

Abstract

Towards Playful Office Culture: Final Report of the OASIS – Playful Spaces for Learning and Collaboration at Work (2014–2015) research project

In the project OASIS – Playful Spaces for Learning and Collaboration at Work (2014–2015), funded by the Finnish Work Environment Fund, the experience of playfulness and the incentives and thresholds of adult play at the workplace were examined. The research focused on a single academic work community, and it was closely connected to research enabled by OASIS, an informal social space for students and staff at the university and a living lab for research. The primary component of the research project comprised three playful experiments involving staff members.

The first experiment was centered around a playful art installation, a sandbox filled with dice called *There Are No Rules* created by Kati Heljakka. The installation was set up in OASIS, and user interactions with it were tracked using the camera equipment in the space. The experiment produced knowledge on methods for analyzing playful interventions.

The second experiment, which combined two outlined experiments into a single larger entity, focused on gamifying the process of forming new social connections and interactions between researchers within the community. The main component of the OASIS Deck of Cards – House of Colleagues experiment was a card game that aimed to facilitate playful and informal community building and strengthening. The game was played for a period of five weeks, after which community impressions were gathered using a survey instrument. The results point to a wide spectrum of experiences. For some respondents, the card game experiment increased feeling of community, activity, social interactions, and well-being within the community, created a more relaxed atmosphere, and facilitated new interactions between community members. Other respondents commented that the experiment did not have an effect on internal networking or social interactions, and it did not impact the feeling of community.

In the third experiment, leading figures of the work community participated in playful workshops where they used predetermined methods and perspectives to formulate a future vision for the community. These workshops were recorded as entertaining videos as a method for exposing the visions to the wider work community. The videos functioned as a probe instrument for investigating staff views on and attitudes towards play and playfulness in the workplace.

The outcomes of the three experiments indicate that attitudes towards and beliefs about play happening in the workplace vary widely within the examined work community. For some play in the workplace is desirable and even self-evident, whereas others would prefer to separate work and play entirely. The social aspects of play can be perceived as positive or negative, as well. In the workplace, it is easier to approach playful activity that blends in with the workplace culture, especially if the associated play is flexible and allows the player to engage in it on the terms of their own preferences and schedules. As attitudes towards and beliefs about play cover a wide spectrum, it is essential that the suitability of a playful element for a specified target community can be evaluated in advance and modified accordingly.

In addition to these playful experiments, previously gathered material was analyzed and reported in the context of the project. The findings from these analyses support the findings of the experiments and revealed important information on adult play, such as the appeal of touch and discovery and the role of social capital in connection with adult playful objects.