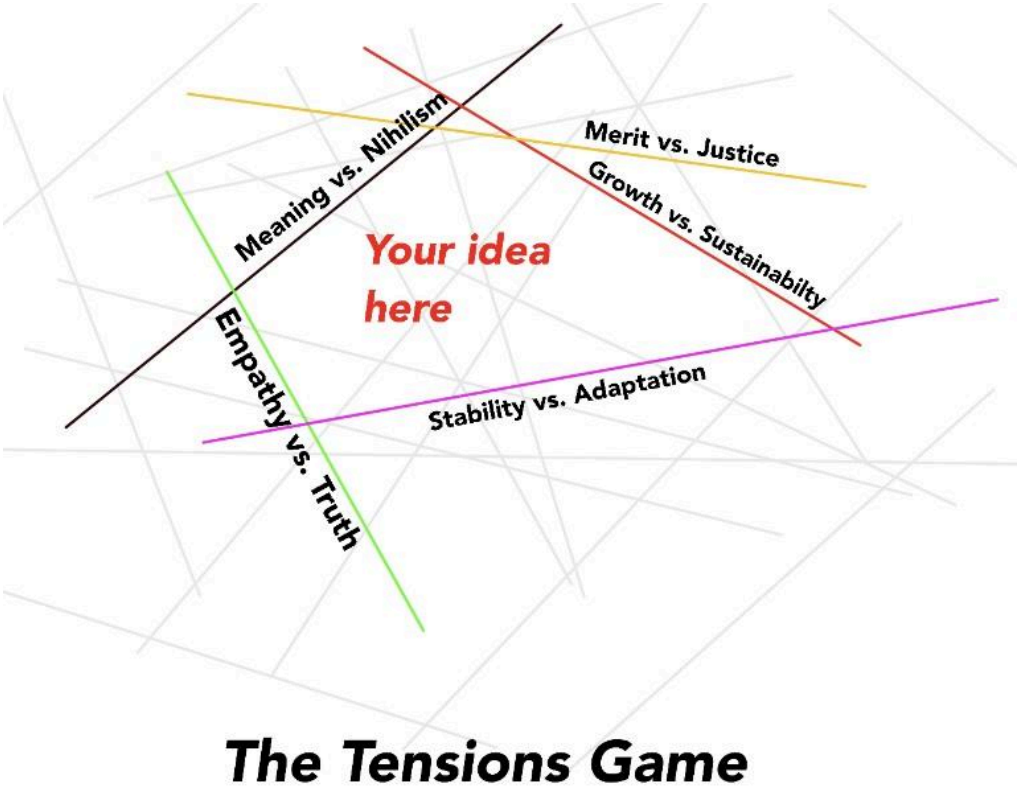
The Tensions Game

V. 0.1

The Tensions Game is a novel sense-making and exploration protocol. It allows a group to collaboratively and iteratively refine future scenarios, visions, and creative solutions to complex problems. Participants layer a stream of “tensions” — fundamental tradeoffs and dichotomies — onto initial premises, creating a progressively tightening bounding box to stress test ideas.



Gameplay unfolds over at least a week. Players collect tensions from each other and integrate them into their model, vision, or proposed solution. They iteratively and competitively refine artifacts that they present to the group at the end in a friendly, competitive format to win prizes. The game incorporates elements from existing techniques like wargaming and hackathons within a highly decentralized and open scaffolding. It is particularly well-suited to

envisioning things in terms of speculative protocols, since protocols are all about balancing competing tensions, often under conditions of conflict and hostility between multiple actors.

The 0xParc research collective, Moving Castles gaming studio, and Summer of Protocols, are collaborating to develop The Tensions Game through live play tests. The game uses ZuPass, a novel zero-knowledge (ZK) proof wallet application developed by 0xParc. ZK technology and programmable cryptography elements allow for highly open play with decentralized structure with support for anonymity/pseudonymity. Tradeoffs are difficult subjects to discuss, but stress testing ideas benefits from the free flow of ideas.

The first game was played for a week at Edge Esmeralda (see game review below) in June 2024. The next game will be played at Edge Lanna in the last week of October 2024 (see game preview below). If you're attending Edge Lanna during that time and would like to play, register here.

How the Game Works

The **game master** kicks off the game at a kickoff session by presenting a competitive **artifact** development objective, such as developing futures scenarios, design fictions, or solutions to complex problems, over a **live play period** of at least a week. Players sign up to host salient **tension discussions** through the week, and/or compete to make artifacts. For example, if the theme of the game is "climate futures" a player may volunteer to host a session on "local adaptation vs. migration." Each day, a set of such small-group tension discussions (limited to 8-10) are held in parallel during a fixed **check-in session,** during which the game master will also offer abbreviated onboarding for new players. Additionally, more *ad hoc* sessions may be held throughout the gameplay period.

Players and new tensions may be added anytime during the live play period, and the game master may choose to curate this with tight or loose permissioning. The game can even be played permissionlessly by allowing open addition of tensions.

Each day during the live play period, players are expected attend the check-in session, and pick a tension discussion to attend. The tension hosts spend half an hour explaining their tension to their breakout groups. At the end, attendees can “collect” the tension by scanning a QR code provided by the host. These show up as cards with short descriptions and optionally, a Q&A catechism in Zupass. Those who collect it must try to integrate it in the artifact they’re developing.

Tension cards may also be collected 1:1 by scanning the zupass of a player who attended the tension discussion. In this case the player sharing their card is responsible for explaining the tension to the receiver. This is highly encouraged.

At the end of the live play period, in a closing session, players present or demonstrate their artifacts in order of the number of tensions collected and incorporated, in an informal lightning talk format. Players may form teams to do so. During these presentations, the game master may choose to include previously unrevealed tensions that all players must accommodate in improvised ways. The game master may optionally impose constraints on the presentation/demonstration format, such as a prescribed template.

The game concludes with a **plurality vote** to rank the presented artifacts, and small prizes (such as swag items) are distributed.

What’s the point?

The point is to simulate real-world complex problem solving and management where constraints and tradeoffs slowly become evident through iterative refinement, with incomplete information. The process mimics the one described as “the method of successive approximations” in the classic paper by Charles E. Lindblom, The Art of Muddling Through, and seeks to inspire creative and oblique, but also pragmatic and viable visioning approaches. John Kay’s book Obliquity, based partly on Lindblom’s work, explores some of the theoretical and empirical ideas that the game seeks to model. Though there is a friendly competitive element, the point is to explore a space of

possibilities, in the spirit of an infinite game, not find definitive solutions or “win” a finite game.

How to participate as a player

Just show up at the kickoff (or at a check-in session anytime during the live play period if you missed the kickoff) and start collecting tensions and building out your artifact. If there is something relevant to the theme you think you could teach other players, frame it in the firm of an X vs. Y tension and submit it to the game master, who will schedule you to host a session if a slot is available.

How to incorporate the game into an event as an organizer

The tensions game is designed to be easily incorporated into adjacent activities. If you’re holding an event, salon, or workshop near where the game is taking place, you can just register it as an *ad hoc* tension session with the game master. All you need to do is frame an X vs. Y tension and have a way (such as a slide during the talk) to attendees scan a QR code the game master will supply.

Edge Esmeralda: Protocolozed Futures Game Review



Participants at the first live trial of the Tensions Game were tasked with imagining an artifact from a protocolized future. Their second task was to present the hypothetical artifact to the broader group at the end of the week. Teams and individuals could gain extra points by integrating additional tensions (from the tension cards they had collected) into their protocolized future. More tensions → smaller space of effective artifacts.

Participants could collect tension cards by scanning physical keychains with the Zupass app. Keychains were distributed by *tensionholders*, each of whom had created and submitted a tension to the game, such as “Honoring tradition vs. Transforming indigeneity” or “Centralized killswitches vs. Catastrophic failures”. Four tensionholders presented their cards each day, but participants could only collect two each day, adding a meta-tension to the experience.

Onboarding people to the app was somewhat difficult and the overall structure of the week was illegible for most people. However, participants found the group discussions each day engaging. Multiple protocol-based sessions were generated by the daily workshops, leading to participants hosting their own tangentially related events in the afternoons. The leaderboard, which showed which anonymous Zupass user had collected the most tensions, was another highlight.

TK… Editorial summary with a link to a full game review. Include some pictures.

Edge Lanna: TK Southeast Asia Futures?

Links go here for registering as a player, submitting a tension, submitting an ad hoc session etc.?