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Play Boards: An Organizational Tool for Creative Collaboration

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Play Boards: An Organizational Tool for Creative Collaboration

By

Cherylin M. Pauly

An Abstract of a Project in

Creativity and Change Leadership

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
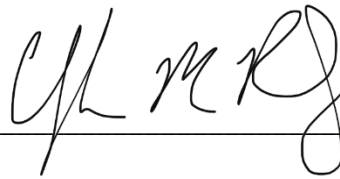of the Requirements
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February 2020

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

Play Boards: An Organizational Tool for Creative Collaboration

Play boards are collaborative play spaces within organizations that invite people to come together to share ideas, insights, inspiration, and information. After leadership at a large organization asked for this concept to be implemented, several focus groups were conducted to explore potential user acceptance and gain concept feedback. Mural was found to be a promising digital platform for Play Boards. This paper further examines creative organizations through the lens of creative climate. Studies in psychological safety and creative collaboration are explored. The Agile mindset is also considered as an exercise in contextual thinking.

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Signature

_____4/29/20_____

Date

Buffalo State

State University of New York

Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

Play Boards: An Organizational Tool for Creative Collaboration

Sections One to Three of a Master's Project in
Creative Studies

By

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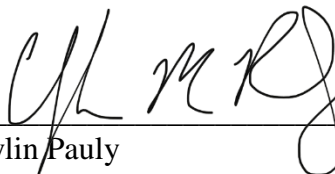Dates of Approval:

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                                  Cherylin Pauly

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Section One: Background to the Project

Over the course of my time in the Creativity and Change Leadership Master's program, I've gained an interest in organizational creativity. In part, this is because my employer is providing tuition reimbursement—I am determined to see the fruit of my studies benefit the company for which I work. My primary goal is to benefit the creative process of our product development department. This is the department in which I am directly involved. By request of the president of my company, I am in the process of developing and implementing a tool for inspiring talent and collaborative creativity.

History

Last semester, I completed an independent study that assessed the current creative climate in my organization. This was done by reviewing employee engagement results and conducting employee interviews. During the course of my independent study, there was an idea fair held in our organization. I presented an idea for how to integrate Creative Problem-Solving methods into our day-to-day work life. This consisted of two key tools: One for divergent thinking, and one for convergent thinking.

The divergent thinking tool I called "Play Boards," which are mobile dry-erase boards with the purpose of facilitating the cross-pollination of ideas, allowing people to crowd-source ideas for their problems. See Figure 1 for the image I presented in the idea faire.

HOW WE MIGHT PLAY WITH IDEAS MORE:
PLAY BOARDS

Put them around campus - team spaces, break rooms, hallways. ANYONE can contribute!

Pose challenge questions, SILLY or serious.

Capture INSPIRED ideas from presentations

When not in use, FREE PLAY!
Doodle, tell a joke, and have f-u-n!

Figure 1. Play Boards graphic pitch

Play Boards would be woven into the culture by being placed in high traffic areas around the campus. They would allow anyone to pose a challenge question to which anyone else could respond: all ideas would be welcome. Questions might be silly, relational, or creative. The boards might even come with tips on how to phrase problems as creative questions. The concept was designed to embody the four rules of divergent thinking--Defer judgement, go for quantity, seek wild and unusual ideas, and build on ideas/make connections. This tool would also allow for incubation, as questions would be left up for a week at a time.

The convergent tool pitched was a training class for the PPCo tool (Pluses, Potentials, Concerns, and Overcoming concerns). This could help us better select the ideas we move forward with in the product development process.

When I had the chance to pitch my idea to the president of the company at the idea faire, he responded quite positively, specifically to my proposal for Play Boards. He asked me to develop a plan, and to let Human Resources (HR) know what I need. I was honored to have such enthusiastic support from leadership, which is one of the biggest challenges in the Exploring Acceptance stage of the creative problem-solving process (CPS). Coming out of the idea faire, I was also connected with a designer who was just finishing up his master's degree in Human-Centered Design. Many of the concepts we've studied overlap, and he has been a great resource for discussing project design and implementation methods.

In the weeks following, I developed an outline defining the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the concept. After presenting to HR and Talent development and refining it, they put me in touch with one of our leadership teams tasked with inspiring talent. This leadership team I would consider to be key stakeholders needed to champion this concept. I intended to present the refined concept to all four members of the team, HR, and talent development, but only two team members attended. The feedback I received stressed the importance of considering the busy workloads of our employees and suggested I start by piloting the concept with one board. They also discussed an appetite for updating and reintegrating the creativity toolkit we already have.

Coming out of that meeting, I assessed the situation and sensed that I needed to shift back and forth between the Formulating Solutions stage and the Exploring Acceptance stage of the CPS model. Therefore, I considered the following data:

1. The leadership team I've been working with is responsible for "Inspiring talent."

2. There is a general perception that we are already very good at coming up with ideas.

3. Collaboration is a key focus of both the Play Boards concept and leadership.

4. In the current linear development model, we are often up against tight deadlines that put pressure on teams. Solutions are needed quickly.

5. The business has been considering production process reform to a more Agile-inspired structure — a more iterative and user-centric process.

Project Rationale

Because of these insights, I've shifted the business focus of the Play Boards from the Transformation stage to the Clarification stage. Instead of asking my coworkers to share their problems and solutions, I am asking them to share their experiences and insights as consumers. Amazon, one of the most highly innovative companies of today, has a primary company principle of "customer obsession" (Rossman & Euchner, 2018). Obsessing over their customers—thinking like them and about their every need—is infused into their culture. The purpose of the concept is to encourage my peers to think more like our end-users, with an added benefit of gaining insights into the social fabric of the company. This still allows for cross-pollination, but of insights rather than ideas. While it is still possible to use the boards to answer creative questions, this can be secondary, and introduced after the boards have been better integrated into the culture.

How Play Boards Work

I am proposing one Play Board be located in our design building by the break room, as it a high traffic area. I would be the point person for posting questions and documenting results. One question would be written on the board at the beginning of each week, and then photo-documented on the following Thursday. Fridays would be "Free Play Friday," when anyone can write or draw on the board.

For instance, say we have an insight that tells us that sustainability is top of mind for our target audience. On a Monday, I might post the Play Board question, "What is something you've reduced, reused, or repurposed?" Responses would be collected until the end of the day on Thursday, at which time I would document the results and erased the board. I'd upload the documentation to a public location so results can be easily accessed. The intent is to keep the process as simple as possible for the user while still engaging in a meaningful way.

<div align="center">**Personal Goals**</div>

Through this project and informed by the Organizational Creativity course I'm taking this semester, I hope to learn practical and effective ways to explore acceptance. Thinking of the end-user first is a top priority for the company, and it is a top priority for me as I develop and refine my project. To do this effectively, I have the following goals:

1. **Practice using a variety of CPS tools for Exploring Acceptance, like Stakeholder Analysis and Assisters and Resistors.**

These tools were designed especially for the point in my creative process I am now in. I have not had extensive experience with these tools, but my goal is to become proficient in them.

2. **Gain a better understanding of Agile principles, values, and related methods.**

Using Contextual Thinking skills, I want to understand what change my users might be going through when this idea is implemented. If this process change is imminent, how might I shape my project to complement the core values of Agile?

3. **Maximize cross-pollination and collaborative creativity**

I want to better understand the concept of cross-pollination, and how it has been achieved in the past. There have been several anecdotal complaints that employees often feel "silo'ed" on their teams. Is there a way these boards might help the communication flow between departments?

How might the boards get credit? What is the difference, if any, between cross-pollination and collaborative creativity?

4. Ensure the "press" of the Play Board experience feels safe and inviting

I want to explore the idea of psychological safety and potentially reference other initiatives that have demonstrated success. How might I make the board inviting and fun?

5. Inspire Talent

This is the primary reason I was asked to implement this idea. Though broad and difficult to measure, I must ensure that this project is perceived as an inspiring opportunity. How do I make my pitch more effective and inspiring? It might be helpful to gather more data: What has inspired them in the past?

Section Two: Pertinent Literature

To meet the afore-mentioned goals, the key areas of focus for this project are: organizational creativity, exploring acceptance, collaborative creativity, psychological safety, and Agile principles and values. The following resources will help as I shape the concept and pitch for Play Boards.

Organizational Creativity

Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin define organizational creativity as "the creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system" (1993, p. 293). In the broadest perspective, I am looking to disrupt the current organizational creativity methods by introducing a community collaboration board. Studying the wider concept can help confirm I am hitting the proper objectives. Relevant literature follows.

Lang, J., & Lee, C. (2010). Workplace humor and organizational creativity. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *21*(1), 46–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190903466855

Understanding humor in the workplace will likely provide useful insights into organizational creativity. I theorize that humor contributes to building trust in the social work setting, a key component of psychological safety.

Mumford, M. (2012). *Handbook of organizational creativity* (1st ed.). Amsterdam: Academic Press.

Mumford's book looks at creativity and innovation at multiple levels in organizations with input from experts in the field of organizational creativity. I hope to gain some insights into creativity at the group level.

Speranzini, G. (1998). Competencies and guidelines for situational outlook questionnaire

practitioners. *CPSB's Communiqué*, *6*, 13-16.

The Situational Outlook Questionnaire (SOQ) assesses the climate for creativity in an

organization. It explores nine dimensions. Understanding the competencies and

guidelines for practitioners may give insights into effective implementation methods of

the SOQ.

Exploring Acceptance

Exploring Acceptance falls under the Implementation phase of the Thinking Skills Model

(Puccio et al., 2011). Looking at different tools and methods for exploring acceptance will be

helpful as I have a diverse group of potential users. In my studies, I hope to find more literature

on designing effective focus groups.

Puccio, G., Mance, M., & Murdock, M. (2011). *Creative leadership: Skills that drive change*

(2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.

Puccio's chapter on exploring acceptance will be beneficial in providing a clear outline of

the Exploring Acceptance stage in the CPS process, especially how it relates to

leadership. It highlights specific divergent and convergent tools I can use in the process

of implementing Play Boards.

Puccio, G. J., Burnett, C., Cabra, J. F., Fox, J. M., Keller-Mathers, S., Murdock, M. C., &

Yudess, J. A. (Eds.). (2008). Proceedings from *Creativity and Innovation Management:*

An International Conference, The 2nd Community Meeting. Buffalo, NY.

These proceedings in part offer a practical understanding of the Exploring Acceptance

stage of the Thinking Skills Model.

Collaborative Creativity

Collaborative creativity looks at how social dynamics affect creativity. How might a collaborative creativity tool affect the cross-pollination of ideas?

Adler, P. S. & Chen, C. X. (2011). Combining creativity and control: Understanding individual motivation in large-scale collaborative creativity. *Accounting, Organizations, and Society 36,* 63-85. doi:10.1016/j.aos.2011.02.00

This article addresses large-scale organizations while still considering the individual. I expect to find valuable insights that are relevant to my project.

Hoever, I., van Knippenberg, D., van Ginkel, W., & Barkema, H. (2012). Fostering team creativity: Perspective taking as key to unlocking diversity's potential. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, *97*(5), 982–996. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029159

Creativity benefits from empathetic and diverse relationships in organizations. This article explores the empirical findings on perspective-taking in diverse teams, and how it affects creativity. These findings might be helpful data to use in the Play Boards pitch.

Ricchiuto, J. (1996). *Collaborative creativity: Unleashing the power of shared thinking.* Akron, Ohio: Oakhill Press.

This book provides insights into collaborative creativity across several domains: business, the arts, and the sciences. The essays included might provide some inspiration for methods of shared thinking.

Psychological Safety

When introducing a creativity tool that displays ideas in a public setting, how might I ensure that potential users feel comfortable generating and sharing ideas?

Hu, J., Erdogan, B., Jiang, K., Bauer, T., Liu, S., & Hu, J. (2018). Leader humility and team creativity: The role of team information sharing, psychological safety, and power

distance. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, *103*(3), 313–323.

https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000277

This article tests hypotheses on leader humility (admits limitations and mistakes, appreciates followers) as a key leadership characteristic that benefits creativity in teams. This is moderated by psychological safety, which might provide some insights into how psychological safety is achieved.

Kasper-Fuehrer, E., & Ashkanasy, N. (2001). Communicating trustworthiness and building trust in interorganizational virtual organizations. *Journal of Management*, *27*(3), 235–254.

https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-2063(01)00090-3

Trust is a key component of psychological safety. I expect learnings from this article will be applicable to physical organizations.

Agile

If Agile is going to be part of the context in which I am introducing change, it will be helpful for me to understand its fundamental purpose and principles. This might give me a better understand of what leadership is aiming to accomplish.

Schuh, G., Dölle, C., Kantelberg, J., & Menges, A. (2018). Identification of Agile mechanisms of action as basis for Agile product development. *Procedia CIRP*, *70*, 19–24.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procir.2018.02.007

Stare, A. (2014). Agile project management in product development projects. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *119*, 295–304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.034

Varma, T. (2015). *Agile product development: How to design innovative products that create customer value*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-1067-3

Section Three: Process Plan

As I embark on this journey to implement Play Boards, I know that I will need to be in close contact with potential users. I plan to put together a pitch for my current iteration of Play Boards, then re-present it to the leadership team tasked with inspiring talent, HR, and Talent Development. I then plan to present the refined concept to three small focus groups before scheduling the presentation of the final concept to the president of the company. In my presentations and focus groups, I plan to use the PPCo tool to document feedback and refine the concept. My ultimate goal is to successfully pitch and implement Play Boards as a creative collaboration tool that invites users to share insights, experiences, and ideas in response to consumer-inspired prompts.

Estimated Time in Hours: 20 hours a week

Project Timeline:

- **January 31st:** Submit Concept Paper
- **February 1st – 14th:** Research methods for organizational creativity, exploring acceptance, collaborative creativity, psychological safety, and Agile methodology.
- **February 15th – 23rd:** Refine Play Board pitch and focus group design
- **February 24th:** Submit Sections 1 to 3 of Master's Project
- **Week of February 24th:** Get leadership team input, refine
- **Week of March 2nd - Week of March 16th:** Present to focus groups, refine
- **March 23rd – 31st:** Design rollout plan
- **March 30th:** Submit sections 4-6 of Master's Project

- **April:** Pitch full final concept to HR, and hopefully to president—schedule permitting.

- **April 13th:** Final Project Write Up

- **April 27th:** Project Approval – Digital Commons Upload

- **May 2nd:** Present Project to Master's Project Class

Evaluation Plan

I plan to evaluate using focus groups and the PPCo tool as I refine the concept. When all concerns have been addressed, I will know I have my final concept. The ultimate evaluation for this project will be if I am officially approved to implement the concept by the end of the semester. While I would love to get the board up before the end of the semester, I cannot reliably schedule a date for that to happen. After the boards have been up for a considerable amount of time, I might pose the question, "How are you liking this board?" and provide a smiley rating scale. Depending on the reaction, I might ask a follow-up, "How else might we use this board?" The great benefit of this board is that it can be adapted to multiple functions, as needed.

Section Four: Outcomes

As I begin writing this fourth section of my Masters Project, the world has gone into lock-down in response to COVID-19, the novel coronavirus. I and my colleagues have been working from home for over two weeks now. Everyone is being charged to practice social distancing to stop the spread. We must isolate. We must stay home. Right in the middle of my scheduled focus groups, the world turned upside-down.

So what does this mean for Play Boards, which were supposed to serve as physical creative collaboration points in high-traffic areas? We simply don't have areas like this now—at least, not in a physical sense. Thinking back to my original design intent, having these boards in high-traffic areas was to meet my colleagues where they were at—break rooms, hallways, near the cafeteria, etc. Although we don't have access to these common spaces now, there is certainly still an opportunity to meet my colleagues where they're at—digitally.

The wonderful thing about working with a multitude of creative minds is that ideas for adapting to change are plentiful. While technology hasn't been perfect, product development continues and problems are being solved as they arise. Our meetings are now held via conference calls and video chats. Product prototypes are going virtual. At the very least, we can be thankful that our commutes are much shorter. We are finding our way through ever-changing circumstances.

While new processes are being ironed out, there is still much to consider for creative collaboration. I held my first two focus groups on campus, but my third fell into our first week of working from home. By a twist of fate, Mural, a digital collaboration platform, was introduced briefly in my Organizational Creativity course by a guest speaker. Mural is a self-proclaimed digital collaborative whiteboard. As I presented the Play Boards concept via video conference to

my third focus group, I also invited them to evaluate the concept collaboratively on a Mural board. Validated by the feedback in all three of my focus groups, Play Boards need a digital component—especially in this time of isolation. The Mural platform is a promising path to explore.

Focus Group Structure

I scheduled my focus group in hour sessions. For my first two focus groups, I prepped the space much like I would a brainstorm. I had the song "Happy" by Pharrell Williams playing as the invitees came in, setting a positive tone. I also provided some fidget toys and snacks. My third Focus Group was held both in a Microsoft Teams meeting and on a Mural board. Fortunately, almost all the invitees were able to attend for at least a portion of the focus groups, totaling 23 people. After I presented the concept, a period of discussion and evaluation followed.

Play Boards Presentation

After providing a brief explanation of the purpose and history of Play Boards, I walked the groups through some PowerPoint slides answering the key data questions: who, what, where, when, why, how? These presentations evolved from one focus group to the next, building in learnings from the previous group. See Appendix A for the final PowerPoint presentation. Generally, the first slides answered the question, "What and why are playboards?" Physically, they are magnetic whiteboards with colorful dry-erase markers. They come with magnetic, dry-erase squares that would act as reusable sticky notes. These squares would not only be eco-friendly, but they would help make documentation quick and easy through the proposed documentation process. I then explained how they would work. I provided a functional breakdown of what would be included as well as an example Play Board.

Because one of the goals of the boards to help keep consumer insights top of mind, the example I provided featured a consumer insight. The board would provide an "Insight of the Week," a space to provide inspiration, and a space to play with the insight. I also asked the focus groups about what resources they use to brush up on current consumer insights. Through this I discovered that typically only the product designers were on the distribution list for the company's monthly consumer insights report.

The Play Boards could also be used for purposes other than insights. They could provide a "Challenge of the Week" where anyone could challenge their coworkers to help with a problem or goal they want to achieve. This might be particularly useful for brain dumps on a broad topic, such as "all things related to Christmas." Other weeks, we could simply post a playful question like, "What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?"

I then explained how the boards could be maintained and documented on a weekly basis by a "designated player" or group of players. The prompt would be posted on Monday, and then documented and cleared on Thursday. Fridays would be Free Play Friday where anyone could draw or write whatever they wanted. I proposed using the Post-It app to digitize and document the contributions, which then could be uploaded to a shared folder for later reference. A QR code would also be on each board, linking to this shared folder.

Finally, I proposed putting the Play Boards in high traffic areas. To test run the concept, I proposed that the first one would go by our design break room. After this, I asked if anyone had any questions. Then, most of the time was spent using tools to evaluate the concept. Respecting the time of my group members, I decided to drop the formal "o" step (overcoming concerns) of PPCo and focus instead on the pluses, potentials, and concerns. Ideas to overcome a variety of concerns were naturally generated in discussion.

Focus Group One Results

The first focus group I held was with my content design team. I had all five of my

teammates in attendance. See Table 1 for PPC results.

Pluses	- It allows us to collaborate with people with which we don't normally collaborate. - It allows us to contribute to different teams. - It's easy and accessible. - It allows us to engage others without setting up a brainstorm.
Potentials	- They run out of magnets. - We might gain unexpected insights. - It might single-handedly save the company (a little tongue-and-cheek from one teammate). - They might not engage people.
Concerns	- How might we incentivize people to use the boards? - How might we make sure questions are relevant to what we're working on?

Table 1. Focus Group One Evaluation

Several ideas were generated as the tool was being facilitated. I took notes on those

separately. Someone suggested that Play Boards be online because some people might not pass

the board often. The question was also raised if all the boards would have the same question of

the week or not, to which I responded, they would so that the collective data would be consistent

for the week. Another focus group member recommended offering incentives for participating. I

thought this was interesting. With this idea came an additional concern: How to reward someone

who contributes while still maintaining a level of anonymity for ideas?

My major takeaway from this first focus group was that there needs to be a clear reason

to engage. The two listed concerns stem from the potential that the boards might have low

engagement. In addition to incentives, this group also discussed how the insights should be

relevant to what we're working on. Maybe there is a way to find insights that align with what

leadership is pursuing. People want to know that their ideas matter. This also came up in my second focus group.

Focus Group Two Results

The second focus group consisted of nine employees from around the campus. There were representatives from product design, engineering, copywriting, voice of the consumer (VOC) team, mechanical design, and the digital asset development team. For this group, I wanted to talk a little more about incentives. I updated the presentation to include the possibility for contributors to tag their ideas with their phone extension, which could then be entered for a prize drawing. See their PPC results in Table 2.

Pluses	- The Insight of the Week is well structured and organized. - It feels fresh. - The boards are mobile. - It gives a voice to everyone--It's inclusive.
Potentials	- It might benefit the workplace culture. - Ideas might vanish into the ether.
Concerns	- How to ensure the ideas generated are valuable? - How to engage introverts? - How to keep it fun? - How to curate provocative questions?

Table 2. Focus Group Two Evaluation

The key sentiments that came out of this focus group were to keep the boards fun and not too directive—no one wants to be told what to do. One of the focus group members who recently acquired a degree in human-centered design offered to discuss the different techniques he's learned to better understand consumers. Another attendee brought up the concern that he's introverted, so he is unlikely to participate in a high traffic area, although he would engage digitally if there was an option. There seemed to be a general positive sentiment towards using the boards to boost workplace culture.

Several key points came out of this meeting. Insights of the week should not feel like data. They should be written in a way that piques the interest of someone walking by. The more unexpected, the better. The copywriting team might be able to help craft engaging insights. It was also brought up that there could be a team of creatives that runs the Play Boards—not just a single person per board. This team could curate insights and brainstorm a list of potential ways to use the Play Boards. One person suggested the first question posted could be, "How do you think we should use this board?" Therefore, my main takeaway from focus group two is to make the boards fun by offering a variety of ways to engage with minimal prescription—Allow for as much creative freedom as possible.

Focus Group Three Results

Although my third focus group was held while everyone was adjusting to their first week of working from home, it held the most fruitful conversation. This group consisted of seven people from a variety of departments: product design, digital asset production, engineering, graphics, audio development, and licensing. The presentation focused less on consumer insights and more on fun, diverse ways to play.

 I presented the concept in a Microsoft Teams meeting, then moved into a Mural board to evaluate the concept. My attendees instantly began playing when I explained all that they could do in Mural. A favorite moment of mine was when someone found a shark icon, made it big, and began "eating" the other elements on the board. It set a fun tone as we began to evaluate. Instead of PPC, I tried out one of Mural's evaluation templates. It was comprised of four quadrants: Works well, needs to change, unanswered questions, and new ideas to try. We worked together to capture the feedback and ideas generated in response to the Play Boards concept. Results can be seen in Table 3.

Worldwide users

any time day or night

easy access

Post-it app, consider amount of work to document

Typical white board problems - not erasing fully, markers missing

graphic

Easy to use

fun to see what's new

Cross brand sharing

★

👍 archived

love the idea of brainstorming insights

Worked well ✚

△ Needs to change

Unanswered questions ?

💡 New ideas to try

WACOM scanner can digitize a whiteboard

Trend Reports

MS Teams Channel

Safety and Quality

Doodle of the Day

Interview people in the call center

Unused Stylus Screen TV in Digital Lab for possible test run

Touch Screen TV or Projector

SCAN ME

Table 3. Focus Group Three Evaluation

Results for this focus group were particularly interesting because there was less focus on the content of the boards and more on opportunities for a digital experience. While I see Mural as a strong asset for collaboration while working from home, my concern is that when we return to the office, it will become just another overlooked link in an email. Physically passing by a board has an element of surprise that is lost when a person must intentionally click a link to view a board.

One attendee from digital asset production recommended using a mobile touch screen TV or projector that can host a Mural board. Mural can even be integrated into Teams, which means the boards could potentially have their own channel and be accessible from any TV on the company's network. He had high confidence that this was possible, and even recalled an unused Stylus-input TV that could most likely be used for a test run once we return to campus. Although this path would be more expensive than traditional whiteboards, contributions would be much easier to digitize and organize. In addition, there would be a much wider variety of tools to create and organize ideas.

<div align="center">**Final Outcome**</div>

With the wealth of information I've gathered from these three focus groups, I have put together a final evolution of the Play Boards presentation which can be viewed in Appendix B. This presentation also demonstrates ways Mural can benefit our creative processes beyond Play Boards. Further exploration of logistics and a rollout plan is desired before the ultimate presentation to leadership.

Section Five: Key Learnings

The process of presenting and refining the Play Boards concept with focus groups has

been enlightening. One of the main goals of this project has been to offer an opportunity to play

together in the workplace in a meaningful way—I was pleasantly surprised to see elements of

this happening even in the focus groups. With some additional research, I've gained insights into

organizational creativity through the scope of creative climate. This learning has been deepened

by a better understanding of how to foster psychological safety when promoting collaborative

creativity. Additionally, I've explored acceptance by seeking a contextual understanding of the

Agile mindset. These key learnings will shape the ultimate Play Boards experience.

Organizational Creativity through Creative Climate

Organizations are complex systems of people, projects, processes and politics. Methods

for organizational creativity must strike a balance between providing structure for creativity and

allowing for flexibility of thought. These methods find the most success when they have a

healthy creative climate in which to thrive. The Situational Outlook Questionnaire (SOQ)

measures people's perceptions of the climate for creativity, innovation, and change within their

immediate work environment (Creative Problem Solving Group, n.d.). The measure looks at the

following nine dimensions as seen in Figure 2:

The nine dimensions measured by the SOQ include:

- *Challenge and Involvement* – The degree to which people are involved in daily operations, long-term goals, and visions

- *Freedom* – The degree of independence shown by the people in the organization

- *Trust and Openness* – The emotional safety in relationships

- *Idea-Time* – The amount of time people can, and do, use for elaborating new ideas

- *Playfulness and Humor* – The spontaneity and ease displayed within the workplace

- *Conflict* – The presence of personal and emotional tensions (a negative dimension – in contrast to the debate dimension)

- *Idea-Support* – The ways new ideas are treated

- *Debate* – The occurrence of encounters and disagreement between viewpoints, ideas, experiences and knowledge

- *Risk-Taking* – The tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity

Figure 2. SOQ Dimensions

Research has shown that innovative companies score significantly higher in all these dimensions except conflict, which is a negative dimension (Isaksen & Ekvall, 2015). According to Boston Consulting Group, Google and Amazon were assessed to be the two most innovative organizations of 2019 (Ringel et al., 2019). By taking a closer look at the top innovative companies of today, we can see the SOQ dimensions at play.

Amazon ranked #2 on Boston Consulting Group's innovative companies list. As previously mentioned, Amazon's organizational creativity is largely due in part to their primary company principle, "customer obsession." They are always looking for new ways to give the consumer what they want. This is likely to mean that the company will have to take financial risks to meet customer expectations; two-day Prime shipping does not come without a cost. This does not stop Amazon. Decisions are made with the understanding that what is good for the customer is good for Amazon. Their "obsessive" behavior enables them to take risks—a key indicator of organizational creativity according to the SOQ.

Ranked the #1 innovative organization of 2019, Google goes above and beyond in several of the SOQ's dimensions. Their headquarters, known as the Googleplex, is known for being filled with playful elements such as slides, bikes, ping pong tables, and even a giant dinosaur skeleton. These are likely to influence a high score in the Playfulness and Humor dimension. Google also preaches a 80/20 rule, meaning employees are expected to spend 80% of their time on specified company projects and 20% of the time on developing their own ideas (Wojcicki, 2011). This would clearly earn a high score in the SOQ's Idea-Time dimension. Finally, Google employees report having autonomy over their ideas (Google, 2007). They can work on what they find important. This supports the SOQ's Freedom dimension.

As I put together options for possible Play Board content, I'm asking the question, how might I use these boards to strengthen our SOQ dimensions? The dimensions that are particularly noteworthy are Humor and Playfulness, and Trust and Openness. The boards should provide an unexpected opportunity to interact while also fostering a safe environment to share ideas. This directly ties into psychological safety.

Psychological Safety

For some people, contributing to a public board is perceived as a social risk. This is important to overcome, as it has been shown that team information-sharing and psychological safety both significantly relate to team creativity (Hu et al., 2018). My goal is to provide psychological safety so that more information-sharing can occur. In my research, trust and humor have risen to be two significant factors contributing to creativity. Not surprisingly, these are also two dimensions the SOQ evaluates.

Trustworthiness develops in organizations by having standardized and reliable communication, a common business understanding, and clear business ethics (Kasper-Fuehrer &

Ashkanasy, 2001). There is an element of transparency in which members of the organization have a clear shared vision for the future. In virtual organizations specifically, methods of emotional communication should be available to convey what would normally be communicated through body language and inflection. Video conferences and emoticons can help with this. In short, trust is built when people feel well connected, well informed, and understood.

Humor can also be tool for developing psychological safety and therefore promote creativity in organizations, but the type of humor used is significant. Lang and Lee (2010) found that liberating humor is positively related to organizational creativity. Liberating humor will make light of cultural issues, social concerns, or taboo topics in order to test openness or riskiness of sensitive issues. It will often reframe or reorganize information through playful reorientation that enhances openness and acceptance of the unexpected.

In contrast, controlling humor was found to be negatively related to organizational creativity (Lang & Lee, 2010). This form of humor is told at the expense of someone else. Sarcasm, satire, and parody are common forms of controlling humor that are likely to create conflict, the negatively scored SOQ dimension. Those who use controlling humor are likely to use it for personal gain.

Through clear communication and humor that reframes a problem or idea in an interesting way, I can create a safer psychological Play Boards experience.

Collaborative Creativity

Our company takes a team-based approach to product development. While we are used to working collaboratively, information is not easily shared across different teams. Play Boards could be a promising tool for cross-pollination. In my research, I have found a few notable insights for collaborative creativity that can be integrated into Play Boards development.

One major insight that came out of the Focus Groups was that people needed a good reason to engage. In other words, they needed to be motivated. Adler and Chen (2011) proposed that "Large-scale collaborative creativity will be best supported when contributors have simultaneously high levels of identified and intrinsic forms of motivation" (p.69). Identified forms of motivation include tasks that the contributors consider purposeful or worthwhile. Intrinsic forms of motivation include tasks that contributors enjoy doing. With this insight, I intend to design Play Board content to have an element of purpose and an element of fun. Maybe consumer insights are delivered in the form of a comic.

Adler and Chen (2011) also proposed that contributors are most likely to have the necessary motivation for large-scale collaborative creativity if they feel they have an independent identity and an interdependent identity in the organization. Some Playboard content might engage contributors on a personal level, while other content engage contributors based on their role in the organization. It is likely that balancing personal and organizational Play Board content will also balance intrinsic and identified motivations. Collaborative creativity is naturally a social process, so it is helpful to develop empathy for those with whom one is collaborating. This is especially helpful in diverse groups where everyone does not share the same perspective. A study done by Hoever et al. (2012) found that perspective-taking is a key way to unlock creativity in diverse teams. See results in figure 3.
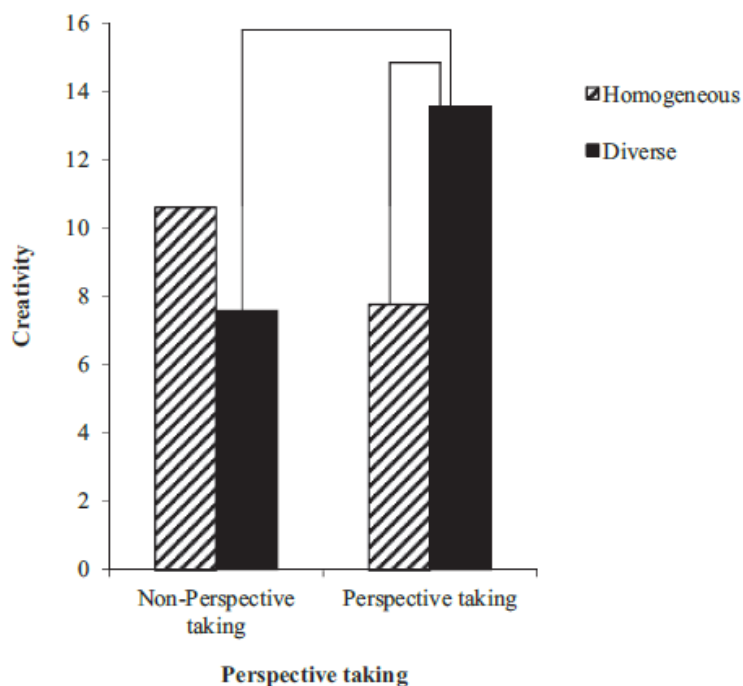
Figure 3. The effect of perspective taking on creativity in homogeneous and diverse teams.

One of the reasons why perspective-taking increased creativity in diverse groups was because it facilitated more information elaboration. The sharing of information to gain a better understanding of collaborators' goals and concerns leads to a more unified group perspective and creative output. This learning inspires a Play Board content that helps my colleagues get to know each other better.

In sum, people are more likely to engage with Play Boards if they find the topic to be purposeful and fun. People are also more likely to be creative with their contributions if they also assume the diverse perspectives of their colleagues. Play Boards provides an opportunity to hear and respond to diverse perspectives.

An Agile Mindset

Agile is not a methodology, but rather an approach for quick, iterative, and customer-focused development that can adapt and respond to change. Originally designed for software development, more and more organizations are attempting to integrate Agile philosophies into

other fields of work. The four core values of Agile according to the Agile Manifesto are (1)

Individuals and interactions over process and tools, (2) Working software over comprehensive

documentation, (3) Customer collaboration over contract negotiation, (4) Responding to change

over following a plan (Kent et al., 2001). See Table 4 for the twelve principles of Agile.

1. Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
2. Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
3. Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
4. Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
5. Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
6. The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
7. Working software is the primary measure of progress.
8. Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
10. Simplicity--the art of maximizing the amount of work not done--is essential.
11. The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

Table 4. Twelve principles of Agile (Kent et al., 2001)

While some of these values and principles are specific to software development, there are

many key themes that can be applied to product development. Customer satisfaction is a clear

universal principle that has surfaced throughout organizational creativity research.

Understanding customers through frequent communication is paramount for making properly

informed decisions in product development. Within this frequent communication, providing

iterative prototypes allows customer feedback to be targeted and more meaningful than

theoretical conversation or documentation.

An Agile mindset also strengthens adaptability. Product development rarely goes exactly

as planned, so some flexing must occur so the unexpected can be resolved in stride. Sometimes

this process goes well, and sometimes it doesn't. Regular periods of team reflection allow teams to learn from failure and retain best practices.

I have not heard any more discussion on Agile framework implementation on our campus, likely due to the virus outbreak. Nevertheless, Play Boards might complement Agile principles and values through invitations to reflect on best practices and failures. More opportunities can be explored should Agile frameworks be implemented.

Exploring Acceptance

Because the president of my company asked me to implement the idea I presented, I began my journey in the Exploring Acceptance phase of the creative problem-solving process. This phase is conducted to maximize the likelihood of success. While leadership support is required for implementation, the success of Play Boards is measured by the level of engagement with the boards. Exploring acceptance requires contextual thinking and sensitivity to one's environment.

Contextual thinking is an effort to understand the interrelated conditions, circumstances, or influences that will support or hinder success (Puccio et al., 2012). This includes understanding the people and politics involved in introducing change. Sensitivity to one's environment is the paired affective skill to contextual thinking. This skill focuses on understanding the degree to which people are aware of their physical and psychological surroundings (Puccio et al., 2012). Understanding the psychological environment often requires empathy and perspective-taking. Together, these cognitive skills help bring clarity to the path to acceptance.

Force field analysis is a helpful tool for exploring acceptance. Based on psychologist Kurt Lewin's work in field theory, force field analysis begins by diverging on all the forces for

and against the proposed change. These forces be can anything within the contextual realm of the change—psychological, social, financial, logistical, etc. These forces can also be weighted for influence exerted on the change. Forces can then be converged upon, identifying which negative forces against change can be minimized and which positive forces for change can be maximized so that the net forces acting upon the change is positive.

Some positive forces for digital Play Boards on Mural have been ease of accessibility (+2), ease of documentation (+3), and diversity of contributors (+1). Negative forces include users' busy schedules (-2), financial investment (-2), and unclear return on investment (-3). My next step is to pick a force or forces within my control and to add some positive weight—Based on this force field analysis, I can weaken the "unclear return on investment" force by bringing some clarity to the measurable benefits of Play Boards.

Project Evaluation

Overall, project execution went well. Having a series of focus groups allowed me to develop Play Boards with direct user input and see trends in feedback. There was a high level of idea-sharing in the groups that allowed me to better identify user wants and needs. Adapting to the change of working from home brought me to a breakthrough with Mural, which was a turning point that answered a common user desire for a digital way to engage. Using Mural for my final focus group was also a way to provide exposure to some of Play Board's potential users.

If I could change some design elements of this project, I would start by adding one more focus group. Feedback in the third focus group evolved the concept drastically so another round of feedback on the next evolution would be helpful. This would also increase the number of participants to over 30, which is a more significant data pool. I also found facilitation of the PPC

tool in my first two focus groups to be difficult while also discussing the ideas generated. While this could improve with facilitation practice, providing sticky notes to my first two groups to capture ideas would have been helpful.

Section Six: Conclusion

In a time of world crisis, it becomes more apparent than ever that change is inevitable. When we are pushed out of our comfort zones, we must be able to rise and adapt. It is outside of our comfort zones that breakthrough creativity is forged. I am encouraged to see such adaptability and resilience through my own company's transition to a work-from-home model. This is stewarded by a strong transformational leader who inspires, challenges, and considers each of his followers.

This project has been a valuable learning experience in group facilitation. I have yet to feel completely comfortable facilitating an organic creative problem-solving session, but with regular practice, the nerves subside and the sessions go better. Creative problem-solving is a muscle that needs to be trained and maintained. To supplement Play Boards as a divergent thinking tool, What I see myself doing is developing a session to train my coworkers in convergent thinking tools. These could be CPS tools or perhaps design thinking tools that are available in Mural.

I also see myself developing a collection of Play Board content examples that provide users with both identified and intrinsic motivation. Content need to grab user attention, then also be perceived as worthy of engagement. Dr. Jeffery Goldstein (2012) defines play as "any activity freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, and personally directed" (p. 5). Identified and intrinsic motivation are both key for the Play Board concept to engage users and live up to its name.

Once our company is back in the office, I will be able to evaluate logistics. How does Mural work on the stylus-input TV identified in focus group three? Can the TVs be updated with different Play Boards remotely? If not, does Mural have recommendations for host technology?

Once logistics are resolved, the next steps would be to Make a Play Boards Team in Microsoft Teams, recruit a group of Play Board volunteers to help manage the boards and curate the weekly play experiences, then develop a rollout plan.

This project has come so far from the photoshopped image in Figure 1. While I would have liked to have a thorough final pitch for Play Boards to turn in, it's clear that this pandemic pays no mind to my plans. Though this project ends here, this is not where the story ends. Play Boards will continue to evolve into a successful collaborative creativity tool for sharing insights, inspiration, and ideas through play.

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Appendix A

[Leadership Action Planning]

[Inspire our talent and Be consumer-focused]

? **What (and Why) are Play Boards?**

What (and Why) are Play Boards?

A multi-functional collaborative play space for sharing insights, inspiration, and ideas in a fun new way!

Why?

To provide a collaborative PLAY space

To gather inspiration and ideas from diverse perspectives

To "obsess" over our consumers
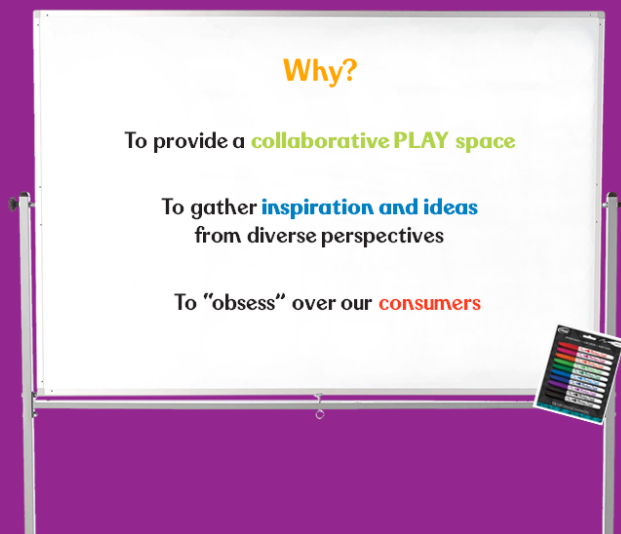
Weekly Play Possibilities

Insight of the Week

Something interesting we've learned from (or know about) our consumers.

Challenge of the Week

(by request) Need more brains? Request a week on the Play Board, and you can challenge others to play with ideas with you! Great for brain dumps.

Silly Question of the Week

What's your favorite ice cream flavor?

Insight of the Week

To parents, sleep is more precious than gold.

INSPIRE

PLAY

Regular Routine

Soothing music

Baby Massage

Projection lights

Alexa skill that starts lullabies at bedtime

Routine projects on wall

Singing Weighted Blanket
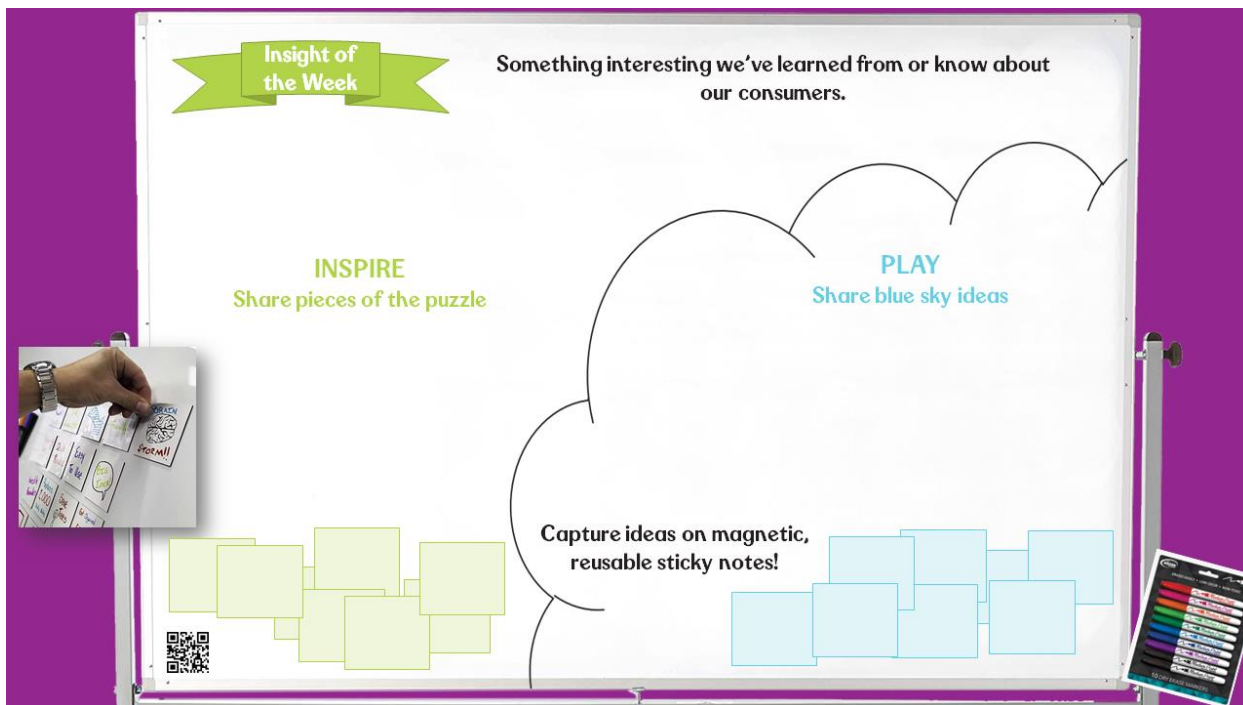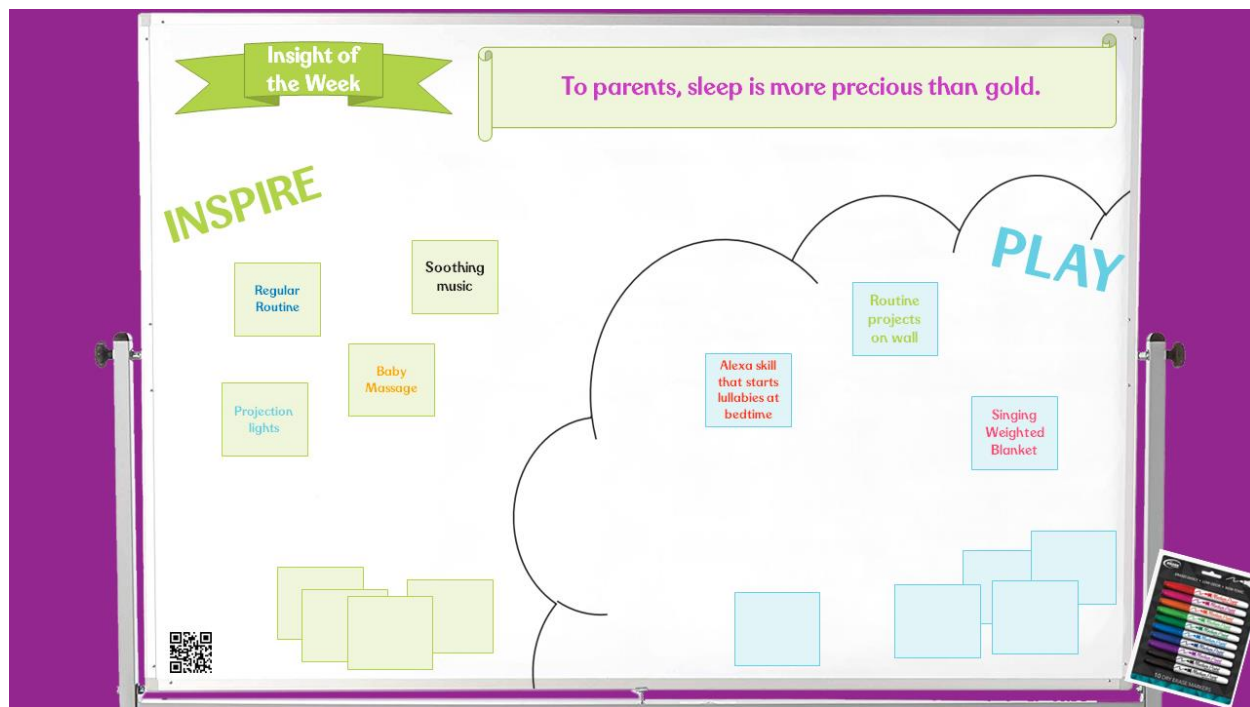
Possible Insight Sources

- Customer interviews
- Research
- Product Reviews
- Leadership

[Example Company Consumer Insights Report]

What's the process?

Each board has a designated player that updates and documents the board every week.

The same insights can be sent out to all designated players.

Monday Morning: Post Play of the Week.

Thursday EOD: Document responses, upload to a shared location, and erase.

Friday: FREE PLAY FRIDAY! Doodle, share a joke, have FUN!

How to document?

Use The Post-It App

To upload to a SharePoint folder.
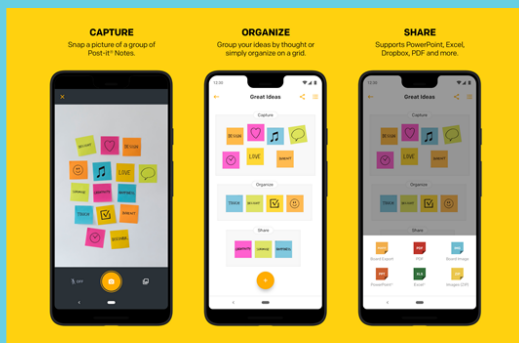
Play Boards - Animal Insights

Group A	Annotation	
Puppies	Puppies	
Kittens that Shoot Laser beams	Kittens that Shoot Laser beams	
Sloths	Sloths	
Monkeys that have telekinetic Powers	Monkeys that have telekinetic Powers	

Explore the folder, scan the QR code!

The Plan:
Test run with ONE rolling board,
In the Team Center, near the break room.

Questions?

Let's evaluate
On Mural!

PLAY Boards Summary

What?

Insight of the Week — Something interesting we've learned from or know about our consumers.

INSPIRE   PLAY

Why?
- Inspire talent
- Collaborative creativity
- Focus on the consumer

How?
- Posts Monday
- Closes Thursday
- Post-It App to SharePoint
- Free Play Friday

Who?
- Anyone can contribute
- Designated players update and maintain the boards

Where?
- High traffic areas

Other Engagement Opportunities

Challenge of the Week   **Silly Question of the Week**

Appendix B

Reasons to love **M U R A L**

| Collaborate from anywhere | Integrates into TEAMS | Easy IP Documentation | A playful interface | Ideate AND Evaluate |

How might we get the most out of **M U R A L** ?

MURAL, Meet **PLAY BOARDS**

Mix Faire 2019

HOW WE MIGHT PLAY WITH IDEAS MORE:
PLAY BOARDS

Put them around campus - team spaces, break rooms, hallways. ANYONE can contribute!

Pose challenge questions, SILLY or serious.

Capture INSPIRED ideas from presentations

When not in use, FREE PLAY!
Doodle, tell a joke, and have f-u-n!

Play Boards Masters Project
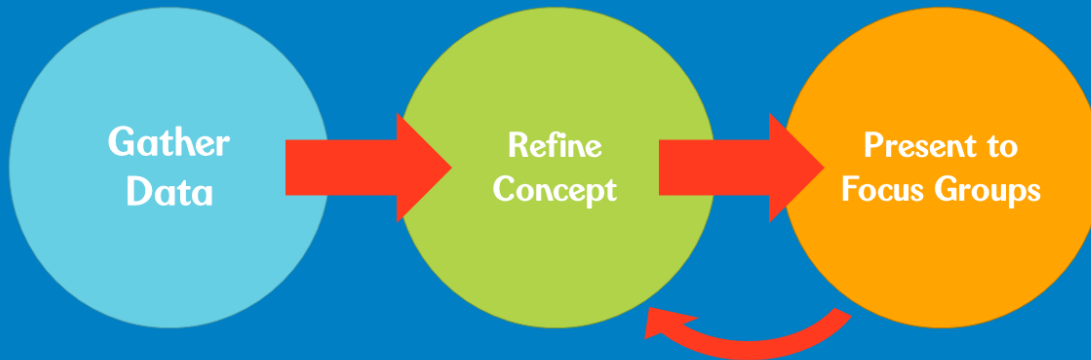
[Leadership Action Planning]

[Inspire our talent and Be consumer-focused]

PLAY Boards Summary

What?
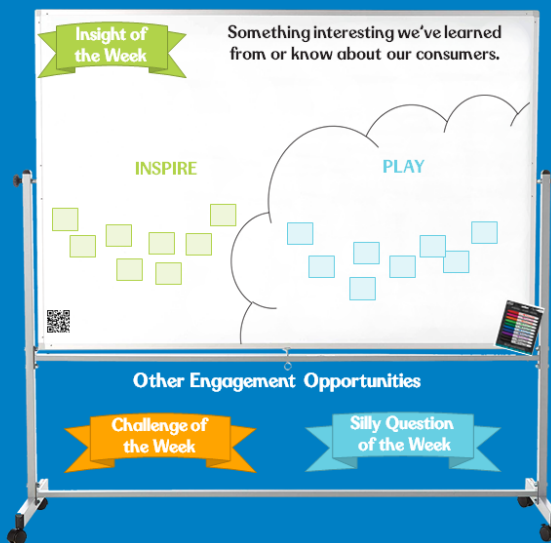
Why?
- Inspire talent
- Collaborative creativity
- Focus on the consumer

Who?
- Anyone can contribute
- Designated players update and maintain the boards

Insight of the Week

Something interesting we've learned from or know about our consumers.

INSPIRE

PLAY

Other Engagement Opportunities

Challenge of the Week

Silly Question of the Week

How?
- Posts Monday
- Closes Thursday
- Post-It App to SharePoint
- Free Play Friday

Where?
- High traffic areas

Focus Group Results

Group 1:
- Liked collaboration with new people
- Liked easy accessibility

- Wondered how we make sure make sure insights are relevant?

Digital Option?
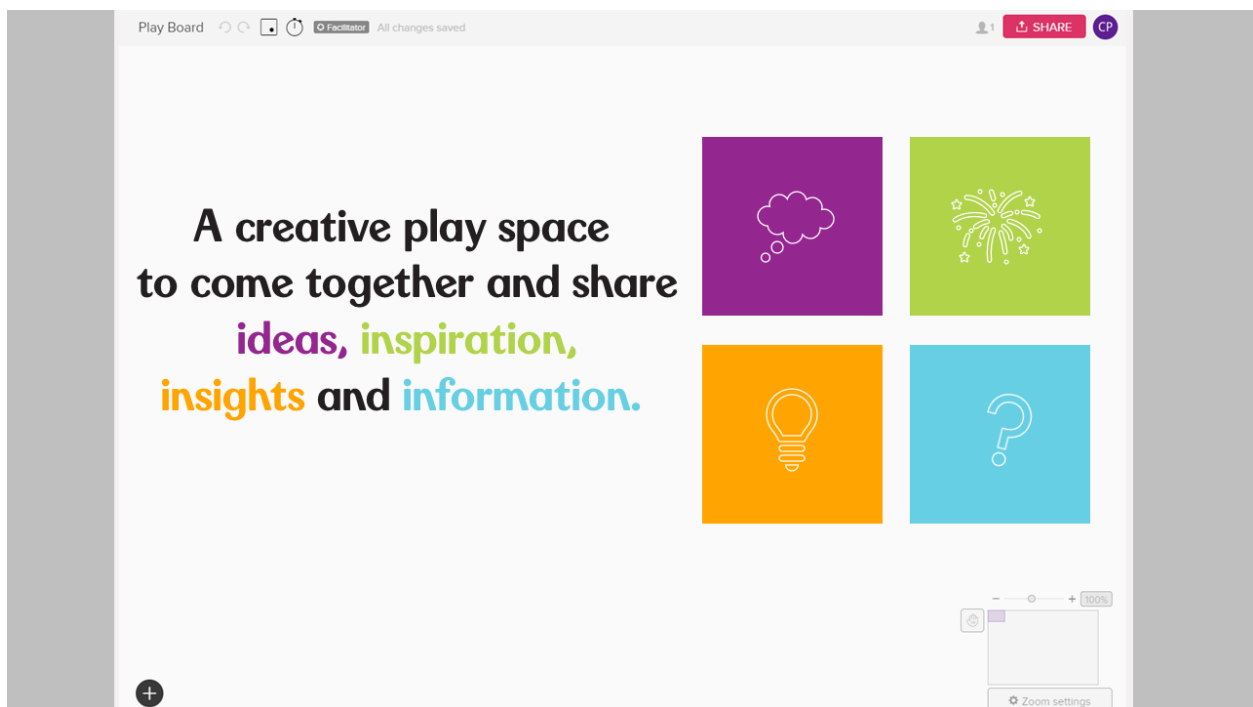
Group 2:
- Liked mobility of the boards.
- Liked how it gives a voice to everyone.

- Wondered how we keep the prompts fun and engaging?

Digital Option?

Group 3:
- Liked brainstorming insights
- Loved digital component— opens up collaboration to world-wide users.
- Liked that it's easy to archive
- Liked that Mural integrates into Teams
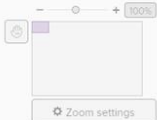
How do they work?

A **SPARK** is posted at the beginning of the week.

A **SPARK** is:
- Something **SILLY**
- Something **PARENT-RELATED**
- Something **AWESOME**
- Something **RELEVANT**
- Something **KID-RELATED**

Mombie

(n.) Mŏm-bē: A sleep deprived supermom who feeds on caffeine and survives on sticky kisses and messy smiles. Mombies are master multi-taskers and suck it uppers.

Possible SPARKS

Insights — Something interesting we've learned about our consumers.

Challenges — (by request) Anyone can request a week on the board to challenge our collective brains. Great for brain dumps or polls!

Community — Brag board - Epic Fail Board - Meme board - Silly questions

Games — Giant Sudoku - Playoffs - Secret Messages

Leadership — Special sparks from leadership!

Sources for **Insight of the Week**

VOC

Trends

Leadership

[Some Sources Redacted]

Social Media

Who's in charge?

Volunteer SPARK Force

- Quarterly brainstorm party to come up with SPARKS
- Ongoing open Mural to drop in possible SPARKS
- Rotating responsibility to export and archive Play Boards

Why PLAY Boards?

| Invite ideas from our diverse talent pool | Share our stories across teams | Empathize with our consumers | Build community | Inspire a playful creative culture |

Next Steps for Play Boards:

- Creating a Play Boards Team in Teams
- Recruiting members for the SPARK Force
- Creating a Spark Bank
- Rollout with fun, icebreaking activities

Digging Deeper:

Bridging the Gap
to Creative Product
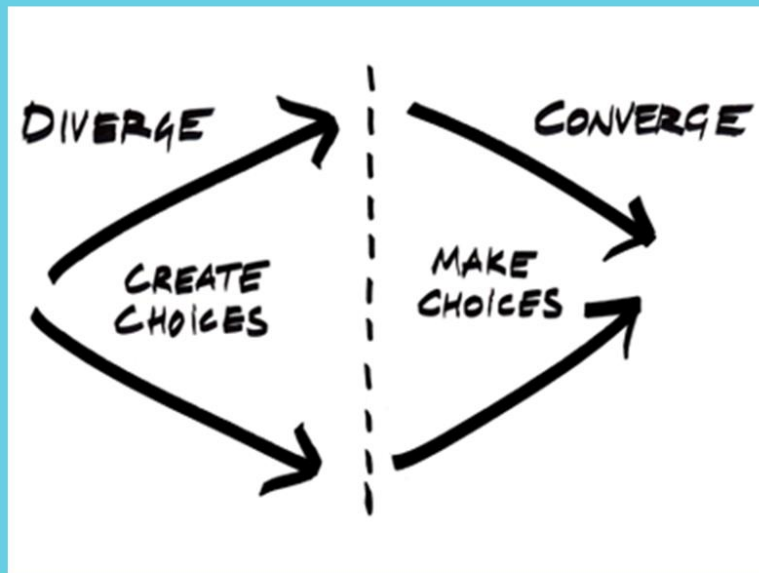
Templates in **MURAL**

CLARIFY   IDEATE   DEVELOP   IMPLEMENT

CLARIFY

Plane Map

Abstraction Laddering

Empathy Map
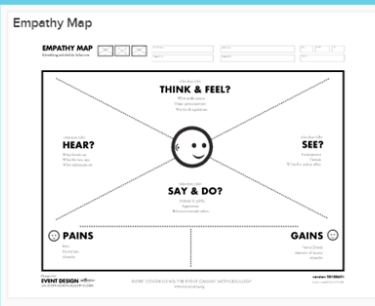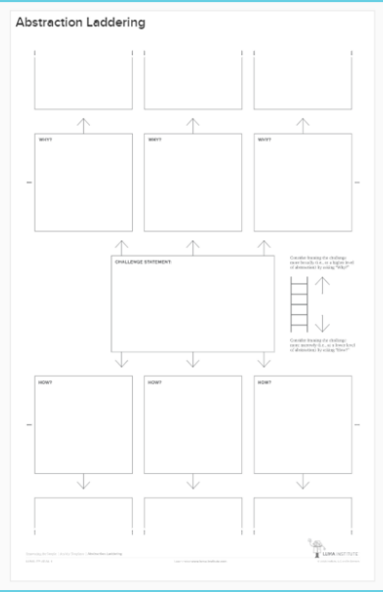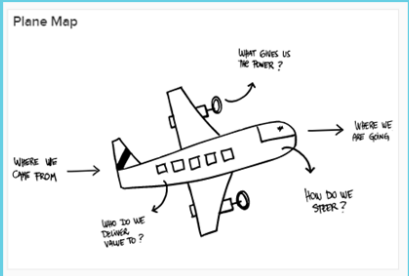
I D E A T E

BRAINSTORM - GROUP - PRIORITIZE

DEVELOP

Feedback Grid

Worked well **+**	**△** Needs to change
Unanswered questions **?**	**♡** New ideas to try

Creative Matrix

IMPLEMENT

Roadmap

	Stage 1 "Cupcake"	Stage 2 "Birthday Cake"	Stage 3 "Wedding Cake"
Describe the experience			
Main capabilities ("Big Bets")			
Other capabilities ("No Brainers")			
User / customer value			
What we want to learn			

Continued possibilities...

- Monthly Play Board Highlights – incentivized?
- Training sessions in Mural templates
- Customize our own Mural templates for development
- Creative Preference Profiles with FourSight
  - Which preference(s) do you have?
    - Clarifier, ideator, developer, or implementer?

Permission to place this Project in the Digital Commons online

I hereby grant permission to the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State college permission to place a digital copy of this master's Project (Play Boards: An Orgnaizational Tool for Creative Collaboration) as an online resource.

_____
Name

_____4/29/20_____
Date