RUNNING HEAD: THE WORKS OF GÖRAN EKVALL

The Works of Göran Ekvall

Sarah Komendat

The International Center for Studies in Creativity

Buffalo State College

CRS 625, Spring 2010

Dr. Diego Uribe

**Introduction / Biography**

The researcher I decided to “dig deeper” about is the Swedish, creative climate theorist Göran Ekvall. The reason for this choice is that I have really enjoyed learning about creative climate and I feel that his studies are quite relevant to my area of work. From briefly learning about Ekvall during CRS 560, I believe that his theories of creative climate may be quite beneficial to an elementary classroom. Ekvall is best-known for his development of the ten dimensions of creative climate. New research of his hints at the possibility of an eleventh dimension of creative climate and some other various researchers argue that there may be fourteen dimensions of creative climate(Hunter, Bedell, & Mumford, 2005).

Göran Ekvall’s first published work about creative climate came in 1971, at the age of 41. The twenty year prior to this publishing merely involved inquiry and research. The inspiration to study the lives of ideators came from his time working for a Volvo automobile plant in Sweden in the 1950s. When he first started researching, he was merely studying the life of “suggestors” (ideators) and “suggestion systems” (idea generation teams) within the Swedish mechanical industry. He questioned, “Why suggest? How are suggestors different from other people?” (Ekvall, 1971, p. 10). Present day researchers are still trying to figure out how creative ideators are “made” and what makes a creative ideation team. Simpson (2001) posed a similar view / inquiry to Ekvall when she stated, “while you can increase the level of creativity by training, the more important element is making sure that the corporate environment allows people to exercise what they’ve learned” (p. 54).

In the 1960s Ekvall was promoted to full-time “suggestion investigator” for Volvo and started to give out attitude surveys out to employees involved in the ideation teams. His primary goals were to assess attitude, intelligence, and personality. In 1962, Ekvall was given his first research team to work with to research suggestion systems within the organization SAF. In the following year, he carried out a similar study with a mechanical industry which years later was later published in the “PA-council’s report series” (Ekvall, 1971, p. 11). In 1968, Ekvall and Rolf Olsson presented to the mechanical industry all across Sweden the effect of suggestion systems. A few years later in 1971, Ekvall wrote his thesis on *Creativity at the Place of Work*, which kicked off his long career of studying creativity and organizational climate. The works and research done from his thesis to the present day will be discussed through remaining sections of this paper. As for his personal life, Ekvall’s wife’s name is Ingrid, and they have three children and one child of late.

**Seminal Works**

Göran Ekvall has presented many works and contributions to the field of creativity; however, two of his works stand out from the rest. *Climate, Structure and Innovativeness of Organizations* (1983) and *Organizational Climate for Creativity and* *Innovation* (1996) are his two most referenced compositions within the field of creativity.

In *Climate, Structure and innovativeness of Organizations* (1983), Ekvall conducted a study in which participants from industry and public administration assessed their company’s level of innovativeness. There were four parts to the assessment, representing four different aspects of an organization: climate, bureaucratic aspects, organizational goal-clarity, and educational and professional level of the staff” (Ekvall, 1983). From this study, Ekvall found that “the results indicate that climate is the most crucial of these four organizational variables in regard to innovativeness” (1996, Ekvall, p. 113). This article is seminal to his research because it is when he truly started to project his research to the world (as opposed to solely Swedish mechanical industries) about his theories of organizational climate. He also introduced four “climate variables” in this article which later expanded and turned into his well-known ten dimensions of creative climate.

*Organizational Climate for Creativity and Innovation* (1996) is the article that sums up all of Ekvall’s research within organizational climate and creativity throughout the second half of the 20th century. This paper was where Ekvall formalized his ten dimensions of creative climate (challenge, freedom, idea support, trust / openness, dynamism / liveliness, playfulness / humor, debates, conflicts, risk-taking, and idea time) as well as described the implications of the *Creative Climate Questionnaire* (CCQ). By creating the CCQ, Ekvall combined all the small questionnaires and interviews that he used in the past with mechanical industries in Sweden to create one useable assessment of creative climate, making the CCQ a seminal creation of a measure. The CCQ is still used today all around the world, most recently with the work climate of staff in Autistic Spectrum Disorder sheltered homes (Benderix, 2010). The basis for how the CCQ was created lies within Ekvall’s (1996) own definition of creative climate, “climate is regarded as an attribute of the organization, a conglomerate of attitudes, feelings, and behaviours which characterizes life in the organization, and exists independently of the perceptions and understandings of the members of the organization” (p. 105).

Ekvall outlined the reliability, validity, and usability of the CCQ measure by conducting studies done using the CCQ. The graphs and results show high reliability since there were high Cronbach Alpha scores when administering the CCQ amongst 6 different companies and a variety of employees. Ekvall (1996) promoted the usability and validity when he stated, “the practical relevance and usefulness of the climate factors of the CCQ as tools for organizational diagnosis and treatment is confirmed by the widespread use of the CCQ in organizational and management development projects and programmes” (p. 110). Ekvall then highlighted the study he did in 1983 (mentioned above) in order to reiterate and advertise the importance of creative climate in the creative workplace. In 1987, Ekvall, Arvonen, and Nyström conducted a study which involved four companies within the business of “producing chemicals for the paper and pulp and detergent industries” (Ekvall, 1996, p.115). Two companies were more traditional or stagnated and two were more innovative. Ekvall, Arvonen, and Nyström (1987) found that the more innovative companies had higher scores in “Freedom, Dynamism, Playfulness, Debates, and Risk Taking” (1996, p. 116).

Ekvall (1996) summed up the article by building details into some descriptions of the ten dimensions of creative climate and he also outlined some imperfections of the CCQ. He clarified for readers that it is not beneficial for companies to allow some dimensions such as freedom and playfulness in excessive amounts. Although companies need time for freedom and playfulness, restrictions need to be in place as well (Ekvall, 1996).

Researchers have begun to critique Ekvall’s work on creative climate, with particular concentration on his paper published in 1996. Moultrie and Young (2009) recently did a study comparing Ekvall’s organizational climate theory vs. Theresa Amabile’s theory about creative climate. The two theories were released within one year of each other (Amabile’s work came out in 1997), causing some debate over which theory is to be labeled the best and most useful. Moultrie and Young (2009) found that Ekvall’s work is maybe too broad, yet “addresses organizational creativity at a slightly higher and more abstract level [than Amabile’s]” (p. 305).

**Germinal Works**

Ekvall has written many articles throughout his career that have been complementary to the construction of his theories about creative climate. Within the next section of this paper, several of these articles will be briefly overviewed. There are a few germinal works Ekvall has written in Swedish that have yet to be translated to English.

In 1972, Ekvall published *A Study of two Creativity Tests*, which studied the reliability and validity of *The Brick Uses Test* and *The Purdue Creativity Test*. This study was unrelated to his studies on creative climate. Ekvall wanted to see if the scores correlated in Sweden with those in America, since the measures had not yet been tested outside of the United States. Both assessments measure one’s level of creativity by assessing one’s fluency and flexibility of ideas. The definitions of fluency and flexibility were based on Guildford’s *Structure of Intellect Model* (Ekvall, 1972). Ekvall established that the reliability of both measures was good, noting little difference in scorer bias in the *Brick Uses Test*. Ekvall (1972) also found that the measures could be up for questioning, since the “correlations between the two scores are around .80; a value note seldom accepted as a parallel-test-reliability” (p. 11). In terms of validity, Ekvall (1972) noted, “the coefficients suggest that the creativity tests have a capacity to discriminate between groups of non-suggestors and suggestors” (p. 21).

In 1998, Ekvall paired up with Lars Ryhammar to study the climate and leadership styles of a college university in Sweden. The researchers chose a sample of 130 professors to answer questions about how the leaders of the college affect the climate in the workplace. Ekvall and Ryhammar (1998) founds that “leadership style in the studied organization may not exert a separate and direct influence on creative outcomes” (p. 129). Although leadership does not directly influence a worker’s creative output, leadership can affect climate which in turn affects creative output.

In 1999, Ekvall did a study with Jouko Arvonen involving more about the effect of leadership style on the “universality and situational contingency” of companies’ differing “goals, strategies, structure, etc.” (1999, p. 244). The study was done with several companies in Sweden and the USA. Subordinates in the companies were asked to rate their managers by means of the *Leadership Behavior Styles* questionnaire (1999). The researchers found that the leaders that had a high leadership style within the domains of “change / development, production / task / structure, and employee / relations” scored highest operation demands” (1999, p. 248). Ekvall and Arvonen (1999) concluded that, “effective leadership thus requires marked behavior orientations towards all three types of behavior, namely change, production, and employee orientations. Managers high in these leadership style aspects are on the average much more efficient than managers who are low” (p. 249).

In the year 2000, Ekvall teamed up with Isaksen, Lauer, and Britz to write *Perceptions of the Best and Worst Climates for Creativity: Preliminary Validation Evidence for the Situational Outlook Questionnaire.* The researchers set out to see if the *Situational Outlook Questionnaire* (SOQ) was valid and also to see how it correlates with Ekvall’s CCQ and ten dimensions of creativity. Isaksen, Ekvall, Lauer, and Britz (2000) reminded readers that the SOQ had participants rate a best-case scenario of a working environment as well as a worst-case scenario of a working environment (2000). Three samples were tested to find that the best-case scenarios did indeed score significantly higher than worst-case scenarios, which proved the SOQ to be valid. The researchers also figured that “it seems reasonable to conclude that the SOQ appears to perform similarly to its parent measure, the CCQ” (2000, p. 180).

**Cutting Edge Work**

The latest work Göran Ekvall has had published was written with Sellgren and Tomson, entitled *Leadership Behaviour of Nurse Managers in Relation to Job Satisfaction and Work Climate* (2008). Sellgren, Ekvall, and Tomson (2008), noted that “the aim of the current study was to examine how nurse managers leadership behaviour relates to job satisfaction and a creative work climate” (p. 580). 426 subordinate staff participated in the sample. They were to answer questionnaires which evaluated “job satisfaction, leadership behaviour and work climate” (p. 580). Sellgren, Ekvall, and Tomson (2008) concluded that the workplaces in which subordinates rated their managers as “super” had significantly higher ratings in job satisfaction, leadership behaviour, and work climate (2008). The researchers also suggested that the high turnover rate within the nursing field is due in part to low job satisfaction, and that more emphasis should be placed on positive job satisfaction in the nursing field in the future.

**Conclusion**

Göran Ekvall has made himself a quite prominent researcher within the field of creativity, all because of a hunch and blazing interested in the previously unmentioned creativity sector of creative climate in the 1950s. With works still being published within the past couple years, it seems that even though Ekvall is getting up in age, he is still producing a strong quality of work to build on his dimensions of creative climate.

**Recommendations of Göran Ekvall’s Works / Creative Climate**

**Ekvall, G. (1996). Organizational climate for creativity and innovation. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 5*(1), 105-123.**

* In this paper, readers will obtain the detailed description of Ekvall’s ten dimensions of creative climate.

**Ekvall, G. (1983). Climate, structure and innovativeness of organizations. Stockholm: FA rådet The Swedish Council for Management and Organizational Behaviour.**

* Here readers gain insights into the start of the formalization of Ekvall’s theories on creative climate.

**Moultrie, J., & Young, A. (2009). Exploratory study of organizational creativity in creative organizations. *Organizational Creativity in Creative Organizations, 18*(4), 299-313. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8691.2099.00536.x**

* In this paper, researchers compare and contrast Ekvall’s and Amabile’s theories about creative climate.

**Sellgren, S. F., Ekvall, G., & Tomson, G. (2008). Leadership behavior of nurse managers in relation to job satisfaction and work climate. *Journal of Nursing Management, 16*, 578-587.**

* This paper is Ekvall’s latest work. Readers can gain insights into what Ekvall is working on in the present.

**Isaksen, S. G., Lauer, K. J., Ekvall, G., & Britz, A. (2000). Perceptions of the best and worst climates for creativity: preliminary validation evidence for the Situational Outlook Questionnaire. *Creativity Research Journal, 13*(2), 171-184.**

* Readers will see how the researchers tested the validity of the *Situational Outlook Questionnaire*.

Bibliography

Arvonen, J. & Ekvall, G. (1999). Effective leadership style: both universal and contingent?. *Creativity and Innovation Management, 8*(4), 242-250.

Benderix, Y. (2010). Staff members view of the work climate in sheltered homes for adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Nursing Science &Research in the Nordic Countries, 29*(2), 38-42.

Ekvall, G. (1971). Creativity at the place of work: a study of suggestors and suggestion systems in the Swedish mechanical industry. Reklamlito, Malmö: The Swedish Council for Personnel Administration.

Ekvall, G. (1972). A study of two creativity tests. Stockholm: The Swedish Council for Personnel Administration.

Ekvall, G. (1983). Climate, structure and innovativeness of organizations. Stockholm: FA rådet The Swedish Council for Management and Organizational Behaviour.

Ekvall, G. (1996). Organizational climate for creativity and innovation. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 5*(1), 105-123.

Ekvall, G. & Ryhammar, L. (1998). Leadership style, social climate and organizational outcomes: a study of a Swedish university college.  *Creativity and Innovation Management, 7*(3), 126-130.

Guilford, J. P. (1968). Intelligence has three facets: there are numerous intellectual abilities, but they fall neatly into a rational system. *Science*, *10*(160), 615-620.

Hunter, S. T., Bedell, K. E., Mumford, M. D. (2005). Dimensions of creative climate: a general taxonomy. *Korean Journal of Thinking & Problem Solving, 15*(2), 97-116.

Isaksen, S. G., Lauer, K. J., Ekvall, G., & Britz, A. (2000). Perceptions of the best and worst climates for creativity: preliminary validation evidence for the Situational Outlook Questionnaire. *Creativity Research Journal, 13*(2), 171-184.

Moultrie, J., & Young, A. (2009). Exploratory study of organizational creativity in creative organizations. *Organizational Creativity in Creative Organizations, 18*(4), 299-313. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8691.2099.00536.x

Sellgren, S. F., Ekvall, G., & Tomson, G. (2008). Leadership behavior of nurse managers in relation to job satisfaction and work climate. *Journal of Nursing Management, 16*, 578-587.

Simpson, L. (2001). Fostering creativity. *Training, 38*(12), 54.