

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

PLAY HARDER TO WORK BETTER: WAYS TO MOBILIZE COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE TO INNOVATE AND COMMIT PEOPLE

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Playful work? It might seem like an oxymoron at first sight... but structuring your shared work sessions as games can boost participant motivation and quickly lead to some very effective results. This type of highly-participatory working addresses, above all, what is now a major challenge for companies: reinforcing innovation and employee commitment as they pursue their strategies in complex, uncertain, and shifting environments. The choice of games is broad, and it encompasses both simple games to stimulate creativity or order speaking, and tools that can often be highly sophisticated—all grouped under the term “serious games”—a title that originally described non-entertainment video games used for serious purposes. So, what are the options today? What can these games offer to a company? And how should you best use them?



THE POWER OF GAMES... AT WORK

Companies know how difficult it is to collectively—and effectively—engage their employees in strategic change and/or performance improvement. And they are becoming increasingly aware of the important role played by participatory working methods.

Games, with their innovative character and operational efficiency, are an excellent way to set collective intelligence to work:

- / Games place the participant in a different context to that of their workaday activities, or the normal course of meetings. As a result, people are more relaxed, receptive, motivated, and active.
- / The game, just like real life, is based on a stimulating balance between “production,” “emotion,” “content,” and “relationship”.

Professional games differ in purpose to games played purely for relaxation. Such games are designed to meet a specific objective:

- / **Appropriate a message** (communication),
- / **Analyze a situation** (diagnosis),
- / **Find ideas and solutions** (brainstorming and ideation),
- / **Build a strategy for action** (co-construction).

The choice (form and rules) and content of the game depend on its objective and the context it's being applied in (i.e. the number of participants, time available, etc.). For example, take the basic objective of appropriating a message: the use of play responds to a need for meaning and belonging, and, if its effects are to be maximized, must involve the participant in an “integrative” activity.

AN ANSWER TO TODAY'S CHALLENGES

By better involving the participants, games help avoid the information losses that are all too prevalent in conventional media like speech or text: we know that we retain just 10% of information when we simply hear it, but that rises to 80% when we hear, see, and do it—and find it motivating. By acting—at

the same time—on content, production, emotion, and representations, games allow collective work to draw on resources that are far richer and much more related to the entirety of factors involved in motivation and commitment.

Moreover, in a complex, uncertain, and shifting environment, mobilizing, collective intelligence at the operational level is now

THE “STORY OF THE FUTURE”

In basic terms, this exercise allows a team to project itself positively into the future and identify the key success factors when managing change. By its form, it invites you to take a step back from a project—to look at, and discuss, things differently.

- 1 The participants work together in pairs, taking turns to play the role of the “pioneer” (who has already experienced all the change) and the “newcomer” (who is finding out what is planned). A lot of care is needed in this step to create an open and free atmosphere.
- 2 There should be a debrief on what surprised the participants, both in terms of the change targeted and its management.

“DRAW ME A PICTURE”

In most cases, work at meetings is based on two media: speech (the exchange of points of view and debate) and writing (drafting, modifying, and finalizing texts); images are only used in PowerPoint presentations.

However, we believe that sharing and discussing each person's “representations” (for example, of an organizational structure, a mode of operation, opportunities, risks, etc.) are essential to put flesh on the bones of speech and written words. You can use Lego, photos, images or drawings.

- 1 The facilitator invites each participant (or subgroup) to draw a picture on the theme of work.
- 2 Once produced, the drawings are displayed, and a discussion takes place to share the ideas generated by them. We start with the interpretations of the “spectators,” not commentary from the “artists.”

a major issue. People have to know each other, understand each other, co-build, make adjustments, and act, if they are to be more effective, innovate, and make gains in competitiveness. Games are used in all phases of projects and types of team setting—whether that involves assessment, design, planning, implementation, or appraisal.

HOW TO MOTIVATE MANAGEMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A STRATEGIC PROJECT

When 50 senior managers from an insurer meet at a seminar to launch their new strategic plan, they are looking to play their part in a co-construction dynamic. A work session then unfolds using the “envelope game,” which is based on the “frame games” designed by Thiagi (see www.thiagi.com).

The objective is to define the contributions that the various functions (Marketing, Sales, HR, Finance, etc.) need to make to the success of the strategic plan. For this, ten groups of five people are formed, mixing people from the different functions. Each group thinks about the expected contributions from a particular business function and

slips their ideas into an envelope with the function’s name on it.

Then, the envelope passes three times from one group to another, with each group introducing new expectations into the envelope. The participants, then regroup into their functions, look at the expected contributions – by opening their function’s envelope – and work together to set out the commitments the function will make in order to meet the expectations, before displaying them on boards.

This game maximizes the extent of everyone’s participation in a large group, and leads to a good understanding of the requirements of the strategic project—both those of each individual and the rest of the group. The props, rules of the game, and movement generated in the group setting make managers much more attentive and creative than they would be in a traditional “brainstorming” session.

SOME KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The keys to success lie as much in the “technical” characteristics of the game itself—and therefore the choice of the most relevant game in relation to the goal—as the way the

game is played. Let’s work the detail of three key points when designing and holding these games:

/ 1 Precisely define the objectives and how the game will run.

The structure of the game must match the nature of the desired results (a shared analysis, a search for solutions, an action plan, conflict management, training, etc.): making the right choice of game—and tailoring it to the need—are therefore essential. In addition, the game must be prepared very carefully. Aspects like the size of the room and how it’s equipped, the resources for running the game, and the timing of the sessions, are essential points to consider if progress is to be smooth and efficient. We then move from a preparation stage essentially devoted to producing content, according to conventional group working methods, to one essentially dedicated to the creation of favorable conditions for a flourishing and convergence of collective intelligence.

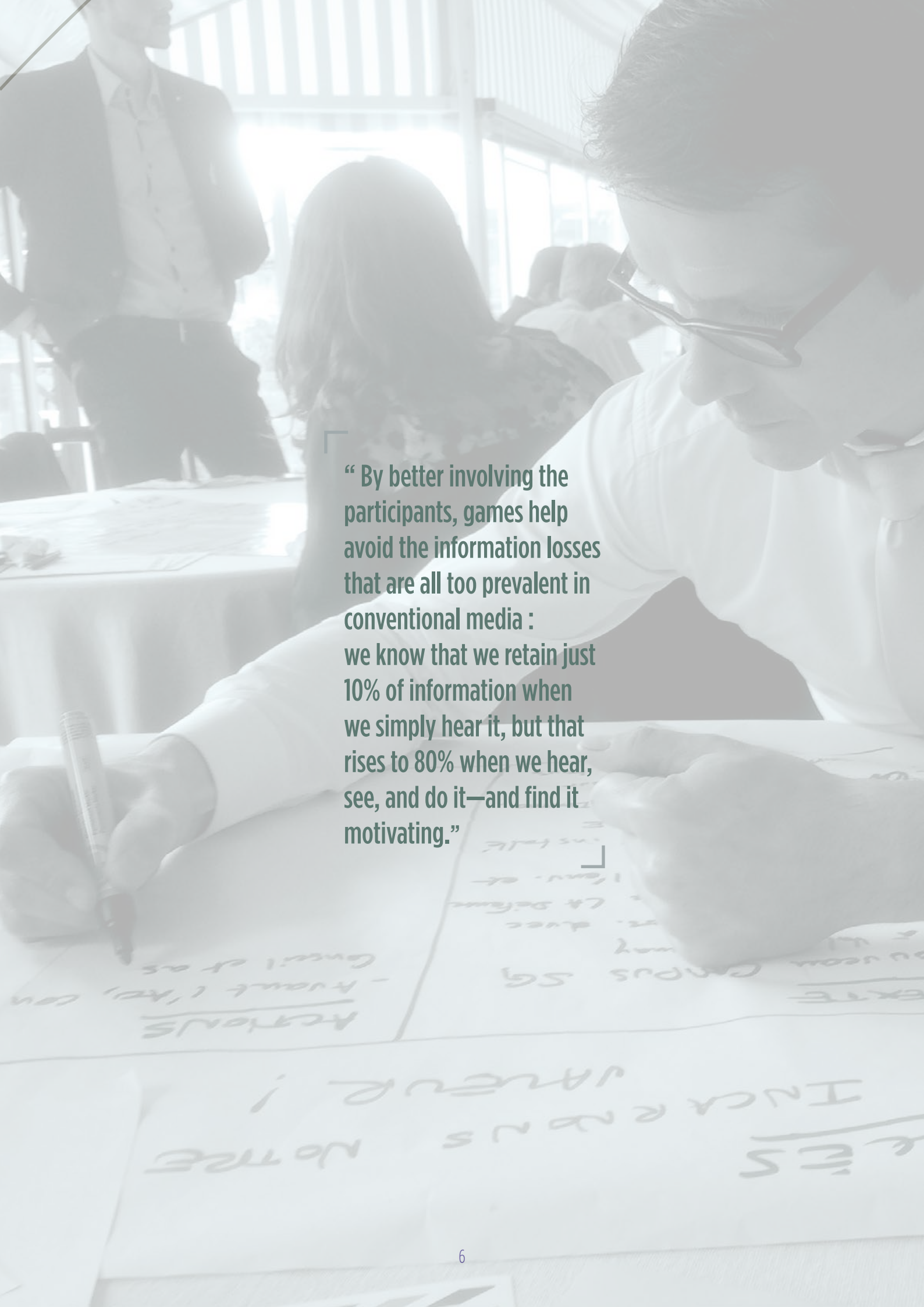


“POPCORN” FEEDBACK

We’ve all experienced feedback from workgroups and round-tables that is both tedious and frustrating; all the more so when, after the third person has “said their bit,” just about everything seems to have been said. Those who come after work hard to make some kind of contribution, by trying to say something different, or sitting back, before admitting: “I’ve have nothing to add to what’s already been said.”

“Popcorn” feedback is similar to what a handful of popcorn kernels does in a hot pan: the grains burst, one by one, from all sides, slowly at first, then more rapidly, to the very last grains, which take their time.

- 1 The facilitator asks for one, and only one, idea from a participant (or sub-group).
- 2 Then they get other participants (or subgroup member) to add to and clarify the idea.
- 3 A second person then goes—and so on—until all the ideas have been shared and summarized together, legibly, where everyone can see them.



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/ 2 The game should not be used to “dress up” an undesirable activity.

Motivating participants around fun working methods requires a lot of time and commitment. If the game is merely a pretext, the credibility of management could be called into question even more than it might be normally. This point becomes a particularly sensitive one when the objective is to share key messages: if the communication strategy is very top-down, it’s best to use learning exercises, rather than pretending to use games involving co-construction.

/ 3 A results-sharing phase is absolutely necessary.

This is about reserving enough time to use the ideas and information from the game. We have referred above to the balance between “production” and “emotion.” This balance varies from game to game. When the focus is on “production”, this step of the

game consists of generating a product that is viewable, readable, and shared by everyone. Different methods of taking notes allow this result to be achieved.

When the focus is on “emotion,” this step consists of a very open debrief to “share emotions” and link them to the work theme; when doing this, it’s better not to make a visible note of what participants say in order to encourage free expression.

CONCLUSION

Faced with complex, uncertain, and constantly evolving ecosystems, most companies are seeking to strengthen their capacity for understanding and action, working as closely as possible with customers and partners. We believe that the key to achieving this lies in committed employees who take responsibility, and in developing their capacity to cooperate with others. Today, mobilizing this collective intelligence is a

major driver of innovation, development, and performance.

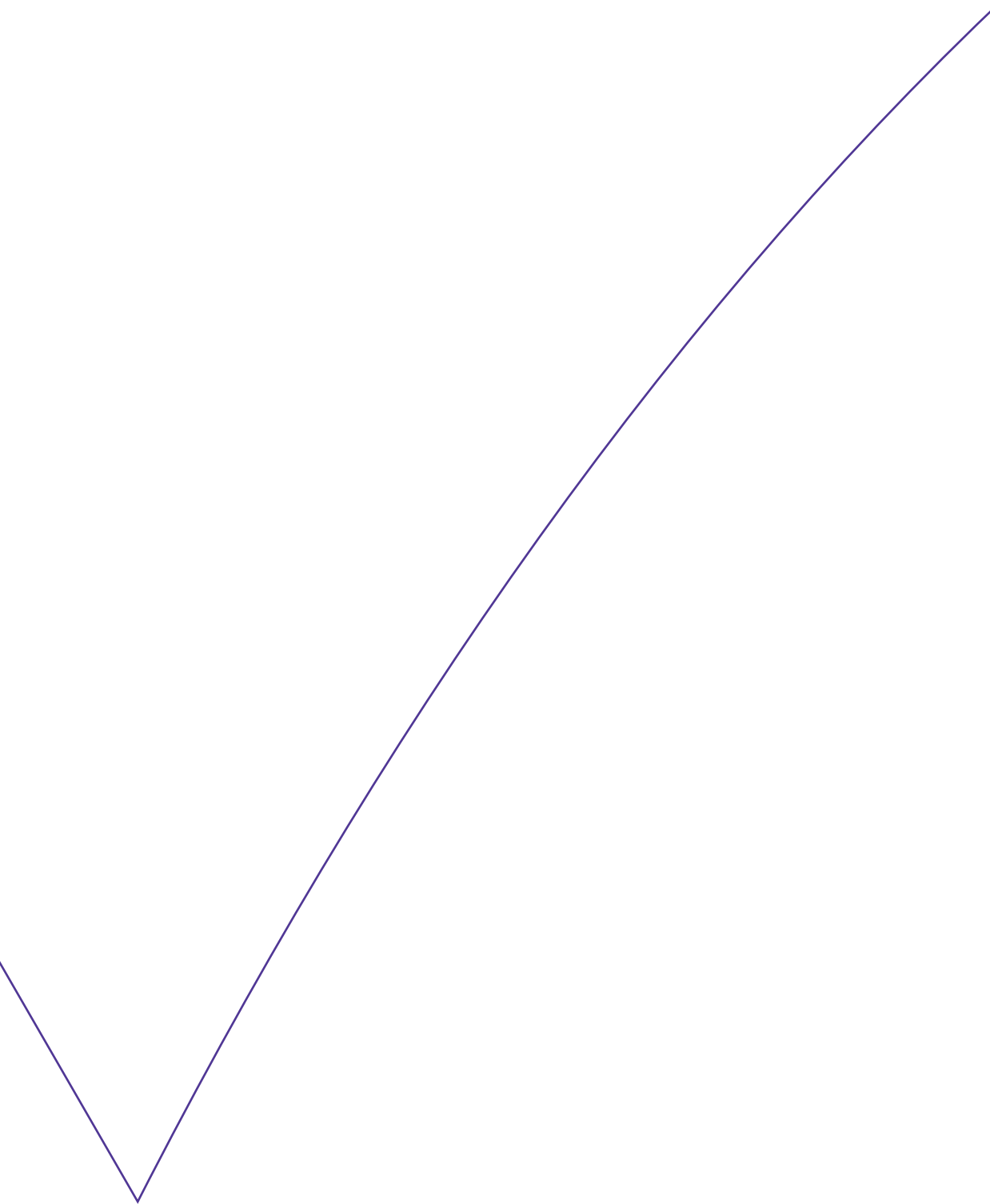
Methods of working, based on collective intelligence, enable such commitment to be fostered through role play and the development of trust in others.

And now... it’s your turn to play!

Summary of the contexts for games presented in this document

	THE ENVELOPE GAME	THE STORY OF THE FUTURE	POPCORN	DRAW ME A PICTURE
PROJECT PHASE	ANALYSIS	✓	✓	✓
	DESIGN	✓	✓	✓
	IMPLEMENTATION	✓		✓
	APPROPRIATION		✓	✓
DOMINANT STYLE	“PRODUCTION”	✓	✓	
	“EMOTION”	✓		✓

Beyond these four examples, we have detailed over a hundred methods that can be used in a broad range of situations.



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