

Expanded abstract

Creativity in Social Economy entities from a multiple case, mixed methodology perspective

Contextualization and objectives

To adapt to the adverse circumstances brought about by the covid-19 health crisis, Social Economy Entities (SEEs) need to apply creative solutions using knowledge and social innovation to contribute to the growth of these entities to sustainability. Organizations that foment creative thinking in management can develop innovative products and processes that motivate employees to act and engage in solving problems and satisfying people's needs. This article aims to validate a measurement scale using the Delphi method directed at different types of SEEs. We study how employee creativity can influence innovative processes and knowledge management and, at the same time, promote sustainable action.

Design and methodology

We reviewed the literature on employee creativity, innovation, knowledge, and sustainability in the context of the social economy. This led us to consider a questionnaire that was validated by experts using the Delphi method and a study of different types of SEEs (educational cooperatives, non-profit organizations, and foundations). A priori, we wanted to know the experts' opinions about the scale measuring employee creativity processes that supported increased capabilities in these SEEs in the Dominican Republic. We wanted to know how the experts viewed the challenges these social organizations face to adapt to the new situation brought about by covid-19. The support of different cooperatives and information from the Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Crédito Cooperativo (IDECOOP) and the Consejo Nacional de Cooperativas de la República Dominicana (COOPNACOOP RD) were used to identify 18 expert profiles. Previously, we established a general conceptual model with strategic variables, and we presented various models of the questionnaire based on the literature review to the experts for their revision.

In the second trimester of 2021, 1,267 cooperatives were in existence in the Dominican Republic, which represented 47.7% of the economically active population of the country, according to the Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Crédito Cooperativo (IDECOOP). Of that number, 169 were working in the area of education. Non-profit organizations (NGOs) and legally established foundations were also included, giving us a sample of 158 social economy entities. These were subdivided into 89 education cooperatives, 32 NGOs, and 37 foundations related to technical training. The data was collected using an online questionnaire channeled through different federations, with an effectiveness rate of 63%. Finally, the results were analyzed using the PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling) technique to validate

the questionnaire about the influence employee creativity has on innovation and knowledge management processes in the sustainability of SEEs in the Dominican Republic.

Results, conclusions, and limitations

The results of this study have important practical applications to employee adaptation processes, administration approaches, and knowledge and sustainability management. Employee creativity is nurtured in an environment where workers feel valued and cared for. This develops individual confidence that, in turn, helps create responsible, supportive, and united groups that are willing to work toward just causes. SEEs promote an environment of collaboration and employee empowerment, and they provide the conditions necessary for shared learning. Internal learning builds social capital, strengthening employees' independence and self-sufficiency, resulting in the generation of creative ideas. Employees' creative capacities are supported by the formal structures of SEEs through the development of educational services aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and helping people obtain well-paid jobs.

Creativity management strengthens the generation of knowledge and its transfer, as well as the relationship between innovation and social sustainability. This contributes to innovative solutions for sustainable social actions. Of the five hypotheses posed, four are confirmed and one is rejected. In the context of a serious health crisis with great impact on social economy entities, knowledge management does not contribute to strengthening social sustainability. This is due to the fact that tension arises from the natural apathy of knowledge managers and the maintenance of information system infrastructures due to the volatility of the information multiplied by increased risk. These entities have been forced to invest their resources in establishing new, virtual channels of communication. In addition to enhancing social sustainability, it is necessary to establish direct connections among those involved in programs to improve capabilities and competences. This study was developed with data from a single country, so its results cannot be extrapolated to other contexts.

Original value and practical implications

Strategic alliances among different sectors of the social economy are being created in the Dominican Republic to provide integrated and inclusive development. The expansion of the cooperative sector in its different modalities strengthens productive activities, foment knowledge transfer, and supports vulnerable groups. This study integrates the different components of employee creativity with social innovation management and explores knowledge management and its impact on social sustainability. We examine the impact these processes have had in the context of the covid-19 pandemic on the diversity of the actions carried out in the cases studied and on the effect of these actions on different areas of sustainability. In terms of practical implications, we believe that there is a direct link between social innovation and programs that foment sustainability. However, since there is a negative relation between knowledge and sustainability, SEEs should try to make their knowledge management processes more flexible, linear, and direct to facilitate informal feedback.