What is theory if theorizing is a game?

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Throwing a six to start

The purpose of this paper is to explore what we mean by theory, by looking at theory through a game lens. In comparing and contrasting the two phenomena of games and theory, we seek to better understand what theory is and is not, how theory is distinguished from theorizing, what constitutes a theoretical contribution, how theory and practice are linked, and the nature of academic work.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin by discussing what is meant by a game, and, notwithstanding the difficulties of defining what constitutes a game, we outline four characteristics of games, and identify four basic roles in game activity. In the next section, we discuss the similarities between games and what is commonly understood as theory. We then proceed to describe how a game perspective can add to our understanding of theorizing. The paper's final section then builds on this to consider the implications of thinking about theorizing as a form of game-playing. This exercise in comparing and contrasting theory leads, ultimately, to recognising

the importance of *phrónēsis* in games, and its relatively marginal position (until recently) in theory and theorizing.

What is a game?

Play, according to Huizinga (1955), is elementary to the human condition. 'Play', he asserts, 'cannot be denied. You can deny, if you like, nearly all abstractions: justice, beauty, truth, goodness, mind, God. You can deny seriousness, but not play' (1955: 3). Animals play, which means that it must be older – and hence more fundamental – than culture. Hence, rather than seeing play as trivial, we should treat it seriously, because it is basic to the human (and animal) condition.

For Huizinga, war, religion, sports and the arts are all forms of play. And indeed the very different meanings of the word displays the pervasiveness of the phenomenon: an infant plays with a toy, a woman plays a musical instrument, a corporation's stock goes into play, an audience watches a play in a theatre, playing is a professional sportsperson's work. Play is of particular interest in management studies, not least because management has traditionally focused on play's presumed opposite – work – and, more recently, because play is seen as intrinsic to learning and creativity (Kavanagh 2011). In this paper, we focus on the more bounded concept of *game*. The difference between play and game can be usefully understood using Caillois' (1961) classification of four forms of play – *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation) and *ilinx* (vertigo). Games fit easily into the first two forms (sports and games of chance), but less comfortably into the other two (*ilinx* refers to quick changes of movement, such as a merry-go-round, while *mimicry* refers to phenomena like the carnival and theatre). Notwithstanding this reduction in scope, the concept of game still encompasses a wide variety of activities: children's games like hide-and-seek, thousands of different card games, an even more eclectic collection of board games (almost 100,000 games are listed on the website *boardgamegeek.com*), a massive video game industry and field games like football, tennis, hurling and hockey. More broadly, many social activities can be interpreted as games. For instance, some have argued that business is just a game, akin to poker, with its own rules and practices (Carr 1968; Stack and Burlingham 1992), while others have observed that people, including managers, continually play psychological games in their interactions with others (Berne 1964; Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Weber 1989). Most obviously, asset markets display many of the

attributes of games (though Hamington (2009) sees this as a case of taking a metaphor too far). To add to the complexity, an activity may be classified as a 'game' in one context, while an almost identical activity is 'not a game' in another context: clay pigeon shooting is a game, while military sharp shooting is not. There are also 'serious games', such as *3rd World Farmer,* which 'challenges players to keep themselves and their families alive while managing a farm in poverty and conflict-stricken Africa'. Wittgenstein (1953) saw that context was vital, not only for games but also for language, and it was this insight that formed the basis for his important concept of *language-games.* For him, languages, are analogous to games in that meaning is always contingent, while saying something in a language is like making a move in a game. He also observed how the word 'game' covers a multitude of very different, but similar, activities, from which he developed his important concept of 'family resemblances', though the wide diversity of games demonstrated for him, the futility of trying to define anything, least of all games.

In direct opposition to Wittgenstein, Suits (1978) felt up to the task, and memorably defined playing a game as 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles' (p. 41). Our approach is less succinct, which means that some of our supposed 'defining' features of a game may appear in one game but are absent from others. To move towards a definition, we analysed some of the large number of texts on the design of games (board or video) published since 2000, from which we compiled a list of some of the key characteristics of board games used and accepted by the professional game design community. A distinction sometimes proposed is that the sole reason players in a game have for carrying out certain actions in certain ways is that they are adhering to the rules of the game. However, this particular game-like characteristic does not exclude every 'real world' activity or practice. For example, Caillois (1961/2001) defines play as: 'Unproductive: creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for the exchange of property among the players, ending in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game' (p. 10). But this is a characteristic common of many activities beyond play and games.

Whether any activity in life is really a game or not is probably always likely to be the subject of disagreement and is, perhaps, not amenable to a conclusive answer. We take the view that any activity that displays one or more of the accepted game

characteristics is open to examination through a game lens. We partly follow Schell (2008: 51) in dividing our list of selected game characteristics into four groups (Table 1), though our groups do not precisely correspond to his. Schell's 'aesthetics' has become just one factor in a group that includes other factors related to **Design**. The 'story' characteristics are gathered in a group labelled **Narrative** that includes matters related to the game's 'world' or its political framework. Since gaming is essentially a human activity, characteristics affecting human engagement with a game belong in the **Human Factors** group. The **Mechanics** group is largely self-explanatory.

In addition to its characteristics, the practice of game design involves four essential roles: 1) the **designer** who devises and tests the rules and mechanisms, 2) the game **referee** who ensures that the rules are followed, 3) the **player** who actually plays the game according to its rules and 4) the observer or **spectator** who decides whether the game will have any life beyond its original publication. Note that all four roles may be combined in the person of a single individual. Note also that any role may be well or badly executed: referees may ignore or misapply rules, players may cheat.

Human factors	Game is voluntary Heuristics: players may improve Players are rewarded The forward-looking imagination Competitive Cooperative	Design	Aesthetics Essential playtesting Game must be fair / balanced Avoid 'gaming' opportunities Game must be player-centric Asymmetry in goals, resources
Narrative	Game exists in a world, domain World built of 'real' constructs Avatars represent players Game has a goal or purpose Game presents problems Consequences may be low or high The game provides information	Mechanics	The game is the rules Rules are monitored Rules may limit player actions Scoring mechanism Economy & currency Randomising mechanism Hidden information
The four basic roles in game activity	1) Designer, 2) Referee, 3) Player, 4) Spectator		

*Table 1: The four groups of game **characteristics**, and the four basic **roles**.*

First move: theory as game

Wittgenstein's unease about defining games is equally, if not more so, apposite when it comes to theory, since, even though the word 'theory' might be seen as fundamental to the social sciences, an accepted meaning of the word is elusive. Merton's (1967`: 39) concerns are typical: 'Because its referents are so diverse' he suggests, 'including everything from minor working hypothesis, through comprehensive but vague and unordered speculations, to axiomatic systems of thought—use of the word often obscures rather than creates understanding.' Sutton and Staw (1995`: 371) echo these sentiments, observing that 'there is lack of agreement about whether a model and a theory can be distinguished, whether a typology is properly labelled a theory or not, whether the strength of a theory depends on how interesting it is, and whether falsifiability is a prerequisite for the very existence of a theory'. For them, the 'lack of consensus on exactly what theory is may explain why it is so difficult to develop strong theory in the behavioral sciences' (Sutton and Staw 1995: 372). Corvellec (2013: 14) disagrees, arguing that 'lack of consensus on what theory is itself explains why it is possible to develop strong theory in the social and cultural sciences'. For Weick (1995: 385), 'products of the theorizing process seldom emerge as full-blown theories, which means that most of what passes for theory in organizational studies consists of approximations'. Instead of theory as a product, he suggests, the focus should be on theorizing as a process. To add to the complexity, a theory may be applied in practice before its principles have been observed or described. For instance, when Hornick articulated the principles of a mercantilist theory of trade in 1684 he merely proposed for Austrian national policy what had long been established in many countries as a normative pattern of behaviour. Notwithstanding this complexity, social scientists are routinely concerned with what theory is and is not, what constitutes a theoretical contribution, and how the practice of theorising should be done. For us, and hopefully for you, the intriguing question is whether or not games can help in this endeavour.

At a minimum, theories consist of a collection of relationships between a parsimonious set of meaningful, situated constructs. This minimalist definition seems

to apply just as well to games, if we take the well-known board-game of *Monopoly* as an example. In that game, the constructs are specific terms like 'player', 'house', 'street', while the relationships specify, for instance, that a 'player' can only 'build a house' if the player 'owns' a 'set' of 'streets'. Players and observers can also infer relationships between constructs; again, using *Monopoly* as an example, players will place a higher premium on the orange set of streets on the basis that players leaving 'jail' are more likely to land on these streets, or they might inductively develop a sense of the relationship between investment and cash flow through repeatedly playing the game. Players may then use this knowledge, acquired through playing, to make predictions (which some see as a basic criterion of theory-building): 'Mary will win because she has built a hotel before anyone else has built even a house'. Moreover, players will develop many local interpretations and predictions - 'Johnny [the novice player] will make a foolish decision in negotiating with Michael [the expert player]' – which, taken together, can be understood as collective and individual attempts to explain and predict success in the game.

A long-standing and largely uncontested position in the social sciences is that theorizing is an exercise in modelling or representing the world (Stinchcombe 1968; Lave and March 1975). Thus, theorizing is an exercise in abbreviation and simplification, which is why Poole and Van de Ven's (1989) assert that, 'A good theory is, by definition, a limited and fairly precise picture' (p. 562). Can we say the same about games? Are games a model or representation of the world? To address this, we begin by returning to Huizinga who famously saw play as 'an act apart', separated by a 'magic circle' from 'ordinary life' (1955: 10, 13), a point picked up by Caillois (1961/2001: 10) who saw games as 'separate'. Likewise, in the computer games literature, Crawford (1984: 7) asserts that:

> a game is a closed formal system that subjectively represents a subset of reality… By 'closed' I mean that the game is complete and self-sufficient as a structure. The model world created by the game is internally complete; no reference need be made to agents outside of the game.

Schell (2008: 34) also includes the idea of the game as a 'closed formal system' within his 10 'game qualities'. In contrast Zimmerman sees games as 'a context for reflection', evoking the Aristotelian concept of the spectator as theorist, and implying an important relationship between the world and the game world. Juul (2005: 36)

sees the boundaries between the game and real worlds as 'fuzzy areas under constant negotiation', while Woods argues that 'a particular game can offer a vastly different experience depending upon the context in which it is played' and that 'board game systems are anything but closed' (2012: 6). Malaby (2007:96) also holds this view, noting that, 'Ironically, it is how we have sought to account for what is remarkable about games by setting them apart (as play-spaces, as stories) that is the largest roadblock to understanding what is powerful about them'. In this debate, we side with, Juul, Malaby, Woods and Zimmerman. Board games are akin to fairy-tales in that they bring the player/reader into what Tolkien (1966/1983) describes as a 'Second World' which is both consistent and rational, and which provides a unique and insightful perspective on the 'Primary World'. Moreover, the primary and secondary worlds are not separate but mutually constitutive as understandings, principles and values interpenetrate between them. As Tolkien put it, the point of fairy stories, such as the frog princess story, 'lies not in thinking frogs [as] possible mates, but in the necessity of keeping promises (even those with intolerable consequences) that, together with observing prohibitions, runs through all Fairyland' (Tolkien 1966/1983: 152–3). Even the simplest games, like *Snakes & Ladders*, help frame and construct our understanding of concepts such as ambition, purpose, competition, failure, chance, turn-taking, beginnings and endings. Indeed, following and going beyond Luhmann (1995), we see the "Primary World" as but an emergent effect in a myriad system of interlocking games and stories set in Secondary Worlds. In this sense, games and fantasy stories work very similarly to a theoretical model in that they are framed around a limited set of constructs and a structuring narrative (understood as 'rules of play' in a game). And like theories, games have a relatively defined domain or scope as specified by the rules which define the field of play, the world, or conceptual space within which the game operates, while they also have utility, relevance, or some ultimate aim for the various actors engaged by them.

Some games have been designed with a serious instructional purpose. For instance, *Monopoly* began life explicitly as Elizabeth Magie's way of testing and illustrating Henry George's economic theories about property. Magie's original title of *The Landlord's Game* for her 1904 patent preserves her narrative intention, and the early instructions included with the game explained that it was 'designed to show the evil resulting from the institution of private property' (Raworth 2017). Likewise, the CIA

has used board games for many decades as a way of giving its analysts 'repetitions in the practical application of intelligence gathering skills' (Hall 2017). The constructs for *Fire in the Lake* (a commercial game design by a CIA analyst and a military historian) include representations of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam and 130 historical event cards (such as the Tet Offensive, Domino Theory, the Honolulu Conference) that allow players to re-run a randomised chronology of fascinating 'what if?' scenarios. The aim of *3rd World Farmer*, according to the game's creators, is to make the player 'experience' injustice, 'so as to stimulate a deeper and more personal reflection on the topics". The highly successful computer simulation game *SimCity* was based closely on Jay Forrester's *Urban Dynamics* – a computer simulation model conceived as a 'serious' urban planning tool. But as Wells (1926: 3) argues:

> what if we were to claim that Urban Dynamics actually is a game, or at least a manual describing the rules of a game, rather than a serious minded policy proposal? This is not what Forrester intended, of course, but that does not mean that this claim is unfounded.

Games, in this sense, are performative, as they are riven with performative utterances – 'I will buy that street', 'I will be the iron', 'I am building a hotel' – that illustrate the capacity of speech to act or to consummate an action. If games have long been recognised as performative – and speech acts in games are routinely used to illustrate the idea of performativity – the notion that theories are also performative is of more recent vintage.   For instance, Callon (1998) and Mackenzie (2006) have shown how economic and financial models work to make markets come to be, and in this sense economic theories are models are better understood as performative 'engines' rather than 'cameras' that seek to represent a world 'out there'.

Second move: game trumps theory

This suggests that we should be cautious about ocular metaphors, including the notion that games provide a 'lens' on what we understand as theory. Instead, games might be better thought of as device for exposing that which is absent or deficient in our current understandings of theory and theorizing. In this section, we consider such absences and deficiencies.

Our first point is that games are epistemologically beyond the compass of lists and

definitions and can only be properly known through playing. Games are phenomenological practices as they emotionally engage players, giving them a meaningful experience and opportunity to express themselves. Players – and non-players – engage with games wilfully, and good players must develop the craft of playing the game, usually through repeatedly playing the game. And that craft has a material, aesthetic dimension, using, in the case of board games, a mix of material components such as plastic tokens, boards, dice, pens and cards. How then does this apply to theory and theorizing? One take on this is to see the practice of theorizing as a distinctive craft, the skills of which must be learned through continuous and repeated practice. James March provides one pedagogical template for developing these skills in the famous course he developed while he was Dean of the School of Social Sciences in UC-Irvine during the 1960s (March 1970; Lave and March 1975). However, March's focus was on the skills of representation and modelling – based on a natural science tradition – and he paid little or no attention to how a model of the social world might inform or even constitute social practice. This issue of the relationship between theory and practice is of particular concern if one is modelling business phenomena, as business can quite easily and justifiably be considered a game where there are winners and losers, and where the model will presumably be of value to those playing the game.

To develop this further, we find MacIntyre's notion of 'practice' especially useful.

> By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. (MacIntyre 1981/1984:187)

Crucially, games provide the paradigm of what MacIntyre understands as a practice, which he then extends to include domains such as farming, physics, chemistry, the work of the historian, painting, music, etc. But practices are always situated in time and place, and so a theory that makes sense in relation to one practice might make

no sense in relation to another. For instance, one might hypothesise that it makes strategic sense to buy the orange streets in *Monopoly* – and a Monte Carol simulation model might provide compelling supporting evidence – but neither the strategy nor the model make any sense in the game of tennis. Of course practices may have enough in common so that a theory or model developed in one practice or game might have application in another. So, for instance, Grusky (1963) studied the rate of managerial succession in sixteen professional baseball teams over two time periods, 1921–41 and 1951–58, and found this to be negatively correlated with organizational effectiveness. This finding might be applicable beyond baseball, though even there it can be contested as other factors – such as the general manager's role and a well-organized scouting and farm system – are probably more important than the field manager's transitory influence (Gamson and Scotch 1964).

The degree to which theories transcend particular practices is perhaps more related to MacIntyre's distinction between practices and institutions, which he again explains by drawing on the paradigmatic case of games: 'Practices must not be confused with institutions. Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laboratories and hospitals are institutions' (MacIntyre 1981/1984: 194). Though he then confuses practices and institutions when he says that, "The making and sustaining of forms of human community—and therefore of institutions—itself has all the characteristics of a practice" (ibid). In this sense, the practice of managing a football team is perhaps not that different from the practice of managing a hospital.

This shows how one game can spawn other, derivative games. So, for instance, we can see games being played in the administration of a football club, but we also see derivative games such as table football, fantasy football leagues, Mexican waves, betting games, and the like, which highlights the problem in any simplistic attempt at relating 'theory' to 'practice'. Many different actors are involved in games – players, supporters, spectators, analysts, regulators, commentators, coaches, administrators, referees, etc. – and the activities of each of these groups are likely to display the characteristics of what MacIntyre refers to as a practice, with a derivative practice of theorizing about the practice. Players theorize, as do referees, supporters, analysts, and indeed anyone with a working conscience and interest in the game/practice can theorize.   Games within games, theories within theories.

Notwithstanding this confusion of categories, MacIntyre retains a core distinction

between a practice and an institution, which he explains by articulating a difference between what he calls 'internal' and 'external' goods. Again, he turns to games for his explanation. In this case he tells a story of an adult encouraging a child to play chess. Initially, the adult promises the child a material reward, like sweets, for playing the game, but, over time, the child learns to enjoy playing the game and will (hopefully) eventually play the game for its intrinsic reward (the love of the playing the game) rather than any extrinsic reward (sweets). MacIntyre associates internal goods (or intrinsic rewards) with practices and external goods with institutions. Applied to our practices, the internal good is the joy we get from theorizing, analysing, reading, writing, etc., while Research Assessment Exercises, which are created and maintained by the institution rather than the practice, are an example of an external good. For MacIntyre, such external goods are 'characteristically objects of competition in which there are winners and losers' and when achieved 'are always some individual's property and possession' (MacIntyre 1981/1984: 190).

Practices depend on institutions – 'no practice can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions' (MacIntyre 1981/1984: 194) – but institutions can also create an excessive emphasis on external goods, which MacIntyre sees as less vital than the internal goods obtained through actually playing the game: 'the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution' (ibid). Moreover, the spawning of derivative games, the ability to devise new games and associated institutions, and the meaningful nature of game-playing can work to create sets of related but disconnected games and institutions. So, for instance, one can easily imagine Mexican-waves (or fantasy football leagues) developing as distinctive games in their own right, with competitions, regulations, regulatory bodies, supporters, etc. This is arguably what has happened with organization theory, which has now spun off into its own game, effectively disconnected from the practices from which it emerged. Thus, just as those playing the Mexician-wave game can become immersed in that game, forgetting that they are spectators at a game of football, organization theorists can become preoccupied with their own particular game, which, in time, can become quite disconnected from the original game from which it is derived.

Endgame: Gamifying Theory

This paper has used a games lens to re-examine questions about the nature of

theory and theorizing. And it has gone further than simply using games as a lens, to argue that theorizing is best understood as a form of game-playing. This suggests a stream of lines of inquiry and research questions.

First, a game perspective foregrounds the activity of designing games, or, when applied to theory, the activity of designing theories. We can sometimes attribute the design of a game to an identifiable game designer, but in other cases a game may have evolved over a long period, and there may never have been a master designer. Applied to theory, we are prompted to ask question such as the following. If theories are not designed, how do they come to be? When is a theory designed, by whom, and for what purpose? Are there different theory-design modes? Is there a recognisable practice of theory design, with a knowledge base, a set of tools and skills? Where and how might theory-design skills be acquired or taught? What artefacts might we need for theory-design and how should they be used?

The games literature makes it clear that games can only be properly known through *playing*. Applied to theories and theorizing, this suggests that theories can only be properly comprehended through use. In other words, we might say that a theory is worthless unless it is experienced, or applied. This suggests that the focus should move from generating and testing theories, to studying theories in use, which, in turn, generates other interesting questions. Who uses theories? Why, how, where and when are they used? Where do theories that are used come from and why are some theories never used? What artefacts are involved in the use of theories? How might one recognise a theory in use? What constitutes a good theory in use? How are theories selected for use? When and how do theories fall into disuse?

Our theorizing tradition valorises the passionless standpoint of the detached spectator, which perhaps explains why theories rarely emotionally engage us, at least not in the way that games capture our heart. Of course some theories do have emotional appeal (Marxism comes to mind), but perhaps we should give more attention to this aspect when assessing which theories are used and not used, why and how theories come and go, and why some endure while others fade without trace. If affect and emotion are so central to games, then perhaps they should also be more central to our own inquiries.

The game model also shifts our focus to *regulating* the game, which perhaps brings

us towards institutional theory and its concern with how broader cultural beliefs and norms structure individual cognition and action and how institutions work to make individuals and organisations similar to one another. In particular, this invites us to consider whether a deeper engagement with the legal framework of society – specifically the law as a constituting framework of rules – might be fruitful. A number of questions and lines of inquiry can be identified. How are theories regulated and policed in practice? How is authority constituted with respect to theory? Who regulates theories? Are there different modes of theory-regulation?

The theorizing tradition places the academic in the role of spectator, not least because it is well known that the etymology of the word "theory" can be traced to the Greek word *theōros*, meaning "spectator". Moreover, since "theatre" shares the same etymological root, a particular type of spectator—one viewing a theatrical production—is privileged. However, a games perspective presents a much richer understanding of spectating, not least because in games there are many different types of spectators, taking different positions. This is particularly important in the game called business, where there are very identifiable winners and losers. A salient question, then, is who are academics spectating/theorizing for?

Another issue relates to ethics and the ways in which a game lens can help us distinguish between right and wrong. In considering this, we draw on the classical Greek distinction between *poíēsis* and *praxis* (Dunne 1993; Kavanagh 2012). *Poíēsis* 'describes an activity associated with making or fabricating something, which necessarily terminates in and brings about a separate product or outcome that provides it with its end or *telos*' (Kavanagh 2012: 109). In terms of games – or practice, using MacIntyre's language – we can consider each game, as in the game of football, to be an instance of *poíēsis*, with the multiplicity of games constituting what one might refer to as the game cosmos. *Praxis*, in contrast, 'is not structured around a separately identifiable outcome [but] has to do with the conduct of one's life as a citizen; it is about activities such as being friendly, honest, truthful, loyal, helpful. In essence, the distinction between *poíēsis* and *praxis* is between productive and ethical activity' (ibid.). Both domains have an associated form of knowledge: *téchnē*, or productive knowledge, is associated with *poíēsis*, while *phrónēsis*, or practical wisdom, is the form of knowledge associated with *praxis*. In the context of games, it can be argued that each game is within the domain of *poíēsis*, in so far as each has

its own *telos* or end state. *Phrónēsis* is the wisdom that allows us to act ethically within, between and about games, to recognise that bluffing might be acceptable, even valorised, in poker, but inappropriate in personal relationships, or to understand the qualitative difference between 'killing' in chess and in real life. *Phrónēsis* is also 'in play' during game design, as when a Polish research institute developed a board game, inspired by *Monopoly*, that teaches young people about life under communism (instead of buying property, players must wait in endless queues for scarce goods).[1] Indeed games are always and necessarily infused with *phrónēsis* because *phrónēsis* is the practical wisdom that allows us to know the difference between play and not-play, and to understand the complex network of interdependencies between different games (each of which is a form of *poíēsis*) and 'real' life.

Thus, there is no need to 'put' *phrónēsis* into play, since it is a necessary and essential part of the phenomenon. But perhaps we do need to put it into theory, or at least remember that *phrónēsis* is as intrinsic to theory and theorizing as it is to games. This is the central and important point made by Flyvbjerg (2001; 2004), who equates *phrónēsis* with ethics or 'deliberation about values with reference to *praxis*' (Flyvbjerg 2004: 402). For Flyvbjerg, 'the point of departure for classical phronetic research can be summarized by the following three value-rational questions: (1) Where are we going? (2) Is this desirable? (3) What should be done?' (Flyvbjerg 2001: 60). It seems to us that these are important framing questions for any piece of social inquiry, not least because ethics rarely features in discussions about what constitutes social theory. This sidelining of an explicitly ethical dimension in the collective understanding of what theory is seems to shadow Ghoshal's (2005: 77) observation that "a precondition for making business studies a science has been the denial of any moral or ethical considerations in our theories". This is both unfortunate and inadequate. Importantly, a games lens shows that theory and theorizing is not just a matter of epistemology, but also of ethics.

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