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Thriving in Intercultural Interactions as an Antecedent of Organizational Creativity and Innovation

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The aim of the paper is to depict the role of thriving in intercultural interactions as an antecedent of organizational creativity and innovation in multinational corporations (MNCs). The theoretical framework for the discourse is based on social learning and social cognitive theories, cognitive dissonance and information-processing theory. The paper is a conceptual type and its relevance to the topic of corporate entrepreneurship is emphasized. It both portrays the theoretical background as well as summarizes the results of the studies on thriving, creativity and innovation in intercultural interactions, proposing a conceptual framework concerning the above links. Finally, it provides conclusions and directions for future research. The paper emphasizes that an inevitable component of thriving – learning – is an immanent part of interactions with culturally different others and an antecedent of organizational creativity and innovation, which are inherent elements of corporate entrepreneurship.

Keywords: creativity, innovation, intercultural interactions, multinational corporations, thriving.

Prosperowanie w interakcjach międzykulturowych jako poprzednik organizacyjnej kreatywności i innowacji

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie roli prosperowania w interakcjach międzykulturowych jako poprzednika organizacyjnej kreatywności i innowacji w korporacjach wielonarodowych (MNCs). Bazę teoretyczną rozważań stanowią teorie społecznego uczenia i społeczno-poznawcza, dysonansu poznawczego oraz przetwarzania informacji. Artykuł ma charakter koncepcyjny. Zawiera także odniesienia do zagadnienia przedsiębiorczości korporacyjnej. Opisano w nim założenia teoretyczne oraz podsumowano wyniki badań dotyczących prosperowania, kreatywności i innowacji w interakcjach międzykulturowych, proponując koncepcję pokazującą związki między nimi. Wreszcie zawarto wnioski i wskazano kierunki przyszłych badań. W artykule podkreśla się, że integralny element prosperowania – uczenie się – jest nieodzownym efektem interakcji z przedstawicielami innych kultur i poprzednikiem organizacyjnej kreatywności i innowacji – składowych przedsiębiorczości korporacyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: kreatywność, innowacje, interakcje międzykulturowe, korporacje wielonarodowe, prosperowanie.

JEL: F23, M12, M14, O31

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1. Introduction

The research on organizational creativity and innovation is of vital importance since to survive, prosper and sustain competitiveness organizations need creativity potential that translates into successful innovation. Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, being interrelated, are also recognized as the drivers of an entrepreneurial culture and socio-economic development (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015). The way how creative ideas are turned into successful innovations has been the central topic in the entrepreneurship literature (Sarooghi, Libaers and Burkemper, 2013).

Creativity is perceived as the production of novel, useful ideas or solutions aimed at solving problems, launching new products or services, capitalizing business opportunities as well as increasing organizational effectiveness (Rego, Sousa, Marques and Cunha, 2012). It is also seen as "the precursor of innovative behavior and a central dimension of 'enterprising potential' in individuals" (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015, p. 33). As far as innovation is concerned, it refers to some new outcomes, e.g. products, services, ideas, etc. but also the adaptation of those outcomes that could be invented inside and/or outside an organization (Woodman, Sawyer and Griffin, 1993). Entrepreneurship, or corporate entrepreneurship in particular, refers to creation of new organizations or initiation of renewal and innovation within an existing organization (Wang, Chung and Lim, 2015).

Both creativity and innovation are a function of social/contextual factors, the results of individual efforts of people working together in a complex social system. Similarly, entrepreneurship can be perceived as "a process that unfolds as individuals behave within and interact with the environments where they are embedded" (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015, p. 32). Therefore, social interactions are a crucial factor in activating organizational creativity that contributes to innovation and may instigate corporate entrepreneurship (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2015; Rego et al., 2012; Rozkwitalska, 2014b; Woodman et al., 1993).

Intercultural interactions, i.e. contacts between people from a home country and other country nationals, have become important in today business and workplace. An increased number of employees works with culturally diverse others as multinational corporations (MNCs) with their multicultural workforce have spread across many economies worldwide (Abdul Malek and Budhwar, 2013; Groeppel-Klein, Germelmann and Glaum, 2010). MNCs have attracted considerable attention of scholars who have attempted to study various aspects of their functioning, including interactions of their multicultural employees and outcomes of such interactions (Lee, 2013; Mäkelä, Andersson and Seppälä, 2012; Suutari and Mäkelä, 2007). Specifically, the literature on cultural diversity has revealed that diversity may lead to increased creativity and innovation in multicultural teams (Stahl et al., 2010; Stevens, Plaut and Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Nevertheless, it has also provided evidence that intercultural interactions pose

significant challenges, which may counter potential benefits. As a result, the 'double-edge sword' perspective on cultural diversity has been emphasized by various researchers (Caprar, 2011; Fitzsimmons, Miska and Stahl, 2011; Mannix and Neale, 2005; Rozkwitalska, 2014a), who have also found out that learning, as a vital aspect of individual and organizational functioning, is particularly evident when individuals face cultural diversity (Davidson and James, 2009).

Learning, alongside vitality, is a component of employees' thriving. The literature on positive psychology defines thriving as "the experience of an individual's growth resulted from vitality and learning in a work context" (Rozkwitalska and Basinska, 2015, p. 1898). The phenomenon is becoming an important domain of inquiry and the studies on thriving are systematically growing in number due to the fact that thriving contributes to many positive outcomes for organizations (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005; Wallace et al., 2013), including creativity and innovation (Carmeli and Spreizer, 2009). The prior studies also show that thriving is a socially embedded process and social interactions, including intercultural contacts, may trigger thriving (Rozkwitalska and Basinska, 2015; Spreitzer et al., 2005).

This paper tries to link thriving in intercultural interactions with creativity and innovation, and consequently to broaden knowledge of the innovative and entrepreneurial processes in MNCs. This view on the phenomenon appears to be a missing element in the previous research. Hence, the aim of the paper is to depict the role of thriving in intercultural interactions as an antecedent of organizational creativity and innovation in MNCs. Both creativity and innovation are immanent elements of corporate entrepreneurship that can be enhanced by learning, a component of thriving, since corporate entrepreneurship is dependent upon organizational members' continuous learning ability (Hayton, 2005).

The paper is a conceptual type. It first emphasizes the role of learning, creativity and innovation in corporate entrepreneurship. Then it portrays the theoretical background concerning thriving in social interactions, including intercultural interactions, and its links with organizational creativity and innovation. Furthermore, it summarizes the results of the studies on thriving, creativity and innovation in intercultural interactions as well as proposes a conceptual framework concerning the above links. Finally, it recapitulates the discourse, identifies the potential research gaps and puts directions for future studies.

2. Relevance of the Topic and Theoretical Background

2.1. Corporate Entrepreneurship – The Role of Learning, Creativity and Innovation

Corporate entrepreneurship is defined as "the discovery and pursuit of new opportunities through innovation and venturing" (Hayton and Kelley, 2006, p. 407). It is also seen "as the process by which teams within an established company conceive, foster, launch and manage a new business that is

distinct from the parent company but leverages the parent's assets, market position, capabilities or other resources" (Wolcott and Lippitz, 2007, p. 75). Over the years the phenomenon has attracted a significant attention of scholars. For example, they found that learning from both successes and failures fosters entrepreneurship since it enables firms to be innovative, establish new businesses as well as strategically renew their operations (Martín-Rojas, García-Morales and Bolívar-Ramos, 2013). Organizational learning also makes future entrepreneurial initiatives more probable (Shepherd, Covin and Kuratko, 2009) and is driven by collaboration, creativity and individual commitment (Hayton, 2005). Innovation, i.e. creation of new ideas, is perceived as one of the dimensions of corporate entrepreneurship, its synonym, while innovative competences, considered as a function of creativity, are one of four competencies specific to corporate entrepreneurship (Hayton and Kelley, 2006; Kuratko, Hornsby and Covin, 2014; Martín-Rojas et al., 2013). Researchers stress the role of ensuring a work environment conducive to innovation as a prerequisite of corporate entrepreneurship (Kuratko et al., 2014), since the basis of entrepreneurial organizations are their employees with their learning and creativity potential (Wiatrak, 2008). With regard to MNCs an idea of dispersed entrepreneurship is highlighted in prior research. It assumes that corporate entrepreneurship is facilitated by informal social groupings in geographically dispersed units of MNCs (Lee and Williams, 2007). Thriving individuals, members of such groupings, may therefore become a vital asset in companies' pursuit toward corporate entrepreneurship.

2.2. Thriving in Social Interactions and Organizational Creativity and Innovation

Thriving reflects a combined experience of a sense of vitality, which is perceived as positive energy and enthusiasm, and learning that shows people's growth through acquiring new knowledge and skills that can be applied. Vitality represents an affective dimension of thriving, its energy component and it is defined as a pleasurable psychological experience in the workplace. It includes a feeling of energy, aliveness and high arousal of job-related positive emotions. Learning as a cognitive component of thriving refers to growing through new knowledge and skills, increasing people's sense of efficacy and competence (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005). It can be seen as a dynamic transformational process, being constantly extended and re-defined as well as a function of the context in which it occurs. Learning exhibits an organic growth of a person and it can unleash the potential of developing new ideas. Learning, in view of psychologists, includes acquisition or modification of one's representation of the environment, i.e. mental states, e.g. ideas, specific concepts or beliefs, needs and knowledge, through which individuals represent the world (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2006; Bartel-Radic, 2006).

The concept of thriving assumes that it is a socially embedded process, since both "vitality and learning are deeply rooted in social systems" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 539), and relies "on the interactions among people to determine what needs improving and how to do it" (Carmeli, Brueller and Dutton, 2009, p. 81). Social learning theory and social cognitive theory have laid the foundations for explaining how social interactions may enhance thriving through learning and vitality.

Social learning theory particularly emphasizes the role of learning in social interactions. It assumes that people learn their behaviors from the environment as they are involved in the process of observational learning. Every type of social interactions creates learning opportunities, i.e. it gives a chance of mutually observing others and consciously deciding if one wants to adapt or not (Bandura, 1977). It can also boost vitality as people's energy grows when they become absorbed in the learning process.

An even more thorough explanation of thriving as a result of social interactions can be found in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). The theory posits that when people are active and purposeful at work, they act agentically. Three agentic behaviors, namely task focus, exploration and heedful relating, contribute to thriving at work. They can also enhance individual and organizational creativity and innovation. Task focus describes the extent to which individuals focus on their responsibilities at work. It can increase thriving since focusing on tasks and devoting certain energy to accomplish them increases vitality. Moreover, when people are concentrated on their tasks, they need "to develop and refine routines and repertoires for doing their work efficiently and effectively, which contributes to learning" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 541). Developing and refining routines and repertoires involves creative processes that lead to innovative outcomes in doing one's work. Exploration, another agentic behavior, is strictly connected with creativity and innovation as it refers to experimentation, risk taking and discovery that enable individuals to grow in new directions. Social interactions contribute to thriving at work and activate exploration behavior since when people work together, they discover new ways of doing tasks, feel energetic and learn. Exposure to novelty is of vital importance here. Finally, social interactions involve individuals in heedful relating, i.e. caring about one another's task connectivity. Such agentic behavior supports thriving as it requires energy and learning. It can also foster creativity and innovation when, due to awareness of being a part of a larger system, people are forced to go "beyond the boundaries of their focused work responsibilities" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 541).

The above discourse indicates that social interactions are fuel for thriving, which in turn may lead to organizational creativity and innovation.

Intercultural interactions, which are a peculiar and complex type of social interactions[1], can provide even more room for thriving and, as a result, creativity and innovation. The learning component of thriving appears to be especially significant here.

2.3. Intercultural Learning as a Foundation of Thriving

The theories described above support the notion that intercultural interactions can also enhance thriving, in particular via its learning component. Concerning social learning theory, attention, an antecedent sub-process of learning, can be even stronger in intercultural interactions than in other types of social interactions. When people interact with culturally different others, their attention is attracted by behaviors that they perceive as novel, while their motivation for learning can be additionally strengthened by MNCs if they provide necessary job resources facilitating intercultural interactions (Bakker, van Veldhoven and Xanthopoulou, 2010). In addition, in view of social cognitive theory, since intercultural interactions are more demanding and challenging than common social interactions, individuals are compelled to be active, learn and adopt agentic behaviors in such contacts. Likewise, job resources offered by MNCs, apart from the fact that they enable agentic behaviors, strengthen collective agency by means of their accessibility (Bandura, 2000).

People involved in intercultural interactions exhibit different representations which are highly influenced by their culture, because it affects what appropriate behavior is in a given situation. While interacting with culturally diverse others, individuals' representations are questioned, they experience cognitive dissonance and their mentality changes (Davidson and James, 2009). Cognitive dissonance is a state of uncomfortable arousal that results from an observed discrepancy between cognitions, or between behavior and cognition. Cognitive dissonance motivates people to reduce or eliminate it, which can help to facilitate learning and, as a result, creative and innovative processes (Maertz, Hassan and Magnusson, 2009). When intercultural interactions take place, intercultural learning, i.e. "the acquisition or modification of the representations of intercultural situations" (Bartel-Radic, 2006, p. 651) is observed. More specifically, intercultural interactions inside MNCs have a higher potential for learning than interactions with external foreign parties (Bartel-Radic, 2006). They can facilitate intercultural learning if they are long-term and spontaneous, occur in a shared context and are accompanied by positive emotions or a conflict. Intercultural contacts leave an ample room for a conflict because people's expectations are violated and cognitive dissonance and tensions come into surface. Nevertheless, Davidson and James (2009) claim that learning in such circumstances leads to high-quality connections or relationships which trigger thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

3. Thriving, Creativity and Innovation in Intercultural Interactions

3.1. Prior Research on Thriving, Creativity and Innovation in Intercultural Interactions

The state-of-the-art literature presents a substantial gap concerning research on thriving that takes into account intercultural interactions or the multicultural work environment. To the best of the author's knowledge, only a few studies so far have tackled the issue. Nonetheless, there are studies which stress learning in intercultural interactions as well as show creativity and innovation as their outcomes[2].

With regard to thriving in intercultural interactions Rozkwitalska and Basinska (2015), based on case studies in two MNCs, infer that the multicultural work environment in MNCs is highly demanding, however MNCs enable their staff to cope with challenges, which contributes to their learning and arouses more positive than negative emotions. They also demonstrate that employees in MNCs, being involved in intercultural interactions, experience thriving. The authors posit that challenges faced in intercultural interactions are a natural source of learning, which can explain why the learning component of thriving in the multicultural workplace is more salient than vitality. This observation was also confirmed in the quantitative study of Basinska (2017). Although Basinska did examine the relationship between thriving and certain workplace outcomes, namely subjective well-being including positive and negative emotions and satisfaction, its association with creativity and innovation has not been demonstrated in prior research yet[3]. Nevertheless, it was presented in the theoretical model in the works of Rozkwitalska (2016) and Basinska (2017).

The previous studies demonstrate that intercultural interactions initiate the process of learning. This observation has been revealed in plenty of works (e.g. Bartel-Radic, 2006; Luijters, van der Zee and Otten, 2008; Noorderhaven and Harzing, 2009; Rozkwitalska, Chmielecki and Przytuła, 2014; Rozkwitalska, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Shore et al., 2009), which also notice that contacts among culturally diverse others increase their knowledge base, broaden perspectives and experiences, change worldviews and facilitate the development of intercultural competence. Moreover, the studies on cultural diversity and multicultural teams provide evidence that contacts among culturally diverse people may contribute to creativity and innovation (e.g. Mannix and Neale, 2005; Noorderhaven and Harzing, 2009; Rozkwitalska et al., 2014; Rozkwitalska, 2014a, 2014b; Stahl et al., 2010; Stahl et al., 2009). This notion forms a basis of the 'value in diversity' hypothesis deduced from information-processing theory[4] and assumes that since "cultural differences are associated with differences in mental models, modes of perception, and approaches to problems, they are likely to provide strong

inputs for creativity", which "is an important component of innovation" (Stahl et al., 2009, p. 693).

3.2. Thriving, Creativity and Innovation in Intercultural Interactions – A Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 reflects a conceptual framework of the links between thriving in intercultural interactions and organizational creativity and innovation. It takes into account the theories and the prior research depicted earlier in the paper.
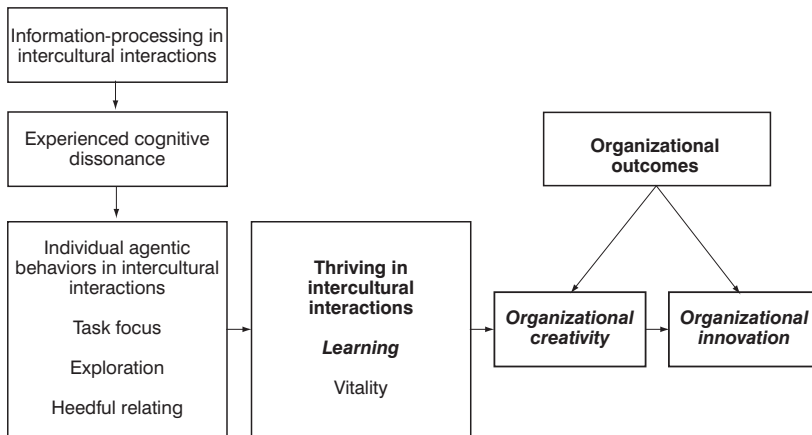

Fig. 1. Intercultural interactions, thriving and organizational creativity and innovation

The conceptual framework indicates that information-processing in intercultural interactions is based on multiple information sources, the background, skills and knowledge. However, it faces people with an experience of cognitive dissonance, which compels them to become agents. Their agentic behaviors stimulate thriving, yet learning is a more salient manifestation of thriving's components than vitality. The organizational outcome of thriving in intercultural interactions is creativity that further fosters organizational innovation and may be translated into corporate entrepreneurial activities.

4. Conclusions

The concept of thriving appears to be an important, missing element in explaining organizational creativity and innovation as the outcomes of intercultural interactions. Learning is an immanent part of interactions with culturally different others and can be seen as an antecedent of organizational creativity and innovation. Innovation is seen as a crucial dimension

of corporate entrepreneurship. People thrive in intercultural contacts since, as their different representations are confronted with one another, they experience cognitive dissonance and learn as well as feel vitality. They take an active role in intercultural interactions, where the learning component of thriving appears to be more noticeable than vitality. Consequently, learning may activate individual and organizational creativity and innovation that are perceived as the results of learning processes.

Although the amount of research on thriving is growing, its relationship with organizational creativity and innovation in the multicultural work context has still not been sufficiently documented. In fact, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is a lack of studies on the aforementioned phenomenon. This paper attempted to fill the above gap by contributing to the development of a conceptual framework concerning the issue. As it focuses on the positive outcomes of intercultural interactions and perceives cultural diversity as an asset, it adds to the positive stream in the literature on cultural diversity in MNCs and the nature of the creative and innovative processes in these organizations.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence is necessary. Therefore, future studies should explore empirically both qualitatively and quantitatively the links indicated in Figure 1 and develop or question the conceptual framework it proposes.

Endnotes

[1] Intercultural interactions can be interpreted as very complex social interactions due to the impact of cultures, personalities, occupations, the type of relationship and the specific context on the behaviors of interacting people. In intercultural interactions individuals manifest behaviors that are mutually oriented and interpret these behaviors by the lens of their own cultures and, as a result, different cognitive mechanisms (Müller, 1998; Rozkwitalska, 2014a; Rummel, 1976).

[2] With regard to the studies which emphasize learning, creativity and innovation as the results of interactions of individuals from different cultures, the author referred to the meta-analysis conducted by Stahl et al. (2009) and further supplemented it by other studies that can be perceived as exemplification of the phenomenon under study. Concerning the research on thriving in intercultural interactions, a narrative review was implemented (Czakon, 2013; van Knippenberg, 2012). Other researchers recommend this method if the field is rudimentary and the topic is not well recognized, thus integration of various evidence from the studies is feasible (van Knippenberg, 2012; Takeuchi and Chen, 2013). A narrative review is specifically advised when it is intended not only to summarize and integrate the literature but also to contribute the conceptual insights (van Knippenberg, 2012). To analyze how intercultural interactions relate to thriving, the author conducted a computerized search of several databases (Ebsco, Emerald, Science Direct, ProQuest, Google Scholar), using the sets of keywords, i.e.: intercultural (cross-cultural) interactions and thriving; multinational companies (enterprises, corporations) and thriving; multicultural environment (workplace, context) and thriving. The studies that matched the searching keywords are discussed in the paper.

[3] In the study of Carmeli and Spreizer (2009), the associations between thriving and innovation were revealed. Nevertheless, it was neither conducted in a multicultural work setting nor in MNCs.

[4] In view of the theory, the cultural diversity of staff enables access to people who grew in different backgrounds, have their specific personal networks, unique information, expertise, skills, and cognitive perspectives. Due to these factors, group-think is limited and the capacity for creative and innovative problem solving increases (Mannix and Neale, 2005; Stahl et al., 2009).

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