

already alive, and ideas, once they take root, do not disappear politely.

So, we decided, somewhat recklessly, to go for it.

The Coffee-Break Hustle

The hour before our session became a blur of walking, smiling, and ambushing colleagues between sips of cappuccino. We sold the idea like cheerful street vendors:

“Come, it’ll be fun! No slides, promise!”

“Ever wanted to play The Disruptor in a safe environment?”

“You’ll love this: no risk, all laughs!”

There were so many parallel sessions running that the fear of speaking to an empty room hung over us like a cloud. We kept repeating the same pitch, polishing it, sharpening it, praying it would land.

We walked into the room ten minutes before the start, nervous. And froze.

It was full.

Actually, more than full.

People were standing along the walls, sitting on the floor, squeezing in at the back. The kind of crowd that makes a speaker both thrilled and slightly terrified.

One hundred participants. Maybe more. Far more than we had dared to hope for.

All ready to play.

The Experiment

We split them into groups, handed out the cards: the personas you’ll come to know very well in this book, and explained the rules. Then we let go.

Watching a room of association executives dive headfirst into improvisation is something to see. Everyone was playing a role they had probably inflicted on someone else in real life:

The Skeptic (“This will never work!”)

The Advocate (“But it *must* work!”)

The Data-Driven (“What’s the source for that number?”)

The Quiet One (who, unsurprisingly, played the role perfectly)

And the poor facilitator in the middle, desperately trying to build consensus on a topic that had been drawn from a deck of absurd scenarios.

The room erupted: laughter, arguments, alliances, confusion, breakthroughs. Everything that happens in a real meeting, only louder. For a facilitator, this is the moment when theory becomes very real.

It was chaos, and it was brilliant.

At the end, someone asked the question that settled what you are now holding:

“Do you have a book that explains all of this?”

I shook my head.

But the idea planted itself in my mind.

Just like the card game had.

And it didn’t leave.

The Moment I Knew

A few weeks later, I found myself replaying the scenes from that session: the Difficult Participant derailing a debate on purpose, the Enthusiast trying to fix everything with optimism, the Big-Picture Thinker launching into a 2050 strategy when all we needed was to decide on a three-month pilot.

I realized that I had spent my entire career dealing with these characters.

Smart, well-intentioned people, each equipped with a very specific operating system. And unless you understood that system, your meeting would collapse under its own weight. The difficulty is rarely intelligence or goodwill; it is that each person arrives with a different mental model of what the meeting is supposed to achieve.

The card game had done in an hour what no slide deck had managed in years. The idea of a book stopped feeling crazy. It felt inevitable: a book about the psychology and art of managing the eight personas in every boardroom: corporate boardrooms, association committees, startup teams, public institutions. The logo on the door changes. The behavior rarely does.

If, at any moment while reading this book, you nod and think: "That happened to me," then this book will have done its job.

Because it all began with one goal: to help others navigate the chaos of real meetings.

A card game sparked it. This book completes it. Welcome.