

BRIEF SUMMARY

Wen, M.-C., Butler, L. T., & Koutstaal, W. (2013). Improving insight and non-insight problem solving with brief interventions. *British Journal of Psychology*, 104, 97–118.

Developing brief training interventions that benefit different forms of problem solving is challenging. In earlier research, Chrysikou (2006) showed that engaging in a task requiring generation of alternative uses of common objects improved subsequent insight problem solving. These benefits were attributed to a form of implicit transfer of processing involving enhanced construction of impromptu, on-the-spot or “ad hoc” goal-directed categorizations of the problem elements. Following this, it is predicted that the alternative uses exercise should benefit abilities that govern goal-directed behaviour, such as fluid intelligence and executive functions. Similarly, an indirect intervention — self-affirmation (SA) — that has been shown to enhance cognitive and executive performance after self-regulation challenge and when under stereotype threat, may also increase adaptive goal-directed thinking and likewise should bolster problem-solving performance. In Experiment 1, brief single-session interventions, involving either alternative uses generation or SA, significantly enhanced both subsequent insight and visual–spatial fluid reasoning problem solving. In Experiment 2, we replicated the finding of benefits of both alternative uses generation and SA on subsequent insight problem-solving performance, and demonstrated that the underlying mechanism likely involves improved executive functioning. Even brief cognitive– and social–psychological interventions may substantially bolster different types of problem solving and may exert largely similar facilitatory effects on goal-directed behaviours.
