

# From Theatrical Conflict to Value Re-authoring: An Exploratory Study on the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" Workshop's Cultivation Path

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**Abstract:** In contemporary China, the cultivation of "personality" among students in financial institutions faces a dual challenge: they must master outstanding professional skills while also fostering the professional ethics and sense of social responsibility that align with the "Financial Power" national strategy. However, the highly quantified competitive environment can easily lead students into a value dilemma of "instrumental rationality" and "refined egoism." This study aims to explore the intrinsic cultivation path of a novel psychological education model—the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" workshop. This model uses educational drama as its vehicle and "theatrical conflict" as its core mechanism to guide students toward "value re-authoring." Adopting an exploratory case study paradigm within qualitative research, this study involved 12 finance major students who participated in a complete three-month (eight-session) workshop. Through participatory observation, in-depth narrative interviews, and analysis of participants' reflective texts, the complete cultivation process of the "Quartet" (i.e., "Prelude: Value Awakening," "Variation: Conflict & Negotiation," "Chord: Systemic Resonance," and "Finale: Meaning Re-authoring") was deeply analyzed. The study found that this path is not a linear superposition of four independent stages, but a spiraling upward process centered on "theatrical conflict." The cultivation path manifests as: 1. Cognitive Awakening: In the "Value Awakening" stage, latent values are "made explicit" through narrative and artistic exploration; 2. Embodied Involvement: In the "Conflict & Negotiation" stage, abstract "professional ethical dilemmas" (e.g., integrity vs. profit, efficiency vs. equity) are transformed into embodied "theatrical conflicts" through "Forum Theatre," compelling participants to move from "knowing" to "feeling"; 3. Perspective Fusion: In the "Systemic Resonance" stage, through "multi-role-playing" and "ripple effect" analysis, participants' perspectives shift from "individual optimal solutions" to a "sense of systemic responsibility," catalyzing profound ethical empathy; 4. Identity Internalization: In the "Meaning Re-authoring" stage, participants integrate their new value understandings into their "financial personality" self-narrative through forms like "Future Self-Portraits." This study reveals the pedagogical function of "theatrical conflict" as a form of "ethical rehearsal," offering a "beyond-cognition" and "embodied practice" path for personality and values education in financial institutions and other high-stakes professions.

**Keywords:** Financial Personality; Value Re-authoring; Theatrical Conflict; Psychological Education; Exploratory Research; Qualitative Research; Educational Drama.

## 1. Introduction: The "Knowing-Doing Gap" in Financial Personality Cultivation

Against the backdrop of China's "Financial Power" strategy, higher financial education bears a dual mission: to cultivate globally competitive professionals and to shape students' solid professional ethics and "Finance for the People" value stance [1]. However, the reality of financial talent cultivation often falls into a "Knowing-Doing Gap." On one hand, students receive comprehensive professional ethics education in the classroom ("knowing"); on the other hand, their environment—a highly quantified and competitive field defined by GPA, internships, and competitions—implicitly reinforces the subtext of "instrumental rationality," "performance-supremacy," and even "refined egoism" ("doing") [2].

This disconnect between the "ought" and the "is" leads to a unique psychological and value profile among finance students: they may be highly sensitive to "utilitarian anxiety" while simultaneously deeply internalizing its logic; they "know" the importance of integrity, but in simulated business

decisions, they may prioritize "profit maximization." Traditional value education models, such as lectures and case studies, often remain at the "cognitive" level, unable to shake the value hierarchy solidified by the environment and "embodied inertia" [3].

Therefore, the cultivation of "financial personality" urgently requires an intervention path that can "shock" students' habitual thinking, connect "cognition" with "emotion" in "action," and "rehearse" real ethical choices in "simulation." Educational Drama, especially its use of "Theatrical Conflict," offers a possible solution. It does not "tell" students what is "good," but rather creates a "dilemma" in a dramatic context, allowing students to "experience" the weight of choice under the "safe shell" of a "role," and to spontaneously initiate value reflection and re-authoring through "embodied involvement" in the "conflict" [4].

This study focuses on a localized intervention model designed for this purpose—the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" workshop. This model attempts to combine the psychological process of "personality growth" with the artistic form of "drama" to construct a four-stage cultivation spiral. The core question of this study is not "Is this workshop

effective?" but a deeper, exploratory one: How does the cultivation path of the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" unfold? How does it specifically use the core mechanism of "theatrical conflict" to guide students from "value awakening" to "value re-authoring"? This paper will use qualitative research methods to deeply "decode" this "cultivation path."

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Theatrical Conflict as an "Ethical Rehearsal Space"

### (A) "Financial Personality": An Integrative Construct Beyond Skills

The "Financial Personality" in this study is not a stable psychological trait, but a dynamic, malleable, and integrative construct specific to this professional field. It comprises at least three dimensions: 1. Professional Resilience: The ability to maintain psychological stability and rational decision-making in "high-risk, high-pressure" environments; 2. Ethical Self-Awareness: The intrinsic tendency to actively activate and adhere to professional ethics (such as integrity, fairness, responsibility) when facing "temptations of profit" and "gray areas"; 3. Social Concern: The ability to transcend "individual profit maximization," understand the impact of financial activities on the social system, and hold a value orientation of "finance for social good."

Clearly, the cultivation of this construct, especially the latter two dimensions, goes far beyond "knowledge transmission"; it requires "contextualized" "practice" and "internalization" [5].

### (B) "Theatrical Conflict": From "Dilemma" to "Value Clarification"

In educational drama theory, "theatrical conflict" is the core engine that drives the plot and character development, and it is the "catalyst" that sparks deep learning in participants. Unlike a "problem" in a business case, theatrical conflict often manifests as a "dilemma," a "clash of values" where both sides have valid points [6].

When students are placed "in character" to "live through" this conflict, the pedagogical mechanism is activated. This mechanism originates from Jacob Morenos Psychodrama theory and Dorothy Heathcotes "Mantle of the Expert" and other process drama concepts [7]. In "role-playing," participants are forced into "perspective-switching"; they must "stand in the shoes of the other (the character)" to think. More importantly, they must "act," not just "comment." This "embodied action" can trigger "cognitive dissonance" and strong emotional involvement, thereby breaking automatic thinking patterns and opening a gap for "values clarification" and "re-authoring" [8].

### (C) "The Quartet": A Spiraling Cultivation Concept

The design of the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" workshop in this study borrows its structure from a musical "quartet" (exposition, development, recapitulation, coda) and maps it onto a psychological growth spiral:

1. Prelude: Value Awakening: The "cocoon-breaking" at the individual cognitive level.
2. Variation: Conflict & Negotiation: The "re-authoring" at the interpersonal and situational level.
3. Chord: Systemic Resonance: The "soaring" at the social and systemic level.
4. Finale: Meaning Re-authoring: The "value integration" returning to individual identity.

This study's theoretical hypothesis is that "theatrical conflict" is the "main theme" and "turning point" connecting these four stages. It is introduced in the "Variation" stage, amplified in the "Chord" stage, and integrated in the "Finale" stage.

## 3. Research Design and Method

### (A) Research Paradigm

This study adopts an "Exploratory Case Study" paradigm within qualitative research. This paradigm aims to deeply understand the "process" and "mechanism" of a specific "case" (the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" workshop), rather than pursuing broad "generalization" [9]. The researcher holds a "constructivist" stance, believing that participants "value re-authoring" is "generated" through deep interaction in a specific context, rather than "instilled."

### (B) Research Participants

The researcher posted a workshop recruitment notice at a financial institution, clearly stating it was an experiential workshop "using drama to explore financial ethics and personal growth." After screening, 12 students (7 female, 5 male) from majors such as Finance, Accounting, and Investment, all in their second or third undergraduate year, committed to participating in the full three-month, eight-session (3 hours each) workshop and became the participants of this study. All participants signed informed consent, and the research process strictly adhered to ethical standards.

### (C) The Workshop Implementation as "Field"

The data collection and intervention implementation of this study were conducted simultaneously; the entire "Quartet" workshop was the researchers "field."

1. Prelude: Value Awakening (Sessions 1-2): Focus on establishing "psychological safety" and "self-awareness." Activities included: "Trust Walk," "Body Sculptures" (e.g., "My view of Finance," "My ideal of Success"), "River of Life (Narrative)" (mapping the "sources of my values"). This stage does not introduce conflict but "sets the stage" cognitively.
2. Variation: Conflict & Negotiation (Sessions 3-4): The core stage begins. "Theatrical conflict" is introduced as the central tool. Using the "Forum Theatre" format, an ethical dilemma script tailored for finance students (e.g., "Conflict between Profit and Integrity," "Conflict between Efficiency and Equity") is presented. Participants ("spect-actors") can shout "Stop!" at any time, come on stage to "replace" the protagonist, and try to "solve" the conflict in their own way.
3. Chord: Systemic Resonance (Sessions 5-6): Deepening and amplifying the conflict. Moving from "individual" conflict to "systemic" impact. Using "Process Drama" and "Ripple Effect" techniques. For example, after a "protagonist" makes a (dishonest) decision, group members role-play "affected stakeholders" (e.g., the victimized client, the implicated colleague, the disappointed family, the regulator), and speak to the "protagonist" from their "roles," making them "bodily" feel the "systemic" consequences of their decision.
4. Finale: Meaning Re-authoring (Sessions 7-8): Integrating and internalizing the conflict. Focus on reflection and "re-writing." Activities included: "Future Self-Portrait" (playing oneself five years later, adhering to new values), "Letters to Past/Future

Roles," "Redrawing the River of Life" (seeing what values have changed).

(D) Data Collection and Analysis

1. Data Collection: 1) Researchers participatory observation notes (approx. 40,000 words over 8 sessions), detailing field dynamics, key events, and participants "embodied" reactions; 2) Participant reflective journals (12 participants \* 8 sessions, 96 entries), recording immediate insights after each session; 3) In-depth individual narrative interviews (conducted with all 12 participants post-workshop, 90 mins average), tracing their "turning points" in the "Quartet" and their understanding of the "conflict."
2. Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis, as described by Braun & Clarke [10], was used, combined with a "Process Tracing" approach. The focus was not on "extracting themes" but on "reconstructing the path": How was the "Value Awakening" (Stage 1) "activated" and "challenged" by the "Conflict" (Stage 2)? How was the "Individual Negotiation" (Stage 2) "elevated" into "Value Integration" (Stage 4) via "Systemic Resonance" (Stage 3)?

#### 4. Research Findings: The Cultivation Path from "Value Awakening" to "Meaning Re-authoring"

Through an in-depth analysis of the three months of experiential data from 12 participants, this study reveals the cultivation path and internal logic of the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet." This path, centered on "theatrical conflict," propels participants through four stages to achieve "value re-authoring" in a spiraling manner.

(A) Prelude: Value Awakening — The Cognitive Foundation of "Making Explicit"

The initial stage (Sessions 1-2) of the workshop does not rush to "educate," but rather commits to "seeing." Its core function is to make participants latent, vague, or even conflicting values "explicit," providing a "target" for the subsequent "conflict."

After establishing a high degree of group safety through activities like "Trust Walk," the facilitator organized a "Values Auction." Each person received 1000 "value coins" to "bid" on values such as "High Income," "Social Status," "Integrity," "Family Happiness," "Personal Growth," and "Fairness & Justice."

*"(At the auction) I found all my money was spent on High Income and Social Status. When Integrity and Family were bought by others, I didnt care at first, but when I looked back at my trophies, I suddenly felt very empty. ...I used to think I wanted everything, but now I see, in my subconscious, my ranking is so utilitarian. This is the first time Ive started to examine myself."* (Participant A, 3rd Year Undergrad)

In the "River of Life (Narrative)" activity, participants mapped the "sources of their values."

*"I drew my parents, movies Ive seen, business novels. I realized my imagination of finance is full of winner -takes-all and the -ends-justify-the-means. ...I thought this was reality, but the facilitator asked me: Is this the only reality? I couldnt answer. This planted a hook for me for the rest of the workshop."* (Participant F, 2nd Year Undergrad)

The significance of this stage is that it achieved a "cognitive unveiling" of values. Participants clearly "saw" their own value foundation dominated by "utilitarianism" and

"instrumental rationality" [2], and they developed an initial "discomfort" and "reflection" about it ("This makes me a little scared," "I couldnt answer"). This "discomfort" is precisely the "cognitive gap" that allows "theatrical conflict" to intervene.

(B) Variation: Conflict & Negotiation — Theatrical Conflict as an "Ethical Forge"

The second stage (Sessions 3-4) is the "engine" of the entire cultivation path. It transforms the "cognitive" "value dilemmas" from Stage 1 into "action-based" "embodied conflicts" through "Forum Theatre."

The facilitator presented a meticulously designed "oppressive" script, "The P2P Storm": The protagonist (played by a facilitator team member), a management trainee at a P2P company, accidentally discovers "falsification" in the companys underlying assets, posing a risk of "implosion." If he "reports" it, he will be fired immediately, lose his high salary, and possibly be "blacklisted" by the industry; if he "stays silent," he will violate the principle of "integrity," and countless investors may be ruined in the future.

As the protagonist agonized over the "dilemma," the facilitator (as the "Joker" or "Difficilator") asked the participants: "What can he do?" and invited them to come on stage, "replace" the protagonist, and "act out" their solutions.

*"I was the first to rush up. I thought it was simple, of course you report it. But when I was acting, the Supervisor (played by a facilitator) came over, put his hand on my shoulder, and said: Li, next months rent, and your fathers medical bills, all depend on this job. I instantly froze. I knew I should report it, but my body couldnt move. I felt the fear."* (Participant D, 3rd Year Undergrad)

Another participant went on stage to try a "more strategic" approach, attempting to "persuade" the supervisor privately.

*"I played the persuasion. But the Supervisor shot back at me: On what basis do you claim falsification? Did you do the data? You just got here, what do you know? He be rated me. I realized my cleverness was useless in the face of power: I failed."* (Participant G, 2nd Year Undergrad)

The core mechanism of this stage is "Embodied Involvement." "Theatrical conflict" forces participants out of a "safe," "all-knowing" "commentator" perspective and "drops" them into a "dangerous," "limited-information" "protagonist" perspective. While "acting," the participants "cognition" ("I should be honest") and "emotion/body" ("I am afraid of being fired," "I feel humiliated") clashed violently [8].

*"(In the discussion off-stage) we were all self-righteous. But once on stage, I realized integrity is not an option, its a sacrifice. ...The workshop didnt give us a standard answer, it acted out the dilemma itself for us. I s pent the whole night thinking about that frozen feeling. This was more effective than ten moral education classes."* (Participant D, interview summary)

The "Conflict & Negotiation" stage achieved a "breakthrough" from "cognition" to "emotion." It did not "solve" the conflict, but "amplified" it, letting participants "bodily" experience the pain of the "knowing-doing gap." This pain is the necessary prerequisite for "value re-authoring" and is the core value of the "Variation."

(C) Chord: Systemic Resonance — From "Individual Choice" to "Systemic Empathy"

The third stage (Sessions 5-6) is the deepening of the

"Variation." If the conflict in "Variation" was the "individuals" "dilemma," then the conflict in "Chord" is the "systems" "chain reaction." The path function of this stage is to force participants to "transcend" individual gains and losses, to "see" the impact of their choices on other "others" in the "system," thereby catalyzing "ethical empathy."

The facilitator used the "P2P Storm" conflict scenario again, but employed the "Ripple Effect" drama technique. One participant (e.g., Participant D) stood in the center, playing the "protagonist" who ultimately chose "silence." Then, the other 11 participants were asked to role-play "people affected by his decision"—"his parents" (expecting his high salary), "his colleague" (relieved he didn't cause trouble), "an investor victim (an elderly woman) who invests three months later," "a scapegoat colleague who is arrested because of it," "the angry public opinion after the P2P implosion," etc.

These "characters" approached the "protagonist" one by one, speaking their (characters) lines.

*"I played the investor victim. I walked up to D (as the protagonist) and said: Young man, I trusted you were a big company, I put my entire pension in... As I said it, D couldn't look me in the eye. I (as the player) almost cried myself. I suddenly understood the weight of finance for the people. It's not for the people as a grand concept, it's for this old lady."* (Participant H, 2nd Year Undergrad)

*"I was the protagonist D. I was standing in the middle, surrounded by them (the characters). ...The ones who stung the most were H (as the old lady) and another classmate playing the scapegoat. I knew my silence would hurt someone, but I never thought someone was this person. When they stood in front of me, alive, accusing me, crying, I (as the character) broke down. I realized my individual optimal solution (keeping my job) caused the collapse of the systemic optimal solution. This resonance was terrifying, and too real."* (Participant D, interview summary)

In this stage, "theatrical conflict" shifted from "intra-psychic" (internal) to "inter-personal" and "systemic." Through "role-playing" and "perspective-switching" [7], participants were forced to "see" and "bear" the "social" consequences of their actions. The "Systemic Resonance" stage completed a "perspective fusion" from "individual ethics" to "social ethics." Participants' understanding of values like "responsibility" and "fairness" was no longer an abstract "concept," but "embodied," "emotional," and "relational."

(D) Finale: Meaning Re-authoring — From "Conflict Reflection" to "Identity Internalization"

The final stage (Sessions 7-8) is for "settling" and "integration." After the "cognitive awakening," "embodied conflict," and "systemic resonance" of the first three stages, participants needed a "space" to "rewrite" their stories. The path function of this stage is to internalize the "new insights" gained from the "conflict" into a part of their "financial personality," achieving "value integration."

The facilitator used the "Future Self-Portrait" activity. Participants were asked to play "yourself five years from now, a financial professional you truly want to be," and be "interviewed" by other members.

*"I played Future Me. I was no longer the GPA-obsessed A (Participant A). I played a financial public interest lawyer. ...During the interview, someone asked me: Don't you regret it? You could have made big money. I (as the character) told him: I met that old lady in the P2P Storm (the workshop script). From that day, I knew I couldn't be (the*

*silent) kind of person. I don't make much money now, but I feel at peace. —When I said the words at peace, I (as the participant) felt a huge release. It's like I found my anchor."* (Participant A, interview summary)

In the final "Redrawing the River of Life," the "sources" of participants' values changed significantly.

*"The first time I drew (in the Prelude), my river only had my parents and business tycoons. This time (in the Finale), I drew that old lady (Chord) and the frozen D (Variation) into it. They became my coordinates. ...My financial personality? I feel like it was made of paper before, easily torn. Now it feels like it has bones. Those bones were planted in me by that conflict."* (Participant F, reflective journal)

The "Meaning Re-authoring" stage completed the "identity integration" from "dramatic role" to "real self." By "rehearsing" a "future self" more aligned with their new values, participants "anchored" the "peak experiences" and "conflict reflections" from the workshop as part of their self-narrative. They reconstructed their definition of "success" and internalized "ethical self-awareness" and "social concern" as organic components of their "financial personality."

## 5. Discussion: "The Quartet" as a "Cultivation Path"

The findings of this study reveal the cultivation path of the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" workshop, which hinges on the "conscious, staged" use of "theatrical conflict."

First, this study validates the unique value of "theatrical conflict" in ethical education, surpassing "cognitive preaching." The "knowing-doing gap" dilemma in traditional ethics education lies in its stopping at the level of "should" [3]. "Theatrical conflict," through "embodied involvement" and "role-play," creates a level of "must"—participants "must" "act" in the "here and now" and "bear" the "consequences." This forces them from the "comfort zone" of "cognition" into the "dilemma zone" of "emotion," thereby activating "value re-authoring" [8].

Second, this study reveals the "spiraling" and "phased" nature of this path. Without the cognitive groundwork of the "Prelude: Value Awakening," "conflict" might only trigger "defensiveness" rather than "reflection." If "conflict" only remained at the "Variation: Individual Negotiation" stage, it could easily lead to "self-blame" without ascending to the "social responsibility" level of the "Chord: Systemic Resonance." If it lacked the "internalization" of the "Finale: Meaning Re-authoring," the "peak experiences" from the conflict might be fleeting, failing to settle as part of "personality."

Therefore, the "Quartet" path is not a simple linear sequence of "Awakening-Conflict-Resonance-Re-authoring." It is a "spiraling ethical rehearsal" centered on "theatrical conflict." It first "awakens" cognition, then "forges" it through "embodied conflict," "elevates" it through "systemic empathy," and finally "internalizes" it through "identity re-authoring." This path fully responds to the "unity of knowing and doing" required for "financial personality" cultivation.

## 6. Conclusion, Limitations, and Implications

(A) Conclusion

This exploratory study, through a qualitative analysis of the "Financial Personality Growth Quartet" workshop, has

delineated a value cultivation path with "theatrical conflict" as its core mechanism. The study found that this path, through four interlinked stages—"cognitive awakening," "embodied involvement," "perspective fusion," and "identity internalization"—effectively transforms abstract "ethical dilemmas" into participants' "embodied experiences" and "emotional resonance." It guides students in financial institutions beyond the limitations of "instrumental rationality" to achieve "value re-authoring" and the integrative growth of their "financial personality."

#### (B) Limitations and Future Research

As an exploratory case study, the conclusions of this research aim for "depth" rather than "breadth." The experiences of 12 participants cannot be casually "generalized" to the entire finance student population. Additionally, the researchers' partial role as facilitator, while providing a rich "insider perspective," also requires caution regarding "researcher bias."

Future research could adopt mixed-methods designs with "pre- and post-testing" to more objectively assess the "Quartet" models' impact on students' ethical decision-making tendencies. Furthermore, "longitudinal studies" could track participants after they enter the workplace to see the "durability" of this "value re-authoring."

#### (C) Practical Implications

The path discovered in this study has significant implications for higher professional education (especially in high-stakes fields like finance, law, and medicine) facing the "knowing-doing gap":

1. From "Telling Ethics" to "Rehearsing Ethics": Curricula should increase the proportion of "situational simulation" and "embodied practice," making "theatrical conflict" a standard component of ethical education.
2. Respecting the Value of the "Dilemma": Educators should not "rush" to provide "standard answers" but should "make good use" of conflicts and "dilemmas" to provide space for students to "reflect in uncertainty."
3. Cultivating "Systemic Empathy": Personality education should not only focus on "individual" morality but also help students build a sense of "social" and "systemic" responsibility through "perspective-switching" training.

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