

# Why dancers are better workers, according to research

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Breakdancing in the break room might not seem like the best way to get ahead at work, but research shows recreational dance can actually improve productivity performance in the workplace.

It is well known that engaging in [physical activity](#) has many [health benefits](#)—from reducing the risk of diabetes, to lowering the risk of developing coronary heart diseases and dementia. The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) has even linked the increasing incidence of noncommunicable diseases (those characterized by slow progression and long duration) to unhealthy lifestyles.

If you still need motivation to move, there is evidence that a lack of physical exercise can result in [lower earnings](#), and lower probability of [finding employment](#) or even being [invited to interview](#).

So, moving is good for you. But when it comes to work, [our research shows](#) that dance, in particular, could help you—and your company—get ahead.

## Let's dance

Dance is special. Neuroscience and psychology researchers have not only recognized the positive health effects of dance but have also discovered that dancing has [additional benefits](#) compared to other forms of physical exercise. Cognitive psychologist—and dancer—[Peter Lovatt](#) explains that dance is a [cognitive activity](#) that engages the brain through learning dance routines, processing music and thinking about rhythm and coordination.

Several studies have focused on the benefits of dancing for the aging brain and its effectiveness in improving quality of life among those affected by degenerative conditions such as [Parkinson's disease](#). And while there have been no specific studies on the economics of dance, [research tends to relate](#) cognitive skills to [higher wages](#) and [productivity](#).

And so, because it improves [cognitive abilities](#), we believe dance can also improve productivity in the workplace.

## The workplace benefits of dance

To show this, we used a survey-based approach to collect data from a sample of dancers located in Italy, the UK and Brazil. We also collected data from a [control group](#) from the same three countries—these participants actively exercise but do not dance.

To measure performance in the workplace, we used a selection of questions on absenteeism (not turning up to work) and presenteeism (not working as hard as usual when at work).

We picked five questions from the WHO's [Health and Work Performance questionnaire](#) to measure presenteeism: how often respondents have not worked when they were supposed to, how often they have not worked carefully, how often their work has been of [poor quality](#), how often they have not been concentrating while working, and how they self-rate their job performance.

To evaluate absenteeism, we used respondents' reports about how many times they had missed a whole day of work (or part of a day) for health reasons and for non-health related reasons over the week prior to the survey.

For a more meaningful comparison of productivity performance, we matched each dancer with a non-[dancer](#) with similar personal and job characteristics. This way, the only observable difference between the matched participants is how they exercise. So, any differences in productivity could be due to dance.

We found that presenteeism is lower among dancers compared to non-dancers. We also found that dancers are more productive compared to non-dancers because they exhibit less absenteeism.

## Dance or well-being—or both?

So, the research indicates that dance could improve productivity directly through enhanced cognitive abilities. But there are other potential ways that doing a few pirouettes could benefit you at work.

Several studies have found [a positive relationship](#) between well-being and performance in the workplace. This makes sense. If you feel happy and satisfied with your life, you're more likely to concentrate on your work tasks and perform them more effectively, possibly because you're less [distracted](#).

Equally, scholars have identified [a positive relationship](#) between dance and well-being. We also found that the dancers in our sample enjoy higher levels of well-being compared to the non-dancers. So, our results could simply indicate that dance improves well-being, and well-being leads to higher productivity, rather than dance improving productivity directly.

To probe this issue further, we compared dancers and non-dancers who match in terms of other personal and job characteristics, but who also have similar levels of well-being. After controlling for well-being like this, we found dancers still perform better in terms of presenteeism and absenteeism. This suggests that the positive correlation between dance and productivity goes beyond the well-known well-being effects. Dance has a direct effect on worker productivity, it's not just making dancers feel happier.

## Who benefits from dancing at work?

The productivity difference between dancers and non-dancers is most concentrated in respondents with jobs involving below average levels of

cognitive tasks and above average levels of routine tasks, such as packaging, package delivery or payment processing. It's reasonable to assume that this group is not cognitively stimulated at work, so dancing seems to provide a way of improving [cognitive skills](#) which, in turn, affects their performance.

The productivity-enhancing effect of dance is also stronger in activities involving high levels of teamwork. Also, although the matched male sample is rather small, our results suggest that men who practice recreational dance benefit more than women in terms of presenteeism and absenteeism.

The relationship between dance and presenteeism or absenteeism is very important economically. The annual cost of poor mental health for UK employers could be as much as £45 billion, [according to research](#) by Deloitte. A large part of this cost arises from presenteeism and absenteeism. So, a workplace dance intervention could help reduce such costs, as well as being beneficial for workers.

Dancing is a universal activity, it's part of the cultural heritage of most countries. It could be used worldwide to promote health and performance in the workplace as well.

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