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Effects of Workplace Fun on Employee Behaviors: Focused on Generation Y in the Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

The conceptual model of this study was tested based on responses from 234 hospitality students in the US who are Generation Yers and had worked in the hospitality industry for more than 3 months. This study revealed that Generation Y employees' attitude toward workplace fun positively affects their experienced workplace fun. In turn, Generation Yers' experienced workplace fun showed direct effects on their job satisfaction, task performance, and interpersonal citizenship behaviors. Affected by experienced workplace fun, job satisfaction significantly enhanced employees' task performance and interpersonal job satisfaction. In essence, for Generation Y employees in hospitality businesses, workplace fun is a significant factor in their job satisfaction, task performance, and interpersonal citizenship behavior. These findings provide a significant insight to hospitality employers who typically have a hard time to attract best young talents and motivate them mainly due to low-paying, low-status nature of hospitality jobs.

Keywords: *workplace fun, Generation Y, hospitality business, job satisfaction, task performance, interpersonal citizenship behavior.*

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of business writers and consultants maintain that fun at work is essential for enhancing employee motivation and productivity, reducing stress (Karl, Peluchette, Hall, & Harland, 2005). According to Glasser (1994), having fun is the highest level of need of workers and often unmet at work while the lower levels of needs are mostly met at work. Bolton and Houlihan (2009) even articulated that fun at work seems become an established and accepted contributor to advisable people management and thus the bottom line. Indeed, previous academic studies have linked workplace fun with job satisfaction (Karl & Peluchette, 2006) and with task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Fluegge, 2008).

However, the situations surrounding workers in most developed countries are becoming increasingly harsher. Due to growing global competition, job insecurity and downsizing is widespread (cf. Redman & Mathews, 2002). Especially, employees in hospitality businesses are thought to experience more workplace stress and burnout than ever before because of ever-growing level of customer service. Hospitality customers are getting gradually more demanding owing to their improved market knowledge and tightened budget, and increased global competition in hospitality businesses. Consequently, the role of workplace fun is particularly important to alleviate hospitality employees' stresses and strains.

In hospitality businesses, employees significantly shape customers' service experiences and thus well-managing employees' emotions and moods should be considered equally critical for a hospitality business's success. Having fun at work is clearly expected to give employees good feelings as fun-at-work activities are designed to do such function. Therefore, this study aims to reveal how workplace fun affects employees' task performance and interpersonal citizenship behavior (ICB) through its effect on employees' job satisfaction in the hospitality context. In addition, this study focuses on Generation Yers' responses to workplace fun, given that they are fueling America's work ethic shift (Izzo & Withers, 2001) and thus will shape America's future corporate cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Generation Y is generally defined to consist of the 71 million people born between 1977 and 1994 (Nayyar, 2001; Paul, 2001). Cohort generations are argued to share a common and distinct character shaped by their experiences through their times (Scheme & Noble, 2000; Strauss & Howe, 1991). The most recent entrants to the workforce, the Gen Yers (also called Millennials, Netters, and Nexters) grew up with frequent IT inventions during prosperous times (Robbins & Judge, 2010). They are at ease with diversity, technology, and online communication. It may imply that they are more flexible to new inputs and possibilities than other generations. In general, they have high expectations and seek meaning in their work (Robbins & Judge, 2010). They regard jobs as primarily a means to build a career résumé and lack long-term attachment or commitment to the organization (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Further, they are flexible, fun, and team-oriented (Hill, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Such distinct characteristics of Gen Yers lead managers to the possibility of using workplace fun to motivate this group (Karl et al., 2008). In fact, Lamm and Meeks (2009) revealed that Gen Yers show stronger positive associations between workplace fun and individual outcomes than other generations. In a sense, Gen Yers may regard fun in the workplace as a requirement, rather than a benefit (Lamm & Meeks, 2009). This appears to coincide with America's work ethic change in which workers expect balance and synergy between their personal lives and work lives (Izzo & Withers, 2001).

Recently, in appreciation of the conceptual evolution of the workplace fun construct, Lamm and Meeks (2009) defined workplace fun as "playful social, interpersonal, recreational, or task activities intended to provide amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure" (p. 614). Thus, fun environment at work "intentionally encourages, initiates, and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities that positively impact the attitude and productivity of individuals and groups" (Ford, McLaughlin, & Newstrom, 2003, p. 22). In essence, workplace fun involves

purposefully designed fun activities that are expected to improve organizational outcomes.

Aldag and Sherony (2001) identified three dimensions of attitude toward workplace fun: appropriateness, salience, and perceived consequences of fun. Individuals are likely to have diverging views on whether having or pursuing fun at work is appropriate. Some may think that work-hours are solely for work while others think that play and work are complementary in workplace. Employees also have varying attitude toward the salience or importance of having fun at work (Karl et al., 2005). Some may regard workplace fun as a critical element of a job while others may regard it as a pleasant extra, but not necessarily required. People may also vary in views on expected consequences of fun at work (Karl et al., 2005). Some may view fun activities as facilitators of individual and team performances while others may view them as impeding work processes.

Karl and Harland (2005) revealed that among 40 fun activities, both male and female workers rated social activities highest such as company-wide outings and food-related activities. These authors argued that the social element of fun and all-inclusiveness are vital for genuine fun in the workplace. In the meantime, as mentioned, individuals would have different views on fun at work (Aldag & Sherony, 2001). Employees with more positive attitude toward workplace fun would experience more fun from the same activity than those with less positive attitude toward workplace fun.

Hypothesis 1: Attitude toward workplace fun has a positive effect on experienced workplace fun.

Considerable research has demonstrated that positive moods tend to spill over from one stimulus to others. As such, some research supports that workplace humor and fun has a positive impact on employee job satisfaction (Karl & Peluchette, 2006). Further, job-related stress and burnout which adversely affect job satisfaction are thought to be reduced by fun work environment (Karl, Peluchette, & Harland, 2007).

Hypothesis 2: Experienced workplace fun has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

The social psychology literature supports that when people are put in a good mood by an event, they tend to be more altruistic and more likely to help others (Karl & Peluchette, 2006). In part, it may be because such altruistic and helping behaviors tend to prolong their good mood (Clark & Isen, 1982). Further, such altruistic and helping behaviors seem to go customers as well so that employees can provide better customer service (Berg, 2001; Karl & Peluchette, 2006). Doing so is a core task performance in the hospitality industry.

Hypothesis 3: Experienced workplace fun has a positive effect on task performance.
Hypothesis 4: Experienced workplace fun has a positive effect on interpersonal citizenship behavior.

Although the causal relationship between job satisfaction and task performance is inclusive in the literature, the causal effect of job satisfaction on task performance has its own evidence and logical background; attitudes lead to behavior (cf. Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton,

2001). In other words, employees' positive attitude toward the job leads them to engage in the behaviors that foster the target of attitude (i.e., the job) (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). When it is a team-based task, such behaviors may include ICBs as well in that helping others would enhance teamwork and provoke reciprocal helps from others about one's own tasks even in a short term.

Hypothesis 5: Job satisfaction has a positive effect on task performance.
Hypothesis 6: Job satisfaction has a positive effect on interpersonal citizenship behavior.

METHODOLOGY

To measure the constructs in the proposed model, validated scales were borrowed from the literature; attitude toward workplace fun (13 items) (Aldag & Sherony, 2001), experienced workplace fun (3 items) (Karl, Peluchette, Hall-Indiana, & Harland, 2005), job satisfaction (2 items) (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1983), task performance (4 items) and ICB (5 items) (Williams & Anderson, 1991) (see Table 1). All items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree').

The initial questionnaire was modified after a pretest with 11 Hospitality Management graduate students in a Midwestern university in the US. Then, a pilot test was conducted with 52 undergraduate students in the same program. Reliability coefficient of measures of each construct were assessed using Cronbach's alpha and all the values were higher than the cutoff value of .7 (Hair et al. 1998).

The target population was college students majoring hospitality management who were born between 1981 and 1977, and had worked in the hospitality industry for more than 3 months. From 114 accredited hospitality management programs in the US, 56 programs were randomly selected. The authors examined each program's undergraduate director's email address one by one and requested to forward the survey invitation to their students. As a result, a total of 256 students participated in the survey. Among them, 18 inconsistent or incomplete responses and four non-Yers' responses were screened out. A total of 234 samples remained in the analysis.

Of 234 respondents, 69.2% (n = 162) were female. Given the target population were college students, the majority of the respondents (93.6 %, n = 219) were from 18 to 25 years old and the remaining 6.4% (n = 15) were from 26 to 33 years old. In terms of the ethnicity, Caucasian/White was 85.5% (n = 162), followed by Hispanic (6.0%, n = 14), Asian/Pacific Islander (4.7%, n = 11), and African American/Black (2.6%, n = 6).

Table 1
Measurement Items and Item/First-Order Factor Loadings

Construct and Scale Item	Standardized Loading[a]
Attitude toward Workplace Fun	
Appropriateness	***.708***
Joking, laughing, or having a "playful attitude" while on the job is immature and unprofessional. (R)[b]	.566
Having a good time and doing a good job are incompatible achievement. (R)	.484
If you are playing, you cannot be possibly working. (R)	.702
Salience	***.893***
Having fun at work is very important to me.	.696
If my job stopped being fun, I would look for another job.	.565
I prefer to work with people who like to have fun.	.765
I don't expect work to be fun-that's why they call it work. (R)	.579
Experiencing joy or amusement while at work is not important to me. (R)	.541
Perceived consequences	***.986***
Having fun at work can enhance interpersonal relations and teamwork.	.526
Fun at work can help reduce stress and tensions.	.599
When work is fun, employees work harder and longer.	.685
When Employees are having fun, they are typically goofing off and avoiding their work. (R)	.575
Employees with a healthy sense of humor tend to work well with others.	.597
Experienced Fun	
At my workplace, we try to have fun whenever we can.	.788
Managers encourage employees to have fun at work.	.657
We laugh a lot at my workplace.	.751
Job Satisfaction	
All in all, I was satisfied with my job.	.949
In general, I liked working here.	.948
Task Performance	
I adequately completed assigned duties.	.804
I fulfilled responsibilities specified in job description.	.895
I performed tasks that are expected of me.	.879
I met formal performance requirements of the job.	.817
Interpersonal Citizenship Behavior	
I helped others who have heavy workloads.	.589
I assisted supervisor with my work (when not asked).	.611
I took time to listen to coworkers' problems and worries.	.726
I went out of way to help new employees.	.814
I took personal interest in other employees.	.772

a. All factor loadings are significant at $p < .001$.
b. Reverse coded.

RESULTS

Measurement model

As shown in Table 2, the measurement model provided an adequate fit to the data (TLI = .932; CFI = .940; RMSEA = .048; $\chi^2(310) = 476.9$, $p < .001$) (cf. Byrne, 2001). The composite reliability for the scales ranged from .777 to .947 showing the adequate internal consistency of the measures. The values of average variance extracted (AVE) were equal to or greater than .501, so all were above the recommended cut-off point of .5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Convergent validity was established since all indicators loaded on the proposed constructs significantly at $p < .001$ and AVEs were all above .5 (cf. Fornell & Larker, 1981). Strong discriminant validity was demonstrated since all the squared correlations between each pair of constructs were less than AVEs for individual constructs (cf. Fornell & Larker, 1981).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Associated Measures

	No. of Items	AVE	AtWF	ExWF	JS	TP	ICB
AtWF	13	.757	**.902**[a]	.613[b]	.124	.376	.541
ExWF	3	.539	.376[c]	**.777**	.289	.180	.435
JS	2	.900	.015	.084	**.947**	.426	.407
TP	4	.722	.141	.032	.181	**.912**	.425
ICB	5	.501	.293	.189	.166	.181	**.832**

Goodness-of-fit statistics:
$\chi^2(310) = 476.86$, $p < .001$
$\chi^2/df = 1.54$
TLI = .932, CFI = .940
RMSEA = .048

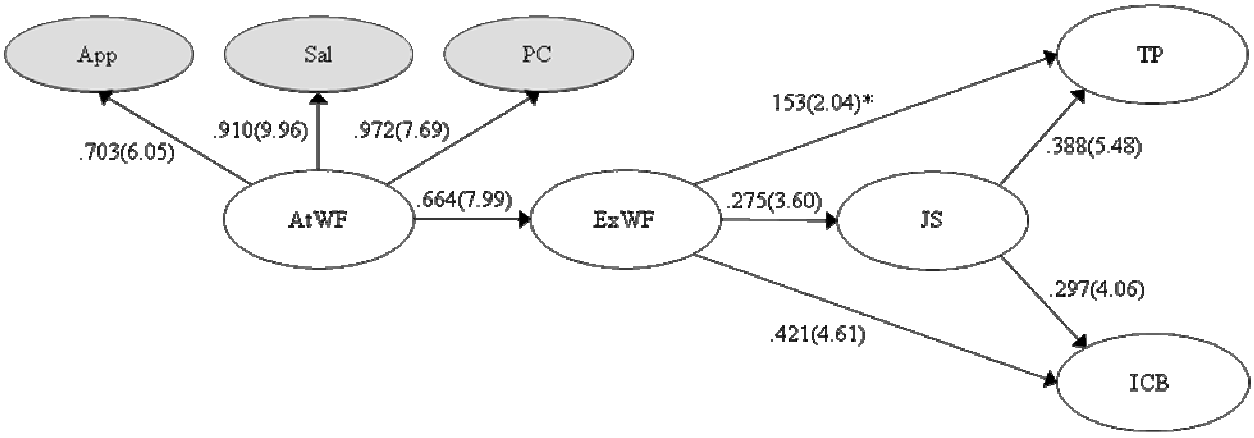
Note: AtWF = attitude toward workplace fun; ExWF = experienced workplace fun; JS = job satisfaction; TP = task performance; ICB = interpersonal citizenship behavior; AVE = average variance extracted; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.
a. Composite reliabilities are along the diagonal.
b. Correlations are above the diagonal.
c. Squared correlations below the diagonal.

Structural model

The proposed model provided a fairly good fit to the data in the foodservice setting (TLI = .914; CFI = .923; RMSEA = .054; $\chi^2 = 528.1$, $df = 314$, $p < .001$) (cf. Byrne, 2001). Further, the modification indices indicated that no other paths are necessary for a better model fit. Figure 1 shows that all the hypnotized paths are significant. In addition, a mediation test revealed that the weak path from experienced workplace fun to task performance was a result of partial meditation by job satisfaction. Specifically, when the path from job satisfaction to task performance was constrained to zero, the effect of experienced workplace fun on task performance was highly significant ($\beta = .289$, $t = 3.60$, $p < .001$). The χ^2 difference ($\Delta\chi^2(1) =$

30.7) between the original model and the constrained model was significant at $p < .001$, showing that the mediation effect is significant.

Figure 1.
Results of Structural Equation Modeling



Note: App = appropriateness; Sal = salience; PC = perceived consequences; AtWF = attitude toward workplace fun; ExWF = experienced workplace fun; JS = job satisfaction; TP = task performance; ICB = interpersonal citizenship behavior.
*$p < .05$, otherwise $p < .001$
1. Numbers in parentheses are the *t*-values.
2. Numbers outside of parentheses are the standardized path coefficients.
3. Shaded circles indicate first-order factors.

According to the squared multiple correlation (SMC; i.e., R^2), attitude toward workplace fun explained 44.1% of the total variance in experienced workplace fun. In turn, experienced workplace fun explained 7.6% of the total variance in job satisfaction. Together with job satisfaction, experienced workplace fun explained 20.7% of the total variance in task performance and 33.4% of total variance in ICB. Overall, the R^2s demonstrated that experienced workplace fun explain fairly large amounts of the total variances of the key employee behaviors (in- and out-role) in the hospitality industry, directly and through its effect on job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Testing responses from nation-wide hospitality college students in the US, this study revealed that attitude toward workplace fun significantly contributes to experienced workplace fun. Fortunately, scholars and practitioners report that generation Y tend to have positive attitude toward fun at work more than other generations. Thus, the management in hospitality businesses needs to foster fun-loving cultures to get rid of any unnecessary guilt feeling of having fun at work among employees, and thus fully enjoy positive effects of workplace fun. The positive effects of workplace fun found in this study were on job satisfaction, task performance, and ICB.

Chan (2010) provided a useful typology of workplace fun activities in the hospitality industry. In his typology, staff-oriented activities include personal celebrations and events such as birthday, marriage, and retirement. This type of activities is likely to give employees a feeling of appreciation by the organization and coworkers. Such positive feeling is highly likely to increase employees' job satisfaction and motivate them to do his/her job better for the organization and to help coworkers regarding on- and off-the-job matters. Supervisor-oriented workplace fun activities in his typology include lunches, breaks, and informal gatherings after work with immediate supervisors. Such personal time between an immediate supervisor and an employee is likely to lead the employee to more easily open his/her heart regarding on- and off-the-job matters and also enable the supervisor to provide more open feedback on the employee's performance. Consequently, the employee can form an intimacy with his/her supervisor and ultimately may become more willing to and able to improve his/her task performance. Chan (2010) also reported that hospitality firms often sponsor social-oriented activities as well such as company picnics, holiday parties, and charity fun. Such activities would certainly enhance group cohesiveness so that employees can build a ground to help one another at work. The last type of workplace fun activities in his typology is strategy-oriented activities. These activities include management practices of outstanding performance, policy of participation program, family-friendly policies, etc. These activities would demonstrate the organization's appreciation for employees' hard work and active participation in organizational life, and its orientation toward employees' well-being at work and family life. Therefore, employees are more encouraged to promote the organization's well-being in return with better performance and teamwork.

One critical thing to remind is that not all employees like to have fun at work, especially when it is a packaged official fun in which all employees are 'supposed' to participate (e.g., Bolton & Houlihan, 2009, Redman & Mathews, 2002). Even worse, some official fun activities may involve a day out during a weekend, formal rewards, enforced play-hard rules, etc. To make fun activities work as they are intended, while giving employees an option not to participate, the management should carefully design fun activities so that employees voluntarily choose to participate (cf. Chan, 2010). Involving employees in the designing process of fun activities or letting employees plan fun activities by themselves and providing necessary supports might be an adequate strategy to motivate employees to participate and to make the activities genuine fun to employees. That is, empowering employees in a fun culture to embrace their demands and boost their interests (Redman & Mathews, 2002). Given that hospitality businesses consist of lots of fun-loving people and hope their customer to have fun in their businesses, hospitality organizations have high potentials to allow more fun at work and subsequently instill an atmosphere of playfulness without substantial negative consequences (cf. Newstrom, 2002).

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the samples used in this study had at least three months of work experiences in hospitality field, they are current college students. As a result, the older Gen Yers who are 26 or older were underrepresented in this study. In addition, Gen Yers who are less educated than college are not included in this study. Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalized to less-educated Gen Yers. Future study may include less-educated Gen Yers, given that hospitality businesses typically hire a lot of them. Further, future study may also exam differential effects of workplace fun by generation or cultural background.

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