

# Fun and humour in the workplace essay

[Business](#), [Management](#)



In organisations, morale is an important facet of productivity and overall office attitudes; if people are happy, they work harder, and more gets done as a result. The application of fun in a workplace environment may be an effective way to increase morale, as it leavens the tension and anxiety that comes across in such a high-stress environment as a workplace. In this essay, the positive effects, as well as potential pitfalls, of adding fun and humour to the workplace will be detailed. Despite the factors that can diminish productivity and the effectiveness of humour initiatives, the end result can be overall positive.

There are most certainly positive effects to adding fun to a workplace environment - increased job satisfaction can result, as well as improved organisational citizenship behaviour, creativity and innovation (Lamm & Meeks, 2009). Absenteeism decreases when workers have fun at their job, and burnout happens much less frequently as well. The presence of fun at work creates a positive mental attitude, which creates a greater flow of oxygen, blood and endorphins to the brain; this can facilitate creative thinking and clear minds. This is typically facilitated through organisational humour, granted through rapport and joviality with coworkers (Lamm & Meeks, 2009).

Humour within organisations is usually accomplished in a number of ways. First, there is clowning; this is self-deprecating humour that is at the expense of himself, in order to make others laugh. While this is often humorous, it is typically thought to be a slap in the face to discipline in the workplace (Stromberg and Karlsson, 2009). Teasing is the making fun of other workers at their expense for one's own enjoyment; while this is effective at creating

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enjoyment for those doing the teasing, the person being teased often has varying reactions to this. They can either see it as a sign of friendship and solidarity, or they can believe it is harassment.

Finally, there is satire, which is a cynical expression of the management and higher-ups; this creates even greater solidarity for those who are in the in-group, creating a "counter-culture within the workplace" (Stromberg & Karlsson, p. 634). This, along with the other two types of organisational humour, are effective ways of creating camaraderie and increasing workplace enjoyment, but can be toxic to productivity and leadership by managers if used improperly (Stromberg & Karlsson, 2009).

Fun in the workplace can come in two different forms - "packaged" and "organic" (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009). Packaged organisational fun is management-led, organized and clearly linked as a means to increase work performance through the intentional administration of enjoyable activities. This creates a manufactured "fun" culture that can often be ineffective due to its transparency. However, "organic" fun comes about through the natural interactions between coworkers, and is often less focused on the increase in productivity. At the same time, it is more effective in creating camaraderie, as it is not forced upon the coworkers, who may or may not be willing at the time to undergo these initiatives (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009). As a result, a combination of the two practices would be conducive to both creating real humour and fun in the workplace, but in a way that dramatically increases productivity.

Normative control is a practice that organisations have exercised for a long time - this involves internal molding of " common attitudes, beliefs and values among employees" (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009). Neo-normative control, however, is a unique branch of normative control that encourages employees to " be themselves." This type of individuality is encouraged, allowing employees to express their personalities and have fun at work. This has the result of the employees giving more of their personality and drive to their jobs, equipping them with the tools necessary to increase productivity (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009).

While normative controls " were designed to instill a shared value orientation in the firm - love of the organization and/or the customer," neo-normative controls are much more individualistic. These are often accomplished through the use of friendship networks, employing very young employees who are encouraged to express their identities and bring items to work that express who they are. Organized events that are intended to be silly and wacky (motivational games, cartoon characters decorating the workspace) allow employees to branch out into a greater sense of levity, which brings comfort with their coworkers and their surroundings (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009).

Managers can find ways to increase fun and humour in the workplace, especially in a way that increases productivity and morale without sacrificing productivity. Often, managers end up not having fun, but the employees respond well to the 'fun at work' initiatives that are started in these organisations, and create a better sense of well-being in the workplace

(Baptiste, 2009). Despite policies aimed at creating a workforce that is free of stress, the managers often suffer from a lack of time spend on working life realities, such as staff and budget concerns. Frankly, managers often prove too busy to implement these changes, as they simply do not have the time to provide these solutions and deal with the day-to-day concerns of the office.

It is said that " the often highly bureaucratic and slow-to-change culture of public sector organisations is likely to be less tolerant to " fun," as this can bring about heavy scrutiny from stakeholders" (Baptiste, p. 61). This can be solved, however, by treating these initiatives as methods to squeeze effort and work out of workers who are already exhausted. At the same time, managers still need to find other ways to inject fun into their own work, as current initiatives only add to the work toll.

This kind of levity has consequences if taken too far in the workplace, however; boundaries have to be set within the workplace in order to facilitate a more comfortable work environment for everyone. Boundaries can be set at both ends - boundaries preventing fun and boundaries from having too much fun. While it can improve employee morale to increase fun quotients and allow employees to lighten up, letting it continue unabated carries the potential for chaos and a lack of productivity. While having fun makes the work less stressful, having too much fun prevents work from getting done (Plester, 2009). Boundaries can include restrictions on electronic forms of humour - in some companies, " all video files are blocked by IT employees scanning for offensive, inappropriate material" (Plester, p.

589). This is done in order to skirt harassment issues and potential offense taken by other employees.

This is the primary concern regarding fun and levity in the workplace; humour can often be offensive, and it can be inflammatory and insensitive to others of different genders, races and sexual orientations. The more informal the atmosphere, the raunchier the humour can get, making professionalism difficult to maintain, and increasing the risk for harassment (Plester, 2009).

Humour can often be generational as well, making some initiatives to improve fun in the workplace not as effective for older or younger workers. Some baby boomers might not be as receptive to certain types of humour, as they have different attitudes toward work. Compared to Generation Xers, baby boomers are much more focused on success as a barometer of their own self-esteem and self-worth; Gen Xers are much more focused on having fun and indulging in competition among their peers. The implementation of humor initiatives can potentially serve to divide the group along age and humour lines, segregating the workforce further (Lamm & Meeks, 2009).

In conclusion, adding fun and humour to the workplace can serve a number of purposes, and can come in many forms. Organisational humour, including teasing and satire, is a great way to increase solidarity among peers.

Benefits of a humour-filled workplace are both business and health-related, and substantial enough to make the investment worth it. There are some concerns about generational differences in humour, potential harassment and the need for boundaries. Also, in implementing these initiatives while maintaining the normal operations of the office, managers can feel the

added strain on their workload, thus decreasing their ability to have fun. However, the potential benefits inherent in adding a lighter atmosphere to a workplace can make implementing similar initiatives an advantageous option.

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