

Your Story of Opportunity

For Creative Expression

Consider This.

In my book, *Creative Together: Sparking Innovation in the New World of Work*, we explore, stage by stage, how to activate your creative potential and use it to create together more effectively.

To bring your creativity forward more consciously and proactively, it is important to understand how the past influences the way you take creative action today. Then, you can learn to manage that influence with greater awareness and insight.

Over the course of our lives, we each have many opportunities to express our creativity in private and in public, and in less important or more urgently important ways. As young children, we are often fearless with our creative play. But quickly, we begin to learn what gets rewarded, what goes unnoticed, how our creative efforts compare with those of others, and who gets acknowledged for “creative” results. We begin making decisions about what it means to be creative, how we measure up, and about the consequences of creative action. These decisions crystallize over time, and impact both when and how we choose to express creativity.

In *Creative Together*, I refer to this collection of opportunities and experiences as your story of opportunity:

- **the range of opportunities** you had to express creativity, to succeed and fail, to experiment with different resources, and to see how others responded to your ideas.
- **the quality of knowledge** you encountered, and how you incorporated new information into what you already learned.
- **the consequences** of your creative expression, such as what happened when you succeeded and failed, what public rewards and embarrassments you encountered, who supported you and who tended to suppress your creativity, what you were told about being creative, and what you decided about yourself and about others as a result.

This folder is designed to help you reflect on your story of opportunity—and draw out the strengths as well as the challenges in your past experiences.

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Try This.

First. Use the reflection activities in this guide to explore your story of opportunity in greater depth.

Next. Use the *Interview Guide* to talk with a partner, colleague, or family member about your history—and how you might shape a new, more conscious story about who you are as a creator.



Exploring Your Story of Opportunity

Personal Reflection

1. Reflect on your range of opportunities

Use the blank pages provided at the end of this guide to answer any or all of the following questions:

In general, how free were you to express creativity:

- At home when you were growing up?
- In primary school? In secondary school and college or University?
- During playtime with friends and peers?
- At work-now and in the past?

For each context, how often did you encounter open-ended challenges –where you could invent your own answers?

How would you describe the threshold for mistakes in each of the contexts above? What happened when you took risks and made mistakes?

What kinds of things were you curious about? Was there support to explore these interests? What opportunities were available to explore your interests?

What happened when you experimented with ideas and materials?



In general, how have key authority figures (parents, teachers, boss, etc.) typically responded to your ideas?

2. Reflect on the quality of knowledge you encountered

What experiences and knowledge prepared you to invent solutions to the challenges and opportunities you are facing in your work and life today?

Were you presented with diverse perspectives on the problems you faced? Or was one viewpoint presented as the last word or 'correct' perspective?

What was the balance between learning through self-discovery and learning by being told what was true? How did people respond when you were curious, and asked questions?

Were your learning environments rich with resources for exploration? What was the effect, either way?

Imagine that over the years, you have kept all your knowledge in a stockroom in your head.

- How carefully have you organized your stockroom?
 - In which areas are the shelves full, and where is the selection thin?
 - How easy is it for you to retrieve knowledge you need?
 - How careful are you to make sure that new information and knowledge is stored effectively?



3. Review your past experiences

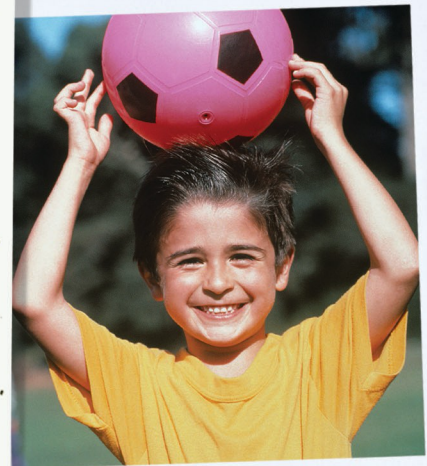
Think about the opportunities you have had to express your creativity in both public and private situations. Use the space in the chart to make some initial notes about people and situations in your past, which you believe influenced your perception of yourself as a creative person.

	<i>Positively influenced me</i>	<i>Negatively influenced me</i>
<i>Public experiences</i> What happened in front of others that influenced you?		
<i>Private experiences</i> What happened on your own that influenced you?		
<i>Specific people</i> Who had a strong influence on you? How did they behave toward you?		

4. Reflect on how the past is influencing you now

Circle either the plus (+) or minus (-) to indicate whether you believe your story of opportunity in general has had a more positive or more negative effect on your willingness to:

- + - Take risks against the odds and in the face of uncertainty
- + - Daydream and let your imagination take flight
- + - Use criticism and constructive feedback to improve your solutions
- + - Push yourself beyond the easiest or most common answers
- + - Adapt, iterate and experiment with different approaches as things unfold
- + - Stay engaged in creative collaboration—even when your ideas are not adopted
- + - Accept that “time” and “timing” might test you along the way
- + - Finish projects
- + - Allow yourself to publicly make mistakes and fail
- + - Swim against the tide of public opinion
- + - Allow things to be messy, unresolved, and/or incomplete
- + - Suggest new ideas and solutions in public situations
- + - Manage resistance, and pressure to maintain the status quo
- + - Say definitively when something is “good enough” and/or complete
- + - Take responsibility for—and learn from mistakes and failures
- + - Improvise if you don’t know what to do next
- + - Share the credit with others for ideas and creative results
- + - Explore the difference between intended and actual results
- + - Ask for help when you get stuck
- + - Tap into your creative potential when you encounter obstacles and setbacks
- + - Lead others—and share leadership—in creative endeavors
- + - Use conflict productively, as an opportunity for healthy “creative abrasion”
- + - “Sell” your ideas to key stakeholders and “customers”
- + - Follow your intuition and hunches
- + - Share resources, knowledge, and ideas generously
- + - Greet the unknown with a sense of wonder and adventure



5. Your overall self-concept

When I think about myself, I would say: (check any that apply)

- I have a deep trust in my creativity, and I know it is always available to me across many different situations and circumstances.
- I feel like I am creative some of the time—or in specific kinds of situations.
- I don't think of myself as particularly creative.
- I am consciously and proactively utilizing my creativity to achieve my goals.
- I need to improve the way I use my creative potential if I am going to achieve my goals.
- I am not sure I know how to activate my creativity and use it to achieve my goals.
- Creativity is not really a factor in doing my work or achieving my goals.
- I am great at coming up with new, useful ideas.
- I am great at building on other peoples' ideas.
- I am great at evaluating ideas and knowing what will and won't work.
- I am great at implementing ideas.
- I could improve the way I get *Creative Together* with others.

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Notes



