

## Organisational Learning in Remote Teams: Harnessing the Power of Games for Meaningful Online Exchanges

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### ***Were there any specific external events-political, social, or economic-that influenced your decision to pursue this research?***

It may (hopefully) feel like a distant memory now, but we all know how 2020 went. The COVID-19 pandemic affected every single one of us. We saw the accelerated adoption of digital technologies, transformed learning environments, and emphasised the need for agility, adaptability, and resilience in organisational learning. With the widespread implementation of remote work policies, organisations rapidly shifted to online-only exchanges, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Gone was the crowded commute to work, the need to put up with the smell of Tom's egg-sandwiches and the overbearing noise of office politics. The elusive goal of work-life balance seemed possible for the first time – all we had to do in exchange for the 'new normal' was trade in that seemingly obsolete practice of in-person interaction.

This didn't seem like a bad deal. Facilitating exchanges in organisations is an age-old struggle. Besides, communication often seemed to be by happenstance – that kitchen conversation, that idea, shared in the corridor. Surely our new-found ability to schedule purposeful exchanges from the comfort of our homes could make all this better. It could, but didn't – not for everyone, and not always. Having 24/7 access to communication channels (in some cases) meant employees had to be available 24/7, often juggling child-care and work at the same time. There were new challenges too, from the staple 'you are muted' prompt, to creating a space for meaningful connections online, in order to build trust and thus be able to exchange ideas and share learning. This is hard enough to do in person, let alone when having an emoji conversation with disembodied heads in Teams or Zoom frames.

Could we make those online exchanges more meaningful, especially in the early weeks of global lockdowns when we still lacked the protocols for online interaction? This was the question we set out to investigate. We wished to structure online interactions by allowing participants to use their hands and work on a task, rather than stare at muted faces on Zoom. So, we adopted the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method during five workshops with remote participants from small to medium sized enterprise (SMEs) to understand how an open system can support interactive flow of resources and skills.

### ***In what ways is your research innovative, and how do you think it will impact the field?***

Remote working is now a regular part of working practices, enabling greater flexibility for workers. We celebrate this. However, since the isolated pandemic days, we have a new wave of absenteeism with the 'quiet quitting' phenomena while managers struggle with how to deal with it. We can see this only worsening with disconnected remote workers and the next generation of workers, Gen Z, choosing purpose over profit. The workplace, in any shape or form, needs to have a healthy foundation of meaningful purpose and meaningful connections in order to sustain effective teamwork.

Our article sheds new light and learnings, bringing in sociological perspective from Bernstein's role system theory. We find that using a device, like the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method to structure dialogue and allow the emergence of shared experiences through dialogue, making up for reduced visual cues like body language, tone of voice and facial expressions. This promotes trust and organic solidarity

between remote teams, more effectively bringing teams relationally together. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method and other forms of structured activity could become a critical antecedent of meaning-making in teamwork for online-only and hybrid organisations, especially when bringing together participants meeting for the first time.

***What advice would you give to new scholars and incoming researchers in this particular field of study?***

Embrace interaction. Technology is transforming various aspects of management learning, from online education platforms to simulation tools, but it doesn't create shared learning – interaction does. Interaction can develop common understanding, trust, and allow organisational learning to emerge even when members aren't co-located. Try pedagogic devices like the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method or other digital tools to inspire you and support your collaboration with others.

Where managers are learning, we can too. But, most importantly, ensure that it is meaningful as learning happens in the mind after all. Ask yourself these questions on the outset if you are not sure:

1. What is it that I would like to achieve or learn here?
2. Is my chosen way the only way that this can be done?
3. Is there anyone or anything (i.e. technology) that could better support this?