

# Fun Culture in the Work Place: A Systematic Review

(1) Ms.V.L.Dilakshini, Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar  
-608002,India / Senior Lecturer, Department of Management, Eastern University, Sri Lanka

(2) Dr.S.Mohan kumar., Faculty Member, Department of Business Administration, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar -  
608002, India

## Abstract

A Fun environment is a positive and simple atmosphere which encourage the attraction and retention of valuable human resource in an organization. This study reviews some literature (nearly twenty (20) articles based on fun culture) in past to give a clear picture regarding the workplace fun which is most important factor for today's managers to engage their employees in the work environment happily. Fun means different things to different people and the purpose of this paper is to attempt to answer the question "what is workplace fun?". And also how the leader playing a major role in the fun environment. This paper suggests some specific connections between fun and some positive as well as negative organizational outcomes. The ambiguity and complexity of workplace fun is an emerging topic for research that offers a variety of implications for scholars and practitioners in HRM and Organizational Behaviors. The Authors contend that workplace fun potentially offers practitioners opportunities for fostering a climate which create workplace benefits.

**Key Words: Workplace fun, Culture, Fun Culture, Corporate Culture, Leadership**

## Introduction

**As the jargon goes, "Happy Employees produce Happy Customers" (Wang & Ko, 2009, Pg. 196)**

"Have a fun. Don't allow your office to become a morgue, with everyone walking around like Zombies."(Nelson & Economy, 2010). Whiteley and Hessian (1996) encouraged fun with their words "Lightening up is not a management initiative. It's a symptom, a spirit. The official designation of April 1 as "International Fun at Work Day" may be accepted as an entirely serious

attempt to foster the notion that work should be fun (Wilson, 2004, p. 4; Weinstein & Barber, 2006, p. 88). These words are showing the importance of fun culture in the working environment to create if as “Love to Work”.

Its crucial to create a unique corporate culture where people enjoy one another’s company and where there is a healthy mix of productivity, professionalism and fun in the office. In order to offer an enjoyable working environment to a happy and effective workforce, it is suggested to lighten up the work environment. Because employees love to work hard when they also get to play hard. It’s the quickest, easiest and the most effective way to improve the office life.

Fun that is an outgrowth of a positive organizational culture may be used to enhance the goals of the organization while increasing an employee’s commitment and satisfaction with his or her job. Plato believed that life should be lives as play. The bible reminds us that a merry heart does wonders. The Talmud warns that we must account for the permitted pleasures we failed to enjoy during our life time. According to Weinstern, the idea that “laughter, play, and fun are an essential part of life” is not a modern concept. Studies suggest that work place fun may be an inexpensive, profitable mechanism of engagement that correlates directly with increasing job satisfaction, cultivating morale, and improving quality of customer service. Such studies posit that younger workers desire more fun in the workplace, and advice that managers recognize the need for creating a playful, creative work environment to recruit and retain a productive workforce (April, n.a).

Fun in the workplace has long been promoted as a key mechanism for enhancing organizational effectiveness. Deal & Kennedy (1982), who encouraged managers to develop corporate cultures that promoted play, humor and fun. In that dot com trend of the 90s new corporate cultures of fun emerged such that business become more associated with play and less related to work (Van Meel & Vos, 2001). Recent literature indicates that employees desire a fun workplace a majority of workers under the age of 30 list having coworkers who “make work fun” as an important factor in their job search (Belkin, 2007).

Today more companies are attempting to integrate fun into the work place and this is a sign that this trend is changing. Because the sustainability of the success of an organization goes through having a culture of engagement that makes work fun. However, a corporate culture that supports laughter, play and celebration doesn’t arise spontaneously in most workplaces. Creating fun at

work often involves concentrated effort and most of the time there has to be put in a lot of work behind the scenes to create a fun-filled atmosphere on the job.

Fun is an important part of organizational life when autonomous and collective, naturalistic and socially produced and even at times, when part of a manufactured “Fun Cultures”. Little wonder, then, that organizations now seek to harness play in ways that can be readily managed if this is truly the aim. Yet, at the very least, fun and laughter is spontaneous; not neatly packaged with the promise of expected results. Clearly marked on the label. It is timely for a fresh look at the notion of fun at work; what it is, what it does, and what it really means to people. What is required is an assessment of the current fascination with this hitherto informal, subterranean social side of work, and the veracity of the under – theorized association between fun, happiness and productivity.

The concept of fun at work, the seeming anti thesis of the protestant work ethic, has surfaced as a growing topic of interest within the workplace. The silence and importance of fun at work have been emphasized by a growing number of practitioners and managers. 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. Fun is the one of the positive phenomenon in the workplace and included social events, recognition of personal milestones, public celebrations, humor, games, entertainment, opportunities for personal development, job play and fun tiles. Everyone wants to fun at work and it has positive consequences on employees. Being fun at work has far-reaching effects on employees and organizations. For example, fun positively affects employees job satisfaction, commitment, creativity, energy, organizational citizenship behavior, productivity and negatively affects absenteeism, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, turnover and burnout.

## **Workplace Fun**

The concept of fun is a growing field for workplace research and while studies offer potential benefits of managers, and scholars, fun can be difficult to research. It is largely because the notion of fun means different things to different people that the concept of fun is hard to pin down, and this lack of conceptual clarity makes it hard to explore relationships between fun and

organizational outcomes. In spite of this lack of evidence, fun at work is receiving increasing research attention and empirical investigation (Barbara, 2015).

There is little consensus regarding the meaning of “fun”, because what is fun (and / or funny) to an individual may be just as easily considered offensive, demeaning and/or silly to a different person. The term fun is often confounded with the concepts of humor, laughter and joking, but is, in fact a distinct but overlapping concept. For example, while humor is said to occur when amusing stimuli are contextually appropriate, and a reaction such as a smile or laugh occurs, fun doesn’t necessarily involve laughter or humor. Rather, definitions of fun comprise elements of activity, enjoyment, pleasure, frivolity, spontaneity, surprise, informality and even play. Ultimately, workplace fun can be seen as “any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment or pleasure (Barbara, 2016).

There is distinct conceptualization and constitutes of fun in the workplace in the literature. Fluegge (2008) emphasized fun activities are included in task activities; McDowell (2004) highlighted the 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 conceptualization are distinct. For instance, there is a reaction to humor such as laughter or smiling however, fun doesn’t have reactions. Basically fun shows the pleasant activities in the workplace that provides to contacts and interactions among employees each other (Busra and Oya, 2016).

**Table 1: Definitions of Different Authors**

Authors	Definitions
Ford et al. (2003)	A fun work environment that internationally encouraged, initiates and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities.
Fluggee, (2008)	Any social, interpersonal or task activities at work of a playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment or pleasure

McDowell (2005)	Engaging in activities not specially related to the job that are enjoyable, amusing or playful
Bolton and Houlition (2009)	Fun draws on an implied link between play, fun and laughter and increased corporate performance, in the forms of motivation, creativity and job satisfaction.
Karl and Peluchette (2006)	Workplace fun is defined as a work environment centered around fun that intentionally encourages, initiates, and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities, such as participating in parties, giving awards, playing competitions, and gathering to have fun activities.

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111 Studies have started to examine employees' perceptions of the formation of a fun work  
112 environment. Workplace fun is defined as a work environment centered around fun that  
113 intentionally encourages, initiates and support variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities  
114 such as participating in parties, giving awards, playing competition and gathering to have fun  
115 activities. Ford described twenty-three activities that create a fun workplace environment.  
116 Results indicated that the three most commonly used activities were casual dress days,  
117 employee's recognition and rewards, and organization provided food and refreshments. A funny,  
118 humorous or playful environment can be created by the workplace activities. The workplace fun  
119 activities included outings (e.g.: companywide trips), food gatherings (e.g.: lunch and dinner for  
120 birthdays) and contests (e.g.: singing). Workplace fun is a "variety" of enjoyable and pleasurable  
121 activities that positively impact the attitude and productivity of individuals and groups or more  
122 succinctly "a work environment that makes people smile" (Ford et al., 2003, p 22). Aldag and  
123 Sherony (2001) explained that employees' early socialization experiences, work history, peer  
124 influences, and personality characteristics would influence the experience of having workplace  
125 fun.

126 Elif and Ugur (n.a) suggest that it is the managers who should create and nurture of fun  
127 environemtn, in that way, they may set the comple in the organization to hshow the employees

that there is nothing wrong with having fun at work. Otherwise the employees may hesitate that the management will think that they are goofing off. And while developing these fun environments, the ideal scenario would be to incorporate these activities that the employees believe to be the most effective one.

But as Pryor et al. (2010., p 300) states that the concept of workplace fun is a real phenomenon which can be influenced by both management and non-management employees and adds that it is everyone's job to create a fun work environment and keep it alive, the researcher also suggest that it is also important to keep in mind that neither the management, nor the employees alone may create and nurture workplace fun.

Vimal and Bee (2014), also stated that in this ever-changing and competitive society, it is important for companies to provide a happy working environment for their employees, as happy employees can help to improve productivity which make the company to survive in the market. Its essential that before developing such a happy workforce, company should make sure their employees are having positive attitudes toward fun.

### **Culture, Corporate Culture and Fun Culture**

Culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9) or as “a pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1990, p. 111).

Corporate culture, which symbolizes the signature of the organization (Adams, 2015, p. 108) who refers to the values, beliefs and attitudes that permeate a business and defines what the company considers important and unimportant (Case, 1996, p. 44) and so it can have a significant impact on employee behavior (Ford, McLaughlin & Newstrom, 2005, p. 14). Gostick and Elton (2007, p. 97) define culture as “If your firm were a computer, your corporate culture would be akin to the operating system, guiding how members think, feel and act on the job. If your organization were a living, breathing person, your culture would be your personality and very soul. It runs that deep. In fact, culture colors everything we do.” and emphasize their definition with the words “Culture is how you do things: the rules, spoken or unspoken, that you

158 play by. Culture is the foundation of everything you embrace, and the reason for everything you  
159 do.”

160 Just like Motsett (1998, p. 47) states that one of the most difficult aspects of a company culture is  
161 trying to change it and it usually can’t be successfully changed via an edict or new policy just  
162 because cultures are stronger than any policy; Manley (2008, p. 88) asserts that creating a fun  
163 atmosphere at work is tricky; you can’t exactly direct people to have fun and give them orders  
164 such as “This is going to be a happy place to work, and that’s a directive!”

165 Urquhart (2014) asserts that there are 3 ways to motivate people to work harder, faster and  
166 smarter and these ways are to threaten them, to pay them lots of money and to make their work  
167 fun. She adds that in today’s workplace, threatening people has not been effective, paying them  
168 lots of money has only shown short-term success but making the workplace enjoyable, has a  
169 track record of effecting real change and so it is time leadership experts and managers learned  
170 how to create an atmosphere that is challenging and gives inspiration for creativity - a workplace  
171 that is fun for employees as well as for themselves.

172 Abshire (2014) states that from celebrating the big things to enjoying the little things, building a  
173 strong company culture that inspires both teamwork and friendly competition isn’t very hard to  
174 do and doesn’t need to deplete revenues and adds that the golden rule of building a happy culture  
175 gets through answering the question “If this wasn’t your company, would you want to work  
176 here?”. Just like in the cultures that Deal and Kennedy (1982, .pp. 113-116) call “Work Hard /  
177 Play Hard”, Housh (2015) also claims that it is possible to run a successful business while still  
178 having fun and argues that the secrets of creating a fun culture is to create fun office challenges,  
179 to get moving, to celebrate special occasions in unique ways, to make time for fun and to  
180 occasionally get out of the office. Demers (2015) also argues that there are several strategies that  
181 an organization can use to keep its productivity high while simultaneously injecting an  
182 atmosphere of fun into the office environment and these are to organize challenges, to encourage  
183 breaks, to socialize offsite, to celebrate achievements and to focus on productivity, not schedules.  
184 Hemsath and Yerkes (1997, pp. 216-229) offer a twelve-step program for fun with the titles  
185 “Start with yourself, inspire fun in others, create an environment that encourages fun, celebrate  
186 the benefits of fun, eliminate boundaries and obstacles that inhibit fun, look for the humor in  
187 your situation, don’t postpone your fun, make fun inclusive, smile and laugh a lot, become  
188 known as “fun loving” and put fun into action”. They also claim that fun is a simple phenomenon

that anyone can participate and that it doesn't require special training, it won't necessarily cost you money, its benefits are infinite and it can have a positive impact on the lives of the people you work with every day.

Joyful workplaces are buzzing with people bursting with energy, vitality and enthusiasm. These people love what they do and feel they are important at work (Gore, 2014). In order to make an organization more fun, changes should be created through the complex system of the organization's culture, through formal and informal training, and through turnover and selection. The organization needs to work on changes continuously (Abramis, 1989, p. 69). In a high-pressure work environment, there is simply not enough time to do everything you need and want to do. So generating a sense of fun and play falls to the

bottom of the to-do list unless you consciously choose to make it a priority. Making having fun at work a priority doesn't only lead to reaching out to your coworkers in a playful, upbeat way, but also to treating fun as an essential component of your basic job description and evaluating yourself on how well you are contributing to the creation of a positive corporate culture around you, in addition to the usual stuff, like sales and productivity (Weinstein, 1996, p. 51). It is suggested to start with yourself and not to wait for someone else to start the fun, to inspire fun in others and encourage others to engage in fun-loving activities and to create an environment that encourages fun (Hemsath, 1997, p. 52).

Ford, McLaughlin and Newstrom (2003) made a survey among the human resource managers to address whose responsibility it is to create a fun workplace environment. One-fourth of the respondents indicated that it was based on a corporate culture, another fourth indicated that it was top management who has primarily responsible for creating a fun work environment and that it must start at the top.

Elif and Ugur (n.a) stated managers who should create and nurture a fun work environment. In that way, they may set the example in the organization to show the employees that there is nothing wrong with having fun at work. Otherwise the employees may hesitate that the management will think that they are goofing off. And while developing these fun work environments, the ideal scenario would be to incorporate these activities that the employees believe to be the most effective ones.

## **Leadership and Fun Culture**



Leader is the mostly responsible person to shape the culture to fit to any group. The example of the behavior of the leaders are seen and followed by others (Parker, 2008, pp. 231-232). Llopis (2013) claim that people desire a “leadership refresh” in their organizations and the employees want leaders who they like, who understands their needs, who can authentically motivate people and who know how to energize a workplace culture to generate the best results for the organization.

As with any other principal attribute of an organization’s culture, the spirit of having fun at work must originate and be wholly supported from the top and then transmitted all the way to the bottom (Gropper & Kleiner, 1992, p. 15). Because of the common vision that fun and corporate culture rarely seem to intersect (Twu, 2006, p. 11), unless an atmosphere for fun is supported in the organization, employees and midlevel managers may not take steps to promote it, fearing resistance (Society for Human Resource Management, 2002, p. 45).

More companies are investing a lot of time and effort in creating a fun culture. That often starts at the top, at the company’s CEO and these high energy CEOs embody the social spirit that creates an entertaining culture based on working hard and having fun (Feigon, 2013, p. 106). Losyk (2005, p. 132) suggests that the leader should lead by example so if the leader never has fun or is known to frown upon fun, the employees will be afraid to have fun. If the leader lightens up, the employees will lighten up. Management philosophy and policy can encourage or discourage fun in the workplace (Pierce, 2001, p. 80). CEOs should appreciate the value of fun at work and recognize the importance of a positive work environment which encourages fun (Mackay, 2010, p. 14). Weinstein (1996, p. 26) who claims that the employees or coworkers having fun create an opportunity to encourage an atmosphere of excitement, support and celebration on the job, adds that instead of suppressing fun at work, the managers can begin to nourish and cultivate it, because the expression of fun at work can be extraordinarily beneficial for the morale and productivity of the entire organization.

Organizational leaders and their employees can help increase the potential for workplace fun by their personal attitudes and actions, by helping eliminate factors that decrease workplace fun, by supporting factors that increase workplace fun, and by understanding that workplace fun can be a result as well as a cause (Pryor, Singleton, Taneja & Humphreys, 2010, p. 300).

Deal and Key (1998, p. 122) state that leaders, as instigators of fun, are risk takers, willing to become vulnerable, to go out on a limb and to create a culture of playfulness and add that there

is much work ahead to infuse today's workforce with frolic and fun. Robertson (2011, p. 4) states that creating a relaxed, fun working environment is much more demanding to manage than simply working to rule.

Kahle (2015, p. 13) claims that it is the business leaders' job to make work fun, where Gostick and Christopher (2008, p. 173) argue that great managers aren't always the ones to initiate fun, but they certainly allow fun to happen and adds that if they see fun happening they should encourage it. They also state that the managers know that the fun should start on an employee's first day so when a new hire joins their team, they should recognize the stress that person is feeling and lighten their atmosphere to make him/her see that he/she has joined a fun environment.

Above, it is emphasized that the workplace fun is often flows from the top down. However, there are also opposite points of view that argue that fun is not a from top to down given order, instead it is something everyone should create in his/her own atmosphere so it fills in the gaps when people stop taking themselves so seriously. Leeder (2014, p. 627) who states that fun creeps in when managers are willing to laugh at themselves and see humor in the little things that go wrong, even if they think it makes them look bad, adds that for best results, managers should engage in play side by- side with other staff and leave their supervisory hat outside the door, embracing the equalizing nature of fun.

## **Conclusion**

This study has identified and developed the concept of fun activities through the different view of the different authors. Its concluded that organizations have termed workplace fun culture as joy, happiness, surprise and enjoyment in the employment relationship. Usage of fun activities will help the employees to be comfortable with their working environment. It will increase the level of wellbeing in the workplace. And also it's a powerful tool in the working environment to make the employees more involved in the job. Nowadays, managers can introduce the fun activities in the working environment to allow them great experience in the working cite to get great change in the environment.

This study contributes to the existing literature to support to the concept of workplace fun an its impact of workplace environment. This study re-visited the traditional philosophy "Work at job;

play at your home” to “enjoy and play at work” (Chan, 2010). A fun work environment will eventually increase the level of enthusiasm, satisfaction, creativity, engagement, and commitment. And it also reduces the turnover, absenteeism and some other negative consequences. But management must be aware of the working environment so that they can create workplace fun guidelines to enhance the employee well-being and retention. This study ultimately concluded a better understanding of workplace fun activities and its importance in the workplace.

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