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Exploring the Role of Fun in Organizational Commitment, Creative Performance, and Job Stress: A Case of Higher Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract *Any organization desires to have an environment of less job stress, committed employees, and impressive performance in every dimension of their organization. The study at hand is designed to find how fun is related to organizational commitment, creative performance, and job stress. The study is qualitative in nature and used a single case-study design as a research strategy. The target population is an institution of higher studies. Sixteen faculty members from the institute participated. The faculty members were interviewed to find out the relationship of fun with the aforementioned constructs. Findings indicated that people had felt more commitment towards the organization due to fun at the workplace. Fun also proved to be instrumental in enhancing creative performance and reducing job stress. The study provides incentivize directions to institutions and make employees productive cum creative performers. Along with the implementers the policymakers can take benefit from the study.*

Key Words:

Fun at Workplace, Organizational Commitment, Creative Performance, Job Stress, Humor

Introduction

The world is changing rapidly and so are the things in it. Imagine people are busy in gossips, playing games, passing jokes, and making friends in the workplace. To a traditional manager, all these may seem nuisance and waste of time, but actually,

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these things are not bad for the organization and individuals themselves. Research shows that these things pay off, and now managers have this realization and they try to provide a fun environment for their employees. Since they know, it is beneficial for the organization and helps in improving employee's morale, communication, and retention(Ford, Newstrom, & Mclaughlin, 2004). That is why some of the great companies of the world have given it importance and it is seen that Kodak has "humor Rooms" (Caudron, 1992), and IBM has "playrooms" (Collinson, 2002). On the other hand, the workforce also wants to have lighter moments at the workplace and most of the applicants give it due consideration while searching new jobs, they want to be placed in the companies where they could have fun at the workplace (Belkin, 2007), and in the same vein leisure at work, activities can yield feelings of expressiveness in the employees(Duerden, Courtright, & Widmer, 2018).

However, fun is a new construct and despite a lot of acclaim from the managers and practitioners, empirical support for such claims is still lacking(Fluegge, 2008&Cook, 2008). There is scarce literature in the field of fun at the workplace, which makes it worth exploring to have clear understating what this concept is? Besides, is it capable of rendering the acclaimed benefits? Moreover, humor, fun, and play are used interchangeably in the literature, which makes it difficult to differentiate fun from these other constructs. Studies are needed in the area of fun, these studies will be useful in providing the basis for such claims and will answer the various unanswered question about fun, which is largely a neglected area in organizational research (Cook, 2008). This study is aimed to explore the relationship of fun at the workplace with organization commitment, creative performance, and job stress and tried to answer the following questions: How fun at the workplace is related to organizational commitment? How fun at the workplace is related to creative performance? How fun at the workplace is related to job stress?

Literature Review

Fun at the workplace and Organizational Commitment

Those employees having more fun at the workplace experience increased affective commitment (Mcdowell, 2005), less absenteeism, and low intent to quit (Mariotti, 1999) and increased work engagement (Plester&Hutchison, 2016). However, the scant literature available on the fun at the workplace indicates that the relationship of fun at the workplace and organizational commitment has not been tapped at large. Nevertheless, an indirect link between the two constructs is always present. Dessler(1999), argues that get together parties among employees i.e. 'joy events' (birthday parties, lunches, retirement parties, etc) always help in creating a sense

of community among employees, which in turn increases the commitment of the employees.

On the other hand, humor literature purports a positive relationship between humor and organizational commitment. Susa(2002), investigated the effects of different types of humor on different organizational outcomes. The study results showed that superiority humor was negatively correlated while relief humor was positively correlated to organizational outcome i.e. job satisfaction, commitment, and creativity.

Job satisfaction and organizational commitment have also been long studied and their association is well recognized. Srivastava(2013), study confirms a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organization commitment, while trust and locus of control moderate this relationship. Curry *et al.* (1986), also substantiate the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. On the Other hand, fun literature demonstrates that there is an established link between fun at workplace and job satisfaction (Ching& In, 2010&Ford et al., 2004). If fun at the workplace is positively related to job satisfaction so it can be inferred that fun at the workplace may be positively related to organizational commitment too.

Fun at the workplace and Creative Performance

The relationship between the fun at the workplace and creative performance is also not widely investigated. Oldham & Cummings (1996), define creative performance as new and unique, "products and ideas produced at the individual level" (p. 608). Substantial literature implies that creativity bears good results for organizational improvement, success, and continued existence (Amabile, 1996). However, to our knowledge, only two studies have investigated this relationship of fun at the workplace and creative performance(Friedman, Förster, & Denzler, 2007&Fluegge, 2008). Friedman et al., (2007), conducted a study in the lab and they predicted that when employees were in positive moods and the tasks were framed as fun and silly their creative performance bolstered. Fluegge, (2008), results are not in accordance with those of the Friedman et al., (2007). Her model shows that fun at workplace direct relation with the creative performance is very weak (i.e. r=.10), while indirect relation (through mediators) between the two variables has also not improved to a large extent.

However, the link between humor and creative performance is known. Ziv (1976), argued that those who listened to humor were significantly better on the creativity test as compared to those who did not listen to humor. An appropriate humor style on the part of the leader evoke followers to perform more creatively (Hughes, 2009), humor is positively correlated with creativity (Susa, 2002), liberating humor was positively related to organizational creativity (Lang & Lee,

2010), and fun and humor make the employee creative under pressure (Hemsath & Yerkes, 2010).

Fun at the workplace and Job Stress

Fun and humor are usually used, as coping mechanisms in real life in any case of distress and the same is evident from the fun and humor literature (Yovetich, Dale, & Hudak, 1990). Humor has a considerable contribution to coping with stress in real life (Safranek&Schill, 1982). Hemsath & Yerkes, (2010) argue that people cope with predicaments and troubles with fun and humor. They further assert that fun enhances the capability of managing stress on the job and be more flexible.

Abel (2002), assessed two different groups of people with a high sense of humor and with a low sense of humor and found that both groups faced the same level of stress; however, people with a better sense of humor are more positive as compared to those with a low sense of humor. Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance(1993), argued that people with a good sense of humor evaluate situations more positively because humor facilitates positive cognitive appraisals.

Humorproduction might be an effective way to manage stress, particularly for those who do not make use of humor during stressful circumstances (Newman & Stone, 1996). Even managers can use humor to their purpose and help in stress reduction, improving creativity, leadership skills, and group unity (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

Methodology

Case Study as a Research Strategy

The current study aims to investigate the existence of fun in the organization and its relationship with other constructs such as creative performance, organization commitment, and job stress. This study uses an embedded case study approach with qualitative methods (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2017). This research endeavors to examine thoroughly within a single organization how it is related to some factors of organizational behavior.

However, the present study uses a case study strategy. Case study as a research strategy is selected because the case study permits the author, "to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2002, p. 4). Since the present study, aims to investigate the real-life events in depth which made it more logical to use case study (ibid).

Data Collection Techniques

To know how fun is related to organizational commitment, creative performance, and job stress, semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were developed

from the literature and were used for data collection.

Sampling and Respondents

The teaching staff of IMScienceswas the population of the study. Based on purposive sampling sixteen teachers (7 Assistant Professors 9 Lecturers) were selected, to participate in the study.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Presently, data was divided themes and those themes were clumped into different categories based on their similarities.

Fun and Organizational commitment

Factors Affecting Affective Commitment to the Organization

Eight of the people in the organization felt emotionally attached to the organization. One of the respondents said that when someone spoke high of the organization it meant that he/she was emotionally attached to the organization. However, another member said she was more attached to the organization when she was a student, "Since I was also the student in this very organization so if we compare our emotional attachment as a student it was much more than a faculty member"**(LL4).**

Ten of the participants agreed that fun affected their affective commitment to the organization positively. Fun was considered as a source of joy, which increased the love of the organization. Jokes, fun, relax moments, recreational activities, and relaxation of mind increased affective commitment. To some of the colleagues were very important and they affected their affective commitment to the organization. They thought of the organization as a family where they could share anything and all felt free.

There were mixed views regarding the relationship of fun and affective commitment but nine faculty members thought of the positive relationship and they felt affective commitment towards the organization. However, two members did not feel any affective commitment and only a member had regarded the relationship between the fun and commitment as negative.

Parties, Events and Celebrations, and Organizational commitment

People thought of parties, events, and celebrations as positively affecting their organizational commitment. However**,** the effect was considered very nominal and to one faculty member, it affected no more than 30-40% of the organizational

commitment. These parties and events were believed to be enhancing the chances of socialization in the organization and that socialization affected their organizational commitment to a large extent.

Except for four members who said either parties or events did not affect their organizational commitment or negatively affected organization commitment, all others were of the views that such events did affect positively their organizational commitment.

Humor and Organizational commitment

Only four people thought that humor affected their organizational commitment but they also cautioned that the role was very nominal: "They [fun and humor] might have some role in increasing organizational commitment but there are other more crucial factors in influencing organizational commitment due to which the effect of fun and humor may not be felt"**(L2).** Four of the respondents were of the view that humor had no connection at all with organizational commitment.

Fun and Decision of Leaving of an Organization

When the participants were asked, would fun affect their decision of leaving an organization? Five of them regarded fun as not a decisive factor in their decision regarding leaving or joining an organization. Different people mentioned different things, which might affect their decision in this regard like environment, salary, friends, relationships, etc. but not fun.

Fun and Creative Performance

Positive Mood and Funny Task, Relation with Creative Performance

Participants were asked to share their views about the scenario if the task given to them were framed as fun and silly, would that affect their creativity. Eleven of the respondents thought that such tasks would affect their creative performance positively. It was thought that it mattered how tasks were assigned. People said that they enjoyed the tasks given to them in a nice mood and a funny manner. They enjoyed performing such tasks and they performed creatively on those tasks since fun used to reduce stress and less stress made people more creative.

Also, fun framed tasks were considered worthwhile for the organization since people felt reluctant in serious situations to share things and creativity was all about sharing. Nonetheless, three of the participants thought of fun as not affecting creative performance. One teacher said that creativity was something serious thing to him and fun might have no role in affecting that. The light tone of the task giver was thought of as some help but not humor and fun.

Fun, Humor, and Creative Performance under Pressure

Eleven faculty members believed that fun and humor boost up creative performance under pressure. They considered fun and humor as sources of recreation, which refreshed and encouraged people and they performed well. It was also mentioned that not only under pressure but also in normal circumstances fun and humor were of great value.

On the other hand, six of the members took fun and humor as a negative thing which negatively affected creativity. Quite a few clearly said that fun and humor would be enough to destroy their attention: "It might distract my attention or it might not be fun at all for me"**(LL3),** "In pressure situation fun will destroy the creativity and not increase it" **(AP7).**

Leader's Style of Humor and Subordinate's Creative Performance

Nine of the participant thought that leader's style of humor important in evoking the creative performance of the subordinates. A female participant shared that her supervisor knew her nature that she was prone to pressure so he always used to crack jokes whenever he would give her any task.

Furthermore, the negative side of the leader's humor and sense of humor also was surfaced. Three of the respondents thought that leader's humor would lessen the importance of the task and people might think of the task as trivial and not important. Females criticized the gender biases of the leaders' jokes.

Listening to Humor and Creative Performance

Overall impression regarding the relationship between listening to humor and creative performance was negative. Five of the participants regarded listening to humor while working on a creative endeavor as a nuisance and distracting the attention: "It will destroy everything. I need seclusion to be in a creative mood"**(AP7).** Yet to three of them, it was not that bad a thing and they viewed it as an agent, which helped in reducing stress and fatigue, gave energy, mitigating undue pressure, but might not work in boosting creativity.

However, situations and moods may vary and in some situations and moods listening to humor may not be that bad. During interviews, one thing which got surfaced time and again was that not simultaneous but sequential fun would help and would bear good fruits.

Fun, Humor and Job Stress

Fun, Humor, and Real-Life Stress

This was accepted as fact that fun and humor helped in reducing real-life stress

and all the members agreed on this except one who was of the view that fun could not help unless stress was over. An interviewee considered fun in stressful situations as a source of catharsis. However, too much fun may eliminate stress and may make fun dysfunctional since no stress makes people lazy and will result in poor performance and delayed deadlines.

Fun and humor were also considered useful in alleviating job-related stress. A member confirmed this view who said, "Yeah it happens to me. Even if I do not find any fun here, I forget all my real-life stress here because of my job, the workload I have"**(L6).**

Fun and Capability of Managing Stress

It was commonly thought and 11 respondents regarded that fun helped manage stress. Since fun is subjective due to which same events of fun might not help manage stress for all the people. Fun diverts one's attention and makes people happy but to a female teacher, the organization was devoid of fun.

Three participants viewed fun as not capable of managing stress: "I would like to say that it is not necessary to increase my capability to manage the stress"**(AP7).** Another respondent said that since the organization could not provide fun to all as fun was subjective, so managing stress through fun would not be possible. However, they regarded socialization as useful in managing stress.

Good Sense of Humor and Positive Evaluation of Stressful Situation

Eleven of the participants considered a good sense of humor useful in evaluating a stressful situation more positively. Humor was supposed necessary for the positive evaluation, as a teacher during his interview declared that people with a good sense of humor faced problems more positively as compared to those with a bad sense of humor. They said that personality mattered.

Three of the participants were sure that sense of humor could be useful in managing stress but they were not sure of the link between sense of humor and positive evaluation of the situation. One of them said, "…what is the link of good sense of humor with an evaluation of the situation, here I feel blank…But I have seen people with a good sense of humor who feel relaxed in stressful situations"**(L8).**

General Discussion

Fun and Organizational Commitment

The role of fun in organizational commitment was visible but the strength of the relationship was not very strong. The results of this research validate the findings

of Mcdowell's (2005) study which indicates that fun affects the affective commitment of the employees in the organization, but here findings show that the effect was very nominal.

However, results illustrate that parties, events, and celebrations affected the commitment towards the organization up to some good extent. These parties not only provide opportunities for the employees to have fun and socialization but they also help in solving the issues the organization faces. The finding is in complete accordance with those found in the literature which suggests that such events improve the sense of community among the employees and this sense of community, in turn, enhances the organizational commitment of the employees (Dessler, 1999). Similarly, the study of Tews, Michel, Xu, & Drost (2015) also argues that fun is the prime predictor of embeddedness succeeded by other factors. However, humor seemed to be very poorly related to organizational commitment. People thought that humor's role in affecting organizational commitment could be negligible. Unlike the findings of this study management literature, suggest that relief humor was positively related to commitment, creativity, and satisfaction (Susa, 2002). The overall relationship of fun and organizational commitment is evident although it is weak and people regarded it not to be that much strong, which could affect their decision of leaving or joining an organization.

Fun and Creative Performance

This study indicates that fun and creative performance are positively related to each other. People thought that they could perform very well if fun was introduced when they had felt the pressure. Fun literature substantiated this finding and showed that fun and humor were instrumental for employees to be creative under pressure (Hemsath & Yerkes, 2010). Results also show that a leader's style of humor evoked creative performance in the employees and all those employees who were treated mildly and humorously by their leaders performed more creatively. Management literature also authenticated this notion and confirmed that the appropriate style of humor on the part of the leader was enough to make the employees perform more creatively (Hughes, 2009).

However, listening to humor while performing certain tasks negatively affected creative performance. Results show that people get offended while listening to humor in between their work and it distracts their attention and they cannot focus on the task they are performing. This research's findings are different from those found by previous researchers, which recommend listing to humor while working to be positively related to organizational creativity (Lang & Lee, 2010). Nonetheless, the relationship of fun with creative performance is confirmed that fun positively affects the creative performance of the people in the workplace.

Fun and Job Stress

The relationship between fun and stress is found to be very clear. This research found that fun and humor helped mitigate stress. People said that they felt stress at home but coming to the organization always made them forget that stress. Literature also endorses this and claims that fun and humor are always used as coping mechanisms for alleviating real-life stress (Yovetich et al., 1990&Safranek&Schill, 1982). At the same time, it was found that stress enhances the capability of managing job stress. People thought that fun and humor helped to make people happy and forget their stresses. The same is validated by the literature and (Hemsath & Yerkes, 2010), who claims that fun and humor make people more flexible and improve their ability to cope with the job stress in a better way.

The literature proposes that people with a good sense of humor always asses stressful situation more positively as compared to those with a bad sense of humor (Abel, 2002). The results of this research also show that people with a good sense of humor take a positive view of the situation and perform well in comparison to those who do not have that much good sense of humor.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

Findings indicate that fun has a role in increasing organizational commitment, creative performance, and reducing job stress. Therefore, the belief that fun at the workplace is beneficial for the organization and its individuals is supported by the findings of the present research and warrants further investigation of the phenomenon.

This research would prove a cornerstone upon which great edifice of fun literature could be erected in a South Asian setting. There are many possibilities for future research. An area to explore is to see whether fun is always fruitful for an organization. As previous researches show a negative aspect of fun at the workplace and make it clear that in certain circumstances and places when people have fun at the workplace they forget about work and just think of play and fun (Decker, 2012). This is also an important aspect of fun at the workplace, which will be of great benefit to human resource managers.

In the present study, some of the respondents, particularly women, complained of sarcasm and sick humor. Some of the participants had a very bad experience of humor at the workplace and they called it to be decreasing their creativity and self-confidence. Future studies can be directed to investigate what are the factors, which make humor sick for the people at the workplace due to which humor becomes a source of a nuisance instead of giving relief and happiness.

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