INTIMATE CO-CREATION: AN EXPLANATION THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The current study is a qualitative research with an inductive approach of phenomenology to elaborate the concept of intimate co-creation. Intimate co-creation is a relatively recent concept that was earlier theorized conceptually and requires an empirical validation. The current study is the first empirical attempt to qualitatively examine this concept of intimate co-creation through the lens of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Using a semi-structured interview guideline, eight in-depth interviews were conducted from the employees working in the teamwork environment of different organizations for mutually assigned tasks that required active interpersonal collaboration. Transcribed data of interview cases was analyzed using QDA Miner Lite software. Five emerging themes were identified from the transcribed data and those five themes are proposed to be the potential predictors of intimate co-creation. Coding frequencies and thematic analysis has provided a three factor grouping / categorization of emerging themes. This study would prove to be a milestone for researchers aiming to empirically extend the research work on intimate co-creation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations are always in the search of adopting new and productive ways of employees' mutual engagement at the workplace. The purpose of such efforts is to keep the organizational stakeholders engaged in increased performance at all levels. Hence, the need for co-creation at the workplace is manifested through teamwork, group work and mutual creative assignments; may it be for a functional hierarchical structure or for a team based organization. This requires the employees to have workplace persuasion skills (Jena & Pradhan, 2020) and for having mutual interactions based on synergy, creativity and shared interpersonal boundaries at dyadic level in particular (Rouse, 2020; Decoster, Stouten & Tripp, 2019) for an effective reciprocal arrangement in a teamwork (Tse & Dasborough, 2008).

Intimate co-creation denotes close association of employees at a workplace in the form of a dyad, group or a team. Intimate co-creations helps in creating a sense of "we", and members identify the shared interpersonal boundaries while working on a creative task. Intimate co-creation is a source of synergy, creativeness and long-term relationship of team members. Importance of this concept of intimate co-creation has increased even more in this era of intense competition. There is only one conceptual study available on intimate co-creation; however, no empirical study is available on it (i.e. Rouse, 2020). The current qualitative study which is based on the approach of phenomenology has tried to address this gap of empirical validation on intimate co-creation. It is important to first conduct an inductive qualitative study on a new phenomenon before proceeding for generalization based approach of deductive quantitative studies for the purpose of theory testing (Cresswell, 2013).Gronroos (2012) explained that the collective effort of co-creation for the task accomplishment enhances performance of the employees. Bowen (2016) explained that the co-creation is also important with respect to modern digital era and the companies now require their employees to play the role of value providers. Co-creation is typically vital for the frontline employees of an organization because they are the ones who form the image of the organization (Santos-Vijande, 2015). However, the positive role of leadership in the organization is of vital importance for inculcating the spirit of intimate co-creation (Jarvi, Kahkonen & Torvinen, 2018).

Cresswell (2013) explained that phenomenology is one of the important qualitative research approaches that explores a phenomenon through lived experiences of respondents for an in-depth analysis. Usually, methodological approach to study phenomenology is of "interpretive phenomenological analysis". Phenomenology is also called the study of conscious experiences (Moran, 2000). Two popular approaches of phenomenology are interpretive phenomenology and descriptive phenomenology (Finlay, 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is not a distinct methodology but a turnkey approach for qualitative data analysis especially when one is dealing with phenomenological data. It is more of a philosophy of research and there are a number of streams of it. Research question is important to identify the need for IPA. The research question for the current study was *"what does intimate co-creation mean to the employees of an organization"*? Here, intimate co-creation is an indirect experience of employees. Approach to understand it would be phenomenology because we are trying to understand the essence of a phenomenon. Context is not that much relevant as it is an indirect approach.

The current study is based on "interpretive phenomenological analysis" of intimate co-creation. Through the use of purposive sampling, in-depth interviews of eight respondents were conducted who were mainly represented university academia and banking sector (Boddy, 2016). However, all of them were involved in intimate co-creation due to their association in team work environment and they were also involved in research and development activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured interview guidelines on intimate co-creation. Condition for inclusion of respondents in the interview process was that they must be supervising a team of at least three individuals. QDA Miner Lite software was used for analyzing the qualitative data. Data analysis revealed that based on the identification of axial codes, five themes were emerged that explained the concept of intimate co-creation through this inductive approach and explanation of those five themes helped in answering the research question of the current study.

1.1 The Theory of Intimate Co-creation

Rouse (2020) theorized the concept of intimate co-creation for the first time with a greater emphasis on studying this phenomenon on dyads. However, it was acknowledged in her study that the concept of co-creation at the workplace has been already studied at the group and team level to some extent in the previous studies and that the intimate co-creation typically occurs at dyadic level; however, the phenomenon is equally applicable on groups and teams. According to her, intimate co-creation is a source of shared interpersonal boundaries, creative idea generation and idea disclosure, supportive elaboration, shared ownership, individual validation and positive emotions among the actors involved in this process. However, empirical foundation of this concept needs to be established for which the current study is the very first empirical attempt on understanding the perceived intimate co-creation.

1.2 Motivation for the Study

Current study is an empirical research for establishing the extent of validity for the concept of intimate co-creation. Earlier, as presented by Rouse (2020), theory of intimate co-creation exists only at the conceptual level. However, author recommended the future researchers for the empirical validation of this concept. As a rule of thumb, it is highly recommendable that the newly developed concepts should first be evaluated with an inductive approach of qualitative study for an in-depth understanding of the associated dynamics related to that concept. This can further lead to quantitative studies for theory testing. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to study this phenomenon of "intimate co-creation" through the lens of phenomenology. Phenomenology in general and descriptive phenomenology in particular is a philosophical stance for a study that explores and describes the lived experiences of the respondents. Current study is an effort to study intimate co-creation through the lens of phenomenology. However, it is pertinent to mention that the qualitative studies are guided by a research question (Cresswell, 2013). The research question for the current study was *"what does intimate co-creation mean to the employees of an organization"*?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Co-creation is meant for sharing of ideas while intimate co-creation can be differentiated from simple co-creation in the way that the element of mutual relationship and the concept of shared interpersonal boundaries become more evident in working relationships based on intimate co-creation. So, the two essential elements of intimate co-creation are generation of creative ideas and mutual relationship. However, the timing of occurrence for idea and resultant relationship due to the intimate co-creation might differ. For example, good relationship may be an outcome of a creative idea in a dyad, group or a team. Sometimes, people are reluctant to share the idea because of the fear that it

would be stolen; however, an environment of psychological safety and intimate co-creation can help in this regard (Rouse, 2020; Decoster, Stouten & Tripp, 2019; Santos-Vijande, 2015).

With the increased need of collaborative work and creativity in the modern day organizations, scholars have focused more on social element of work (Gronroos, 2012; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Zhou & Hoever, 2014; Tse & Dasborough, 2008). Theorists have started focusing on collective creativity (Harvey & Kou, 2013; Harrison & Rouse, 2014; Perry-Smith, 2006; Skilton & Dooley, 2010). For example, dyadic work can be a source of creativity along with the team work and work groups. However, dyad remains to be a primary creative unit (Rouse, 2020; Shenk, 2014). Intimate co-creation is one form of co-creation that occurs when two people exchange ideas for novelty and innovation. Occurrence of intimate co-creation in groups creates diversity of ideas and an environment that is psychologically safe. However, there is scarce theoretical knowledge that under which conditions intimae co-creation occurs. But, many theorists agree that psychological safety eliminates the fear of judgement and people start sharing creative ideas, hence, they get themselves engaged in the process of intimate co-creation (Tse & Dasborough, 2008; Rouse, 2020; Gilson & Shalley, 2004; Kark & Carmeli, 2009). Purpose of co-creation may vary in different organizations. Workplace activities based on organizational citizenship behavior such as those involving the implementation of green HRM practices etc., also require employees to involve in co-creation based activities (Shahzad, 2020).

In the group setup, the way one person communicates to the other group members and the way that communication is endorsed, makes an impact on the creativity (Cordova & Scott, 2001). However, just like the dyadic creativity, the group level creativity has also not been theorized (Rouse, 2020). Hence, creativity based intimate co-creation is a phenomenon that needs to be further explored. Rouse (2020) defined intimate co-creation as "*a process in which two people form and maintain a shared interpersonal boundary by engaging in a series of intimate creative interactions—interactions that involve unfiltered idea disclosure, supportive elaboration, and idea-focused evaluation—as they work together over time to develop novel, useful ideas and products*". Strong interpersonal relations at the workplace offer mutual support, creativity and novelty at the workplace (Kark & Carmeli, 2009).

Creativity has an important association with the phenomenon of intimate co-creation. People also develop psychological ownership of their ideas. Past research on groups, teams and social networks has shown that such diversity of individuals working together produces diverse and creative ideas; however, the information must be of beneficial use (Mannix & Neale, 2005; Tse & Dasborough, 2008). Similarly, the new comers in a group are the source of creativity as they are new and produce heterogeneous ideas, however, people with repeated collaborations share similar mind maps which hinders creativity (Skilton & Dooley, 2010).

Uzzi and Spiro (2005) also stated that people tend to share common grounds rather than differences which hinders creativity. Similarly, people tend to avoid sharing original ideas in case of having fear of negative evaluation (Mullen, Johnson, & Salas, 1991). Hence, creativity thrives in an environment of psychological safety. Feedback to employees can help eliminating that fear of negative evaluation in the employees (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). In intimate co-creation, all the actors involved should have an equal contribution in the co-creation process. While, those processes where a single actor is mainly involved, don't come under intimate co-creation (Alvarez, Svejenova, & Vives, 2007; Hunter, Cushenbery, Fairchild, & Boatman, 2012). With respect to dyadic relation in intimate co-creation, companies with co-CEO can perform well due the trust and relationship factor in the dyad (Alvarez et al., 2007).

Disclosure of feelings and ideas is central to intimate co-creation and then the responses of colleagues in intimate co-creation are thought to be caring (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Partners working on a task requiring intimate co-creation have to take the risk of expressing their ideas and feelings which is usually not always possible in a simple co-creation process. An acceptance of such ideas leads to the involvement of cognitive component in the partnership and mutual consensus helps in affective commitment towards the task (Rouse, 2020; Prager, 1995). Solano and Dunnam (1985) found that as the group size increases, the disclosure and relevancy of disclosed information also reduces. However, the factors of trust and psychological safety depend upon a single party (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Intimate interactions take place between group and within the groups as well. Lewis (2017) elaborated with reference to dyads that in intimate co-creation, a sense of being in a work together gets generated. Hence, both the partners feel that they are being understood well by the other partner and hence, positive emotions are developed in that relation. In that regard, intimate co-creation is closely associated with interactional co-creation.

Organizational structure may be a source of co-creation as well. In advertising companies, co-creation and creativity is encouraged and organizational structure is designed in a way that supports the co-creation based activities in the organization. This is also applicable for intimate co-creation (Rouse, 2020; Hackley & Kover, 2007). Similarly, this trend is prevalent in the software development industry where pair programming is done by two software developers sitting side by side as a source of synergy (Cockburn & Williams, 2000). However, one's ability to pair with someone for intimate co-creation is a source of performance and it also determines the outcomes of that relationship to a large extent. It is also important to consider different elements related to human psychology for a peaceful co-existence and for avoiding the relationship conflict. For avoiding such conflicting situations, team mindfulness and essence of intimate co-creation is the key (Underhill, 2006; Shahzad et al., 2019). These kinds of findings provide us a platform to understand how social interactions can become a source of creativity and performance (Rouse, 2020). However, the exceptions are also there. For example, the creative interactions can also become a source of frustration at time when people want to protect their creative ideas (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013). This makes an interesting avenue of research for future researchers because it presents a research gap with reference to intimate co-creation and sharing of creative ideas.

Hewett and Shantz (2021) introduced the idea of HR co-creation. It was theorized that as the users of HR practices, i.e., the employees can co-create value by using the HR practices designed by HR professionals within an organization. Hence, values co-creation, intimate co-creation and relational co-creation become the concepts of pertinent value for HR co-creation. HR decisions take place in the form of a chain where decisions are made at the top and are implemented at the bottom of the hierarchy (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013). Hence, all levels of hierarchy involving human resource, needs a close consideration for the design of co-creation based measures for an agile workplace.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Among the different methods of qualitative research, grounded theory and phenomenology are most common (Cresswell, 2013; Gill, 2020). Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that ground theory method is the one in which researcher makes an effort to collect as much data through interviews as possible to reach at a saturation point of inductive research process for theory generation. However, in phenomenology, effort is made to understand a phenomenon with the help of lived experiences instead of theory development. The phenomenon that is observed in phenomenology should be observable with conscious experience of the respondent (Moran, 2000). Two popular types of phenomenology include descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Finlay, 2009). Current study is one of the series of studies on intimate co-creation whose purpose is to understand the phenomenon of intimate co-creation with inductive qualitative research. For deductive theory testing approach, a separate study has been conducted by the researcher.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is relatively recent and was introduced by Jonathan Smith. It is also the study of respondents' experience related to a particular phenomenon. Data collection usually takes place through semi-structured questionnaire in this method of IPA. This interrogative form of study produces interpretive data (Smith, 2010; Smith, 2004). Some scholars are of the view that in phenomenology, minimum sample size should comprise of at least three respondents for detailed elaboration (Giorgi, 2006). The sample size for the current study comprised of eight respondents which was sufficient for this study based on interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Smith and Osborne (2003) proposed the process of thematic analysis that was followed in this study. Purposive sampling was done for the selection of eight respondents who were required to be engaged in creative task accomplished in an environment of team-member exchange (Boddy, 2016). Hence, preferably those respondents were selected who were involved in research and development tasks in the university academia and those from other sectors were required to be supervising a team of at least three subordinates.

Eight in-depth interviews were conducted from the respondents using semi-structured interview guidelines. All the interviews were conducted on Skype and were recorded with the permission of respondents. Average time per interview was 21 minutes. The obtained responses were transcribed in MS Word file and were segregated into cases for the ease of data analysis. QDA Miner Lite is a very useful software for qualitative data analysis and has been used in many previous studies (Bubnovskaia, 2019). The current study has also used QDA Miner Lite software for coding and analysis of qualitative data. Repeated open codes helped in the identification of axial codes and similar axial codes formed the selective code / emerging theme. With the use of coding process in QDA Miner Lite, it was observed that five emerging themes were extracted from the qualitative data of eight interview transcripts which represented the

phenomenon of intimate co-creation. Furthermore, those five emerging themes were given three categories including social intimate co-creation, perceptual intimate co-creation and relational intimate co-creation.

4. ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

With the coding process in QDA Miner Liter software, open, axial and selective codes were identified. Axial codes represented the categories that formed the selective codes / emerging themes of this study. Total of five emerging themes were found in this study. Those five themes were value formation, effective socialization, perception of synergy, workplace creativity and perception of joint innovation. Following is the detail of those axial codes and their related selective codes / emerging themes of this qualitative data in a tabular form:

Table of Codes, Themes and Definition of Themes

Codes	Themes	Definition of Themes
Working together Mutual discussions	Value formation	Working together and having task related discussions at the workplace for mutual benefit
Social relations Consensus Trust Sharing of experiences	Effective socialization	An effort to have good relationship with colleagues at the workplace.
Policy status Co-creation Creativity Common goals Team work	Perception of synergy	The understanding that combined output is always better as compared to individual output.
Opportunity Innovation Self-motivation Incentives	Workplace creativity	Inner zest for execution of creative ideas and innovation at the workplace.
Efficiency Idea sharing Innovative capability Learning	Perception of joint innovation	The individual's perception that working jointly is a source of innovation at the workplace in dyads, groups and teams.

Table 1: **Axial codes and selective codes / emerging themes along with the definition of themes.**

It can be observed from the table 1 that five emerging themes were supported by nineteen axial codes. Each theme was defined for the ease of thematic analysis via interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). It is important to know about the demographic characterizes of the eight respondents. Following table 2 shows the demographic details of eights respondents who participated in this current study as interviewees:

Demographic Details of the Respondents

Respondent No.	Gender	Age in years	Education level	Monthly Income (in Rupees)	Experience	Designation
1	Male	39	MS	Above100,000	12 years	Unit Head – Corporate Lending
2	Male	40	PhD	Above 100,000	14 years	Assistant Professor
3	Male	36	MS	Above 100,000	10 years	Lecturer
4	Female	44	M Phil	Above 100,000	16 years	Associate Professor

5	Male	25	BSc	Above 30,000	7 years	IT Supervisor
6	Male	43	MS	Above 50,000	14 years	Lecturer
7	Male	40	MS	Above 100,000	12 years	Instructor
8	Male	31	BA	Above 40,000	8 years	Branch Services Officer

Table 2: **Shows the demographic details of eights respondents / interviewees**

From the table 2, with respect to gender, it can be observed that out of eight informants, seven were male and only one informant was female. All the informants were in the age bracket of 31 to 40 years. With reference to education level, five respondents had the master's degree, two had bachelor's degree and only one had a PhD degree. Minimum monthly income of the informants was Pakistani Rupees (Rs) 30,000 and maximum was above Rs. 100,000. No informant had the work experience of less than seven years. Maximum work experience of an informant was 16 years. Five informants were from university academia; two informants were from the banking sector and one informant was from a commercial organization. All the interviewees were from Pakistan.

Theme 1: Value Formation

Value formation was the first emerging theme with two supportive codes that were working together and mutual discussions. With reference to working together, one participant stated, *"team work, sharing of ideas and socialization is very important for running any institute"* (Batool, age 44). Another supportive code for the theme of value formation was mutual discussions. One of the participants stated, "*Definitely, when you are working together, it means you are discussing different ideas. By discussion with colleagues, there are more chances to move towards innovation as compared to doing yourself individually"* (Nabi, age 40). Working together and having mutual discussions is also of vital importance for the newly hired individuals for learning purpose. One of the participants stated, *"I recently hired two members in my team. The working is in a way that each relationship manager in my team has his own portfolio. So, two new guys came in my department and they were freshly hired Management Trainee Officers (MTOs). One had good grip on financial analysis while other was weaker. So, whenever I gave a case to my weaker team member, I advised him to discuss with his other colleague who is the other MTO because he is better in analysis and all other things………. And they are definitely trusting on each other because they are supporting each other"* (Abbas, age 39).

It can be concluded from the quotes of supportive codes that this theme of value formation gets strength from the codes of working together and mutual discussions. Value formation is the first theme that indirectly explains intimate co-creation at the workplace. For example, in the first quote, team work was emphasized. In other quotes, discussion of ideas, learning and tacit knowledge transfer; all are the factors that require close association of individuals at the workplace that helps in intimate co-creation.

Theme 2: Effective socialization

This emerging theme had an emphasis on the need for effective socialization at the workplace as an indirect source of intimate co-creation. Working on combined tasks may be one source of socialization and intimate co-creation that enhances performance as well. One of the informants quoted in this regard, *"The employees and the high ups in our department; for example, the supervisor, she is a female and she really encourages us to work in groups as a team and that has really benefitted us over the years…………. You will be amazed that we published that research paper in HEC recognized journal and few are still in the process of publication. This never happened earlier. But, whenever this practice was introduced, it benefitted us"* (Ahmad, age 36). One of the respondents spoke in favour of working in dyads rather than a team of individuals. She quoted, *"I think working as two people helps us to achieve any task in a better way as compared to working with a team. When you are working with one person, you can convince her in a better way as compared to convincing five to six persons"* (Batool, age 44).

According to another informant, trust and consensus are interlinked. He quoted, *"The first important thing is trust in relationship. Initially, most of the people do not want to come on consensus but if consensus is developed, then this goal is also achieved"* (Ibrahim, age 40). According to another viewpoint, sharing of experiences at all levels is important for socialization. He quoted, *"In meetings or in our trainings, when we sit together and join [each other]*

and exchange [ideas] with the staff of other branches and [hence] we share experiences" (Rehman, age 31). Hence, this theme highlights need for sharing of experiences, collective working and that the working in dyads and teams can help in effective socialization process that indirectly and positively contribute towards intimate co-creation.

Theme 3: Perception of synergy

This theme represents the individual employee's perception that collective output is always better as compared to individual output at the workplace. Axial codes of policy status, co-creation, creativity, common goals and team work formulated this theme. One of the informants quoted that motivation is important to work on the tasks that have the element of synergy in them. *"If we are to work efficiently to improve our business from my point of view, it is my motivation because I am at the front end of my organization"* (Abbas, age 39).

Another informant also spoke about the increased performance because of joint task. He quoted, *"There was a mutual cooperation from each member and you will be amazed that we published research papers in HEC recognized journals and few are still in the process of publication"* (Ibrahim, age 40). Working on common organizational goals and routine tasks may be due to the official requirement of the organization or it may be due to the own motivation of an individual. One of the informants spoke in this regard, *"Sometimes, due to the order of boss, we work together and achieve the target and sometimes we prefer [on our own] to work together for common goal or target"* (Batool, age 44). Hence, based on the quotes of above mentioned informants, it can be concluded that perception of synergy positively contributed towards the intimate co-creation.

Theme 4: Workplace creativity

This theme denotes the innovation and creativity at the workplace. The codes of opportunity, innovation, self-motivation and incentives supported this theme. One of the informants was of the view that idea sharing with the management can help in workplace creativity. He quoted, *"Idea sharing with management is a source and reason of creativity and innovation. Yes, sharing of ideas does increase chances of innovation and creativity"* (Abbas, age 39). Motivation also has its importance for the initiatives based on workplace creativity. One of the informants quoted, *"If we are to work efficiently to improve our business from my point of view, it is my motivation because I am at the front end of my organization. I am dealing with the customers. Each requirement of customers comes to me and I am motivated to interact with different departments; so that, I may get it done. So, this is my internal motivation"* (Abbas, age 39). Therefore, based on some of the quotes, it can be stated that workplace creativity indirectly contributes towards intimate co-creation.

Theme 5: Perception of joint innovation

Four axial codes formulated the emerging theme of "perception of joint innovation". Those codes were efficiency, idea sharing, innovative capability and learning. Furthermore, all the codes were supported by useful quotes, some of which are mentioned here. One of the informants who was a faculty member in a university and a PhD scholar as well, quoted that group performance is a source of efficiency. He quoted, *"I experienced that when I was working individually, there was very less output but when we started working in the groups then our performance and our output regarding PhD thesis and finding research gaps, making research questions and objectives became more clear and the process became quicker as compared to that when I worked individually"* (Nabi, age 40).

On job learning is also a source of better output and perception of joint innovation. One of the informants quoted, *"I have learnt a lot from them [i.e. from senior colleagues]. I consult them for many tasks assigned to me and they also trust me that I am eligible and capable now that whatever task assigned can be done perfectly"* (Ahmad, age 36). Another informant emphasized on task variety for the learning and perception of joint innovation. He quoted, *"While working in the organizations, a number of tasks are performed. As some tasks need focus, concentration of an individual employee on a specific task matters. Yes, sharing ideas with colleagues helps in thought sharing and in increasing the knowledge"* (Rehman, age 25). Therefore, based on some of the quotes, it can be stated that perception of joint innovation indirectly contributes towards intimate co-creation.

5.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

All the five emerging themes had support from the previous literature. The first theme was value formation. Gronroos (2012) linked the value formation with respect to value co-creation between the customers and the employees. Both of them are important stakeholders of the co-creation processes within the organizations. However, with respect to value formation, it is also the interactional co-creation that is of vital importance for an organization (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). It is also because employees are the value providers for an organization and without their intent, neither interactional nor value co-creation would be possible (Bowen, 2016). Intimate co-creation remains there in the process of value co-creation as well as relational co-creation.

Perception of joint innovation was the second theme. Coordination with the management supports this theme along with the idea of service and product innovation (Santos-Vijande, 2015) and socialization at the workplace. With respect to the theme of perception of synergy, Oertzen (2018) stated that any form of positive co-creation at the workplace enhances the perception of synergy. All these themes are however relevant to the theory of intimate co-creation (Rouse, 2020). It is because a collective sense of purpose, shared interpersonal boundary and creative idea disclosure takes place in intimate co-creation when people work on the tasks involving close proximity. For theoretical elaboration of intimate co-creation, future researchers need to carefully examine the association of this concept of intimate co-creation with social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Other possibility of looking at this concept with the theoretical lens of social exchange theory is to examine it with reference to team-member exchange in relationships based on relational co-creation in general and intimate co-creation in particular.

Dimensions	Literature support for dimensions	Interview support
Value formation	Gronroos (2012), Bowen (2016), Santos-Vijande (2015), Bowen (2016)	Yes
Effective socialization	Oertzen (2018), Rouse (2020), Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005)	Yes
Perception of synergy	Oertzen (2018), Rouse (2020)	Yes
Workplace creativity	Zhang (2017), Shih & Wijaya (2017)	Yes
Perception of joint innovation	Santos-Vijande (2015), Jarvi et al. (2018), Rouse (2020)	Yes
Intent of relationship	Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2018), Gronroos (2012)	Yes

Table 3: **Shows the prominent literature support for the emerging themes of this study**

Furthermore, the emerging themes can be grouped into three categories. The themes of effective socialization and workplace creativity have been grouped into intimate co-creation based on social creativity. The theme of value formation represents the category of relational intimate co-creation. The category of perceptual intimate co-creation is supported by two themes including perception of joint innovation and perception of synergy. Following figure demonstrates the pictorial representation of the grouping of themes:
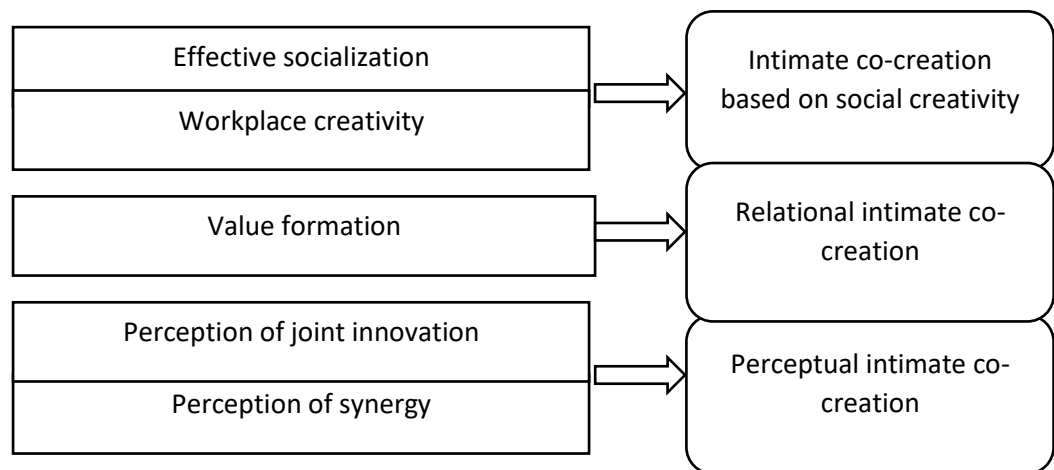
Figure 1: **Grouping of themes into three categories of intimate co-creation**

Future researchers may closely examine the three categories of intimate co-creation based on social, relational and perceptual co-creation. Coding frequency of axial codes and themes is also equally important with respect to qualitative data analysis based on interpretive phenomenological analysis. The transcribed data of eight interviews was coded in QDA Miner Lite software and coding frequencies were analyzed in detail. Table 4 represented the detailed coding frequencies of transcribed data.

Table of Coding Frequency

Selective Codes / Theme	Axial Codes	Count	% Codes	Cases	% Cases
Value formation	Working together	7	5.50%	4	5.7 %
	Mutual discussions	6	4.70%	1	1.3 %
Effective socialization	Relationship	9	7.00%	7	9.4 %
	Consensus	7	5.50%	1	1.3 %
	Trust	11	8.50%	7	9.4 %
	Sharing experiences	3	2.30%	1	1.3 %
Perception of synergy	Policy status	2	1.60%	1	1.3 %
	Co-creation	8	6.30%	4	5.7 %
	Creativity	5	3.90%	8	10.8 %
	goals	1	0.80%	2	2.7 %
	Team work	8	6.30%	4	5.7 %
Workplace creativity	Opportunity	1	0.80%	3	4 %
	Innovation	4	3.10%	6	8.1 %
	Self-motivation	7	5.50%	3	4 %
	Incentives	1	0.80%	1	1.3 %
Perception of joint innovation	Efficiency	3	2.30%	3	2.7 %
	Idea sharing	10	7.80%	1	1.3 %
	Innovative capability	2	1.60%	1	1.3 %
	Learning	7	5.50%	3	4 %

Table 4: **Represents the coding frequency of codes and themes**

It can be observed in table 4 that all the codes had different counts and frequencies in different cases. This guides us to know about the emphasis of informants on specific terms in different cases. As there were eight respondents, so their transcribed data was categorized into eight cases and then the analysis was run in QDA Miner Lite software. For the understanding of reader, one code from each theme can be elaborated here. For example, the code of mutual discussions in the theme of value formation had an overall count of 6 and appeared only in a single case. The code of relationship in the theme of effective socialization had an overall count of 9 and it appeared in 7 cases. The code of policy status in the theme of perception of synergy had an overall count of 2 and it appeared only in a single case. The code of opportunity in the theme of workplace creativity had an overall count of 1 and it appeared in 3 cases. The code of efficiency in the theme of perception of joint innovation had an overall count of 3 and it appeared in 3 cases. Similarly, the percentages of coding frequencies are also mentioned there in the table 4.

Theoretical contribution of the current study is that it has empirically verified a theory of intimate co-creation (Rouse, 2020) that earlier stood only on the conceptual grounds. Further theoretical contribution can be made with respect to intimate co-creation with the help of current study. Future researchers would better know about the dimensions that constitute this concept of intimate co-creation on empirical grounds. This may help in testing this concept with the help of other theories as well. This study is useful for understanding of researchers that more scholarly work is needed to be done with respect to the concept of co-creation at the workplace in general and on intimate co-creation in particular (Hewett & Shantz, 2021). Practitioners such as managers would have learnt that it is always useful to let the people work in dyads and groups of their choice for better performance through human capital. Better performance of individuals means better performance for the organizations. Individuals can also learn that how the perspective of thinking and work attitude changes when you establish personal intimacies at the workplace rather than working separately (Shahzad et al., 2019). Studies related to intimate co-creation can guide not just managerial but individual behavior.

6. CONCLUSION

The concept of intimate co-creation is a new concept in the literature of management (Rouse, 2020). However, every new concept or theory requires empirical investigation for further validation. This empirical validation should typically start with an inductive approach. This current study was one such approach to empirically validate the concept of intimate co-creation through the lens of phenomenology. It's a phenomenon that occurs in organizations involving combined and creative tasks with intimacy of relationship that leads to synergy and high performance at the workplace. Every effort of co-creation, may it be value co-creation or any form of relational co-creation involves intimate co-creation at the first instinct. The current study has established the foundation for future researchers to further validate this concept in different contexts and add to this theory of intimate co-creation. In-depth qualitative analysis through interpretive phenomenological analysis has identified five clear dimensions that are potentially and empirically helpful for predicting the abstract phenomenon of intimate co-creation at the workplace. Future researchers are welcome to critically examine and further extend the work on intimate co-creation and add to the existing body of knowledge in field of human resource management.

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