

Work, Creativity and Reflection in Performing Arts

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Introduction

This working paper was created during a Professional Training Development Day at the University of Surrey on Friday 18th January 2008. It was created using a questionnaire and a voting system during the introductory presentation of the day.

Thirty five people participated in the process: a mix of final year music and dance students who have been out on placement working with major dance and music organisations (mainly in the subsidised sector, and a few music publishers and recording studios). There were also placement students, and a mixture of people (mostly alumni) who work for a range of music and dance organisations, mainly in the dance and music subsidised sector (so they get public funding) and several freelancers/sole traders. There were also a few members of University staff.

Views on self

In response to the question, 'how do you describe yourself in the context of your work?' Participants used the following descriptors.

Creative thinker and realism balance.

Hardworking!

Learning the field building experience.

A way to approach my life – not just work.

Freedom, it's a whole lifestyle –work, play, food, clothes, words, thoughts, feelings, just the way I am – I love it.

Busy, dedicated.

Organised, friendly.

General administrator, running the office side of a record label.

Assistant to help others produce work and produce basic work on the side.

Writing music, thinking outside the box, arty and neat presentations.

Hard working, aware.

Daring.

Bored.

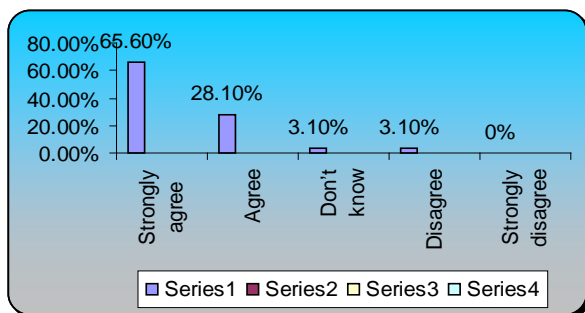
Views on Creativity

What does being creative mean to you? Any context..

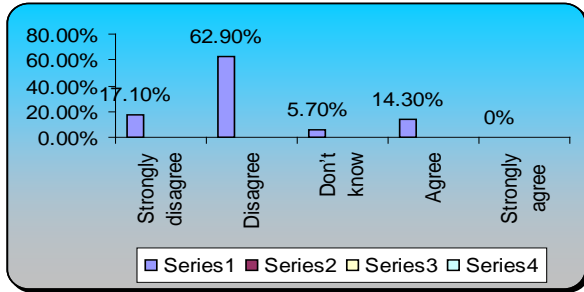
More exiting than other field's reason we stay in the job.

Variety, interesting.

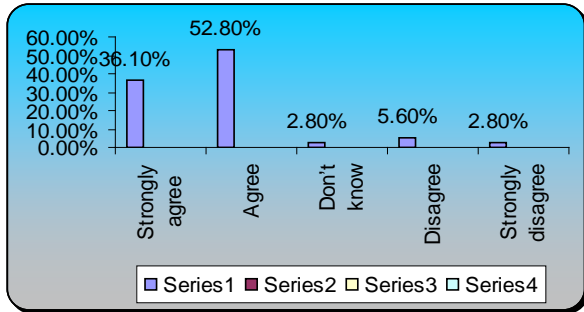
Passionate, express yourself.
 Problem solving making links, new thinking, building relationships.
 Imagination. Generating ideas. Lateral thinking. Thinking outside the box. Freedom to change plans. Job satisfaction.
 Being flexible, new ideas, new approaches.
 Creating new things, using your imagination.
 Creating and finding problems and taking steps to solve them (even if they can't be resolved).
 An opportunity to express yourself, finding new ways to overcome old challenges.
 Making things, drawing, cutting and sticking, but also creative thinking.
 Working in a unique different way. Using other methods to look at your work.
 Applying your personal knowledge /skill to a particular task.
 Imagination, unique, active, personal, express, important to self, self reflection.
 Seeing a better way of doing something visualising, and being able to act on a new idea.
 Writing music, creative ideas, presentation of ideas.
 To develop a sense of enjoyment, visually or musically. Being stimulated to create and engage with the task set.
 Being free to use any ideas to get a job done. Getting below the surface or round a problem.
 Experimenting, engaging, expressing, thinking.
 Taking risks.
 Experimenting.
 Creating something new, collaborating with different art forms, expression.
 Problem solving, bringing most out of our people or resources, late night thinking.
 Having an idea and realising it.
 Doing something differently, perhaps in a non-traditional way- in more engaging, exciting and interactive, perhaps multi-sensory way. Innovative.
 Using your imagination, using an idea to be original, personal.
 Using your imagination. But for me it has to be with some limits. i.e designing a piece of print for a tour.
 Being creative is my lifestyle.
 Being able to make my ideas, reality . Having an impact.
 Individuality, different perspective.
 Being able to express myself/opinion/make an influential difference, get lost in my head.
 Sharing ideas with others. Responding to ideas of others working with others to create new things.
 Making sure I don't sit in my office staring at a computer, thinking, using my brain, making exciting entertainments programme.



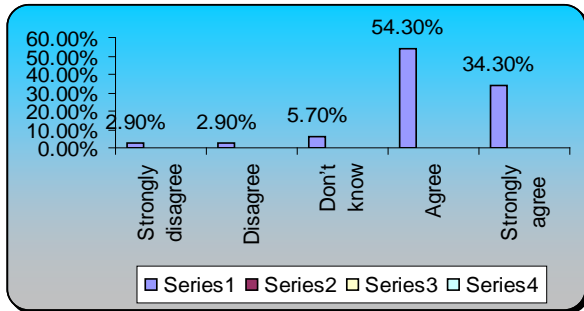
Most participants felt that creativity was an important part of their identity (only 3% did not think so).



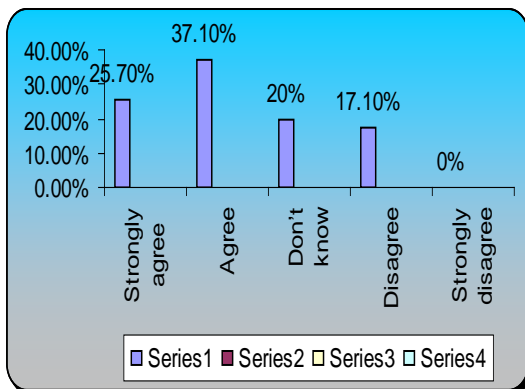
Most (80%) felt that creativity was not a rare gift that only a few people have.



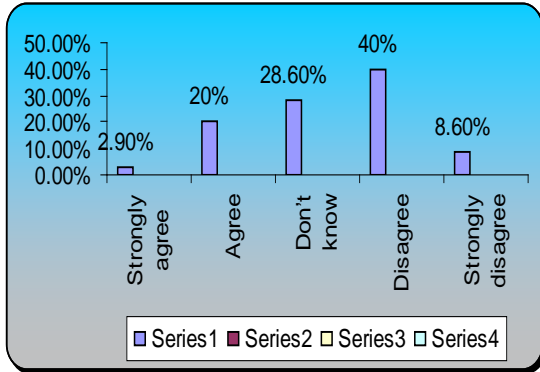
But most (nearly 90%) felt that some people are more creative than others.



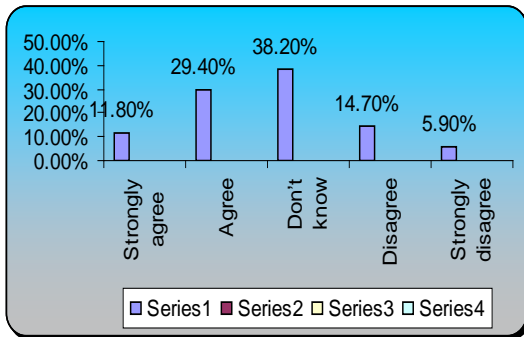
Most participants believe that it is possible to develop your creativity if you are given the opportunity to do so.



But a significant minority 17% believe that opportunities for being creative are constrained in some work situations



Nearly 50% disagreed with the idea that the more complex and challenging a role the more scope there was for creativity.



And only just over 40% of people believed that the more autonomy you have the more scope for creativity.

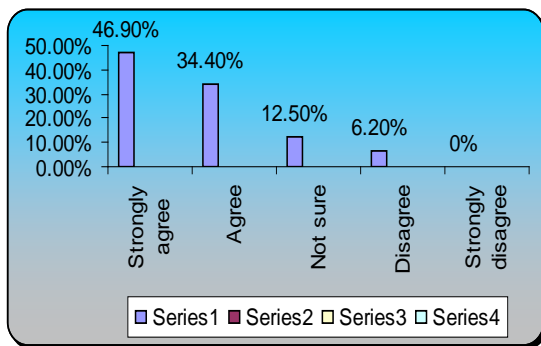
What being creative means to participants in their field of practice



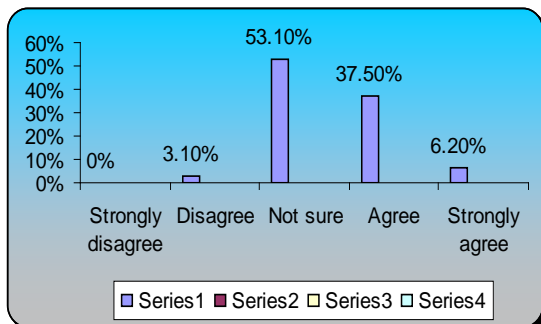
- Facilitating others keeps interest in job through the less creative aspects seeing results.
- Being able to help and influence others and provide them with a variety of options.
- Essential, part of the job. Can get in the way if not allowed to be creative.
- The art of allowing the main "creative" work to happen! Requires me to be creative and flexible – time and approach.
- Being creative in one way I move and think.
- Helping clients realise their ideas, improving current systems to make work practice easier, helping others develop and overcome challenges and personal development.

At Uni making things, at work marketing creative and innovative solutions.
 Putting my ideas on paper, freedom of thoughts within the organisations regulations.
 Knowing what jobs to do first & making that decision myself. Thinking problems through to find the best solution.
 Learning, images, colour, developing.
 Finding solutions, using information that I have better, playing better.
 Assisting in others people's writing.
 To be able to inspire my fellow peers to perform well in a concert. To be able to construct a well written essay when given no constraints.
 The permission to be creative gets me up in the morning. I'm lucky enough to have line managers who respect this and trust me.
 Finding new ways of doing, thinking/perceiving things. Sharing ideas with others on whatever level. Open minded.
 New choreographers that you believe in creating new work. Supporting them and their ideas.
 Finding solutions to complex problems, being alert to differences and enabling others to flourish.
 Providing as many opportunities as possible to allow the creativity of others.
 Being creative means avoiding boredom.
 Coming up with and putting into action new ways of delivering dance in Education. Trying ideas out to find if they will be successful or not and working to improve on them.
 Choreography for classes and shows. Teaching.
 Designing print/blogs etc, creating ways of working within education, ways of encouraging students to take part in activities.
 Developing new ideas.
 Expression, exploration.
 Find solutions and answers, expressing things in different ways.
 Communication, working together, being inspired by the people and things around you.
 Pushing the boundaries, trying new things, original ideas.

Importance of reflection in creative practice



80% of people believed that reflection was essential to their creative performance but 6% disagreed.

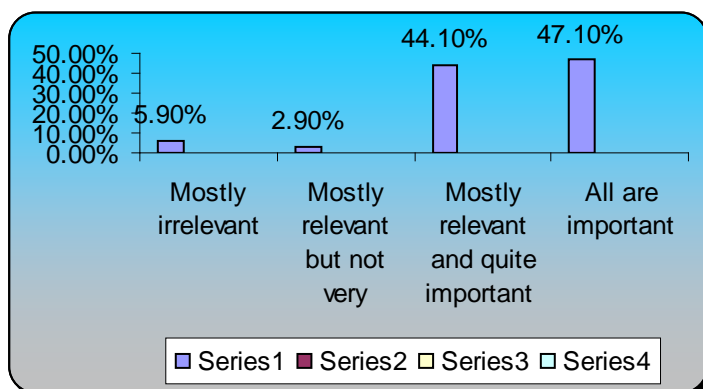


When faced with a significant challenge over 40% felt that they worked iteratively between problems and potential solutions rather than following a linear data gathering to solution pathway

Important features of creative practice in performing arts

Previous studies in six disciplinary areas (Jackson and Shaw) has shown that there are number of widely recognised cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural features associated with creativity

- *Being imaginative* – generating new ideas, thinking out of the boxes we normally inhabit, looking beyond the obvious, seeing the world in different ways so that it can be explored and understood better.
- *Being original*. This embodies:
 - the *quality of newness* for example: *inventing* and producing new things or doing things no one has done before;
 - being *inventive with someone else's ideas or products* – recreation, reconstruction, recontextualization, redefinition, adapting things that have been done before, doing things that have been done before but differently; in performance this is improvisation;
 - and, *the idea of significance* – there are different levels and notions of significance but utility and value are integral to the idea.
- *Being curious and having an enquiring disposition* – *willing to explore, experiment and take risks* i.e. the attitude and motivation to engage in exploration and the ability to search purposefully in appropriate ways in order to find and discover. It is necessary to work in an uncertain world and often requires people to move from the known to the unknown.
- *Being resourceful* – using your knowledge, capability, relationships, powers to persuade and influence, and physical resources to overcome whatever challenge or problems are encountered and to exploit opportunities as they arise.
- *Being able to combine, connect, synthesise* complex and incomplete data/situations/ideas/ contexts in order to see the world freshly/differently to understand it better and solve problems.
- *Being able to think critically and analytically* – its not enough to generate lots of ideas we also have to be able to evaluate them in order to distinguish useful ideas from those that are not so useful and make good decisions about how to act.
- *Being able to represent ideas and communicate them to others* – the capacity to sell ideas and show people possibilities, opportunities and solutions in ways that make sense to them and capture their imagination.

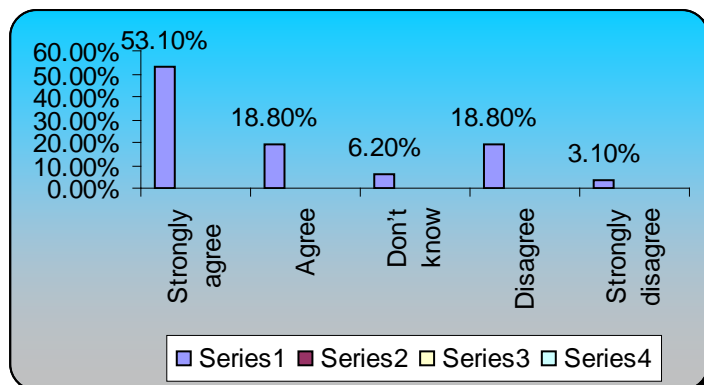
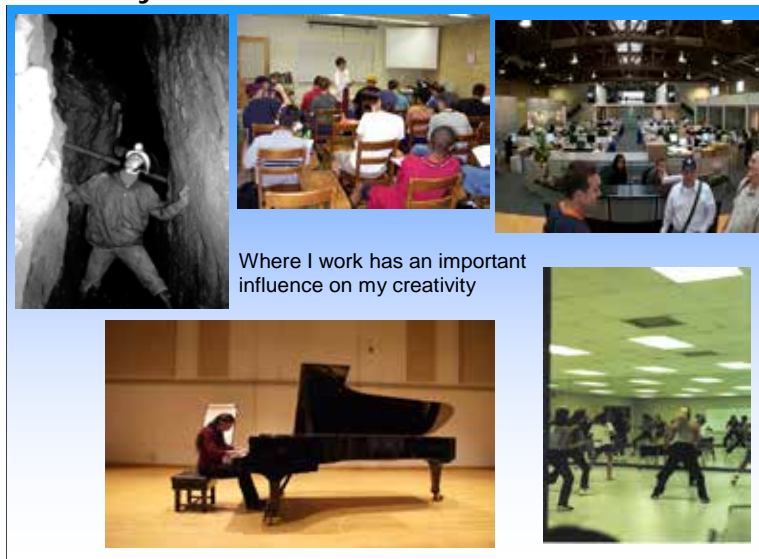


These features associated with creativity were endorsed with over 90% of people believed that most of these characteristics were important or all were highly relevant. One participant noted that this profile matched the perfect Arts Manager! Another that this totally summarises my way of working!

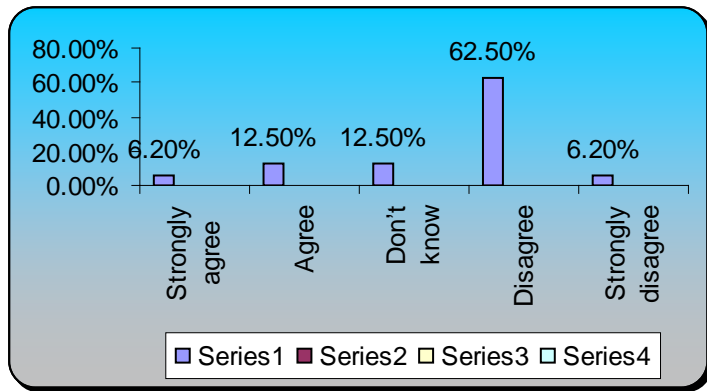
Additional features mentioned included:

- Being resourceful
- Relationships
- Thinking big – visioning
- Being able to change plans
- Enabling others' creativity through my own work
- Being reflective
- Being given opportunities for personal and professional development within my work contexts and organization
- Being assertive
- Learning
- Using instinct
- Differing perspectives
-

Creativity and work



Over 70% of people felt that the places where they worked was important to their creativity. But over 20% felt that the work place was not a significant factor.



Quite clearly work is not where people feel most creative. 70% felt it wasn't. This is an unexpected response given that most people are working or studying in creative enterprises.

Individual creativity

When are you at your most creative?

Making an idea into a viable project.

When under pressure.

When I'm well and ill too when I'm busy, when I move. I give myself space, at the last minute with others or on my own in nurture when I'm angry, when I'm fighting for something and when I free too.

In discussion – digging.

When I'm planning work and can think of what to do best.

When I am designing a flyer.

When I least expect it.

Watching a performance/rehearsal, talking and sharing ideas.

In a Studio.

Work projects, when I am stimulated and excited by what I'm doing.

When I am most engaged and excited in something and truly believe in what I am working towards.

When I feel inspired.

When an opportunity presents itself to make something better by using my creativity.

After seeing something that inspires me (e.g on the stage).

As soon as I have space and music. Choreographing is when I am creative but also when ever I have paper and a pen! I am creative through my writing and designing anything.

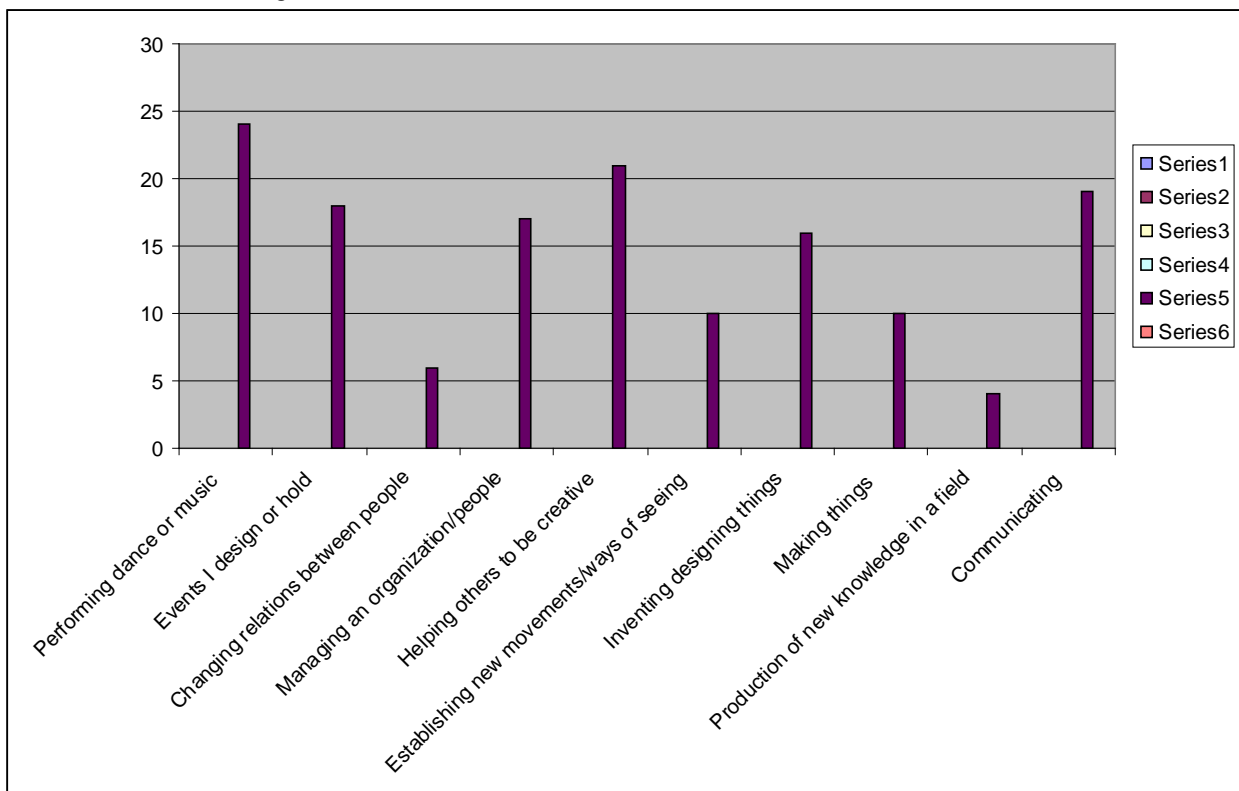
When left to work independently.

When I'm enthusiastic/ passionate about something.

When I am walking and having good conversation with a friend/lover!



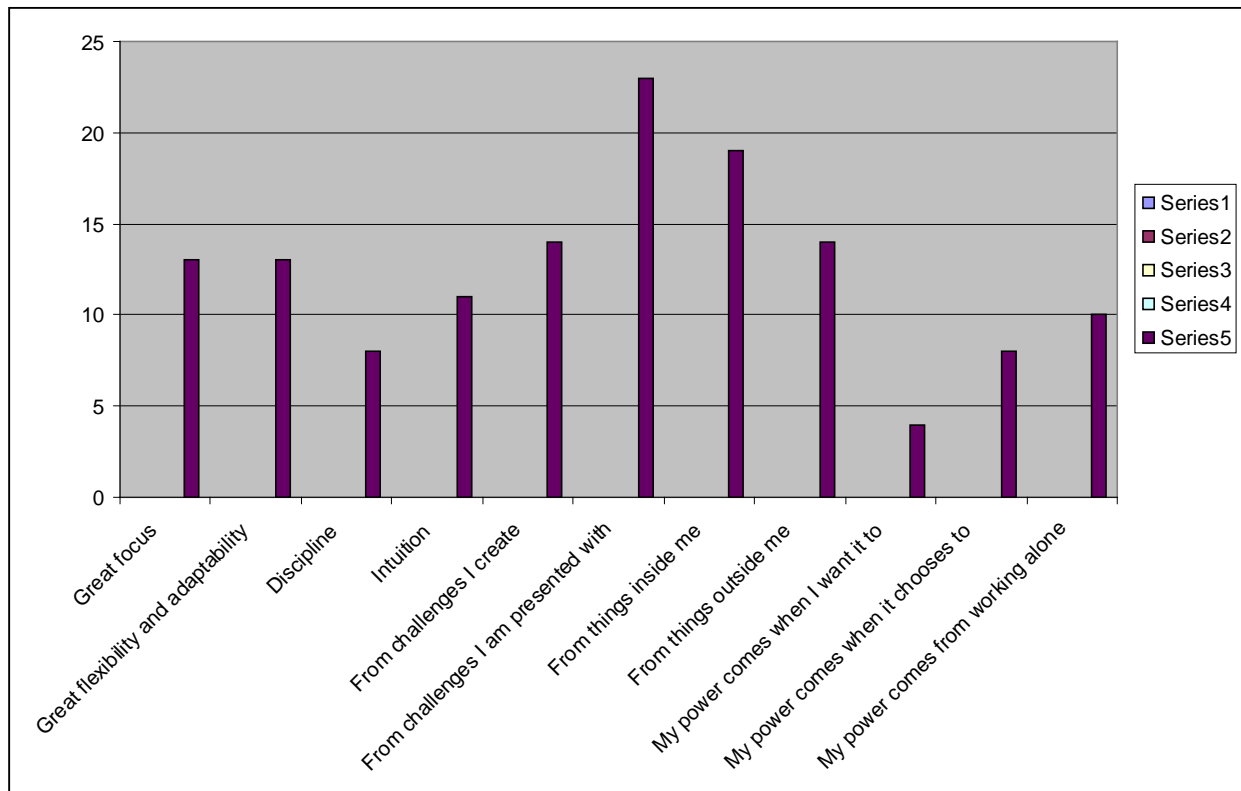
Focus for creativity



Additionally foci for creative activity included:

- Creating and implementing new systems and tools at work

Sources of creative power



Additionally sources of personal power come from:

- Encouragement from others
- Working with others
- Other people

Who judges your creativity?

The people who recognise and judge my creativity are – in order of significance to me.

My students, members, Arts Council.

Friends, Clients.

Me, peers & other managers.

My partner, family & work colleagues/clients.

Myself, my manager, my tutor, my family and friends.

My manager.

Myself, my parents, my peers, my employers.

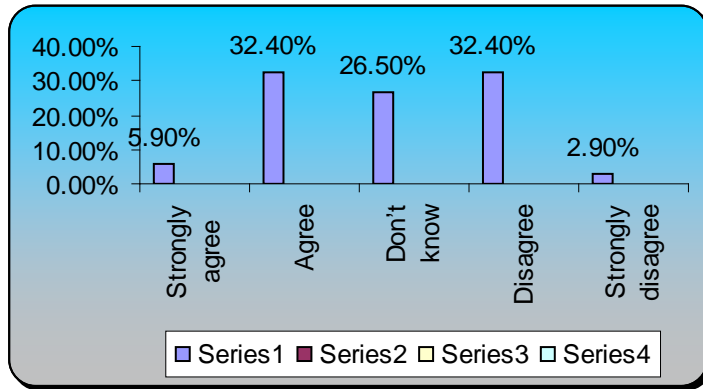
Myself, my family, my friends.

My students I teach, my boss, work colleagues, audiences.

My Peers, work colleagues, parents, tutors, audiences.

Family & friends.

Immersion



While 38% of participants felt that immersing themselves in a problem or challenge enabled them to access their creativity a similar percentage 35% did not.

Things which discourage/encourage creativity

What discourages/encourages you from being creative in your work environment?

Things that discouraged people me from being creative in their work included

- Lack of funding, fire fighting mode, lack of support.
- Nature of the job, what the boss wants, stress.
- Doubt, constraints, time, financial.
- Negative people/Clients, stress, time.
- Stress, timescales, other people/structures.
- Having deadlines needing to get things done.
- Fear of failure, overloading.
- Lack of Forum or channel through which to discuss my ideas, organisational politics, daily pressures, e.g. admin, phone, email.
- Time, opportunities, branching.
- Company guidelines, people with restrictive view of my ability, time constraints.
- Things that are routine/have to be done., work atmosphere, time.
- Repetitive/low effort tasks, lack of challenges, my own apathy.
- Rules & boundaries, no recognition of previous creativity.
- Restrictions, guidelines and rules.

Not being respected or trusted, feeling of institution doesn't deserve my effort and good ideas.
Fear of failure, time restrictions, stress.
Time restrictions, myself, fear of failure.
Time restrictions, space (bad).
Workload, too many people working on the same thing.
Too many tasks, tiredness.
The nature of my work, very factual, not inspired, using others peoples work.
Lack of excitement, lack of interest, lack of motivation.
Funding budgets, restrictions.
Too much to get alone, when I have to be creative, when I'm tired.
Too many limits or boundaries, sometimes not enough resources.
I don't know a lot about the industry compared to my colleagues.
Bad work relationships, travelling, lack of enthusiasm.
Diversity, discussion, passion about context/subject happiness.
Rules, health & safety, manners/protocol.
Time limits, financial limits, fear of failure.
Time limits, money, stress.

Things that encourage and facilitate creativity

Meeting creative people, time & space.
Self respect & achievement, helping others.
Freedom, access to all, space.
Positive people, making beneficial links, getting results.
People, Real life situations, time.
A little pressure- but not stress, being well organised, peer learning & discussion.
Being encouraged to be creative, working alongside others.
Positive feedback, deadlines.
Good venue- great product, every day is different, positive feedback.
Participants, outcomes, enjoyment.
The people I work with, my challenges, my aspirations.
Variation, my own initiative.
Encouragement from colleagues, personal belief.
Seeing problems & imagining solutions.
Diverse stimulus, organisation, no time constraints.
Colleagues that trust me, complex challenges with no easy answers, experience of knowing my creativity has had a positive impact.
My mind, my peers/work colleagues, people, discussion, variation, challenges, real life situations, organisation.
Bodies, music.
Reflection, other people.
Enjoyment of project, good working relationships, variation.
The people around me, the opportunities available, the projects taking place.
Recognition, appreciation, good communication.
Enthusiasm from people we teach.
When I teach an enthusiastic class, when I have discussions with my colleague, when I feel passionately about something.
My imagination, my confidence, the responsibility given to me.
Feedback – good & positive on things I have done, thinking that my colleagues were once where I am today, I am still learning.

Independent working, challenges, organisation.
Lack of support from others, time, not feeling comfortable.
Supportive/sympathetic colleagues, freedom to manage present work load, Cake!
Other people, Variation in my role & responsibilities, passion.
Students, line manager, myself

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all participants for generously sharing your knowledge and beliefs.

The help of Phil Sampson is gratefully acknowledged in putting this paper together in the space of 4 hours. Please forgive typographical errors.

16.15 on the 19/01/08