OASIS Deck of Cards – House of Colleagues: A Playful Experiment on Community Building

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ABSTRACT

A research experiment to facilitate playful interaction and community learning within an academic organization of about 170 employees was conducted. A 2-player card game including 61 'staff character cards' and 39 question cards was implemented to be played by the relatively new community. The game period, including supporting events, ran for 5 weeks. After the experiment 59 staff members responded to an online survey on play experiences. The results showed that ways of participation and means of play are more diverse in a work community context than as they are specified in the game rules. More emphasis should be set on framing the game and supporting it as a continuous activity to become a playful practice in the work community. An academic community has inherent contextual prerequisites that need to be addressed in order for a playful practice to gain traction as a means for community building.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.8.0 **[Personal Computing]:** General – Games; H.5.2

General Terms

Management, Design, Experimentation, Human Factors.

Keywords

Playfulness, card game, community, design, play at work, adult play, academia, university, attitudes towards play.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article findings on a playful experiment on community building aimed at the staff of a university faculty are presented. The School of Information Sciences (SIS) is a versatile university faculty with research and teaching in the areas of Information Studies and Interactive Media, Mathematics, Statistics, Computer Science, and Interactive Technology. The current structure of SIS was formed through a series of mergers, resulting in a work community of around 170 people. This makes the School an interesting target for an experiment on community building, as the community consists of multiple social groups, many of them based on older organizational structures. In the respondents' words, the

community is thus inherently "fragmented", "cliqued", and "loose", but then again also "dynamic", "versatile", and "multifaceted".

Many interorganizational collaborations fail to produce powerful results, not succeeding in leveraging the differences among participants and balancing their divergent concerns. Development of collective identity has been recognized as a key success factor and one that shared conversations and interaction can produce [10]. This can help participants to identify with their partners in a subsequent collaboration and provide rationale for the cooperation, which is essential to its effectiveness [9].

As the SIS community is rather large, many of its members have not even met everyone else in the community. In many cases people have only passing knowledge of each other, as there is no specific reason that would force direct interaction. This makes it difficult for the work community members to develop a conventional sense of community, as defined by McMillan [21], even though some suggest that the workplace can be considered as a new source for sense of community in modern societies [7].

There are multiple benefits that studies have linked with a playful mind-set: playful attitude can alleviate anxieties, help to cope with depression, or promote the formation of new friendships [2, 3, 27]. Proponents of play and playfulness such as Stuart Brown emphasize that the opposite of play is not work, but depression, and that the "quality that work and play have in common is creativity" [6]. Supporting a playful mindset in an office environment is important for the well-being of the staff. In the busy environment of modern working life, this has become even more crucial.

Even though being playful is associated with children in particular, there is a tradition of thought that points out how beneficial fun and play can be at work. In her review of research into this area, Jacqueline Miller [23] reported that humor at work can relieve stress, improve interpersonal skills, and foster creativity and rapid learning, among other things. Hunter et al. [13] have examined the role of play in the programming profession. They conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of five high-tech companies in USA and Poland, finding that the roles of play and work were tightly interwoven in a knowledge-intensive work such as programming. The play activities were important for the pacing of work activities, building of work identity, socializing, and creativity.

However, it seems that even though play can be seen as an integral part of modern knowledge work, not all playful constructions are equally successful. Peter Fleming [8] describes an ethnographic study of a call center work culture where the boundaries of work

and non-work were blurred with a managed "culture of fun". The youthful work environment was enhanced with interiors of bright colors and kindergarten-like elements such as cartoon character murals. The environment was further cultivated with metaphors of parties, school and family in social activities. Even though some workers internalized this approach, rise of cynicism was observed in half of the interviewed workers. The study emphasizes the need to address the culture of fun in an appropriate way.

Some contemporary offices take the playful environment even further. For instance, Google's offices include not only bright colors and decorations, but for instance igloos and ski lifts repurposed as small conference rooms and even fireman poles and playground slides. A workplace slide could lead to such cynicism as well: depending how it is used and contextualized, the slide can become an operating symbol that successfully captures and promotes fun and spontaneous aspects of the work culture, but it can also become an empty sign if the existing workplace culture does not support it. A different approach to that of a static element are playful elements that can be updated through a service-like scheme, such as *MurMur Moderators*, talking playful seats for office environments studied by Nummenmaa et al. [24].

There are differences in the degree of success the implementation of fun elements has met in different work sectors. According to a study by Baldry and Hallier [1], work that was generally seen as "boring" did not get more fun even when the office was decorated with murals, palm trees and a waterfall. Then again, the moments of fun in a workplace dominated by monotonic work might be emerging in an organic rather than organized manner, such as spontaneous joking and laughing with co-workers, thereby making working much more tolerable for everyone involved [28]. Karl et al. [16] found that trust in supervisors and co-workers is important and positively related to attitudes toward fun, and trust can even be seen as a precondition for workplace fun. A low level of trust can easily lead to resistance and cynicism.

One way to introduce playful elements to professional communities is by using games. In conference settings, conference games have been implemented as a method for community building. Through such games, activities in a conference can be embedded with the goals of increasing the engagement of the participants and turning passive tasks into active tasks [19, 26]. This process can be called gamification, "a process of enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences in order to support user's overall value creation" [14].

Material artefacts can be considered significant to the formation of a collective identity, as they are placed in the physical interaction environment where more elaborate discursive resources are produced. This was highlighted by Trammel [30] in an ethnographic study among a *Magic: The Gathering* player community that explored preference for physical rather than virtual play. Toivonen and Sotamaa [29] have also noted how in digital gaming the material game objects, such as game boxes, are displayed at home much like books or records, and as such they are used in creating a gamer identity and gathering subcultural capital. Correspondingly, it has been noted [18] that game experiences are not determined only through direct interaction with the game system, but that they are affected by the wider frame of the artefact including information retrieval, enabling, preparation, afterplay, and even disposal activities connected to the game. For players, it is vital how the game can be accessed, what type of preparation is needed and how they can manage the game as part of their everyday lives, or as in the case of this experiment, as a part of their work environment.

The prospect that sociability is one of the main sources of enjoyment in board games [31], led to choosing the format of a physical card game for the experiment described in this article. The material aspects and seemingly needless tasks needed to keep a track of a game can act as a stimulant for social interaction while playing the game [32]. Furthermore, material game objects can be considered as cultural artefacts [11], which can inspire social interaction [22].

The goal of the experiment was to create a game that would work as a tool for learning about the community and as a way to enable engaging with the community through a playful atmosphere. Even though the research instrument is in the form of a physical game, it should be important to notice that play does not automatically emerge from a game or toy as a plaything. The use of material objects is intimately linked with the mindset and culture they are embedded in. The main questions that could be answered by the experiment were: What are the enablers and obstacles for play in the given workplace? What would need to be taken into account when designing a game for this specific community?

2. EXPERIMENT BACKGROUND

Before planning the experiment, a series of individual interviews with staff members was conducted in order to probe their attitudes towards playfulness at work and their engagement in playful activities while at work. A total of 18 staff members were interviewed. Most of the interviewees expressed positive or neutral attitudes towards play and playfulness in general and in a work context: they were seen as a means for relaxing and keeping up one's well-being. Several interviewees also noted that playfulness might be beneficial for work in general and that it can help stimulate creativity and thus aid in doing research. Another major trend in attitudes towards playfulness was the demarcation of work and play: 6 interviewees explicitly stated that they want to keep one clearly separated from the other. One interviewee said that play and playfulness during work hours feel wrong and are a source of guilt.

When asked about whether they engage in any playful activities at work, 11 interviewees replied that they do not engage in any such activities. A few mentioned activities such as doodling or playing online chess, and two interviewees said that they sometimes use playful methods in teaching. A playful mindset could also be reflected by playful elements such as office decorations: five interviewees said they used elements like comics printouts or plushies to decorate their office. Interviewees were also asked for suggestions for what kinds of playful activities they would like to see at the workplace. The suggestions included general and specific activities (such as social gatherings and quiz nights) and broad guidelines, such as making the playful elements or activities voluntary and aesthetically pleasant.

The results of these interviews were used in informing the decision of what types of playful activities the experiment would involve and what kinds of features the card game would have.

3. EXPERIMENT DESIGN

OASIS Deck of Cards – House of Colleagues was a card game design experiment aiming to facilitate social interactions and community learning within the work community. The set of cards used in the game included 61 'character cards' and 39 question cards. Each of the character cards contained information about a staff member who had volunteered to become a part of the deck: their name, picture, staff position, and keywords about their research interests and hobbies (Figure 1). All of the data presented on each card was reported by the staff volunteers themselves. The

data was gathered using an online survey that was distributed via the staff email list along with the call for volunteers and information on how the data would be used. Approximately a third of SIS was represented in the card deck.

Each employee was delivered a starter pack of 2 character cards and 2 question cards. The question cards contained both questions pertaining to the information in the character cards, such as *What is the first name of this person?* or *How many affiliations does this person have?* and sentences with blank spaces in them (for example, *I love the smell of ____ in the morning*). These two categories were used in the two game modes available to players: Quiz and Fill In The Blank. The game was designed as a two-player game. In Quiz, two players would use the question cards to inquire facts about a character card in their deck, and upon a correct answer, the other player would receive the character card in play. In Fill In The Blank, both players would use any text from a character card to complete the sentence in a chosen question card, a third person would decide which of the answers won, and the winner would receive the opponent's character card. Thus, one possible answer for the example above would be: *I love the smell of ethics in the morning* (see Figure 1). Fill In The Blank was designed to be a more humorous game mode, and it featured an added social element by requiring a third person to judge the result. Both game modes also required the players to swap a random question card from their deck at the end of each game round in order to keep the game more interesting.

Promo decks (Figure 1), consisting of all of the character cards, bound together, were placed in common areas within SIS premises. These were cards that staff could browse, for example when having a coffee break, and they would enable staff members to learn about the game and other staff members. The different coloring of the back signaled that cards from the promo deck could not be used to play the game.

The overall goal of the game was to collect as many character cards as possible, and several paths to this goal were designed into the game. Players could engage in the core gameplay, as described above, or play in alternative ways. These ways included several activities that were designed around the card game or linked to it in order to facilitate progress towards the overall goals of the experiment. For example, the research team organized a week-long 'treasure hunt' where character cards were hidden in common areas of the School and clues about their location were sent to the staff email list. Each day the hideout was replenished at least once, so that multiple people could find the same hidden location. Additionally, 15-minute playing sessions, where each participant would receive additional character cards, were organized during the last 7 weekdays of the experiment. Two of these events took place in OASIS – an informal space open for everyone including staff, students and visitors of the university [17] – and five took place in a staff common room called the SIS Lounge. 1–2 people came and participated in the sessions at OASIS while attendance at the SIS Lounge was 6–8 people each time.

Figure 1. Character card, question card and promo deck

A major activity related to the card game was Know SIS?, a pub-style competitive quiz organized three times in OASIS. While playing the card game was not a prerequisite for participating in the quiz events, attendees received extra cards for the card game, and demonstrational rounds of the card game were organized during quiz score calculations. Additionally, the initial information regarding the quiz events was distributed along with information about the card game. Each event had a quiz of 6 difficult questions about the School and its staff as well as refreshments and prizes. A scoreboard was kept throughout all events to determine the team that would win a tournament prize. 28 staff members attended the Know SIS? quiz events, forming 7 teams for quiz competition.

Another alternative way to collect more cards was to engage in creative, player-devised ways of playing, such as social engineering. For example, players could ask colleagues choosing to not play the game to give away their cards, as the rules neither endorsed nor prohibited such activities. Indeed, whether or not players engaged in creative play was determined to be one of the success factors of the experiment.

Games worth mentioning as an inspiration for DCHC include *Metagame* [33], *Cards Against Humanity*[1], *Magic: The Gathering*[2], and trump games. *Metagame* is a card game about cultural debate, which was initially created as a conference game but has since been released in the public market. *Cards Against Humanity* is a game with fill-in-the-blank mechanics. *Magic: The Gathering* is a game where players collect cards, build decks and then compete with each other. Trump games feature rules comparing values presented on cards.

The card game was launched on April 20, 2015 and officially ran until May 22, 2015. The originally planned game period was shorter, and it was extended by two weeks in early May in order to provide staff members more opportunities to play the game. At the launch, each SIS staff member was delivered a starter pack of cards along with an introduction to the game and its rules via the university's internal mail service. An email announcing the start of the game was also sent to the SIS staff email list, and to increase the motivation for the employees to participate in the experiment, the Dean of the School was asked to send the launch email. During

the game period, staff members were informed and reminded about the game, its rules, the prizes for the winners, and the related activities via email messages and flyers distributed to common areas.

At the end of the game period, return envelopes were distributed to all staff members, so that players could submit their card deck and choose to enter the competition for prizes as well as enter a raffle for additional prizes. Thus all players had a chance of winning something, regardless of how many cards they had collected. In the end, only a total of 11 participants returned cards to enter the competition. A total of 18 people entered the raffle.

4. DATA AND METHOD

At the end of the game period and after it, staff members were asked to fill in a survey about the game. Information about the survey was distributed along with the final instructions on how to enter the competition to win prizes, both as a printout along with the return envelopes for the cards and electronically via email. To make it as easy as possible for people to fill in the survey, it was possible to fill in and return the survey both as a paper form and through an online survey system. Additionally, the survey was made available both in Finnish and in English, as Finnish is the native language of most of the staff. Filling in the survey was not required for entering the competition.

The survey was designed to answer the following questions: What were the primary means of play and participation in DCHC? What are the attitudes towards playfulness at the workplace? What were the issues that prevented participation? What were the effects and outcomes of the experiment?

The ways of participation and questions about play styles were asked via multiple choice questions. Reasons preventing participation in the card game and in the quiz events were asked via open questions, along with general feedback, experiences from the experiment and views on the community and how it had changed through the experiment. The survey also included questions about background information, such as age, gender, affiliation within the School, and starting year of work at SIS.

It is important to note that the authors and the facilitators of the game were a part of the community in question[3]. This provided important insight to analyzing the results, but it can also be regarded as a methodological limitation of the study. The authors worked to reduce this effect by collectively analyzing and discussing the data to reach research triangulation.
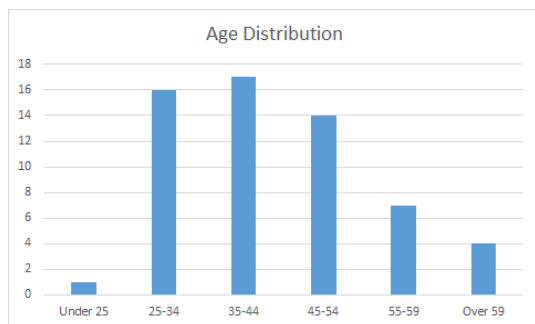

Figure 2. Age distribution of the respondents.

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[3] The authors were participating to the game only to facilitate play and did not participate in the raffle or the competition. Authors did not take part in the survey.

The survey was filled by 59 members of the staff – approximately one third of all employees. This is a fairly satisfying number, as it is uncommon for many more staff members to participate in any single intradepartmental activity at the same time. 27 of the respondents were female and 32 were male. All the main staff groups of the School were represented. The age division is seen in Figure 2.

The data from the survey was coded by two researchers. The codes were then grouped using affinity diagramming [5]. The data clustering and group forming of the affinity diagramming procedure was conducted by 5 researchers.

5. RESULTS

Topics discussed in the survey responses include participation and issues that prevented it, effects of the experiment, and feedback and attitudes towards playfulness in the workplace.

5.1 Participation

Of the 59 respondents, only 16 said they participated by playing the card game. However, as many as 45 participated at least in some way, for instance by examining the cards (these could be actual game cards or the promo deck) or by watching someone else play the game. Observing play or examining the cards was not always seen as participating: while 23 respondents stated not participating in the experiment, 9 of them also admitted to having engaged in some game related activities. The ways of participation are presented in Figure 3.

Surprisingly, the most popular way to get more cards was receiving them as a donation from fellow staff members. While as many as 15 claim to have gained cards this way, only 3 admitted giving their cards away. Even though asking cards from others was not included in the official rules, this was not seen as cheating. Interestingly, no one admitted they had cheated in any way during the experiment. All official ways to gain cards were represented, winning cards being the most popular of these. The means of getting more cards are presented in Figure 4.

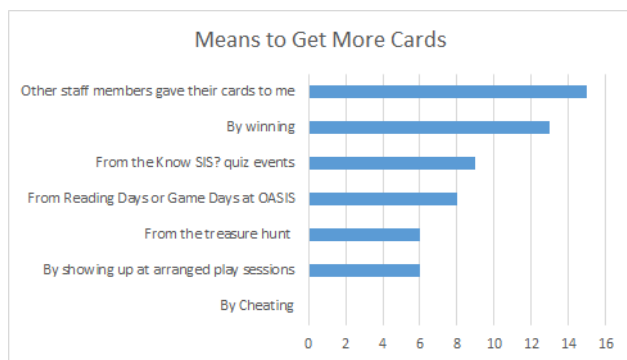
Figure 3. Ways of participation.

Figure 4. Means to get more cards.

5.2 Issues that Prevented Participation

The major reason the survey respondents reported for not participating in the card game was that they were too busy, often describing how they needed to concentrate on something else. Indeed, it appears that many were busier than usual during the period of the experiment, as one respondent remarked how it was the busiest time of the year and another that the spring when the experiment took place was exceptionally busy. The card game was often not a priority. This also affected others, as there were remarks about how it was difficult to find co-players. One respondent said that "*[ID6] I prioritize work, as clients come first during work hours*", signaling that participation in the experiment was not always considered to be a part of working. The exceptionally busy spring affected the supporting events as well, as being too busy was also a clear reason for not participating in the related quiz events.

Other related reasons for not participating in the experiment were cases when the respondent was not on campus during the experiment. Even being away only part of the time affected participation: "*[ID8] I was on vacation and it was too late to join the game*". There were also other remarks about how starting the game late was not seen as sensible or possible. Communication about the experiment to the community also received criticism, as some respondents missed important information, especially information about the quiz events. Language was also identified as an aspect that affected the experiment, as some respondents would have liked to receive information in their native Finnish language instead of English. There was also a case where the respondent did not notice that the starter pack had been delivered. These echo the overall communication challenges of the organization, as there is no completely reliable mass communication method for contacting every member of the community.

Many respondents saw that the rules for the card game were too complicated or that learning the rules would require too much effort: "*[ID25] A slightly simpler idea could work even better and inspire people to join in; familiarizing people to the idea and logic of the game should not take a lot of time/resources.*" Some just did not catch on to the game idea or the goal of the game. There were also notes about the design of the cards, and remarks about disliking card games of this type in general and disliking the two-player gameplay mechanic. One respondent also remarked that "*[ID2] I did not want to play that much, because I did not want to lose even one of my nice cards*", pointing to how the mechanic of losing cards can be seen to have restricted participation.

Personality traits such as shyness and introversion also prohibited participation in the card game, as well as did the feeling of not belonging. One respondent described personal passivity to be one of the factors in not participating in the experiment while some were just not interested or could not get excited about the game. Missing the data collection for the card deck and thus not being a character in the deck of cards was also seen as an issue. Interestingly, one respondent saw that not being in the deck was also a prohibitive issue to attending related quiz events, even though there were actually no such restrictions.

Long distances were also seen as an obstacle. The School premises are spread over multiple floors and multiple buildings, so this kind of feedback can be expected. One participant described that instead of participating in the card game or the quiz events it was just easier to not participate.

5.3 Effects of the Experiment

Both the OASIS Deck of Cards – House of Colleagues card game experiment as a whole as well as the Know SIS? quiz was mentioned as something that can, and indeed did, help people to get to know each other. This could be through simply browsing the cards and matching names with faces and learning facts about people, or by direct interaction with colleagues. The cards could by themselves make employees realize that they might have potential collaborators inside the School: "*[ID52] I think I understood again a tiny bit better that there might be interesting people in other departments – if I only knew them*". Meeting people who they do not see that often was also seen as positive. Not all agreed, though, as it was also stated that these means were not that effective for networking and social interaction.

Some also stated that their sense or perception of the community strengthened during the experiment. Again, not everyone experienced these effects, as some also reported that their perception of the School remained unchanged.

For some, the experiment also appeared to influence the atmosphere of the School. The gamelike features and playfulness were mentioned as nice to have around even if you did not actively participate yourself. Some respondents reported that they felt that these experiments increased relaxedness, sense of community and well-being in the School. As one respondent said, "*[ID21] The game (and other continuous common things!) are to thank for improved collaboration between different groups in SIS*". It was also reported that the School seemed to become more active and social during the experiments.

As seen already from the ways of participation (see Figure 3), there was a lot of playing outside the core game experience. These experiences outside of the core were seen as important and interesting, even if the respondent had not participated in other ways. This type of play can be described as an expanded game experience [18]. Examples that were reported include observing others playing the game and just browsing the cards. Some activities, such as browsing the cards was actually sometimes seen as more interesting or fun than actually using the to play: "*[ID49] Browsing and examining the cards was more interesting than the formal games*" Some also said they liked the treasure hunt or collecting the cards in general. One respondent even stated being "*[ID2] more of a collector than a gambler*".

Observing other people play also brought up some views on the activity: it revealed how the activity differed from one group to another inside the School, as some reported low activity and lack of interest towards the game, and some stated how some people were enthusiastically involved and seemed to have fun while playing. One respondent had been talking with others who had played the game and heard positive things about it.

5.4 Feedback and Attitudes towards Playfulness in the Workplace

In general, the respondents' attitudes towards the experiment and playfulness as such were positive. In addition to many general positive comments about the card game being "*nice*", "*fun*", "*a good idea*" etc., there were some more descriptive comments, like: "*[ID51] The idea for the game and the way it was brought together were clever and fun*" or "[*ID52] A good idea, something to be encouraged*". Some participants specifically explicated that they enjoyed browsing the promo decks in coffee rooms: "*[ID46] It was nice to browse the cards, and I got to match names to familiar faces.*"

Quite a few respondents showed genuine enthusiasm towards playful experimentation in the community in general and sent their regards, encouragement and thanks to the team: "*[ID45] Keep up the good work. I like that you're boldly trying things out. It has a certain angle that I think is very fitting for these days*" and "*[ID51] I think it is wonderful that there are new experiments for improving communality and atmosphere at work*". Furthermore, some respondents pointed out that they like attempts to increase the sense of community, although they might have not participated in the current experiment for one reason or another: "*[ID25] Good idea, but in practice I did not become inspired to play. I appreciate attempts to increase the sense of community*"; "*[ID45] I'm glad that new things are bravely tried out in the community, although this time I felt myself a little bit an outsider.*"

At the same time, some suggested taking the card game to the School's recreation days or similar events. This further suggests that the best place for work-related play is thought to be during events that are already playful or outside the scope of "real work". The experiment was also hoped to continue. It was suggested that the card game period could be repeated later or it could be a continuous process, where everyone would have a card in the deck and all of them could be collected. This might be an indication of the need to get used to tools like this for a more extensive period.

It was not clear from the beginning what the deck would be used for, and the purpose or motivation to attend in the experiment itself was not clear to all. Some never understood the usefulness of the card game and why one should play, while one respondent noted that the usefulness was only revealed to him/her at the end discussion at the prize ceremony. Some criticized the cards themselves, noting that they had missing or unclear information, or that the "Fill In The Blank" assignments were difficult to fill with the information on the cards. On the other hand, some also praised the layout of the cards.

Only one feedback was clearly negative towards playfulness at the workplace, noting that the community does not feel professional: "*[ID31] Professional community of experts or preschool / kindergarten? At the moment, it's the latter. My experience: pisses me off in a big way sometimes.*" There was also dislike towards the top-down motivation for the game, relating to the initial message about the game coming from the dean: "*[ID42] Bottom-up motivation would have probably worked better at least for me, as it would have emphasized community, togetherness and knowing each other instead of a mandate from the boss*".

There was also some frustration towards the recurring organizational changes which diminish the usefulness of community building efforts: "*[ID24] [SIS] is an organization that tries to build an identity from time to time, but it's not really worth it to put any effort in, because the next organizational revision is already around the corner.*"

One respondent thought that the card game might become awkward for some: it might work for personalities who like social games anyway, but other people might try their best to avoid the experiment. Interestingly the respondent thought this evasion could be experienced as a game in itself and that it even could be fun sometimes, even having its own benefits: "*[ID56] Reaction to avoid card gameplay also makes something visible about the work community*", hinting that the lower sense of community might be behind the general prioritizing of directly work-related activities over play that is less so.

The Know SIS? quiz, one of the major supporting events, received both positive and critical feedback. The events were seen as fun and easy to participate in, and the events had a good atmosphere. Some felt that the questions were ambiguous or just too hard, especially so for new employees, while others felt the difficulty level was appropriate. In addition to the quiz events, the treasure hunt was brought up as enjoyable.

6. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK

Even though the game went through several design iterations, it did not appear simple enough to many of the survey respondents. This is most likely due to the rules making the game seem more difficult than it actually was, and the fact that the game featured two game modes. Different players get pleasure from different aspects of the game – be it for example socializing, competing or collecting [4]. This was also evident in the diverse ways people enjoyed this experiment. When the game is designed as a social artifact which should reach the whole community, it has to be versatile enough to offer many different possibilities for play.

The card game of the experiment can be seen to be related to conference games, as it has various similarities (e.g. [19, 33]), but cannot be considered one. In a conference, all participants would be continuously engaged with the conference and its theme and most people carry all of their possessions with them throughout the day, including the play objects of a conference game. Communication would be easier, as the length of the game is rather short (a few days) and participants gather regularly in conference rooms. In our case, people would not carry the cards with them, as they could keep them in their office, for example. Communication is also more challenging, as it was necessary to communicate a lot of information during a period of several weeks to staff which was shown by this experiment to be quite difficult to reach. This also felt like an extra burden on top of daily routines for some. Unfortunately, extra streamlining of communication was not possible due to lack of time and resources on part of the research team. Even though the time period was longer than one in a conference game, it was obvious that it was still somewhat short for this type of game and some respondents noted that the game could work better as a longer version. For example, a game lasting one whole semester would also allow more time for enthusiastic participants to teach the game to other community members. We also did not utilize gamification with the goal of increasing the engagement of the staff to specific tasks, as would be done in some conference games. Our goal was to increase socialization and familiarity within the community, a goal which might not actively be in the minds of the staff, but one that is important for a relatively new and also constantly changing community seeking to define a collective identity.

Several respondents concluded that missing the start of the experiment or not being active in the beginning left them out and it was not possible to participate later. This sense of exclusion seems to be inherent in a loosely bound academic organization, and it was not easy for every participant to automatically feel included in the

experiment. Personality traits might interact with this effect as extroverts are more attracted to organizations offering opportunities for interaction, friendship and social cohesion and have a stronger sense of community [20]. An academic community might in fact have a representative amount of people with introverted personalities needing more personal effort to join shared activities. These issues, including also the difficulties in communication, are ones that the experiment was aiming to improve, but their presence also affected the experiment itself.

It was found that the card game was not experienced as a part of the daily job, leading staff members to allocate their resources to work tasks that were felt to be more primary and as a result avoiding card gameplay. It was also apparent that the community needs a shared time and place to engage with the game. A location where staff meet informally on a regular basis (the SIS Lounge) collected a handful of people for organized playing events, mainly due to the daily joint coffee breaks that a sub-group of staff members have in the space. Many of them did not arrive with the goal of attending the play session, but were willing to play if invited. Comparatively, not many staff members arrived to the organized play sessions in OASIS, a space where staff usually do not hold coffee breaks and which is often populated by students. It seems that first there needs to be an established practice for daily informal contact – in an agreed time and place – which cannot be forced.

Playful experiments in work environments, such as DCHC, are delicate artefacts promoting play in a serious environment. This is also apparent in a comment where one respondent discussed how the school feels more like a preschool than a professional environment. Indeed, an extensively playfully behaving adult may be seen to transgress behavioral norms and become perceived as "childish" or as a "clown". Some people adhere to such behavioral norms and standards more strictly than others, and there are certainly ways of exploring and expressing playful impulses also in adulthood. Johan Huizinga [12] promotes the argument that much of our culture – art, science, even war – is actually based on a play impulse. Many of our most visible achievements, such as the Eiffel Tower, International Space Station, or the highest building on Earth are not solely based on immediate utility, but rather are also rooted in playful exploration of what can be done, on the associated symbolic values, and on achieving something that Arnold Pacey calls "technologically sweet" – pleasurable in itself [25].

Transforming the image of work as a non-playful environment should be considered a longitudinal development project. An increased integration with work tasks was initially planned for this experiment as well, but was not implemented as well as we would have hoped due to lack of time and resources. This type of integration may be effective in resolving some highly negative views on the relation of work and play and could also promote the experiment more deeply as a part of work culture and not just something that would be seen to fit recreational events. As the community building aspect should be the main focus of the game, mechanics that concentrate on building the social capital could prove to be a fruitful approach. Integrating the game more heavily with the actual work people are doing – taking a more gamification-like approach – might help in building the motivation for playing.

The Fill In The Blank feature of DCHC supported innovative discursive material production as it required certain cleverness to come up with fun wordplays. More importantly the card game became visible as a cultural artefact and built up the overall playful atmosphere in the School when for example knowledge not presented on the cards was brought up and discussed during the play interactions. The interactions and discussions the game inspires are valuable material for constructing shared meaning and collective identity. This in turn becomes a shared social capital that can be built upon in future collaborations and co-work.

Looking to the future, the promotional decks are still present in meeting rooms around the School premises and thus continue to have an effect on the community. The game might also continue, as the cards were returned to the players at a later date after the results were calculated, and not all players returned the cards. The continuing effects of the card deck and its possible successor are a potential topic for future research.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, playful interaction and community building in an academic community was facilitated through a card game designed specifically with this purpose in mind. The game acted as a social artefact and promoted a playful atmosphere. The results of the study showed that the ways of participation and means of play are more diverse in an academic work community than as they are specified in the game rules. Social interaction with colleagues and a shared place and time are important enablers for play at work. Future research efforts should increase the emphasis on framing the game and supporting it as a continuous activity in order for it to become mainstay as a playful element in the community. This would cultivate more favorable attitudes towards a playful work environment. There are, however, contextual prerequisites in an academic community that need to be addressed, such as preconceptions towards play as a part of work and challenges in communication.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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