

A little respect can kindle creativity at work

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Everyone wants respect, but not everyone gets it. A new study by University of Michigan professor Jane Dutton indicates that workers who are treated with respect reach higher levels of creativity.

Dutton and co-authors Abraham Carmeli of Tel Aviv University in Israel and Ashley Hardin, a doctoral student at U-M's Ross School of Business, found that engaging respectfully at work raises creative behavior by individuals and teams.

Dutton, professor of management and organizations and professor of psychology, is an expert on processes that build capabilities and strengths of employees in organizations.

"Organizations are fertile terrains for interrelating that can either build or destroy human accomplishments including creativity," Dutton said. "Across our studies, we demonstrate that respectful engagement is more than simply a nice way to interact, but is a catalyst and cultivator of creativity."

In four studies, the researchers showed that the connection between respectful engagement and creativity holds at both the individual and team levels, suggesting that this mode of positive interrelating may have a uniform link to creativity.

Respectful engagement is defined by behaviors such as recognizing another person, understanding and appreciating them, listening, attending to needs, emphasizing another's good qualities, and making requests not demands.

The researchers also looked at relational [information processing](#)—how organizational members use conversation to reflect upon their goals and work. They focused on relational information processing instead of self-reflection because it opens up opportunities to develop theory about how this mechanism may build core capabilities key for continuous work improvement, such as knowledge creation, coordinating and capacity to manage conflicting demands.

For example, organizations such as Pixar have enacted relational information processing and were able to develop high quality, creative products over a long period of time.

Since individuals spend the majority of their time from ages 20 to 70 in organizations, relationships in the workplace are key for important human accomplishments such as creativity.

This series of studies has expanded the repertoire of theoretical lenses for examining how relationships at work matter for [creativity](#), beyond networks of social exchange, by defining and testing how respectful engagement and relational information processing help us understand the relational roots of new ideas in work organizations.

"In a more demanding [work](#) world the cultivation of respect is challenging," Dutton said. "These studies remind us of the potential yield from making respectful engagement an interpersonal goal and a strategic imperative."

More information: "Respect as an engine for new ideas: Linking respectful engagement, relational information processing and creativity among employees and teams." webuser.bus.umich.edu/janedut/High%20Quality%20Connections/Respect%20as%20an%20Engine.pdf

Provided by University of Michigan

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