

Towards *Playful* Organizations

How online gamers organize themselves
(and what other organizations can learn from them)

Proefschrift

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PREFACE

For a long time now I have been fascinated by the potential of learning from the way in which online gaming communities are organized. I am referring here to the ‘guilds’ and ‘clans’ that groups of players form within the context of well-known online games such as *World of Warcraft* or *Call of Duty*. These communities are highly diverse in a number of ways, including number of members, length of time in existence and social structure. They are also highly diverse in the types of games they play. Sometimes they play in a single persistent game-based virtual world, in other words a massively multiplayer online game, such as the aforementioned *World of Warcraft*. Sometimes they play a single online game that is non-persistent and smaller (in terms of its spatial design), such as the aforementioned *Call of Duty*. Sometimes they play both types of online games, or multiple games of the same type.

Online gaming communities are basically voluntary organizations. Online gaming is, after all, an entertainment activity (well, at least generally speaking). It is an intrinsically motivated activity. We play because we *want* to, not because someone is paying us to do so (apart from some notable exceptions, see Chapter 4) or is forcing us to do so in any way.

Yet these communities do not look like the run-of-the-mill volunteer organizations that we are familiar with, such as the sports clubs or charity organizations we ‘work’ for in our free time. They seem to operate in a context similar to that of many ‘real-life’ work organizations of this day and age. As will be further explained in Chapter 1, these communities involve players from all over the world, which forces them to communicate and collaborate using information and communication technologies, despite cultural differences. This can be very similar to work situations at large global multinationals. Online gaming communities also have to tackle new and quite complex problems, e.g. in ‘dungeons’ or ‘raids’. There seems to be a lot of learning, strategy development and organization involved. Even the actual gameplay involved can resemble ‘real-life’ work quite closely, despite the fictional world in which it takes place, e.g. when players trade or auction goods among each other. Moreover, it turns out that online gaming communities oftentimes manage to attract hundreds of members, some spending dozens of hours each week for weeks, months or years on end ‘working’ to achieve common goals.

Surely, a lot can be learned here. Could ‘real-life’ organizations perhaps take an example from the organizational cultures and structures of these online gaming communities? This book is the end result of this initial fascination with what organizational leaders and researchers could learn from online gaming communities.

Along the way I started thinking about playful forms of organization in general and how online gaming communities could be *playful organizations* in particular, i.e., organizations in which the ability to play has become so institutionalized that it is highly spontaneous, creative and enjoyable. In a sense I contextualized my fascination within the broader interest in gaming I observed from organizational leaders and researchers. The fascination turned into a working hypothesis, i.e., that work organizations could learn how to be more playful from online gaming communities and transform into playful organizations. I soon came to realize, however, that not

all online gaming communities are playful organizations *per se*. This made the relationship between online gaming communities and work organization all the more interesting.

In the end this book has turned out to be a critical examination of what a playful organization could be and to what extent online gamers consider their communities and work organizations to be playful organizations. As such it offers insights into the degree to which online gamers themselves view their communities as organizations and how they see the relationship between gaming and their work organizations. In the process the book offers many examples of playful organization in both the 'virtual' and 'real' world.

This book is thus also interdisciplinary in nature. It is positioned between the fields of organization studies (often approached with the disciplines of the social sciences and sociology) and computer game studies (often approached with the disciplines of the humanities). It hopes to contribute to both in terms of methodology and theory. In terms of methodology, this book shows the scientific potential of online gaming communities as (still) a new object of study for several disciplines, not just one. Moreover, this book combines diverse research approaches and designs, borrowed from several disciplines typically involved in organizational studies and computer game studies. In terms of theory this book offers a playful organization theory (or at least a good start at it). This theory can be considered quite new (though not completely, as explained in Chapter 2), one which binds the two fields of organizational and computer game studies together rather nicely. The contribution hopefully continues through the very nature of this theory, i.e., the combination of a critical and descriptive theory (not unfamiliar to computer game studies) with a predictive theory (not unfamiliar to organization studies).

All of the above hopefully interests scientific researchers, of course. Indeed, the book is first aimed at scholars of computer game studies and organization studies, especially those interested in new ideas about what organizations are or can be, based on a cultural as well as a structural perspective. The book should also be of special interest to those interested in having a deeper look at online gaming communities from an organizational perspective, perhaps also to understand whether our current age of play and the generations it brings forth might lead to new types of organizations.

Yet this book should also be of interest to leaders and managers looking for ideas to boost creativity among their employees and to make work a bit more fun, based on scientific research into this very practical idea. This book shows that online gaming communities can inspire a new way of looking at organizations. Leaders and managers looking for more information about the currently 'hot topic' of gamification might be a bit disappointed, though. This book is *not* about gamification. At best it relates to the basic idea behind gamification: an interest in introducing playfulness (creativity, spontaneity, enjoyment) into an organization.

Finally, this book should interest *gamers*! What is that I hear you say? "Gamers?! Gamers do not like to read, let alone a scientific book!" I disagree. Most gamers are adults, and smart and social adults at that. They like to talk about what's going on when they game. They like to read about it, too. To them a book that tries to connect online gaming communities to 'real-life' organizations is provocative and stimulating. Well, to a lot of them, surely. Read on!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have a confession to make. I now almost regret starting this project back in July 2007. *Almost...* I had just finished my Master's studies at Utrecht University and started working at Delft University of Technology as a Ph.D. candidate. My teachers in Utrecht had suggested that I would thrive in academia. The thought had crossed my mind several times already during my Master's. I was intrigued and Delft offered the opportunity. I took the leap.

So far, so good? Well... It is very important to realize that my Master's (called *New Media and Digital Culture*) was positioned within the Faculty of the Humanities at a 'general' university, while my Ph.D. work was positioned within the Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management at a university 'of technology'. For those of you in the know, moving from the former to the latter is a *big* leap, to say the least.

Let me try to explain. From what I could gather during the two years of my Master's, the Humanities were all about 'arts and culture' (in all their grandeur, but in my case particularly video gaming and internet culture), uncovering and trashing common presuppositions through critical thinking (think Marx, Habermas, Kant, as well as feminism and activism more generally), and reading and writing theories on a high level of abstraction (some would actually call it philosophy rather than theory). Social-scientific notions and ideas such as 'doing empirical research', 'gathering data', 'forming and testing hypotheses' ... were implicitly or explicitly not part of the vocabulary. That was not what that Master's program was about.

The difference with Technology, Policy and Management could not be greater. Granted, the faculty is a hugely diverse one. The best way I can attempt to bring together this diversity is by describing the research as generally design- and social-scientific in nature, focused on how infrastructures might be designed and used given the complexity of the technologies, policies, economics, ethics, organizations and actual management involved. Think of industries related to public needs (e.g. energy, roads, rails, water, etc.). Indeed, this faculty is not about 'arts and culture', at least not from my perspective. Every now and again they try to creep in, especially in the serious gaming projects I see happening around me. But they do not have staying power. You can hardly build models and prescriptive theories with or around 'arts and culture', as my colleague Jan Paul van Staalduinen also realized when he interviewed artistic serious game designers during his Ph.D. research. Comparatively speaking, there is much less room for the likes of Marx, Habermas or Kant at this faculty. Well, the aptly named Philosophy department has use for them. But still, my new surroundings focused mostly on the things I had *not* been trained in at all: the design and use of serious games within the context of engineering, policy-making, public administration, organization and management. Design science, social science...all Greek to me, at the time.

I experienced something that I came to understand as 'culture shock'. At first I tried desperately to hang on to some of my old skills, mostly the skills of thinking and writing critically and on a high level of abstraction. I realized that this would be accepted only partly. Moreover, I realized I had a unique opportunity here. After all, the Ph.D. candidacy is meant to be

a learning experience. I dived into my new surroundings, hungry to learn. I took lots of courses in designing and doing empirical research offered by the faculty and beyond. I tried to learn from my fellow gaming Ph.D. colleagues who had done their Master's at the faculty as well. But the truth of the matter is, I felt homesick many times during the first two years. I missed taking research discussions to a more critical or fundamental level. Simultaneously I felt ignorant and naïve, not being able to contribute to discussions at hand. I basically wanted what I previously had, felt like I was not really fitting in where I was now, and realized that I could not go back. The main ingredients of culture shock, indeed.

Leading theorists on culture shock such as Schneider, Barsoux and Hofstede tell us that when it comes to culture shock, there are three ways out. The first is absconding, i.e., sticking to your roots incessantly, alienating yourself from your new surroundings. This is not really a way out, at least not for me. It would basically entail giving up, which I would regret all my life. The second is 'going native', i.e., internalizing the new culture utterly and completely, shedding away all your previous customs and assumptions. No, not for me either. I value my experience in Utrecht too much for that. I cannot simply erase that from my mind. Then there is only one option left, according to theory. The option has many names, but I call it accommodation, or the attempt at creating synergy.

I thus tried to find and use 'the best of both worlds'. I tried to find a use for at least some of the theories and skills I learned about in Utrecht, in combination with some of the new theories and skills I was learning about in Delft. Mind you, this was not an easy thing to do. Some might even say that I have horribly failed, judging from the thesis at hand. They might value this thesis as a typically 'TPM thesis'. Nothing artsy-fartsy about it. I disagree for too many reasons to delve into here and now. Have a good look at the upcoming chapters (particularly Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5) from the position of a design scientist or engineer like those at my current faculty.

In the end I do not regret deciding to take on a Ph.D. research project back in 2007, though I must say that I did on numerous occasions. Two important realizations made me cast aside feelings of regret. First, I came to realize that my initial feelings of culture shock were exaggerated. As the aforementioned cultural theorists also suggest, when one experiences culture shock, notions of one's native culture and current cultural context change. They become more extreme. The same happened to me. Was TPM so superficial? Of course not. And was I a true Humanities scholar to begin with? No. Before my two-year Master's, I followed a Bachelor's in Communication Systems at HU University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht. No Humanities there whatsoever; in fact, lots of design/applied science (in Dutch one does not even call it 'science'). Even during my Master's, I always had a practical approach to the high-level abstractions. My Master's thesis was about the use of a specific learning theory in designing university teaching with the use of virtual worlds. A very practical subject. I have always been rather eclectic, and my Ph.D. candidacy has greatly contributed to this part of my personality. This brings me to the second important realization. I now have a distinct feeling of awe at how much I have learned about the world. In that sense the Ph.D. candidacy has been a priceless experience that will remain with me for the rest of my life. I do not regret it one bit.

I have many to thank for helping me get through all of the above in their own ways. I would first like to thank Delft University of Technology's Investment Impulse program, the Next Generation Infrastructures Foundation and all my respondents for making my research and hence this thesis possible in the first place. On a more personal note, I would like to thank my colleagues of Policy, Organization, Law and Gaming for making me feel like this was the only department I could ever fit in at Delft University of Technology. I would like to acknowledge some colleagues by name. I would like to thank my supervisors Igor Mayer and Hans de Bruijn for their huge efforts in helping me keep going with the Ph.D. research project over the five and a half (!) years it has taken me. I thank Casper Hartevelde and Geertje Bekebrede for helping me get through the first years within the gaming group of our department. I learned so much from all of you, there is no way I can express it in words. I would also like to thank Sonja van der Arend, Zhou Qiqi, Mu Rui and Bertien Broekmans for being such great roommates. Thank you for your willingness to listen to my ramblings and take part in so many great conversations, no matter what topic. I also thank people who helped me do my work as part of a 'peer group' (a dying Delft institution in which Ph.D. candidates come together about once a month to discuss each other's work): again Casper Hartevelde, Carla Haelermans, Maartje van den Bogaard, Emiel Kerpershoek and Hester Goosensen. From an earlier attempt at a 'peer group' I would also like to thank George Dafermos. You were one of few links to my Utrecht past. From a final attempt at something resembling a 'peer group', but never called that, I thank Michel van Eeten, Shirin Tabatabaie, Hadi Asghari and Floris Kreiken. A great intellectual group of people very much open to all sorts of ideas. I also thank Frank-Jan van Lunteren for helping me get a grip on *EVE Online* as a research assistant. And last but certainly not least, I would like to thank Marko Siitonen for our wonderful and extensive collaboration. Thank you all!

I continue my expressions of gratitude with people who belong to other circles of friends. Nienke Saanen, again Carla Haelermans and Stephanie ter Borg – I love our regular outings together and hope we can continue them for a long time. They have great therapeutic power, honestly. Moreover, it is great that we have managed to form such a diverse little group. Together we could conquer the world, you know. Many thanks to Mijke Gligoor, Olaf Graeff, Vincent Vijn and Yvette Jansen for actually *asking me* to rant on about my thesis writing issues. You are lovely people. I would like to thank Claire van Mil and Gabriel den Hollander for their loving support, particularly during the final leg of this Ph.D. candidacy. I greatly value the friendship we have built up since I moved to Delft a couple of years ago. Also many thanks to all the many friends who I have slowly lost track of over the years, you know who you are! Although my changed/changing life here in Delft and your changed/changing lives elsewhere has managed to keep us apart, I *greatly* value how we can come together both physically and virtually every now and again as if nothing has changed. True thanks to you as well.

Two people from my Utrecht past deserve separate attention. Marinka Copier – you vouched for me when I was applying for the Ph.D. candidacy in Delft. And, as you know very well, you first introduced me to massively multiplayer online games. Without you I would not have come this far. I mean that quite literally. I also must give special attention to Erna Kotkamp. In Utrecht I was your student assistant and you were my wonderful supervisor during my

graduation period. Now you work literally next door to me at Delft University of Technology. It seems we are destined to follow each other around. How wonderful, truly! Thank you.

I must end these acknowledgments with very special thanks to my sister Anita Warmelink and her husband Wibe Balt, my aunt and uncle Anja and Sijbrand de Bruin, my parents Gerrit and Tineke Warmelink and Dennis Snabilie, the most playful boyfriend I could ever wish for. You *all* were supportive and patient. It has been quite a ride and I am glad that I can share it with you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Harald Warmelink
Delft, May 2013

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE:

THE EMERGENCE OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Organizations of all kinds are showing a growing interest in gaming, in all its variety. Games have long been used as tools to help students and employees learn about different aspects of organizations (see e.g. Faria, Hutchinson, Wellington & Gold, 2009). People can learn much about e.g. management and communication within an organization by playing an interactive game that models reality. Such 'serious games' are consciously designed to be educational rather than purely entertaining. However, the flourishing entertainment gaming industry has not gone unnoticed. Organization researchers and leaders have been interested in how that industry operates (see e.g. Kim & Kim, 2011). Strategies for fostering creativity and innovation have been analyzed and applied in other industries. Most recently, organizations have started experimenting with common gaming principles and techniques (see e.g. Zichermann & Linder, 2010). Scoring systems, badges and leaderboards have been introduced to stimulate specific work practices or simply make work more fun. Overall, organizations' interest in gaming is very broad indeed.

Gaming's impact on organizations could therefore be profound. Organization leaders and researchers seem to understand and analyze gaming in a very broad sense. Arguably, the interest in gaming is so broad because people value gaming for its creativity, spontaneity and enjoyment. And in this day and age organizations clearly need these things. As the well-known sociologist Bell (1973) would argue, in a 'post-industrial society' organizations cannot remain the inflexible, rigid and boring bureaucracies of the past. Over the past decades organization theory has evolved, stressing the importance of decentralization and flexibility (T. W. Malone, 2004). Gaming fuels and perhaps accelerates this evolution. As a result, gaming could change organizations extensively in terms of their structure, culture and performance.

The question remains as to how gaming's impact on organizations can specifically be understood and researched. Quite a wide variety of expectations of gaming's impact on organizations can be raised (see e.g. Edery & Mollick, 2008). Consequently, a lot of research into the topic can still be proposed. After all, the topic is simply rather new still. It is also important to realize that the research that has already been done is very fragmented, because the gaming research community is diverse and gaming is understood so broadly. In any case, gaming's impact on organizations is sure to be an important topic of research for years to come. This thesis aims to contribute to this topic.

This chapter argues that an emergence of *playful organizations* is one way to frame and research gaming's impact on organizations. A preference for play can subtly yet profoundly transform the ways in which people communicate and collaborate with each other at work. Play can thus affect organizations fundamentally, on a cultural level. As a result the organization

changes structurally as well. The organization becomes highly creative, spontaneous and enjoyable. The emergence of playful organizations can be researched by focusing on online gamers, i.e., players of online entertainment games. It is hypothesized that online gamers have extensive experience with playful organizations, because they create them to be able to play their games. They create organized communities often known as *guilds* and *clans*, because the online games enable and necessitate such organization. Gamers do this voluntarily. The organizations they develop thus also motivate rather than obligate. Online gamers show how organizations can be playful. As experts in playful organization, they can offer examples of how work organizations can become playful as well.

The above arguments are further developed in the following sections. Section 1.2 reviews four different ways of understanding gaming's impact on organizations. The section ends with a description of my own understanding of the topic, one that considers gaming a powerful socio-cultural phenomenon that could impact organizations culturally and structurally. Section 1.3 introduces online gaming, specifically how it leads to playful organization from which actual work organizations can learn. The question then remains as to whether empirical research shows that playful organizations can exist in both the 'virtual' and 'real' world. Section 1.4 introduces the research steps with which an answer to this question was pursued. In doing so it introduces the upcoming chapters.

1.2 FRAMING THE IMPACT OF GAMING ON ORGANIZATIONS

Framing is one way to create order in the chaos of diverse expectations and discussions about gaming's impact on organizations. Framing is the act of attributing meaning to events and phenomena. Frame analysis is thus the scientific inquiry into how a researcher can observe and define frames, what frames subsequently seem to exist and how frames develop over time. Sociologist Goffman is widely acknowledged as the founder of frame analysis (1974), and his work has since been used and built upon throughout the social sciences and humanities, though not without criticism (see e.g. Fisher, 1997; Scheufele & Iyengar, forthcoming). In recent years it has also been used in computer game studies, primarily to focus attention on the problematic ways in which people tend to understand computer games (Consalvo, 2009; Deterding, 2009; Glas, Jorgensen, Mortensen & Rossi, 2011; Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008).

My frame analysis hopefully enables the study of "how people understand an issue, and to track the way in which this understanding changes over time" (Fisher, 1997, 6.2), in this case concerning the issue of gaming's impact on organizations. I define a *frame* as "an instrument for defining reality' as opposed to 'an instrument for describing reality'" (Donati, 1992 in Fisher, 1997, 5.4). This means that I am *not* describing different perspectives on the potential impact of gaming on organizations.¹ This would assume that the impact of gaming is a phenomenon that

¹ This also means that I am trying desperately *not* to confuse frame analysis with the identification of ideologies or agenda setting, to name just two ways in which frame analysis has been framed itself (Fisher, 1997; Scheufele & Iyengar, forthcoming). Following Fisher (1997), I am not concerned with ideologies here. I consider ideologies as "shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups" (Giddens, 1989, p. 727). Defined in this manner, ideology is a much larger concept than a frame. Moreover, an ideology is value-laden, while a frame is not. In a similar vein, I am also consciously not

can be objectively observed in different ways. On the contrary, I wish to show that gaming's impact is subjective rather than objective. The impact depends on how a game researcher, designer or player implicitly or explicitly chooses to interpret the role of gaming in organizations and its subsequent impact on them. This means, in accordance to Fisher's definition (1997), that the frames I define in this section are neither mutually exclusive nor an easy fit for any one individual. They exist in parallel, and many researchers (including myself) implicitly or explicitly switch frames or adopt a couple of them simultaneously. They are essentially different "language games" (Wittgenstein, 1953) in which any researcher can choose to take part at any time.

I conceptualized four frames in total. This started by identifying the "smallest common denominator" (Fisher, 1997, 4.12) in the highly diverse publications that I found about gaming and its relationship to organizations or society at large. For conceptualizing the first two frames the work of Egenfeldt-Nielsen (2007), Konzack (2007), Williams (2005) and Woods (2004) were particularly inspirational. For the latter two frames the work of Edery & Mollick (2008), Nieborg (2011), Raessens (2006, 2009) and Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) were particularly inspirational. Reviewing these works I find that discussions of gaming's impact on organizations start from two ontological assumptions, one concerning gaming itself and one concerning gaming's objectives. I treat each assumption as a dichotomous dimension. This leads me to the four frames. A frame can define gaming as a designed experience or a socio-cultural phenomenon. Thus a frame can focus on gaming as an experience that results from playing something, e.g. a board game or computer game. Conversely, a frame can focus on how gaming is more than an individual's experience. It is something that can be observed throughout society. It can be viewed as an industry or a frame of mind that serves society. A frame can subsequently define gaming's objectives instrumentalistically or ideologically. Instrumentalistically, a frame can focus on how organizations can benefit from gaming. Ideologically, a frame can focus on how gaming can introduce norms and values into an organization.

The four frames are essentially combinations of "object analogy" and "event/action sequence" frames (Donati, 1992 in Fisher, 1997, 5.12). The frames' basis in gaming *as* a designed experience or *as* a socio-cultural phenomenon shows that the frames draw analogies in an attempt to create specific meaning around what gaming is.² Subsequently, the frames' basis in understanding gaming's objectives instrumentalistically or ideologically shows that the frames portray a sequence of events, in this case the event of gaming's impact on organizations over time. This combination of object analogy and event/action sequence framing led me to name the four frames as, successively: experience-instrumentalizing, experience-ideologizing, phenomenon-instrumentalizing and phenomenon-ideologizing frames. Figure 1.1 presents the frames on the two aforementioned dichotomous dimensions. The figure visualizes both the differences and similarities between the frames, as discussed in the following sections.

setting agendas here. That is a much more normative and politically motivated act, in my opinion. Ideology and agenda-setting make use of multiple frames but do not simply equate frames.

² In the case of object analogy frames, Donati (1992) was referring to analogies to actual objects rather than the grander analogy that I am applying here which includes an 'experience' or 'phenomenon'.

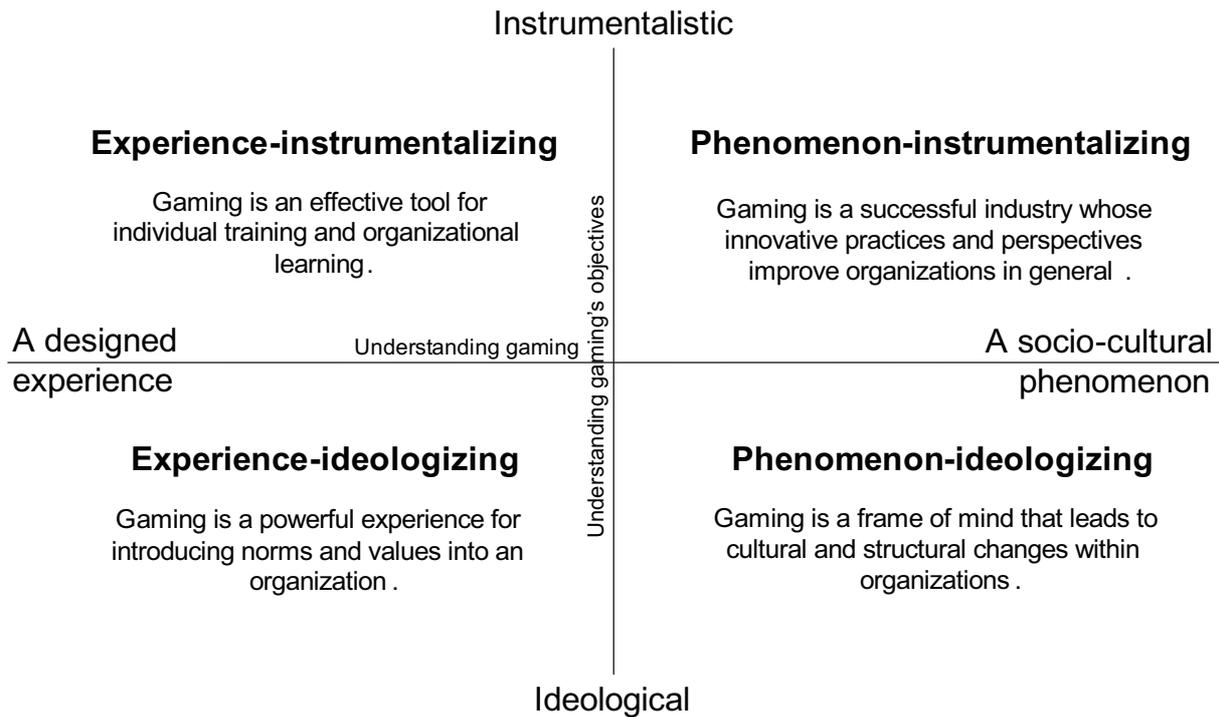


Figure 1.1 Framing the impact of gaming on organizations.

1.2.1 THE EXPERIENCE-INSTRUMENTALIZING FRAME: GAMING TEACHES ORGANIZATION

Games have been designed for and applied in organizations for several decades under many pseudonyms, notably business or management games (Faria, 2001; Faria et al., 2009) and policy games (Mayer, 2009), as well as the more general gaming simulation (Duke & Geurts, 2004; Greenblat & Duke, 1975) or simulation games. The tradition was first popularized in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of systems thinking and simulations (Mayer, 2009). Arguably, simulation gaming's roots can also be traced back much further (Duke & Geurts, 2004, pp. 31-34; Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, pp. 21-24; Wolfe & Crookall, 1998, pp. 7-8). Although its history is intricate and debatable, the work of Richard Duke has had a profound impact on simulation-gaming's development. Duke showed the potential of simulation games by developing several influential games (e.g. Hexagon, see also Duke, 2000) and by publishing the equally influential book *Gaming, the Future's Language* (1974). Duke argued that games essentially offer a language for understanding the complexity of society and its organizations. Since this first popularization, many business, management and policy games have been developed, as well as combinations and spinoffs of these types of games. At the time, of course, the games involved little technology. They were and often still are physical board and role-playing games, at most computer-assisted. They nevertheless rely on high- or low-fidelity simulations of physical and/or social systems. They are known for allowing players to experience a certain system in which organization is required and from which players can subsequently learn. Many of these games have actually been applied in formal education rather than in organizations. Yet organizations have also applied games themselves as part of their internal education programs or to aid managers and employees in their daily jobs (see e.g. eight cases studies in De Caluwé, Geurts, Buis & Stoppelenburg, 1996).

When developed for organizations, simulation games are generally designed to facilitate individual and organizational learning (De Caluwé et al., 1996; Kriz, 2003; Ruohomäki, 2003; Wenzler & Chartier, 1999). Individual learning entails training players' organizational skills, while organizational learning entails building "an organizational understanding and interpretation of [the] environment ... to begin to assess viable strategies" (Fiol & Lyles, 1985, p. 804). When focused on individual learning, games are often designed to train players in leadership skills (e.g. in the game *Virtual Leader*, see Aldrich, 2004) or specific management skills (e.g. understanding and countering the 'bullwhip effect' in the *Beer Game*, see Serman, 1992). When focused on organizational learning, games may be designed to allow players to develop a strategy or policy for e.g. rail cargo transport (Meijer, Mayer, van Luipen & Weitenberg, 2012) or for obtaining and licensing patents (Gasnier, 2007). Of course games are also sometimes designed to accomplish both types of learning objectives simultaneously.

Research into simulation games has been mostly social-scientific, focusing on game design and effectiveness. Yet the importance of simulation in these games has led to involvement by different fields and disciplines of scientific research, e.g. politics, organization, management, psychology, engineering or physics. Researchers from such fields and disciplines help develop and validate simulations of physical and social systems in the first steps of the game design process. An important consideration for this step is how to make the simulation playable, i.e., to allow people to take on roles in the simulation, and to incentivize them into action (Duke, 1980). After this design process, research focuses on an evaluation of the design's effects. This question can be approached from a design-scientific perspective, focusing on the evaluation of the simulation game's design. It can also be approached from an analytical-scientific perspective, focusing on the evaluation of its outcome (Klabbers, 2006; Meijer, 2009). Put most simply, a design scientist considers whether the design has the desired effect or which design has the most effect. The analytical scientist considers what the effect is on the players or on scientific theories, moving away from the design itself.

A preference for causality is easily identified in the research endeavors surrounding the experience-instrumentalizing frame. The preference for causality is evident from several authors' efforts to determine the effectiveness of simulation games in general (Chin, Dukes & Gamson, 2009; Dorn, 1989; Randel, Morris, Wetzel & Whitehill, 1992). It is also evident from several authors' efforts to develop theory-based frameworks for game evaluation studies (Kriz & Hense, 2006; Tennyson & Jorczak, 2008). These authors have argued that general conclusions about a simulation game's effectiveness depend on the researcher's theory of learning as well as his or her criteria for effectiveness studies. Randel et al. (1992) were much more hesitant to consider games generally effective than were Chin et al. (2009). Nevertheless, many like to consider games as causes of a learning effect while recognizing the importance of game-related factors such as player demographics or the quality of a post-game debriefing (De Caluwé, Hofstede & Peters, 2008; Kriz & Hense, 2006).

Thinking of games as causes of individual or organizational learning effects reveals an instrumentalistic perspective on gaming's objective. Games are considered as designed artifacts that create a learning experience with a clear start and ending. A focus on a game's learning effects shows that this frame is instrumentalistic, i.e., interested in "taking effective means to

one's ends" (Lockard, 2011). In this frame games are designed as instruments to benefit an organization, once applied. With such an instrumentalistic view of gaming, an interest in causality easily follows. The typical research question asked in this frame is the simple general question of whether and how the games work.

1.2.2 THE EXPERIENCE-IDEOLOGIZING FRAME: GAMING ACTIVATES ORGANIZATION

In the 2000s interest in the use of games for organization-related learning purposes was renewed. The term 'serious games' was popularized (e.g. Michael & Chen, 2005), though it was coined by Abt decades earlier (1970). An interest in computer games and game technology for learning purposes emerged following their ever-increasing popularity and continued development. The goals remained the same for many researchers and designers concerned with games for organizations: training relevant organizational skills and offering a means for organizational learning. Instead of developing board games or role-playing games that were at most computer-assisted, some researchers and designers decided to design, apply and evaluate computer games (see e.g. Harteveld, 2011, 2012).

The research was subsequently often quite similar in intent, i.e., based on a preference for causality. Consider, for example, Ke's review of the general effectiveness of educational computer games, finding it difficult to "quantify and synthesize the impact of games across different studies to create a standard effect size" (2009, p. 23). Or consider the emergence of renewed theory-based frameworks for systematic evaluations of educational computer games (Bekebrede, 2010, pp. 116-121; De Freitas & Oliver, 2006). For many researchers and designers the term 'serious games' has simply become a new umbrella term for all games that have a learning objective, including business, management or policy games (see e.g. Woods, 2004).

A new strand of game design and research emerged simultaneously, influenced by what some authors called a critical socio-cultural or constructivist perspective (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, p. 79; D. Williams, 2005, p. 450). Egenfeldt-Nielsen offered quite a comprehensive discussion of the emergence of this new strand (2007, pp. 13-16, 21-44). I extend Egenfeldt-Nielsen's work by further framing this new strand of game design and research, with which the deviation from its instrumentalistic 'sibling' frame can be explained.

Several researchers have positioned computer games as creators of engaging ideological experiences with an educational potential (Frasca, 2003b; Gee, 2003; Konzack, 2007; Squire, 2002; Woods, 2004). These researchers argue that games allow designers and players to reflect on, critique and activate society and its organizations. Well-known game researcher Bogost deems games especially suited to 'procedural rhetoric', "the practice of authoring arguments through processes" (2007, p. 29). Closely related is Shaffer's notion of 'epistemic games', i.e., games that help players understand the ideology or 'epistemic frame' of a professional within a certain industry (2006a, 2006b).

Three examples of organization-related games for which the designs were based on this new perspective are worth mentioning: the *McDonald's Video Game* (Molleindustria, 2006) about understanding and critiquing how fast-food restaurant chains are run, *World Without Oil* about living in a world where oil has been depleted (Electric Shadows, 2007), and *Urban Science*

about the complex subject of urban planning (University of Wisconsin, 2007). Bogost also developed serious games – or, as he termed them, ‘persuasive games’ – for specific organizations, e.g. *Cold Stone Creamery: Stone City*, in which players (employees of the creamery) discover the different ways they can avoid waste as they play the game (Bogost, 2007; Persuasive Games, 2007). In all of these games players come to better understand the systems in which they find themselves as they play. More importantly, in all these games players are influenced by the norms and values underlying this system.

In this frame gaming is still considered a designed experience, but the instrumentalistic rhetoric is cast away in favor of an ideological rhetoric. Gaming is viewed as a powerful communicator of norms and values that the designer has built into them. Serious games can activate organizations based on specific norms and values. As such they impact organizations more fundamentally than the experience-instrumentalizing frame assumes. This main difference with the experience-instrumentalizing frame can seem subtle and easily reconciled. The difference implies a different perspective, not so much a fundamentally different frame. Nevertheless, two serious game research communities have come into being that do not interact much but which could nonetheless learn much from each other (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, p. 12; D. Williams, 2005; Woods, 2004). Closer inspection indeed reveals more fundamental differences in definition of gaming’s objectives, warranting the identification of this second serious gaming frame.

The ideological foundation of this frame necessitates a slightly different type of research, i.e., research into the design of engaging gameplay experiences. In this newer strand of serious game research, “the computer game is not primarily about simulating, but rather about providing an interesting experience when the player fulfills certain explicit goals” (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, p. 15). Basing a game on a simulation of reality can be irrelevant or problematic for this frame. A game that focuses on norms and values does not necessarily require an extensive simulation. Moreover, extensive simulation can render the game disengaging. This frame considers engagement a prime criterion for games and their educational quality, because the ideologies embedded in the game will otherwise never surface.

The frame also problematizes research into the game’s learning effect. It cannot be assumed that the fundamental norms and values embedded in a serious game are simply ‘transferred’ to its players. Players are not unilaterally affected by a game, they are co-constituents of a game. More attention is paid to evaluating how engaged players are during and after gameplay. For example, following an evaluation of ‘political internet games’ (including the aforementioned *McDonald’s Video Game*) Neys and Jansz concluded that players were to some extent politically activated (2010). However, the authors were keen to discard the experience-instrumentalizing frame, stressing that “the impact that [the game] might have on its audience is not derived solely from its content as such, but is also dependent on the meaning the audience

attributes to it while playing” (Neys & Jansz, 2010, p. 238).³ The typical research question asked in this frame therefore shifts from the closed question of whether and how games work to the more broad and open question of what the designers and players of games think and do.

1.2.3 THE PHENOMENON-INSTRUMENTALIZING FRAME: GAMING INNOVATES ORGANIZATION

Gaming is also more than a designed experience. In the previous two frames gaming impacts organizations through a designed experience with educational potential. This third frame deviates from that, looking instead to the massive entertainment gaming industry that has formed over the past couple of decades (see industry figures in e.g. Entertainment Software Association, 2012; Newzoo, 2011a). The frame acknowledges that gaming is more popular than ever. Games are played on countless widely-sold devices (e.g. smartphones, game consoles, computers, boards and other paraphernalia) and come in many genres (e.g. role-playing, simulation, first-person shooter or real-time strategy games). As such, gaming is a societally and organizationally important phenomenon.

This gaming perspective renders researchers more interested in game developers and the gaming industry as a whole than in a specific game. The frame is thus dominated by organizational researchers. Many of them are interested in organizational structures in and of the gaming industry (see e.g. Edery & Mollick, 2008, pp. 171-184; Kim & Kim, 2011; O'Donnell, 2008; D. Williams, 2002). They perform an “administrative analysis” or pursue a “profit and efficiency orientated line of questioning” (Nieborg, 2011, p. 30). For example, several researchers have analyzed how a specific country’s gaming industry has developed (the USA, South-Korea, India), often attributing growth to certain governmental or industry policies and a high degree of competition (Kim & Kim, 2011; O'Donnell, 2008; D. Williams, 2002). Edery & Mollick were interested in how game developers manage to attract and take advantage of player communities (Edery & Mollick, 2008, pp. 171-184). There has also been interest in the effectiveness of “the work and employment models typical of the industry” (Teipen, 2008, p. 310) and the positive psychological effects of playing entertainment games at the workplace (Reinecke, 2009). The common denominator is the interest in ‘what works’ in the gaming industry. The typical research question asked in this frame is hence the relatively closed question of whether and how game developers and the gaming industry work.

The usefulness of researching game developers’ organizational structures is often presumed to be very high, because they are considered part of the ever-expanding ‘creative’, ‘cultural’ or ‘new economy’ industries (Johns, 2006; Kim & Kim, 2011; O'Donnell, 2008, p. xii; S. Taylor, 2011; Teipen, 2008). Game developers and the wider creative or cultural industries are “often heralded as emblematic of the resulting changes in the organization of production and working practices” (Johns, 2006, p. 152). Some researchers consider game developers to be pioneers within the entire creative, cultural or new economy industries for new organizational

³ The difficulty with communicating this crucial point is evident from game philosopher Sicart’s (2011) critique of the ‘procedurality’ that serious games can portray. In his article, Sicart critiques Bogost and other game designers I would position in the experience-ideologizing frame. As such, the critique seems to be misdirected, as Bogost also hinted (Pratt, 2012). The article would arguably be a better critique of the experience-*instrumentalizing* than of the experience-*ideologizing* frame of gaming.

structures that in time might be applied much more widely. The interest in these industries fits a general trend in organizational studies over the past decades. Many researchers have focused their studies on an innovative societal phenomenon, industry or organization, subsequently presenting their theories as being of interest to leaders looking for ways to renew their organization's structure and increase performance (see e.g. Leadbeater, 2008; T. W. Malone, 2004; Tapscott & Williams, 2006).

1.2.4 THE PHENOMENON-IDEOLOGIZING FRAME: GAMING TRANSFORMS ORGANIZATION

The question remains as to whether the phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame can be critiqued similarly to how some serious game researchers have critiqued the experience-instrumentalizing frame. Researchers would have to be identified who equally define gaming as a socio-cultural phenomenon, but who disagree with an instrumentalistic view of gaming's objectives. Their ideological view would make them more interested in gaming as a way of thinking that impacts how people communicate and collaborate in an organization.

Several socio-cultural researchers have indeed argued that extensive gaming changes people, society and organizations. A well-known notion pertaining to game-based societal change is the 'net generation', or similar notions of new generations (Bekebrede, Warmelink & Mayer, 2011; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998, 2008). Many have argued that generations born roughly after 1982 have grown up with games, rendering their attitude towards learning and organization different from those of previous generations. Unlike their predecessors, new generations are supposedly tech-savvy 'twitch-speed' multi-taskers. Beck and Wade argued that in order to harvest the potential of active gamers, managers need to focus less on managing their organization's structure ("fine-tuning incentives, policies, and management metrics") and more on motivating those gamers as 'heroic' employees (Beck & Wade, 2006, pp. 101-102).

Other researchers have shown how organizations can be 'gamified', i.e., can apply characteristics of gaming to their existing processes (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled & Nacke, 2011; Edery & Mollick, 2008; McGonigal, 2011; Reeves, Malone & O'Driscoll, 2008; Reeves & Read, 2009; Zichermann & Linder, 2010). More specifically, gamification can be defined as the application of common gaming principles, techniques and a more general gaming frame of mind to non-game contexts such as organizations. Gamification often leads organizations to apply common gaming characteristics such as scoring systems and leaderboards to their processes. A well-known example is *Foldit*. Although *Foldit* is in itself a game, when viewed in its organizational context it becomes clear that gamification is a relevant term here. The game changed a process at one department of the University of Washington, i.e., the process of predicting complex protein structures. The process was essentially gamified, rendering it attractive to a global community of players and allowing the university to speed up the process tremendously (S. Cooper et al., 2010). Other examples include gamified marketing practices (Zichermann & Linder, 2010). Game-like marketing campaigns are introduced to render them more attractive to customers and thus more successful. An organization's human resource management strategy can also be gamified. Scoring systems, badges, titles and leaderboards can be introduced to promote certain work practices or simply make work more fun.

Some have critiqued the instrumentalism of 'net generation' and 'gamification' enthusiasts. Beck and Wade's plea is arguably very instrumentalistic (2006). Similarly instrumentalistic recommendations can be found in Zichermann & Linder's approach to and design of gamification (2010). Nieborg preferred studying the entertainment game industry's underlying 'political economy' over a more instrumentalistic study (2011). He revealed the unchanging capitalist and industrialist ideology behind the development and publication of 'triple A' video games. Bogost likewise critiqued gamification, specifically the instrumentalistic approach of some of the gamification enthusiasts (2011). Extensive empirical research showed that many other researchers have critiqued several suppositions of the 'net generation' and related theory as well (Bekebrede et al., 2011; Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008; Schulmeister, 2009).

These researchers (including myself) are more interested in how gaming can transform society and its organizations fundamentally. Bogost is also interested in this idea, stating that "games can offer something different and greater than an affirmation of existing corporate practices" (Bogost, 2011). Other socio-culturalists also value the idea, evident from notions of the "ludification of culture" (Raessens, 2006, 2009), i.e., the adoption of values of gaming and play throughout everyday life. Indeed, since gaming is so prevalent and pervasive, it is interesting to consider whether society can change more fundamentally than the phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame suggests. Games can introduce a gaming frame of mind that may very well influence how people regard organization itself. Thus the general research question asked in this frame is that of what employees think and do in an organization dominated by a gaming frame of mind.

This is the phenomenon-ideologizing frame. It is a new frame that is just as interested in gaming's impact on organizations. The frame's emergence is mostly evident from the three aforementioned notions of the 'net generation', 'gamification' and the 'ludification of culture'. These notions have at times been approached instrumentalistically. However, they all share a common interest in gaming as a frame of mind that can lead to fundamental changes in society in general and organizations in particular.

I place the concept of *playful organization* in this frame. I use the concept to refer to an organizational culture that allows employees to experience their work as play. This means that the commonly upheld boundaries between 'work' and 'play', or 'games' and 'reality', are removed (see e.g. Dibbell, 2004; Mainemelis & Altman, 2010). A continuous search for creative, spontaneous and enjoyable experiences takes their place. The experience-instrumentalizing, experience-ideologizing and phenomenon-instrumentalizing frames actually strengthen the phenomenon-ideologizing framing of the playful organization. The popularity of serious games shows that organizations are willing to experiment with the use of games for learning purposes. The development of theories of game developers and the larger creative, cultural and new economy industries show that there is an interest in experimenting with new structures. The first three frames substantiate the phenomenon-ideologizing claim that gaming is a socio-cultural phenomenon that impacts how people interact and collaborate. Playful organizations can emerge. They are arguably already emerging.

1.3 LEARNING FROM ONLINE GAMERS

As someone who positions himself in the phenomenon-ideologizing frame, it has been my goal to determine whether online gamers can offer further insights into possibilities and conditions for playful organization. Online gaming has been my focus because it led me to wonder whether gaming can transform organizations culturally and structurally in the first place. Online games are complex and highly popular contexts of play in which extensive organization takes place. It thus seems that online gamers should be able to shed light on how organizations can be playful. The question remains, however, as to exactly *why* online gamers can be so insightful. This section answers this question by discussing what online games are, how much they are played, what happens when people play them, and how socially and culturally significant they are.

1.3.1 INTRODUCING ONLINE GAMES

In terms of technology, online games emerged primarily from the text-based computer-generated environments often referred to as *MUDs* (Multi-User Dungeons).⁴ The acronym 'MUD' actually refers to only one program. MUD was developed at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s by Richard Bartle and Roy Trubshaw (Bartle, 2004, pp. 4-6). By the mid-1980s, with the help of the emerging network infrastructure we now call the Internet, MUD had become very popular. Moreover, all sorts of spinoffs, recodes and extensions sprung from it.

In the 1990s the computer game industry started publishing game-based virtual worlds. Many of these games can accommodate a large number of players. As such they are called 'massively multiplayer online games'. A popular subgenre of these are 'massively multiplayer online *roleplaying* games' (MMORPGs). As Figure 1.2 shows, the number of new MMORPGs released each year has risen exponentially since 1997. Throughout the decades, the basic technological principles of a virtual world have remained quite constant. A virtual world remains a computer-generated environment in which people can roam, with which people can interact, and where people can interact with each other, all using a character they designed. As such they are, technically, simply 'places' (Bartle, 2004, p. 475).

(Massively multiplayer) Online games are graphically rich virtual worlds, as they are more or less three-dimensional in appearance. The online game *World of Warcraft* is one of the most popular online games, having over 10 million paid subscribers (Blizzard Entertainment Inc., 2010; Van Geel, 2012). Like MUDs, online games such as *World of Warcraft* are persistent virtual worlds. The environment is available 24 hours a day. Non-persistent online games are even more popular. These types of virtual worlds are created by players 'on the fly', i.e., whenever they want one. One of the most popular non-persistent online game series is *Call of Duty*, selling extremely well worldwide (Activision Blizzard Inc, 2009). Regardless of their

⁴ This is arguably quite a simplification. I do not offer a full-blown history of virtual worlds. Others have described these already. For instance, Bartle already provided a detailed history of virtual worlds since the development of MUD in 1978 (Bartle, 2004, pp. 3-31). The influential sociologist Rheingold developed a history of the development of the closely related concept and field of Virtual Reality (Rheingold, 1991), which Castronova later coupled to the development of virtual worlds (Castronova, 2005, pp. 285-294). In her dissertation Copier coupled the various 'transmedial' forms of fantasy role-playing that first emerged in the 1960s to the development of virtual worlds (Copier, 2007, pp. 37-57). The reader could use these and other sources to reconstruct a history of virtual worlds, and a complex and comprehensive one at that.

persistence and graphical richness, online games differ from MUDs because of one important functional addition. Unlike most ‘social MUDs’, online games are much more riddled with what designers call game mechanics, or simply content: an engagingly designed combination of player affordances and limitations tied to a storyline and the virtual environment (Bartle, 2004, pp. 54-55; Mulligan & Patrovsky, 2003, pp. 151-152).

Features such as game mechanics incentivize players into all sorts of play. A typical and actually quite old game mechanic in online games like *World of Warcraft* is the ‘quest’, ‘mission’ or ‘adventure’, where a player obtains a specific assignment and claims a reward once the assignment has been completed (Mulligan & Patrovsky, 2003, p. 149). The specific assignment might entail defeating another computer-generated character (in the case of *World of Warcraft*, a fantasy monster) that poses itself as an enemy. A player might need or ask for help from other players to accomplish this. Once successful, the player might obtain some loot, e.g. a small amount of fictional money or a usable item. Indeed, players of online games are most often able to have and spend money. As a result they create markets. They create an economy that economists can actually analyze (Castronova, 2001, 2005). To make such socio-economic gameplay possible, it is important to have a large player base that can use a set of tools to communicate with each other. A virtual world indeed also offers a wide variety of direct and indirect voice and/or text communication tools, i.e., a set of text chat channels and discussion forums.

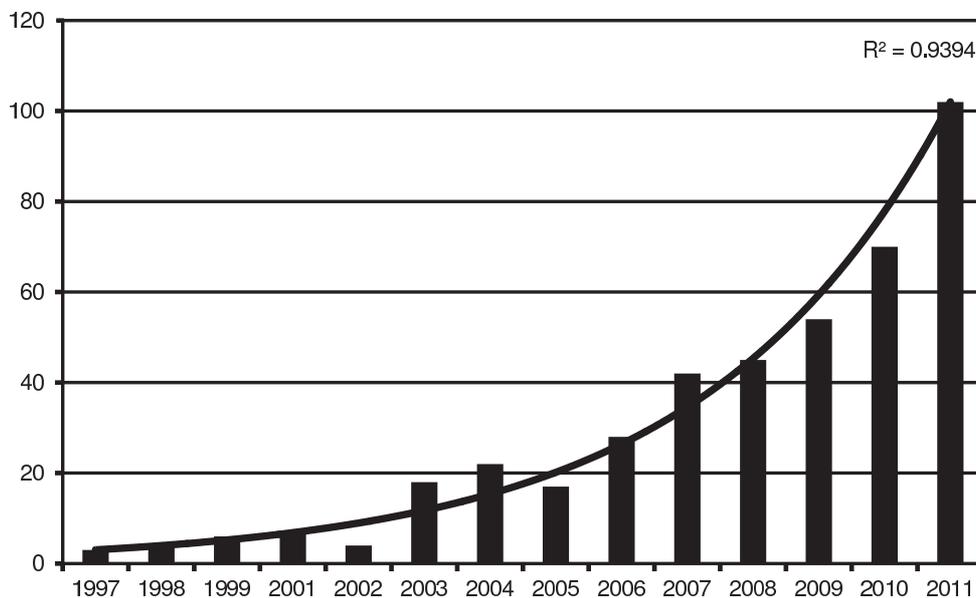


Figure 1.2. Number of MMORPGs released per year, with an exponential trend line.⁵

⁵ Data obtained from Cyber Creations Inc. (2012).

Since online games offer a large fictional environment with many different possibilities for action and interaction, they are quite complex environments. A virtual world may contain game mechanics and all sorts of content waiting to be discovered and 'consumed'. This does not mean that these mechanics unilaterally determine a player's actions and interactions within a virtual world. If a virtual world is able to attract a large enough player base, the players will figuratively or literally extend it through their interactions. In 'open' virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, players often have the capability to extend the virtual environment (Messinger, Stroulia & Lyons, 2008, p. 5). This feature categorically allows such virtual worlds to become more than they were at the start. Yet even without these features, the fact that players can roam in a virtual world *together* makes it possible for them to form a society of their own, extending the world more figuratively as well (Bartle, 2004, p. 590).

Many online games have succeeded in attracting a loyal and at times gigantic player base. Not all are able to attract enough subscribers, as the turbulent history of the online game industry attests.⁶ Some researchers have managed to obtain and analyze data from dozens of different virtual world developers about their subscription base (Van Geel, 2012; White, 2007; Woodcock, 2008). Most recently Van Geel plotted the growth of the total number of active players of 77 online games that existed over the period 1997-2012, showing that the number had risen substantially since 1997, totaling around 21 million worldwide since 2011 (Van Geel, 2012). Intriguingly, different definitions and counts of 'active players' have led others to conclude there are many more, e.g. over 45 million worldwide in 2008 already (White, 2007).

1.3.2 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF ONLINE GAMES

Several social-scientific researchers provided insightful statistics about who plays online games, as well as how they play. Research into five well-known globally marketed online games showed that around 81-85% of the players are male, the average age of all players lies between 27 and 31, and the average amount of weekly gameplay is no less than around 22-25 hours (Griffiths, Davies & Chappell, 2004, p. 481; D. Williams, Yee & Caplan, 2008, p. 1002; Yee, 2006a, p. 316). With some limits, these statistics show that virtual worlds attract reasonable diverse players for hours upon hours each week.

Other researchers have shed light on which aspects of online gameplay attract so many players with so much activity. MUD creator and virtual world designer Bartle developed a first theory about the motivation to play virtual worlds. Bartle originally developed the theory by categorizing MUD players into four types: achievers, socializers, explorers and killers (Bartle, 1996; 2004, p. 130). He based these typologies on two dimensions of player focus. The first dimension ranges from a focus on other players (killers, socializers) to the world itself (achievers, explorers). The second ranges from a focus on interacting (socializers, explorers) to acting (achievers, killers). Less known is his third dimension, ranging from implicit to explicit, to form eight player types rather than four (Bartle, 2004, p. 171; 2005, pp. 4-6). In his research Yee reflected on Bartle's original theory and researched it further through a multiple online game

⁶ Two examples of online game failures:

NCSOFT's *Tabula Rasa* closed in 2008, just over a year after launch. NetDevil and Lego Group's *LEGO Universe* closed in 2012, again just over a year after launch. See also

http://www.mmorpg.com/blogs/zergwatch/122008/2962_The-Top-10-MMORPG-failures-of-all-time.

survey (Yee, 2006a, 2006d). In the end Yee developed three main motivational factors, i.e., achievement, being social and experiencing immersion (Yee, 2006c). In their *EverQuest II* research Williams et al. confirmed these main factors (D. Williams et al., 2008, pp. 1005-1006). A different psychological perspective was provided by Ryan, Rigby and Przybylski (2006). They argue that Bartle's and Yee's motivations for playing in a virtual world "largely reflect the structure and content of current games, rather than the fundamental or underlying motives and satisfactions that can spark and sustain participation across all potential players and game types" (Ryan et al., 2006, p. 348). They confirmed their hypothesis that "players experience autonomy, competence and relatedness while playing" (Ryan et al., 2006, p. 348). By doing so they showed that virtual worlds can offer positive life experiences, i.e., experiences we subconsciously aspire to have throughout our lives.

Online games are not only socially and psychologically significant, they are also culturally significant. MUD researchers were the first to argue that virtual worlds are cultural constructs deserving studies and descriptions in their own right (Bruckman, 1992; Cherny, 1999; Curtis, 1992; Masterson, 1994; Reid, 1994a; Turkle, 1995). A virtual world reveals characteristics of its unique culture right from the start, when the player creates his or her first character. Not only does an MUD offer the possibility of gender bending, it also offers completely new configurations of gender (Bruckman, 1992; Reid, 1994a). Having the ability to choose a character name and description enables players to construct and perform identities that seem quite opposite to their own, at least at the surface (Bruckman, 1992; Turkle, 1995). The relative anonymity and constructed nature of the players' identity seems to make them much more uninhibited. Players develop close relationships with each other in virtual worlds (Cherny, 1999, pp. 82-83; Kolo & Baur, 2004; Reid, 1994a; Yee, 2003). When role-playing, players make explicit distinctions between 'in character' and 'out of character' speech, and develop their own play experience by leading conversations and actions in different directions (Copier, 2007; Mortensen, 2002). Players rigorously tackling game mechanics are quite frustrating to role-players. These 'power gamers', an extreme version of Bartle's 'achievers' player type, have an absolute focus on winning (T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 30). 'Gold farmers' are perhaps even more extreme achievers (Castronova, 2006). These players acquire in-game currency to sell for real currency on websites, normally taking hours upon hours of playing to acquire. This is often explicitly against the will of a virtual world's developer, though not always of the players (Castronova, 2006; Consalvo, 2007; Constantiou, Legarth & Olsen, 2012). Overall, the continuing development of player identities and relationships as well as communication and play styles show that players have their own culture. They create, uphold and contest rules, norms and values for behavior and social interaction.

Since online games have cultures of their own, they can be viewed as creators of intriguing and inspirational "new societies" (Kelly 2, 2004, p. 13). Yet, as Taylor states, it is problematic to consider these cultures as categorically separate from other cultures (T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 18). A virtual world is "not a tidy, self-contained environment but one with deep ties to value systems, forms of identity and social networks, and always informed by the technological structures in which it was embedded" (T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 18). Taylor pleads not to theorize about online culture as being hermetically sealed from daily life, but rather

intertwined with it. She concludes, “[P]eople are very adept at moving back and forth between on- and offline spaces and relationships, even while being ambivalent or unsure of how to frame the experience online life produces” (T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 18).

Online gaming culture thus has intriguing relations with ‘the real world’. Online gaming is inspired by all sorts of aspects of the ‘real’ world, and it can in turn inspire many aspects of the ‘real’ world (see also D. Williams, 2010). Given such relationships between ‘virtual’ and ‘real’ world cultures, it is interesting to apply social-scientific theoretical frameworks when researching virtual worlds (J. H. Smith, 2007). Online gaming communities can thus be researched from an organizational perspective.

1.3.3 THE ORGANIZATIONAL RELEVANCE OF ONLINE GAMES

A common play practice in online games is indeed organization. In the game industry it is common knowledge that designers develop online games in such a way that players need each other to reach certain goals. Players quickly find themselves in need of groups to tackle a certain mechanic in the game. Typically, a ‘quest’, ‘mission’ or ‘adventure’ induces social interaction as players find that a certain computer-generated enemy cannot be defeated by themselves alone. Game mechanics such as these expect players to tackle problems cognitivists would deem very significant, including constructing a “problem representation, conditions, goals, procedures, strategies and metastrategies” (Steinkuehler, 2005, p. 4). As players progress, the mechanics become more and more difficult, if not impossible, to tackle alone. Defeating an enemy requires the cooperation of multiple players, each with their own knowledge of the problem to be tackled, and each with characters that have different abilities and skills. Active players constantly form temporary groups and are very likely to be members of player organizations known as *guilds* or *clans* (C. H. Chen, Sun & Hsieh, 2008; Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore, 2006a).

Game mechanics are not the only inducers of organization. Affording players specific abilities and incentives to self-organize is often considered an essential element of virtual world design (Bartle, 2004, p. 213; Friedl, 2002, p. 202; Mulligan & Patrovsky, 2003, p. 143). Chat capabilities, group information services and a basic economy of supply and demand are some examples of other ways organization is induced. Whether persistent or non-persistent, game-based or open, all virtual worlds are multiplayer in nature and inspire designers to enable social interaction and organization. No wonder some scholars have named online games organizational ‘ecosystems’ (C. H. Chen et al., 2008; Galarneau, 2009).

Some have approached these *guilds* and *clans* explicitly from an organizational perspective. Williams et al. offered insights into the characteristics of *World of Warcraft* guilds following mostly quantitative research. They showed that guilds could be based on two types of game mechanics, i.e., player-versus-player combat or raiding. Moreover, they showed that they could be based on two types of sociability, i.e., role-play or “purely social” (D. Williams et al., 2006, p. 345). These rationales are often explicated in mission statements (D. Williams et al., 2006, p. 348). The authors also showed how a single guild could encompass several rationales or sub-divisions. Some guilds define regular tasks and acceptable social behavior. Chen, also a *World of Warcraft* researcher, explained the division of labor that took place within a raiding guild (M. G. Chen, 2009). He showed what character-specific abilities are needed in such monster

battles. He subsequently explained the development and adherence to certain social norms within the guild, e.g. concerning what to do with a raid's loot. In the process he also explained the use of a variety of communication channels and online knowledge repositories.

At times playing in a guild or clan seems more like working (Jakobsson, 2006, pp. 214-215; T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 88; Yee, 2006b, p. 71). Reeves & Read linked no less than 40 specific activities within online games to work, including information gathering, planning and interpersonal activities (Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 42-58). Seeing that virtual worlds are increasingly popular social, cultural and organizational environments that instantiate 'work-like play', it seems that there is a great deal to be learned from them. As McGonigal stated, "gameplay isn't just a pastime. It's a twenty-first century way of working together" (2011, p. 13).

Some organization theorists have indeed argued that both players and managers can learn a lot about different aspects of organization from online gaming communities (Reeves, Malone & O'Driscoll, 2007; Reeves et al., 2008; Reeves & Read, 2009). Psychologist Yee's work was one of the triggers for these organization theorists. Yee's surveys showed that online gamers need to develop leadership skills while playing (Yee, 2006a). The leadership skills concern administration or coordination, i.e., "role assignment, task delegation, crisis management, logistical planning, and how rewards are to be shared among group members". They also concern motivation and cultivation, i.e., "motivating group members, dealing with negative attitudes, dealing with group conflicts, as well as encouraging group loyalty and cohesion" (Yee, 2006a, p. 323). Following these and other results from computer game studies, organizational researchers Reeves, Malone and O'Driscoll surveyed IBM employees who actively played online games such as *World of Warcraft* and *EVE Online* (Reeves et al., 2007, 2008). They confronted respondents with a set of statements related to the Sloan leadership model – a model of leadership exemplified by IBM management. Having found several correlations between the model's scores within the context of online games and IBM, the researchers concluded that online games can be understood as "leadership's online labs" (Reeves et al., 2008). Moreover, these researchers deemed online gaming communities quite relatable to organizations that need to rely more and more on using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to cope with the "rapid pace of change in today's global business environment" (Reeves et al., 2007, p. 24).

1.3.4 THE RETURN OF THE PHENOMENON-IDEOLOGIZING FRAME

A bridge from the above review of the organizational relevance of online gaming to the phenomenon-ideologizing frame is easily built. As explained in Section 1.2, from the phenomenon-ideologizing frame I raised the expectation that work organizations are becoming more playful. This expectation is substantiated by two developments. First, work organizations are expected to become playful through *interventions*. The four frames discussed in Section 1.2 already showed organizations' broad interest in gaming. Whether framed instrumentalistically or ideologically, serious games and new gaming-inspired organizational structures are interventions that can impact organizations extensively and render them more playful. Second, work organizations are expected to *evolve* into playful organizations. As mentioned earlier, the emergence of a 'post-industrial society' (Bell, 1973) already initiated decentralization and

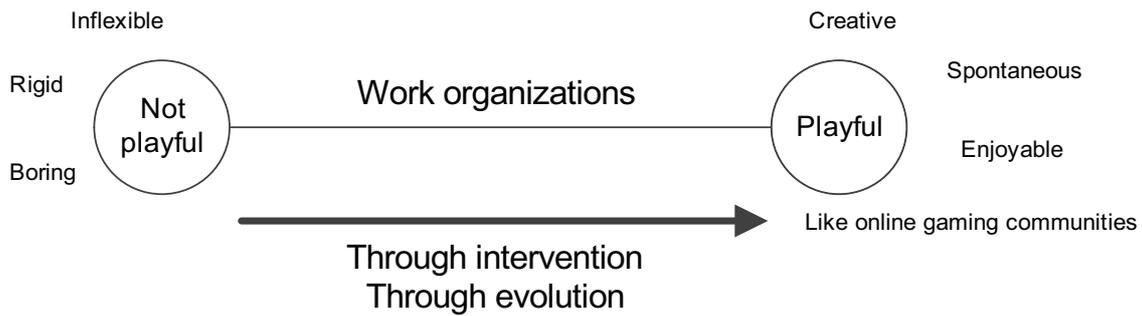


Figure 1.3. The initial working hypothesis of this thesis.

flexibility within organizations decades ago. The emergence of an age of play fuels and accelerates this process, creating playful organizations as a result.

This is where online gamers come in. It is hypothesized that online gamers' communities are the *playful organizations* of the phenomenon-ideologizing frame, because they are organizations set within a highly demanding context of play. These organizations need creativity, spontaneity and enjoyment to survive. If a community does not have these qualities, it risks losing either the game or its members. It is thus expected that online gamers already have experience with playful organization. The discussed organizational studies of online gaming show that these experiences are highly relevant to 'real-life' work organizations. Given their high mean age (see Section 1.3.2), online gamers will generally have lots of work experience as well. Online gamers could therefore relate their online gaming communities to their work organizations. Experiencing a playful form of organization in an online game might even lead to a preference for playful organization at work. It is thus also hypothesized that online gamers can reveal the emergence of playful 'real-life' work organizations, perhaps even because of their own influence.

I thus argue that the phenomenon-ideologizing framing of gaming's impact on organizations can actually be researched through online gamers. The initial working hypothesis of this thesis is that work organizations are becoming playful organizations, like online gaming communities already are (see Figure 1.3). This working hypothesis is researched by focusing on online gamers' communities and work organizations. By doing so the thesis contributes to the phenomenon-ideologizing frame of gaming's expected impact on organizations.

1.4 PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION: A RESEARCH AGENDA

1.4.1 STUDYING THE EMERGENCE OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS

The previous sections lead up to four main issues that form an agenda for the exploratory, interdisciplinary research that is presented in the upcoming chapters of this thesis:

- *What is this 'playful organization'?*
It is as yet unclear what a playful organization entails. It is only partially insightful to consider a playful organization as a creative, spontaneous and enjoyable one, where

employees value their ability to play. The notion of the playful organization deserves more conceptualization. Further conceptualization of the playful organization can inspire further research and application.

- *How can playful organizations be researched?*

It is as yet unclear how organizations can be researched to determine their playfulness. Both the notion of the playful organization and phenomenon-ideologizing frame for how gaming impacts organizations are quite new and thus hardly operationalized for empirical research. The empirical study of the emergence of playful organizations requires more work. Further conceptualization of empirical research approaches can inspire studies of playful organization for years to come.

- *Can playful organizations be observed where online gamers play?*

It is as yet unclear whether online gaming communities are playful organizations. The research reviewed in the previous section has provided only limited insight into online gaming and its communities. Publications concerning online gaming design (Bartle, 2004; Friedl, 2002; Mulligan & Patrovsky, 2003), motivations and play styles (Bartle, 2004, 2005; Ryan et al., 2006; D. Williams et al., 2008; Yee, 2006a, 2006c, 2006d), economics (Castronova, 2001, 2005, 2006), learning (Steinkuehler, 2005), culture (Consalvo, 2007; Copier, 2007; Mortensen, 2002; T. L. Taylor, 2006b) and leadership (Reeves et al., 2007, 2008; Yee, 2006a) have been discussed. Although the research topics have been diverse, research from an *organizational* perspective has been limited (M. G. Chen, 2009; D. Williams et al., 2006). Moreover, there has been limited synthesis of previous online gaming community research. Further empirical study of online gaming communities can result in an understanding of their organizational structures and cultures, as well as of their playful organization.

- *Can playful organizations be observed where online gamers work?*

It is as yet unclear whether work organizations are becoming playful organizations. Since the playful organization and phenomenon-ideologizing frame have hardly been operationalized, they also lack empirical findings to back them up. Having conceptualized the playful organization as well as an empirical research strategy, studies can be done to determine whether playful work organizations are indeed emerging, especially where online gamers work.

1.4.2 SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIETAL RELEVANCE

The drive to further conceptualize the playful organization stems from the realization that a playful form of organization is important in contemporary society. A common analytical framework is needed to argue that playful organization emerge in the 'virtual' and 'real' world. The drive to subsequently test the existence of playful organizations in the 'virtual' and 'real' world stems from a scientific and societal relevance.

Assuming society is open to playful organization (a central assumption in the phenomenon-ideologizing frame), social scientists should be able to observe playful

organizations anywhere. Using a playful organization theory as an analytical framework, social scientists can research the characteristics and functioning of online gaming communities and contribute to the field of organization theory. Social scientists can also contribute by researching the theory's applicability to work organizations.

From a societal perspective the research shows leaders, managers and employees how an organization can be playful. It inspires them to trigger a highly attractive organization. Assuming that online gamers internalize their playful organizational gameplay experiences, such playful work organizations would be very attractive to gamers. Playful work organizations would also be attractive to any employee. However, the phenomenon-ideologizing frame also acknowledges the threats of playful organizations. This research can indeed also show the potential threats of playful organization, which is equally inspirational to leaders, managers and employees.

1.4.3 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

The above issues can easily be translated into questions for exploratory research into playful organization. The following main research question has been formulated:

What are characteristics of a playful organization, and to what extent are these characteristics identifiable among online gamers' communities and work organizations?

This main research question captures the issues discussed in Section 1.4.1. It captures the goal of further developing the playful organization theory, as well as of further empirical research within the 'virtual' and the 'real' world to ascertain the existence of playful organizations. To help further define the research steps, the main research question is broken down into several sub-questions.

1.4.4 SUB-QUESTIONS & BOOK STRUCTURE

When compiling this thesis there was first a need for more conceptual work to elaborate the concept of playful organization. My central assumption is that a playful organization is a social entity with a structure and culture that allows employees to experience their work as play. The conceptualization of the playful organization neither focuses on the specific activities of employees, nor on the results of these activities. Therefore Chapter 2 asks and answers the following first sub-question:

- What are structural and cultural characteristics of a playful organization? (Chapter 2)

The structural and cultural characteristics developed in Chapter 2 enabled research into the playful organization of online gaming communities and work organizations. A first indication was offered by reviews of computer game studies and organizational studies literature. The playful organization theory of Chapter 2 was used as an analytical framework. As explained in Chapter 3, the review of organizational studies was limited to *professional* organizations. The review of computer game studies was limited to *massively multiplayer online games*. Chapter 3 compares the structure and culture of a playful organization to existing theories about currently common structures and cultures of both online gaming communities and work organizations.

This offers a first understanding of whether online gaming communities and work organizations have characteristics of a playful organization. Thus Chapter 3 asks and answers the following second and third sub-questions:

- To what extent can the structural and cultural characteristics of online gaming communities offered in computer game studies literature be considered playful? (Chapter 3)
- To what extent can the structural and cultural characteristics of professional organizations offered in organizational studies literature be considered playful? (Chapter 3)

After reviewing and reinterpreting previous empirical studies, my own empirical studies are discussed in Chapter 4. Part of the research agenda was a qualitative inquiry into how online gaming communities organize themselves. Another part of the agenda was a more quantitative inquiry into how online gamers compare their communities to their work organizations. The question remained how these inquiries could be done. An empirical research strategy was thus developed, in which the playful organization theory of Chapter 2 served an important purpose. The development had some playful characteristics. Hopefully the research strategy and the playful approach to its development will inspire other researchers. Chapter 4 thus asks and answers this fourth sub-question:

- How can playful organizations be empirically researched in the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ world? (Chapter 4)

The first part of the empirical research concerned ethnographic research of one specific online game, namely *EVE Online*. As explained in Chapter 4, I extensively played *EVE Online* to experience the structures and cultures of its communities firsthand. By describing how I played this online game and subsequently joined some of its communities, an understanding is offered of how online gamers continuously combine something as serious as organization with something as fun as play. A subsequent reflection determines the extent to which I had experienced playful organizations. Hence Chapter 5 asks and answers this fifth sub-question:

- When and how does an online gamer create or join communities, what are the characteristics of those communities, and to what extent are the communities playfully organized? (Chapter 5)

The downside of the *EVE Online* study was that its outcomes could not be further generalized. As explained further in Chapter 4, a panel of Dutch online gamers was set up to enable more quantitative research. These online gamers were or had recently been members of online gaming communities as well as employees at specific work organizations. Quantitative research allowed me to formulate more general conclusions about the playful organization of these online gamers’ communities. The panel filled in a questionnaire and was interviewed to ascertain whether they considered their online gaming communities to be playful organizations. This data allows Chapter 6 to ask and answer the following sixth sub-question:

- To what extent can Dutch online gamers’ communities be considered playful organizations? (Chapter 6)

The panel of Dutch online gamers was approached a second time. The panel filled in another questionnaire, this time about their work organizations and how these organizations related to their online gaming communities. In the aforementioned interviews the panelists discussed this as well. As explained in Chapter 4, it was assumed that these online gamers could relate the organizational characteristics of their communities to the characteristics of their work organizations. The data allows Chapter 7 to ask and answer the following final sub-question:

- To what extent can Dutch online gamers' work organizations be considered playful organizations, similar to their communities? (Chapter 7)

Having asked and answered the above seven sub-questions, Chapter 8 concludes by providing an answer to the aforementioned main research question.

1.5 CONCLUSION

1.5.1 EXPLORATORY RESEARCH INTO PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

This chapter introduced four frames with which gaming's impact on organizations can be better understood and further researched. The phenomenon-ideologizing frame was introduced as a frame in which gaming is defined as a socio-cultural phenomenon that impacts how people communicate and collaborate with each other. Gaming is a frame of mind that can impact organizations culturally and thus fundamentally. *Playful organizations* ensue. This notion was introduced as essentially a new 'image of organization' (Morgan, 1997), with gaming and play at its foundation.

It was hypothesized that online gaming communities are playful organizations. The technical, social, cultural and organizational characteristics of online games were introduced to further argue this working hypothesis. Online games attract at least tens of millions of players from practically all walks of life, who subsequently spend an average of around 20 hours per week playing them for years on end. In the course of their play they develop a culture, i.e., unwritten rules and conventions for communicating and styles of play. They form organizations that manage to achieve complex objectives. These organizations defy the unserious and frivolous connotations of play. Yet they simultaneously manage to remain fun. The organizations that online gamers create and join might be the best available examples of playful organization. These player organizations manage to recruit players from all over the world to successfully fulfill complex objectives using ICT, all presumably with a sense of enjoyment. This renders player organizations highly interesting to organization theorists.

It was subsequently hypothesized that playful work organizations are emerging as well. Work organizations can evolve into playful organizations. The emergence of a 'post-industrial society' (Bell, 1973) already initiated decentralization and flexibility within organizations decades ago. The emergence of an age of play fuels and accelerates this process, creating playful organizations as a result. Work organizations can become playful through specific interventions as well. The four frames discussed in Section 1.2 showed organizations' broad interest in

gaming. Serious games and new gaming-inspired organizational structures are interventions that could potentially impact organizations extensively, rendering them more playful as a result.

A research agenda was then developed. There is a need for further research into the characteristics and existence of playful organizations. Characteristics of a playful organization are first conceptualized to form a playful organization theory. This theory is subsequently applied in empirical research of online gamers' communities and work organizations. As experts in playful organization, online gamers can best inform whether and how online gaming communities and work organizations can be considered playful organizations. The following main research question captures the research agenda:

What are characteristics of a playful organization, and to what extent are these characteristics identifiable among online gamers' communities and work organizations?

The research agenda shows a 'subtle-realistic' approach to the topic of playful organization. Subtle realism is defined as an ontology in which validated knowledge is pursued, but the knowledge in question is considered to be the researcher's own interpretation of a phenomenon rather than an objective truth (Hammersley, 1992, pp. 52-54). Subtle realism thus has an interpretivistic rather than a classically realistic underpinning. The existence of an objective truth is, after all, discarded. Indeed, this chapter has developed a specific approach to and understanding of playful organization, i.e., the phenomenon-ideologizing approach. The notion of the playful organization is thus presented as one researcher's interpretation of it. Nevertheless, this thesis aims to show the validity of this interpretation through specific research steps by means of the discussed research agenda. My subtle-realistic approach to the playful organization had a specific impact on both the research agenda and the specific research endeavours, as will become clear in the upcoming chapters.

1.5.2 NOTES ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this first chapter several terms have been used for roughly the same phenomena. Moreover, the terms often seem to defy their own meaning. The fact that MUDs, online games and 'open' virtual worlds are so elaborate and open to emergent social phenomena makes researchers think about and question the concepts they use to describe them (Castronova, 2005; Malaby, 2007). As Bartle already observed in 2004, several concepts meant to explain what it means to play in them had gained and lost popularity over the past decades, including simulation, medium and game (Bartle, 2004, pp. 474-475). Bartle resolves to calling them virtual worlds and subsequently understanding them as 'places' (Bartle, 2004, p. 475; Curtis, 1992) in which all sorts of activities can happen, including simulations and games (just like in the 'real world'). I use the term 'virtual world' throughout this thesis to denote the computer-generated environment regardless of the nature of the specific actions and interactions that take place in it. As such I treat it as an umbrella term, just as Bartle does.

Using the term 'virtual world' is arguably problematic. It conjures up images of these environments being 'not real', or at least separate from daily life. However, considering virtual worlds as places to which a large and vibrant community is attracted introduces a social and cultural understanding of what virtual worlds are actually about. This makes a virtual world

quite real, hence my reluctance to use the term 'virtual'. Yet I realize that there is a need to use a simple term to pinpoint to these places as being something else than the places we wander in when we work for a living. Alternative terms such as 'synthetic world' (Castronova, 2005) or 'metaverse' (Stephenson, 1992) seem just as insufficient for similar reasons. The adjective 'synthetic' still conveys an image of something not real. The term 'metaverse' was actually meant to pinpoint to the merger or at least the possible combinations of virtual/synthetic and real/physical worlds. Although this term fits my research interests quite nicely, the term 'metaverse' is not an easy or commonly used term to specifically point to a specific place in which one does not wander to work (at least not yet). A solution is to continue to use the term 'virtual world' conform Bartle's meaning, while acknowledging its problems.

Throughout this thesis I also consistently use the terms 'online game' and 'online gaming community'. Online game denotes a type of virtual world, i.e., multiplayer and massively multiplayer online games, in which actions and interactions are largely intertwined with game mechanics. Online gaming community denotes the communities that form in these specific types of virtual worlds. This way I can communicate that my research does not concern communities that are formed in other types of virtual worlds, e.g. open worlds such as *Second Life*. There are downsides to the use of 'online game', similar to the downsides of using the term 'virtual world'. For many readers the word 'game' has connotations similar to those evoked by the term 'virtual'. It can conjure up images of these environments as being unserious or frivolous, i.e., images that separate these environments from daily life. Again, the term 'online game' nevertheless serves a purpose. It is a familiar term for describing an environment in which people are confronted with game mechanics. I use the term 'online gaming community' to refer to the researched communities.

By choosing to use the adjective 'virtual' and the term 'game', another problem emerges. I sometimes have to resort to problematic antonyms, e.g. 'real world' or 'real life'. These antonyms again portray images that physical reality is something more real than a virtual world or an online game. To counter this, I continue to put 'real world' and 'virtual world' between quotation marks when juxtaposing one against the other. This is meant to communicate a sense of irony of using the terms 'real' and 'virtual' together to denote two different context that are each in practice no more real or virtual than their respective counterpart. Hopefully, at some point in time, either the described connotations will have vanished, or new terms with no problematic connotations will have gained favor.

1.5.3 ONWARDS

Section 1.4 provided insights into the structure of this book. Each posed sub-question is answered in a different chapter of the thesis. Structural and cultural characteristics of a playful organization are developed in Chapter 2 (sub-question one). Chapter 3 reviews the computer game studies and organizational studies literature using the newly developed understanding of a playful organization as an analytical framework (sub-questions two and three). Chapter 4 discusses how playful organizations can be and were researched empirically (sub-question four). Chapters 5, 6 and 7 discuss the results of the empirical research. Chapter 5 offers a so-called "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of my organizational experiences in *EVE Online* (sub-

question five). Chapter 6 offers the first results of the research carried out with a panel of Dutch online gamers (sub-question six). Chapter 7 offers the second results of the panel research, focusing on the panel's work organizations and comparisons to their online gaming communities (sub-question seven). Finally, Chapter 8 answers the main research question and offers conclusions. It also discusses the consequences of the results and offers recommendations directed at gamers, leaders and researchers.

CHAPTER 2

UNFOLDING THE CONCEPT AND ITS POTENTIAL: THE PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION IDEAL-TYPE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 reviewed different perspectives on gaming's impact on organizations. Some argue that organizations need to rethink their management strategies to engage gamers and accommodate their learning and social interaction styles (Beck & Wade, 2006). The ever-expanding gaming and creative industries can also be sources of inspiration for new social structures and systems (e.g. Edery & Mollick, 2008; Reinecke, 2009; Teipen, 2008). Organizations also develop and apply 'serious games' for all sorts of engaging training and learning purposes (e.g. De Caluwé, 1997; Edery & Mollick, 2008; see also Chapter 1). They even 'gamify' their human resource management or marketing strategies in an attempt to increase employee and customer engagement (Edery & Mollick, 2008; Reeves & Read, 2009; Zichermann & Linder, 2010).

Concepts such as 'gamification' or 'ludification' (Raessens, 2006, 2009) suggest that gaming can change organizations culturally and structurally. Chapter 1 explained that this line of reasoning fits a phenomenon-ideologizing frame of gaming's impact on organizations. This frame assumes that gaming/play can form the foundation of an organization. Gaming and play can transform what norms and values leaders, managers and employees uphold at work, and thus how they communicate and collaborate with each other. A 'play ethic' might emerge that stresses "adaptive, imaginative and passionate" action (Kane, 2004, p. 62). As Kane argued, such a play ethic stands in stark contrast to a Protestant work ethic that stresses a conservative or even inactive attitude (Kane, 2004, pp. 72-73; Weber, 1930/1958). The implications could indeed be considerable.

Still much remains unclear as to what culture and structure organizations would have in an age of play. There is a need for further conceptualization of a playful organization 'ideal-type' (Torr, 2008; Weber, 1949). An ideal-type is a utopian, "stereotypical" or "pure" (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 156) organization theory that enables further research. Many scholars position their organization or sociological theories as ideal-types to enable further empirical research and easy comparisons with other theories (Mintzberg, 1983; Torr, 2008; Weber, 1946/1947, 1949). A *playful* organization ideal-type can help us to understand how a structured social entity can still allow its employees to experience their work as play and render the organization creative, spontaneous and enjoyable as a result.

This chapter therefore conceptualizes the playful organization ideal-type. It offers a conceptual framework consisting of six values of a playful organizational culture and seven concepts of a playful organizational structure. Throughout the chapter several practical examples of organizations applying these values and concepts are offered. The chapter ends with a discussion about the implications this framework offers for design and social science.

2.2 METHOD OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

The development of the proposed conceptual framework requires a starting point. The question remains as to exactly *how* an organization, playful or otherwise, can be conceptualized. One way to find a starting point is to review the field. Previous definitions and characterizations of organization give insight into how this particular phenomenon has been approached in the past. It is not my intention to systematically review all organizational studies ever conducted. Thankfully, many have already provided overviews of how organizations have generally been defined and characterized (e.g. Hassard, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Scott, 2008; Shafritz & Ott, 1987).

2.2.1 THREE PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATION

Scott's pillars of institutions (2008) are a useful starting point for conceptualizing the playful organization ideal-type. An organization can be viewed as a social entity that a number of individuals instigate together. As a process or experience organization equals institutionalization, i.e., explicit and implicit rule-making after which the social entity can actually be identified. Rules can be clearly defined regulations, normative incentive systems, or implicit beliefs and values (Scott, 2008, pp. 52-56). Scott defines these rule types as three pillars of institutions theory, i.e., "regulative", "normative" and "cultural-cognitive" pillars (2008, pp. 50-59). Together these pillars represent a scale of rule-making, ranging from explicit to implicit. A social entity can thus turn into an organization when at least one of these three rule types are identified.

Scott's cultural-cognitive pillar subsequently inspires a first cultural perspective on organization. Within the field of organizational studies such a perspective is common, albeit relatively new (see e.g. Alvesson, 2002; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Cultural studies of organization focus on that which is by default implicit, i.e., the shared values and beliefs about communication and collaboration that organizations' employees do and do not uphold. Culture is not easily operationalized and observed, but must be defined by the researcher (Geertz, 1973). Defining an organization's culture greatly aids in understanding the organization, because of the focus gained on the values and beliefs that govern employees' actions. It is useful to start developing the ideal-type by defining what employees would value highly in an extremely playful organization.

Scott's more explicit normative and regulative pillars inspire a management-sociological perspective on organization. Within the field of organizational studies this is a well-established perspective. Classical studies of how leaders/managers structure (or should structure) an organization fit this perspective nicely (e.g. Fayol, 1916; Mintzberg, 1979, 1983; F. W. Taylor, 1911). These studies have shown that formal regulations and rules take on many different forms. They generally introduce task specialization (a division of labor) and a method of coordination (e.g. leadership or monitoring systems; see also Shafritz & Ott, 1987). More recent theories that have emerged as antitheses to the above classical studies also fit a management-sociological perspective. Most notably, the more recent 'human relations' theory emerged as antithetical to classical management theories (Bruce, 2006). It still fits a management-sociological perspective because it stresses the importance of managers taking care of the psychological wellbeing of employees. It is thus still "structural-functionalist" (Hassard, 1993, p.

19). It focuses strongly on an organization's function and what kind of structure helps leaders/managers to pursue that function. A management-sociological perspective remains relevant for contemporary organizational studies, including one into the playful organization ideal-type.

Scott's other two explicit pillars also inspire a socio-technical perspective on organizations. This is a more recent perspective in which the structuring effects of ICTs are stressed. The emergence of this perspective is often attributed to the Tavistock Institute in Great Britain (Cherns, 1976; Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p. 167). The socio-technical systems perspective gave rise to studies of knowledge management (Rao, 2005, p. 27). Knowledge management studies concern the technologies and techniques that aid the acquisition, distribution, structuration and storage of knowledge (Begoña Lloria, 2008; Rao, 2005). Technology can aid such knowledge processes within an organization.⁷ Such types of studies again focus on an organization's function and the structure that helps attain it. For researchers technology and management practices can structure an organization in such a way that it fulfills its function. A socio-technical systems perspective is highly relevant in this day and age, as organizations continue to virtualize as a result of the use of all sorts of technologies (Camarinha-Matos & Afsarmanesh, 2005; Davidow & Malone, 1992). Online gaming communities are arguably the epitome of 'virtual organizations'. After all, they *have* to use technology to communicate and collaborate with each other regardless of their physical locations. As such a socio-technical perspective is also particularly relevant for conceptualizing the playful organization ideal-type.

The three organizational perspectives discussed above position the playful organization ideal-type in the heat of ongoing debates about what organizations are, how they develop and how they change. This debate is taking place among management-sociological, socio-technical and cultural scholars who often disagree on certain suppositions. It is a debate about the role of management: how do people lead, how do they coordinate, how do they define and divide labor? It is a debate about the role of technology: what technologies and techniques do people use to structure, communicate and store knowledge? It is also a debate about the role of culture: what do people believe, treasure or simply seem to hold on to within or beyond an organization?

This chapter combines these three perspectives to offer rich insights into the playful organization ideal-type. Some might find this combination problematic. This is because the aforementioned debate has given rise to distinct paradigms (Hassard, 1993, pp. 62-64; Kuhn, 1962/1970). The cultural perspective on organizations emerged as a postmodern critique on a structural-functionalist predisposition. Rather than focusing an organizational study on the structures with which a specific function is pursued, culturalists stress the importance of that which underlies structure and could be considered *dysfunctional*. As such a cultural analysis hardly fits the structural-functionalism of a management-sociological or socio-technical analysis. The interpretive and structural-functionalist predispositions can indeed be viewed as two incommensurable paradigms of organizational research. However, this chapter considers the cultural, management-sociological and socio-technical predispositions as three relevant and

⁷ The field has arguably moved on, though, from its socio-technical or at least its technological deterministic origins (Hislop, 2002).

insightful perspectives.⁸ The goal of this chapter is to develop rich insights into a playful form of organization that can enable further research. For this reason all three perspectives are applied.

2.2.2 DEFINING PATTERNS OF PLAY

To develop insights into what a playful organizational culture would entail, an understanding of play itself is first needed. The cultural perspective of organization dictates that cultural characteristics are not observed or measured, but constructed by the researcher. The construction of cultural characteristics of a playful organization ideal-type requires another starting point. This chapter offers an understanding of play derived from a review of play theory. Play theory is viewed as a theory of people involved in an experience they would be inclined to term 'play'. An organization's employees are also involved in an experience, i.e., the collective pursuit of the organization's rationale. If a researcher is to interpret an organizational culture as playful, he/she would have to determine that the organization's employees are to some extent able to play at work. To characterize a playful organizational culture it is therefore important to review play theory first.

The understanding is offered in the form of *patterns* of play. Play is too malleable to consider it unilaterally definable. Any attempt at crystal-clear definitions of play will prove unfruitful and problematic. Theories of play nevertheless show that play can be characterized, in spite of its tremendous diversity. A pattern is such an abstract characterization. By defining play patterns, the malleable nature of play is thus not compromised. Simultaneously, patterns of play can apply to play experiences in any setting, i.e., on a playground, around a table, behind a computer, or indeed at work.

The patterns of play were defined after reviewing general and game-specific play theory. Game-specific play theory was reviewed only marginally. This is a subset of general play theory, as games can be seen as artifacts that instantiate specific forms⁹ of play (see also Juul, 2005). Play thus takes place in a game but does not require a game to take place. A set of both older and newer theoretical publications on play was reviewed (Bateson, 1972/2006; Björk & Holopainen, 2005; Caillois, 1958/1961; Consalvo, 2009; De Koven, 1978; Huizinga, 1938/1950; Malaby, 2007; Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Sutton-Smith, 1997). The selected publications are relevant, as they are comprehensive, build upon previous work and are well-known to the field.

The actual review of these publications comprised noting different characterizations of play. Effectively this was a deconstruction of written accounts of play. The characterizations were then grouped. This led to the conceptualization of five common patterns of play, effectively a reconstruction of play in my own words. The characterizations I noted are quoted in the upcoming discussion of the five patterns. In the end the five patterns characterize play by

⁸ Not even frames! I do not believe that organization can be *defined* well enough using just one of these perspectives. Given the definitions of frame and frame analysis provided in Chapter 1, I think it's better to consider these three perspectives for *describing* organizations.

⁹ Many in the game studies community use Caillois' (1958/1961) distinction between *ludus* and *paidea* to make the difference between the rule-based experience of playing a game and the relatively more free experience of simply playing (see e.g. Deterding et al., 2011; Newman, 2004).

people's *behavior* when they play (e.g. 'eliciting creativity'), and by how people can understand play as a specific *context* (e.g. 'stepping into a magic circle').

2.2.3 DEFINING A PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND STRUCTURE

From the five defined patterns of play a playful organizational culture was conceptualized and illustrated by examples from play-inspired organization/management publications. A selection of relatively recent organization/management publications referring to theories or notions of play or providing apparently playful examples was included into the review (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, 2010; Kane, 2004; Levy, 2011; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; McGonigal, 2011; McNely, 2011; Ou, Leung & Davison, 2011; Pink, 2009; Reeves & Read, 2009; Zichermann & Linder, 2010). Many of these publications can be considered non-specialist or semi-scientific. The publications are nonetheless relevant, as they offer specific examples of how organizations (16 in particular) can be playful. The list of apparently playful organizations includes Google (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010; Levy, 2011; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006), Disney (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007), Pixar (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010), the Quest to Learn school (McGonigal, 2011) and the Scottish Media Group (Kane, 2004).

To conceptualize a playful organizational structure, such a culture was related to seven basic management-sociological and socio-technical themes. With the main values of a playful organizational culture defined, the question remained as to how these values would affect the ideal-type structurally. The defined management-sociological and socio-technical perspectives only offer a direction for defining a playful organizational structure. Seven common management-sociological and socio-technical themes were defined after several well-known publications about organizational design and knowledge management had been consulted. The themes became evident from publications (Mintzberg, 1979, 1983; Ostrom, 1990) and review books and articles (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Begoña Lloria, 2008; Huczynski & Buchanan, 1985/2007; Morgan, 1997; Rao, 2005; Shafritz & Ott, 1987; M. Smith et al., 1982) on inter- and intra-organizational design and knowledge management. The themes are relevant because they are quite basic. They are common and can be relevant to any organizational context, including an online gaming community. Moreover, once the themes are related to characterizations of a playful organizational culture, it becomes clear just how unconventional a playful organization can be.

The themes are defined as follows. Management-sociological publications often discuss how organizational design can determine how employees enter and leave an organization, how roles are developed and divided, what leadership or influential behavior the organization's employees exhibit, and how relationships between roles are hierarchically defined. Contrarily, socio-technical publications often discuss how specifically chosen and implemented technologies and techniques can aid the acquisition, distribution, structuration and storage of both explicit and tacit knowledge. Thus the seven themes are:

1. Access to and exit from the organization
2. Division of labor within the organization
3. Leadership, i.e., influential behavior
4. Hierarchically defined relationships between roles

5. Strategies for the implementation of ICTs
6. Strategies for the acquisition and distribution of explicit and tacit knowledge
7. Strategies for the structuration and storage of explicit and tacit knowledge

In summary, the playful organization ideal-type is developed by first conceptualizing a playful organizational culture. This conceptualization is based on an understanding of play. The playful organizational culture subsequently inspires a playful organizational structure. This conceptualization follows the aforementioned seven themes. Ultimately the playful organization ideal-type is a framework consisting of six values (the organizational culture) and seven concepts (the organizational structure).

2.3 FIVE PATTERNS OF PLAY

2.3.1 ALTERNATE REALITY

Many have argued that when people play they step into a “magic circle” (Huizinga, 1938/1950, pp. 35-37), an “imaginary universe” (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 19) or simply a “frame” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 94). In any case, people seem to step into a context delimited by space and time (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 22; Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 37). Some see this context as “separate” (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 10) and often “fanciful and visionary” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 127), having a “boundary” (Björk & Holopainen, 2005, p. 8; De Koven, 1978, pp. 37-38; Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 37) and governing the behavior that players can exhibit within it (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 7; Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 38).

There has been much criticism of the above conceptualizations of play. This is mostly because of their connotation that play is something completely separate from reality. Huizinga and Caillois even chose to define the context of play as not serious, unreal or nonsensical to argue that it is clearly separated from the reality of daily life, even though they also recognized that play can be very serious in itself (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 10; Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 33). Arguably this definition is too stringent and problematic, as many others have also argued (Consalvo, 2009; Malaby, 2007; Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008; Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 208). The definition renders an observation and argumentation of any relationship between play and non-play difficult or even problematic.

The term *alternate reality* is used in its place for two main reasons. First, the term denotes that the context of play is in itself a reality. This alternate reality can be well-defined, e.g. through a graphically rendered environment in the case of a computer game. On the other hand, it does not have to be detailed and well-defined at all. It can be created by only adopting a simple set of rules, i.e., some affordances and limitations that state which behavior is or is not allowed. As long as the players can understand such affordances and limitations, they are able to appreciate them as creating an alternate reality in which they can play. The second reason for using the term alternate reality is because it denotes the importance for a player or play designer to recognize that the play reality is positioned within the reality of daily life. Despite possible confusion with the game genre of the same name (Connolly, Stansfield & Hainey, 2011;

Örnebring, 2007), one can recognize a relationship between a play reality and other realities better with the term alternate reality.

The main consequence of an alternate reality is that players have a sense of uncertainty and suspense, or at least interest and intrigue (Caillois, 1958/1961, pp. 7-9; Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 38; Malaby, 2007). Players are confronted with a reality of which they know little or nothing, yet step into nonetheless. As such, an alternate reality is an important basic first step for an experience to become one of play.

2.3.2 FREEDOM OF ACTION

Many have argued that once an alternate reality has been accepted, players need to be confronted with a sense of freedom before they can really play (Caillois, 1958/1961, pp. 8-9; Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 35; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 304). Although the alternate reality creates certain and often very clear boundaries (Sutton-Smith, 1997, pp. 182-183), it also explicitly needs to leave room for choice. Specifically, it needs to allow players to exhibit at least a couple forms of behavior for them to feel free and creative (Sutton-Smith, 1997, pp. 127, 175). Thus the player has to have some extent of freedom of action.

Affording players some freedom is important for them to consider an experience as one of play. Without it players are more likely to feel they are performing a routine task that requires very little creativity or even attention (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 305). Ironically, such a task might be termed 'work' rather than 'play'. Freedom of action is arguably an integral part of the alternate reality. It nevertheless deserves separate attention, as it is another defining characteristic of play. The pattern helps make a distinction between an activity that is play and an activity that is not play.

2.3.3 EQUIVALENCE

When playing, freedom of action also comes with a sense of equivalence. Specifically, players are asked to equate themselves with a role or with another (potential) player. The former concerns a substantive equivalence, i.e., becoming something or someone else as the alternate reality dictates. The latter concerns social equivalence, i.e., a resistance to any power hierarchy that is not part of the alternate reality itself. Huizinga seemed to consider a sense of equivalence an integral part of the created alternate reality (1938/1950, p. 38). Caillois is one of the few play theorists who discusses substantive and social equivalence explicitly. Players might be asked to become a certain character, take on a certain role, or more figuratively to equate themselves with a state of mind or feeling. Regardless of the exact nature of the equation, players are asked to transform themselves, i.e., to become something within the alternate reality (Caillois, 1958/1961, pp. 23-26). Players also equate themselves with other players. They are asked to see themselves as equal to other players. If the roles that players take on in the alternate reality are different and conflicting, players need to be offered and convinced of an equality of chance (Caillois, 1958/1961, pp. 14-19; De Koven, 1978, p. 34). This way play can be a competition (though it does not have to be), i.e., a comparative test of the players' abilities (Sutton-Smith, 1997, pp. 74-75).

Substantive and social equivalence are not always apparent when playing. Instances of play can be imagined where no equation takes place. Play is not always multiplayer, nor is it always a competition. Play also does not necessarily involve a person becoming someone or something else. Figuratively, players always equate themselves with other potential players. In other words, play is always based on equal freedom of action. The alternate reality should always be a level playing field. Stepping into the alternate reality is meant to be easy and uniform. If not, then players should invest time in understanding the alternate reality to ensure a level playing field. Players should always have a basic understanding of the rules of a board game before they can start playing the game together. Social equivalence is always relevant, even though it might not be apparent.

2.3.4 ENGAGEMENT

Equal freedom of action is only meaningful when players actually exhibit it. This means that it is important that each player is active, i.e., that each player actually does something with the equally afforded freedom of action. Without player activity, play does not manifest, does not become an actual experience, and therefore ends up never having existed in the first place. Yet player activity is arguably not the most fitting term, as players do not have to be physically and observably active when playing. Engagement is arguably a widely-used term. However, it is a difficult concept to define and understand (Boyle, Connolly, Hainey & Boyle, 2012).

Often the psychological theory of flow is used to explain what engagement actually is (Boyle et al., 2012; Sherry, 2004). Flow can be defined as a state of consciousness that occurs when an activity is both challenging and doable (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Being in a state of flow can be deemed a prime indicator of engagement. Salen & Zimmerman's definition of play as a "system of experience that always includes some kind of sensory input, player output, and internal player cognition" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 316) helps further our understanding of the context of engagement. The 'system of experience' can be understood as learning by continuous trial and error (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 315). With this continuous loop of input, processing and output a player can attain flow and the experience can be deemed as one of play. Players are so engaged that they lose track of time and find the experience highly engrossing (De Koven, 1978, p. 42; Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 38; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, pp. 336-339; Sutton-Smith, 1997, pp. 184-186). Game and play designers try to ensure that players actually bring a game to life and find playing it engaging, allowing both players and designers to confidently call the game a play experience.

2.3.5 EXTERNAL INCONSEQUENCE

External inconsequence is a pattern that allows players to be engaged in a daunting or even dangerous alternate reality with equal freedom of action. The reason players allow themselves to engage in alternate realities with equally afforded freedom of action is because they agree that other realities with their own limitations and affordances are at least initially inconsequential. The pattern of external inconsequence is arguably an integral part of the alternate reality pattern, especially to those play theorists who already defined the alternate reality as not serious, unreal or "frivolous" (Sutton-Smith, 1997, pp. 201-207). External inconsequence nevertheless deserves separate attention.

Several play theorists pay explicit attention to external inconsequence when naming play “voluntary” (Huizinga, 1938/1950, p. 36; Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 174), “unproductive” (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 10), “untrue or not meant” (Bateson, 1972/2006, p. 319)¹⁰ or simply “safe” (De Koven, 1978, pp. 16-17). Using these adjectives they effectively argue that play not only takes place in an alternate reality, but that other realities are inconsequential. Caillois argued that once other realities are of consequence, an experience can no longer be deemed as one of play. To substantiate his argument he provided examples of professional players making a living from playing sports, such as boxing (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 45). Arguably, professional play (i.e., play to make a living) can indeed feel like a unique and somewhat strange form of play at least. Once other alternate realities are of consequence, freedom of action is influenced by external factors. In the case of Caillois’ example, action is determined by whether the player makes money from it. This can therefore be an important concept for terming an experience ‘play’, even though it is a subject of debate among game and play scholars (see e.g. Consalvo, 2009; Malaby, 2007).

2.3.6 FROM PLAY TO PLAY-LIKE WORK

Regardless of the continuing play-theoretical debates, the applicability of the aforementioned five patterns of play can render an experience one of play. The experience of work can also be an experience of play, provided the workers find the play patterns to some extent applicable. The common dichotomy between play and work can be false, as some have argued already (for a discussion see Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 115). Play theorist McGonigal sees play as a form of work (2011, pp. 29-31), while organization theorists Reeves and Read prefer to see work as play by realizing that play is “an important component of attention, involvement, and productivity, and it’s capable of energizing behavior of all sorts” (2009, p. 173). Employees do not have to find play and work as separate experiences, provided the organization they work for has a playful organizational culture.

2.4 A PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

This section argues that employees would uphold six values in an organization to ensure that they continuously experience their work as play. In other words, six values govern how employees collaborate and communicate with each other in a playful organization. By upholding these values the aforementioned five play patterns can emerge within an organization. The six values are discussed below. To aid the reader’s understanding of the values, a principle is stated in bold for each one. These principles are normative statements that describe the value being discussed.

¹⁰ Bateson was actually referring to “the messages or signals exchanged in play” as “in a certain sense untrue or not meant” (Bateson, 1972/2006, p. 319). This shows that within the reviewed set of play-theoretical publications, Bateson’s positioning of play is unique. Bateson analyzes play communicatively rather than experientially.

2.4.1 CONTINGENCY

Employees appreciate uncertainty and eventuality, rendering organizational goals that are well-defined and instrumental irrelevant.

By adopting contingency as a value employees of the playful organization ideal-type embrace uncertainty and eventuality. Put most simply, contingency is thus defined as an appreciation for not knowing exactly where the organization is or should be heading. The value is derived from the instantiation of an alternate reality and the accompanying equal freedom of action that comes with play (see also Malaby, 2007 for a discussion about play and contingency). For these patterns to be applicable to an organization, its culture has to encompass an openness towards new ideas for tasks, processes, products and services. The open organization adopts such a culture because it realizes the opportunities of continuous innovation above its threats. Appreciating employees' new ideas stems from a view of employees as players with equal freedom of action. More importantly, new ideas envision the organization in an alternate reality. Instead of pursuing a well-defined instrumental goal, i.e., a target statement that includes the means to efficiently reach it, a playful organization will resort to adopting a longer-term and vaguer goal for itself. Employees would accept that, because they value the contingency that comes with play, i.e., the uncertainty and eventuality of an alternate reality in which players have equal freedom of action.

Many authors express the value of contingency when analyzing how leaders of an apparently playful organization should develop its goal, vision or mission statement. Kane (2004, p. 257) as well as Mainemelis and Ronson (2006, pp. 89-90) refer to contingency specifically when discussing how an organization that embraces play effectively embraces uncertainty and risk-taking. Some refer to it when advising leaders to develop "epic goals" (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 55-57) or goals that are neither "narrow" nor short-term (Pink, 2009, pp. 45, 50-51) to inspire employee efforts without constraining them. Others refer to contingency when advising leaders to develop a "unified vision" as effectively a good story rather than a clear statement of a goal (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, pp. 42-44; 2010, p. 25). These types of goals or visions inspire employees without constraining them. They also ensure that employees adhere to at least some basic principles, befitting the play pattern of alternate reality.

2.4.2 AGILITY

Employees are aware of the organization's goal or rationale and act on any opportunity with which this can be pursued.

By adopting agility as a value employees of the playful organization ideal-type not only freely develop new ideas, but also act on any opportunity to materialize them. Put most simply, agility can be defined as an appreciation for swiftness and alertness. The value is derived from the equal freedom of action and engagement that comes with play. These play patterns make it both possible and imperative for every employee to find and take opportunities befitting the organization's epic long-term goal or unified vision. Indeed, with only a vague goal or vision, possibilities for action are multifold and need to be actively pursued.

Pink expressed the value of agility somewhat when emphasizing the autonomy employees should have in an organization (2009). He makes a distinction between several forms of autonomy employees should experience. Employees should be able to define their own work tasks, times, techniques and teams (2009, pp. 79-91). Employee autonomy is indeed an important starting point for a playful organization. Yet, like employee independence or empowerment (Pink, 2009, p. 79), autonomy can be insufficient for an organization to be highly playful. The play concept of engagement demands more than the value of autonomy offers. The value of agility arguably befits the play concept of engagement better than autonomy does.

Other authors express the value of agility more clearly when emphasizing that a playful organization should explicitly incentivize and instigate risk-taking. The perhaps best-known example is Google's policy to let employees spend roughly 20% of their time pursuing their own ideas for new products (Levy, 2011, pp. 162-164; Pink, 2009, p. 82). Others simply emphasize agility when stating that playful organizations give employees "leave to try crazy ideas" (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, p. 28), let them take "adaptive, imaginative and passionate" actions (Kane, 2004, p. 62) or let them "take risks, to let their off-the-wall ideas take flight" (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, pp. 47, 128). The authors generally appreciate agility, because they appreciate continuous trial-and-error learning, i.e., repeated failure to ensure the highest successes are reached (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, pp. 62-64; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 83; Reeves & Read, 2009, p. 89).

2.4.3 EQUALITY

Employees have equal opportunities for action and growth regardless of hierarchical differences.

Equality actually strengthens agility. The term is easily understood. It can be defined as an appreciation for equal opportunities, regardless of apparent differences. The similarly named play pattern of equivalence is indeed easily applied when conceptualizing a playful organizational culture. The social equivalence one experiences when playing is also valued in a playful organization. This does not mean that a playful organization is devoid of a hierarchical division of decisionmaking power, as further explained in Section 2.5. On the contrary, a playful organization's employees can appreciate a power hierarchy as simply part of 'the rules of the game', i.e., part of the alternate reality that the organization effectively is. Social equivalence makes employees value a level playing field and equal chances for growth. Those higher up the power hierarchy might thus be considered fellow players who have 'reached the next level'. As a result employees communicate and collaborate quite informally with one another, despite possible differences in decisionmaking power. Moreover, in a playful organization a power hierarchy does not immediately inhibit an employee's actions. The concept of freedom of action and the aforementioned agility renders the power hierarchy unable to limit employee actions *a priori*. An employee higher up the hierarchy can only limit a lower employee's actions either at the request of the actual employee or in hindsight. In the latter case, the higher employee could make the lower employee realize that his/her initiative is failing, even though initiatives are always highly encouraged. Such a management intervention does not negate the trial-and-error environment and level playing field of a playful organization.

The consulted publications show that a playful organization can express equality in several ways. According to Levy, Google was hesitant to introduce a new management layer, as its leaders did not want “managers telling engineers what to do” (2011, p. 160). A lack of *a priori* decisionmaking power can make one wonder how many layers of management are actually needed in a playful organization. Some authors indeed suggest that a playful organization’s hierarchy might be less extensive, i.e., ‘flatter’ (Kane, 2004, p. 276; Levy, 2011, p. 158; Pink, 2009, p. 30). Equality is also expressed in other ways. Capodagli and Jackson showed that equality can also be expressed by granting any employee the opportunity to attend certain test and feedback meetings despite possible hierarchical differences. In other words, an organization can be playful by “toppling hierarchical barriers” (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, pp. 89-90). Pixar apparently allows all levels of the organization to attend management presentations with the aim of getting as much feedback as possible on an undergoing movie project (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, p. 42). Similarly, Disney asked all levels of the organization to test and provide feedback on the rides at Disneyland (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 8). Equality can also be expressed by basing the entire organization on teamwork, i.e., relatively small groups of people who self-organize to do certain projects or sub-projects. Several authors indeed stress the importance of teams in an organization that values play (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 90; 2010, p. 38; Levy, 2011, p. 162; Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 129-133).

2.4.4 TEACHABILITY

Employees take opportunities for all sorts of educational and helpful experiences.

Related to equality is teachability. Put most simply, teachability can be defined as an all-around appreciation for learning. The play patterns of equivalence and engagement make teachability an important value for the playful organization ideal-type. By allowing employees to learn and understand the alternate reality they find themselves in, they can become engaged and contribute. Moreover, the value is quite obvious when viewing play as inherently a trial-and-error learning process. As the value of equality should enable anyone to play, a playful organization will need to value teachability to encourage all employees to learn about and understand the alternate reality they find themselves in.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which a playful organization can express its teachability is through an extensive internal education program. In such programs employees not only train relevant job skills but also develop an understanding of and appreciation for the organization’s goal or vision. Capodagli and Jackson stress especially the latter form of education when describing Disney’s and Pixar’s extensive ‘university’ programs (2002/2007, p. 150; 2010, pp. 47-49). Levy also mentions a ‘Google University’, i.e., Google’s internal education program (2011, p. 136). However, he emphasizes how Google values teachability wholeheartedly at the ‘campus’ formerly owned by Silicon Graphics (2011, pp. 131-135). In his own words, “Google was simply a continuation of the campus life that many Googlers had only recently left” (Levy, 2011, p. 135). The subsequent popularity of technical lectures, book talks and other educational activities was understandable, rendering Google indeed quite playful.

Yet there are other ways in which a playful organization can express its value for teachability. A playful organization will often stimulate (internally) sharing information and knowledge, as further explained in Section 2.5. Reeves and Read acknowledge the importance of openness in the form of 'knowledge equity' (2009, p. 133), being an important prerequisite for good teamwork. They therefore also suggest the use of 'avatars' in a work organization as digital representations of employees complete with highly informative expertise statistics (2009, pp. 64-65). Besides openness, teachability can also be evident from the empathy employees generally have towards one another, rendering them willing to educate or help whenever needed (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, p. 53). This connects closely to the idea of employees constantly providing and getting feedback, e.g. about what stage a project is in or how team members are contributing to a project (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 57-58; Pink, 2009, p. 62; Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 71-75). Finally, teachability can also be expressed through what McGonigal calls 'naches', "a vicarious pride from playing over someone else's shoulder, and giving advice and encouragement" (2011, p. 87).

2.4.5 MERITOCRACY

Employees are socially recognized for their efforts and competence.

When an organization values meritocracy, employees are socially recognized for the efforts and competence they exhibit (Saunders, 1995; Young, 1958). Social recognition is essentially an increase in social status, i.e., a means for explicitly and generally recognizing an employee's worth to the organization. Put most simply, meritocracy can thus be defined as an appreciation for recognizing someone's efforts and competence. The value stems from the play patterns of engagement and equivalence. Many psychologists argue that social recognition of one's efforts and competencies is very engaging (McGonigal, 2011, p. 49; Pink, 2009, pp. 64-65; Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 75, 79; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus to an extent a meritocracy safeguards engagement. A meritocracy's design is arguably just as important as its effect. The play concept of equivalence makes it important for a playful organization to be generally and consistently meritocratic. Employees higher up in a hierarchy should be socially recognized in the exact same manner as those with lower social status. Social recognition should be based on the same conditions for all employees, with the same amount of status increase as a result.

Many of the reviewed publications acknowledge the importance of meritocracy and offer some suggestions for how organizations could express it. McGonigal acknowledges the power of social recognition when arguing how powerful "prosocial emotions, most notably compassion and admiration" (2011, p. 82) are and when seeing "social engagement as ... intrinsically rewarding" (2011, p. 91). Capodagli and Jackson acknowledge meritocracy in their call for managers to "support, empower, and reward employees" (2002/2007, pp. 10, 162-163). Game designers acknowledge it when they afford players with points for doing something well (i.e., exhibiting competent effort) and subsequently have the game communicate the points to all other players, e.g. through a leaderboard. The same could apply in a playful organization, as gamification enthusiasts argue. Reeves and Read suggest the introduction of 'social micropayments' (2009, p. 79), where employees reward each other with a virtual currency for proven effort and competence. Google adopted a similar system when managers instigated a game to incentivize employees to improve performance of existing Google products (Levy, 2011,

pp. 186-187). Teams needed to ensure that their products passed a performance benchmark or they would accrue “a debt that had to be paid off by barter with a team that exceeded its benchmarks” (Levy, 2011, p. 186). This way the game offered social recognition to all employees whose products passed the performance benchmark. The game-based school Quest to Learn also values meritocracy as learners ‘level up’ based on proven competence and efforts to help “students build real esteem among their peers” (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 130-131).

2.4.6 CONVIVIALITY

Employees interact informally and are high-spirited and humorous about their work.

Conviviality values informality, high spirits and even humor among a playful organization’s employees. Put most simply, conviviality can be defined as an appreciation for explicit joy and high spirits. The play patterns of engagement and equivalence can introduce conviviality into the playful organization’s culture. In an organizational culture that encompasses conviviality employees are often informal, high-spirited and humorous among each other, because it is a sign of both their engagement and their equality. Conviviality therefore entails employees interacting and chit-chatting about anything, both work-related and personal, as long as it is informal, high-spirited and/or humorous.

The play patterns of alternate reality and external inconsequence also help induce conviviality in an organization. Conviviality allows members to joke about, make fun of or simply step back and ironically observe the organization’s goal and their own attempts to pursue it. It allows employees to reflect on the organization and themselves. By valuing conviviality employees can again see their work as play, i.e., as something that is a reality in itself that stands on an equal footing with other realities they are involved in. More importantly, conviviality allows employees to come to terms with the value of contingency. Thanks to a convivial atmosphere employees actually dare to take the risks the playful organization requires them to take. Reflecting positively, ironically and humorously on taken risks allows employees to effectively delude themselves that their risk-taking is consequence-free, as trial-and-error is simply ‘part of the game’. It also allows employees to see their failures as not automatically having personal consequences. When employees figuratively view their organization as an alternate reality without external consequences, conviviality emerges.

Several authors express the value of conviviality when identifying the importance of informality, high spirits and humor. Capodagli and Jackson express the value when arguing for a good morale, a sense of humor and employee socializing (2002/2007, p. 136; 2010, pp. 67-68). Google seems to value conviviality by including the ability to be sociable in its applicant selection criteria (the “Googliness” factor, Levy, 2011, pp. 138-139) and by greatly valuing humor every year on April 1 (Levy, 2011, pp. 123-124). McGonigal acknowledges a need for a convivial environment to ensure that employees embrace the contingency and agility that comes with a playful organization (2011, pp. 64-67). In other words, in a playful organization failure is fun, because “the more we fail, the more eager we are to do better” (McGonigal, 2011, p. 66). Or more subtly, a playful organization needs to embrace informality as it is a “‘possibility machine,’ ... and

those who manage its boundaries have to be relaxed about the possibilities that might ensue” (Kane, 2004, p. 285).

2.5 A PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

More specific insights into the playful organization emerge when the six values are related to the seven management-sociological and socio-technical themes defined in Section 2.2. By doing so a more complete picture is painted of the playful organization ideal-type. Seven concepts of a playful organization structure are discussed below. To aid the reader’s understanding a principle is again stated in bold for each concept. A utopian conceptualization is subsequently discussed and illustrated by more practical implementations derived from the reviewed literature.

2.5.1 OPEN ACCESS AND EXIT

Organizational boundaries have limited meaning, as employees access and exit the organization continuously.

Access and exit, and the boundaries that control them, form a common theme in research into organizational structure and design. In a competitive environment with limited resources organizations try to secure a better position than that of their competitors. As a result organizations raise barriers, of which organization entry barriers are probably most evident (McAfee, Mialon & Williams, 2004; Ostrom, 1990). Another common barrier concerns individual employees, i.e., employee access and exit barriers. Amidst fierce competition an organization needs access to an apt workforce, while allowing them to leave when required or requested. As a result an organization can raise access and exit barriers in the form of job interviews and carefully formulated employment contracts.

In the playful organization ideal-type anyone is able to access and exit the organization at any time. The playful values of agility, equality and contingency have this specific effect on access and exit. In a playful organization, managers are aware that engaged employees can offer the organization many new opportunities. Moreover, the values of equality and contingency make a playful organization’s manager consider that in theory *anyone* can offer the organization all sorts of opportunities. The manager only requires indications that employees are engaged by the organization’s ‘epic goal’ to such an extent that they will seek out interesting opportunities.

Some practical examples show how the concept of open access and exit can be implemented and identified, although they are arguably still quite extreme in nature. Capodagli & Jackson advocate more open access and exit through limited use of employment contracts (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, p. 44). Similarly, Pink identifies the increasing number of ‘non-employer businesses’ in the USA. These businesses have no paid employees and limited to no management, allowing for relatively more open access and exit (Pink, 2009, p. 30). Arguably these examples are quite extreme, as they hardly afford employees any sense of job security.

Other practical examples show how the concept can be implemented and identified more subtly. Pink’s plea for team autonomy, i.e., the ability to self-select a team for a project, also

reflects a preference for open access (2009, p. 89). One of Levy's anecdotes reveals the reasoning behind a preference for more open access at Google. When a potential new marketing employee indicated that he had organized a foosball championship in Italy, Google CEO Brin was willing to hire him. As Levy stated, "If the guy worked that hard at *something*, the logic went, he'd probably be pretty good at selling ads" (2011, p. 141). Instead of preferring an indication of superior competence or experience in a specific role, Brin preferred an indication of agility. This led to a more open approach towards access and thus a playful approach to organization. Levy's account of Google also shows how the organization approaches exit very openly. As Levy stated, "[N]ot a single one of [the associate product managers] saw him- or herself working for Google in five years" (2011, p. 5). Indeed, if an employee is no longer engaged, playfulness dictates that both the employee and the organization's leaders will be open to his or her leave.

2.5.2 FREE-TO-CHOOSE AND FREE-TO-DEVELOP ROLES

Employees are free to choose and develop their roles within the organization.

The second common management-sociological theme is the division of labor, i.e., how employee roles and tasks are defined and divided. The theme became particularly relevant during the industrial revolution, when bureaucracy theory emerged (Weber, 1946/1947). In a bureaucracy task specialization is deemed highly important. Labor is very clearly defined and divided among employees. A bureaucracy defines an organizational structure so well to pursue the highest effectiveness and efficiency. Divisions of labor are also apparent in inter-organizational design theories, such as Ostrom's design principles for managing common pool resources (1990). In a competitive environment with limited resources, organizations need to divide certain roles among themselves (e.g. market regulation) to ensure the long-lasting availability of the resources to all organizations.

In the playful organization ideal-type roles are freely chosen and developed. They are neither set in stone nor specifically divided among the employees. This is the result of the playful values of contingency, agility and equality. In the ideal-type an employee does not apply for an extensively defined role, but simply for a chance to become an employee. The freedom to choose and develop your own roles could lead to a rather chaotic organization.

Task specialization is still relevant to the playful organization ideal-type for two reasons. First, task specialization is a result of employee agility and management's openness to it. Over time an employee can develop preferences for certain roles as well as the strategies to fulfill them. This is bottom-up rather than top-down task specialization. Secondly, the playful values of agility and equality also stimulate employees to assert unique yet equally important roles which complement each other. Employees acknowledge each other's unique roles, are each committed to it and together contribute to the organization's 'epic goal'. In the ideal-type the 'epic goal' keeps employees focused, limiting what roles employees will choose and develop for themselves. As a result task specialization still occurs.

Several scholars identify and advocate practical implementations of freedom in choosing and developing roles in today's work organizations. As discussed earlier, Pink advocated

autonomy to stimulate employee engagement. Pink's task autonomy (Pink, 2009, p. 81) and technique autonomy (Pink, 2009, pp. 87-88) connect particularly well to the playful concept of free-to-choose and free-to-develop roles. Capodagli & Jackson made a similar plea when stressing the importance of managers allowing employees to choose what they do, how they do it and when they do it (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, pp. 40-41). They identified this particular attitude towards division of labor at Pixar, the successful animation studio.

2.5.3 DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Employees frequently assume leadership, and thus also expect and accept it from each other.

Leadership, i.e., influential behavior, is another theme common to research into organizational structure and design. Over the past decades many theories of leadership have emerged (Bligh, Kohles & Pillai, 2011). Influential theorist McGregor offered a simple and still relevant abstraction of various leadership theories, i.e., "theory X" and "theory Y" leadership (McGregor, 1960). Theory X leadership values commanding and controlling behavior, following the presupposition that employees are generally unambitious and even unintelligent. Conversely, theory Y leadership values coordination and cultivating behavior, following the presupposition that employees are generally responsible and capable. Although these two dichotomies can seem simplistic, it still offers a rudimentary understanding for the specific leadership behavior researchers identify and advocate.

In the playful organization ideal-type, coordination and cultivation is the most frequently occurring leadership style and can be identified among all employees. This interpretation of leadership is heavily determined by the playful values of agility and equality. As explained, agility and equality stimulate employees to choose and develop their own roles. The resulting employee uniqueness renders employee responsibility quite important. With agility and equality leadership does not refer to the organization's leaders controlling their employees (M. Smith et al., 1982, p. 161). Instead leadership is considered behavior with which any employee influences one or more others (Alvesson, 2002, p. 93). In the playful organization ideal-type, leadership is therefore distributed among all employees. It is not appointed to a specific employee but asserted by all of them. A highly responsible employee counts on the complimentary roles of fellow employees and when necessary will assert leadership to fulfill a task. Employees therefore also expect and accept leadership from each other.

The playful organization ideal-type still has actual leaders also asserting coordination and cultivation leadership. Distributed leadership does not mean that the playful organization ideal-type has no employees explicitly responsible for leading others. On the contrary, the playful organization has leaders, and these leaders are very important for the organization's continuance. These leaders are responsible for safeguarding the organization's playfulness by formulating 'epic goals' and "mobilizing and coordinating group resources and decisionmaking". This "much more participative style" style of leadership behavior corresponds well to McGregor's 'theory Y' view of people as "active and co-operative" (M. Smith et al., 1982, p. 167). The amount of controlling behavior a playful organization's leader exhibits is very limited because of the leader's appreciation of agility and equality.

A couple of practical examples show how this concept of leadership emerges in today's work organizations. Pink's plea for team autonomy is an example of distributed leadership (2009, p. 90). By allowing employees to freely form their own project teams, they are able to assert and accept leadership with different colleagues in different projects. Capodagli & Jackson showed how Walt Disney institutionalized coordination and cultivation behavior among the leaders in his organization. Disney explicitly defined exemplary leadership as "the ability to establish and manage a creative climate in which individuals and teams are self-motivated to the successful achievement of long-term goals in an environment of mutual respect and trust" (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, p. 38).

2.5.4 EXPERTISE HIERARCHY

The organization's hierarchy reflects differing sorts and levels of expertise.

The fourth management-sociological theme concerns hierarchy, i.e., how divisions of employees relate to each other in terms of power. When defining an organization's main goals and processes, leaders often create some sort of a hierarchy to define power relations between an organization's divisions. As the simplest form of hierarchy, the pyramid instigates a classical organization in which a Theory X leadership style can be upheld. Many other types of hierarchy can be identified in research into organizational structure and design. Consider, for example, the complex hierarchy portrayed in the more contemporary 'matrix organization' theory (Davis & Lawrence, 1977/1987; Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p. 169). Leaders often have a need to somehow group roles into divisions, assign specific responsibilities to them and define power relations between them. The concepts free-to-choose/free-to-develop roles and distributed leadership make it hard to imagine the playful organization having a hierarchy as a power structure. If everyone has power to determine his/her own actions and the actions of others, there hardly is any static structure of power. Still, hierarchy is relevant.

In the playful organization ideal-type the hierarchy depicts differing sorts and levels of expertise rather than differing levels of decisionmaking power. This interpretation of hierarchy is influenced by the playful values of agility, equality and meritocracy. The hierarchy does not serve the purpose of explicating power relations between divisions. The concepts of agility and equality conflict with the idea of having a power hierarchy that governs the actions of and relationships between employees. The playful organization ideal-type's value for meritocracy nonetheless dictates a hierarchy. The hierarchy is essentially a leveling system, a well-known game mechanic. The hierarchy thus serves the purpose of structuring the members according to the specific expertise they have developed and exhibited. Those high up in the hierarchy have higher levels of social recognition, but not the power to unilaterally control those lower in the hierarchy. The added value of this expertise hierarchy is that questions concerning a specific issue or task can easily be directed to those employees with the most expertise. This reinforces meritocracy as well as team autonomy. Employees higher up in the hierarchy are continuously recognized for their expertise by constantly being involved in projects, issues and tasks as experts.

Some of the practical examples of meritocracy discussed in Section 2.4.5 already showed how several scholars identify and advocate hierarchies of expertise in today's organizations. McGonigal (2011) as well as Reeves and Read (2009) highly valued expertise hierarchies in the form of leveling and reward systems. Through 'social micropayment' (Reeves & Read, 2009, p. 79) or achievement/point systems a hierarchy can be introduced that denotes employees' expertise and connotes social recognition. Additional examples can be found in Zichermann & Linder's work (2010). One example concerns the use of leaderboards and point systems to motivate salespeople in particular (Zichermann & Linder, 2010, pp. 185-186). Such leaderboards and point systems instigate an expertise hierarchy by communicating which employees have performed the best.

2.5.5 DEMAND-BASED KNOWLEDGE & COMMUNICATION SUITE

Employees communicate and collaborate using whatever ICTs they see fit.

A theme common to the field of knowledge management concerns the strategy for developing and implementing innovations in ICT. Knowledge management theorists and practitioners often focus on how to develop, select, integrate and deploy innovative ICTs within an organization (Begoña Lloria, 2008; Rao, 2005, p. 30). In a society where new ICTs are continually invented, knowledge managers can actively scout for technologies that facilitate the acquisition, distribution, structuration and storage of knowledge.

The playful organization ideal-type will have many ICTs in use, including technologies that overlap in purpose and function. Moreover, in the playful organization ideal-type the importance of each technology is derived from how widespread it is used, i.e., whether as many employees as possible use it. Thus the playful organization bases the use of these technologies on the demands of the employees. At any point in time the organization will have a set of technologies that all employees know of and use, and another set of technologies that might be redundant and hardly used.

This conceptualization of ICT implementation is influenced by the playful values of agility, equality, teachability and conviviality. The fact that there is a wide range of ICTs in use is the result of agility and equality. These values make it all but impossible to control the technologies that employees of the playful organization ideal-type use. They dictate that everyone can and should be able to suggest and implement a specific ICT for which they have a need. At the same time there is a specific need for the playful organization to have a suite of ICTs. The fact that there is a need for a suite of technologies is also the result of teachability and conviviality. The playful organization needs to have ICTs with which all employees can discuss potentially interesting opportunities. The organization also needs to have an outlet for teachability and conviviality. It needs ICTs to enable employees to ask for and offer help at any time, and to talk about their lives openly and humorously as a form of escaping their roles and the potentially negative consequences of their actions. Moreover, the organization needs to be open to conviviality to allow employees to become and stay close-knit. In turn becoming and staying close-knit reinforces the values of agility, equality and teachability.

Some practical examples show how organizations can approach the implementation of ICTs more playfully. Reeves and Read suggested such a playful approach towards ICTs when discussing the use of multiple easily reconfigurable communication systems (2009, pp. 84-88). Communication technologies can include text or voice chat software, or the more indirect discussion forums or message board systems. Knowledge repositories can include wikis or highly specific and professional document storage and retrieval systems. Knowledge managers might want to introduce and maintain an infrastructure that enables and promotes free experimentation with certain knowledge management technologies. Such a strategy can indeed be considered very playful, with a much lower risk of employees overspending on the acquisition of new technology.

2.5.6 BOUNDLESS KNOWLEDGE NETWORKING

Employees use ICTs to acquire and distribute knowledge both internally and externally.

Another common socio-technical research theme concerns one of the main purposes of using ICTs in organizations: the acquisition and distribution of knowledge. Knowledge management theorists and practitioners are often concerned with creating knowledge-sharing communities or networks within and beyond the organization (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Begoña Lloria, 2008, pp. 12, 54; Rao, 2005; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Such theorists and practitioners argue that knowledge-sharing communities/networks and the technologies that support them are important to organizations for continued innovation and performance. The knowledge that these communities share is often very explicit, i.e., easily put into words. However, many knowledge managers advocate knowledge-sharing communities because of the importance of sharing tacit knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is not easily put into words (Begoña Lloria, 2008). By sharing ideas and expertise communities can attempt to make taken-for-granted and completely internalized knowledge more explicit, from which others can benefit.

In the playful organization ideal-type, employees continuously network within and beyond the organization to share explicit and tacit knowledge. The networks emerge spontaneously and often implicitly through the use of all sorts of technology that the Internet offers or an organization might have. This is because of the playful values of agility and teachability. To allow employees to search for and take opportunities that fit the organization's 'epic goal', they need to be able to network with fellow colleagues and beyond. Networking is essentially a simple technique for employees to ensure the possibility of quickly gaining useful knowledge and finding opportunities for action. The technique entails socializing, i.e., forming friendships, and often results in doing specific tasks collaboratively when possible. The actual act of networking is deeply intertwined with the value of teachability. When networking, employees of the playful organization ideal-type willingly and inadvertently share knowledge.

Social networking websites and instant messaging systems are practical examples of employees implementing this knowledge management principle to some extent. Twitter is a notable example of a technology that serves this knowledge management purpose quite literally. Its 'follow' mechanism allows professionals to form networks in which relevant knowledge is acquired and distributed. Instant messaging systems can similarly allow professionals to quickly

share the relevant knowledge they find on the Internet. Some have argued that the knowledge management possibilities of social networking websites and instant messaging systems are of seminal importance to today's organizations (McNely, 2011; Ou et al., 2011). The key point is that employees must be able to use any technology freely if the knowledge management strategy is to be considered playful.

2.5.7 COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOPED EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE

Employees structure and store knowledge of processes and procedures collaboratively.

The final knowledge management theme discussed here concerns the second basic purpose of using ICTs in organizations: the structuring and storage of the organization's processes and procedures (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Begoña Lloria, 2008; Rao, 2005, p. 54). Researchers and practitioners concerned with this aspect of knowledge management argue that technology can and should help organizations to retain knowledge and subsequently to operate more efficiently and effectively. As a result organizations tend to start using knowledge repositories to structure and store knowledge in a specific way.

In the playful organization ideal-type, employees use knowledge repositories to collaboratively develop and store processes and procedures. They develop and store guides for tasks and collaboration in general. The available knowledge allows employees to paint a picture about how the organization is functioning and could continue to function. By doing so they establish norms under which employees operate, communicate and collaborate. These norms are not absolute. They can be discussed, changed or amended. The importance is that they are *collaboratively* developed. In a playful organization employees develop them together, regardless of social status or function. The playful values of agility, equality and teachability stimulate this collaborative development. Combined, these concepts make it attractive for the organization to establish norms concerning what communication and collaboration styles employees should or should not adopt. The values of agility and equality make it possible for employees to choose and develop roles as they see fit. The playful organization is able to set some boundaries by developing and storing explicit knowledge in the form of processes and procedures. Yet the same values render it important that all employees have an equal opportunity to develop such norms together.

Google showed how an organization can implement the concept of collaboratively developed explicit knowledge. It apparently implemented collaborative development of processes and procedures through its openly available project management systems and knowledge repositories (Levy, 2011, p. 164). The key issues here are that these knowledge repositories are available to everyone and moreover that leaders and managers do not use the knowledge repositories to structure and store processes and procedures unilaterally. It should be a collaborative process if it is to be considered a playful one.

2.6 OPPORTUNITIES OF THE IDEAL-TYPE

Within the context of this thesis the ideal-type is developed to enable empirical research, specifically analytical social-scientific research into the emergence of playful organizations. It is important to elaborate on the wider implications to further explore what the ideal-type *means* to design and social science.

2.6.1 FOR DESIGN SCIENCE

The worth of the ideal-type presented here lies first in the new design opportunities it offers. New play experiences can be designed as contained moments of playful organization, i.e., as moments in which at least some of the playful values temporarily apply. Van Bree and Copier (2010) offer an example by describing a game designed for a hospital in which at least contingency and equality seemed to be valued for the purpose of developing a new social structure. Befitting experiments with ‘gamification’, managers were able to implement playful interventions inspired by the presented examples.

The presented playful organizational culture can be used in evaluations of playful interventions. Some if not all of the values might turn out to be predictors for the success of playful interventions in organizations. As already mentioned, some authors offer the example of implementing scoring and status allocation systems (Edery & Mollick, 2008, pp. 163-165; Reeves & Read, 2009, p. 79). Without a value for equality and meritocracy, immediate and broadly shared positive feedback in the form of scoring and status allocation systems make limited sense. Other authors offer the example of implementing social networking technologies across an organization (Reeves et al., 2007). Without equality and teachability, freely and constantly sharing knowledge across an organization through social networking technologies also makes limited sense. Based on their research at IBM, Reeves and Read (2009, p. 171) also realized the importance of having a playful organizational culture when trying to apply notions of play to leadership.

The ideal-type also inspires new interventions for instigating playful organization. Debates around gamification already show the difficulty game designers have with defining possible interventions for the purpose of playful organization. Gamification has been defined quite restrictively by focusing solely on competitiveness and achievement, i.e., the introduction of “rewards, challenges and contests” (Zichermann & Linder, 2010). This leads many gamification enthusiasts to introduce scoring systems, badges, titles and leaderboards among customers as part of their marketing strategy, or among employees as part of their human resource management strategy (Edery & Mollick, 2008; Zichermann & Linder, 2010). In the eyes of some game and play designers, e.g. Bogost (2011), this is a problematically limited perspective on the common characteristics of games and play. Competitiveness and achievement can be deemed common characteristics. Introducing them in an organization even fits the playful value of meritocracy. This chapter shows that there are more play patterns and playful values to consider.

2.6.2 FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

Conceptually

Presumably the most fundamental and pertinent question a social scientist could have at this point is how the ideal-type should be *understood*, specifically how it should be positioned in the wide spectrum of organization theory. Underlying the initial question of how an organization can be considered playful is the suggestion that organizations are non-playful by definition. The suggestion is fueled by the juxtaposition of play against work before a subsequent reconciliation to argue for a playful perspective on organization. It should be reemphasized, however, that organizations are defined as social entities in which some form of institutionalization takes place (Scott, 2008). When specific rules, procedures and norms are institutionalized, an organization might become something of a bureaucracy. When play is institutionalized, the organization becomes playful, i.e., creative, spontaneous and enjoyable. The term organization in itself connotes no specific culture or structure.

This means that the notion of the playful organization presented here can best be understood as a scale variable. The ideal-type epistemology explains this point. The construction of an ideal-type entails theorizing about organizations in a utopian manner to enable empirical research. Hence ideal-types such as the playful organization or the bureaucracy are theoretical extremities. Moreover, the playful organization ideal-type can be considered the counterpart of the bureaucracy ideal-type (Weber, 1946/1947). Most playful values clearly do not apply in a bureaucracy. It should be noted that some theorists argue that bureaucracies are highly meritocratic as well (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 37). Weber's bureaucracy should therefore be viewed as least playful rather than a non-playful organization. Playful organization can thus be seen as a scale variable. Lashinsky's description of Apple is an example of how playful organization can be considered to be a scale variable. He described Apple as in some ways an apparently playful organization, and in others "a brutal and unforgiving place, where accountability is strictly enforced, decisions are swift, and communication is articulated clearly from the top" (Lashinsky, 2011). In many if not most organizations, one can identify at least some of the discussed playful values.

This suggests that the playful organization is actually not radically new, but a next evolutionary step. Similar organization theories lead up to it quite nicely. In a way the playful organization has many characteristics of, for example, adhocracies (Mintzberg, 1979, 1983), learning organizations (Senge, 1990) and network organizations (Fulk, 2001). Playful organization can nevertheless be considered a novel concept. The playful organization can best be considered a next evolutionary step in the development of organization theory, set in motion decades ago by theories stressing decentralization, flexibility and related anti-bureaucratic concepts.

Empirically

Several contextual factors could influence the emergence of playful organization, such as cultural regions. Hofstede et al. (2010) suggest that low scores on their 'uncertainty avoidance' and 'power distance' cultural dimensions are most conducive for playful organization. If that is the case, then playful organizations are arguably much more common in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures than elsewhere. Presumably playful organizations have both strengths

and weaknesses, depending on one's perspective. Creativity, spontaneity and enjoyment can be viewed as opportunities. From a different perspective playfulness can be viewed as having weaknesses.

Two potential weaknesses, as well as the contexts in which they might be discussed, are easily identified. The first weakness is that playful organizations may lack reliability and efficiency in their product or service delivery. As became evident from Leavitt's work (2005), bureaucratic organizations can reach well-defined goals reliably and efficiently. Capodagli and Jackson (2002/2007, 2010) showed that both Disney and Pixar are known for spending huge budgets and delaying product delivery. Nevertheless, both have achieved enormous commercial successes, even if production was inefficient and delivery was late. Still, these organizations base their entire existence on innovation, specifically on developing new entertainment products and services. This of course hardly applies to all organizations. For an organization built upon the delivery of large quantities of a long-existing product in a well-defined manner, efficiency and dependability are key. In a playful organization employees have the opportunity and responsibility to choose and develop their own work within the limits of the organization's 'epic goals'. It is simplistic to consider this categorically inefficient and unreliable. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that a playful organization is much less efficient and reliable than its counterpart, the bureaucracy.

Another potential weakness is the playful organization's lack of stability as an organizational form. Organization theory suggests that as an organization ages, bureaucracy emerges and playfulness wanes (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 79-80). It could be argued that this is happening to Google, for example. This organization played an important role in this chapter as an example of an organization scoring apparently high on the playfulness scale. However, Google's recent radical changes to its privacy policy suggest that the organization is looking for a strategy to safeguard the success of its products rather than accept a product's possible failure. Google thus seems to be losing some of its playfulness. Perhaps the playful organization is indeed unstable, because of the tensions between order and disorder that continuously arise within it. With such tensions, conflicts easily ensue. The result could be that the organization chooses one over the other, i.e., order over disorder, as recent developments at Google suggest.

2.7 CONCLUSION

2.7.1 THE PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION IDEAL-TYPE

This chapter has offered a playful organization ideal-type in order to better understand the potential impact that gaming and play can have on an organizations. To safeguard the ability to play, a playful organization needs to value contingency, agility, equality, teachability, meritocracy and conviviality. In a playful organization employees thus value their equal ability to pursue opportunities for the organization as they see fit, as well as the uncertainty and eventuality that comes with such behavior. They learn continuously from their actions and from each other, are rewarded for their spontaneity and creativity with social recognition, and experience a convivial work atmosphere.

When taken to extremes a playful organization is very open to any employee joining or leaving the organization. Moreover, employees' roles are self-determined and self-developed. Leadership is distributed throughout the organization and entails mostly coordination and cultivation behavior. The organization's hierarchy is a delineation of all the expertise employees have, as well as the levels of expertise they have. ICTs are based on the demands of the employees and implemented left and right. They help employees to continuously share knowledge internally and externally. They also help employees to collaboratively develop and store preferred practices and procedures.

To aid the reader's understanding of the ideal-type, this chapter also offered several examples of the ideal-type's values and concepts put in practice. Table 2.1 lists all these examples and connects them to a specific value or concept of the ideal-type. The table shows that although the ideal-type is conceptualized and presented as a utopian organization theory, many publications already offer examples of playful organization.

Nevertheless, the playful organization ideal-type should not be considered an easily applied model, despite the many practical examples of playful organization that have been provided. The playful organization theory is descriptive rather than prescriptive. This is primarily because of the applied ideal-type epistemology. The presented theory follows Weber's ideal-type epistemology, as it is utopian, a theoretical extremity. It is a starting point for empirical research (both design-scientific and analytical social-scientific). As Torr argued, when an organization theory is presented as a prescriptive model, it is essentially an endpoint of research (2008). With the ideal-type epistemology Weber introduced a type of organization theory that is a well-considered reference point with which empirical research can be started rather than finished (Weber, 1949).

The initial working hypothesis developed in Chapter 1 now requires scrutiny. After all, the ideal-type has further specified the working hypothesis itself. The emergence of playful organizations can now be specified with the help of the presented playful values and their counterpart bureaucratic values. Figure 2.1 shows how the working hypothesis can be amended accordingly.

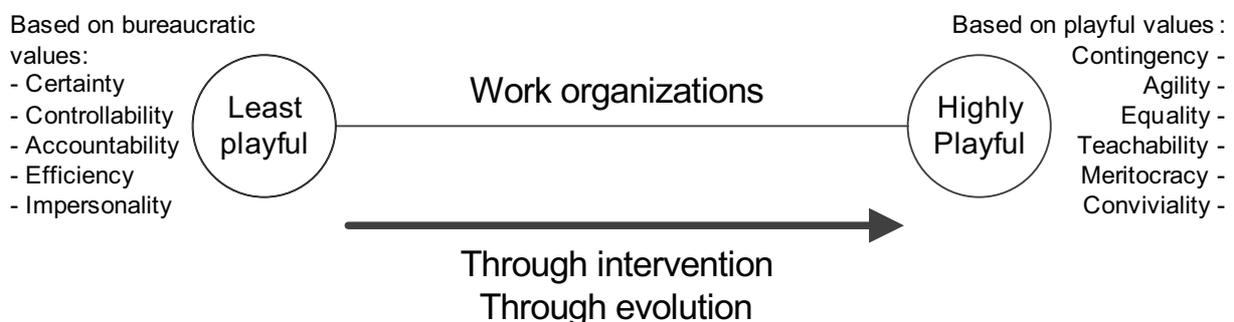


Figure 2.1. The initial working hypothesis amended using the developed playful organization

2.7.2 DISCUSSION

The ideal-type's development raises a practical and a more fundamental point of discussion. From a practical perspective, it should be noted that some of the values, concepts and examples might seem daunting or naive, as they suggest a rather anarchic organization (if they suggest an organization at all). The ideal-type can still be considered an organization rather than an anarchy for two reasons. First, institutionalization can still be identified, namely the institutionalization of values that enable play experiences. Second, employees are still concerned with a singular organizational goal. In a playful organization an organizational goal will be generic, or 'epic' in the words of McGonigal (2011). It is unattainable in practice, but nevertheless pursuable. Employees should be able to adopt this organizational goal as a personal goal to ensure that it enthralls them. Effectively this means that a playful organization is one with limited to no 'social dilemmas' (Dawes, 1980), i.e., it is an organization in which personal goals generally align well with the organization's goals.

More fundamentally, the way the patterns of play, playful values and playful structure have been presented could be found problematically structuralist by a play theorist. Arguably, the emergence of play and playfulness in organization theory could have been analyzed and presented differently. After all, there have already been attempts at defining playfulness from a psychological perspective (Glynn & Webster, 1992). Playful values can also be identified in older works that did not explicitly reference play at all. Semler advocated employee autonomy by not allowing leadership to define procedures and process descriptions (1993, 2003). He did not base this or any other of his management principles on play or playfulness, at least not explicitly. Some advocate a playful form of organization based on an understanding of hacker values rather than play/playfulness values. Himanen (2001) juxtaposed a 'hacker ethic' against Weber's Protestant work ethic, equal to Kane's juxtaposition of a 'play ethic'. Before analyzing the playfulness of Google, Levy developed hacker values that are highly compatible with the playful values discussed in this chapter (1984). Values of equality and agility are particularly apparent in Levy's hacker ethic. The very nature of play could also have been approached differently. The relatively recent emergence of other forms of play shows how play can 'play' with itself, e.g. live-action role play where external inconsequence is seemingly an irrelevant concept (Harviainen, 2011).

Conversely, an organization theorist, leader or manager may find the manner of presentation problematically *post*structuralist. By choosing Weber's ideal-type epistemology, as well as a cultural foundation, playful organization is presented as a utopian theory that can be neither fully observed nor instigated. Moreover, the operationalization of the ideal-type remains unclear. The ideal-type's applicability in society and in social science may as yet be perceived as limited.

It is important to stress that this chapter's presentation of play and the playful organization ideal-type are neither fully structuralist nor fully *post*structuralist. The presented theories on play and playful organization have an interpretivistic foundation. They are first and foremost my own interpretations. My subtle-realistic perspective thus reveals itself again, just as it was revealed in Chapter 1. Hammersley defined subtle realism as an ontology in which

validated knowledge is pursued but the knowledge in question is considered to be the researcher's own interpretation of a phenomenon rather than an objective truth (1992, pp. 52-54). As a subtle realist, I stress that other patterns, values and concepts could and should be defined to expand the understanding of what play and a playful organization can be. Simultaneously, this chapter is still meant to provide a clear answer to a clear and relevant question, i.e., what cultural and structural characteristics a playful organization can have. The benefit of the manner of presentation is the understandability of the line of reasoning and its results. More importantly, it is the aim of this chapter to present interpretations of play and playful organization that should be acceptable to a larger audience. Thus I acknowledge that in spite of my interpretivistic foundation, there is an element of realism to how play and the playful organization have been developed and presented. Again, this fits my subtle-realistic approach to the notion and research of the playful organization.

2.7.3 ONWARD

There are many ways an organization can exhibit playfulness, meaning that there are many ways in which e.g. more open access, an expertise hierarchy or some of the other concepts can be accommodated. Many of the concepts' interpretations and applications will become clear from the research in cases where the playful organization ideal-type was applied as an analytical framework. Thus the many opportunities that organizations have to be playful will become clear in the coming chapters.

Indeed, the defined playful organization ideal-type offers ample opportunity for further research into online gaming communities and work organizations to ascertain whether they are playful organizations. The other sub-questions posed in Chapter 1 were meant to do just that. The next chapter returns to the second and third sub-questions. Previous empirical research into online gaming communities and professional organizations is reviewed to determine whether both contexts reveal an emergence of playful organizations.

The playful organization ideal-type	Examples from reviewed organization/management publications, with reference to the section numbers concerned
<i>Contingency</i>	2.4.1: Embracing an organization's uncertainty, risk-taking, 'epic goals' or goals that are at least not 'narrow'.
<i>Agility</i>	2.4.2: Stimulating risk-taking and repeated failure to ensure that the highest successes are reached. 2.4.2: Google's policy to allow employees to spend roughly 20% of their time pursuing ideas for new products.
<i>Equality</i>	2.4.3: Google's hesitation to introduce a new management layer into the organization. 2.4.3: Organizations' 'flat' power hierarchies, i.e., limited vertical length of the power hierarchy. 2.4.3: Managers 'toppling hierarchical barriers' by involving any employee in projects and decisionmaking. 2.4.3: Emphasizing teamwork, i.e., relatively small groups of people who self-organize to do certain projects.
<i>Teachability</i>	2.4.4: Organizations' extensive 'university' programs to educate and train employees. 2.4.4: Google's acquisition and use of the 'campus' headquarters formerly owned by Silicon Graphics. 2.4.4: Advocating 'knowledge equity', i.e., the right to knowledge, essential to good teamwork. 2.4.4: Employees helping each other by e.g. providing and getting feedback.
<i>Meritocracy</i>	2.4.5: Recognizing the power of social recognition, i.e., 'prosocial emotions' and 'social engagement'. 2.4.5: The idea of 'social micropayments', i.e., a virtual currency that indicates a level of social recognition. 2.4.5: A game played at Google in which software passing a performance benchmark is socially recognized. 2.4.5: The Quest to Learn school where students 'level up' based on competence/efforts, building 'esteem among their peers'.
<i>Conviviality</i>	2.4.6: Emphasizing the need for a good morale, a sense of humor and employee socializing. 2.4.6: Google's search for 'Googliness' in job applicants, and Google's annual April Fool's ritual. 2.4.6: Embracing informality and a sense of fun to incentivize continuous trial-and-error behavior in an organization.
<i>Open access and exit</i>	2.5.1: Advocating limited use of employment contracts or noting increases in 'non-employer businesses'. 2.5.1: Emphasizing 'team autonomy', specifically the ability to self-select a team for a project. 2.5.1: Google's hire of a person mostly because he had organized a foosball championship in Italy. 2.5.1: Google's newest managers expected not to work for Google anymore after five years.
<i>Free-to-choose & free-to-develop roles</i>	2.5.2: Emphasizing 'task autonomy' and 'technique autonomy'. 2.5.2: Pixar's emphasis on allowing employees to choose what they do, how they do it and when they do it.
<i>Distributed leadership</i>	2.5.3: Advocating 'team autonomy', i.e., forming multiple teams and self-defining different leadership arrangements. 2.5.3: Walt Disney's definition of leadership, which stresses coordination and cultivation rather than command and control.
<i>Expertise hierarchy</i>	See also <i>Meritocracy</i> . 2.5.4: Using leaderboards and point systems to motivate salespeople in particular.
<i>Demand-based knowledge & communication suite</i>	2.5.5: Using multiple easily reconfigurable communication systems.
<i>Boundless knowledge networking</i>	2.5.6: Emphasizing knowledge management possibilities of social networking websites & instant messaging systems.
<i>Collaboratively developed explicit knowledge</i>	2.5.7: Google's use of ICTs to share information and knowledge by and among all employees.

Table 2.1. Examples of playful organization from literature related to the developed playful organization ideal-type.

CHAPTER 3

PREVIOUS STUDIES RE-EXAMINED: HAVE PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS ALREADY EMERGED?

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters suggest that playful organizations can be observed in the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. Chapter 2 discussed the cultural and structural characteristics of a playful organization ideal-type, i.e., a utopian theory of playful organization. The chapter showed that despite the ideal-type's utopian nature, several organizations already have many characteristics that suggest a level of playful organization, including Google, Pixar and Disney. Online gaming communities presumably have most of the ideal-type's characteristics, as they are organizations that emerge in a context of play. Chapter 1 hypothesized that online gamers are experts in playful organization and should therefore be involved in empirical research into the subject.

The structural and cultural characteristics of work organizations and online gaming communities have actually been a popular topic of empirical research for quite some time. There is a growing body of scientific literature about online gaming communities. It has been growing since the 1990s, with the birth of social-scientific research into MUDs as the first online games or virtual worlds (see also Chapter 1). Since then there have been quantitative and qualitative studies into social phenomena within online games, including some into the structural and cultural characteristics of online gamers' communities (e.g. T. L. Taylor, 2006b). The body of scientific literature about work organizations is already much more vast. Organization theory has been in development for over a century, as became clear in Chapter 2. Arguably, the industrial revolution greatly stimulated the field's development. A topical subfield is the study of structural and cultural characteristics of 'professional organizations' (e.g. Brock, 2006; Von Nordenflycht, 2010), i.e., organizations with a high concentration of highly-educated knowledge workers (Cortada, 1999). It is often argued that professional organizations rose in parallel with the emergence of ICTs (Frenkel, Korczynski, Donoghue & Shire, 1995).

As yet it is unclear whether the aforementioned previous empirical research also indicates the emergence of playful organizations. The fact that no empirical research has been done based on the playful organization ideal-type does not warrant discarding all previous empirical research. The hypothesis that online gaming communities generally have many of the playful organization ideal-type's characteristics can, to an extent, be tested by further reviewing recent empirical studies. The results of these studies can be juxtaposed against the ideal-type. Contemporary work organizations can arguably have playful cultural and structural characteristics, regardless of whether or not online gamers are a part of them. Chapter 2 showed that companies such as Google, Pixar and Disney can be considered playful professional organizations. Perhaps other empirical studies of professional organizations will provide more insights into the emergence of playful organization as well. The results of these studies can also be juxtaposed against the ideal-type. A more extensive review of professional organization

literature can thus show whether these types of organizations generally are able to have many of the ideal-type's characteristics.

This chapter therefore reviews previous empirical research into online gaming communities and professional organizations to determine whether both are able to have characteristics of the playful organization ideal-type. Thus the two sub-questions below, as posed in Chapter 1, are answered:

- To what extent can the structural and cultural characteristics of online gaming communities offered in computer game studies literature be considered playful?
- To what extent can the structural and cultural characteristics of professional organizations offered in organizational studies literature be considered playful?

The chapter builds upon the results of a review of online gaming community studies conducted together with Marko Siitonen (Warmelink & Siitonen, 2011, 2013). It also builds upon the results of a professional organization studies review conducted by Brock (2006). Both results are juxtaposed against the playful organization ideal-type to answer the two aforementioned questions. Before the chapter discusses the results, it first discusses the review method.

3.2 REVIEW METHOD

The material used for the review of online gaming community studies consisted of 17 publications which, following empirical research, describe and conceptualize online gaming communities at least as a substantial part of their focus. The publications were collected by searching six multidisciplinary publication databases¹¹ and seven non-indexed scientific journals¹² for relevant publications. The search phrase "online game OR multiplayer game AND communit*" was used when possible.¹³ Only journal articles and authored or edited books were selected to ensure substantive quality. Other publication types, including conference papers, were also discarded, as a complete overview of such publications simply cannot be obtained. All the chosen publications were published in the period 2000–2010. The maturity of the research field and the game genre influenced the decision to limit the publications to this time period. Most publications discussing online gaming communities date from the beginning of the 21st century. Most publications from the 1990s concerned MUD communities (Bartle, 2004; Bruckman, 1992; Clodius, 1997; Curtis, 1992; Reid, 1994b, 1999) that were much less pervasive (in terms of economic and societal impact) than the communities of contemporary online games.

¹¹ EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite; EBSCOhost Communication & Mass Media Complete; PsycINFO; CSA Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts; CSA Sociological Abstracts; Directory of Open Access Journals.

¹² Game Studies (est. 1999); Eludamos (est. 2007); Journal of Virtual Worlds Research (est. 2008); The International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations (est. 2009); Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds (est. 2009); International Journal of Role-Playing (est. 2009); Entertainment Computing (est. 2009).

¹³ Some search engines did not support the wildcard, forcing the use of 'community' and 'communities'. Many of the additional journals did not provide a search engine. These were searched manually.

The material used in the review of professional organization studies consisted of Brock's article and the publications to which it refers. Brock's article concerns archetype theory, a contemporary branch of configuration research (Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999; Short, Payne & Ketchen Jr., 2008). Configuration research is common in organization theory, as it aims to describe the "patterns of structural arrangements" (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993, p. 1053) of organizations, arguably a primary goal of organization theorists. As such it has a long history. It has developed under many pseudonyms, including theories on forms (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993, p. 1053), configurations (Miller, 1996) and arrangements (Greenwood, Hinings & Brown, 1990, p. 726). Archetype theory focuses on the configurations of professional organizations. Central to the development of archetype theory is the inclusion of a cultural perspective. An archetype has been defined as "a set of *structures* and *systems* that reflects a single *interpretive scheme*" [my emphases]. In turn an interpretive scheme consists of "ideas, beliefs, and values" (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993, p. 1052). An organization's interpretive scheme helps to further explain the prevailing structures and systems that an archetype theorist might find (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993, p. 1055). Previous configuration research often did not incorporate this cultural perspective, limiting analyses to the structures and systems that organizations commonly have in place. Archetype theory is relevant because of its relatively recent development, apparent continued value (e.g. Kitchener & Mertz, 2012; Richter, Dickmann & Graubner, 2008) and extensive empirical basis (Brock, 2006, p. 164; Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 86). Moreover, the theory is based on an organizational perspective similar to my own, as explained in Chapter 2.

All selected publications were analyzed on the conceptual definitions, aspects and operationalizations they offered of online gaming communities or professional organizations. No scrutiny of conceptual definitions, aspects and operationalizations was made. Any definition or characterization was noted. Any and all aspects (qualifiable variables) or operationalizations (quantifiable variables) the authors focused on were also noted. Concerning online gaming communities this was a much harder task, because Brock's review already provided the main conceptual definitions of professional organizations.

The gathered data was subsequently juxtaposed against the playful organization ideal-type. The conceptual definitions, aspects and operationalizations were compared to the ideal-type's characteristics as defined in Chapter 2. By doing so insights were gained into the general extent of playful organization of both online gaming communities and professional organizations, at least according to the literature. The number of aspects and operationalizations for online gaming communities was much higher than for professional organizations. This made the juxtaposition of the gathered online gaming communities data against the ideal-type relatively more difficult. The juxtapositions nevertheless provided useful insights. The results are discussed in the following two sections.

3.3 ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY STUDIES

The selected online gaming community publications are highly diverse in terms of the empirical research on which they are based. Thirteen of the 17 publications resulted fully or partly from

ethnographic research. They thus primarily resulted from participation and observation. In nine of these publications authors explained how they used differing data gathering techniques in addition to participation/observation, i.e., interviews (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010), logging of chat sessions (M. G. Chen, 2009; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009), screenshot and video logging (Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009) and document analysis (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006b). Ten other publications resulted solely from quantitative methods, i.e., data mining, surveys and network analysis. These publications offered precise numbers of respondents (in the case of surveys; Kolo & Baur, 2004; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006) or avatars (i.e., in-game played characters, in the case of data mining; C. H. Chen et al., 2008; Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006). They also showed what data was specifically gathered. The publications offer many insights into the structure and culture of online gaming communities.

3.3.1 CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

Most authors offered no clear definitions for their chosen concepts. Instead, the selected publications offer a plethora of more general characterizations of online gaming communities. Table 3.1 abstracts 10 key social concepts from the characterizations offered in the selected publications. The table shows that three of these 10 are clearly most popular, i.e., *community*, *guild* and *group*. The other concepts – network, organization, team, raid, party, clan and social formation/unit – were often used interchangeably with the first three concepts.

The three most popular concepts (community, guild and group) suggest three possible perspectives on online gaming communities, i.e., macro, meso and micro perspectives. The other concepts can also be connected to these three perspectives, as many authors indeed did. The concepts of team, raid and party fit the micro perspective well, as they all focus on small groups. The concepts of guild, organization, clan and social formation/unit generally fit a meso perspective that focuses on larger social entities. The concepts of network and community generally fit a macro perspective that focuses on the largest social entities.

The three perspectives are defined as follows:

- Adopting a **macro perspective**, several researchers characterized communities as large social entities with an identity that is implicitly upheld by its members (see also J. P. Williams, 2009). Pearce & Artemesia discussed the shared value of belonging to a “play community” that plays all sorts of games together (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009, p. 129), or of offering technological and informational support to tackle complex game mechanics (Humphreys, 2005; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; T. L. Taylor, 2006a).
- Adopting a **meso perspective**, several researchers characterized guilds as more institutionalized and sometimes smaller social entities (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006). The institutions these guilds develop seem to point to two types of guilds:
 1. A ‘casual’ (K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; T. L. Taylor, 2006a, p. 331; D. Williams et al., 2006, p. 350), ‘social’ (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; Ratan et al., 2010,

p. 96; T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 43; D. Williams et al., 2006, p. 350), 'family' (T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 43), or 'non-raiding' (Humphreys, 2005) guild.

2. A 'well-articulated' (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 43), 'hierarchical' (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 43), 'uber' (C. H. Chen et al., 2008, p. 294; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 43), 'strategically oriented' (Ratan et al., 2010, p. 96) or even 'militaristic' (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006, p. 903) guild.
- Adopting a **micro perspective**, several researchers characterized groups as being relatively small, temporary and goal-oriented social entities (M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Ratan et al., 2010; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010; D. Williams et al., 2006; J. P. Williams, 2009).

Key social concept	Publications
Guild	(C. H. Chen et al., 2008; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; Ratan, Chung, Shen, Williams & Poole, 2010; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006a, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006)
Community	(Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kobayashi, 2010; Kolo & Baur, 2004; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006a, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006; J. P. Williams, 2009)
Group	(M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Ratan et al., 2010; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006a, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010; D. Williams et al., 2006; J. P. Williams, 2009)
Network	(Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006)
Organization	(Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006)
Team	(Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006)
Raid	(M. G. Chen, 2009; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; T. L. Taylor, 2006b)
Party	(Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006)
Clan	(Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Kobayashi, 2010)
Social formation / unit	(Kolo & Baur, 2004)

Table 3.1. Key social concepts in the selected publications.

Often several of these perspectives and several concepts within each perspective were applied interchangeably or in an overlapping fashion. Chen (2009) analyzed 'raid groups' that for each raid attempt had different compositions of roughly 40 members, thus rendering each raid group more of a "multigroup formation" (T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 37) or an organization. J. P. Williams (2009, p. 5) considered – though critically – a group as a "temporary intentional community", while Pearce & Artemesia (2009, p. 138) considered guilds as "communities of play". Some of these instances can arguably be attributed to differences in interpretation, theoretical confusion or a simple attempt to make the text livelier by the use of synonyms (or near-synonyms). Having interpreted the results of their empirical research, authors often use commonplace concepts like group and community to portray their understanding to the reader. Moreover, as noted by D. Williams et al., it seems that many if not most online gaming communities can be considered hybrids (2006, p. 345) of several social constructs, e.g. a community and an institutionalized guild at the same time. This makes different perspectives on the same phenomenon also quite relevant.

Thus, although regrettable, it is also understandable that hardly any conceptual definitions of online gaming communities were offered. Most of the studies were exploratory in nature, since online gaming communities are still a relatively new phenomenon. Many authors also preferred not to apply existing theoretical frameworks, in an attempt to understand online gaming communities on their own terms. Arguably, an online gaming community can indeed be a community, an organization and a collection of groups at the same time. Such an argument is still hard to defend, simply because the authors generally used the concepts of Table 3.1 without defining them. It is thus easy to misinterpret findings. The publications can also be confusing, especially in those cases where the focus of the study seemed to fit several of the micro, meso and macro perspectives. It is also more difficult to build a body of knowledge when scholars do not clearly communicate their understanding of online gaming communities.

3.3.2 ASPECTS & OPERATIONALIZATIONS

The publications also describe a plethora of aspects and operationalizations of online gaming communities, regardless of the applied perspectives. Overall, 18 aspects and operationalizations were noted. Six of these were clearly most common, as they were mentioned in seven publications or more, while the other 12 were less common, as they were mentioned in four or fewer publications.

The six most common aspects and operationalizations were:

- **Social structuring (including all forms of management)**

Many publications discussed social structuring as an aspect of online gaming communities in two ways. First, they discussed game-specific social structuring (M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; T. L. Taylor, 2006b). Game-specific social structuring concerns the definition of roles that the played game requires. Such roles thus depend on the game the community plays. Roles such as 'tank' and 'healer' are arguably common combat roles across several games. Second, publications discussed community-specific social structuring, i.e., how players define roles specific to the community. These social structuring practices can simply be

interpreted as management. In this case authors discussed recruitment, activity assessment, reward allocation and conflict resolution. Leadership was also discussed, though not always specified. When it was specified it tended to concern 'class' leaders who would instruct or advise players on how to perform game-specific roles before starting a game mechanic as a group. Leadership could also concern a community leader defining and safeguarding a vision to guide the community's actions (M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Ratan et al., 2010; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006a, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010; D. Williams et al., 2006).

- **Rationale**

Many publications discussed the reasons for online gaming communities' existence. A community's rationale can be a clearly defined goal, e.g. finishing one, several or all game mechanics which, once reached, might lead to the end of the community altogether (M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006; J. P. Williams, 2009). It can also be a much less clear pursuit that might never end or be voiced, but only interpreted by the researcher, e.g. the continuous pursuit of friendship or opportunities for all sorts of social play (Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Ratan et al., 2010; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010; D. Williams et al., 2006; J. P. Williams, 2009).

- **Culture & social norms**

Many publications discussed how communities seem to have a set of unwritten rules, norms or conventions, as well as clearer written norms. Culture and social norms are exhibited in patterns in communication and collaboration that the members of an online gaming community develop and uphold. The aforementioned militaristic culture tends to emphasize competitiveness, rules for player admission and contribution, and hierarchical structures of power (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; Ratan et al., 2010; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006a, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006). A casual culture tends to emphasize a sense of fun, closeness and equal distributions of power (M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Ratan et al., 2010; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006; J. P. Williams, 2009).

- **Used ICTs**

Many publications discussed communities' ICTs and their purposes. They discussed ICTs used for communication, i.e., direct or indirect text and direct voice chat applications. They also discussed ICTs used for knowledge management. They specifically discussed the use of forums, wikis and other applications to create, store, share and review game-specific knowledge (how-tos or walkthroughs) or organization-specific knowledge (social norms, social structure, members' contributions or the community's progress) (M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Kolo & Baur, 2004; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Ratan et al., 2010; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006a, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006).

- **Number of members**

Many publications stated the specific number of members communities have, mostly dynamically by specifying a range, noting relative differences or reviewing its development over time (C. H. Chen et al., 2008; M. G. Chen, 2009; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; Humphreys, 2005; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Ratan et al., 2010; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010; D. Williams et al., 2006).

- **Time in existence**

Many publications stated the specific or relative amount of time that communities are or have been in existence, i.e., the amount of hours, weeks, months or years, and whether it ever disbands (C. H. Chen et al., 2008; Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010; D. Williams et al., 2006; J. P. Williams, 2009).

Of the 12 other aspects and operationalizations, eight were quantifiable operationalizations, three were qualifiable aspects, and one was used both qualitatively and quantitatively. The nine quantifiable operationalizations were:

- The members' **avatar/character levels**. Publications discussing this operationalization typically stated that avatar/character levels tended to be similar within a community. In turn, online games tended to have communities with highly differing average avatar/character levels (C. H. Chen et al., 2008; Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; Voulgari & Komis, 2010).
- The members' **commitment**, also given their time spent online and the community's player turnover rate. Two publications stated that commitment tended to be higher (or at least *valued* more highly) in a larger and organized community than in a smaller and temporary group (Voulgari & Komis, 2010; J. P. Williams, 2009).
- The members' degree (number of other members played with) or **centrality** (proportion of other members played with). Two publications stated that members' centrality tended to be higher in a larger and organized community and tended to increase as their avatar/character levels increased (Ducheneaut et al., 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006).
- The members' high **interdependency** and the community's overall **heterogeneity**. Two publications discussed that community members tend to be highly interdependent, rendering the community as a whole very heterogeneous in terms of roles the members fulfill (Kobayashi, 2010; Ratan et al., 2010). In both cases the findings were interpreted positively, as both aspects tended to create trust and strong ties within the community.
- The members' **ages**. One publication stated that some communities had members of highly divergent ages, while others resorted to allowing only certain age groups (T. L. Taylor, 2006a). Another publication stated a high diversity in members' ages as well, but also found that younger players tended to play online games more often (Kolo & Baur, 2004).
- The members' **weight**, i.e., their amount of time spent within a community (group) to do a specific game mechanic. One publication stated that *World of Warcraft* players' weight increased greatly as they reached the top avatar/character level (Ducheneaut et al., 2006b).
- The members' **intensity of play**, i.e., number, period and duration of log-ins. One publication stated that *Ultima Online* players generally logged in 5.7 times per week for 3.9 hours, mostly

in the evening (Kolo & Baur, 2004). The publication also stated that players were mostly also community members and had a fixed group of playing partners no matter what their play intensity was.

- The members' level of **trust** with one another. As already indicated, one publication stated trust in a community to be high and attributed it to members' high interdependency and the community's overall heterogeneity (Ratan et al., 2010). The publication also stated that self-disclosure was important in the development of trust. Furthermore, the publication stated that trust in community members was higher than trust in other players.

Two qualifiable aspects concerned a community's **boundaries** and **identity**. Boundaries were based on clear criteria or on none whatsoever (J. P. Williams, 2009), while identity encompassed a sense of shared history (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009). Another aspect concerned the members' **spoken languages, locations and national identities**. All three are of course greatly related to each other, which is why they are discussed together. One publication argued that online games enabled members from highly diverse locations around the world to form communities together, leading to a high diversity in spoken languages and national cultures (T. L. Taylor, 2006a). However, other communities restricted members to speaking only certain languages or to name and disapprove of certain activities attributed to national identity (e.g. 'Chinese gold farmers'). A final aspect was both qualified in several publications (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006; T. L. Taylor, 2006b; D. Williams et al., 2006) and quantified in another (Kobayashi, 2010). In both cases it concerned the members' 'bonding' and 'bridging' **social capital**. Put most simply, the former concerns members' close ties, while the latter concerns members' weak ties.

The plethora of aspects and operationalizations problematizes comparisons and generalizations of all the individual findings. There is much overlap between the micro, meso and macro perspectives in terms of aspects and operationalizations. Arguably, there at least seems to be some consensus that the six most common aspects and operationalizations are relevant for studying online gaming communities, regardless of the applied perspectives. However, many other aspects and operationalizations have also been defined. All the different aspects and operationalizations make it difficult to compare and generalize findings.

3.3.3 PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS?

In spite of the difficulties in comparing and generalizing results, it is still possible to analyze whether online gaming communities have characteristics of the playful organization ideal-type. The conceptual definitions, aspects and operationalizations can be juxtaposed against the ideal-type's organizational culture and structure, as defined in Chapter 2. Still, the reviewed studies hardly offer any clear conceptual definitions of online gaming communities. In and of itself a macro, meso or micro perspective on online gaming communities does not indicate any particular degree of playful organization. The mere diversity in and applicability of multiple perspectives shows that online gaming communities organize themselves in different ways. In that sense they can already be considered playful organizations. The temporary groups and fluid networks that online gamers also form suggest that playful organization is a very relevant concept. These two types of communities alone suggest the applicability of the playful value of

equality (Section 2.4.3) as well as the playful concept of open access and exit (Section 2.5.1). However, a more specific analysis of the relation of the identified aspects and operationalizations to the ideal-type's values and concepts will prove more insightful.

I find several concepts of the playful organization ideal-type applicable to the identified **social structuring** practices of online gaming communities. Many scholars have described game- and community-specific social structuring. Game-specific social structuring concerns the definition of roles that the played game requires. The game-specific role that a player fulfills depends on the type of avatar or character the player has chosen and developed. It seems the playful concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles (Section 2.5.2) therefore fits well when it comes to an online gaming community's game-specific roles. Community-specific social structuring concerns the definition of roles to aid the community's functioning, i.e., managerial roles. Managerial roles can apparently be quite different per community. Leadership is a common managerial role, focused on instructing or advising certain 'classes' or even on high-level strategic decisionmaking (deciding on a vision to guide community efforts). Recruitment, activity assessment, reward allocation and conflict resolution are specific examples of other managerial roles, all suggesting that management involves the coordination and cultivation of other members' activities. These managerial roles indicate that coordination-and-cultivation leadership is more common than traditional command-and-control leadership. This fits the playful concept of distributed leadership (Section 2.5.3). Moreover, the differences in managerial roles per community suggest that management is again a self-defined role. This again fits the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles.

The playful value of contingency (Section 2.4.1) strongly suggests how a playfully organized community defines its **rationale**. The value renders well-defined instrumental goals irrelevant. Thus the value fits well with online gaming communities that have unclear rationales, e.g. the pursuit of friendship or opportunities for social play. Contrarily, the value fits less well with online gaming communities that pursue well-defined game-specific goals. These communities want to finish one, several or all game mechanics, often with the highest score as possible (regardless of how that score is calculated). A sense of uncertainty and eventuality is less relevant for these communities, since they know exactly what to attain and often also how to attain it (in terms of division of labor). These communities might want their existence to be short-lived in order to allow members to pursue other interests after the goals have been reached. In this case, contingency still applies to some extent. Members then show that they value a sense of contingency in their choice of communities, rather than being part of only a single community. Even so, the identified rationale types indicate that online gaming communities can but do not necessarily value contingency.

The identified **culture and social norms** indicate that online gaming communities vary in their degree of playful organization. The values equality and conviviality (Section 2.4.6) indicate that 'casual' online gaming communities emphasizing a sense of fun, closeness and equal distributions of power are particularly playful organizations. Contrarily, agility (Section 2.4.2) and equality fit less with 'militaristic' online gaming communities where rules for player admission and contribution and hierarchical structures of power prevail. The playful organization's structural concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles and distributed leadership

probably do not fit with these communities, either. Some of the other playful values might still be upheld, i.e., meritocracy (Section 2.4.5), teachability (Section 2.4.4) and conviviality. In some cases, militaristic communities therefore also apply some of the playful concepts that arise from these values, e.g. expertise hierarchy (Section 2.5.4) and boundless knowledge networking (Section 2.5.6). The two main cultures thus only provide a couple of insights into the playful organization of online gaming communities.

The three playful concepts pertaining to ICTs fit well when considering the ICTs identified by previous online gaming community studies. **ICT usage** is apparently quite different per community. The used ICTs are not categorically based on what is provided by the game, but are based on the demands of the community. This fits with the playful concept of a demand-based knowledge & communication suite (Section 2.5.5). The use of ICTs to share game-specific knowledge fits with the concept of boundless knowledge networking. Apparently online gaming communities indeed use ICTs (most notably discussion forums and wikis) to share knowledge within and beyond their communities. The resulting knowledge networks are both implicit and explicit. When consulting a website for game-specific knowledge, an online gamer might not even interact with the online gamer who created the website. Thus a knowledge network can remain implicit. Conversely, if the online gamer decides to take part in forum discussions on other online gamers' websites, the knowledge network becomes explicit. The use of ICTs to structure and store organization-specific knowledge fits with the playful concept of collaboratively developed explicit knowledge (Section 2.5.7). The concept fits particularly well if the knowledge structuration and storage process is a collaborative one, i.e., involving most if not all of the community's members. The consulted publications do not always indicate whether this is the case. Nevertheless, the use of e.g. discussion forums and wikis to create and store knowledge about the community's social structure shows that explicit knowledge is developed and stored in at least potentially a collaborative manner.

Concerning **number of members** and **time in existence** the playful organization ideal-type offers only indications but no clear answers. The concept of open access and exit renders the number of members very dynamic and hard to ascertain with certainty. This fits well with the diverging and dynamic descriptions of number of members found in several publications. When it comes to time in existence, the playful values of contingency and agility can suggest that playful organizations last very long. The spontaneity and creativity that these values initiate should allow an organization to persevere in spite of setbacks and failures. Then again, the two values also suggest that a playful organization's trials and errors might easily lead to its destruction. The structural concept of open access and exit equally suggests this uncertainty pertaining to time in existence. If online gamers are free to leave at any time, the community can easily cease to exist the moment most or all online gamers leave it. Overall, the fact that the descriptions of time in existence are highly diverse suggests contingency and thus playful organization. Other than that, these variables offer no clear indication of playful organization.

The **ages, avatar/character levels, and spoken languages and national cultures/identities** of community members are not an issue in a playfully organized online gaming community because of the concept of open access. At the same time, the concept of collaboratively developed explicit knowledge allows a playfully organized community's

members to develop and agree to such norms together. Such agreements would also not compromise the value of equality within the community itself. In fact, they can strengthen a sense of equality. A community might wish to allow only certain avatar/character levels in order to ensure that the community continues to have members of roughly equal gameplay skill level. Still, this is highly debatable. Allowing only a specific national culture/identity might create a community of equals, but it hardly makes equality an applicable general value. By defining norms for allowed ages, avatar/character levels, and spoken languages and national cultures/identities, open access is nullified.

Community members' **commitment** and **play intensity** is very high in a playfully organized online gaming community. After all, a playful organization is meant to be enjoyable because of the engaging play experiences it affords. A high commitment level and play intensity easily ensue. If commitment level and play intensity are low, the concept of open exit permits and encourages that members leave (at least temporarily). On the other hand, there is no specific value or concept that suggests that players should generally be highly committed or play intensively in a playful organization. In other words, the ideal-type's values and concepts do not indicate that a playfully organized community only consists of players who remain members forever and log in every single day for hours on end.

The ideal-type dictates that members with high levels of gaming or managerial expertise have much **social capital** and high **player centrality**, and earn much **trust** from other players. These members enjoy much social recognition because of their merits. As a result they are able to help and collaborate with many people inside and outside their community. They thus have much bridging social capital and high player centrality. The fact that some publications indicated that community members have much bridging social capital and high player centrality indicates that meritocracy is an applicable value. Members with proven expertise possibly also have acquired bonding social capital and have earned much trust. The ties to other members are close and personal, resulting from their frequent collaborations. The playful value of conviviality strengthens the relevance of bonding social capital and trust in a playful organization. Indeed, both forms of social capital are identifiable in a playfully organized community. Section 3.3.2 showed that some of the reviewed publications found online gaming community members to have both bridging and bonding social capital. These publications thus show that meritocracy and conviviality are applicable values for online gaming communities.

A playfully organized community has unclear and symbolic **boundaries** because of the concepts of open access/exit and boundless knowledge networking. A playful organization's only boundary is raised by its common **identity**, befitting the value of contingency. As already discussed, communities with clearer boundaries will deter at least one opportunity for playful organization. Clearer boundaries include the definition of access criteria (e.g. only certain ages, languages or national cultures allowed) or of well-defined goals (e.g. being the top-scoring community by finishing all game mechanics most efficiently). Such boundaries deter the playful concepts of open access and exit, free-to-choose/-develop roles or distributed leadership.

There is no particular value or concept that indicates that a playfully organized community's members are **interdependent** or that the community as a whole is

heterogeneous. Arguably, the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles stresses the individual's ability to choose and develop roles as he/she sees fit. A high level of heterogeneity does not necessarily ensue if the individual bases the choice of roles solely on his/her personal motivation. Nevertheless, Chapter 2 argued that several values force an individual to not just consider his/her personal motivation. The values of agility, equality and meritocracy incentivize individuals to consider what complementary role they can fulfill and how they might excel at it. Thus members of a playfully organized community also value their interdependence and the resulting heterogeneity of their community.

Finally, although the **time players spend grouped** is an interesting operationalization for online gaming communities, relating this aspect to the playful organization ideal-type is difficult. As a whole the playful organization ideal-type acknowledges the importance of collaborations throughout the organization. More specifically, the value of teachability and the concept of distributed leadership indicate the importance of all sorts of collaborations. In a playfully organized community players feel the need to form groups to help each other in general or to help each other fulfill their role(s). Yet the amount of time players spend grouped differ in a playfully organized community. In the end there is no value or concept that dictates that collaborations are short or long in a playful organization.

Apparently online gaming communities do not necessarily fit all of the playful organization ideal-type's values and concepts. Of course, this can be expected when considering the ideal-type as a utopian conceptualization of organization. The ideal-type is meant as a reference point to enable further research. As such it was already assumed that empirically no organization (whether in the 'virtual' or the 'real' world) would fit the ideal-type perfectly. However, it is still surprising to find that communities can be militaristic, having rules for player admission and contribution and hierarchical structures of power. Access criteria pertaining to ages, avatar/character levels and abilities, spoken languages and national cultures/identities are also somewhat surprising. Particularly militaristic communities lose some opportunities for playful organization. Communities that have a clearly defined and unchanged organizational structure and define clear goals, after which they immediately and completely disband, could perhaps better be considered bureaucratic instead of playful organizations. The playfulness of these organizations lies only in their relatively short existence. Of course, the conclusion would be completely different if these were actually sub-communities of a larger and longer-lasting community. In that case these could be thought of as simply temporary collaborations within an organization, rather than organizations in themselves.

3.4 PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Contrary to online gaming communities, conceptual definitions of contemporary professional organizations were already discussed in Brock's review of archetype theory (2006). Brock reviewed four relevant and informative archetypes of professional organization, i.e., the professional bureaucracy, professional partnership, managed professional business and global professional network.

The four archetypes have a relatively long tradition in professional organization studies. The professional bureaucracy was originally posited by Mintzberg several decades ago (1979, 1983) but remains relevant today. Mintzberg synthesized findings of many publications and used his own university (McGill University in Montreal, Canada) to conceptualize the archetype. Later, Greenwood, Hinings and Brown posited the professional partnership (1990). The authors developed the archetype through qualitative (interviews, document analysis) and quantitative (survey) research across 4 of the 'Big Eight' accounting firms that operated in Canada at the time. Originally posited by Cooper et al. as the *managerial* professional business (1996), this third archetype was first developed following qualitative research (document analysis, interviews, literature reviews) into five of the largest law and accounting firms in Canada. The global professional network is the newest archetype here discussed, originally posited by Brock et al. (1999). Publications concerning these four archetypes offer conceptual definitions, aspects and operationalizations of professional organizations that are relevant for this review.

3.4.1 CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

Professional bureaucracy

The professional bureaucracy still has a prominent place in configuration theory in general, and archetype theory specifically. The archetype was relevant, or at least a useful starting point, for several scholars (Brock, 2006; Germov, 2005; Honingh & Karsten, 2007; Lamothe & Dufour, 2007; Lega & DePietro, 2005). These scholars applied the archetype in qualitative research (interviews, ethnography, document analysis) into organizational configuration and behavioral/organizational change in Australian, Canadian and European hospitals and healthcare systems, as well as Dutch vocational education and training institutes.

The professional bureaucracy owes its name firstly to the fact that professionals are complemented by management responsible for administration. Managers form a minority group, supplemented by a large support staff of administrators (Brock, 2006; Mintzberg, 1979). They do not engage in professional practice, though they probably did in the past. Management is seen as a necessity for the professionals to be able to do their jobs. Management tasks are not directly related to professional practice but are necessary to ensure the continuity of professional practice, e.g. facility, asset and human resource management, as well as external communication (Mintzberg, 1979, pp. 358-363).

In this archetype professional practice is specialized and skills are standardized, which the term bureaucracy also connotes (Mintzberg, 1979, pp. 351-352). The organization's product/service delivery is well-defined, leading to explicitly limited professional practices. The specialization of professional practice and the standardization of skills are a form of control. The professionals still experience a high level of autonomy, since the practice itself is not standardized (Brock, 2006, p. 159). Management remains the necessary facilitator, not a determinant of professional practice. Concerning professional practice, management only needs to ensure that professionals conform to and keep up with skill standards. To ensure the professionals' high skill level, training is deemed important (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 350).

In a professional bureaucracy management defines the organization's success using an internal perspective, which is another defining characteristic of a bureaucracy. Management first defines organizational success through the quality and dependability of product/service delivery by the professionals. Management therefore evaluates the organization's performance through reviews of its professionals. These reviews primarily concern whether the professionals conform to or exceed the skill standards. To pursue the organization's success, management hardly needs to define strategy, as strategy change propositions emerge from the professionals and are minor (Mintzberg, 1979, pp. 363-364). The change that a professional bureaucracy experiences more often concerns changes in skill standards. New knowledge such as a new surgical method or procedure might introduce new skill standards and require some strategic change (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 364).

Since professional practice is not standardized and professionals operate autonomously, the extent of the bureaucracy is limited (Brock, 2006, p. 159). Brock attributes the professional autonomy to a "culture of professionalism" (Bledstein, 1978; Brock, 2006, p. 158), where the assumption is "that the professionals can be trusted to perform in the best interests of their clients and thus of the organization" (Brock, 2006, p. 159). This is supplemented by the assumption that professionals should then be relieved of any responsibility that is not directly related to their professional practice, i.e., the necessary management tasks.

Professional partnership

The professional partnership also has a prominent place in configuration and archetype theory. Since its inception the archetype has proven relevant to several scholars of organizational configuration and change (Brock, 2006; Brock, Powell & Hinings, 2007; Greenwood & Empson, 2003; Pinnington & Morris, 2002, 2003). These authors applied the archetype in their quantitative (survey) research and literature reviews into law, accounting and architecture firms in the UK and beyond.

The professional partnership owes its name to the partnership form of ownership, in which the professionals who become managers also become part-owners. Thus in a professional partnership management is seen as an addition. It is an extra responsibility for the professionals, and it is often temporary (Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 730). Professionals can become managers, though they will never give up their professional practice. Because of the partnership form of ownership, management brings shared ownership and a share of the organization's profit (Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 730). Management also brings a set of administration tasks, e.g. facility, asset and human resource management.

In this archetype professionals are again quite autonomous, but their practice is more diverse. Professional practice is only controlled through the standardization of skills (Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 732). The professionals experience a high level of autonomy, since the practice itself is not standardized. Management remains an addition to professional practice, not a determiner of it. In a professional partnership this level of autonomy is arguably higher than in a professional bureaucracy, since the professional practice is less specialized. This is because a professional partnership's products or services are customized and tailored to the needs of the clients. If the client's needs are diverse, the products or services become diverse as

well (Greenwood et al., 1990, pp. 732-733). Professional practice becomes more diverse than in a professional bureaucracy. The diversity still has its limits. The package of products and services offered should be homogeneous, i.e., the products and services should be relatable to ensure the organization's coherence (Greenwood & Empson, 2003, p. 920). For example, a professional partnership could offer a full range of legal services, including all types of court cases and legal disputes.

Since the professional partnership focuses its attention on the clients' needs, management defines the organization's success using an external perspective. Management considers whether the market is served. To do this professionals are reviewed and involved in strategic decisionmaking (Brock, 2006, p. 160). Because of its market perspective, management reviews performance of its professionals by examining the professionals' ability to serve clients (a qualitative review) and to generally bring in capital (a quantitative review; Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 736). Although consultation is much more extensive than in a professional bureaucracy, strategic change is still limited. Again, change first entails a change in skill standard through the training of professionals. Yet change still occurs more often than in a professional bureaucracy, as clients' diverse needs lead professional practice to expand into more areas.

A sense of collegiality is an important element of a professional partnership's culture. Collegiality is deemed important, as it ensures quality in professional practice and leads to high employee motivation (Greenwood & Empson, 2003). In this respect the organizational culture resembles the professional bureaucracy. Both share a culture of professionalism "where power rests in the hands of professional experts" and "managers administer the facilities and support the professionals" (Brock, 2006, p. 160).

Managed professional business

Since its inception, several authors have provided further evidence of the emergence of the managed professional business archetype, or at least many of its structural characteristics and values. The research has been qualitative (ethnography, interviews, document analysis) and has to date concerned three global accounting firms (or business advisory firms) in Canada, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as several law firms in the USA and UK (Brock et al., 1999, p. 219; Flood, 1999; Rose & Hinings, 1999). Hinings, Greenwood & Cooper argued that "all of the Big Five [the five largest accounting firms in the world at the time] are to a greater or lesser degree moving towards this ... archetype" (Hinings, Greenwood & Cooper, 1999, p. 152). Pinnington & Morris, scholars of organizational configuration and change, did extensive quantitative (survey) research into law and architecture firms in the United Kingdom. They concluded that there was at least some evidence (though limited) of the emergence of the managed professional business archetype in those contexts (Morris & Pinnington, 1999; Pinnington & Morris, 2002, 2003).

The use of the word 'business' to conceptualize this archetype stems from the importance given to making a profit efficiently. For professional organizations, making a profit has not always been relevant, as many are publicly owned in one way or another. With privatization and an increased popularity of market mechanisms, identifiable in e.g. New Public Management theory (Dent, Howorth, Mueller & Preuschoft, 2004; Hood, 1995), a public professional organization can also start to look and behave like a business.

Some argue that a managed professional business has relatively more managers and administrators than a professional partnership or professional bureaucracy (Ackroyd & Muzio, 2007, p. 734; Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 92). Moreover, in a managed professional business management has professionalized itself (Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 87). Managers are recruited externally instead of internally (contrary to the professional bureaucracy and partnership archetypes). Professionals and managers are two distinct entities, and management forms the foundation of the organization.

In a managed professional business, professional practice can become heterogeneous and is standardized. The organization's existence does not depend on the demand for its current products or services. Instead, it depends on which products and services the clients demand. This means that managers expand the organization into new products and services, leading to an overall high diversity or heterogeneity in professional practice (Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 87). Unlike in the previous two archetypes, professional practice is standardized to ensure its efficiency. Professionals are deemed to be 'heteronomous' (Brock, 2006, p. 163) rather than autonomous.

The key responsibility of management is to ensure professional performance and a high degree of efficiency. Management formulates financial, operating, legal and marketing controls (Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 87). For this reason these organizations centralize decisionmaking. Managers thus consult professionals less than in a professional partnership. They directly affect and determine professional practice (Brock, 2006, p. 163; D. J. Cooper et al., 1996, p. 633). Subsequently, standardized performance and productivity assessment is an important instrument to determine a professional's worth to the organization (Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 87).

The term 'managed' in this archetype's name refers to an organizational culture that favors managerialism over professionalism. A culture of managerialism pervades this archetype, where management has been professionalized in itself and forms the foundation of the organization. The power relation between managers and professionals is different in a culture of managerialism. In such a culture professional practice is no longer the basis of the organization to which management caters. Managerial practice is the basis and concerns running an efficient and profitable organization.

Global professional network

Since its inception the global professional network has been acknowledged in multiple publications. It fits popular theories that stress the emergence and importance of networks in contemporary society (e.g. Castells, 1996). Publications acknowledging the archetype followed both qualitative (interviews, document analysis, literature reviews) and quantitative (data gathering) research into many law and accounting firms in the UK, USA and beyond (Beaverstock, Muzio, Taylor & Faulconbridge, 2008; Brock, 2006; Brock & Powell, 2005; Brock et al., 2007; Segal-Horn & Dean, 2009).

The use of the word 'network' denotes the importance management gives to developing networks of organizations to guarantee product/service delivery and innovation. The concept of

'global' is of course used to denote the transnational reach of these organizations. Management is therefore seen as the network creator and innovation enabler (Brock, 2006, pp. 164-165). As in a managed professional business, management is a substantial group of employees who do not engage with professional practice but again have professionalized management itself. Professionals generally do not become the managers, nor vice versa. Managers are instead recruited externally (Brock et al., 2007).

Managers are responsible for building networks and for professional performance with a high degree of efficiency. The performance of professionals is mainly assessed through the capital brought in and clients serviced. Furthermore, reward systems are introduced to incentivize professionals (Brock, 2006, p. 165). Like in a managed professional business, a global professional network centralizes strategic decisionmaking. Management is seen as being responsible for enabling necessary professional practice in networks of organizations, as well as for the continued growth of capital (Brock, 2006, p. 165). It therefore defines the strategy with little consultation of the professionals. Strategic change can occur relatively often.

Still, professionals are more autonomous than in a managed professional business, as their practice is very multidisciplinary (Brock, 2006, p. 164; Brock & Powell, 2005, p. 452). Product/service delivery is not statically defined, but subject to frequent change. Continued product/service innovation is key to this archetype, not only to offer clients all the services they might need, but to secure capital as well (Brock & Powell, 2005, p. 452). Management therefore determines professional practice to a lesser extent, even though it is a separate entity and has tasks similar to those of the managed professional business. The importance of global networking and innovation thus puts pressure on the emergence of a culture of managerialism. A value for professionalism is identifiable, specifically by acknowledging the importance of not overspecializing or overly controlling professional practice (Brock, 2006, p. 166). As a result, managerialism and professionalism form a tenuous relationship.

3.4.2 ASPECTS & OPERATIONALIZATIONS

As the above definitions and characterizations suggest, archetype theorists have been interested in researching a number of common aspects and operationalizations of organization. The following nine aspects and operationalizations are relevant to most of the four archetypes:

- **Form of ownership**

Ownership form is often linked to organizational configuration and is therefore deemed an important aspect (Greenwood et al., 1990, pp. 730-731). Mintzberg did not consider a certain form of ownership a condition for the professional bureaucracy, yet the organizations he used as examples – “universities, general hospitals, school systems, public accounting firms, social work agencies, and craft production firms” (Mintzberg, 1979, pp. 348-349) – suggest that public ownership is a favorable condition for the emergence of a professional bureaucracy. Some theorists suggest that the increased popularity of private forms of ownership can deter a culture of professionalism in their attempt to, for instance, “improve management performance” (Brock, 2006, p. 161).

- **Locale and scale**

Geographic location and the number of employees have also been linked to organizational

configuration. Both the professional bureaucracy and professional partnership can be large, even transnational, yet they are locally oriented (Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 733; Mintzberg, 1979, p. 366). The emergence of the managed professional business and global professional network archetypes has been attributed to the growth and globalization of many professional organizations, which is in turn attributed to increased competition (Brock, 2006, p. 162; D. J. Cooper et al., 1996, p. 634).

- **Management identity and responsibilities**

Another influential aspect of organizational configurations is who the managers are and what their responsibilities are. In the professional bureaucracy the managers are former professionals (Mintzberg, 1979, pp. 358-363), while in the professional partnership they are still professionals (Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 730). In both archetypes the managers are responsible for mostly administrative tasks. Contrarily, in the managed professional business and the global professional network managers are externally recruited and can control professional practice more directly (D. J. Cooper et al., 1996, p. 631; Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 87).

- **Manager/professional ratio**

Many archetype theorists also deem the ratio of managers to professionals influential, although they do not provide exact numbers. In a professional bureaucracy or partnership, the ratio is rather low. Only a limited number of managers are needed. In the managed professional business and global professional network the ratio is higher (Ackroyd & Muzio, 2007, p. 734; Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 92).

- **Strategic decisionmaking process**

The strategic decisionmaking process, specifically how extensively the professionals are consulted during the process, is another important aspect. A change in a professional bureaucracy's strategy is not initiated by the manager, but 'seeps in' through the professionals (Mintzberg, 1979, pp. 363-364). Thus, in a sense, the amount of consultation in strategic change is quite extensive. In the professional partnership the process is initiated by management and consultation is subsequently more extensive (Brock, 2006, p. 160; Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 736). In managed professional business and global professional network archetypes the process occurs more often and involves less consultation (D. J. Cooper et al., 1996, p. 632).

- **Diversity in professionals' practices**

Concerning the professionals, one important aspect is how diverse the practices of each professional are. In a professional bureaucracy, this diversity is very limited. Professionals perform only a small number of practices (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 352). In a professional partnership the diversity increases and depends on the professional (Greenwood et al., 1990, pp. 732-733). In a managed professional business diversity is again limited (D. J. Cooper et al., 1996, p. 633). Overall, the diversity seems to be highest in the global professional network (Brock, 2006, p. 164; Brock & Powell, 2005, p. 452).

- **Standardization of professional practice**

The standardization of professional practice is also an aspect that archetype theorists deem relevant. In the professional bureaucracy, professional partnership and global professional

network professional practice is not standardized. Here only the professionals' skills are standardized. In the managed professional business, however, it is standardized.

- **Performance assessment**

How performance is assessed is a less prevalent aspect, yet still identifiable. In the professional bureaucracy and partnership, archetypes performance assessment is simple and not extensive (Greenwood et al., 1990, p. 736). Since professional practice is not standardized, there is only a need for assessing outcomes (e.g. quality of products/services provided, amount of income generated or number of clients served). In a managed professional business, where professional practice is standardized, performance assessment is much more extensive and focuses on the professional's efficiency (Pinnington & Morris, 2003, p. 87).

- **Interpretive scheme (organizational culture)**

This is perhaps the most important aspect of all. Essentially it is an aspect that is determined by an answer to the question of whether the professionals or the managers are considered the most important actor within the organization. In the professional bureaucracy and partnership archetypes, the professional is the most important actor, while management is deemed more important in a managed professional business. In a global professional network the question remains unanswered.

Compared to the reviewed studies of online gaming communities there is much less diversity in aspects and operationalizations of professional organizations. This is of course totally understandable. Professional organizations have been studied for decades, while online gaming communities have been studied for just over a single decade. Moreover, online gaming communities have hardly been studied as organizations. They have mostly been studied in a very exploratory manner, befitting a humanities approach to empirical research common to the field. Professional organization studies is a relatively more established research field, dominated by social-scientific approaches to empirical research. As a result the level of depth is lower, but comparisons and generalizations are easier. This also makes the juxtaposition of each archetype against the playful organization ideal-types easier.

3.4.3 PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS?

The conceptual definitions and characterizations already show that the professional bureaucracy, professional partnership and global professional network archetypes are more playful than the managed professional business. Professional autonomy is emphasized in the characterizations of the professional bureaucracy and the professional partnership. The higher level of autonomy in these two archetypes renders the playful values of agility and equality very relevant. The global professional network also connects rather well to the ideal-type, but for a different reason. In this archetype professional autonomy is discussed but not emphasized. A sense of agility is nevertheless relevant for this type of organization. In this case the agility is most evident at the managerial level, because management actively looks for opportunities to set up new organizational networks. This approach to agility also renders the playful concept of open access and exit relevant. After all, in the global professional network employees are able to collaborate with people from different organizations more easily. The managed professional business connects less to the playful organization ideal-type. This is because of this archetype's

emphasis on the power of management rather than professional autonomy. The characterizations suggest that contingency, agility and equality are values that are particularly hard to find in this archetype. Still, a specific analysis of how the identified aspects and operationalizations relate to the playful organization ideal-type's values and concepts will prove more insightful.

A professional organization's **form of ownership** is an apparently important aspect to archetype theorists. Chapter 2 conceptualized values and concepts of a playful organization in which the accompanying ownership system was simply irrelevant. A professional organization that deems playfulness important can theoretically encompass the structural and cultural concepts of Chapter 2 regardless of whether it is e.g. publicly or privately owned. However, as explained earlier, the introduction of private ownership or market mechanisms can render an organization a managed professional business. If this is true, then private ownership tends to limit some opportunities for playful organization. The concepts of free-to-choose/-develop roles or distributed leadership are in that case particularly inapplicable, primarily because the values of contingency, agility and equality are hardly relevant.

Several characteristics of the playful organization indicate on what **locale and scale** it would operate. The general idea of the playful organization is that it operates transnationally using whatever ICTs employees deem necessary. The concept of open access and exit strengthens such transnational operations. The concept also suggests that the playful organization's number of employees fluctuates widely. Both transnational operations and a highly fluctuating number of employees are consistent with the global professional network archetype. The managed professional business also operates transnationally, though presumably not as extensively as a global professional network. Both professional partnerships and bureaucracies are known to operate locally, although they might be part of a larger transnational organization. In doing so these two archetypes arguably lose an opportunity for playful organization.

Furthermore, several characteristics of the playful organization ideal-type indicate **who its managers are and what their responsibilities are**, as well as **how diverse professional practice is** and **how professional practice is standardized**. Managers of a playful professional organization are esteemed professionals with additional coordination tasks (e.g. human resources, asset and facility management) because of the concepts of expertise hierarchy and distributed leadership. Professional practice is very diverse and principally unstandardized because of the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles. Management decides to only define and standardize the basic skills a professional should have when joining the organization, e.g. specific surgery skills in the case of a hospital. The standardized skills take the organization's playfulness into account through e.g. a leadership training that focuses on coordination and cultivation, or a training in all the available ICTs. The idea of having professionals as managers with coordination tasks, together with professional practice being unstandardized, is most consistent with the professional partnership archetype. It is again the least consistent with the managed professional business archetype.

The ideal-type's values and concepts also indicate what its **manager/professional ratio** is, **how much consultation there is** in strategic decisionmaking and **how performance is measured**. The manager/professional ratio is relatively low in a playful professional organization. This is because management has limited power. Since leadership is distributed, management's main goal is to coordinate and cultivate the organization's activities, rather than command and control them. The values of contingency and agility indicate that a playful professional organization has relatively few instances of strategic decisionmaking, simply because it does not require a well-defined strategy. If there were a need for strategic decisionmaking, then a playful professional organization tries to involve most employees (because of equality) but tries to keep the process short and simple (because of contingency and agility). ICTs help achieve this in even a large professional organization. A playful professional organization can also develop systems to measure employees' performance. However, it cannot measure task efficiency, because tasks are unstandardized. Thus a playful professional organization will only want to measure a professional's activity (qualitatively and quantitatively) in order to determine his/her social status. This way the value of meritocracy is upheld and a subsequent expertise hierarchy is instigated. A low manager/professional ratio, extensive consultation in strategic decisionmaking, and performance assessment that focuses on the professional's efforts are most consistent with the professional partnership archetype. They are again the least consistent with the managed professional business archetype.

Finally, as already explained, in terms of **interpretive schemes** the culture of professionalism connects better to the playful organization ideal-type than the culture of managerialism. As such, the ideal-type fits well with the professional bureaucracy and professional partnership archetypes. The ideal-type points towards professionalism, i.e., a culture in which professionals have autonomy and management is seen as a necessity or an addition instead of the foundation of the entire organization. In particular the value of agility points towards it, as explained in Section 2.4.2. In a culture of managerialism there is limited room for contingency, agility and equality. There is still room for meritocracy, teachability and conviviality. The archetypes offer no clear indications as to whether these playful values are relevant in a managerialistic professional organization such as the managed professional business. Then again, this particular archetype also stresses that managers are not the organization's own professionals (current or former). Therefore the value of meritocracy does not apply as well. At least the professionals' merits cannot be rewarded with additional managerial opportunities in this case.

The review has shown that the professional partnership archetype is best relatable to the playful organization ideal-type. Contrarily, the managed professional business archetype is the least relatable to the playful organization ideal-type. It is reasonable to assume that there are professional organizations that already have many characteristics of a playful organization, and there are professional organizations that hardly seem playful. However, some of the aspects and operationalizations again indicate no level of playful organization at all or could be interpreted in different ways. Moreover, some of the ideal-type's concepts did not arise from archetype theory's main aspects and operationalizations, most notably the three concepts pertaining to the use of ICTs.

3.5 CONCLUSION

3.5.1 REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

As a first step towards ascertaining the existence of playfully organized online gaming communities and playful professional organizations, previous empirical studies were reviewed. A review of online gaming community publications was conducted, and a recent review article about professional organization archetypes was analyzed. In both instances conceptual definitions, characterizations, aspects and operationalizations were juxtaposed against the ideal-type developed in Chapter 2 to ascertain whether they indicated playful organization. The reviews led to the identification of several examples of playful organization, both in the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. Table 3.2 summarizes these examples by relating each of them to one specific value or concept of the playful organization ideal-type.

The analysis showed that some conceptualizations, operationalizations and aspects of online gaming communities oppose the playful organization ideal-type. Scholars have used many different and often undefined concepts to describe the online gaming communities they researched. The concepts revealed micro (group, team), meso (guild, organization) and macro (community, network) perspectives on online gaming communities. The scholars also described many different aspects and operationalizations. The high diversity in concepts, aspects and operationalizations rendered it problematic to generalize the results. The mere diversity nonetheless reveals the high level of playful organization among online gaming communities. More specifically, the playful concepts of free-to-choose/-develop roles and distributed leadership are applicable to the identified game-specific and community-specific social structuring practices. Still some aspects and operationalizations opposed the ideal-type quite clearly. The most pertinent example is the identified militaristic culture. The playful values of agility and equality fit poorly with militaristic online gaming communities in which rules for player admission and contribution and hierarchical structures of power prevail. Online gaming communities are usually, but not always, highly playful organizations.

The analysis also showed that one conceptualization and several aspects of professional organizations oppose the playful organization ideal-type. Brock discussed four quite extensively researched archetypes of professional organization: the professional bureaucracy, professional partnership, managed professional business and global professional network. Archetype theorists have described all these archetypes using practically the same aspects and operationalizations. The professional partnership archetype was best relatable to the playful organization ideal-type. The managed professional business archetype was the least relatable. Overall, many professional organizations have characteristics of a playful organization. Yet professional organizations limit opportunities for playful organization as well.

The conclusions problematize the phenomenon-ideologizing frame and its research agenda presented in Chapter 1. It seems that a play context such as an online game does not necessarily lead organizations to become highly playful. Moreover, although society is arguably in an age of play, this does not necessarily lead to more playful professional organizations. These

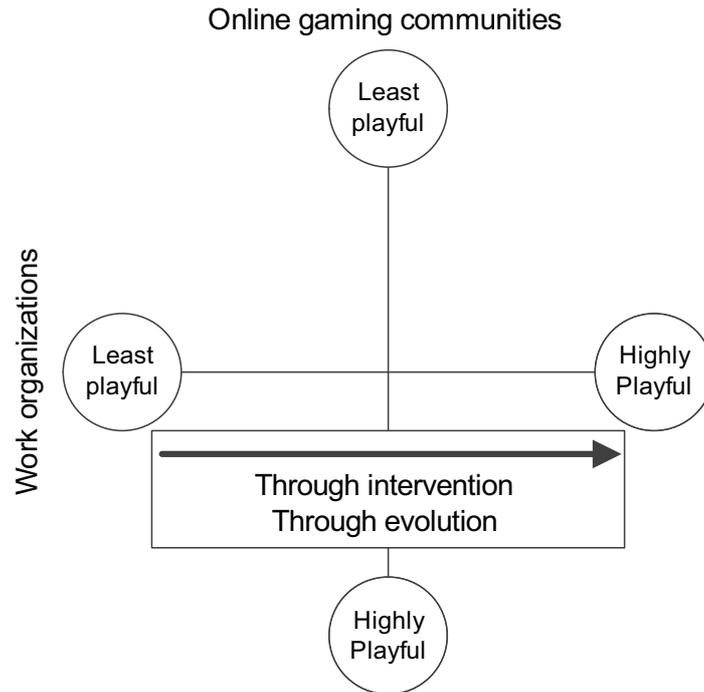


Figure 3.1. The working hypothesis further amended following the results of this chapter.

conclusions problematize the working hypothesis that work organizations are becoming playful, like online gaming communities already are.

The working hypothesis thus needs further amendment. Chapter 1 first introduced the working hypothesis that ‘real-life’ organizations are becoming more playful, like online gaming communities already are. Figure 1.3 visualized this initial working hypothesis. Subsequently, Figure 2.1 amended it. The development of the playful organization ideal-type allowed me to visualize the initial working hypothesis more specifically. In turn this figure now requires amendment to acknowledge that online gaming communities are not necessarily playful organizations. Figure 3.1 depicts this amendment. It shows an additional y-axis, depicting the realization that online gaming communities can also differ in their extent of playful organization.

3.5.2 DISCUSSION

The chosen approach raises questions about publication selection and analysis procedures, and the subsequent results raise questions about validity and relevance. These questions are discussed in this section.

Concerning online gaming communities, the publication selection strategy led to the exclusion of several potentially relevant publications. At least four arguably relevant conference papers (Ducheneaut and Moore 2004; Ducheneaut et al. 2006a; Seay et al. 2004; Tosca 2002) and presumably some Ph.D. theses were excluded. Being a young field of research, many insightful publications have been written on the subject other than those selected. Many discussions about social dynamics in online games also take place in popular media, i.e., wikis

The playful organization ideal-type	Examples from the reviewed empirical studies, with reference to the section numbers concerned
<i>Contingency</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities as small groups/teams, larger guilds/clans/organizations and largest networks/communities.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities without a clear rationale or boundary, e.g. simply pursuing opportunities for social play.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gamers choosing to form communities that disband quickly after reaching a well-defined game-specific goal.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities with highly diverse times of existence.</p>
<i>Agility</i>	<p>3.4.3: Professional organizations dominated by a culture of professionalism, i.e., where professionals enjoy much autonomy.</p> <p>See also <i>Free-to-choose/-develop roles</i>.</p>
<i>Equality</i>	<p>3.3.3: 'Casual' online gaming communities emphasizing equal distributions of power.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities that only allow players with avatars/characters of a certain level to ensure equal skill levels.</p> <p>3.4.3: Professional organizations that consult employees extensively in their strategic decisionmaking process.</p>
<i>Teachability</i>	<p>3.4.3: Professional organizations in which training is important to standardize and maintain the professionals' skills.</p> <p>See also <i>Boundless knowledge networking</i>.</p>
<i>Meritocracy</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gamers recognized for their merits with much 'bridging' social capital and high centrality in their communities.</p> <p>3.4.3: Professional organizations focusing performance assessment on professionals' efforts to determine their status.</p>
<i>Conviviality</i>	<p>3.3.3: 'Casual' online gaming communities emphasizing a sense of fun and closeness.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities with much 'bonding' social capital and trust, i.e., close ties between members.</p>
<i>Open access and exit</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities that do not uphold access criteria, e.g. certain ages or national cultures/identities.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities with highly diverse and dynamic numbers of members.</p> <p>3.4.3: Professional organizations operating transnationally with highly dynamic numbers of employees.</p>
<i>Free-to-choose & free-to-develop roles</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gamers choosing and developing game-specific roles (e.g. 'healers', 'tanks') and applying them in their communities.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gamers choosing and developing different management roles in their communities.</p> <p>3.4.3: Professional organizations where professional practice is unstandardized – only professional skills are standardized.</p>
<i>Distributed leadership</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gamers managing their communities through coordination and cultivation only, e.g. activity assessment, reward allocation, conflict resolution.</p> <p>3.3.3: Online gamers helping and collaborating with others inside/outside their community because of their proven expertise.</p> <p>3.4.3: Professional organizations where managers only do coordination tasks, e.g. human resource, asset & facility management.</p> <p>3.4.3: Professional organizations with a low manager/professional ratio, because professionals enjoy much autonomy anyway.</p>
<i>Expertise hierarchy</i>	<p>3.4.3: Professional organizations where managers are esteemed professionals with additional management tasks.</p> <p>See also <i>Meritocracy</i>.</p>
<i>Demand-based knowledge & communication suite</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gaming communities that use different ICTs for communication and knowledge management purposes.</p>
<i>Boundless knowledge networking</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gamers that use ICTs (chat, forums, wikis) to share game-specific knowledge within and beyond their communities.</p>
<i>Collaboratively developed explicit knowledge</i>	<p>3.3.3: Online gamers that use ICTs (forums, wikis) to structure and store organization-specific knowledge, i.e., concerning social norms and social structuring.</p>

Table 3.2. Examples of playful organization from previous empirical studies related to the developed playful organization ideal-type.

(e.g. WoWWiki.com), blogs (e.g. Terranova.blogs.com) and news/fan sites (e.g. Gamasutra.com). Overall, much potentially relevant material has been excluded. The problem is that conference papers and online articles are not always published publicly or indefinitely. Moreover, the research quality of such publications is not always clear. A preference for a systematic review of relevant scientific research prohibited the inclusion of these publication types. Nevertheless, others might have chosen to include these and other additional publication types to extend the review.

The publication selection strategy also led to the exclusion of many other potentially relevant publications. For instance, Mintzberg's influential work on other organizational configurations – 'machine bureaucracy', 'divisional structure' and 'adhocracy' (1979, 1983) – was excluded. Other research into configurations of professional organizations was also excluded, including research into the 'star' (Brock, 2006; Brock et al., 2007), 'diversified professional federation' (Lamothe & Dufour, 2007), 'reconstructed professional firm' (Ackroyd & Muzio, 2007) or the more specific 'public hospital corporation' (Dent et al., 2004). Again, a preference for a systematic review of relevant scientific research prohibited the inclusion of these works. The above alternative configuration theories have as yet limited empirical evidence, do not apply the structural *and* cultural perspectives of archetype theory, or are arguably no longer current. These selection criteria are indeed much stricter than those applied to online gaming community studies. This is because the field of organizational studies is much older and further developed. The field's older age not only allows for stricter selection criteria, it also obligates it. The field is simply too large to include all relevant configuration theories in the review.

The subsequent analysis also had its limits. Juxtaposing the identified conceptual definitions, characterizations, aspects and operationalizations against the ideal-type proved fruitful. However, the juxtaposition is arguably also problematic. It required interpretations that can be disputed, no matter how carefully they were made. Some aspects and operationalizations also indicated no level of playful organization, and some of the playful organization ideal-type's characteristics were not identified. Ideally the exact same aspects and operationalizations would have been compared, requiring no interpretation whatsoever. Yet since the playful organization ideal-type is new, such a comparison was simply impossible.

The analysis of online gaming community studies was also different in nature than that of professional organization archetype studies. Researchers of online gaming communities have not aggregated their results to form a theory of types and archetypes like researchers of professional organizations have. From the review it became clear that there is limited incentive for developing a typology of online gaming communities. This is different from archetype theory, and configurational research in general, which is fraught with typologies. The difference also rendered the analyses of the two fields different. In the case of online gaming communities the analysis had to focus almost solely on whether the individual aspects and operationalizations indicated playful organization. In the case of professional organizations the analysis focused more on whether the archetypes in their entirety indicated playful organization. The difference in analysis also renders the conclusions different, at least in terms of how they can be

understood. A focus on the individual aspects and operationalizations makes it easier to conclude that online gaming communities are often to some extent playfully organized.

The reviews' issues suggest that the conclusions are intriguing, but have as yet limited validity and require further research. If online gaming communities and professional organizations cannot always be considered playful organizations, the relationship between the two is more complex than assumed in Chapter 1. Still, the discussed reviews' issues problematize the validity of these conclusions. There is therefore a need for more empirical research that uses the playful organization ideal-type as a framework for gathering and analyzing data. Only then can the research agenda presented in Chapter 1 be pursued and the main research question be answered.

3.5.3 ONWARD

Although the literature review has been insightful, it is high time the playful organization ideal-type was applied in empirical research. By studying both online gaming communities and professional organizations using the ideal-type developed in Chapter 2, its relevance can be demonstrated further. Moreover, through empirical research the factors that influence the development of playful organizations can be ascertained to explain the existence of different degrees of playful organization. The next chapter discusses the empirical research strategy that was developed to accomplish these goals.

CHAPTER 4

NEW STUDIES DESIGNED:

CAN PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS BE EMERGING?

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Empirical research needs to focus on understanding and explaining the occurrence of playful organization in the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. Evidently from the review conducted in Chapter 3, the emergence of the playful organizational culture discussed in Chapter 2 can have great consequences for work organizations, both public and private. Fundamental change occurs when, for example, a managed professional business becomes more playful as a result of specific playful interventions such as those discussed in Chapter 1. Online gaming communities can have great consequences if they are playfully organized and members start to value this type of organization beyond the context of online gaming. Like any type of organization, a playful organization introduces both opportunities and threats. The playful values of contingency and agility can render an organization creative as well as risky. Chapter 3 showed that although not much is known about the organizational aspects of online gaming, many playful organizations seem to be emerging. The chapter also showed that professional organization archetypes can be considered playful in different ways and to differing extents. Nevertheless, not much is known about the nature and extent of playful organization in either the 'virtual' or the 'real' world. This is simply because the playful organization is a new concept that has never been used in empirical research.

The empirical research needs to be both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The first goal is to offer an understanding of how online gaming communities develop as organizations, both playful and otherwise. This is a qualitative research goal because it emphasizes understanding a phenomenon in all its diversity. However, my subtle-realistic approach to playful organization (see Chapter 1) leads me to also pursue quantitative research. The second goal is to generally ascertain, explain and compare the extent of playful organization in online gamers' communities and work organizations. This is a quantitative research goal because it emphasizes formulating general conclusions about a specific dimension of a phenomenon (the extent of playful organization).

The question remains as to how the qualitative and quantitative research goals can be pursued. Since the playful organization ideal-type is a new theory, it is also a new topic of empirical research. Chapter 3 showed that the diversity of methodologies for researching online gaming communities has been somewhat limited. It showed that ethnography has by far been the most popular methodology for researching online gaming communities. Concerning work organizations, the chapter offered some suggestions for quantitative research, e.g. sending questionnaires to leaders of organizations in several branches (e.g. law and accounting). The goals of the research reviewed in Chapter 3 were nonetheless quite different from my own.

Previous research methods cannot simply be reapplied for the pursuit of the proposed research goals.

This chapter therefore discusses the approach that was developed to pursue the aforementioned qualitative and quantitative research goals. A playful stance towards designing and executing empirical research appears throughout the chapter. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 respectively discuss how the qualitative and quantitative research goals were pursued. These sections describe the research design and implementation. Section 4.4 discusses several issues of the research design and implementation.

4.2 THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

4.2.1 THE CHOICE FOR VIRTUAL-ORGANIZATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The first goal of my empirical research was to offer an understanding of how online gaming communities can develop as organizations, and as playful organizations in particular. The research reviewed in Chapter 3 provided only limited insight into the organizational aspects of online gaming. More specifically, previous research provided only limited insights into online gaming communities as playful organizations.

This first goal suggests qualitative research. It suggests that online gaming communities' organizational characteristics should be uncovered. Qualitative data (e.g. ideas, stories and experiences) can arguably accomplish this better than quantitative data can (Creswell, 2003, pp. 181-182). The question remains as to what qualitative data can be gathered, where it can be obtained, and how it can be gathered and analyzed.

Methodical alternatives

For qualitative research the playful organization ideal-type can directly be used as a framework for gathering and analyzing data. The cultural, management-sociological and socio-technical perspectives on organization already pinpoint what ideas, stories or experiences can be gathered and analyzed. The values and concepts of the ideal-type can be used as a lens for gathering and analyzing qualitative data.

Methodical alternatives emerge when considering from which online gamers and their communities the qualitative data can be gathered. The data can be gathered from players of one or multiple online games, due to their being members of a single or several communities. The research goal does not necessarily dictate that the data concern a wide spread of online gaming and communities. The goal does not suggest such a quantitative criterion. Nevertheless, there are many different online games and online gaming communities to choose from.

More methodical alternatives emerge when considering applicable qualitative data gathering techniques, such as interviewing, group discussions and ethnography. In interviews a researcher has the opportunity to ask open or structured questions to an online gaming community member. The researcher could also pursue 'narrative inquiry' and ask the interviewee for stories of organizational experiences in online gaming (Boje, 2001). In group

Questions	Methodical alternatives
What data?	Qualitative data (ideas, stories, experiences) pertaining to organization, most notably the playful organization ideal-type.
From whom or what?	Players of one or more online games within one or more communities.
How gathered?	Through e.g. interviewing, group discussions, ethnography.
What analysis?	Qualitative analysis using the playful organization ideal-type as a framework.

Table 4.1. Methodical alternatives befitting the proposed qualitative research.

discussions the researcher has the opportunity to direct questions toward a group of discussants. Using such a technique is particularly useful if the researcher seeks diverse ideas and group consensus (Krueger, 1994). Ethnography allows the researcher to become directly involved for an extended period of time with those researched (O'Reilly, 2005). The direct involvement is mostly referred to as participant observation, i.e., a combination of being the researched (participation) and a researcher (observation; Adler & Adler, 1998, pp. 84-85). Table 4.1 summarizes the aforementioned methodical alternatives. It specifically summarizes alternatives for defining the nature of the qualitative data, the data's point of origin, and its gathering and analysis techniques.

The methodical alternatives reveal a practical advantage of ethnography and trigger a discussion about the selection of online games. Interviewing, group discussions and ethnography all allow researchers to develop a rich understanding of online gameplay, the process of joining an online gaming community and the organizational characteristics of such a community. However, developing a rich understanding is harder when the researcher does not involve him-/herself with online gaming. Regardless of method, the question remains as to which online games and online gaming communities the study should focus on. There is a practical argument to selecting a popular online game and its communities, such as *World of Warcraft*. Developing an understanding of the organizational aspect of a popular online game has the benefit of being potentially applicable to a larger group of people. Then again, an unpopular online game might offer much newer – and in that sense intriguing – insights.

The comparison also reveals one important theoretical difference between ethnography and the other data gathering methods. The choice for ethnography requires the researcher to appreciate a more interpretivistic epistemology. Through ethnography researchers become a part of the field they are researching. They can and often will have an influence on the field as a result (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 222-224). This can be viewed as an asset rather than a problem, as long as the researcher chooses to value insight seeking over the pursuit of 'true' knowledge (Pondy & Boje, 1981).

Choosing an ethnographic approach

An ethnographic approach was chosen for three main reasons, each befitting a playful approach towards the design of an empirical research strategy:

1. Ethnography fits my scientific assumptions. As explained in Chapter 1, the phenomenon-ideologizing frame for understanding gaming's impact on organizations formed the foundation of this thesis. Underlying this frame is an ideological understanding of the objective of gaming. As a socio-cultural phenomenon, people can value gaming experiences throughout daily life. This frame does not view gaming as having a unilateral effect on people. The frame also does not aim to make gaming research uncover such a unilateral effect. As such the frame fits well with ethnographic methodology, or at least one subset of it. In this more 'interpretivistic' subset of ethnography insights rather than 'true' knowledge are sought, because the ethnographer wishes to understand a culture on its own terms (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 47-54).
2. Once chosen, ethnography calls for playfulness quite specifically. The methods of ethnographic research depend on the site being researched (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 32). Each context will allow and compel the researcher to apply specific data gathering techniques. Ethnographic research thus allows a researcher to experiment, to play. Ethnography's playfulness is important since the research subject and goal are so new.
3. Extensive interaction with the researched appealed to me personally. I was intrinsically motivated to develop insights into organizational characteristics of online gaming communities as a gamer with other fellow gamers. I was therefore also intrinsically motivated to develop ethnographic research skills.

The choice for ethnography introduced a number of characteristics to the research design. Ethnographic research takes place in a specifically chosen site. The research first involves direct interaction with the people within the chosen site. The researcher acknowledges his/her own role within the site critically and draws from different data depending on the site's characteristics (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 1-4). The data is analyzed mainly qualitatively, i.e., the analysis will often not involve any statistics. After all, the goal is to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Often the researcher will want to develop the understanding collaboratively, or at least check the developed understanding with the researched (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 181).

The choice of site is not an easy one and again requires a playful stance. As became clear from Chapter 1, there are hundreds of online games in which organization takes place. The review discussed in Chapter 3 showed that *World of Warcraft* was by far the most researched online game. *World of Warcraft* could therefore be chosen solely for the purpose of building upon previous work. However, choosing *World of Warcraft* solely for this reason is problematic. It would be a mistake to focus empirical research into the genre solely on this specific game. The diversity in online games is huge, the online gaming market is very dynamic, and online gaming research is still in its infancy. Although *World of Warcraft* is still the market leader in massively multiplayer online roleplaying games (at least according to some statistics), it would be more interesting to focus the ethnographic research on another, less-researched online game. This conclusion renders it difficult to rationally argue for the choice of online game. There are still hundreds of online games that have hardly been researched. With still hundreds of online games to choose from, the choice cannot be approached systematically and rigorously. A playful approach is more appropriate. The playful approach to online game selection led me to choose a

game not only on the basis of its suitability, but also on the basis of whether I was personally motivated to invest highly in it in terms of gameplay and research.

I started playing *EVE Online* in August and September 2007. At the time I was interested in trying out a new online game, having played *World of Warcraft* irregularly over a period of one and a half years. *EVE* attracted me, as it was positioned as a unique and open online game in a science fiction theme (CCP Games, 2012). My first year of playing *EVE* was not very intensive. I spent an average of one to two hours per week getting to know the huge universe, the lore behind it, the user interfaces that make it and the main game mechanics that fill it. I enjoyed the first impressions I got and therefore considered researching it ethnographically.

EVE Online was a suitable online game for the ethnographic research, because the organizational aspect of gameplay was evident and surprisingly easy to relate to 'real-life' organizations. *EVE*'s environment is a three-dimensionally rendered universe consisting of literally thousands of fictional solar systems, each containing one or more suns, planets, moons, asteroid belts and space stations. A player operates a character and a space ship to be able to roam this immense universe, i.e., to 'warp' and 'jump'¹⁴ from solar system to solar system. In this science-fictional universe economy plays an important part. A player can obtain and use the virtual currency 'ISK' (InterStellar Kredit) by selling or buying practically anything. Items such as a space ship and its parts can be bought and sold for ISK using a market system. Markets are everywhere. Each space station offers a market, and players can access the market system even while flying through space. The pervasive market system affects the communities that players form. In *EVE* a community is called a 'corporation'. As the name suggests, *EVE* corporations can be seen as businesses with diverse rationales. Many are focused on collaborative combat against other corporations to control resources and markets, while others are focused on shipping and trade. The ubiquity and importance of *EVE*'s corporations show that the online game is suitable for pursuing the first research goal.

EVE was also suitable for this research, as it is a unique online game within the industry that has not been researched extensively. *EVE* has intrigued many scientific and journalistic scholars of computer game culture (Castronova, 2005, pp. 162-163; Craft, 2007; Egan, 2009a; Ludlow & Wallace, 2007, pp. 235-237; Rossignol, 2005; Sardu, 2009; Schiesel, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Sicart, 2009, pp. 188, 218), despite the fact that it is a small player in the industry.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ In *EVE*, a space ship can 'warp' through a solar system, meaning that the space ship can reach the speed of light and thereby cross the solar system within a couple of seconds, instead of hours. Interestingly, a player cannot fly from one solar system to the next using this warp capability. Instead, each solar system has one or more 'jump gates'. These structures instantly transport or 'teleport' a space ship from one solar system to the next. Unlike *World of Warcraft*, *EVE* does not consist of multiple instances of the same virtual environment to be able to accommodate all its players. Instead, each solar system (or group of solar systems) resides on a single server. The jump gates are needed to allow players to 'jump' from one server to the next. The jump gates allowed *EVE*'s developer to offer a 'single server' play experience.

¹⁵ Developer/publisher CCP Games launched *EVE* officially in May 2003 (CCP Games, 2011a). Since then CCP Games has expanded the game countless times. The company itself expanded by opening offices in the UK, USA and China. When I started playing *EVE* in August 2007, the game had close to 200,000 subscribers (Woodcock, 2008). In 2011 CCP reported that *EVE* had over 340,000 subscribers (CCP Games, 2011b). By early 2013 this number had increased to over 500,000 (CCP Games, 2013). Despite its growth over the

carefully planned and executed heists or scams attract the most attention. Players often infiltrate communities as spies and manage to steal assets or trick them into giving them. *EVE* also attracts attention because of its *Council of Stellar Management* – a player-elected council overseeing and guiding *EVE*'s design.¹⁶ *EVE* thus specifically caters to “transformative play”, i.e., “play that occurs when the free movement of play alters the more rigid structure in which it takes shape” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 321; Sotamaa, 2007, p. 386). Developer CCP Games also presents *EVE* as such. The company specifically presents it as an open online game, i.e., a ‘sandbox’ (Egan, 2009a; Sardu, 2009; Schiesel, 2008). The sandbox design allows players to take on many different play styles, develop their own play styles, and indeed change the rules of the game entirely. Still, *EVE* research has thus far been limited. Several Master’s theses posted online discuss *EVE*'s economy (Lehtiniemi, 2008), player leadership (Anonymous, 2012), gameplay culture (Keatinge, 2010) and game design politics (Óskarsson, 2010). Several scholarly and journalistic publications about *EVE* are based on only passing acquaintances with the game. Philosopher Craft discussed *EVE*-specific concepts of morality, based on an unknown amount of gameplay experience (2007). Other scholars simply named *EVE* in examples of online gameplay culture (e.g. Castronova, 2005, pp. 162-163; Ludlow & Wallace, 2007, pp. 235-237; Sicart, 2009, pp. 188, 218). Still, the scientific interest in *EVE Online* has in fact increased greatly over the past few years, even though most findings have only been presented at conferences (Carter, 2013).

Overall *EVE* is an interesting site for the proposed ethnographic research. In *EVE* play transcends its own connotations, most notably the pattern of external inconsequence (see Chapter 2). The play-work paradox takes center stage in *EVE*. Playing *EVE* means extensive organization that pushes the boundaries of CCP Games’ gameplay design. *EVE*'s corporations presumably develop as playful organizations, but perhaps also as less playful organizations. In any case researching *EVE* can lead to an understanding of how *EVE* corporations can develop as organizations, playful or otherwise. Most importantly, I personally found the game intriguing and attractive.

A specific form of ethnographic research

In practice researching *EVE Online* ethnographically required letting go of the need for “prolonged face-to-face contact with members of local groups” (Conklin, 1968, p. 172). The basic assumption that ethnographic research involves direct contact with those researched cannot apply to online gaming. Previous Internet researchers coined the term *virtual ethnography* (Hine, 2000), denoting ethnography in a virtual rather than physical domain. Arguably this is ‘virtually ethnography’ (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 216), i.e., *almost* ethnography. Online gaming

years, in comparison to e.g. *World of Warcraft* – reported to still have over 10 million subscribers in 2012 (Van Geel, 2012) – *EVE* can still be considered a smaller player within the industry at the time of writing.¹⁶ The development of the *Council of Stellar Management* (CSM) could and perhaps should be the focus of an entire thesis. The emergence of the CSM can actually be debated quite extensively. CCP Games employee Óskarsson stated that the CSM’s emergence was long part of CCP Games’ plans (2008). The emergence can also be related to community upheaval, most notably concerning the infamous *Band of Brother* alliance. One CCP Games employee was also a member of this alliance and reportedly used his role at CCP Games to offer the alliance valuable resources (Blancato, 2007). Shortly thereafter, in 2008, the CSM was instated (Óskarsson, 2008; Xhagen, 2008). At the time of writing the CSM still exists. Elections for CSM members are held every year. The first CSM consisted of nine elected players, but by the seventh installment it consisted of 14 elected players (Diagoras, 2012).

researchers can do as the researched do and even get to know those researched. Yet ethnographers will never know the researched population physically if they limit their research to online interactions.

The research was also not traditionally ethnographic because it focused on organizations within *EVE Online*. Considering ethnography as a methodology for researching a culture as “a thing in itself” (T. L. Taylor, 1999, p. 437), an ethnographic researcher aims to describe the culture holistically. In the case of online games a holistic preference leads an ethnographer to focus broadly on “game mechanics, the emergent game culture, and personal beliefs taken up by the players about what it means to play and have fun” (M. G. Chen, 2009, p. 50). However, my interest in understanding online gaming communities as organizations introduced an organizational rather than holistic focus. As ethnographer Rosen argues, any organization can be approached as simply another “‘foreign’ social group” (Rosen, 1991, p. 17) and is therefore amenable to ethnographic research. Ethnographer Van Maanen used the term *organizational ethnography* to denote the organizational context in which ethnography was applied (1979). The term also denotes a relation of research results to organization theory, resulting from the relevance of such theory to the field under study (Rosen, 1991, p. 15).

The qualitative research thus ended up being *virtual-organizational ethnographic* research of *EVE Online*. The qualitative goal was pursued ethnographically, but in a manner different from previous ethnographic online gaming research. Through virtual-organizational ethnographic research the following questions could be answered:

When and how does an online gamer create or join communities, what are the characteristics of those communities, and to what extent are the communities playfully organized?

4.2.2 VIRTUAL-ORGANIZATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Data collection by playing the game

My initial ethnographic research into *EVE* consisted of regular play sessions using one main character.¹⁷ In September 2008 I started playing *EVE* each day for an hour or more on average. After about half a year the amount of gameplay was reduced to an average of five hours per week, because playing *EVE* each day was often simply unattainable. Between September 2008 and January 2009, I was able to hire a student-assistant already familiar with *EVE* for 8 hours per week. My assistant helped me play and research the game. He specifically informed me of notable events, helped me get through my bewilderment and kept me critical of my own interpretations.

My assistant and I developed a strategy to approach play as ethnographic research, with the goal of understanding how corporations were organized. The strategy involved choosing a specific *EVE* career. I chose an ‘industrialist’ career, where gameplay focuses on using minerals, materials and blueprints to manufacture products and subsequently sell them on the market of a well-chosen space station. I did not choose a combat-oriented career, common to many online

¹⁷ Specifically a male character of the Minmatar race and the Sebiestor bloodline. *EVE*’s character selection possibilities as well as my choice for this specific character are described in Chapter 5.

games including *EVE*. I was personally more interested in industrialism and mining than in combat.¹⁸ I set out to develop this career and eventually join one of *EVE*'s long-lasting corporations.

The first weeks of the research entailed getting experience with game mechanics generally and associated with the aforementioned career path. Developing an industrial career entailed finding out what skills were important for my character, and subsequently letting my character develop those skills. The process involved a lot of in-game and out-game searches for information, most notably of the official *EVE* website and its forums, and of the immensely useful *EVE-wiki.net* fan website (Nickel Deuce, Piotrus, Shyra & Meta Tinara, 2011). The search was also social in nature. I used the popular *Help* chat channel in-game to ask typical 'noob' (newbie) questions. There were always many fellow players in that chat channel willing to provide simple answers to questions about character development. In the end the character's skill development process actually lasted indefinitely.

After gaining some of the basic character skills for manufacturing and selling goods, I started looking for a good corporation to join. The search was done using three techniques. First, my assistant checked several official *EVE* forums and used some of the more popular *EVE* fan websites¹⁹ to get an idea of which corporations had been in existence for at least a year. Second, we both kept an eye on the news items CCP Games broadcasted in- and out-game, as well as ongoing conversations in the *Help* and location-specific chat channels for mentions of good corporations. I also checked the *Recruitment* chat channel. In this chat channel many players advertised their corporations regularly in search of new members. The channel allowed me to see which corporations were looking for members and suited my chosen career path.

Much data was logged during and after practically each play session. Most data entries were conversation logs, website texts, brief mental notes and screenshots. An additional journal was kept for reflecting on the gathered data as often as deemed necessary. In practice this was once or twice per month. The data log and additional journal mostly concerned the game mechanics I was experiencing, e.g. how I could/should produce, transport and sell goods. The intricacies of these acts cannot be easily expanded upon. Developing a good strategy for producing, transporting and selling goods was a continuous process of trial and error. The data log and journal also concerned *EVE*'s cultural characteristics, i.e., the norms and conventions I came across while producing, transporting and selling goods. Recurring cultural characteristics as well as new questions were identified, with which an understanding could be developed of what I had experienced.

Befitting an ethnographic position on research methods, I took an opportunity to further analyze the corporation data that the *Recruitment* chat channel offered. By building a database of advertising corporations, a general idea could be obtained of the corporations in *EVE* and their differing rationales. A semi-automated process for gathering and sorting the huge amount of

¹⁸ I later found out that combat is integrated into all careers in *EVE*. Over time I also started to get a taste for one specific form of combat. Both developments are further explained in Chapter 5.

¹⁹ There are too many to list here. See for instance <http://eveinfo.com> or CCP's list of fan websites on <http://community.eveonline.com/community/fansites.asp>.

chat channel data was developed, based on similar work by Ducheneaut et al. (2006a). Log files of the chat channel were gathered daily at peak hours over the course of six weeks. Peak hours were estimated to be between 18:00hrs and midnight GMT, because of CCP Game's focus on the European market and the heightened activity observed during these hours. Roughly three hours of data were gathered every day from Thursday October 16 until Friday November 28, 2008. A MySQL database was filled with advertisements, corporations and keywords that describe each corporation's rationale. A PHP web application was written to go through the chat log files' advertisements of a specific day and sort out the corporation name, player name and keywords semi-automatically. In total 21,433 advertisements were recorded over 121 hours in 43 days.

Data collection by being a member of a corporation

I eventually found and joined an interesting corporation. It was heavily involved in industry (logistics, production, sales - my *EVE* career) and had been in existence for several years, judging from the structure and contents of its website (e.g. detailing extensively its social norms and application process). It was also a well-known corporation within *EVE*, because it offered several banking and other financial services to the community. For the sake of privacy neither the corporation's name nor the names of its members are divulged. This thesis uses the pseudonym *Major* to refer to the corporation.

The research within the *EVE* corporation was covert only initially. Ethnographic research is often covert, because researchers prefer to approach participant observation naturalistically (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 61). They prefer to approach the field as one of the researched instead of a researcher. In *EVE* I was indeed also first a player. The necessity of using an avatar or character makes it also almost impossible for an ethnographer of online games to present him-/herself first as a researcher. The sense of covertness this brings sparks reflections on research ethics (e.g. Copier, 2007, p. 208; Siitonen, 2007, pp. 44-45). Following ethical considerations my research became more overt very soon after becoming a full member of *Major*. I told the corporation's recruiter about my research interests during the initial application interview. Other members learned of my research interest when I or my recruiter spoke to them. Overall my fellow corporation members seemed hardly bothered by my ethical conundrum, as other virtual world ethnographers also had found (Copier, 2007, pp. 208-209; Siitonen, 2007, p. 110).

Taking on the identity of a player and a fellow corporation member offers many opportunities for gathering data. The player identity makes it easy to interact with those researched. It enables in-depth conversations and even fully-fledged interviews. I spent many hours in the corporation's main Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel talking to fellow corporation members. Since the corporation used IRC channels, something completely separate from *EVE*, play was thus extended to beyond the confines of the *EVE* environment and software. There were always 'regulars' in the IRC channels, being mostly founders and/or leaders of *Major*. Over time my assistant and I did 8 formal interviews with corporation members and other *EVE* players. I spent many hours doing manufacturing, sales, logistical and at times combat tasks that were relevant to both *Major's* and my own success in *EVE*. I had access to the corporation's website and forums, just like any other member. All this provided invaluable knowledge and experience about how *Major's* members defined and coordinated actions, as well as how the members defined the corporation's rationale.

After spending roughly six months with *Major* more interviews were done to further determine how the corporation was organized. Five interviews were done with three leaders and two non-leaders of the corporation, all male. All interviews were carried out online (i.e., without face-to-face communication) as the respondents lived in countries different from my own (i.e., Denmark, USA and Finland). One interview was carried out using voice chat software, while the other four were carried out using text chat software. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I only structured the interviews thematically using the three perspectives on organization described in Chapter 2 (cultural, management-sociological and socio-technical). I was open to the respondents' own conceptualization of the corporation.

A survey was also done in the form of an online anonymous questionnaire made available to *Major* during three weeks. In the survey respondents were asked about their gender, age, country of residence, occupation, gaming habit, position within the corporation, commitment to the corporation and the corporation's organizational culture. Measurements for commitment and organizational culture were derived from the "shortened organizational commitment questionnaire" (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982) and "organizational culture assessment instrument" (OCAI; Cameron & Quinn, 2006), respectively. Following only very minor changes I used the shortened organizational commitment questionnaire's nine statements and seven-point Likert scale. I deemed the OCAI potentially insightful as it is based on four types of organizational culture that together form a comprehensive set (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 31-34). I found that the response data would be most insightful for developing a theory of the corporation's organizational culture. I altered the OCAI slightly, as I used a seven-point Likert measurement scale for the 24 statements instead of the original ipsative measurement scale. As Cameron and Quinn suggest, the Likert scale allows researchers to better determine the statement's individual validity within the domain it is applied (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 160-161). I also altered the formulation of each OCAI statement slightly to ensure the respondents would relate the statement to the *EVE* corporation instead of to their work organization (see Appendix A). In total 18 of my 60 fellow corporation members filled in the questionnaire.

Finally, a qualitative document analysis of *Major's* website was performed. The website consisted of pages about the community's mission and history, as well as specific applications for storing knowledge or for communication. I analyzed what these 'documents' explained about *Major's* structure and culture. In total 13 web pages were analyzed, of which six were forum discussions (both recent and over a year old), five were static information pages and two were other web applications.

In summary the ethnographic research lasted roughly 400 hours over a one-and-a-half-year period, of which 14 months as a member of *Major*. My data log comprised of 189 pages, providing details of almost each of my *EVE* play sessions, including the verbatim reports of many conversations with members of my corporation and other *EVE* players. My journal comprised of 22 pages, providing brief periodic reflections on the logged events, as well as the research process. A database contained 121 hours of *Recruitment* chat channel data. My assistant and I did thirteen formal interviews with fellow *Major* members and other *EVE* players. Eighteen of my corporation's members took part in a survey. I read a number of discussions on the official

EVE forums, news bulletins about *EVE* gameplay events on the official *EVE* website, and unofficial player-maintained pages – most notably *EVE-Wiki.net* – about the intricate details of *EVE*. Finally, 13 of *Major's* web pages were analyzed in detail.

Analysis

Overall a lot of different kinds of data needed to be analyzed. Analysis became difficult, like in all ethnographic research (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 178). Many ethnographic researchers resort to analysis through description, or even “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). They analyze their data regularly by attempting to describe what they had experienced using a historical, autobiographical, relational, interactional and situational writing style (Denzin, 1989, pp. 92-95; Ponterotto, 2006, p. 545). The importance of analysis through description stems first from the type of research goals common to ethnographic methodology, i.e., offering an *understanding* of the researched phenomenon. It also stems from the “iterative-inductive” (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 178-184) approach to results writing that ethnographers tend to prefer. Writing up results regularly forces the ethnographic researcher to develop and record his/her own understanding of the researched phenomenon using the data he/she has. Moreover, writing forces the researcher to communicate his/her understanding clearly yet critically to a reader. From the writing attempts behavioral patterns tend to emerge that allow the researcher to develop and test a theory that represents the results well. Since my ethnographic research was virtual-*organizational* in nature, my theme (organization) was clear from the start. During the research process I wrote up several thick descriptions of my experiences and how *Major* could be characterized as an organization, frequently referring back to my data or even gathering some more data.

The characterization of *Major* required my analysis to be more than writing up thick descriptions of experiences. I also analyzed the available data qualitatively using the playful organization ideal-type presented in Chapter 2 as a framework. This meant examining my thick descriptions and the interview transcripts, selecting *Major's* web pages and applications, and reviewing the survey results to form an opinion about *Major* as an organization, i.e., its access and exit strategy, division of labor, hierarchy, leadership and ICTs. The analyses allowed me to interpret *Major's* organizational culture, i.e., values and principles that seem to underlie *Major's* organizational structure. I wrote up a research report and asked the corporation's leaders to read and comment on it. The corporation's recruiter coordinated the review effort and provided me with valuable feedback, which led to several changes to the report. Using the report I could argue to what extent the corporation was playfully organized.

Chapter 5 offers the results. The chapter shows that the main value of all the ethnographic research and analyses is the wealth of insight they offer into playful organization and into *EVE Online* as a breeding ground for it. Leaders and managers of any organization can be inspired to create their own playful organizations using the understanding of online gaming communities developed from the virtual-organizational ethnographic research. Organizations operating ‘virtually’ (i.e., globally and technologically) should be able to relate to *Major*. The fact that this corporation was involved in something as real as goods production, logistics and sales makes it even more relatable to a work organization.

4.3 THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The ethnographic research has obvious limits in terms of generalizability. Only one single corporation was analyzed in depth. Other corporations will have a different structure and culture. As already discussed, *EVE* is also generally quite unique in at least two ways. First, the highly capitalistic basis is quite unique. Other online games such as *World of Warcraft* also have economic systems, but these systems are often not as fundamental to the game mechanics that virtual worlds possess as is the case in *EVE*. Second, the apparent ubiquity of infiltrations, thefts and scams in *EVE* is quite unique. They are what attracted many game culture scholars and journalists to write about *EVE* in the first place, as they are much less frequent and much more contested in other virtual worlds. Ethnographic methodology hardly permits the possibility or even acknowledges the worth of generalization. The uniqueness of *EVE* within the online gaming market also makes it near impossible to argue that the discussed results are generalizable. Overall, the ethnographic approach proved very useful, but offered no insights into other online gaming communities.

4.3.1 THE CHOICE FOR PANEL RESEARCH

My subtle-realistic stance towards playful organization (see Chapter 1) led me to consider an additional, more quantitative research project. As explained in Section 4.1, the goal of this second project was to generally ascertain, explain and compare the playful organization of online gamers' communities and work organizations. The question remained as to how another context (e.g. another game, another group of players) could influence an online gaming community's playful organization. Moreover, it was still unclear whether work organizations could generally be deemed playful. For work organizations the question also remained as to which contextual factors could influence their extent of playful organization.

This particular research goal indeed suggests quantitative research, i.e., research aimed at formulating general conclusions (Creswell, 2003, pp. 6-7). To ascertain, explain and compare organizational phenomena more generally, empirical research was required that involved a sample of a larger population. Qualitative data could still be used for this research, but the amount of time it takes to gather and analyze qualitative data from a respondent limited the extent of the sample. Moreover, the preference for statistical analyses inherent to quantitative research necessitated data quantification. The question remained as to how the research goal could be translated into concrete empirical research. In other words, what quantitative data could be gathered, where it could be obtained, and how it could be both gathered and analyzed.

Methodical alternatives

Unlike in qualitative research, the playful organization ideal-type needs to be operationalized further for quantitative research. The ideal-type needs to be quantified before it can be used. There are many ways in which a concept can be quantified. Researchers can quantify a concept through data pertaining to the population's behavior. They can also quantify a concept by developing a set of statements or questions accompanied by a closed measurement instrument such as a Likert scale. A 'proxy' instrument is also a possibility. In this case researchers decide to use an existing instrument, because they argue that the instrument can also measure the concept under study. The benefit of this approach is that the chosen measuring instrument has already

been tested. The instrument's validity and reliability has, at least to some extent, already been proven. When researchers develop their own form of measurement, validity and reliability need to be assessed before it can be applied (Creswell, 2003, p. 157).

Additional predictor variables need to be defined as well. Variables that can possibly predict the occurrence of playful organization need to be defined to be able to *explain* playful organization quantitatively. The findings of the qualitative research can help define possible predictors. Previous research findings can also help define predictors. Predictors can also be defined quite freely, especially when the research is exploratory. Researchers can brainstorm about additional predictors and ascertain how they can be measured.

The researcher can subsequently develop an empirical research model in which the outcome variable (i.e., playful organization) and predictor variables are related to each other. Such a research model helps to define what specific statistical analyses can be conducted. Certain types of correlation or regression analyses are generally preferred to ascertain which variables have actual predictive power.

An issue emerges when considering what sample can or should be formed to obtain the data from. Generally, quantitative researchers will want to form a sample that is representative of the population under study, or at least diverse enough given the population's characteristics. In this case, the population is two-fold: online gamers' communities and work organizations. Formulated in this manner, it is clear that a representative sample is impossible, at least within a single time-constrained research project. There are limited statistics about online gamers and their communities and work organizations, simply because they have not been studied very long. There are statistics about online gamers in general, regardless of whether they belong to gaming communities or work for an organization. However, most statistics are commercially obtained and distributed. It is not easy to come by these statistics. Nevertheless, there are statistics about the number of online gamers in specific countries, including the Netherlands, in a certain year (Newzoo, 2011b; TNS/Newzoo/Gamesindustry.com, 2009). The population could thus entail online gamers from a specific country in a given year. As argued in Chapter 1, most of these online gamers have (or have had) jobs, given the high mean age of this population. A sample from this population can provide diverse and useful data about online gaming communities and work organizations.

Methodical alternatives emerge when considering what the dataset could be in the end. When researchers wish to gather behavioral data, forming a sample is less of an issue. The issue instead becomes how the researcher can get access to behavioral data. Data can also be obtained from the sample directly using a questionnaire. In this case the data was assessed by the sample itself. Researchers can attempt directed and undirected calls for respondents. Directed calls are targeted and sent to a specific group of people, while undirected calls are more general and posted at a venue (online or offline) common to the population in question. Snowball sampling is also a common technique for obtaining respondents, where the researcher asks each respondent for referrals to other respondents (Handcock & Gile, 2011).

More options reveal themselves when considering how self-assessed data can be obtained once a sample has been formed. An online questionnaire would be suitable, since the population spends a lot of time online. A questionnaire could be sent once or multiple times. When sent once, the researcher would be doing a cross-sectional survey. When sent multiple times the researcher would effectively be doing a panel study. Panel studies are often done to e.g. test whether certain behaviors, attitudes or opinions generally hold up over a longer period of time (Babbie, 1998, pp. 102-103; Bailey, 1987, pp. 206-207; Biemans & Geurts, 1981). Although my own research goal does not require longitudinal research, a one-time cross-sectional survey could be problematic. A single questionnaire would have to be developed that concerns both the online gamer's community and work organization. This would not only lead to a lengthy questionnaire, it could also direct the respondents' opinions concerning relations between their online gaming community and work organization. Table 4.2 summarizes the discussed methodical alternatives. It specifically summarizes alternatives for defining the nature of the quantitative data, the data's point of origin, and its gathering and analysis techniques.

Comparisons of methodical alternatives mainly reveal practical considerations. All methodical alternatives strive for realism, in a philosophical sense (Leplin, 1984). They strive for the ability to make more general statements about the population in question. When obtaining a sample the goal is thus to obtain a representative sample or at least a sample with wide variety. Similarly, when considering data gathering techniques the goal is to gather valid and reliable data for the concept that is actually being observed. The assessment of methodical alternatives is therefore mostly practical in nature. It concerns an estimation of which alternative would work better.

Choosing a panel approach

To pursue the quantitative research goal, I chose to reapply the OCAI (Cameron & Quinn, 2006) measurement instrument. During the ethnographic research the OCAI already proved a useful instrument. Respondents understood it and appreciated its relevance in the context of their online gaming communities. It provided useful additional insights into an online gaming community's organizational culture. The OCAI can also be related to the playful organizational ideal-type quite well, as explained later on. The use of the OCAI also saved a lot of time, because the instrument had already been extensively applied and tested for its reliability and validity (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 153-160).

Questions	Methodical alternatives
What data?	Quantitative data – behavioral or self-assessed – pertaining to the playful organization (outcome variable) and features (predictor variables) of online gamers' communities and work organizations.
From whom or what?	A wide variety of online gamers and their communities and work organizations.
How gathered?	Through e.g. interviews, a survey, or panel methodology.
What analysis?	Statistical analyses, e.g. descriptive, correlation or regression analyses.

Table 4.2. Methodical alternatives befitting the proposed quantitative research.

A panel approach was subsequently chosen. The research goal's two contexts (online gamers' communities and work organizations) makes panel research an interesting option. By forming a panel of online gamers, multiple questionnaires could be distributed and interviews could be done concerning the online gamers' communities and work organizations. As explained, the practical advantage over a cross-sectional survey is that a panel approach allows for shorter questionnaires, at least in this case. In turn this aids the reliability of the results. Panel research also better fits a playful approach to empirical research. It offers flexibility, as the researcher has the opportunity to apply multiple data gathering techniques rather than a single one.

A practical difficulty of a panel approach is the very first step, i.e., forming a panel. Since panel research is a form of quantitative research, there is a preference for forming a large panel. The larger the panel, the better the generalizability of the results. Ideally the panel is even representative of a population. However, panel researchers often expect a lot from their panelists. They generally expect panelists to fill in multiple questionnaires that are provided to them over a certain period of time. This means that a panel researcher cannot expect huge numbers of panelists. Moreover, panel researchers can also expect 'panel mortality' (Bailey, 1987, p. 207), i.e., waning interest or simply the disappearance of panelists over time. This is why panel research is not necessarily a quantitative research technique of which results can reflect an entire population. Instead, it is considered a research technique for testing the commonality of a certain phenomenon, mostly of a certain effect over time. Panel researchers can therefore aim to get a minimum number of panelists to enable meaningful statistical analyses, rather than aim to get a representative sample of a specific population.

In this case the difficulty concerned forming a panel of working online gamers. To make it as easy as possible to form an adequate panel, I decided to focus the research on Dutch online gamers. It can be assumed that most Dutch online gamers will have (or have had) experience within a community. Forming communities is after all an integral part of online gameplay. It can also be assumed that most Dutch online gamers will have (or have had) experience working at a specific organization, given their high mean age (TNS/Newzoo/Gamesindustry.com, 2009). There were three additional advantages of focusing on Dutch online gamers:

1. An adequate estimation could be made of how to reach Dutch online gamers, since I am a Dutch online gamer myself. I can find the guilds, clans and other online gaming communities in which the Dutch are involved relatively easily, since I know (or at least can easily get to know) the online discussion forums and other community websites that Dutch online gamers use.
2. I would be able to approach the online gamers in their native language. If I had chosen to focus on online gamers with different nationalities, I would have had to resort to approaching them in English. Of course, in many cases English would not be the panelist's native language. As a result, the reliability of the chosen measuring instruments might have been lower. By focusing on Dutch online gamers, I was able to develop questionnaires and do interviews all in Dutch, the panelists' native language.
3. A constant would be introduced in the research design, i.e., nationality of the panelist. A constant is a relief given the high number of variables that could impact the structure and culture of online gaming communities. A constant is also an enabler for future research.

Future research might opt to focus on other nationalities and compare their findings to the outcomes of this study.

A specific form of panel research

In practice, the research did not conform to traditional applications of panel research. In this case the panel approach entailed forming a panel of Dutch working online gamers who would take part in research concerning their communities and work organization for a brief period of time. This approach does not fit panel research when considering it relevant for effect or developmental studies. The approach clearly shows no interest in a phenomenon's effects or developments over time. Still, the research can be interpreted as an application of panel research, because it involved recruiting a panel that agreed to take part in research over a certain period of time. The study allowed me to answer the following two research questions:

- *To what extent can Dutch online gamers' communities be considered playful organizations?*
- *To what extent can Dutch online gamers' work organizations be considered playful organizations, similar to their communities?*

4.3.2 PANEL RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Operationalizing the outcome variable

As explained, the OCAI was used to operationalize the outcome variable, i.e., playful organization, as the OCAI also relates well to the playful organization ideal-type. The OCAI requires further definition before its relation to the ideal-type can be explained. The OCAI is based on the Competing Values Framework, i.e., four theories of competing organizational culture. OCAI designers Cameron & Quinn define the four organizational cultures as follows:

- **Hierarchy**, a culture that “is characterized by a formalized and structured place to work” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 37). The goal of organizations that generally adopt the culture is “to generate efficient, reliable, smooth-flowing, predictable output”. Cameron & Quinn offer as examples “a typical U.S. fast-food restaurant ... major conglomerates ... and government agencies” (2006, p. 38). The OCAI statements that represent this organizational culture include concepts such as ‘efficiency’, ‘stability’, ‘control’ and ‘procedures’ (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 26-28).
- **Market**, a culture that assumes “that a clear purpose and an aggressive strategy lead to productivity and profitability” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 40). The goal of organizations that generally adopt the culture is “to conduct transactions (exchanges, sales, contracts) with other constituencies to create competitive advantage” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 39). The authors offer Philips Electronics and General Electric as examples (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 39-40). The OCAI statements that represent this organizational culture include concepts such as ‘competitiveness’, ‘achievement’, ‘goal accomplishment’ and ‘stretch targets’ (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 26-28).
- **Clan**, a culture that is characterized by “teamwork, employee involvement programs, and corporate commitment to employees” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 41). The goal of organizations that generally adopt the culture is to place “a premium on teamwork, participation, and consensus”, as that is deemed “an effective way to coordinate

organizational activity” in a “rapidly changing, turbulent” environment (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 41-42). Cameron & Quinn offer the US organization PeopleExpress Airlines as an example, that currently no longer exists as such (2006, p. 42). The OCAI statements that represent this organizational culture include concepts such as ‘participation’, ‘trust’, ‘commitment’ and ‘openness’ (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 26-28).

- **Adhocracy**, a culture that “is characterized by a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative workplace”, as it assumes “that adaptation and innovativeness lead to new resources and profitability, so emphasis [is] placed on creating a vision of the future, organized anarchy, and disciplined imagination” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 43). The goal of organizations that generally adopt the culture is to “foster adaptability, flexibility, and creativity where uncertainty, ambiguity, and information overload are typical”. The authors offer as examples “industries such as aerospace, software development, think-tank consulting, and filmmaking”. The OCAI statements that represent this organizational culture include concepts such as ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘innovation’, ‘risk taking’ and ‘freedom’ (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 26-28).

When comparing all four organizational cultures to each other, it becomes clear that in Clan and Adhocracy organizational cultures flexibility and discretion are important, while in Market and Hierarchy organizational cultures stability and control are important (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 35 - 45). Figure 4.1 visualizes this comparison.

Cameron & Quinn’s definition suggests that the Clan and Adhocracy cultures fit well with the playful organization ideal-type. The playful value of conviviality is particularly well-represented in the Clan culture. Contingency and agility are well-represented in the Adhocracy culture. Teachability and equality are arguably represented in both Clan and Adhocracy cultures, judging from Cameron & Quinn’s definition. The value of meritocracy connects well to both the

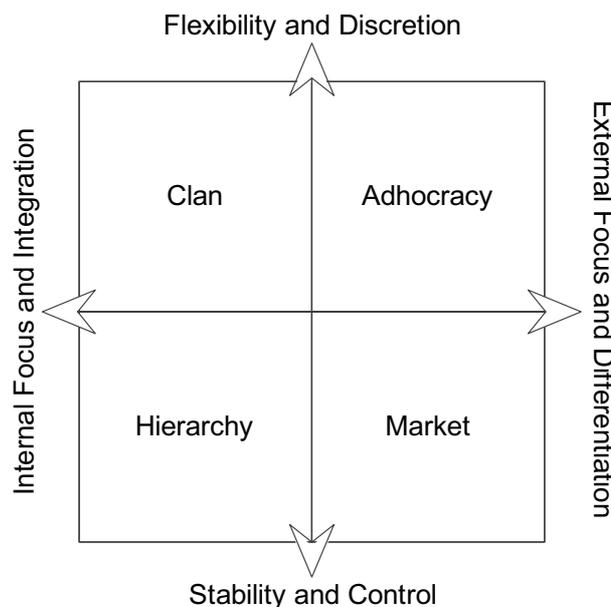


Figure 4.1. The competing values framework as defined by Cameron & Quinn (2006).
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Clan and Hierarchy cultures. Cameron & Quinn argue that Hierarchy cultures particularly value meritocracy (2006, p. 37). This is primarily because meritocracy assumes a hierarchy, as also explained in Chapter 2. Still, together the Clan and Adhocracy cultures connect well to the playful organization ideal-type, as depicted in Figure 4.2. This is unsurprising, given these culture’s shared value for flexibility and discretion.

The OCAI can therefore be used to quantify the playful organization ideal-type for the contexts of online gaming communities and work organizations. If a respondent scores his/her online gaming community or work organization high on Clan and Adhocracy, both can be considered highly playful organizations. If the respondent also scores both organizations low on Market and Hierarchy, they could be considered even more playful. This is because the Market and Hierarchy cultures represent ‘stability and control’. These values are easily connected to Weber’s bureaucracy ideal-type, which Chapter 2 referred to as a least playful organization (Weber, 1946/1947). Thus the OCAI was applied to measure two outcome variables: the playful organization of the panelists’ online gaming communities and work organizations.

For both organizational contexts the formulation of the OCAI’s statements needed to be altered slightly. Appendix A lists exactly how the statements were altered. The OCAI asks panelists to rate the current and preferred organizational cultures by posing 24 statements (six per organizational culture) twice. The seven-point Likert measurement scale was used for the exact same reason it was also used in the qualitative research discussed earlier. The organizational culture scores are calculated by averaging the scores for each of the four culture’s statements. The OCAI thus provides scores for current and preferred Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy organizational culture, allowing me to determine the current and preferred extent of playful organization.

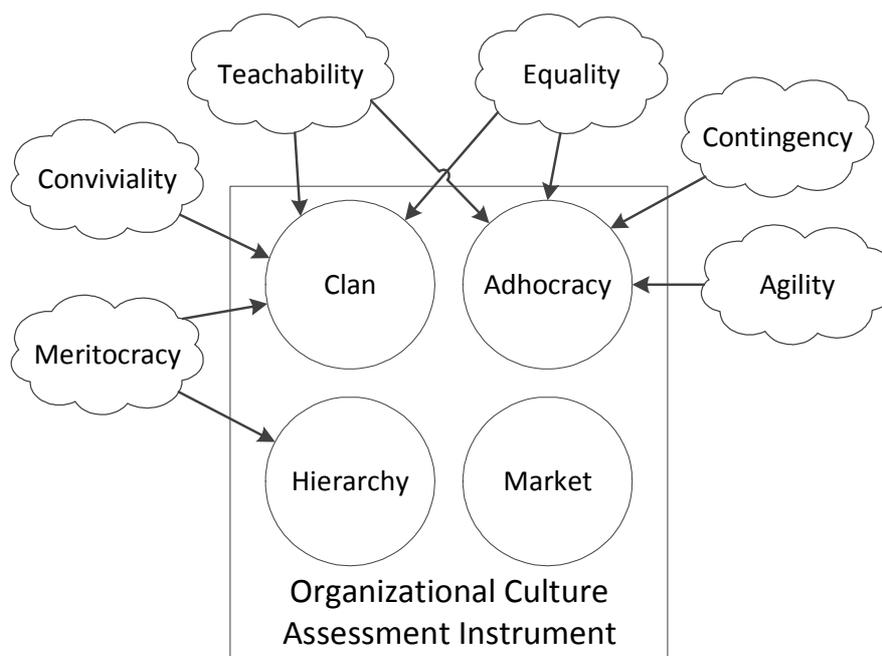


Figure 4.2. The relationship between the OCAI and the playful values of Chapter 2.

Operationalizing predictor variables

Several predictor variables were defined for the context of online gaming communities and work organizations:

- *Game(s)* and *rationale type* in case of online gaming communities, or *branch* in case of work organizations. The review of online gaming communities, as well as my own *EVE Online* research, showed that an online gaming community can focus on playing a specific online game competitively or socially. This denotes a rationale and a context, like any organization will have. Rationale and context could influence the organizational culture greatly in both the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. A production-oriented organization might be culturally highly different from a professional service organization.
- *Number of members* in case of online gaming communities or *number of employees* in case of work organizations. These variables can arguably influence an organizational culture, especially when taking the organization's context into account. A large product/service delivery organization can arguably be much more hierarchical and thus less playful.
- *Time in existence*. For both online gaming communities and work organizations this variable can arguably greatly influence organizational culture. Longer-lasting organizations might develop more standardized or formalized procedures, for example (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 171).
- *Diversity in national culture* in case of online gaming communities, or *level of globalization* in case of work organizations. A certain level of diversity in national culture can arguably influence organizational culture. A lower level of diversity could lead to the higher applicability and influence of cultural-specific organization theories (see e.g. Hofstede et al., 2010). A panelist can determine the diversity in national culture of his/her online gaming community is easier than of his/her work organization. A level of globalization of a work organization is arguably determined more easily by a panelist and can differ widely.

Predictor variables pertaining to the individual panelist can influence the measured organizational culture as well and thus need to be taken into account. The individual is important in this study, as communities and organizations consist of individuals, and as the self-assessment involved will probably differ per person. Variables pertaining to the individual thus also functioned as possible predictors:

- *Total gameplay time* or *total working time*. Arguably, the amount of time a panelist has spent playing or working determines the type of communities or organizations he/she joins, and how he/she perceives the community's or organization's culture.
- *Weekly gameplay time* or *weekly working time*. The amount of time a panelist spends playing or working per week can also determine the type of communities or organizations he/she joins, and how he/she perceives the community's or organization's culture.
- *Commitment to the community* or *to the organization*. The level of commitment a panelist has to a community or organization can arguably determine a panelist's estimation or acceptance of the organizational culture. For example, it is imaginable that low levels of commitment can explain why a player and employee views the organizational culture as hierarchical, and why his/she is a member of it. Like in the qualitative research, the

shortened organizational commitment questionnaire was used to measure these two commitments (Fields, 2002, p. 49; Mowday et al., 1982).

- *Role or function type.* A panelist's view of the community or organization can arguably be determined by what role or function he/she has. Those without leadership might view the organization differently from those who do have it (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 79).

Background variables needed to be measured to determine the sample's diversity and representativeness. Gender, age and place of residence were measured for this purpose. Only gender and age were also considered predictor variables, as place of residence (within the Netherlands) is assumed to be of limited meaning to the panelist's assessment of organizational culture.

The outcome variables were also considered each other's predictor variables. The phenomenon-ideologizing frame discussed in Chapter 1 introduced such a potential relation between online gaming communities and work organization as a relevant topic of research. Panelists potentially base their decision for or opinion of their work organization on their online gaming community. The reverse could also be true. Panelists could base their decision for or opinion of their online gaming community on their work organization. In either case, the relation between the two organizational contexts is of interest and subject to empirical research. The organizational culture of an online gaming community should therefore also be defined as a predictor variable for the organizational culture of a work organization, and vice versa.

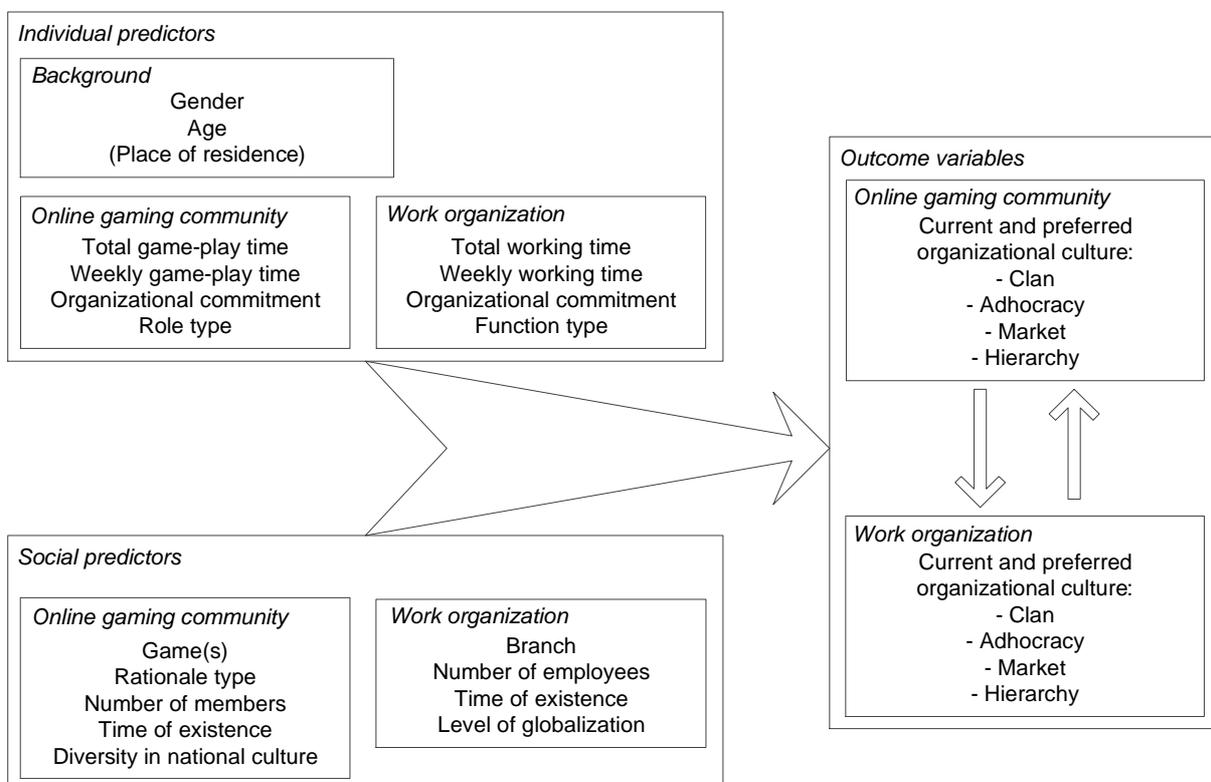


Figure 4.3. The empirical research model.

The explained predictor and outcome variables are visualized in Figure 4.3. Following the definition of these variables several questions and statements that panelists could easily answer were developed. In many cases exact numbers or levels could simply not be asked of the panelists, e.g. the exact number of employees an organization has. In those cases I developed an easier statement with a 5- or 6-point response scale. Appendix B lists all the questions, statements and response methods used in the panel research.

Data collection

A standard panelist recruitment call tailored to the target audience was first written. The call asked Dutch online gamers who were members of communities and who had a job of some sort to take part in social scientific research. The popular terms 'guild' and 'clan' were used to simplify the call. Online gaming communities who focus solely on one massively multiplayer online game at a time (though perhaps multiple sequentially) are often called 'guilds' in everyday language. Communities who focus solely on multiplayer games or on both multiplayer games and massively multiplayer online games are often called 'clans', at least in the Netherlands. In the call my intentions were stated clearly. A small reward was offered in the form of a gift certificate for a well-known online shop. The call was used in three main recruitment efforts:

- *Open calls for participation*
In total 23 e-mails were sent to people within my own network who have played or are interested in online gaming. Various social networking websites were also used to spread the call for respondents (Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn). A leaflet was spread at a gaming conference held in Delft, the Netherlands, which was attended by around 300 people. Finally, I wrote two short columns about phenomena related to my research for the popular entertainment gaming website Gamer.nl, in which I also asked for respondents.
- *Direct requests for participation*
The targeted sampling technique consisted of carefully searching the World Wide Web for online gaming communities who were currently active, and completely or partially consisting of Dutch players. After several hours of searching, a list of 20 such online gaming communities had been compiled. E-mails were sent and forms on the communities' websites were used to request each community for panelists.
- *Snowball sampling*
The above calls and requests attracted quite some panelists. Most of these respondent were asked if they could provide a name and e-mail address of other potential panelists. These people were also contacted using the same recruitment call.

The panelists were asked to fill in two questionnaires consecutively. The first questionnaire concerned the panelist's online gaming community. It consisted of the OCAI's 24 statements, as well as questions and statements for measuring the aforementioned predictor variables relevant to online gaming communities (see Appendices A and B). It also consisted of questions pertaining to the aforementioned background variables (gender, age, place of residence; see also Appendix B). Some panelists turned out to have recently left an online gaming community but still worked for an organization. These panelists were allowed to join the

panel. Most of the questions, statements and answer forms of the first questionnaire were therefore also formulated in the past tense (see Appendix B). The second questionnaire was only about the panelist's work organization. It again consisted of the OCAI statements, as well as questions and statements for measuring the aforementioned predictor variables relevant to work organizations. The second questionnaire was sent to the panelist at least 24 hours after filling in the first one to ensure the panelist would focus only on the context of the questionnaire in question. In total the panelists took roughly 45 minutes to fill in the questionnaires.

Some panelists were also interviewed after they had filled in the two questionnaires. The results of the two questionnaires were reviewed to get an impression of the panelist and his/her online gaming community and work organization. The interview allowed me to test this impression. These interviews were semi-structured, like the ones carried out in the qualitative research. The questions concerned the themes of organizational structure discussed in Chapter 2 (access and exit, division of labor, hierarchy, leadership and ICTs) as well as the panelist's general impression of the community and work organization. I was open to the panelist's own organizational conceptualizations. The interviews generally lasted around 60 minutes.

Sample

The sample finally consisted of 95 Dutch working online gamers. Over a period of six months I received 121 responses from Dutch gamers willing to take part. Twenty-three subsequently did not respond to my invitations to fill in the first questionnaire. Another three respondents ended up not fitting the criteria for participation. Of the 95 panelists 19 did not fill in or finish the second questionnaire, probably because they lost interest or had misunderstood the call. I asked the first 30 respondents if they would also agree to being interviewed, to which 22 agreed.

Of all panelists 91 were male and 4 were female. The mean age was 25.9 ± 8.6 years. The panelists lived across the four biggest regions of the country (north: 8.60%; south: 13.98%; west: 45.16%; east: 32.26%). They had been playing online games for an average of 4.40 years (± 2.68), currently for an average of 18.81 hours per week (± 11.48). The 76 panelists who filled in the second questionnaire indicated that they had been working for an average of 5.31 years (± 6.68), currently for an average of 31.61 hours per week (± 15.12). The entire panel provided data about 68 online gaming communities and 76 work organizations. Of the 76 panelists who filled in the second questionnaire, three were self-employed who sometimes worked together with partners and/or clients.

Analysis

The data provided by the two questionnaires were first subjected to reliability analyses. These analyses were necessary to determine whether the panelists' responses to the 24 OCAI statements indeed revealed four components, i.e., Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy organizational cultures. The analyses were also necessary to determine whether the panelists' responses to the nine organizational commitment statements revealed a single component, i.e., organizational commitment. The high Cronbach's alpha scores these analyses returned confirmed the reliability of the measuring instruments. Table 4.3 shows these scores for the current and preferred organizational cultures as well as organizational commitment per questionnaire. These results confirmed that scores could be calculated for the organizational

cultures of and commitment towards the panelists' online gaming communities and work organizations.

Descriptive analyses were subsequently conducted, leading to useful data recodes. Descriptive statistics were obtained for all variables defined in Figure 4.3. The descriptive statistics of the Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy cultures showed great diversity, i.e., high standard deviations. Four types of online gaming communities and four types of work organizations were formed that indicated differing degrees of playful organization. The types were named 'most playful', 'moderately playful', 'least playful' and 'unorganized' and are further explained in chapters six and seven. Appendix C lists the descriptive statistics per type of online gaming community and work organization. Chapter 7 further discusses how the comparison between organizational culture of the online gaming community and that of the work organization was coded. This particular coding procedure led to the introduction of two new variables. The first concerned the similarity of organizational cultures ('highly similar', 'slightly similar' and 'different'). The second concerned the significance of the level of similarity ('significant' or 'not significant'). The coding procedure of this second variable is further explained in Appendix G.

The new variables introduced by data recoding allowed for several insightful logistic regression analyses. The data recoding offered two nominal outcome variables, i.e., types of online gaming community and work organization, both pertaining to playful organization. Logistic regression analyses allowed me to ascertain which predictor variables (see Figure 4.3) actually predicted these outcome variables. Further logistic regression analyses were performed to ascertain which variables predicted similarity of organizational cultures as well as the significance of the level of similarity. The logistic regression analyses are described in Appendices D-F.

Component	Cronbach's Alpha questionnaire #1 (online gaming community)	Cronbach's Alpha questionnaire #2 (work organization)
Clan organizational culture		
- Current	.852	.897
- Preferred	.821	.864
Adhocracy organizational culture		
- Current	.788	.897
- Preferred	.780	.862
Market organizational culture		
- Current	.909	.874
- Preferred	.897	.871
Hierarchy organizational culture		
- Current	.860	.851
- Preferred	.835	.842
Organizational commitment	.871	.913

Table 4.3. Results of reliability analyses concerning the organizational culture and commitment components.

The data provided by the interviews were analyzed using the playful organization ideal-type of Chapter 2 as an analytical framework. All interview transcripts were read through to further ascertain structural and cultural characteristics of the panelists' communities and work organizations. It was also ascertained whether those characteristics could be connected to the playful values and concepts defined in Chapter 2. Responses to questions about comparisons between the organizational cultures of both contexts were coded freely. The results of this process are used in Chapters 6 and 7 to substantiate the findings of the statistical analyses.

4.4 CONCLUSION

4.4.1 ETHNOGRAPHIC AND PANEL RESEARCH

This chapter discussed my empirical research design and implementation with which the qualitative research goal stated in the introduction could first be pursued. The qualitative research goal was pursued through virtual-organizational ethnographic research of *EVE Online* and its 'corporations'. I simply started researching *EVE* as a player. This approach could help me answer the question of when and how an online gamer creates or joins communities, what the characteristics are of those communities, and to what extent the communities are playfully organized. *EVE* was selected for a number of reasons, most notably because the play-work paradox takes center stage in *EVE*. *EVE*'s gameplay design is surprisingly easy to relate to 'real-life' organizations, because of its economic foundation and its heavy reliance on organization. I gathered data by noting and reflecting on my gameplay experiences, my interactions with fellow players and my membership of one *EVE* corporation referred to as *Major*. I also gathered 121 hours of chat channel data and did 13 more formal interviews. I obtained more data about my corporation from 18 of my fellow corporation members who filled in a questionnaire about themselves, their gaming habits and how they perceived the corporation's organizational culture. I finally examined 13 of my corporation's web pages and other *EVE*-specific discussion forums, news bulletins and fan websites. The common ethnographic technique of analysis through 'thick description', accompanied by qualitative analyses of the interviews, documents, as well as descriptive statistics of the survey, allowed me to develop an answer to the posed question. *Major*'s leaders commented on a report detailing my findings, leading to several amendments.

Playful characteristics of the qualitative research appeared throughout the chapter. The alternative form of ethnography shows that the research design can be quite playful. In a fleet of agility, I chose to apply a rather novel form of ethnography (termed 'virtual-organizational') to an online game that had hardly been researched. There is also a sense of equality in the actual execution of the ethnographic research. The researcher tries to become one with the population being researched. Then there is a sense of contingency, agility and teachability when doing ethnographic research. Contingency emerges when ethnographic researchers do not define their research methods very extensively up front. The goal of developing an understanding of the researched population on its own terms prohibits such a perspective on doing research. The research methods are only defined as the researcher moves through the site. Teachability and agility dictate that an ethnographic researcher needs to let the site under study inform him/her

of the opportunities it offers for gathering data. The researcher takes opportunities for gathering data as he/she sees fit, critically assessing the usefulness of the method and subsequent data it offers.

The chapter subsequently discussed my research design and implementation with which the quantitative research goal could be pursued. A panel methodology was applied, primarily because it is a useful and playful data gathering technique. It is useful in this context, because it allowed me to obtain more data from a sample than a different quantitative method would have done (e.g. a cross-sectional survey). The panel research ended up involving 95 Dutch working online gamers. The panel was diverse in terms of games played, age, place of residence and amount of gameplay. Assuming most online gamers at some point join or create a player community, the sample could provide a good indication of whether online gaming communities in which the Dutch are involved are in general playfully organized. This panel could thus help me answer the question regarding the extent to which the communities of these online gamers could be considered playful organizations. It could also help me answer the question of to what extent the work organizations of these online gamers could be considered playful organizations, and thus in that sense similar to their communities. In a first questionnaire all 95 panelists provided quantitative data pertaining to their communities' characteristics and playful organization. Assuming most online gamers have some work experience, the panel provided a good indication of whether the organizations in which Dutch online gamers work are generally playful. In a second questionnaire 76 of the panelists indeed provided quantitative data pertaining to their work organization's characteristics and playfulness. Statistical analyses of the results from both questionnaires as well as further analyses of 22 interviews allowed me to develop answers to the posed questions.

The quantitative research again had playful characteristics. A panel approach was chosen to allow for flexibility in how the sample is questioned. This effectively introduced contingency, agility and teachability into the research design. The panel allowed me to test out different data gathering techniques and learn from the results. The playful values of contingency and agility emerge when considering the extensiveness of the research model shown in Figure 4.3. Since the quantitative research was rather novel, I only had my qualitative research experience and my knowledge of previous studies to base my research model on. There were hardly any similar studies from which hypotheses could be developed and on which the quantitative research design could be based. Moreover, the panel approach introduced the opportunity to obtain quite a lot of data from the sample. All this led me to define relatively many potential predictors.

As a whole my empirical research has followed a "sequential exploratory strategy" in which "an initial phase of qualitative data collection and analysis" is followed by a second "phase of quantitative data collection and analysis" (Creswell, 2003, p. 215). This strategy allowed me to "explore a phenomenon but also [...] to expand on the qualitative findings" (Creswell, 2003, p. 216). The qualitative research offered the possibility of developing and communicating an understanding of how online gaming communities can develop as organizations in the first place, whether playful or not. The research helped me to theorize the extent of an online gaming community's playfulness qualitatively. The quantitative research offered the possibility of

setting up completely different empirical research to generally ascertain, explain and compare the extent of playful organization of online gamers' communities and work organizations.

4.4.2 DISCUSSION

Ethnographers might critique the limited extent of my ethnographic research. O'Reilly argued that an ethnographer has fulfilled his/her task when 'the strange' has become familiar and 'the familiar' has become strange again (O'Reilly, 2005, pp. 92-93; 2009, pp. 208-209). At that point the ethnographer has noted and reflected upon practically every aspect of the people under study. Indeed, if the ethnographic research at one point no longer provides relevant new insights, then continuing the research would hardly be worthwhile. The question is what insights can be considered relevant in the first place. The inclusion of the adjectives *virtual* and *organizational* already indicated that my research was not fully ethnographic in an anthropological sense. My research goal and question show that it was never my intention to develop a full understanding of *EVE* gameplay, but 'only' of *EVE* organization. In other words, this is not an *EVE* thesis. After approximately one and a half years of ethnographically researching *EVE*, the amount of new insights into organizational development in *EVE* and the characteristics of my own corporation began to diminish. Still, the research could and perhaps should have continued, but my interest in more quantitative research beckoned.

Ironically, panel researchers might also critique the limited extent of my panel research. Ideally a quantitative researcher is able to argue that the sample is representative of a population. The choice for panel research made this practically impossible to do. This approach makes it less attractive for online gamers to take part in the research. Moreover, the amount of statistics available about the population in question was also limited. It was therefore quite hard to determine what the sample would need to look like for it to be representative of the population. It could still be argued that the panel research should have been continued, but the amount of analysis and writing that had to be done made it important for me to bring that to an end. Ultimately, it is the sample's diversity, not its representativeness, that renders it valuable for pursuing the aforementioned research goal. More importantly, as chapters six and seven as well Appendices D-F show, the 95 panelists still enabled meaningful statistical analyses.

The playful approach towards empirical research design can be critiqued on two aspects: its novelty and the risks it introduces. First, it is arguably unsurprising to find that many of the playful values of Chapter 2 were applicable to the described research design and execution. Research institutions such as universities already have many characteristics of a playful organization. They value the uncertainty and eventuality that comes with the pursuit of new knowledge. Researchers are given leave to pursue opportunities for new methodologies and theories. They are subsequently stimulated to share their ideas and experiences with the scientific community and the public at large. They are even socially recognized for the knowledge they develop and share through e.g. titles and media attention. Second, it is important to realize that playful organization introduces the risk of inefficiency. The uncertainty of a playful approach towards research design and implementation could lead to disappointing results, and hence delays in result delivery. There were indeed disappointing results during my ethnographic research. The amount of useful insights offered by *EVE's Recruitment* chat channel

data was disappointing. Only limited results of this part of the ethnographic research are offered in Chapter 5. Moreover, the number of respondents for the *Major* survey was also a bit disappointing. Luckily, neither disappointment introduced particularly poignant problems. Both the ethnographic and panel research led to interesting and relevant results, as the upcoming chapters will show.

Since my empirical research strategy led to the intriguing application of both qualitative and quantitative research, a reflection on my scientific assumptions is needed. My playful approach dictates a value for equality and thus for considering qualitative and quantitative research equally. This means that the one cannot be discarded for the other. To many this can be confusing, as both types of research are often based on different scientific assumptions, such as interpretivism and realism.

As explained in Chapter 1, my 'subtle-realistic' ontology led me to combine both types of research. Hammersley defined subtle realism as an ontology in which validated knowledge is pursued but in which the knowledge in question is considered to be the researcher's own interpretation of a phenomenon rather than an objective truth (1992, pp. 52-54). The interpretivistic underpinning of subtle realism allowed me to pursue ethnographic research. However, the further course of my empirical research shows realistic tendencies. This first becomes clear when reviewing the nature of my ethnographic research. The use of the playful organization ideal-type in my ethnographic research suggests a more realistic approach to social science than many ethnographers are used to. The use of the OCAI throughout the research also suggests a more realistic approach. Cameron & Quinn view organizational culture as a variable manipulable by leaders. The OCAI helps leaders in changing organizational culture by first measuring "how things are" (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 147). Although I have used the OCAI, I do not agree with Cameron & Quinn's realistic approach to organizational culture and subsequent use of the OCAI. Still, the panel research design and implementation suggest I am not a pure interpretivist. The quantitative goal of generalization is more realistic than interpretivistic. I have indeed considered it worthwhile and possible to pursue more general insights into the playful organization of online gaming communities and work organizations. However, I am aware of the constructed and multi-interpretable nature of the playful organization itself.

4.4.3 ONWARD

Having defined and discussed the characteristics of the conducted empirical research, it is high time the results are presented. The results of the virtual-organizational ethnographic research are presented in Chapter 5 in the form of a 'thick description' of what I initially experienced as a player, and of how the corporation I ended up in was organized at the time. I also connect my description of the corporation's organization to the playful organization ideal-type. The results of the panel research are presented in chapters six and seven. Chapter 6 focuses on the panelists' online gaming communities, while Chapter 7 focuses on their work organizations and their own comparisons between the two contexts. Both chapters first discuss the extent of the communities' or organizations' playfulness and subsequently discuss the factors that can lead to a loss of opportunities for playfulness.

CHAPTER 5

AN ONLINE GAMER SPEAKS OUT: PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS IN *EVE ONLINE*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Game studies scholars have shed some light on organizational characteristics of online gaming communities. Chapter 3 offered a review of relevant studies published over the past decade. It is clear that online games can bring forth communities involving dozens of people from all over the world to accomplish often quite complex tasks. Many researchers have offered insights into online gaming communities' social structuring practices, rationales, applied ICTs, membership fluctuations, time in existence, and culture. The review suggested that online gaming communities have differing degrees of playful organization. Some communities hardly seem playfully organized at all. Interestingly, the differing degrees enabled the identification of several new examples of playful organization.

Still not much is known about online gaming communities as organizations, playful or otherwise. Chapter 3 revealed that organizational perspectives on online gaming communities have overall hardly been pursued over the past decade. The many analyzed aspects and operationalizations of online gaming communities render it difficult to compare and evaluate conceptual definitions of these communities. This means that the review was able to provide only a very rough indication of the extent of playful organization in online games. The indication that online gaming communities can develop as organizations with differing levels of playfulness also raises new questions. It remains unclear as to how online gaming communities organize themselves in such a way that they manage to attract players continuously. More specifically, it remains unclear why a hierarchical (Jakobsson & Taylor, 2003; K.-L. M. Malone, 2009; T. L. Taylor, 2006b, p. 43) or even militaristic (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006, p. 903) community can thrive in an online game as a context of play.

The conducted ethnographic research of *EVE Online* offers more insights into the organizational characteristics of online gaming communities and thus into playful organization. Through virtual-organizational ethnographic research online gaming communities can be researched up close as organizations. The organizational aspects of these communities can be experienced firsthand. The online game *EVE Online* is particularly interesting for such research, as explained in Chapter 4. The organizational aspect of *EVE* gameplay is evident, given the game's economic system and the 'corporations' it brings forth. Developer CCP Games also allows for 'transformative play' through its 'sandbox' design principle, i.e., "play that occurs when the free movement of play alters the more rigid structure in which it takes shape" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 321; Sotamaa, 2007, p. 386). *EVE*'s realistic economic system and transformative play confuse the common understanding of play as externally inconsequential (see Chapter 2). *EVE*'s organizational aspects are therefore particularly relevant.

The playful organization ideal-type offered in Chapter 2 was an important framework for the ethnographic study. The cultural, management-sociological and socio-technical perspectives on organization already pinpointed what qualitative data should be gathered. The values and concepts of a playful organization were used as more specific lenses for gathering and analyzing qualitative data. A level of playful organization was determined and more examples of playful organization were obtained by juxtaposing the gathered data against the ideal-type. The ideal-type offered a framework with which a better understanding could be developed of playful organization in general and in *EVE* specifically.

The virtual-organizational ethnographic research took one and a half years, as discussed in Chapter 4. Roughly 400 hours of participant observation were conducted during this period. Conversations, screenshots and gameplay experiences were logged and reflected upon. During the last year of the ethnographic research I was a member of a corporation referred to with the pseudonym *Major*. Additionally, 121 hours of data from the *Recruitment* chat channel were logged and analyzed, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted and 13 corporation documents were analyzed. Finally, 18 fellow *Major* members took part in a survey to ascertain their gaming habits and opinions about the corporation's organizational culture. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI; Cameron & Quinn, 2006) was used in the survey. A research report about *Major*'s structure and culture was written and commented upon by the corporation's leaders. "Thick descriptions" (Denzin, 1989, pp. 92-95; Geertz, 1973; Ponterotto, 2006) of the gameplay experiences were written up, focusing specifically on organizational aspects. The thick descriptions, interview transcripts, selected *Major*'s web pages and applications, and survey results were also analyzed using the playful organization ideal-type as an analytical framework.

This chapter offers the results. It specifically answers the following research question:

When and how does an online gamer create or join communities, what are the characteristics of those communities, and to what extent are the communities playful organizations?

The following sections offer the final thick description and analyses of my *EVE* experiences. Section 5.2 describes the basics of playing *EVE* through my own experiences as a new player at the time. These initial experiences are complemented by data gathered from the *Recruitment* chat channel. Section 5.3 describes my involvement in *Major*. It describes the process of joining the corporation, doing differing tasks, advancing in the hierarchy, experiencing leadership and using different ICTs. In that section my experiences are complemented by interview and survey data, as well as a reflection on how they all can be interpreted culturally. Section 5.4 summarizes and further interprets my experiences and reflections to ascertain *Major*'s playful organization.

5.2 *EVE ONLINE*, ONCE UPON A TIME

5.2.1 ENTERING THE UNIVERSE

Put most simply, *EVE* is a fictional universe set in the far future. Although the universe is fictional, the story of *EVE* is about humankind. When I started up the game for the first time I watched a 5-minute video that introduced the *EVE*'s lore.²⁰ It introduced *New Eden: EVE Online's* galaxy. *New Eden* was discovered by humans when brave space explorers had found a wormhole, i.e., a portal that had instantly led them to this unknown, distant universe. Soon many others passed through the wormhole. They called the wormhole *EVE*, as it was seen as a salvation from the completely depleted Milky Way galaxy. Unfortunately, the wormhole collapsed, leaving the many who had migrated to *New Eden* helpless. Over the centuries humankind managed to survive, although much knowledge was lost along the way. Having evolved and rediscovered the technology required for space flight, four races started to roam around *New Eden*: the *Amarr*, *Minmatar*, *Gallente* and *Caldari*. The *Amarr* and *Minmatar* soon waged wars against each other, resulting from great cultural differences between the two. Similarly, the *Gallente* and *Caldari* also fought each other. Having fought extensively, the four races managed to forge a peace with each other, although a tenuous one at best. After a century of relative peace and quiet, it is up to players to enter *New Eden* and become a part of its history.

A new player first needs to develop a character with which he or she can enter *New Eden*. The character can either be of *Amarr*, *Minmatar*, *Gallente* or *Caldari* descent. At the time each race was introduced by a short introductory video, meant to highlight the uniqueness of that particular race. Each race had three bloodlines, and each bloodline had three ancestries. Each bloodline and ancestry was briefly described to highlight its uniqueness within a particular race. Having chosen a specific race, bloodline and ancestry, I could choose either a female or male gender to finalize the basic characteristics of my first character. I chose a male gender. Subsequently, I needed to choose an appearance (of which the basic characteristics are dependent on the chosen race) by changing certain bodily parameters (depending on the chosen gender). Finally, I needed to enter a unique name for the character before being able to enter *New Eden*. In the interest of privacy (both my own and the players I have interacted with) I shall not divulge my character's name.

By the end of my first character creation process, I felt emotionally attached to this character. I had spent more than an hour figuring out who this character could and should be. I ended up choosing the *Minmatar* race, *Sebiestor* bloodline and *Traders* ancestry. The reason for this choice was highly personal. I chose the *Minmatar* race as it was based on a tribal society, which I interpreted as a closed type of society, least preoccupied with any kind of domination –

²⁰ An online game's lore is basically its background story. Online games, or massively multiplayer online games to be more specific, often present players with background stories in the form of text in a manual or on a website, and/or in the form of an introductory video when the game is first played. When I first played *EVE* back in 2007, I saw an introduction video different from the one used in later expansions. The original introduction video that I saw was, at the time of writing, still available on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50lxKejNptI>. The one I saw introduced the lore, while later ones introduced *EVE*'s 'sandbox' gameplay design philosophy. This suggests that although *EVE*'s lore is interesting, its importance to new players has diminished with each new expansion.



Figure 5.1. My EVE character. © 2013 CCP hf. All rights reserved. ‘CCP’ and ‘EVE Online’ are registered trademarks of CCP hf in the United States and other jurisdictions.

space, economic, societal or otherwise. I chose the *Sebiestor* bloodline for its relative emphasis on innovativeness, specifically in engineering. Finally, I chose the *Traders* ancestry for its focus on a self-sufficient life of travel. I knew that my choices in race, bloodline and ancestry influenced my character’s learning abilities, but it was very unclear what this influence entailed specifically at the time. Instead of focusing on my character’s abilities, I focused on its representation within this dark and gloomy *New Eden* universe (see Figure 5.1). I wanted my character to appear friendly, both in looks and background, even though creating a friendly look was actually quite difficult.

My character entered *New Eden* without me being able to control it directly, e.g. walk around with it. At the time players took part in *EVE* by either controlling a space ship within three-dimensionally rendered space (Figure 5.2) or being docked at a space station where the user interface consists of mainly text-based or even spreadsheet-like windows (Figure 5.3).²¹ A character entering *New Eden* for the very first time was boarded on a space station where a number of game features are available.

My first space station introduced me to several main features of *EVE*, most importantly the economic system. The economic system is based on an *EVE* currency called ‘InterStellar Credits’ (ISK) and revolves around countless location-based markets. Players are able to buy and sell almost anything using ISK, from minerals and the smallest parts for space ships to massive space ships themselves. Each space station has its own market. Players are able to browse and search through all the space station markets of the region the player is in at a given moment. Aboard the station I also got to know my first space ship and its fittings, e.g. its propulsion, shield

²¹ At FanFest 2008 and 2009 – a yearly CCP-organized *EVE* event of about four days held in Iceland – CCP Games developers announced a project codenamed ‘Ambulation’ in which the ability to walk in stations was central. Later it was announced that the ability would become available in a game expansion called ‘Incarna’. In this expansion, players would be able to actually board and walk on space stations and supposedly large space ships with their characters to do new missions and to interact with each other. See the teaser video presented at Fanfest 2009: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yCCRmNT-WI>. The Incarna expansion was released in June 2011, long after I had finished my ethnographic research.

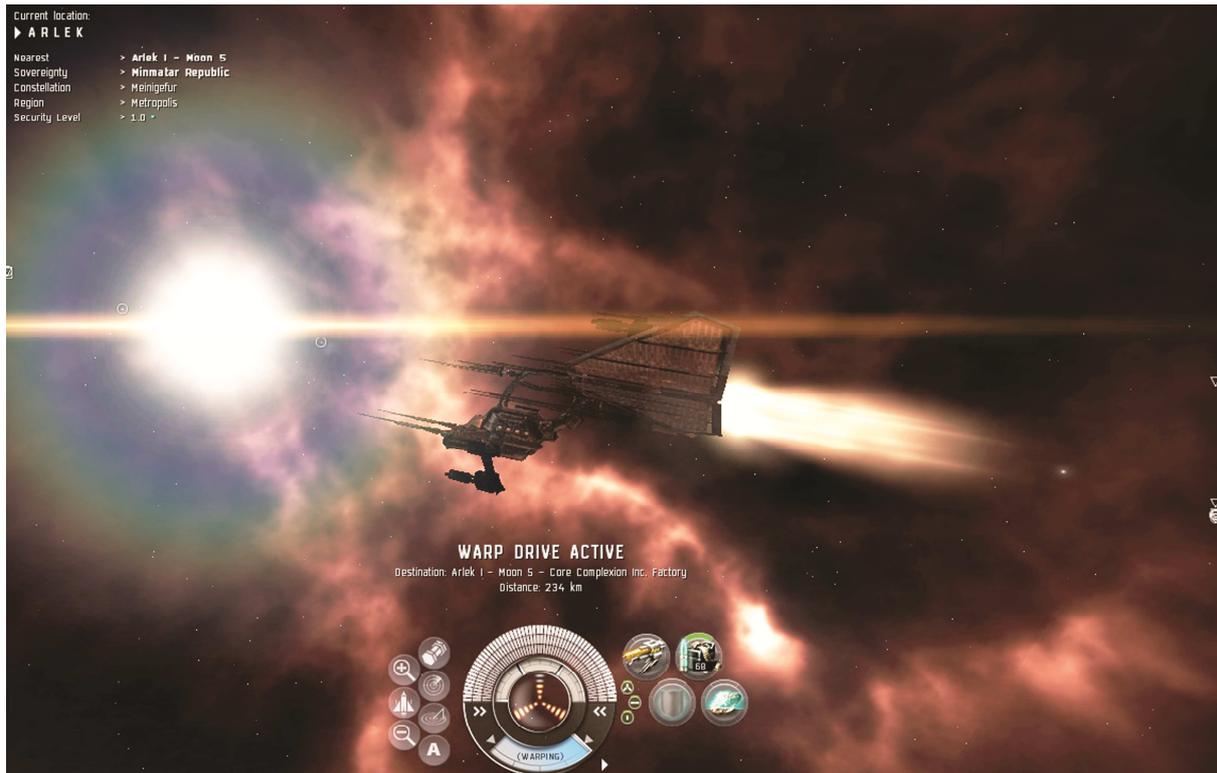


Figure 5.2. Screenshot of the space graphical user-interface, showing the controlled ship in the center within a 3D-rendered solar system. © 2013 CCP hf. All rights reserved. ‘CCP’ and ‘EVE Online’ are registered trademarks of CCP hf in the United States and other jurisdictions.

and weapon modules, or in my case its lack thereof. I reckoned I needed to start making ISK in order to buy a better space ship.

Soon I entered the vast universe in my first unimpressive and easily recognizable space ship, feeling vulnerable and alone. All I really knew was that I was in a specific solar system, part of a specific constellation of solar systems, which formed a part of a region of constellations. Since *New Eden* comprises over 780 constellations, each with dozens of solar systems, *EVE* has literally thousands of solar systems. Indeed, this universe is vast.²²

The universe is also unsafe. *New Eden* is a Player-versus-Player (PvP) universe. When flying in a space ship, one can be shot out of space at any moment. However, I soon realized that my fears were somewhat unfounded, at least for the time being. Each solar system in *New Eden* has a security status between 0.0 (completely unsecured) and 1.0 (completely secured). Solar systems with a security status of at least 0.5 are ‘high-sec’. They are well-controlled by a fleet of non-playing characters (i.e., computer-generated space ships) called *Concord*, i.e., space police. As a new player I entered a part of space called *Empire*, consisting of several regions that all have solar systems with security statuses of at least 0.5, though most are simply 1.0 (see Figure 5.4). If a player had attacked me in *Empire* space, *Concord* would immediately have come to my rescue.

²² See http://www.eve-wiki.net/index.php?title=List_of_Constellations or <http://www.eveonline.com/universe/the-world-of-eve/> for numbers on the vastness of *New Eden*, i.e., the number of regions, constellations and solar systems.



Figure 5.3. Screenshot of the space station graphical user-interface, showing windows of my ship's cargo and personal assets, with more station options on the right. © 2013 CCP hf. All rights reserved. 'CCP' and 'EVE Online' are registered trademarks of CCP hf in the United States and other jurisdictions.

Regardless of security status or region, each solar system contains one or more suns, planets, moons, asteroid belts, space stations and star gates. The latter are means of traveling between solar systems. In *EVE*, a space ship can 'warp' (travel at light speed) through a solar system, meaning that the space ship can cross the solar system within a couple of seconds, instead of hours. When traveling at sub-light speed, each solar system seems as large as our own. A player cannot fly from one solar system to the next using this warp capability. Instead each solar system has one to five star gates. These structures instantly transport a space ship from one solar system to the next. Like the space stations and planetary bodies, star gates are scattered throughout the solar system, but they can easily be found using the navigation system. The game software includes *New Eden* maps complete with navigation and autopilot functionalities (of which Figure 5.4 is an example).

As explained further in Section 5.2.2, solar systems offer many possibilities for gameplay. They can hold several valuable resources. Asteroid belts and moons can hold all sorts of minable minerals. Space stations offer all sorts of services, including the markets and fitting services mentioned earlier. Moreover, several non-playing characters reside in them and offer missions, i.e., assignments with which players can earn ISK once completed successfully. Since *New Eden* is so vast a universe, there is much to explore, play and acquire.

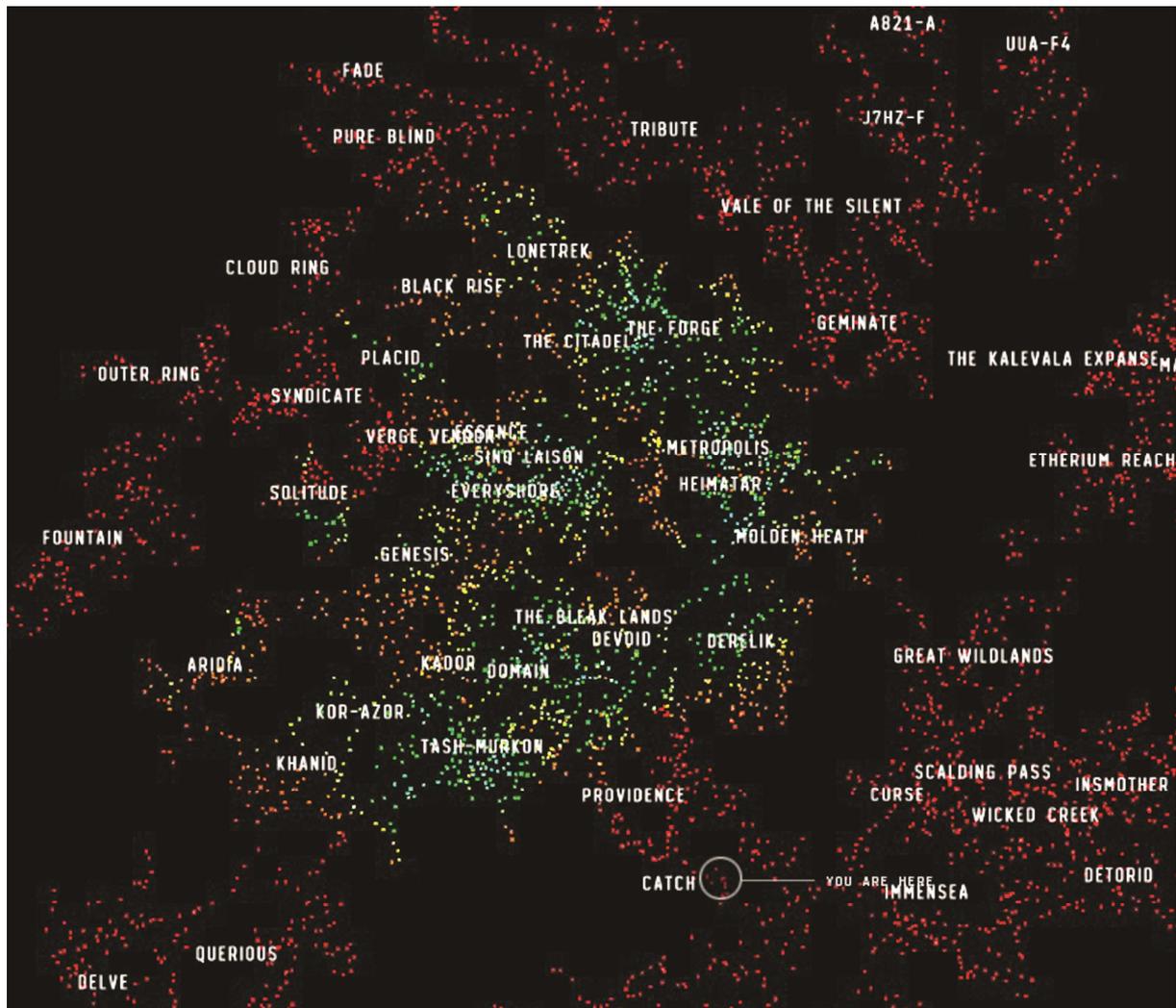


Figure 5.4. A portion of New Eden. Each green or lightly colored dot represents a solar system with a relatively high level of security (Empire space). Each red dot represents a null-security solar system. The names shown are those of regions. © 2013 CCP hf. All rights reserved. ‘CCP’ and ‘EVE Online’ are registered trademarks of CCP hf in the United States and other jurisdictions.

5.2.2 INITIAL GAMEPLAY

My character needed to acquire skills to really start playing *EVE*. In *EVE* a player’s character can gain and develop specific skills by acquiring the accompanying skill book from a market at a space station and setting the character to subsequently study it. The study process could take anything from several minutes (for first level basic skills) to several weeks (for highest level advanced skills). Learning the more advanced skills always required a character to have mastered at least three other skills, which could in turn all have required other more basic skills as well. Planning is thus important when it comes to character skill development.²³

²³ A skill that is being ‘trained’ by a character will become available within a very specific and explicitly communicated amount of time. Skill training takes place whether the player is actually playing the game or not. A small and quite simple program called *EVEMon* helps players plan and monitor their character’s

The many available tutorials – 49 in total at the time – were very helpful for finding out how I could handle the graphical user-interface and how I could play *EVE*. Through tutorials I was introduced to different game mechanics, like the missions for example. The missions were at first tutorials in themselves. They introduced me to the basics of combat. By engaging in combat with non-playing characters, i.e., computer-generated enemies, I became aware of how I could attempt to stay alive within this PvP universe. As such, the tutorials and missions introduced me to certain paths of skill development. Subsequently, the market interface and character development interfaces allowed me to find out which skills one could develop further. I soon found out that choosing skills to develop meant choosing who you wanted to be in *EVE*. To become truly professional in combat, for instance, one would need to develop skills at least within Spaceship Command, Gunnery, Missiles, Electronics and Engineering categories. Alternatively, to become truly professional in mining, one would need to develop skills within some of those categories, e.g. Spaceship Command and Mechanic, but other categories as well, i.e., Industry and Science.

I needed to plan skill development carefully, because it took up a significant amount of time. I had to find out what more could be done in this universe and subsequently decide my own preferences. This meant choosing a career, as briefly explained in Chapter 4. While doing some of the lowest level missions, I found out that I liked the mining and production game mechanics. I preferred them over combat game mechanics. I therefore decided to plan my first skills around the mining and production careers. Reflecting on these first steps, it becomes clear that through the tutorials and first missions I was slowly eased into the possibilities of *EVE* and selecting the specific possibilities that attracted me the most.

Yet even after learning the lore and basic possibilities of the universe, I knew there was still much more to be discovered. I realized it every time I read an *EVE* news bulletin supplied by CCP Games, or tried to follow the more advanced conversations on one of the public text chat channels. In this enormous and complex universe, it was quite evident that play was not just about developing a character, but also about developing yourself as a player trying to understand the complex *EVE* universe and the culture that has developed in it.

The more I understood the basics of and further opportunities for gameplay, the more I realized that I was being drawn into social gameplay. There were three moments when I realized that I needed other players. First, I started to get more complicated missions that I repeatedly could not complete alone, but would need some help with. Second, I started to really want some assets, e.g. a specific space ship good for mining and cargo hauling, but realized I would need to spend a lot of time making and saving money to buy them. Consequently, I started to have an interest in the resources of low- or null-security space, e.g. rarer minerals, as they would allow me to make money much faster. In low-/no-security solar systems I would need trusted players backing me up to make sure I was not blown up by some other player or players.

New Eden is too complex to discover and roam alone. It might be technically possible, but it would be highly impractical, especially for a new player. After playing for a total of about thirty

skill training without starting the game software. Many or perhaps even most players use it. See <http://evemon.battleclinic.com>.

hours, I realized I needed to socialize more. Up to that point I had interacted with other players already through various chat channels. I had asked several questions and offered several answers on the hugely popular *Help* text chat channel, which I had automatically joined when I entered the universe for the first time. Yet I realized that social interaction could have a much more profound meaning in *EVE* than simply through the in-game text chat channels.

The universe encourages players to form communities called ‘corporations’, as explained briefly in Chapter 4. A player will already be part of a corporation upon entering the universe, albeit one managed by the game software instead of an actual player. I had not been really aware of this. I also did not meet or even feel any connection to other players that might also be a member of the same game-managed corporation. I decided to find a ‘real’ first corporation I could join.

5.2.3 SOCIAL GAMEPLAY

I was still too new a player to be valuable, or even to be able to comprehend the well-established corporations I had already heard of. I needed to find a corporation that accepted ‘noobs’ (new and inexperienced players) in which I could learn more and more easily about *EVE*’s possibilities. Fortunately, they are not that hard to find. Many corporations are founded by groups of new players and are willing to accept almost anyone into the group. Some players referred to them as ‘startups’ or ‘startup corporations’. Using the *Help* and *Recruitment* public chat channels I found such a corporation that was open, seemed friendly, and had many Dutch-speaking members. I decided to join them.

Gradually gameplay became more social, resulting in an expedited learning process. As briefly explained in Chapter 4, I started to develop my chosen industrialist career. I developed the ability to quickly find and mine asteroid belts for minerals. This was in part thanks to the help of my fellow ‘corpmates’, who organized a weekly mining expedition which anyone could join. I also explored the market system further to find out how I could make the most money with mining. At times this meant refining the ore I had mined at a space station’s refinery. I started ignoring missions to focus solely on mining and refinery. I also discovered how I could use blueprints and the minerals I had mined to produce products or even space ships (with the right skills). I started looking for space stations in *Empire* where I could sell my merchandise the quickest. Like many other corporations in *EVE*, with each sale a small percentage of my earnings went to the corporation’s account. This is known as ‘corporation tax’, a feature that all corporation leaders can use to automatically get funds from their members. The mining, production and sales still occurred in a PvP context. I needed to be careful not to be too conspicuous, as this could attract players seeking to destroy my ship and steal my cargo. The possibility of being attacked at any moment added a level of excitement to the whole mining, refining, production and sales endeavor.

The corporation had fallen apart by the time I had developed some production and sales procedures for myself. Since the corporation had been founded as a means to collaboratively learn more about the game, the members were not very committed to the corporation itself. We were more committed to learning about the game together. When I started developing procedures for production and sales, I actually started to operate more individually within the

corporation. It is quite imaginable that other players did the same. I knew from the start that the corporation's rationale would render it more of a temporary network of players than a long-term organized corporation.

What this startup corporation experienced was no exception. Many players form corporations to learn quicker about *EVE*'s possibilities and have a shared sense of fun. This is indeed stimulated, as anyone can start a corporation at any time. In turn, players can technically start an alliance of corporations at any time. Thus there are literally tens of thousands of corporations in existence at any time. In December 2007, CCP stated that there were in fact over 34,000 corporations in existence (Guðmundsson, 2007).

The *Recruitment* chat channel illustrated that many corporations are formed each day for all sorts of purposes, and subsequently try to get players to join them. On average 61 corporations advertised their existence 25 times every day during peak hours in October and November 2008 (when I logged the channel's data; see Section 4.2.2). By the end of the logging period each day, around 27% of the logged corporations were still new advertisers. Almost half (47.8%) of all recorded corporations only advertised on a single day in the chat channel during the period of analysis. After single advertisements, high-frequency ones occurred most often (32.2% of the recorded corporations). The advertisements themselves show that most corporations (84.6%) are open to players interested in at least four of the following seven forms of gameplay:

1. Combat – attacking other players
2. Military – controlling space
3. Doing missions
4. Mining asteroid belts and moons
5. Manufacturing equipment and space ships
6. Hauling cargo between stations
7. Trading on the markets

The data suggest that startup corporations frequently use the chat channel to advertise their openness to new members and activities for a short period. My own experiences and those of interviewed players suggest that startup corporations either find enough committed members and persevere, merge with another corporation or simply disband again.

The more successful corporations become large ones that exist for years and years. I knew that long-term organized corporations were an intricate part of *EVE* gameplay. In fact they seemed to define the game. I wanted to experience this whole new dimension of social gameplay, which often seemed to take place mostly outside of *Empire* in the null-security regions of space. Having gotten to know *EVE*'s main features, I felt that I had surpassed the beginner's stages of the game for which safe *Empire* space was designed. I wanted to be a part of one of the many organized and long-lasting corporations and alliances *EVE* is known for.

Old player-run corporations and alliances reign supreme in the null-security solar systems.²⁴ Null-security solar systems can in fact be *claimed* by an alliance of corporations. Wars are waged over the control of highly lucrative solar systems, constellations or even whole regions. To do this players not only need to be highly knowledgeable of the intricate details of the *EVE* universe, they also need to be able to enthuse and manage many other players – dozens if not hundreds of them – within both a corporation and an alliance. I needed to look for such an organized corporation part of an organized alliance to take my next big step in *EVE*. Being a member of such a corporation could help me reach the more lucrative regions of *New Eden* and experience more of the extremely social and emergent gameplay *EVE* has to offer.

5.3 MAJOR AS AN ORGANIZATION

5.3.1 ACCESS

Experiences

I found *Major* with the help of my research assistant. This old and established corporation was based on production and sales, my primary interests. At the time the corporation was quite small. It had around 40 members, all English-speaking. *Major* had been a big player in null-security space as a production, sales and general financial service-providing powerhouse for years on end. It was part of a small and non-aggressive alliance that controlled a relatively small region of space, but principally allowed access to all players with neutral or friendly standings towards it.²⁵ As such the alliance was an ideal production and trading partner in general and to this corporation specifically. Thankfully, the corporation was looking for new members.

From the corporation's website I learned that players who wished to join the corporation should meet a number of requirements. *Major* upheld a couple of character prerequisites for joining, although they were somewhat minor. Concerning the character the corporation specifically required a minimum amount of skill points, limited amount of previous corporation switches and a friendly standing towards the corporation and its alliance. The leaders I interviewed found *player* requirements more important than the *character* requirements. While character requirements generally ensure applicants have a certain level of experience with *EVE*, player requirements generally ensure applicants fit in and are trustworthy. The player requirements for this corporation encompassed an ability to speak English and a willingness and ability to actively use a set of specific technologies outside of *EVE*. The most important

²⁴ Two old and large alliances of corporations were at the time by far the most notorious: *Band of Brothers* and *GoonSwarm*. Both alliances were known for their continued commitment to controlling large regions of null-security space. Among *EVE* players it was considered common knowledge that the *Band of Brothers* was a fast-paced alliance with players who were also CCP Games employees, while the *GoonSwarm* alliance had players who were quite recalcitrant, unpredictable and humorous.

²⁵ *EVE* characters have standings towards each other, corporations and alliances. A standing is nothing more than a negative or positive number. A neutral standing equates to 0, a friendly one to a positive number, and a hostile one to a negative number. Standings are both automatically calculated by the game software, and manually manipulated by other players. Negative and positive standings towards other players, corporations or alliances lead to several limitations and affordances. See also <http://eve-wiki.net/index.php?title=Standing>.

technologies were Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels, a corporation website and an alliance website. Both websites contained discussion forums and other web applications for the purpose of sharing *EVE* knowledge and keeping an open line of communication. Another player requirement was the acceptance of a set of social norms. Applicants had to be willing to act maturely towards both friends and foes of the corporation, and to abide by the corporation's strict sharing policy. The corporation's sharing policy stated that all members should relinquish all their character's possessions to the corporation, including ISK. In return, no one paid corporation tax and everyone was free to use or request anything (e.g. skills, ships, fittings) from the corporation's hangars at the space stations where the corporation had offices.

As I was willing and able to meet the above requirements, I started the actual application process, which *Major* had defined quite clearly. I needed to have conversations with existing members to introduce myself, my *EVE* interests and my willingness to join the corporation. To do this I first started a new topic on the corporation's open discussion forum on October 28, 2008, to which the Recruitment director replied the same day. I was asked to proceed with the application by sending an e-mail to a specific recruitment e-mail address. Contrary to the forum topic, this was regarded as a more formal application letter. In time the corporation's application process changed and stipulated that new applicants were asked to immediately have an informal preliminary interview with one of the corporation's recruiters. In any case, in this first step the corporation wanted to obtain two different types of information. I needed to provide information about myself, i.e., my name, age, gender, country and time zone. Moreover, I needed to provide information about my game experiences and preferences, specifically which career path (or paths) I had chosen and was willing to develop, what goals I had set for the short- and long-term, and what type of player I felt I was. I also needed to provide my Limited Access API (Application Programming Interface) Key, i.e., a specific *EVE*-generated code²⁶ with which the corporation would be able to check my character's statistics. In short, I needed to relinquish a lot of information to allow the corporation to judge my trustworthiness and my worth.

Once I had sent the e-mail, the application process went underway with one or more recruiters doing a background check of my main character using the information I had provided. The corporation wanted to know which other corporations I had been a member of to ascertain that I was no enemy of sorts and was able to commit to a corporation. The more corporations a character had been a member of, the more questions would have been asked, as this could be interpreted as an uncommitted player or a smoke screen for a spy looking to be trusted. Paradoxically, a character that had been a member of only one or even none at all would equally raise more questions, as this could be interpreted similarly. Indeed this method of background checking was hardly objective. It was based on previous experiences and gut feelings.

I scheduled a formal meeting with one of the recruiters on *Major's* IRC channel on November 3, 2008. At the time two of the six leaders did these interviews using the

²⁶ CCP Games offers API Keys to each player that can be used in third-party software (like *EVEMon*, see an earlier footnote) to obtain character information from *EVE* without the need to actually use the game software. This feature thus allows players to develop their own software with which they can to a limited extent also play the game. Another example of an at the time well-known third-party application was *EVE-MEEP*. See <http://sites.google.com/site/evemeep>.

corporation's preferred direct text-based communication channel: the IRC channel. The first thing the recruiter said to me was, "So... Tell me a bit about yourself." With 'yourself', he meant me, not my character. This was a proper interview. Only after discussing my job as a Ph.D. candidate did we move on to my *EVE* career so far. He asked, "You're an industrialist? On what scale do you currently act?" I clarified my choices and previous experiences as an industrialist, i.e., a manufacturer and salesman of goods. I felt he wanted to know what the added value of my membership would be. "Production will keep you busy only for so long," the recruiter then added. At the time I thought otherwise, but was intrigued by what other things I could do in this corporation. In turn the recruiter used this interview to once again ascertain whether the applicant was truthful and not an infiltrator attempting to spy on, steal from or break up the corporation. We ended the interview after almost two hours.

Over the next couple of days the recruiter convened with the corporation's leaders, whoever of them was available. Three days after the interview I was notified of their decision. I was in. The whole application process took just over a week to complete. I later learned that overall, applicants were accepted if they were truthful (hence trustworthy) and if their play experiences, preferences and goals fit with the corporation's rationale. Since I was open about myself and my character, and was interested in manufacturing – the corporation's core business – the decision was apparently quite easy to make.

Trust-based access

The player requirements I was confronted with when attempting to join the corporation essentially seemed to be social norms that defined the corporation. As several interviewees argued and the corporation's website stipulated, these social norms were in essence defining characteristics of the corporation. Since the corporation's conception in 2003 the access protocol had been designed to ensure that only truthful players whose play experiences, preferences and goals fit with the corporation's rationale became members. Thus access was based on trust, namely on the trust that the applicant would not steal from or break up the corporation/alliance, and on trust that the applicant would actually be willing and able to contribute to the corporation. The latter form of trust was acquired when the applicant stated his/her appreciation and adherence to the corporation's social norms. The former form of trust was acquired from the provided personal and character information accompanied by the described background check.

The entire application process simultaneously was and was *not* a job interview. It was an extensively structured interview. Applicants like me needed to do multiple interviews and provide an *EVE*-specific résumé of sorts. It was *not* a job interview, as applicants did not apply for a job. There was no clarity about which task applicants might do and responsibilities he or she might have. The applicants simply applied for membership, not for a job. The recruiters tried to find overlap between the applicant's and the corporation's *EVE* interests to ensure that the member would be intrinsically motivated to contribute to the corporation. As such the process was perhaps more similar to the interview and balloting process one finds in certain voluntary organizations, e.g. a fraternity or sports club.

5.3.2 DIVISION OF LABOR

Experiences

That same month my recruiter asked me to get in touch with one of the *Major's* most active leaders. The leader had heard of my interest in production and sales and wanted to teach me the ropes of doing so within this corporation. We had our first meeting in one of the corporation's IRC channels at the end of November. He quickly introduced me to one of the generic tasks of the corporation that anyone could pick up, including me. On the corporation's discussion forum there was a separate section for logistical requests. One of the still open requests concerned a big cargo hauling job, which the leader asked me to do.

He asked me to head out to the corporation's main space station at the edge of *Empire*, from which I could get a good cargo hauling ship. I let the automatic pilot plot the course from my current location to the edge of *Empire*. I had to cross almost all of *Empire* space, which meant doing about 30 jumps. Thankfully, the automatic pilot did all the flying. I boarded the space station and obtained the huge cargo hauler from the corporation's hangar. I left the station and plotted a new course to a space station where I was to obtain the requested resources. The leader explained that I had to do the flying myself from then on, as the autopilot feature was unsafe. Since autopilot disengages the warp drive several tens of kilometers away from the jump gate, a player still needs to do some sub-light speed flying before being able to jump through the gate to the next solar system. This is dangerous, as 'gate campers', i.e., players hanging around jump gates waiting for others approaching it, can easily attack you. Since I was in a huge cargo ship capable of carrying very lucrative resources or even complete space ships, I was a prime target. After another half hour of much more intense flying than I was used to, I reached the space station where I needed to buy all sorts of merchandise, load them onto my huge cargo hauler and bring them all the way back to the main *Empire* office. The whole endeavor took over an hour, involving an intensive trip across *Empire* from space station to space station. It was quite an exciting endeavor, as there was a risk of being blown to bits by some adversary. It was also a highly collaborative endeavor, as I discussed my progress informally in the IRC channel every 10 minutes or so with a couple of corpmates, getting tips along the way.

I spent my first weeks in *Major* doing a couple more of these logistical operations I found on the forum's logistical support section. I started interacting with fellow members on the forums and IRC channels. Moreover, I obtained and trained new skills for my character to be able to follow the production and sales procedures of the corporation. Having found my way within this corporation, I realized that it was high time I went to the corporation's main null-security solar system and space station. The trip to our null-security region was safest and easiest from the corporation's space station at the edge of *Empire* space. The approximately 30-minute trip to null-security space was a milestone for me. It had symbolic value as it represented a definitive new era in my *EVE* gameplay. Ironically it was quite an uneventful journey since I did not run into any other players. While the null-security region seemed physically no different from *Empire* space, it had much fewer players roaming around. This makes almost perfect sense, since the null-security region was claimed and controlled by our alliance. Having arrived at the null-security station, I needed to meet with the corporation leader again to get to know the production and sales procedures within this new region of space from which we operated.

One night in January 2009 I logged on to the IRC channel. The active corporation leader was probably expecting me, since he had asked me six days earlier to start production soon. The leader asked, "You got a minute for me to walk you through sales production?" Before I knew it I was chatting with him in the IRC channel, studying a Google spreadsheet he had made, and managing the manufacturing processes in *EVE* at the same time. He explained how a script he had written exported market data from *EVE* into a spreadsheet mostly useful for people doing sales and manufacturing. He explained specific information the spreadsheet offered that was relevant for me as a manufacturer. "This is where the magic happens," he said. The spreadsheet kept track of the items that *Major* endeavored to sell, checking how much of the item in question was still on the market and, if none, signaling that more needed to be manufactured. We got into the steps that I needed to follow before starting the manufacturing process. When we were rounding off the training, he started planning, "So this is something you can do without me being around. And the more you keep up with it, the less I have to check it." My new role in the corporation was clear. Moreover, my new relationship to this leader was clear. I would become part of one of the production teams, led by this specific leader. I thanked my new team leader for the explanations. He ended our conversation with, "If you ever feel you have time for more duties, I have other stuff that needs taken care of too [...] I will eventually split [...] sales from logistics and make it its own team, but at the moment I have no one that can actually fill the team lead role for [...] sales. No one...yet :P" I replied, ":) Well let's see how it all goes."

I spent the next months working on production in the above fashion. I would first open the Google spreadsheet to check whether there was a need to set up new manufacturing jobs. If so, I would log into *EVE*, open the corporate hangar containing all our blueprints, select the appropriate blueprint, open the manufacturing facility and select the manufacturing parameters the spreadsheet signaled. Once successfully set up, I would set my name in the specific product row in the Google spreadsheet, indicating that production had started. This way I knew none of the other players would set up the same manufacturing job. Once the job had finished, the manufactured product would turn up in a separate corporate hangar. The products would periodically be picked up from this hangar by another member for transport to a space station with a vibrant market, where it would be put up for sale.

During these couple of months the production procedures changed slightly as a result of the corporation's expansion. One or two new members were joining the corporation each month. Fellow members had developed new manufacturing arrays with which we could boost our production. Since production was booming, after two months my team leader asked me to also help in sales, like he had mentioned at the end of my training in production. We spent another session – similar to the one described earlier – on the sales procedures of the corporation. Using my new sales skills I was able to put the products we manufactured up for sale on a vibrant space station's market, even though I was on another space station altogether.

Doing logistics, production and sales often from a single space station can in time become quite a dull way of playing in the vibrant universe *EVE* offers. Some factors mediated this dull feeling. First, as I already explained the PvP basis of *New Eden* makes any operation in space a tricky and exciting one, especially in low- or null-security space. Second, the conversations I had in the IRC channels and the discussion forums reduced this sense of

boredom. I was gradually getting to know some of my fellow corporation members, specifically my recruiter and team leader. Moreover, being able to stay informed about the activities of my fellow corporation members made me at times feel like I played an important albeit minor part in pursuing the corporation's or alliance's rationales.

After talking about my role in the corporation with my recruiter at the end of September 2009, I decided to get in touch with a fellow member who had recently joined and was more into PvP. Although the corporation had always focused on service provision through production or sales, a PvP team was considered good to have. With a good PvP team, a solar system's security could be kept tight, which helped us carry out production, logistics and sales tasks. At the beginning of October, I had an introductory session with the PvP team leader using the voice chat software TeamSpeak, which again lasted a couple of hours. I learned the basics of good PvP procedures, specifically the communicative practices of patrolling and controlling star gates as well as which ships and ship fittings were suitable for the job. Like all the other tasks and procedures, this one led to more skill training, allowing me to fly better combat ships and control their fittings, i.e., weapons, shields and propulsion systems. I realized then that within a year of my acceptance to the corporation I had developed skills with which I could do quite comprehensive logistics, production, sales and PvP tasks that benefitted the corporation and the alliance, whenever I wanted.

I only joined two PvP operations of the alliance *Major* was in at the time. Both times the alliance had initiated the PvP operation because a neighboring alliance had declared war against us in an attempt to take over our territory and its lucrative resources (e.g. its minerals and space stations' assets). Our alliance was relatively small and quite peaceful, so most PvP operations were reactions to war declarations others made. Each time the alliance was declared war against, we would automatically receive an in-game mail message to notify us of it. This already sparked conversations in the IRC channels as to what PvP operations were being set up and how one could join. Since our alliance had its own discussion forum, we could always check the details of the operations and the joining possibilities quite easily. During the two operations I was struck by the sheer amount of skills and procedures both my character and myself could still learn. Since *EVE*'s basis is PvP combat, the entire combat system is even more elaborate than those of other game mechanics, e.g. production and sales.

A typical PvP operation organized by the alliance could easily attract hundreds of players and last for at least three hours. If an opposing alliance would learn of our combat plans, it too could rally hundreds of players. One night in October 2009 an alliance-initiated PvP operation managed to attract hundreds of players from several of the alliance's corporations. It turned out the opposing alliance that had declared war on us had learned of our imminent attack and also assembled a fleet of hundreds of players in the next solar system. Meeting each other for battle within the same solar system (meaning that 500+ players would play on a single server) would have been hard for *EVE* to cope, perhaps resulting in 'lag' – an annoyingly asynchronous gameplay experience. On that particular night, after hours of assembling, structuring and preparing the fleet, the battle did not even take place, as the fleet commanders deemed the possibility of lag and the resulting loss of space ship control too risky. But on other nights battles

went ahead, lasting for hours, sometimes leading to gains, sometimes to losses. They were subsequently of course great conversation starters in the IRC channels the next day.

Self-determined and negotiated roles

Major's strategy for the division of labor first encompassed defining the kinds of labor that anyone could suggest and pick up at any time. Anyone could request or suggest the acquisition, transport and delivery of certain minerals, parts, ammunition, space ships or skill books. There were several reasons for such requests or suggestions. Partner corporations within the alliance might be in need of certain space ships, parts or ammunition. A member might want to construct an elaborate space ship to use in combat, daily operations or to sell. A corporation leader might want to fill a hangar with basic equipment useful and available to any member. Subsequently, anyone could offer to help fulfill the request or suggestion, or discuss it further. Members could also engage in combat against enemies with other players at own discretion, as long as the corporation's and alliance's norms concerning who and where to engage were adhered to. Members were encouraged to join large fleet operations organized within the alliance. Members were also encouraged to keep alliance territory safe from 'pirates', i.e., enemies that entered the territory to obtain some of the solar systems' or alliance's lucrative resources.

A member could also be involved in teams for more specialist or advanced tasks. Once an applicant was accepted, it was clear to both the recruiter and most of the leaders who the new member was and what he or she would like to do. In my case this meant getting in touch with one of the corporation's leaders who had set up production procedures. According to the interviewees a certain specialist or advanced task was never imposed on the member. Instead a recruiter tended to suggest a certain regular task or procedure the new member might do, based on the member's goals, preferences and experiences. In time a member might want to be part of more or other teams. In my case this meant becoming involved in sales as well. *Major* had at least eight active 'teams' responsible for different critical tasks, most importantly multiple production and sales teams. Each team consisted of a small group of members who, if actively involved, made sure that the tasks assigned to the team were done regularly, if not continuously. Moreover, each team had a leader responsible for hustling up enough members to maintain steady activity.

The corporation also operated four lucrative financial services to the entire *EVE* community that were much more controlled than the teams. To ensure the corporation's anonymity these services have to remain unnamed. To nevertheless be a bit more specific, the financial services were typical of a bank (e.g. storing or lending money). Given the financial risks involved, the community services were actually operated completely separately from the corporation's regular teams. Each of these services were financially independent from the corporation's teams and operated by only a couple of members who had high status and were deemed most trustworthy, e.g. the corporation's leaders. Thus, unlike in other teams, members were not free to perform tasks for these financial services.

Although these financial services were economically very important to *Major*, in terms of total amount of labor they were secondary to the corporation's core teams. Thus it was very important to keep members motivated to contribute to the teams. The production and sales

teams required multiple active members to keep the corporation going. Although the corporation encouraged a member to be in only one team at a time, this was in practice not upheld strictly. At times there were not enough active members, or a member became more active when part of multiple teams. A team leader also tended to hustle up members on an ad hoc basis, i.e., seeing who's available at a certain moment to help out with a task or procedure that really needed doing. Overall it was felt that more strict *a priori* divisions of labor tended to decrease engagement. At one time a corporation leader suggested formally switching from the 'team' to a 'project' style of labor division. With this labor division, a member would be involved in a project, instead of being a member of a team. Members were from then on more free to contribute to all sorts of tasks.

Figure 5.5 sums up that labor was structured in *Major*, but it was not clearly divided. Generic logistics (shown at left in the figure) was never clearly assigned to specific members, but simply offered as jobs anyone could pick up. Other tasks were team-based (shown in the middle of the figure). They were neither clearly assigned to specific members, nor open to anyone at any time. The only tasks that were actually divided among specific individuals were those falling under one of the four financial services that *Major* offered. These were specifically assigned to members who were deemed trustworthy and competent.

The division of labor was both self-determined and negotiated. Active members tended to fulfill multiple tasks and had no clearly definable singular role description. The survey results also reflect this. When the respondents were asked what role or title description they upheld, one respondent indicated that he did not have one, four respondents upheld multiple role/title descriptions and the other 13 provided merely their rank, e.g. 'recruit' or 'president' (explained further in Section 5.3.3).

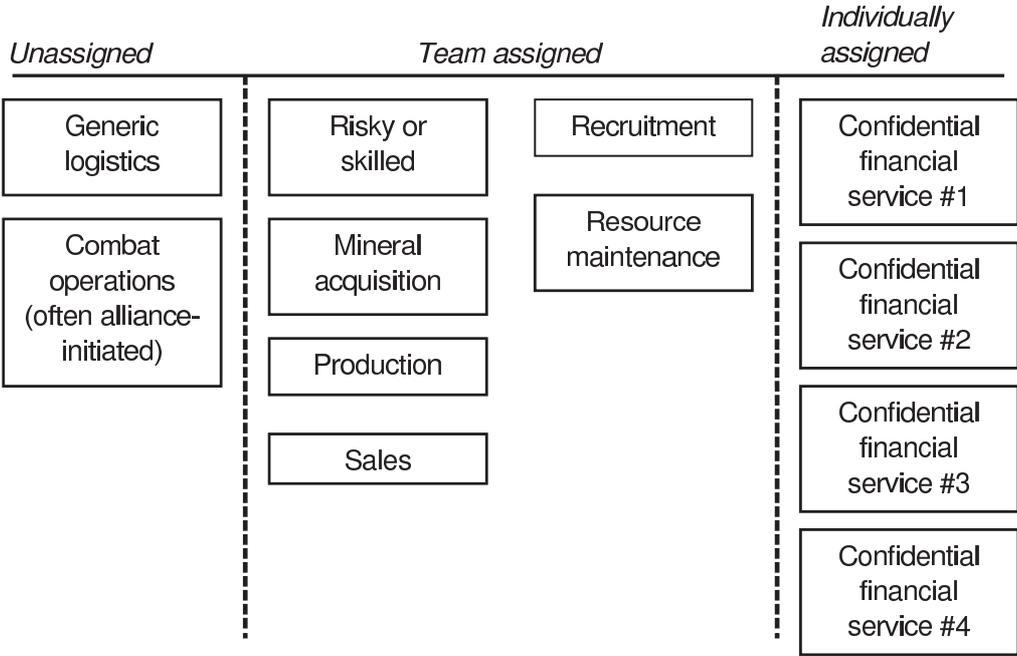


Figure 5.5. The project-based division of labor of the corporation.

A unilateral division of labor, i.e., leaders assigning a single clearly defined task to a member, was considered unengaging. Merely structuring labor as a leader and then simply letting a member contribute at his or her own discretion was considered to be more engaging. Moreover, the more a member contributed, the more he or she was allowed to contribute, as the member had a proven trustworthiness. Since the fruits of everyone's labor (ISK and assets) could be used freely in *Major*, the more the members contributed, the more they got in return. Important factors in this type of labor division are expertise and trust. The corporation upheld a hierarchy of expertise and trust to be able to determine which members were willing and able to actually contribute, as explained in the next section.

5.3.3 HIERARCHY

Experiences

Over the course of my membership in *Major* I acquired more and more skills and learned more about the procedures applicable to the region of null-security space we operated in. It was quite a basic start, becoming more and more elaborate over time. With each new task, my character and I learned more skills. Moreover, with each new task I (as a player) became part of another team or project.

Ironically, I was not even a full member of the corporation yet. I only had Recruit status. When joining *Major* members have Recruit status for some time during which they are in a sort of trial membership period. During this trial membership period some of the corporation's resources are still unavailable. Once the Recruit is willing to relinquish all his/her personal assets to corporate hangars, and the corporation leaders still deem the member trustworthy, the Recruit will be promoted to Enlisted status and become a 'regular' member. Close to the end of my first year within the corporation, in October 2009, I indeed got promoted to Enlisted status. I was talking to my recruiter over IRC about access to certain assets, when he said, "Ah, which reminds me. We've been discussing about your promotion. ... Tbh [to be honest], I've somewhat missed you in my sporadic checks. ^^ [an emoticon denoting embarrassment] You've been a recruit for ten months, which is somewhere close to a new record." Apparently, a Recruit becomes Enlisted after somewhere between three and six months, my recruiter estimated. After quickly checking and discussing whether I had relinquished all my personal assets to corporate hangars, my recruiter said, "Feel yourself duly promoted."

It became clear that in time I could be promoted to higher statuses. The next step had a title I cannot divulge as it would give away the corporation's name. That status came with high esteem, but not yet with formal recognition of strategic decisionmaking power. Members with high esteem were not only highly trusted with practically all possible tasks, they were also considered 'permanent' members. They could leave or (temporarily) become inactive if they so desired, but they would always be able to use the status' title. The next status a member could pursue was that of President. Such members had formally recognized strategic decisionmaking power, and the same esteemed status. If they decided to leave or (temporarily) become inactive, they could still use the esteemed status' title if they so wished. I could have obtained even higher statuses within *Major*, if I had chosen to remain an active Enlisted member.

The corporation was indeed hierarchically structured. Members higher in the hierarchy had relatively more task abilities and decisionmaking power. The corporation had a number of leaders, i.e., Presidents as overall corporation leaders and team (or project) leaders. During the study *Major* officially had 6 leaders, of which one was Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO was also the original founder of the corporation. Each team had a team leader, although some members led more than one team. Some of the leaders also led teams. Both the number of teams and number of members per team fluctuated resulting from the self-determined and negotiated division of labor. The teams were not related to each other hierarchically, although they were often related to each other in some way nonetheless. Each team was equal to the next, but some teams were dependent on others. Production teams were dependent on the mineral acquisition team and good logistical support. The sales teams were dependent on production teams. Yet there was no perception that certain teams were more powerful than others. Having said that, the teams that had been longer in existence, e.g. production and sales teams, were more established. These teams defined the corporation. They were an important part of the corporation's identity.

Expertise and trust hierarchy

The existence of corporation and team leaders suggests the existence of a power hierarchy. Generally speaking, the power hierarchy consisted of only three layers: corporation leaders, team leaders and members. Corporation leadership changed relatively less often as members tended to remain corporation leaders once they had become one. However, corporation leaders were often also team leaders and simply general members, as they performed the tasks associated with those roles as well. Team leadership was more fluid, as people could become a team leader more easily than a corporation leader. Team membership or general corporation membership was very fluid as anyone could perform general or team-specific tasks. Some leaders seemed to switch between layers constantly. It is thus not very adequate to describe *Major's* hierarchy as simply a power hierarchy consisting of three layers.

The corporation leaders and members stressed the existence of a hierarchy of expertise and trust, using the aforementioned status system. Members who had been actively acquiring knowledge and experience in one or more tasks to the benefit of the corporation were recognized for that by being awarded an increase in status. As became clear from my experiences, there were five statuses or 'ranks': recruits, 'regular' members, esteemed members, Presidents (leaders) and the CEO. It is interesting to note the difference between esteemed members and Presidents. Esteemed members had generally already been deemed absolutely trustworthy. If such members wished to become a President, then they had to show expertise (knowledge and experience) that is not *EVE*-specific (e.g. production or sales), but community-specific. They had to be willing and able to lead the corporation, i.e., make decisions about the corporation's structure and function within the alliance and the *EVE* community in general.

Figure 5.6 shows how the expertise & trust hierarchy and the strategic decisionmaking power hierarchy related to each. Note that at the time of the survey the total number of members had risen from 40 (at the moment I joined *Major*) to 60. Each step up the hierarchy (i.e., increase in rank) was a recognition of one's abilities, efforts and trustworthiness. As Figure 5.6 shows, the mean main character skill level and number of months being a member of the

corporation increased each step up the expertise & trust hierarchy. At the time each step up possibly resulted in an increase in decisionmaking power, yet hardly any difference in tasks. The division of labor remained self-determined and negotiated. Though team leadership could consist of people of any rank (except recruits), corporation leadership could only consist of people of the ranks of president and CEO. Some members understandably preferred to use the term 'flat hierarchy' to explain *Major's* hierarchical structure, as the power hierarchy was not extensive.

The expertise & trust hierarchy rendered this corporation highly meritocratic. Leadership was rewarded to those who contributed most to the corporation by exhibiting many capabilities and, more importantly, much effort. This analysis is supported by the high level of agreement to the following OCAI statement that connects human development to participation and trust:

"The corporation emphasizes human development. High trust, openness, and participation persist." (mean: 6.3 ± 1.1)

However, the meritocratic nature of the corporation had its limits. The President level, i.e., the corporation leader level, was relatively stable within the hierarchy. It was not a very frequent occurrence that new members quickly managed to rise up the hierarchy to become presidents. The survey statistics confirmed this; the current presidents had held their rank for at least 22 months. Interestingly, the CEO was the same person since the corporation's conception.

This did not render the corporation a dictatorship. The CEO had the same decisionmaking power as any of the presidents, with the addition of a right of veto, which had almost never been invoked throughout *Major's* 6-year existence. The CEO was also considered to be less active than most of the presidents. The self-determined and negotiated nature of the division of labor partially explains the stability of corporation leadership. Some members simply

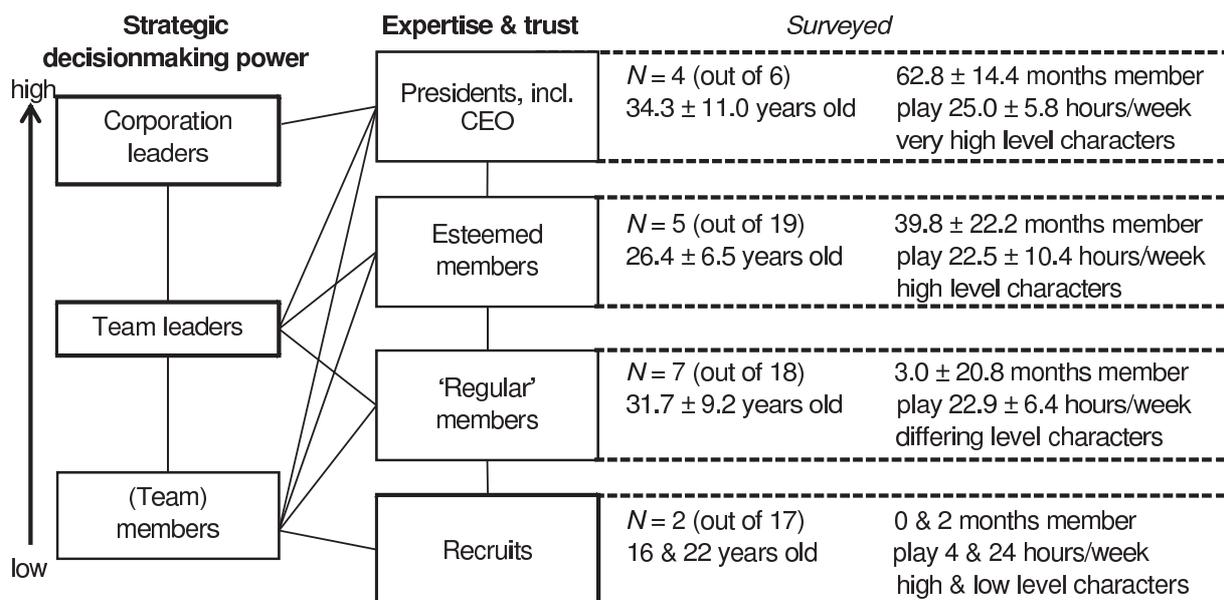


Figure 5.6. A visualization of *Major's* hierarchies, accompanied by survey data.

did not want the decisionmaking responsibilities of management. Moreover, the survey showed that the members had a high commitment (mean: 6.6 ± 0.4) to the corporation. No one seemed interested in rebelling against the leaders or calling for new leaders to step up.

One of the results of the above described expertise and trust hierarchy was that most active members held multiple titles. Some were both a president and a specific team leader or member. Others were an esteemed member and a team leader. Another result was that members supported the leaders and their decisions quite extensively. One interviewee aptly called *Major* a successful oligarchy. Not only did the corporation leaders *earn* their decisionmaking powers, they often continued to or were at least able to do the tasks that all members did. This allowed them to quickly identify problems and issues within the corporation. In turn this rendered the escalation of conflicts (problems, issues, disagreements) a very infrequent occurrence.

The expertise and trust hierarchy that *Major* upheld shows how engagement can be incorporated into organization design. A step up the hierarchy meant more opportunities and decisionmaking power concerning the corporation's goals and structure. The step up did not necessarily come with any specific restrictions in tasks. This is also why the power hierarchy was considered to be 'flat'. Not only was the hierarchy very small (see Figure 5.6), the division between leaders and non-leaders was not so clear-cut. If it was, then that would have compromised the sense of freedom that *EVE* is meant to encompass as a context of play. At the same time steps up the hierarchy were earned, meaning that anyone could obtain decisionmaking power by 'working' hard. The character development that *EVE* is meant to encompass as an online game reveals itself here. Or rather, character development turns into player development. Within the game, players are stimulated to develop their characters through the afforded opportunities that follows that development. Within the corporation, players were stimulated to develop *themselves* again through the afforded opportunities and recognition that follows that development (i.e., an increase in rank). The player development that this hierarchy enabled made 'work' engaging. This reflection has already brushed upon what members high up the hierarchy, i.e., leaders, actually do. Yet their behavior, as well as leadership behavior in general, is worth further analysis and discussion.

5.3.4 LEADERSHIP

Experiences

By the summer of 2009 *Major* had changed as a result of a growth in number of members. Moreover, the balance of power in null-security space had changed dramatically. The corporation had been attracting quite some new players over a couple of months – roughly 20 in total – who were willing to spend a lot of effort on different production and sales teams. Moreover, one of *EVE*'s oldest and most successful alliances – *Band of Brothers* – had been infiltrated by one of their arch-enemies and subsequently disbanded in February 2009, leaving their null-security space open to new alliances (unsurprisingly including that same enemy).²⁷

²⁷ See Egan (2009b) for much more details about this extensively planned and well-executed operation that attracted much attention from online media. In short, the *Band of Brothers* alliance was infiltrated by a *GoonSwarm* player who managed to get access (without hacking or stealing another account) to the

Although highly debated, in the end this clever move was accepted by both CCP Games and many of the *EVE* players. No accounts had been shared, stolen or hacked. The action therefore fitted CCP's sandbox' design philosophy nicely (see Chapter 4). With that acceptance distrust became the norm even more generally throughout *EVE*, and assuring trust became even more important to corporations and alliances, including *Major*.

One day in July of that same year I was trying to find a skill book in one of the hangars freely accessible to recruits at one of our main space stations in null-security space. I noticed that all our resources had been stolen from that hangar. I opened the corporation's main IRC channel and said, "Hmmm is it just me or is the Recruits hangar in [the space station] completely empty?" A fellow corporation member answered, "Try changing back and forth between hangars, and try scrolling a bit =P [an emoticon denoting a tongue sticking out, thus connoting cheekiness]." When I confirmed I had checked my observation already, the same member replied, "Well that sounds bad," and another one stated, "Well, the culprit shall be caught." The hangar had been emptied. We had experienced something similar to what *Band of Brothers* had experienced. One of the new members the corporation had accepted months earlier had gained access to the hangar with his Recruit status, taken everything, and vanished without a trace. Although slightly bewildered, my corpmates and I quickly realized that this had become an intrinsic part of *EVE* gameplay long ago. The big thefts, infiltrations and scams that *EVE* became famous for have together gradually transformed the collective understanding of what it means to play *EVE*. Luckily the culprit had 'only' been able to empty a Recruit hangar containing relatively less valuable assets.

Yet the corporation leaders did not leave it at that. Within a couple of hours the culprit had been identified. One of the corporation leaders sent the culprit a funny albeit harsh in-game medal (Figure 5.7), normally meant to decorate a player positively for services rendered to a corporation or alliance. The corporation also decided to instigate a new rule. Three days later one of the corporation members asked me to relinquish even more information about my character, his whereabouts and actions by providing its full-access API key. I voiced some concerns about this move, and the corporation leader explained, "It's not like we're going to start monitoring people more in reality. It's more like a back up. So we can for example check from logs for signs who grabbed all the stuff, as their assets would be logged by the system."

As I explained in the previous section, I was never a leader during my membership, at least in a traditional and formal sense. As a Recruit and an Enlisted member I had no strategic decisionmaking power. I had no opportunity to decide what the corporation would pursue or how it would pursue it. However, when considering leadership as simply behavior with which one influences another, I had and took some opportunities for leadership nonetheless. The

alliance management functionalities of the game. The player was able to completely disband the alliance and as such reverse its claim to its null-security space regions, leaving it open to claims by other alliances, most notably *GoonSwarm* of course. Incidentally, the observant reader will have noticed by now that I am not using pseudonyms to refer to these two particular alliances, while I am using a pseudonym to refer to the corporation I joined. Since the corporation I joined is still in existence and the two aforementioned alliances are not, I feel no need to refer to these alliances with pseudonyms.



Figure 5.7. The medal on of the corporation leaders sent to the culprit who had infiltrated *Major* and stolen all assets from one of our hangars. © 2013 CCP hf. All rights reserved. ‘CCP’ and ‘EVE Online’ are registered trademarks of CCP hf in the United States and other jurisdictions.

above description of how I uncovered a theft and alerted my fellow corporation members of it is essentially an example of my leadership behavior.

I sometimes also alerted my recruiter or production/sales team leader of depletions of resources, or asked them to provide access to Google spreadsheets, manufacturing blueprints and the facilities or minerals necessary for producing goods. In hindsight I realize there were also opportunities for leadership that I did not take. On the corporation’s discussion forums, there were several sections in which *Major’s* goals and strategy were discussed regularly and openly. Anyone could take part in those discussions, but I often found that others had already managed to voice the opinion I also had, or that the particular discussion did not grab my interest. If I had taken part, providing my own views on the proposed goal or strategy, I would have undoubtedly influenced my fellow corporation mates to some extent.

From my interactions with *Major’s* (team) leaders I noticed another form of leadership. My recruiter, production/sales team leader and PvP team leader all had one thing in common when interacting with me: a non-authoritative influencing style. The language the production/sales team leader used during the training session explained in Section 5.3.2 is evidence of this non-authoritative style. In such interactions the leaders never stated any time constraints as to the tasks I was asked to do. They also never pushed me to do the tasks at all. I was asked but not held responsible to do production, sales and PvP tasks. I was simply trained to do those tasks in accordance to the strategy the corporation had developed over time, since I had expressed an interest in them.

Erratic and non-authoritative leadership

In *Major* leadership behavior seemed erratic when reflecting on my experiences, as well as my conceptualizations of hierarchy (Section 5.3.3) and division of labor (Section 5.3.2). Defined in traditional terms many *Major* members exhibited leadership behavior by, for instance, starting a new team or requesting a random other member to fulfill a certain task. This is in essence leadership behavior. One person influences the actions of others by simply telling them what to do specifically. Yet not everyone seemed to exhibit this behavior. The behavior was not *equally* distributed. The recruits did not exhibit this behavior, nor did many of the regular members. The team leaders or most active team members seemed to exhibit this behavior the most, as they needed to do so to keep a team or project going. As explained earlier, many members could be team leaders or active team members, whether they were 'regular' members, esteemed members or corporation leaders. This more traditional leadership behavior could be identified widely throughout the corporation, although with the explained limitations.

This does not mean that the members who exhibited leadership behavior were by definition leaders. *Major* had a clear distinction between members who by default had the right to define the corporation. As stated earlier, these Presidents made the decisions that affected the entire corporation. The decisions concerned mostly the corporation's goals, rationale and main structure, i.e., common issues for corporation leaders (*EVE* or otherwise).

Although the actual leaders made decisions, they did not do so unilaterally or individually. The leaders tended to rely on the thoughts and actions of others to help determine what decisions needed to be made. All of the six corporation leaders exhibited behavior that was less direct than traditional leadership behavior, even though they were there to make decisions. One could theorize that they did not need to be so direct in the first place. The members were generally quite willing to help out in whatever way they could, since *Major* offered all its members all the resources they needed and the ability to do the tasks they wanted to do. The leaders only needed to coordinate the teams, instead of command them. Coordination meant ensuring the teams were able to do whatever they needed to do. For instance, if a production team ran out of minerals, the team and/or corporation leaders ensured that the mineral acquisition team knew of this and helped out if able, necessary or appreciated. They also coordinated external relations the most. They ensured that other players and corporations who were implicitly or explicitly dependent on *Major* were content. For instance, if another corporation within the alliance required certain space ships, then corporation leaders made sure the production teams knew of this.

To ensure their implicit power it was even more important for the leaders to cultivate member activity, i.e., to ensure that members were engaged with(in) the corporation. For instance, if members seemed bored or disgruntled, corporation leaders tended to take decisions that favored increased engagement. This cultivation behavior meant taking initiatives, i.e., identifying a need, opening it up for discussion on the corporation's forums and IRC channel, and finally making an informed decision that fit with the corporation's rationale and position within the alliance. The leaders also cultivated member activity by rewarding active members with increases in status and privileges, as explained earlier. Again, this behavior meant taking

initiatives, i.e., identifying an active member, the status he/she had and the status he/she seemed to deserve.

The above analysis is derived from interviews and document analysis, and is supported by the highest levels of agreement to a number of statements from the survey. The statements concerned organizational leadership and management style respectively, both being topics about the relationship between leaders and non-leaders. In Table 5.1 the responses to these statements are shown. A distinction has been made between the responses of the leaders themselves ($N = 3$) and of the other corporation members (i.e., recruits, ‘regular’ members and esteemed members; $N = 13$). Interestingly, the leaders and non-leaders in general differed over the fourth statement, but had similar opinions about the first three statements. The first three statements position leadership and management as first consisting of cultivation and second of coordination. Thus, they support the presented analysis. Simultaneously, the fourth statement suggests that the leaders identified erratic leadership behavior more than the non-leaders do.

The conceptualization of leadership presented here should not be interpreted negatively. I do not interpret the fact that leadership behavior was somewhat erratic as a sign of ‘bad’ leadership from the leaders. I interpret it as yet another way of accommodating engagement in organizational design. If the leaders were to have exhibited only traditional leadership behavior, they would limit the members’ possibilities within the corporation. This would have compromised the sense of freedom that the context of play is meant to encompass. Hence, it is not surprising why the leaders were more agreeable to the fourth statement presented in Table 5.1. If they would not have been, they would have seemed more traditional leaders who determined everything everyone else does. Simultaneously, they recognized their ‘job’ of keeping the corporation running. They did so by cultivating member activity and by actively coordinating the teams and projects. Given the implicit power this type of leadership gave them, it was arguably the best way to assert power within the still voluntary context of an online game.

	Leaders ($N = 3$)	Non-leaders ($N = 13$)
“The leadership in the corporation is generally considered to exemplify mentoring, facilitating, or nurturing.”	5.7 ± 1.5	6.0 ± 0.9
“The leadership in the corporation is generally considered to exemplify coordinating, organizing, or smooth-running efficiency.”	5.7 ± 1.5	6.0 ± 1.6
“The management style in the corporation is characterized by teamwork, consensus, and participation.”	6.3 ± 1.2	6.0 ± 1.6
“The management style in the corporation is characterized by individual risk taking, innovation, freedom, and uniqueness.”	6.0 ± 1.0	5.0 ± 1.9

Table 5.1. Comparison in leadership and management perception between leaders and non-leaders within the corporation.

5.3.5 INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Experiences

In the previous sections I referred to the use of several ICTs, most notably a discussion forum, IRC channels, voice chat channels and Google spreadsheets. These and other technologies enabled *Major* to function in the way described in the previous sections.

The IRC channels were very important to *Major*. One channel was available to everyone (including non-members) and one was available to members only. For both IRC channels some of the Presidents had the right to remove/ban certain users from a chat channel and/or set the channels' topic description. Once a new member was accepted into the corporation, he or she would be required to register and use his or her in-game main character name as a username in the chat channels. On the IRC channels a registered username was protected by a password, which ensured that the IRC user was in fact the corporation member and not someone else entirely who happened to use the same username in IRC. Everyone was encouraged to be online in the corporate chat channel as often as they could. In practice roughly 65% of the corporation (the active members) actually did this. Some were present more often in IRC than in *EVE*. There frequently were multiple conversations, especially in the channel dedicated to the members. The conversations were about alliance and corporation operations (e.g. planned or suggested combat operations), team procedures, corporate values and vision, events that happened around the world or even personal issues concerning work, studies or health. Conversations were often public, i.e., directed at anyone who was listening and willing to contribute.

Roughly just as important was *Major's* discussion forums. Being an asynchronous textual communication technology and knowledge repository, the discussion forum system had different categories, each for different types of users, i.e., externals/visitors interested in the corporation, former members and current members. Many forums had discussions permanently marked important and available, as they had led to conclusions that defined *Major's* strategy and tactics. For example, one forum had a discussion in which the corporation's charter (rationale/mission statement and main organizational structure) was developed and updated every couple of months. Additionally, a couple of forums had procedure guides concerning e.g. production of certain types of goods.

As a knowledge repository the corporation used a set of Google spreadsheets for gathering, maintaining, storing and sharing statistics. The Google spreadsheets used the members' stored API keys to automatically gather data about the assets of the corporation and activity of its members in *EVE*. Subsequently, most spreadsheets allowed manual input as well, making the spreadsheet a useful management tool. Interestingly, almost every spreadsheet was developed by one specific corporation leader as part of his general interest in operational efficiency. Most spreadsheets were available for viewing to all members. The specific corporation leader granted manual input access to almost any member who requested it. At the time of the study the corporation had spreadsheets listing members and their activity, *Major's* purchase orders, its owned materials, and the current prices of materials at one important space station's market. Moreover, there were spreadsheets that showed current statistics concerning production, sales and assets owned.

As a synchronous voice communication technology, *Major* used channels on several voice communication servers owned by the corporation itself, the alliance and one of the other corporations in the alliance. During the study, the alliance and its corporations had started to prefer cheap or free self-hosted Teamspeak 3 voice servers. One Ventrilo server was only used in fleet-based PvP combat. The voice communication servers were always available without any clear structuring. The servers were hosted, operated and administered by key corporation and alliance members, most of them being esteemed members or leaders. In principle the corporation had one channel on any voice communication server, though new channels could easily be added if need be.

Finally, a number of other ICTs were used less frequently, as they were either a bit redundant or they were only relevant to a specific team or project. They were nonetheless of importance to at least some of the members. As an asynchronous textual and graphical communication technology, the corporation used a website consisting of 12 static pages of information about the corporation's rationale, specific services, history, structure and contact information, handy for recruitment and external communication purposes. The corporation used in-game public and private corporation, alliance and regional chat channels as another synchronous textual communication technology. As a knowledge repository the corporation also used a 'killboard': a standardized tool for gathering, storing and sharing statistics about the corporation's specific victories and defeats in combat. As another asynchronous textual communication technology *Major* used an in-game mailing system. Finally, as another knowledge repository the corporation used an image gallery for gathering, storing and sharing images of all sorts.

Demand-based supportive ICTs

Many of *Major's* ICTs were deployed in accordance with the needs of the corporation. Moreover, they strengthened the expertise & trust hierarchy, the self-determined and negotiated labor division, and the erratic and non-authoritative leadership style, as explained below.

The IRC channel strengthened the expertise & trust hierarchy, as the channel users were listed in order of that hierarchy. The same applied to the forum system. A member's rank was always shown with the member's personal information. The forum system offered another indicator of the expertise & trust hierarchy. As a member's postings were always retrievable and statistics were kept of the frequency of a person's responses, members could easily deduce which were the most active. The most active members on the forums were indeed of higher ranks. The killboard system also offered an indicator of the expertise & trust hierarchy. A member who was active in the combat team would keep statistics of combat he or she was involved with on the killboard, from which one could easily deduce the member's contribution to the corporation. It is important to note that both systems did not determine who first got to climb up in the expertise & trust hierarchy. Members who had relatively worse statistics could be just as eligible. Nevertheless, the statistics indicated the existence of the expertise and trust hierarchy itself, as they showed that high-ranked members were also active members.

Both the forum system and the IRC channel strengthened the self-determined and negotiated nature of the labor division as well as the erratic nature of leadership behavior. The

fact that these two systems were the most widely used communication systems made these principles of labor division and leadership possible. Whenever a member wished to suggest a task or perform it with others, he or she could count on other members being present and responsive in the chat channel or reacting quickly on a forum post. More importantly, since all members used the same chat channel and had access to all the same forums, communication was broad and disregarded differences in rank. Open communication across the expertise & trust hierarchy in the chat channels and on the forums enabled members to ask for help from anyone and thus exhibit leadership behavior.

The Google spreadsheets also strengthened *Major's* labor division style, as members could use them to deduce which tasks needed to be done. Practically all members could easily get access to the spreadsheets through its designer, i.e., a specific President. The President was in turn easily approachable through the chat channel and forum system). Using either one of the preferred procedure guides on the forums, or a query on the chat channel, a member could subsequently pick up a new task quickly (provided their character had the required skills).

Corporation leaders encouraged members to be online in IRC and check the forums as often as possible to enable this style of labor division and leadership. Moreover, corporation leaders tended to endorse new ICTs introduced by a member. The leaders needed some assurance that the new ICT would be a significant asset to the corporation's existing technologies and that it would be preferred and used by as many members as possible.

In turn the ICTs aided the corporation leaders in that they showed the most active members. The discussion forum and killboard specifically showed the most active members. As such they helped leaders to cultivate and identify member activity. Both the website and the discussion forums helped leaders to coordinate the acts of members. The website was used to communicate a vision that united all the teams and members. The discussion forums were used in a similar fashion when leaders marked a discussion as important, rendering it defining to the corporation's organization. Finally, the Google spreadsheets also strengthened the leadership behavior of leaders. More specifically, they were exhibits of one specific leader's coordination behavior. Thanks to the spreadsheets, members could easily find out which specific tasks could be done.

Many of the IRC conversations and forum discussions ensured that *Major* was a closely-knit group of players. Most of the active members seemed happy to stay online on the IRC channel or keep track of forum discussions extensively. Moreover, conversations and discussions were often personal and supportive in nature. This strengthened commitment to the corporation, which in turn ensured that members contributed to whatever teams/projects or generic tasks they wished to contribute to. Moreover, it ensured that member inactivity was not a real issue. If someone needed to take some time off from the corporation, this was always accepted and dealt with.

Since the ICTs and their usage techniques strengthened many of the management-sociological concepts discussed earlier, they also strengthened the way these concepts incorporated engagement in the organization design. In other words, the ICTs and their usage

techniques strengthened the sense of freedom that the corporation's hierarchy, labor division and leadership styles afforded. They helped to reintroduce a sense of play into *Major's* work-like context. Having many ICTs and accompanying usage techniques was also a way to ensure engagement. Leaders unilaterally defining which specific set of ICTs were used in the corporation would presumably have been seen as a restriction. Members who, for instance, might have wanted to use other or newer ICTs or who had an interest in trying them would then be left disgruntled. The many ICTs and their individual usage techniques revealed the openness in technology use, which fits with a sense of freedom that the context of play is meant to encompass.

5.3.6 INTERPRETING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Friendship

After one year of being a member I was able to contribute to *Major* and its alliance in multiple ways. From then on, besides roaming around *New Eden*, *EVE* gameplay also consisted of chatting on the IRC channels, keeping track of Google spreadsheets, joining in on forum discussions and talking to fellow alliance members on voice chat channels when taking part in PvP fleet operations. I had gotten to know some key figures in my corporation, alliance and beyond as a result. Thus, I felt like I was slowly though steadily becoming more and more entangled with the complex universe generally, and *Major* specifically.

With my sense of entanglement came a sense of closeness and similarity. In time I had come to consider my corporation to be a friendly group with which I shared similar interests and interaction styles. I was not the only one who considered the corporation a group of friends. The corporation was initially founded by a small group of friends (meaning friends 'in real life') when *EVE* was still in a beta stage of development. Moreover, many later members stayed, got to know each other well and therefore almost naturally became friends over the years as a result.

Being a friendly group entailed being first close-knit and second focused on engagement. Meetings in physical reality were not uncommon in *Major*. Some of the members also lived relatively close to each other, or even in the same house in Finland. One of the corporation's leaders – living in the USA – tried to visit members whenever he was coincidentally visiting their home town. At previous FanFests²⁸ some of the corporation's leaders and most active members met each other in Iceland (with pictures to prove it). Yet regardless of whether members met each other in physical reality, to many this corporation was indeed a group of friends. It was common to talk about one's life outside of the corporation (or *EVE* entirely) in IRC or on the forums, and to support each other when needed. Besides the open and personal conversation style on the chat channels and forums, the focus on engagement, i.e., fun, is also an indicator of the importance of friendship in this corporation. Members tried to find a sense of fun in whatever they did. This led to spontaneity and humor throughout the corporation, i.e., in chat conversations, forum discussions and tasks.

²⁸ A typically three-day festival/event that CCP Games organizes annually in Iceland especially for *EVE* players, with presentations, game expansion previews and artist performances.

The survey results also show that many considered *Major* be a friendly group, or even simply a group of friends. The conceptualization of *Major*'s culture as valuing friendship is supported by the high level of agreement to the following three statements:

- “The corporation is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves.” (mean: 6.4 ± 0.8)
- “The glue that holds the corporation together is loyalty and mutual trust. Commitment to this corporation runs high.” (mean: 6.9 ± 0.3)
- “The corporation defines success on the basis of the development of human resources, teamwork, player commitment, and concern for each player.” (mean: 6.3 ± 1.0)

Moreover, the other already presented statements that determined the corporation's leadership style, employee management and strategic emphases equally reveal the friendly culture. Together, all these statements are based on the theory of 'clan culture', i.e., a culture that is common in “a family-type organization” where “shared values and goals, cohesion, participativeness, individuality, and a sense of ‘we-ness’” dominate (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 41).

The friendly culture served a clear purpose in *Major*'s organization. The described main characteristics of friendship, i.e., open, personal, spontaneous and humorous conversations and actions, had been beneficial to the corporation's survival. From this corporate perspective, preferring a friendly culture is derived from preferring a sense of commonality, open communication and innovation. The importance that the corporation leaders put on open communication and innovation helped the corporation to pursue its rationale of providing services to the alliance and the *EVE* community in general through production, sales and whatever other lucrative financial services could be thought of.

The friendly culture had clear influences on the organization's structure, i.e., the IRC channels' usage techniques, self-determined and negotiated labor division and the expertise & trust hierarchy. A first result of the friendly culture is that a large portion of the most active members of the corporation were often if not always online in the IRC channel and discussed a lot together, often not at all related to *EVE* but to a person's personal issues (studies, employment, a country's topical events). Another result is that there were hardly any easily identifiable strict rules for members, besides the explained social norms. The ones that did exist were certainly not enforced strictly. Most notable was the openness about attendance or activity. A final result is that members were viewed as equal to each other, even if there was a hierarchical difference. Each member had a say in the corporation if they wanted, and was sure to be recognized if this led to actions useful to the pursuit of the corporation's rationale.

Uniqueness

Besides the value of friendship, members also shared the value of being a unique corporation within the *EVE* community in terms of rationale and ways of pursuing it. It was of high importance that *Major* provided services to the community that no or few other corporations offered. Moreover, members considered openly sharing information and offering trustworthy

services as important characteristics of the corporation's uniqueness. By providing services to the *EVE* community, the corporation put less effort into pursuing game mechanics and a competitive advantage, e.g. winning in combat and claiming more and more solar systems or constellations. This led to a more collaborative perspective on the community than a competitive one. Members deemed it important that the *EVE* community recognized *Major* for innovative and trustworthy service provision. From the community's recognition (i.e., being famous, not infamous) the corporation derived its legitimacy, i.e., its reason for being in existence.

The uniqueness of the corporation was an important design principle when the corporation was founded. Uniqueness is arguably also central to the gameplay experience. Being a successful unique corporation can actually also be seen as a competitive goal within the game that *EVE* is designed to be. Over the years the value of uniqueness has attracted many new members. The four interviewed members who were not cofounders of the corporation all noticed and were attracted to *Major's* unique position within the *EVE* community. The corporation's strategy had worked well. The corporation was relatively well-known and respected in the *EVE* community.

Again, the value of uniqueness had clear influences on the corporation's structure, i.e., the self-determined/negotiated labor division and coordination/cultivation leadership behavior. The corporation was founded to offer unique services to the community, whatever they specifically entailed. The result is that members were encouraged to think up new ideas for the corporation or to make sure that there were enough funds to enable new ideas to be pursued. The type of labor division and leadership I conceptualized earlier enabled that.

In practice valuing uniqueness did not often lead to new tasks and procedures. The corporation leaders introduced or recognized new teams/projects, tasks or procedures an estimated once every three or four months on average. On a day-to-day basis the value of uniqueness was more easily recognized. When the alliance was engaged in war with another alliance controlling a neighboring solar system, the corporation would be the first to help out in whatever way possible, which could suddenly lead to new – albeit temporary – projects or tasks. Overall, at the time of the study the corporation's teams or projects, as well as the social norm of relinquishing all of one's character assets, remained quite unique within the *EVE* community, thus not requiring as many innovations as one might expect.

The above interview-based conceptualization of the value of uniqueness is backed up by three specific survey results. As mentioned earlier, overall the respondents deemed it important that the corporation's leaders focused their efforts slightly more on "acquiring new resources and creating new challenges," i.e., "trying new things and prospecting for opportunities" for the corporation. Organization theorists Cameron and Quinn deemed these statements representative of the 'adhocracy' organizational culture, intended "to foster adaptability, flexibility, and creativity where uncertainty, ambiguity, and information overload are typical" (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 43). Although the respondents might have preferred slightly more emphasis on the value of uniqueness in the future, it was also already part of the corporation's culture. The second highest-scoring statements concerning *Major's* dominant characteristics and

'organization glue' supported the 'adhocracy' organizational culture, which in turn supported the value of uniqueness here described:

- "The corporation is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks." (mean: 5.9 ± 0.9)
- "The glue that holds the corporation together is commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being on the cutting edge." (mean: 5.6 ± 1.3)

Efficiency

A final important characteristic of *Major's* culture is the value of efficiency. Many members generally acknowledged the value of doing projects and tasks efficiently. Doing tasks efficiently entailed doing them in standardized ways to increase speed, transferability, spending predictability and fun. First, by standardizing a task and letting members learn the execution standard, the speed of execution could be increased, which benefited the corporation's performance. Second, a standardized task was more easily transferable to another member, which made it possible for multiple members to do it. In turn this led to quicker task pickup and execution. Third, the arguably best-known advantage of a standardized task was spending control. Without a standard, the task of producing e.g. a specific space ship would involve unknown spending on buying required semimanufactured products. By setting a standard the spending became much more (if not almost completely) predictable. Finally, a standardized task helped make the dullest tasks a little bit more fun to do. By increasing a dull task's speed of execution and ease of transferability, it was relatively more attractive to do it or ask someone else to do it every once in a while. More generally, a sense of efficiency can also be fun, as with efficient work a certain goal is reached presumably more quickly and with lower costs.

The value of efficiency was introduced primarily by one specific corporation leader. He could in fact be considered as *the* member that managed to introduce and uphold this efficiency culture. Efficiency was arguably also central to the gameplay experience. Being as efficient as possible at intricate game mechanics helped gain a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, procedures and tasks were often analyzed for efficiency, mostly by the specific corporation leader, although other leaders and members would join in on the discussion.

Again, efficiency clearly influenced the corporation's structure, i.e., the negotiated nature of labor division, coordination behavior of the corporation leaders and the ICTs used. Members started and maintained lots of forum topics about procedures and tasks, sorting the corporation's assets and the details of someone's new ideas for procedures and tasks. Many tasks were standardized through guides (step plans) offered on *Major's* forums. Moreover, many members frequently reflected on tasks (new or familiar) with others that were online on one or more chat channels to discuss and ascertain the most efficient manner of doing it. Finally, efficiency influenced the corporation's ICT choice itself. When a member offered to introduce a new ICT and accompanying usage technique in the corporation, the value of efficiency led the corporation leaders to ascertain and discuss the proposed ICT's usefulness for and effect on the corporation. Without a clear added value to the current structure or the pursuit of corporation's rationale in general, the corporation leaders would not accept the proposed ICT easily. The current ICTs and accompanying usage techniques were all selected and designed to structure the

corporation in such a way that they helped reach the corporation's rationale. The efficiency culture rendered a new though arguably redundant ICT inefficient, and therefore unnecessary within the current ICT portfolio.

The existence of efficiency as a generally upheld value is supported by several survey results. First, it is supported by the high level of agreement with the following statement:

"The leadership in the corporation is generally considered to exemplify coordinating, organizing, or smooth-running efficiency." (mean: 5.9 ± 1.6)

This statement is derived from the theory of what Cameron and Quinn called a hierarchical organizational culture. In such a culture an organization has a need "to generate efficient, reliable, smooth-flowing, predictable output" and thus incorporates "characteristics that have become known as the classical attributes of bureaucracy" (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 37). Not only did this statement score highly on the respondents' current conceptualization of leadership behavior, it scored even higher on the respondents' *preferred* leadership behavior (see the discussion of the friendly culture). Moreover, the statement concerning current strategic emphases, also inspired by the theory of a hierarchical culture, led to a very high level of agreement as well:

"The corporation emphasizes permanence and stability. Efficiency, control, and smooth operations are important." (mean: 6.1 ± 1.6)

What it was not

Another way to describe *Major's* culture is to focus on what it was *not*, i.e., to focus on what values the members were adamant to discard. As already stated, to many members the way in which the corporation pursued its rationale (i.e., with openly sharing information and lots of trust) was quite unique. Many members upheld the supposition (perhaps unfounded) that most other corporations were much less open and trustworthy, and were much more goal-oriented and competitive. They were attracted to *Major* because it was *not* goal-oriented or competitive.

The following two lowest scores on statements that emphasize a market organizational culture support the above conceptualization of the corporation's culture as *not* encompassing goal orientation and competitiveness as values:

- "The leadership in the corporation is generally considered to exemplify a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-oriented focus." (mean: 3.8 ± 1.8)
- "The management style in the corporation is characterized by hard-driving competitiveness, high demands, and achievement." (mean: 3.9 ± 1.6)

Almost ideal

Overall the organizational culture, described as encompassing the values of friendship, uniqueness and efficiency, seemed to work well for *Major*. Respondents scored very highly on commitment to the corporation (mean: 6.6 ± 0.4). Nevertheless, the respondents seemed to prefer a little less of the effects of the friendly culture on leadership behavior and strategic emphasis. Specifically, on average the respondents had a slight preference for a more

hierarchical leadership style over a clan leadership style, as the following two survey results show, respectively:

- [Preferred, Hierarchy]: “The leadership in the corporation is generally considered to exemplify coordinating, organizing, or smooth-running efficiency.” (mean: 6.3 ± 1.1)
- [Preferred, Clan]: “The leadership in the corporation is generally considered to exemplify mentoring, facilitating, or nurturing.” (mean: 6.1 ± 1.0)

Moreover, the respondents preferred strategic emphases common to adhocracy and clan cultures slightly to those common to a hierarchical culture, as shown by these three survey results respectively:

- [Preferred, Adhocracy]: “The corporation emphasizes acquiring new resources and creating new challenges. Trying new things and prospecting for opportunities are valued.” (mean: 6.5 ± 0.5)
- [Preferred, Clan]: “The corporation emphasizes human development. High trust, openness, and participation persist.” (mean: 6.5 ± 0.9)
- [Preferred, Hierarchy]: “The corporation emphasizes permanence and stability. Efficiency, control, and smooth operations are important.” (mean: 6.3 ± 1.2)

One way to further explain the slight differences between the current and preferred scores is the importance many members placed on regular activity and continued commitment of the corporation leaders, i.e., the Presidents. Members seemed to expect the Presidents to put lots of time and effort into coordinating and cultivating the activities of *Major* members. However, the Presidents did not always live up to that expectation, which led to some frustration. Two of the Presidents, as well as the CEO in fact, were known to be not very active in comparison to the other Presidents. As a result, the other Presidents often found themselves making decisions without consulting these less active Presidents and the CEO. This did not remain unnoticed. The differences between current and preferred leadership and strategic emphasis scores show the resulting slight frustration.

5.4 PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS, WITH SOME NOTES

5.4.1 BACK TO THE PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION IDEAL-TYPE

The previous sections indicate playful organization on several occasions. The descriptions and reflections point towards one or more concepts of the ideal-type quite directly, supporting the ideal-type. Other descriptions and reflections support one or more concepts indirectly. In this case they offer new examples of how an organization can be playful without adopting a concept of the ideal-type wholeheartedly. Table 5.2 lists all the examples of playful organization discussed in the previous sections per value or concept of the playful organization ideal-type.

Table 5.2 lists several examples of playful organization in *EVE* as a whole. Startup corporations are arguably playful organizations *pur sang* in *EVE*. There is a sense of equality and agility in how they emerge and how they are open to all forms of gameplay. Open access and exit is highly relevant to these types of corporations, as they allow almost anyone to join and leave. Teachability is a relevant value when these corporations emerge out of need for collaborative learning and start offering regular collaborative learning events. There is also a sense of contingency in how they can quickly grow, merge with each other or simply disband. Playful organization is also evident from how players continuously ask and answer gameplay questions in the public *Help* chat channel. It is also evident from the websites, wikis, discussion forums and applications players build and use for structuring and sharing gameplay knowledge. Boundless knowledge networking is indeed a relevant concept for *EVE* in general.

Table 5.2 also lists several examples of *Major* as a playful organization. In fact, 23 of the examples listed in the table concern *Major*. Some examples fit a value or concept of the ideal-type almost to the letter. Others do not fit directly but relate to a value or concept of the ideal-type nonetheless.

The value of contingency fits with *Major*. Well-defined goals were completely absent in *Major*, although the corporation was mostly focused on industry (production and sales). We wanted to be a friendly, unique and efficient corporation known for its good service to our alliance and the *EVE* community in general. Of course this is a goal in itself, but it is hardly a well-defined goal. The term 'service' in this context was intentionally vague. That way we could provide all sorts of services, not just industrial ones. Indeed, the concept of agility fits well, too. We each had many opportunities for action within the corporation and could use the corporation's resources freely. The importance of being a unique corporation also strengthened agility as a value. We could choose from multiple tasks and could pose new ideas to ensure our uniqueness within the *EVE* community.

The related concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles fits to an extent. Members could choose freely from a quite large pool of tasks and roles. Yet certain labor could only be chosen once a member had developed the appropriate skills (for both his/her character and him-/herself) and had been deemed trustworthy. Moreover, new services, roles or tasks were not often proposed, although the corporation might theoretically be open to them. The only good example is of the new member who had an interest in PvP gameplay (see Section 5.3.2).

Similarly, the concept of open access and exit fits to an extent. Access was not as easy as the playful organization ideal-type suggests. It involved quite a lengthy process of relinquishing information, being interviewed and having one's background checked. Still, in the end a basic level of trust was the only access barrier. Access was therefore still relatively open. The concept of open *exit* fits better with *Major*. The corporation was very understanding towards people leaving the corporation temporarily or permanently for whatever reason. The wide use of the IRC channels and discussion forums allowed the corporation to handle irregularity of player availability quite well.

Equality and teachability are other important playful values that apply to *Major*. Befitting of the value of friendship, we communicated and collaborated with each other as equals even though there were hierarchical differences between *Major* members. We were also willing to help each other out when needed regardless of hierarchical differences.

The discussed erratic leadership fits with the similarly named playful concept of distributed leadership. Since this concept is based on the values of agility, equality and teachability, its applicability makes sense. Then again, the concept of distributed leadership does not apply completely. Strategic decisionmaking power was only afforded to those with the highest expertise and trust.

Major's expertise and trust hierarchy corresponds to the similarly named playful concept of expertise hierarchy. The additional importance of trust in this corporation is a result of the thefts, infiltrations and scams common in *EVE*. Trust is important in a virtual universe where such acts are an integral part of gameplay. Expertise (i.e., a proven knowledge and experience) and trust go very well together. Nevertheless, trusting a member before granting him/her an increase in status level is an additional criterion that renders the concept of expertise hierarchy applicable to only a limited extent. Following this conceptualization of hierarchy the playful cultural concept of meritocracy also fits with this corporation. Still, the people in the expertise and trust hierarchy did not shift levels as often as one could expect if meritocracy is highly valued.

The values of teachability and conviviality are expressed in how ICTs are used, as described in Section 5.3.5. The common use of IRC channels, discussion forums and voice chat channels for ad hoc coordination and collaboration purposes shows how *Major* valued teachability and boundless knowledge networking. The addition of quite a number of other ICTs as well shows that the playful concept of a demand-based knowledge & communication suite fits well. Moreover, the use of the suite for out-of-game personal conversation and interaction means that the playful cultural concept of conviviality also fits well with the corporation. The corporation's friendly culture also stresses conviviality.

Finally, the discussions about strategy and tactics on *Major's* forums show that the playful concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge fits as well. When considering an organization's strategy and tactics explicit knowledge, it becomes clear that *Major* held many discussions concerning explicit knowledge openly on the widely used discussion forums. There are again some limits to the applicability. Strategic decisionmaking was only afforded to those highest up the expertise and trust hierarchy. Strategy and tactics were not *decided* upon collaboratively (i.e., with anyone within the corporation), even though they might initially be developed collaboratively.

5.4.2 LIMITS ON PLAYFULNESS

The fact that some of the concepts of the playful organization ideal-type discussed in Chapter 2 do not fit well means that the corporation implicitly limited the full extent of these playful opportunities. The question then remains as to how these limitations can be understood. What explanation can be given for the corporation's limits to open access, free-to-choose/-develop

The playful organization ideal-type	EVE Online examples, with reference to the section numbers concerned
<i>Contingency</i>	5.2.3: 'Startup corporations' disbanding, merging or growing quickly. 5.3.2: A corporation offering many different services to its alliance and the <i>EVE</i> community in general. 5.3.3: A corporation experiencing irregular player activity.
<i>Agility</i>	5.2.3: Players starting corporations and alliances to learn collaboratively. 5.2.3: Publicly advertising corporations being open to many forms of gameplay. 5.3.1: Players using a corporation's assets/resources at their own discretion.
<i>Equality</i>	5.2.3: All players being able to start a corporation or alliance at any time. 5.3.1: A corporation requiring all assets/resources to be shared with the entire corporation. 5.3.5: Players using ICTs to communicate and collaborate regardless of hierarchical differences.
<i>Teachability</i>	5.2.3: A 'startup corporation' offering a weekly group mining expedition as a collaborative learning activity. See also <i>Boundless knowledge networking</i>
<i>Meritocracy</i>	5.3.3: New players getting the lowest 'recruit' title in a corporation, advancing once active and useful involvement is shown. See also <i>Expertise hierarchy</i>
<i>Conviviality</i>	5.3.5: Players engaged in personal, informal and wide-ranging conversations in widely used IRC channels and discussion forums. 5.3.6: Players finding friendship a defining characteristic of a corporation's culture.
<i>Open access and exit</i>	5.2.3: Players easily joining and leaving a 'startup corporation'. 5.3.1: A corporation having a basic level of trust as the only access barrier. 5.3.5: A corporation handling irregular player availability thanks to widely used IRC channels and discussion forums.
<i>Free-to-choose & free-to-develop roles</i>	5.3.1: Players applying for membership of a corporation rather than for a specific position. 5.3.2: Players frequently negotiating with corporation leaders for new roles and tasks. 5.3.5: Players offering and selecting available tasks using widely used IRC channels and discussion forums.
<i>Distributed leadership</i>	5.3.4: A corporation experiencing erratic leadership behavior, i.e., from many players throughout the corporation. 5.3.4: A corporation's leaders exhibiting mostly non-authoritative leadership behavior, i.e., coordination and cultivation. 5.3.5: Players instructing any available other players on tasks thanks to widely used IRC channels and discussion forums.
<i>Expertise hierarchy</i>	5.3.3: A corporation having titles that together form a hierarchy of expertise and trust. 5.3.5: A corporation indicating the expertise and trust hierarchy through its ICTs. 5.3.3: A corporation having a decisionmaking power hierarchy that is 'flat' and of limited importance.
<i>Demand-based knowledge & communication suite</i>	5.2.3: Public chat channels in-game, which players often automatically join. 5.3.5: A corporation having a diverse set of ICTs to support the gameplay it is involved in.
<i>Boundless knowledge networking</i>	5.2.2: Players asking and answering gameplay questions in public chat channels. 5.2.2: Players creating/using public websites, wikis, discussion forums and applications to structure/share gameplay knowledge. 5.3.5: Players using IRC channels and discussion forums to share and obtain gameplay knowledge within a corporation.
<i>Collaboratively developed explicit knowledge</i>	5.3.5: A corporation using discussion forums to involve all its players in strategic and tactical decisionmaking. 5.3.5: A corporation using discussion forums to broadly communicate the agreed-upon strategy and tactics.

Table 5.2. *EVE Online* examples of playful organization related to the playful organization ideal-type.

roles, expertise hierarchy, distributed leadership and collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge?

Trust assurance, resulting from a capitalistically designed ‘sandbox’

One very important factor that influenced *Major*'s structure was trust assurance. The apparent ubiquity of thefts, infiltrations and scams makes *EVE* players highly geared towards trust. This makes the corporation's structure very much based on the continuous assurance of trust among the members. In turn the thefts, infiltrations and scams are arguably so ubiquitous because of the centrality of *EVE*'s economic system within all gameplay and CCP Games's openness to transformative play through the 'sandbox' design principle. Put simply, *EVE*'s design is so much based on capitalism that players look for innovative ways to quickly obtain the scarce resources they need to pursue their goals. As long as the adopted strategy does not involve account hacking or stealing, chances are high that CCP Games will accept it. Hence trust assurance becomes important. The access procedure described in Section 5.3.1 is meant to assure trust. If the access procedure were more open, e.g. involving only a brief conversation instead of a lengthy application, interviewing and background checking procedure, the existing corporation members would not be able to implicitly trust the new member from the start.

Trust assurance also limits the full applicability of the concepts of free-to-choose/-develop roles and expertise hierarchy. As Figure 5.4 showed, in the corporation several roles were individually assigned by team and corporation leaders, while others could be freely taken up by any member at any time. The individually assigned roles were the ones from which *Major* could lose the most capital if done badly or taken advantage of. For these roles trust assurance was again of importance, and the applicability of the free-to-choose/-develop labor was hence limited. Simultaneously, the individually assigned roles limit the applicability of the concept of expertise hierarchy. For these roles expertise was of only limited importance. Trust in the member wishing to perform the role was much more important to the corporation.

Finally, trust assurance limits the full applicability of the concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge. Corporation members were generally involved in the development of explicit knowledge, i.e., the strategic decisionmaking process. Yet only those with President status were able to make the final decisions. Again, the importance of assuring trust made it difficult for this corporation to allow anyone to make strategic decisions. Since the hierarchy signified differing levels of expertise and trust, only those high up in the hierarchy were afforded absolute strategic decisionmaking power.

Loyalty, resulting from trust assurance

Loyalty is another important factor that influenced the corporation's structure. In a sense loyalty is a result of trust assurance. From placing importance on assuring trust of members, loyalty towards the trusted members easily follows, especially if the trust is rewarded with good performance. Loyalty subsequently limits the applicability of the concept of expertise hierarchy. Those in the highest echelons of the hierarchy had the advantage of loyalty, rendering it difficult for others to rise to the same level. Of course this argument assumes that the total number of members in the highest ranks of the hierarchy, i.e., the number of Presidents, was limited. Since Presidents also had strategic decisionmaking power (see Figure 5.6), the number of people in

the highest level of the hierarchy was limited. However, it was not clear whether the existing corporation leaders had defined a *specific* maximum number of Presidents. Nevertheless, with a limitation on the total number of Presidents and the loyalty that existing Presidents had, the hierarchy became quite static. Those members who exhibited high levels of expertise did not quickly climb in the hierarchy, at least not during the study.

Simultaneously, the loyalty that those high up in the hierarchy enjoyed limited the applicability of the concept of distributed leadership. The Presidents were effectively afforded certain leadership in the form of strategic decisionmaking power. Since loyalty limited the expertise hierarchy (the possibility of advancing up the hierarchy based on increasing levels of expertise), it effectively also limited the possibility for this form of leadership to become more distributed. Instead this form of leadership was effectively individually assigned.

5.5 CONCLUSION

5.5.1 *EVE ONLINE'S* PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS

An *EVE* player can decide to start or join a first corporation when in need of other players to complete missions, be protected from enemies and acquire resources more quickly. Missions become more difficult over time, requiring multiple players to accomplish them quickly. Acquiring more advanced resources, e.g. a specific space ship good for mining and cargo hauling, will be so expensive that a lot of time must be spent making and saving money. Consequently, a player will start to have an interest in the more lucrative resources of low- or null-security space. However, since low-/no-security solar systems offer limited to no protection from the automated space police *Concord*, trusted players are needed to offer the necessary protection from enemies. There are other general and more specific reasons to start or join a corporation. A player can simply find social gameplay much more rewarding. Social gameplay is always a possibility, since players use public chat channels to interact with others and can start a corporation or alliance at any time. Still, in time game mechanics will incentivize or even obligate players to become very social.

Startup corporations play an important part in *EVE* as organizations formed out of a need for collaborative learning. These corporations are highly dynamic in terms of number of members and member activity. They often allow practically anyone to join the corporation, most notably new players. They are open to all the gameplay *EVE* has to offer, since the goal of the corporation is to learn the game collaboratively and thus more quickly. Startup corporations are non-competitive, at least not initially. They will not attempt to claim a region of space, or make ever-increasing amounts of ISK on production and sales, for example. It is more likely that they will first focus on understanding the intricate details of *EVE's* game mechanics and gameplay styles. The startup corporation I was a member of for a short while focused on collaborative mining, for example. In time startup corporations grow, merge with other corporations, or simply disband. In my case the startup corporation disbanded, mostly resulting from members leaving the corporation to pursue differing gameplay interests within more established corporations and alliances.

Corporations like *Major* have structural and cultural characteristics that contribute to their continued existence and importance to the *EVE* community. *Major* was particularly successful in production, sales and a number of financial services. It was also quite stable. When I became a member it had been in existence for over six years and grew from about 40 to about 60 members. The corporation had six Presidents (leaders) at the time. Access was based on trust, and the roles members had were both self-determined and negotiated with the leaders. The corporation had a hierarchy showing differing levels in expertise and trust as well as a less important and 'flat' hierarchy of decisionmaking power. Leadership behavior was erratic, as members of all levels of the hierarchy exhibited it when taking on tasks and requiring help from others. The behavior of the actual leaders of the corporation was non-authoritative and consisted mostly of coordination and cultivation. A wide range of ICTs were used, most notably IRC channels and discussion forums. The ICTs supported and were based on the demands of the corporation. They strengthened the style of labor division, leadership and hierarchy this corporation upheld. Culturally most members of *Major* seemed to value friendship, uniqueness and efficiency within the corporation.

Table 5.2 shows that both *EVE*'s startup corporations and *Major* can be considered playful organizations. Startup corporations offer several examples of playful organization, most notably their openness to new members, their willingness to try all sorts of gameplay experiences and their uncertain existence over time. *Major* offers 23 more examples of playful organization. The playful concepts of open access, free-to-choose/-develop roles, expertise hierarchy, distributed leadership and collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge were applicable to *Major*. Two factors put pressure on the full applicability of these concepts, i.e., the importance of assuring trust among members and the loyalty towards the esteemed members and leaders that comes with long-lasting trust. Thus at least trust assurance and loyalty can limit the playfulness of an online gaming community. The playful organization ideal-type is not an absolute ideal or standard in online gaming. *Major* was still very much playfully organized, even though it did not fit the playful organization ideal-type completely.

A corporation's larger context influences its values and thus the extent of playful organization. Figure 5.8 visualizes how a corporation's structural and cultural characteristics should be positioned within a larger context. *Major* was also influenced by the alliance it was a part of at the time, as well as *EVE* as a game within the entire massively multiplayer online gaming market. *Major*'s choice for an alliance was a conscious one. The chosen alliance had to fit with and simultaneously had an influence on the corporation's preferred structure and culture. The alliance preferred peaceful interactions with *EVE* players even if they were not part of the alliance. This preference was applicable to *Major* as well, considering its non-combat orientation and unique function in the *EVE* community. The corporation's alliance needs to be positioned within *EVE* as a specific online game to understand it. The alliance was small and non-imperialistic among others that were much larger and rather imperialistic. The ability to form such a unique alliance or any type of alliance stems from the 'sandbox' design principle CCP Games upholds as the game's unique selling point. In that sense *EVE* is an ideal environment for playful organization within the entire online gaming landscape. However, the gameplay that the

sandbox allowed to emerge included infiltrations, thefts and scams, rendering trust assurance so important that corporation leaders had to explicitly limit the extent of playful organization.

5.5.2 DISCUSSION

Playing *EVE* was as much about developing my character as it was about developing myself within *Major* and the *EVE* community in general. Playing an online game as complex as *EVE* is an intense learning experience, where one must continuously learn the functional basics (e.g. spaceflight, spaceship assembly, skill development), the main game mechanics (e.g. missions, combat, production, sales) and, of course, the entire gameplay culture (e.g. the terms people use, the ubiquitous distrust, the infamous powerful players and alliances). Although my character could have theoretically been a personality in itself – i.e., a consciously performed personality – this was not really the case for me. My character was first and foremost an interface with *EVE* and a representation of myself in *EVE*. Without it I could not interact with other players and with the *New Eden* universe. My character also logged my *EVE* knowledge and experiences and communicated them to the *EVE* community. The character detailed the corporations and alliances I had been a member of, my standings towards other players, corporations and alliances, and my gameplay possibilities through the developed character skills.

For me, playing *EVE* as a member of an *EVE* corporation was like having a new hobby and being part of a voluntary organization. Of course the corporation was first based on voluntarism. Yet the analogy fits particularly well, as I spent most of my time playing late in the afternoons, evenings and weekends. During the day I was often online on the IRC channels. I could have played during the day much more, since playing *EVE* was essentially part of my work as a Ph.D. candidate. Yet playing in the afternoons, evenings and weekends came with more social interaction, as other players of course did not have the luxury of having to play the game *as* work. The analogy also fits, given the playful way in which the corporation was structured (e.g. the described strategy for the division of labor, hierarchy, leadership). Of course the analogy of a voluntary organization already fits with the general idea of playful organization. The intrinsic

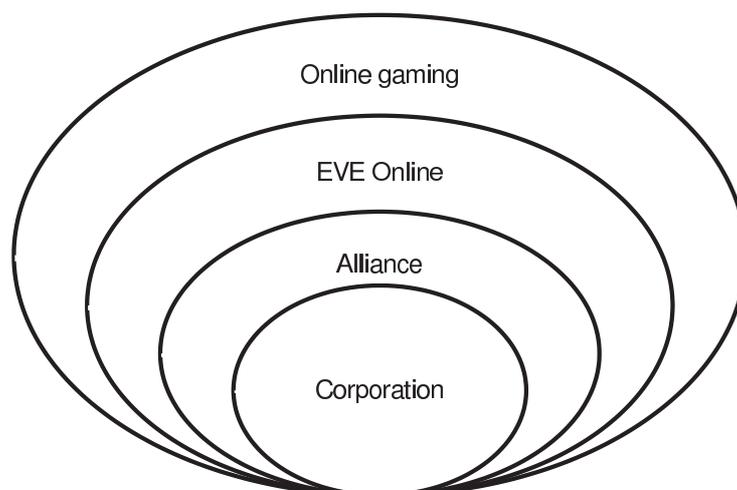


Figure 5.8. Positioning a corporation in the context of an alliance, *EVE Online* and online gaming in general helps in understanding cultural and structural influences.

motivation and sense of enjoyment that comes with voluntarism is a major goal of a playful organization in the first place.

My play style had a big influence on what I experienced, and thus on the results of my research. A different player/researcher would have undoubtedly experienced different types of corporations and come to different conclusions about possibilities for playful organization. There are indications of other possible experiences and conclusions. A more achievement-oriented player with a higher level of *EVE* knowledge and experience would probably have experienced more and more complex gameplay in a different corporation. Some of the interviewed *Major* members also questioned my choice for *Major*. They found *Major* so unique that it was hardly representative of all *EVE* corporations. Of course for this part of the empirical research my goal was not to develop a generally valid theory of *EVE* corporations' structural and cultural characteristics. Nevertheless, these particular interviewees indicated that other experiences could have been obtained if another corporation had been selected, leading to other results and conclusions.

The results indeed have obvious limits in terms of generalizability. Other corporations undoubtedly have a different structure and culture, given *Major's* uniqueness. Moreover, as a play context *EVE* is also generally quite unique in at least two ways. First, the highly capitalistic basis is quite unique. Other online games, such as *World of Warcraft*, also have economic systems, but these systems are often not as fundamental to the game mechanics the virtual worlds possess as is the case in *EVE*. Second, the apparent ubiquity of infiltrations, thefts and scams in *EVE* is quite unique. They are what attracted many game culture scholars and journalists to write about *EVE* in the first place, as they are much less frequent and much more contested in other virtual worlds. This means that trust assurance – an important factor that limited my corporation to fully take several opportunities for playful organization – might be much less relevant in other online games. Ethnographic methodology hardly permits the possibility or even acknowledges the worth of generalization. The uniqueness of *EVE* within the online gaming market also makes it near impossible to argue that the discussed results are generalizable.

The main value of the results of this first part of the empirical research is the wealth of insight they offer into playful organization and *EVE Online* as a breeding ground for it. Table 5.2 summarizes these particular results usefully. The results are useful to work organizations. Leaders and managers of work organizations can be inspired to create their own playful organizations using the understanding of online gaming communities developed in this chapter. The way my corporation handles access, the division of labor, hierarchy, leadership and the use of ICTs can be particularly inspirational. Organizations operating 'virtually' (i.e., globally and technologically) should be able to relate to *Major*. The fact that this corporation was involved in something as real as goods production, logistics and sales makes it even more relatable to a work organization. Since this playful organization had managed to exist for over 6 years, had grown to 60 members and had a high overall organizational commitment shows that it could be very successful.

5.5.3 ONWARD

As a 'subtle realist' I value the generalizability of the playful organization theory I am developing. The second part of the empirical research therefore involved quantitative research into 68 online gaming communities and 76 work organizations in which a panel of Dutch online gamers were involved. Using this approach I could develop more general insights into the playful organization of online gaming communities and the factors that limit their possibilities for playfulness. Moreover, I could find out whether the panel's work organizations are playful as well, and how the panel draws comparisons between their online gaming communities and work organizations. In the following chapter I therefore offer the results of the quantitative research into the panel's online gaming communities. In Chapter 7 I offer the results of the quantitative research into the panel's work organizations, with which the comparison to the panel's online gaming communities can be drawn and explained.

CHAPTER 6

LET'S ASK OUR PANEL:

DUTCH ONLINE GAMERS ON THEIR COMMUNITIES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

EVE Online and its corporations have provided useful insights into playful organization. Table 5.2 summarized many examples of playful organization in *EVE Online*, including of a 6-year-old corporation referred to as *Major*. Leaders, managers and employees alike can be inspired by *Major* to add playfulness to their organizations. Organizations operating 'virtually' (i.e., globally and technologically) are particularly relatable to *Major*. The fact that the corporation was involved in goods production, logistics and sales makes it even more relatable to a work organization.

Yet it remains unclear whether *any* online gaming community can provide useful insights into playful organization. The degree of playful organization in online games in general is in fact in dispute. Chapter 3 showed that online gaming communities are organizationally highly diverse. Previous empirical research suggests that online gaming communities are not always highly playful organizations.

Thanks to the panel research the differing degrees of playful organization in online games can be ascertained and explained more generally. The panel research also sheds light on the factors that influence online gaming communities' development as organizations. Thus the research enables the identification of differing levels of playful organization in online games, and an explanation for why these levels can be identified. This knowledge helps to ascertain whether online gaming communities can generally be inspirational to work organizations in becoming more playful.

The research involved a panel of Dutch working online gamers providing data about themselves and their communities. The panel consisted of 95 Dutch online gamers and was formed over a period of six months. The panelists filled in one questionnaire about their gaming habits and the characteristics of their online gaming community. They were asked to state their agreement to the 24 statements of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI; Cameron & Quinn, 2006) on a seven-point Likert scale. Reliability analyses proved the existence of OCAI's four cultures (Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy) underlying the panelists' responses (see Section 4.4.2). The online gaming communities' scores on these four organizational cultures could thus be calculated on again a seven-point Likert scale (see Figure 6.1). These scores painted a picture of the communities' extent of playful organization. Interviews with 22 of the panelists offered more information about how the panelists viewed their communities' organization. The playful organization ideal-type (see Chapter 2) was an important framework for conducting and analyzing the interviews. The interviews thus further indicated the communities' playful organization.

This chapter offers the results to answer the following research question:

To what extent can Dutch online gamers' communities be considered playful organizations?

The following sections discuss and interpret results of the statistical analyses and interviews. Statistical analyses entailed descriptive and logistic regression analyses. Descriptive analyses were conducted to first ascertain the communities' scores on Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy cultures. Using these results four types of online gaming communities were formed that indicated differing degrees of playful organization. The types were named 'most playful', 'moderately playful', 'least playful' and 'unorganized'. Section 6.2 offers the descriptive statistics for each of these four types, accompanied by interview results that further indicate characteristics of the communities of each type. The four types were used in logistic regression analyses as nominal outcome variables. In these analyses all other measured variables pertaining to the panelist, community and work organization were considered potential predictors (see Figure 4.3). Section 6.3 explains the existence of differing degrees of playful organization by interpreting the results of the logistic regression analyses and interviews.

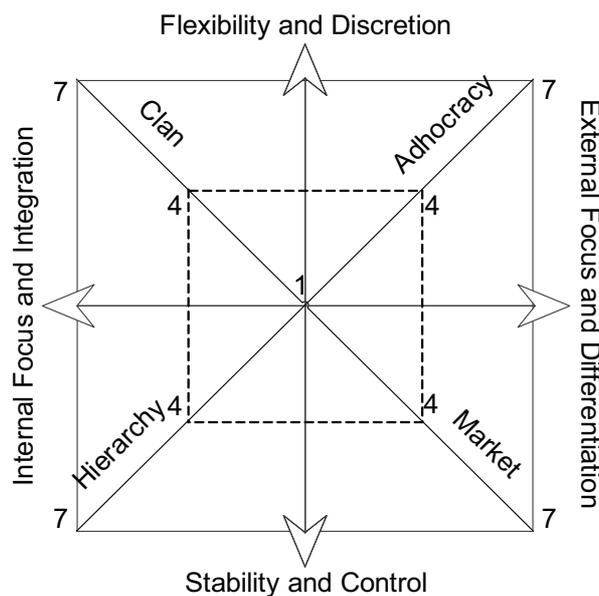


Figure 6.1. The panelists scored their online gaming communities on Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy cultures using the OCAI. The scores were on a seven-point Likert scale. On this scale four is the threshold between disagreement and agreement.

6.2 DEGREES OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

6.2.1 MOST PLAYFUL

Organizational culture

Of all 95 panelists 48 (50.5%) scored their online gaming community highest on Clan and Adhocracy organizational cultures, or on Clan only. Specifically, they scored five points or higher on both Clan and Adhocracy cultures or on Clan culture only, while scoring lower on Market and/or Hierarchy cultures. These panelists generally agreed at least slightly with the applicability of Clan culture and often also Adhocracy culture, but less with the applicability of Market and/or Hierarchy cultures. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 6.1.

These panelists' online gaming communities are seen as most playfully organized. As argued in Section 4.3.2, high scores on Clan and Adhocracy cultures already signify a playful organizational culture, even more so if accompanied by low scores for Market and Hierarchy cultures. These panelists still have different opinions about the organizational culture of their communities. Table 6.1 shows that some panelists also scored highly on Market or Hierarchy cultures, or low on Adhocracy culture. Moreover, the standard deviations for Market and Hierarchy cultures are quite high. Nevertheless, compared to the others these panelists indicate that their communities are the most playfully organized.

The 48 panelists are quite content with and committed to their community's playful organization. The differences between the preferred and current scores are generally not very high. The mean scores for preferred organizational culture are generally all slightly higher than the scores for current organizational culture. The limited differences between preferred and current cultures become most apparent when comparing all the scores for the individual statements for all 48 panelists. It seems like the panelists are content with their online gaming communities in terms of the organizational culture. This conclusion is substantiated by a high average score for organizational commitment: 5.73 ± 0.83 .

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD
Clan	5.00 – 7.00	6.16 \pm 0.60	4.67 – 7.00	6.30 \pm 0.65
Adhocracy	1.83 – 7.00	4.90 \pm 0.96	1.00 – 7.00	5.19 \pm 0.98
Market	1.00 – 6.33	3.61 \pm 1.30	1.00 – 6.33	3.92 \pm 1.45
Hierarchy	1.00 – 6.67	4.60 \pm 1.14	1.00 – 6.83	4.98 \pm 1.15

Table 6.1. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose online gaming communities can be interpreted as most playful organizations ($N = 48$).

Thirteen of these 48 panelists were also interviewed, providing their own characterizations of their communities. When asked to characterize their online gaming communities as organizations, these panelists used terms that indicated playful organization:²⁹

- “a convivial guild (especially social) that organizes raids, instead of a raiding guild (especially performance-based) that is convivial” (panelist #20; a leader of a reasonably large and old *World of Warcraft* guild)
- “we want to be a very close-knit guild ... we are a community and we put emphasis on playing and experiencing things together, and we have a code of conduct ... it really is as stated on our site: team-based, mature, fair play, best behavior.” (panelist #22; officer in a reasonably large and old *World of Warcraft* guild)
- “reliability, freedom, friendship, respect, openness, self-steering, social control” (panelist #23; member of a smaller and reasonably old clan playing *Call of Duty* and other games)

The interviewees provided more insights into their communities’ playful organization when asked to describe structural characteristics.

Organizational structure

For seven interviewees the playful concept of open access and exit was relevant, given their descriptions of their communities’ organization (#11, #20, #22, #23, #25, #30 and #31). They referred to the importance of open access, i.e., allowing those who want to join the community to actually join it quite easily. One Xbox multi-gaming clan only limited access through a minimum age criterion, simply because the community wanted to consist of only adults (#30 and #31). The concept of open exit followed quite naturally. As most interviewees explicitly mentioned, members are free to leave, which effectively also ensures that the community consists of only the most engaged members. One interviewee described how exit from the community was so free that once the leaders had decided to leave the entire community disbanded (#11).

Interestingly, the other six panelists explained how their community had defined clear criteria for access to the community (#2, #4, #10, #12, #18, #19). Specifically, they had defined a number of game-related or demographic criteria for access. Members needed to live only in the Netherlands, play a specific game mechanic of a specific game, or pay a small annual fee to cover server hosting and related maintenance costs (#4, #12, #18, #19, #25). Two panelists indicated that their communities had trial periods lasting up to a month (#2 and #10).

All interviewees explained that in their communities members were free to choose and develop roles as they saw fit. Three interviewees were leaders who let both leaders and non-leaders develop new roles within the community (#4, #11 and #19). Two other interviewees were able to choose and develop new roles in their own community. One decided to become a regular gaming news poster (#31), while another developed a valuable in-game logistics service to his fellow community members (#2). Two interviewees belonging to the same community (#20 and #22) offered other concrete examples of how their community enabled free development/choice of roles, despite the large number of members it had. The community used

²⁹ These and later interview responses were originally in Dutch. I translated them to English as closely as possible.

an 'invite list', i.e., a list to which members could add their names to indicate their interest in joining the next 'raid'. The community also allowed members with high status to freely organize instances of collaborative play of all sorts and at any time, including collaborative role-playing. Finally, the community allowed those with specific management roles, i.e., 'class officers', to define their tasks freely (e.g. training new members, keeping track of available assets).

Most of the interviewees described leadership as distributed when talking about their communities' organization. Eight panelists (#2, #4, #10, #11, #19, #22, #25 and #31) indicated that leadership was indeed distributed, while those higher up in the hierarchy were responsible for coordination and cultivation, i.e., managing resources and enthusing members. Four panelists were actually community leaders (#4, #20, #23 and #25). Panelist #20 described the role as a director, i.e., a person who has an idea of the community's norms and values and ensuring that what is being said and done within the community fits with those norms and values. Panelist #23 was only concerned with appointing managers ("sub-clan leaders"), ascertaining members' activity and "activating the community feeling on the forums". Both role definitions ensure that other members are free to assert leadership. Two other leaders (#4 and #25) found it hard to limit their leadership behavior. They found it important to limit their leadership behavior to coordination and cultivation. Yet they found it hard not to exhibit command and control behavior as well.

From three interviews it was clear that the playful concept of distributed leadership was less relevant. One panelist considered his community as lacking in coordination and cultivation (#12). This interviewee spoke of how individual members asserted conventional command-and-control leadership behavior. Members suggested, asked or even demanded the involvement of others in doing a certain in-game activity. Yet he also spoke of how his community lacked vision and management tasks with which that vision would be guaranteed. For panelists #18 and #30 leadership was afforded to a specific player for every gameplay session. This meant that a couple of members asserted command and control leadership behavior mostly within the community. Other forms of leadership were not apparent in the communities of these two panelists.

Concerning the existence and form of a hierarchy, two interviewees had trouble defining a hierarchy of any kind (#11, #12). They found that their communities lacked any kind of explicit or implicit hierarchy, whether that hierarchy was a delineation of power, expertise or something else. They agreed that there was at least one leader in their community, but they could not ascertain what that leader did differently, or how that leader was different from other members at all.

The other 11 interviewees described their community's hierarchy as a display of expertise levels. Six described it specifically as a display of gaming expertise levels (#2, #18, #19, #20, #22 and #23). They spoke of how their community appointed a specific title as a sign of social status to those who had shown gaming knowledge, skills and effort. This description fits with the playful organization's conceptualization of hierarchy as based on expertise, specifically *gaming* expertise. Five other interviewees described the hierarchy as a display of *management* expertise levels (#4, #10, #25, #30, #31). They again stated quite clearly that the hierarchy was still not a display of power differences. Yet they also stated that having gaming expertise is not

the most important criterion for stepping up the hierarchy. For these panelists the hierarchy was a display of differing levels of skills, willingness and time for management tasks (#4, #25, #30 and #31). In these cases management mostly concerned coordination and cultivation activities, befitting the earlier discussed form of leadership. Community managers kept track of member activity and recruited new members. They supported members when needed by offering ICTs (e.g. voice chat servers). Members were allowed to become managers and advance in the management expertise hierarchy when willing and able to perform such activities.

As to ICTs, six interviewees stated that their community primarily had a use for a discussion forum for simple communication purposes (#10, #11, #18, #23, #30 and #31). Except for panelist #10 (playing *Star Wars Galaxies*), the communities of these panelists focused on multiplayer games rather than on massively multiplayer online games. They set up gaming sessions in relatively smaller virtual worlds with relatively smaller teams. The amount of gameplay knowledge involved was also relatively smaller. Moreover, the online games in question offered ample communication technologies in-game, most notably voice chat. The communities only used an additional discussion forum for arranging gameplay sessions and general chitchat.

Seven other interviewees described how extensively knowledge & communication technologies were used in their communities (#2, #4, #12, #19, #20, #22 and #25). Each of these communities used multiple voice chat software and multiple discussion forums. Moreover, most of them had their own website as well, which in one case also included a wiki (#2). These seven panelists were quite clear about the usage techniques for the forums and websites in particular. They explained how the forums and websites were used for administrative and organizational purposes, e.g. to discuss possible community rules and the issues that members might have with them. They also explained how they were used for developing and reflecting on gameplay strategies, as well as for simply staying in touch with fellow members and having a laugh. Panelist #20 explained how his community had started using Twitter for spreading news about what the community was doing. Panelist #22 mentioned the use of combat logs and spreadsheets to create all sorts of statistics about what the community was doing, and how well it was doing it.

Most descriptions correspond well to the playful organization's conceptualizations of knowledge & communication technologies and techniques. In these communities there was a wealth of technologies in use because of the demands of the members and their possibility to fulfill that demand themselves. The technologies enabled members to share knowledge in the networks they formed both inside and outside of the community. Befitting the playful organization ideal-type, they also enabled members to collaboratively develop explicit knowledge in the form of preferred procedures.

6.2.2 MODERATELY PLAYFUL

Organizational culture

Thirty-four of all 95 panelists (35.8%) scored highly on all or only two conflicting organizational cultures. Specifically, the panelists scored five or higher on either all four organizational cultures

($N = 28$), Clan and Market ($N = 2$), Clan and Hierarchy ($N = 3$), or Adhocracy and Market ($N = 1$). In the latter three cases the panelists scored their communities on two organizational cultures that are on opposite sides of one or both dimensions of the OCAI (see Figure 6.1). The descriptive statistics for this subset of panelists are shown in Table 6.2.

These scores still signify playful organizational cultures. In all cases Clan and/or Adhocracy organizational cultures are deemed relevant. Compared to the previous – most playful – organizations, these panelists indicate a moderately playful organization with their OCAI scores. Clan and Adhocracy are after all generally deemed to be relevant cultures, but less relevant than in the previous group of panelists. Moreover, Market and Hierarchy are generally deemed even more relevant cultures.

The panelists were still quite content with their communities. When subtracting the preferred and current scores for each individual statement this observation is confirmed. There were some panelists within this subset who preferred a different organizational culture. Yet in general these panelists deemed an evenly high score for Hierarchy and Adhocracy preferable. They also scored quite high on organizational commitment: 5.55 ± 1.05 .

The six interviewed panelists provided a number of details substantiating the interpretation that they are only moderately playfully organized. One interviewee provided quite an elaborate and fitting description of his community’s organization:

“I would typify the organization as **well-structured**, clear and transparent as to ranks, leadership and responsibility. Furthermore, I think that we as a guild organization are transparent, **open**, honest, clear in the communication towards our members and amongst the guild leaders, we have **a couple of principles, nothing is obligatory, everything is possible**, if you are present then that is good, but if you are not for a short while, then that is fine, too, because we all have a normal life besides WoW [World of Warcraft]. Respect each other and **treat each other with respect**, if this does not happen and things happen that cannot pass as to our guild and regarding the standing of other guilds if you are visiting them in an instance group or raid, then you will run into us and we will **take measures which will not always work out favorably but will be well-weighted, honest and clear**” (#26; leader of a small and young *World of Warcraft* guild; the bolded text indicates my own emphasis)

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD
Clan	3.17 – 7.00	6.12 \pm 0.71	4.67 – 7.00	6.33 \pm 0.55
Adhocracy	3.83 – 7.00	5.71 \pm 0.78	4.00 – 7.00	6.01 \pm 0.66
Market	2.00 – 7.00	5.77 \pm 0.96	1.67 – 7.00	5.81 \pm 1.02
Hierarchy	1.17 – 7.00	5.87 \pm 1.10	3.00 – 7.00	6.01 \pm 0.78

Table 6.2. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose online gaming communities can be interpreted as moderately playful organizations ($N = 34$).

The interviewees provided more insights into their communities' extent of playful organization.

Organizational structure

The playful concept of open access and exit was applicable to only a minority of the interviewee's communities. Two interviewees' communities (#5 and #17) had a reasonably open access policy by only insisting on a small amount of game-specific criteria for access. In both cases the communities were involved in a specific game mechanic (concerning *Guild Wars* and *World of Warcraft*, respectively) and asked new members to contribute to that if they wanted to join. Two other interviewees' communities (#16 and #28) had stricter access policies by not only insisting on game-related access criteria, but on a trial period of up to a couple of weeks as well. The final two interviewees' communities (#9 and #26) had the strictest access policies. The community of panelist #9 kept track of the roles and tasks they needed fulfilling and only allowed new members willing and able to fulfill an opening. The community of panelist #26 even allowed only 'real-life' Dutch-speaking friends into his community.

Conversely, the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles was quite applicable to a majority of the interviewee's communities. Despite the quite strict access policy one interviewee's community had institutionalized role alternation (#28). Members were able to freely choose an offensive or defensive role every time they joined the community's *Call of Duty* gameplay sessions. The same more or less applied to panelists #16, #17 and #26. Their communities allowed some freedom in developing roles. All three were members of different *World of Warcraft* communities, where they always had one specific role but were free to develop the skills, strategies and accompanying assets for that role. Conversely, the communities of panelists #5 and #9 – also *World of Warcraft* guilds – controlled labor more extensively. In those communities leaders indicated how members should develop their character's role within the community to ensure success in gameplay sessions (raids and instances).

For half of the interviewee's communities the concept of distributed leadership was applicable. Three panelists (#5, #16, #28) described leadership as distributed throughout the community. The actual leaders primarily concerned themselves with coordination and cultivation. As panelist #16 put it, "they keep track of you, but only to help you; it's not like they're going to boss you, because you should just do what you want, but they just give you tips so to speak". Conversely, the other three panelists (#9, #17, #26) described leadership more personified and based on coordination and cultivation as well as command and control. As one of the panelists put it, the community had such leaders "to ensure that people know who the highest in rank are and can address them if something goes bad or wrong" (#26). Panelist #9's community had several types of leaders, i.e., class leaders, raid leaders, guild leaders and a council of elected members. Class leaders needed to ensure there were enough members of the different classes of characters and that the class members had appropriate skills, equipment and experience. Raid leaders coordinated raids, a specific *World of Warcraft* game mechanic requiring a range of classes and several hours of gameplay. Council and guild leaders were strategic decision-makers and often conferred with class and raid leaders.

Although expertise hierarchies were not always apparent, all interviewees were keen to emphasize their communities' meritocratic nature. Panelist #9's elected council awarded a

group of members with strategic decisionmaking power. Hierarchy is a delineation of power for such a community. Yet the communities were still meritocratic. Moving up the hierarchy was described as based on merit, i.e., a show of activity and expertise. In two cases the shown expertise did not need to be purely game-related, but organization-specific (#26 and #28). Members needed to show a willingness for and expertise in e.g. recruiting or scheduling, similar to the earlier described most playfully organized communities. The other panelists described moving up in the hierarchy as primarily based on shown gaming expertise, i.e., “people who’ve been around long, behaved normally, often taken part in the guild’s activities and/or often talked in the chat etc., they get the job [of leader]” (#5).

Concerning knowledge & communication technologies, none of the communities seemed to use very many. Four panelists explained that there was limited demand for many different technologies (#9, #16, #17, #28). They primarily used voice chat (Skype, Ventrilo or Xbox 360’s own chat) for coordination purposes during gameplay. Only one panelist explained that his community also used a website and a forum for discussing/reviewing gameplay strategy and general chitchat. The other two panelists explained that the technology suite was heavily controlled, as it consisted only of direct communication technologies accompanied by certain usage rules. As one panelist put it, “we currently don’t have a website or forum in the guild. Perhaps I’ll want that again in the future, but that will only happen when I decide that I want the guild to grow, and then I’ll let [someone] build a website” (#26).

Overall, the characteristics of the six interviewees’ communities generally fit the playful organization ideal-type less than the earlier discussed communities. The six interviewees’ communities often combined open access and free-to-develop roles with personified command & control leadership and limited knowledge & communication technologies and techniques. Some playful values were often acknowledged, i.e., meritocracy and conviviality, while others were at times not, i.e., equality and agility.

6.2.3 LEAST PLAYFUL

Organizational culture

Four of the 95 panelists (4.2%) scored highest on Market and/or Hierarchy organizational cultures. Specifically, they scored five or higher on Market and/or Hierarchy, while scoring lower on Clan and/or Adhocracy cultures. These panelists generally agreed at least slightly with the applicability of Market and/or Hierarchy cultures and less with the applicability of Clan and/or Adhocracy cultures. Table 6.3 shows the descriptive statistics for this group of panelists.

These communities are interpreted as least playfully organized. The panelists generally scored their communities’ cultures opposite to those whose scores indicated most playful organization. Low scores on Clan and Adhocracy cultures already signify a low level of playful organization. The level of playful organization is even lower if these scores are accompanied by high scores for Market and Hierarchy cultures. However, Table 6.3 shows that the Clan culture has the highest standard deviation in this group of panelists. The Clan culture was still relevant for a couple of the four panelists. Moreover, as argued in Chapter 4, a hierarchical culture is

arguably still a meritocratic culture. Playful organization is still somewhat relevant for these four panelists.

Not all four panelists preferred this. In general the panelists would like to find Clan and Adhocracy organizational cultures much more applicable. They also preferred a more hierarchical culture. The differences between preferred and current cultures became most clear when comparing the scores for the individual statements of the four panelists. The differences are higher than the 82 panelists discussed in Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2. The panelists are generally the least content with their online gaming communities' organizational culture. This conclusion is substantiated by a much lower average score for organizational commitment: 4.30 ± 1.29 .

One of these four panelists (#21) was also interviewed. When asked to typify the online gaming community as an organization, this panelist used terms that did not indicate playful organization in accordance to the ideal-type. The terms also did not indicate Clan or Adhocracy organizational culture. In his own words, "I would say, strict, militaristic, impersonal, goal-oriented..." (#21). This community was quite an old and large *World of Warcraft* guild. The interviewee provided more insights into his community's characteristics that could be juxtaposed against the playful organization ideal-type.

Organizational structure

The community had characteristics that were in opposition to those of the playful organization ideal-type. Access to the community was very well-defined, as the community upheld a number of criteria as well as a one-month trial period. Prospective members needed to fulfill a role (class) that the community required to play raids and instances. They needed to have a high-level character with which they would be online very regularly, i.e., a couple of hours every week. Although members might be free to leave at any time, they would also be forcibly kicked out if they did not regularly fulfill a clear role within the community. Labor was thus defined and divided very specifically. Members did not switch roles or develop new roles at all. Leadership was also not distributed, but clearly assigned to those with management tasks. This rendered the community's hierarchy a display of power difference.

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean ± SD	Min – Max	Mean ± SD
Clan	3.67 – 5.50	4.58 ± 0.97	4.17 – 5.83	5.29 ± 0.76
Adhocracy	4.00 – 4.83	4.42 ± 0.35	4.67 – 5.83	5.13 ± 0.52
Market	5.00 – 6.50	5.83 ± 0.65	5.50 – 6.83	6.00 ± 0.59
Hierarchy	4.33 – 6.00	5.04 ± 0.77	4.50 – 6.83	5.92 ± 1.08

Table 6.3. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose online gaming communities can be interpreted as least playful organizations (N= 4).

As to the used ICTs, the community only had a forum and voice chat in use. The forum included an agenda on which members could see what actions were scheduled and who was scheduled to take part in them. The community used in-game voice chat in a very structured way. Only 'raid leaders' were allowed to use in-game voice to allow for clearest unidirectional communication. The community only used third party information (strategy guides) on other fan sites (if needed at all) and thus did not develop its own. Since the members had high-level characters, they needed to learn relatively little more about *World of Warcraft* and its game mechanics. Both the adopted technologies and the accompanying usage techniques were thus determined only by the community's management.

6.2.4 UNORGANIZED

The remaining nine panelists (9.5%) scored low on all four organizational cultures. Specifically, they scored lower than five on Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy cultures. These panelists generally disagreed with the applicability of all four organizational cultures. The descriptive statistics of this group of panelists are shown in Table 6.4.

Low scores on all organizational cultures indicate an unorganized online gaming community. After all, the panelists deem none of these well-known organizational cultures applicable. These communities do not become organizations but remain communities. Members have a shared interest, but the community has no characteristic to deem it an organization. Connected to Scott's institutionalization theory (2008) the OCAI scores suggest that these communities hardly had any unifying values, norms or rules for behavior.

In general these panelists were not very content with their communities. They would have preferred their communities to be more playfully organized. They deemed a higher score for all cultures preferable, and for Clan and Adhocracy cultures in particular. In general these panelists preferred a slightly more playful organizational culture. The extent of playful organization they preferred is debatable, given the still low means on preferred organizational culture. When subtracting the preferred and current scores for each individual statement, overall it becomes clear that these panelists were nonetheless not content with their communities. The differences were higher than those of panelists who were members of most or moderately playful organizations (Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2). They were, however, lower than those of the four panelists who were members of least playful organizations (Section 6.2.3). The

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean ± SD	Min – Max	Mean ± SD
Clan	1.67 – 4.83	3.93 ± 0.97	2.67 – 6.67	4.74 ± 1.12
Adhocracy	2.17 – 4.67	3.76 ± 0.76	2.67 – 6.33	4.54 ± 1.03
Market	1.67 – 4.83	3.61 ± 1.00	2.50 – 5.83	4.31 ± 0.93
Hierarchy	2.33 – 4.50	3.44 ± 0.73	1.83 – 6.17	4.13 ± 1.32

Table 6.4. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose scores can be interpreted as signifying unorganized online gaming communities (N = 9).

panelists indicating least playful organization were the least content with their communities, followed by these nine panelists indicating unorganized communities. Still, these nine scored lowest on organizational commitment of all four groups: 4.14 ± 1.06 .

Two of the nine panelists were also interviewed. When asked to typify their online gaming communities as organizations, they responded:

- “There was no direction [...] With that there was also a lack of leadership now and again ... there was no-one who took the lead.” (#13; member of a small and reasonably young *EVE Online* corporation)
- “With regards to that clan ... I was referring to more of a group of friends, of people who played that. A fixed group of friends.” (#15; member of a *Call of Duty* community of unknown age and number of members)

Both interviewees went on to explain that their communities lacked any form of organization. Panelist #13’s community played *EVE Online*, intriguingly, while panelist #15’s community played several online games on Xbox 360. The interviewees could define no social structuring in the form of hierarchy and leadership. They also had no ICTs at their disposal, other than those afforded by the games being played. One community also had a fairly unstable group of members. For each gaming session the community was open to new members worldwide (#15), even though there might be a couple of ‘regulars’ joining in. This can easily be interpreted as highly playful behavior, but the community as a whole cannot be interpreted as a playful *organization*. Basic criteria for considering a social entity an organization could not be determined. Not only was it too difficult to define any form of institutionalization, there was also no common goal or vision other than playing the game together for a while.

6.3 DEGREES OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION EXPLAINED

The results indicate that playful organization is generally an applicable form of organization for these panelists’ online gaming communities. A slight majority of the panelists indicated most playful organizations (50.5%), while another substantial number of panelists indicated moderately playful organizations (35.8%). Only a small subset of the panelists’ scores were interpreted as indicating least playful organizations (4.2%) or hardly organized at all (9.5%). The results have therefore also offered additional examples of playful organization. Table 6.5 lists the examples discussed in the previous sections per value and concept of the playful organization ideal-type.

The results also suggest that certain factors render online gaming communities less playfully organized or even unorganized. There is now a need for understanding why online gaming communities are playful organizations to differing extents. The logistic regression analyses provided a first answer to this question. The interviews subsequently enabled useful interpretations to answer the question fully.

The playful organization ideal-type	Examples from Dutch online gamers' communities, with reference to the section numbers concerned
<i>Contingency</i>	6.2.1: A community disbanding after a leader with great influence on members had suddenly left .
<i>Agility</i>	6.2.1: A community allowing members with high status to organize instances of collaborative play of all sorts (e.g. role-play). 6.2.2: A community where members 'do what they want to do'. See also <i>Free-to-choose & free-to-develop roles</i> .
<i>Equality</i>	6.2.2: a community where members 'are not bossed around'. See also <i>Distributed leadership</i> .
<i>Teachability</i>	6.2.1: A community where 'class officers' train other members of the same class (i.e., with the same in-game role). 6.2.2: A community where leaders offer tips to other members pertaining to their chosen roles/tasks.
<i>Meritocracy</i>	6.2.2: Communities where proven gaming/management expertise moves members up a decisionmaking power hierarchy .
<i>Conviviality</i>	6.2.1/6.2.2: Communities where members use a website and/or forums to stay in touch, have a laugh, and chitchat.
<i>Open access and exit</i>	6.2.1: Communities allowing those who want to join to do so easily. 6.2.1: A community with only a minimum age criterion for access. 6.2.1: A community not being able to keep members (incl. leaders) from leaving. 6.2.2: A community with a small amount of game-specific criteria for access.
<i>Free-to-choose & free-to-develop roles</i>	6.2.1: Communities letting members develop new roles, e.g. a news poster or an in-game logistics service provider. 6.2.1: A community with an 'invite list' on which members could indicate their interest in joining the next 'raid'. 6.2.2: Community members having one specific (management) role, but freely obtaining skills, strategies & accompanying assets. 6.2.2: A community where roles were regularly alternated.
<i>Distributed leadership</i>	6.2.1: A community with a lack of leaders, but no lack of leadership as many members asserted command and control behavior. 6.2.1: A community leader describing his role as a 'director' responsible for ensuring activities fit established norms and values. 6.2.1: A community leader appointing managers, ascertaining members' activity and creating a close-knit community. 6.2.1: Community leaders finding it important but still hard to keep from command and control leadership. 6.2.2: <u>Communities with leadership all around and leaders coordinating & cultivating rather than commanding & controlling.</u>
<i>Expertise hierarchy</i>	6.2.1: Communities with hardly any hierarchy at all, at least not a decisionmaking power hierarchy. 6.2.1: Communities with a hierarchy depicting differing gaming expertise levels, often with titles as signs of social status. 6.2.1: Communities with a hierarchy depicting differing management expertise levels (mostly human resource management).
<i>Demand-based knowledge & communication suite</i>	6.2.1: Communities with a need for only a discussion forum to arrange collaborative gameplay sessions. 6.2.1: Communities with a need for a website, voice chat software and discussion forums for differing purposes. 6.2.2: <u>Communities with limited demand for additional technologies besides the use of the game's voice chat software .</u>
<i>Boundless knowledge networking</i>	6.2.1: A community member spreading news about the community's activities using Twitter. 6.2.1: Community members creating and spreading statistics about community activities using game logs and spreadsheets. 6.2.3: <u>Community members finding gameplay knowledge on public websites to determine an optimal strategy.</u>
<i>Collaboratively developed explicit knowledge</i>	6.2.1: Communities discussing community rules and the issues members might have with them using their website and forums. 6.2.1/6.2.2: Communities developing and reflecting on gameplay strategies using their website and/or forums.

Table 6.5. Examples of playful organization from Dutch online gamers' communities, related to the playful organization ideal-type.

6.3.1 PREDICTORS OF ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY TYPES

Appendix C suggests that a number of variables influence the type of online gaming community that a panelist indicates. The appendix lists descriptive statistics of all four types of online gaming community, i.e., most playful, moderately playful, least playful and unorganized. The statistics concern all the measured variables explained in Chapter 4. Six variables differ most clearly per type of community:

- The least playfully organized communities generally have competitive rationales, while the most playfully organized communities have social rationales.
- Unorganized communities generally have few members, while most playfully organized communities have many members.
- Unorganized communities have generally existed the shortest, while most playfully organized communities have existed the longest.
- Organizational commitment is generally highest for the most playfully organized communities and lowest for the unorganized communities.
- The total gameplay time is generally highest for panelists in the most playfully organized communities and lowest for those in the least playfully organized communities.
- Panelists in the least playfully organized communities are generally younger than those in the most playfully organized communities.

Appendix D shows which of the variables together predict the type of online gaming community most accurately, according to statistical analyses. The appendix shows that a model consisting of the following three variables and one interaction effect proved to most accurately predict the types of online gaming community observed among the 95 panelists:

- The panelist's **age**.
As a panelist's age increases, the odds increase that the panelist will find his/her online gaming community more playfully organized.
- The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the online gaming community.
As a panelist's organizational commitment increases, the odds increase that the panelist will find his/her online gaming community more playfully organized.
- The online gaming community's **time in existence**.
As the community's time in existence increases, the odds increase that the panelist will generally find it more playfully organized.
- Interaction between the online gaming community's **competitive rationale and time in existence**
A non-competitive rationale greatly stimulates the effect of time in existence. As the age of a community with a non-competitive rationale (i.e., more oriented toward social interaction) increases, the odds increase more strongly that the panelist will indicate more playful organization. However, as the age of a community with a competitive rationale increases, the odds increase greatly that the panelist will indicate *less* playful organization.

The statistical results are insightful but require further interpretation before they can be fully understood. My own experiences and those shared by the panelists in interviews help in

determining meaningful interpretations. The experiences indicate that the predictors need to be considered collectively rather than individually. A meaningful interpretation of the significance of a panelist's age or organizational commitment alone is difficult. An explanation of the significance of these variables individually can also lead to misinterpretations quite easily. It would be a misinterpretation, for example, to consider high organizational commitment or old age a prerequisite for most playful organization in online games. A more meaningful interpretation emerges only when the other variables are taken into account as well. This leads to profiles of a most playfully organized, less playfully organized and unorganized online gaming communities.

6.3.2 PROFILE OF A MOST PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

Judging from the panelists' experiences, a most playful organization generally attracts older panelists because of the preference they have for the less stringent and more social play style that comes with it. The younger interviewed panelists were often focused on doing well in the online game than on playing the game within a community. Panelist #9 (male, 40 years old) found his *World of Warcraft* guild a moderately playful organization and stated, "The type of player who is member of the [community] is clearly different. Clearly more mature. The players do it for the fun of it, not just for the drops [the loot or rewards that game mechanics offer]". Classic psychology argues that adolescents are mostly concerned with identity development (Erikson & Erikson, 1982/1997). As Hibbard and Buhrmester explained, adolescents "are grappling with future plans and identities related to job and educational pursuits that involve varying degrees of ambition and competition" (2010, p. 413). If this psychological theory also applies to online gaming, then adolescent panelists would have a higher chance of playing the game competitively because of the identity development process they are in. For them it would thus make sense to be attracted to less playfully organized groups. The reverse would also be true. In general older panelists would be interested in being members of more playfully organized communities, because they dislike the game ambitions and competitiveness of less playfully organized communities. It should be noted, however, that age did not predict a choice for a community *rationale*. An additional binary logistic regression analysis indeed showed that age alone did not predict the occurrence of a competitive rationale. Age predicts a type of online gaming community, and then only when complemented by the aforementioned other predictor variables.

The significance of age and a competitive rationale should therefore also be considered together with time in existence and organizational commitment. The statistical results already showed that competitive rationale and time in existence have an interaction effect. The results also showed, however, that time in existence is a significant predictor on its own. Thus in general chances increase that any community will be deemed most playfully organized as it ages. Yet the effect is greatly strengthened by a lack of competitive rationale. A community with a social rather than a competitive rationale means that the community is more focused on its members. Arguably, the longer such a community lasts, the tighter the bonds between its members can get. This means that the longer the community exists, the higher the organizational commitment can become of its members. Organizational commitment is, after all, a measure of whether the panelist is committed to his/her choice of community and its continued existence.

All this strengthens the community's playful organization, because a playful organization is highly geared towards its members, i.e., who they are and how they would like to play the game. Overall, a social rationale introduces a focus on members rather than on the community's ambition and achievement, which in time leads to tighter bonds and higher organizational commitment. This generally attracts older players. The community becomes more and more playful organization.

The statistical results show that a competitive online gaming community can still be considered a more playful organization when it is young. The interaction effect between competitive rationale and time in existence shows that competitive communities have a higher chance of becoming less playful organizations as they age. This means that when they are young, competitive communities still have a relatively high chance of being more playful organizations. Competitive communities can be formed to achieve a certain short-term target. For such a newly-formed competitive community playful organization is indeed relevant. The most competitive communities still need a great deal of creativity, spontaneity and sense of enjoyment when it is formed to attract members and achieve its targets.

Section 6.2.1 showed that not all of the playful organization ideal-type's values and concepts are consistently applicable to online gaming communities that scored highly on playful organization. This shows the utopian nature of the ideal-type, as intended. The most playfully organized communities will still not fully conform to the ideal-type. As became clear in Section 6.2.1 as well as Chapter 5, many of the most playfully organized communities prefer less open access and exit than the ideal-type dictates. They also developed more static hierarchies than the ideal-type concept of expertise hierarchy dictates. Chapter 5 attributed the inapplicability of these concepts to the importance of assuring trust in *EVE Online* and to the loyalty that *Major's* members showed towards their leaders. Both reasons are again relevant to the panel of Dutch online gamers.

Trust assurance

Just like *Major*, many of the most playfully organized communities found assuring trust important enough to introduce access criteria and thus limit the applicability of the open access and exit concept. In *EVE* trust was an issue because of the heists and scams players could be involved in. For communities playing other online games assuring trust is often also important on a slightly more figurative level. Recall that eight of the 13 interviewees indicating most playfully organized communities had different access criteria, e.g. having a minimum age, living in the same region, or successfully finishing a trial period (#2, #4, #10, #12, #18, #19, #30, #31). These communities upheld access criteria to assure that new members fit in, i.e., to trust that they will be beneficial to the community.

The different access criteria ensured that new members would have a personality and behavior similar to the existing members. Hence the preference for a new member who is already a friend of one or more existing members (#26, #28), lives in the same region (city or country; #4, #13, #18, #28) and/or who can at least prove that he/she can fit in over a period of a couple of weeks or even months. The communities of three panelists (#4, #30, #31) did not freely allow players to join them, because the communities wanted only 'mature' players, e.g. of

at least 18 years old. The communities essentially adopted such a minimum age requirement to uphold maturity, i.e., polite and well-considered behavior, as a social norm.

Adopting certain access criteria to ensure that a new member will 'fit in' supports the theory that the community in question has a Clan culture where "shared values and goals, cohesion, ... and a sense of 'we-ness'" dominate (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 41). Thus although trust assurance can limit one particular opportunity for playful organization, the effects of trust assurance alone on a community's level of playful organization will probably be minimal. In fact, it could also strengthen the community's conviviality as well as its value for playful organization as a whole. By assuring new members 'fit in', a community can safeguard its conviviality and appreciation for playful organization.

Loyalty

Some of the most playfully organized communities also developed enough loyalty towards their leaders to limit the applicability of the playful concepts of equality, meritocracy and the expertise hierarchy. This is again similar to *Major*. Two panelists of a most playfully organized community explicitly indicated in their interviews a general sense of loyalty towards leaders (#18, #19). The communities of these two panelists were indeed not convinced that those who exhibited the most expertise (i.e., knowledge and effort) were awarded higher status, strategic decisionmaking power and/or more possibilities for leadership and management tasks. In these communities the leaders were actually also founders. As argued in Chapter 5, loyalty towards leaders essentially entails awarding them with more power. Members recognize the opinions and activities of leaders more or even afford them more strategic decisionmaking power without a need for justification. As a result it becomes harder to uphold equality and meritocracy, and consequently an expertise hierarchy.

The members of these communities were content enough with their leaders' activities to implicitly limit others becoming leaders. This means that many of the most playfully organized communities limited the number of members in the higher levels of their hierarchy. Even for a playful organization this still makes sense. A more exclusive upper level of a hierarchy enhances a sense of accomplishment and value when one reaches it. However, it makes more sense if the hierarchy is a delineation of strategic decisionmaking power. A smaller group of members with relatively more power is arguably more palatable than vice versa. It is simply easier to collectively make strategic decisions as a small group.

Although an expertise hierarchy is deterred by the loyalty members have towards their leaders, a sense of equality and meritocracy may still be relevant. The common distinction between formal and informal organization is relevant here (Mintzberg, 1983, pp. 8-9). A community can still feel like it is based on equality even if its founders have been leaders for years on end. A community with a rather static hierarchy that delineates strategic decisionmaking power differences formally can still value equality informally in e.g. communication styles. Moreover, once a leader of such a community loses interest or simply has too little time to contribute, a new one can still be selected using meritocratic criteria.

6.3.3 PROFILE OF A LESS PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

As argued earlier, younger panelists are generally more attracted to less playfully organized communities because of the competitive focus that can come with such a community. A competitive rationale was indeed quite attractive to panelist #17, a 22-year-old male. The panelist was attracted to a competitive community because, in his own words, “they primarily had high-level members (lvl 80) and I was almost at that level, so that was convenient, and they indicated that they raided dungeons regularly which I really wanted to do with a good group.”

The significance of organizational commitment shows that generally a competitive community will experience a continuous coming and going of members. The low organizational commitment that generally comes with less playful organization makes it easier for members to leave. Low organizational commitment makes sense for a competitive community. A community with a competitive rationale does not require high organizational commitment. It requires high *goal* and *task* commitment. A competitive community wants to maintain a certain position, e.g. a top position on the game’s community leaderboard. After a while some members will lose interest and simply move on.

A competitive community tends to become less playfully organized over time. This fits well-established organization theory. Mintzberg argued that the most bureaucratic organizations are generally old, because they have institutionalized their processes over several years in an attempt to increase efficiency (1983, p. 171). As Cameron & Quinn also state, “[o]ver time, companies tend to gravitate toward an emphasis on the hierarchy and market culture types” (2006, pp. 79-80). Similarly, a competitive community defines and institutionalizes a specific gameplay strategy over time, because of the sense of certainty and efficiency that comes with it.

The concept of playful organization is still relevant here, if only because a competitive community is still enjoyable for many gamers and values creativity and spontaneity, at least initially. Psychological studies of online gaming have already shown that a sense of competence and achievement is one of the main motivations for gameplay (Bartle, 1996; 2004, pp. 130-138; 2005; Yee, 2006a, 2006c). Thus a sense competence and achievement can generally attract many online gamers. A newly-formed competitive community initially requires more playful organization to ensure members are creative and spontaneous enough to tackle game mechanics successfully and pursue the achievement that the community is looking for.

Nevertheless, for various reasons, most values or concepts of the playful organization ideal-type do not apply to less playfully organized communities. As discussed in Section 6.2.2, the moderately playful organizations often still value a sense of meritocracy as well as some freedom in choosing and developing roles. Conviviality and teachability are also notable values for the less playfully organized communities. Still, the less playful the organization, the less relevant the concepts of the ideal-type. Discussed below are the five main reasons why most of the playful organization ideal-type’s values and concepts do not apply.

A well-defined goal and target focus

A community deciding to target a well-defined goal limits the applicability of contingency and agility, as well as of open access and exit. Well-defined goals and target foci applied most clearly to five interviewees who deemed their communities moderately or least playfully organized (#5, #16, #17, #21, #28). Naturally, targeting a well-defined goal renders the concept of contingency inapplicable. A well-defined goal and contingency were juxtaposed against each other when defining the concept of contingency in the first place (see Section 2.4.1). Unsurprisingly, a community that targets a well-defined goal can deter agility. Certain ideas are easily dismissed as irrelevant when one has a clear goal in mind. Moreover, to ensure that only players interested in pursuing the community goal join, communities control access to the community quite strongly.

A well-defined goal and target focus befits communities with a competitive rationale. For example, when a community wishes to play *World of Warcraft* competitively, it can decide to define the goal of simply finishing all the content (raids, instances) the game has to offer. A community playing *Ikariam* (a browser-based online game that panelist #19 played) can decide to competitively reach the top position of the community leaderboard. To ensure the pursuit of such well-defined goals, the communities become highly focused on targets. A *World of Warcraft* guild can decide to obligate players to spend a minimum number of hours playing per week, to ensure that a number of raids/instances are regularly finished. Targeting a well-defined goal can be inherent to online gameplay. Nevertheless, it deters some opportunities for playful organization.

Targeting a well-defined goal relates to the market culture of Cameron & Quinn (2006, pp. 39-40). The goal orientation of a market culture can be found among online gaming communities in the achievement that motivates many players. This can lead communities to implicitly forego some opportunities for playful organization. In its totality a market culture will force structure rather than elicit contingency and agility. Such a loss of playful organization only occurs if the community has characteristics in addition to a well-defined goal and target focus. In itself, having a well-defined goal and target focus does not have to render an organization least playful. A market culture will lead to a well-defined goal and target focus, but a well-defined goal and target focus will not necessarily lead to a market culture.

Highly specialized roles

A community can subsequently also choose to specialize roles. Some communities specifically define and divide roles among members. For example, a *World of Warcraft* guild might define roles such as the 'tank' or 'healer', or more game-specific 'classes' such as the 'warlock' or 'rogue', and subsequently define the necessary skills and assets a person fulfilling such a role would need to have or obtain over time. In some cases the community could also have dedicated 'class officers' to ensure that people fulfilling certain roles were aware of and investing in their skills and assets. Such class officers are essentially tutors or mentors. This specialization of labor was most visible in seven interviews with panelists in moderately and least playfully organized communities (#5, #9, #16, #17, #21 #25, #26), although not always to the same extent. Some interviewees explicitly explained that they had class officers, while others did not.

Highly specialized roles hinder the applicability of the playful organization ideal-type's values of agility and equality, as well as of the concept of free-to-choose/-develop labor. It is not hard to imagine that a sense of agility, i.e., a sense of being able to grab any opportunity one comes across, is lost when the community imposes not only a specific role but also a list of skills and assets one must have or obtain over time. This loss of agility also comes with a loss of equality, especially for those communities that have class officers. Class officers will always have the upper hand when they ask or even demand members to develop skills and obtain assets. Whether or not class officers are present, with the specialization of roles the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles is also hardly applicable. A member fulfilling only one well-defined role is not free to choose or develop other roles. Then again, some communities mitigate such a loss of agility or general role freedom. They never place restrictions on when and how a member chooses to fulfill his or her role, or they never state a timeframe in which a member should have developed certain skills or obtained certain assets.

Judging from the interviews there are three main interrelated reasons why communities choose to specialize roles in this manner:

1. Players can enjoy developing and filling one specific position in a community, especially if they are motivated by achievement. As Mintzberg argued, a sense of pride and joy comes from being good at one specific role or task (1983, p. 179).
2. There is a sense of necessity. Since online game mechanics generally demand a complement of roles, some communities feel a need to specialize roles to tackle them. Some multiplayer games (e.g. the *Call of Duty* series) explicitly require groups to consist of a small number of well-defined complementary roles, e.g. a heavy gunner or sniper. In this case specializing roles make it easier to regularly tackle such game mechanics.
3. Specialized roles come with a sense of responsibility, both for a member adopting a game-specific role as well as for a 'class officer' working with certain members on developing skills and obtaining assets. With a sense of responsibility there is more certainty of regular effort, even in a completely voluntary online gaming community.

The above lines of reasoning suggest that some online games are designed in such a way that they strongly suggest (though do not obligate) less playful organization. This fits organization theory nicely. Mintzberg argued that bureaucratic organizations are branch-dependent. Branches focused on the production of large quantities of goods often lead organizations to become 'machine bureaucracies' in which labor is highly specialized (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 171). An organization's branch can be translated to the type of online game a community plays. This statement requires a cautionary note though. There is no statistical evidence that suggests a certain (type of) online game increases the odds for less playful organization.

Professionalized HR management

A community can also professionalize recruitment. Such professionalization is effectively a form of human resource management. Communities with professionalized recruitment have one or more members dedicated to ensuring that the community has enough members and that the community is well-balanced in terms of the roles the members fulfilled. Moreover, these human

resource managers also make it part of their jobs to develop criteria that members need to conform to depending on their roles. This professionalization of human resource management arose most clearly from five interviewees of moderately or least playfully organized communities (#5, #9, #16, #17, #21).

Professionalized recruitment hinders the applicability of the playful concept of open access and exit. It is not hard to imagine that when recruitment is professionalized to such an extent that it actually turns into human resource management, there is a possibility that access effectively becomes more difficult. Some players will be deterred from joining because they cannot fulfill a role that the recruiters are looking for. Panelist #9 also stated that even exit from the community becomes a bit more difficult. No formal agreement or contract exists to render exit from the community impossible. Nevertheless, when human resource management is professionalized to such a great extent, the community invests quite some time, effort and assets into its members. If members leave quickly and unexpectedly, that investment will have been quite a waste. A community could decide to hold an application interview to ensure a potential new member understands the community's significant investment. By introducing this additional access criteria the community tries to assure a member does not leave the community quickly and unexpectedly.

In essence, professionalizing human resource management is similar to highly specializing roles. When highly specializing roles, a community chooses to specialize those roles pertaining to the online game it plays. When professionalizing human resource management, a community chooses to specialize the roles pertaining to the community itself. The two forms of specialization are similar. Hence reasons for professionalizing human resource management are similar to those for highly specializing roles. For some players, becoming a professional in human resource management is very enjoyable. A sense of necessity and responsibility, perhaps resulting from the type of online game being played, again influences a community's decision to professionalize human resource management. A sense of necessity is fueled by the fact that players have less organizational commitment. Players are more likely to leave, rendering continuous human resource management a high priority, especially if the community targets a well-defined goal.

Professionalized ICT management

Besides human resource management, communities can also professionalize their ICT management. They assign the role of choosing and maintaining ICTs to one or more members. These members are then responsible for selecting, installing and updating software, moderating discussion forums, or selecting a good hosting provider and paying their annual bill. Such ICT management arose most clearly from five interviewees of moderately or least playfully organized communities (#5, #17, #21, #26, #28). These practices had been professionalized, meaning that there were one or more members dedicated to ensuring that these practices were performed. Moreover, these members were dedicated to ensuring that the practices were performed according to certain standards, e.g. finding not only a cheap hosting provider, but one who offers high reliability and the server software necessary for the community's ICT applications.

As a result of professionalized ICT management the playful concepts of a demand-based knowledge & communication suite, boundless knowledge networking and collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge are not always or not completely applicable. In the case of the panelists, since one or more specific community members were held responsible for the choice and usage of ICTs, any new technology that a random other member found interesting or worthy of a try first needed to be discussed and subjected to quality standards. If professionalized to an extreme extent, this meant that ICTs were not simply based on the demands of the members, but on the demands of the responsible managers. Professionalized ICT management also rendered the concept of boundless knowledge networking much less applicable. Here ICT managers controlled the technologies used for direct and indirect communication, thus limiting the ability of members to freely share knowledge with each other and with those outside of the community. It is important to note that in some communities knowledge networking *externally* was deemed not very important, as the game mechanics did not require it. Only internal communication technology was deemed necessary, and then only for immediate collaborative purposes (i.e., voice/text chat channels). In such communities the concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge is also irrelevant. Moreover, explicit knowledge that concerned the choice and usage of ICTs is not developed collaboratively, but unilaterally by the ICT managers.

Professionalizing ICT management is similar to highly specializing labor. Filling the position of ICT manager in a community can be very enjoyable, especially when the person has a passion for ICTs and knows a lot about them anyway. A sense of necessity and responsibility are also reasons for professionalizing ICT management. Many of the panelists who played multiplayer games found voice/text chat channels during gameplay the only really necessary ICTs. When only a limited set of ICTs are deemed necessary, having a single person responsible for managing them is useful and straightforward. A large, vibrant community is chaotic if the choice and usage of ICTs is not monitored or regulated to at least some extent. Once a community deems many more technologies necessary, it is easier to distribute responsibility for their choice and maintenance to only one or a couple of capable members.

Assigned leaders who command and control

Finally, communities can choose to assign command and control leadership to certain members, rendering leadership personified instead of distributed. Such communities have one or more leaders who unilaterally determine the community's rationale and the strategy with which it was pursued. Determining the strategy means determining which game-specific ('tanks', 'healers', etc.) and which organization-specific roles (recruiters, class officers, ICT managers) are needed. Moreover, command-and-control leaders also determine specific activity rules, e.g. when members are expected to be online and taking part in collective activity, and for how long. Assigning command and control leadership arose most clearly from four interviewees of moderately and least playfully organized communities (#9, #17, #21, #26).

As already explained in Section 2.5.3, the playful organization concept of distributed leadership is opposite to assigned command & control leadership. The playful organization concepts of equality and conviviality are hardly applicable as well. In a community where leaders command and control, a sense of equality is hard to uphold. A sense of conviviality is also hard to uphold, as leaders simply 'drill' members as to what they should do. Moreover,

when leaders make decisions that do not fit the expectations and wishes of other non-leading members, a sense of conviviality is difficult to uphold.

Command and control leadership makes sense in an online gaming community that resembles Mintzberg's 'machine bureaucracy' (1983). If a community consists of achievement-motivated players, a well-defined goal could be targeted and roles could become highly specialized (including management roles). To maintain the resulting organizational structure, it is practical and necessary to have leaders who command and control.

6.3.4 PROFILE OF AN UNORGANIZED COMMUNITY

It makes sense that a newly-formed online gaming community seems very unorganized. Mintzberg made a similar observation by stating that the 'simple structure' is typical of newly-formed organizations (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 159). It is also understandable that a newly-formed, unorganized community tends to be based on a non-competitive rationale. A more social basis opens up the community to so much diversity that it becomes unclear what its identity exactly is. In Scott's vocabulary (2008), the community does not institutionalize any values, norms or rules, indeed rendering it lacking in identity and hence unorganized. It is understandable that a *competitive* community seems more organized from the start. The competitive edge of such a community introduces a sense of institutionalization. It at least introduces a goal statement and thus a sense of identity.

An unorganized community can experience low organizational commitment from its players, simply because there is no organizational identity to commit to. Thus a member can easily leave again, without anyone regretting it. In *EVE Online* I experienced such an unorganized 'startup corporation' (see Chapter 5) and did decide to leave it quite quickly because of the lack of certainty, focus and purpose.

It is no surprise that a panelist's age does not significantly affect the chances of deeming an online gaming community unorganized. Appendix D shows that the odds are higher that an older panelist will find his/her community unorganized rather than least playfully organized. Yet these changes in odds were not very significant ($p = .105$). This again is logical. Players of online games are of highly differing ages, as previous studies have also shown (Griffiths et al., 2004; D. Williams et al., 2008; Yee, 2006a). This means that players of all ages could decide to form a community or join a newly-formed community and thus experience it as unorganized.

As a result several of the playful organization ideal-type's values and concepts do not apply. An unorganized community is usually very playful. Most of the values identified as befitting the playful organization ideal-type apply, most notably contingency, equality and conviviality. The playful value of teachability also applies when the community has only been instigated to allow players to learn collaboratively, as I experienced in a 'startup corporation' in *EVE*. The value of meritocracy is of little relevance. An unorganized community's lack of identity hinders its ability to decide what merits should be awarded social recognition. Several of the ideal-type's structural concepts are also inapplicable, most notably expertise hierarchy, and collaboratively developed explicit knowledge. Although many of the ideal-type values and concepts might apply, a community's lack of identity prohibits a panelist from deeming it

organized, whether playful or not. There are two main reasons for the inapplicability of the ideal-type, as explained below.

No need for hierarchy definitions

The communities of panelists #13 and #15 had no need for a hierarchy in any shape or form, limiting the applicability of the value of meritocracy and concept of expertise hierarchy. These communities were relatively small (up to 20 members) and had no members who could explicitly be called the leaders. In the case of panelist #15, the community simply consisted of a group of players who occasionally formed even smaller teams to play a game, during which anyone of them could be the leader. Like my first *EVE* corporation (see Section 5.2.3) these communities were a group of players who played together occasionally. A small community with no identity of its own has little need for a hierarchy. The same can be said for young communities. This needs to be taken into account, since a community's time in existence was a statistically significant predictor. In a small or young community without a hierarchy the playful concepts of meritocracy and expertise hierarchy are of course inapplicable. A community that has no hierarchy needs no meritocratic basis, either.

No need for defining explicit knowledge

The communities of the two panelists had no need for explicit knowledge pertaining to the community's organization, prohibiting the relevance of the playful concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge. In other words, some communities do not explicitly develop and store any knowledge pertaining to what type of behavior would be acceptable, either in terms of social interaction or task performance. With a focus on simply playing the game together and perhaps learning from each other, there is no need to start defining such explicit knowledge. The playful concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge is of course completely irrelevant. The communities of these panelists did not even use any ICTs for structuring and storing knowledge. They only used direct communication technologies during gameplay, specifically voice or text chat channels.

6.4 CONCLUSION

6.4.1 DIFFERING DEGREES OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION UNCOVERED AND EXPLAINED

To ascertain and explain differing levels of playful organization in online games, this chapter discussed the results of the panel research explained in Chapter 4. Descriptive statistics led to a grouping of the 95 panelists into four categories. Just over one half of the panelists' responses were interpreted as indicating most playful organizations, because they agreed the most with the Adhocracy and/or Clan cultures. Second, just over one third of the responses were interpreted as indicating moderately playful organizations. Third, only 4.2% of the responses were interpreted as indicating least playful organization. Slightly more of the responses were interpreted as indicating unorganized online gaming communities, as panelists scored lower than five points on all four of the OCAI's organizational cultures.

The four different levels of playful organization were explained using results of logistic regression analyses (see also Appendix D). The results show that as a panelist's age and organizational commitment increase, the odds increase that the panelist will find his/her online gaming community more playfully organized. Moreover, as a community's age increases, the odds increase that the panelist will generally find it more playfully organized. A social rationale greatly stimulates this effect. As the age of a community with a social rationale increases, the odds increase more strongly that the panelist will indicate more playful organization. However, as the age of a community with a competitive rationale increases, the odds increase that the panelist will indicate *less* playful organization. Profiles of a most playful organization, a less playful organization and an unorganized community were sketched in order to further understand the statistical results.

Most of the ideal-type's values and concepts (see Chapter 2) apply to a most playful organization. This type of organization often attracts older players, because of the preference they tend to have for the less stringent and more social play style that exists in a most playful organization. Such a non-competitive community focuses on its members rather than the community's ambition and achievement, which in time can lead to closer bonds, higher organizational commitment and hence more and more playful organization. Trust assurance and loyalty are still relevant to even the most playfully organized communities. They limit the applicability of only a couple of the ideal-type values and concepts in the process. Effectively, they strengthen other values as well.

Fewer values and concepts of the ideal-type apply to a less playful organization. This type of organization generally attracts young players motivated by achievement. Together these players uphold a competitive rationale. They are committed to a goal and a task rather than to the online gaming community itself. The longer such a competitive community lasts, the less playfully organized it can become. The community will often target a well-defined goal, highly specialize roles (including management roles) and assign leaders who command and control.

Even fewer values and concepts of the ideal-type apply to an unorganized community. Such a community is often young and non-competitive in nature, attracting players with the lowest organizational commitment. This type of community has limited to no identity, rendering organizational commitment rather irrelevant. The members find no reason to define an organizational structure, most notable any type of structured hierarchy or defined social norms.

6.4.2 DISCUSSION

The presented conclusions should be treated with caution in two main ways. All conclusions drawn in this chapter refer to the obtained data set, i.e., the self-reported characteristics and organizational culture of the communities of 95 Dutch online gamers. As explained in Chapter 4, the downside of the panel approach was the limited number of respondents it attracted. Generalizations about a population are impossible with the data set obtained, especially since there are limited statistics about the population the panel was intended to represent. The low number of panelists also leads to a second cautionary note. The method applied for the logistic regression analyses (see Appendix D) led to the exclusion of many of the potential predictors presented in Figure 4.3. The low number of panelists leads to a higher chance of Type II errors,

i.e., a higher chance that a predictor is incorrectly dismissed. Since this study is the first of its kind, it is difficult to determine if these errors occurred. Overall, the conclusions should not be overgeneralized. The specific method of logistic regression analysis still led to meaningful results, as discussed in Appendix D.

The results indicate that the method with which the data was obtained is also not infallible, in two ways. First, a noteworthy difference is apparent when comparing the results presented in this chapter to those presented in Chapter 3. The number of least playfully organized communities is lower than expected from the review of online gaming community studies. It could very well be that the method with which panelists were drafted mostly attracted online gamers playing in more playfully organized communities. A second point of discussion concerns the data that the panelists provided. Some panelists belonging to the same community interpreted its organizational culture slightly differently in the questionnaire, or provided some other details about the community's structure in the interviews. Different interpretations of organizational culture are of course possible and understandable. Differences in details pertaining to e.g. number of members or time in existence are more problematic. Over time certain statistics of a community can change. However, most of the panelists belonging to the same community were questioned within the same month. Indeed, errors in judgment can and did occur, albeit to a minor extent. The more general formulation of questions about community size and age (see Appendix B) prevented serious errors. The question remains as to whether future research into online gaming communities will show similar or very different results.

Still, the results are the first of their kind and strengthen the conclusion that online gaming communities have educational value for both players and managers interested in playful organization. Most of the panelists (90.5%) indicated that their communities were in one way or another organized by scoring at least one of the four organizational cultures highly. Only one tenth of the panelists indicated that their community was quite unorganized. This means that most online gamers obtain organizational experience from playing in communities, regardless of the level of playful organization. Since just over half of the panelists indicated that their communities were organized most playfully, managers can learn from any online gaming community about how to make a more playful 'real-life' organization. Yet other panelists indicated least playfully organized communities. Thus, the relationship between online gaming communities and 'real-life' work organizations is far more complex than originally assumed. Online gamers experience least playful organization, sometimes even quite bureaucratic organization, as well.

6.4.3 ONWARD

Having offered the first results of the panel research discussed in Chapter 4, I have been able to provide a first insight into the general extent of playful organization among Dutch online gamers' communities, and which factors affect that characteristic. The results showed that not all online gaming communities are playful, although playfully organized communities are still very common. These results resonate with the conclusion drawn at the end of Chapter 3. The relationship between online gaming communities and work organizations is far more complex than originally assumed in Chapter 1. As online gaming communities can also be least playfully

organized, players can also gain other meaningful organizational experiences from online gaming. To better develop the complex relationship between online gaming communities and 'real-life' work organizations, further results of the panel research need to be offered and discussed. In Chapter 7 the extent of playful organization of the Dutch online gamers' work organizations is ascertained and explained. Comparisons between the Dutch online gamers' communities and work organizations are also drawn.

CHAPTER 7

BUILDING AN UN-/COMFORTABLE BRIDGE: DUTCH ONLINE GAMERS ON THEIR WORK ORGANIZATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters have provided many insights into online gaming communities as organizations, playful or otherwise. Chapter 5 focused on a single online game and a single community within it to provide an in-depth analysis of organization in a specific online gaming context. Chapter 6 adopted a broader perspective. It focused on a wide variety of communities that Dutch online gamers were involved with. As such the chapter analyzed and explained the general extent of playful organization among the communities of Dutch online gamers. Together the two chapters contribute to the field of computer game studies by introducing an organizational perspective and subsequent empirical results. Moreover, the two chapters have contributed to the field of organizational studies by providing many practical examples of playful organization.

However, the question remains as to whether work organizations can actually be playful organizations, too, similar to online gaming communities. The context of online gaming can be distinguished from that of a work organization, at least intuitively. Chapter 1 argued that the two contexts do not have to be very different from each other. Online gaming communities can be considered 'virtual organizations' (Camarinha-Matos & Afsarmanesh, 2005; Davidow & Malone, 1992), because of their extensive use of ICTs for global interaction and collaboration. Chapter 5 further questioned the distinction between the two contexts by showing just how extensive the organization of an online gaming community can get. Still, to be able to argue that the two contexts and resulting organizations can be similar, further empirical research into the playful organization of work organizations is in order.

The second phase of the conducted panel research sheds light on the similarity of work organizations to online gaming communities. The differing degrees of playful *work* organization can be ascertained and explained thanks to the panel research. Moreover, the panel research allows for comparisons between the panelists' communities and work organizations. This helps to ascertain whether work organizations can be playful organizations and in that sense similar to online gaming communities, at least according to Dutch online gamers.

This second phase consisted of 76 of the 95 panelists providing data about their work organizations and about how they perceived the comparison with their online gaming communities. The panelists completed a second questionnaire about their work habits and the characteristics of their work organizations. They were also asked to indicate to what extent they felt their work organizations were culturally similar to their online gaming communities (see Appendix B for the statements). The panelists again stated their agreement to the 24 statements of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI; Cameron & Quinn, 2006), this time concerning their work organizations. Appendix A shows the difference in formulation to that of

the OCAI statements. Reliability analyses again proved the existence of Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy cultures underlying the panelists' responses (see Section 4.3.2). The work organizations' scores on these four organizational cultures were therefore again able to be calculated on a seven-point Likert scale. In the 22 interviews the panelists also provided more information about how they viewed their work organization structurally and culturally. The playful organization ideal-type of Chapter 2 served as an important framework for analyzing the interviews. The results painted a picture of the work organizations' extent of playful organization. They also allowed for easy comparison with the panelists' online gaming communities, complementing the panelists' own opinions about the comparison.

This chapter offers results that answer the following research question:

To what extent can Dutch online gamers' work organizations be considered playful organizations, similar to their communities?

To answer the above question the following sections discuss and interpret the results of statistical analyses and interviews. Statistical analyses entailed descriptive and logistic regression analyses. With descriptive analyses the work organizations' scores on Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy cultures were ascertained. Four types of work organizations were again formed that indicated differing degrees of playful organization. The four same groups were formed, i.e., most playful, moderately playful, least playful and unorganized. Section 7.2 offers the descriptive statistics for these four types, accompanied by interview results. The four types were again used in logistic regression analyses. Section 7.3 explains the existence of the types of work organization by interpreting the results of the logistic regression analyses and interviews. Section 7.4 draws the comparison with the panelists' online gaming communities and attempts to explain it. Further logistic regression analyses were done to ascertain predictors of equivalence between the organizational cultures of online gaming communities and work organizations. Intriguingly, the panelists valued the comparison between the two organizational cultures differently. Not all panelists found the comparison to be significant. To understand this difference in significance, more logistic regression analyses were done. Section 7.4 also discusses the results of these final statistical analyses.

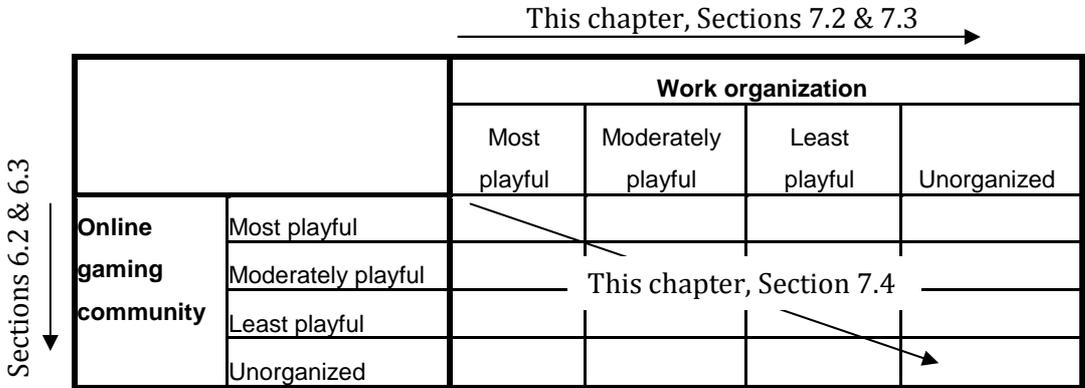


Figure 7.1. An overview of this chapter and its relation to Chapter 6.

Figure 7.1 aids the reader’s understanding of the structure of this chapter and its relation to Chapter 6. Vertically, the figure lists the four types of online gaming communities defined and discussed in Chapter 6. Horizontally, the figure lists the four similar types of work organization defined and discussed in Sections 7.2 and 7.3. The actual comparison between the two is finally discussed in Section 7.4.

7.2 DEGREES OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

7.2.1 MOST PLAYFUL

Organizational culture

Of the 76 panelists, 26 (34.2%) scored their work organization highest on Clan and Adhocracy organizational cultures, or on Clan or Adhocracy only. Specifically, they scored five points or higher on these cultures, while scoring lower on Market and/or Hierarchy cultures. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 6.1. The table shows high means for Clan and Adhocracy, with relatively the lowest standard deviations. The table also shows that some panelists scored quite highly on the Market or Hierarchy cultures, despite the fact that they scored higher on Clan or Adhocracy. The standard deviations for these two cultures are also the highest. The standard deviations of the Market culture are notably higher than when it concerned online gaming communities. Moreover, three panelists scored highest (five points or higher) on Adhocracy only. None of the panelists scored their online gaming community as such. Overall, despite the similarities, there are also differences between these scores and those concerning online gaming communities.

Overall, these 26 panelists are quite content with and committed to their work organization’s playful organization. Like for most playfully organized online gaming communities, the differences between the preferred and current scores are generally not high. The means for preferred organizational culture are slightly higher than the scores for current organizational culture. The limited differences between preferred and current cultures become most clear when comparing the scores for the individual statements of all 26 panelists. It seems the panelists are content with their work organizations in terms of organizational culture. This conclusion is substantiated by a high mean for organizational commitment: 5.60 ± 0.86 .

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD
Clan	4.17 – 7.00	5.76 \pm 0.79	3.83 – 7.00	6.04 \pm 0.81
Adhocracy	3.83 – 7.00	5.47 \pm 0.84	4.00 – 7.00	5.74 \pm 0.81
Market	1.33 – 6.67	4.47 \pm 1.27	2.50 – 6.67	4.81 \pm 1.18
Hierarchy	1.50 – 6.50	4.58 \pm 1.09	2.83 – 7.00	4.88 \pm 1.16

Table 7.2. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose scores can be interpreted as signifying most playful work organizations ($N = 26$).

Ten of these 26 panelists provided their own characterizations of their work organizations in their interviews. When asked to characterize their work organizations, most interviewed panelists used terms pointing to a playful organizational culture:³⁰

- “Very relaxed atmosphere ... and: by all means do whatever you feel like, but the work has to be done.” (panelist #2; a programmer working part-time at a small ICT company)
- “After a while you grow towards a larger organization and then the organization needs to rely less on individual people. ... you need a more democratic model, like: what shall we do? ... I assume that there is a certain need, and that need should come from the market, so to speak. You need to take advantage of that. You shouldn’t try to compulsively impose structure that might come from your own vision.” (#4; a manager of a small group of game designers)
- “The atmosphere is very informal ... There’s a lot of room for independence and certain tasks that just need doing, are picked up by the person who identifies them ... The company is of course also far more focused on success and performance, there is more competition between colleagues.” (#20; an intern working as a journalist at a newspaper’s small online division)

The interviewees provided more insights into their work organizations’ playful organization when asked to describe specific structural characteristics.

Organizational structure

For eight of the interviewed panelists the playful concept of open access and exit was relevant, although in differing ways. Interestingly, panelists #2, #4 and #20 described how their professional organizations (software developer, game developer and local newspaper, respectively) were open to attracting people who could prove their interest in and relevant expertise for the organization, at least for the department they worked in. Both organizations used temporary or flexible contracts as well as internships. The same applied for panelists #5 and #11, but they worked for organizations of a very different type, i.e., catering companies. It should be noted that such employment arrangements are financially very attractive for the organization as well. The final three panelists worked in very small organizations that were less open to anyone joining at any time, but were still open in terms of who contributed to the organization’s goals and in what way. To be specific, panelist #15 was a self-employed ICT businessman who asked the involvement of different people in his network whenever necessary and depending on the nature of the specific project. Panelists #17 and #18 worked in ICT organizations that applied a similar strategy but already consisted of up to five full-time employed employees.

For the other two panelists open access and exit simply did not apply. Panelist #13 was self-employed as an artist and preferred to work alone. The only collaborations he had was with his clients. Of course these clients deferred responsibility for delivering the product, e.g. a painting, completely to him. A sense of playful organization can therefore still emerge, even

³⁰ Again, these and later interview responses were originally in Dutch. I translated them to English as closely as possible.

though the panelist did not involve other artists or craftsmen in his work. Panelist #10 worked as a design team leader for a well-structured, very large ICT organization with a separate human resources department that raised several barriers for access and exit. Although he led his own team, the organization's own human resources department deterred him from selecting his own team members. Open access and exit was therefore not an applicable concept.

All 10 panelists were keen to point out that they were at least free to develop their roles within the organization. Seven of the panelists also indicated that they were even quite free to choose their roles within the organization. Of course, the two panelists who were self-employed (#13, #15) were very free to choose and develop their roles. The two panelists who worked for catering companies indicated that the work they could do was practically all low-skilled, thus they were able to choose work that needed doing, as long as it was done following certain basic quality criteria. For them this ability already gave a sense of freedom of choice. The final six panelists, all working in ICT in one way or another (software, game or website development) offered similar descriptions. They were free to choose whatever labor they felt like doing or they could come across, as long as particularly high-priority labor (e.g. software testing, game content development or discussion forum moderation) was done before its deadline.

All but one of the respondents indicated that leadership was often distributed throughout the organization rather than being personified and static. The panelist working for a catering company (#5) was able to take on some responsibilities. He indicated that he at times temporarily exhibited leadership behavior by asking help from colleagues to perform his task or by asking their actual involvement in the task itself. For panelists #2, #4, #10, #17, #18 and #20, all working in ICT in one way or another, the same applied. ICT projects were always collaborative and involved different team members exhibiting leadership to get different parts of the project done. Again, for the self-employed panelists (#13, #15) this applied particularly, as there was simply no one else who they allowed to be their leaders. In their cases the involved people were always also self-employed or within their own organizations. Only in the case of panelist #11, working at another catering company, did the concept of distributed leadership not apply. His manager heavily commanded and controlled the organization.

An expertise hierarchy was much harder to identify from the interviews. Panelist #11 was very unhappy with the power hierarchy he identified. He had difficulty communicating and collaborating with his dominant manager. For the self-employed interviewees or interviewees working for very small organizations (#13, #15, #17, #18) the concept of hierarchy did not really apply at all. For them there was no delineation of power or expertise. Panelists #5 and #20 indicated that in their organizations hierarchy was a power delineation not necessarily based on expertise. They were quite content with that, because their leaders mostly coordinated and cultivated work, rather than commanded and controlled it. As a manager of a subdivision within his organization, panelist #10 was able to adopt an expertise hierarchy. This did not apply to the larger organization as a whole, however. Only panelists #2 and #4 indicated that their organizations clearly adopted an expertise hierarchy. Specifically, these two ICT organizations (software and game developer) recognized employees' efforts and successes by offering more resources or opportunities for leadership in a new project.

Finally, in terms of knowledge & communication technologies, it quickly became clear that not all of the panelists' organizations had a need for or interest in them (panelists #5, #11, #13 and #20). Indeed, for a small catering company knowledge & communication technologies are not necessary. Moreover, for panelists working in only small organizations from a single physical location such technologies are also hardly necessary. For the other panelists there was a need for knowledge & communication technologies, and the choice of technologies was indeed based on the needs of the employees for building, storing and sharing knowledge. All panelists working in one way or another in ICT used and shared knowledge on the World Wide Web about coding or other technical issues when developing software, websites and games (#2, #4, #10, #15, #17 and #18). None of the panelists seemed to use technologies for the purpose of developing and storing explicit knowledge, e.g. preferred collaboration or communication procedures.

Overall, the work organizations' characteristics discussed by the ten interviewees generally fit the playful organization ideal-type reasonably well. For only a couple of interviewees was a sense of open access/exit and distributed leadership irrelevant. Contrarily, the concept of expertise hierarchy was harder to identify from the interviews. The playful conceptualizations of ICTs were also mostly irrelevant, particularly the concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge. This was often due to a limited need for such technologies, given the limited size of the organization or the low-skilled labor involved. Some work organizations are actually less complex than online gaming communities.

7.2.2 MODERATELY PLAYFUL

Organizational culture

Similar to the online gaming communities, 22 of the 76 panelists (31.6%) scored their work organizations highly on all or only two conflicting organizational cultures. Specifically, the panelists scored five or higher on either all four organizational cultures ($N = 17$) or on two quite conflicting organizational cultures, i.e., on Clan and Market ($N = 1$), Clan and Hierarchy ($N = 5$), or Adhocracy and Market ($N = 1$). Thus seven panelists again scored five points or higher on two organizational cultures that are on opposite sides of one or both dimensions of the OCAI. The descriptive statistics for these 22 panelists are shown in Table 7.3.

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD
Clan	4.50 – 6.67	5.69 \pm 0.50	5.33 – 6.83	6.22 \pm 0.41
Adhocracy	3.00 – 6.33	5.15 \pm 0.94	3.00 – 6.67	5.60 \pm 0.88
Market	3.17 – 6.50	5.27 \pm 0.91	3.50 – 6.67	5.39 \pm 0.88
Hierarchy	4.50 – 6.67	5.76 \pm 0.59	4.33 – 7.00	5.96 \pm 0.70

Table 7.3. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose work organizations can be interpreted as moderately playful organizations ($N = 24$).

From Table 7.3 it is still concluded that the panelists indicate that their work organizations are relatively playful. The table shows quite high means overall, thus also for Clan and Adhocracy cultures. Adhocracy nevertheless has the highest standard deviation. This high standard deviation resulted from the five panelists who only deemed Clan and Hierarchy to be applicable cultures. Thus a sense of playfulness seems to exist, though it is moderate by comparison.

These panelists were generally content with their work organizations. The scores for preferred organizational culture were higher than the current scores, which suggests that no significant shift in organizational culture was preferred. There were panelists who preferred a different organizational culture. Table 7.3 shows that panelists generally deemed a Clan culture preferable to a Hierarchy culture, as well as preferring an Adhocracy culture to a Market culture. Overall the panelists scored quite highly on organizational commitment: 5.33 ± 0.70 . All things considered, these panelists were content with and committed to their work organizations, although less than the previously discussed group.

Six interviewed panelists provided details that indeed indicated moderately playful organizations. When asked to typify their work organizations, the following three interviewed panelists pointed to a complex organizational culture with both playful and less playful elements (the bolded text indicates my own emphasis):

- “[Are you often bound to rules in your work?³¹] Not really... a large part of the information [we use and develop] is reasonably confidential, but other than that **there are few rules...** I have to keep to the organization’s house style for reports, but other than that.. no... ... [Could you characterize the organization?] **Friendly/close, convivial, social, sluggish. ... sluggish in terms of decisionmaking.**” (#21; working at a large governmental organization)
- “Quite a **cold** organization in which you just do your job ... there are **few bonds between the employees.** That other one has a job and performs it. You have a job, too. That’s it. It’s very task-/goal-oriented. Most people are with clients most of the time, so you actually have **more bonds with those clients** than with the parent company. I visit the home base very little.” (#22; working at a large ICT outsourcing company, i.e., an ICT company that sends employees on secondment to clients)
- “[The organization] is subject to change due to transfers ... and is progressive. Global. Is ready to **constantly shift priorities** ... you often work along established **rigid commercial lines** ... often you can **get more done when working with clients**, for example if there is a **more friendly atmosphere.**” (#30, working at a large ICT hardware manufacturing and repair company)

The interviewees provided more insights into their work organizations’ playfulness.

Organizational structure

Half of the interviewees found that their organizations strongly controlled access and exit, while the other half found them much more open. Three panelists worked for very large organizations (#21: a governmental organization; #23: an educational institute; #30: an ICT hardware

³¹ One of the questions asked during the interview.

manufacturer and repairer). These organizations had the tendency to control who became an employee or otherwise involved with the organization, and how they could subsequently leave the organization again. All three organizations had human resource departments that determined which functions there were and who fulfilled them, either to ensure high quality performance (#23 and #30) or because the functions involved confidential information (#21). For two panelists access and exit were much more open (#19 and #22). Both concerned ICT organizations that either employed staff using temporary and flexible contracts or deployed employees flexibly for different clients. The contracts were flexible, because they allowed the employee to self-determine the amount of worked hours each week to some extent. Panelist #16's organization also employed staff with temporary and flexible contracts. This organization was an amusement park where labor was lower-skilled.

Four of the six interviewees indicated that they had some freedom to choose and develop roles at work. For two of the interviewees, the work organization offered no freedom in role choice or development. The organizations of panelists #16, #22 and #23 had standardized roles and assigned them specifically. In the amusement park panelist #16 performed many different standardized roles, but these roles were always assigned to him at the start of his work by the a department. The same principle applied to panelist #22 working for an ICT outsourcing company. For the other four interviewees the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles was more applicable. Panelist #23's organization (an educational institute) had also standardized and assigned roles, but the situation was different in the panelist's department (multimedia center/library). Within the department the panelist was afforded more freedom to develop his role. The playful concept of free-to-develop roles also applied to panelists #19 and #30 working for ICT companies, as well as #21 working for a governmental organization. These professional organizations enabled the panelists to self-organize their ICT and policy-research/-making projects.

Distributed leadership could only be inferred from two interviewees (#21 and #23). Panelist #21 had many responsibilities within his governmental organization, pertaining to policy research and policy-making. His manager did not concern himself with substantive matters, but only with project coordination and human resource matters. This suggests that leadership was more distributed. Actual project work required leadership as well, but this was asserted by professionals such as the panelist rather than his manager. The same held true for the educational institute of panelist #23, at least within the panelist's department. In the organizations of the other four panelists leadership consisted of command and control behavior specifically asserted by the organization's managers and leaders. Three of these four worked for reasonably large ICT organizations (#19, #22 and #30), while the last one (#16) worked in the amusement park. In all four cases the leaders who exhibited command and control behavior were focused on achieving the organization's goals in a timely and efficient manner.

None of the panelists' organizations indicated the relevance of the playful concept of expertise hierarchy. Panelist #21's work organization had a power hierarchy of sorts, although the panelist's leader did not concern himself with job-substantive matters. The impact of the power hierarchy was therefore limited. This was different for panelist #16, working at an amusement park. There the power hierarchy had a clear effect on the panelist's and his

colleagues' day-to-day work. Though not very involved with the park, the owner – positioned at the top of the hierarchy – chose to unilaterally develop the organization's strategy and to subsequently have his leaders/managers apply it. To an extent the same applied to the final four panelists' ICT organizations (#19, #22, #23, #30). The main difference was that the leaders still consulted their managers and other employees to determine what projects and tasks could or needed to be done. In the organizations of panelists #19 and #30, employees higher up in the hierarchy had more professional expertise, enabling the panelists to consult them for advice on their work. This denotes an expertise hierarchy. Yet for these panelists the hierarchy was first and foremost a delineation of power, contrary to the playful concept of expertise hierarchy. As already explained, these panelists' organizations had leaders who exhibited command-and-control leadership.

All the interviewees' organizations used knowledge & communication technologies, although with differing extents of implementation freedom. The amusement park of panelist #16 used ICTs only for scheduling purposes, from which the panelist discerned his work shifts. Similarly controlled ICT use was apparent from panelists #22, #23 and #30. The ICT outsourcing company of panelist #22 used ICTs for employee performance logging purposes. The panelist was of course free to develop and implement a set of knowledge & communication technologies for the client he was working for. The educational institute of panelist #23 also controlled ICTs for internal use. The organization resisted this panelist's idea to implement a new knowledge & communication technology (a discussion forum) within his department. ICT management was also centralized in the ICT hardware company of panelist #30. Only the ICT and governmental organizations of panelists #19 and #21 based their knowledge & communication technologies on their employees' demands. These organizations allowed any employee to implement an ICT if it served a knowledge management and/or communication purpose. In both cases the ICTs concerned were certain online collaboration tools, e.g. group document writing and sharing tools.

The described ICT usage techniques indicated that the playful concept of boundless knowledge networking often applied, while the concept of collaboratively developed explicit knowledge did not. The playful concept of boundless knowledge networking applied nicely to the professional organizations of panelists #19, #21, #22, #23 and #30. Employees used the World Wide Web to obtain and share knowledge, mostly pertaining to software development and implementation. In the case of panelists #21 (governmental organization) and #30 (ICT organization) this had its limits because of the confidentiality of the information they were dealing with. In other words, they had to be careful in terms of what information and knowledge they divulged or discussed online. The use of ICTs for developing and storing e.g. preferred collaboration or communication procedures was not relevant for any of the interviewees. For panelist #16 there was no need for such ICT use, while panelists #21 and #30 were hesitant to share this information, given their organizations' need for confidentiality.

Overall, the interview results strengthen the interpretation that the work organizations of these panelists were moderately playful in nature. The above discussion shows that the playful concepts were sometimes but not always applicable for the interviewees. The concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles was applicable in most cases. Contrarily, the concepts of expertise

hierarchy and collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge were not applicable at all. Leadership was also mostly not distributed and access/exit was often not open.

7.2.3 LEAST PLAYFUL

Organizational culture

A smaller subset of the panelists, 10 of the 76 (13.2%) to be precise, scored highest on Market and/or Hierarchy organizational cultures. They scored five points or higher on these cultures, while scoring lower on Clan and/or Adhocracy cultures. These panelists generally agreed at least slightly with the applicability of Market and/or Hierarchy cultures and less with the applicability of Clan and/or Adhocracy cultures. Table 7.4 shows the descriptive statistics for this group of panelists.

The work organizations of these panelists are interpreted as the least playful. The means and standard deviations shown in Table 6.3 indicate that in general these respondents found a Market culture most applicable. The high mean for Hierarchy indicates that these panelists found hierarchical values also applicable, yet its high standard deviation also reveals quite some differences of opinion. A couple of panelists even scored highly on the Clan culture.

Not all panelists preferred the identified culture of their work organization. In general the 10 panelists would have liked more of a Clan and Adhocracy organizational culture. However, they generally also scored higher on a preference for Hierarchical and Market cultures. The differences between preferred and current cultures became most clear when comparing all the scores for the individual statements. The differences are higher than the 50 panelists discussed in Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2. The panelists were not content with their work organization in terms of its organizational culture. This conclusion is substantiated by a much lower average score for organizational commitment: 3.82 ± 1.38 .

Three interviewees typified their work organizations using terms that indeed did not benefit the values of a playful organizational culture as defined in Chapter 2. The clearest response was from panelist #26:

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD	Min – Max	Mean \pm SD
Clan	2.50 – 6.33	4.22 \pm 1.13	4.17 – 7.00	5.92 \pm 0.87
Adhocracy	1.67 – 4.83	3.67 \pm 1.17	4.00 – 7.00	5.70 \pm 0.93
Market	4.67 – 6.33	5.47 \pm 0.46	4.17 – 7.00	6.02 \pm 0.83
Hierarchy	2.00 – 6.67	5.25 \pm 1.37	4.33 – 7.00	5.73 \pm 0.90

Table 7.4. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose scores can be interpreted as signifying least playful work organizations (N = 10).

“At work the hierarchy is clear, communication is honest, open and transparent – at least they try to LOL [laughing out loud] – and as colleagues we have a lot of fun, but we’re also tough, down-to-earth and professional when necessary.” (panelist #26, working as a security officer for a large public transport company)

The above suggests that the panelist was generally content with the organization, but further on in the interview the panelist offered insights into what he considered to be downsides of the current organization. All three interviewed panelists discussed more characteristics of their work organizations that could be juxtaposed against the playful organization ideal-type.

Organizational structure

For the three interviewed panelists access to and exit from their organizations differed. Panelist #25 worked for a postal organization facing financial difficulties. As a postal worker, he joined the organization easily, as the work involved is practically unskilled. Leaving is also quite easy, especially given the organization’s interest in cutting back on personnel costs. Thus access and exit were arguably quite open. However, work hours were very clearly defined, rendering it impossible for him and his colleagues to determine when they worked. The situation was similar for panelist #28, working as an electrician intern at an installation company. Panelist #26 worked as a fully-qualified security officer at a public transport company. For him access and exit were very much controlled. His education and legal qualifications represented a substantial investment for and substantial risk to the organization. Thus access was not open and exit needed to be well-anticipated.

The three panelists’ roles were not freely chosen or developed, as already suggested above. Roles were instead standardized and assigned. Deviations from the task descriptions, whether it concerned postal, electrical or security work, were scarcely permitted. To an extent this can be expected, given for instance the importance of security and legal regulations that govern electrical and safety inspection work.

Leadership was personified and entailed command and control behavior for all three panelists’ organizations. The importance of work-governing regulations made it important for leaders to ensure that regulations were adhered to. If they were not, it was important to ensure that they would be again quickly. Panelist #26 also seemed to exhibit lots of leadership in his function when he needed to assess a potentially unsafe situation and decide on the appropriate action by both him and his colleagues. In his organization leadership was arguably to a limited extent distributed. The other two panelists mostly worked alone and had lighter responsibilities.

All three panelists’ organizations had clear power hierarchies. This is unsurprising since leadership in all three cases was personified and entailed command and control behavior. In the case of panelists #25 and #26 the organization was also not meritocratic, rendering the hierarchy not based on expertise. Those higher up in the hierarchy presumably had less or no experience in actual postal or security work but controlled the panelists’ work nonetheless. In the case of panelist #28 this was different. His superiors had the most experience with electrical engineering, rendering the organization much more meritocratic. Yet in all three cases those

higher up in the hierarchy had more power over those in lower ranks of the hierarchy. The hierarchy was first and foremost a delineation of power rather than of expertise.

All three panelists had limited to no need for ICTs. In all three cases the work was done in small teams or completely alone and was physical in nature. ICTs were therefore hardly necessary. Only panelist #26 reflected on the importance of communication with fellow colleagues and leaders/managers. Communication was fueled by the sensitive nature of the work and the development of best practices for dealing with unsafe situations. Yet knowledge sharing did not seem to involve the use of specific technologies. All in all the three playful concepts concerning knowledge & communication technologies were rather irrelevant.

The above discussions strengthen the interpretation that the interviewees' organizations were the least playful. Of all structural concepts of the playful organization ideal-type, only open access and exit was somewhat applicable to two interviewees' organizations. Distributed leadership was also somewhat applicable for one interviewee. All other concepts were not applicable, although for differing reasons.

7.2.4 UNORGANIZED

The remaining subset of panelists, 16 of the 76 (21.1%), scored lower than five on all four organizational cultures. These panelists generally disagreed with the applicability of all four cultures. Table 7.5 offers more specific descriptive statistics for these panelists. The low means and reasonably low standard deviations listed in Table 7.5 show that the panelists at least found the four cultures of the OCAI inapplicable. Of all four cultures the Hierarchy culture is most applicable given its highest mean and lowest standard deviation. Yet with a mean still lower than four, even this organizational culture was generally rather irrelevant to these panelists.

Similar to the nine online gaming communities discussed in Section 6.2.4, the OCAI scores indicate that these work organizations had no unifying values, norms or rules for organization, at least none of the four types covered by the OCAI. The organizations presumably have a specific interest or goal. However, since none of the four organizational cultures fit, there might be no other values, norms or rules with which the organization can be deemed organized. The interview results indicate that this interpretation is too strong. Nevertheless, the OCAI results suggest something is amiss with these work organizations.

Organizational culture	Current		Preferred	
	Min – Max	Mean ± SD	Min – Max	Mean ± SD
Clan	1.67 – 4.33	3.31 ± 0.90	2.67 – 6.67	4.95 ± 1.12
Adhocracy	1.00 – 4.50	3.23 ± 0.99	2.83 – 6.50	4.77 ± 1.08
Market	1.00 – 4.67	3.43 ± 0.90	2.33 – 6.33	4.79 ± 1.09
Hierarchy	2.50 – 4.83	3.72 ± 0.73	3.33 – 6.17	4.86 ± 0.90

Table 7.5. Descriptive statistics for those panelists whose scores can be interpreted as signifying unorganized work organizations (N = 16).

These panelists were indeed not content with their work organizations. Table 7.5 shows that the panelists deemed an evenly higher score for all cultures preferable, particularly for the Clan culture. Thus these panelists preferred a slightly more playful organizational culture for their work organizations. When subtracting the preferred and current scores for each individual statement overall the panelists' discontent becomes even clearer. The differences were higher than for all other panelists. Moreover, the panelists again scored low on organizational commitment (though not lowest): 3.93 ± 0.90 .

Three interviewees offered more explanations for the low OCAI scores. The interviewed panelists offered the following characterizations of their work organizations:

- "A non-profit company, in Catholic foreign aid. So yeah, in itself it's a very informal organization. There's a lot of contact among employees. Only the general manager was very... how should I say this... in control. He was on top of everything. Not very healthy. ... No, not motivating at all. ... My direct supervisor did not function very well. He sort of let everything take its course. He didn't stand up for his people. ... If you have a very weak direct supervisor and above that a very strong general manager who meddles with everything, not always being an expert, then you have an extraordinarily unstable structure." (#9, ICT specialist for a small non-profit organization)
- "A small photo business, but a good one. Everything in-house, so to speak. ... Yes, the work is a lot of fun. ... The boss is an egoistic oaf :D [an emoticon denoting a big smile] ... the boss is personally a good man, very convivial, but professionally he's very different, and that became clear only later." (#12, a photographer for a small photo business)
- "Catering wholesaler ... well-structured, tough and big ... You don't want to conform to procedure? That's easy, you leave. ... And they'll make sure you leave of your own accord ... Quite out-of-date, or in other words, bad." (#31, manager for a large catering wholesale business)

From these quotes it becomes clearer why these panelists scored their work organizations low on all four organizational cultures. They were simply very negative about them and as such did not deem them organized in any way, whether based on Clan, Adhocracy, Market or Hierarchy organizational cultures.

All three panelists deemed their organizations poorly organized due to the leadership behavior they experienced, in conjunction with the hierarchy they found themselves in. In all three cases the hierarchy was not based on expertise but was a delineation of power. Thus the leaders had a lot of power over those lower in the hierarchy. Leadership was thus barely distributed. It was again personified and consisted of command and control behavior. Yet all three panelists deemed the leaders quite incompetent. In the case of panelist #9, working as an ICT specialist for a non-profit organization, the leader was micromanaging without any substantive knowledge. The leaders of panelists #12 and #31 were not conducive to the wishes and concerns of the panelists concerning working hours, salary or more generally the company's strategy. As a result, all three panelists deemed the organization flawed. Characteristics of the Hierarchy culture were arguably still relevant, but the organization's flaws rendered the culture's applicability limited.

Concerning access/exit and the division of labor, the interviewees actually pointed to playful organization. For all three panelists access and exit were quite open. Panelist #9 had no formal education in ICT, but 'only' a passion for it. In fact, he had studied Japanese language and culture. Yet his passion for ICT allowed him to get a job at a non-profit organization. Thus the organization had initially shown an openness towards access. The fact that he got a one-year contract also shows that the organization wanted at least some leeway in terms of exit. The aforementioned remark by panelist #31 concerning exit from the catering wholesale company shows that the organization wanted exit to be as easy as possible. The panelist did not agree with this at all, however. Panelist #12 (the photographer) had a flexible contract (a 'zero-hours' contract), rendering access to and exit from the organization indeed very open. There was some freedom in choice or development of roles for all three panelists,. Panelist #9 was free to develop his role as an ICT specialist. The other two experienced more standardized roles, but were free to choose roles nonetheless.

Playful conceptualizations of ICTs did not apply for the three interviewees. The work organizations of panelists #9 and #12 had no need for such technologies at all given the branch and small scale of their organizations. For panelist #31 this was slightly different, as his catering company was very large and operated from several locations. The technologies and techniques were probably standardized by a separate ICT management division, although the panelist did not offer many insights into the use of ICTs.

The interview analysis shows that considering these panelists' work organizations to be unorganized is a bit of an exaggeration. Nevertheless, it is also problematic to consider the organizations as playful. Two playful concepts were only applicable sometimes and somewhat, i.e., open access/exit and free-to-choose/-develop roles. This suggests that these panelists' organizations were bureaucratic and therefore least playful at best. The interviewees' quotes strengthen this interpretation. However, the panelists' negative views made them find it poorly organized or simply unorganized rather than befitting the values of a Hierarchy or Market culture. The organizations might have been based on Hierarchy or Market cultures in theory, but these cultures did not materialize in practice.

7.3 DEGREES OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION EXPLAINED

The results show that playful organization is in general also an applicable theory for most of the panelists' work organizations. Most of the panelists' work organizations were interpreted as most playful organizations (34.2%), as was the case with the panelists' online gaming communities. Many panelists found their work organization less playful or even less organized organizations. Specifically, 13.2% indicated working for least playful organizations, while 21.1% indicated that their work organizations were hardly organized at all, or at least badly organized. Of all 76 panelists 31.6% indicated working for moderately playful organizations. Thus overall almost two-thirds of the panelists found their work organizations to be at least moderately playful organizations. The results have again offered additional examples of playful organization, though this time concerning 'real-life' work organizations. Table 7.6 lists the examples discussed in the previous sections per value and concept of the playful organization ideal-type.

The question now remains as to whether these similar types of work organizations can also be explained similarly. There are factors that render work organizations less playfully organized or even badly organized or unorganized. Further statistical and interview analyses help understand why work organizations are playful organizations to differing extents. This understanding is a useful stepping stone for a comparison with the panelists' online gaming communities.

7.3.1 PREDICTORS OF WORK ORGANIZATION TYPES

The second half of Appendix C suggests that a number of variables have an influence on the type of work organization a panelist indicated. The final two pages of the appendix list descriptive statistics of all four types of work organization, i.e., most playful, moderately playful, least playful and unorganized. The statistics concern all the measured variables explained in Chapter 4. Five variables differ most clearly per type of work organization:

- In general, panelists working at least playful organizations are more often leaders/managers in their online gaming communities and spend much more time playing than panelists working at most playful organizations.
- Organizational commitment is generally high for playful work organizations and low for least playful and unorganized work organizations.
- The most and moderately playful work organizations generally operate in the information/communication branch. The least playful and unorganized work organizations generally operate in logistics and wholesale/retail branches.
- The most playful work organizations generally have few employees, while the least playful work organizations have many employees.
- All types of work organizations generally operate from one location in the Netherlands, except for the least playful ones, which generally operate from all over the world.

Appendix E shows which of the variables together predict the type of work organization most accurately, according to statistical analyses. The appendix shows that a model containing the following three variables predicted the types of work organization observed among the 76 panelists most significantly:

- The panelist's **weekly gameplay time**
As weekly gameplay time increases, the odds increase that the panelist found his/her work organization less playfully organized rather than unorganized. The change in odds is low, however.
- The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the work organization
As a panelist's organizational commitment increases, the odds increased greatly that the panelist found his/her work organization more playful.
- The work organization's **time in existence**
As a work organization ages, the odds increased that a panelist found it moderately playful rather than unorganized. The significance scores are too low to simply conclude that a the work organization becomes less playful as it ages. Still, it is intriguing that this variable is significant enough for inclusion into the logistic regression model, even though Appendix C did not suggest that it would be.

The playful organization ideal-type	Examples from Dutch online gamers' work organizations, with reference to the section numbers concerned
<i>Contingency</i>	7.2.1: A game design organization where a manager openly asks 'what shall we do?' 7.2.2: A global IT hardware manufacturing organization that 'is ready to constantly shift priorities'.
<i>Agility</i>	7.2.1: A newspaper department where tasks 'are picked up by the person who identifies them'. 7.2.2: A governmental organization with few rules for work involving policy research and policy making. 7.2.4: A non-profit organization offering an enthusiastic applicant an IT job, even though he had studied Japanese culture. See also <i>Free-to-choose & free-to-develop roles</i> .
<i>Equality</i>	7.2.1: A game design organization with 'a more democratic model', involving employees in strategic decisionmaking.
<i>Teachability</i>	7.2.1: A catering company's and IT company's employees frequently helping each other to perform their individual tasks. 7.2.1: IT organization employees asking and answering coding questions on differing discussion forums on the WWW.
<i>Meritocracy</i>	7.2.1: Organizations recognizing employees' efforts and successes by offering more resources in a new project. See also <i>Expertise hierarchy</i> .
<i>Conviviality</i>	7.2.1/7.2.4: Organizations with a 'very relaxed' or 'informal' atmosphere. 7.2.2: A governmental organization characterized as 'friendly/close, convivial, social'. 7.2.2: IT organizations where employees often work at clients, experiencing 'more bonds' or a 'more friendly atmosphere' there.
<i>Open access and exit</i>	7.2.1/7.2.2/7.2.4: Organizations applying temporary or flexible contracts as well as internships, at least within one department. 7.2.1: A self-employed person and very small organizations asking involvement of people within their networks in projects. 7.2.2: An IT organization deploying its employees at different clients, allowing them to self-determine work time distribution. 7.2.3/7.2.4: Organizations with relatively much low-skilled labor, where workers join and are let go easily.
<i>Free-to-choose & free-to-develop roles</i>	7.2.1: Self-employed people being able to choose and define their own work. 7.2.1: Organizations having much low-skilled labor with limited quality criteria, enabling employees to choose from it freely. 7.2.1/7.2.2: Employees of organizations choosing their own work, provided that prioritizations are checked and deadlines are met. 7.2.2: An educational institute standardizing/assigning roles, but having a department with freedom in role choice/development.
<i>Distributed leadership</i>	7.2.1/7.2.2/7.2.3: Employees asking involvement of or suggesting work for colleagues and other people. 7.2.1/7.2.2: Organization leaders exhibiting coordinate-and-cultivate leadership, allowing employees to assert leadership as well. 7.2.2: A manager not being involved with project work, but only with project coordination and human resource matters.
<i>Expertise hierarchy</i>	7.2.1: Organizations recognizing employees' efforts and successes by offering leadership in a new project. 7.2.2: Employees higher up organizations' hierarchies having more expertise, enabling lower employees to consult them.
<i>Demand-based knowledge & communication suite</i>	7.2.2: Employees of organizations implementing ICTs in projects, e.g. online tools for group document writing and sharing.
<i>Boundless knowledge networking</i>	7.2.1/7.2.2: Employees of IT organizations using and sharing knowledge on the WWW about coding or other technical issues.
<i>Collaboratively developed explicit knowledge</i>	No examples found.

Table 7.6. Examples of playful organization from Dutch online gamers' work organizations, related to the playful organization ideal-type.

My own organizational knowledge and experience as well as those shared by the panelists in interviews help to determine meaningful interpretations of the above results. The predictors again need to be considered collectively rather than individually. Explanations of the significance of the individual variables easily lead to misinterpretations. Meaningful interpretations emerge only when all variables are taken into account. This leads to profiles of a most playful, less playful and unorganized work organizations.

7.3.2 PROFILE OF A MOST PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

The panel indicates that work organizations are more playful when they are young, because they have a relatively higher need for playfulness while starting up. It is understandable that young work organizations have an explicit need for employees who are highly motivated by their equal ability to self-determine their roles. Mintzberg's observations pertaining to the 'machine bureaucracy' (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 171) seem to apply here once more. As organizations age they start to settle into certain markets and standardize their practices, leading to the emergence of more bureaucratic values and hence less playful organization. Apparently, time in existence has an opposite effect when it concerns work organizations, as opposed to with online gaming communities. Although Mintzberg's classic organizational observation pertaining to time in existence did not apply to the panelists' online gaming communities, it apparently does generally apply to their work organizations. However, when online gaming communities adopted a competitive rationale, time in existence actually affected them similar to work organizations. Perhaps work organizations could thus also be affected differently over time if they do not emphasize a competitive rationale.

The results also suggest that a playful work organization is so enjoyable that its members are highly committed to it. This is a slightly simpler interpretation of the effects of organizational commitment than when it concerned online gaming communities. Chances were higher for non-competitive and long-lasting online gaming communities that they would be playfully organized and have high organizational commitment. A commitment to an online gaming community's existence makes sense if it has been a highly social community for a long time. For work organizations this interpretation does not hold, at least statistically. This is because of the aforementioned reverse effect of time in existence. The most playful work organizations are generally not old, but young. Moreover, the panelists' work organizations mostly had some sort of competitive rationale, or at least a rationale that did not emphasize the organizations' sociability. In this case the statistical results suggest that panelists are simply committed to the work organization because of its playfulness, rather than because of the people who are also part of that organization.

The final predictor of weekly gameplay time is interpreted in two ways. Although the effect on the odds ratio is not very strong, the fact that the variable is a significant one within the entire model is striking. Avid weekly gameplay could be a counterweight for working for a least playful work organization. This interpretation assumes that panelists experience more playful organization in their online gaming communities to compensate their least playful work organization. However, several younger panelists had low-skilled part-time jobs at less or least playful organizations, e.g. in the catering industry. They simply had more time to spend on

online gaming. This interpretation is essentially not very different from the first one. Panelists having more time for online gaming could still spend it because they wished to compensate the least playful work organizations they experienced. However, this was not always the case.

Still, even the most playful work organizations did not completely conform to the playful organization ideal-type, for two main reasons. Within this panel the concept of open access and exit was at times inapplicable to the most playful work organizations. The concepts of distributed leadership and expertise hierarchy were also not always applicable. This shows the utopian nature of the ideal-type, but it also simply shows that some organizations value their ability to control access and exit. One could expect an organization's branch or size to play an important role in controlling access. Appendix C suggested that these variables were significant, but statistically they proved not to be. Statistically, the panelists' work organizations can generally be deemed most playful, regardless of branch or size. The question remains as to what explanations can be given for the fact that these two variables turned out not to be statistically a highly significant predictor.

Professionalism requirement

As argued in Chapter 2, organizations raise access and exit barriers through the level of professionalism they require from their employees. Access and exit is strongly controlled, as organizations need assurances from employees or candidates that they will be willing and able to contribute something (i.e., they have the branch-specific professional knowledge, skills and/or values). This is very similar for many online gaming communities which find trust assurance an important requirement in allowing new members (see Section 6.3.1).

Controlling access and exit for the purpose of ensuring that employees or candidates are able to contribute arguably applies most strongly to professional organizations. These organizations require a high level of education from their employees for them to function well in their branch. The catering and postal organizations of panelists #11 and #25, respectively, did not require such professionalism, allowing them to adopt the concept of open access and exit much more easily. Thus for particularly professional organizations the concept of open access and exit might not apply. It is understandable that an ICT hardware manufacturer (#30), electrical installation company (#28) or governmental organization (#21) wish to ensure that all employees have relevant knowledge, skills and values. Requiring a level of professionalism to ensure that a new employee actually contributes nevertheless limits one specific opportunity for playful organization.

However, panelists #2, #4, #9, #12, #19, #20, #22 showed that professional organizations (of any branch) still apply the concept of open access and exit in different ways. One way to accommodate more open access and exit is to offer flexible contracts, e.g. a zero/limited hour or client deployment contract that allows employee and employer to negotiate when and where the employee exactly works (panelist #4, #19, #20 and #22). Another way is to simply be open to the passion and interest of the potential employee (and thus the willingness to learn) even though he/she might not have the necessary knowledge or skills for the job yet (panelists #2, #9, and #28). An employee can still obtain or bring in the necessary knowledge and skills through formal learning (obtaining a diploma), informal learning (e.g. an

online self-study) or even simply asking others for help through the Internet. As explained in Chapter 2, boundless knowledge networking enables access and exit to become quite open. This helps to explain why branch proved not to be a significant predictor for playful organization.

Large organizations

Section 7.2 suggested that very large organizations are likely to have managers ascertain and obtain personnel necessary for common tasks. Large organizations will often create separate human resource, ICT or financial management departments. In such organizations several opportunities for playful organization are lost. By applying such a strategy these organizations effectively create and professionalize supportive divisions that have much power over the professionals. As a result a sense of meritocracy and thus of expertise hierarchy is lost. The organization places limits on the additional tasks and responsibilities a professional could take on. Professionals are then unable to obtain opportunities for more or other tasks and responsibilities in recognition of their merits.

Managerial departments can have quite a lot of power over employees. For panelist #10, being a team leader in a financial software development company meant that he was limited in his leadership within his team by managerial departments of the umbrella organization. The same applied for panelists #20 and #23, although neither were team leaders or managers. Both felt limited by the power hierarchy such managerial departments created in their organizations, respectively a local newspaper and an educational institute.

However, large professional organizations can still have something of an expertise hierarchy on a departmental level. Team leader #10 was given full responsibility of leadership over his team, i.e., his own department. Within the department he still was able to uphold an expertise hierarchy and thus a sense of meritocracy. He used this opportunity for playful organization to stimulate his professionals to highly contribute to the software development projects they undertook. He rewarded his professionals with more involvement in substantive decisionmaking, e.g. future decisions about how a certain software functionality would be implemented. Leaders of panelists #20 and #23 applied similar techniques for a departmental-specific expertise hierarchy. This technique had its limits. Since the department was still part of the umbrella organization, the departmental leader only had so much leeway in providing those who showed merit with social recognition. These panelists show that an expertise hierarchy can still apply on a departmental level, in spite of the powerful managerial structure that a large organization imposes on a department of professionals. This helps to explain why number of employees proved not to be a significant predictor of playful organization.

7.3.3 PROFILE OF A LESS PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

It is important to realize that work organizations can also be *least* playful regardless of their size and branch. Statistically only older organizations have a strong chance of becoming less and less playful. The inclusion of organizational commitment in the logistic regression model shows that the employees of such work organizations will generally be much less committed. The employees might even spend more time on online gaming than those working for more playful organizations. This of course does not have to be an issue for less playful work organizations. Goal and task commitment are more important than organizational commitment, just like for

competitive online gaming communities. If employees lose interest in committing to a certain organizational goal or task, they move on. This was particularly evident from panelist #22, working for an ICT outsourcing company. The panelist was more committed to the client organization he was seconded to than the ICT company he was actually working for. From the perspective of the ICT company this is arguably an asset rather than a problem.

Playful organization is still a relevant concept for these work organizations. Less playful organizations still have a high need for distributed leadership, for example. The extent of distributed leadership that a less playful organization requires is debatable. Still, an employee often makes decisions that affect the entire organization, even if his/her role is well-defined and positioned low in a power hierarchy. Panelist #26, a public transport security officer, showed the importance of such leadership distribution, despite indicating that his work organization was least playful. Panelists #25 and #28 showed that a less playful organization also values some forms of open access and exit, especially if the labor is low-skilled. Even a less playful organization can value at least two concepts of the playful organization ideal-type.

Nevertheless, different factors will render most values or concepts of the playful organization ideal-type inapplicable to less playful work organizations. Several reasons explain how an organization of any size and in any branch becomes less and less playful, especially as it gets older. Ironically, the reasons are actually almost exactly the same as those that explained why online gaming communities become less playfully organized.

A well-defined goal and target focus

Many of the older, less playful work organizations that were observed in the interviews and survey targeted a well-defined goal, just like the less playfully organized online gaming communities did (see Section 6.3.2). Unsurprisingly, a goal orientation and target focus applied to the work organizations of most of the interviewed panelists, even those indicated as being most playful. An organization operating in an older production-oriented branch understandably targets a well-defined goal most clearly. Perhaps it operates in a highly competitive market and emphasizes the importance of timely delivery of its products or services. Four of the interviewees who indicated less playful work organizations worked for non-professional organizations targeting well-defined goals (#16, #25, #26, #28), e.g. catering or postal companies. Still, a professional organization can also target a well-defined goal, as other panelists showed. Only the less playful ICT outsourcing organization of panelist #22 had no well-defined goal. It focused on offering practically all forms of ICT products and services imaginable for its clients. Other less playful professional organizations that the panelists worked for targeted a well-defined goal as well, e.g. reaching certain profits and delivering only very specific ICT products. Thus a work organization's branch had limited effect in this panel. This is similar to online gaming communities. In online gaming, 'branch' equates to type of online game. Chapter 6 showed that online gaming communities also target well-defined goals regardless of what online game they play.

The effects of targeting a well-defined goal are slightly different, however. When concerning work organizations, the panelists showed that targeting a well-defined goal render the playful concepts of contingency, agility, conviviality or distributed leadership inapplicable.

The potential irrelevance of contingency and agility was already discussed in Section 6.3.3. The same line of reasoning applies to work organizations, as far as the panelists are concerned. A general openness to uncertainty, eventuality and an employee's ability to pursue them is easily deterred when the organization targets a well-defined goal. For two panelists (#22, #30) there was also a lack of conviviality resulting from their organization's target focus. It is not hard to imagine that an organization highly focused on achieving "stretch targets" (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 39), e.g. achieving a minimum amount of revenue or profit, has less of a convivial work atmosphere. This was always not the case when it concerned online gaming communities. For two more panelists (#16, #22) there was no room for distributed leadership because of their organization's target focus. Instead these organizations assigned command and control leadership to specific leaders only, as explained later.

When online gaming communities targeted a well-defined goal, the concept of open access and exit was often also inapplicable. Online gaming communities deterred members who were not willing to help attain the community's well-defined goal. This was different when it concerned less playful work organizations. Arguably, a work organization does not have to deter new employees who show limited to no commitment to pursuing the organization's well-defined goal. The goal-oriented and less playful work organizations of panelists #21 and #26 controlled access and exit quite clearly. However, they did so not because they wanted to ensure new employees would help attain their goal. These organizations specialized labor and valued a new employee's ability to fulfill and commit to a specific role. This influenced the applicability of open access and exit more heavily, as explained below.

Highly specialized roles

Several of the panelists' work organizations highly specialized the labor of their employees and deterred several opportunities for playful organization as a result, just like some of the online gaming communities did. This is of course a well-known phenomenon in both professional and non-professional organizations, as first explained in Chapter 3. An organization that has been targeting a well-defined goal for a long time has the opportunity to define many of the actual tasks employees perform. Six panelists showed particularly how their less playful work organizations targeted a well-defined goal and highly specialized labor (#21, #23, #25, #26, #28, #30). In Mintzberg's terms, such labor specialization befits the 'machine bureaucracy', (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 171), or least playful organization.

The result of labor specialization is that the playful concepts of agility, free-to-choose/-develop roles or open access and exit are inapplicable. The ability to take any opportunity an employee might come across is lost when an organization imposes specific well-defined roles on its employees. An inapplicability of agility comes with an inapplicability of the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles. An employee fulfilling only one well-defined role is arguably not free to choose or develop other roles. As already mentioned, for panelists #21 and #26 labor specialization also meant that the concept of open access and exit was inapplicable. This was due to the sensitive nature of their work and the level of professionalism it required. Panelist #21's work was sensitive, as some information he dealt with in his governmental organization had to stay confidential. Panelist #26's work was sensitive, as he was legally allowed to use physical force if needed to ensure safety on public transport.

When online gaming communities specialized labor highly, the playful organization value of equality often hardly applied. Some communities appointed ‘class officers’, responsible for mentoring and training members who had chosen a certain character class. This technique ensured that members conformed to the community leaders’ preferred labor specialization, despite the completely voluntary nature of online gaming. From interviews a similar technique actually emerged when it concerned work organizations. Appointing class officers is arguably the same as appointing a powerful manager who determines how an employee develops his/her skills and thus what the employee specifically does within the organization.

Professionalized HR management

A logical step after highly specialized labor is professionalized human resource management. The panelists’ work organizations professionalized their human resource management in two ways that were similar to how online gaming communities professionalized it. First, work organizations would ensure there were enough employees fulfilling the roles that were defined as part of the organization’s strategy. Essentially, professional human resource management entailed ensuring that the organization was well-balanced in terms of the roles the employees fulfilled. Second, human resource managers also made it part of their jobs to develop job/function criteria that the employees (or candidates) fulfilling them needed to conform to.

The professionalization of human resource management often rendered the playful concepts of free-to-choose/-develop roles, teachability, open access and exit, meritocracy and expertise hierarchy hardly applicable. A sense of freedom to choose or develop one’s roles is lost when a professional human resource management department starts planning jobs or functions to ensure the organization’s strategy is best applied. A sense of teachability is also lost, because there is less need for developing and sharing knowledge pertaining to what roles can be done and how they can be done best. This of course does not apply if learning is included in the job description itself. Furthermore, access is not open when an organization has a human resource management department responsible for ascertaining job criteria and ensuring that employees fit them. Finally, meritocracy and expertise hierarchy suffer when a human resource management department controls whether an employee fulfills a particular job. In this case an employee’s merits are no longer recognized with additional possibilities or responsibilities. This is instead up to the human resource management department, which will want to ascertain to what extent the employee fits the additional job criteria.

The effects and origins of professionalized human resource management differ from those defined in Section 6.3.2 when it concerned online gaming communities. In that case only the concept of open access and exit was less applicable. Teachability, meritocracy, free-to-choose/-develop roles and expertise hierarchy were still applicable when the panel’s online gaming communities decided to specialize roles. This shows how the playful context of an online game influences how people interact, collaborate and thus organize themselves. When work takes place in a context of play, more organizational aspects are needed to render concepts of the playful organization ideal-type inapplicable. Outside the context of play, an organization deters more opportunities for playful organization by professionalizing human resource management. It might have understandable reasons for doing so. Probably the most important reason is that work organizations want to at least try to ensure that people fulfill roles that they

are best suited to. In a context of online gaming this means finding the most engaged person, while outside that context this often means finding the most qualified person. Of course, the two do not have to conflict with each other at all. Still, within this panel, they often did.

Professionalized ICT management

ICT management is another example of management that had very much been professionalized at many panelists' work organizations. In these cases the organization had defined preferred practices for technology choice and maintenance, quite similarly to online gaming communities (see Section 6.3.2). These practices had been professionalized, meaning that there was a department dedicated to ensuring these practices were performed. Moreover, the department was dedicated to ensuring that the practices were performed according to certain standards, e.g. ensuring high levels of security, support and interoperability.

The result of professionalized ICT management was that the playful concepts of demand-based knowledge & communication suite, boundless knowledge networking or collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge were not applicable. This effect was practically identical to the effects of online gaming communities professionalizing ICT management. Professionalized ICT management rendered it impossible for some panelists to experiment with new ICTs because of technological or organizational constraints. ICT departments could prohibit the installation of software on the organizations' computers, or they could require a formal request and discussion of a newly proposed technology. If professionalized to an extreme extent, this meant that ICTs were based on the demands of the responsible managers rather than the demands of employees in general. In some organizations professionalized ICT management also meant that boundless knowledge networking was much less applicable. The ICT management department controlled ICT used for direct and indirect communication, thus limiting the ability of members to share knowledge internally or externally. Knowledge-based networking externally was also not very important to some organizations, especially professional organizations that targeted well-defined goals (panelists #22 and #30). In these cases only internal communication technology was deemed necessary, and then only for immediate collaborative purposes. The concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge was also irrelevant, because preferred job practices or skill standards were incorporated in the job descriptions. Such preferences and standards were simply imposed on employees.

Professionalized ICT management in work organizations makes sense for the oldest and largest organizations. In some branches such organizations simply require professional ICT management. Without it employees would simply spend too much time on ensuring that their computers and network connections worked, for example. In the context of online gaming, such basic ICT management is of course not taken up by a community. Moreover, this ICT management is harmless in terms of playful organization. ICT management goes further in a work organization – perhaps too far, as several panelists attested. With an ICT management department in place, it attracts so many responsibilities that it deters several opportunities for playful organization, as described above. When an ICT management department becomes aware of this effect, it can limit its reach throughout the organization, as several panelists working for ICT-developing organizations showed.

Assigned leaders who command and control

Finally, as is arguably common knowledge, some of the highly structured work organizations chose to assign command-and-control leadership to specific employees (i.e., the actual leaders). In those organizations leadership is indeed personified instead of being a behavior that is distributed within the entire organization. For these organizations, determining the strategy meant determining the organization's structure, processes and in some cases the individual tasks. Once again the playful concept of distributed leadership was of course inapplicable in this case. The playful value of equality was also hardly applicable. A sense of equality is difficult to uphold when a power hierarchy exists and those higher up the hierarchy make full use of it.

The concepts of meritocracy and expertise hierarchy were also not always applicable in these cases. An older organization might have defined tasks for managers/leaders and afforded them with decisionmaking power. It can also have managers/leaders who do not have the professional knowledge and experience of those under them. In effect these organizations have assigned command-and-control leadership from professionals to non-professionals. In such organizations meritocracy and expertise hierarchy are inapplicable concepts. Climbing up in the organization's hierarchy as a professional has its limits, especially when management has been professionalized in itself. For some panelists a sense of meritocracy and expertise hierarchy was still applicable, as these concepts were upheld within the panelist's specific department.

The effects and origins of assigning command-and-control leadership are different for a work organization than for an online gaming community. Section 6.3.2 showed how online gaming communities assigning command-and-control leadership still accommodate meritocracy and expertise hierarchy. The shift from 'professionalism' towards 'managerialism' described in Chapter 3 explains this difference. In a work organization it is often deemed important to assign responsibilities for the organization's success to the higher regions of the hierarchy. The higher regions obtain more power, even though they do not necessarily have the professional experience of those they control. When risks are high it is attractive to adopt this managerialistic culture and assign more responsibility and power to managers as non-professionals. In such a managerialistic culture management itself is professionalized. This also renders it unattractive to allow professionals to obtain more responsibilities or possibilities as a recognition of their merits. After all, professionals do not necessarily have management skills. As a result a sense of meritocracy wanes and an expertise hierarchy cannot emerge. For some online gaming communities this line of reasoning also applies, as discussed in Section 6.3.3. However, it generally applied less than to the panelists' work organizations. As panelists stated during their interview, in online gaming the stakes are always lower than 'in real life'. This allows professionalism to prevail over managerialism within the context of online gaming.

7.3.4 PROFILE OF AN UNORGANIZED ORGANIZATION

The statistical analyses showed that unorganized organizations have the highest odds of being the youngest and having the least organizational commitment from their employees. To an extent this fits with intuition. A start-up simply still has to explore its possible goals and strategies, let alone define them. The fact that a lack of goal, strategy and institutions comes with the lowest organizational commitment is understandable. Like when it concerned online gaming

communities, there is simply no organization to commit to. Nevertheless, low organizational commitment is more problematic for a work organization than for an online gaming community. The stakes are after all higher, as many panelists argued. Ideally a young work organization has employees who are highly committed to its survival, as argued in Section 7.3.2. In that case employees contribute extensively to discussions about possible goals and strategies.

The interviewees who indicated unorganized work organizations showed a slightly different possible interpretation of the statistical analyses. The panelists scored their work organizations low on the OCAI's cultures, because they were deemed badly organized. This different interpretation emerges, because panelists deemed the stakes to be higher for work organizations than for online gaming communities. The panelists were effectively indicating that the organizations *should reconsider* their goals and strategies. In this case low organizational commitment also makes sense.

Most of the playful organization ideal-type's values and concepts did not apply, for three main reasons. Only open access/exit and free-to-choose/-develop roles were applicable to an extent. The other concepts were not applicable for the interviewees, suggesting that their work organizations were bureaucratic. Still, the panelists' negative views made them find it badly organized or simply unorganized. The opinions of these panelists already suggest how the occurrence of these types of work organizations can be explained. With one exception, the explanations are again similar to those that concerned unorganized online gaming communities (see Section 6.3.4).

No need to define or redefine hierarchy

In spite of their negative opinions, the interviewees gave no indication that their work organizations were going to change their goals, strategies or institutions. This paradoxical situation can only be explained by realizing that leaders found nothing wrong with the organization, contrary to the panelists. Indeed, the organizations of panelists #9, #12 and #31 had limited incentive to define or redefine their hierarchy. The Catholic philanthropic organization of panelist #9 and the photo company of panelist #12 were small (less than 50 and less than 10 employees, respectively). It should be noted that a low number of employees was not a significant predictor, while a short time in existence was. Both small and young organizations have limited need for a hierarchy of any kind. Defining a strategy is relatively simple, as the organization is easily overseen when it is small and/or young. A debatable strategy might be kept in place simply because of the debate itself or because the stakes (revenues, costs) are lower for a small or young organization. Managing a small or young organization comes with less risks than managing a large and established multinational, if they are comparable at all.

Resulting from an apparent lack of need for defining or redefining the hierarchy, the playful concepts of meritocracy and expertise hierarchy are not applicable. An organization that has no need to define or redefine its hierarchy will hardly be interested in upholding a meritocratic basis for it, either. As a result the hierarchy will also not be based on expertise, provided the existing hierarchy is not based on it, either. Judging from the interviewed panelists the hierarchies were quite static divisions of power (if they existed at all). Thus in all three cases

the playful organization concept of expertise hierarchy was inapplicable. Just like in online gaming communities, a limited incentive for defining or redefining a hierarchy limits some opportunities for playful organization and render an organization quite unorganized.

No need for defining or redefining explicit knowledge

Closely related is the lack of incentive a small or young organization has for (re-)defining explicit knowledge pertaining to the preferred social interaction styles or task performance. The interview results also show that some work organizations are not very complex because of the branch they operate in. Some interviewees were rather independent. Panelists #12 and #31 (respectively a photo company and a catering wholesaler) were involved in labor that required little to no other employees. Panelist #9 only used ICTs to perform his job. He used freely available knowledge on the World Wide Web to assist him in building the company's website. Panelist #12 had no ICTs at all (a point explained further below). Only the organization of panelist #31 used some ICTs, but they were not used for the purpose of letting employees collaboratively develop explicit knowledge. Such organizations can still have limited need for developing knowledge concerning social interaction and task performance. The organization's leaders had no interest in changing the organization at all, let alone following the suggestions or wishes of its employees. The playful concept of collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge is of course as a result irrelevant.

No need for ICTs

As already suggested, some organizations had no apparent need for ICTs at all. It is not hard to imagine that a small or young organization operating from a single physical location needs limited to no ICTs for knowledge sharing or communication purposes. This applied to the work organizations of panelists #12 and #9. Only the organization of panelist #31 operated from multiple locations. Yet since the work was relatively independent, collaboration and communication across locations was at least at the non-management level again hardly necessary. It should be noted that a low level of globalization did not significantly predict unorganized work organization. However, many young organizations operate from one location and therefore have a limited need for ICTs. As a result the playful concepts of having a demand-based knowledge & communication suite, boundless knowledge networking and collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge were again hardly relevant. All three concepts are based on the existence of ICTs in the first place.

7.4 COMPARISON TO ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITIES

Throughout this chapter the panel's work organizations have already been compared to the online gaming communities, showing that they can be viewed similarly. Section 7.2 showed that the OCAI responses concerning work organizations could be grouped similarly to those concerning online gaming communities. Section 7.3 showed that the four types of work organizations had similar profiles to the four types of online gaming communities. The panelists' online gaming communities and work organizations thus experienced similar organizational phenomena. The differences between the two contexts concerned only the origins and effects of the organizational phenomena. The origins and effects of e.g. targeting a well-defined goal are

different for an online gaming community than for a work organization, as discussed in Section 7.3.3.

However, the question remains as to how the panelists' individual online gaming communities and work organizations compared, and how the panelists actually valued those comparisons. If online gaming communities and work organizations can indeed be described similarly from an organizational perspective, it stands to reason that the panelists would find one context relevant to the other. The initial working hypothesis presented in Chapter 1 suggests that the panelists would want their work organizations to be playful organizations, similar to their online gaming communities. That hypothesis was already amended, following the realization that online gaming communities are not always highly playful organizations. Still, some of the panelists found the playful organization theory very applicable to their work organizations.

7.4.1 DRAWING THE COMPARISON

Table 7.6 draws the comparison between the individual panelists' online gaming communities and work organizations. It lists the four types of online gaming communities (rows) and work organizations (columns) and shows the number of panelists for each comparison between the two. Dark grey cells indicate panelists experiencing highly equivalent organizational cultures, while light grey cells indicate slightly equivalent cultures. An unorganized work organization or online gaming community was considered a completely separate type. For this type the concept of organization was problematic, let alone one of a playful organization. This category therefore has no slight similarity with the other categories.

Table 7.6 shows that there are several equivalence levels, i.e., much diversity in cultural comparisons. Still, when observing each table cell individually, most panelists (18.4%) experienced most playful organizations in both the 'virtual' and 'real' world. In total 28 panelists (36.8%) worked in organizations with an organizational culture that was at least slightly similar to their online gaming community's culture, regardless of what those cultures actually were. A further 27 panelists (35.5%) seemed to find them slightly equivalent. This means that a majority

		Work organization				Total
		Most playful	Moderately playful	Least playful	Unorganized	
Online gaming community	Most playful	14	13	4	7	38
	Moderately playful	7	9	5	5	26
	Least playful	1	2	1	0	4
	Unorganized	4	0	0	4	8
Total		26	24	10	16	76

Table 7.6. Comparison of the panelists' online gaming communities and work organizations.

of the panelists ($N = 55$; 72.3%) indicated that their online gaming communities and work organizations were to some extent culturally equivalent. Overall, there is much diversity when it comes to comparing the organizational cultures of the panelists' online gaming communities and work organizations.

Appendix G describes how significance level was introduced as a new variable to indicate the panelists' opinions about the comparison between the two organizational contexts. Thirty-three of the 55 panelists in culturally equivalent organizations indicated that the equivalence was significant (60%). The other 22 panelists (40%) indicated the cultural equivalence was insignificant. Furthermore, 13 of the 21 panelists in culturally non-equivalent organizations indicated that this non-equivalence held significance (61.9%). The other 8 panelists (38.1%) indicated that the cultural non-equivalence was insignificant. For the panelists indicating equivalent and non-equivalent organizational cultures the distribution of significance and insignificance was thus roughly the same.

7.4.2 PREDICTORS OF EQUIVALENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVELS

To explain the differing equivalence and significance levels, further logistic regression analyses were conducted. Appendix F explains how analyses were conducted to determine predictors of equivalence levels. The appendix shows that statistically the cultural equivalence level depends mostly on four variables:

1. The panelist's **function type (leader/manager or not)** in the work organization.
A panelist who is not a leader or manager at work has higher odds of finding his/her work organization and online gaming community culturally equivalent.
2. The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the work organization.
As a panelist's commitment to his/her work organization increases, the odds increase that he/she will find it culturally equivalent to his/her online gaming community.
3. The online gaming community's **competitive rationale**.
An online gaming community with a competitive rationale has higher odds of a panelist finding it culturally *slightly* equivalent to his/her work organization rather than equivalent. The panelist might find it non-equivalent, but this particular change in odds is statistically not significant.
4. The online gaming community's **time in existence**
An older online gaming community has higher odds of a panelist finding it culturally *slightly* equivalent to his/her work organization rather than non-equivalent. The panelist might find it equivalent, but this particular change in odds is also statistically not significant.

The odds of finding an online gaming community culturally equivalent to a work organization were highest when the panelist was highly committed to the work organization and had no leadership/management function in it, while the online gaming community was quite old and did not adopt a competitive rationale.

These results lead to three important conclusions:

- **Panelists pursue playful organizations in any organizational context.** Organizational commitment has a triple effect. Organizational commitment was also a predictor for the type

of work organization (see Section 7.3.1) and type of online gaming community (see Section 6.3.1). The more a panelist was committed to his/her work organization's survival, the higher the chance that he/she would find the online gaming community similarly playfully organized and would commit to it, too. This result indicates that panelists choose to pursue playful organizations in both the 'virtual' and the 'real' world.

- **Panelists find the two contexts culturally equivalent regardless of whether both are most or least playful organization.** An online gaming community's time in existence was also a predictor of its most playful organization (see Section 6.3.1). Panelists who were part of old and playfully organized online gaming communities had high odds of also working for an at least moderately playful organization. A community's competitive basis was also a predictor for the type of community, in combination with its time in existence (see Section 6.3.1). Panelists who were part of an old competitive community were more likely to deem it a less playfully organized community. They subsequently also tended to deem their work organization less playful.
- **Panelists who are leaders or managers of a work organization find the organizational context different from an online gaming community.** The results indicate that leaders/managers perceive their work organization differently. I assume they perceive it as more complex or more hierarchical, due to their unique position within the work organization.

The above conclusions are insightful but do not indicate what panelists think about the differing equivalence levels. The statistical results strengthen the observation that comparisons between online gaming communities and work organizations are not at all clear-cut. Since online gaming communities are not necessarily highly playful organizations, cultural comparisons are much more complex than the initial working hypothesis assumed. The above results strengthen this conclusion. The question remains as to how the panelists value the different possible comparisons.

The second part of Appendix F explains how final logistic regression analyses were conducted to help further explain differing significance levels, i.e., how panelists valued the cultural comparison. The appendix shows that significance of an equivalence level depends mostly on four variables:

1. The panelist's **weekly working time**.
As a panelist's weekly working time increases, the odds increase that he/she will find the equivalence level between his community and work organization of significance. However, this effect is minimal and has the lowest statistical significance.
2. The panelist's **weekly gameplay time**
As a panelist's weekly gameplay time increases, the odds increase that he/she will find the equivalence level between his community and work organization of significance.
3. The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the online gaming community.
As a panelist's organizational commitment to his/her online gaming community increases, the odds increase that he/she will find the equivalence level to his/her work organization to be of significance.
4. The online gaming community's **diversity in national culture**.

As a community's diversity in national culture increases, the odds increase that its panelist will find the equivalence level to his/her work organization significant.

Overall, the odds of finding any significant relationship between a community and work organization were highest when the panelists were highly committed to their online gaming community and played for many hours each week, while their online gaming community consisted of people from all over the world.

Two additional insights should be noted:

- **Panelists in most playfully organized communities tend to find a comparison to their work organization of significance.** This is because of the extensive effects of a panelist's organizational commitment to his/her online gaming community. High organizational commitment also predicted a most playfully organized community. A panelist highly committed to his/her community had higher odds of finding the community playfully organized and a comparison to his/her work organization significant. Chances were also high that his/her work organization was also a most playful organization.
- **Panelists in least playful work organizations tend to find a comparison to their online gaming communities of significance.** Weekly gameplay time was also a significant albeit minor predictor for least playful work organization. Thus the more a panelist was playing each week, the higher the odds that he/she deemed the work organization least playful. The panelist subsequently also had higher odds of finding the comparison to his/her online gaming community significant.

The statistical results are insightful but require further interpretation and explanation before they can be fully understood. It arguably makes sense that a panelist will find a comparison between organizational cultures significant if he/she works full-time and games a lot every week. After all, such a panelist obtains many organizational experiences from both contexts. Relating one organizational context to the other is in that case easier than for panelists who game or work for only a couple of hours each week. It also makes sense that a panelist will find a comparison significant if he/she is highly committed to the community. A lack of commitment to the community easily leads a panelist to dismiss it as an insightful organizational context. Finally, it seems logical that a community that consists of many internationals gives a panelist pause for thought. A community that only consists of close friends from the same region or country is also easily dismissed. The question remains as to whether the panelists' own explanations further aid interpretations of the results. The interviews offered the panelists' actual opinions concerning playful organizations in the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. They helped to develop four profiles of how panelists compare the two organizational contexts.

7.4.3 PROFILE OF A PANELIST FINDING EQUIVALENCE SIGNIFICANT

Six interviewees indicated that they found the organizational cultures similar and wanted to keep it that way (#2, #10, #11, #18, #20, #28). Three of them explained their viewpoints on the matter nicely. Their explanations explain why panelists appreciate playful organization anywhere and therefore find a comparison between the two contexts significant.

- “It’s really that lingering atmosphere [in the online gaming community]. It’s all very informal/unconstrained. ... it’s very similar [in my work organization]. ... In both contexts that’s really attractive. ... I think I do look for a corporate culture that’s – how can I say this right – very open and very flexible. ... As long as I can bring up my own ideas.” (panelist #2, playing in an *EVE* corporation and working at an ICT company)
- “Yes, when I first signed up for this study I thought [the community and work organization] were not similar, but during this conversation I’ve realized that I rather adopt the same ‘management style’ [in the community] as my own boss [in the work organization]. This helps me put some things into perspective. ... Yes, I think I will look for a job that gives me free rein to really add value. Within the same domain though, but at a place where an atmosphere lingers of optimism and improvement, more than ‘it cannot be done because management does not want it.’” (panelist #20, leader of a *World of Warcraft* guild and an intern at a newspaper)
- “I’m sure that what both have in common is that you try to make it as convivial as possible at both. The work needs to be done, but it’s much more important that you’re close-knit, otherwise you’ll never reach incredible operating results. ... I can’t say that I’ve learned this or that [from the online gaming community as an organization]. But you can say that it’s similar [to the work organization]. ... I hope to be a leader someday, and it’s nice if I’ll then be able to create a group that’s so close-knit they’ll be willing to work really hard for the company. That they have that same motivation.” (panelist #11, playing in an *Ogame* community and working at a catering company)

In eleven cases of slightly equivalent organizational cultures panelists considered their online gaming communities more ideal than their work organizations. Specifically, they wished for a more playful work organization, similar to what their online gaming community already was. Three interviewees critiqued their work organizations quite clearly (#16, #22, #23). By doing so they help us to understand why panelists in least playful work organizations were most likely to find a comparison to their online gaming communities of significance. As panelist #16 put it, “You have certain experiences in your guild and then you think: I wish it was as easy at work” (panelist #16 playing in a *World of Warcraft* guild and working for an amusement park). Panelist #22 managed to explain the criticism, “Everything that’s been written down [about the community] wasn’t developed all at once. We’re working on it continuously and then you automatically start making comparisons with other situations, like work” (panelist #22, playing in a *World of Warcraft* guild and working for an ICT outsourcing company). This quote shows that the extensive efforts panelists put into their community’s organization provides food for thought. The quote also explains why commitment to the community and weekly gameplay time predicts the significance level.

Conversely, five panelists considered their work organization to be more ideal than their online gaming community. One interviewee deemed his online gaming community least playfully organized and his work organization slightly playful, stating:

“The social characteristic [of my work organization] I notice a lot is missing in the guild. ... You don’t have to become *too* social, but a little more understanding of someone’s situation

wouldn't hurt." (panelist #21, playing in a *World of Warcraft* guild and working at a governmental organization)

Descriptive statistics indicated that there were four additional panelists who were of a similar opinion. These panelists wished their online gaming communities to be more playfully organized like their work organizations, even though the two organizational cultures were already reasonably equivalent.

Three other interviewees were less critical, as they appreciated the contextual differences between their work organizations and online gaming communities (#17, #19, #26). They individually appreciated the comparison in itself and found it provocative. They suggested that their work organizations could also benefit from being more playfully organized like their online gaming communities already were. Yet they argued that changing the work organization was problematic or impractical. As panelist #19 put it, "I think [the community] is still too loose/casual [for the work organization]. If a change of organization works out better [for a community], you change, but at work that's difficult" (playing in an *Ikariam* alliance and working for an ICT development company). Panelist #26 (leading a small *World of Warcraft* guild and working for a large public transport organization) stated similarly, though very bluntly, "The problem of every company is simply that too many managers and leaders have their own agendas and are really only there for themselves instead of for their staff." The panelist found the comparison plausible and potentially of significance for his work organization, but also accepted the contextual difference. Panelist #17 found his work organization more playful than his community, but still liked his work organization to be more like his community (less playfully organized). He accepted the contextual difference as well, because of the difference between the large context of his community (a large *World of Warcraft* guild) and the small context of his work organization (a very small web application developer).

7.4.4 PROFILE OF A PANELIST FINDING EQUIVALENCE INSIGNIFICANT

It is not a big step from appreciating contextual differences to actually finding the comparison entirely insignificant. During his interview panelist #4 found it indeed very hard, if not impossible, to decide whether the cultural equivalence between his online gaming community and his work organization had any significance:

"The fact of the matter is... there is a difference in motivation. For the team [at the work organization] the motivation is: if I don't do this I won't get my salary anymore. And in the other it's: I won't have my game anymore. ... when there's work to be done, you choose your work first [over the community]." (panelist #4, leading a multiple-games clan and a game development team)

Two others interviewees besides #4 also found the comparison insignificant. The two other panelists indicated the insignificance much more clearly during their interviews (#5 and #30). Panelist #30 indeed indicated in both his questionnaires and the interview that his work organization (a large ICT hardware manufacturer) was culturally equivalent to though less playfully organized than his online gaming community (a large multiple-games clan). When asked whether this apparent slight difference had any significance, he responded:

“No... I think that’s good. ... I’ve simply accepted a job in which I’m expected to be able to patch up and to raise a racket if needed. ... I don’t really have the need to see a certain organizational structure in my clan that’s comparable to my work, or vice versa. The clan has turned out nicely the way it is. At work it’s simply the intention of my function.”

The above quotes suggest that the ‘magic circle’ (Huizinga, 1938/1950) concept still applies to some panelists. Chapter 2 introduced the notion of ‘external inconsequence’ to argue that that other non-play realities are by default inconsequential for the ‘alternate reality’ that play introduces. This play pattern leads panelists to uphold strict separations between online gaming communities and work organizations, even if the two are culturally equivalent. The statistical results suggest that panelists uphold this separation if they e.g. spend relatively little time on online gaming each week or are not committed to the community.

7.4.5 PROFILE OF A PANELIST FINDING NON-EQUIVALENCE SIGNIFICANT

There were 21 panelists (27.6%) who indicated that their online gaming communities and work organizations differed enough from each other to consider them simply non-equivalent. Thirteen of these panelists found the non-equivalence to be significant. Results showed that nine panelists were members of most playfully organized communities, worked for least playful or unorganized organizations, and found that comparison significant. These nine panelists included two interviewees. A further three panelists were members of moderately playfully organized communities, worked for an apparently unorganized organization, and found that comparison to be significant. These three panelists included one interviewee. A final panelist was a member of an unorganized online gaming community and worked for a playful organization. This is the only panelist who found the two cultures non-equivalent and preferred a more playfully organized online gaming community, thus more equivalent to his work organization.

The first three interviewees indicated that they preferred their work organizations to become more playful (#9, #12 and #25). These interviewees explain why panelists in least playful work organizations are likely to find a comparison to their online gaming communities significant. All three interviewees wanted their work organizations to become more playful organizations, similar to what their communities already were. Panelists #12 and #25 wanted their photo developing and postal organizations to become much more playful, which would be a big step for both. For the work organization of panelist #9 (Catholic philanthropic organization) the preferred change would also be a big step. The organization would have to become moderately playful, while the panelist currently deemed it unorganized.

7.4.6 PROFILE OF A PANELIST FINDING NON-EQUIVALENCE INSIGNIFICANT

For the final eight panelists the fact that their online gaming communities and work organizations were culturally non-equivalent had no significance. Three of these panelists had been interviewed (#13, #15 and #31). Two of the interviewees (#13, #15) were self-employed, of which one (#13, an artist) did not prefer any form of collaboration in his work. Panelist #15 (an ICT consultant) did collaborate a lot, and deemed such collaborations playful organizations. Both panelists deemed their online gaming communities quite unorganized and did not find that preferable for their work. For panelist #31 the reverse was true. Although he did not find his work organization ideal, he did not feel that a more playful organization (like his online gaming

community already was) would be beneficial. For most panelists the organizational culture of one context was perhaps accepted because of the practically opposing culture of the other context. As panelist #31 put it, "I think that the things you do within your clan or guild should be done properly, and that you should just do your job properly. You shouldn't lump them together. ... They're just two separate things." This quote again points to the play pattern of external inconsequence. It also strengthens the statistical results. The statistical results show that unorganized online gaming communities generally lead to low organizational commitment, which in turn leads panelists to find comparisons with work organizations insignificant.

7.5 CONCLUSION

7.5.1 LESS PLAYFUL WORK ORGANIZATIONS, COMPLEX RELATIONS WITH COMMUNITIES

This chapter discussed the results of the second part of the panel research explained in Chapter 4 to ascertain, explain and compare differing levels of playful work organization. Following descriptive statistics of the OCAI responses, the 76 involved panelists were grouped into four categories, similar to the panelists' online gaming communities. Compared to the panelists' online gaming communities a lower percentage of the work organizations were deemed most playful. The spread of work organizations among the four categories – most playful, moderately playful, least playful and unorganized – was actually much more even than was the case for online gaming communities (34.2%, 31.6%, 13.2%, 21.1% respectively). Still, most work organizations within the panel were deemed slightly or most playful, somewhat surprisingly.

The four types of work organizations were explained by interpreting results of logistic regression analyses discussed in Appendix E. The results show that as a work organization ages, the odds increase that the panelist will find it a less playful organization. Less playful work organizations are generally paired with low organizational commitment and even higher weekly gameplay time. Profiles of a most playful organization, less playful organization and apparently unorganized work organization were sketched to further understand the statistical results. The profiles were again similar to those concerning the online gaming communities. The panelists' online gaming communities and work organizations thus experienced similar organizational phenomena. Moreover, a slight majority of the 76 panelists indicated that both their online gaming communities and work organizations were playful or moderately playful organizations. The differences between the two contexts concerned only the origins and effects of the organizational phenomena.

The comparison was continued by analyzing how the individual panelists compared their communities to their work organizations. Most panelists indicated that their online gaming communities and work organizations were culturally equivalent. For most panelists (60.5%) the comparison was significant, whether or not the cultures were equivalent. Further logistic regression analyses (Appendix F) showed that four variables predicted whether or not a panelist finds a cultural comparison significant. If panelists played and worked many hours each week, were highly committed to their communities, and had fellow members from all over the world, chances were high that they would find a comparison to their work organizations significant.

Often these panelists preferred both slightly or most playful work organizations and online gaming communities, although they might accept that this would be hard to achieve for some work organizations. For the other panelists (39.5%) the comparison had no significance. Generally these panelists saw and preferred to see the context of an online gaming community as different from that of a work organization, as traditional play theory suggests (Huizinga, 1938/1950).

Given these results it is clear that the amended working hypothesis needs even more amendment. Chapters 3 and 6 already showed that online gaming communities can also be least playful organizations. This led to a first amendment of the initial working hypothesis. The initial working hypothesis suggests that work organizations become playful organization, like online gaming communities already are. This assumes that people are willing and able to find work organizations comparable to online gaming communities. Many online gamers are indeed willing and able to do so. Many other online gamers are not. Figure 7.7 therefore adds significance as a third dimension, showing that the initial working hypothesis is based on another somewhat simplistic assumption.

7.5.2 DISCUSSION

The limitations of the panel approach discussed in the previous chapter (Section 6.4.2) of course still apply. I prefer not to generalize given a lack of panelists and of data about the population. This cautionary note is even more important given the lower number of panelists whose data

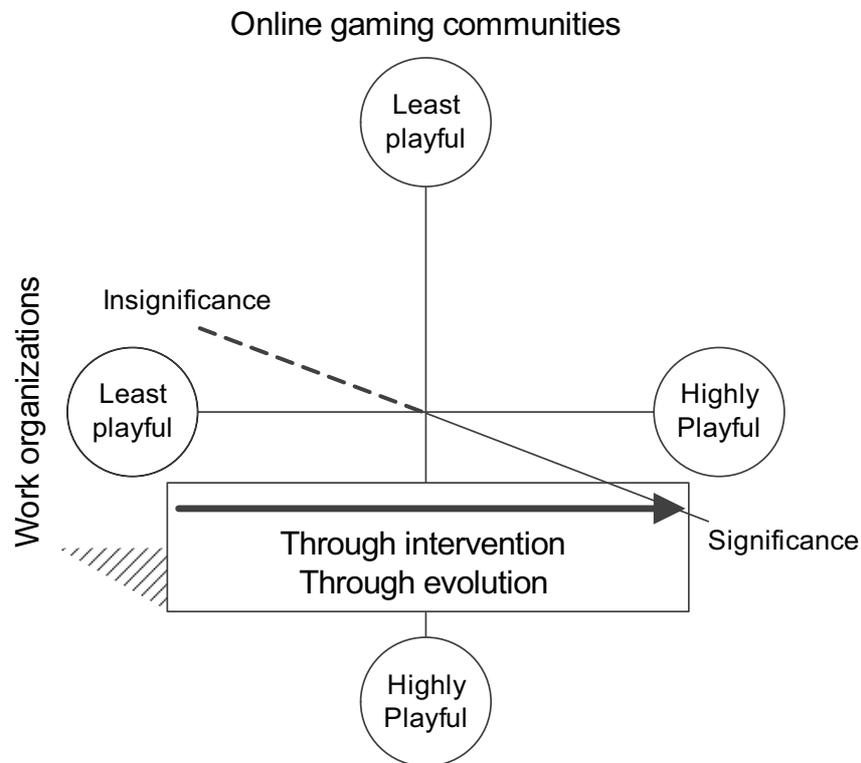


Figure 7.7. The working hypothesis again revisited, now with the additional significance dimension.

could be analyzed in this chapter (i.e., 76 out of the 95). The rather low number of panelists prevent full analyses of all possible predictors using logistic regression analyses. More respondents or fewer variables in the empirical research model would be needed to do more reliable analyses. Other researchers are encouraged to develop empirical research approaches that can further build upon this work.

One additional drawback of the method of analysis discussed in this chapter should be noted. The analyses described in this chapter consisted of making clear distinctions in responses, i.e., categorizing panelists on their responses to the questionnaires and during the interviews. For some panelists it was hard to code their questionnaire or interview responses on significance of a cultural comparison. Presumably these panelists had trouble understanding the topic in the first place. Indeed, when panelists frame online gaming as a context of 'play', the unserious connotation of play's 'magic circle' (Huizinga, 1938/1950; see also Chapter 2) renders it difficult to form an opinion about how online gaming communities compare to 'real-life' work organizations. This made coding these panelists' responses on significance or insignificance of a cultural comparison the hardest. A panelist's difficulty in making a comparison between the two contexts was interpreted as indicating insignificance. It should be acknowledged and underlined, however, that other researchers might have coded responses differently when analyzing the same data.

The main value of the results is the more general insights they have offered pertaining to playful organizations in the 'real' world and their relation to those in the 'virtual' world. The panel has provided interesting insights into the organizational cultures of online gaming communities and work organizations. Moreover, the panel has offered intriguing insights into how the two organizational contexts can be compared. As such the panel research has greatly built upon the results of the ethnographic research presented in Chapter 5.

7.5.3 ONWARD

Having answered all the sub-questions posed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, it is high time to move on to the final concluding chapter. Indeed, the main research question can now be answered. It would generally seem that the initial working hypothesis that playful organizations are generally emerging in both the 'virtual' and 'real' world has been substantiated and critiqued. All the answers and nuances offered in the past chapters also have consequences for the starting points of this thesis, i.e., the cultural and organizational theories from which the initial working hypothesis was developed in the first place. The upcoming final chapter returns to these starting points and discusses their continued relevance given the presented results. Following these discussions further recommendations for online gamers, leaders/managers and researchers are offered.

CHAPTER 8

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

THE EMERGENCE OF PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS

UNCOVERED AND CRITIQUED

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis started with the observation that there are different ways of understanding gaming's impact on organizations. In the experience-instrumentalizing frame gaming is an experience designed to have a specific learning effect for the individual learner and/or the organization as a whole. In the experience-ideologizing frame gaming is an experience designed to activate specific values and principles in an organization. These two similar frames are complemented by two frames that view gaming not as a designed experience but as a socio-cultural phenomenon. In the phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame gaming is an industry of which the social structures and systems are examined to innovate organizations both internally and externally. In the phenomenon-ideologizing frame gaming is a frame of mind that could lead to a fundamental change in organizational culture. The frame considers all other three frames as symptoms of this change. Moreover, the popularity of all sorts of play in daily life is acknowledged as another factor of this change. In an age of play the ability to play at work is valued so highly that organizations become playful, i.e., creative, spontaneous and enjoyable.

The question remained as to whether the emergence of playful organizations could be observed. Online gamers were deemed to be the people who could answer this question. Online gamers' communities were presumed to be playful organizations *pur sang*. Millions of online gamers spend many hours each week for months on end voluntarily collaborating with dozens of others to tackle difficult and ever-changing game mechanics. The game world effectively demands online gaming communities to be creative, spontaneous and enjoyable organizations. Online gamers could even develop a preference for playful organization beyond their online gaming community. Perhaps they are therefore experts in playful organization. They can show how their communities manage to organize playfully and whether work organization can become playful organizations as well.

The working hypothesis was introduced that playful organizations emerge in both the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. Figure 8.1 visualizes this initial working hypothesis. It shows that through interventions (such as serious gaming) and evolution (the emergence of an age of play) organizations become playful, like online gaming communities already are. The figure was a useful starting point for formulating a research agenda.

The question remained, however, as to what the characteristics of a playful organization actually are and to what extent those characteristics are identifiable among online gamers' communities and work organizations. With a conceptual framework of a playful organization ideal-type defined in Chapter 2, the first part of the question was partly answered. Literature

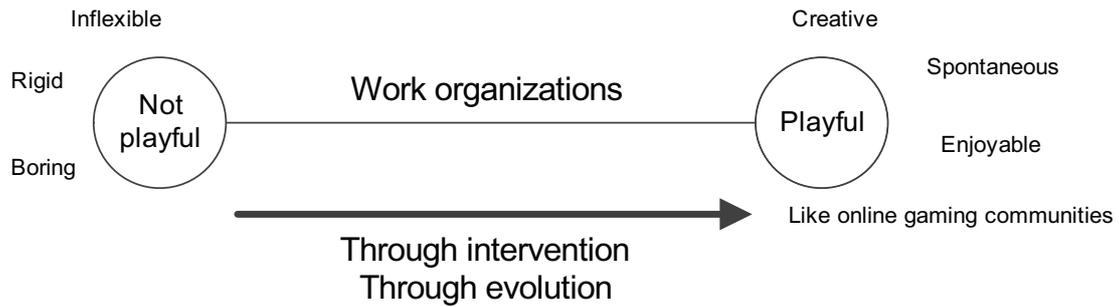


Figure 8.1. The working hypothesis presented in Chapter 1.

reviews and empirical research provided the data with which the main research question could be answered further. Insights were gained into the emergence and characteristics of playful organizations in both the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ world, and thus into the relations between them.

This chapter first summarizes the results of the conducted research per sub-question as posed in Chapter 1 (Section 8.2). It subsequently discusses the consequences of the results using the observations with which this thesis started, i.e., the aforementioned frames for understanding gaming’s impact on organizations (Sections 8.3 and 8.4). These discussions open up avenues for several recommendations, including recommendations for further research (Section 8.5).

8.2 A SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

8.2.1 A RETURN TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are structural and cultural characteristics of a playful organization?

From a cultural perspective, Chapter 2 started with the assumption that a playful organization is one in which employees so deeply value their ability to play that the organization is creative, spontaneous and enjoyable as a result. The chapter subsequently specified this much further. In a playful organization employees value their equal ability to pursue opportunities for the organization as they see fit, and the uncertainty and eventuality that results from that ability. They learn continuously from their actions as well as from each other, are rewarded for their spontaneity and creativity with social recognition, and experience a convivial work atmosphere. This brief description is based on the six cultural characteristics introduced in Chapter 2: contingency, agility, equality, teachability, meritocracy and conviviality.

From a structural perspective, when taken to extremes a playful organization is very open to any employee joining or leaving the organization. Moreover, employees’ roles are self-determined and self-developed. Leadership is distributed throughout the organization and primarily entails coordination and cultivation behavior. The organization’s hierarchy is merely a delineation of all the expertise and the corresponding levels of expertise employees have. ICTs are based on the demands of the employees and implemented left and right. They help

employees continuously share knowledge internally and externally. They also help employees to collaboratively develop and store preferred practices and procedures. This brief additional description is based on the seven structural characteristics introduced in Chapter 2: open access and exit, free-to-choose and free-to-develop roles, distributed leadership, expertise hierarchy, demand-based knowledge & communication suite, boundless knowledge networking, collaboratively developed explicit knowledge.

Chapter 2 presented the above characterization of a playful organization as an 'ideal-type' (Weber, 1949) and something of a scale variable. The described playful organization is not a 'model' that can be applied through a specific step-by-step plan. The presented playful organization theory is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It is also utopian, a theoretical extremity. It is a starting point for empirical research. In such research the concept of playful organization is best understood as a scale variable. Organizations can be interpreted as e.g. highly or hardly playful. Moreover, the playful organization ideal-type can be considered the counterpart of the bureaucracy ideal-type (Weber, 1946/1947). A bureaucracy should be viewed as a 'least playful' organization. As such the concept of a playful organization is not radically new. In a way the playful organization has many characteristics of e.g. adhocracies (Mintzberg, 1979, 1983), learning organizations (Senge, 1990) and network organizations (Fulk, 2001). It was therefore interpreted as a next step in the evolution of organizational culture theory, set in motion decades ago by theories stressing decentralization and flexibility.

2. To what extent can the structural and cultural characteristics of online gaming communities offered in computer game studies literature be considered playful?

Chapter 3 first presented a review of empirical studies of online gaming communities published in the period 2000-2010. The review revealed a plethora of conceptualizations, aspects and operationalizations of online gaming communities, resulting from the mostly open nature of the selected empirical studies. Most of the studies did not build upon previous studies or theories, due to the relative novelty of and qualitative perspectives on online gaming communities. This frustrated comparisons somewhat. A general picture could nevertheless be painted in two ways. First, underlying the plethora of concepts were three main perspectives on online gaming communities. A *micro* perspective focuses on small and temporary groups or teams. A *meso* perspective focuses on more institutionalized and larger guilds or organizations. A *macro* perspective focuses on the largest social structures sharing only a common identity, i.e., communities or networks. Second, six main variables were found to be most popular: social structuring (including all forms of management), rationale, culture & social norms, used ICTs, number of members and time in existence.

The review led to a surprising conclusion as to the playfulness of this type of organization. Particularly, the three different perspectives as well as the plethora of variables and their values showed that there is high organizational diversity among online gaming communities. The mere diversity in concepts applied and variables analyzed reveals a high level of playful organization among online gaming communities. It at least shows that the values of contingency and agility are very applicable. Specific conceptualizations and aspects also indicate

that online gaming communities are culturally and structurally playful organizations. For example, some studies showed how online gamers manage their communities purely through coordination and cultivation, e.g. through activity assessment, reward allocation and conflict resolution (see also Table 3.2). Other communities develop very strict power hierarchies and behavioral rules, which strongly goes against the playful organization ideal-type. This is surprising, given the working hypothesis that online gaming communities were highly playful organizations by definition. Apparently this part of the working hypothesis does not hold true.

3. To what extent can the structural and cultural characteristics of professional organizations offered in organizational studies literature be considered playful?

Chapter 3 also presented a review of empirical studies of professional organizations. Since this is a much larger and older field, conducting another systematic review was problematic and unnecessary. One readily available review of ‘archetype theory’ proved to be a useful starting point (Brock, 2006). The review offered four main conceptualizations of professional organizations: the professional bureaucracy, professional partnership, managed professional business and global professional network. Underlying these concepts were nine variables: form of ownership, locale and scale, management identity and responsibilities, manager/professional ratio, strategic decisionmaking process, diversity in professionals’ practices, standardization of professional practice, performance measurement and interpretive scheme (organizational culture).

This review led to slightly less surprising conclusions as to the playfulness of this type of organization. The professional partnership archetype was best relatable to the playful organization ideal-type. Contrarily, the managed professional business archetype was the least relatable to the playful organization ideal-type. Professional autonomy is emphasized in the characterizations of the professional bureaucracy and the professional partnership. The high level of autonomy in these two archetypes renders the playful values of agility and equality very relevant (see also Table 3.2). In the case of the global professional network, agility is most evident at the managerial level, because management actively looks for opportunities to set up new organizational networks. The managed professional business is much less of a playful organization, because of the archetype’s emphasis on the power of management rather than professional autonomy. The characterizations indicate that contingency, agility and equality are values that are particularly hard to find in this archetype. Overall, the literature review led to the conclusion that there are professional organizations that already have many characteristics of a playful organization, and there are professional organizations that hardly seem playful at all. This is somewhat surprising, given the working hypothesis that an age of play has rendered organizations more playful. Apparently this part of the working hypothesis also does not hold true, at least not according to archetype theory.

4. How can playful organizations be empirically researched in the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ world?

Chapter 4 explained my research approach and in the process promoted a playful perspective on designing empirical research into playful organizations. The research was based on a “sequential

exploratory strategy”, i.e., an empirical research endeavor with “an initial phase of qualitative data collection and analysis” and a second “phase of quantitative data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2003, p. 215). This strategy allowed me to “explore a phenomenon but also [...] to expand on the qualitative findings” (Creswell, 2003, p. 216). The qualitative research offered the possibility of developing and communicating an understanding of how online gaming communities can develop as organizations in the first place, whether playful or not. The research helped me to theorize the extent of an online gaming community’s playfulness qualitatively. The quantitative research offered the possibility of setting up completely different empirical research to generally ascertain, explain and compare the extent of the playfulness of online gamers’ communities and work organizations.

My empirical research thus first entailed qualitative research in the form of virtual-organizational ethnographic research in *EVE Online*. I started researching *EVE* by playing it. An ethnographic methodology was applied, mostly because its assumptions fit those of my own research frame (the phenomenon-ideologizing frame presented in Chapter 1) and because it quite explicitly calls for playfulness. *EVE* was selected for a number of reasons, most notably because the play-work paradox takes center stage in *EVE*. *EVE*’s gameplay design is surprisingly easy to relate to ‘real-life’ organization, because of its economic foundation and simply its heavy reliance on organization. I gathered data by noting and reflecting on my gameplay experiences, my interactions with fellow players and my membership in one *EVE* corporation, referred to as *Major*. I also gathered 121 hours of chat channel data and did 13 formal interviews. I obtained more data about my corporation from 18 of my fellow corporation members who filled in a questionnaire about themselves, their gaming habits and how they perceived the corporation’s organizational culture. I finally examined 13 of my corporation’s web pages and other *EVE* specific discussion forums, news bulletins and fan websites. The common ethnographic technique of analysis through ‘thick description’ was accompanied by qualitative analyses of the interviews, documents, descriptive statistics of the survey. *Major*’s leaders subsequently commented on a report detailing my findings, leading to several amendments. This allowed me to develop an answer to the first empirical sub-question (posed below as sub-question 5).

The empirical research subsequently entailed quantitative research (with a qualitative component) by forming and querying a panel of 95 Dutch working online gamers. A panel methodology was applied, primarily because it is a useful and playful data gathering technique. It is useful in this context, because it allowed me to obtain more data from a sample than a different quantitative method would have done (e.g. a cross-sectional survey). The research focused on interpreting the level of playful organization of the panelists’ online gaming communities and work organizations. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI; Cameron & Quinn, 2006) was used to help accomplish this. The OCAI is based on four cultures, including Clan and Adhocracy organizational cultures. The definitions of these two particular cultures can be related quite well to the values of the playful organization ideal-type presented in Chapter 2. The OCAI was therefore used as a proxy for measuring extent of playful organization. The panel could provide a good indication of whether online gaming communities in which the Dutch are involved are playfully organized in general. In a first questionnaire all 95 panelists provided quantitative data pertaining to their communities’ characteristics and playful

organization. The panel was subsequently able to provide a good indication of whether the organizations in which Dutch online gamers work are generally playful. In a second questionnaire 76 of the panelists provided quantitative data pertaining to their work organization's characteristics and playfulness. Statistical analyses of the results from both questionnaires as well as further analyses of 22 interviews allowed me to develop an answer to the second and third empirical sub-questions (posed below as sub-questions 6 and 7).

5. When and how does an online gamer create or join communities, what are the characteristics of those communities, and to what extent are the communities playfully organized?

As an online gamer, my answer to this question follows my experiences in playing and researching *EVE Online*. An *EVE* player decides to start or join a first corporation when in need of other players to complete missions, be protected from enemies and acquire resources more quickly. There are other general and more specific reasons to start or join a corporation. A player can simply find social gameplay much more rewarding. Social gameplay is always a possibility, since players are able to use public chat channels to interact with others and start a corporation or alliance at any time. Still, in time game mechanics will incentivize or even obligate players to at least become very social. 'Startup corporations' play important roles in *EVE* as organizations formed out of a need for collaborative learning. They often allow anyone to join the corporation, most notably new players. These corporations are thus highly dynamic in terms of number of members and member activity. They offer several examples of playful organization, most notably their openness to new members, their willingness to try all sorts of gameplay experiences and their uncertain existence over time. In time startup corporations grow, merge with other corporations or simply disband. *Major* managed to grow out of its 'startup' status many years ago to become one of the better-known corporations of *EVE*. It turned out to be quite a playful organization, offering no less than 23 examples (summarized in Table 5.2). The playful concepts of open access, free-to-choose/-develop roles, expertise hierarchy, distributed leadership and collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge were applicable to *Major*. Two factors put pressure on the full applicability of these concepts, i.e., the importance of assuring trust among members, and the loyalty towards the esteemed members and leaders that comes with long-lasting trust.

Thus even though an *EVE* corporation can be quite a playful organization, the values and concepts of the ideal-type are not necessarily completely relatable. This was expected, given the ideal-type's utopian intent. Chapter 5 further explained *why* a corporation such as *Major* does not fit the ideal-type completely. The explanation started with the realization that corporations are also network organizations influenced by their direct associations with other corporations (i.e., within their *alliance*), the culture developed by the entire *EVE* player community, and the culture developed by the online gaming community (both players and developers) as a whole. This context influences the organizational culture of the community at hand and thus its playfulness. *EVE*'s affordance to form an alliance of any type stems from the 'sandbox' design principle upheld by CCP Games as the game's unique selling point. In that sense *EVE* is an ideal environment for playful organization within the entire online gaming landscape. However, the gameplay that the sandbox allowed to emerge included infiltrations, thefts and scams, rendering

trust assurance so important that corporation leaders have to limit the extent of playful organization.

6. To what extent can Dutch online gamers' communities be considered playful organizations?

Chapter 6 grouped the 95 panelists' responses into four categories of online gaming community organization. This grouping was based on the panelists' responses on the OCAI used in the first questionnaire, which concerned the panelists' online gaming community. Just over half of the responses were interpreted as indicating most playful organizations. Just over one third of the responses were interpreted as indicating moderately playful organizations. Only 4.2% of the responses were interpreted as indicating least playful organization. Interestingly, slightly more of the responses were interpreted as indicating unorganized online gaming communities. Overall, a majority of online gamers indicated that their online gaming communities were at least moderately playful organizations. Still, the empirical results again fuel further skepticism towards the initial assumption that online gaming communities are by definition playful organizations.

The four different levels of playful organization were subsequently explained by interpreting the results of logistic regression analyses (see also Appendix D). Generally the online gamers were likely to interpret their communities as less playfully organized if they were younger and had low organizational commitment (i.e., a low preference for the community and its existence). They were also likely to interpret their communities as such if the community was young. If the community had a competitive rationale (e.g. to be in the top three of a leaderboard), then its age sometimes had an opposite effect. In that case an older community could also be interpreted as being less playfully organized.

7. To what extent can Dutch online gamers' work organizations be considered playful organizations, similar to their communities?

The same method of grouping was used in Chapter 7, leading to the development of four equal categories of the panel's work organizations. In this case the data concerned the OCAI responses in the second questionnaire, filled in by 76 of the 95 panelists. Compared to the panelists' online gaming communities a lower percentage of the work organizations were deemed most playful. The spread of work organizations among the four categories – most playful, slightly playful, least playful and unorganized – was actually much more even. Nonetheless, most work organizations within the panel were slightly or most playful, somewhat surprisingly. Thus playful organizations had also been found in the 'real world'. Playfulness organization can be identified among organizations within different branches, as working online gamers attest. The four types of work organizations were explained by interpreting the results of the logistic regression analyses discussed in Appendix E. In general, as a work organization ages, the odds increase that the panelist will find it a less playful organization. Less playful work organizations will generally also have low organizational commitment and even higher weekly gameplay time.

The analysis continued by comparing the panelists' online gaming communities to their work organizations with regard to organizational culture, specifically playful organization. A light majority of the 76 panelists indicated that both their online gaming communities and work

organizations were at least moderately playful organizations. Most panelists indicated that their online gaming communities and work organizations were culturally quite equivalent. For most panelists (60.5%) the comparison had a significance, regardless of whether or not the cultures were equivalent. Further logistic regression analyses (Appendix F) showed that four variables predicted whether or not a panelist would find a cultural comparison significant. If panelists played and worked many hours each week, were highly committed to their communities, and had fellow members from all over the world, chances were high that they would find a comparison to their work organizations significant. Often these panelists preferred both slightly or most playful work organizations and online gaming communities, although they might accept that for some work organizations this is hard to achieve. For the other panelists (39.5%) the comparison had no significance. Generally these panelists saw and preferred to see the context of an online gaming community as being different from that of a work organization.

What are characteristics of a playful organization, and to what extent are these characteristics identifiable among online gamers' communities and work organizations?

An answer to the first part of the main research question does not simply entail a reference to the playful organization ideal-type of Chapter 2. The ideal-type is only one part of the answer, albeit an important one. The ideal-type offered a useful starting point (or a point of reference) for a further empirical investigation into characteristics of a playful organization. In the end both the ideal-type and the further empirical investigations (both others and my own) offered many examples of playful organization, listed in Tables 2.1, 3.2, 5.2, 6.5 and 7.6.

Overall, online gamers' communities have characteristics of a playful organization to a large extent. Contrary to my initial working hypothesis, some of the involved Dutch online gamers' communities have hardly any characteristics of a playful organization. It is clear, however, that these communities are in the minority. In turn online gamers' work organizations also have characteristics of a playful organization, though to a lesser extent. Most of the involved Dutch online gamers' work organizations actually have characteristics of a playful organization. It is difficult and problematic, however, to attempt to offer any clearer conclusions. Even though the panel study offered clear percentages, the panel was not representative of the Dutch working online gaming population, let alone of the entire working online gaming population worldwide. Moreover, given the popularity of online gaming and the dynamic nature of online gaming communities, it is a very hard and questionable endeavor to attempt to offer any 'hard numbers' concerning their extent of playful organization in general. The same can be argued of work organizations, of course.

My research has shown that the relationship between the 'virtual' and the 'real' world is quite a complex one from an organizational perspective. Online gamers indicate differing relationships between their online gaming communities and their work organizations. Many indicate that their online gaming communities are quite playfully organized and that their work organizations are or should be similarly playful. Others indicate that their online gaming communities are less playfully organized and do not wish their work organization to become culturally similar to their communities. Some find the idea of comparing their online gaming

community organizationally to their work organization strange or problematic. Online gamers with high organizational commitment to their online gaming community, playing in a community with highly diverse nationalities (i.e., from countries in Europe and beyond) and for relatively many hours per week, generally find a significant relation between it and their work organizations.

Playful organizations have been identified among online gaming communities and work organizations, though less among work organizations than among online gaming communities. As a result the initial working hypothesis needed amendment. Figure 8.2 depicts that amendment. The figure shows two axes depicting scales of playful organization for work organizations and online gaming communities. As explained in Section 8.1, the initial working hypothesis was that work organizations were becoming more playful (creative, spontaneous and enjoyable), similar to online gaming communities. This working hypothesis is again depicted in Figure 8.2 through the boxed black arrow. Some of the assumptions behind this working hypothesis have proven to be too simplistic. The y-axis shows that there is more organizational diversity among online gaming communities than the initial working hypothesis assumed. The z-axis shows that online gamers may or may not deem their communities significantly relative to their work organizations. All in all, Figure 8.2 shows that the initial working hypothesis has been backed up with empirical results, but only to a limited extent.

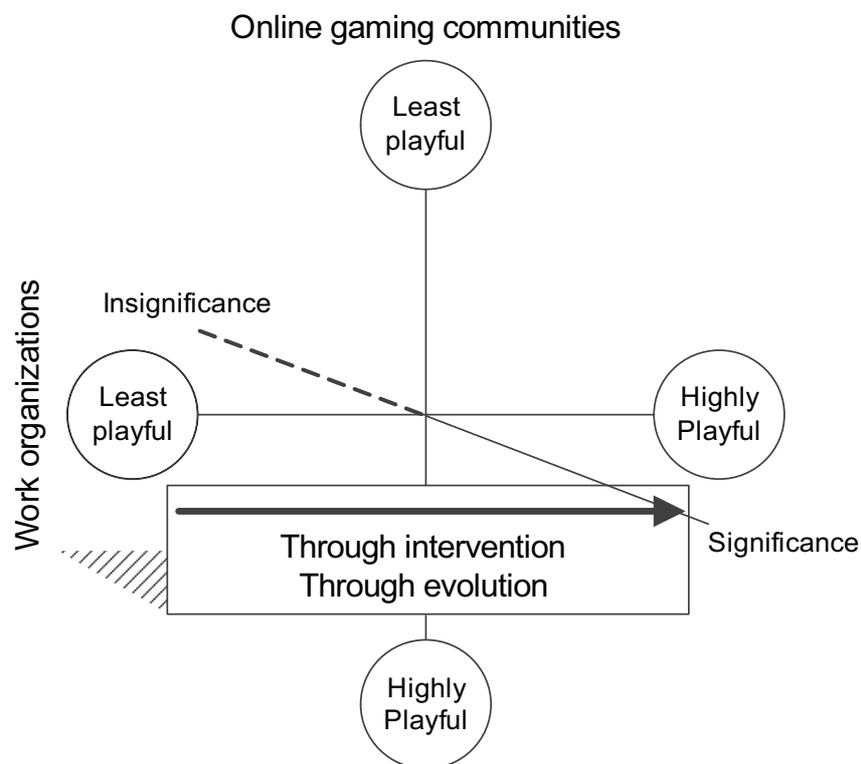


Figure 8.2. The initial working hypothesis amended, following the results of the presented research.

8.2.2 OFF TO FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

The results have several consequences that need to be discussed. One way to discuss these consequences is to use the four frames of organization-related games research as an analytical framework. From my own phenomenon-ideologizing frame, gaming is viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon and gaming's objectives are viewed ideologically. Gaming is viewed as a frame of mind that governs individual behavior, social interaction and organization. In an age of play organizations are influenced by dominant play values and norms, leading to fundamental changes and the emergence of playful organizations.

Regardless of which frame is used, the discussion involves answering two questions. The first question is: *What are the consequences of the results for the frame in question?* For example, what consequences do the results have for someone adopting the experience-instrumentalizing frame, who is interested in developing and evaluating serious games for specific learning and training purposes? Answering this question advances the particular strands of organization-related gaming research. The second question is essentially the reverse of the first: *What points of critique does the frame in question raise concerning the results?* In other words, what would someone adopting the phenomenon-ideologizing frame say, for example, upon examining the applied methodology and subsequent results? Answering this question raises new questions, and thus introduces new avenues for further research.

8.3 A DISCUSSION FROM THE PHENOMENON-IDEOLOGIZING FRAME

8.3.1 CONSEQUENCES OF THE RESULTS

A transformation of organizations is observable but faces barriers

Many online gamers value a playful form of organization and a similarity between their communities and work organizations. This confirms the phenomenon-ideologizing thesis that society is in an age of play, in which playful organizations emerge and attract. The emergence will presumably continue if the age of play continues. Perhaps this thesis even contributes to this continuation.

Several barriers nevertheless still hinder the emergence of playful organizations. First, a highly playful form of organization does not necessarily follow in a context or age of play. The results show that online gaming communities are at times hardly playfully organized. Some online gamers do not have a need for playfully organized communities. Moreover, online games sometimes do not require them or stimulate their emergence. Second, the context of play is at times consciously kept apart from the context of work. Online gamers often find any relation between their game life and their work life insignificant. They find the idea of work life being similar to game life naive, or the idea of game life being similar to work life dangerous. Third, the risk of instigating playful work organizations is often deemed too high. Online gamers might find the idea of a more playful work organization more similar to their communities interesting and relevant. Yet they value a work organization's stakes more highly and therefore also the risks of cultural and structural change. As a result they are hesitant to help change their work organizations and accept continuing differences with their online gaming communities.

Whether these barriers will persist or be broken through remains subject to further research. If an age of play persists, several if not all of these barriers can be broken through. Risk-taking might be valued more and more, since it is an integral part of play itself. The risks of cultural and structural changes to a work organization also depend on other factors, e.g. the organization's cultural region or industry. In time the risk of playful work organizations could be perceived as negligible, and its opportunities could be valued much more highly. Over time, explicitly separating play from work contexts could also become more and more meaningless. Online gamers cannot uphold a strict separation of work and play in an age where the number of online games, online gamers' ages, organizations' 'virtualization' (Camarinha-Matos & Afsarmanesh, 2005; Davidow & Malone, 1992) and the use of serious games and gamification continue to increase.

The conclusions have consequences for three theories upon which the phenomenon-ideologizing frame was built: the net generation, ludification of culture and gamification.

The net generation theory is simplistic

The theory of the net generation begins with the observation that generations from roughly 1982 onwards have grown up with technology in general, and computer games in particular (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998). Using technology and games all their lives, these newer generations have generally developed a learning style and social interaction pattern substantially different from those of older generations. The net generation is generally characterized as consisting of tech-savvy 'twitch-speed' multitaskers. They favor or even expect other more formal contexts of learning and social interaction, i.e., education and work, to accommodate this new style. Education therefore needs to be more active, social and technology-based through e.g. the use of serious games, simulations and e-learning systems. Work needs to be less structured, favoring e.g. spontaneous meetings and technology use (Beck & Wade, 2006).

Many have critiqued the net generation theory already, following the results of extensive empirical research (Bekebrede et al., 2011; Bennett et al., 2008; Schulmeister, 2009). The results discussed in this thesis can neither confirm nor deny the theory, since it was not researched specifically. They have consequences nonetheless. The discussed results problematize the theory in three ways. First, given the organizational diversity in virtual worlds, the assumption that new generations of avid online gamers develop a preference for more playful social interaction and organization is too simplistic. Relatedly, one could even argue the opposite, namely that some online gamers develop a preference for *less* playful social interaction and organization as a result of their extensive virtual world experiences. Finally, the results also show that online gamers often consciously keep the context of gaming separate from other contexts, which contradicts the net generation theory's main argument.

Ludification of culture further developed and to an extent validated

Ludification of culture suggests that the prevalence and pervasion of games introduces playful perspectives on society and the construction of identity in particular (Raessens, 2006, 2009). As such, ludification of culture is first and foremost a philosophy. It is arguably still an underdeveloped philosophy or theory, as it remains unclear how a ludified culture would be

different from a non-ludified culture. As the ludification of culture is presented as a philosophy, its practicalities are by definition ill-defined. It is simply often not the goal of philosophy to be practical or empirical. Moreover, the protagonists of the ludification of culture probably find it problematic to unilaterally define the empirically observable characteristics of a ludified culture, given the malleable nature of play and gaming. As explained in Chapter 2, any attempt to unilaterally define play or gaming is both practically impossible and theoretically problematic. Patterns and common characteristics of play and gaming can still be defined, which lead to the development of the playful organization ideal-type.

As such, the results discussed in this thesis contribute to and have consequences on the ludification of culture, specifically the ludification of *organizational* culture. The understanding of play and how it can introduce an organizational culture encompassing certain playful values contributes to the theory of the ludification of culture. By showing that online gaming communities often adopt many if not all of these values, the ludification of organizational culture in the 'virtual' world is evident. The ludification of organizational culture in the 'real' world is also evident, since many Dutch online gamers appreciate similar playful values in their work organizations. Simultaneously, by showing that the aforementioned playful values cannot always be found among online gaming communities, the ludification of organizational culture seems to have its limits, at least for now. The fact that many Dutch online gamers prefer to keep the 'virtual' world separate from the 'real' world also limits the theory of the ludification of organizational culture.

Gamification broadened in scope and further stimulated

Gamification is the most recent theory of the three, and perhaps the most criticized one as well. It is similar to the ludification of culture, as both theories stress the influence of characteristics of gaming on other aspects of daily life. At the same time, gamification is clearly different. While the ludification of culture is an empirically underdeveloped philosophical theory, gamification is a much more pragmatic theory that is rather *overdeveloped*. As game designer Bogost argued (2011), some have defined gamification quite restrictively by focusing solely on the motivational power of competitiveness and achievement, i.e., the introduction of "rewards, challenges and contests" (Zichermann & Linder, 2010). This leads many gamification enthusiasts to introduce scoring systems, badges, titles and leaderboards among customers (through marketing efforts) or employees (as part of their human resource management strategy; e.g. Ederly & Mollick, 2008; Zichermann & Linder, 2010). In the eyes of game designers such as Bogost, this is a too limited understanding of common characteristics of games. Chapter 1 explained that players are often not at all motivated by the sense of achievement games create. Zichermann & Linder (2010) realized that different play motivations introduce different demands on the games and gamification introduced in marketing and human resource management. Yet they argue that achievement or competitiveness is a powerful foundation that can fit all play motivations (Zichermann & Linder, 2010, pp. 150-153). In my opinion play simply denotes more than achievement, as I have shown in Chapter 2.

The extrinsic motivation promoted among employees and customers by currently common applications of gamification is also problematic. Play is and should be related to intrinsic motivation, i.e., the notion that players first and foremost are engaged by the act of

playing itself. By introducing scoring systems, badges and leaderboards in an attempt to incentivize customers and employees to further commit to pre-defined actions, leaders and managers offer rewards for the efforts they so desire, rather than for play itself. As a result players (customers, employees) are more motivated by these rewards than the act of playing (consuming, working). The organization hardly becomes a game or a play experience. Through the introduction of additional rewards it simply reinforces its existing non-game and non-play structure, with the exception that the rewards entail increases in social rather than financial capital.

This thesis proposes a richer understanding of gamification. In itself the term gamification does not necessarily denote the aforementioned limited applications (see also Deterding et al., 2011). As De Koven argued, in a 'well-played game' competition is not the end but the means to a different end, namely a sense of equality and engagement among all players (1978). Put simply, one considers a competitive game well-played only if all players – friends and foes – have taken part with equal powers and with an equal amount of effort. The most competitive games are no fun if the opposing players clearly have more or less power and put more or less effort into playing. Hence in a well-played game the outcome (win or loss) will matter less than the process that led to it. This is an important realization for gamification enthusiasts, because it opens up the field to many more gamification opportunities. For an organization to be gamified much more extensively, all employees would have to consider their organization as a game and their work as play. For that to happen, many of the values conceptualized in Chapter 2 would have to be found applicable. Intriguingly, scoring systems, badges, titles and leadership boards can still emerge in the end, because they can still motivate play. They would, however, emerge bottom-up and would form only one piece of the puzzle that a playful or gamified organization is.³²

Thus the presented results denounce gamification when it is viewed as a top-down intervention strategy primarily based on introducing achievement and competitiveness. Although Zichermann & Linder base gamification mostly on achievement and competitiveness, they argue that "creating an experience that caters too explicitly to the highly competitive is sure to make others feel like failures" (2010, p. 151). The results of this research underscore this statement and to an extent confirm this part of gamification theory. Online gaming communities often do not adopt competitive goals or visions for themselves. As 'classic' gamification could render a work organization more competitive, it could actually *deter* rather than attract the organization's online gaming employees.

If gamification theory is broadened as suggested, the presented results both confirm and denounce it. They confirm it as playful because an extensively gamified organization is indeed valued by many online gamers in both an online gaming community and a work organization. They denounce it because some online gamers do not value playful or extensively gamified organizations in the 'virtual' and/or the 'real' world. Moreover, they denounce it because several

³² I realize that I am promoting an understanding of gamification as more or less synonymous to rendering something playful. Many will find this questionable, preferring to focus gamification on the use of some game characteristics rather than on the broader transformation towards a playful experience (Deterding et al., 2011).

Dutch online gamers prefer to keep the context of online gaming separate from the context of work.

8.3.2 CRITIQUES OF THE RESULTS

One critique concerns the conceptualization of the playful organization. The conceptualization of the playful organization can be seen as skewed. Protagonists of the ludification of culture, for example, might find the conceptualized playful organizational culture too limited. As explained in Chapter 2, the conceptualization is based on an understanding of play developed after reviewing several play-theoretical publications, both old and new. There are other ways of understanding play (see e.g. Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006), given play's malleable nature. Researchers adopting the phenomenon-ideologizing frame might not concur with the presented understanding of play and therefore disagree with the resulting conceptualization of a playful organization.

Additionally, *how* the playful organization is presented could be critiqued. The ideal-type presented in Chapter 2 consisted of precisely six values and seven structural concepts. This can already seem structuralistic, to which some adopting the phenomenon-ideologizing frame might object. The question remains as to why a different type of characterization was not pursued, one focused less on neat definitions and more on e.g. play experiences seeping through an organization. Although the understanding of play and a playful organization was presented through specific concepts, this does not mean that both are structuralistic. On the contrary, play is understood as an indeed malleable experience in which several patterns or common characteristics can nonetheless be identified. These patterns or characteristics were conceptualized to aid the reader's comprehension.

Some of the results might also be questioned, specifically the separation of play and work contexts some panelists upheld. It could be argued that this separation of contexts was elicited by the design of the panel study itself. Indeed, the two contexts were separately queried in the panel study's interviews and questionnaires. As explained in Chapter 4, this was a conscious choice. Cultural and structural similarities between online gaming communities and work organizations were hypothesized, not assumed. These similarities were subject to empirical research. It was therefore necessary to query the two contexts separately but similarly. Only that way could possible similarities and differences be ascertained critically.

8.4 DISCUSSIONS THROUGH REFRAMING

Since the research was developed and executed from an experience-ideologizing frame, discussions from the other three frames essentially *reframe* (De Bruijn, 2011, p. 39) the research and its results. This can be confusing. By reframing the results they can easily be misrepresented and misunderstood (De Bruijn, 2011, p. 39). There are two main reasons for doing so anyway. First, by making explicit how the research could be reframed, I am actually attempting to avoid misunderstanding among the readers. Second, reframing simply raises several interesting and relevant points of discussion. The results take on a different aspect, which is also insightful and helpful rather than confusing.

8.4.1 A DISCUSSION FROM THE EXPERIENCE-INSTRUMENTALIZING FRAME

The experience-instrumentalizing frame is a classic frame for serious gaming. Serious games are viewed as games designed for specific learning purposes. They are designed artifacts that, once played, should lead players to make decisions for, change their behavior in or change their attitude towards the organization they work for. They are tools that can lead to better organizational performance.

Within this frame the term 'playful organization' will have a slightly different meaning. It denotes an organization in which employees are engaged in creating a better organization through serious gaming. A playful organization is a lot like a 'learning organization' (Kriz, 2003; Senge, 1990). Continuous individual and organizational learning are highly valued. Employees develop and use serious games often and successfully (i.e., with high learning effects) to sustain a high engagement with learning and organizational performance. Ideally, the applied serious games and organizational performance are found to be dependent on each other. In the eyes of the employees this legitimizes the playful organization model itself, ensuring its continued application and an even higher level of employee engagement.

Consequences of the results

Acceptance of organizational models in serious games is uncertain

In this frame serious games' designs are based on well-defined theories and models of desirable behavior and organization. Serious gaming should lead to a specific learning effect. Contrarily, play assumes a sense of freedom, equality and uncertainty (as discussed in Chapter 2). When a well-defined theory or model meets a context of play, it becomes unclear whether the model will be accepted. Players might not appropriate or even recognize and understand the model at all in a context of play. There is a level of uncertainty concerning the outcomes of serious games that an instrumentalist might find discomfoting. An instrumentalist will want to explicitly restrict serious games to well-defined learning goals pre-approved by an organization's leaders. The games' learning goals will have to be easily relatable to real or potential increases in key performance indicators.

This can actually deter many employees. The results show that many gaming employees value the ability to play in an organization. For these gamers, restricting serious gameplay will not lead to the desired learning effect but rather to a low acceptance of serious gaming. The serious games might not only be deemed uninteresting but might also be deemed a gimmick or management fad aimed at simply reinforcing the status quo. The playful organization envisioned in the experience-instrumentalizing frame might not materialize. The games will have limited effect and the desired playful organization will not ensue at all. This means that the decision to extensively apply serious games can demand serious game designs that do not fit the experience-instrumentalizing frame.

Effects of extensive serious gaming can be much more fundamental

A person adopting the experience-instrumentalizing frame must therefore also be aware that extensive serious gaming can lead to a different kind of playful organization than he/she assumes. The cultural changes ensuing from extensive serious gaming can be much more fundamental. Through extensive successful serious gaming the much more playful form of

organization defined in Chapter 2 can emerge. This is because of the common patterns of play that can govern successful serious gaming.

The question remains as to whether these expectations have merit. The results show that many working online gamers value playfulness in their communities and their work organizations. They also show the opposite. It is therefore still unclear whether online gamers will accept serious games at work if these games are framed and designed in an experience-instrumentalizing manner. Moreover, the question remains as to whether extensive use of serious gaming alone can lead to cultural changes favoring the playful organization ideal-type. Longitudinal case studies at organizations implementing an extensive serious gaming program can offer a clearer answer to this question.

Critiques of the results

Researchers adopting the experience-instrumentalizing frame will find the playful organization ideal-type lacking in operationalization for more rigorous empirical study and more conclusive results. Although something of a causal model seems to have been developed for empirical research in Chapter 2, I actually opposed it being understood as a model, and the empirical application can seem meager to an experience-instrumentalizing serious gaming researcher. The formed panel is not representative of the Dutch online gaming population, and the variables' effects were not rigorously tested. Approached from this frame, the quantitative research should have been designed differently. The effect of specific online games and their design characteristics on playful organization should have been centralized. Mediating variables such as individual play styles could have been taken into account. An experimental or quasi-experimental research design could have been developed to rigorously ascertain whether playing online games within a playfully organized community creates a preference for working at a playful organization.

It would be interesting to research the playful organization from the experience-instrumentalizing frame. The assumptions on which the frame is based are, to some extent, debatable. The assumption that serious games can be effective tools is interesting. Why not consider an online game a serious game, i.e., a tool for inducing a playful approach towards efficient and effective organization? Why not consider doing much more experimental research into the causal link between specific online games and their organizational design characteristics (independent variables) and a more refined playful model of organization (dependent variable)?

The distinction between an entertainment game and a serious game is relevant in this discussion. Although the term 'serious game' is in itself problematic, it has a purpose, no matter what frame one applies. It makes a distinction between games that are consciously designed to be entertaining and games that are consciously designed to be educational. Framed experience-instrumentalistically or otherwise, it is questionable to assume that an online entertainment game has a learning effect in general, i.e., that it teaches players to organize playfully. Furthermore, it is problematic to view playful organization as a model designed into online games that players apply and learn. Researchers adopting the experience-instrumentalizing frame will probably agree with that assessment.

Furthermore, the presented playful organization theory remains an ideal-type, not a model. From this perspective an experimental research design is problematic, as the playful organization ideal-type defined in Chapter 2 is neither implementable nor observable as a whole. One can still use quantitative research methods to attempt to predict more playful interpretations of organizations, but a causal link between certain variables and one model of playful organization is problematic to pursue.

8.4.2 A DISCUSSION FROM THE EXPERIENCE-IDEOLOGIZING FRAME

The experience-ideologizing frame was presented as a frame in which a serious game is viewed as an artifact that activates organizations in accordance to specific norms and values. A serious game's 'procedural rhetoric' (Bogost, 2007) can activate players to form or change an organization. The instrumental approach to serious games and organizations is denounced. Serious games are not tools that affect their players. Such a view overvalues the agency of a game and undervalues the agency of a player, especially given the focus on norms and values.

Within this frame a 'playful organization' denotes an organization activated through serious games. Players are engaged in forming or redesigning an organization in accordance to the ideology the game proposes. Serious games can have a cultural and thus more fundamental impact than assumed in the experience-instrumentalizing frame. Serious games are designed to promote all sorts of values and forms of communication and collaboration. However, the play experience is highly valued. The experience-ideologizing framing of the impact of serious gaming is more fitting to the presented playful organization ideal-type. By centralizing the play experience, the player's ability to play, both within and outside the serious game, can be valued explicitly.

Consequences of the results

Online games can activate playful organization

The results suggest that games can activate players into playful organization. The ethnographic and panel studies show that many gamers create and are part of playfully organized online gaming communities. Online games activate players to form playful organizations, even if the designers do not consciously design their games to have this specific impact. If online games can have this impact, serious games surely can have it, too. The impact of such serious games can again be unintended. Researchers adopting the experience-ideologizing frame should realize that their appreciation of the play experience can affect the entire organizational culture of the organization in which they apply their serious games. The researchers probably find nothing problematic about this, since that is, at least in part, their intention.

Within the experience-ideologizing frame there are two consequences of the fact that not all online gamers are activated into playful organizations. If a serious game is designed in an attempt to activate players into playful organization, the results suggest that the attempt will fail for some players. This is acceptable and appreciable in this frame. To assume that the player will always or mostly be affected as intended is simplistic and problematic. This leads to the second consequence. The results also confirm the main supposition of the experience-ideologizing frame: the denouncement of the instrumentality of games. Playful organization is indeed not a unilateral 'effect' of extensive online gaming.

Games can be designed or simply applied to stimulate playful organization

Developing a serious game to activate players into playful organization is not an easy task. Design researchers adopting the experience-ideologizing frame will have to work hard to develop a serious game concept that activates at least a majority of players into playful organization. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer concrete design principles or specifications. The results should nevertheless offer a useful starting point for such a design if read by someone comfortable in the experience-ideologizing frame. Moreover, online games can at least serve as inspirational for such serious game design.

The idea of simply applying existing online games within organizations is also worth further thought and experimentation. The previous critique still applies: an online entertainment game is something different from a serious game. Nevertheless, employees could indeed benefit from forming and joining guilds or clans with each other and with total strangers. With the help of a facilitator they should be able to relate their organizational experiences in the online game to their work. This raises several practical questions. Could any online game be used? Which online games can engage the most employees? How would a facilitator have to relate gameplay experiences to work experiences? How long would this intervention take in total? Several of these practical questions have been asked by educators applying 'commercial off-the-shelf' games within formal education. Charsky & Mims argued that applying entertainment games in a formal learning environment requires several gameplay facilitation skills as well as the skill to let players reflect critically on the validity of their gameplay experiences (2008). Further research can provide more practical suggestions for and critical evaluations of this approach.

Critiques of the results

It is probably a bit disappointing for someone adopting the experience-ideologizing frame to find no clear design principles or criteria for serious games activating playful organization. Indeed, it remains unclear how an organization can (best) start to value play and become a playful organization, both in general and more specifically through a serious game. As design scientists, those adopting the experience-ideologizing frame are more interested in developing and applying a serious game aimed at initiating a playful organization. They could also be interested in 'gamifying' an organization, i.e., applying gaming/play principles directly in the organization's structure in an effort to render it more playful. Such researchers might find that this research should have focused much more on how the playful organization could be triggered, either through serious games, gamification or other playful interventions.

Those adopting the experience-*instrumentalizing* frame might agree with the above critique, even though it is slightly different from their own critique. Researchers adopting the experience-instrumentalizing frame might agree with the earlier discussed rebuttal that an entertainment game is different from a serious game. Still, they might also pose the subsequent question: Why not consider doing design scientific research with a serious game aimed specifically at stimulating playful organization?

It will prove interesting to attempt to induce playful organization using a serious game and gamification. Through such design-scientific research the presented conclusions can be

taken a step forward. The research would not only be useful for understanding how a playful organization can be initiated; it would also be useful for the further conceptualization of and analytical work into the playful organization. The success or failure of a serious game or gamification aimed at triggering playful organization further informs the characteristics and contexts of a playful organization. It is important to realize, however, the importance of the conceptual and empirical work presented in this thesis to enable such research in the first place. Thanks to the work presented in this thesis, there is now a good basis for more design-scientific research.

A serious game and gamification could be applied simultaneously within an organization in an attempt to render it more playful. A serious game could be developed for a specific organization, in which the organization is represented in a familiar yet more playful manner. Interestingly, the Dutch tax authorities seem to have attempted this somewhat with the game *Code 4* (Demovides serious gaming, 2012). Judging from the brief description, in this interesting project a serious game was developed and applied in an effort to render the authorities' organizational culture apparently more playful. In such a serious game a player-employee is able to recognize his/her own organization yet is activated into a more playful personal attitude and social structure. The game incentivizes the player-employee to explore different ways in which the organization could become more playful. It also incentivizes the player-employee to actually experiment with some of these ways as he/she sees fit, by making such experimentation an integral part of the gameplay. Thus the game also initiates the actual application of certain playful characteristics. It renders the player-employee also a researcher or experimenter. By letting all employees play this type of serious game, one avoids the pitfall of purely top-down initiation of organizational change. Ideally, the serious game leads to fundamental organizational change in favor of playful organization.

An important question that design researchers need to ask in this case is how successful such interventions would be. The success of playful interventions might in fact be limited. A culturalist perspective dictates that culture cannot be manipulated by leaders and managers at their own will (Alvesson, 2002). The suggested design-scientific research might thus lead to disappointing results. It might be difficult if not impossible to render an organization playful through specific interventions, for example if many employees continue to value certainty and controllability over contingency and agility. If interventions are to lead to playful organization, they should at least be directed towards most if not all employees.

8.4.3 A DISCUSSION FROM THE PHENOMENON-INSTRUMENTALIZING FRAME

The phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame shares the instrumental approach to research of the experience-instrumentalizing frame, but perceives gaming as a socio-cultural phenomenon. The frame has a strong focus on the social structures and systems of the gaming industry. From this perspective organizational research should lead to knowledge about how organizations can be improved structurally.

Within this frame a 'playful organization' denotes a model of a play-based organizational structure that can be observed and implemented. The researcher is interested in defining specific social structures and systems common in playful contexts where continuous innovation

is important, i.e., the gaming, cultural, creative and new economy industries. Examples of play-based organizational structure were provided in Chapter 1 and included specific human resource strategies, industry policies and the use of games at the workplace. The researcher is subsequently interested in the model's effectiveness. He/she expects a play-based organizational structure to be quite effective in terms of performance. For example, it should increase employee engagement and stimulate innovation.

Consequences of the results

Many possibilities for playful intervention uncovered

For those adopting this frame this thesis offers several examples of playful social structures and systems that online gaming communities and work organizations adopt. Tables 2.1, 3.2, 5.2, 6.5 and 7.6 list these examples. Some examples are simpler than others, and some are more prevalent than others. Nevertheless, they are inspirational for leaders and managers attracted to the phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame.

The study of *EVE Online* provided some interesting examples of playful organizational structure. The *Major* corporation had defined a lot of tasks that anyone could pick up at any time. This allowed members to freely choose and develop labor. It also allowed them to assert leadership, specifically when other members were needed to finish a task. The corporation had defined two intertwined hierarchies, one of power and one of social recognition (specifically, expertise and trust). Together they formed a meritocratic system. The more competence and effort a member showed, the higher he/she would climb up the expertise and trust ladder. The more specialist, sensitive and interesting labor would also become available. *Major* used several ICTs for both socialization and collaboration purposes. Socialization occurred through many informal, humorous and personal conversations. For many members the conversations in the chat channels and forums strengthened the bonds between them. All this made *Major* a convivial corporation.

The results from the panel study provided more examples of playful organizational structure among online gaming communities. The examples of *EVE Online* were actually also offered by many of the panelists. Many communities used additional ICTs, e.g. voice chat channels, a wiki or Twitter. These technologies also allowed convivial atmospheres to emerge. Open access and exit were often quite apparent among online gaming communities, despite the adoption of certain joining criteria (e.g. minimum age). Many of the playfully organized online gaming communities had leaders who coordinated and cultivated members rather than commanding and controlling them. Leaders often took on the task of activity and/or performance assessment. Some took this task quite far, developing spreadsheets that updated automatically or semi-automatically using data from gameplay logs. This information identified the most active and involved members. This helped to create a sense of meritocracy. Leaders could even use this information to identify necessary advancements in social status. They often did not seem to use the data to punish members for lack of activity, or even to point members to a lack of activity. The openness towards member exit and the preferred leadership style prevented this from occurring.

The panel study results provided similar examples of playful organizational structure among the panelists' work organizations. Open access and exit are most evident in project organizations, where people organize themselves around specific projects for relatively short periods of times. Self-employed people often work on a project basis. This is not very different from an online gaming community. In many online games a play session is clearly demarcated by design and therefore a 'project' of sorts around which players organize themselves. The openness towards choosing and developing one's own tasks was also very evident from several playful work organizations, both project-based and otherwise. Similar conceptualizations of leadership were also relevant for playful work organizations. Often panelists explained their ability to assert leadership when needed and found their own leaders to be more collegial than authoritarian. The main difference with online gaming communities concerned the work organization's hierarchy and use of ICTs. Disregarding the self-employed panelists, few found their work organizations to instigate an expertise hierarchy or reward merit with increases in social status. Few to none found the use of ICTs very extensive, mostly due to the limited necessity for them.

Work organizations can thus indeed learn from online gaming communities to implement a playful organizational structure. Implementing ICTs can stimulate the organization's teachability, agility and conviviality. Even if the organization is quite small, these technologies can allow employees to collaboratively develop strategies or norms for the tasks they share. The technologies subsequently allow employees to pick up certain tasks at their own will. They also offer a setting for socialization, which can aid a convivial atmosphere. To foster meritocracy, work organizations can instigate an additional hierarchy of social recognition through e.g. titles or badges, as gamification enthusiasts have already proposed (Zichermann & Linder, 2010). These and other opportunities for gamification are further discussed in the next section.

Playful interventions in work organizations both attract and deter

Online gamers appreciate playful social structures and systems at work. Many panelists found such parallels between their online gaming communities and work organizations to be significant. Since many online gamers are attracted to playful organizations in both the 'virtual' and the 'real' world, they certainly appreciate such playful interventions at work.

However, those adopting the phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame need to realize that playful social structures and systems will not attract everyone. The results do not offer any certainty as to the general success or failure of playful interventions. Some online gamers do not find playfulness a worthwhile or even acceptable trait in their work organizations. They do not value the ability to play at work, nor do they feel their work organization would benefit from increased playfulness.

Critiques of the results

Like researchers adopting the experience-instrumentalizing frame, those adopting the phenomenon-instrumentalizing will want more conclusive results and theories. They will find the presented notion of the playful organization underdeveloped, and the conducted empirical research inconclusive. They might assume that there are many more and more specific playful

social structures and systems than those discussed. They will also want to know more about the effects of a playful organizational structure. A causal empirical research model should have been developed, where an organization's performance would be considered dependent on the playful organizational structure. An experimental research design focusing on understanding the effectiveness of a playful organizational structure would have been preferred. To do this, mediating variables such as the organization's industry would have had to be taken into account. That way one could rigorously research whether and why playful organizations can exist.

This line of research is worth further thought. A playful organization's performance could be operationalized and used in quantitative research to determine when and how a playful organization functions well. The conceptualization of a playful organizational structure could be taken a step further to research its effectiveness. The conceptualization of a playful organizational *culture* could also be used in such a quantitative performance study, thanks to the successful application of the OCAI. Organizational performance could be operationalized in various ways. Several relevant performance indicators could be defined, e.g. role innovation, job satisfaction or organizational commitment (Fields, 2002). The latter was already applied in this thesis through the Shortened Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (see also Chapter 4; Mowday et al., 1982; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979), showing that playful organization often indeed comes with high organizational commitment. Still, as a 'structural-functionalist' (Hassard, 1993, p. 18), those adopting this frame may want to rigorously research the playful organization's ability to foster engagement and innovation.

The line of research nonetheless has its problems. First, most of the research has arguably already been done. Cameron & Quinn (the developers of the OCAI) already found the Clan and Adhocracy to excel in their own domain of effectiveness:

"Institutions that had clan-type cultures were most effective in domains of performance relating to morale, satisfaction, internal communication, and supportiveness, all attributes consistent with clan values. Institutions that had adhocracy-type culture were most effective in domains of performance relating to adaptation, system openness, innovation, and cutting-edge knowledge – all attributes consistent with adhocracy values." (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 156)

Of course, the above conclusion assumes that the context of a playful organization is practically identical to organizations having Clan and Adhocracy cultures. This is questionable. As explained in Chapter 2, the context in which strengths and weaknesses become subject of debate might still be an interesting line of research. Such research would show how a playful organization develops over time.

Another cautionary note is in order. Organizational studies have long shown that multitudes of organizational structures exist and seem to function, despite structural-functionalist scholars arguing for the effectiveness or even superiority of their organization theories. It is important to realize that one organizational structure is never better on the whole than another. In this day and age it is more relevant for such organization theorists to understand the context of their theories rather than to pursue classical effectiveness studies.

This is perhaps something of a culturalist critique to organizational studies. Many theorists of organizational culture have long argued that considering one organization culturally superior to another is problematic (e.g. Alvesson, 2002; Hofstede et al., 2010), even though some have nonetheless adopted such structural approaches to organizational culture (including Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Overall, the phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame is one I am not eager to step into wholeheartedly.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.5.1 DEFINING TARGET AUDIENCES

I end this thesis by defining recommendations, all aimed at continuing the scientific study and practical (though critical) application of playful organization. The observed emergence of playful organizations alone renders it important to formulate such recommendations. Moreover, this thesis itself could very much contribute to the further emergence of playful organizations, making further recommendations even more important.

Still, these recommendations cannot be defined out of thin air. They have and *should* have a context. A context can first be created by formulating a target audience. Arguably, there are three most apparent target audiences for this thesis: gamers, leaders (of organizations) and researchers. In the following sections I chose to focus my recommendations on these three target audiences. Of course readers might at times be both gamers and leaders or leaders and researchers simultaneously. They might even be all three. The recommendations that follow take this into account by not being mutually exclusive. Instead they are all complementary to each other.

Stating that the recommendations are focused on gamers, leaders and researchers is nevertheless not sufficient. It is important to consider the mindset of these target audiences in more detail. In other words, it is important to estimate what these target audiences tend to think. Only then can clearer recommendations be formulated. The earlier discussed frames for understanding the impact of gaming on organizations could of course again be used. However, these target audiences think more broadly than simply about how gaming can impact organizations, especially after reading this thesis. Ultimately, the thesis is after all as much about organization in general as it is about gaming's impact on it.

Following these considerations, 10 recommendations were formulated for gamers, leaders and researchers with diverse perspective on organization, playful or otherwise. This section discusses the recommendations per target audience. For gamers the recommendations stress the importance of understanding gaming as an activity filled with potentially relevant organizational experiences. As such, the recommendations challenge gamers to break through the self-created barrier of separating play from work contexts. For leaders the recommendations stress the possibilities they have to stimulate playfulness in their organizations. Finally, for researchers the recommendations stress the questions that remain unanswered. The recommendations for leaders and researchers are to a large extent intertwined. They stress the importance of leaders working together with researchers.

8.5.2 FOR THE GAMERS

Gamers can be very skeptical when they think about the organization involved in gaming, as this research has shown. Granted, many gamers proved to be intrigued about and open towards the idea of gaining relevant organizational experience in online games. Some gamers, however, are very skeptical towards interpreting any of the social interactions in online games as organization. Behind such skepticism is a narrow perspective on organization itself, often only attributing it to what has been referred to as 'real-life' work organizations. Also behind such skepticism is a strict separation of play and non-play, as explained in Chapter 7. The following three recommendations are mostly aimed at these particularly skeptical gamers.

1. Exploit the potential of organizational gameplay; ignore its fictional setting

Once a game becomes multiplayer, organization quickly becomes a relevant concept for describing gameplay. Serious game designers have much experience with this, as those adopting the experience-instrumentalizing frame can attest. Online gaming also offers some kind of organizational experience, whether implicit, explicit, good or bad. Online gaming more and more resembles work as a result of organizations' increased use of ICTs to enable global collaboration and communication. The strict separation between organization while playing and organization while working hardly seems fair. Gamers would do well to be open towards the instructive organizational experiences that can ensue from gameplay, even if it were designed to primarily be entertaining. As some already argued years ago, the organizational experience obtained from active participation in online gaming communities can be valuable enough for inclusion on one's résumé (Brown & Thomas, 2006; Sorden, 2008).

Gamers should subsequently be open to the transferability of organizational forms in online games to work organizations. The results show that when a gamer spends many hours each week playing within an online gaming community with dozens of culturally diverse members, he/she is likely to find the community relevant for work organizations. Whether or not the online gaming community is playfully organized is secondary. Regardless of playfulness, the relationship and transferability of the community's culture and structure to work organizations becomes evident. Realizing this can help an online gamer to develop a preference for organization and to find or create a work organization that best fits this preference.

2. Organization is an elusive experience; work towards learning objectives

There are lots of different forms of organization identifiable in any game and at any workplace. Once a gamer acknowledges online gaming's organizational relevance, the question of *what* organization would be instructive or transferable to a work organization emerges. In this thesis three main perspectives on organization have been applied: socio-cultural, management-sociological and socio-technical. Using these perspectives, playful organization was presented as a scale variable on which an organization can be positioned. Gamers need to specify their organizational experiences in games (both serious and entertainment) using these perspectives and the playful organization ideal-type specifically. That way they can understand what form of organization they are actually experiencing and learning. Of course there are equally different

forms of work organization. The three perspectives on organization and the playful organization ideal-type also allow gamers to specify their work organizations.

Once gamers have specified both their organizational experiences in games and at work, the learning potential of one for the other also becomes more specific. The relevance of the organizational experiences in a game become clearer. It is up to the gamers to decide on the merits of playful organization, whether for an online gaming community or a work organization. It is also up to the gamers to decide on the merits of serious games that promote specific forms of organization, whether playful or not. The results nonetheless show that the most active gamers can start to value highly playful organizations over time.

3. Start tomorrow: apply gaming's organizational experiences at work

The relevance of organizational experience in games assumes that gamers can actually *act* on their experience at work. This might prove difficult. Yet as an employee, an online gamer could have at least some influence on the organization's structure. If society is truly in an age of play, communicating about organizational gameplay experience should not be awkward. Actually implementing new forms of collaboration or communication at work as an employee could be thwarted by management. Nevertheless, implementing new ICTs readily available on the Internet is often quite easy. Meritocratic systems can also be implemented relatively easily with or without such technologies. Such interventions do not have to oppose the existing structure management has set up.

Still, a gamer's influence is bigger if he/she is also a leader or manager in the work organization. For leaders or managers more recommendations are offered in the next section. Whether they are leaders or not, gamers might want to study these recommendations as well to be further inspired. Involving leaders and managers will help make the move towards a playful organization more substantive.

8.5.3 FOR THE LEADERS

My studies of and personal experiences with organizational leaders has taught me that leaders can react to the notion of playful organization in the 'virtual' and the 'real' world in three main ways. First, they can be totally unsupportive. Such leaders might have a technocratic personality (i.e., they value the pursuit of 'the' technique for a certain job or organizational process), or they might value a highly structured or bureaucratic organization within their particular industry (e.g. in the oil and gas industry, where safety is a prime concern). The second reaction is much more neutral. These leaders expect that the validity and applicability of the playful organization depends solely on its context. They at least try to put themselves in a position in which a playful organization would make a lot of sense. Finally, leaders can quite simply be very supportive. Such leaders tend to fully agree with the playful values put forward in Chapter 2. Perhaps they also have the same perspective on organization theory's evolution towards playfulness, as suggested in Chapters 1 and 2. They might even be quite nostalgic, thinking that their organizations – or organizations in general – have somehow lost a lot of playfulness over the past years or decades. The following recommendations are primarily aimed at these supportive leaders looking for ways to introduce playfulness in their organization, though often perhaps a bit naively.

4. Beware of the playful organization's potential; avoid unforeseen effects

The results have put online games on the map of organization leaders and managers. Leaders and managers can learn a lot from studying online gaming communities, especially if they find the idea of creating a playful organization appealing. The differences between online gaming communities make it unclear what exactly would be learned. A variety of organizations emerge in online games whose guiding principles can be insightful, regardless of what they are specifically.

To determine what exactly might be learned from an online gaming community, it is important for a leader or manager to first choose a definition of a playful organization. The four frames presented in this thesis provided four such definitions (see Chapter 1). The experience- and phenomenon-instrumentalizing definitions were similar. They both value the usefulness of gaming, whether it is a designed experience or a socio-cultural phenomenon. The experience- and phenomenon-idealizing frames focus on the norms and values gaming introduces, regardless of whether gaming is a designed experience or socio-cultural phenomenon. A different definition of a playful organization ensues. The playful organization looks more like the ideal-type presented in Chapter 2 in the latter than in the former two frames. If a leader or manager forgoes modernist tendencies towards command and control, he/she will find the latter definitions of a playful organization more appealing.

Online gaming communities actually fit all presented perspectives on playful organization. The research has revealed the organizational diversity of online gaming communities. A leader or manager can thus always learn from an online gaming community, regardless of his/her playful organization perspective. If a highly playful organization is valued, most online gaming communities will offer many lessons in relevant organizational culture and social structures and systems. Otherwise online gaming communities will still be insightful, but to a much lesser extent.

Regardless of the chosen perspective, it is important to realize its risks. A least playful organization is well-defined. The role of the manager or leader is extensive and powerful. This limits an organization's level of creativity, spontaneity and enjoyment. When markets change and innovation becomes important, the more playfully organized competitor will have an advantage. On the other hand, the most playful organization is less defined. The role of the manager or leader is less extensive and more equal to the roles of other employees. This increases the organization's level of creativity, spontaneity and enjoyment, but introduces risks, including financial and legal risks. The uncertainty this brings can be difficult for a manager or leader to deal with.

The risks increase when considering the possibility that not every employee appreciates the chosen playful organization perspective. Not everyone values the chosen perspective on playful organization, no matter what it is. Not all gamers find the playful organization ideal-type in any way applicable to their organizational experiences in games. Moreover, not all gamers are at all interested in playful work organizations. Gamers who would appreciate a highly playful organization in accordance to the phenomenon-idealizing frame might not appreciate or

accept it at work if a serious game or other playful intervention would be designed to initiate it from the experience- or phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame. Such playful interventions are instead viewed as mere management fads or quick wins with little merit.

Leaders and managers should therefore first research and conceptualize their own organization's culture. That way they can consider whether their perspective on a playful organization fits that of employees more generally. The success of the playful interventions the leader plans will depend on it. Valued colleagues can also indicate whether there is a need for increased playfulness and whether the proposed interventions might fulfill that need. The OCAI has proven to be a useful instrument for gaining insight into current and preferred organizational culture, both generally and in terms of playfulness. With the OCAI data (and that of other research efforts), leaders and managers can determine the likelihood of success for the playful organization they wish to instigate. In any case, it is still important to acknowledge risks and remain willing to experiment. Trial and error is the hallmark of play, and hence of playful management and leadership.

5. Start tomorrow: try some playful interventions on your own

There are many experiments leaders or managers can do on their own. This thesis has offered many general and specific examples of playful social structures and systems that can inspire a leader. These examples were listed in Tables 2.1, 3.2, 5.2, 6.5 and 7.6. There are simply too many ideas to extensively discuss in this final recommendations section. By accepting some assumptions, specific recommendations are nonetheless possible.

For these recommendations a leader is envisioned who is part of a quite bureaucratic professional organization, e.g. a governmental organization. Job descriptions are well-defined and highly specialized. Many communication and collaboration procedures have been defined. They are also monitored to ascertain compliance and efficiency. Administration is deemed of high importance. A standard pyramid hierarchy distributes power from top to bottom. Leaders and managers use data gathered through administration to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. The leader in question has a high position in the hierarchy and is able to make strategic decisions for the organization. The leader would also like his/her organization to become much more playful. Alas, the leader has been awarded only limited resources, both in terms of money and time. Perhaps his/her colleagues do not share the enthusiasm for playful organization. The leader needs to prove the value of playful organization with the least amount of effort.

To advise this leader, the playful organizational culture of Chapter 2 is used as an analytical framework. Some of the easiest implementable examples that came up during the research are repeated here:

- *Stimulate contingency: cancel instrumental goals*
The leaders of the organization in question have set clear goals for the organization, as well as the strategy to attain it. A first simple step towards playful organization would be to let these goals go. The leader could at least let go of the formulated strategy to reach said goals, without canceling the goals themselves. The leader would do good to subsequently develop

more 'epic goals' (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 55-57), i.e., inspiring visions for the future. These visions could include some or all of the values of a playful organization itself, e.g. agility, equality, teachability and conviviality.

- *Stimulate agility: make job descriptions generic*
A second simple step would be to 'unspecialize' job descriptions. The leader would restore faith in the capabilities of employees to fulfill existing tasks. He/she would also allow employees to develop new tasks altogether. The step fits with the 'culture of professionalism' that organization theorists attribute to classic professional organizations like the 'professional bureaucracy' (Mintzberg, 1979, 1983). Leaders would do good to actively promote such professionalism, as the playful values of agility and equality already suggest.
- *Stimulate equality: democratize decisionmaking*
There are several examples of involving employees in decisionmaking – strategic or otherwise – in both online gaming communities and work organizations. The 'easiest' way is to simply invite employees to management meetings in which such decisions are made, and actively involve them in the decisionmaking process. The question remains as to how a large group of people can be actively involved during such meetings. Technology can aid the involvement of larger groups of people. Online gaming communities showed that discussion forums, perhaps in combination with polls, allow members to get involved in decisionmaking if they desire. Similar technologies could of course be used at a work organization.
- *Stimulate teachability: institutionalize education*
Education is important in a bureaucratic organization like the one in question. It mostly involves training, i.e., ensuring employees perform their pre-defined tasks efficiently and effectively. In a playful organization, however, the education is geared more towards skill and personal development. Moreover, employees will choose their own education as they see fit. The organization's educational programs will need to be extended and diversified.
- *Stimulate meritocracy: instigate a second social recognition hierarchy*
To make employees feel valued, the leader should develop and implement a meritocratic system. Badges, titles and point systems are examples of meritocratic systems, though they should conform to five specific criteria to ensure they surpass the limitations of past gamification experiments:
 - The system should encompass regular and frequent positive feedback, e.g. every week on the same day. This contributes to the system's meaningfulness.
 - The system should communicate said feedback among all employees. This further contributes to the system's meaningfulness.
 - The system should function separately from the organizational structure. The positive feedback should concern the employees' actions in general rather than the

roles and tasks that leaders require them to do. The system should also not take the organization's power hierarchy into account. It should apply equally to all levels.

- The system should also not affect the organizational structure, at least not directly. This means, for example, that the positive feedback should not concern a promotion or some other step up the power hierarchy. It should only increase social recognition. In time increases in social recognition might still lead to a promotion.
- The system should not explicitly state any specific reward as part of the positive feedback. Rewards should nevertheless still be given to stimulate the system's social effects. These last three criteria ensure that the system does not extrinsically motivate.

- *Stimulate conviviality: informalize the workplace*

The organization in question is a very formal one, expressed through its interior decorating or employee attire, for example. The leader could easily 'informalize' the workplace by redecorating the workplace or dropping any explicit or implicit dress code.

The examples above are only a starting point. Leaders and managers cannot instigate a playful organization on their own. They can stimulate it through interventions such as the above, but the employees will together have to accept such interventions, and understand and appreciate the concept of a playful organization itself. A playful organization can only emerge if all employees value their own and each other's ability to play.

6. Team up with game and play designers; they are the new rainmakers

This does not mean that a leader or manager has limited to no power to stimulate a playful organization. The discussed examples of playful interventions can be complemented by more playful interventions with potentially more impact, i.e., games and gamification.

An example of a playful intervention with high impact is, quite simply, a game. Leaders could have games developed and/or applied in their organizations aimed at stimulating playful organization. As argued in the discussions from the experience-instrumentalizing and -ideologizing frames, these games could be newly developed as serious games, or they could in fact be well-facilitated existing online games. In any case, leaders could work together with game and play designers to apply games in their organization. Ideally these games would be played widely, e.g. from employees' own workplaces at any time.

A playful intervention with potentially even higher impact would be gamification, i.e., the implementation of principles of gaming and play directly in the work of employees. Section 8.3.1 already argued that gamification should be understood more broadly than it has been so far. Game and play designers can help leaders implement gamification in their organizations. Gamification would encompass playful interventions similar to those already discussed (recommendation five). The biggest difference is that the organization would take part in the 'language-game' (Wittgenstein, 1953) of gaming much more explicitly. In other words, the language involved in these playful interventions would be that of gaming. The organization would effectively become a game. Typical gaming phrases could be regularly used at work, resulting from gamification. Consider the following phrase examples:

- “Game over. Let’s try again!” – used e.g. when a business deal fails
- “Congratulations, you’ve unlocked a new achievement!” – used e.g. in the meritocratic system
- “What’s the score?” – used e.g. to assess a person’s or project’s social status
- “What role did you choose this time?” – used e.g. at the beginning of another project
- “Let me check the walkthrough.” – used e.g. to read through previous good practices
- “We’re at level eight now.” – used e.g. to indicate a project’s complexity or difficulty

Whether developing and applying games or gamification, leaders need to realize that this is a design-scientific endeavor. The impact of such interventions are to a large extent still unknown, especially when it comes to the instigation of playful organization. Designers and researchers have a major part to play if these types of experiments are to be pursued, as discussed in the next recommendations.

8.5.4 FOR THE RESEARCHERS

The experience of doing and presenting this research among other researchers has made me realize just how diverse researchers are. Within the context of this thesis two main types of researchers can already be identified, i.e., researchers of organization and of gaming. It is important to realize that these two types refer only to the object of study. When focusing on the method of study, there are of course many more types of researchers to consider (again within the context of this research), e.g. the social scientist or the humanities scholar. The following recommendations are based on the realization that there is diversity among researchers reading this thesis, both in terms of their methods and their object of study. In any case, the recommendations stress the importance and opportunities of *combining* different objects and different methods of study. Thus they are aimed at researchers who are interested in new opportunities for interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research.

7. Take a leap forward in interdisciplinarity: entertainment game and organizational studies unite

This thesis is indeed the result of interdisciplinary research. The two disciplines of game studies and organizational studies have been bound together throughout this thesis. In some sections the two disciplines were each easily discernible. Chapter 3 reviewed game studies and organizational studies separately and consecutively. In other sections the two were inextricable. Chapter 5 essentially offered results of an organizational game study, for example.

This combination and intertwining of the two disciplines is worth further effort in the future. The two disciplines can learn a lot from each other, and in combination even more. This thesis has shown that the organizational studies community can learn from organization in online games. The thesis has also shown that the game studies community can offer a new organization theory.

The game studies community needs to pursue organizational perspectives on games. Many will have no problem with this, judging from the interdisciplinary understanding they have of their discipline already (e.g. Copier, 2003). Others might find this daunting or problematic (e.g. Aarseth, 2001). The ‘ludology-narratology debate’ (Frasca, 2003a) of long ago

is actually a testament of this. Although the specifics of this 'debate' are not worth recalling, it is important to realize that the debate concerned game studies as a discipline. The debate essentially was about whether or not game studies was a discipline in itself. Judging from this debate, ludologists might find the interdisciplinary research I propose problematic. Then again, much has happened since the ludology-narratology debate.

A lot has happened within the organizational studies community as well. Traditionally, those concerned with this discipline have focused their research on the most apparent organizations, e.g. business and government. When games were involved, organizational studies mostly fit the experience-instrumentalizing frame. The tremendous growth of the gaming industry introduced the phenomenon-instrumentalizing research frame. The emergence of the Internet led organizational studies to also focus on the less tangible organizations we refer to as online communities, e.g. open source software communities (Von Krogh & Von Hippel, 2006). Online *gaming* communities have as yet hardly been included. This thesis is meant to convince the skeptics of the value of researching online gaming communities.

8. Recalcitrant organization in online games and beyond: validation is urgent

The question remains as to what interdisciplinary game-organizational studies could offer more specifically. Several theoretical, methodological and empirical research possibilities are discussed in these last three recommendations. The discussion has been limited to the topic of playful organization, as this is after all the focal point of this thesis.

The offered concepts and ideas pertaining to the playful organization could first of all be treated as urgent hypotheses for further research. The thesis is the result of exploratory research that involved the first conceptualization of the playful organization. The subsequent empirical studies were the first of their kind and led to provocative results. Further research should be conducted to scrutinize these results. To aid such research endeavors, the main results can be reformulated into the following testable hypotheses:

- Most online gaming communities are highly playfully organized. Or in other words, a majority of online gaming communities closely match the playful organization ideal-type.
- Predictors of online gaming communities' playful organization are the community's rationale and time in existence, as well as the respondents' age and organizational commitment.
- Most work organizations are not highly playful. In other words, a minority of work organizations closely fit the playful organization ideal-type.
- Predictors of work organizations' playfulness are the organization's time in existence and the respondents' organizational commitment and weekly gameplay time.
- Most gamers find a comparison between their online gaming communities and work organizations to be significant. More specifically, most gamers prefer highly playful work organizations and online gaming communities.
- Significant predictors of comparing online gaming communities to work organizations are organizational commitment to the community, the community's diversity in national culture, weekly gameplay time and weekly working time.

9. Playful organizations are intricate, so how can they be further defined and triggered?

The exploratory research could also be continued. More structural concepts of a playful organization could be defined from a management-sociological perspective. This has been a fiercely pursued perspective on organizations for decades. One popular theme that fits a management-sociological perspective is strategic decisionmaking within one specific organization or within a network of organizations (De Bruijn, Ten Heuvelhof & In 't Veld, 2010; Etzioni, 1989; March, 1994). Some of the playful organization concepts presented in Chapter 2 (i.e., distributed leadership, expertise hierarchy) suggest how decisions would be made in such organizations if they were to be considered playful, but much more work could be done. Arguably, some researchers' pleas for process-focused rather than project-focused management in large engineering projects (De Bruijn et al., 2010) is effectively a plea for more playful organization. The benefit of having defined what a playful organizational *culture* encompasses, is that it offers an analytical framework for all other organizational perspectives. Many other structural concepts for a playful organization can be defined thanks to the conceptualization of a playful organizational culture.

Contingency theorists (Hassard, 1993, p. 43; Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p. 238) will be much more interested in conceptualizing the context in which playful organizations can emerge. Several contextual factors deserve further research, most notably the influence of cultural regions and online games on playful organization. It is arguable that highly playful organizations mostly emerge in specific national cultures. The *Major* corporation consisted mostly of Northwest Europeans and a handful from the USA. The panel research also revealed that Dutch online gamers are often involved in communities that encompass other Dutch and European gamers (see Appendix C). Moreover, they all worked in the Netherlands. Hofstede's theories suggest that national cultures that score low on his "uncertainty avoidance" and "power distance" indices are most conducive to playful organization (Hofstede et al., 2010). If that is the case, then playful organizations are arguably much more common in Northwest Europe than elsewhere. Another possible contextual factor is the online game(s) the community plays. Although several panelists were involved in communities playing *World of Warcraft* or *Call of Duty* (any versions), the impact of these highly differing games was insignificant. A more general difference between communities playing only MMO games, multiplayer games or both was also statistically insignificant. Nevertheless, these results are certainly not definite, since hundreds if not thousands of highly differently designed online games exist. Following his history of virtual world development, Bartle suggests that developers not overly limit players' organization strategies (Bartle, 2004, p. 230). Yet online games are continually being published, and the future development of playfully organized communities in them is not at all certain. Exploratory research can focus on whether fictional world design or game development region influence online gaming communities' organization.

Finally, design scientists will be much more interested in developing and evaluating playful interventions, most notably serious games and gamifications. As explained in Section 8.4, researchers in both the experience-instrumentalizing and -ideologizing frames have an opportunity to research whether extensive serious gaming leads to playful organization. The

former type of researcher can define the playful organization and design a serious game differently from the latter. Regardless of their differences, both share a common interest and can therefore learn from each other. Design scientists could also be interested in design research from the phenomenon-instrumentalizing and -ideologizing frames. They have an opportunity to research the effects of gamification and playful interventions in social structures and systems more generally.

10. Playful organization is a research strategy, not just an object of study

A final remaining question is *how* the aforementioned topics could be researched. My own research strategy's limitations can serve as inspiration. As explained in Chapter 4, both the more qualitative first phase and the more quantitative second phase of my sequential exploratory strategy had its drawbacks. Ethnographic researchers may find the *EVE Online* study quite limited in terms of time and scope of observation. Quantitative researchers may find the panel study quite limited in terms of time as well as number of panelists. Researchers can improve on and apply similar strategies to further research the playful organization. Adopting a playful perspective, researchers also need to be open to trying out completely new research strategies. The researcher needs to be willing to develop a new strategy without exactly knowing its probability of success.

New strategies can be developed among others by considering new observational techniques for both qualitative and quantitative research. One promising data gathering technique for mostly quantitative research is game data mining, i.e., obtaining automatically logged player behavioral data (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a), even with the help of a specific game developer (D. Williams et al., 2008) or by publishing one's own game (Szell & Thurner, 2010). As organizations virtualize, similar data mining opportunities will emerge within work organizations as well. It should be noted that data mining comes with obvious privacy issues, regardless of the context in which it is performed. This issue requires further exploration and policy-making either by the research community itself or from scientific and gaming sector organizations. Moreover, it is a challenge to operationalize playful organization in the form of behavioral data. While the OCAI was a useful operationalization based on self-assessment, one based on actual behavior has yet to be developed. The playful organization ideal-type conceptualized in Chapter 2 offers a useful starting point.

New strategies also include specific design scientific strategies. Design scientists seem to have developed ample methodologies for their disciplines (e.g. Hevner & Chatterjee, 2010). They can be readily used for developing and evaluating serious games, gamifications and other playful interventions in organizations. I look forward to seeing the results.

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APPENDIX A

THE OCAI STATEMENTS USED IN THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Variable	Original formulation used in questionnaire #2 of the panel research (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 26-28)	Adjusted formulation used in the ethnographic research and questionnaire #1 of the panel research
Dominant characteristics <i>Clan</i>	The organization is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves.	The [corporation gaming community] is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves.
<i>Adhocracy</i>	The organization is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks.	The [corporation gaming community] is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks.
<i>Market</i>	The organization is very results-oriented. A major concern is with getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement-oriented.	The [corporation gaming community] is very results-oriented. A major concern is with getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement-oriented.
<i>Hierarchy</i>	The organization is a very controlled and structured place. Formal procedures generally govern what people do.	The [corporation gaming community] is a very controlled and structured place. Formal procedures generally govern what people do.
Organizational leadership <i>Clan</i>	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify mentoring, facilitating, or nurturing.	The leadership in the [corporation gaming community] is generally considered to exemplify mentoring, facilitating, or nurturing.
<i>Adhocracy</i>	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify entrepreneurship, innovation, or risk taking.	The leadership in the [corporation gaming community] is generally considered to exemplify entrepreneurship, innovation, or risk taking.
<i>Market</i>	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-oriented focus.	The leadership in the [corporation gaming community] is generally considered to exemplify a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-oriented focus.
<i>Hierarchy</i>	The leadership in the organization is generally considered to exemplify coordinating, organizing, or smooth-running efficiency.	The leadership in the [corporation gaming community] is generally considered to exemplify coordinating, organizing, or smooth-running efficiency.

Variable	Original formulation used in questionnaire #2 of the panel research (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 26-28)	Adjusted formulation used in the ethnographic research and questionnaire #1 of the panel research
Management of employees <i>Clan</i>	The management style in the organization is characterized by teamwork, consensus, and participation.	The management style in the [corporation gaming community] is characterized by teamwork, consensus, and participation.
<i>Adhocracy</i>	The management style in the organization is characterized by individual risk taking, innovation, freedom, and uniqueness.	The management style in the [corporation gaming community] is characterized by individual risk taking, innovation, freedom, and uniqueness.
<i>Market</i>	The management style in the organization is characterized by hard-driving competitiveness, high demands, and achievement.	The management style in the [corporation gaming community] is characterized by hard-driving competitiveness, high demands, and achievement.
<i>Hierarchy</i>	The management style in the organization is characterized by security of employment, conformity, predictability, and stability in relationships.	The management style in the [corporation gaming community] is characterized by security of tasks, conformity, predictability, and stability in relationships.
Organization glue <i>Clan</i>	The glue that holds the organization together is loyalty and mutual trust. Commitment to this organization runs high.	The glue that holds the [corporation gaming community] together is loyalty and mutual trust. Commitment to this [corporation gaming community] runs high.
<i>Adhocracy</i>	The glue that holds the organization together is commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being on the cutting edge.	The glue that holds the [corporation gaming community] together is commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being on the cutting edge.
<i>Market</i>	The glue that holds the organization together is the emphasis on achievement and goal accomplishment.	The glue that holds the [corporation gaming community] together is the emphasis on achievement and goal accomplishment.
<i>Hierarchy</i>	The glue that holds the organization together is formal rules and policies. Maintaining a smooth-running organization is important.	The glue that holds the [corporation gaming community] together is formal rules and policies. Maintaining a smooth-running gaming community is important.

Variable	Original formulation used in questionnaire #2 of the panel research (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 26-28)	Adjusted formulation used in the ethnographic research and questionnaire #1 of the panel research
Strategic emphases <i>Clan</i>	The organization emphasizes human development. High trust, openness, and participation persist.	The [corporation gaming community] emphasizes human development. High trust, openness, and participation persist.
<i>Adhocracy</i>	The organization emphasizes acquiring new resources and creating new challenges. Trying new things and prospecting for opportunities are valued.	The [corporation gaming community] emphasizes acquiring new resources and creating new challenges. Trying new things and prospecting for opportunities are valued.
<i>Market</i>	The organization emphasizes competitive actions and achievement. Hitting stretch targets and winning in the marketplace are dominant.	The [corporation gaming community] emphasizes competitive actions and achievement. Hitting stretch targets and winning in the game world are dominant.
<i>Hierarchy</i>	The organization emphasizes permanence and stability. Efficiency, control, and smooth operations are important.	The [corporation gaming community] emphasizes permanence and stability. Efficiency, control, and smooth operations are important.
Criteria of success <i>Clan</i>	The organization defines success on the basis of the development of human resources, teamwork, employee commitment, and concern for people.	The [corporation gaming community] defines success on the basis of the development of human resources, teamwork, player commitment, and concern for each player.
<i>Adhocracy</i>	The organization defines success on the basis of having the most unique or newest products or services. It is a product or service leader and innovator.	The [corporation gaming community] defines success on the basis of having the most unique or newest gameplay strategy. It is a leader and innovator in gameplay strategies.
<i>Market</i>	The organization defines success on the basis of winning in the marketplace and outpacing the competition. Competitive market leadership is key.	The [corporation gaming community] defines success on the basis of winning in the game world, and outpacing the competition. Competitive leadership in the game is key.
<i>Hierarchy</i>	The organization defines success on the basis of efficiency. Dependable delivery, smooth scheduling, and low-cost performance are critical.	The [corporation gaming community] defines success on the basis of efficiency. Dependability, smooth scheduling, and low-cost performance are critical.

APPENDIX B

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE PREDICTORS USED IN THE PANEL RESEARCH

This appendix lists how all the predictor variables used in the panel study were operationalized in the study's two questionnaires. The predictor variables are discussed in Chapter 4. Figure 4.3 visualizes all the predictors together with the outcome variables. The outcome variables are the four organizational cultures underlying the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument, as discussed in Chapter 4 as well. Appendix A shows how the OCAI operationalizes the four organizational cultures. It also shows how the cultures were operationalized in the two questionnaires of the panel study. The following lists the predictor variables' operationalizations. For some operationalizations existing instruments were chosen. The references to the instrument's original/main publications are included. When no reference is listed the questions, statements and answer forms were self-developed. The first five interviewed panelists also functioned as questionnaire testers. The questions, statements and answer forms were all in Dutch, since the entire panel study concerned Dutch online gamers. For this thesis all the below questions, statements and answer forms were translated into English. The translation follows the original Dutch meaning as closely as possible.

BACKGROUND VARIABLES

Gender

Question: What is your gender?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- Male
- Female

Age

Question: What is your age?

Answer: [open, numerical, max. 3 digits]

Place of residence

Question: What is the postcode of your home address?

Answer: [open, four number and two characters]

INDIVIDUAL PREDICTORS PERTAINING TO THE ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY

Total gameplay time

Question: For how many months have you been playing multiplayer or massively multiplayer online games or virtual worlds in total, so far?

Answer: [open, numerical, max. 3 digits]

Weekly gameplay time

Question: How many hours per week do you play multiplayer or massively multiplayer online games or virtual worlds on average?

Answer: [open, numerical, max. 3 digits]

Organizational commitment

Derived from Fields, 2002; Mowday et al., 1979.

Question: Listed below is a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about their gaming community. Please indicate to what extent the statements describe your own feelings about your current or last gaming community you are/were a member of. Indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the seven alternatives below each statement.

Statements:

- I am/was willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this gaming community be successful.
- I talk/talked up this gaming community to my friends as a great community to be a member of.
- I would accept or would have accepted almost any role or task in order to remain a member of this gaming community.
- I find/found that my values and the gaming community's values are very similar.
- I am/was proud to tell others that I am part of this gaming community.
- This gaming community really inspires/inspired the very best in me in the way of role/task performance.
- I am/was extremely glad that I chose this gaming community over others I was considering at the time I joined.
- I really care/cared about the fate of this gaming community.
- For me, this is the best of all possible gaming communities to be a member of.

Answer: [a 7-point Likert scale]

1. Strongly disagree
2. Moderately disagree
3. Slightly disagree
4. Neither disagree nor agree
5. Slightly agree
6. Moderately agree

7. Strongly agree

Role type

Question: How would you classify your role or function within your gaming community?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- I am/was a potential/intended member or recruit.
- I am/was a member, but do/did not concern myself with the community's goals and structure.
- I am/was a member and concern/concerned myself with the community's goals and structure.
- I am/was a community leader or manager.

INDIVIDUAL PREDICTORS PERTAINING TO THE WORK ORGANIZATION

Total working time

Question: How many months have you been working in this and in previous assignments, both at your current and at other organizations (if applicable)?

Answer: [open, numerical, max. 3 digits]

Weekly working time

Question: How many hours per week do you work for your organization, on average?

Answer: [open, numerical, max. 3 digits]

Organizational commitment

Derived from Fields, 2002; Mowday et al., 1979.

Question: Listed below is a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about their organization. Please indicate to what extent the statements describe your own feelings about the organization for which you are now working. Indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the seven alternatives below each statement.

Statements:

- I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.
- I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to be a member of.
- I would accept almost any job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.
- I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.
- I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.
- This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.

- I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.
- I really care about the fate of this organization.
- For me, this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.

Answer: [a 7-point Likert scale]

1. Strongly disagree
2. Moderately disagree
3. Slightly disagree
4. Neither disagree nor agree
5. Slightly agree
6. Moderately agree
7. Strongly agree

Function type

Question: Do you have a leadership or management position?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- No, I am not a leader or manager in my organization.
- Yes, I am a leader or manager in my organization.

SOCIAL PREDICTORS PERTAINING TO THE ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY

Game(s)

Question: Which multiplayer or massively multiplayer online game(s) or virtual world(s) do or did you play within your gaming community?

Answer: [closed, multiple options possible]

- World of Warcraft
- EVE Online
- EverQuest (1 or 2)
- Lord of the Rings Online
- Dungeons and Dragons Online
- Warhammer Online
- Star Trek Online
- Age of Conan
- Dofus
- Counter Strike (all versions)
- Team Fortress (all versions)
- Battlefield (all versions)
- Crysis (all versions)
- (Wolfenstein:) Enemy Territory (all versions)

- Half-Life (all versions, except Counter Strike)
- Call of Duty (all versions)
- Left 4 Dead (all versions)
- Other, namely... [open, no restrictions]

Rationale type

Question: What is/was the primary goal of your gaming community? Choose the most appropriate answer.

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- The goal of this community is/was primarily to be a social community with shared interests.
- The goal of this community is/was primarily to win in the game world or from other gaming communities.
- The goal of this community is/was primarily to think of and perform services to other players.
- The goal of this community is/was primarily to develop and play out storylines as role-players.
- The goal of this community is/was primarily different from the above, namely... [open, no restrictions]

Number of members

Question: How many members does your gaming community have at this moment, or did it have the moment you left it?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- Less than 10 members
- 10 to 20 members
- 20 to 50 members
- 50 to 100 members
- 100 members or more
- I really have no idea [missing]

Time in existence

Question: How long has/had your gaming community existed?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- Less than 1 month
- 1 to 6 months
- 6 to 12 months
- 1 to 3 years

- 3 years or more
- I really have no idea [missing]

Diversity in national culture

Question: To what extent are/were different countries represented in your gaming community, as far as you know?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- As far as I know, all or nearly all members of this gaming community live/lived in the Netherlands.
- As far as I know, all or nearly all members of this gaming community live/lived in different countries in Europe.
- As far as I know, all or nearly all members of this gaming community live/lived in different countries all over the world.
- I really have no idea where the members of this gaming community live/lived [missing].

SOCIAL PREDICTORS PERTAINING TO THE WORK ORGANIZATION

Branch

Derived from CBS Statistics Netherlands, 2012.

Question: In which branch does your organization operate primarily?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- Agriculture, forestry and/or fishery
- Extraction of minerals, including related services, specifically of oil, gas, coal and other minerals
- Industry: manufacturing materials, semimanufactures and end products, specifically (chemical) raw materials and semimanufactured products, foods, luxury foods, medicine, clothing, electronic equipment and machines, means of transport, furniture and other goods
- Production, distribution and trade in electricity, gas, steam or cooled air
- Extraction and distribution of water and waste, including waste water management, recycling, dismantling and decontamination
- Building industry: building of property and infrastructure, demolition, installation and finishing
- Wholesale and retail in all goods, including (specialist) repairs to commercial vehicles and private cars
- Transportation and storage using all means of transport, including postal delivery and courier service
- Accommodation, meal and drink supply, including hotels and cafés
- Information and communication, including production, publishing and broadcasting of all media, all forms of telecommunication, information technology, and information services

- Financial services, including banks, investors, intermediaries, insurances, pension funds, holdings and asset management
- Rent of and trade in real estate, including intermediaries
- Counseling, (scientific) research and other specialist business services, including legal services, consultancy, accountancy, architecture, industrial design, marketing and language, photography and veterinary services
- Rent of movable property and other business services, including rent of transportation means, rent of equipment and media, employment-finding, travel intermediaries, security, call centers, facility management and sanitation, and auctions
- Public administration, government services (fire brigades, defense, judiciary, etc.) and obligatory social securities
- Education, regardless of level and specialization, including driving schools and educational services
- Healthcare and welfare for people, including child care, nursing and social work
- Culture, sports and recreation, including all forms of art, museums, conservation/preservation of monuments, nature conservation, zoos, games of chance, lotteries, and amusement/theme parks
- Other services, specifically philosophical/ideological or political organizations, residents' associations, social clubs, repairs of consumer electronics, external care, and undertaking
- Household employment; non-specialist goods and services production by and for households

Number of employees

Question: How many employees does your organization have?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- 1 employee (I am self-employed, a freelancer, or something related)
- 2 to 10 employees
- 10 to 50 employees
- 50 to 250 employees
- 250 to 500 employees
- 500 to 1000 employees
- 1000 employees or more

Time in existence

Question: How old is the organization for which you work?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- Less than one year old
- 1 to 4 years old

- 4 to 7 years old
- 7 to 10 years old
- 10 years or older
- I really have no idea [missing]

Level of globalization

Question: Where does your organization have its offices?

Answer: [closed, max. one option]

- In only one specific country and location (e.g. in one specific city, town or place, regardless of the number of properties)
- In only one specific country, but at various locations in that country (e.g. in multiple cities, counties, states or provinces, regardless of the number of properties)
- In multiple countries within a single continent (e.g. in multiple countries in Europe, regardless of the number of properties)
- In multiple countries all over the world (e.g. in Europe and Asia, regardless of the number of properties)

APPENDIX C

DESCRIPTIVES OF THE PANEL RESEARCH

Types of online gaming community	Types of work organization	Social predictors Descriptives	Individual predictors Descriptives
<p>Most playful N = 48</p> <p>Mean Clan: 6.2 ± 0.6</p> <p>Mean of Adhocracy: 4.9 ± 1.0</p> <p>Mean of Market: 3.6 ± 1.3</p> <p>Mean of Hierarchy: 4.6 ± 1.1</p>	<p>Most playful: N = 14</p> <p>Moderately playful: N = 13</p> <p>Least playful: N = 4</p> <p>Unorganized: N = 7</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Type of game played:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: only multiplayer games <p>Type of rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: social <p>Number of members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 50-100 - Mode: over 100 <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: over 3 years <p>Diversity in national culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: mostly European - Mode: mostly Dutch <p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Branch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: information/communication <p>Number of employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 50-250 - Mode: 1000 or more <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: 10 years and older <p>Level of globalization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: multiple locations in the Netherlands - Mode: one location in the Netherlands 	<p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Total gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.7 ± 2.9 years <p>Weekly gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 18.5 ± 12.6 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.7 ± 0.8 (out of 7) <p>Role type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: leader/manager <p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Total working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.8 ± 6.0 years <p>Weekly working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 32.8 ± 15.7 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.8 ± 1.3 (out of 7) <p>Function type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager <p>Age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 26.6 ± 8.2 years
<p>Moderately playful N = 34</p> <p>Mean of Clan: 6.1 ± 0.7</p> <p>Mean of Adhocracy:</p>	<p>Most playful: N = 7</p> <p>Moderately playful: N = 9</p> <p>Least playful: N = 5</p> <p>Unorganized: N = 5</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Type of game played:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: only multiplayer <p>Type of rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: social <p>Number of members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 20-50 and 50-100 - Mode: over 100 	<p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Total gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.2 ± 2.4 years <p>Weekly gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 20.3 ± 11.2 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.7 ± 1.0 (out of 7)

Types of online gaming community	Types of work organization	Social predictors Descriptives	Individual predictors Descriptives
<p>5.7 ± 0.8</p> <p>Mean of Market: 5.8 ± 1.0</p> <p>Mean of Hierarchy: 5.9 ± 1.1</p>		<p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 1-3 years and over 3 years - Mode: over 3 years <p>Diversity in national culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: mostly Dutch <p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Branch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: manufacturing industry <p>Number of employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: 50-250 <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: 10 years and older <p>Level of globalization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: one location in the Netherlands 	<p>Role type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: non-leader/non-manager, but concerned with strategy - Mode: leader/manager <p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Total working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 7.5 ± 8.3 years <p>Weekly working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 34.4 ± 13.2 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.2 ± 1.0 (out of 7) <p>Function type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager <p>Age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 26.4 ± 9.1 years
<p>Least playful N = 4</p> <p>Mean of Clan: 4.6 ± 1.0</p> <p>Mean of Adhocracy: 4.4 ± 0.3</p> <p>Mean of Market: 5.8 ± 0.7</p> <p>Mean of Hierarchy: 5.0 ± 0.8</p>	<p>Most playful: N = 1</p> <p>Moderately playful: N = 2</p> <p>Least playful: N = 1</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Type of game played:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: only multiplayer* <p>Type of rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: competitive <p>Number of members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 20-50 - Mode: 50-100 <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 1-3 years - Mode: over 3 years <p>Diversity in national culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: mostly European <p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Branch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: manufacturing industry* <p>Number of employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 250-500 - Mode: 10-50* 	<p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Total gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 3.5 ± 1.8 years <p>Weekly gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 15.8 ± 1.7 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.3 ± 1.3 (out of 7) <p>Role type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: non-leader/non-manager, but concerned with strategy - Mode: non-leader/non-manager* <p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Total working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 1.8 ± 1.7 years <p>Weekly working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 18.3 ± 15.0 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.5 ± 1.2 (out of 7)

Types of online gaming community	Types of work organization	Social predictors Descriptives	Individual predictors Descriptives
		Time in existence: - Median & mode: 10 years and older Level of globalization: - Median & mode: multiple locations in the Netherlands	Function type: - Median: non-leader/non-manager and leader/manager - Mode: non-leader/non-manager Age: - Mean: 19.0 ± 6.0 years
Unorganized <i>N</i> = 9 Mean of Clan: 3.9 ± 1.0 Mean of Adhocracy: 3.8 ± 0.8 Mean of Market: 3.6 ± 1.0 Mean of Hierarchy: 3.4 ± 0.7	Most playful: <i>N</i> = 4 Unorganized: <i>N</i> = 4	<i>Pertaining to the community:</i> Type of game played: - Mode: only multiplayer Type of rationale: - Mode: social Number of members: - Median & mode: 10-20 Time in existence: - Median: 1-3 years - Mode: over 3 years Diversity in national culture: - Median: mostly European - Mode: mostly Dutch* <i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i> Branch: - Mode: Information/communication Number of employees: - Median: 10-50 and 50-250 - Mode: 1 (self-employed) Time in existence: - Median: 7-10 years - Mode: 1-4 years Level of globalization: - Median: one location and multiple locations in the Netherlands - Mode: one location in the Netherlands	<i>Pertaining to the community:</i> Total gameplay time: - Mean: 3.9 ± 2.9 years Weekly gameplay time: - Mean: 16.1 ± 9.2 hours Organizational commitment: - Mean: 4.1 ± 1.1 (out of 7) Role type: - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager, but concerned with strategy <i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i> Total working time: - Mean: 2.2 ± 1.9 years Weekly working time: - Mean: 23.9 ± 15.1 hours Organizational commitment: - Mean: 4.8 ± 0.9 (out of 7) Function type: - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager Age: - Mean: 23.6 ± 8.9 years

* Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown, although this is of course only relevant for ordinal variables.

Types of work organization	Types of online gaming community	Social predictors Descriptives	Individual predictors Descriptives
<p>Most playful N = 26</p> <p>Mean Clan: 5.7 ± 0.8</p> <p>Mean of Adhocracy: 5.5 ± 0.8</p> <p>Mean of Market: 4.5 ± 1.3</p> <p>Mean of Hierarchy: 4.6 ± 1.1</p>	<p>Most playful: N = 14</p> <p>Moderately playful: N = 7</p> <p>Least playful: N = 1</p> <p>Unorganized: N = 4</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Branch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: Information/communication <p>Number of employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 10-50 - Mode: 2-10* <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: 10 years or more <p>Level of globalization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: one location in the Netherlands <p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Type of game played:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: only multiplayer games <p>Type of rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: social <p>Number of members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 50-100 - Mode: over 100 <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 1-3 years - Mode: over 3 years <p>Diversity in national culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: worldwide 	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Total working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.5 ± 6.7 years <p>Weekly working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 33.1 ± 15.2 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.6 ± 0.9 (out of 7) <p>Function type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager <p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Total gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.8 ± 2.7 years <p>Weekly gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 16.2 ± 9.4 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.3 ± 1.0 (out of 7) <p>Role type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager, but concerned with strategy* <p>Age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 26.6 ± 8.6 years
<p>Moderately playful N = 24</p> <p>Mean of Clan: 5.7 ± 0.5</p> <p>Mean of Adhocracy: 5.1 ± 0.9</p> <p>Mean of Market: 5.3 ± 0.9</p>	<p>Most playful: N = 13</p> <p>Moderately playful: N = 9</p> <p>Least playful: N = 2</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Branch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: Information/communication <p>Number of employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 50-250 - Mode: 1000 or more <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: 10 years or more <p>Level of globalization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: multiple locations in the Netherlands 	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Total working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.6 ± 6.9 years <p>Weekly working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 29.5 ± 14.2 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.3 ± 0.7 (out of 7) <p>Function type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager

Types of work organization	Types of online gaming community	Social predictors Descriptives	Individual predictors Descriptives
<p>Mean of Hierarchy: 5.8 ± 0.6</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: one location in the Netherlands <p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Type of game played:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: only multiplayer games <p>Type of rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: social <p>Number of members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 50-100 - Mode: over 100 <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: over 5 years <p>Diversity in national culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: mostly European - Mode: mostly Dutch 	<p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Total gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.3 ± 2.7 years <p>Weekly gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 14.5 ± 6.9 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.4 ± 1.0 (out of 7) <p>Role type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: leader/manager <p>Age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 25.9 ± 9.3 years
<p>Least playful N = 10</p> <p>Mean of Clan: 4.2 ± 1.1</p> <p>Mean of Adhocracy: 3.7 ± 1.2</p> <p>Mean of Market: 5.5 ± 0.5</p> <p>Mean of Hierarchy: 5.3 ± 1.4</p>	<p>Most playful: N = 4</p> <p>Moderately playful: N = 5</p> <p>Least playful: N = 1</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Branch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: logistics* <p>Number of employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 500-1000 and 1000 or more - Mode: 1000 or more <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: 10 years or more <p>Level of globalization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: multiple locations in the Netherlands and multiple countries in Europe - Mode: multiple countries all over the world <p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Type of game played:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: only multiplayer games <p>Type of rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mode: social* <p>Number of members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: 20-50 <p>Time in existence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median: 1-3 years - Mode: over 3 years 	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Total working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 6.2 ± 7.5 years <p>Weekly working time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 34.6 ± 16.8 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 3.8 ± 1.4 (out of 7) <p>Function type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager <p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Total gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 4.0 ± 2.7 years <p>Weekly gameplay time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 29.8 ± 20.0 hours <p>Organizational commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 5.6 ± 0.9 (out of 7) <p>Role type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Median & mode: leader/manager <p>Age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean: 25.5 ± 8.5 years

Types of work organization	Types of online gaming community	Social predictors Descriptives	Individual predictors Descriptives
		Diversity in national culture: - Median & mode: mostly Dutch	
<p>Unorganized N = 16</p> <p>Mean of Clan: 3.3 ± 0.9</p> <p>Mean of Adhocracy: 3.2 ± 1.0</p> <p>Mean of Market: 3.4 ± 0.9</p> <p>Mean of Hierarchy: 3.7 ± 0.7</p>	<p>Most playful: N = 7</p> <p>Moderately playful: N = 5</p> <p>Unorganized: N = 4</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Branch: - Mode: wholesale and retail*</p> <p>Number of employees: - Median: 10-50 and 50-250 - Mode: 10-50</p> <p>Time in existence: - Median & mode: 10 years or more</p> <p>Level of globalization: - Median & mode: one location in the Netherlands</p> <p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Type of game played: - Mode: only multiplayer games</p> <p>Type of rationale: - Mode: social</p> <p>Number of members: - Median: 20-50 and 50-100 - Mode: over 100</p> <p>Time in existence: - Median: 1-3 years and over 3 years - Mode: over 3 years</p> <p>Diversity in national culture: - Median & mode: mostly European</p>	<p><i>Pertaining to the work organization:</i></p> <p>Total working time: - Mean: 5.4 ± 6.2 years</p> <p>Weekly working time: - Mean: 30.3 ± 16.1 hours</p> <p>Organizational commitment: - Mean: 3.9 ± 0.9 (out of 7)</p> <p>Function type: - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager</p> <p><i>Pertaining to the community:</i></p> <p>Total gameplay time: - Mean: 3.6 ± 2.2 years</p> <p>Weekly gameplay time: - Mean: 19.2 ± 8.7 hours</p> <p>Organizational commitment: - Mean: 5.3 ± 1.2 (out of 7)</p> <p>Role type: - Median & mode: non-leader/non-manager, but concerned with strategy</p> <p>Age: - Mean: 24.7 ± 8.1 years</p>

* Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown, although this is of course only relevant for ordinal variables.

APPENDIX D

LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS #1

The panel research described in Chapter 4 led to a dataset of 95 Dutch working online gamers who had described and assessed their gaming communities' characteristics. The responses to the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument were recoded to develop four types of online gaming communities, i.e., most playful, moderately playful, least playful and unorganized online gaming communities (see Chapter 6). The dataset allowed me to statistically predict the occurrence of these four types of online gaming communities.

Multinomial logistic regression analyses led to the identification of four statistically significant predictors of the online gaming community types. The analyses were carried out in PASW Statistics version 18. There are different methods for conducting logistic regression analyses. The forced entry method is suitable for hypothesis testing. The panel research was, however, exploratory in nature. The goal was to develop a first model of predictors rather than test an existing one. Many potential predictors were therefore included in the research design, as explained in Chapter 4. A stepwise method is more suitable in this case. Statisticians disagree about whether backward or forward stepwise methods are more suitable for exploratory research (Burns & Burns, 2008, p. 575; Field, 2009, p. 272). For this reason both methods were applied. All potential predictors were thus tested by backward and forward stepwise analyses. The analyses led to different models, both roughly equal in accuracy. The four distinct predictors that arose from the two types of analyses were tested in a single model. All possible interaction effects between these predictors were also tested by final forward and backward stepwise analyses. The entire process led to four possible models. The most accurate model consisted of four forced-entered predictors, of which one was an interaction effect:

- The panelist's **age**
- The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the online gaming community
- The online gaming community's **time in existence**
- Interaction between the online gaming community's **competitive rationale and time in existence**

Statistical tests suggested by Field (2009, p. 273) confirmed this final model's validity. The three variables and interaction effect significantly predicted the type of online gaming community, $R^2 = .38$ (Cox & Snell), $.44$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(12, N = 95) = 41.22, p < .001$. Goodness-of-fit statistics showed that the assumption of independence of errors was met. There were signs of underdispersion, meaning that there was actually less variation in the data than the model predicted. Scatter plots suggested that there were some outliers, i.e., erroneous cases that the model had catered for nonetheless. This could account for the apparent underdispersion. Given the exploratory nature of the research, outliers could not be ascertained reliably. Hence no additional actions were taken. Several diagnostics showed there was no multicollinearity in the model, as expected. The assumption of linearity of the logit was also met for the ordinal and scale predictors.

Tables D.1-D.4 below show the odds ratio effects of each of the four predictors when comparing one type of online gaming community with another. Table D.5 provides an overview of all relevant statistics pertaining to the final logistic regression model. The five tables show that as a panelist's age and organizational commitment increase, the odds increase that the panelist will find his/her online gaming community more playfully organized. The tables also show that as a community's age increases, the odds increase that the panelist will generally find it more playfully organized. A social rationale greatly stimulates this effect. As the age of a community with a social rationale increases, the odds increase more strongly that the panelist will indicate more playful organization. However, as the age of a community with a competitive rationale increases, the odds increase that the panelist will indicate *less* playful organization.

Comparison category	Unorganized	Least playful organization	Moderately playful organization	Most playful organization
Reference category				
Unorganized	1	0.415	1.035	1.031
Least playful organization	2.412	1	2.497*	2.488*
Moderately playful organization	0.966	0.400*	1	0.996
Most playful organization	0.969	0.402*	1.004	1

* $p < .1$

Table D.1. Odds ratio effects of age

Comparison category	Unorganized	Least playful organization	Moderately playful organization	Most playful organization
Reference category				
Unorganized	1	0.061	2.873**	3.546***
Least playful organization	16.342	1	46.953*	57.944*
Moderately playful organization	0.348**	0.021*	1	1.234
Most playful organization	0.282***	0.017*	0.810	1

* $p < .1$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .01$

Table D.2. Odds ratio effects of organizational commitment

Comparison category	Unorganized	Least playful organization	Moderately playful organization	Most playful organization
Reference category				
Unorganized	1	0.093	1.965	2.794**
Least playful organization	10.802	1	21.226	30.185
Moderately playful organization	0.509	0.047	1	1.422
Most playful organization	0.358**	0.033	0.703	1

** $p < .05$

Table D.3. Odds ratio effects of time in existence

Comparison category	Unorganized	Least playful organization	Moderately playful organization	Most playful organization
Reference category				
Unorganized	1	34.638*	1.352	1.133
Least playful organization	0.029*	1	0.039*	0.033*
Moderately playful organization	0.739	25.611*	1	0.838
Most playful organization	0.882	30.567*	1.194	1

* $p < .1$

Table D.4. Odds ratio effects of the interaction between competitive rationale and time in existence

Predictors for type of online gaming community	B (Std. Error)	Sig.	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
Most playful compared to unorganized					
Intercept	-9.518 (3.17)	.003			
Age	.031 (0.07)	.671	.894	1.031	1.190
Organizational commitment	1.266 (0.45)	.005	1.469	3.546	8.566
Time in existence	1.028 (0.52)	.047	1.013	2.794	7.709
Competitive rationale × Time in existence	.125 (0.42)	.767	.495	1.133	2.593
Moderately playful compared to unorganized					
Intercept	-7.410 (3.06)	.015			
Age	.035 (0.07)	.636	.896	1.035	1.196
Organizational commitment	1.055 (0.45)	.018	1.196	2.873	6.899
Time in existence	.675 (0.50)	.178	.736	1.965	5.247
Competitive rationale × Time in existence	.302 (0.42)	.469	.598	1.352	3.061
Least playful compared to unorganized					
Intercept	28.935 (19.71)	.142			
Age	-.880 (0.54)	.105	.143	.415	1.202
Organizational commitment	-2.794 (2.08)	.180	.001	.061	3.636
Time in existence	-2.380 (2.07)	.250	.002	.093	5.345
Competitive rationale × Time in existence	3.545 (1.91)	.063	.821	34.638	1461.773
Most playful compared to least playful					
Intercept	-38.453 (19.92)	.054			
Age	.911 (0.54)	.091	.864	2.488	7.163
Organizational commitment	4.059 (2.08)	.050	.993	57.944	3381.030
Time in existence	3.407 (2.10)	.105	.490	30.185	1859.923
Competitive rationale × Time in existence	-3.420 (1.87)	.067	.001	.033	1.274
Moderately playful compared to least playful					
Intercept	-36.345 (19.89)	.068			
Age	.915 (0.54)	.090	.868	2.497	7.187
Organizational commitment	3.849 (2.07)	.063	.814	46.953	2706.752
Time in existence	3.055 (2.10)	.145	.347	21.226	1297.622
Competitive rationale × Time in existence	-3.243 (1.87)	.082	.001	.039	1.515
Most playful compared to moderately playful					
Intercept	-2.108 (1.97)	.284			
Age	-.004 (0.03)	.905	.936	.996	1.061
Organizational commitment	.210 (0.26)	.414	.745	1.234	2.045
Time in existence	.352 (0.32)	.273	.757	1.422	2.671
Competitive rationale × Time in existence	-.177 (0.16)	.838	.615	.838	1.141

$R^2 = .38$ (Cox & Snell), $.44$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(12, N = 95) = 41.22, p < .001$.

Table D.5. Overview of all relevant statistics

APPENDIX E

LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS #2

In the second phase of the panel research 76 of the 95 Dutch online gamers described and assessed their work organizations' characteristics. The descriptions and assessments were similar in nature to those about the panelists' communities. The panelists were again confronted with the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument. Their responses to the instrument were recoded to develop the same four types of work organizations, i.e., most playful, moderately playful, least playful and unorganized (see Chapter 7). The dataset allowed me to statistically predict the occurrence of these four types of work organizations.

Multinomial logistic regression analyses led to the identification of three statistically significant predictors of work organization types. The analyses again followed both backward and forward stepwise methods (see Appendix D for more on the reasoning for doing this). All potential predictors (see Section 4.4.2) were thus tested by backward and forward stepwise analyses. The analyses led to two different models consisting of at most three predictors. All possible interaction effects between these predictors were also tested by final forward and backward stepwise analyses. No significantly predicting interaction effects were found. Thus the entire process led to only two possible models. The most accurate model consisted of these three forced-entered predictors:

- The panelist's **weekly gameplay time**
- The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the work organization
- The work organization's **time in existence**

Statistical tests suggested by Field (2009, p. 273) confirmed this model's validity. The three variables significantly predicted the type of work organization, $R^2 = .56$ (Cox & Snell), $.60$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(9, N = 76) = 57.35, p < .001$. Goodness-of-fit statistics showed that the assumption of independence of errors was met. There were again signs of underdispersion, meaning that there was actually less variation in the data than the model predicted. Just like in the case of online gaming communities, scatter plots suggested there were some outliers, i.e., erroneous cases that the model had catered for nonetheless. This could account for the apparent underdispersion. No actions were taken for the same reason as explained in Appendix D. Several diagnostics showed there was no multicollinearity in the model, as expected. The assumption of linearity of the logit was also met for all three predictors.

Tables E.1-E.3 below show the odds ratio effects of each of the three predictors when comparing one type of work organization with another. Table E.4 provides an overview of all relevant statistics pertaining to the final logistic regression model. The four tables show that as a panelist's weekly gameplay time increases, the odds increase that the panelist will find his/her work organization less playful rather than unorganized. The change in odds is low, however. As a panelist's organizational commitment increases, the odds increase greatly that the panelist will find his/her work organization more playful. Finally, the tables show that as a work organization ages, the odds increase that a panelist will find it moderately playful rather than unorganized.

The significance scores are too low to simply conclude that a panelist will find the work organization less playful as it ages.

Reference category \ Comparison category	Unorganized	Least playful organization	Moderately playful organization	Most playful organization
Unorganized	1	1.130**	1.049	1.070
Least playful organization	0.885**	1	0.928	0.947
Moderately playful organization	0.953	1.077	1	1.020
Most playful organization	0.934	1.056	0.980	1

** $p < .05$

Table E.1. Odds ratio effects of weekly gameplay time

Reference category \ Comparison category	Unorganized	Least playful organization	Moderately playful organization	Most playful organization
Unorganized	1	3.269	19.115***	29.329***
Least playful organization	0.306	1	5.847**	8.971***
Moderately playful organization	0.052***	0.171**	1	1.534
Most playful organization	0.034***	0.111***	0.652	1

** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

Table E.2. Odds ratio effects of organizational commitment

Comparison category Reference category	Unorganized	Least playful organization	Moderately playful organization	Most playful organization
Unorganized	1	6.168	2.523*	1.781
Least playful organization	0.162	1	0.409	0.289
Moderately playful organization	0.396*	2.445	1	0.706
Most playful organization	0.562	3.464	1.417	1

* $p < .1$

Table E.3. Odds ratio effects of time in existence

Predictors for type of work organization	B (Std. Error)	Sig.	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
Most playful compared to unorganized					
Intercept	-18.731 (5.45)	.001			
Weekly gameplay time	.068 (0.05)	.211	.962	1.070	1.190
Organizational commitment	3.379 (0.85)	.000	5.563	29.329	154.611
Time in existence	.577 (0.48)	.224	.702	1.781	4.518
Moderately playful compared to unorganized					
Intercept	-17.674 (5.39)	.001			
Weekly gameplay time	.048 (0.06)	.385	.942	1.049	1.169
Organizational commitment	2.950 (0.83)	.000	3.787	19.115	96.489
Time in existence	.925 (0.49)	.060	.963	2.523	6.611
Least playful compared to unorganized					
Intercept	-16.134 (7.73)	.037			
Weekly gameplay time	.122 (0.06)	.025	1.015	1.130	1.257
Organizational commitment	1.185 (0.78)	.131	.703	3.269	15.196
Time in existence	1.819 (1.19)	.125	.604	6.168	63.013
Most playful compared to least playful					
Intercept	-2.597 (7.43)	.727			
Weekly gameplay time	-.054 (0.05)	.300	.855	.947	1.049
Organizational commitment	2.194 (0.78)	.005	1.949	8.971	41.293
Time in existence	-1.242 (1.18)	.291	.029	.289	2.897
Moderately playful compared to least playful					
Intercept	-1.540 (7.39)	.835			
Weekly gameplay time	-.074 (0.05)	.156	.838	.928	1.029
Organizational commitment	1.766 (0.75)	.019	1.338	5.847	25.555
Time in existence	-.894 (1.18)	.449	.040	.409	4.139
Most playful compared to moderately playful					
Intercept	-1.057 (2.71)	.697			
Weekly gameplay time	.020 (0.04)	.598	.947	1.020	1.099
Organizational commitment	.428 (0.39)	.267	.721	1.534	3.267
Time in existence	-.348 (0.28)	.206	.411	.706	1.211

$R^2 = .56$ (Cox & Snell), $.60$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(9, N = 76) = 57.35, p < .001$.

Table E.4. Overview of all relevant statistics

APPENDIX F

LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS #3

The panelists' assessments of their online gaming communities and work organizations were similarly structured, allowing for statistical comparisons between the two contexts. In both questionnaires the panelists were confronted with the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument. The scores of both questionnaires could thus easily be compared. A new variable was added per panelist, indicating the level of equivalence between organizational cultures, i.e., equivalent, slightly equivalent and non-equivalent (see Chapter 7). The level of equivalence could then be predicated statistically.

Multinomial logistic regression analyses led to the identification of four statistically significant predictors of level of equivalence. The analyses again followed both backward and forward stepwise methods (see Appendix D for more on the reasoning behind this). All potential predictors (see Section 4.4.2) were tested by backward and forward stepwise analyses. In this case both the type of online gaming community and type of work organization were also considered potential predictors. The analyses led to two different models consisting of at most three predictors. All possible interaction effects between these predictors were also tested by final forward and backward stepwise analyses. This led to a third model. The first and third models were similar in accuracy. In the end the first model was chosen, as it still appeared to be slightly more reliable. The final model consisted of these four forced-entry predictors:

- The panelist's **function type (leader/manager or not)** in the work organization
- The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the work organization
- The online gaming community's **competitive rationale**
- The online gaming community's **time in existence**

Statistical tests suggested by Field (2009, p. 273) confirmed this model's validity. The four variables significantly predicted the level of equivalence, $R^2 = .42$ (Cox & Snell), .47 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(8, N = 76) = 37.03, p < .001$. Goodness-of-fit statistics showed that the assumption of independence of errors was met. Contrary to previous analyses, there were no clear signs of underdispersion this time, nor of overdispersion for that matter. Several diagnostics showed there was no multicollinearity in the model, as expected. The assumption of linearity of the logit was also met for the two ordinal predictors (organizational commitment and time in existence).

Tables F.1-F.4 below show the odds ratio effects of each of the four predictors when comparing one level of equivalence to another. Table F.5 provides an overview of all relevant statistics pertaining to the final logistic regression model. The five tables show that a panelist who is not a leader or manager at work has higher odds of finding his/her work organization and online gaming community culturally equivalent. As a panelist's commitment to his/her work organization increases, the odds increase he/she will find it culturally equivalent to his/her online gaming community. The effects of the final two variables are less clear. An online gaming community with a competitive rationale has higher odds of a panelist finding it culturally *slightly*

equivalent to his/her work organization rather than equivalent. The panelist might find it non-equivalent, but this particular change in odds is statistically not significant. An older online gaming community has higher odds of a panelist finding it culturally *slightly* equivalent to his/her work organization rather than non-equivalent. The panelist might find it equivalent, but this particular change in odds is also statistically not significant.

Reference category \ Comparison category	Comparison category		
	Non-equivalent	Slightly equivalent	Equivalent
Non-equivalent	1	0.432	6.577*
Slightly equivalent	2.316	1	15.229***
Equivalent	0.152*	0.066***	1

* $p < .1$ *** $p < .01$

Table F.1. Odds ratio effects of non-leader/non-manager function in the work organization

Reference category \ Comparison category	Comparison category		
	Non-equivalent	Slightly equivalent	Equivalent
Non-equivalent	1	2.232**	3.441***
Slightly equivalent	0.448**	1	1.542
Equivalent	0.291***	0.649	1

** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

Table F.2. Odds ratio effects of organizational commitment to the work organization

Comparison category \ Reference category	Non-equivalent	Slightly equivalent	Equivalent
Non-equivalent	1	1.436	0.193
Slightly equivalent	0.696	1	0.134*
Equivalent	5.184	7.447*	1

* $p < .1$

Table F.3. Odds ratio effects of competitive rationale of the online gaming community

Comparison category \ Reference category	Non-equivalent	Slightly equivalent	Equivalent
Non-equivalent	1	2.241*	1.225
Slightly equivalent	0.446*	1	0.547
Equivalent	0.817	1.830	1

* $p < .1$

Table F.4. Odds ratio effects of time in existence of the online gaming community

Predictors for level of equivalence between organizational cultures	B (Std. Error)	Sig.	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
Equivalent compared to non- equivalent					
Intercept	-7.652 (2.96)	.010			
Non-leader/non-manager function ¹	1.884 (1.13)	.094	.725	6.577	59.627
Organizational commitment ¹	1.236 (0.42)	.003	1.526	3.441	7.758
Competitive rationale ²	-1.646 (1.01)	.104	.026	.193	1.406
Time in existence ²	.203 (0.36)	.572	.606	1.225	2.475
Slightly equivalent compared to non-equivalent					
Intercept	-6.676 (3.44)	.052			
Non-leader/non-manager function ¹	-.840 (0.89)	.347	.075	.432	2.488
Organizational commitment ¹	.803 (0.40)	.045	1.017	2.232	4.898
Competitive rationale ²	.362 (0.86)	.674	.266	1.436	7.767
Time in existence ²	.807 (0.46)	.078	.915	2.241	5.490
Equivalent compared to slightly equivalent					
Intercept	-.976 (3.47)	.778			
Non-leader/non-manager function ¹	2.723 (0.95)	.004	2.388	15.229	97.117
Organizational commitment ¹	.433 (0.39)	.268	.716	1.542	3.318
Competitive rationale ²	-2.008 (1.04)	.053	.018	.134	1.029
Time in existence ²	-.604 (0.48)	.211	.212	.547	1.407

$R^2 = .42$ (Cox & Snell), $.47$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(8, N = 76) = 37.03, p < .001$.

¹ Variable pertains to the panelists' work organizations.

² Variable pertains to the panelists' online gaming communities.

Table F.5. Overview of all relevant statistics

The panelists also indicated how they valued the levels of equivalence. A new variable was added to each panelist indicating whether or not he/she found the equivalence level of significance. Some found the fact that their work organizations and online gaming communities were culturally similar or different of limited meaning. These panelists thus indicated insignificance of the equivalence level. Others did find the cultural similarity or difference of meaning. These panelists indicated a significance of the equivalence level. The coding procedure for the insignificance or significance of an equivalence level is explained in Appendix G. This could again be predicted statistically.

Binary logistic regression analyses led to the identification of four statistically significant predictors of significance or insignificance. All potential predictors were once more tested by backward and forward stepwise analyses. The analyses led to two different models consisting of at most four predictors. All possible interaction effects between these predictors were also tested by final forward and backward stepwise analyses. This led to third and fourth models that introduced additional interaction effects, sometimes even between three variables. Further examination of these models revealed that all the interaction effects had limited additional value.

Although they had significant predictive power, their actual influence was minimal (i.e., all odds ratios stayed very close to one). Moreover, interpretations of these interaction effects simply strengthened the interpretations derived from the effects of the individual variables. In the end the first model was therefore chosen as a sufficient model with which the significance or insignificance of an equivalence level could be explained. The final model consisted of these four forced-entry predictors:

- The panelist's **weekly working time**
- The panelist's **weekly gameplay time**
- The panelist's **organizational commitment** to the online gaming community
- The online gaming community's **diversity in national culture**

Statistical tests suggested by Field (2009, p. 273) confirmed this model's validity. The four variables significantly predicted the level of equivalence, $R^2 = .23$ (Hosmer & Lemeshow), $.27$ (Cox & Snell), $.37$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(4, N = 76) = 22.31, p < .001$. Goodness-of-fit statistics showed that the assumption of independence of errors was met. There were again no clear indications of over- or underdispersion. Several diagnostics showed there was no multicollinearity in the model, as expected. The assumption of linearity of the logit was also met for all four predictors.

Table F.6 show the odds ratio effects of each of the four predictors. The table shows that as a panelist's organizational commitment to his/her online gaming community increases, the odds increase that he/she will find the equivalence level to his/her work organization of significance. A panelist's weekly gameplay time has a similar effect. However, the actual odds ratio effect is low. The other two variables, i.e., a community's diversity in national culture and a panelist's weekly working time, also have a similar effect, but these effects are less statistically significant. Moreover, the effect of weekly working time is minimal. Nevertheless, since the logistic regression analyses led to the inclusion of this variable, it should not be simply dismissed.

Predictors of significance of a level of cultural equivalence	B (Std. Error)	Sig.	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
Constant	-7.10 (2.02)	.000			
Weekly working time	0.02 (0.02)	.290	0.98	1.02	1.06
Weekly gameplay time	0.09 (0.04)	.021	1.01	1.09	1.18
Organizational commitment ¹	0.83 (0.30)	.006	1.27	2.30	4.16
Diversity in national culture ¹	0.54 (0.34)	.115	0.88	1.72	3.36

$R^2 = .23$ (Hosmer & Lemeshow), $.27$ (Cox & Snell), $.37$ (Nagelkerke).

Model $\chi^2(4, N = 76) = 22.31, p < .001$.

¹ Variable concerns the online gaming community

Table F.6. Overview of all relevant statistics

APPENDIX G

SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL EQUIVALENCE: THE CODING PROCEDURE

It was difficult to code a panelist as indicating either significance or insignificance of a level of cultural equivalence between his online gaming community and work organizations. The first step of the procedure entailed calculating scores for current and preferred cultural difference using two simple equations. In the following equations 'OCOIN' and 'OCOIP' represent the scores for current and preferred organizational culture of the work organization, respectively. 'OCCIN' and 'OCCIP' represent the scores for current and preferred organizational culture of the online gaming community, respectively. All four terms are preceded with an A, B, C or D, representing Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy factor scores, respectively. As an example, 'OCCINA' represents the score for agreeability that the online gaming community currently encompasses a Clan organizational culture. Using the OCAI scores pertaining to the panelists' online gaming communities and work organizations the following two variables were calculated for analyses:

- **Current cultural difference $\Delta C_n =$**

$$\sqrt{(OCOINA - OCCINA)^2} + \sqrt{(OCOINB - OCCINB)^2} + \sqrt{(OCOINC - OCCINC)^2} + \sqrt{(OCOIND - OCCIND)^2}$$

The resulting score indicated how much the organizational cultures of the work organization and online gaming community generally differ. A value of four or less was considered low, indicating in this case highly equivalent organizational cultures.

- **Preferred cultural difference $\Delta C_p =$**

$$\sqrt{(OCOIPA - OCCIPA)^2} + \sqrt{(OCOIPB - OCCIPB)^2} + \sqrt{(OCOIPC - OCCIPC)^2} + \sqrt{(OCOIPD - OCCIPD)^2}$$

The resulting score indicates how much the preferred organizational cultures of the work organization and online gaming community generally differ. Again, a value of four or less was considered low, indicating in this case a preference for highly equivalent organizational cultures.

The second step entailed selecting the panelists who scored ΔC_n and ΔC_p in such a manner that they could be interpreted as indicating significance. For this, two assumptions were upheld:

1. If ΔC_p was four or lower, then the panelist was indicating that he/she preferred the organizational cultures to be quite equivalent. If ΔC_n was also four or lower and $\Delta C_n - \Delta C_p$ was almost equal, then the panelist was indicating that the organizational cultures were already equivalent. Two interpretations were possible. Either the panelist preferred it that way or the panelist preferred the two to be even more equivalent. In either case the equivalence seemed to be of significance.
2. If only ΔC_p was four or lower, but $\Delta C_n - \Delta C_p$ was at least one (while $\Delta C_n > \Delta C_p$), then the panelist was indicating that he/she preferred the organizational cultures to be more

equivalent than they currently were. The equivalence level again seemed to be of significance.

The third step entailed selecting the panelists who scored ΔC_n and ΔC_p in such a manner that they could be interpreted as indicating insignificance. For this, two additional albeit related assumptions were upheld:

1. If ΔC_p was higher than four, then the panelist was indicating that he/she did not prefer the organizational cultures to be equivalent, even if ΔC_n was (much) higher. Of course if ΔC_n was lower, this conclusion was easier to draw. In either case the equivalence level did not seem to be of significance.
2. If ΔC_p and ΔC_n were four or lower and $\Delta C_n - \Delta C_p$ was negative, then although the organizational cultures were already equivalent, the panelist was indicating that he/she did not clearly prefer them to be equivalent. The equivalence level therefore did not seem to be of significance.

The fourth and final step involved the conducted interviews as well as six additional statements to which the panelists responded on a 7-point Likert scale. These statements offered additional information that aided the above interpretations:³³

1. "The leaders in my work organization behave the same as the leaders in my gaming community."
2. "The leaders in my work organization should behave the same as the leaders in my gaming community. "
3. "The leaders in my gaming community should behave the same as the leaders in my work organization. "
4. "In my work organization people generally treat each other the same as in my gaming community. "
5. "In my work organization people should generally treat each other the same as in my gaming community. "
6. "In my gaming community people should generally treat each other the same as in my work organization. "

When it was hard to interpret scores for ΔC_p and ΔC_n , both the above statements and interviews were key. A panelist could only be coded as indicating significance of a cultural equivalence level if he/she scored five points or higher on the above statements two, three, five or six. Ideally the panelist scored at least statements two and five or three and six with at least five points.

There are three points of discussion concerning the above coding procedure:

1. A simple distinction had been made between significance and insignificance, unlike the distinction between equivalent, slight equivalent and non-equivalent organizational cultures. Partial significance was deemed quite meaningless. Some interviewees nevertheless

³³ Since the panel consisted of only Dutch online gamers, I actually used Dutch statements, as with all questionnaire statements used in the panel study. For this thesis, I have translated these statements to English, staying as close as possible to their original Dutch meaning.

indicated that they could see some significance to the level of equivalence (see also Chapter 7). In those cases the equivalence level was deemed of significance, although this choice is debatable.

2. Two panelists indicated in their interviews very explicitly that there was no significance to the equivalence level, while their survey scores indicated some significance. Both panelists were self-employed and filled in the second questionnaire as if they were in a project requiring collaboration with others. Although they always collaborated in some way with other players when online gaming, when working they hardly collaborated with others in practice and sometimes preferred it that way. This indicates an insignificance of equivalence level. Despite the fact that their questionnaire answers indicated significance, they were thus considered panelists who did not find the equivalence level of significance. There was only one other respondent who was also self-employed. Therefore this specific error in interpreting survey results could have only occurred once.
3. There were four panelists who scored low points on the OCAI in both questionnaires. By doing so they indicated currently and preferred unorganized online gaming communities and work organizations. This suggests that the equivalence level was significant. The responses to the six aforementioned statements were, however, very uninformative. All this suggests non-responsiveness. The panelists were therefore coded as not finding the equivalence level of significance. Arguably, the panelists' data could also have been removed from analyses. The choice is debatable either way.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

It is becoming easier and easier to imagine that the impact of gaming on organizations can be extensive. There are at least four frames for understanding the potential impact of gaming on organizations. I define a *frame* as “‘an instrument for defining reality’ as opposed to ‘an instrument for describing reality’” (Donati, 1992; Fisher, 1997 ,5.4). Thus each frame defines gaming’s impact on organizations in a different way. This means that gaming’s impact is subjective rather than objective. The impact depends on how a game researcher, designer or player implicitly or explicitly chooses to define the role of gaming in – and its subsequent impact on – organizations. The different definitions are exposed by considering possible ontological assumptions about gaming and gaming’s objectives. Gaming can be defined as a designed experience or as something much bigger, i.e., a socio-cultural phenomenon. In turn, gaming’s objectives can be defined instrumentalistically or ideologically. Together these ontological assumptions of gaming and gaming’s objectives create four frames for defining gaming’s impact on organizations: the experience-instrumentalizing, experience-ideologizing, phenomenon-instrumentalizing and phenomenon-ideologizing frames.

In the experience-instrumentalizing frame gaming is an experience designed to have a specific learning effect for the individual learner and/or the organization as a whole. The desired or imagined organizational impact might consist of a measurable change in employees’ behavior or in the organization’s overall key performance indicators (e.g. increased efficiency or turnover). In the experience-ideologizing frame gaming is still an experience, but here the experience is designed to activate specific values and principles among its players and thus within an organization. The desired or imagined organizational impact might be much less tangible but much more fundamental. In the phenomenon-instrumentalizing frame gaming is viewed as an industry that needs to grow or be learned from for the benefit of other industries. The social structures and systems of the gaming, creative, cultural or new economy industries are examined to innovate organizations both within and outside these industries. The impact of such an examination could consist of extensive organizational change on a structural level.

Finally, in the phenomenon-ideologizing frame the previous three frames are seen as symptoms of an even more fundamental change in organizations, i.e., a change in organizational culture. It is theorized that a change in organizational culture is imminent thanks to the popularity of play in daily life. The ability to play at work might be valued so highly that organizations might become *playful* as a result. They could become highly creative, spontaneous and enjoyable. I position this thesis in this frame.

The problem is that we can thus far only speculate about this potential transformation of organizations into more playful ones. As yet there seems to be limited knowledge of the actual organizational impact of gaming in general, let alone on a cultural level. The notion of a playful organization needs more fundamental and empirical research to turn speculation of its nature and emergence into an actual theory.

One way to enable research into the nature and emergence of playful organizations is to focus on online gamers and their experiences with online gaming communities and work organizations. This is because online gaming communities can actually be considered playful organizations *pur sang*. Online gamers are often adults (Griffiths et al., 2004, p. 481; TNS/Newzoo/Gamesindustry.com, 2009; D. Williams et al., 2008, p. 1002; Yee, 2006a, p. 316), thus having experience in both communities and work organizations. They could very well be the experts when it comes to playful organization in the virtual world of online gaming and the 'real' world of work. They could tell us about the extent of playful organization among online gaming communities and its applicability and desirability among work organizations.

This thesis is the result of an investigation into what the playful organization could actually be and the extent to which online gamers' communities and work organizations can be deemed playful organizations. As a working hypothesis, it was assumed that 'real-life' work organizations are becoming playful organizations, like online gaming communities already are.

METHODOLOGY

To pursue a first workable understanding of the nature of a playful organization, a playful organization 'ideal-type' (Torr, 2008; Weber, 1949) was developed first. The development of this ideal-type started with the pursuit of an understanding of a playful organizational culture. This is because organizational culture is understood as the foundation of an organization's structure and dynamics. To develop an understanding of a playful organizational culture, many publications concerning play theory and play-inspired organization theory were consulted. A subsequent understanding of a playful organizational structure was developed by approaching the topic from two basic perspectives. The first is a management-sociological perspective, from which researchers can be concerned about how management defines access and exit, the division of labor, hierarchy and leadership. The second is a socio-technical perspective, from which researchers can be concerned with what is commonly referred to as knowledge management: the design and implementation of technologies and techniques for developing, sharing and storing knowledge.

The resulting ideal-type enabled more focused literature reviews and empirical studies. Reviews were carried out of organizational studies of online gaming communities and of professional organization archetype theory (Brock, 2006). The playful organization ideal-type was used as an analytical framework to determine whether the reviews revealed anything about an emergence of playful organizations in the two contexts. Subsequently, designing empirical research called for quite some playfulness. Since the emergence of playful organizations in the 'virtual' and the 'real' world had not been studied before, a lot of creativity, spontaneity and – dare I say – enjoyment was required to design this empirical research. A 'sequential exploratory strategy' (Creswell, 2003, p. 215) was pursued, based on a 'subtle-realist' (Hammersley, 1992, pp. 52-54) approach to developing knowledge about the playful organization. In this empirical research strategy a qualitative research endeavor is followed by a quantitative one. The latter is meant to further generalize, contextualize and simply extend insights developed during the former.

Qualitative research was a necessary first phase of the empirical research. To be able to fully understand the organizational relationship between online gamers' communities and work organization, I needed to first understand what actually happens in online games in terms of organization in the first place. One common and good way to develop this understanding is to become an online gamer oneself as a researcher. This is referred to as ethnographic research, a strategy common to anthropology. Ethnographic research helped me answer the question of when and how an online gamer creates or joins communities, what the characteristics are of those communities, and to what extent the communities are playfully organized.

I chose to do *virtual-organizational ethnographic* research of *EVE Online*. The research concerned the online game *EVE* for several reasons. Organization seemed to be an integral part of gameplay, the fictional world had a strong economic and thus realistic foundation, and the online game had actually not been researched that extensively yet. With the help of an assistant, I managed to find and join a quite old and well-known 'corporation', referred to in this thesis with the pseudonym *Major* for privacy reasons. The playful organization ideal-type could readily be used as an analytical framework for an organizational analysis of this corporation. This approach diverged from 'traditional' ethnography for three reasons. First, this was merely one step in the entire sequential exploratory strategy. Second, there were no face-to-face interactions with the people encountered. Third, the research focused solely on aspects of organization defined in the playful organization ideal-type.

Quantitative research formed the second step in the sequential exploratory strategy. It was aimed at generalizing and contextualizing the results, as well as extending them to include reflections on the relationship between online gaming communities and work organizations. For this a group of online gamers was required, offering quantifiable data that would enable statistical analyses. I chose to form a panel, and this allowed me to obtain more data from a sample of online gamers than a different quantitative method (e.g. a cross-sectional survey) would have. The panel ended up including 95 Dutch working online gamers. The panel was diverse in terms of games played, age, place of residence and amount of online gameplay (per week and in total). Assuming that most online gamers at some point join or create communities, the panel provided a good indication of whether online gaming communities in which the Dutch are involved are on the whole playfully organized. More importantly, it enabled comparisons between online gamers' communities and work organizations.

However, the ideal-type needed to be operationalized further before it could be used as an analytical framework in this quantitative study of online gamers' communities and work organizations. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI, Cameron & Quinn, 2006) proved to be a useful instrument for measuring the general extent of playful organization of both online gaming communities and work organizations. This is because the OCAI relates well to the playful organization ideal-type. The OCAI is based on four organizational cultures named Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy. In Clan and Adhocracy cultures flexibility and discretion are important, while in Market and Hierarchy organizational cultures stability and control are important (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 35-45). This suggests that the Clan and Adhocracy cultures fit particularly well with the playful organization ideal-type. The OCAI can therefore be used to quantify the playful organization ideal-type. A number of potential

predictors were defined, as a starting point for contextualizing the playful organization of online gamers' communities and work organization, as was a comparison between the two. These included individual (e.g. age, weekly gameplay time, weekly working time) and social predictors (e.g. number of members in the community or number of employees in the work organization). The statistical analyses included descriptive and logistic regression analyses (see Appendices C-G).

RESULTS

A PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION IDEAL-TYPE

An understanding of play enabled the conceptualization of values that employees would need to uphold for them to be able to play at work. Six values were conceptualized and explained:

- *Contingency*
Employees appreciate uncertainty and eventuality, rendering an organizational goal that is well-defined and instrumental irrelevant. The value of contingency surfaced in publications that e.g. embrace an organization's uncertainty or the definition of 'epic' or not 'narrow' goals (Kane, 2004, p. 257; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, pp. 89-90; McGonigal, 2011, pp. 55-57; Pink, 2009, pp. 45, 50-51).
- *Agility*
Employees are aware of and act on any opportunity with which the organization's goal or rationale can be pursued. Agility surfaced in publications that e.g. embrace the stimulation of risk-taking and repeated failure to ensure that the highest successes are reached (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, pp. 47, 128; 2010, pp. 62-64; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 83; Reeves & Read, 2009, p. 89). More practically, it surfaced in publications noting Google's policy to let employees spend roughly 20% of their time pursuing their own ideas for new products (Levy, 2011, pp. 162-164; Pink, 2009, p. 82).
- *Equality*
Employees have equal opportunities for action and growth regardless of hierarchical differences. Equality surfaced in publications that e.g. note organizations' 'flat' (i.e., vertically short) power hierarchies (Kane, 2004, p. 276; Levy, 2011, p. 158; Pink, 2009, p. 30). It also surfaced in publications embracing teamwork, i.e., relatively small groups of people who self-organize to do certain projects (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 90; 2010, p. 38; Levy, 2011, p. 162; Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 129-133).
- *Teachability*
Employees take opportunities for all sorts of educational and helpful experiences. Teachability surfaced in publications that e.g. note organizations' extensive 'university' programs to educate and train employees (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 150; 2010, pp. 47-49; Levy, 2011, p. 136).
- *Meritocracy*
Employees are socially recognized for their efforts and competence. Meritocracy surfaced in publications that e.g. argue how powerful "prosocial emotions, most notably compassion and

admiration” are and see “social engagement as more intrinsically rewarding” (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 82, 91).

- *Conviviality*
Employees interact informally and are high-spirited and humorous about their work. Conviviality surfaced in publications that e.g. embrace informality and a sense of fun to incentivize continuous trial-and-error behavior in an organization (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 136; 2010, pp. 67-68).

These six values in turn inspired four management-sociological concepts and three socio-technical concepts of what a playful organization would look like structurally:

- *Open access and exit*
Organizational boundaries have limited meaning, as employees access and exit the organization continuously. This concept is identifiable in publications that e.g. embrace limited use of employment contracts (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, p. 44) or which note increases in “non-employer businesses” (Pink, 2009, p. 30).
- *Free-to-choose and free-to-develop roles*
Employees are free to choose and develop their roles within the organization. This concept is identifiable in publications that e.g. note animation studio Pixar’s emphasis on allowing employees to choose what they do, how they do it and when they do it (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, pp. 40-41).
- *Distributed leadership*
Employees frequently assume leadership and thus also expect and accept it from each other. This concept is identifiable in publications that e.g. embrace team autonomy, i.e., forming multiple teams and self-defining different leadership arrangements (Pink, 2009, p. 90).
- *Expertise hierarchy*
An organization’s hierarchy reflects differing sorts and levels of expertise. This concept is identifiable in a publication noting a school where students ‘level up’ based on competence/efforts, building “esteem among their peers” (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 130-131). It is also identifiable in a publication embracing the use of leaderboards and point systems to motivate salespeople in particular (Zichermann & Linder, 2010, pp. 185-186).
- *Demand-based knowledge & communication suite*
Employees communicate and collaborate using whatever ICTs they see fit. This concept is identifiable in a publication embracing the use of multiple easily reconfigurable communication systems (Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 84-88).
- *Boundless knowledge networking*
Employees use ICTs to acquire and distribute knowledge both internally and externally. This concept is identifiable in a publication embracing the knowledge management possibilities of social networking websites & instant messaging systems (McNely, 2011; Ou et al., 2011).
- *Collaboratively developed explicit knowledge*
Employees structure and store knowledge of processes and procedures collaboratively. This concept is identifiable in a publication noting Google’s use of ICTs to share project information and knowledge among all employees (Levy, 2011, p. 164).

PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS IN PREVIOUS EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The first part of the literature review offered indications that online gaming communities can be considered playful organizations. Scholars have used many different and often undefined concepts to describe the online gaming communities they researched, including community, guild, group, team, organization or network. Scholars have also described many different aspects and operationalizations of online gaming communities (18 in total). The sheer diversity in concepts, aspects and operationalizations already reveals a high level of playful organization. Specific operationalizations and aspects also suggest that online gaming communities are culturally and structurally playful organizations. A brief summary of all these operationalizations and aspects is simply impossible. A couple of examples will have to suffice. One such example is the social structuring practices discussed in the literature. Several characteristics of the playful organization ideal-type are applicable to the identified social structuring practices, most notably the concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles and distributed leadership. Another important example is the two main cultures that were identified in the literature, i.e., 'casual' and 'militaristic' cultures. The values of equality and conviviality suggest that casual online gaming communities emphasizing a sense of fun, closeness and equal distributions of power are particularly playful organizations.

The analysis also showed, however, that some operationalizations and aspects of online gaming communities oppose the playful organization ideal-type. The most pertinent example is the identified militaristic culture. The playful values of agility and equality fit poorly with militaristic online gaming communities in which rules for player admission and contribution and hierarchical structures of power prevail. The playful organization's structural concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles and distributed leadership probably do not fit with these communities, either. Some of the other playful values are still sometimes upheld, i.e., meritocracy, teachability and conviviality. Militaristic communities can therefore also apply some of the playful concepts that arise from these values, e.g. expertise hierarchy and boundless knowledge networking. Still, the literature also suggests that some online gaming communities have characteristics that limit one or more opportunities for playful organization. Online gaming communities can mostly, but not always, be considered highly playful organizations.

Brock discussed four quite clearly defined and extensively researched archetypes of professional organization: the professional bureaucracy, professional partnership, managed professional business and global professional network (2006). Theorists have described these archetypes using practically the same aspects and operationalizations: form of ownership, locale and scale, management identity and responsibilities, manager/professional ratio, strategic decisionmaking process, diversity in professionals' practices, standardization of professional practice, performance assessment and interpretive scheme (organizational culture).

Definitions and characterizations suggest that the professional bureaucracy, professional partnership and global professional network archetypes are more playful than the managed professional business. Professional autonomy is emphasized in the characterizations of the professional bureaucracy and the professional partnership. The higher level of autonomy in these two archetypes renders the playful values of agility and equality very relevant. The global

professional network also connects rather well to the ideal-type, but for a different reason. In this archetype professional autonomy is discussed but not emphasized. A sense of agility is nevertheless relevant. The agility is most evident at the managerial level, because management actively looks for opportunities to set up new organizational networks. This approach to agility also renders the playful concept of open access and exit relevant, because employees are able to collaborate with people from different organizations more easily. The managed professional business connects less to the playful organization ideal-type, due to the archetype's emphasis on the power of management rather than professional autonomy. The characterizations suggest that contingency, agility and equality are values that are particularly hard to find in this archetype.

Taking also the identified operationalization and aspects into account, the professional partnership archetype was best relatable to the playful organization ideal-type, while the managed professional business archetype was the least relatable. The playful concepts of expertise hierarchy and distributed leadership suggest that managers of playful professional organizations can be esteemed professionals with additional coordination tasks (e.g. human resources, asset and facility management). The concept of free-to-choose/-develop roles suggests that professional practice is very diverse and principally unstandardized in a playful organization. Management can decide to only define and standardize the basic skills a professional should have. A low manager/professional ratio and extensive consultation in strategic decisionmaking were more playful than their counterparts. Performance assessment that focuses on the professional's efforts rather than on task efficiency was also deemed more befitting of the playful organization ideal-type. All these characteristics mean that the professional partnership archetype can be deemed much more playful than the managed professional business archetype.

EVE ONLINE'S PLAYFUL ORGANIZATIONS

EVE Online provided actual experience with playful organization in the virtual world. I started playing it in September 2008 with a character of a specific race (Minmatar) and class (Sebiestor), focusing on a career involving the manufacturing and sales of spaceships and their parts. The required character skill development was continuous and took anything from several hours to several days or even weeks per skill. The higher the skill level, the longer it took to train. Luckily training takes place even when not playing *EVE*. With the correct skills, manufacturing can take place by gathering blueprints and supplies in a space station equipped with manufacturing bays. The resulting large amount of time spent in a space station could get a bit boring at times. I sold the manufactured goods on space stations where players were offering the best prices. This spiced up the gameplay, because I had to take cross the 'Player-versus-Player' universe with exceedingly precious cargo, risking being attacked and robbed by a rival player.

In time, game mechanics incentivize or even obligate players to become very social and decide to start or join a first corporation. By joining a 'startup corporation' I learned about *EVE's* possibilities more quickly. This was a small group of Dutch-speaking players. We went mining together and discussed with each other things we did not yet completely understand. Startup

corporations such as this one play an important part in *EVE* as organizations formed out of a need for collaborative learning. These corporations are highly dynamic in terms of number of members and member activity. They often allow practically anyone to join the corporation, most notably new players. They are open to all the gameplay *EVE* has to offer, since the goal of the corporation is to learn the game collaboratively and thus more quickly. Startup corporations are mostly not competitive, at least not initially. They will not attempt to claim a region of space, or make ever-increasing amounts of ISK (game currency) on production and sales, for example. In time startup corporations will grow, merge with other corporations, or simply disband. In my case the startup corporation disbanded, mostly resulting from members leaving the corporation to pursue differing gameplay interests within more established corporations and alliances.

With the help of an assistant I found and joined the more established corporation *Major*. Corporations like *Major* have structural and cultural characteristics that contribute to their continued existence and importance to the *EVE* community. *Major* was particularly successful in production, sales and a number of financial services. It was also quite stable. When I became a member it had been in existence for over six years, and it grew from about 40 to about 60 members over about six months. The corporation had six Presidents (leaders) at the time. Access was based on trust, and the roles members had were both self-determined and negotiated with the leaders. The corporation had a hierarchy showing differing levels in expertise and trust as well as a less important and 'flat' hierarchy of strategic decisionmaking power. Leadership behavior was erratic, as members of all levels of the hierarchy exhibited it when taking on tasks and requiring help from others. The behavior of the actual leaders of the corporation was non-authoritative and consisted mostly of coordination and cultivation. A wide range of ICTs were used, most notably IRC channels and discussion forums. The ICTs were supportive for and based on the demands of the corporation. They strengthened the style of labor division, leadership and hierarchy this corporation upheld. Culturally most members of *Major* seemed to value friendship, uniqueness and efficiency within the corporation.

Both *EVE*'s startup corporations and *Major* can be considered playful organizations. Startup corporations offer several examples of playful organization, most notably their openness to new members, their willingness to try all sorts of gameplay experiences and their uncertain existence over time. *Major* offers 23 more examples of playful organization (see Table 5.2). The playful concepts of open access and exit, free-to-choose/-develop roles, expertise hierarchy, distributed leadership and collaboratively-developed explicit knowledge were applicable to *Major*. Two factors put pressure on the full applicability of these concepts, i.e., the importance of assuring trust among members, and the loyalty towards the esteemed members and leaders that comes with long-lasting trust. Thus at least trust assurance and loyalty can limit the playfulness of an online gaming community. The playful organization ideal-type is not an absolute ideal or standard in online gaming. *Major* was still very much playfully organized.

A corporation's larger context influences its values and thus the extent of playful organization. *Major* was also influenced by the alliance of corporations it was a part of at the time, as well as *EVE* as a game within the entire massively multiplayer online gaming market. *Major*'s choice for an alliance was a conscious one. The chosen alliance had to fit with the corporation's preferred structure and culture and simultaneously had an influence on them. The

alliance preferred peaceful interactions with *EVE* players even if they were not part of the alliance. The alliance needs to be positioned within *EVE* as a specific online game to understand it. The alliance was small and non-imperialistic compared to other and better-known alliances that were bigger and imperialistic. The ability to form such a unique alliance or any type of alliance stems from the 'sandbox' design principle upheld by CCP Games as the game's unique selling point. In that sense *EVE* is an ideal environment for playful organization within the entire online gaming landscape. However, the gameplay that the sandbox allowed to emerge included infiltrations, thefts and scams, rendering trust assurance and thus limitations on playful organization very important.

DUTCH ONLINE GAMERS' EXPERIENCES IN PLAYFUL ORGANIZATION

The more quantitative panel study enabled further insight into the extent of playful organization among Dutch online gamers' communities more generally. Descriptive statistics showed that the OCAI responses of the 95 involved panelists could be grouped into four categories. Just over one half of the responses were interpreted as indicating most playful organization. Just over one third of the responses were interpreted as indicating moderately playful organization. Only 4.2% of the responses were interpreted as indicating least playful organization. Slightly more of the responses were interpreted as indicating unorganized online gaming communities, as panelists scored lower than five points (less than 'slightly agree') on all four of the OCAI's organizational cultures.

The four different levels of playful organization could be explained by interpreting results of logistic regression analyses (see also Appendix D). The results show that as a panelist's age and organizational commitment increase, the odds increase that the panelist will find his/her online gaming community more playfully organized. Moreover, as a community's age increases, the odds increase that the panelist will generally find it more playfully organized. A social rationale (as opposed to a more competitive rationale) greatly stimulates this effect. As the age of a community with a social rationale increases, the odds increase more strongly that the panelist will indicate more playful organization. However, as the age of a community with a competitive rationale increases, the odds increase that the panelist will indicate *less* playful organization. A most playful organization will attract older players because of the preference they can have for the less stringent and more social play style that comes with a most playful organization. Such a non-competitive community focuses on its members rather than the community's ambition and achievement, which in time can lead to tighter bonds, higher organizational commitment and hence more and more playful organization. Trust assurance and loyalty can still be relevant to even the most playfully organized communities, just like they were to *Major*.

Less playful or unorganized communities have very different profiles. Less playfully organized communities often attract young players motivated by achievement. Together these players will be committed to a goal and a task rather than to the online gaming community. The community can target a well-defined goal, highly specialize roles (including management roles) and assign leaders who command and control. An unorganized community will often be young and non-competitive in nature, attracting players with the lowest organizational commitment.

The community will have limited to no identity, rendering organizational commitment rather irrelevant. The members will find no reason for defining an organizational structure, most notably a hierarchy of sorts or some social norms. This is similar to *EVE*'s 'startup corporations'.

The panel study design allowed for a comparable analysis of the online gamers' work organizations. Descriptive statistics showed that the OCAI responses of 76 of the 95 panelists could be grouped into four categories, similar to the online gaming communities. Compared to the panelists' online gaming communities a lower percentage of the work organizations could be deemed most playful. The spread of work organizations among the four categories – most playful, moderately playful, least playful and unorganized – was actually much more even than it was in the case for online gaming communities (34.2%, 31.6%, 13.2%, 21.1% respectively). Still, most work organizations within the panel could, somewhat surprisingly, be deemed moderately or most playful.

The four types of work organizations were again explained by interpreting results of logistic regression analyses discussed in Appendix E. The results show that as a work organization ages, the odds increase that the panelist will find it a less playful organization. Less playful work organizations are generally characterized by low organizational commitment and even higher weekly gameplay time. Profiles of a most playful organization, less playful organization and apparently unorganized work organization were similar to those concerning the online gaming communities. Together the panelists thus experienced similar organizational phenomena in both contexts when describing them, using the main themes of the ideal-type as a framework. Moreover, a slight majority of the 76 panelists indicated that both their online gaming communities and work organizations were at least moderately playful organizations. The differences between the two concerned only the origins and context of the organizations.

The comparison was continued by analyzing how the individual panelists compared their communities to their work organizations. Most panelists found their online gaming communities and work organizations culturally quite equivalent. For most panelists (60.5%) the comparison was significant, whether or not the cultures were equivalent. Further logistic regression analyses (Appendix F) showed that four variables could predict whether or not a panelist was likely to find a cultural comparison significant. If panelists played and worked many hours each week, were highly committed to their communities and had fellow members from all over the world, chances were high they would find a comparison to their work organizations significant. Often these panelists preferred moderately or most playful organizations, for both their work organizations and online gaming communities. They at times indicated that they accept that this would be hard to achieve for some work organizations. For the other panelists (39.5%) the comparison had no significance. Generally these panelists saw and preferred to see the context of an online gaming community as different from that of a work organization, as traditional play theory suggests (Huizinga, 1938/1950).

CONSEQUENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given these results it is clear that the initial working hypothesis needs amendment. The initial working hypothesis suggested that work organizations are becoming similar to online gaming

communities, i.e., playful organizations. Many online gamers are indeed willing and able to find work organizations comparable to their online gaming communities. Yet many other online gamers are not. The results have shown that online gamers can find their communities least playfully organized and a comparison with their work organizations insignificant.

When positioned within the phenomenon-ideologizing frame (explained earlier), the presented results have further consequences. The first consequence is that a transformation of 'real-life' work organizations towards more playful ones is observable but that it faces three main barriers. First, a highly playful form of organization does not necessarily emerge in a context or age of play. Second, the context of play is at times consciously kept apart from the context of work. Finally, the risk of instigating playful work organizations can be found too high.

Further consequences of the results concern three scientific notions or theories underlying the phenomenon-ideologizing frame. First, the 'net generation' theory can be considered too simplistic. This theory assumes that younger generations require different (more playful) approaches to education and work because a majority of them have grown up with computer games and ICTs (see e.g. Beck & Wade, 2006; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998, 2008). A second notion is that of the 'ludification of culture' (Raessens, 2006, 2009). The presented results further develop and, to an extent, validate this notion. This thesis sheds more light on the ludification of *organizational* culture and shows its relevance, particularly in the 'virtual' world.

A third notion underlying the phenomenon-ideologizing frame is the currently highly popular 'gamification'. While the ludification of culture is an empirically underdeveloped philosophy, gamification is a much more pragmatic theory that is rather *overdeveloped*. As game designer Bogost argued (2011), some have defined gamification quite restrictively by focusing solely on competitiveness and achievement, i.e., the introduction of "rewards, challenges and contests" (Zichermann & Linder, 2010). This thesis contributes to a richer understanding of gamification. If gamification were broadened in meaning and applied to organizations, it would arguably be highly relatable to the notion of the playful organization. The results presented in this thesis would then both confirm and denounce the opportunities of gamification. They confirm it because a playful or gamified organization can indeed be valued by online gamers within the context of both an online gaming community and a work organization. However, they also denounce it, as online gamers sometimes do not value a playful or gamified organization in the virtual and/or 'real' world. Moreover, online gamers sometimes prefer to keep the context of online gaming separate from the context of work.

The results also have consequences when framed differently, i.e., using the other three frames of the impact of gaming on organizations. Framed in an experience-instrumentalizing manner, the results suggest that the acceptance of organizational models in serious games is uncertain. This is because many gaming employees value the ability to play in an organization and might therefore not accept the restrictive gameplay of a serious game designed from this frame. Simultaneously, it is important to realize that the effects of extensive serious gaming can be much more fundamental than the designers had hoped for, because of the implicit values that can underlie a play context. When gaming's impact is framed in an experience-ideologizing manner the results show that playful organization can be activated by online gaming, even

though the designers might not have consciously designed their games to have this specific impact. For experience-ideologizing researchers this might feel like a vindication, because the results show that games can be designed or simply applied to stimulate playful organization. Finally, framed in an phenomenon-instrumentalizing manner, the results uncover many possibilities for playful interventions in organizations. It should again be noted, however, that these playful interventions both attract and deter employees. The results do not offer any certainty as to the general success or failure (i.e., employee acceptance) of these playful interventions.

Ten recommendations were subsequently formulated in Chapter 8 for this thesis' main target audiences: researchers, organizational leaders and gamers. It should be noted that these target audiences can overlap, as the empirical research has in fact shown. The recommendations not only take into account the four different frames on gaming's organizational impact, they also take into account a diversity of opinions on organization itself.

Three recommendations were found to be most relevant for gamers, given that my studies have shown that gamers can be skeptical about the organization involved in online gaming. The recommendations focused on:

1. Ignoring the fictional setting of an online game in order to focus on the learning potential of organizational gameplay;
2. Specifying the organizational gameplay experience to increase the learning potential; and
3. Attempting to apply organizational gameplay experiences at work, by e.g. implementing readily available ICTs (for knowledge management or the instigation of an expertise hierarchy).

Of course, a gamer's influence is greater if he/she is also a leader or manager in the work organization. For such leaders three additional recommendations were found to be most relevant. These recommendations are based on my observation that leaders can be unsupportive, neutral or supportive of the notion of the playful organization in the 'virtual' and the 'real' world. These three recommendations focused on:

1. Being aware of the playful organization's diverse potential, thanks to the identification of four frames for positioning the concept within discourse on gaming's organizational impact;
2. Trying out some playful interventions using the examples offered in this thesis (see Tables 2.1, 3.2, 5.2, 6.5 and 7.6); and
3. Teaming up with game and play designers for design research into serious games and gamification with the aim of instigating playful organization.

When it comes to formulating recommendations for researchers, it is important to realize the high diversity of researchers in terms of objects and disciplines of study. The following final recommendations stress the importance and opportunities of *combining* different objects and disciplines of scientific research. Thus they are aimed at researchers who are interested in new opportunities for interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research. The final four recommendations focused on:

1. Taking a leap forward in interdisciplinarity by bringing together the entertainment game and organizational studies communities, both in terms of research object and discipline;
2. Considering the results presented in this thesis as urgent hypotheses requiring further research.
3. Continuing the exploratory research by developing new (structural) concepts of a playful organization, an understanding the contexts in which playful organizations can and cannot emerge, or actual serious games and gamifications as playful interventions.
4. Approaching the design and execution of the above research playfully by e.g. developing and using new observational techniques.

SAMENVATTING (SUMMARY IN DUTCH)

OP WEG NAAR SPEELSE ORGANISATIES

HOE ONLINE GAMERS ZICH ORGANISEREN

(EN WAT ANDERE ORGANISATIES VAN HEN KUNNEN LEREN)

INTRODUCTIE

Het wordt steeds makkelijker om voor te stellen hoe veelomvattend de impact van gaming op organisaties kan zijn. Er zijn minstens vier frames om de potentiële impact van gaming op organisaties te begrijpen. Ik definieer een frame als een instrument waarmee realiteit *gedefinieerd* in plaats van beschreven wordt (Donati, 1992; Fisher, 1997, 5.4). Zodoende definieert elk frame de impact van gaming op organisaties op een andere manier. Dit betekent dat de impact van gaming subjectief in plaats van objectief is. De impact hangt af van hoe de gameonderzoeker, -ontwerper of -speler impliciet dan wel expliciet de rol van gaming binnen en de daaropvolgende impact op organisaties kiest te interpreteren. Dit wordt blootgesteld door de ontologische veronderstellingen over gaming en de doelen van gaming te beschouwen. Gaming kan worden gedefinieerd als een ontworpen ervaring of als iets veel groters: een sociaal-cultureel fenomeen. De doelen van gaming kunnen in algemene zin instrumentalistisch of ideologisch worden gedefinieerd. Samen creëren deze veronderstellingen over gaming en zijn doelen vier frames voor het definiëren van de impact van gaming op organisaties: het ervaring-instrumentaliserende, ervaring-idealiserende, fenomeen-instrumentaliserende en fenomeen-idealiserende frames.

In het ervaring-instrumentaliserende frame wordt gaming als een ervaring (een gespeeld spel) gezien dat ontworpen is om een specifiek leereffect op individueel of organisatorisch niveau te bewerkstelligen. De gewenste of voorgestelde organisatorische impact bestaat dan uit een meetbare verandering in het gedrag van werknemers of in de kritieke prestatie-indicatoren van de organisatie (bijv. toegenomen efficiëntie of omzet). Gaming is nog steeds een ervaring in het ervaring-idealiserende frame, maar nu is de ervaring ontworpen om specifieke waarden en principes te activeren bij de spelers en daarmee binnen de organisatie. De gewenste of voorgestelde impact is dan minder tastbaar, maar wél fundamenteeler. In het fenomeen-instrumentaliserende frame wordt gaming gezien als een industrie dat moet groeien of waarvan geleerd moet worden ten behoeve van andere industrieën. De sociale structuren en systemen van de gaming, creatieve, culturele of nieuwe-economie industrieën worden geanalyseerd om zo organisaties binnen en buiten deze industrieën te innoveren. De impact van zulke analyses zou kunnen bestaan uit structurele veranderingen.

Tenslotte worden in het fenomeen-idealiserende frame de vorige drie frames gezien als symptomen van een fundamenteelere organisatieverandering: een verandering in organisatiecultuur. Een verandering in organisatiecultuur is op komst dankzij de populariteit van spelen in het dagelijks leven. De mogelijkheid om te spelen op het werk zou dusdanig

belangrijk gevonden worden dat organisaties als gevolg heel *speels* worden. Ze worden heel creatief, spontaan en plezierig. Ik plaats dit proefschrift in deze frame.

Het probleem is dat we tot dusver alleen maar kunnen speculeren over deze potentiële transformatie naar speelse organisaties. Er is nog weinig kennis over de daadwerkelijke organisatorische impact van gaming in het algemeen, laat staan op een cultureel niveau. De notie van een speelse organisatie vereist meer fundamenteel en empirisch onderzoek om speculatie over zijn aard en opkomst te veranderen in een daadwerkelijk theorie.

Eén manier om onderzoek naar de aard en opkomst van speelse organisaties te doen is te focussen op online gamers en hun ervaringen met online gaming communities en werkorganisaties. Dit is omdat online gaming communities eigenlijk speelse organisaties *pur sang* zijn. Online gamers zijn vaak volwassenen, waarmee ze ervaring hebben met zowel communities als werkorganisaties. Ze zouden wel eens de experts kunnen zijn als het gaat om speelse organisaties in de virtuele wereld van online gaming en de 'echte' wereld van werk. Ze zouden ons kunnen vertellen over de mate van speelse organisatie onder online gaming communities en de toepasbaarheid en wenselijkheid ervan onder werkorganisaties.

Dit proefschrift is het resultaat van onderzoek naar wat de speelse organisatie nou eigenlijk zou kunnen zijn en in hoeverre online gamers' communities en werkorganisaties daadwerkelijk speelse organisaties kunnen zijn. Als werkhypothese werd aangenomen dat werkorganisaties speelse organisaties aan het worden zijn, zoals online gaming communities al zijn.

METHODOLOGIE

Er werd eerst een speelse organisatie 'ideaal-type' (Torr, 2008; Weber, 1949) ontwikkeld om een werkbaar begrip van de aard van een speelse organisatie te verkrijgen. De ontwikkeling begon met een focus op wat een speelse organisatiecultuur zou inhouden. Dit startpunt werd gekozen, omdat organisatiecultuur wordt gezien als het fundament van de structuur en dynamiek van een organisatie. Vele publicaties over speltheorie en spelgeïnspireerde organisatietheorie werden gadeslagen om vervolgens kernwaardes die gezamenlijk een speelse organisatiecultuur vormen te conceptualiseren. Vervolgens werd een speelse organisatiestructuur geconceptualiseerd, welke zijn basis vond in twee perspectieven. De eerste is een management-sociologisch perspectief, welke ingaat op hoe management o.a. toegang tot en vertrek uit de organisatie, taakspecialisatie, hiërarchie en leiderschap definieert. De tweede is een socio-technisch perspectief, welke ingaat op wat veelal kennismanagement wordt genoemd, ofwel het ontwerp en de implementatie van technologieën en technieken voor het ontwikkelen, delen en opslaan van kennis.

De ontstane ideaal-type maakt meer gefocuste literatuurstudies en empirische studies mogelijk. Zodoende werden organisatorische studies van online gaming communities en de theorie van professionele-organisatiearchetypes (Brock, 2006) besproken. De ideaal-type vormde een analysekader om te achterhalen of de literatuur iets onthulde over de vermoedelijke opkomst van speelse organisaties in beide contexten. Het daaropvolgende ontwerp van

empirisch onderzoek vereiste behoorlijk wat speelsheid. Er was een sterke behoefte aan creativiteit, spontaniteit en (als ik zo vrij mag zijn) plezier om het empirisch onderzoek tot stand te brengen, aangezien de opkomst van speelse organisaties in de virtuele wereld en de 'echte' wereld nog niet eerder onderzocht was. Een sequentiële exploratieve strategie (Creswell, 2003, p. 215) werd gevolgd gebaseerd op een subtiel-realistische (Hammersley, 1992, pp. 52-54) benadering van het ontwikkelen van kennis over de speelse organisatie. In deze empirische onderzoeksstrategie wordt er eerst een kwalitatief onderzoek ontworpen, gevolgd door een kwantitatief onderzoek. Het laatste is bedoeld om inzichten verkregen uit het eerste te kunnen generaliseren, contextualiseren en simpelweg uit te breiden.

Kwalitatief onderzoek was een noodzakelijke eerste fase van het empirisch onderzoek. Ik moest eerst beter begrijpen wat er daadwerkelijk in online games gebeurt qua organisatie om de organisatorische relatie tussen online gamers' communities en werkorganisaties volledig te kunnen begrijpen. Eén veelvoorkomende en prima manier om dit begrip te ontwikkelen is om zelf als onderzoeker een online gamer te worden. Dit wordt etnografisch onderzoek genoemd, wat een veelvoorkomende strategie is in antropologie. Etnografisch onderzoek hielp me een antwoord te vinden op de vraag op welk moment en hoe een online gamer communities creëert of toetreedt, wat de kenmerken zijn van die communities, en in hoeverre de communities speels zijn georganiseerd.

Ik koos ervoor om *virtueel-organisatorisch etnografisch* onderzoek te doen naar *EVE Online*. Het onderzoek richtte zich tot de online game *EVE* om meerdere redenen. Organisatie bleek een integraal onderdeel te zijn van gameplay, terwijl de fictieve wereld een sterk economisch en daarmee realistisch fundament had, en de online game eigenlijk nog niet veel onderzocht bleek te zijn. Met hulp van een assistent wist ik een vrij oud en bekend 'corporation' te vinden en toe te treden, welke in dit proefschrift de pseudoniem *Major* heeft gekregen uit privacyoverwegingen. De speelse organisatie ideaal-type kon voor dit onderzoek als kader gebruikt worden voor een organisatorische analyse van deze corporation. Deze aanpak week af van 'traditionele' etnografieën om drie redenen. Ten eerste vormde dit onderzoek slechts een eerste stap in de gehele sequentiële exploratieve strategie. Ten tweede was er geen sprake van direct/persoonlijk interactie met de ontmoete mensen. Ten derde richtte het onderzoek zich alleen op de aspecten van organisatie zoals gedefinieerd in de speelse organisatie ideaal-type.

Kwantitatief onderzoek vormde de tweede stap in de sequentiële exploratieve strategie. Dit onderzoek had het generaliseren, contextualiseren en uitbreiden van de resultaten van het etnografisch onderzoek ten doel gesteld. De uitbreiding ging in op reflecties op de relatie tussen online gaming communities en werkorganisaties. Hiervoor was een group online gamers nodig die kwantificeerbare data konden bieden ten behoeve van statistische analyses. Ik koos ervoor om een panel te vormen, wat het mogelijk maakte om meer data van een steekproef van online gamers te behalen dan een andere kwantitatieve methode (zoals een eenmalige vragenlijst). Het panel bestond uiteindelijk uit 95 Nederlandse werkende online gamers. Het panel was divers qua gespeelde spellen, leeftijd, woonadres en speelduur (per week en in totaal). De steekproef kon een goede indicatie geven of online gaming communities waar Nederlanders bij betrokken zijn in het algemeen speels georganiseerd zijn, ervan uitgaande dat de meeste online gamers op

een bepaald moment communities creëren of toetreden. Belangrijker nog, de steekproef maakte vergelijkingen mogelijk tussen online gamers' communities en werkorganisaties.

De ideaal-type moest echter eerst nog verder geoperationaliseerd worden voordat het kon worden gebruikt in dit kwantitatieve onderzoek van online gamers' communities en werkorganisaties. Het Organisatiecultuur Bepalingsinstrument (Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument, ofwel OCAI, Cameron & Quinn, 2006) bleek een nuttig instrument voor het meten van de algemene mate van speelse organisatie van zowel online gaming communities als werkorganisaties. Dit is omdat de OCAI goed te koppelen is aan de speelse organisatie ideaal-type. De OCAI is gebaseerd op vier organisatieculturen, genaamd Clan, Adhocratie, Markt en Hiërarchie. Als deze culturen met elkaar vergeleken worden, dan wordt het duidelijk dat Clan en Adhocratie flexibiliteit en beslissingsvrijheid centraal stellen, terwijl Markt en Hiërarchie stabiliteit en controle centraal stellen (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, pp. 35 - 45). Dit suggereert dat Clan en Adhocratie erg goed bij de speelse organisatie ideaal-type passen. De OCAI kan daarom gebruikt worden om de speelse organisatie ideaal-type te kwantificeren. Er werden een aantal mogelijk voorspellende variabelen gedefinieerd als startpunt voor het contextualiseren van de speelse organisatie van online gamers' communities en werkorganisaties, alsmede vergelijkingen tussen de twee. Deze variabelen richtten zich op het individu (bijv. leeftijd, wekelijkse speeltijd, wekelijkse werktijd) en op de sociale context (bijv. aantal leden in de community of aantal medewerkers in de werkorganisatie). De statistische analyses bestonden uit descriptieve en logistische regressieanalyses (zie Bijlagen C-G).

RESULTATEN

EEN SPEELSE ORGANISATIE IDEEAAL-TYPE

Een begrip van spelen maakte het mogelijk kernwaardes op te stellen die medewerkers centraal zouden moeten stellen om te kunnen spelen op het werk. Zes kernwaardes werden geconceptualiseerd en toegelicht:

- *Eventualiteit*
Medewerkers waarderen eventualiteit en daarmee ook onzekerheid, wat een sterk afgebakend en geïnstrumentiseerd organisatiedoel irrelevant maakt. Eventualiteit komt tot uitdrukking in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld onzekerheid of het formuleren van 'epische' of niet 'nauwe' doelen nadrukkelijk omarmen (Kane, 2004, p. 257; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, pp. 89-90; McGonigal, 2011, pp. 55-57; Pink, 2009, pp. 45, 50-51).
- *Alertheid*
Medewerkers zijn bewust van en handelen naar elke mogelijkheid waarmee ze het doel of de rationale van de organisatie kunnen nastreven. Alertheid komt tot uitdrukking in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld het stimuleren van het nemen van risico's en herhaald falen ten behoeve van de grootste successen omarmen (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, pp. 47, 128; 2010, pp. 62-64; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 83; Reeves & Read, 2009, p. 89). Nog praktischer komt het tot uitdrukking in publicaties die refereren aan Googles beleid om medewerkers

ongeveer 20% van hun tijd besteden aan het bedenken en uitwerken van hun eigen ideeën voor nieuwe producten (Levy, 2011, pp. 162-164; Pink, 2009, p. 82).

- *Gelijkwaardigheid*
Medewerkers hebben gelijke mogelijkheden wat betreft acties en groei, ongeacht hun hiërarchische verschillen. Gelijkwaardigheid komt tot uitdrukking in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld een organisatie 'platte' (ofwel een verticaal gezien korte) machtshiërarchie benadrukken (Kane, 2004, p. 276; Levy, 2011, p. 158; Pink, 2009, p. 30). Het komt ook tot uitdrukking in publicaties die teamwerk omarmen, ofwel relatief kleine groepen mensen die zichzelf organiseren om zo bepaalde (sub-)projecten te doen (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 90; 2010, p. 38; Levy, 2011, p. 162; Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 129-133).
- *Leergierigheid*
Medewerkers maken gebruik van allerlei soorten educatieve en behulpzame gelegenheden. Leergierigheid komt tot uitdrukking in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld de uitgebreide universiteitsprogramma's van grote organisaties benoemen waarmee medewerkers worden opgeleid en getraind (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 150; 2010, pp. 47-49; Levy, 2011, p. 136).
- *Meritocratie*
Medewerkers worden sociaal erkend voor hun moeite en competentie. Meritocratie komt tot uitdrukking in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld stellen hoe krachtig 'prosociale' emoties zoals medeleven en bewondering zijn, en hoe intrinsiek belonend sociale betrokkenheid is (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 82, 91).
- *Levenslustigheid*
Medewerkers gaan informeel met elkaar om en zijn levendig en humoristisch over hun werk. Levenslustigheid komt tot uiting in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld informaliteit en een plezierige werksfeer omarmen om zo continu proefondervindelijk ('trial-and-error') gedrag te stimuleren (Capodagli & Jackson, 2002/2007, p. 136; 2010, pp. 67-68).

Op hun beurt inspireren deze zes kernwaardes vier management-sociologische concepten en drie socio-technische concepten van hoe een speelse organisatie er structureel uit zou zien:

- *Open toegang en vertrek*
Organisatorische grenzen hebben een beperkte betekenis, omdat medewerkers continu de organisatie in- en uittreden. Dit concept is te identificeren in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld het beperkt gebruik van arbeidscontracten omarmen (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, p. 44), of een toename signaleren in zelfstandigen zonder personeel of freelanceorganisaties ('non-employer businesses', Pink, 2009, p. 30).
- *Vrij kiesbare en ontwikkelbare rollen*
Medewerkers zijn vrij om rollen te kiezen en te ontwikkelen binnen de organisatie. Dit concept is te identificeren in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld benoemen hoe animatiestudio Pixar benadrukt dat medewerkers kunnen kiezen wat ze doen, hoe ze dat doen en wanneer ze dat doen (Capodagli & Jackson, 2010, pp. 40-41).
- *Verspreid leiderschap*
Medewerkers nemen geregeld leiderschap aan en verwachten en accepteren dit dus ook van

elkaar. Dit concept is te identificeren in publicaties die bijvoorbeeld 'teamautonomie' omarmen, ofwel het kunnen vormen van meerdere teams en het zelf kunnen bepalen van leiderschapsarrangementen binnen teams (Pink, 2009, p. 90).

- *Expertisehiërarchie*
De hiërarchie reflecteert de verschillende soorten en niveaus van expertise binnen de organisatie. Dit concept is te identificeren in een publicatie waar studenten kunnen 'levelen' gebaseerd op competenties/inzet, waarmee achting wordt opgebouwd (McGonigal, 2011, pp. 130-131). Het is ook te identificeren in een publicatie die het gebruik van scoreborden en puntsystemen omarmt om met name verkopers te stimuleren (Zichermann & Linder, 2010, pp. 185-186).
- *Vraag gestuurde kennis- en communicatiesuite*
Medewerkers communiceren en werken samen met wat voor ICT ze ook maar willen. Dit concept is te identificeren in een publicatie die het gebruik van meerdere gemakkelijk aanpasbare communicatiesystemen omarmt (Reeves & Read, 2009, pp. 84-88).
- *Grenzeloos kennisnetwerken*
Medewerkers gebruiken ICT om kennis te vergaren en te verspreiden, zowel intern als extern. Dit concept is te identificeren in een publicatie die de kennismanagementmogelijkheden omarmt van social networking websites en instant messaging systemen (McNely, 2011; Ou et al., 2011).
- *Gezamenlijk ontwikkeld expliciete kennis*
Medewerkers structuren kennis en slaan kennis op over processen en procedures op een gezamenlijke manier. Dit concept is te identificeren in een publicatie die Googles gebruik van ICT om projectinformatie en -kennis door en onder medewerkers te delen (Levy, 2011, p. 164).

SPEELSE ORGANISATIES IN REEDS UITGEVOERD EMPIRISCH ONDERZOEK

Het eerste deel van de literatuurbespreking gaf indicaties dat online gaming communities speelse organisaties kunnen worden genoemd. Wetenschappers hebben veel verschillende en vaak niet gedefinieerde concepten gebruikt om de online gaming communities die zij onderzochten te beschrijven, waaronder community, guild, groep, team, organisatie en netwerk. Wetenschappers hebben ook veel verschillende aspecten en operationalisaties van online gaming communities beschreven (18 in totaal). Alleen al de diversiteit in concepten, aspecten en operationalisaties laat zien dat er een hoge mate van speelse organisatie is. Specifieke operationalisaties en aspecten suggereren bovendien dat online gaming communities structureel en cultureel speelse organisaties zijn. Een korte samenvatting van alle operationalisaties en aspecten is onmogelijk. Er kunnen alleen enkele voorbeelden gegeven worden. Eén voorbeeld zijn de besproken praktijken in sociale structurering. Meerdere kenmerken van de speelse organisatie ideaal-type zijn toepasbaar op de geïdentificeerde praktijken voor sociale structurering, waaronder het concept van vrij kiesbare en ontwikkelbare rollen en van verspreid leiderschap. Een ander voorbeeld zijn de twee belangrijke culturen die de literatuur benoemt: de 'casual' en de 'militaristische' culturen. De kernwaardes gelijkwaardigheid en levenslustigheid suggereren dat de 'casual' online gaming communities

speelsere organisaties zijn, omdat ze vooral plezier, hechte banden en gelijke machtsverdeling benadrukken.

De analyse toonde echter ook aan dat sommige operationalisaties en aspecten van online gaming communities sterk contrasteren met de speelse organisatie ideaal-type. Het meest pertinente voorbeeld hiervan is de zojuist genoemde militaristische cultuur. De speelse kernwaardes alertheid en gelijkwaardigheid passen slecht in een militaristische online gaming community waar regels voor spelerstoegang en –bijdragen, alsmede hiërarchische machtsverhoudingen de norm zijn. De speelse structurele concepten van vrij kiesbare en ontwikkelbare rollen en verspreid leiderschap passen waarschijnlijk ook slecht in dit soort communities. Andere kernwaardes kunnen nog steeds van toepassing zijn: meritocratie, leergierigheid en levenslustigheid. Speelse concepten geïnspireerd door deze kernwaardes kunnen daarmee ook nog steeds van toepassing zijn, zoals expertisehiërarchie of grenzeloos kennisnetwerken. Desalniettemin suggereert de literatuur dus dat sommige online gaming communities kenmerken hebben die één of meerdere mogelijkheden voor speelse organisatie beperken. Online gaming communities kunnen vaak, maar niet altijd, als zeer speelse organisaties worden beschouwd.

Brock behandelde vier vrij duidelijk gedefinieerde en uitgebreid onderzochte archetypen professionele organisaties: de professionele bureaucratie, professionele partnership, gemanagede professionele business en het wereldwijde professionele netwerk (2006). Theoretici hebben deze archetypen beschreven middels vrijwel identieke aspecten en operationalisaties: eigendomsvorm, plaats en schaal, management identiteit en verantwoordelijkheden, manager/professional ratio, strategische besluitvorming, diversiteit in de praktijken van de professionals, standaardisatie van de professionele praktijk, prestatiemeting en interpretatieschema (organisatiecultuur).

Definities en karakterisering en suggereren dat de professionele bureaucratie, professionele partnership en het wereldwijde professionele netwerk speelsere organisaties zijn dan de gemanagede professionele business. Professionele autonomie wordt benadrukt in de karakterisering van de professionele bureaucratie en de professionele partnership. De hogere mate van autonomie in deze twee archetypen maakt de speelse kernwaarden alertheid en gelijkwaardigheid zeer relevant. Het wereldwijde professionele netwerk past ook goed bij de ideaal-type, maar om een andere reden. In de beschrijvingen van dit archetype wordt professionele autonomie wel besproken, maar niet benadrukt. Alertheid is desalniettemin belangrijk voor deze archetype. In dit geval is alertheid vooral evident op managementniveau, omdat het management actief op zoek gaat naar mogelijkheden voor nieuwe netwerken met andere organisaties. Deze benadering van alertheid maakt ook het speelse concept open toegang en vertrek relevant, omdat medewerkers makkelijk zouden moeten kunnen samenwerken met mensen uit andere organisaties. De gemanagede professionele business past slechter bij de speelse organisatie ideaal-type, omdat deze archetype de macht van het management benadrukt in plaats van professionele autonomie. De karakterisering en suggereren dat eventualiteit, alertheid en gelijkwaardigheid uitermate moeilijk te vinden zijn in dit archetype.

Als ook de geïdentificeerde operationalisaties en aspecten mee worden genomen, dan blijkt de professionele partnership het beste en wederom de gemanagede professionele business het slechtste te relateren aan de speelse organisatie ideaal-type. De speelse concepten expertisehiërarchie en verspreid leiderschap suggereren dat managers van een speelse professionele organisatie eigenlijk gewaardeerde professionals zijn met additionele coördinatietaken (bijvoorbeeld personeelsmanagement, vermogens- of voorzieningsbeheer). Het speels concept vrij kiesbare en ontwikkelbare rollen suggereert dat de professionele praktijk divers en in principe niet gestandaardiseerd is in een speelse organisatie. Management zou dan alleen de basiscompetenties van een professional kunnen definiëren en standaardiseren. Een lage manager/professional ratio en uitgebreide consultatie in strategische besluitvorming zijn ook meer speels dan hun tegenhangers. Het past ook beter bij de speelse organisatie ideaal-type als prestatiemeting zich richt op de professionals inzet in plaats van op taakefficiëntie. Al deze kenmerken betekenen dat de professionele archetype meer een speelse organisatie is dan de gemanagde professionele business.

EVE ONLINE'S SPEELSE ORGANISATIES

EVE Online bood daadwerkelijke ervaring met speelse organisatie in de virtuele wereld. Ik begon dit spel in september 2008 te spelen met een karakter van een specifiek ras (Minmatar) en klasse (Sebiestor) en was gericht op een carrière in de productie en verkoop van ruimtevaartuigen en hun onderdelen. De competentieontwikkeling die het karakter hiervoor nodig had of kon hebben was onophoudelijk en duurde telkens tussen enkele uren en enkele dagen of zelfs weken. Hoe hoger het competentieniveau, hoe langer de ontwikkeling duurde. Gelukkig vond die ontwikkeling zelfs plaats als ik niet *EVE* speelde. Met de juiste competenties en de juiste blauwdrukken kon productie plaatsvinden op een ruimtestation voorzien van productiegedeelte. Als het gevolg hiervan spendeerde ik veel tijd in een ruimtestation, wat nogal saai kon zijn. Ik verkocht de geproduceerde goederen op ruimtestations waar spelers de beste prijzen ervoor boden. Dit maakte het spelen weer spannend, omdat ik er het 'Player-versus-Player' universum voor moest doorkruisen met steeds waardevollere lading, waardoor ik risico liep overvallen te worden door een tegenspeler.

Op den duur zullen spelmechanismen spelers stimuleren of zelfs verplichten meer sociaal te worden en doen beslissen een eerste corporation te vormen of bij aan te sluiten. Door bij een 'startup corporation' aan te sluiten leerde ik meer en sneller over *EVE's* mogelijkheden. Dit was een kleine groep Nederlandssprekende spelers. We gingen gezamenlijk grondstoffen ontginnen ('mining') en bespraken zaken die we nog niet volledig begrepen met elkaar. Dergelijke startup corporations spelen een belangrijke rol in *EVE* als organisaties die ontstaan uit een behoefte aan samenwerkend leren. Ze zijn heel dynamisch qua aantal leden en ledenactiviteit. Ze laten vaak bijna iedereen toe, voornamelijk nieuwe spelers. Ze staan ook open voor vrijwel alle gameplay die *EVE* te bieden heeft, aangezien het doel is om gezamenlijk en daarmee sneller het spel te leren spelen. Startup corporations zijn meestal niet competitief, in ieder geval niet in eerste instantie. Ze zullen niet pogen om een regio uit de ruimte te overheersen, of om alsmear meer ISK (gamegeld) te verdienen middels productie en verkoop, bijvoorbeeld. Op den duur zullen startup corporations groeien, fuseren met andere corporations of simpelweg uit elkaar vallen. Dat laatste gebeurde met mijn startup corporation, vooral omdat

leden de corporation verlieten om verschillende carrières te gaan ontwikkelen of spelmechanismen verder te gaan ervaren binnen meer gevestigde corporations en allianties.

Met hulp van een assistent wist ik ook een meer gevestigde corporation te vinden en bij aan te sluiten: *Major*. Dergelijke corporations hebben structurele en culturele kenmerken die bijdragen aan hun voortdurend bestaan en belang binnen de *EVE* community. *Major* was met name succesvol in productie, verkoop en een aantal financiële diensten. Het was ook behoorlijk stabiel. Toen ik lid werd had het al meer dan zes jaar bestaan en groeide het gedurende ongeveer zes maanden van 40 naar 60 leden. De corporation had zes 'presidenten' (leiders). Toegang was gebaseerd op vertrouwen, en de rollen die leden hadden werden door ze zelf bepaald in onderhandeling met de leiders. De corporation had een hiërarchie die verschillende niveaus in expertise en vertrouwen aangaf, alsmede een minder belangrijke en 'platte' hiërarchie die strategische besluitvormingsmacht aangaf. Leiderschap was grillig, omdat leden van alle niveaus in de hiërarchie het leken te tonen wanneer ze taken aannamen en hulp vroegen van anderen. Het gedrag van de daadwerkelijke leiders van de corporation was niet autoritair en bestond voornamelijk uit coördinatie en cultivatie. Een grote hoeveelheid ICT werd gebruikt, met name IRC kanalen en discussiefora. De ICT was in ieder geval ondersteunend van aard en was gebaseerd op de behoefte van de corporation. Ze versterkten de stijl van taakspecialisatie, leiderschap en hiërarchie. Cultureel leken de meeste leden van *Major* een hoge waarde te hechten aan vriendschap, uniciteit en efficiëntie binnen de corporation.

Zowel *EVE*'s startup corporations als *Major* kunnen gezien worden als speelse organisaties. Startup corporations bieden meerdere voorbeelden van speelse organisatie, met name in hun openheid voor nieuwe leden, hun bereidheid om allerlei soorten spelervaringen te proberen en hun onzekere bestaan over tijd. *Major* bood nog eens 23 voorbeelden van speelse organisatie (zie tabel 5.2). De speelse concepten open toegang en vertrek, vrij kiesbare en ontwikkelbare rollen, expertisehiërarchie, verspreid leiderschap en gezamenlijk ontwikkeld expliciete kennis waren van toepassing op *Major*. Twee factoren zetten druk op de volledige toepasbaarheid van deze concepten: het belang van vertrouwen tussen leden en de loyaliteit naar de gewaardeerde leden en leiders dat komt met langdurig vertrouwen. Hiermee kon worden geconcludeerd dat een vertrouwensgarantie en loyaliteit de speelsheid van een online gaming community kan beperken. De speelse organisatie ideaal-type is wederom niet een absoluut ideaal of standaard in online gaming. *Major* was desalniettemin een erg speelse organisatie.

Een corporations grotere context beïnvloedt zijn kernwaarden en dus de mate van speelse organisatie. *Major* werd ook beïnvloed door de alliantie van corporations waar het onderdeel van was destijds, alsmede door *EVE* als spel binnen de gehele massively multiplayer online gaming markt. *Majors* keuze voor een alliantie was een bewuste. De gekozen alliantie moest passen binnen en had tegelijkertijd een invloed op de corporations geprefereerde structuur en cultuur. De alliantie prefereerde vreedzame interacties met *EVE* spelers, zelfs als ze niet onderdeel waren van de alliantie. Om hem beter te begrijpen moet die alliantie vervolgens weer geplaatst worden binnen *EVE* als een specifieke online game. De alliantie was klein en niet-imperialistisch in vergelijking met andere en bekendere allianties die groter en imperialistisch waren. De mogelijkheid om een dergelijk unieke alliantie te vormen, of welk type alliantie dan

ook, komt voort uit het 'zandbak' ontwerpprincipe die CCP Games aanhoudt als onderscheidend en daarmee goed verkopend eigenschap. In dat opzicht is *EVE* een ideale omgeving voor speelse organisatie binnen het gehele online gaming landschap. Desalniettemin maakt het zandbakprincipe gameplay mogelijk die infiltraties, diefstal en zwendelpraktijken omvatte, waardoor vertrouwensgarantie en daarmee beperkingen op speelse organisatie zeer belangrijk werden.

NEDERLANDSE ONLINE GAMERS' ERVARINGEN MET SPEELSE ORGANISATIES

Het kwantitatieve panelonderzoek bracht meer inzicht in de mate van speelse organisatie onder Nederlandse online gamers' communities in het algemeen. Beschrijvende statistieken lieten zien dat OCAI antwoorden van de 95 panelleden ingedeeld konden worden in vier categorieën. Net over de helft van de antwoorden werden geïnterpreteerd als duidend op meest speelse organisatie. Net over één derde van de antwoorden duidde gematigd speelse organisatie. Slechts 4,2% van de antwoorden duidden minst speelse organisatie. Iets meer antwoorden werden geïnterpreteerd als duidend op ongeorganiseerde online gaming communities, omdat panelleden de vier organisatieculturen van de OCAI lager dan vijf punten scoorden (minder dan 'lichtelijk mee eens').

De vier verschillende niveaus van speelse organisatie konden worden verklaard door resultaten van logistische-regressieanalyses te interpreteren (zie ook bijlage D). De resultaten laten zien dat hoe hoger de leeftijd van het panellid, hoe hoger de kans dat het panellid zijn/haar online gaming community als meer speels georganiseerd kenmerkt. Bovendien neemt die kans ook toe naarmate de leeftijd van de community toeneemt. Een sociale rationale (in plaats van een competitieve rationale) moedigt dit effect sterk aan. Hoe ouder een community met een sociale rationale, hoe hoger de kans dat het panellid zijn/haar community als speels georganiseerd kenmerkt. Echter, hoe ouder een community met een competitieve rationale, hoe hoger de kans dat het panellid zijn/haar community als *minder* speels georganiseerd kenmerkt. Een meest speels georganiseerde community trekt oudere spelers aan, omdat deze spelers behoefte kunnen hebben en minder strikte en de meer sociale speelstijl dat bij een speelse organisatie komt kijken. Een dergelijke niet-competitieve community richt zich op zijn leden in plaats van op ambitie en prestaties, wat op den duur kan leiden tot hechtere banden, hogere betrokkenheid en daarmee meer en meer speelse organisatie. Vertrouwensgarantie en loyaliteit kunnen nog steeds relevant zijn voor de meest speels georganiseerde communities, net als bij *Major*.

Minder speels georganiseerde of ongeorganiseerde communities hebben hele andere profielen. Minder speelse organisaties trekken vaak jongere spelers aan die gemotiveerd zijn door prestaties. Samen zijn deze spelers gecommitteerd aan een doel en een taak in plaats van aan de online gaming community. De community kan zich richten op een goed afgebakend doel, rollen/taken sterk specialiseren (inclusief managementrollen) en leiders toewijzen die commanderen en controleren. Een ongeorganiseerde community zal vaak jong en niet-competitief van aard zijn, waarmee spelers worden aangetrokken met de laagste betrokkenheid aan de community zelf. De community zal een beperkte of geen identiteit hebben, waarmee betrokkenheid nogal irrelevant wordt. De leden zullen geen reden vinden om een

organisatiestructuur zoals een hiërarchie of sociale normen te definiëren. Dit is soortgelijk aan *EVE's* 'startup corporations'.

Het ontwerp van het panelonderzoek maakte vergelijkbare analyses mogelijk van de online gamers' werkorganisaties. Beschrijvende statistieken liezen zien dat de OCAI antwoorden van 76 van de 95 panelleden in vier categorieën ingedeeld konden worden, vergelijk met de online gaming communities. In vergelijking met de communities bleek een lager percentage van de werkorganisaties als meest speelse organisaties aangemerkt te kunnen worden. De spreiding van werkorganisaties over de vier categorieën – meest speels, gematigd speels, minst speels en ongeorganiseerd – was meer gelijk dan in het geval van de communities (respectievelijk 34,2%, 31,6%, 13,2% en 21,1%). Desalniettemin konden de meeste werkorganisaties binnen het panel verrassend genoeg als gematigd of meest speelse organisaties worden beschouwd.

De vier typen werkorganisaties konden weer verklaard worden door resultaten van logistische-regressieanalyses te interpreteren (zie bijlage E). De resultaten lieten zien dat naarmate een werkorganisatie ouder wordt, de kans toeneemt dat het panellid het een minder speelse organisatie vindt. Minder speelse werkorganisaties brengen in het algemeen lage betrokkenheid bij de organisatie met zich mee. De profielen van een meest speelse, minder speelse en ongeorganiseerde werkorganisatie waren soortgelijk aan die van de online gaming communities. Gezamenlijk ondergingen de panelleden dus soortgelijke organisatorische fenomenen in beide contexten wanneer die werden beschreven aan de hand van de hoofdthema's van de ideaal-type. Bovendien gaf een kleine meerderheid van de 76 panelleden aan dat zowel hun online gaming communities en werkorganisaties (gematigd) speelse organisaties waren. De verschillen tussen de twee lagen alleen in de oorsprong en context van de organisaties.

De vergelijking werd doorgezet door te analyseren hoe de individuele panelleden hun communities met hun werkorganisaties vergeleken. De meeste panelleden vonden hun online gaming communities en werkorganisaties cultureel (redelijk) gelijkwaardig. De vergelijking had bovendien voor de meeste panelleden (60,5%) betekenis, ongeacht of de culturen gelijkwaardig waren of niet. Verdere logistische-regressieanalyses (bijlage F) lieten zien dat vier variabelen konden voorspellen of een panellid een culturele vergelijking betekenisvol vond. Als panelleden relatief veel uren per week werkten en speelden, sterk betrokken waren bij hun communities, en hun communities leden hadden van over de gehele wereld, dan waren de kansen hoog dat ze een vergelijking met hun werkorganisatie betekenisvol vonden. Vaak hadden deze panelleden voorkeur voor gematigd of meest speelse organisaties, zowel wat betreft hun werkorganisatie als hun online gaming community. Soms gaven ze aan dat ze konden accepteren dat dit moeilijker te bereiken was voor sommige werkorganisaties. De culturele vergelijking had voor de andere panelleden (39,5%) geen betekenis. In het algemeen zagen deze panelleden (liever) de context van een online gaming community als anders dan dat van een werkorganisatie, zoals traditionele speltheorie ook suggereert (Huizinga, 1938/1950).

CONSEQUENTIES EN AANBEVELINGEN

Gegeven de resultaten is het duidelijk dat de oorspronkelijke werkhypothese aangepast moet worden. Deze werkhypothese stelde dat werkorganisaties soortgelijk aan online gaming communities aan het worden zijn, namelijk speelse organisaties. Veel online gamers zijn inderdaad bereid en in staat om werkorganisaties te vinden die vergelijkbaar zijn met hun online gaming communities. Echter, veel andere online gamers zijn dat niet. De resultaten laten zien dat online gamers hun communities minst speels georganiseerd en een vergelijking met hun werkorganisaties betekenisloos kunnen vinden.

Er volgen meer consequenties wanneer de resultaten in het eerder besproken fenomeen-idealiserende frame worden geplaatst. De eerste consequentie is dat een transformatie van 'echte' werkorganisaties naar speelsere organisaties te observeren is, maar drie barrières ondervindt. Ten eerste blijkt een speelse vorm van organisatie niet noodzakelijk te ontstaan in een spelcontext of -tijdperk. Ten tweede blijkt een spelcontext soms bewust apart gehouden te worden van een werkcontext. Tot slot wordt soms het risico van een speelse werkorganisatie te hoog gevonden.

Verdere consequenties betreffen drie wetenschappelijke noties of theorieën die ten grondslag liggen aan het fenomeen-idealiserende frame. Ten eerste kan de 'netgeneratie' theorie als te simplistisch worden geacht. Deze theorie gaat er van uit jongere generaties andere (speelsere) benaderingen van onderwijs en werk nodig hebben, omdat ze opgegroeid zijn met computerspellen en ICT in het algemeen (see e.g. Beck & Wade, 2006; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998, 2008). Een tweede notie is die van de 'ludificatie van cultuur' (Raessens, 2006, 2009). De gepresenteerde resultaten ontwikkelen en in zekere mate valideren deze notie verder. Dit proefschrift doet de ludificatie van *organisatie*cultuur uit de doeken en laat zijn relevantie in met name de virtuele wereld zien.

Een derde notie ten grondslag aan het fenomeen-idealiserende frame is het momenteel zeer populaire 'gamificatie'. Terwijl de ludificatie van cultuur een empirisch onderontwikkelde filosofie kan worden gevonden, is gamificatie een veel pragmatischere en nogal *overontwikkelde* theorie. Zoals gameontwerper Bogost beargumenteerde (2011) hebben sommigen gamificatie erg beperkend gedefinieerd door alleen te focussen op competitie en prestatie, ofwel de introductie van beloningen, uitdagingen en wedstrijden (Zichermann & Linder, 2010). Dit proefschrift draagt bij aan een rijker begrip van gamificatie. Als gamificatie in betekenis uitgebreid en toegepast wordt op organisaties, dan is het in feite sterk vergelijkbaar met de notie van de speelse organisatie. De presenteerde resultaten zouden dan de mogelijkheden van gamificatie zowel bevestigen als ontkrachten. De resultaten zouden ze bevestigen, omdat een speelse of 'gegamificeerde' organisatie inderdaad gewaardeerd kan worden door online gamers zowel in de context van een online gaming community als een werkorganisatie. De resultaten ontkrachten ze echter ook, omdat online gamers soms een speelse of 'gegamificeerde' organisatie in de virtuele en/of 'echte' wereld niet waarderen. Bovendien prefereren online gamers soms de context van online gaming duidelijk gescheiden te houden van die van werk.

De resultaten hebben ook consequenties wanneer ze anders worden geframed, te weten middels de drie andere frames voor de impact van gaming op organisaties. Binnen het ervaring-instrumentaliserende frame suggereren de resultaten dat de acceptatie van organisatiemodellen in serious games onzeker is. Dit is omdat veel gamende medewerkers de mogelijkheid om te spelen in een organisatie hoog zullen waarderen, waardoor de beperkende gameplay van een serious game ontworpen binnen dit frame niet geaccepteerd zal worden. Tegelijkertijd is het belangrijk te realiseren dat de effecten van serious gaming op grote schaal fundamenteeler kan zijn dan ontwerpers hoopten, dankzij de impliciete kernwaarden die ten grondslag liggen aan een spelcontext. Wanneer de impact van gaming op een ervaring-idealiserende manier wordt geframed, laten de resultaten zien een speelse vorm van organisatie geactiveerd kan worden door online gaming, ondanks het feit dat de ontwerpers hun games hier niet bewust voor ontwierpen. Dit zal door ervaring-idealiserende onderzoekers als bewijs aanvoelen, omdat de resultaten laten zien dat games ontworpen of simpelweg toegepast kunnen worden ter stimulering van speelse organisatie. Tenslotte, binnen het fenomeen-instrumentaliserende frame bieden de resultaten vele mogelijkheden voor speelse interventies in organisaties. Hierbij moet wederom opgemerkt worden dat deze interventies medewerkers zowel zullen aantrekken als afstoten. De resultaten bieden geen zekerheid over het algemene succes of de algemene mislukking van dergelijke speelse interventies (in termen van acceptatie door medewerkers).

Er werden vervolgens tien aanbevelingen geformuleerd voor de hoofddoelgroepen van dit proefschrift: onderzoekers, organisatieleiders en gamers. Hierbij moet worden opgemerkt dat deze doelgroepen kunnen overlappen, zoals het empirisch onderzoek in feite ook heeft laten zien. De aanbevelingen hielden niet alleen rekening met de vier verschillende frames voor de organisatorische impact van gaming, ze hielden ook rekening met diverse meningen over organisatie in het algemeen.

Drie aanbevelingen leken het meest relevant voor gamers, gegeven dat mijn onderzoek heeft laten zien hoe sceptisch gamers kunnen zijn over de organisatie die bij online gaming komt kijken. Deze aanbevelingen richten zich op:

1. Het negeren van de fictieve setting van een online game om zo te focussen op het leerpotentieel van organisatorische speelervaringen.
2. Het specificeren van organisatorische speelervaringen om zo het leerpotentieel te verhogen.
3. Het proberen toe passen van organisatorische speelervaringen op het werk, door bijvoorbeeld gemakkelijk beschikbare ICT te implementeren (voor kennismanagement of het creëren van een expertisehiërarchie).

Natuurlijk is een gamers invloed groter als hij/zij ook een leider of manager is in de werkorganisatie. Voor dergelijke leiders zijn drie aanvullende aanbevelingen met name relevant. Deze aanbevelingen zijn gebaseerd op mijn observaties dat leiders de notie van de speelse organisatie in de virtuele en 'echte' wereld niet steunen, neutraal tegenover staan of juist wel steunen. De drie aanbevelingen richten zich op:

4. Het bewust zijn van het diverse potentieel van de speelse organisatie, dankzij de identificatie van vier frames waarmee het concept binnen het discours over gamings organisatorische impact wordt geplaatst.
5. Het uitproberen van enkele speelse interventies middels de voorbeelden die in dit proefschrift geboden worden (zie tabellen 2.1, 3.2, 5.2, 6.5 and 7.6).
6. Het samenwerken met game- en spelontwerpers voor het doen van ontwerponderzoek naar serious games en gamificatie met als doel het doen ontstaan van speelse organisatie.

Wat betreft aanbevelingen voor onderzoekers is het belangrijk om te realiseren hoe divers deze doelgroep is in termen van onderzoeksobject en –discipline. De volgende laatste aanbevelingen benadrukken het belang en de mogelijkheden van het *combineren* van verschillende onderzoeksobjecten en –disciplines in verder wetenschappelijk onderzoek rondom de speelse organisatie. Ze zijn daarmee gericht op onderzoekers die geïnteresseerd zijn in nieuwe mogelijkheden voor interdisciplinair of multidisciplinair onderzoek. De laatste vier aanbevelingen richten zich op:

7. Een sprong voorwaarts nemen in interdisciplinariteit door de communities van entertainment-game- en organisatiestudies bij elkaar te brengen in termen van zowel onderzoeksobject als –discipline.
8. Het beschouwen van de gepresenteerde resultaten als urgente (werk-)hypotheses die verder onderzoek benodigen.
9. Het vervolgen van exploratief onderzoek door nieuwe (structurele) concepten van een speelse organisatie, begrip van de contexten waarin speelse organisaties wel of niet kunnen ontstaan, en daadwerkelijk serious games en gamificaties als speelse interventies te ontwikkelen.
10. Het op een speelse manier benaderen van het ontwerp en de uitvoering van bovenstaande onderzoek door bijvoorbeeld nieuwe observatietechnieken te ontwikkelen en gebruiken.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Harald Warmelink was born in Aberdeen, Scotland (United Kingdom) on February 23, 1982. He completed his secondary education (VWO) at Vincent van Gogh College in Assen in 2000. He subsequently obtained a Bachelor's degree (Bachelor of Communication) in 'Communication Systems' from HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht in 2004. He then obtained a Master's degree (Master of Arts, *cum laude*) in 'New Media and Digital Culture' from Utrecht University in 2007. During these two tertiary educational programs, he completed three internships, each of three months or longer, including one at Petroleum Development Oman's Information and Communication Technologies department in the Sultanate of Oman. He was also a research/teaching assistant on three separate occasions, involved in teaching and web application development. By then he had already been involved in web application development work, both self-employed and at SURFnet (the Dutch Internet Service Provider for higher education). He had also been a technical support agent at Tiscali (also an Internet Service Provider). During an internship at SURFnet, he studied the potential of using virtual worlds like *Second Life* and *Active Worlds* in higher education. His subsequent Master's thesis connected the use of such virtual worlds to collaborative constructivist learning theory and educational practice.



He joined Delft University of Technology's faculty of Technology, Policy and Management in 2007 as a Ph.D. candidate. At the department of Policy, Organisation, Law and Gaming, he carried out the Ph.D. research presented in this book and became involved in teaching. He has been involved in a variety of courses that concern different aspects and theories of organization, management and serious gaming. He has also been involved in several additional research projects and international research associations, including the EU-funded *Games and Learning Alliance* project, where he helped establish the *SG Academy* (<http://academy.seriousgamessociety.org>), and the *Digital Games Research Association*, where he helped establish the *ToDiGRA* journal (<http://todigra.org>). He co-edited the book *Learning in a Virtual World: Reflections on the Cyberdam Research and Development Project* with dr. Igor Mayer in 2009. He has also authored and co-authored over 15 publications for various scientific conferences, journals and books resulting from social-scientific work into gaming, including serious gaming. Harald has continued his career at Delft University of Technology and is currently an assistant professor. He recently also started working as a part-time teacher/project manager at HKU, Utrecht School of the Arts.

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