

Daily Practice of Innovation

Small actions, big shifts



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Daily Practice of Innovation

Small actions, big shifts

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CONTENT

Introduction

Stepping into the innovation mindset 6

Getting ready

Set the foundations
for productive work

1.1 Moments that make you feel great 10
1.2 The power of checking in 14
1.3 Sense of purpose 20

It's crunch time

Make the most out of the day

2.1 Priorities through strategic thinking 28
2.2 Pomodoro for productivity 34
2.3 Regain focus and reflect 39
2.4 Maintaining motivation 44

A spark of creativity

Finding the opportunities
hidden in plain sight

3.1 How are you curious? 52
3.2 Connecting the ordinary
with unusual 57
3.3 Creativity constraints 62
3.4 Inspiration and imagination 67
3.5 Core of inspiration 72

Hitting a wall

Boost your energy

4.1 Connect with your body 80
4.2 Activity to boost energy 84
4.3 Exercising eye muscles 88
4.4 Energy and breathwork 94

You got this

Gaining perspective

5.1 Tackling self-doubt 98
5.2 Resilience and
post-traumatic growth 102
5.3 Agency & influence 108

Closing thoughts

Igniting an idea 114

STEPPING INTO THE INNOVATION MINDSET

In almost every role, we are often required to be a jack of many trades and jump frequently and fluently between different tasks. It can be creating new ideas for a new program launch, or deciding on the best strategy to increase revenue, or even framing the customer needs in a compelling way for a project proposal.

What makes up a productive workday can differ vastly depending on what needs to be done. Good quality deep thinking and reflection might be equally productive as a brainstorming session with a stack of wild ideas. However, a headspace conducive to achieving these tasks is significantly different. In facilitated work sessions such as classes or workshops, it's natural to build short transitional activities like warm-ups or energisers the program to help participants get to the 'correct' headspace. How can we bring this approach into our daily work?

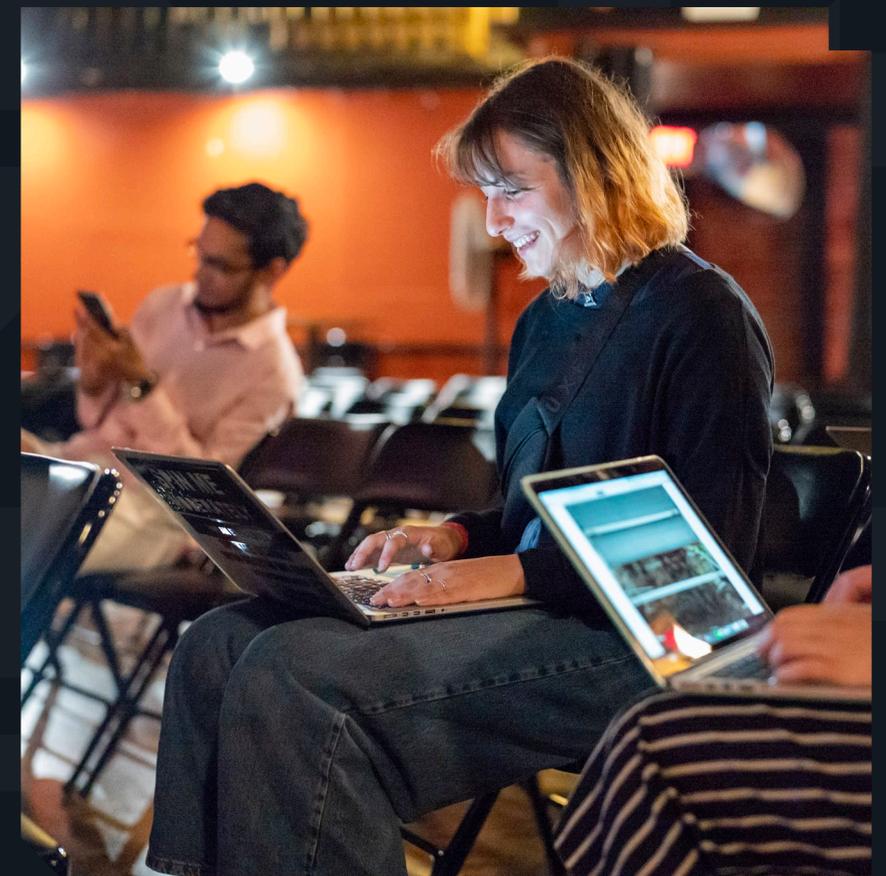
At DFM, we wanted to gather a set of fresh perspectives to the core work we do around innovation. We try to walk the talk: find inspiration and new understandings in the side lines of our core work and to bring the knowledge straight into practice. To pause for a moment and dive deeper into the essential elements of innovation activities. For example, creativity and idea generation are inherent parts of innovation and design processes, but how is creativity actually constructed and how is it related to the closely linked words like curiosity and inspiration? More importantly, how can you embed creativity into your practice and perhaps, channel more creativity into your work when you need to?

We are excited to share this Daily Practice of Innovation book, a collection of insights and activities that guides you on how to take a step back from your daily work and to find a new perspective to tackle tasks at hand. The activities are brief and require no prior knowledge, so you can jump right into the doing.

The articles in this book have been previously published in a 'Rev Up with DFM' series in 2020. We have now compiled them into a single publication for easy access and curated them to support your daily work. For ease of navigation and selection, the articles have been organised into five separate themes. They loosely follow a typical workday from planning ahead and organising your day to staying productive, getting creative, hitting the afternoon tiredness wall, and gaining perspective.

Browse through this book like a cookbook. Glance through the recipes for inspiration or if you have a particular need in mind, jump straight into the matching topic. Every article stands by itself so you can read the articles in any order you like. Every article has a short 'think' section complemented with an activity you can try straight away. We follow a 'bias towards action' strategy, and believe that the best approach to practise new skills is to simply perform them.

We hope you find the articles inspiring, and that the publication becomes your handy innovation toolkit. A toolkit that boosts your energy, unlocks new perspectives, and prepares you to tackle with confidence the different activities in your workday.





GETTING READY

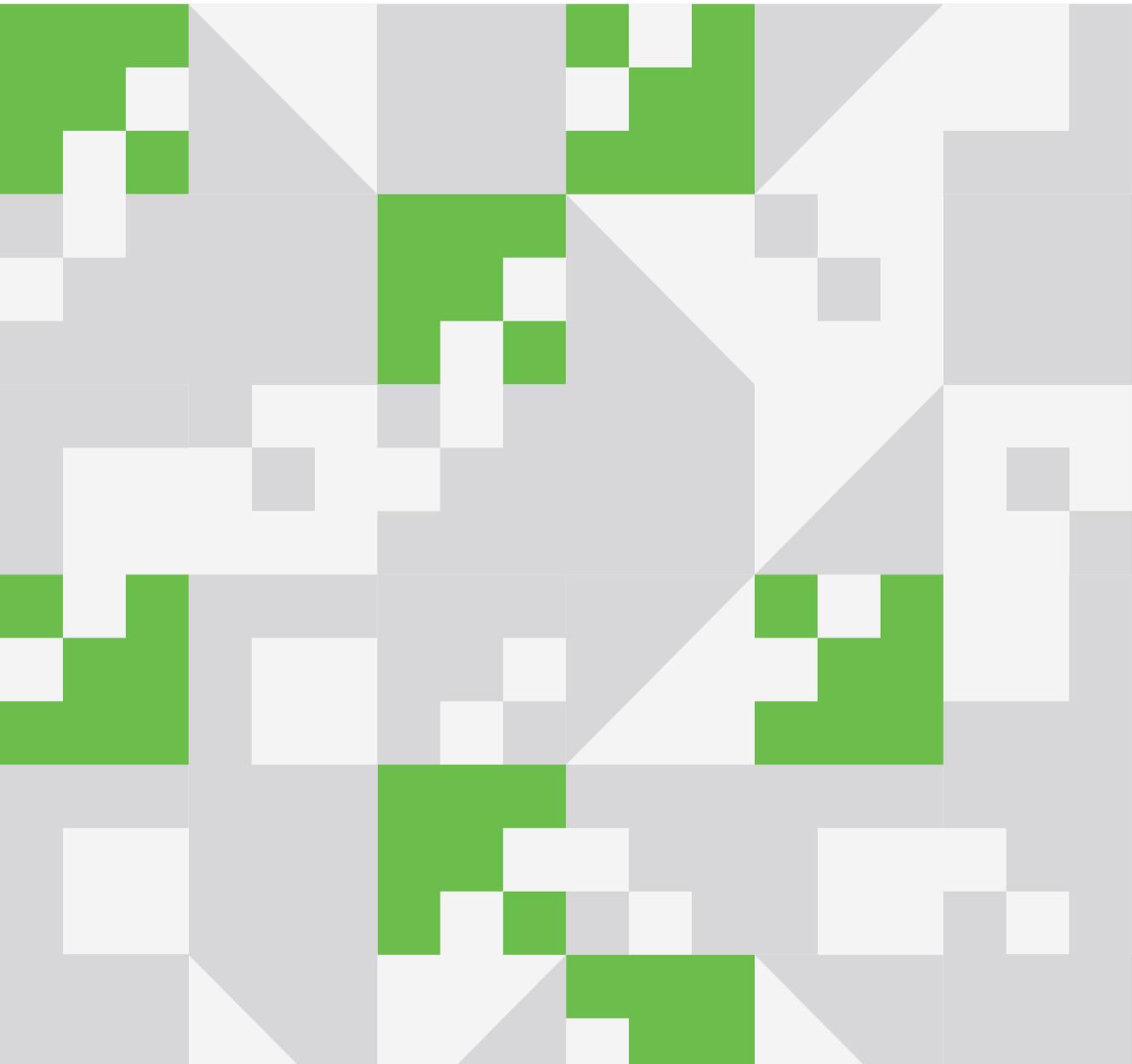
Set the foundations for productive work

Getting ready is vital for a productive day. It gives you a clearer target, increases productivity, and aligns your activities with your short- and long-term goals. Finally, getting your mindset ready for work strengthens the connection between your daily practice and that of your workforce.

The following articles provide ideas and methods that tune you holistically towards a work-conducive mindset. These articles range from focusing on positive moments, reinforcing work motivation, to addressing your emotions towards work. All exercises take a different lens enabling you to make the most of your workday.

MOMENTS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL GREAT

Reinforce positive experience to build motivation.



Our emotions motivate our actions and power our concentration. But to leverage our emotions in our work, we first need to pause and reflect on positive emotions. The short exercise introduced in this article is about finding inspiration and energy through recognising great moments and actions that will enable us to harness more positive emotions on a day-to-day basis. Taking time to recognise positive emotions is a worthwhile activity, as our state of emotions can be linked to our performance and physical well-being (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007; Rimer, 2011).

Reflecting enable us to gain insight from experience, by evoking our emotions and giving an opportunity to connect our past with our future. There are three reasons why we should pause to reflect, especially when we are in busy periods.

1. Reflecting recognises how we receive information and create personal knowledge. This allows us to replace expired information with new knowledge for future use.
2. Reflecting acknowledges how we react emotionally to wins and challenges. This allows us to strengthen the meaning between how we feel and our circumstances.
3. Reflecting takes stocks of our achievements, which we may perceive as insignificant while doing it.

By reflecting, we harness our emotions better to increase our resilience and effectiveness at work (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007).

“Most people realize that they tend to perform best when they’re feeling positive energy ... When people are able to take more control of their emotions, they can improve the quality of their energy, regardless of the external pressures they’re facing.”

(Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007)

Connecting with positive moments

This activity helps us recognise positive feelings that we may ignore or forget to share with others. It is simple and relies on carefully framed prompting questions to draw out good reflection.

This activity can be done to prepare your day or task ahead, or if you need to feel more ground in positive emotions. Give this exercise a go and see how these questions prompt different thinking.

TIME	10-15mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual - group
MATERIALS	Pen Paper

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

Exercise

There are three parts to this exercise. Take 3-5min for each question part. If you are doing this with your team, encourage voluntary sharing after each question.

PREPARE (2 MINUTES)

1. Think about your work.
2. Write down a moment from work in the past week that made you feel great about yourself.

REFLECT ON THE PAST (5 MINUTES)

3. Why did that moment make you feel great? Write it down.

PROJECT AHEAD (5 MINUTES)

4. Now, look forward to the work week ahead.
5. What actions can you take to ensure a positive moment will occur? Write the actions down.

Reflection

How do you feel? Did something surprising emerge? Did you find any positive moment from a seemingly small encounter? Perhaps something quite big that you have been working towards, which went well? Perhaps you feel inspired by those moments?

Did you find it difficult to identify moments when you have felt great at work? If so, take some time to think about what feeling great means for you. Then think back to even the smallest moments, instances, or interactions. This could be something that appear insignificant at first or was a fleeting moment. From these micro-experiences, begin to collect your positive moments.

All answers are correct. Remember, the purpose of this exercise is to take time to reflect and recognise positive emotions from past work experience. Adopting such practices will enable you to have a more positive outlook on work, as these optimistic thoughts foster positive emotions.

Think about the actions you identified in the Activity's question two. What do you hope for, and what can you do about it? As David and Tom Kelley (2013) shared in their *Creative Confidence* book:

“The value lies not in the idea, however, but in the action.”

Finally, consider repeating this activity at the start of each week, to recognise moments where you felt great and ensure you can build on those moments and replicate them as much as you can. We also encourage you to revisit your actions and thoughts, to ensure you can keep accountable for yourself and ensure you give time and focus to your personal development.

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THE POWER OF CHECKING IN

Manage emotions and workloads, and communicate expectations of any upcoming projects.

Expressing emotions or labelling them may not always come naturally to us in a work environment. Some may even attempt to suppress emotions at work. However, the ability to recognise and perceive your own and your co-workers' emotions (i.e. emotional intelligence), is a key skill for effective leadership (Goleman, 2004; Ovans, 2015). One approach to develop your emotional intelligence is to simply check-in with how you feel. As David (2016b) states:

"...naming our emotions [...] is an important first step in dealing with them effectively. But it's harder than it sounds; many of us struggle to identify what exactly we are feeling, and often times the most obvious label isn't actually the most accurate."

Checking-in involves writing down your different emotions so that you can analyse them with the experience they were felt. Not only does expressing emotions start the process of embracing difficult sentiments (David, 2016a), but it also provides a cognitive distance between us, the emotion, and the event, allowing us to reconsider the meaning of the experience. As psychologist Jonathan M Adler (in Rodriguez, 2013) reminds us:

"One of the primary reasons we have emotions in the first place is to help us evaluate our experiences."

When we check-in with our emotions, we recognise and name our feelings from a cognitive distance. This detachment allows us to make rational decisions, solve problems and collaborate effectively. When we reflect on these written emotions, we also learn about which emotions motivate our different behaviours. In contrast, when we do not reflect on our emotions, we let our feelings drive our decisions, which may lead to dire consequences. As Scharz & Pines (2020) said:

"We can't change what we don't notice, so the first step is becoming more aware of what we're feeling at any given moment. That means cultivating the capacity to observe our emotions, rather than being run by them."

Checking-in is also useful for collaborative sessions. When we share our emotions, thoughts and expectations with the team, we:

- foster psychological safety within the team,
- build empathy between team members,
- clarify a shared direction or motivation towards a task or challenge ahead, and
- reduce our team's emotional assumptions.

When we neglect to check-in emotionally with each other, we create unintended possibilities for erroneous perceptions, misunderstandings, misguided solutions, and conflicts.

Hopes, Fears and Expectations

This activity tunes you into your emotional energy. The aim is not to address these emotions immediately. Instead, the aim of this exercise is to simply acknowledge the different feelings.

You can use this exercise at the start your day. Doing so helps you to emulate your ideal work environment (hope), anticipate possible setbacks (fear), and clarify work goals (expectations). You may also use this exercise in any particular context, such as starting a new project.

TIME	10-15mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual - group
MATERIALS	Pen Paper

Preparation

Set aside some undisturbed time for yourself. If you are working with a team, invite your co-workers to join you on your existing digital communication tools or at the office.



Exercise

Hopes, Fears, and Expectations exercise can be used in various different situations to recognise how you are feeling before jumping into action. The role of these prompting questions is to gain perspective, set goals and also create clarity within your team or working group.

For the best outcome, we recommend you write your answers down. Writing down makes your reflection more grounded, gives you the opportunity to come back to your thoughts, to share them with others if desired, or synthesise to find similarities in the team's thoughts to guide future work.

PREPARE (5 MINUTES)

1. Make sure you have a few minutes of uninterrupted time.
2. Think of a context which you want to focus on. This could be for example
 - a. regarding the meeting/session ahead.
 - b. towards a challenge you are facing.
 - c. related to a project you are starting.

REFLECT ON YOUR EMOTIONS (10 MINUTES)

3. What do you hope to get out of your chosen context?
Hopes can include things you'd like to see progressing, something you look forward to or something you wish to happen or would like to see.
4. What do you fear you will encounter during your chosen context?
Fears can be attitudes, behaviours or other factors that are blockers, obstacles, challenges or barriers that you identify within yourself, in your team or in your surroundings.
5. What do you expect to accomplish in your chosen context?
Expectations are things you envision to change, achieve, happen or see as an outcome.

PROJECT AHEAD (5 MINUTES) - OPTIONAL

Articulating your hopes, fears, and expectations gives you opportunities for action. Actions are anything that you can do to advance the situation. For example, when you feel overwhelmed because you encounter an unsolvable complex problem at work, a small action that you can do to advance the situation is ask your co-workers. It may seem small at first but asking for help may lead to new knowledge from your co-workers.

Reflection

When we identify our hopes, fears, and expectations, we become more conscious of motivating ourselves through our hopes, cautioning against our fears and, aiming to complete expectations. This is the same when we share our hopes, fears and expectations with our team. In fact, we can even draw on our peers to ensure that our hopes are realised, fears are not actualised, and expectations are met or better aligned.

We encourage you to give this simple activity a go and try it out in different settings. After trying it out, take some time to reflect how it felt, worked and what you learned.



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SENSE OF PURPOSE

Build a sense of purpose in your work and connect it with your daily activities.

Purpose, cause, values, beliefs, vision, mission, your why, your future state. Exploring our inner purpose, to understand its relationship with our circumstances, is complex. Such explorations can be overwhelming as well. But it is an important topic that motivate our daily action, whether it is in our personal lives, current jobs, careers, or a specific work project.

In this article, we discuss about finding purpose, value, meaning, and a sense of belonging in what we do in our day-to-day activities. When we explore, connect, and align these meanings with our everyday actions, it leads to tangible and intangible benefits for both ourselves and our organisations. In our current rapidly changing world, Malnight et al. (2019) pointed out that:

“Many high-growth companies use purpose to stay relevant in a fast-changing world.”

Given the complexity of this topic, we bravely explore our inner purpose to clear our headspace gradually and to identify incremental actions that will connect our purpose with our daily life.



Exploring and connecting with your purpose tuning in

This activity tunes you into your spiritual energy.

As exploring one's inner purpose may be akin to opening a Pandora's box, this activity should not be a one-off effort. Instead, you should revisit it regularly to help you become more connected with yourself and the people around you. It will be surprising to find anyone who can effortlessly answer these challenging questions. Hence, keep this exercise as deep or as light as you like and focus on exploring your purpose.

TIME	10-15mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual - group
MATERIALS	Pen Paper

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

Exercise

There are five parts to this exercise. If you're short on time, you can answer a few of these questions at a time. For example, you can address one question at the start of each workday or workweek.

Keep this activity as deep or as light as you want. Some questions may overlap, and some are more concrete than others. Some are geared towards more external connections, some more intrinsic. Some have a future focus, some are timeless. If you get repetitive answers, feel free to skip some questions.

Diversity in questions is to cater different needs. Some of us may be visionaries and some need grounding to the here and now. Don't worry, if you don't have a strong vision of where you want to be in two years' time, focus on building attributes that bring meaning to your work.

If you are doing this with your team, encourage voluntary sharing after each question.

PREPARE (2 MINUTES)

1. Think about the context to explore your inner purpose. You can consider the work you do in general or narrow it to your current role. You can also focus on a specific project that you are a part of.

REFLECT ON THE PAST (5 MINUTES)

2. **Values:** What are the values that guide your work? Write it down. This could be the work you do, the project you're involved in or the context you have chosen in the first step.
3. **Vision:** What do you want to be known or remembered for? Write it down. Consider your past achievements. What have you achieved in the past that you are particularly proud of? Why?
4. **Motivation:** What stimulates you to act? Write it down.

PROJECT AHEAD (5 MINUTES)

5. **Your future self:** Where do you see yourself in two years? If an article is written about you in two years' time, what should it be about? Write it down.
6. **Your future environment:** What do you see in your ideal world two years from now? Write it down.
7. **Your actions:** How are you contributing towards that ideal state? What do you want to achieve in two years? Why? Write it down.

GROUND IN THE NOW (5 MINUTES)

Think about your daily tasks and activities. Here, you can connect what you have written down so far with your current and immediate future. Below are some prompting questions for you to do so.

8. **Your current self:** Are you bringing your full self to work? If not, how can you enhance it?
9. **Your current actions:** Are you doing the things that you want to be known for? If not, why? How is it reflected in your week? In today's tasks?

MAKE YOUR MOVE (10 MINUTES)

In this final stage, the goal is to identify ways how you find what's meaningful that will bridge your daily work to your future self.

10. **Your time:** How can you schedule time on an ongoing basis to explore and reflect on these topics? How can you carve out time for things that are meaningful but not urgent? Write it down.
11. **Your people:** Who do you want to connect with to support you in getting closer to your purpose and vice versa? Write it down.
12. **Your purpose:** What would make today more meaningful? This week? Write it down.

Reflection

How did this activity make you feel? Did you identify areas that you enjoy but find hard to integrate into your daily work? The key to change is to initiate new routines to “bridge the gap between the value you aspire to and how you currently behave” (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007).

The aim of this activity is not to find the ultimate description for your life purpose and values. Instead, it is to:

- keep reflecting on these questions,
- practice awareness,
- evolve your purpose and values accordingly, and
- connect what you find meaningful in life to your environment.

Doing this activity individually helps you discover new insights about your purpose and values, which may have changed from your work and life experience.

Doing the activity with your team, where psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) is present, can strengthen your sense of togetherness. By sharing your aspirations and purpose with others, you not only get the benefit of hearing yourself commit to your vision (which often makes your vision more real), but you also become a supporter of others in achieving their purpose. Aside from individual and team settings, this is an excellent activity for defining project objectives of your business unit or tying it to any strategy work.

Taking the time to connect with your mission and define objectives is an essential source of motivation. It is an unlimited source of spiritual energy that often gets neglected amongst the hectic day-to-day pressures. As Schwartz & McCarthy (2007) demonstrated, such activities have long-term benefits for employees, companies, and the broader society:

“People tap into the energy of the human spirit when their everyday work and activities are consistent with what they value most and with what gives them a sense of meaning and purpose. If the work they’re doing really matters to them, they typically feel more positive energy, focus better, and demonstrate greater perseverance.”



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insights

TY → ACCOMM.
→ TRANSPORT
→ ACTIVATIONS

☹️ ← --- → 😊
EXPERIENCE SPECTRUMS

FRICION ↔ FRICTIONLESS
RESISTANCE = PRESENCE } IT REQUIRES balance

PEAK END RULE
WHAT WE REMEMBER

MUNDANE ↔ MAGICAL

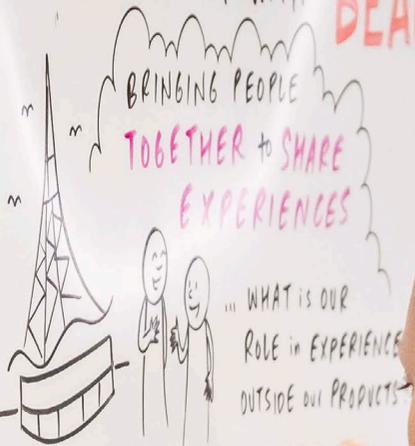
AWESOME... SENSE OF VASTNESS, NEED FOR ACCOMMODATION

PLACE

MEANING SIGNIFICANT MEANING

connections
all senses
COMMUNICATING IN A "SOUND OFF"

A CONVERSATION WITH BEAU VIGUSHIN



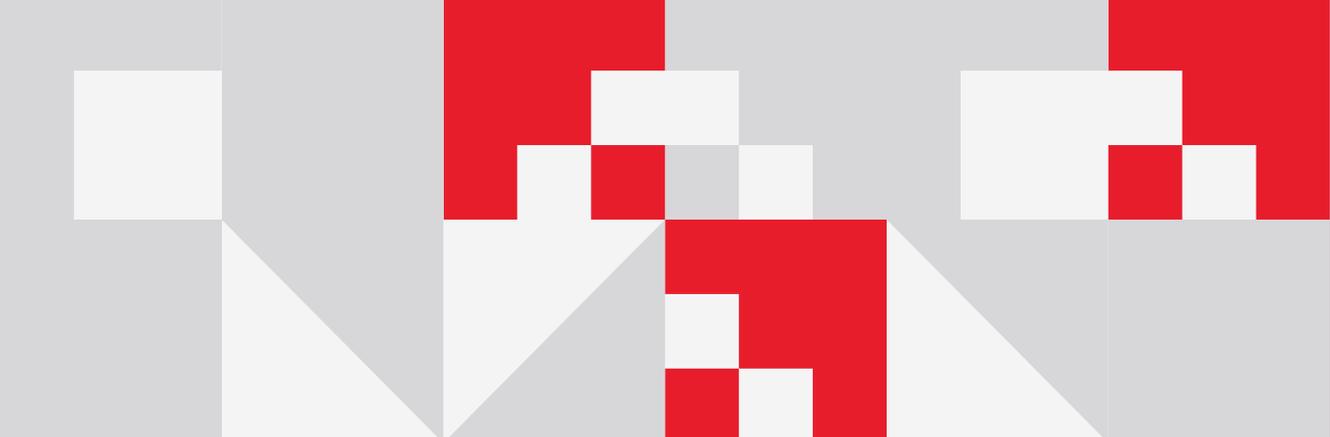
SHIFT to

IT'S CRUNCH TIME

Making the most out of the day

Setting goals is the first step but staying on track is the next. The following articles and activities help you prioritise time for vital tasks, maintain concentration and regain focus – all essential ingredients for productive work. Even small steps of progress are beneficial as they allow you to create momentum!





PRIORITIES THROUGH STRATEGIC THINKING

Knowing what tasks to prioritise, schedule and delegate.

This article allows you to find more clarity in task priorities and make time for strategic thinking. We will look into the ongoing challenge of juggling between urgent tasks and not sacrificing the time allocated for what's important.

...who can define for us with accuracy the difference between the long and short term! Especially whenever our affairs seem to be in crisis, we are almost compelled to give our first attention to the urgent present rather than to the important future.

- Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961 address to the Century Association

Eisenhower (more about him later) was quite accurate in his address on how we tend to be blindsided by a sense of urgency over choosing tasks that would have greater long-term payoffs. In this article, we would like to take a look into the ongoing challenge of juggling between urgent tasks and making time for what's important. We want to enhance clarity in our priorities and make time for strategic thinking.

With the high pace at work becoming the norm, time and time again we see this challenge in our own work. This fast-paced tendency is also voiced by participants in our workshops, colleagues and clients we work with, regardless of the sector or their roles. It seems to be the major blocker for not having enough time for skill development, future planning or focusing on projects that are meaningful.

Strategic thinking is fundamental for organisational success especially in a leadership context (Kabacoff, 2014) but more and more in any role. However, we tend to be incapable of making time for something that may not have tangible outputs or immediate payoffs (Horwath, 2012).

What may lie behind this behaviour is called 'the urgency effect'. We are more inclined to perform an unimportant task over an important task when the unimportant task is characterised by a sense of urgency (Zhu et al., 2018). In other words, we are conditioned to avoid meaningful work over tasks we feel are urgent. Fortunately, we can flip this tendency the other way round as well. When we focus on the importance of the task and its benefits, we can shift our focus away from the perceived time-sensitivity.

What may explain this 'urgency behaviour' is our desire to resolve discomfort or distraction by accomplishing a task quickly regardless of its objective value (Zhu et al., 2018). In other words, a way to move away from the reactionary behaviour might be a matter of learning to become more comfortable with unfinished work. Another way to go about this could be to break a task into micro goals to create a sense of achievement.

Making decisions requires energy, so if possible, make decisions on what to focus on when your mental energy levels are up.

The last point regarding the importance-urgency balancing act is about headspace. Strategic thinking does not necessarily require a lot of time, but you need to be in the right frame of mind for it (Clark, 2018). Making decisions requires energy, so if possible, make decisions on what to focus on when your mental energy levels are up. We are then more likely to make choices requiring self-discipline and hopefully will better see the long-term payoffs over the illusion of being productive by ticking off tasks for the sake of doing it. Similarly, Zhu et al. (2018) concluded in their study and found out that people who identify themselves as busy were more inclined to choose urgent tasks over importance.

Balancing urgent and important tasks

Below we will describe a few different tips for integrating strategic thinking in your work and making clarity and connections with your priorities, so that you don't fall into the 'urgency trap.' You can practice this activity at any time. However, it is best to practise this exercise at the beginning of each day. This allows you to determine the most essential activities you need to do for the day.

TIME 15mins
PARTICIPANTS Individual
MATERIALS Pen
 Paper
 Post-its

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

General Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969) served as the 34th president of the United States of America. In a speech he gave in 1954 he has been said to quote a former college president Dr. Miller saying, "I have two kinds of problems: the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent." This is the premise of the *Eisenhower Matrix* (see Figure 1), also known as the *Priority matrix*. Think of your tasks and use the matrix to prioritise and map them based on their importance and urgency.

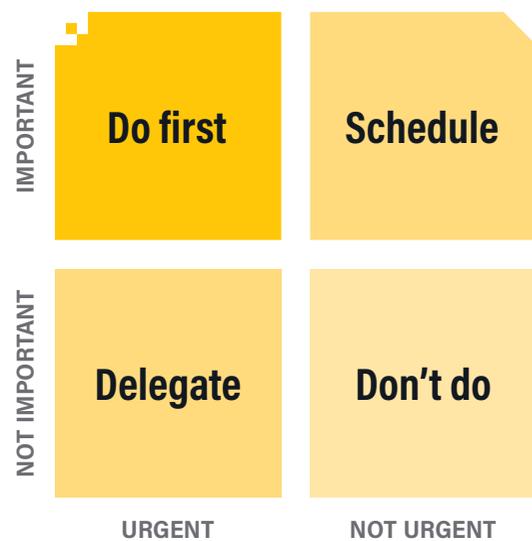


Figure 1 Eisenhower matrix

Exercise

PREPARE (10 MINUTES)

1. Make a list of tasks in any given project. Be exhaustive as you can. You can use post-its for this step.

REFLECT ON YOUR TASKS (5 MINUTES)

2. Go through each task and decide whether it is important or unimportant. Important tasks often require substantial amount of time, so you have to be in a proactive and strategic state of mind to make considered decisions.
3. Go through each task again and decide whether it is urgent or not. Urgent tasks often require our immediate attention and are time sensitive.

PROJECT AHEAD

4. For tasks labelled important and urgent, **do first.** These tasks include meeting project deadlines and resolving project crisis. Without immediate attention, such tasks will complicate progress and can be costly.
5. For tasks labelled important but not urgent, **schedule.** These tasks are necessary to complete your long-term goals, but do not yet have a pending deadline.
6. For tasks labelled urgent but unimportant, **delegate.** Think of what you can delegate and who could do this task for you or how can you automate it?
7. For tasks labelled not urgent and unimportant, **don't do.** These tasks are generally time-consuming actions that do not contribute to accomplish your long-term goals.

Reflection

Using the *Priority matrix* helps you filter down tasks that require greater cognitive energy, so that you can commit more time and space for deeper thinking. In contrast, the matrix also helps you filter out unimportant and non-urgent tasks so you can eliminate and free up time for the more important activities.

Final notes

Below are some other ways to stay focus on your priorities:

1. GET AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER.

Connect with a friend or colleague and serve as sounding boards for each other. When you convey your priorities to someone else, it casually commits your mind to those priorities as well as holding you accountable to starting those tasks.

2. SET TIME TO BE REACTIVE AND TO BE PROACTIVE.

Interruptions are unavoidable, so anticipate them by having a backup plan for when urgent tasks arise. For example, schedule two free 30-minute sessions (in the morning and in the afternoon) in case your work gets delayed by an interruption. Additionally, you also want to set time aside to work on your important but non-urgent tasks. This is your dedicated time to think ahead and work on projects that moves you towards your long-term goals.

3. BREAK PROJECTS DOWN INTO ACTIONABLE TASKS.

A task is a single action item that you can do in a single working session. For example, writing a report section, creating a figure, or proofreading a report. A project, on the other hand, is bigger and often requires multiple tasks to complete. For example, pitching a project proposal or submitting a project report. After sorting through the *Priority matrix*, use the *Pomodoro Session* activity (see Chapter 2.2, *Pomodoro for productivity*) to advance the tasks through focused and uninterrupted working sessions.

4. REFLECT ON YOUR ROUTINES.

Take a moment to reflect on your routines in general and perhaps you might find insights into how to build a routine around making time for important, yet non-urgent tasks. How did you set your routines up? What led to it? Is there something you would like to change? What would you aspire to continue doing? What do you need to keep it as a routine? Who could help?

5. TAKE A PAUSE

While being responsive to tasks may demonstrate your engagement on a project, not every task requires a reaction from you. Do you associate being busy as a sign of productivity? As American writer Derek Sivers once said, "busy is what happens when you're at the mercy of someone else's schedule". Perhaps it's time to stop being busy and instead, ask if the responses are important or urgent?

6. EXPERIMENT TO FIND YOUR IDEAL SCHEDULE

There is no one-size-fit-all productivity framework, so try different activities and at different times of the day to find what works for you. Perhaps a weekly reflection to determine your task priorities is sufficient. Or perhaps a monthly review of project priorities is what you need instead. Remember, building a positive work habit takes time and experimentation. However, taking the time to strengthen your productivity tools and skills helps you handle interruptions more effectively and will make you more adaptable and resilient in the long run.

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POMODORO FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Work is a marathon, not a sprint.



Productivity is often a key measurement in many organisations. Widely used throughout the industrial revolution, productivity stems from a history of measuring processes that streamlines and maximises the amount of output of physical labour over a given length of time.

However, most tasks we do today, particularly in knowledge work, overlaps with different projects and is more intangible in nature. Unlike manual labour, where completion of work is more obvious, the results of intellectual work are less visible. This often leads to delayed responses and feedback and ultimately, decreased productivity. To increase our productivity, we must address complex issues such as identifying optimal conditions and procedures for reaching peak performance as well as clarifying tasks that generate the most impact.

How can we provide a sense of accomplishment for tasks that involve deep thinking, higher focus, and are more complex in nature? Drawing from common productivity techniques, we can:

- break down complex tasks,
- prioritise the tasks, and
- become more targeted.

Individually, productivity methods can also assist us to:

- alleviate work anxiety,
- manage competing tasks,
- avoid procrastination,
- become self-aware of our progress, and
- stay on the path to enhanced personal effectiveness.

The purpose is not to justify your use of time to others, but to recognise your own level of productivity in a clear and meaningful way.

At DFM we regularly test different ways of working together and trying different techniques for productivity that would be effective both in remote work and in-office contexts. One of the time management techniques we found particularly useful is *Pomodoro*.

Francesco Cirillo created the *Pomodoro* technique in the early 1990s when he began organising his work and time by using a kitchen timer shaped like a tomato (Cirillo, 2006). The approach attempts to improve attention and concentration by reducing interruptions, to reduce concern over time and efficiency, to raise awareness of decisions, and to improve your work or study process (Cirillo, 2006).

Pomodoro sessions

This activity sustains your cognitive energy in a world of constant notification disruptions. You can practice it at any time of the day and it allows you to focus for longer periods of time and to stay on task.

TIME	30 mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual - group
MATERIALS	Timer

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

The *Pomodoro* technique is based on two different time intervals: a 25-minute working session and a 5-minute break. Understanding that our ability to focus can be limited or can be tempted by multi-tasking and procrastination, the 25-minute segments allow for a manageable amount of time to channel your focus on one goal. Pure focus is required for a successful *Pomodoro*, and the session is void if you give in to distraction from the task you've chosen (Cirillo, 2006). Acknowledging that there are a variety of internal and external distractions will help to know when to ignore them to be able to complete the *Pomodoro*. As Cirillo (2006) said,

“The Pomodoro Technique was created with the aim of using time as a valuable ally to accomplish what we want to do the way we want to do it, and to empower us to continually improve our work or study processes.”

If you are doing this alone, make a promise to yourself that you will not leave the session and will not check alerts until the 5-minute break. If you're facilitating this with a team, it's a good idea to clarify the rules of the activity (see above) and allocate roles. Choose someone to serve as the *Time Keeper* and manage the concentration and break sessions. Ask each *Pomodoro Pal* to state their aim for the session aloud, since this adds an aspect of social accountability.

Exercise

PREPARATION (5 MINUTES)

1. Pick a goal or task you would like to work on.
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes.

EXERCISE (30 MINUTES X 3)

3. Work on the selected the goal or task.
4. When the timer goes off, take a five-minute break. You can also review your goal.
5. When the five-minute timer goes off, start the next round of 25-minute work session.
6. Repeat the *Pomodoro* sessions (25 minutes work, 5 minutes break) and then take a longer 25min break after four sessions.

REFLECT ON YOUR FOCUS (OPTIONAL)

7. How did you feel after a few *Pomodoro* sessions? Did you manage to stay focused, or perhaps you struggled with the designated tasks?
8. How did you go with turning off notifications and attempting to stay uninterrupted?
9. Did you make any headway on the more difficult tasks? Were you able to estimate accurately how many *Pomodoro* sessions it took to complete a task?
10. Did you notice any difference in your focus when you did the exercise with a team?

Reflection

At DFM, we embrace the hybrid work environment and foster a sense of community through a variety of ways. For example, we inform and invite our co-workers to upcoming *Pomodoro* sessions through our digital communication platform, Slack. When we run our *Pomodoro* sessions, we use a video conferencing tool, Microsoft Teams, to foster a sense of the virtual office.

Pomodoro sessions with colleagues, as well as social accountability and support, can help make any work task more enjoyable. Why? It is much easier to keep focused and on track when you are aware that your co-workers are also working hard. Additionally, you are less likely to interrupt yourself and others. Lastly, when you are in a working session with your co-workers, it may be easier to stay away from emails or other notifications that may break your concentration, since you have committed to work with them during the sessions.

Final notes

If you want to bring your *Pomodoro* session to the next level, consider downloading a designated app, (e.g. Focus Keeper) or check out one of the online timers below.

- [Tomatotimer](#)
- [Marinaratimer](#)
- [Microsoft](#)
- Focus Keeper app, [iOS](#) or [Android](#)

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REGAIN FOCUS AND REFLECT

Look into creating space and breaks in our thinking to allow a change of pace in our days.

This article looks into creating space and breaks in our thinking to allow opportunities for reflection, creativity and a change of pace in our day. First, let's start with a story and a mental exercise.

Imagine you are at the office or on campus. You walk across a familiar block or street for a meeting and then head back to your office with your colleague. On the walk back, you digest the meeting, discuss strategy, share perspectives and consider different approaches with them. You get back to your desk to realise it's lunchtime, so you grab your sunglasses, pick up your phone and walk down to your favourite cafe to grab a bite. You run into a different colleague on the way, exchange a few words and this encounter brings a smile to your face.

Waiting for your lunch order you check your emails on your phone, respond to a few Slack or Teams messages, get back to your partner on the evening plans and take a breath. You pause and observe the barista doing their magic, wait staff running around and people sitting and chatting in the cafe. You sit for a moment with your own thoughts.

On your walk back you go through the rest of the day in your mind and decide what you are going to do next when you get back to your desk.

When you're at the office, in-person, there are several moments throughout the day that create fluctuation in the rhythm of our pace, break up the space and paint nuances to different moments.

The world of work has shifted to a hybrid setting, with many people working remotely and in-person at the office, with that shift we should consider how to bring more variance and changes in pace into our days to keep up with this adaptation.

The change to remote and hybrid work has many positives, including things such as the lack of commute time, reduced effort to travel to meetings, or less distractions and interruptions from our colleagues or peers (however certainly acknowledging all the other interruptions and distractions at home). We don't need to leave our desk every ten minutes and instead can attend different meetings with a click of a button. We've witnessed the reports on increased or sustained productivity and efficiency when working from home, but we might have underestimated the importance of those moments that are created naturally as we change environments and shift our focus.

First, small breaks are much needed throughout the day, as our attention is challenged if we are doing one task for a long time since "the brain gradually stops registering a sight, sound or feeling if that stimulus remains constant over time" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011). Many theories suggest that attention is a limited resource, and these studies focus on the need to divide our fixed amount of attention among competing sources of information (Cherry, 2019). However, Ariga and Lleras (2011) believe that it is not that our attention is limited, but instead that we struggle to maintain focus for prolonged periods of time on one task. They found out in their study that short breaks from a main task improve our ability to focus as responding and detecting change are core functions of our brain (Ariga & Lleras, 2011). Thus, we should create brief distractions to avoid mindlessness and fatigue from a continued task.

Second, these changes in our day help create opportunities to shift gears and create opportunities for inspiration, creativity and reflection to occur. To spark our inspiration, we need to actively engage with the world and be receptive to external inputs (see Chapter 3.5, Core of inspiration). Our creativity flourishes when we take in varying perspectives and make connections in unexpected ways. Creativity gets crippled under stress and high time pressure, and instead moderate time pressure is shown to increase our creativity (Amabile, 2017).



These shifts in space increase our well-being as we get to take a moment to reflect, which helps us to ground our sense of accomplishment and balance. In addition, studies show how we consistently underestimate the benefit of outdoor nature walks even though a brief walk outdoors is shown to make us happy (Nisbet & Zelenski, 2011). Not to forget that breathwork and slowing down impacts our parasympathetic nervous system (see Chapter 4.4, Energy and Breathwork) which decreases our stress levels and the reactive 'fight or flight' response.

Thus, to create favourable conditions for our wellbeing, inspiration and creativity, we need to allow time to think, be curious and explore.

How might we recognise these transitions and moments of shift in space equally as important and a part of our workday as our video conference meetings, emails and instant messaging? How might we ensure we don't bounce from one video meeting to another, without any space in between to pause, reflect, gather your thoughts and unlock new perspectives?

Have we really seized the opportunities that the remote working offers? Minervini et al. (2020) suggest that as we are not anymore location bound, we should also consider if it is necessary to be bound by the clock and replicate a traditional 9 to 5 pace. According to their findings, we seem to default into a co-location replicated "seeing the face" mode when working remotely even when it is not necessarily the best way to organise work and a particular work task or situation could be accomplished differently even better (Minervini et al., 2020).

Regaining focus and shifting gear

These activities refresh your cognitive energy. The aim is to change the intensity of work and differentiate your day. You can also use these exercises at any time of the day. You could do these alone, with a colleague or encourage your whole team to join.

TIME	as long as you need
PARTICIPANTS	Individual - group
MATERIALS	Walking shoes

Exercise 01

TALK AND WALK

As Merchant (2013) said in her TED talk, “fresh air drives fresh thinking”. Can you make your next meeting a walking meeting? Consider if this meeting necessitates video conferencing and screen time. Do you need to reference documents and take notes? Or is the meeting more focused on exchanging ideas, updating each other, and checking in? If the meeting is more of the latter, could it be over a phone call and a walk?

How about after the virtual meetings, you schedule a ten minute ‘talk and walk’ phone call with your colleague to reflect on the meeting and share your thoughts, just like you would when walking back to the office from an in-person meeting.

Exercise 02

WALK AND THINK

We all know how important it is to break a sedentary lifestyle and long days in front of the screen. If you haven’t already built this habit, we encourage you to try and break your day with short walks where you can reflect, think, and just breathe. You’ll be surprised at how this can change your mood, feelings, and decision-making when you return to your work.

Reflection

Both these small activities enable you to change the space where your mind and body are in and to create variances in your day. Walking certainly also carries many physical and cognitive benefits and movement is essential to learning (see Chapter 4.1, Connect with your body).

“The most restorative break you can take is a nature break.”

(Burkus, 2020)

What are all the ways you can give yourself time to think, gain perspective, and change your environment and head space? How can you create moments and situations where you are forced to think at a different pace? Walking away from screens and devices is one way to achieve this, and you may have discovered other ways as well. We encourage you to keep going.

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MAINTAINING MOTIVATION

Identifying connections with what motivates you and what the barriers are for your motivation.

Many of us might say that we have struggled with motivation in a hybrid working environment. Working from home can be lonely, chaotic, disrupt boundaries or make us feel disconnected. This might manifest itself through struggling to focus, having an internal pressure to be more productive, choosing to tick off simple tasks and having difficulties starting complex or ambiguous challenges. We might miss having daily interactions with our colleagues, the unplanned corridor conversations and encounters, where we learned something or gained information we were not seeking at that time but that helped us to untangle something complex or to advance a topic.

Something we have noticed in relation to motivation towards work is that we miss the fun. Fun connects with joy and happiness, and these moments are supercharged with connection, empathy, endorphins and excitement.

In this article, we want to briefly discuss the power of motivation, and especially encourage you to **find the connection with what motivates you and what are the barriers for your motivation**. We will share a few small actions, prompts and thoughts that we at DFM have been practicing when working from home, which have helped us to have a bit of fun and find motivation.

What gets you going and boosts your enthusiasm?

According to the Cambridge dictionary, motivation is the “enthusiasm for doing something” (Motivation, n.d.). It is our willingness to get things done and keeps us moving.

There is a wealth of research about our motivation, but there are no clear answers or golden tickets for how to be more motivated. Often our motivation is a sum of many parts, context and situation dependent and fluctuating. We know that inspiration has an enduring impact on motivation and focus (see Chapter 3.5, Core of inspiration) and that we all have different things that drive us and make us tick.

Make connections with what motivates you and what is stopping you.

What are elements of motivation? What contributes towards motivation?

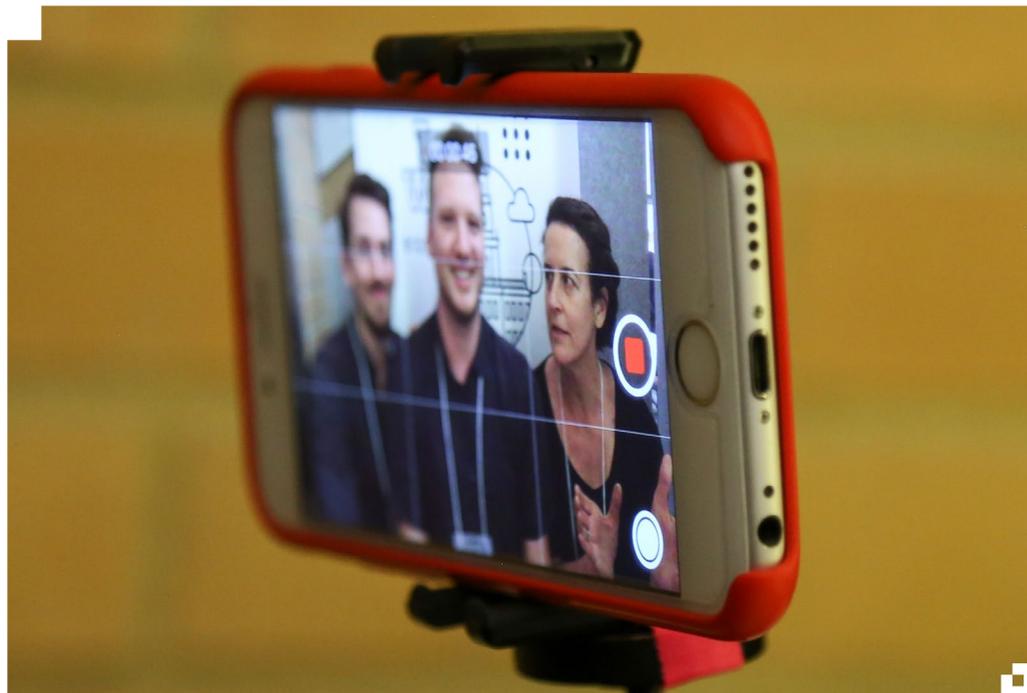
According to Fowler (2014), there are three psychological needs that are ingredients for our motivation; autonomy, relatedness and competence. Autonomy relates to the perception that we have choices and opportunities to guide our actions. Relatedness connects with our purpose (see Chapter 1.3, Sense of purpose), feeling of connectedness and sense of contributing towards something meaningful. Competence is our opportunity to grow and learn and use our capabilities to their full potential (Fowler, 2014). Recognising these psychological needs and what might be missing, can be a source for reconnecting with our motivation.

Furthermore, we are all driven by different values which impact what drives and motivates us. As Clark & Saxberg (2019) pointed out, we might be driven by the intellectual qualities of a task (interest value), the strong connection to our perception of ourself and our capabilities (identity value), the urgency and importance of a task (importance value), or the future benefit and impact we foresee when completing a task (utility value). Rod Judkins, author of *The Art of Creative Thinking*, reminds us that:

“We come alive when we consider that we are creating something that is worthwhile. If creatives drive on with the projects that matter to them, if they feel they’re working on something of significance they devote all their energy and time to it. Doing what matters, is what matters.”

Making connections with our psychological needs, what drives you and what you care about, reveal opportunities to use them to your advantage when looking to boost your motivation. Taking time to connect with your purpose and to clarify priorities is an invaluable source for motivation and this source of energy often gets neglected amongst the hectic day-to-day pressures (see Chapter 1.3, Sense of purpose).

In addition to understanding the pillars for your motivation, it is important to make connections with why you might struggle with motivation. These motivation traps might reveal the underlying reason behind the missing motivation and help you to think of the right course of action (Clark & Saxberg, 2019). You might realise that there is a mismatch with your values, you might believe you are not capable of doing what you need to do, you might be consumed with negative emotions or perhaps you can't really identify the reason for struggling (Clark & Saxberg, 2019). It all starts by recognising why you are avoiding a certain task or what might be stopping you to achieve something. Then, try thinking about what you can realistically influence and have agency to change, and finally find small actions to change the course.



EXERCISE

How to find motivation

The aim of these small exercises is to acknowledge your motivation boosters and traps. You can practice these exercises at any time of the day and they can be completed in any order. We encourage you to consider little acts you may try and undertake on a regular basis to boost your motivation. Can you modify your view of a complex issue, place, or activity at hand even for a moment if you can't change it right away?

TIME	-
PARTICIPANTS	Individual
MATERIALS	Pen Paper

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

Exercise 01

WHAT MAKES YOU TICK AND WHAT IS HINDERING YOU?

1. Take a moment to reflect on work experiences when you were motivated.
Can you identify what contributed towards that? Write the factors down and try to be explicit.
2. Make a list of your strengths and how you could leverage them in your current projects and the problems you are working on.
3. Think of a challenging task you are struggling with.
What is the benefit of accomplishing and completing the task?
4. What is the impact if it will not get resolved?
Can you connect tasks you are struggling with to a higher goal or mission you or your team is trying to achieve?
5. Consider why you want to do what you have to accomplish.
There is always a silver lining even in the darkest clouds.

Exercise 02

MAKE IT FUN: BREAKING UP YOUR ROUTINES AND FINDING INSPIRATION

1. Have a look at your wardrobe and your accessories. Is there something you haven't worn for a while? Choose a piece of clothing, accessory, lipstick or a dress up party prop that you could wear for the day, that could make you smile a bit and perhaps also make others smile at the other end of a video call. It's all about successorizing, a term we love and learned from O'Clery's (2019) television show, *Love on the Spectrum*.
2. Can you do this together with your colleagues, and perhaps choose a colour for a day and see what are all the orange, purple, blue or sparkling things you and your team can bring to the next video call?
3. Come up with different themes for each week and think of ways to incorporate it into your day to day. Think of food to prepare, movies to watch, clothes to wear and activities to do. You can draw the themes from your passions - our team has been experimenting with nautical, magic, animals and outer space themes during the lockdown. Play is a wonderful way to strengthen your imagination and curiosity, which is the roots and the soil for our creativity (see Chapter 3.4, Inspiration and imagination).

Exercise 03

FIND AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER AND CREATE A BUDDY SYSTEM

1. For many of us we are more likely to get something done when we have shared our intention with someone else. Can you find a buddy amongst your team, your organisation or outside, to help boost each other when motivation is running low?
2. You can make this as light touch or intensive as you like, sharing daily goals, learning intentions or activities.
3. Try out a *Pomodoro* session (see Chapter 2.2, Pomodoro for productivity) together with a colleague to tackle challenging tasks and dissect complex or difficult things into bite sized bursts of action.



Reflection

Most importantly, focus on things which you have control. It is pointless to expend energy into fighting battles that you can't impact or influence. Instead, find motivation from within yourself, and use your value-base as your fuel.

"Happiness fuels ones self-esteem and gives people hope for a better tomorrow. We are all victims of taking our work too seriously. Step back and enjoy the journey. Your motivation to achieve is ultimately based on earning a living that brings you tremendous joy and satisfaction."

(Llopis, 2012)

We also encourage you to open this topic with your colleagues or your team, to crowdsource what motivates them, what they have done to keep up the motivation and what they might have struggled with. Perhaps you will find new perspectives or insights from others, which you could incorporate into your day. And remember to have fun with it!

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A SPARK OF CREATIVITY

Finding the opportunities hidden in plain sight

Time to shift gears again. From deep focus and getting things done, creativity needs a different headspace. In this section we'll explore creativity from multiple perspectives. Curiosity and inspiration are closely linked, even reframing the challenges itself before jumping into solution mode is a matter of seeing the issue at hand creatively. Jump into the next pages to get your creative juices going.

HOW ARE YOU CURIOUS?

Exploring a challenge is a starting point for creativity.

This article inspires you to explore and unleash your curiosity and to embrace an investigative mindset to uncover new approaches and thinking. The short activity challenges you to practise asking questions and to discover underlying causes for a topic, issue or problem.

Curiosity and creativity are closely linked. Curiosity is the roots and the soil for creativity, it is the engine for our creativity and it is a way to explore our surroundings and learn. However, curiosity often gets bundled with creativity and gains less attention on its own. Human beings are inherently curious, and as children, we all have embraced curiosity on a daily basis when navigating new experiences to learn and grow. Unfortunately, we might dim down our curiosity as we get older, and tend to get stuck on our ways, and rely on existing thought patterns or assumptions to make sense of the world and don't take the time to wonder and question as much. Practising curiosity more consciously can be inspiring, as it can open new avenues of thinking and unveils new approaches for problem-solving.

“When our curiosity is triggered, we think more deeply and rationally about decisions and come up with more-creative solutions.”

(Llopis, 2012)

In an organisational context, curiosity is useful and called for at all levels, as an enabler to adapt to new, unfamiliar or sudden changes. Curiosity also speaks to a level of humility in being able to admit that you don't have all the answers, but that you are willing to go out and learn new things. This can be an especially valuable trait for leaders, since humility and curiosity don't only build trust within the organisation, but also embracing them requires everyone to have a role and responsibility in development efforts and problem-solving. Cultivating a culture for curiosity can encourage teams and employees at all levels to challenge the status quo and to practice asking better quality questions.

“From grade school to high school and college and even to a certain extent graduate school, you're judged by how well you answer somebody else's questions. That gives you a grade on a test. But if you think about the way you're judged in life, I don't think it is by how good your answers are; it's by how good your questions are. I want to help people make that transition from giving good answers to asking good questions.”

Bob Langer, MIT Professor (Prokesch, 2017)

Indeed, we have been conditioned since childhood not to ask questions and just to keep answers coming (Gregersen, 2018), and whilst organisations, managers and employees alike can feel threatened by being questioned, the practice of asking questions can actually produce a wider range of opportunities and thus yield better outcomes.

“Creative solutions nearly always come from an alternative definition of your problem.”

(Wedell-Wedellsborg, 2017)

Curiosity is best provoked and sparked by asking questions, in particular 'why' questions. When exploring a problem, system, topic or theme, the avenue to discovering insightful and unexpected answers is through high-quality questions.

The Five Whys exercise

One way to practice your curiosity is simply to ask 'why.' The aim is to think more deeply and rationally about given challenges to uncover any implicit assumptions and to explore root causes.

TIME	10mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual
MATERIALS	Pen Paper

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

Exercise

Five Whys is a simple exercise that you can use individually to unpack questions or challenges related to your personal or work context. This exercise also practices your curiosity by sustaining your investigation so that you can dive deeper into the topic you are working on. When you use this exercise to stay curious, you most likely will uncover different perspectives to approach a topic or to solve a challenge.

PREPARATION (2 MINUTES)

1. Writing a statement down.
The statement needs to stand by itself (i.e. it cannot be a keyword or a phrase). The statement could be an issue, a problem, or a topic you are currently investigating.

REFLECT ON THE STATEMENT (5 MINUTES)

2. Seek further clarity in the key elements of your statement by asking 'why.'
For example, ask yourself, "Why is [insert your topic here] happening?" Consider attitudes, behaviours, lack of knowledge or skills, process, lack of resources or other, as you go deeper on each level.
3. Write down your answer in a statement form that addresses your first 'why' question.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 (asking 'why' and writing a new statement) five times.
Focus on the key elements in each set of questions to understand why they occur.
5. After unpacking the topic through the five 'why' questions, compare the final statement with the original statement to discover the difference and identify any insights.

Note: Give each question step some serious thought. Don't hurry into making statements, but also don't overthink them. Don't be concerned if your final statement deviated from the topic at hand. This is still beneficial because it gives you an alternative perspective on your initial statement. Also, if you feel stuck or feel you are not heading towards a productive direction, you can go back to your original statement and consider other answers to the immediate 'why' question. Doing this might lead you towards a different path of underlying causes.



Reflection

How did your statements evolve? Don't worry if you struggled to answer each 'why' question. Keep practising and try again with another statement. If you found this exercise easy, that's great! We encourage you to go back and carefully consider your responses to ensure you're fully exploit the question's potential. Did the 'why' questions prompt a different kind of thinking or perspective to your statement?

The purpose of each round of questioning is to uncover opportunities for new perspectives and insights. It is not to find the root problem to solve, but better problems to solve. So, keep in mind that the answer to your fifth 'why' is not necessarily the "right" or "correct" one.

Practicing this exercise enables you to keep asking high-quality questions regularly, seek out clarity in ambiguous statements, and create alternative perspectives to foster out-of-the-box thinking. Ultimately, this form of deep inquisitiveness will become intuitive and part of your daily work practice.

Final notes

If you are interested in learning more about the Five Whys method, have a look at this [short video by MindTools](#) that explains the basic principle

As Gino (2018) reminds us, rather than ponder on "How curious you are?" ask yourself, "**How are you curious?**"

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CONNECTING THE ORDINARY WITH UNUSUAL

Flexing creative muscles by making unusual connections

This article sheds some light into the art of making connections between the ordinary and the unusual, a method typically applied by creative thinkers. The short activity at the end of this article aims at stretching your thinking and enhancing creativity in your everyday practice.

Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something.

– Steve Jobs

Connecting things is and isn't easy. By pushing ourselves to make associations between objects and rituals that we usually wouldn't, we encourage ourselves to use lateral thinking and explore alternative ways of perceiving and interpreting the world around us. As our mind is opening up to new points of view, we practice our creativity and can get into a generative mindset faster. Strengthening our 'creativity muscles' makes engaging in divergent thinking easier, which is particularly useful when we need to come up with lots of different ideas to solve anything from everyday challenges to complex problems with lots of uncertainty.

“Divergent thinking is almost always seen as a gift rather than an acquired and developed skill. But this is far from the truth: **divergent thinking is a distinct form of higher-order thinking that can be taught to all ages of students.**”

(Dan Rothstein, 2011)

This activity helps us to overcome creative paralysis, caused by our inner critic. We often compare the ideas in our head to the best ideas out there, resulting in a mental block. Generating unlikely connections supports us in reducing mental blocks and assumptions that often limit our creative abilities. Thus, the main intention of this exercise is to practice letting go, and to get ideas rolling. This may take more time for some, and less for others, we all get into generative mindsets at our own pace. Try doing this just before a brainstorming activity as a warm-up, or as a daily ritual to boost your creativity over time.

EXERCISE

Making connections between the ordinary and the unusual

This activity warms up your cognitive ability.

TIME 15 mins
PARTICIPANTS Individual - group
MATERIALS Walking shoes

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.



Exercise

There are four parts to this exercise. You can perform it alone or in a group. If you are in a group, you can invite people to share some of their ideas. Often we might be surprised to see how differently other people see the world around them, and these diverse perspectives are a strength to be embraced while working together.

PREPARE (2 MINUTES)

1. Choose one object in your physical surrounding that you are attracted to. This can be any object, from your favourite mug sitting on your desk, or a whiteboard marker in a conference room. You don't need to move it, but if you can, feel free to get it closer so you can touch it and move it around.

EXERCISE (5 MINUTES)

2. Think of five unusual ways you could use this object. Describe each unusual use on your paper. If you are feeling adventurous, sketch them! Challenge yourself to come up with unexpected ways of reusing the object, while keeping it realistic.

GROUND IN THE NOW (3 MINUTES)

3. Reflect on your five unusual uses.
 - a. Did you get to a stage where you felt ideas kept coming?
 - b. Were you able to silence your inner critic?
 - c. Are your ideas absolutely crazy, or did you embrace some ideas closer to home?
 - d. Did your ideas have little to do with the object you selected?

MOVING AHEAD (5 MINUTES)

4. Do not despair if you struggled with creating ideas; you may simply need more time to get into a creative flow. If you have time, consider repeating this exercise with a different object. Alternatively, you can try again another day at a different time, to discover when the best time is for your creativity to flourish.
5. If ideas came very easy to you, you can challenge yourself more. Try sketching instead of writing, explore some more bizarre ideas that nobody ever thought of, or push yourself to think of 10 or perhaps 20 different use cases.
6. You could push yourself further if the ideas came easily. Try sketching instead of writing or come up with some strange ideas that no one has ever thought of. What if you challenged yourself to come up with 10 or 20 new uses?

Reflection

How do you feel? Even if ideas were not bubbling, did you enjoy trying to think of alternative use? Do you feel more open to ideas? Are you excited to explore more perspectives? Consider repeating this activity at a set time every day and look at the effects over time to keep boosting your creativity! Or, you can use it directly at a work task at hand as a tuning-in exercise. And remember what Heise (2019), an emotional intelligence and leadership coach, said about creativity:

“Creativity is like a muscle - it needs to be flexed regularly if it’s to play a positive role in your life.”

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CREATIVITY CONSTRAINTS

Identifying the role of boundaries and limitations to creativity and the advantages of constraints.

Have you ever felt you can't embrace or harness your creativity to the fullest? Project requirements limiting you from what you can and want to create? Unexpected setbacks by some external circumstances? At any point in time, we face several restrictions to what we can do and what is expected from us. Limitations in our work may feel annoying and restraining, however, they can also work to our advantage. In fact, limitations can fuel creativity and enhance work outcomes. In this article, we'll look into the types of constraints and how to approach them to enhance creativity in your work.

Despite the well-stuck thought that innovation and creativity will flourish once all boundaries are removed, there's opposing evidence arguing that constraints in moderate proportions are in fact beneficial for individuals, teams, and organisations (Acar et al., 2019a). Applying constraints enable teams to push themselves beyond immediate thoughts and conventional ideas, promoting taking risks and exploration of areas that may lead to more radical innovations (Voss et al., 2008). Constraints are limiting when the boundaries an individual is given, consume and occupy cognitive resources, and channelling when constraints efficiently guide the creative efforts and focus on required resources (Roskes, 2015).

“Applying constraints enable teams to push themselves beyond immediate thoughts and conventional ideas, promoting taking risks and exploration of areas that may lead to more radical innovations.”

(Voss et al., 2008)

There is no set formula on what the right amount of constraints are for each project or situation, but below we'll share a few guidelines for you to apply in your own work. It is important to note that constraints impact work in multiple ways, so it's a constant balancing act at different times and in different situations.

One way of understanding how constraints can be used and embraced (Acar et al., 2019a) is to see them as limiting inputs, for example, any resources such as time, human capital, budget, materials. Constraints apply to processes, for example using a particular approach like design thinking or ideation methods. And finally, constraints can limit the outputs such as product requirements, or certain attributes the outcome should have.

Exploratory innovation projects may benefit from relaxing some constraints, such as allowing time for discovery and using a wide variety of tools and methods to 'go wide' and give a lot of freedom to the team to decide on their approach. Strict constraints can be put in place by limiting exploration time and forcing teams to continuously create intermediate outputs in the forms of different prototypes or setting ambitious goals for what the outcome could achieve. On the other hand, input constraints such as budget can be more generous (Acar et al., 2019b), if a project is rather incremental with known outcomes (strict output constraints), allowing the project to be run at a big scale.

The way constraints impact one's work is mostly a matter of how they are perceived.

Although a high number of constraints are deliberately set by the team or a manager to guide a project, some constraints might be out of a managers' or team's control. Some might be inherent (for example material or situation) or imposed by others (Elster, 2000) such as safety standards or policy regulations. However, the way constraints impact one's work is mostly a matter of how they are perceived. In every situation a constraint should be approached as openly as possible, seeing it rather as a channelling constraint instead of a limiting roadblock.

One useful approach (Acar et al., 2019b) could be to adopt a principle and switch from blaming to framing - with every constraint experienced, seeing them as possibilities for increased creativity. It might be a matter of allowing time to absorb the limits, accepting something as a boundary, which gives focus and direction or outlining the benefits of such constraints. For example, limited resources may promote the team to be more resourceful. Or accepting product quality requirements that are contradictory can allow the creation of novel responses that integrate these seemingly conflicting qualities (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011).

Using constraints to your advantage

Different ideation techniques are a common way to apply process constraints. Below, we'll introduce a common ideation technique called *Lotus Blossom*. Any boundaries are better than no boundaries at all. You can follow different ideation technique rules or a simple topical boundary. Timeboxing (a fixed time period) is also a very common technique and you can use it in conjunction with any ideation tool. In addition, if you need to address the needs of multiple user groups, you can choose one perspective at a time, create ideas for those specific needs and then move on to a different stakeholder

TIME	25 mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual - group
MATERIALS	Timer

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

Exercise

This exercise is *Lotus Blossom*, which is a structured ideation method that allows you to better understand your challenge but also to move to the solution space. Originally created by Japanese Yasuo Matsumura, *Lotus Blossom* starts with your challenge at the centre, then expanding into sub-areas of that challenge. Each sub-area can then be broken down into more specific ideas addressing your challenge.

One of the main benefits of *Lotus Blossom* technique is that it is a very linear approach allowing you to move away from your original challenge step by step, but also it enables lateral thinking and radical ideas.

PREPARATION (1 MINUTE)

1. Write your challenge in the centre of a paper.
This challenge can take the form of a "How might we...?" question.

EXERCISE (3 MINUTES PER SUB-THEME)

2. Create 8 sub-themes related to your challenge and place them around the centre. Michalko (2014) has posted good prompting questions for this step. Consider things like: What are my specific objectives? If my subject were a book, what would the chapter headings be? What are the dimensions of my challenge?
3. Repeat step 2 on each of the subthemes. Use those themes starting point to come up with eight new related ideas.
4. By now, you will have 64 ideas (8 subthemes x 8 ideas) from your initial challenge. Consider creating a third level by creating 8 new subthemes for each of those 64 ideas.

Reflection

Constraints exist to provide a limited idea space, which enables you to explore with courage and confidence within those boundaries. Imagine standing on top of a skyscraper and the daunting experience of peering over a ledge that has no safety railing. Now, what if there were glass railings? Would you move differently on the roof? You are more likely to move closer to the edge to admire the scenery without the fear of falling over. Similarly, constraints can give you a dedicated space to explore, limitations to narrow your scope, and allow you to move quicker through different ideas.





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INSPIRATION AND IMAGINATION

Sharing insights into the power of imagination.

This article invites you to tap into your imagination by taking a short journey through children's books.

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

- Albert Einstein

Imagination is an inherently human ability. We can imagine things that don't exist, things that are not objective truths, and we are able to do this collectively. Yuval Noah Harari, the author of the book *Sapiens*, explains how "it's our imaginations and our ability to believe in myths and stories that enable us to communicate on a mass level!" (BBC Culture, 2015). In other words, we don't simply live in a "what is" world, but instead our imagination enables us to explore the realm of "what is not but could be, enabling us to conceive and create new things and to shape what is" (Reeves & Fuller, 2019).

"Inspiration feeds our imagination, which pushes us to mentally sketch new possibilities."

(Reeves & Fuller, 2019)

“Imagination is the ability to form images and ideas about things never seen or experienced before” (Manu et al., 2007). It is our ability to produce mental representations of things that may or may not exist and to form new images that don't exist in the here and now (Purdy, 2017). It is a process that involves perception, thinking and taking action (Reeves & Fuller, 2019), and something that is not just about daydreaming; we use our imagination frequently throughout our day to day as we blend immediate sensory experiences with memories, think of stories or consciously perceive something that is not currently present. (Purdy, 2017; Thompson, 2018). Ultimately, imagination is about creating new knowledge (Samli, 2011).

Imagination suggests ideas resulting from freedom of thought, while creativity suggests some actual aspect of creation, even if only in concept (Manu et al., 2007). Imagination enables us to explain things and to tap into something unexpected, something new and different, which we then make sense of, create meaning and put it to use through creativity. Especially under pressure and stress, we might forget to keep our imagination alive (Reeves & Fuller, 2020). However, imagination is crucial in exploring possibilities, creating alternatives, envisioning future scenarios and shaping uncertainty (Reeves & Fuller, 2020). It helps us to shape the ‘art of possible’ (Reeves & Fuller, 2019) and find new paths to growth (Reeves & Fuller, 2020). Therefore, imagination is something we all should not just keep alive but find ways to strengthen and embrace.

There are various ways to spark and awaken our imagination and one of the ways might be through engaging with unexpected sources of information and input, such as escaping into children's books. Picture books, comics, audio books are rich mediums that engage and can transport you through multiple experiences, extraordinary worlds, and scenarios.

At some point in our lives, we have experienced picture books at home, read by a loved one, and or at a kindergarten, primary school and in some circumstances a medical waiting room intended for younger patients and yet taken up by adults. Picture books authored for children and adults offer access to layers of understanding and offer an immediate sensory experience. They encapsulate all the good elements that carry a narrative, a tale, a song, a myth ranging from illustration, imagery, typography, shape and colour to diverse text forms.

Children's books of any genre can act as a reminder of alternate perspectives outside our immediate lives or sphere of work and welcome a momentary escape. Looking at a picture book typically requires you to shift to another place. A momentary flick of a few pages can set you up for the day; immersing you in a tale, a lesson or simply bring a smile to your face, or they can act as a source of comfort at the end of the day; bringing the demands of work and life into perspective when stumbling across an array of scenarios ranging from hilarious disgusting tales, visceral images and rich evocative memories. Dipping into a rich source of inspiration that does not require a high cognitive load can help you to check out, explore and stumble across memories and moments, unlocking perspectives you may not expect. This is a worthwhile journey, even for the duration of a few pages.

Katherine Rundell, the author of *Why you should read children's books*, shares how this “helps us refind things we may not even know we have lost.” This can take us back to times when “new discoveries came daily and when the world was colossal, before the imagination was trimmed and neatened.” (Preston, 2019).

On discussing favourite stories most people will have an associated tale to tell wrapped up in a life moment. The stories are a source of inspiration and convey a memory or an indelible tale that can be easily recalled. They offer transformative potential guiding the reader to explore the ‘something other.’ It is moments of short access into these other perspectives wrapped up in new forms of language, expression and visual complexity that allows us to connect with our imagination.

Spark your imagination through picture books

This activity triggers your creative cognition. You can practice this activity at any time of the day. This is a simple exercise involving a picture book that you can do in the comfort of your home office. The goal is to quickly immerse yourself in imagination to change mindset. As Rick Walton, the author of *Why Picture Books Are Important*, and *And Why They Are for Everyone*, said:

The picture book is short and can fit easily into the nooks and crannies of our lives. Five minutes here, 10 minutes there, plenty of time for a complete literary experience.

TIME 10 mins
PARTICIPANTS Individual
MATERIALS Picture book

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.

Reflection

Take a few minutes to reflect how you feel and what this experience sparked in you? Can you think of other ways to nurture your imagination? What was your favourite imaginary friend, spot or world as a child? What did you learn through engaging in that world? Go back for a moment and reconnect with your inner child and your amazing human capability of imagination.

Final notes

Put the book somewhere close by as a visual reminder of where you can find quick inspirations. Perhaps on the shelf alongside other wonderful books?



Exercise

PREPARE

1. Find a picture book.
If you don't have a picture book, grab a book that is easy to read. Make sure it is unrelated to your work.
2. Find a place you won't be distracted for 10 minutes.
Try to find a comfortable reading spot.

REFLECT ON THE PAST (5 MINUTES)

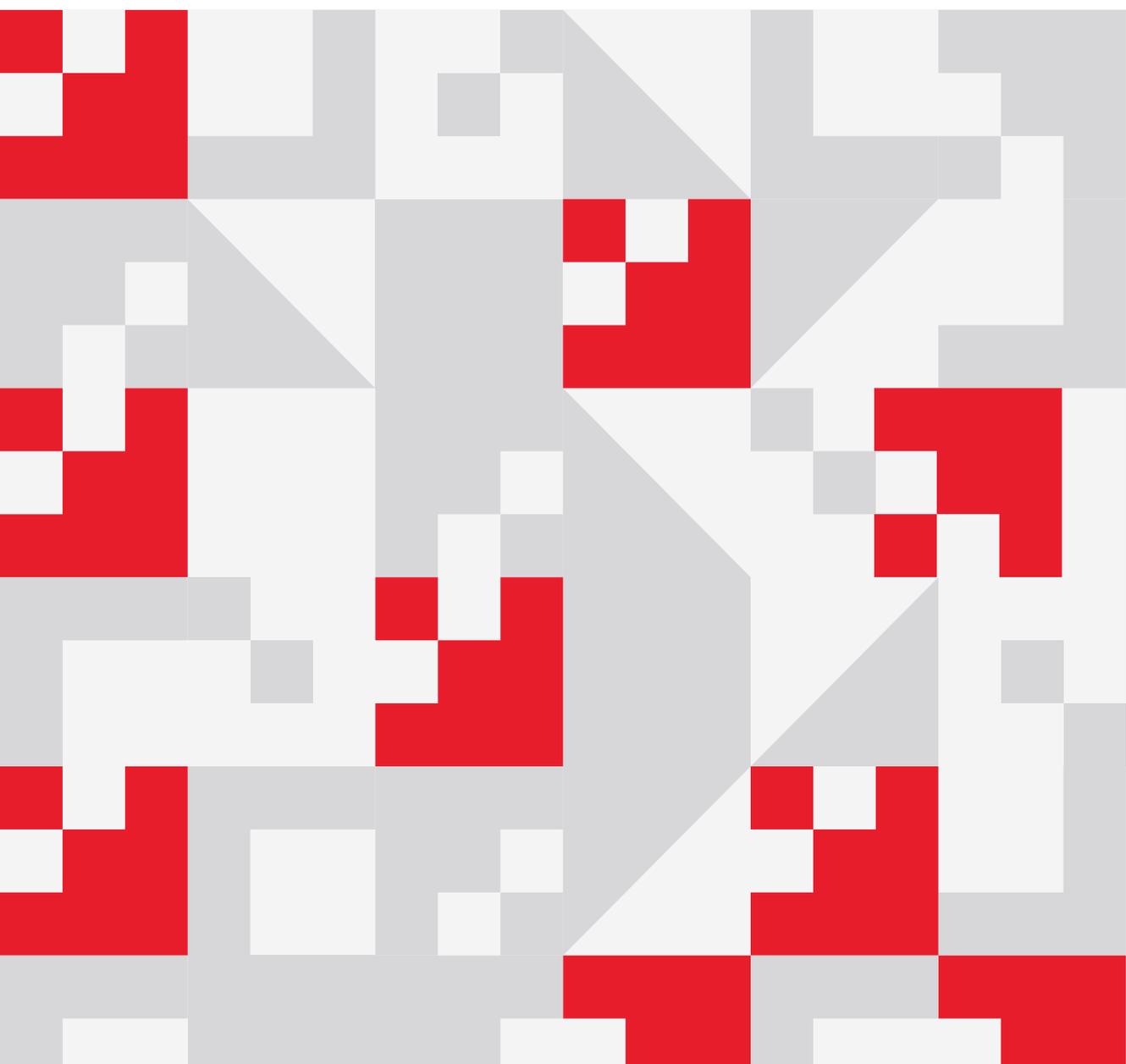
3. Flick through the pages of the book and take yourself on a momentary journey.
Learn new things, gain new insights, imagine or take the comfort of an old friend.
4. Use your senses to taste the flavours, smell the scents, feel and hear the surroundings.
If reading the real thing is not your thing, be read to. Read out aloud, read to yourself, and if you're not a reader, listen to an audio book.

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CORE OF INSPIRATION

Unpacking what inspiration is, its foreseeable benefits and exploring how to create fruitful conditions for inspirational experiences.



This chapter takes you to the very core of inspiration. It unpacks what inspiration is, what the foreseeable benefits are and how you can increase your chances of feeling inspired on a regular basis.

Inspiration, an elevated feeling that boosts our capability and is fundamental in many domains, yet hard to quantify and as a result, perhaps hard to justify. Inspiration is “a breathing in or infusion of some idea, purpose etc. into the mind; the suggestion, awakening or creation of some feeling or impulse, especially of an exalted kind” (Inspiration, 1989). Although the word inspiration is widely known and commonly used especially in the fields of design, innovation and creativity, not everyone is aware of the exact characteristics of inspiration. Hence, the goal of this article is to take a detailed look at how inspiration is constructed (specifically stemming from the field of psychology). Understanding that hopefully sheds some light into how you can incorporate more inspiration in your life. Indeed, inspiration is not something that just strikes us while sitting back and doing nothing. While you can’t necessarily force inspiration to occur, you can address the conditions for more frequent inspirational experiences.

Simply put, inspiration is “best thought of as a surprising interaction between your current knowledge and the information you receive from the world” (Kaufman, 2011). There’s emerging consensus that inspiration consists of three parts: passive evocation (an external trigger), transcendence (appreciation of new or better possibilities) and motivation to bring the new possibilities into fruition (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In other words, an external stimulus evokes an inspiration episode. Through this, an awareness of new possibilities is gained exceeding the ordinary constraints, and once being inspired, an individual becomes motivated to actualise the newly seen possibility.

“Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations. Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility, and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities.”

(Kaufman, 2011)

Besides the characteristics of the inspired state, inspiration can also be broken down into two distinct processes, a rather passive process of being inspired by something and a relatively active process of being inspired to act on (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). In other words, inspiration could be seen as a motivational state – being energised to act on creative ideas. Indeed, several studies indicate that inspiration predicts creativity (Oleynick et al., 2014), although there is still a commonly withheld belief that perspiration is critical to creative output. Inspiration and effort, however, should not be seen as mutually exclusive. In fact, they contribute towards different quality aspects in the process in the sense that inspiration predicts the creativity of the output and the effort predicts the technical merits (Thrash et al., 2010).

Going back to the inspiration definition, inspiration cannot be forced but instead, focusing on creating the conditions for inspiration may increase your chances for those A-ha moments. First, openness to experience (feeling open to a new idea, behaviour or feeling) best facilitates inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) and these traits predict the frequency of inspiration in daily life as well (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

The intensity of inspiration tends to be related to sensitivity to positive stimuli (that is high approach temperament) (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). People whose approach temperament is high, tend to get inspired to create in response to creative insight. Think of insights as incentives and individuals may be more or less sensitive to them to experience a moment of inspiration. In addition, work mastery both precedes inspiration and is a consequence, meaning that inspiration favours the prepared mind, but it also has a lasting impact on motivation and focus (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Finally, goal progress and inspiration are well connected, creating a positive reinforcing cycle. Being inspired sparks setting inspired goals and their successful achievement, which further reinforces inspiration (Milyavskaya et al., 2012).

In summary, to become inspired to create, “one must be both open to new ideas, as well as motivationally responsive to those ideas as reward cues” (Thrash et al., 2010). Active engagement with the world and being receptive may increase your tendency of inspiration stemming from external triggers. Setting small achievable goals can set you on a positive cycle of greater inspiration and goal attainment.

EXERCISE

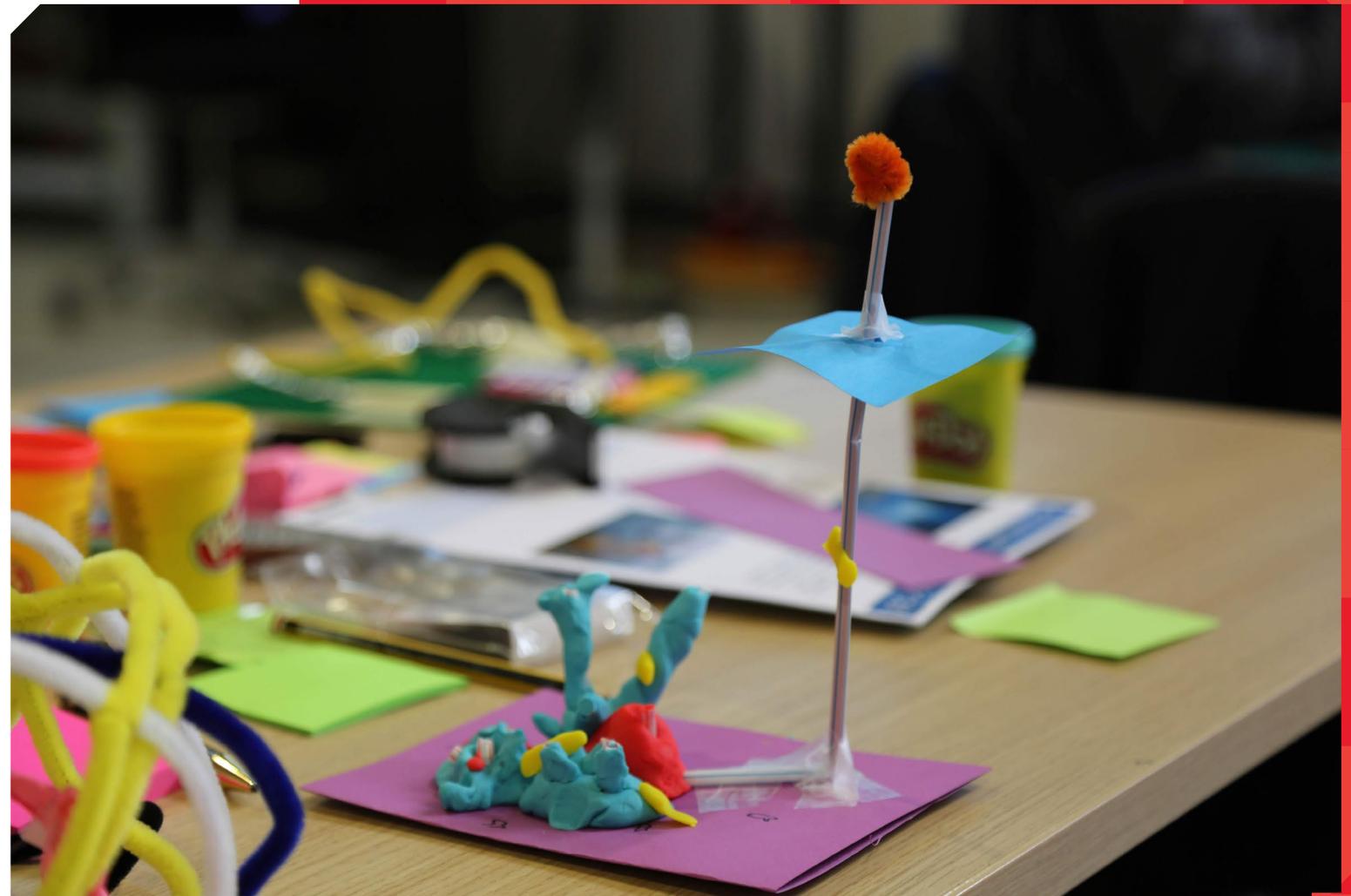
Find inspiration

The aim of these small exercises is to acknowledge your motivation boosters and traps. You can practice these exercises at any time of the day and they can be completed in any order. We encourage you to consider little acts you may try and undertake on a regular basis to boost your motivation. Can you modify your view of a complex issue, place, or activity at hand even for a moment if you can't change it right away?

TIME	5-30 mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual - group
MATERIALS	Pen Paper

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. You can also use your computer - we often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished.



Exercise

This activity can be done individually or in a group setting. If you do this with others, make sure, everyone feels safe to share their thoughts.

FINDING INSPIRATION TRIGGERS

Think about your current projects and your roles and responsibilities. Have you felt moments of inspiration related to that? If you lack inspiration, put yourself in situations where you're more likely to experience feelings of elevation, admiration, or aspiration. There is a plethora of sources for inspiration and here are a few suggestions:

- Role models: who is a leader in this area? Look into their work (e.g. TED Talks, articles). Their impact or work may encourage you to see the possible impact you can have through your work.
- Consider something that is related but slightly removed from your core area. For example, at DFM our work circles around design and innovation, and the best moments of inspiration arise from the sidelines of the core topic, such as curiosity, resilience, constraints in creativity, or frameworks from different business disciplines. For example, if your job is project management, the related fields could be around motivation, visual communication, stress management, leadership, or perhaps systems thinking.

TAKING ACTION AND SETTING GOALS

If you have been inspired by something, consider the action. What are you inspired to do? What exactly are the elevated possibilities that you can foresee? How can you articulate them or bring them to life? How can you share them to others so that they are equally inspired? What would be compelling ways to communicate them? How can you translate your vision into a set of achievable goals and what are the first steps in pursuing those goals?

FINDING INSPIRATION TRIGGERS

Try to remember a situation when you were told about something new, an idea perhaps or you were encouraged to do or try something new. What was your initial feeling? Did you jump into it or were you hesitant? How strongly did you feel towards an idea?

- If your initial reaction was hesitant, you can give yourself and others time to process the reaction and become more comfortable with the newness.
- Use caution to your benefit. Consider first the reasons for your caution, but also spend time in articulating positive possibilities.

OPENING UP TO EXPERIENCES

Consider how much information you absorb from the world around you.

- How can you put conscious effort into engaging with new knowledge, interests or sensory experiences?
- Think about different ways to make changes in your routines. Try perhaps a new program, switch working spaces or change the order of your schedule.
- Exercise your imagination. Force yourself to come up with wacky ideas and envision future possibilities beyond boundaries.

Even though inspiration might be a tiny part of any innovation effort, it is the catalyst for it and needs to be cultivated. Hopefully, this article will fuel some inspiration to your workday and allows you to experience those moments more frequently. Given its evocative nature, we cannot force inspiration to happen, yet we can seek for fruitful conditions.

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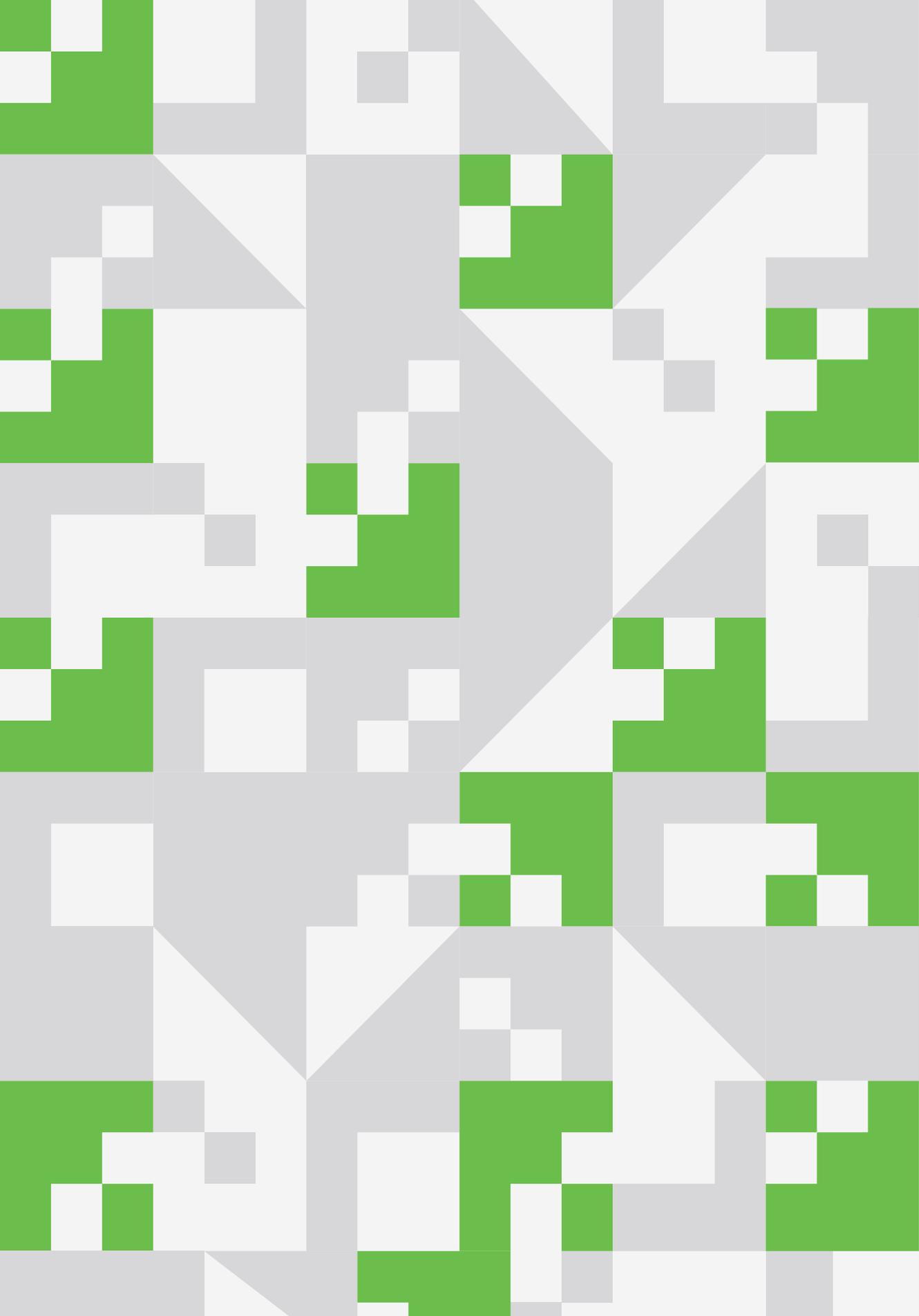
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HITTING A WALL

Boost your energy

For the mind to work, you need your body to be aligned too. With hybrid work environments we spend more time in front of the screen than walking and moving between different meetings. Sometimes a short spurt of physical energy to wake up the body and can resurrect your focus and get your energy back on track. Or, your racing mind can calm down when we make a few breaths and regain your physical presence. The activities introduced in the following pages are a great opportunity to do in teams to get the work done that you need to!



CONNECT WITH YOUR BODY

Engage your body to enhance your physical and mental presence.

Let's start by focusing on the basics - from breath, concentration, and presence. The short activity shared in this article is a physical tuning in exercise that aims to make you feel more grounded and present. In general, different types of short warmup activities help us prepare our mind and bodies for a task, activity, or session ahead and channel our energy towards a desired direction. Physical warmup activities are great for aligning our physical energy to a suitable level, to wind down for focus and presence or to boost up for excitement and enthusiasm.

“Learning involves the building of skills and skills of every manner are built through the movement of muscles.”

(Hannaford, 1995)

Many educators and researchers agree that the brain is activated during physical activity and that movement is essential to learning. In addition, the inherent human capabilities we associate with the mind, such as creativity, empathy and curiosity, cannot be separated from the body (Hannaford, 1995). Making conscious effort to be aware of your body, your breath and your surroundings, is a way to become more mindful and create space for both your body and mind. Through taking breaks and moving, you can make space for learning, bring clarity to ambiguity and gain perspective to problems you are solving.

Physical presence warmup

This activity ignites your physical energy. Doing this activity is useful throughout the day whenever you feel you need to align or realign your focus. At the start of the day, before meetings, to sharpen up your afternoons. You can do this by yourself or with other people, but please ensure other participants feel secure to fully engage in the activity.

TIME 10 mins
PARTICIPANTS Individual - group

Preparation

Begin by standing and keep your eyes closed if you are being guided through this activity. If you have difficulty standing with your eyes closed, you might want to hold the back of their chair or a door frame.



Exercise

This exercise can be done individually or in a group. If you guide others through this activity, ensure all members are comfortable to participate.

BREATHING (2 MINUTES)

1. Notice your breath. Are you taking full breaths, or are they quite shallow?
2. Now, take three deep breaths filling up your lungs as much as possible, holding it for a second before exhaling. Breathe at your own pace and continue focusing on the breath throughout the activity.

BREATHING INTO TIGHT SPOTS (2 MINUTES)

3. Scan your body looking for tight or sore spots and breathe deeply into those areas to create more space where the body might be compressed.
4. Close your eyes and imagine that as you breath in, the breath is going to that spot which is giving you discomfort.

COMING BACK TO THE SPACE (2 MINUTES)

5. If you aren't already holding on to something in the room, find something to put your hand on. It might be a chair, the wall, a table.
6. Notice the texture and the temperature and bring your awareness back into the room you are in.

FINDING THE FLOOR (2 MINUTES)

1. Feel your feet on the floor, noticing gravity and the weight distribution whether you are more on your heels, in the middle of your foot or your weight is forward on the balls of your feet.
2. Bring the weight back into the middle of your feet.
3. Open your eyes, check your body alignment and posture, and readjust so your feet are under your hips, your hips are under your shoulders, and your head is balanced on top.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE SPACE (2 MINUTES)

4. Look at the other furniture and things in the room where you are and think about all of the positive space that is created or being taken up.
5. Now look at all the empty space, or negative space where there is nothing. Notice how much room there is in this space.
6. Now closing your eyes again, and without moving the body, try to fill yourself into all that negative space spreading into all the emptiness so that you've filled up the entire room.
7. On your next breath, on the exhale snap yourself back into your body like an elastic band and open your eyes.

Reflection

Take a breath in – did you breathe deeper than you had been before? Recognise how you feel and we hope you feel more grounded to continue your day.

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ACTIVITIES TO BOOST ENERGY

Boosting energy and injecting humour and laughter into your day to get our bodies and minds reset and energised!



Across this book, we have addressed how short transitional activities can enhance meetings and collaboration sessions and can help to shift your state of mind to the task at hand. Sometimes what you, your team or participants of a session you run need the most, is an **energy boost**. This often includes fun, laughter, physical engagement and being in the moment. This article will share a few activities on how to get really revved up and gain energy!

We need energy to get things done. Everything around us is energy and energy is shared in each interaction. When collaborating or creating something new with others, you want to ensure the energy is there, and everyone is engaged, present and connected. At times an ice breaker or other fun short activity is needed to remove initial tensions, especially if the participants are not yet familiar with each other. Or it could be that midway a meeting or workshop you sense that participants are becoming restless and disengaged, which calls for an intervention to recharge and inject some fresh energy into the mix. Energising activities also help to create variation into your session and create breaks for both body and mind. Especially when working most of our days seated and in front of a computer, these activities create a change in that dynamic and remind us to break the sedentary patterns and use our bodies.

When doing a booster, consider to make it fun! Humour has significant benefits for our wellbeing and performance, and it can help to enhance participation, sustain attention and reduce stress (Savage et al., 2017). Humour often materialises through laughter, that is a signal of interaction and bonding, and a powerful way to relieve tension or stress (Edwards, 2010). Laughter triggers our brain to release dopamine (Edwards, 2010), which makes us feel good and connect with each other.

“Laughter is part of a universal language of basic emotions that all humans share. [...] When people share laughter, there is a special connection between them.”

(Savage et al., 2017)

It is good to have a few short activities up your sleeve to bring them out when you sense that energy levels are dropping, and you need participants to stay active and energised. Choosing the right type of energiser is crucial, so consider how you want to break the dynamic and where do you want to direct it to. For example, a discussion heavy session might call for a nonverbal energiser or a group of music enthusiasts might appreciate an energiser involving some good tunes.

Boosting Energy

Following activities recharge your physical energy. They are useful throughout the day, before a large workshop or after lunch, to sharpen up your afternoons.

TIME

PARTICIPANTS Group

Preparation

Make sure you and your team have enough space to move around without bumping into each other.

Exercise 01

BALANCING ACT

1. Choose a random colour (e.g. purple) in your team.
2. You and your team then find an item in your surrounding of that specific colour.
3. Balance the item on your head and walk back to your original position.
4. Wait with the item balanced on your head until everyone is back.

Exercise 02

30-SEC DISCO

This energiser combines fun and physical movement and it calls for leaving judgment and self-criticism at the door.

1. Put on some good dance tunes.
If you're working virtually with your team, share your computer audio with others.
2. Set a timer for 30 seconds.
3. Stand up and make sure you have space around you.
When the timer starts, dance like nobody's watching!
4. The more you put in, the more energy you get out!
 - a. For those who are shy, you can ask your team to look away from each other during this exercise. For example, everyone stands in a circle at the centre of the room but are faced outwards (facing the walls instead of each other).
 - b. If you are running this exercise online, your team can turn their webcams off.

Exercise 03

DRESS-UP PARTY

This exercise needs to be kept short so that it compels the team to think on their feet, to work with what is at hand, and encourages bias towards action.

1. Announce to the team that it is time for a virtual dress-up party.
2. Set a timer for five minutes and ask the team to go get ready.
They can only use items in their proximity to dress up for the party.
3. Once the timer ends, invite your team back in whatever state they are in.
4. Go around and share your dress-up persona, encouraging your team to come up with imaginary names and background stories for their characters.

Reflection

Did you experiment with one of these or another energiser? How did that activity make you feel? Was it fun? Did you break a sweat? Did you feel invigorated? Do you feel a rush of energy?

These activities could be organised without preparation whenever you sense that energy levels are low. If these activities feel like too much, standing up for 30 seconds and stretching is better than doing nothing. Perhaps that is the first step before jumping into a full disco mode. Most importantly, think about when a booster is needed and how it supports the next activity ahead. Also, consider your participants or colleagues and calibrate the activity according to how much you estimate people are willing to throw themselves into it. We encourage you to try these out with your own team or with a group of people who already are familiar with each other.

Final notes

There are also several great sources online for inspiration and instructions for different types of activities. Explore them and give them a go. Check out for example:

- [IDEO](#)
- [Hyper Island](#)
- [Session Lab](#)
- [Mural](#)

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EXERCISING EYE MUSCLES

Refresh and strengthen your eyes and take a break from screen time.

You're sitting behind your computer, have trouble concentrating, feel a headache coming up, and letters and images are dancing in front of your eyes. Sounds familiar? In *Chapter 4.2, Activities to boost energy*, we shared the importance of energising yourself to be productive, accompanied by some boosters around laughter and movement to be shared and experienced with others. Finding ways to boost energy is just as important when you are by yourself. Taking breaks and connecting with your body is important to stay focused, as we shared in *Chapter 4.1, Connect with your body*. Expanding on this, sometimes giving special attention to relaxing your eyes can be of great benefit.

Many of us spend long hours in front of a computer screen; this was true even before working from home full time became the norm. What we often don't realise, is that besides being quite sedentary and not using our bodily muscles, we are also not using our eye muscles, and we even reduce the frequency of blinking. As Blehm et al. (2005) pointed out:

"Most individuals normally blink between 10–15 times per minute. Studies have shown that the blink rate at the computer is significantly less than normal. [...] This reduction in blink rate may be as great as 60%."

This is one of the reasons we experience dry eyes, eye strain, and fatigue, reducing our ability to work effectively and enjoyably. If you have a chance, try to find alternatives to your screen time, such as doing an audio call instead of a video call and sketching or writing on a physical piece of paper before typing it up.



Exercising your eye muscles

For those moments of non-avoidable screen time, below are two quick exercises that strengthen your eye muscles and hydrate your eyes. These will improve the blood circulation and muscle, to keep your eyes healthy and refreshed. That way you can see more clearly and reduce eye strain and pain, enabling you to work more efficiently (Lens Pure, 2020).

TIME 5 mins
PARTICIPANTS Individual

Preparation

Find an empty wall at least three meters away from you. If there is an empty wall you can see outside, about six meters away, that's even better.

Exercise

SETUP (1 MINUTE)

1. Sit or stand up straight. Look forward with your shoulders relaxed.
2. Think of your favourite animal, object, or anything you can visualise clearly. Picture it in your head.

EXERCISE YOUR EYE MUSCLES (2 MINUTES)

3. Now pretend you are superperson, with laser-eyes, and trace the object on the wall. Draw it as big as you can using all your eye muscles.
4. Keep tracing for about 20 seconds, then take a few seconds break looking at an object closer to you, make sure to blink frequently, and continue.

HYDRATE YOUR EYES (2 MINUTES)

5. Look at the image you traced on the wall.
6. Now pretend your eyelashes can wipe out the drawing. Slowly close your eyes, let your eyelashes brush through the drawing, fading it out.
7. Keep your eyes closed for a second, then reopen them and look at the faded image.
8. Repeat the slow closing and reopening about 20 times, further removing the image you traced with each slow movement.

Reflection

How did that feel? Did you use and stretch all your eye muscles? Are your eyes less dry compared to before the exercise? Consider repeating these activities at set times throughout the day and look at the effects over time to keep energising your eyes and your body! Additionally, try playing with speed and size when tracing the images on the wall to strengthen those eye muscles.

Final notes

And remember, just exercising and refreshing your eyes is not enough. Make sure to also regularly go outside and stretch your eye muscles in nature, by exploring the environment around you and focusing on things both at a distance and close by. As Ryan et al. (2010) said, "on days in which a meaningful portion of time (at least 20 min) is spent outdoors, individuals experience a greater sense of vitality for that day."

Disclaimer: No research has proven that these self-help exercises will keep you out of glasses or prevent conditions such as near-sightedness or farsightedness. (Harvard Medical School, 2020)

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ENERGY AND BREATHWORK

Exploring breathwork techniques to reduce stress, to feel focused, energised and grounded.

Breathwork is an accessible technique that can help you feel energised, focused and reduce your body's stress response. In *Chapter 4.1, Connect with your body*, we shared an activity that uses breathing as a starting point to gain presence. This article gives you further options for some simple and quick breathwork exercises that are easy to use during a busy day.

You may feel fatigue from working remotely, with more screen time and less opportunity to move as part of the workday. Days can fill quickly with teleconferences, meeting after meeting, and before I know it, it's the afternoon and I haven't exercised or moved as I had planned and then that adds to my already growing stress levels of never-ending deadlines.

Breathwork is a simple way to create a quick mental and/or physical re-set to find that extra bit of energy, calm or focus you might need during a busy day.

On average we take about 20,000 breaths per day, and it happens mostly on autopilot. When we are stressed, we tend to breathe shallowly and the body's respiratory system is not at optimal function as the lowest part of our lungs does not fill to capacity with oxygen (André, 2019). In turn, our mitochondria, cells that use oxygen to convert protein, fats and sugars into chemical forms of energy our body can readily use, are not receiving optimal levels of oxygen (Levine, 2015). Studies also demonstrate slow, regulated deep breath can help regulate our nervous systems by engaging the parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation response) and inhibiting the sympathetic nervous system to decrease stress response (Ramirez-Duran, 2020).

Breathwork is a broad term for describing a range of breathing techniques or exercises. The following are a couple of commonly used techniques. Each can be done in only two to three minutes, and facilitate slow deep breathing to help reset breath rhythm to help energy and focus.

EXERCISE

Focusing on your Breath

These exercises focus on your breathing technique. The aim is to notice how our body functions, since we often forget to check in with our physical needs.

TIME 8 mins
PARTICIPANTS Individual

Preparation

Sit or stand straight with good posture or lie down flat. Focus on **breathing into your diaphragm instead of your lungs**. Your stomach should inflate and deflate, instead of your chest.



Exercise

These exercises target the act of breathing. According to psychologist Daniela Ramirez-Duran (2020), there are many benefits of practicing our breathing. For example, deep breathing techniques can help hypertensive individuals lower their blood pressure (Brandani et al., 2017), and heart rate (Saoji et al., 2019). Deep-breathing exercises can also reduce physiological stresses (Hopper et al., 2019), including anxiety and depressive symptoms (Jerath et al., 2015).

DEEP BREATHING (2 MINUTES)

1. Allow your belly to expand on your in-breath, and contract on your out-breath. Do not suck in your stomach! This will allow you to take a deeper breath.

REGULATED BREATHING (2 MINUTES)

2. Close your eyes.
3. Breathe in for five counts, pausing at the end for one extra count.
4. Breathe out for five counts, pausing at the end of one extra count.
5. Repeat these steps five times. (you can repeat more times, or make the five counts faster or slower)

BOX BREATHING (2 MINUTES)

6. Breathe in for four counts.
7. Hold your breath for four counts.
8. Breathe out for four counts.
9. Hold your breath for four counts.
10. Repeat these steps three times.
You can repeat more times or make the counts faster or slower.

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING (2 MINUTES)

11. Use your index finger to block your right nostril. Air should not be able to enter or leave the right side of your nose.
12. Breathe in, from your left nostril, for four slow counts.
13. Move your index finger to block your left nostril instead.
14. Breathe out, through your right nostril, for four slow counts.
15. Now, switch sides to breathe in from your right nostril and out through your left nostril.
16. Repeat three times on each side.

Reflection

How do you feel? More alert? Does your breath feel larger, maybe even clearer? You may even feel more prepared physically to tackle any challenges in the day.



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YOU GOT THIS

Gaining perspective

Looking back on how we worked before the COVID-19 pandemic and comparing to how we work now, many of us were pushed to enter into new territories and adopt entirely new practices. In essence, how we performed our daily work became quite different. This chapter addresses how to build confidence with your remote team, explore new opportunities for growth, and increase your impact one step at a time.

TACKLING SELF-DOUBT

Finding moments of connection, calibrating ourselves with the rest of the team and silencing the inner self-doubt.

In this article, we will concentrate on feeling more connected especially in the context of a remote and digital working environment.

We are more connected than ever, with a range of digital tools and platforms available to us. The recent global events have even accelerated the growing trend of remote work and many of us have become accustomed to ongoing remote work. MS Teams and Slack channels are bursting with messages, and Zoom and Skype calls fill up our days, yet we may feel increasingly isolated from the workplace or community. Digital tools offer us an instant connection, answer or piece of information, but these interactions may be very transactional. Or, at the opposite end of the scale, the interaction points are often designed for purely social catch-ups, which may become burdening in the long-run, hard to commit to, and derail you from your core tasks.

Whenever working remotely, we naturally lack everyday spontaneous and unplanned encounters with colleagues. Within our team at DFM, we've noticed that remote work stretches our emotional scale, which has become more like a roller coaster, with highs and lows more extreme than in an in-office or hybrid work situation. These circumstances have two major implications. First, lack of physical presence of colleagues means that we miss those meaningful micro-connections that confirm the sense of belonging and enable alignment of work. Moments of quickly sense checking an email response, seeing if it's worth reaching out to a particular client, whether thoughts on a project scoping are ok, or a shared laugh on complicated office politics suddenly disappear.

The threshold of asking for quick comment or feedback might become higher over distance compared to a quick checkpoint or thumbs up from your colleague in the office.

In addition, reaching out may be harder, as initiating every email, message or call is a conscious decision. The threshold of asking for quick comment or feedback heightens over distance compared to a quick checkpoint or thumbs up from your colleague in the office. Thus, those sense checks or confirmations of direction become even rarer and as a result, the feelings of doubt start to creep in. These implications can easily reduce our confidence and increase the feeling of being more distant from the team than we actually are, as we lack the daily micro-reference points for feedback and temperature checks for a shared emotional state or direction.

How might we create small moments of connection, that enable us to find alignment, calibrate ourselves with the rest of the team and silence the inner self-doubt? First and foremost, proactive efforts are even more vital in an online environment (Raghuram et al., 2003). Thus, it might be useful to adopt a principle: "When in doubt, reach out." Elements of self-efficacy theory may also provide a helpful way of approaching the situation and making more changes. Self-efficacy reflects an individual's beliefs in one's ability to perform a certain task successfully (Bandura, 1977). Social modelling and comparison is one of the four factors that influence self-efficacy. In practice, when we see reference points, for example, a colleague's success through dedicated efforts, it will inspire us to believe that we can reach our goals as well. Consequently, the less knowledge we have on the reference group, the more sensitive we are for our self-efficacy to fluctuate (Bandura, 1977). What we mean though is that we should focus on making the sustained efforts and thoughts behind the polished results more visible. This theory supports the thinking around actively reaching out to seek for those connections and reference points which may give us confirmation and reassurance on our feelings, approach or direction.

When in doubt, reach out.

Making meaningful connections

This activity increases the awareness of your work connections. The aim is to make you feel more connected with your team and provide assurance that your work aligns with your team.

Below are some prompting questions for you to find clarity in your connections. You can do the scanning exercises by yourself, reaching out to others is a matter of you taking action. The last two exercises may require some coordination with your colleagues.

TIME 5 mins each
PARTICIPANTS Individual - group

Exercise 01

SCAN YOUR CURRENT FEELINGS AND ATTITUDE

Consider your current tasks and work in general. Is there an area that you feel uncertain about? What's causing that self-doubt? Is it related to a particular task? What would be the smallest action to reduce that uncertainty or to give you assurance? Do you already have the skills you need to accomplish something? Can you make it more visible what you have done to reach certain outcomes so that people are more aware of the efforts behind results? Would you be open to sharing your doubts?

Exercise 02

CONSIDER WHO YOU CAN CONNECT WITH

Think about who you could reach out to, to make a meaningful connection. Can you take five minutes to give feedback to a colleague? Is there an email sitting in your inbox that you could address and frame the feedback in a way that is constructive and encouraging? Can you perhaps try and call them instead of sending a text-based message? How can you make your message more personable and empathetic?

Exercise 03

ASK A COLLEAGUE TO BE A SOUNDING BOARD

If you are working on scoping a project or perhaps writing a short article, it is helpful to relay your thoughts with someone. Often formal feedback mechanisms are built in larger projects, but in other cases, you may be working on something by yourself and expected to hand out a finished result. In these moments, ask a colleague to spare a few minutes to glance over your written piece or a project plan, and share any thoughts they might have. If possible, you could even set up a 'feedback buddy' system with one of your colleagues to share current work with each other and ask for early-stage feedback. Any external thoughts are often valuable. It may give you confirmation that you're on the right path, you might be asked a question that sparks your thinking, be provided with a fresh perspective or identify an area that has not yet been explored.

Exercise 04

CREATE A VIRTUAL OFFICE ROOM

In *Chapter 2.2, Pomodoro for productivity*, we shared an example of using *Pomodoro* time management technique in a remote teamwork setting. The activity enables you to create a virtual open office and enables you to automatically create fruitful conditions for unplanned, yet relevant work conversations allowing you to stay on task.

Final notes

Hopefully the above sparks some meaningful micro-connections and sense-checks in your virtual office. Every small gesture counts!

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RESILIENCE AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Inspiration for you to explore the potential of post-traumatic growth for thriving, not just surviving, in today's challenging environment.

There's no denying that we are all in extremely challenging times – both personally and professionally, individually and collectively. Obviously, the nature and extent of the challenges we face differ from situation to situation, but they remain challenges, nonetheless. For example, the challenge faced by *Who Gives a Crap* (a toilet paper production company that donates 50% of their profits to sanitary projects in developing countries) in ramping up to meet a huge and rapid growth in demand without sacrificing employee wellbeing (Smith, 2020) is very different from that faced by hospitality businesses forced to develop new business models (Shea, 2020), but both must still adapt to sudden disruption wrought by the pandemic.

The effectiveness with which they do so depends in part on their 'organisational resilience', but the silver lining of the disruption we're all facing is that it can help us build this resilience through a process known as 'post-traumatic growth'. By focusing on a few key steps on the journey from trauma to growth, individuals and organisations can move forward with more confidence, resilience and purpose than ever.

From resilience to growth (and back again)

Post-traumatic growth is an idea that emerged from positive psychology, and essentially takes the concept of resilience one step further: where resilience is the quality of being able to move forward in spite of hardship, post-traumatic growth is a process of positive transformation caused by hardship.

"Post-traumatic growth is the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises."

(Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004)

Put in other words, we can think of resilience as 'surviving', while post-traumatic growth is more like 'thriving'. However, while the two ideas are distinct, they are also closely related, representing a sort of positive feedback loop: resilience is a requisite for growth (Mattila et al., 2020), and growth in turn improves our resilience and adaptability in the future.

Of course, we don't just jump straight from one to the other, and this growth doesn't come without a cost – trauma tends to shatter our beliefs about ourselves, others and the future (Seligman, 2011), resulting in emotional distress and making it difficult to move forward with optimism and confidence. Indeed, individuals must face several specific challenges along the way to post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), and organisations may face analogous challenges in their own journeys to resilience and adaptability.

For example, in an investigation of organisational resilience in the context of the 2017 Mexico earthquake, Mucharraz y Cano (2020) found that post-traumatic growth in an organisational setting is a collaborative learning process requiring reflection, vulnerability, responsibility, solidarity, and openness to both internal and external support and guidance – themes more recently echoed by McKinsey:

"Resist going it alone. Collaborate closely with your ecosystem of suppliers and customers—they might identify strengths you didn't even know you had."

(Schaninger et al., 2020)

In contrast, Mucharraz y Cano (2020) pointed out that “the enemies of resilience were corruption, conformity with the status quo, a lack of flexibility, and the inability to accept the crisis before it escalated”.

Clearly, for both individuals and organisations, the journey from trauma to growth requires work. However, if we do this work, we can benefit from a greater awareness of our individual or organisational strengths, more rapid innovation, improved relationships and networks, greater focus on available opportunities, and spiritual or existential growth (Tedeschi, 2020). From an organisational perspective, this may look like a clearer sense of vision and purpose, an increasingly important differentiator in today’s world (Schaninger et al., 2020).

“In moments of crisis, the default expectation is that businesses will hunker down and focus on bottom-line fundamentals. Indeed, many CEOs feel constrained to making defensive moves to protect their businesses. But in this crisis, stakeholder needs are already so acute that the opportunity for businesses to make an indelible mark with human support, empathy, and purpose is greater than it has ever been.”

(Schaninger et al., 2020)

The journey to post-traumatic growth

Tedeschi (2020) outlines the five steps required to move from trauma to growth:

1. Education

Replace ‘rumination’ (or anxious, repetitive thinking) with education that asks and answers the questions that really matter.

2. Emotional regulation

Shift your focus from negative emotions to positive (or at least useful) ones.

3. Disclosure

Be honest about how the situation is impacting you, both as an individual and as an organisation.

4. Narrative development

Tell the story of the trauma from your (or your organisation’s) perspective, so you can accept and make sense of the chapters that have already been written and imagine what might come next.

5. Service

Focus on how you (again, as an individual or organisation) can help in this situation, whether it’s supporting your co-workers, finding ways to provide more value for your customers, or contributing to significantly impacted communities.

This article is based on a special guest edition from the Customer Experience and Insight (CXI) Research Group at Swinburne Business School as part of the ‘Rev Up with DFM’ article series.

Developing your story

This activity strengthens your ability to find and build your personal narrative. You can do this exercise at any time of the day. You could do these alone or with your colleagues.

TIME 10 mins
PARTICIPANTS Individual

Exercise

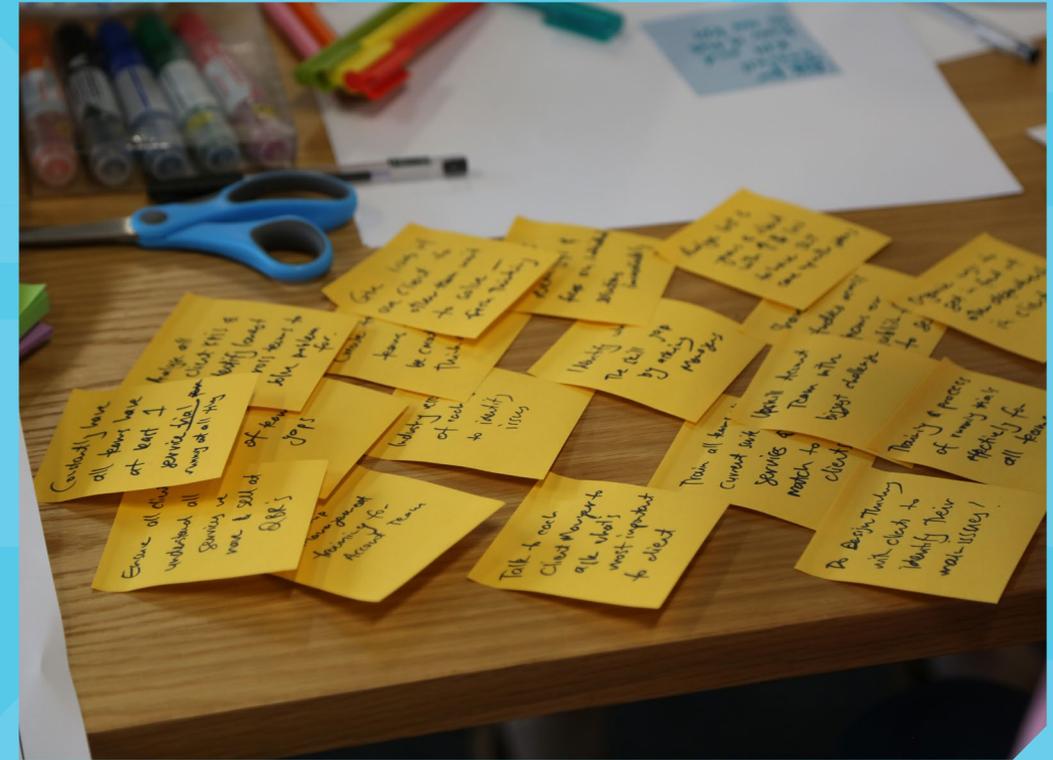
NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Practise telling your story, either from your personal or organisational perspective. You can use whatever format you choose – bullet points, a full narrative, even a mind map or storyboard. If possible, try to include at least three defining moments in what has happened so far.

Reflection

The above activity should have given you a new sense of focus and perspective when it comes to how a significant challenge is affecting you and your organisation. This focus and perspective can help you imagine and take the next step of your journey from the challenge to growth: service. By focusing on how we can help others – whether our team, our organisation, our community, or our customers – we move one step closer to the positive transformation of post-traumatic growth.

This transformation will help you and your organisation move through the challenge more successfully by allowing you to identify your strengths and opportunities to innovate, improving your relationships with both customers and suppliers, and refocusing you on a clear purpose, all of which will help make you more resilient and adaptable in the future. Of course, this doesn't happen all at once – it requires an ongoing commitment to the steps outlined above.



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AGENCY & INFLUENCE

Exploring how to focus on the things you can influence and ways you can expand your agency.

This article explores how to focus on the things that you can influence and ways you can expand your agency. We'll share *The Circle of Influence* framework that helps you in increasing the feeling of being in control in challenging circumstances.

The constant changes and transformation we are experiencing in our days-to-day can easily feel overwhelming. These large systemic changes may make you feel that we have very little control of the environment around us, and that our actions ultimately would not have much impact.

A story shared by Martela and Kent (2020) illustrates well the power of expanding the circle of influence one step at a time.

During the 9/11 attacks, Manhattan resident Nicole Blackman was as lost as anyone in the city. She wasn't trained to do rescue work and didn't belong to any emergency management organizations. But she felt the need to help in any way she could — so she decided to donate some sandwiches to the rescue workers at *Ground Zero*. From there things quickly escalated: After delivering the sandwiches, she stayed around for a while at the volunteer drop-off point. When the person in charge of operations left for the day, Blackman ended up taking over. In a few weeks' time, as she recounted in Damon DiMarco's 2007 oral history, *Tower Stories*, she was leading an ad hoc volunteer organization involving hundreds of people, with job titles, divisions of labour, and an expanded mission. Most government agencies in the area even assumed her group was an established non-profit like the *Red Cross*.

As this example highlights, ultimately, we have more influence than we think and our actions carry a much bigger opportunity for impact than we might think. Agency is about "active striving, taking initiatives, or having an influence on one's own life situation" (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). It "refers to acts done intentionally" and inherently carries out the notion of our power and control over our own life (Bandura, 2001). Consequently, we all have power, and a responsibility, to create change towards the kind of life we want to live and the kind of world we want to be a part of creating. Instead of focussing on things that we can't influence, we should strengthen our ability to map out areas, actions, relationships and behaviours that we can influence and impact.

"The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times."

(Bandura, 2001)

There are ways of increasing the feeling of being in control

Regardless of the role or job title you hold, there will be issues that you can advance and influence on your own or through identifying people in your networks to tap into to aid the process. It might be as small as altering one's perspective or attitude, which is often fundamental before creating tangible changes as well. This is an active endeavour, which requires self-regulation and self-direction (Bandura, 2001).

"Agency thus involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution."

(Bandura, 2001)

Another way of approaching an overwhelming situation is to break it into smaller chunks. Identifying an aspect you can work on to improve the situation is the key to get us moving. Starting from the smallest action, smallest step, or minor element of the whole (see Chapter 2.1, Priorities through strategic thinking) doesn't only help us to take agency over a seemingly overwhelming situation, but also gives us more information about the situation and makes us feel more effective. This in turn increases our motivation (see Chapter 2.4, Maintaining motivation) and capacity to start expanding our sphere of influence, moving on to more meaningful goals (Martela & Kent, 2020). Thinking about the possible benefit, reward or impact of your actions can help to boost motivation and behaviour towards change (Bandura, 2001).

“The idea here is just to get moving: Try a number of things and see what sticks. We assume that our goals determine our actions. But the reverse is also true. Our small actions generate feedback that allows us to discover more-meaningful goals.”

(Martela & Kent, 2020)

At the end of this article, you'll find an activity that helps you to recognise your agency and reveal how you could expand your influence. Taking a moment to map out your sphere of influence might help you to identify new opportunities and perspectives and reveal a much larger area than you originally had thought of.

Taken together, our approach matters, and you have influence over your decisions. Becoming aware of this agency and taking action is the avenue for everyone to “redesign and construct environments to their liking, create styles of behavior that enable them to realize desired outcomes, and pass on the effective ones to others by social modeling” (Bandura, 2001). This ultimately increases our well-being and mechanisms for thriving.

EXERCISE

Map out your Circle of Influence

This exercise involves using the tool *Circle of Influence* (Covey, 1992). It is a good activity to map your concerns in a systematic way, to create clarity around your ownership and opportunities for action and increase awareness of your influence.

TIME	15 mins
PARTICIPANTS	Individual
MATERIALS	Pen Paper Post-its

Preparation

Have a piece of paper and a pen. We often prefer the tactility of a paper and pen, and the opportunity to scribble thoughts without the feeling that they need to be fully prepared or finished. If you have post-its, we encourage to use them instead. It makes moving the notes easier when you are mapping and prioritising elements on the framework. If you prefer, you can also use a digital whiteboard and post-its.

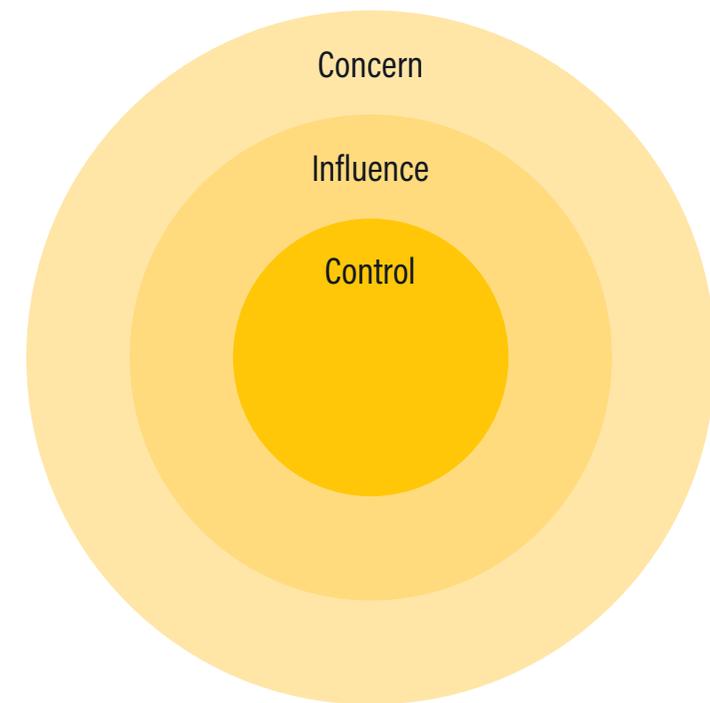


Figure 2 Circle of Influence

Exercise

You can use the *Circle of Influence* (see Figure 2) for different contexts and circumstances that affect your life. You could for example think of a challenge you are currently facing, a situation that you are currently in, a future aspiration, or a conflict you want to resolve. The key is to start somewhere and see how the framework can support you the best to unlock new insights and perspectives towards your agency.

PREPARE (2 MINUTES)

1. Draw a bullseye circle using three circles (see Figure 2).
2. Think of a work or life situation and your agency in creating change in this context.

EXERCISE (10 MINUTES)

3. In the inner most circle, write a list of things that you know are within your control. In this area, we can make and keep commitments and promises. We can have the authenticity and trust that tasks within this circle will be completed. This is your circle of control.
4. In the second layer of the circle, write a list of things you do not have direct control, but have influence over the outcomes. What or who do you need to influence? This is your circle of influence, and it often is larger than you may realise.
5. In the outer most circle, list anything that lingers in your mind as a concern. These may be systemic, health-related, financial, political, or personal concerns. Consider what might be inhibiting you from proceeding with your focus.
6. Look at all the items and their corresponding circles. If you do not agree with the initial placement of an item, move it to a different circle.

REVIEW (3 MINUTES)

7. Looking at your final map. Are you more proactive or reactive towards creating change in your environment?

The reactive approach tends to see and focus on the things that are beyond control and have little opportunities to change. With the reactive mindset you might feel burdened by your concerns, feel that you have influence over only very few things, and might perceive the circle of influence shrinking as a result of this.

The proactive approach means that you focus on issues and elements that you can do something about, thus topics that are within your circle of influence. Advancing these things means you are working towards creating positive change and pushing the boundaries of your circle of influence, and ultimately expanding it through your actions and behaviours.

Reflection

Now, what can you see? What does this make you feel and think? Did you realise something unexpected or recognise an area you have more influence over than you perhaps originally realised? How do you feel now that you have mapped your concerns? Were you able to create clarity around things that are within your reach, and which are not?

“Being responsible for our own lives... our behaviour is a function of our decisions, not our conditions.”

(Covey, 1992)

We encourage you to think about how you could embrace the proactive mindset and approach more, to take action within your circle of influence and by doing that, expand your agency.

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IGNITING AN IDEA

Transforming a thought into a publication.

We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience.

- John Dewey

Everything starts from a single thought or an idea. So has this publication and it shows the power of making small trials to build momentum. As mentioned in the introduction, this publication is based on a series of articles DFM published during 2020. For five months, we wrote and shared 20 bite-sized articles on activities and approaches that support innovation culture and co-creation, named as a 'Rev Up with DFM' series. The series was established to support continuous learning and development efforts for individuals and organisations as a response to the sudden disruption to our work and move to remote and online modes.

The original purpose was to engage with and beyond our community, share our thinking, support professionals to navigate through changes of work, and to experiment with the way we share our training compared to traditional synchronous in-person workshops, projects and sessions. The articles were designed to provide inspirational content with easy access, easy to digest and easy to put into action. In addition to embracing these principles of microlearning, the tiny bursts of ideas and activities were aimed to be practice-based and easy to integrate into the day to day, also addressing the well-known challenge of adapting and transferring knowledge and learning from a formal training into the context of daily work.

This article series started originally as a simple idea and a small experiment. As we were navigating through the drastic changes, we wanted to create something beneficial for our community and use this experiment as a meaningful learning experience for our team as well. In a very iterative manner, we started writing weekly articles about topics our team was curious about and to share fresh perspectives to innovation processes. This project became a continuous learning opportunity for us as a team and a work-based learning initiative on its own.

Throughout the whole five-month journey we worked in a very collaborative manner, co-writing and planning content together. We were able to learn from each other and got exposed to each other's thinking on a deeper level. The article series created a rhythm, and a reason to come together on a weekly basis and an opportunity for us to be curious and explore a new topic together. Originally the articles were posted on LinkedIn as it gave us an opportunity to share our thinking to our wider networks.

Although the spark for the original articles was largely inspired by the fully online working mode, this publication has modified to suit the hybrid work environment. We hope that this book will continue to provide inspiration for the many working days ahead.

We are always looking for innovative ways of work. If you had any insights from reading this book, we would love to hear those. Please get in touch with us at dfm@swin.edu.au

