

HUMOUR AND SERIOUS PLAY ENHANCING CREATIVE THINKING  
IN COMMUNITY DISABILITY SERVICE DESIGN

By

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We accept this Report as conforming  
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## ABSTRACT

Over the years of providing disability services in Alberta, there has been an intention to design support models that are innovative and relevant to an individuals' needs, and aspirations. This project researched what might set the stage for innovations in disability services to emerge. In particular, this research project explored the use of serious play in the design processes of a pilot project, Recruiting Allies Within Kcommunity (RAWK). From the data, a number of unexpected conclusions emerged. The first is that serious play in the design process fosters strong trust among the members and on that basis more creative ideas emerged. Second, there was a need to balance serious play and critical thinking to select relevant ideas. Third, from comparing and contrasting the data with relevant literature on enhancing creativity, an organizational culture can be strengthened to support creative thinking abilities in order to produce quality outcomes for service recipients.

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Nothing in man is more serious than his sense of humor; it is the sign that he wants all the truth. (Thinkexist, 2010, para. 1)

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## CHAPTER ONE – FOCUS AND FRAMING

## Introduction

“One cannot be creative without learning what others know, but then one cannot be creative without becoming dissatisfied with that knowledge and rejecting it (or some of it) for a better way.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 92)

Over the years community disability services within Alberta have striven to reflect on how they deliver supports to the populations whom they serve. Leaders in the disability services sector have realized that one of the reasons for lesser quality services is partially that practitioners adhere to old ways of providing services and often do not truly understand what the persons they serve need and want for a meaningful life. For instance, Kendrick (2007b), a world leader in innovative service design for persons with disabilities, said:

To transform into truly individualized and person centered services, service leaders will need to: 1. Provide the various supports to better enable people to “start from scratch” and to experiment with imaginative or innovative ideas for life or service improvements. 2. expose people to options and examples that enable them to see beyond the options they are currently most familiar and comfortable with. (pp. 21-23)

Kendrick (2007a) also commented that disability services are mired in the status quo and that organizational cultures must move beyond the status quo assumptions for relevant innovation and possible paradigm shifts to emerge:

The culture of innovation is one in which there needs to be a great deal of questioning of status quo assumptions or other apparent givens. It is through the ability to look at practices with new eyes that the much vaunted paradigm shifts become possible. (p. 9)

The fact that some leaders from the sponsoring organization of this project, SKILLS Society, often consider service designers as trapped in assumptions and the status quo has resulted in much discussion on how to be innovative (Reid, 2006). Innovation in service design has become a passion for me and inspired me to investigate how one might set the stage in an

organization for relevant innovations and creative service design to emerge. Although I could have explored the specific innovations that service recipients and other stakeholders currently require, I felt that that approach might be short sighted because discovering what processes and kinds of organizational cultures sustain the production of relevant innovations over time might have the greatest impact. Jung (2001) noted that if one wants to increase creativity and innovation in an organization, it is likely more effective to look into what fosters an organizational environment that induces innovation and creativity. Particularly, in this action research project I explored how integrating humour and serious play into the process of designing disability services could foster creative thinking and lead to innovative, quality services.

Services designed through enhanced creative thinking could, as Kendrick (2007a) explained above, lead to innovative and imaginative options that are more in line with the individual aspirations and needs of the recipients of services. The use of humour and serious play could help service designers to transcend common assumptions and view the challenges in service design with fresh, creative eyes. Fredrickson (1998), for instance, found that humour could help designers to see beyond the common solutions to a problem (p. 308).

Before I proposed this project, key leaders of the sponsoring organization, SKILLS Society, had already expressed an interest in it because it fit with the espoused and lived values of members of the organization. For instance, at employee world cafés in 2008 the executive director and senior manager of leadership and community development identified SKILLS Society's emphasis on the value of supporting a culture of humour and play to foster creative ways to support the population that the society serves (D. Reid, personal communication, May 16, 2008). Throughout 2008 SKILLS Society employees were engaged and trained in the

FISH! Philosophy (2009) training program, which helps organizations to grow stronger and healthier cultures through integrating play and humour. In addition, D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009) commented that SKILLS Society supports creative pilot projects that explore new ways of delivering services and encourages the leadership of employees who are experimenting.

Over the past six years my role within SKILLS Society has been coordinator of community supports and facilitator of a course, Community Connecting in Action, that I developed and teach to employees of SKILLS Society. I have a personal passion to benefit not only the persons whom the organization serves, but also the colleagues with whom I work. As a leader, I too have realized that community disability services often try to sustain what has worked in the past, but this may not result in consistent quality support and services that meet the needs of individuals in the current time. For that reason I was interested in learning how to address current needs with a less rigid view of past practices and lead others beyond the status quo assumptions about service delivery. This is also related to my background in fine arts and experimental music and my keen interest in ideas that result from thinking “out of the box,” all of which have influenced my exploration of how creativity and serious play can enhance service design.

Over two years ago a leader of SKILLS Society invited me to be a key player in a pilot project called Recruiting Allies Within Kcommunity (RAWK) to experiment with innovative processes for designing services and consciously integrate playfulness and humour into brainstorming sessions on how the RAWK team could better connect the people whom SKILLS Society serves with their community. Because of funding cuts in 2010, the RAWK project ended, and it was therefore an opportune time to evaluate the learning from the project. The

aspect of the RAWK project that I explored in this study involved the main research question, “How might serious play and humour have enhanced the creative thinking of the persons involved in designing services through the RAWK pilot project?” The subquestions included the following:

1. What playful and humorous practices did the RAWK team do well that might have fostered creative thinking?
2. How did the RAWK team connect play and humour to the tasks on which they were working?
3. What were the challenges that the RAWK team faced in using humour and playfulness in service design?
4. What supports, skills, and resources might be required to expand and further develop the practices of serious play and creative thinking that enhanced the service design processes of the RAWK project?
5. What other practices that employ creative thinking and serious play might be incorporated into the process of designing disability services in a way that leads to better quality outcomes?

#### The Opportunity and Its Significance

The culture of SKILLS Society was open to new ideas on how to provide effective, quality services to persons with disabilities. This was evident during a meeting with SKILLS Society’s funding body, Persons With Developmental Disabilities, Edmonton Region Community Board ([PDD] 2009b), when “Ms. Conrad talked about the importance of innovation and finding ways to foster creativity in providing supports and service” (p. 2). SKILLS Society’s cultural value for innovation and creativity, which was particularly evident during the two-year

RAWK pilot project, presented an opportunity to explore with the society how humour and serious play might foster creative thinking in quality service design. Community disability services in the province of Alberta is a field in which there is still considerable exploration of how services should be delivered and what constitutes quality outcomes. D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009) referred to this exploration when she talked about the discussions between SKILLS Society and its provincial funding body, PDD, on the measurement of service outcomes and the differing views of professionals on what effective services are. This action research project presented an opportunity for community disability services professionals to reflect on the creative processes of an innovative pilot project and recommend effective ways to design services in alignment with the wishes and needs of the persons supported.

In working with SKILLS Society for the last six years as a teacher, coordinator of support services, and team member in the RAWK project, I observed before and during the RAWK project that when employees integrated humour and play into their behaviour, more creative ideas often emerged. The ideas for service delivery were creative in the way that leading researchers, such as Smith (2005), have agreed that a product of creativity is deemed authentically creative. Namely, the ideas that struck me in the humorous interactions among employees were, as Smith defined them, novel and valuable to the domain of effective and quality disability services.

In this research project I explored the processes of humour and play that can lead to creative thinking patterns that result in novel ideas for service. The benefits of this research project to SKILLS Society could be that effective, quality practices will emerge that enhance the design and delivery of services for the disabled. In addition, an organizational culture that values and engages humour and play could lead to increased employee morale and retention of current

employees, as Manion (2004) reported in research on how human service staff view a culture of retention (p. 34). The service recipients of SKILLS Society would benefit from more effective services that meet their needs, because if fostering creative thinking helps people to see beyond the status quo assumptions, then the services will be fresh, more relevant, and more closely aligned with the core needs and aspirations of the individuals who receive them (Kendrick, 2007a ). Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) suggested that the positive emotion that results from amusement and play can broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire (pp. 326-327), which, they noted, often leads to "flexible, creative and unusual thinking" (p. 316). This research could therefore result in new, more flexible, and more effective practices in delivering disability services.

The results and recommendations from this action research project could help SKILLS Society continue to earn recognition for its innovative services through its government funding body, PDD. SKILLS Society reports regularly to PDD, and PDD is often interested in hearing about how the society's employees live its values, such as those concerning innovation. For instance, in 2007 key leaders of SKILLS Society were asked to make a presentation to the PDD (2007) on how SKILLS fosters a culture of innovation and learning to provide quality supports. The results of this project could further demonstrate to PDD SKILLS Society's commitment to innovative service.

SKILLS Society began to explore the integration of humour and play into the organization's culture through the RAWK project and staff training in the FISH! Philosophy (2009). This project offers more data and learning for reflection to continue to grow SKILLS Society's fun, creative, and innovative culture. I appreciate SKILLS Society's decision to

support the further exploration of the link between play, humour, and creativity in the service design process.

### Systems Analysis of the Opportunity

Exploring how serious play to foster creativity might be incorporated into the processes involved in designing quality services for the persons whom SKILLS Society serves required a number of systems considerations in designing my major project. One of the foremost was how the service design outcomes would affect the service recipients. In the past, professionals in disability services often guided and built service models based on their own learning and education and the requirements of funding bodies. Unfortunately, designing service models aimed to improve the quality of life of the consumers of the services without consulting the recipients themselves often results in service models that do not support the development and maintenance of quality, effective services. As Baker (2003) wrote, “The very best thing to contribute to the people on your list is not what you think they need, but what they really need. And there’s no way for you to know what someone really needs unless you ask” (p. 13). In other words, community disability services’ design of the past was usually fairly rigid and did not afford room to truly meet the needs and interests of the individuals being served. Therefore, in developing the recommendations of this research project, I considered the individual needs of the persons who receive services to ensure that the outcomes of a creative service design process are effective and of high quality.

The second consideration was how SKILLS Society often designed services outside the RAWK pilot project. Within the organizational context of how a service design often developed, D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009) noted that meetings were often held with all stakeholders to brainstorm possible directions for service and that employees usually

presented ideas for service delivery that had worked for other people in the past. Sometimes something that worked for others could work for a person for whom services were being designed; however, often the approach of offering suggestions based on the past experiences of practitioners tended to result in limited quality outcomes and did not foster creative thinking, as Kendrick (2006) implied:

It is almost always true that people will tend to underestimate, rather than overestimate, what could be possible in life for people with disability. A key factor in much of this is the extent to which most of us are limited by what we have not yet seen, experienced or believed to be feasible. . . . In many cases, we may be deeply skeptical of what is new simply because the old is so comfortable, even if it is not all that satisfying. (p. 2)

This second system of the design of services often involved frontline staff, team leaders, managers, the person receiving services, and his or her family members. Full-time persons such as frontline employees and team leaders who were used to designing service models based on what had worked in the past were involved in the RAWK pilot project. However, the organizational culture adhered to and to date continues to adhere to the espoused value of exploring new ideas and creative approaches to service delivery. For example, Reid (2006) made a presentation to SKILLS Society employees on the creative culture that the society strove to cultivate and described the organizational value of engaging practices that enable stakeholders to view services in new ways. Reid wrote, “We are doing a whole bunch of things differently to jiggle up our habits and help us have new ways to experience ourselves, each other, our work and to help us get new eyes” (p. 41).

The third system that could influence the potential value of this project is the provincial view of SKILLS Society’s government funding body, PDD. The leaders of Alberta’s disability services desire to discover innovative practices that better meet the needs of the populations whom they serve. This is evidenced in the PDD’s (2009a) document, *Charting Our Future*. The

document states that PDD uses the strategy of exploring innovative service models to support persons with disabilities (para. 19). The section of this project on what fosters innovative service models can help PDD and other service providers to explore the cultural shift in designing services in Alberta.

The fourth systems consideration was that the RAWK pilot project was a safeguarded think tank with room to fail because it was experimental, which had a bearing on the validity of the recommendations from the RAWK research because they might not be generalizable to all SKILLS Society service design areas. The RAWK participants' mental models might have included the society's cultural norms of service design and delivery; however, when the brainstorming meetings took place, they were free to experiment because it was a pilot project. In addition, senior management and the executive director of SKILLS Society supported the innovative, experimental processes because it was a small pilot project. This system needed to be considered because the rest of SKILLS Society's culture might not include as much flexibility and value for experimenting as a pilot project framework does.

#### Organizational Context

SKILLS Society, the nonprofit organization that sponsored this action research project, provides community-based supports to persons with developmental disabilities in the Edmonton area. The society receives funding for these services from the provincial government's Edmonton regional board Persons With Developmental Disabilities (D. Reid, personal communication, November 4, 2009). SKILLS Society supports over 600 individuals and as of November 2009 employed approximately 550. Its services support children and adults who live with their families, alone, or in congregate-care living arrangements (SKILLS Society, 2004a). The board of directors does not oversee operations, but mainly sets the society's policies.

D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009) noted that the executive director has broad freedom to determine the means to achieve organizational aims and is free to decide how to support the agency's vision, which allows pilot projects to experiment and explore innovative practices. Few documents have addressed SKILLS Society's commitment to innovation and creative service design, but the executive director, P. Conrad (personal communication, November 4, 2009) described the strong culture based on sharing information through dialogue and conversation; the espoused value for innovation is evident in the oral culture. However, the meeting minutes that document the presentation to SKILLS Society's funding body, PDD (2009b), refer to this commitment.

The current agency vision, mission, and statement of principle are included in SKILLS Society's (2004b) *Policy and Procedures Manual* as follows:

SKILLS' Vision is one of a community where all individuals are valued citizens deserving respect, recognition and rights. SKILLS' Mission is to support individuals with disabilities and their families in their right to learn and grow in the community. We are committed to providing services that encourage and support individual choice and opportunity. SKILLS' statement of principle is that SKILLS as an organization believes that: People with developmental disabilities, their families and personal networks have a shared vision of a lifetime of participation, contribution, and connection in community within neighbourhoods they choose. SKILLS will respect the right of every individual and their family to direct and control services. (pp. 7-8)

SKILLS Society's (2008b) organizational chart illustrates the structure of employee roles and accountability. Despite the formal hierarchical structure, Reid, a SKILLS leader, described the critical role of engaging stakeholders from all areas of the organization in problem-solving and building collective wisdom on the delivery of services (SKILLS Society, 2007, p. 16).

D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009) stated that SKILLS Society values building a conversational culture to model an organization that learns from the collective wisdom of the whole. Reid's comments demonstrate that SKILLS Society values hearing from persons

engaged in every area of the society rather than only the people at the top of the hierarchy. An organizational culture that values the perspectives of all employees is conducive to key leaders' integration of the recommendations from the RAWK project into organizational practices.

The last 20 years have seen a change in disability services from service recipients' being told what kinds of service they will receive to their directing the services, which is a value espoused in SKILLS Society's (2004b) mission statement: "We are committed to providing services that encourage and support individual choice and opportunity" (p. 7). D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009) recalled that in the last 20 years persons with disabilities who access services from SKILLS Society and other Alberta organizations have begun to advocate for more choice and more voice in directing the services that they receive.

Individualized support models designed with the persons who receive services in mind are known in disability services as *person-centered supports*. SKILLS Society strives to maintain person-centered support models by ensuring that persons who receive services and their support networks are at the helm of decisions on how the supports will be offered. The person-centered approach to service delivery is evidenced in SKILLS Society's (2005) Community Support Worker 3 job description, which states that employees must monitor the development and implementation of person-centered plans. A person-centered approach to service means that the old role of the "expert" professional who tells clients what kinds of services they need to have designed for them is no longer valued as it was in the past because each person supported by SKILLS Society has unique aspirations and needs and requires tailor-made service plans. In an annual report (SKILLS Society, 2008a), Reid reported that in the coming year, 2009, SKILLS' organizational culture would support the integration of person-centered approaches with "expansive patterns of thinking" (p. 9). This is another potential link between using more person-

centered and effective approaches and engaging practices such as serious play that have been shown to foster expansive patterns of thinking, according to Fredrickson and Branigan (2005, p. 316).

A good basis for innovation, creativity, and learning in the sponsoring organization was the culture of learning essentials, similar to what Baker (2003) described as “leaders actively encouraging learning by doing, teaching, coaching, mentoring, sharing good ideas and spreading best practices” (pp. 12-13). For instance, Reid explained that “SKILLS is a learning organization as much as it is a service organization and has worked hard to create a gift-focused culture” (SKILLS Society, 2007, p. 14). D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009) also spoke of the culture in which SKILLS Society supports and encourages staff to take time and provides the funding to enable employees to experiment with innovative projects to improve the quality of services and foster leadership development within the organization. In my conversations with D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009), she told me that SKILLS Society’s culture and key leaders allow employees to experiment with humour and play to explore new creative processes in service design and delivery.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

“If you want creative workers, give them enough time to play.” (Ideachampions, 2010, para. 1)

Chapter two reviews the literature related to my research question, “How might playfulness and humour have enhanced the creative thinking of the persons involved in designing services?” This literature review addresses three topics: (a) a definition of creative thinking (b) the role of serious play and humour in fostering creative thinking, and (c) how individuals and group processes can enhance creativity. In the first section I present a number of definitions of creativity and the two main processes involved in creative thinking, in the second I discuss the relevance of serious play and humour as elements of creative thinking, and in the third I explore the recommendations in the literature to enhance creative thinking in individual and group processes.

### Defining Creative Thinking

Because this action research project is about fostering and enhancing creative thinking in anticipation that it will lead to more effective practices in disability services, it is helpful to begin with a discussion of the meaning of creative thinking. Furthermore, understanding creativity and creative thinking is important to determine whether a culture that integrates humour and play fosters authentic creative thinking or pseudo-creativity.

### *Identifying Creative Thinking*

Humans have engaged in creativity as far back as recorded history reaches (Kraft, 2005). From experimenting with harnessing fire to, more recently, splitting atoms, humans have shown a tendency for innovation that is rooted in creative thinking. Although we still do not know much about what creativity is, especially in terms of where it originates in human brains (Kraft, 2005), some researchers have agreed that creativity can be defined generally as the ability to fluently

solve problems with original, innovative, novel, and appropriate solutions (Amabile & Guildford; as cited in McCoy & Evans, 2002). Smith (2005) identified a problem with defining creativity: that most definitions mix two distinct perspectives (p. 293). One perspective, such as Kraft's observation, has to do with creativity as a cognitive process associated with right-hemisphere brain activity (p. 20). The other contradictory perspective is associated with how outcomes of a creative cognitive process are evaluated and whether they are considered creative or not (Smith, 2005). For outcomes of creative thinking to be effective, the flow of creative ideas at some point needs to be evaluated to deem them valuable or not (p. 293). The evaluative, critical censoring of ideas that takes place in the brain is usually associated more with left-hemisphere brain activity than right-hemisphere creative activity (Kraft, 2005, p. 21). Kraft summed up the creative process by stating that creative ideas bubble up in the right hemisphere of the brain, and then the left hemisphere filters ideas that are relevant to a given problem. What this suggests is that effective creative thinking to solve a problem requires the engagement of both divergent and convergent thinking processes. Or, as Elder and Paul (2007) noted, one can say that both creative and critical thinking are needed for an outcome of a creative process to be deemed authentically creative.

### *Divergent and Convergent Thinking*

For creativity to be effective in disability services requires an understanding of both divergent and convergent thinking. Arriving at many diverse, novel solutions to problems is known as divergent thinking; creativity researchers often consider it synonymous with creative thinking (Cromptley, 2006). However, Runco's (2009) recent research has shown that divergent thinking is not synonymous with creativity, but predicts it. For instance, Runco showed that

when a person tests high in divergent thinking, it demonstrates a greater likelihood that creative, novel ideas will emerge.

Convergent thinking is oriented toward finding a single best answer to a problem, and it emphasizes logic and reasoning (Cropley, 2006). Cropley pointed out that in the past, creativity researchers promoted divergent, more creative thinking than convergent critical processes (p. 391). They thought that convergent thinking hindered the creative process; however, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) stated, “Divergent thinking is not much use without the ability to tell a good idea from a bad one” (p. 61). He concluded that convergent thinking helps to select ideas that are appropriate to solving a given problem. Cropley further suggested that the convergent thinking process compares ideas with the preexisting knowledge of the domain in which one is engaging creativity. Therefore, understanding the preexisting knowledge of the domain of effective disability services is important to assess whether a product of creative thinking is truly novel and useful. Understanding that generated, creative ideas need to be evaluated will help to ensure that wild divergent thinking does not simply yield reckless change. Cropley warned that divergent thinking untamed by evaluative, convergent thinking can lead to the endorsement of ideas and products that are unrelated to the domain of interest. If unrelated ideas and products of a domain of interest are endorsed as novel in the same domain, then, as Cattell and Butcher (as cited in Cropley, 2006) indicated, then this lends itself, not to genuine creativity, but to pseudo-creativity. Csikszentmihalyi suggested that true “creativity occurs when a person, using the symbols of a given domain, has a new idea or sees a new pattern, and when this novelty is selected by the appropriate field for inclusion into the relevant domain” (p. 28).

*Extraordinary Creativity Versus Creative Abilities in Everyone*

Often only a unique few who display a natural talent and extraordinary accomplishments are seen as creative (Elder & Paul, 2007; Smith, 2005). Smith pointed out that creativity that produces worthwhile, profitable products has too often been considered important and has therein resulted in research based on exceptional accomplishments of creativity such as those by Nobel laureates and their equals. Researchers have found that focusing on the exceptional and extraordinary accomplishments of creative individuals has lent itself to the view that creativity is not part of everyday life and ordinary persons (Elder & Paul, 2007; Smith, 2005). More current literature on creativity has strongly emphasized that ordinary people are often creative and can learn to enhance their creative abilities in everyday settings (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Craft, 2003; Lemons, 2005; Russ, 1998). For example, Russ contributed to the understanding of creativity as part of daily life in noting that researchers have viewed creative problem solving as part of everyday coping and adjustment. To strengthen a culture in an organization that aims to foster creativity in most members, it is important to dispel the myth that creativity applies to only an extraordinary few. With regard to fostering creativity in SKILLS Society, to date, the majority of employees are not regarded as having produced extraordinarily creative products because most employees are not, according to Csikszentmihalyi's definition of creative outcomes, creating knowledge that has been selected for integration into the general knowledge of the domain. This led to my assumption then that, based on the literature (Craft, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Lemons, 2005), this research project would help to foster the creativity of ordinary individuals who have the capacity to enhance their creativity in everyday working situations in SKILLS Society. In integrating creativity into the everyday lives of ordinary persons, Craft also suggested that it is important to consider the diversity of backgrounds of the

persons who engage in creativity. For instance, Craft noted that being raised in a culture that values individuality and thinking independently of social norms helps an individual to more readily develop creative abilities and understand that creativity is part of ordinary life. On the other hand, Craft warned that persons who are raised in more conformist, collectivist cultures could have a more difficult time understanding the relevance of creativity because it often undermines conformity. Therefore, Craft pointed to the need to consider the influence of cultural backgrounds and the potential variances in the degree of openness to creativity in developing a creative culture.

### The Role of Serious Play and Humour in Fostering Creative Thinking

It is important to explore how the current literature has defined humour and play and how serious play can enhance creative thinking. Often in Western cultures today play is considered childish, unproductive, or unprofessional (Brown & Vaughan, 2009). Therefore, if play as part of a professional process of service design is to be taken seriously, more research findings must be shared with professionals to show the very real role of humour and play in the generation of creative ideas.

#### *Defining Humour and Serious Play*

Cundall (2007) noted that philosophical theories of humour and play have existed since the time of Plato, and in more recent times psychologists have investigated the cognitive processes involved in humour. One of Cundall's key findings is the relationship between incongruities in situations and humorous responses such as laughter: "Incongruity Theory (IT) claims that our perception of humour is the result of the perception of an incongruity that causes the humorous response" (p. 203).

Cundall (2007) discussed another theory of humour called relief theory (RT). He pointed out that Freud and Spencer developed the RT of humour based in the notion that laughter and humour are release responses to built-up nervous energy. However, Freud's RT is a more negative theory, according to Cundall, who suggested that it means that a release such as humour or laughter is caused by negative feelings of frustration over an event that does not meet expectations. Although RT is a more negative theory, many researchers on humour and play have found that humour and laughter can help an individual to let go of negative stress (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Palus & Horth, 2002). Therefore, laughter can be considered a positive stress reliever.

Cundall (2007) also believed that humour is very much a social behaviour that is more often shared with others than enjoyed alone. Cundall cited the findings of Cohen that jokes are often an invitation to others to share a kind of intimacy. He explained that what Cohen meant by intimacy is the giving of a social cue through, for example, laughter, which can often indicate one's state of mind and foster positive exchanges with others. Therefore, using humour to foster creativity may need to be considered in a social context, because humour does not as often emerge without the engagement with others.

The term *serious play* has been used in the last 20 years to convey that play is not simply frivolous when it is applied to creative problem solving (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Palus & Horth, 2002; Weissman, 1990). Palus and Horth wrote that research has shown that serious "play introduces a light touch of curiosity and a selective relaxation of restraints that can transform serious work" (p. 107). They cited Gergen, who coined the term serious play, and described it as "a style of communicating that explores similarities and differences, not by deconstructing the other's point of view, but by playfully exploring new combinations of perspectives for something

fresh and useful” (p. 107). The literature on serious play conveys the message that play helps people to escape the traps of being caught in status quo assumptions, seeing problems too narrowly, imposing false limits, fearing risking, needing to conform, and needing external rewards (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Palus & Horth, 2002; Weissman, 1990). Weissman stated that the above all hinder creative thinking processes but can often be overcome through consciously developing the ability to engage in serious play. March and Olson (as cited in Weissman, 1990) offered an alternative definition of playfulness: “the deliberate, temporary relaxation of rules in order to explore the possibilities of alternative rules” (p. 60). Palus and Horth’s and Weissman’s definitions of and theories on serious play emphasize that the qualities of play entail a state of mind that is curious, exuberant, and spontaneous; is open to improvisation; does not inhibit thought; defers judgment; and creates the feeling that one is outside time and is acting from intuition. These states of a playful mind can free the imagination, diminish petty self-consciousness, and foster novel, relevant innovations (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Palus & Horth, 2002; Weissman, 1990). Palus and Horth warned that serious play is intended for serious challenges and not just comic diversions and that it should not be used simply as an icebreaker, but that it is important to consider the value of getting serious about play in facing challenges and solving problems creatively. Brown and Vaughan summed up the impact of play on creative thinking: “The genius of play is that, in playing, we create imaginative new cognitive combinations. And in creating those novel combinations, we find what works” (p. 37).

*The Role of Humour and Serious Play in Enhancing Creative Thinking*

Roger Von Oech (1998) wrote, “There is a close relationship between the ‘haha’ of humour and the ‘aha’ of discovery” (p. 126). Lemons (2005) vividly described the links between humour and creative discovery, which further illuminates Von Oech’s quotation:

Laughter provides a train wreck for the mind, suspending thought and being in the moment, which opens the channels for innovative, creative thinking. You can’t think while you are laughing. Try it. Try doing a calculus problem (or move a couch) while in the throes of laughter. It can’t be done. But what it does do is metaphorically open the cranial channels and allow for creative, innovative thinking to emerge. (p. 32)

Theorizing on the links between play and creativity, Russ (1998) suggested the importance of first clarifying whether one is interested in the outcomes of creativity or the processes that lead to a creative outcome. As I mentioned in the section on definitions of creativity, for a product or idea to be deemed creative, it must be novel and relevant to the domain for which it is created (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Smith, 2005). Palus and Horth (2002), Russ, and Csikszentmihalyi explained that play and humour as enhancers of creativity are more usefully discussed in terms of how they influence a creative process. Furthermore, they suggested that play that influences a creative process could lead individuals and groups to producing novel, relevant outcomes that are accepted in their respective domains.

The incongruity theory of humour, Cundall (2007) noted, also points to a correlation with creative thinking: “The core of IT is the novel placing together of disparate concepts” (p. 204), and placing disparate concepts together in new ways is akin to creativity.

Russ (1998) reported that a number of researchers have proposed that play and humour are predictors of divergent thinking, which, as I discussed earlier, is a key cognitive process involved in creativity. Russ indicated that research on positive mood induction is relevant to the question of whether play and humour can in fact facilitate creative thinking. Isen, Daubman, and

Nowicki (1987) found that positive mood-induction exercises facilitate divergent thinking. They discovered that participants who were exposed to humorous situations demonstrated greater creative problem-solving abilities. Isen et al. and Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) noted that a specific mood that can foster creative thinking is one characterized by positive emotion from, for example, a humorous interaction. Fredrickson and Branigan also suggested that positive emotion caused by amusement and play can broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire, which often results in "flexible, creative and unusual thinking" (p. 316). It could also result in the emergence of novel, more flexible, and more effective practices in disability services. Fredrickson (2003) found that not only do induced positive emotions foster creativity in the short term, but also that a short-lived emotional response to a situation can have a lasting effect on the fostering of creative ideas:

Twenty years of experiments by Isen and her colleagues show that when people feel good, their thinking becomes more creative, integrative, flexible and open to information. Even though positive emotions and broadened mindsets they create are themselves short-lived, they can have deep and enduring effects. By momentarily broadening attention and thinking, positive emotions can lead to the discovery of novel ideas, actions and social bonds. (p. 333)

Fredrickson's (2003) findings imply, then, that a few humorous interactions in a service design meeting could facilitate creative thinking that lasts for more than the short moment that a humorous interaction might last. This could have an impact on the service design process because humorous interactions may not be required at all times during the meeting to enhance creative thinking.

#### *Effects of Humour and Play Integrated Into Workplace Cultures*

Fredrickson's (2003) and Isen et al.'s (1987) work has to do mainly with inducing a positive state to enhance creativity in individuals who are on their own. For the purposes of this research project, the question is also whether humour and serious play in group dynamics can

foster creativity. Cundall (2007) affirmed that we laugh most of the time, not when we are alone, but in social contexts with others. For instance, Provine (as cited in Cundall, 2007) wrote after years of researching humour and laughter, “Laughter, like speech, is a vocal signal that we seldom use unless there is an audience” (p. 209). According to Asmus and James (as cited in Cundall, 2007), typically, the view of researchers on creativity is that group interactions diminish it. However, Cundall found a contradiction between the social nature of humour and the idea that, at the same time, humour can be seen as a certain “species of creative thought” (p. 211). In other words, group dynamics might sometimes weaken creativity, and yet Cundall described humour and witty interactions in groups as a kind of manifestation of creative thought. In contrast, after Palus and Horth (2002) observed creativity in groups, they stated decisively that no one individual can form creative ideas entirely on his or her own: “No person is creative by him or herself. Somebody else is always involved in making creativity happen. You might be sitting there pouring forth an idea, but other people will have inspired you, directly or indirectly” (p. 130). Being aware of this creative tension in group dynamics can inform the participants in a creative culture that integrates play and humour.

Integrating humour and play into a workplace culture also has social and morale-boosting benefits. For instance, Lemons (2005) explained that laughter not only opens the mind for creativity, but is also a good foundation for the building of trust and a sense of community: “Humour plays a social function by liberating people from perceived constraints. It can help ease tensions and smooth difficulties” (p. 32). Rasulzada and Dackert (2009) noted in their research that when employees enjoyed humorous interactions with others, it fostered trust and resulted in an expressed perception that their organization was creative and innovative. In terms of trust fostered through play, Palus and Horth (2002) wrote, “If you create an environment where

serious play is the norm, eventually trust becomes the norm” (p. 116). Manion (2004) also reported in a study on staff retention in the nursing field that a best practice to improve retention is to create a sense of community with employees through the use of humour and play in their work.

A creative organization known not only for designing thousands of household innovative products, but also for developing innovative organizational cultures that foster creativity is IDEO (Butler, 1999; “Deep Dive,” 1999). In an interview in *Business Week* (Butler, 1999), the CEO of IDEO, David Kelley, spoke about the benefits and effects of creating a playful culture and reflected on the importance of fun and play in his organization’s culture:

It’s all in the breakdown of barriers of who’s important in the company. You can be playful when everybody feels they’re just as important as the next person. The reason you’re not throwing a Nerf ball around at IBM is not that you’re not playful; it’s fear of retribution from somebody higher up. So if you can break down that barrier, everybody not only feels comfortable throwing the Nerf ball but coming up with ideas. (p. 1)

What seems key in Kelley’s comments is the importance of breaking down hierarchical barriers, which in turn strengthens trust and results in creative outcomes. The literature also suggested that if play and humour are integrated skilfully into the workplace culture, it is likely that the results of more intrinsic rewards and incentives will be that employees wish to stay with the company (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; “Deep Dive,” 1999; Lemons, 2005; Manion, 2004).

### *Challenges of Developing a Culture in Which Humour and Play Are Integrated to Foster Creative Thinking*

Developing a culture that integrates humour and play to foster creative thinking has some potential challenges. For that reason it is beneficial to summarize the key barriers that the literature has identified to be more aware of what an organization can face in leading

organizational change towards the effective integration of serious play and humour into the culture.

1. Play will not be valued and integrated into a culture if it is seen as childish, unproductive, and a waste of time (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Palus & Horth, 2002; Von Oech, 1998; Weissman, 1990).
2. Senses of humour can vary: Something that is funny to one person might not be funny to another. The challenge is to effectively integrate diverse play styles into the organizational culture (Brown & Vaughan, 2009).
3. Sometimes people can go too far and harm trust in a group through hurtful humour and sarcasm. The challenge is to balance the need for genuine play to engage humour that pushes boundaries with the need to be respectful (Brown & Vaughan, 2009).
4. Playfulness in an organization goes against the grain of what is normally deemed socially acceptable in Western cultures. Employees might not be strong willed enough to sustain play and humour as part of their practice when they face opposition to it (Weissman, 1990).
5. If persons in an organization that integrates play do not have permission to play as part of their process, they will be faced with inhibitions and resistance to integrating genuine, effective play into the organizational culture (Weissman, 1990).
6. If people in an organizational culture take themselves too seriously and believe that their hierarchical titles make their ideas more important, it is tricky to integrate serious play effectively (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Butler, 1999).

It might be helpful to discuss with both a creative group and the members of the organization this list of likely challenges that organizations face in creating a culture that

integrates play to proactively make everyone more aware and avoid derailing or stifling the creative organizational culture. Perhaps asking all members of the organization to suggest solutions to the challenges could encourage them to take responsibility for them and by including everyone, regardless of position, would deemphasize the hierarchy. As Butler (1999) and Brown and Vaughan (2009) found, deemphasizing hierarchical titles loosens people up to play and become more creative.

### How Can an Individual and a Group Process Enhance Creativity?

#### *How Can an Individual Enhance Creativity?*

An underlying theme in this research project was the need to enhance creativity to foster relevant innovations, and I explored how humour and play can lead to and enhance creativity. It is therefore useful to examine the literature on fostering and enhancing creativity as an individual and in group dynamics. The literature that I reviewed revealed the following themes on aids to enhance creativity in individuals.

*Cultivate a sense of curiosity.* Both Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Kraft (2005) reported that central to a creative person is a cultivated sense of curiosity and wonderment about the world. Kraft described a sense of wonderment as a childlike curiosity about the world and a questioning of understandings that others consider obvious. Csikszentmihalyi discovered from his research that curiosity about the world often disappears in adulthood; however, he found that creative individuals tend to retain their inquisitiveness. Therefore, both Kraft and Csikszentmihalyi offered the advice that to support creative thinking from an individual perspective one should remember to be curious and inquisitive. Kraft further suggested that striving to think outside commonly accepted principles and habitual perspectives such as “We’ve always done it that way” will help a person to develop curiosity and thus creative-thinking

abilities. Csikszentmihalyi found that curiosity could be brought to the fore in an individual's experience by cultivating daily situations in which to experience surprise. In other words, Csikszentmihalyi found that the element of surprise causes childlike curiosity, which fosters creativity and could be a link to the role of humour and play in fostering creativity. Fredrickson (2009) wrote that "often what makes something humorous is that it arises in an unexpected, surprising way" (p. 45). As I discussed earlier with regard to the incongruity theory of humour, when situations arise in an unexpected, incongruent way, the experience can provoke humorous responses and lead to creativity. Therefore, if an individual strives to shake up habits and daily patterns and cultivate the element of surprise in life, this can enhance not only individual creative thinking, but also humour and play in groups.

*Focus, then let go; alternate repeatedly.* Knoblich and Oelinger (2006) found that maximizing the conditions for creative thoughts requires two basic ingredients: studying and focusing on the rules and norms accepted within the domain in which one is trying to be creative and taking time to relax, play, or do something unrelated to the problem for which one is trying to find creative ideas or solutions. Kraft (2005) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) also advised individuals to increase their creativity by consciously taking time after focusing on a problem to relax, daydream, and ponder, because, ironically, these are the times during which new insights and ideas often arise. Another way that Knoblich and Oelinger put it is that the emergence of authentic creativity requires a balance between being versed in the field of study in which one is trying to be creative and not letting prior knowledge hinder a fresh perspective. They noted that taking time to play, relax, and engage in unrelated activities helps to temper the rigid focus that can keep a person stubbornly locked into his or her assumptions about a subject.

*How Can a Group Process Enhance Creativity?*

According to Wolf-Shenk (2010), Leonard (2010), and Csikszentmihalyi (1996), in Western, individualistic cultures we are inundated with the stories of seemingly lone creative geniuses who discover novel innovations on their own, as if in a vacuum, disconnected from the influence of others. However, this is a myth because successful, creative people are disclosing that their discoveries would not have been possible without interaction with others. For instance, Leonard, in her work on fostering creativity, recognized the myth of the lone genius: “A high percentage of the world’s most important inventions resulted not from the work of one lone genius, but from the collaboration of a group of people with complementary skills” (p. 7).

The literature revealed several themes on strategies to enhance creativity in groups.

*Balance previous experience with a fresh perspective.* Leonard’s (2010) observation was similar to that of Knoblich and Oelinger (2006) that a creative group needs to know the norms of its domain of inquiry, and at the same time the group members need to be free of assumptions and have inquisitiveness beginners’ minds. In terms of this research project, the work of Leonard as well as Knoblich and Oelinger suggests that to be more creative in disability service design requires that some members of the group have a deep knowledge of the disability services domain and be willing to give up their status quo assumptions and preconceived ideas. At IDEO, Kelley remarked that its design process consciously engages people from many different disciplines to help them to develop creative ideas (“Deep Dive,” 1999). By engaging the diverse perspectives of experts in different domains, the groups members have to explain their perspectives because not everyone will have the background experience to understand each domain’s assumptions. Martin (1999), Henry (1999), Senge (2006), and Leonard suggested that when group members verbally clarify their perspectives and identify possible assumptions when

they describe how they view a particular problem or issue, this process can help the participants to avoid being hindered by their biases and status quo assumptions

*Avoid stiffness.* The CEO of IDEO, Kelley, stated in an interview on *Nightline ABC* (“Deep Dive,” 1999), “If you go into a culture and there are a bunch of stiffies going around, I can guarantee they’re not going to invent anything” (p. 14). Michalko (2001) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) proposed that being stiff in a creative group context means fixating on rules, habits, and familiar patterns and being rigid in thought which forces attention on one area. Furthermore, Michalko, Csikszentmihalyi, and Palus and Horth (2002) all explained that childlike curiosity about the world and playfulness are the antitheses to being stiff and rigid in one’s thought processes. Kelley on *Nightline ABC* (“Deep Dive,” 1999) also echoed the above sentiment in the interview: “Being playful is of huge importance for being innovative.”

*Use serious play and humour.* As I discussed in the section on the role of serious play and humour in fostering creative thinking, play has also been found to be an enhancer of individual creative thinking and creative organizational cultures. Wenner (2009) explained that play in groups is often considered unproductive and that, because of that predominant view, play needs to be reframed and “not seen as opposite to work, but rather as a complement” (p. 29). Wenner also cited the research of Bekoff on how unstructured play fosters creativity: “Play is like a kaleidoscope, which encourages flexibility and creativity” (p. 29). Weissman (1990) noted the importance of serious play in workplace cultures and warned that if it is not present, the creative potential will likely be diminished. His work is particularly relevant to community disability services because it has to do with serious play in a social-work context. He identified the common fear of integrating serious play into social-work organizations because it is usually seen as unprofessional in such a serious line of work. Community disability service organizations

might also be concerned with integrating serious play and humour into their cultures because they serve vulnerable populations, similarly to social-work organizations. Weissman addressed these concerns: “Certainly, playfulness is difficult in a profession (Social work) dealing with some of the world’s most serious situations. Yet, too much emphasis on consistency, logic, and order can limit severely creative potential” (p. 61). Therefore, serious play and humour are seen in many diverse disciplines as an enhancer of group creativity (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Butler, 1999; “Deep Dive,” 1999; Weissman, 1990; Wenner, 2009).

*Provoke the unexpected.* Because fostering personal daily surprises can enhance humour and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Fredrickson, 2009), it might also be useful to find ways for a group to shake up its routine habits and create the space and time for unexpected, surprising interactions. Leonard (2010) also suggested the importance of creating a workplace culture that provokes the unexpected to foster group creativity. She cited Robinson and Stern in describing a creative workplace that was alive with the unexpected and yielded creative outcomes.

*Free oneself and each other of assumptions.* Leonard (2010) called being willing to give up assumptions and see with fresh eyes having a beginner’s mind. A person who demonstrates a beginner’s mind is someone who is “curious, even playful, and willing to ask anything because he doesn’t know what he doesn’t know” (p. 15). Henry (1999) offered a similar description and explained how to assist in developing the qualities of a beginner-like mind. She pointed out that the postmodern theories of deconstruction in working with assumptions and preconceived ideas skew a fresh view of a problem or question and that to be more creative, it is important to understand and focus on the elements that we usually neglect in our dominant assumptions about the world. However, even with a fresh, beginner-like mind at play in a creative group, Leonard noted the importance of having deep knowledge of the subjects that are relevant to the problem

for which creative solutions are being sought, and the literature that I reviewed stressed the need to find a balance between a fresh perspective and the wisdom of experience. “Deep Dive” (1999) and Leonard proposed that a way to help a group to find this balance is to seek diverse perspectives in a creative group.

*Include intellectual diversity.* Leonard (2010) and Palus and Horth (2002) both highlighted that creativity can also be enhanced in a team process by ensuring that the team is diverse—comprised of people with different thinking styles and diverse areas of expertise. Leonard, Palus and Horth, “Deep Dive” (1999), and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) hypothesized that if a group is made up of intellectually diverse people, the ensuing creative tension can enhance and set the stage for innovations and creative outcomes. Leonard cited Lippmann, who summed up what often occurs if a creative group does not demonstrate intellectual diversity: “When all men think alike, no one thinks very much” (p. 18). Leonard also warned that putting people with diverse thinking styles together will likely result in disagreements and possible clashes. She recommended discussing the “creative abrasion” (p. 28) that would likely emerge and asking the group to develop its own way of navigating conflict before it arises. Leonard and Palus and Horth implied that planning ahead the way that the group would handle its more difficult situations can temper the potential for harming trust and stifling creativity.

*Demonstrate reflective openness.* Creative think tanks involve a great deal of dialogue and sharing of opinions, assumptions, views, experiences and, of course, ideas; and the people in the group will reflect on these ideas either directly or indirectly. I found relevant literature on the subject of reflective openness that leads to true learning, creativity, and sustained trust among group members. One warning, however, is that communicating transparently and openly can also often offend and at times stifle creativity; Leonard (2010) noted the potential for creative

abrasion to arise when diverse persons engage in a creative group process. Senge (2006) reported a common misconception that began in the 1980s with regard to fostering transparent communication in a group to clarify assumptions. The misconception is that, to clarify assumptions and let others in a group know what all of the members are thinking, it is important that they openly express their opinions, especially their critical perspectives. Senge called this *participative openness* or *expressive openness*. He summed up why expressive or participative openness fails by quoting an unnamed executive: “The implicit assumption around here is that the solution to all problems is sharing our views” (p. 261). Senge implied that sharing more critical views in the spirit of being open can often offend others, erode trust in the group, and, ironically, foster a lack of openness with others. Furthermore, the core problem with expressive openness is that the participants do not truly listen, but simply wait to ‘talk at’ each other, which makes true reflection impossible. Senge suggested that true reflective openness requires that, as we listen to others’ perspectives, we should look inward at our own assumptions and biases and explain the basis for our mental models. True reflection on how to understand more clearly “leads to a willingness to continually test these views” (p. 262). However, Senge warned that it is very difficult to be truly reflective and open and recommended starting with a courageous willingness to open ourselves and possibly discover that our assumptions are wrong. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2005) write that consciously being aware of the need for periods of time to suspend judgement can help to avoid being caught in assumptions in a group: “In practice, suspension requires patience and a willingness not to impose pre-established frameworks or mental models on what we are seeing” (p. 31). They also offered some practical advice:

Rather than saying nothing or telling the other person why you think he or she is wrong, you can simply say, That is not the way I see it. My view is . . . . Here is what has led me to see things this way. What has led you to see things differently? (p. 33)

Authentic reflective openness and suspension are especially crucial during the divergent, creative thinking phase of a creative group process. However, as I discussed earlier, the convergent thinking phase involves critical thinking about the multitude of ideas that arise in a divergent thinking process to choose the ideas that will most likely meet a creative need. Even so, the literature suggested that being critical of ideas and being critical of people should still be differentiated (Senge et al., 2005). In the latter case, creativity and trust can be harmed in a group if criticism is personal and biases are untempered by self-reflective awareness (Senge et al., 2005).

*Allot time to being imaginative and practical.* Von Oech (1998), De Bono (1999), Csikszentmihalyi (1996), and Kelley (as cited in “Deep Dive,” 1999) all recognized that creative groups need to consciously make time for two main types of creative thinking: divergent and convergent. In “Deep Dive” Kelley explained that IDEO’s creative process involves two main phases to generate creative products, being playful and being ‘crazy,’ and then critically determining which ideas might work to solve a problem. De Bono systematized six main thinking styles at play in creative groups to which he assigned symbolic representations of different-coloured hats. For instance, green-hat thinking is divergent, imaginative, and creative; and black-hat thinking is critical and practical. To enhance creativity in meetings, De Bono suggested that time be allotted to each of the six thinking styles. This system involves taking time to wear a certain hat and signalling to the members that it is time to switch from, say, the green hat of creative thinking to the black hat of critical thinking. De Bono’s six thinking hats model for creative group meetings offers a way to depersonalize the switch from one thinking

style to another and make each group member feel that his or her thinking style is valued because the members will focus on each style individually. This avoids the chances of one style of thinking dominating a whole meeting and better ensures success because all phases of a creative thinking process will be addressed. Whether De Bono's six thinking hat system or another creative process is used, the reviewed literature suggested that a creative group process should have a leader who signals to members the time at which to switch between an imaginative and a practical thinking style (De Bono, 1999; "Deep Dive," 1999; Leonard, 2010; Martin & Carey, 1999; Palus & Horth, 2002; Von Oech, 1998). In terms of the kind of leadership that a creative process requires, Palus and Horth wrote, "Creative leadership needs people who are agile of mind, light on their feet, and have a sense of humour" (p. 127). In summing up the above strategies to enhance a group's creative process, Leonard recommended that the group blend the following paradoxical elements:

A beginner's mind, while also demonstrating experience.  
 Freedom, while also demonstrating discipline.  
 Play, while also demonstrating professionalism.  
 Improvisation, while also demonstrating planning. (p. 14)

These paradoxes are each a part of either divergent or convergent thinking. Leonard simply arranged them in ways that reinforced what the literature emphasized; namely, that in a creative process neither divergent, playful thinking nor critical, convergent thinking can be forgotten. Both deserve consideration in a creative group process and, as the literature suggested, are crucial to the emergence of novel, relevant outcomes.

In conclusion, the literature clearly suggested a strong connection between humour and creative thinking, which Von Oech (1998) summed up well: "There is a close relationship between the 'haha' of humour and the 'aha' of discovery" (p. 126). Organizational cultures that engage serious play and actively seek humorous interactions to foster creativity, the literature

showed, tend to produce novel, relevant outcomes in their respective domains of creative exploration (Butler, 1999; Palus & Horth, 2002; Weissman, 1990). The literature also described a culture that integrates humour and play and identified the factors that enhance creative-thinking abilities. The next chapter explains the methodology and methods that I used to conduct this action research project.

## CHAPTER THREE – CONDUCT OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Imagination is the manipulation of images. Human reason discovers new relations between things not by deduction, but by that unpredictable blend of speculation and insight that scientists call induction, which like other forms of imagination cannot be formalized. (J. Bronowski; as cited in Palus & Horth, 2002, p. 72)

### Research Approach

In chapter three I define and describe the research approach that I used to gather data and the rationale underlying the selected approach. This section is divided into four parts:

(a) methodologies: the general methodologies that I used to conduct the research project; (b) project participants: the research team and the research participants; (c) data-gathering tools: the tools that I created and used to gather the data; and (d) study conduct: the specific steps that I used to conduct the research project. Finally, I outline the ethical considerations that framed the project. The research question that I explored in this study was, “How might serious play and humour have enhanced the creative thinking of the persons involved in designing services through the RAWK pilot project?” The subquestions included the following:

1. What playful and humorous practices did the RAWK team do well that might have fostered creative thinking?
2. How did the RAWK team connect play and humour to the tasks on which they were working?
3. What were the challenges that the RAWK team faced in using humour and playfulness in service design?
4. What supports, skills, and resources might be required to expand and further develop the practices of serious play and creative thinking that enhanced the service design processes of the RAWK project?

5. What other practices that employ creative thinking and serious play might be incorporated into the process of designing disability services in a way that leads to better quality outcomes?

#### Project Participants

Stringer (2007) observed that the power of action research is that it “envisages a collaborative approach to investigation that seeks to engage ‘subjects’ as equal and full participants in the research process” (p. 10); thus, the involvement of participants who are engaged in the issue is critically important. As the researcher, I selected participants through purposeful sampling of the individuals who were directly involved in designing services through the RAWK pilot project of SKILLS Society. Purposeful sampling meant inviting potential participants who were directly involved for any length of time during the two-year period of the RAWK project. In involving the individuals who engaged serious play and humour to enhance creative thinking in designing services, I hoped that their experience and learning would inform the rest of the organization on what worked, what did not work, and what part of the RAWK project might be useful to the rest of the organization. Stringer commented that action research involves participants who will find solutions to problems that they confront in their organizational lives through the action research process (p. 34). Over the two-year existence of the RAWK project, 10 persons were involved (including myself) in the experimental processes of designing services. At the time of this study, 8 of the 10 project team members held other full-time positions in SKILLS Society, and none reported to me. The positions that the former RAWK team members held ranged from community support worker to team leader to senior management. Two participants in the RAWK pilot project were outside contractors and integral to service design meetings as equals in the design process. I did not include other SKILLS

Society staff because I believed that including people who were not involved in the processes of the pilot project would cause ambiguity and might impact the validity of the results. Everyone in the RAWK pilot project was equal, except that the nine (including myself) were mentored by and reported to Reid, the senior manager, on the project. Because Reid was fully involved as a RAWK team meeting participant and integral to the creative processes, it was therefore important to interview her one to one as a research participant. To build the interest of potential participants in the research, I held informal telephone discussions with the nine individuals who were part of the RAWK project and then sent invitations via e-mail (Appendix A) to those who verbally expressed interest in participating in the research. In the invitation I explained the purpose of the action research, gave an overview of the methods, and explained that their participation was voluntary and could end at any time before or during the research. Prior to collecting data, the participants signed an informed consent form that also included information on confidentiality and how I would use the data (Appendix B).

The response rate to the invitation to participate in an anecdote circle, the first method, was 55.6% (five of the nine people), which I considered a sufficient number to yield useful data. Five people, including myself, attended the anecdote circle. A few weeks later I sent another invitation (Appendix C) to all nine former RAWK participants to participate in a focus group to develop recommendations. I decided to invite all of the former RAWK participants even though some had not attended the initial anecdote circle because I felt that their experience in the pilot project would result in valuable recommendations. All of the same participants in the anecdote circle attended the focus group, as well as another participant who had not attended the circle. After I conducted the anecdote circle and focus group, I e-mailed an invitation to Reid to invite

her to participate in a one-to-one interview (Appendix D). She agreed, and we scheduled a mutually convenient time to conduct the interview.

### Research Methods

Throughout the entire project, not simply at the data-analysis stage, I worked to ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research, which, according to Creswell (2003), involves ensuring that the results are accurate from the perspective of the participants and the researcher. This can be accomplished through triangulation, member checking, the use of rich descriptions to capture as much information as possible, and clarification of any researcher bias (Creswell, 2003). I chose methods that were conducive to gathering data from a group who worked closely together as equals and aimed to draw out rich descriptions through the participants' stories of their experiences. Having multiple data-collection methods, Glesne (2006) suggested, contributes to the trustworthiness of the data and can enhance the credibility of the study results (p. 36). The literature available on humour, play, and creative thinking helped to inform the data that I collected from the anecdote circle and focus group. The literature also helped me to consider various perspectives and opposing views in discussing the findings from the research, which increased the trustworthiness of the results. There has been some debate on whether it is trustworthy to review literature prior to conducting the research because of the potential for biased opinions (Glesne, 2006). However, Glesne recommended that the literature be examined throughout the entire research process because knowing the literature on the domain of inquiry helps to determine whether the findings can be applied to other research; the research might even add to the field of study (p. 24).

Other techniques that I used to ensure trustworthiness included recording and transcribing each data-gathering session to ensure that I would not have to rely on memory alone to analyze

the data, reflecting on my own researcher bias and discussing it with my project supervisor, and checking back with the research participants to ensure that my findings reflected their experience and insight.

### *Tools*

To collect data from the research participants I used three research methods: an anecdote circle, a focus group, and a one-to-one interview. Storytelling in world cafés based on an appreciative inquiry approach is common practice in SKILLS Society to discuss with employees at all levels of the organization an important issue or question. Therefore, the initial anecdote circle research method was congruent with SKILLS Society's existing storytelling culture. Anecdote circles are informal and are often described as dinner parties rather than the more traditional focus groups. For example, Callahan, Rixon, and Schenk (2006) noted that although anecdote circles lack a rigid focus, the questions have themes. They recommended that the facilitator leave space for stories to emerge naturally. I hoped that the anecdote circle would elicit personal experiences, creative ideas, and enriching stories related to the questions to inform the study. The questions that I asked in all three methods (Appendixes E, F, and G) were qualitative, open ended, and related to the main and subquestions. After the anecdote circle I themed the ideas that I had collected and then checked back with the participants via e-mail to ask for further clarification and to ensure that the themes I had identified were accurate from their perspective. After I gathered the five participants' feedback and insights, I developed further questions to help to formulate recommendations in the focus group (see Appendix F). Once I developed the questions for the second method and confirmed them with my project supervisor, I convened the focus group. I chose a focus group because it would allow more focused dialogue on the recommendations based on experience. In the third method, a one-to-one

interview, I gathered data from the supervisor of the RAWK project. In all three data-collection sessions, before I collected any data, I informed the participants that the sessions would be recorded and asked them to sign the informed consent form that contained information on the anonymity of the collected information.

### *Anecdote Circle*

I chose the anecdote circle method because it is a means of acquiring qualitative information from the participants' storytelling. Callahan et al. (2006) described anecdote circles as useful not only to share stories on a given theme, but also to elicit insights that would act as catalysts for change (p. 5). As the purpose of the project—to implement change to enhance creative thinking in service design—implies, interactions in the anecdote circle would in a natural way foster change and possibly change the participants' practice in designing SKILLS Society's services in the future (p. 5). An additional reason for choosing the anecdote circle was that it would foster shared learning among the participants through collective discussion (Callahan et al., 2006). Because shared learning is an important espoused value of SKILL Society (2007, p. 16; D. Reid, personal correspondence, November 4, 2009), it fits with the cultural practices of the organization. In the anecdote circle I asked questions (Appendix E) about the RAWK team members' former experiences with the playful process in service design meetings and how they felt that it contributed or did not contribute to the generation of relevant ideas on providing services to people. The questions were based on the main and subquestions.

To ensure that the participants felt safe in telling their stories, I chose a politically neutral setting, made the environment comfortable by creating a circle of chairs, and prepared food and beverages. Within the first 10 minutes of the gathering, as the facilitator I explained again the purpose of the gathering, the need to record the session, and the guidelines for the anecdote

circle. The storytelling did not begin until everyone had signed the informed consent form (Appendix B). The guidelines that Callahan et al. (2006) recommended included asking the participants to (a) focus on providing examples, experiences, anecdotes, and stories; (b) allow their colleagues to complete their anecdotes without interruption; and (c) rather than disagreeing with someone's story, to tell the story the way that they remembered it (p. 14).

After the 10-minute introduction to the circle, I asked the first question (Appendix E) and let the storytelling flow. As the facilitator I occasionally asked another story-eliciting question, asked a participant to share an example, or reminded the participants if we were straying from the guidelines of the discussion. Because I was an equal member in the initial RAWK team, I also shared my stories, but only after the participants had told their stories, to temper the potential to lead the participants in the direction of my biases.

### *Focus Group*

I chose the focus group method as another means of acquiring qualitative information from a group perspective (Stringer, 2007, p. 73) and because focus groups tend to foster shared learning among the participants through collective discussion. (Glesne, 2006; Palys & Atchison, 2008). I invited the participants in the initial anecdote circle and all nine RAWK team members to join the focus group. Before we engaged in a discussion, the participants signed their consent forms (Appendix B). The first part of the focus group entailed checking in again with the participants to ensure that the themes that I had identified from the anecdote circle resonated with their experiences and to ask for further thoughts. In the second part of the focus group we explored the questions in Appendix F to arrive at recommendations from the group members' experience that might help to inform the service design practices of the rest of SKILLS Society. More specifically, the questions asked how serious play had been successful, what challenges the

group had faced, and what might further enhance creative thinking in an individual and in a service design process. Six people attended the focus group, which did not exceed Glesne's (2006) recommendation of no more than nine persons for an effective focus group.

### *Interview*

I chose a one-to-one interview as the third method to gather relevant data from each crucial participant without the data-gathering method potentially interfering with other participants. In addition, face-to-face interviews can build rapport as a result of the intimate connection between the researcher and participant (Palys & Atchison, 2008). When rapport is developed, "people will talk more willingly about personal or sensitive issues" (Glesne, 2006, p. 113).

After I had completed the two methods of data gathering, I invited the supervisor of the RAWK pilot project to participate in an interview in person (Appendix D). She agreed, and we found a mutually convenient time to meet and discuss the questions (Appendix G) after she signed the informed consent (Appendix H). I designed the questions to enable the "interviewee to explore her experience in detail and to reveal the many features of that experience that have an effect on the issue investigated" (Stringer, 2007, p. 69). The interview questions focused on her stories of the RAWK project, and I asked for her recommendations.

In addition to the one-to-one interview with the RAWK project supervisor, I conducted informal interviews in person and via e-mail with the participants in the anecdote circle, focus group, and one-to-one interview. The purpose of the informal interviews was to seek clarification on comments that they had made in the data-gathering sessions, and I explained this in the informed consent forms (Appendixes B & H).

*Procedures/Study Conduct*

In this research project my main focus was on qualitative research, with action research as a methodology. Palys and Atchison (2008) described action research as based on a qualitative approach rather than a more objective quantitative methodology. The qualitative focus of this project is related to my social-constructivist view that to understand an issue better, I must clarify both my own mental models and the ways that other people construct meaning from their experience in the world (Glesne, 2006). A qualitative approach to understanding the main research question aligned with SKILLS Society's espoused and lived values in that qualitative research considers the unique thoughts, perceptions, and values of the participants (Palys & Atchison, 2008; SKILLS Society, 2007, p. 16). The focus is more on seeking to understand what the participants think is important about the issue or the question being explored. SKILLS Society's RAWK project participants were familiar with the need to seek an understanding of what others want and feel is important, in that the organization's approach to service design is based on person-centered values, which focus on the experiences and interests of the recipients of services to build the service design (SKILLS Society, 2007).

The overarching methodology that I employed in this research project was action research, which is based on a "participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes" (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007, p. 3). In this process the views and narratives of the participants are paramount to the learning and recommendations on the subject of inquiry. Stringer (2007) described action research as a "systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (p. 1). Action research is also described as a process that involves an iterative cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Stringer referred to this

iterative cycle of the action research process as an interacting spiral in which learning in one step of the process informs the next in a new way (p. 9).

I have outlined much of the study conduct in earlier sections in this chapter. The following is a brief summary of the steps that I followed in the action research project.

1. Step 1, week 1, June 2010: I sent an invitation to participate in the anecdote circle to everyone who worked with the RAWK pilot project.
2. Step 2, week 3: I conducted the anecdote circle with five participants.
3. Step 3, weeks 4 and 5: I conducted the preliminary data analysis of the anecdote circle and checked the accuracy of the data with the participants via e-mail; their feedback informed the questions for the recommendations focus group.
4. Step 4, week 5: I sent an invitation to the focus group to everyone who worked with the RAWK pilot project.
5. Step 5, week 8: I conducted the focus group with the same five participants from the anecdote circle and one more person from the RAWK project who had not attended the first anecdote circle.
6. Step 6, weeks 8 and 9: I conducted the preliminary data analysis of the focus group and sent e-mails sent to the participants to ask for clarification of certain points that they had made.
7. Step 7, week 9: I sent an invitation for the one-to-one interview to Reid.
8. Step 8, week 9: I conducted the one-to-one interview.
9. Step 9, weeks 9, 10, and 11: I analyzed the data from the anecdote circle, the focus group, and the one-to-one interview independently and then compared and contrasted them.

10. Step 10 and the following weeks until completion, December 2010: I wrote the final results.

### *Data Analysis*

Stringer (2007) informed us that “data analysis is the process of distilling large quantities of information to uncover significant features and elements that are embedded in the data” (p. 95). Analyzing the collected data gave me an opportunity to clarify and deepen my knowledge of “the events and other phenomena associated with the issue at hand” (p. 83). Glesne (2006) explained that data analysis involves organizing what the researcher has seen, heard, and read to make sense of what he or she has learned (p. 147). Data analysis of qualitative research is rarely straightforward, and it can be difficult to set specific guidelines for analyzing qualitative data because it depends on the research (Palys & Atchison, 2008, pp. 307-308). Because of the nonlinear nature of data analysis, Palys and Atchison suggested that qualitative data analysis is iterative in nature (p. 308), which means that each pass through the data is different from the last and that with each cycle a more identifiable direction emerges (p. 308). The iterative process helps to explain the data and develop theories about the research by searching for patterns and themes, linking stories, and categorizing the data (Glesne, 2006, p. 147). Glesne recommended that researchers reflect on four questions in analyzing data, and these questions guided my thinking through the iterative process and informed my theming and coding: “What do you notice? Why do you notice what you notice? How can you interpret what you notice? and How can you know that your interpretation is the ‘right’ one?” (p.166). Furthermore, reflection on these questions helped to ensure the trustworthiness of my interpretation of the data (p. 166).

I analyzed the data that I collected in this project in three iterative phases. The first phase occurred after the anecdote circle. I transcribed the audio recording from the anecdote circle

myself, which took longer than I expected but helped me to become more familiar with the participants' stories. After I found and highlighted the themes from the first round of data gathering, I checked with the participants and the project supervisor informally over the phone and via e-mail to ensure that these themes were congruent with what they had actually said. I then identified additional themes and ideas that informed the questions for the second method of data collection, the focus group.

The second phase of the data analysis occurred after I had transcribed the data from the focus group and the one-to-one interview with Reid. I analyzed and themed these data independently. After the preliminary thematic coding of the data, I sent e-mails to the participants when I found that I needed to clarify a few of their comments. I then themed and coded the recommendations that emerged from the focus group and one-to-one interview. My thematic process involved highlighting key sentences in the transcripts that seemed to be related to other comments. I then cut up the transcripts and segregated the themes into related groups for further meaning making and analysis. Once I had distilled the data into key themes of recommendations, I sent the themes to the participants via e-mail again and asked them whether the themes reflected the focus group recommendations.

The third phase involved comparing and contrasting the themes from the anecdote circle, the focus group, and the interview with the recommendations from the current literature on enhancing creativity through humour and play. Comparing and contrasting the literature and the data that I collected from each of the three research methods helped to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the recommendations.

### Ethical Issues

In conducting research with humans there is a need to balance scientific obligations with humanistic obligations to protect persons and their dignity (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 69). Finding an acceptable balance between the above two is crucial to progress with research. Royal Roads University (2007) requires that all research involving humans be subjected to a full ethical review by its Research Ethics Board. The “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2005) outlines eight key elements of ethical research: respect for human dignity, free and informed consent, respect for vulnerable persons, respect for privacy and confidentiality, respect for justice and inclusiveness, balancing harms and benefits, minimizing harm, and maximizing benefits. I adhered to these eight requirements in conducting my research.

#### *Respect for Human Dignity*

The underlying research principle of respecting human dignity, according to the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2005), is based on the need to protect the persons involved from bodily, psychological, and cultural harm. To ensure that the research would not inflict psychological harm, it was important that I respect the stories and personal perspectives of the participants. Also, to ensure that I maintained the dignity and respect of the participants, I informed them in writing and verbally before their participation and again verbally before each research session of their right to withdraw from the research at any time for any reason without fear of repercussions.

*Free and Informed Consent*

Stringer (2007) described seeking informed consent as explaining transparently to the participants the purpose, results and likely consequences of the research. I did so in writing (Appendix B) and verbally and included a statement that their participation was voluntary and that they could remove themselves from the research at any time for any reason without fear of repercussions.

*Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality*

The “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2005) states that respect for human dignity also implies respecting the right of the participants to have their personal information kept confidential. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality also helps to ensure mental and psychological integrity (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2005). Because the sponsoring organization supports clients in the Edmonton community, I have maintained the confidentiality of the participants at all times throughout the research and after; it’s also an ethical requirement generally. The participants shared anecdotal stories of events that led to creative practices, and I explained to them in writing and verbally the need to avoid using the names of the individuals who were involved. In addition, they shared potentially sensitive information about the culture of the sponsoring organization that had the potential to jeopardize their respect in the organization if the information was shared with others who might disagree with their viewpoint. In consideration of the political implications for the participants in the sponsoring organization, I have upheld their right to confidentiality and anonymity by not using their names in the research and final results. I have also stored all of the information that I collected in a safe location away from the sponsoring organization.

*Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness*

To respect justice and inclusivity and avoid biased research, Royal Roads University's Ethics Review Board reviewed the research methodology and methods, and I invited everyone who was connected with the RAWK pilot project to participate in the research.

*Balancing Harms and Benefits*

I believe that the potential benefits of this action research project outweighed the potential harms of conducting it. With regard to minimizing harm, the "Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2005) states that the researcher has a duty to avoid, prevent or minimize harm to others. The main potential harm that I foresaw was that the research had the potential to harm the reputation of the sponsoring organization and the individuals involved if I did not carry out the research ethically and ensure that the results were not biased. D. Reid (personal communication, November 4, 2009), senior manager of leadership and community development at SKILLS Society, cautioned that informing employees that the way that they have been working and for which they have been praised in the past is not in keeping with the current trends and needs of service recipients can sometimes provoke negative emotions. Therefore, discussions with professionals on how humour and play can lead to creative thinking and improve the quality of services need to avoid disempowering or belittling their former contributions. I strove to avoid this potential harm by ensuring that the research was as free as possible of researcher bias, that I maintained confidentiality and anonymity at all times, and that I adhered to the eight principles of ethical research (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2005). The "Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans" states that this type of research should aim to benefit the participants as well as society as a whole. The use of qualitative

research methodologies in this project had the potential to give the participants an opportunity to enhance their learning and understanding by reflecting on their own experiences of humour that have led to more creativity in their practice (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007). Another potential benefit is that the culture of the sponsoring organization could improve its ability to nurture creativity, which would effectively lead to improved practices in designing services to support persons with disabilities.

## CHAPTER FOUR – ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

There is a close relationship between the “haha” of humour and the “aha” of discovery. (Von Oech, 1998, p. 126)

Chapter four outlines the results of my three-phase action research project and highlights the themes that emerged from the anecdote circle, the focus group, and the one-to-one interview. The themes and findings informed the conclusions from the research project. The chapter ends with the scope and limitations of the research.

The purpose of this action research project was to answer the research question “How might serious play and humour have enhanced the creative thinking of the persons involved in designing services through the RAWK pilot project?” The underlying questions that guided my research included the following:

1. What playful and humorous practices did the RAWK team do well that might have fostered creative thinking?
2. How did the RAWK team connect serious play and humour to the tasks on which they were working?
3. What were the challenges that the RAWK team faced in using humour and playfulness in service design?
4. What supports, skills, and resources might be required to expand and further develop the practices of serious play and creative thinking that enhanced the service design processes of the RAWK project?
5. What other practices that employ creative thinking and serious play might be incorporated into the process of designing disability services in a way that leads to better quality outcomes?

Over the two-year life of the RAWK project 10 persons in total (including myself) were involved in the creative service design process at various times. The research findings are based on an anecdote circle that included five (including myself) of the nine possible RAWK participants, a focus group with six of the nine participants (including myself), and a private interview with the original project leader of the RAWK project, who was the 10<sup>th</sup> person involved in the RAWK project. All of the research project participants with the exception of Wendell were SKILLS Society employees at the time of the data collection. I analyzed the anecdote circle, focus group, and interview separately and then compared and contrasted them. Because the themes that emerged from each method were similar in many ways, I report the findings simultaneously and highlight the differences whenever appropriate. In that the focus group questions and parts of the interview revolved around the recommendations from the participants, I include further themes and highlights in chapter five's Recommendations section. Seven core themes emerged from the data that I collected from the anecdote circle, focus group, and interview:

1. Play and humour foster strong bonds and trust.
2. Play and humour foster intrinsic rewards.
3. Play and humour must be framed in a creative process.
4. Play and humour lead to creative ideas.
5. Environment is a catalyst for play and creativity.
6. Creative play, critical thinking, and the outcome expectations must be balanced.
7. It is uncertain whether the outcomes of the creative process are relevant.

I will discuss each of the themes in depth and use direct quotations from the participants in the anecdote circle, focus group, and interview to emphasize the significance of a theme.

Three men, including myself, and four women participated in the research. However, to protect the anonymity of the participants, I have used pseudonyms unrelated to the gender of the actual participants.

Throughout the discussion of the research findings I make broad references to the play, serious play, and humour that influenced the RAWK processes and outcomes. Before I address findings 1 through 7, I will create from the data a sense of how the play and humour in the RAWK design processes influenced creativity.

Before the meetings the RAWK members discussed the humorous interruptions that would be encouraged because of the belief that unexpected interactions can shock people out of their habitual viewpoints and improve their creative thinking ability. Spontaneous, humorous outbursts and natural play with objects found in the room were part of the group's core conscious practices. Playfulness and humour were allowed to occur and even valued because the participants thought that they might indirectly lead to innovative ideas. Wendell described the play in the RAWK project as sometimes spontaneous, unplanned gentle teasing of each other with attention to avoiding offending each other. Throughout the data collection the participants found it difficult to describe play and humour, and yet they reported that laughter and humorous interactions did occur that somehow led to more open-mindedness and creative ideas. Their descriptions in the data were more about playful, spontaneous ways of being with each other that they could not seem to put into words when they reflected on their experiences in the RAWK meetings. Wendell said that it was like trying to describe a humorous situation to others who were not part of it and who did not see it as funny at all, and in the end having to say, "You had to be there." Palus and Horth's (2002) statement that play is less cerebral and more visceral and is characterized by broad qualities such as "curiosity, exuberance, spontaneity, improvisation,

uninhibited movement and thought and a feeling of being outside of time” (p. 108) applies to the participants’ difficulty in describing play and humour in the RAWK process. They used similar terms to describe play, such as using spontaneous expressions, feeling excited by play, feeling less inhibited, and finding that the time in the RAWK meetings seemed to pass quickly.

The interactions among the RAWK members often alternated unexpectedly between jokes and ideas on how to connect people. Play sometimes also involved their commenting on a humorous incongruity in an object or interaction in the room and then joking about it as a group. For instance, someone once noticed a generic Kleenex box with improper spelling that identified a particular body part. Larry expressed the incongruity spontaneously when he saw it, which led to laughter and a suggestion to phone the number of the restaurant on the Kleenex box in the middle of the meeting. This spontaneous, humorous interaction led to more humour, member bonding, a release in the midst of serious discussions, and then a return to the task at hand. There seemed to be a consistent back and forth between the focus on the task of identifying ways to creatively connect someone with a disability and the playful, humorous interactions that happened naturally and without intention. Murray reported that often a meeting would begin when a few members arrived and began to discuss the humorous parts of their days, other members would arrive and begin to engage in the verbal jostling, and the conversation would then switch to a discussion of someone whom they were supporting and a request for ideas. Palus and Horth (2002) summed up how spontaneous, playful activities lead to comfortable discussions of important tasks: “Play is an inviting front porch activity, which then draws people inside to participate in deeper matters” (p. 114). In many ways the participants’ key description of play was that it engaged and invited others into a different way of relating, thinking, noticing

patterns, and being together; then from the playful interactions, creative ideas would easily emerge.

### Study Findings

#### *Finding 1: Play and Humour Foster Strong Bonds and Trust*

The first theme, which emerged numerous times, was that play and humour led to strong bonds of friendship and trust among the RAWK project members. The participants noted that play first and foremost built bonds and trust, and then they began to link humour, play, and creativity. The data indicated that play and humour reduced the RAWK members' defences, made them feel comfortable about being themselves, and helped them to develop a sense of trust. In any relationship people search for cues about how to act in a situation and around people, and Wendell commented, "A general convention within our field, or any business-type relationship for that matter, is a formal, hierarchal structure that says you may speak with colleagues and superiors about work and other generalities, but other topics are off limits." The RAWK project broke down those conventions and allowed the participants to be themselves and therefore build trust, friendship, and strong bonds. Wendell added, "Since the conventions in the RAWK project such as play were more like those of visiting friends, I very quickly interpreted this as 'These people are very much like my friends.'" Palus and Horth (2002) also noticed the connection between play, humour, and trust in creative teams: "If you create an environment where serious play is the norm, eventually trust becomes the norm" (p. 116).

The participants also suggested that the trust they built through play and humour in the RAWK team interactions created conditions that were more conducive to navigating conflicts than more formal group cultures that avoid humour and play would have. A few participants reported specifically, and other participants nodded their heads in agreement, that trust built

through play helped to resolve conflicts in meetings. Gretel, for example, commented that when a RAWK member was having a difficult time with the work, the group members acted as though that person were a family member and, accordingly, helped him or her to find solutions. Murray described the play that occurred during conflict in RAWK meetings:

I remember in the beginning there was a division amongst the RAWK team dealing with roles, responsibility, and defining what success for this project looked like. These were heated discussions. During these tense moments the idea/action of play helped to lighten the mood. Someone would tell a joke or stand up and say something totally random during a moment where play was needed. These moments always helped to ease any tension and helped people to examine the issue from a different perspective.

Gertrude described times of breaking from a formal meeting structure when someone would, for example, pick up one of the Nerf guns and shoot sticky darts into the ceiling. The mutual understanding not to follow typical meeting rules but to take unexpected breaks to release stress and be naturally comedic was a reminder and cue to the group members that they were good friends. In other words, playing together signalled that trust and friendship rather than conflict are the bases for relationships. The participants who were of different genders and ranged in age from the mid 20s to the late 50s, all reported the unusually strong friendships and bonds that they felt resulted from the play. Larry summed up the theory that the play and humour that fostered trust helped the RAWK project members to better navigate conflict when they faced serious issues that had to be resolved: “Having the working cushion of play and the resulting bonds helped make it easier to trust each other and not hold on to resentment.”

In terms of the participants’ comments on what might have hindered the development of trust, some of the data suggested that at times they demonstrated what Senge (2006) called *participative or expressive openness*. For example, Wendell recounted, “Conflicts happen all the time, but maybe we felt more comfortable in being able to say what we wanted. Sometimes people being openly frustrated is good because it puts things transparently right on the table.”

Other participants reported that there were times when the RAWK members' open criticism of others' ideas seemed to hinder trust and make them reluctant to offer creative ideas. For instance, Lois explained that "a negative comment leaves an impression on the contributor and the rest of the people in the meeting. It will make me not want to share my ideas if I feel personally criticized." Senge noted that, essentially, participative and expressive openness both involve expressing personal opinions and openly criticizing others. However, they can damage trust and hinder authentic openness to each others' points of view. In reflecting on the qualitative data that revealed the underlying value in the group for honesty and the open expression of opinions, I wondered whether the participants' expressive openness might have at times resulted in negative conflict. Therefore, in the Recommendations section of this project I will discuss the use of what Senge called *reflective openness* to sustain trust in the convergent, critical-thinking phase of a RAWK-like creative process.

*Finding 2: Play and Humour Foster Intrinsic Rewards*

In all of the data-collection methods the participants described how some aspect of play made them feel. The predominant feelings were positive. First, they reported that the play in the meetings made them genuinely look forward to the meetings because they were fun and exciting. Lois, for instance, commented, "The play made me want to come to meetings and made me more naturally committed to the work." Gretel echoed Lois's sentiment that play in the RAWK meetings made her feel happy to get up in the morning and go to her job. The participants agreed that the RAWK work was challenging and at times frustrating, but Gretel reflected that, possibly, "play and humour made it easier to get over those walls." The participants' comments that they wanted to attend RAWK meetings, not because they had to, but because the meetings were fulfilling, reminded me of Manion's (2004) and Lemons' (2005) research findings that a

workplace culture that integrates humour and play can increase staff morale, staff retention, and intrinsic rewards.

Second, the theme emerged from the three data-collection methods that play and humour in the RAWK meeting process made the participants feel energized, enthusiastic, and confident about taking on creative challenges. According to Gertrude, play made them feel that they were doing exciting, groundbreaking work, which made them more open and creative. Larry also described the feeling of play in the group process: “For me, with the messing around and why it interests me is, it feels like there are unlimited possibilities, and play facilitates that.” Wendell commented that even though the meetings sometimes lasted for a few hours, play made the participants feel more actively engaged with the others. Murray, who had read Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) work, reported that he reached a “state of flow” during the meetings that made his creative ideas emerge easily and that he felt excited throughout the process. The participants commented on their experience of serious play in the RAWK meetings: “Play made me feel happy to come to meetings,” “Play made me feel more committed to my work,” “Play made me feel more actively engaged and empathetic with other group members,” “Play made me feel inspired and like there were unlimited possibilities,” “Play made me feel like I was in a state of flow,” “Play made me feel trusting of others,” “Play made me feel more able to handle challenges,” and “Play made me feel creative.” These positive feelings suggests that what often seemed to occur was what Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) referred to as *positive mood induction*, which leads to divergent, creative thinking. Isen et al. (1987) and Fredrickson and Branigan noted that the specific mood that fosters creative thinking is characterized by the positive emotion that results from, for example, a playful, humorous interaction.

The participants also commented that they often felt the loss of the positive state when the meetings were over and that they wanted to find ways to sustain the positive feeling that led to creativity after the RAWK meetings ended. Wendell, for instance, summed up the general sentiment: “I felt really creative while I was there spitting out ideas, but then you almost got smacked with reality again when a meeting was over.” In chapter five I will discuss the participants’ recommendations from the focus group and interview for sustaining throughout their daily work the positive feelings generated in the RAWK meetings.

*Finding 3: Play and Humour Must Be Framed in a Creative Process*

The majority of the participants in the three data-collection sessions reported that if play and humour are not framed as part of the process by explaining their purpose to the participants, then they can easily be misinterpreted and adversely affect the outcomes and the group process. For example, Lois, who entered the RAWK project after a year, described a playful meeting in which the play had not been framed: “I was very uncomfortable at first—not that I didn’t enjoy it later, but it was like, ‘What is going on?’” She explained that because she was used to meetings with traditional, professional, straight-to-business structures, she was not sure whether jokes and playfulness were acceptable in such serious work. Lois’s description was akin to Weissman’s (1990) observation that social workers often struggle to integrate serious play into serious work: “Certainly, playfulness is difficult in a profession (Social work) dealing with some of the world’s most serious situations. Yet, too much emphasis on consistency, logic, and order can limit severely creative potential” (p. 61). Lois also commented, “After I understood the purpose of the play, I saw there were a lot of connections for clients made and that it worked positively.”

The participants in the focus group created a list of what to say to effectively frame a creative, playful process before it takes place; I will discuss this list in the Recommendations

section of chapter five. The overall theme, however, is that explaining the rationale for the integration of play and humour into the process of designing disability services is essential if they are to be taken seriously and used effectively.

*Finding 4: Play and Humour Lead to Creative Ideas*

The theme that play and humour lead to creative ideas is most aligned with the main research question of this project: How might playfulness and humour have enhanced the creative thinking of the persons involved in designing services through the RAWK pilot project? A majority of the participants contended that they would not likely have produced creative, novel, relevant ideas for supporting persons with disabilities in the community if play and humour had been suppressed in the process. For instance, Murray commented, “We likely would have come up with really regular suggestions if we had rigid meeting structures without play. We would have found the same stuff disability services are already doing.” Murray described the play as unexpected, spontaneous comments on some interaction or incongruent feature of the environment that led to sharing and playful, verbal jostling with each other. The humorous interactions and spontaneous verbal jostling created a positive mood, and often a natural switch to engagement in a creative, task-oriented discussion on how to connect clients would ensue. In other words, spontaneous play created trusting, positive moods, and in this positive state of mind the participants felt more creative and proposed more ideas than usual. Fredrickson (2003) also found that quick, humorous interactions that create positive moods foster divergent thinking and creativity. In particular, Fredrickson noted that even a short moment of laughter can sustain creative thinking minutes and even hours after a humorous experience. Fredrickson’s research explains why the participants in the RAWK project reported that humour helped them to be more

creative even after the playful moment had past and that they were subsequently more focused on the task.

I also found it interesting that the RAWK members remembered naturally transitioning between their playful interactions and their focus on ideas to create relevant outcomes. For instance, Larry described the natural back and forth transitions in the RAWK meetings from members' sharing of information to make connections for clients they were supporting and the playful digressions sparked by the funny or interesting ways in which they described their particular challenges. A creative process that focuses attention on a problem and then relaxes into playful activities, according to Knoblich and Oelinger (2006), fosters creative 'Aha!' moments of discovery. Therefore, this natural process that occurs spontaneously at various times can indirectly foster more creative ideas.

The participants reported that when play fostered strong trust, they felt less inhibited to voice their creative thoughts. For instance, Gretel commented:

I think that when people play together, there is more of a sense of trust and sharing. For people, myself included, that are a little more reserved than say Larry [laughter], the laughter, the silliness, and the stupidity we engaged in made it, as you said, Murray, comfortable to express creative ideas. So, like in other meetings (not RAWK) where I might be afraid to share something because I feel I have nothing intelligent to share, in RAWK that didn't matter because I didn't have to be intelligent! [laughter]

Other similar comments on the creative process suggested that play decreases inhibitions, instils confidence, and increases the participants' comfort with engaging in and expressing divergent ideas. Larry explained that "the style of our RAWK meetings built bonds, and because of feeling comfortable, it felt like that inspired state would arise where new, fresh ideas could come up." Therefore, it seems that the participants believed that play also puts people at ease, and when they are at ease, creativity bubbles up. Feeling at ease creates a positive mood, which several

researchers suggested leads to creative, divergent thinking (Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Isen et al., 1987).

Some participants suggested that play broke them out of their stiff, unbending inner patterns of thought and helped them to form creative ideas. Murray commented:

I know, personally, I would bring forth some ideas, and sometimes I'd be stuck. I'd be looking at a problem from [inside] "the box," and then with the play aspect, different action plans and ideas would come from play with others in the group.

Murray's notion that play can lead to different action plans and ideas is aligned with Fredrickson and Branigan's (2005) notion of play and humour "broadening thought-action repertoires" (pp. 326-327), which often leads to "flexible, creative and unusual thinking" (p. 316). In addition Murray's comments are in line with the findings of Michalko (2001), Csikszentmihalyi (1996), and Palus and Horth (2002), who considered playfulness an antithesis to stiff and rigid thought processes that hinder creativity. Wendell also suggested that "in that free space of mind that play fosters, associations come up that can be useful down the line."

The number of ideas generated in a creative process is also a sign that effective divergent, creative thinking is taking place (Rietzschel, Nijstad, & Stroebe, 2010). In terms of the number of novel ideas that arose in the RAWK meetings, the participants noted that more ideas arose than usually do in a more rigid meeting structure. Lois reported, "Sometimes, there were so many ideas we came up with. Rather than one or two choices, we'd have like seventeen to check out." The participants commented on the difficulty of having to sort through the large number of ideas to determine the best possible course of action or idea to meet an expected outcome. The emergence of large numbers of ideas has been linked to creative, divergent thinking processes, but Rietzschel et al. also pointed out the difficulty that creative groups face in having to select ideas for implementation.

The overarching message in this theme is that play helped the participants individually and as a group to trust each other deeply, to loosen their rigid thought patterns, and to be more open to new ways of seeing, which helped them to develop creative ideas.

*Finding 5: Environment Is a Catalyst for Play and Creativity*

All of the participants contended that the environment of a creative group fosters creativity and play. They agreed that a comfortable venue rather than a boardroom (Lois, Wendell, Gretel, Larry, Murray) is conducive to relaxation and opening up to a creative process. Five of the six participants in the focus group commented that the location of most of the SKILLS Society's RAWK meetings was a fairly creative space because the circle of mismatched couches and vintage chairs made it inviting and comfortable. It looked like a comfortable living room with couches and chairs that created a kind of circle around a coffee table. In addition, the walls were painted in shades of brown and red, which the participants noted are not typical colors in professional offices. The overall theme is that this space allowed them to feel more open to creativity because it conveyed the message that it was acceptable to relax.

A theme in the literature with regard to how to foster creativity was also that certain environments stimulate creativity. McCoy and Evans (2002) cited Dubos's research in which he found that people confined to featureless environments suffer intellectually and emotionally. I believe that this relates to the participants' comments that a featureless boardroom would not put the RAWK members at ease to enable them to open up. McCoy and Evans further referred to Dubos's findings: "The potentialities of human beings can become fully expressed only when the physical environment provides a wide variety of experiences" (p. 409). Their research led to their finding that "environments high in perceived creativity potential most frequently were visually interesting and tended to be highly complex, both spatially and ornamentally" (p. 418). In the

Recommendations section of chapter five I will discuss in more detail the participants' ideas on the kind of environment that fosters play and creativity.

*Finding 6: Creative Play and Critical Thinking Must Be Balanced*

The next theme that emerged was the need to balance the two phases of divergent thinking and convergent thinking. The participants generally expressed confusion about whether they always effectively achieved the expected outcomes and targets in a meeting. Some reported feeling frustrated at times over RAWK meetings that simply revolved around play with no outcomes or tangible selection of ideas for implementation. Lois commented, "I felt sometimes, like I didn't do enough. It sometimes felt unproductive, but we were bonding and being creative." Wendell also recalled "getting to the end of some meeting and wondering, Did anything get accomplished?" The participants noted the unique, creative connections for the persons they supported that resulted from the RAWK creative process, but they lamented that they did not regularly meet the anticipated outcomes. I will discuss the specific outcomes from the RAWK project finding 7 below. Many participants reported that part of their occasional confusion about the RAWK process was a result of the feeling that they were not clear on the expected outcomes or that they often left a RAWK meeting without one or two tangible ideas to work with. Not being sure of the desired outcomes of a creative process, as the literature warned, can adversely affect the generation of novel, relevant ideas (Rietzschel et al., 2010). In the focus group and interview the participants recommended that enlisting a steward in the creative process might ensure that both the playful divergent and the critical-thinking phases of the creative process occur. In the Recommendations section of chapter five I will discuss specific recommendations for potential stewards to ensure a balance between creative play and critical thinking.

I also found it interesting that the RAWK members remembered the natural transition back and forth between playful interactions and their focus on ideas to meet anticipated outcomes. Knoblich and Oelinger (2006) found that a creative process that focuses attention on a problem and then relaxes into activities such as play fosters creative ‘Aha!’ moments of discovery.

In general, the participants agreed that in the RAWK process more often the focus was on the playful, creative-thinking phase than on the selection of best ideas and that there needed to be a better balance to achieve quality outcomes.

*Finding 7: It Is Uncertain Whether the Outcomes of the Creative Process Are Relevant*

The purpose of this research project was to explore how humour and play integrated into a creative process of designing disability services might enhance creativity, not just for the sake of creativity, but also based on the belief that an enhanced creative process can lead to better-quality outcomes for persons who receive services. As the literature showed, for a product of a creative process to be deemed creative, it has to be original and relevant to the domain (Cropley, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Attaining quality outcomes from a creative process in the design of disability services is of key importance if the process is to be deemed beneficial. Gertrude identified the most important consideration in whether a creative process is relevant or not, and other participants concurred: “I’ve always felt strongly that creativity in disability services needs to be linked to talking about people we support. If playfulness and creativity does not relate to helping the persons supported, then what is the point?” The participants admitted in all three data-collection sessions that they wondered from time to time whether the play and the wild creative process would always lead to quality outcomes. As I discussed in finding 6, the participants suggested that a steward be enlisted to clarify expectations and gently guide the

process to ensure that the outcomes are reached. They remarked that too often in meetings a process to select the best ideas to achieve an outcome was neglected and that often the RAWK meetings involved only creative, divergent, playful thinking phases, which left some participants feeling that the meetings were unproductive. The participants reported that over the two-year, once-a-week, two-hour involvement of the 10 employees in the RAWK project, they achieved only a handful of original, quality outcomes:

1. A person supported by SKILLS Society who wanted to connect with other musicians was linked with a musician without a disability. In a long-term community connection based on their shared passion for playing music, they still play professional, live music in the community together.
2. A person with a passion for hockey was connected in his community with a hockey team.
3. A person who wanted to learn a language was connected with Spanish classes and a natural support in the class.
4. A person with a passion for everything related to Star Trek™ was connected with a local Star Trek group in the community. He continues the connection today.
5. A woman with a passion for Goth culture and music was connected with another woman who shared her passion. The relationship continues, and, as a result, the woman requires less paid support because of her natural supports in the Goth community.
6. An attempt was made to connect a young adult with a passion for maps and neighbourhood walking with a group that maps the community. To date, the connection has not been made.

7. A young woman with a passion for helping animals was connected with an animal rescue group and volunteered with them for a while.

The participants suggested that what makes these outcomes of the creative process high quality is that they are not the usual types of prescriptive supports that persons with disabilities receive. Therefore, they can be considered creative because they are novel, relevant, and based on the wishes of the recipients of the services. The participants clarified that the usual types of supports are based more on the needs of the system than on the desires and wishes of the client. Their descriptions of these typical lower-quality services are aligned with Kendrick's (2007b) recognition that most services are predetermined without consulting the individual who will receive the support. This theme reveals that the quality of the outcomes must be measured against what the persons who receive the services consider quality outcomes for them. Kendrick also cautioned that service providers must design services *with* the persons supported rather than *for* the persons supported (p. 4). The participants wondered from time to time whether the activities in the RAWK meetings were in line with Kendrick's warning that often brainstorming occurs without the presence of the person who is being supported. However, the participants concurred that prior to the RAWK meetings they had developed person-centered plans that they built from scratch in collaboration with the individuals who were receiving the services and that the clients had guided the RAWK members in terms of the kinds of outcomes and connections in the community that they desired. Therefore, the RAWK members were living their espoused value for authentic person-centered supports. Also, whenever someone suggested an idea or action plan to connect clients, the members always sought the approval of the clients and their guardians before they acted. In addition to the above outcomes, the participants described many unique, creative ideas to serve persons whom SKILLS Society supports. However, they stressed

that no matter how creative the group might think an idea, it is often irrelevant if the person supported or his or her guardian reject it.

In summary, the findings emerged from the analysis of the data from the anecdote circle, focus group, and interview. I used the results of the anecdote circle to inform the questions for the focus group and interview, especially in areas that the participants felt required recommendations to enhance the creative-thinking process. Further exploration led to three conclusions.

### Study Conclusions

The analysis of the findings resulted in three conclusions:

1. Play and humour foster divergent thinking, increase morale, and deeply bond the members of a group.
2. Balancing the dual priorities of enhancing a creative process and achieving better quality outcomes is a challenge.
3. A workplace culture can be developed and strengthened to support serious play and creative thinking abilities.

#### *Conclusion 1: Play and Humour Foster Divergent Thinking, Increase Morale, and Deeply Bond the Members of a Group*

I was surprised to find that the participants often identified the trust among the RAWK members as the link between play and creativity. As findings 1, 2, and 4 show, play in the RAWK project resulted strong bonds among them, and openness and relaxed inhibitions and rules ensued from these strong bonds. After comparing and contrasting the findings in the literature with my findings that play and humour result in strong bonds and trust, I concluded that one of the benefits of the resulting trust is increased morale and intrinsic rewards. All of the

participants asserted that the play process increased the bonds and made them want to go to work for the fun of it rather than because they had to work. This has strong implications for staff retention if employees go to work not just for the income, but also for the intrinsic rewards. Often intrinsic rewards such as feeling trusted and happy to be at work have the biggest impact on staff morale and staff retention (Lemons, 2005; Manion, 2004). I am also reminded of Palus and Horth's (2002) statement that in an environment in which play is part of the culture, trust eventually becomes a norm as well in that culture. Trust allowed the participants in this project to let down their guard, be themselves, and relax. Their relaxation and comfort with each other made them feel confident enough to share divergent ideas that were not yet fully developed when they expressed them. Sharing them openly with each other would often trigger other ideas and lead to original and relevant ideas as a result of their dynamic interactions. Many participants explain that a novel idea might arise from the realization of a connection to a completely unrelated conversation or playful interaction. Wendell described situations similar to Murray's story in chapter five in which RAWK members would tease each other, and in the midst of the good-humoured play someone would have a spontaneous 'Aha!' moment and blurt out an idea on how to connect someone in their community. For example, on one occasion when the RAWK team was playful and joking, Wendell spontaneously interrupted with an idea on how to connect a young man with whom Murray was working with an activity related to the client's passion for maps. In other words, the playfulness seemed to spark divergent ideas that led to connections with unrelated information. I concluded, as did Cropley (2006), that play fosters divergent thinking. Runco (2009) also found that people who test high in divergent thinking are more likely to develop novel, relevant ideas or innovations. Despite Runco's research, the participants were sceptical that the divergent thinking process is manifested in novel, relevant outcomes. I

will explore this more in my discussion of conclusion 2. Comparing and contrasting the literature and the qualitative data, I concluded that play and humour foster divergent thinking and generate unique ideas; however, they do not necessarily yield relevant outcomes if only divergent thinking is used to solve problems in a creative group process.

*Conclusion 2: Balancing the Dual Priorities of Enhancing a Creative Process and Achieving Better Quality Outcomes Is a Challenge*

From the results of the qualitative data, particularly findings 6 and 7, I concluded that the participants believed that the creative RAWK project meetings were missing a process to engage both divergent and convergent thinking styles. They complained that there seemed to be too strong a focus on creative play to foster innovative ideas than on separating the ideas that they needed to execute from those that they needed to discard. I compared and contrasted these data with the literature and found the participants' challenge to balance divergent thinking with the achievement of relevant outcomes reflected in the literature as well. For example, I concluded that the challenge resulted from the fact that many members of the RAWK project were initially caught in the common myth that only divergent, wild, brainstorming-like thinking is required to yield original creative ideas (Cropley, 2006; Rietzschel et al., 2010). The participants seem to have agreed with what Rietzschel et al. wrote with regard to idea generation: "The underlying assumption is that it is vitally important to generate as many creative ideas as possible, because this will increase the probability that at least one of these ideas is extremely good" (p. 48). Lois reported that, because there were so many ideas, it was difficult to decide which to adopt. The participants found it challenging to select one good, relevant idea given the dynamics of the usual RAWK process, which favoured divergent thinking. They noted that the group process often did not allow them time to figure out which ideas to pursue and which to discard. It seems

that during the two-year period of the RAWK project the participants did not understand or have enough experience to know how to balance divergent and convergent thinking in a creative group process. However, when they reflected on the group process and presented their recommendations in the focus group session, the participants recognized, as the literature did, that a more focused critical, convergent thinking phase to select the best ideas would likely have led to more quality outcomes. Findings 6 and 7 reveal that the participants recognized that achieving more effective, quality outcomes requires both playful, unbridled divergent thinking and focused critical thinking to select the most appropriate ideas given the needs and ideas of the client. Rietzschel et al. echoed the participants' discovery:

Originality is the hallmark of creative behavior and ideas will not be creative if they are not new or unusual. However, some form of appropriateness is essential to distinguish truly creative behavior from behavior that is merely bizarre or erratic. (p. 48)

Because of the participants' lack of knowledge about the two main phases of a creative process, many struggled with achieving the anticipated outcomes because they too often became lost in the one-sided playful, divergent, enjoyable chaos of the RAWK meetings. In chapter five I will further discuss recommendations from the participants and the literature for balancing divergent thinking with sorting through ideas to reach the best outcomes possible.

*Conclusion 3: A Workplace Culture Can Be Developed and Strengthened to Support Serious Play and Creative Thinking Abilities*

Comparing and contrasting the literature with the data on enhancing creativity at an individual level and in a group process have revealed that a workplace culture can be developed and strengthened to support serious play and creative thinking abilities. The focus group and interview participants made several suggestions on how to enhance the environment and relate to group members to enhance serious play and creativity. Because the environment is an element of

the culture, a more conscious focus on enhancement will result in a positive cultural shift. In chapter five I will further discuss the participants' suggestions; however, I concluded from the results of this study that they believe that anyone exposed to the right culture and processes has the potential to engage in play and become more creative; in fact, Leonard (2010), Csikszentmihalyi (1996), and Kraft (2005) all found that everyone has creative potential. Some of the participants noted that play and creativity come more easily to some people than others, but Lois and Trudy, who did not consider themselves naturally creative, acknowledged that when they became comfortable with the playful process, they were able to formulate creative ideas. Lois observed, "I felt energized by the play, and that led to having lots of ideas to bounce around. That to me was a sign I was being creative"; and Trudy affirmed, "I think anyone can be creative if they are able to have open, unstructured, playful conversations." Their comments show that, given the right environment and cultural practices, it is possible to enhance the creativity even of persons who do not ordinarily describe themselves as creative. This conclusion has the largest impact in terms of the realization that leading an empowering organizational change towards a more creative culture can potentially yield relevant innovations and creative outcomes. This is hopeful in that this conclusion suggests that the people who make up any organization have relevant creative potential and that the leaders simply need to develop the right cultural practices and environments to elicit and enhance that potential. In chapter five I will elaborate on the literature's and the participants' suggestions to enhance the creative potential of people and their organizational cultures.

In summary, my conclusions resulted from analyzing the findings and comparing and contrasting them with the literature. The essence of the conclusions is that everyone in an organization has creative potential and that the right processes, environment, and cultural factors

will enhance it. It is also clear that an effective creative process requires a balance between creative playful processes and critical thinking to develop the best ideas. Too often the RAWK process was characterized by playful, divergent, creative thinking but no direction toward clear goals. Play and humour, in addition to fostering and enhancing divergent thinking, are beneficial in developing deep trust and bonding among those who engage in them. Therefore, play and humour in a workplace culture can also increase morale and have the potential to improve staff retention through the intrinsic rewards that play and humour offer.

These conclusions directly informed the recommendations in chapter five. An analysis of the scope and limitations of this research concludes this chapter.

#### Scope and Limitations of the Research

The purpose of this research project was to explore how play and humour integrated into a disability service design culture can enhance creative thinking. The results of this study suggest that much can be done to enhance creativity and that play and humour in a workplace culture help to develop trust and offer other intrinsic rewards. However, this research has some limitations. Although I received a fairly high response rate to my invitation to participate in this study, a couple of RAWK members who were the most active over the two-year period were not able to take part in the research, which could possibly have affected the results. One of those former RAWK members lives in another province, and the other was unable to participate.

Another limitation is that in exploring the outcomes of the RAWK project, I did not consult the individuals who are supported. As Gertrude commented, “If playfulness and creativity does not relate to helping the persons supported, then what is the point?” As I explained in chapter one, the SKILLS Society strives to live its espoused value of providing person-centered supports to people with disabilities. With regard to the quality of the outcomes,

it is essential that an organization that strives to live person-centered consult the persons receiving the services or their guardians.

A third limitation is that I conducted the research about a year after the RAWK project had ended. In addition, the participants had to recall events and experiences that occurred over a two-year span. Therefore the data might have been more accurate and rich if I had conducted the research during the RAWK project or immediately after it ended.

Finally, in terms of the scope of the research, it is difficult to determine whether the outcomes of the RAWK project were, in fact, different from the service design processes in other areas of the SKILLS society because this study did not include a comparison of the outcomes.

## CHAPTER FIVE – RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Necessity may be the mother of invention, but play is the father. (Von Oech, 1998, p. 92)

Chapter five outlines a number of recommendations based on the findings and conclusions of this major project, discusses the organizational implications of the research, and concludes with an overview of future research opportunities that are a result of this project. The purpose of this research project was to answer the question “How might serious play and humour have enhanced the creative thinking of the persons involved in designing services through the RAWK pilot project?”

### Study Recommendations

The analysis of the gathered data and the review of the literature on the domains of creativity, creativity enhancement, serious play, and cultures that integrate creative practices have resulted in six recommendations:

1. Frame serious play to show why it can be useful in a creative process.
2. Enhance the environment of the workplace culture to foster creativity and useful serious play.
3. Ensure that there is time in the creative process for both divergent and convergent thinking.
4. Enlist a steward to gently lead a creative process.
5. Encourage reflective openness to sustain trust in the critical thinking phase of a creative process,
6. Sustain the creative state that serious play fosters throughout the work day.

*Recommendation 1: Frame Serious Play to Show Why It Can Be Useful in a Creative Process*

The results of this research project show that the participants recognized that if serious play is not framed properly in a creative process, it can be misunderstood as unproductive or a waste of time. A relevant theme for this recommendation in the literature on serious play. It is also important to frame and state the benefits and purpose of serious play so that organizations and people do not discount its real potential to foster relevant innovations (Brown & Vaughan 2009; “Deep Dive,” 1999; Fredrickson, 2009; Leonard, 2010; Palus & Horth, 2002). Based on the results of this research project, the participants and I offer recommendations to frame serious play in a disability service design process:

1. State the purpose and value of play to foster creative, innovative ideas.
2. Give the participants permission to “get a little crazy” and not follow the traditional rules of meetings.
3. Ensure that senior leaders give the participants permission to engage play and humour in the design process.
4. Allow the participants to stray off track sometimes because that often leads to unexpected, creative ideas.
5. Reassure the participants that there will be time to get back on task and sort through the ideas that are valid and those that will not work, but do not force that time too early.
6. Be patient and open because the results might not immediately seem apparent in the process.
7. Do not judge, and try to learn what makes others laugh because everyone has different styles of play.

8. Keep a positive attitude even if a joke is not funny at that precise moment, because it might be funny to someone else.
9. Apologize for mistakes, because play can be ‘messy,’ and sometimes humour can offend.
10. Avoid hurtful sarcasm that points at someone’s faults.

Some aspects of this list suggest a tension between convergent and divergent thinking styles. Getting back on task to find the best solutions rather than fostering unstructured conditions for creative ideas to arise might be considered convergent and divergent thinking styles, respectively. For instance, the participants identified the need for framing: “Allowing going off track sometimes because often that leads to unexpected, creative ideas” implies that people who might have left-brain thinking tendencies such as convergent thinking might consider going off track (divergent thinking) as a waste of time if it is not framed. However, both the literature and the findings indicate that often innovative, creative ideas arise in unexpected ways that are completely separate from attempts to solve a challenge or problem. For instance, Murray explained how going off track in the project led to more effective ideas that were not apparent during the process of going off track and following divergent trains of thought:

Playing led to connections. When the project was just beginning to lift off, our first real success came from discussing an unrelated topic. A few RAWK members were talking and joking about music and upcoming locale gigs. While flipping thru *SEE* magazine, an ad was found about a man looking to connect with other musicians. A person with a disability supported through the RAWK project matched the ad request. Over time, this ad led to a meaningful and long-term connection; the two were paired up. The man from the ad would teach and play in a band with the guy we were looking to connect to the music scene. Discussions of unrelated topics would often generate potential connections and leads.

Overall, the participants suggested that conflict can arise if the playful tendencies of divergent, creative thinking patterns are not explained and framed, because the play and

divergent thinking might be considered unproductive and a waste of time. They alluded to the Western myth that play is unproductive, which reminded me of how Brown and Vaughan (2009) in their book *Play* framed and showed the value of play and humour in creative problem solving and in community-building contexts. The participants contended that if the purpose of serious play is clearly explained to a creative group and examples given of how it can lead to innovative, relevant outcomes, then the members of that group might relax and trust the process, which can elicit divergent, playful abilities. It might also be useful to display posters in the room where a creative design process is occurring to remind the participants of the purpose and framing of serious play. For instance, the poster might state that it is acceptable to “encourage wild ideas” in order to be more creative; or, in the “Deep Dive” (1999) documentary on the innovative organization IDEO, Kelley described key slogans that had been displayed in the creative design team’s room to remind them of the need for framing and the rules of engagement in a creative process. One of the slogans read, “Fail often in order to succeed sooner” and another read, “Encourage wild ideas.” A similar kind of framing of the practice of serious play can enhance the creative process and result in better outcomes. Recommendation 2 further describes environmental frames to enhance creativity and serious play.

*Recommendation 2: Enhance the Environment of the Workplace Culture to Foster Creativity and Useful Serious Play*

Kelley (2005) wrote that “the world’s most creative companies use space to reinforce their internal culture” (p. 200). The participants’ overarching perception of an environment that is conducive to creativity and play is that conventional professional office spaces are not suitable. Gertrude thought that the space should be a place “where the rules are different and we don’t have to deal with stiff bureaucracy.” I asked Wendell what helps a person to get into a

playful, creative state with others: “The workplace itself should convey creativity.” The participants’ recommendations to create a thought-provoking, creative environment include the following:

*Furniture.* They recommended “comfortable seating like couches in a circle or facing each other”; “Have cool chairs, unconventional seating arrangements, maybe a bunk bed!” “A slide in the room”; and “[a] Winnebago Van in the office for meetings.”

*Decorations.* For decorations, the participants suggested, “Decorate the room in unique, artistic, thought-provoking ways” and “Put up funny quotes, funny pictures.”

*Knickknacks and props.* The participants had several ideas for objects to enhance the environment: “Space that shows playfulness has diverse and large quantities of knickknacks and odd objects people find and bring to the space”; “Having a little box of figurines to mess around with to enrich the story (not forced to play with the objects though)”; Storytelling becomes playful and humorous with props, but also learning ensues from the interaction”; “Having natural props as part of the room like figurines, Nerf guns, drawing tools, war room–like map for role playing”; and “Have odd fidget objects around the room.”

*Playful people.* The participants recommended “invite[ing] some people that are naturally good at playing to draw out playful interactions with others.”

McCoy and Evans (2002) concluded that “environments high in perceived creativity potential most frequently were visually interesting and tended to be highly complex, both spatially and ornamentally” (p. 418). McCoy and Evans’ conclusions are linked to the participants’ lists of the kinds of things that make an environment conducive to play and creativity; namely, diverse knickknacks and odd objects. The participants’ ideas on the diversity and quantity of objects required in a creative environment suggest a complex setting that is

conducive to creativity, as McCoy and Evans found. McCoy and Evans also noted that creative environments for think tanks often tend to convey cooperation, collaboration, and social support. The participants also recommended couches and open seating arrangements as conducive to creativity in a group process, which is akin to McCoy and Evans' comment that "settings displaying sociopetal furniture arrangements and design were perceived as more supportive of creative thought" (p. 424). *Sociopetal* means the arrangement of people to facilitate interaction with each other. Therefore, a creative group environment has features that promote group interaction.

Throughout the three data-gathering sessions and when I confirmed with the participants that my interpretations of what they had said were accurate, everyone agreed that playful, creativity-provoking props in an inspired environment should not be forced on people. For example, the participants agreed with Wendell's report of his rejection of a steward's suggestion, "Okay, everyone, now we are going to play with hula hoops' or some other object." The participants appreciated that they could choose whether they wanted to pick up a playful object in the environment and use it to think differently and generate play. Gertrude, Wendell, Larry, and Murray reacted negatively to the idea of being forced to play with objects in the environment; they considered it "cheesy." The participants contended that the interactions in a playful environment need to be natural to make them feel at ease and open up their creative potential. However, they stressed the need to consciously recognize and invite a few people in a creative group culture who are naturally good at initiating play and humorous interactions when they are engaged with others. The participants maintained that playful people in a group environment encourage others to become playful and respond with play and humour in turn.

Gertrude offered a creative suggestion for a war room–like map of the community and funny figurines to encourage people to joke and playfully imagine what it might be like to enact a hypothetical story. She thought that using figurines would also trigger divergent ideas and lead to creative outcomes. Furthermore, she considered the environment the first sign of a creative organizational culture:

It takes some time for people in an org to see value in that style of creativity and reflective practice. Sometimes that comfort level is reflected in the kind of images you have around your office, or how you dress, or how you goof around with people. It takes time to create culture like that. It takes a critical mass of people to make that shift in an org—to watch people that are out of the box and then tap into that side of themselves.

In terms of the kind of organizational culture that fosters creativity, Trudy said, “I think anyone can be creative if they are able to have open, unstructured, playful conversations.” Trudy’s and Gertrude’s comments suggest that a creative environment can also provoke unstructured interactions where the participants are free to express themselves spontaneously. Csikszentmihalyi (1996), Fredrickson (2009), and Leonard (2010) also noted that in a culture that spontaneously and unexpectedly stimulates people, humour can result in creative insights. Humour itself, as the literature showed, is often based on responses to situations that do not meet the usual expectations (Cundall, 2007). For instance, in the RAWK meetings the participants would often unexpectedly make a joke or shoot a Nerf dart at something in the room. The unexpected comments or activities would encourage others, and their divergent, humorous ideas would often lead to unexpected, relevant ideas. In my discussion of recommendation 1, I cited Murray’s example of an unexpected, playful process and its relevant outcomes.

Overall, I recommend that the environment include a diverse collection of objects that stimulate serious play, divergent ideas, and group interaction; it should be visually interesting and will tend to be highly complex, both spatially and ornamentally (McCoy & Evans 2002,

p. 418). I also recommend that the environment promote and naturally provoke playful group interactions to develop a creative group culture.

*Recommendation 3: Ensure That There is Time During the Creative Process for Both Divergent and Convergent Thinking*

In the results and conclusion sections of this study, the data that I reported show that the participants lamented that there often was no balance between divergent and convergent thinking processes in the RAWK meetings. As a result of the lack of balance and their preference for playful divergent thinking, they believed that fewer relevant outcomes emerged. Therefore, I recommend that future creative group processes in a creative service design meeting include time for both divergent and convergent thinking processes. It is difficult to say how much time should be allotted to each of the two phases, but the complexity of the situation and the team's deadlines need to be taken into consideration. In general, the participants recommended that half the time be spent in the divergent phase and the other half in the convergent phase. However, if the challenge is complex, it might initially take the team longer to generate creative ideas, and the members might need to devote more time to enhancing the divergent thinking and creativity phase. As more ideas are generated and recorded, more time can be spent in the convergent phase, where the focus is on selecting the best ideas for implementation. The results of this study and the findings in the literature show that play, humour, and a creative environment legitimately enhance and support divergent thinking and can lead to original and relevant creative ideas.

In support of the convergent, critical thinking phase of a creative process, recommendations 4 and 5 include suggestions for the successful use of critical thinking in a collaborative process.

*Recommendation 4: Enlist a Steward to Gently Lead a Creative Process*

Rietzschel et al. (2010) found that the quality of selected ideas generated in brainstorming sessions improves when the participants have clear criteria for the selection of ideas. Therefore, if the participants in the RAWK project had clarified the criteria for creative ideas, the process might have resulted in less confusion and more outcomes.

To define the criteria and ensure a better balance of creative processes and outcomes, the participants suggested that a leader or a facilitator of the creative group process might be useful. However, Gertrude proposed a steward as more effective as a creative group leader. She explained her rationale for choosing a steward of the process rather than a facilitator/: “I think a facilitator is more an objective outsider, and a steward is more an engaged holder of the vision.” The participants all concurred that the leader, whether they call that person a steward or not, should be as actively involved in the playful process as anyone else; and that if a facilitator is a passive observer, the participants might not feel free to lower their guard, play, and engage in divergent thinking processes. They recommended that the members of a creative group take turns as the steward of the creative-process vision and suggested actions that a steward can take to increase the chances of a successful process. They also suggested strategies that the steward can use to lead the divergent, creative thinking phase:

1. Frame the play and explain the value of a creative process.
2. Be an example of creative play and encourage others to engage.
3. Provoke the unexpected through jokes and playing with props in the environment; this should happen naturally, not be forced.
4. Ensure that everyone’s voice is heard and valued by asking for input from everyone, just as a facilitator does.

5. Monitor naysayers during the creative, playful, divergent thinking phase to ensure that negative comments do not derail the creative process.

The participants also suggested actions that a steward can take in the convergent thinking phase to select the best possible ideas to meet a desired outcome:

1. Frame the critical thinking questions so that the group knows when to ‘change gears’ and begin to critique the ideas.
2. Ask the participants not to criticize others, but to critique the ideas to find the best possible ideas and solutions that will result in the desired outcome.
3. Remind everyone that playfulness can still be part of the critical convergent thinking phase of the creative group process, but that it is important to stay focused on selecting ideas that would best fit a situation.
4. Ask from time to time, “How are we doing? What is the goal of this process? Are our ideas linked to targets we need to hit?”
5. Remind the group during the convergent thinking phase that in designing disability service, the selected ideas or action plans are valid only if the person who is being supported and/or that person’s guardian agrees with them.
6. Ensure that everyone’s voice is heard and valued by asking for input from everyone, just as a facilitator does.
7. Ask, “If we choose this particular path, where would you imagine that path leading?”
8. Seek agreement on who is responsible for meeting the outcomes, who will contribute, and who will do the work.

9. Remind the think-tank members that they can ask for time to focus creatively on an issue with which a member might be struggling by saying, “Hold on. I still need an idea. Can we focus on this issue for a little while?”

The participants affirmed that these possible actions that a steward might take would have enhanced the effectiveness of the wild, playful, divergent creative process and the critical, practical, task-oriented, convergent thinking process. The recommendations reveal that a steward is needed particularly to ensure that the critical, idea-selection phase occurs before the meeting ends. Gertrude and Wendell contended that not having someone to ensure that the convergent thinking phase occurs would result in fewer relevant outcomes.

In general, throughout the three data-collection sessions there was a sense of confusion about how to integrate and reconcile the convergent, critical thinking phase with playfulness and the need to reach outcomes. The participants were also confused about the outcomes that they were expected to produce. Lois expressed her confusion: “I found it challenging to balance the drive to get outcomes and the laidback playfulness.” The consensus in the focus group and interviews with regard to a recommendation was that a steward would greatly both enhance the playful, creative process and better ensure that the outcomes are achieved.

*Recommendation 5: Encourage Reflective Openness to Safeguard Trust in the Critical Thinking Phase of a Creative Process*

The study findings reveal that conflict can arise in a chaotic, playful creative process. Finding 1 in chapter four that play and humour fostered strong bonds and trust shows that the strong bonds of trust that were established through play in the RAWK project helped to navigate the conflict with little residual resentment that affected future meetings. Finding 1 also indicates that strong trust among the participants in a creative group process is essential to activate their

divergent, creative thinking abilities; therefore, implementing the recommendation to safeguard trust is beneficial in a creative group process.

In chapter four I reported that the participants engaged at times in what Senge (2006) called *expressive openness*, which often occurs when group members express personal, critical opinions. Senge noted that the difficulty with expressive openness is that the participants often take offense to critical comments, with the result that they do not really listen to each other's valid points. Given the need for critique and convergent thinking on all of the ideas that divergent thinking produces in a playful creative process, the literature and the participants in this project made recommendations on how to use critique without jeopardizing trust in the process.

The participants recommended that the critical phase be expressly framed as necessary to a creative process and that personal attacks are to be avoided. The steward should frame it in the creative meeting and explain that people might unintentionally take critiques of their ideas personally. This recommendation is based on the underlying idea that if a group is transparent and recognizes the inevitability of personal attacks when their ideas are critiqued, it is less likely to harm trust. The participants also pointed out that the members must agree to speak respectfully of each others' ideas and give each other permission to assess the relevance of ideas with regard to clear criteria for the outcome that a client expects.

The participants also recommended that humour and playfulness continue to be part of the critical thinking phase because they are conducive to sustaining trust; however, the steward should gently facilitate to ensure that the group stays on topic.

The development of a loose code of conduct for a creative group is another recommendation to sustain trust. The participants recommended that the steward ensure

collaboration on the critique-phase rules of conduct by asking the members how they could critique each others' ideas while at the same time sustaining strong, authentic trust. Asking the creative group members to develop their own vision, values, and code of conduct for the meeting process might ensure more intrinsic buy-in, and they would more likely adhere to them (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Senge, 2006).

Rather than expressive openness that can harm trust inadvertently, Senge (2006) recommended engaging in *reflective openness*, which he described as follows: "Reflective openness leads to looking inward, allowing our conversations to make us more aware of the biases and limitations in our thinking, and how our thinking and actions contribute to problems" (p. 261). Expressive openness puts the focus on external circumstances as the causes of and solutions to conflict. On the other hand, with reflective openness the locus of control is inward; it acknowledges that biases and assumptions shape one's perspective on a given situation. In practice, the recommendation is that a creative group should learn about and engage in reflective openness so that the group members explain their perspective on an idea and its source. Reflective openness is not about putting down others' ideas, but about being transparent about one's biases and assumptions in discussing another member's idea. In other words, engaging in reflective openness avoids a tone of blame or a personal critique in communication and focuses more on clarifying personal assumptions. I recommend that creative groups follow the advice of Senge et al. (2005) to help them to suspend their judgement and practice reflective openness:

Rather than saying nothing or telling the other person why you think he or she is wrong, you can simply say, That is not the way I see it. My view is, . . . Here is what has led me to see things this way. What has led you to see things differently? (p. 33)

The final gauge of the success of a convergent thinking process that involves reflective openness is whether implementing a selected idea will meet the needs and wishes of the specific

client with a disability. As Wendell said, “You have to make sure before following a creative idea to connect someone that the client is in fact interested in being connected in that way.”

Implementing these recommendations based on the data findings and related literature would safeguard the trust among people engaged in the critical thinking phase of a creative process.

*Recommendation 6: Sustain the Creative State That Serious Play Fosters Throughout the Work Day*

Finding 2 that the feeling of play and humour fostered intrinsic rewards involved the theme on the positive mental state that resulted from playfulness and humour in the creative RAWK process. In general, the participants believed that engaging play and humour in the RAWK creative process left them feeling happy, intrinsically committed to their work, and trusting and aroused an inspired, creative state. They also commented that after the RAWK meetings ended and they returned to their regular areas of work, they often felt the loss of the inspired state and wanted to discover how to sustain the playful, creative state in all situations. For instance, Wendell reflected, “I felt really creative while I was in a RAWK meeting spitting out ideas, but then you almost get smacked with reality again when you come out of it.” The data revealed the clear theme that the participants felt strongly that to improve at serious play and creativity, it cannot simply be reserved for a meeting once a week, but should be supported and engaged in throughout the whole organization. In the interviews and the focus group, the participants made the following recommendations to sustain an inspired, creative state in an organizational culture throughout the day.

*Permission and support to play.* A participant recommended that the staff “have organizational permission to be playful and play practical jokes on each other, because this builds strong bonds and can shock people out of rigid habits.”

*An environment that elicits play.* The participants' recommended the following: "Use Blackberries and a closed Facebook group to continue passing ideas around"; "Ensure the environment has 'bumping' places where the environment encourages interaction, like the water cooler in a more social area where people can sit down and chat"; "Have a big whiteboard in frequented areas of the office where anyone can share a cool idea, thought, quote, or joke to elicit inspiration and play"; and

Have odd objects, like golf clubs, Nerf guns, musical instruments, art, and other interesting features that are available for natural play. People shouldn't be forced to play with them, but when they are there, people tend to engage them, which elicits breaking habits and spontaneous creative expressions.

*An opportunity to learn from naturally playful people.* The participants' recommendations include the following:

1. "Encourage the natural 'players' to lead by example and engage others in play."
2. "Have senior executives recognize the natural 'players' regardless of position in the organizational hierarchy, and encourage others to watch how they play."
3. "Invite inspired artists and creative people from other disciplines to come by the office to share some stories in a natural, comfortable setting, like maybe around the water cooler."
4. "Recognize and thank others that are playful and creative; ask them what is going on in their minds."

*The need to stay inquisitive and be aware of assumptions.* The participants' recommendations are as follows:

1. "Be inquisitive; almost childlike curiosity."
2. "Ask questions about things we often take for granted; e.g., 'Why do we do it that way?'"

3. “Read books about creativity and serious play.”

These recommendations are interesting because they show links to similar recommendations designed to enhance and sustain creativity individually and in a group process that I reviewed in the literature in chapter two.

Gertrude, whom the participants recognized as a naturally playful and creative person, said that she often sustains the inspired, creative state by associating with other inspired people and that she seeks engagement with creative, passionate people who can “jar [her] out of habitual thought patterns.” She could not put into words how the “jarring” out of habits occurs; however, she explained that it has something to do with unexpected, sometimes humorous interactions. Gertrude’s comments mirror the finding of Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Fredrickson (2009) that I highlighted in chapter two that surprise fosters creativity. In particular, Fredrickson found that humorous interactions often occur when something unexpected happens in a surprising way. Being open and seeking humorous interactions that might “jar” members of an organizational culture out of habitual thought patterns could help to sustain creativity in an organizational culture. I therefore recommend that leaders dialogue with all organizational members on the relevance of being open to unexpected interactions, seeking ways to be playful, and giving each other permission to experiment with play.

Gertrude also made an interesting comment that one of the reasons that she seeks playful interactions to sustain creativity is that she considers it a signal to others that she is authentic and that hierarchical positions do not matter as much as people and relationships in the organizational culture. Gertrude explained that being playful with others is a way of being herself; it “kind of shows your inner workings.” In being transparent about one’s inner workings through playful interactions, Gertrude suggested that it “levelled the playing field” and that it makes leaders

more accessible, which lead to greater trust and engagement in shaping and sharing a lived vision. Gertrude's recommendation again reflected those in the literature on how to enhance and sustain creativity. For instance, Butler (1999) cited Kelley as saying:

“It's all in the breakdown of barriers of who's important in the company. You can be playful when everybody feels they're just as important as the next person. If you can break down that barrier, everybody not only feels comfortable throwing the Nerf ball but coming up with ideas.” (p. 1)

Not only can playfulness convey transparency and foster accessibility, but it is also an aspect of an empowering leadership style that fosters buy-in to a shared vision (“Deep Dive,” 1999; Palus & Horth, 2002).

To echo the literature, I also believe that it is of utmost importance to convey to the stakeholders in an organizational culture that play has a purpose; it is not simply play for its own sake (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Palus & Horth, 2002; Weissman, 1990). For example, Palus and Horth warned, “Childish play—unlike childlike play—is a step backward. Work toward serious goals, and make sure others understand the point of the play” (p. 126). The key to differentiating childish play from childlike play is to frame its importance so that it leads to clear outcomes and goals.

To integrate play into a workplace culture to generate creativity, trust, and engagement in a shared vision and related goals, I also concur with Palus and Horth's (2002) recommendations to ensure that playfulness is purposeful and useful to an organizational culture to sustain creativity:

*Start small:* If you are not naturally playful, start small with little experiments in places where one is well supported.

*Practice before jumping in:* Watch others and practice in safe areas first.

*Make mistakes:* “Fear is the single greatest enemy of the creative spirit” (Jones; as cited in Palus & Horth, 2002, p. 126)

*Don't play frivolously:* Don't denigrate play by merely making it an ice breaker. Work towards serious goals with the support of play.

*Play kindly:* Check whether people are playing along. If they are not, desist and find out why. When people around you get the idea that the play is all about your game and your way, then they don't want to play.

*Get lots of feedback:* Play depends on timely feedback. Playing in the same rut all the time is incompetent. Remember play is about learning.

*Know where the exits are:* Play can go unexpectedly wrong. Plan on getting out gracefully if there's a problem. Have a backup plan, but don't apologize for having tried to play. (pp. 126-127)

These recommendations from the participants and me and from the relevant literature are for actions that a leader can take to sustain creativity and a playful, inspired state throughout a workplace culture. Chapter two of this study contains other recommendations from the literature to enhance creativity individually and in a creative group process.

In summary, if the recommendations in this chapter are implemented, they will enhance the usefulness of serious play and creativity in disability service design processes. Each recommendation addresses a specific component of the findings and conclusions from this study, and if they are implemented together, they will address some of the core needs of the organization and the employees and lead to better quality outcomes for the individuals whom the organization serves.

### Organizational Implications

This study engaged a number of participants from the RAWK pilot project, which had support from and was led by senior leaders in the organization. The recommendations can be considered a cultural shift for the whole organization or opportunities for future small RAWK-like pilot projects to determine whether the outcomes are relevant. If these projects are

conducted, then the organizational implications will be simpler. By implementing the recommendations in another pilot project, the executive director will empower key leaders who share and demonstrate the value of serious play. These empowered leaders can be stewards of a small think tank that would implement the recommendations that I have made in this chapter. If they are implemented more generally in the whole organization to enhance its creative culture, then more considerations and further implications are evident. In the context of a shift in the whole organizational culture, most of the organizational implications revolve around key leaders' supporting and leading a cultural shift towards more engagement in serious play, creative practices, and the development of a more creative workplace environment. As I reported in chapter one, the senior leaders' encouragement to all employees to take the FISH! Philosophy (2009) training some years ago demonstrates that the sponsoring organization already has an espoused and lived value of engaging play. Therefore, the shift to serious play in workplace interactions would not be large in the organizational culture, but would reaffirm to employees and deepen the already existing playful practices. Implementing the recommendations implies that the organization is seriously sharing with its employees the purpose of serious play; for example, there is real evidence that serious play and humour in employee interactions can lead to creative thinking and innovation if it is balanced and directed toward clear goals. If the sponsoring organization decides to implement all or some of the recommendations throughout the organization, then it might be beneficial for me to invite employees to a presentation that showcases the core findings and recommendations of this study. A presentation would clarify the purpose of serious play and offer recommendations on how to make it useful and balanced with convergent thinking.

Developing a culture that integrates serious play and creativity also has implications for employees who will not embrace it because it is a change from what most employees are used to doing or they might not see a need for it. As I reported chapter one, the leaders of disability services recognized that the status quo assumptions and adherence to old practices often hinder employees from providing high-quality services to their clients. Over adherence to current practices will likely result in challenges to buy-in from all employees to a vision of an organizational culture that engages serious play and creative thinking in service design. First and foremost, in leading an organizational shift in culture, it is important that the key leaders believe in the vision for the change. Burke (2008) emphasized this importance when he advised CEOs who want to effectively lead a cultural change in their organizations to embody and truly believe in the changes that will be made. Therefore, if the recommendations are implemented, the executive director and key leaders of SKILLS Society must clearly understand and communicate the reasons for the changes and the potential benefits of implementing them. Kouzes and Posner (2007), in reflecting on the challenges of leading and implementing change, suggested that leadership is in fact about “men and women, in times of constancy and complacency, actively seeking to disturb the status quo and awaken others to new possibilities” (p. 164). As chapters four and five reveal, implementing the recommendations and awakening the employees to new possibilities that this project creates have the potential to increase morale and retention through engaging serious play and to develop a culture that produces creative and relevant outcomes for the persons who are served. Kouzes and Posner also recommended, to assist in the change process, engaging stakeholders in developing a shared vision and deciding how to implement it to foster genuine buy-in and encourage employees to work together to fulfill the shared vision. Consequently, it may be beneficial for key leaders to host a world café or other employee

meeting to discuss the study recommendations and decide together how to effectively engage play and creativity in the organizational culture so that it becomes useful. A world café could “access the collective intelligence” (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 3) of the employees and “create innovative possibilities for action” (p. 3). Most important, a world café fosters dialogue and ideas from people on how they will contribute to the change and vision (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). When employees decide themselves how to live the values and vision, they are more likely to participate in the creation of the new culture rather than passively standing by.

A final organizational implication of implementing the recommendations is that the stewards of a creative service design process must understand the divergent and convergent thinking phases of creativity and be able to model and elicit serious play from the group members.

In summary, if senior executives empower a leader to implement the recommendations by piloting another RAWK-like project, it will have the potential to yield more outcomes than the last RAWK project did. However, by implementing the recommendations in only another small pilot project, SKILLS society could miss out on some excellent opportunities to increase staff morale and staff retention, and there is a possibility that more high-quality creative outcomes will emerge from the service design processes throughout the organization. If other organizations are any indicators of the potential of implementing recommendations to develop a creative culture, then IDEO is an excellent example. In design organizations such as IDEO, developing creative environments and cultures was paramount to the emergence of innovative, creative ideas from its employees (“Deep Dive,” 1999; Kelley, 2005). SKILLS Society already has a rich culture, and discussions of the recommendations with employees in a world-café format could result in some lasting, high-quality outcomes.

### Implications for Future Research

There are many opportunities for future research in this area. It would be interesting to implement some of the recommendations in a new RAWK-like think tank to determine whether more quality outcomes will emerge than did from the first pilot project. To check the scope of the findings, it would also be interesting to determine whether there is a difference between the creative ideas generated from a RAWK-like think tank and those generated in more traditional ways in the organization.

In addition, I did not explore other creative thinking methods. Therefore, conducting research to compare and contrast the methods of generating creative thinking might enhance creative thinking and be useful in designing a disability service process. For example, it would be interesting to conduct research on Edward De Bono's (1999) six thinking hats model to discover whether more creative outcomes emerge from this method than from integrating only serious play and humour into a creative process to enhance creative thinking.

To summarize this chapter, I believe that there is a great potential for high-quality service design if the recommendations from the participants and the relevant literature are implemented in this human services organization. For success, the leaders need not only to support and give staff permission to engage in serious play and creative processes in service design, but also embody and model the qualities of serious play. As Palus and Horth (2002) emphasized, "Creative leadership needs people, lots of people (not just a few leaders), who are agile of mind, light on their feet, and have a sense of humour" (p. 127).

I also recommend that a creative design process such as the one that the RAWK project utilized, carefully balance divergent and convergent thinking styles. Rather than an either/or perspective, I believe that there is room for both divergent playfulness and convergent critical

thinking in a completely creative process. There is also an overarching concern that implementing the recommendations will result in ambiguity and uncertainty in the organizational shift to serious play and a more creative culture. However, as Palus and Horth (2002) reminded us, “Play is necessary if individuals and communities are to begin to think in new ways. Play is what passionate people naturally do at the boundary between order and chaos” (p. 213).

In chapter six I will discuss what I have learned throughout the research process of this project.

## CHAPTER SIX – LESSONS LEARNED

The genius of play is that, in playing, we create imaginative new cognitive combinations. And in creating those novel combinations, we find what works. (Brown & Vaughan, 2009, p. 37)

In this concluding chapter I reflect on the lessons that I have learned from engaging an action research methodology in an applied research project intended to promote organizational change. This chapter also focuses on the lessons learned that have shaped my current leadership practices.

Stringer (2007) reminded us that action research is usually not a neat and orderly undertaking. Even though there are clear steps along the way, such as identifying a problem or question, followed by a process of inquiry, and concluding with explanations that promote understanding, often the researcher jumps steps, goes back to the beginning, and rethinks interpretations over and over again (Stringer, 2007). I found Stringer's words true that a strict systematic process of action research does not really occur in a real-world setting. However, possibly because of my preference for a divergent thinking style, I often enjoyed the chaos of the action research process, except when I had to go back to the beginning again and again to rethink my interpretations of the data. Nevertheless, I present the following selected lessons learned to inform future researchers.

#### Recognizing Subjectivity and Assumptions

Although the results show a strong link between serious play and creativity, when I reflect on a key learning from the research process, my mind keeps coming back to how easy it is to be caught by my own assumptions and subjectivity. I was continually intrigued by the notion of there being a positive and a negative side to subjectivity in qualitative research when you are aware of it and monitor it. I was intrigued because my previous mental model said that any

subjectivity in research hinders relevant outcomes. On the other hand, as Glesne (2006) wrote, “When you monitor your subjectivity, you increase your awareness of the ways it might distort, but also increase your awareness of its virtuous capacity” (p. 123). I did find it helpful to check my assumptions with the participants and my project sponsor because of my natural preference for playful, divergent thinking and not being sure that there really was a link between humour, play, and creative outcomes. By acknowledging my preferences, I believe that I was more open to understanding that divergent thinking is only one part of the dual process that fosters relevant creative outcomes.

#### Learning From Engaging the Research Methods

With regard to my role of researcher through the lens of an active learner, I learned some lessons from engaging some of the action research methods. I learned that in hosting an anecdote circle the researcher needs to often ask clarifying questions to elicit stories and to be careful not to ask for the participants’ recommendations or solutions. I found that both the participants and I often tended to make broad generalities, and the data might have been richer in the anecdote circle if I had asked the participants to expand more on certain broad statements. In the anecdote circle it was more difficult than I thought it would be to talk about experience and stories of play and creativity in the RAWK project, although I was often surprised by the participants’ unexpected insights and stories when they talked about their experiences with humour and serious play in the creative process. In the future, if I were to utilize an anecdote circle as a data-gathering method, I would be more aware of broad statements and ask the participants to expand more or ask for a specific story that relates to their statements. In fact, this lesson is one that I can apply not only to data gathering, but also to leadership roles and my work with clients. Rather

than assuming that I understand what a broad, general statement means, I will strive to be more aware of the need to ask for clarification before I jump to conclusions.

#### Focus on the Data, Then Let Go and Revisit Them Again Later

I also learned how important it is to revisit and revisit and revisit again the collected data after I thought that I was clearly seeing the themes in the data, because often unexpected insights or fresh perspectives would emerge. I believe that the unexpected insights and ‘Aha!’ moments that unexpectedly emerged when I revisited the data after some days of not looking at them were related to Knoblich and Oelinger’s (2006) suggestion to enhance creativity; namely, by alternating focusing on a problem and letting go. For example, it is a good idea to work on something entirely different, and when you return to the data, ‘Aha!’ discoveries often emerge. I also found it interesting that the participants seemed to naturally recognize in the course of engaging in the research that they intuitively transitioned back and forth during the RAWK process between playfulness and focus on a task. Again, I was reminded of Knoblich and Oelinger work that showed that transitioning back and forth between focus and play facilitates ‘Aha!’ moments and creativity.

#### Valuing Critical Thinking More

The research process helped me to see the value of critical thinking in a creative process. Before this project, I had only a one-sided perspective biased toward playful, divergent thinking, and I believed that critical thinking was stiff and rigid and would not yield creative outcomes. However, as Csikszentmihalyi (1996) stated, “Divergent thinking is not much use without the ability to tell a good idea from a bad one” (p. 61). Through engaging with the participants, analyzing the data, and comparing and contrasting them with the literature, I think that I now have a more balanced and enriched perspective on creative processes. I learned that people who

have different thinking styles all add value to a collaborative creative process if they understand and utilize those styles at appropriate times. Some people might share their gift of playfulness and humour to shake the group out of rigid thought patterns, and others might ground the conversation by considering how an idea might be relevant to a desired outcome. I also learned that if the participants in a creative process do not understand the value of both divergent and convergent thinking styles, then unhelpful conflict can arise and derail the process. These understandings will greatly enhance my practice as a steward of collaborative creative processes and, I hope, lead to higher quality outcomes in designing individualized human services.

#### Leadership Learning in the Research Process

First, realizing that in a collaborative group each member's thinking style has value, I think I have gained a clearer understanding of empowering leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2007) highlighted the importance of valuing others' thinking styles in leading collaboratively: "Leaders make sure that they consider alternative viewpoints, and they make use of people's expertise and abilities" (p. 229). I think that before this project I had a mental model of an empowering leader who is adept at all thinking and leadership styles. Although some flexible people can be everything to everyone as leaders, I have come to realize that it is not practical to attempt to be a leader who has perfected all of the leader's thinking styles. I have also learned that believing that I can learn to be a leader who has fully developed all styles can foster a kind of arrogance and the belief that other perspectives are not necessary to a leader. The former attitude can foster arrogance when the leader holds the unrecognized and possibly subconscious assumption that he or she needs to develop every thinking style because others are not competent to develop effective styles of their own. I am grateful that my mentors and the participants in this project taught me this lesson indirectly and inspired me to value the rich perspectives of others in

a creative process. I recognized that I have a preference for and a well-developed (although not perfect) creative leadership style, but that I need to listen to others more about what is practical in exploring an issue or a need. This leadership lesson of needing others with different thinking styles and gifts reminds me of the falsity of the myth of the lone genius that I outlined in chapter two. As I explain in chapter two, there is still a common misconception that creativity is a lone process for only a gifted few (Leonard, 2010). However, in the current times leaders and creative persons in all domains are recognizing that innovative and creative ideas do not emerge in isolation, but through influences and connections with others (Leonard, 2010; Senge, 2006). I hope to lead future collaborative creative projects and organizations in an empowering, thoughtful way, and this lesson has taught me to strive to see the gifts of those I lead and seek ways to engage their ideas and perspectives.

#### Summary

I believe that the greatest leadership lesson that I learned has to do with recognizing my assumptions to ensure that they did not hinder empowering leadership. Changing my own perspectives and taking responsibility for my assumptions could influence larger systems with which I am connected, just as Mahoney (1991) recognized:

Personal change lies at the heart of collective change, and the interactions between individuals and their worlds are complexly reciprocal. Changes in either will trigger changes in the other, even when the persons involved are relatively unaware of or apparently uninterested in the larger spheres of influence. (p. 4)

Largely as a result of this project, I believe that I am more acutely aware of the power of personal change to effect positive change in the systems with which I am connected, such as relationships, teams, groups, organizations, and the larger community. I have learned that in leading I have more leverage by changing my own view than in changing outer systems. As Senge (2006) wrote, “Herein lies a secret of the systems worldview. The system is not only out

there, it is in here. We are the seed carriers of the whole in the sense that we carry the mental models that pervade the larger system” (p. 348). This systems worldview connected with leading others out of their status quo assumptions and into a world of creative possibilities could mean that, to be more creative in service design, the stakeholders must strive to work on clarifying their own mental models and develop their inherent creative abilities. Working on assumptions and creative abilities might be one more truly effective approach to positively changing larger systems to ensure more creative, higher quality disability service delivery.

Be sure to play with complexity because, surely, complexity is coming to play with you. (Palus & Horth, 2002, p. 127)

The kind of humor I like is the thing that makes me laugh for five seconds and think for ten minutes. (Quotegarden, 2010 para. 2)

Humor has bailed me out of more tight situations than I can think of. If you go with your instincts and keep your humor, creativity follows. With luck, success comes, too. (BrainyQuote, 2010, para. 1)

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APPENDIX A – LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE  
IN THE ANECDOTE CIRCLE

Dear former Recruiting Allies Within Kommunity member,

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of a requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. My name is Ben Weinlick and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Wendy Rowe, Acting Director, School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx.

The objective of my research project is to explore how play and humour involved in the processes of the RAWK brainstorm meetings might have lead to creative ideas in how the RAWK team designed and went about their work in the pilot project. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership degree, I will also be sharing my research findings with SKILLS Society and possibly the research findings may also be used in the future in journal articles and presentations.

My research project will consist of open ended questions in the form of an anecdote circle and is anticipated to last for one and a half hours. The foreseen questions will refer to your experiences in the last two years with the RAWK team meetings particularly around play and creative thinking in the team process. An anecdote circle is an inquiry method that involves facilitated storytelling of participants experience and listening to others stories. An anecdote circle can often look and feel like a dinner party discussion. For more information regarding anecdote circles please visit [www.anecdote.com.au](http://www.anecdote.com.au).

This invitation has been sent to you because you were involved in RAWK brainstorm meetings at least once over the course of time the RAWK pilot project existed. The Anecdote circle will be held on XXXX from 10 am – 1130 am at SKILLS Society.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format and digitally voice recorded. Where appropriate, the information gathered will be summarized, in **anonymous** format, in the body of the final report. The voice recording will be transcribed and then destroyed immediately afterwards. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality of clients names who were worked with during the RAWK project must also be kept private and so no last names of persons supported can be used during the research. After the anecdote circle you may receive a phone call from Ben Weinlick in regards to sharing what themes were found from the gathering and asking you if found themes fit with your memory and experience of the anecdote circle.

A copy of the final report will be published. A copy will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

You will receive a confirmation of participation by phone one week prior to the Anecdote Circle, including a copy of the questions that will be asked as well as all of the details you will need. You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Please note that if you choose to withdraw during or after the anecdote circle it will be impossible to remove your contributions as they are anonymous and specific comments are not attributed to any one participant at the anecdote circle. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact:

Name: Ben Weinlick

Email: xxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx

Telephone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx

Thank You.

Sincerely,

Ben Weinlick

APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR  
ANECDOTE CIRCLE AND FOCUS GROUP

This project is part of a requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. My name is Ben Weinlick and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Wendy Rowe, Acting Director, School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx.

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project, the objective of which is to explore how play and humour involved in the processes of the RAWK brainstorm meetings might have lead to creative ideas in how the RAWK team designed and went about their work in the pilot project

The research will consist of open ended questions in the form of an anecdote circle in the first round of research and will last an hour and a half and the second method will consist of a focus group lasting 2 hours. The foreseen questions will refer to your experiences in the last two years with the RAWK team meetings particularly around play and creative thinking in the team process. An anecdote circle is an inquiry method that involves facilitated storytelling of participants experience and listening to others stories. A focus group is more purposeful in exploring questions related to the research and in the focus group there will be a focus on participants recommendations to the rest of SKILLS Society in terms of what may work for integrating play and creative thinking into service design meetings. After each method you may receive an informal phone call from Ben Weinlick in regards to sharing what themes were found from the gathering and asking you for clarification if found themes fit with your memory and experience of the anecdote circle and focus group.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format and digitally voice recorded. Where appropriate, the information gathered will be summarized, in **anonymous** format, in the body of the final report. The voice recording will be transcribed and then destroyed immediately afterwards. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality of SKILLS Society client names who were worked with during the RAWK project must also be kept private and therefore no last names of persons supported can be used during the research. By signing this you are agreeing to not use last names of individuals supported by SKILLS Society through the RAWK pilot project.

A copy of the final report will be published. A copy will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

To ensure everyone is equal in both group sessions, the supervisor of the RAWK team Deb Reid will be absent from the dialogues.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project and that you will not use last names of individuals supported through the RAWK pilot project in order to protect confidentiality of individuals served by SKILLS Society.

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C – LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE  
IN THE FOCUS GROUP

Dear former Recruiting Allies Within Kommunity member,

I would like to invite you to be part of the second round of my research project that I am conducting. This project is part of a requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. My name is Ben Weinlick and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Wendy Rowe, Acting Director, School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx.

As stated in the first round of research the objective of my research project is to explore how play and humour involved in the processes of the RAWK brainstorm meetings might have lead to creative ideas in service how the RAWK team designed and went about their work in the pilot project. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership degree, I will also be sharing my research findings with SKILLS Society and possibly the research findings may also be used in the future in journal articles and presentations.

This second round of research project will consist of open ended questions in the form of a focus group and is anticipated to last for 2 hours. The foreseen questions will refer to your experiences in the last two years with what worked well with the RAWK team process of engaging play and humour to enhance creative thinking. In addition questions will aim at gathering participants ideas for recommendations on what might work well to enhance play and creative thinking in service design for the rest of SKILLS Society where employees design support services. A focus group is an inquiry method that involves facilitated dialogue around some questions related to the area of inquiry. After the focus group you may receive a phone call from Ben Weinlick in regards to sharing what themes were found from the gathering and asking you if found themes fit with your memory and experience of the focus group.

This invitation has been sent to you because you were involved in the first round of research through the Anecdote circle and your insights and ideas would truly informative for my research. Recommendations have to potential to positively influence practices within SKILLS Society, so by participating you will be making great contribution to SKILLS Society. The Focus group will be held on XXXX from 12 pm – 2 pm at SKILLS Society. Food will be provided.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format and digitally voice recorded. Where appropriate, the information gathered will be summarized, in **anonymous** format, in the body of the final report. The voice recording will be transcribed and then destroyed immediately afterwards. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality of SKILLS Society client names who were worked with during the RAWK project must also be kept private and therefore no last names of persons supported can be used during the research.

A copy of the final report will be published. A copy will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

You will receive a confirmation of participation by phone one week prior to the focus group, including a copy of the questions that will be asked as well as all of the details you will need. You are not required to participate in this second round of the research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Please note that if you choose to withdraw during or after the focus group it will be impossible to remove your contributions as they are anonymous and specific comments are not attributed to any one participant at the focus group. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

If you would like to participate in the focus group, please contact:

Name: Ben Weinlick

Email: xxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx

Telephone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx

Thank You.

Sincerely,

Ben Weinlick

APPENDIX D – LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE  
IN THE INTERVIEWS

Dear former Recruiting Allies Within Kommunity member,

I would like to invite you to be part of the second round of my research project that I am conducting. This project is part of a requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. My name is Ben Weinlick and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Wendy Rowe, Acting Director, School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx.

The objective of my research project is to explore how play and humour involved in the processes of the RAWK brainstorm meetings might have lead to creative ideas in how the RAWK team designed and went about their work in the pilot project. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership degree, I will also be sharing my research findings with SKILLS Society and possibly the research findings may also be used in the future in journal articles and presentations.

My research project will consist of open ended questions in the form of a one to one interview and is expected to last about one hour. The foreseen questions will refer to your experiences in the last two years with the RAWK team meetings particularly around play and creative thinking in the team process.

This invitation has been sent to you because you were paramount to the RAWK Pilot project and your insights and ideas would truly be informative for my research. Recommendations have the potential to positively influence practices within SKILLS Society, so by participating you will be making great contribution.

The interview will be recorded in hand-written format and digitally voice recorded. Where appropriate, the information gathered will be summarized, in **anonymous** format, in the body of the final report. The voice recording will be transcribed and then destroyed immediately afterwards. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality of SKILLS Society client names who were worked with during the RAWK project must also be kept private and therefore no last names of persons supported can be used during the research.

A copy of the final report will be published. A copy will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice and your recorded comments will be omitted from the final data analysis. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

If you would like to participate in the interview, please contact me with a time that works with your schedule and I can accommodate:

Name: Ben Weinlick

Email: [bweinlick@gmail.com](mailto:bweinlick@gmail.com)

Telephone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx

Thank You.

Sincerely,

Ben Weinlick

## APPENDIX E – QUESTIONS FOR THE ANECDOTE CIRCLE

## Framing the Anecdote Circle

Anecdote circle is like a camp fire conversation. This research project is about, what could we be doing to enhance creative thinking in service design? Particularly this research is looking at the RAWK project. Was there anything in our madness; in our play that might have lead towards, or fostered more creative ideas? This 1<sup>st</sup> around is around peoples experience and their stories. Not a place of would've, could've should've, that is the next session. The next one will be the session around our recommendations.

1. What do you remember from our RAWK time that might have enhanced our creative thinking, what helped lube the creative thinking or didn't work? Do you remember any stories that might have enhanced creative thinking or inhibited it?
2. Anyone have a story or memory of a time when the play felt like it derailed things?
3. Any thoughts around, memories, like "ok. I'm being creative, what were signs you were being creative?"
4. How was this circle for people?

## APPENDIX F – QUESTIONS FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

## Focus Group to Formulate Recommendations

First part of focus group, go over themes from last anecdote circle and ask for clarification and input.

Framing the recommendations session:

One way to frame recommendations might be to think, “Okay, what would we say to future, potential RAWKers around what they should know individually and about our process in order to have success with serious, creative play in a meeting?” In other words, here’s what would be helpful to get out creative ideas and to ensure the play is useful.

- Any recommendations for individuals involved in a RAWK like think tank in order to be successful?
- Any recommendations for the processes of a RAWK like think tank in order to be successful?

The questions below based on “things” that were identified as tricky to navigate helped inform the overarching frame above.

- How do we convey play is okay and useful in our meetings?
- Some people like structure and some don’t, how to accommodate both?
- Lost train of thought, due to all the dynamic, playful back and forth communication, how to safeguard losing ideas in the play?
- How did we know something useful was happening?
- How do we sustain the high energy and creative space of mind after a RAWK meeting?
- Should play be all the way through a meeting or just at the beginning?
- Hard to sort out all the ideas that were coming up. How do we know which ones to follow and which ones to discard?
- Did the rest of the org. think we were crazy? Were we hard to relate to? What might help other people understand or see value in a RAWK like think tank?
- Is play and creative thinking we engaged in only for certain personality types?
- If there were no results right away, does that mean that others could blame the play being unproductive and a hindrance to real work?
- Did the play add to creative ideas that were generated?

- What might have made people feel comfortable with the play?
- Any ideas on how we can encourage people to throw out preconceived ideas, or old ideas and biases? How as an individual might we do that and how as a group process could something aid that process?

## APPENDIX G – QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWS

1<sup>st</sup> part around gathering stories

- In the first anecdote circle, I showed the RAWK PowerPoint to refresh and remind each other what we did in RAWK.
- Can you remember a time when our planning process was really successful or a flop? How might have play or humour affected that?
- What was your experience of creative play in the RAWK project? Any memories of stories?

2<sup>nd</sup> part around recommendations

- Any recommendations for individuals involved in a RAWK like think tank in order to be successful?
- Any recommendations for the processes of a RAWK like think tank in order to be successful?
- Did the play add to creative ideas that were generated?
- What might have made people feel comfortable with the play?
- Do you think that this style of play and getting crazy is only for certain types of people?
- Any ideas on how we can encourage people to throw out preconceived ideas, or old ideas and biases? How as an individual might we do that and how as a group process could something aid that process?
- When sorting out which creative ideas to follow and which to discard, any recommendations to help participants to decide?

## APPENDIX H – INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

This project is part of a requirement for a Master’s Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. My name is Ben Weinlick and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Wendy Rowe, Acting Director, School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University at x-xxx-xxx-xxxx.

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project, the objective of which is to explore how play and humour involved in the processes of the RAWK brainstorm meetings might have lead to creative ideas in how the RAWK team designed and went about their work in the pilot project

The research will consist of open ended questions in the form of an interview, expected to last about one hour. The foreseen questions will refer to your experiences in the last two years with the RAWK team meetings particularly around play and creative thinking in the team process. After the formal interview you may receive an informal phone call from Ben Weinlick in regards to asking for possible clarification on answers given.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format and digitally voice recorded. Where appropriate, the information gathered will be summarized, in **anonymous** format, in the body of the final report. The voice recording will be transcribed and then destroyed immediately afterwards. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality of SKILLS Society client names who were worked with during the RAWK project must also be kept private and therefore no last names of persons supported can be used during the research. By signing this you are agreeing to not use last names of individuals supported by SKILLS Society through the RAWK pilot project.

A copy of the final report will be published. A copy will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project and that you will not use last names of individuals supported through the RAWK pilot project in order to protect confidentiality of individuals served by SKILLS Society.

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_