

# Collaboration



Nāu te rourou,  
nāku te rourou,  
ka ora ai te iwi

With your  
food basket  
and my  
food basket  
the people  
will thrive

## Creative collaborations

The definition of collaboration is ‘working with others to achieve a common goal’. Any good audience development strategy will embrace a spirit of collaboration, not just with your audience, but also with other creatives, organisations and stakeholders.

Collaborations are an opportunity to broaden and grow your audience, as well as stretch your creative practice in new and exciting ways.

Think of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra’s 2021 collaboration with Alien Weaponry, a fusion of classical orchestra with thrash metal band and taonga pūoro (traditional Māori instruments), all sung in te reo.

## Partnering through themes

If you are looking to partner with external people or organisations with a particular event, consider these questions:

What are the themes and messages in this content/event?

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Who do we want to see this?

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Who aren't existing audiences and how do we get them in front of it?

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Who are the organisations that will be interested in the themes of this content?

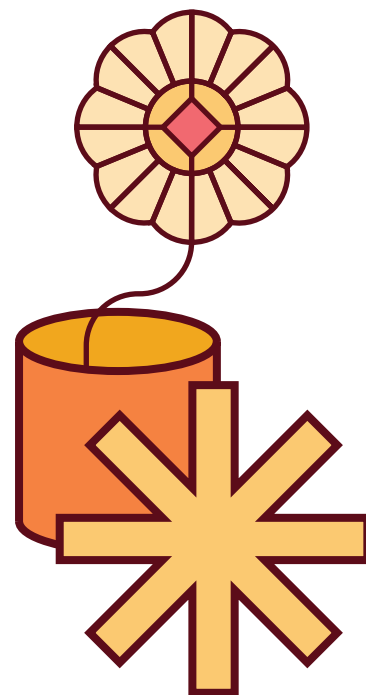
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The Meteor Theatre in Kirikiriroa quite often looks at the themes in upcoming shows and uses these as a springboard to reach out to new and different audiences, “tempting people to get the bug” as theatre manager Deborah Nudds puts it. For example, when they had a show with dementia themes, she reached out to those in the community who live with or support people with dementia, and invited them to the show with complimentary tickets.

Another innovative approach was taken by The Courtyard Arts Centre in the UK, to engage with audiences in the rural Herefordshire area with their play *I Was A Rat*. They wanted to attract audiences from within a 30-minute radius who’d never been before, so they hired a local workshop skills leader to host family friendly events in two small towns, from whom they’d had little engagement. They promoted the event with flyers and notices in the local newsletter, direct emails to the customers they did have, and emailed posters to the local halls who printed them off and put them around town.

At the event the facilitator explained what *I Was A Rat* was about and told a brief story. All the children who attended were face painted as rats. “There were sensory boxes for the children (and adults) to smell the things a ‘rodent’ would sniff out and they learned circus skills including parachute games, balancing a feather on their nose, Diabalo tricks, juggling, plate spinning, tightrope walking and hula-hooping. We hid toy rats for a treasure hunt at the end of the day and after this told the parents about a free bus to a selected performance of *I Was A Rat*, giving them information to take away and a booking form for them to fill in.”<sup>1</sup>

This approach was a huge success, not just because of the increase in attendance, but because it “turned out to be cheaper than putting an advert in the local newspaper but with better results.”<sup>2</sup>



1 & 2 <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Rural-community-engagement-1.pdf>

## Why collaborate?

Collaboration is when different elements work together, combining strengths and overcoming weaknesses, to successfully accomplish shared goals.

You may be motivated to collaborate because of a funding opportunity, or a desire to enhance or expand your creative output, or a wish to reach new audiences or networks, and create greater social impact.

Creative collaborations can certainly make better use of resources, funding and capability. You can collaborate with others on mutually beneficial outcomes, providing audiences with a more diverse and exciting range of creative activities, ultimately adding to a stronger and more resilient arts sector.

They can be enriching, empowering and fulfilling. You get to not only pool resources and funding, but also ideas, workloads, skills, share problem solving, and create something that could never have been achieved on your own.

Collaborations however, aren't for everyone, and aren't suitable for every type of project or goal. Creative collaborations can take twice as long, and require an open minded approach, willingness to compromise and a dedication to the outcome. Some describe collaborations like a marriage, and you have to ensure yours isn't simply a marriage of convenience.

You have to really want the riches, enough to ride the inevitable waves!



**Some describe collaborations like a marriage**

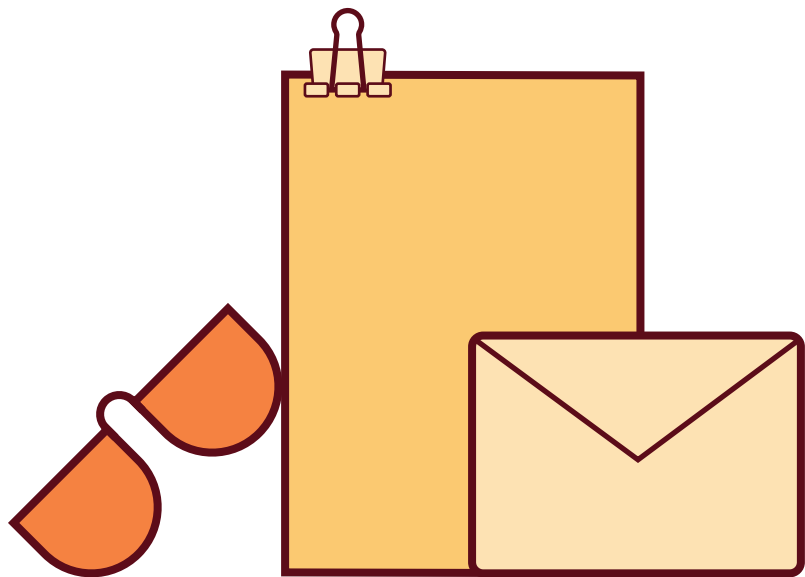
## Develop a culture of collaboration — avoid working in silos

Oftentimes the very system artists and arts organisations operate in can pitch us against one another, feeling like we are competing for the same funding pools and fighting for the same audience.

But this does not mean we need to shrink into competitive thinking and operate in isolation as ‘silos’.

If you’re feeling protective of your patch and threatened by ‘competition’, then chances are you’re operating in a ‘silo’ and robbing yourself of many opportunities to grow, enhance your mahi, and even more joy. It can be a limiting and lonely place to operate from.

If however, you look around you and see opportunity and potential, then you are operating from a powerful place, and probably viewing your community more like an ecosystem.



There's a lot of talent in the Waikato, but often what happens is creatives are working in isolation, and they don't really know each other or what each other is doing.

There is a lot of potential for people to blend their artforms but there's little opportunity for the people working in bubbles to even know about each other.



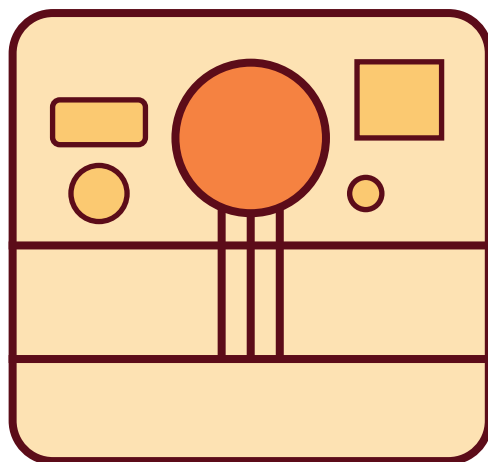
It would be great to be able to combine the pool of knowledge a lot more, and share resources and skills among the creative community.<sup>3</sup>

Mike Sorenson  
Performing Arts Strategy  
2022

<sup>3</sup> <https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Performing-Arts-Strategy-interim-community-report.pdf>

## Ecosystems

Ecosystems are networks with whom we complement, collaborate, work symbiotically with, and at times compete with. If you're only focusing on competition, you're not seeing a whole lot of opportunities, sustainability, connection and community that potentially supports, promotes and enhances what you do.



## Mapping your ecosystem



Draw yourself in the middle of an empty page. Now think about the community and networks you operate in (in person and online), the existing suppliers, partners, supporters, clients/customers/audience members, volunteers etc. Write them on the page with circles around them.

Who have you already got strong connections with?

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What other people or organisations (that are similar) could you develop relationships with?

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Where can you see potential synergy: where your combined value is greater than just one offering?

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Who could you collaborate with?  
Think outside the square here

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Draw lines connecting the circles that you've already got relationships with. Think about where others in your ecosystem fit – if you're not connected, how can you be?

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If in your ecosystem you only have other people complimenting you then this is a powerful place to be. If in your ecosystem you only have intense competition, something isn't working and you need to differentiate yourself more. Think: what makes me unique? The answer will be the key to what you highlight when you present yourself to the world.

Your ecosystem can potentially show you plenty of opportunities for exciting and innovative collaborations, particularly if you choose to look outside the box. You could collaborate with other arts disciplines – live painting with live music for example, or whakairo and animation, spoken word and dance.

Or, you could look to collaborate outside the creative sector with other venues, artists or organisations and get really innovative. Imagine poets pairing with a rugby team to tell their stories, or a restaurant and a theatre troupe creating an immersive dining experience?

Mr Milton's Canteen, Creative Waikato and Wintec School of Media Arts collaborated on *Piano and Eggs* in 2016, which was a series of breakfast concerts held at Milton's cafe in Kirikiriroa Hamilton. Concerts are usually held in the evenings, but this fun collaboration had people enjoying a diverse range of music each Monday morning with their eggs. What a way to start the week!



## How to start

A collaboration could be as simple as advertising events of others in your ecosystem, even those that might traditionally be seen as competitors.

Collaborations might be one-off, short projects, or longer projects that may last for years. Some may require little energy, and others may demand larger amounts of time, money and resources.

If you're keen to look into a collaboration, perhaps consider the below questions first.

What do we want to achieve,  
and who can help us get there?

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Are we ready and prepared to enter into a partnership?

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Is it the right time for a partnership?

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What are the costs and benefits in time and energy?

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## Collaboration ready



Once you have a collaboration in mind, it is useful to ask:

Why are we specifically choosing to collaborate with these people in particular?

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What do we appreciate about what they bring?

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### What is our shared vision?

E.g. “we want to push our creative boundaries and expand our audiences”

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### What values do we share?

E.g. Whakaiti (humility), manaakitanga (good relationships), courage, sustainability, ko tau rourou (generosity), open-mindedness, etc

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### Do we have clear goals?

E.g. we will have at least 2 summer gigs in place by the end of October

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### Do we have clear roles and responsibilities?

E.g. X will be responsible for making sure we have all the gear we need, will be responsible for approaching all the potential venues

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### What is their working style, communication style and values?

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Are the motivations for collaboration understood by all?

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Are the expectations clear?

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Do you need a collaboration agreement?

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Perhaps the most important aspect to a collaboration is ensuring you all have shared goals. Your goals will set the direction, pinpoint what you want to achieve, and what success looks like.

Has each individual/organisation, as well as for the collaboration, set the goal/s?

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Are the goals specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and relevant, and time-bound and trackable (SMART)?

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**There are many resources online that delve further into SMART goals**



## Conflict

# Conflict and differences are to be expected from time to time in collaborations.

And in creative processes, creative conflict can be helpful and useful! There is the concept of ‘failing forwards’ that could be applied here, where conflict (or ‘failure’) can be viewed as an important part of the process that can bring positive outcomes, such as new and innovative ways of doing things.

When there is an issue however, it is vital that all collaborators walk towards it with a willingness to listen and respect each other, and a commitment to resolve the conflict before it takes root as a negative block.

Michael Winer and Karen Ray, in their book *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining and Enjoying the Journey*<sup>4</sup> offer four steps in resolving conflicts:

### Expect conflict

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Clarify the issues (requires open communication)

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Create a conflict resolution process

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Resolve the unresolvable (requires a willingness to resolve the issues and move on)

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They recommend dealing with the conflict as soon as it arises, setting aside dedicated time to work towards a resolution.

Below are the main sources of conflict they’ve identified in their studies:

### Power struggles

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The wrong people as part of the team

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Low trust

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Vague vision and focus

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Incomplete desired results and strategies

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Lack of clear authority

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In the planning stage of your project, have an honest conversation about where things might go wrong in your collaboration, and together look for ways to minimise these issues if and when they come up.

<sup>4</sup> Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey by Michael Winer and Karen Ray

## Common reasons for failure

Similarly, if you anticipate these common pitfalls in collaborations, you can prepare to avoid them. Michael Winer and Karen Ray found these are common reasons for failure:

Collaboration does not have sufficient depth of purpose

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Weak communication

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Insufficient funding

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Irreconcilable logistical challenges (e.g. meeting schedules)

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Change of focus or direction

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Insufficient time given to reach the full extent of goals

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Goals are too ambitious

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Overestimation of availability of resources, including energy and time

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The collaboration was simply a means to an end and lacked the necessary depth and substance needed to sustain it

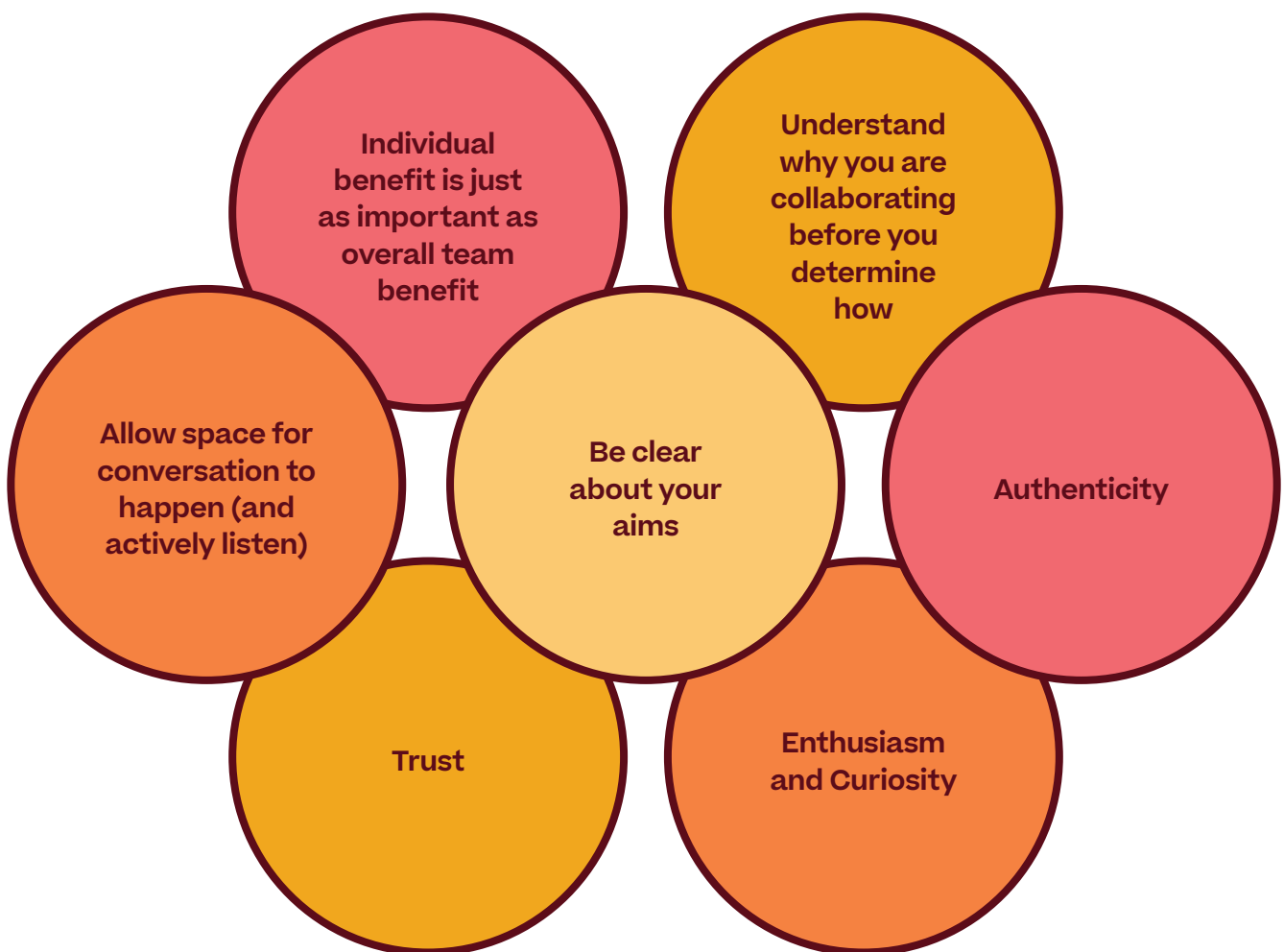
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One partner failed or was unable to meet its obligations

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## Collaboration principles

The art of collaboration can help each individual to enhance their own creative practice, learn more about their own work, and find a great sense of achievement in their own development – as well as connect with new audiences.



**Collaboration done right should be a mutually beneficial experience, forging connections that will hopefully last a long time**



## Collaboration tips

Getting your collaboration arrangement (including outcomes, roles and responsibilities etc) in writing can be really important. Then you can trust that you are all on the same page, that the agreement is clear for everyone involved, and there is little room for error

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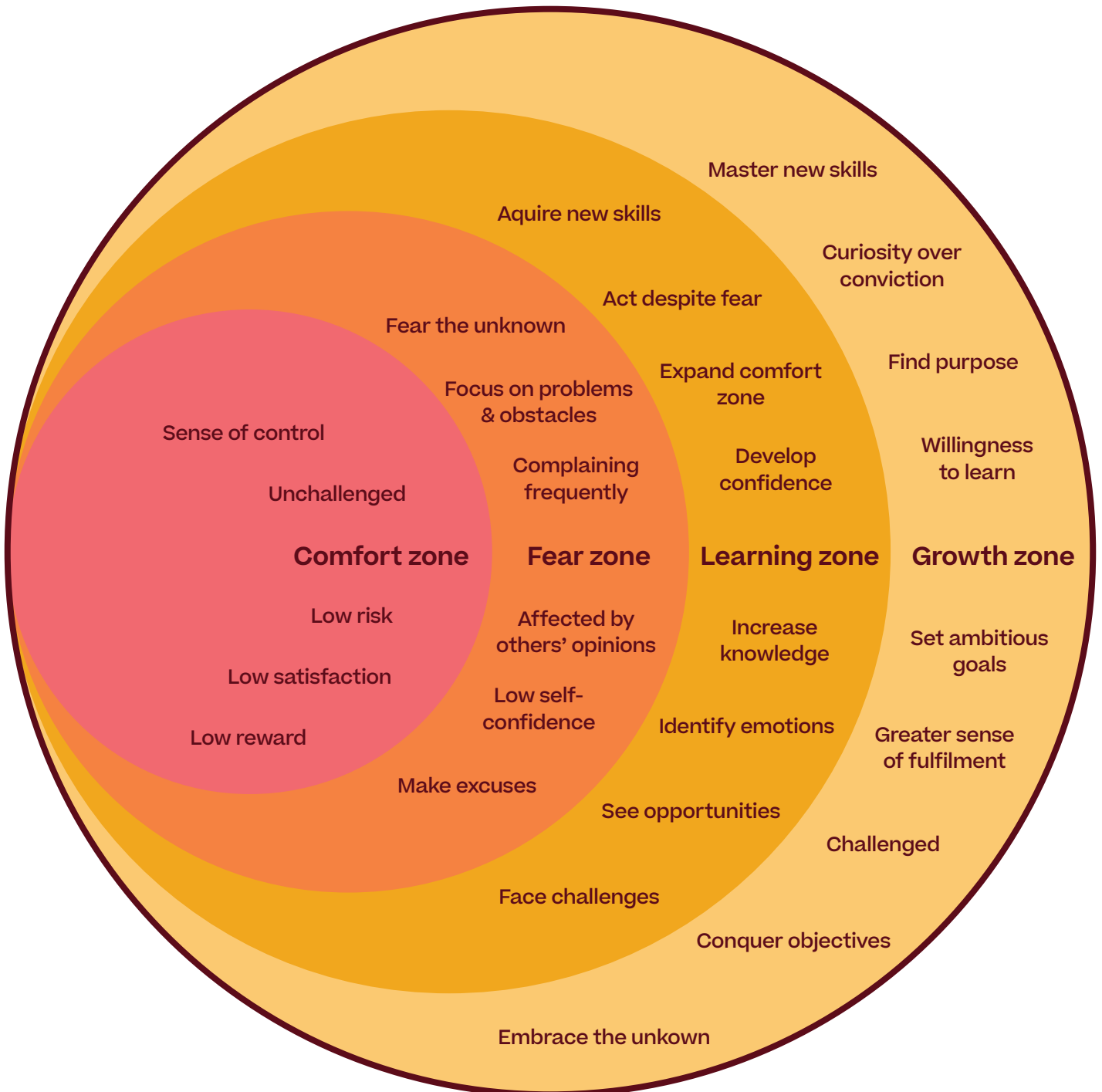
Can you embody these qualities: time, flexibility, trust, mutual respect, healthy communication, goal-oriented focus, honesty, resilience, willingness to work through issues, a growth mindset?

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Can you channel a growth mindset?

- A growth mindset is the belief that intelligence and talents are growable and changeable. With this mindset, it's normal and ok to fail before acquiring a new skill, and setbacks are viewed as learning opportunities
  - A fixed mindset is the belief that intelligence is fixed – so if you're not good at something, you believe you'll never be good at it. For those with a fixed mindset, any undue exertion of effort in a new task is an indicator that they (or the collaborator) don't possess the required skill
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**Which do you choose?  
To grow or stay  
the same**



## Useful links and reading

Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and  
Enjoying the Journey by Michael Winer and Karen Ray

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Performing Arts Strategy (Waikato, 2022)

 [creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Performing-Arts-Strategy-interim-community-report.pdf](https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Performing-Arts-Strategy-interim-community-report.pdf)

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With  
collaborations  
come whole  
new worlds,  
new ideas  
and new  
exciting  
projects.

Janina Mundy

