

## “1 out of 100: an exploration of the artist through value based cognitive models”

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Imagine; you put on a solo exhibition and invite 100 people. 99 people are indifferent. They didn't outright tell you that they didn't like your work, but you sense it. It hurts. You begin to get anxious thinking about just how much time and money has effectively gone to waste in this pursuit of being an artist. But then, 1 last person come along and tells you how much your work touched them, that despite what other people think you must; “*never give up*”... You feel invigorated, vindicated even! With that 1 comment you feel reassured that you are doing the right thing.

Why does this end up being the case for creative people? The following article will point to existing research to explore the idea that creative individuals may well unintentionally be victim to their own creativity.

### **Setting the scene,**

We fall in love with our creativity. And like love, we are able to hate it as passionately as we are able to cherish and care for it. We slowly begin to prioritise our creativity above other things, and this 'love' develops within us a dedication and focus towards our practice that is instrumental in helping us sharpen our skills and ideas. It becomes obsession, and through obsession we begin to cultivate mastery. However mastery doesn't happen over-night. It takes time. And during this 'time' we inevitably expose ourselves and our work to public critique.

### **The research,**

Daniel Rubenson and Mark Runco, in their '92 paper; 'A Psychoeconomic Approach To Creativity', proposed the idea that personal investment of both money and time increases the value of our creative pursuits to us.

In his work on 'flow', Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi outlined the phenomenology of enjoyment as having eight components:

- 1 - realistic possibility for completion of task
- 2 - concentration on task
- 3 - clear goals
- 4 - immediate feedback
- 5 - awareness of 'outside world' removed through deep, effortless, involvement in task
- 6 - a sense of control over actions
- 7 - self is 'lost' in task, only to re-emerge with a stronger identity after task
- 8 - time vacuum

Not all components are necessary to achieve flow, but only ONE is required to increase enjoyment.

In the '80s, Jacqueline Eccles' research was to do with how we *value* tasks. Her Subjective-Task Value (STV) model posits that our choices have 4 dimensions;

- Attainment value; how close the choice will be to the sense of oneself
- Interest value; how enjoyable the choice will be
- Utility value; the perceived usefulness of the choice (especially how it fits with future plans)
- Cost; to time & effort, finance, mental well-being, etc.

## **The effects,**

So then, what are the implications of this?

Well, investment starts early. Perhaps in school, or before, and the main investment is time. As we study more rigorously and begin to develop our careers we invest financially; we buy materials, equipment, and software. We pay for education, we rent studios, enter competitions, attend courses, art shows, museums, etc.

In our practice the outside-world can melt away. Our work gives us immediate feedback. We learn more about *who we are* each time, and so we allow ourselves more time to enjoy it and explore it. And if that happens enough times, we consider trying to make a career of it.

In almost every case, once we've decided on pursuing a career in the arts we've already made a value / identity assessment of ourselves and invested into it. In many ways, though it goes unsaid, we're artists now - for better or worse.

From this point onwards we are more likely to pursue opportunities that are art-adjacent because we will value them higher on 'Attainment', 'Interest', and 'Utility'. However, commonly for artists is that we often ignore the 'Cost' value. Why is this? Is it because we are driven so heavily to justify (and perhaps capitalise) on our initial investment as Rubeson and Runco suggest? Or is it because it is partly balanced by the enjoyment and 'flow' achieved through our own practice?

Viewing the creative pursuit through these lenses of value based cognitive assessment brings to the forefront the heavy tax that comes to our judgements and decision making abilities. We, as *humans*, are constantly assessing and re-assessing all life choices in light of our ever-changing immediate positions. And these assessments are heavily swayed by the importance of our practice in our lives at that time.

It may be the reason why that 1 person is not just saying something nice, but that they're in fact the viewpoint that aligns strongest with our identity; our sense of self-worth, and our sense of usefulness in this world. That viewpoint allows us to ultimately continue doing what brings us the most joy in the world.

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### *Further reading:*

*Runco, M. A. (2007). Motivation, competence, and creativity AND Eccles, J. S. (2007). Subjective task value and the Eccles et al. Model of achievement-related choices, both appear in A. J. Elliot & C. S. Dweck (Eds.), Handbook of competence and motivation. New York: London: Guilford.*

*Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2008). Flow: the psychology of optimal experience. New York: London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.*