24 How Health Promotion Programs Can Enhance Workplace Creativity

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> Creativity is not a luxury. Ideas are as important as genes. . . . Wisdom is becoming the new criterion of fitness.
> Jonas Salk (Helvarg 1984, p. 195)

As we hurtle full-out into an information based economy, enhancing workplace creativity becomes ever more important to organizational success. Information is the one resource that is not depleted by use (Otto and Joseph 1984). In fact, using it can improve it, and the most dramatic improvements come from creative ideas. Such improvements increasingly are the means by which businesses remain competitive and profitable.

Creativity also is needed to invent new products and services and to devise strategies for living with technology's side effects. From the Model T to the Volkswagen Bug, from video games to personal computers, industry is replete with examples of how a good idea, well executed, can drive a company's fortunes.

Today more than half the Fortune 500 corporations provide in-house training in creativity development (Rice 1984). Many business schools offer graduate courses in creativity, and institutions such as the Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina specialize in continuing education in this domain. Even government bureaucracies and the military are looking more seriously than ever before at how to enhance the creative productivity in their work forces (Backer 1985e).

But both individuals and organizations are discovering that just learning how to have more good ideas is not enough. Creative work takes enormous personal energy. The work itself, the work environment, and

the personalities of creative people provoke many stresses that can inhibit creative productivity or even lead to burnout. Creative people need an appropriate context for their work, a total environment that can be custom-tailored to individual needs, helping to maximize creative output.

For the last 12 years, I have been exploring creativity development and its practical applications for individuals and organizations (Backer 1983a, 1983b, 1985c, 1985d, 1985e). Much of my work has been concentrated in the performing arts, the visual arts, and the film and television industries in Hollywood. After working with approximately 20,000 individuals, I have no doubt that physical and emotional health are intricately connected with creative productivity. But in reviewing the literature, I could find no explicit references to creativity development as an objective of health promotion programs. A 1985 series of interviews with leaders in health promotion produced similar conclusions. Many companies with outstanding health promotion programs also have creativity development efforts, but the two are rarely, if ever, coordinated.

Yet the framework for coordination already exists in many forward-thinking organizations. For example, health promotion programs often have "enhancing peak performance" as a stated goal. Part of peak performance is creativity, perhaps even more so now than in the past, as individual and group creativity is viewed as ever more critical to organizational success. Moreover, several observers (for example, Pelletier 1984) have concluded that the best current programs are the multiple-service, holistic ones. Adding a creativity-enhancement component seems entirely compatible with the state-of-the-art health promotion programming.

Such a strategy also is consonant with one of Pelletier's (1984) ten basic tenets of effective health promotion programs — that they respect workers' individual needs and unique circumstances. And health promotion programs generally are prevention oriented, which fits with the aim of preventing creative burnout and conserving creative resources.

The three issues of personal energy, stress and burnout, and alternate methods for enhancing creativity all relate quite directly to health promotion programs now operating in thousands of workplaces. Enhancing a health promotion effort by giving specialized attention to work force creativity can stimulate greater benefit without much increase in overall costs. Results may be especially dramatic with personnel overtly identified as creative, for example, scientists and designers. What

follows focuses on these so-called "key creative personnel" although fostering creativity at all levels in a workplace also is important.

The strategies suggested here are just now being explored in medical and behavioral research, so of necessity much of the discussion to follow is rather general — ideas and speculations rather than operational techniques. But enough evidence already exists to encourage organizational leaders to coordinate actively their health promotion and creativity development activities.

PERSONAL ENERGY

In their biographies and other accounts of the creative process, people who do creative work refer constantly to the total, consuming energy the work requires (Ghiselin 1952; May 1975; Arieti 1972). Many report working days or even weeks virtually without stopping. Project-oriented work, such as making a feature film or designing a new consumer product, may be especially demanding. Poor physical health can interfere with, or even stop altogether, peak performance. Innovators working in organizational settings have the further challenge of getting their good ideas to the marketplace, a process also requiring intense energy and commitment (Rosenfeld and Servo 1984).

Absenteeism, lack of concentration, greater propensity for accidents and injury, and other side effects of poor health also can cripple a workplace's creative forces. Key creative people may be removed from the scene temporarily or permanently. Moreover, the energy used in coping with these by-products of ill health cannot then be used for creative endeavor. Especially for companies battling to keep a competitive edge, even a temporary energy drain can spell disaster.

Naturally, workers with little in the way of creative responsibilities are affected by energy limits too. It's common sense that we all have only so much energy, and whatever is drained away by ill health or its side effects can't be used for other activities, such as work. But increasingly business organizations find that their most creative people are, in Buckminster Fuller's terms, "trimtabs," small sails that help guide the entire ship. Where such enormous leverage effects are involved, attention to energy level is even more important.

STRESS AND BURNOUT

Poorly handled stress is one of the greatest impediments to creative productivity (Backer 1985c). Every year, thousands of creative people, from rock stars to design engineers in high-tech firms, suffer so much stress that they simply burnout; they lose the capacity, and the desire, to be creative. Many thousands more suffer in their creative productivity. Stress depletes energy, creates anxiety that impedes or blocks altogether the process of creative inspiration, and generates interpersonal tensions that make team creativity more difficult.

In a recent Los Angeles *Times* article (Isenberg 1983), a half-dozen leading artist/producers in theatre and music were profiled. All had suffered a burnout so serious that they felt it imperative to take a leave of absence. Fruedenberger (1980) and others have chronicled the incidence of burnout in highly competitive, creatively oriented executive positions. Avoiding burnout means learning to identify and cope with sources of stress in both work and personal life.

Everyone in modern life faces stress, but at least three sources of stress are special for creative people. First, the nature of the work itself is stressful. Creativity is about risk and about change, and so is stress. The two are bound together inextricably, like Siamese twins. Coming close to the edge to find something new is the bedrock of creativity. Although race car drivers, trauma surgeons, and coal miners all face risks, creative people are especially vulnerable to their risk-taking activities because deep emotions are likely to be exposed in the act of creating. Dredging up material from one's unconscious is a hallmark of creative inspiration (Arieti 1972) and also has its psychological stresses, especially because even today we still understand very little about how the creative process really works.

Second, certain psychological characteristics of creative people are likely to induce stress. Campbell (1977), in a summary of many years' research on the psychological correlates of creativity, identifies among the core attributes "psychological turbulence" and "preference for complexity over simplicity"; both traits obviously increase a person's likelihood of living under stress. Moreover, those working as part of a creative team may be affected by attributes in their creative colleagues as well; a group of turbulent people working together is bound to generate some stress!

Third, creative environments, whether the research and development department of a large chemical company or a motion picture studio, are places where uncertainty is a way of life, with many associated stresses.

Many creative workplaces involve unusual working hours, a lack of separation between work and personal life, and often a lack of understanding and support from top management regarding the creative process.

ALTERNATE METHODS FOR STIMULATING CREATIVITY

Evidence is accumulating (Arieti 1972; Harman and Rheingold 1984) that there are a number of ways to promote creative inspiration and that there are wide individual differences in what works best. Benson (1984), for example, cites his Relaxation Response as helpful in stimulating creativity. Yet this approach may not work for all people. Heide (1985) found that relaxation techniques are actually anxiety producing for some high-energy, achievement-oriented people, including many doing work that is largely creative in nature. In laboratory studies Martindale (1975) and others have found that there can be even a negative relationship between relaxation and creativity.

Thus, alternate methods for stimulating creativity need to be explored. One that is part of most health promotion programs is physical exercise. Ghiselin (1952) is one of many writers reporting that creative people often speak of exercise as immediately preceding creative inspiration. Mozart, for example, often had his best musical ideas while walking quietly in the country after a good meal. Both Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison in their autobiographies speak of creative ideas forming in their muscles as they exercised. In working with thousands of creative people in workshops and classrooms, I found the incidence of reported creative inspiration during exercise to be so high that I now recommend a regular exercise program as the single best way both to increase resistance to stress and to facilitate personal creativity. People find their own ways to make a connection between the two. For example, one television writer reported that once she began noticing how many of her best ideas came while jogging, she started carrying a small pad and pencil on her run to jot down the ideas as they occurred (Backer 1985c).

The basis for such a relationship between exercise and inspiration is not hard to intuit. Virtually every analysis of the creative process includes reference to an incubation period, a time of relaxed concentration during which there is an opportunity for creative ideas to form and bubble up from the unconscious (Neurnberger 1984). This is what novelist Saul

Bellow refers to as "dream space" (Backer 1985c, p. 87). Exercise is one way to facilitate this state, simply because the mind and body are focused on an activity that is diverting but not distracting (as is, for example, concentration on another intellectual subject). Both physical movement and creativity involve overlearned skills that are practiced largely at an unconscious level.

Moreover, exercise stimulates the flow of endorphins in the brain, the natural painkillers that produce "jogger's high" and also are known to reduce depression and elevate mood (Sime 1984). Elevated mood is clearly associated with creative activity, especially if the individual had been depressed before the creative burst (May 1975).

We are just beginning to understand the relationship between creativity and exercise, through both case studies and laboratory research. However, there is already enough anecdotal evidence (especially because exercise is well known to have other benefits) to warrant some experimenting with creative people and the exercise components of health promotion programs.

CREATIVITY ENHANCEMENT AS A HEALTH PROMOTION COMPONENT

Experimenting with exercise, stress reduction, burnout avoidance, energy maintenance, or other health-creativity connections, however, should not be haphazard. A number of systematic approaches to enhancement are possible.

Health Promotion Policy

Having a written organizational policy on how a program is to serve an organization's key creative people can help, both in stimulating program design and in focusing attention on the special needs of the creative work force. This also reflects a top management commitment to providing a conducive work environment for creativity. The workplace's key creative staff should be involved directly in formulating this policy, using their own creative ingenuity to help make it effective.

Creativity Development Activities

Creativity development activities can be offered through the health promotion program (active cooperation with the company's existing creativity development program should be sought, of course). This arrangement helps to develop a general understanding of the linkages between health and creativity. It also provides a chance to address specific issues such as the relationships between stress, exercise, and creative productivity. For example, most creative people have little awareness of how much influence their physical health can have on creative prowess (Backer 1985c).

Health Promotion Activities

Specially tailored health promotion activities can be offered for key creative people. Structurally these can be scheduled to favor unusual work hours, the intermittent needs for intensive services in project-related work, and interface between health promotion and creativity development. For example, at the Center for Creative Leadership, fitness consultant and psychologist Joan Kofodimis offers exercise classes as an ongoing part of the center's creativity development programs. The 30-minute classes typically are given at the end of each seminar day. They involve simple stretching and muscle relaxation exercises, combined with education on the role of fitness in effective work performance.

In Hollywood, fitness consultants now come to the film and TV studios, to give personalized workouts to performers and key executives. A company also could organize an exercise program to be followed by quiet times in a secluded environment, to further enrich the creativity-stimulation value of exercise.

The content of health promotion activities also can be targeted for creative people:

Substance abuse education and counseling can focus on the attempts creative people often make to cope with stress and to enhance their creative powers through using alcohol and drugs. The evidence is overwhelming that such tactics do not work for either purpose (Barron and Harrington 1981; Arieti 1972), but they persist among the myths of creativity for many people. For example, clients of the Entertainment Industry Referral and Assistance Center (an industry-

wide substance abuse program serving the film and television industry in Hollywood) often say they started using drugs or alcohol for stress reduction or for promoting creativity (Backer 1985b).

Exercise and fitness training can include specific attention to the benefits of exercise for creative inspiration.

Stress management seminars and counseling can focus on the special stresses of the creative process and ways to handle them. Because stress management is currently the fastest-growing area in health promotion (Fielding and Breslow 1983; Pelletier 1984), there are still chances to design original stress management programs for this purpose.

Mental health counseling can include attention to the problems of creative work as they affect the family and on ways to handle the significant degree of "psychological turbulence" that seems a trait of most creative people.

Modeling Effective Behaviors

Managers of creative people can model effective behaviors. Especially on creative projects where the leaders set the tone for everyone else's behavior, a manager who takes time for fitness classes or for stress management activities can be highly influential. Over the last several years, I have been teaching stress management to film and television directors at the Directors Guild of America. A key topic in these classes is how directors can serve as role models for the actors, camera operators, and others in the high-pressure environment of the TV or movie set.

Intervention

Individual direct interventions may be necessary with key creative people in trouble. For example, I have been called in as a consultant by the managers of successful creative people to help with everything from dietary changes — particularly limiting junk food — to dealing with drug and alcohol problems, to handling interpersonal difficulties in the individual's private or work relationships, to increasing daily exercise and sleep requirements, to meditation and yoga training. A comprehensive program of activities may be necessary to salvage a key

creative person who is teetering on the edge of burnout or severe health problems.

Organization Redesign

Increasingly, organizations where much creative work goes on are retooling entire environments to stimulate creative productivity. Specialized health promotion programs can, of course, be a part of this redesign. For example, Jonas Salk at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, says that the design of his institute's offices, from interior furnishings to choice of site, was governed by the goal of developing an environment where creativity would be maximized (Helvarg 1984). Rosenfeld and Servo (1984) report establishing an Office of Innovation for Kodak Research Laboratories, designed to help innovators deal with the stresses of getting their ideas to the marketplace. Ward (1985) describes a comprehensive environmental design for Hallmark Card's Technology Innovation Center, where the special care of 700 creative people takes place. And increasingly, industrial parks are being designed to lure high-technology firms by providing an environment with special appeal for these firms' creative staffs. One example is the Woodbridge Technology Center in Scottsdale, Arizona ("A Center for Corporate Creativity" 1985).

In a 1985 series of interviews I conducted with creative staff at Calty Design Research, Inc., in Newport Beach, California, several aspects of the physical environment were mentioned as significant for creative effectiveness. One is the beautiful seaside setting of this organization, which is the U.S. design subsidiary of Toyota Motors. Another is the relative isolation of the workplace for Toyota's U.S. and Japanese corporate headquarters. A third is the clean, uncluttered architectural and interior design (interestingly, several staff said their own creative processes were stimulated best by a more diverse, "messier," environment, again highlighting the need for custom-tailoring of the creative context to fit individual needs and preferences). Finally, this small company is unusual in that it has its own tennis court and resident tennis pro, affording exercise opportunities for staff in addition to such activities as walks on the nearby beach.

CREATIVITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS OVER THE LONG HAUL

As with other human resource development issues, organizations face choices between short-term profits or long-term success in dealing with issues of health promotion and creativity. Coordinating certain programs might admittedly be expensive in the short run, but long-run benefits can be great (other activities, as suggested here, may cost very little). Peters and Waterman (1982) say that the best-run companies tend to look at the long haul, including the overall maintenance of human resources. So it seems only a matter of time before companies begin to explore more systematically the relationship between health and the creativity of their best innovators.

Evidence is growing that certain qualities or norms within the work environment can promote either burnout or peak performance, such as creativity (Jaffe, Scott, and Orioli, 1984). We can do some exciting experimenting on both the values and the structures of workplaces with respect to health and creativity. The workplace is, in fact, a natural environment where behavior can be observed and where organizational and social structures can be used in the design of interventions (Krantz, Grunberg, and Baum 1985).

Dialogue and sharing of strategies for enhancing creativity through health promotion is certainly needed. Managers of health promotion programs can share with each other and with their counterparts in creativity development programs. Symposia at professional conferences and further writing on this subject also would seem to be of great value.

Recent reviews on creativity (for example, Barron and Harrington 1981) make it clear that there is still more that we do not know than we do about this complex, mysterious subject. Controversy rages even on seemingly simple matters such as definition of the word "creativity," itself. Yet progress is being made. Behavioral studies in the laboratory and in the real world are telling us more about the correlates of creativity; brain waves and other physical phenomena associated with the creative process are being studied intensively.

As we learn more about the nature of creative activity itself, we doubtless will learn more precisely how health promotion activities can stimulate creative productivity. This presentation is admittedly only a bare beginning. Following through is important for health promotion, however, if for no other reason than economics. If health promotion programs can be shown to protect and expand a company's vital creative

resources, their overall worth is better demonstrated. There already is evidence that organizations are demanding that their health promotion activities show such types of concrete payoffs (DeMuth et al. in press). Gathering evidence on the availability of health promotion activities to stimulate creative productivity may, in the long run, help such programs in their quest for survival.

J. M. Keil, advertising executive with Dancer Fitzgerald Sample, reminds us that it is important simply to believe that "creativity and management can co-exist in a profitable environment" (1985, p.2). The glue of that coexistence is using the organization and power of management to help structure and support creativity through programs such as those in the health promotion arena.

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