

# **PlaySolving™**

**A scenario planning process  
for leadership and strategic planning**

**Adrienne Gans, Ph.D.**

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**“Learning organizations” of the future will still do three things they’ve always done:**

**1. CREATIVE INNOVATION**

**2. PROBLEM SOLVING**

**3. EXECUTION**



**What changes is the**

**C o n**  
**t e x t**

# The Global Context Requires

- Accelerated decision making.
- Working with ambiguity.
- Operating with “fuzzy” logic or from “gut feelings.”
- Flexibility and resilience in response to change.
- Skilled interpersonal communication.



# Learning for the “global economy”

Must itself mirror the complexity, fuzzy, accelerated, ambiguous, emotive, and cross-cultural components of a changing world.

# Learning through Simulating “Ecologically Valid” Scenarios has History

## Gaming

Examples: Intuit –Quicken developers learn accounting by playing a board game rather than taking an accounting class.

## Other examples:

- Computer simulation and modeling.
- Story boarding and play acting.
- Performance visualization.



**Intuit developers at play**



# Leadership Development and Strategic Planning with the PlaySolving™ Process

## What is PlaySolving?

- A form of constructive, playful thinking described by Piaget.
- “Symbolic architecting” of narrative scenarios.
- Results in a 3-D microcosm or solution prototype.
- Integrates logical and emotive processes.
- Simulation followed by concrete action planning.



**Give this picture a title**



# The PlaySolving Environment:

Symbolic objects are used to stage solutions or goals through a narrative process



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**If a picture is worth a thousand words...  
Symbols from real world history: human diversity...**

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# Urban Environment Human Culture



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## Natural Environment

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## Team Collaboration

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# How does it work?

- **Assessment**

Initial interviews to collect information and set a point of focus for PlaySolving session.

- **Scenario creation**

Focal point scenarios are staged using real-world miniature objects in a 3-D theatre environment.

- **Prototyping**

A new vision or solution is created and refined “in vitro.” This is the rehearsal, editing, fine tuning process of the “prototype” for a real-world leadership development process or business strategy design.

- **Execution**

The prototype solution becomes input to action planning. Goal implementation is designed. Follow-up project management and coaching ensures accountability and execution.

- **Evaluation**

Periodic evaluation of goal attainment with adjustment in action plan ensures relevance.

# What is it used for?

- **Coaching and leadership development**  
For leadership performance and advancement
- **Board development and team building**  
Less friction in workflow and communication
- **Strategy, branding, market research**  
Qualitative research: scenario planning, interviewing, focus groups
- **Product innovation**  
Prototype new product and service concepts



# Case Examples to Follow

- Sales performance
- Leadership role and identity
- Business and strategy planning
- Change management
- Emotional intelligence learning

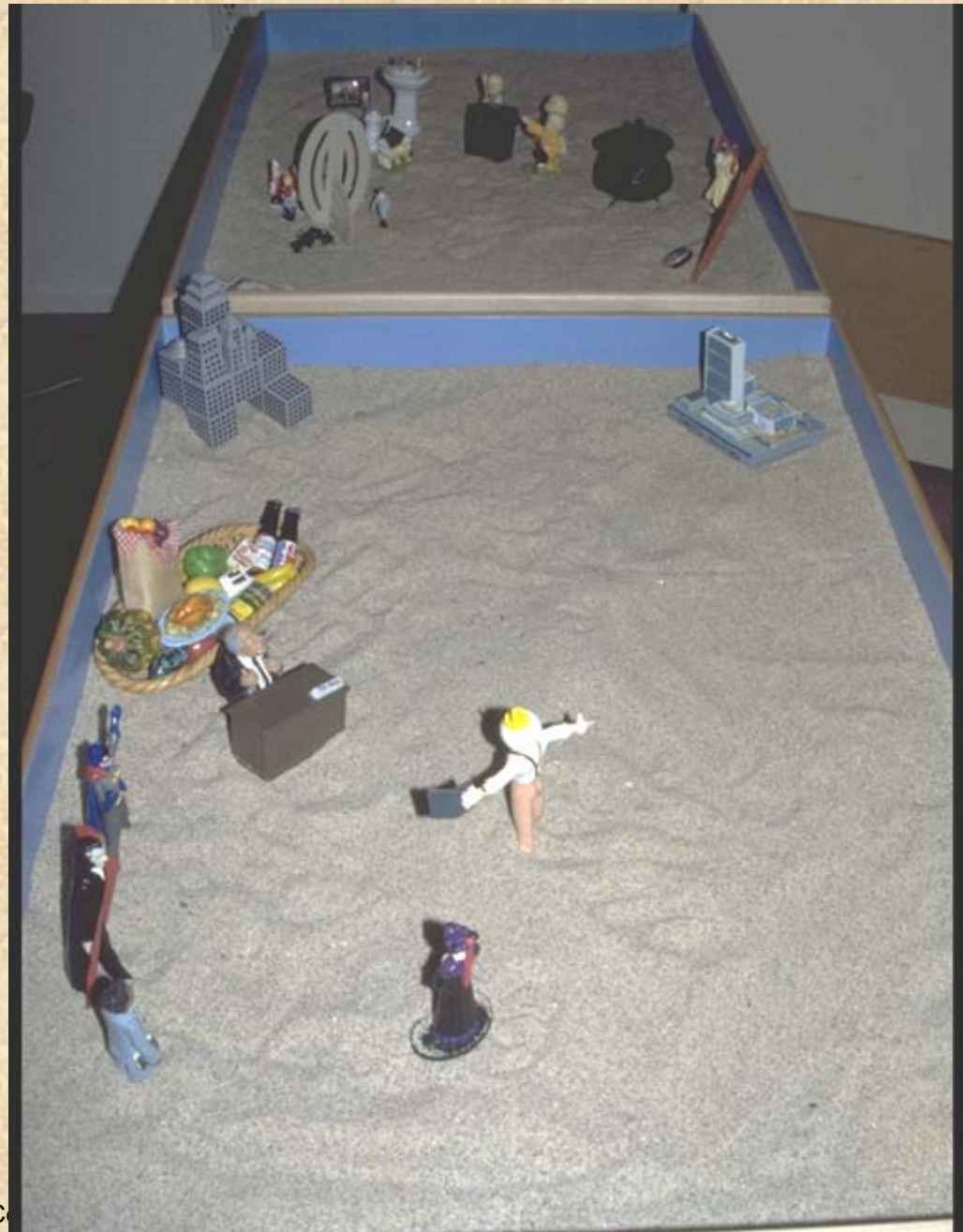
## Example 1: Sales Performance Problem

### Initial Scenario:

Portrayal of a “typical”  
sales presentation.

What’s wrong with  
this picture?

Hint: revealed in the  
use of space



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Customers backed up against wall, incentives out of view, ***salesperson*** center stage.

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## **Example 2: Alignment of Personal Leadership Goal Narrative**

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# Reported Benefits

- **Concrete** creation of a strategy/solution viewable from “**the outside.**”
- **Insight**, perspective, new information.
- **Experiment** with new solutions **before** taking action or **deploying resources** -- integrated with action planning.
- **Safe** way to work through “hot button” issues, individually or in teams -- and feels **restorative**.
- **Accelerates** problem solving.

# Why it works

- **Learning through play** ventilates thinking and creativity; allows incubating ideas to surface non-verbally into narratives.
- **“Learning by doing”** creates solutions in microcosm and alleviates difficulty of verbalizing complicated or emotionally sensitive issues.
- **Multiple sense modalities**, kinesthetic, visual information *plus* **analytic thinking** produces rich solutions.









# **Problem: Symbols of change and disorganization**

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## **Solution Prototype:**

Identifying areas for  
delegation



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## **“Building blocks” of new business development**

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## Final prototype: growth with continuity of values

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# Emotional Intelligence Learning

- **Emotional and Interpersonal\*** competencies are difficult to develop through traditional training models which do not evoke the internal and external triggers in “real-time” in a safe and playful way.
  - **Self-awareness**
  - **Self-control**
  - **Motivation**
  - **Empathy**
  - **Social communication**

\*Daniel Goleman, 1998



## Example 4: Leadership Identity

From Command &  
Control Leadership...



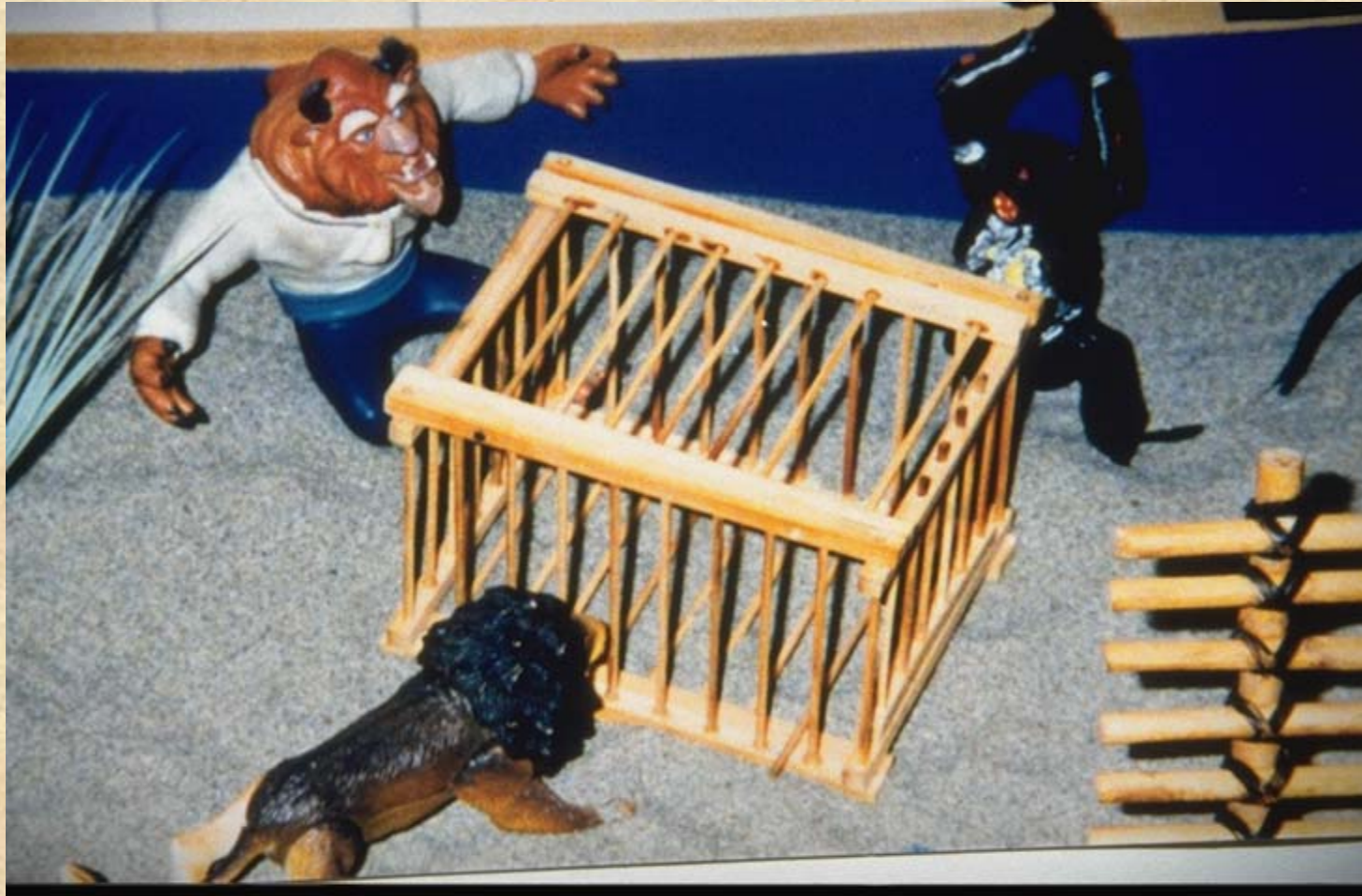




**To prototyping a new way to lead**

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## **Example 5: When old frameworks should be changed: tempering destruction with construction**

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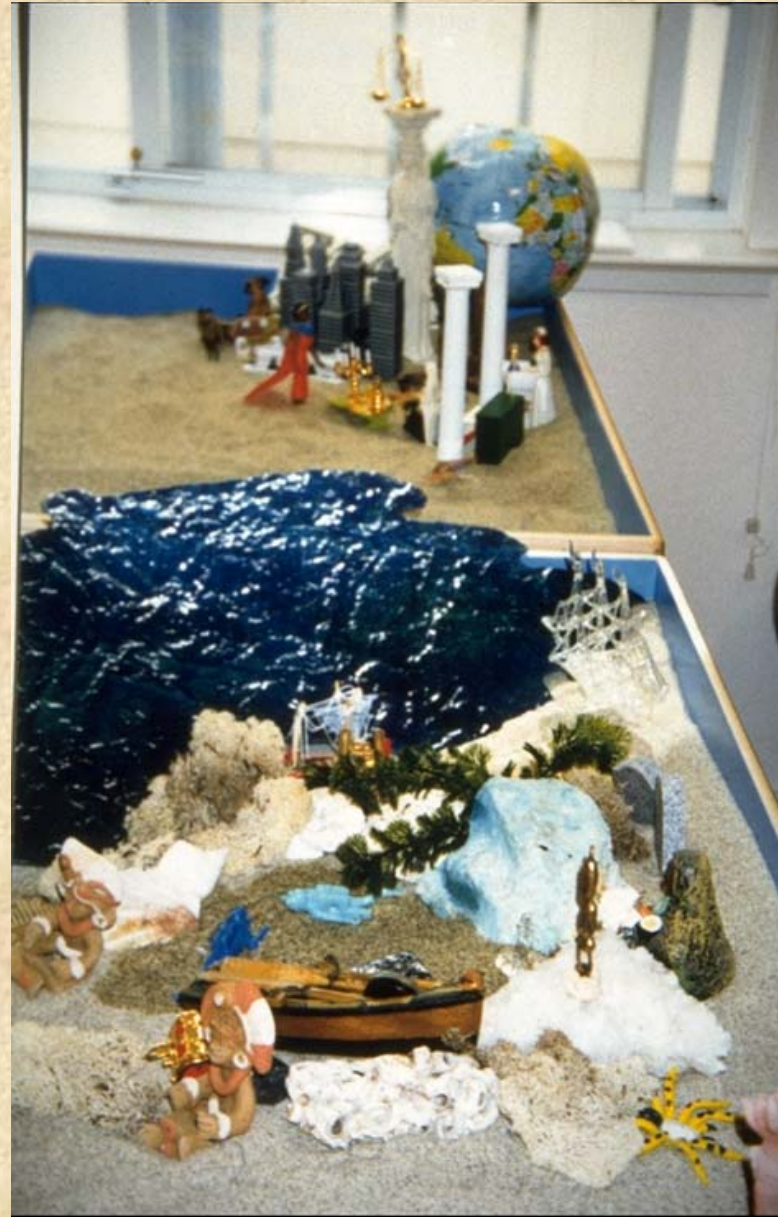
**Example 6:**  
**Channeling negative impulses towards the status quo**

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## **Example 7: Work Life Balance**

Creating a restorative ecosystem (foreground) to reduce stress and release blocks in a restricted business planning process (background)....







**Result: Expansion, better alignment, motivation,  
and self-awareness**

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**Example 8:**

**Empathy through  
identification with  
diverse cultures**



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**PlaySolving is a  
process to build  
better business  
ecosystems**



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# Guidelines for Selecting and Using OD Simulations

- Tools that simulate a **microcosm of the actual world**, including subjective, symbolic, emotional information, yield richer, more viable solution prototypes.
- **Emotional Intelligence** skills are as important to cultivate as intellectual or business skills in training, especially at senior management levels.
- Innovation training **integrated with project planning** bridges the gap between “strategic” brainstorming and “tactical” execution.
- **Value in low-tech process.** Getting out of the Windows/Web environment “box” has advantages for high-tech thinkers and technology power users.
- A learning environment that is **aesthetically and ecologically restorative** contributes to sustainable growth.

**For More Information, contact Adrienne Gans: [adrienne.gans@nyu.edu](mailto:adrienne.gans@nyu.edu)**

### **About Adrienne Gans, Ph.D.**

Dr. Gans brings 20 years of diversified experience in business and psychology to organizational consulting focused on leadership and productivity. She is on the faculty of New York University's Industrial-Organizational Psychology graduate Masters program where she teaches Executive Coaching and Development, Assessment, and Quality of Work Life.

As a licensed psychologist, Dr. Gans works with human and cultural aspects of business management. She has worked with organizations including Scholastic, Inc., Merrill Lynch, Wells Fargo Bank, Cunningham Communications, Starlight Networks, and the NY Board of Trade. Previously, as marketing vice president and consultant to rapidly growing technology firms, Dr. Gans managed product campaigns, client satisfaction programs, and co-marketing alliances with corporations including IBM, Unisys, Kodak as well as client organizations including Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, Chase Manhattan Bank, NJ Department of Labor, Federal Express, and Consolidated Edison.

Dr. Gans received a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley and has presented professional papers to the Institute for the Future, Global Business Network, Women in Technology International, the Association for Business Simulation and Learning, and the National Association of Women Business Owners. She is the developer of PlaySolving™, a creative process for executive development and strategic planning. Her results-oriented coaching and consulting:

- Improve communication and interpersonal skills for individual leaders.
- Improve productivity and communication in collaborative teams.
- Provide a confidential sounding board to executives.
- Coach high-potential managers to assume senior leadership positions.
- Resolve conflicts between executives that are reducing productivity.