



e a w o p

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- **Professional, streamers and amateur players: a virtual ethnography for exploring organizational behaviours in different work-play conditions**
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In recent decades, work has been going through a series of transformations in the Western world leading to a shift in its organization and the rise of new organizational structures, like virtual organizations (DeSanctis & Monge, 1999). As the popularity of such organizations has grown, drawbacks and human resources issues have also arisen (Johnson & Isenhour, 2003), with reference to e.g., the management of a displaced workforce (Flecker, 2016) and knowledge sharing (Cramton, 2001).

Possible solutions could be drawn from the study of game worlds (Rapp, 2020a), since they are often designed to reply existing social structures, such as work ecosystems (Lukacs et al., 2009), and support organizations of players (Rapp, 2020b). In fact, virtual organizations have tried to respond to issues arising from the “virtualization” of their structure by embedding “gamification” techniques within work practices (Smith & Kilty, 2014) or developing video games aimed at e.g., engaging their members (Stanculescu et al., 2016). As these practices spread, the boundaries between *work* and *play* started blurring (Taylor, 2012), in a way that the old dichotomies between game and labour or between “real” and “virtual” worlds are no more arguable (Goggin, 2011).

In this new scenario, we need to understand how the entanglement between work and play may affect the structures of organizations and the organizational dynamics of their members. Therefore, I will explore how players, performing in different “play-work” conditions, produce different organizational forms and enact different organizational behaviours. Players engage in gaming sessions differently, depending on the perception of their activity as work, leisure, or both of them (*playbour*) (Törhönen et al., 2019). The target of the study consists in three types of players: Esports professionals, video game streamers, and casual players as they differently intertwine “playing” and “working” practices when playing video games. Esports professional are engaged in problems that are typical of professional workers, like pursuing a career in the area or developing their skills as professionals (Taylor, 2012). Video game streamers actively model their behaviour and their emotions during live performances (Woodcock & Johnson, 2019) in order to attract spectators and “retain” them (Walker, 2014). Finally, amateur players could occasionally be considered labourer, as they produce economic value (Koutsouras et al., 2017), despite not receiving any income.

A cross-comparison between all the three aforementioned categories, which is currently missing, may be an original contribute to WOP community in a twofold sense: it would clarify how different modalities of combining work and play impact on organization members; then, it

could help both academic and practitioners address the issues faced by current working virtual organizations, by providing insights on how to effectively organize people collaborating from a distance through “best practices” that can be found in games.

An ethnographic study will be conducted within an Italian gaming community. We will focus on a video game of the *Call of Duty* series, a First-Person Shooter (FPS) game which requires players to enact organizational efforts in order to reach the in-game objectives (e.g., defeat the enemy team). The study will use i) semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted in the game

environment played by the amateurs, ii-iii) observation of gaming sessions, analysis of online content and semi-structured interviews with reference to streamers and Esports professional.

We expect that organizational forms might result to be more formal and goal-oriented if players perceive their activity as a sort of “work”. We also expect to identify which elements can support the organization of virtual teams when an external, profit-related motivation is absent, and how these differ from those that support teams externally motivated. This comparison may reveal novel strategies to keep a virtual team engaged and focused on the objectives in the long term in absence of profit-related motivators, as well as their drawbacks in comparison to situations in which people earn a salary. The analysis of stream players may reveal which leadership skills are enacted to engage and retain a huge community of followers in an online environment. Since we expect that streamers are rewarded by social gratification when playing (Blight, 2016), this research might also inspire the design of innovative strategies for employees’ social rewarding in the organizational context. Preliminary results are expected for December 2021 and could be presented at the conference.

Limitations of this work lies in the likely difficulties of generalizing the results to a wider population being targeted to the Italian context. However qualitative research aims to provide rich insights rather than generalizable results.

- **“Proto-organizations” in human-AI teams: exploring organizational abilities in a collaborative-competitive video game.**
Arianna Boldi & Amon Rapp

In the last ten years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become pervasive in the context of work, being employed to support workers in a variety of high-complex tasks (Topol, 2019; Hayashi & Wakabayashi, 2017). Technology now autonomously and proactively helps humans, so that consensus is growing on considering artificial agents as subjects (Cai et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019), or partners endowed with skills and competencies (Abbass, 2019), rather than as mere tools.