



A COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR THE EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Viktorija JAKUBAUSKYTĖ-ANDRIULIENĖ 

Department of Entertainment Industries, Faculty of Creative Industries, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Trakų g. 1, LT-01132 Vilnius, Lithuania

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Abstract. Creativity is a key competence of present and future-oriented employees of the business organisations, as well as a prerequisite for the success of the companies. By conducting a comprehensive literature review this article discusses on the concept of creativity in organisations, the role of communication in managing the expression of employee creativity. Furthermore, in response to the contemporary needs of organisations to comply with the legal requirements based on the European Union directives on the integration of sustainability into the activities of organisations, the article also examines the concept of sustainability and its intersection with the organisational culture of companies and communication. The communication model developed on the basis of the theoretical assumptions includes empowering, managing and engaging communication, through which the organisational culture promotes the creative expression of employees and their involvement in the implementation of sustainability practices in organisations. In addition, the integration of sustainability as a distinct theme and strategic direction into the organisational culture is also noted and embedded.

Keywords: communication, communication model, creative expression, creativity, organisational culture, sustainability.

 Corresponding author. E-mail: viktorija.jakubauskyte@gmail.com

1. Introduction

As the world faces challenges to environment, human life and well-being, governments, private business and individuals join forces towards sustainability goals, which aim “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987). The adoption of sustainability practices in business has so far been voluntary and largely driven by the need to ensure a reputation as a socially responsible company. However, following the approval of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards these practices become obligatory for the businesses. Given the importance of the sustainability objectives and the inevitable integration of the issue into the activities of the companies, the question arises whether the creativity of employees is harnessed in the personal, professional and social spheres and how this is influenced by organisational culture and communication practices.

The enhancement of the creativity element in organisations is not unambiguously understood. Theoretically, the promotion of this characteristic at the individual, team or organisational level and at different stages of the business life cycle is perceived as a positive element that helps organisations to stand out from the rest and gives them a competitive advantage (Zabelavičius et al., 2011; Girdauskiene, 2013; Župerkienė & Šimanskytė, 2014). However,

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researchers who are more oriented towards psychological theories argue that creativity is not sufficiently enhanced in organisations and in some cases is not supported due to the inherent personal characteristics of the creators – the uncertainty and immeasurability of the creative process, or the time-consuming nature of the process and the distraction from other tasks (Bilton, 2015; Kačerauskas, 2014). In light of this debate, it is relevant to analyse the topic of employee creativity from a communication science perspective, to identify how organisations can communicate to embed employee creativity in their organisational culture, and which communication model works most effectively within an organisation to encourage employees to develop and implement new ideas related to the implementation of sustainability practices. On the other hand, it is important to know whether sustainability initiatives in businesses are becoming a part of the organisational culture and whether the employees of the companies are implementing them with a conscious understanding of their meaning and implications. All of these components – organisational culture, employee creativity and its expression, sustainability – are linked by communication, which involves not only the empowerment and engagement of employees, but also, in a sense, the communicative aspect of management, which fosters or controls the creative expression of employees. Therefore, the topic is relevant to business companies due to the new theoretical insights that can be applied in practice.

The scientific problem of the paper is the lack of research on the relationship between the applied communication tools and models and the organisational culture and employee creativity in the implementation of sustainability practices in the business companies.

The aim of the paper is to develop a communication model that supports organisational culture and creative expression of employees through the conscious implementation of sustainability practices.

In order to achieve this objective, the following research objectives are formulated:

- By analysing scientific literature, define the concepts of creativity and its expression, organisational culture and sustainability practices, identifying the interrelationships between these areas;
- To develop a theoretical model of communication that covers aspects of organisational culture, employee creativity and its expression, and sustainability practices.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted in order to gather conceptual information for the purpose of modelling. The literature was selected according to the following criteria: relevance, quality of the source, credibility. The data from academic sources was subjected to analysis and synthesis, resulting in the development of a communication model that addresses the aforementioned goal and topics.

2. The concept of creativity in the context of sustainability

The understanding of creativity has expanded over time and is now referred to almost all areas of human activity or life. Creativity is a prerequisite for the success of modern business (Almonaitienė, 2011), and is understood as a driver of social and economic progress (Bilton, 2015). Moreover, creativity is one of the key competences of the present and future human being, related to problem solving and the ability to generate new and original ideas in order to meet the expectations of society at large (Cropley, 2006). In modern times, creativity has led to advances in science and technology (Zhou & George, 2001) and improved the quality

of people's lives, but at the same time, the question is how creativity is used and whether it is not contributing to the growth of the current societal issues of sustainability and the environment through the outputs it generates (especially through the new products that are produced in large numbers in industrial companies). As Montuori and Donnelly (2020) state, in contributing to the future, creativity must be associated with a greater responsibility towards society, and therefore technological and engineering creativity must not only be used to develop new products, but also to be able to apply theorems and strategies to different contexts, or to form systems of understanding the world that people can use to solve current problems (Cropley, 2006).

Dunphy (2011) identifies the key characteristics of forward-looking sustainable businesses: pro-active initiation of change, creative adaptation to change through the development of solutions, new products, services, new technological innovations, and the creation of business sectors that are less resource-intensive and have a lower environmental impact. Successful organisations of the future will be those that seek change and are disruptive, rather than those that resist change and seek to maintain the status quo (Dunphy, 2011). Employee innovativeness, which is embedded in the value system of organisations, needs to address the needs of society and individual user groups. According to Maceika et al. (2007), employee innovativeness consists of creativity and entrepreneurship, and must therefore be considered in terms of how well it fits with the value perception of the global society. In the context of the sustainability theme, it can be argued that the practices introduced and their integration into the day-to-day activities of the organisation are in line with society's value perception of the need for sustainability.

3. Creativity in organisations

Creativity in business enterprises can be analysed at two levels: personal and organisational.

Personal creativity in organisations is often seen as the basis of innovation (Amabile, 1988) and is inherent in originality and the ability to communicate one's experience as a creator (Negus & Pickering, 2004). Research on the effectiveness of creativity techniques shows that individuals generate more and better ideas than those working in groups (Dunnette et al., 1963), but according to Urban (1991), the conditions for the personal creativity are: 1) special knowledge, abilities, skills; 2) divergent thinking; 3) general knowledge; 4) tolerance of uncertainty; 5) motivation; and 6) the ability to perform a task (Zabelavičius et al., 2011). Amabile (1998) identified similar components – creative ability, expertise, motivation – and argued that effective creativity in organisations requires the interaction and synergy of all these elements.

Caldeira (2019) proposes that, in order to ensure a healthier and more creative work environment, it is necessary to take into account: 1) intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which depends on the emotional, mental and physical well-being of employees, and which encourages them to engage in activities for the sake of enjoying them; 2) the meaningfulness of the activity, which is not only linked to the organisation's goals and their purpose, but also to the employee's autonomy, the freedom to plan their work, and to develop their knowledge; 3) the commitment to the organisation's goals; 4) the self-awareness of their work and to discover one's own definition of one's role as an employee and its meaning at work.

Together with internal organisational factors, such as financial position, human resource management, innovation (Baležentis, 2007), creativity is also influenced by the social environment: the people who are around the creator and with whom ideas can be exchanged through communication (Kačerauskas, 2014).

Organisational creativity is relevant in business practice and is related to an organisation's ability to generate and implement new ideas, to adapt quickly and effectively to changing external conditions, and to renew itself (Almonaitienė, 2011). Such collective creativity is strongly influenced by managers, the leadership they show (Strazdas et al., 2010) and the communication they use to motivate, inspire, develop and encourage employees. Managers' ability and willingness to think creatively promotes the creative potential of the organisation (Župerkienė & Šimanskytė, 2014). Amabile (1998) wrote that managers can encourage or kill creativity, and identified six management practices that affect employee creativity: 1) challenges that are consistent with the employee's abilities, supporting motivation and enthusiasm; 2) adequate resources of time and money to meet challenges; 3) freedom to choose how to act; 4) building teams with different abilities and competences but equal motivation to achieve goals; 5) support and intercession from managers, displaying a leadership model and learning from mistakes; 6) organisational support and a culture that encourages creativity.

The promotion of creativity at both the individual and organisational level helps to create a creative environment in an organisation, where breaking stereotypes and rules leads to the development of innovative solutions and intellectual property, which are beneficial not only to the organisation, but also to the society (Župerkienė & Šimanskytė, 2014).

4. The role of communication in creativity management

The promotion or management of creativity is inseparable from strategic communication, which aims to mobilise creative employees by clearly defining creativity goals and motives (Kačerauskas, 2014). In an era of media diversity and technology, communication requires a variety of tools that bring together demographically diverse or disparate groups of employees, giving them equal access to information (Thatcher & Brown, 2010). On the other hand, creativity management is not only about disseminating information or providing a creative environment in the physical and social environment, but also purposeful and qualitative direction with soft control and support (Mumford et al., 2011). Maceika et al. (2007) view creativity as a complex and difficult process that cannot be controlled directly, so it is necessary to define the desired end result and to be able to communicate an appealing vision that gives meaning to the work. The authors also stress the importance of the availability of information and link the promotion of creativity to the creation of an enabling environment, the setting of objectives, the allocation of resources, evaluation, rewards and the use of group work. Satell (2017), while emphasising the role of the leader, argues that the most effective communication for creativity is in organisations where communicators are both the senders and receivers of the messages. A symmetrical communication model, where feedback is sought and information is not received from a single source, promotes creativity among employees because it engages them in cognitive processes of evaluating different information (Lee &

Kim, 2021). Caldeira (2019) uses the metaphor of a tree to create employee engagement and motivation, saying that the roots are favourable working conditions, personal relationships and a sense of belonging to the team, job security, clear hierarchy and fairness, status, and fair rewards. The other elements – feedback, recognition, well-being (work-life balance), understanding why and for whom work is done – are the trunk of the motivation tree, with the top or crown consisting of the nature of the work, responsibility and autonomy, learning, prospects and growth, achievement and the adrenaline rush of success, and the satisfaction of the results. As can be seen, although some of the aspects relate to elements of management, most of them are in the area of organisational communication. Kačerauskas (2014) summarises that creatives require strong principles, clear rules, but also freedom of communication, good conditions and respectful leadership.

5. Creativity in the context of organisational culture

Creativity is a social dimension and is influenced by the social context, a person's belonging to a particular social group, organisation (Dunphy, 2011). Organisational culture also has certain cultural layers – values, norms, standards, symbols, heroes, communication styles, a certain sequence of actions and procedures – that influence the overall atmosphere of the organisation, and therefore it can be argued that an organisational culture, promoted by means of purposeful internal communication, creates the preconditions for human creativity and its expression (Smaliukienė & Survilas, 2018). Leaders who wish to enhance the creativity of employees must understand the cultural and value aspects (Schein, 2004). In order to foster creativity as a value, it is essential to include it in the company's philosophy and culture (Zabielavičius et al., 2011), as well as take concrete actions, such as change the behaviour of managers and create a constructive psychological climate. In addition, the definition of an organisation's purpose, or meaning of existence, is also important, which, according to Rigby et al. (2023), motivates employees to develop innovative products or solve problems creatively. The authors emphasise that creating value for all stakeholders in an organisation is a driver of innovation and creativity.

The importance of organisational culture for creativity is highlighted by Girdauskienė (2013), and Župerkienė and Šimanskytė (2014), who state that creativity flourishes only in an environment where risk is tolerated, positive self-awareness, openness to change, self-confidence, freedom of action and autonomy, a clear vision, appropriate management and the fostering of continuous learning prevail. Keyton (2005) argues that members of an organisation are united by a common culture (values, artefacts, attitudes) and communication (interpersonal and between organisational units) in order to achieve common organisational, personal and professional goals. Therefore, creativity management as a management category should, by definition, be integrated at both the institutional and the communicative levels (Martins & Terblanche, 2003). On the one hand, communication about the organisational culture and its elements creates the preconditions for employees to identify with the organisation and to be oriented towards common goals. On the other hand, organisational culture itself can influence communication and its organisation: the process of information sharing, decision-making, the choice of communication channels, the tone of communication (Schein, 2004).

Daniel R. Denison (1990) asserts that organisational culture has a positive impact on employees' professional development, and that the communication elements of empowerment and engagement provide employees with opportunities for improvement and orientation towards teamwork. In addition, the author pointed out that organisational culture communication should be linked to strategic directions and goals, while being consistent and oriented towards the organisation's adaptation to change and customer needs, as well as towards organisational learning (Šimanskienė, 2008). In order for employees to perceive their belonging to the organisation, its leaders need to ensure an effective and continuous flow of information, and to set the direction of the organisation's development, which creates a mature relationship between the members of the organisation and the meaningfulness of their work (Schabracq, 2007).

Effective communication builds a strong organisational culture that helps employees to become more familiar with the values of the company they work for, to assess their role in the organisation and to evaluate their professional abilities (Paužuolienė & Trakšelys, 2009). The level of self-awareness and the assessment of creative and professional expression can be a tool to measure the achievements of organisational culture communication, which are important for employee engagement.

6. Organisational culture and sustainability

In business enterprises, organisational culture not only shapes the behaviour of the organisation members, sets the core values and the vision for the organisation, but also defines the meaning of the organisation's existence. Given that sustainability is becoming one of the strategic focuses of an organisation and a prerequisite for enhancing competitive advantage (Banerjee, 2002), the organisational context and culture becomes crucial for the effective implementation of sustainability initiatives (Epstein & Rejc Buhovac, 2014) and for the resilience of organisations in a time of highly rapid change (Dunphy, 2011). Incorporating sustainability in a broad sense into an organisation's philosophy, as a vision and mission (Harris & Crane, 2002), value system can influence the overall culture of the organisation and the embedding of this theme in all aspects of business operations, from decision-making to process improvement and product development (Banerjee, 2002; Leonidou et al., 2015). The culture of a sustainability organisation is observed by both the members of the organisation and by other stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, partners (Maceika et al., 2007).

An organisational culture that values sustainability fosters a sense of commitment among employees to work together with their team to achieve common goals and at the same time enhances a positive employer brand image (Leonidou et al., 2015), as well as helps to attract and retain the best employees (Dunphy, 2011). In addition, an organisational culture that supports sustainability fosters organisational innovation and creativity (Yang et al., 2018) and, conversely, sustainability as an important part of the business can foster an innovative organisational culture (Dunphy, 2011).

The integration of sustainability, especially in relation to topics that require a strategic decision, has an ethical dimension that depends on the cultural norms and values of the organisation. It is noteworthy that organisations that link sustainability to their strategy and

organisational culture tend to be more willing to demonstrate the value of money to their stakeholders and to engage employees at all levels in dialogue.

Leadership plays an important role in the corporate sustainability model, where the organisation's managers have to take external factors into account in order to develop and implement a sustainability strategy. In addition to having a good understanding of the business domain, top managers need to be able to advocate for the organisation, effectively define the organisation's sustainability vision and communicate it to the rest of the organisation (Epstein & Rejc Buhovac, 2014). It is the responsibility of the leaders to create an environment and culture that fosters sustainability, and at the same time, through their actions, to set an example to the employees in terms of the practices they implement.

Managers of the companies also play a role in sustainability communication, which is the deliberate integration of sustainability into the communication process, informing internal and external audiences about the company's sustainability goals, practices, outcomes and progress, the company's strategic and operational activities, and the alignment of processes for the transition to sustainability aligned activities. Communicating corporate sustainability themes to stakeholders is a long-term process, which usually includes awareness, understanding, commitment, and involvement phases (Epstein & Rejc Buhovac, 2014).

Companies that actively and regularly communicate the implementation of sustainability practices to internal and external target audiences build stakeholder trust and demonstrate transparency.

7. Communication for employee engagement

In the context of organisational culture, employee creativity and sustainability practices in organisations, internal communication is key to effectively embedding the organisation's value system, ensuring that employees are aware of the organisation's key goals and priorities, as well as identify with them (Šimanskienė, 2008), encouraging or managing creativity and raising awareness about sustainability issues. According to FitzPatrick (2012), internal communication within an organisation ensures compliance with legal requirements, helps to build a community of organisational members, defines the roles and responsibilities of employees in achieving the organisation's goals, promotes support for change within the organisation, and at the same time prepares employees to represent the organisation in an external context.

The organisation needs to seek the participation of all employees at all levels, ensuring sufficient quality information, building trust and creating a culture of openness (Fann Thomas et al., 2009). To achieve employee engagement, communication must be two-way. Caldeira (2019) states that an organisation's communication should be organised as a conversation rather than a monologue, but at the same time, leaders are needed to create and sustain this environment.

The role of the manager is crucial in engaging employees through internal communication tools, communicating, persuading, coordinating and motivating. The supportive communication of organisational leaders, with openness, empathy and understanding as key elements, influences employee engagement (Walden et al., 2017). When employees feel valued and supported, and understand the purpose and meaning of their work, they trust the

organisation and communicate openly (Fann Thomas et al., 2009), and at the same time they are more actively involved in decision-making activities, listen to and contribute to the ideas of other employees. Isaksen II and Akkermans (2011) emphasise that the tone of a manager's communication should reflect the philosophy and authenticity of the organisation. Moreover, while managers are likely to have the best understanding of the organisation's strategy, they must also listen to employees' expectations and explain what each employee's role is in this strategy (FitzPatrick, 2012) and, if changes are planned, how they will affect each individual.

An employee-centred operating model, with feedback on performance from the line manager, will be successful if employees believe in the idea and show commitment to the organisation from the start. This starts with clear communication about how employees' skills are valued and their views on various issues (Garber, 2012). In addition, employees need to be kept informed, ensuring that the information is understood, accepted and committed (Thornton, 2019). Theoretical models emphasise that communication must ensure a consistent flow of information and also appeal to understanding and feelings through the messages it delivers, and at the same time encourage action.

Table 1. Communication stages and strategies to promote employee engagement (source: created by author, based on FitzPatrick (2012), Garber (2012), Thornton (2019))

Stages of communication	Stages of an employee engagement programme	Communication strategies and tools
Empowerment	Awareness	Formal written and verbal information
		Communication style avoiding corporate language
		Ensured access to the information needed for job functions
	Understanding	Formal communication, explaining "what" and "why"
		Presentation of the organisation's vision and strategy to clarify key objectives
		Clarification of the role of each organization member in achieving the strategic objectives of the organisation as a whole
		Verbal communication through middle managers and team leaders
Engagement	Commitment	Listening and hearing employees from the start. This starts with clear communication about how employees' views and expectations, debunking myths about employees' fears
		Formal and informal communication between the team leader and the employee
		Unwritten operational rules giving employees freedom of choice
	Involvement	Delivering the organisation's messages for external communication and preparing employees to represent the organisation externally
		Ensuring risk tolerance and support from managers
		Demonstrating leadership by example
		Two-way communication with ensured feedback

Taking into account the data in Table 1, it can be emphasized that the first two phases – awareness and understanding – are aimed at empowering employees, *i.e.* providing them with sufficient information to enable them to communicate according to the organisation’s positions and represent certain communication messages in the subsequent phases. Meanwhile, the last two phases – commitment and involvement – are about encouraging action, what we can call engaging communication.

8. A theoretical model for communicating organisational culture, creativity and sustainability

The study on the three dimensions of organisational culture, creativity and sustainability showed that communication can be a connecting element in each of these areas, integrating them into the overall organisation. Eisenberg et al. (2016) argue that organisational communication can be of several types: communication as a means of information transfer, a transactional process, a tool for strategic control and a tool for balancing creativity and constraints. These types are essentially intertwined in organisations and each is applicable in different contexts, including the relationship between creativity, organisational culture and sustainability.

Summarising the theoretical material, it is possible to construct a model (Figure 1) in which the role of organisational culture and employee creativity in the implementation of sustainability practices is linked to communication. It is an important tool for communicating information and promoting understanding, engaging employees through favourability and commitment. The combination and synergy of all these elements fosters the creative expression of employees, which at the same time has an impact on both organisational culture and sustainability. As a feedback loop, the model seeks to ensure that sustainability is embedded as part of the organisational culture through communication tools, and is repeated cyclically through the creative expression of employees.

The model implies the following key statements:

1. Empowering communication of organisational culture fosters creativity of employees;
2. Managing creativity through communication is important for the creative expression of employees;

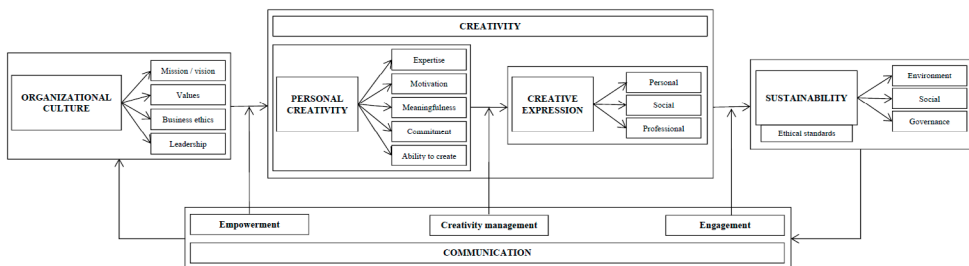


Figure 1. A theoretical model of communication including organisational culture, employee creativity and sustainability practices (source: created by author)

3. Engaging organisational communication influences employees' creative expression in implementing sustainability practices;
4. Employees' creative expression leads to the conscious integration of sustainability practices into the organisational culture.

This model provides a basis for further analysis of the topic. Given that this model has established a general relationship between organisational culture, employee creativity, its expression and sustainability practices in the broadest sense, the research could focus on specific areas of sustainability (environmental, social, or governance) and their related practices, and determine whether employees are willing to engage in these through their creative expression. Furthermore, if communication is important for integrating sustainability into organisational culture, further research could identify in more detail the ways and means of communication and how such integration could take place in different types of companies. Further research could therefore focus on different target audiences within companies and, through additional research, identify relevant aspects related to specific groups of employees.

9. Conclusions

The literature review examines the concepts of creativity, organisational culture, sustainability and communication and their interrelationships. The concepts were found to contain overlapping elements, such as effective and regular communication to foster creativity, build and maintain organisational culture and implement sustainability practices; the role of managers and leadership in the organisation; and the engagement of the organisation's employees. In addition, the interrelationship between the concepts – the importance of organisational culture for creativity, the links between sustainability and organisational culture, communication and the creative society – was identified. Finally, communication has a dual role in the organisation – it aims to engage employees and at the same time to foster and manage their creative expression.

The model, based on theoretical insights, reflects the role of organisational culture, the individual creativity of employees in the implementation of sustainability practices, where the connecting element is communication, empowering through awareness and understanding, engaging through commitment and involvement. Given the harmony and synergy of all the elements, the creative expression of employees is achieved, influencing both the culture and sustainability of the organisation.

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