# MASTERS IN MANAGEMENT (MIM)

# MASTERS FINAL WORK

## DISSERTATION

## AN ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS EMPLOYEES FACE WHEN THEY ENGAGE CREATIVELY

## MAGDALENA MARIA PFEFFEL

## MARCH 2023

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**An analysis of barriers employees face when they engage creatively**

# ABSTRACT

In today's world, there are many articles and books that provide information on how companies can motivate their employees to get more involved in the company. Others show how workers' creativity can be enhanced, but always from a managerial or boardroom perspective. In contrast to these articles, this dissertation does not focus on what a business can do to encourage the creativity of its employees. This paper serves the purpose of giving employees a voice and showing their perception of barriers once they act proactively. The literature identifies many barriers that make it difficult for employees to act creatively. Barriers described in the literature focus strongly on the co-workers' refusal to change, resource restrictions, and strong hierarchical levels. The right leadership in the process of implementing ideas plays an essential role and gives employees the feeling of being supported. To investigate the topic in more detail 20 interviews were carried out. The interviews were semi-structured and a high diversity among participants was ensured. Answers were then coded according to 11 subcategories. Findings of the analysis mostly agree with literature, but some differences were identified. Respondents most frequently mentioned the following barriers in the interviews: Lack of support & communication, interpersonal challenges like resistance to change, time scarcity, unsupportive culture, and inefficient or chaotic structures. Nevertheless, employees were motivated to implement their ideas at the start. Most started an initiative because they were intrinsically motivated by the value of their idea. A few others wanted to improve working conditions for co-workers, or simply contribute something to the company's success. Only a few were driven by extrinsic factors. This motivation was maintained for some participants despite challenges. Especially employees surrounded by supportive leaders maintained a positive attitude. However, most of the interviewees were frustrated after encountering barriers. They even declared to never engage creatively at their current company again.

**Keywords:** ideas, change, creativity, barriers, engagement, motivation, idea process

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have proposed ways and tools businesses can use to encourage employees to be creative and help the company to become innovative (Chandani et al., 2016). However, only a few explore what employees feel, think, and do when they have novel ideas that could bring positive change to the business (Amabile, 1997). This dissertation is examining the barriers employees experience when coming up with ideas and how these challenges influence engaging behaviour and motivation. In contradiction to other articles, this dissertation does not focus on what a business can do to encourage the creativity of its employees. This paper serves the purpose of showing the employee's perception of barriers once they act proactively.

## 1.1 Theoretical contextualization

Creativity is a concept that has been studied during the decades. Researchers tried to understand individual as well as organizational creativity and came up with many theories that explain creative behaviours. One theory is called the Componential Theory and it suggests that three components need to be present to achieve a creative outcome. An individual needs to have enough knowledge, task motivation, and creative skills to come up with creative ideas and act on them (Amabile, 1997). This theory describes what variables are needed to produce a creative outcome. However, it seems to assume that creativity faces no problems or issues during the creative process. In other words, it does not focus enough on the barriers that could stop employees to engage in the company with these creative ideas. To close this gap in research the dissertation aims to explore these barriers in more depth.

Research indicates that a creative workforce can be a major advantage for companies (Agbor, 2008). Several articles make suggestions and implications on how to engage employees more and how to promote their creativity. It is surprising, that barely any literature reflects the views of workers on their creative engagement (Susomrith & Coetzer, 2015). Therefore, it is of utter importance to analyse the barriers and motivational factors employees perceive to exist in their organizational environments. When understanding the reasons for employees to engage creatively the companies can adapt accordingly (Crant, 2000). Moreover, existing studies often use quantitative measures to test engagement. Qualitative data analysis could offer deeper insights into

the perceived barriers and mental processes employees go through (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). Thus, the research in this paper is of qualitative nature.

Leaders are one of the major influences that impact creativity in the workplace (Alblooshi et al., 2021). The work environment is influenced by leaders who have a direct impact on the creative outcome of workers. The Componential Theory indicates that leader support is crucial but fails to suggest how leaders shape the experience of idea implementation in the face of barriers (Amabile et al., 2004). Therefore, this dissertation will look at how leadership support affects the perception of barriers.

Another contribution of this research is a deeper insight into perceived barriers to creative engagement in Western societies. Cultures have a significant impact on creative practises and the factors that enhance or stifle creativity (Rice, 2006). The empirical part of the thesis focuses on Austrian workers giving the research additional novelty. In contrast to other studies, this paper gathers information about workers from various industries, and participants of this research project range in age, gender, and work experience. The originality of this study is therefore ensured and provides a great inside into employees' views of barriers.

## *1.2 Relevance of the study*

Nowadays, experts call the job market a battlefield and speak of the "war of talent". It becomes more and more difficult to find employees that have the expected knowledge and the required personality (DeCenzo et al., 2013). Job seekers have more and more choices and it is not uncommon to choose the company that makes people feel heard most. Therefore, companies should take the ideas and suggestions of employees seriously and try to break down barriers that prevent cooperation (Behera & Pathy, 2013). Even though the Covid 19 crisis was hard on many people, they still did not lose interest to realize their ideas (Brownell, 2020). In the summer of 2020, the applications for startups reached an all-time high (Altun, 2021). Experts forecast that entrepreneurship will stay a priority for many and will not decrease even after the Covid 19 pandemic (Altun, 2021). This shows that having a voice, getting autonomy, and realizing ideas are becoming a priority for the labour force (Hoover, 2022). Businesses need to listen to the suggestions of their workforce to manifest loyalty to the workplace or they might as well open a start-up (Brownell, 2020). Thus, it is of utter importance to reveal all hurdles and structures that hinder employees to realize ideas and burn these barriers down.

Since there is a shortage of labour companies focus on hiring the ones with the right personality that might still lack some technical skills. Firms then offer training and workshops to provide the employee with the right skillset (Fera, 2014). Even though creativity can be enhanced with certain practices it is also part of the personality of a human (Amabile, 1997). Therefore, businesses often invest in creative potential rather than excessive technical knowledge making it so essential to further explore the field of creativity (Fera, 2014).

Not only creative workers are desired, but also the demand for sustainable solutions to reduce global imbalances is increasing. Currently, the United Sustainable Development Goals (short SDG) are working towards reducing the global injustices and organizations worldwide try to support them. The UN has defined 17 Sustainable Development Goals that should be fulfilled as far as possible by 2030. One of the goals, goal number 8 to be exact, is called "Decent work and economic growth" (United Nations, n.d.). The literature states that ideas from employees often make work processes more efficient and can help companies to cut costs (Caniëls et al., 2017). Thus, when the creative projects of employees are taken seriously and are implemented with care they can ultimately lead to economic growth and contribute to the SDG 8.

## *1.3 Research question and objectives*

Creative engagement of workers that introduce new ideas and make suggestions is vital for many businesses (Agbor, 2008). However, this niche topic is not explored enough, and existing research does not go into detail. The main purpose of this dissertation is to investigate barriers in the process of idea implementation. Since this topic is not extensively explored, the first step is to analyse the barriers employees encounter. Therefore, the question "What circumstances do employees perceive as barriers to implementing their creative ideas?" should be answered. Especially for workers having a difficult time realizing their ideas it is very interesting to understand why they continue to take on the burden. Even though existing approaches, like the Componential Theory, try to explain engagement and motivation, an approach to understanding the willingness of employees to engage even when dealing with barriers is missing. The second research question closes this gap by answering the following: "Why do employees engage creatively?".

It is the goal of this paper to understand what employees experience during the process of implementation. Leaders play an important role in this process and the paper tries to understand how leader behaviour possibly shapes and influences the two research questions. Finally, this thesis aims to give a voice to employees and wants to display how they are affected emotionally by these hurdles.

## *1.4 Structure*

In total, this dissertation consists of five chapters. In the introduction, the reader will get a general overview of the topic and understand its relevance in today's economic situation. Then, the research questions are stated which provide the basis for the analysis. Moreover, a description of each chapter elaborates on the structure of this thesis.

Continuing with the second chapter, the essential existing literature is reviewed and summed up. Major theories are discussed, and the underlying concepts of creativity, engagement and leadership are analysed. Theoretical standpoints regarding barriers and motivational factors are explained and give the reader a better understanding of the issue this dissertation is dealing with.

The third chapter talks about the methodology used for this dissertation. Within this chapter the methods of research are justified, and the author illustrates how interviewees were selected. Moreover, the interview structure is showcased, and the author explains on what grounds the interview questions were chosen.

Chapter four provides an overview of the results of the empirical research carried out. The categories used for the analysis are explained and give the reader an overview of each subcategory.

The fifth chapter presents collected data and compares them to existing literature. Findings are critically drawn and discussed.

Lastly, chapter six concludes this dissertation by answering the research questions defined. Limitations are presented and recommendations for future studies finalise this dissertation.

# 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research barely examines the barriers and practices that prevent creative engagement according to employees (Mostafa & El-Masry, 2008). In this chapter, existing theories are explained and possible factors that constrain or motivate creative behaviour are described. First literature about creativity in the work context is examined. Subchapter 2.2 explains why leadership is important for creative engagement. Then the barriers to creative engagement are summarized and the factors that motivate employees to contribute creatively are explained.

## *2.1 Creativity in the workplace*

Over the last few years, professional businesspeople became more and more aware of the importance of supporting creative minds (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015). Studies have shown that nowadays it is creativity, organizational environment, and innovation that bring companies a competitive advantage (Agbor, 2008). Implementing creative ideas can increase efficiency, job satisfaction, teamwork, and many other positive work-related factors (Mostafa & El-Masry, 2008). For example, when an employee engages in creative ideas which lead to higher customer satisfaction, the worker will gain a good reputation in the company and is more likely to stay in the firm (Thompson, 2005).

When examining creativity and trying to measure constraints it is important to distinguish between creative potential, practised creativity, and creative output. Creative output is a performance measure and is usually quantitatively used. Creative potential describes the self-assessment of a person. Someone who believes they are a creative thinker has great creative potential. Practised creativity or executed creativity "reflects the extent to which employees perceive themselves to be able to actually exploit their creative potential at work" (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015). This dissertation will focus on executed creativity and on how barriers affect practised creativity.

Creativity is not produced by the boss or manager alone but results from collaboration and diverse thinking of the individual employees. Of course, some workers might have more novel ideas than others due to personality and job tasks (Amabile et al., 2004). Studies found that gender impacts the creative actions of employees. Initiating change can be scary and requires the person to take a certain risk. Since male managers are culturally expected to be risk-takers, they seem to have higher practised creativity than

females. Additionally, studies show that younger managers like to act on ideas to bring change while older employees rather stick to the status quo (Mostafa & El-Masry, 2008). Even though studies suggest these tendencies in age and gender, it is not possible to define a typical creative person. Someone who does not show creative characteristics can utilize the ideas of other employees and use their knowledge to successfully create change (Kolnhofer Derecskei et al., 2017). Not only characteristics of the individual person define their creative efforts. The work environment and job tasks also influence employee creativity (Mostafa & El-Masry, 2008).

To understand practised creativity even better, the Componential Theory proposes three variables that are necessary for individual creative outcome. According to the theory, expertise acts as the foundation for creativity (Amabile, 1997). An individual must know their domain to solve complex problems in the field. The second component is the creative-thinking skill. To some extent this skill depends on personality, self-discipline or risk-taking, but can be developed by training and practice (Amabile, 1997). The first two factors enable the person to be creative and the last component decides if the person is willing to act on it. Task motivation is the last variable and depends on the (intrinsic) motivation of individuals (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019). Especially the last variable is important in this research as it helps to explain why employees act creatively (RQ2).

## 2.2 Leadership and creativity

The leadership style is a crucial factor for the success of creative engagement (Alblooshi et al., 2021). Some leaders can jeopardize creativity while others are catalysts for innovation (Arikan, 2020). Research experts have provided compelling evidence that the environment at work created by leaders and the perceived social- emotional support are linked to the employee's practised creativity. Thus, leader support is one of the major factors at work affecting creative engagement (Amabile et al., 2004).

Nowadays many leadership styles are known and researched. It is impossible to define one that works for all businesses, but great leaders can adapt their skills to the people they are leading and to the circumstances of the situation (Arikan, 2020). A few leadership styles are mentioned the most often to be suitable for fostering creative behaviour. Some of them are the democratic and transformational leadership styles which should help unlock creative potential the best (Mostafa & El-Masry, 2008).

For a leader to be considered supportive he must be perceived as a competent leader on the task oriented (instrumental) and socioemotional (relationship) levels (Hussain & Hassan, 2016). For instance, while monitoring a subordinate the leader must manage the relationship aspect at the same time and convey support (Amabile et al., 2004). Previous research could identify several behaviours a leader performed to increase the practised creativity of subordinates: they acted as an ambassador for the team, prioritised work-related communication over administrative talk, offered to assist the team in their work, provided general supervision and not micromanagement (Amabile et al., 2004).

It is crucial that leaders create an innovation-friendly environment and promote the generation of ideas. The workforce is driving innovation and their perception of leadership must facilitate the process (Alblooshi et al., 2021). Leaders do not only influence the general work environment, but their behaviour also affects the feelings of workers. Especially negative behaviour patterns of managers have a strong influence on employees' moods. However, positive emotional support is important for workers in difficult periods (Amabile et al., 2004). A study has shown that leader behaviour primarily triggers affective responses indicating emotions are affected in the first place. Indeed, it can be concluded that leader behaviour influences the subordinates' moods and attitudes which in turn affect their performance and creative engagement (Amabile et al., 2004).

## *2.3 Creative engagement*

Creative employees can help companies become more effective if they share their ideas (Thompson, 2005). For instance, if the creative idea helps to reduce a work step in a process the company can save time and use resources more efficiently. Ultimately, this can lead to economic growth and would contribute to the SDG 8 (United Nations, n.d.). Therefore, it is essential to understand why employees decide to dedicate themselves to an idea (Kular et al., 2008). Once we know what employees feel and think during the process of engagement, one might understand better how to manage them (Crant, 2000).

At the moment, there is no consistency in research for defining engagement, as it has been operationalized in a variety of ways. There are so many areas such as schools, work, or families where one can talk about engaging activities (Kular et al., 2008). In the workplace engagement is described as "a result achieved by stimulating an employees' enthusiasm for work and redirecting it towards organization success" (Chandani et al., 2016). Other authors find different words to describe engagement. For example, Kahn

defined engagement as an investment of "significant personal resources, in the form of time and effort" (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). Using creativity to start an initiative is an extraordinary effort in the workplace. Thus, an employee who wants to implement their creative idea can also be characterized as an engaged worker (Kular et al., 2008). This dissertation focuses on the specific engagement of employees providing creative input.

Employees often use a cost/benefit approach to decide whether they should engage creatively or not (Crant, 2000). On the one hand, social risks are a big cost people evaluate in this approach (Zhang et al., 2020). On the other hand, career development and self-realization are the perceived benefits (Kular et al., 2008). The result of this cost/benefit analysis decides if the employees think it is worthwhile to engage in creativity (Crant, 2000). To be more specific, the cost/benefit approach can be split into two judgments employees need to make (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Firstly, they compare the effect their action will bring and how much effort they need to put into it (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015). Secondly, they compare positive and possible negative consequences that could result from their initiative (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Then they decide to engage or not. This judgment depends on the personality of the employee as well as work environment, autonomy, job role, general work motivation and resources (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Of course, there are many factors that influence the decision of an employee to engage creatively or not (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). However, this approach lays a good foundation and is considered when answering research question two.

## *2.4 Barriers to creative engagement*

Barriers are especially demoralizing for the employees who usually engage most (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). Interestingly, a study showed that lacking constraints lowers performance and creative engagement (Weiss et al., 2011). Certain challenges motivate workers to become more efficient and drive their need to innovate. For example, time constraints can motivate employees to find a solution to be more efficient (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015). However, most articles suggest that constraints stifle innovation (Weiss et al., 2011). Unfortunately, barely any literature goes into detail about the employees' view of barriers to their creative engagement (Susomrith & Coetzer, 2015). Following paragraphs close this gap and help to answer research question one by identifying several perceived barriers.

### *2.4.1 Co-workers*

Especially the organizational climate and supervisor subordinate relationship relate to innovative behaviour (Crant, 2000). Even though being a proactive employee gives many benefits to the company it can have positive and negative effects on the employee as well (Zhang et al., 2020). If workers build a supportive network and are valued advocates for change their social capital increases and job performance rises (Thompson, 2005). However, difficult work relationships and a non-supportive community makes it challenging to succeed with a creative initiative. Negative reactions from co-workers can decrease effectiveness of the change and reduce work motivation of the initiator (Zhang et al., 2020). A study showed that acting proactively is perceived as very strenuous and exhausting. One participant mentioned that starting a creative initiative is "like fighting an extra battle that you just don't need" (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Arguing with co-workers over an idea often does not seem worth the negative vibes (Del Val & Fuentes, 2003). If there is a lack of trust in senior co-workers, subordinate workers will not speak up or take initiative to get their idea approved. Employees do not want to feel exploited and therefore practised creativity decreases if trust in superiors is missing (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009).

### *2.4.2 Resources*

Companies which do not have a big resource base, like most startups, struggle to find available time or people for creative projects (Brush et al., 2001). Resource constraints can stem from unrealistic deadlines, procrastination, business formalities, or negativism (Sonnenberg & Goldberg, B, 1992). One major resource constraint is time. Sometimes essential workers are already overwhelmed with daily workload (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015). To avoid time scarcity for creative projects companies like Google have a special worktime system implemented called 80-20. Employees have 80% of their weekly worktime to finish daily business tasks. 20% of the time is reserved for creative sessions (Crawford, 2020). Budget for new ideas or projects is often not available. Companies sometimes have an initiative in place where employees can request financial funds for their projects in-house (Gupta & Singhal, 1993).

Another resource needed for idea implementation is the personnel. Nowadays we can find a so-called war for talent on the job market (Van Hoye, 2013). Since Baby boomers (born 1946- 1965) are in their retirement phase the search for qualified personnel will

increase over the next few years (DeCenzo et al., 2013). A shortage of qualified people makes it challenging to attempt to change something in the business. Additional work, such as idea implementation, is often not possible without hiring someone to support. Participants of a study mentioned high workload as number one reason for not participating in voluntary tasks offered by the company (Susomrith & Coetzer, 2015).

Besides the resources mentioned above an idea needs certain knowledge to be carried out. Some companies provide workshops for specific fields or offer to cover the costs for additional training (Susomrith & Coetzer, 2015). Once employees have gained more knowledge, they are able to exploit their creative ideas (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015).

### *2.4.3 Hierarchy*

Research showed that very formal systems and strong hierarchy negatively associate to creativity (Saeed & Rafique, 2014). Acting on creative ideas often means that resources are spent on the project and to do so a permission needs to be granted (Clark, 2022). Excessive hierarchy can lead to poor and slow decision-making especially in the case of approving new projects (Ferris, 2018). Creative adaptions or innovative ideas usually emerge from the bottom level in organizations (Clark, 2022). However, something called the authority bias is often in the way when it comes to implementation. This authority bias stands for the tendency to undervalue ideas from the regular workers (Clark, 2022). Opinions from top management, however, are often overvalued (Burkus, 2012). When employees get frustrated because superior positions hold all the power they will get less and less involved (Clark, 2022). Another factor that makes hierarchies anti-creative is that labour is highly divided into groups. The individual departments and management do not exchange ideas and knowledge, which would stimulate creativity (Cummings, 1965).

In a company with many levels of hierarchy the idea has to work its way up through many managers, each of them able to reject the idea (Burkus, 2012). Usually, the higher the rank of a manager the further away they are from the domain of the idea. This means that they are less likely to grasp the full potential and novelty of the project. Moreover, if ideas have the potential to jeopardize the power position of managers, the ideas are likely to be vetoed against (Cummings, 1965). Owen calls this the "hierarchy of no" (Burkus, 2012). The company Rite-Solutions built an internal idea stock market to fight against this hierarchical scheme. Each employee, no matter what rank, gets 10,000 points which they can invest in ideas published on the idea board. The ideas with the highest rank get

permission to be implemented and investors get compensated by receiving a bonus or other stock options (Burkus, 2012).

## *2.4.4 Culture*

Researchers believe that organizational culture that prevents innovation is the biggest barrier to overcome. This discouraging environment is usually built by organizational politics that fear failure (Agbor, 2008). If employees do not feel secure enough in their environment to take the risk of proposing an idea, their creative engagement decreases (Amabile et al., 2004). Many aspects of the work culture such as office politics, hierarchy, diversity, and management style, can be barriers to creativity (Sonnenberg & Goldberg, 1992).

## *2.4.5 Communication and missing recognition*

Not only the work environment and culture can militate proactive behaviour (Agbor, 2008). A study showed that employees who did not know about a specific policy or procedure to initiate change or thought there is no available budget to do so were hesitant to act on their ideas, as they thought it is not expected of them to be creative (Susomrith & Coetzer, 2015). These problems arise due to lack of information and communication (Sinclair, 2021). Not only communication tools are important, also the timely communication and collaboration is essential (Perceptyx, 2019). Another vital part in communication is to show appreciation for employees and their efforts (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). Sometimes it is enough to do so in a private conversation and sometimes a public announcement of the achievement is more appropriate. Missing recognition reduces engagement and performance (Sinclair, 2021). Thus, if an employee does not feel appreciated after trying to implement an idea they will relinquish to participate with creative input in the future (Saeed & Rafique, 2014).

## *2.4.6 Resistance to change*

One argument often mentioned when it comes to complications in change management is "people do not want to change". However, that is not entirely true (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Often the underlying cause for this resistance is the fear of the unknown. Change brings a lot of uncertainties about loss of status, loss of comfort or even loss of replacement (Spring, 2021). Many articles blame employees to be opposed to change and

suggest how to make them more receptive to it. However, aspects like fear of loss of status is much more prevalent in senior positions. A study conducted with 3,000 Ford managers revealed that middle managers accuse executives to resist change initiatives. According to this study top management wants to maintain the status quo and fear that the failure of a project has impact on their performance reviews (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). Ultimately, it does not matter who shows more resistance to change. Any resistance, whether from the workforce or from management, represents a barrier to the successful implementation of creative ideas. Sometimes it is not even active resistance to change but the inertia of people that kills creativity (Del Val & Fuentes).

## 2.4.7 Other factors

Other characteristics like size and industry of a company can be a barrier to creative ideas (Kular et al., 2008). While it is relatively easy to speak to the decision-maker in a company with 20 employees, that can be a big privilege in a 2,000-people business (Damanpour, 1992). Hierarchies might be more complex in bigger companies, but they also have more resources to spend on idea utilizations (Shefer & Frenkel, 2005).

Another factor that can be a burden for change initiatives is the industry the company operates in. The high-tech sector is known to be very agile, and change is daily business for many corporations (Shefer & Frenkel, 2005). Moreover, areas like the non-profit sector indicate high creative engagement because the employees are motivated through the mission and passion of their work rather than money (Kular et al., 2008).

Of course, not only the industry but also the culture of the country can interfere with ideas of employees. Hofstede defined a popular model to analyse cultures all around the world (UKEssays, 2018). In some cultures, ideas are more welcomed than in others and appear in different settings. For example, Egyptians prefer a strong power distance and might act demoralized and uncreative in any other cultural setting (Rice, 2006).

## 2.5 Motivation to act creatively

The motivation of an employee to implement their idea is a very complex construct. There are many definitions trying to describe motivation. One of them defines motivation as "the degree to which a person is moved or aroused to expend effort to achieve some purpose" (Golembiewski, 2000). Experts in the field have published many theories that aim to generalize and explain motivation (Souders, 2019). Understanding motivation will

contribute to answering research question two. When we understand what motivates employees to be creative it can help to answer why they engage creatively.

Research distinguishes internal, external, and prosocial motivators which can be the drivers for an employee to act on their ideas and take on the barriers. Intrinsic motivation is described as the cause for an action to be "performed for its own sake rather than for the purpose of acquiring material or social rewards" (Hong, 2017). One can describe an extrinsically driven employee as someone who performs to get rewarded, reach a goal or avoid penalties (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019). According to the Componential Theory, intrinsic motivation is considered to be a stronger force when it comes to creative behaviour compared to extrinsic stimuli (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019). Recent findings discovered that a third type of motivation exists, called prosocial motivation, which has the main purpose of benefitting others (Ramus & Killmer, 2007). In other words, employees might take actions on their creativity to solely benefit the company and not to enrich themselves. All three kinds of motivation can coexist and contribute to the overall motivation of workers to implement their ideas (Van Hoye, 2013).

Often the absence of barriers that undermine creativity, like destructive criticism or strict control, is already enough to motivate creativity (Amabile, 1997). A study identified nine elements in the work environment that support creativity. These elements are: Teamwork, autonomy, encouragement, enough time to think, challenging goals, creative tasks, recognition for creative ideas, task rotation, rewards for creative implementations and results. Some of the factors being of intrinsic and some of extrinsic nature (Horng et al., 2016).

### 2.5.1 Task complexity

One intrinsic motivation for employees is working on an interesting and challenging task. If a person has general interest in the topic, they will be motivated to spend time on it (Cummings, 1965). A challenging problem can be motivating for employees who are convinced to have the necessary skills to solve it (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019).

### 2.5.2 Training and career development

Whenever an employee shows interest in an area the company should help to develop the skills and abilities of the worker in this field. According to the Componential Theory, employees with higher expertise are likelier to provide ideas in this field (Amabile, 1997). Moreover, employees will feel more valued and respected when they are offered these

development opportunities and are likelier to engage in personal creative initiatives (Chandani et al., 2016).

### *2.5.3 Autonomy*

Research implies those employees with more autonomy act more creatively. Excessive control of authorities is one of the factors that negatively affects engagement (Chandani et al., 2016). Thus, self-controlled work and increased responsibility motivate the employee to test their own ideas. Workers who can manage their own tasks, time and workload are able to find time to participate in creativity more frequently (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010).

### *2.5.4 Physical environment*

Physical aspects like interior design can motivate creativity. Natural lighting and pleasant sound ambient are related to a more creative workforce. People working in this environment show a higher intrinsic motivation to act creatively (Horng et al., 2016). Moreover, studies show that an open work environment without dedicated offices increases creativity (Ashkenas, 1999).

### *2.5.5 Bonus*

Companies can choose to offer their creative employees a bonus. Monetary incentives can come in many forms, such as an increase in salary, a cash bonus, gift cards or many more. Even though these rewards are not unusual it is more efficient in Western cultures to raise intrinsic motivation of employees to act creatively (Chandani et al., 2016). However, in other countries, such as China, extrinsic motivation might be more significant (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019).

### *2.5.6 Goals and feedback*

Clear project goals help employees to focus on the important tasks and are extrinsic motivators for creativity. As mentioned in the Goal Setting Theory, employees are motivated to work towards something and will use their creative abilities to reach it. Another external stimulus is frequent feedback. This will motivate them to get good feedback and increases their motivation to perform well on their creative task (Amabile, 1997).

## *2.6 Conceptual framework*

In seeking to respond to the research questions of the study, the proposed conceptual model (Figure I) is based on several articles. The figure below portrays the basic concepts and respective relationships that the present research seeks to explore. This conceptual model was developed based on several scientific papers. First creative engagement is explained with the help of Kular et al. (2008) to give context. Creative engagement is a wide topic, barriers to engagement are only a subsection as well as the reasons to engage creatively. There are many published works that partially mention barriers but not excessively. Papers by Robertson-Smith & Markwick (2009), Caniëls & Rietzschel (2015) or Mostafa & El-Masry (2008) give certain insights into perceived challenges and contribute to answering research question one.

The Componential Theory by Amabile (1997) lays a foundation to explain why employees act creatively and is complemented by other approaches. Crant (2000) argues that employees make two judgments before engaging creatively. These two theoretical models aim to answer research question two. To go into more detail some specific motivational factors are additionally described.

Moreover, leadership behaviour can influence perceived barriers as well as motivation. Two research works were mainly used to assess how leaders affect the perception of workers. Amabile et al. (2004) gives good insights into this topic which are accompanied by the findings of Alblooshi et al (2021).

Figure I – Conceptual framework
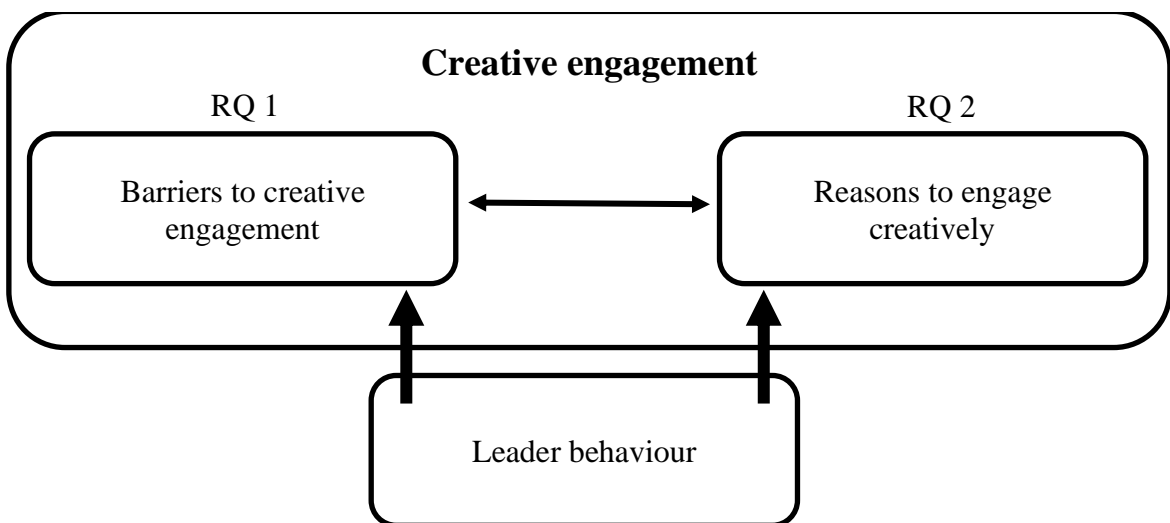
# 3. METHOD

Existing research does not describe the creativity barriers from the point of view of employees precisely enough, hence exploratory research helps to discover new insights (Saunders et al., 2009). The resulting data collection and analysis should help to lay a foundation for further research.

## *3.1 Design and data collection*

To create a fundamental understanding of the topic an in-depth literature review was carried out. Most existing research focuses on the perspective of companies and how they arguably fight barriers for creative employees (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2015). The current empirical research describes the creativity barriers from the point of view of employees precisely and can complement literature in a significant way. An exploratory research strategy is used, which allows discovering and studying new insights. The resulting data collection and analysis can help to lay a foundation for future research (Cuffe, 2007). A qualitative research approach suits best to answer the research questions of this dissertation. Qualitative interviews were carried out to explore the problem and understand the underlying motives of the participants (Kothari, 2004).

The interviews contained open-ended questions and were done in person and via video call. Due to the coronavirus, it was not possible to see all participants in person. However, other channels such as Zoom, Skype, or MS Teams created a good alternative to have a face-to-face conversation (Saunders et al., 2009).

An advantage of personal communication is that further explanation of the topic can be given to the interviewee and an emphasis on certain aspects of the question can be given with verbal stimuli (Kothari, 2004). Each participant was interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Thus, the interviewee was alone with the researcher and could speak freely about the questions. Since participants and companies are anonymised, the one-to-one basis helped to guarantee confidentiality (Saunders et al., 2009).

Right at the start of each interview, the participants officially stated that they consent to an audio recording of the conversation. An audio recording makes it easiest for the interviewer to fully focus on the partner and ask follow-up questions (Kothari, 2004). A natural flow is maintained since there is no extensive notetaking. Furthermore, the

recording helps later to transcribe the interview and the researcher can once again analyse the content without any distraction (Creswell, 2009).

## *3.2 Selection of participants*

To provide high-quality results the author selected interview partners based on their experience with idea implementation. It was ensured that participants have already had several ideas they wanted to implement and were familiar with the topic. Another requirement for participants was that they could either speak English or German on a B2 level at least, since expressions and correct description of the circumstance was important.

In total a number of 20 interviewees took part in this research project. These respondents provided several hours of material to be analysed. After these 20 interviews no essential discoveries would have been made with additional interviews and data saturation was reached. The answers given in the interviews were sufficient to analyse the underlying research questions.

It was made sure that the participants are from different industries and companies of different sizes. The smallest company of the participants only employs around 30 people and the biggest one employs over 1,000 people. Additionally, the author chose interviewees of different ages and gender to increase diversity and variety of possible answers which increase quality (Creswell, 2009). The youngest respondent was 23 years old and the oldest was 64 years old. 11 participants were male and 9 were female to ensure that answers do not have a gender bias. Some of the respondents were already working in the company for several years when they tried to implement their idea. Some were relatively shortly employed in the company. Even though the diversity among the participants is large, there were some restrictions on who would be interviewed. People in the board or senior positions did not make it into the pool of participants, since a higher position in the hierarchy affects the control over budget, time and power of decision-making. All participants needed to proactively ask for these resources to encounter potential barriers and make it into this research project. The pool of participants only consists of people working in the private sector. Public institutions such as schools, hospitals, or police departments also have many creative individuals. However, the barriers these individuals face are often caused by specific state related rules or budget restrictions (Hassan et al., 2013). Of course, these barriers would be interesting to study,

but to not exceed the frame of this dissertation a focus on private organizations was chosen.

## *3.3 Interview structure*

Interviews can be structured differently. There are structured, unstructured and semi-structured interview styles. In the course of this investigation, a semi-structured interview process was chosen. That means, that the questions and topics are previously defined but can be adapted during the interviews (Saunders et al., 2009). Depending on the answers the interviewee gives the investigator has the chance to ask for more detailed information or change the order of the questions (Cuffe, 2007). Especially in exploratory research a certain flexibility is important (Saunders et al., 2009).

Questions were open and phrased as clearly and unbiasedly as possible. To further reduce any bias all questions were asked in a neutral tone. Especially during interviews, the researcher needs to be careful to not put any words in the mouth of the participant (Kothari, 2004). On average, the interviews lasted 26 minutes and 33 seconds and participants were always able to answer all questions without a hurry. A total of 12 questions were previously designed confirming with the critical incident technique (CIT). This CIT can be defined as "a research method in which the research participant is asked to recall and describe a time when a behaviour, action, or occurrence impacted (either positively or negatively) a specified outcome" (Rosala, 2020). Questions were designed to introduce the respondent carefully to the topic before asking more complex questions about motives and feelings, as the CIT suggests (Saunders et al., 2009). The interview guide can be found in Annex 1.

The questions had three main purposes. At the start of the conversation some "warm-up" questions were asked to understand why the interviewee chose this particular incident to talk about. During the middle part of the interview the questions relate to the barriers of this incident and tools they used to overcome them. This part should later answer the research questions. In the final part of the interview the participant was asked to reflect on the experience and had the chance to add details they felt were still left out.

The general topics of the questions were sent beforehand, so that the respondent could refresh their memory and look up documents if needed. Some might argue that the responses are not as natural in this case but in exploratory topics in can help to increase the quality of the answers and reduce interview time (Saunders et al., 2009).

## *3.4 Process of analysis*

As mentioned before, the interviews were audio recorded. The first step after an inquiry is to transcribe the recording and mark important statements. To make the transcriptions the program "f4 transcript" was used. Writing down the answers of the participants can be vital for the analysis' success, because it makes it easier to identify new discoveries (Kothari, 2004). Since this is an exploratory topic, a flexible structure is of utter importance (Saunders et al., 2009). After every few interviews the questions were slightly adapted to the already received inputs of the participants to make future interviews even more effective. The participants were mainly Austrians, and the interviews were therefore held in German. To have a uniform collection of interviews they were then translated to English. All interviews can be provided on demand but are not included in the Annex of this dissertation.

A colour coding system was developed with the tool "f4 analysis". Answers can be grouped by marking them a predefined colour which helps to reveal what answers add value to which research question. All groups can then be easily summarized which gives a great overview of all statements per group. To start with, three main categories were developed and used to code the interviews. After careful consideration these three categories were further divided into 11 subcategories. Table I in chapter 4.1 provides a summary and description of the categories. After analysing all interviews, the results were compared to the literature findings. Similarities and differences were highlighted and are presented in the Discussion.

# 4. RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the interviews are presented and analysed. The analysis is organized in several subsections. Each sub-chapter refers to a category. They are summarized and described in the next part. All data have been assigned to categories with care and results are evidenced through Tables with literal quotes from the interviewees.

## *4.1 Summary of categories*

After transcribing the interviews, the answers were coded according to certain topics. All data were coded and reviewed several times. In total 378 statements were characterized and put into specific subcategories, as visualized in Table I.

Table I - Frequency of codes

| Codes | Number of codes |
|---|---|
| Helping others | 17 |
| Personal development & enrichment | 26 |
| Convincement of value | 26 |
| Resources | 42 |
| Structures | 44 |
| Culture | 25 |
| Interpersonal challenges | 44 |
| Lack of support & communication | 55 |
| Other barriers | 31 |
| At the start | 22 |
| After encountering barriers | 46 |
| **Total frequency** | **378** |

First, the answers were divided into three main categories, then the statements were further specified and put into 11 smaller subcategories. In Table II are all subcategories defined to maintain consistency in their use in the process of analysing. Additionally, the Table helps to get a better understanding of each subcategory.

Table II - Summary of codes

| Category | Subcategory | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| Motivation | Helping others | The main motivation is to help others and improve their work conditions. Experts define it as prosocial motivation (Ramus & Killmer, 2007). |
| | Personal development & enrichment | This code describes the motivation to achieve a personal goal or get rewarded, thus extrinsic motivation in this category prevails (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019). |
| | Convincement of value | This code is the motivation to be creative because employees are convinced of the value of their idea. This intrinsic motivation is "performed for its own sake rather" (Hong, 2017). |
| Barriers | Resources | This code includes all resource constraints. Some examples are time, budget, qualified workers. |
| | Structures | Includes hierarchy, internal processes and other barriers related to specific work structures and methods. |
| | Culture | Schein argues that organizational culture is "the pattern of shared basic assumptions" (UKEssays, 2018). This code focuses on the shared values of the labour force. |
| | Interpersonal challenges | Interpersonal challenges arise from human interaction. This category describes all challenges that occur when people interact and different opinions clash. |
| | Lack of support & communication | This category describes incidents where lack of communication and missing support acted as barriers. |
| | Other barriers | Includes all other kinds of barriers described. EG: Technical barriers, special circumstances, etc. |
| Emotional state | At the start | All emotions related to the moment the employee officially started a creative initiative. |
| | After encountering barriers | Positive and negative emotions and consequences that resulted from the perceived barriers |

## *4.2 Category Motivation*

This category describes the motivation of the employees to implement an idea. In existing research, the motivation described is the initial motivation to start an initiative. The author focuses on motivation to deal with an idea despite barriers and challenges. It is interesting to see what motivates employees, even if the process does not go smoothly.

## *4.2.1 Helping others*

As previously described in the literature analysis, the motivation to help others can be defined as prosocial motivation (Ramus & Killmer, 2007). This type of motivation is one of the three subcategories that the author uses to analyse motivation of interviewees.

During the interviews, 9 participants mentioned that helping others is part of their motivation to implement an idea even though challenges might make the process more difficult. A total of 7 of the 9 people even emphasized that their greatest motivation is to implement an idea when they realize that this idea will help others. It can therefore be said that for 35% of the respondents, the motivation was the well-being of others and the company. Out of these 7 people, 3 specifically saw the need of the employees as a motivation. The ones worried about the well-being of their colleagues mostly stated that they tried to reduce the workload for their co-workers. Another 3 participants wanted to help the company to get better in an area. It is fascinating that almost 50% of these 7 people find helping the company their biggest motivation. It is often difficult to understand why and to which degree an employee feels responsible to help the company and make it more profitable without great personal gain. Just one person mentioned that both company efficiency and employee well-being are their key drivers of motivation. Table III displays some quotes supporting the above comments.

Table III - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Helping others)

| Helping co-workers | "I felt like my idea is helping others" (Interview 2, paragraph 16)<br>"The idea was to help the workers with their workload" (Interview 18, Paragraph 12) |
|---|---|
| Help the company | "solely to help the company become more efficient and cut costs." (Interview 4, Paragraph 22)<br>"the main point for me was that the company could have a really cool product" (Interview 10, Paragraph 19) |
| Help both | "my intention was to help the company and make all of our lives easier" (Interview 5, Paragraph 20) |

## *4.2.2 Personal development and enrichment*

When someone is trying to achieve a goal or get a reward it is considered extrinsic motivation (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019). The next subcategory summarizes motivation related to career opportunities and pursuing interests. Some of the motivating reasons in this subcategory are therefore extrinsic in nature.

11 out of 20 people described personal development as at least part of their motivation to implement an idea despite challenges. Of the 11 people, 5 stated this was their top motivation for persevering in the face of challenges. In context of all 20 interviews, this means that 25% of the employees are driven by self-development and enrichment. Compared to other categories, this is the rarest motivation among employees in this research.

As mentioned in several scientific articles, there can be a monetary bonus for implementing an idea if it was officially announced to the organisation, for example through an idea software (Chandani et al., 2016). Even though a few employees said that they got a monetary bonus or wished for one none of them mentioned a bonus as their primary motivation. This means that 100% of the participants that stated personal enrichment as their main driver were not driven by money, which would be a clear extrinsic factor. All of them either mentioned building up knowledge and status or working on their personal passions as motivation to be creative. In Table IV are some examples displayed. The interview participants highlighted that they primarily implement ideas in areas that they themselves find interesting and want to know more about.

Table IV - Supporting quotes (Personal development and enrichment)

| |
|---|
| "An idea that I implement, even though I have a lot to do, must really be an idea I am passionate about." (Interview 3, Paragraph 17) |
| "I wanted to be seen in the big company and thought that project is a great way to do so." (Interview 11, Paragraph 14) |
| "People want to pursue their passion. Self-realization is one of the main drivers I think." (Interview 13, Paragraph 44) |
| "When a topic is really interesting I follow up on the ideas and implemented them." (Interview 16, Paragraph 9) |

### 4.2.3 Convincement of value

This subcategory is about the motivation to implement something because the employees were convinced it was a good idea. They were impressed by the value of the idea and therefore motivated by it. If you do something without hoping for a great reward but rather for its own sake, it is called intrinsic motivation (Hong, 2017). The answers of interviewees in this subcategory often indicate intrinsic motivation.

During the research it was noticed that this type of motivation is the most common. A total of 15 participants named intrinsic reasons that at least partly contribute to their

motivation. This means that for 75% of respondents the value of the idea contributed somewhat to the overall motivation. 40% of all participants even answered that this motivation is the decisive point for them to want to implement an idea. Table V shows some answers indicating this type of motivation.

During the interviews, some employees also mentioned that their idea would be very simple to implement, but that the effect would be huge. Thus, they weighed the effort against the benefit. Even if they did not get a direct improvement from the idea themselves, employees wanted to implement their idea if they were convinced of its value. The interviewees often said that their idea was just too good not to try to implement it.

Interestingly, nearly a third out of the 15 interviewees also mentioned that they would check with their colleagues to see if they think that the idea is valuable too. Once colleagues confirm a certain value the employees are motivated to implement it.

Table V- Answer categories and supporting quotes (Convincement of value)

| Convinced of value | "I was so convinced of the idea I was motivated to change the mind of the others. I did not lose my drive." (Interview 1, Paragraph 31) <br> "I was convinced that my idea is a good idea." (Interview 5, Paragraph 38) |
|---|---|
| Considering effort and value | "The effort was less than the value added so I tried to implement it." (Interview 10, Paragraph 9) <br> "Not implementing the idea caused more trouble and resources than sitting down for 10 minutes." (Interview 5, Paragraph 38) |
| Check with colleagues | "Whenever I realize that others really like the idea when I talk with them about it, I will try to implement it." (Interview 7, Paragraph 9) <br> "I always check my ideas with colleagues." (Interview 14, Paragraph 9) |

## *4.3 Category Barriers*

In the interviews, an attempt was made to reveal as many challenges as possible that employees had to master during the implementation of their ideas. These barriers are very versatile but can still be summarized in a few subcategories.

Be aware that one employee can name multiple barriers they encountered and several of these barriers might relate to one subcategory. That means that even though there are 20 interviewees, there could be more than 20 times the employees mentioned one subcategory as a barrier.

### *4.3.1 Lack of support and communication*

Lack of support and communication was the most cited barrier during the interviews. 85% of respondents encountered at least one barrier related to this category.

The respondents mentioned 10 different times, that ineffective communication was a problem. Most employees stated that there was not enough dialogue and missing feedback. For example, one participant mentioned that it was difficult to communicate between parties to get the idea approved.

Most of the barriers in this subcategory specifically relate to the lack of support and need for a sponsorship. In total 11 statements were identified, in which the employees were missing a support system. Some respondents said they were alone with the task and overworked. Others mentioned they would have needed a sponsor from someone in the management team to support them in getting the resources they needed. Further exemplary answers can be found in Table VI.

The analysis showed that 5 issues arose because their superior did not follow up on the idea suggestion. In these 5 incidents the interviewees had to be persistent and continuously ask for support and hoped for further actions from management.

Shockingly, there were another 5 barriers identified in which other colleagues and superiors discouraged the idea implementation. In these cases, the idea was not supported too little, but an active attempt was made to denigrate the idea and prevent the employee from implementing it. For instance, one employee said the idea was not taken seriously by superiors but instead the employee was declared lazy.

Table VI - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Lack of support and communication)

| | |
|---|---|
| Bad communication | "The problem was the communication and the decision of what is important to communicate and what not." (Interview 9, Paragraph 30) "The communication was all over the place and roles were not clear." (Interview 11, Paragraph 20) |
| Lack of support | "Sponsorship is very important for ideas. You need someone from a higher management level who is also behind it" (Interview 20, Paragraph 33) „Unfortunately, the lack of resources prevented the necessary support. I was completely left alone with this challenge" (Interview 8, Paragraph 33) |
| Discouragement | "The old leaders don't like and don't support ideas, they say things like "You are here to work and not to think"." (Interview 17, Paragraph 19) |

## *4.3.2 Interpersonal challenges*

When humans interact with each other it is normal that conflicts arise. In this subcategory are all barriers summarized that originate from interactions at work. Lack of support and bad communication could potentially be characterized as an interpersonal challenge too. However, since lack of support builds its own subcategory, this subsection summarizes all interpersonal barriers except the ones related to lack of support and communication or any other subcategory separately analysed.

Three quarters of those surveyed named at least one interpersonal challenge. Some even struggled with several interpersonal issues. The most mentioned barrier in this subcategory is the resistance of people to change. During the interviews the respondents very often claimed that there is simply no willingness to change something. There were 3 main arguments the interviewees made. The first one being the resistance of the co-workers to change, the second being the resistance of management and superiors, and lastly the general resistance of all people to support change. Interestingly, the resistance of co-workers was named as a problem 6 times, but management was also blamed 6 times for not being open to change. Another 7 answers refer to the refusal to change by the "people". To summarize, an equal number of barriers were identified for the first two arguments. It should be remembered that some interviewees might have experienced barriers from management and co-workers, contributing answers to both arguments. It can be observed that the resistance from co-workers often stems from the fear of being replaced by the idea the person is trying to implement. For instance, one respondent wanted to introduce a Chatbot to reduce workload for the customer service team, but co-workers felt threatened by it. The resistance of management is more difficult to analyse, some interviewees argue that management does not see the need for change.

Another interpersonal challenge mentioned 6 times is the difficulty to manage the interests of all stakeholders. Especially the decision-making process can be very long and complex when many people with different interests are involved. A total of 4 answers indicate that the barrier was the work position. Since some respondents are general work staff at the bottom of the hierarchy their ideas are not taken seriously by management. Lacking authority and assertiveness of the boss was mentioned twice as a challenge during the process of idea implementation. Table VII supports the assumptions by quoting participants.

Table VII - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Interpersonal challenges)

| | |
|---|---|
| Resistance of co-workers | "Another challenge was the resistance of other colleagues. They were afraid to lose their jobs to these external." (Interview 19, Paragraph 30) "The resistance of the service people was definitely the biggest challenge. Giving someone more work just because it's your "nice" idea is always hard." (Interview 14, Paragraph 31) |
| Resistance of management | "I looked at a confused face of my supervisor. He said "Why would you change our system? We always did it like that?"" (Interview 15, Paragraph 27) "My boss for example was old fashioned and didn't want his work influenced with something new." (Interview 19, Paragraph 37) |
| Different interests | "It is difficult to identify internal stakeholders and think about their needs and then recognize irrational needs." (Interview 20, Paragraph 23) |
| Bottom level | "The managers kind of look down on the regular workers and do not take ideas of them seriously." (Interview 16, Paragraph 36) |

## *4.3.3 Resources*

Ideas often need certain resources to achieve successful implementation. Four different resources were identified by the respondents as being crucial for the success of idea implementation and rare to have available. The four resources are time, money, qualified workers, and knowledge. In total 16 people, that means 80% of the interviewees, declared resource scarcity as one of their barriers to creativity. Exemplary responses are portrayed in Table VIII. All individuals stated time as the main resource constraint, and some even had multiple barriers that originated because of the lack of time. Not even half of the employees additionally mentioned budget restrictions as a resource problem. Out of the 16 people 25% mentioned a shortage of personnel as part of the reason why they had troubles during the idea process. Just one person stated that there was not enough technical knowledge present, and co-workers could not help.

Table VIII - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Resources)

| | |
|---|---|
| Time | "The problem was that we didn't really have enough time to work on this idea." (Interview 13, Paragraph 12) "Time. That's also the biggest barrier for all other ideas me and my colleagues have." (Interview 2, Paragraph 34) |
| Budget | "The budget for us and our idea implementation may not be exceeded, so financing is difficult. The salary of the managers depends on how small they keep the budget." (Interview 17, Paragraph 12) |
| Qualified workers | "The main problem why in the end it did not work was the personnel shortage." (Interview 18, Paragraph 28) |

## *4.3.4 Culture*

The organizational culture is a complex construct, and many aspects contribute to the overall culture a business is living. Schein argues that organizational culture is "the pattern of shared basic assumptions" (UKEssays, 2018). Even though other subcategories also interplay and contribute to organizational culture, this subcategory focuses on answers of employees who explicitly mentioned "culture" or a shared belief as a barrier.

Since this subcategory is rather specific it was the least mentioned barrier of individuals. However, that does not mean that it was the least significant. Even though only half of the participants unmistakably mentioned the culture as a barrier in their organization almost all the 20 interviewees think that organizational culture is of great importance when it comes to idea generation. Of the 10 participants who identified culture as a challenge, 70% described the company's overall culture as narrow-minded or power-seeking and defined it as a barrier. The other 30% argued the workers have issues trusting in abilities of other employees. Additionally, 50% mentioned the error culture as a burden to executed creativity. In these organizations the fear of failure is too high to try something new as employees are afraid of getting punishments or losing their status. All answer categories are demonstrated with examples in Table IX.

Table IX - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Culture)

| Culture overall | "The culture and people in the company are the biggest barrier." (Interview 9, Paragraph 34) |
|---|---|
| Error culture | "Now, doing something wrong means getting punishments. Doing it right is natural, nothing special. Many companies have the wrong culture for mistakes I think." (Interview 1, Paragraph 40) |
| Trust issues | "Be more trusting in the employees. In a small company like this we discuss democratically every small idea but I think sometimes they should trust that one person alone can do something." (Interview 5, Paragraph 42) |

## *4.3.5 Structures*

Many structures in organizations can empower employees to work on their ideas. However, too much bureaucracy, inefficient hierarchy or long processes can be perceived as barriers to creativity. These factors are summarized as structural barriers in this subcategory and evidence is portrayed in Table X.

80% of respondents stated at least on barrier related to the organizational structures. Most of the time the interviewees labelled the structures as long and chaotic and declared

unnecessary bureaucracy and inefficient processes as barriers to their creative projects. For instance, one employee blamed the chaotic decision-making process as main barrier, and another argued that ideas simply get lost in the long processes.

Only half as often, 6 times to be exact, the hierarchy was made accountable for the problems in the idea process. Interestingly, 5 out of the 6 times the respondents argued that the hierarchy was a barrier because it was too stiff and strict. Only once a participant mentioned the flat hierarchy as a challenge since too much discussion erupted. Another 6 times the interviewees mentioned lacking structures as barrier. Employees would have wished for a standard process or framework that assists the idea implementation. Not having a clear guideline for creative projects was perceived as a challenge.

Table X - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Structures)

| | |
|---|---|
| Chaotic structures and long processes | "If a person is not fully committed to their idea it could get lost in the process." (Interview 20, Paragraph 26)<br>"In our companies there are these long bureaucratic mills." (Interview 15, Paragraph 43) |
| Hierarchy | "This hierarchy is not supportive of change." (Interview 19, Paragraph 44)<br>"But the hierarchy in this small company is almost too flat. There is too much discussion about topics that are so unimportant." (Interview 5, Paragraph 44) |
| Missing frameworks | "There was not a clear process we could follow, and I had to know all of the steps myself." (Interview 18, Paragraph 35) |

### 4.3.6 Other barriers

In this category are the barriers summarized that could not be clearly categorized into one of the other codes. Many identified other challenges in addition to the ones described in the above paragraphs. Sometimes these barriers can be very specific to the incident. Even though it is interesting to look at, analysing each hurdle would go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Some participants mentioned the industry they were working in as a burden to practised creativity and idea implementation. Others focused very much on the challenge of technically implementing the product and handling logistics. Interestingly, a few respondents stated that management feared how they would be perceived by their clients after implementing change. One interviewee mentioned lack of understanding what management does and the complexity of a business as a burden to creative engagement.

Of course, all these barriers are important to the experience of the individuals, and it would be exciting to find out more about each one of them. However, the focus must be on the barriers that seem to be found more frequently and not only arise from a one-off situation with unique circumstances.

## *4.4 Category Emotions*

Emotions in the workplace can be relevant to employee job satisfaction. Since the employees often put a lot of personal energy into their idea, these ideas are very valuable to them and can trigger a wide variety of emotions. It is interesting to analyse how the implementation process affects the minds of employees. During the interviews two questions were asked regarding emotions of the employees. The first question is aiming to understand how employees feel at the start of their creative journey. The second question should answer how employees feel when faced with a challenge during the process of implementation.

### *4.4.1 At the start*

As described above, the first category describes the emotional state of employees at the start of the process. Out of the 20 interviewees 2 participants failed to describe their emotional state precisely. That means 18 answers can be considered for this subcategory. 3 employees had their first barrier already at the start when the project had issues getting approved and had rather neutral feelings to start with. All of the other employees had very positive emotions in the beginning, indicating that they were happy to start their project.

Interestingly, out of the remaining 18 employees which could describe their emotions half of the interviewees stated they felt motivated to work on their idea. This feeling was the most used to describe the emotional state at the start of the process. Another 22% of respondents mentioned they felt supported and appreciated. This feeling is the third most mentioned and was especially visible for employees who talked with their superior about their ideas. The superiors gave positive feedback and approved the project immediately leading to these emotions. A total of 33% simply described their emotions as "good". Representative examples are presented in Table XI. It is important to mention that some interviewees identified more than one emotion they were feeling at the time. So it can be that one employee was feeling good and supported at the same time. Lastly, a few

participants described their emotional state as being proud of themselves and nervous about the next steps in the process.

Table XI - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Emotions at the start)

| Motivated and good | "Motivated. I was excited to work on it and really wanted to finish the product as soon as possible." (Interview 10, Paragraph 16) <br> "I felt good at the start." (Interview 6, Paragraph 16) |
|---|---|
| Supported and appreciated | "Management and other departments really liked my idea and always supported it. It felt great. I felt appreciated." (Interview 7, Paragraph 16) <br> "I felt appreciated. It gave me confidence and I couldn't wait to work on it." (Interview 14, Paragraph 17) |
| Nervous and proud | "Very proud and motivated to work on this idea." (Interview 12, Paragraph 16) <br> "We were really nervous at the start to ask for permission." (Interview 13, Paragraph 29) |

## *4.4.2 After encountering barriers*

Employees encountered a variety of barriers with different magnitudes. Some barriers resulted in a delay while others were crucial for the success of the project. Therefore, employees had different emotions when dealing with the challenges they were facing.

Just like the previous category, this section has 18 viable responses from interviewees to analyse emotions. As mentioned before, a person may have used multiple emotions to express their feelings. Exemplary statements of interviewees are displayed in Table XII.

Even though there are many words to describe feelings about 28% specifically used the word "frustrated". It was one of the emotions most employees felt when they dealt with the challenges. It is interesting that another 28% seemed to maintain a very positive mindset. These rather optimistic employees got motivated by a challenge and were confident to overcome these burdens. Most of these optimistic workers had a functioning support system provided by their superior. Another 28% of the participants experienced anger and disappointment. Interestingly, all the participants that mentioned anger or disappointment also stated that their negative experience with idea implementation will lead to consequences in the future. In total, a third of the interviewees argued that the negative incident will impact their future creative engagement in the company. Most of them stated that they will never try to implement an idea in their current workplace again and 2 participants even declared this incident as part of their decision to leave the company. Even though most employees stated that they did not consider any

consequences when starting the initiative, they will think about the effects their engagement has in future projects. 3 people described their mood as nervous during the difficult phases and 3 people found it sad to have to deal with these barriers. A few participants have said, among other things, that they feel stressed, annoyed, overruled, unsatisfied and not appreciated. Of course, feelings depend on how the barriers were managed in the organisation or what the origin of the barrier was.

Table XII - Answer categories and supporting quotes (Emotions after encountering barriers)

| | |
|---|---|
| Positive | "I like challenges. It was a very good experience the whole process. After managing a barrier, I felt motivated again." (Interview 10, Paragraph 32) "It was a positive challenge and not a burden which kills my motivation." (Interview 18, Paragraph 33) |
| Frustrated and disappointed | "Frustrated. I did not understand it. It was such a waste of resources." (Interview 5, Paragraph 34) "Somehow disappointed. There are so many great ideas, but nothing happens with them." (Interview 2, Paragraph 36) |
| Incident caused consequences | "In this company I will not announce any more ideas because there is no willingness to change anything, and I have had enough. I will keep my ideas to myself." (Interview 5, Paragraph 46) "In the end this whole incident was the reason why I left the company." (Interview 16, Paragraph 14) |

## 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to compare empirical findings with existing literature. Each important standpoint is critically analysed and unbiased conclusions can be drawn.

The Componential Theory lays an important foundation for this study in analysing creative behaviour. According to this theoretical approach an individual should have knowledge, task motivation and creative skills to creatively engage in a company (Amabile, 1997). Although this theory attempts to explain some phenomena, it neglects the effect of barriers in the creative process. To close this gap, the three factors were also partially assessed during the interviews. Firstly, the knowledge component seemed to be very dependent on the ideas of the individuals. While some employees claimed missing expertise as a barrier, most of the participants had rather simple projects. Often, they suggested a simplification of processes or other trivial ideas which do not need specific knowledge in the field. The second factor, creative thinking skill, was difficult to evaluate but the participants usually described themselves as creative thinkers. Lastly, task motivation was a very important topic for employees encountering barriers. The motivation to implement creative ideas was described in detail by many participants. As explained in the Componential Theory, the largest and most common motivation was intrinsic in nature (Amabile, 1997). A proud 40% saw the value of the idea as motivation and were not deterred by challenges. As a second motivator, the literature mentions extrinsic factors, such as rewards or goal achievements (Amabile, 1997). This type of motivation was also found among participants, to be exact a total of 25% stated they were mainly extrinsically motivated. Interestingly, the Componential Theory does not pay prosocial motivation enough attention. In the interview analysis, 35% saw the need to help others as the main reason for implementing the idea, which is 10% more than in the extrinsic category. It seems that literature overvalues extrinsic motivation and fails to consider motivational factors in a broader context.

Task motivation is not the only factor influencing the willingness of people to fully engage to achieve a creative outcome. According to the cost/benefit approach, employees think more rationally about their decision to engage, besides being initially motivated to do so. Studies suggest that people make two judgements before engaging creatively. The first one is to evaluate perceived costs and benefits that come with idea implementation (Crant, 2000). During the interviews it was also detected that employees considered this evaluation. Especially participants experiencing time scarcity perceived creative

engagement as a big cost to their already rare available time. For them the value had to exceed the cost to be considered a worthwhile idea. To correctly judge the value of the idea, some participants asked co-workers to confirm the value. This aspect is neglected in articles about the effort/effect approach. Secondly, literature states that workers assess the likelihood of possible consequences deriving from creative engagement (Crant, 2000). Interviewees' answers were very diverse when they were asked if they considered consequences. Although answers were so different at the beginning of the interviews, the respondents had similar answers towards the end of the questioning. Those who have encountered many challenges and have experienced negative consequences from their idea implementation will evaluate the decision whether to engage or not more carefully in the future. They will be more concerned with the possible risks and tend to stay away from creative engagement.

It is interesting to see how negative experiences shape the intentions of employees. Also, leader behaviour can influence how someone perceives a situation. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, leaders can be catalysts for creative engagement or jeopardize it (Arikan, 2020). Depending on leader behaviour, the employees either feel supported throughout the process and stay motivated or they feel neglected and discouraged to be creative (Amabile et al., 2004). Participants surrounded by a supporting leader stayed positive throughout the project and did not let the barriers kill their motivation. However, most other respondents mentioned lack of support as number one barrier indicating that the perceived leader support was insufficient. This lack of support has led to frustration among participants. Many negative emotions were described, even by participants who initially had a positive attitude. Moreover, a third of the interviewees even refuse to implement their creative ideas in the future or changed employers. Thus, interview results confirm the literature in this regard. Leader behaviour, especially negative behaviour like lacking support, influences the emotional state of employees which leads to decreased creative engagement (Amabile et al., 2004).

Besides the lack of support there were several other barriers mentioned. Another major challenge was the interpersonal conflict between employees. Especially the resistance to change of the people was perceived as a barrier to practised creativity. In literature both the resistance of employees as well as the resistance of the workforce are described as barriers (Spring, 2021). Interview results agree with literature and find that colleagues resist change because they are afraid to be replaced. Also, managers seem to resist change, but reasons are more hidden. Literature mentions co-workers and their attitudes in general

more often as a barrier than superiors, but the interviews have contrary results (Zhang et al., 2020). Co-workers' opinions can act as motivators to change and are less perceived as challenges. Hierarchical difficulties and resources are both declared as barriers in literature as well as empirical findings. Literature states the authority bias and the "hierarchy of no" as main problems in highly hierarchical organizations (Burkus, 2012). Interview findings confirm that both can be present but especially the "hierarchy of no" is a perceived barrier. Instead of giving the idea a chance, managers reject ideas simply because they see no need for it. Another barrier identified in existing research is the organizational culture (Agbor, 2008). The interview results comply and reveal culture as hurdle to overcome in the idea implementation process. However, interviewees specifically focus on the mistake culture and fear of failure. One barrier mentioned a lot by participants is the organizational structure. 80% of interviewees experienced problems in the process because of excessive bureaucracy and long processes. Some articles might imply structural difficulties as barriers, but they are not the primary focus of most studies. To sum up, the current research produced the following key points:

i)  The Componential Theory lays an accurate foundation to study creative behaviour but should consider prosocial motivation more. Moreover, extensive expertise is not always necessary to come up with ideas.

ii)  As suggested by literature, employees do consider effort and effect of their ideas before implementing them. The effect is often confirmed by co-workers before starting an initiative.

iii)  Employees that experienced barriers will consider them in future decisions to start an initiative. Without previous negative experiences, consequences are not a major concern for workers.

iv)  Barriers can be very diverse. However, many problems derive from human interactions. Some of them being lack of support & communication, resistance of people to change, and an unsupportive culture. Other barriers emerge from organizational structures, hierarchies (of no), and resource constraints.

v)  Barriers drastically affect the emotional state of creative individuals. These strong negative emotions affect behaviour. Some might refrain from creative engagement in the future while others might change employer.

vi)  Leaders influence how barriers are perceived. A supportive environment created by leaders is fundamental for practised creativity.

# 6. CONCLUSION

Creative behaviour of employees can give companies a major competitive advantage (Mostafa & El-Masry, 2008). Unfortunately, there are many factors in the idea process that can act as barriers (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). This chapter identifies these barriers and explains why employees still engage in creativity.

## *6.1 General conclusion*

Due to extensive research conducted several barriers could be identified and can answer the research question one "What circumstances do employees perceive as barriers to implementing their creative ideas?" The biggest barriers to creative engagement are human actions or the lack thereof. Primarily, the lack of support and bad communication among colleagues were characterized as difficulties in the process. One interviewee described the discouragement as following: "The old leaders don't like and don't support ideas, they say things like: You are here to work and not to think" (Interview 17). Furthermore, the resistance of workers at all hierarchical levels is a perceived burden in creative projects. Another challenge is to manage all interests of the stakeholders involved, especially when communication processes are chaotic and long. Besides the human barriers other factors make it challenging to implement an idea, too. Resource constraints, especially time scarcity, very often hinder employees to implement their idea. Organizational structures can be either too chaotic or too vague. Companies need to find a compromise between setting guidelines and giving complete autonomy. Other barriers identified are hierarchical levels and power positions that make idea implementation unsuccessful. Lastly, unsupportive culture, such as a strict error culture, is a barrier that decreases creative engagement.

After revealing so many barriers, it seems impossible to find motivation to introduce an idea. Thus, one might ask "Why do employees engage creatively?". Due to the combination of literature and interview findings this research question can be answered as well. As the Componential Theory suggests, the motivation to be creative can be resistant to barriers. Employees are intrinsically motivated by the value of their idea, and they simply want to try to implement it. It should be added that also prosocial motivation can be a major driver for employees to start a creative project. Helping colleagues and helping the company, in general, is a motivational factor for workers. Besides being

motivated, employees look at the effort and effect their idea will have to decide if it is worthwhile to act on it. When making negative experiences employees will consider the negative incidents for future idea implementations and might refrain to start an initiative.

Leader behaviour can influence the experience employees have with idea implementation. Supportive leaders seem to decrease the effect the barriers have on employees' attitudes. However, inadequate leader behaviour is triggering negative emotions even more. That means, that the magnitudes of barriers and the motivation to be creative is partially influenced by the leaders the employees work with.

To conclude, barriers should not be underestimated, as they can have severe consequences for employees' attitudes. Effective leader behaviours should be practised and ensure a supportive environment for idea implementation. Only then can intrinsic motivation of employees to engage creatively be maintained.

## 6.2 Research limitations

This dissertation has some limitations, which may influence the results of the study. Even though the author tried to have a diverse pool of participants, all interviewees were selected by the author, which could lead to sample selection bias. Even though the sample size was sufficiently large, the research cannot be generalized completely. Firstly, all participants described unique incidents. Their experiences can be influenced by the personality, the job tasks, and other hidden factors. Secondly, the respondents were Austrians. Although this gives new insights into the Austrian work culture, it limits outcomes to Western Societies. Thirdly, the respondents were working in different sectors, but not all industries are represented in this study, which may affect results.

## 6.3 Recommendations for future research

Future research should focus on the magnitude of barriers. This dissertation aimed to identify the most common barriers, but future studies could classify them in magnitude and see how much each barrier affects the success of the project. Furthermore, this research only analysed barriers in the private sector. Future investigations about barriers in the public sector could reveal interesting results. As this research showed, many employees mentioned prosocial motives as their main driver. More focus should be laid on this type of motivation and how important it is for creative engagement.

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# ANNEX

## *ANNEX I -Interview guide*

*Warm up*

Think of 2 different ideas you had: One where you did not take any actions to implement it and one idea which you started to work on and tried to introduce into your organization. What was the difference between these 2 ideas?

1: I asked you before the interview to think about an idea you already had at work. Could you please describe this idea? Why did you choose to talk about this incident?

2: To whom in your workplace did you speak first after coming up with the idea?

3: How did they react and how did their reaction make you feel?

4: What did you think were the possible consequences your initiative could have in the company regarding how colleagues see you, career development, etc.?

5: Why did you decide to start an initiative to implement your idea?

6: How did you announce this idea to your organization? (e.g.: idea box, meetings, informal,..).

7: Could you please describe what happened after you tried to bring attention to your idea.

8: What were the challenges you faced during the process of idea generation and implementation, and which one was the biggest barrier for you?

9: How did these challenges make you feel?

10: What was the origin of these barriers/challenges?

11: If you would come up with this idea now, what would you do differently?

12: What can be done differently by the company?

Would you like to add anything?