

HARNESSING EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY THROUGH REWARD – AND CHOICE

If your workplace asked its employees for ideas on how to improve the business, how much effort would you put into your response? According to new research from UNC Greensboro's Bryan School of Business and Economics, that depends on whether your company is offering a reward – and a choice – in return.

Bryan School Management Professor Dr. Aichia Chuang was the co-author of a recent paper, "Enhancing Employee Creativity: Effects of Choice, Rewards and Personality" that originally appeared in the Journal of Applied Psychology.

Many organizations launch formal suggestion programs to solicit innovative ideas from their rank-and-file employees. Suggestion programs are easy for organizations to set up and convenient for employees to use. In these programs, employees are encouraged to submit ideas about almost any topic such as ways to streamline work processes, improvements to employee benefits policies, or ways to enhance customer satisfaction.

For their research, Chuang's team gathered test subjects and solicited fresh, creative ideas that would be of value to an organization. Certain individuals were offered not only a reward for submissions in the top 20 percent of ideas, but a choice of reward: \$80 to keep, priority to select preferred days off, \$80 for your team to split, or \$80 for the charity of your choice.

Using two main criteria – novelty and usefulness – Chuang says those given a choice not only offered more ideas, but those ideas were also more creative. "Every job has some kind of creativity employees must show – some industries require more than others. Front-line employees know best about what customers need," said Chuang.

Chuang, who earned her PhD from the University of Minnesota in 2001 before returning to Taiwan for a role as an assistant professor, has been at the Bryan School for four years. Spending much of that time directing the School's PhD in Business Administration program, she says there's no place she'd rather be from a research perspective, noting the opportunities for collaboration in particular.

In the coming months, Chuang says she'd like to further explore the sizable data set from this latest effort, having only examined a portion of the variables. "After receiving a reward, what will happen? We predict these workers will feel more committed and find more meaning in their work," she said.

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