



Play in Organizations

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Organizations agree today that the business landscape is increasingly complex due to the intricate interrelatedness of factors on all levels. Therefore, organizations continuously want to strike a balance between quickly adapting to sudden shifts in their business environments and grasping fleeting new opportunities that may shape the environment (Oliver and Roos, 2000). Recognizing the need to make order of reigning chaos, act with awareness, as well as adapting and shaping their organizations, many managers are seeking new tools and new ways to approach their tasks.

To complement existing concepts, models and tools about new ways of working, we suggest that play, rather than work, can help organizations strike such better balances. Play is a fundamental human activity in which we both adapt and explore new possibilities. Unfortunately, play has been relegated to being the frivolous opposite of work, something that children do and certainly not adults, especially adults at work. From this perspective, play is associated to a “mindless” and “unproductive” activity distinct from work only serving the purpose to have fun, relax from work, and being together with friends in your time off or free time. Thus, play has no intrinsic value at least for the working adult¹. It is not surprising then that play has been disregarded as a serious concept in organizational studies for so long (Kellaway, 2001)

This paper explores the value of play in organizations and proposes a new concept – “serious play” - for both describing critical organizational processes and ultimately actively enhancing a source of managerial effectiveness in 21st century organizations. We begin by reviewing the many perspectives and definitions of play found in the

¹ Already in the *Republic*, Plato did not think that playing games was meant for the ruling elite. Schiller described play as “the aimless expenditure of exuberant energy.” (Schiller, 1875). The 19th Century Victorians propagated the idea that play was sinful; “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop” (Fein, Rubin, &

literature. We then consider the value of play for adults in and around organizations. Finally we propose some research questions that we hope can fuel the actual discourse in organizational studies.

What is play?

From children to adults, everyone plays! Play is a fundamental and essential human activity. Play is generally described in the literature as a multifaceted and ambiguous concept that does not lend itself easily to an integrative definition as a generic concept (Henriot, 1969; Empsons, 1955). We agree. The difficulty of defining play relies in the idea that one makes of play not the reality of play itself. The play literature is a vast domain that suggests alternative and sometimes even confusing descriptions and definitions. The vast majority of the play literature is focused on child's play, with only limited accounts of adult play. Many different forms of play are described, in the literature, like pretense or symbolic play, constructive play, sociodramatic play, play with rules, competitive play from a diversity in theoretical approaches, including anthropology, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and even mathematics. Furthermore, many attempts have been made to categorize play from different perspectives: the psychological activity of play (Château, 1946), the sociological attitude of the player (Caillois, 1958), the specific purposes of play (Similansky, 1990)². Because they focus on limited criteria relative to their different finalities and because authors often mistake classifications for definitions, classifications are deceptive and arbitrary in determining the nature of play.

The perspectives on play have evolved from a static perspective to an active one. Throughout the nineteenth century, to the beginning of the twentieth, most of the

Vandenberg, 1983). Even the 1961 Websters dictionary defined play as "any exercise of series of actions intended for amusement or diversion (Websters Dictionary, 1961).

² Similansky (1990) designed a model with five basic forms of play: functional play, constructive play, Dramatic, sociodramatic, and games with rules.

emphasis on play was on its imitative character, seeing play as a reflection of society and a contribution to the society as it is. The ancient rhetorics of play comprise perspectives of fate, identity, power, and frivolity. On the other hand, the modern rhetoric's involve a strong focus on the individual as well as characteristics of the imaginary, and different forms of progress (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Thus play can be seen as a more radical and creative process involving our human imagination producing constant alterations (Schwartzmann, 1978; Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne, 1984; and Spariosu, 1989).

The literature mostly refers to play as a pleasurable activity, involving a sense of freedom and spontaneity. It has been argued that pleasure in play, is related to the harmonious functioning of the body and mind (Groos, 1901; Château, 1946), to the cathartic release of emotions, instincts, and strength, to the sensuality, to the renunciation of immediate impulse (Vygotsky, 1978) and to the balance between the players intrinsic motivation and the challenge at stake (Duflo, 1997). According to the classic literature play always serves a purpose. Most of us may think that fun and enjoyment are the only purposes of play, but that may be limiting. When do we play? When we want to have a good time! Indeed this is the primary purpose stated in the literature, but this is not the sole purpose. We also play to compete, mostly to win, for the pleasure of the "winning feeling" or to win a tangible reward. On the contrary we also play to cooperate in an altruistic fashion, sharing an experience with significant others, (Schwartzmann, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Further, we play to escape the contingencies of everyday life, changing our mode of thought from a logic, rational, and convergent mind set to a more irrational, imaginary mind set. In this perspective the purpose is either for entertainment, or for the discovery of new experiences, and/or new alternatives. Frequently expressed emotional purposes comprise avoiding the lack of stimulation that leads to boredom, or on the opposite the excess of stimulation that leads to anxiety (Berlyne, 1960; Apter, 1989). Typically you play either to fill empty spaces of your life when you've nothing else to do, or you play to relax and get away from stressful situations. Yet another emotional purpose for play, is reaching or repeating the apex of play, described as the fleeting moment of great joy related to the achievement of ones goals. In reaching this fleeting moment we feel

complete, powerful, having overcome challenge, vanquished self-doubts as well as potential adversaries. The pleasure of achievement is essentially about feeling one's own potential in real time. Subsequently, it brings us feelings of competence, achievement, and strong emotional fulfillment.

Thus, play is characterized as a pleasurable and purposeful activity. Yet these characteristics are not sufficient. In reviewing the literature we have seen that most authors agree on the following characteristics defining play: play is a *limited, structured* and *voluntary activity* that involves the *imaginary*. These characteristics mainly stem from a stream of literature initiated by the seminal work of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1951), and contribute from the non-less important works of the psychologists Lev Vygotsky³ (1978), and Jean Piaget (1932; 1945) and the French philosopher Colas Duflo (1997).

Arguing from a historical perspective Huizinga (1955) postulated that the origins of society rely on play, implying that an imaginary situation is the basis of culture at large, through the numerous rituals invented by man being of "agonistic" (competitive nature) or religious nature (cooperative). His thesis, *Homo Ludens*, in this respect was completely new and it reversed the disrespect in which play was held until then. Huizinga defined play as a voluntary activity or occupation executed within fixed *limits* of time and place, according to rules freely accepted, but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness. In this paper, we primarily define play by a *structure* of interrelated rules involving the imagination. The rules of play are not the same rules as in every day life, they have value only in the play activity that they create and regulate. There are two types of rules in play: the constitutive and the regulatory rules. The constitutive rules have two objectives: one, to set up a structure permitting the activity of play to take place, and two, generate

possibilities for the imagination to unfold. The constitutive rules serve to constitute and limit the boundaries of the activity in space and time. The space of play is qualified by the boundaries within which the rules apply in relation to one another and to the goal of play. The time of play has a beginning and an end, which is initially set, or negotiated among the players. The length of the imaginary situation and the application of the rules are thus limited (Duflo, 1997).

The regulatory rules are the rules of conduct that are made possible by the constitutive rules. These regulate the interactions between the player and the structure of the play, consisting for example in simple strategies used by the players to adapt best. For example, chess is composed by a set of constitutive rules that limit as well as give a direction to play. Furthermore, each player chooses strategies based on the constitutive rules to adapt best to the play situation in progress.

Play is a *voluntary activity*. In play we are free to choose the rules. Upon entering play, the players initiate a contract (implicit or explicit) concerning these rules. If this contract is broken or modified along the course, then, play is put to end, at least in its primary form (Duflo, 1997). The opening and pursuit of the activity of play depends on the intrinsic motivation of the player. Play primarily involves the active free choice of the player: it cannot be forced upon us, otherwise it becomes work, or some other activity dependant on exterior forces. The interrelated structure is simultaneously constraining and enabling. The rules constrain in the sense that the player can only do what the rules dictate, and what the rules give the liberty to do. They enable because the players are free to act beyond the rules, and increase their potential to act based on the rules. Let us consider a child playing "mother" or "indian". The child cannot apply any behavior wished, but must follow the rules of maternal or indian behavior as he/she understands them.

³ Lev Vygotsky actually wrote his thesis before that of Huizinga, in 1933, but his texts were not translated from Russian and edited until the late 60's.

Nevertheless, in this understanding of the rules, degrees of freedom are opened for all sorts of imaginary possibilities to happen.

In addition, Vygotsky (1978) describes the long-term development of play as a gradual movement from an explicit *imaginary* with implicit rules (often internal motor rules) in early childhood, to an implicit imaginary situation with explicit rules (often shared social rules), which characterizes the often highly canonical play of adults.

In play, the imaginary situation permits a shift from a real world dominated by things and actions, to a world dominated by meaning, The imagination is the capacity to form mental representations, motivated by our emotional responses to the world surrounding us in three different manners: in a mimetic, productive, and parodic way which are closely interrelated in play Kearney⁴, 1989). The shifts from one to the other modes lead to what is perceived as the distortionate and divergent aspects of play. Imagination perceived that way, permits to pretend that one object, or idea, may be perceived and used as another. This process leads to the construction of metaphors, parody and allusions. For instance, in play, the same red LEGO brick may represent a car, a house, an emotion like joy or passion, or an abstract concept like speed.

The mimetic imagination is the propensity and ability to mentally reproduce or imitate the world with accuracy from ones own experience of the existing reality. The productive imagination relates to the capacity of evoking original possibilities, which can emerge from the combination, recombination or transformation of things or concepts. In this sense it is a creative imagination. Creativity comes from new conclusions about things by placing them in new relationships with one another and exploring those possibilities from

⁴ In his seminal analysis of the history of imagination, Kearney (1989) distinguishes paradigmatic shifts in society in the understanding of imagination through western society. Three paradigms are described relative to the social-historical conceptualization of the relationship between imagination and reality: mimetic imagination, productive Imagination, and parodic imagination. They provide us with an essential framework for the definition of imagination and its distinction from other similar processes such a creativity and fantasy.

an emotional affiliation. The key link between imagination and creativity lies in the opportunity that imagination provides for innovation, original changes and possibilities based upon emotional and motivational issues grounded in reality (Fein 1989⁵; Mellou, 1995).

The parodic imagination evokes the deconstruction of what we perceive as the real world. This imagination defames, contradicts, and destroys the clarity generated by representation and the sense of progress stemming from creativity (Kearney, 1988). Parody and Carnivals as forms of play are typically representative of the parodic imagination. Thus imagination is closely related, but not equal to creativity, as well as distinct from fantasy. Imagination is related to reality and thus to rules, while fantasy is related to unreality, to the transcendence of rules (Mellou, 1995), to the fictional projection of non-existent things, leading to the non-differentiation, or confusion between the real and non real (Kearney, 1989).

How do adults play?

So far we have characterized play as an enjoyable voluntary activity involving rules and imagination that occurs in a distinct time and space. We have also said that most of the literature focuses on children's play. As organizational scholars we are interested in organizational phenomena, in particular in how play may, or may not create value in organizations. Our interest in play is centered on adult play in organizations. Adult play, we suggest, is a complex and serious matter in which imagination emerges, bringing insight to the willing and active adult. Thereof we must describe qualities of adult play?

A common fact is that adults play differently than children do. One of the common rational assumptions is that children's play is uncertain, random, fantasiesque, while

⁵ For Fein, "It is the embedding of the non literal (Imagination) in the literal (rules) with the unexpected, unlikely

adult play is ruled determined, social and more rational. In fact we do not see this as the discriminating factor between children's and adults play. Adults play with a different consciousness than children do. A child perceives the world as an extension of himself, therefore play is not perceived as different from other activities that they do in the real world. On the contrary to children, adults have a strongly developed self-identity, which is well distinguished from other individuals and relate to a specific socio-cultural position. When we play, we play with our "self"; our sense of identity is put in the forefront of our play, all actions are related to our sense of who we are. In play we deeply involve ourselves, therefore we play with careful consideration and devotion. Thus, adults play for a purpose: the serious intention to gain a desirable experience beyond having simple fun. It follows, that play is an important, non-trivial matter, nor is it an idle activity; the player who voluntarily engages in it does not wish to loiter and waste their time. The ambition of playing adults, is not to reconnect with their creative childhood (even though they may feel as playful as children), but to assume the constructive potential of their adulthood directed towards some sought-after objective.

Play with a purpose

While children play for simple pleasure, to imitate adults, compensate their lack of capacities, or simply for the experience, adults play for serious purposes, beyond playfulness and the pleasure of the activity. These purposes are generally consciously sought after goals that provide the intrinsic drive to engage in the play activity. Looking deeper at how we play as members of organizations, we identify four different purposes: social bonding, emotional expression, cognitive development, and competing.

Social bonding

Social bonding is an important purpose because it brings a sense of partnership, cohesion, security and role attribution through cooperation and the expression of cultural traits. Play is inextricably linked to culture: play mediates culture, but culture also promotes the reproduction and unification of play forms (Vygotsky, 1978; Noyes, 1995). Play themes embody the actual socio-cultural meanings derived from society at large. In this sense it can contribute to alter the identity of the group, and therefore of the individual through the group. One way this can be done is by providing imaginary situations for desires to be fulfilled, or counter acted (frustrated). (Vygotsky, 1978).

The adult player is seeking to be a part of a constructive collective social interaction, with significant others, where feelings of wholeness, authenticity, patterns of coherence and total presence in a collective unity are experienced (Sutton-Smith, 1997). It is about feeling whole, masking individual differences, renewing communal identity (Sutton-Smith, 1997), and detecting patterns of interaction that can provide the basis of later social interactions (Kemple, 1994). For example, in organizations we often send people to so-called "outdoor" exercises with the latter explicit purposes.

Committing ourselves to playing we, as adults, actively learn about partnership and cooperation with appropriate partners, who can play what roles and the meanings of these roles and their interactions in the social context. There are possibilities to diversify social relationships and broaden our social repertoire, as well as opportunity to develop leadership, followership, cooperation, competition, teamwork, perseverance, altruism, etc. which all contribute to the development of a discriminative self-appraisal, and a constructive concept of the self.

Play also offers adults the opportunity to invert the cultural code, values, and norms of the real world by collectively participating in festivals, carnivals and social play. These are perceived as opportunities to create turmoil in the basic divisions of society, restoring temporarily a sense of community and balance between otherwise divided individuals or groups. Tensions generated by the conflicts with the normative culture are thus reduced

through the formation of (temporary) new communities or 'Communitas' (Turner, 1974). These Communities celebrate by instating a new order often based on the principles of equality between participants, but at the same institutionalize the opposite through inverting power or through the abandonment of inhibitions or authoritarian principles (Sutton-Smith, & Kelly-Byrne, 1984).

Emotional expression

The motivational basis of play behavior is described as primarily emotional (Fein, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). The representations used in play are in fact representations of the player's own affective knowledge. Emotions like love, anger, or fear, motivate and shape the different forms of play the player engages in, as well as the symbolic representations he produces. Therefore, through the capacity to pretend, and shift attention and roles, play is a natural setting for a voluntary or perhaps nonconscious the release of internal tensions to take place perhaps leading to a therapeutic process. Play also offers an outlet for frustration, a transitional space for the realization of unrealizable desires, or desires that cannot be dealt with immediately, through the use of imagination (Winnicott, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978).

As adults, we often perceive play as a "social laboratory": in play we are able to control the content, the roles and the outcomes while experiencing attached emotional experiences. We explore and discover, trying out a variety of different styles of communication, enacting different roles, breaking out of the constraining confinements and limitations of everyday real life, testing the potential of diverse dramatic approaches, the free expression of feelings, or experimenting the desirability and the acceptability of social behaviors.

Intellectual development

Through play, adults have the implicit intention to learn new intellectual skills. Play is a learning activity in the least that it requires learning the necessary rules prevalent to play. In extension, we always try to master the strategies pertinent to the processes of play we engage in. The process of play requires a degree of "self control" as well as the need to act against immediate self impulse, it requires a voluntary submission to rules, and involves important cognitive efforts (Vygotsky, 1978). Rules must be understood to a certain extent: one must grasp their interrelations in a system, and master the possibilities of the form of practice they constitute, as well as adapt them to our needs (Nicopoulou, 1993). This enables the connection of previously experienced information into ever more complex levels of functioning.

The psychological literature points to progress particularly in the domain of problem solving (Fein, Rubin, Vandenberg, 1983), but also to the improvement of certain skills like language, symbolic thought, focused attention, flexibility (learning to shift perspectives) and de-centration (Bruner, 1972; Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983; Smilansky & Shaftya, 1990; Berk & Winsler, 1995; Sutton-Smith, 1997).

Competing

Competing is an important purpose because it permits us to measure our own skills comparatively to those of our opponents, or our co-players. Additionally, along with a potential victory play holds promises of a possible material gain, extrinsic reward, like prizes, money, or intrinsic rewards like assertiveness, or virtue.

Huizinga believed that the major form of human play is contests and that contests have a civilizing potential, developing social influence around which the society constructs its values. From contest stems the development of social hierarchies, and the social identities that relate to them. (Huizinga, 1955)

Competing includes considerations of play and power such as hegemony, conflict, competition, manliness, and contest (Sutton-Smith, 1997), where the involvement of the player is for the glory

of winning, for the rivalry with competitors, for personal prestige and recognition, to develop "manly" skills, or to impose hegemony. Competing is not a free enterprise and is often accompanied by the expression of one's aggressiveness. Players often relate stories of some deep dark side empowering them, providing them with positive aggressive energy necessary to tackle the stress of the challenge and the fear of uncertainty. In that sense, it is about surmounting difficulty, triumphing over skill, overcoming risk, being cunning, yet, sometimes ruthless and aggressive (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

Play is perhaps always competitive to some extent, because we fight for our relative freedom on an interdependent basis: increasing one's degrees of freedom meaning the necessary reduction of the opponent's freedom and vice versa (Duflo, 1997).

Transformation

As adults, we play with a specific intention. We play the way we are, the way we could, or could not be, and through our engagement in play it shows us what we choose to do, not what we have to do. Sometimes, however we get so caught up in our play that it leads us to change who we are: we call this transformation.

Play is potentially transformative on two levels: on one's relation to the socio-cultural world as well as the relation to the individual self.. Play mirrors the conceptual resources of the existing cultural world. The roles, themes, narratives or episodes of play express the players understanding and appropriation of the socio-cultural material of society. Even solitary play is always social in that respect (Vygotsky, 1978). In constructing narratives through play, the individual player(s) draw on images and symbolic frameworks that are cognitively, emotionally, and culturally available to them which unconsciously (sometimes consciously) color their perspectives. From this standpoint play is always an exercise in individual self-definition: we all play differently, constructing different narratives.

Play provides us with the possibility, to measure the level of challenge involved. In choosing our level of risk and uncertainty according to our motivation, and skills, we optimize the challenge of the situation, avoiding boredom or anxiety. This enables us to have more focus on the means than the behavior itself (Bruner, 1972). When the level of challenge is too high the player focuses principally on his own behavior in order to match the challenge. In these circumstances, our play potentially leads us to an altered state of consciousness, where there is so much involvement in the activity that nothing else seems to matter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). There is a lasting feeling of empowerment: irrational behavior becomes safe because we feel in total control of our senses. At the same time there is a feeling of being transported to new realities, new discoveries, a push to higher levels of performance, and/or a lead to unexpected states of consciousness. The unfolding of the situation takes the player beyond the expected: “the ordinary then becoming the extraordinary”⁶. This situation is similar to the descriptions of “flow”, or “deep play” by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Geertz (1973) respectively.

Play is naturally conducive to flow because it comprises most of these characteristics: the optimization of challenge, strongly focused attention, having clear and realistic goals, providing clear feedback as to whether one is reaching the goals, having a feeling of control, being so involved in the activity that self consciousness disappears, that worries and frustrations temporarily disappear, that time is transformed during the activity. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

It is in such moments that a transformation potentially occurs leading to a profound change in one’s intrinsic feelings and values, on the personal and social levels. Consequent to this transformation, we may expand the scope of our risk taking behaviors, create novel combinations, and practice and discover new behavioral strategies. Subsequently this leads to an increase of self-confidence, and perceived or effective competence (Katz & Chard, 1989), as well

⁶ K. Blanchard, 1992. Notes on Notes: Geertz’s Cockfight and the Academic Legitimacy of Sport, in *Play and Culture*, 5, 1992, p. 262

as the construction of new social and cognitive skills, which stays closely affiliated to the situation it was experienced in (or remains unconscious for most).

Play activities are naturally conducive to flow because of the following characteristics: they enable an easier achievement of the optimal experience described as Flow. Play has rules that require the learning of skills, it has specific goals set, it provides direct feedback, control is possible, and concentration and involvement are facilitated by a distinct form from everyday activity, the imaginary situation of play (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

This situation leads to great enjoyment; therefore, players naturally wish to repeat the experience. Nevertheless, this transformation is mostly only transitory- the increased awareness felt in flow ends with the play situation, and the experience gained through the transformation does not last unless a conscious effort is undertaken to reinforce it. Furthermore, reaching flow, and experiencing transformation in one activity like play does not necessarily guarantee that we can extend the feeling, and the experience gained to other activities in life. However, we believe that the player has the possibility to learn, making meaning of the transformation through simultaneous facilitation and ex-post debriefing, which we will not discuss here.

An anecdote in C.J. Jung's biography⁷ (C.G. Jung, 1962) illustrates such a play. Around 1913, after the well-known separation from Freud and his psychodynamic doctrine, C.G. Jung was feeling disoriented and restless ignoring what the next step in his life would be. As he was being troubled by his dreams, and fruitless subsequent to numerous self-introspections, he decided to simply do what would come to mind. Shortly after, souvenirs of his pre-adolescence emerged, when he played passionately with construction games, stones and soil to build houses, towns and castles.

For Jung, this reminiscence was interpreted as a sign of his creative energy needing to be unleashed, his only salvation being in play. He recalls this as a turn of fate. It is not without a

⁷ translated into English by the authors.

grown man's feelings of utter resignation and humiliation that he began playing again, constructing with stones and gravel around a little lake in the Hospital's property as when he was a child. Morning and evening he would play, with great zeal, building, whenever there was time between his occupations with the patients. These constructions were triggering fantasies ("Imaginations") that he carefully noted down, transcribing the emotions into images, into symbols that he could use to guide him. The transformation he went through slowly liberated his thoughts; the effective constructions were somehow organizing his thoughts, making sense of his imagination, his intuition. Later, these personal thoughts would establish the foundations of his theory.

Serious Play

The kind of adult play that is important, purposeful, and potentially transformative we call "serious play". By important we mean that it is non-trivial. Because we involve our identity, serious play requires careful consideration and devotion. Having a meaningful purpose gives direction and coherence to the forms of play that we engage in. In the above we have defined four purposes of serious play. Social bonding is an important purpose because through constructive social interaction it brings a sense of partnership, cohesion, security and role attribution through cooperation the expression of cultural traits. Furthermore it allows the playful deconstruction or inversion of existent social hierarchies and normative laws. Intellectual development is an important purpose, because players have the possibility to connect previously experienced information into ever more complex levels of functioning. The serious player wishes to develop new skills, learn new rules, or improve strategies. Competing is equally an important purpose because it opens the possibility to compare skills with adversaries, potentially bringing dominion and power to the winning individual, or group. Moreover, under certain conditions (i.e. attaining an

altered state of awareness) serious play is potentially transformative; we are able to learn new skills as well as discover more about who we are and where we stand.

As organizational scholars, we are interested in how serious play may have value in and around organizations. We believe that serious play allows to shed new light, or open different perspectives on existing problematics, and issues concerning identity, people, culture, rules, and structure of an organization. Furthermore, serious play enables to underline the different links between the components of an organization, as well as how they influence one another. Moreover, serious play opens the possibility to “play out” emotional concerns embedded in the subtexts of the organizational functioning.

Discussion

If play in organizations does have the aforementioned qualities, then we may ask why we don't play more in organizations? In fact, we see that the play/work dichotomy, perceiving play as an activity with no value for the working adult, if not for “time out” from work, or to shape team spirit, is still prevalent in organizations today. Hence, there is still shame and guilt relative to playing in and around organizations, under the assumption that play is threatening, reducing the possibilities of success and social recognition.

Is play in the organization just about case studies, pretending to be a manager to better apprehend the business landscape, about outside bonding exercises or business lunches, playing golf and entertaining clients, playing solitaire on your computer when you are tired of work or is there more to it? Can play in organizations enhance imaginative thought process' as well develop new skills, enhance interactions, express the internal tensions, build competition, and compare skills and strategies between colleagues?

As we have shown, we believe that play is an essential quality of human interactions, and that serious play offers challenging possibilities regarding its implication with work environments and within organizations. We need to direct these possibilities to specific challenges regarding work. Is the challenge precisely not that of applying serious play in an effective and valuable way to the

business landscape? We believe so. In this perspective we present several implications for further research.

A first step is describing the play culture in and around organizations today. Is the play/work dichotomy still repressive in today's organizations or are we witnessing a general change towards more play in organizations? If that is the case, then, are there some types of organizations who are more inclined to adopt changes and why?

Furthermore, investigation is needed to understand how may we promote the use of play and work simultaneously in a productive, and constructive way integrating more play into work. For which purpose is it possible in the organization to re-conciliate play and work? For example switching from work, a convergent output oriented mode, to a serious play mode may be useful when more imagination is needed, in representing, deconstructing or rebuilding the process, the strategies, the structure, or the people involved in the organization. In this perspective, we might want to look at what constructivists and organizational designers already do for children in this context, building games and video games intended for learning purposes. (Kafai, 1995; Rieber, 1996; Papert, 1996; Jones, 1997)

More specifically, in the perspective to propose serious play as a concept, which permits to re-create the original settings naturally conducive to serious play and to potential transformation, we should investigate the different factors that intervene in the process. First we effectively need to explore the natural incidence of serious play as we have defined it outside and in organizations. Furthermore, investigation is needed to characterize the specific characteristics serious play: is serious play really important to adults, and how is it important to them? What are the specific purposes of serious play? Does serious play potentially induce transformation on the individual and social levels?

Furthermore, we need to know more about what happens when we play seriously? We need to describe the processes of serious play, as well as discover a methodology for observing such processes. There is more to do in this area of research, for a vast part of the play literature focuses on static descriptions of play, its components, its value, its classifications, but little is said about "playing", about the effective processes of play.

We should also investigate the context of serious play in organizations: when are we aloud and not aloud to play in our organizational environments, and if so where, and how, and who is aloud to play? We need to look at the different factors that promote and hinder serious play in and around organizations. Moreover, how is it possible to overcome the preconceptions regarding the use of serious play in organizations?

We believe that serious play is a fruitful concept, which can lead to more in depth theory and interesting applications. Seeing the positive responses of organizational members encourages us in our research. Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done, so let's play!

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