

# Open-source/ <Introduction to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®>



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# LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

## Basic principles and philosophy

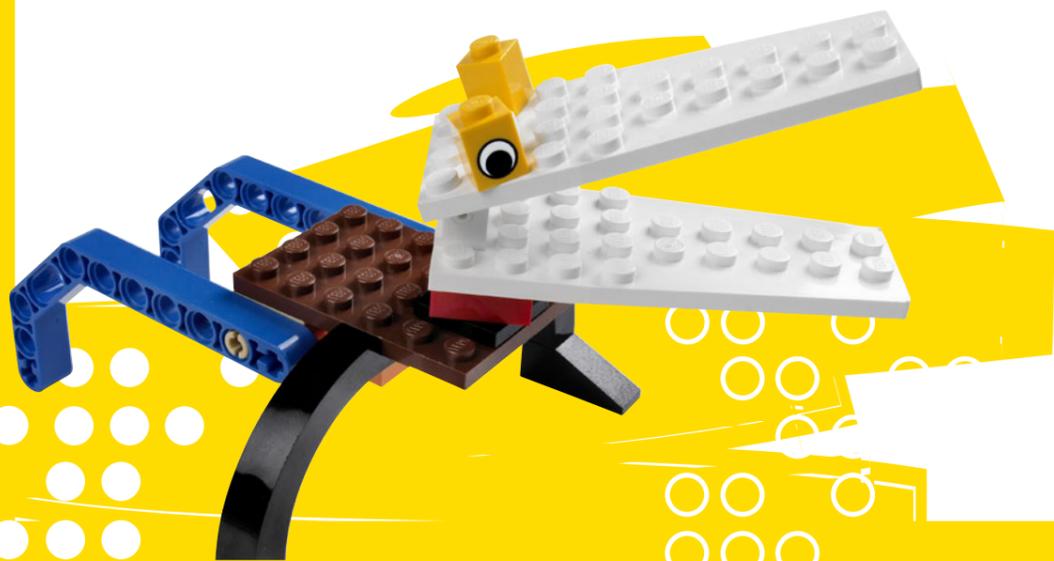
This document outlines the basic principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. It has been made available by the LEGO Group under a Creative Commons licence ('Attribution Share Alike': see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/> for licence details). Over the past decade, the LEGO Group has supported the rigorous and careful development of three types of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® resources:

1. **The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® basic principles and philosophy, upon which everything else is built;**
2. **The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® materials – sets of specially selected LEGO bricks and pieces;**
3. **LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® 'applications' – detailed roadmaps of different workshops which make use of the principles and philosophy, and the materials.**

In the past, all three of these were only available to trained and certificated consultancy professionals. From June 2010, however, the first two of these have been made 'open source'. This document outlines the basic principles and philosophy; and LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® boxes (large sets of LEGO bricks and pieces) are now on sale from the [www.seriousplay.com](http://www.seriousplay.com) website.

It does not include detailed applications, because LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is entering a new phase. New applications will be developed by the international community of users, and may be shared online. In this new phase, we welcome creative uses of these tools, and innovation in the community. This document introduces users to the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® approach, so that good use can be made of the materials. However, in order to make the best use of these methods it is likely that you would benefit from the help of a trained LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator.

*First published June 2010*



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## Introduction -

### Origins of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

#### Origins of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is built upon a process which stems from the heart of LEGO bricks and the LEGO system. Looking for a tool to unlock innovation within the company, the LEGO Group realized that a solution might be found in the LEGO System itself: just as the LEGO Group had been telling children to 'build their dreams' for decades, so perhaps adults could be asked to build their visions for future strategy.

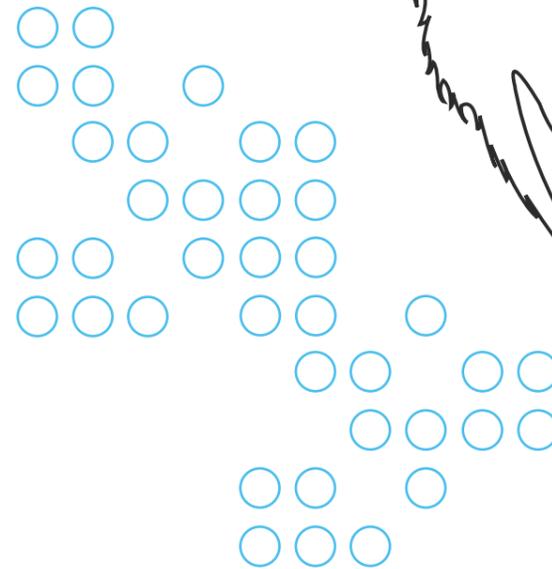
Building upon the inclusive and participatory nature of the LEGO System, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® rejects the idea that external 'experts' must be brought in to identify problems, and to propose solutions; on the contrary, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® begins with the assumption that the answers are 'already in the room', and invites participants to 'think with their hands' to build their understandings. Every member of the team participates, and everyone has a voice.

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® went through a number of iterations from 1998 to 2010, and has been successfully used by businesses around the world. Furthermore, the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® concept has been developed to meet the needs of teachers and educators, and specially designed 'LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® for Education' products and training are available for this target group (see <http://educatorsweb.lego.com>).

#### Why use LEGO bricks?

There are a number of reasons why LEGO bricks are particularly well suited to this kind of process. The material makes it easy for participants to put together satisfying models which represent something that they wish to communicate. They do not need significant technical skills; the LEGO System is familiar to many, and even if they have not used LEGO bricks before, most people find it quite easy to build meaningful constructions.

LEGO bricks come in many shapes and colours, and can often provide inspiration for metaphors through serendipity. They can be built into simple or complex forms, as suits the personality of the builder, and research has shown that people from all walks of life feel comfortable attaching diverse metaphorical meanings to LEGO bricks.



## Why make things, rather than just talking?

Research has shown that the process of making something, which is then discussed, can lead to much more valuable, insightful and honest discussions. (See, for example, David Gauntlett: Creative Explorations, 2007, and Making is Connecting, 2011). The creative, reflective process of making something prompts the brain to work in a different way, and can unlock new perspectives. In addition, when all participants have a constructed object in front of them, at the start of a discussion – an object which represents what they think is important about the issue at stake, before anyone has said a word about it – this gives all participants the opportunity to set their own issues on the table (literally and metaphorically), and they all have an equal standing.

This is quite unlike the typical discussions that occur in places of work, where a dominant personality often identifies the ‘key issues’ at the start, and then the rest of the conversation follows from there. In LEGO SERIOUS PLAY, everyone builds, and everyone discusses. This gives more ‘junior’ or less vocal members of a team the chance to have a say, and perhaps more importantly offers the ‘senior’ or dominant members the opportunity to listen to insights and challenges which they may not have otherwise heard. Indeed, the process of building and collaborating often produces insights which simply would not have appeared in regular discussions.

When we give shape and form to our imagination, by constructing and externalizing concepts – making them tangible and shareable – we can not only reflect on them ourselves, but invite others to reflect with us. LEGO SERIOUS PLAY offers an engaging hands-on environment, where the activity is perceived as meaningful, one’s abilities are in balance with the challenge at hand, and one has the tools to express the emerging knowledge.

LEGO SERIOUS PLAY exemplifies the virtues of the LEGO System as a whole. It is creative, enabling, and open. It does not set any path for the individual or group to follow, but rather embraces and supports any ideas that may emerge, and encourages development and collaboration to make these stronger. Every stage of the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY process involves building with LEGO bricks, utilising the ‘hand-mind connection’: there is never a point where participants merely sit back and write down, or chat about, the issues without building their response first. Therefore everything that is discussed comes from out of the building process, where the hand and mind engage to give visual, metaphorical shape to meaningful things, emotions, and relationships.

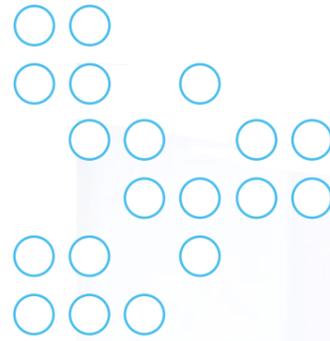
The idea that we need to ‘think with the body’ has gained support from a convergence of new evidence from psychology and neuroscience. These theories emphasize that cognitive processes such as learning and memory are strongly influenced by the way we use our bodies to interact with the physical world. These processes are supported by the use of LEGO bricks, because when a system has an inherent logic, and a set of constraints that can be grasped, it can support endless possibilities. It is easy to pick up, and yet enables development, experimentation and expansion. Our mental work is helped by being able to build visual reminders of different significant aspects of a problem. Neuroscientific researchers have called this ‘reduction of workload’ – reducing the number of things the brain has to deal with at once by off-loading the meanings into visible and tangible objects.

**“LEGO SERIOUS PLAY offers an engaging hands-on environment, where the activity is perceived as meaningful, one’s abilities are in balance with the challenge at hand, and one has the tools to express the emerging knowledge.”**



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## What LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is, and what LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is not



The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® methodology offers a sophisticated means for a group to share ideas, assumptions and understandings; to engage in rich dialogue and discussion; and to work out meaningful solutions to real problems.

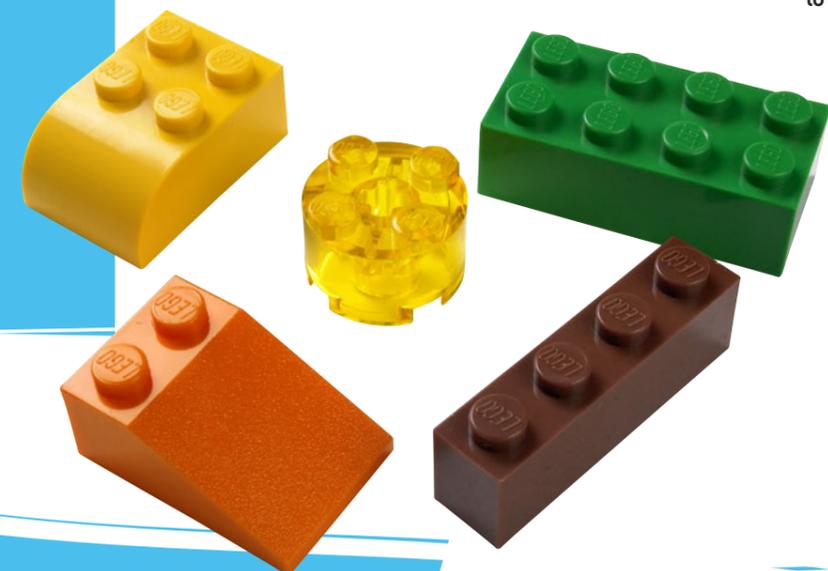
A LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop typically takes at least one day. At its shortest, a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop takes three or four hours. Unsurprisingly – as time is tight in business, and everywhere else – efforts have been made, over the years, to reduce the length of time that LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® takes. But it has clearly been found that shorter workshops are ones of significantly lower quality. If a facilitator was to leave out the skills-building exercises and leap straight into a complex task and encourage participants to race through it quickly – this is simply not effective.

Users of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® methods have to recognize that the strengths of the process lie in its cycles of building, reflection, and collaborative learning. It is a particular kind of facilitated process, used for particular purposes. Therefore:

- **LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is not a fun ice-breaker exercise to start off a meeting. You can use exercises with LEGO bricks for this purpose, of course, but it is not LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®.**
- **LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is not a tool for building organizational diagrams or for planning physical environments (such as buildings or work spaces). You can use LEGO bricks for this purpose, of course, but it is not LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®.**

Also:

- **LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is not anything that anybody says can be done in an hour.**
- **LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is not about communication as persuasion, where one member of the team persuades others that their point of view is the only relevant one, or where the manager communicates messages to their staff.**



# LSP: Open-Source 1/2/3/4/5

## The Core of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is a method that enables constructive reflection and dialogue processes. During a structured process, participants use LEGO bricks to create models that express their thoughts, reflections and ideas.

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method creates the framework within which the bricks are being used – and without this framework, it would not be a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process.

### The core of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® concept consists of:

- **Process structure:** A basic, step-by-step process structure
- **Bricks:** The use of the bricks as implements to create visible, tangible 3D-models that represent thoughts, reflections and ideas.
- **Participants' etiquette**
- **Facilitator's code of conduct**

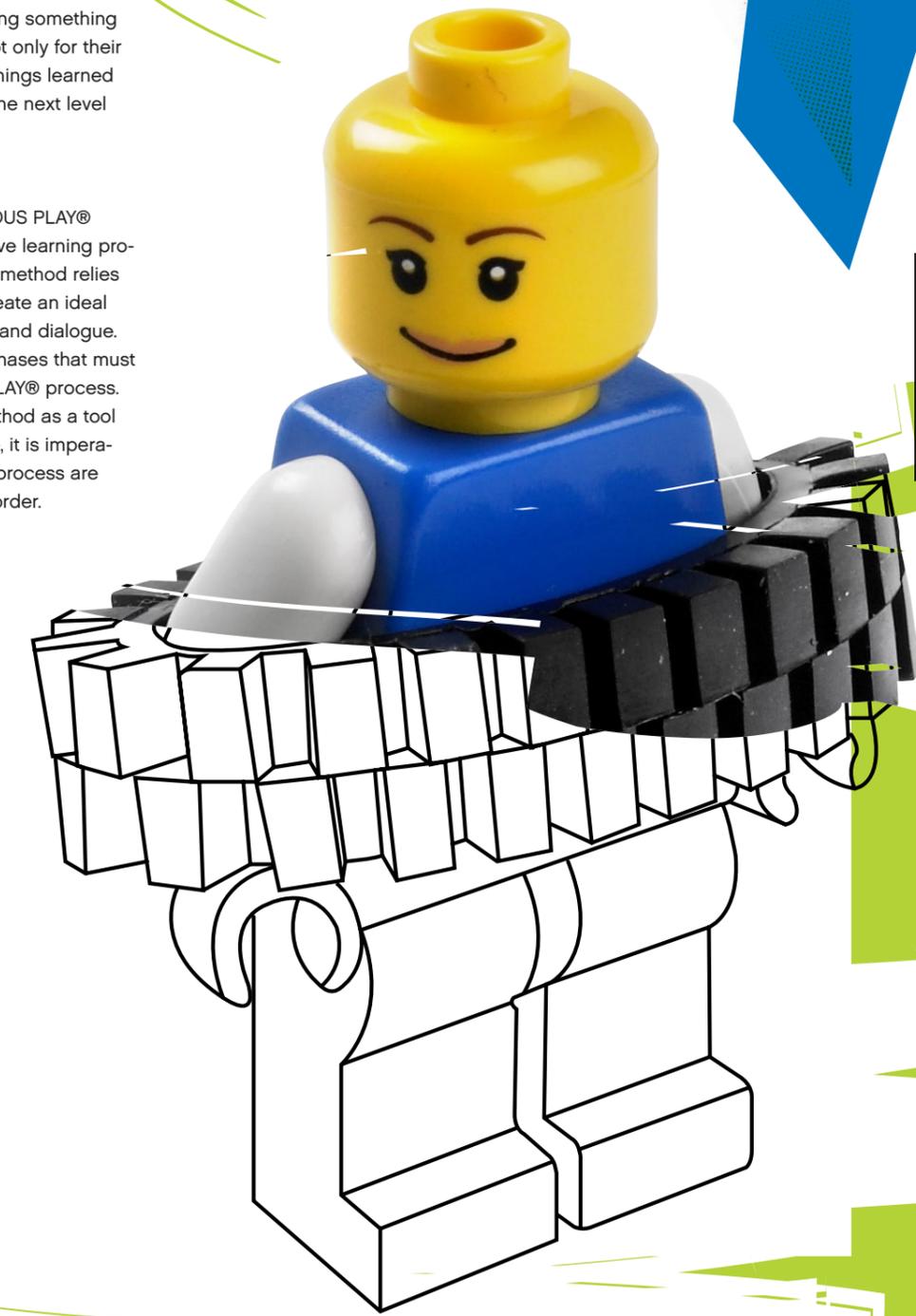
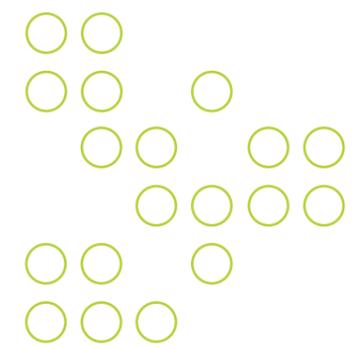
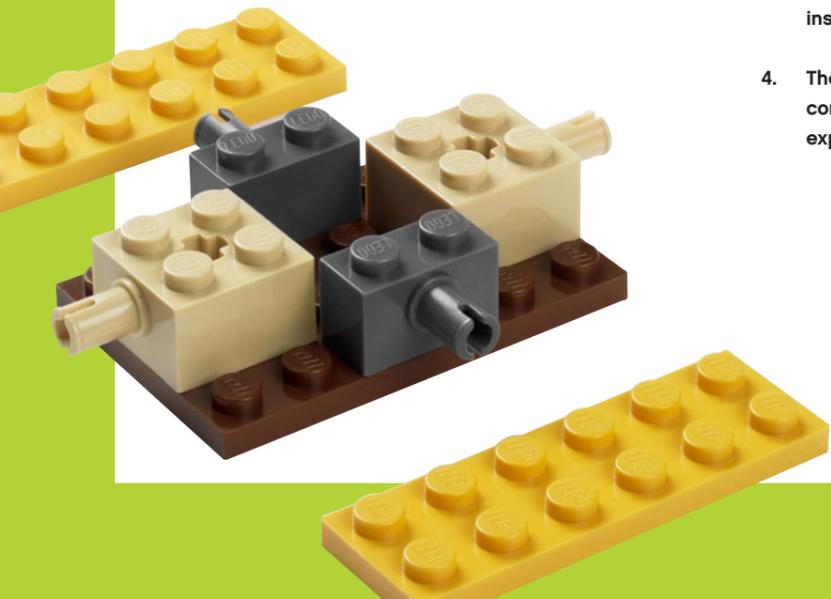
### The process structure

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method is built upon basic knowledge about how people and groups best learn and develop. The process structure of the LSP process is building upon a learning process that ensures that people take ownership of their own learning and learn the most. This learning process implies four steps that you move through in a spiral:

1. The first step of the ideal learning spiral is to help people connect to what they are going to explore, and to understand the context and meaning of what they are about to learn more about.
2. The second step is to involve people in a process where they create a product connected to the targets of exploration, involving their own knowledge and reflections as well as their own creative skills – and their own hands.
3. The third step is to help people reflect on what they have created and look deeper into their own reflections about their own product, in order to become aware of what their explorations have brought them, and in order to gain more insights.
4. The fourth step is that people get a chance to connect their newly gained knowledge to new explorations they would want to pursue.

When people go through an iterative process like the one described here, they are learning something profoundly, and they take ownership not only for their own learning process but also for the things learned and even for taking the knowledge to the next level and developing even more with it.

The process structure of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® builds on the insights about this effective learning process, and the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method relies on this specific process structure to create an ideal environment for constructive reflection and dialogue. This structure consists of three basic phases that must be covered by any LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process. To exploit all the advantages of the method as a tool for constructive reflection and dialogue, it is imperative that the three basic phases of the process are covered every time and in the correct order.



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## The three basic phases of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process

The three basic phases of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process structure are:

**1**



**Phase 1: The Challenge:**  
The facilitator poses the building challenge to the participants.

**2**



**Phase 2: Building:**  
The participants build a LEGO model representing their reflections on the building challenge.

**3**



**Phase 3: Sharing:**  
The participants share the meaning and the story that they have assigned to their own models.

**This sequence – challenge, then building, then sharing – is repeated several times in any LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® session. It is the basic 'building block' of any LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process.**

**1** **Phase 1: The Challenge**

Considering the purpose of the workshop in advance, the facilitator has formulated each building challenge in a way that will open up reflection and dialogue. When the process starts, the building challenge is posed to the participants, the building time is made clear, and the facilitator asks participants to build a model with their LEGO® bricks that expresses their thoughts on, or response to the building challenge.

The facilitator's choice and formulation of the building task is crucial for participants' experience of the process. The challenge for the facilitator is to formulate the building task so that it best serves the purpose of the workshop while following the basic principles of the method.



**2** **Phase 2: Building**

In the building phase, participants build their response to the building challenge with LEGO bricks.

While building their models, participants assign meaning and narrative to their models by means of metaphors, figures of speech, and narratives. During construction of the model, the individual participant undergoes a reflective process through which they gain a clearer and more detailed conception of and insight into their own reflections and thoughts.

The building process both inspires and supports the reflective process, and participants are given a chance to think with their hands. The fact that participants use their hands to build concrete, three-dimensional models of their reflections and ideas, gives them easier access to the knowledge and experience that is stored in their minds and it catalyses new trains of thought.



## 3 Phase 3: Sharing

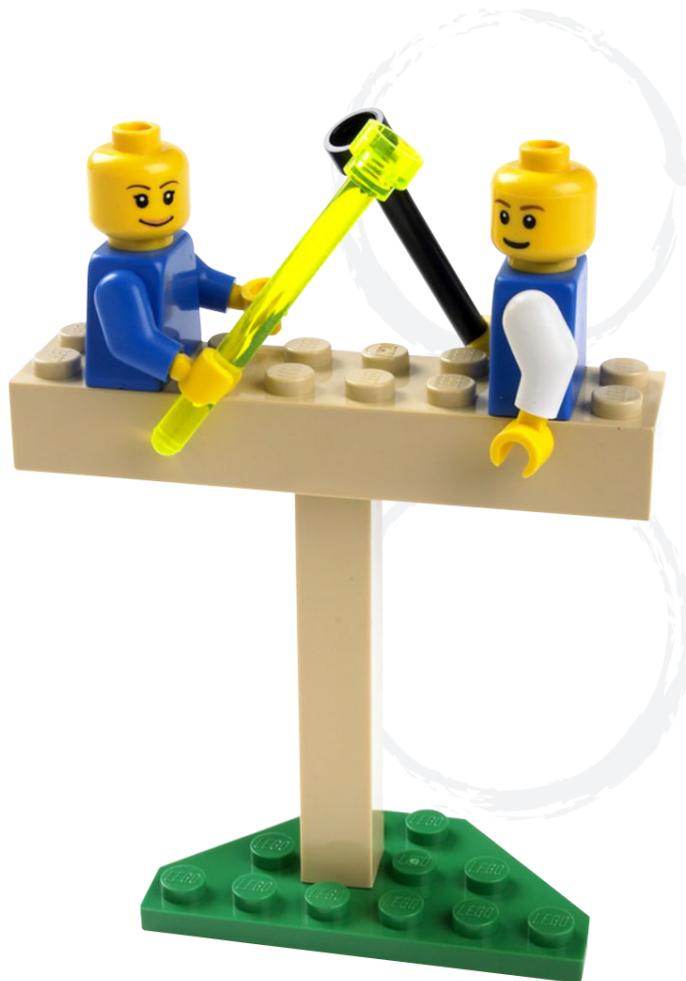
The point of the sharing phase is that participants share their stories and assigned meanings about their models with each other. So one at a time, each participant shares the significance and story that they have assigned to their own model. It is very important that each participant gets the chance to share the story about their model. The sharing is in itself a reflection process, in that when they share their models, participants explore their own expressions more closely. Those listening also have an opportunity to explore in more detail what the narrator expresses through the model. The facilitator plays a crucial part in the sharing phase when asking facilitating questions. Facilitating questions are asked with the purpose of getting participants to reflect more and share more about their thoughts and ideas with each other.

It is crucial that each person's voice is heard during this process. Everybody shares what is on their minds, and everybody is listened to. This is very important to reach one of the purposes of the LSP process: to let everyone share their thoughts in a constructive way and to give everybody a chance to hear each others' points of view. This is on the one hand to create a shared understanding of the group's way of handling the situation, and on the other hand to create the best starting point for people to feel ownership for the reflections and ideas expressed. Eventually this will help them to arrive at the solutions and actions that need to be taken in order for them to handle the situation the best way possible.

### The Bricks

Participants should have equal access to a good range of bricks and pieces, so that they feel they have a pleasing opportunity to express themselves.

The LEGO sets developed for LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® processes are recommended as ideal for this purpose, as they contain many different pieces, shapes, animals and other useful parts. It has been found that using only the most basic rectangular bricks can be frustrating for participants, who do not necessarily want a difficult building challenge. Instead, animals, flags, minifigures, domes, and a wide range of other attractive shapes make it easy for people to pick out metaphorical elements.



### The Etiquette of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY™ process should be carried out in accordance with a set of principles that are managed and controlled by the facilitator. This set of SERIOUS PLAY principles is an integral part of the method, and is known as 'the Etiquette'.

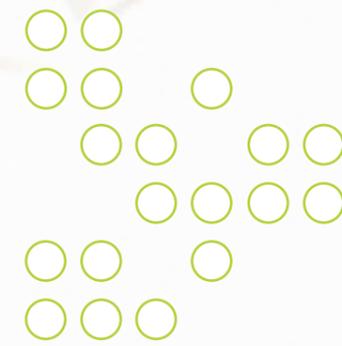
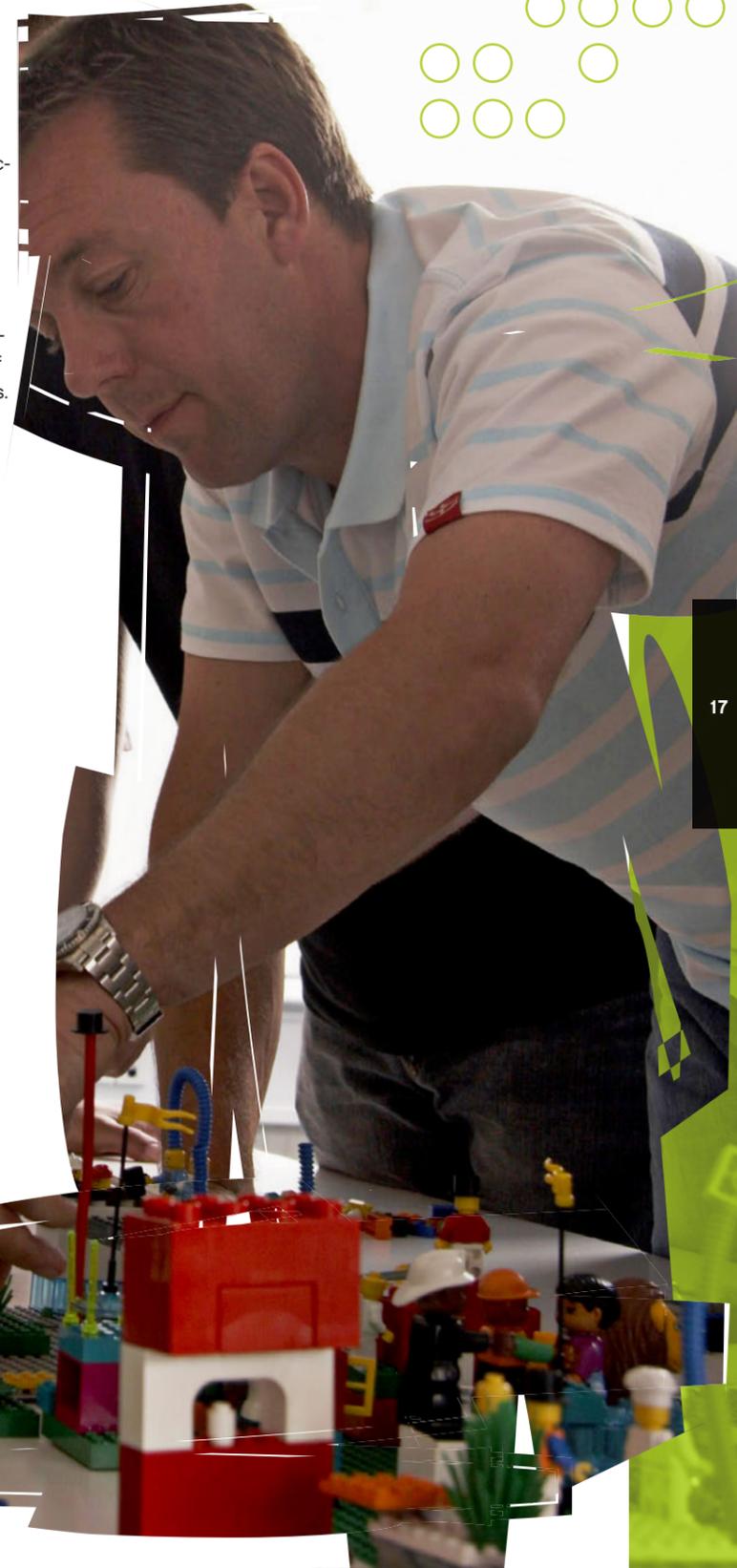
To ensure the integrity of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process, and to gain the greatest benefit from it, participants must remember and adhere to these guidelines. The facilitator has the task of making the etiquette clear to participants throughout the process.

The principles build on a set of values that are central to the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and the thinking that lies behind it.

These basic values state that:

- **The answer is in the system. Therefore, the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method is all about participants expressing themselves and listening to each other.**
- **The multitude of contributions to the dialogue is the important part. The method has the overall goal of getting participants to express their reflections and thoughts — never to produce 'correct' answers or facts.**
- **There is no ONE right answer. Everyone has different views, and this is a good thing. The process enables these different perspectives to come out in the open without anybody saying which is 'right' or 'wrong'.**

The LEGO models are tools, and means to an end. The model in itself is not the result — the model building is a helpful process while reflecting on an issue or problem, and the model is a tool for participants to express and to understand more. The meanings attached to each model are what make it valuable.



## The etiquette of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®



### Participants' Etiquette

The basic values listed above translate into the following etiquette that participants should adhere to:

- The facilitator poses the building challenges, sets the building time and guides the process.
- The LEGO model **IS** your answer to the building challenge.
- There are no wrong answers: There is no right and no wrong way to build. What the model looks like is not the most important thing. What is important is what the participants can share/describe through the model. If the participant says that a model represents something specific, then that is what it is!
- 'Think with your hands': If you don't know what you want to build, it is often a good idea just to start building. The facilitator may encourage participants to do this and say that they should let their hands do the thinking.

- What counts is your meaning for your model and only the person who built the model knows what it means. This means that:
  1. Participants are free to ask questions about each others' models and stories—but they may not express an opinion about or interpret each others' models or stories.
  2. The facilitator asks questions about the model and the story—not about the person. Focus must be on the model and the story around the model—not on the person describing the model.
- 'Listen with your eyes': Look at the model that is being shared – use your visual sense to grasp and understand even more of what the other participants are describing.
- Everybody participates during the full process.

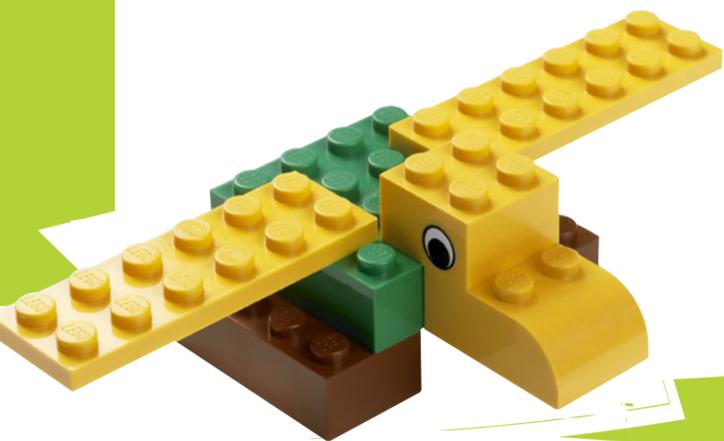
The basic values also translate into the following code of conduct that the facilitator should keep in mind when using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method:

### Facilitator's code of conduct

ALWAYS follow the 3 basic phases of the process.

- Maintain flow in the process. Introduce participants to the method in accordance with the section 'LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building'. Be process-oriented and aware of participants' needs as the process develops.
- Assign building challenges that are clear and serve the workshop's purpose: When creating the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® processes, the facilitator must take into account their knowledge about the participants' starting point.
- A building task must always be completed individually before it may be completed in a group. The level of reflection achieved in the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® processes is a movement from individual reflection to group reflection (where group model building is utilized).
- Use the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® models actively – look for answers in the models and look for details about the stories, the thoughts, ideas and reflections in the models. When the LEGO models are used actively in the process, they are ideally suited as tools to promote constructive reflection and dialogue. Therefore, the facilitator should keep focus on the models, i.e. trust the method and return to the models when facilitating the process.

1. Remember that asking questions of the person who built a specific model is optimal utilization of the model's potential as an implement in the process. Such questions must be aimed at exploring the model and/or the relationship between several models and the story told. Never ask questions that require the person to explain why they intended the model to express what it does.
  2. The models are ideal for bringing out more details and nuances in participants' descriptions of their reflections; and helping participants focus specifically on the reflections they are sharing, rather than on the individuals involved.
- Everyone must be given the chance to explain their model. When participants are asked to build and do their best, it is crucial that they feel that their stories are listened to. Similarly, it is crucial that their contributions to the process are accepted and recognized—never as a simple truth, but for the way, that person shares their story today and from a personal perspective.



## LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building

### LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building

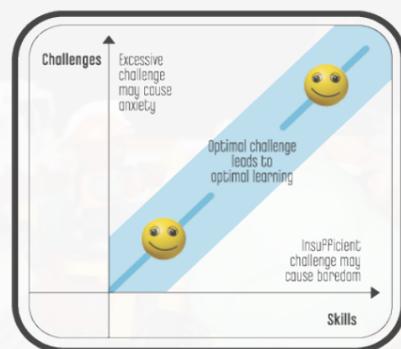
The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method must be implemented correctly to be successful. Thus, participants must be introduced to the method and its use in accordance with the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building program. As soon as participants are proficient in the method and the process, they will be able to use the method constructively and efficiently during a facilitated workshop.

In order for a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop to be successful, it is vital that participants are introduced to the use of the method by first exploring the three phases of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® and the act of building itself. Letting the participants become acquainted with the method before using it for workshop purposes, will ensure the participants' experience of flow in the subsequent LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® processes.

### What is 'flow'?

The theory of flow, developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, states that individuals gain most from a learning or developmental process when they are committed to and enjoy the process. It is imperative for a participant's engagement in a developmental process that they experience 'optimum stretch' in terms of cognitive and emotional involvement – in other words, that their skills and resources are suitably challenged. Flow theory states that if a developmental process is not enough of a challenge, the individual gets bored and the learning curve tails off.

By contrast, if individuals are presented with too difficult a challenge, they become anxious, have difficulty memorizing, and lose grasp of the situation, which also results in a falling learning curve. Humans feel good and develop best, and therefore learn the most, when they are presented with assignments that challenge them optimally – neither too little, nor too much.



With this knowledge from the flow theory, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops should start off with people in flow so that they – as individuals and as a group – gain the most from the process. The facilitator has the responsibility of ensuring flow in the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process. To ensure flow, the facilitator must use their knowledge of the specific group of participants as individuals and as a group, closely monitoring the process and adjusting questions to promote the participants' experience of flow.

The most important time to ensure flow is when a group of people begin learning the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process, and the facilitator does this by following the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building process and principles.

### Principles for the skills building process

The first time a group of people uses LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, the first couple of hours are of crucial importance in ensuring participants' experience of flow. The facilitator ensures flow by applying the principles for LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building and taking participants through the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building process. The aim of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building program is to acquaint participants with the following aspects of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method:

1. The three basic phases of the process.
2. The Etiquette.
3. Use of LEGO bricks as personal metaphors.
4. The use of the LEGO models to share thoughts and present stories.
5. The function of the models and stories as implements in active listening and constructive dialogue.

The skills building must be taught to participants hands-on. It cannot be conveyed to the participants only verbally – telling people about the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and what they are supposed to do during the process will not bring them into flow with the method. They will have to experience it.

Therefore it is necessary that at the start of any LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop, participants should be led through a series of skills-building exercises, such as this sequence:

- To introduce participants to LEGO bricks and to the experience that they are all able to build with the bricks, they are invited to each build a tower. The towers can be 'tested for stability' by the facilitator, causing some of them to break. Participants will typically be sad to see their tower shatter, and this is taken as a learning point: illustrating the emotional connection we can quickly develop to things we have built with our own hands. When participants have built their towers, the facilitator should ask them to share something about their own tower – such as their immediate thoughts about it. Including the sharing phase at this stage will make sure that the participants are introduced to the basic phases of the process from the very beginning. The facilitator can lead the participants' attention to the fact that the participants' etiquette includes that you have to share the story about your model each time you have built a model.

### Metaphors

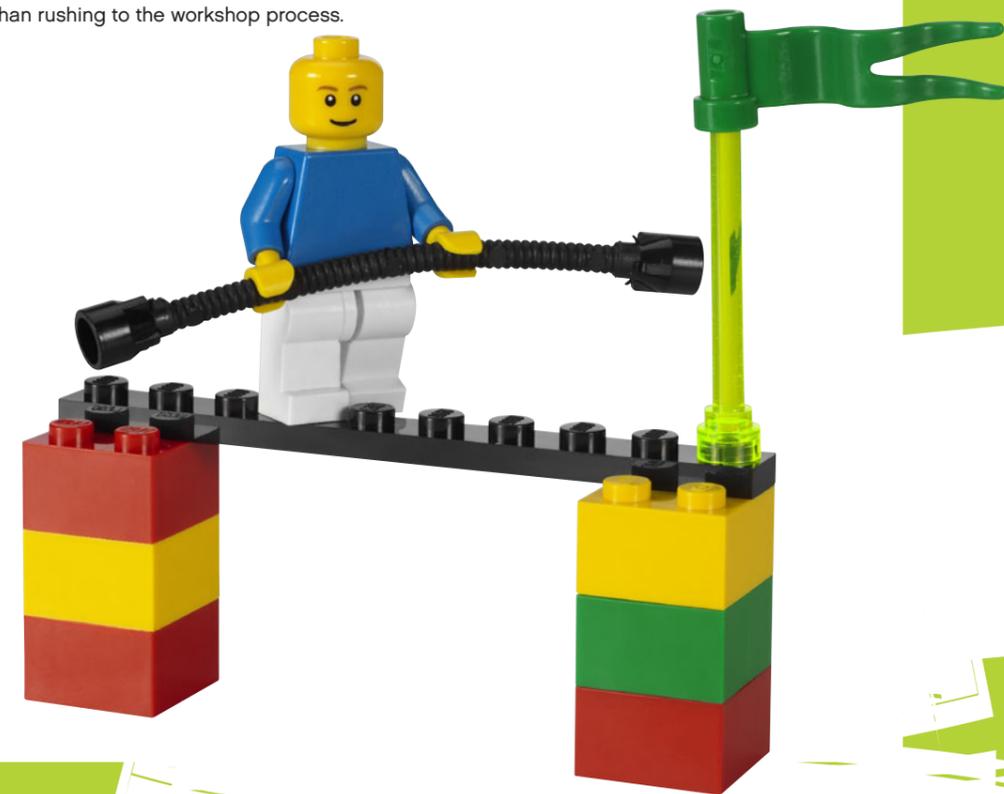




## LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® skills building

- To introduce participants to the use of metaphors, they should first be asked to build a creature in LEGO bricks (a normal, non-metaphorical representation). After this, the facilitator gives the participants just four minutes to turn the creature into a representation of the ideal boss or the worst imaginable boss you can think of. This is a turning-point which shifts participants into building on the metaphorical plane. When participants have shared the meaning of their models, it will be obvious that each model has a number of different, metaphorically meaningful features which the facilitator can highlight in order to emphasize this special way of using the bricks.
- To further develop experience with building metaphors and add the storytelling element, participants are invited to build a metaphorical representation of 'My Monday mornings'. This challenge will help participants see that they can use the bricks and their metaphors to share a storyline and share personal experiences.

In each of these stages, as in every stage of a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® session, participants should build (individually, simultaneously) and then share (going round each participant in turn, each telling the 'story' of their model). The facilitator should be aware of conveying the Participants' Etiquette to the participants during the skills building challenges. If these three building challenges do not seem to get participants into flow with the use of the method, the facilitator should make sure that they reach a state of flow by having them go through some more lightweight building challenges that build their skills in using the method rather than rushing to the workshop process.



## When and why to use LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is a tool which can be used in a wide range of contexts. Unsurprisingly, however, its use is more appropriate in some situations than in others. A LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® practitioner should be sensitive to the needs of a client and should select the most appropriate tools.

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, at its heart, is a method for the facilitation of dialogue and constructive communication within groups of people known or related to each other. It is based on the belief that everyone can contribute to the discussion, the decisions and the outcome.

Therefore it is best suited to:

- **Team building, where a group of people work together (but do not necessarily know each other very well)**
- **Working out the best solution to a shared problem**
- **Strategy development, where all relevant individuals get the opportunity to contribute their vision of the aims and challenges, and consolidate these with the ideas of others**
- **Creating a shared mindset about something**
- **Understanding each other's points of view on a deeper level**
- **Having effective and constructive discussions where everybody is heard**
- **Unleashing creative thinking**

### What LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® can achieve in organizations

When a leader or manager wants to gather the full individual and team brain power to work on complex business issues such as developing strategy plans, handling conflicts, forming and developing teams and working with turnaround and restructuring – then LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is the method of choice.

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® has been used at companies worldwide as an innovative way to increase the commitment, confidence and insight of their executives, managers and employees. It has been used for a broad range of purposes, including:

- **Strategy development and exploration – Examining and evaluating relations to external partners and clients.**
- **Organizational development – For management, teams and individual employees.**
- **Innovation and product development – Unleashing creative thinking and transforming ideas into concrete concepts.**
- **Change management – Facilitating and implementing structural changes and mergers.**

Experience shows great relevance of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method in other areas such as scenario development and testing, mergers and acquisitions, branding, leadership and team development, turnaround and restructuring, market entry, operational efficiency and competitive analysis.



Understanding each other's points of view on a deeper level

## Reflection, ownership and collaboration

A central strength of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is that participants in the process are encouraged and enabled to:



Think and reflect



Contribute to the communication process



Listen to each other



Think and communicate in a different way than they usually do.

Having participated in the intense, creative and exhilarating process of a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® session, participants are more likely to feel ownership of the analysis and decisions made. Having been central to the creation of something – and having been listened to – individuals are more inclined to take ownership of the consequent actions.

Collaboration, too, is strengthened through listening and experiencing a positive, constructive dialogue. Participants come away with skills to communicate more effectively, to engage their imaginations more readily, and to approach their work with increased confidence, commitment and insight.

## Thinking with the hands

The process of reflecting while you seek to translate your thoughts into metaphors, is a helpful process for:



- Accessing new and/or different information in your mind – setting yourself free from the usual thinking patterns and automatic thoughts you 'run into' when confronted with the topic
- Starting and inspiring an associative process where the metaphors as well as the LEGO bricks work as 'inspirators' for new thoughts and connections
- Finding new lines of thought
- Helping the individual keep different points in mind – as they are represented in the model – while working further on the associative trail.
- Externalizing thoughts, feelings, experiences from the person, thus giving the person a possibility to look at these things from an outside view, and consider it all as something that can be acted on, instead of as something that is a part of themselves.

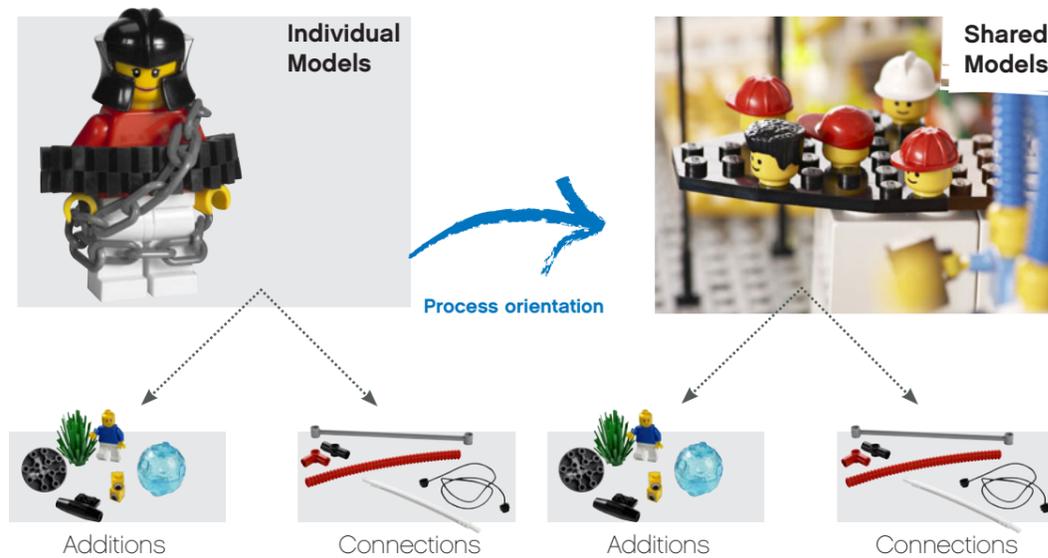
## Using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

As noted above, participants in a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop should be taken through a basic skills building session in order for them to obtain the experience of flow when working with the bricks and the method, and in order to gain the most benefit from the workshop.

After the skills building has been completed, the facilitator can take the participants to the actual workshop level, where the participants use the

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method to engage actively in a process with a specific focus or theme. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method can be used in a variety of different ways – as long as the core of the method is kept intact by making sure that the basic process steps are followed, and that the facilitator and the participants adhere to the Etiquette and code of conduct. The different ways of using the method can be combined in different ways in order to serve the purpose of the workshop.

### Different ways to use the method:



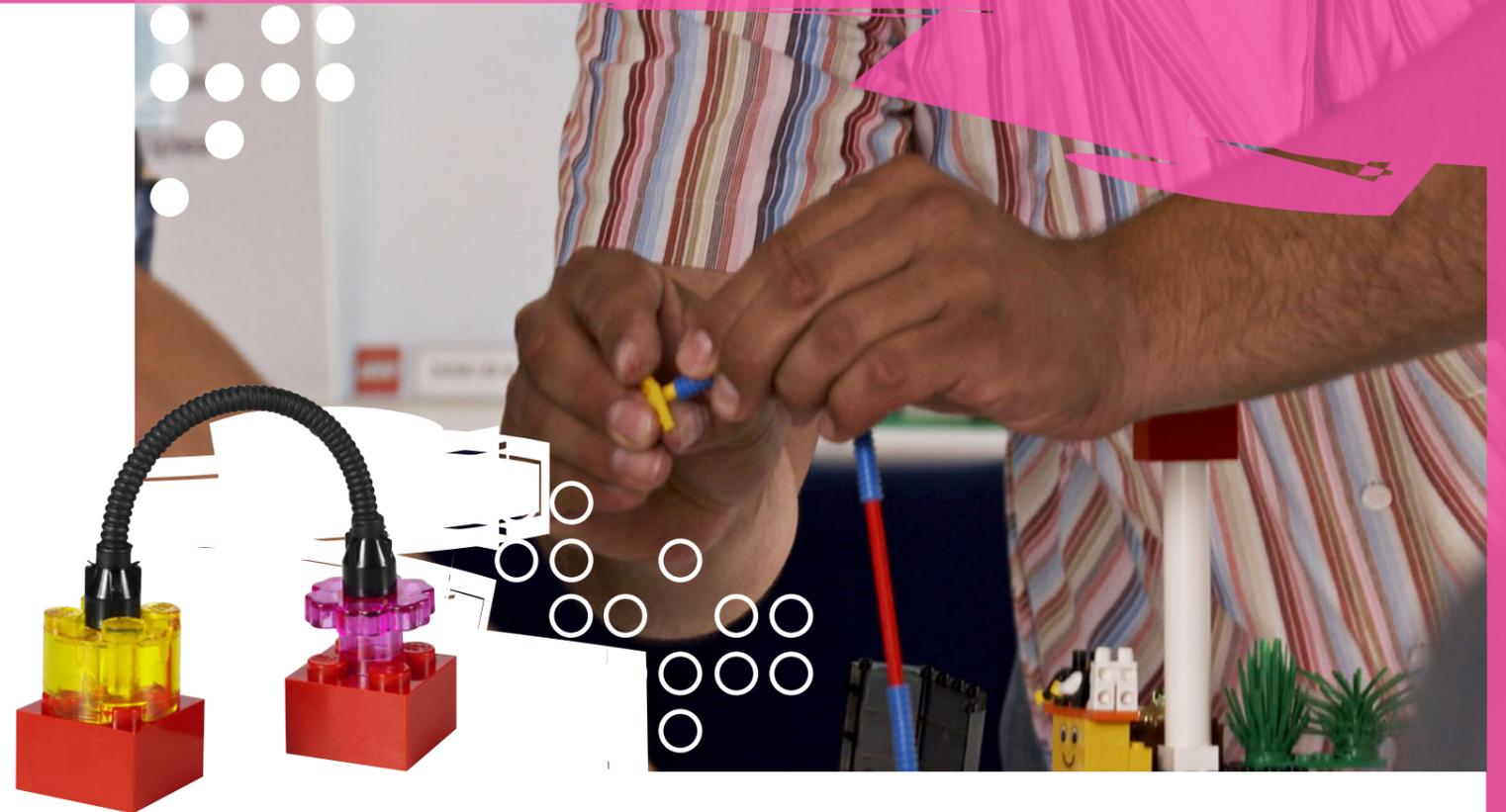
Each of these different ways to use the method follows the three basic process steps every time.

A LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process typically begins with participants building individual models. They might then be asked to build additions to models they have already built, and to build connections between models already built.

Additions could, for instance, be building challenges that ask participants to further investigate a detail

concerning the issue they have just reflected upon, or could be a building challenge that ask participants to add another dimension or perspective to the model they have already built.

Connections are built between two or more models, and they can be shown with placement – by placing the models at a certain distance and in a certain direction towards each other – or by physically building the relation between two models in a manner which represents the kind of relationship.



### Handling shared model building

Additions and connections can be built in relation to shared models as well, and these can be built individually, or together as a group.

Shared models are built by combining individual models into one model, through a process of dialogue and negotiation.

Shared model building requires a very skilled facilitator, as there may be a lot of complex group dynamics in play. Shared model building requires skilled facilitation during the building phase, which the individual model building does not.

When planning to use shared model building in a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® session, it is crucial to keep the following in mind:

- **A building challenge for shared models must always be posed as an individual building challenge before it is posed as a shared building challenge. This means that whenever a shared model is being built, participants have always**

built their individual response to the building challenge before they are asked to engage in the shared model building process. This ensures that everybody's voice is heard, and that everybody will have something to contribute to the shared model.

- **Building a shared model should not be a matter of finding the lowest common denominators from the individual models. A shared model building process should have the purpose of getting as many details and nuances of the group's reflections in the shared model, and it should strive towards capturing that essence which each of the group members can accept and recognize as part of their shared reality. Reaching this will be the responsibility of the facilitator and requires excellent facilitation skills.**

When different ways of building have been used during a workshop, participants can reflect on the different responses that have been built in order to gain deeper understandings.

## Leading the process through facilitation

LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops should always be run through facilitation. Facilitating a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop is a skill and a craft.

Facilitation in the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® context prescribes a certain way of handling the process.

The concept of facilitation in a business context is about leading meetings and processes to run optimally, to give the best possible results for the group and the group members. The fundamental meaning of the word 'facilitation' is, 'making something (difficult) easier'. The 'facilitator' can be a person or an implement that drives the facilitated process. A range of definitions of what facilitation is all conclude that facilitation is about the process of helping people to explore, learn and develop.

The facilitator's task is to get the group's dialogue to serve its purpose and make the participants capable of expressing the reflections and ideas that are needed for the group to reach their goal (for example, to resolve their issue, to plan their strategy, or to implement company values). The role of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator is, therefore, to make the reflection and dialogue processes easier.

The behaviour of the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator is key to how participants experience the process, and to its success. When facilitating LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® processes, the facilitator must keep the basic values (described above) in mind. They must employ behaviour that expresses these basic values. The facilitator's code of conduct (also described above) indicates how the facilitator should handle their role during the process.



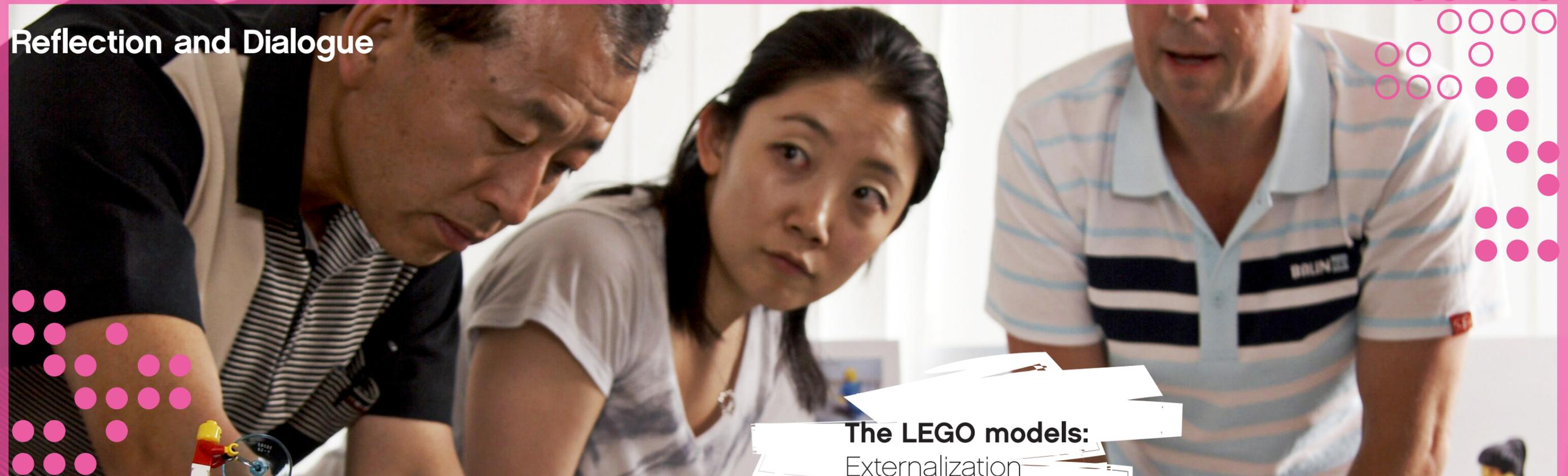
With the purpose of reaping most benefit from the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process, the two most important things for the facilitator to keep in mind are:

- **The purpose of using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is to make way for constructive reflection and dialogue for the system to gain insight and find their own answers (the system being the group of individuals and their relations to each other). This implies a focus on open-ended building challenges and facilitating questions as well as on the reflection and dialogue as a goal in itself.**
- **The concept provides a tool that should be utilized to its full potential. That tool is the LEGO models and their being physically present representations of people's thoughts, reflections, ideas, opinions, hopes, dreams, fears, and narratives. Using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® to its full potential means exploiting the presence of the physical LEGO models, and fully engaging with them and the meanings that they contain.**

So combined with the basic value that 'the answer is in the system', the facilitator's main task is to help the participants express themselves, listen to each other, and take each others' reflections into account. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator's goal when using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method should not be to drive the group to a certain conclusion, or a certain decision or opinion.



## Reflection and Dialogue



### The LEGO models: Externalization

The SERIOUS PLAY process is focused on the participants' reflections and dialogue. The facilitator's job is to help participants reflect and express themselves via the LEGO models they build during the process.

The facilitator can best achieve this by demonstrating curiosity and showing an interest in the model the individual participant has built and the story they tell about it. The facilitator does this by asking questions that encourage the participant to dig deeper into the meaning of their model and the story attached to it.

The facilitator's opinion, interpretation or understanding of the model and the story becomes irrelevant in the sense that the process has the purpose of getting the participants to gain more insight through their own reflection and dialogue. The facilitator must avoid the role of censor. They must never decide the meaning of a model, and may never decide how relevant or irrelevant, or how good or poor, the models are.

The facilitator's most efficient tool in the process is to ask questions and show genuine interest in taking a deeper look into the thoughts, feelings and ideas conveyed through the models and their assigned stories. Even though the facilitator must take this neutral position in the process, the facilitator still has a powerful way of influencing the process through the questions they pose. Good facilitating questions are an effective way of influencing the process.



One of the principal advantages of the method is that it is an excellent tool for externalizing participants' reflections. The term 'externalizing' describes how the thoughts participants share during the process are distanced from the person because they are built as LEGO models. The participants' thoughts are expressed in a way that makes it easy for participants to explore as a group what has been expressed individually. Externalizing individual reflections in this way distances them from the individual, making it easier to explore the reflections without challenging the person who expressed them.

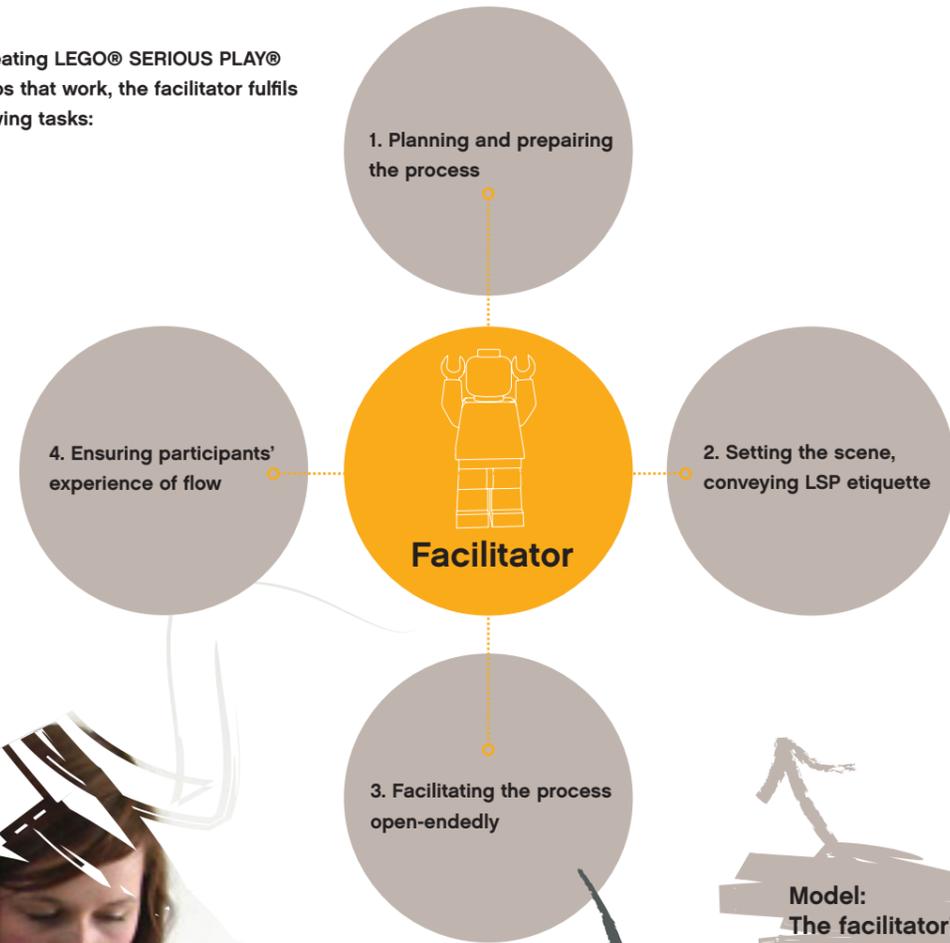
At the same time, the LEGO® models (as physical representations) help anchor what has been said during the process, which makes dialogue and subsequent reflection flow better from the individual and from the group. If a discussion has gone off on a tangent, externalization provides the perfect method for getting it back on track, by leading the discussion back to the physical models in front of the participants and what they can 'read' from them.

With the LEGO models, externalization is integrated into the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method as a familiar and effective means by which to express participants' reflections. The facilitator must maintain focus on the models, consistently using them as tools as participants explore their own and each others' reflections. The facilitator's questions must consistently relate to models built during the process—and they must encourage participants to do the same.



## Creating LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops that work

When creating LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops that work, the facilitator fulfils the following tasks:



The facilitator prepares – i.e. creates and plans – the LSP workshop, and in doing that there are several things that they should be aware of and should consider.

First and foremost, the process will be formed and influenced very much by the building challenges that are making up the workshop.

### Formulating the building challenges

#### The open-ended approach

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator has the task of planning the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process. In advance, they need to prepare building challenges relevant for the particular workshop. As mentioned above, the formulation of building challenges has a crucial impact on the process, and it is important that the building challenges are formulated in a way that means they will serve the purpose of the workshop, and ensure the integrity of the method.

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method is built upon an 'open-ended' approach. The basic philosophy is that challenges should open up to reflection, rather than ask for definitive 'correct' responses. The approach presupposes that a challenge has a developmental effect when there are several different correct or 'true' solutions.

This means that when participants are presented with a challenge, there are many different ways to meet and solve the challenge, and a challenge should be formulated exactly to meet this rich approach to reality.

In formulating building challenges, the facilitator must strive to ask open-ended questions that encourage reflection and dialogue. In this context, open-ended questions are often all about thoughts, imagined future scenarios, and things that have yet to happen.

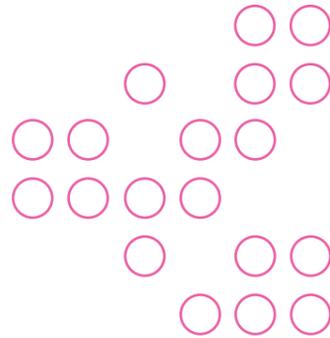
The aim of the building challenges is to reach the core of what participants should reflect on. Questions should also focus on experiences and characteristics, rather than on hard facts and concrete knowledge.

Participants tend to see a good building challenge as one that is easily understood and that triggers their thoughts in an unusual way. When formulating each separate building challenge, the facilitator will naturally benefit from consultancy experience and professional perspectives about the specific participant group.

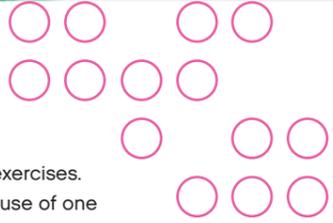
#### Progression from one building task to the next

Building a process with several consecutive building challenges that form layers often works well to move teams on in their exploration and learning.

Questions forming layers are questions that move from one level of reflection to another. The aim of constructing several layers into building tasks is that several 'rounds' of reflection on the same theme from a variety of perspectives will expand the scope of participants' reflections and produce more nuanced dialogue.



## Creating LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops that work



### Size and scale of a workshop

A LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop typically involves four to eight people. Groups of more than eight tend to be too big, so that the process of going round the table hearing about constructions might become tiresome (or might put pressure on individuals to speed up), and can make it difficult for participants to remember all of the meanings and stories. A workshop can involve as few as two participants, although a group of four to eight is optimal – bringing the energy of different people and more ideas.

In terms of materials required, each participant should be given a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Starter Kit.

(item no. 2000414) for the skills-building exercises. The workshop group will make collective use of one LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Identity and Landscape Kit (item no. 2000415), and if connections are to be built between models, participants will benefit from having one LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Connections Kit (item no. 2000413).

**Note that** one workshop group requires one facilitator. It is not possible to facilitate two groups 'side by side' (for example, two tables, each with eight participants, in the same room) because each group would need focused attention from the facilitator, at the same time – so this is not possible

### Outline of a basic LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® session

This is an example of one basic LEGO SERIOUS PLAY session, which is designed for a working team that wish to unlock further potential in their working relationships and what they can achieve. The process allows the participants to reflect on their own feelings, reactions and responses, and to deepen their knowledge of themselves, and how they relate to the team.

At each stage, as is always the case in LEGO SERIOUS PLAY workshops, the participants build, and then share the 'story' of what they have built with each other.

**Materials needed:** one LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Starter Kit (item no. 2000414) for each participant, for the skills-building exercises; one Identity and Landscape Kit (item no. 2000415), and one LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® Connections Kit (item no. 2000413).

### Focus

**Skills Building**  
(Several individual builds)

**Core identity**  
(Individual build)

**Aspirational Identity**  
(Individual build)

**Aspirational Identity**  
(Individual build)

**Team Life**  
(Individual build)

**Shared Team Life**  
(Shared build)

**Team Connections 1**  
(Individual build)

**Team Connections 2**  
(Individual build)

**Aspirational Team Life**  
(Individual build)

**Shared Aspirational Team Life**  
(Shared build)

### Facilitator's instructions/ Building Challenge

First of all, the participants go through the several stages of a skills-building session, as described above.

"Build a model showing who you are on this team. What do you bring to the team? What could you bring? Consider building some of the functions that you carry out on the job, but also some aspects of you that are more hidden."

"Build an addition to your model that shows how you think others in your team perceive you."

"Who are you at your best, right now? Build another addition to your model showing your thoughts about this – what characterizes you right now when you are at your best?"

*"Keep your model – but set it aside for now, you will need it later."*

"How do you perceive your team? Build a new model showing what you believe your team is all about – what is the spirit, the 'feel', of the team right now?"

"Build a shared model that shows what your team is all about – what is the team's perception of the team? What is the team's shared perception of the spirit and the 'feel' of the team life?"

*When the team has built their shared model, the facilitator asks for a volunteer to tell the story of the model. The other team members may contribute to the story.*

"Now, position your own identity model in connection to the shared model of your Team Life. Use the position of your model to say something more about the team and about your connection/relation to the team."

"Build two or three connections between your own identity model and the shared Team Life model. Have your connections show and tell about what in your team life you feel the most connected to and how."

"Look at the models we have on the table, connected to each other, showing each of you in relation to your team and showing your team's shared perception of the team life.

Now, each build a model showing what you aspire to be like as a team in the future."

"Build a shared model that shows what you aspire to be like as a team."

### Duration

60–90 minutes total

15 minutes building and  
15 minutes sharing

10 minutes building and  
10 minutes sharing

10 minutes building and  
10 minutes sharing

15 minutes building and  
15 minutes sharing

30 minutes

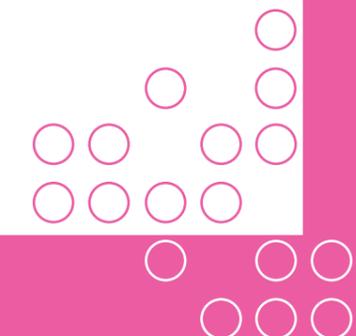
5 minutes positioning  
and 15 minutes sharing

10 minutes building and 10  
minutes sharing

15 minutes building and 15  
minutes sharing

30 minutes

Going through a process of this kind would take at least one day, and participants are likely to become tired – this kind of play is hard work. Make sure that pleasant breaks, and a nice lunch, are scheduled.



## Taking it further

### Why choose training in LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®?

This document was intended to provide a general introduction to the basic principles of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. However, it is not possible to fully learn and appreciate the strengths of the method simply by reading a short document. In particular, developing a suitable facilitation style takes time and practice, and it is especially helpful to see a trained professional in action.

Therefore we strongly recommend that new users seek training in LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitation.

Before the method and materials were 'open source', many consultancy professionals attended intensive week-long training sessions run by the LEGO Group. That training is no longer offered by the LEGO Group, training programs and coaching is available from those existing trained practitioners in the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® community. To find such training close to you, visit [www.seriousplay.com](http://www.seriousplay.com), which includes links to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® communities around the world.

### The benefits of an external LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator

As we have seen, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® is a method and a tool for making interventions in organizations, on the management level – creating the company strategy, or developing the organization's values – or on an employee level – helping teams work well together, or implementing organizational values.

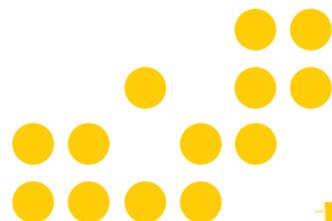
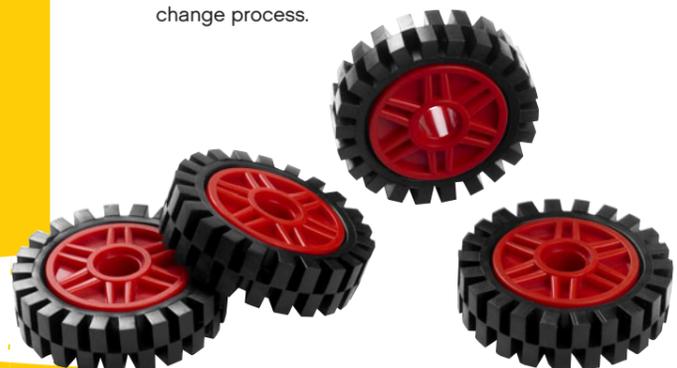
In organizations every intervention has the goal of affecting the system (the system being the people that make up the organization and their relationships to each other). You affect the system because you want it to move forward, change and develop. Designing such an intervention is a skilled task, requiring experience and insight. It has been observed and established that when managers within an organization try to create interventions, they are just as much a part of the system as the people they are trying to affect – and therefore they cannot see the needs of the employees clearly enough to create the right intervention.

Being part of the system yourself will make it very difficult to know which questions will invoke the right reflection process, and ultimately the wished for change process.

There are also the interpersonal dynamics to consider. When a boss or a colleague is asking you a question or giving you feedback, you will always consider that question or the feedback in the context of the relation you have to that person. You cannot take your everyday relation out of the equation when you are making interventions in the system.

Using an external and trained consultant to create and drive the intervention will ensure that the intervention is much more likely to be the right one, and will help the organization reach their goals of change or development.

Hiring in an external consultant should be more cost efficient, because that external consultant should be able to make the right intervention and make it the right way the first time around. Also the involvement of an external consultant will ensure that involved employees will feel in safe hands because they are not confronted with their boss asking something from them which might contain a hidden agenda. Instead they are confronted with a consultant looking for greater insight and trying to help the organization find their own answers.



## Taking it further

### Getting started with LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

The above describes what the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® concept is and how it is used as a method in general. If you want to run LEGO SERIOUS PLAY workshops and take upon yourself the role of the facilitator, you need to consider how you make yourself ready to handle the method so that you and your workshop participants will get the most out of using it.

Running an efficient and successful LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop requires a skilled facilitator, deep knowledge about the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® process, and experience with facilitating such processes. Being a skilled LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator requires that you have insight into the pitfalls and essentials of the method and that you have practical, hands-on experience with the use of the method. If you have never used the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method before as a facilitator, it is strongly recommended that you build up your practical knowledge about the method as well as your skills as a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator.

First of all, in order to appreciate the method and understand it fully it is recommended that you experience a range of different LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshops as a participant.

Secondly, to ensure your success with the method, it is recommended that you train your skills as a facilitator of the process by facilitating a number of lightweight workshops in settings and with groups of people where the process is not likely to do any harm if any mistakes should occur.

Train your skills to conduct an efficient and purposeful skills building process by taking a group of friends or colleagues through it a couple of times, without a long LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop after it.

Practice your formulation of good building challenges by testing different building challenges on friends or colleagues (who have been taken through the basic skills building exercises first). Test your building challenges on yourself – and continue to do this every time you plan a workshop even when you are an experienced facilitator.

Be aware of the fact that the process can bring up things in the dialogue that you could not have foreseen – and prepare for this situation. Train your facilitation skills to handle this situation by taking different groups of people through different test LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® processes that you create.



### Go further online

See the website, [www.seriousplay.com](http://www.seriousplay.com), for further information, and for links into the growing LEGO SERIOUS PLAY community.

# LSP: Open-Source/1/2/3/4/5

