Original Research Article

The Impact of Ethical Climate on Creative Problem-Solving Capacity: An Empirical Study on Human Resource Employees in Saudi Arabia.

ABSTRACT

Purpose –The purpose of this paper is to determine the impact of ethical climate on creative problem-solving capacity. The paper also aims to identify how knowledge sharing and affective commitment influence this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – This is quantitative descriptive study applied on human resource employees working in companies belong to four different sectors in Saudi Arabia.115 responses were used to test research model using Partial Least Square approach.

Findings – The results reveal that ethical climate indirectly affect creative problem-solving capacity through knowledge sharing. In addition, affective commitment moderates the relationship between knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity.

Research limitations/implications –The study conducted only in Saudi Arabia so results cannot be generalized. The study demonstrates the role of ethical climate, knowledge sharing, and affective commitment on enhancing creative problem-solving capacity.

Originality/value – The paper broaden knowledge on antecedents of creative problem-solving capacity. In addition, the paper extends the line of research on affective commitment by examining its moderating role on the relationship between knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity.

Keywords: ethical climate, creative problem-solving capacity, knowledge sharing, affective commitment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of ethical work climate is significant for every organization and employee [1]. Researchers have underlined the significance of examining such climate due to its important influence on the attitudes and behavior of employees as well as on organizational results [1]. Organization capability to create competitive edge is mostly depend on knowledge foundations and individuals' creative problem-solving capacity [2]. Creative problem-solving importance is obvious in a set of situations like in the

workplace, interpersonal relationship as well as in education settings, and this what is make it a more viable effective measure for creativity [3]. The most crucial and essential component of creativity is knowledge [4]. Knowledge sharing is a mean to promote gaining an access to knowledge [5]. Moreover, affective committed employees considered as critical source for organization as it has been revealed that they provide several advantages for their organizations [6].

1.1 Research Objectives

The research is developed with three main aims:

- To examine the impact of ethical climate on employees' creative problem-solving capacity.

- To identify the effect of knowledge sharing on relationship between ethical climate and creative problem-solving capacity.

- To investigate how affective commitment can influence the relationship between knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity.

1.2 Problem Statement

In Saudi Arabia, human resource experts consider human resource as a key strategy for enhancing the performance of organization [7]. However, due to worldwide integration, human resource function is under stress to be more agile, flexible, inventive, and results mainly concentrate on certain fields of recruiting, selecting, training, compensation, professions, health and occupational safety [8]. Thus, the present study would apply on human resource employees in Saudi Arabia to identify the bond between ethical climate and creative problems solving capacity, as well as the influence of knowledge sharing and affective commitment on this relationship.

1.3 Importance of Study

The current study is developed to broadening knowledge on antecedents of creative problem-solving capacity. Prior research has identified the role of internal and external knowledge sharing on creative problem-solving capacity [9]. However, relatively little to known about how ethical climate would affect both knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity. Moreover, the researchers were interested in shedding a light on the role of affective commitment in affecting the relationship between

knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity. In the sections that follow, the researchers provide a review of the relevant literature and present several sets of hypotheses. Then, explains the methodology and present the statistical results. Lastly, discuss the findings, implications, and limitations of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Background

Drawing on social exchange theory, it is expected to find a link between employees' perception of ethical work climate and their creative problem-solving capacity.[10 p.148] Point out that due to influence of ethical climate on one's "emotional- psychological state", such climate affects the organization's trust feelings as well as "perceptions of organizational support". According to [6 p.57], when employees react to "perceived organizational support", the reciprocity used to give an interpretation of favorable outcomes.

2.2 Ethical Climate

Ethical climate subject attracted the interest of business ethics' scholars [11]. It affects decision-making and the consequent behavior in dealing with moral issues [12]. [13 p.101] define ethical climate as "the prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content". According to [14] ethical climate evolves as an element of the organizational climate and reflects the shared notion of appropriate and inappropriate behavior in particular place of work. Ethical climate theory of Victor and Cullen identified nine ethical climate's categories which are: "self-interest, company profit, efficiency, friendship, team interest, social responsibility, personal morality, company rules/ procedures, and laws/professional codes" [15   p.327]. However, five from these nine types had been confirmed to be exist, which has called "caring, law and code, rules, instrumental, and independence" [16 p.726]. Ethical leadership is viewed as essential for developing an ethical climate by fostering other ethical resources in direct and indirect ways [17]. [11] founds a positive association between CEO ethical leadership and ethical climate. Moreover, [18] find negative relationship between ethical climate and turnover intention.

2.3 Knowledge Sharing

[19 p.341] define knowledge sharing as "the act of making knowledge available to others within the organization". Knowledge sharing is the most significant stage in knowledge management [20]. Knowledge sharing helps in the growth of different organizational abilities like innovation and creativity that are critical for organizational effectiveness [21]. In addition, [22] have reported that knowledge sharing has important positive impact on service innovation. [23] identifies two processes of knowledge sharing, which are donating knowledge and collecting knowledge. Knowledge donating indicates sharing with others the individual's intellectual capital, whereas knowledge collecting means benefiting from the intellectual capital of others [23]. It has been considered that knowledge sharing is not merely involve willingness to transfer information, but it involves also a willingness to assist recipient in internalizing information to enhance one's creative act [24]. [25] point out that when knowledge is shared, knowledge sharers and knowledge receivers are involved in learning process, which contribute in the depth and breadth of their current knowledge, which in turn improve their performance appraising.[25] found that knowledge deepness and broadness are increased greatly for knowledge sharer than for knowledge receiver. In addition,[9] found that both leadership and knowledge sharing assist significantly in promoting creative problem-solving capacity.

2.4 Creative Problem-Solving Capacity

Creative problem solving refers to "the production of high-quality and original solutions in response to complex, novel, ill-defined problems" [26 p.230]. Creative problem solving consists of idea generation phase and implementation phase [27]. Within each phase, numbers of core processes exist [27]. Problem identification and construction, relevant information identification, new idea generation processes belong to idea generation phase while idea evaluation and solution implementation are part of implementation phase [27]. According to [9] involvement in core creative problem-solving processes is called creative problem-solving capacity. Within creative problem solving, independent solution is developed by way of reflection instead of learning with help [2]. Considerable and purposeful cognitive processing is needed for creative problem solving [27]. [28] point out that creative problem solving necessitates obtaining and arranging of problem relevant information. Fellows and professional colleagues are commonly sources for getting information particularly problem related information [29]. [9] found that creative problem solving is positively related to creative performance-originality and fluency.

2.5 Affective Commitment

Affective commitment defined as "identification with, involvement in, and emotional attachment to the organization." [30   p.253]. It is an organizational commitment component that shown to have the highest correlations to job behaviors and performance when compared to other organizational commitment components which are continuance and normative commitment [31]. In addition, it has been argued that affective commitment is associated positively to individual desire to exert more work effort and it could be expected that this type of commitment is associated with the desire to provide and get knowledge [23]. [31] found positive relationship between affective commitment and work engagement. According to [32] as employees with affective commitment enjoy being employed in organization and have desire to sustain their job within it, they appreciate tasks assigned to them and have positive work view. This in turn, makes them more interested to devote to the work, improve their performance, and remain in the organization [32]. Affective commitment entails positive emotional feelings [33]. It has been proposed that positive emotions and feelings reinforce employees' awareness and behaviors, which lead to new and creative ideas [32]. However, intense feeling of connection to organization could restrain flexibility [33] and might lead to excessive confidence of former policies and procedures and fixation of conventional practices [34,33]. Moreover, it has been stated and empirically proven by many researchers that such feelings could increase exposure to possibly negative impacts of job requirements and stressors and consequently reduce one's probability to effectively deal with these obstacles [33].

3.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
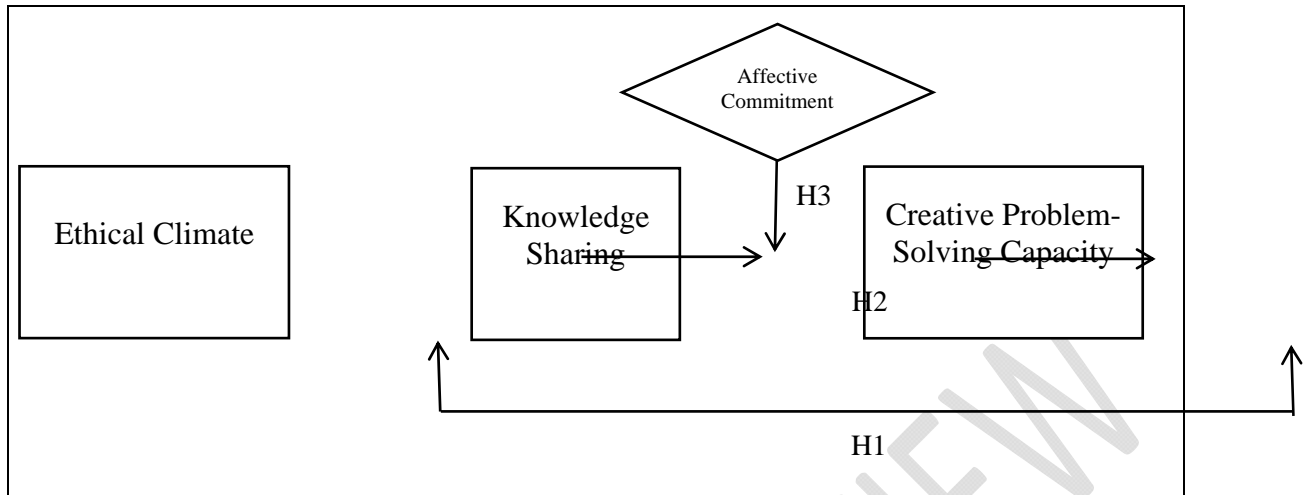
3.1 Research Proposed Model

Fig. 1.   Research Proposed Model

3.2 Research Hypotheses

The proposed model is tested with the following hypotheses:

H1. Ethical climate has a significant statistical impact on creative problem-solving capacity.

H2. Ethical climate has an important statistical influence on creative problem-solving capacity via the mediating role of knowledge sharing.

H3. Affective commitment has an important statistical impact on the relationship between knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity.

3.3 Research Methodology

3.3.1 Data collection and sampling framework

Data were collected from human resource employees who work in Saudi Arabia for companies that belong to any of these sectors: materials, education, health, or information technology sector. Participants were taken part in the study using online questionnaire that distributed through social network platforms' messages and posts. Respondents informed about main purpose of study. Screening questions were

employed to ensure that who pass these questions were only the intended respondents. 342 responses were received. However, only 124 responders passed screening questions and 115 responses were valid for study.

3.3.2 Data collection instrument

Except for creative problem-solving capacity, all scales were measured on 5-point likert-scale range from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Ethical climate scale, measured with 7 items, is adopted from [35, 36]. A 3-items of knowledge sharing scale is adopted from [37]. Affective commitment scale, which consists of 3 items, is adopted from [21]. Creative problem-solving capacity is rated on five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a large extent) and consist of 8 items. This scale is adopted from [9] and it was developed "based on Reiter-Palmon & Illies (2004) conceptualization" [9   P.101]. Some items were modified to fit with study context. The original scales were in English language then translated into Arabic. The scales then translated back to English. In addition, number of professionals in business field reviewed the scales to ensure content validity. The scales and demographic questions that used in this study are shown in the Appendix.

3.3.3 Statistical analysis techniques

The data were analyzed through Partial Least Squares (PLS) using Smart PLS 3 software. This approach was adopted for both measurement and structural model testing.

4.RESULTS

4.1 Demographics

Sample demographic information was summarized in table 1. Participants (i.e. human resource employees) were working in companies belong to four different sectors. Thirty-one percent of participants were from materials sector, twenty-five percent were from information technology sector, twenty-five percent were from health sector and eighteen percent were from education sector. Most respondents were male; they composed 71.3 percent of whole study sample. With respect to education, the majority of participants were highly educated. 72.2 percent of respondents hold bachelor degree followed by 18.3 percent hold master degree and above. Almost half of participants were in age between 30-39 years old

(49.6 percent) and more than half of participants were with work experience ranging from one to ten years (58.3 percent).

Table 1.   Sample Characteristics

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	82	71.3
	Female	33	28.7
Age	20-29	35	30.4
	30-39	57	49.6
	40-49	20	17.4
	More than 50	3	2.6
Educational level	High School degree	2	1.7
	Diploma Degree	9	7.8
	Bachelor Degree	83	72.2
	Master Degree and Above	21	18.3
Experience	Less than 1 year	2	1.7
	1-5	37	32.2
	6-10	30	26.1
	11-15	23	20.0
	16-20	12	10.4

	21 Years and Above	11	9.6
Sector	Information Technology	29	25.2
	Education	21	18.3
	Basic Materials	36	31.3
	Health	29	25.2

Note: N=115

4.2 Measurement Model

Reliability and validity indicators were used to examine measurement model. Reliability, which indicates the measurement's internal consistency, was measured using composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's α. As shown in table 2, reliability for all constructs/variable is acceptable. Cronbach's α for all constructs were exceed 0.6 which is accepted. AVE, which is ranging from 0.65 to 0.78, is greater than acceptance value of 0.50. Composite reliability (CR) of all constructs/variable exceeds the value of 0.7. In addition, convergent validity was estimated using factor loading. Results of each item factor loading, mean and standard deviation are shown in appendix. One item of knowledge sharing was dropped because of the low factor loading and AVE. However, all other items' factor loading is greater than 0.6, which indicate satisfactory convergent validity.

Table 2.   Results of Reliability Assessments

Construct/Variable	CR	Cronbach's α	AVE
Ethical Climate	0.936	0.920	0.676
Knowledge Sharing	0.781	0.778	0.652

Affective Commitment	0.915	0.861	0.783
Creative Problem-Solving Capacity	0.962	0.955	0.761

4.3 Structural Model

The hypothesized model was tested using Bootstrapping procedure in Smart PLS software. Figure 2 shows P-value for all construct/variable. Detailed results of hypotheses testing were reported in table 4. The results show that statistically significant impact of ethical climate on creative problem-solving capacity proposed in first hypothesis was not supported (*P = 0.133, P ≥ 0.05).* However, the second hypothesis that suggests that ethical climate has an important statistical influence on creative problem-solving capacity via the mediating role of knowledge sharing was supported (*P =. 048, P ≤ 0.05*). As shown in figure 2 ethical climate can explain 8% of variance in knowledge sharing. Moreover, affective commitment has important statistical impact on the relationship between knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity (*P =. 049, P ≤ 0.05*). Therefore, the third hypothesis was supported. The result indicates that 44% of the variance in creative problem-solving capacity is explained by affective commitment and knowledge sharing.
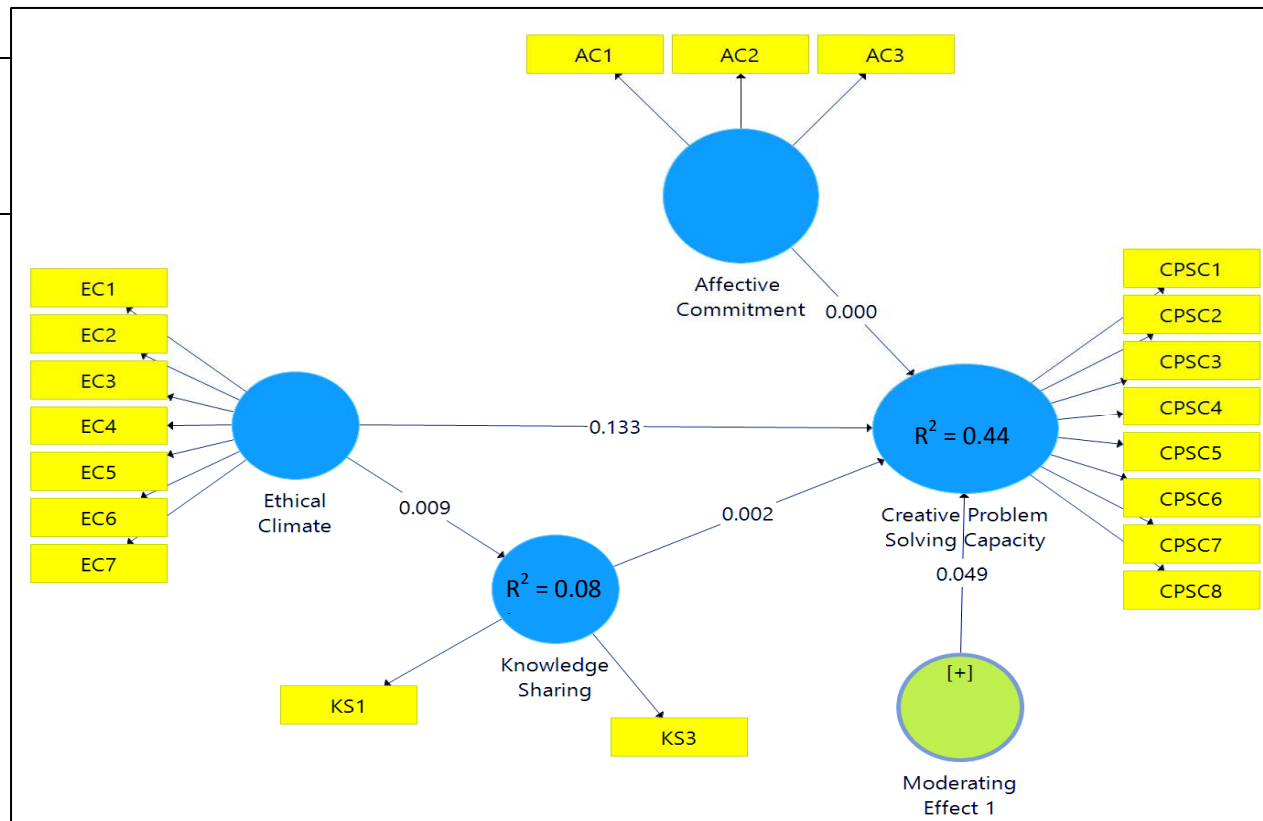
Fig. .2. PLS Results of hypotheses testing for the research model

Direct Path

H1	Ethical Climate → Creative Problem-Solving Capacity	0.105	1.505	0.133	Not Supported

Mediating Path

H2	Ethical Climate → Knowledge Sharing →Creative Problem-Solving Capacity	0.037	1.984	0.048	Supported

Moderating Path

H3	Affective Commitment ↓ Knowledge Sharing → Creative Problem-Solving Capacity	0.069	1.976	0.049	Supported

Table 3. Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study examined how ethical climate directly and indirectly predict creative problem-solving capacity. Unlike our expectations, ethical climate was unrelated to creative problem-solving capacity. This may due to the nature of creative problem-solving capacity that reside on one's own capability. Creative problem solving necessitates extensive and complex cognitive processing [2]. Fluency and originality are the most frequent gauged elements of creative problem solving [38]. Fluency indicates the amount of ideas one's is capable to produce and originality indicates the relative novelty of every idea produced [38]. Moreover, the results demonstrated that ethical climate indirectly influence creative problem-solving capacity through knowledge sharing behavior. Previous study found that knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between business ethics diffusion and service innovation [24]. Another study found that organizational ethical climate positively related to favorable attitude and engagement in knowledge management of the organization [15]. In addition, [9] found in first study that both internal and external knowledge sharing has positive relationship with creative problem-solving capacity. However, in second study,[9] found that only internal knowledge sharing has positively significant relationship with creative problem solving. According to [4] knowledge sharing is the most significant component of creative behaviors and it is regarded as essential part of knowledge management systems for all organizations. The study also examines the moderating role of affective commitment on the relationship between knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity. The finding suggests that effective commitment is a key element in strengthens the relationship between knowledge sharing and creative problem-solving capacity. Prior study had found that affective commitment tends to significantly positively affect employees' creativity [39]. Overall, the present research extends the line of studies on creative problem-solving capacity. The study sheds light toward role of ethical climate in fostering knowledge sharing behavior among human resource employees thereby enhance creative problem-solving capacity. The findings also indicated that when affective commitment was high, knowledge sharing is strongly associated with human resource employees' creative problem-solving capacity.

6. IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Human resources management contributes significantly for successfulness of any organization [18]. Thus, it is recommended that top management and business leaders, specifically who lead in companies in materials, health, education and information technology sectors, enhance human resource employees' creative problem-solving capacity by embracing ethical climate within their companies. Ethical climate contributes to knowledge sharing. In other word, ethical climate paves the way for knowledge sharing among human resource employees, consequently promote their capabilities to solve work-related problem creatively. Moreover, top management and business leaders recommended seeking ways to get more affective committed employees. Affective committed employees increase the likelihood that knowledge sharing will contribute in enhancing human resource employees' creative problem-solving capacity.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The study applied only on four sectors in Saudi Arabia (i.e. materials, health, education and information technology), which bounded the findings to these sectors in Saudi Arabia, thus, results could not be generalized to other countries. The study also was narrow in scope. Future research may try exploring other antecedents of creative problem-solving capacity. In addition, the present study adopts ethical climate as a construct, future study is recommended to tie specific type of ethical climate to creative problem-solving capacity.

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APPENDIX

Table.   Results for Factor Loading, Mean and Standard Deviation

Construct / variable	Item	Factor Loading	Mean	SD
Ethical Climate	EC1	0.783	3.809	1.426
	EC2	0.888	3.652	1.272
	EC3	0.811	3.696	1.365
	EC4	0.884	3.678	1.276
	EC5	0.855	3.826	1.353
	EC6	0.766	4.183	1.213
	EC7	0.758	3.878	1.326
Knowledge Sharing	KS1	0.964	4.322	0.983
	KS3	0.718	3.165	1.312
Affective Commitment	AC1	0.876	3.783	1.284
	AC2	0.897	3.817	1.191
	AC3	0.880	2.896	1.36
Creative Problem-Solving Capacity	CPSC1	0.869	3.809	1.038
	CPSC2	0.854	3.826	1.015
	CPSC3	0.884	3.913	0.965
	CPSC4	0.888	3.983	0.978
	CPSC5	0.921	3.974	0.955

	CPSC6	0.892	3.913	1.009
	CPSC7	0.837	3.861	1.037
	CPSC8	0.832	3.843	1.001

Questionnaire

A) Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, where: 1 = strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree.

Ethical Climate

	Code	Statements					
1	EC$_1$	My company has a formal, written code of ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
2	EC$_2$	My company strictly enforces a code of ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
3	EC$_3$	My company has policies with regards to ethical behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
4	EC$_4$	My company strictly enforces policies regarding ethical behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
5	EC$_5$	Top management in my company has let it be known in no uncertain terms that unethical behaviors will not be tolerated.	1	2	3	4	5
6	EC$_6$	If human resource employee in my company is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior that results primarily in *personal gain* (rather than corporate gain), she or he will be promptly reprimanded.	1	2	3	4	5
7	EC$_7$	If human resource employee in my company is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior that results in primarily *corporate gain* (rather than personal gain), she or he will be promptly reprimanded.	1	2	3	4	5

Knowledge Sharing

	Code	Statements					

			1	2	3	4	5
1	KS$_1$	I voluntarily share my know-how, information, and knowledge with other employees.	1	2	3	4	5
2	KS$_2$	I cooperate or communicate with other employees in teams or groups for sharing information and knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5
3	KS$_3$	I can freely access documents, information, and knowledge held by other departments within the company.	1	2	3	4	5

Affective Commitment

	Code	Statements					
1	AC$_1$	I have a strong desire to work with my company.	1	2	3	4	5
2	AC$_2$	I have a positive emotional attachment to my company.	1	2	3	4	5
3	AC$_3$	Even if I had other better job opportunities, I would want to work with my company.	1	2	3	4	5

Creative Problem-Solving Capacity

B) Please indicate with the following statements the extent to which you possess capabilities to solve problem creatively, where: 1 = not at all 2= to a small extent 3= to some extent 4= to a moderate extent 5 = to a large extent.

	Code	Statements					
1	CPSC$_1$	Capability to define work problems creatively (problem definition and construction).	1	2	3	4	5
2	CPSC$_2$	Skill to creatively articulate work problems (problem definition and construction).	1	2	3	4	5
3	CPSC$_3$	Ability to generate novel ideas to solve work problems (idea generation).	1	2	3	4	5
4	CPSC$_4$	Capability to suggest creative solutions to work problems (idea generation).	1	2	3	4	5
5	CPSC$_5$	Capability to appreciate what ideas are best for solving work problems (idea evaluation).	1	2	3	4	5
6	CPSC$_6$	Capability to choose the optimal solution for a specific work problem (idea evaluation)	1	2	3	4	5
7	CPSC$_7$	Capability to effectively implement novel ideas chosen to solve a specific work problem (idea implementation).	1	2	3	4	5
8	CPSC$_8$	Capability to implement the chosen creative solution to solve a specific work problem (idea implementation).	1	2	3	4	5

Demographic Questions

- Gender
  - Male
  - Female
- Age
  - 20-29
  - 30-39
  - 40-49
  - 50 and above
- Level of experience
  - Less than one year
  - 1-5 years
  - 6-10 years
  - 11-15years
  - 16-20 years
  - 21 years and above
- Education Level
  - High school degree
  - Diploma degree
  - Bachelor degree
  - Master degree and above