

creativity at work

Creativity, originality, problem solving, innovation – whichever term is used, the ability of employees to generate new ideas is critical to the success of every commercial organization. Using a pool of interviews across industries and roles, The Workplace Intelligence Unit set out to explore the way people form new ideas and the implications for the working environment.

The research identified 4 “creative types” – each with different preferences for their working environment...

Jigsaw Junkies
...look at problems as puzzles to be solved. They start with the problem, then explore and analyse relevant evidence in order to reach a resolution

Creative process

Jigsaw Junkies are information gatherers who like to have access to all the pieces of the jigsaw before forming a solution.

The Jigsaw Junkie relies upon getting all the information into a tangible, codified format for analysis. They work in a logical, structured way –



manipulating, reviewing and ordering each piece of the puzzle in turn. Jigsaw Junkies believe there is always an answer out there, and feel a great sense of satisfaction, and relief, once they find that solution.

Working culture

Jigsaw Junkies perform best to clear objectives. They are happy to work within a prescribed creative process, and often employ structured tools to order their ideas, such as mind maps, and lists. They have confidence that, by having the right processes in place

(brainstorming, weekly meetings etc.), the answer will become apparent. They thrive in a working culture which promotes structure, stability and routine. Jigsaw Junkies can be resistant to flexible working and must develop methodologies to ensure their operational structure can still be maintained.

They perform well in companies where people are given time and space to analyse a problem rather than having to form an opinion immediately. When it comes to implementing their ideas, Jigsaw Junkies like a culture where things are thoroughly tested to minimise risk.

Workplace

Jigsaw Junkies like a workstation layout which facilitates regular spontaneous discussion, such as “inward facing” workstation hubs with no or low partitions.

However their productivity will be stifled by a lack of quiet, private space where they can work individually. Often, single person rooms are designed for conference calls, with little desk space – however, Jigsaw Junkies need functional private space where they can comfortably spread out their information, analyse and write.

This preference for ‘laying out’ evidence means Jigsaw Junkies will benefit from spaces such as dedicated project rooms or white walls where information can be built up over time to form a full picture.

Jigsaw Junkies need to have information at their fingertips – whether that means sitting close to colleagues they regularly interact with, or an on-site library. Effective (formal or informal) knowledge management systems can be critical to productivity. Valuing routine and stability means Jigsaw Junkies can be negatively impacted by any workplace change so they must be effectively engaged throughout the change process.

Random Idea Generators

...constantly generate a flow of new ideas. They make random and spontaneous connections that spark new thoughts and solutions

Creative process

They are original thinkers with vivid imaginations. They are independent and do not feel the need to 'toe the party line' with their ideas – they like it if their ideas occasionally shock or surprise.

Their creativity is highly spontaneous. Information from the world around them will randomly spark ideas and form connections to their subject of work. This can happen at any time, without any obvious literal connection between the stimulus and the solution.

They do not work well under constraints or deadlines, finding it hard to turn creativity "on and off" at will. Contrived 'creative time', such as brainstorming sessions, is deemed unproductive and frustrating.

Delegation can be a struggle, as Random Idea Generators are personally attached to their idea. They are impatient to see their ideas come to reality quickly and have little time for arduous checks and balances.

Working culture

Random Idea Generators need to work in a culture with a high level of trust. They need autonomy to work as they like, to be assessed on the quality of their final idea, rather than



the process used (which may appear unproductive or chaotic to others) Random Idea Generators benefit from a regularly changing environment, to expose themselves to varied stimulus. Thus, flexible working schemes can be productive.

They feel frustrated in cultures which are risk averse or have excessive checks and balances which impede the realisation of fresh ideas. They also dislike organisations with silos – inspiration can come from anywhere and sharing ideas across seemingly unrelated teams can spark ideas.

Random Idea Generators flourish in cultures which are buzzy, vibrant and constantly changing – their creativity will be restricted if constantly working in a subdued 'library-like' atmosphere.

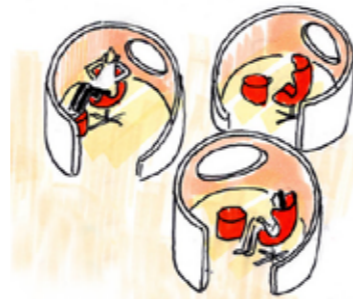
Workplace

Random Idea Generators are drawn to spaces which are fluid and informal. They like an open plan environment which encourages traffic flows around the space. They rely on informal information flows of 'shared context', tuning in to catch

quick snippets of conversation. They respond positively to visual energy and movement within the workplace.

Random Idea Generators like a workplace which changes regularly and provides high levels of visual stimulation – this might be through monitors displaying news feeds; via regularly updated artwork; or greenery. Extending the workplace to include an outdoor space is great for their creative thinking.

'Daydreaming' is important for the Random Idea Generator. They need time for their imaginations to roam free – this might be supported by taking a walk outside, or using specific areas in the workplace suitable for 'zoning out' and thinking.



Change Agents

...are forward looking and visionary. They spot gaps, seek out new opportunities, and are able to define a better future than inspire others to believe in it.

Creative process

Change Agents challenge organisational norms and question the way things are done. To do this successfully they have to be independent thinkers and confident in themselves.

Without always knowing it, they are constantly on the look out for new and better ways of doing things. They are always asking "why can't we...", "wouldn't it be good if...". This perspective leads to a clear sense of how things might look in the future if something changed for the better. Crucially, Change Agents are eager to share this vision with others and are able to communicate it clearly.

However, the creative value of a Change Agent lies in identifying an 'end state' - they cannot necessarily come up with a practical solution for how that vision can be achieved. They are thinkers rather than 'doers' and prefer to inspire others to realise their vision then delegate its implementation.

They are energetic people and often feel restless or agitated – they need to be constantly on the move and looking for the next challenge.



Working culture

Change Agents feel stifled and frustrated in risk-averse cultures, or where 'analysis paralysis' foils any drive for change. They enjoy working in a culture where people are encouraged to ask questions, and challenge the status quo.

They need to be recognised and valued as initiators of great ideas, rather than deliverers. Change agents often feel agitated in junior roles where a high level of delivery work is expected.

To use their creativity efficiently, Change Agents must have a trusted team of colleagues to whom they can delegate implementation. Change agents need buzz and energy around them and enjoy working in a lively, even frenetic atmosphere – they may like working with music playing, and busy traffic flows as people move around. Workplace protocols on noise and disruption are an irritation.



Workplace

Of the four creative types, Change Agents are least influenced by their physical workplace. However, their preference is for open plan spaces which allow them to hear what is being said on the grapevine.

They like to be able to move around rather than being tied to their desk – tools such as standing height desks and phone headsets can help facilitate this need to 'roam'. Home working can starve the Change Agent of the social interaction and vitality they require.

Change Agents like the workplace because they like to be visible – they need personal contact with their team in order to inspire and guide them. A managerial Change Agent would infinitely prefer to sit in the open plan, rather than tucked away in a personal office.

Sensory Creators

...perceive the world in a holistic and non-linear way. They are constantly stimulated by all that is around them. They mentally hoard information which they later access to help create new ideas

Creative process

Sensory Creators often have a natural talent which, whilst honed through training, is founded on natural aptitude.

Sensory Creators live life absorbing and storing snippets of information from nature, art, music, other people, or anything stimulating from their daily environment. They subconsciously create a bank of inspirational stimulus which they automatically draw from when they are being creative.

They are highly curious and strongly intuitive people, liking to “get a feel” for a problem and evaluating potential solutions using instinct. As they explore the problem from multiple angles, they trust that their intuition will draw out a solution eventually.

The exploration process is iterative, intense, focussed and often carried out alone. After working in isolation to form an idea, the Sensory Creator will share it with a few trusted others for review and refinement. Once fully developed they share it with the wider world, and are willing for others to evolve and implement the idea.

Working culture

Sensory Creators enjoy working in an open and honest culture. They like to interact with a team of like-minded people both for stimulation and to receive honest feedback on their ideas. They like to let their creative output ‘speak for itself’, thriving in meritocratic cultures.



Workplace

Sensory Creators need the option to go somewhere quiet for intense periods of focussed thinking. Working from home to “really get through things” can be productive, but they also need the social interaction and stimulation of the workplace.

Sensory Creators share the Jigsaw Junkies’ need to spread things out before them. They benefit from using multiple surfaces (walls, desks, breakout tables) to create a palette of stimulating visuals.

Sensory Creators enjoy working with clutter - it provides a physical equivalent of the mental store of information and experience which they draw from to be creative. Clear desk policies and sterile workplace environments run contrary to their natural creative processes.

The Challenge

Few companies have, or would want, only one creative type in their organisation. Plus, many employees will use a hybrid creative process. So how can the workplace support creativity across a diverse workforce? Whilst every organisation has specific needs, the research led to four workplace lessons with broad application.

1. Variety of workspaces – varied worksettings can meet various functional needs, but creativity is also supported by a variety of *spaces* i.e. moving from one distinct space to another, with a different view and atmosphere. This might mean moving from indoor to outside space,

or simply transferring from one floor to another. The stimulation of moving venue can be supported by the interior design – leveraging external views, branding distinct areas, using partitions to create discernible areas which “feel” different from one another.

2. Real collaborative space – for too long collaboration was “what happened in meeting rooms”. Workplace design has come a long way since then with the introduction of breakout areas, cafés etc. However, there is often scope to match demand and supply of collaborative space more accurately. Organisations should consider how their employees actually collaborate together optimally (whether at the workstation; via virtual networks; when two people huddle around a laptop; or over lunch) and design to support that demand effectively, choosing furniture, spaces and technological tools which facilitate effective interaction.

3. Creative individual space – too often private spaces are designed primarily as ‘phone booths’. It is tempting (and efficient) to squeeze small rooms into otherwise difficult corners of the floor plan and design them primarily to resolve issues with phone noise in the main workstation area. However, this does not support individual elements of the creative process which may require space to lay out visual input, a visually inspiring atmosphere or comfortable “thinking space”.

4. The evolving workplace – all four creative types draw on a flow of varied external stimulus. If a workplace does not change in five years, it is contributing nothing to this stream of stimulus. Flexible furniture which can be reconfigured; a revolving art collection; a workplace strategy that facilitates regular changes; making the most of external views which ‘showcase’ the seasons – such tools can provide food for the creative thought process without disrupting elements of the workplace which some creative types find stabilising.