

Promoting leadership and creativity among elderly people

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Abstract Human leadership and creativity constitute one of the most important factors of progress and economic development. However, it is known that creativity is undergoing a decline with the cognitive abilities and vital powers of people decreasing with age.

This paper aims at describing the main benefits of enhancing the leadership and creativity traits of the old people. The results demonstrate that special targeted approaches and creative activities help elderly, to alleviate the burdens of the role change, find meaning of daily activities, tackle some physical conditions, and to better social and personal life with more life satisfaction. The leading approaches to endorsing creativity in old age might include special targeted programmes such as art therapy, moderate exercises, meditations, and other useful techniques.

1 Introduction

Human creativity has always been in the centre of attention for many scientists and has become the topic of profound research (see e.g. Barrett and Limb 2019). Much of it has focused on what might be called successful creativity or influential creativity by examining the lives and circumstances of famous innovators in the art, science, and business worlds. As a result, those taking this approach emphasize factors such as extensive background or training and a high level of intrinsic motivation in their creativity analysis.

Because creative and cognitive qualities share almost everywhere they make a significant contribution to their chosen field of activity. However, many scientists are interested in the universal cognitive foundations of normal (often profane) human creativity and not in the characteristics, motivation or prior knowledge of those who excel in this respect. An essential principle is to involve them in the building of knowledge from the wealth of human development, and to focus on identifying and describing with the specialist the abilities that point to creativity.

The other field of study which undergoes quick development is the creativity in everyday life especially with respect to effectivity, work-life balance, health outcomes and overall state of wellbeing. It was established, that the capacity for creative thinking and higher levels of cognition not only improve economic output of individuals and countries, but also enhance social life, civil participation, improve the state of health, help to deal with unforeseeable situation and have many other positive effects on economic, psychological, social sides of human existence.

One of the biggest academic discussion concerning creativity and cognition is related to the changes the individual undergoes in his life time. The levels of creativity and cognition are showed to be related to age (Kerka, 1999; Deary et al. 2009), lifestyles (Hickson and Housely 1997), existence of hobbies, and levels of stress (Fratiglioni, et al. 2004). The sub-sample of these studies concern with the persons at the age of older adults. In the context of population ageing, the efficient and creative use of the abilities of elderly may mitigate some of the

economic and social challenges the ageing may bring. Creative older adults with sufficient cognitive functions are more probably to find new employment, have better health, may look for better social engagement on the local level and have more fulfilling life. Thus, improving creativity and cognition of elderly may help to reduce unemployment of older adults, alleviate the pressure on social security compensations and health expenses and bring the life experience to the use of the society.

Creativity as the emergence of attributes of man springs from a wealth of knowledge rich in meaningful experiences. The considerations expressed in this context are only intended to open the discussion in training for geriatrics, as it is important to convey wisdom and creativity for human development. There is also an apparent connection between creativity and leadership (Selyanskaya et al. 2018). For example, Wang et al. (2016) examine the effects of team creativity on intrinsic motivation and transformational leadership.

This paper links the creativity with the life span of people and aims at explaining the main benefits of creativity and cognition. The latter two, though often researched separately, in real life situation often interfere and are difficult to separate. The example of hobbies illustrates both the ability of cognition and creativity to meaningfully engage in any type of hobby activity. Similarly, social life may encompass the aspects of both creativity and cognition, making the separate study of both of them more cumbersome. The final section of the paper provides some conclusions, implications and recommendations.

2 Aging and creativity

In our hectic and busy 21st century that is full of information that is hard of absorb and the pace of life hardly anyone can catch, the relationship between aging and creativity can be crucial, especially as the Earth population grows older with the quality of life getting better and the span of life getting longer. On the other hand in the context of Industry 4.0, automatization and computerisation will make redundant repetitive and dull work extinguishing many of office based professions. The people, formerly working in the offices will have to re-educate themselves in the way of being more creative, of finding new unexpected approaches and concentrated more on the human side of production processes. All of these jobs will require more of independent and critical thinking and eventually more creativity in income and outcome.

While the new generation of millennials is already expecting and accepting the type of jobs that presuppose openness to new experiences, work flexibility and enhanced creativity, the old generation was still grown up under the condition of currently-losing-its-positions management style which required obedience, punctuality, and did not have much space for originality and creativity. In addition, the prolonger retirement age and the enhanced state of health of elderly live them more time for their own creative businesses, which, if not used well, may result in depression.

However, more often than not, older people are losing the ability to be innovative and creative they had in the younger age (Kerka 1999). Part of this change might be due to biological changes in the brain, but the other part may be attributed to the life styles and life goals. While the goals for younger adults are pretty specified by the society (education, job, family, children), the goals of the elderly adults are yet to be stated. In some sense it implies more flexibility as for the life choices, but, surprisingly, many of the elder adults have difficulties to imagine what to do with the time they have which end them up in suboptimal life situation and health state. In addition, older adults are going through the changes in roles, relationships, losses, and living environments (Tabloski 2014). The creative coping strategies development may substantially help to alleviate the burden of such changes and bring more adaptability and meaning to the older adults.

For the reasons above, some researchers believe that our society as a whole should strive to redefine the later years of our lives as a time for more creativity (Zhang and Petrini 2019) as, among other, it may reduce the pressure on the health system, bring more employment and entrepreneurial opportunities to the older adults, support touristic and art industry and bring better quality of life for the adults themselves and for the society as a whole. Active and creative older adults may significantly contribute to the civic society and improve the social environment people live in.

More important than social benefit, however, is the meaning that creativity brings to the humanity as a whole. Abstracting from the economic and social aspect of human life, the enhanced creativity of the elderly may result in the works of literature or art which reflect their life choices and experiences and can benefit the elderly themselves and the younger generation too. This way the society can bridge the generation gap and increase the rootedness of the younger generation in their families, towns and cities improving cohesion of the country as a whole.

There is a remarkable picture of changing aging in today's society. The study of the potential and the consideration of creativity in later life is crucial not only from the point of view of quality of life, but also from the point of view of health. Most common and most costly health conditions of the older adults include heart diseases, hypertension, cancer and arthritis (Older Americans 2008: Key indicators of well-being) and, according to Vacarolis (2002) 80% of persons over 65 of age have a chronic condition. Wikstrom (2002) found that older

women in Sweden, who looked at paintings of famous paintings, had more happiness, peace, contentment and serenity, in addition to improved blood pressure and better overall medical health than the control group.

Besides the physiological aspect, many of these conditions are connected to the psychological and existential problems people of the older age may encounter (Flood & Phillips, 2007). Existing literature stipulates numerous effects of the creative activities in alleviating psycho-social challenges of the old age. Hickson & Housely (1997) suggest, that creative activities offers and new outlet that helps to respond to the limits and uncertainties of existence especially in the old age. Creative involvement may generate meaning in activities and deepen understanding of oneself by the individual (Fisher & Specht, 1999), increases the sense of self-competency and capability in performing daily operations (ibid) and may substantially contribute to personal growth of an individual. Creative activities of older adults also bring cognitive benefits which are likely to slower down the process of cognitive ageing. They bring mental clarity and increased awareness (Beck, 2005)

Some of the latest research has focused on the productivity of older people, showing that people who are socially connected and involved in productive activities not only receive important amortization in terms of overall life satisfaction, but also in terms of health (Trnka et al. 2019). Similarly, productive and purposeful activities of older adults as well as having a hobby or other leisure activity are shown to be related to general state of wellbeing (Fisher 1995; Glass et al. 1999; Lennartsson and Silverstein 2001)

All in all, creativity has been shown to have a substantial positive effects to older adults. Various programs are developed and funded to help older adults achieve this goal, and particularly therapeutic programs that use the creative arts, it is important to understand how creative expression through art is beneficial to the elderly.

3 Creativity and cognitive decline

There are several ways to define creativity and many features creative thinking and acting is supposed to have. Fisher and Specht (1999) stipulates the feature of openness to new ideas and approaches in order to find new solution to the problem. Adams-Price (1998) and Pesut (1990) stress the range of emotional and cognitive processes involved in generation of new associations, attributes of images to create meaningful products or better solve the problem in a new product. Fasnacht (2003) highlights the ability to recognize the existing problem and experiment with new ideas.

While all these approaches are related to creative thinking, they also imply sufficient cognitive abilities which are shown to be declining with age (Deary et al. 2009). However, there are substantial individual differences in the rate of decline (Wilson, et al., 2002). Some of this differences may be attributed to the different social and creative life of older adults (James, et al., 2011). It was found, that the rate of global cognitive decline was reduced by an average of 70% in persons who were frequently socially active (ibid). The social activities in this case included going to restaurants, sporting events, playing bingo; going on trips, doing unpaid community or volunteer work, visiting relatives' or friends' houses, participating in groups, attending churches or religious services. Arguably in at least some of these activities have the main features of creative activities defined above.

The categories of social and creative activates in general overlap. However, while creative activities may not necessarily be social, social activities may exhibit substantial signs of creativity. Both of these activities are shown to be related to smaller cognitive decline in elderly.

Besides creativity and social life, the other factor that helps to preserve high cognitive status in the old age is the intellectually challenging activity all over the life (Hultsch 1999). Similarly of the weakening effect on the muscle structure in the case the muscle is not used long, the brain capacities including the cognitive capacity seem to be related to the challenges and the level of use they encounter over the life span. While in the young age the factor of usage is not that pronounced, the cognitive capacities of older adults a shown to be substantially different depending of the profession or other activities that help to engage the brain. People with a high level of cognitive stimulation at work were associated with a higher cognitive function than participants with a lower level of cognitive stimulation. Other studies provided strong evidence that workers in jobs with a high degree of mental workload were prospectively associated with a high level of cognitive function. There is an apparent conflicting evidence as to whether mental work demands could protect against cognitive decline. It might be that mental work demands slowed cognitive decline. Thus, it is advisable to engage the brain in the older age and throughout the life span.

The last but not least hypotheses about the way to reduce the cognitive decline in the old age is a lifestyle including the level of stress, leisure activities, physical activities, and social networks (Fratiglioni et al. 2004). The enhance levels of stress which a person has to endure throughout the life span decrease its cognitive abilities and increase the speed of cognitive decline associated with age. Leisure activities as was shown above may enhance both the creativity and cognitive functions of older adults and may include both the effect of socialization, brain stimulation, stress reduction and unleashing the creativity.

Nowadays, there are some valuable insights into the relationships between the level of cognitive function and decline in later life, while removing some of the limitations of previous research in this area. In this way, the researchers are able to provide fairly accurate descriptions of the level of cognitive functions and cognitive changes

as well as estimates of the associations the level of cognitive functions and cognitive changes in old age. Even though the considerable heterogeneity of results is linked to cognitive variability of the sample, another significant level of variability seems to be explained by methodological differences between the studies.

To understand how age affects cognitive function, future global research in the field of cognitive aging should consider the different and specific effects of age on cognition and the relevance of education and gender as important modulation factors. For many, aging is associated with a low cognitive decline, for some memory decreases significantly with age, and for others, aging is associated with severe cognitive deficits. In maintaining cognitive function, various health factors and behaviours can be protective, including nutrition.

4 Conclusions, discussion, and recommendations

The 21st century brings substantial changes in the demographic structure of the society. Population ageing and the prolonged time of relatively good health of elderly presents the society with both the problems and the opportunities. The most straightforward ones is the effect on the social retirement compensations which burden the state budgets and the increasing unemployment of the older adults. The higher expenses on health care is the other factor economically of the highest importance. The less visible factors are the declining cognitive and creative potential of the older adults, which, supposedly, might have helped to reduce the budget burden.

The cognitive decline and creativity of the older adults is an important topic from various points of view. The economists point out the positive effect of creativity and good cognitive condition of the older adults on the social benefits and the costs of health care. It may also have substantial influence on civil society, quality of life in a particular locality and education of younger people. Psychologists point out the positive effect of the creativity and cognitive abilities of the older adults on the overall psychological state and the subjective well-being.

The reasons for this cognitive and creative decline are twofold. The first and the most obvious is the biological ageing of brain and body. However, there are substantial interpersonal differences in the speed of the decline most probably caused by the life styles of the older adults. Numerous studies researched the factors that influence the speed of the decline. There is a clear pattern in cognitive function in old age, based on the levels of creativity and the life styles of older adults. This relationship is two-directional and multi factorial as the level of creativity is also endogenous category which is a function of the life style efforts.

It was shown that the intensity of social life, the existence and maintenance of a hobby, lower level of stress, more mental and physical activity are strongly associated with lower cognitive decline in elderly. However, some of these activities represent the signs of creative activities as these two categories overlap. The higher levels of both cognition and creativity of the older adults may substantially mitigate the negative effects of population ageing and improve the overall state of cohesion and well-being of a country.

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