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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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Keywords: Fun; manager support; socialization; engagement; taking charge

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

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