

Does Fun Pay? The Impact of Workplace Fun on Employee Turnover and Performance

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Abstract

This research demonstrated that fun in the workplace has both beneficial and potentially negative effects on employees in the hospitality industry. This research focused on the impact of fun activities and manager support for fun on employee performance and turnover. Fun activities include such endeavors as productivity contests, social events, teambuilding activities, and public celebrations of work achievements and personal milestones. In turn, manager support for fun reflects whether managers in general allow and encourage employees to have fun on the job. With a sample of 195 servers from a national restaurant chain, we found that fun activities had a favorable impact on performance and manager support for fun had a favorable impact in reducing turnover. Interestingly, manager support for fun had an adverse impact on performance. Thus, whether fun ultimately is beneficial depends on the type of fun and the desired human resource outcome.

Keywords

workplace fun; turnover; retention; performance; affective commitment

It has long been argued that fun matters in the workplace. The roots of the modern workplace fun movement can be found in the work of Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982), who encouraged managers to develop organizational cultures that promote play, humor, and fun. More recently, fun has been advocated in the popular press to promote energized and productive work environments (Lundin, Paul, and Christensen 2000). In fact, a number of organizations, such as Pike Place Fish Market, Google, IBM, and Southwest Airlines, have incorporated fun into their organizational cultures with great reported success (Collinson 2002; Karl et al. 2005; Sunoo 1995). Proponents of fun suggest a host of favorable outcomes, such as higher employee job satisfaction, morale, creativity, performance, and retention, as well as reduced employee tardiness, absenteeism, and burnout (Abner 1997; Abramis 1989; Lundin, Paul, and Christensen 2000). Despite the anecdotal evidence of the benefits of fun, academic research has only begun to test the value of fun within the last decade.

The central premise of this article is that fun may be of strategic importance for employee retention and productivity in the hospitality industry. In one respect, fun may promote camaraderie and the development of cohesive working relationships among employees. Moreover, fun may motivate employees to work to their potential by making the work more enjoyable, reducing stress, and directing employees toward accomplishing their performance goals.

Supporting the assertion that fun is valued in the hospitality industry, Dermody (2002) reported that fun was one of the top reasons cited by restaurant managers as to why their employees remained with their establishments. We believe that hospitality employees certainly do appreciate a work environment that includes fun, but we need to further examine the actual business impact of fun in the workplace. Toward this end, the goal of this research is to test the popular belief that fun matters in the hospitality industry in terms of employee retention and performance. In that context, we focus on the impact of two types of fun—fun activities and manager support for fun—on turnover and performance among servers at a national restaurant chain.

What's Fun Got to Do with It?

As we said, academic research has only recently begun to focus on the business value of fun. These studies have focused on various aspects of workplace fun and its

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outcomes, and they have included both quantitative and qualitative investigations. As a whole, these studies have provided an initial step toward establishing impact of fun in the workplace.

Karl and colleagues focused on the impact of *experienced fun*, which refers to whether individuals experience the existence of fun on the job. Peluchette and Karl (2005), for instance, established that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction for healthcare employees. Subsequently, Karl and Peluchette (2006a) found that experienced fun buffered the impact of emotional exhaustion on job dissatisfaction among healthcare workers, and Karl, Peluchette, and Harland (2007) demonstrated that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to emotional exhaustion. Among students employed in service settings, Karl and Peluchette (2006b) found that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction and to employee perceptions of customer service quality. Finally, Karl, Peluchette, and Hall (2008) demonstrated with volunteers that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to turnover intentions.

McDowell (2004) and Fluegge (2008) focused on the impact of fun as a multidimensional, higher order construct. McDowell developed a four-dimensional measure of fun, used in both of these studies, which included *socializing*, *celebrating*, *personal freedoms*, and *global fun*. Socializing refers to friendly social interactions among coworkers; celebrating refers to marking special events and having social gatherings at work; personal freedoms refers to employees being afforded flexibility and autonomy regarding workplace attire, playing music, and playing around at work; and global fun refers to an overall evaluation of whether an organization has a fun work climate. With oil company employees, McDowell demonstrated that fun was significantly related to job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Extending McDowell's work, Fluegge found that fun has an impact on job performance for working undergraduate students. That study provided evidence that fun has a positive impact on task performance, creative performance, and organizational citizenship behavior. However, it should be noted that since fun was examined as a single dimension, McDowell and Fluegge did not assess which forms were more influential.

Tews, Michel, and Bartlett (2012) examined the impact of three forms of fun in the context of applicant attraction. They asked a sample of undergraduate job seekers to evaluate hypothetical recruiting scenarios that included three forms of fun: fun activities, fun coworker interactions, and fun job responsibilities. Their results demonstrated that fun was a stronger predictor of applicant attraction than compensation and opportunities for advancement. Moreover, fun coworker interactions and fun job responsibilities were stronger predictors of applicant attraction than fun activities.

Some qualitative investigations have viewed the impact of fun in a more critical light. In one such piece, Redman and Mathews (2002) reported on the implementation of a "fun culture," which called on managers to be enthusiastic about employees having fun and saw the organization sponsor fun activities. While this program improved staff relations, reduced stress, and increased service quality, Redman and Mathews found that some individuals viewed the program cynically. Similarly, Fleming (2005) found that many employees disliked company-sponsored fun, considering it inauthentic and fake. These studies suggest that not all forms of fun are equal and that some forms of fun may be more valued than others.

Despite what we currently know, additional research is warranted in two key respects. One, research is needed that further examines the impact of fun on key behavioral outcomes, such as employee turnover and performance, to substantiate the generalizability of previous findings. Two, research is necessary that examines the impact of different types of fun on these outcomes, given that not all types of fun may be equal. While fun may have value in the workplace, additional work that examines fun in a more nuanced perspective would be fruitful.

The Impact of Fun on Turnover and Performance

Workplace fun is a multifaceted construct that refers to "any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of a playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure" (Fluegge 2008, 15). As illustrated in the studies reviewed earlier, fun can be derived from various sources on the job. This research focuses on two aspects of fun—*fun activities* and *manager support for fun*. We focus on these two aspects of fun because they are largely under management's direct control, and because management may have a fair amount of discretion in implementing such aspects of fun in the workplace. Fun activities include such endeavors as productivity contests, social events, teambuilding activities, and public celebrations of work achievements and personal milestones. Such activities have been a common focus of popularized accounts of fun at work and several empirical investigations (e.g., Ford, McLaughlin, and Newstrom 2003; Hemsath, Yerkes, and McCullen 1997; Karl et al. 2005). Manager support for fun, in turn, is conceptualized as the extent to which managers allow and encourage employees to have fun on the job. This type of support, which is similar to McDowell's (2004) personal freedoms construct, includes adopting a relatively casual business attitude and affording employees the opportunity to have fun at work.

Fun and employee turnover. Employee turnover is arguably one of the hospitality industry's greatest management challenges. Turnover rates for entry-level employees in hotels

and restaurants can easily exceed 50 percent annually (Hinkin and Tracey 2000; Tracey and Hinkin 2008; Wildes 2005), straining organizations with escalating costs and lost productivity (Hinkin and Tracey 2000). Moreover, given high turnover and the need to quickly fill vacancies, managers often fall victim to hiring warm bodies without concern for qualifications, which only compromises the guest experience.

Fun may be an antidote to the turnover challenge, since most individuals want more from work than financial compensation. In addition to sufficient pay, employees seek intrinsic satisfaction, quality relationships with others, and enjoyment in their work (Grant and Parker 2009). Furthermore, given the large amount of time spent on the job, individuals would likely prefer the experience to be enjoyable and fun. While too much fun may be a bad thing, a healthy dose may enhance employees' quality of work life.

In one respect, fun may be important in reducing turnover among hospitality employees because fun is arguably one of the reasons why individuals seek employment in the hospitality industry in the first place. The hospitality industry is typically thought of as a fun and social industry, and individuals may want to work in hospitality because it is fun and dynamic. New hires may soon find that not all hospitality work environments are particularly fun, however. Whether employee needs and expectations are met with respect to fun may determine ultimately whether employees remain with their place of employment.

Fun is also thought to help reduce turnover because it may compensate for conditions of employment that are not generally favorable. Entry-level hospitality work is often considered "low skill and low pay" and is typically not conducive to promoting long-term retention. Hinkin and Tracey (2000) asserted that a number of outdated human resource management (HRM) practices continue to plague the hospitality industry and contribute to the perennial turnover challenge. They contended that employees often perform routine tasks, are given little autonomy in carrying out their work, receive inadequate supervision, and are typically poorly compensated for their efforts. Furthermore, work shifts are frequently erratic and irregular (DiPietro and Milman 2004), and the work is often emotionally demanding (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993). In spite of these negatives, fun may create a more favorable work environment and promote retention.

On another front, fun could curb turnover because it may foster more cohesive interpersonal relationships. Maertz and colleagues argued that high-quality relationships are key forces that embed employees in organizations (Maertz and Campion 2004; Maertz and Griffeth 2004). Similarly, Mossholder, Settoon, and Henagan (2005, 608) asserted that high-quality interpersonal relationships "enmesh individuals within a relational web, making them less susceptible to forces that could dislodge them from their organization." In the hospitality industry, coworker

relationships may be especially important given the interactional nature of job responsibilities. We argue that fun activities and manager support for fun allow employees to interact with each other informally and facilitate individuals getting to know each other better, thereby providing a context that facilitates the development of friendships. Based on these interrelated arguments, it is hypothesized that fun activities and manager support for fun will be significantly related to turnover.

Hypothesis 1a: Fun activities will be negatively related to turnover.

Hypothesis 1b: Manager support for fun will be negatively related to turnover.

Fun and employee performance. Fun may also have a significant impact on employee performance for three reasons. First, fun may represent a positive job resource, in line with the job demands-resources model, which proposes that greater job resources lead to fewer job demands and greater employee well-being (Demerouti et al. 2001). Fun may be a resource for hospitality employees because it fosters social relationships that provide social support to combat the stress of service work and enables individuals to immerse themselves in their work and be more productive. Second, fun may serve as an individual recovery mechanism and therefore promote sustained effort (Sonnentag 2003). Fun may allow employees to take momentary time off from their tasks, recharge, and thus be more engaged when on task. Finally, in the context of fun activities, fun could facilitate goal accomplishment, such as in the case of sales productivity contests. Such contests with special incentives are widely popular among restaurant organizations to enhance check averages and total sales revenue (Murphy, Dacin, and Ford 2004). If properly designed, such activities likely have a significant influence on the effort employees devote toward achieving sales goals. Because fun may engage employees in their work roles in a variety of ways, fun activities and manager support for fun are hypothesized to have a positive relationship with employee performance.

Hypothesis 2a: Fun activities will be positively related to performance.

Hypothesis 2b: Manager support for fun will be positively related to performance.

Interaction between fun activities and manager support for fun. An additional issue to be examined is whether fun interacts with management support in influencing turnover and performance. It may be the case that fun activities would have the greatest impact when managers support fun. Considering the resistance to fun activities in some instances (Fleming 2005; Redman and Mathews 2002), we believe that employees may be more resistant when activities are incongruent with other aspects of work. However, when fun

activities and manager support for fun align, the overall impact could be greater. This argument builds on strategic HRM research findings that demonstrate that HRM practices are more effective when they are in alignment with one another (Delery and Doty 1996). Given that manager support sets the stage for fun in the workplace, fun activities should be more effective when they are congruent with this support. When manager support for fun is low, employees are thought to perceive such activities as artificial and contrived. However, when manager support for fun is high, employees are thought to perceive these activities as more genuine. In this case, fun activities would likely be more effective in achieving favorable outcomes.

Hypothesis 3a: The impact of fun activities on turnover will be stronger when there are greater levels of manager support for fun.

Hypothesis 3b: The impact of fun activities on performance will be stronger when there are greater levels of manager support for fun.

Younger versus older employees. The other issue we wanted to investigate is whether fun has a different impact on employees of different ages. A common perception is that young individuals (particularly the “millennials,” born in 1980 and later) generally value fun more than their baby boomer elders do. Researchers have suggested that millennials prefer work environments that emphasize freedom, status, and social involvement, and they are quick to leave their jobs if these needs are not met (Crumpacker and Crumpacker 2007; Dries, Pepermans, and De Kerpel 2008; Loughlin and Barling 2001; Smola and Sutton 2002). Given the relative youth of most hospitality workers, fun may be valued in the hospitality industry on the whole. That said, there is still variability in age among entry-level employees, and we hypothesize that the dimensions of fun will exhibit stronger relationships with turnover and performance for younger employees than older ones.

Hypothesis 4a: Fun activities and manager support for fun will have a stronger negative impact on turnover for younger versus older individuals.

Hypothesis 4b: Fun activities and manager support for fun will have a stronger positive impact on performance for younger versus older individuals.

Affective commitment. The final issue to be examined in this research is the extent to which affective organizational commitment mediates the relationship of fun with turnover and performance. Affective commitment, which reflects the degree to which employees identify with, are involved in, and enjoy membership in the organization (Allen & Meyer 1990), is one of the most important attitudes driving individual behavior in the workplace (Meyer et al. 2002). When employees are emotionally attached to the organization, they

are more likely to exert extra effort toward meeting organizational goals and to desire to continue working with it. In fact, a meta-analysis by Meyer et al. (2002) demonstrated that affective commitment is a robust antecedent of both employee performance and employee turnover. For the same reasons that we believe fun would have a favorable impact on employee turnover and performance, we believe that fun activities and manager support for fun should lead to greater levels of affective commitment. In support of this argument, McDowell (2004) demonstrated that fun is positively related to commitment. Given that fun should promote affective commitment and that affective commitment should favorably influence turnover and performance, affective commitment is hypothesized to mediate the relationships between the dimensions of fun and the turnover and performance outcomes.

Hypothesis 5a: The impact of fun activities and manager support for fun on turnover will be mediated by affective commitment.

Hypothesis 5b: The impact of fun activities and manager support for fun on performance will be mediated by affective commitment.

Method

Sample

The sample for this study included 195 restaurant servers from a casual-theme restaurant chain in the United States. The employees worked in 17 restaurants in one of the company's regional districts in the Northeastern United States. The sample was 68 percent female and 72 percent Caucasian. The average age was 25.67 years. The average organizational tenure at the beginning of the study period was 1.45 years.

Procedure

We invited 502 servers to participate in our study and complete a survey about their experiences at work. The survey included items relating to demographic characteristics, fun activities, manager support for fun, and affective commitment. Of the 502 survey packets sent out, we received 206 with useable data, yielding an initial participation rate of 41 percent. We obtained corporate sales performance data for each employee for the two weeks following survey administration. Six months later, we checked corporate records for employees' voluntary turnover. Eleven participants of the initial 206 were excluded from the final sample because they were terminated, resulting in the final sample of 195.

Measures

Fun activities. This fun activities scale included five items based on Ford, McLaughlin, and Newstrom's (2003) study.

The scale was refined through discussions with the organization's vice president of human resources to ensure that the activities and corresponding item wording were appropriate for the organizational context. The five activities are as follows: (1) social events (e.g., holiday parties and picnics), (2) teambuilding activities (e.g., company-sponsored athletic teams and bowling nights), (3) competitions (e.g., sales and productivity contests), (4) public celebrations of work achievements (e.g., public recognition for outstanding results and employee of the month programs), and (5) recognition of personal milestones (e.g., recognition of birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries of employment). The employees indicated how frequently each activity occurred with a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *all the time*. The internal consistency reliability estimate for the scale was .75.

Manager support for fun. Five items were used to measure manager support for fun, based on a measure developed by Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) and adapted to reflect support for having fun in the workplace. Examples include "My managers care about employees having fun on the job" and "My managers try to make working here fun." The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency reliability estimate for the scale was .97.

Affective commitment. Six items adapted from Meyer and Allen (1997) were used to measure affective commitment. Sample items included the following: "[Company name] has a great deal of personal meaning for me" and "I feel emotionally attached to [company name]." The respondents again indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a similar 5-point response scale. The internal consistency reliability estimate for the scale was .87.

Voluntary turnover. Voluntary turnover was coded dichotomously as 1 for *leavers* and 0 for *stayers*. For the final sample of 195 employees, 58 employees left, and 137 stayed. The voluntary turnover rate for the study period was 30 percent.

Performance. We measured servers' performance by their sales per guest. We focused on sales per guest as opposed to overall sales because overall sales is more a function of the number of hours and shifts worked. As indicated above, the sales data were obtained for the two weeks following survey administration.

Control variables. Employee age, gender, ethnicity, and prestudy tenure were used as control variables in the analyses. Gender was coded 1 for female and 0 for male. Ethnicity was coded 1 for Caucasian and 0 for other ethnic groups.

Analytic Strategy

Random coefficient modeling (RCM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships. RCM was used as opposed to logistic and ordinary least squares regression because the study participants were nested within restaurants, whereby the assumption of independence may be violated. Indeed, the intraclass correlation, ICC(1), estimate was .23 for turnover and .24 for sales performance, indicating that 23 percent of the total variance in employee turnover and 24 percent of the variance in sales performance could be explained by restaurant location. RCM partitions the total variance into the within-group and between-group components, thereby controlling for the nonindependence issue (Bliese and Hanges 2004).

The RCM analyses were performed using the open-source platform R and the nonlinear and linear mixed-effects (NLME) package for R and S-Plus (Pinheiro and Bates 2000). The generalized linear mixed model with normal random effects using the penalized quasi-likelihood function was used to estimate the impact of fun on turnover, which is a dichotomous variable. In turn, the linear mixed-effects model was used to estimate the impact of fun on sales performance, which is a continuous variable.

For the overall sample, the independent variables were entered into the models in four steps. The control variables were entered in Step 1. In Steps 2a and 2b, fun activities and manager support for fun were alternately added to the model individually. Then in Step 3, both of these variables were included together, and in Step 4, the fun activities \times manager support for fun interaction term was added to the model. Prior to creating the interaction terms, the fun activities and manager support for fun variables were centered to limit the potential for multicollinearity that might otherwise bias the results (Aiken and West 1991).

To serve as the basis for examining differences based on age, the RCM analyses were run separately for younger and older employees. For ease of presentation, the results are presented in two steps with the control variables in Step 1 and the fun variables in Step 2. Younger employees were operationalized as those under the age of 25, and all others were categorized as older. We split the sample at age 25 (near the mean for the sample) as it has been argued that 25 is the age that marks the transition from provisional adulthood to adulthood (Levinson 1978). Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, and Piquero's (1998) formula was used to test for significant differences in the effect sizes.

Potential mediation of affective commitment was examined following Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger's (1998) three criteria for testing indirect effects. Those criteria are the following: one, the independent variable is related to the mediator; two, the mediator is related to the dependent variable, controlling for the independent variable; and three, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable becomes nonsignificant (complete mediation) or significantly

Exhibit 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Prestudy tenure	1.45	1.91	—								
2. Age	25.67	7.63	.52**	—							
3. Gender	0.68	0.47	.06	-.04	—						
4. Ethnicity	0.72	0.45	.13*	.08	.05	—					
5. Fun activities	2.36	0.75	.03	.06	-.10†	.12†	—				
6. Manager support for fun	3.15	1.06	.12*	.20**	.01	.13*	.45**	—			
7. Affective commitment	3.19	0.88	.23**	.23**	.13*	.12*	.44**	.58**	—		
8. Voluntary turnover	0.30	0.46	-.25**	-.09	.01	-.02	-.11†	-.18**	-.25**	—	
9. Sales performance	15.02	1.76	-.06	-.17**	-.09	-.19**	.05	-.21**	-.11†	.01	—

Note. $n = 195$. Gender: male = 0, female = 1. Ethnicity: Other = 0, Caucasian = 1. Turnover: 0 = stayer, 1 = leaver.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Exhibit 2: RCM Predicting Voluntary Turnover for the Overall Sample.

Predictors	Step 1		Step 2a		Step 2b		Step 3		Step 4	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Prestudy tenure	-.61**	.18	-.64**	.18	-.63**	.18	-.64**	.18	-.64**	.18
Age	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
Gender	.20	.36	.15	.36	.22	.36	.19	.37	.21	.37
Ethnicity	.12	.38	.16	.38	.15	.38	.17	.38	.19	.38
Fun activities			-.39†	.25			-.24	.27	-.25	.27
Manager support for fun					-.36*	.17	-.29†	.19	-.28†	.19
Fun activities × Manager support for fun									.11	.22
Pseudo- R^2	.04		.08		.15		.15		.15	

Note. $n = 195$. Gender: male = 0, female = 1. Ethnicity: Other = 0, Caucasian = 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Significance levels reflect one-tailed tests.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

lower (partial mediation), controlling for the mediator. Furthermore, the significance of the indirect effects was determined using the z -prime version of the Sobel test outlined in MacKinnon et al. (2002).

Results

Exhibit 1 provides the descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. Exhibits 2 and 3 display the RCM analyses for the overall sample for turnover and performance. Exhibits 4 and 5 present the results for turnover and performance based on age. The results in the final steps of these models were used to assess support for the hypotheses. Finally, Exhibits 6 and 7 present the results from the mediation analyses.

Hypothesis 1a, which proposed that fun activities would be negatively related to turnover, was not supported. The regression coefficient of $-.25$ for the overall sample (Exhibit 2, Step 4) was nonsignificant ($p > .10$).

Hypothesis 1b, which proposed that manager support for fun would be negatively related to turnover, was supported.

The regression coefficient of $-.28$ for the overall sample (Exhibit 2, Step 4) was significant at the .10 level.

Hypothesis 2a, which proposed that fun activities would be positively related to performance, was supported. The regression coefficient of .52 for the overall sample (Exhibit 3, Step 4) was significant at the .01 level.

Hypothesis 2b, which proposed that manager support for fun would be positively related to performance, was not supported. While the regression coefficient of $-.31$ for the overall sample (Exhibit 3, Step 4) was significant at the .05 level, the negative coefficient indicates the opposite outcome.

The question arises whether the results of the tests for Hypotheses 1 and 2 are a consequence of both dimensions of fun being included in the models. It was demonstrated earlier that manager support for fun, but not fun activities, was negatively related to turnover. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that fun activities were positively related to performance, while manager support for fun was negatively related. To address this issue, the turnover and performance models were also run with each dimension of fun alone plus

Exhibit 3:
RCM Predicting Sales Performance for the Overall Sample.

Predictors	Step 1		Step 2a		Step 2b		Step 3		Step 4	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Prestudy tenure	.09†	.07	.09	.07	.09†	.07	.09	.07	.11†	.07
Age	-.04*	.02	-.04*	.02	-.04*	.02	-.03*	.02	-.04*	.02
Gender	-.41*	.24	-.37†	.24	-.41*	.24	-.33†	.24	-.36†	.24
Ethnicity	-.26	.28	-.29	.28	-.26	.28	-.31	.28	-.35	.28
Fun activities			.32*	.16			.45**	.17	.52**	.17
Manager support for fun					-.13	.13	-.27*	.14	-.31*	.14
Fun activities × Manager support for fun									-.32**	.14
Pseudo-R ²	.02		.02		.04		.06		.09	

Note. *n* = 195. Gender: male = 0, female = 1. Ethnicity: Other = 0, Caucasian = 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Significance levels reflect one-tailed tests.

†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Exhibit 4:
RCM Predicting Voluntary Turnover for Younger versus Older Employees.

Predictors	Younger Employees				Older Employees			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Prestudy tenure	-.34†	.23	-.39†	.24	-.07**	.02	-.07**	.02
Age	-.07	.12	-.05	.13	.01	.01	.01	.01
Gender	.33	.46	.39	.48	-.07	.11	-.08	.11
Ethnicity	-.14	.43	-.07	.44	.07	.12	.09	.13
Fun activities			-.23	.35			-.03	.07
Manager support for fun			-.46*	.24			.01	.06
Pseudo-R ²	.01		.03		.02		.03	

Note. *n* = 195 (younger employees, *n* = 130; older employees, *n* = 65). Gender: male = 0, female = 1. Ethnicity: Other = 0, Caucasian = 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Significance levels reflect one-tailed tests.

†*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

the control variables, Steps 2a and 2b. For the turnover models, manager support for fun was still a significant negative predictor ($b = -.36$, $p < .05$), and fun activities were now a significant negative predictor as well ($b = -.39$, $p < .10$). In the performance models, fun activities were still a positive predictor ($b = .32$, $p < .05$), yet manager support for fun was now nonsignificant ($b = -.13$, $p > .10$). The signs for the coefficients remained the same in all cases, yet the levels of significance varied to an extent.

Hypothesis 3a, which proposed a positive interaction between fun activities and manager support for fun on turnover, was not supported (Exhibit 2, Step 4). The interaction term of .11 was not significant at the .10 level.

Hypothesis 3b, which proposed a positive interaction between fun activities and manager support for fun on performance, was not supported (Exhibit 3, Step 4). Counter to the hypothesis, the interaction between fun activities and manager support for fun was negative and significant ($b = -.32$,

$p < .01$). This interaction is graphically presented in Exhibit 8. As manager support for fun increases, the impact of fun activities on performance decreases. Thus, manager support for fun reduces, rather than enhances, the impact of fun activities on performance.

Hypothesis 4a, which proposed that fun activities and manager support for fun would have a stronger negative impact on turnover for younger versus older employees, was partially supported (see Exhibit 4). For manager support for fun, the coefficient of $-.46$ ($p < .01$) for younger employees was significantly larger than the coefficient of $.01$ ($p > .10$) for older employees ($z = -2.25$, $p < .05$). For fun activities, the coefficient of $-.23$ ($p > .10$) was larger for younger employees than the coefficient of $-.03$ ($p > .10$) for older ones, but this difference was not significant ($z = -.69$, $p > .10$).

Hypothesis 4b, which proposed that fun activities and manager support for fun would have a stronger positive

Exhibit 5:
RCM Predicting Sales Performance for Younger versus Older Employees.

Predictors	Younger Employees				Older Employees			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Prestudy tenure	-.18†	.12	-.21*	.12	.19*	.11	.16†	.10
Age	-.08	.08	-.07	.08	-.02	.03	-.02	.03
Gender	.01	.27	.06	.27	-1.08*	.51	-.92*	.50
Ethnicity	-.41†	.30	-.41†	.30	-.68	.57	-1.00*	.57
Fun activities			.01	.20			.86**	.33
Manager support for fun			-.38**	.14			-.39	.27
Pseudo-R ²	.03		.09		.04		.13	

Note. *n* = 195 (younger employees, *n* = 130; older employees, *n* = 65). Gender: male = 0, female = 1. Ethnicity: Other = 0, Caucasian = 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Significance levels reflect one-tailed tests. †*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Exhibit 6:
RCM Analyses with Affective Commitment Mediating the Fun–Voluntary Turnover Relationship.

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	Sobel Test
Previous tenure	-.61**	.18	
Age	.03	.03	
Gender	.20	.36	
Ethnicity	.12	.38	
Model 1—Mediation of fun activities and turnover relationship			
Step 1 Fun activities to commitment	.48**	.07	
Step 2 Commitment to turnover (controlling for fun activities)	-.53*	.24	
Step 3 Fun activities to turnover (controlling for commitment)	-.15	.28	-2.10*
Model 2—Mediation of manager support for fun and turnover relationship			
Step 1 Manager support for fun to commitment	.44**	.05	
Step 2 Commitment to turnover (controlling for manager support for fun)	-.48*	.28	
Step 3 Manager support for fun to turnover (controlling for commitment)	-.18	.21	-1.68*

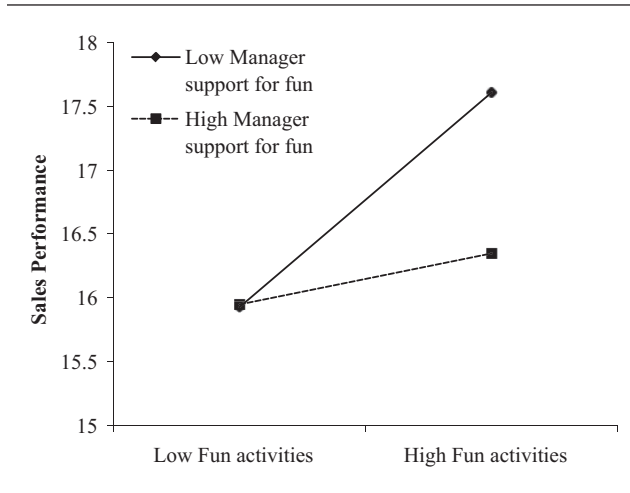
Note. *n* = 195. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. †*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Exhibit 7:
RCM Analyses with Affective Commitment Mediating the Fun–Sales Performance Relationship.

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	Sobel Test
Previous tenure	.09†	.07	
Age	-.04*	.02	
Gender	-.41*	.24	
Ethnicity	-.26	.28	
Model 1—Mediation of fun activities and sales relationship			
Step 1 Fun activities to commitment	.48**	.07	
Step 2 Commitment to sales (controlling for fun activities)	-.15	.16	
Step 3 Fun activities to sales (controlling for commitment)	.39*	.17	-0.93
Model 2—Mediation of manager support for fun and sales relationship			
Step 1 Manager support for fun to commitment	.44**	.05	
Step 2 Commitment to sales (controlling for manager support for fun)	.10	.17	
Step 3 Manager support for fun to sales (controlling for commitment)	-.17	.15	0.59

Note. *n* = 195. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. †*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Exhibit 8:
Interaction Between Fun Activities and Manager Support for Fun on Sales Performance.



impact on performance for younger versus older employees, was not supported (see Exhibit 5). Counter to expectations, the coefficient for fun activities for older employees was larger ($b = .86, p < .01$) than the coefficient for younger employees ($b = .01, p > .10$), and the difference between these coefficients was significant ($z = -3.39, p < .01$). Furthermore, the coefficients for manager support for fun were negative for both younger employees ($b = -.38, p < .01$) and older employees ($b = -.39, p > .10$), counter to expectations. While nominally larger, the coefficient for older employees was not significantly greater than that for younger employees ($z = .05, p > .10$).

Hypothesis 5a, which proposed that the impact of fun activities and manager support for fun on turnover would be mediated by affective commitment, was supported (see Exhibit 6). In Step 1, both fun activities ($b = .48, p < .01$) and manager support for fun ($b = .44, p < .01$) were positively related to affective commitment. In Step 2, affective commitment was related to turnover while controlling for fun activities ($b = -.53, p < .05$) and related to turnover while controlling for manager support for fun ($b = -.48, p < .05$). In Step 3, fun activities were not significantly related to turnover ($b = -.15, p > .10$), and the Sobel test was significant ($z' = -2.10, p < .05$), providing support for complete mediation. Similarly, manager support for fun was not significantly related to turnover ($b = -.18, p > .10$), and the Sobel test was significant ($z' = -1.68, p < .05$), providing support for complete mediation.

Hypothesis 5b, which proposed that the impact of fun activities and manager support for fun on performance would be mediated by affective commitment, was not supported (see Exhibit 7). As indicated earlier, both fun activities and manager support for fun were positively related to affective

commitment in Step 1. However, affective commitment was not related to sales performance while controlling for fun activities ($b = -.15, p > .10$) and not related to sales performance while controlling for manager support for fun ($b = .10, p > .10$), thus precluding the need for Step 3.

Follow-up Analyses

As indicated earlier, fun activities were a significant positive predictor of sales performance. We needed to determine, however, whether this finding could only be attributed to the “sales and productivity contests” item in the fun activities scale. We therefore reexamined the sales performance model with the sales and productivity contests item included separately from the overall fun activities scale, along with the control variables. Both the sales and productivity contests coefficient ($b = .25$) and the other fun activities coefficient ($b = .30$) were positive and significant at the .05 level. These statistics suggest that sales and productivity contests are not the sole driver of sales performance with respect to fun activities.

Discussion

Rather than relying on anecdotal observations of the benefits of fun, our study has systemically analyzed fun’s effects on turnover and performance among entry-level employees in the hospitality industry. Our findings demonstrated that fun can have a beneficial impact, but the framing of that fun must be carefully aligned with the desired organizational outcome and employee characteristics. We say this because the impact of fun activities and manager support for fun differed for employee turnover and performance, and fun mattered differently for younger and older employees. Hospitality firms that wish to benefit from fun should be aware that one size does not fit all in the case of fun at work.

One helpful finding is that manager support for fun was demonstrated to have a direct negative impact on voluntary turnover. Moreover, manager support for fun was a stronger predictor of turnover among younger employees than among older ones. Interestingly, fun activities were found to have a negative impact on turnover as well, but only when manager support for fun was not considered. It is possible that manager support for fun was a more dominant predictor because managerial behavior is a more constant feature of an employee’s day-to-day experiences. In this respect, manager support for fun is a defining aspect of work for individuals. In contrast, fun activities are more discrete events and may have been a less central part of work when considering employment alternatives. Overall, this finding that manager support for fun has a significant impact on turnover suggests that employees particularly value a work climate where managers adopt a relatively casual business attitude and afford them the opportunity to have fun on the job.

Another helpful finding is that fun activities had a favorable impact on sales performance. Thus, we can conclude that fun activities are an important tool to motivate employees to work to their potential. There was also a difference in the impact of fun activities on performance based on age. Counter to expectations, fun activities had a stronger impact on performance for older employees than for younger employees. It is important to acknowledge that the relationship between fun activities and sales performance was not just attributable to sales and productivity contests, but also to the other fun activities that we tested. We see the other fun activities, such as social events and teambuilding activities, as facilitating performance by promoting social support among coworkers and reducing stress that might otherwise lead to burnout.

We were surprised to find that manager support for fun showed a negative impact on performance. We suspect that when managers allow too much fun, employees slack off in achieving higher levels of sales. It should be noted that manager support for fun was only a significant negative predictor of performance when fun activities were taken into account. Furthermore, there was a negative interaction between fun activities and manager support for fun, contrary to our expectation that fun activities and manager support for fun would be mutually reinforcing. Instead, our results demonstrated that manager support for fun reduced the positive impact of fun activities on sales performance. The key implication of this finding is that too much fun has adverse consequences where productivity is concerned. Future research should strive to validate this unanticipated finding and examine factors that might attenuate the negative relationship between manager support for fun and performance.

Our results demonstrated that affective commitment mediated the relationships between fun activities and manager support for fun and turnover. Even though fun activities were not directly related to turnover, they were found to have an indirect impact through affective commitment. Thus, fun activities, as well as manager support for fun, led to higher levels of emotional attachment and personal identification with the organization. Such commitment, in turn, reduced the likelihood that an employee left the organization. Despite these findings, affective commitment did not mediate the fun–performance relationships. These mediating relationships were not substantiated primarily because the affective commitment–performance relationship did not hold. While previous research has demonstrated that employees may be skeptical of fun activities (Fleming 2005; Redman and Mathews 2002), the positive relationship between fun activities and affective commitment in this study implies that hospitality employees are not resistant to them.

Future work should examine additional mediators in the relationship of fun to workplace outcomes. One potentially

useful mediator is employee engagement, which has emerged as a key motivation state in workplace research and is arguably a more proximal antecedent of turnover and performance than job satisfaction (Macey and Schneider 2008). Engaged employees are immersed and absorbed in their jobs (Kahn 1990; Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001). As fun may make the workplace more enjoyable and meaningful, employee engagement may be a key mechanism through which fun affects turnover and performance.

We also want to note that the average tenure of the servers in this study was approximately one and a half years. When discussing the results with the organization's vice president of human resources, he indicated that a key challenge is promoting "six-month retention" among new hires, explaining that the largest amount of turnover occurs within the first few months of employment. Once employees meet a "six-month threshold," they tend to remain employed for a relatively long period. Thus, the challenge of turnover in restaurant settings appears to be greatest in the first several months of employment. Additional research that specifically focuses on this six-month window would be worthwhile to assess what drives newcomer retention.

The practical implication of this research is that organizations should encourage fun in the workplace following three general conclusions from this research: (1) Manager support for fun lowers turnover, particularly among younger employees; (2) fun activities increase sales performance, particularly among older employees; and (3) manager support for fun lowers sales performance irrespective of age. Since promoting both retention and sales is important to hospitality organizations, managers who adopt a fun managerial style should also implement specific sales goals to help ensure performance is not compromised. Managers must learn how to achieve the delicate balance of allowing employees the freedom to enjoy themselves at work while simultaneously maintaining high levels of performance.

Another practical implication of this research is that sales contests are an effective means to enhance sales check averages, provided the contests do not involve the pitfalls identified by Corsun, McManus, and Kincaid (2006). Managers should ensure that increased sales are not realized at the expense of service quality and cooperation among employees. In this respect, a "balanced scorecard" approach to performance management that uses both financial and nonfinancial measures could be an effective strategy to motivate restaurant servers to achieve multiple, and sometimes competing, performance objectives (Kaplan and Norton 1992). Research on sales contests in food service settings has been limited, and consequently, research that addresses their effectiveness is needed.

The results of this study should be interpreted in the context of the primary limitation that the data were collected from only one employee group in one organization. While the results are meaningful, future research should assess the

impact of fun in other restaurant companies, other employee groups, and in hotels. One opportunity for future research would be to examine the impact of fun for both back-of-house and front-of-house employees. Typically, front-of-house employees are more extroverted than back-of-house employees, and research has demonstrated that extroverts value fun more than introverts (Karl, Peluchette, and Harland 2007). It would be useful to draw on this research to determine whether fun relates equally well to turnover and performance for both back-of-house and front-of-house employees and assess whether these employees value different types of fun. Another opportunity for research would be to assess the impact of fun among entry-level employees and managers in a single study to determine whether managers value fun similarly to employees in entry-level positions. Such a study would provide greater insight into the role of fun at different stages of employees' careers.

Other avenues of research are also worth pursuing. For example, one opportunity would be to conduct field experiments where fun is experimentally manipulated. Such interventions could focus on manager support for fun, for example, where managers adopt a more causal business attitude, encourage employees to socialize, and allow employees to have fun on the job. Experimental interventions could also focus on the implementation of the various fun activities addressed in this research, such as social events, teambuilding activities, and public recognition of personal milestones in the workplace. Another opportunity for research would be to examine the impact of fun in conjunction with perceived organizational support, coworker support, and other HRM practices, such as compensation and benefits and opportunities for advancement.

Although we have generally validated the popular belief that fun has a beneficial impact for employees and organizations, this study has also demonstrated that fun can result in adverse outcomes when management is not careful. Despite the limitations, this study has provided a more nuanced perspective on the role of fun in the workplace. Fun may have value, but it must be strategically aligned with an organization's goals and objectives if its benefits are to be realized.

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