Playshops: Workshop series exploring play

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PLAYSHOPS
WORKSHOP SERIES, EXPLORING PLAY

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THE PROMISE OF PLAY FOR ORGANIZATIONS

"When adults play with ideas, use creative techniques, accomplish risky or unusual feats, employ models to exemplify their mental worlds, and allow themselves to be truly comfortable and creative in their environment, they are also using the medium of play, although they may call it something else"

—Bergen, 2009, p420)

In recent years, much writing in the business and popular press has stressed the need for more innovation and creativity within organizations, for various reasons: to develop successful products and services; to deliver more value to stakeholders; or to solve seemingly intractable economic, social, and environmental problems at a global scale. Collaboration is being hailed as a key driver of this desired innovation, as in creativity researcher Keith Sawyer's latest book, *Group Genius* (Sawyer, 2007) and a recent special issue on Collaboration from the *Harvard Business Review* (July-August, 2011). This paper will show that play can be conceptualized as a powerful, adaptable human activity that involves creativity and collaboration, and may offer opportunities for organizations to practice and improve both.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PLAY THEORY?

Although play is often characterized as 'frivolous', or defined as the opposite of 'work' (Sutton-Smith, 1991), an exploration of play theory reveals a variety of definitions and frameworks, suggesting that play is a rich and vital part of human activity.

Johan Huizinga was a Dutch historian whose writing on play theory inspired much subsequent scholarship on the topic. Huizinga believed that play was a fundamental element of human culture. In *Homo Ludens* (meaning 'man the player'), he argued that play is as much a *creator* of culture as it is a product of it, by showing how play was integral to language, law, war, poetry, philosophy, and art (Huizinga, 1950). Huizinga focused mainly on conflict-related play (which he called *agonistic*), and defined play by describing its qualities. The following qualities remain useful for recognizing play activities across many contexts: (1) it is voluntary; (2) it is separate from 'ordinary' life, but absorbs players intensely; (3) it is unconcerned with material interests, and creates no profit; (4) it is limited, in duration and location; (5) it has order and rules, but uncertain outcomes (1950, p 13).

Roger Caillois' *Man, Play and Games* provided a more comprehensive way of looking at play, partly in response to Huizinga's narrow focus on competitive play forms (Henricks, 2010). Although he agreed with most of Huizinga's defining qualities, Caillois made some key distinctions: that play *can* be concerned with the *exchange of material interests*, as in gambling; that *rules* and *uncertainty* are two separate concepts; and that play can be *fictive* (make-believe). Caillois' first major theoretical contribution was to suggest a typology of play forms: *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation or role play), and *ilinx* (vertigo). Caillois also explored pairings that seem to arise between these four types, showing that play can be a mixture of many elements. The second major contribution was Caillois' notion of a continuum between *paidia* and *ludus*, or between play that is free and improvisational at one extreme (paidia), and play that is bound by arbitrary and strict rules at the other extreme (ludus). The four types can exist on various points of this continuum, allowing an even greater variety of play forms (Caillois, 1961).

More recently, others have also explored frameworks to describe the variety of *experiences* possible during play, such as competition, thrill, or exploration (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, Korhonen et al, 2009).

This variety—and even the multiple ways the word 'play' is used in the English language—suggests that ambiguity is a key element of play. Acknowledging this ambiguity, Brian Sutton-Smith used the concept of 'rhetorics' as a framework to examine the different concepts underlying various interpretations of play (1991). Four of these rhetorics are ancient in origin: Fate, Power, Communal Identity, and Frivolity. The other three are more modern developments: Progress, The Imaginary, and The Self.

As a way of unifying these diverse perspectives and exploring the value of play, Sutton-Smith looked to evolutionary biology and neuroscience. The key elements of quirkiness, redundancy, and flexibility seem to be essential to both play and evolution. He proposed that the benefit of all this ambiguity might be that it increases an organism's adaptability, thus improving its chances of survival (Sutton-Smith, 1991, p 222). This suggests that play might also be helpful in increasing an organization's adaptability and ability

to innovate in a changing world.

It should be noted that specific play theories are a product of the time and the society in which they are written (Henricks, 2010). But in the most general sense, there is also a universality to play that transcends time and culture. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman synthesized several play theories to offer a general definition of *play*, which is useful for its brevity and its adaptability to a variety of contexts: 'Play is free movement within a more rigid structure.' (2004, p 304)

WE'RE BUILDING A SPACESHIP (AN IMPROV GAME)

PLAY AS CREATIVITY

How might insights from play theory help organizations understand and practice creativity? Sutton-Smith used the term Rhetorics of the Imaginary to categorize ways of thinking about play which emphasize creativity, imagination, and flexibility, including improvisation in art and literature (1991, p127). In this rhetoric, play is valued precisely because it is an imaginative activity, and there is a very straightforward relationship: being creative *is* playing. However, organizations are interested in the outcomes of creativity, not just imaginative acts for their own sake. Therefore it is necessary to take a closer look at both the similarities and differences between theories of creativity and theories of play.

Creativity, like play, has many definitions and interpretations across multiple domains of knowledge. In the context of this paper, it is helpful to begin with a model of creativity developed by Teresa Amabile specifically to understand creativity in organizations. Amabile defined creativity as generating an idea that

is *original*, *useful*, and *actionable*. She also identified three components of creativity: *expert knowledge, creative thinking skills*, and *motivation*. Two key aspects of *creative thinking skills* are the willingness to disagree with others, and the ability to persevere through difficulty (Amabile, 1998). This recalls the competitive play of *agon* (Callois, 1961), and also relates to the 'lusory attitude' by which players in a game accept difficult obstacles and less efficient means while striving towards their goal (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

Amabile's model also makes a key distinction between external and intrinsic motivation, arguing that the latter is a more effective source of creativity. Intrinsic motivation is also a key element of play, which is undertaken voluntarily and for its own sake (Huizinga, 1950, Caillois, 1961, Sutton-Smith, 1991, Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

There are three other ways in which creativity is similar to play. The first is that both deal with *uncertain outcomes* (Huizinga, 1950, Caillois, 1961). Even in games at the *ludus* end of the spectrum, there may be a goal and known rules, but there is still no way of predicting the outcome. Second, both involve activity within *constraints*. In organizational creativity there are always limits of some kind (time, resources, abilities) and in play there are rules or at the very least boundaries. This calls to mind Salen & Zimmerman's general definition of play as 'free movement within a more rigid structure' (2004, p 304). Finally, both play and creativity are *emergent* (Sawyer, 2007). They cannot be forced to occur, or even necessarily planned ahead of time. This emergence is challenging

for organizations used to rational processes of control, but also points to the value of play as a complement to these rational processes (Jacobs & Statler, 2006).

Another similarity between creativity and play can be found in the experience of each, by asking "What does it feel like to play or to be creative?" Psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi coined the term *flow* to describe positive experiences common to both play and creativity, in which an individual is so deeply immersed and challenged by an intrinsically motivating activity that they lose their sense of time and self-consciousness (1991). The frameworks mentioned above which categorize various 'playful experiences' (Korhonen et al, 2009, Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) can also be used to describe the experience of creativity, using such categories as *challenge* or *discovery*.

In more general terms, *fun* is an irreducible aspect of the experience of play (Huizinga, 1950, p 3). In fact, research has shown that the experience of positive emotions – like fun – can lead to a broadening of attention and an increase in creative thought (Fredrickson, 2001, Amabile et al, 2005), suggesting a positive emotional feedback loop linking play and creativity.

In spite of these similarities, there are differences between the theories of play outlined above and Amabile's model of organizational creativity. Play does not always create new ideas that are 'useful and actionable'. Play does not require *expert knowledge* as in Amabile's model, it only requires a basic understanding in order to play along.

Nor does creativity meet the definitions of play in every case. Creativity does not always happen in a time or place separate from the 'ordinary' world. It may be very much concerned with material interests, and even the production of wealth. Creativity may be more effective when intrinsically motivated, but it can also be extrinsically motivated. Thus, while play and creativity are related, they are not interchangeable concepts.

PLAY AS COLLABORATION
In a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review*, Yochai Benkler makes the case that human beings are much more cooperative than the conventional rhetoric of competition suggests, citing current research in

evolutionary biology, psychology, sociology, political science, and economics (Benkler, 2011). Within play theory, there has been a similar transition over the past 60 years, from Huizinga's focus on competitive play (1950) to more recent writing that positions competitive play within a larger frame of cooperation. Even participating in a competitive game requires players to cooperate with one another and co-create the 'space of the game' (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). As Csíkszentmihályi points out, the root of the word 'compete' is the Latin *con petire*, which means 'to seek together' (1991).

This notion of seeking together is enforced by the social nature of most games, or as Caillois said, that all four types of play in his typology "presume not solitude but company" (1960, p40). Of course, there are solitary games and one can certainly be playful alone, but in general, play is more fun when experienced with others.

Those who are interested in collaboration in organizations have employed play as a method for collaborative strategy making (Roos & Victor, 1999, Jacobs & Statler, 2006), as training in 'collaborative leadership' (Dentico, 1999), and as a medium for innovation (Shrage, 2000).

IMPROVISATION AS A SPECIAL CASE OF PLAY, CREATIVITY, AND COLLABORATION
Improvisation is a true melding of play, creativity, and collaboration into a single activity. Mary Crossan has studied theatre improvisation and collaborated with the Second City improv group in order to learn how improvisation can benefit organizations and managers. Crossan identified three types of skills, similar to Amabile's components of creativity: *process skills* such as listening and communication; context-specific *skills and knowledge*; and *a willingness to take risks* (Crossan, 1998). Improv theatre creates collaboration that is positive and generative, based primarily on the rule of 'yes, and…'—stating that players must agree with and add to any idea that is suggested (Crossan, 1998, p 596-97). Crossan showed that this simple rule could be applied to organizations to help create a safe space where people can take *psychological risks* (1998, p 597). This immediate, free-form play could be located on the *paidia* end of Caillois' play spectrum. In

the words of Crossan, 'Improvisation is one of the few concepts and tools we have to develop the capacity to be innovative in the moment—a key requirement of organizations… in the twenty-first century.' (p 598)

More recently, Colin Fisher and Teresa Amabile have explored improvisation as a unique form of creativity. They outlined a model for 'improvisational' creativity as distinct from traditional 'compositional' models of creativity (Fisher & Amabile, 2008). Compositional models of creativity, including previous work by Amabile (1996), typically divide the creative process into distinct phases, for example: (1) *problem presentation*, (2) *preparation*, (3) *response generation*, (4) *response execution*, and (5) *outcome and evaluation*. In contrast, there are two key differences in their model of improvisational creativity. First, the *problem presentation*, *response generation*, and *execution* are happening almost simultaneously, in the moment. Second, because of this immediacy of action, *preparation* must happen first—before the act of improvising—by accumulating knowledge, expertise and existing patterns. The willingness to take risks and the response to "temporally proximate stimuli" are two other key components of successful improvisational creativity. Improvisational creativity is particularly useful in situations of crisis or opportunity where individuals must react quickly (Fisher & Amabile, 2008). In the immediacy of response to stimuli, there is a parallel with play, which always occurs in the moment and requires reactions from players that are often based on intuition and previous knowledge. In other words, players cannot leave the game space in order to research and evaluate their options, then

return at a later time to act, since doing so would disrupt the play experience.

Fisher and Amabile raise some concerns that the expertise and experience required for improvisation within organizations would be costly and difficult to attain. This might be true at the individual level, but collaboration and play can both help to mitigate this concern. By encouraging collaboration between individuals with diverse backgrounds, skills, and mindsets, there will be an increased pool of expertise to draw from. Such diversity has often been cited as a key to successful creativity and innovation in group settings. While diversity can sometimes lead to conflict and misunderstandings, play might be a way to avoid this conflict. By using play techniques, like 'yes-anding' from theatre improvisation (Crossan, 1998), the collaboration can occur in a safe space that is more positive and generative.

Conclusion: What can play offer organizations?

An exploration of play theory reveals that play is a fundamental part of the human experience. While the theories suggest many definitions and explanations as to why people play, one overarching benefit of such an ambiguous activity is that it leads to adaptability. If this can help individuals survive in an evolutionary sense, then it can also be of benefit to organizations that make play a part of their activities.

Creativity and play share many skills and common experiential qualities. Play may therefore be an effective way to bring creativity into organizations, as a compliment to rational activities. In a similar way, the activity of play offers a great opportunity to introduce more collaboration into an organization, in a way that is safe and accessible for everyone.

Borrowing techniques from improvisational theatre is one way to combine play, creativity, and collaboration and inject them into an organization. Further research and experimentation would help reveal more ways to harness these three activities and provide greater adaptability for organizations.

In their working paper *Ain't misbehavin': Taking play seriously in organizations*, Matt Statler, Johan Roos and Bart Victor argue that play has a place in organizations and can offer benefits – but they stress that the benefits will be experienced outside of the play 'frame': later in time and at different scales than the play activity itself (Statler et al, 2002, p 17). This position on the value of play, combined with the above emphasis on adaptability, suggests that play within organizations may be thought of as useful *practice* for future activities that require creativity and collaboration. The benefits of this practice might include the following transferable skills:

Flexibility of thought: By providing a safe space to be more playful with words, ideas, or actions, people's confidence in taking risks and thinking unconventional thoughts will increase, leading to more innovative thinking in other areas of their activity.

Working within constraints: Creativity is often spurred on by constraints, and because play is 'free movement within a more rigid structure', it provides an opportunity to practice this creativity within a set of constraints. Ultimately, learning to recognize and adapt to constraints also develops a group's ability to imagine how to creatively break the rules and 'change the game', to borrow an apt phrase.

Co-creation, rather than compromise: Because play is social and collaborative, it can develop emotional skills that are necessary for co-creation. Specific actions like playing together as a team, building ideas collectively in a generative and positive way, and even the 'seeking together' of competitive games all offer experiences that are about enjoyment for all, rather than the win-lose or lose-lose approach of compromise so often found in organizations.

These skills, as well as the ability to 'be innovative in the moment' and respond quickly to emerging opportunities and crises will all become more important in the future. As our familiar structures, institutions, and rules are disrupted by global forces – economic, social and environmental – there will be a need for more improvisation, more adaptability, and more creativity in order for organizations to thrive within this turbulent world. Play offers a way to practice dealing with these unknown changes, while having some fun along the way.

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EMMA WESTECOTT
A CALL TO PLAY

Play is a core human function. Play is the way we become self-conscious; playing with fingers and toes, with cause and effect. Play is the first way we learn. Play is the way we place ourselves in society through playground games. Play is, without fail, the way we generate new knowledge.

It seems odd then that contemporary society attempts to control how, where, when and why we play. Different groups have different access and rights to play. Some types of play are sanctioned, whilst others are sanitized, and yet more excluded from the time-poor context of modern life. We are fundamentally locked- in to a work/play divide in capitalist ideology and remain impoverished, both personally and more generally as a culture, as a result.

PLAYING GAMES

Digital gaming is a play form. It is no longer the province of the young or technically inclined and like much computationally mediated experience games are increasingly popularized within culture. Technology increasingly surrounds us each minute of each day, and often where there is technology there is a game to be played. Even more radically we are seeing aspects of digital game form being taken up in the popular imagination beyond the specificity of the relationship between a particular gaming device and the game experience it facilitates. Trends like 'gamification' (the use of game reward mechanics and points systems in wider application) and the growth of dispersed real-life gaming experiences (ARG's, street-gaming, big games, etc.) are increasingly appearing as border experiments with the form of games outside of a required technological dependency.

Modern digital games are a significant cultural force, increasingly seen as the current generation's medium-of-choice and rapidly gaining acceptance as a powerful contemporary art form. Growing from the entertainment sector, games increasingly move beyond a leisure activity to wider application as a tool for education, research, activism and innovation. One of the most significant aspects of digital games is the explicit inclusion of the consumer in active and playful experience.

It would seem that the public rhetoric around gaming has changed from a reaction against game form as inciting violence, addiction and worse of all, apathy to a more utopic view of the positive potential of games for more effective learning, social engagement and even providing a solution to the world's problems. Popular practitioners and theorists like Jesse Schell (2010) and Jane McGonigal (2010) propose a positive potential for a future of games that is productive for both personal and social good. The pendulum swings. Yet whilst this development is positive for those of us passionate about videogames, it speaks to an over-simplification of the phenomena. What about play? What both these views miss is the creative and chaotic nature of the act of play above the particulars of any one game. Both Schell and McGonigal re-figure productive play to their own ends, in the sense that the play they propose is intended for a greater good. Their vision focuses on their own sense of ideal players. Yet the social phenomenon of digital games includes a spectrum of play, both productive and transgressive. We play games, play with games and play against games.

There are as many different types of gaming experience as there are individuals; each is bound to the situated context of the gamer engaging in the game. The connective tissue of gaming lies in its frame for play. This creates a certain approach to engagement that sets up an experimental mindset on behalf of the gamer. The gamer playfully explores the game experience open to the actions on offer, orienting herself within the presented game world using the game controllers at hand to act, and thereby progress, the game.

As technologically mediated experience over the past 30 years or so the design of videogames has developed in intimate dialogue with the technological capacity of their delivery medium. The design of early arcade games oriented around a 'cash to gameplay' value system that responded to the specifics of coin-operated gaming machines in public spaces. The more domestic setting of gaming consoles and the personal computer offered new genres and contexts for gameplay in the home in front of a big screen. The rise of the network typified by the popularization of the Internet in the 90s provided games with a specific context for distributed multi-player experience. More recently with the advent of smart mobile telephony, games have gained a capacity to respond to movement and location. My point with this fleeting history (for more depth see Mayra 2008) is that gameplay has evolved in dialogue with the specific affordances of technological delivery. In this process videogames have become a powerful popular and mainstream cultural form. Currently we play different games in different situations on different devices as the fragmented commercial landscape creates a seemingly eternal hunger for the new.

My suggestion is that increasingly we will see games overflow specific delivery channels and use a range of technologies to reach the gamer across the course of a day. Currently different types of games tend to center on a specific handful of platforms, for example delivering a game via console and using social networks for marketing and promotion. In market terms this makes sense-allowing developers

to re-purpose content afresh in each channel thereby earning more through an aggregation model. In design terms this often impoverishes the original idea. The potential of designing for the specific channel offers a rich source of innovation in design. For example, we can see that each modality of delivery, or should we say context of play, offers specific design opportunities whether for personal, shared, spectacular or mobile game experience. For example, a smartphone enables mobility and allows the gamer to connect real world movement with in game progress. At the same time phones provide a personal address between the game and the gamer, as I hold my phone close to me I enable the game to speak to me alone as I play.

Designers and artists working with this rapidly evolving form are challenged to enrich the play potential of the games they build. The active nature of games has the potential to change the dynamic embodied in existing cultural media — that media supports distance from culpability. Games can positively affect our culture of remoteness by involving players in the interplay between action and consequence. This is one of the most exciting aspects of game form and points to possibilities for individuals, societies and cultures in building and communicating ethical values. But it is important to note that the designer should not make the moral

decision for the player; rather the designer provides a tool set for decision-making and feedback regarding the associated outcome.

Game designers must heed the call by Flanagan (2009) to develop a criticality towards the range of play practices brought forward by the meme of the gamer. This works towards an equitable future for games over the re-play of existent power structures in this new framework. Flanagan s approach is important as it acknowledges a more diverse play (pun intended) on display between the history, status and use of digital game form in a number of contexts. Her notion of critical play allows for unplaying (the enactment of forbidden play), re-skinning (altering the appearance of play objects) and rewriting (the creation and consumption by players of play fictions)

A key question in this challenge is how will this increasingly significant form, born in military research labs and built by capitalist mechanisms driven by hard profit, create new possibilities for cultural expression and alter existing paradigms of both social and individual power?

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SUZANNE STEIN & SCOTT SMITH
PLAY AS IDEATION

Creative elicitation games are helpful for moving design concepts further towards refined ideas. While we are exploring the use of these for such aims; we are also looking at the inclusion and extension of these play tactics as part of a growing taxonomy of foresight techniques. In short, we are using Play for Design Concepts and we are also using play to imagine possible futures and to practice possible responses. There is a tie between the two uses. If we imagine a future state, develop a concept for it, scale that concept to present-day feasibility and viability issues, we might have unlocked a fresh view *and* a resilient idea.

Playful, role-playing techniques form a quickly ascending terrain in Foresight practice, which has placed, perhaps by necessity, an unbalanced premium to date on its methodical processes as the backbone of its core techniques. Foresight is used to discern and extrapolate trajectories of change in society for the purposes of understanding implications and often, to develop strategies of resilience or survival. Over the last decade, the practice of Foresight has come back into vogue (F1)—and this time the characteristics of our modern society seem to promise its permanence: extreme competition, crisis and uncertainty. We seem to be going to "Hell in a Hand basket" on personal, organizational, national and global levels. With the stakes so high (e.g. quality of life issues, organizational relevance and survival, and the end of the planet as we know it), comes a renewed interest in those techniques developed to manage change (F2). Characteristically, however, the practice of foresighting is losing its anxious, uptight grip(F3); it is embracing the business "un-usual" world of play, or what we have come to call: "ludic foresight".

Ludic foresight is useful to diverse or interdisciplinary groups, where game and role-playing are used to create design concepts and artifacts for the future that can further stimulate on-the-ground ideas for innovation and problem solving. Ultimately, the aim of such exercises is to engage a wide range of actors in foresight thinking by both engaging in simple but immersive simulation via play, and generating concepts via models that make contemplation of possible futures more tangible, engaging, and provocative.

Design Approach

Teams where participants have mixed experiences, roles and points of view are asked to play structured games combining social, technological, economic, environmental, political and values- based trends, with assigned identities, missions and resource constraints, in order to elicit new thinking towards problem solving. As a multi-stage process, the games typically entail rapid, lightweight future scenario development via structured role playing followed by artifact creation— typically a model of an ideal product, process or other type of solution. The exercise's assigned internal identities, missions and external conditions allow groups of divergent opinions and standpoints to come together to create new affordances, converged interpretations of specifications for a future state, and resolutions to present day and possible future tensions.

Case in Point

After piloting the play session during the Digital Futures Workshops at OCAD U, Stein flew to Austria to work with the World Youth Summit Award recipients; young new media designers from around the word who were creating notable and inspiring social, technological innovations. She worked with the youth as well as their mentors and older ICT experts to use the above

described technique to develop social, technological possibilities in attaining the UN's millennium goals. Stein distributed Trend Game Cards, adapted from the book of media trends that Smith and Stein developed earlier that year. The workshop only lasted two hours. At mid-point, people might have feared she was 'a bit too off base' but enough respect had been garnered by the presentation so far that the audience continued to take a leap of faith and pretended that they had
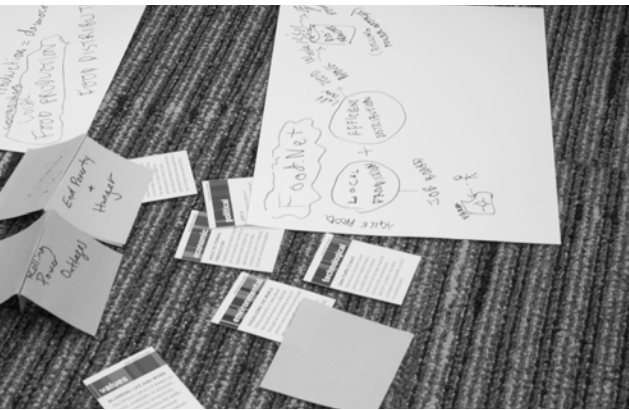
time travelled to the future by 50 years and that the Millennium Goals still needed attention. Due to time limitations and number of participants, tangible artifacts were not created but participants presented and discussed new media concepts that they could feasibly and viably build today. Generally, groups left feeling elated, inspired and exhausted. Success was perhaps modest, but evident: 1) many participants felt the ideas deserved to be returned to again, in earnest, and that new possibilities and approaches had been opened, and 2) many expressed desire for further training or support in using these tools in their own organizations.

Findings
Debriefs with participants as well as facilitator observation during the above and Stein and Smith past game play experiements suggest the method, even with some variation, provide an effective means of:

» *'leveling the playing field' of seniority and experience among members of a team playing together, removing a frequent barrier to both free exchange of viewpoints and*

interpretation of possible futures that crop(s) up in team or organizational settings,

» *fusing teams of players that had never met face-to-face quickly form into a cohesive working group, with the game as a social object on which to focus a common understanding and vision,*

» *creating a narrative vehicle on which teams can develop rich stories of imagined futures, and*

» *providing a driver for development of a communication artifact that both enables co-creation by team members and opens the possibility for refinement and iteration through the artifact as prototype.*

Although there has been resistance to ludic techniques due to lack of reliability, and uncertainty of ROI from the exercises, the value of changing roles and perspective, giving permission to alternative views, and the value of playfulness in lowering barriers to co-created ideas is increasingly becoming accepted practice.

We hope that our continued explorations provide a foundation for injecting playfulness as a catalyst for strategic foresight. The ideation exercises are not just useful for group cohesions, but also for the ideas and insights generated through play. Play as Ideation might just be one of the most powerful tools in our toolset to resolve the Wicked Problems of today and tomorrow.

Summary
The UN Millennium goals provided a good test bed for this approach. They constitute some of the most important and pressing wicked problems for us on a global scale:

» *End Poverty & Hunger*
» *Universal Education*
» *Gender Equality*
» *Child Heath*
» *Maternal Health*
» *Combat HIV/AIDS*
» *Environmental Sustainability*
» *Global Partnership*

The exercise left people wanting to play more, again and often. No one idea was sure fire, but it was evident that the more we played, the smarter we could become. We realized that we were on to something.

Clearly, this approach is not efficient by usual business standards. The "leap of faith" taken to engage in these exercises may not, necessarily, pay off. There is no clear return on investment of time in the usual sense. However, playing such games has value in professional practice; benefits include skills development, group formation and fresh thinking. These exercises evolve group knowledge—of awareness of team members' value, of the topic matter, and of possible responses: actions or interventions.

Ludic Foresight exercises (Play as Ideation) are useful for:

» *Wicked problems: where the multiple issues and solutions to the system surrounding the problem generally net out at further problems, creating indeterminacy of action.*

» *Creative elicitation: to practice and leverage cognitive, elastic abilities, resulting in lateral and new, or radical thinking*

» *Group formation: establish non-hierarchical social dynamics to allow the free flow of the above*

» *Group vision & understanding: to mobilize the group, regardless of position into refined understanding and united pathways to action.*

» *Problem reframing: to create new paradigms of thought as an approach to successful ideation.*

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BARBARA RAUCH
CHINESE WHISPER & MORE

"Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always. The word intropection need hardly be defined—it means, of course, the looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover."

—James, 1890, Vol. 1: 185

Emotions are probably the most confusing phenomena for not only psychology, but also in biology, and more generally for the sciences and humanities alike. Artists and designers have over the centuries devoted themselves to work on questions of and around consciousness and emotions. This is not only because emotions and their expressions often withdraw themselves from verbal reports. They are equally expressed internally as feelings and sensations and externally as bodily gestures or facial expressions.

Being such a complex issue many influencial researchers have engaged in emotion studies, Charles Darwin should be named as an early figure of evolutionary biology and William James (1884) would be an early key representant of the psychology of consciousness. Dennett with his cognitive studies and as a contemporary philisoph, one ought to mention his method of heterophenomenology when it comes to the study of one's own mind, if it is for Dennett we are all just conscious robots. On the other hand Josepf E. LeDoux and Antonio Damasio confront us with their neurological views and as of Damasio in Descartes' Error (1994) he outlines how important emotions are for rational decision making. He explains that reason and emotion are not separate, instead, mind and body need to be examined and explained in tandem.

For facial expressions and emotions and bodily emotional gestures we will have to highlight Paul Ekman's work over many decades. Ekman's examples of how to read emotions on faces will be explored. Ekman created hundreds of photos, some are collaged works since they are difficult to make on demand. One approach in the workshop will be to improve our ability to read the face of the other. We will mimic and play with simple toys basic communications between ourselves.

Robert Plutchik developed a study of psychoevolutionary theory of emotion and it will be his work that we will study in more depth to employ his wheel of emtotions in our Play workshop session. If we consider his elaboration on emotion and cognition, emotions are really developed to help predict future events. Emotions are there for survival of the species and they serve as cognitive information about our environment. In that sense they are not a linear event but feedback processes, they are in loop to restore a state of equilibrium in one body. This is true for internal as for external stimulation as for dreams trigger much of our emotion processing in the amygdala of the brain, where emotional data is mainly being processed.

As for the three-dimensional colour wheel for emotion concepts Plutchick has developed a "circumplex" model that not only represents emotions and their intensity, it also explains how emotions can be combined and in addition the wheel has been used as tool for personality labeling. I would hope that by Playing with the model we will examine also how we relate to the each other's emotional states.

The e_Motion Research Project (e_MRP) looks into Autism Spectrum Disorders as a model of understanding the mind of the other, this is through facial expression and reading emotions through an intersubjective approach to explore both the relations with oneself and an object and the manyfold relationships between subjects and externalized others.

Theory of mind is the theory of understanding the fact that another person has their own mind and understanding of the world, in autistic people it was found that they often have a problem reading the other's mind, or more generally expressions or bodily signals that are send out. Stanley Greenspan engages in a new model of floortime approach where he works with young children with all levels of the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Imaginative play or pretend play situations are situations when one engages in make-believe situations. Imagination and pretending helps children to rehearse actions and sequences of actions, they can play out their ideas as to rehears for later.

The Play Methods Workshop will be considered such a rehearsal situation. We aim to visualize the information we have gathered and hope to come up with some infograph/ sketch for the one hour session. It is hoped that the visualization employs Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow, where through the "optimal state of experience" and deep immersion in the experience of one's self.
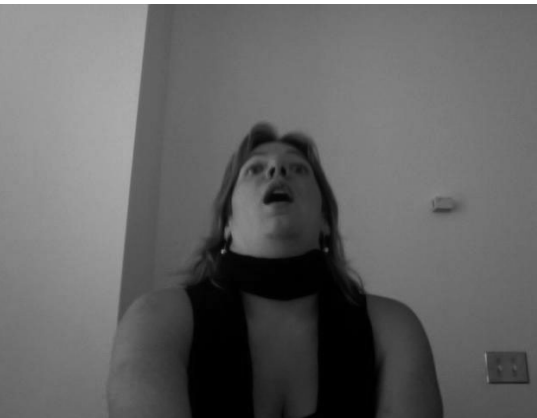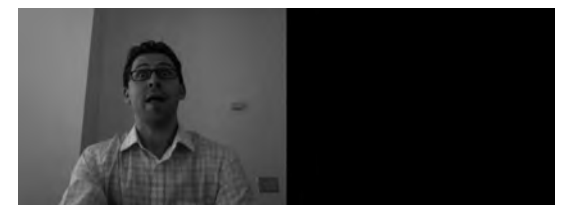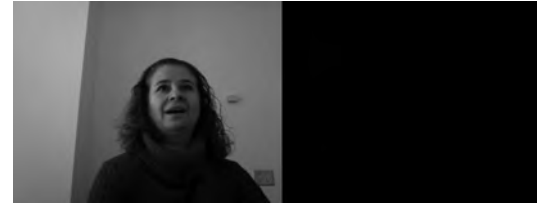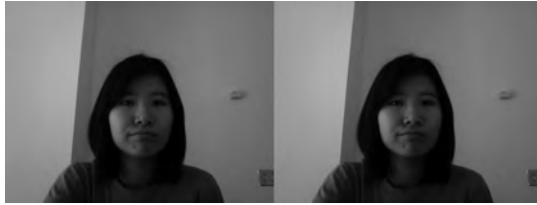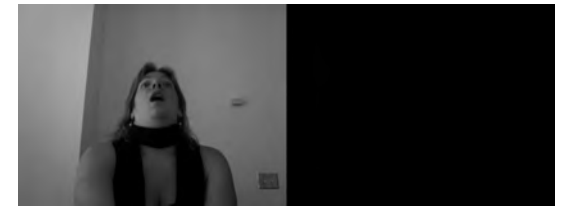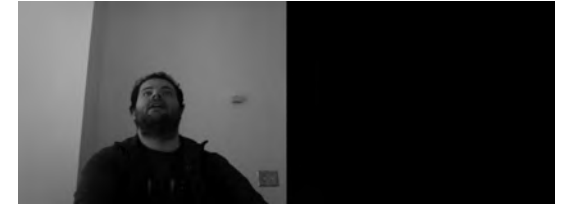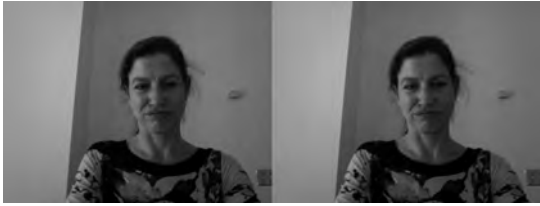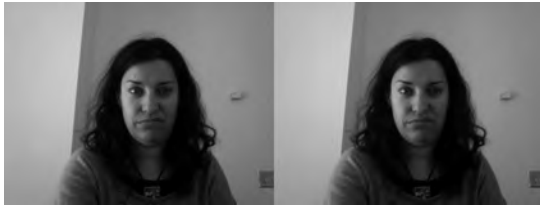
Face to face

Face to Screen

Face to Photo

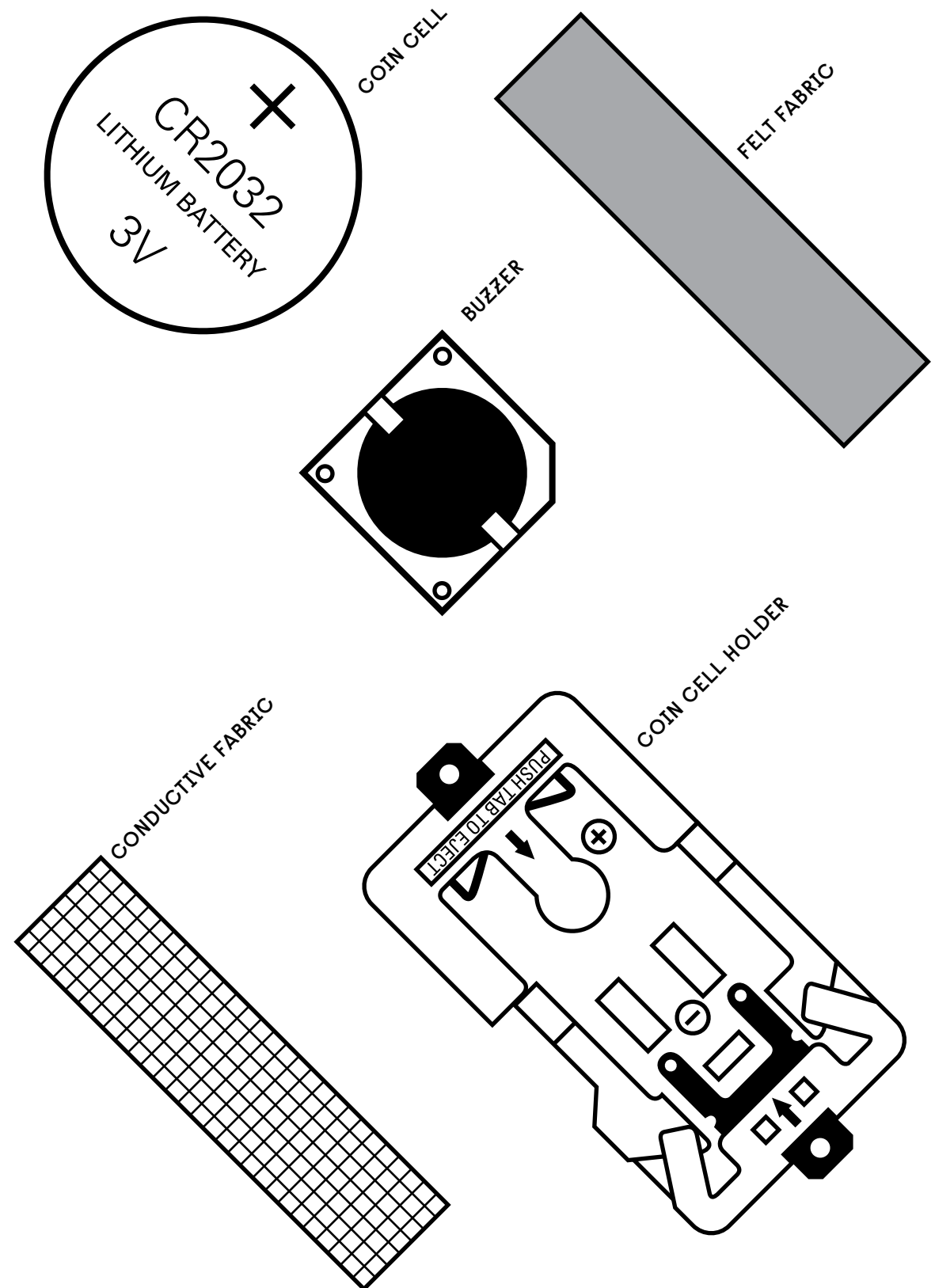The e_Motion Lab tackles the Play Methods Workshop from a unique perspective of emotion study.

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KATE HARTMAN
HACKING AS PLAY

A switch is something that enables or prevents the flow of electricity. It creates or breaks the physical connection of two conductors in a circuit. Switches can come in familiar forms: the toggle switch that controls the light in a room; the slide switch on the barrel of a classic flashlight; the blinking red "DO NOT TOUCH" button on the control panel of a failing intergalactic vessel. But switches can also be designed for less common scenarios: the twirl of a moustache; the meeting of eyes; the act of two bodies embracing. Regardless of form or application, the nature of a switch is to connect.

In the workshop Hacking as Play, participants were asked to consider ways in which wearable electronic systems might acknowledge or encourage social interaction. Using electronic components and conductive materials, participants created wearable social prosthetics that responded to a social interaction between two or more people.

COIN CELL

CR2032
LITHIUM BATTERY
3V

FELT FABRIC

BUZZER

CONDUCTIVE FABRIC

COIN CELL HOLDER

PUSH TAB TO EJECT

Eye Contact Antennas: Proboscises that connect when the wearer's gaze is met.

Twirl `stache and Stroke Beard: Facial hair offers an unusual interface.

We're All in This Together: Hands joined create a multi-body circuit.

Hold Me Hug Sleeves: A circuit that encircles two bodies.

The Menagerie: Antlers + tail + paws help social animals unite.

GUIA GALI & SYMON OLIVER

FAILING THROUGH PLAY: OVERCOMING UNCERTAINTY

Using unfamiliar and unpredictable materials build a structure; build it quickly and build it strong. How should such a challenge be approached? The answer may be, to be frivolous, be impulsive, be unconventional; in short, play it out.

Play can be a liberating addition to problem solving. The role of play in the process of problem solving is complicated through the rhetoric of distinction between play and work. Play is typically perceived to be trivial, irrational, and futile, and hence has very little place within pedagogical and professional disciplines. However, without the fortitude we cultivate through frivolous play, we continue to be overtly cautious, refraining from taking risks—especially in situations where the level of uncertainty and loss is high.

Uncertainty in any task proves taxing and even crippling to the problem-solving process. This tension between uncertainties, fear of failure, and emphasis on outcomes can result in paralysis and self doubt; consequences of the outcome-driven methods found in work.

Play creates a safe space—free of reprisal—for exploring irrational solutions, techniques, roles, and behaviours (Bird 1). When viewed through this lens play can be an enabling activity, facilitating the experimentation. In this freedom, failure is an intended outcome. Using the process of play as a problem-solving technique embraces failure as a valid approach to successfully arriving at a solution. It is through learning from failures that humanity has found better ways to create things. Therefore, instances where uncertainty is high, a process that prioritizes and embraces failure is a positive, constructive, and edifying approach to solving problems.

Our Play as Uncertainty workshop attempts to explore the notion that failure through play can be a necessary process for embracing—and essentially overcoming—uncertainty in goal-oriented tasks. We observe how a combination of constraints (time and chance) influence participants' attitudes towards goal oriented tasks and methods of problem solving. Might the divide between play and work be present in their processes? Would they rather play it safe to complete the task or take risks that may lead to more inventive solutions? Did those who take risks fare better than those who played it safe?

To explore our assumptions we designed an experimental game. Presenting the workshop as a game lends itself to a ludic and slightly competitive space for play, while a time limit of 20 minutes adds just enough pressure to position the game as a goal-oriented task. We used the established rules from two common games, Jenga, and House of Cards to govern

the game. The goal remains familiar: build the tallest structure using only one deck of cards.

The workshop began with the distribution of shuffled card decks among four teams of two players each. A shuffled deck introduces uncertainty into the game by providing a randomized suit whenever each player draws a card. Implementing a turn-based system encourages teams to strategize early in the workshop while the presence of teams stimulates a competitive atmosphere, which increases the risk factor of every move in the task.

Prior to the game the cards were perforated to indicate folding lines with each suit bearing different perforations. Limiting how each card could be used added complexity to the typically straightforward task. Thus, each suit can only be folded in a particular manner: spades to be folded in half vertically, clubs are folded in half horizontally, diamonds are folded twice corner to corner and once down the vertical middle, and hearts remain unfolded. Resembling a rigid bowtie, the diamond represented the most complex geometry. As additional aid, four Jokers were added to serve as wild cards, which can be folded in any way desired to complement or reinforce the structure.

The familiar conventions of the game allowed all four teams to jump right into building. The chosen workspace to build the structures was on a carpet floor, which provided ideal stability and grip for the slippery cards. Once teams began building and developing approaches to stable designs, we observed a variety of strategies leading to to the following questions: will teams continue to push on the same structural design or begin from scratch once it fails? Will they take a risk on creating novel structural patterns or settle for archetypal—yet proven—forms like the pyramid? How far are teams willing to bend the rules in order to win?

One unexpected occurrence was the prevalence of casual conversation that dominated the atmosphere of the workshop. The conversations were nuanced with brief insights into how to build the structure better, or what they should try next.

As time passed, all the teams were noticeably invested in building their structures using three varied strategies:

One team would draw all their cards from the deck before building while another would build their own separate structures before adjoing them together.

Some would build different structural designs as fast as possible, leaving the Diamond cards—the most complex shape—off to the side.

Another team would watch the competing teams and take note of patterns that work, which would later be applied to their own structure.

Overall, the team that pushed aside the rules and built several different structures—regardless of success or failure—was the first to achieve the tallest, as well as the boldest, structural design.

A suggestion made to improve the activity was to add different rules to each card (e.g. "Take a card from another player's tower") to completely push the idea of uncertainty. Thus, no matter how tall one builds a structure, another team could just as easily take it down at any minute. This fosters a more strategic and competitive gaming atmosphere that could potentially push teams to choose one distinct process over another (i.e. playing it safe vs. taking risks).

It was observed that as the time limit neared, teams without a working structure made a distinct reversal from a heavily strategic approach to a frivolous and heuristic one by hastily stacking cards just to have a legitimate structure at the end of the game. It can be assumed that once the team had embraced the unpredictable nature of the cards, any structural pattern could offer the possibility for a solution.

Brian Sutton-Smith explains how play contributes culturally to the philosophical, creative, social, and political fabrics of culture (202 Sutton-Smith). And yet distinctions made between play and work attempt to negate the benefits of play as a valid tool for solving problems. However, the process of play proves effective under circumstances where uncertainty is high. The developmental and exploratory disposition of play is more conducive to taking risks and learning by failing, hence fostering a more positive and stimulating method to problem solving.
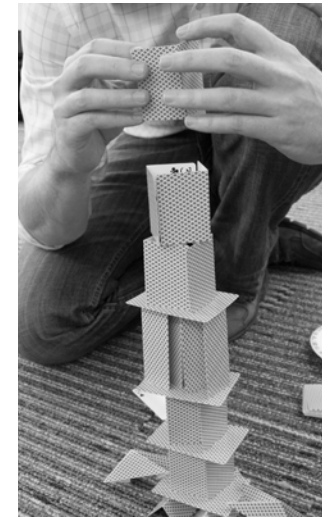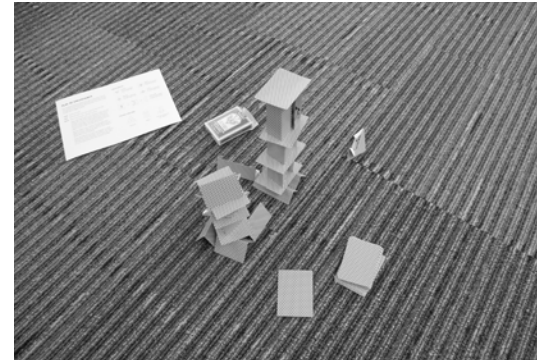
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