Research Article

Workplace Fun: A Management Tool for Employee Engagement?

İşyerinde Eğlence: Çalışanların İşe Angaje Edilmeleri İçin Bir Yönetim Aracı mı?

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a review of contemporary debates on organic and managed workplace fun initiatives. The managed workplace fun initiatives are named by some scholars and practitioners as a management tool for employee engagement. This paper discusses the workplace fun phenomenon and investigates the most frequently used workplace fun practices and the fun practices which are believed to be the most effective ones. Furthermore, it examines whether the workplace fun activities are regarded as a management tool through a literature review and a quantitative research. For the research 388 Turkish private bank employees who work for the headquarters of these banks are surveyed using convenient sampling method. The findings of the study highlight not only the most frequently used workplace fun practices like recognition of personal milestones, community volunteerism engagement opportunities, entertainment and games, but also the fun practices which are believed to be the most effective ones like stress release activities, recognition of personal milestones, fun social events and community volunteerism engagement opportunities among the others. The responses also revealed that the workplace fun initiatives are not regarded as a management tool by the employees and/or a sanction of the management on them. Furthermore, the findings provide evidence that there are significant negative correlations between effectiveness of the fun activities and usage of them as a management tool or a sanction of management on them.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma organik ve yönetilmiş işyeri eğlence girişimleri hakkındaki günümüz tartışmalarına dair bir değerlendirmeyi içermektedir. Yönetilmiş işyeri eğlencesi girişimleri bazı akademisyenler ve uygulayıcılar tarafından çalışanların işe angaje olmaları için bir yönetim aracı olarak adlandırılmaktadırlar. Bu çalışma, işyeri eğlencesi olgusunu işlemekte, bununla birlikte en sık kullanılan ve en etkili olduğuna inanılan işyeri eğlencesi uygulamalarını araştırmaktadır. Çalışma aynı zamanda işyeri eğlencesi etkinliklerinin bir yönetim aracı olarak görülüp görülmediklerini bir literatür taraması ve nicel bir araştırma yoluyla araştırmaktadır. Araştırma için Türkiye'de yer alan özel bankaların genel müdürlüklerinde çalışan 388 çalışana kolayda örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak anket uygulanmıştır. Çalışma bulguları sadece kişisel kutlamalar, toplum gönüllüğüne katılma imkânları, hoş vakit geçirme ve oyunlar gibi en sık kullanılan işyeri eğlencesi uygulamalarına değil, aynı zamanda stresi azaltma etkinlikleri, kişisel kutlamalar, sosyal etkinlikler ve toplum gönüllüğüne katılma imkânları gibi en yararlı olduklarına inanılan işyeri eğlencesi uygulamalarına da ışık tutmaktadır. Yanıtlar, işyeri eğlencesi girişimlerinin çalışanlarca bir yönetim aracı ve / veya yönetimin kendilerine yaptırımı olarak görülmediğini de ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma bulguları, işyeri eğlence etkinliklerinin etkinliğinin bu etkinliklerin bir yönetim aracı veya yaptırımı olarak kullanımıyla önemli ölçüde negatif ilişkili olduklarına dair kanıtlar da sunmaktadır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive environment having motivated and engaged employees is one of the most important strategic advantages of an organization (Society for Human Resource Management, 2007; Wellins, Bernthal & Phelps, 2015). Hence, the most successful leaders do their best to unleash the energy of their employees by mastering employee engagement best practices and employee recognition ideas. First, they should know what really motivates and engages their employees. Workplace fun is now a popular managerial topic (Redman & Mathews, 2002: 60). Many organizations are organizing workplace fun activities which are enjoyable and serve as a reward for their employees. Workplace fun activities aim to make the employees relaxed, engaged and happy by enriching the quality of working life and so to make the workplace a merrier place (Baptiste, 2009: 602; Biro, 2014; Leo, 1999: 19).

Managers are crucial to increasing the engagement of the employees. They are responsible for creating a work environment where employees feel more passionate about their work and exhibit the behaviors that organizations need to drive better results (Baumruk, 2006: 24; MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Williams & Byford, 2013: 260). Hence, today the organizations do not only offer perks like medical and dental benefits, but they also think outside the box and create an atmosphere that aims to make their employees want to spend time there. But for many managers today, the challenge of creating a fun environment at work does not evolve form a genuine idea and it is only promoted by the challenge of creating employee engagement.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the most frequently used workplace fun practices and the fun practices which are believed to be the most effective ones in the Turkish context. This paper also offers a review of contemporary debates on organic and managed fun initiatives. Since the managed workplace fun initiatives are named by some scholars and practitioners as a management tool for employee engagement, the objective of this paper is to discuss the workplace fun phenomenon from a management tool viewpoint and to investigate how the employees variously engage, enjoy, endure, resist or escape managed fun initiatives and furthermore to investigate whether the workplace fun activities are regarded as a management tool byhrough a literature review and a quantitative research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Workplace Fun

The traditional belief that, work is not supposed to be fun because it is the opposite of fun, gets its roots from the Protestant work ethic (Urquhart, 2005: 3; Willis, 2000). In old-economy companies, fun at work is still not approved because the management believes that if there's too much fun, there's too little work (Capodagli & Jackson, 2007: 136).

Today the work ethic has changed. The organizations want employees who are enthusiastic, who are socially versatile, and who see their work as socially satisfying and fun (Morreall, 1997: 9-10). The changing culture has increasingly legitimized play as an activity, while maintaining it separate from work. Play will be described as focusing on a process, where work focusses on an end product. These foci are accepted as complements to each other rather than as being mutually exclusive (Dandridge, 1986: 159).

However, fun often requires permission as the employees may worry that the superiors may frown upon laughter. It is the management who creates a fun work environment and who should encourage the employees to elevate a positive culture, whilst they should withdraw permission for attitudes and behaviors that create a negative culture. The management philosophy and policy can encourage or discourage fun in the workplace (Pierce, 2001: 80; Warren, 2007: 23).

It is also important how the employees perceive this fun work environment. If the employees believe that the workplace fun activities are structured, predetermined and superficial or if workplace fun is seen as an employee engagement mechanism and it becomes a part of a corporate strategy as the participation is obligatory and its outcomes are highly controlled, then it can cease to engender fun. Grugulis, Dundon & Wilkinson (2000: 97) state that more succinctly; as the private time is captured and colonized by the employer.

Although there is extensive anecdotal evidence ascribing workplace fun to be as a sanction of management or a management tool to create positive positive organizational outcomes, to the researchers' knowledge, there is no empirical research on this issue. Therefore, in this study, the researchers aim to investigate whether there are negative correlations between workplace fun as a management tool and effectiveness of the fun activities and whether there are negative

correlations between workplace fun as a sanction of management and effectiveness of the fun activities.

2.2. Is workplace fun regarded as a management tool for employee engagement?

Activities conducted in the name of fun that are planned and organized with the official sanction or encouragement of authority figures in an organization are named "structured fun", "managed fun", because they are frequently sold by consultants "packaged fun" (Gordon, 1992: 25), "prescribed fun", "designer fun" (Warren & Fineman, 2007: 93-96), "organized fun", "manufactured fun" (Strömberg & Karlsson, 2009: 646), "purposeful fun" (Twu, 2006: 11) or "official fun" (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009: 565). Structured fun can have a negative effect on a workforce (Monaghan, 2007: 18; Stillman, 2011), where it is somebody else's idea of a good time (Gordon, 1992: 26).

In their study, Redman and Mathews (2002: 58) asserted that the employees showed resistance to fun, when they thought that it was forced on them and the employed complained that sometimes they just don't feel like having fun.

Schumpeter (2010) also states that the fake fun has met some resistance because fun for fun's sake is like sugar in kids. In addition to that, this type of fun presumes that fun will be on managerial terms and that there will be benefits for all; excludes those who are unable to party all weekend or those who choose not to party all weekend; imposes formal reward mechanisms and demands macho work-hard, play-hard rules (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009: 565). Mollick and Rothbard (2014) claim that engaging employees requires more than imposing a game or fun workplace and there is a variance in the degree to which people consent to the imposition of a fun workplace environment and add that consent is not just about participation and engagement, it is also about the belief that managerial goals are legitimate, appropriate, and just and entails an active acceptance of such goals.

Plester, Cooper-Thomas and Winquist (2015: 387) state that it the main reason why managed fun is the form most likely to attract negative responses is perhaps in many cases it doesn't allow employees voluntarily deciding for participation. Burkeman (2013) claims that the managers cannot generate fun through deliberate efforts. Indeed, there's evidence that this approach, which has been labeled as "fungineering" might have precisely the opposite effect, making people miserable and thus reaffirming one of the oldest observations about

happiness and add that when tried too hard to obtain it, it's almost guaranteed to fail.

It is suggested not to make it mandatory, if there are people who do not want to be part of creating or having fun (Losyk, 2005: 133). Although structured fun appears to be a bona fide trend (Gordon, 1992: 25) the idea of someone being forced to participate in fun activities is somewhat distasteful as well as ironic, but more importantly, the person concerned may well not experience feelings of fun at all (Warren, 2005: 181) and these initiatives may even run the risk of backfiring (Filipczak, 1995: 54; Hartley, 2014; Plester et al., 2015: 384; Taylor & Bain, 2003: 1498). Because the structured fun is almost never fun (Gordon, 1992: 25; Morin, 2015). Hamilton (2000: 126) argues in his article where he judges the structured fun activities and states that he speaks for the victims of structured fun.

Although many herald workplace funs as a means to achieve positive organizational outcomes, others point to managed fun as a mechanism for employers to increase the command and control of their workers through the orchestration of mandated corporate culture. Besides, both planned and unplanned fun can be leveraged by workers as a form of resistance (Weststar, 2013: 308).

Fineman (2006: 280) states that structured fun cannot substitute organic fun and is likely to be counterproductive if attempted. In one of his articles Zimmerman (2007) argues that if it's a celebration for your boss or supervisor, you should participate and that is actually a part of survival in an office. And when talking about office parties, McCarthy (2014) states that it's obligatory to join these events and as long as they are not awkward and uncomfortable, they are always fun and festive and argues that parties are supposed to be fun but how much fun can you really have in a party which is populated by people who hold sway over your annual review. And Olsen (2011: 44) everyone is encouraged to participate to these events which have been created to build community among the staff and not to participate is seen as being anti-community.

Bolton (2006: 14) who states that the companies which achieve a position on the "Best Companies to Work For" list of Sunday Times, use it as a branding exercise to position themselves as employers of choice and appear to offer the magical formula of making work fun add that their mantra is "Play hard, work hard" but this inclusive party culture is also an exclusive club for the employees who are under 35s. The employees of these companies report work as "fun", "a buzz", "rewarding" or "one long party" but because of

these activities to which attendance is often compulsory, there becomes no distinction between work and life, the boundaries are blurred as weekends and evenings are spent together in organized fun activities, work colleagues are also playmates and the company spans work and social life. He adds that being an employee of best company is to be a part of an exclusive youth club, where Bolton and Wibberley (2007: 143-144) states that not everyone is able to party all weekend and this is especially the fact for the employees who are over 35s with family commitments and add that if there is an overreliance on a fun culture, the ones who do not participate may be discriminated against in terms of opportunities, incentives and rewards. They also emphasize that these companies' very specific approaches to best practice and their hard work to promote images as equal opportunity employers forms a paradox with this situation.

Monaghan (2007) emphasizes that it's not for management to decide what's fun and not fun and it should be an employee-owned initiative, where McCracken (2010) states that commandeering personal emotions in the interest of forced conviviality seems wrong to him and he believes that emotions are mostly a private matter and should not be controlled by the corporation. Muhr, Pedersen and Alvesson (2013: 212) state that fun has to be self-managed and so fun is accepted and encouraged by management. Geisler (2014) suggests that fun cannot be mandated, but only welcomed and rewarded so that it grows natural.

Some employees speak of the superficiality of the workplace fun activities and claim that management's intentions are not really to provide a more pleasing work environment, but, instead the whole campaign is a marketing gimmick and that the rationale of the fun environment is to create the right impression on clients. Another reason that the employees failed to engage in the fun was that they found it to be political or not really intended for them so that it is perceived as superficial (Warren & Fineman, 2007: 99-101). And Weststar (2013: 309) claims that the mantras of "work hard, play hard" and "work as play" can be a thin guise for extended working hours, downloaded risk and responsibility, and uncompensated effort in many occupations.

When participation in these endeavors is voluntary, when an employee likes and shares common interests with his or her peers, and when activities are more informal that may make the participation more enjoyable (Tews, Michel & Allen, 2014: 19).

Jaffe (1990: 58) claims that workplace fun is not a widespread management tool, where Schumpeter (2010) states that the bosses do not think that fun is

a management tool. Although there is growing attention to the structured forms of fun which may offer or impose as an employee engagement mechanism, it is important not to lose sight of its more long-standing cousin, organic fun and humor (Strömberg & Karlsson, 2009: 646). That means work should be fun, but fun shouldn't be work (Mackay, 2010: 14). With the below stared hypothesis this study will be examining whether the workplace fun activities are regarded as a management tool:

H_1: There exist negative correlations between workplace fun as a management tool and effectiveness of the fun activities.

H_2: There exist negative correlations between workplace fun as a sanction of management and effectiveness of the fun activities.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

This research was carried out among the employees of the private banks that are operating in the Turkish banking industry and listed in the Banks Association of Turkey Member Banks List (2016). In this context, the opinions and perceptions of the employees working at the headquarters of these banks are taken as base. The main reason for selecting the banking industry is that it is the sector where fun at work activities are widely used. Questionnaires were pretested with 40 employees, after some changes by wording distributed and completed ones collected in closed envelopes. All respondents participated voluntarily. After deleting the semi-filled ones 388 remained to analyze. The group consisted of 237 women (61.1 %) and 151 men (38.9 %). The respondents ages ranged from 20 to 55, with a mean of 31.62 (SD = 6.19), tenure from 1 to 34 years mean 9,64 (SD = 6.25) and bank experience from 1 to 22 mean 6.44 (SD = 5.21). 255 (52.8 %) are married. The majority of the participants (88.2 %) have a university degree, whereas 8.0 % have a vocational school qualification, and 3.8 % have a high school degree.

3.2. Measures

This study first examines the most frequently used workplace fun practices and the fun practices which are believed to be the most effective ones. "Workplace Fun Activities Measure" developed by Ford, McLaughlin and Newstrom (2003) is adapted to Turkish organizational context. The respondents are asked to rate activities of this measure which consists of 10 categoriess in terms of their

frequency in their organizations with a six- point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (all the time) and to rate whether these activities are perceived as effective in their organizations with a six- point scale ranging from 1 (not effective at all) to 6 (very effective).

These categories are humor, opportunities for personal development, public celebrations of professional achievements, entertainment, games, fun social events, recognition of personal milestones, community volunteerism engagement opportunities, stress release activities and friendly competitions among employees (See. Appendix 1).

The respondents' perceptions on whether workplace fun activities are seen as (a) *a management tool* is measured with the question "Do you believe that the workplace fun activities are used as a management tool?" and (b) *a sanction of the management on them* with the question "Do you believe that the workplace fun activities are used as a sanction of the management on you?"

The reliability (Cronbach's Alpha values) of the workplace fun activities factors vary between .85 and .95 in the acceptable range (Nunnaly, 1978) (See. Appendix 2).

3.3. Findings

The findings of the study reveal that the most used workplace fun practices are; recognition of personal milestones – (mean = 4.33, std.dev. = 1.55), community volunteerism engagement opportunities - (mean = 3.92, std.dev. = 1.55), entertainment - (mean = 3.59,   std.dev. = 1.51) and games - (mean = 3.59, std.dev. = 1.62). The findings also showed the fun practices believed to be the most effective are; stress release activities - (mean = 5.10,   std.dev. = 1.16), recognition of personal milestones - (mean = 5.07, std.dev. = 1.13) and community volunteerism engagement opportunities

- (mean = 4.99, std.dev. = 1.16).

The factor analysis results of the fun practices believed to be the most effective are given in Appendix 3. 89.04 % of the total variance was explained by ten factors.

The study also examines if the respondents believe that the workplace fun activities are a management tool or a sanction of the management on them. The responses revealed that they do not agree that these activities are used as a management tool (mean = 2.61, std.dev. = 1.54) and or a sanction of the management on them (mean = 2.78, std.dev. = 1.56).

Depending on answers of the respondents there were found negative significant correlations between effectiveness of the fun activities and usage of them as a management tool (varies between -.248** and -.320**) or a sanction of management on them (varies between -.107* and -.165**). Both of the hypotheses were approved (Table 1).

Respondents' age, gender, marital states, level of education, and tenure have no significant differentiated impact on perceived effectiveness of the fun practices, usage of them as management tool or a saction of management on them.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

An effective manager should find ways to increase employee engagement but also keep in mind that in order to identify the most effective engagement drivers, he should first understand what is most important for the employees. An effective employee engagement strategy can only be designed and implemented after these particular drivers have been identified and understood. This will increase

Table 1: Correlations between usage of fun activities as a management tool / a sanction of the management on them and effectiveness of the fun activities

	Mean	S.D.	F01	F02	F03	F04	F05	F06	F07	F08	F09	F10
Management tool	2.61	1.54	-.287***	-.290***	-.272***	-.323***	-.248***	-.320***	-.294***	-.316***	-.294***	-.273***
Sanction of the management	2.78	1.56	-.151**	-.159**	-.111*	-.118*	-.145**	-.164**	-.151**	-.158**	-.165**	-.107*

Note 1. F01: Humor; F02: Opportunities for personal development; F03: Public celebrations of professional achievements; F04: Entertainment; F05: Games; F06: Fun social events; F07: Recognition of personal milestones; F08: Community volunteerism engagement opportunities; F09: Stress release activities; F10: Friendly competitions among employees.
Note 2. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

the employee engagement far more effectively.

The findings of the present study reveal that there are negative significant correlations between effectiveness of the fun activities and usage of them as a management tool or the erception that they constitute a sanction of management on them The findings also reveal that the respondents' age, gender, marital states, level of education, and tenure have no significant differentiated impact on perceived effectiveness of the fun practices, usage of them as a management tool or the perception that they constitute a sanction of the management on them. These findings reveal that the respondents do not believe that the workplace fun activities are a management tool or a sanction of the management on them.

The findings of the present study are in line with the claims of Strömberg and Karlsson (2009: 646) that the structured fun may offer or impose as an employee engagement mechanism, and Jaffe (1990: 58) that fun is not a widespread management tool, but aren't in line with Schumpeter's (2010) belief that bosses think that fun is a management tool and that behind the fun facade there often lurks some crude management thinking such as a desire to brand the company as better than its rivals or a plan to boost productivity through team-building. Since the organizations should do their best to understand the potential antecedents of employee engagement, the researchers believe this area may be of substantial interest to industrial and organizational psychologists as well as managers at all levels.

Creating a fun work environment is worth serious consideration by all organizatins. Although workplace fun is regarded as a means to achieve positive organizational outcomes by many, considering that an employee's attitudes towards fun is the best predictor of how much fun he/she experiences, it is suggested not to make the participation in these activities mandatory. It should be kept in mind that there may be employees who do not want to be a part of it.

The findings show not only the frequency of the workplace fun practices in organizations, but also the type of fun practices which are believed to be the most effective ones. The researchers hope that the results of this research encourage the organizations to design and offer workplace fun activities that the employes may like in order to embrace workplace fun more genuinely and as a result a smiling workforce becomes a stereotype.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of this paper should be interpreted in the context of two primary limitations. The first limitation of this paper is related to the research sample. This research was carried out among the employees of the private banks that are operating in the Turkish banking industry and listed in the Banks Association of Turkey Member Banks List (2016). Further research is suggested to collect data over a wider range like the employees of the whole financial industry in Turkey or the employees of the IT sector, which is also known to have a wide range of workplace fun activities, to make sure that the findings of this study can be generalized.

Another limitation of the paper is that employed self-report scales to assess all the variables in the model. Although it is often advisable to supplement self-report data with observational data, regarding the ethical issues that may arise from not informing the participants of the nature of the research, the researchers preferred to have informed consent. Before they have taken part in the present study, all the participants were informed about the topic and the purpose of the research as well as the nature of questions to be asked.

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Appendix 1

Fun Activities Questionnaire

F01: Humor
      F011: Cartoons
      F011: Jokes in newsletter
      F012: Jokes on the boards in the company

F02: Opportunities for personal development
      F021: Social clubs for employees
      F022: Dance classes
      F023: Book clubs

F03: Public celebrations of professional achievements
      F031: "Employee of the month" program
      F032: Creativity and innovation promoting awards
      F033: Best idea competition

F04: Entertainment
      F041: Bands
      F042: Choirs
      F043: Skits

F05: Games
      F051: Company-sponsored football matches
      F052: Tournaments for darts, backgammon and/or chess
      F053: Tournament for billiard and/or table tennis

F06: Fun social events
      F061: Happy hour
      F062: Company picnics
      F063: Evening meals during Ramadan and/or New Year parties

F07: Recognition of personal milestones
      F071: Celebrating individual birthdays
      F072: Celebrating anniversaries of employment
      F071: Appreciation of personal successes of the employees

F08: Community volunteerism engagement opportunities
      F081: Donations campaigns for education
      F082: Blood donation
      F083: Tree planting campaigns

F09: Stress release activities
      F091: Massage
      F092: Colorful office decorations
      F093: Office group exercise

F10: Friendly competitions among employees
      F101: "Who will find the best solution?" competitions
      F102: "Who will give the best advise?" competitions
      F103: Competititon among business units

Appendix 2

Means, Standard Deviations, Crobachs' Alpha Values of the Fun Activities Factors and Correlations among Them

	Mean	SD	F01	F02	F03	F04	F05	F06	F07	F08	F09	F10
F01	4.42	1.35	(.85)									
F02	4.81	1.25	.65***	(.95)								
F03	4,81	1.25	.58***	.64***	(.89)							
F04	4.75	1.26	.62***	.74***	.66***	(.95)						
F05	4,68	1.28	.61***	.72***	.62***	.74***	(.95)					
F06	4.98	1.54	.54***	.65***	.61***	.60***	.75***	(.95)				
F07	5.07	1.13	.49***	.56***	.57***	.59***	.61***	.67***	(.95)			
F08	4.99	1.16	.52***	.62***	.53***	.65***	.65***	.61***	.67***	(.94)		
F09	5.10	1.16	.56***	.59***	.59***	.61***	.61***	.64***	.54***	.56***	(.94)	
F10	4.49	1.43	.48***	.54***	.59***	.57***	.64***	.58***	.54***	.55***	.55***	(.94)

Note 1. F01: Humor; F02: Opportunities for personal development; F03: Public celebrations of professional achievements; F04: Entertainment; F05: Games; F06: Fun social events; F07: Recognition of personal milestones; F08: Community volunteerism engagement opportunities; F09: Stress release activities; F10: Friendly competitions among employees.
Note 2. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Note 3. Values in brackets are Cronbachs' Alpha Values

Appendix 3

Fun Activities Factor Analysis Results

Rotated Component Matrix
Component

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
F101	.869									
F102	.844									
F103	.738									
F072		.824								
F073		.801								
F071		.792								
F092			.824							
F091			.792							
F093			.790							
F081				.797						
F082				.777						
F083				.773						
F062					.774					
F061					.735					
F063					.727					
F012						.778				
F011						.759				
F013						.728				
F022							.756			
F021							.734			
F023							.733			
F032								.806		
F031								.778		
F033								.612		
F043									.730	
F041									.716	
F042									.707	
F052										.701
F051										.653
F053										.631
Variance Exp. %	10.05	9.78	9.74	9.49	8.91	8.90	8.87	8.34	8.16	6.80

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .929,
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = .929, df = 435, Sig. = .000