

The KEYS Framework

assessing support for creativity

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Abstract – *As a part of the MBA project an assessment is made of the climate within an organization for creativity and innovation, this is partly to verify the initial thesis of the project about a lost innovation culture and partly to have a status quo measurement for later comparison when the project is concluded. The present paper presents the KEYS to creativity survey and its background theory together with outlining the planning and results of the assessment. The KEYS survey is found useable beyond expectation for a knowledge organization.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to describe a framework for assessing the innovation maturity of an organization.

The idea of this paper is to uncover the KEYS framework and its usability within the organization, by doing a small scale test run within the organization. Even being in small scale it is expected that the data produced can be used to indicate key areas for improvement of the innovation culture within the organization. The output of the test run is targeted to be used for discussing future improvements and actions to take; it will be used for input to the change management plan of the project. The KEYS framework was first evaluated together with four other possible surveys for measuring innovation climate; these are listed in section 2. The KEYS survey was selected for three reasons: The KEYS framework is fully focused on innovation and is of the highest scientific quality and is well documented.

The present project was started on the thesis that the innovation culture had been lost, and that there were an urgent need for re-vitalizing this culture together with implementing new processes to support it. The idea is to use the KEYS survey for helping to establish the current level of organizational support for innovation.

2 THE KEYS FRAMEWORK

KEYS is an organizational wide framework that is used for assessment of the climate for creativity and innovation within a given organization. The framework focuses on management practices that have influence on and supports innovation and creativity. The framework is designed to identify the parts of the organization that encourage or discourage people from working at their highest performance level.

The purpose of using such framework is to help establishing an innovative workplace and improve the motivation amongst employees for creativity and creative solutions.

The KEYS framework is hosted at <http://www.ccl.org/keys>, which is part of the Center for Creative Leadership. This is also the center which was responsible for developing the framework together with the Harvard Business School professor Teresa Amabile. Teresa is a MBA of 1954 professor of Business Administration and senior associated dean for research at the Harvard Business School, (Amabile, T. M., 1998).

The Center was founded in 1970 by Smith Richardson, today it is a nonprofit educational institution with 600 staff and faculty members around the globe and they maintain relationships to 500 adjunct faculty members, (CCL website, 2008). The centers main focus is on developing leadership and educating new leaders around the globe, since 1970 470.000 people have attended education controlled by the Center of Creative Leadership, (CCL website, 2008).

2.1 KEYS explained

The purpose of the KEYS framework is to explore and judge the climate for creativity and innovation within a group or organization. The exploration is done by assessing several management practices and organizational behaviors.

Currently the framework bases its input side on a questionnaire consisting of 78 questions, which are designed to assess the how well creativity thrives in the organization. The assessment is based on 10 management areas which can be parted in to four main subjects, (CCL website, 2008): Management Practices, Organizational Motivation, Resources, and Outcomes.

▪ Management Practices

- **Freedom:** The sense of being in control of one's own work, what to do and how to do it.
- **Challenging work:** The sense of having to work hard on challenging problems in important projects.
- **Supervisory Encouragement:** The supervisors should show Appropriate goals, supporting the work groups, must value the individual contributions and a show of confidence in the group.
- **Work Group Support:** Work groups with

diverse skill sets, good communication, open to ideas, challenging constructively and where people take it natural to help each other.

▪ **Organizational Motivation**

○ **Organizational Encouragement:** A culture that encourage creativity through: fair and constructive judgment of ideas, reward and recognition for creative work and an active flow of ideas.

○ **Lack of Organizational Impediments:** Impediments like political problems, harsh criticism of new ideas, destructive internal competition, neglecting of risks and over emphasis on the status-quo.

▪ **Resources**

○ **Sufficient Resources:** Appropriate resources, funds, materials, facilities and knowledge allocated for the tasks at hand.

○ **Lack of Unrealistic Workload Pressures:** Absence of unrealistic expectations and distractions from creative solutions.

▪ **Outcomes**

○ **Creativity:** Do we utilize creativity for innovative and effective problem solving?

○ **Productivity:** How efficient and effective are we?

These are the key features of the KEYS framework as seen from the target organizations point of view:

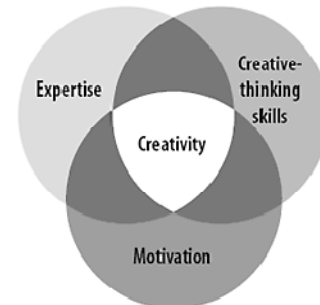
- It assesses elements encouraging innovation, elements that inhibit innovation and it assesses the organization's level of creativity and productivity (efficiency and effectiveness).
- Can be used with any size group, feedback can be broken down by organization structure or other relevant parameters.
- The Questionnaire can be completed in 15-20 minutes per participant.
- Low priced framework with online support, reducing administration effort for completing a KEYS survey.

2.2 Theory of KEYS

Much of the theory, which the KEYS framework is based on, is put forward by Amabile, T. M. (1998). This section is a short study of the findings Amabile, T. M. (1998), has put forward on how to kill or support creativity. Management most often suppress the innovation and creative culture unintentional by prioritizing coordination, productivity and control with less priority towards supporting innovation by motivation, rewards and by the way work is assigned to people.

Business creativity is more than highly original ideas, as it is often associated with the arts. Creativity in a business concept needs to be appropriate, useful and actionable. So the creativity in a business sense is measured by the usability of the ideas generated and not so much by the radicalism of the ideas.

Managers tend to consider creativity as being linked only to the way employees think and thus how they solve problems. Amabile, T. M. (1998) has found that this is only one of three major parts that support creativity in the staff: Creative-thinking skills, Motivation and Expertise, this is illustrated in the figure below, (Amabile, T. M., 1998).



The expertise of a person is everything that he or she knows and is capable of achieving within areas relevant to his or hers work. In a sense it is the person's capability to explore and solve problems.

Creative thinking is the way we approach our problems and their solutions. It is about getting new ideas and combining existing ideas in new ways and uses these in solving problems. Masters of this often turns problems upside down and looks out side of 'the box' to find the better ways of solving the problem.

The motivation factor will determine the priorities of the employees, one can state that: You get what you measure. Motivation can be parted in two: Extrinsic and intrinsic.

Extrinsic being motivation outside of the person, most often this involve some kind of payment related to success of solving a specific problem.

Intrinsic motivation is evidently that with most influence on the creativity of the organization. Intrinsic motivation is from within a person e.g. passion, interest and desire to perfect the problem solving. When people are intrinsic motivated their work itself will be enjoyable and motivating.

Theory of the measurement questions are explained in the following. Amabile, T. M. (1998) elaborates on 6 of the main management practices that is also included in the KEYS framework described in section 2.1.

In the following the six categories of what mangers can do to support creativity.

Challenge

To have rich and detailed information of employees and the available problems to be solved is crucial to set the right challenges for the employees. When tasks and employees are matched properly, the employees will feel an increase in intrinsic motivation.

Freedom

Freedom is the autonomy granted to employees to select means, tools, processes and structures but typical not the outcome. Good managers should spend majority of time on setting perfectly clear goals and let the team decide how to get there. Freedom in how you approach your work will increase the intrinsic motivation.

Resources

Supplying just the right amount of time and money to a team or a project will support creativity, where as both too much and too little of each will discourage creativity. Fake and impossible tight deadlines often kill creativity in organizations, open and honest planning which applies just the right amount of pressure is desirable. Also funding and resources allocated to the project must be just right, too little and the team will fail and intrinsic motivation ceases to exist.

Work-Group Features

Creative teams are mutually supportive and created from people with diverse background and perspectives. The diversity can be in intellectual foundations, approaches to work or thinking style. Respecting the knowledge and perspective of others within the team is key for intrinsic motivation to thrive. If instead homogeneous teams are assembled, everybody will meet up with the same mind-set and they will be leaving with the usual solutions and mind-sets.

Supervisory Encouragement

It is important, for intrinsic motivation in teams and individuals, that they feel that their work matters. Here it is important that managers searches for ways to explore the team's new ideas, opposite of searching for reasons not to use the new ideas.

Organizational Support

The organization's leaders must prioritize and encourage innovation, this must be communicated when ever possible and it should be included in strategy, measurements and rewards. It is up to the leaders of the organization to ensure appropriate systems and processes for supporting innovation, together with enabling and supporting information sharing and collaboration.

The elements above can fairly easily be recognized in the assessment parts of KEYS explained in section 2.1.

Besides the framework: KEYS, Assessing the Climate for Creativity a few other frameworks were evaluated to see which was most appropriate for the organization, following frameworks was considered:

- Creative Climate Questionnaire.
- Situational Outlook Questionnaire.
- Team Climate Inventory.

- Siegel Scale of Support for Innovation.

These were judge by the following parameters: Focus on innovation, scientific value, foundation and available documentation. It was concluded that the KEYS framework is fully focused on innovation and is of the highest scientific quality and is well documented.

2.3 Relevance of KEYS

The KEYS framework is considered to have the potential necessary to accurately pinpoint the conditions necessary for supporting innovation in the organization.

The framework is based on research involving 12000 or more managers and employees situated around the globe in some of the top companies. The framework promises to be well proven for evaluating the organization's climate for creativity and innovation, (CCL website, 2008).

The force of the KEYS framework is that it focuses on the people to people interactions in the organization opposite of many other models in the theory base of innovation which focuses on processes and systems. The grand goal would be to have a KEYS survey performed each year to assess the climate of creativity and innovation. This would make the results, if treated right, a possible KPI for the company. The creative and innovative environment is of interest in all parts of the organization, thus it would be wise to have the measurement responsibility placed in some corporate level function e.g. Business Development or Quality departments.

3 PLANNING

A simple 9 step plan could look like the following that was put together for a test run of the KEYS framework.

1. Get the organization's support for running the survey.
2. Qualify as a 'KEYS to creativity' facilitator.
3. Selecting Participants.
4. Send out invitation to participants with introduction to why we are testing the KEYS framework.
5. Facilitation meeting for preparing the participants.
6. 1 week should be provided for participants to fill out the questionnaire of the 78 questions.
7. Extracting interesting findings, major results, conclusions and perspectives from the survey.
8. Planning actions for improving the creative and innovative culture in the organization from these results.
9. Gather decision makers to decide if this should become a yearly assessment and part of the organizations KPI set?

3.1 Become a KEYS approved facilitator

To purchase the KEYS survey one has to qualify as a KEYS facilitator, which requires that you adhere to the

following statements and being willing to sign on that. Facilitator Qualification Form, (CCL website, 2008):

- *If I collect data on an individual, group, or organization, I will give feedback.*
- *I will not facilitate individual feedback to any participant with whom I am in a direct reporting relationship.*
- *Individual participants are the owners of their feedback data, and all copies of individual feedback reports will be given to the participant by me.*
- *Center instruments were not developed for use in selection, compensation, or performance appraisal processes and I will not use them for any of these purposes.*
- *Except where specifically noted and agreed upon prior to the start of the data collection process, I will maintain the confidentiality of the individuals providing feedback (respondents).*
- *I understand and agree to abide by the above statements for the use of all products.*

Besides regular address and personal information the following data is also required to apply for approval as facilitator:

- *Education: Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate, Other*
- *Managerial Experience: 0-5 Years, 6-10 Years, 11+ Years.*
- *Functional Level: Supervisor, Manager, Executive, Independent Consultant, Human Resource Representative, Other*

Following the facilitator is asked to describe other relevant experiences and the intended use of the survey:

- *Courses in tests and measures, group process, organizational development, psychology, counseling, educational design, etc:*
- *Experience with assessment instruments and/or facilitating feedback:*
- *Intended use of feedback results:*

3.2 Selection of participants

In this section the selection of participants for a test run of the KEYS framework is selected.

The KEYS framework is designed for organization wide assessment of the creativity level, thus it would be preferable to have participants in the test run from all departments. Overall this project is working on innovation processes and innovation culture, thus the participants will be weighted towards areas with the most influence on innovation processes, hence employees where innovation culture and creative skills are prioritized.

The reason for not selecting a too small group is that the participants must be convinced of their anonymity

to be inclined to answer freely to the assessment questions.

The selection will be done as random as possible within each of the relevant functions. Not all will be random as some functions are as small as one person.

3.3 Correlating surveys

Data correlation is build into the KEYS survey; the idea is to send back (snail mail) all the responses of the survey to the Center of Creative Leadership, which will make a feedback report. There is a basic report, which is organization wide, and several sub reports can be ordered as extras.

4 RESULTS

<The company specific part left out of this article.>

5 CONCLUSION

When turning in the questionnaires the participants was shortly asked for their opinion on the questions. The responses were mostly positive and the participants found that the questions was understandable, also surprisingly the questionnaires was reported to take less time to fill in than expected. in general the KEYS survey were a pleasant experience both for producing the input and also result wise, it is believed to have good value for the time spent, and thus it is recommended that we try this out for the entire organization. It should be tested in full organization width before deciding if it should become a yearly event to assess the creative and innovative climate of the organization.

REFERENCES

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