

## **Creative thinking for mental health professionals**

This programme has been developed to assist you to develop and enhance creative thinking skills as they relate to dementia. The course consists of three 20 minute video tutorials with a number of exercises.

The programme specifically sets out to assist you attaining the following learning objectives

- To gain an understanding of the nature, scope and contemporary perceptions of creativity and creative thinking.
- Gain an understanding of the need for creative thinking in our response to dementia.
- Develop insight into your existing thinking processes and how to shape them to achieve a greater level of creativity.
- Experience, explore and practice a range of creative and associated thinking exercises.
- To understand and apply creative thinking in your domain.

## **Assessment**

Assessment takes two forms: Firstly you will prepare a 1,000 word report which articulates the need for creativity in the design and delivery of dementia related services. The second part of the assessment takes the forms of a journal within which you will record and reflect on applied creative thinking in your specific domain.

The three video tutorials are presented under the following titles.

### **Part 1** Contextualising creativity

### **Part 2** Building awareness

### **Part 3** Strategies

### **Part 1** Contextualising creativity

- What is creativity?
- Why is creative thinking important?
- What's not creativity?
- Views on creativity?
- Key protagonists
- Summary
- Activity one
- Further reading

### **Part 2** Building awareness

- how you think
- Joined up thinking

- It's not your fault
- Pattern forming
- How do you measure up
- Building
- Activity 3

### **Part 3 Strategies**

Review

Factors influencing creative thinking

Strategy one.

Strategy two

Strategy three

Way forward.

## **PART 1.** Contextualising creativity

Welcome to creative thinking for dementia. Over three short tutorials we aim to provide you with the knowledge, insight and practical tools to strengthen your creative thinking abilities. Each of the tutorials lasts approximately fifteen to twenty minutes and will involve you undertaking some short exercises during and after the programme.

In the three videos we will define and contextualise creative thinking. We will explore how you think and will have opportunity to build awareness of the factors which have shaped and which influence how you think. We will provide you with simple exercises for you to practice and through these you will strengthen your creative ability and build greater awareness. We will provide you with practical creative thinking strategies which can be used for training and in practice. By the end of the course you will have everything you need to be as creative as you want to be.

To prepare for this programme I suggest having a few sheets of unlined paper and a soft pencil to hand. As frame of mind is an important aspect in creative thinking, I also suggest you find a comfortable spot, have sufficient time and are free from distractions. If possible, turn your phone off.

The video tutorials lasts approximately 60 minutes in total with a number of exercises, which will be completed during the programme and afterward on an ongoing basis. I suggest you give yourself three weeks to complete the course: the work won't take three weeks but the information takes time to successfully propagate in your mind. You should also form a discussion group with at least two other colleagues. Dialogue around ideas raised in the course is vital to building new thinking practices. A recommended further reading list also accompanies the tutorials. However, the tools and exercises should be more than sufficient to provide you with the skills needed to develop your creative thinking abilities.

**START.**

1. Before we begin to explore the complex world of creative thinking I want to ask you a question: Would you like to be able to think more creatively?

While many of you may already consider yourself to be a creative thinker and others possibly not creative at all, I would be surprised if anyone answered NO. But you answered yes, and if you are willing match that yes with a willingness to invest some time and effort, I can guarantee you will be able to think more creatively. The ability to think more creatively begins with motivation. If you have that you are already half way there.

2. So, what is creative thinking? Well to answer that we must first define creativity, no easy task in itself. Currently there are in excess of 100 definitions in contemporary usage covering an equally

diverse range of domains. While there is much disagreement about what creativity is, what is generally agreed is that definitions fall into two groups; those that centre on *the creation of new and socially useful products* and those that focus on *creative activities represented in day to day activities of individuals*. These definitions are sometimes partially reflected in what are referred to as big 'c' and little 'c' creativity; big referring to creativity which results in significant societal impact and little 'c' being creativity expressed by individuals on a day to day basis.

A couple of other frequently cited definitions include

*'The process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies, and so on; identifying the difficulty; searching for solutions, making guesses or formulating hypotheses about the deficiencies; testing and retesting them; and finally communicating the results'*. Torrance (1965)

*'Creativity is a process of discovering what has not been considered – the act of making new connections'*. Gilliam (1993)

A word of caution about definitions, particularly from an academic perspective, the vast majority of creativity literature is limited to the cultural perspectives of developed western societies and to one single source: The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity. A brilliant read all the same!

For clarity and sanity we'll stick to creativity being *the creation of new and socially useful products*.

The study of creativity can be broadly captured under four headings; *process*, which centres on the cognitive processes involved in creativity; *product*, which focuses on measuring creative output; *person*, which centres on the characteristics of individuals in relation to creativity or what might be referred to as internal factors; and *place*, which focuses on external factors influencing creativity.

While we will explore all of these areas the primary focus of this course is *process*: Specifically, developing your personal creative thinking capacity.

This programme is not designed to change your personality or instil a creativity trait, instead I will demystify specific aspects of the thinking processes and methods. I will provide you with a tool box from which you can draw from. With time and practice you will become adept at using them.

2. Why is creativity important? Well for the purposes of this course we're agreeing - or not - that creativity is *the creation of new and socially useful products*. From that perspective, there are few if any human attributes that have so much influence over our lives and the planet as creativity. Gaining a greater understanding of the processes related to it is seen as one of the most important endeavours of contemporary academia.

While many of you may think of creativity within the realm of the arts, it is widely viewed as the engine of technical and economic growth, vital in the development of societies and individuals, and is considered the second major field in human performance next to intelligence...by the end of this programme you'll know it's actually the most important!

Take a moment to look around you. The chair you're sitting on, the speakers you're listening to, the screen you're viewing, the building you're in...all of these things were created. At one time they did not exist. Someone had to create them. They are a product of creativity. As to how creative the process was, well that's another story. Creativity, like dementia, is a complex spectrum.

Can you think of any area of human interest which would not benefit from creative input? I bet you can't.

You are developing knowledge and skills to contribute to the domain of dementia; a significant and growing challenge. One with serious, economic, social and psychological implications for society. We're on the back foot, in terms of planning for services and infrastructure. This however presents you with an opportunity to create. To build on existing knowledge and apply new thinking to make become world leading in response to dementia. To some extent at least, the future of dementia response rests on your ability to be creative. On your ability to develop and in-act creative thinking skills.

3. What is not creativity? A strange question to start slide three with but a very important one and here's why? We've already learned that creativity is a contentious domain with over 100 definitions in use. This range of understanding frustrates development, causes confusion, puts people off and leaves creativity in a mystical realm.

Some things confused with creativity include innovation, divergent thinking and imagination. Stating that these things are creativity or creative thinking is akin to describing dementia as simply memory loss. Memory loss is a component of dementia but it does not capture the whole concept.

In the same way, innovation is a part of and is related to creativity but is often more specifically focused on business and economics. You might see a creative/innovative new product but are unlikely to see an innovative art work.

Divergent thinking is also frequently confused with creative thinking. Divergent thinking is defined as the ability to come up with many answers to open ended questions. Like lateral thinking, it represents a very important component of creative thinking and both will be used in later in the programme. Imagination is the ability to form new images and sensations in the mind.

Creativity and imagination are often interchanged in relation to children. You'll hear people comment on how their child is so creative, while pointing to a fridge covered in weird and wonderful paintings. This is imagination in action not creativity.

Creative thinking is said to encompass two types of thinking; the aforementioned divergent thinking, and convergent thinking. The latter being the ability to come up with right answers to questions. At its core, creativity is the capacity to develop multiple ideas and to be able to develop, refine and articulate these into something new and useful for society.

#### 4. Views on creativity and thinking.

I bet you've been asked to collaborate recently. If you've not been asked, you should start to worry! Collaboration is a fundamental part of our working lives and its popularity owes a lot to increasing demand and changing views on creativity.

If I were to ask you to think of someone famous for being creative you might think DaVinci or perhaps Einstein, you might have thought Warhol or perhaps Steve Jobs. Regardless of who you thought of, the point is you could think of someone. Literally, an individual. A mad genius perhaps, beavering away alone. This concept of the lone creative genius underpins much of the 100 years of research into creativity and emerged in the renaissance. Prior to this, the idea of creativity was the sole preserve of the Gods. We were fascinated by these people, determined to find a secret sauce, a key to unlock their creative elixir. To a large extent, the creative genius concept is still a firm belief in society. It appeals to us. But things have moved on. The direction of much contemporary research into creativity has moved toward the idea of group creativity. Something which has appeal for organisations and business. The focus on group creativity gave rise to something you will no doubt have participated in: a brainstorming session. Ironically, while group brainstorming sessions can be stimulating, particularly when facilitated by an expert, they often produce less than creative results. Why? Because creative thought requires risk, a shift away from tradition and conservative views, reduced sense of judgement and a relaxed mind... things rarely found in groups.

The study of creativity extends far beyond individual and group perspectives. Much research has also sought to understand the relationship between it and intelligence with multiple theories proposed. These can be broadly framed as either viewing creativity as a subset of intelligence and visa-versa. Others see creativity and intelligence as overlapping constructs or completely separate constructs. Another major area of creativity research seeks to understand how personality plays into creative capacity. Traits such as openness, confidence, willingness to take risks and low levels of conscientiousness have all been aligned with increased creative ability. That's not to say that people with completely set traits cannot develop their creative thinking skills. Far from it. Other theoretical models for creativity centre around development, measurement, evolution and problem solving. While hugely important and often the thing people think of in terms of organisational creativity,

problem solving models are viewed as too narrow. They fit with traditional critical thinking theories and do not reflect the need to also find problems.

On a side note, and given your domain focus, it is interesting to note that research strongly points to a correlation between conscientiousness and good late life cognitive health. Correlations have also been found between mood and bipolar disorders and creativity.

## 5. Key protagonists

Like all important areas of academic investigation, creativity has its leading protagonists and while not imperative in the context of this short course, it doesn't hurt to gain insight into research landscape. You may wish to pursue your new found interest in creativity and you could do worse that to start with these.

Mark Runco: Divergent thinking, ideation and creativity measurement.

Dean Keith Simonton: The study of intelligence, greatness, genius and creativity

James. C.. Kauffman: everyday creativity, creativity assessment, creativity and fairness, and creativity and mental health.

John Baer: Creativity measurement and divergent thinking

Ronald A. Beghetto: Creativity in educational settings

M. D Mumford: Creativity in leadership and organisations

Robert Sternberg: Intelligence, cognitive processes and creativity

Teresa Amabile: Individual and group creativity. The influence of context on creativity.

Paul Torrance: Creativity measurement, intelligence and problem solving

Anna Craft: Creativity in education

Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi: Happiness and creativity. Most noted for his theories on the flow state. The mental state which occurs when engrossed in an activity. We all experience it in some form. Perhaps you play an instrument, or paint...perhaps even making the dinner. The flow state is akin to a meditative state...perception of the outside world, time, change.

Edward DeBono: The father of lateral thinking. DeBono sits somewhat outside the academic spectrum focusing his work on specific thinking strategies applied in business and educational contexts.

5. Okay, so we've learned that the domain of creativity is highly complex and contentious, but we've decided that a workable definition is the *creation of new and socially useful products*. We've also learned that the study of creativity is undertaken from multiple perspectives; of the four category model provided here, we're most interested in process, or the cognitive processes involved in creativity. We've gained insight into historical and contemporary perspectives on creativity and how paradigms have shifted from individuals to groups, from evolution to development...and, well everything in between.

We've learned that creativity is a hugely important domain...second, equal or perhaps ahead of intelligence and the future of dementia care in Ireland may well rest on your creative thinking abilities.

## 6. Activity 1.

Right, you've already had too much time resting in your comfortable spot, it's high time you saved the world. Or at least the dementia world.

I'd like you to do something, I'd like you to come up with a number of interventions to improve how your organisation interacts with people with dementia. I want you to write your interventions down. You can take as long as you want for this activity, but you need to complete it before you begin part 2.

Responses to the activity will not be assessed. By all means discuss them with colleagues but no marks will be awarded or deducted on the quantity or quality of what you do.

See the attached reading list for specific articles and books.

## **PART 2** Building awareness

### 1. How you think?

Did you complete activity one? Great if you did. If you didn't, can you revisit your response to the question posed on slide one?

Before you progress to the next slide, I'd like you to do something. Activity 2: I'd like you to do your best to write down what happened when you set about to complete activity one. In essence this is a reflective practice exercise. One in which I want you to try to understand how you think you think! And the factors that influence you.

Consider things like how you felt about the activity, how did you approach it, how did interventions form in your mind, how did you respond to your inventions, did they change as you wrote them, how long did you spend doing it, what environment did you work in, what time of day, how were you feeling at the time?

As stated at the start of video one and here, motivation is the first step in developing creative thinking skills. The next is understanding how you think, or simply awareness of thought.

Students undertaking this type of work always benefit from discussing 'what happened'. I would encourage you to do so with your group.

Stop the video now until you have completed activity two.

### 2. Joined up thinking

One of the first tasks in a creativity lesson is usually to have a class discussion on how the class were taught to think. No doubt you recall those classes well. Discussions are usually quite animated as everyone relates the various primary and secondary experiences. How they were presented with concepts, theories, the extensive thinking exercises, how their unique thinking processes were acknowledge, nurtured and enhanced.

Ah, if only that were the case. Alas, this task is usually met with furrowed brows, open mouths and frantic below-desk Google searches.

Unless you attended a specialist school or college or have been exposed to theory and practice in third level education, the likelihood is that you were never taught to think. Think about that for a minute: you're taught to do joined up writing, multiplication tables, to comprehend words and sentences, some might even have been taught tips and tricks to help you recall information for the purposes of assessment, but at no stage are you taught how to use your brain. An astounding fact.

From personal experience, this is perhaps the most important stage in developing thinking skills: a realisation that thinking can be learned and directed; that how you interact with the world need not be a consequence of fuzzy stuff that happens in you mind. It is empowering. From now on, you'll never use the expression... because I've always done it that way.

Okay, so you've come up with interventions and explored what happened. It is interesting doing such exercises with groups as many people get frustrated at this point. Many of them can be seen clutching their list of interventions and their in-depth reflections. Their frustration? They want to be told if they got it right, they want to know where their responses sit in relation to others. They want to be graded. Given our education system this is unsurprising. They always look deflated when I refuse to apply a quality value to them!

Before we get behind your thinking I want to watch this short video. Many of you will have seen it before, but even so, I'd like you to watch it again.

<https://youtu.be/zDZFcDGpL4U>

### 3. It's not your fault.

I recall watching that video for the first time and feeling relieved. Phew I thought, I wasn't to blame for my terrible educational experience. No wonder I'd not done well. It still influences my views on how I work in class situations and also how I view my children's educational experience. While it doesn't explicitly teach it, traditional education reinforces convergent thinking. This course will not explore this as you are probably already quite adept at it!

But lets move on and get behind 'what happened' when you set about suggesting interventions.

While each of you have unique thought processes and no doubt went about the activity in a unique way, it is interesting to unpack and frame how thinking happens. I say this with a pinch of salt, being the process by which humans interact with the world, understanding thought is understandably a vast and contentious domain spanning philosophy, phenomenology, psychology, biology and sociology. For the purposes of this course we're avoiding rabbit holes and I will instead provide a simple framework which draws on theory and which will allow you to develop.

But lets remind ourselves of the activity. You were asked to come up with some interventions to improve how your organisation interacts with people with dementia. So what happened?

Well most likely you had an initial reaction...oh god, not one of these exercises... grand, not being assessed, I'll get this done in no time... yes but, it's not as simple as that...I need more information to give a good answer.. and so on.

Understanding your personal response is important and will help you to develop later.

Regardless of your initial response, it emerged from the same root: your memory. Given your domain I suspect you already have a good insight into how memories are laid down, retrieved and how they influence how we interact with the world.

The most useful and succinct analogy to imagine is that of rain falling on a landscape forming rivers and tributaries. Experiences of the world form neural paths or rivers; over time these become more fixed as repeated experiences reinforce them. Like the rain, they form gullies, streams, rivers and valleys.

When we have a new experience - being asked to come up with interventions for instance - Responses following the patterns created by previous experience laid down as memory. The shape of the rivers in your mind will shape how you respond and in turn your response will shape the course of the rivers.

Viewed metaphorically, what we're doing here is learning how to row, to navigate these rivers. With practice you'll learn to direct the rivers to your benefit.

If rivers don't float your boat, use the image of a spider web. A network of memories connected together. To perceive a new experience we first find a node on the network which is similar. Connected to that node are related memories, or associations. These associations are the basis for how we make judgements or decisions on any new experience. If I say playground...your mind zips to the playground node and in a split second is already forming judgements based on past experience.

I cannot underestimate the importance of building awareness of your thinking processes!

But back to the activity: After an initial response, you may sought to gather information. For instance, about the organisation, your position, people with dementia, the good and bad bits of the current situation and so on. you may have placed judgement on the activity or suggestions you made...this is brilliant, this is stupid and so on. It has been suggested that we are hard wired for negativity, or negative response to situations, particularly those which are perceived to threaten us. Being asked to suggest interventions can be viewed as a threat...so don't beat yourself up if you responded negatively! You may have worked logically through the activity, reducing the task to a number of components and dealing with them individually. Regardless of your response and process, it was based on memory and experience. I will explore how you can build awareness and start to direct your responses in the next video. For now, be content with knowing, or at least, building awareness of how you think.

## 6. Pattern forming

I'm keen to reinforce the concept of awareness of your personal thinking and for you to start to direct it.. In order to process the complex sensory data taken in by the mind, some short cuts must be taken. Essentially our brains only process a small amount of the data we perceive and it fills in the blanks. I

read an article recently on why eye witness testimony should not be used in court. Why? because most of what we perceive is conjured by the mind.

On a more complex level, this cognitive activity is enshrined in Gestalt psychology which sees the mind as a self organising, or pattern forming machine. In the worlds of it's Gestalt psychologist, Kurt Koffka...'The whole is great than the sum of the parts'.

The image below on the left is four dots, but the mind sees a square, the text on the right can be read by most people despite only featuring a limited number of letters.

I mention this here as I want you to assist you building awareness. If you understand that your mind will seek patterns, often at the experience of reality, you can better direct how you respond how you respond to situations.

Your responses to activity one were borne of experience, memory and patterns. When viewed from this perspective, you may have had less conscious choice in what you proposed than you think. Thankfully, now that you're aware you can have choice!

5. So how did you measure up?

We love to measure stuff. As the saying goes, If you cant count it, it doesn't count. While I am personally not a huge fan of measuring creativity - it can reinforce perceptions of ability, both good and bad - it is useful here as they may provide you with a reference point and framework for enhanced reflective practice in the coming months and years.

So, how to measure creativity thinking. The most widely used form of creative output measurement in use is the TTCT, or the Torrance Test for Creative Thinking developed by E. P. Torrance - you can it to review your own list of interventions, or that of a colleague.

The TTCT measures four aspects of creative thinking. Please note it also use other measurement categories but these three will be more than sufficient for our purposes.

- Fluency. The total number of interpretable, meaningful, and relevant ideas generated in response to the stimulus.
- Flexibility. The number of different categories of relevant responses.
- Originality. The statistical rarity of the responses.

I would really encourage you to compare and contrast interventions with others. While no one likes to feel they did worse than others, exposure and exploration of other people's products is one of the best ways to build creative thinking ability. How many times in your life how you said...oh, I never thought of it that way?

6. Building. Right, so you had the opportunity to get behind your thinking, to unpack what happens when you're asked to do something. I've presented you with a coupe of general concepts for thinking and how

education reinforces certain thinking styles. You've also had a chance to measure your creative thinking, but it's time to start focusing on building your creative thinking ability.

There are a myriad of approaches to building creative cognition, the Internet is awash with sites devoted to it and like most of the web, there are a few good examples but the majority lack any depth. As we have learned, two important first steps are motivation and awareness.

Our next step is *building* and we are going to build on what you already know: that thinking is based on experience, memory and patterns.

This next activity centres around simple exercises, which were first developed by E. P. Torrance to aid measurement like those explored in part 2. These exercises, like any exercise will show results when repeated over a long period. You will reap what you sow! In essence they build connections or associations between memories. So if I said playground to you, you will be able to access a huge range of alternative associations. Other more familiar examples of this type of exercise include word association games.

Activity 3: come up with as many responses to the tasks below being conscious of what's happening, the network of associations that come to mind and how they overlap. Ken Robinson talks about one of the tasks in the video you watched. When you've had a go, write down what happened. Reflect on what you did and try to understand and articulate why you came up with the responses you did. There are no rights or wrongs, just how you perceived your actions.

Unusual uses or a tennis ball.

Unusual uses for a giraffe.

Ways in which frogs and lamp posts are similar.

Ways in which computers and forests are similar.

Instances of things that are crunchy.

Instances of things that are bendy.

Please note that the exercises are designed to stimulate and build divergent thinking rather than creative thinking. As previously mentioned, creativity involved divergent and convergent thinking. You've already been trained in the latter.

The Internet is awash with tools to aid divergent/associative/lateral thinking. By all means go and explore them.

### Part 3 Strategies

1. Okay, welcome back. Hopefully you've given yourself time to explore the exercises and gain more insight into how you think. In this video I will delve a little deeper into what happened and articulate many of the factors known to inhibit your ability to think more creatively, and I will provide a set of additional strategies you can employ.

In the previous video you were asked to undertake tasks to build - and measure - your divergent thinking ability. Don't worry if you feel you didn't do so well at them. In my experience, people who start from a lower perceived point, but are very motivated, have the most to gain and really enjoy their new found skills.

#### 2. Factors influencing creative thinking

So, let's take a look at some of the factors which influence how you responded to the exercises. Hopefully you will have identified some of them in your reflections.

Firstly, let's look at personality. People with open, extrovert personalities are more likely to do well on this type of task. As are confident, agreeable people. Such people are likely to be more open to new experiences and new perspectives. That's not to say you're introverted, insecure and disagreeable if you feel you didn't do well!

People who are risk averse are less likely to do well as are people who fear perceived failure. This is a terrible consequence of our education system.

People with firmly held traditional beliefs are less likely to do well, as are perfectionists or people who are more fixed. A tennis ball is a tennis ball and so on.

People who are more unconventional will be more likely to do well. This doesn't mean that you've to have purple hair and only eat paleo. It simply means that you may not have fixed perceptions.

People with a wider range of experiences fair better. They have more to draw on and see connections between things more easily.

Environment also plays in to how you responded. You won't have done as well as you could if you were under time pressure, working in an uncomfortable space, distracted or even in a bad mood.

For obvious reasons, motivated people will have fared better.

In my experience, many of these factors come together in the form of our internal judge, or the manifestation of negativity bias. Our minds are negatively charged. This is often explained as an evolutionary protection trait. It's safer to take the safe option. Such negative judgement is reinforced through schooling. Our education is based on critical thinking, logic, analysis, reductionism, rights and wrongs, conformity. When faced with a strange task like being asked to come up with unusual uses, the patterns or rivers of our thinking become threatened. Instinctive fight or flight thinking comes in...we defend ourselves with yes but, or this is just silly, this is a waste of time. In my experience, after motivation, awareness and starting to explore exercises, the most interesting and revelatory aspect of

undertaking this type of course is getting to know your internal judge. We all have them. Some are louder than others. Get to know your and learn how to shut them up!

3. Okay, lets explore three strategies you can employ to build your creative thinking skills. The first two were developed by lateral thinking guru Edward DeBono and the third is a more emergent and alternative perspective. DeBono's strategies are used here as they are practical, useable and being built on logic they are more easily adopted. As we review these strategies and you get to explore them, it is critical you understand the need to continue reflecting on what happens. You need to constantly strengthen awareness as not doing so will undermine the value of divergent exercises and reduce strategies to abstract, novel tools. It takes perseverance to change the course of well established rivers!

The first of these strategies is random input. Random input is both a great lateral strategy but also a good exercise. In my experience it can also be great fun. At its core it is the introduction of a random element into a situation. Metaphorically, it's a strategy which changes the course of a river.

Let me give you an example. Say you've been asked to come up with new dementia service for Ireland. Your ideas will emerge from existing patterns formed by memories of experiences. You might have worked for a long period in A & E, such experiences will emerge in how you respond, say the development of procedures for A & E department on dealing with dementia sufferers. You might work in admin, this experience might direct you towards administrative services. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. In fact your experience will be vital in the refinement of any service. However, your experience may also serve to bind your ideation potential. Depending on your experience, you might find yourself being overly judgmental on ideas...oh, that'll never work, sure that's not practical, sure that's a mad idea... and so on. Such responses are unsurprising given our negativity bias. Our critical minds tend to lead us down convergent roads; we seek rightness. BY introducing a random elements such as words, pictures, sounds and so on. In art and design this process is often more esoteric and more fuzzily referred to as seeking inspiration.

So lets introduce a random element. A word: Milk (I have to get milk from the shops later!). Now we have two very different networks or rivers of thought. One being the dementia service and the other being milk. They have very different characteristics, the elements connected to them are also very different. Random inputs work by using traits of one to shape the other. So, when I think of milk I can draw out my associations; cows, farms, white, liquid, udder, breast, bottle, teeth, calcium, school, bones, flowing, delivery, bottles. I could go on but you get the point.

I can exploit any of these things to redirect my thinking about services. I'm thinking about farms and animals, services using model farms or animals for therapy, perhaps dementia services for rural populations, piggy backing on existing delivery services in rural areas to assist with monitoring and retaining connections, perhaps using the Irish Farm Association or Irish Country Association as a vehicle to communicate with elderly rural populations.

I could go on but I want to make a point about conscious awareness of thought. I introduced a random word and went for it. I am aware my internal judge want to be critical or place value on my ideas and have to resist...he's hard to shut up once he's started! My thoughts are also following a river or pattern...a rural one. So I stop and take an alternative perspective: White.

White is a colour..can we offer colour services? A dementia decorating service, a service where a colourist comes around and designs a scheme which assists the person with dementia. This makes me think of decoration, perhaps wallpaper can be used, colours and textures to help people navigate.

I deliberately stop again, aware of my judge and patterns forming!

What about flowing? This leads me to bathing, cleanliness...how do dementia sufferers deal with this, how does it play into dignity, how can bathrooms be adapted for people with dementia.

Again, this could keep going and going. You get the point. The random input helped to disrupt the flow of thoughts. To change the course of my thinking. To provide me with new perspectives. Once I remain aware of my internal judge and pattern forming tendency I can develop lots of ideas. By switching words I can increase my levels of ideational fluency, flexibility and originality. One of the great joys of this is that it took me as long as it took to speak it as it did to come up with the ideas.

Oh but your internal judges are so loud. I can hear them from here...that's not practical, I can think of a hundred reasons why that wouldn't works and so on!

Keep this in mind. It took me all of a few seconds to come up with the ideas. If I gave it some time I might come up with a 100 diverse ideas. Now, isn't it better to have the opportunity to review and choose between a 100 ideas than hammer away at one?

Again, I cannot over emphasise the importance of reflective practice in this.

For the next activity I want to give this a go. I want you to come up with suggestions for how dissemination of dementia information can be improved. As for the random word, it really doesn't matter. And if you find you're struggling with a word, change it. If that doesn't work, try using random pictures, or sounds, or textures. Explore a variety of different things and see what works best for you. Reflect on what happened, your internal judge, the factors influencing your abilities.

Something to keep in mind here is humour. Lateral thinking is the root of all jokes. Jokes play on fixed perceptions, punch lines are lateral perspectives. As part of your training you might like to watch some one liner comedians!

*'I want to die like my grandfather in his sleep, not like his screaming passengers'*

4. Thinking hats. I hope you had some fun with the previous activity. If you've not done so, please review with your colleagues. You can also reflect on your capacity using fluency, flexibility and originality to measure output.

Random input can be applied in all sorts of situations but in my experience it lends itself best to individual activity. The next strategy is DeBono's thinking hats. You have most likely heard of it before as it is widely used in the commercial sector. At its core, the thinking hats strategy is a logical reductionist approach to thinking that facilitates the compartmentalisation of thinking aspects. While it is useful for individuals, the thinking hats strategy is especially useful for group situations. Let me explain it with a situation.

You have been called into a meeting between a number of government departments, private service providers, academics and front line managers to discuss your proposals for improving the dissemination of dementia information. The attendees all have their opinions and agendas. As you will have no doubt experienced, such meetings can be dispiriting to say the least as each attendee wants to be heard, wants to feel valued and is prepared to defend their position.

The thinking hats are a thought structuring process that allows all viewpoints to be considered within defined categories as follows. Think of them like a sophisticated talking stick!

The black hat centres on known facts. For instance the known about dementia information dissemination. During the meeting all of the facts can be assembled.

The yellow hat centres on the positives of the idea, why benefits and opportunities it will afford.

The black hat is judgement, the potential negatives, why your great idea won't work. Given our schooling and bias it's hilarious to see this in practice!

The red hat centres on emotive aspects. How people feel about the idea, their intuitive response.

Their fears and likes. Generally we don't place much value on this which is very unfortunate.

The green hat is creativity. While the black hat was 'yes but' thinking (yes but it won't work because...), the green hat is 'yes and' thinking (yes and I think the idea could be enhanced, developed etc).

The blue hat is the structure itself. Without the blue hat - often in the form of a facilitator - such activities can come apart. Often because of dominant personalities.

The thinking hats strategy is beautiful in its simplicity. I'd like you to practice it first by going back over one of your ideas and framing the aspects of it under the hat categories. Afterward, arrange a meeting with a couple of colleagues and run each of your ideas through a group discussion structured around the strategy.

Reflect on what happened after paying particular attention to the impact of the group on ideation. In group situations we tend to become more conservative. We don't like being judged and are fearful at being perceived as 'the crazy creative one'!

Stop the video here and give it a go before proceeding.

5. The thinking hat strategy works. Yes, it takes practice, but it works and not only for meetings but also to aid how you approach situations and how you build awareness.

The final strategy is somewhat left of centre, perhaps appropriately so. I mentioned previously that the theoretical foundations of creativity are a western construct. The strategies and exercises explored here feed into western constructs of thinking. But there are other perspectives too. This strategy centres on mindfulness, or conscious awareness of what you are doing when you are doing it. Something which has become increasingly important in our increasingly distracted world. Rather than the logical and very practical approach of DeBono, the mindfulness approach is more focused on preparing the mental and physical ground for creative thought. It is not in any way religious and while it can have a spiritual dimension, it is essentially a form of brain training.

Although a new area of research, findings show that practicing mindful meditation for 10-20 minutes a day can improve your ability to think creatively. The reasons why include reduced production of stress hormones, reductions in anxiety, depression, exhaustion and irritability. All of which undermine creative thinking potential. Meditation also permits opportunity for pause, which allows wider perspectives to form and to mediate the impact of emotional and other bias on decision making. Meditation is said to reduce defensiveness while also encouraging confidence and courage.

you could be forgiven for assuming that mindful mediation is a little fluffy compared to the practical DeBono strategies, but this is not the case, much creativity research centres on how the mind is prepared or framed for creative thought and on how the immediate environment impacts your thinking abilities.

There is a lot of evidence which points to how contact with nature can calm the mind; even having a view to nature has been shown to have a positive influence. To an extent we in the west have been tricked into thinking we can think our way out of everything. Sometimes the most creative approach is to simply connect with the world through your senses.

I have no intention on providing instruction on mindful meditation within the scope of this short course. This is a personal journey you can pursue yourself and which will positively contribute to you gaining more holistic set of creative thinking skills.

On a final note in relation to mindfulness and creativity, one of the most significant areas of exploration in recent times is the concept of the flow state. A term coined by Hungarian psychology professor, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi to describe the mental state achieved by people engaged in creative pursuits. If you have a real interest in something, say playing an instrument, a sport, reading...something you are passionate about you will probably have experienced this state. You are totally immersed in it, the world around you stops, time distorts and you become 100% engaged. The flow and mindful mind

have much in common. You can engage in mindful meditation to aid you develop focused creative thinking practices. In time you might find that engagement in creative practice facilitates a mindful state.

Please see an attached reading list for this section.

6. Way forward. Okay, so we've come along way. In our three short videos we have defined and contextualised creative thinking. We explored ways in which you think and some of the factors influencing your thinking. We've looked at simple exercises to build divergent thinking skills and we've explored a number of alternative creative thinking strategies which you can practice and employ.

As I said at the beginning when you said you wanted to think more creatively, it starts with motivation. From motivation it moves to awareness through cycles of practice and reflection, within which you learn about how you think and the role of your internal judge. We also explored how mindfulness may assist you.

The reality with creative thinking training is that it's a minefield and I suspect the vast majority of short courses result in an initial increase in creative ideation which quickly dissipates. If you are really motivated to develop your skills you will keep investing in the cycle of awareness, practice and reflection. Seek out opportunities to employ and practice. The situation doesn't matter. Best of luck.