

# *Discovering Play*

in work, in identity, & in social life

## **Presenters:**

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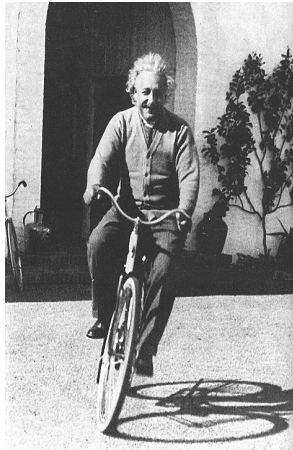
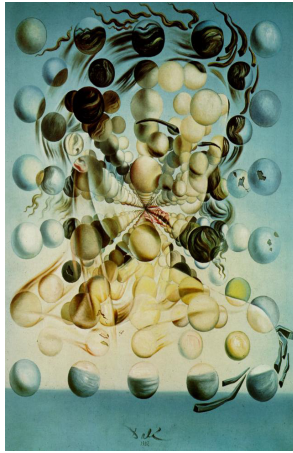
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# *Why study play?*

- Because we lag far behind other fields in the study of play.
- To question the topsy-turvy logic that portrays play as frivolous but the business that supply it as serious.
- Because our current theories are often at odds with needs and behaviors in “play industries.”
- Because our current knowledge about play behaviors within organisations is incomplete or confusing.

- I have an active fantasy life.
- I try to keep all my thoughts directed along realistic lines and avoid flights of fancy. (inversely scored)
- I take too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working.

*Playfulness scale, Costa & McRae (NEO, 1992).*

*Workplace Deviance scale, Bennett & Robinson (JAP, 2000)*

## *Two Dualistic Definitions of Play & Work*

- Useful vs Useless Action:

Work is all action that is productive, necessary, & useful to life. Play is all action that is useless and frivolous.

Work is better than play--all our energy should be turned to account and not be wasted to aimless motion.

- Free vs Imposed Action:

Play is all action that is done freely and for its own sake whether or not it has ulterior benefits. Work is all action that is done unwillingly and out of the spur of necessity. Play is better than work—freedom is a better condition than servitude or slavery.

(Santayana, 1955)

# *Rethinking play in organizations*

- Play behaviors as peripheral to core work tasks:
  - Play as a brief activity that induces positive affect (Isen, 1999)
  - Play as a ‘mindless,’ cognitively restoring activity (Elsbach & Hargadon, 2002)
  - Play as informal social interaction (Locke, 1989; Palmer, 1983; Roy, 1959)
- Play as internal to core work tasks:
  - Work is turned into play when it is intrinsically motivated & certain contextual conditions are present (Amabile, 1996); and when the structural configuration of the task allows total involvement in the activity by facilitating an optimal balance between challenges and skills (Csiczentmihaly, 1990), and the temporary suspension of the normal sociotemporal context of work (Mainemelis, 2001)

# *Rethinking play in organizations*

- Play as a metacommunicative action:
  - When a task is cued as play, individuals are more means orientated, more intrinsically motivated, spend more time on it, adhere to the rules of the task, and their responses are more elaborate and image-laden. When the task is cued as work, individuals are more ends oriented, spend less time on it, are concerned with comparative performance, and their responses are more streamlined and efficient. (Glynn, 1994; Sandelands, 1988)
- Play as a transitional space:
  - Characterized by experimentation and improvisation rather than purposive, consistent behaviour (Ibarra, 2003; Kolb, 1984; March, 1976)

# *Elements of Play*

- Freedom within limits
- Ritualized novelty
- Autotelic engagement
- Boundaries in time and space
- Positive Affect