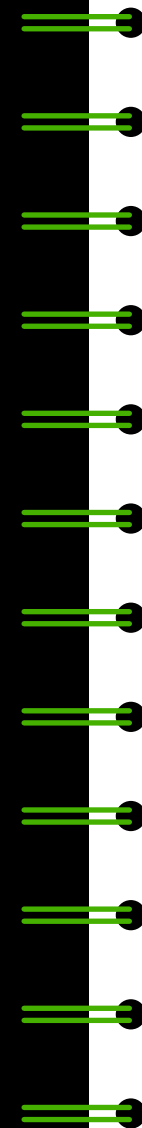


This document presents findings from a survey gathering perspectives from people working in the creative industry.

The research was conducted by **Emmi Salonen** (Studio Emmi), creator of the **Creative Ecosystem** – a model designed to nurture and sustain creative wellbeing.



Creative Wellbeing Insights

How creative minds manage stress and thrive in the creative industry



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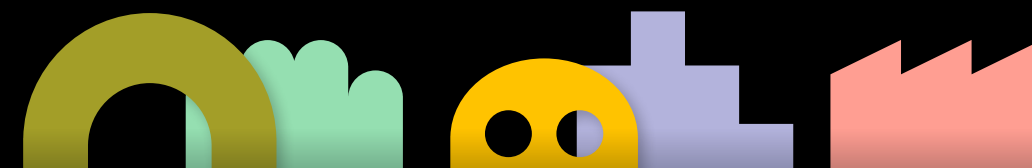
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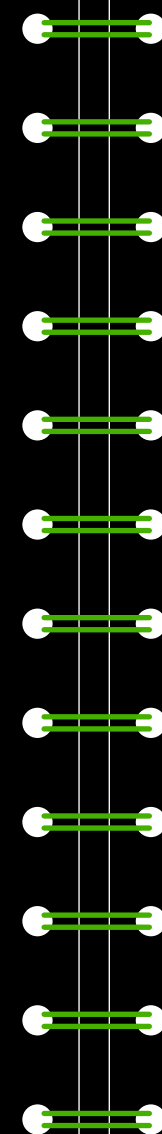
Introduction

Creative wellbeing survey results

Our study found 67% of responding professional creatives regularly experience a lack of motivation, and just 7% consider their workday to be close to ideal. It confirms a well-known fact in the creative industry: being a creative can be challenging.

There are a multitude of ways to address these challenges however, and support creative wellbeing. More than nine out of ten (91%) respondents, for example, actively find ways to be inspired by their everyday activities, and 95% recharge during dedicated alone time.

Professional creatives based in 17 countries worldwide generously shared their tips and solutions with us. This report is an opportunity to share them on – so that more creative professionals can avoid burnout and thrive in their work.





Creative Ecosystem

A model to sustain creative wellbeing by Emmi Salonen

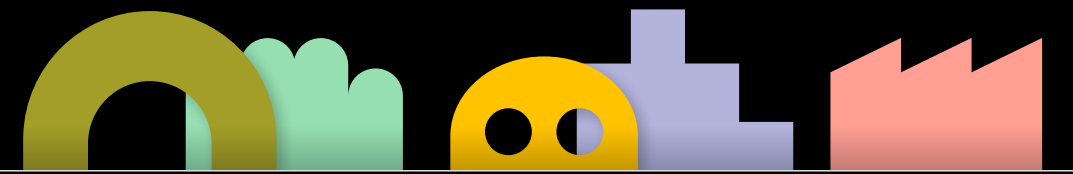
How to foster creative wellbeing

The research results support the theory behind the Creative Ecosystem, a model developed by Design Leader Emmi Salonen (Studio Emmi).

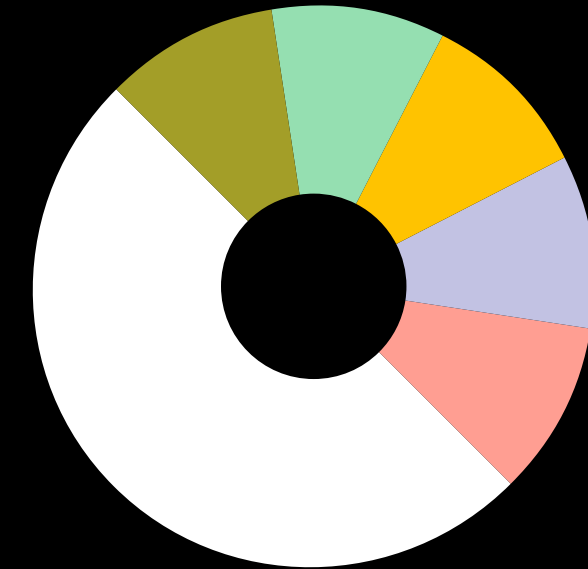
Through talks and workshops Emmi encourages creatives to reconnect with their purpose, develop personalised wellbeing rituals and reduce stress and burnout. The research insights reinforce the central proposition of the model: tiny, consistent habits can carve out pathways to better creative wellbeing.

The model identifies five key input areas that are proven to sustain creativity and wellbeing: *Connection, Wonder, Pause, Movement* and *Joy*. Find a short introduction to the model [here](#) (pdf download).

The research outlined in the rest of this document explores each component of the Creative Ecosystem model and how they impact the lives of creatives around the world. It seeks to understand the specific nature of the challenges faced by creatives, and collect their insights on tackling them.



To sustain your creative wellbeing, balance your creative outputs with five core nourishing inputs:



Connection

Connect who you are with what you do to nurture your *purpose*

Wonder

Explore the ordinary with curiosity to nurture your *inspiration*

Pause

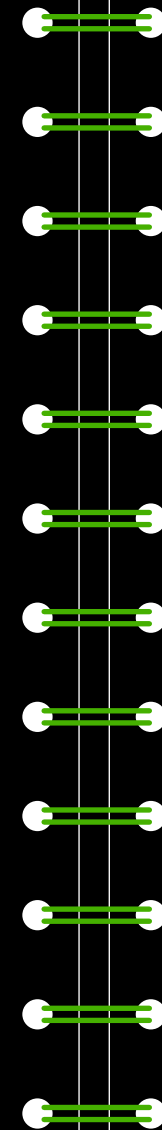
Book in time for solitude and reflection to nurture your *intuition*

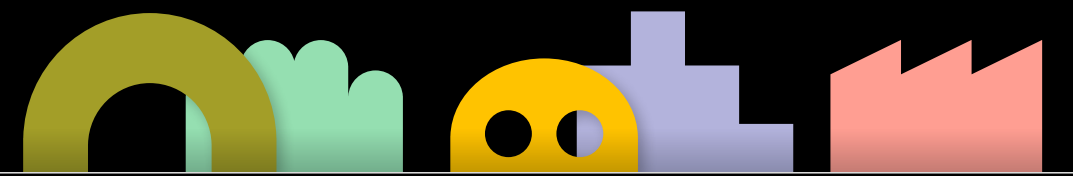
Movement

Stay fluid and evolve with the process to nurture your *resilience*

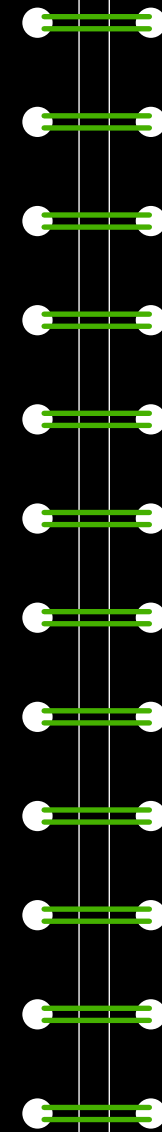
Joy

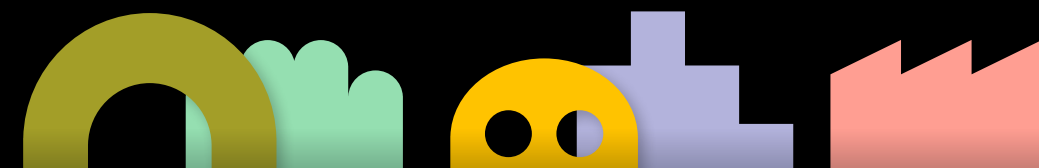
Immerse yourself fully in an activity to nurture your *vitality*





Survey responses and insights





Survey highlights

This research confirmed a well-known fact in the creative industry: being a creative can be challenging.

The generous responses from creative professionals around the world also revealed the many ways we can design our days – and even our desks – to lead more creatively fulfilled lives.

87%

of surveyed creatives question being good enough

14%

of responding creatives report experiencing a happy week

7%

consider the structure of their work day as close to ideal

67%

regularly experience a lack of motivation, combined with 66% experiencing anxiety

65%

define success as having meaningful connections to others and personal values

91%

of creatives find inspiration in the everyday

95%

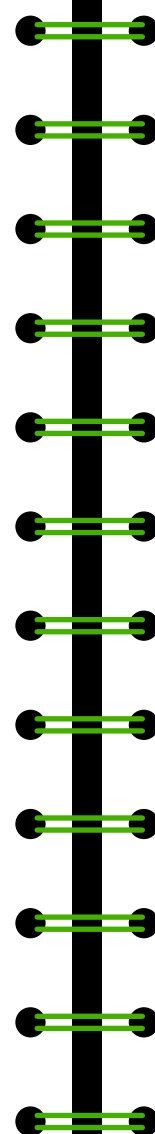
benefit from alone time, even if brief, to recharge their creative energies

40%

exercise daily, with going for a walk being most popular for beating creative doubt

50%

find embracing their natural pattern, be it early bird or night owl, increases creativity





Who we spoke to

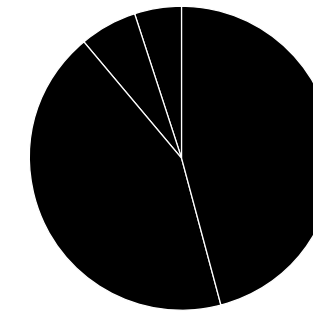
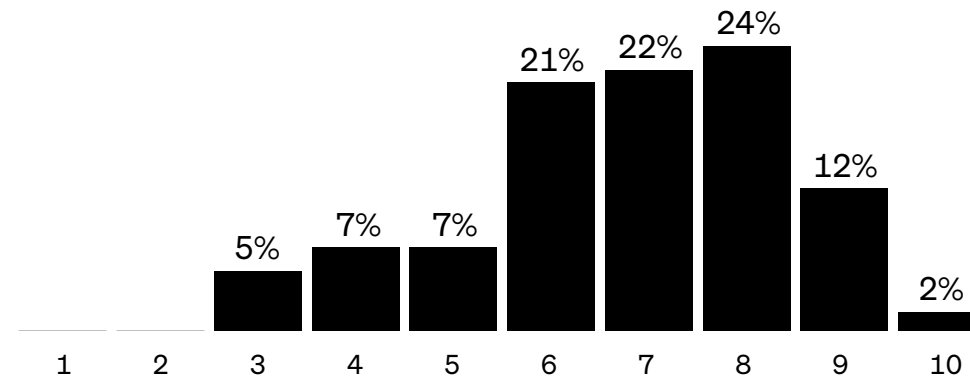
58
participants

17
countries*

* current location for work or study

- Australia
- Brazil
- Canada
- Colombia
- Dominican Republic
- Finland
- Germany
- India
- Ireland
- Japan
- Nigeria
- Portugal
- Spain
- Switzerland
- United States
- United Kingdom
- Peru

Happiness rating from 1-10



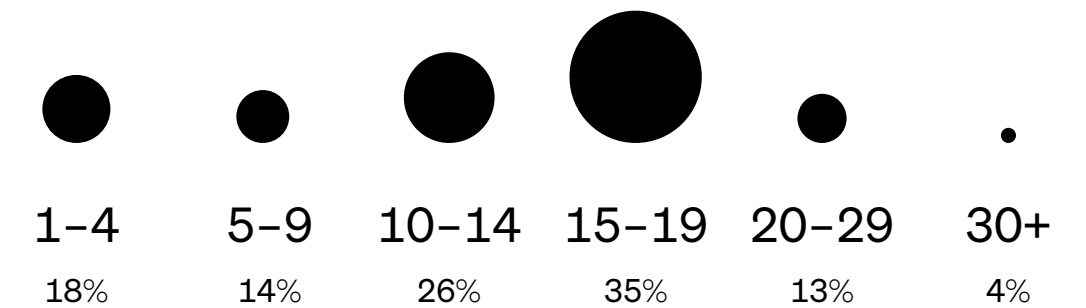
46% self-employed

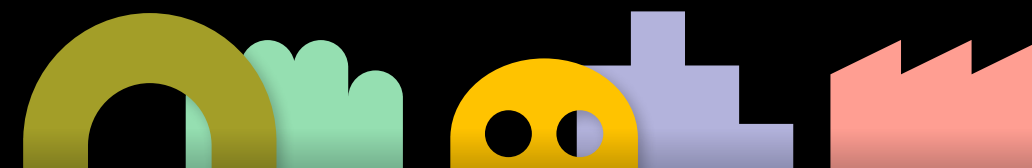
43% employed

6% Out of work
5% Students

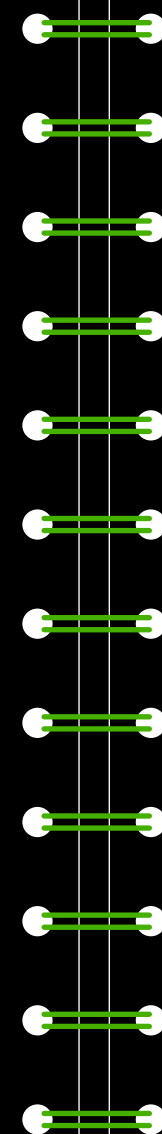
Survey responses collected August–November 2023

Time in years in the creative industry





The challenges





INSIGHTS

Creative hurdles

When participants were asked about creative challenges, four main areas emerged: motivation, management, innovation time and pay.

67% of responding creatives experience a lack of motivation, whether due to external challenges or staying inspired in self-initiated endeavours.

The pressure to create on demand, coupled with unclear briefs, poor communication, irregular work hours, and project management issues, makes managing creative projects complex. Added to this, there's often a lack of appreciation for creative work.

Innovating, pushing boundaries and exploring ideas become difficult when there's limited room for testing and trying out ideas, and no time to start over if explorations are unsuccessful.

Insufficient financial compensation is also mentioned. This leads to emotional challenges in believing in the worth of our work and, ultimately, our own self-worth.

RESPONSES

What do you find most challenging about being a creative?

Staying motivated

“What I find most challenging is the competition present in the industry and the complexity of defining myself as a creative professional in a field in constant flux.”

“Managing my own focus and energy.”

“Constantly having to come up with interesting ideas! That part seems impossible. Dealing with budgets, having to do more in less time.”

“Keeping my motivation up for long periods of time. I am very motivated when I join a new position but I'm usually burnt out in 12-18 months.”

Mastering the chaos

“I find managing all of the other stuff that surrounds creativity the most challenging.”

“Poor communication from my employer along with their own apathy and ignorance about good design.”

“Balancing creativity with logic and research.”

“The need to please others and maintain the harmony makes it hard to have a non-hierarchical discussion.”

“Managing client's expectations.”

Finding time to create

“Having to 'turn creativity on', as if it's a commodity.”

“Finding the time to be creative in a world that goes 13892 km per hour.”

“Setting enough time so that I can be relaxed enough to start something without the end goal looming over the process.”

“Finding (paid) work, but still maintaining time for personal projects because those are the best creatively and inspirationally.”

“Uncertainty, and living inside a system that doesn't support creatives.”

Selling the output

“Selling what I do, and putting a price to it.”

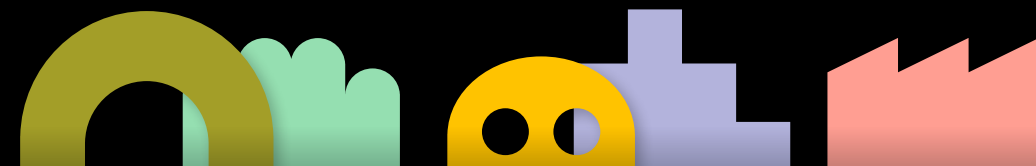
“Making a living.”

“Now the focus is only on revenue, in whatever form possible, strategy doesn't matter anymore, nor does creative opportunities.”

“Finding clients and promoting myself.”

“Delivering a new value through our product to customers.”

“Communicating what I do.”





INSIGHTS

Negative stories

87% of the surveyed creatives struggle with feelings of inadequacy.

Many shared their personal experiences with self-doubt, fearing they were too slow, lacking creativity, or feeling out of touch. Despite these overwhelming feelings, some individuals have found solace in positive affirmations, transforming negativity by understanding its roots.

For instance, what was once perceived as laziness was recognised as valuable thinking, resting, and daydreaming. Adopting such positive mantras has helped some to combat debilitating self-doubt.

We don't always need to know all the answers. Moreover, it's essential to become comfortable with challenging thoughts and feelings, acknowledging that most of us face similar internal conflicts.

RESPONSES

Do you have repeating negative things you tell yourself?

Not good enough...

"I'm not good enough and specifically not creative enough... or maybe just the wrong kind of creative."

"I often feel I'm not doing enough and that resting isn't a good enough use of my time."

"Not organised enough. I'm not focused or disciplined enough."

Respondents that identify with the following:

- 67% Lack of motivation
- 66% Anxiety
- 50% Worry
- 46% Stress
- 42% Burnout
- 38% Creative Block
- 35% Apathy
- 33% Problems sleeping
- 28% Lack of inspiration
- 5% Other

"Oh that's not a clever idea."

"Don't let people know you don't know. You're falling behind."

"I am not a good enough designer or creative, usually in the form of what will people think or there are people who could do this waayyy better than me."

"I am not good at this, my artwork is awful, no one will ever buy it."

"My work isn't good enough, I am CRAP at communicating and making connections."

"Am I worth the money?"

"I'm a starter and not a finisher."

Too...

"I am worried that I am too slow.. I don't allow myself to time to produce qualitative work."

What will they think...

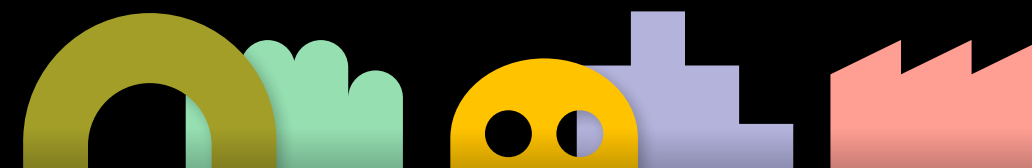
"I worry about what other people I deem 'more creative' than me, think of my work and creative choices."

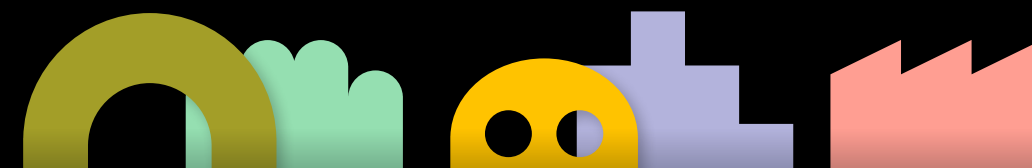
"There is a general theme around my age placing me outside of what is current (I'm over 50). This leads to self doubt and job insecurities."

"You are too lazy, you don't work hard enough, you repeat the same mistakes over and over again."

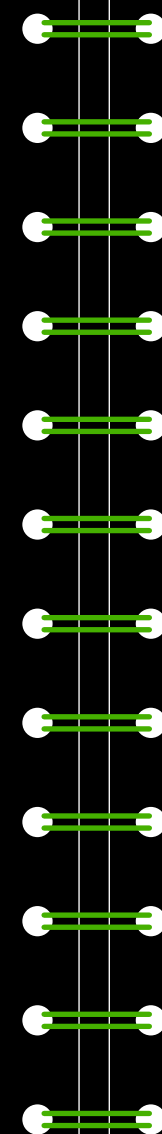
"I keep thinking: 'I have to impress these people', 'should I go on and confront their ideas?', 'I don't feel I belong.'"

"I have massive impostor syndrome, and all the negativity that goes along with that."





The solutions





INSIGHTS

Define success

Overwhelmingly the conclusions are very similar, although with some variations. **As long as our work supports us, and we feel happy and inspired in what we do, we can say we are succeeding.**

We yearn to be recognised for our efforts, and ultimately, we need to feel connected to others, our work and our selves, to be happy – and therefore successful. To delve deeper into the subject, explore Creative Ecosystem's 'Connection' input.

Some of us use systems to stay on track. Below is a list of the tools mentioned:

- purpose dashboards
- pen and paper lists
- apps like Monday and Google Sheets
- an accountability partner
- a tickable Word document for daily and weekly priorities and goals.

RESPONSES

What does being successful mean to you?

Meaningful happiness

“Happiness and being fulfilled in my daily practice.”

- “To be able to make choices that complete me in my professional and personal life instead of choosing one or the other.”
- “Having meaning.”
- “Being happy, enjoying what you do. Not focusing on money.”

Making a living

“I'm conflicted between what I believe success should be (contentment, leaving the world better than found) and the ingrained learnings of money, control and recognition.”

- “Having enough money to sustain myself, and loving what I do / being happy with what I do.”
- “Being able to do a job that I like and where I'm getting recognition from it, both monetary but also from peers.”
- “Having a business that supports myself and all those I work with creatively and financially.”

Being part of something

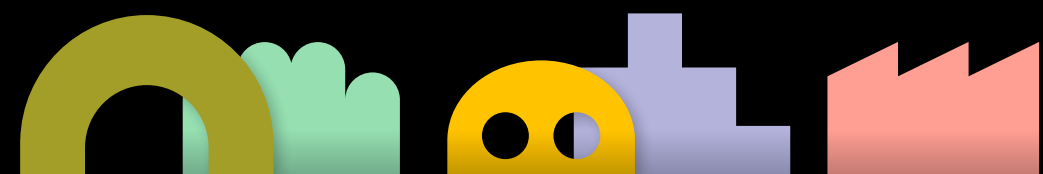
“Making an impact on the life of others, while expressing your true identity and achieving something memorable to yourself and others.”

- “Influencing change, inspiring others, creating beauty in the world.”
- “Create things to share that improve our life on this planet and create communities.”
- “Making an impact on the life of others, while expressing your true identity and achieving something memorable to yourself and others.”
- “Serving.”

Accomplishing goals

“Ideally, having a seamless thread from doing what I love, to earning a living, and to meaningfully contribute to society.”

- “Looking back at my career and feeling really proud.”
- “Being able to accomplish your goals and getting results you wanted.”
- “Seeing a project fulfil its purpose.”
- “Being able to carry out the entire design process with confidence.”
- “Well mental and physical health.”





INSIGHTS

Stay connected

Maintaining relationships and connections is vital for creativity as it exposes us to diverse perspectives and ideas, fosters collaboration, and provides emotional support, all of which are essential for stimulating creative thinking and generating innovative solutions.

When participants were asked about how they stay connected, the answers fell into two main categories: those who are already very much connected and have methods to nurture their connections, and those who are still connecting and finding ways to create the links with people who inspire and support our journeys.

Ways to do this crossed over, so on the second page you can use the answers as a way to explore and find your own ways for staying in touch.

RESPONSES

How do you stay connected to people who inspire and support your creativity?

Rooted networks

“I have people whose lifestyle, characters, and ways of thinking inspire me. I try to maintain the connection with them in any forms possible: messaging, conferences, conversation, podcasts...”

“I schedule conversations, time off together where the quality of connection is key.”

“I meet up with other self-employed people.”

“It's tough when you are physically so disconnected, but visits whenever possible, and little interactions over social.”

Dropping seeds

“I'm still looking for the way to find such people.”

“I'm trying to reach out more to meet new people with shared values and experiences. This currently feels infrequent but regular.”

“The odd conference. Daily work. Otherwise, not.”

“Quite rare occasions. Seeing people at my studio. Or grabbing a coffee with a friend. Sometimes just a walk in the park is enough.”

Ways to stay connected

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Workshops | Travelling |
| Fitness classes | Newsletters and blogs |
| Board game nights | Exhibitions |
| Yoga | Networking groups |
| Meditation groups | Coffee meet-ups |
| Wildlife clubs | Communal activities |
| Community art projects | Collaborations |
| Meet ups | Music events |
| Social media | Classes |
| Run groups | Mentoring |
| Voice notes to friends | Shared meals |
| Social meetups | Talks and lectures |
| Individual meetups | New experiences |
| Meals together | Communal activities |
| Book clubs | Share and discuss music |
| Events | Call a friend |
| New activities | Volunteer |
| Museum visits | Join a book club |



INSIGHTS

Maintain inspiration

It was exciting to discover the diverse ways we immerse ourselves in the world so full heartedly. **91% of participants find inspiration from the everyday.** From people to places, to change and staying still – and even from a good night's sleep.

The 'Wonder' input of the Creative Ecosystem highlights the importance of keeping an open mind, continually learning, and sharing your thoughts, inspirations, and influences with others.

Keep asking why. See the world with wonder and inspiration will follow.

RESPONSES

What inspires you?

Space and time

“A good night’s sleep!”

“Time to dwell on ideas.”

“I plan artist dates for myself and day trips to explore areas of my city.”

“Family and proper time away from work, out of the country. The sea.”

“The quiet.”

Change and new

“A change of scene to explore something or somewhere new.”

“People, places and experiences.”

“Travelling and experiencing different places and communities.”

“Movement, big dreams, collective energy, connections and change.”

Creativity and output

“Just an innate feeling of wanting to create.”

“The next job!”

“Making things with my hands.”

“I am directly inspired by seeing other people’s work that I admire and their attitude and energy used to fight for its purity. Success in my own work is also re-energising.”

Learning and growing

“Generally being immersed in creative culture, whether that's in design, music, art, architecture.”

“Visiting museums is my happy place that always keeps me looking forward to create new things.”

“Feeling a sense of progress.”

“Discovering new technologies, education, collaborations.”

Mama Earth

“Nature and being surrounded by it.”

“Everything outdoors.”

“Being in the sea and mountain at least a couple times a year.”

“A new day, a new sunrise, the moon, nature.”

Every thing and everything

“Everything around me.”

“Humour, art, stories, my family.”

“Music, people, walking, doing, being, art.”

“Books, contents online (on design, creativity, well-being...), meaningful conversations.”

“Beautiful stories.”



INSIGHTS

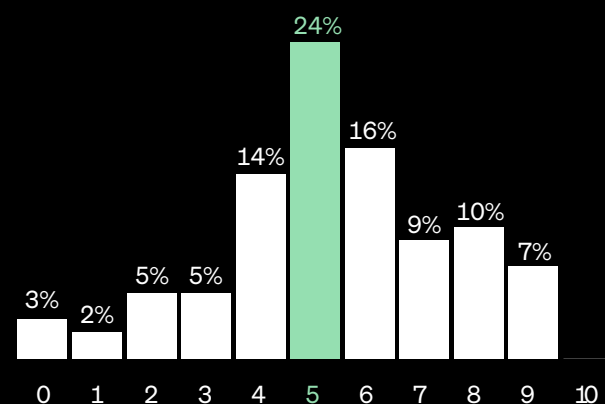
Map your ideal day

Only 7% of creatives surveyed find their workday nearly ideal.

Some of the responding creatives suggested structures for an ideal creative day, with a compilation of ideas for an entire week featured on the right. Though a third of participants wish for fluidity!

"There would be no structure. Creativity would come and go, and I'd learn to tap into it like catching fish when the tide is high."

How far from a typical working day your ideal creative day is, on a scale of 0 – 10



RESPONSES

How would you structure your day if you could plan it entirely around your creativity?

1

" Early mornings for creative tasks and exploration.

Midday for more fine-tuned tasks (completing projects and sending off to client).

Afternoons for monotonous tasks and admin."

3

" Morning coffee, journal and meditation.

Do some creative work.

Wander in the park, eat under a tree.

Read a good book or listen to some podcasts. Have a good talk.

Walk under the moonlight."

2

" Wake up: 7am
Prepare breakfast: 7:30am
Work: 8am
Exercise time: 12:30pm
Lunch time: 1:30pm
Working time: 2:00pm
Reading time: 5:00pm
Family time: 6:00pm
Study and reading time: 8:30pm
Sleeping time: 11:30pm"

4

" Wake up early around 8am.

Do some writing, researching different topics I'm interested in and creating mind map.

Lunch with creative friends, meditate and create something.

Watch a cool webinar or go to the cinema."

5

" Wake-up late (as I'm an out and proud night owl). Start the day gently with coffee, music and breakfast, then yoga, all of this without looking at a device.

Then do an hour or two of drawing or sewing or physical creativity.

I'd then have lunch with a particular motivational friend or mentor just to discuss ideas and brainstorm.

Then an hour or two of free thinking research and ideation.

I'd probably have to do a few hours of practical goal- and timeline-focused stuff before spending an evening in deep flow and laptop-based execution."

6

" Meditation in the morning along with movement, then breakfast with a book or my journal.

Then I would dedicate time to my projects outside in nature, lunch, a walk, project work again until 4pm.

I will then dedicate time to sports and hobbies and to the people I love."

7

" Writing.

Then making with my hands.

Cooking and socialising somehow.

More group activity and play."



INSIGHTS

Embrace solitude

Although the survey unveiled a wide range of preferences regarding solitude, from “Omg I’m alone all the damn time!”, to finding it challenging to get a moment alone, the **participants were unified in identifying technology as the biggest obstacle for reflective alone time.**

Many respondents choose to start their day with a solo morning routine, like savouring a hot drink. Most often, moments of solitude punctuate the day as short respites, rather than extensive retreats.

Some find solace in crafting, saunas, or a peaceful stroll with their dog. Yoga, meditation, and outdoor swimming emerged as recurrent themes, emphasising the quest for mindfulness and inner balance.

Creative Ecosystem's 'Pause' input encourages finding time in solitude, to create space for thinking, reflecting, healing and growing – so you can listen to your inner creative spirit.

RESPONSES

Do you do any activities alone, to allow some time for deep thinking and reflection?

Mornings

“Morning yoga and eating breakfast before turning any devices on.”

- “Morning journaling.”
- “Morning cup of coffee.”
- “Morning walks.”
- “20 minutes reading first thing every day.”
- “I try to write in the mornings to ground myself, I swim in the cold sea to get out of my head.”

Words

“I tend to write about my reflections or sensations, what I’m feeling, and why I’m feeling that.”

- “Reading time for myself and go to the river to disconnect.”
- “Keeping a diary about what I did and I’m planning.”
- “Weekend reading all the news. No time in week.”

Activities

“I take a walk alone everyday.”
“Solo travel, even if it’s just getting the bus!”

- “Surfing, swimming. These are my thinking activities.”
- “I do exercise almost four times a week, running or dancing are my favorite ones.”
- “Crafting.”
- “I love cooking on my own.”
- “Walking around my block.”
- “Going to exhibitions.”

Pauses

“Yes, both in business, where I keep shorter breaks, and leisure, where I’m often immersed in nature.”

- “I meditate regularly.”
- “Solitude has been severely eroded by the pandemic (working from home) and through having kids! The commute is a nice place of solitude, as is the garden and gardening.”
- “I’d like to travel more on my own.”



INSIGHTS

Create habits

Bringing awareness to oneself and making deliberate choices through reframing, changing, adding or stopping habits can have a profound impact, which reflects the essence of the Creative Ecosystem model: **tiny, consistent habits can carve out pathways for a better creative wellbeing.**

Whether it's swimming, spending time in nature, or even taking a brief moment to acknowledge the clouds above, these moments can bring balance, mindfulness, and rejuvenation.

For many, these actions transcend mere activities; they serve as a ritualistic reminder to stay grounded, from the therapeutic effect of journaling and yoga in the morning, to the calming burning of incense at night.

It's also clear that whether through talking to family, listening to an uplifting podcast, or simply calling a missed friend, connecting to others remains vital.

RESPONSES

What small habit has had a big positive influence on you?

Reflecting

“In morning writing, answering the two questions 'what do I need *for* myself today?' and 'what do I need *from* myself today?'.”

“Think about what is really important in life, changing perspectives.”

“Stopping or slowing down when I notice I get wound up in something. Getting aware of my thinking and watching my thoughts from a neutral point.”

Order of things

“Going to bed earlier.”

“Walking. Before doing anything.”

“Coffee AFTER water. Two liters a day minimum of water.”

“Waking up at 5:30am.”

Connections

“Talking to family.”

“Calling people when I miss them.”

“Googling the question the moment it comes to mind.”

“Get some direct sun everyday for a few minutes in my face and, of course, therapy.”

“Taking notice of what's around me eg: clouds, I look up, people watch.”

No more

“Stopping myself from working or thinking about problem solving beyond the work hours I've outlined for myself.”

“Saying 'No' more.”

“Quitting coffee, I feel more stable without it.”

Movement

“Walking home instead of taking train.”

“Doing things that are scary.”

“Playing football weekly is a total break from everything.”

“Little exercise breaks during the day.”

“Swimming twice a week.”

Sunset and sunrise

“Morning drawing practice. I saw that I was improving after about six months.”

“Moving my alarm clock away from the bed so I need to get up to turn it off. No more snoozing, and being groggy all day.”

“Lighting up incense before going to sleep. It calms me down and allows me to have softer dreams.”



INSIGHTS

Rethink and reframe

To counteract negative thoughts and feelings, adopting a variety of strategies is key to building resilience.

The participants report engaging in physical activities like swimming, yoga, or even just taking a walk provide a much-needed break from overwhelming thoughts and emotions.

Communicating feelings, either through conversations, journaling, or therapy, provides a way to process and reflect on emotions.

Breathing exercises and meditation can centre the mind and help manage anxiety. Some respondents find solace in creative pursuits, from sketching to cooking, which serve as outlets for expression and distraction from stressors.

The underlying principle of the 'Movement' input in the Creative Ecosystem, emphasises the importance of finding fluidity both mentally and physically to maintain resilience when faced with challenges.

RESPONSES

What helps when you feel anxious or overwhelmed?

Movement and nature

“I stop everything and go out for a walk.”

“Going to the gym.”

“Journaling. And exercise. I can get stuck and static exercise releases that.”

“Getting out and into different spaces.”

“Getting a cuddle in with a fuzzy little animal helps.”

“Meditation, swimming, dancing, talking to a loved one, spending time in nature, eating chocolate.”

Mindful relaxation

“Anything that truly disconnects me from any devices.”

“Breathe.”

“Sleep is a very key one for me. I often find I can sit through moments of anxiety or of feeling overwhelmed by knowing that it will NEVER be as bad in the morning.”

“I learned tapping recently and have found it helpful. Also breathwork and short meditations.”

“Giving myself permission to not cope – to step away.”

“Prayer.”

Expressing emotions

“Saying a clear no.”

“Creating or making something that does not have to become ‘something’ – I just do it for the love of doing and playing, without the pressure of it having to be on social media or sold afterwards.”

“Just to stop all input, and play with something new (like AI for example), until I feel my feet underneath me again.”

“Talking to others, managing breathing, and physically distance myself from the place where I first felt overwhelmed.”

Shifting perspectives

“The idea that every day is a clean slate.”

“Thinking it through, then stepping actively out of a thought.”

“Taking note of how I feel now and what makes me so exactly.”

“Come back to my breath. Mentally remind myself why I started, and how hard I've worked to this point.”



INSIGHTS

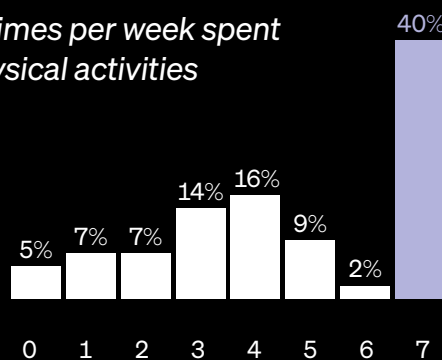
Get up and move

An impressive 40% of responding creatives move their bodies daily, thereby nurturing their creativity.

"I have always felt that movement in particular, is key to a healthy creative balance. It is necessary to step away from the computer and let things percolate while moving. It helps keep me in a good mood. It fulfills the need for adult human connection. It gives me more patience. The list of benefits is endless!"

Walking is a particularly popular choice, often integrated into daily routines. A colourful mix of activities is mentioned, with frequency and intensity varying widely.

0 – 7 times per week spent on physical activities



RESPONSES

How many times a week do you do physical activities?

Daily walks

"I walk daily, nothing much is fixed in my week."

"I walk my dog at least once, usually twice a day. I don't do any other significant workouts."

"Every day. Yoga, running, walking, running up stairs at work and at home, allotment tasks."

"I make sure I move a lot daily; and do sport few times a week. That's not always the case though, I go through periods where I'm less good at it. Hopefully I can keep up in the future!"

Varying times and activities

"15 minute Tai Chi or stretching in the mornings. Two weekly classes of salsa and two social dances. One weekly workout. Some cycling."

"A handful – swimming walking and the occasional dance video workout."

"Depends on the week, and what needs doing. I swim, walk the dog, chop fire wood, cycle to the village and then the best of all, screen print."

"At least five times a week I go surfing, running, swimming, to the gym or cycling."

"One day at the gym."

Regular routines

"Four times a week, it is essential for me to move and challenge my body."

"I swim for an hour a week. I also try to walk and do gardening every day."

"Twice, yoga and pilates."

"I walk and cycle nearly everyday. I run 2 times a week. I try to swim once a month."

"I do a 25 minute workout video or yoga four times a week."

Something to consider

"I need to manage this."

"Zero unless it's a by product of doing something else like walking to the train station when I go into the office."

"I Love it, depends from 0-3 times a week."

"One to two times if grocery shopping counts."



INSIGHTS

Start the flow

For many participants, **the journey into creative flow begins with the simple, yet essential step of preparing the workspace.** This seemingly mundane action lays the foundation for our minds to focus and dive into the creative process.

Others find solace in simple pleasures like brewing a cup of coffee or tea, or taking a stroll outdoors. Music plays a pivotal role in sparking creativity for numerous individuals, whether it's lofi beats, classical tunes, or fast-paced tracks.

Self-care acts like showering, stretching, or even some form of meditation can also help channel one's focus.

Above all, as encouraged by the Creative Ecosystem's 'Joy' input, the best thing is to just get started. Take that first step, regardless of any insecurities or hesitations, and it will often set the momentum for cultivating creativity.

RESPONSES

How do you get into the flow?

Setting the scene

“Often arriving to the studio is enough. But I need to take care of basic things before being able to fully concentrate, eat if I'm hungry, have a nap if I'm tired, organise the space if it's messy and so on...”

“I find my flow happens in the evening, quiet late night working is a sweetspot for me, but it's hard to achieve in a world built for early birds.”

“Breakfast is very important for me, it's a time for relaxing and centering. I then listen to music, that helps me get started. I sketch letters on a notebook also... they don't need to be related to the projects I'm working on, but they help me put my eyes and brain in motion!”

“Tidying and removing distractions.”

“Breathing techniques, play guitar.”

“Clear my desk, arrange books.”

“Getting amongst my products, working directly with them.”

“Make a cup of coffee.”

“Shower, todo lists, just focus.”

“I have a lot of problems in this area, I usually listen to something, or body-doubling really helps.”

“Check my plants.”

“A fresh cup of tea, setting a 25 minute timer (which I don't stick to but the initial promise of only 25 minutes tricks me into starting).”

Sound on / off

“Put on classical music, prioritise creativity over mundane tasks.”

“I really struggle to get into a flow. I make sure there's silence or that I have blocked out sound. And I put my phone on do not disturb.”

Focus

“Just start doing it. Don't think.”

“Be surrounded by people who work as well, and white noise.”

“I start with a cup of latte, some music or a podcast as a background, it depends on the project. I light an incense to move the energy too.”

“I keep my work space clean and clear, and always tunes tunes tunes.”

“Quietness, no distractions.”

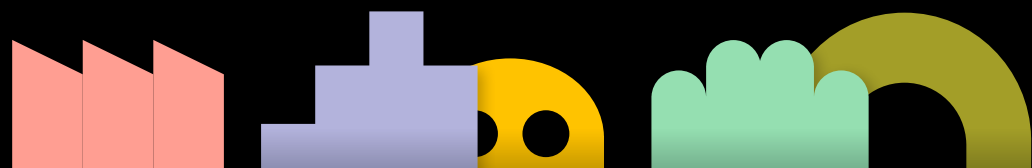
“Just get started!”

“Pull all the materials out.”

“Getting amongst my products, working directly with them.”

“By doing.”

“Start with the easiest task in my to do list and whack it out so I can immediately cross it off my list.”



INSIGHTS

Catch the moment

The participants find moments of clarity and inspiration in various settings and at different times of the day. Often, these moments occur when the mind is at ease and free from the pressures of daily life. Nature, especially, emerges as a common catalyst for creative thought.

50% find embracing their natural pattern increases creativity. Night-time and the wee hours of the morning are frequently mentioned as prime times for reflection and ideation. Similarly, solitude plays a significant role, with many people favouring quiet, trusted spaces where they feel both inspired and secure.

Interestingly, everyday activities like commuting, taking showers, or even being in a restroom can spark moments of creativity.

Ultimately, these insights emphasise the importance of finding personal sanctuaries and routines that nurture a creative thinking mindset, for the inspiration to strike.

RESPONSES

Where and when do you do your best thinking?

Early mornings

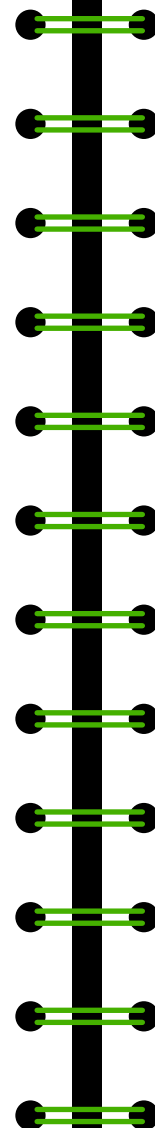
“I like to wake up and start work early in the morning because that’s when I feel freshest. I find usually at the end of the day I’m stressed about creative block, then I think of things to work on and do at night when I’m reflecting and first thing in the morning I’m excited to try them.”

Late nights

“At night, in the quiet, without a deadline or timeline and a great playlist.”

- “Alone in the morning.”
- “Mornings are best for me, either on the beach or in the garden.”
- “Morning walks are the best.”
- “In the morning and when I am alone, although it relies on the input from others before and after.”
- “In the morning when others are still asleep.”

- “At night whilst trying to fall asleep!”
- “In a quiet room in the early evening.”
- “In bed at night when I’m decompressing.”



In calmness

“When I’m not thinking, when I’m doing something completely unrelated to what I should be thinking about.”

“It’s sporadic, but definitely when my heads a bit clearer and I’m feeling happier.”

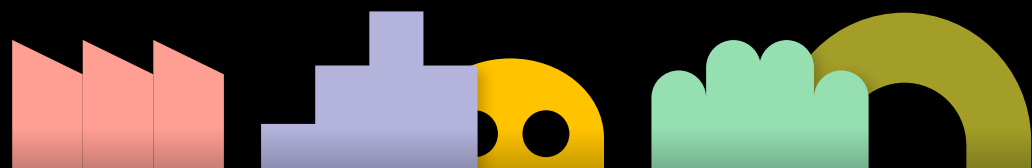
“When my mind is empty and my body is relaxed.”

“When I’m in a relaxed frame of mind and I don’t feel judged. In solitude and sometimes with people who trigger that in me.”

“In random moments of boredom.”

“When journaling.”

- “Often when resting on the studio sofa, or maybe walking in the forest.”
- “In transit.”
- “When I’m doing something else like walking in the woods.”
- “In my cocoon or in spaces I trust and feel inspired and safe.”
- “Swimming.”
- “At home, while resting.”
- “In a restroom.”
- “In solitude.”
- “Usually after I’ve absorbed all the elements and aims. It can happen anytime and anywhere.”
- “My best most rounded thinking happens when I’m working or in conversation with people. This has been a learning curve as I’m quite a socially anxious person, and often prefer to be on my own.”



INSIGHTS

Conclusion

The survey results have revealed many ways both creatives and the creative industry can better support wellbeing – and these small changes are much needed.

Overall, the responses paint a picture of **a desired future where work is more human-centered, balanced, and adaptable, valuing individual needs and societal contributions equally.**

Many desire greater trust and autonomy in their place of work. Collaboration and teamwork are viewed as vital, with a push for less hierarchy and more cooperative environments. Continual learning needs to be supported so we can adapt to the changing world and have flexible, creative, and diverse skill sets.

There's a call for fair salaries, better wealth distribution, and valuing jobs based on societal contribution.

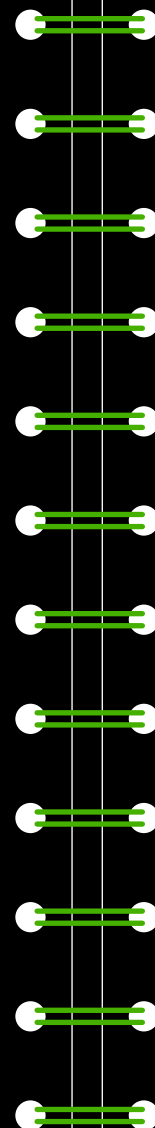
“Being self-driven, self-inspiring, and finding your own incentives for how and why we work is more important than seeking inspiration from our leaders.”

“Everyone needs to be open minded about lifelong learning.”

“Not measuring worth by productivity, not working in systems that are based on extracting value from each other, from earth.”

"Appreciating the value of creative work is essential."

"Jobs to be paid based on their value to society."



Many responses focus on the human aspect of work, advocating for more empathy, trust, and understanding, especially towards those who are neurodiverse or have unique needs.

Several call for a shift in perspective, suggesting more time for reflection, play, and nurturing ideas.

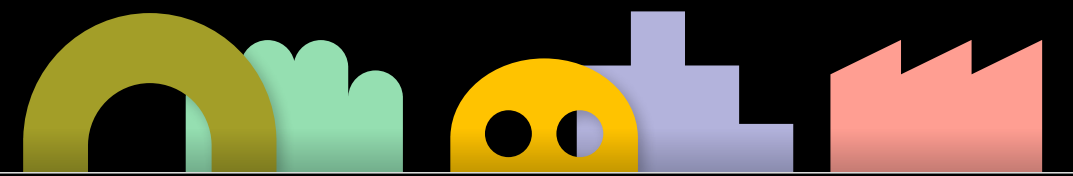
The need for a healthier work-life balance is frequently mentioned, with suggestions for shorter work hours, more time off-screen, and less emphasis on productivity as a measure of worth. There is a strong desire for a workplace that nurtures wellbeing.

“More freedom to be who we are.”

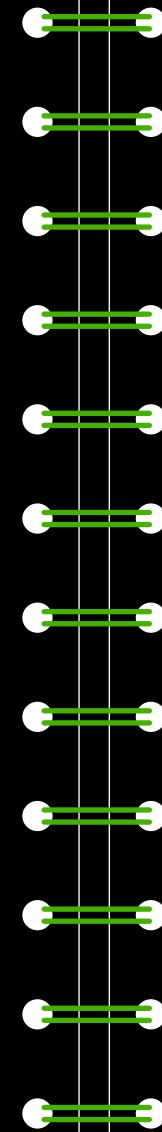
“Greater understanding of what work means to us, and the different situations we all need in order to feel rested and supported enough to do whatever it is we do well.”

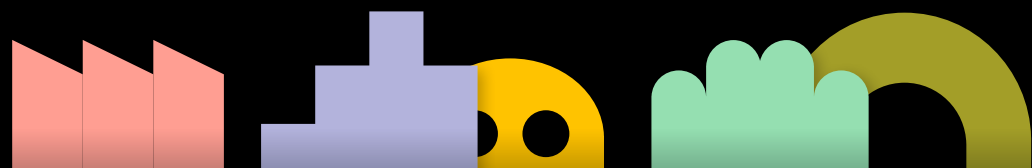
“More time to play and sit with ideas.”

“Popularise the understanding about wellbeing as the culture of the company. Then curate the environment to nurture it as an identity alongside with other cultural traits. ”



Endnotes





Hello there, I'm Emmi



Emmi Salonen
Studio Emmi

IG @StudioEmmi

Everything I do is underpinned by a simple but powerful idea: Positive Creativity. From the creative process to the final output, I believe design can bring people together, create sustainable choices and foster wellbeing.

THE MODEL I'm a founder of the Creative Ecosystem, a model that nurtures sustainable creative wellbeing and supports individuals and organisations through workshops, inspiring talks, events and 1-2-1 mentoring. I'm also an accredited Happiness Facilitator.

I used to think it was only hard work that leads to good creative output. I then learned the hard way that in order to keep producing creative work sustainably, I needed a healthy balance of inspiring sources of input.

The Creative Ecosystem model provides you with wisdom and ideas that will not only inspire you to develop and enjoy your creative practice, but will help you find meaningful connections in life – be it nourishing self-kindness or cultivating happier interactions with people and the environment.

CreativeEcosystem.org

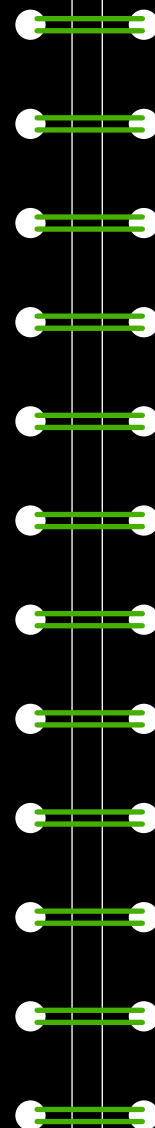
THE STUDIO I set up Studio Emmi in 2005 to partner with clients and creatives who want to make a positive contribution to society and planet.

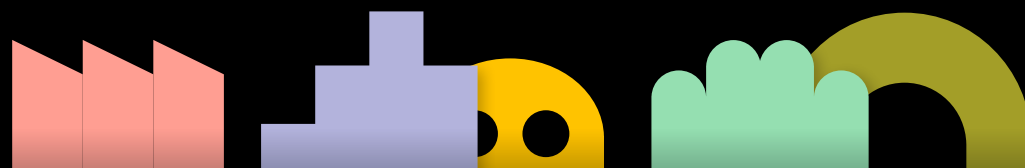
Whether it's engaging audiences through purpose-led brand identities, mentorship for creative wellbeing or making engaging spaces, I work with people to find the very best solutions through design.

I am author of the book 'Common Interest: Documents', and the Domestika course, 'Sustainable Visual Identities: Create Positive Impact'. I contribute to industry publications on topics ranging from typography to the importance of lifelong learning. I regularly give keynote talks and workshops on design and creative wellbeing internationally.

Born in Finland, I'm a strong advocate for a balanced life full of curiosity, growth and wonder. I studied graphic design in the UK at the University of Brighton. In 2001 I moved to northern Italy to work at Fabrica, Benetton Group's prestigious communication research studio for young designers. I then worked at Karlssonwilker in New York and Futerra sustainability agency as their UK Creative Director.

Emmi.co.uk





Talks and workshops

How Creative Ecosystem can benefit you:

- Reinvigorate creative energy
- Reconnect with purpose
- Build resilience
- Reduce stress
- Nourish inspiration

Emmi helps individuals and teams get back into their flow by bringing them on a journey to uncover the processes, practices, and rituals that fuel their creative energy across all areas of their lives.

Feedback from previous events can be found on the right. To find out how you can engage with the model and learn more, email Emmi at: hello@emmi.co.uk



RGD Design Thinkers Toronto, Canada. Main stage talk

“Emmi gave a buoyantly special talk on how important it is for us to take pause from work, connect with our personal values and joy are.”

– Cal Thompson / VP of Design, Headspace
Attendee, Design Matters Tokyo, Japan

“Very much enjoyed Emmi's talk in Toronto. As someone who has had a couple of breakdowns, and is new to developing a proper work-life balance, I appreciated her candour and perspective.”

– Attendee, RGD DesignThinkers Toronto, Canada

Talk highlights 2023:

RGD DesignThinkers Toronto, Canada

CEDIM Innovation Programs, Mexico

Design Matters Tokyo, Japan

DMJX Copenhagen, Denmark

Margate Festival of Design, UK



Design Matters Tokyo, Japan. Workshop (and keynote talk)

“I absolutely love Emmi's energy and calming force. Everything was so visually appealing and every workshop activity she had was so actionable. I am going through this utmost horrible chapter of burnout and her talk felt so refreshing. I'm constantly bombarded by thoughts to become better (and we are in a conference!) but you're giving me permission to take a break – and that's so precious.”

– Attendee, Design Matters Tokyo, Japan

Workshop highlights 2023:

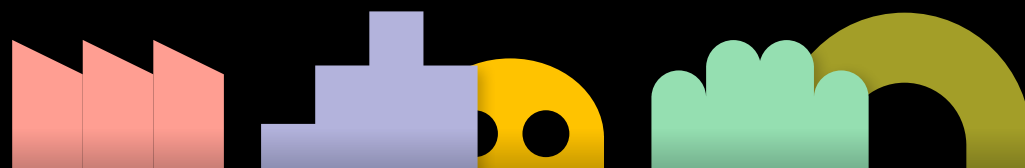
Design Matters Tokyo, Japan

All Flows Festival, Milton Keynes, UK

Design Matters Copenhagen, Denmark

Nottingham Trent University, UK

Manchester School of Art, UK



Thank you

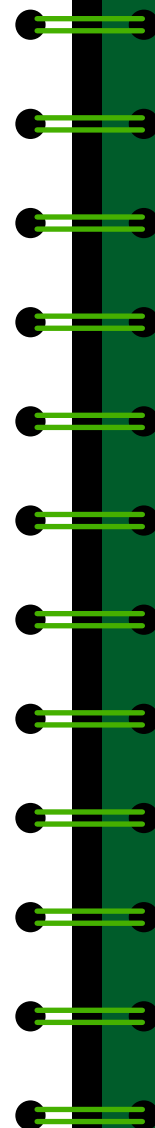
My heartfelt thanks and gratitude to each of my creative industry fellows who participated in the questionnaire.

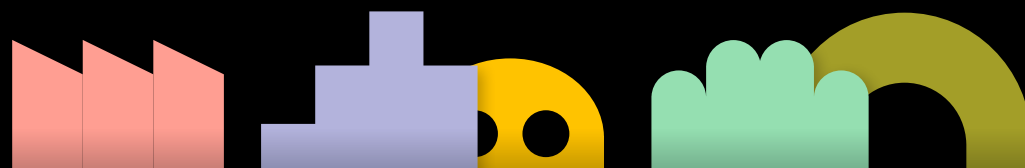
Your insights and experiences enrich our understanding about creative wellbeing. There is power in collective wisdom and the vibrant diversity that defines our creative community.

My wish is together we can shape a healthier future for our industry.

Thank you for your time, effort, and the perspectives you have shared about your own *unique* creative ecosystems.

Emmi Salonen



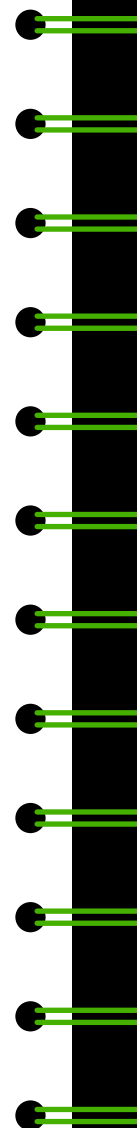


Contact

To learn more about the thinking behind the Creative Ecosystem model, to explore how it might work for you, your team or your university, or to explore a tailored partnership, please get in touch with Emmi.

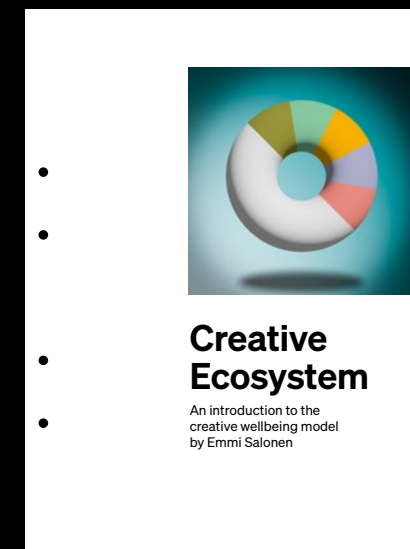
hello@emmi.co.uk

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CreativeEcosystem.org



For latest news and events, follow

IG [@StudioEmmi](https://www.instagram.com/StudioEmmi)



Find a short introduction to the Creative Ecosystem model [here](#) (pdf download)