



**Encouraging Creativity and Innovation among Ghanaian and African Leaders and
Organization**

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Abstract

This article seeks to encourage a culture of innovation and creativity among Ghanaian and African business leaders and their organizations. This rationale is pursued through the following: 1) a presentation of the need for innovation and creativity among Ghanaian and African leaders and their organizations; 2) a redefinition of the terms “innovation and creativity” in organizations; 3) perceived barriers to innovation and creativity among Ghanaian and African Leaders and businesses; 4) a candid view of how Ghanaian and African leaders can promote innovation and creativity within their organizations; and 5) five practical steps towards developing a culture of innovation and creativity among Ghanaian leaders and their organizations.

Keywords: *Organizational Leadership, Creativity, Innovation, Organizations, Businesses, Africa, Ghana.*

Introduction

Today's vibrant and competitive local and global business environment calls for a high level of innovation and creativity among leadership everywhere especially in Ghana and Africa. Ghanaian and African Leaders cannot afford to be satisfied with minimal efficiency and responsiveness with the services and products they provide.ⁱ They must seek to increase their understanding of innovation and creativity in their organizations and the market within which they operate, seek to foster a culture and an environment that promotes and enhances the tapping of deep sited innovative and creative potentials among their employees. With the increasing need for innovation and creativity in the 21st Century, it will take organizations with the capability to adapt and shift quickly to the rapid transformation in the knowledge to effectively compete in both local and global economies.ⁱⁱ Hence, the significant role of leadership in the creation and development of an organizational culture that promotes innovation and creativity.ⁱⁱⁱ This article seeks to encourage and promote a culture of innovation and creativity among Ghanaian and African leaders and their organizations.

Why Innovation and Creativity in the Ghanaian Business Environment?

One may be wondering why the push towards a culture of creativity and innovation among Ghanaian and African leaders and their organizations? As indicated above, it will take a strong culture of innovation and creativity for existing and future Ghanaian and African businesses to strategically compete and win locally and globally. Innovation and creativity among Ghanaian and African business men and women will assist in improving competitiveness and the promotion of high performance among their employees.^{iv} Ghanaian and African organizations that exhibit these two attributes have the extreme potential of assuming and maintaining a competitive edge in their sector of operation.^v Additionally, an innovative and creative organizational environment will facilitate the process of augmenting opportunities for the surfacing of imaginative ideas that will enhance the prevalence of organizational inventiveness^{vi} which is needed in all aspects of today's Ghanaian and African businesses. Moreover, an atmosphere of innovation and creativity will foster an organizational environment that allows the inherent ingenuity within organizational members and groups to surface and result in productive outcomes.^{vii} In answering the questions "why innovation and creativity in the Ghanaian and African business environment;" it is imperative that a definition and meaning of the terms are presented.

Redefining Innovation and Creativity in Organizations

Creativity and innovation flourish on a diversity of aptitudes and viewpoints.^{viii} A creative leader or follower is noticeable by his/her affinity towards divergent thinking, differentiated by uniqueness, ease of ideas, flexibility and ability.^{ix} Creativity, therefore, is the capacity to create work that is both original and suitable for an organization's clientele. The term is also connected with words such as initiative, creation, and breakthrough.^x It is also a philosophy that involves the production of new ideas and solutions and the relationship

between things or ideas.^{xi} Innovation on the other hand, is the application, development and implementation of new thought. It is the actual process of initiating a solution to an existing crisis or challenge in a particular field of operation or study. Thus, it is the production, reception, and execution of new thought, procedures, invention, or service.^{xii}

Perceived Barriers to Innovation and Creativity in Ghanaian and African Business Organizations

Barriers to innovation and creativity can be internal or external. These could be factors within the organization and its surrounding environment or factors that arise within members of the organization. Though Ghanaian business leaders may possess what it takes to promote, improve and enhance a culture of creativity within their organizations, it is relevant to recognize the deep sited barriers and limitations they may encounter in their quest to do this.^{xiii} Few perceived barriers to innovation and creativity among Ghanaian and African leaders and organizations are captured and elaborated in the following:

The fear of failure

Like most cultures, failure is not encouraged in Ghana and many parts of Africa, especially in business due to the cost of production. Success is rewarded and failure is punished in most organizational cultures.^{xiv} This is debilitating and unfavorable to the pursuit of innovation and creativity in organizations because of the meaning it presents to both leaders and followers. As such, both leaders and followers refrain from failure in all endeavors. Though the fear of failure may serve as a motivating factor for some organizational members in their quest for success, it becomes a recipe for paralysis for others thereby preventing them from realizing their full potential in the workplace.^{xv}

Lack of Flexibility and Resistance to Change

The tendency to hold on to old and set ways of running organizations can hinder innovation and creativity. Most Ghanaian leaders and organizations have the propensity to preserve the established traditions and regulations of their organizations by upholding existing rules and regulations which in effect inhibits innovation and creativity.^{xvi} Most leaders and employees fail to consider alternative means of achieving organizational goals and objectives^{xvii} familiarity with existing ways of doing things. Lack of flexibility, holding on to rigid rules and regulation is a recipe for resisting relevant and strategic change in organizations which greatly affects innovation and creativity because of its link to change. Creativity is therefore needed for an organization to react successfully to change since creativity leads to the realization of organizational change.^{xviii}

Low commitment to organization

Due to the lack of opportunity for employee advance in careers and the absence of recognition for performance on the job in most Ghanaian and African organizations, the pursuit for innovation and creativity is low. Most employees lack the appropriate levels of commitment to their organizations because they are usually not shown the required gratitude and admiration for the work they do.^{xix} The absence of such motivational factors leads to low self-esteem and less dedication to the organization on the part of the employee. Innovation and creativity is therefore drastically reduced due to the part-hearted services of organizational members.^{xx}

Conformity to the standard way of doing things

Lack of curiosity, needed resources, a spirit of inquiry and fear of failure and risk taking are factors that inhibit organizational creativity and innovation in most cultures of the world.^{xxi} Similarly, these same factors impede innovation and creativity in Ghanaian organizations. The rampant lack of vision, foresight and imagination among Ghanaian leaders and employees is a result of reverting back to “this is how we do it” and “this is how we have always done it” mostly because of the fear of stepping into new territories and trying new things. This kills a spirit of initiative leading to the absence of innovation and creativity among employees and an entire organization.

Five Practical Steps towards Improving Innovation and Creativity in Ghanaian and African Businesses

In order to encourage and promote creativity and innovation among Ghanaian and African leaders and organizations, the following five steps should be adopted and applied in the workplace to facilitate the process of building a culture and environment that supports innovation and creativity.

1. Corporate Culture Conducive for Learning

An organization’s culture can inhibit or enhance both leader and employee efforts to promote a culture of innovation and creativity.^{xxii} Ghanaian business leaders who desire to move their organizations towards a culture of innovation and creativity must endeavor to create an environment that allows employees to learn through their successes and failures. Employees should be celebrated when they succeed and accepted when they fail. Such a culture and environment will strengthen the organization in terms of learning and long-term survival, competitiveness and profitability. As part of the process of encouraging a culture of innovation and creativity, leadership must take the necessary steps to ensure that the needed resources, tools and implements are made available to all organizational members to develop a learning environment that promotes to innovation and creativity.^{xxiii}

2. A Strategy that Allows Flexibility and Acceptance of Change

Creativity and innovation cannot be generated in a vacuum.^{xxiv} An organization's strategic direction determines the rate and speed of learning and the yearning for knowledge, understanding and prospects.^{xxv} Leadership must be willing to stimulate the imaginations of their employees, listen to new perspectives and new patterns of getting work done.^{xxvi} The leadership of Ghanaian business must work towards developing a strategy that supports learning and allows organizational members to seek information from external sources such as customers, clients and suppliers to inform their quest for creativity and innovation.^{xxvii} These organizational strategic goals must be effectively communicated to organizational members, well aligned with organizational goals and objectives, professional as well as personal goals of organizational members.^{xxviii} Most importantly, organizational members should be able to interpret the organizational strategy by themselves.

3. Organizational Structure that allows Innovation, Creativity and New Insights

Organizational chain of command can affect the creative and innovative abilities of organizational members. A flat, dispersed and flexible organizational structure can enhance and facilitate the process of developing and maintaining a strong culture of creativity and innovation in Ghanaian businesses.^{xxix} This will allow the free flow of information among organizational members and other functional areas of the organization for maximum productivity. Additionally, a flat and decentralized structure enhances decision-making processes by granting more autonomy to all members of the organization by making access to top management easier. This can enhance motivation on the part of employees to take the initiative to create and innovate.^{xxx}

4. Freedom and Autonomy

An organizational culture and environment that allows members the freedom and autonomy needed for creativity and innovation cannot be underestimated. The lack of restrictions and independence allows organizational members to determine and define the ways and means to accomplish set organizational goals.^{xxxi} Such goals must be valuable, worth reaching for and fruit bearing for organizational members.^{xxxii} Amidst this freedom and independence, Ghanaian and African leadership must strive to be specific and strategic in their setting with organizational members since this can serve as an effective means of enhancing organizational members' creative and innovative capabilities.^{xxxiii} Having commendable goals is central to motivation but the absence of clearness and precedence can lead to unfavorable effects on inspiration, creativity and innovation.^{xxxiv}

5. Resources

One of the main barriers to organizational creativity and innovation identified in the literature is time.^{xxxv} Ghanaian and African organizational leaders must endeavor use their

organizational resources wisely and be able to strike a balance between when to allow make available ample resources to encourage creativity. They must be able to determine when to make sufficient time available for creative and innovative performance within their organizations.^{xxxvi} On a similar note, enough financial resources should be made available to organizational members to prevent a situation where they have to put their creative and innovative efforts towards finding the needed financial and material resources to get work done.

Conclusion

Considering the wealth and potential in Ghana and the rest of Africa in terms of human and natural resources, business leaders in the country and across the continent cannot afford to overlook the subject of creativity and innovation. Most importantly, current educational institutions at all levels, especially the universities and colleges must ensure that their curricula is embedded with materials that would facilitate the process of raising a new generation of Ghanaians and Africans who will create and lead the path for individual and organizational creativity and innovation. This journey will require a high level of willpower, firmness and above all time, financial, human and other resources to be realized. However, the organizational and business leaders of Ghana and Africa cannot afford to retreat. They must forge forward by creating a culture and environment within their organizations that foster creativity and innovation. Ghanaian and African business organizations must be designed and structured in a way that enhances and promotes organizational as well as individual creativity. Such organizational structures must allow organizational members the needed freedom and autonomy for creative and innovative thinking. Ultimately, Ghanaian and African leaders must take creativity and innovation into consideration during strategy formulation processes to encourage, enhance and promote a culture of creativity and innovation in their organizations.

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