

Provocation workshop 2b

The Creative Condition and the Conditions for Creativity

Creativity is often thought to be innovative and original yet Csikszentmihalyi notes that a person needs to be involved in what he terms a "domain" or field of work "deeply enough to reach its boundaries and then push them further" (53). In other words, people need to have a real commitment to their area of work and a curiosity about subject which will prompt a deep level of enquiry that may lead to a new perspective.

In fact, Csikszentmihalyi goes further to suggest that an individual needs to be fully immersed in the system within which they work in order to facilitate what he terms a process of "internalization". He describes how a person needs to be able to: "reproduce that system within his or her mind" as it is this profound level of competency which allows a person to be creative (47). So, rather than being a rebel, Csikszentmihalyi's work suggests that, in order to be creative, people must be able to play by the rules, even if they later choose to break them.

Internalization requires a high level of commitment over a period of time. It also suggests a level of enjoyment which Csikszentmihalyi suggests is essential to creativity. He asserts that his study of 'creative persons' - drawn from the arts, sciences and business - revealed one characteristic in common; that they all loved what they were doing. Csikszentmihalyi links this passion to the quality of experience people felt when they were involved in the activity. Csikszentmihalyi identifies what he terms 'flow' as an enjoyable experience which often leads to a sense of happiness. He suggests that there are nine aspects of flow:

- 1) There are clear goals every step of the way
- 2) There is immediate feedback to one's actions
- 3) There is a balance between challenges and skills
- 4) Action and awareness are merged - i.e. people are 'in the moment'
- 5) Distractions are excluded from consciousness
- 6) There is no worry of failure
- 7) Self-consciousness disappears
- 8) The sense of time becomes distorted
- 9) The activity becomes worth doing for its own sake

These elements were all present in the work of the creative people that Csikszentmihalyi interviewed.

The rewards of the flow state appear to negate the risks of rejection that may arise from the creativity. Csikszentmihalyi notes that creativity:

... often goes unrewarded, or even brings ridicule. Divergent thinking is often perceived as deviant by the majority and so the creative person may feel isolated and misunderstood (47).

The flow state brings its own state of well-being which may lead to a mind -set such as that held by Jacob Rainbow - one of Csikszentmihalyi's interviewees. Rainbow says:

It's fun to come up with an idea, and if nobody wants it, I don't give a damn. It's just fun to come up with something strange and different (48).

This state of committed play appears to be highly desirable when working with the health and care workforce. Csikszentmihalyi's outline of the aspects of the flow experience may give indicators of what might be required to support such a perspective but his work also appears to suggest that creativity is fundamentally a matter of personal commitment. Thus, in relation to the health and care workforce, the challenge may be how to encourage people to become deeply involved in their 'domain' in order to provide the conditions for creativity and, once they are immersed, to encourage them to go against what they have committed to...

Reference:

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Invention*, New York: HaperPerennial, 1996