Review of Business Research; V. 7 (5); 2007: 11-18.

FUN AT WORKPLACE IN TURKEY: (A SURVEY)[*]

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the term "work" is associated with words such as "tough," "tedious," "boring," "serious," "routine". Today, however, the nature of work and business is changing rapidly. Managers need to create a professional but also more enjoyable and fun work environment. The purpose of this work is to present the main findings from a survey on a fun work environment and its results for employees and organizations according to a research, which was undertaken between January and June 2005 in Turkey. In brief, the present study yielded two main findings. First of all, a fun work environment generates several valuable benefits for organization and employee, in spite of a few negative outcomes. The research has also found that corporate culture and top management have a leading role in creating fun work environment.

Key Words: *Fun, humor, enjoyable workplace, Turkey.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the term "work" is associated with words such as "tough", "tedious", "boring", "serious", and "routine". The operating style is grim business in many organizations. Smiles may be advocated, but the policy is understood to mean "smile-in-spite-of" rather than "smile-because-of". This style propagates itself throughout an organization. Grim breeds grim. The expectation from front office professionals may smile politely, but one quickly gets the sense that they'd rather be somewhere else. Consequently, for anything to be regarded as work in such an organization, it has to be seen as difficult, practical, detailed, and painstaking (LENS, 2001).

Today, however, the nature of work and business is changing rapidly. Employees want a positive and enjoyable work atmosphere. Having fun on the job makes employees happier and more efficient. Accordingly, managers need to create a professional but also more enjoyable and fun work environment.

"A fun work environment represents a combination of factors that collectively add up to tangibly and publicly showing concern for the person, that person's achievements and worth, and the desire to make that person believe that the organization is a good place to be" (Ford and McLaughlin and Newstrom, 2003). From a broader point of view, having fun at work means making the workplace a pleasurable environment and employees happy with their jobs.

Recently, many businesses are realizing the value of creating a fun workplace in terms of what it can do for the organization's quality of work life, reputation, and financial performance (Karl and Peluchette and Hall and Harland, 2005). They seek to find a way to put fun into their daily or weekly routines, and produce a more dynamic, friendly and pleasant work climate by injecting a sense of fun into the organization.

On the other hand, the literature provides some evidence of the potential benefits of humor at work. Clarke (2002) indicates that fun may increase a person's ability to cope, persevere, ward off illness, and become more productive (Breeze and Dawson and Khazhinsky, 2004). Buxman (2000) claims that when used appropriately, humor can have positive psychologic, communication, and social benefits, as well as positive physiologic effects (Buxman, 2000). Abramis (1990) has discovered that happy employees are more creative, more productive, and have greater corporate loyalty (Foster, 2000).

In addition, some authors believe that an enjoyable work climate also fosters positive corporate culture that establishes and sustains a competitive advantage. John Kao, the writer of Jamming: The Art and Discipline of Business Creativity, asserts that all companies have to innovate and create if they are to succeed. To stimulate that creativity, they need to build a positive corporate culture (Perrin, 1998).

There are a number of good examples of businesses that are successfully implementing an employee-friendly and enjoyable environment. Southwest Airlines has become well known for its remarkable

[*] **This study was supported by The Istanbul University Research Fund. The project numbers are UDP-1364 /23072007.**

success in creating a culture of fun (Goldsmith, 2003). Another noteworthy example is Kodak that has a humor room filled with toys, videos, and games where employees can escape the pressures of their work (Perrin, 1998). Similarly, the leading companies and agencies like Deloitte & Touche, IBM, Monsanto, Honda, and the Internal Revenue Service have periodically hired humor consultants and organizations to infuse humor into their businesses (Breeze and Dawson and Khazhinsky, 2004).
The purpose of this work is to present the main findings from a survey on a fun work environment and its results for employees and organizations according to a research, which was undertaken between January and June 2005 in Turkey. The study analyzes five dimensions of fun activities: sorts of fun activities used, level of fun activities, correlation between types of organizations and fun activities organized, individual and organizational reasons for fun activities, contributing and constraining factors for a fun work environment. The paper comprises 4 sections. Following the introductory section providing a conceptual framework, the section 2 gives a general description of the survey design and data collection procedures. The third section presents the results and discussion. Finally, the section 4 offers some concluding remarks.

2. THE METHOD

2.1. Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from the Istanbul Chamber of Industry Annual List (ICIAL) of Turkey's 500 Major Industrial Enterprises by revenue as ranked by ICI (ICI 2003). The data were collected using a questionnaire form. Questionnaires (electronic or paper) were sent to human resources departments of 100 companies randomly selected from the ICIAL. The questionnaire was returned by 61 of them (response rate 61%).
The responding companies ranged in size from 100 employees to more than 5000 employees. 23% of the samples had operations in more than one country. Participants mostly were from the manufacturing sector. Accordingly, a large part of respondents had a workforce that was dominantly blue-collar (69%) and male (87%). Most of the exempt workforce at respondent companies graduated from high school (70 %), and 30% had graduate degrees.

2.2. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire form was developed to examine the extent and nature of fun and activities, and their results among Turkey’s top companies. The form was comprised 6 parts with 24 questions. The questions in study were adapted from a survey (SHRM, 2002). The questionnaire was a mixture of closed question/multiple response type questions as well as open-ended questions. Questionnaire surveys were carried out by master students. Fifth-nine percent of the respondents completing the survey were males, 62% had graduate, and 38% had a master’s degree.
To assess the findings of research, the survey employed frequencies and cross tabulations. The frequencies were used to describe the work environment and its component characteristics. Moreover, the analysis by size and industry was investigated by the cross tabulations.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Profile of Fun Activities

3.1.1. Characteristics of Practices

For organizations desiring to support positive corporate culture and create a fun work environment, one of the more challenging issues is to determine exactly what makes an enjoyable work climate. Some authors propose group activities at workplace comprising company lunch or dinner and after-hours outings. Others suggest workplace parties such as Halloween, New Year and happy birthdays (Breeze and Dawson and Khazhinsky, 2004). According to Collis, managing director of consultancy MC Human Resources, the atmosphere of fun depends on clear communication among employees. Kao focuses on the positive language in management. Finally, Martyn Sloman believes that fun comes from respect from one's colleagues, from liking one's colleagues, and from shared experiences. That creates shared jokes, and makes it fun to come to work (Perrin, 1998).
The measure of activities’ characteristic creating a fun work environment was derived from the responses to a list of 10 fun activity categories by the participants, as seen in Table I. The rating format was a five-

point scale from “1 (never)” to “5 (always)”. Secondly, the respondents were given a second list of 10 specific activity items (e.g. casual dress days, bring the child to work) building a fun work culture. Lastly, the participants were allowed to add three specific activities organized by them to the questionnaire.

TABLE I: MEAN SCORES OF FUN ACTIVITY CATEGORIES

Category of Activities	Mean Scores
Rewarding of professional achievements	4.1
Recognition of personnel milestones	4
Company-sponsored sports (e.g. football)	3.8
Social events (e.g. office picnics, trekking),	3.7
Corporate volunteerism activities (e.g. tree planting)	3.1
Friendly competition (e.g. “what is the best solution?”)	2.8
Humor (e.g. cartoons, funny e-mails)	2.7
Entertainment (e.g. plays)	2.7
Social clubs among employees (e.g. dancing club)	2.6
Play activities (e.g. dart, bridge, chess)	2.1

Reponses to these three of the questions indicated that the respondent chose to use the activities as tool to promote a fun work environment. The analysis revealed that the respondents employed especially three fun activity categories including recognition of personnel milestones, social events, rewarding of professional achievements.

Table I deals with frequencies of each fun activity category in all sample. It also presents the middle-range scores. An interesting detail is that every category creating the fun work culture received some scores from the participants. According to the scores, rewarding of professional achievements ranked the highest score in the average, while play activities obtained the lowest.

The second step determined whether the respondents participated in 10 different types of fun activities. The findings were divided into three parts as shown in Table II. The first section contains three items reported as used by more than 60 percent of the sample, which were staff recognition and awards, bairam greetings and New Year party. The activities in the second part were reported less frequently than 1 in 5 including casual dress days and company-provided food and refreshments. The infrequently used activities such as exercise or relax rooms and bring-your-child-to-work days varied between 3 % and 19 % in the entire sample.

TABLE II: FREQUNCIES OF FUN ACTIVITIES

Frequently Used Activities	Percent Using
Employee recognition and awards	78
Bairam (feast) greetings	65
New year party	60
Less Frequently Used Activities	
Casual dress days (e.g. Free Friday)	48
Company-provided food, refreshments	37
Fun committees	28
Special props (e.g. Balloons, flowers)	25
Infrequently Used Activities	
Exercise or relax rooms	17
Social activity policy	13
Bring-your-child-to-work days	3

On the other hand, 54% of the participants added 40 different activities to the questionnaire form. The other activities reported by participants were mainly concerned with social events involving food. Those fun items covered “company picnic and outing”, “happy hours”, “visiting to the company for employees’ families”, “therapy massage”, “office parties”, “social clubs (e.g. trekking, photograph, diving, dancing etc.)”, and “sporting events for children of staff”.

According to the results, the responding companies employed a wide range of fun activities to improve the social climate and working atmosphere. However, there is currently no widespread consensus or proof as to which of these is the most useful.

3.1.2. Level of Fun Activities

In an organization, the existing fun activities are very important in creating a fun work environment. But what level of activity is necessary to improve positive organizational climate? More important, how do employees perceive the current level of fun in the organization? Is the actual level of fun adequate? Have the expectation of employees to fun activity changed to the past? Will it increase in the future?

In order to answer these questions, the respondents were asked to rate the level of fun activities in their companies, and compare what they thought the level of fun ought to be in their organizations compared to their perception of the actual level of fun they thought their employees were having.

TABLE III: LEVEL OF FUN ACTIVITIES

	(%)
Much less than there should be	64
About the right amount	25
More than there should be	11

The responses implied that the participants mostly considered the level of fun activities to be insufficient. 64% of the respondents believed that their employees had a bit less fun to much less than it should have been. Only 1 in 4 indicated that the actual level of fun in their organizations was about the right amount. That means that the participants suggested that the level of fun reported by the companies was very low.

For a deeper analysis of this question, the respondents were asked the level of fun activity that their organizations should be. While 71% of the participants marked “frequently” or “often”, only 8 percent answered “infrequently” or “never”.

On the other hand, the respondents were asked to evaluate the expectation of fun level in their organizations from the past and future. According to 71 % of the respondents, the expectation on a fun work environment was much lower 5 years ago. Another finding supporting this conclusion is that 97% of the participants said that the sense of humor at workplace is stronger than it was five years ago. Moreover, the respondents mostly (95%) believe that the emphasis on a fun at work is going to continue to increase in the future. Consequently, it is clear that organizations should take much more efforts to make work more fun.

Finally, the respondent were requested to rate their organizations with regard to its fun work environment on a 10-point scale, where 1 equals “poor” and 10 equals “excellent”. 15 % of the respondents rated their organizations at 3 or lower. Consequently, at least 1 in 6 thought that fun atmosphere was inadequate in the organization. However, 64 % considered that their organizations had an average level of fun work environment. It means that the most of participants see themselves neither as excellent nor as poor.

3.1.3. Fun Activities by Type of Organization

As mentioned in the literature, there is a correlation between types of organizations and fun activities utilized. Some authors claim that employees in a service firm have higher expectations of fun than those in a manufacturing organization. Others argue that smaller organizations have a much more entertaining and fun environment than big ones. The survey by SHRM shows that the greater the degree of unionization, the lesser the frequency of these two categories of fun. It also suggests the fun activities such as games and social events to be more common in corporations than non-profit organizations. Probably these activities are not organized by non-profit organizations as their mission is incompatible with these kinds of activities (Ford and McLaughlin and Newstrom, 2003).

The present study revealed that the size of workplace was a critical determinant in creating a fun work environment. With respect to the scale of firms, the social events, corporate volunteerism activities and being in a contest were more common in large companies than smaller ones. However, the rewarding of professional achievements and play activities were found to be more prevalent especially among the small and medium-sized enterprises. This difference may be explained by the budget constraints. While the costly fun things are organized by big companies mostly, the group friendships activities such as special personnel celebrations appear to be much more among small and medium-sized organizations.

With regard to the other characteristics, the findings have varied. For example, while the respondents employing mostly white-collar workers used largely personnel celebrations and activities (50%), professional achievements (35%), and personal development activities (25%), the organizations that have largely blue-collar workers utilized social events and outings (38%). The study found that there was a higher tendency to utilize sports activities among the production companies (40%) to the service ones (12%). However, all respondents showed interest in some activities such as picnics and awarding. The main characteristic of these activities is that they include food.

There were also some differences in terms of the gender profile of participants. While the companies that work with dominantly female employees provided social activities (50%), and corporate volunteerism activities (25%), those that work with dominantly male employees organized rewarding of professional achievements (35%) and personal development activities (25%). However, the respondents employing about equally male and female reported personal celebrations (%50) and social activities (40%).

3.2. Reasons for Fun Activities

3.2.1. Organizational Factors

Encouraging a sense of fun at work brings positive benefits to business. According to Perrin, common sense supports the theory that having fun at work helps to increase productivity and profits. She believes that employees who enjoy their work produce more, and companies that create a happier environment win more staff loyalty. Moreover, happy employees also make for happy customers (Perrin, 1998).

TABLE IV: POSSIBLE OUTCOMES FOR ORGANIZATION

Advantages	Improvement (%)
Friendship at work	98
Decrease in interpersonal conflicts	97
Interpersonal communication	95
Strength of organizational culture	94
Decrease in employee stress	93
Organizational loyalty	92
Mutual trust among employees	88
Employee productive	88
Understanding of the mission	78
Customer satisfaction	77
Disadvantages	
Frequency of employee errors made	54
Employee turnover rates	51
Accident rates	48
Cost of operations	47
Absenteeism rates	5

In the study, the organizational advantages of having a fun environment were assessed on a five-point scale from "substantial decrease" to "substantial increase". According to the findings, the respondents greatly believed that introducing play and humor into the workplace created positive outcomes for the organization.

A number of striking conclusions emerge from a deeper analysis. Firstly, the respondents in the study confirmed the advantages of fun activities, as mentioned in the literature. The participants were of the opinion that an enjoyable atmosphere improved friendship at work, interpersonal communication, strength of organizational culture, and organizational loyalty.

In sum, the results clearly demonstrate that the responding companies expect significant advantages from utilizing fun activities. By contrast, a few participants reported their fears of negative effects of fun work culture including accident rates, cost of operations and absenteeism rates.

3.2.2. Individual Reasons

Working in an enjoyable environment also creates disadvantages and advantages to employee. Carter considers that a pleasant workplace can boost staff morale, and therefore reduce the consequences of stress such as colds, back pain and migraine headaches (Ovenell, 2005).

In the present study, the probable effects of an enjoyable work environment were measured using a list of the advantages and disadvantages of fun activities.

TABLE V: LIKELY EFFECTS FOR EMPLOYEE

Advantages	(%)
Having the opportunity to individual development	97
Group cohesiveness	95
Employee creativity	94
Employee satisfaction	92
Being able to relax and enjoy oneself at work	91
Promotion of employee participation	89
Building interpersonal friendships at work	88
Breaking up the monotony at work	82
Having autonomy and interdependence at work	66
Willingness of employees toward work	65

Table V presents the findings of respondents' thoughts on likely results of a fun work environment for employee. A large percentage of participants were found to believe that a fun work atmosphere improved group cohesiveness (95%) and employee satisfaction (92%). Accordingly, a positive environment cultivated close friendships with others, and encouraged employee creativity at work. Moreover, over eight in ten respondents described fun activities as a useful tool in breaking up the monotony at work. It is also to note that there are views that a fun work environment may cause

several disadvantages. For example, some managers believe that creating a fun environment can induce increases in interpersonal conflicts or that work groups that are having fun are not likely to have the respect of other departments or top management (SHRM, 2002).
These concerns were of secondary importance to the respondents included in our sample. They believed that the fun activities improved group climate, and created high morale workplaces. The participants predominantly reported that a fun work atmosphere built a culture of respect, instead of fear, greatly accelerate trust-building and effective communication among the staff, which produces and maintains a positive workplace culture so as to encourage involvement, commitment and accountability.

3.3. Contributing and Constraining Factors

3.3.1. Contributing Elements

What are the key factors creating an enjoyable work atmosphere? The literature put forward three primary factors: organizational climate and culture, management's efforts and actions, and employees' expectations and willingness. Most believe that the creation of a positive workplace climate is the CEO's job. For example, the president of Brady Corporation, Katherine Hudson emphasizes the role of top leadership in shaping an enjoyable work culture (Ford and McLaughlin and Newstrom, 2003). The former CEO of Southwest, Herb Kelleher, is an interesting example that encourages and promotes the family and fun environment for staff and customers (Smith, 2004: 31). Similarly, Walt Disney and Norm Brinker are the role models in defining and sustaining a fun environment.

TABLE VI: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

	(%)
Top management's efforts and actions	48
Employees' exceptions and willingness	28
Middle management's efforts and actions	23

The study examined the leading factors in making a fun work environment. The present findings seem to support the views claimed in the literature. 48% of all respondents believed that the top level of management had the primary responsibility of creating a fun work environment. Basically, corporate culture is a critical issue in injecting fun into the workplace. As top management is the responsible of forming organizational culture, encouraging a sense of fun and a friendly climate at work is also its job.
Secondly, the participants stressed that employees had a role in maintaining an enjoyable work climate. Indeed, although corporate culture is created by top management, employees are responsible of maintaining cultural values. Especially, fun activities can be put into practice by employees' desire and efforts. Finally, approximately one-quarter of the respondents pointed to middle managers' willingness and responsibilities on creating a fun work environment. Actually, middle management is the key point in incorporating contemporary fun activities into daily routines.

3.3.2. Constraining Factors

In the study, the participants also reported some resistance factors inhibiting the creation of a fun work environment. The survey identified ten limiting factors that might have a negative impact on producing an enjoyable work environment.

TABLE VII: LIMITING FACTORS

	(%)
Organizational culture	85
Budget constrains	73
Disregard of importance of fun activities	57
Time constraints	51
Lack of management' desire	51
Lack of group cohesion	49
Lack of employee's desire	47
Fear of losing motivation	31
Place constraints	31
Fear of violating work discipline	22

The respondents were requested to rate the factors using a seven-point answering scale varying from "very unlikely (1)" to "very likely (7)".
The responses were divided into two groups. The first group was associated with the fear of losing production and producing unnecessary costs including the responses such "time constrains", "budget constrains" and "unproven impact".
Secondly, a large number of the participants did not believe the necessity of fun activities, and considered that there was an inconsistency between professionalism and an enjoyable work culture including "lack of management' and employee's desire" and "fear of violating work discipline".

It is interesting to note that although most of the participants believed that fun activities would improve group cohesion, the half of them also reported this factor as a limiting factor.

On the other hand, while the responses from participants identify the resistance factors, they also provide a map for creating a fun workplace. If fun is important for creating a work environment that is enjoyable and productive for all, then increasing level of fun in the work environment requires neutralizing the limiting factors mentioned above (Ford and McLaughlin and Newstrom, 2003).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigated the characteristic, level and reported potential results of fun activities that create fun work environment. The results suggest that fun activities, especially such as recognition of personnel milestones, social events rewarding of professional achievements, may play an important role in creating an enjoyable and pleasant work climate. Secondly, although there are fun activity differences in terms of size, gender and statue profile, the respondents generally believe having a reasonable level of fun work environment.

On the other hand the respondent companies mostly consider that a fun work environment generates several valuable benefits for organization and employee in spite of a few negative outcomes. According to them, corporate culture and top management have a leading role in creating fun work environment. By contrast, especially the budget constrains and professional perceptions are considered as the main barriers in putting the fun activities into practice.

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