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From Cutting Edges to the Cutting Edge: Knowing and Theorising through Collage Inquiry

Georgia Stavraki¹, Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki^{2,*} and Lena Jaspersen³

¹ Department of Organisation Management, Marketing and Tourism, International Hellenic University, Thessaloniki 57400, Greece. E-mail: stavrakig@ihu.gr

² Department of Marketing and International Business, Faculty of Business, Economics and Statistics, University of Vienna, Oskar-Morgenstern-Platz 1, Vienna 1090, Austria. * Corresponding author. E-mail: e.plakogiannaki@univie.ac.at

³ Management and Organisations Department, Leeds University Business School, Maurice Keyworth Building, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, West Yorkshire, United Kingdom. E-mail: L.J.Jaspersen@leeds.ac.uk

Author Biographies

Georgia Stavraki is Assistant Professor of Marketing at the International Hellenic University, Greece. Her research interests lie in the areas of visual research methods, arts marketing, experiential consumption and consumers' identity projects. She has published in *Management Learning* and *European Journal of Marketing*, among others.

Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki is Chaired Professor of International Business at the University of Vienna, Austria. She is Fellow of the British Academy of Management and Associate Editor at the *British Journal of Management*. Her research interests include qualitative research as well as SME and family firms internationalisation. She has published in the *Academy of Management Review*, *British Journal of Management*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, and *Journal of International Business Studies*, among others.

Lena J. Jaspersen is Lecturer in Innovation and Qualitative Research Methods at Leeds University Business School. With a multidisciplinary background in organization studies, sustainable development and innovation, Lena is committed to challenge-driven research, with a special interest in collaboration, co-creation and related research methods. Lena has co-authored methods textbooks ('Management and Business Research', 'Design Thinking for Student Projects', 'Understanding Global Development Research') and published in academic journals including the *British Journal of Management*.

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Abstract

Prompted by ongoing debates about the need for more novel and pluralistic management research, this paper explores the different ways of researching, knowing and theorising emerging from the arts-based method of collage inquiry. We used a problematising approach to examine how collage inquiry has been used in management research and neighbouring disciplines with the aim of unpacking its potential for relevant scholarship. We advance a typology of five approaches taken to collage inquiry: collage as *projection*, as *triangulation*, as *sensemaking*, as *negotiation*, and as *art*. The typology links research motivation, ontological and epistemological assumptions, process of collage creation and interpretation, the role of the researcher in the process, data collection and analysis, emerging meanings, and different ways of knowing, theorising, and assessing rigorously from collage inquiry. It clarifies when collage supports incremental extension and when—and how—it enables more imaginative, disruptive contributions. In doing so, we contribute to the broader management community, namely researchers, reviewers, and editors, by showing that different uses of collage inquiry rest on different assumptions and therefore enable different forms of knowing and theorising, as well as require different criteria for evaluation.

Keywords: *Collage, qualitative research, theorising, arts-based methods, visual methods, pluralism*

Introduction

Recent debates about knowledge production in management studies suggest that one-size-fits-all methodological approaches (e.g., standardised methodologies and templated-led procedures) can narrow paradigmatic, methodological and theorising pluralism, while encouraging formulaic and incremental work (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Bell, Kothiyal and Willmott, 2017; Mees-Buss, Welch and Piekkari, 2022; Paavilainen-Mäntymäki and Plakoyiannaki, 2025). A narrow view of rigour, where rigour is “confused with conventionalism” (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2021, p. 35), limits the kinds of theorising considered legitimate (Cunliffe, 2022) and risks allowing sedimented assumptions to harden into ‘bad’ theorising with adverse practical effects (Ghoshal, 2005). Calls to diversify theorising styles and innovate methodologically therefore remain pressing, with the *British Journal of Management* empowering discussions for promoting such pluralism (Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021). Building on this emphasis, management researchers have used arts-based methods (Appendix 1), which draw on artistic practices as a way of understanding a phenomenon under study to generate new knowledge from diverse philosophical standpoints (Lehtonen, 2024).

Within this growing interest of arts-based methods, collage inquiry shows particular promise for responding to such calls for pluralism and advancing management research (cf. Hansen *et al.*, 2023; Parsley and Acevedo, 2024). Yet, collage inquiry remains underexplored, with many claims to its methodological novelty leaving unclarified what is new and why it matters for theory. As such, we focus on collage inquiry’s potential to unlock new theoretical possibilities needed for capturing complex, relational, and interconnected phenomena characterising the management field (Busch, 2025). We argue that collage inquiry allows for such possibilities as it invites participants or researchers to (de)construct meaning by exploring

material, affective, and heterogeneous associations, which can foster new understandings (e.g., eliciting ineffable meanings and evoking resonances). Collage foregrounds contradiction and emergent connections rather than relying on abstraction and linear logic. Working “first from feelings about something to the ideas they evoke” (Butler-Kisber and Poldma, 2010, p. 3), making a collage supports movement from embodied, affective response to conceptual articulation. It opens alternative routes to knowledge production and brings into view tacit, embodied, and relational aspects of organising that template-led procedures often overlook. At the same time, what collage brings into focus may also leave other phenomena in shadow; we therefore treat collage as both an analytic resource and a site of ethical–political choice that demands reflexive use.

Given this context, we ask *how do researchers theorise from collage inquiry?* To connect method to theorising, we synthesise studies on current practices of collage inquiry and advance a typology, linking underlying philosophical premises to distinct interpretive moves: *collage-as-projection*, which treats collage as a cognitive device; *collage-as-triangulation*, which uses collage to elicit and contextualise other qualitative data; *collage-as-sensemaking*, which treats collage creation as a non-linear, intuitive, and embodied process; *collage-as-negotiation*, which foregrounds co-creation of meaning; and *collage-as-art*, which evokes suggestive meanings that surface and often challenge established understandings. We do not rank these approaches; rather, we clarify their distinct affordances and theorising payoffs, alongside criteria for rigour (Delios *et al.*, 2023; Christofi *et al.*, 2024).

By advancing a typology of five approaches to collage inquiry, the contribution of the study is threefold: 1) The typology unpacks the underexplored relationship between method (collage inquiry) and theorising (through collage inquiry) showing that researchers have a choice

about how to theorise, just as they have a choice about how to produce and analyse data from collage inquiry; 2) it expands the possibilities of theorising through collage inquiry, illustrating the multi-faceted theorising nature of collage inquiry; 3) it provides a framework for moving beyond one-size-fits-all notions of rigour in collage inquiry.

The paper proceeds as follows. We first introduce collage inquiry and what it means to conduct collage-informed research. We then describe the problematising approach used to develop the typology of five approaches to collage inquiry. Next, we present the resulting typology. We close by returning to collage's ethical–political stakes and the risks of 'bad' theorising, showing how the typology can help make pluralism in collage inquiry more intelligible and evaluable in practice.

Collage inquiry

Collage, as a visual art form, traces its roots to synthetic cubism (1912–1914), when artists such as Picasso and Braque experimented with diverse materials and objects (Vaughan, 2005). Artists create collages by juxtaposing various and even incongruent materials (e.g., photographs, fabrics, newspaper clippings) onto a surface to create a composition that unsettles conventions of representation and order (Davis, 2008). Collage often works by challenging perception, inviting viewers to renegotiate meaning rather than simply depicting it. A collage is created through cumulative, situated and affective encounters between artists and materials, which allow artists to query the given and imagine otherwise. For instance, Vaughan (2005, p. 37), in the making of a collage, notes the following: 'I wonder whether a work of art that has a mourning function becomes "a work of forgetting"... then, I imagine that my work of mourning will be complete when I have remembered enough'.

The technique of collage entered the world of research through the arts. In collage inquiry, we mobilise the same properties as in collage art—i.e., materiality, fragmentation and the generativity of juxtaposition—as ways to elicit tacit and embodied experience, empower participation and surface assumptions when words alone are limiting (Cambre, 2013; Lehtonen, 2024; Parsley and Acevedo, 2024). Juxtaposition is approached as the central analytic mechanism of collage inquiry, as in collage art. Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999, p. 5) describe the process of creating juxtapositions as “impromptu visual poetry”, which can subsequently be deliberately analysed as meaning-making moves that generate insight. Practically, materials are sourced, selected, altered (e.g., cutting images into new shapes), and positioned in relation to one another (i.e., creating juxtapositions) until a pattern or expression emerges in relation to the research focus. Through these steps, collage making produces data: thought and its manifestation are (re)connected in intuitive ways, driving a reflexive process that involves interpretative, analytic, and creative acts allowing for (re)imagining existing meanings about a phenomenon (e.g., see Letter 1 in Parsley and Acevedo, 2024).

Extending the above, the compositional counterpoint between image fragments functions as an expressive strategy that brings the material and the visual–semantic into dialogue. The placement of cut images (e.g., a composition that feels liberating), and the relational play between images and words, create openings for multiple and sometimes transformational interpretations (Parsley and Acevedo 2024; Vaughan, 2005). Thus, juxtapositions invite playful explorations of emerging meanings that support the unpacking of new ways of thinking and feeling. As Lehtonen and Putkonen (2023, p. 8) argue, such playful exploration ‘go[es] deeper than reflecting or performing pleasure, and [is] about world-building, self-exploration, and uncertain outcomes’. Attending to multiplicity is also political: by foregrounding embodied

making and subjectivity, collage can challenge settled truths and entrenched power relations (e.g., see Letter 1 in Parsley and Acevedo, 2024), widening inquiry to include voices otherwise marginalised. In this light, collage inquiry encourages us to think beyond existing knowledge structures to acknowledge vulnerability and to recognise and appreciate the other(s) encountered in and through our work (Saville, 2020; Sai *et al.*, 2024).

Making, interpreting and reporting collages

Collage inquiry involves making collages in analogue, mixed-media, or digital forms. Across formats, the juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials underpins collage creation. A small number of design choices shape the creation of juxtapositions: the *materials* (e.g., images to be used in the collage) and how closely they relate to the topic (Parsley and Acevedo, 2024; Pavesi, Denizci Guillet and Law, 2017); the *briefing and prompts* used to engage participants (e.g., metaphor cues as prompts; Lehtonen, 2024); and the *making environment* (e.g., privacy and comfort support depth; Culshaw, 2019). For step-by-step procedures and practical considerations, see Culshaw (2019), Parsley and Acevedo (2024), and Plakoyiannaki and Stavragi (2018); for ethical issues (e.g., copyright and consent), see Coffin and Hill (2022). Based on the above, collage creation can be more or less standardised, since this has significant implications for what collages are, how they can be ‘read’ and analysed, and what kind of insight they may enable (Jancsary and Lehtonen, 2025; Jaspersen and Stein, 2019), as we discuss below.

Collage interpretation mainly reflects two broad analytic stances: focusing on the *representational* content of the images composing a collage (e.g., employment of content/thematic analysis) or focusing on *processual/embodied dimensions* of making a collage (e.g., arts-based, (auto)ethnographic analysis). These choices align with distinct onto-

epistemological commitments, from viewing the collage as a static composition (representational content) to treating it as a dynamic opening (processual/embodied dimensions) for (un)learning through sensing (Preece, Rojas-Gaviria and Rodner, 2023). Different ways of presenting collage interpretation mirror these stances: reporting (e.g., Hogg, Bruce and Hill, 1999) and illustrating (e.g., Roberts and Woods, 2018) prioritise text-led explanation, whereas evoking can enact embodied meanings (e.g., Parsley and Acevedo, 2024). Although esteemed journals increasingly accommodate divergent methodologies, text-heavy norms persist and can constrain their presentation (Coffin and Hill, 2022). Consequently, decisions about making, interpreting and reporting collage inquiry are not neutral; they configure what counts as evidence and how theoretical claims can be warranted.

Problematising collage inquiry

To address our question, *how do researchers theorise from collage inquiry?*, we adopted a problematising approach to the collage inquiry literature (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020), aiming to interrogate rather than simply catalogue a fragmented field. We developed a typology of the methodological possibilities of collage inquiry (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020; Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020) by synthesising work across business and management and neighbouring fields, including education and pedagogy, psychology, marketing and consumer research, and urban, tourism, leisure, political, and health studies. These labels are indicative rather than exhaustive: disciplinary boundaries are porous, and some items straddle categories (e.g., marketing/consumer work within business).

We first conducted a Google Scholar search (1996–2024) using terms such as *collage inquiry*, *collage methodology*, *collage in qualitative research*, *collage visual method*, *collage art*,

and *collage arts-based method*. We then complemented this search with citation tracking to identify books, book chapters, conference papers, and journal articles relevant to collage inquiry. This approach enabled us to bring into conversation papers that set methodological expectations (e.g., influential management and methodology journal papers) alongside contributions from neighbouring disciplines, fostering deeper reflection and highlighting novelty and disruptive potential in collage inquiry (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020; Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020).

We included studies that explicitly used collage inquiry as an aspect of data collection, that included research-related discussion about the use of collage inquiry, and that featured evidence of collage visual data. We treated such evidence broadly, including the collage itself, records of its creation, and/or records of its interpretation and related explanations. We also attended to different forms of agency, that is, whether collages were created by participants or researchers, because this shaped the research motivation and the kinds of meanings generated. Participant-produced collages typically offered the vantage point of those experiencing the phenomenon (e.g., Koll, Von Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2010), whereas researcher-produced collages could support data creation, conceptualisation, and analysis (e.g., Bröckerhoff and Seregina, 2022; Capous-Desyllas and Bromfield, 2018). We excluded papers that did not focus on collage inquiry itself (e.g., papers using collage research to understand another methodology) or did not use collage as a visual method (e.g., narrative collage).

On this basis, we considered both empirical and conceptual contributions in order to a) recognise different manifestations of collage inquiry, and b) examine whether conceptual discussions informed empirical applications. This synthesis proved important because the literature was fragmented across disciplines, and papers using collage were often not in dialogue with one another. For instance, the emphasis on embodied theorising (e.g., in *collage-as-*

negotiation approach, see Table 1) is evident in both conceptual (e.g., Chilton and Scotti, 2014) and empirical (e.g., Yuen, 2016) papers, even though there are no associations, such as citations, linking these different papers. Such associations were also reflected in shared vocabulary used in the selected papers as well as in discussions that either problematised existing thinking to collage inquiry or were inspired by alternative sources (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020). On this point, we observed that researchers who had used collage inquiry were not necessarily aware of how scholars from other disciplines used collages before them; disciplinary boundaries might have stifled such exchange.

The final corpus comprised 42 items (18 empirical studies, 19 conceptual/method papers, and 5 hybrids, see Appendix 2). We coded the papers for discipline, research question, motivation, contribution, type of study, paradigmatic positioning, data collection, data analysis, theorising, and quality criteria. In practice, however, many papers were unevenly specified. Paradigmatic positioning assumptions were sometimes tacit, methodological choices underexplained, and quality criteria in some cases sat uneasily with the study's implicit positioning. Claims of methodological novelty were common, but often without a clear articulation of what was novel or why it mattered. This led to a careful examination of the (sometimes tacit) assumptions underlying different collage studies, and related ontological and epistemological underpinnings. For instance, to uncover the tacit assumptions underlying different collage studies, we explored the borrowed methodological and philosophical authorities, and asked whether the analytic moves corresponding to these authorities were echoed in the data (Pratt, Sonenshein and Feldman, 2022). Emerging from this analysis were recurring dimensions and practices that sensitised us toward the development of our typology (Biggart and

Delbridge, 2004). This process was complemented by a mapping exercise through which these dimensions and practices were further refined and organised.

Moreover, while capturing and categorising diverse approaches to collage inquiry (Jaakkola, 2020), we created a collage to envisage and refine our emerging typology. Figure 1 presents the collage as an analytical device that synthesises and visually interrogates its underlying dimensions and practices. Inspired by a problematising approach (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2020), it enabled us to surface and question deeper assumptions across different forms of collage inquiry. In doing so, it refined the typology in three ways. First, it made visible distinct philosophical assumptions and “ways of seeing” (e.g., *look*, *escape*, *add*, *live*, *experience*, refer also to Appendix 3) linked to different onto-epistemological orientations (see Table 1). Second, it foregrounded issues of agency by clarifying who creates, who interprets, and how interpretive authority is distributed (e.g., the recurring motif of hands in Figure 1; see Appendix 3 and Table 1). Third, it highlighted differences between incremental and disruptive theorising, where disruption refers to approaches that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about investigated phenomena.

[illegible]

Towards a Typology: Five approaches to collage inquiry

We now turn to the typology of the five approaches to collage inquiry (Table 1). Each approach entails different features that distinguish it from the others. Accordingly, we organise each approach across distinctive features that connect design to claims, i.e., research motivation and process of collage creation, paradigmatic positioning, process of collage interpretation, the role of the researcher in the process, data collection and analysis, emerging meanings as well as the different ways of knowing, theorising, and assessing rigorously from collage inquiry. We also provide illustrative references for each approach. The typology expands and clarifies the possibilities of both theorising and rigorous evaluation in collage inquiry.

Table 1. The typology of the five approaches to collage inquiry

Features	Projection	Triangulation	Sense-making	Negotiation	Art
Research Motivation	Collage as an elicitation tool and ‘recorder’ of facts that makes the invisible visible.	Collage as a means for eliciting, communicating, triangulating, and contextualising understandings.	Collage as an intuitive non-linear process of sense-making that privileges the unimagined and uncertain.	Collage as a process enabling the negotiation of meaning.	Collage as a technique that inspires understandings and evokes resonances through its expressive and aesthetic qualities (e.g., juxtapositions, shifting margins).
Collage Creation	Usually created by participant to document cognitive patterns. Meaning emerges from commentaries (‘research text’).	Created by participant or researcher. Collage is part of a multimodal research design aimed at generating holistic interpretations of human experience. Collages and related explanations are both treated as data.	Created by participant or researcher. The focus is on collage as a process of elucidation and playful exploration. Recorded process, collage, and related explanations are treated as data.	Co-created by researcher and participant or between researchers. Meanings evolve and become articulated in the process of creating and reflecting on the collage.	Created by participant or researcher. The focus is on the collage-as-art that captures complex layers of meaning drawing on imagination and experience.
Ontology	Reality is concrete and subject to fundamental rules and laws.	Reality is socially constructed through meanings and interpretations.	Realities are constructed in embodied and performative ways.	Social constructed realities are relationally embedded, the personal is connected to the shared.	Realities are material and situated, yet also multi-dimensional and fluid.
Epistemology	Collage as an object that makes accessible memories of experiences, tacit understandings or opinions.	Collage as interpretation. Visual expressions elicit memories and related thoughts and feelings otherwise difficult to convey.	Collage as a process for intuitive, tangible and reflexive ways of knowing.	Collage enables the exploration and negotiation of situated understandings and intuitive meanings, bringing into dialogue personal and shared, pragmatic and abstract knowledge.	Collage as an aesthetic expression of creativity and materiality; collage has agency.
Process of interpretation	Single hermeneutics.	Double hermeneutics.	Double or reflexive hermeneutics.	Reflexive hermeneutics.	Double or reflexive hermeneutics.
Role of Researcher	Researcher is separate from the world and ‘collects facts’ about the social world; designs prompts/materials and treats collage as an instrument to elicit latent content.	Researcher as outsider or insider elicits, interprets, validates and integrates meanings; links collage with interviews/observation/docs; manages convergence/divergence.	Researcher attends to embodied/affective responses and enables plurality in meaning-making; actively engaged with both collage data and the process of analysing the data.	Researcher and participant engage in a dialogue that aims at the negotiation of meanings and the co-creation of knowledge.	Researcher as outsider or insider who appreciates and interprets collages as art; cultivates conditions for evocative making; attends to display and captioning; interprets with openness;

					foregrounds resonance; and resists over-closure.
Data Collection	Collage, (semi-)structured interview and/or focus groups to create research text.	Collage in conjunction with other data collection methods such as interviews and journal keeping.	Collage and recording of its production, reflection and/or interview. Participants are actively engaged in the creation of new ways of seeing, crafting and understanding.	Collage created by researcher and/or participant, process is recorded and is accompanied by reflection and discussion.	Collage as art and/or visual data.
Data Analysis	Deductive and inductive: Content analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory. Often high degree of structuration through the application of codes standardising content.	Inductive, driven by categorisation: Content and thematic analysis, constructionist grounded theory but also narrative and metaphor analysis.	Inductive and abductive, more syntagmatic: Hermeneutics, thematic analysis, reflexive (auto)ethnographic analysis, but also narrative analysis.	Inductive and abductive: Participatory or dialogic analysis methods.	Abductive analysis involving interpretation of visual elements and their relationships (process may draw on methods established in arts/arts history).
Meanings	Meanings treated as facts.	Situated and hidden meanings contextualised with other sources.	Emerging, multiple meanings and reflexive questions.	Dialectic interplay of meanings—experienced and co-created in the moment and between people and the environment.	Suggestive meanings and evoked resonances.
Knowing	Cognitive—explanatory knowing via abstraction and standardisation.	Pragmatic (propositional) knowing, situated by multiple sources.	Intuitive knowing: Situated and embodied knowing (temporal/affective).	Co-constructed, negotiated, relational knowing.	Imaginative/evocative knowing that invites re-interpretation and re-theorising.
Theorising	Systematic categorisation of projected content (i.e., recorded facts) to build predictive theory; extends theorising by surfacing (thematic and/or tacit) patterns otherwise inaccessible in interviews.	Integrates collage with other sources to produce thick, mechanism-aware and transferable explanations across convergent/divergent evidence.	Abductive moves from felt shifts to concepts; yields processual, embodied accounts and sensitising concepts that broaden what counts as phenomenon/mechanism.	Dialectical, co-created theorising around a shared collage; produces relational explanations and practice boundary concepts; extends theory by exposing limits and possibilities of shared meaning and power.	Compositional provocation; generates reframing, sensitising concepts, and critical insight; opens new problem framings rather than definitive propositions.
Quality Criteria	Validity, reliability and analytical generalisability.	Credibility, authenticity, rich rigour, transferability, researcher positionality.	Plausibility, interpretive rigour, resonance, experiential and embodied reflexivity.	Credibility, resonance, responsibility, practical relevance, relational reflexivity.	Resonance, criticality, catalytic insight, aesthetic—critical reflexivity.

Illustrative References	• Dakoumi Hamrouni and Touzi (2011); • Hall (2010); • Havlena and Holak (1996); • Herz (2010); • Hofstede <i>et al.</i> (2007); • Hogg <i>et al.</i> (1999); • Shin and Parker (2017).	• Belk <i>et al.</i> (2003); • Blasco <i>et al.</i> (2021); • Grob (2012); • Herz and Diamantopoulos (2013); • Koll <i>et al.</i> (2010); • Kubacki and Siemieniako (2011); • Malhotra <i>et al.</i> (2021); • Pavesi <i>et al.</i> (2017).	• Capous-Desyllas and Bromfield (2018); • Davis (2008); • Dekel-Dachs and Moorlock (2020); • MacKenzie and Wolf (2012); • Mackworth-Young <i>et al.</i> (2022); • Roberts and Woods (2018); • Van Schalkwyk (2010).	• Bailey and Woodall-Greene (2022); • Chilton and Scotti (2014); • Culshaw (2019); • Juzwik and Antonucci (2020); • Parsley and Acevedo, (2024); • Yuen (2016).	• Bröckerhoff and Seregina (2022); • Cambre (2013); • Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999); • de Rijke (2024); • Särnä (2016); • Vaughan (2005).
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Collage-as-projection

A common approach to collage inquiry, *collage-as-projection* uses collages as projective devices with the aim of eliciting and recording material that is otherwise inaccessible—making the invisible visible. By creating collages, participants can externalise cognitive patterns (Hall, 2010), surface tacit knowledge and feelings (Herz, 2010; Hogg *et al.*, 1999) and recall autobiographical memories (Shin and Parker, 2017). This approach rests on a broadly realist, single-hermeneutic stance: reality is taken as concrete and patterned by underlying regularities that an independent researcher can uncover through systematic procedures.

Accordingly, the researcher collects ‘facts’ about an aspect of this reality, using collages (often in some semi-structured form) in conjunction with other (semi-)structured or probing data collection methods, such as interviews or focus groups, which then constitute the main ‘research text’. A systematic comparative analysis between the visual representation and the written explanation is achieved through rounds of deductive and inductive coding characterised by a high degree of structuration (e.g., hierarchical data structure following more standardised methodological processes). Analysis is guided by methods involving systematic analysis of meanings as recorded facts—such as content analysis, thematic analysis, classical grounded theory—structured around an imposed conceptual order. For instance, Hogg *et al.* (1999, p. 672) discuss that participants were asked “to determine the reasons behind the images” and “content analysis was used to identify themes from the collages and the taped commentaries”.

Knowing is generated by a standardised process of abstraction (in terms of processes adopted for the analysis of collage as qualitative data). Its aim is to generate predictive theory, by identifying (thematic and/or tacit) patterns. For instance, collage-as-projection has been used to confirm pre-defined categories and associations in participants’ minds, such as nostalgia classes

(Havlena and Holak, 1996) and children’s recognition of brand names and logos, alongside “more indirect associations” (Hogg *et al.*, 1999, p. 673). Criteria used to assess the quality of studies using this approach include validity, reliability and analytical generalisability albeit usually adjusted for qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). For instance, Herz (2010) explicitly refers to securing high validity. Dakoumi Hamrouni and Touzi (2011, p. 319) also implicitly refer to the above mentioned quality criteria (e.g., validity and generalisability).

Collage-as-projection has been used in marketing (e.g., Hogg *et al.*, 1999; Shin and Parker 2017) but also in other disciplines such as urban studies (Hall, 2010). It suits exploratory research where access to subconscious and/or affective knowing is needed, e.g., researching habitus or portraying practices and transitions (Lê and Schmid, 2022). The novelty typically lies in treating collage as a non-standardised data source with an enhanced ability to capture the phenomenon of interest (e.g., Shin and Parker, 2017). However, analysis and theorising often follow template-led methods that privilege structure (e.g., identifying patterns and dissimilarities), which can mute what the process of making reveals. Greater openness—and different ways of knowing—emerges when researchers attend to embodied, processual aspects of collage (Jancsary and Lehtonen, 2025; Preece *et al.*, 2023).

Collage-as-triangulation

Whereas *collage-as-projection* adopts a broadly objectivist stance, *collage-as-triangulation* aligns more closely with a weak subjectivist stance (Cunliffe, 2011), using collage to elicit, communicate, and triangulate or contextualise interpretations. In this approach, collages — created either by researchers or participants — form part of multimodal designs and are used for method (e.g., Koll *et al.*, 2010) or data triangulation (e.g., Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2013). The

aim is to build more holistic understandings of human experience, from testable propositions to phenomenological accounts. Both collages and related explanations are analysed as data. For instance, in McCabe *et al.*'s (2020) study, collages are used as an additional context that provides phenomenological insights (e.g., 'ways of being in the world') into grooming practices.

A paradigmatic assumption underlying this approach is that reality is seen as socially constructed through meaning, which the collage facilitates in eliciting and expressing. Researchers typically use double hermeneutic to interpret, validate and synthesise interpretations of the social world. For instance, Belk, Ger and Askegaard (2003, p. 333) state that "collages from the projective exercises depicting desire emphasize exotic and luxurious travel destinations... the collages emphasized lust, hunger, thirst, and dreamlike fantasies". Moreover, collages are triangulated with other data (e.g., interviews, journals) or methodologies (e.g., case studies and arts-based methods) to elicit memories, thoughts and feelings otherwise difficult to convey; creating "visual depictions enriched the verbal interviews" as Malhotra *et al.*, (2021, p. 7) state.

Analysis and theorising in collage-as-triangulation are typically inductive and often multimodal. Researchers code both the created collage and associated talk/text, develop thick descriptions of manifested meanings, and combine methods such as thematic analysis, constructionist grounded theory, content, narrative and metaphor analysis to surface situated and latent meanings. These materials are then organised into categories that structure the account (e.g., "we categorised all collage elements and interview statements following content analysis guidelines," Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2013, p. 101; "in the final reanalysis we used jointly constructed categories of meaning... capturing the lived experience of informants' consumer

desire” Belk *et al.*, 2003, p. 333). This categorisation-led logic typically supports expert syntheses, convergent/anticipatory interpretations, and transferable theory.

Accordingly, this approach emphasises abstraction (moving from collage data to categories), conceptual clarity, procedural standardisation (e.g., content/thematic analysis), and propositional knowing—claims warranted by categorised data. Abstraction tends towards convergent interpretations rather than exploring interconnections and ambiguities arising from the adopted multimodal design. Collages are mainly treated as instruments for surfacing unconscious material, with the researcher evaluating the clarity and stability of the interpretation, rather than dwelling on the productive messiness of non-linear knowing. Thus, by revealing hidden associations and affective knowing that are difficult to verbalise yet consequential (Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2013), the aim is to make the familiar strange (e.g., seeing (anew) the invisibility of everyday behaviours). Quality of the research is typically evaluated using adapted quantitative logic and qualitative criteria such as credibility, authenticity, rich rigour, transferability, and researcher positionality (Tracy, 2010). For example, Koll *et al.*, (2010, p. 599) mention that their study “pools data from respondents to draw conclusions about cross-method homogeneity of results and thereby applies a quantitative perspective to making sense of qualitative data”; Pavesi *et al.*, (2017) and Blasco, Kjærgaard and Thomsen (2021) also explicitly discuss relevant criteria.

Collage-as-triangulation has been used in marketing/consumer research (e.g., Belk *et al.*, 2003; Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2013), tourism (Pavesi *et al.*, 2017), sustainability (Grob, 2012) and education research (e.g., Blasco *et al.*, 2021). Research requiring thick descriptions of experience, meanings and feeling, such as studies on human relationships at different levels, emotions (e.g., emotion-related organisational routines), and human engagement with technology

or Artificial Intelligence may benefit from this approach. Recent discussions suggest that despite differences across forms of triangulation (e.g., method triangulation aiming for holistic understanding versus data triangulation aiming for discovery), triangulation broadens the scope of business and management research (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020).

Collage-as-sensemaking

Whereas the first two approaches use collages as tools for data collection and elicitation, *collage-as-sensemaking* shifts the focus from the collage itself to its creation. The research motivation for using collage is to privilege the unimagined and uncertain emerging from the non-linear process of collage making (e.g., “allowing our momentary knowing to be cut and collaged into that which we might not have been able to predict” MacKenzie and Wolf, 2012, p. 5). Collage making engages its creators—participants or researchers—in a different way of seeing and crafting through a creative process of elucidation and playful exploration: “Collage as inquiry allows one to reflect, elicit, and conceptualise ideas, naturally weaving together the practices of *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*” (MacKenzie and Wolf, 2012, p. 8).

This approach assumes a socially constructed reality that is embodied and performative, reflecting its emphasis on the act of making. Collage opens up intuitive, tangible (e.g., giving form to elusive feelings) and reflexive ways of knowing. Meaning-making operates through a double or reflexive hermeneutic and welcomes paradigmatic plurality: researchers engage both with the visual data and with the processes of creating and analysing it. As Seregina (2019, p. 523) puts it, arts-based methods like collage inquiry allow for “an embodied way of processing our senses, emotions and interactions”, which then guides the cutting, placing and (re)arranging of materials in collage making.

This physical engagement implies a performative view of reality: the collage is not a static representation but a relational composition through which meanings flow between the collage and its creator. In other words, collage evokes a singular experience each time: if created or interpreted again, it would yield different associations and meanings. Accordingly, this approach treats the process of making the collage and of explanatory accounts (interviews or written reflections) as complementary data. For instance, MacKenzie and Wolf (2012) state that they explore collages alongside written reflections that accompanied them, and their own poetic reinterpretations of these reflections. Similar statements can be found in studies by Roberts and Woods (2018) and Mackworth-Young *et al.* (2022).

Data analysis is usually driven by inductive and abductive reasoning. While it may involve coding, analysis tends to be more syntagmatic than categorical. Variants of phenomenology, hermeneutics, reflexive (auto)ethnographic analysis, but also some forms of narrative analysis, lend themselves to an analysis of reflexive questions and emerging meanings in a form of embodied and situated knowing. Thus, this kind of focus on collage creation allows collages to lend themselves to a progressive exploration and articulation of tacit and/or ambiguous knowledge and understandings.

This process of analysis aims at contextualised, embodied, and dynamic theorising that broadens understanding without necessarily yielding abstract, transferable theory. As Lahman *et al.*, (2020, p. 269) note, using collage across data collection, researcher reflexivity, and analysis “affords a researcher a deeper understanding of the data, and simultaneously hones research through an intuitive–rational process ... [that] contributes to new insights and understandings.” Qualitative quality criteria associated with this approach (e.g., see Capous-Desyllas and Bromfield, 2018; MacKenzie and Wolf, 2012) include plausibility, interpretative rigour,

resonance, and experiential and embodied reflexivity (e.g., how sensation, affect and context participate in meaning as it emerges through making, Cunliffe, 2022).

Examples of studies that have used collage-as-sensemaking can be found in management learning (e.g., Roberts and Woods, 2018) and across the social sciences (Butler-Kisber and Poldma, 2010; MacKenzie and Wolf, 2012). What this approach especially legitimises is researcher engagement with the power of collage as process, that is, acknowledging and expanding on the idiosyncratic nature of collage inquiry, which invites for “slowing down and honouring meaning-making” (Roberts and Woods, 2018, p. 627).

Thus, collage-as-sensemaking allows for a process of playful exploration that privileges the unimagined and uncertain, paving the way for new contributions in phenomenological and bricolage research (Lerman, Mmbaga and Smith, 2022). Furthermore, this privileging of the ‘unimagined and uncertain’, combined with this approach’s ontological focus, make it a suitable methodology for studying emergent, socially constructed, and complex (e.g., tacit, fragmented) micro-processes, such as organisational sensemaking/giving (Garreau, Mouricou and Grimand, 2015) and embodied management practices (e.g., coaching, mindful management education).

Collage-as-negotiation

The fourth approach of *collage-as-negotiation* differs from the aforementioned ones in terms of research motivation; it involves the negotiation and co-creation of knowledge through dialogue around the collage-making process. Collages may be produced by individual participants or researchers or co-created in groups and serve as a shared object of dialogue (e.g., between an individual participant and the researcher) around which meanings are elicited, discussed, revised, and jointly articulated—both during making and in subsequent reflection on the composition.

This approach implies an inter-subjectivist paradigmatic positioning (Cunliffe, 2011), framing socially constructed realities as relationally embedded, where the personal connects to the shared. Unlike collage-as-sensemaking, where meaning is developed through the maker's embodied and affective engagement with the collage and then synthesised into an interpretation by the researcher, collage-as-negotiation foregrounds meanings that are actively negotiated between participants and/or researchers. Thus, while collage-as-sensemaking primarily retains interpretive synthesis with the researcher, collage-as-negotiation redistributes interpretive authority through co-analysis and negotiated meanings. In doing so, collage enables the exploration and negotiation of situated understandings and intuitive meanings, bringing personal and shared, pragmatic and abstract forms of knowing into dialogue. Meaning-making is reflexive: researchers engage in co-interpretation with collagists rather than analysing collages in a separate step. Accordingly, the making process is typically recorded and accompanied by reflection and discussion.

Collage-as-negotiation shifts the attention even further from data collection to the analytic process of collage creation, treating collage as a participatory method. By so doing, the fluid boundary between data creation and data analysis can be even more transparent in this approach. Such a boundary here foregrounds emerging meanings as they are sensed, rather than referring mostly to (rigorously) knowing from collage data (e.g., recorded process and its explanation, Preece *et al.*, 2023). Here, data analysis is usually driven by inductive and abductive reasoning, guiding the co-creation of meanings/insights relevant to both academic and practitioner theory. Such insights emerge through participatory or dialogic analysis, a process that allows for a dialectic interplay of meanings and negotiated ways of knowing that are experienced and co-created in the moment and between people and the environment. For

instance, Chilton and Scotti (2014) describe how such a way of knowing, emerging from a dialogic method of collage creation and letter writing, surfaced new learnings through embodied discoveries and sudden insights.

Hence, theorising through this approach not only aims at more contextualised, embodied, and dynamic theorising like collage-as-sensemaking, but also evolves from contact boundaries explored during meaning negotiation. Contact boundaries (Lehtonen, 2024) are one's (re)understanding of and relationship with their environment which, "by being co-constructed through the interactions between researchers and participants, as well as between individuals and their environment" (ibid., p. 56), allow for discoveries "[to take] place within and between the participant and the researcher" (ibid., p. 63). For example, created juxtapositions make a collagist aware of how they experience both an external world and internal sensations related to that world. This awareness is then negotiated with other participants or researchers, who have their own understanding of the created juxtapositions. This process engages all participants in mutual (un)learning (Preece *et al.*, 2023) and creates space for insights and new perspectives. Parsley and Acevedo (2024) noted how cuttings of collage images surfaced different identities of a collagist (p. 14) and how this process—of making the collage and negotiating its meanings—helped them "challenge the (masculine) performativity of academic roles" (p. 21).

Collage-as-negotiation, like collage-as-sensemaking, may be deemed less standardised (i.e., focusing more on the (co-)creation process rather than the outcome) than collage-as-projection and collage-as-triangulation. Thus, quality criteria appropriate for collage-as-negotiation research are those adopted for Action Research: they range from credibility and resonance to practical relevance and responsibility, and include relational reflexivity (e.g., who was included/excluded, and how co-inference was reached). For instance, Chilton and Scotti

(2014, p. 166) discuss that through reflective letter-writing about collages co-inference was reached. Yuen (2016, p. 343) further discusses the importance of researcher reflexivity in terms of including/excluding perspectives by noting that “revisiting the body maps (i.e., the body as a canvas, which was used as a data collection method in Yuen’s study) to create the collages allowed for bringing back feelings and memories I had experienced when interviewing the women, such as moments of amazement, discomfort, and enlightenment”.

This approach, used in wellbeing (Yuen, 2016) and education (Culshaw, 2019) studies, may inspire research into organisational identities (e.g., multiple identities) and organisational creativity (e.g., paradoxes guiding creative processes). It could also be used to explore topics such as power and performativity by bringing to the fore forces that subvert, escape or disrupt organisation. To illustrate, since this approach focuses on developing negotiated meanings, which are both discursive and visual, it could facilitate the expression of pre-reflective meanings, namely meanings that occur below the level of awareness. Pre-reflective meanings may include raw emotional reactions, multiple identities or paradoxical behaviours (Hill, Canniford and Mol, 2014). This collage approach enables capturing such meanings since they become accessible as participants engage in and reflect on the process of collage creation (e.g., discussing and coordinating both visual and discursive meanings).

For example, a participant creates a collage showing different identities of an organisation, such as innovation, efficiency and sustainability. When the images are arranged, the juxtaposition may feel constraining or conflicting, as one identity depicted in a specific image seems to overpower the others, and this might be an unrealised relationship. The participant and researcher then discuss the collage to understand shown (and unrealised) relationships and agree on the insights collage offers. This process of interpretation not only

shows that interpretive authority and ownership are shared but also that shared meanings allow for disclosing pre-reflexive modes of thought that can destabilise or enhance existing perspectives. On this latter point, Bailey and Woodall-Greene (2022, p. 1963) note that collaborative collaging (i.e., people work together to create a collage) allowed all engaged in the process to be attuned to the sensory nature of interpreters' experiences, since it disclosed the emotional and embodied dimensions of interpreters' labour, a connection that is usually either misunderstood or neglected.

Such co-ownership, which refers to the created collage as a shared output, often strengthens the pathway to impact: claims are locally warranted, legible to those involved, and therefore easier to translate into action. These benefits are conditional on purposeful inclusion and facilitation; they are not automatic, nor universally preferable to other approaches. Overall, these dialogic and participatory dimensions make collage-as-negotiation well suited to impactful research. It can broaden the range of voices, e.g., when recruitment and facilitation intentionally include under-represented participants such as interpreters' experience and D/deaf students (Bailey and Woodall-Greene, 2022). It can also encourage reflexive praxis in the spirit of researching on the edge, e.g., suspending habitual ways of engaging with collage inquiry (Hutton and Heath, 2020). Negotiation can also be dyadic (single participant), with think-aloud making and brief letter/memo exchanges documenting how pre-reflective sensations become articulated positions and how co-inference is reached (e.g., Parsley and Acevedo, 2024).

Collage-as-art

In *collage-as-art*, the research motivation is to inspire understanding and evoke resonance through collage's expressive and aesthetic qualities (e.g., juxtapositions, shifting margins).

Collages may be created by research participants or researchers, with a focus on capturing complex layers of meaning through imagination and experience. This approach recognises not only multiple realities but also their material, situated, multi-faceted and fluid character. As Bröckerhoff and Seregina (2022, p. 1729) note, “collage gives space to free *association* (e.g., material) which allows subconscious meanings to emerge through an *embodied* practice (e.g., situated) of *juxtaposing* disparate *imagery* (e.g., fluid and multi-faceted)”. It also grants agency to makers: collages are not innocent representations of hidden understandings but deliberate, purposive creations. A double or reflexive hermeneutic follows, in which the researcher — whether outsider (viewer) or insider (maker)—appreciates and interprets the work as art.

Some scholars (e.g., Cambre, 2013; Vaughan, 2005) further argue that collage-as-art also gives agency to the collage itself so that it is treated not only as visual data but also as art. Thus, the analysis of collages involves the interpretation of visual elements and their relationships with processes, drawing on methods established in arts/arts history for purposes different to those that govern management research today (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021). Emphasising the responses triggered by expressive and aesthetic qualities, Cambre (2013, p. 830) suggests that “the question is not about what the collage consists of or what it might mean . . . it is about what it does”. Similarly, Bröckerhoff and Seregina (2022) refer to Eureka moments they experienced in the collage-making process, such as in selecting images that resonated with collagists, and in gluing and fitting images together. These moments gave them access to deep-seated and spontaneous responses, disclosing connections that they would otherwise not have found. As such, collage-as-art offers suggestive meanings and evoked resonances, achieved through the interpretation of visual elements and their relationships.

Collage-as-art problematises dominant approaches to data collection and analysis with a view to what constitutes research. It encourages us to (re)imagine and challenge our ways of relating to the world. The imaginative knowing that it enables, and the re-interpretation and re-theorising it invites, make this approach disruptive not simply because it is novel or critical, but because it unsettles the assumptions that often govern contemporary theorising, such as abstraction and the privileging of generalisable theory. Thus, collage-as-art does not aim to predict or even explain; it seeks to engage and resonate with suggestive meanings to inspire rather than direct theorising. As noted by Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999, p. 2), “in a well-made collage the good fit is not merely satisfying; it may border the uncanny”.

Studies that approach collage-as-art emphasise the process of making a collage and its creative strategies (e.g., juxtapositions and metaphors) for encouraging a deeper engagement between researcher(s), participants and research context (Bröckerhoff and Seregina, 2022; Vaughan, 2005). This engagement foregrounds the messiness of collage inquiry and the embodied, affective and interactive discoveries it can give rise to. This messiness makes it difficult to evaluate any research adopting this approach. Criteria such as resonance, criticality, catalytic insight and aesthetic–critical reflexivity (e.g., reflexivity about how juxtapositions act on thought and the ethical responsibility of evocation) replace criteria such as validity or rigour (or at least require their re-definition). For instance, Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999, p. 4) and Cambre (2013) discuss the resonance and aesthetic–critical reflexivity criteria by suggesting respectively that “collages evoke experiences initially characterised by a heightened emotional response and an awareness of personal values” (Davis and Butler-Kisber, 1999, p. 4) and that collage sets the stage for encountering ideas in their complexity, not individuality. Vaughan

(2005, p. 13) explains the criticality and catalytic insight criteria by discussing how collage practice is “oriented toward the broader sweep of cultural critique and transformation”.

In sum, collage-as-art invites scholars to supplement the rational and logico-scientific with an imaginative and narrative mode that destabilises the familiar and opens up further understanding of participants’ intentions (Preece *et al.*, 2023; Rojas-Gaviria, Preece and Surman, 2026). From this perspective, it is fruitful to explore how collages can “create a reality of their own—in life and in art” (Bruner, 1986, p. 43). Research on marginalisation, reflexivity, or spirituality may particularly benefit from an orientation to resonance and provocation, inviting us to question—and at times reconceptualise—lived experience.

Conclusion

Business and management fields call for novel and pluralistic research methods (Christofi *et al.*, 2024; Cunliffe, 2022; Delios *et al.*, 2023; Paavilainen-Mäntymäki and Plakoyiannaki, 2025) for researchers to deal with both contemporary problems and old questions in *new* and *rigorous* ways. Collage inquiry holds the potential to unlock new theoretical possibilities, yet current discourses leave underexplored collage inquiry’s pluralistic potential to enable such possibilities. To connect method with rigour, we advance a typology of collage inquiry that 1) sheds light on the underexplored relationship between method (collage inquiry) and theorising (through collage inquiry), 2) expands the possibilities of theorising through collage inquiry, and 3) provides a framework for moving beyond one-size-fits-all notions of rigour in collage inquiry (e.g., Cunliffe, 2022; Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Tracy, 2010).

Regarding the first contribution, we unpack the underexplored relationship between method (collage) and theorising (through collage inquiry) to tease out how collage inquiry enables

paradigmatic, methodological and theorising pluralism. Existing discussions often acknowledge collage's pluralistic potential but either leave open the relationship between method and theorising through which that potential emerges (e.g., Vaughan, 2005) or connect collage too closely to one specific onto-epistemological stance (e.g., Parsley and Acevedo, 2024). For instance, Vaughan (2005) refers to a borderlands epistemology to stress that collage inquiry combines insights from multiple traditions from which its generative impact (i.e., collage's potential to open up multiple ways of understanding) emerges. On the other hand, other studies (e.g., Cambre, 2013; Parsley and Acevedo, 2024) connect the non-linear ways of knowing emerging from collage inquiry with specific (onto-epistemological) stances. By advancing a typology through which we link design choices, including underlying philosophical premises, to distinct modes of theorising and approach-appropriate warrants for evaluating knowledge claims, we enhance collage inquiry's generative impact through transparency (i.e., features of each collage approach get front-staged, Pratt *et al.*, 2022). This transparency in turn increases reflexivity as the typology enriches the potential of collage inquiry to accommodate different perspectives. By so doing, our typology encourages researchers to reflect critically upon their own and others' preconceived views of how to theorise, produce and analyse data from collage inquiry (Preece *et al.*, 2023).

Our second contribution is to expand how collage inquiry supports theorising by making its underlying assumptions explicit and broadening what counts as legitimate ways of knowing. Through collage inquiry, researchers can make different choices in moving from data to theoretical claims and in reflecting on the nature of theorising itself (Harley and Cornelissen, 2022). We show that theorising through collage is not only cognitive and emotive but also embodied and generative, i.e., reconfiguring meanings during and after the process of making. This multifaceted approach enables cognitive, embodied-temporal, and relational forms of theorising. Collage inquiry thus

moves beyond treating collage as a visual data form; it provides affordances for more alive (temporal and reflexive), sensitive (co-constructed), and transformative (ethically attentive to what remains unfinished, unresolved and/or in the making, such as unfinished/not final participant interpretations and acknowledging this in the research process) research (Hansen *et al.*, 2023). In doing so, collage allows scholars not only to revisit old questions in new ways but also to pursue new questions and alternative theorising practices that foster richer understandings of the worlds we study (Christofi *et al.*, 2024; Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021; Toraldo *et al.*, 2025).

To this end, collage inquiry carries ethical–political stakes. Choices about materials, prompts, composition, captioning and display reconfigure attention: they bring certain realities into view (e.g., tacit, embodied, relational) while leaving others in shadow. Power and voice circulate in who selects and interprets images, whose experiences are represented, and how authorship and ownership are handled; aesthetics can illuminate but also seduce or simplify. Collages can be deeply personal and revealing. These dynamics call for reflexive transparency and care (e.g., consent/copyright; Coffin and Hill, 2022) and for acknowledging that every approach to collage involves trade-offs—between revelation and occlusion, evocation and warrant, and provocation and responsibility. In approaches that foreground negotiation, pathways to impactful research often run through co-ownership: when participants help analyse and claim, findings are locally warranted and practically legible, making them easier to translate into action.

Our third contribution is a framework for moving beyond one-size-fits-all notions of rigour in collage inquiry. The value of our typology also envisages the rigour and relevance debate in management research. Hence, we acknowledge that although the typology helps minimize uncertainty in using collage inquiry, and as such enhances its rigour/trustworthiness (Christofi *et al.*, 2024), it also allows us to question the role of the researcher in each approach,

which is a core element in producing engaged knowledge (Preece *et al.*, 2023); for example, from reporting rigorous claims in the first approaches, to evoking insights in the final approaches, in which collage inquiry is understood as destabilising researcher expertise. By adopting explicit, approach-appropriate warrants and reflexive clarity about what collage brings into focus—and what it leaves aside—can reduce the risk of narrow, sedimented theorising and sustain both relevance and rigour. We invite researchers to use the typology to match approach to purpose, make their reflexive stance and warrants visible, and claim contributions on those terms. Through this we suggest that collage inquiry can remain both imaginative and responsible, making space for cutting-edge work that avoids the slide into narrow, sedimented theorising and support at the same time both relevance and rigour.

Taken together, these theoretical implications also shed light on the practice of collage inquiry in management research. Particularly, the typology is intended as a practical guide for designing, evaluating, and reviewing collage-based research. As we have shown throughout the paper, what collage does in a study is closely tied to its research purposes and the philosophical assumptions that shape its use. These, in turn, influence the forms of knowing, theorising, and quality criteria that become relevant.

Accordingly, we see our audience as extending beyond qualitative scholars to include mixed methods and quantitative researchers who assess the contribution of collage inquiry. Such audiences are sometimes guided by dominant methodological norms rather than by the possibilities afforded by paradigmatic and methodological pluralism. We therefore hope that the proposed typology makes these possibilities more visible and helps render the pluralistic nature of collage inquiry more intelligible and evaluable in practice. To support this, Table 2 offers guiding prompts that encourage explicit consideration of the relationship between collage use,

knowledge claims, and forms of theorising. In this sense, the typology functions as a living map—helping authors, reviewers and editors, and readers to recognise, navigate, and assess diverse approaches to collage inquiry.

Table 2. Guiding prompts for engaging with the typology	
Audience	Questions for using the typology
Researchers / authors	• What is the purpose of collage in this study? • What assumptions about reality, meaning, and interpretation does this imply? • What forms of knowing and theorising are being pursued? • What quality criteria follow from these choices?
Reviewers / editors	• Is the collage approach clearly articulated and identifiable? • Are purpose, philosophical positioning, method, theorising contribution, and quality criteria aligned? • Is the study being evaluated on terms appropriate to its approach, rather than through standardised templates?
Readers / newcomers	• What is collage doing in this study: eliciting, triangulating, sensemaking, negotiating, or evoking? • What forms of knowledge and contribution does this use of collage enable? • How is collage interpreted and represented? What tensions between sensing and knowing are you identifying?

Two limitations shaped our synthesis. First, many articles were unclear and sometimes inconsistent about their ontological/epistemological positioning and sometimes also invoked quality criteria that sat uneasily with their implicit assumptions. Second, the corpus was uneven: creative and promising, but often fragmented and insufficiently connected across disciplines. Precisely because the area is emergent and experimental, a typology that surfaces assumptions, clarifies design–quality criteria fit, and names theorising payoffs is timely—both for collage inquiry and, by analogy, for other qualitative methods where templates risk substituting for reasoning.

Looking ahead, we see several developmental trajectories. In projection, more explicit articulation of how prompts and image banks co-produce data could strengthen research claims

without defaulting to proceduralism. In triangulation, problematising processes of power (e.g., whether interviews and written narratives of created collages are prioritised) could sharpen discussions about mechanisms of emerging knowledge. In sensemaking, future work could trace more explicitly the movement from sensation to concept, making embodied warrants more inspectable. In negotiation, an important challenge is to make participation more substantive by documenting co-analysis, clarifying decision rights over interpretation and dissemination, and showing how co-inference changes the claims produced. In art, experimenting with modes of display, alongside clearer aesthetic–ethical heuristics, may help carry evocative content responsibly.

We hope that this paper highlights opportunities afforded by collage inquiry, encouraging a wider readership to (re)engage with paradigmatic pluralism and to make space in our thinking (and journals) for ‘cutting-edge’ research.

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