

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Howard Thurman.

CHAPTER 1: TOO BUSY NOT TO PLAY

What is it that makes us come alive? When do we feel most alive? When do we feel both content and yet challenged, energetic and also relaxed, collaborative and competitive, vulnerable while invincible? This research joins a choir of voices that argue that these experiences all come together in play. The research journey in which you are about to take part in is therefore about play and how it interacts with work. More specifically, the research focuses on the facilitation techniques and methods, infused by play and playfulness, with which other facilitators, participants and myself have been interacting over the last few years in pedagogical contexts,⁴ i.e., workshops and facilitated interventions. This interaction has been against the larger backdrop of an organisation-wide intervention that aims at individual enrichment, personal insight and organisational renewal.

Renewal is an interesting and appealing concept; the new broom, a clean page, a fresh start. Perhaps, instead of organisational renewal, the words *workplace rejuvenation* could also be applied. We are talking about workplaces that *allow* people to 'come alive'. With the increasing prominence of interventions that aim at assisting with renewal, rejuvenation, people-engagement and related forms of stress management (Van der Colff & Rothmann, 2009), it seems that the idea of "people that come alive" is undoubtedly pressing, persistent and therefore deserving of our priority attention. Furthermore, with a growing body of knowledge on play and play-based methods in relation to these initiatives (Nel, 2007), it stands to reason that play offers potentially valuable avenue of research, one that has remained largely unstudied.

⁴ While I take note of the difference between pedagogy and andragogy, more recent trends have leaned on pedagogy as a term of choice for both adult and child learning. While workshops and facilitation interventions are not always necessarily training per se, these contexts are essentially about learning, whether that is self-learning, team-learning, problem solving, and more.

The research contained in this dissertation can be described as an explorative case-study, studied and written from the perspective of my own lived experience. Through my personal exposure to play and play-based methods over the last few years, I have come to understand and appreciate that methods that incorporate the sensorial, the aesthetic, the spontaneous and the fun have a fundamental role to play in workplace rejuvenation. Through being both participant and facilitator in such methods, a curiosity as to what is *at play* in play has taken hold of me. My personal point of view and personal lived experience are therefore an important departure point for this research. The case-study, however, extends my own experiences by incorporating the perspectives of colleagues and participants in an attempt to triangulate, reinforce and offer counter perspectives.

This qualitative genre described above is called autoethnography and is an approach that combines ethnography and biographical research (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Sparkes, 2002). The method is treated in detail in chapter two, but as an introduction, it is important to note that narrative, or story-telling if you like, plays an important part in this study. As one qualitative researcher eloquently stated, stories can be simply seen as “data with soul” (B. Brown, 2010). It is therefore important to alert the reader to a departure from the traditional scientific styles and approaches normally encountered in social science research.

Before we explore the philosophical roots and methodological implications of this research approach in more detail, let us first throw a glance at the subject and elaborate on the *what* and the *why* before moving to a more in-depth exploration of *how*.

1. Research challenge - the what and why of this research

Three important points highlight the reasons for doing this research. Firstly, play among working adults is largely ignored as a topic. Secondly, there is a widespread wellness problem requiring action, which has been largely taken up by the Industrial Psychology profession. Thirdly, play offers a unique contribution to this wellness predicament, and therefore merits our serious attention. These points are argued in the following paragraphs by briefly reviewing the pertinent literature.

1.1. Studies of play in adult work contexts are rated.

There are many subjects about which prominent play scholars disagree (Sutton-Smith, 2001), but two arguments seem to unite them. Firstly, they agree that play is a fundamental and essential expression of life which, especially in humans, continues into adulthood, a term called *neoteny* (S. Brown, 2008a ; Kiel, 2011). Secondly, play among adults, especially working adults, remains largely ignored (Kane, 2006; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Terr, 2000; Van Leeuwen & Westwood, 2008). In matters of work, play seems anathema, only “appropriate for children and poets, but not for serious adults” (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p.83). We see this throughout play literature which pertains to adults. The logic of this is questionable and has a long history of contestation, as can be seen when Berg observes that “if play is as omnipresent as it appears to be, then it must bear an essential relationship to work (as cited in Hans, 1981, p. 25)”. These sentiments continue to find echoes among play scholars and are poignantly illustrated when Kane (2006) asks:

If play is so constitutive of our humanity, the psychological and biological starting-point of all our complexities and capacities, why do we think that at a certain stage in our development, we must stop playing, ‘put childish things behind us’, become non-playful, perhaps working adults (p. 47)?

What a contradiction in adult logic. We fiercely treasure-hunt the mythical “fountain of youth”, yet continue to label the juvenile in rejuvenation as childish, whimsical and silly.

This is not to say that work on play is few and far between. Ever since Huizinga (1949) wrote his landmark work, academic interest in play from a variety of disciplines has been constantly growing (F.F. McMahon, Lytle, and Sutton-Smith, 2005); anthropologists, sociologists, educators, psychologists and, more recently, strategists and organisational scholars, have all added their voices to the choir (Gordon, 2008; Henricks, 2006; Sutton-Smith, 2001). However, the interest has been fairly eclectic and has led to a field that is characterised by diversity, divergence, and

ambiguity. Sutton-Smith (2001), the person often referred to as the “godfather” of play studies,⁵ says:

We all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us, and much ambiguity (p.1).

The call for more discipline to come on-board and for more interdisciplinary efforts is therefore loud and clear. It remains to be seen, however, whether the disciplines of Industrial Psychology and other Management Sciences are willing to meaningfully contribute to the development of this field. Of the very limited studies of play within organisational settings, the articles that have been published often use a theoretical approach, leaving a huge opportunity for field research (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Roos, Victor, & Statler, 2004; Statler, Roos, & Victor, 2009).

1.2. Positive psychology excludes a focus on play.

Surprisingly, the absence of focus on play extends even into the widely popular field of Positive Psychology, where scholars vigorously study happiness and well-being (Carr, 2004; Seligman, 1999). Even here, adults at play and workplace-play are consigned to academic shadows. On the front cover of Martin Seligman’s landmark “Authentic Happiness” (2002a), renowned author Daniel Goleman is quoted as saying that, “at last, psychology gets serious about glee, fun and happiness”.⁶ Yet, the few cursory comments that play has been offered in academic works relate either to flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) or remain focused on children (Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Seligman, 2002a). Some influential books in Positive Psychology do not even include “play” as a keyword (Carr, 2004; Lopez, 2009). If, as Goldman holds, psychology has turned its attention to what fosters happiness, subjective well-being, glee and fun, the topic of play remains conspicuous by its absence.

In Psychology, we therefore see a broad tendency towards ignorance about play among working adults, despite the constant beckoning of prominent sociologists,

⁵ This is an oft-quoted reference and tribute to the massive impact that Sutton-Smith’s career in play-studies has made on the field, and can, for instance, be seen in Mechling’s 2002 article.

⁶ This quote only appears in certain prints, but can easily be found in the review sections on Amazon.com. Due to its poignancy, I decided to retain the quote despite the reference difficulty.

anthropologists, organisational scholars, and lone voices in psychology, such as Sutton-Smith's. Why the ignorance, is the question that begs asking. One suggestion is that play, commonly seen as the opposite of work, is for this reason by definition excluded from a focus in workplaces. Statler, Roos, and Victor (2009) agree, and add that contemporary scholarship "casts play as a frivolous activity, with no purpose other than enjoyment and therefore with only peripheral relevance to the productive life of adults" (p.88). These authors proceed to suggest that this juxtapositioning of work and play carries a strong set of embedded value assumptions: work is good; play is bad. This of course renders Sutton-Smith's (2001) observation, that "the opposite of play is not work, it is vacillation, or worse, it is depression" (p.198), rather striking, yet ignored. Play being bad, and work being good, does not stand up to scrutiny. There's a problem with work and workplace, and this serves as another important introductory angle on the research challenge.

1.3. What are we losing in work?

If the opposite of play is indeed depression, as Sutton-Smith suggests, it is fascinating to note that depression is closely related to the current experience of work and workplaces. Numerous scholars write about how contemporary workplaces are plagued by stress, burnout and loss of meaning (S. Rothmann & Malan, 2006; S. Rothmann, 2008; Science Museum, 2009). Something about work seems not to be working. The business of busyness has perhaps caught up with us, and it begs the question: Have the constantly increasing demands and pace of work sapped our vitality, energy and youthfulness? Is the business and busyness of our workplace related to the overall tarnished sense of well-being? If so, what should we be keeping ourselves busy with? Are we in fact too busy to play? And is this related to our collective play-deprivation, or "depression", as Sutton-Smith suggests?

The business of busyness – all work and no play

"The world has gone and got itself in one big damn hurry." This line was written by Brooks, a character from the 1994 movie "The Shawshank redemption" (Darabont, 1994). In the movie, Brooks is an elderly man who has spent much of his extra time and food in prison patiently feeding birds. After five decades in prison, Brooks is finally released on parole. Upon being confronted with the realities of 1947 urban life, Brooks writes the quoted line in a depressing suicide message addressed to Andy, a

close friend who remained incarcerated. Although this is not the main plotline, the movie tragically illustrates Brook's inability to cope with the demands of the "outside world", notably due to its sheer pace.

If this was a statement of life in the mid-twentieth century, one wonders what it would look like today. Cars, trains and commercial airlines have geographically "shrunk" the world. Furthermore, the Internet and mobile technologies create a super-highway of instantly available information and constant accessibility of people. As a result, people are increasingly suffering from "time-poverty" (Goodin, Rice, Bittman, & Saunders, 2005). I don't believe it necessary to argue or defend these observations, as this is a convincing focus in fields such as sociology (Lahiri, Pereznordtvedt, & Renn, 2008; Wajcman, 2008) and recreational studies (Fassel, 2000; Gini, 2003; Goodin, 2008). But it would seem, by looking at wellness work in psychology and industrial psychology, that we are impoverished beyond just our time.

1.4. A wellness predicament

A broader reflection on how our "busyness" with work has tarnished our well-being reveals a disturbing picture. As Uys (2006) argues, our collective wellness seems to find itself in precarious territory:

The well-being of a nation is determined by examining factors such as the unemployment rate, poverty levels, the distribution of wealth, levels of corruption, crimes against humanity to name but a few. If these factors were examined to determine the state of well-being of the world, most people would agree that the world is not in a good state. (p. 53)

Pat Kane (2000, 2005) has written extensively and thought-provokingly about the state of our workplaces, arguing that it is time for something to succeed the "outdated" work-ethic, something he calls "play-ethic"⁷(book title). He emphatically echoes Uys' sentiments: that there is indeed something wrong with our world, and specifically with our world of work. As Kane explains, our work fails to make us happy, succeeds in making us unhealthy, aggravates an identity-crisis and leads to the continual exploitation of employees. The result has been a strong disillusionment about work, notably among younger generations. In criticising the predominance of

⁷ "Play-ethic" is also the title of Kane's book.

the work-ethic, he asks: “Why believe in work, when it doesn’t believe in you?” (2005, p.45). The disillusioned “Generation Y’s”, “millennials”, or “web-generation” simultaneously present workplaces with a persistent talent headache and arguably, also its only remedy for future sustainable talent (Clark, 2010; Deloitte Consulting, 2011; Howe and Strauss, 2000).

Another point that substantiates this wellness predicament is the explosion of work that focuses on organisational wellness and well-being. Sebastiaan Rothmann (2008), for example, notes that “Issues of employee well-being have never been more important than now” (p. 11). As a society, we are realising that the situation is both intolerable and unsustainable. Hence, a contemporary emphasis on organisational sustainability, a revolution in social norms and expectations (Pirson & Lawrence, 2010), as well as broadened ideals around ethics (Hover, 2005), can all be seen as potent supporters to the call for organisations to not only do no harm, but also start doing good in ways that include all their stakeholders, and notably their employees.

It takes two to tango

Is it true that we can merely point a finger at the impersonal organisation, the march of capitalism and the un-negotiable demands of work as the main culprits? All these play significant roles, and it is true that we often feel powerless against them, but no. While external demands and the “state of the world” are significant contributors, this wellness dilemma is exacerbated by our own internal responses to those demands of work and workplace. It has been observed that employees are spending more discretionary time at work, earning more, having more freedom, and yet suffer from more addictions while failing to find more happiness (Gini, 2003; Goodin et al., 2005; Seligman, 2002a). In related work on workaholism, others have questioned the presumed innocence of employees, pointing out that it is the worker who acquiesces in being exploited and *voluntarily resigns from life in order to work* (Burke & Cooper, 2008; Schaufeli, Taris, & Bakker, 2008). Workaholism offers a path to “clean” addictions, easily condoned, and often rewarded (Gini, 2003; Killinger, 1997). Gini looks at workaholism as an “*addiction to action*” and poignantly summarises the consequence where “you *leave* yourself by *losing* yourself in work” (p. 23). This work-ethic and ethos, which we have developed in response to what has been referred to as the *omnipotence of the corporate call* (J.Coetzee, personal

communication, April 21, 2007), perpetuate the prevalence of our stress-related pathologies as well as our tarnished sense of well-being. We are a society busy losing ourselves.

1.5. What can be regained in play

A third and final point to anchor this research challenge should be obvious by now. If work is increasingly characterised by stress, depression and illness, and the workplaces exclude play, is play perhaps the missing ingredient? Is play perhaps the medium by which we can find ourselves, and breathe new life into work and workplace?

From the literature on play within the larger field of psychology, there appears to be no doubt that play offers a unique and potent pathway to wellness and well-being (Cattanach, 1994; L. McMahon, 2009; Schaefer, 2003; B. Snyder, 1997). In the words of Snyder, play can contribute “to restoring the cognitive/intellectual, emotional/affect, and creative/inspiration vacuums in today's stress-driven, technological, impersonal, and often unsafe world” (p. 74). The most obvious evidence for the therapeutic powers of play is arguably found in the field of play therapy.

Play therapy has a long history in psychotherapy with children (O'Connor, 2000), but, although still mainly focussed on children, its application has found its way into adult practice in more recent years (Schaefer, 2003). These expansions, although fairly rare, have included adult workplaces, with play-based methods such as expressive-arts play, narrative and metaphor, and role-play and improvisational theatre finding their way into the work context (Hansen, 2006; De Klerk, 2007; Saldaña, 2008). However, despite this expanded utilisation, these broader applications have largely failed to gain academic attention and have mostly been limited to special populations such as people with Alzheimer's and Dementia (Hoffman, 2003; Legerstee, 2007).

Illustration 1. Research challenge



Literature on play therapy makes an interesting case in favour of play's therapeutic powers, but looking at play through the lens of play therapy can be unnecessarily limiting. Although adult play is often therapeutic, it does not necessarily come in the form of play therapy. Also, simply approaching play-based methods through the strict lens of psychotherapy runs the risk of "professionalising" play, and may leave it stigmatised as being only applicable to psychosis. This study explores a less explicit approach to play, one that is hopefully accessible and empowering to all players.

1.6. Summary of the research challenge

As depicted in figure 1.1, three points were raised in the paragraphs above and together form the contextual problem and rationale for this research. They can be summarised as follows:

- Firstly, play among working adults is understudied, even by the elite candidates, such as scholars in Positive Psychology. There is therefore a widespread ignorance about play, especially in industrial psychology.

- Secondly, we are faced with a significant wellness predicament in our organisations that create an urgency to finding feasible solutions. Our organisations need rejuvenation.
- Thirdly, literature suggests that play and play-based methods are prime candidates for improving the well-being of people. Yet, play for working adults remains largely unexplored.

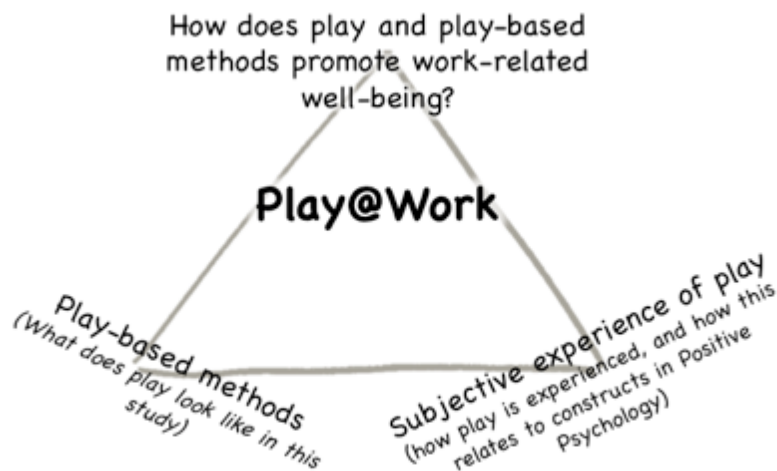
An urgency in addressing the wellness predicament that has arguably exacerbated by our busyness. By exploring play at work, I hope to demonstrate a few possible solutions and therefore hold that, as the title suggests, perhaps we are too busy not to play. Specifically, this research study aims to fill the missing gaps in current organisational studies on play by exploring how play promotes work-related well-being. It addresses the question of how we ensure that, instead of leaving and losing ourselves, we find ourselves.

1.7. Research question

In this qualitative, explorative and largely phenomenological study, this question will further be explored by adopting the phrase “play at work” to frame the inquiry. Firstly, the phrase refers to a more objective exploration of what play looks like at work. This perspective has to do with the play-based methods that are at the heart of this study, and includes icebreakers, games, metaphor and story, expressive arts play as well as physical play (these are described in more detail in Chapter 3). Secondly, the phrase refers to the underlying process that is at work in play. That is, what our play experience does for us, from a more subjective point of view. This also represents the more explicit link to well-being, and will be explored in more depth in relation to the well-being constructs found in Positive Psychology.

By exploring both more objective, external play-based methods, as well as our more subjective, internal experiences of play, the study proposes to clarify the central research question: ***How does play and play-based methods promote work-related well-being?***

Illustration 2. Research question



1.8. Effect and impact of this research

The benefits this research therefore offer range from academic relevance to practical opportunities, and should be of interest to scholars, leaders, employees and practitioners. Furthermore, the specific genre of autoethnography proposes benefits to the researcher and the participants, as well the reader.

The effect and impact of this research can be summarised as follows:

- Advance our understanding of play and play-based methods as they interact with organisational contexts in general, and pedagogical contexts specifically.
- Deepen our understanding of the experiences inherent to play, and how play can be harnessed to promote our work-related well-being.
- Invite play into the spotlight of positive psychological inquiry by bringing it into the context of work-related well-being.
- Challenge the assumption that play and work are either opposites or mutually exclusive, while promoting a healthy synthesis between play and work.
- Provide a basis for the author to understand the relevance of play and work in his own life.

- Inspire individuals to break with conventions of work that make them unwell and embrace patterns of play that can promote work-related well-being.
- Provide a base to guide and direct further research on play at work.

2. The role of literature in this study

The use of literature in qualitative studies has been a somewhat controversial subject. Mouton and Marais (1996) pointed out that explorative studies lead to the development of hypotheses as opposed to the development of hypotheses leading to explorative studies. Flinders and Mills (1993, p. xi) supports the caution, which they ascribe to as the “loss of theoretical innocence” and further on elaborate:

...researchers seem to believe that theory can be as much a bane as it is a blessing. They want to be neither wedded to their theories nor blinded by them...Empirical researchers across the board take a certain pride in allowing observations to directly inform their thinking. They are wary of theoretical imposition. They talk of emergent theory and are quick to note the simple-mindedness of theory in the face of an uncertain and complex world. (p. xiii)

Due to the uncommon subject of this research, as well as the unconventional research approach, which has been touched on in the prologue and will be elaborated on in the next section, I am therefore faced with a dilemma that requires delicate balancing. On one hand, I would like to de-emphasise the use of literature in this study and allow the study to be guided by the data. However, given both the fairly ambiguous and under-studied status of play in Industrial Psychology, as well as the unusual research approach, the existing literature will be broadly explored in chapter three to further illuminate the research findings.

3. The how of this research – introducing autoethnography

As already mentioned, this study can be described in a number of ways. Firstly, it falls within the broader ambit of qualitative approaches and can be seen as an explorative case study, using autoethnography as method. Autoethnography, in stemming from ethnography, is essentially a study of culture. Although ethnographic studies are seldom encountered in psychological research, the logic employed here

maintains that, if culture is the lens through which we experience and interpret the world, studying culture allows for insight on subjective experience. By studying a particular life, we can understand a way of life (Ellis, 2004). By understanding a way of life, we gain insight into the phenomenological experience that is the key in learning how play relates to work-related well-being.

While chapter two deals in detail with the necessary methodological considerations, I feel obliged to offer a few introductory remarks on autoethnography in this opening chapter.

3.1. Why autoethnography?

Autoethnography is a research methodology that combines ethnographical and autobiographical approaches. Chang (2008) highlights conditions under which the use of autoethnography becomes favourable. These include situations in which researchers are complete members of a research setting, multiple data sources are utilised, and culture and cultural influences become important. All of these are applicable here and therefore already provide a strong motivation for this approach. However, there are two additional reasons that have been even more significant to my rationale.

One, there is a strong trend in social science research for researchers to no longer hold onto their “white coat” clinical distance to research phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This trend promotes research where there is greater intimacy between researcher and research phenomenon, and, as some authors conclude, there is a move towards epistemological intimacy (Smith, 2005). Two, there is a growing realisation among qualitative researchers that form and content are inseparable (Richardson, 2000), i.e., the type of language and style of writing used to represent research findings are not neutral containers of independent research findings, but are part and parcel of the research findings being conveyed. Style and format (form) influence, mediate, and illuminate research findings (content) in a particular way. Harmonising one’s research subject with the research approach is therefore of fundamental importance.

These two points have particular relevance to this research study. Firstly, I acknowledge that both my personal interest in this dissertation, as well as my member

status in the research setting, requires a methodology that explicitly acknowledges and deals with this, as autoethnography does through reflexivity. Secondly, autoethnography offers a particularly apt approach to play, as its relationship to traditional scientific writing mirrors a tension similar to that which exists between play and work. Traditional scientific writing values objectivity, rationality, and control. Autoethnography is more fluid and dynamic; it values aesthetics and celebrates emotion. This study is therefore an attempt to study play *playfully* (Ault, 2007). In as much as this represents a harmony between method and problem, it is also an attempt to honour Brown's reminder (S. Brown & Vaughan, 2009): "Play is a thing of beauty best appreciated by experiencing it. Defining play has always seemed to me like explaining a joke—analysing it takes the joy out of it" (p. 15).

3.2. Lived experience – a point of departure

From the above motivation, it is therefore essential to inform the reader as to my own "introspective site of research," a sensible tradition in all autoethnographic writing. The prologue to this study provides the précis to the research in an attempt to acquaint the reader with its style and format, and to acknowledge that I bring my own set of personal perspectives and biases into the writing. Although I am a behavioural scientist with strong analytic sensibilities, I am also a philosopher, a Christian, and fundamentally - I am a player. The research will reflect some of these components in ways that offer an authentic voice for my experiences. It aims to reflexively celebrate the subjective and emotive components of social sciences, as opposed to minimising and controlling them.

4. Overview of the dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation will be organised into five additional chapters. Chapter 2, "Methodology - approaching play, playfully", outlines the specifics of the methodology as it fits into the larger landscape of qualitative research, and the methods and approach. The chapter argues that the time is ripe for organisational studies to consider autoethnography as a viable option in keeping up with postmodern themes. It will also strengthen the rationale and motivation for autoethnography in this study and outline important criteria for evaluating autoethnographic research.

Chapter 3, “Literature review – in the footsteps of other players”, while building on the metaphor of exploration and hiking established in the prologue, ventures into more detail on play, playfulness, and play-based methods as well as Positive Psychology and work-related well-being. Along the ideas of finding traction, footpaths and contours, the objective of this chapter is to articulate the key concepts and theoretical frameworks that guide the inquiry at the heart of this dissertation while narrowing the ambiguous field and crystallising important considerations.

Chapter 4, “Autoethnography - regaining in play what we’ve lost in work”, is an autoethnographic text which should be seen as the primary output of this inquiry. This chapter takes its cue from the data gathered throughout this research process and presents it in a narrative form. The text follows a creative, non-fiction approach, blending actual events, conversations and phenomena into a fictional plotline in order to provide the reader with an engaging and evocative encounter to test the research findings against his or her own experience.

Chapter 5, “The research journey – going behind the scenes”, continues the themes of hiking, and reflects on the research journey through that metaphor. The chapter consists of three sections. The first tells the back-end story of how the research was conducted and then moves into the second section, which explores in more analytic and academic terms how the data was analysed. The third section in this chapter responds to the idea that the very approach to a dissertation (which is work) through autoethnography (which has been positioned as playful) is another angle on the research topic, play at work. In a concluding reflection in this chapter, the research therefore bends back on itself and reveals a few key insights about play at work.

Chapter 6, “Serious business - conclusion and recommendations”, offers the final construct on the metaphor of exploration and hiking, and suggests that the journey gives us a very specific view of the destination. The chapter summarises the key findings and explores both some limitations as well as further research suggestions. Ironically, at the end of a serious pursuit to establish the importance of play, this Chapter also playfully suggests that the best way to re-discover our inner-child, is to perhaps stop taking even play so seriously.

5. Chapter summary – a “Dee-dah day”

Are we too busy to play? Or are we too busy not to play? Is a healthy play-ethic, which enhances and transforms our work-ethic, possibly the answer to our need for workplace renewal, as the very idea of rejuvenation suggests? This study suggests that we will only know these answers if we bring play and play-based methods into focus through the lens of well-being. As an introduction, this chapter has therefore argued that play is an under-explored yet productive avenue for academic enquiry. Secondly, I broadly defended autoethnography as a chosen research method in that it offers a natural and opportunistic avenue for exploring play and play-based methods, while specifically accommodating and celebrating subjectivity and researcher proximity.

Closing reflection

Work and play. How have we come to have such a costly dichotomous view of these two ideas? In a way, our very conceptions of work and the Protestant work ethic have some of their roots in a particular paradigm around the creation story, as depicted in the Bible. But perhaps there is a different way to look at this. I remember watching an Imax film regarding whales in which juvenile whales playfully block the air holes of their mothers while swimming. Why would they do this? What instinct would drive them to play? I was amazed at the sheer abundance with which play presents around every corner of creation.

In contemplating this, I was struck by Ortberg’s (2002) depiction of the creation story. In framing it through the classic song “Wonderful Day”, composed by Ray Gilbert and Allie Wrubel, Ortberg writes:

On the first day, God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw the light was good. The first day was a Dee Dah Day. And God did a little dance. And the next day God said to the light, ‘Do it again’. And the light did it again, and God danced once again. And so it has gone every day to this one. (pp.62-63)

In terms of my own Christian beliefs, this is poignant. It leaves me with numerous questions about work and play. If play is so present in creation, what does it say of the character of the Creator? Is God perhaps playful? If we are made in God’s

image, do we possess the same playful essence? And if work started off in the way that Ortberg describes, can we reclaim it?