

Giving employees time to 'warm up' can help correct creativity power imbalance





The effect of high and low power on novelty score across rounds, Study 2. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Credit: *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104474

Power often boosts employees' creativity because it liberates them from constraints such as worrying that their ideas will be rejected. However, new research shows that employees who are not in positions of power can become more creative when given time to "warm up" to a task by engaging in the creative task more than once.



"This is important because when people with more power are able to express their <u>creative ideas</u> more than those with less power, it leads to a rich-get-richer dynamic that reinforces or exacerbates these power differentials," said Brian Lucas, assistant professor in the ILR School and co-author of "Low Power Warm-up Effect: Understanding the Effect of Power on Creativity Over Time," forthcoming in the July issue of *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

"Understanding ways to boost the <u>creativity</u> of lower power workers can help them navigate this low-power disadvantage, generate more creative ideas and promote a more equitable workplace," Lucas said.

In the study, Lucas and his co-authors found that although low-power individuals are less creative than <u>high-power</u> individuals at the beginning of a creative task, they can eventually catch up and match high-power individuals' creativity. This is because the creative task provided feelings of autonomy and liberation that eventually help them overcome their low-power disadvantage, the researchers said.

Lucas and two other researchers, Sahoon Kim and Jack Goncalo, both of the University of Illinois, conducted three studies to reach their conclusion.

In the first study, they divided the creative idea generation session into two rounds consisting of a one-minute "warm up" followed by a second round in which the participants could take as long as they wanted. Participants were randomly assigned to a high-power condition or a lowpower condition, and feelings of power were induced with a role manipulation where participants were given a <u>leadership role</u> and control over resources (high power) or an <u>employee</u> role with no control over resources (low power).

The study found that high-power individuals were more creative than



low power individuals in the warm-up round. There was no difference, though, in creativity in the second round.

In the second study, the researchers changed the creative task and increased the number of rounds from two sessions to five, taking as long as they like to complete the task. In the final study, they used two different creative tasks across two rounds, both of which were oneminute long.

Consistent with the first study, these studies found that high-power individuals were more creative than low-power individuals in the first round. But the creativity of low power individuals "caught up" to the creativity of the high power individuals after the first round. Results of the third study demonstrated that a different creativity task can also warm-up low-power people for an unrelated creativity task.

"The experience of being creative can, in and of itself, have positive psychological consequences," Lucas said.

"Given the high value of creative ideas for organizations and for the careers of the employees that champion them, it is important to cultivate strategies that empower all employees to tap their creative potential," he said. "The low power warm-up effect suggests a simple intervention that does just this and overcomes power differentials in the workplace: when pursuing <u>creative work</u>, let employees warm up first."

More information: Sahoon Kim et al, Low power warm-up effect: Understanding the effect of power on creativity over time, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2023). DOI: <u>10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104474</u>



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