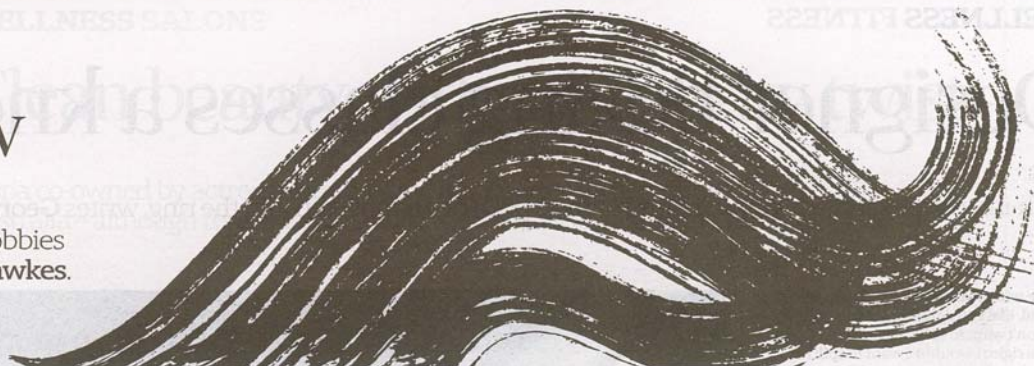


WELLNESS WORKPLACE

Go with the flow

A growing body of research finds creative hobbies can be good for your career, writes **Helen Hawkes**.



Creativity is the new, unsung hero of the stressed-out executive, with classes in watercolours and weaving promising not only to help you overcome toxic stress and connect you to your bliss – but could even help you live longer.

At the same time, creative coaches and innovators say developing your creative brain may empower you to optimise work projects and come up with winning ideas.

In an IBM Global CEO Study, creativity was ranked as the No.1 factor for future business success – above management discipline, integrity, and even vision.

"Developing your creative brain translates into higher levels of productivity – it can bring a different approach to your work," says Nicole Gorton, a managing director at Robert Half Australia. "Creativity helps you imagine new solutions. A lot of organisations now have training around using the brain creatively."

Cathryn Lloyd is a creativity coach and founder of Maverick Minds. She helps coaches and corporate staff develop both healthy creativity and creative leadership. For her, there is a clear link between communication, creativity and innovation, three qualities everyone, in any workplace, now requires. "Many organisations struggle with how to innovate," she says. "They know it's something they need to do but they haven't understood that, at the heart of that, is creativity."

Using creative processes such as painting, improvisation, working with images and storytelling, Lloyd helps staff at companies like Rabobank and Ernst & Young connect with their creativity.

For Catriona Pollard, a PR director, fibre artist and TEDx presenter, engaging in creative arts and crafts began as a solution to near burnout in 2012. "It wasn't about finding balance: it was deeper than that," says Pollard, who now runs creativity workshops for individuals and technology and communications companies. The result, she says, was "transformational".

"Through art, I was able to change how I saw things. I wrote a book, launched an online company, and started to work with my team in different, better ways."

Pollard's business became more stable, but more importantly, perhaps, she felt

"more in control of where I wanted to take the business and what its purpose in my life was".

Shima Ghedia, an emergency physician at Sydney's Concord Hospital, tells a similar story. She makes jewellery, which she sells at markets, tried calligraphy and has taken up painting, including commissions from friends. Recently she enrolled in a week-long course in painting at Sydney's National Art School.

"I can work 10-hour shifts and I need to get my mind off work," says Ghedia. "I love emergency medicine, but the stress is quite profound, and I don't want to drink too much alcohol or use other negative methods of coping."

She's adventurous, tackling whatever project catches her interest, and says all her hobbies help her "get in the flow".

Positive psychology has long celebrated the benefits of a flow state – being "in the zone" – including boosting self-esteem and happiness. "It's important for us to strengthen the part of our brains that not only engage with logic and problem solving," says Pollard, "but also taps into the creative and imaginative side of our minds."



It may be painting, garden design, woodwork, cooking or even basket weaving.

The "flow" also pays business benefits, with companies such as Brisbane-based Impact Innovation Group, whose clients include Deloitte, Coca Cola and Rio Tinto, engaged to run programs that enable executives to break out of the status quo and come up with next-generation products or services.

"We conduct a series of exercises that get people to think differently about solving problems," says managing director Brian Ruddle. "We give them permission to be creative."

But generating new ideas also results in a workforce that is more engaged – and that taps into the whole area of wellbeing, says Ruddle.

Blocking out the constant noise of society can also work wonders for your mental health, says Pollard.

A 2018 analysis published in the *Behavioural Sciences Journal* of 37 separate studies on creativity and stress found that 81.1 per cent recorded a significant reduction of stress in individuals who took part in art, music, dance/movement and drama therapy.

In another study of 1000 older men, conducted between 1990 and 2008, researchers discovered those who were more creative tended to live longer, perhaps because by stimulating the brain, creativity kept it healthier.

You don't have to be an artist to achieve longevity and stress-reduction benefits, just find a creative hobby. It may be painting, garden design, woodwork, cooking or even basket weaving.

Whatever your creative outlet, Nicole Gorton says many companies are now offering mental health days where you get paid but choose to do whatever you want, such as pottery or photography. "There's no doubt more corporates are veering towards that creative space." **LSL**

■ Cathryn Lloyd | Creativity in the office



- Provide an environment in which people can tap into creativity, experiment and take risks.
- Understand that good ideas and solutions can come from anybody. Leaders don't have to have all the answers themselves.
- Design the workplace so that it inspires and enables people to bring creativity to their work. This may include private or collaborative work spaces, intentional conversations about creativity, flexibility and a great learning culture.
- Allocate resources such as time for people to work on new initiatives and offer workshops and programs focused on creativity. Innovation doesn't happen without creativity.



Top: Catriona Pollard found art gave her a new perspective. Above: Creativity boosts productivity, says Nicole Gorton.