RAW Lab
Relationships and Well-Being Lab

Can Induced Gratitude Improve Creative Performance on Repurposing Tasks?

Sisson et al. (2022)

Sustainability challenges (such as retired wind-turbine blades that are difficult to repurpose) require creative solutions. Can making engineers feel grateful increase their creativity to address these challenges?

Two studies were done where:

Engineering employees and/or students were recruited (49 in the pilot study, 329 in the full study). In each version, participants either recalled a time:

- when they felt grateful,
- when they they felt a generally positive emotion (e.g., happy),
- or when they were doing an ordinary daily activity (e.g., getting ready in the morning).

They then rated their feelings of gratitude and positivity before completing two tasks assessing their creativity:

One where they listed alternate ways they could use a spoon...

...and one where they listed and drew diagrams of ways to repurpose the blade of a wind turbine.

Results showed that...

In the pilot study, participants who recalled positive and grateful experiences indeed reported feeling more gratitude than when recalling an ordinary activity, but this manipulation was not effective in the full study.

And that...

Those in the full study who recalled a time they felt grateful came up with more appropriately sized and feasible wind-turbine blade reuses, suggesting greater quality in their creativity.

In Short

The results of this study suggest that while simply recalling an an experience of gratitude may not be enough to make engineers feel more grateful, it may still be enough to improve their creativity and the quality of their ideas!

Sisson, N. M., Impett, E. A., & Shu, L. H. (2022). Can induced gratitude improve creative performance on repurposing tasks? Journal of Mechanical Design, 144, 051401. https://doi-org/10.1115/1.4052586