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Work, reimagined: Unlocking innovation with art and science

How neuroscience, storytelling, and design fuel innovation and connection

Creativity isn't a "nice-to-have"—it's a leadership imperative and, in the age of Al, a strategic differentiator. As the boundary between personal and professional life blurs, organizations must design work for both performance and human potential. The science is clear: engaging the senses with aesthetic experiences can spark innovation, improve collaboration, and foster healthier, more connected teams.

Rewiring work with creativity

Recent research in **neuroaesthetics**—the study of how aesthetic experiences measurably change our brains and bodies confirms what artists and philosophers have long known: we are biologically hardwired to respond to the arts. When intentionally activated in the workplace, creative opportunities and immersive, aesthetically rich environments fuel better outcomes, faster learning, and stronger emotional regulation.

"We are made up of stories. They define us. When we creatively express our thoughts and feelings, we chemically, physically, and psychologically bind to each other."

— Ivy Ross

Storytelling is a superpower for innovation

In a world of constant change, leaders must inspire—not just inform. Emotionally resonant storytelling increases retention, empathy, and alignment.

"We felt very similar emotions. Our brainwaves actually synchronized... making us more open and empathetic."

— Susan Magsamen, describing the collective response to a live poetry performance by Emmy-nominated spoken word artist IN-Q

(i) **KEY INSIGHT**

We process visual, tactile, auditory, and olfactory data far more than we realize—34,000 visual inputs per hour, trillions of olfactory signals, and sound vibrations that synchronize brain waves in just milliseconds. When these systems are engaged, teams think more clearly, adapt more quickly, and relate more deeply. As Susan put it, "science is proving that when we create the conditions for salient experiences, our brain functions significantly better."

(i) **KEY INSIGHT**

Creative expression—especially storytelling and poetry activates both hemispheres of the brain, engages memory networks, and strengthens connection across teams. And it doesn't require mastery. The mere effort creates the impact.

3 QUICK ACTION

- Assess your current workspace: Does it inspire creativity or
- Incorporate natural light, sensory-friendly materials, and flexible space for movement and quiet reflection.

QUICK ACTION

- Turn routine updates into compelling narratives that highlight purpose.
- Encourage teams to share impact stories from customers or colleagues to fuel creativity and emotional buy-in.

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3 Designing for creative breakthroughs

From immersive sensory rooms to spontaneous art-making sessions, forward-thinking organizations are transforming the environment of work to unlock new thinking.

"We've been optimizing for productivity since the Industrial Revolution... but we're not happy. Arts experiences are neuromodulators—they instantly change our brain and body chemistry."

— Susan Magsamen

(i) KEY INSIGHT

Novelty, movement, and sensory immersion create new neural pathways. Teams that engage in hands-on art-making or spend time in nature report higher resilience, creativity, and trust. Tools like sound beds, immersive visual environments, and even playful activities like sand art or doodling activate the prefrontal cortex and default mode network—critical systems for focus, self-reflection, and ideation.

QUICK ACTION

- Introduce "creative breaks" in meetings—try movement, music, or group sketching.
- Leverage AI for rote tasks to free up mental space for humancentered problem-solving.

We're entering an era where creativity is not just a soft skill—it's a strategic differentiator.

As Ivy Ross said, "We have senses, not sensors. That's our advantage."

Play is not the opposite of work—it's the opposite of depression."

—Kyle Johnson, Creative strategist and storyteller

By blending neuroscience, art, and leadership, we can reimagine the workplace not just as a place for work, but as a space that inspires creativity, catalyzes problem solving, and fosters transformation.

Reimagine work with creativity at the core

BetterUp's platform blends behavioral science, coaching, and Al to help leaders build the creative capacity their teams need to innovate and thrive. From emotional intelligence to storytelling and design thinking, we help unlock the human side of transformation.

Explore how BetterUp can help your teams create, connect, and grow.

Schedule a demo \rightarrow