

Innovation Games

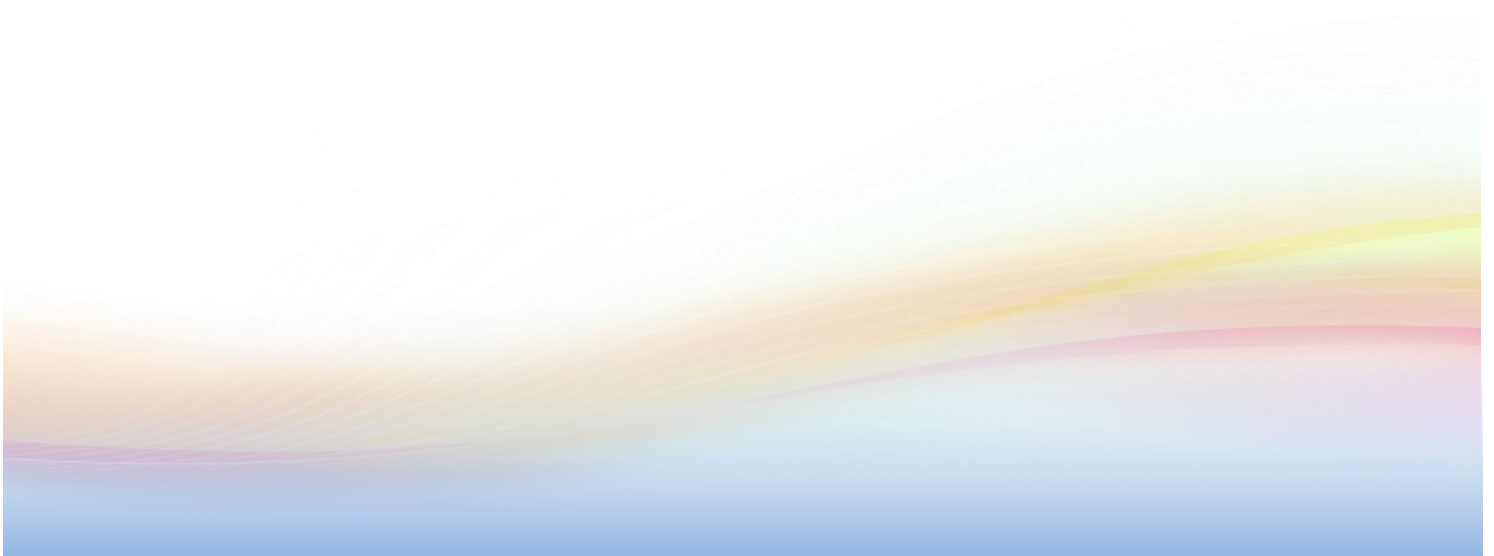
Serious Play to Do Serious Work, Seriously!

ANDREA SIMON Ph.D.

President, Simon Associates Management Consultants

CARMEN EFFRON

President, C F Efron Company LLC



How Innovation Games® Can Help You Think In New Ways, Open New Markets And Discover New Customers

With all the pressure on you to reimagine your company fast and often, perhaps you need to “play” a little more. Could Innovation Games help you create better ideas and convert those ideas into great innovations? This white paper is for you!

Speed of change today is creating a crisis requiring top-notch innovation

Not just the front-end of idea generation, but the back-end of execution as well. Companies today are expected not so much to perform standardized routines but to **generate creative innovative results** that will **delight** customers and colleagues.

The challenge is that we know what we know, and we know what we don't know. But — and this is really the opportunity — we “don't know what we don't know.” There is a big space of new ideas awaiting us, if only we have a way to capture them and turn them into impactful innovations.

Recent research is very compelling. The more ideas you have, the more likely you will have “great” ones. You just don't know which ones they are. And they often come at the intersections of disciplines where they collide and turn into even bigger ideas.

To find great ideas, look in “overlooked” places

Clients often ask us, “Where do those great ideas come from?” Often, ideas come to you by looking in places where you normally don't pay much attention. You might pick up a great idea by looking across different industries, not just within the one you know so well.

That big idea might be sitting in the unmet needs of a different market segment than the ones you currently focus on: If you are a premium product, what could a mass market audience teach you that could be applied in innovative ways? Or perhaps those ideas are residing in the needs of different buyer groups? Pharmaceutical companies did it so well when they started to market directly to consumers who couldn't buy their products without a doctor's prescription, but who could influence physicians and their choice of solutions.

The challenge is that to respond to changing times, we have to “see with new eyes” and force our brains out of their comfort zones. But the brain hates change. If it is really going to “see, feel and think” in new ways, you have to get it to relax, open up to new ideas and allow it to “play games.” Not simply “playful” or silly exercises but serious play — games that have structure to them and help fool the brain. We call these [“Innovation Games,” designed by Luke Hohmann](#) and modified by us with other games from the cognitive sciences that help you move along the process of creativity and innovation.

Why “games?”

The human brain is a pattern-making machine. We consistently use patterns to shortcut, analyze and react to the stimuli of our lives. We are hardwired to play games that use those patterns to redesign what we are seeing and feeling.

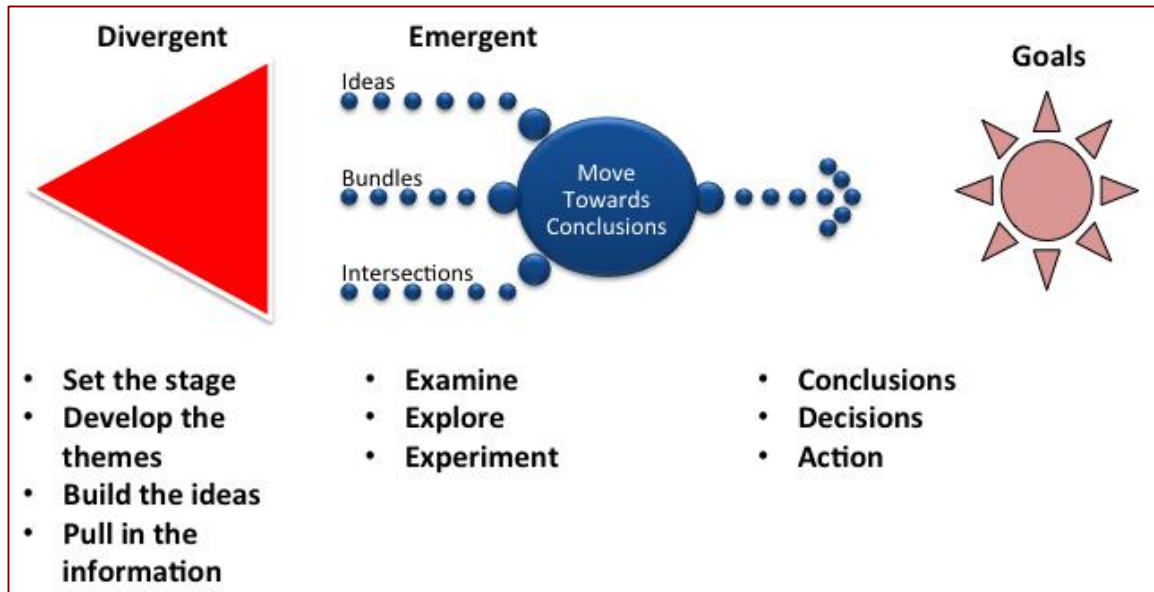
Games involve a high level of emotion in a safe environment. These emotions help us to “ideate” and free us from our habits. Plus, the randomness of games fools the brain and lets it see things in new ways. Games help us imagine better solutions. As the neurosciences have proven, humans buy with emotions and justify those decisions with logic or reason. Games, then, become an effective method for feeling in new ways and then organizing our thoughts to understand why.

Organizations and corporate cultures need to create new ways to sustain a process of innovation to respond to rapid changes in business environments. Old management structures — hierarchies, processes and management structures — just sustain the business. It is new innovative techniques within companies that are becoming essential to create new opportunities.

Let us take you through the process and see how you can get those creative juices flowing so you can design new ways to do your jobs for greater impact and effectiveness.

The brain’s creative process

To begin, there is a process that the brain has to go through for it to “see with new eyes.” It looks like this:



Let's take a look at each part.

Divergence.

This is the discovery phase. For the brain to see in new ways, it has to stop seeing in the old ways. Through visual exploring and deconstructing what exists today, we can begin to build a bank of ideas that open up our minds to new ways to solve unmet needs, new problems, open new markets and discover new customers. It is equally valuable as a tool to solve tough internal business problems, process issues and management challenges. The traditional brainstorming sessions, surveys or focus groups just don't produce actionable results as quickly. Far too often, they generate ideas within the space that exists today rather than take you past that into uncharted waters.

There are a number of games we use for divergent phases in the creative process. Some of our favorites are "Prune the Product Tree" or "Hot Tub." But the one that we find most productive for clients just beginning the creative process is "Reverse Everything." Very simply, it is way to open up your mind to new ideas by reversing everything you do today, including that which you don't do at all or do very little of today.

The example we use is that of a restaurant.

Today	Opposite	New Element
Menus	No Menus	Owner comes out and tells us what he found at the market today for our meal
Serve food	Don't serve food	Bring your own food and we entertain you —picnic style
Pay for food	Don't pay for food	Rent the space for a period of time and we give you free food
Sit at tables	Don't sit at tables	Chairs set up like a stadium and you watch oversized TV's with exclusive entertainment on them

As you can see, first we list all the assumptions about a restaurant today. Then we simply don't do any of those tomorrow. What else could we do? The ideas come quickly once you stop worrying about how to judge them. And they often come from *outside your industry*. As you link them together, the big ideas begin to emerge. Get ready for some "a-ha" moments to bubble up!

There is actually a restaurant in Chicago called "[Next](#)." It has decided that the most valuable thing it has to sell is *time*. So it doesn't just sell you food or liquor, it sells a performance that you buy online. The same performance takes place at different times; you pay a premium price for a premium time, less for a less premium time. The same food and wine, just at a specific reserved time. Since you buy your time online and there is no refund, people buy and resell time on everything from Facebook to Craigslist. A typical evening? \$450 or more.

The lesson here? When beginning your creative process, first list all your assumptions about your business today. Reverse each assumption. Then ask yourself how to accomplish each element with new ideas. When you reverse your assumptions, you often find new ideas and new viewpoints.

This is not about changing your mind. It's about finding the other possibilities that exist and making choices with more variables. Remember, the more ideas you have, the more likely you will have good ones. Maybe even great ones. You just don't know which ones they are until you do it.

As you start to build your idea-bank, you have to take those ideas someplace. This becomes the bundling, intersections and early stages of prototyping where you combine ideas into "maybes" and "what-if's." The best game for doing this, we find, is "Build a Better Product Box." Let's take a look at Emergence and a sample game.

Emergent.

This is the time when you want to “examine, explore and experiment.” The game that brings out great ideas and helps you combine and recombine them in new ways is called “Build a Better Product Box.”

You basically take a blank box, a bunch of magazines, scissors, markers and stuff. Then you build a box as if it was a new product. On it you put the images and write anything you would to make this new product come alive.

This game allows you to take all the ideas from the “Reverse Assumptions” and begin to organize them into a more concrete entity. An exciting part of “Build a Better Product Box” is how it engages all the participants in building something new. When you sell it back to the group, additional ideas emerge. Most importantly, key themes come through. Team building is amazing. The experience is “Inspiring!”

Here are some pictures of people reimagining a healthcare system:



You can see the intensity. These were all strangers who came together to help us better understand how they were dealing with healthcare reform.

What happens next as emerging ideas turn into converging ones? What does that mean anyway?

Convergence.

Convergence is all about turning these ideas that are bundling together or intersecting in new ways into actionable prototypes. We encourage clients to prototype new concepts and then bring their customers or prospective customers into the creative process, too. Customers can help deconstruct the concept and see it from *their* perspective. These games can be played with employees, partners, customers, prospective customers — even the general market.

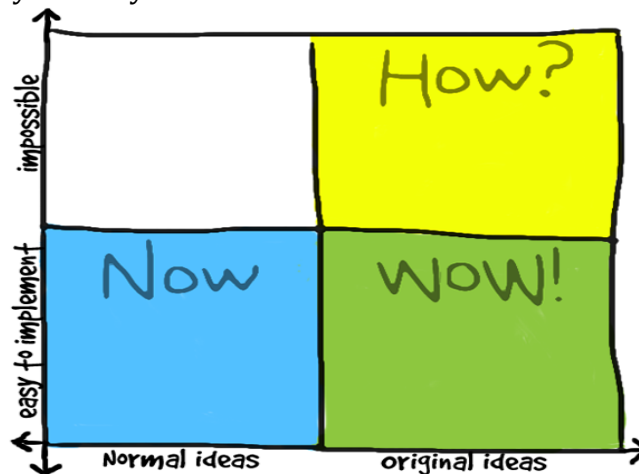
Some of the games that are excellent engagement tools are:

- **“Buy a Feature”:** Here we ask customers to take the features of a product and put values on them. Then we give them play money that is not sufficient to buy all the elements of the new concept. They have to decide as a group what they will pool their money together to buy and which features that matter the most to them as a team.

- **“Prune the Product Tree”**: This is another game that works exceedingly well. We have teams take the elements of the concept and build a tree. What are the roots, the trunk, the branches, the leaves? What is the fruit? When you see how they build their tree, you begin to understand their perceptions of the fruit and the elements that go into how they perceive the benefits of your features.
- **“Now/WOW/How”**: This is a wonderful and simple game that helps you understand and prioritize. Used with employees, partners and customers, you can deal with the paradox of choice: i.e., when there are so many options people don’t know which to select.

When it comes to convergence, people often end up picking ideas that are most familiar to them. This is called the “Creative Paradox” or “Creadox.” There are a number of games that can help here. But the “Now/WOW/How” works well.

The “Now/WOW/How” matrix is an idea selection tool that breaks the “Creadox” by forcing people to weigh each idea on two parameters: ability to implement (easy to impossible) and quality of the idea (more normal versus original). It looks like this and is easy for you to try.



Why Do You Need Games?

We work with clients that are dealing with the rapid pace of change. They know that the old is not returning but they are uncertain about how to adapt to changing times. In all too many ways, they feel like Columbus on a ship heading for a “Fuzzy Goal” ...not sure whether the course they have plotted is the right one or not. The risks feel far greater than before and the wisdom they used to rely upon, those “best practices” that permeated an industry, have only led to commoditization.

As Rita Gunter McGrath has written in her latest book, [“The End of Competitive Advantage,”](#) the old models for competing within a market space with a long period of market maturation is long gone. And as [Blue Ocean Strategists®](#), we know that

those who thrive in changing times are companies that can “see, feel and think” in new ways, opening up new market space and becoming value innovators, not duplicators.

It might sound strange but seriously, *serious play to do serious work works!* Give the games a try and let us know how you are turning good ideas into great innovations.

For more information or to learn more about Innovation Games for your organization please contact us:



**Carmen Effron
President
C F Effron Company LLC
Carmen@cfeffroncompany.com**



**Andrea J. Simon Ph.D.
President
Simon Associates Management
Consultants
info@simonassociates.net**