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## Establishing the right starting conditions: The opening

How the facilitator frames the first 45 to 60 minutes of a workshop using the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method with first-time users is absolutely critical for a successful outcome. There are typically three different reactions to a being “confronted” with the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method:

1. *This is silly – how can this be efficient and worth my time!*
2. *This is frightening – I have not played with LEGO for 20 years/I don’t consider myself creative, this is intimidating!*
3. *This is terrific – let’s get started!*

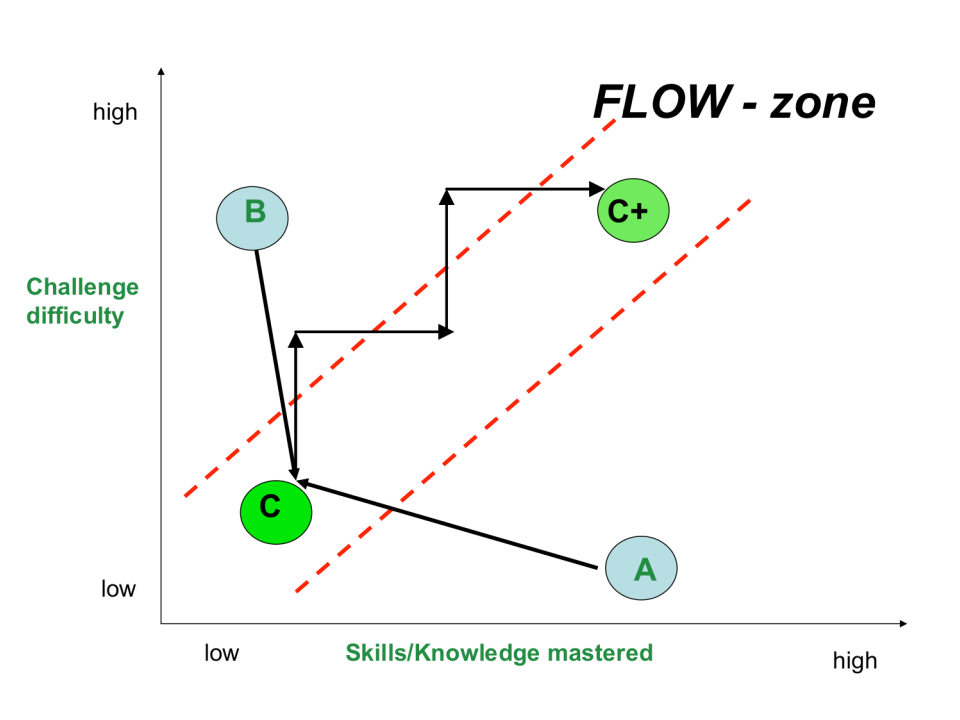
Everything during the first 45 to 60 minutes of using the LEGOS SERIOUS PLAY method is rigorously designed to:

- Establish 100 percent participation from the start for all, regardless of where on the above spectrum they fall.
- Establish belief in the value of the process, and commitment to using it.

The key “handles” you have for reaching this include:

- Room set up
- Selection of identical bricks for each participant
- The skills building exercises
- Framing of the intended outcome of the workshop

How we establish participation, belief and commitment to working with LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method can best be illustrated with the “**flow-diagram**” below (adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. For more information, see Science in Manual 1 and Flow Essentials in Manual 3).



In the diagram we have placed the three categories mentioned above. The A's are concerned they won't be challenged by the session, and the B's are concerned they will be overly challenged. The C's are where they like to be, that is the **FLOW-corridor**. When you are in the flow-corridor you experience a high

degree of engagement, meaningfulness and relevance. And any sense of either anxiety or boredom will disappear.

The lasting results and impact of your workshop are closely connected to how well you are able to design (for more see Manual 3) and facilitate a session, where you manage to bring all members into the C position within the first 45-60 minutes or less, and how well you manage to move all members up the corridor, step-by-step, towards a higher degree (C+) of engagement and learning. The Skills Building process is an essential and indispensable set of challenges that will help you do this. The three steps in the skills building are outlined below.

Additionally, the room set-up, a compelling opening, a clear agenda, a set of ground rules, and having the right boxes of bricks are other important elements. Use these "handles" to create a space that is sufficiently safe or recognizable for the participants to sense that this is something they know (about), is important and relevant, but also sufficiently different and difficult for them to feel challenged.

The members in the session will experience what some call a "roller coaster ride". They will feel varying comfort levels as they move through the process and the challenges. The processes are deliberately designed this way; to greatly increase the chances that real change and long-term learning will take place, as well as a deep feeling of accomplishment.

## **Establishing the right starting conditions: Skills Building**

### **What can participants expect from Skills Building?**

Skills Building helps participants gain insight into what the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method is, to be confident and committed to using it to gain insight and action steps relevant to the workshop topic. The Skills Building process is all about making the participants ready to dive in and handle whatever complex issue they address.

The participant will work with and become familiar with the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY approach to:

1. Constructing
1. Giving Meaning
2. Making stories

These are the three key steps in any Skills Building; below we will return to them and the dedicated challenges. In manual 3 you will find advanced and alternative versions of these challenges. The advanced and alternative challenges are to be used when you work with participants who have worked with the method before. When you have build an extensive experience with LEGO SERIOUS PLAY, the advanced challenges may also help you in adding Skills Building in special cases

In short workshops, the Skills Building will be adapted so that it will also begin exploring the topic of the workshop.

### **Why do we need Skills Building?**

Further to what we outline above about the opening, the participants come into the workshop with very different experiences and expectations.

Their experiences may be influenced by:

- Previous meetings in the company or with this group.
- Previous workshops, with or without facilitators/consultants.
- Previous attempts with "creative" techniques.
- Perception of the manager's agenda or intentions.
- Background with LEGO bricks and/or the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method.

Their expectations may be influenced by:

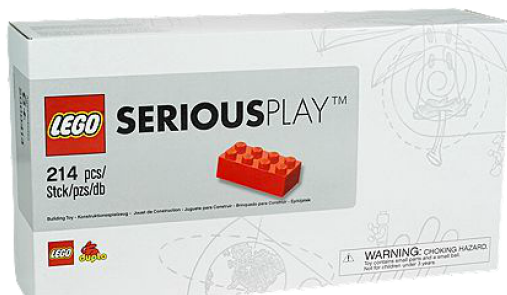
- Their concept of play.

- Importance of the topic.
- Their prior experience of being listened to, or not.
- Their seniority in the group, organization, or team.
- Their expertise and background in the topic area (for example, strategy making).
- The organizational culture

No matter which combination of the above you are faced with, the Skills Building exercises are designed to establish the right starting conditions. If you want or need them to build in a relaxed manner, comfortable with real thinking and honest dialogue about the topic of the workshop, then they need to master the methodology and trust each other and the space (the notion that you create a safe space where they can play and explore).

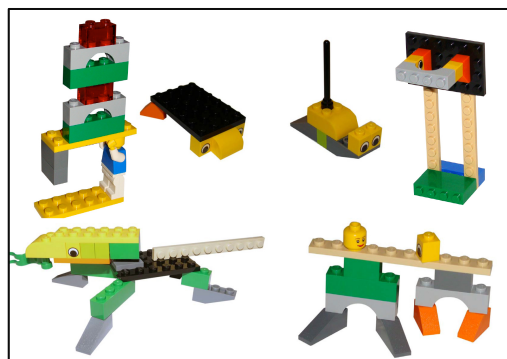
### Preparing the bricks for Skills Building

The outline below is based on using either the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY Starter Kit or the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY Window Exploration Kit. See images below.



In the Starter Kit you will find the Imaginopedia booklet (image to the left), which is used for challenge 2.0. If you are using the Window Exploration Kit you will use the building instructions shown on the image to the right.

In Manual 3, you can find more information about this and also alternative options for how to deliver the Skills Building section, IF you don't have one of the above available. The essential rule is that BEFORE starting the three Skills Building challenges each participant MUST have his or her own set of bricks in front of them on the table.



### Challenge 1.0: Building a Tower (familiar with constructing)

As soon as you have outlined agenda and ground rules move onto opening the Starter Kits, and one or more of the bags in the kit (see below for number of bags). If you use the Exploration Bag, they simply open that bag and take the bricks out. Ask the participants to start touching and fiddling with bricks. LEGO

bricks are a 'new tool' with play connotations. So people may initially be cynical, feel silly, or feel uncomfortable using bricks.

Introduce the new language of LEGO! Yes, they are all bricks, (maybe different from the ones you had as kids). Yes they are bricks, but we can infuse them with other powerful meanings too.

Point out that the set of bricks in front of each member are exactly the same, and, despite their different appearances, they are all LEGO bricks (elements).

With this move on to the construction challenge.

#### **Objective of the challenge 1.0**

The objective of this activity is to get everyone participating and everyone feeling comfortable with bricks. LEGO bricks are a 'new tool' with play connotations. So people may initially be cynical, feel silly, or feel uncomfortable about using the bricks. It can also tease out how we tend to get committed to what we build external to ourselves.

It is key to establish the understanding this method surfaces many possible and different answers, yet they are all "right" and that this is how the method works.

#### **Step 1: Posing the Question: Build a tower**

Have you ever wondered what a meeting would be like if everyone participated, clearly expressed his or her ideas and commitment on an issue, and everyone's ideas were clearly seen to the satisfaction of all? To get this level of involvement, we may need more than words, paper and Power Point presentations. We just may need to get your hands on the bricks. So let's do that, let's get your hands on the bricks

Build a tower on top of the table. Build individually. Start on the ...plate, use only.....and finish with.....

The .....indicates that you determine the constraints based on which bricks they have in front of them. For suggestions see below.

You have 4 minutes.

#### **Step 2: Construction**

Some participants will have difficulty getting the bricks to stick together – it is not a test of LEGO skills, so be ready to give them a hand if they get frustrated. Some may also try hard to make it higher than their neighbor's. But try not to allow competitiveness to dominate; it should be easy and relaxing.

#### **Step 3: Sharing**

The sharing here consists of saying a few words about your tower. Did you have a plan, anything in particular you are happy with, etc.?

#### **Step 4: Reflection**

Simply of looking at the different towers, noticing them and their difference and reflecting upon how the bricks and the process got everyone involved 100%

Note how they have all build very different towers, even though they had the exact same challenge and the exact same bricks (and in the advanced version the exact same change, see manual 3)

This is how LEGO SERIOUS PLAY, I will ask you a question, you will all build your answer of it, and even if the models (answers) will always look different, they will always all be right.

#### **Additional Facilitator Notes**

Remember to announce how much time they have for the building. Too long such as 10 minutes or more is not a good idea. Keep it within the 3 to 6 minute range in the beginning. At this stage, make the story-telling very short and open-ended, simply "can you share something about your tower". Simple rules such as a building plate at the bottom can help participants ease into the flow. Additional rules could be as high as possible or a mini-figure on top.

One or more bags: This exercise works with as little as one of the “large” bags in the Starter Kit or the full Exploration Bag. The recommendation is to use 1-3 bags, more material than that will add to the perceived difficulty of the challenge, and therefore, only the most confident or experienced LEGO builders will come into flow.

## **Challenge 2.0: Giving Meaning (familiar with metaphors)**

This challenge is based over two different questions, which are summarized in the detailed flow description below.

### **Objective of the challenge 2.0 and 2.1**

The initial purpose is to get people comfortable with building with the LEGO bricks by raising the perceived difficulty; this is the focus of step 1.

The second purpose of this challenge is to get people more comfortable with their ability to use metaphors; this is the focus of step 2.

Additional learning points related to step 2:

- Metaphors can be simple or complex.
- Metaphors help others understand me.
- Metaphors help us remember

Often adults tend to believe that building a good LEGO model without having instructions to follow is almost impossible. In a LEGO SERIOUS PLAY setting, they are often concerned or fearful that they are not creative enough, or that they just won't know how to build with LEGO bricks at all. This exercise helps them overcome this concern.

Participants will be blown away by this new power to convey meaning with punch. However, don't push the “metaphor” word when you initially pose the question, and only do it in the second round if you sense that participants are comfortable with the concept (what metaphor means). Examples of metaphors will emerge naturally near the end of a sharing round when they are already experts. Humor and emotion and the often heard revelation – “Hey – I had absolutely no idea I knew so much about this issue until just now!” are all worth visiting at the end.

### **Step 1: Posing the Question: Build a model following the instructions (2.0)**

The first exercise went well, so let's make it a bit more difficult. Please build one of the models shown in the pictures (Fig 1 is an example from the Imaginopedia in the Starter Kit, Fig 2 is from Manual 4 and is to be used with the Exploration Bag). And

please build the model following the instructions. It is the only time we are going to ask you to follow instructions, so please humor us by doing it.

The models are not exactly easy; so if you need “tech-support” then please let me know.

You have as much time as it takes.

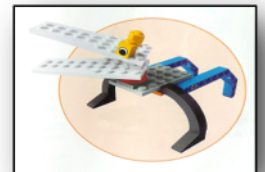


Fig 1

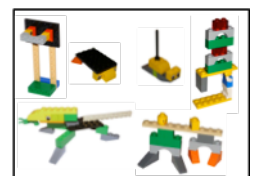


Fig 2

### **Step 2: Construction**

Be ready to offer tech-support, but allow the participants to immerse themselves deeply in the process of searching for bricks, understanding the building instructions, and doing the actual building.

When everyone is done, move on to:

### **Posing the Question (2.1): Now adapt your model...**

Well done, but this was only the first step in the challenge. Now you will get the opportunity to explore a bit more how it can be (a metaphor for) “XYZ” (**See notes for input on choice of metaphor**). Start with what you have, adapt it, customize it, modify so it captures something about “XYZ”.



Suggestions for metaphors XYZ: The metaphor should typically be for an aspect of something the participants know well. This way the exercise does not feel too difficult and the insights about the power of metaphors and "trust your hands" become clear. The safe choice is "an aspect of your work" or "what energizes you at work".

There is no right or wrong here – and everyone intuitively 'knows' that your metaphor is NOT the absolute reality. So go for it!

If you are working with a group which is very risk averse, wanting to plan everything before they do anything, etc., it can be powerful to point to these additional learning points in the metaphor challenge:

- Trust your hands - they know more about what you know than your conscious mind.
- Start building even though you have no idea what to build.
- Don't start "having a meeting with yourself." Too much thinking gets in the way.

If in doubt, just start building; give your brain a hand

You have a couple of minutes.

### Step 3: Sharing

Invite the participants to share their models using metaphors.

### Step 4: Reflection

This exercise creates an opening for you to start asking questions into the models, thus introducing that behavior. Depending on the actual situation you might draw attention to some of the aspects mentioned below in the additional facilitator notes. However – don't overdo it!

#### Additional facilitator notes to the Metaphor Challenge

This challenge was about introducing metaphors and makes the point that the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method is not about following a set of building instructions. That would be too boring, too difficult, and would NOT unlock the imagination of all the people present. We are not building anything that looks like anything

Mention that metaphors are an extremely efficient way of sharing information.

Metaphors and models allow dangerous topics to be explored safely.

When we talk in metaphors, we can also use humor and emotion. This makes our story highly memorable. Humor also makes it safe for wilder ideas to be expressed.

Our models can distill meaning quickly. We "naturally" talk about our models using metaphors because metaphors access past experiences, and can convey a huge amount of meaning in just a few words.

Everyone was asked to build the same thing so there was no need to be concerned about whether or not you can make a model that is "impressive."

If you were to go and purchase a new LEGO set from the store, the instructions would give you confidence that you could follow them and build the model shown on the box. Without instructions, people sometimes lose this comfort level.

Our experience suggests that most people feel it is actually more difficult to follow a set of instructions! Instructions are two-dimensional and the real world is three-dimensional. Our brain evolved to handle data and information in 3D.

Make the point that a LEGO SERIOUS PLAY process is not about following instructions. It is about unlocking the potential in the group. If everyone built the same model, this potential could not be realized!

By becoming comfortable about building objects using LEGO bricks, participants have also been given a new skill and language, which enable them to convey complex ideas to others.

When we have a model in our hands, we can communicate so much more confidently, because we are talking about THE MODEL! People can also see what we are talking about. Everyone can do it, so everyone participates equally.

Instruct participants before they start building that it might be a bit challenging for them – but this is planned, and we will explain why later.

The models are technically a bit difficult, so you may need to offer help up front. However the payoff is surprisingly rich. The models are “dynamic”; it is not easy to imagine what they can do by looking at the picture. However, once they are built, participants will almost intuitively recognize some of the features as a person or issue they know. This is the when you take the challenge to the next step.

Being able to access all the knowledge and wisdom of all the employees – not just the bit they bring to the job within the constraints of their official roles – would be a major competitive advantage for any business!

Using metaphors accesses the knowledge and wisdom of both speaker and listeners in the same way. They grab emotions, associate with past knowledge, and compress information into a minimum number of meaningful and dramatic words in a way that numbers and reports, alone, cannot do.

When you choose which metaphor you want your participants to build, make certain that you choose something from a domain they know something about. This is about using metaphors to make sense of what they know. If they don't know anything about a domain, then asking them to build a 3D metaphorical model about something new will be stressful and disrupt the flow.

### **Challenge 3.0: Making a story (familiar with story-making)**

#### **Objective of the challenge 3.0**

We are all natural story-makers, and story-making is the most efficient way to convey complex information.

Story-making carries the listeners on a journey that actively probes and clarifies something that is fuzzy or unknown. It could be an issue; an opportunity or it could be the future. Only as we actually make the story can we understand – in real time. Through story-making with a model, we have our best chance to check out the future before we meet it.

#### **Additional learning points**

- We use stories to invent, explore, test and decide.
- Stories can be used to explore the future, make sense of the current and share the past(s)
- Stories must be shared to make a difference, and sharing leads to co- or social construction.
- Stories are emotional which makes it easier for us to remember them.

Before you can pose the question for 3.0 you need to determine what the question should be. The question is STILL part of the Skills Building process, so the process of building and making the story is MORE important than the answer to the question. The question must NOT be part of answering the big questions, which is the objective of the workshop. It must not force people to come up an answer that they later can be hold accountable for. It must not force anyone to feel limited by the realities.

When you have a long workshop the recommended choice is to ask the participants to build the ideal or nightmare of something. This helps create a safe space and the participants focus on being able to create stories. In shorter workshops, story-making is more customized and typically become the bridge into the rest of the workshop.

When you ask for the ideal/nightmare then encourage the participants to go beyond the reality and set their imagination free and take it to the extreme. So it is not realistic “XYZ”, it is not someone who ever existed. Here is a list of sample questions that should give you a sense of the nature of ideal/nightmare questions

- Build the nightmare team member



- Build a disaster project
- Build the ideal leader
- Build the nightmare CEO
- Build a nightmare client
- Build your ideal professional organization
- Build the ideal cooperative environment

As mentioned, going with the ideal or nightmare is in most cases the best and most safe. However depending on the context, group and objective, other questions can also be used. This is typically when the workshop is shorter and you want the participants to start sharing insights already as this step. Here is a list of sample questions that gives you a sense of the nature of customized questions

- Build our ideal customer
- Build the leader you don't want to be
- Build your dream for the future
- Build obstacles to change

### Step 1: Posing the Question: Build the.....

It is time to really dive into the third step of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY, into story-making. We can use stories to explore the future, make sense of the current or share the past. We use it really to unlock our imagination and share what we know

To really get the stories going, and unlock your imagination, please build the nightmare/ideal/.....

Go ahead and explore the traits, values, competencies and characteristics of ... (the chosen extreme example.)

You have 5-7 minutes.

### Step 2: Construction

Allow the participants to really dive in. If there is time for it, and they are really in flow, then it is okay to give them a bit more time here.

### Step 3: Sharing

Invite the participants to share their stories.

Set the tone with a couple of good questions.

Encourage questions from the other participants. Real powerful story-making happens during questioning because the builder finds even more meaning in the model.

If you have chosen ideal/nightmare, then maintain that this is about extremes, not something real. Keep the playful atmosphere.

### Step 4: Reflection

People at last FULLY UNDERSTAND what they have had stuck in their heads when they have a model to talk with. The story develops as it is being told.

Stories and models allow dangerous topics to be explored safely, which builds CONFIDENCE. The model is literally "a mediator at arm's length", much less dangerous than face-to-face confrontation.

Notice how literally seeing the story also helps people understand.

### Additional facilitator notes

When posing the question, you can also emphasize the power of story making, how it has been used historically to challenge or to form identities; or how story-making is our brain's most natural way of understanding complex matters. Our brain looks for narratives all the time. It loves emotions.

Note how we deliberately talk about story-making, rather than telling. It is about exploring possible states, or making sense of what was. It is not about telling someone else's interpretation.

Notice how the energy in the room often changes here. It becomes more intense, almost more "serious."

This is the final challenge in Skills Building, so the participants should be getting comfortable with using LEGO bricks to make stories, and with sharing them, so all of the elements in the core process should really come together here.

If you sense that some of the participants are still a bit uncertain, assure them by saying, "You just can't be wrong – so you can work with complete confidence." Since the Stone Age, the story-maker has had license to exaggerate, and even be outrageous – that's what catches our attention.

Focus on Skills Building, not reaching a conclusion on what the ideal/nightmare/.... as mentioned this is the last skills building challenge, so it is key that you really leave the group feeling very comfortable and confident with the method

(Some of the learning points from the metaphor challenge can also be used or repeated here.)

### The Imaginopedia for the Core Process

The *Imaginopedia for Core Process* is designed to support the participants in this process. It gives support to the basic concepts and steps in the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method. However, in addition to the three Skills Building exercises, the imaginopedia also outlines some of the challenges that should be considered as advanced, alternative or additional. These and their use are described in Manual 3

Please use the imaginopedia to support rather than structure your Skills Building. Use this manual for the structure.