Using the Project Artistry framework to optimise executive education

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If business schools hope to continue delivering impactful executive education in a fast-changing and unpredictable world, they must embrace the world of design thinking and creative problem-solving embodied in the project artistry framework. The human centricity and creativity that these design-based techniques aim to unlock have been looked at with some scepticism by organisations and their leaders in the past. However, they are increasingly being viewed through a new lens and regarded as the key to unlocking business competitiveness, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

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Abstract

The concept of design thinking is rooted in the 1950s, where it first emerged out of Stanford University as an impactful process that enables participants to engage in creativity logically. Design thinking began to grow in popularity in the turbulent and technologically transformational 1980s. In isolation, design thinking cannot push the boundaries of imagination, but coupled with creative problem-solving methodologies, it can better navigate the range of complex unknowns underlining the nature of business in today's unpredictable world.

Introduction

Definitions of creativity all speak to generating new ideas, methods, and original thinking that transcend the usual (Collins, 2010) – drawing on the power of the human imagination to shake up old patterns and associations. There are other interpretations of creativity. In 2014, Jeffrey Tjendra, founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Canada-based Business Innovation by Design, described creativity as 'the ability to make sense of new logic', explaining that: **'Design thinking is created because big corporation [sic] lack the ability to be creative and on [sic] extreme cases, aren't able to create new projects and services that meet unmet needs of their customers.'**

Referring to an outdated education system that fosters 'dominant logic and disregard[s] creativity', Tjendra (2014) argued that the 'ambiguous, messy and unpredictable' nature of design-focused creative processes is often too overwhelming for businesses to comprehend and even control. However, it is both possible and preferable to integrate creative problem-solving and design thinking paradigms across the business operations spectrum, including technical departments, such as information technology (IT) or software development (Makhoalibe, 2011). The project artistry framework, specifically, offers a new take on design thinking, enabling businesses across the spectrum of industries to develop and support those who are leading future-fit organisations.

The project artistry framework draws from the body of work that spans design thinking, creative problem-solving, and systems thinking. It is a way of navigating projects that sit in the quadrant of the 'unknown unknowns', where organisations cannot rely solely on logic. A clear balance between logic and imagination is required, coupled with a rigorous process to extract fresh thinking to navigate a world of unknowns.

Personal reflection: a journey from IT to artistry

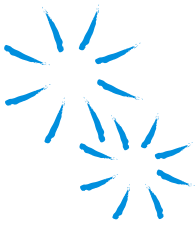
Coming from an IT background, with a degree in computer science and statistics, I came to the realisation that I too could tap into my innate creativity and be deliberate about applying creativity to work, projects and leadership. Being boxed into a software development mould for so long, I started playing with the project artistry framework to lead teams tasked with solving complex problems, empowering them to harness creativity and imagination in their thinking. I realised that bringing a diversity of views into the room at the beginning of technical projects held greater potential for innovation than blocking participants off in silos – all the better if these voices included the customers whose problems the team tried to understand and solve.

By 2011, I had found resonance in design thinking, creative problem-solving, systems thinking, and taking the time to think, resulting in the emergence of the project artistry framework. Being a relatively new area of study, it was a hard sell at first, but I leveraged my then-position as IT manager at the University of Cape Town to build a design thinking team that delivered IT solutions using the project artistry approach. Thereafter, we tackled all our projects in line with this methodology, its process, and its pillars, which created a foundation that fostered collaboration. Clutching our Post-it notes, we set about clustering themes and making meaning together, which proved highly successful.

Keen to document the effectiveness of this approach, I presented my first paper on the topic at the INTED conference in Spain in 2012, during which I began to categorise how creativity played itself out in projects located in a space of complete unknowing. I pursued my PhD in business management around this same concept. However, I soon realised that the body of knowledge at the time – in the mid-2000s – was not yet ready to be challenged on this level. For example, when presenting at a project management conference in the United States (US) in 2014, about 90% of the feedback echoed that 'design thinking was just a fad'. Only one individual believed in the work, recommending an open innovation approach.

Responding to calls to simplify the mindset, practices, and thinking styles of project artistry, I converted my PhD thesis into a book format. *The Alchemy of Design Thinking* (2019) was published in 2016, but attracted a less-than-inspired reception. Over time, fortunately, the project management body of knowledge started opening up to the idea of design thinking.

> *Today, amidst unparalleled global change and uncertainty, companies from all sectors and across all divisions are scrambling for human-centred priority skills, such as critical thinking, co-creation, and problem-solving, all of which are exemplified by the project artistry approach.*



The power of design thinking

Contrary to popular belief, design thinking is not a novel phenomenon. It emerged in the design field as a means of theorising how creatives work, in an attempt to apply these insights to training in that field. In the early 2000s, design thinking was adopted by businesses to help navigate so-called 'wicked problems' – those concerns comprising multiple and interconnected factors that make them hard to understand and solve (IDEO, 2021). Global design and innovation company IDEO is often associated with the application of design thinking. Its CEO, Tim Brown (2008), has written extensively on the subject, delivering insightful and entertaining presentations, referring to design thinking as an effective and fresh approach to instil innovation across industries.

Design thinking, as we know it today, is a step-by-step creative process designed to spark flexible and innovative thinking (Auernhammer and Roth, 2021). The concept of design thinking originated at Stanford University in the US in 1957.

Design thinking is grounded in 'psychological theories of creativity, visual thinking, and human values' (Auernhammer and Roth, 2021: 637). By 2005, design thinking had become an 'accepted term in the innovation management discourse as an approach to creativity and innovation based on design practices', that includes 'need-finding, brainstorming, and prototyping with multidisciplinary teams' (Auernhammer and Roth, 2021: 624).

Recognising the importance of harnessing innate human creativity to solve complex and multifaceted problems in business is crucial. Unfortunately, because some perceive the process as too abstract, it is difficult to develop the concept and determine its impact on leaders and businesses. Nevertheless, the demand for interventions to develop creativity in business and leadership has ballooned in recent years, driven by the business imperative to harness internal innovation to fuel growth. The author has observed and explored this area with rigour across various industries and contexts in recent years. To quote Brown (2009: 7):

> *As the center of economic activity in the developing world shifts inexorably from industrial manufacturing to knowledge creation and service delivery, innovation has become nothing less than a survival strategy. It is, moreover, no longer limited to the introduction of new physical products but includes new sorts of processes, services, interactions, entertainment forms, and ways of communicating and collaborating.* (Brown, 2009: 7)

As a creative method to nurture innovation (Magistretti et al., 2022), the acceptance of design thinking has grown in the world of business. Yet, less than 30% of company board members polled by Harvard Business School in 2018, ranked innovation among the top three challenges for their organisations to achieve strategic objectives (Cheng and Groysberg, 2018). Despite this widely held view that 'Laying the foundation for innovation requires a forward-looking mindset throughout the firm and the board' (Cheng and Groysberg, 2018), many companies are still not getting it right when encouraging creativity and innovation within their organisations.

Possible reasons (MIT Enterprise Forum CEE, n.d.) why companies flounder when having to harness the power of innovation to ensure sustainability and future fit include poor innovation culture and an impatient leadership team/board that demands fast returns amid reluctance to shake things up within the company. Equally challenging are a dearth of issues concerning ownership of the innovation process and support of the end-to-end process. While design thinking is an ideal alternative to address these challenges and is increasingly popular and accepted for extracting value, admittedly no model is perfect. In a world increasingly buffeted by change and uncertainty, a flaw in the current design is addressed by project artistry.

Solving rampant uncertainty

Several acronyms are used to describe environments of uncertainty and anxiety that organisations operate in and embrace the fundamental unpredictability of the world today. VUCA – which stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – is probably the most well-known, while others include RUPT, used in the US (as a quick reference to a rapid, unpredictable, paradoxical, and tangled situation), TUNA (turbulent, uncertain, novel, and ambiguous), or BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible) (Glaeser, 2023).

While all industries and organisations are impacted by an inherent complexity in some way, 'project management as a field has to overcome significant barriers to change and develop the capacity for more subjective, interactive, and interpretive innovations that appear to be more effective in these settings' (Makhoalibe, 2017: vii). Having interrogated the impact of applying design principles on project management teams' efforts to achieve project objectives, adopting a fresh design approach certainly added a new dimension to their endeavours. It facilitated an understanding of changing conditions, enabling a clearer vision that enlightened and transformed those who were engaged in the projects, while cultivating creative confidence and fostering collaboration (Makhoalibe, 2017; Makhoalibe and Sewchurran, 2012).

In the past, a business or leadership team could muddle through solutions and innovations using available insights (Justo, 2019), partly because some problems sat in the quadrant indicated in Figure 1, as the preserve of the 'unknown unknowns'. Yet, increasingly, organisations around the world now operate in this realm that requires more than just design thinking to solve related challenges.

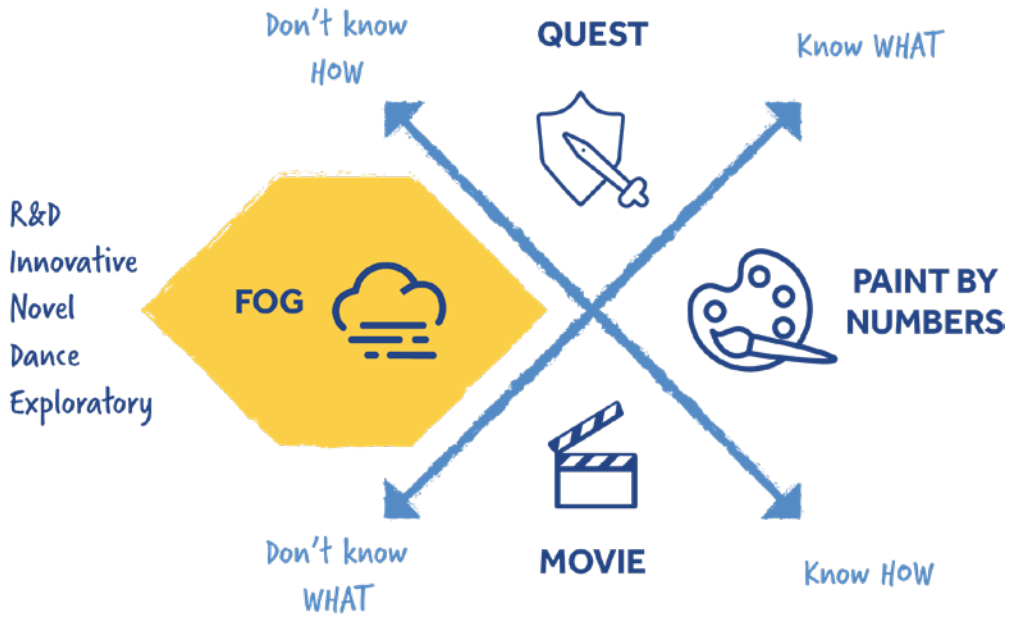


Figure 1: The matrix of complex decision-making
Source: Adapted from Aucoin (2007); Obeng (1994); Turner and Cochrane (1993)

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (CNN, 2016) explained:

> There are known knowns: there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we do not know we don't know.

Project artistry as part of the designer's toolkit

Project artistry presents a way to navigate projects that sit in the realm of the 'unknown unknowns' ('don't know what' and 'don't know how' in Figure 1) where a clear balance between logic and creativity is needed.

It is no longer possible to rely on logic or knowledge alone to navigate through a challenge. Rather, imagination must be harnessed alongside a rigorous process to extract the fresh thinking required to conquer a world of unknowns.

Design thinking is an impactful process that enables participants to apply creativity logically, although it cannot push the boundaries of imagination when used on its own. Conjured with the creative problem-solving methodologies of the personal and professional transformation Creative Education Foundation (Isaksen and Treffinger, 2004), frameworks that fit in the quadrant of the 'unknown unknowns' can now be created to facilitate the design of exploration projects.

While design thinking presents the principles and the methodology, creative problem-solving is particularly strong when delving into those principles to guide the methodology. The combination of these two approaches – which were born at almost the same time in the 1950s – finds a powerful expression as part of a project artistry intervention, particularly when strengthened with some aspects of systems thinking (Pourdehnad et al., 2011) and when adding time to think. This combination creates a way of introducing artistry – or skill – into the world of project management.

Systems thinking meets design thinking

Systems thinking is an approach that considers all variables that make up an organisation and how they interact. This enables managers and designers to envisage how a change to one component might have ripple effects down the line.

Pourdehnad et al. (2011) explored the interplay between design thinking and systems thinking, although no formal connection exists between these two separate concepts. The authors believed these two schools of thought have the potential to work together effectively to better understand the interrelated parts of a complex and multifaceted system and then to design solutions based on all the available data and interrelationships (Pourdehnad et al., 2011).

Project artistry framework

The project artistry framework encompasses four pertinent steps and four pillars, which are both discussed in the sections that follow.

Four pertinent steps

- The first step of the project artistry framework entails ***clarifying*** the problem at hand through ***contextualisation*** by digging into the issue or problem at hand. The empathy and listening skills favoured by a design thinking approach are characterised by language, such as 'It would be great if...' (IWBGI), to frame questions and responses.
- Participants then move to ***ideation,*** sharing unpolished ideas during a mind-mapping exercise.
- The subsequent ***prototyping i***nvolves trimming down the ideas on the table and fleshing them all out into an actionable concept. Richness in creative problem-solving is accomplished by carefully clarifying the problem or opportunity to be explored.
- The final step is ***conceptualisation***, during which rough edges are smoothed off ideas to produce something that can be tested and further refined in line with the developmental phase of creative problem-solving.

Project artistry is meant to add additional depth and learning in the realm of transformation and change, leading participants through the stages of the design process. The journey should be personally resonant and a transformational learning experience that is exited with a 'light-bulb moment'.

Four design pillars

Four supportive design pillars (as illustrated in Figure 2) form the foundational blocks that underpin the project artistry process, namely ***diverging and converging, creative language, applied imagination,*** and ***reflection***. In turn, these blocks are supported by ingraining empathy into the intervention, actively empowering people, and creating a safe space without an imbalance of power, where people feel free to engage and express themselves.

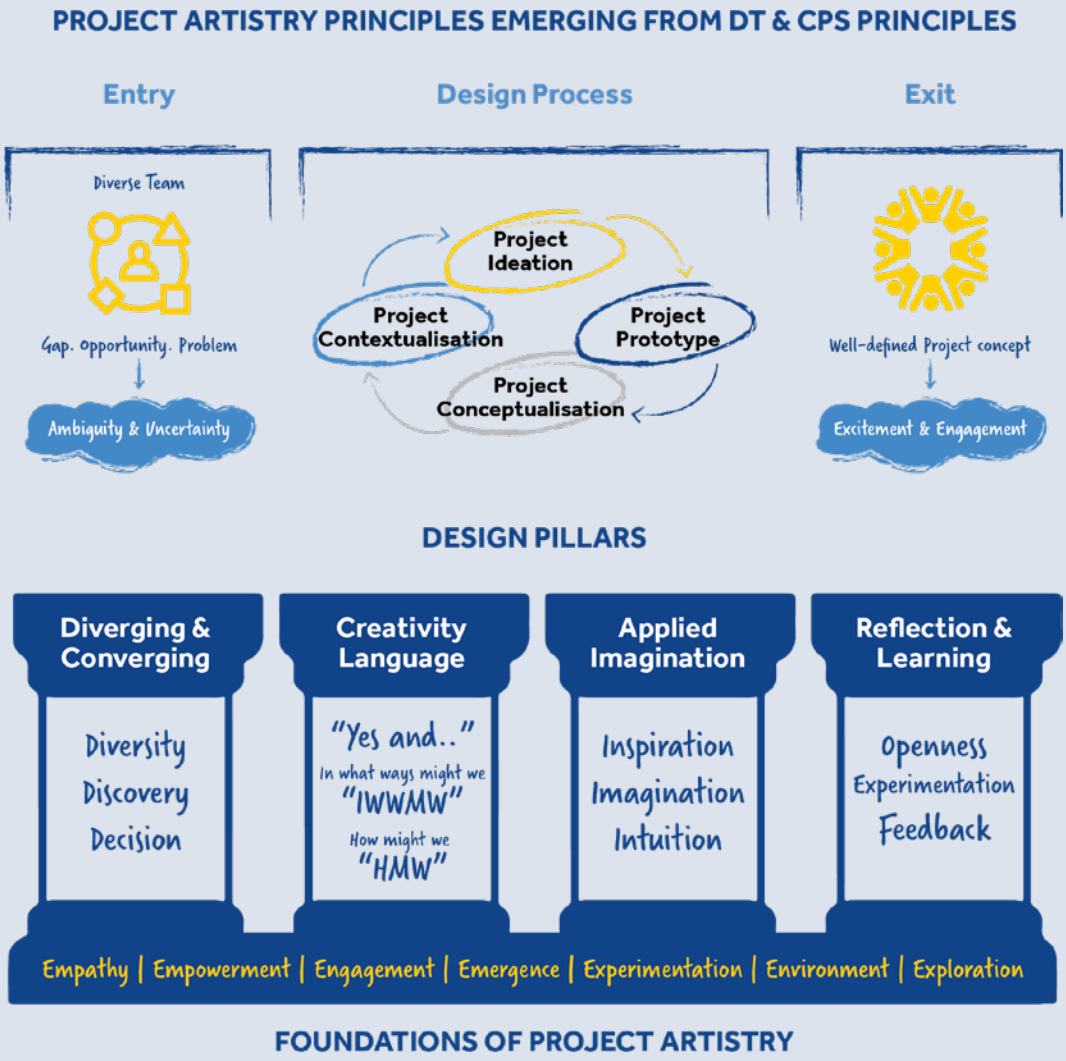


Figure 2: Project artistry: merging design thinking and creative problem-solving
Source: Adapted from Makhoalibe (2017)

Each pillar makes a unique contribution to the project artistry framework:

- **Pillar 1: Diverging and converging –** entails 'brainstorming', originating from the 1950s (Guilford, 1957), that comprises a two-step process of diverging and converging (Byron, 2012). First, divergent thinking delves into all possibilities, then convergent thinking is a process during which a list of ideas is moulded into a tangible answer that can be put into action. These two thinking processes should be communicated clearly and applied correctly to achieve innovative outcomes.

- **Pillar 2: Creative language –** refers to a process where language is intentionally converted to supportive and inspiring words to encourage creativity. As language is a very powerful tool in terms of unlocking a group's brain power, organisations are cautioned to refrain from using language that may kill the creative spirit, and rather replace it with so-called leap stimulators that will enable creativity (Thompson, 2016).

- **Pillar 3: Applied imagination –** concerns the deliberate application of imagination. Rather than playing it safe, the intention is to help people use all the knowledge they have acquired and then push beyond those limits. This may take participants into a personally uncomfortable space, requiring them to listen and embrace what others are saying, no matter how challenging that might be. A psychologically safe environment is critical for the imagination to thrive. Without this pillar, innovation is impossible.
- **Pillar 4: Reflection –** this is a clear recognition that learning cannot be achieved by simply talking at people. Rather, it is achieved through experimentation and is reinforced by taking sufficient time and intent to contemplate an experience and its impact and then being intentional about how to create a shift (Makhoalibe, 2017).

In dealing with the world of 'unknown unknowns' curiosity, it is vital to be able to experiment and explore. The area of uncertainty where project artistry interventions are located is not primed to exploit existing ideas or thinking. They operate as explorations. They are the stuff of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* and can only be unlocked with a fresh mindset and an openness to discovering new insights.

The gradual evolution

When project artistry was initially envisaged in 2011, it was a hard sell. This was not only because of the scepticism around design thinking from the world of business, but also because the word 'artistry' proved a distraction for corporates for whom the notion of creativity evoked concerns of wayward thinking, irrationality, and implausibility. Over the past few years, there has been a notable softening of this stance.

Project artistry in executive education

Progressing across disciplines and industries

Having won over many big corporations and multinationals, such as General Electric, Proctor & Gamble, and Sony (Matthews and Wrigley, 2017), as well as leading South African businesses like Standard Bank, First National Bank, and Liberty Life, design thinking principles are increasingly used to build innovative corporate cultures and are finding their way into strategic business thinking centred around problem-solving (Reynolds, 2016). Although project artistry has its roots in project management, it is now applied across industries and professions. So much so, that the author's focus now includes an executive education perspective to enable a wider footprint for sharing a design process and transformational intervention that is valued across the corporate world. Matthews and Wrigley (2017: 51) presented a preliminary mapping of how design thinking was being incorporated into business education programmes in various global institutions, including Stanford University and the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management:

> *This dynamic field appears to be in constant change as institutions develop internal capabilities bringing schools of design and business together or developing alliances within or across universities to experiment with programmes. Furthermore, many of the existing courses and programmes are adapting and changing to respond to increased demand from the industry.*

In addition, IDEO (2013) now offers a design thinking toolkit to support educators in their quest to jointly create equitable change in schools through a design-driven process that is informed by the community and conscious of achieving equity and inclusion. The tool has, for example, been successfully applied by The Teachers Guild non-profit in the US, enabling teachers to innovate and allowing students the freedom to solve problems (The Teachers Guild x School Retool, n.d.).

Pre-VUCA versus VUCA conditions

In a less complicated, pre-VUCA world, business schools knew how to conduct leadership interventions, which modules were required for impact, and how to deliver them. It was not necessary to factor in listening and empathy; everything evolved around general management expertise, financial accounting, and international business. However, today, *in a world highly characterised by unknowns, specific leadership traits are coveted by big business*, namely (Gartner, 2022):

- **T**olerance for ambiguity;
- **E**mpathy;
- **A**uthenticity;
- **C**onfident leadership; and
- **H**arnessing adaptability.

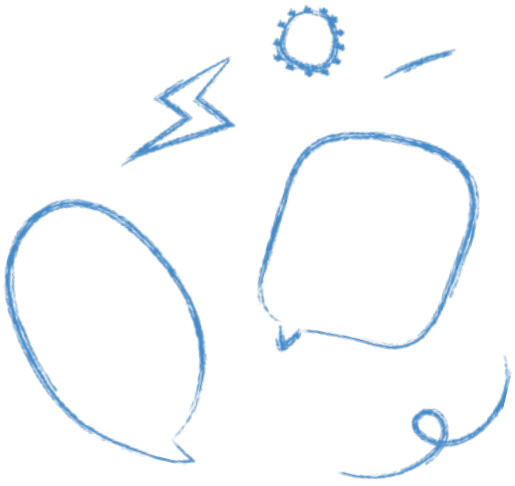
Creativity creeped into the top skills required. Moreover, the crucial skills required to thrive, are creativity and innovation, which have been positioned as part of the top five 'in-demand' skills since 2013, per the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020). The WEF (2023) Future of jobs reports creative and analytical thinking as the top skills important for workers. The same report further highlights creative thinking as the top skill that is increasing in importance (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Skills that are increasing in importance
Source: Adapted from World Economic Forum (2023: 39)

Embedding these human-centric and innovation-friendly skills requires a different touch, with the input of experienced executive education facilitators to guide a diverse audience through the process of navigating real-world problems. The project conceptualisation phase of the project artistry framework also needs to be advanced, commencing interventions with *upfront client consultations* and a *co-creation of processes* to extract real value from the process.

In essence, building bespoke executive education offerings should mirror the very process that participants will follow, starting with contextualising the issue, ideating the best possible intervention, prototyping it, and conceptualising the end product.

Executive education should no longer be a tick-box exercise where pre-existing modules are combined. Instead, a co-created personal learning and development process should be created in response to the challenges of the business, involving the right people, to achieve positive outcomes, as the intervention is tweaked for even greater impact.



The Sea of Change

The world of project artistry refers to a so-called sea of change that entails an intersection of three Cs, namely *creativity, courage*, and *curiosity,* that are critical for personal transformation and to steer individuals towards what the author refers to as a personal sea of change (see Figure 4).

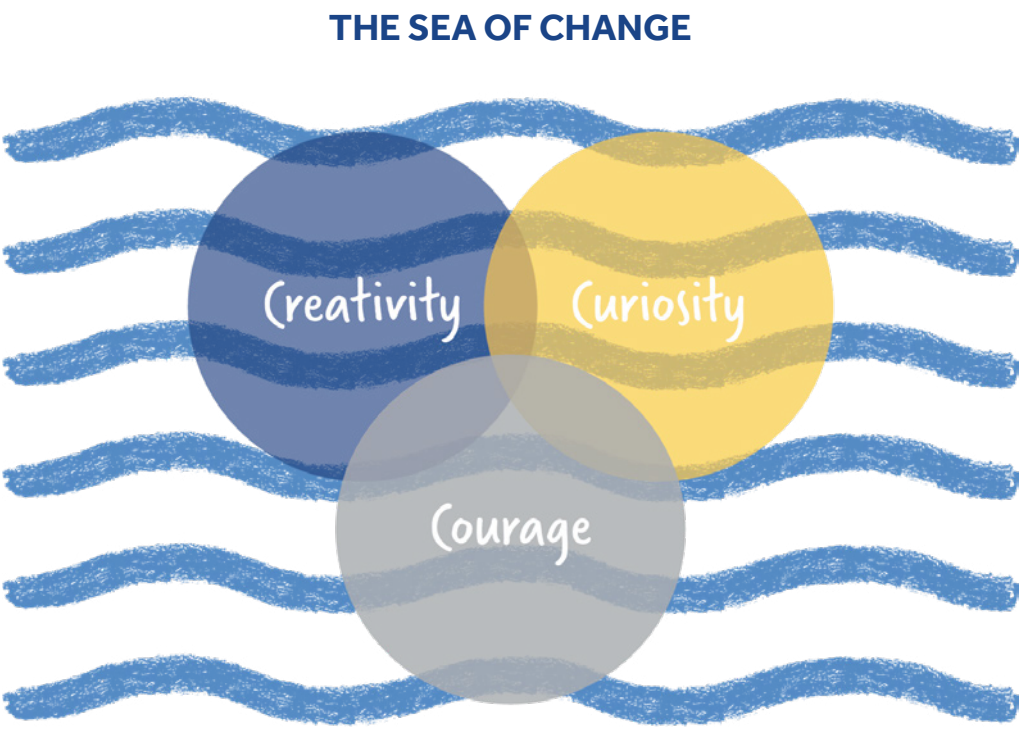


Figure 4: The Sea of Change
Source: Author's Own

To better understand the intersection of the three Cs, it is important to understand the unique nature and respective roles of each of the Cs in achieving personal transformation.

Creativity
The notion of creativity can be confusing. Being closely associated with creative fields, business school scholars often find themselves at a disadvantage when encountering this subject matter. Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) provided some clarity when unveiling their 'four C model of creativity' – a framework that highlights creativity as being part of a continuum. The authors explained that *big-C creativity* encompasses significant changes or contributions in a domain or area of work, while *pro-C creativity* is the sort of creative contribution we might see from individuals who are recognised professionals or experts in their field. No less important, but perhaps not as celebrated are efforts of *little-C creativity*, the sort of day-to-day creative actions that people who are not experts produce. *Mini-C creativity* refers to the personal interpretations and creative thinking we all apply to events, learning, and experiences as we process input through which we begin to construct a personal understanding.

The Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) definition of big-C creativity aligns with Dr Ruth Noller's formula of creativity (see Figure 5). Noller was a mathematician who worked with Dr Sidney J. Parnes and Alex Osborn, who presented the concept of brainstorming as a creative problem-solving method.

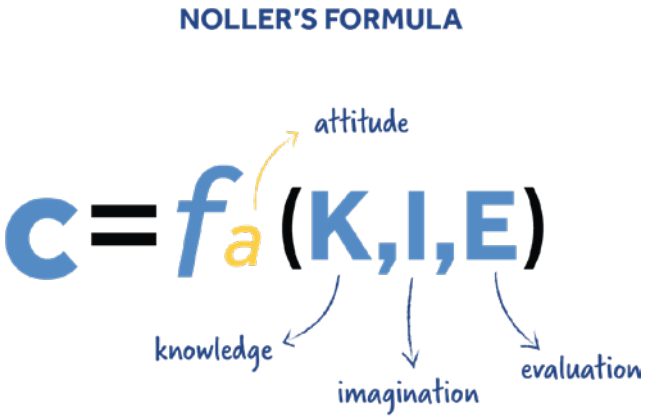


Figure 5: Noller's formula for creativity
Source: Adapted from Creativity Wake-up (2021)

Noller believed that creativity (C) was the function of three things: knowledge (K), imagination (I), and evaluation (E), and that all of these were amplified by attitude – the all-important (a) in the equation (Isaksen and Treffinger, 2004).

Courage
Sternberg (2022) stated that, despite courage possibly being our most important gift, we are neither born with it nor do we learn to be courageous during our years of formal education. For Sternberg, courage is an active choice that one makes deliberately and, as such, one has to be willing to pay the price that comes with that choice by acting on both words and intentions (Sternberg, 2022).

Curiosity
During a 2018 TED Talk, researchers Spencer Harrison and Jon Cohen indicated that curiosity is a personal 'superpower', referring to children's overload of daily questions, often prefaced with a 'why?' Although curiosity, wonder, and inquisitiveness can diminish as we progress through life, it is possible to explore and enquire throughout our lives (Harrison and Cohen, 2018).

Together, creativity, courage, and curiosity are the essential ingredients that can ignite a spark within us to unlock access to a sea of possibilities, provided we have the courage to act. Each action taken on the journey builds on the next, creating small wins that help to build the confidence we need to pre-empt change.

Evidence of success

The sea of change in project artistry was evident when Henley Business School Africa worked with the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) business school in Johannesburg to deliver the award-winning #unTAP strategic leadership programme for Standard Bank's Leadership Centre of Excellence in 2017.

Example: #unTAP
A fast-paced, 10-day pan-African programme, #unTAP won the EFMD accreditation body's 2020 Excellence in Practice Gold Award for Executive Education. The brief from Standard Bank Group's head of Leadership Effectiveness, Shayne Weideman, was to 'co-create and make magic happen', which is what the bank achieved with its two business school partners (Bouwer, 2020). Following a co-creation process with the client, Henley Business School Africa and GIBS created a programme that introduced delegates to 'design thinking principles in a practical and unique way', incorporating unique immersions, focusing on passion projects, adding peer-to-peer and delegate-to-natural-support team linkages, and injecting storytelling and visual thinking into the process (Standard Bank et al, 2020).

The #unTAP design team also decided to bring a creative into the room. For the client, whose goal was to ensure notable disruption, this was quite a departure from the usual programme design, as it wove in a series of disruptive experiences using unusual facilitators. This approach has since been replicated in other programmes, be it by including an edgy comedian or unique industry expert among the facilitators, or by having participants take part in a drumming circle. Even introducing the work of an unusual artist, whose approach could be harnessed during the prototyping phase, shakes up the programme design.

The impact of the #unTAP programme on the 328 high-potential leaders who participated was measured carefully by Standard Bank, concluding that 99% applied what they had learnt at work; 98% applied learnings in their personal lives; and 69% applied the insights in their communities (Standard Bank et al, 2020). One programme participant observed:

> *The training was nothing compared to what I first expected. The training was over the top, it was a different level of learning and not just about the work environment but focused on 'self'. It was the best training by far.*
> *(Standard Bank et al, 2020:22)*

Acceleration
Since the success of #unTAP, Henley Business School Africa and Standard Bank have collaborated on another award-winning programme, called Acceleration. The customised, one-year executive education programme was designed to fulfil the bank's need for a 'strong African pipeline of succession and talented leaders with the skills and capabilities to effectively lead into the future' (EFMD Global, 2022). Acceleration was awarded silver in the talent development category at the 2022 EFMD Excellence in Practice Awards (JeanR, 2022).

South African government initiatives
South African government bodies, such as the Industrial Development Corporation, have also shown interest in the project artistry approach. Leaders attended a session in September 2022 to expand their thinking around building a leadership legacy through design thinking by putting their artistic expression to work.

Banking sector
Programmes were successfully run for the Banking Sector Education and Training Authority to conceptualise disruptive action learning projects in order to help shift organisational cultures, build business acumen for creatives, or create and deliver enterprise and supplier development programmes.

Encouraging feedback
Feedback following these interventions included:

- 'The programme was delivered in a way that I never imagined. It made me feel like a child again where I feel anything is possible through the power of imagination.'
- 'It made me feel vulnerable, scared, uncomfortable ... which is great because those feelings make me want to act and change.'
- 'I thought innovation was difficult.... It is about being open to any idea.... It was about exploring the world.... What a lesson!'
- 'My bubble was certainly popped. The reality of the new world and new ways of working for the future was laid bare. Having fun while we learn and engage.'
- 'Creativity is a way of life. Idea generation is a simple and easy task.'

Opportunity knocks for business schools

While the successful application of project artistry across a range of corporate and executive education programmes highlighted the value of applying a creativity and design thinking approach to leadership development, a pertinent question remains: *'How are business schools and educational institutions around the world incorporating this approach into their organisations, curriculum design, and pedagogy?'*

According to Heiman and Burnett (2007: 11), 'For design thinking to permeate, an organisation requires an environment different from the traditional work or educational environment.' Subsequently, institutions tasked with developing current and future leaders should also embrace thinking that equips leaders with a 'more exploratory skill set' that encompasses reasoning, creativity, openness, and willingness to experiment and innovate. The mix of relevant skills and abilities can be developed using a method that draws on design thinking and other decision-making and problem-solving approaches (Glen et al., 2014).

Conclusion

In 2014, Glen et al. (2014) contributed a review to the debate around incorporating design thinking into business school education. The authors stated:

> *While business school education equip[s] the students with the functional business knowledge using a pedagogy of lectures and case studies, it is the opportunities provided in practical implementation in the real world challenges where it leaves the students wanting*
>
> *(Glen et al., 2014: 3)*

They advocated for making project-based learning part and parcel of the business school experience. They even suggested incorporating this learning across the coveted Master of Business Administration curriculum into subjects like strategic management, which has 'scope for inclusion of adaptive learning' and entrepreneurship, where design thinking applications can be used for 'business modelling and creating prototypes to tap the advantage of feedback to avoid mistakes in actual ventures' (Glen et al., 2014: 4).

Heiman and Burnett (2007: 11) explained:

> *Within this organizational context, high performance design and innovation outcomes occur when a multidisciplinary team engages in design thinking process by explicitly working with five dimensions of design thinking action: user centered research, prototyping, iteration, critique, and form-giving.*

The tenets of design thinking can provide an important competitive advantage when it comes to business (Damian, 2012). However, it should be remembered that the foundations of both design thinking and creative problem-solving are well-established bodies of knowledge, with decades of research across various fields. The world in which business executives operate today is a combination of VUCA, BANI, RUPT, and TUNA influences (Glaeser, 2023), wrapped up in a wealth of 'unknown unknowns'. It simply cannot be business as usual. By combining the undeniable impact of design thinking with creative problem-solving and systems thinking – which underlines the project artistry ethos – the long-term impact of business educational interventions can be enhanced; supporting sustainable leadership skill sets that companies need to remain relevant.

As such, the challenge to business schools and institutions of executive education is to move swiftly with the times to incorporate frameworks like project artistry that have been shown to work effectively in a diversity of sectors, from IT and banking to government and across the industry. Amid the complex world of business, creativity is highly sought after. If business schools are to play a meaningful role in unlocking this human potential, they too need to challenge themselves to change, innovate, and create. If not, can they hope to remain relevant?

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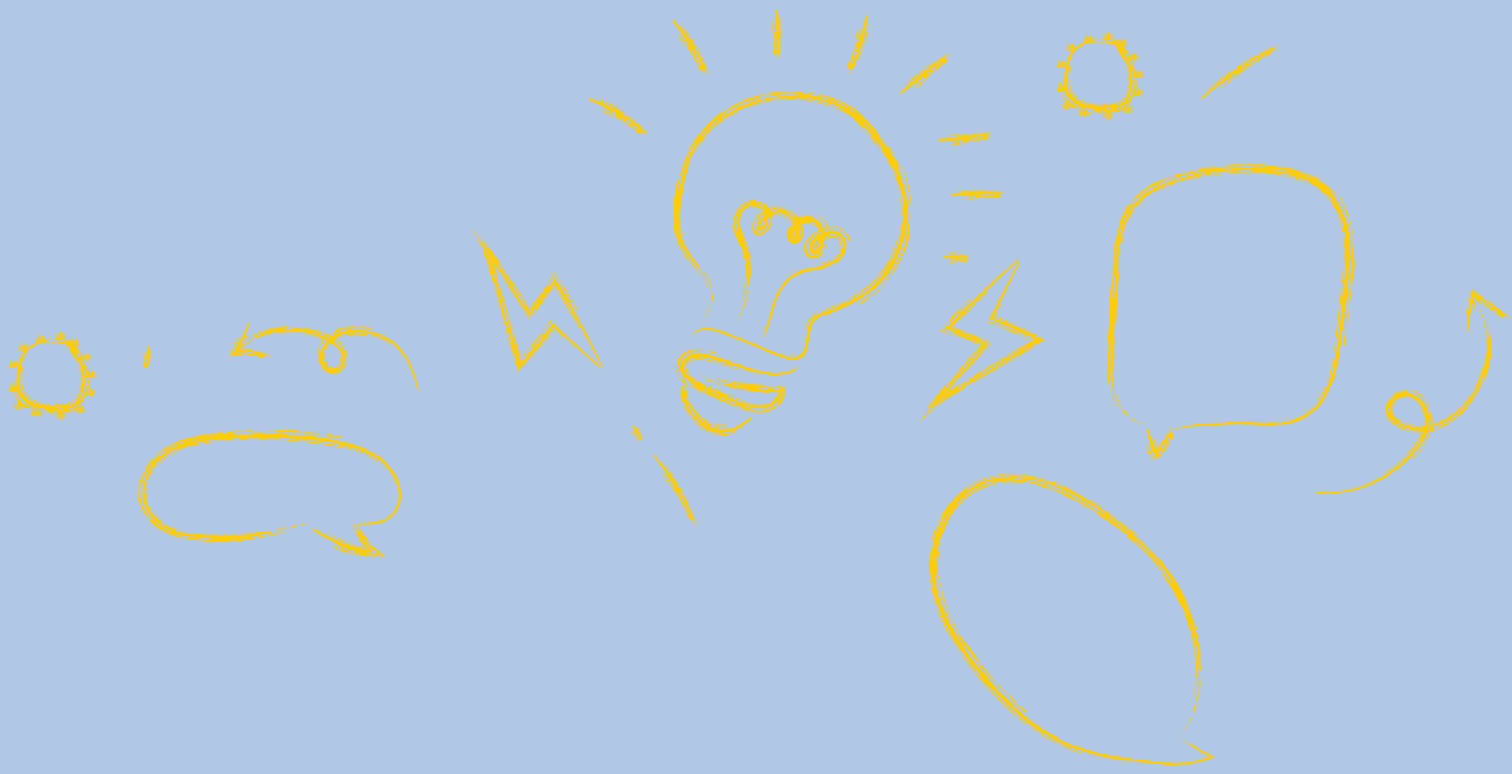

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