

PHD RESEARCH

**Exploring a Hybrid Framework of Design Thinking and Pluralistic Counselling:  
How Does It Affect Individual Responses to Wicked Problems?**

## Information Letter

# Executive Summary

Could a free consultant help your team analyse and formulate an innovative response to a complex business challenge?

Your challenge may involve creating/improving:

- A system or business process
- Communication within or outside of your business
- A disruptive response to market/industry conditions
- Some other complex issue you wish to discuss

The potential benefit to your business is a tailored action plan to respond to your unique challenge. You will also be contributing to original Australian research.

The consultant-researcher – Mr Zern Liew – will work as a member of your team to facilitate the use of a novel hybrid framework. This evidence-based Framework enables individuals to develop creative and practical responses to complex business challenges.

Your project should run for about 8-12 weeks meeting 1-3 times a week (to define the challenge and create a response plan) starting July 2024 onwards. The consultant-researcher will accommodate your schedule where possible. Your business will receive 96 or more hours of the consultant-researcher's time.

Your team should comprise 7-10 participants with varied roles. Participation is voluntary and unpaid. Each participant will need to devote about 4.5 hours total to research activities during this period. The consultant-researcher will interview participants several times about their subjective experience of using the Framework. This is not an evaluation of your business or individual participants.

The consultant-researcher has three decades of international business consulting experience plus interdisciplinary tertiary qualifications, including business management.

This work is part of the consultant-researcher's PhD project. It has the approval of Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee (approval 2023/147). There are strict guidelines to protect the confidentiality of your business information and the privacy of your employees who participate in this research.



## About this Research

Complex challenges (or Wicked Problems) are a mix of uncertainty, contradictions, varied/varying requirements, and diverse stakeholder needs. Complex challenges do not have obvious solution paths and cannot be resolved using standard operating procedures.

## Research Aims

This original Australian research is exploratory in nature. It aims to:

- Discover how using the Hybrid Framework may affect individual self-beliefs of creative confidence, self-efficacy, resilience, hope, and optimism. These characteristics affect how individuals respond to uncertainty and complex challenges. They are malleable and will vary across individuals. They are not used to judge whether an individual is good/bad, right/wrong, or better/worse.
- Understand each participant's subjective experience of using the Hybrid Framework and how they perceive their capacity to respond to complex challenges.
- Improve the ability of individuals in businesses to respond creatively and effectively to complex challenges.
- Contribute new knowledge that addresses gaps in Organisational Problem-solving, Design Thinking, and Pluralistic Counselling research.

## Participation Key Activities

- The consultant-researcher will work alongside team members on your business challenge.
- The consultant-researcher will facilitate using the Hybrid Framework and introduce different techniques.
- Participants and the consultant-researcher will work collaboratively, including making decisions on the most appropriate goals, tasks, activities, and techniques for each phase of the work.
- Participants will attend four one-on-one interviews with the researcher. After each interview, participants will confirm the resulting transcripts. In total, these interviews may take up to 4.5 hours.
- When working alongside participants, the consultant-researcher will gather data by asking questions and making observations. Temporary recordings will be made to augment notetaking and produce interview transcripts.

## Potential Benefits

To your business:

- Apply an evidence-based Framework, with facilitation, to assist your team in creating a tailored, innovative response.
- Add the consultant-researcher's real-world experience and expertise to your team's capabilities.
- Improve your team's ability to respond to complex situations.
- Gain rich insights and perspectives into your situation.
- Develop a practical action plan.
- Note: due to the nature of complex challenges (also called Wicked Problems), these benefits cannot be guaranteed.

To individual participants:

- Receive guidance to gain greater awareness of individual capacity when facing uncertainty and complex challenges.
- Learn a new creative thinking Framework
- Experience a range of interdisciplinary techniques to explore situations, generate ideas, and prototype change.

## Potential Risks

Individuals working to respond to a complex challenge may experience some situational/momentary anxiety in the following circumstances:

- Sharing ideas during brainstorming, offering gut reactions and opinions, experiencing disagreements and criticisms, and practising assertive communication.
- Reflecting on past experiences of failures and rejections.

The consultant-researcher is a trained counsellor with experience in helping individuals manage strong emotions. Participants who experience unusual levels of distress may approach the consultant-researcher for confidential debriefing. Where relevant, the consultant-researcher will support the distressed participant to access ongoing support, such as from your EAP provider or Lifeline. (The researcher will not provide counselling.)

## Participant Privacy

- Individual contact details will only be used for this research project.
- Information that identifies individuals will only be stored until the project is complete. All data is de-identified for analysis, publication, and archiving.
- All collected data will be treated as confidential. Identities of individuals will be replaced with labels (such as Participant01, Client02, Expert03, and Client04) prior to analysis, publication, and archiving.
- Research data will be stored on the University's OneDrive, Qualtrics, and email systems and only accessed via password-protected computers.
- Archived (de-identified) data may be used for future research, but never for commercial purposes.
- The organisation and managers will NOT have access to any of the collected data.
- Recordings will be made to augment the researcher's notetaking and to generate interview transcripts. When the researcher has made sufficient notes and participants have confirmed their transcripts, recordings will be deleted. Recordings will not be published or archived.
- Interview recordings will be transcribed using the Otter.ai service. This is a service trusted by large institutions and has robust security and privacy policies in place (<https://otter.ai/privacy-security>). Recordings and transcripts will be removed from Otter.ai as soon as transcriptions are complete.

## Business Confidentiality

- This research is only interested in how individuals experience the use of the Hybrid Framework. This research does not set out to collect confidential business information or detailed information about the substance of the organisation's Wicked Problem.
- All collected data is confidential. Identities and business confidential information will be replaced with labels (such as Supplier01, Client02, Strategy03, and System04) prior to analysis, publication, and archiving.
- Research data will be stored on the University's OneDrive, Qualtrics, and email systems and only accessed via password-protected computers.
- Archived (de-identified) data may be used for future research, but never for commercial purposes.
- The organisation, the University, and the researcher will not make claims on each other's respective intellectual properties.

## Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research is voluntary. There are no fees or remunerations payable to any party.

The organisation agrees not to mandate participation in this research project. Each member of the problem-solving team may make their own decision to participate. Participation in this research will not affect a team member's employment conditions or performance review.

A team member who chooses not to participate in this research will still be welcome to engage with the researcher while he is working alongside the team. This team member will not need to engage in data collection activities and their input will not be included in the collected data.

## Right to Withdraw and Implications

Individual participants (and your business) have the right to withdraw from this research for any reason and at any time.

Individual withdrawal means:

- The participant will no longer need to complete data collection tasks.
- The participant may continue to remain on the problem-solving team.
- The data from that participant will be deleted unless it has been de-identified for analysis. At this point, extracting components from specific individuals will no longer be possible.

Business withdrawal means:

- The researcher ceases engagement with the entire organisation.
- All participants will be deemed to have withdrawn consent.
- The entire data pool will be deleted unless data has been de-identified and analysis has begun.

## Consultant-researcher and Supervisor Profiles

The researcher – Mr Zern Liew – has 28 years of consulting experience, helping organisations and individuals solve complex problems involving software systems, business processes, technical communications, interpersonal efficacy, and intrapersonal capability. His interdisciplinary approach combines methods from Design, Counselling, and Business Management. He has tertiary qualifications in these disciplines.

This research is supervised by Dr Graeme Ditchburn a registered Organisational Psychologist with 20+ years' consulting experience working with multi-national organisations. His research interests focus on the individual at work, including personality and dynamic performance, organisational commitment, and organisational culture and values.

This research is co-supervised by Ms Erica Mason. Erica is an experienced lecturer in Design with a professional background in art and design. She holds a BA in Design & Visual Communication from Curtin University, and Honours in Design & Visual Communication from Edith Cowan University, and is currently conducting PhD research at ECU. Erica leads service design and design thinking at Murdoch University.

## Research Findings

At the end of the PhD project, the consultant-researcher will share a summary of the final findings with participants. Findings will be general and not contain material specific to an individual or your business.

## Call for Participants

Research needs participants from the real world. The participation criteria are outlined below. If your business cannot participate, please help spread the word by sharing this website with your network.

### Criteria: The Participating Business

- A start-up, established business, or a branch/department of a larger business. Your team should work in an office in or near Perth, Western Australia.
- The following organisations are not eligible: (a) not-for-profit, (b) education, (c) consulting in management, strategy, innovation, or problem-solving, especially those using Design Thinking or similar methodologies, (d) organisations with established use of Design Thinking or similar methodology, or simultaneously engaging with another consulting provider that uses Design Thinking or similar approaches.
- Your business is facing a suitable complex challenge (Wicked Problem) including but not limited to changing/improving a system or process, internal/external communication, and a disruptive response to market/industry conditions.
- Challenges that are not suitable for this project include those that require specialist engineering, medical, financial, or legal expertise, and your business cannot provide suitable subject matter experts. The consultant-researcher is happy to discuss details with you.
- Your challenge should be sufficiently substantial to engage 7-10 team members, working on the challenge 2-3 days a week for around 12 weeks to get to the response plan stage. The consultant-researcher will negotiate an appropriate engagement period with you.
- Your team may include members who wish to refrain from participating in the research activities. There must be 7-10 members willing to participate in the research activities.
- Your team should have diverse roles in your business, such as strategist, project manager, engineer, manager, subject matter expert, frontline server, programmer, and so on.
- A business or teams with members already known to the consultant-researcher are not eligible to participate.

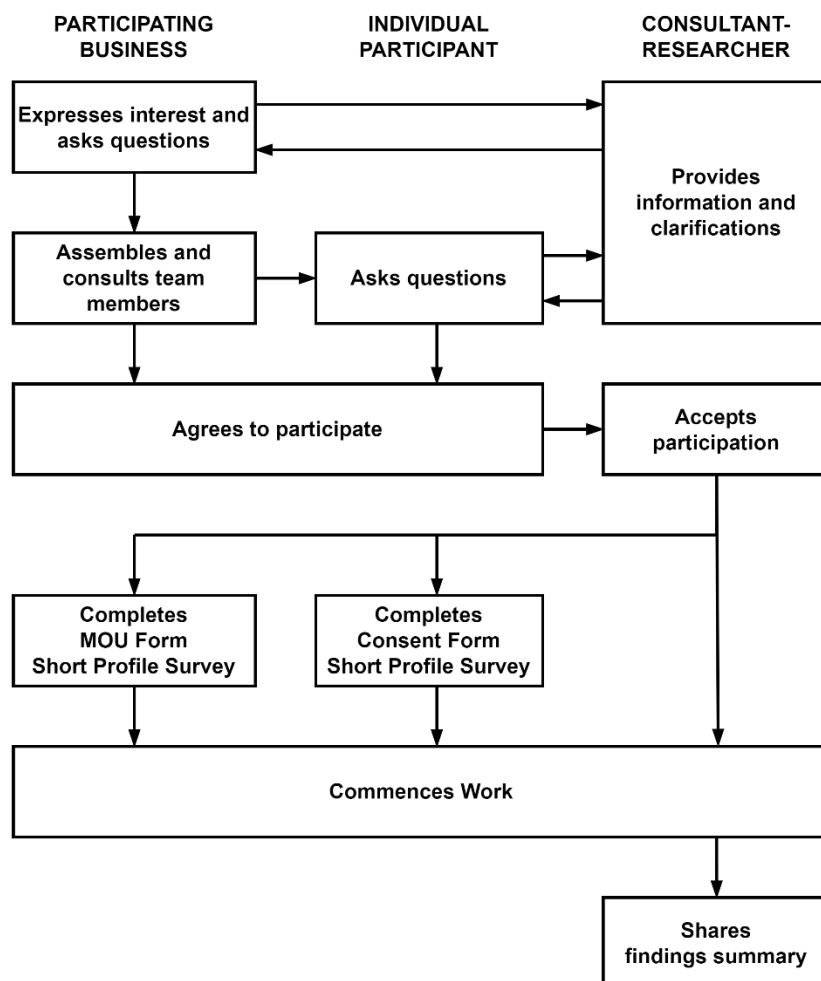
Your business is prepared to:

- Provide senior leadership support for this project.
- Accommodate the researcher working alongside its team as a member of the team. Payment for the consultant-researcher's work is not required.
- Allow sufficient time for team members participating in research activities to engage with research data collection. This is expected to take up to 4.5 hours across the entire engagement.

## Criteria: Individual Participants

- Participants must be adults over 18 years of age.
- Have sufficient proficiency in workplace/business English. You do not need to be a native English speaker.
- Are partners, owners, employees, or contractors of your business.
- Are members of the project team working on the business' complex challenge (Wicked Problem).
- Family, friends, prior colleagues, or prior clients of the consultant-researcher are not eligible to participate.
- Prepared to work alongside the consultant-researcher on project and research activities for an estimated period of 12 weeks. See table below.
- Willing to attend a total of 4 one-on-one interviews with the consultant-researcher and confirm the accuracy of transcripts created after each interview.

## Expressing Interest in Participating





**EXPRESS INTEREST.** Start by emailing the consultant-researcher expressing your business' interest. The consultant-researcher will then organise a phone or in-person discussion with you. These preliminary discussions are not part of the research and carry no obligations.

**SELECTION.** The consultant-researcher will select the most appropriate business in consultation with his supervisors. All businesses that have expressed interest will be informed of the outcome of the selection.

**POST-SELECTION.** The consultant-researcher will engage in more detailed discussions with the selected business and participants. Participants will have two weeks to ensure all questions are answered to their satisfaction before signing their consent.

**CONSENT.** Participants will complete an online consent form. This step is the formal granting of informed consent. The organisation will also sign an MOU by completing an online form.

**COMMENCE.** The consultant-researcher will work with the organisation to arrange access, schedules, start date, working days, and other logistical issues. As the consultant-researcher will work alongside the project team, he will also complete any onboarding procedures of your business.

**FINDINGS.** At the end of the PhD project, the consultant-researcher will share a summary of the research findings with participants. Findings will be general and not contain material specific to an individual or the business.

## Contact Information

Email the consultant-researcher of this project [zern.liew@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:zern.liew@murdoch.edu.au) or phone +61 413 33 77 44.

The consultant-researcher will be your primary contact for all questions and problem/conflict resolution relating to this research project. If you have any questions about any aspect of this research, please contact the consultant-researcher first.

This project has human research ethics approval 2023/147. If your problem cannot be resolved directly with the researcher, please contact the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee: Call (08) 9360 6677 or email [human.ethics@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@murdoch.edu.au)