Dungeons & Dragons for Employment and Work Outcomes

Jesse E. Olsen
Department of Management & Marketing
Faculty of Business & Economics
University of Melbourne
Level 10, 198 Berkeley Street
University of Melbourne, 3010, VIC, Australia
jesse.olsen@unimelb.edu.au

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Playing tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) like *Dungeons and Dragons* (*D&D*) (Tactical Studies Rules 1974; Wizards of the Coast 2024) in educational settings helps people develop skills in such domains as language and communication, perspective-taking, self-awareness, empathy, creativity, critical thinking, and moral development (Daniau 2016; Spotorno, Picone, and Gentile 2020; Wright, Weissglass, and Casey 2020). Counselling research also suggests that TTRPG experiences can boost confidence in social interactions and reduce fears around making mistakes, both contributing to better decision-making (Abbott, Stauss, and Burnett 2022). Playing *D&D* regularly over an extended amount of time also seems to reduce anxiety, depression, and stress, while increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy (Merrick, Li, and Miller 2024). Some have noted the potential of games like *D&D* to develop work skills critical to performing in the workplace of today and tomorrow (cf. Dondi et al. 2021; World Economic Forum 2023). For example, Strebel and McKenzie (2023) point out that *D&D* might help equip military personnel with capabilities to manage complexity and uncertainty in combat. Academic research is lacking, however, to explicitly examine how TTRPG experiences might affect employment experiences and work outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTION & APPROACH

People are not always aware of how their outside activities might translate into work-relevant skills and experiences (Moxey and Simpkin 2021). Further study is therefore required to understand how individuals reflect on TTRPG experiences, as well as how they might apply such experiences to other life domains. This research aims to answer the question:

> *How do experiences with TTRPGs like* D&D *link to outcomes relating to employment, work, and careers?*

To answer this and explore the factors/themes associated with how TTRPG experiences relate to workplace experiences, this research (which is still in progress) consists of interviews with working-age adults who have experience playing TTRPGs. Some of these individuals are interviewed after playing *D&D* for the first

time with the researcher. Other interviewees are individuals with prior TTRPG experience. Depending upon participant availability and the potential to better understand group dynamics, the research may also entail some group-based interviews.

Employing grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz 2019; Glaser and Strauss 1967) as an abductive method of analysing data, this research entails analysis of the interview transcripts for emerging theory-informed themes and explanations for any observed phenomena (Kennedy and Thornberg 2018).

Data collection is currently in progress, but consistent with the research noted above, participants thus far note the importance of teamwork, creativity, etc., as well as its relevance to other domains of life, including work. Previously unexplored themes have also emerged. For example, participants have mentioned how playing *D&D* allows them to see others in a new light. Players also seemed to enjoy stepping into a fictional character's shoes, allowing them to take bold actions that they otherwise would not take in real life.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research adds to the literature on how extracurricular activities might contribute to work outcomes (e.g., Daniel and Zhan 2023; Jackson and Bridgstock 2021; ten Brummelhuis and Bakker 2012; Tulchinsky 2023; Winwood, Bakker, and Winefield 2007). Additionally, this research will promote theoretical development into how TTRPGs might impact people's work. For example, drawing on social psychological theory (Lord and Foti 1986; Taylor and Crocker 1981), it may be the case that TTRPGs help individuals create event schemas/scripts, leading to a different understanding of their work experiences.

Further, the practical implications of this research include the potential to incorporate engaging TTRPG experiences in management education, training, and development programs. People's past experiences with TTRPGs may also be considered as relevant to employment and career opportunities, potentially impacting recruitment and selection processes and outcomes. Finally, building on the finding around a deeper understanding of other players with whom one plays a TTRPG session, sharing TTRPG experiences could contribute to coworker/teammate relations, increasing cohesiveness at work.

BIO

Jesse Olsen is a Senior Lecturer of Management in the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne. He earned his PhD in Organizational Behavior from the Scheller College of Business at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, USA. His research focuses on hobbies/leisure and work; improvisation in organisations; diversity, equity, and inclusion; international/cross-cultural management; and leadership. For both his teaching and research, Jesse has recently begun looking at the applicability of hobbies and personal activities to work and the workplace, with particular interest in Dungeons & Dragons (*D&D*) and other tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs).

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