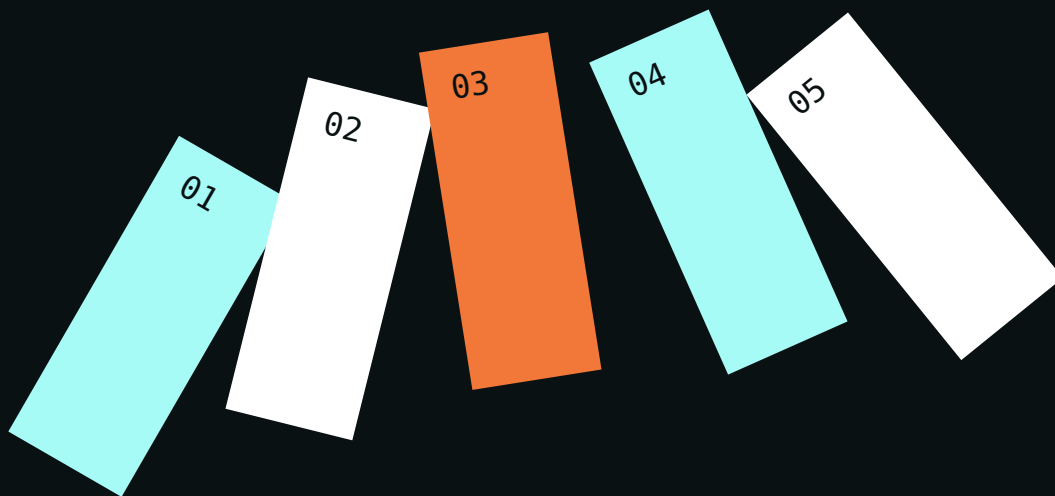


ILLUSTRATED FIELD GUIDE / NO. 098

# ONE SMALL MOVE.

A practical, research-informed way to think about creative cascades without pretending that the future is predictable.



MAKE. NOTICE. CONNECT. RECOMBINE. REVISE.

[01 / START HERE](#)

# Read before you push

*A playful installation. A serious distinction.*

The invitation. Make one small creative object. Show it to someone. Notice how it might create an opening for another act. Repeat - without assuming a

## THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF STATEMENT

### Evidence

What published research or direct observation actually supports.

### Interpretation

A defensible explanation of why one step might connect to another.

### Speculation

An imagined future path, marked as a possibility, not a prediction.

Operating rule. Every chain in the interactive site is a storyboard. Its steps are not calculated probabilities, causal estimates or evidence of personal destiny. The demo does not collect or transmit visitor inputs.

A good outcome is not the only valuable outcome. A sketch, learning moment, shared joke, unfinished zine or small beautiful thing can have value whether or not it becomes a larger project.

# Five stages, no miracle

*An interpretation of the creative process, not a universal law.*

01

**MAKE**

A small, complete artifact

02

**EXPOSE**

Someone or something encounters it

03

**CONNECT**

A new link becomes available

04

**COMBINE**

Ideas are translated or remixed

05

**REVISE**

Feedback changes the next artifact

Loops matter. This picture looks linear because a page is flat. Real creative work returns to earlier stages: feedback changes what gets made; connections collapse; a paused experiment may be resumed years later.

Another possibility: the first step is enough. There is no requirement to maximize the chain.

## 03 / RESEARCH LENS

# Small wins

*A bounded act can make a large challenge more approachable.*

Karl E. Weick (1984) proposed a strategy of small wins for reframing overwhelming social problems into concrete outcomes of moderate importance. The argument concerns how action becomes more imaginable and manageable; it does not claim that every small act will scale.

## THINK IN BOUNDED UNITS

**Too large**

Build a universally loved creative platform

**Bounded**

Make a one-page interactive sketch

**Observable**

Show it to one willing reader

Worksheet prompt. What is the smallest version of your idea that would still be recognizably yours? What can you complete without asking an imaginary future audience to validate it?

SOURCE / Weick, American Psychologist (1984), DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.39.1.40

# Progress is not spectacle

*Meaningful forward movement can be psychologically important.*

Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer (2011) analyzed workday experience and reported a strong association between progress in meaningful work and positive inner work life. That is a motivation finding, not a guarantee of innovation, attention or commercial success.

## A MORE USEFUL QUESTION THAN “WILL IT GO VIRAL?”

- 01 MEANING**  
Why does the small act matter to the maker?
- 02 MOVEMENT**  
What is different after making it?
- 03 LEARNING**  
What did the attempt reveal?
- 04 FREEDOM**  
Would it still be worth doing if it ends here?

Practical distinction. Measurable audience growth is one kind of outcome. The act of understanding, finishing, revising or enjoying the craft is another.

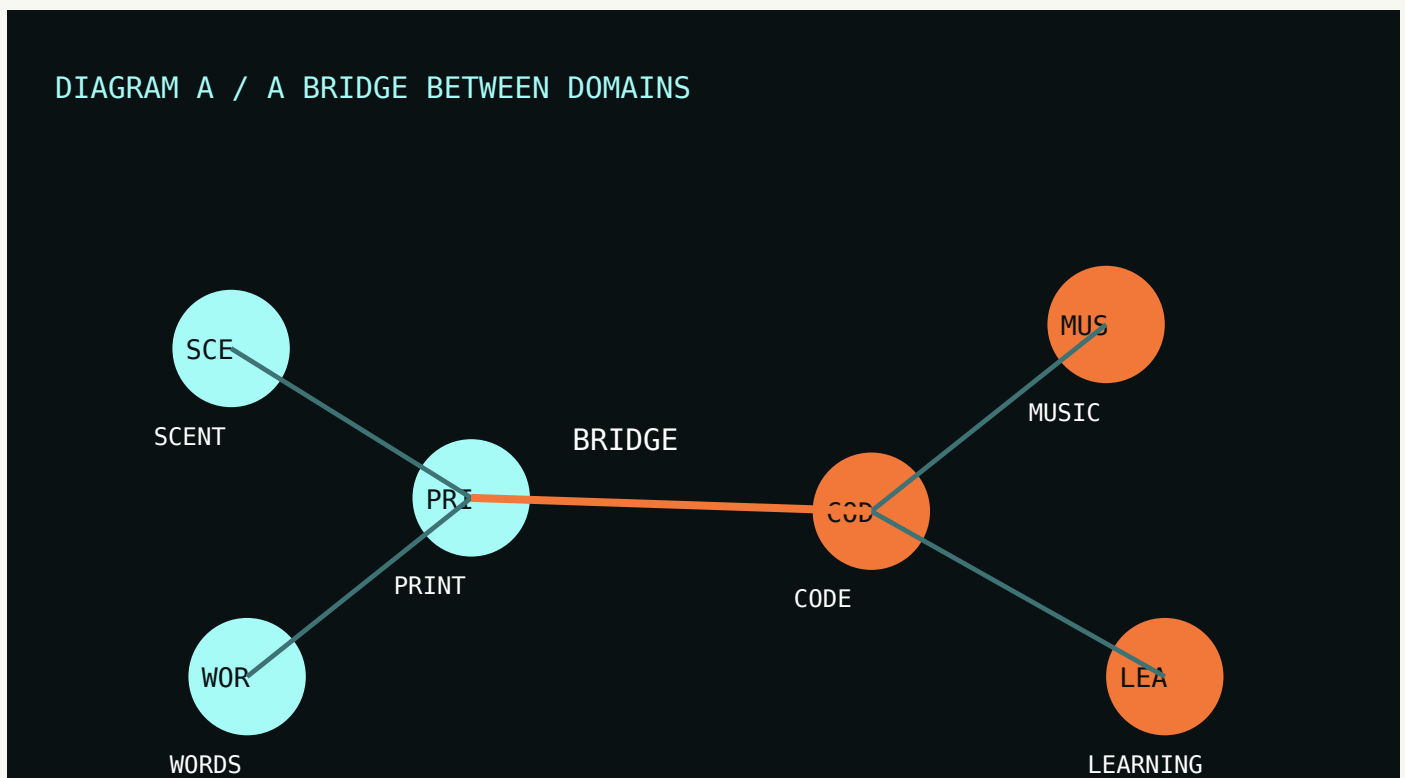
SOURCE / Amabile & Kramer (2011), Harvard Business Review: The Power of Small Wins

# Ideas travel through bridges

*New connections may carry unfamiliar knowledge.*

Hargadon and Sutton studied technology brokering in a product design firm. They describe how solutions known in one industry could be transferred and recombined in another. The point is not that all unexpected pairings work. It is that boundaries can become sources of

DIAGRAM A / A BRIDGE BETWEEN DOMAINS



Try it. Pick a craft, discipline or hobby far from your usual project. What method from that world could you borrow ethically, adapt honestly, and credit where appropriate?

SOURCE / Hargadon & Sutton (1997), Administrative Science Quarterly 42(4), 716-749

# Recombine, then test

*Novelty can increase uncertainty, not just excitement.*

In research on technological search, Lee Fleming (2001) found that unfamiliar component combinations are associated with more variable results in the studied setting. New combinations can fail, surprise or occasionally succeed exceptionally. A “remix” is an experiment, not a shortcut around evidence.

## A CONCEPTUAL RECOMBINATION MATRIX

ANALOG RESEARCH

SCENT MEMORY

INTERACTIVE WEB

### EXAMPLE COMBINATION

An interactive exhibit about how memories of smells are discussed, compared and revised.

Useful test. Name the actual question your hybrid project helps investigate. Does it do something better, clearer, more interesting or more humane than a single-discipline version?

Failure mode. A visually unusual mash-up may be memorable but incoherent. The remedy is not more spectacle; it is a sharper purpose.

SOURCE / Fleming (2001), Management Science 47(1), 117-132

07 / FICTIONAL DEMO

# The zine that became a lab

*An invented teaching story, explicitly not empirical evidence.*

**01 A maker prints one scent zine**

**02 A friend shares it with a musician**

**03 The musician proposes a sound exercise**

**04 A teacher asks for a class adaptation**

**05 A workshop is planned together**

Counterfactual: the friend might never open the message. The musician might be busy. The teacher might not have a suitable class. Each branch requires real conditions and other people's independent choices.

Notably: the zine was a creative work before any of the later steps occurred.



08 / WORKSHEET

# Build your own chain

Write in verbs. Keep every step conditional.

Start with an act that is small, ethical, and under your control. Name three plausible next encounters. Then write at least one reason the sequence might stop. An interesting chain is not the same thing as a likely chain.

## 01 / THE ACT

*I could make...*

---

## 02 / THE ENCOUNTER

*It might reach...*

---

## 03 / THE CONVERSATION

*Someone might ask...*

---

## 04 / THE REMIX

*A new combination could be...*

---

## 05 / THE LIMIT

*But it might stop because...*

---

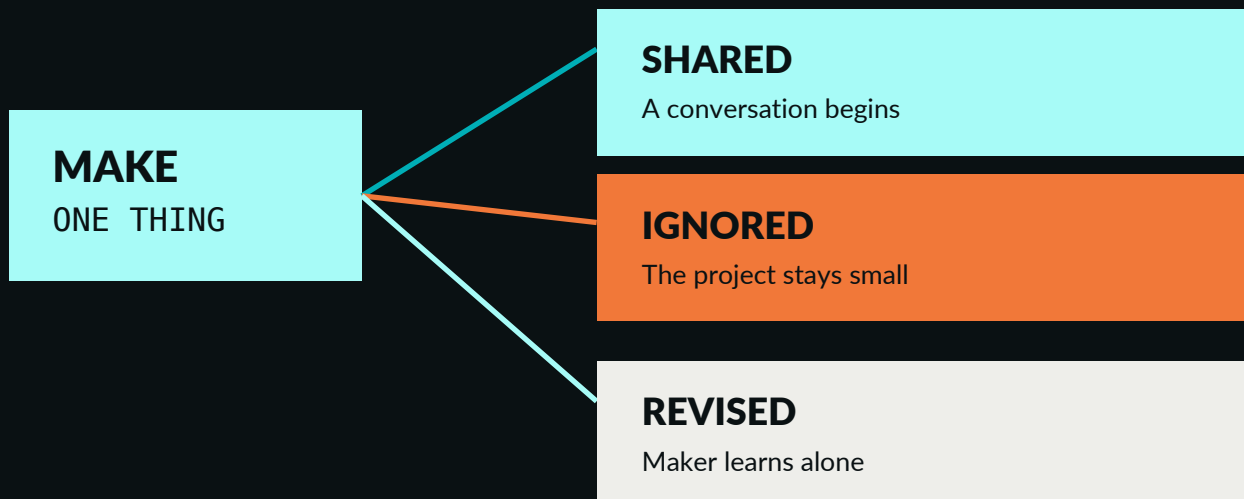
Make a companion version online at [chainreaction.sahilwho.online](https://chainreaction.sahilwho.online), or use the blank boxes above with a pen.

# Draw the path not taken

*The alternative story is part of good reasoning.*

After imagining a successful sequence, add competing explanations and outcomes. This practice helps avoid hindsight bias: the feeling that a result was always destined once we know it happened.

DIAGRAM B / MULTIPLE PLAUSIBLE BRANCHES



Three prompts: Which conditions make each path possible? Which assumptions are outside your control? Can the original act remain worthwhile across all three?

If only the most flattering branch appears in your story, redraw the tree.

# The observation ledger

*Separate what happened from what you inferred.*

The most useful record of an experiment is often mundane: what you made, what you observed, who chose to engage, and what changed afterward. Use the fields below without turning them into a performance score.

## DATE / ARTIFACT

*What did I actually make?*

---

---

## OBSERVED RESPONSE

*What evidence did I see directly?*

---

---

## MY INTERPRETATION

*What story am I telling about it?*

---

---

## AN ALTERNATIVE

*What else could explain the result?*

---

---

# Build without manipulation

*The environment around a domino matters.*

Creative chains often involve other people. Their attention, labour, consent and independence are not mechanisms to be exploited. A workshop, share request or collaboration should allow an easy “no”.

## INVITE; DO NOT CONSCRIPT

A share is an invitation. A response is not owed. Credit collaborators and preserve their right to disengage.

## MEASURE ONLY WHAT MATTERS

A creative artifact can be worthwhile without vanity metrics. Collect only necessary data and explain any tracking.

## HANDLE UNCERTAINTY CLEARLY

Name fictional outcomes and speculative scenarios. Do not present an imaginative chain as a demonstrated causal model.

## LEAVE ROOM FOR PLAY

Unfinished, private and unmonetized work can be valuable. This guide is not a prescription to scale everything.

# A 20-minute experiment

*A creative invitation, not a productivity target.*

00-05

## MAKE

Create a one-screen sketch, tiny scent note, micro-essay or 12-word poem.

05-10

## TRANSLATE

Describe it in the vocabulary of a very different discipline.

10-15

## BRANCH

Write three outcomes: connection, revision and no further response.

15-20

## REFLECT

Which act itself felt worthwhile? What did you learn without an audience?

Optional: tell another person what you made. Do not treat their reply, silence or enthusiasm as a verdict on your worth or future.

## 13 / SOURCES

# Reading & evidence notes

*Read the originals. Notice where this guide goes beyond them.*

**WEICK / 1984**

Weick, K. E. "Small wins: Redefining the scale of social problems." *American Psychologist* 39(1), 40-49. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.39.1.40. Used for the concept of bounded, achievable outcomes.

**AMABILE & KRAMER / 2011**

Amabile, T. M., & Kramer, S. J. "The Power of Small Wins." *Harvard Business Review*, May 2011. Used for the relationship between progress in meaningful work and inner work life.

**HARGADON & SUTTON / 1997**

Hargadon, A., & Sutton, R. I. "Technology Brokering and Innovation in a Product Development Firm." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42(4), 716-749. DOI: 10.2307/2393655. Used for knowledge transfer and recombination across domains.

**FLEMING / 2001**

Fleming, L. "Recombinant Uncertainty in Technological Search." *Management Science* 47(1), 117-132. DOI: 10.1287/mnsc.47.1.117.10671. Used for the uncertainty of new technological combinations.

**GRANOVETTER / 1973**

Granovetter, M. S. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6), 1360-1380. DOI: 10.1086/225469. Additional reading on how social connections can bridge otherwise separate groups.

# The first domino is enough

*A brief field note for whatever comes next.*

Sometimes a small act becomes the beginning of a surprising collaboration. Sometimes it stays precisely what it is: a sketch, a sentence, a private discovery, a pleasure. Both can be real forms of creative life.

## THE METHOD, IN FOUR LINES

- 01 Make something you can name.
- 02 Let it meet the world without demanding a reply.
- 03 Distinguish what happened from what you hoped.
- 04 Keep the freedom to make again.

THE INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION  
**chainreaction.sahilwho.online**

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