



Creativity and MY time

BY SUE

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“creativity, the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form.” **Encyclopedia Britannica**

As we enter retirement, our thoughts flow to how we will fill our time now we are not ‘having to work’. The conundrum of removing one demand from our life can leave us with a void, which we often rush to fill.

We are leaving a time in our lives which have been governed by demands which are outside our own making. In retirement we will continue to have demands placed upon us which we cannot ignore, but making space for **Creativity and My Time** is crucial in retaining balance and self-worth.

Reflecting on the creative thoughts and deeds we have been involved in, in our careers, now is the time to consider the focus of Creativity and MY Time. How do we remove any guilt or psychological self-deprecation we may feel about exploring our creative self?

Retirement comes as a result of many coalescing elements: the white light that is formed from a prism of enlightenment. Being in this spotlight may feel uncomfortable, or unwanted, but it sets the stage for the next act or round. Whilst we may not have indulged in a physical fight, we have been involved in many psychological battles, and wear the scars and battle favours earned throughout our working life.

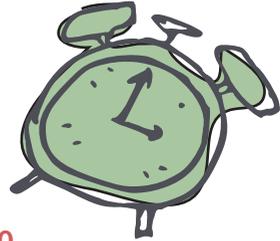
“I’m retiring because there are more pleasant things to do than beat up people.” **Muhammad Ali, 1942-2016, American boxer**

The two thoughts that emanate from this are:

- What are the intrinsic demands we place upon ourselves to 'keep busy'?
- What pleasant things do we wish to pursue, and why do we feel driven to be busy?

Busyness

"The more we do, the more we can do; the more busy we are, the more leisure we have." **William Hazlitt, 1778-1830, English essayist & critic**



Consider the insightful cynicism of the author Terry Pratchett: 1948-2015

"Gods don't like people not doing much work. People who aren't busy all the time might start to think." **Terry Pratchett 1948-2015**

The myriad web-sites and lifestyle gurus appear to follow the tenet of 'busyness is good'. "Visualize your life as a pie that allocates time and attention to the pursuits that you value the most."

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So, where does this Creative ethos emanate from?

Occupational Therapy, our Roots

Putting cynicism to one side and recognising the beauty of creativity and of being creative, let's take a short walk into the roots of our profession (non-occupational therapists are welcome to join our short trip).

The history of the occupational therapy profession is steeped in creativity, and the provision of therapy through practical activities and interventions. The students of occupational therapy in the 1950s, 60s and 70s spent a fair proportion of their training exploring crafts and creativity as tools to treat a wide variety of physical and psychological malaises, and as techniques for improving function or engagement with life skills.

As the profession has evolved over the decades, we have rolled with the changes and seen a move away from creative arts as a specific focus of our interventions, especially in physical and social care. However our creativity is utilised in problem-solving, and in supporting our fellows in achieving what matters to them.

Recent recognition of the value of creativity and its inclusion within the national curriculum, has brought it back into clearer focus in many BSc occupational therapy courses, and new proponents of the profession are stepping away from the medical model and exploring the value of creativity in our lives, and in society.

Social prescribing has re-invigorated the value of purposeful activity in our lives, and has raised the profile (and a few hackles!) of creativity as a medium for societal support.



Occupational Therapists are drawn to the role of social-prescribing, and the echoes and tenets of occupational therapy that are manifest in its provision. It is becoming a useful tool in many areas of healthcare intervention, and is being recognised for its effectiveness.

Elizabeth Casson, the acknowledged founder of occupational therapy in the UK, was a contemporary and employee of Octavia Hill, the social philanthropist of the late 19th century. After she qualified as a doctor she initiated the occupational therapy profession, inspired by the role of creativity in the health and wellbeing of patients in her mental health clinic:

“When I first qualified as a doctor ... I found it very difficult to get used to the atmosphere of bored idleness in the day rooms of the hospital. Then, one Monday morning, when I arrived at the women’s wards, I found the atmosphere had completely changed and realised that preparations for Christmas decorations had begun.

The ward sisters had produced coloured tissue paper and bare branches, and all the patients were working happily in groups making flowers and leaves and using all their artistic talents with real interest and pleasure. I knew from that moment that such occupation was an integral part of treatment and must be provided”

Dr Elizabeth Casson, Elizabeth Casson Trust website

The timeframe in the quote below does cause some consternation, but perhaps ‘creativity was a necessity’ prior to the 1920-1940s after which mechanisation allowed for more defined leisure time, and we could adapt ‘necessity to pleasure’? This really does show how Elizabeth Casson’s ideas were innovative, and how the introduction of craft into the medical model was a change for good.

“Creativity is a relatively new phenomenon

Creativity has only been a thing for the past 60-80 years or so.”

www.99designs.com

So what is Creativity?

The link above makes us think about creativity, including their thoughts about it:

“Creativity is the ability to transcend traditional ways of thinking or acting, and to develop new and original ideas, methods or objects.”

But is that our understanding of it? There are some points for reflection as we move through the guide,

“the arts, also called fine arts, modes of expression that use skill or imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects, environments, or experiences that can be shared with others.”

Encyclopaedia Britannica

(---however the Wikipedia (24 April 2023) definition of the Arts starts, thus:

(----“The arts are a very wide range of human practices of creative expression, storytelling and cultural participation. They encompass multiple diverse and plural modes of thinking, doing and being, in an extremely broad range ---)

Whether we engage as a participant, observer or creator, we enter an environment that takes us from the mundane to the spiritual. Creators of yarn arts often refer to the action as a moving meditation; participants in musical performances regard them as up-lifting, ethereal, especially when this includes performance in experiential and inspiring settings. Storytellers can take us to worlds, times and cultures so diverse and realistic that we believe in them. Gaming, cos-play, and virtual reality all create opportunities to step into new realities with new persona. So there is no need for an individual to BE extrinsically creative in order to participate in creative activities. We can participate in creativity as an observer, as someone who appreciates the skill and creativity of the medium we interact with.

During our working lives, the value we place on creativity can be proportional to the respite it gives us from toil and mundanity. So, for those of us who appreciate the benefits of creativity, it's vital to give credit to our creative selves as we begin our journey into retirement, and assign the appropriate time in our routine.

Pause point

Consider the following questions to begin to explore your relationship with creativity.

Did your work involve creativity in any form?
How have you given time to your creative self, when you were working?
Does creativity feature highly in your plan for retirement?

Work time vs 'My' Time

As we move towards (or reflect on) retirement, let's consider some concepts and societal norms around work and 'my' time. Our adeptness in managing our working/life balance may already have allowed a significant shift in the proportion of work to non-work activities.

Work-life balance

Work-life balance is defined as *"the state where a person chooses to equally prioritize the demands of work and career and the demands of their personal life. An individual who lacks this balance has more work and home obligations, works longer hours, and lacks personal time."*

www.employsure.co.nz

When we retire, or are planning retirement, is this a conscious nod to the fact that we crave more of 'My Time'? In retirement, how do we view Personal time, is this My Time?

If so, how can we ensure we give adequate time, energy and resources to My Time? There may be a need to consider **Expectations, Productivity, Health,** and our engagement with like-minded and compatible communities.

Expectations

Retirement will bring with it a host of expectations: Our own expectations, others' expectations, societal expectations. Exploring the pocket guide 'Finding Your Tribe' may help in understanding how to manage these. Recognising where our 'creative self' sits within these, can help the transition into retirement.



Productivity

We are used to being busy: meeting the demands of a busy life, so do we want to be productive? Do we consider creativity (in all its forms) as being productive? How do we move to a state where we can be productive and not busy? Are we productive if we are creating a physical item or creating prose or poetry, photography or music?

Health

How do we adapt to our 'new' life and ensure our health is optimised? Remembering that health also applies to our psychological health: we can become physically fitter, but we need to be aware of the psychological impact of retirement, too!

Can we be creative in our understanding of our own well-being and health? This could be creative in trying something different in how we care for ourselves, such as swimming, mindfulness, a new exercise regime? Or is there now the time, space and opportunity to develop our personal mastery in a skill we already have?

Communities

There is an inevitability that we will become part of a movement or group (**Finding your Tribe??**) as we seek to make sense and take order from our time as a retiree.

Many organisations include creativity and productivity in their programmes and which recognise retirees as distinct groups (although not exclusively)

- U3A
- Mens Sheds



These organisations have either recognised the need for creativity to be part of everyday life or have responded to a specific need to include it. As with our pre-retirement lives we chose those activities to suit our intrinsic and extrinsic needs, now we have the opportunity to review what matters to us, in retirement.

Aligning ourselves with groups specifically for 'older people', does bring us to the point where we might consider if we are happy to define ourselves or be defined as a retired person?

OTs United!

"Engaging with my local professional fellowship group became essential as I retired. This coincided with Lockdown, and as restrictions eased we could take socially distanced walks, as a group. I had worked alongside, in parallel with these people for many years and the value of our professional connection morphed into a personal one, we make no demands upon each other (although there is an implicit nod to the support being readily available), we just enjoy each other's company."

Re-engaging with, defining My Time and connecting with our creative self.

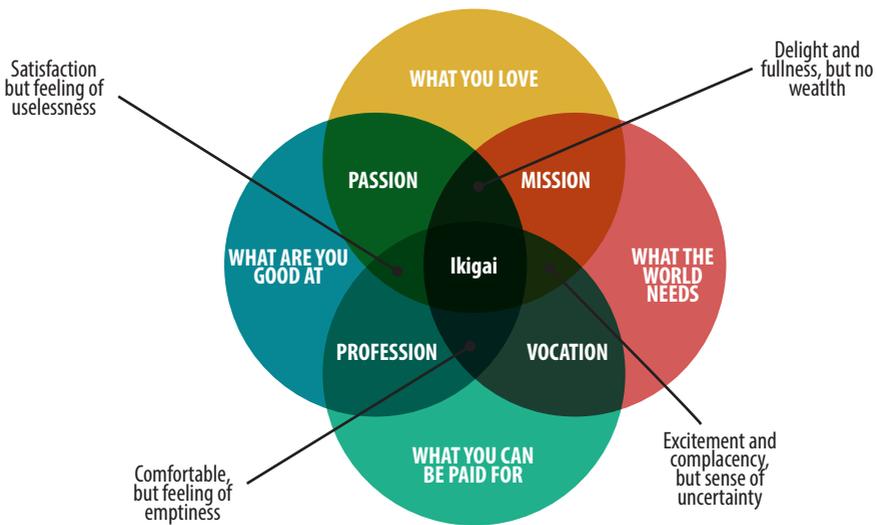
As we move from being employees, and the routine of work, how do we re-engage with My Time, as a time for play and creativity?

The opportunities are boundless, but constraints may limit our engagement, so it's vital to choose wisely, and decide which are deserving of our time, effort and resources. 'What is important to me' is the reason for our being. The pocket guide Personal Mastery also considers this.



The ikigai model is a great tool for checking where you might develop your interests from here.

Talking with newly retired friends and those who are 'some way in', the overarching theme is that time is soon filled, but by choice rather than by demand. The other point often raised as being important is the ability to say 'no'. Preservation of My Time is as vital as the activities we use to fill our time.



In conclusion

We are now at a point in the guide where we may have a clear idea of how we might engage with our creative self. Thankfully (as with life) there is no definite answer to the conundrum of what?, where?, how?, or why? but the insight we may have gained in this short guide may set us on a path of discovery, fruition and well-being.

"creativity, the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form."

Encyclopedia Britannica

Sue. 06 April 2023

References/Resources

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