

A Consideration of Workplace Fun: A Conceptual Inquiry

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Abstract: In a dynamic and competitive business environment today, play and work are not opposites. A fun work environment is a positive atmosphere for organizations to attract and retain employees. This paper addresses the concept of workplace fun as a real phenomenon which has distinct causes and consequences, some of which we discuss in this article. Based on the literature review, this study defines the concept, dimensions, antecedents and outcome variables. On the basis of the integration of the existing research results, the article summarizes the workplace fun and points out the future research direction.

Keywords: Workplace Fun, Work Environment, Attitude vs Experience

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment, organizations continue to emphasize the deployment of human capital as a key source of competitive advantage (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). It is more important for the organizations to focus on enhancement of the performance of workers in order to survive in competitive market. A half-century ago, Abraham Maslow introduced hierarchy of needs theory that progressed from physiological needs to safety and security, then belonging and social needs, esteem and fulfillment. Later Glasser(1994) produced a new hierarchy of five levels of needs. He pointed that the highest level was the drive to have fun. Unfortunately, it often unsatisfied at work, thus forcing employees to obtain their fun elsewhere. In addition, with the progress of the times, the new generation of young workers into the workplace want to have more fun in the work, in order to attract young people to work more, managers should make the workplace fun.

The roots of the modern workplace fun movement can be found in the writings of Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) who encouraged managers to develop corporate cultures that promoted play, humor, and fun. Following this advice, more and more managers and practitioners emphasize the importance of fun at work. For example, "The 100 best companies to work for in America" such as IBM, Google, Southwest Airlines and Pixar emphasized the role of fun in the workplace (Karl et al., 2005). More recently, fun has been

promoted in publications like Fish! as a key ingredient to create energized and productive work environments (Lundin et al., 2000). In recent years, many domestic enterprises have begun to use fun to work, some of the more successful examples of Netease, grand, AFU oil etc. Looking at foreign workplace fun research literature, we can find that the relevant research mainly focuses on the concept, type, influencing factors, influencing results and realization methods of workplace fun.

2. THE CONCEPT OF WORKPLCE FUN

Workplace fun is a broad construct, and several similar, yet slightly distinct, conceptualizations have been advanced. Foreign scholars generally believe that fun at work, workplace fun and fun work environment is synonymous, not a strict distinction, and that workplace fun is usually fun, humor and laughter.

Table 1 Definitions of Workplace Fun

Authors	Organic/Official	Definition
Ford et al (2003)	Official	A fun work environment that intentionally encourages, initiates and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities
McDowell (2005)	Organic	Engaging in activities not specifically related to the job that are enjoyable, amusing or playful.
Flugge (2008)	Organic	Any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of a playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment or pleasure.
Bolton and Houlihon (2009)	Official	Fun draws on an implied link between, play, fun and laughter and increased corporate performance, in the forms of motivation, creativity and job satisfaction
Lamm and Meeks (2009)	Organic	Playful social, interpersonal, recreational, or task activities intended to provide amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure.

sources: adapted from Büşra Müceldili, Oya Erdil(2016)

Many scholars have explained the connotation of workplace fun. Some of them comprehend workplace fun more intuitive. Strand (2000) points that workplace fun gives the impression that people are introduced into the workplace to joy, laugh, humor, etc. taking your work seriously, but not necessarily yourself seriously (Strand and Steinauer, 2000). From a prescriptive point of view then, it would seem that workplace fun happens when work and play are successfully intermixed (Owler, 2008) to create a calm, stress-free, and happy environment

(Urquhart, 2005). Other foreign scholars study the connotation of fun from the empirical point of view. For example, Fluegge (2008) emphasized fun activities are included in task activities, while McDowell(2004) highlighted that fun activities are excluded from task activities. As seen in table 1, a wide body of writings on the nature of fun in the workplace.

Scholars generally focus humor and playfulness when investigating workplace fun. However it is important to note that humor, joking, funny, laughter and fun are similar concepts but their conceptualizations are district. For instance, there is a reaction to humor such as laughter or smiling however, fun does not have reactions (Plester, 2016). Kerryann Cook(2009) presents an overview of literature related to humor, play, fun, and fun at work, utilizing a three phase framework consisting of presage, process and product (3P).Table 2 presents a difference of them.

Table 2 The difference of workplace fun, play, humor

	fun	Play/playfulness	humor
concept	In order to create a fun working environment for employees, organizations interested in initiating or employee spontaneously carry out a series of activities, so that employees feel happy at work, improve staff work attitude and productivity.	The organization creates an open and free working environment for employees, allowing employees to work in fun.	An interesting exchange of positive emotions and ideas for individuals, teams, and organizations, Individual can free from the boredom.
characters	Spontaneous, expressive, amusing, passionate	Sense of humor, fun-loving, silliness, Informal, whimsical	Sense of humor, creativity, playful, Recognition of humor, appreciation of humor
Activity forms	48 activities-themes socializing with co-workers, icebreaker functions and goofy stuff (McDowell,2005)	Make-believe, role paly, games with rules Games of mastery, Mucking around, teasing, games	Jokes, stories, wit, sarcasm, satire, black, goofing off, Teasing, practical jokes
scope	Mainly working environment, and physical environment	Rarely related to work, mainly concerned with defining features and results.	The most widely research and comprehensively map
source	It can be activity-related activities, or activities that are completely unrelated to work.	Mainly unrelated to the work (spontaneous activity).	There is no specific source, as long as it has a positive impact on individuals and groups.

sources: compiled from Kerryann Cook (2009)

Although there are some differences in the fun, play and humor, but scholars do not strictly distinguish them, as a synonym for the conversion between the literature. The boundaries of fun, play and humor are blurred. Generally, workplace fun is humorous, funny and laughter. If the organization wants to play a greater role in the fun of workplace, then individuals, teams and organizations will continue to break the boundaries of the workplace, encouraging more and more effective fun activities, creating a better working environment, stimulating employee attitude and improving efficiency and productivity.

3. WORKPLACE FUN DIMENSIONS

The effects of workplace fun on the individual, the team, and the organization are becoming more and more obvious, and some scholars have studied it by empirical (Ford et al, 2003; McDowell, 2005; Simon, 2009). The research results of the structural dimension are quite rich. Summarize the relevant literatures, this article defines the workplace fun from the following three aspects.

Firstly, from the aspects of typology of workplace fun, the academic type widely recognized is the classification of Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990), which is divided into two categories: packaged/official fun and organic fun. Packaged fun refers that managers consciously initiate some fun activities and create workplace fun environment when they realize these activities produce positive effect. Organic fun can be considered as a kind of feeling or affection, atmosphere or climate reflected in the company, and this kind of fun is unconscious. Plester et al (2015) combine current conceptions of fun with their research they categorize the complex notion of workplace fun into three clear categories: organic, managed, and task fun. Organic fun occurs naturally between organizational members through interactions that arise spontaneously; Managed fun is consciously and even strategically organized by managers to fulfill organizational objectives; Task fun which employees experience in work tasks. Cook (2008) examines whether fun initiate by organized spontaneously which divides it into four categories: organizational/spontaneous (OS), Social/ spontaneous (SS), organizational/planned (OP) and Social/ planned (SP).

Bolton and Houlihan (2009) developed a matrix of managerial motivations for workplace fun, including human resource strategy and management. They divide fun activities into four aspects: fun as containment; fun as engagement; fun as alleviation; fun as developmental reward. Subsequently, Chan (2010) conducted a qualitative field study with grounded theory approach was used by conducting interviews with ten hotel human resource practitioners in china, dividing the official workplace fun into four dimensions, for short "4S", namely: staff-oriented, supervisor-oriented, social-oriented and strategy-oriented. Staff-oriented workplace fun refers to the company's fun activities designed for the staff and arrange employee personal events so as to satisfy their needs, such as celebrating birthday and hiring anniversary; Supervisor-oriented workplace fun is the immediate supervisor initiated fun activities, such as dinner with superiors, informal meetings with superiors; Social-oriented

workplace fun refers to the organization for all staff initiated social fun activities, such as annual dinners or buffet lunches, social barbecue parties and Christmas parties, etc; Strategy-oriented workplace fun refers to initiated by organization and has some policy-oriented fun activities such as casual wear, family friendly programs and so on.

Secondly, From the perspective of the form of workplace fun, the scholar's analysis of the forms of fun at work. Meyer (1999) divides workplace fun into "tangible" and " intangible". Among them, the fun activities actually created by the manager are actually known as tangible work, such as recreational facilities in the workplace. While the staff in the daily work feel the fun is called the intangible workplace fun. For example, joking, humor and so on. Ching (2010) identified two main categories of workplace fun such as the tangible and intangible nature of workplace fun.

Ford et al. (2003) surveyed 572 human resource managers found that the activities of the organization's frequently engaged activities were: personal milestones (e.g. birthdays, hiring anniversaries), social activities (e.g. picnics, parties), public celebrations (e.g. award banquets), friendly competitions (e.g. sales contests), stress release activities (e.g. exercise facilities, casual day), humor (e.g. cartoons, e-mail), games (e.g. darts, bingo) , Opportunities for personal development (e.g. book club), entertainment (e.g. band, skits). Which ranked the top three frequently activities were casual dress day, employee recognition and rewards, company provides food and refreshments. Karl et al. (2005) list 40 common workplace fun activities, using the principal component analysis method to finally get eight types of activities, namely, fun activities, competition, outing, delivery of gifts, food, incentives, wild and celebrations. Among them, the staff that the most interesting is to provide foods, and the most boring is wild, games and celebrations.

Tews et al (2012) pointed that fun was a multifaceted concept. McDowell (2004) and Fluegge (2008), In their doctoral dissertations, examined fun from a more nuanced perspective by focusing on four dimensions of fun, which were aggregated into an overall construct. Specifically, they examined socializing, celebrating, personal freedoms, and global fun. Subsequently, Tews et al. (2012) focused on the impact of fun in the context of applicant attraction. They divided workplace fun on three dimensions: fun activities, coworker socializing and fun job responsibilities. Tews et al. (2014) focus on a casual dining restaurant chain in the US and explain workplace fun via three interrelated constructs namely: fun activities, coworker socializing and manager support for fun. Tews et al. (2015) divided workplace fun into four dimensions, including fun activities, coworker socializing, manager support for fun and fun job responsibilities. They pointed out that not all fun is equal and that researchers should focus on different components of fun, rather than treating fun as a unitary construct.

Thirdly, from the mechanism of workplace fun, scholars are concerned about the individual's attitude and experience of fun at work. Aldag and Sherony (2001) identified three dimensions of attitude toward workplace fun: appropriateness, salience, and perceived consequences of fun. Karl et al. (2007) divides workplace fun into the following aspects:

attitude towards fun, experience fun and job satisfaction. Young et al(2013) use empirical research validating the effects of attitudes and experience of workplace fun on employee behaviors.

4. ANTECEDENTS OF WORKPLACE FUN

The workplace fun mentioned in this article includes both spontaneous and official. Employees in some fun activities carried out spontaneously, would be subject to certain factors of intangible effects, such as organizational culture, organizational atmosphere, subordinate relationship, colleagues, etc.; organizations engaged in some fun activities, will also consider various factors, such as the nature of the organization, the size of the staff, the degree of education of employees, the degree of unionization. And some factors will have an impact on these two kinds of fun activities, such as Plester(2009) pointed out that fun boundaries are constructed within an organization but may also be influenced through industry and societal expectations.

The factors that affect the workplace fun are divided into individual factors and organizational factors in this article.

Primary, from the perspective of individual character, individual's attitudes towards workplace fun will affect the type, quantity and final effect of fun activities. A Idag and Sherony (2001) hold that all people had the same view of workplace fun was too simplistic, and they point that the difference in individual's characters included individual early socialization experiences, individual work experiences, peer influence, individual personality traits and other factors will affect the workplace fun. Karl et al (2005) examined employees' attitudes toward fun, their perceptions of what is (and is not) fun, and the role of trust in the supervisor and coworkers across three sectors(public, nonprofit, and private). Subsequently Karl et al (2007) test the role of personality (the big five dimensions) in attitudes towards fun and levels of experienced fun in the healthcare environment. The results show that extraversion and agreeableness were positively related to attitudes towards fun. Extraversion and emotional stability (low neuroticism) were positively related to the level of experienced fun. Lamm and Michael (2009) focus on one specific area-e.g. the age factor, investigated the generational differences in perception and evaluation of the workplace fun, and suggest an analytical framework that conditions the positive outcomes of workplace fun on the common values and behavioral tendencies of the generational cohort of which an individual is a member.

In short, the employee's attitude towards workplace fun will be affected by many individual factors. The organization should fully understand the different attitudes of employees. If the organization ignores the existence of this difference, some fun activities may bring pressure on some employees, resulting in a negative impact. Therefore, in order to design fun activities, it is necessary to in-depth analysis of individual factors in the work of employee's attitude and experience towards workplace fun.

Furthermore, organizational factors that affect the fun of the workplace include organizational types, organizational trust, and corporate culture. Ford et al. (2003) compared the differences between for-profit and non-profit organizations in carrying out workplace fun activities and found that there was no difference in the form of most fun activities, only in the use of games, fun social events, and friendly competitions. For-profit organizations participate in these activities more frequently than non-profits do. Perhaps there is some concern by non-profits that engaging in these types of fun events and activities will show them to be not serious enough about their non-profit mission so they tend to avoid them. Karl et al (2005) examined that there were no significant differences across the three sectors(public, nonprofit, and private sector organizations) in their attitudes toward fun, there were significant differences across sectors in their ratings of the company-wide outings category and ten (of forty) individual fun activities. Public sector employees tended to rate the activities as less fun than at least one of the other two groups. Employees in all three sectors agreed that food-related activities were fun. Plester et al (2009) researched a study of four New Zealand companies found that informal organizations had more fun activities than formal organizations.

The levels of trust that individuals have in their managers and co-workers are also likely to influence their attitudes toward workplace fun (Karl et al, 2005). In being playful or humorous, individuals take a risk that others will laugh at them and not with them. This is supported by the authors of *Fish! Tales* who state, "You can try to duplicate what the fishmongers [at the Pike Street Fish Market in Seattle, Washington] do on the surface, but if you don't have the shared commitment and trust that make playfulness possible at work, it may not happen" (Lundin et al, 2014).

A group has a culture when it has enough shared history to have formed a set of basic assumptions which guide behavior, perceptions, thoughts and feelings (Schein, 2004). As a cultural phenomenon, fun carries underlying values and assumptions and thus to truly understand the culture in an organization, it is necessary to consider humor and fun (Fine & De Soucey, 2005). Linstead (2011) and Davies (1982) both found that humor can clarify the social and moral boundaries that define acceptable workplace behavior; even though boundaries between 'funny' and 'serious' can be ambiguous in organizations (Westwood, 2004). Plester (2009) found that cases have illustrated the shaping influence of organizational culture and level of formality on the construction and enactment of humor boundaries. In the formal companies these boundaries were narrow, and humor and fun activities were careful and constrained, even in circumstances where a fun culture was rhetorically espoused. In the informal company boundaries were wider, and humor and fun was more prevalent, more normatively offensive, and quite different from that experienced in the formal companies.

5. OUTCOMES OF WORKPLACE FUN

In recent years, scholars have paid more attention to the factors affecting the workplace fun, and more and more studies have shown that fun in the workplace has important consequences.

For example, Karl and colleagues illustrated that fun is significantly related to job satisfaction (Karl et al, 2006; Peluchette & Karl, 2005), emotional exhaustion (Karl et al, 2007), and turnover intentions (Karl et al, 2008). Furthermore, Tews and colleagues found that fun is related to applicant attraction (Tews et al, 2012), job embeddedness (Tews et al, 2015), job performance (Tews et al, 2013), and employee retention (Tews et al, 2014), informal learning (Tews et al, 2017). Ford et al (2004) believed that creating workplace a fun work environment can increase job satisfaction, creativity, better customer satisfaction, stronger employee commitment, and lowered employee turnover and absenteeism. And they pointed that employees in a fun work environment often complain less about boredom, anxiety, and stress. Cook(2008) argued that fun activities have a positive influence on mood, job satisfaction, the management of stress, workplace effectiveness and workplace relationships to varying degrees.

Although workplace fun can have some positive impact on the organization, not everyone has a positive attitude towards fun. Newstrom et al. (2002) argue that managers who do not define the boundaries of fun in the workplace may be uncontrolled by the fun activities of the workplace, and then recreational activities can have negative effects such as annoying customers, increasing interpersonal conflicts, reduce productivity and so on. Therefore, it is critical to find the right time and place to engage in fun activities.

In a word, workplace fun is not a panacea. Although Pryor et al. (2010) supported the concept of Padilla et al. (2007) describing workplace fun as toxic triangles negatively impact the work environment, other factors (e.g., systems and structure inadequacies) also have the potential of decreasing fun at work. Such as: Negative culture and work environment; Management inadequacies and failures; Non-management inadequacies and failures; Systems and structure inadequacies.

6. DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the research results of workplace fun, we find that people have a long history of interest in the workplace, but the time of academic research is short, and the current research on workplace fun has been partly theoretical basis. Some scholars use a systemic process framework as a conceptual framework foundation. In addition, workplace fun has been found to be a construct distinct from humor and play/playful in a work context. Then, we analyze the structural dimensions of the workplace fun, and this is the theoretical foundation for the following research. The dimensions identified could be used as a tool to assess corporates on their current climate and desired levels of fun. Next, we analyze the factors that affect workplace fun, which divided into individual factors and organizational factors. The breadth of the research on the antecedents of workplace fun is expanding in literatures, and some suggestions are put forward to improve the workplace fun. In terms of the outcome, most studies focus on job satisfaction, job performance, organizational citizenship and turnover. The quantitative research on workplace fun is increasing, and more and more examples and data are

provided by the previous assumptions and viewpoints. Figure 1 is the structure of workplace fun framework.

However, the study of workplace fun is still in its infancy, both theoretical research and empirical research are still not perfect. First of all, domestic and foreign development is not balanced, foreign research has been more than thirty years of history, and domestic related academic research has just emerged in recent years, and research is still a lot of gaps. Secondly, the standard of measurement is not consistent. Because of the different structure of the workplace, it is difficult to make a horizontal comparison. Furthermore, the research on the antecedents and outcome variables of workplace fun is not comprehensive. The existing empirical studies only investigated personality traits and age factor, rarely involve other variables in the antecedent variables; in outcome variables, the existing empirical studies only related to job satisfaction, service quality, emotional exhaustion and other factors. In addition, research mainly from the perspective of management, rarely with other disciplines, and it also from a positive perspective, ignoring the potential negative impact, may lead to research conclusions are not comprehensive.

Further research in relation to the construct and impact of workplace fun could greatly benefit from a selection of methodological approaches, including organizational observations and detailed case studies. In the first place, drawing on the theories of philosophy, sociology and social psychology, we can enrich the study of workplace fun. The second place, from the point of view of design and matching, future research explores the role of workplace fun in the selection of talents and the allocation of organization. The third place, to strengthen the empirical research on the variables of antecedents and outcomes, especially to strengthen workplace fun and job involvement, organizational identity and subjective well-being of individual level important variables, as well as to study the relationship between organizational culture, organizational atmosphere, morale, organizational image and other organizational level variables. The last one, future research the formation mechanism of organic workplace fun, as well as both spontaneous and official workplace fun complementary, integration relationship and the integration of the two mechanisms, providing guidance for managers in the workplace fun.

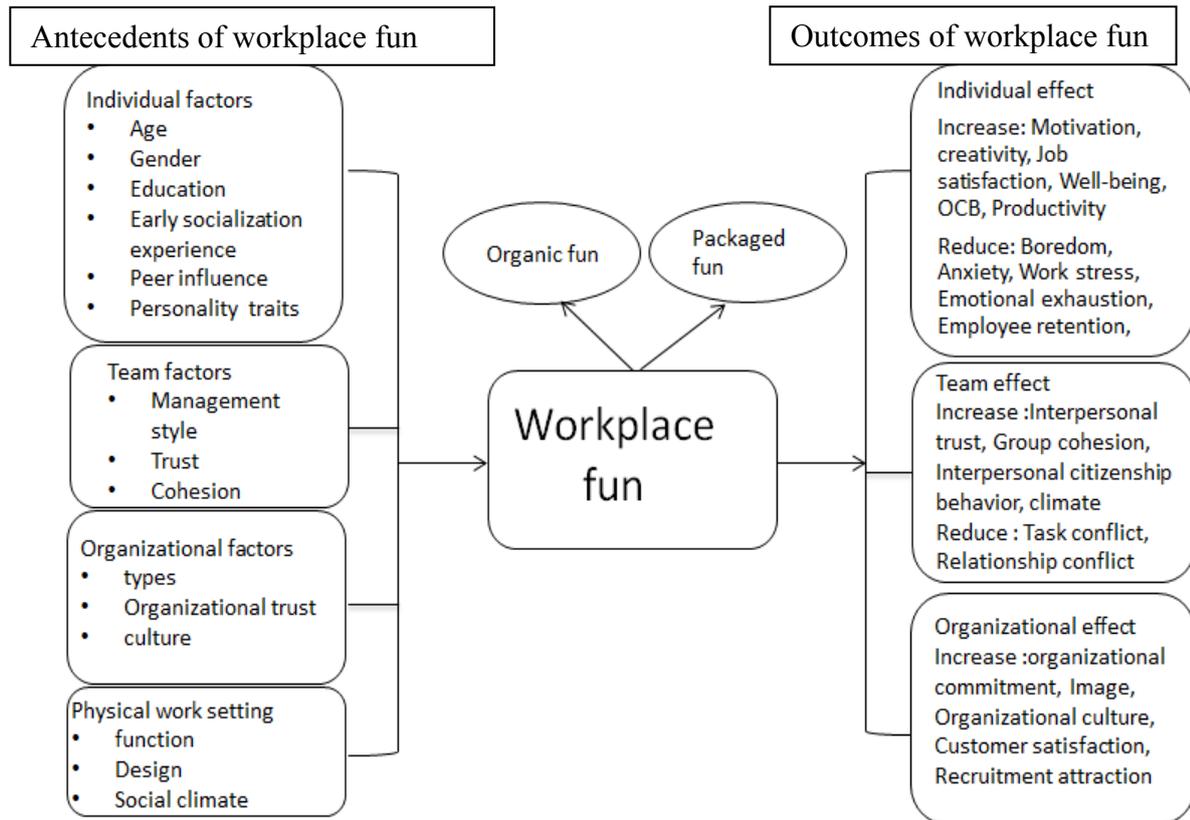


Figure 1 Model for workplace fun in this article

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