

‘Espoir’: Towards a more ‘humane’ organizing through play and art

Jinia Mukerjee

Montpellier Business School, France

One of the challenges of workers in organizations is their struggle to be fully human at work. Traditional views of organizations see employees as a system of roles and contracts rather than as a “community of persons” (Melé, 2012). The rational-legal bureaucratic form that characterizes many modern corporations emphasizes efficiency and fragmentation over being fully human. However, over the past few decades, there are growing efforts to humanize the workplace, so that organizational life represents “a site for the search for ‘personal wellness’, a place and time where ‘well-being’ is defined and self-expression actively encouraged, where ‘happiness’ is sought through a proliferation of techniques celebrating the self” (Costea et al., 2005: 141). This movement to humanize organizational life calls for rethinking and reinventing practices that challenge traditional conceptions of work.

Two promising developments in this movement have been the inclusion of play and arts in organizations. When we play, “*we are engaged in the purest expression of our humanity, the truest expression of our individuality*” (Stuart Brown). The use of play in organizations is progressively receiving more and more interest, especially due to its relation to ‘wellness’ (Butler et al., 2011; Costea et al., 2005). Research on play in work organization shows play’s beneficial effects on employees’ health and well-being, creativity, affective experience, job satisfaction, work motivation (Amabile, 1996; Karl & Peluchette, 2006; Mainemelis & Dionysiou, 2015; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Statler et al., 2009; Statler et al., 2011, Mukerjee & Metiu, 2022).

Similarly, arts-based interventions are increasingly utilized in organizational development processes (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009) and have been recognized for their ability to spark innovation (Ibbotson & Darso, 2008) foster greater attentional capacity, (Springborg, 2010), enable individuals to manage their emotions more effectively (Taylor & Statler, 2009) and generate spaces in which people can create alternative visions for new futures (Barry & Meisiek, 2010). Art fosters the development of new discourses, allows people to express themselves authentically. In the field of management, there is a growing interest in how art and art-based interventions can be used to bring about more sustainable ways of living (Dieleman, 2007).

The efficacy of play and art for humanizing work and organizations can be attributed to their deeply rooted origin in human nature. While describing the relation between play and art, Nachmanovitch (1990) said: “*Play is the taproot from which original art springs; it is the raw stuff that the artist channels and organizes with all his learning and technique*” (p. 42). On the other hand, cultural historian Huizinga (1955) observed that arts promote the development of more playful sensibility. Play and art share a common orientation of doing the activity for its own sake. As Huizinga (1958) asserts, play is not a means to external ends or purposes. The reward of play is in the act: the prize of play is play itself. That is not to suggest that play has no functional utility,

but that utility is not what the player engages in play for. Oscar Wilde's (1891) comment about art, that 'all art is quite useless,' is in the same spirit of escaping from the hegemony of purposiveness. But to say that play and the arts lack purpose is not to say that they lack meaning; rather, they are meaningful ends in themselves (Morgan, 2007), thus representing a "higher seriousness" (Hegel, 1959: 55).

Herein lies the challenge. With organizations seeking to optimize performance and efficiency, play and art may be seen as frivolous, unproductive, or even as a deterrent to positive organizational outcomes. Additionally, play and art are as susceptible to perversion if they are practiced to accomplish an explicit function.

This track, inspired by one of the major forces of the Art Nouveau movement in Nancy (France), Émile Gallé, and his piece "Espoir" (hope), focuses squarely on playful and artistic sensibility. The hope of this track is to be a space where scholars, practitioner and artists can rethink how play and art in businesses and organizations can allow people to be more authentic to their inner self, be more 'humane', and promote well-being and human connections. As a group, participants of this track will explore how play and art can be fruitfully integrated with work in organizations. What are the benefits, challenges, and opportunities around play and art-based interventions? How can we use play and art to redesign our organizations "*so that we can follow this playful human nature—rather than constantly shave the blade against, across and through it*" (Kane, 2004: 12). This track invites all kinds of contributions which can further develop our understanding, theorizing and discussion of how play and art can be leveraged to help develop more humanizing ways of organizing our communities, societies, and work organizations.

Please submit a 750-word proposal, as a Word.doc, wherever possible, in size 12 font, Times Roman. Proposals are due by 02nd December 2023 and should be sent to auomo2024nancy@gmail.com, copying in j.mukerjee@montpellier-bs.com

References

- Barry, D., & Meisiek, S. (2010): "Seeing more and seeing differently: Sensemaking, mindfulness, and the workarts." *Organization Studies*, 31(11):1505–1530.
- Butler, N., Olaison, L., Sliwa, M., & Spoelstra, S. (2011). Work, play and boredom. *Ephemera Theory & Politics in Organization*, 11(4): 329-335.
- Costea, B., Crump, N., & Holm, J. (2005). Dionysus at work? The ethos of play and the ethos of management. *Culture and Organization*, 11(2):139-151.
- Dieleman, H. (2007): "Sustainability, art and reflexivity: Why artists and designers may become key change agents in sustainability." *European Sociological Association Conference: New Frontiers in Arts Sociology*, 1–26.
- Huizinga, J. (2014). *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture*. Martino Publishing. Routledge (original work published 1955).
- Ibbotson, P., & Darso, L. (2008). "Directing creativity: The art and craft of creative leadership." *Journal of Management and Organization*, 14 (5):548–559.

- Karl, K., & Peluchette, J. (2006). How does workplace fun impact employee perceptions of customer service quality?. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 13(2): 2-13.
- Mainemelis, C. & Ronson, S. (2006). Ideas are born in fields of play; towards a theory of play and creativity in organizational settings. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 27: 81-131.
- Mainemelis, C., & Dionysiou, D. D. (2015). Play, flow, and timelessness. *The Oxford Handbook of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship*, 121-140.
- Mukerjee, J., & Metiu, A. (2022). Play and psychological safety: An ethnography of innovative work. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 39(3), 394-418.
- Melé, D. (2012). The firm as a “community of persons”: A pillar of humanistic business ethos. *Journal of business ethics*, 106(1), 89-101.
- Springborg, C. (2010). “Leadership as art – Leaders coming to their senses.” *Leadership*, 6 (3): 243–258.
- Statler, M., Heracleous, L., & Jacobs, C. D. (2011). Serious play as a practice of paradox. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(2): 236-256.
- Statler, M., Roos, J., & Victor, B. (2009). Ain’t misbehavin’: Taking play seriously in organizations. *Journal of Change Management*, 9(1): 87-107.
- Taylor, S.S., & Ladkin, D. (2009). “Understanding arts-based methods in managerial development.” *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 8(1): 55–69.
- Taylor, S.S., & Statler, M. (2009). “Material matters: Using media to manage emotion in arts-based learning processes.” *Working paper*.

Short bio of Convenor

Jinia Mukerjee is an Associate professor at Montpellier Business School, France. She has a PhD from Skema Business School and a Doctorat en Science from Aix Marseille University, France. She studies how individuals and groups work together to sustain innovative work, primarily using ethnographic methods. She is particularly interested in the way play unfolds and coexist with innovative work, and, the role of play in the entrepreneurial process. She also studies the role of well-being and psycho-markers in entrepreneurship. Her research has been published in journals like *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *Journal of Small Business Management*, *Small Business Economics*, *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *Social Psychological Bulletin*, *BMC Public Health*. She has also written two book chapters (co-authored with Anca Metiu), published by Routledge, on play at work entitled - “*Using Anthropological Methods to Study Play in Work Settings*”(2021), and, “*Ethnographic Images of Work: Lessons from Journalism*” (2017). Passionate about creative writing, Jinia’s collection of short stories, *Violet is the color of my heart*, was published in 2015.