



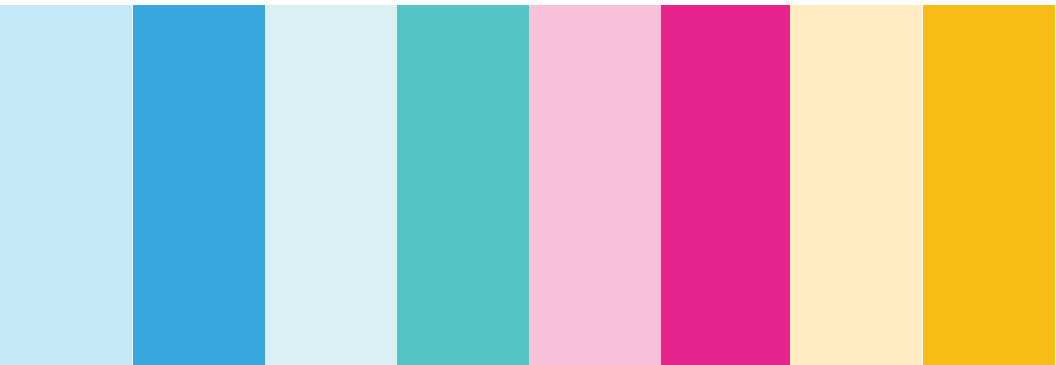
Identities Ikigai

P O C K E T G U I D E

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CREATE SAFE



THE IKIGAI EXERCISE

01.

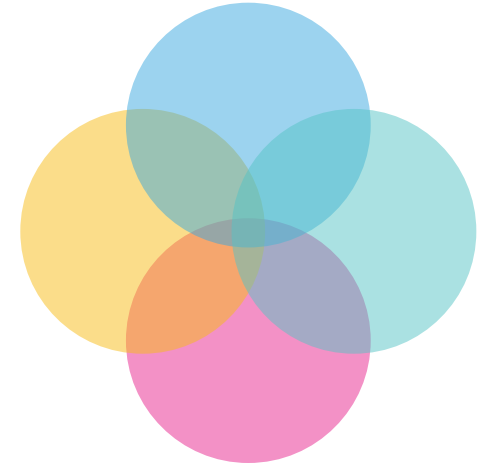
THE IKIGAI EXERCISE

The Japanese word “ikigai” (ee-key-guy) translates to “life purpose” or “reason for being”. In Japanese, ‘iki’ means ‘life,’ and ‘gai’ means value or worth. The focus of Ikigai is that of defining your personal meaning of life considering your mission (what moves you), your passions, your talents, and profession, as well as what you can give to the wider world.

For this exercise, we look at the intersections of what makes you, what informs who you are, and where do you feel you need to go.

Through the use of four, simple and direct reflective questions, it carves a moment for the participant to consider the things that makes them.

Participants answers are anonymous, and as the exercise progresses through time, it elevates the magnitude of the collective permitting participants to see themselves as part of a community and find the common threads of their shared humanity.



- Why a space and time for this?
- What is it not.

02.

INTENTION

Why a space and time for this?

“We are observing an increased awareness of the intersections of our multifaceted identities and how the role of the event designer and strategist will be concerned with reimagining networking, and facilitating connections outside the comfort of the familiar.” (Storycraft Lab, 2022)

We see how, at events, people are looking to make connections beyond surface level, looking for ways to talk about their identity, and to authentically meet others who could potentially be part of their expanding networks. “We are all seeking to find the many dimensions where we fit and how that relates to the larger world.” (Storycraft Lab, 2022)

The Identities Ikigai exercise is an inclusive invitation to share aspects of your identity in a manner that is comfortable, safe and reflective. Is an opportunity to cede power to the participants and create a space that is sincerely about them, what informs them, what makes them. Participants are able to share what they desire, what is comfortable for them at the moment or, even, to disengage from the activity at any time.

What is it not.

Even though its anonymous data could be quantified for the purpose of illuminating what informs participant identities, this is not the sole purpose of the exercise. The exercise does not exist for the purpose of obtaining participant data, as an icebreaker, or even as a networking exercise. Activating it within these parameters risks eliminating the anonymity, and self-directed pace participants should be afforded to comfortably participate and thus its need to be a safe space.

This exercise should not be executed under any type of mandate. In order for it to work, people need to be able to share what they are comfortable sharing. Some may feel uncomfortable disclosing aspects of their identity or responding to the prompts, it is important to allow for that to happen.

03.

SAFE SPACE

People crave feelings of safety. And when people feel unsafe, there are real consequences. Learning or retaining information is more challenging if we perceive a source of threat (Goswami, 2004). When faced with undue stressors, our ability to be present diminishes, and creativity suffers (Byron et al., 2010). People who feel unsafe are likelier to withhold their voices or feel they cannot show up as their authentic selves. (Create Safe, 2020).

In 2020, Create Safe conducted original research with 97 organizations. In one study focused on how people define feeling safe, a majority of participants described two significant factors:

- They can show up as their authentic selves and be free to choose which identities to share.
- They feel free to speak their authentic voices, creative ideas, and honest opinions without fear of repercussions or dismissal.

If people felt these two factors were violated, they described experiencing three primary sensations: isolation, exhaustion, or disconnect. Further, when ranking the severity of the behaviors that caused them to feel unsafe on a scale of 1–10, most violations ranged from 3–5. Many of the specific behaviors described were issues like being cut off in meetings, a lack of respect for schedules, exclusion because of a held identity, or others ignoring their perspectives.

04.

FACILITATING SAFELY

Across the Ikigai activation, it is crucial that your participants feel safe. Safe to authentically engage. Safe to share their identities and perspectives. And safe that their vulnerability will not lead to any consequences.

To foster safety throughout the Ikigai activation, here are a few recommendations:

- Modeling the way can help remove doubt, insecurity, or nerves. Facilitators might consider responding to each prompt before participants arrive to provide examples.
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues. Be mindful of people who seem closed off, uncomfortable, or physically isolating. You can try to help them feel included through verbal prompts or attention if appropriate.
- Be intentional to include every voice present. Pay attention if people are monopolizing the conversation. If necessary, you might ask reserved participants to share their thoughts but frame your prompts to ensure they have a choice in whether to speak up.
- In previous implementations, Storycraft Lab found that participants had the most difficulty responding to Prompt Four, “What is one area you can push yourself to get out of your comfort zone? What support do you need to feel comfortable to try something new?” For now, we are unclear if this is due to its place in chronological order or its content. To potentially overcome this lower response rate:
 - When starting the activation, remind people that responding to the prompts does not need to occur in any specific order.
 - During the post-activity discussion, if you notice a trend where many participants did not respond to this prompt—or any other prompt—you could pose a facilitation question. Consider asking why people did not respond or their general thoughts.

- Be mindful of formal and informal power dynamics within your event's broader context. If someone in a group holds status afforded by their job title, role, or social standing, it might impact others' comfort levels.
- Demographics related to your event's community or societal dynamics also impact experiences. Demographic factors can include relatively visible identities such as age, race, or gender. They might also stem from private identities such as sexual orientation, personal beliefs, people with physical or mental disabilities, and beyond. Never assume what identities someone holds, but always remember that this activation occurs within a greater context.

- About YOU
- Format Needs

05.

THE EXERCISE

About YOU

The exercise is about the participant. Accommodations have to be made so that all participants can engage safely, freely, equitably, and genuinely.

- Let participants know that what they choose they share is entirely up to them and that it is okay to leave at any time.
- Participants should be able to respond with any answer that they see fit and preferably with no limit as to how many answers per question or total to the exercise.
- Never ask participants to add identifying information to their responses. Identifying information can include their name or other details such as their job title, role, company, or any descriptors that can link a response to an individual.
- To allow for comfortable space to answer, we advised against having more than eight participants in the space answering at one time.
- If the exercise needs a time limit to accommodate various groups, no less than ten minutes for a group of eight or less is advised.
- It is important to allow participants to find their comfort level with their exercise and make a decision about how they would like to engage. It is OK for a participant to simply observe or to take in the collective answers on the tableau board. People have different needs and ways to reflect.
- If possible, provide an opportunity for participants to return and participate at one other time not too far into the future - preferably within 24 hrs. This does not put undue pressure on the participant but it also indicates the importance of the exercise opportunity.

Format needs

The exercise can take various formats and utilize a variety of materials according to what the host can afford. Some elements are essential to its effectiveness as an user centered exercise that provides a good balance of comfort, intimacy and ease of use:

- Present in a space that can afford some quiet and slower traffic.
- Provide enough light balance for good sightlines, visibility and readability of materials but avoid harsh lighting.
- Utilize materials that are easy to use and with which participants can self-direct.
- A good facilitator with a clear understanding of the safety recommendation is an ideal, but in the absence of such a room monitor or aide to ensure safety is a must.

- Your role as facilitator
- Guiding attendees

06.

THE EXERCISE

Your role as facilitator

The Ikigai exercise is an excellent opportunity for those that enjoy being active listeners, naturally empathetic, and even good at conflict resolution.

The main job as facilitator is to provide a safe space and know how and when to intervene in the event that safety is threatened.

Facilitator should:

- be able to engage with the exercise and understand it themselves in order to effectively assist participants.
- ensure that participants have the materials and understand what the exercise is about as well as what their options are.
- acknowledge the presence of all participants in the exercise space.
- remain approachable and positive at all times.
- be able to ask for help, excuse or remove themselves if a situation becomes too emotionally untenable for them to conduct themselves positively.

Facilitators are also key observers in the dynamics of the various groups engaging in the exercise and should be ready to share observations with the event host in order to aid the continuous improvement and accessibility of the exercise for all participants.

Guiding Attendees

Facilitators,

- Welcome entering participants and provide a brief overview of what the exercise and the rules of engagement are.
- Provide physical and emotional space for participants to engage in the exercise and with each other.
- Be sincere and comfortable with a degree of vulnerability. Participants can feel more comfortable sharing their humanity if they see others feel comfortable sharing theirs in the space.
- If needed, point to their own answer on the table/board to help scaffold participation.

CALL TO ACTION

The Ikiagi exercise is a thoughtful yet simple tactic to allow for authentic connections and visibility in the events we create and the organization we operate. How might you reimagine this exercise so that it serves your audience or even your teams? How would you design intentionally to be for them, work for them? What other formats would you use to keep it relevant, interesting, and fresh?

Acknowledgements:

The Google Xi and Storycraft Lab teams are incredibly thankful of all of the individuals and organizations that have taken part in this fascinating exercise. We see you.

RESOURCES

Wheel of Belonging



Building Belonging Paper



Belonging Index by
Valuegraphics



Guiding Principles in
Experience Design



