

Creative activities outside work can improve job performance

April 16 2014

Employees who pursue creative activities outside of work may find that these activities boost their performance on the job, according to a new study by San Francisco State University organizational psychologist Kevin Eschleman and colleagues.

Creative pursuits away from work seem to have a direct effect on factors such as [creative problem](#) solving and helping others while on the job, said Eschleman, an assistant professor of psychology.

The study examined whether creative activity might have an indirect impact on employees' performance by providing them with a way to recover from the demands of their job, by restoring them through relaxation, increasing their sense of control, or challenging them to learn to new skills that can be transferable to one's job.

But the findings reported in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* suggest that creative activity seems to also improve job performance outside of its effect on these traditional types of recovery.

"It can be rare in research to find that what we do in our personal time is related to our behaviors in the workplace, and not just how we feel," Eschleman said.

The employees in the study were free to define creative activities however they wished. In previous studies, Eschleman noted, people say

they spend creative time doing everything from writing short stories to playing video games.

Despite this diversity, "they usually describe it as lush, as a deep experience that provides a lot of things for them," he said. "But they also talk about this idea of self-expression and an opportunity to really discover something about themselves, and that isn't always captured with the current recovery experience models."

The study included data on 341 employees from a major national survey who answered questions about their creative activities, recovery experiences like taking charge of their downtime schedules, and their own ratings of how creative they had been on the job and how they had supported their organization and coworkers.

It also included a second group of 92 active duty U.S. Air Force captains, who were surveyed on similar items about creative activity and recovery but were evaluated on their job performances by coworkers and subordinates.

Many studies of recovery have focused on employees working in notably stressful jobs in healthcare and the military, said Eschleman, who worked as a civilian researcher with the Air Force before coming to SF State. But he cautioned that the need for recovery is something that all employees may face at different times, during quarterly deadlines or organizational changes, for instance.

Eschleman said that employers can encourage their employees to engage in more creative activities outside work, but the encouragement has to strike the right tone.

"One of the main concerns is that you don't want to have someone feel like their organization is controlling them, especially when it comes to

creative activities," he said, "because intrinsic motivation is part of that unique experience that comes with creative activity."

Instead, employees can encourage their employees to bring their creative activities into work, whether through a department cake baking contest or a program like the one used by Zappos, Inc., where [employees](#) bring in personal artwork to decorate their offices. Eschleman also suggested that companies could provide discounts to local art studios and other outlets for [creative work](#).

"A lot of organizations carve time out where they talk about physical health and exercise and eating habits, but they can also include in that a discussion of mental health and the importance of recovery and creative activity," he said.

More information: "Benefiting from creative activity: The positive relationships between creative activity, recovery experiences, and performance-related outcomes," by Eschleman, Jamie Madsen, Gene Alarcon, and Alex Barelka, was published April 17 in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*.

Provided by San Francisco State University

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