



The Power of Play: Fostering Creativity and Innovation in Libraries

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Abstract

Play is a powerful method of fostering creativity and innovation in organizations. As libraries confront a rapidly changing information landscape, the need for innovation in meeting user needs is paramount. Libraries can embrace organizational play as a means of stimulating employee creativity and developing innovative products and services. This article discusses the work-play dichotomy, the definition of play, and the Millennial generation's attitude toward play. Several important characteristics of play are discussed, including time and space, transformation potential, safety, and intrinsic motivation. Various types of play activities are explored, and the psychological links that exist between play and creativity are examined. Several successful businesses have made bold moves to embrace organizational play. Examinations of Google, 37signals, IDEO, and Pixar Animation Studios provide lessons about the ways that play can be integrated into the library workplace. Finally, this article poses questions that should be answered by libraries wishing to foster a culture of innovation through play.

Introduction

The question “Do libraries need to innovate?” has become a popular subject for discussion in recent years, with librarians debating the role of innovation in libraries and the possibilities for implementing innovative products and services. At the 2007 American Library Association (ALA) Conference panel “The Ultimate Debate: Do Libraries Innovate?,” participants disagreed as to whether libraries were truly innovative, and they discussed various obstacles that stood in the way of library innovation, including limited resources and a culture that discourages experimentation (*Pace, Janes, Schneider, & Abram, 2007*).

The question “Do libraries need to innovate?” might be better posed as “Does it benefit libraries to adapt quickly to a changing environment?” If an organization existed in a world that was reasonably static, perhaps the answer to this question might actually be no. The world of libraries, however, is dynamic. Ranganathan’s Fifth Law of Library Science directly states that “The library is a growing organism” (*Ranganathan, 1963, p. 326*). The profession’s past is rich with innovative thinking. For example, the card catalog creatively answered the question “How does one provide the maximum amount of access with the minimum number of access points?” MARC records allowed for cataloging information to be shared across very low bandwidth networks. Encouraging innovation does not mean violating tradition, but rather embracing the future. The question then becomes not “Should libraries innovate?” but “How can libraries become more innovative?”

Librarians need to find methods of creating cultures that promote this quality. Creativity and experimentation require that problems be viewed in new ways and that members of an organization feel the freedom to express ideas about these problems that may challenge assumptions and the status quo. A powerful method of fostering innovation in an organization is to encourage play. Play has a positive impact on the work environment in several ways, but one of its most important benefits is its impact on the creative process and the critical role that play has in innovation. Play enables members of an organization to break routines and change the ways they think about regular processes; it allows for experimentation and free-form thought. Play that initially seems unproductive promotes a more comfortable work environment, which encourages unique and imaginative approaches within an organization. Libraries interested in fostering inventive environments that encourage employees to experiment with cutting-edge ideas would do well to consider recent research into the links between organizational play and innovation.

What Is Play?

Work versus Play

Play is often regarded as the antithesis of work and therefore worthy of neither serious study nor serious consideration in the workplace. It has become more common to find work life becoming part of play time. It is not unusual, for example, to hear tales of colleagues hauling their smart phones and laptops with them on vacation. The idea that play also deserves a place in work life has received less attention and certainly less

widespread acceptance. Play has been viewed as an activity that does not happen while one is working and if it does, it occurs only rarely at the annual company barbeque or holiday party. Centuries-old economic and religious norms about the value of work (e.g., the Protestant work ethic that has played such a prominent role in the shaping of American attitudes toward work) have also popularized the notion that play is wasteful and should therefore be avoided by adults (*Sutton-Smith, 1997*).

What accounts for this strict division between the concepts of work and play? Perhaps one reason is that play is fundamentally not goal-directed; in fact, once an outcome has been fixed for a particular play activity, that activity may cease to be play. When people play, they are often more concerned with process, whereas when they work, they are more concerned with outcomes (*Glynn, 1994*). Thus, play is pursued for its own sake rather than to gain any particular reward (*Ellis, 1973; Huizinga, 1950; Statler, Roos, & Victor, 2009*). While play is important for the creative process and can therefore lead to innovation, all play need not necessarily be creative. These qualities can make play difficult to accept within libraries, where value is placed on efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control (*McQuinn, 2000*).

Regardless of the popular distinction between the two concepts, work actually shares many similarities with play, and the differences between them are not always evident (*Holmes, 1999*). The same activities can be play for some and work for others. Writing, running, drawing, and even research are actions that may be play or work, depending

upon the motives and methods that govern their execution. The very language used in discussions of work and play is so powerful that it can strongly affect the way activities are executed. Glynn (1994) found that labeling tasks as play rather than work results in greater intrinsic motivation, improved performance quality, more concern with process, and more elaborate, image-laden responses. Labeling tasks as work results in more concern with efficiency, output, and comparisons to others. Webster and Martocchio (1993) also discussed similar issues.

The distinctions between play and work are becoming less pronounced. The growth of technologies that diminish the importance of the physical workplace, the prevalence of online social networking, and the phenomenon of mass collaboration (*Tapscott & Williams, 2006*) are bringing about the further diminishment of the work-play dichotomy. For example, workers from remote locations may engage in business discussions while playing online role-playing games, and company employees may use Facebook and other social networking sites to communicate about affairs related to both business and leisure (*Tapscott & Williams, 2006*). In addition, the current generation of college students, those known as Millennials, often make little distinction between work and play. Tapscott (1998) observed that members of this generation “love hard work because working, learning, and playing are the same thing to them” (p. 10). Millennials have grown up viewing cyberspace as a virtual playground and believing that play can be productive (*Tapscott, 1998*). Improved technologies, which cater to multiple intelligences and keep them constantly connected to others,

allow Millennials to be continually playful and creative. A merging of work and play is increasingly evident at library computer stations, where Millennials can be seen with multiple windows open and headphones in place as they switch back and forth among homework assignments, Facebook pages, Internet surfing, chat, and video watching, among other activities.

While it is common to talk about the needs of Millennials as library users, it is less common to think about the needs of Millennials who are entering the library workplace. Indeed, new pedagogies that emphasize the importance of media literacy focus on students as content creators who engage in media production tasks that are necessarily interactive, socially connected, creative, and collaborative. In this age of new media, play, or “the capacity to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving,” is an essential skill for today’s learners (*Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel, and Robison, 2006, p. 4*). Raised in this new media environment, Millennials bring a different set of values and expectations to the workplace. According to Tapscott and Williams (2006), their “concept of work is best described by a set of nontraditional attributes or norms . . . speed, freedom, openness, innovation, mobility, authenticity, and playfulness” (p. 54). Libraries have much to gain by recognizing that these energizing attributes of Millennials can be a powerful force for innovation. Those libraries that do not adapt to Millennials’ expectations about work and play may find that they are unable to retain talented young librarians.

Changing views about work and play are slowly making their way into organiza-

tional structures, and Millennial attitudes are not confined solely to Millennials working in libraries. Therefore, it is time for a reexamination of the work-play distinction in regard to the library workplace and a closer examination of the concept of play itself.

Play Defined

Play has been a subject of study in several disciplines for its role in cognitive and emotional maturation, social relationships, cultural identity, and development of ethical principles (*Statler, Roos, & Victor, 2009*). Nonetheless, play remains difficult to define. Although the act of play may be easy to identify when people are throwing around a ball or taking part in a video game, at other times play can seem elusive. Both a noun and a verb, the word “play” can mean a dramatic performance, a move in a game, to engage in an enjoyable activity, or to joke around—to name a few of the numerous definitions found in the nine pages devoted to play in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Dansky (1999) noted that play has “often been used as a catchall for virtually every type of behavior that does not seem to serve some immediate, goal-directed purpose” (p. 393).

While it is customary to think of play as a type of activity—as in playing tennis or playing the piano—play cannot be defined as merely an action. Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) defined play as “not a limited set of activities but a behavioral orientation to performing any type of activity” (p. 84). Research, for example, can be play, work, or both simultaneously. For a doctoral student who spends hours in the library pursuing a research idea that he or she hopes will

be original and significant enough to meet the demands of a dissertation committee, the research process may feel like work. However, the desire for research often comes not from a class assignment but from an intrinsic desire—often it is playful curiosity that inspires a user to search for information. Brown (2009) described play as a “state of mind” rather than a specific action, noting that almost any action can become play depending upon the spirit with which it is performed (p. 60). If play is not an activity but an orientation or state of mind, then it can best be understood by describing its characteristics, several of which are especially important for the library workplace.

Play may occur within specific times and spaces.

Play frequently occurs within times and spaces that serve to distinguish it from “normal” life (*Huizinga, 1950*). Play activities often have their own space, such as a ballpark, or their own time, such as a weekly game night. These separate play times and spaces signal to participants that different expectations and rules will be in operation during play (*Huizinga, 1950*). The importance of time and space in affecting the actions of participants is well known to librarians. Libraries regularly attempt to provide spaces for users that support playful learning and experimentation such as play areas for children and information or learning commons for students. Washburn University Library even installed a miniature golf course for library users (*Utemark, 2008*). However, while libraries are growing increasingly sensitive to the importance of playful environments for users, less attention is paid to providing playful environments for li-

brary employees. If play is to be encouraged in libraries, consideration should be given to the impact of time and space.

Play is transformative.

Play involves an imagined reality that differs from ordinary life (*Huizinga, 1950*). Often play creates a “threshold experience”—that is, an experience between previously established dichotomies: true and false, convention and illusion, inner and outer reality, stability and change, old and new, real and imaginary (*Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, pp. 86-87*). Play allows participants to set aside both work roles and work rules (including their positions in library hierarchies) and explore new relationships, roles, conventions, and systems. The imagined state entered into during play also allows for the potential for improvisation (*Brown, 2009*). The unpredictability of the imagination is one of the factors that make play so important to organizations: New ideas can suddenly emerge during play activities. Play encourages openness to new possibilities and facilitates an environment for serendipity that can result in creative discoveries. Brown (2009) explained that through play “we stumble upon new behaviors, thoughts, strategies, movements, or ways of being. We see things in a different way and have fresh insights” (p. 18). Play can even result in more fundamental organizational change. Statler, Roos, and Victor (2009) explained that “people that play seriously in organizations may open themselves up to a process through which the overall significance of who they are as individuals or as a collective may be transformed or adapted” (p. 102). The imaginative power of play is

important for libraries not just because it can lead to the development of novel products and services, but because it has the potential to lead to self-examination and genuine transformation.

Play is safe.

While play has a subversive element, it is also relatively risk-free, providing safe situations in which experimentation and exploration have few serious consequences (Anderson, 1994). This can be an extremely liberating aspect of play, allowing participants to experiment with new ideas in ways they would never dream of doing in “real” life. For example, playing with prototypes, which allow for safe exploration and experimentation, can lead to the development of new products and services (Schrage, 2000). Through play, library employees can be free from the fear of criticism and failure. Because certain types of evaluation or even the threat of evaluation can hinder creativity (Amabile, 1996), play provides a valuable outlet for experimentation to occur without fear of judgment or emphasis on outcomes or success. During play, failure is not only acceptable but encouraged, and failure can even lead to discoveries that have a role in future innovations. The freedom to experiment with ideas in a safe, risk-free environment can be liberating for librarians who may be fearful of implementing expensive products and services without some idea of their consequences. In addition, a safe environment in which play is encouraged can lead to improved skill development and learning among library employees, both of which can enhance creativity (Amabile, 1998).

Play is motivating.

Play consistently energizes, engages, and motivates its participants (Anderson, 1994). People who play are likely to be intrinsically motivated to complete a task, which is critical for creativity (Amabile, 1996). Part of play’s power as a motivator results from its association with positive emotional states such as pleasure, joy, excitement, and optimism (Dansky, 1999; Lieberman, 1977), which can be important facilitators of the creative process (Isen, 1999; Russ, 1999). Surprise, uncertainty, exploration, and tension may also be characteristic of play, such as when doing puzzles or playing games (Huizinga, 1950; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). The experience of play does not necessarily exclude other emotions, such as sadness, frustration, or at times even anger, but overall play involves a positive emotional state. Through emotional engagement, play promotes openness to new ideas and greater cognitive flexibility. For example, a library manager who begins a meeting with playful banter and jokes helps to set a positive, open tone in which library employees enjoy the exchange of ideas. Even something as simple as flying a kite or throwing a Frisbee can create joy, helping to raise spirits and improve attitudes. Sutton-Smith (1999) observed that play can instill in participants a “renewed belief in the worthwhileness of merely living” (p. 254). This sense of optimism can be a powerful force for innovation within the workplace. When library employees are excited about their work and believe in their value, they are much more likely to seek to genuinely understand their users, to go the extra distance to ensure that their users are satisfied, and to put their energies into experimenting with

the implementation of new tools, resources, and services.

Types of Play

Because people play differently, it is ineffective to impose one type of play on a heterogeneous group of people. Some people are drawn to playing board games while others are not. Some are highly competitive players while others find that competition takes the fun out of activities. Regardless, an inherent attraction exists between the player and the play activity, and players eagerly return to those forms of play that they most enjoy. Brown (2009) described eight different types of play personalities: the joker, the kinesthete, the explorer, the competitor, the director, the collector, the artist/creator, and the storyteller. While Brown's categories are not scientifically based, they do suggest the wide range of play styles and preferences that may exist among library employees. Thus, for a library that seeks to have a playful work environment, employees must be given latitude to find their own kinds of self-directed play and experimentation.

Various types of play should not only be sanctioned but also encouraged within the library workplace. Organizational play can exist in both structured and unstructured forms (*Abramis, 1990*) and can be valuable for both high and low-skilled forms of labor (*Glynn, 1994*). Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) found that organizational play can occur either as a form of engagement with work tasks or as a form of diversion from them. Play as engagement includes activities that are related to employees' core tasks; for example, librarians design, research, create, explore, and in-

vestigate as part of their core work assignments, and these activities can easily be transformed into play. On the other hand, playing a game of checkers during the workday is not part of a librarian's core duties and is therefore a form of diversion. As either engagement or diversion, play can facilitate creativity by enhancing learning, improving performance, improving intrinsic motivation, becoming a source of positive emotions, and providing a healthy social atmosphere (*Glynn, 1994; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006*).

When learning that play should be part of an organizational structure and culture, the first urge may be to find a way to formalize that activity. Play, in fact, can be formalized in such a way, and in certain spaces, it is. Architects and designers, for example, will engage in structured forms of play in order to help them in the design processes. However, if over-engineered, play is once again just work and fails to offer the creative break from the routine needed to encourage experimentation. The encouragement of play in the workplace includes not only an acceptance of different forms of play but also a commitment to play as an organic process that is voluntary, often unstructured, and without a goal orientation.

The Role of Play in Creativity and Innovation

The Link between Play and Creativity

Creative activities and play have much in common, and Dansky (1999) explained that both "are often or always intrinsically motivated, almost never occurring when one is anxious or narrowly focused on achieving a specified goal.

Both involve transformations, possibilities, and out-of-the-ordinary combinations of ideas, actions, and situations” (p. 406). Much psychological research into the link between play and creativity has focused on young children, and many studies have used divergent thinking, or thinking that goes off in different directions, as a measure of creative ability. Studies of preschool-age children and kindergarteners have revealed connections between play and greater divergent thinking skills (*Dansky & Silverman, 1973; Dansky, 1980; Lieberman, 1977*). While adult play has historically been less socially sanctioned than child’s play, the impulse to play is nonetheless present in adults and may be just as important. Many great scientists and artists, such as Albert Einstein, Alexander Fleming, Charles Dodgson, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Richard Feynman, and others, have embraced play as a cognitive tool that has had a profound effect on their creative output (*Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999*). In a theoretical study of play and creativity in organizational settings, Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) argued that play facilitates five cognitive processes involved with creativity: problem framing, divergent thinking, mental transformations, practice with alternative solutions, and evaluative ability. They wrote that play allows for “exploring different perspectives, creating alternative worlds, assuming different roles, enacting different identities, and also taking all these, and the players themselves, out of the cognitive contexts in which they normally operate” (*Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 95*).

Recognizing the creative benefits of play, some businesses have attempted

to incorporate play into their organizational structures. As a corporate play consultant, Stuart Brown (2009) wrote that the most common reason that companies have wanted him to talk to their organizations about play is because of its role in creativity and innovation: “Production matters now, but creativity is the source of all growth . . . the difference between a company that will thrive and one that will soon be deader than the eight-track tape” (p. 134). Several research studies attest to the benefits of organizational play. Abramis (1990), for example, found that game-like play not only added fun and enthusiasm to work but also increased learning, mastery, organizational involvement, and job satisfaction. Styhre (2008) found that the elements of skill and chance in play were integral to drug innovation at a major pharmaceutical company. Schrage (2000) analyzed the ways that prototypes and simulations allow companies to experiment with new products through the process of play.

According to creativity scholar Teresa M. Amabile, businesses can allow creativity to thrive while still meeting production goals. In most organizations, managers believe in supporting new and useful ideas, but these ideas are constantly undermined due to the structure of the work environment (*Amabile, 1998*). Business creativity differs from artistic creativity in that “ideas must be appropriate, useful and actionable” (p. 77), which is also true of creativity in libraries. However, more than just data and numbers should be important for measuring success; rather, the goals and outcomes that libraries want to achieve should be the major focus of creative efforts. Libraries need to meet goals and outcomes successfully while

allowing room for trying new ideas even when there is a possibility of failure.

Three components are critical for individual creativity: expertise, creative-thinking skills, and motivation (*Amabile, 1998*). For better or worse, managers can and do have an influence over these components through workplace practices and conditions. Creativity must be system-wide and should not be limited to one or a few areas, but should be promoted throughout an organization. Many companies make the error that only marketing or research and development departments can benefit from creativity, whereas in reality every facet of an organization can benefit from creative thinking. In libraries, technical services might not be thought to need creative thinking because the work depends on attention to detail and rules-based cataloging, but the reality is the opposite. With the variety of employees, workflows, materials, metadata formats, and systems, creative solutions and problem solving are needed on a regular basis. Motivation is a large determining factor in creative thinking. If an employee “lacks the motivation to do a particular job, she simply won’t do it; her expertise and creative thinking will either go untapped or be applied to something else” (*Amabile, 1998, p. 79*). Rather than managing through reward and punishment, managers should rely on intrinsic motivation, which occurs when people become engaged in the work they do because they enjoy it for its own sake.

If several successful businesses have recognized the value of play for innovation, then it follows that libraries interested in innovation could also benefit from organizational play. But how do librarians bring play into their organizational cultures? How can library adminis-

trators convey to employees that play is not only acceptable but also valuable? A few examples from industry can help to answer these questions.

Businesses at Play

Google is well known for being an innovator that supports a playful workplace for its employees. Google provides an environment that, according to Hoahland (2006), is both “a flurry of playful activity and creative technological innovation” through providing spaces such as volleyball courts, swimming pools, gyms, pool tables, and other spaces containing games, toys, art, novelty items such as lava lamps, and even a dinosaur skeleton (*Google 2007, 2009*). Google encourages employees to use “idea boards” to explore and experiment with new ideas, allows employees to bring their dogs to work, provides bikes and scooters for employees to get around, displays employee artwork on cafeteria walls, and offers massages, gourmet meals, and yoga and pilates classes to employees (*Google, 2007, 2009; Hoahland, 2006*). But more important than these many enjoyable perks is Google’s overall attitude toward employee management. Google hires some of the most talented people and gives them the freedom to work on their own projects 20% of the time, a policy that not only relies heavily on intrinsic motivation to keep employees engaged but also encourages all employees to be involved in the innovation process (*Girard, 2009*). Most of Google’s new product ideas come from this 20% personal project time (*Tapscott & Williams, 2006*). Google has managed to minimize the bureaucratic process that so often chokes innovation at large companies by encouraging the rapid exchange of

ideas within the company and by using small teams (usually three to six people) which are given the autonomy to creatively achieve a set of clearly defined goals. Google places top priority on the needs of its users and makes a practice of introducing new applications early and often, thereby encouraging users to play with new products and to offer feedback that may have a direct impact on future development (*Girard, 2009*). Google's playful approach to employee management, its emphasis on creative applications that satisfy user needs, and its inclusion of users in the development process have resulted in a winning formula for this young and innovative leader in information search.

37signals is a company that is focused on shifting the work/life balance closer to the life side with the conviction that this will benefit the company. A successful Web-based startup providing project management software, 37signals has been able to grow while challenging the conventional workaholic mindset that pervades many other startups. In 2007, the company initiated four-day work weeks, feeling that they accomplished just as much work and deciding to make it a standard. Their experience was that "three-day weekends mean people come back happier on Monday. Three-day weekends mean people actually work harder and more efficiently during the four-day work week" (*37signals, 2008, March 5*). 37signals' response to industry criticism was that the entire point is to think outside the forty-hour workweek: "Results, not hours, are what matter, but working longer hours doesn't translate to better results" (*37signals, 2008, August 20*). Play can often be easily dismissed when organizations lose sight of real goals and get caught

up with employees being busy a certain number of hours per week. By realizing that urgency increases stress and decreases morale while rarely being necessary or beneficial, 37signals recognizes and opens up a more relaxed space where play is fostered. In addition to four-day workweeks, 37signals also supports the passions and interests of its employees by helping them pay for their hobbies, such as flight lessons, provided they share their experiences with the company and its community.

IDEO, considered a leading innovation and design firm in the United States, also strives to provide a creative and playful environment for its employees. Although many factors are involved in creating an environment as unique as IDEO's, three elements are critical in offering innovative service design: environment, team morale, and role-playing. IDEO provides a physical work environment that corresponds with the mental process used in design thinking, a technique that matches design sensibilities and methods with user needs and technological capabilities (*Brown, 2008a*). Tischler (2009) writes that:

Ideo's headquarters look like a cross between a cool Montessori school and a crash pad circa 1970. There are tubs of markers and easel pads of paper everywhere; Post-it Notes litter the walls of conference rooms. A gum-ball machine, xylophone, and Tickle Me Elmo lie nearby. . . . A vintage Volkswagen bus has been converted into a meeting area, complete with beach chairs on the roof. The playfulness of the place is utterly intentional, an outgrowth of Kelley's [IDEO's founder] conviction that children are naturally creative—at least until the educational system beats it out of them.

IDEO provides a playful work environment with an abundance of fun and novel features for employees to enjoy, but it goes even further by encouraging employees to personalize their workspaces and to make everything mobile. According to Kelley (2001), "Space is the team and the work. If a member wants to jump aboard another project, he or she needs to be able to quickly take off and land in another building or office" (p. 125). He also explained that, "Most companies don't see the connection between creative space and innovation" (Kelley, 2001, p. 126).

Many organizations recognize the value of employee or team morale, yet IDEO acts on the principle that making people feel special is an inexpensive way to intrinsically motivate them to do exceptional work. "When people feel special, they'll perform beyond your wildest dreams," wrote Kelley (2001, p. 93). For example, at an end-of-the-year party, IDEO held a gingerbread house design fest with prefabricated cookie houses ready to be decorated with various candies (Kelley, 2001). Letting people play hooky and go off to watch a movie or see a baseball game is another way of motivating employees. Although this sounds risky, IDEO is confident that they receive a return on investment in the form of highly creative output. IDEO also boosts team morale by encouraging pranks, group field trips, and unplanned breaks throughout the day in the form of riding bikes, playing hockey, or shooting foam fingers at each other (Kelley, 2001, pp. 93-94). While unconventional, these techniques ensure that ideas flow freely and lead to innovation through play.

Finally, according to chief executive officer Tim Brown, IDEO uses role-playing

and the acting out of scenarios to "try on the identity of users and project ourselves into an experience" (Brown, 2008b). Role-playing is critical in development because not only do designers wrestle with serious problems through acting, but they also have an opportunity to learn what is broken and to empathize with users through play. For example, a designer once took on the role of a patient in a hospital emergency room and videotaped it to learn more about the patient experience, of which a large portion involved staring at hospital room ceilings (Brown, 2008b). Role-playing has the powerful potential to help employees thoroughly understand user experiences.

Similar to the design industry, animation is often associated with creativity because of the art and drawing involved, but it is also very technical, sometimes tedious, and demanding. Recently animation went through a major change, going from only analog hand-drawn work to largely computer-generated work. Pixar Animation Studios has emerged as a successful cutting-edge studio because it is not afraid to take risks, it has an environment in which play is encouraged, and it is an innovator in the industry. At the 2009 Innovative Users Group Conference in Anaheim, keynote speaker Michael B. Johnson, Head of the Moving Pictures Group at Pixar, spoke at length of the workflows, methods, project management, and challenges he faced in his work. At one point, he described the failure of training employees in using Adobe Photoshop software through conventional methods and training sessions. Only after an employee took a humorous picture of another employee who was sleeping on a couch in an

awkward position and emailed it to others did everyone start to learn Photoshop. They learned by manipulating the emailed photo and putting this person in a variety of funny scenarios, with elaborate backgrounds and added props and characters. Nothing was forced or disingenuous; the employees were simply encouraged to play, to learn, and to share (*Johnson, 2009*). In another scenario Johnson described how, to capture an animated character's actions, it is sometimes necessary to act out and film the movements so that later they can be drawn. For their work on the film *Ratatouille*, the employees play-acted to understand how the characters and props would need to move. They recorded these play sessions and later used them as reference material when they created the animations (*Johnson, 2009*). As these scenarios demonstrate, play can be used to solve very specific problems.

Libraries can learn much from the design and animation industries, but in particular, they stand to benefit from an understanding of the three-stage process through which design projects move from beginning to end: inspiration (exploring and brainstorming problems and solutions), ideation (developing and testing ideas), and implementation (bringing solutions to fruition) (*Brown, 2008a*). Libraries wishing to incorporate design thinking into the workplace would do well to follow Brown's advice. He advocates designing products based on an understanding of human behavior, needs, and preferences; trying early and often through experimentation and prototyping; and involving users in a process of co-creation (*Brown, 2008a*).

How Can Libraries Embrace Play?

Libraries have recently begun to recognize the value in play and its connection to creativity and learning for users. Libraries provide playful spaces and access to tools and games, such as Wii, Rock Band, Dance Dance Revolution, Second Life, and Facebook, as well as popular reading and video collections. Play and gaming are brought into the academic library for several reasons, one of which is to allow students to take a break from studies without leaving the library space. But it is not just about keeping users from leaving the building; by bringing play into the library environment, libraries are also encouraging users to use their imaginations to learn and grow.

Since libraries have begun to recognize the value of play for users, it is ironic that libraries do not create the same kind of playful environment for employees. Libraries acknowledge the value in allowing student users to play and create so that they may graduate and take leadership positions as innovators for the future, yet there is incongruity within libraries in which the organization does not value these attributes for employees. Endless possibilities for creativity and innovation may occur in a library that promotes an environment of play. Many questions need to be asked and answered:

- How can a playful environment be consistent with the need for measurable outcomes in libraries?
- How can managers model play for their employees and promote play within the organizational culture?

- How can play be encouraged without seeming disingenuous?
- Should libraries make distinctions between different types of play, such as playing with technology and goofing off?
- How can libraries motivate employees with reward rather than punishment, and how can that improve creativity?
- How can play be used to enhance communication among library employees, and how can it be used to enhance relationships with other personnel and entities, such as information technology departments?
- Would alternative work schedules result in more autonomy and greater creativity?
- How might a playful environment be more conducive to the creative and scholarly work that must be produced by librarians seeking tenure and promotion?
- Should play expectations be different for professionals and paraprofessionals and, if so, why?
- What kinds of playful solutions can be generated in response to an understanding of user practices and needs?
- How can workflows and traditional library processes be improved through creative thinking and play?
- How can play be incorporated into training?
- How can play and creativity be incorporated into information literacy sessions and other types of user workshops to make learning more enjoyable and effective?
- When resources and budgets are low and time is more valuable than ever, how can library employees find time to play?

The options for incorporating play into the library workplace are numerous, but what is most important is that libraries provide environments that allow employees to dream. A rigid, overly structured environment can squelch the possibility for spontaneity and improvisation that lead to imaginative journeys. The best way that libraries can support play is to take an attitude of open-mindedness that encourages these flights of fancy, nurtures employees by allowing them time and space to experiment, and champions bold ideas by providing the support necessary for dreams to be transformed into innovative products and services.

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