Wicked Problem Solving®

Practitioner Playbook

A Modern Operating System For Creative Collaboration

ESSENTIAL PLAYS

1 POST UP — What are our ideas? — Write, Post Up. — Page 32	**2 CLUSTER** — How should we categorize our ideas? — Cluster, Talk, Synthesize. — Page 36	**3 SORT** — How should we sequence our ideas? — Sort, Talk. — Page 40	**4 VOTE** — Which ideas do we prefer? — Vote, Talk. — Page 42	**5 QUESTION BLITZ** — What questions can and should we ask? — Question, Post Up. — Page 44
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OPENING

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MIDDLE

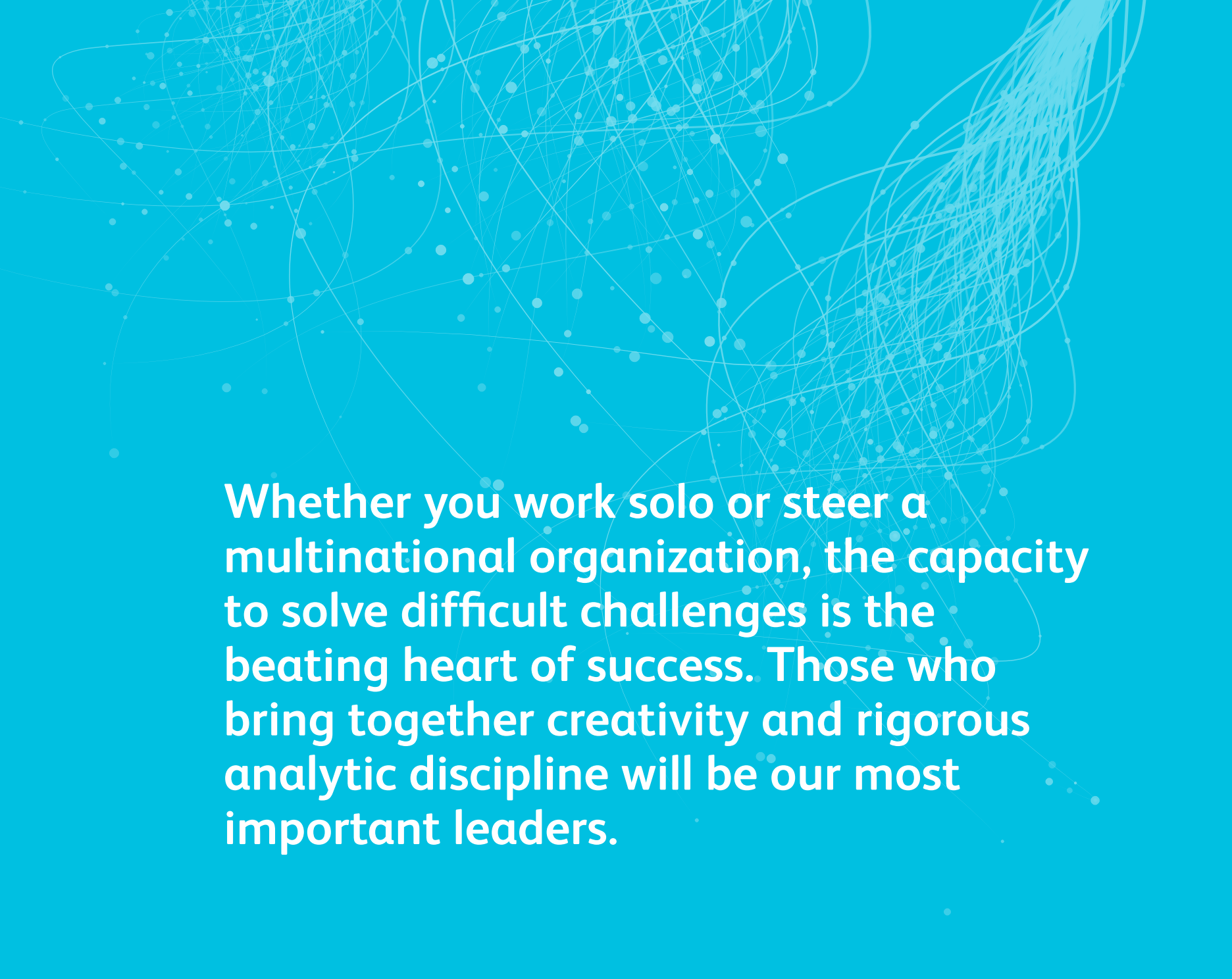|				
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CLOSING

Wicked Problem Solving is a modern operating system for creative collaboration. Here you will find tools and methods to solve problems, lead change, guide teams, and thrive in a world that is constantly in motion.
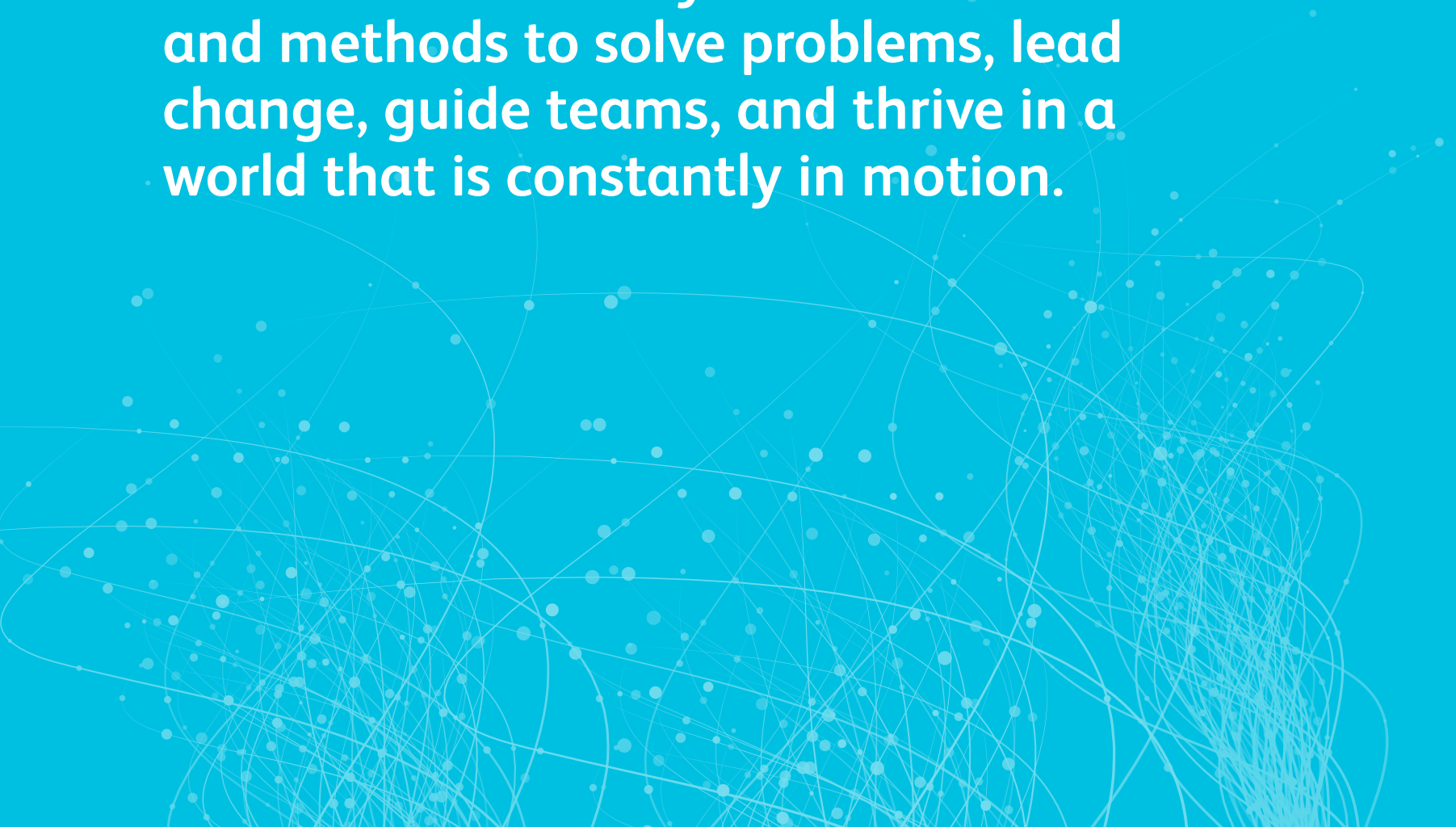
Whether you work solo or steer a multinational organization, the capacity to solve difficult challenges is the beating heart of success. Those who bring together creativity and rigorous analytic discipline will be our most important leaders.

The Power Of Plays

An overview of plays: what they are, why they work, when to use them, and how to apply them to simple and complex challenges.
Page 1

Essential Plays

Learn ten Essential plays to build a solid foundation of the tools and methods of creative collaboration.
Page 26
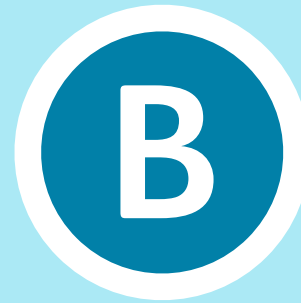
Playsets

Combine Essential plays into simple structures to compare and contrast ideas and generate multiple points of view.
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Meetings

Design and run better meetings by selecting plays that clarify and reach the goals of a group.
Page 98

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Solve Problems

Solve difficult challenges by using the WPS Path and adding Extended Plays to your arsenal.
Page 164

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Lead Change

Guide people to adopt a new vision, strategy, technology, culture, process, or business model through change plays.
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F

Tame Wickedness

Address complexity, ambiguity, and dilemmas by reducing the qualities of wickedness.
Page 248

G

Extended Plays

Expand your toolkit with a rich variety of useful plays.
Page 278

Introduction

The world will never move as slowly as it does today. The challenges ahead will only become more convoluted, pressing, and divisive. To tackle them, we must learn to adapt faster than the world is changing.

This Playbook will add to your arsenal of thinking and collaboration tools to not only ride the waves of change but to also thrive in the days ahead.

The Future of Work

The nature of work continues to evolve, and we need to evolve with it

Modern knowledge work is a wonderful vocation. Thinking for a living is rewarding and challenging and can elevate you to the top of your organization and industry.

Up until recently, it was possible to succeed only by developing technical and management capabilities. Mastering your vocation while growing your people skills was sufficient to thrive.

But in today's environment, work is increasingly complex, fluid, uncertain, biased, and emotionally charged, and it demands a broader range of capabilities. We are required to identify hidden problems, understand their impact quickly, set sharp and inspirational goals, generate creative options, and do all of this with our teams and customers—in person and remotely.

According to the World Economic Forum, the most valued capabilities in this decade of the pandemic are the abilities to solve complex problems, think innovatively, and fluidly adopt new learning strategies. These capabilities do not consist of individual skills but emerge from a constellation of attitudes and aptitudes.

The capacity to solve complex problems demands that we see the world as a collection of systems and understand how its parts interconnect with the whole.

The ability to innovate involves identifying problems that matter, systematically exploring options creatively and analytically, and aligning on desirable, viable, and feasible solutions.

The capacity to foster active learning strategies requires that we periodically pause, stand back, and do what it takes to elevate our skills. We must be aware of the strategies we take, reflect on their effectiveness, and be able and willing to try something new.

What we as leaders, innovators, managers, and changemakers need now is not just to grow specific skills but also to develop our broader capabilities and hoist us above immediate pressures to orchestrate work at a higher level.

In today's economy, our worth correlates with the value we contribute to our customers and organizations. To develop our ability to create more value—for ourselves, our teams, and our organizations—we need a good system.
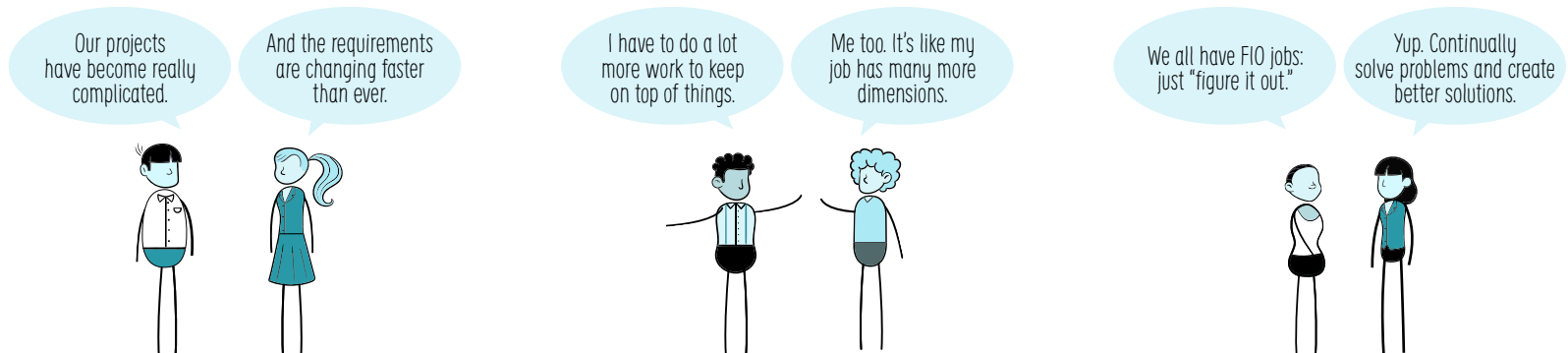
Improve Work By Designing and Running Better Plays

Use a visual system to organize work and collaborate with teams

Wicked Problems Solving (WPS) provides a unified and integrated approach to elevate your thinking and collaboration skills. It's adapted and developed from the hard-won lessons of design thinkers, lean practitioners, Agile masters, successful entrepreneurs, and modern cognitive research and behavioral economists.

When applied thoughtfully, this system will help you lead yourself and your teams to work more cohesively and intelligently, forge better outcomes, and create more value.

The central premise of the WPS Playbook is that we can systematically elevate our ability to perform better knowledge work by thinking in plays. The habit to run plays—time-bound courses of action—causes us to pause, consider the challenges at hand, and for a few moments, think about how we will get to the best outcomes.

Plays change how you tackle an issue with a coworker, boss, or client. Plays expose root causes and promote a shared understanding of deeper issues. Plays coax you to think about questions first—and to use them more consistently, thoughtfully, precisely, and strategically.

Plays remind you to visualize ideas, not just talk about them. They invite you to use a shared visual workspace to think more vividly, lucidly, and systemically.

Plays also provide simple, clear, cogent instructions to elevate the quality of the thinking of your coworkers, employees, bosses, partners, and customers.

When you use plays, a discussion about an agenda becomes a reminder to get sharp about who will be in the meeting, what changes need to take place, and how best to guide those changes.

A customer working session transforms from a surface conversation to rich exploration of their world, what jobs they need to perform, what pains they experience, and what joys they feel in their work.

And a change initiative becomes an opportunity to understand what really needs to happen in your organization and how to make a real and lasting improvement in the people you work with.

Seeing the big picture cuts through the complexity.

I manage change better when I see it all in front of us.

A visual workspace simplifies complex problems.

Doing work visually seems to expand my skills.

It's easier to figure things out when we share ways of working.

Plays help us design and do better work.
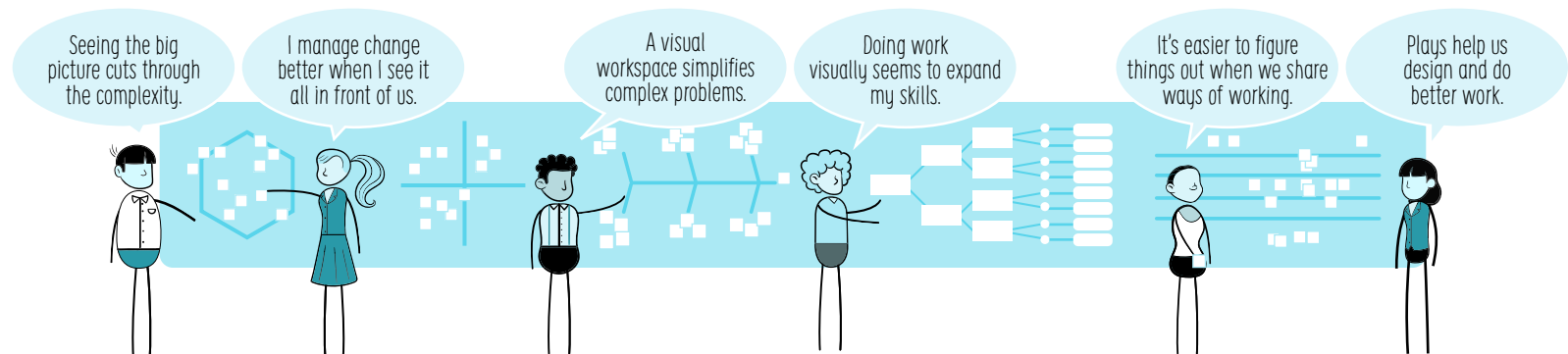
How to Use This Playbook

Read it sequentially from start to finish or use it as a reference tool

The WPS Practitioner's Playbook is a companion to the WPS Practitioner's Workbook. Whereas the Workbook delves deeply into the mechanisms of creative collaboration, the Playbook provides a wide set of practical tools to address problems—from everyday issues to complex dilemmas.

You can use the WPS Playbook in two ways: you can read it from start to finish and build up a clear understanding of how plays fit together, from the essentials to the wicked; or you can jump around and select the plays that suit the moment.

I'd recommend that you read the guide sequentially as you would read an instruction manual. This approach will give you a solid grounding to the many diverse applications of Wicked Problem Solving. The time you spend learning about different kinds of plays will dramatically increase the breadth and depth of your mental and collaboration toolkit.

The Playbook introduces a wide range of plays, some that you may be familiar with and others that may be completely new to you. You'll find plays that untangle specific aspects of a problem and plays that expose how people are feeling and showing up.

You'll find general-purpose plays designed to be used frequently, and specific plays that are suited for nuanced discussions. There are plays that you might use once or twice in your career. But when you do, they become the perfect tool to untangle the situation you find yourself in.

The Playbook starts with the essential plays—simple, general, and powerful plays you can use anytime, anywhere. It progresses to playsets, where you combine plays into pairs and triplets to see multiple points of view and create simple problem solving recipes. From there, you add new plays to design and run better meetings. We've included a meeting diagnostic and a collection of Meeting Maps to quickly select playsets that suit the meeting you need to run.

From there, you can dig into the WPS Path to select Extended Plays to tackle more-nuanced problems. You will apply these Extended Plays to three sections: Problem Solving; Lead Change; and Tame Wickedness. Here's how the Playbook unfolds across six sections:

THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL
HOW TO SELECT, DESIGN, AND RUN PLAYS

A	B	C	D	E	F
ESSENTIAL PLAYS	PLAYSET COMBINATIONS	MEETING PLAYS	PROBLEM SOLVING	LEAD CHANGE	TAME WICKEDNESS
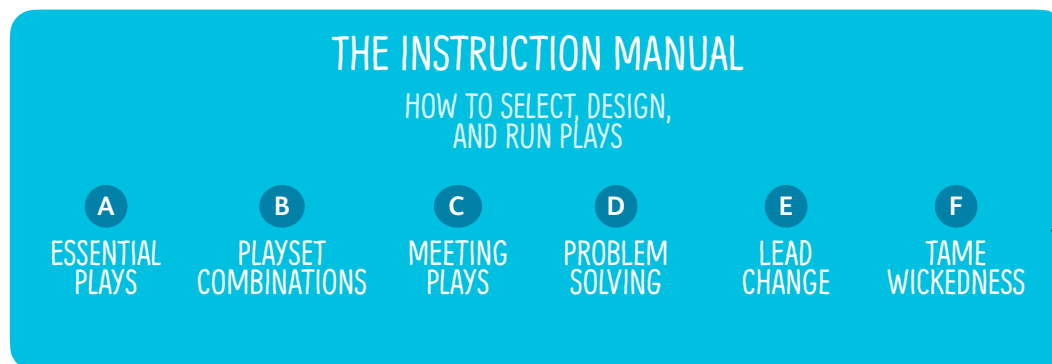
Read through the Playbook to understand how to combine plays into custom playsets.
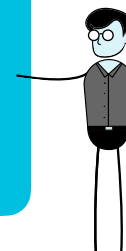
THE PLAYBOOK AS AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL

A **ESSENTIAL PLAYS**

Begin with ten Essential plays to kick-start collaborative visual collaboration.

B **PLAYSET COMBINATIONS**

Combine Essential plays into simple patterns to compare and contrast and bring multiple points of view together into a cohesive whole.

C **MEETING PLAYS**

Design and run better meetings by using plays to identify the desired outcomes as well as perform tasks to deliver those outcomes.

D **PROBLEM SOLVING**

Use the WPS Path to select the best plays to unpack and solve hard problems. Bring your team along to make creative and logical solutions.

E **LEAD CHANGE**

Use the WPS Path to create positive change, drive small changes, or orchestrate institutional transformations.

F **TAME WICKEDNESS**

Tackle wicked problems— the complex, entangled, and biased dilemmas— that affect businesses, society, and the planet.

WHAT YOU LEARN

Become comfortable running Essential plays in everyday situations.

Use plays fluidly to untangle the deeper issues in everyday situations and bring clarity to your team's thinking.

Transform meetings from loosely structured gatherings to tightly focused collaboration sessions. Add visual workspaces to improve clarity and alignment.

Untangle virtually any challenge by stepping through the WPS Path: Identify the problem; diagnose it; select plays that suit the problem; run the plays; and resolve the issue.

Select from a wide set of Extended plays to elevate strategic thinking, guide a transformation, and apply the fundamentals of Design Thinking.

Explore how to tame the qualities of wickedness and find a path forward to manage and exploit trade-offs. Combine all of the elements in *Wicked Problem Solving* to become a master.

Build a solid foundation of the essential skills.

Use playsets to work through everyday issues.

Apply plays to make meetings more effective.

Add extended plays to address more complex issues.

Guide your teams to create positive change.

Address the tough problems that matter.

Use the Playbook as a Fast-Access Reference

Identify your situation and jump to the play or playset that suits your challenge

If you want to use the Playbook as a reference guide, simply use the WPS Play map to select relevant plays, playsets, and playbooks.

If, for example, you need to run a client workshop to pinpoint their challenges, go to the meeting section and choose the Customer Introduction and Sense-Making Plays. If you need to work with a client to create a better value proposition, go to the Lead Change section. Or if you need some inspiration to work through a dilemma of trade-offs of doing hybrid work, choose the Decision Tree or Polarity play.

The WPS Play maps are presented in three versions: the Problems to Solve map, which organizes plays by kind of challenge; the Meeting map, which presents plays by kinds of meetings you need to run; and Roles map, which organizes plays by the roles of people most likely to use them.

Once you pick the play or playset that fits your challenge, simply go to the page. Modify if you'd like, adding and embellishing if the situation demands it, or subtracting and simplifying if it is less pressing or consequential.

To run the play, use the tools that suit the environment you are working in—whiteboards, posters, foam core boards, markers, and sticky notes if you are working in person, or a digital visual collaboration tool if working virtually.

If this is your first time running plays, and you haven't yet taken the Wicked Problem Solving Practitioner's Course, I'd suggest you review the core principles, plays, paths, and playsets on the following pages. This will orient you to the essential ideas.

A — PROBLEMS TO SOLVE
SELECT PLAYS BY
IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

B — OUTCOMES TO CREATE
SELECT PLAYS BY
IDENTIFYING OUTCOMES

TEAM   PROJECT
CLIENT   CHANGE

C — ROLES TO FULFILL
SELECT PLAYS BY THE
JOBS YOU FILLS
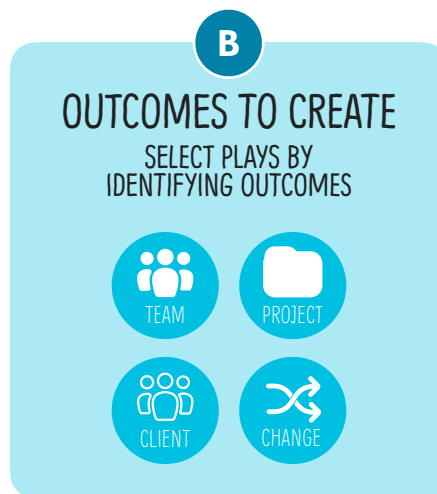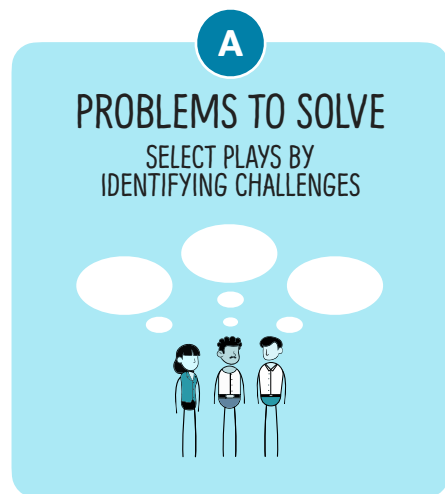
PROBLEMS TO SOLVE
SELECT PLAYS BY PROBLEM FRAME

PERSONAL

TEAM

PRODUCT/PROJECT

ORGANIZATION

B

OUTCOMES TO CREATE
SELECT PLAYS BY IDENTIFYING OUTCOMES

TEAM

PROJECT

CLIENT

CHANGE

GUIDE TEAMS

MANAGE PROJECTS

ENGAGE CLIENTS

LEAD CHANGE

Team Charter Page 122
- New product team
- Technology transformation
- New product development

Project Kickoff Page 132
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- Website refresh

Introduction Page 142
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- New leader introduction
- Sales pitch

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- New product concepts
- Use case scenarios

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- Win/loss review

Negotiation Page 148
- Contract discussion
- Conflict resolution
- Employee dispute

Decision Making Page 158
- Hire a new employee
- Select a vendor
- Approve a proposal

c

ROLES TO FULFILL
SELECT PLAYS TO SUPPORT JOBS

SENIOR LEADER
Set direction. Allocate resources.

PROJECT MANAGER
Guide project execution better.

PEOPLE MANAGER
Lead teams to do their best work.

PROCESS ENGINEER
Design ingenious systems.

ENTREPRENEUR & SMALL BUSINESS
Grow a thriving business.

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR
Get important work done.

CLIENT-FACING LEADER
Help customers succeed.

CREATIVE & INNOVATOR
Produce breakthrough solutions.

CONSULTANT & SERVICE PROFESSIONAL
Elevate business performance.

DEVELOPER & CHANGE LEAD
Create great technology nimbly.

Four Key Concepts of Wicked Problem Solving

Principles, Plays, Paths, and Playsets

Wicked Problem Solving helps people coordinate their work by applying a simple visual system built on four concepts: principles, plays, paths, and playsets. The principles establish the underlying approach to solving problems.

Plays are concise units of work. Paths are steps used to select and run plays. Playsets are collections of plays. That's it. Everything else is an elaboration of these four central concepts.

1

PRINCIPLES

2

PLAYS

3

PATHS

Three fundamental principles form the foundation of Wicked Problem Solving: lead with key questions; make ideas visible; and engage with forward steps. These principles are simple but deep, and can be applied in profoundly creative ways.
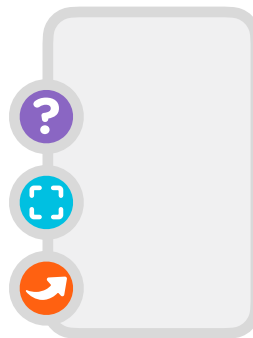
Plays bring together the three principles—a key question, a visual workspace, and clear tasks—into concise instructions that guide people to perform specific work. Plays concentrate attention, illustrate thinking, and engage people to be fully involved as they progress through the problem.

A path consists of the steps you take from start to finish, from problem to solution. It begins with identifying and diagnosing the problem, selecting and designing optimal plays, and running those plays fully, then concludes with arriving at a fruitful and satisfying resolution.

4

PLAYSETS

Plays can be combined into playsets. Playsets range from simple and fast combinations that address everyday challenges to complex and deep combinations that untangle thorny issues.

Simple.
Concise.
Fast.

Complex.
Deep.
Involved.

C

MEETING PLAYS

Improve the outcomes of everyday meetings by using clear collaboration structures.

D

PROBLEM-SOLVING PLAYS

Systematically build shared understanding, generate options, and make choices to align on winning solutions.

B

SIMPLE PLAYSETS

Combine several plays into a sequence to make space for several points of view.

E

LEAD CHANGE PLAYS

Drive strategy, align teams, increase agility, foster innovation, and engage customers.

A

ESSENTIAL PLAYS

Run a single play to work through an idea or explore a challenge.

OUR
OPPORTUNITIES

OUR
CHALLENGES

F

TAME WICKEDNESS

Address complexity and uncertainty to deal with intense change, dilemmas, and grand challenges.

1. Principles Elevate Creative and Analytical Thinking

The fundamental approaches underpinning creative collaboration

Every modern method of creative collaboration employs a set of operating principles, a collection of approaches that define its philosophy and application. The Wicked Problem Solving principles are questions, visuals, and tasks.

Questions open the door to investigation, exploration, analysis, and understanding, When we lead with questions (rather than assertions), we immediately adopt a mindset that is open to learning and curiosity.

Making ideas visible involves using visual workspaces to show what you and your team are thinking. A whiteboard or shared digital collaboration space creates a place to think, communicate, and collaborate. Here, you model the problem.

Engaging with forward steps means selecting simple tasks that advance the problem toward a solution. In other words, you do more than talk. You take specific action to work the model.

Together, these three principles engage complementary modes of thinking: verbal thinking for questions; visual thinking in the workspace; and tactile thinking through physical actions. Plays brings the entire person and all their capabilities to the table.

PRINCIPLES

These principles represent the fundamental approaches to solving and leading.
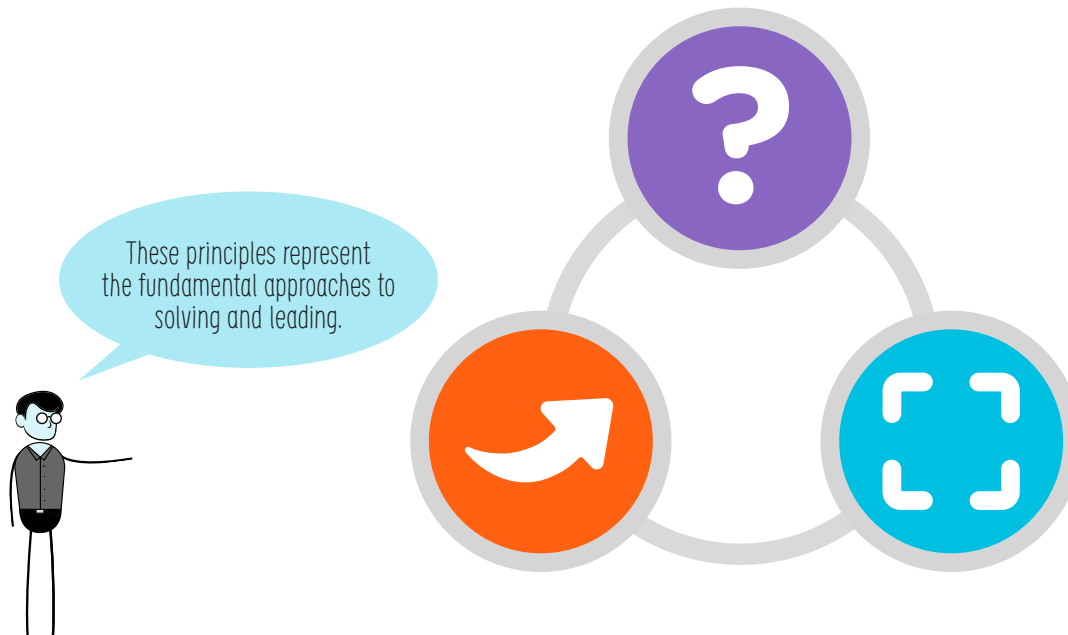
LEAD WITH
KEY QUESTIONS

Questions inspire, challenge, provoke, and stimulate our imaginations to embark on a journey to explore and find answers. Great questions open the door to learning. Use them to frame problems with precision, to navigate the stages of collaboration, and to probe ideas deeply, surfacing the truth to discover better solutions.
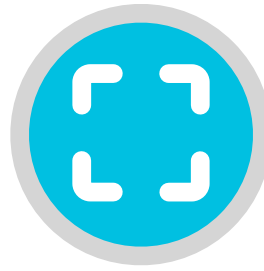
MAKE IDEAS
VISIBLE

Visuals clarify information. The act of making sketches, populating diagrams, and creating maps—converting abstract thoughts and conversations into images—forces people to express their ideas in tangible forms. Besides showing what we mean, images reduce the cognitive cost of juggling many thoughts inside of our head. Images make ideas accessible and available in a persistent visual workspace. Our collective IQ grows when we build a cohesive picture together.

ENGAGE WITH
FORWARD STEPS

Tasks deepen people's involvement in a situation. The physical acts of writing, drawing, sorting notes, building models, interviewing, and using software, among many other actions, convert passive bystanders to active participants. When people bring more of themselves into working through a challenge, they are more invested in creating a positive outcome.

2. Plays Provide Concise Instructions to Think Cohesively

Teams work better when they perform time-bound courses of action—cogently and cohesively

A play takes the three fundamental principles of Wicked Problem Solving—questions, visuals, and tasks—and fuses them into a single package, a block of work. It encourages people to concentrate their energy on a specific challenge they can complete within an allotted time.

Plays are represented by playing cards. Each card delivers a concise set of instructions. Think of a play as a little sprint, a brief process that guides people to question, build, and reflect.

To run a play is to deliver and follow the instructions: pose the question clearly; use the workspace to display your thinking; and invite others to perform the tasks. Well-run plays produce clearer outcomes, the best possible answers to a question.

Think of plays as concise units of work.

PLAY

? Key question.

⛶ Visual Workspace.

➦ Tasks.

Plays Concentrate Attention
Use plays to direct people to work intensely for a brief period of time. Select plays that have a relevant framing question, a visual workspace that suits the challenge, and tasks that are appropriate for the people involved and that can be run within the available time.

Plays Encourage Deep Work
Select plays that stretch people's capabilities. When you need fresh ideas, pick plays that expand creativity. When you need rigor, choose plays that emphasize logical connections. Select plays the inspire people do their best work, individually and collectively.

Plays Improve Performance
Run plays thoughtfully and deliberately, like you are coaching a sports team or directing a theater troupe. Deliver clear instructions and guide the team to follow them to the upper reaches of their ability.

The title identifies the name of the play.

The key question sets the agenda for the play. It directs people's attention on a central topic of investigation.

The visual workspace establishes a shared stage for people to gather and organize information and ideas.

The forward steps are sequences of tasks that people perform together to work through and answer the key question.

LEAP

? How do we move from the current to desired state?

Write. Post Up. Sort. Synthesize.

3. Paths Are Steps to Advance Through Problems

Move from irresolution to resolution by thoughtfully selecting optimal plays

Every problem, project, and initiative progresses through a path as it moves from irresolution to resolution. Simple challenges are solved by taking a short path. For example, to generate an agenda for a client meeting, you might quickly run one or two plays to gather your team's ideas about the issues to address, the sequence to address them, and the experiences you'd like to instil. Two or three plays run over fifteen minutes will resolve the issue.

But deep challenges must be solved by running several plays down a long and sometimes convoluted path, often with many different teams and rival stakeholders. Developing a plan to introduce new collaboration software or shifting the business model of your organization involves many tasks, meetings, and discussions, from the strategic level to planning stages, and from execution to tracking.

Though the number of steps places these activities in entirely different categories, they are each constructed from component plays. Applying discipline to select and run these steps benefits both short and long paths.

Think of Wicked Problem Solving plays as Lego blocks. To build the path, select the plays that create the structure and process that best carries you and your team along.

PATH

Paths help you select which plays to run.
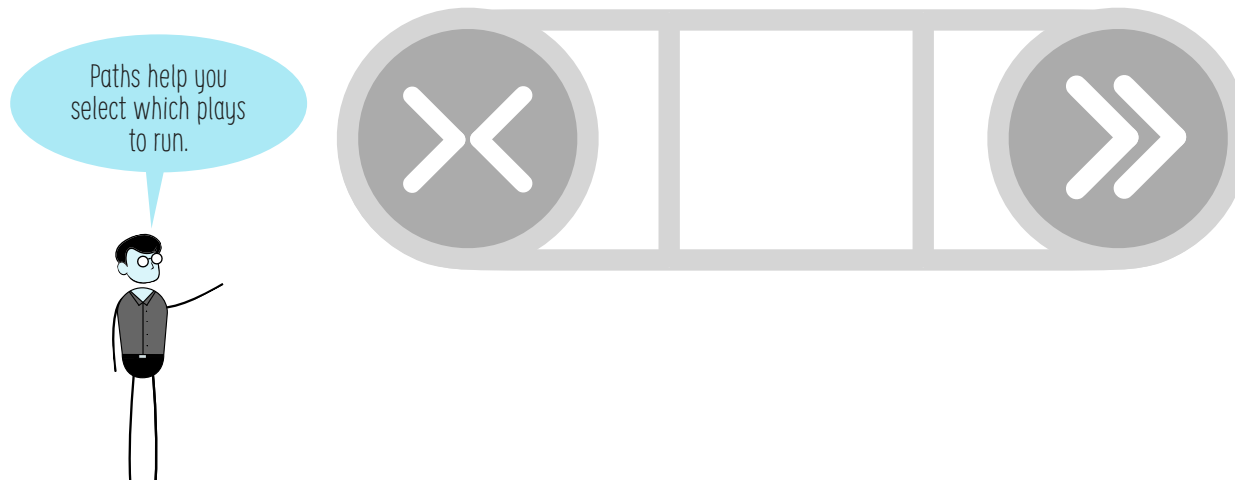
You will run individual plays when leading stand-up conversations, and larger play combinations when untangling more complex issues. Think of the path as carrying you from irresolution to resolution. Many of these paths are linear, but some are winding, doubling back on themselves. Generally, paths have three sections: an opening, a middle, and an end.

Opening plays frame the challenge and build a shared understanding of the problem. Middle plays explore options, work alternatives, and introduce and weigh different points of view. End plays resolve the problem. Though the plays feel different and perform different tasks, they all use the same underlying structure: lead with questions, make ideas visible, and engage with tasks.

The impact of working this way is that you create a visual system to see and document your collective thinking. As a group, you build a picture of the problem (with words and simple diagrams), create solution options, and align on an outcome. This is especially useful in complex situations or when you need to coordinate complex work. The WPS Path can be used as a simple framework to plot out a few plays, and it can be expanded into a universal five-step process to coordinate more complex work.
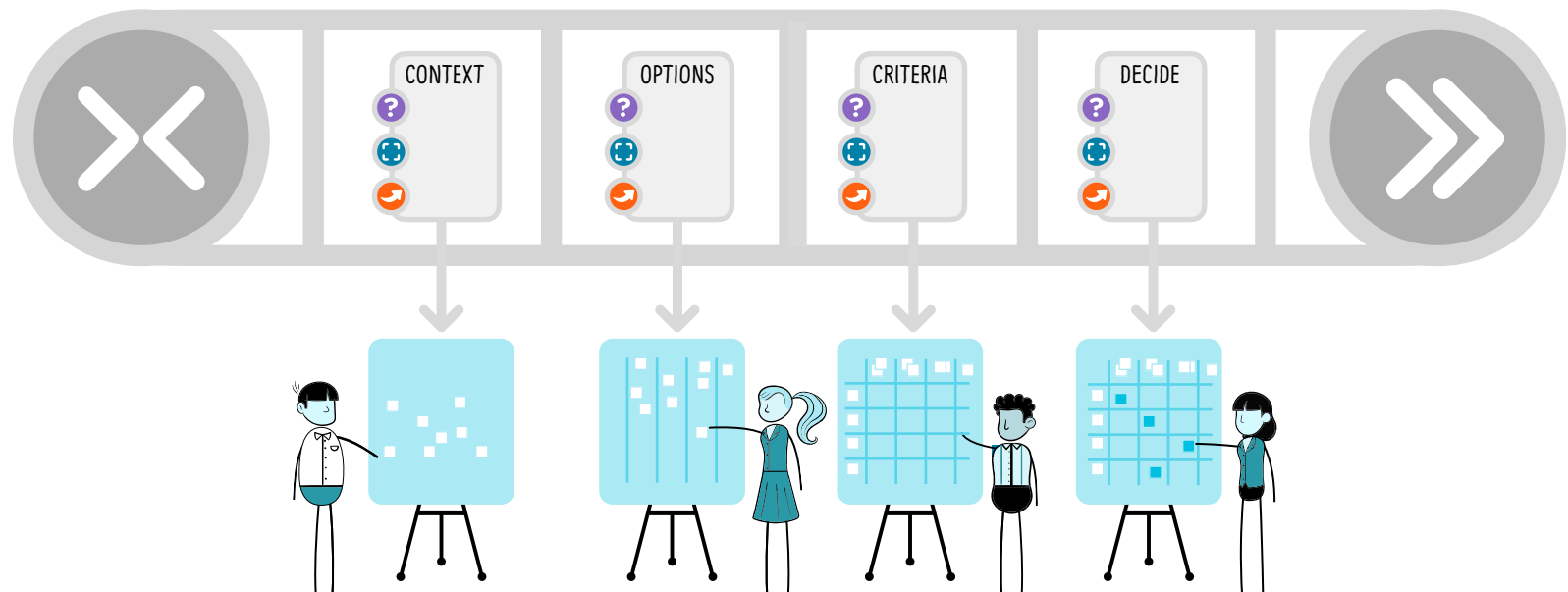
IDENTIFY
THE CHALLENGE

Clearly define the problem by describing the current state. Precisely, what challenge do you face?

DIAGNOSE
THE PROBLEM

Determine the frames, pressures, and structures shaping the problem. What kind of problem is at hand?

DESIGN
THE PLAYS

Pick plays that best advance people through the problem: build understanding, explore options, align on an outcome.

RUN
THE PLAYS

Execute the plays by working the principles: lead with questions, use visual workspaces, assign tasks.

RESOLVE
THE OUTCOME

Reach a conclusion that suits the nature of the challenge: Make a choice, build a plan, manage or exploit a dilemma.
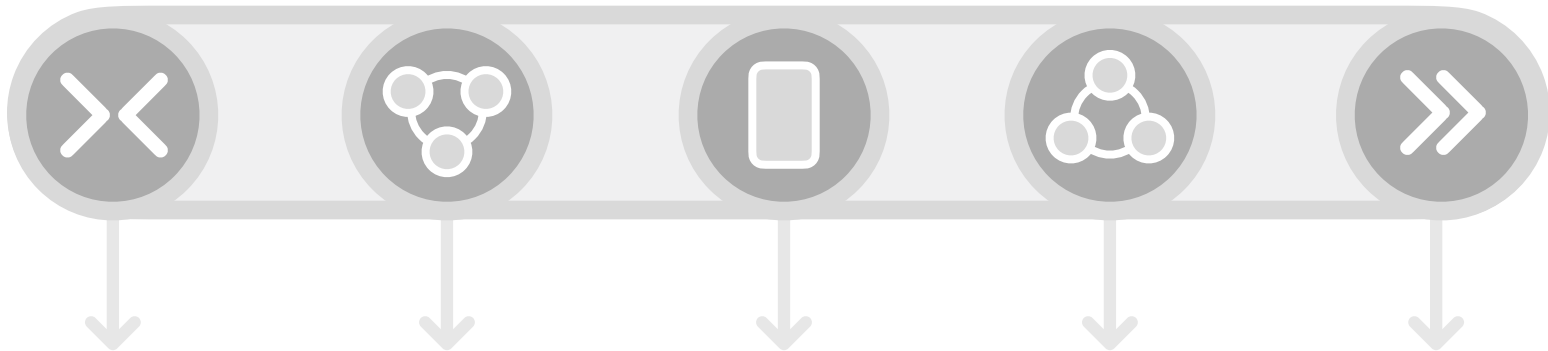
The challenge symbol is an 'X'. Think of it as pinpointing the key issue or irresolution. You can also think of it as a symbol of opposing forces.

The diagnosis symbol shows three interconnected circles. These represent the three parts of the problem diagnosis: frames, pressures, and structures.

The design symbol is a play card. In this step, select plays or a playset based on the diagnosis that guide you forward.

The run symbol is an icon representing the three WPS principles. While running plays, work the principles.

The resolution symbol is the forward icon. It represents an answer, solution, decision, or plan to advance.

The Path Is a Planning Tool

Move from irresolution to resolution by thoughtfully selecting optimal plays

The WPS Path is a diagram to identify and diagnose problems, design and run plays, and document outcomes.

The WPS Path has different flavors with slightly different naming conventions. You can use it to plan meetings, solve complex problems, lead change, or tame wickedness. But they all share the same elements:

WPS Path

TEAM   OWNER   DATE

IDENTIFY   DIAGNOSE   DESIGN   RUN   RESOLVE
1   2   3   4   5
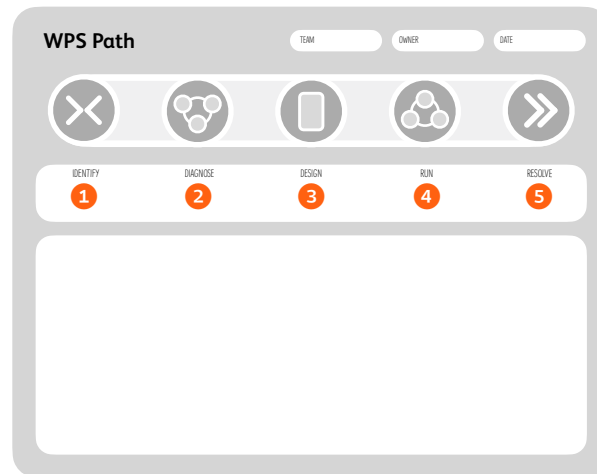
Apply this five-step process to solve problems, design meetings, lead change, and tame wickedness.
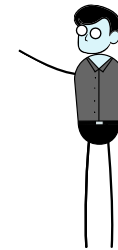
1 Identify

Figure out the problem. What exactly are you trying to solve or achieve? This could be a meeting to design, a problem to solve, a change initiative to lead, or an aspiration to reach.

2 Diagnose

Determine the size, scope, and depth of the situation. This will tell you what resources you'll need to bring to resolve it—and help you pick the plays you'll need to run to successfully resolve it.

3 Design

Select plays that address the challenge. Pick from the Playbook or design your own. The design will vary greatly depending on the problem you face. It's here you pick the kind of thinking and collaboration that best suits the problem. Many of the playsets are illustrated as Maps.

4 Run

Guide people to perform the plays. Coach the best performance. Here you move from the planning to the real world. You've created the workspace and you guide people to fill out the visual workspaces as they think through the challenges.

5 Resolve

The whole purpose of running plays is to arrive at a resolution or solution that has taken advantage of the participants' collective experience and intelligence. In the resolve section, you document the outcome.
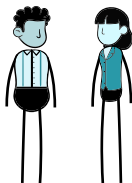
4. Playsets and Playbooks

Combine individual plays into playsets that suit the complexity and ambiguity of the situation

A

RUN INDIVIDUAL PLAYS

Select a single play to chart an issue and enrich a conversation. Pick from the ten essential plays—or Extended Plays—to tackle a simple problem, map out a situation, enrich a conversation, or simply show what everyone is thinking.
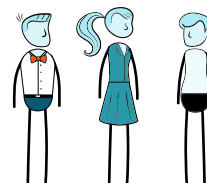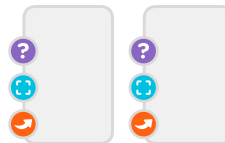
B

COMBINE PLAYS INTO SETS

Combine two or more plays to explore a topic from several points of view. Elevate dialogue—with teams and customers—to see ambiguity and trade-offs, and generate previously unseen options. Solve simple problems quickly.

C

USE PLAYS FOR MEETINGS

Make meetings more engaging, effective, and productive by using plays that steer a group to accomplish clear goals. Convert meetings from loose conversations to sharp strategic tools that inform, engage, and align.

Foster Clearer Thinking and Dialogue

Explore Ideas from Multiple Points of View

Design and Run Better Meetings

D
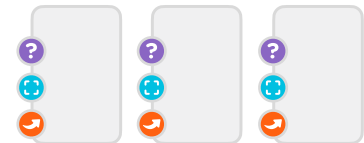
RUN PLAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

Use the WPS Path to systematically progress through a complex problem. Identify and diagnose the problem. Select plays that build a shared understanding, explore options, and align on next steps. Run plays to work the front channel of the problem and the back channel of the team. Resolve the problem by finding the optimal outcomes.
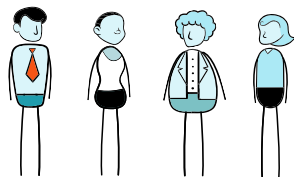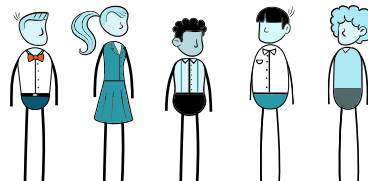
Find Better Solutions Faster

E

USE PLAYS TO LEAD CHANGE

Design plays to lead teams through significant change. Align strategy with tactics. Guide a technology transformation. Engage clients in a new way of working. Improve on Lean, Agile, or Design Thinking implementations. Help people realize their aspirations.
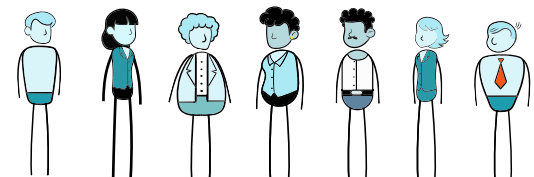
Guide Teams to Make Important Change

F

USE PLAYS TO TAME WICKEDNESS

Devise plays that address today's inscrutable problems and dilemmas. Design a playbook consisting of playsets you can run with diverse teams to untangle difficult situations. Go deep into the bigger challenges to create a difference that counts.

**Untangle Complexity and Ambiguity**

When the all the elements are brought together, these principles, plays, paths, and playsets form a powerful operating system for creative collaboration. Simple component parts, when fit together, provide teams with tools and methods to address virtually any size or class of problem and create a positive impact in their business and beyond.

A Modern
Operating
System

SIMPLE COMPONENTS COMBINED INTO TOOLS TO LEAD TEAMS, SOLVE PROBLEMS, AND CREATE CHANGE
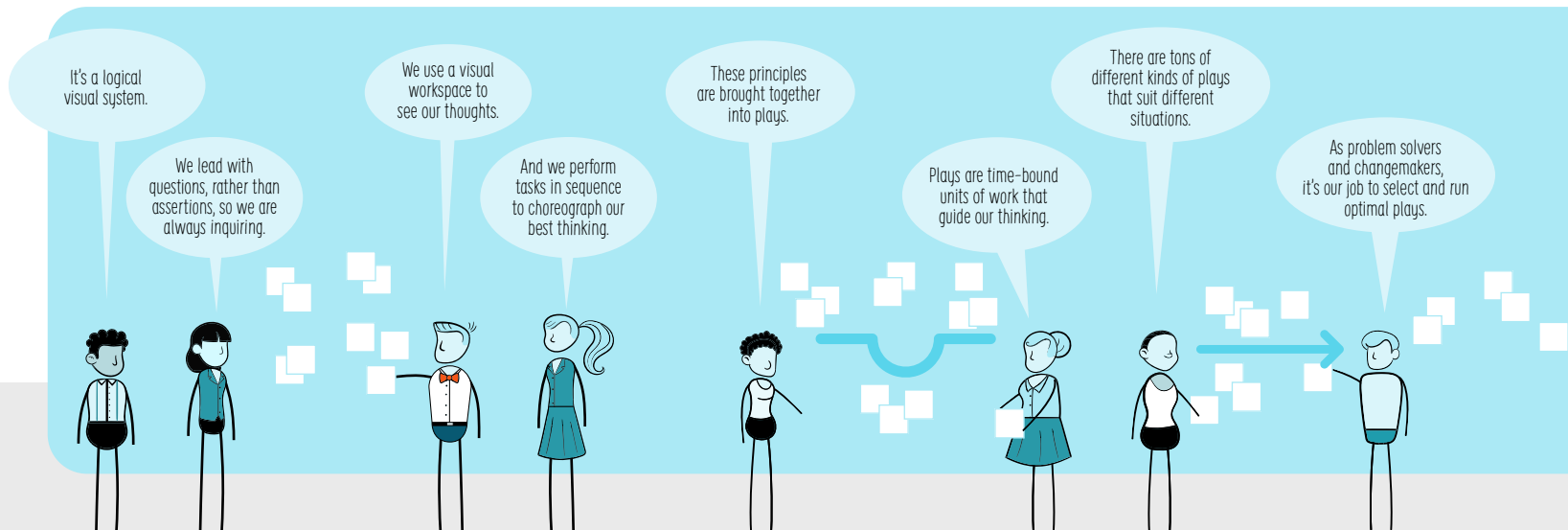
For
Creative
Collaboration

WORK ANYWHERE TO CREATE SMART SOLUTIONS, ELEGANT BREAKTHROUGHS, AND MASSIVE POSITIVE IMPACT
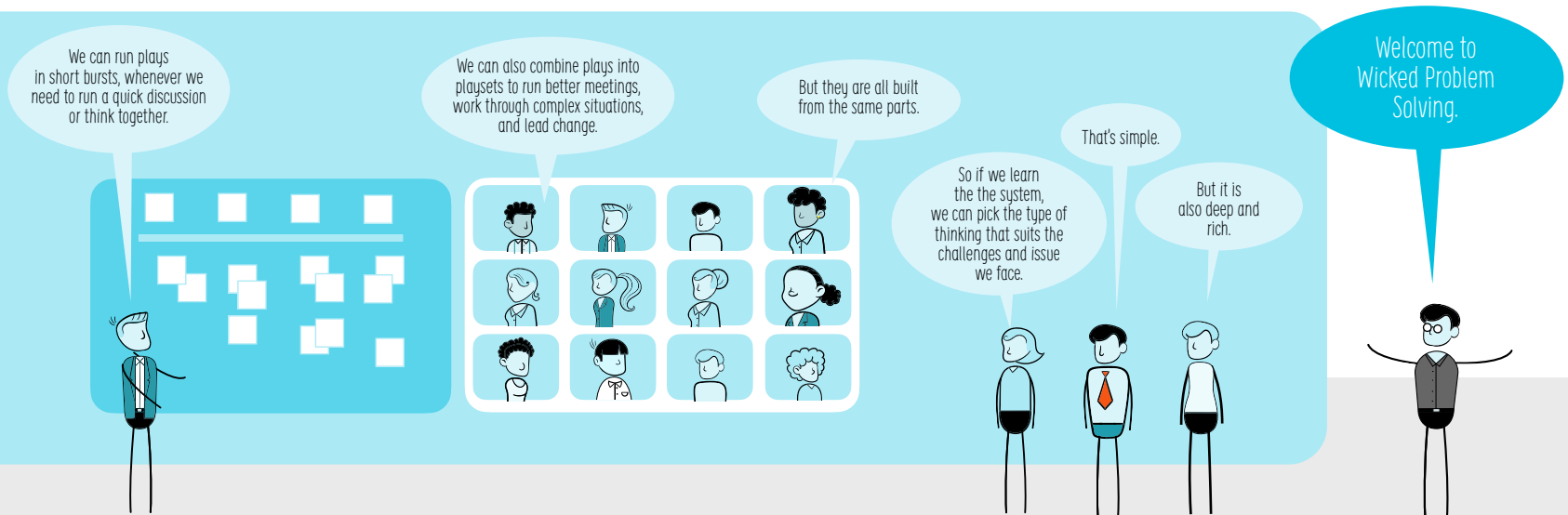
Setting Yourself Up for Success

With so many plays, how do you pick the ones that matter now?

The WPS Playbook can seem daunting. It contains ten essential plays, fifty extended plays, and dozens of custom versions. These plays can be combined into seemingly endless combinations. How can busy people with important things to do dedicate the time and effort needed to learn it?

First of all, you don't need to memorize the full Playbook. The Playbook is like a grocery store with many ingredients. When you walk in, you have an idea of the meals you want to make and the recipes you'll use. The playsets provide you with recipes.

But I would recommend learning the Essential plays. These are useful in a tremendously wide range of situations. As you apply them, the experience of collaborative work changes. People who perform these simple plays throughout a project, a few times a week, have better discussions that others appreciate and welcome.

The biggest success factor in applying collaboration methods is simply recognizing that when you discover an issue—a different set of goals, a mismatch of perspective, a project derailing—you need to ask yourself if it's time to consider running a play.

Use the SPACE acronym from the *Wicked Problem Solving Workbook* and in the Essential plays section to pause and consider whether the situation would be better if you made space for your thinking.

Finding these moments of potential change, and acting upon them, builds the habit of pausing and being open to the possibility of working differently.

That's actually difficult to do. The powerful forces of momentum and inertia tend to prevent us from trying something new—and from making space for thinking. We rush to solutions, we feel we have the answers, we get annoyed at coworkers who don't see things our way. And we avoid running a play because it just seems like a bit too much effort in the moment.

But making the little switch in attitude from solving the problem as we normally do to making space to see what you and others think and feel will dramatically change conversations, dialogues, meetings, workshops, and problem-solving sessions.

If you don't make this change in the moment, you've lost an opportunity to make something better.

Ask yourself, "Where might plays make our work better?"

PLAY

And when you do build on the habit of making space for your collective thinking, it becomes easier to add the plays that suit the problem.

This has been a transformative skill that has shaped the careers of countless leaders and consultants—including mine. When I began my journey forty years ago of using these tools to solve problems, create change, and lead teams, I began with designing better museum exhibits and creating better documentaries.

When I shifted to the private sector and designed and built software for visual effects, design, and engineering, the tools were invaluable. I applied Design Thinking tools to help design Academy Award–winning software and Agile tools to help organizations create better apparel, running shoes, cars, buildings—even nanotechnology devices.

Today I have led a vast range of people—from frontline workers to CEOs and board members of the largest companies in the world—in tackling their pressing challenges. They have used these methods to make improvements in visual effects, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, moviemaking, video game development, and other industries. I've been on the TED stage six times and many TEDx stages. And I feel it all boils down to figuring out which plays to run and how to run them well.

I hope you find the plays that will bring you the success you want, personally and professionally.

Run plays that make a positive difference for you and your teams.
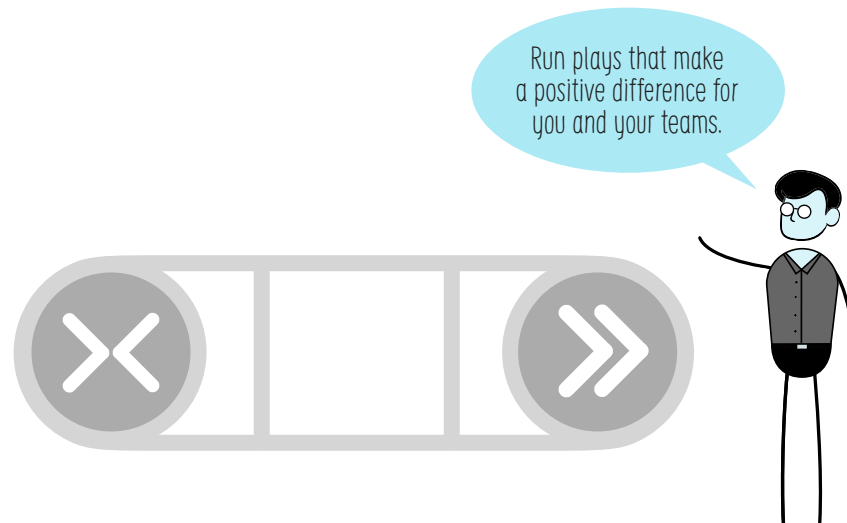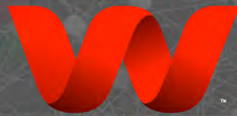
Wicked Problem Solving®

This book presents a full range of plays that changemakers and innovators need to solve complex problems and lead their teams.

Wicked Problem Solving is for anyone who wants to create a positive and lasting impact on their business, on their life, or for other people in their world.

Pick from essential individual plays to make simple situations visible or combine them into sequences to tackle complexity and uncertainty.

Whether you want to help teams think more clearly and cohesively, lead better meetings, engage in more fulfilling work, or make big things happen, *Wicked Problem Solving* provides tools to help you step toward a better future.

Tom Wujec is a technology pioneer, multiple TED speaker, entrepreneur, writer, and executive facilitator who helps people use modern tools and methods to create positive impact in their business and life.

Apply Essential Plays	Select and apply simple plays to engage people, make their ideas visible, and collaborate deeply.
Create Winning Ideas	Combine plays into patterns to delve more deeply into understanding situations with more points of view.
Run Better Meetings	Design and lead effective meetings by introducing plays that support the goals of different meeting types.
Solve Complex Problems	Use a five-step process to make better decisions, find new options, and work through challenging situations.
Lead Big Change	Apply best practices to align teams and clarify strategy by becoming more nimble and innovative.
Tame Wickedness	Address the most challenging issues in your world by addressing their complexity and uncertainty.

Get all 340 pages of the full Wicked Problem Solving Playbook to learn how to run plays, transform meetings, and solve any problem as part of the WPS Practitioner course.