# The games people play when adopting agile and how to reframe them

Stage:          Coaching & Mentoring
Session type:   Workshop
Keywords:       game, simulation, experiential, coaching
Duration:       90 minutes
Level:          Practicing


## Short Summary

Many barriers encountered in adopting Agile stem from the psychological level - fear of the unknown, perceived loss of power, threats to ego, identity etc. In response, many people revert to playing games.

A game is a series of transactions that are complementary, have ulterior motives, and which proceed towards a predictable outcome. Each game has a payoff that usually reinforces our personal life plan.

Drawing on the work of Eric Berne M.D., this session uses Transactional Analysis to make sense of the games that we experience when coaching and to find new ways to defuse/reframe them.


## Extended Summary

In adopting Agile, many of the barriers we run into stem from the psychological level - fear of the unknown, perceived loss of power, perceived threats to ego, identity etc. Not everyone responds by engaging in an candid adult dialogue to work through such issues. Instead, many people revert to playing games.

A game is a series of transactions that are complementary, have ulterior motives, and proceed towards a predictable outcome. Each game has a payoff for those playing it, such as earning sympathy, satisfaction, vindication, or some other emotion that usually reinforces the life script.

For example...
A powerful Business Analyst group may play games to sabotage the agile adoption because it fears losing exclusivity of interaction with the customer.
A team member may play two bosses or pseudo Product Owners off against each other for the more favourable answer.
Games may be evident when stakeholders refuse to engage with an agile project and then go into blame-storming mode when they see something they don't like months later.
An agile coach may be experiencing a game when a coachee continually uses excuses such as "I'm too busy" to avoid coaching conversations.
We may also find a game in a persistent habit of reporting green lights to stakeholders when we know a project is not going well.


We might also be familiar with the games evident from the following dialogue.
"How about you…?" "Yes, but…"
"My boss needs a firm estimate on this project now. You have 5 minutes!"
"Self-organisation obviously isn't working so management is going to have to step in."
"If we don't have a Project Manager, who do we blame when it all goes wrong?"

As an Agile Coach, consultant or change leader, it is all too easy to slip into a parent-child dynamic with a coachee and this may evolve into a game just as it can between a psychiatrist and a patient in a consulting room. In this session, we go Back to the Future through exploration of some classic games described in the 60's by Eric Berne M.D.:
"I'm only trying to help you" - upstaging a coach by showing up failings in his/her advice,
"Indigence" - going through the motions without real intent to become more agile,
"Peasant" - praising agile/the coach without actually trying what is suggested,
"Stupid" -  acting stupid in order to avoid learning/changing, and
"Wooden Leg" - using a difference or disability to abdicate responsibility.

Awareness of these dynamics and how to avoid/defuse them may assist coaches in everyday coaching conversations.

This session will outline a series of transactional games frequently encountered in agile adoption and explain

their psychological dynamics in terms of the ego state model of Parent, Adult and Child. Participants will be invited to play both presented and games from their own experience in role-plays.


**Learning outcomes**

A tool of making sense of our behaviour in an agile coaching context
Familiarity with games and transactional analysis
Connection between games and experiences at work
Appreciation of the role that games play in an agile adoption context
Recognition of real-time indicators of games as they may present in an agile adoption context
Familiarity with basics of the ego state model
Awareness of some commonly encountered games that we all play without being aware of it
Ideas as to how games can be reframed toward more positive outcomes
Insights into how game analysis can help you as an agile coach


**Process/Mechanics**

*Make connections (5 mins)*

*To make immediate connections with games, participants move around the room to representations of games that they can identify with as they are briefly described.*

*Introduction to transactional games (15 mins)*

*An introduction to transactional games and ego states including examples examples presented as a concise lecture.*

*Game role-plays (30 mins total)*
*5 mins - Setup for role-plays. Split into triads inc. two game role-players and an observer. Each triad chooses two games from the game description sheets distributed. These are written using a consistent structure which may be used when writing up games in the next exercise. Some of the game options may already be familiar from the "make connections" introduction.*
*5 mins - Role-play of game A*
*5 mins - Debrief of the game A role-play led by observer*
*5 mins - Role-play of game B*
*5 mins - Debrief of the game B role-play led by observer*

*This will have created familiarity with 4-6 different games within a large table group of 6-9.*

*Analyse your own game (25 mins total)*

*In table groups of 6-9, have a story teller share a story about a game experienced at work and analyse this using the models presented.*

*5 mins - Share quick outlines of scenarios from around the table and select one to use*
*20 mins - Game story telling and analysis*
*Story teller: Tells a story about a game he/she has experienced at work*
*Others: Write up the game*
*Whole group: Analyse in terms of the ego state model*
*Whole group: Discuss ways of reframing/defusing the game*

*Group spokesperson: Shares a summary of the game and the suggested reframing*

*Wrap-up (15 mins)*

*Open discussion about how insights from this session might be applied in an agile coaching context.*
*The presenter will have noted some insights from observing various groups and these may be injected to stimulate discussion.*
*Key points will be noted on flip-chart paper for posting from the session.*