

The Goal of Creativity

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In case you missed it, the cameras were rolling at the 24th APS Annual Convention. Marieke Roskes, University of Amsterdam, presented her research on overcoming the cognitive costs of creativity.

If you struggle with creativity and feel exhausted after a creative task, then psychological scientists have good news for you. People who strive for success and positive outcomes (approach motivation) are often more creative than those who strive to avoid failure or negative outcomes (avoidance motivation). But individuals who are motivated by avoiding failure can be as creative as those who are striving for success if they need creativity to achieve their goal.

[Marieke Roskes](#), along with coauthors Carsten de Dreu and Bernard Nijstad, from the University of Amsterdam hypothesized that avoidance-motivated individuals are not incapable of being creative, but they have to compensate for their inflexible and controlled processing style with effort and persistence.

In one study, participants saw a mouse and a piece of cheese (approach condition), or a mouse and a dangerous owl (avoidance condition). The participants were asked to solve creative problems on a computer. When solving the problems did not help the mouse to get closer to the cheese (or away from the owl), approach-motivated people were more creative than avoidance-motivated people. However, when solving problems was useful, and helped the mouse to get closer to the cheese (or away from the owl) both approach- and avoidance-motivated people were equally creative.

Overall, the findings show that creative performance is difficult and depleting for people focusing on avoiding negative outcomes. Yet if they invest more energy and effort, they can achieve the same level of creativity as approach-motivated individuals. Creativity has a high cognitive cost for avoidance-motivated people, but they are willing to pay it if creativity helps them achieve their goals.

You can read the full paper (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*) here:

<http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2012-12079-001/>

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