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EXPLORING TEAM DYNAMICS

Teamwork and LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

HOW DID MACGYVER GET INVOLVED?

LEGO SERIOUS PLAY and Improvisation

By **Lukas Zenk**

Over the past decades, our globalized world has become even more dynamic and we are now facing unprecedented challenges; the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the latest examples of this. Organizations have to continuously adapt to their environments due to a faster pace of change. In addition to organizational structures that are necessary for this purpose, radical collaboration in constantly transforming teams is of paramount importance. It is no longer sufficient to carry out classic team meetings to distribute already known information. Instead, both the different expertise of people and their collaborative integration of knowledge are needed.

To face this challenges, improvisational skills are becoming more and more important. Improvisation

(lat. *improvisus*) essentially means to deal constructively with unpredictable situations. Instead of the idea of being able to completely foresee and plan the future, currently available resources have to be used collaboratively in the here and now. In Applied Improvisation, techniques and mindsets from improvisational theater, among others, are trained for the professional context. A basic principle for this is called “Yes, And”. In order to develop new scenes and theater pieces in a collaborative way on stage in real-time, all ideas in the ensemble have to be accepted (Yes) and further ideas are built upon them (And). Applied in a professional context, the aim is not to blindly accept every idea, but at least to recognize the perspective of others and to further develop it. Instead of a typical meeting culture of

“Yes, but”, in which the ideas of others are (kindly) blocked in order to defend one’s own idea, the mindset of “Yes, and” encourages to respect the knowledge, the experiences and ideas of others and to further enhance them.

In LEGO SERIOUS PLAY (LSP) a variety of these and other improvisation techniques and principles are included to strengthen collaborative processes in teams. Three examples are described in the following: (1) Individual Improvisation: In LSP, challenging questions are asked. Instead of answering them using existing explicit knowledge, participants start to explore their own implicit knowledge using Lego bricks. Answers emerge in the very moment and first models are built. This process is also called bricolage, using the available material to solve a problem. The movie character MacGyver, who builds explosive devices on the fly, is a well-known example of such a bricoleur, as is the Apollo 13 team, which improvised with technical material in a space mission in order to survive. (2) Collaborative improvisation: The individual Lego models are presented and discussed in a further process step. The team members thereby perceive the models of the others (Yes) and combine them into a shared model to develop a common understanding (And). Following this process, team members exchange ideas continuously to develop a



common understanding in the moment. (3) Real-Time Creativity: Improvisation means having only little time between planning and action, or in the most extreme case, to plan and act simultaneously (real-time). Instead of performing routines, new ideas and solutions are developed ad-hoc (creativity). In LSP, following approaches of Mintzberg, attention is paid to the current situation rather than developing rigid long-term plans. The concepts of Real-Time Strategies clearly reflect this principle. To understand and solve complex and dynamic problems, neither individual and singular perspectives nor

long-term and rigid plans are helpful. Instead, collaborative processes are needed, especially in teams, in which the currently available experience and knowledge of all participants are used to constructively face rapid social changes. The methods and mindsets in improvisation, which are also included in the core processes of LSP, support teams on a fundamental level in doing so.

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