alternative solutions to solve problems. The third is a prepared mind that is always

searching out the trends, new research, and facts. The fourth is positive thinking; it is important to keep a positive mindset and keep looking forward. Failure does not mean the end; it means an opportunity to make changes and find something better. The fifth is being willing to take risks. The sixth is being action oriented. When someone is action-oriented, they do what they say they are going to do. The seventh is persistence. The eighth is that a creative innovation champion must be hard working. Tanner and Reisman (2014) mention that this is the one characteristic that is common to all creative innovation champions, to which I agree, as without being willing to engage in hard work, none of the other characteristics will carry an idea very far.

The idea of innovation champions is similar to IDEO's Tom Kelley's (2005) idea that organizations need people with diverse backgrounds who can serve as cross-pollinators. These people are able to look at problems from many different angles. Kelley (2005) suggests that organizations can foster innovation and combat the naysayers by developing roles in the organization that promote innovation through strategies that drive creativity. To promote a culture where creativity and innovation are embraced, it is recommended that leaders introduce concepts to their stakeholders that help to overcome the roadblocks to their involvement. Some examples of this would be utilizing design thinking exercises, piloting ideas, and experimenting.

Defining Psychological Safety in Terms of Creativity

Harvard professor, Amy Edmondson (1999), defines psychological safety as an environment where staff do not fear being themselves. There is a culture of respect and trust between the administration and the staff. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a person's unmet needs serve as a motivator for their behavior (Evans & Ward, 2007). However, even if the person has met their need for food or shelter, they still may feel a risk to their feelings of safety (Huber & Potter, 2015). Safety includes physical protection from danger as well as workplace morale, a stable environment, predictability, and understanding an employee's place in an organization (Evans & Ward, 2007). A lack of feeling safe in an organization can result in feelings of not belonging. Additionally, when the culture of the organization does not support the employees' feelings of belonging, it can erode the trust between the employee and the administration. This can be related back to employee's feelings of contributions not being appreciated or welcome in the organization (Corrado, 2022).

Creative Climate

The climate of the workplace environment has a direct impact on the employee's feelings of belonging (Isaken & Ackkermans, 2015). While the culture of the organization is defined by foundational beliefs based on the history, traditions, and values of the organization; climate is defined as the experience of those in the organization who observe the culture. Ekvall has identified ten dimensions that make up this climate (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock; 2011):

Table 1

Ekvall's Climate Dimensions (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock; 2011)

Dimension	Definition	High	Low
Challenge	Emotional involvement in the tasks or goals	People feel meaningfulness and joy in the task and are willing to invest energy	People feel alienation and indifferent to the task. They are disinterested
Freedom	Independence in behavior or thought	Problems are discussed freely, and people feel they have the power to take initiative	People are passive or feel they cannot “break the rules”.
Idea Support	The way in which new ideas are treated	Superiors or peers pay attention to what is suggested. People listen to each other. They create ways to test and trial new ideas	There is an attitude where everything is faced with an automatic “no.” Suggestions are countered as being wrong or will never work.
Trust & Openness	Emotional safety in the relationships around the individual	Everyone offers ideas and opinions without fear of reprisal or ridicule. Communication is open and direct.	People are suspicious of each other and having ideas stolen. Mistakes come at a cost.
Dynamism & Liveliness	The amount in which the environment is eventful	New things are constantly happening. The pace is quick and idea flow is constant.	There are no new projects. Things do not change.
Playfulness & Humor	Spontaneity and ease are displayed	The atmosphere is relaxed. There are lots of jokes and laughter.	People have a grave demeanor. The atmosphere is stiff and gloomy. Jokes and laughter are considered inappropriate.
Debate	Differences of opinion or clashes of ideas	People are interested in discussing new ideas and viewpoints	People do not question the status quo. No ideas or viewpoints are discussed.
Risk Taking	The level of tolerance for uncertainty	People do not hesitate to participate in new opportunities. Action is more important than investigation and analysis	People are cautious and hesitant to act on new ideas. They create committees to come to a consensus before deciding on ideas.
Idea Time	The amount of time people invest and do when it comes to new ideas	Tasks outside of daily assignments occur. Impulses are tested in the moment as people explore possibilities.	Every minute is accounted for leaving no room for deviation from assigned or scheduled tasks.

Conflict	The presence of personal or emotional tension	People dislike or hate each other. Hostility is present. Gossip and slander exist.	People control their impulses and are mature in their manner and interactions.
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As shown in Table 1, the first nine dimensions on the chart are positive dimensions; therefore, a high ranking is preferred. The Conflict dimension is seen as a negative and the organization likely wants to score on the low end in that area. While the climate dimensions are best utilized in an organizational environment, people do not live in a bubble. Our personal values have an impact on our professional selves. There is a thin line between our professional and personal selves as most of our development takes place in the workplace, since that is where people spend most of their time (Kotter, 1996). Therefore, our experiences in the workplace are just as much a part of us as our experiences outside of it. If there is misalignment between the employee and the organization's values, then this can impact the climate of the organization. Mental models can hinder the process of innovation because people sometimes get stuck in their perceptions and cannot move forward (Dweck, 2006; Senge et al., 2012). This can relate back to the perception of the culture of the organization when it comes to risk-taking and the freedom to pursue innovative ideas.

According to Sahlin (2013), a creative environment embodies generosity, community, qualifications, diversity, trust and tolerance, equality, curiosity, freedom of spirit, and small-scale size. Sahlin describes the creative environment as being warm and welcoming whereas the uncreative atmosphere has the smell of death. Sahlin's theories align with the idea that environments play a part in our perceptions of creativity. Creative environments not only have a physical feeling of warmth, but also a mental one that extends to the people who make up the environment. People in a creative environment tend to be open and generous. They give off a sense of belonging to the group (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006). Sahlin (2013) also states that in a creative environment, the people in the group are likeminded and respectful of the opinions and ideas of others. An environment that promotes creativity would score high on the positive dimensions of the CCQ. This depiction of the creative environment echoes the characteristics of Edmondson's psychological safety.

Creativity's Relation to Workplace Happiness

When it comes to establishing happiness at work, it is more about motivation and mindset than it is material things (Achor, 2010). While money may make some people happy, that happiness is temporary because the bar is always being reset, e.g., "If I can only reach x then I will be happy, but when x is achieved, it then becomes, now I only need to reach y and I will be happy." Not only is this goal of happiness always being moved, but the negativity that can exist because of this failure can be contagious throughout the workplace. Negativity in turn can lead to a decrease in engagement. However, organizations can utilize creativity as a tool to combat the negativity. According to Lyubomsky (2007), our states of happiness hinge on both environmental (10%) and genetic factors (50%) as well as our

intentional activity (40%). Since only 40% of our happiness is in our control, it makes sense to strive towards the things that make us happy.

Defining Happiness at Work

To understand how to achieve happiness at work, we must first understand how it is defined. The definition of positive psychology from Dr. Martin Seligman is the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that allow communities to thrive (Tanner & Reisman, 2014). The World Health Organization (2012) categorizes our levels of happiness in three ways: positive affect, negative affect, and overall life satisfaction. So just as creativity can be subjective, so too can happiness. It is also important to note that this is not “toxic positivity”. Happiness cannot be forced. It requires a shift in the culture of the organization where there are healthy boundaries and balance.

Job Satisfaction and Employee Engagement

According to the World Happiness Report (De Neve & Ward, 2017), employee engagement goes hand in hand with the employee’s levels of satisfaction with the job. In order to be engaged at work, the individual must be positively absorbed by the work that they are doing. As mentioned in the research by Achor (2010), more money does not always equate to higher job satisfaction. According to the World Happiness Report (De Neve & Ward, 2017), while high-paying jobs do rate higher on the satisfaction scale than low-paying jobs; increases in pay of an extra \$100 mean more to the lower-paid than the higher-paid. Work-life balance plays a more significant role than pay. Jobs that leave the employee too tired to enjoy family time or where work is constantly brought home have a lower satisfaction rate than ones that allow for more time spent with family and friends. Also, jobs that hold more challenges and variety are high in satisfaction. Employees who have control over planning their day-to-day workday experience have higher levels of happiness and job satisfaction than those that are micromanaged.

Management’s Role

A big part of management’s role in fostering a positive workplace culture is to listen. Inside an organization, really listening to this feedback is just as important as soliciting it:

When we are in a room, there are no titles, grades, seniority. All voices have equal weight and all have equal time. Everyone knows they are listened to, and their contribution is always given time. Everyone is in a relationship that is based on trust and honesty, and not always the easy kind of honesty. (Seppala, 2016 September)

To achieve engagement, employees need to know that their opinions matter and that their ideas contribute to the organization (Gallup, 2017). This will not only give the employee a sense that their thoughts have importance to the organization, but also show that the organization cares about the employee enough to have these communication channels (Gallup, 2017). Seppala and Cameron (2015) recommend that management follow these six principles towards establishing a positive culture in their workplace:

1. Caring for, being interested in, and maintaining responsibility for colleagues as friends.
2. Providing support for one another, including offering kindness and compassion when others are struggling.
3. Avoiding blame, and forgive mistakes.
4. Inspiring one another at work.
5. Emphasizing the meaningfulness of the work.
6. Treating one another with respect, gratitude, trust, and integrity.
(para. 11)

According to the World Happiness Report (De Neve & Ward, 2017), societal connections and our place within society are part of what determines our overall well-being. Employees want to know that what they say and what they do matters; not just to the organization, but also to the world. Employees want not just to feel supported in what they are doing right, but also to know that it is okay to make mistakes. Seppala (2016) also recommends that managers and their staff take time to do nothing. Allowing for time to let the mind wander not only serves as a break from intense workloads, but also for generating creative new ideas. This could be as simple as taking a walk or a “field trip” to a business unlike the one of which currently employed.

How They Are All Connected

Flow states are mental states that happen when a person is totally absorbed by the task at hand. According to Csikszentmihalyi, when people are in a flow state, they are completely engaged in what they are working on (Collins & Amabile, 1999). Many organizations follow traditional hierarchies and bureaucratic methods of management where everything is regimented and specialized (Williams & Yang, 1999). However, as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states, happiness and engagement are very much part of individual creation and cannot be found simply by following checklists and recipes for success. Variety, challenge to skills, creativity, and opportunities to set own goals is part of what can lead to an employee’s flow state. However, according to the Gallup’s (2017) Employee Engagement Survey, only 40% of employees feel that they are given the opportunity to use their talents and do what they do best. Employers are more concerned over achieving productivity than they are with whether the work is enjoyable for the employee (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

“Because work is so universal, yet so varied, it makes a tremendous difference to one’s overall contentment whether what one does for a living is enjoyable or not” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pg. 144). In order to provide opportunities for flow states to flourish, organizations must create environments that are conducive to these states. This can be accomplished by allowing employees the opportunity to set their own goals and the flexibility in how they will achieve those goals. Additionally, employees should be given the opportunity to utilize their skills in creative ways that not only realistically challenge their abilities, but also help contribute to the purpose or mission of the organization.

Reasons for Creativity Resistance in Libraries

While many organizations have adopted creativity as a way to establish and build sustainability for their brand's success (Bilton, 2007), they are losing sight of the opportunity creativity can serve towards their internal brand and their greatest resource: their employees. Library administrators are responsible for enabling personnel at all levels of the organization to take risks and infuse innovation into the infrastructure of the institution (Huber & Potter, 2015). In a time where there is still plenty of uncertainty, administration needs to support cultures of psychological safety where staff feel that their ideas and individual contributions are supported. However, in many scenarios, library administration has taken a step back from encouraging individual forms of creativity from their staff as a form of expression in the workplace. Australian Librarian, Jane Cowell (2017) identifies this as administration micromanaging their teams and putting restrictions on how they use their time to be creative.

There can be many reasons why administration is hesitant to allow for creative expression from staff. Many libraries face financial constraints, budget cuts, and rely on funds provided by external stakeholders through sources like donations and taxes (Huber & Potter, 2015). Therefore, staff time to devote to these activities may face restrictions due to various factors such as the need for ideas to go through an approval process (Bizzle and Flora, 2015) where creative ideas are seen as a waste of resources (Rogers, 2003). These resources can be in the form of supplies or staff time. In some scenarios, the resistance from administration can be due to psychological factors having more to do with the administrator themselves (Huber & Potter, 2015; Van Gorp, 2011). These risks can be due to a fear of change, fear of failure, or a fear of losing credibility (Prentice, 2011; Evans & Ward, 2007; Huber & Potter, 2015; Parker, 2015; Bridges, 2003; Swid, 2015; Van Gorp, 2011; Maslow, 1971; Sutton, 2001). However, by restricting these activities, the administrators also risk incurring a lack of psychological safety for their staff.

Study on Workplace Creativity

A 2020 study on creativity resistance in the Maryland public libraries found that the factors influencing stakeholder resistance are connected to 1) how change is communicated in the organization and 2) the stakeholders' perception of the organizational culture (Hopwood, 2020). The successful adoption of an innovative idea within an organization is contingent upon the supportiveness of the organizational culture. When the perceived culture of the organization is not supportive of creativity and innovation, then the likelihood of the innovation to be adopted decreases. As the findings from the administration of the Situational Outlook Questionnaire (SOQ) illustrates, when it comes to innovation, successful organizations are the ones with high correlations to perceptions of a culture that are supportive of risk-taking, trust, involving stakeholders, exploring ideas, open discussion, and having fun. Once again, all of these culture traits connect back to psychological safety.

Traditional organizations tend to follow a bureaucratic formula for their rules, authorities, and relationships as there are strict guidelines on the roles of the employees and the actions they can take within the system. This can also put communication in jeopardy because the pattern becomes top-down instead of

two-way (Rogers, 2003). If roles at the organization have been specialized, supervisors may not be familiar enough with the roles to understand the potential of ideas to innovate. Therefore, such ideas may be turned down. Another problem that results because of this bureaucratic formula is many employees refrain from stepping out of line because they believe it can place their survival at the organization in danger, which could impact their security in their personal life (Williams & Yang, 1999; Maslow, 1971). When an employee comes to their supervisor or organizational leader with an idea and is immediately told, “That will never work,” employees become afraid to voice ideas (Eikenberry, 2007). Comments like these are known as “creativity squelchers,” which make it difficult for innovation to flourish in an environment because of a fear of failure (Fullan, 2011). Employees want to know what they say and what they do matters, not just to the organization, but also to the world (Senge et al., 2012). Employees want to feel supported when they succeed as well as when mistakes are made. (Bizzle & Flora, 2015; Prentice, 2011). Changing the culture of the organization is not easy, but if leadership embraces this adjustment, success is possible.

Ideally, to change from a traditional organization to a creative one, the facility must adopt a systems-thinking approach toward pursuing goals (Williams & Yang, 1999). Leaders must create a fear-free environment where employees are able to make suggestions on innovative or creative ideas without repercussions (Prentice, 2011). They should create a shared vision, be open, and be flexible regarding their mindsets (Senge et al., 2012). While knowledge and training can influence change, it must be put into practice by innovation champions within the organization (Tanner & Reisman, 2014). Staff need to see successful innovative ideas in action, but the area in need of improvement or attention needs to be communicated to stakeholders in a manner that shows leadership’s acceptance of piloting risky ideas, even if the result may be failure.

Additionally, it is important for library leaders to be aware of the perception their stakeholders hold in relation to innovation within the organization. Their outlook and support can hinder or support the behaviors needed to embrace innovative change. Even if innovative ideas are accepted, the actions of the organization’s leaders must support that perception. Otherwise, these ideas may remain unvoiced by those in the organization. Employees should be given the opportunity to utilize their skills in creative ways that realistically challenge their abilities and help contribute to the purpose or mission of the organization. Most importantly, employees need to know they are supported by their organizations without a fear of reprisal for failure or their idea being squelched. In a world where the only constant is change, library employees and stakeholders must strive for a culture of innovation to move into the future and obtain sustainability.

What You Can Do in Your Workplace

Creativity as a Means to Stress Reduction

According to a study conducted in 2014 by the American Psychological Association (APA), 77% of the people surveyed reported regularly feeling stressed. An almost equal percentage of 73% reported experiencing psychological

symptoms caused by stress. Half of those responding reported experiencing a negative impact on their personal and professional lives (American Institute of Stress, 2016). Eighty percent of workers feel stress on the job, with 42% reporting that they need help managing it. The cost to employers for stress-related health care or missed work is over \$300 billion (American Institute of Stress, 2016). When surveyed regarding the previous day's work post-pandemic, 50% of American workers reported that they had experienced a stress event on the job and 41% experienced a worry event (Gallup, 2022). This stress can cause ripple effects where it can not only impact customer transactions but also interactions with friends and family (Gallup, 2022). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) cautions that when we are constantly threatened by things that instead of aligning to our goals, distract us from our goals, then this can cause our energy to weaken and cause us to lose investment. According to Runco (2014), “[c]reativity can help the individual maintain both psychological and physical health” (pg. 110).

A study published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* found that people who do small creative projects report feeling happier and more relaxed (Lewis, 2016). According to the study, “[i]ntervention designs are still relatively rare in creative research [...], but research suggests that art-making interventions can reduce stress and anxiety” (Conner, DeYoung, & Silvia, 2016, pg. 2). In fact, the study found that the effects of small creative endeavors, small “c” tasks, could induce states of “flourishing”, as described by Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) theory of flow states. These states were recorded as lasting longer, up to a day longer, than the time the participant invested into the activity. If emotions can have an effect on levels of creativity (Runco, 2014), then it makes sense that the inverse is also true, where engaging in creative endeavors can have a similar effect on emotions resulting in a more positive mood and therefore reducing stress levels. Therefore, if employees are given the autonomy to engage in small “c” type creative tasks, it is predicted that their interest and engagement in their work will also increase.

Failure as an Opportunity

According to Fullan (2011), people with a fixed mindset see their mistakes as negative, and therefore, mistakes are something to be avoided. He echoes Dweck (2006) and her theory that a growth mindset is necessary and that individuals and organizations can learn from their mistakes. Skills and talent are developed over time and don’t just happen overnight. Learning from our mistakes is necessary for the growth of the organization just as much as it is to the growth of the individual. Fullan (2011) states that mistakes are not always a bad thing. Sometimes mistakes should be celebrated just as much as the successes. This is especially important in a learning organization because much can be learned from mistakes. If organizations are too scared to make mistakes, then they will never take risks and strive towards innovation because they are afraid of failure. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) describe this as “permission to fail.” They say to broaden your definition of success so as to adopt an experimental mindset, change your vocabulary to be one of an open mindset where failure is an acceptable possibility, and try for small experiments first as they can be easier to bounce back from.

Bizzle and Flora (2015), also address the need of making sure that leaders promote a culture where failure is accepted. They state that leaders should provide an environment where the members of the organization are free to make decisions without the fear of being beaten over the head for making a mistake. They should instead be encouraged to pick themselves back up and to go out there to try again. Prentice (2011) suggests that having this type of culture creates an environment where employees will be comfortable not only being involved in innovative endeavors, but also in suggesting ideas of their own. According to Weinert (2013), trust as the ability to accept the vulnerability of what others may think of us is a big part of our ability to accept change. According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), leaders who fear the pressure to produce certain results can use experimentation as part of a process to test ideas in a safe environment. By seeing innovation initiatives as an experiment, employees are free to see any change as part of an educated guess. By doing so, they are opening themselves to the possibility of innovation and creativity.

Gratitude Journals & Boards

Journaling and creative writing are methods for relieving stress and contributing to positive mood building. Building on the work of Maslow's self-actualization, researchers have found that if an individual participated in positive-writing, this was followed by an increase in mood and well-being. The study also found that writing created an outlet for solving problems and working through difficult experiences. In addition to affecting mood, there was also a documented increase in immune function as well (Lowe, 2006). Achor (2010) refers to the neurological effect that a daily gratitude habit creates as the positive Tetris effect. When we spend twenty-one days of consistently looking for the positive things in our lives, we will begin to see positivity everywhere and more often than we see the negative things. Tanner and Reisman (2014) recommend not only writing down three gratitudes a day, but also sharing them with staff and coworkers as a way to create unison in gratitude beliefs.

Making Time to Be Silly

Seppala (2016) recommends "inviting fun back into your life" (pg. 113). Silliness, fun, play—whatever you call it, all has a positive impact on us because it stimulates positive emotions. When we feel good, we also pay more attention to what is around us. While it may sound silly, an adult playing childhood games can not only refresh the individual, but also make us more productive. Many companies, like Google and Facebook, are now providing opportunities for fun in the workplace. Some simple things that can be done in the workplace are to host board game events, competitive office challenges (like cubicle decorating), or casual Fridays. Take time to mix things up a little and try things in different ways (Tanner & Reisman, 2014). A way to apply this in libraries is to allow employees to decorate bulletin boards, book drops, book carts, or find other ways to express their creativity. Mental health breaks are just as important as bathroom breaks. Allow staff time to take a breather away from the desk.

Traveling

Seppala (2016 September) suggests traveling or changing the perspective as a way to stimulate happiness. This is very similar to theories presented by creativity researchers. Runco (2014) also suggests as creative tools the idea of shifting the perspective of a problem so you can see it from another angle or turning it upside down. The benefits of looking at something from a new angle is that it can inspire renewed interest in the problem, which can generate new ideas and also can change the perspective enough that new ideas will be generated because things will no longer be looked at as obstacles. A major way of changing your perspective may be leaving the problem entirely, taking a break, and trying something new or even traveling. Runco (2014) states that traveling produces excitement as it can be stimulating. This change in mood can facilitate creativity as well as help people to be more grounded. They may even produce those aha moments because the individual is no longer so focused on the thing that was stressing them that they are finally able to think clearly. Many professional development conferences now feature behind-the-scenes tours as part of a pre-conference experience. These tours echo the idea proposed by Seppala (2016 September) that a change in scenery might be needed to stimulate ideas. The next time you attend a library conference, take a tour of a museum or local library for idea inspiration.

Conclusion

According to Tanner and Reisman (2014), employees respond to optimism in different ways. Some employees crave social connection, some want managers to acknowledge their work, some need help setting goals and realizing expectations, and others need a change of scenery. When employees are happy, it can create a rippling effect that flows through the organization. When people are happy, they work harder and are inspired to try new things. Happiness, just like creativity, is subjective to the individual. However, when it comes to the workplace, it is important to find that right mix of creativity and optimism that will lead to engagement and overall well-being not only for the individual but also for the organization.

As Maslow (1971) stated, people feel anxious when their needs are not met. These needs could relate to safety, belonging, or accomplishment. Often, it is experience which defines the lens through which these needs are viewed. If an employee has a negative workplace experience, that is going to shape their workplace behaviors. They have their own mental models of what is taking place. Taking time to allow employees to be creative can help foster their psychological safety. When it comes to employee engagement, creating workplace cultures where employees thrive and flourish begins at the top but is defined by those at the bottom.

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