

### 3.1 Competence – creativity and problem solving

#### Slide 1

To maintain wellbeing and resilience, we need to feel equipped to manage challenges and setbacks.

The more creative we are, and the more space we have to think clearly, the more likely it is that we will be able to find solutions and alternatives. If we lack options, we feel stuck, and this drains our resilience.

All researchers are creative – our success depends on the quality of our research ideas and the creativity with which we address research questions and interpret and communicate our findings.

We also need this creativity to deal with the inevitable day to day challenges in our relationships and busy lives.

#### Slide 2

Thinking about your routines, lifestyle, working pattern... when, where and how do you find time to reflect and let your mind wander? When, where and how do you have your best ideas?

Think about the last time you had an 'aha' moment, or the last time you found an exciting solution or saw something in a completely new way. Where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing? What was the context?

#### Slide 3

We all access our creativity and quality thinking time in different ways. Imagine that the different activities and experiences were ingredients in a diet for healthy thinking time.

Here are some typical activities that enable us to think clearly or have creative ideas.

Some might seem contradictory, but the point is to get a variety of ingredients to feed your capacity to think well.

#### Slide 4

The first is exercise – many of us know the power of exercise to get us thinking well. There is evidence to suggest that when we are exercising, our brain operates in a divergent thinking pattern – enabling us to think of new ideas and opportunities. It doesn't have to be too strenuous – a brisk walk during the day will be enough to give you time to process a problem and think of new ideas.

#### Slide 5

The next ingredient is randomness and escape from routine. If we do the same things day in and day out, our brain soon gets used to it and starts to get lazy. If we do things to wake it up occasionally, it helps us to notice new things, new connections and perspectives.

Introducing an element of randomness could be anything from reading papers or talking to people from different discipline areas, through to shaking up your daily routine by taking a different route to work or sitting in different places in the canteen.

#### Slide 6

Mind mapping, drawing or free writing, or anything that enables you to empty your head out on to paper are known creativity techniques. They help you to express and see your ideas in a new way, to realise you know more than you thought, to tap into your subconscious and to generate lots of new ideas.

They can also help enormously when we are feeling overwhelmed.

The good news is that you can develop these skills to make them more beneficial.

You will find links to mind mapping and free writing articles in the resources list.

#### Slide 7

Another well-known source of creative inspiration is the stimulation we get from conferences, workshops, meetings on any scale: anything that enables you to hear new perspectives and ideas, and for others to help you to see yourself and your ideas in different ways – this all opens up options and helps you to get unstuck.

If you can't get to a conference or meeting to hear different perspectives, an interesting technique is Edward de Bono's thinking hats: wearing different hats that represent different ways of thinking about a problem. You will find a link to this idea in the resource list.

#### Slide 8

Finally, another group of ingredients relates to relaxing and meditative activities.

There is a known link between meditation and creativity – just ten minutes a day can give your creativity (and resilience) a boost. There is even some evidence that procrastinating (but not for too long!) raises creativity. Links to this research can be found in the resources section.

Other meditative and relaxing activities that give our brains a rest and enable good thinking are day to day things like showering, drifting in and out of sleep, cooking, or hobbies and pastimes like knitting, colouring-in books, painting etc.

#### Slide 9

Imagine that your creativity was the fruiting tree that you needed to keep alive and grow so that you could harvest from it when you needed it. You would need to keep the tree fed and watered, and the same could be said for our creativity and problem-solving ability.

If you understand where it happens for you, then you can plan your daily routines to ensure that you are providing plenty of opportunities to feed your thinking time and creativity...this will keep your problem-solving ability and resilience topped up.

#### Slide 10

So...what are your ingredients? You will already do some of these, but can you adopt one or two more, to enhance your creative thinking capacity?

What combination of these things will you make sure you do every day (even if only for a few minutes) to keep your creativity fed?