

Play hard, work smarter!

In March, *AgileTODAY* headed along to #play14 Sydney. The event was part of the broader #play14 movement: “an international gathering of like-minded people who share the common idea that playing is the best way to learn and understand”. Over two and a half days, we played games and created our own in an effort to unleash our ‘inner child’ and spark creativity.

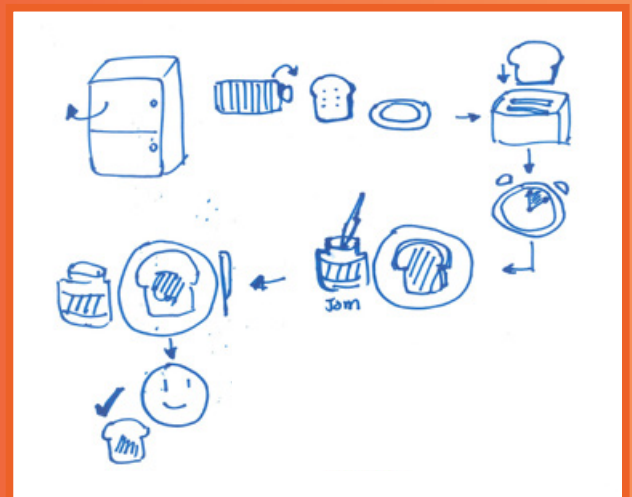
Playing as an adult is no easy feat: it’s difficult to eliminate your inner critic, overcome your fear of judgement and simply let loose! However, as #play14 co-organiser Hanna Karlsson explains on the next page, play is becoming increasingly important. It helps develop our facilitation skills, increases our responsiveness to change, and boosts our capacity to come up with new ideas.

This was the first time #play14 had come to Australian shores, and we thank Hanna and the rest of the #play14 team – Hayley Bell, Ralph Warta, Catherine Hyams and Cédric Pontet – for warmly welcoming us into this highly enjoyable event!

We’re keen to learn more about the importance of play from Hanna and other speakers like Mark Dodgson at the upcoming AgileAus19 Conference. Game on!

LET’S TOAST TO PLAY

In a game facilitated by Sol Pandiella-McLeod (Senior UX Consultant, DiUS), #play14 delegates drew the steps they take when making toast. Interestingly, the average person is said to include 5-7 steps in this drawing exercise. The game highlights the diverse mental models that exist within organisations – everyone brings a different set of biases and approaches to the same task.



#play14 attendees



The benefits of play

HANNA KARLSSON

Hear Hanna (Founder, theWorkshopper) delve further into the importance of play when she presents at AgileAus19.

While the benefits of play have been recognised in fields such as psychology and neuroscience, a resistance still remains. Play is often seen as a frivolous activity, less valuable than 'productive time'. However, play enables us to improve learning, create psychological safety, increase engagement, and, maybe most importantly, it can allow us to embrace ambiguity and creativity.

Somewhat ironically, we've created a world that makes adaptability and creativity harder, as well as more important. We are hardly optimised to deal with adaptation and creativity. Thus, in these times of increasing speed of change and the importance of adaptability, play is crucial! As kids, we didn't hesitate to throw ourselves into any activity that looked like a bit of fun. Yet, when we grow up, we seem to lose that ability. We develop filters that make it a challenge to be silly and let our guard down.

In some ways, these filters are great: they stop us from wasting the energy that'd be expended by imagining all possible options at all times. Other filters are there to make sure we behave appropriately, adhere to social rules, and avoid rejection. Unfortunately, these filters also make it harder for us to come up with novel ideas. And, even if we do think up these ideas, we are prone

to keep things just like they are. We need to feel safe, happy and engaged in order to have enough energy and courage to be creative and open to change.

Making a concerted effort to engage in play – both through initiatives like #play14 and in everyday life – lets us temporarily suspend our fixation with productivity and appearing 'proper'. Play pumps you up with good 'brain juices', stimulating neurotransmitters linked to well-being and pro-social behaviour. It releases dopamine (increasing focus and learning capabilities) oxytocin (building trust and collaboration) and endorphins that move you into a relaxed, creative mode. It's a brain cocktail that even beats the best Mojito!

In unlocking these parts of our brain, play becomes a key ingredient in organisational health – boosting our ability to come up with novel ideas. Play also helps us get comfortable with ambiguity: it creates an environment where we don't know what comes next but where it is safe to fail.

Ultimately, play encourages us to challenge the filters we've constructed and deliberately work around them – and you'll have a laugh in the process!

AgileAus19 speakers include:



Nish Mahanty
Head of Development,
irexchange



Erin McManus
Engineering Manager,
Spotify



Jody Weir
Head of Agility,
THE ICONIC



Pete Young
Head of Digital Planning &
Enablement, Australia Post

The importance of a playful mindset:

#play14 attendees explore the nexus between play and work

Dara Simkin (Director, ProjectPlay.Work)

Whether we like it or not, rapid advancements in technology like automation and AI will be eliminating jobs by the millions in the next five to ten years. Our only defence against irrelevancy is being more human.

To be human is to challenge assumptions, push past the possible and constantly ask the question ‘What if?’ Through this curiosity and exploration, we create a rich world of possibilities and opportunities.

Adopting a playful mindset is the foundation of any great idea. The science of play shows that when we play we’re more optimistic, open-minded, adaptable, empathetic and creative. Our soft skills are now undoubtedly our hard skills. In an ever-changing world of technology where uncertainty is a constant, play is no longer just an ‘option’ – it’s a necessity to keep your organisation and your people relevant for the future of work.



Chris Morgan (Software Team Lead, ResMed)

Learning by doing is far more powerful than just reading about a subject, as we store memories through the emotions we attach to experiences. Games allow you to distill into minutes experiences that would otherwise take you months or years to collect on the job.

By taking a team away from their usual context and area of expertise, problems associated with ego and historical momentum (‘this is how it’s done’) diminish. Games create a far more receptive learning environment.



Frederic Ducros (Chief Transformation Officer, AirAsia Group)

Games get us into a happy, productive state conducive to change. They give us lessons we can then hear and benefit from, thanks to the state we’re in.

Amanda Clarke (Agile Coach, Commonwealth Bank)

I see two benefits in using play regularly at work:

1. Results are often dictated as much by our 'state' as by our knowledge, experience or capability. Sports psychologists and executive coaches help their clients to know what states are most useful in different situations and how to access them quickly for this reason. Play can often help whole groups of people access useful states quickly. Think about the states useful in designing and adopting change: curiosity, openness, focus, and more. Games can be used to access these states quickly and together so teams can learn, change and deliver better outcomes.
2. Some games contain lessons as well as helping to create useful states. Lessons learned in a state that enhances curiosity and energy have been demonstrated to be more powerful and have longer term benefits than being lectured to or reading about a topic.



Talk change. Create change.

At Elabor8 we know that real change requires more than a strategy deck. It requires activating a clear vision from within to get traction. It requires the ability to work through uncertainty to take the guesswork out of product design. It requires streamlined processes and systems to help you deliver faster.

And it needs people who are empowered to step out of their comfort zone and make real change happen. We've worked with some of Australia's biggest companies and most iconic brands to transform the way they work and perform.

If you're ready to create change, so are we.

Product & Innovation • Agile Delivery • Technology • Business Agility



elabor8.com.au