



Working at Home and the Creativity Depletion

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Every cloud has a silver lining. At the beginning of the year, a small global invader forced us to reconsider our normal working pattern. Flipping on the computer at home became preferable to the commute to the workplace and spending time with colleagues. This shift of the normal working place from the HQ to home had, and has some unexpected advantages. There was an increase in road safety expressed in the number of traffic victims, simply because fewer people were driving on the highways. The sudden disappearance of the daily trek resulted in an extra hour, or more, of free time every day. 5 hours per week to do extra things, or just enjoy whatever you want. Months later, I wonder where those 60 daily minutes went.

However, the cloud is still there and a second front is in the making. COVID will stay with us for a while. The question is how we are going to live with it. Working at home gives you more flexibility to organize your work, however, the grey zone, the mental transition between work and home has broadened. While being off the road is safer with it comes the blurring of the distinction. Home is work, and work is home without a clear delineation between the two. A virtual meeting, a reply to an e-mail late in the evening is no longer an exception, rather the rule.

I have also observed a decrease in my creativity during these new-normal months. No new articles, no new stories, no ThinkBoxes... surely signs of fewer creative impulses firing off in my brain. There was enough news around to surf on, however, none of that inspired me to write. Well, at least, no articles, because I did keep for 6 months a journal on our quarantine adventures (these last three words are to be interpreted broadly). A daily story, yes, but no creative writing. A strange phenomenon. Might that be the unconscious reason why I jumped at the challenge of the virtual conference? Could my creativity find its origin at work? I wonder.

According to studies, scarcity makes for creativity. Scarcity refers to the basic economic problem, the gap between limited, or scarce, resources and theoretically limitless wants. Like every organization, we do not have limitless resources and thus, theoretically, we work in a scarce environment, right? However, this explanation does not satisfy me, I have a limited salary and working at home did not inspire me that much.

A resource is a source or supply as a basis for the production of a benefit that has some utility. The utility to satisfy a want. By defining a problem as a difference between a perceived and a desired situation, we understand that a resource is something you need to

bridge that difference or gap. As an HQ, we are bridging the gap between today and the shaped tomorrow, and we need resources for that.

To make the definition of a problem complete, we have to add two more elements. Firstly, the gap must be wide enough to be able to 'measure' it. We will not build a bridge to span a small pothole in the road. Lastly, the measurable gap must be big enough to annoy somebody.

If the person annoyed by the problem can access all the resources to solve it, you live in an ideal world. Or you are an excellent marketer. However, that is seldom the case. Normally, you miss some resources to complete the job according to your wishes. One of these rare resources is time. Problem-solving and solution implementation take time and time is something you normally do not have enough. A slow change over time or a snail's speed towards a solution leads to frustration.

Scarcity and frustrations increase negative emotions like depression and anxiety, which affect our decisions. These, in turn, can affect our thought processes and behaviours. People who are anxious or sad tend to be less patient; that is, they value smaller, short-term solutions. A phenomenon we all have experienced.

However, like scarcity, frustration can have a positive effect as it may lead to trying to find other ways to bridge the gap by creatively circumventing the obstacles, developing new approaches... anything to reduce the gap between is and perceived. As this must not be the real thing, the reduction can also be in the mind. Creatively thinking about an issue and solving it in your mind's eye may bring inner peace. This inner peace needs to be disturbed to ignite the neurons of the creative brain. Like a nuclear chain reaction that needs enough electrons to keep it going. When these are depleted, the reaction simple stops.

The best workplace for creative people may be an environment where things go wrong and people gets frustrated, and not a cosy place like home?