JOURNAL OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Special Issue: Call for Papers

The Power of Play in Organizations:
Implications for Well-being and Work Effectiveness

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Background and Rationale for the Special Issue

Imagine fantasy football, virtual escape rooms, trivia nights, ping pong games, and tables of Legos alongside office workstations. These are a few typical examples of how play can be found in contemporary organizations (Stewart, 2013). Broadly defined, play refers to a type of activity carried out primarily for fun and enjoyment (Celestine & Yeo, 2021; Petelczyc, Capezio, Wang, Restubog & Aquino, 2018). Play has traditionally been considered to be outside the purview of work. As such, play is often not taken as being serious or contributing to the achievement of task-relevant goals. In fact, because play generally lacks predictability and cannot be easily controlled or mandated (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015), it can often be viewed as diverting employees from the goals of the organization. These features render play antithetical to what many managers and employees might think of as appropriate, effective and productive workplace behaviors. Yet, recent reviews of play and empirical studies challenge this assumption.

First, related research from allied disciplines, such as psychology, has significantly improved our understanding of why play serves a crucial function in who we are and how we thrive (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). Not only is play central to our psychological health, it is also a vital source of creativity, learning, and our deep-seated drive for exploration and discovery (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Fredrickson, 2001). As social species, play gives flavor to our social interactions and helps develop and deepen social relationships that bestow us with pleasure and meaning beyond material and transactional exchanges (Baxter, 1992).

Second, the growing emphasis on innovation, collaboration, and intrinsic motivation in contemporary organizations has led organizational scholars to re-evaluate the role and relevance of play in the workplace (Landers & Martin, 2021; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). Increasingly, the benefits arising from play are seen as legitimate, pertinent, and valuable to modern forms of work, organizing, and organizations (Bakker, Sharp, Breevaart & de Vries, 2020; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010).

Yet, the same features that can stimulate positive outcomes may also have detrimental impacts that can threaten the organizations' ability to provide a productive and safe place for employees to work. For example, play can distract employees from focusing on work tasks, disrupt organizational routines and order, and blur the lines between personal and professional relationships (Roy, 1959). Along similar lines, play can be distorted by individuals and organizations to abuse, harass, and control others (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). What constitutes play is also highly subjective and therefore can be misconstrued and may cause task and relational conflicts among employees. Therefore, despite its many potential benefits, play can have unwanted consequences in organizations if it is interpreted in negative ways by some employees.

To contribute to a deeper, comprehensive, and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between play and work, this special issue seeks to publish original empirical

research and theory development papers in the area of workplace play. It also serves as a catalyst to accelerate and advance innovative, interdisciplinary, and cutting-edge research on workplace play. For example, the special issue highlights central and unanswered questions of workplace play, such as the processes and conditions under which play impacts work and how organizations can effectively introduce play in ways that leverage its potential benefits while minimizing its limitations and potential detrimental consequences.

The influence of play on human cognition, motivation, emotion, and social relationships suggests that it has a broad impact on many areas of organizational behavior. In this respect, we are especially interested in scholarly work that can meaningfully expand our current understanding of the consequences of workplace play by focusing on new and previously underexplored outcomes, such as how play relates to employees' collaboration and teamwork, conflict and negotiations, leadership and influence, and network structures. To gain a more complete and balanced view, we welcome papers that examine different types of play and investigate play at different levels, including the trait level, activity level, or the level of organizational culture (Celestine & Yeo, 2021; Petelczyc et al., 2018). We are also interested in both the bright and dark side of play, and welcome submissions that shed light on the boundary conditions under which play may contribute to or hamper work effectiveness and well-being. Finally, to contribute to the development and advancement of organizational theory and research on play, we especially welcome manuscripts that consider how play can be integrated into existing organizational theories.

Some research questions that might be addressed in this Special Issue include (but are not limited to):
1. How does play affect employees' ability to recover from stress?
2. How does play influence learning and exploration in organizations?
3. How does play facilitate creativity and innovation at individual, team and organizational levels?
4. How does play alter employees' motivations, contribute to the accumulation of social and psychological resources, and subsequently impact performance?
5. How does play shape peoples' ability to work together, collaborate towards common goals, and resolve conflict?
6. How does play influence the quality and structure of individuals' social and work relationships?
7. How does a playful work environment affect an organization's ability to recruit, develop, and retain talent?
8. Does play have a dark side, including how others form negative views of employees who engage in play at work or interpret play as being unwanted, undesirable, or exclusionary? How does the dark side of play impact work?
9. What are the individual, organizational and/or contextual factors that drive engagement in play at work?
10. How can organizations introduce play to enhance organizational effectiveness?
11. How can we better measure play at work?

Although play is increasingly legitimized and introduced into the workplace through new philosophies and practices (Landers & Martin, 2021), such as the gamification of work (Mollick & Rothbard, 2014), we argue that organizational scholarship in this domain of research has not been able to keep pace with accelerating developments in management practice. By bringing together cutting-edge, expert knowledge from world-leading scholars to advance novel, interdisciplinary, and critical understanding of how work and organizations can be impacted by play, this Special Issue bridges the theory-practice gap on play and can

serve as a valuable source of knowledge for evidence-based management practices on how play can be best incorporated into the business world.

Timeline and General Submission Guidelines

The timeline for the Special Issue is as follows:

June 30, 2022	Special Issue call posted to the JOB website and other sources
August 6, 2022	Academy of Management Paper Development Workshop
March 15-April 15, 2023	Submission window
April 30, 2023	Desk edits completed; manuscripts sent out for review
July 15, 2023	First decision sent to authors; 120 days allocated for revisions
November 15, 2023	First revisions due back
January 30, 2024	Second round decisions to authors; 60 days for revisions
March 31, 2024	Second revisions due back
May 31, 2024	Second decisions on manuscripts
August 15, 2024	Final decisions on manuscripts

This call is open and competitive. We are interested in submissions which are original cutting-edge and must not be consideration by another journal or outlet. Papers to be considered for this Special Issue should be submitted electronically via JOB's online submission system (selecting 'Special Issue Paper' as the manuscript type) during the submission window and adhere to the style of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th Edition (www.apastyle.org/manual). Manuscripts will be handled by the Special Issue guest editors and reviewed by at least two anonymous reviewers, who will be blind to the identity of the author(s). The Special Issue Editors are happy to discuss initial ideas for papers and can be contacted directly: Karl Aquino (karl.aquino@sauder.ubc.ca), Simon Lloyd D. Restubog (simonldr@illinois.edu), Gillian Yeo (gillian.yeo@uwa.edu.au), Lu Wang (nick.wang@anu.edu) and Kohyar Kiazad (kohyar.kiazad@monash.edu).

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