

# Do Legos, standardized testing, and Googling hamper creativity?

August 12 2015

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Legos, the popular toy bricks, may be great for stimulating creativity in little kids. But when it comes to adults, things might be a little different. According to a new study in the *Journal of Marketing Research*, when adults are given a set of Legos to solve a well-defined problem, their creativity may suffer when tackling subsequent tasks.

"There are a lot of studies that explore what enhances creativity. Ours is one of the few that considers ways in which creativity may be undermined," write the authors of the study, C. Page Moreau (University of Wisconsin) and Marit Gundersen Engeset (Buskerud and Vestfold University College, Norway). "What we find is that a well-defined problem—in our case, following an explicit set of instructions to build something with Legos—can actually hamper creativity in solving future problems."

To reach that conclusion, the authors, among other things, conducted a test in which they gave participants Legos and a set of instructions. Some of the participants were given a "well-defined problem"—instructions to build a particular thing by following explicit, step-by-step instructions. The others were given an "ill-defined problem": they were simply asked "to build something." After building with the Legos, the participants were then asked to complete a second well-defined or ill-defined task.

The authors found that solving well-defined problems can diminish performance on subsequent creative tasks. The decline in performance is largely due to having, in the well-defined problem, a specific goal to

meet. In addition, engaging with a well-defined problem increases the chances that a person will choose another well-defined problem to solve next.

"Well-defined problems are becoming ever more common—we Google something, for instance, rather than struggling to retrieve information from our memory—and that can be having negative effects on our [creativity](#)," Moreau and Engeset write. "Managers and policymakers should become more aware of the way in which things like routine tasks can make an employee ill-suited for creative work and how standardized testing, by encouraging the use of well-defined problems, can hamper imaginative thinking."

**More information:** C. Page Moreau and Marit Gundersen Engeset. "The Downstream Consequences of Problem-Solving Mindsets: How Playing with Lego Influences Creativity." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

Provided by American Marketing Association

Citation: Do Legos, standardized testing, and Googling hamper creativity? (2015, August 12) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-08-legos-standardized-googling-hamper-creativity.html>

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