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Encouraging business innovation – how is this reflected in top 10 international automakers

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Abstract. *The theoretical concept of innovative work behavior (IWB) has achieved substantial consideration from academicians across the globe starting with the second half of the last century. More recent, for about three decades, researchers have become concerned with more concrete organizational implications towards the innovative work behavior. Therefore, they directed their attention to organizational factors that might influence innovative behavior and to the relationship between multiple organizational aspects and innovative work behavior. Employees' behavior at work is a key component for organizational success. Consequently, employees' innovative spirit plays a critical role in the performance of their companies. The current paper has two purposes. First, to do a key literature review on innovative work behavior as part of the general concept of innovation by highlighting the theoretical aspects from international literature. Second, to present an analysis on the topic of innovation for the top 10 multinational companies in automobile industry taking into consideration three components: the mission statement, core values and dedicated innovation section declared on their official global websites.*

Keywords: innovation, creativity, innovative work behavior, multinational companies, automakers, mission statement, core values

Introduction

Activating in an international business context, companies and their success are influenced by several key aspects. One of them is innovation capability. Through it, organizations can differentiate from competitors. Innovation can be approached at organizational level (Nicolescu & Nicolescu, 2012) and at individual level (Canet-Giner et al., 2020).

Due to fast changes in international business environment organizations have to adapt their goods and services, but also their organizational procedures (Nicolescu et al., 2013) by innovating them. In order for the companies to be innovative in general, employees must manifest an individual innovative spirit at work (Ramamoorthy at al., 2005). In this way, innovative work behavior is a powerful characteristic that can influence the existence of competitive advantage at company level (Shih & Susanto, 2011). On the other hand, innovation does not necessarily need to generate competitive advantage all the time. As more an organization is innovating, as more are the chances to create competitive advantage (Hamel, 2006). O'Sullivan and Dooley (2009) argue that organizations are encouraged to innovate through four drivers: emerging technologies, competitor actions, new ideas coming from customers, partners or employees and changes in external environment.

Literature review

Creativity

The origins of creativity concept are related to mystical beliefs as creativity was associated only with individual capabilities. In history a creative person had the ability of creating only with the

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help of a divine intervention (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996), therefore creativity can be mixed up with eccentric personality, art, intelligence or good (Amabile, 1996).

Later, research on creativity advanced from the old mystical belief and concluded into two approaches: one is traditional, conventional and the other is contemporary. The traditional approach is limited in terms of practicability due to its basic principle. In traditional approach creativity is exclusively related to an individual particularity of being creative. On the other hand, the contemporary approach does not limit creativity to the individual particularities. In this type of approach social environment influences the degree of creativity. Moreover, creativity is not limited to certain persons. It is strongly related to external factors. This involves that creativity is a characteristic of people, but also of products or processes (Amabile, 1996). According to Zhou and Shalley (2008, p.4) creativity is "both an outcome and a process".

Several authors highlight the vast implications of creativity, which are wider than the ones that point out exclusively the individual level. Csikszentmihalyi (2006, p.3) argues that besides the psychological event, creativity involves a cultural and social component. According to Amabile (1996), organizational environment is influencing creativity (individual or team creativity). Sternberg and Lubart (1996) consider that creativity is relevant at two levels: individual and social.

According to Amabile (1996) creativity is consolidated by three components: expertise, creativity skills and task motivation. In order for creativity to be present, the creative individual has to have expertise in a certain domain. Creative skills is a step forward for the person with expertise to go beyond the adequate or acceptable level. Final step in expressing creativity is task motivation. The individual that has expertise and also developed creativity skills has to find the motivation to perform the process of creating. Intrinsic motivation has bigger impact than extrinsic motivation.

Innovation

Creativity is reflected in creative idea generation. The successful implementation of this type of ideas leads to innovation. Therefore, innovation is different than creativity. A creative individual is not necessarly an innovator, unless he or she generates ideas that are succesfuly implemented and are making a difference in organizational context (Amabile, 1996).

Innovation is not equal to the development of something completely new or radical. Also, innovation is misunderstood as many individuals and organizations only believe in major and radical innovations rather than accept that incremental innovations in a continuous process are also strongly contributing to the success of the organizations (Kahn, 2018). In order for the creativity to be assesed and lead to innovation, the individual that does the assessment has to be very familiar or even expert in the field of activity in which creativity is activating. Therefore, expertise is necessary for approving creativity (Amabile, 1996). In Accordance, Csikszentmihalyi (2006, p.3) explains that in order for creativity to materialize an individual has to develop a novelty into a certain domain. The novelty is then evaluated and accepted by a field wich is represented by experts in the particular domain. The field gives acceptance for the inclusion of the novelty into the domain of reference, leading to innovation.

According to Kahn (2018), definitions on innovation are related to two major implications. First type of definitions see innovation as an outcome. Second type of definitions present innovation as a process. From an outcome perspective, innovation includes: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation, business model innovation, supply chain innovation and organizational innovation. On the other hand, the process perspective requires the presence of the following phases: discover, develop and deliver phase. Innovative organizations are able to put in

practice new ideas through their business model. Also, the business model can become a resource for innovation within the company (Massa & Tucci, 2014, p.424). Organizations capable to add novelties within their already established way of working are characterized by the adoption of management innovation (Birkinshaw et al., 2008). For the continuous process of innovation to take place, employees have to be both willing and able to innovate (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). Some innovation definitions are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Innovation definitions

Definition	Source
"Innovation represents the core renewal process in any organisation."	Zhang and Bartol, 2010
"Innovation is widely considered the life blood of corporate survival and growth"	Zahra and Covin, 1994
"Innovation is the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization."	Amabile, 1996
"We view innovation in organisations as an outcome of individual, team, and organisational efforts joined to produce a new product, process, or service that is potentially attractive to a market. Innovation is then the result of a number of activities performed at different levels of the organisation and in its external world."	Denti and Hemlin, 2012
"An innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method inbusiness practices, workplace organisation or external relations."	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005

Source: Authors' own research contribution.

Innovative work behavior

According to de Jong and Den Hartog (2007) innovative behavior is a "multi-dimensional, overarching construct that captures all behaviors through which employees can contribute to the innovation process."

Innovative behavior has two major phases: initiation and implementation. The separation of the two phases is done by the moment when idea is adopted. Kleysen and Christopher (2001) define individual innovative behavior as "all individual actions directed at the generation, introduction and or application of beneficial novelty at any organizational level". Wang et al. (2015) synthetize the definition to "idea generation, idea promotion and idea realization". Similarly, de Jong and den Hartog (2010) propose four dimensions of innovative work behavior: idea exploration, generation, championing and implementation. Innovative behavior at work involves a process that is completed through three stages. First, the employee has to identify a problem and encounter it with generation of ideas in order to solve it. Second, he or she needs to attract supporters of the idea within the organization (Carmeli et al., 2006). In order to do so the employees must take part to social activities and build a coalition through which to further sell the idea (Wang et al., 2015). After the acceptance of the idea, the last part is testing by applying it into a certain context within the organization (Carmeli et al., 2006).

Employees with a high perception of their own competency and a strong determination are prone to have a more expressed innovation behavior (Singh & Sarkar, 2012). Into an organizational context where innovative behavior is getting an increased attention the employees are receiving the role of a driving force for innovation. Innovative behavior is influenced by internal factor such as own ability to be creative and also by external factors like being open, accept team environment,

receiving support from leaders (Li & Zheng, 2014). Also, leaders play a key role in the presence of innovative work behavior in organizations by directly and indirectly influencing it (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Yet, companies need to be very careful as the degree of job standardization can impact employees' level of creativity (Luoh et al., 2014).

De Spiegelaere et al. (2015) conclude that innovative behavior at work is characterized by the ability of employees to stimulate the creation and implementation of innovations. Seppala (2016) identified three things that leaders should do in order to increase the engagement of their employees: inspire them, develop a kind environment at workplace and encourage self-care. A similar structure is presented by Gunzel-Jensen et al. (2017), which includes intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence and individual consideration from transformational leaders, who intend to determine employees to focus on the group gaining rather than on individual interests.

Leadership influence on innovative work behavior

According to Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) one of the most powerful influencer of innovation is leadership. Leaders can generate innovation at company level through their vision on organizational characteristics, their behavior with employees and motivation. A lot of studies on leadership influence on innovation are focusing on leader-member exchange (LMX), transformational leadership and participative leadership.

LMX concept is addressing the exchange relation between the leaders and subordinates (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). According to Kim and Koo (2017), leaders have a subtantial role in developing employees' attitude at workplace and their work performance. The quality of the leader-member exchange is strongly influencing employees' engagement and their innovative behavior. A good relationship between employees and their leaders is more likely to contribute to a higher implication of the employees in the organization. Agarwal et al. (2012) also suggest that leaders have a critical role in generating engagement among subordinates. According to them, employees with high engagement contribute to the benefit of the organization as they manifest emotions such as joy and interest. In addition to this, employees with a high engagement have less tendencies to quit.

Transformational leaders are encouraging employees to deal with dayly tasks in a different manner so that their creativity is stimulated (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). Their thinking is stimulated through constant questions and challenges that allow employees to address new ideas permanently, while leaders develop the sense of engagement with the organization's vision for their followers (Afsar & Umrani, 2019). According to Bin Saeed et al. (2019), transformational leadership appears when managers dedicate their efforts to increase employees' motivation beyond external rewards so that they enjoy generating and implementing new ideas. Therefore, transformational leadership has more potential to generate innovative work behavior when psychological empowerment is present (Jain, 2015). When employees are feeling meaningful they allocate more interest in identifying new solutions and challenge their working style as they are confident in themselves, resulting in a higher level of innovation work behavior (Luoh et al., 2014).

Participative leadership involves the fact that leaders are giving employees the opportunity to express their ideas and contribute to setting the team goals. In this way, the members of the team will be dedicated towards a commonly agreed vision, leading to a higher motivation and commitment at work. Participative leaders are active listeners and take into consideration employees suggestions. In this way they send a positive message to the team by putting value on employees' ideas and their innovative behavior (Odoardi et al., 2015).

Methodology

The methodology used is descriptive analysis applied to a case study on the topic of innovation presence in international automakers. The international perspective of the case study is given by the multinational companies selected to be part of it. The selection criteria were market capitalization. The subject of the analysis is represented by the top 10 automakers in the world based on market capitalization. For the ranking the author used the website companiesmarketcap.com which was accessed on the 12th of March 2022.

The ranking of the companies was done through the market capitalization at the moment of the study realization. The innovation orientation of each company was assessed through the company mission and values expressed on the company's official website at the date of the analysis, which is March 2022. For the companies' website where the author couldn't find the mission statement and core values, the following website was consulted: mission-statement.com. For a better understanding of the innovation orientation the author extended the analysis on vision, code of conduct, basic principles and innovation sections present on companies' websites.

The automakers industry was chosen as car producers are constantly updating and upgrading their products in order to be competitive and satisfy consumer needs.

Results and discussions

First part of the analysis consists in comparing mission statement and core values declared on official website of each of the company. Afterwards, the analysis continues with a more in-depth investigation of the websites in order to discover a clearer orientation on innovation. Table 2 provides a comparison of mission statement and core values on official website of top 10 international automakers.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of mission statement and core values of top 10 international automakers ranked by market capitalization

Rank	Company	Market Capitalization	Mission / Vision	Values / Core Principles	The presence of innovation in the mission/ values of the company	Dedicated innovation section on the webpage
1	Tesla	$822.00 B	Section not available on official website	Section not available on official website	Data not available	No
2	Toyota	$218.71 B	"Toyota will lead the way to the future of mobility, enriching lives around the world with the safest and most responsible ways of moving people. Through our commitment to quality, constant innovation and respect for the planet, we aim to exceed expectations	• Respect for the planet • Commitment to quality • Challenging goals • There is always a better way • Exceed expectations • Rewarded with a smile • Engaging talent & passion of people • Lead the way	Yes	No

Rank	Company	Market Capitalization	Mission / Vision	Values / Core Principles	The presence of innovation in the mission/ values of the company	Dedicated innovation section on the webpage
			and be rewarded with a smile."	• Future of mobility • Safest & most responsible way of moving people • Constant innovation • Enriching lives		
3	Volkswagen	$98.48 B	"For all our products and mobility solutions we aspire to minimize environmental impacts along the entire lifecycle – from raw material extraction until end-of-life - in order to keep ecosystems intact and to create positive impacts on society. Compliance with environmental regulations, standards and voluntary commitments is a basic prerequisite of our actions."	• Responsibility • Honesty • Bravery • Diversity • Pride • Solidarity • Reliability	No	Yes
4	BYD	$95.31 B	"Technological innovations for a better life. During the daytime, solar farms capture the power of sunshine; at night, energy storage systems deliver power to families. Electric vehicles on the streets and SkyRail systems along green belts connect the city with zero emissions and zero pollution. We provide more	• Excellence • Pragmatism • Passion • Innovation	Yes	Yes

Rank	Company	Market Capitalization	Mission / Vision	Values / Core Principles	The presence of innovation in the mission/ values of the company	Dedicated innovation section on the webpage
			possibilities for a better life. We see a new energy future approaching. This is the mission of BYD, and the green dream of all mankind."			
5	Mercedes-Benz	$68.78 B	Not available on official website	Not available on official website	Data not available	Yes
6	Ford	$64.22 B	"We are here for one purpose, to help build a better world, where every person is free to move and pursue their dreams."	• Put people first • Be curious • Built for tough • One Ford • Play to win • Create tomorrow • Do the right thing	No	No
7	General Motors	$60.31 B	"Our goal is to deliver world-class customer experiences at every touchpoint and do so on a foundation of trust and transparency."	• Be inclusive • Think customer • Innovate Now • Look Ahead • One Team • Be bold • It's on me • Winning with integrity	Yes	No
8	BMW	$51.86 B	Not available	Not available	Data not available	Yes
9	Honda	$46.05 B	"Maintaining a global viewpoint, we are dedicated to supplying products of the highest quality, yet at a reasonable price for worldwide customer satisfaction."	Respect for the individual • Initiative • Equality • Trust The three joys • The joy of buying • The joy of selling • The joy of creating	No	Yes
10	Stellantis	$45.70 B	"Powered by our diversity, we lead the way the world moves"	• We are customer centric • We win together • We are agile & innovative • We care for the future	Yes	No

Source: Authors' own research contribution.

Innovation concept in top 10 automakers

Some of the analyzed car makers have mentioned innovation in their core values or principles. Others have dedicated sections in their website where they offer more details on how they innovate. In the next part a more in detail presentation of what innovation embodies for each car producer will be made.

Tesla

The "about" section on official Tesla website was not available at the moment of the analysis. However information on https://mission-statement.com/tesla/ accessed at 12th of March 2022 reveal that the mission statement of the company is "to accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy". According to the same website, the core values of the company are "doing the best, taking risks, respect, constant learning, and environmental consciousness". Although innovation is not mentioned in the mission statement and company's goals, this car company is well known for its revolutionary advancement and innovations that contributed to the evolution of electric cars.

Toyota

This company has innovation and creativity present in one of the five main principles defined by its founder: "Always be studious and creative, striving to stay ahead of the times."

Moreover, according to the guiding principles, the company is encouraging the creative spirit of the employees: "Foster a corporate culture that enhances both individual creativity and the value of teamwork, while honoring mutual trust and respect between labor and management."

Also, curiosity and new ideas are promoted within the company's code of conduct: "Taking a personal interest in everything, we ask questions to discover the mechanics behind phenomena. This mindset generates new ideas." The code of conduct for Toyota is directly mentioning innovation: "Encouraging both incremental and breakthrough innovative thinking, we seek to evolve with Kaizen, never accepting the status quo". According to the code of conduct, participative leadership characteristics can be observed: "No work is solitary. No job is a one-person endeavor. We make the most of diverse perspectives turning differences into fortitude as one team. With fundamental respect for people, we create an environment where all feel welcome, safe and heard, and everyone can contribute their best toward meaningful goals".

Innovation is present also in the global vision of Toyota: "Through our commitment to equality, ceaseless innovation, and respect for the planet, we strive to exceed expectations and be rewarded with a smile".

Volkswagen

This company has a section within its global website called "Group Innovation". In this section Volkswagen is presenting its global innovation ecosystem whose purpose is to offer customer-oriented solutions while achieving climate objectives. Volkswagen treats innovation internationally through the presence of several innovation centers or hubs across the globe: two locations in North America, one location in Europe, one location in Middle East and three locations in Asia. According to volkswagenag.com "close cooperation and collective creativity allow us to think mobility in multiple facets and make the most of all". The innovative spirit of the company sits also within its new strategy naming called "NEW AUTO", suggesting the interest in developing novelties.

BYD

This company has a section on its website called "Automotive Innovation". For BYD, innovation is strongly related to electric technology, as the company declares. According to the company's official website, "BYD is the first automaker in the world to have full expertise and intellectual property in three core technologies of EVs – batteries, electric motors and electronic controls". This facilitates easier production process foe electric vehicles.

BYD is a high-tech company, thus being easier to produce electronic vehicles. According to its official website, the company is "devoted to technological innovations for a better life". Besides innovation in technology, BYD focuses also on innovation in materials development and new product design.

Mercedes-Benz

Mercedes-Benz includes in its official website a section for innovation. According to this company, the pioneering role in automobile has to be reflected also into innovation area.

This automaker identified four trends in mobility and is focusing on innovation at these trends' level. They called the trends as follows: connected, autonomous, share & services and electric. Similar to other car makers, innovation in Mercedes-Benz is strongly related to electric vehicles.

Because the mission statement couldn't be found on official website, the website https://mission-statement.com was consulted again on the 12th of March 2022. According to it, Mercedes-Benz mission statement is "We will inspire and create an exceptional place to work and to do business. One employee, one customer, one vehicle at a time. Through our transparent atmosphere, premium auto inventory and individualized customer care, we create the luxury shopping experience that our customers truly deserve". From the mission statement's perspective, innovation is related to the luxury experience that every customer is living. Also, according to the same website mentioned above, the core values of this company are passion, respect, integrity, discipline and excellence.

Ford

This company doesn't address innovation on its website. Ford is communicating rather on building a better world through mobility. Their purpose is based on improving lives, building better communities and contributing to a healthier planet through electric vehicles development.

General Motors

The only reference to innovation on General Motors' website is through one of its behaviors: innovate now. Other behaviors mentioned on the website reveal an orientation to a participative leadership style: "creating an environment where all voices can be heard", "respectfully speaking up, exchanging feedback and boldly sharing ideas without fear".

BMW

The BMW group website has a comprehensive section dedicated to innovation. The main innovation areas mentioned on the website are production, technology and design. In this section the company is presenting the history of innovations within its business starting from 1917. BMW is encouraging innovation beyond its employees and offers anyone the possibility to present innovative ideas regarding the car industry through their virtual innovation agency.

Honda

Honda is also one of the companies that offers an innovation section on their global website. In Honda, innovation is related to the following fields: electrification, automated drive, future technology, technology and design. In the innovation section the company presents its 2030 vision: ”Serve people worldwide with the joy of expanding their life’s potential – lead the advancement of mobility and enable people everywhere in the world to improve their daily lives –“.

Stellantis

This company doesn’t have a dedicated section on innovation on its global website. However, within the core values of the company it is mentioned the following: “Agility and innovation that constantly move the limits of the possible.”

Out of the top 10 automakers ranked by market capitalization, one did not have available the “about” section on its website at the moment of analysis and another two do not offer information on their mission and values. From the rest of seven international automakers, four have mentioned innovation within their mission statement or core values on their official websites. In terms of having a dedicated innovation section on their webpage, only half of the companies have met this particularity. However, the companies that offer information on their innovation capabilities through their websites are focusing mostly on the technological sector as innovation in car manufacturing is strongly related to abilities of technical improvements.

Conclusion

The paper explains the concepts of creativity, innovation and innovative work behavior with focus on business environment. The analysis from the current paper was performed on the topic of innovation in the international auto-market. Car industry is very competitive as producers are constantly improving their products to keep up with consumers’ needs but also with social and environmental obligations. The result of the analysis reveals that within top 10 international automakers, eight are addressing innovation on their official website. One of the remaining two companies analyzed did not offer information on innovation and the other did not have its website fully operational at the moment of investigation. The majority of the companies that address innovation on their website are focusing on technological advancements, but there are also companies that build their values on innovation and they favor creativity and innovative ideas at work, presenting evidence of participative leadership in the work environment. The current paper is a starting point in innovation research at the level of international car manufacturers, further analysis being required to assess the impact of innovation capabilities on car producers’ performance level.

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