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# Developing a Prototype of a Playfulness Toolkit

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Developing a Prototype of a Playfulness Toolkit
by
Hanneke Hövels


An Abstract of a Project
in
Creativity and Change Leadership


Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of


Master of Science


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

# Abstract of Project

## Developing a Prototype of a Playfulness Toolkit

Playfulness is the ability to reframe situations, seeing new possibilities. A playful mind-set increases our mental flexibility, resilience, empathy, and our overall well-being. Unfortunately, growing up most of us lose part of our playfulness. How can we facilitate adults to live a (more) playful life? To ignite playfulness in adults' lives, we first have to raise awareness for the benefits of playfulness, and then help people to develop a playful mind-set and integrate playfulness into their lives. In this project I combine my knowledge of creativity and playfulness with my experience in service and behavior design. I developed a prototype of a Playfulness Toolkit, a game that guides people through the process of developing a playful mindset, consisting of tools, objects and Tiny Playful Habits. With this toolkit I hope to bridge the gap between knowing and doing, facilitating more playful behavior in adults' lives.

*Key words*: creativity, playfulness, playfulness skills, playful mind-set, behavior design

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Your Signature

May 8, 2022

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# Acknowledgements

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# SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

## Purpose and Description of Project

*"The opposite of play is not work. It's depression."*
Brian Sutton-Smith (play researcher)

The most common definition of playfulness found in literature is "The predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment." (Barnett, 2007, p. 955).

Research shows that playfulness increases our fun, compassion and resilience. Which is very necessary and useful in these insecure and polarizing times. Playfulness also nurtures a more creative life.

Unfortunately, growing up most of us lose part of our playfulness. There is a lot of knowledge out there about the positive impact of playfulness on our happiness and well-being, but there is a world between knowing and changing your behavior. How can we facilitate adults to live a (more) playful life?

This project will explore answers to this question: it will provide more detailed insights in the benefits of playfulness, why (most) adults lose at least part of this great asset while growing up and what ways there are to stimulate more playful behavior. Based on this exploration I will design tools that help people to develop their own playfulness. These tools will be tested and evaluated. The most interesting ones will be collected in a prototype of a toolkit that helps people to live and work more playful. To do this I will combine my knowledge of creativity and playfulness with my experience in service and behavior design, bridging the gap between knowing and doing.

To guide myself through this journey I have also formulated some personal goals. Along the journey:

1. I will approach any obstacle I meet in a playful way, using playfulness to breakthrough whenever I get stuck.

2. Because the subject is so dear to me, I want to become an ambassador of playfulness and share my experiences with the world.

3. I am quite modest/not a 'broadcaster' and by putting myself on the foreground I will also enhance my tolerance for risks.

With a growing awareness of the importance of creativity and playfulness, the time seems right to help people live and work more playfully.

## Rationale for Selection

For a while now I've been aware of the importance of playfulness in my own life. It is a balancing act between playfulness and seriousness. Playfulness has become a necessity for me to feel light, happy, and connected. It is naturally there if I give it space and nurture it. When I'm too busy, stressed or occupied with stuff to do, I lose my playfulness and my life turns grey.

Adults lose their playfulness because with growing responsibilities our seriousness also increases. Apparently, a lot of adults – not only me - seem to struggle with this polarity between seriousness and playfulness. Also, because being serious still seems to be the most appreciated norm in adulthood, typically associated with professionalism and expertise. But I see a shift: creativity is one of the 21st century skills, more and more play ambassadors are sharing their beliefs on social media, "play advisor" is a new job title I recently came across, and the awareness of the importance

of playfulness is growing, influenced by the current Corona pandemic which is testing our resilience.

With this project I want to help myself and others to live playfully *more deliberately*. The time's right to initiate little acts of playfulness and stimulate people to engage in it and reframe their everyday challenges. I hope this will lead to more understanding, connectivity, curiosity, and resilience: happier lives.

**SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE AND RESOURCES**

**Introduction to Playfulness**

Playfulness is the ability to frame or reframe a situation. It helps people to look at things from a different perspective, a more positive approach to life and less fortunate situations. Playful people appear to be more stress-resistant and have more resilience than less playful people (Magnuson & Barnett, 2013). Also, playfulness increases people's empathy and self-insight (DeBenedet, 2018).

I think it is important to understand the difference between play and playfulness and why I aim for more playfulness (and not necessarily more play). Play has a time and place, a beginning and an end, and is in that way an act on its own, next to the serious parts of our lives.

Playfulness is a set of behaviors that leads to a different mind-set or personality. Playfulness is then holistically integrated into our lives and influencing the way we see the world, our lives, and the challenges we meet. The most common definition of playfulness found in literature is "The predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment". (Barnett, 2007, p. 955).

Acts of play come relatively easy, also in adult lives, but as DeBenedet states: "Jump-starting the playful part of our personalities is harder." (DeBenedet, 2018, p.13).

**Why (Most) Adults Lose Their Playfulness**

In history we can find an explanation for the decrease of playfulness in adult lives. From the industrial revolution onwards, a clearer distinction originated between

adults and children: work became a separate world. Before that, children were seen as small adults. And although you might expect no playfulness at all from this wording, both "small" and "big" adults played together. After the Industrial Revolution, play and playfulness became something for children; adults had to attend to their serious jobs (Henricks, 2020).

Two main reasons DeBenedet gives for the lack of playfulness in adult lives nowadays is that we do not apply playful behavior deliberately and that we lack knowledge of the positive impact on our overall happiness and well-being (DeBenedet, 2018).

In order to ignite playfulness in adults' lives, we first have to raise awareness for the benefits of playfulness, and then help people to develop a playful mind-set and integrate playfulness into their lives.

## The Benefits of Playfulness

*"When we lack that feeling of lightness in what we do*
*it should be (…) as alarming as chest pain."*
Brown & Vaughan (2009)

Why would we want to increase playfulness in adulthood? What is the impact of living a more playful life? As I will explain in more detail below, research shows that playfulness increases our mental flexibility, tolerance for risk, empathy, self-insight and our overall happiness and well-being.

As mentioned earlier, playfulness is the ability to frame or reframe a situation. It helps people to look at things from a different perspective, a more positive approach to

life and less fortunate situations. It increases our *mental flexibility*. Playful people appear to be more stress-resistant and have more resilience than less playful people (Magnuson & Barnett, 2013).

Practicing playfulness increases people's mental flexibility: a person with a playful disposition has "a tendency to attribute their own meaning to objects or behaviors, a focus on pretence and non-literality, a freedom from externally imposed rules, and active involvement." (Barnett, 1991, p. 52). This *tolerance for risks*, being able to look beyond established patterns, rules and behaviors is a necessity for expanding people's boundaries and to learn new things.

Mental flexibility is also crucial for developing *empathy* and compassion. In that sense playfulness could accelerate social change, reframing the way we look at and think about each other, exploring perspectives beyond our own social 'bubble'. As Salit (2021) describes it:

> Play is how we experiment with how we relate to each other. Playfulness gives us a way to challenge what we normally do, what we are socialized to do, what the culture tells us, what is allowed and isn't allowed. We can use play and playfulness to help us discover different ways to deal with our differences and disagreements. (n.p)

In the literature the power of play in gaining *insight* is represented well: "Playfulness is a state of mind reflected in behavior in every tiny action. When you are immersed in this

mood, you are open to experience pleasure, discovery, knowledge, and creativity."
(Hassan, 2019, p.4)

"Play challenges us to dwell on the meaning of things and events. (…) Play is a luring of some other or some-thing into a sphere of openness: to be surprised, touched, moved, and engaged. (…) Things become images that tempt, entice, and allure the players into intimations of variations of meaningful imaginations and insight." (van Manen, 2018, p. 678)

"Play is an exploration of powers and potentials. We play to find out what we can – and cannot – do and to see if we can extend our capabilities." (Henricks, 2014, p. 204)

Gaining insight, not by deliberately looking for it, but by surprise during a time-free, purposeless play experience. Hassan explored the relationship between playfulness and mindfulness: playfulness enhances a state of mindfulness (focus and attention) and it enhances observing inner thoughts and outer feelings and emotions (Hassan, 2019). This temporarily 'standing still' while playing with possibilities can lead to new connections, thoughts, and self-insight. For some people playing or playfulness might be an easier alternative for doing a mindfulness exercise.

DeBenedet talks about playful intelligence as "The notion of knowing how playfulness can influence one's inner and outer adult life" (DeBenedet, 2018, p.14). The qualities he found that influence our playful intelligence most are *imagination*, *sociability*, *humor*, *spontaneity*, and *wonder*. Consciously using these capacities in our daily lives positively impacts our overall happiness and well-being (DeBenedet, 2018).

**Creativity and Playfulness**

The Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process has been modified and refined throughout its history. The version developed by Gerard Puccio, Marie Mance and Mary Murdock is called CPS: The Thinking Skills Model (Puccio, et al. 2011, p88). This model consists of three main stages: *Clarification* (Exploring the Vision and Formulating Challenges), *Transformation* (Exploring Ideas and Formulating Solutions) and *Implementation* (Exploring Acceptance and Formulating a Plan) and describes for each stage both the cognitive and affective skills that are used during the process (Puccio, et al. 2011).

Playfulness is an affective skill that supports Ideational thinking which is important in the step Exploring Ideas. Puccio, Mance and Murdock describe playfulness as an affective skill below.

> Unlike the pragmatic adult who looks for one right answer, the playful adult recognizes how allowing a little fun can open up possibilities and new ideas. (…) Playfulness is an attitude, an emotional mind-set, a motivation that enhances the ability to generate novel ideas. (Puccio, et al. 2011, p.111)

Hassan created a framework to show the relationship between playfulness, mindfulness and improvisation and the effect on a creative mind-set. It affirms that playfulness supports in developing mental flexibility, which is an important skill in creativity, see Figure 1 (Hassan, 2019).

**Figure 1**
*The Interrelations Among Creativity Dynamics*
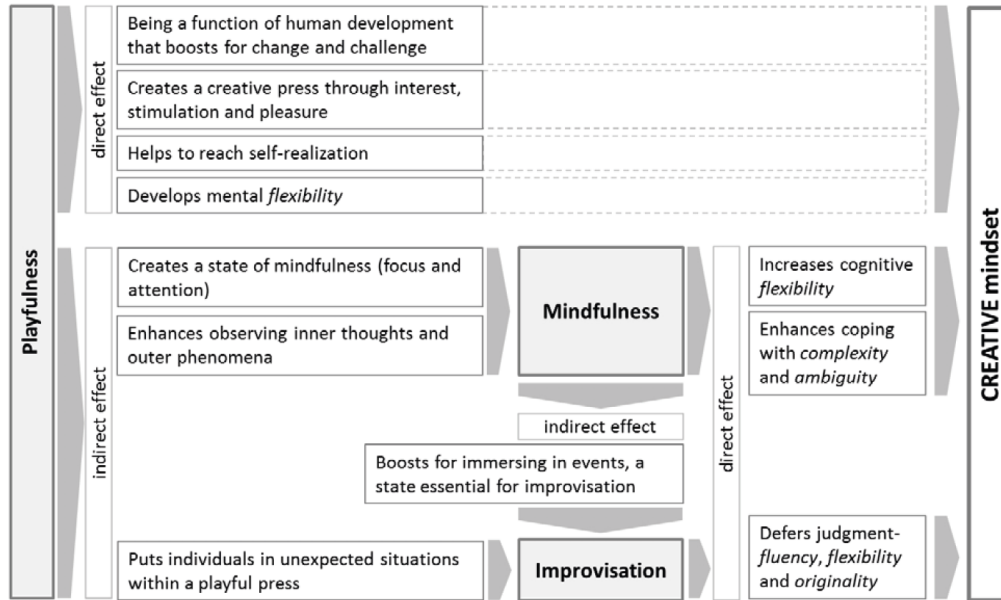


*Note*: Reprinted with permission from Hassan, 2019, p10

## Playfulness Skills

How can we develop a more playful mind-set? A lot of research has been done on how to develop a more creative mind-set. Like soccer, creativity isn't just about one skill. To be a good soccer player you need to develop multiple skills, like for example kicking, dribbling, running and teamwork. Over the years a creative thinking skillset has been developed. Applying these 20 creativity skills deliberately enhances a creative mind-set. In figure 2 this skillset is shown which is developed by Dr. Burnett (*https://creativityandeducation.com*), based on the work of Guilford (1956), Torrance and Safter (1999), Amabile (1996) and Puccio, et al. (2011).

**Figure 2**

*Creative Thinking Skills*



**Creative Thinking Skills**

| Keep Open* | Curiosity | Look at it Another Way* | Produce & Consider Many Alternatives* | Playfulness and Humor* |
| Risk-taking | Embrace the Challenge* | Highlight the Essence* | Elaborate but Not Excessively* | Make it Swing! Make it Ring!* |
| Be Aware of Emotions* | Embracing Ambiguity | Mindfulness | Be Flexible* | Enjoy and Use Fantasy* |
| Break Through and Extend the Boundaries* | Put Ideas into Context* | Get Glimpses of the Future* | Be Original* | Visualize it Richly & Colorfully* |

Creativity AND EDUCATION

Foundational Skills | The Essential Four
Skills for Engagement | Focus on Emotions
Future Skills

© Copyright Weaving Creativity into Every Strand of Your Curriculum – Burnett, Figliotti & Saltzberg, 2020
Images credited to Barney Saltzberg. *Leap skills from Torrance and Safter

BEYONDER

*Note:* Used with permission from: https://creativityandeducation.com

Looking at these Creativity Skills and comparing them with the benefits of playfulness and the qualities that influence playfulness as described earlier, there are four of them that are most directly related to playfulness: Look at it another way, Playfulness and Humor, Enjoy and Use Fantasy, and Embrace the challenge. If we help people develop these four skills, they will develop a more playful mindset as well. From now on I will refer to them as Playfulness Skills. I will describe and explain the relationship between these four skills and playfulness in more detail.

**Figure 3**

*Relationship between Playfulness Skills and a Playful Mind-set*

Playfulness skills
(creativity skills mostly
related to playfulness)　　Leads to other creativity skills that enhance playfulness　　Which leads to...

| Look at it another way | Enjoy & use fantasy | Be flexible | |
| Embrace the challenge | Risk-taking | Be flexible | Playful mindset |
| Enjoy and use fantasy | Keep open | Be flexible | |
| Playfulness & humor | Enjoy & use fantasy | | |

*Note*: Derived from the Creativity Skills from Torrance (Torrance & Safter, 1999)

## Look at it Another Way

*"We cannot solve our problems*
*with the same thinking we used when we created them."*
Einstein

The skill Look at it Another Way is maybe closest related to playfulness, since the definition of playfulness is about reframing, looking at things from a different perspective, which helps in seeing new opportunities. People all have their own familiar way of looking at things. Being able to break out of that routine and challenge yourself to take another unusual perspective opens a world of playfulness and possibilities (Torrance & Safter, 1999).

A deliberate set of tools or objects that facilitates breaking out of routines and generate new perspectives would help individuals to become more flexible and empathic. This will enhance a more playful live.

**Playfulness and Humor**

"With its outward expression of laughter, humor is perhaps the most recognizable playful quality we have. (…) in fact, one might even say that having a sense of humor is equivalent to having a sense of playfulness." (DeBenedet, 2018, p.105**)**

To a lot of people humor is a survival technique and a healing force. A person with a good sense of humor is someone who sees himself and others in a somewhat distant and detached way. Such a person can laugh at himself and events in life and at the same time remain in contact with people and events in a positive way (Torrance & Safter, 1999).

Definitions of humor include elements such as unusual combinations and surprise. Playing with analogies is a way to produce laughter and humor (Torrance & Safter, 1999).

A deliberate set of tools or objects that trigger laughter and surprise, would invite individuals to play and have fun. This will enhance a more playful live.

**Enjoy and Use Fantasy**

> *"Imagination is more important than knowledge.*
> *Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."*
> Einstein

Imagination is often seen as something childlike and misjudged as inconvenient and inappropriate when growing up. While fantasy and imagination inspire intrinsic motivation, encourage creativity and nurture emotional and intellectual growth. And next to that it is intriguing, engaging and fun (Burnett & Figliotti, 2015)!

Fantasy provides an almost endless supply of analogies: from personal analogies (imagining what it is like to be a drop of paint, a kitchen appliance, or a chair) to analogies in nature, fairy tales and future scenarios (Torrance & Safter, 1999).

A deliberate set of tools or object that helps people to use analogies and fantasy would help people to develop their imagination and mental flexibility. This will enhance a more playful live.

**Embrace the Challenge**

This skill is about developing a mindset of being open to challenges as opportunities to something new. The key of Embracing the Challenge is not to freeze by the stress of the situation, but to work through the complexity, and to view the challenge as potential possibilities (Burnett & Figliotti, 2015). To see challenges as a game you could say, in which you can overcome things, experience victory but also fail, learn, and try again. This skill as well is about reframing: Instead of 'I must...' we could say 'I have the opportunity to...'. A deliberate set of tools and objects that encourage people to explore the challenge, make mistakes, learn, and keep going, would enhance a more playful live.

For an overview of these four skills and in what way they relate to playfulness see the table below.

**Table 1**

*Playfulness Skills, Qualities and Benefits of Playfulness*

| Primary Playfulness Skills | Qualities enhancing Playful Intelligence | Secondary playfulness skills (result of practicing primary playfulness skills) | Benefits of Playfulness (which lead to more resilience) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Look at it Another Way | Imagination, Sociability | Be Flexible | Reframe (mental flexibility), Empathy |
| Playfulness and humor | Humor, Wonder | Enjoy and Use Fantasy | Mental flexibility |
| Enjoy and Use Fantasy | Imagination, Wonder | Keep open, Be Flexible | Mental Flexibility |
| Embrace the challenge | Spontaneity | Risk-Taking, Be Flexible | Tolerance for risk |

*Note*: The Primary Playfulness Skills are related to qualities that enhance Playful Intelligence as described by DeBenedet. By practicing the Primary Playfulness Skills, also the Secondary Playfulness Skills are developed. The result of this are the benefits of Playfulness, which altogether lead to more resilience.

## Igniting Playful Behavior

There is already a lot of knowledge out there about the benefits of living more playfully, and this definitely motivates people to live more playful. But there is a gap between being motivated and actually changing your behavior.

Making the connection to behavioral design would be a good next step to really start changing people's behavior. Two of the most important lessons from behavior design are: *help people do what they already want to do* and *make them feel successful*. A good way to kick-start a more playful life is by starting small. Baby steps towards the bigger aspiration result in a higher success-rate and builds motivation to continue this new behavior. B.J. Fogg calls these Tiny Habits® (Fogg, 2019). See for more information on his method https://behaviormodel.org/. In the context of my

Masters Project, they will become *Tiny Playful Habits*. For each of the four Playfulness skills I will create Tiny Playful Habits.

There are plenty of existing creativity *tools and techniques* for each of the four playfulness skills. For example: "Forced-fit" (offering people random stimulus and use it to change their perspective on the challenge), and "Heroes" (how would superman deal with this?). DeBenedet also mentions a few exercises in his book to practice reframing, for example: "Empathize with your enemy", and "Giving yourself permission to daydream" (DeBenedet, 2018). For each of the playfulness skills I will explore existing tools and translate them into something that stimulates individuals in playful behavior.

Making it tangible also helps as a reminder or catalyzer of new behavior. What *objects* or other visual cues might invite or stimulate people to live and work more playfully? I will explore, design and test tangible objects for each of the four playfulness skills.

The most interesting Tiny Playful Habits, tools & techniques, and objects I will collect in a prototype of a *playfulness toolkit*, which is the end product of my master's project.

**SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN**

**Plan to Achieve Your Goals and Outcomes**

I will make a prototype of a Playfulness toolkit, consisting of Tiny Playful Habits, tools & techniques and objects that help people develop their playfulness. To reach this I will do the following:

For each Playfulness skill, I will explore existing tools & techniques and translate them into a form that helps individuals to live and work more playful. I will test and evaluate these tools & techniques with friends, colleagues, and family members to improve them.

I will organize an ideation session to generate ideas for Tiny Playful Habits and anchors as a reminder for each of the Playfulness skills.

I will select the most interesting Tiny Playful Habits®, objects and tools & techniques and create a first prototype of my Playfulness toolkit. I will test & evaluate this prototype with friends, colleagues, and family members.

Simultaneously along this journey, I will apply my own Tiny Playful Habits, objects and tools & techniques and reflect on these to learn what works best. I will also share my insights and ideas about the four Playfulness Skills in at least two short posts on LinkedIn.

In my current profession as a (self-employed) service designer, I already use creativity and playfulness to create space for change, to facilitate aha! -moments and increase ownership and engagement. I'm planning on further developing and implementing the Playfulness Toolkit and using it myself in my projects, maybe even selling the toolkit to stimulate and facilitate others to work and live more playfully.

**Project Timeline**

In February I will work on and submit my concept paper section 1-3 (12 hours).

In week 7-10 I will:

- Explore literature & collect existing tools & techniques for the four Playfulness Skills (16 hrs)

- Build and write my literature for the four Playfulness Skills further based on literature exploration (Section 1-3 - 16 hrs)

In week 11-12 I will:

- Generate first tools for my Playfulness toolkit (8 hrs)

- Create first objects for my Playfulness toolkit (8 hrs)

In week 13 I will:

- Organize and facilitate an ideation session on Tiny Playful Habits (8 hrs)

- Write a short post on one of these playfulness skills and post it on LinkedIn (4 hrs)

- Evaluate the tools & objects and learn (4 hrs)

In week 14-16 I will:

- Adjust and work further on the Playfulness toolkit (4 hrs)

- Build a prototype of the toolkit itself and design the 'unboxing experience' (8 hrs)

- Evaluate the toolkit & lessons learned (4 hours)

- Writing section Section 4-6 (week 15 - 8 hrs)

Week 16-19 will be a period of finalizing everything:

- Write a short post on one of these playfulness skills and post it on LinkedIn (4 hrs)

- Finalizing prototype Playfulness toolkit (8 hrs)

- Final write-up of the paper (16 hrs)

- Submission of the entire project (week 18, May 2nd)

- Submission of final approved docs & Digital commons (week 19, May 9th)

Week 20 I will share my project in class.

This is 128 hours in total. Below a visual overview of this planning.

**Table 2**

*Planning*

| | Jan | February | | | | March | | | | | April | | | | May | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Week numbers* | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| Concept paper | ░ | ░ | ░ | D | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Explore literature, collect tools Playfulness Skills | | | | ░ | ░ | ░ | ░ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Write Paper section 1-3 | | | | ░ | ░ | ░ | ░ | ░ | D | | | | | | | | |
| Generate first tools & objects for playfulness toolkit | | | | | | | | ░ | ░ | | | | | | | | |
| Facilitate workshop Playful Tiny Habits | | | | | | | | | | ░ | | | | | | | |
| Write LinkedIn post on Playfulness | | | | | | | | | | ░ | | | | | | | |
| Evaluate first tools & objects | | | | | | | | | | ░ | | | | | | | |
| Adjust and work further on the Playfulness toolkit | | | | | | | | | | | ░ | ░ | | | | | |

| Task | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Build prototype of the toolkit & evaluate | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Write section Section 4-6 | | | | | | | | | | | | D | | | | | | | | |
| Finalize prototype toolkit | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Write LinkedIn post on Playfulness | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Final write-up | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Submit entire project | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | D | | | | |
| Approval of project | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | D | | | |
| Submit to Digital Commons | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SHARE IN CLASS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## Evaluation Plan

Some ideas for evaluating the success of my project:

- When I have developed at least two tools or objects for each Playfulness skill

- When I have managed to enjoy my journey (used a playful approach myself)

- When I have submitted two posts in LinkedIn about Playfulness


The systems I have in place for the journey:

- Feedback and input on content from: participants, sounding board partner (my best friend, fellow-designer and creativity expert Aniek Bax), Professor Susan Keller-Mathers.

- Bi-weekly intervision and reflection on process with my study-mates Jeanette and Mieke.

**SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES**

**Introduction**

There are many outcomes of this project. They include:

1. Exploration of Literature on Playfulness

2. Prototype of the Tiny Playful Habits Kit

3. Prototype of the Playfulness Toolkit

4. Playfulness Blogs

I will describe the outcomes in more detail below.

**Exploration of Literature on Playfulness**

The exploration of literature on Playfulness in Section two was a necessary basis for developing a playfulness toolkit. Elaborating on each of the four playfulness skills (Playfulness and Humor, Enjoy and Use Fantasy, Embrace the Challenge and Look at it Another Way) helped and inspired me to create all the other outcomes. I needed a slightly revised formulation of the Playfulness Skills, to make them distinctive and clear when using them in my own contexts. These are the Playfulness Skills I will use from here:

- Let Humor Flow

- Use Fantasy

- Embrace the Challenge

- Look at it Another Way

**Tiny Playful Habits Kit**

While ideating about the playfulness toolkit, I first developed a prototype of a *Tiny Playful Habits kit*, which is also part of the Playfulness toolkit. I will describe it as a separate outcome, also since it can be used as a stand-alone product.

I had the opportunity to facilitate two workshops on Playfulness for teachers at Nyenrode University. In this workshop participants designed their own Tiny Playful Habits based on their own Playfulness aspiration. Each workshop had a duration of 45 minutes. I noticed that participants had trouble designing Tiny Playful Habits in such a short period of time. Not only the time but also their high ambitions were a barrier: most of them had trouble making behavior tiny. Probably because we as adults are used to set a high bar. Anything less is not worth aiming for. The outcome of these workshops was very insightful for the further development of my Playfulness Toolkit.

To facilitate people in designing their own Tiny Playful Habit, I had to give people a more worked-out starting point. Therefore, I developed different prototypes, tested them with friends and improved it several times. Figure 4 and 5 show the iterations this Tiny Playful Habits kit has gone through, the main feedback I got on each prototype is listed in Table 3.

**Figure 4**

*Prototype 1, 2 and 3 of the Tiny Playful Habit Toolkit*



**Figure 5**

*Final prototype of the Tiny Playful Habit Toolkit*



*Note*: each of the Playfulness Skills has its own color. Yellow is Use Fantasy, blue is Let Humor

Flow, green is Embrace the challenge and pink is Look at it another way.

**Table 3**

*Iterations of Tiny Playful Habits Kit*

| Prototype | Feedback |
|-----------|----------|
| #1 | Use color-coding for Playfulness Skills |
| #2 | Option to customize: I want to decide myself on how to celebrate success (last part of Tiny Habit) |
| #3 | Would be more playful to make it completely customizable, and blank cards are needed to add new ideas |
| Final | This prototype has color-coding, is fully customizable, and has a lot of blank cards |

*Note*: received feedback for each prototype

The final prototype can be used as follows:

- *Formulate aspiration*: Ask participants which playfulness skill they want to develop further. Then explore the aspiration behind it: if you would succeed, what would it bring you? What could you do or feel then that you currently cannot?

- *Generate playful behaviors*: Start with generating behaviors that help reach this aspiration. Participants can use the behaviors on the cards (with the color matching the playfulness skill they want to develop more) and add new behaviors on the blank cards. Encourage them to make the behavior as tiny as possible.

- *Select behavior and make it tiny*: Then let participants select one of the behaviors that they see themselves doing ánd that is effective in reaching their aspiration.

- *Choose anchor moment*: For the behavior they chose, they generate anchor moments: what routines already exist around the situation you want to approach more playfully? Which of them are useful to use as a reminder to actually do your new behavior?

- *Choose celebration*: Finally, participants design the way of celebrating their success. What conscious emotion or gesture can you add to make the behavior stick?

With these three ingredients (anchor moment, tiny behavior and celebration) participants create their own Tiny Playful Habit. Using the different parts of the cards as puzzle pieces makes it a playful activity. As an extra playful activity participants could create Tiny Playful Habits for each other that work or don't make sense at all, just for fun. The duration of such an exercise is one and a half hour with a small group (maximum of five participants) and two hours with a bigger group (maximum of 12 participants).

## Prototype of the Playfulness Toolkit

In the process of developing the Playfulness Toolkit, I started collecting both existing and new exercises, tools and objects for each of the Playfulness skills. Along the journey the shape of the toolkit changed. Where I originally thought about a toolkit

filled with separately applicable tools, I found that a creative process guiding people through a journey to develop a playful mindset makes more sense. As stated in the literature (Section two), the first step to ignite playfulness is to create awareness about the benefits of Playfulness. Once people are aware of their personal benefits, they are much more motivated to deliberately apply new playful behavior. Therefore, the final form of the Playfulness toolkit is a game: going through the different phases of the game helps both individuals and teams to practice with and develop a playful mindset in a specific situation. A situation they aspire to approach more playfully.

I put a lot of thought in a playful unboxing experience, but it took some time before everything fell into place. Once I decided a simple process is helpful in solving the right challenge and in guiding people the right way towards a more playful live, the idea for a game raised. The Playfulness Toolkit now consists of a game with three phases: Start, Exploring and Doing. These phases are generally the phases of the CPS model: clarification (Start), transformation (exploring) and implementation (Doing) (Puccio et al., 2011).

**Figure 6**
*The Playfulness Toolkit*



**The Start Phase**

In the Start phase participants create clarity about their challenge: in what situation or what parts of your live do you want to be more playful? Do you want to raise your kids more playful? Do you want more playfulness in your relationship(s)? Or do you want to approach specific challenges at work in a more playful way?

In the game I call this first phase the *Look-out*: from here you can oversee everything and choose a point at the horizon where you wish to go to. At the look-out place on the board participants can pick-up an aspiration-card from a pile to fill out, to have a clear starting point for the rest of the game. And of course, they can choose a playful avatar to walk over the board.

**Figure 7**

*The Start Phase: Formulating Your Challenge at the Look-out*



**The Exploring Phase**

Now it is time to roll the dice! Participants continue their journey by throwing one of the four Playfulness Skills: Look at it Another Way, Embrace the Challenge, Let Humor Flow or Use Fantasy. Every Playfulness Skill gets a matching environment on the game-board. Look at it Another Way is taking participants to the *Valley with many faces*, Embrace the Challenge is the *Cliff of neverthought*, Let Humor Flow becomes the *Roaring brook* and finally, Use Fantasy leads participants through the *Forest of imagination*.

Participants put their avatar on the Playfulness Skill the dice shows. From the point of view of this Playfulness skill participants start to explore solutions for their challenge. On each of the Playfulness Skills a pile of cards offers tools & techniques to find new ideas for more playful behavior in their specific situation (see Figure 8):

- Look at it another way:

- o *Superhero*: what if superman would solve your challenge? What ideas would he have for new playful behavior? Or Ghandi? Or Lady Gaga? Or..?

- o *Time travel*: how would your future-you would solve your challenge? What ideas would he/she have for more playful behavior? And your younger-you?

- o *Another perspective*: what if you change your perspective literally: hang above or next to the situation...? What ideas does it give you for more playful behavior?

- o *With new eyes*: what if you look at the situation as if it were in a museum, full of curiosity and wonder. What new ideas do you see for more playful behavior?

- Embrace the challenge:

  - o *The sailboat*: what are catalyzers for your aspired situation (wind in the sail)? What is holding you back (anchors)? How can you use or overcome these?

  - o *Make it big*: imagine the situation would become worse. What would it look like? What is needed for more playful behavior?

  - o *Pieces*: in what pieces can you break down your challenge or the situation? How can you start with one of them to approach it more playfully?

- o  *Game*: how can you make it a game? What are the rules of the game? What is going to be your first challenge? When did you reach level 1?

- Let Humor Flow:

  - o  *Humor:* how can humor help you to approach this situation more playfully?

  - o  *Distance*: look at the situation from a distance: what is actually quite funny about it?

  - o  *Pet*: if you would compare your challenge or situation with a pet, how would you tell us about it? What new ideas does this give you for more playful behavior?

  - o  *Self-mocking*: in what way can you laugh about yourself in this situation? What new ideas for more playful behavior does it give you?

- Use Fantasy:

  - o  *Object*: which object plays a role in the situation you want to be more playful in? Imagine you would be this object: what would you experience? What new ideas for more playful behavior does it give you?

  - o  *Future*: imagine you would solve your challene, what is the most relevant change? How could you start with achieving that?

- *Imagine*: imagine you could fly, dive, not talk, communicate without words, get a strange color, become big or small, …? What new ideas for more playful behavior does it give you?
- *Anti-problem*: imagine you would make the situation worse; you would be even less playful. What new ideas for more playful behavior does this give you?

For each Playfulness tool participants apply on their challenge they get a suitable object as a kind of reward and to get in the mood even more. For example, after Look at it Another Way they can put on a silly pair of glasses.

After each perspective or Playfulness Skill participants can choose to roll the dice again or move on to the next part of the game. If they feel they already have a playful behavior they like to work on further, they can continue to the next part.

**Figure 8**

*Exploration Cards: Tools for Each Playfulness Skill*



*Note:* Each playfulness skill is represented by its own world. Let Humor Flow is the Roaring brook, Look at it Another Way is the Valley of many faces, Use Fantasy is the Forest of imagination, and Embrace the Challenge is the Cliff of never thought.

**The Doing Phase**

The last part of the game is Doing (see Figure 9). In this phase participants create their own Tiny Playful Habit step by step, a new routine that helps them to set a first step towards the aspired playful behavior. In the game it is called the *Big City of Tiny Towers*. The steps in the game are like the process described for the Tiny Playful Habits Kit:

- *Tiny behavior*: How can you make the behavior you choose to work on further as tiny as possible? There is a pile of Tiny Playful Habit recipes where the participant can capture their own recipe step by step. In this step they fill in the tiny behavior.

- *Anchor moment*: What routines already exist around the solution you have in mind? Which of them are useful to use as a reminder to actually do your new tiny behavior? Here is also a pile of cards with routines to choose from or as inspiration. Participants choose a routine and fill it in on their own recipe card.

- *Celebration*: What conscious emotion or gesture can you add to make the behavior stick? In a pile of cards there are some ways of celebrating as examples. Participants add this to their own recipe card.

The game ends with the participant having his or her own Tiny Playful Habit Recipe card to take home and start practicing.

**Figure 9**

The Doing Phase: Creating Tiny Playful Habits



**Playfulness Post**

The last outcome of the project are my posts related to Playfulness on LinkedIn. My intention was to post two short blogs on Playfulness. I procrastinated for a long time, but eventually I managed to post two times (see Figure 10). What held me back was the fear of not being relevant or interesting. Once I did it I felt relieved and also a little proud. I did it! The positive reactions I received gave me the confidence to share the second blog, in which I involve people in my game. I notice my network is more and more tagging me in Playfulness posts and items, which feels like I'm being recognized as a Playfulness ambassador.

# Figure 10

## Playfulness posts on Linkedin



**Hanneke Hovels** (She/Her)
Service Designer I Design researcher I Playfulness ambassador
4h ·

Ik ben
Jij mag

Mooie woorden op de muur van het gemeentehuis van de Utrechtse Heuvelrug. Het doet mij denken aan spelen, waarschijnlijk omdat ik in het kader van mijn Master Creativity & Change Leadership een playfulness toolkit ontwikkel.

Playfulness wordt in de literatuur gedefinieerd als het vermogen om situaties te 'reframen', en zo nieuwe mogelijkheden te zien. Een speelse mind-set helpt ons om mentaal flexibel, veerkrachtiger en meer empathisch te zijn. Je kunt dit trainen.

Gera Pronk maakte dit korte muurgedicht over Artikel 1 op verzoek van de gemeente. Artikel 1 zegt dat in Nederland iedereen gelijk is, ongeacht godsdienst, levensovertuiging, politieke gezindheid, ras, geslacht of wat dan ook.

Een mooi voorbeeld van een (spel)regel die mogelijkheden geeft in plaats van beperkt. Een regel die je misschien zelfs helpt om meer te spelen.

Waar zou jij graag (meer) speelruimte willen?

#creativity #playfulness

ART.1
IK BEN
JIJ MAG

Gera Pronk

Veerle Migchelbrink and 15 others                    1 comment

Reactions

👍 Like        💬 Comment        ↪ Share        ✈ Send

📊 718 views of your post in the feed

Add a comment...

Most relevant ▾

**Hanneke Hovels** (She/Her)
Service Designer I Design researcher I Playfulness ambassador
1h ·

Kies een kaart! :-)

#playfulness #creativiteit #behaviordesign

Use fantasy     Embrace the challenge
Look at it another way     Let humor flow     haha!

Winnie Nijhoff and 13 others                    3 comments

Reactions

👍 Like        💬 Comment        ↪ Share        ✈ Send

📊 846 views of your post in the feed

Add a comment...

Most relevant ▾

**Lisette van Elst** · 1st                              1d ···
Maakt merkstrategie beeldend en begrijpelijk voor de twee leukste ...
HUMOR!! 😄
Like · 2 | Reply

**Carian van der Sman** · 1st                          1d ···
Brengt creativiteit in gezondheidsnetwerken
Embrace the challenge ... hoewel ik daar ook wel een beetje jeuk van krijg, zoals "duik in je weeën". haha!

## SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS

### Introduction

This journey has brought me a lot of insights. In this section I will elaborate on the most relevant learnings both on process and content.

### Process Learnings

I experienced that I'm much more creative once I get away from the screen. Using paper, scissors, post-its and pens, creating something tangible, helps me to shape thoughts and ideas. During my master's project I waited too long, next time I will start creating sooner, not only after my writing is done. Making things tangible is even a playful and deliberate way of getting un-stuck. A tool to add to the Playfulness Toolkit.

Once I started making things tangible, my own ideation improved. Not only my creative juices started flowing, also it was relatively easy to improve and develop my ideas further. The iterations I made on the prototype of the Tiny Playful Habits kit couldn't be made without getting feedback from friends on my tangible prototypes. Although it is scary to show others your new and unrefined ideas, feeling vulnerable and insecure about the results from time to time, it had so much added value. In the future this is the way I want to embrace challenges more.

My fellow students (master matties) Jeannette and Mieke helped me through tough times in the process as well. Meeting with them via Zoom and keeping each other updated via WhatsApp was inspiring and motivating. Having people going through the same struggles I was going through, helped me putting things in a different perspective.

Zooming out and looking at Playfulness as part of my future work and live, I realize I still feel insecure about the topic from time to time. I must work further on my pitch, being able to convince others of the value of playfulness. And for myself: why stimulating people to live and work more playfully is meaningful. I believe that this stronger argumentation for myself also helps me to overcome the fear of sharing my insights and experiences around playfulness with the world. But I now know it also works the other way: sharing my knowledge and ideas about Playfulness and getting reactions on that, strengthens me in being a Playfulness Ambassador.

**Content Learnings**

The biggest content learning for me was the shift from a Playfulness Toolkit filled with independent tools, objects and Tiny Playful Habit towards a Playfulness Toolkit that offers a creative process, guiding people the way towards a more playful mind-set. I now believe going through a process first and exploring their personal benefits of playfulness helps to formulate better and more appealing Tiny Playful Habits. After this experience people might be able to use independent tools, objects and Tiny Playful Habits as well.

Already somewhere halfway my master's study, I learned that a process, how small it might be, makes the result and experience better. Apparently, it took me some time to remember this, doing my masters project.

Another learning for me was, that using a selection of the Creativity Skills and transforming them into Playfulness Skills, made me feel a bit uncertain. As if I had to make it completely scientifically proven, and otherwise it would have no value. I don't

believe that anymore. I now even think that I need to modify the four Playfulness Skills a bit more to make them my own and create my own narrative. I want them to be clear and distinctive enough to explain to clients and participants.

As a creativity student I sometimes felt like cheating, using playfulness as my 'thing', while it is just a part of creativity. Who was I to 'claim' playfulness? Doing my master's project made me realize that this is what the master is all about: finding my 'thing' within creativity. This realization helps me to embrace playfulness more.

# SECTION SIX: CONCLUSIONS

What I know now about Creativity and Change Leadership that I didn't know before is that there is a whole science behind it. All the Creativity Scholars I have 'met' along the way, help me to be a better Change Leader.

What I see myself doing next is:

- Using the Playfulness Toolkit with individuals and teams, facilitating them in integrating more playfulness in their work and lives. Also testing what works and what not, further refining the game and adding tools for each Playfulness Skill. I have already planned a workshop for Nyenrode Business University in Summer where I can apply and test my Playfulness Toolkit.

- Working out further the Playfulness Toolkit, turning the prototype into a 'real' toolkit. I would love the participants to be their own avatars, walking through the process literally.

- Integrating the tools in the toolkit in my projects and live. That way I keep practicing what I preach, living a playful live.

- Keep learning about Playfulness, gathering more knowledge and examples of why it is important. That way strengthening myself as a change leader and ambassador of playfulness.

- Keep challenging myself to approach my own life and work playfully, embracing uncertainties and enjoying the journey.

*"Creativity is playfully creating mental space for change."*
Hanneke Hövels

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Hanneke Hövels

5/8/2022