

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Towards a Constructivist Grounded Theory for Leadership Programme Design: The Case of the MA in Creative Leadership

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Abstract:** A Grounded Theory of Leadership Programme Design is proposed, through the story of the MA in Creative Leadership, which interweaved scholarship of integration and application (Boyer, 1990) and offered a unique proposition for exploring leadership. It captures how a diverse team of academics and practitioners, synthesised their multiple perspectives to shape the programme curriculum.

Research data comprised of semi-structured interviews, emails and documentary evidence. The findings are a proposition for collaborative and developmental programme design. Four temporal phases are identified: Initial Seeding, Conceptual Design, Co-creating the Curriculum and Authoring & Presenting. Additionally, key core characteristics that aided the design process are revealed, while tensions around language and the sequencing of learning outcomes are offered for further exploration.

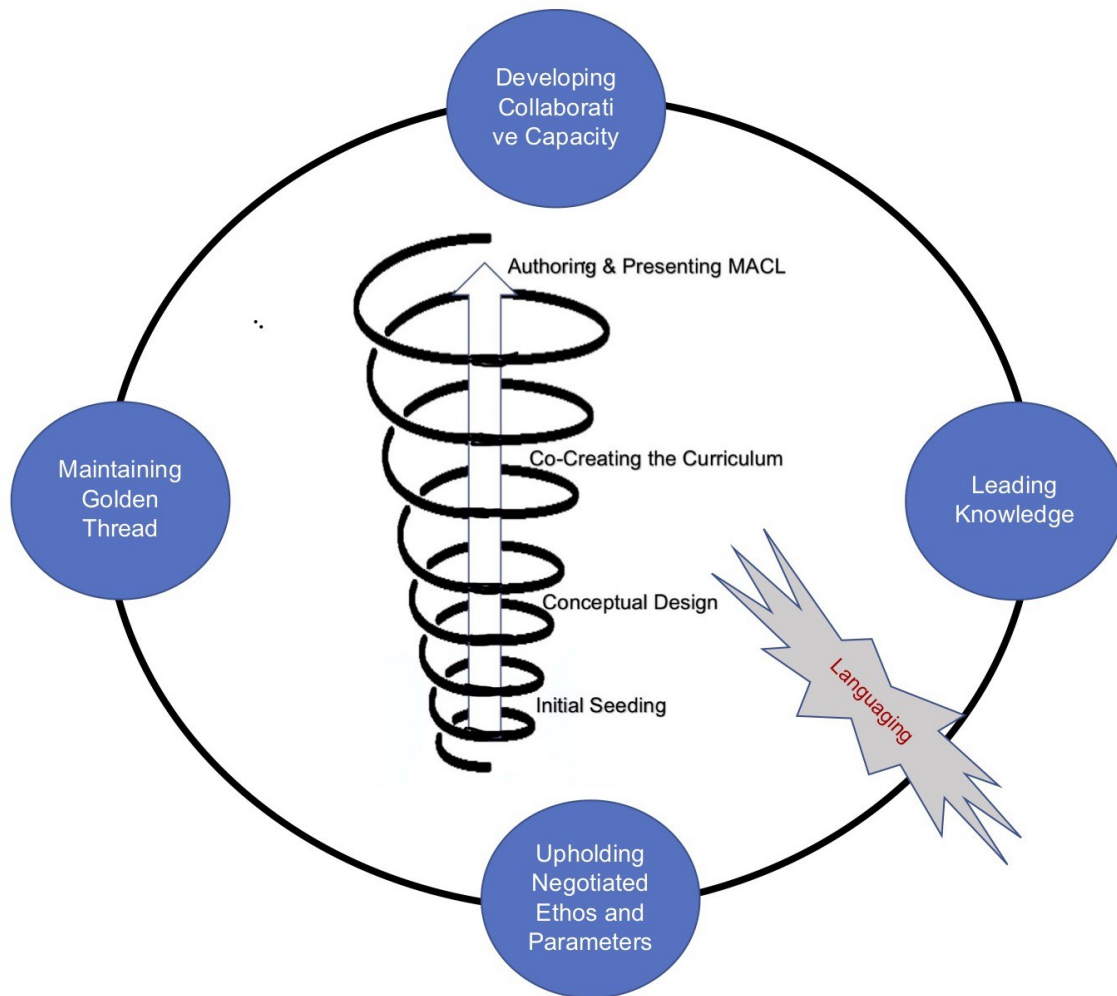
**Paper:** This paper tells the story of the co-creative development process of the MA in Creative Leadership (MACL), a post-experiential programme, that offered a unique proposition for exploring leadership and gave the design promise of rigorous and relevant learning. Its development process was informed by crossdisciplinarity and the practitioner perspective, interweaving Boyer's (1990) scholarship of integration and engagement. It was developed by a diverse and agile team comprised of academics from different disciplines and external practitioners. The core curriculum was mainly developed through enabling emergence via two co-creative workshops. A neutral 'space' was created, where participants would not feel bound by their discipline-specific norms, yet, still feel able to contribute their expertise in exploring leadership. They shared each other's language and sought to synthesize across perspectives.

Seeking to establish relevance, the development team, could not resonate with mainstream leadership theory (Collinson et al., 2017). Rather than thinking what content to impart, the focus was on offering a cross-disciplinary perspective that was contextually relevant to programme participants. The team therefore opted to develop curriculum as 'process' rather than 'product' (O'Neill et al., 2014), where participants are afforded with knowledge that guides them into action.

MACL's development process was evolving to be unique. I searched for established framework that reflected it and realised there was minimal guidance on developing Leadership programmes (Montuori, 2010). In fact, there was a wider gap on the process of programme design in general, despite the abundance of curricula theories (Johns-Boast, 2016).

The paper proposes a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) of Leadership Programme Design. Using Charmaz's (2006) CGT, I sought to construct meaning into its design process by delving into rich data (Jentoft and Olsen, 2017). I used authentic emails exchanged during the development period and relevant documentary evidence such as minutes and development plans. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with five team members accounting their social reality into the process.

I engaged in this research with role duality; the researcher who was also an agent of the researched (Saunders et al., 2017). As a researcher, I interpreted data elements, through a social constructivist lens by looking for complexity of viewpoints (Creswell, 2015) and constructing shared meanings through the data. As a participant in the process researched, I offered insights into the development process. This enabled me to weave disparate data elements into a continuous narrative leading to the grounded theory construction. Reflexivity, was key in appreciating the personal, intersubjective and the social processes impacting the research project (Marshall and Rossman, 2016).



(Figure 1: Grounded Theory for MACL Design)

The emergent Grounded Theory (figure 1) reconstructs MACL’s design into four temporal phases (Davieson and O’Callaghan, 2011). It starts with “Initial Seeding”, where a preliminary team collaboratively defined MACL’s broad purpose into an ethos statement and set initial parameters. Transitioning to “Conceptual Design”, a more diverse team sought to expand the parameters into design and key programme parameters. The third phase was labelled “Co-creating the Curriculum” and involved two facilitated workshops. The first workshop saw the co-creation of thematic modules, as they were fitting in five residential periods broadly defined during the “Conceptual Design” phase. The second workshop profile-matched the participant to the learning that came out of the programme (Trahar, 2011) by constructing a narrative of the learning journey of the participant. The final stage, “Authoring & Presenting” involved working in smaller teams to develop specific modules and present MACL through the programme handbook, which was then reviewed and validated.

Four characteristics were identified as key to their entire process. Integration was maintained by a perceived 'golden thread' (Bent and Stockdale, 2009). Moreover, the ethos and parameters were revised and upheld throughout, so that they aligned to the end product. All these required a team with enhanced collaborative capacity. Finally, the programme's epistemological purpose was to enable participants to exhibit 'leadership in knowledge' as opposed to being imparted leadership knowledge. It was intended that participants would construct their own meaning into leadership and seek relevance to it (Carroll et al., 2016).

There is a gap in the literature in terms of guidance on educational programme design. Yet, there are many studies discussing content of leadership curricula (Quinlan and Gangogtokh, 2018). Likewise, curriculum theory has plenty to say on what a good curriculum looks like, such that it should be constructively aligned (Biggs, 2014) but with little guidance on the design aspect (Johns-Boast, 2016). For instance, this process revealed two key tensions that warrant further exploration.

Language barriers kept prevailing across all phases and in different contexts. Such challenges, prevail when developing cross-disciplinary, integrated curricula (Baxter, 2015; Choi and Pak, 2006). Another tension identified was the persistent resistance of the team, to develop concrete learning outcomes (LOS), early on in the process. It was generally felt that LOs stifled creativity and the team only explicitly engaged with their development during the authoring phase. However, there was commitment and engagement with developing a Programme Ethos, which was upheld throughout. In fact, ethos and parameters were determined first, while ideas about pedagogy, assessment and structures were evolving iteratively and concurrently. Developing concrete LOs was particularly resisted during the co-creative phase.

It has been argued that LOs can stifle creativity and impede on learning when presented as threshold statements (Johns-Boast, 2016). Their introduction, has also been perceived to have commodified knowledge (Barradell et al., 2018). On the other hand, LOs place students at the learning core (Maher, 2004), they make accreditation of learning possible and they can potentially express achievement in a way that can demonstrates employability enhancement (Khan et al., 2016).

This paper supports the view that the end product of the process should be an aligned curriculum, however, the focus should be on creating a developmental process where curriculum is primarily seen as process, praxis and context rather than as product. (Hunkins and Ornstein, 2016; Cornbleth, 1990; Freire, 1970).

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