

# Digital Workplace Impact



with Paul Miller



## Episode 68

How LEGO approaches workplace experience

## Transcript



***This is where it really becomes important going forward and we really need to solve this – and it's not easy – that is, how do we redefine the purpose of the office space or, in other words, we do need to redefine the purpose of the office space. So, you know, up until now probably in many countries, in Denmark too, it has been the default option to go to the office. Now we're maybe heading towards the situation where we could easily see it the other way around, so the employee will be asking us: "Why do we have to go to the office? What is it that the office can uniquely contribute that the home office cannot?"***

– Jesper Ambrosius, Head of LEGO Workplace Experience, LEGO

LEGO wants the values that the brand is built upon to be channelled through workplace experiences to its employees, and uses its globally recognized creativity and playfulness to achieve that.

But it's not just about having fun. Jesper Ambrosius, Head of LEGO Workplace Experience, and the team have adopted some seriously inspiring and thorough approaches to create what they have to date, and are now looking ahead at how their workplaces need to evolve to support the needs of post-pandemic working.

Jesper offers us an exciting glimpse into what it's like to work at LEGO and how they've got to where they are, from the "brave zone" and learning through play, to anthropology and data analytics.

Paul

So, what I try to do on the podcast, is to mix what I think of as kind of core traditional digital workplace content with some more "out there" content and subjects – and then occasionally there are things that don't fit into *either* of those categories. I would say that today's episode with Jesper Ambrosius, head of LEGO Workplace Experience, is one of those, because on the one hand it's a conversation about the workplace – not just the digital but the physical also and the interaction between the two at LEGO, a huge Danish headquartered global brand everybody knows – but I think what I liked about this particular episode, apart from just the tone and experience of the conversation, was that there's a lot of language which Jesper uses to talk about how they approach work for people at LEGO that I think is really quite different language.

There's a lot of talk, unsurprisingly, about play and fun and surprise and courage and curiosity and "wow" factors and beauty – and I think, you know, if you wanted to design a place to work, those are the kind of things you'd want. I found myself – and mostly I never

really want to go and work for any organization – but occasionally I just kind of get an atmosphere from an organization which I feel communicates something about them and it makes me think: “That could be, that *would* be, a really fun place to work!” – and I definitely thought that after Jesper had talked to me about LEGO.

So I'm delighted to be joined by Jesper Ambrosius. Jesper is the head of LEGO Workplace Experience at, you guessed it, LEGO, and since graduating with a Masters in Economics, Jesper's been working within primarily two areas; high-level strategy at a CXO level and leadership. He started out as a management trainee for the global telecoms company Telenor, where he later took on two different leadership positions.

In 2015 he joined the LEGO Group to work with strategy and worked closely with, among others, LEGO's Chief Marketing Officer and Chief People Officer, and he now heads up LEGO Workplace Experience, where his aim is to create workplace experiences that enable employees at LEGO to be and do their best work, attract and retain world-class talents and bring them closer to the LEGO values, which I'm interested to know about.

So, Jesper, just to start off, you're responsible for LEGO Workplace Experience. How would you describe the LEGO workplace experience and how is it different from somebody else's workplace experience?

Jesper

Well, thanks very much Paul, I'm happy to be here.

Yes, so that question probably takes quite a while to answer (laughs). I think first of all, it is really an ambition that we are working towards, so we're definitely not there yet but I think, you know, looking back at this team that I now head up, we didn't exist a year and a half back, so it's a fairly new team and a fairly new ambition.

Some of the concepts we have were developed five or six years back when we opened our so-called “hubs”, which are regional headquarters. We have these in London, Singapore, Shanghai and also in the US, outside Boston. We didn't really have the core experience back then, so we only had workplace designers and then we actually had, interestingly enough, an anthropologist, who would observe and interview the employees to figure out what they wanted. Back then what we were trying to aim for was the connectiveness and, you could say, “casual encounters” leading to more creativity. That was the aim and there was the theory that casual encounters and working more together and bumping into each other, would lead to that, so we actually went for an open

office with no fixed seats and no team areas. Then, after a while, maybe two or three years, we had grown the hubs quite a lot so we saw issues start to come up and then the anthropologist back then also did some studies of this and found some key themes regarding a lack of belonging as one important example. Also, that managers tended to hide in meeting rooms and so on and so forth, so this kind of led to a change in our approach when we moved to focusing more on team zones – so still free seating but with team zones to mitigate the lack of belonging.

We would also design for different activities, whether it be silent zones or more busy areas, but we found that, whether you actually do go to one of these areas is not only dependent on the activity that you're doing – whether you want to focus or whether you want to be in a more social area – but actually also the mood you have, so while the activity is a causal factor actually different moods are important too.

We also wanted to make sure we solved the management issue we had seen; we wanted to design office space so that managers would always have to share management offices so there would always be managers out and about, and close to the teams because they simply couldn't just lock themselves in a meeting room. So the difference, I would say, is small notches from a design perspective really, and also actually from a communications perspective, to help solve some of the issues that we had seen.

We are now actually doing this to full effect in our new campus, the new headquarters we're building in Billund in Denmark, whereas in other places we haven't got to that yet. But this is just a bit of context and I think it's important before we then get into what is the LEGO workplace experience and how do we see that?

I think we really see it as a combination of activities within four separate areas, so we believe that a LEGO workplace experience should “wow” and inspire; it should be fun and playful; it should adapt to our diverse needs; and it should provide what we call a “caring home-like” feel. So, within these four areas, we have defined a core bunch of activities that we believe will deliver a better experience for current employees and also future employees. And you cannot just take one of the activities and say: “This is a LEGO workplace experience”, because that is not in any way unique. I'll give a few examples: we have storytelling through environments and experiences as one; we have fun and playful events as another initiative; health and well-being; community building, and so on – and each one of these in itself is not really

unique but the combination of them, and how we build them into the workplace, is what we see as unique to LEGO.

What we're really trying to do with the workplace now is that we want to channel what we call the LEGO DNA. We want to channel that through the office – so it's really about the story of the brand. We've existed now for, I think, 87 years, with lots of successes, different dramas, near bankruptcy, you name it, and we want to draw on the values the brand is built upon and we want to tell that story and we think actually that the workplace is such a good forum to do that. Whereas we've been very used to telling the story through our products obviously, and we've been used to telling that story to our customers, we haven't really told those stories to our colleagues, the employees of LEGO, so that is a really what we're trying to do here – and I think it will actually be even more important going forward with COVID-19. I will probably get back to that, figuring out what is the exact purpose of the office compared to, say, working from home. So that was probably the long answer (laughs)!

Paul

It's a wonderful answer! I'm going to say it's an "intoxicating" answer – and I've written down lots of words that I'm going to feed back to you – but one of the things I'd really like to get into is, could you give me an example of something that's happened in the LEGO workplace experience that, if you like, sort of sums up or represents, or is an example of, this kind of unique way you've got of approaching things?

Jesper

Yes sure. So I think I have two good examples. One of them is actually an example of how we've used design as a way of channelling the LEGO DNA: about a year ago, we had to relocate the office in Madrid, Spain. We had to refurbish a whole new office, so what we actually did there was, instead of design it top down, we basically involved the office and tried to design it bottom up, and what we did was, or what actually the office and the employees came up with, was to use a new leadership model we have in LEGO that we call the "leadership playground", which is actually also a leadership model for everyone and is also built from the bottom up by employees. We wanted to see if we could get that into the office space and the way we did this was actually that there are three behaviours of the leadership playground, of this leadership model we have, that are especially important – and those are being brave, being curious and being focused. So we then built around or designed the office around these three different behaviours. So it's interesting that you can have, let's say, being curious as a leadership tool and thinking about what does curiosity mean when leading but also what does it maybe mean in an office

context, in a workplace context – and the same obviously with bravery and being focused. You know, are you subconsciously, maybe more focused if you are in the focused areas? Of course, we've also made the focused areas more with cubicles, so there's no noise, there are quiet zones, and so on and so forth, but just thinking about how these might work and knowing that you're in a different area, how that might affect you, right? For example, are you maybe a bit more brave when you are in the brave zone and are you maybe more willing to have that conversation? We don't know, of course, but the funny thing here is that you are basically building, you could say, a “LEGO leadership model” into the workplace, so in that way people really get it under their skin. I think this is a really cool example from a design perspective.

Then, another example maybe from a more community-building point of view, is that maybe a year ago, our colleagues in Singapore were complaining about, I think it was the coffee beans – you know, they didn't like the taste or whatever. So, what we did was we invited people in; we invited in five or six different company vendors, and they came to the office. Then we invited people in for a coffee tasting and they got to choose what coffee to proceed with going forward, so they decided for themselves as in a mini-democracy. So that's a good way also to include the small community. As I say, we have different offices around the world, so it's how to include them in workplace decisions. It's a small example but I think if you have many of these examples, it really builds up to something unique.

Paul And how would you say that this – and I'm going to say “unique”, because I think it is a unique approach – is benefiting LEGO as an organization?

Jesper Yes, I think it is. I mean, in general, people are very happy to come to the offices; you know, for a lot of people it's been tough being away.

I think in general also, people around the world are *super* proud working for LEGO and I think to really build a strong brand you need to be consistent, not only of course with the products and what goes out to the customers, but also internally, so in terms of processes and, of course, in this case also when we're talking about the workplace, it's so important that, you know, it generates a lot of the creativity, the inspiration, the collaboration, all that we believe are important factors – also for the brick and the whole idea behind the brick. So I think it really is benefiting us in recruiting and also making people want to stay with LEGO so we retain the world-class talents, which is also part of our aspiration as a team.

You know, I think it's still true that the leader is super important and, if you have a bad leader, then it's much more likely that you'll probably leave the company than if the office is not, you could say "super inspiring" or whatnot – but I still think that the workplace and the workspace do have quite an important role there and we're actually – and I mean of course we don't know that – but we're experimenting with that right now, trying to figure out when we do recruit new colleagues, what is actually their perception of LEGO as a workplace. Just to give you an example, Paul, we test it out. We have two groups, picked at random; to one group, we send a workplace video that is a very happy movie on the workplace, with lots of good music in it, so the idea, the hypothesis, is that people, after having seen that will have a *better* perception of LEGO as a workplace than if you haven't seen the movie. Because usually when you go to a company, you don't know a lot about the workplace beforehand, right? You know a lot about the product, the brand and all that, but you don't actually know how it is to work in it. Maybe you haven't even seen the office space because that wasn't where you had your interviews – so we're testing that and we're also testing if there are some spillover effects to the LEGO brand and to the LEGO culture to really figure out what role the workplace plays in all of this. Anyway, this is just an example of what we're trying to figure out – what role it actually does play in LEGO and as a brand as well.

Paul

Yes, and I think one of the things that strikes me listening to what you're saying, is that the language you're using to talk about the LEGO workplace experience is, I think, pretty distinctive. So you're talking about curiosity, bravery, anthropology, casual encounters, storytelling, wow, caring. I mean, not all of them are completely unique terms, but actually when you start to put them together, what I get is a sense of – I'll use the word a "more evolved" workplace – a workplace that has the courage, if you like, to start to embrace some concepts and ideas. And if you look at the idea of an anthropologist – and I'd really be interested to know why you hired an anthropologist – this is really kind of breaking some ground. Why did you hire an anthropologist and how did the anthropologist help you?

Jesper

Yes, that's an interesting story. I mean it was back before I had my current role. She's actually in my team now, so I do work quite closely with her and we also, by the way, have a psychologist and other different types of, you could say, the social science roles in the team, because we're really interested in figuring out, to your question Paul, what are the issues we're trying to solve in the workplace?

I'll come back to that and I think the reason why we hired her back then was actually to kind of take the next step up and figure out, more purposefully, what is it that we want to achieve as a workplace and what are some of the things that we can really improve on? So it coincided with us building these three new hubs in the regional headquarters; first in London in 2013/14, then in Singapore and in Shanghai. It was really about figuring out how do we design these places and what do we want to design for and what is it that we're trying to solve for with these offices? So that was the reason why we hired her in to help with that work, to help the designers and also to evaluate the success of our hubs.

And going back to now and why we think it's important – it's something I'm also quite curious about as a person and with my background. You know, I don't come with a workplace background as such, so everything related to space and the workplace in general and workplace strategies and, you know, I'm learning and I'm getting there, but I didn't have that when I got the role – but what I did have was an understanding of data and how you gather data and how you use it afterwards. After a few months, I went to different conferences and I heard interesting people speak; I also did question whether we, in the field of workplace and especially with workplace experience, do we know enough about our target group – in our case, of course, my colleagues in LEGO? And the answer was, especially for LEGO – but I would also guess this goes for a lot of other companies as well – we don't know that much about the employees; we know so much about our customer, we have all kinds of data, and we test a lot of things, but at least my conclusion was that, back then – and I can only speak of course for LEGO – that we didn't have a lot of that data. If you don't have that, it's difficult to know what you're solving for and so that's something we're doing a lot now. Why I also have data-setting people in the team and the anthropologist is because we want to do interviews, we want to do focus groups, we want to do surveys, but we also want to do the experiments, as I told you before. We want to do randomized controlled trials, and so on. We want to *test* different things in the office – of course respecting that it's a workplace. It is a complex system so it's really difficult, but we still want to get more data out than we have and we want to, you know, of course try to react to that, so it's now much more part of our story that we tell that, you know, we're actually asking people.

Right now, we're working very much on a global flexible working policy, which was really accelerated, of course, by COVID-19, but it was something that we'd been looking at for a while but hadn't really done anything serious about it – and now, of course, every

company is looking at this. And here we've got so much good data from the workplace, it's also much easier for us to sell it to the executives – you know, this doesn't come from us, this doesn't come from Coca Cola or Adobe or other big companies – this is actually coming from LEGO, and the employees say they want more of this, or they want less of that or, you know, they have these issues when working from home and then it's up to us to fix it, right? So I think that's an element that an anthropologist can also help with, because I'm not only talking about hard data here, it's also important to follow up with focus groups and interviews – and usually an anthropologist will be very equipped to do that.

Paul                      Hmm, as you say, COVID-19 is accelerating changes in terms of flexibility and, if you like, designing your work around what suits and works for people best and for teams – has anything surprised you from the analysis you've done of the LEGO community?

Jesper                    Yes, there were a few surprises; actually maybe more than a few (laughs), because it was a big survey – but I'll give you a few examples. Actually, up to I think 84% would like a combination of working from home and the office, so only 16% would prefer either to work from home or from the office. I think that's a big number right, and it really speaks to the fact that this is something that people are really interested in.

I would say, interestingly enough, one third say that work–life balance is a big positive surprise of working more from home, but likewise a third write that work–life balance is the biggest challenge of working from home. So, you know, I guess the theory behind it is probably that for some it's difficult; if your home is also work, it might be more difficult to plug off and maybe if you're all the time in front of your computer and everything, there are emails, there are messages in Teams, and so on and so forth. For some it might be difficult to really plug off work; for others, and we assume that this is mostly families with smaller kids, it's easier to help with the kids as well and so, you know, for that group it might improve the work–life balance.

Paul                      Yes, and I was just going to ask: has LEGO decided to make any changes to your, if you like, digital and physical mix due to COVID and due to the research that you've found – or any regional differences, demographic differences?

Jesper                    Yes, that's a good question. We do see some differences actually, and I want to say that, you could say, culture-wise, there is a big difference between, let's say, Denmark and the UK, compared to China and Shanghai. It's also about the way our colleagues in Shanghai, and actually our colleagues in China, score the lowest

on their experience of working from home, and I think, you know, some of the differences we see can be attributed to culture. I'll give you an example I heard of a few months back: it was in Shanghai and there was a leader that tried to get hold of his or her employee but couldn't – and this particular employee was working from home and that was seen as an example of someone not working, of doing something else other than working because this person was not available. And I'm categorizing a bit here – but in Shanghai it is more usual that they see a linear, so to say, correlation between you being in front of your screen working and then also you being productive, which is not how we see it in Denmark and, for instance, in the UK, so that's a big difference and something we will have to solve for.

Maybe another example, another thought that pops up when you ask about the mix, is that I foresee – and I think this is where it really becomes important going forward and we need to solve this and it's not easy – that is, how do we redefine the purpose of the office space or, in other words, we *do need* to redefine the purpose of the office space. So, you know, up until now probably in many countries, in Denmark too, it has been the default option to go to the office. Now we're maybe heading towards a situation where we could easily see it the other way around, so the employee will be asking us: "Why do we have to go to the office? What is it that the office can uniquely contribute that the home office cannot?" And, you know, that's again where I think we need more data. We've actually looked into it already but we probably need even more to understand what it is that the home office does so well and what it is that the work office does well – and we can then double down on that. We've been trying to figure out, you know, how to make that even stronger, and what it does well compared to the home office. That would be an interesting task and I think a key task for everyone in this space.

Paul

Yes, absolutely, and I've said on other episodes of the podcast that I've become more aware, having been, you know, *forced* to work from home – even though my normal way of working is to work from a summerhouse in my garden anyway. So it's not an unpleasant place to work... I mean, I'm looking out, there's lots of lavender, I can see lots of bees working away. So, you know, they're working, I suppose I'm working, and I can kind of compare my work with their work (laughs). You start to think about communities of work and how do they know how to do that and who's deciding which bits of the plants to look at!

But I think – and this has been happening for years – in a way, offices had no competition going back decades, and increasingly

over the years they've had more and more competition as alternative places for people to work have become feasible. And I've often thought it seemed ridiculous, I'd go into an office building in Paris or Boston or New York, and I would see people sitting at a desk having no contact with their colleagues around them, working on a screen or screens, and then presumably going home and doing the same thing – and I think in a way that's a very poor use of the whole journey, the environmental impact, as we've discovered. And I think it does bring up a really interesting point: I think your 84% of people wanting a combination or choice is really borne out. It's not that *everybody* wants to work from home or *everybody* wants to work in the office; what people are asking for is a level of choice, and what I think people will miss is that ability to simply be in the physical company of other employees, so there's a level of social, human connection and then there's a level of just kind of being creative or enjoying working on something together, and we're into areas of collaboration, community, and so on – and I think that really makes quite interesting approaches to offices of the future.

One thing I must ask you though... as a brand, I suppose everybody feels like they know LEGO a little bit and know that it is unique, but how would you describe the LEGO brand and LEGO's position in the world? I know that's a sort of demanding kind of question but I feel like it's got a unique place in our world and I can't quite articulate what that is.

Jesper

No, I think you're right Paul. You know, when I started in the company, I actually didn't realize, even as a Dane... of course I knew that it was a big brand, but I had no idea how big it actually is. So I think you actually need to get into the machine room to fully understand the impact it has on so many kids around the world and of course adults as well. Because we've been around for so long, quite a lot of adults have fond memories of building with LEGO as kids, right, so that's also where I guess a lot of the positive association comes from. It comes from childhood when people were building with LEGO bricks, so I think that's more from an emotional point of view, but then I think there are other elements too, like our mission of inspiring and developing the children of tomorrow, which is quite deep. We really do believe in what we call 'learning through play' and that is maybe opposed to a lot of the standardized testing. We believe that, you know, there may be other ways to achieve you could say "good learning", and we believe that play is such an important aspect of that. We really want to get that out to the whole world basically, that play is so fundamental – and not only play with LEGO but play generally.

And I think that when it comes to LEGO, when it comes to the brick, I think it's so unique because it's so simple and yet it opens up a world of limitless options, of building options, and only the imagination really sets the boundaries. I think that in essence it's such a beautiful concept and beautiful idea. The LEGO bricks that are produced this year still fit with those produced 50 years ago and that's really strong, I believe, as a product. Then, of course, there are so many things that the product relates to but I think also just the product is so simple and yet so uniquely limitless in how it can be used.

Paul And just on a technology level, just describe to me the kind of digital workplace services and tools that you use inside the organization.

Jesper Yes, I think that's actually an area where I would love us to be much more mature, so I still think we do lack some digital workplace services in LEGO. I would say we are getting much more ambitious here luckily and, as an example, right now we're building a new guest experience, which to a large extent will be digital and that looks super promising, but I think actually what comes to mind where I think we are fairly good is maybe digital training, for instance, compliance courses that we do – because they're actually quite fun and they're playful. So, you know, when you have to take one of these courses and it takes half an hour – and you know it always pops up at a time when you're busy with something else – but then when it's fairly playful and fun to do, it's not that bad. I think we're good at that, so I would probably pick that one out – but I think it's an area where we have a lot to learn and also a lot of development to do as well.

Paul Yes, and do you have a slightly frustrated desire to create digital worlds of work yourselves that would be reflective of LEGO as a company because, inevitably, you're buying in technology from enterprise software providers who are developing approaches that are quite generic across lots of different organizations and so on. You know, they've done their UX and user and design thinking... but would you really like to just be able to kind of throw the creativity of LEGO at the digital tools?

Jesper Yes, for sure, and we have done that quite a lot, especially a few years back – and we do still want to “LEGO-ize” it in one way or another.

I will say though that, on the flip side, we are also becoming more aware of the complexity that it builds up afterwards, so one thing is just using a digital tool out of the box and, you know, it's easier for the vendor maybe to update it and develop it, whereas if we put

different layers on top, it just makes it all the more complicated and so there is that dilemma, that trade-off. So, in some areas, we are trying to, you could say, make it more just out of the box and as it is, and in other areas we do like to customise.

I think it's the same with the guest experience. There, of course, we have to make it a unique LEGO experience for guests, whereas for, say, an internal HR system, maybe that's less important, just as an example. It's not to say it's not important but I'd say it's maybe *less* important, so it's also about figuring out so you don't build up layers of legacy IT systems that have difficulties speaking together because of all kinds of specialization from our side.

Paul

I suppose what I'm thinking is, you know, that with an anthropologist, a psychologist, people involved with social science and data, you get a kind of picture of the type of way of collaborating, let's say, or forming teams inside the organization, a way of sharing knowledge and information that's quite distinct... and then you've got a bit of a dilemma because, you know, LEGO is not a technology company, it's a company producing LEGO and experiences around that. I am just kind of feeling like that must cause quite a challenge in that what you might envisage what you'd like to have but the ability to design that, build that, acquire that... it must be quite tricky?

Jesper

Yes, I suppose you're right. I mean it's not an area where I'm that much involved, at least right now, but I think you're right. But I do also think that, and this is really to your point, Paul, that we do come from a physical world and we want to continue doing that, so we're building, you could say, a universe around the physical brick, kind of like building a digital layer around it.

It's a much more difficult area than we're used to, but I think we're getting there with also some great LEGO experiences for kids digitally. But it's true, we do come from a physical world and we do want our people to have the bricks in their hands – the “minds on, hands on” experience, as we call it.

That's super important and will continue to be so and, of course, we also need in our workplaces... we have an ambition, actually one project we're working on right now, is: How do we create a more playful work culture at LEGO? Obviously it's not a small project, it takes more than a week to do that, but what we hope to achieve at some point is actually that people will, in the way they behave and the way they facilitate meetings and all that, become much more playful and creative. So, you know, we are definitely a more playful company than most other companies but I still think that we're too corporate. We can be much more playful; we can do much more of

what we are actually do, a lot more of the ideas we're selling to customers, right? So, you know, I would love at some point to work at LEGO where we, let's just say as an example, you were to facilitate a meeting or workshop and, because you had called for that workshop, you felt it was your obligation to actually facilitate the workshop in a playful manner using, for instance, LEGO bricks, or other tools, but of course a LEGO brick in many ways, so we can build in that creative fun way of facilitating meetings or workshops and so on and so forth – because not only would it then be more fun to work in the company and to attend meetings, it would also actually build up specific capabilities for people of how to, in this case, facilitate something in a playful manner. Just think about how valuable that would be for, of course, LEGO while you're working here, but also for you as an individual for your individual development. You'd maybe go to another company being able to have that skill, so you could say that you can make every meeting inspiring, fun, creative, just by the way you facilitate it. I think not a lot of companies would be able to do that, so that would be something that would be also difficult to copy, right – because it takes a while, it takes years.

Paul Absolutely, and it would also be something that I think a lot of companies would be very interested in. It strikes me that play is a really untapped resource. I mean, if you look at sports or just play generally as a kind of aspect of human nature, it's a release of creativity, energy. Could you just describe to me LEGO *serious* play and do you and your colleagues use that?

Jesper We do use that, yes, but I would say we have different levels of facilitation where the LEGO brick plays a role, so it's not just LEGO serious play we use but it is a very strong concept, having being developed over quite a few years. We also have up to maybe 2,000 so-called “play agents” that can facilitate different LEGO exercises, so either as an ice breaker during a break or as a discussion starter. That's not so much serious play but it's something similar and, remember, we do see play as a way to learn, not only for kids but also as adults, as you were alluding to, to develop not only cognitive skills but also social skills, emotional skills, creative skills and actually also physical skills – and I think I fully agree with also your statement before. You know, I'm also into football. I watch a lot of Premier League football and it's quite interesting that, if you look at the some of the best UK football academies, a lot of those academies use play as a way to develop your football skills and they actually use it until I think the kids are 15 or 16, so it's not only something they use while they're five, six, seven, eight years old. It's something they use much more deliberately also as they grow

older, because it's something where you can maintain motivation more, obviously if it's fun. And I think the same goes for play at our workplace definitely, so I fully agree it's a huge untapped area of possibilities... and if we're not doing it as the LEGO group, who should be doing it? So I almost feel as if it's an obligation to actually do something here!

Paul

No, I think you're right. I mean if you look at companies like Nike or Adidas, Lulu Lemon, you know, you can't work there without being physically active; you're kind of representing the brand. And I think in a sort of COVID-19 world, one of the things and challenges is, as people have been working increasingly in digital environments, what I would call a sort of digital fatigue, digital monotony sets in – there's something about it, it doesn't matter even if the people are different in the different meetings you have, if the technology is the same, in the same place, there's this kind of routine and monotony that comes to it – and trying to introduce something a little more playful helps.

I've been interested in looking at the different apps that are being developed to increase people's digital literacy, digital understanding, digital readiness – and they're a lot more what I would call 'playful apps'. I mean, I've talked about it before but, you know, Duolingo, the language app, is successful because it's tapping into that aspect of play. You're certainly making me think a great deal about this.

I mean, we've got (as I endlessly go on about on some of the podcasts!), myself and my co-author Shimrit Janes have a new book coming out in January 2021, called "Nature of Work" – and it's going to look like a coffee-table book about forests. We're just finishing off writing it and it's really about organizations as living systems, that they're not machines, they're living systems; they're not organizations, they're *organisms* – and thinking about yourself as something that's alive. And I think a lot of the language that you've used around diversity, caring, storytelling, community, curiosity, bravery – to me, this is language not of the *industrial* age, it's a language of a *living* age and I'd be really interested to see how an organization like LEGO might see this idea of the Nature of Work and say: "Well, what might that mean for us if we were a more *alive* LEGO company? What might that actually look like in HR, recruitment, innovation, collaboration?" And we've created new "elements" within it around seasons and roots and habitat, again borrowing language from nature to try and get people to think differently, I guess.

Jesper No, that's very interesting and I think you're right and it also makes me think, Paul, actually – going back to the big survey we just did – from when people were working from home, and some of the interesting differences we actually saw were that, you know, individual focused work and phone calls and Skype meetings, Teams meeting, people actually prefer to do that from home, whereas if you look at something like collaboration, agile work, formal meetings, social interaction, people would *much* rather do that in the office space, right? And that is really where people come together, so to your point about the living organism and looking at this from a more human-centric point of view, there is a lot we can do there and I think, coming back to redefine the purpose of the office, that's probably where you should start.

Paul Yes, I think that's really interesting. So, the question I like to end with Jesper, which I'm going to ask you, is: what does the perfect working day look like for you?

Jesper (Laughs) And I can't answer, you know, working from the beach, I guess (laughs)? No, let me try to be a bit more practical! I like to get up fairly early in the morning, do some exercises, send the kids to school and kindergarten, then I actually like to just go outside with a cup of coffee (laughs), think about the day, what I need to prepare, and also to think about more long-term ambitions and goals. Then I'll do a quick catch-up on emails, 30 minutes or so, very quick, very effective, and then I want to be available for social interaction and those random encounters. I really love that. Of course, that is best being done in the office space so I would probably ideally spend half a day at home and half a day in the office. And I like to be surprised! I like inputs to help my creative thinking, so I will also set up team meetings, with my team, whether that's in a meeting or at lunch. Then the rest of the day I think I would spend that, you know, maybe half thinking on my own and then also collaborating, workshoping difficult problems; you know, figuring out, for instance, how to make good interpretations, to investigate if our initiatives are actually making a positive change and so on and so forth, so I'll probably do that. I do get quite a lot of energy from being with people but I also get energy from being very much on my own, in my own thoughts. Probably on my way home from the office, I would listen to podcasts, maybe yours Paul, so that would be close to a perfect working day in the real world.

Paul (Laughs) Great, that sounds beautiful. I love the idea of surprise being part of the day! I think you're right. I like that... well, I don't like too many surprises, but I like, you know, some level of

surprises because I think that, again, sort of stimulates this dormant place of energy.

So, just before we end Jesper, any closing comments or anything you'd like to say?

Jesper No, I don't think so. I mean, we've been around a lot, it's been really enjoyable, Paul, so thanks very much for inviting me in and, yes, I also lead with new ideas and things that I want to bring to the LEGO workplace experience.

Paul Fantastic and me too, so thank you so much for your time Jesper. It's been a pleasure to talk to you and to get some of the atmosphere of LEGO and your life.

Jesper Likewise, Paul.

Paul Digital Workplace Impact is brought to you by the Digital Workplace Group. DWG is a strategic partner covering all aspects of the evolving digital workplace industry through membership, benchmarking and boutique consulting services. For more information visit: [digitalworkplacegroup.com](https://digitalworkplacegroup.com).

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Head of Digital Experience

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# Overview of services.

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Director of Client Services

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