

# **Innovating through hybridisation: art-based pedagogy in leadership development**

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## **Abstract**

This study outlines a multi-year collaboration journey between academics in two widely disparate disciplines: art/design and business/management. Eventually this culminated in co-designing and co-developing a folded paper zine, and related processes, to improve private reflective practice, particularly of managers and students of management. This zine co-design journey was articulated through the lens of Schumpeter's hybridity perspective: "new combinations", in the context of transdisciplinarity.

As both commercial and social organisations face increasing complexity and uncertainty, the rationally oriented tools developed for planning and decision-making in more stable times need to be augmented by those which assume or even welcome ambiguity and not-knowing. This creates an opportunity to draw on art-based methods such as zines, given that the arts acknowledge, value and address such uncertainty.

**Keywords: zine, leadership, art-based methods, change, paper-folding**

## **1. Introduction**

### **Context and scope**

Global events have precipitated an unusual degree of volatility into the task of leading business organisations. Traditional understandings have been replaced by widespread ambiguity: an area of long-standing interest in the arts and humanities. This paper is a case study of a pedagogic collaboration around paper-folded zines that was initiated in 2016 and intensified in mid-2019, building on the prior separate discipline-based practices of the two researchers. The collaboration turned into an approach that led to insights into three

aspects of cross-disciplinary hybridisation. It is a form of educational action research (Ulvik, Riese and Roness, 2018).

The starting point for the collaboration was a shared interest in innovative tools for developing reflective practice for professionals, including student learners, in face-to-face workshops. The shared interest was in evolving paper-folded zines. We trace the evolution of this collaboration over a five-year period, summarised as “hybridity #1”.

The COVID crisis of 2020 prevented physical workshops, which had to move fully online. This led to a second form which interwove the physical and online, summarised as “hybridity #2”.

The initial collaboration on reflective practice had focused entirely on private reflection. But increasingly in workshops, especially with senior executives, the question began to be posed as to whether there was potential for augmenting private reflective zines with the possibility either of sharing individual reflections within a common task, or on zines which embodied intensive co-design. This move from private to collective collaboration we summarise as “hybridity #3”.

## **Paper folding and zines**

The history of paper folding and zines overlap and intersect through form and function. Paper folding has origins as both art and craft and is most instrumentally connected to printing processes. The practice of artistic folding has been a strong point of focus in the literature connected to this area of study, bringing particular interest to the practice as an art form, including kirigami cutting and folding (Badalucco, 2000); folding for designers (Jackson, 2011) and folding for artists (Hiebert, 2013). In current times, working with large

sheets of paper and folding down to produce multi-page publications is associated with artist book production (Golden, 2010).

Zine is a term applied to describe small publications connected to the fanzine do-it-yourself movement (Piepmeier, 2008). The term is derived from the word magazine to accentuate the use and meaning of the term to refer to a more accessible alternative method of publishing. The use of zines as we know them today, emerged conceptually through the use of distributed communication in the 1930s subculture of science fiction fandom. Into the mid-20th century, low cost reproduction gave rise to a number of genres of zines, most connected to the idea of challenging the status quo and expressing views that differed and contested existing cultural mores. The most notable movements connected to zines since World War 2 are the punk and riot grrrl movements. (Thomas, 2008)

The use of the term zine in this paper describes a paper folded into a variety of multi-page formats that are chosen and designed to facilitate reflection for an individual in a process. As the form created by the participant has the possibility of being distributed (even if only verbally or through specific pages being shared), the application of the term zine is a deliberate reference to the potential of generating and distributing written content via limited circulation methods. As well the term zine carries the resonance of accessibility of the do-it-yourself movement with which our approach aligns. Over and above its ability to package and distribute content, the zine, as we apply it, is designed to encourage and enhance self-reflection and to improve communication.

## 2. Hybrid and hybridity

The terms hybrid learning and hybrid pedagogy evolved prior to the pandemic, and indeed have taken on new significance during the pandemic (Cohen; Nørgård and Yishay, 2020). We have, however, focussed more narrowly on the classic dictionary definitions, under which hybrid as an adjective has two main meanings (Merriam-Webster, 2021)

1: relating to or produced from parents of different species, varieties, or breeds

2: having or produced by a combination of two or more distinct elements: marked by heterogeneity in origin, composition, or appearance

From the co-authors' perspective, the starting point for this paper fell under the first definition, namely academic parents from different 'species' (Design and Management) co-producing a pedagogic approach based on folded-paper zines. However, as we came to develop this paper, the significance of the second meaning, emphasising the heterogeneity, of the differences between us, increased in importance. Cohen, Norgard and Mor (2020, 1039) stress this second meaning when they say that:

A hybrid is not a meshing of two constituents, it is the two distinctively at once and this duality is what creates something new.

Joseph Schumpeter was a leading theorist of capitalism and innovation, and though he did not use the word hybrid, he famously coined the equivalent term 'new combinations', which is particularly appropriate to working across academic disciplines:

'...innovation combines factors in a new way, or that it consists in carrying out New Combinations.' (Schumpeter, 1989, 62)

Hanappi and Hanappi-Egger (2004, 2) have revisited the work of Schumpeter and conclude:

more and deeper issues are involved in the concept of new combinations than is commonly understood. Moreover, a proper understanding of these issues would not only enhance our knowledge about observed innovation processes in economic life, it might reveal several properties common to creative processes in general.

Nearly a decade ago, Rorabaugh, P. & Stommel, J. (2012, 3) defined hybrid pedagogy expansively, and in this paper we touch on several of the aspects prefigured by Rorabaugh and Stommel:

As a philosophical concept, hybridity suggests hesitation at a threshold. Hybridity is not an attempt to neatly bridge the gap, but extends the moment of hesitation and thereby confuses easy categorization... As the digital and analog — the physical and virtual — commingle, we must let go of the containers for learning to which we've grown accustomed. We must open to random acts of pedagogy — to connections that are, like the web, associative and lively but sometimes violent and deformed. In this, hybridity is not always safe, moving incessantly (and dangerously) toward something new — something as yet undetermined.

The irony here is that higher education in the West at least has for nearly two centuries pursued a strongly discipline-based route, and indeed new researchers are often explicitly warned about the risks in cross-disciplinary research, and there is as a consequence relatively little encouragement to 'new combinations' compared, say, to the technology sector. In a comprehensive UK study, Davé et al (2016, 28) reviewed the status of Interdisciplinary research (IDR) and found:

It can be difficult for researchers to be ‘taken seriously’ by their subject area if they are too heavily involved in IDR. Such negative attitudes can be made worse if monodisciplinary researchers see IDR as a potential threat to their discipline and/or institutional/departmental vision.

### **3. 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership: VUCA and leadership qualities**

The business acronym VUCA stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. It was developed at the US Army War College (Stiehm, 2002) as a response to the military and political events which unfolded after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It has subsequently been disseminated by corporate management practitioners such as Johansen (2009).

Our specific focus in practice has been primarily on the ambiguity dimension of VUCA, specifically with how learners can develop knowledge, skills and intuition to be able to cope with ambiguity. The word ambiguity derives from the Latin for being driven in two ways.

The US Carnegie Foundation report (Colby *et al.*, 2011) was of particular interest in its concern with social as well as commercial outcomes. It draws on the humanist tradition to call for students to be offered integral liberal learning options alongside business courses; and praised the few US business programs which already integrated a scientific and humanities perspective in their teaching, including Santa Clara University’s ‘double helix’ curriculum (Colby *et al.*, 2011, 6).

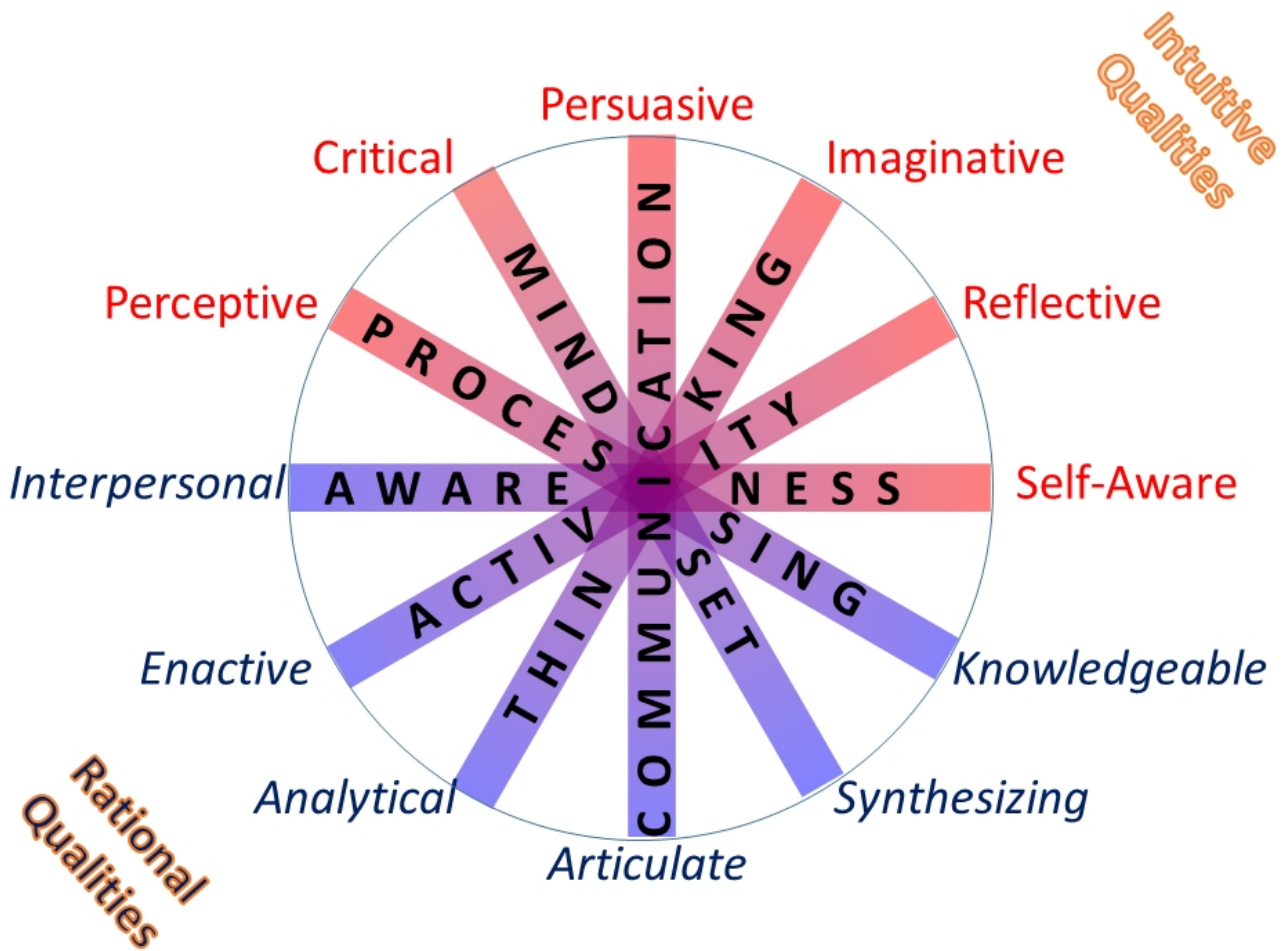


Figure 1: Rational and intuitive qualities of effective leaders

We placed importance on first delineating and clarifying key personal qualities which underpinned skills, knowledge and practical wisdom generally. These are represented graphically in Figure 1. Of particular significance here is our visual metaphor of the wheel as it conveys the interlinked relevance of rational and intuitive qualities and their generative replenishing through iteration, which is a key underlying principle in art and design education.

We then moved on to examining arts-based perspectives on ambiguity, specifically looking to literary thinking about living with ambiguity, Keats (Li, 2009) defined negative capability as:

..when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason..

Weil (1986, 89) made a yet stronger claim:

And, so, because art is ambiguous, and our lives and our knowledge are the very essence of uncertainty and ambiguity, art is uniquely capable of revealing to us -if we but have the wisdom to give it our attention -the nature of our *selves*. Because art is ambiguous, it can deal with feeling and the complexity of human experience in a way that discursive language cannot.'

Ziarek (2004) understands a work of art as a force field that can become disencumbered of the governing configuration of power and open an alternative modality of relations. In this framework, art becomes a dynamic occurrence, a shifting and movable field of tensors and forces capable of repeatedly and differently rupturing the social conditions of production and reception. He refers to non-power or the power-free as art's ability to open an alternative modality of relations.

MacGilchrist (2009) who unusually was initially a scholar of English before retraining as a psychiatrist, has powerfully argued that the 20<sup>th</sup> century preoccupation with rationality at the expense of the intuitive is not only dangerous for individual mental health, but also for collective and planetary well-being. Schiuma (2011) details how the arts and humanities can play a crucial role in rebalancing business more evenly between the intuitive and the rational.



#### **4. Hybridity #1: Pedagogy: Art and Business**

We now examine three cases of hybridity, in each case drawing on a different type of zine use.

##### **Worked Example: the unfolding of the collaboration 2015-2021**

We have analysed the relative roles of the two collaborators C and D, with reference to key events since 2015, and developed a timeline to unfold the evolving collaboration and the points of connection made in that six-year period of research activity. We can trace the starting point of this research activity to 2015 when co-author C, with a background in art and design, posted a self-initiated zine to conference participants as a way to connect and express the engagement and activities shared during that time. Co-author D received that zine by post as well. The contact made through the means of postal delivery resonated with a team of researchers and discussions ensued as to how to extend and apply the zine within a development process. C tested out an initial version of the zine method at a 2016 international business and management conference. This reflective zine workshop was attended by D who was active in teaching and researching reflective journaling via art-based methods for business students and managers. From 2016 to mid 2019 each was pursuing separate activities but attended one another's workshops during an EU project, initially as participants and increasingly as assistants (C for D's sessions in 2018 and 2019) and consultants on the delivery and content of their respective sessions (2019). This shifted at the end of 2019 to an active collaboration, with explicit planning meetings and co-designed activities. A follow-up physical meeting in March 2020 proved to be the defining moment of the collaboration-in-the-making. It expressly set out research plans for a shared remote working to test collaborative tools as part of the interaction. A shared electronic platform

was set up (before lockdown) and from that point onwards there were regular online meetings, jointly led events, and collaborative writing: authentic hybrid working.

The lengthy period from 2016 to 2019 could be regarded as Wallas's (1927) second stage of creativity, as an extremely long "incubation" period, essentially ending in an "illumination" stage in 2019 when it was decided to collaborate on a jointly designed workshop process to run later in the year. The subsequent success of the workshop was sufficient for the Wallas "verification" stage. That then precipitated a more significant commitment to ongoing co-design and co-delivery, marking the explicit start of ongoing hybrid working. Perhaps ironically, this commitment took place at a face-to-face meeting in March 2020, the week before UK lockdown started; all subsequent collaboration has been fully online. Hybrid here means that it is not C augmenting their process with the work of D, or vice-versa, but explicitly aiming to develop an approach which moves into a new combination, being, in Nicolescu's (1996, 3) transdisciplinary phrase, "beyond all discipline".

## **5. Hybridity #2: From Face to Face to (mostly) fully online**

Up to March 2020, zine events had been entirely based on physical workshops. Lockdown stopped this entirely, so all post March 2020 all events were wholly virtual. For a minority of these, a form of hybridity is achieved by printing and mailing A4 or A3 sheets of paper to participant's home addresses. We choreographed the engagement achieved at every step, investing resources into producing and posting materials to all participants pre-session, in order to set up the anticipation for the session and, it was hoped, to fuel interest before the online activity took place. We ensured as well that there was a making component to the participant engagement, building into our process the expectation that the participant not only 'receive' the template, but 'completes' the template through folding and content

production. This was also enhanced through asynchronous pedagogic content in the form of how-to videos and access to content ahead of sessions so as to initiate engagement and facilitate successful participation in the process. Creating a variety of routes into the content (via post, how-to videos, and electronic files) was an important aspect of our hybrid session development and delivery.

As the session started online, the participation in the activity had already started through the opening of the packs sent by post, reading and perusing materials, and physically making the templates to be used during the session, as well as preparation of space and materials to participate in the session. All of this helped to set the stage for the session as well as bring the participant mentally into the framework of the session before it started, by combining physical activity and remote engagement before and during the session. For all other events, participants needed to provide their own A4 copy paper or equivalent sheet, drawing materials and scissors; still, content delivery was planned for pre-session activity as this brought the participants into the frame of the activity to take place. This level of planning was very well received and enhanced the engagement of participants during the sessions, with participants reporting back during and post session that receipt of materials by post and creating of templates was an integral part of the experience of the session. This is a key enhancement achieved through the arts based iterative process of pedagogy; considering a process and all the steps involved and how to involve holistically the participant in the process.

In the longer term we anticipate a reduction in the number and length of face-to-face events, and an increase in same-time and particularly asynchronous collaboration. New technologies are not needed, the key constraint is that even during Covid, old habits of meetings and collaboration were frequently simply transposed to online, rather than developing new habits that would more fully exploit the technology.

## Worked Example: International High-Level Experts Group September 2020

This is a case study of how to create a sequence of experiences that include material for hybrid online and physical activity within a process. This session took place in September 2020 with an invited group of international high-level experts. It involved physical artefacts and started with online content and asynchronous activity ahead of the session, which was then integrated into a focused discussion in a one-hour webinar format.

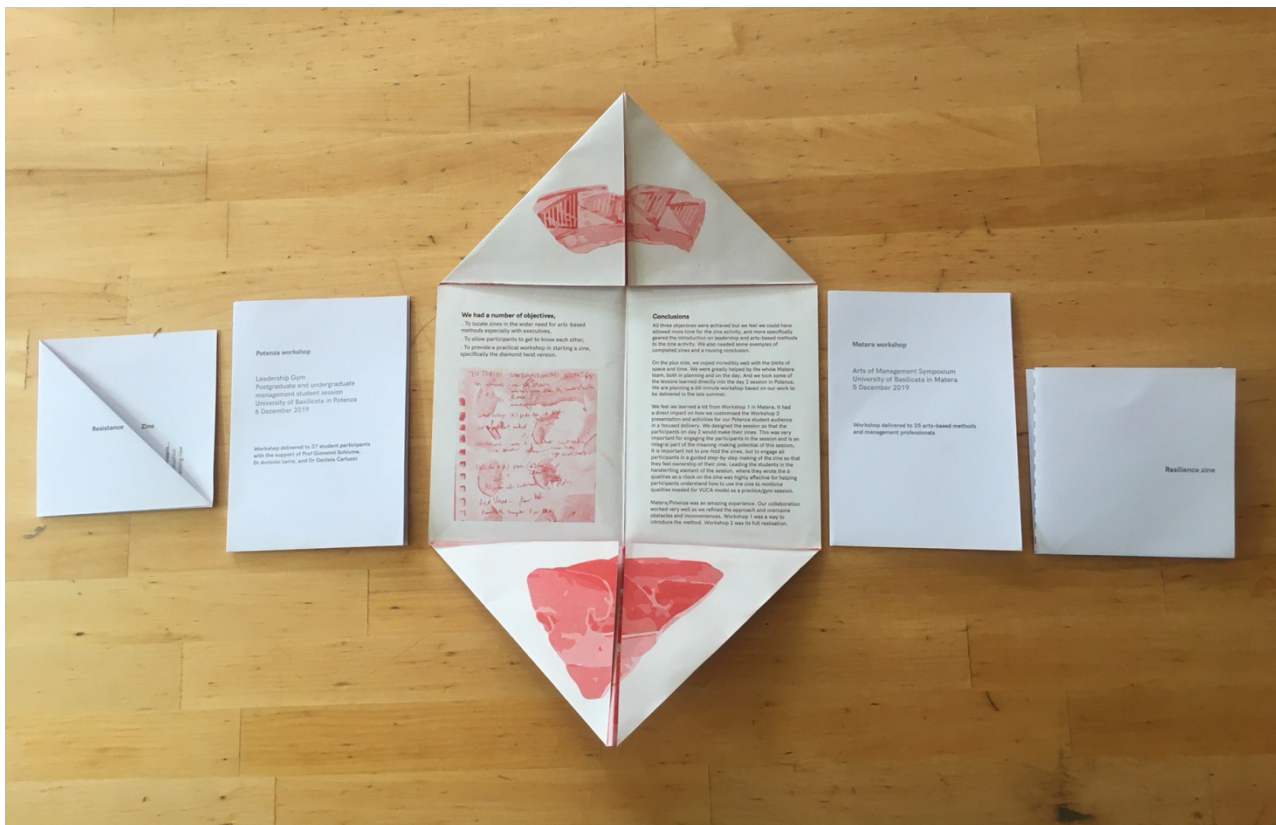


Figure 2: Risograph Physical Document posted to participants

The focal point of the session was a discussion around the Thinking by Making publication produced as a result of a two-day set of workshops involving zines delivered at a Symposium and to undergraduate and graduate students at the REDACTED UNIVERSITY in December 2019. The publication was designed to be a working record of the sessions

conducted then, with information about the context and delivery of the sessions, along with templates of the zines used and detailed step-by-step instructions. It was constructed as an artwork (with ISBN), with consideration for paper stocks, risograph printing method, and choice of inks to give a sense of the sessions and their context. The publications in the bespoke collection were folded by hand in a numbered limited edition.

The physical artefact was mailed out ahead of time, so as to provide enough time for session participants to handle the artwork and read the materials in advance of the session.

Feedback on that aspect of the experience came from one of the participants via email:

‘I’ve just received it, thanks so much. It’s great to see these complex ideas and explorations captured so artfully. I especially like the diamond fold envelope, that gives a sense of drama to opening and exploring the contents.’

We also sent instructions on how to make their own zine ahead of the meeting, so that everyone would have their own construction to notate during the session. The session itself was choreographed to provide an introduction to the Thinking by Making publication and the possibility of exchanging views and ideas during the session. At the start, all participants were invited to introduce themselves, followed by a short slide presentation on the zine method and how we applied it during the Matera and Potenza sessions. We then discussed the zine templates and their application. This was followed by an exchange of perspectives on the project and an opportunity for all participants to share their own work in progress.

## **6. Hybridity #3: From Individual Reflection to Applied Action**

After over a year of active collaboration in 2020, its focus evolved further. The reflective zine had always been presented as a tool for private personal reflection, but as it became

taken up by managers, it became clear in late 2020 that this private approach could be augmented by an additional hybridity perspective, that of participants in zine workshops co-operatively working on shared reflection processes that would stimulate applied actions.

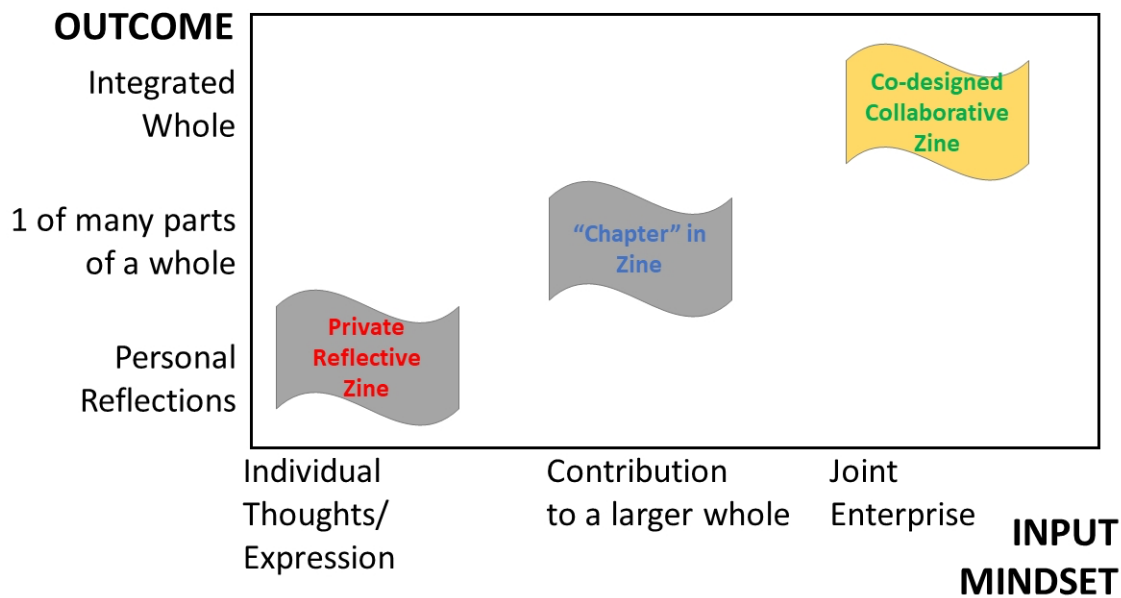


FIGURE 3 Zines: individual and collective approaches

In order to explain how our thinking has evolved, we have identified three broad categories of folded paper zine, which can be separated along two axes (Figure 3). The X axis relates to the 'input mindset', which is how the originator conceives of their contribution. The Y axis outlines the intended outcomes, starting from the wholly private individual reflective approach, to the integrated document, typically made for publication, with no individual authorship apparent.

The personal reflective zine is intended to be private. We then argue there are then two distinct types of collective zines:

- a. A 'Chapter' zine (which we also sometimes describe as a 'Quilt', where individually produced inputs are aggregated into a single document. This will normally have a brief for contributors, and more often than not the brief will be top down. The classic activist 'traditional' printed zine (such as the Decolonisation zines from University X) are of this type, but within organisations, there is scope for hand-written/drawn semi-structured folded paper zines to evolve as components in a change process.
- b. A 'Co-designed, collaborative' zine which is co-designed by a group working collectively, and is a single, integrated artefact where the inputs of individuals are not manifested.

All three could be linked, with ideas being worked up individually and privately in a reflective zine, then refined and related in a Chapter Zine, and ultimately a co-design process being used to generate a single-artefact zine.

The Private and Chapter Zines are well developed and understood, though not necessarily in a leadership context. Much of our work with executives has been on supporting and coaching them to get into the habit of keeping a private reflective journal, with an emphasis on playfulness and art-based methods. There are a huge variety of existing methods for physically developing and making artefacts that perform the same role as a Chapter Zine, including plastic bricks, activist zines, photos of sticky paper notes, and so on. Our development of paper folded zines in a corporate context particularly emphasises the distinctive affordances they offer. This though has to be accompanied by a designed process which interweaves individual and group working.

As a result of working with senior executives and others involved in difficult change situations, it was suggested that some of these challenging conditions that tend to evoke

strong opinions or even resistance to change, might be well suited to the joint production or individual contribution to a larger whole. This led to an examination of topics that might be suitable, and this was piloted in July 2021.

### **Worked Example: Contested Problems July 2021**

A frequently occurring problem in management and leadership education are contested problems without linear solutions. In a higher education context, these include:

- Decolonisation of the curriculum
- EDI equality, diversity, inclusivity – staff, students, community
- Attainment gap
- Precarity
- Work/life balance
- Better time management

Designing a contested problem solving zine/workshop started from the physical affordances of a zine for personal reflection, and augmented them with stimuli and formatting that encouraged collective group activity. In the area of decolonisation, there has already been a well designed and implemented eight pane zine developed by Dy et al (2020), which can serve as valuable exemplar more generically. We were, however, looking for a narrower approach, drilling down in more depth into a single perspective of change.

Here, the content aspect involved drawing on a quite different sub-discipline of management studies, namely theories of change. There are literally dozens of such theories. But what was needed was one which both had working credibility and could also be



introduced to non-experts in the context of a two hour workshop. This search turned out to be much more prolonged than envisaged. Eventually, the Dannemiller and Jacobs (1992) “formula for change” theory was selected. This involves five parameters of change:

- C Change
- D Dissatisfaction with the status quo
- V Vision of future state
- F First concrete steps towards the vision
- R Resistance

We particularly cross checked this with equality, diversity and inclusion colleagues. In its first version, participants created the semi-structured content via oral and video briefing; essentially these were the key four letters from the formula ( $C = D \times V \times F > R$ ), then time (3-4 minutes each) was provided for three panes to be worked on.

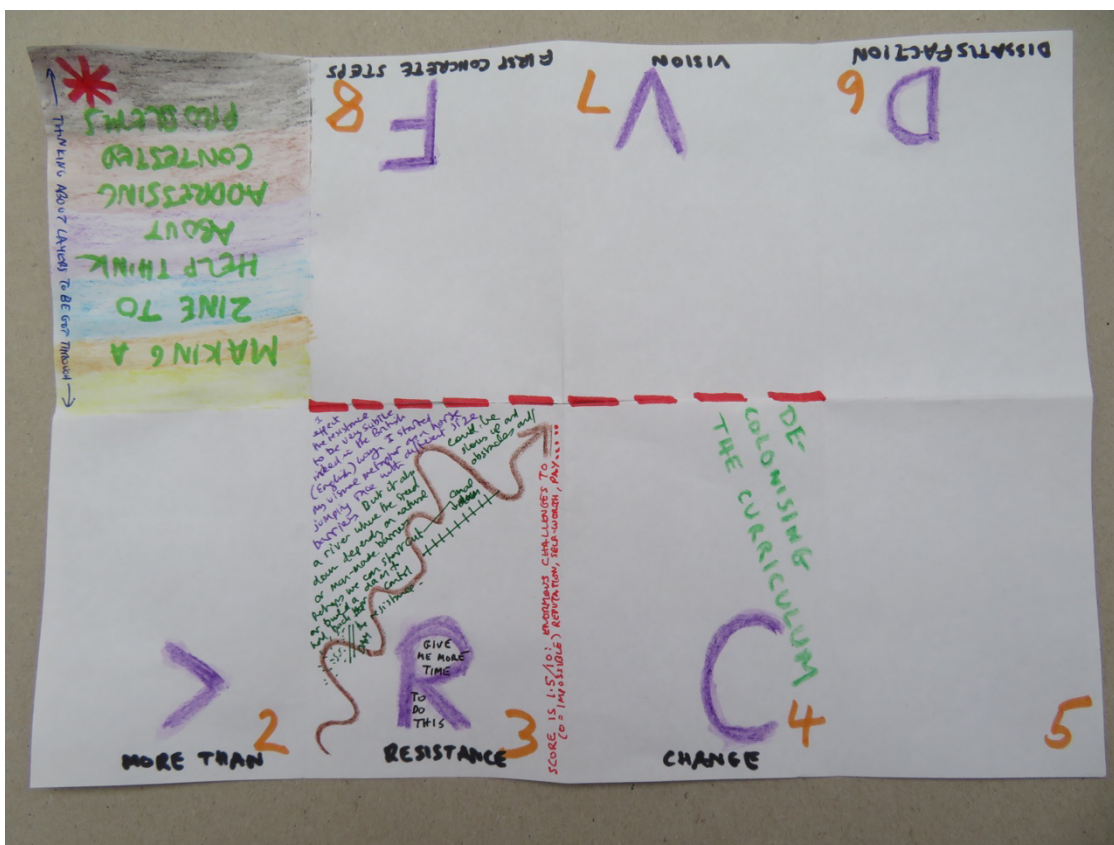


Figure 4: 8 pane zine with change formula; partly completed zine from workshop

An example of a partly-completed zine page is shown in Figure 4, as introduced in the pilot “contested problems” workshop on a pane by pane basis. Participants were asked to select one of the letters and focus for four minutes on visualising how the issue might be addressed in practical terms. Despite the constraints of workshop duration, participant knowledge, being fully online and needing to address profound issues, the feedback was very positive.

## **7. Implications**

If as Schumpeter argues, “new combinations” are so central to innovation, higher education needs to address at least three dimensions:

(a) The issue of “new combinations” explicitly.

There is a need not just for “obvious” or even “old” combinations, but also those which are genuinely new, and also (of necessity) risky. The often strongly rational mindset of higher education frequently finds it hard to address the “contradictions” which appear to be a core dimension of “new combinations”.

(b) Rethink the preoccupation with single disciplines

It is essential to appreciate the limitations imposed, but not widely acknowledged, as a result of an increasingly dominant focus not just on individual disciplines, but even on a potentially narrowing range of such disciplines. Though there remain important roles for both inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary working, the relatively neglected transdisciplinary approach needs to be elevated in the higher education consciousness and practice.

(c) Set up personal and institutional development programmes to provide skills and experience in forming and sustaining “new combinations”.

Hanappi and Hanappi-Egger (2004) argue that the “experience of the innovating unit” is particularly important in making wider jumps away from the local point. So, providing early and sustained experience in “new combinations” should be a high priority. This suggests that one of the key areas for urgent attention needs to be in doctoral and post-doctoral training programmes.

## **8. Conclusions**

Art-based methods do have considerable potential for developing insights and processes for dealing with ambiguity. We have addressed three different perspectives on hybridity as outlined above.

However, there needs to be a considerable and wider initiative to develop skills in working hybridly:

- Transdisciplinary
- Indisciplinary
- Technologically
- New processes e.g. group action

We are optimistic from these preliminary experiences that the folded-paper zine within appropriately designed processes may be one useful vehicle in the toolkits needed for addressing contested and difficult problems.

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