

[toward]

radical

creativity

[foreword] 3

toward radical creativity: emerging shared questions 3

data 3

[conceptualizations of radical creativity] 4

emerging meanings 4

painting a landscape 5

disciplinary connections 6

[radical creativity in research] 8

research elements 8

research conversations 9

[radical creativity in education] 10

toward radical creativity in learning 10

teaching conversations 11

[enablers of radical creativity] 12

10 common enablers 12

enablers conversations 13

[commentary] 14

[closing words] 15

[contact] 16

[toward radical creativity: emerging shared questions]

Organizations and communities across the globe are reaching for novel solutions and innovation for human and planetary flourishing. Indeed, to promote such development, Aalto University has established three cross-cutting strategy elements: sustainable solutions, entrepreneurial mindset, and radical creativity. Yet, when overhearing conversations that are sparked by the notion of “radical creativity”, the wide range of viewpoints in the community is noteworthy. Radical creativity appears to be a core concept in the university’s strategy that seemingly everyone interprets differently. As innovation, design, and change scholars, we were intrigued.

What you have in front of you is a conversation starter capturing how faculty members across all six schools of Aalto University conceptualize and connect radical creativity to their work. This user research illustrates some of the common denominators and underlying dimensions of radical creativity, with the different report sections exploring how radical creativity manifests in different fields and in the research, education, and impact we pursue across our community.

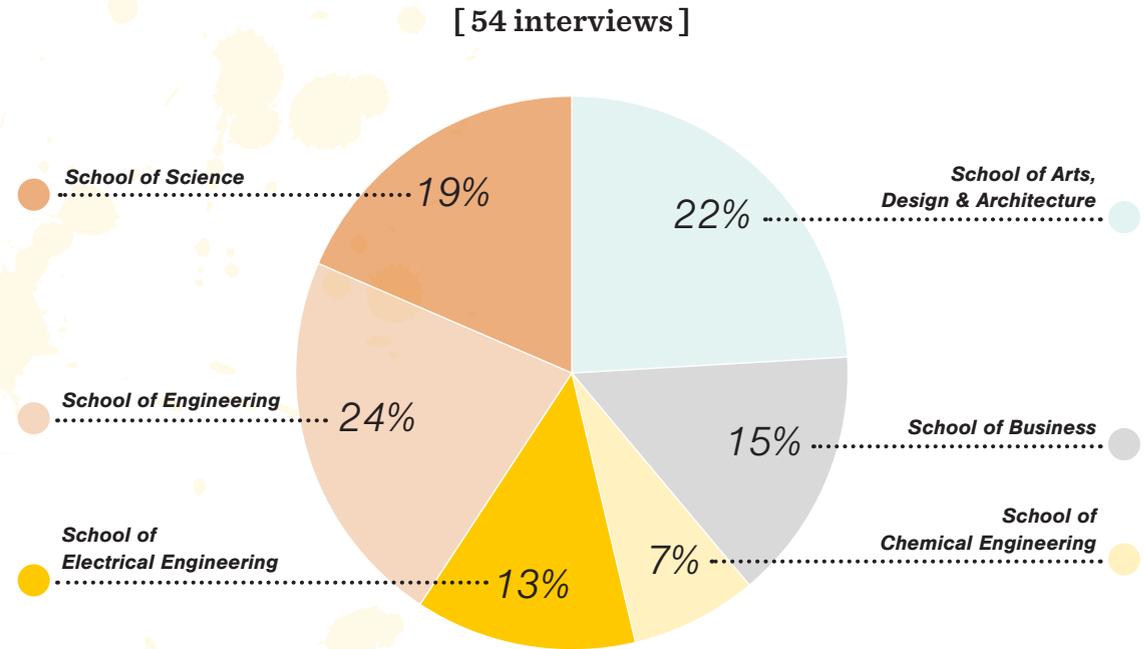
This work has been enabled by CREATNet, a joint research project across ENG, ARTS, BIZ, and SCI, funded through the internal funding call at Aalto at the beginning of 2022. For the research project, this represents a first step in a longer process of data collection and analysis. We’re diving into questions such as how organizations can cope with strategic ambiguity, how identities inform emerging norms, and how creative collaboration supports exploring and exploiting radically new ideas.

While we cannot offer a definitive answer yet, we hope this first step can prompt discussion by shedding light on some of the diverse entry points into radical creativity at Aalto. There are common threads, unique emphases, interesting examples, and shared questions that we can leverage to learn more from each other and reflect on what we would like to pursue as individuals and as a community.

*Tua Björklund, Assistant Professor
Design Factory, Aalto University*

[data]

Between April and June 2022, the Aalto University Design Factory research team conducted 54 interviews with faculty members across the university. We sought to invite interviewees from each department, utilizing Aalto directories and interviewee recommendations alike to move beyond our own networks to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Most interviewees were assistant or associate professors, but a range of titles was represented. The open-ended, thematic interviews lasted for approximately an hour, focusing on how the interviewee conceptualized radical creativity and its potential linkages to their field and work. The academic analysis of the data continues, but we’re eager to share the first community insights already!



[emerging meanings]

Talking to faculty members across Aalto, it became clear that radical creativity was understood in a multitude of ways. Many were making sense of the concept throughout the interviews rather than having a set, clear definition from the start.

Common features attached to radical creativity were addressing relevant **problems**, embracing **novelty**, and operating in **uncertainty**. Radical creativity was seen to enable individuals and teams to make **creative leaps**, often through drawing from **multidisciplinary** and **collaboration**.

Many also saw a threshold or degree of novelty or impact required to reach radical creativity - **shifting dominant paradigms**, having **systemic impact**, or making leaps in progress.

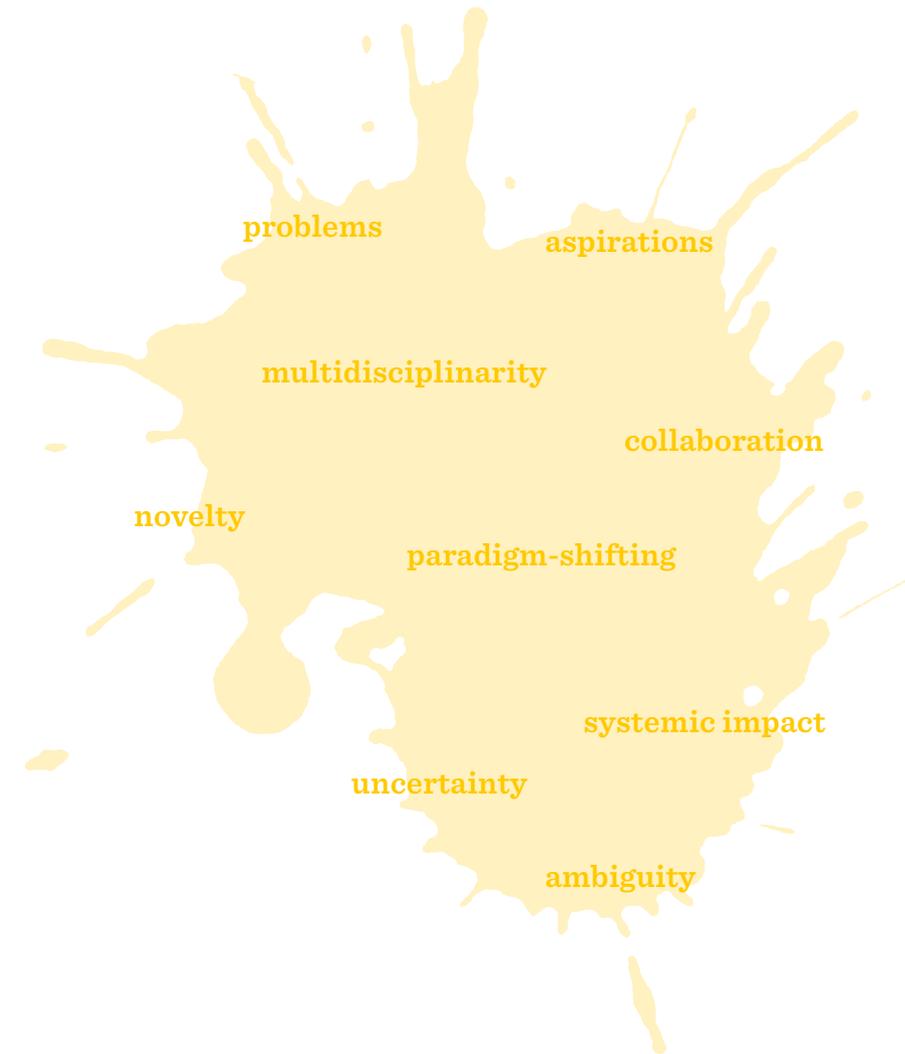
“ *Radical means that you’re really changing the paradigm of what you’re doing.*
- Interviewee from ELEC

“ *Radical has to do something with the beliefs held in an existing sociotechnical system, about how things should be organized. And “radical”, it’s somehow contradicting or requiring a revolution in how things are done, the technical infrastructures and the beliefs and the politics of that sociotechnical system.*
- Interviewee from SCI

As such, radical creativity was often considered to be something **aspirational** when connected to one’s work. Examples were often preceded by hedging, disclaimers, and noting that there could be a connection to radical creativity, but most were not comfortable claiming that it indeed was “radical”. Creative certainly, but radical? From a certain perspective yes, but perhaps not fully or truly. However, as a future aspiration and a current imperative, radical creativity could motivate interviewees to challenge themselves, be bold and ambitious, and reach beyond the goal of being merely creative, which many perceived as an inherent aspect of their work.

Interestingly, some interviewees were comfortable with the fuzziness and **ambiguity** of the concept, while others wished for a concrete definition that could help them operationalize it in practice.

“ *Radical creativity is that which transforms from the root; it tears out received wisdom by the roots. So, from a philosophy of science perspective, that means, radical creativity attacks ontology, it attacks what we think we know is. And it also attacks our epistemology, that is, how we think we know something, and the procedures that we use about knowing.*
- Interviewee from BIZ



[painting a landscape]

Drawing on the faculty conceptualizations of radical creativity and their examples, we noted different parameters attached to how radical creativity is currently understood and operationalized. Responses reflected a mixture of varying degrees and combinations of three underlying dimensions:

Process & outcome

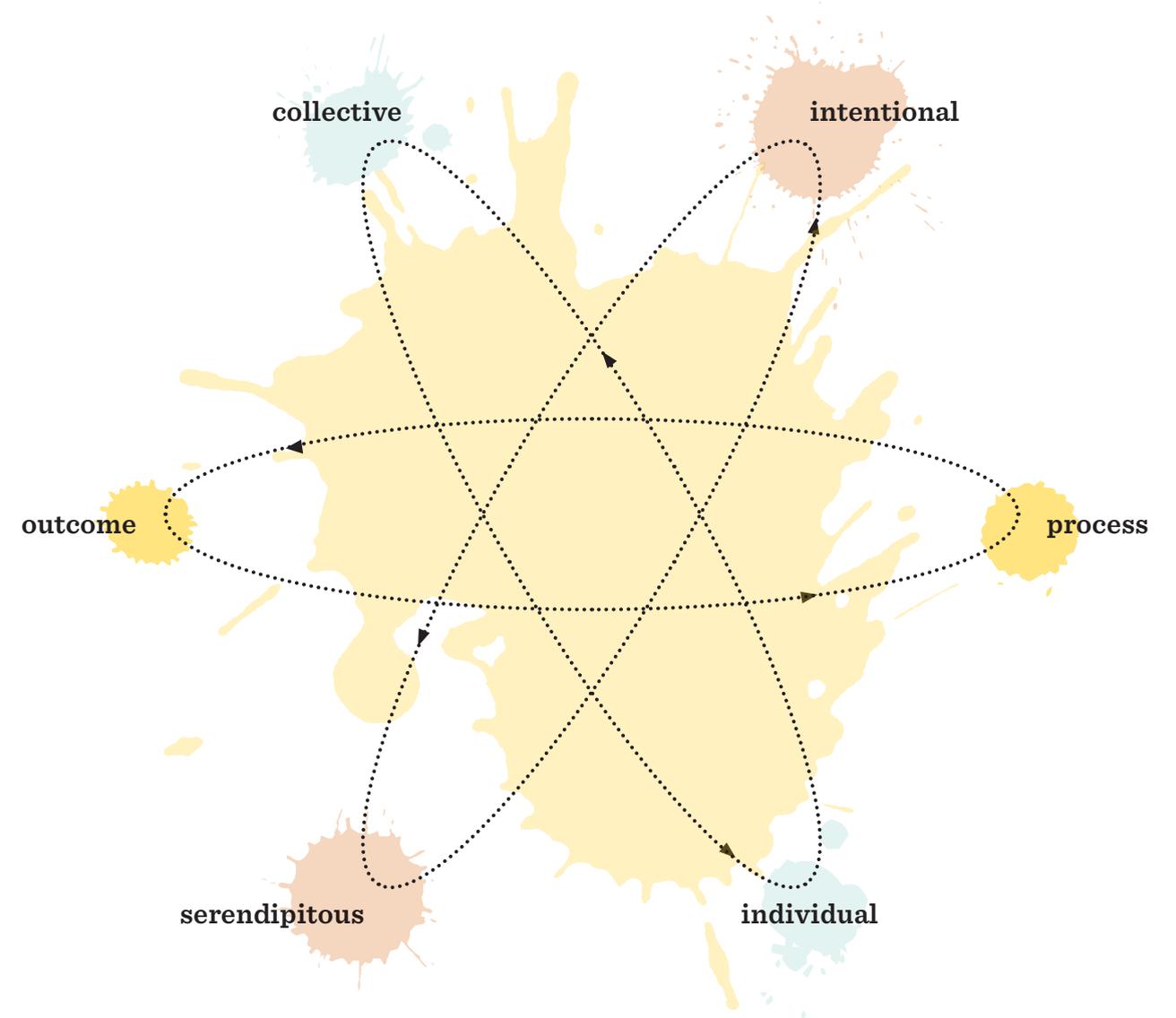
On the process side, radical creativity was considered to be a novel, open-ended, uncertain, and iterative way of working. On the outcome side, results were discontinuous, akin to a Eureka moment of discovery. Such outcomes were deemed highly uncertain, and difficult to plan or anticipate.

Individual & collective endeavor

From the individual perspective, radical creativity involved building on one's expertise by proactively thinking in new ways, tolerating uncertainty, developing a positive attitude to failure, and curiously venturing out into unfamiliar territory to create new knowledge that may otherwise remain inaccessible. From the collective perspective, radical creativity was a social performance that involved negotiation of meaning and requires a conducive culture and translators that can mediate between group members adopting varying interpretations.

Intentional & serendipitous

From the perspective of intentionality, radical creativity was sought and planned for, and represented a strategic ambition. From the perspective of serendipity, there is an uncontrollable element in radical creativity requiring the right conditions or even luck, being catalyzed by serendipitous encounters or combinations of knowledge. Like all dimensions, intentionality and serendipity were not necessarily seen as mutually exclusive - chance favors the prepared mind.



Faculty members' responses highlighted differences both within and across disciplines, and often connected radical creativity examples to moving beyond single disciplines. No clear and coherent arts, business, engineering or science view emerged, however, some tones in the conversation recurred within different fields.

[radical creativity in the business]

In the business realm, several faculty members brought up that, from a practitioner point of view, radicality could have a negative connotation. Business demand for radicality could be limited, with too much turmoil challenging operations and structures. Radical creativity was often connected to paradigm shifts and sudden leaps in different industries. As such, there could be resistance to radical creativity from incumbents.

“If you believe that the business school should produce valuable practices or theories for businesses, then you're gonna think that oh, radical creativity equals super useful and good theories and practices for businesses. That businesses will love radical creativity. But you don't necessarily even think that what you're producing could be dangerous or politically unstable for these corporations or other stakeholders.

- Interviewee from BIZ

However, the critical reflection by no means implied that radical creativity could not take place in business. Similar to engineering and science faculty, many business professors connected the need for radical creativity to tackling grand challenges, such as climate change. Radical creativity was also seen as beneficial in connecting specific fields to the wider organizational and societal landscape.

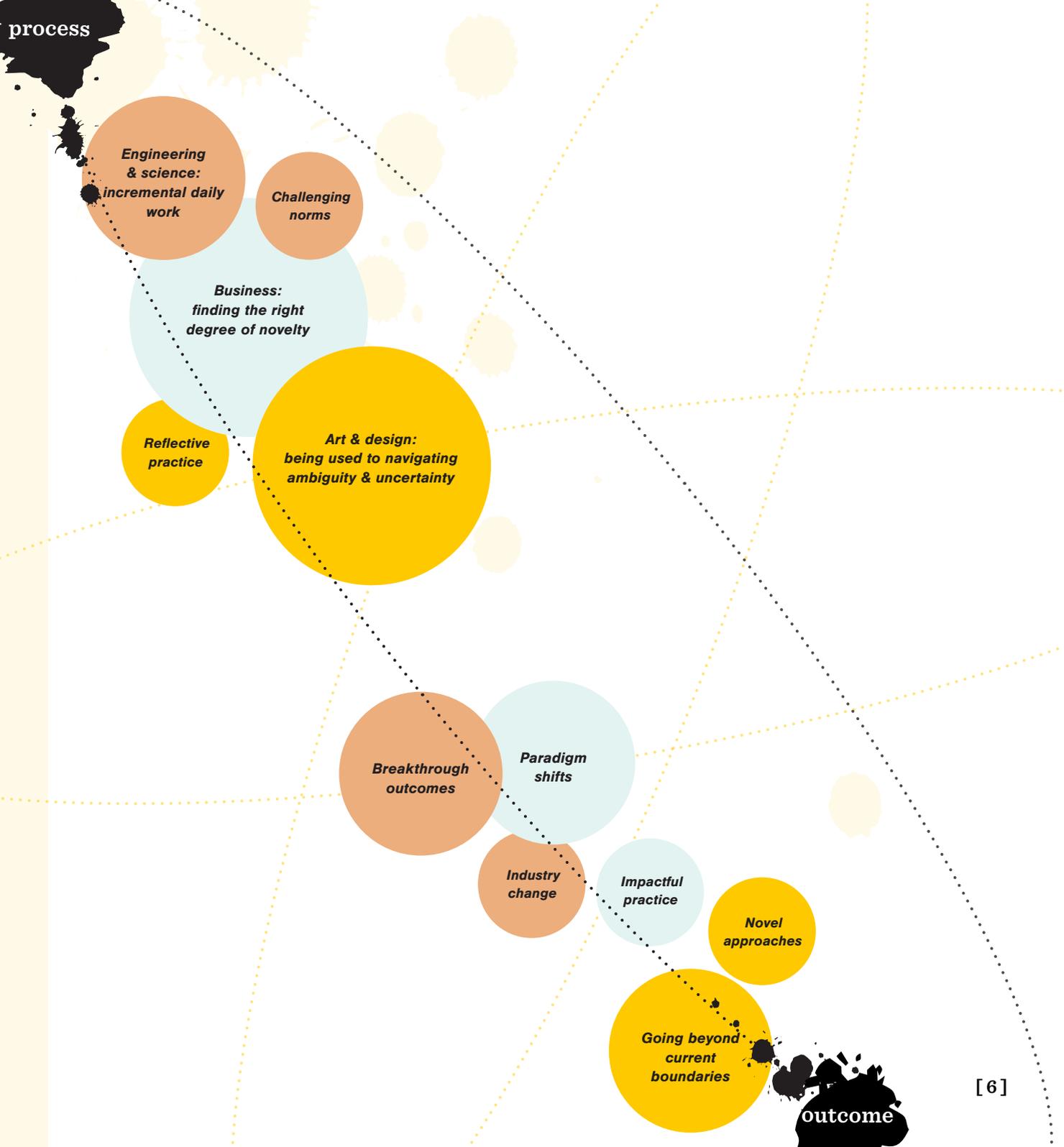
“Accounting connects to a broader perspective. How do you collect data? Does it represent a true and fair view of a firm's financial position? How to measure the efforts towards sustainability? Businesses are embedded in society and the environment. Accountants or auditors have to understand whether a firm's efforts towards sustainability are good enough and how to measure sustainable solutions from an accounting perspective.

- Interviewee from BIZ

Examples of radically creative work in business often entailed combining business methods and perspectives with other fields. For example, integrating business with technology, such as AI, changing the way companies operate businesses and people's lives. Interviewees also discussed the importance of considering the social, philosophical, ethical, and political aspects of business faculty's work.

“As the speed of data being generated and utilized becomes increasingly faster, algorithms will become much smarter and encourage more critical or radical innovations in the near future, such as robotic delivery services or robotic chefs, changing our daily life.

- Interviewee from BIZ



[radical creativity in the engineering & science]

Within science and engineering fields, many interviewees highlighted problem-solving and a solution orientation, positioning radical creativity as a way to create novel solutions to real-world problems in better and more efficient ways.

“ *Engineering creativity is about problem solving, being resourceful in coming up with solutions to the problem and creating things to solve the problem. It’s a very creative practice.*
- Interviewee from ELEC

However, this was seen to require radical and incremental creativity alike. Many faculty members discussed how engineering practices and scientific work has an incremental nature process-wise, requiring continuously safe and standard experiments. This could then lead to radically creative outcomes and impact in, for example, the ability to address grand challenges.

“ *At first look, my PhD research may not seem to be very close to what we are doing now. But, in fact, we are just shifting the application while the main physical phenomena remain the same. Also, we went from old methods to new methods, which is quite common in science that we have taken these steps. The changes don’t happen immediately, but we, as scientists, are trying to go towards the truth.*
- Interviewee from ENG

“ *On a daily basis, we do incremental work, because we continue from what we’ve done last year and follow a structured research path or topic. Sometimes things come unexpectedly, but those are not things that you can plan.*
- Interviewee from ELEC

However, many interviewees also highlighted the need to challenge norms. This could mean trialing novel approaches, asking different types of questions or pursuing interdisciplinary work.

“ *In neuroscience, radical creativity means that we would ask research questions that not just target tiny bits but rather the whole mechanisms, such as having an in-depth understanding of a certain brain disorder. To do this, we need to change our thinking and ability to study and measure the brain through asking those big and field-pertinent questions.*
- Interviewee from SCI

Finally, some scientists and engineers referred to being used to working with exact measures and precise definitions. As such, they were eager for a definition and operationalization for radical creativity to better examine what it might contribute to their work and fields.

[radical creativity in the art & design]

For many in the art and design realms, the ambiguity and uncertainty around radical creativity was familiar. Indeed, dealing with such ambiguity and uncertainty was seen as a strength of their fields, with many established practices and deep traditions.

On the one hand, faculty members pointed out a number of ways that radical creativity manifested in art and design, frequently mentioning for example reflection, sense-making, empathy, human-centered design.

“ *The traditional way of doing human-centered design is to observe very closely what people do and look at the shortcomings of the present technologies, and present products and services in achieving those goals. In empathic design we are paying more attention to people’s dreams, motivations, aspirations and fears, which everyday behavior doesn’t reveal.*
- Interviewee from ARTS

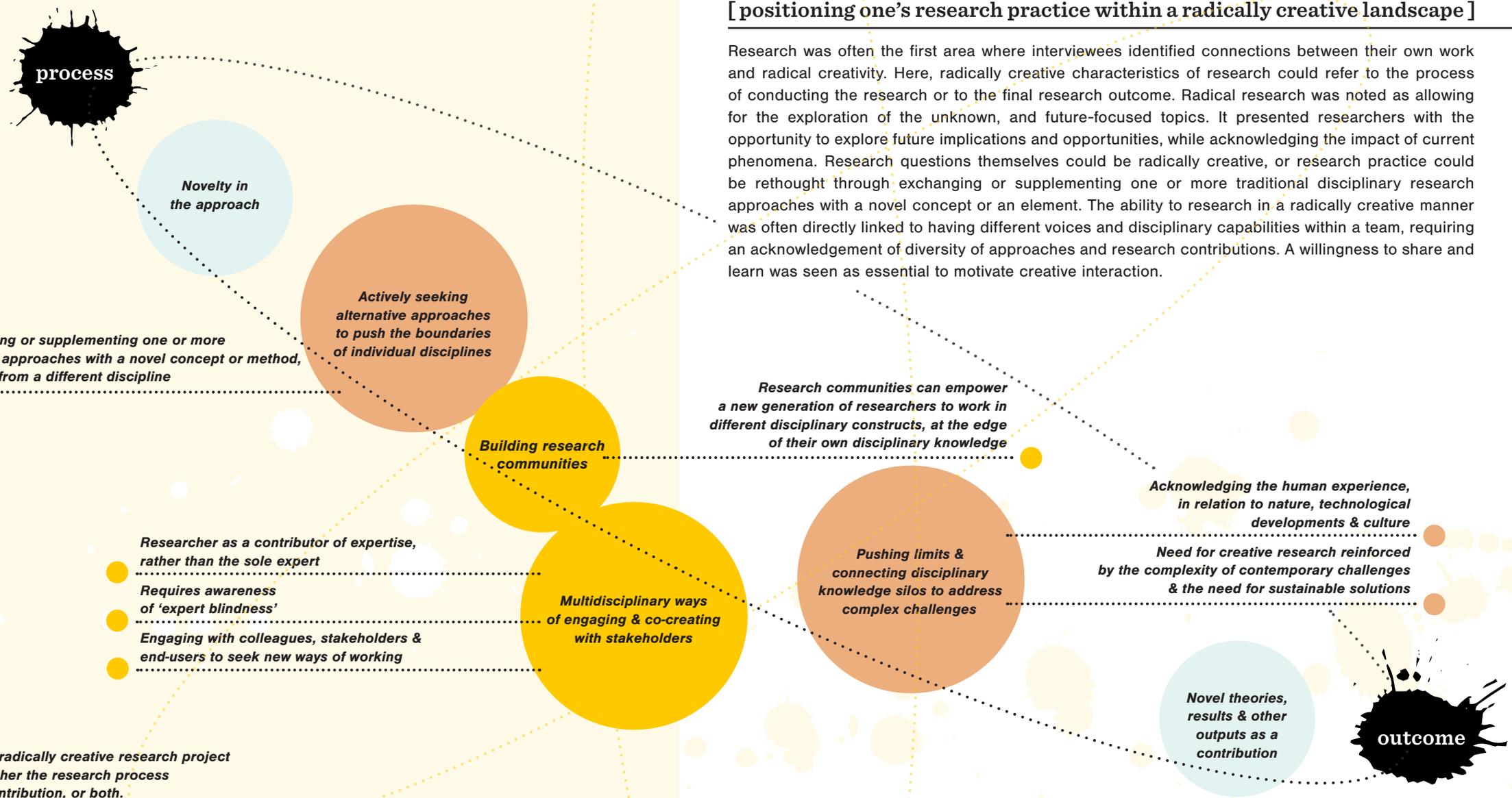
On the other hand, radical creativity was also connected to pushing for novelty, and going beyond existing boundaries. Again, any examples were connected to multidisciplinary collaboration.

“ *I’ve been more or less focused on art, science and technology, crossing disciplinary borders. I guess the radicality is stepping on the turfs which I don’t know or I’m not an expert in, but I’m not afraid of them either.*
- Interviewee from ARTS

“ *My roots are within architecture, shaping the environment. I was mainly working within my discipline, then I started to look into computer science. Now I’m also looking into neuroscience, math, art, and games, and new things or radical things that were unexpected start to emerge from these interactions and collaborations.*
- Interviewee from ARTS

However, some art and design faculty members felt that their fields could be misperceived by others as an extra addition in multidisciplinary work, rather than being treated as equal partners. This could limit interdisciplinary collaboration, where art and design were seen to have the potential to create new approaches.

“ *The world is changing so fast that the present ways of solving problems and designing products and services are simply not enough. For example, in the energy sector, the ecological transitions that we need to go through require radical innovations in many companies and organizations. Designers can use new approaches and develop new solutions that others haven’t done.*
- Interviewee from ARTS



process

Novelty in the approach

Exchanging or supplementing one or more research approaches with a novel concept or method, possibly from a different discipline

Actively seeking alternative approaches to push the boundaries of individual disciplines

Building research communities

- Researcher as a contributor of expertise, rather than the sole expert*
- Requires awareness of 'expert blindness'*
- Engaging with colleagues, stakeholders & end-users to seek new ways of working*

Multidisciplinary ways of engaging & co-creating with stakeholders

Research communities can empower a new generation of researchers to work in different disciplinary constructs, at the edge of their own disciplinary knowledge

Pushing limits & connecting disciplinary knowledge silos to address complex challenges

Acknowledging the human experience, in relation to nature, technological developments & culture
Need for creative research reinforced by the complexity of contemporary challenges & the need for sustainable solutions

Novel theories, results & other outputs as a contribution

outcome

[positioning one's research practice within a radically creative landscape]

Research was often the first area where interviewees identified connections between their own work and radical creativity. Here, radically creative characteristics of research could refer to the process of conducting the research or to the final research outcome. Radical research was noted as allowing for the exploration of the unknown, and future-focused topics. It presented researchers with the opportunity to explore future implications and opportunities, while acknowledging the impact of current phenomena. Research questions themselves could be radically creative, or research practice could be rethought through exchanging or supplementing one or more traditional disciplinary research approaches with a novel concept or an element. The ability to research in a radically creative manner was often directly linked to having different voices and disciplinary capabilities within a team, requiring an acknowledgement of diversity of approaches and research contributions. A willingness to share and learn was seen as essential to motivate creative interaction.

The novelty of a radically creative research project could refer to either the research process or to the final contribution, or both.

Open mindedness & seeking alternatives contribute to creative research.

Engaging with others, in the form of active multidisciplinary research or communities of scholarship supports radical creativity.

[curiosity]

[collaborative practice]

[societal contribution]

Challenging what you perceive as the status quo in your field.

Being open to approaches from outside your own discipline as they might be valuable to your own work.

How can I open myself to new ideas and ways of doing?

Recognizing that inspiration for creative thinking can come from anywhere – yoga, nature, teaching...

How can we actively seek collaborators?

Seeking collaborators through diverse channels, including 'cold calling' if needed.

What can be the first steps toward multidisciplinary engagement?

How can we as researchers give back to society?

Recognizing that we have a responsibility to society to contribute creative solutions that enable meaningful change.

“Radically creative research means new avenues of thinking. How to perhaps combine different, already existing elements together with perhaps a new twist? How to bring together different elements from different fields, which have not yet been tried out together - what might be the outcome? So, it's a kind of curiosity and then a kind of braveness to take the steps.

- Interviewee from ARTS

“My purpose in this life is to build bridges between different disciplines, and that's what I've been trying to do - to be open-minded enough to understand and appreciate the work of different approaches in order to find something maybe radically creative.

- Interviewee from BIZ

“Expertise is quite important, but expert blindness is a very well-known thing. They know very well everything within the boundaries of their expertise, but they're blind to expertise outside of this and this can lead to incremental innovation. We need more radical innovation.

- Interviewee from ARTS

“If I'm filling this small gap here, who are the other partners that I would need with me in this project? I've even called random people when preparing funding applications, in the sense that I haven't known them beforehand but I've searched for who might be working in areas that I feel would benefit the project.

- Interviewee from ENG

“Our practice doesn't just happen inside the walls of the campus. It happens in all kinds of spaces out there. We have the power to say things around current crises that matter, and what we say and do matters in civil society.

- Interviewee from SCI

“We really look for new, futuristic innovations, something that has the chance of being a breakthrough. Our hope is to not just create more information, but that some of our projects could be commercialized.

- Interviewee from CHEM

Many faculty members did not report teaching radical creativity directly, but they described various teaching and learning activities that were seen to facilitate and enhance students' development of creativity and radical creativity. These were described both in the context of coursework as well as instructing theses and dissertations. Three approaches to teaching were highlighted throughout these examples:

[leveraging multidisciplinary collaboration]

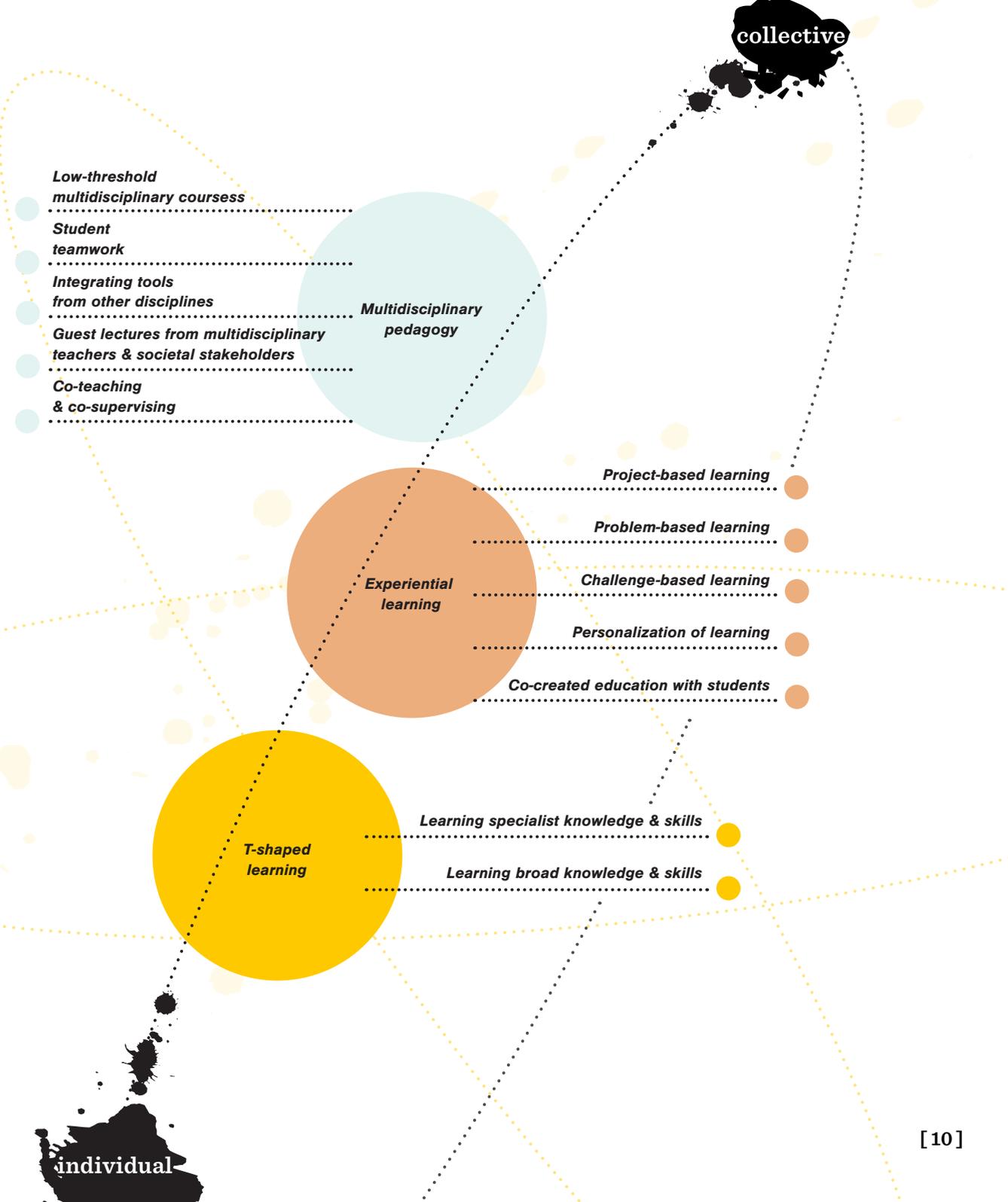
Radical creativity in education was often connected to multidisciplinary collaboration. Students were seen to learn from juxtaposing different perspectives in other disciplines. Multidisciplinary collaboration took place on many different levels: student teamwork, guest lectures, co-teaching, and co-supervising. Multidisciplinarity was also connected to the importance of widening participation, for example by offering low-threshold multidisciplinary courses on cross-cutting topics, such as entrepreneurship or sustainability, to students regardless of their disciplines. Teachers also described integrating tools from different disciplines to inform new practices.

[educating through experiential learning]

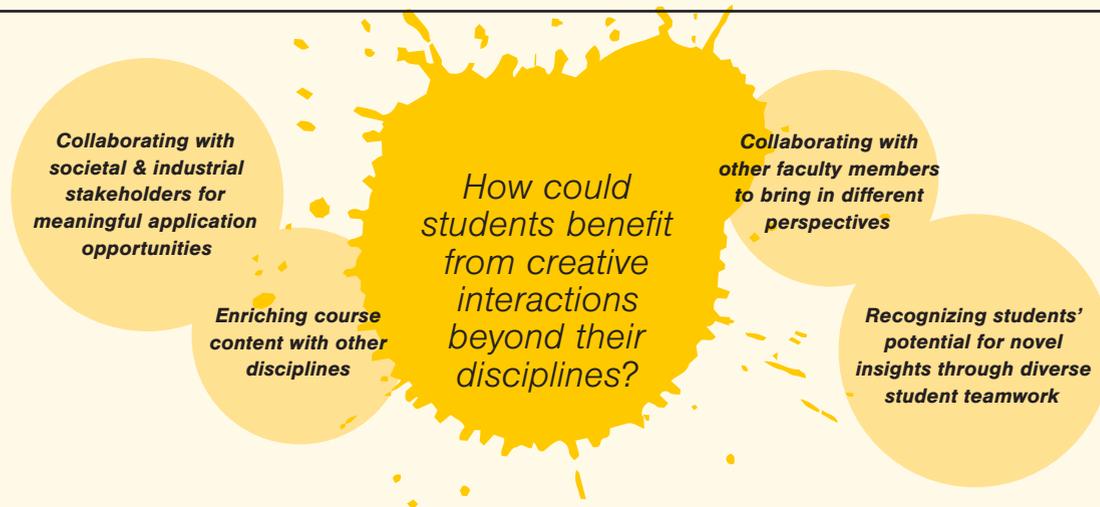
Faculty members emphasized the importance of students' learning experiences through shifting the focus of instruction from the teacher to students through involving students in teaching and learning to co-construct knowledge. They felt this enabled students to pursue one's own interests and to take ownership of their learning and develop creativity and radical creativity at their own pace. Faculty members also expressed appreciation towards students gaining novel perspectives and insights through first-hand experiences. They discussed various efforts in creating effective learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom, for example organizing company visits, field trips, role play, project-based courses, problem-based and challenge-based learning, taking the time and effort to use a hands-on approach to education to engage students directly in authentic situations. Another dimension of experiential learning was recognizing the need and value of students' personal learning pathways.

[pursuing T-shaped learning]

T-shaped learning refers to deep knowledge and skills in one area combined with broad knowledge and skills in other domains. Faculty members from different disciplines emphasized the importance of learning basic disciplinary knowledge for students to lay the foundation for novel and creative outcomes. However, exposure to and general understanding of other fields was seen as conducive to creativity, as were discipline-free capabilities such as reflective thinking, conceptual thinking, critical thinking, problem framing, holistic thinking, ethical and philosophical considerations, systemic thinking, and integrative thinking.



[incorporating diverse perspectives]



“ Guest lectures in my course provided very different perspectives for students about the value of nature. How nature can or cannot be governed by law, the importance of urban ecology, and the complexity of cohabitation or multispecies sustainability in urban context in real life... I think those lectures were a quite quick solution for providing the space for creative thinking.
- Interviewee from ARTS

“ The courses for structural engineers are about structural engineering or management, but students don't know how an architect thinks. So just for a structural engineer to understand how their work fits into a bigger whole, it's the first time they do it in this cross-disciplinary course. The students had to work with other disciplines, and they had to coordinate everything. It's a huge team effort to design a building. So, I would say that putting all these skills together requires radical creativity, because that's missing and not educated. Now, students can learn it through interdisciplinary project work. The companies were also awed at how these students could achieve so much in six weeks.
- Interviewee from ENG

“ My course got students to think about new methods of how we conduct research through visual ethnography, sound-based ethnography, and embodied action. It's about figuring out how we understand, make sense and collectively discover new phenomena with other participants. They could be just really interesting informants and later become part of our work as co-researchers, and then we can co-design together.
- Interviewee from SCI

“ I organize student groups with different kinds of backgrounds, so that students bring their knowledge to the table and discuss together how they can do things. Students are able to integrate different kinds of knowledge from different disciplines to create better solutions.
- Interviewee from BIZ

[crafting experiences to support creativity]



“ I taught a course where students could express their team project results in any format that they wanted, such as Lego Technics or modeling clay. And I guess, in that sense, it was radical creativity, because at that point, all of my colleagues thought I was being ridiculous and that it was not the way to teach. They were convinced that people wouldn't learn anything. But then, when people saw that my course was ranked very high in terms of learning outcomes, this way of teaching started to catch on.
- Interviewee from CHEM

“ When we are defining the project assignments for our course, one important thing is that if the sponsor or company already knows exactly what they want, I'm afraid we are not the best partner for them. We recommend working with an engineering or design consultancy instead. For us, when a project starts, most likely nobody knows what exactly needs to be done, and that's a good starting point for radical creativity. The students explore the problem together with the industry partners, and decide which challenge to tackle and how.
- Interviewee from ENG

“ We have one course about materials and the environment that we begin by going into a forest. We bring a mycologist along, a scientist specialized in the lives of fungi, and it's such an amazing day. People get tuned into the Finnish sensibility of forest culture and you have amazing conversations with everyone. Then, the mycologist gives us another angle, making us aware of the size of our footsteps and our intrusion into the environment. So we become really comfortable there but also feel alien at the same time. The students take some fungi back, and we go to the lab to grow the mycelium of these fungi. We're asking students to design something in response to the mycelium, either a poetic response, a material, or an object. By taking the students back to the source of biomaterials, to the organism, we are creating an experience through which they learn to build empathy not only with other people, like users, but also the materials and the organisms that we're working with.
- Interviewee from ARTS

[opportunities: situational conditions]

Funding security was brought up frequently as a key to being able to pursue novel ideas and move from incremental to radical creativity. Seed funding for radical creativity was mentioned as an excellent way to kickstart the rollout of this strategic pillar, and many appreciated Aalto's services, such as Grant Writing support, Aalto Media, and research.aalto.fi.

Both the multidisciplinary and the international character of Aalto, as well as external industry connections, were leveraged to find partners, communities, and networks supporting radical creativity. Enablers were also seen in existing spaces and initiatives such as ChemArts, Design Factory, AVP, IceTank and UWAS courses, where staff and students were already seen to experience more freedom in terms of time allocation or how to acquire credits.

Lastly, having the freedom to explore collaborations outside one's school, as well as the ability to create your own working culture with your team were experienced as facilitators of creativity.

[abilities: knowledge & existing habits]

Actively exploring different processes or approaches than usual was shared by several respondents as a valuable way to support the implementation of radical creativity, both for themselves as well as encouraging others.

Interviewees shared psychological safety tips like making explicit which parts of an exercise will be creative and which ones not, allocating time for building familiarity and trust, and planning for small, visible wins early in the process to get people on board.

Serendipitous encounters were both enjoyed and encouraged, e.g. by spending time at the coffee machine, organizing cross-school seminars, inviting random people to give comments on the work being done, or asking people to share common ways of working in their home country.

Some interviewees also felt they could leverage their experiences of having worked in different disciplines or more creative work environments in the past.

[motivation: attitudes & beliefs]

Many shared that researchers, teachers, and students are already willing to explore more cross-disciplinary research and education opportunities which could connect to radical creativity. Some interviewees felt people generally understand the benefits of learning from others, and there is usually little resistance at Aalto to try new things. Moreover, somebody remarked that professors who collaborate across schools tend to be the more successful ones.

The ability to embrace a mindset of questioning was most often shared as a meaningful enabler, both for the respondents themselves, as well as for colleagues and students. Additionally, several added the perspective of seeing failures as opportunities to learn.



“Iterating, seeking feedback, and being agile, adjusting your thoughts. Seeking inspiration and embracing your intuition at times. The process is iterative and it is unexpected, so one element is that willingness to tolerate uncertainty - that is important.”
- Interviewee from ENG

“It definitely opens up possibilities if you keep your mind open to the fact that people with completely different ways of looking at things might still give you novel ideas. Don't laugh them away or say 'You are not from this domain. Why should you look at our data?'”
- Interviewee from SCI

What motivates people to be more radically creative?

“I'm curious. The curiosity in me, it's always been there. I have a hard time staying in a position or a place for a long period of time. I get too comfortable. So it's a survival strategy for me to try to learn from different fields.”
- Interviewee from BIZ

“Firstly, one needs to be curious. So, I think you need to create an environment where people feel comfortable in stepping out of their own expertise, and ask questions, and openly say 'I'm not getting that, so what do you actually mean?'. This sounds easy, but I found this is very difficult.”
- Interviewee from ARTS

“It's a good start to venture outside your own department and school. It is so eye-opening to talk with colleagues from other schools. It was so wild being like 'Wow, these people, they are looking at exactly the same things but with such different perspective! I benefited from those encounters and the chance to hear about how they do research. Not only, of course, in the same topics that I'm interested in, but that's a good start. And then venturing outside Aalto, even within the field, is always beneficial because we tend to get our own kinds of thinking within the group, so it's always beneficial to venture outside.”
- Interviewee from BIZ

“I had great colleagues, for example, from the School of ARTS. I learned so much from them. I learned how to work with them and how they think, but also they taught me concrete skills, like visual things. And then, since I speak their language already, our collaboration is easier. That's how it goes. And that's what we want for our students, that they already have experiences collaborating with people from different disciplines.”
- Interviewee from CHEM

What do people leverage to be more radically creative?

“We've been trained in asking unusual lateral questions and understanding the value in looking at things with fresh eyes. Because, once you're in the system, you don't actually ask these questions anymore.”
- Interviewee from ARTS

“I always tell myself that I become blind. It's a bit like becoming too expert in something and no longer seeing new things. One would think that the best data analysts are those who have this routine, but the routine can make them blind. We have really had the best realizations when we invite random people just to look at the equipment.”
- Interviewee from SCI

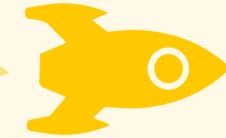
“I think what's amazing at Aalto is the breadth of possibilities we have with being a multidisciplinary research university. We have experts of all different fields. It's kind of astonishing, what kind of fertile ground we have for radical creativity for cross-pollination of disciplines. And in a way, that's the reason why I came here.”
- Interviewee from ARTS

“The way the project started, there was a solid-state physicist coming to a group doing soft matter assembly, and there everybody was gathering and talking around the coffee machine. So, they started discussing and then they realized that one has a solution for the other, and another one has a good problem for the other to solve.”
- Interviewee from SCI

Which conditions support people to be more radically creative?

“The university gave me some internal funding, which I can use for anything I want. So that was very nice, that it was not tied to a specific purpose. And it's also not directly limited to the length of the project, so I can use that funding also after the formal project ends. So that was good support.”
- Interviewee from ENG

“Thinking about good things the university has produced, like IDBM, these were long term endeavors and they stemmed from personal motivation of key professors, who said, 'Let's just create a program where technical and business students come together.' So you have to make people feel it's worth their while, or it's worth it for the department to pursue these things. I think that's the way that we become creative: when we feel that we are in control of our own destinies, of our work, and we get to employ and develop our competencies sufficiently.”
- Interviewee from BIZ



[collective sensemaking instead of checking a box]

Radical creativity is a term that sparks discussion. It pushes us to think and discuss what we actually mean by the term and it evokes reactions – positive and negative ones. Whereas creativity might be a term that meets nodding heads, radical creativity is less self-evident. This can be a generative force in the community.

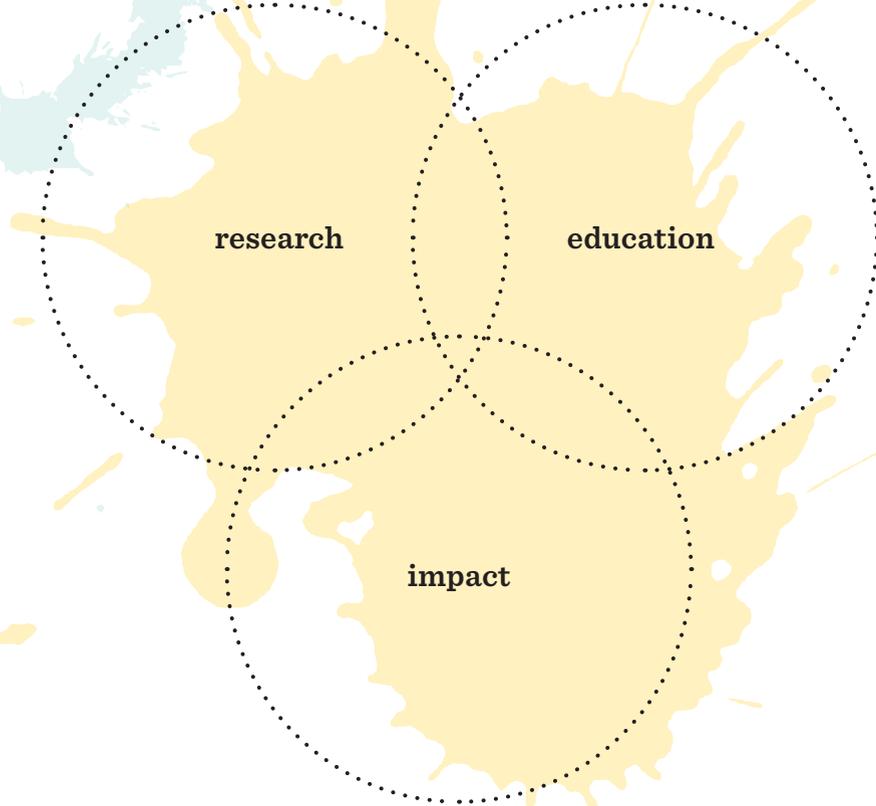
The Austrian conductor Herbert von Karajan said that “the worst damage I can do to my orchestra is to give them a clear instruction”. Clearly defined and straightforward concepts can be more comfortable, but they can also risk compliant behavior that ticks the box but falls short of meaningful engagement. Ambiguity forces one to think and – crucially – discuss, bringing more voices to the table.

Collective sensemaking by a diverse community can go far beyond what even the best strategic planning group could consider. Already this report showcases the myriad of connections and facets the Aalto community can find between their work and radical creativity. It’s also important to recognize that radical creativity is often an enabler or integrated element in these efforts, rather than being something limited to the smaller amount of research projects, courses or initiatives that are explicitly *about* radical creativity. Vice versa, important themes such as interdisciplinarity are integrated into many radical creativity efforts.

The report mentions that many interviewees saw radical creativity as aspirational relative to their current work. Our hope is that radical creativity continues to challenge us to think of new questions in the community. What does it mean for universities and how we do strategy work? What is the research base and differentiating factor? What in this becomes a part of the DNA of Aalto University, and what doesn’t? We look forward to continuing the collective inquiry and discussion.

Tuomas Auvinen
Champion of Radical Creativity

Riikka Mäkikoskela
Head of Radical Creativity



[this is not the end, it's a beginning]

Radical creativity remains an ambiguous concept for many of us at Aalto. In the face of ambiguity, we teach students and executives to make assumptions explicit to facilitate their joint discussion, promote shared understanding, and spark development efforts. We hope to practice what we preach with the insights and visualizations of this report, offering one window into radical creativity to support joint discussions on an abstract and complex issue.

This inquiry is a starting point also from a scientific perspective. We've been inspired by the countless examples of inroads our Aalto colleagues are making into exploring new questions and phenomena while trying out new methods and approaches, and we're looking forward to continuing data collection and analysis. We have more questions than answers at this point, but the questions are evolving based on the initial findings.

Indeed, the problem and solution are said to coevolve in design research - how we address an issue is a reflection of how we understand it. As such, being able to ask better questions is a key step for creating preferred futures. While we continue pursuing scientific answers, we hope that this report can act as a boundary object that sparks further discussion on radical creativity and what it might mean for our professions and communities.



Tua Björklund



Vikki Eriksson



Xiaoqi Feng



Nico Klenner



Anna Kuukka



Floris van der Marel

[research & reporting]

Tua Björklund
Vikki Eriksson
Xiaoqi Feng
Senni Kirjavainen
Nico Klenner
Anna Kuukka
Floris van der Marel

[art direction & layout]

Anna Kuukka

[contact]

tua.bjorklund@aalto.fi