

THE INTEGRATION OF WORK, PLAY, AND LEARNING:
THE FUTURE OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE

by

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THE INTEGRATION OF WORK, PLAY, AND LEARNING:
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ABSTRACT

This capstone threads theories on work, play, and learning in order to present their integration as a new, future construct of the organizational experience. I argue that that an organization's true competitive advantage is the quality of work life of its employees. To substantiate this view, I employ a cross-disciplinary framework to explore the psychodynamic relationship between employee and the organization. I also recommend additional studies on the interplay of work, play, and learning in the organizational context.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Personal Case Study

As a graduate of my organization's leadership development program, I expected much more from my first assignment post-program: more ingenuity in solving problems, more variety in task activity, and essentially more of an opportunity to exercise my intellect. Instead, the role was rote: answer call, follow script, repeat.

As a financial specialist in a call center, I was expected to meet a certain quota of calls each day, but often fell short, instead choosing to spend more time addressing the complex needs of my clients than management had budgeted in their business model. I was never reprimanded for this deficiency – in fact, I was regarded as one of the most technically proficient on the team and had the respect of my high-net-worth clients. I was simply not exposed to other opportunities in the department, such as being considered for promotions, participating on special projects, or receiving public acknowledgement of my corporate citizenship. I observed that such opportunities were given to those who, above all else, met the business metrics despite the quality of their calls or the level of satisfaction of their clients. When I inquired about opportunities that were earmarked for my professional development, I was told that since I was so good in the role, the business needed me to remain there. At the time, I had no words to express the feelings that welled inside me, feelings of incompetence,

inadequacy, and pervasive unhappiness for remaining in a role in a department whose values apparently misaligned with mine. Nonetheless, I stayed for years, hoping to be rewarded at some future time for my dedication to the business, to no avail. This was my first organizational experience.

Background

The above case study offers just one observation of my organizational experience that led me to question the integrity of current management methodologies and their relevance in today's dynamic marketplace. This experience led me to believe that organizations are structured as a system of power and privilege, whose management discipline is predicated on the social and political mastery of maintaining public images and strategic alliances, where premium is placed on expediency and efficiency, being a "team player" means aligning with the ideology of the moment, and supporting the organization's objectives requires flexing one's personal, moral convictions. This experience is congruent, it seems, with the moral maze in the large organization that Jackall (1988) describes and other management theorists have observed. What is more, I assert that this experience is likely representative of others' experiences in the organization today. This capstone seeks to repudiate the prevailing framework for the organization of work and to substantiate a specific view of the organization – one that integrates work, play, and learning through improvements to the quality of work life.

An argument is crafted using an integrative and cross-disciplinary approach, including research from management theory, play theory, animal

behavior theory, positive psychology, behavioral science, sociology, inter alia. Central to this capstone, and likely most controversial, is the study of play in the organizational setting. Research will be cited that presents a scientific justification for play in humans in general, and that identifies its role in the organization. It is important to note that this paper is limited to examinations of play in adult humans only and does not extend analysis to the critical study of play in children or animals; however, it is to be noted that research on play in the latter cohorts is used to support the argument of this capstone. Also, play and other modes of behavior are isolated to the organizational context for purposes of this paper. Further, this paper does not seek to expound the categories of play, rather sets out to explore the implications of play when integrated with work and learning.

The inclusive nature of the research presented herein provides the organizational development practitioner and management theorist with a broad conceptual framework that emphasizes a psychodynamic understanding of the relationship between employee and the organization. (In this context, the organization is defined to include its ancillary programs and management.) It is important to note that this paper does not present a prescriptive or formulaic approach to achieving the integration of work, play, and learning in the organization; rather, it suggests a new lens through which to view an employee's experiences therein.

The remainder of this capstone is organized accordingly: Chapter 2 presents an exposition of how work is traditionally structured in organizations

generally and a discussion of its deficiencies in today's market. Chapter 3 follows with an exegesis of play through its cognitive and behavioral dynamics, and discusses play in the organization through applied creativity. Chapter 4 continues with a review of the literature on organizational learning and adaptation. Chapter 5 discusses the integration of work, play, and learning through the lens of quality of work life. Chapter 6 concludes with a reflection on what has been presented throughout this capstone and offers suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

TRADITIONAL MODEL OF THE ORGANIZATION

Context of Work

The proliferation of big business in American industry during the late 19th century seemed inevitable, primarily in response to the growing urbanization of Western markets through the expansion of the railroad as a system of transportation and communication (Chandler, 1959; Perrow, 2002), and consequently, the need for organizations to be responsive to new market developments and consumer demands (Edwards, 1974). In order to remain agile in these emerging markets of increasing complexity and scale, it became all the more important to achieve efficiency and control in the production of work.

The American engine of growth of the Industrial Revolution (c. 1820-1914), a notable period in history of great change and innovation, could be attributed to the reengineering of industry from a manually intensive mode of production to one that supports mass-production and the standardization of output. Research suggests that the worldview at this time centered on identifying ways in which to achieve growth and to improve worker productivity. Mechanization was the hallmark of this period, marked by technological advancements, such as the rapid industrialization of the textiles industry, and also through the development of a new labor class - management. I suggest that it is this mechanistic view of work which served and continues to serve as the paradigm upon which structures and processes for organizing employee's

behavior in industry and business has been built. This section will discuss the mechanistic model from two contexts: the labor process and the division of labor.

The Labor Process

As a consequence of the mechanistic worldview, with its focus on productivity and efficiency, the need to control work is paramount. Braverman (1974) and Edwards (1979) ascribe the term “crisis of control” to the organization’s focus on controlling worker behavior. Braverman (1974) and Hamel (2007) agree that the modern workplace was structured, or in their opinion, deconstructed, by capitalists’ acceptance of scientific management, a methodology patterned after the mechanization of work that, when applied to people, simplifies each step in the labor process through functional analysis (Ackoff, 1994; Borum, 1980) and specializing administrative functions (Weber, 1907).

The ambition of scientific management, as it was first put forth by Frederick W. Taylor (1911), was to approach process improvement and business management as a scientific problem by extracting the skill and requisite knowledge from the worker so as to identify the one best way to perform a task. The result of this extraction of skill from work is two-fold, in that the task could be standardized into simple, repeatable tasks, and extraneous effort eradicated¹. It is apparent that this homogenization of the labor process facilitates the dissociation of skill from work, thereby rendering the worker incapable of performing the entirety of the production process, thereby creating a mass of

simple labor (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979; Hamel, 2007). Consequently, work became menial and boring.

By standardizing processes, it was suggested that workers could increase production and quality of their output; however, the resulting increase in productivity was not attributable to the individual worker's skill, rather was perceived to be a testament to the organization's ability to structure work into distinct processes. One can argue that machine became the benchmark for measuring excellence at performing a task, with a focus on doing without the interference of thinking.

Division of Labor

Research also indicates the emergence of a new class of labor during the Industrial Revolution, the managerial class, who appear to be central to the organization's ability to achieve efficiency and growth under the mechanistic perspective. As previously discussed, scientific management proposes the separation of conception and execution, whereby the planning of work is polarized from the doing of work. In this way, all decisions related to task identification (i.e. what work is to be done) and execution (i.e. how work should be performed) rest with management. Braverman (1974) notes that

management has become administration, which is a labor process conducted for the purpose of control within the corporation, and moreover, as a labor process exactly analogous to the process of production, although it produces no product other than the operation and coordination of the corporation. (p.186)

The role of management is deemed a necessary class in the organization as overseers of the factors of production, which include man and machine, both of which are presumably interchangeable sources of labor power (Braverman, 1974).

In Table 1, Senge (1990) summarizes W. E. Deming's assessment of the basic elements of the prevailing system of management:

Table 1. Basic Elements of Management
(Deming, as cited in Senge, 1990: p. xiv)

Management by measurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on short-term metrics; - Devaluing intangibles;
Compliance based culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management by fear prevails ; - One gets ahead by pleasing the boss;
Managing outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management sets targets; - People are held accountable for meeting management-set targets regardless of whether they are possible within existing system and processes;
There are "right answers" versus "wrong answers" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical problem-solving is emphasized; - Diverging (systemic) problems are discounted;
Uniformity is valued above diversity, which is viewed as a problem to be solved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflict is suppressed in favor of superficial agreement;
Predictability and controllability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To manage is to control; - The "holy trinity" of management – " planning, organizing, and controlling;
Excessive competitiveness (internally) and distrust <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition between people is essential to achieve desired performance, which is thought to result in innovation;
Loss of the whole <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fragmentation, and the inability to leverage and spread innovation throughout the company.

Hamel (2007) and Pink (2009) agree that management is, in fact, an outdated technology whose central ethic is supervision. The subsection below discusses other social structures in the organization which serve to reinforce uniformity and controllability in worker behavior.

Social Structures

In addition to the crisis of control mentioned previously, Edwards (1975) discusses social relations within the workplace, asserting that the evolution of the labor process also requires a sequence of control mechanisms to continue to elicit certain desirable work behaviors from the employee. As the organization expands and management faces challenges with overseeing the entirety of production, control appears to take on multiple dimensions.

Edwards (1975) ascribes language to these interrelated types of control: simple control, largely aligned with entrepreneurial firms with significant personal relationships between entrepreneur/owner and employees; hierarchical control, which responds to firm expansion efforts and delegates power to multiple levels of management in fiefdoms; technical control, whereby the machines seemingly employ the worker; and bureaucratic control, or “rule of law,” which institutionalizes hierarchal power through titles and promotions, among other distinctions of class. In the context Edwards (1975) sets forth, control is pervasive in the organization. Research suggests that the bureaucratic level of control underscores the mechanistic model. Even from his early 20th century posture, Weber (1907) warns,

Bureaucracy also stands under the principle of *sine ira ac studio*. Its nature, which is welcomed by capitalism, develops the more perfectly the more the bureaucracy is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation. (p.216)

Cappelli et al. (1997) add to Weber (1907) and Edwards' (1975) point that bureaucratic control

...grows out of the formal structure of the firm... embedded in [its] social and organizational structure and built into job categories, work rules, promotion procedures, discipline, wage scales, definitions of responsibilities, and [thereby] establishes the impersonal force of "company rules" or "company policy" as the basis for control. (p. 131)

It is apparent that the organization itself becomes the overarching source of control and rules-making body to which employees must comply.

Summary and Conclusions

During the mechanistic era, work was dehumanized through the alienation of conception from execution, or brain from hand, respectively. In addition, the division of labor made the management class central to the organization's efforts in effecting control over worker behavior, and consequently, their productivity. Although standardization affords discipline, I would argue that the true crisis in this model is that the need to control worker behavior impedes human capability, in that it often does not consider matching the right person with the right job as it relates to determining measures of productivity.

A review of the literature suggests that analysis, (i.e. reducing a task to its fundamental elements), became a synonym for thought. Ackoff (1993; 1994)

purports that the process of analysis is three-fold, whereby the system (defined herein as a whole that can be divided into parts, in which each part is capable of affecting the system's behavior) is first dismembered. Breaking up the whole of a system into its parts affords the opportunity to understand each part separately. Last, one must attempt to aggregate the understanding of the parts into an understanding of the whole. He suggests, though, that if one part of the system is changed or removed, the nature of the system is changed. In this way, the product of analysis of a system is know-how, a perspective of problem-solving that centers on linear, cause-and-effect relationships, whereby one effect can be attributable to one cause (von Bertalanffy, 1968 as cited in Dent, 2003). In other words, the decision to structure work by applying the principles of scientific management supports routine behaviors (Duncan, 1974).

It is apparent to me that the traditional model of the organization of work enables deficiency in the cognitive development of its employees. Continuing to view an organization through the mechanistic lens of the 19th century does not enable the organization or its people to sufficiently and consistently address the changes to the dynamic and increased complexity of the environment of the 21st century. In order to fully appreciate the complexity associated with the new economy (as a result of increased interconnectedness and purposefulness of employees), it is better to change the orientation to the organization of work from mechanistic to socio-cultural.

Changing orientations to work, according to Daniel Yankelovich (1981, as cited in Senge, 1990), include a shift from an instrumental view of work, where work was a means to an end, to a more sacred view, where people seek the intrinsic benefits of work². This shift of perspective calls for a need to change the ways in which work is carried out in the organization, starting with the reintegration of thinking into the work activity. The next chapter discusses the role of play in this regard.

CHAPTER 3

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLAY IN THE ORGANIZATION

Context of Play

The apparent simplicity in play activity, generally, disguises its underlying complex structure. Most research on play reflects biased assumptions that it is relegated to the study of early childhood development and animal behavior. Undoubtedly, play is the principle means of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development for these cohorts; however, its dynamic effects are diluted when discussed in the organizational context. Research reveal that play involves higher-order cognition and facilitates the learning process in consideration of the external environment, both of which are absent in the traditional model of the organization of work. This section seeks to illustrate how play reconnects the brain and hand, or conception with execution, respectively, as it relates to the organization of work.

Diverse academic perspectives on play reflect different priorities; for example, studies through the lens of biology or sociology would reveal how play facilitates socialization and adaptation, whereas viewing it through the lens of a linguist would illustrate how play facilitates narrative development. Sutton-Smith (1997), a leading play theorist, suggests that play can emerge in almost anything and offers great diversity in its form; for example, from the private, intimate forms of play within one's mind (e.g. fantasy and imagination), to the social dynamics of play within teams or groups (e.g. celebrations and festivals, or games and

sports). To Sutton-Smith (1997), play is a system of communication that represents a broad system of ideological values that serve to achieve an understanding of self and the world³.

Based on his empirical research, Brown (2001) advises that play comprises the visceral properties presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Properties of Play
(Brown, 2001: p.17)

Apparently purposeless, done for its own sake;
Voluntary, in that it is not obligatory or required by duty;
Inherent attraction because it provides psychological arousal, excitement;
Freedom from time whereby one loses a sense of the passage of time;
Diminished consciousness of self, in which one stops worrying about outward appearances and can allow a different self to emerge;
Improvisational potential, where one is no longer locked into a rigid way of doing things, but rather open to chance, serendipity;
Continuation desire, where one wants to find ways to sustain the pleasure of the experience.

In addition to Brown's (2001) assertion, Huizinga (1950) suggests that play is an aesthetic quality to be observed through a cultural, social lens. He continues that play is a significant function that serves something that is not play.

A paradox of sorts, play emerges as part of the movement of actions and ideas across space and time. For Chazan (2002), play occupies a realm outside of everyday events and has to do with imagination and trial action. She

continues that play is recognized by its focused attention, transporting one to a place of possibilities, and by its expressiveness as generated by feeling states that are severed from consequences that might be encountered in the everyday world. A review of the literature on play offers compelling evidence to support it as a necessary component to the human condition, one which I believe must be present in the business organization. To contextualize the role of play in the organization, the research presented herein will consider play in animals as it relates to behavioral development, and play in children relative to its affects on cognitive and affective development.

Behavioral Development

Play preceded the language or narrative to describe it, before the emergence of words (Huizinga, 1950). Research on play in animals demonstrates this sequence, given that animals exhibit play signals through facial and physical (body) cues that invite play activity (Brown, 2001; Brown, 2009). The role of play in behavioral plasticity enables individuals to experiment with behavioral routines (Pellegrini, 2009; L'Abate, 2009). Play develops in a system (which, in this context, includes animals, humans, and organizations) as an adaptive quality of learning how to navigate in a dynamic environment and to adjust behavior accordingly. In play, the individual, or player, is no longer concerned with self or fixed to perceptions of reality; rather one is able to view problems from different perspectives and experiment with solutions. Robert Fagen (1981), an animal play behaviorist, remarks on the reason for and the essence of play, "In a world continuously presenting unique challenges and

ambiguity, play prepares these [bears] for an evolving planet” (as cited in Brown, 2001: p.29). Although his assertion is about the evolutionary, survival qualities of play in animals, this behavioral value can also be appropriately applied in the organizational context.

Cognitive and Affective Development

In contrast to research presented in the previous chapter, research illustrates that play, at its essence, synthesizes cognitive and behavioral development because of the co-evolution of the brain and hand. Play links the brain and hand which are always looking for each other (Brown, 2001). As Tim Brown (2009) asserts, play is analogous to thinking with your hands. The neuroscience of play shows that the frontal lobe and cerebellum, among other parts of the brain, are aroused as players test the boundaries in which to play (so as to adapt behavior accordingly). Sutton-Smith (1997) suggests that without play, the human brain is unable to develop normally.

Brown (2001) and Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (1999) postulate that play arises from biological structures that are preverbal and preconscious. Play first arises in the human brain stem, where survival mechanisms such as respiration, consciousness, and sleep originate (Panksepp, as cited in Brown, 2001). Chazan (2002) puts forth that play is a biological entity (like sleep and dreams) that helps craft the brain and offers strategies for socialization and adaptation (also see Huizinga, 1950). Play creates new neural networks in the

brain and supports reconciling cognitive difficulties. The brain is designed to activate functionally diverse brain regions in order to integrate their function.

Other perspectives on play suggest that in essence, play is a state of mind (Brown, 2001; E. Schmit personal communication, May 11, 2010), a catalyst to making humans more productive and happier (Brown, 2001). I hold the belief that play is a form of higher-order thinking that, when coupled with a behavioral application, enables one to make more robust sense of the world. A central element of play is creativity – the ability to generate a richness of ideas and manifest them from thought into reality – a process that involves thinking as well as producing. Streeter (2006) suggests that applied creativity is seeing what works and asserts that it is a primary source of human development. The following sub-section explores applied creativity as a means of contextualizing the role of play in the organization.

Applied Creativity

Creativity is yet another subject that challenges theorists and researchers to define. Complex in its nature, creativity can take on many forms and is typically discussed through a variety of contexts, especially with play. (Creativity is also discussed relative to innovation, though for purposes of this capstone, the discussion will center on applied creativity through play). What is true on the subject is that thinking is a key aspect of creativity. Sternberg (as cited in Adams, 2005: p. 7) asserts three main aspects of thinking are essential for

creativity and, overall, intelligence – synthetic, analytical, and practical. Table 3 presents the definitions of these three elements.

Table 3. Key Aspects of Thinking
(Sternberg, as cited in Adams, 2005: p. 7)

Element	Definition	Forms
Synthetic (creative)	The ability to generate ideas that are novel, high quality and task appropriate. One aspect of this is the ability to redefine problems effectively and to think insightfully. Sternberg also notes that the basis for insightful thinking involves knowledge acquisition in three forms:	a) Selective encoding: distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information b) Selective combination: combining bits of relevant information in novel ways c) Selective comparison: relating new information to old information in novel ways.
Analytical (critical)	The ability to judge the value of one's own ideas, to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and suggest ways to improve them.	--
Practical	The ability to apply intellectual skills in everyday context and to "sell" creative ideas.	--

In this way, the cognitive processes that Sternberg's model suggest requires not only generating new ideas, but also combining existing elements of understanding and executing them in new ways. Campbell (1960, as cited in Adams, 2005) asserts

creativity requires the capacity to generate blind variation in the same sense that genes might generate random mutations and that this generation is not linked to the probability of success of any given variation. The implication is... that it is conceivable that creative performance may be increased by any technique that might serve to break the stranglehold of conventional expectation and simply increase the number of randomly generated variations. (p. 8)

It is apparent that through play activity, one is able to experiment freely with ideas without expecting the creative process to result in something; in other words, play activity and creative performance can be done for its own sake, or as I would suggest, an exercise of the intellect.

When applied purposefully in the organization, play invites a change of perspective that facilitates overcoming the atrophy and arrested development of innovation and human ingenuity in the workplace (Carroll, 2008; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2009). The worker is then challenged to move beyond the steady state conditions of doing what we do but better to a new set of conditions in which doing different things in different ways becomes the norm. Examples of applied creativity in the organization include prototyping (Schrage, 2000); role-playing, or the prototyping of experiences; and idealized design (Ackoff, 1999)⁴.

Amabile (2005), Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) speak of the associative, psychological aspects of thinking creatively and agree that creativity has a strong correlation with performance. Amabile (2005) and Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) suggest the key characteristics of thinking creatively include curiosity; low self-centeredness; comfort in trying solutions that depart from the status quo; persevering through difficult problems; and being motivated to perform activities for intrinsic reasons only.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) describes applied creativity as flow, a key to personal happiness. Although flow is the mental state of operation in which a person in an activity is immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity, the cognitive and behavioral elements are similar to those of play, as described previously. Table 4 summarizes the properties of flow:

Table 4. Properties of Flow
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1996)

There are clear goals every step of the way
There is immediate feedback on one's actions
There is a balance between challenges and skills
Action and awareness are merged
Distractions are excluded from consciousness
There is no worry of failure
Self-consciousness disappears
The sense of time becomes distorted
The activity becomes auto-telic, an end in and of itself

Flow also has a strong correlation with improvements in performance as the response to work in this state is positive. To be caught in the tedium of the traditional concept of work is to be barred from flow. When one is in a flow state, she is working to master the activity at hand; however, to maintain that flow state, she must seek increasingly greater challenges to stretch her skills. In this way,

getting oneself into a play state masks the urgent purposefulness and associated anxiety of work, increasing efficiency and productivity (Brown, 2001).

As previously discussed, play is a state of mind; therefore it is important that one is able to transfer in and out of a play state as appropriate, when appropriate, in order to reflect and make sense of new information and to foster a greater understanding of self. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Adams (2005) suggest a direct correlation between flow (which, for purposes of this capstone, includes play and creative activity) and the environment, indicating that the process of generating new or repackaging existing ideas could be enhanced in an environment that supports this way of thinking.

Summary and Conclusions

The idea that play is a basic, vital human disposition has long been recognized. Play is not a luxury, but an integral component of human intellectual, emotional, and physical development at all ages that without it, one would experience pathology similar to that of vegetation - an inert existence. Comparatively, play in the absence of work (and love) is entertainment (Elkind, 2007). Although implied, it should be explicitly stated that a focus on play in this research does not advocate incorporating recess (as in child's play) at work, nor should it imply that a play activity (through applied creativity) need always result in output. The idea here is that play can be done as a means of working out cognitive or behavioral difficulties in a safe environment, or as a means of producing myriad ideas and experimenting with their outcomes.

Play involves a higher order of thinking that is based in synthesis, the building up of ideas to create new ones. What is integral to the study of play is reflected in the following assertion by Brown (2001): “the opposite of play is not work – the opposite of play is depression” (p.126). To this end, work and play should not be viewed in absolute terms. A review of the literature reveals that these elements are mutually supportive. Play is one of many human artifacts; people are predisposed to play as a learning, evolutionary, and biological process that facilitates cognitive and behavioral development, and consequently, human survival. Play therefore becomes optimal to the organizational construct in that it questions the rules of the game at hand, learns from them, and then adapts actions under changing circumstances. When play and work are involved, learning and development are most effective (Elkind, 2007). The next chapter will review literature on learning in the organization.

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Context of Learning

The notion of learning within organizational settings is not new. Since the Industrial Revolution, training of employees in the technical skills needed for the job has been a key component of organizational functioning; however, this way of learning operated at a level whose desired consequence was a particular behavioral outcome (Duncan, 1974 as cited in Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Today, individual learning to meet job requirements remains important to the organization, but these learning opportunities appear to be principally concerned with the transfer of skills from the head of someone who knows to the head of someone who does not. Senge (1990) terms this method of learning as survival learning.

While individual learning is important to organizations, organizational learning is not simply the sum of each employee's learning. Senge (1990) suggests that individual learning is necessary but not sufficient for organizational learning. Organizations, unlike individuals, develop and maintain learning systems that are then transmitted to employees and other stakeholders through the culture (Lawrence & Dyer, 1983; Martin, 1982; Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976 as cited in Fiol & Lyles, 1985). In this regard, it has become important to understand the relationship between the individual and the organization as it relates to learning.

The imperative for creating a learning organization offers new ways of operating in a dynamic, global, and increasingly crowded marketplace where the boundaries between industries and value propositions is blurring (Stieglitz, 2002). Creating a learning organization centered in knowledge management (the why) and oriented on process excellence (the how) is the challenge faced by management in today's world (Pourdehnad et al., 2006), where learning faster than your competition and adapting to the changes in environment are the key competitive advantages. This section will discuss the organization's capacity for creating a learning system. In order to contextualize the discussion, it is important to define learning.

Learning Defined

Ackoff (1989) defines learning as the acquisition of data, information, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Table 5 presents the definitions of these domains:

Table 5. Learning Hierarchy

Ackoff (1989)

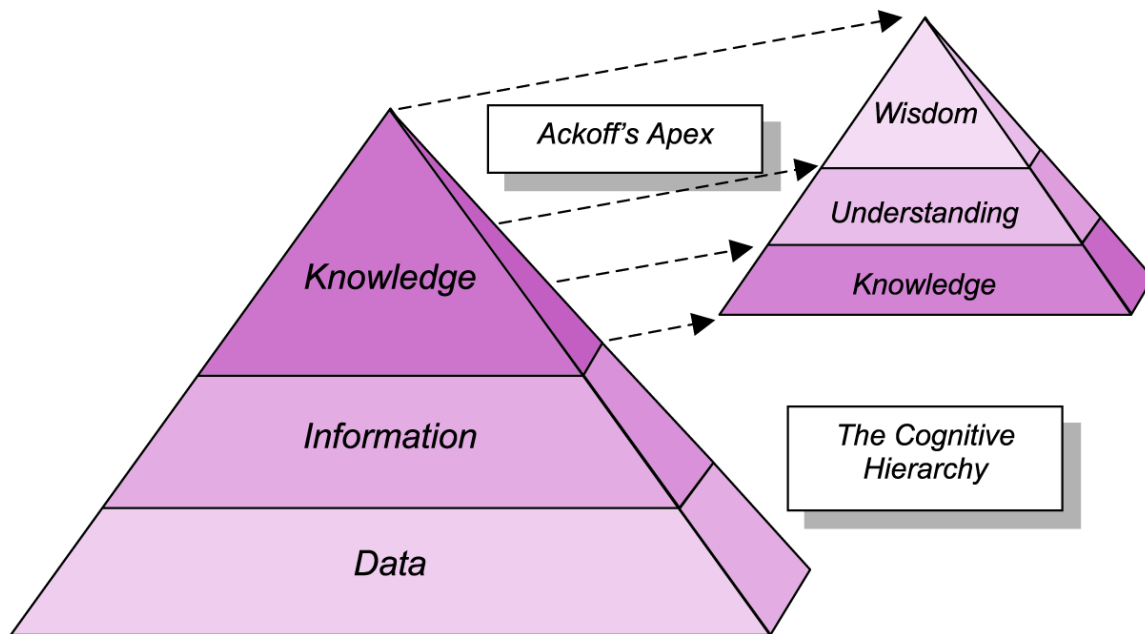
Content of Learning	Definition	Container
Data	Consists of symbols that represent objects, events, and/or their properties	Products of observation
Information	Data that have been processed into useful form to decide what to do, not how to do it. The difference between data and information is usefulness,	Contained in descriptions; describes 'what to do'

	functional not structural.	
Knowledge	Consists of know-how and deals with efficiency; obtained from experience	Contained in instructions; answers questions of 'how-to'.
Understanding	Facilitates and accelerates the acquisition of knowledge, and helps to determine the relevance of data and information.	Contained in explanations answers questions of 'why;'
Wisdom	Ability to perceive and evaluate long-run consequences of behavior	It is the difference between efficiency and effectiveness.

To illustrate his argument, Ackoff (1989) contends that learning follows a hierarchical structure, whereby value increases up the pyramid. Figure 1 (as cited in emeraldinsight.com, 1997) illustrates this structure:

Figure 1. Learning Pyramid

(Ackoff, as cited in www.emeraldinsight.com/fig/2300100602001.png, 1997)



Ackoff's argument suggests that current learning in organizations rests at the lower levels of data and information because of the organization's focus on efficiency (or, per his definition, the functional usefulness in deciding what to do, not how to do it) in lieu of its focus on evaluating the long term consequences of behavior and actions. Learning, according to Ackoff (1996) is doing the wrong thing righter and righter, or a distinction between doing things right and doing the right thing.

Perspectives on Organizational Learning

While no formal theory or model of organizational learning is widely accepted at this time, significant research affords modest efforts to develop a

basis for the need for organizational learning. In all cases, the assumption persists that learning, in general, will improve future organizational performance.

For Argyris and Schön (1978; 1982), organizational learning is described, in sum, as the detection and correction of errors. The following excerpt offers additional insight into this perspective:

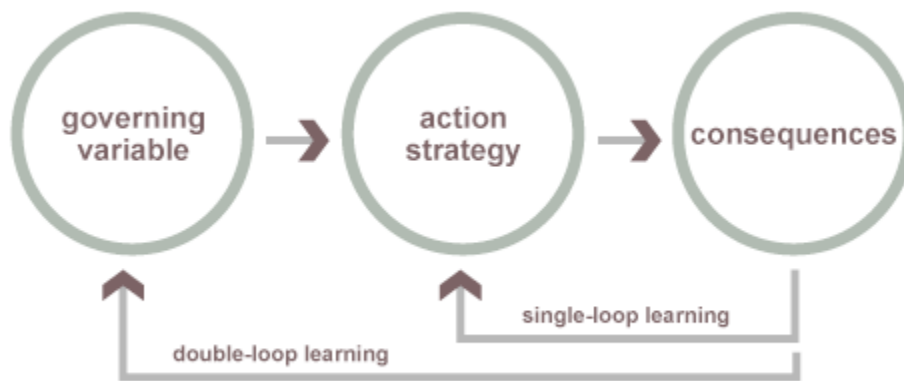
When the error detected and corrected permits the organization to carry on its present policies or achieve its present objectives, then that error-and-correction process is single-loop learning. Single-loop learning is like a thermostat that learns when it is too hot or too cold and turns the heat on or off. The thermostat can perform this task because it can receive information (the temperature of the room) and take corrective action. Double-loop learning occurs when error is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organization's underlying norms, policies and objectives...The former involves following routines and some sort of preset plan – and is both less risky for the individual and the organization, and affords greater control. The latter is more creative and reflexive, and involves consideration of notions of the good. Reflection here is more fundamental: the basic assumptions behind ideas or policies are confronted... hypotheses are publicly tested... processes are disconfirmable and not self-seeking. (p. 103-104)

Figure 2 (as cited in leanandkanban.wordpress.com, 2010) illustrates the relationship between these loops. At first glance, the single- and double-learning loops to which these scholars refer can be viewed as additional interpretations of effecting organizational control. As such, single-loop learning reverts to learning through behavioral modification or simple problem-solving, while double-loop learning alters the organization's cultural norms (i.e. values and policies) that facilitate employee actions. As it relates to this capstone, this discussion on feedback loops begs the question, what is the connection between organizational learning and play? In fact, the element of play, one might suggest,

facilitates the learning process, enabling an individual to “mess around” to get out of the loop and improve understanding of the whole (Janet Greco, personal communication, June 16, 2010).

Figure 2. Single- and Double-Loop Learning

(Argyris & Schon, 1978, as cited in leanandkanban.wordpress.com, 2010)



Pourdehnad et al. (2006) suggest that unlearning, or getting out of the loop by questioning underlying beliefs that govern behavior, is a challenge in the organization because of the human tendency to preserve a particular worldview. To these authors, a change in mindset starts with recognizing that the current work practices are no longer working.

While the former authors offer a socio-technical view of organizational learning, Senge (1990) asserts a socio-psychological approach to the subject. Senge's principal focus with his model is to empower the people in the organization to create their own future. He suggests that a learning organization exhibits five main characteristics or disciplines: personal mastery, which speaks to an individual's commitment to the process of learning; mental models, which

captures an understanding of self and the world; a shared vision, which creates a common (organizational) identity to focus on learning; team learning, which requires more engagement and dialogue than what typically occurs in teams today; and systems thinking, which is the conceptual framework of seeing the structure and systems that underlie complex situations. He contends that an organization's proclivity to learning begins with the individual commitment of its employees, and then develops through group dynamics and ultimately the whole of the organization through shared objectives. It should be noted that the learning organization, as Senge (1990) terms it, is a continuous learning cycle towards designing the organization the employees want, and not as an end state to be achieved.

Conditions to Suggest Learning will Occur in the Organization

As cited in Fiol and Lyles (1985), four contextual factors affect the probability that learning will occur in the organization: corporate culture conducive to learning; corporate strategy that allows flexibility in decision-making; an organizational structure that allows both innovativeness and new insights; and the external environment⁵. These conditions have a circular relationship with learning in that they create and reinforce learning and are created by learning. Of these conditions, it is apparent that culture is central to an organization's ability to learn.

Schein (2004) defines culture in general as

...a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be

taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Culture influences behavioral norms and attitudes in the organization. As new information is taken in from the external environment, the organization's culture facilitates the collective sense-making of this new information, and supports the ways in which the information is diffused to organizational members (Schwandt as cited in Gorelick, 2005). It is the culture of an organization that can either inhibit or foster an environment that is conducive to work, play and learning.

Adapting to the Environment

Studying failure is a good way to understand an organization as a system and to identify causes of failures or mistakes. As Ackoff (1994) posits, mistakes are an indicator of gaps in one's knowledge. Rather than concealing these mistakes in an attempt to create the impression that the organization is infallible, learning must take place so as to identify the mistake, identify its producers, and take actions to correct. To do so, the organization must create a system to detect errors and to correct them, and further, to adapt to changing conditions internal and external to the organization.

Despite diverging perspectives on organizational learning, I assert that a necessary requirement of a learning system is system memory, which is the capacity of an organization to leverage expertise across its system and to support policy formulation and system improvement. System memory is based in systems thinking, which enables seeing interrelationships and processes of change in structures that may recur (Senge, 1990). Much like the memory of a

computer, which collects, stores, and refreshes data, organizational system memory plays a significant role in the performance, support, and stability of an organization. This system archetype enables the organization to anticipate threats and opportunities based on pattern recognition in the environment (i.e. trends), and in turn, to leverage resources to take corrective action (Senge, 1990; Pourdehnad, 2000; Gorelick, 2005). What is important to note here is that the organization may need to recognize that it may be necessary to learn how to learn, which Argyris and Schön (1978) term triple-loop learning⁶. Learning to learn requires a transformational shift in the relationship between organizational structure and employee behavior, which may imply that an organization changes its guiding principles accordingly. It is apparent in this context that adaptation is learning under changing conditions (Ackoff, 1996).

Summary and Conclusions

Change, learning, and adaptation have all been used to refer to aspects of the process by which organizations detect and correct errors and structure internal systems so as to continuously transform itself through learning⁷. Given the accelerating pace of change in today's environment, much of what we know becomes obsolete in less and less time. New learning is required to maintain, let alone increase efficiency when changes of internal or external conditions, if not responded to, result in decreased efficiency and effectiveness.

Learning and adaptation can be summarized as the development of insights, knowledge, and associations between past actions, the effectiveness of those actions, and implications of future actions. In this way, learning, much like

play, necessitates experimentation, encourages multiple viewpoints and, notably, requires employee commitment. The next chapter discusses the importance of an increased focus on employee commitment through the lens of quality of work life.

CHAPTER 5

THE INTEGRATION OF WORK, PLAY, AND LEARNING: QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

Context of Quality of Work Life

Quality of work life (“QWL”) is a philosophy which holds that people are the most important resources in the organization and are capable of making valuable contributions to the organization (Rose et al., 2006). QWL seeks to re-humanize the workplace (Mayo, 1960 as cited in Martel & Dupuis, 2006) in response to the traditional organization of work. A review of the literature in this section will highlight how QWL presents the opportunity to integrate work, play, and learning in the organization through focused efforts on improving the employee’s experiences therein.

To contextualize the discussion of this chapter, it is important to note the distinction between quality of work life and quality of life, wherein the latter is concerned with an individual’s overall sense of happiness across multiple domains of life (e.g. family, education, and work), while the former centers on the extent to which an employee can enhance her life in general through experiences at work specifically. This section will discuss the former, noting the opportunity to achieve increased productivity over the traditional model. For purposes of this research, no consideration will be given to the spillover effects of QWL on other aspects of one’s life (i.e. family, education), although I am mindful of the roles these domains play in influencing the organizational experience. Furthermore,

this section does not expound on the various methods in which to measure QWL effectiveness in organizations; instead, it seeks to explore how QWL creates an environment whereby work, play, and learning can be integrated and nourished.

Source of the Problem

The evolution of QWL began in the late 1960s in an effort to refocus on the human dimensions of work, namely the quality of the relationship between the worker and the working environment (Rose et al., 2006). As a result of the disconnect between the worker and the organization under the traditional model of the organization of work, absenteeism became a leading indicator of job dissatisfaction (Martel & Dupuis, 2006). Initially, QWL was perceived as a marketing initiative to develop ancillary programs in the organization that would satisfy employees' request for more engagement with the organization (Sirgy & Lee, 2001). Now, QWL is observed as a

social movement... in that workers are becoming better educated and that they now consider work as a tool for personal growth and social support rather than merely a means of achieving financial independence (Martel & Dupuis, 2006: p. 343).

In this way, traditional organizational practices that seek to control worker behavior and simplify labor tasks no longer prove effective in a world of higher educated workers.

While there is no prevailing definition on the subject, research reveals that employee commitment is fundamental to the study of QWL, and so is the organization's ability to provide an environment that enables this commitment to flourish (Rose et al., 2006; Martel & Dupuis, 2006). The importance of QWL is

creating a sense of belonging for the employee. From this perspective, work is no longer perceived as burdensome or laborious, rather is viewed as an experience by which one can find expression and fulfillment. I hold the belief that this renewed focus on the human aspects of work highlights the importance of socialization in the work environment, which, as we learned in previous chapters, is a natural derivative of play and learning.

Interpretations of Quality of Work Life

It is apparent that a common thread across the diverging interpretations of quality of work life includes the notion of satisfaction. According to Sirgy and Lee (2001), quality of work life is concerned with the worker's level of satisfaction across three domains: "level of meaningfulness of work, affective response to the work environment, and ratio of job uplifts to job hassles" (p. 288; also see Lawler, 1975 as cited in Martel & Dupuis, 2006). The authors' discuss QWL according to two perspectives: collective (or team) development and individual development. The former addresses social aspects of work such as teamwork, shared decision-making, and role clarity, while the latter depicts concerns for an individual's freedom to decide how work is to be performed, ability to obtain learning opportunities beyond functional role, and opportunity to receive feedback from management on performance. Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs underscores this model, whereby an individual's psychological maturity and self-fulfillment needs are more progressive than the fundamental physiological needs of food, water, shelter, and safety. Once the fundamental

needs are satisfied, an individual will then seek to achieve higher order needs (Appendix A).

Hackman and Oldham's (1975; 1980) interpretation of QWL expounds on the psychological needs of the employee. These particular needs center on the work role effectiveness, including skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. From their purview, effectiveness is a matter of fit between person and job, suggesting that the emotional needs of the employee must be addressed in case of changes to the work itself.

Other interpretations of QWL focus on ways in which to increase employees' participation in decision-making processes, particularly as it relates to restructuring the organization of work and task assignment. Kornbluh (1984) assigns the term "workplace democracy" to efforts of involving the workers in these traditionally management-oriented processes. To this end, a reward system is considered as a means of building cooperation and promoting a climate of involvement. Research indicates that the reward need not always be financial; in fact, the types of rewards that seem most appealing to employees include positive feedback, greater autonomy and freedom to self-define work, and public recognition for achieving results (Rose et al., 2006). It is important to note that it remains imperative that the organization create an environment that supports these efforts.

Summary and Conclusions

A study of QWL reveals that the employee is at the center of the organization of work, unlike the traditional model. QWL reflects a concern for the employee's experience in the organization, her relationships with other people, her work setting, and her effectiveness on the job. QWL is not a unitary concept, rather is seen as a hierarchy of perspectives that incorporate both work and non-work factors, and give consideration to psychological factors about general well-being and happiness. QWL encourages positive and productive work experiences to the extent that those work experiences are rewarding, fulfilling and devoid of unnecessary negative personal consequences.

Companies that seek to prevail in today's dynamic context must realize that a happy employee is a productive employee. The higher the quality of work life an employee enjoys, the higher the quality of products or services she will produce. In turn, one who does not enjoy a high quality of work life will transform her dissatisfaction into the poor quality of products or services she will produce.

Empirical Case Studies

In order to frame the application of QWL, I would like to briefly discuss organizations whose efforts at improving the employee experience have proven beneficial. The focus of this sub-section will highlight a few aspects of QWL in two leading organizations in different industries.

Although famous for the many amenities it affords its employees, Google has successfully integrated work, play, and learning into its organizational fabric. The firm prides itself on having a flat organization, one that is devoid of hierarchy, and giving employees the bandwidth to self-govern time and task. In this way, the technology firm offers an innovation time-off program where employees can allocate 20% of their work time to explore projects that interest them. As a result of this “time-off,” research indicates a marked increase in not only worker productivity and organizational engagement, but also in new product development (Mayer, 2006).

W.L. Gore and Associates, Inc. offer a different perspective on shaping QWL through a shared vision and in the structure of work. A privately-held manufacturing company, Gore's guiding principles center on collaboration, accountability, and hands-on prototyping. Employees are hired under the same title ‘Associate’ so as to deemphasize the division of labor between worker and management. Further, as opposed to being assigned work tasks or appointed managers, employees are given the bandwidth to explore projects they find interesting and to identify senior leaders in the organization with whom they would like to work. As a result of its unique culture, W. L. Gore has been highly regarded as one of the best places to work, with significant levels of employee satisfaction and retention (Hamel, 2007).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This capstone asserted a conceptual framework for viewing the organizational experience as the integration of work, play, and learning. To contextualize this argument, I discussed each element in parallel, beginning with a discussion on scientific management as the basis for the traditional model of the structure of work. Under the traditional model, mechanization, at the hands of scientific management, dehumanized work on two fronts: by separating the conception of what work is to be done from the execution of work; and by dividing the responsibility of each element according to a different labor class (i.e. management and worker, respectively). Research suggests that the organization's need to control worker behavior and productivity is at the core of this model. I put forth that this view of the organization of work persists today.

To negate this view of the organization, I presented a review of the literature on play as a psychodynamic factor that facilitates cognitive and behavioral development. In play, the thought process is both analytic and synthetic, while the behavior involves an element of experimentation, creativity, and a sense of diminished self-consciousness towards achieving a more robust understanding of self and the world. What is more, play synergistically reunites the brain (cognition) with hand (execution, psychomotor) that was alienated under scientific management, and offers more compelling ways to solve

problems and make decisions (in life generally and in the organization specifically).

Research also revealed that most of the activity called learning in organizations under the traditional model results in short-term effects through skills transfer and behavioral modification; however learning at the organizational level may challenge the organization's guiding principles and actions, causing it to unlearn best practices in favor of developing a new understanding of and relationship with the changing environment (or marketplace) and adapting heuristics accordingly.

Finally, I approached the integrated model of work, play, and learning from the perspective of quality of work life (QWL). Unlike the traditional model of the organization of work, QWL views the organization through a socio-cultural lens and suggests that it is imperative that the organization provide an environment that nourishes the employee's human capabilities of self-expression and fulfillment. An interesting aspect of the study of QWL is that work is perceived to be an experience that should present the employee with the opportunity for self-expression and enrich her life overall.

When viewing the organization as a social system, one must recognize and appreciate that people have their own purposes. A major challenge of leadership is motivating the people to work interactively to achieve a common purpose (Ackoff, 1994). The research as presented in this capstone reveals that play, in particular, facilitates this shift in perspective on the structure of work and

will be integral to the organizational experience going forward. In conclusion, I agree with Brown (2001) in that under the model of the organization I propose herewith, no longer will it be sufficient that we work together, rather we will be required to play together.

Suggested Research

I identified scientific management as the source of the problem with the traditional model of the organization of work; however, it would also be interesting to explore the genesis of the human work ethic relative to how work, play, and learning are viewed as separate experiences today. What is more, one can also explore the relevance of a play ethic to deal with the complexities of modern world.⁸

Chapter 2 revealed that management was central to the organization's ability to achieve growth and efficiency in production; however, the integration of play and learning with work requires a redefinition of this labor class, given that the employee is at the center of the QWL model⁹. Future research should consider how the role of management would change under the proposed integration of work, play, and learning.

One could also view the integration of work, play and learning by repurposing the organization as a community of practice or as a democratic organization¹⁰. The contribution in this regard would support viewing the organization through the socio-cultural lens.

Surely the most interesting contribution, in my opinion, would be to advance studies on play in the organizational construct. Research on play for purposes of this capstone was drawn from studies on play in animals and in children. By studying play specifically in adults in the organizational setting, one would be able to better discern and likely develop new practices of problem-solving, decision-making, strategy formulation, and process improvement by looking across levels in the organization.

Personal Case Study Follow-Up

Although the start of my professional career left much to be desired, I am sure that my career will not continue the same constricted trajectory. My experience working in a call center, the quintessence of scientific management, was an important one in my professional career in that it served as a springboard for my journey of self-discovery. Now armed with the language and research to describe factors that influence work in organizations (and finally accepting that my work-role fit was misaligned) and the types of experiences I wish to have in my professional life going forward, I am poised to create a life that envelops me in play.

A designer at heart, my career will center on designing experiences that positively influence one's engagement with an organization. The focus of my work will employ the principles of designers who ideate, prototype, and iterate experiences in order to glean new insights about the human condition. I will champion the aesthetic considerations of an organization that often are

discounted, including culture-building, knowledge management, service innovation, and change management. I echo James Michener's (1992) sentiments in that my work will become my play as I pursue this vision of my work life going forward.

END NOTES

¹ Taylor suggested that workers' compensation should be linked to their output. In this way, given the worker's job was standardized, as she improved her productivity and increased output, her compensation would increase, too. For more information about scientific management, see Taylor, F. W. (1911). *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers.

² For a discussion on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to work, please reference Wrzesniewski, A. P. Rozin, and G. Bennett. (2003). Chapter 8: Working, Playing and Eating: Making the Most of Most Moments. Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived. *American Psychological Association*, 185-204.

³ Sutton-Smith (1997) suggests there are seven rhetorics of play. For more information, please reference Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press.

⁴ Keidel (2010) offers more information about each of these play based strategies in Keidel. (2010). *The Geometry of Strategy: Concepts for Strategic Management*. New York and London: Routledge.

⁵ For more information on the effects of strategy, organizational structure, and the environment on a firm's ability to learn, please reference Fiol, C. M. and M.A. Lyles. (1985). Organizational Learning. *The Academy of Management Review*, 10(4), 803-813.

⁶ Today, triple loop learning may be included in studies on diversity management as put forth by Flood R.L. and N. R. Romm. (1996). *Diversity Management: Triple Loop Learning*. Chichester and New York: John Wiley & Sons. Also reference Romme, G. and A. van Witteloostuijn. (1999). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(5), 439-454.

⁷ For more information on idealized design, please reference Ackoff, R.L., J. Magidson and H.J. Addison. (2006). *Idealized Design: How to Dissolve Tomorrow's Crisis... Today*. Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing.

⁸ Hamel (2007) puts forth the term management innovation and defines it as "anything that substantially alters the way in which work of management is carried out, or significantly modifies customary organizational forms, and, by doing so, advances organizational goals" (p.19). For more information on redefining the management class through management innovation, please

reference Hamel, G. (2007). *The Future of Management*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

⁹ Kane, P. (2005). *Play Ethic*. London: Macmillan UK.

¹⁰ Ackoff (2002) puts forth the democratic approach to the organization as a means of integrating work, play and learning, provided that the following three conditions hold:

1. All those who can be affected by a decision made in the system can participate in making the decision either directly or indirectly through representatives they select.
2. There is no ultimate authority in the system; all those who have authority over others individually are subject to their collective authority. Therefore, no one can hold a position of authority without approval of those over whom they exercise it.
3. Every member of a social system is free to do whatever he or she wants to do, provided it has no effect on others. If it does affect others, and the others approve, it can be done; otherwise, it cannot be done. (p.18).

For more information, please reference Ackoff, R. L. (2002). The Corporation as a Community, not as a Corpus. *Reflections*, 4(1), 14-21.

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APPENDIX A
HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

(MASLOW, 1970,
as cited in icsrpa.org.ge/images/stories/maslow%201.jpg, 2008)



END NOTES

¹ One of the principles of scientific management was to approach process improvement and business management as a scientific problem. The intent was to improve efficiency and reduce waste to the benefit of the worker. Taylor suggested that workers' compensation should be linked to their output. In this way, given the worker's job was standardized, as she improved her productivity and increased output, so too would her compensation increase. For more information about scientific management, refer to *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Taylor (1911).

² Wrzesniewski, et al. (2003) discuss intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to work. The former considers YYY, while the latter considers XXX

³ Sutton-Smith (1997) suggests seven rhetorics of play as a mode of communication.

⁴ For more information about each of these play based strategies, Kiedel (2010) *The Geometry of Strategy: Concepts for Strategic Management*.

⁵ See Fiol and Lyles for more information on the effects of strategy, organizational structure, and the environment on a firm's ability to learn.

⁶ Argyris and Schon posit that triple loop learning extends beyond behavioral norms or organizational values, rather a transformational process that challenges an organization to understand how previous actions created conditions that led to current problems. In other terms, the organization must learn how to learn in an effort to discern effective, principles-based means of responding to the environment, which may require a change in purpose. Today, triple loop learning may include diversity management as put forth by Flood and Romm (200X) in *Diversity Management* or Romme, van Witteloostuijn (1999) in the *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(5), 439-454.

⁷ Also see Ackoff's (2006) model on idealized design in *Idealized Design: How to Dissolve Tomorrow's Crisis... Today*.

⁸ See Pat Kane (2004) *Play Ethic*.

⁹ Hamel (2007) puts forth the term management innovation and defines it as "anything that substantially alters the way in which work of management is

carried out, or significantly modifies customary organizational forms, and, by doing so, advances organizational goals” (p.19).

¹⁰ Note the synergies between play, flow and the Ackoff’s (1994) democratic approach to the design of the organization Ackoff puts forth the democratic approach to the organization as a means of integrating work, play and learning, provided that the following three conditions hold:

1. All those who can be affected by a decision made in the system can participate in making the decision either directly or indirectly through representatives they select.
2. There is no ultimate authority in the system; all those who have authority over others individually are subject to their collective authority. Therefore, no one can hold a position of authority without approval of those over whom they exercise it.
3. Every member of a social system is free to do whatever he or she wants to do, provided it has no effect on others. If it does affect others, and the others approve, it can be done; otherwise, it cannot be done.

Further, Ackoff (1994) and Hamel (2007) agree on creating a community of purpose towards establishing a reciprocal relationship between employee and the organization.