

// PLAY TO PERFORM – WHY PLAY IS THE FUTURE OF WORK

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ABSTRACT

Organizations across Canada and the United States are struggling as up to seventy percent of their employees are disengaged – a leading cause of workplace failure and dissatisfaction – which costs these economies \$500 billion in lost productivity each year. Yet the social technology to overcome this crisis exists – play. Play is essential to employee motivation, collaboration and creativity; all attributes that can help organizations innovate and better adapt to change. However, despite well-published and obvious evidence, organizations seem to have an inability to evolve their practices to pick up play – a ‘playphobia’. This MRP examines the behavioural sciences, history, philosophy, and economics to explain the causes of playphobia and highlight the market opportunity for tackling it. Using causal layered analysis, expert interviews and the K-J Method, the project presents seven design interventions managers can use to adopt play as a major tool in driving future growth and success.

Keywords: play, work, future, behaviour change, adaptability, motivation, collaboration, creativity, innovation, happiness economics, meaning, leisure, economic thought, foresight, post-capitalism, nudge, playphobia

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This MRP is dedicated to all those who put up with my stubborn curiosity throughout the years. To my Ryerson professors who taught me; to the public servants who stood up for me and mentored me; and to those since, who have helped me find my voice.

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Additionally, I would like to thank my family for not understanding why, but trusting me to make my own way. And of course, a special thank you to my partner Olga Evstifeeva: whereas I *think* about it, you *are* it.

Finally, I would like to recognize the one who helped me rediscover my inner child as an adult: my dog Cezar. Thank you for helping me realize that play means nothing in Robot Land, but it's everything in life.

/ DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to all the economists who had no idea what I meant when I told them ‘what we should do in economics is combine analysis with creativity.’

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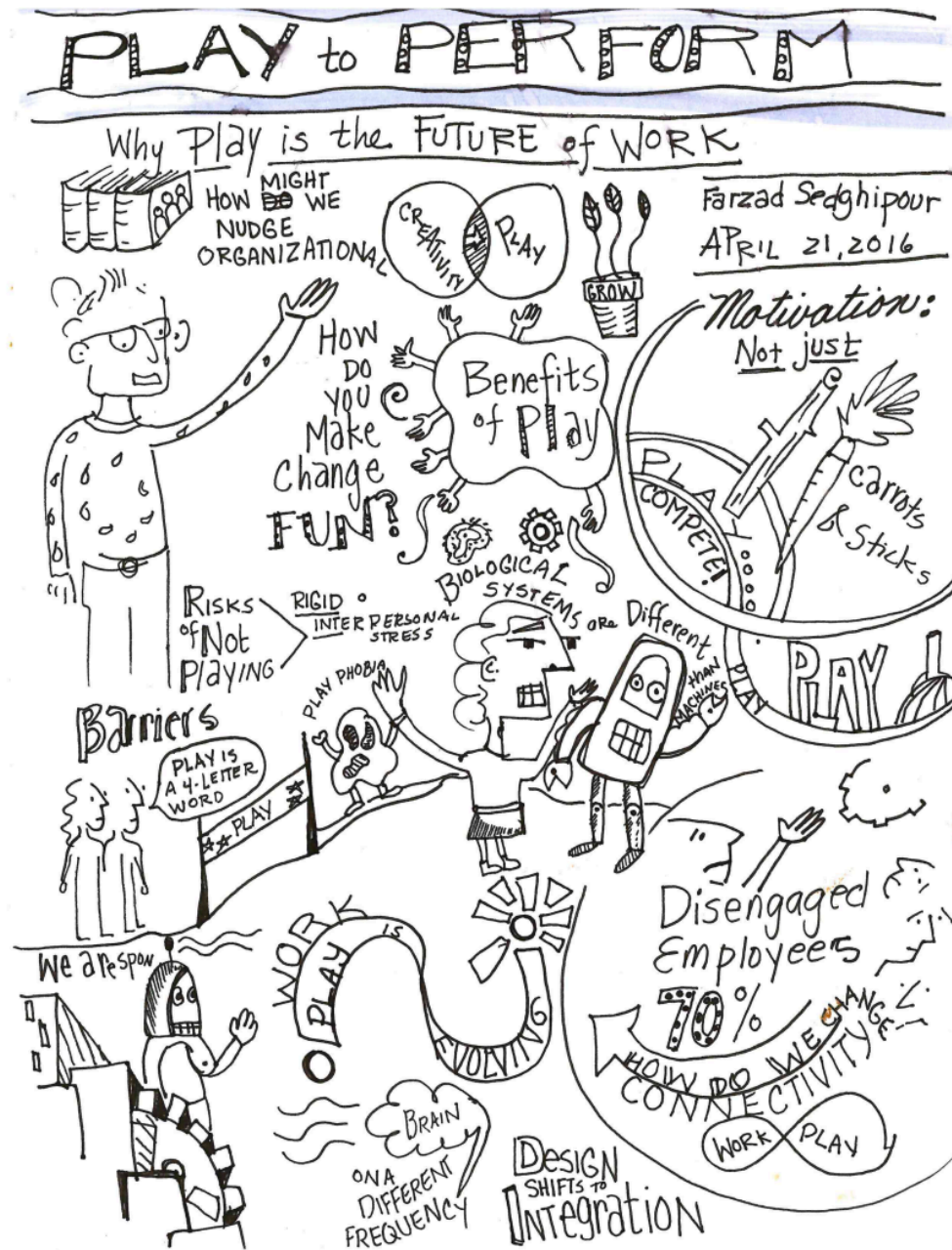
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All great truths begin as blasphemies.

- George Bernard Shaw

FIGURE 1 OVERVIEW OF THIS PAPER AS PRESENTED ON APRIL 21, 2016 BY THE AUTHOR



Illustrated by Patricia Kambitsch

/ PROLOGUE

Batman: Alfred. How does one develop mastery and become the best?

Alfred: Well Master Bruce. To develop mastery, one must practice with intention and work very hard: that is how one becomes master, I suppose.

Batman: Maybe that's true Alfred. But something is still missing.

Batman: What separates the masters of their craft from others?

Alfred: Well sir, I imagine the former love what they do.

Batman: But why do they "love" what they do Alfred? What relationship do they have to it that others are missing?

Alfred: Hmm...

Batman: Is it because of money?

Alfred: Heavens no sir, money is an outcome. And whoever loves it, never has enough. As goes with results, material gain, and consumption.

Batman: But are we not taught that people seek to maximize their utility, and are motivated by money, wealth and consumption?

Alfred: Consumption is necessary, but it is not sufficient Master Bruce. The great thinkers rarely thought of material ends as the reason for living.

Batman: Then what is missing Alfred? Is it that masters serve a higher purpose?

Alfred: You're getting closer Master. Purpose is a stronger motivator than money. Teachers – even butlers, some might say – often work underpaid jobs in order to empower future generations, to serve a higher purpose.

Batman: Right. But Alfred, purpose seems still to be external. And not all teachers are masters. When I think of a Master, I think of someone who needs no external motive to find meaning in his or her work.

Batman: Where then does such a relationship come from?

Alfred: Well Master Bruce, the relationship of masters who love their work for its own sake, comes from only one place; and that place is called *play*. For when we play, what we do, we do it for its own sake.

Batman: Interesting. Possibilities excite us all. But it's only those who connect with what they *do for its own sake* that have the drive to sustain the journey, to overcome any obstacle, to become the best, a Master.

Batman: A last question Alfred. If we know that the path to mastery is through play, then why is it that we tell people not to play in their work?

Alfred: I don't know Master Bruce. It is however, an interesting question...

INTRODUCTION

“To be playful is not to be trivial or frivolous, or to act as if nothing of consequence will happen. On the contrary, when we are playful... everything that happens is of consequence, for seriousness is a dread of the unpredictable outcome of open possibility. To be serious is to press for a specified conclusion. To be playful is to allow for unlimited possibility.”

- James P. Carse

Back in 2011, I won a senior public servant role in the Canadian Government. It was a six-figure annual salary job with a full pension, and that is when I knew it was time to leave my dysfunctional organization. So I quit in 2012. I left because I knew that despite my increased status and income security, my work was going to be a drag: 1. I lacked the agency to design my role – that was decided between my management and union; 2. My work culture was competitive and rife with internal conflicts; and 3. Despite my jazzy title, I knew that in reality, my organizations had a very low tolerance for new ideas. That is to say, that I knew that even to get excited about my work, in order to become great at it, would in and of itself feel like more (dreadful) work.

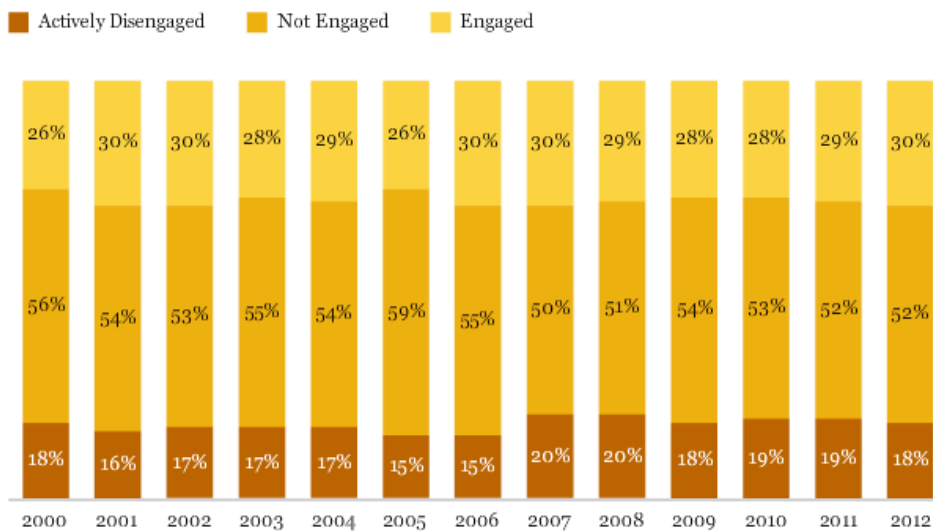
I soon realized after I had left that I was not alone. In fact, according to Gallup survey polls, both in Canada and the US about 70% of the workforce

is disengaged, a figure that costs our economies over \$500 billion in lost productivity each year.¹

FIGURE 2 CARROTS AND STICKS LEAD TO 70% WORKER DISENGAGEMENT

Only Three in 10 American Workers Are Engaged

Employee engagement remains stagnant among U.S. workers, according to Gallup's State of the American Workplace: 2010-2012 report. Only about three in 10 American workers are engaged. Meanwhile, an overwhelming seven in 10 are not showing up to work committed to delivering their best performance. This has serious implications for the bottom line of individual companies and for the U.S. economy.



GALLUP®

Source: <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/162953/tackle-employees-stagnating-engagement.aspx>

What is interesting about these numbers is that they are persistent over time: that is, neither governments nor businesses seem to know how to solve them.

¹Gallup.com
<http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/162953/tackle-employees-stagnatingengagement.aspx>

Google used to say that a good engineer was equal to ten average engineers. They did not mean that the latter had ten times the IQ. But that a good engineer was a builder, who could lead projects, develop relationships, and perform consistently at high levels, thus driving organizational growth and innovation, with little push from the company. A good engineer was engaged in their work.

In contrast, average engineers lacked the same drive and connection with their work. They passed interviews and exams well enough, when it came to being hired. But they required much greater management and intervention in their daily work in order to produce. And even more challenging were the actively disengaged employees: those who more often than not, pose a greater liability than an asset.

Of course, Google is not alone in these regards. As the above data suggests, organizations in Canada and the US routinely find that seventy percent of their employees are either not engaged or actively disengaged. And the impact of this on organizational culture, revenue growth and innovation are significant, and often negative.

Clearly, the Annual Performance Review, which was meant to alleviate such concerns, is not working. And the typical advice that is provided by organizational development and strategy experts is as mundane, as it is predictable and ineffective.

FIGURE 3 MUCH ADO ABOUT ENGAGEMENT



Source: “2016 Trends in Global Employee Engagement”, AON

Consider AON’s recent thought leadership release on the issue, entitled “2016 Trends in Global Employee Engagement” for example. In this report, the top five strategies for creating a culture of engagement are: 1) “Reduce frustration... people want work that is enabled by the right resources and tools, 2) Create a magnetic employer brand... 3) Pay & recognize people in alignment with individual and company performance, 4) Build a clear path and options for horizontal or vertical growth and 5) Provide opportunities

and feedback that enables talent to grow and develop” (AON , 2016). What have we effectively learned from these recommendations that most of us experienced managers do not know already?

Surely, it is important to raise standards at work. But does raising material standards alone resolve the problem of employee engagement? The fact that many well funded and well paying organizations² including Google, have not come up with a secret sauce for resolving employee engagement problems seems to suggest otherwise (Garman, 2013).

Of course, it is not in dispute that effective strategy is important; but people do not get excited about their work because of strategies. As Henderson (2007) notes, “at best, strategic decisions and actions can achieve *coherence*, rather than purpose over time.” That is, strategy is to tasks, what culture is to people. And the latter is what “eats strategy for breakfast”, as Peter Drucker famously reminds us. This is because culture is also where meaning in one’s work comes from, not the tasks that we do. As Kierkegaard put it, “busy people are often trying to satisfy the boredom of the soul by activity, but boredom is satisfied by meaning, not activity.” Hence, to better understand how to resolve employee engagement, we must look deeper than the standard solutions provided in standard HR and organizational development texts, or rather, we must *look at this problem with new eyes*.

² 2015. A Study of Employee Engagement in the Canadian Workplace.
<https://www.psychometrics.com/knowledge-centre/research/engagement-study>

In light of the above analysis, I hypothesize that organizational inadequacies in effectively connecting employees with their work – and each other – cannot be resolved by tactical methods and material means alone. If people lack meaning in their work, then the impact of any raise will only be temporary, and any policies such as the implementation of anti-discrimination laws can only do away with a bad, but can never turn good into great, because one can never force greatness. To explore this hypothesis, I seek to answer following four questions in this paper:

1. Does there exist a social-technology that can enable individuals to find greater connection and meaning in their work?
2. What are the key features and benefits of this technology?
3. If this technology exists and is not currently being used, what factors are limiting organizations from picking play it up?
4. How might managers implement the use of this technology within their organizations going forward?

/ MAIN IDEA AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS PAPER

“Economists and behavioral psychologists alike tend to think of life as a matter of give-and-take, cost-and-benefit, effort-and-reward. From this view, work is what you do for a benefit. If someone gets the benefit without having done the work, something is wrong. Economists and behavioral psychologists often talk of this as if it is essential human nature. But they are wrong. As far as we can tell, hunter-gatherers were living as they do now--without a concept of reward for work done--for hundreds of thousands of years before the advent of agriculture. They did not conceive of life in terms of cost and benefit. They saw it, instead, as a playful adventure. You do things because they are fun, and you share the bounty with everyone you know, regardless of what those people have been doing. Precisely because of that attitude, people willingly and joyfully did the work that needed to be done, all as part of play.”

- Peter Gray

This paper is written for managers who presumably have some agency over how work is carried out in their organizations; but the insights and advice rendered here are applicable to many people, and can be used by anyone. In my investigation into social science, neuroscience, historical philosophy, and economics, I find that we do have the social technology to help organizations effectively phase out above stated problems; it's just that we are not using it. This technology, in a word, is *play*.

Play – defined in greater detail in Chapter 2 – in short is anything that we do for its own sake, without a specific end in mind. For example, doing the “tricky” math problems that are not part of the assigned homework at school is play. To stay back at the end of the workday to help a new colleague out because you want to is play. And the odd city bus driver who sings and tells

jokes to customers on her daily route, even though she does not earn an extra dime for doing so: that is play.

The science of play is remarkable. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 1:

- Of the six motivators that we know of, play is the only *intrinsic* motivator, and also, the most powerful one.
- Play is fundamentally collaborative. There are documented cases of hungry predators ending their hunt and forming friendships with their prey (instead), through play
- And the neuroscience shows that play is where creativity comes from, because it is through play that we make new connections we never imagined possible.

Yet, as Chapter 2 will demonstrate, our organizational cultures carry enormous biases against play – a playphobia – which I attribute to six major factors:

1. **The organization-as-machine metaphor**, which limits our thinking on how humans derive meaning from their work
2. **Social problems as technological problems**, hence we often aim to solve *complex* challenges with tools designed for *complicated* problems
3. **Capitalism's out-dated and myopic view towards living systems**, wherein we continue to emphasize capital optimization – dead matter – at the expense of people and living systems
4. **Puritanism's Impact on Capitalism**, which stipulated that work is the opposite of play
5. **The Cold War as the greatest existential threat of the twentieth century**, which positioned play as a risk to our collective survival

6. **The Instrumentality of business language**, which emphasizes causes and effects, and not the nature of our relationships

Finally, in Chapter 3 I shift landscapes from science and theory to practical application. In this final Chapter, I document:

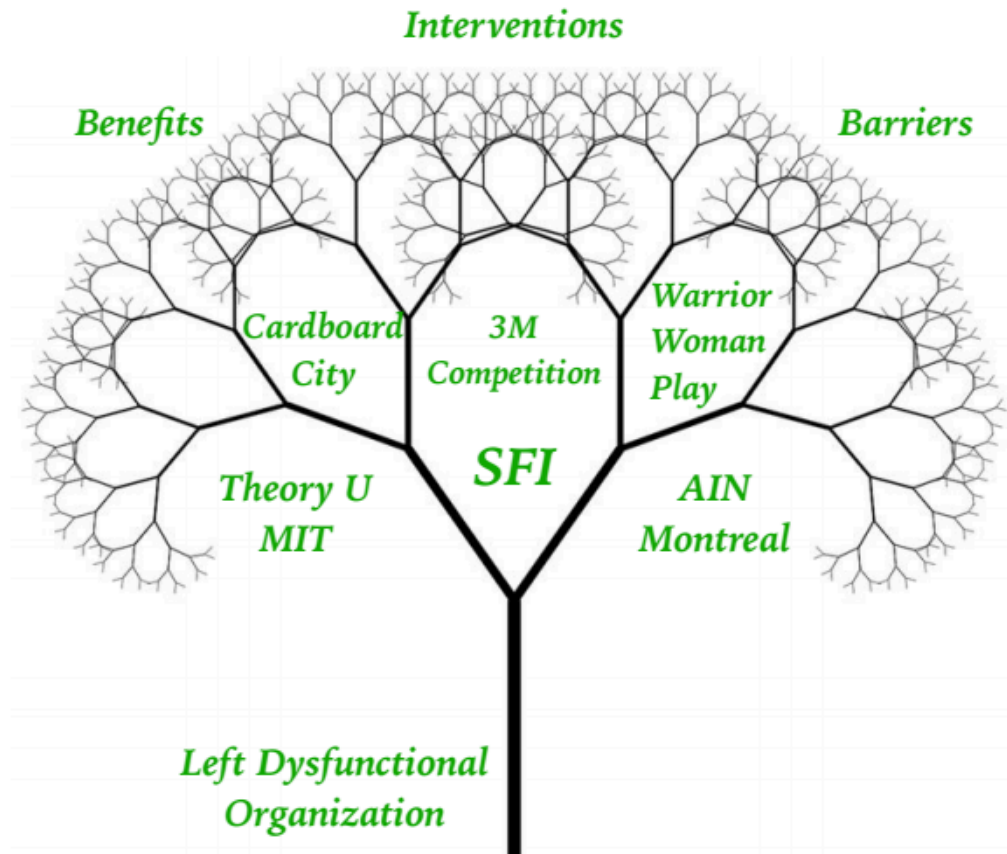
- My methods building on Theory U, POEMS reflections, performing in a play, to include Causal Layered Analysis underlying ‘playphobia’ and primary research with play consultants and K-J method to identify important insights on organizational play
- “Patterns of Play” outlining five key patterns that have emerged across industries signifying ‘how’ leading organizations are wising up to play
- Seven pathways to play, a practical guide to help managers bring play back into their organizational cultures

I finish this paper with my conclusion and suggested next steps.

But first, allow me to outline the process by which I came to this topic.

/JOURNEY AND METHODS

FIGURE 4 DIAGRAM OF EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH PROCESS



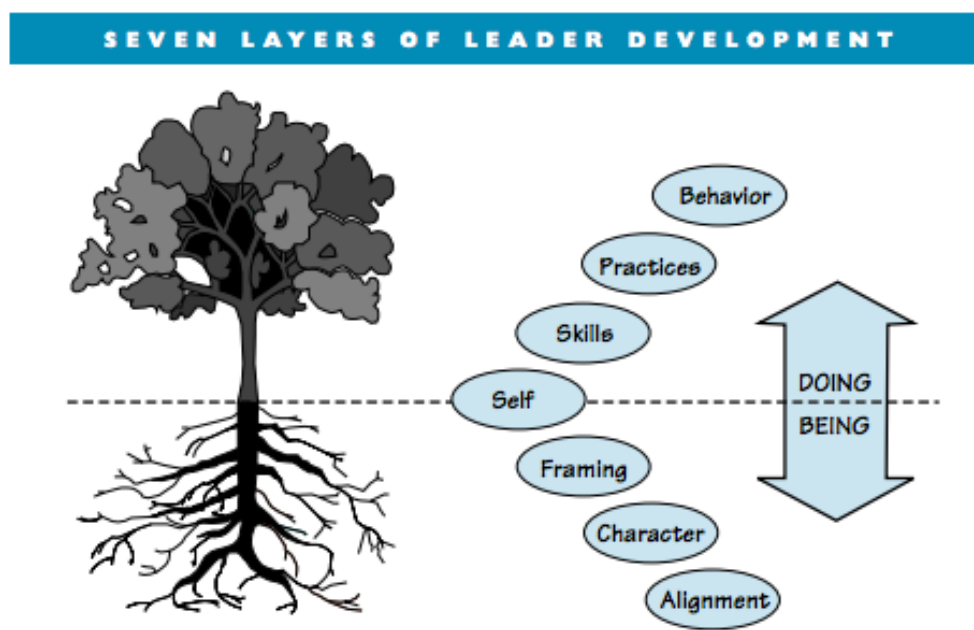
Concept by the author, illustrated by Olga Evstifeeva

I applied to the SFI Masters of Design program at OCAD University in September 2013 because I wanted to be able to marry to strong analytical background in economics and finance, with creativity and human-centered design. This process comprised of eight graduate-level courses, an internship, and a keystone-consulting project in which I created a three-year innovation strategy plan for a client. One year later he wrote me to say his revenues and staff had grown by fifty percent, the business had improved its

profitability, and they had opened a new office in Austin, Texas, all-the-while “still having fun.”

During my time at SFI, I became deeply convinced that real and long-lasting (transformative) organizational change rarely happens without deep personal transformation underlying it. That is, our focus of change has to broaden and not only to include a change in actionable skills, practices, and behaviours, but also, change of the self, and one’s being as well: framing, character, and alignment.

FIGURE 5 THE SEVEN LAYERS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE



Source: Galvin & O'Donnell (2005)

My interests in personal transformation as a corner stone for greater organizational and societal change led me to Otto Scharmer's course at MIT, based on his work under the moniker Theory U, also called "Leading from the Emerging Future", which I took in Edx.org in 2015. Through a 7-step process, Scharmer lays out how we can *evolve* - from mindlessly *downloading to performing* – and in the process, shifting the level of consciousness from which we operate. "The ability to shift from reacting against the past to leaning into and presencing an emerging future is probably the single most important leadership capacity today" he writes. "It is a capacity that is critical in situations of disruptive change, not only for institutions and systems, but also for teams and individuals" (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013).

I gained an appreciation for Scharmer's work and contributions. Theory U is values-led, multidisciplinary, collaborative, and generative. In these regards, my MRP follows on Scharmer's lead. My main criticism however relates to its user interface: Theory U requires considerable mental and emotional effort, and time to embody. Hence, I wondered if it can effectively "cross the chasm" from its early adopters such as myself, to the early majority, who have much more pragmatic needs.

My hypotheses regarding this research were born out of a 'Theory U' leadership retreat with twenty-other co-participants in June 2015, at a cottage-home north of Toronto, surrounded by nature and adjacent to Lake Simcoe. As I leaned into the challenge before me, an unexpected thought ensued. 'We talk at great lengths in innovation fields about people's

resistance to change and that is why change is so hard. But, what if change was something that came naturally to us and did not compel people to resist it? Or to put it in another way, what if change were fun?’

After submitting my first research proposal to my advisor Peter Jones, Ph.D., I was surprised to not only get a warm reception from Peter, but also from his partner Patricia Kambitsch, a teacher and an artist whom I greatly respect. Patricia told me that my ideas excited her, and she asked if I would be willing not just to study play, but practice what I wanted to preach by performing in a play called “Warrior Woman & the Planet of Robots” later on that summer.

I had never performed on stage before, and the thought of doing so brought me serious anxiety. But then, I reflected on Confucious’ reputable saying: “tell me and I will forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I will understand; get me to perform in a play live on stage as a transgendered robot from the future, and I will develop my creative confidence.” Or something like that.

FIGURE 6 THE DISPOSABLE THRONE, CARDBOARD DYNASTY



Photograph by the Author

As a primer, Patricia invited me to come see Cardboard City in July 2015, an annual event, in which artists of all ages come together for a maker session using cardboard (see example picture below). I attended the event with a researcher's hat on, and used the POEMS (People, Objects, Environments, Messages, and Services) observation frame to better understand the people

and the context for this event: What drew participants to the event? And what meaning did it have for them? I had in-situ conversations with ten participants, and the insights generated were interesting. No one I talked with had a pre-defined goal in coming, but they enjoyed the experience for itself; the opportunity to play; and to collectively create something new. “I came here to drop off my friend’s kid; okay this seems fun, let me stay” said one participant. Experienced participants told me they came back because the event “connects the past to the present” for them. Another said the event allowed her to play with new materials, and find new ways to push her boundaries. So not only were people coming to play and be creative, but also, the experience of Cardboard City helped participants experience joy and deepen their trust and community with each other.

Around the same time, we started work on “Warrior Woman and the Planet of the Robots” – based on Patricia’s graphic novel of the same name (Kambitsch, 2015). The story centres on a future where electronic devices have taken over planet earth, and Warrior Woman is the last remaining human. Her quixotic efforts to bring passion back to the futuristic robot prove null, except for one robot, Transbot.

Transbot was the character I played, whose bildungsroman story ended up driving the underlying narrative of the play. Although I still have not been able to bring myself to watch my performance as a transgendered robot from far in the future, the performance is available on YouTube, and can be found at <http://warriorwomanway.com/>.

An autodidactic reflection: In hindsight, here is what Patricia's impulse meant: to ask me to help lead her play, without any prior experience took courage. It also took courage from the other actors in the play to place their faith and trust in me. It was not always easy. I remember being frustrated one time with a fellow actress, because she kept ad-libbing her lines, thus making me mess up the lines I had worked hard to memorize. I could not figure it out at first, but then it dawned on me. The point of the performance was not to memorize my lines and spit them back out verbatim at the audience like some pre-programmed robot – how ironic – but to be alive and present in the moment, and accept what my acting partner and participating audience members gave me; to value their contributions and to build on them – i.e., to boldly answer “YES, AND...” To use business strategy as metaphor, I had to be willing to diverge from the intended strategy and let go of non-realizable plans in order to allow room for emergence and realize a new strategy. And so I did; I let go. And in doing so, I witnessed myself actualizing the character I was meant to play; or rather, *it played me* – Transbot!

FIGURE 7 WARRIOR WOMAN AND THE PLANET OF ROBOTS



Source: <http://warriorwomanway.com/>; photography by Dexter Ico

Anyone I have ever talked to after a performance has told me they come out of it with this indescribable high; as if they had been a caged bird that was finally let out and allowed to fly freely, and felt reborn once again. I have to say, my own experience reflected this sentiment. My friends told me “I saw parts of you I knew on stage, but I also saw sides of you I had never seen before.” Play as performance can be like that. Because on stage – and in the deepest forms of play – we give ourselves *permission to let go of all the things that currently define and bound us*, and in doing so, progress beyond them.

Letting go and leaning into our fears may seem an incredibly scary thought at first. We in the West in particular have been taught *ad nauseam* how important it is to be in control, *to not lose control*. In economics thought and

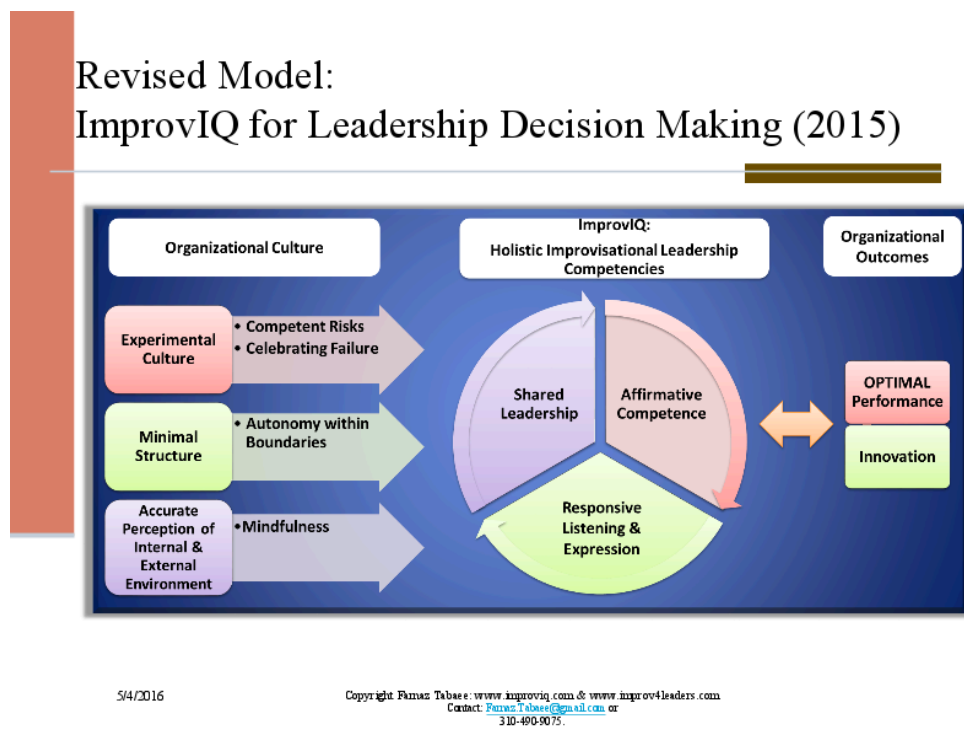
business, we teach that human motivation is linear and predictable, and can be understood and engineered in similar fashion to the way objects and machines conform to Newtonian physics. Yet, what I found in my experience was that play literally shifted my perception of how I saw the world and myself within it. And something that at I feared at first – the idea of performing on stage with no way to predict the outcomes *a priori* – literally changed from causing me fear to filling me up with joy and euphoria. It was as if I had solved a problem not by analyzing it, but as Robert Frost puts it, by going through it, and coming out on the other side transformed. *Such is the power of play.*

After our great successes with Warrior Woman, I was offered a lead role in the Broadway musical “Hamilton” in New York, which I of course rejected in order to continue my research – just kidding. Indeed, after Warrior Woman, I decided to attend the Applied Improvisation Network (AIN) annual conference in Quebec in September 2015. AIN practitioners use applied improvisation tools, mindsets and principles for personal, team, and organizational development. I was there for three-and-a-half days, and the conference as a whole attracted around 250 practitioners. It was here that I participated in several workshops relating to improvisation and conflict management, facilitation, change and adaptation, and even Theory U. In fact, many practitioners demonstrated how art-based research and techniques can and do change organizations and business.

For example, in his presentation, “The ROI of What We Do”, Andrew Tarvin of Humor that Works, demonstrated how Applied Improv workshops show

measurable results in reducing organizational stress and turnover, and increasing productivity and engagement. In another presentation, Dr. Tabae discussed her Ph.D. dissertation entitled “Effects of improvisational techniques in leadership development”, in which she finds organizational leaders to report sustained improvements in listening, teamwork, leadership and decision making, three months after only one 3.5 hour improv led workshop (Tabae, 2013).

FIGURE 8 DEVELOPING LEADERS’ IMPROV IQ FOR LEADERSHIP DECISION MAKING



Source: AIN Conference 2015, workshop by Dr. Tabae (updated slide)

It was at AIN, that I became increasingly confident that play and

performative methods – although a challenging zone for most academics and business thinkers alike – are both fun and powerful tools for change that are being underutilized across academia, business, non-profit and government. Hence my goals with this research, methodologically speaking, were no longer to use social science methods to come up with evidence in support of play, *per se*. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, there is plenty of evidence highlighting the neurological, cognitive, and social benefits of play already, and many of us inherently know these conclusions to be true. But play is not getting any pickup by organizations. There is thus, a deeper pathology here. The metaphors we have for how we structure our thinking, our expectations, and our actions seem in of themselves systemically biased against play (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) – a playphobia. In Chapter 2, I inference from a wide array of disciplines – economics, complexity theory, religious philosophy, history, and linguistics to construct 6-critical factors that currently serve to undermine organizational pickup of play. Lastly, in the spirit of a design degree that centers innovation, I aim to be generative, and use expert interviews and the K-J method in Chapter 3 to propose seven pathways to play managers can undertake for bringing play and its benefits back into their organizations.

Lastly, a *nota bene*: the author competed in OCADU's 3M – 3 minute thesis competition in March 2016, and won *both* 2nd Place and People's Choice Awards.

/ SCOPING AND LIMITATIONS

“Play is the highest form of research.”

- Einstein

A potential limitation of a research project of this nature is that its scope is intentionally broad. This is because play is an innate and evolutionary behaviour that is also pre-cognitive, representing a way of sense making that precedes the Apollonian– ‘rational’ – way of understanding the world, to borrow from Nietzsche. And while I attempt to focus on the key organizational benefits of play here, the instrumentalist logic of the typical social sciences lens through which some of the research is presented, at best provides only a partial understanding into play – in the same way it might be difficult, for example, to fully appreciate the English language, by describing it using mathematical formulae alone $\int e^x = f(u)^n$ [wink, wink].³

The term “organizations” is also intentionally used in a broad sense throughout this paper, to speak to any institution or association that currently operates in the modern Western business and economic milieu. Certainly, most have their own cultures and some are more playful than others. But overall, these contexts are play phobic in the way they exist today; hence, I believe most organizations can benefit from at least some of the design recommendations prescribed in Chapter 3, although perhaps

³ For example, play not only impacts the observable actions of individuals (behaviours, practices, and skills) but also the *self* and the very *being* of individuals (framing, character and alignment); attributes that are not easy to study given current social science methods (Galvin & O'Donnell, 2005).

these recommendations could be more detailed if the scope of this project were limited to a specific industry.

Lastly, the seven pathways to play proposed in Chapter 3 could benefit from further experimentation and refinement. I did try to explore some of these interventions with a partner company at MaRS Innovation. However, the time and scope needed to do so proved be greater than my initial assessment with one of the managers there. Now that I have defined my pathways however, perhaps they can be evaluated further in other graduate work or innovation/play labs in the future.

Lastly, play is complex and culturally specific. Specific forms of play that work with one group may fall on deaf ears or disengage others. For example a group of older accountants may show little enthusiasm for remote-controlled fart machine, while a team of young technicians might exude the opposite sentiment, and be fascinated by the machine's advanced technology - or possibly, even the opposite. Hence, while the seven pathways to play are conceptually strong, they are by no means the final word, and the nascent field of organizational play research stands to benefit from additional scientific and arts-based research experiments. I will address some of these opportunities in the final section of this paper, the Conclusions and Suggested Next Steps.

CHAPTER 1: THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

“Play is the essential feature in productive thought.”

- Einstein

Once upon a while ago, a toddler girl named Jane brought a bunch of wrinkly earthworms she'd found in her garden into her bed and was mesmerized by how they could move without any legs. Many mothers walking into the bedroom to witness their daughter brandishing muddy worms on her bed might have admonished their child; but not Jane's mother. Instead, she acknowledged Jane's joyous and playful curiosity, and after conversing with her about what she was witnessing, her mother asked Jane to take the worms back to the garden so as not to have them die.

A few years later at the age of four and a half, Jane once hid in a henhouse for hours, trying to understand where hen eggs came from, as she could not see a hole big enough in the hens for laying such sizable eggs. When her family eventually found her later in the night, instead of scolding her for being away and worrying the family sick, Jane's mother again encouraged Jane to share her curious discoveries with their family.

Recognizing that animals were the focus of Jane's play, Jane's mother bought her books that centered on them, such as Dr. Doolittle, which helped Jane begin to read at a rapid clip. And Jane delighted in reading such books; imaging herself talking to parrots and squirrels, and even convincing her kindergarten classmates that she could do so.

At the age of 10, Jane bought the book *Tarzan of the Apes* with her savings, and dreamt of growing up, going to Africa, living with wild animals, and writing about them.

Several years later when Jane had grown up, her family, not being able to afford her a college tuition, paid for her to take a secretarial course, which she completed while working as a waitress (Kennedy, 2015).

Soon after at the age of 23, having saved enough money to travel to Kenya, Jane took a boat to Africa, where she met Dr. Leakey, who hired her to work for him in Gombe Stream National Park over the next five years, studying mainly chimpanzees.

Having no formal training in the sciences, Jane did everything wrong. She began living amongst chimpanzees, forming relationships with them as individuals, and naming, instead of numbering them, and seeking to understand their behaviour and culture, in relation to human behaviour.

In fact, Jane acknowledges now that not having an academic background in the sciences was her greatest advantage: for her motive for her research was out genuine curiosity and nothing external, and this intrinsic motive enabled her to act in the field in ways that scientists who had been trained otherwise never could; and as a result, see what they never were able to see.

For example, it was Jane's work demonstrating chimpanzees as toolmakers that first shook the scientific community, for that designation had been attributed only to humans until then.

In fact, we now know that chimpanzees have very similar genetic and behavioural makeup compared to human beings. Regarding behaviour Jane demonstrated to us that chimpanzees were fundamentally playful – even clowning – as well highly collaborative, and innovative, in how they learned and adapted to their environments; all views that countered the prevailing scientific paradigm that chimpanzees must be – like other creatures – driven by external instincts for power and survival, competitive, patriarchal, and purposive in their behaviours. Moreover her work revealed that chimpanzees had personalities, thoughts, and emotions; characteristics only ascribed to the human animal at the time.

Jane's work demonstrated that the prevailing scientific views came from confirmation biases or cultural cognitive biases that supersede scientific thinking altogether, causing scientists to look for or only see evidence of behaviour that supported their beliefs – something that we know is systemic human thinking problem now, thanks to works of Nobel Laureates such as Daniel Kahneman and Vernon Smith, among others.

I'm talking here of course of the story of the most famous primatologist in the world, Jane Goodall, whose landmark studies of chimpanzees shook the scientific community and forced the redefining of our understanding of humans and animals.

What made Jane Goodall so exceptional?

Well, in her own words, it was her extraordinary mother, who always supported Jane to pursue her natural curiosities, irrespective of the

conditions and pressures of the world. It was Jane's mother who despite the remarkable odds, told Jane that she could in fact become anything she really wanted, if she were willing to work for it. And it was Jane's mother whom critically never allowed Jane to lose her childhood sense of play, and in doing so, empowered Jane to pursue an innovative and trailblazing career, which has forever changed our understanding of humans and animals.

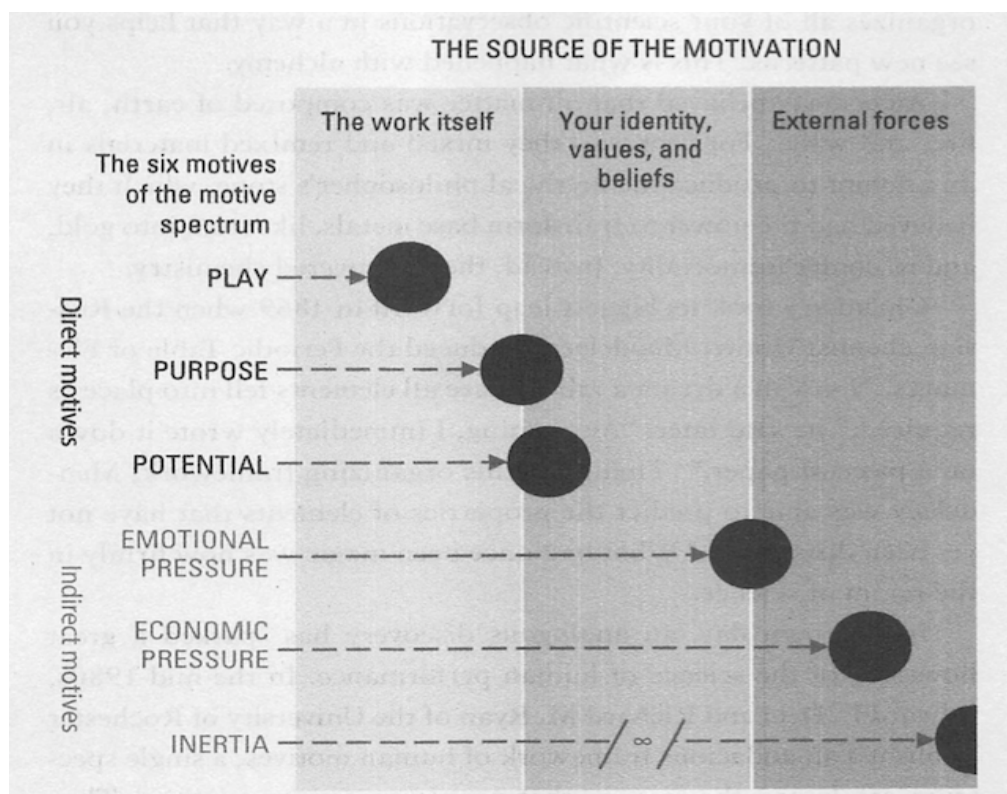
/PLAY AS MOTIVATION

“Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays”

- Friedrich Schiller

We might think that the top source of motivation for human beings is some form of external reinforcement – a proverbial carrot or stick. But the number one source of motivation for human beings is play.

FIGURE 9 THE MOTIVE SPECTRUM



Source: Doshi & McGregor (2015)

The diagram above illustrates a spectrum of the sources of motivation based on Deci & Ryan's "Self-Determination Theory" (6): play, purpose, potential, emotional pressure, economics pressure, and inertia.

Starting with the latter, **Inertia** – amotivational, non-regulated – is the most indirect of motives. If your motive for working is inertia, it means you are simply working because you believe you are expected to do so and have little to no connection with the work itself. As unfortunate as that might sound, research shows that inertia is "surprisingly common in the workplace" (Doshi & McGregor, 2015).

Next, **Economic pressure** – extrinsic motivation, extrinsic regulation – is to do an activity simply for the reward or to avoid punishment. If you are working simply for the money or to avoid getting laid off, well, to quote Peter Gibbons from the movie *Office Space*, "You know Bob, that will only make someone work just hard enough not to get fired."

Emotional pressure - extrinsic motivation, introjected regulation - motivated work that is driven by your perception of yourself and how you feel others view you. If you became an accountant or an engineer because it is what your parents wanted for you, your driver is not the work itself, but emotional pressure.

Potential – extrinsic motivation, identified regulation - is when you find a second order motivation for work that identifies with your beliefs or values. Say for example, you are a high achieving business consultant and want to become partner in three to five years. But you know that to be considered,

you likely need an MBA. You may pursue your MBA because this degree gives you the potential to achieve your career ambitions at work.

Purpose – extrinsic motivation, integrated regulation – is when you work because you identify with the impact your work might have. An example might be working on medical devices because they save people’s lives or for a social enterprise because you believe in your organization’s cause.

Last, but not least, **Play** – intrinsic motivation, intrinsic regulation – is when the motivation for work is the work itself. Maybe you regale in writing clever social commentary through Tweets, or trouble shoot mechanical problems with your hands, or maybe you love running participatory design workshops that engage stakeholders, or maybe you love to outdo yourself every time you open a new discounted cash flow (DCF) spreadsheet. Whenever you are engaged in work in which your primary motivation is the work itself, your motivation is play, the strongest source of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

As Doshi & McGregor (2015) point out, leading companies such as Toyota, W.L. Gore & Associates, Google, Zappos, and Southwest Airlines all recognize the benefits of play, and empower their companies through it by providing workers free time and resources to explore and share their ideas – more on that in Chapter 3.

What is play at work? Consider Gray’s simple test “when we are not playing, what we value most are the results of our actions” (Gray, 2009). That is, if you or your organization are focused more on the outputs of your work

rather than the relationship to the process by which they are produced, you are likely not taking advantage of the number one motivator we know to exist, play.

A number of organizations are increasingly adding playful artefacts to their workplaces to show that they value work-life balance. Certainly, work-life or work-play balance is better than work-play imbalance. But, work-play balance is also *not* work-play integration, which is what I argue for in this paper. As Doshi & McGregor (2015) put it, “play at work should not be confused with your people playing Ping-Pong or foosball in the break room. For your people to feel play at work, the motive must be fuelled by the work itself, not the distraction. Because the play motive is created by the work itself, not the distraction, play is the most direct and most powerful driver of high performance.”

What the authors are warning here is for organizations not to mistake the steak for the sizzle. While many might see play activity as a counterbalance to work, what makes play a strong motivator is that it creates a stronger connection with the work we do itself, work, as well as our organization’s cause or purpose. As Dan Pink puts it in his book *Drive*, “in business, we tend to obsess over the “how”—as in “Here’s how to do it.” Yet we rarely discuss the “why”—as in “here’s *why* we’re doing it.” But *it’s often difficult to do something exceptionally well if we don’t know the reasons we’re doing it in the first place*” (Pink, 2011). And the most powerful why there is the work itself i.e., play.

As the motivational framework above outlines, if we want employees to become their best, we must enable them to connect with their work through play. In fact, the motivation researcher Edward Deci once wrote “the proper question is not, ‘How can people motivate others,’ but rather, ‘How can people create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves?’” (Deci & Flaste, 1995).

It is interesting for this researcher to observe that the literature on motivation has been arguing for play for at least twenty years, yet this has barely gotten any pickup by industry. Such insights lead me to investigate factors limiting the uptake of play within organizations in Chapter 2. For now, let us explore two other important qualities of play for organizations, its potential to spark collaboration and creativity and innovation.

/PLAY AS COLLABORATION

“Culture arises and unfolds in and as play.”

- J. Huizinga

Dewey & LeBoeuf, was formerly one of America’s top law firms. Yet in making the competitive pursuit of money its core value, it created a toxic business culture that that eventually led to its demise and bankruptcy in 2012.

The New York Times wrote about it famously as such (Lattman, 2012):

Many observers say the root causes of Dewey's fall are not unique. Several of the largest firms have adopted business strategies that Dewey embraced: unfettered growth, often through mergers; the aggressive poaching of lawyers from rivals by offering outsize pay packages; and a widening spread between the salaries of the firm's top partners and its most junior ones. These trends, they say, have destroyed the fabric of a law firm partnership, where a shared sense of purpose once created willingness to weather difficult times. Many large firms have discarded the traditional notions of partnership - loyalty, collegiality, a sense of equality - and instead transformed themselves into bottom-line, profit-maximizing businesses.

Business stories such as these illustrate the tragic consequence of eroding community and culture in the name of economic pursuit. In fact, much of what we believed about the drivers of human behaviour and our competitive natures seem to have been misguided or wrong.

In "The Unselfish Gene," Harvard business professor Benkler (2011) argues that the preponderance of new evidence from neuroscience, biology and the behavioural sciences beckons us to "add 'natural cooperation' as a third fundamental principle of evolution beside mutation and natural selection."

Benkler develops his argument by unpacking the fallacies of "rational actor theory", noting Elinor Ostrom's 2009 Nobel Prize-winning work in economics, which articulates the commons as the key to long-term, well-functioning, and sustainable systems. Benkler then offers a review of dozens of studies in evolutionary biology and psychology. In landmark compendium, Benkler flatly states, "In no society examined under controlled conditions have the majority of people consistently behaved selfishly."

Of “homo economicus” – the character central to the development of Western economic thought and theory the last half-century, distinguished behavioural economist Richard Thaler said in a recent interview “are highly rational creatures capable of complex calculations, devoid of emotion, never having self control problems an they are complete jerks. I call these fictional creatures *econs*, and I believe for the last 50 or 60 years, economists have devoted themselves to studying fictional creatures. They might have as well been studying unicorns, because there are no *econs*. They don’t exist. And so we have very fancy models of fictional creatures (Vedantam, Episode 16, 2016).”

It seems then that economists got the whole thing upside down. We seem to be fundamentally collaborative, that is until the games we play are designed to erode this quality out of us. In fact, even the word competition is rooted in collaboration. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) notes that the root of the word “compete” comes from the Latin *con petire*, which means ‘to seek or thrive together.’ That is, competition comes from the more playful “hey, I’ll race you to the pond” rather than a “winner-takes-all” paradigm, as we’ve been encultured to believe.

An interesting study demonstrates this discord. Researchers Warneken & Tomasello (2008) at the Planck Institute conducted a study wherein a toddler is placed beside a researcher, who is working on writing a letter when – oops! – The researcher accidentally drops her pen. She reaches down to get the pen, but cannot reach it. What does the toddler do then? Seventy-eight percent of toddlers dropped the toy they were playing with at the time,

in order to go over and help the struggling researcher retrieve her pen.

When this “accident” was repeated multiple times by the same participants, the tendency to help climbed up to 89%.

Ironically however, when these same toddlers were incentivized to help the researcher in question with a reward, this reduced their desires to help (down to almost 50%). This study had demonstrated an interesting and counterintuitive phenomenon: by externalizing the motive to do the right thing and help, the research designers had effectively disrupted the toddlers’ natural compulsion to collaborate, and made the decision a matter of rational calculation about the benefits of helping – in other words, what is in it for me? This phenomenon actually has a name in the behavioural sciences. It is called the “cancellation effect”: when a person’s motive to do the right thing is cancelled out by poor organizational design (Murayama, Matsumoto, Izuma, & Matsumoto, 2010). And the cancellation effect is pernicious across organizations that center on economic and emotional pressures to motivate behaviour (Pink, *The Puzzle of Motivation*, 2009) – that is, most of them.

Similarly, Clay Shirky in his book *Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into Collaborators* notes a study conducted across day-care centres in Israel, in which in the intent to reduce late daycare pickups by parents, daycare centers imposed a fine for pickups that were more than ten minutes late. Yet, late pickups at daycares actually *increased* significantly as a result of this “deterrent”. Shirky explains this counterintuitive outcome thusly: By making a former personal and social transaction a market one,

the introduction of a fine reduced parents' inclinations to see daycare workers as people with whom they were building a long-term relationship with. He concludes, "introducing the fine killed the previous culture by altering the way the parents viewed the workers, and that culture stayed killed even after the fine was rumoured" (Shirky, 2011). In general, when the design of a behavioural solution makes the original problem even worse, this is called the "cobra effect."

If our conventional thinking suggests that humans are primarily competitive instead of relational and cooperative, how does play serve to enhance collaboration?

Someone once said that Wikipedia is a business model that works really well in practice, just not in theory. This is because when Wikipedia first came out, most wrote off its chances of ever succeeding. In his TED Talk "the Puzzle of Motivation", Dan Pink tells the story thusly,

In the mid-1990's Microsoft started an encyclopaedia called Encarta. They employed all the right incentives. They paid professionals to write and edit thousands of articles. Well-compensated managers oversaw the whole thing to make sure it came in on budget and on time. A few years later another encyclopaedia started — A different model — Do it for fun. No one gets paid a cent or a euro or a yen. Do it because you like to do it. Now 10 years ago if you had talked to an economist ... anywhere ... and said "Hey, I've got these different models for creating an encyclopaedia — If they went head to head who would win? 10 years ago you could not have found a single, sober economist anywhere on planet earth who would have predicted the Wikipedia model. This is the Titanic battle between these two approaches. This is the Ali-Frazier of motivation, right, this is the Thrilla in Manila, alright — Intrinsic motivators vs extrinsic motivators.

While MS Encarta closed shop in 2009, never to be seen or heard of again, the collaborative platform Wikipedia is now the world's number one encyclopaedia and one of the top ten most-visited websites on the Internet. The former embraced indirect motives such as economic and emotional pressure, while the latter chiefly relied on play and purpose.

Most forms of play of course are deeply collaborative. You can easily see this by looking at the lead users of play, children and dogs. Get them excited about play, and they will collaborate with you on almost anything, be it to go on an adventure, play catch, or even clean up the bedroom – well, the last one might be a little bit more challenging with your dog, but you never know until you try ;). In his book *The Well-Played Game*, play practitioner Bernie DeKoven notes that not only does play increase our chances of reaching flow, but play shifts the landscape from “me” to “we,” in which as the person playing with me, whatever I want for me, I want for you: because the better you are, the better we are together, and when we both are both playing together at our best, we are smarter, more alert, and more alive. De Koven calls this state of being and play “CoLiberation.” Coliberation has Gestalt qualities, in which “depending on how we create it, the WE creates us” (De Koven, 2013).

In fact, I would argue that without play, it is very difficult to sustain a collaborative relationship, even if all parties involved do have that intention to start. This is because humans are tribal creatures with a strong need for social belonging, as strong as our need for food (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2009).

It is when we perceive someone as different that our brain functioning changes, our cortisol “fight or flight” hormone levels go up, and our capacity to empathize drops significantly. Play behaviour however signals ‘safe social interaction’, which circumvents these physiological threat responses from unfolding, and opens up the channels for building trust (Rock, 2008). Play therefore reduces our automatic threat response in working with others who are different, and allows us to ‘relate’ to them more.

To conclude this section, I leave you with one of the more dumbfounding examples I have come across documenting the power of play’s ability to override differences in nature. In his TED Talk, “Play is more than just Fun”, Dr. Brown outlines an incident in northern Manitoba, where-in a wild male polar bear approaching a campsite while in a determined predatory gaze, is confronted by a female husky, who immediately goes into a play bow, wagging her tail. And something very unusual follows. The polar bear gets up on his hind legs overlooking the much smaller husky, and then... [t]he two of them begin “an incredible ballet; a play ballet.”

FIGURE 10 PLAY OVER-RIDES THE CARNIVOROUS DIVIDE BETWEEN PREDATOR AND PREY



Source: www.facebook.com/amazingWorld

If play is so powerful that it can override the differential power dynamics of a hungry predator and its prey, then imagine what it can do to ignite a spirit of collaboration within your organization.

/ PLAY AS CREATIVITY & PLAY AS INNOVATION

“If people never did silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done.”

- Wittgenstein

Working out of Intel’s offices in the 1980s, its then executives Andrew Grove and Gordon Moore came upon a startling realization: their Japanese competitors would soon be able to start undercutting Intel on the production of memory chips, and if this were to happen, the two of them would surely be fired by the company’s board of directors. So they looked at each other and said “why don’t we do it ourselves?” They then fired themselves and walked out of the door. The next day, the two returned pretending to be the new super executives hired by the board to turn the company’s fading fortunes around. And almost immediately (after acting out this make believe scenario), the answer they were looking for revealed itself: Intel would leave the memory chip business no matter the cost of internal resistance, and the two eventually steer the company into designing and creating microprocessors, for which Intel is now famous (Brown, 2009).

Since early humans started capturing their expressions in material form, we have known that playing helps us imagine and create. Plato contemplated play as the drive to learn, writing “do not ... keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play.” The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget said more recently “play is the answer to how anything new comes about.” Now,

behavioural research and neuroscience is demonstrating these intuitions more explicitly.

In their study entitled “Do big-brained animals play more?” (Iwaniuk, Nelson, & Pellis, 2001) the authors find a positive relationship between play behaviour and brain to body size. Burgdorf, et al. (2011) actually demonstrate that play behaviour stimulates nerve growth in both the amygdala and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex – the mammalian and cognitive parts of the brain responsible for emotional and cognitive intelligence, respectively. In fact, in his studies on grizzly bears, world leading ethologist Bob Fegan notes that bears that play more compared to their peer group, have a higher rate of survival. When pressed to explain he notes “in a world continuously presenting unique challenges and ambiguity, play prepares these bears for an evolving planet (Brown, 2009) – we will return to more about play and adaptation shortly. It is for the above reasons that I contend it is by no coincidence that the smartest species on land, ocean, and air – humans, dolphins, and crows, respectively – also happen to be the most playful. For “the genius of play” as Dr. Brown writes, “is that, in playing, we create imaginative new cognitive combinations. And in creating those novel combinations, we find what works.”

In his 2009 paper cited earlier, the evolutionary psychologist Peter Gray details the playful behaviours of hunter-gatherer societies who used play to learn, enhance social cohesion, and improve survival, noting that even productive work in these societies came from a place of play. But collectively, we have noticeably lost our sense of play in our work since the

Agricultural and Industrial revolutions. This may be because division of labour and strong emphasis on tactical execution left little room for peasants, farmers, and factory workers to be creative in their work, so industrialists and efficiency experts such as Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor saw play mainly as competing with the work to be done. But times have changed. And the role of labour as Ford and Taylor envisioned in the past, is increasingly becoming automated. In order to effectively solve interconnected social, technological, economic, environmental, and political challenges we face today, modern organizations need their employees to be creative. As Dunnis Gunton once wrote, “anyone who can be replaced by a machine deserves to be.” And to quote John Cleese, “if you want creative workers, give them enough time to play.”

What can play do to amp up the innovative capacity of your organization?

Take the Dissertation findings of MIT PhD engineer Barry Kudrowitz, entitled “(Kudrowitz, Haha and Aha! Creativity, Idea Generation, Improvisational Humour, and Product Design, 2010)Humour, and Product Design” (2010). Kudrowitz designed a series of experiments to teach improvisational play methods and test subjects on remote association, cartoon caption (creativity), and nominal product brainstorm tests. The three key findings of his study are as follows:

- 1) “The ability to quickly generate many ideas is strongly correlated ($r^2 = 0.82$) with being able to come up with a single, promising creative idea.”

- 2) “Improvise comedians on average produced 20% more product ideas and 25% more creative product ideas than professional designers.”
- 3) “All these books [Whack on the Side of the Head, Tinkertoys, Serious Creativity, Six Thinking Hats, and Lateral Thinking] treat creativity and idea generation as play. Playfulness has been found to correlate with divergent thinking, associative fluency, and higher scores on creativity tests. Simply having fun and being in a state of positive affect arouses curiosity, reduces anxiety, and engages creativity, and was shown to increase creative thought processes.

Other findings on play and creativity include (Proyer & Ruch, 2011) who show a strong association between adult playfulness and creativity, “especially the fun and silliness aspects of playfulness”. And (Dodgson, Gann, & Salter, 2005) argue that play mediates the transfer from ideas to action, writing in their book entitled *Think, Play, Do* that “Play is the linchpin between the generation of new ideas and their articulation in practice. It enables thought to be put into action virtually, harnessing innovation technology for speed, efficiency, focus, and accuracy. Play gives shape to ideas, enabling selection, manipulation, and learning about possibilities and focusing the mind of doers on action.”

For the interested reader, I suggest reading the following works: “The Play Time Manifesto: Why having Fun Makes us Better Workers” by Kim Leeder (2014), or “Effects of Improvisation Techniques in Leadership Development” by (Tabaee, 2013), or “Playing at Work: Organizational Play as a Facilitator of Creativity” by West (2015).

My synthesis of the literature presented above and other readings on play are as follows. Play has two core properties: 1) play is God's/biology's connective tissue: play connects us more deeply within ourselves (motivation), with each other (collaboration), and with new ideas (creativity and innovation). And 2) play is the means by which we adapt to change. As the play theorist Sutton-Smith (2001) summed it up, 'play is fundamental to our evolutionary biology because as 1) evolution is characterized by quirky shifts and latent potential, 2) redundancy, and 3) flexibility, all of which are catalyzed by play.'

In fact, in my interview with play expert Bernie De Koven, he said "that playfulness is ultimately a survival skill, to respond to change and create community" (2015). To conclude this section, I leave managers with the following question. If as business scholar Leon C Megginson wrote, "it is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive, but those who can best manage change," then in a world where change is the only constant, can your organization afford not to play?

CHAPTER 2. THE SOURCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL PLAYPHOBIA

“In scholarship the denigration of play in intellectual terms is shown by the absence of the key term play from the index of almost every book about the behavior of human beings. It is true that increased research attention has been given to play within psychology in recent decades, and within biology throughout this century, but there is still much more resistance to the subject than is justified, given its universal role in human behavior.”

- Sutton-Smith, Brian.

The purpose of this chapter is three things:

- To provide a more comprehensive definition of play
- To present six factors that negatively influence our beliefs and attitudes towards play at work
- To highlight the consequences of playphobia

My hope is that by reading this chapter, managers will have the ammunition to understand where businesses' play phobic culture stems from, and what the status quo represents about their underlying relationships and values towards work. In Chapter 3, I build on the material presented here to demonstrate how other organizations have moved the needle on play in their work cultures, and how you can too.

/ *DEFINING PLAY*

“Work and play are words used to describe the same thing under differing conditions.”

- Mark Twain

Play has proven challenging for scholars to define. The term play is of “precarious ontological status” writes Nagel (2002), “with categories lacking mutual distinction.” There are in fact at least 83 different definitions of the word “play” according to wordnik.com (De Koven, 83 Definitions of Play, 2010). Here I do not wish to delve too deeply into the definitional challenges regarding the word “play”. Those interested in the topic can read Huizinga (1971), Caillois (2001), Eberle (2014) among others, along with SuttonSmith’s aptly named book titled *The Ambiguity of Play* (2001).⁴

Eberle (2014), defines play as: “an ancient, voluntary, ‘emergent’ process driven by pleasure that yet strengthens our muscles, instructs our social skills, tempers and deepens our positive emotions, and enables a state of balance that leaves us poised to play some more.”⁵ To this, I add Gray (2009)’s distinction between play in children and play in adults, wherein he

⁴ SmithSutton (2001) cites play as “amphibolous” meaning it goes in two directions at once and it is not clear. Others have called it “liminal” or “liminoid”, meaning it occupies the threshold between reality and unreality. Many play theorists describe play as “autotelic” meaning it has an end or purpose in itself. Play has been conceptualized as about progress (cognitive development), fate (games of chance), power (competitive sports), identity (festivals), creativity (art), and self-development (peak experiences), and can take many forms. Play in its various forms is both temporarily and spatially diverse. Play is metacommunicative, that is, its evolution far precedes language in evolution in that it is also found in animals.

⁵ Not only is play challenging to pin down because it is an emergent process, but, Eberle (2014) also points out that “Play is hard to parse because playing holds a fractal quality (p 231).

writes “Pure play is observed more often in children than in adults. In adults, including hunter-gatherer adults, play is commonly blended with other motives that have to do with adult responsibilities. That is why, in everyday conversation, we tend to talk about children “playing” and about adults bringing a “playful spirit” or “playful attitude” to their activities.” Gray (2009) also notes that “play’s distinguishing characteristics lie not in the overt form of the activity but in the motivation and mental attitude that the person brings to it.” That is play or playfulness is a more important as an intention, a spirit, an attitude or the source of engaging in activity, rather than the physical manifestation of the activity itself. To put it concretely, to play basketball aggressively is not a form of play, because aggression is a source of hostility, and violates the definition of play. In contrast, to do a menial task such as washing dishes with gaiety and lightness is a form of play, as it is voluntary, and deepens the positive emotions from the experience of washing dishes.

Gray’s 5 criteria for validating play and playfulness are as follows:

- (1) The activity is self-chosen and self-directed;
- (2) It is intrinsically motivated (i.e. seemingly purposeless);
- (3) It is structured by mental rules;
- (4) It is imaginative;
- (5) It is produced in an active (joyful), but not stressed frame of mind.

I recommend managers look to satisfy the above definitional criteria when

looking to design greater play into their organizational cultures following my recommendations in Chapter 3.

A final consideration about play here has to do with what play is not. In his chapter entitled “Does play have a dark side?” Brown (2009) notes that many acts of social deviance have been associated with play: for example, aggression or cruelty or sadism; or, addiction to gambling or video games?

But although some play researchers believe there can be a dark side of play - see Sutton-Smith (2009) “phantasmagoria” - many do not. Brown (2009) notes for example, that play addiction stems from psychological issues and pain and gaming addiction does not represent the “dark side” to play any more than obesity represents the “dark side” to food. “We need both play and food to remain healthy. When we overdo it, the fault lies not in the play or food but in ourselves.” Similarly, Eberle argues that acts of aggression and cruelty are neither purposeless nor joyful, and thus fail attribute tests of play. “Strictly speaking, play has no dark side” he concludes, writing “‘dark play’ suffers as an oxymoron bordering on a ‘category mistake’ the way semantic errors like ‘kind cruelty’ or ‘dull witticisms’ do” (Eberle, 2014).

To be clear then, when we witness others demonstrate addictive personalities in play, these are signs of deeper personal issues, and, when we witness individuals attempt to dominate, demean, or control others while hiding behind cultural norms centered on play – “hey, I was just playing or kidding around” – we should take appropriate actions and call these things for what they are. They may be many things, but they are NOT play.

Finally, it is important to note that play is by its very nature “a little anarchic”. Play allows us to bend the rules and push beyond our formerly perceived limits. For organizations, this can be both a boon and a threat. For the last several decades, play has been seen as the latter – a threat. We explore why in the section ahead.

/PLAY, A FOUR LETTER WORD

“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as *we* are.”

- Anais Nin

Six-Reasons for Organizational Playphobia

Given the wealth and depth of evidence that supports play as fundamental to human thriving and mastery at work, why is it that most organizations find it difficult to promote play within their cultures? Six reasons account for this:

1) The Organization as a Machine metaphor

“If there isn't joy in work, you won't get productivity, and you won't get quality.”

- Russell Ackoff

The myth that individuals must be serious in their work endures in part because we conceptualize our organizations as machines. For instance, up until a few years ago, if you took a university level course in business strategy

or management, it was likely that your textbook cover depicted a picture of businesses organizations as a machine or a watch, which processed inputs (raw materials, capital, and labour) into outputs (goods and services) demanded by consumers. Capra (2004) writes:

The machine metaphor is so powerful. The mechanistic approach to management has certainly been very successful in increasing efficiency and productivity, but it has also resulted in widespread animosity toward organizations that are managed in machine like ways. The reason for that is obvious. Most people resent being treated like cogs in the machine. Is it any wonder that 70% of employees dislike their work?

Machines of course are designed by humans to make our lives easier and extend the reach of what is humanly possible. But we get the metaphor wrong when we start to see humans as machines in of themselves, as we did with the utility maximizing economic model of the human being, “the rational agent”, *homoeconomicus*. As Benkler (2011) notes “In psychology, that’s called cognitive fluency: the tendency to hold on to things that are simple to understand and remember. A straightforward, uncomplicated theory of human nature that reduced our actions to simple, predictable responses to rewards and punishments is appealing to the human mind. But our experiences are more complex.”

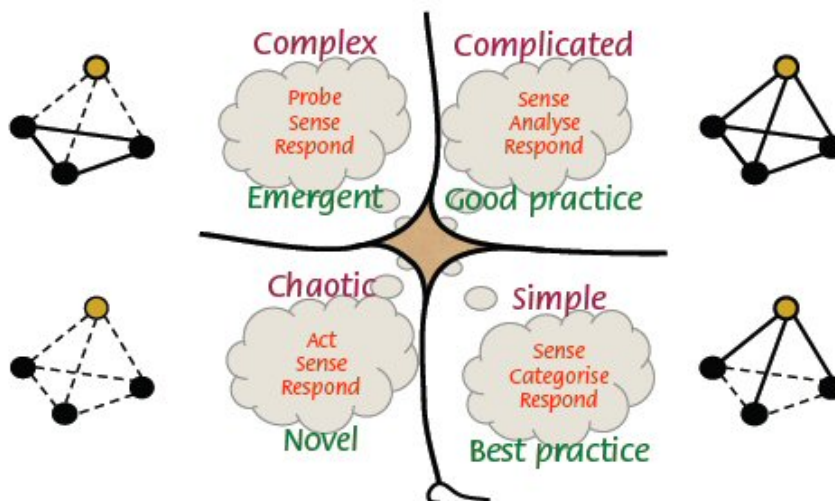
2) Shifting From Machines to Rainforests

“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.”

- Einstein

In their seminal paper on systems thinking and strategy entitled *A Leader's Framework for Decision Making*, Snowden and Boone (2007), explicate the difference between “complicated” and “complex” (adaptive) systems, symbolizing the former as a Ferrari, and the latter, a Brazilian Amazon rainforest. Complicated machines, such as Ferraris are the logical sum of their parts, and the nature of relationships between them typically remains static. In contrast, living systems (humans, organizations, or a Brazilian rainforest) is constantly in a state of flux, with relationships between its various parts almost never remaining the same for long.

FIGURE 11 CYNEFIN FRAMEWORK: COMPLICATED AND COMPLEX SYSTEMS



Source: Snowden & Boone (2007)

In the “complicated” system then, the anchor point for effective problems solving lies in “analysis.” Thus a mechanic with the right “expertise” can adequately diagnose and fix a Ferrari’s mechanical problems, as the cause-and-effect relationships underlying them remain unchanged over time.

Conversely however, “analysis” is not the right tool by which we can solve complex problems. This is because complex adaptive systems are always changing and evolving, and the nature of relationships between their parts is as well, i.e., the *ceteris paribus* assumptions needed for analysis do not hold (constant). Because complexity is the domain of emergence – patterns in flocks of birds, or World Wide Web traffic are constantly evolving; the stock market reacts to a major murder and execution, but never in isolation to other systemic and non-systemic factors. As such, a stronger anchor than analysis in dynamic contests is to ‘probe and sense’ reactions, before formulating the necessary response.

As examples, the author’s point out how no amount of training could have prepared the ground crew at NASA to deal with the “Houston, we have a problem” call from the Apollo 13 mission. The ground team had to assemble the same materials as on the spaceship, and use an iterative ‘probe and sense’ approach until they came upon a feasible solution. In another example, note how Google let go of a heavy management approach in order to allow the experimentation of its new users to drive how its new platform YouTube would evolve and position itself in the marketplace. It is also likely

for similar reasons that “design-thinking” has gained pick-up in the realm of business and innovation, for it adds ‘probe and sense’ elements: empathy, ideation, prototyping into business processes that were born out of the ‘complicated world paradigm’.

To sum up, it is important to understand the distinction that whereas technological systems are complicated, living systems are complex, and that social-technological systems (organizations) are some combination of the two. To paraphrase theorist and foresighter Adam Kahane, when threatened by complex challenges, we have a tendency to breakdown, oversimplify, and force problems into existing (complicated) models. But doing so puts the wrong tools against the walls organizations need climb over. Managers who try to impose order in a complex context will face frustration and fail. But those who let go of their need for control, and open up the space for experimentation will allow new patterns to emerge that point out paths to adaptation and more desirable outcomes, in a constantly evolving scenario. The enlightened manager recognizes this choice, and behaves accordingly.

3) Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Capitalism Optimizes Capital – Dead Matter – Not People

“The problem of social organization is how to set up an arrangement under which greed will do the least harm; capitalism is that kind of a system.”

- Milton Friedman

In economics, we learn that the purpose of an organization is to maximize profit. This is an unusual claim. From a human-centered point of view, people use capital to make their lives better or easier. In the standard economic frame, wherein motivation is extrinsic, the ends and means are flipped: putting people to work for capital, as opposed to putting capital to work for people.

Black (2003) argues that the idea that capitalism reflects biological truths is fallacious. He points out that Thomas Huxley’s depiction of Darwin’s “Survival of the Fittest” was “a better account of economic conditions in Victorian England than it was of natural selection.” He continues, “like most social and political theory, the story Hobbes and his successors told was really unacknowledged autobiography.” In fact, the naturalist and social philosopher Peter Kropotkin, in his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902) argued that the entire theoretical basis for Social Darwinism was wrong, writing “those species that cooperate most effectively tend to be the most competitive in the long run” (Graebber, 2014). And as Benkler (2011) notes, volumes of research more recently in evolutionary biology and behavioural research support Kropotkin’s original position.

If we take as a starting point that human beings are naturally cooperative, then we do not have to choose money as the only reason we come to work together. Our focus can thus shift from ends, to means; from capital to connection. Kahneman and Deaton's famous 2010 study "High income improves evaluation of life but not emotional well-being," illustrates, emotional well-being of humans does not progress with income once people's material needs are well satiated. They write "more money does not necessarily buy more happiness... perhaps \$75,000 is a threshold beyond which further increases in income no longer improve individual's ability to do what matters most to their emotional well-being, such as spending time with people they like, avoiding pain and disease, and enjoying leisure" (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). The fact that we know this, yet espouse an economic ideology that is obsessed with capital accumulation at the expense of all other values seems well, *irrational*.

4) **Puritanism's Playphobic Influence on Capitalism:**

"The ability of mental concentration, as well as the absolutely essential feeling of obligation to one's job, are here most often combined with a strict economy which calculates the possibility of high earnings, and a cool self-control and frugality which enormously increase performance."

- Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

"The true object of all human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground."

- G. K. Chesterton

When I was growing up, I was taught that someone who is engaged in seemingly purposeless activity is being idle or wasting their time. Writing in 1948 – the same year in which the word “workaholic” was coined in Canada – Josef Pieper in his book *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* points out this misappropriation of the meaning of idleness. He writes “the code of life in the High Middle Ages [held] that it was precisely lack of leisure, an inability to be at leisure, that went together with idleness... Idleness, for the older code of behaviour, means especially this: that the human being had given up on the very responsibility that comes with his dignity... that man finally does not agree with his own existence; that behind all his energetic activity, he is not at one with himself; that the Middle Ages expressed it, sadness has seized him in the face of the goodness that lives within him” (Popova, 2015). That is to say that idleness did not mean someone who is not working, but someone was working so much that they had become disconnected within themselves, disconnected from their very soul – reminiscent perhaps of Orwell’s horse Boxer in the novel *Animal Farm*, whose motto “I will work harder” eventually leads to his exhaustion and collapse, whereupon he is sent to a “veterinarian” – knacker’s yard – to be slaughtered.

In Weber’s book, we are told that God had given mankind the natural world and everything in it; with no limits placed on its exploitation for the satisfaction of human wants. And the sin of Adam meant that human wants would no longer be satisfied by God, but that we would have to ‘work’ for them ourselves (Analysis in Manu, 2012). The purposeful life on earth then was to be centered on hard work, prudence, and frugality. For it was by

seeking reform through the exercise of such Protestant values, that one could achieve redemption in the afterlife. In this way, “the Spirit of Capitalism” was not so much metaphysical as it was practical. Let us not forget that in the biblical story, ‘work’ itself was represented as punishment, as a curse cast down from our maker because of man’s original sin.

In the Puritan view then, ‘play as seemingly purposeless behaviour for its own sake’, seems by definition as something of a scandal. Play, is something that distracts man from his true calling, and is assumed to be entirely separate from it. Reflecting on this false dichotomy, the social philosopher Adorno notes the popular adage ‘Work while you work, play while you play’ is nothing more than “the basic rule of repressive self-discipline”. In his essay “Work and Pleasure,” he deconstructs absurd inversion in projecting bi-phasic religious and economic constructs onto the identity of the individual; as opposed to having the individuals define it for themselves (Adorno, 1994). Adorno also recognizes the quintessential importance of the marriage between work and play, writing:

While the advice may offer advantages in terms of economic rationalization, its intrinsic merits are of a dubious nature. Work completely severed from the element of playfulness becomes drab and monotonous, a tendency which is consummated by the complete quantification of industrial work. Pleasure when equally isolated from the “serious” content of life, becomes silly, meaningless and sheer “entertainment” and ultimately it is a mere means of reproducing one’s working capacity, whereas the real substance of any non-utilitarian activity lies in the way it faces and sublimates reality problems: *res severa verum gaudium* [true joy is a serious thing].

What we need is not to see work and play as mutually distinct, hence calling for work-life balance. But what we need is to see work and play as co-essential forces that give productive work meaning. Hence, we need to call for *work-play integration*.

5) The Cold War

(ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT, *a playful re-enactment*)

TOBIAS FUNKE: *As you may or may not know, play and
 work have hit a bit of a rough patch.*
MICHAEL BLUTH: *Really? When did that start?*
TOBIAS FUNKE: *Well, I don't want to blame it all on
 the Cold War, but it certainly didn't
 help.*

The global power struggle between the United States and the former Soviet Union 1947-91 – had a poetic influence on the cultures of these nations and their allies. The ideological battle that ensued during this time between capitalism and free enterprise on one hand, and socialism and collectivism on the other, meant that on both sides, ideas that challenged the status quo were much more likely to be seen as an existential threat and treated with hostility, rather than an openness to discussion and debate in the name of progress.

In his paper, Goodwin (1997) argues that although historically, economists come from a long line of radical thinking and pluralism used to challenging the status quo in order to lead to social and economic progress, economists and intellectuals who did not tow the official party lines throughout most of the Cold War often faced serious administrative and scholarly consequences

from all branches of patronage: academia, government, business, and foundations.

As a result, the breadth of thinking in the West on Economic matters was significantly narrowed, adhering mainly to a “radical rationalistic positivism” paradigm. Goodwin writes, “In part, a Cold War rationale lay behind this new movement: varied environmental factors led postwar business and government leaders to view the reform of business education as a matter of national preparedness. Americans needed a new type of business executive—one who was literate in the everyday details of conducting business, to be sure, but who was also trained to manage individual firms (and the economy as a whole) with minimal disruption and instability through a period of rapid and unpredictable change. *The emphasis in the new business education was to be on problem solving and mastery of analytic technique rather than on exposure to fact and experience* [emphasis mine].”

The fears of nuclear annihilation associated with the Cold War are quite understandable looking back. We know from the social and neural sciences that threat responses shut down our cognitive and playful tendencies – no one wants to play or wax philosophical if their health or security might be in danger. We also know that cognitive biases that we are predisposed to often mean we look for data to support our beliefs and the views we have, as opposed to the other way around (Kahneman, 2011). For example, when the USSR launched the first successful artificial earth satellite Sputnik1, beating

out the West, many here – and despite the lack of any legitimate evidence – rationalized that its reasons must be that the Russians work and study more than Westerners do, believing “in the grim certainty that we play at our own peril; that the Russian students don’t play around, and neither should we!” (Caplan & Caplan, 1973)

Of course, ‘humans are not rational, but rationalizing’ to borrow from Robert Heinlein, the science fiction writer. Heinlein went on to note “We always appear reasonable to ourselves. We can always find a good reason for even our worst behaviour. Our first impulse when something goes wrong is to provide a convincing excuse for our choices. We attempt to explain or justify our own behaviour and attitudes with logical, plausible reasons, even if these are not pertinent or true.”

Well, to paraphrase Max Planck, social science progresses one funeral at a time. And since the death of the Cold War, we are witnessing pluralism raise its beautiful head once again, with Kahneman, Ostrom, Ariely, Thaler and Piketty among some of the best who are challenging mainstream economic thought. Although 911 and continuing fears related to terrorism serve to curb our collective appetite for play, it is my hope that an openness to new ideas will continue to flourish, and that as we look ahead, managers can adopt a more reflective path: one that embodies the mind of a constant learner; the risk-taking of a gamer, and the willingness to adopt a beginner’s mindset to new or unexpected challenges, in order to overcome former barriers and see possibilities not visible before.

FIGURE 12 THE ALL-CONSUMING COLD WAR



My visit to the Diefenbunker Museum, Ottawa, 2012

*/*Even fictional mythological creatures conceived in antiquity from Indian texts 1000s of years ago, were appropriated to take sides in the Cold War.*/**

6) Play is a different language

“The most irritating feature of play is not the perceptual incoherence, as such, but rather that play taunts us with its inaccessibility. We feel that something is behind it all, but we do not know, or we have forgotten how to see it.”

- Robert Fegan

The linguist Friedrich Nietzsche was one of earlier philosophers to recognize that play in fact acts as a different medium or language. “And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear

the music” he writes in his book *Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Importance of Music*. Nietzsche is speaking both literally and metaphorically here. The movement of dance, a form of play, is something that alters our state: we lose our identity and ego in dance, and are intoxicated by its effect. As such, the Dionysian aesthetic is sensual, bodily, and chaotic, and its fundamental feature is that it has to be embodied, giving access to a knowledge and wisdom of the world that the Apollonian aesthetic, despite its pleasure taking in figuring things out, understanding of truth, and problem solving, can never understand or appreciate on its own. That is, the Apollonian is *complementary* to the Dionysian mind, but not a substitute for it.

If the Apollonian (rational) language is the lens we have employed to understand work and its meanings in our lives, then by definition, we cannot see the role that play fills in our work. The Apollonian is cause and effect, ends driven, planned, and material or conceptual; the Dionysian is means centered, reflexive, and transcendental. Whereas the Apollonian (business) language typically dissociates subject (knower) and object (known), play brings them together as one. In play you and I are not separate, but part of whole that is more than the linear sum of the both of us. The same is true with mind, body, and spirit, which are integrated rather than discretely separate entities. This is why *play* and *creativity* for example are intransitive verbs. That is, they are meaningful in of themselves, and do not need to be acted on (as an object) in order to become meaningful, the way for example an apple becomes meaningful to us, only when it about to be consumed. Such a holistic or gestalt view is missing from our ends-based work

language, which centers goals and outcomes without an adequate appreciation of the dynamics and relationships that make them come to be. That is, it is relatively easy for businesses to speak the understand and measure for results associated with planning and doing, and type I error – the costs of making a mistake – but much more difficult to measure for adaptability and being, and type II error – the costs of not having chosen a better path. Yet the latter is arguably more important. “Who knows how much more innovative the early factories could have been had their employees been encouraged to play” asks one scholar, as he questions the myopic view of exploitative employers during the industrial revolution (West, 2015). But until we become aware that the unitary view to work we have adopted is limiting our potential to improve our relationship with work itself, it is doubtful that we will fully be able to realize this and respond accordingly. As Carse (1986) notes, even the most intractable of finite games can be transformed when we think of them as infinite games. That is, if we are able to see work as play, we can connect to it in more multivalent and meaningful ways, opening up doors we never imagine possible otherwise.

As Sutton-Smith (2001) puts our inabilities to understand play through an intellectual lens in another way. He writes, “Play is supposed to be non-productive and not to intend serious consequences. Unfortunately this definition is again derivative of our cultural attempt to make play and work quite distinct. Play has its own instrumental behaviours, and its consequences are quite real and consequential to the players. The conventional concept of instrumentality is a highly narrow one usually

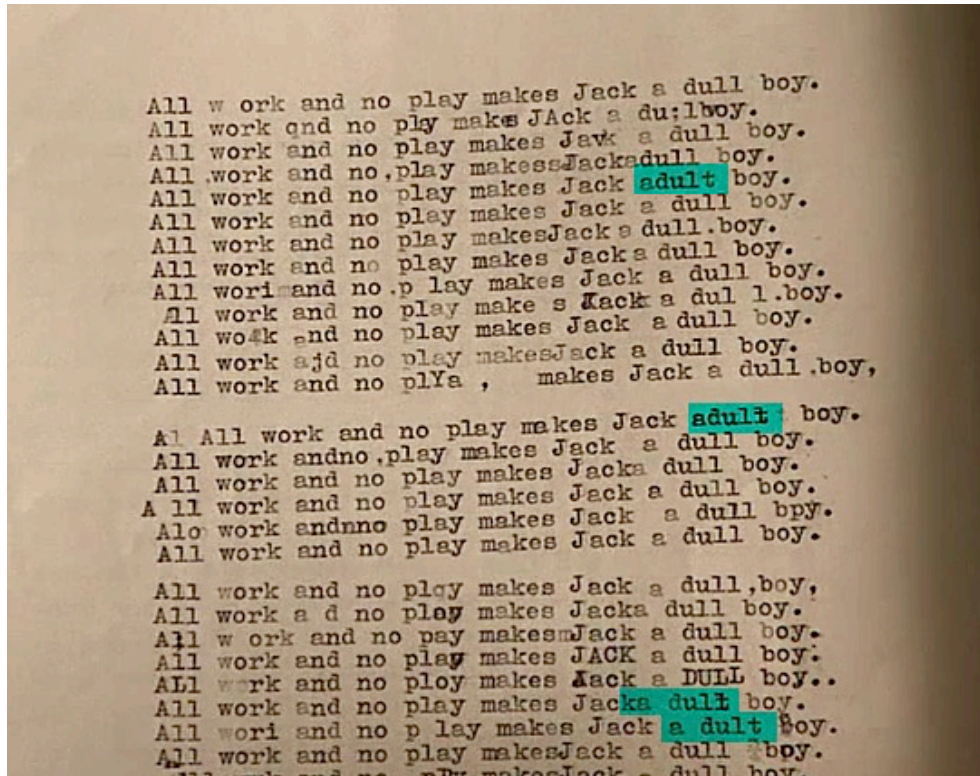
confined to work schedules with clear-cut, externally imposed “goal targets.”

The historical and economic bias for this dualistic metaphor is quite insufficient to deal with the complex intentionalities of everyday life, including play life” (Sutton-Smith, 2001).

Hence we must ask ourselves, is it not time we take up a more expansive view of work? And if so, what might that view enable us to see in the eyes of play?

/CONTINUED PLAYPHOBIA AND ITS RISKS

FIGURE 13 ~~NO BEER AND NO TV MAKE HOMER SOMETHING SOMETHING~~⁶



From the film, the Shining (1980)

Einstein once said, “No problem can be solved at the same level of *consciousness* that created it.” MIT’s Jay Forrester, who looked at systemic organizational challenges echoed the same sentiment: “most problems that corporate leaders (or leaders of any other system) face aren’t caused by outside forces: competitors, market trends, or regulation. *Problems tend to derive from the unintended consequences of the leaders’ own ideas and efforts.*” And the twentieth century’s most notorious economist John

⁶ Side note: For a playful rendition of The Shining, check out the Simpson’s TreeHouse of Horror V, episode 109, in which having been deprived of the two things that his life meaning – television and beer – Homer Simpson writes “No beer and no TV make Homer go crazy” (Simpsons, TreeHouse of Horror V, episode 109).

Maynard Keynes, once stated, “the difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones.”

If we continue to argue against play at work, then what are we really arguing for? In Kubrick’s infamous scene from the film *The Shining*, we are confronted with the protagonist Jack Torrance, who in his desire to seek isolation and focus obsessively on his work loses his mind, and goes crazy. It turns out that insanity is not the only consequence of playphobia and play deprivation. In his talk entitled the “The Neuroscience of Play” Dr. Brown (2015) identifies that all work and no play has seven major negative repercussions:

- 1) Rigidity
- 2) Interpersonal Conflict
- 3) Joylessness
- 4) Addictions
- 5) Diminished Curiosity
- 6) Workaholism – “a form of obsessive rigidity”
- 7) The absence of empathy

Just as a tree that is unbendable is easily broken, an organization whose culture is mechanistic and instrumentalist is doomed for failure.

Consider the study “Is Pay for Performance Detrimental to Innovation?” by economists Ederer & Manso (2013). The two researchers engaged 379 participants at Harvard in a series of experiments involving virtual lemonade stands. Participants could change stand locations, lemonade colours (pink versus green), vary differing sugar levels, and of course, consider and apply different pricing strategies. In the baseline group, participants were given a ‘fixed-wage’ for performance in 20 rounds. In a second group, participants were given a commission, ‘pay-for-performance’ bonus for the commission they generated throughout 20 rounds. And in a third group, participants were told they would earn nothing during the first 10 rounds of play, and then, they would be rewarded a percentage of profits in the simulation of the last 10 rounds.

Which one of these groups performed best?

Well, the group that got to play and explore in the first half of the experiment got to test more new locations and strategies. Consequently, this group earned 26 percent more in profits compared with ‘pay-for-performance’ on average, per round played. Ironically in fact, the subjects under ‘pay-for-performance’ played even more conservatively, and were even less innovative than their fixed-wage counterparts, who on average outperformed them by 8% higher sales on average.

Such studies signify how organizations who are obsessed with the bottom-line, systematically fail to spot and capitalize on new opportunities for innovation and growth. This is because they prioritize short-term results

over experimentation and learning; the latter of which frequently lead to new discovery and the identification of better and more fruitful pathways.

But what if an organization is constrained in a disciplined market, and has no budget for play and exploration? Surely, such scenario is no time to play.

Again, as the authors Doshi & McGregor (2015) demonstrate, as a matter of fact, generally the opposite is true:

Thus begins the death spiral. Just when an organization needs to be at its most fluid, it inadvertently freezes itself. We have seen this unfortunate pattern play out in many companies, and countless empirical studies have confirmed these dynamics. In one, three finance professors asked more than four hundred executives what their company would do when their quarterly earnings targets were at risk. Roughly, 80 percent said the company would cut back on long – term spending in areas like R&D or advertising; 55 percent said it would delay starting a new project, “even if this entails a small sacrifice in value”; 40 percent said it would attempt to book revenues this quarter instead of the next, which can attempt to book revenues this quarter instead of next, which worsen the problem down the road. All of activities reduce the ability to adapt at a time when adaptability should be the number one focus”

That is, by forsaking play precisely when an organization needs to be at its most nimble and dynamic, most organizations prime themselves for failure, by tightening up, and closing the doors to play. Or to parallel Vegetius’ famous dictum, ‘if you want to adapt to change, prepare to play (with the challenges you face before you).’ Such premonitions are echoed far and wide from play scholars and practitioners (Brian Sutton-Smith, 2001; De Koven, 2014; Brown, 2009). And managers, who fail to listen and act on their

forewarnings, are setting themselves up for failure, just like countless before them.

But do not fear for the faith of humanity yet, as Bob Dylan noted famously said, “the times, they are a changing.”

CHAPTER 3: CHANGING THE GAME THROUGH PLAY

“I worked as an instructor doing computer training courses for corporate clients. Months of doing the same lessons, teaching the same stuff over and over again was driving me crazy. One day I decided to start teaching with a fake German accent. I took on a strict German accent and mannerisms. My job was immediately transformed into the must fun job in the universe! The participants loved it and joined in by responding with their own German accents. It was great fun and I’m sure that it also improved the quality of the course.”

- Instructor at a corporate training facility (West, 2015)

In Chapter 1 I put forth evidence of the motivational, collaborative, and innovative potential of play and argued that play is key to human thriving and adaptability (to change). In Chapter 2, I argued that at least six reinforcing factors created a business and economic mindset that is hostile towards play: the organization as a machine metaphor, treating complex problems as complicated ones, privileging capital pursuit, the Puritan imprint on how we view work, the Cold-War, and business language, which stresses results while disintermediating connection. In this (final) chapter, I aim to shift gears from merely insights and conceptual understanding towards helping managers develop ideas and tools to implement play within their organizations. To do this, I rely on the K-J method and primary research with experts to make sense and highlight patterns of play currently taking place in the economics marketplace, and then propose seven key recommendations for bringing play back. I end the chapter with conclusions and suggested next steps.

Let's start by recognizing that in today's modern context, there are tremendous forces both pushing us and pulling us away from play.

Pull factors: As we take on greater responsibilities as adults, *we do not give ourselves enough time – or rather take enough time – to play.* “As we get serious about career, get married, have a family, move up the ladder at work, take care of parents, take part in community and religious duties, and work out to stay in shape to prevent health problems, we are inexorably pulled away from any time for personal play (as adults).”⁷ Although we can take a playful approach to some of these commitments, the overall ecology in which they exist are quite serious, and their culmination often leaves little time for play for play's sake, thus crowding-out play.

Push factors: That it is socially and culturally not acceptable for adults to be seen playing in most aspect of socio-economic life. Could you imagine a business manager playing at work? Or parents, playing around with their children while volunteering at a community centre, or even at an adult social function? Brown (2009) notes, whether as an employee, a parent, a civic-minded citizen or what have you, “the message is that if you are a serious person doing serious work, you should be serious. Seriously.”

He concludes, “if we had simple test for play like we do for diabetes or high blood pressure, we could look at a number and realize that we are in danger.

⁷ The same is increasingly true of adolescent life, which is being jam-packed with scheduled obligations such as school-work, homework, after-school activities, volunteering, tutorials, and test-prep.

But we don't have such a test. Instead we have a smoldering, play-deficient sense that something is missing in life, that we are not getting the feeling of joy and energy that we once did."

We may not have a test yet that can scientifically prove our play deficiencies, and warn us to play more. But we can infer from this research that most adults are play deprived and can benefit from bringing play back into their lives. The real tragedy would be to fully understand this, but do nothing about it. That is why the rest of this Chapter is committed to how we might go about changing our relationship to the serious things we do as adults, mainly, our work. My hope is that the recommendations made in the sections ahead will not be the final word on bringing play back into organizational life, but only the beginning.

/ THE CAUSAL LAYERS OF PLAYPHOBIA

"This is the real secret of life – to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play."

- Alan W. Watts

We can apply Sohail Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) to discern the causes of playphobia within organizations (Inayatullah, 2007). CLA posits that complex social and organizational challenges are rooted in four levels of our perception of reality: levels 1 and 2 are surface layers and thus more visible, while levels 3 and 4 are broader and deeper, and more difficult to identify, because they are imbedded in our current values and beliefs.

FIGURE 14 CAUSAL LAYERS OF PLAYPHOBIA

Causal Layers	Causes
I. Litany	Play at work is irresponsible and a waste of productive time
II. Systemic causes	Taylorism: Quantifiable results, efficiency and capital accumulation are “the” keys to success
III. Worldview	Ego-led Homo economicus: If I maximize my production and profits, then I can maximize my utility, consumption and survival
IV. Myth/metaphor	Hard work is both our punishment and salvation in life on earth; otherwise, we would already be living in heaven

By the Author

At Level I: the Litany, we see those who play at work as irresponsible and wasting owners’, shareholders’ or taxpayers’ money – “you are being paid to work, not play.” The solution at this level is to recognize that play engages us with our work, and helps us become better at it. At Level II: the Systemic cause is that we primarily see work through an *ends* focused lens, centering quantifiable results, such as efficiency and capital accumulation. As William Bruce Cameron warned, “not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.” The solution at this level is to recognize that it the qualitative *means* that drive *why we work*, and to privilege these as much as the ends we hope to attain. As we move to the deeper level III, we are confronted with the prevailing economic worldview

that reduces us to independent rational agents, each playing a finite game to maximize his/her own profit and consumption. The solution is to recognize that this interpretation is only partially true, and as such is limiting our understanding of who we are, and how we relate to each other and our work. As Carse (1986) points out, the most intractable finite games – economics, for example – can be transformed when we think of them as infinite games.⁸ We are not robots that only consume and produce; we seek joy, meaning, and connection too, and sometimes, nothing at all. Lastly is Level IV, the notion that the life on earth is meant to be hard, and that our purpose is to compete and survive, and to serve a higher cause. Hence, work is seen as a necessary evil and through working hard within secular occupations, we can secure our place in death or the afterlife, wherein work is no longer necessary. If one ascribes to this myth, work will always remain external and not intrinsic to who we are. Hence, work's defining characteristics will be that it is burdensome, functional, and unfulfilling. The solution is to recognize that we all have a gift with which to better/best serve this world, and that gift is to do the things that we would do for its own sake, even if no one was willing to pay us for it, and neither was God looking to reward or punish in the afterlife as a result. As Buckminster Fuller famously put it, "the true business of people should be to go back to school and think about whatever it was they were thinking about before somebody came along and told them they had to earn a living."

⁸ Carse's book "Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Possibility and Play", although not perfect, is a seminal contribution to the field and this author highly recommends it as essential reading.

Which is to say, that if we effectively implemented the above solutions, work would cease to be defined by its ends, and be defined instead by its means, which is play. And those who see their work as play are those who are masters of their work. To quote one of the greatest football players of all-time, Lionel Messi, “Money is not a motivating factor. Money doesn’t thrill me or make me play better because there are benefits to being wealthy. I’m just happy with a ball at my feet. My motivation comes from playing the game I love. If I wasn’t paid to be a professional footballer I would willingly play for nothing.”

/ PLAY EXPERTS INSIGHTS AND THE K-J METHOD

“Play is hard to maintain as you get older. You get less playful. You shouldn’t, of course.”

- Richard Feynman

An 8-step questionnaire was first developed in conversation with Todd Falkowsky (my secondary advisor), with the aim of discovery and to better understanding the place play currently occupies in the marketplace. The survey recruited six-experts who either completed it online or through telephone interview. The summary of their answers is provided below, in no specific order.

FIGURE 15 UNDERSTANDING THE MARKET

Respondents N=6				
Consultant Experts	Market	Problems Solved for Clients	Purpose/Goals	Obstacles
Patrick Short, ComedySportz	High Tech	Customer Engagement	Shift from internal competition to collaboration	Quarterly P&L thinking
Trevor Haldenby, the Mission Business	Fortune 500	Foresight and Strategy	Connect Creativity with Strategy	Fear of the Unfamiliar
Bernie De Koven, DeepFun	Science and Tech	Finding Meaning and Purpose in Work	Learn and Embrace fun	Language and Learning Models that don't Include Play
Lisa Yeager, City of Seattle	Cultural Institutions	Collaboration and Performance	Incentivize connection	Play not a Priority at Work

Sandy Marshall, Second City Works	Services	Employee Engagement	Meaning and Purpose at Work	People who really need play don't know it
Akshay Sateesh, Ziksana Consulting	Education	Ideation, Creative Problem Solving	Seed and nurture playful organizational cultures	Fragmented understanding of play as it relates to work

By the Author

This exploratory first survey was part of a fail-fast strategy to test what I was learning through my secondary research against current marketplace conditions. As Todd had suggested, a main issue was not that there was not enough evidence to support that play was valid, but there were other factors preventing organizations from adopting play into their cultures. After a couple of coffee shop meetings, we agreed we might as well ask the question directly to play experts.

Hence, I followed up the above questionnaire with an expanded list of play experts, including:

- David Kelley at IDEO
- Bernie De Koven at DeepFun
- Sue Walden at ImprovWorks!
- Gary Schwartz award-winning actor/director/writer,
- Matt Weinstein at Playfair
- Annemarie Steen at Happier Workplace
- Martin Ryan at Doblin
- Peter Gray at Boston College
- Farnaz Tabaei at California State Dominguez Hills
- Brandon Boyle at IDEO

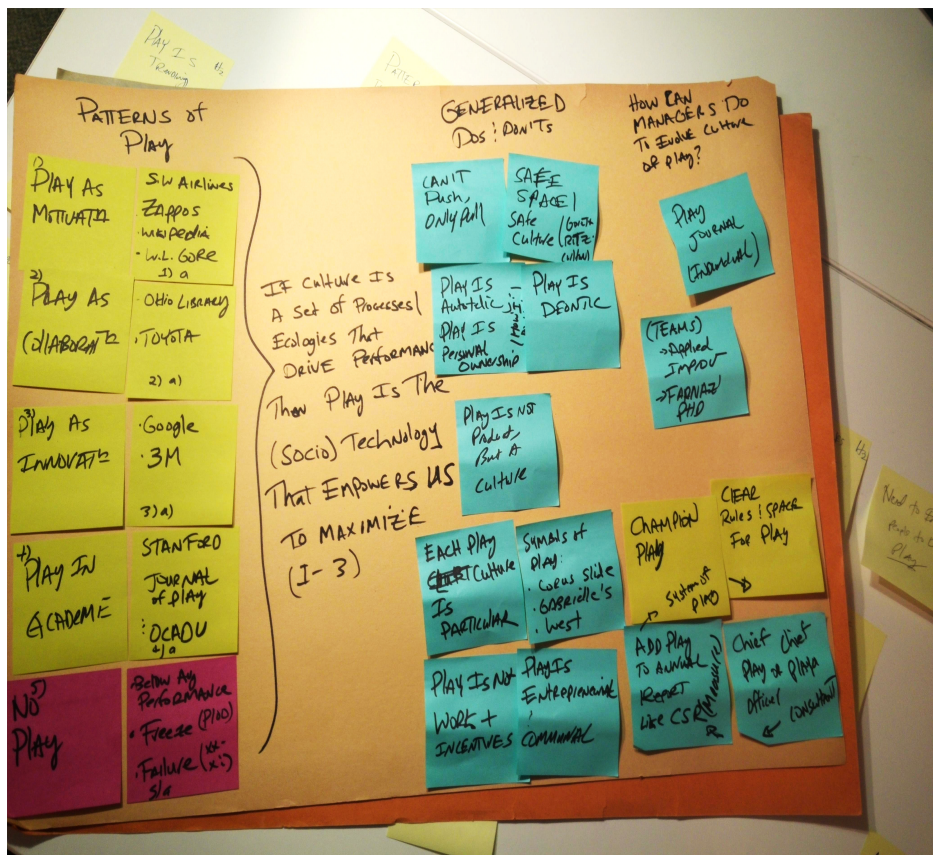
- Tabatha Soltay at Tabtalks
- Akshay Sateesh at Ziksana
- Lindsay McGregor at Vega Factor
- Stuart Brown at National Institute of Play
- Adam Lawrence at IE Business School
- Dan Pink, best selling business author

Because of time constraints and the desire to have a high response rate, I limited my ask from the above participants to answer just one question: *“What would it take for managers of traditional companies to prioritize play in their organization?”* (see Appendix B). After one-month, I had a response rate of 83%, which covered a range of insights. I then needed a way to organize my primary and secondary research insights, such that they might serve in a generative basis for future-looking recommendations, and to achieve this, I used the K-J Method.

The K-J Method is a process for collecting and organizing ideas to identify patterns. The K-J Method is useful for synthesizing discrete pieces of information to help with pattern finding on complex problems. As Fritjof Capra notes, “patterns ... cannot be measured or weighted; they must be mapped” (Capra, 1997). In my case, I began by listing and brainstorming the insights and ideas gathered from my research onto sticky notes. I first did this on tabletop, and then, I grouped them in the diagram illustrated below. What began to emerge were patterns of how early adopters were

picking play up in business and academia, as well as evidence to support failure by organizations who committed to the opposite.

FIGURE 16 THE K-J METHOD OF PLAY CULTURE INSIGHTS



By the Author

If culture is the ecology that drives organizational performance, then play is what differentiates and supercharges that ecology to outperform its competition, I realized. Next, a set of 'dos and don'ts' began to emerge. This presented an answer to the question, what do organizations that 'get' play do differently? Finally, I thought about what managers who might want to inject play into their cultures do? I then re-organized my insights and synthesized these findings into a cleaner looking K-J Method diagram. In this one, 5 clear patterns of play in the marketplace emerged. Then,

integrating the “dos and don’ts,” that came out of the secondary research with the insights gleamed from my primary research, I generated seven pathways managers can undertake to help their organizations overcome playphobia, and benefit from gains from play.

FIGURE 17 5 PATTERNS AND 7 PATHWAYS TO DEVELOPING PLAY IN ORGANIZATIONS



By the Author

The above insights are explored in greater detail next.

/ FIVE PATTERNS OF PLAY

“Necessity may be the mother of invention, but play is certainly the father.”

- Roger von Oech

1. Pivoting from Push to Pull: Companies that identify themselves as twenty-first-century leaders and innovators are starting to pick up play. Most famous perhaps is Google, which not only offers its engineers 20% time to pursue their passion projects, but subscribes to a playful culture, writing among its “Top 10 reasons to work at Google” that “work and play are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to code and pass the puck at the same time (Scott, 2008).” The innovative company 3M provides a similar “15 percent rule that encourages employees to explore and work together to generate ideas” (Innovation, ideas, and solutions for a modern world, Financial Review Case Studies, edition 6). At the furthest end of the spectrum perhaps is the innovative video game, which enables its employees to choose which projects and teams they wish to work with (See Valve’s “New Employee Manual” online).

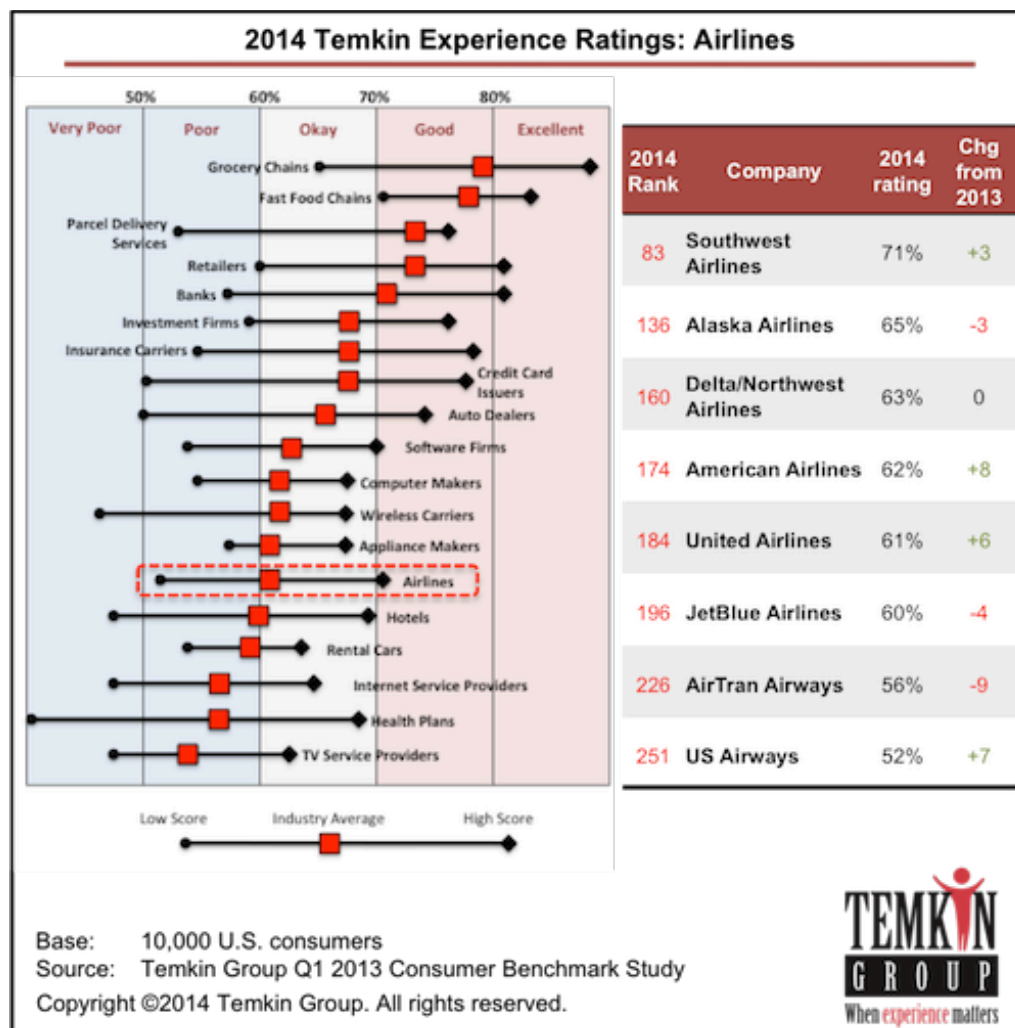
The key takeaway from this pattern is that unlike work, which when assigned to us often feels disconnected and burdensome to who we are; giving employees opportunities to define and choose the work they will engage with, enables them to activate their sense of play (volunteer for the work they want to do). Organizations that are activating this opportunity to engage their employees in designing their roles and contributions to organizational ambitions and priorities, will find that they benefit from a

distinctive competitive advantage vis-à-vis their competitors. As Apple's Steve Jobs once said, "it doesn't make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do."

2. Giving Employees Degrees of Freedom to Experiment -

Innovation companies are not the only ones picking up play. Southwest, the airline company, for example, consistently outperforms its competitors year after year when on customer service, according to Temkin Experience Rating 2014 (Temkin, 2014). Southwest is an interesting case study of an organization that leverages play, because airline companies operate very similar planes, use the same terminals, and have similar food. Yet despite this seemingly lack of differentiation across product offerings, Southwest consistently outperforms its competitors. You might be tempted to ask why and how this could be. And if you Google "Rapping Flight Attendant from Southwest Airlines," you'll find your answer.

FIGURE 18 TEMKIN EXPERIENCE RATINGS: AIRLINES



Source: <https://experiencematters.wordpress.com/2014/03/19/southwest-airlines-leads-airline-industry-in-2014-temkin-experience-ratings/>

Unlike most other companies that tightly control their operations and processes, Southwest airlines encourages its staff to take ownership of their responsibilities and put their own personal touch on *how* they do their work. So whereas competing airlines aim at streamlining and automation of service delivery, including their flight attendants' duties, in this video we see something rather different: a flight attendant on Southwest flight asks

passengers to give him a beat, and then proceeds to rap out the flight announcement instructions. Not only does he finish to an ovation from the passengers, but we can only imagine how much more joy the airline staff at Southwest Airlines must feel, because their company encourages them to explore and experiment with how they do their work without fear of admonishment or reprisal for standing out as being different.

Similarly, if we take a look at Zappos – the online retailer’s – website, and we’ll find that the company centers its values not on its customers, but on its staff. Some of the company’s core values are “embrace and drive change, create fun and a little weirdness, be adventurous, creative, and open-minded, and pursue growth and learning”. Like Southwest, Zappos encourages its people to treat their work and customer relationships as play, and like Southwest, Zappos consistently over delivers to its customers. In fact, Zappos is so confident that its culture is the secret sauce to its success, that it pays 1-month’s salary to any call centre staff who wants to leave after training. That is, if you don’t see yourself growing at Zappos, but need to pay your bills, Zappos helps you reduce some of the risks associated with leaving them and allowing both yourself and the company a better chance at finding a good fit elsewhere.

How much more motivated is a Zappos employee compared to their peers? According to a case study in the book *The Uncommon Service*, “In 2005, when the company’s call center moved from the Bay Area to Las Vegas, an astonishing 80 percent of its California employees relocated—for a \$13-an-hour job. In 2008, a year in which the average turnover at call centers was

150 percent, turnover at Zappos was 39 percent (including turnover owing to promotions).” In fact, the power of play as a motivator weighs so highly that in primedtoperform.com’s six-question diagnostic on employee Total Motivation, Play is weighted at 200% of Purpose (the next most powerful motivator), and 600% of Potential (the third highest motivator). Play not, motivate not.

3. Socializing the Potential of Play: Leeder (2014), the Director of Library Services at the College of Western Idaho, notes how a new culture of play has emerged at his library. At 3PM - during the quiet times of the year - he writes, staff members will get up from their desks and call out ‘game break!’ Staff then migrate to their meeting area to play a board, card, video or otherwise made up game. “Everyone does not play everyday,” he continues, “but most of us play most days.” And there is only one rule: the games must be collegial and collaborative game, and not competitive.

As a Director, Leeder confesses most leadership experts would likely see such unfocused and purposeless work as a waste of time, not even sufficient for “team-building” as not quantifiable goals are attached to it. But Leeder disagrees. He notes that as the library’s director, he is in an industry that is undergoing unprecedented change and it is his responsibility to create a division wherein staff can work effectively to achieve a common vision and purpose. Since supporting this play intervention at his library, Leeder has documented that his staff are more cohesive, collegial, collaborative, creative, and more service driven and productive than other libraries at competing campuses. He attributes these wins to play, which has fostered a deep sense

of trust between colleagues at a personal level, and thus, has empowered staff to co-lead together through constructive feedback and consensus - something that purposive team-building efforts often fail to deliver.

At the Toyota assembly line, the company ascribes to the concept of *hansei*, which means to reflect on what can be done better. An andon cord overlays all factory workers' stations, and workers are encouraged to pull the cord to secure the attention of fellow staff and managers if they have an idea. This way, an idea can be immediately reflected on and tested to assess if it might have potential on its own, or might help generate other ideas. This is one example of how play as 'emergent' process that instructs our social skills and leaves us poised can be built right into a job to encourage collaboration and co-creation.

Lack of close relationships at work hurts performance. Fifty-six percent of a typical workforce feels like they do not have a confidant at work (Doshi & McGregor, 2015). Yet, Carr & Walton (2014) demonstrated that when individuals are working on a problem at work and receive a friendly tip from a colleague, they spend nearly 50% more time on the problem, while at the same time, feeling 40 % less fatigue from trying to solve it – even if their efforts were unsuccessful, in the case of for example being assigned a no solution problem. Hence play as collaboration not only boosts morale, but also performance.

Shopify, the Canadian e-commerce company that was started in 2004, and went IPO in 2015, highly values collaborative play. Instead of using

performance reviews to manage and allocated bonuses - something 90% of employees hate – Shopify uses an internal software called Unicorn. Unicorn gives each worker an allocation of unicorns every month, which they in turn award to other coworkers whom they feel were most helpful. At the end of the month, a portion of company profits are set aside and distributed by Unicorn points. Those with the most Unicorns i.e., those who played to empower their colleagues the most – are rewarded the most by the company, and vice versa.

Wikipedia is the world's number one encyclopaedia and top 10 visited websites on the Internet. While technically not a business, Wikipedia beat out the much better funded Microsoft Encarta because whereas the latter was operated by the best and brightest experts money could buy, the former opened its platform up to anyone who wanted to play. In fact, it is the intentional desire to protect Wikipedia brand now that is ironically preventing contributors from playing with it as they had in the past, and risking the organization's adaptability and future performance (Auerbach, 2014).

4. Working less, Playing More – “All work and no play make Jack a dull Adult”, were the ominous warnings of The Shining's Jack Torrance, who drove himself to insanity by taking up the life of a workaholic.

Unfortunately, industry by-and-large has forgotten, and recent US data shows workers are now working an average of 47 hours, per week (“The ‘40-

Hour' Workweek Is Actually Longer – by Seven Hours”).

The standard 8-hour work/day stems from the industrial era, in which twenty-four-hour day was compartmentalized into three distinct components of eight-hours of sleep, eight-hours of work, and eight-hours of everything else. Productive white-collar work is even less, on average six-hours per day (Baker, 2015). And creative work is closer to four-hours per day, at least according to the arguments put forth by likes of Bertrand Russell, Buckminster Fuller, John Maynard Keynes, Arthur C. Clarke and Ray Bradbury – perhaps also an inspiration to Tim Ferriss' best selling book “the 4-Hour Workweek”.

Innovators of course zig while everyone else is zagging. And there are forward thinking companies that starting the embrace that “success is journey and not a destination.” The Toronto firm archiTEXT for example, made a point of providing 2-month sabbaticals to its entire staff every year. “We give our entire team the summer off to go on a creative journey,” wrote its CEO Zahra Ebrahim in the Huffington Post, “to rejuvenate, to reconnect to ideas that make them tick. It makes our work better, it makes our ideas richer, and makes our jobs feel more like dream jobs.” Ebrahim is now co-lead of Doblin's Canadian practice, and aiming to infuse play into the large consultancy's corporate culture.

Similarly, Treehouse, a leading online platform that helps people learn to code online has instituted a 32 hour work-week, with salaries that compete with 40-hours of pay. Their rationale is that “it's not about the quantity of

time – it's about the quality of time. Life satisfaction equals deeper engagement equals increased productivity” (Husain, 2015).

Take from their lead and your intuition that the exceptional manager works less, not more (‘like everybody else’). How? Ask yourself the following three questions:

- 1) If our people only worked 20 hours per week, how would we work differently?
- 2) If we could give our people 5-hours a week to spend on play and playful activity, how might we go about achieving it?
- 3) What is the next step I can take, in order to bring the visions we defined in questions 1) & 2) closer to reality?

5. Studying and Practicing Play - After being forsaken in the halls of academia for so long, it seems that play is beginning to gain clout again. The American Journal of Play, which was established in 2008, is an interdisciplinary journal with contributions from many different fields. The Association for the Study of Play is a leading organization dedicated to interdisciplinary research and construction. Academics and administrators who are tuned into the benefits of play creative and intellectual inquiry are calling for more playful university (Leeder, 2014). The Applied Improv Network integrates improv led play principles to lead personal development, team building, creativity, innovation, and wellbeing work. OCAD University for example, has a Play Lab, which explores play as a method to of new knowledge generation, “a tool for education, research, activism and

innovation.”⁹ Last, but not least, Stanford University has begun to offer a course entitled From Play to Innovation, which aims to give students a solid understanding of play and its benefits for creativity and innovative problem solving.

Play research is taking off, and it is beckoning managers to start playing. In a recent study entitled “Effects of Improvisational Techniques in Leadership Development” (Tabaee, 2013), managers were given a 3.5 hour improv workshop and asked to take 1 thing they learned back into their work in the month’s thereafter. As a result, these managers consistently reported (verified by their staff) significant improvements in their listening, decision-making, openness to risk, and playfulness and playfulness with staff, not to mention similar improvements in their home life. In short, they began to have more fun, and as a result, their relationships improved. I’m not sure exactly how to put a price on that, but it seems worth the investment.

⁹ <http://research.ocadu.ca/gameplay/home>

/ SEVEN PATHWAYS FOR BRINGING PLAY BACK

“Sometimes you have to take a break from being the kind of boss that’s always trying to teach people things. Sometimes you just have to be the boss of dancing.”

- Michael Scott, *The Office*

Einstein once wrote, “No problem can be solved at the same level of consciousness that created it.” MIT’s Jay Forrester, put it more directly “most problems that corporate leaders (or leaders of any other system) face aren’t caused by outside forces: competitors, market trends, or regulation. Problems tend to derive from the unintended consequences of the leaders’ own ideas and efforts.” And the 20th century’s most notorious economist John Maynard Keynes, once stated, “the difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones.”

If we want to thrive as a species in the way we related to our work in the future, we need to let go of the utterly specious notion that play is frivolous or even that play and work are competing activities.

This requires an important mindset change for the average manager from the former view to seeing play as integral to healthy, productive work. As author and play consultant Matt Weinstein wrote to me, “old-style managers see someone having fun at work and think, ‘there’s someone goofing off! Gotta put a stop to that!’ New-era managers see someone having fun at work and think, ‘There’s someone re-energizing himself, recuperating from stress, and bringing some joy to the office!’ So all it takes is a shift in perspective.”

1. Taking Up Analog Play

To engage in play and playful activity requires time.

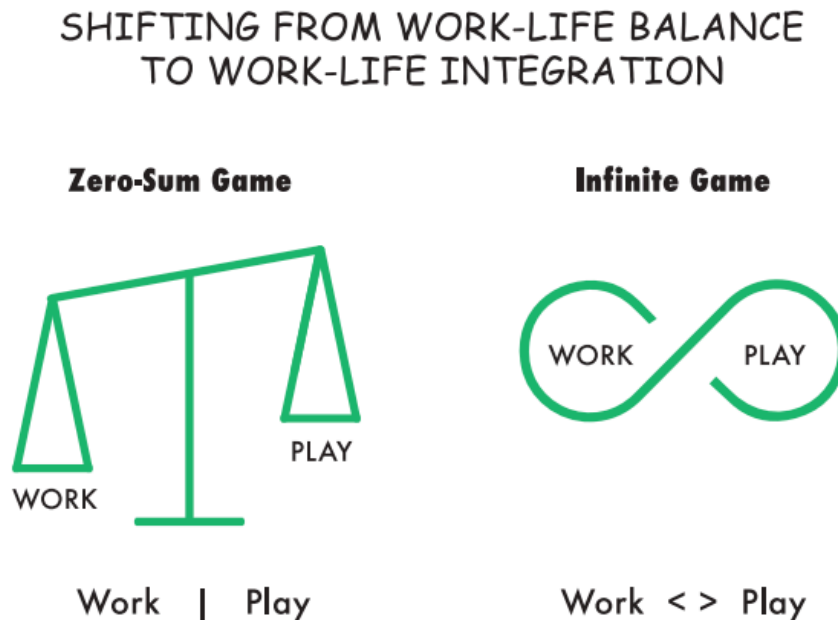
Gary Schwartz, actor, speaker, and improv coach suggests organizations create “a recess period” into every workday, just like children have in school. “A similar play period instituted in companies that require a cell-phone-free zone for interaction and possible structured play activities will create lasting culture change over time” he writes.

Martin Ryan, senior innovation consultant at Doblin adds, “Play is the required activity, but you cannot ask people to “play” anymore than you can ask them to be “creative.” Play relies on building contextually relevant games – games that matter to the player..[And] structures to help them shift modes and start playing.”

How to Implement

- A. Start small. Integrate play methods (5-minute nudges) into your office life – how you start each meeting for example.
- B. Build on this, and create a daily recess period for play.
- C. Seek playful artefacts that imbue your office with a playful aura (Corus Quay in Toronto for example, has a 5-storey spiral slide running throughout its building signifying its playful corporate culture)
- D. Create and install playful spaces in and around the office
- E. Demonstrate that play and playfulness are an acceptable part of your organizational culture

FIGURE 19 SHIFTING FROM WORK OR PLAY TO WORK AND PLAY



Concept by the Author; illustrated by Medina Abdelkader

2. Develop a Learning Model of Play

Akshay Sateesh (Ziksana Consulting) notes that organizations need to develop an awareness and language of play in order to appreciate the “value of play alongside strengths to achieve business results, effective teaming, and innovative thinking.”

How to Implement

- A. Develop workshops on the role and value of Play within your organization.
- B. Help employees answer:
 - a. What is play for me/us?
 - b. What are the components of play that we value?
 - c. What are some ways in which we play here?

- C. Explore how play behaviours can develop listening, influence, giving and receiving feedback, strategic thinking, and communications skills - among others - to improve the values, culture, and performance of your organization.

3. Develop Play into Employee Roles

Lindsay McGregor (Vega Factor) wrote me that the idea of work/play balance in the notion that play means pool tables and beer taps in the office is a “misperception.” Certainly, work/play balance is better than work/play imbalance, but what is even better is to *work/play integration*. “The first step to making play a priority is organizing people into a new, role-related definition of play” she writes. That is, help individuals identify how they can find their play in the roles and responsibilities they hold within your organization.

Additionally she notes, “Play is fundamentally about experimentation... If you tell people *how* to do their jobs, you’re killing play”.

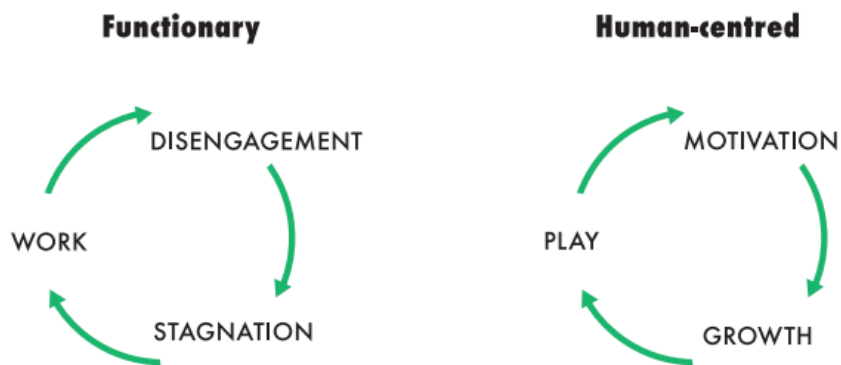
How to Implement

- A. Get people to take Play Journal (See Appendix A). This is a simple 4- questionnaire that helps your employees understand
 - a. What activities did I love doing for their own sake when I was younger?
 - b. What about these activities did I enjoy and why?
 - c. How might I create the same experiences and feelings in my work today?
- B. Ask employees to experiment with how they might perform their responsibilities in a way that is unique to them, but only they would

know about (how is their spreadsheet just a little different than others', or, what about the software they just wrote makes it uniquely theirs? This not only encourages staff to play with new ideas, but also encourages ownership of the work, and pride in its delivery.

FIGURE 20 WORK DEPLETES, PLAY REPLENISHES

HOW WE APPROACH OUR WORK MATTERS



Concept by the Author; illustrated by Medina Abdelkader

4. Encourage Employees to volunteer for new Work Work

“Organizations need to shift from an authoritarian view towards a positive inquiry and contribution approach, wherein managers genuinely seek to understand what makes their employees come alive, and empower them to seek more of it throughout their daily work,” says Annemarie Steen, play facilitator and consultant living in the Netherlands.

The first rule of play is that participation is voluntary. By encouraging employees to play in the organizational challenges that most excite them, you empower them to approach their work from a place of play.

How to Implement

- A. Encourage employees to steward one pet project
- B. Shift your role on this project from manager to that of coach/ mentor
- C. Highlight the benefits of this project: the relationships developed, the new value created, and use it as a way to converse about potential future opportunities that really excite your employees

5. Commit to Play in Your Annual Report

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) used to be a controversial topic in business, but now serves as a competitive advantage, connecting organizations to communities, driving impact, innovation, mindshare, and performance. A Forrester (2014) study found that creative companies consistently outperform competitors on key performance indicators such as revenue growth, market share, and talent acquisition.

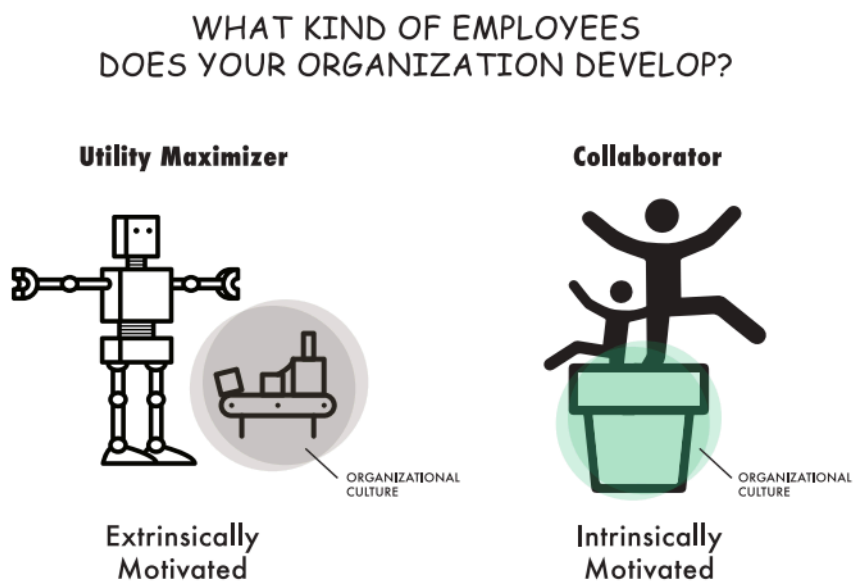
By explicitly committing to play in your organization's Annual Report, your company demonstrates its serious commitment to play, and this can help with recruitment and retention of top talent, brand differentiation, and engagement; all-the-while fostering greater organizational alignment and revenue growth.

How to Implement

- A. Create a play section in your annual report that highlights your organization's commitment and value of play.

- B. Play Champions – play in organizations is mainly social. Suggest 2+ senior executives to co-champion play for your organization; they will have more fun doing it together too.
- C. Share Reflection – ask employees to share their play journal learnings from the previous year in a way that respects their privacy, and work these into the Play section of your Annual report.
- D. Develop Practice – play empowers teamwork, collaboration, and problem solving.
Support team play initiatives, story telling and measurement of play's impact.
- E. Condition Excellence - great teams comprise individuals who evolve their game through play. Encourage employees to use play as the thread underlying the connection between their work, each other, and your organization. Celebrate those who use play to take themselves, their teams, and your organization to the next level.

FIGURE 21 WE ARE HUMAN AFTER ALL



Concept by the Author; illustrated by Medina Abdelkader

6. Use Play to Innovate

Brendan Boyle (IDEO & Stanford) and Sue Walden (ImprovWorks.org) have differing but complementary views on play.

Brendan leads with the science on play, then helps organizations understand that play is their chief ally and competitive advantage, before running them through play-led exercises on innovation.

In comparison, Sue begins by leading organizations through a business challenge that highlights how without play, organizations and managers often use rational tools to solve emotional and creative challenges, and thus, often fall short. Sue then helps these teams analyze what behaviours and skills are required, and using improv tools works to develop them. The teams then take on a similar challenge, often with markedly different outcomes.

How to Implement

For Brendan and IDEO, play can drive your organization's entire innovation/design thinking process.

- 1) You can gain Empathy with Users through **Role-Play** (body storming for example)
- 2) Your team can brainstorm and ideate through **Exploratory Play** (game storming with whiteboards, index cards, sticky notes for example)
- 3) And you can prototype and test ideas through **Constructive Play** (LEGO's "Serious Play" program for example)

For Sue, play is about bringing individuals together to connect and create, in

ways that are just not possible without play. One of the games she shared with me called “Thirty-Five”, which helps groups form consensus on individually generated ideas, and help quickly prioritize the best one. Others can be found on www.thiagi.com

7. Measure Type and Benefits of Play

Author Dan Pink replied, “the key is for corporate leaders to stop thinking of play as something frivolous and begin thinking of it as a form of creative engagement.” For that he notes, we need examples of what successful play looks like among peers, and, develop measures on the ROI of play.

How to Implement

- A. Start developing a library of how other organizations such as Zappos, Southwest, W.L. Gore, Google, 3M, Valve etc. are infusing their cultures with play and explore how your organization might learn from their practices.
- B. Start taking measures on the impact of play on your organization.
How is play impacting for example,
 - a. Engagement
 - b. Retention
 - c. Collaboration
 - d. Idea Generation
 - e. Prototyping
 - f. etc.
- C. Document and share how play is enabling your organization to develop a more human-centered and adaptive culture.
- D. Experiment, Experiment, Experiment... and have fun!

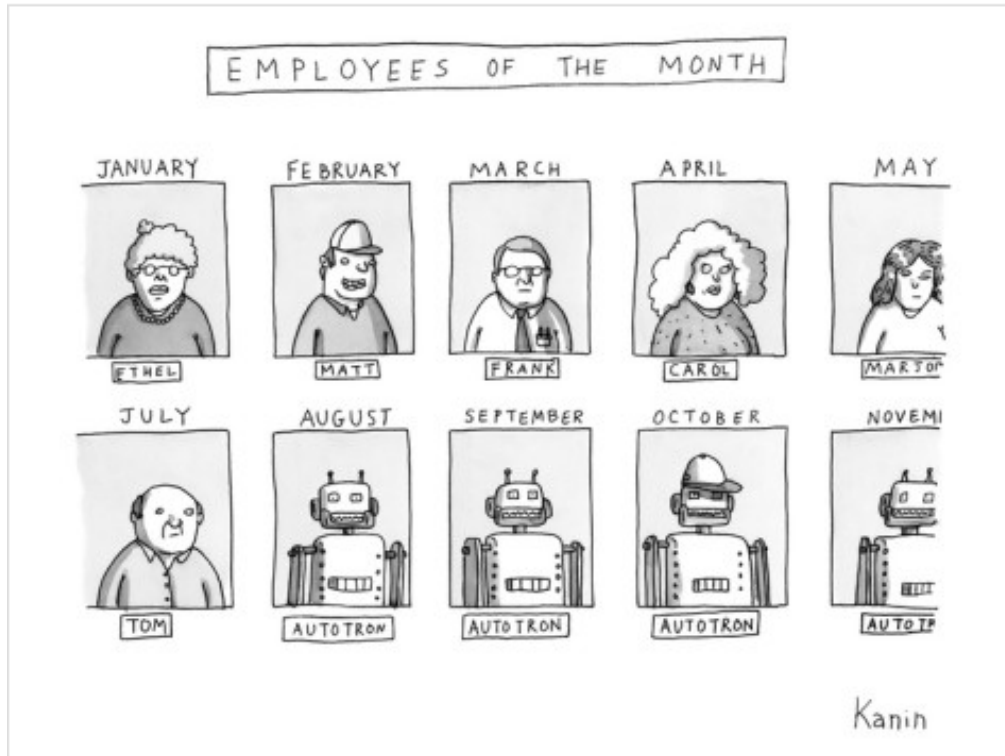
FIGURE 22 WORK TO PRODUCE, PLAY TO PERFORM



Concept by the Author; illustrated by Medina Abdelkader

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

FIGURE 23 THE FUTURE OF WORK?



by Zachary Kanin, New Yorker

In Canada, an estimated 13 million employees do not feel connected to their work. Yet, we have the social technology to minimize the above problem.

This technology is called play. And yet, our playphobic mindsets regarding play at work prevent us from using this incredibly powerful tool. The

consequences are that organizations systemically fall short creating the cultures in which their employees can be their motivated, collaborative, and innovative best. A shortcoming that according to one estimate costs

Canadians \$50 billion in productivity per annum, or, \$5,000 per household, not to mention other significant costs such as significantly higher rates of workplace related anxiety and depression.

It is my hope that the six-factors conflating play outlined in chapter 2 brings to forefront our cultural and organizational biases against play and playfulness for adults at work. Moreover, I hope that the five patterns and seven pathways to organizational play presented in Chapter 3 can offer a constructive perspective on how organizations might create pathways of play back into their cultural milieu and business etiquette.

To these interests, additional research could be of great benefit to those hoping to pickup where this paper leaves off. In particular, there is significant potential in applying design research techniques to help different organizational cultures co-create and integrate greater levels of play into the way their organization do business. There is perhaps overlap here with Thaler and Sunstein's concept of 'nudging,' which stresses instinctive and deontic rather than rational choice making. Nudges can be pursued by organizations interested in 'designing choices' that can help more of the work feel like play, both in how it is done, and how employees connect to it (for example, making a game of a needed job instead of assigning it, or creating nudges that help individuals reframe manual labour as an opportunity to exercise etc.,). A third important area might relate to the use of play as a bridge across generational and culture gaps. How might we for example, get different generations within an organization to work more effectively together, or how might we better connect a corporate culture with a startup culture through play? Fourth, much more work is necessary on

play measurement. If defining attributes of play is that helps adaptation, motivation, learning, collaboration, learning and innovation, how do we measure for these and get better at them? We are good at measuring tactical execution – how well we execute to plan – but we do much worse at measuring adaptive performance – how well we diverge from the plan.

Lastly, my interests in Strategic Foresight and Innovation beckon me to ask what are the implications of play on foresight? I'm concerned that much of the foresight that comes out of the management sciences is missing the social capital that play helps create as a basis for adaptability and resilience. As Rushkoff put it, "your future is less dependent on your 401 K plan than it is on how you are connected meaningfully with the community in which you live.. we can safely dispense with long-term future thinking; it's a task for which we are simply not suited" (Rushkoff as cited in La Fontaine, 2014). Or to quote Alan Watts on the matter, "making plans for the future is only of use to people who are capable of living completely in the present." And what better way to be collectively in the moment than through play?

My own plan pursuing this research is to develop the ideas presented here in some of the following ways. As a writer, my intention is to break up some of the content presented into smaller, more digestible articles for two different groups: early adopters and the early majority. The former might be a play practitioner, looking for scholarly ammunition to support their practice and the changes they seek to create through it. Perhaps my work can serve this group by highlighting the deeper causes leading to business' playphobia, and

open the door for managers' to accept play into their organizations. For the latter, I hope to offer both conceptual insights as to why play is the future of work, as well as practicable advice on how to embody and inject it effectively into playphobic organizations.

Finally, as a play practitioner, I hope to strengthen my chops in the area of Playing to Perform through collaborative work and consultations with various experts. I'm particularly interested in partnering with AIN to develop 3-6 half-day play workshops that might eventually serve corporate visionaries end-to-end solutions for evolving their organizational cultures. Underlying these efforts would be applied research to validate and refine our hypotheses on how to map play's ROI for organizations.

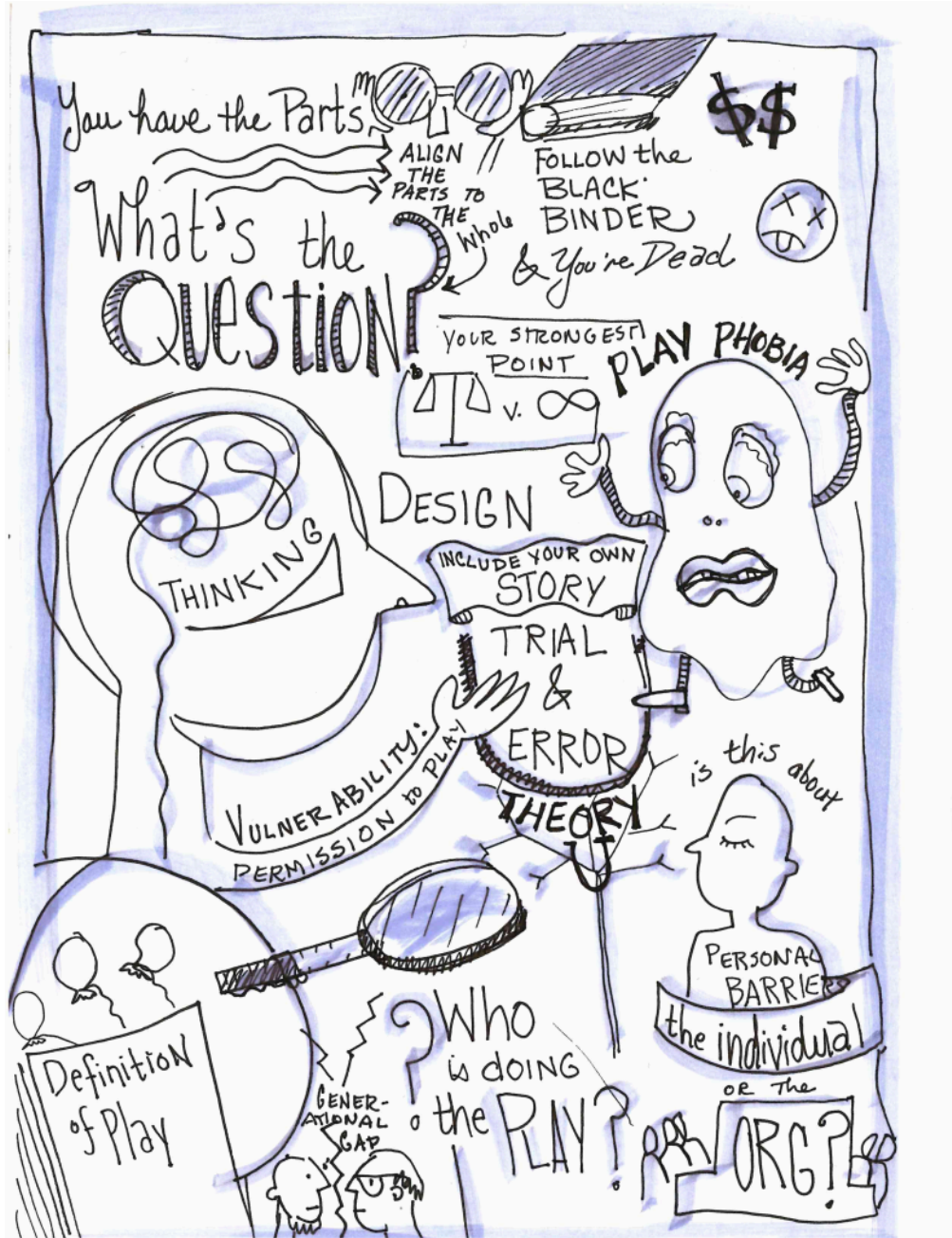
If successful, I expect these efforts could serve as a beachhead from which play consultancies can access the larger, diverse early majority segment of the market, which could witness a rebirth of play as a foundation for work in the 21st century - a big Homer Simpson WOO HOO!! And by aiming to pursue the above paths, perhaps I can help us "Cross the Chasm" on play, as laid out in Messr Moore's venerable book of the same title. In the meantime, I hope to apprentice and continuously seek sage advice from the undisputed thought leaders of play: namely children – perhaps eventually my own – and pets.

As a final word, it is worth acknowledging that the implementation of ideas presented in this paper will become with short-term cost/trade-off for organizations. While the benefits of play (motivation, collaboration, and

innovation) are drivers of long-term organizational adaptability and success – perhaps even transformation – it is easy to lose sight of these in the short-run. We all like to believe that we “think different”; play compels us to take this a step further, and act different too. And that takes courage. To let go of familiar but myopic views of work, to let go of the need to fit in, and instead to carve a new, playful path.

As George Bernard Shaw once remarked, “we don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.” It is time for organizations act on this truth, and start playing again. Play is not dead. And, rumours of play’s demise are greatly exaggerated. Long live play!

FIGURE 24 Q & A AS PRESENTED ON APRIL 21, 2016 BY THE AUTHOR



Illustrated by Patricia Kambitsch

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/ APPENDIX A: PLAY ACTION JOURNAL

1. List the ways you used to play as a child?

[What activities gave you unfettered pleasure, suspended time, and made you want to do that thing over and over again (p66-71 of Stuart Brown's Play for Archetypes)?]

2. What drew you to these experiences and how did they make you *feel*?

3. What activities might enable you to recreate such feelings in your life *now*?

4. How might you get more play out of your life now as an adult (Personal, Career, and Relationships)?

5. Weekly play-work Reflection: how did you bring play into work last week? What did you learn from it? How might you find play in your work next week?

/ Appendix B: My Research Question for Play Experts

Research context: We know that the goal of management is not to motivate others, but to *create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves* ([Deci & Flaste, 1995](#)).

Research shows, the best way to achieve this is through [Play](#): i.e. to encourage people to engage in their work for its own sake.

As humans ([Gray, 2009](#); [Brown, 2010](#); [Bateson & Martin 2013](#) etc.) we know that play is key to motivation, collaboration, creativity, mastery and adaptation, not to mention play is fun!

But, we also know that *in business, play gets us into trouble* (i.e. the perception that if you are playing, then you are not really working).

My research contends that our biases against play stem from an out-dated mechanistic, puritan, and materialist paradigm.

And that we need to overcome these biases now, to create flourishing organizations in the 21st century.

Here's my question: What would it take for managers of traditional companies to prioritize play in their organizations?