

Chapter 4

GREAT MINDS DON'T THINK ALIKE? PERSON-LEVEL PREDICTORS OF INNOVATION AT WORK

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades there has been an explosion of interest in innovation. Organizations have become increasingly aware that it is vital for productivity and growth in all sectors. Management scientists have noted that the downsizing and process re-engineering in the 1990s has had limited success on organizational prosperity, such that business strategy for the millennium must reflect an intense desire to create new markets through innovation (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). With more dispersed and virtual working, role innovation is essential (Herriot & Anderson, 1997; King & Anderson, 1995), since clearly defined job descriptions are a thing of the past. The topic of innovation has generated a great deal of theoretical debate (Delbecq & Mills, 1985; Glynn, 1996; Kanter, 1983; Quinn, 1992; Senge, 1990; Van de Ven, 1986). This review is intended to investigate the recent literature examining innovation at the individual level.

Despite the colossal literature base straddling many academic disciplines, there has been a distinct lack of clarity regarding individual differences in the propensity to innovate. Although there is a fervent practical need to understand innovation in organizations, this area of research has generally been under-represented in the occupational psychology literature. Sternberg (1999) suggests at least six roadblocks to the psychological study of creativity and innovation, including a pervasive confusion of terminology (both in terms of definitions and criteria for assessment), a lack of theoretical development on origins, and a focus on innovation as a unidimensional concept. There is no taxonomy or organizing framework at the individual level to aid the researcher in tracing the literature over many decades.