

Vanessa Rodrigues
UM85688FA94909

*Seminar International Development I –
The Element*

Book Review

Author: Ken Robinson With Lou Aronica

ATLANTIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

November 2024

Contents

	Page no:
1. Introduction 3
2. What is the Element? 5
3. Features of Human Intelligence7
4. Applied Imagination- Creativity 8
5. Barriers to finding the Element10
6. Mentors11
7. Transforming Education12
8. Conclusion15
9. Bibliography16

Introduction

The Element as conceptualized by Sir Ken Robinson is the meeting point between natural aptitude and personal passion. (The Element, Ken Robinson, Page 21) Through this book, he provides readers with a good level of psychological and educational research, along with some great philosophy. The book also includes great case studies of people who have found "The Element", well known figures like Gillian Lynne, Matt Groening, Paul Samuelson, Mick Fleetwood, Bart Conner, Albert Einstein, Paul McCartney, Meg Ryan, Debbie Allen and a number of others, and what their journey through life has been like. Many of these people were interviewed directly by Robinson and present engaging stories about how they nearly missed out on realizing their capabilities, but for a chance encounter, a great mentor or a dedication to push through failure. These case studies really give some practical life application for the principles Robinson talks about.

Another common feature is that most of these celebrities found their element outside of the education system. In general, few successes stories give credit to the education system, most of them then rallied against it and in finding their own passion, their Element, were able to achieve incredible success. My aunt once said that all children are born brilliant, then we send them to school, and dumb them down!

The book contains chapters that cover topics such as the nature of an Element, about broadening our notions about the types of intelligence and where it might lie, about the power of creativity, and about how to get "in the zone" and allow that creativity to flow. It talks about the importance of community groups or "tribes," about resistance, attitude, mentorship, on finding the Element late in life, and on the role of the education system.

In our rapidly changing world, where we can hardly predict what will happen a few years down the line, developing a new paradigm of human talent and capacity will help foster in a new era of human excellence. Sir Ken Robinson emphasizes on teachers, educators and mentors to move beyond traditional teaching methods and to evolve new pedagogies that help identify, understand and nurture every student's unique talent and intelligence. By encouraging creativity and innovation from an early age, we can better prepare students for the future and help them realize their full potential. Our schools, work-places, and public offices should inspire creative growth. We must ensure that everyone has the opportunity to discover their Element—what they are truly meant to do—by fostering spaces that encourage exploration and self-expression. This approach not only empowers individuals but also enriches communities, driving innovation and collaboration.

What is the Element?

Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.- Confucius

According to Sir Ken Robinson, one must find *work* that for you is *play*- do something that comes naturally well while igniting one's passion. The Element, therefore is the meeting point between natural aptitude and personal passion. *Natural aptitude* are our talents or skills that we are born with or inherent to us while *passion* is defined as an intense desire or enthusiasm by the Oxford Dictionary. Robinson in this book, aptly defines the Element as the place where the things we love to do and the things we are good at doing come together.

(purposeconsultant.wordpress.com)

Being in the Element allows a person to connect with their fundamental identity, purpose and well-being. It allows us to think of ourselves as more than just the job we do or the role we play in our families and communities. It helps us tap into the spark that ignites our passions and interests, enabling us to become better versions of ourselves. This not only fosters personal growth and fulfillment, but enriches both our lives and the lives of those around us.

Identifying what you truly love and recognizing your inherent talents is crucial for finding your "Element". By aligning your passions with your skills, one can achieve a deeper sense of fulfillment and inspiration. The book suggests that many people haven't discovered their Element, but those who do—regardless of age or profession—can excel and find greater happiness.

Robinson advocates for this approach as a transformative strategy for education, business, and communities in today's world.

An interesting question in the book was the twist on the traditional-“ how intelligent are you ?” to “how are you intelligent?” proving that everyone is inherently intelligent but in their own varied way. There is no one size fits all.

Harvard developmental psychologist Howard Gardner, speaks of Multiple intelligences. In contrast to other notions of learning capabilities (for example, the concept of a single IQ), the idea behind the theory of multiple intelligences is that people learn in a variety of different ways. ‘*Multiple intelligences*’ refers to a theory describing the different ways students learn and acquire information. These multiple intelligences range from the use of words, numbers, pictures and music, to the importance of social interactions, introspection, physical movement and being in tune with nature. (Top hat Glossary)

Our education systems typically have IQ testing that is skewed towards academics and standardization– looking more at conformity than creativity. What then, happens to the other forms of intelligence?

Robinson categorizes Intelligence into several distinct types:

Analytic Intelligence refers to traditional academic skills, such as logical reasoning, problem-solving, and analytical thinking, often emphasized in educational systems.

Creative Intelligence involves the ability to think outside the box and develop original solutions to complex problems.

Practical Intelligence is about applying knowledge and solutions to real-life situations, focusing on practical problem-solving and the ability to navigate everyday challenges.

In addition to these, Robinson emphasized the significance of:

Emotional Intelligence (EQ): The ability to understand and manage one's emotions and those of others, crucial for personal and interpersonal effectiveness.

Social Intelligence (SQ): The capacity to navigate social complexities and build meaningful relationships, fostering collaboration and understanding.

Beyond Robinson's framework, concepts like *Adversity Quotient (AQ)* and other types of intelligence have emerged, helping to further identify individuals' strengths and areas for growth.

Unfortunately, it is mostly just the IQ tests that are being used as ballparks in selection criteria in educational institutions. The kind of “intelligence” that we measure in our current school system through rote learning and standardized tests is just one of many kinds of intelligences.

Features of Human Intelligence

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” – Anonymous

According to Robinson, Human intelligence is Diverse, Dynamic and Distinctive.

A person can be proficient in a lot of given things and may be able to balance them perfectly.

This is where intelligence is *diverse*.

Dynamic intelligence allows one to make connections and breakthroughs by thinking out of the box, doing a different activity, and then having “Eureka” moments. Albert Einstein used to play the violin to help him think.

Every individual’s intelligence is unique- it is *distinctive* from one another.

Applied Imagination- Creativity

The highest form of intelligence is thinking creatively. (The Element, Ken Robinson, Page 56)

The author describes how creativity is linked to our imagination. How we can create in our mind's eye. How we can visualize. However, its not enough to just imagine and day dream.

Creativity includes putting into action that which has been imagined- creating something of value. Creativity is therefore Applied Imagination. (The Element, Ken Robinson, Page 67)

Creative work also often involves tapping into various talents at your disposal to make something original.

Some noticeable traits among creative people are that they love the medium they work with. Be it literature, paint, wood, dance or music. Much of creativity stems from lateral thinking, which allows for making unexpected connections and viewing situations from different angles. This process engages not only our cognitive abilities but also our physical skills, muscle memory, and intuition, all of which contribute to the creation of unique and innovative expressions.

Our subconscious mind often plays a crucial role in creativity by keeping ideas dormant until they suddenly connect in meaningful ways. In the movie "*Inside Out 2*" the story follows Riley as she navigates adolescence, where feelings like embarrassment and anxiety become prominent. During this transformative phase, her sense of self-worth gets pushed to the background along with repressed memories. The characters—Joy, Fear, Anger and Disgust—must journey through these repressed memories to bring them back to the forefront of Riley's mind. This process helps her develop a new identity as a teenager, illustrating how our experiences and emotions shape who we become. We are, after all, the sum of our parts. Our intelligence is no different. We use

different forms of intelligence for various aspects of our lives, academically, socially, and emotionally and always with a pinch of our very own brand of creativity.

The mind therefore is powerful enough to change the course of our future. William James correctly stated- “If you change your mind, you can change your life!”

In the Zone

Being in your element leads you to being “*in the zone*” that is, completely lost to the process. Here, time passes quickly and fluidly because you are actually having fun. Ideas flow easily without encumbrances and you are a part of the process physically, intellectually, and emotionally. This flow allows people to concentrate and forget everything else. Your skills match the opportunities for action. (The Element, Ken Robinson, Page 92) Being in the zone, invigorates you and does not drain you of energy. It is obvious that doing the activities we love fills us with a positive energy, so much that our work then begins to inspire others.

Part of a Tribe

Being a part of a tribe is like being surrounded by like minded people and helps to bring you to your Element. (The Element, Ken Robinson, Page 105) Finding your tribe brings the luxury of talking shop, of bouncing of ideas around, of sharing and comparing techniques and of indulging your enthusiasms or hostilities for the same thing. (The Element, Ken Robinson, Page 116).

Tribes function as circles of influence where individuals come together to exchange ideas and inspire one another. These groups create a dynamic environment, akin to a think tank or creative hub, fostering collaboration and innovation. When each member operates in their Element, they contribute their highest level of competence and performance, driving the tribe toward collective

excellence. This synergy not only boosts individual creativity but also elevates the entire group, transforming it into a powerful force for generating new ideas and solutions. Creative teams are often dynamic, diverse, and distinct, bringing together varied perspectives and skills. This diversity enriches the collaborative process, fostering innovation and allowing for more comprehensive problem-solving.

Barriers to finding the Element

Sir Ken Robinson speaks of 3 concentric circles of constraint that form barriers to finding one's Element- personal, social and cultural. It is important to recognize these barriers to overcome them. Fear is the singular most common obstacle people face when trying to find their Element.

Personal barriers, such as physical or medical disabilities, can significantly impact an individual's ability to reach their full potential.

Fear of disapproval, lack of encouragement, and a lack of confidence to challenge societal norms can all serve as significant obstacles to discovering and pursuing your Element. "Groupthink" often promotes conformity, where individuals feel pressured to align with the thoughts and behaviors of the majority. This social uniformity and peer pressure can stifle creativity and form social barriers.

All cultures have an unwritten "survival manual" for success as per anthropologist, Clotaire Rapaille. Finding your element sometimes requires breaking away from your native culture in order to achieve your goals.

The author also speaks about the concept of luck and how it all depends on one's own attitude to life's situations, the willingness to look for opportunities and the gumption to follow through. He mentions that having an open mind and heart and developing an aptitude all consist in one feeling lucky.

In 2002, while many of my peers were applying to colleges for medicine and law, I faced the challenge of convincing my family that fashion was my true passion and a viable career path. Thankfully, my parents supported my choice and helped me prepare for the college admissions process. After successfully acing the exams and securing a spot in a top college, I finally found my tribe—like-minded individuals who shared my passion. This supportive environment allowed me to truly shine and thrive in doing what I loved. Since then, a few of my cousins quote my '*rebellion*' as they put it, to seek out new career paths and have done exceptionally well too.

Mentors

Sir Ken Robinson emphasizes the transformative power of *mentorship* in his book, highlighting how mentors can help individuals identify and nurture their Elements. He illustrates that mentors recognize potential and provide the encouragement and guidance needed to pursue dreams, often pushing us beyond our perceived limits.

Robinson also underscores that it's never too late to discover one's Element, using real-life examples like Agatha Christie and Albert Einstein, who achieved remarkable success later in life. He stresses the importance of self-care—through exercise and healthy nutrition—as a way to

maintain a youthful mind and keep pursuing our passions, regardless of age. His message is clear: dreaming and achieving greatness can happen at any stage in life.

Many individuals pursue their Element out of pure passion rather than for financial gain, which often leads to a deeper sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Engaging in activities we love can enhance our overall well-being, spark creativity, and foster a sense of purpose.

Transforming Education

Robinson argues compellingly that the current education system often stifles creativity and individuality, ultimately hindering students from discovering their Element. He critiques standardized testing and rigid curricula that prioritize compliance over exploration, asserting that these practices can lead to disengagement and a lack of motivation among students.

He emphasizes the vital role of educators and mentors in this process. A teacher's ability to connect with students, recognize their unique strengths, and foster a supportive environment is crucial. Robinson advocates for a transformative educational approach that integrates arts and experiential learning, viewing these as essential components rather than separate subjects. By creating a dynamic and fluid curriculum, educators can inspire students to pursue their passions and develop a love for learning, which is essential for thriving in the 21st century. This shift can help cultivate the next generation of innovative thinkers and leaders.

In India, the NEP 2020 (New Education Policy, 2020) has slowly come into effect which aims to introduce a transformative shift in Indian education, making it more relevant to contemporary needs. One of its key components is the promotion of General Education, which involves

breaking down the walls between different fields of study and welcoming a fusion of humanities and sciences, arts, and engineering. (Dr.Chatterji). This move towards a well-rounded education is partly to shift the focus away from coaching institutes, aiming to reduce the prevailing exam-oriented coaching culture in the country. By introducing a new assessment framework that prioritizes overall development and critical thinking, the policy seeks to alleviate the pressure of board exams.

NEP 2020 places significant emphasis on early childhood education and foundational skills, ensuring that students build a strong educational base that reduces the necessity for extensive coaching later. Additionally, the policy promotes the integration of technology in education, providing students with access to online learning platforms and digital resources that can enhance their learning experiences beyond traditional classrooms. The flexibility in course selection and the encouragement of multidisciplinary learning allows students to pursue their interests and explore a broader range of subjects within their curriculum.

While the traditional inclination towards technical and medical education remains strong in Indian society, NEP 2020 is beginning to create pathways for integrating general education with engineering and other fields.

As a parent, I have been noticing positive changes in my children due to the new educational policies. As these reforms take root, they can foster not only academic growth but also emotional and social skills, helping our children become more well-rounded individuals. There may be hope for us yet!

At the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), where I currently work, the emphasis on a holistic educational experience is evident through the offering of Inter-Departmental Minors

alongside Majors. This approach allows students to explore diverse fields and gain a well-rounded understanding of fashion and its interdisciplinary connections. Additionally, the inclusion of courses such as dance, yoga, and languages as General Electives enriches the curriculum. These offerings not only enhance students' creative and physical well-being but also cultivate cultural awareness and communication skills—essential attributes in the global fashion industry.

I am optimistic that these changes will help shape a brighter future for the next generation. It is an exciting time for education!

Conclusion

"*The Element*" is not a self-help guide with step-by-step instructions for discovering one's passions. Instead, it offers a philosophical perspective that inspires readers to think deeply about their lives. The process of finding one's Element is personal, introspective, and challenging. Robinson suggests that we often do our best work when we pursue what we love.

For Parents and educators, this book urges us to recognize and nurture the diverse gifts of children, which may not align with traditional academic achievement. It encourages us to appreciate the wide range of capabilities in ourselves, our children, and the world around us, promoting a broader understanding of potential and success.

Bibliography

Burns, Steve. "13 Types of Intelligence (Which Ones Are You?) - New Trader U." *New Trader U*, 22 Dec. 2022, www.newtraderu.com/2022/12/22/13-types-of-intelligence-which-ones-are-you.

Chatterji, Biswa, and Deepali Barthakur. "How India's National Education Policy Hopes to Make Better Rounded Individuals - World Education Blog." *World Education Blog*, 2 June 2023, world-education-blog.org/2023/06/01/how-indias-national-education-policy-is-going-to-make-better-rounded-individuals.

A review of The Element by Ken Robinson – Compulsive Reader. 5 Nov. 2009, compulsivereader.com/2009/11/05/a-review-of-the-element-by-ken-robinson.

Robinson, Ken, and Lou Aronica. *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Penguin books, 2009.

Top Hat. "Howard Gardner's Theory on Multiple Intelligences Definition and Meaning | Top Hat." *Top Hat*, 24 Nov. 2022, tophat.com/glossary/m/multiple-intelligences/