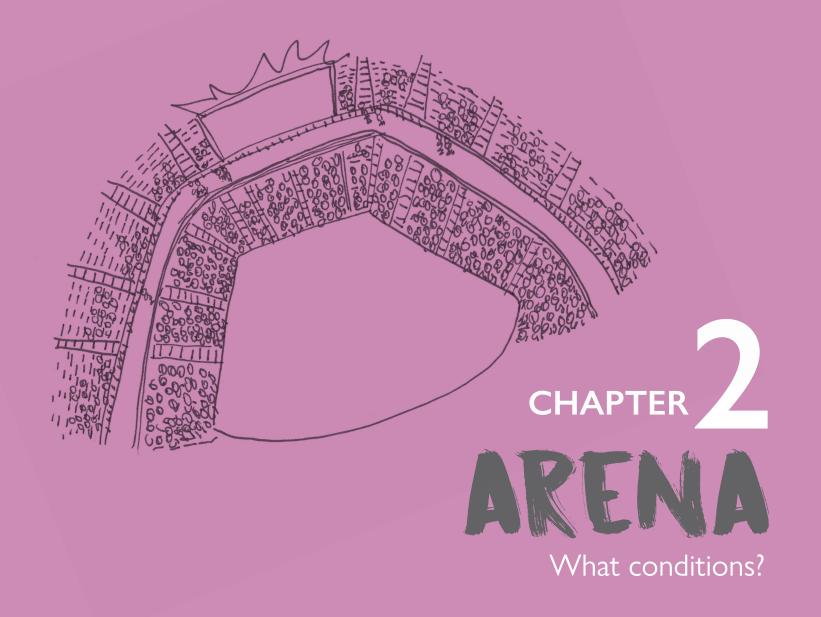
Vell before play commences, frame your GAME.

Design unambiguous GUIDELINES bound to inspire.





ARENA

Upon entering an arena to watch American football, the game's results are uncertain. Well before kickoff, however, **unambiguous conditions** are set. Each of *two teams* are allowed exactly 11 players on the field at a time. The *hour-long* game, divided into quarters, transpires on a *100-yard field* flanked by end zones.

Similarly, when designing and playing GAMEs, the term ARENA describes three critical aspects. Problem-solving champions optimize these conditions of play.



If you have the luxury of SELECTING AN ARENA, set guidelines first. Then determine parameters:

Puzzles What's the ideal team makeup?

Period How much time is reasonably needed?

Where is the ideal venue?

The arena is often OUT OF YOUR CONTROL. If so, design guidelines given the hand you've been dealt:

Which challenge(s) is your team most equipped to solve?

Within the time frame, how big/complex a puzzle can be tackled?

How might we maximize the chosen venue's potential?

63

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."

- Randy Pausch, author of The Last Lecture

PUZZLERS

Who plays?

The COMPOSITION of a **problem-solving army** impacts creative capacity, community culture, logistical complexity, potential to delegate, and the ultimate solution. Swapping just one or two foot soldiers may result in major outcome differences.

You often have no control. Determined by the boss or fate, collaborators include co-workers, board members, folks trapped in the elevator. In such cases, don't spend a moment wishing things were different. Instead, play your best GAME with puzzlers on hand.

Your people are the right people.

If you have the authority, however, curate this community wisely. Not all teams are equal. In fact, no two are alike.

Recruit the collection of puzzlers most likely to crack your code.













Solois 1 perso

The smallest puzzling "team" is an unaccompanied act of one. Working alone offers flexibility, self-pacing, and ample room to reflect. Without opposing viewpoints, *only personal limitations hold you back*. Soloists are particularly well suited for nuts and bolts detail work.



Multi-Team independent groups

With multiple teams, or rival individuals, it is possible to simultaneously breed contrasting solutions. PROPOSALS can **battle for adoption** or be **synthesized**. Competitive formats are often motivational. *Healthy environments stimulate positive peer pressure*.



Team 2-10 people

Even a single partner transforms the GAME, bringing affirmation, critique, ideas, motivation, and accountability. Each new associate augments variety and possibility, just as ingredients added to a base dish generate rich new taste. Increasingly delicious (and sometimes spicy) viewpoints flavor the gumbo. As teams expand, **potential and imagination grow,** while intimacy and podium time diminish.



League arge communities

65

Once a group grows beyond ten or so, detailed collaboration becomes unwieldy. Large crowds produce profound imbalance, dominated by a few. But quantity works in your favor for certain tasks. Leagues are EFFICIENT when communicating challenges, cultivating skills, vetting ideas, asking for help, and building consensus.

SOLO PROBLEMS, TEAM SOLUTIONS

Most individuals assume that PERSONAL CHALLENGES must be solved **single-handedly**. Recruiting help somehow feels inappropriate. After all, it's MY problem. It's MY job. Sometimes this solo arrangement makes sense. But it does not inherently serve self-interest.

Teams are often BETTER than soloists.

Being charged with something doesn't mean you alone must do the solving. There is power in numbers.

H.R. manager Percy Nell has been tasked with improving morale.



While he can certainly invite lecturers (something that's generated grumbles in the past), a hands-on, engaging

experience is preferable. Unfortunately, hours of pondering generate little more than frustration. To be honest, event planning isn't Percy's strong suit. But what can he do? "It's my job!" he curses.

And then an idea emerges. Percy invites a handful of coworkers from various departments to play a "GAME" around this challenge. Surprisingly, all are intrigued and sign up immediately.

COLLABORATION feels entirely different from isolation.

More brains mean more potential. Together, they build upon one another's ideas, imagining directions that never would have dawned on Percy alone. The process is fun, productive, and—unexpectedly—builds a sense of team. "How's that for a clue?..." he reflects.

The team ultimately advocates to organize this development day as a GAME, tackling an important organizational challenge.

Less Suited

You alone control the Small groups: no formal leader required agenda Leadership As size increases. appoint a CAPTAIN Ouiet time and Brainstorm, test, and introspection build creative ideas Detail work and logisti-Accomplish a lot Best Suited cal planning quickly, with limited red tape Draw on personal Delegate tasks expertise

SOLOIST

Ouiet time Detail work better

TEAM

handled by individuals Highly creative

Delegation and feedback

Tasks that don't match

your expertise, interest,

or skills

solutions

Same as individual team strengths

MULTI-TEAM

Option 1: Single GAME

Option 2: Each team

has own CAPTAIN

MASTER

Develop multiple concepts simultaneously

weaknesses

Same as individual team

Hands on collaboration

LEAGUE

Skilled facilitator

necessary at all times

Disseminate content

Test ideas

Solicit help

momentum

Vote on/tweak

Build consensus and

Detail work

existing proposals

SOLOIST

MULTI-TEAMS TEAM

LEAGUE

Autonomous and

efficient

Work at your own pace

Decisions without

bureaucracy

No interpersonal conflict/underperforming members

Social bonding

All voices can be heard on small teams

Accountability

- Balance strengths, weaknesses, skills
- Healthy debate, honest feedback

Generate multiple, diverse solutions

Teams learn from

others

ambition

or be fused

Competitive environments inspire

Proposals can compete

Access to many perspectives

Efficiency, as shared ideas reach many ears

Break into smaller groups

Disadvantages

Advantages

Everything falls on you

Limited perspective, without idea sharing

Nobody to help when stuck, unmotivated, sick, or off track

Often lonely and less fulfilling

Scheduling challenges

Unequal commitment

"Groupthink"

Individual voices/ perspectives can get lost

Interpersonal conflict

people

Logistical challenges coordinating many

Desired activity time

may vary across teams

Not every proposal can

Uneven experience from group to group

be pursued

May encourage passivity

feedback from all

Single dissenter can derail (if not managed)

Can't elicit equitable

The bigger the ship, the harder to steer

Cameos

GAMEs regularly engage individuals BEYOND official puzzlers. Though guests are generally present during only part of the process, their impact can be astronomical.

GAME Master

Neutral facilitator who guides a multi-team experience (see Chapter 10).

Interview Subjects

Target users who provide personal perspectives and insights.

Feedback Providers

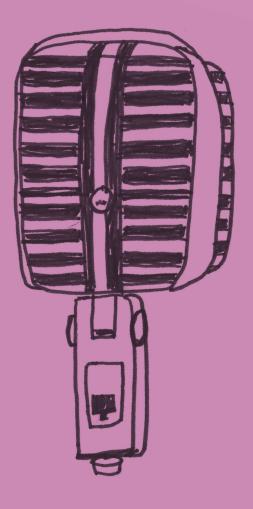
Reviewers who offer honest, objective critique.

Expert Consultants

Mentors who give guidance.

Judges/Respondents

Jurors responsible for evaluating and rating projects.



69



In addition to team size, carefully consider the MAKEUP of puzzlers.

HOMOGENEITY

People are naturally drawn to others who look and think like them. There is comfort in sameness.

Worshippers find solidarity within their church, temple, or mosque. Millennials and seniors limit friendships to a single generation. Public schools, car dealerships, and barbershops investigate parallel entities for inspiration. In most cases, this is no xenophobic exercise. Rather,

It feels safe and logical to associate with similar backgrounds.

Homogenous teams excel at puzzles SUGGESTING THE PAST, INCREMENTAL CHANGE, or MODEL REPLICATION. Drawing from a common reservoir of knowledge and discipline-specific jargon, everybody speaks the same language. Overwhelmingly unified worldviews streamline the process.



In three short weeks, Manny Kyor will quit his job and move across country. Following a long career as a beautician, his new life involves an exciting but intimidating proposition.

CHALLENGE: Open a nail salon.

With limited managerial experience, Manny convenes a group of colleagues to plot his business strategy. Invited precisely because of what they have in common, all are experienced parlor owners or managers. He banks on learning from their experience and wisdom.

DIVERSITY

Homogenous teams have a hard time recognizing *core* assumptions, let alone testing them. When expertise runs deep but narrow, it becomes difficult to see the world through fresh eyes. Conversations get trapped in the weeds. Conventional wisdom is taken as gospel.

DIVERSE TEAMS, on the other hand, summon a larger set of skills and viewpoints. Puzzlers who intersect with the challenge in contrasting ways amplify creativity, knowledge base, and feedback potential.

Diversity is ideal for challenges of innovation.

At times, everyone gets stuck while problem-solving. However, different types of people struggle with different parts of the process. As a result, teams

drawing from diverse perspectives are less likely to suffer a unilateral shutdown when confronting a hitch.

The farmer Harvey Stur struggles to keep his crops alive, and knows he needs help.



To design an extraordinary, efficient solution, Harvey quickly realizes that "farmers only" will be too limited. Hoping to explore a variety of uncommon directions, he invites a colorful assortment of characters offering unique perspectives. The eventual roster includes a fellow agriculturalist, plumber, water engineer, aquarium builder, sculptor, chemist, and general creative with deep problem-solving expertise.



NOT ENOUGH

Emphasizing their commitment to DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, many groups actively recruit historically marginalized, underrepresented populations. Despite admirable intentions, however, even these efforts can fall short.

Different-looking, same-thinking becomes the community.

Diversity entails more than race and gender. Think holistically when assembling puzzlers. Consider:

- Age
- Gender/sexual orientation
- Job title/rank/sector
- Neighborhood/geography
- Personal/professional experience
- Political/social views
- Race/ethnicity/religion
- Skill sets
- Socioeconomic strata
- Thinking styles (e.g. big vs. small picture orientation)
- Topic expertise

If nothing changes, Theo Speeyon fears his theatre troupe may be run out of business.



His puzzling team *looks* fairly diverse, blending men and women of different races. All theatre professionals, they share a deep awareness of industry challenges and are committed to sustaining Theo's beloved organization.

Their GAME starts with a bang. Enthusiasm flows. But after a while, puzzlers hit a wall. The best suggestions mimic other (struggling) companies. **Investigating beyond this familiar paradigm proves challenging.**

Theo realizes he may have made a mistake. *Might voices from other sectors offer fresher ideas?* For example, a sports stadium thrives down the road. "What do they know that we don't?" he wonders.

TOO MUCH

In recent years, hype for diverse teams has exploded. Hailed the secret to all of life's woes, this formula has indeed generated the remarkable. But that is far from guaranteed.

Diversity is not a panacea.

The benefits of diversity are available only when puzzlers are open to new ways of thinking. Intersecting fields or backgrounds lengthen the learning curve. They introduce interpersonal challenges when puzzlers act insensitively or are unaware of EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS.

There is such a thing as too much diversity.

When seven theories compete for attention, teams may become mired in differences, failing to agree on anything. Bitter disagreement on basic facts, premises, or priorities leads to gridlock and frustration.

It would be foolish for someone needing a back operation to consult a panel of dermatologists, stockbrokers, and hairdressers. Skilled surgeons are best equipped to solve this particular puzzle. Stick with the experts.

Ar Katekt is a developer looking to build a welcoming new neighborhood.



To imagine an oasis that energizes a rich array of demographics, Ar's puzzlers include a college sophomore, father of young twins, retiree, wealthy businesswoman, starving artist, and rancher. *At first, the diversity is incredible*. Collectively, they propose all sorts of wonderful fantasies. The dad loves playgrounds. The artist advocates murals. The student wants taverns. The pensioner needs quiet.

When time comes to prioritize, however, nobody will budge. **Their wishes are too different**. With little mood for compromise, this "community for all" starts feeling like a district for nobody.

THE BEST EXPERTS

Problem-solving teams are clearly better off with **brilliant**, **positive**, **invested contributors**. Beyond that, an IDEAL MIX depends on the puzzle itself.

CHALLENGE A

Recode the company website to be sleeker and faster.

Though this may well involve creative strategizing, it calls primarily for TECHNICAL EXPERTISE. When it comes to skill sets, a fairly homogenous crew of **designers** and **developers** makes sense.

CHALLENGE B

How might the company website become more compelling?

Quite different from the previous challenge, this is about INTRIGUE, buzz, and meeting users on their turf. In addition to **IT support**, a diverse team might include **employees** from across the organization as well as **external consultants** with fresh eyes. *How about actual customers?*

CHALLENGE C

Improve employee retention.

This challenge is typically addressed by upper management However, why not include a variety of profiles: **entry-level employees, commuters, nursing moms, late-career workers**, etc.? Or a crazier idea..*Folks who recently left the company.* In addition to offering valuable, feedback, they are likely to broadcast leadership's sincere interest in making things better.

CHALLENGE D

Revise the university English curriculum.

This team is obvious: THE LANGUAGE FACULTY. They own the courses. They teach them. Case closed!

But hold on...Why is revision necessary in the first place? Consider the:



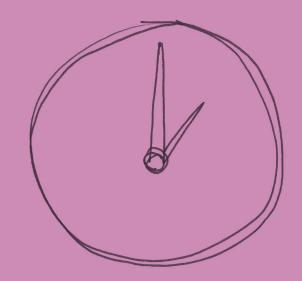
The PROBLEM-UNDER-THE-PROBLEM.

If a discontinued textbook must be replaced, English teachers are key.

But what if the world has changed, yet higher ed hasn't kept up?

What if the goal is to teach STUDENTS rather than English, preparing them for fulfilling lives and viable careers? In this case, a broader coalition is advisable. Identify an array of puzzlers who bring unique value to the GAME.

- English professors who will teach the courses
- Other faculty with transferrable ideas
- Administrators with a solid grasp of university goals
- Representative students with insights on what motivates peers
- Career coaches or business leaders who understand workforce needs



1:00:12

PERIOD

What's the clock?

Problem-solving requires TIME.

Yet in a world where people confront seemingly infinite projects, many important challenges are deprived the minutes they deserve. With everyone so busy, how can we reasonably carve out room for THIS? As a result, vital steps are rushed or neglected altogether. *Innovation is sacrificed*. Important issues are moved indefinitely to the backburner.

Time is the scarcest resource. **Be careful never to waste it.** But skimp here at your own risk.

There is ALWAYS enough time for what matters most.

GAMEs are played on many timelines. In selecting one, carefully consider what can reasonably be accomplished within the allocated period.



HOW LONG does it take to complete a project?

I've posed this query to many groups. The response is predictable: "Depends what you have to do!" But I respectfully disagree. Most of us use **exactly the same amount of time** to get just about anything done.

...As long as you have.

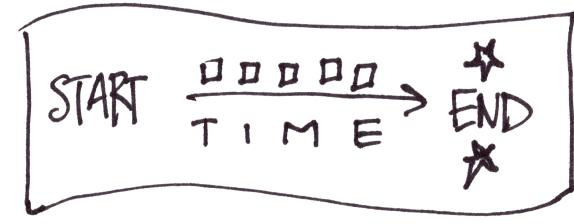
If the assignment is due next week, final touches are added the night before. Given a month or a season, it similarly comes together at the 11th hour. And if there's a year—you get the point.

The exception goes to planners with extended deadlines. When projecting three, five, ten years down the road, the vision is unlikely to ever be realized. *Not enough urgency!*

The trick to planning a GAME, or anything else for that matter, is reserving just enough time. Three sagacious words transform productivity.

77

Deadlines with consequences.



Short GAME: Sprint

Duration: 30-minutes to 2-hours

Short GAMEs, playable during TYPICAL MEETING PERIODS, are all you need to start solving problems. While too brief to flesh out complex solutions, this period is nonetheless sufficient for meaningful, self-contained

experiences.

One possibility is honing in on a SECTOR SOLUTION (page 47), or small part of the problem. Another involves harvesting large-scale concepts, to be developed later. Or the goal can be to simply cultivate skills and build community. Regardless of scope, the key is designing stand-alone processes where something tangible is achieved before the closing bell.

Even sprints can generate valuable outcomes.

Medium GAME: Jog

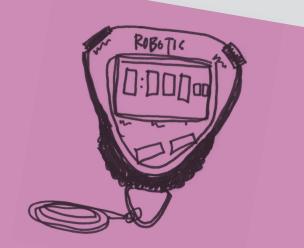
Duration: Half to full day (typically 3 - 10 hours)

Unlike sprints, medium GAMEs require a SPECIAL EVENT. The focal point of retreats, development days, and conferences, they allow more opportunity for

Within the course of a jog, puzzlers can reasonably develop a skeletal prototype and/or proposal. There may be time for outside voices to make cameos (interview subjects, expert consultants, etc.).

Rather than covering too much ground, stay focused.

Deeper is better than wider.



Long GAME: Marathon

2 days to 1 week (or longer)

It is amazing how much can be accomplished during marathons. When done well, these IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES unleash the extraordinary. Individual phases may span hours, allowing ample time for detective work, prototype development, feedback collection, consensus building, and other activities.

Marathons are exhilarating and intense.

Pay special attention to the **emotional trajectory**. Demands of play can wear on individuals over time, though everyone responds differently. Some commit to positivity, while others get skittish. Puzzlers typically begin relaxed and good-humored, and most teams finish strong. But in between, extended concentration and GAME demands may trigger prickly personalities.

Facilitators should stay keenly attuned to team dynamics.

Other Meets	OVERVIEW:	DURATION:	STRENGTH:	CHAL-
Periodic Races	Series of sprints (self-contained GAMEs or continuing effort)	Weekly Monthly Sporadic	Cumulative time Reflect between meetings	Maintaining momentum
Relays	Teams address different parts of problem Hand off solutions	Flexible, as often as time allows	Accountable to a deadline Team decides how to approach	Building continuity Communication between teams
Countdowns	Must solve by prescribed date Meet and work as necessary	Combine sprints, jogs, and/or marathons	More perspectives Time commitment less per person	Not waiting until the last minute Committing enough time and energy
Open-Ended	Work until puzzle is solved	Flexible	No real or artificial deadline Continue until a great solution emerges	Lacks urgency Time management Hard to prioritize
Hybrids 30	Combination of above	Flexible	Integrated approach advantages	Integrated approach weaknesses

Polly Sea has been assigned a daunting task.



Chairing a committee of nine puzzlers representing every department, she has their undivided attention for one hour per week over the course of three months.

Rather than treating this as a single gigantic puzzle, her PERIODIC RACES involve a series of independent GAMEs. Each engaging session tackles one isolated aspect. Policy guidelines are set collaboratively, with individuals asked to craft language between sessions.



"The key is in not spending time, but in investing it."

- Stephen R. Covey, author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People



Perhaps no resource is as universally squandered as PHYSICAL SPACE.

Even multinational corporations with architectural marvels fail this test, at least if they aspire to innovation. Sure, the office is nice. *But walls are bare or boring*. Artwork is limited to CEO portraits and random imagery. An eerie formality punishes creativity, as visitors tiptoe to avoid spilling coffee on the proverbial Persian rug.

Rooms are more than inconsequential square footage. They impact process, psychology, even outcomes. What story does yours tell?

Space matters!



KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS have figured this out. They understand the value—necessity—of **celebrating community members** while **showcasing exploration**. Who needs Rembrandts when we've got dioramas and sock puppets designed by our very own *creative geniuses?*

A little IMAGINATION goes a long way.

It can transform hideous spaces, or even beautiful ones, into VIBRANT EXPERIMENTATION LABORATORIES. They impact process, psychology, even outcomes. What story does yours tell?



When choosing locales, consider how practical implications will impact your GAME. Is it accessible? How many people fit? Which rooms are available? What technology? Wall space? Seating? Food options? Restrictions?

Foreign Offsite locations unleash fresh energy, adding gravitas to the experience.	VS.	Familiar People know how to get there, find bathrooms, use the technology.
Bohemian Unconventional venues may inspire novel thinking.	VS.	Bare Basic rooms provide a backdrop that can be unobtrusive or reimagined.
Unified Challenge-related locations (e.g. farm when discussing agribusiness), allow puzzlers to engage directly with the problem.	VS.	Unrelated Perhaps all you need is a neutral space.
Costly Fancy, expensive locations offer puzzlers a sweet reward for their efforts.	VS.	Complementary Free/inexpensive venues leave money for other activities. This may be the only viable option.

Judy Shurry will lead a team of lawyers and lawmakers.



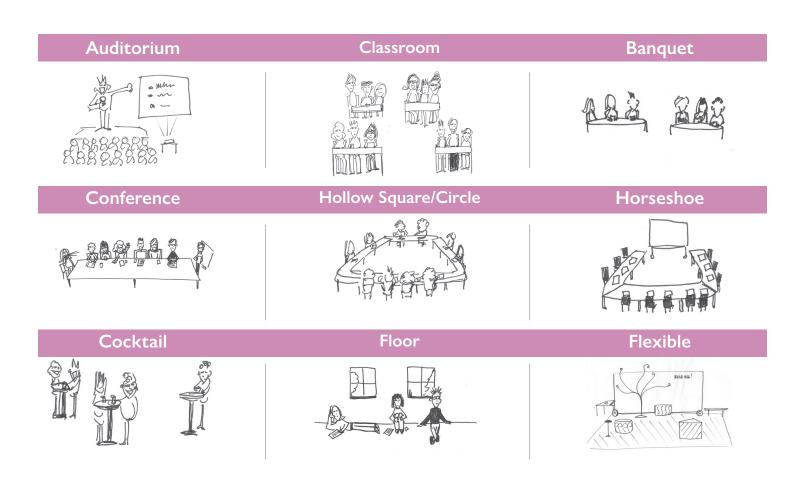
Rather than the usual downtown highrise, she opts for a less traditional setting. Emphasizing urgency surrounding this issue, they convene in a prison.





84

When nothing is bolted to the ground, you control how teams engage. Seating formation impacts activities, conversations, and collaborations. Choose one arrangement, or alternate during various phases.



When left to their own devices, *puzzlers notoriously gravitate to familiar faces* or those with similar backgrounds, particularly in large groups. To force unlikely connections, **assign deliberately diverse seating**. When that is impractical, instruct folks to join forces with those they don't yet know.



Transport puzzlers to an alternate reality.

When that happens, a pleasant shock often beams through their eyes as if to suggest, "WOW, this is cool! We must have important work to do."

Evoking magic mustn't require much, particularly for those new to innovation. Most people operate in realms where creative space making is largely absent. Birthday parties, yes. Problem-solving, no...

Some venues are breathtaking, others hip, still others drab. Regardless of intrinsic aesthetics, any space can be transformed with a little planning and creativity. Consider potential within, and leave ample time for setup.

Design your puzzling space like a work of ART.

85

PAINT THE WALLS

Walls, columns, and other structural elements are commonly integrated as:

MESSAGING Areas display key documents	WORKING Areas collaborate at the wall	DISPLAY Areas showcase team proposals

SET THE TABLE

Tables are opportunities.

More than mere sitting spots, they become a canvas for exploration, displaying vital materials (Chapter 3).

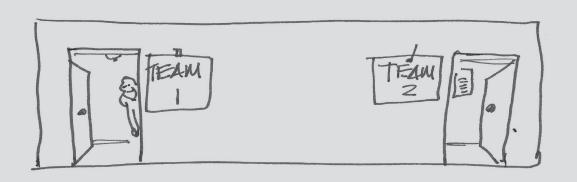
Take great care when "setting the table." Give your GAME a look, considering placement and aesthetics of each item. Pay attention to details, even the direction of pen lids or post-it pad stacks. For multiple stations, begin with a PROTOTYPE TABLE and then unify the setup.



Team Spaces

Many GAMEs involve multiple teams working in the same large chamber, each assigned their own table. Doing so makes it possible to switch seamlessly between independent teamwork and full community discussion. A presiding facilitator—known as GAME MASTER—typically guides the process, roams the space, and addresses questions. Participants learn by observing one another, finding motivation in collective energy.

In addition to this central location, it may be helpful to **offer groups their own real estate** for at least parts of the process. Common practice during long GAMEs, doing so permits increased freedom and autonomy. Just be sure puzzlers clearly grasp instructions when working independently.



FOCAL POINT

Where is attention centered? Consider sightline from various locations. The decision may be made—if a screen is required. Rotating focal points adds variety, but creates logistical challenges.



Each space becomes an independent universe.



It is fascinating to observe competing TEAM ROOMS. Different leadership and collaboration styles emerge. Some groups stay unwaveringly serious, while others are less formal. Creativity on display is astounding, as communities explore their own unique voice.

Whether or not you control an ARENA, make the most of resources at hand.