



The Creative Agent

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By Richard Pedley. April, 2019.

Self-Actualisation

In this topic we will explore some of the concepts to becoming self-actualised through achievement within an endeavour that is aligned to a strong sense of purpose and meaning and is executed through a framework that allows you to recognise strengths and weaknesses and move towards more consistent growth and productivity.

Self-actualisation was a term used by Abraham Maslow to describe the pinnacle of a hierarchy of needs which provide a sense of peace, belonging and contentment in life. At the lowest level our lives are governed by survival and we operate in high levels of stress to acquire the basic resources to sustain us. As basic resources are provided, we then seek to build positive relationships to create a sense of belonging and acceptance within our peer group and community and endeavour to align our efforts in areas of work that are fulfilling and meaningful to us. At the highest level of self-actualisation a person's efforts in life are aligned with the highest expression of their capacity and that derive a strong sense of satisfaction from knowing that through trial and growth they have achieved things of great meaning and value in their lives on a consistent basis.

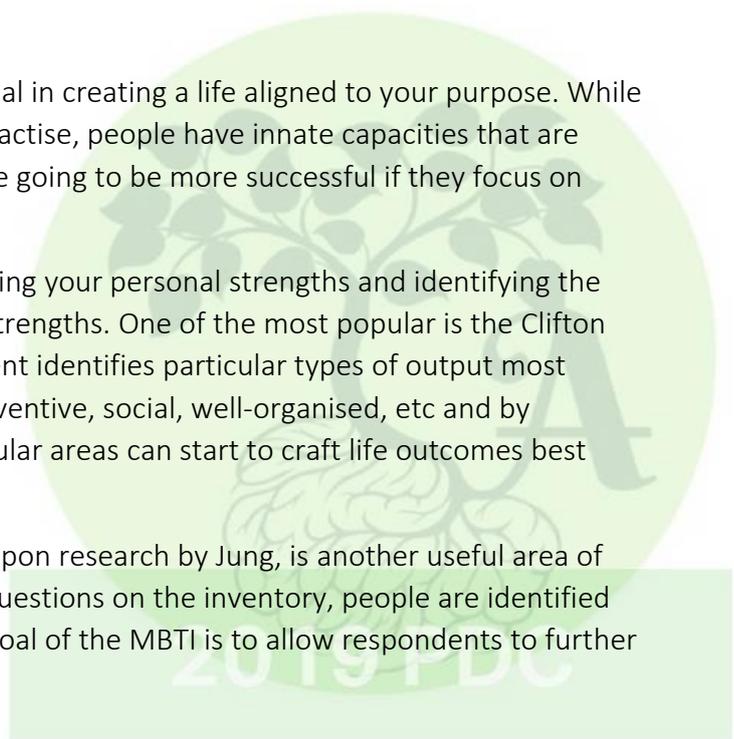
In this topic we explore how this sense of self-actualisation can be moved towards through self-knowledge and creating a meaningful pathway of achievement that is supported through clear goals and habits that we have control over and ability to manipulate in clear and precise ways to move towards the results we want from life.

Leverage Your Natural Strengths

Tapping into your natural gifts is foundational in creating a life aligned to your purpose. While everyone can be good at something with practise, people have innate capacities that are strongest in them and their results in life are going to be more successful if they focus on developing quality output in those areas.

There are a number of online tools for gauging your personal strengths and identifying the areas to focus on to leverage your natural strengths. One of the most popular is the Clifton Strengths Finder assessment. This assessment identifies particular types of output most aligned to your character type, like being inventive, social, well-organised, etc and by determining your relative strength in particular areas can start to craft life outcomes best aligned to those areas.

The Myers Briggs personality types, based upon research by Jung, is another useful area of self-analysis. Based on the answers to the questions on the inventory, people are identified as having one of 16 personality types. The goal of the MBTI is to allow respondents to further



explore and understand their own personalities including their likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, possible career preferences, and compatibility with other people.

Identifying Your Values

Once your natural areas of strengths are identified you need to find particular areas to focus those strengths upon to leverage your strengths and create valuable, rare and quality output. The most fundamental work in this regard is finding what is your value system and how does it align with a particular output of creative strength.

Values are often derived from societal and family influences and with areas of activity where you have been valued and been regarded highly by your peers and parents for your accomplishments. Underlying this is our need for belonging, which shapes our value system so that we 'fit-in' within the social context we were born into and areas of activity which our need for belonging and recognition were positively reinforced.

Within an environment which provided secure attachment and authentic encouragement for innate areas of talent, identifying these areas of strengths can be easy. But when you are born into dysfunction which has resulted in insecure attachment styles developing then identifying areas of strength can be considerably more difficult.

Creating a Mission (Vision) Statement:

Your mission is how you want to show up in the world and use your strengths in ways that add value to people's life's, mitigate some of the suffering of others and provides for a sense of self-fulfilment through making a worthwhile contribution within the world. Your mission is an area you want to express yourself and provide value to the world aligned to your value framework.

Your mission guides you as you make plans to improve an aspect of your life. A mission statement focuses attention on who you want to be. Your mission becomes a source of inspiration and commitment to your future. It provides meaning to every task you want to accomplish and becomes the driving force behind your goals. A mission statement articulates the big idea of who you are and what you are working towards as a goal. It expresses how you wish to be known and the legacy you want to share with others.

Your mission reflects your dream; it is a picture of the future you would like to create. It should be concise and easy to remember. Gordon D'Angelo, author of *Vision: Your Pathway to Victory*, describes a mission statement as "the definable intention from which preparation is formed." Jennell Evans, CEO of Strategic Interactions, defines a mission as an "optimal desired future state – the mental picture – of what an organization [or individual] wants to achieve over time."

Consider these questions as you compose a meaningful vision statement:

1. What are your most notable past achievements?
2. How do you want to be remembered?
3. What values do you want to cultivate?
4. What can I do that adds value to my life and value to the lives of others?
5. What are my talents?

As you consider a personal mission statement, Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, suggested, "Begin with the end in mind." It is composed in present tense and summarizes how you plan to execute your vision.

A mission should:

1. Serve a purpose higher than yourself
2. Align with your natural strengths.
3. Be aligned with an area of output you can leverage and scale to reach more people.

To get an idea, have a look at Mission statements of some of the CEOs across the world:

- "To serve as a leader, live a balanced life, and apply ethical principles to make a significant difference." – Denise Morrison, CEO of Campbell Soup Company.
- "I define personal success as being consistent to my own personal mission statement: to love God and love others." – Joel Manby, CEO of Herschend Family Entertainment.
- "To be a teacher. And to be known for inspiring my students to be more than they thought they could be." - Oprah Winfrey, Founder of OWN, the Oprah Winfrey Network.
- "To have fun in [my] journey through life and learn from [my] mistakes." - Sir Richard Branson, Founder of the Virgin Group

Your mission should align with your values. It becomes a filter through which you choose your words, thoughts, and behaviour. Personal mission statements are the compass that guide decisions.

STRETCH and SMART goals are a useful framework to execute upon your mission. STRETCH goals are BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) that are difficult and novel, that require new approaches of doing things to create changes that rise you to the next playing field of achievement. SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound and help us form a concrete plan of action in order to make the stretch goal a reality.

For stretch goals come up with a menu of your biggest ambitions. Dream big and stretch. Describe the goals that, at first glance, seem impossible, such as starting a company or running a marathon. Then choose one aim and start breaking it into short-term, concrete steps (smart goals). Ask yourself: What realistic progress can you make in the next day, week, month? How many miles can you realistically run tomorrow and over the next three weeks? What are the specific, short-term steps along the path to bigger success? What timeline

makes sense? Will you open your store in six months or a year? How will you measure your progress? Within psychology, these smart goals are known as 'proximal goals' and repeated studies have shown that breaking a big ambition into proximal goals makes the large objective more likely to occur.

Your smart goals should consider (1) what you do, (2) who you do it for, and (3) how you do what you do. These goals should reflect your beliefs and core values and becomes the standard by which you measure your progress.

The following outlines considerations with developing smart goals:

1. **Specific:** Your goal should be clear and specific, otherwise you won't be able to focus your efforts or feel truly motivated to achieve it. When drafting your goal, try to answer the five "W" questions:

- What do I want to accomplish?
- Why is this goal important?
- Who is involved?
- Where is it located?
- Which resources or limits are involved?

2. **Measurable:** It's important to have measurable goals, so that you can track your progress and stay motivated. Assessing progress helps you to stay focused, meet your deadlines, and feel the excitement of getting closer to achieving your goal.

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

3. **Achievable:** Your goal also needs to be realistic and attainable to be successful. In other words, it should stretch your abilities but still remain possible. When you set an achievable goal, you may be able to identify previously overlooked opportunities or resources that can bring you closer to it.

- How can I accomplish this goal?
- How realistic is the goal, based on other constraints, such as financial factors?

4. **Relevant:** This step is about ensuring that your goal matters to you, and that it also aligns with other relevant goals. We all need support and assistance in achieving our goals, but it's important to retain control over them.

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match our other efforts/needs?
- Am I the right person to reach this goal?
- Is it applicable in the current socio-economic environment?



5. Time-bound: Every goal needs a target date, so that you have a deadline to focus on and something to work toward. This part of the SMART goal criteria helps to prevent everyday tasks from taking priority over your longer-term goals.

- When?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?

Forming Habits

Forming habits are a way to be able to consistently execute upon your mission within day to day activities that slowly propel you towards the future you envision. Duhigg (2014) describes habits forming through a three-step loop process that functions to create 'sticky' habits. First there is a cue or trigger that tells your brain which automatic mode and habit to draw upon, followed by a routine action or response and lastly a reward which makes the brain associate the original trigger with the reward and creates a compulsion to repeat the action when that trigger presents itself again. As Sloan (2011) describes 'neurons that fire together wire together', highlighting the way the brain creates strong associations between triggers, actions and rewards. This behaviour is rooted in survival and made it easier to remember environmental stimuli associated with particular rewards to allow us to better recognise and respond to those stimuli in the future (Jarvis, 2005).

An awareness of how habits form can however be used as a way of re-wiring existing habits and associating different rewards with triggers that occur. For example, if tension acts as a trigger and the response associated with that trigger is to avoid social situations and the reward is a relaxation of tension; then different behaviours can be intentionally practiced to determine which other behaviours can be practiced that result in the same reward (release of tension) but still enable you to engage positively within social situations. However, as Freud (1978) and Collison (2003) note, each habit is associated with a unique set of triggers, emotional attachments and associated with past events of varying strength and egoic attachment. This can make changing habits difficult.

Recognising the challenges faced in establishing new habits, I was interested in what strengths we can draw upon to support establishing new behaviours. Motivation is seen as a key factor in applying habits (Sinek, 2017). There are, however, biological challenges in seeking to motivate oneself, as the primal instinct that drive us all is to seek safety and avoid conflict and challenges from which we could grow from (Duhigg, 2017). The reality is often that motivation to change behaviour is hard to achieve, biologically fought against and leaves you feeling anything but motivated to carry out these actions on anything but the most sporadic basis (Butler-Bowdon, 2007).

Self-motivation can be improved by developing a strong locus of control, which can be strengthened by taking ownership of situations and making conscious decisions that help create mental 'buy in' and facilitate initial progress away from inertia (Duhigg, 2014; Sinek, 2017). The brains reluctance to change self-protecting behaviours can be eased by making a

small start on a project or making conscious choices about a challenging task to create a sense of empowerment and control over the execution of the new behaviours (Duhigg, 2017; Kahn, 1990).

Another insight for supporting new habits was using visualisations, associated with creating mental model of desired outcomes that lay the neural groundwork for reinforcing a behaviour (Argyris, 2000) or even create new associations to old triggers by consciously choosing different responses (Burchard, 2017). These mental models are described by Duhigg (2017) as helping to train the brain to look for solutions, improve self-awareness and avoid mental tunnelling or a loss of cognitive awareness that create reactive responses to situations.

Accessing the bodies deep intuitive reaction to thoughts, feeling and reactions has been shown by Harding (2006) as a way of sensing the limbic systems reactions to events and through this awareness experiment with different approaches to situations that can be used to create new habits. Harding describes how a mindful attention to your body can generate an awareness that brings you back in contact with yourself and allows you to choose more effective emotional responses to situations. This was described by Blake (2009) as a 'somatic intelligence' where an awareness of sensation, emotion, and cognitive interpretation of events interact and determine a person's experience of life.

VRIO framework

The VRIO framework is used to identify for a business or person what is special about what they do that provides value and distinguishes them from competitors. It identifies how you can use what you are good at doing to create productivity in unique ways that distinguish you from others.

Within this framework:

- **V=Value:** What are you able to do that provides more value than the money you require for your service. To gain extra income from an output you need to always provide value greater than the monetary return you expect. By providing more value to more people you can, in turn, expect to receive greater financial recognition of that value.
- **R=Rare:** Is what you produce in demand, but a scarce resource. If not how can you leverage your talents to be more productive in areas that are distinguish you from others.
- **I=Imitability:** How hard is it for others to copy what you do? How can you use your creativity and productivity to make what you do more unique.
- **O=Organisation:** Do you have the appropriately organise your time, money and other resources in support of productivity within your niche space which you derive profit from.

Another way of looking at the VRIO framework is with the Pareto principle (also known as the 80/20 rule, the law of the vital few, or the principle of factor sparsity). This describes how that beneficial outcomes normally derive from 20% of the causes. By recognising this more time and energy can be put into the 20% of activities that provide the most valuable outcomes. This is the goal of the VRIO framework to identify where you are best focusing your energy.

Two key areas are commonly identified as being most important to improve productivity in areas that provide value and distinguish you from competitors, which is creativity and output. Your ability to create novel value is derived from your creativity, while your ability to organise your energy, time and resources to focus on productivity within areas of highest value ensures you are able to improve expertise in that area and distinguish you from others.

Creativity

The creative process is the act of making new connections between old ideas. Thus, we can say creative thinking is the task of recognising relationships between concepts.

Mumford (2017) identifies the following five steps as being key in the creativity process:

- 1) **Gathering material:** At first, you learn. During this stage you focus on learning specific material directly related to your task and learning general material by becoming fascinated with a wide range of concepts.
- 2) **Intensely working over the material in your mind:** Thoroughly work over the materials in your mind. During this stage, you examine what you have learned by looking at the facts from different angles and experimenting with fitting various ideas together.
- 3) **Stepping away from the problem:** Next, you put the problem completely out of your mind and go do something else that excites you and energizes you.
- 4) **Allowing the idea to come back to you naturally:** At some point, but only after you have stopped thinking about it, your idea will come back to you with a flash of insight and renewed energy.
- 5) **Testing your idea in the real world and adjusting it based on feedback:** For any idea to succeed, you must release it out into the world, submit it to criticism, and adapt it as needed.

Being creative isn't about being the first (or only) person to think of an idea. More often, creativity is about connecting ideas. Mumford identifies three key attributes to creative thinking:

1. Creative problem solving requires the production of high quality, original, and elegant solutions to complex, novel, ill-defined problems.
2. Problem solving requires knowledge or expertise.
3. There are patterns in the solutions to problems that are cross-transferable despite differences in knowledge requirements and processes.

Creativity is often viewed and studied as an end goal of achieving a particular objectives, but in itself can be linked to many other positive outcomes, such as feeling less stressed, happier, more successful, and more satisfied with your work. Fredrickson (1998), in a detailed analysis of positive emotions, proposed a “broaden and build” theory. She suggested that positive emotions enhance people’s cognitive, social, and physical resources; creativity is specifically highlighted as an ability increased with positive emotions. Rollo May in *The Courage to Create* also advances the position that creative expression represents a pinnacle of life. Being creative is not easy, May argues; it requires challenging the others’ beliefs and, at times, one’s own beliefs. Creativity also plays a key role in growth oriented towards achieving self-actualisation and be able to achieve your potential.

