Different Strokes for Different Folks: A Self-Regulation Perspective on Idea Creation

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SUMMARY

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS – A SELF-REGULATION PERSPECTIVE ON IDEA GENERATION

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Principal Topic

The purpose of the present paper is to add to the small but growing number of studies that investigate individual-level factors in corporate entrepreneurship (e.g., Baron & Tang, 2011). We shed light on the question how employees can be influenced to act entrepreneurially on behalf of their employer. Employees contribute to organizational innovation through the generation of original and potentially valuable ideas concerning products, services, and processes (Zhou & George, 2001). We hence focus on idea generation. In developing our argument, we build on recent developments in creativity research and add personality differences provided by PSI theory (i.e., action- vs. state-orientation). Specifically, we suggest that action-oriented employees benefit from high initial negative affect when asked to generate original ideas while state-oriented employees do not. When receiving feedback, we suspect state-oriented employees to benefit from positive feedback and action-oriented employees to benefit from negative feedback.

Method

We chose an experimental design with repeated measures with 328 full-time employees working in a creativity-relevant environment. Participants rated their momentary affect and proceeded with the first creativity test (t0). Subsequently, the participants were confronted with either a negative or a positive feedback, which was randomly assigned to them. The participants proceeded with the second creativity test (t1). We then asked them to evaluate the perceived feedback. We measured their action-orientation and controlled for age and sex. For both tests, two independent coders rated each unique idea for originality on a five-point Likert-scale. We applied various hierarchical linear regression models.

Results and Implications

As hypothesized, our results show that initial negative affect increases the originality for action-oriented employees but not for state-oriented employees. When receiving feedback, state-oriented employees benefit from positive feedback, whereas their action-oriented counterparts benefit from negative feedback. Hence, our results indicate that potential corporate entrepreneurs need considerably different organizational stimuli. We provide an understanding of how employees differ in their ability to handle their emotions and feedback reactions. Moreover, the patterns we identify provide a detailed understanding of how affective self-regulation determines the kind of feedback employees should get in order to fully unfold their creative potential.

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