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Exploring Pitfalls to Workplace Innovation Among College Students

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Introduction

There are wide-ranging organizational, political, cultural, and leadership dynamics and considerations which may impact innovation in the workplace. Innovation is only possible when we encourage and include perspectives from employees at all levels.

From an industry or industrial-organizational psychological perspective, innovations are ideas from employees that benefit the workplace culture. The implementation of employee innovations may be beneficial for the employee and company, so it is important to understand what may make an employee more or less likely to submit a workplace innovation. Schilpzand, Hekmand and Mitchell (2014) indicate that employees often consider the social cost of publicly identifying workplace problems and Storen (2016) outlines various factors which can impact innovation.

Current Project

The overarching purpose of the current research was to examine the frequency with which employed college students submit workplace innovations as well as the pitfalls this employee population may encounter when considering innovation submission.

Method

Participants

There were 47 total participants in the current study which included 16 males (34%) and 31 females (66%). Self-reported ethnicity was as follows: 85.1% Caucasian/White, 6.4% African American/Black, 6.4% Asian, and 2.1% Hispanic/Latinx. The average age of participants was 24. Employment status of participants was as follows: 42.6% employed full-time and 57.4% employed part-time.

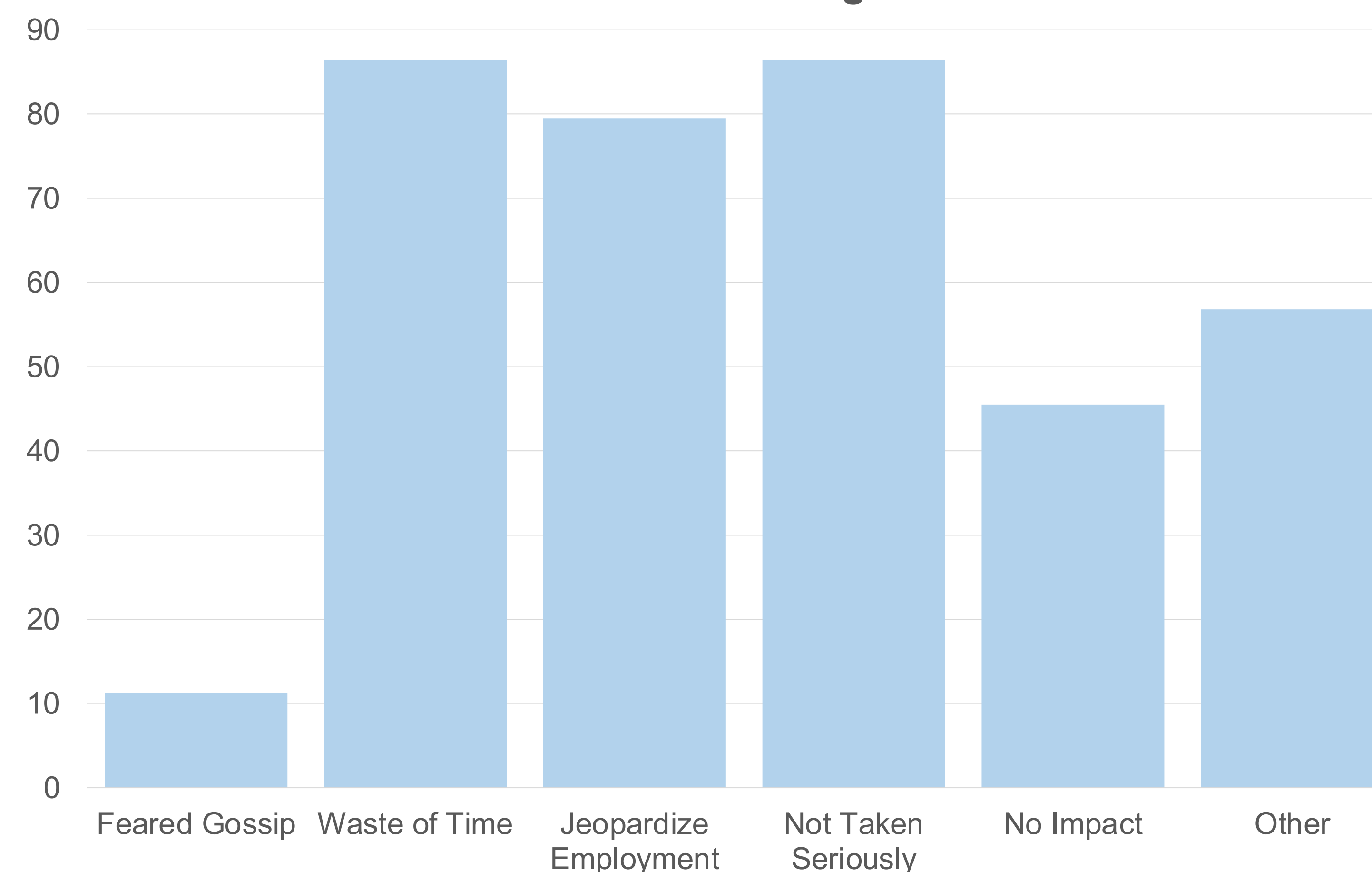
Method (cont.)

Materials/Procedure

Data was collected via the online survey platform Survey Monkey. After providing consent, participants were directed to a series of questions focusing on their prior work experience relating to innovations.

For the purpose of this study, innovations were defined to participants as, “any idea that could benefit you as an employee or the company/organization you work for.” Specifically, participants were asked if they had submitted innovations to their employer, reasons for submitting or not submitting innovations.

Reasons for Not Submitting Innovations



Results

The majority (93.6%) of participants indicated that they have never submitted an innovation to their employer. Of the possible reasons for not submitting innovations, the three most commonly cited reasons included a belief it would be a waste of time (86.4%) or not taken seriously (86.4%) and a fear of jeopardized employment (79.5%).

Results (cont.)

Of note, an open-ended “Other” category was included and students stated other reasons for not submitting innovations were lack of interest, opportunity, and knowledge of the process.

Discussion

Results from the current project suggest employees may be generally hesitant to submit innovations to their employers for a variety of reasons. These findings align with previous research which indicate employees often experience apprehension or worry when considering the prospect of submitting innovative suggestions for improvement to their employer.

Future Research

In light of current findings, additional research is needed to explore pitfalls employees may encounter when submitting innovations to their employer. Additionally, research should explore and examine best-practice methods for solicitation and review of employee innovations. Lastly, it will be beneficial for researchers to collect data directly from administrative and organizational leadership in a variety of industries to obtain a comprehensive or “top-down” understanding of the ways in which innovations are welcomed, discouraged, received, and reviewed by organizational leadership.

References

- Schilpzand, P., Hekman, D. R., & Mitchell, T. (2014). An inductively generated typology and process model of workplace courage. *Organizational Science, 26*(1), 52-77. doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0928
- Storen, L. A. (2016). Factors that promote innovativeness and being an innovative learner at work: Results from PIAAC. *European Journal of Education, 51*(2), 176-192. doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12173