

Telework and Creativity of Professional Employees: A Study in Software Developing Industry in Sri Lanka

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Employee creativity is imperative in pursuing organizational aspirations in a dynamic business environment. Consequently, scholars and practitioners continuously investigate the avenues of augmenting creativity of employees. Creativity is defined as the generation of both novel and useful ideas by individuals. Organizational studies have long recognized that interpersonal relationships, frequent face to face contacts, interactions, mutual trust, support and reciprocity are the important determinants of individual creativity. However, with the development of information technology many organizations have begun to implement teleworking as an alternative job design which enable employees to carry out job activities at a distant location. Intriguing the curiosity, a recent study has found a positive relationship between telework and individual creativity suggesting the distinct benefits associated with reduced interactions in enhancing creativity. Though this piece of evidence provides basic insight about telework and creativity relationship, how teleworking impacts on the individual creativity remains unanswered. Addressing this gap and based on the insights of Identity Theory, this study examined the effect of telework on the novelty and usefulness dimensions of creativity through personal and social identity. Being in positivist paradigm and followed by deductive reasoning approach, the researchers collected data through a questionnaire survey. The sample was comprised of 246 professional employees who engaged in telework in software development companies in Sri Lanka. We conducted a multi mediator analysis by using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and PROCESS macro. This study found two important results. First, extent of telework had a positive effect on personal identity which in turn had a positive impact on novelty dimension of creativity. Second, extent of telework had a negative effect on usefulness dimension of creativity as a result of reduced team identity. The present research adds new knowledge to the existing literature by unearthing the mechanisms through which telework impacts on individual creativity. In addition, the present study has important implications for the practitioners. The study informs that teleworking is a strategy to enhance personal identity which is in turn important in developing novel ideas. Also, the finding of teleworking reduces the usefulness dimension of creativity suggesting the importance of working in collocated context in order to enhance the knowledge sharing and representation in the organization. In summary, these findings imply the importance of maintaining the balance in between working at collocated context and teleworking to foster both personal and team identities that will enhance the overall creativity.

Keywords: telework, novelty, usefulness, personal identity, team identity