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Finding Fun in Work: The effect of workplace fun on taking charge and job engagement

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to advance awareness of fun in workplace. Fun plays a pivotal role in organizations – workplace- as in daily life and can be a powerful form of friendship, leading to extra role behavior and cognition, emotion and physical engagement. With a sample of 195 white-collar employees, we tested the relationship between workplace fun (fun activities, manager support and coworker socializing) and taking charge. Additionally, we investigated whether taking charge mediated the effects of workplace fun on job engagement. Moreover, the study contributes the understanding the role of fun activities, coworker socialization and manager support for fun to provide change oriented voluntarily behaviors (i.e. taking charge) and job engagement. By illuminating positive findings in workplace fun research, we hope to encourage more research that examines the beneficial aspects of fun for employees and teams in organizations.

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1. Introduction

The salience 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

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and Pixar emphasized the role of fun in the workplace (Karl et al., 2005). 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, joy, play and fun titles (Ford, et al.2003, Grant et al.,2014). As Oowler et al. (2010) stated everyone want 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 (Tews et al,2012).

Along with its positive effects on organizational outcomes, workplace fun has gained attention through the increasing interest of positive psychology movement. Positive organizational scholarship and positive organizational behavior (i.e., positive emotions, positive strengths and positive psychological states) increases the promoting fun in the workplace. According to positive organizational scholarship perspective positive concepts enhances extraordinary performance and broaden employees' perspective (Cameron et al., 2003). Fun can be play unique role in creating and fostering such positive deviance in organizations.

The study also investigated the job engagement. In recent years the interest to job engagement is increased due to the importance role of sustainable competitive advantage and positive organizational outcomes. We observe that the literature on job engagement focuses consequences rather than antecedents. In this study, we followed Kahn (1990) and Rich et al. (2010) and investigated job engagement via emotional, physical and cognitive dimensions and argued the role of being fun and taking charge role on job engagement. Job engagement refers to “the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s “preferred self” in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional) and active, full role performances (Kahn,1990,p.700). Saks (2006) noted engagement included the active of use of emotions, behaviors and cognitions. Physical (behavioral) engagement refers to state of increased levels of effort to directed toward organizational goals through devoting a lot of energy. Cognitive engagement refers to state of psychological interpretations about the work devoting a lot of attention. Lastly, emotional engagement refers to state of positive feelings such as pride to the work (Shuck and Reio,2014).

Interestingly, managers and practitioners noted the importance of workplace, scholars neglected the workplace fun and especially empirical studies are nascent. In this study we seek to advance nascent literature on workplace fun by empirically demonstrating that workplace fun -i.e. fun activities, coworker socialization and manager support- (Tew et al.,2014) can have a measurable effect on taking charge and job engagement. As shown in conceptual model, we examined, (i) the impact of fun activities, management support for fun and coworker socialization on taking charge, (ii), the effect of taking charge and job engagement (iii), the mediating role of taking charge among workplace fun and job engagement. Accordingly, our study is structured as follows; the first section provides a brief literature review of workplace fun, after we discuss the relationship among workplace fun, taking charge and job engagement in hypothesis development part. Hypothesis development is followed by research design where the empirical results are discussed. Lastly, managerial implications and future research suggestions are provided.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Workplace Fun

There are distinct conceptualizations and constitutes of fun in the workplace in the literature (Tews et al.,2014; Ford 2003). For example; while Fluegge (2008) emphasized fun activities are included in task activities, 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). Basically fun shows the pleasant activities in the workplace that provides to contacts and interaction among employees each other. In this study we follow Tews et al. (2014) and explain

workplace fun via three interrelated constructs namely are; fun activities, coworker socializing and manager support for fun. Fun activities indicates formal activities that formed by organizations such as competitions, team building activities. Coworker socialization shows informal activities are formed by coworkers such as going outside together or joking with each other. Lastly, manager support for fun includes both formal and informal activities such as encouraging for fun and allowing play around on the job.

Although organizational scholars yet investigated the workplace fun, interest of workplace fun date back to Deal and Kennedy (1982), Peter and Waterman culture studies (Tews et al.,2012). For example, Deal and Kennedy and Peter and Waterman emphasized the role of play, humor and fun developing corporate culture. Additionally, Schein's culture model also promote to workplace fun (Owler et al.,2010). Specifically, workplace fun will facilitate by his three level model in organizational changing times.

Table 1 Definitions of Workplace Fun

Authors	Organic/Official	Definition
Ford et al (2003, p. 22)	Official	A fun work environment that intentionally encourages, initiates and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities.
Flugge (2008, p.15)	Organic	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, p.9)	Organic	Engaging in activities not specifically related to the job that are enjoyable, amusing or playful.
Bolton and Houlihon (2009, p.557)	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.

3. Hypothesis Development

3.1. *The relationship between workplace fun and taking charge*

Taking charge refers to extra role behavior that is inherently change oriented and aimed at improvement (Morrison and Phelps,1999). Taking charge is a voluntarily behavior and goes beyond his or her responsibilities. Morrison and Phelps (1999) mentioned the factors for motivating change oriented. In the light of these arguments, we argue that workplace fun triggers improved procedures, introduce new structures, and suggest constructive suggestions for improving operations. Fluegge (2008) also noted fun at work influences extra role behaviors. Additionally, being fun, fosters the task motivation by providing energy for employees. This means that when managers emphasize and encourage fun and allow play around on the job, they provide to increase feeling of energy towards challenging tasks (Fluegge, 2008). Beside, through fun activities, coworker socializing and manager support for fun expedite informal ties among employees and providing improved and changed activities. As Van Oech (1982,110) stated “ a fun working environment is much more productive than a routine environment”.

Therefore;

H1: A positive relation exist between fun activities and taking charge.

H2: A positive relation exist between manager support for fun and taking charge.

H3: A positive relation exist between coworker socialization and taking charge.

3.2. The relationship between taking charge and job engagement

As Ludwig and Frazier (2012) noted as “variables that lead to engagement are numerous”. We argue that taking charge is positively related to job engagement. For example, employees who are ready for change and voluntarily give extra effort for their task want to put their physical, emotional and cognitive energies to their work. Trying to improve procedures and introducing new structures, technologies and policies foster emotional, physical and emotional energies of engagement.

Therefore;

H4: A positive relation exist between taking charge and job engagement.

3.3. The relationship between workplace fun and job engagement

As Bolton and Holihan (2009) noted management scholars tend to investigate workplace fun for enhancing employee involvement and empowering recently. Additionally, number of studies shows that workplace fun has positive effect on employee engagement in organizations (Plester, 2009). However, Plester (2016) indicated there is a gap in the literature that demonstrated the link between fun and engagement empirically. Nevertheless, their study has investigated the relationship between fun and engagement through qualitative data.

We argue that fun can be a powerful tool of enhancing engagement in organizations, leading to emotions, cognitions and behaviors. For example, fun activities, coworker socialization and manager support for fun facilitates to contact employees each other and building friendship ties that strengths emotional engagement. Bakker et al. (2011) suggest that creating an enthusiastic and energized organizational context facilitate work engagement. Also, Christian et al. (2011) noted, managers influence employees’ perspectives of their work. When managers allow employees to play around on the job and emphasize employee fun in the workplace, employees tend to show higher engagement in their job and willing to invest themselves in their work. Additionally, Conway et al. (2015) emphasized the crucial role communication mechanisms while identifying key drivers of engagement. In this respect, coworker socializing via sharing stories and joking with each other in working hours influences job engagement.

Therefore;

H5: Taking charge mediates the relationship between (i) fun activities, (ii) coworker socialization (iii) management support for fun and job engagement.

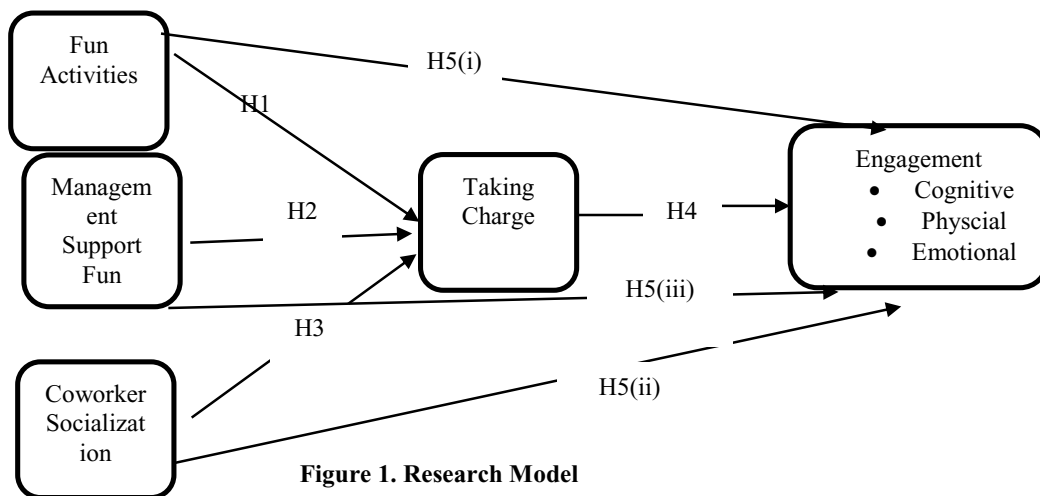


Figure 1. Research Model

4. Research Design

4.1. Sample and Data Collection

We collected data from 195 employee who worked under a supervisor in İstanbul and Kocaeli to empirically test the proposed model. We used questionnaire and data were collected through face to face interviews. The questionnaire was composed of four parts. The first part was designed to investigate the demographics of participants and the second section includes items to measure workplace fun, the third part was designed to measure engagement (i.e. emotional, physical and cognitive) and the last part includes items to measure taking charge.

Of the 195 participants, 58, 5 percent were male and 40,5 percent were female. The average age of employess was 26-35. Respondents reported 44,4 percent they had , had bachelor's degree. 35,4 % had 1-3 years of work experience at the organization. The questionnaire was prepared following an exhaustive literature review and all constructs were measured with existing scales. All items were measured on a five point Likert-type scale where 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

4.2. Measures

Work place fun: Workplace fun was measured using fourteen items adopted from Tews et al. (2014). We followed Tews et al. (2014) and used fun activities (5 items), Cronbach alpha was,85 and sample item was "recognition of personal milestones", co-worker socialization (4 items) Cronbach α : ,86 and sample item was "My coworkers and I socialize at work" and manager support for fun (5 items) Cronbach α : ,93 and sample item was "My managers try to make my work fun".

Job Engagement: Job engagement was measured by three dimensions and eighteen items (i.e. physical, emotional and cognitive) adopted from Rich et al. (2010). Physical engagement was measured via six items and an example item was; " I strive as hard as I can to complete my job" and Cronbach alpha was: 79. Emotional engagement was measured by six items and a sample item was "I am enthusiastic in my job" Cronbach α : ,90 ; last dimension is cognitive engagement was measured through 6 items and a sample item was "At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job" and " Cronbach α : ,90

Taking charge: Taking charge was measured by ten items adopted from Morrison and Phelps (1999). An example item was "In my work group, group members are very cooperative with one another". " Cronbach α : ,91.

4.3. Factor Analysis

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS for examining construct validity. After eliminating problematical items, the resulting measurement model was found to fit the data reasonably well: $\chi^2_0 = 950,544$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .923, incremental fit index (IFI) = .924, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .917, $\chi^2/df = 1.636$, and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05. The Parsimonious Normed fit index (PNFI) = .761, which is above the cutoff point of .70. In addition, as seen above all items loaded significantly on their respective constructs and enhance to support for convergent validity.

Table 2 shows the reliabilities, correlations and descriptive statistics for the scales. Table 2 also demonstrates all reliability estimates, including coefficient alphas, average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable, and AMOS-based composite reliabilities.

Table 2. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fun Activities	1	(.70)						
Coworker Socialization	2	.25**	(.80)					
Management support for fun	3	.40**	.40**	(.87)				
Taking Charge	4	.14**	.28**	.33**	(.76)			
Emotional Engagement	5	.40**	.22**	.40**	.41**	(.84)		
Physical Engagement	6	.21**	.26**	.18**	.40**	.36**	(.70)	
Cognitive Engagement	7	.30**	.13	.19**	.29**	.52**	.56**	(.83)
Mean		2.9	3.9	3.0	3.8	3.7	4.0	3.8
S.dev.		1.12	.79	1.80	.63	.89	.61	.77
Average Var. Ext. (AVE)		.50	.64	.76	.72	.58	.50	.70
Composite reliability		.87	.87	.94	.92	.90	.80	.90
Cronbach's α		.85	.86	.93	.91	.92	.86	.90

p<.05, *p<.01. Note: Numbers on diagonals indicate square root of AVE. No correlation is greater than the corresponding square root of AVE.

4.4. Analysis and Findings

To test our hypotheses, we performed a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis using AMOS. Table 3 shows the relationships among workplace fun, taking charge and job engagement. Table 3 indicates that our model adequately fits the data. The incremental fit index and comparative fit index were .92. The ratio ($\chi^2/d.f.$), the chi-square per degree of freedom, is 1.63,. The RMSEA is 0.05. For the relationship between fun activities and taking charge, we found that fun activities ($\beta = .21$ p.05) is not related to taking charge, management support for fun ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$), and co-worker socialization ($\beta = .20$ $p < .05$) are positively related to taking charge, supporting H2 and H3 and not supported H1. Regarding the role of taking charge on job engagement, we found that taking charge is positively related to engagement ($\beta = .45$ $p < .01$), supporting H4. To test the mediating effect of taking charge between fun activities, coworker socialization and management support for fun and job engagement (i.e., H5), we followed Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure. Table 4 indicates analysis results. Based on the below results H5 is supported.

Table 3. Path model

Hypotheses	Path	Path coefficient	Result
H1	Fun Activities → Taking Charge	.21	Not Supported
H2	Management Support For F → Taking C	.20***	Supported
H3	Coworker Soc→ Taking C	.17**	Supported
H4	Taking C →Job Engagement	.45***	Supported

$\chi^2/df=1.63$, CFI: 0,92 IFI: 0,92, RMSEA: 0,05

Path coefficients are standardized. *p < .1. , **p < .05. , ***p<.01.

Table 4. Results of mediating hypothesis

	Model A	Model B	Model C
Fun → Engagement	0,18*		0,30***
CWS→ Engagement	0,27**		0,11
MSF → Engagement	0,18*		0,50
Fun → Taking c		-,05	-,047
CWS→ Taking c		0,16**	0,16**
MSF → Taking c		0,21***	0,31***
Taking c. → Engagement.			0,48***

Path coefficients are standardized. *p < .1. , **p < .05. , ***p|<.01.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the relations among workplace fun –via three forms of fun, namely are; fun activities, co-worker socializing and manager support for fun- taking charge and job engagement. Specifically, our study empirically shows that workplace fun is positively related to engagement and taking charge in white-collar employees that supports prior studies. In light of previous qualitative arguments (Owler,2010), our findings emphasize that scholars should pay attention to build culture through informal forms of fun. When employees perceive manager support for fun they will be motivated about constructive changes in their workplaces and challenge with status-quo rather supporting the status quo.

Interestingly, the study did not show any significant statistical relationship among formal fun activities and taking charge. The reason for this might be related to the perception formal and informal fun activities in organizations. Indeed, there are evidences in the literature that demonstrates the positive relationship between informal fun activities i.e. manager support and co-worker socialization and extra role behaviour (Moorman et al., 1998) and for example, Podsakoff et al. (1990) highlighted the important role of transformational leadership (the leadership style challenge the status-quo) on extra-role behaviour. However, the studies that shows formal activities and extra role behaviour is nascent.

In addition, this study indicated the mediator role of taking charge between workplace fun and job engagement. While previous studies highlighted the direct effect of workplace fun on workplace engagement (Plester and Hutchison,2016) we specifically demonstrated the indirect role of co-worker socialization on job engagement.

Next, the study showed that employees desire to suggest new work methods, improve operations and introduce new structures or alternative solutions to problems foster job engagement.

In this study we showed the positive effects of workplace fun. However, future studies should investigate the negative effects of workplace fun. For example, fun activities such as public celebrations of work achievements, social events, competitions induce time wasting or chaos in the workplace. Additionally, in this study we focus on workplace fun in individual level. Workplace fun can be investigated in the positive organizational scholarship umbrella. Because it is inherently positive concept and however, there are studies about workplace fun interestingly is missing.

It is important to investigate workplace fun on collective level (i.e. team). Future research can investigate antecedents and consequences of collective level fun. Furthermore, the moderating effect of firm type and firm size can be investigated. Lastly, future research might explore underlying questions whether organizational climate

lessen the effect of workplace fun activities on job engagement.

As a conclusion of the research we can state that, the management should encourage employees to socialize each other and emphasize joking and humour importance. In this respect, human resource managers should promote fun in the workplace via formal (public celebrations, social events, competitions) and informal ways (socializing coffee break, joking each other's).

Finally, this study is not without limitations. There are some methodological limitations to this study. We gathered data only by using survey questionnaire by cross-sectional design. Then the study can not provide the real causality among workplace fun and taking charge and job engagement. Specifically, we only investigate white-collar and in service sector. Besides, the study was conducted in Turkey Marmara Region. To generalize the effects of fun cross cultural studies are needed.

To conclude in this study we showed the positive side of workplace fun in positive organizational scholarship context which has received less attention in the organizational behaviour literature. The results indicated that manager support for fun and co-worker socialization positively influences taking charge. Moreover, the results showed that taking charge slightly mediates the relationship among workplace fun and job engagement.

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