A Place to be me, A Place to Belong:
Defining Fun at work in a New Zealand Call-Centre

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Abstract: This paper examines the multiple meanings and differing value that employees attach to 'fun at work' in a large call-centre. It utilises a phenomenological methodology to identify four components of fun at work: (1) 'doing' something exciting (2) a light-hearted expression of self (3) positive collegial relationships (4) best balanced with other rewards. The research findings have implications for individuals, human resource practitioners and managers who seek to make the most of a phenomenon that fascinates so many and seems to offer important organisational benefits.

Keywords: fun at work; workplace friendships; organisational culture; identity; healthy workplaces.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of 'fun at work' has been written about in managerial and human resource practitioner literature for around thirty years. More recently, the notion of workplace fun is receiving scholarly attention. However, despite this interest, there have been few serious attempts to define the experience of fun at work. In this paper we tease out the multiple meanings and relative importance that employees attach to 'fun at work' in a 180 person call-centre in New Zealand. We identify four components of fun at work that are commonly identified by participants: (1) 'doing' something exciting (2) a light-hearted expression of self (3) positive collegial relationships (4) best balanced with other rewards. This allows us to deepen our understanding of the experience of fun at work, explore how it occurs and discuss its promotion in human resource practice.

BACKGROUND

Over the last thirty years many claims have been made in management and human resource literature in regard to the efficacy of fun in the workplace for promoting a variety of organisational benefits. Benefits promoted include flexibility, competitive advantage and increased motivation (e.g., Fleming, 2005; Kanter, 1989; Peters, 1999; Peters & Austrin, 1986), good customer service, innovation, empowerment, creativity (e.g., Barsoux, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 2000; Deal & Kennedy, 1999; Peters, 1992) and productivity (e.g., Costea, Crump, & Holm, 2005; Pinault, 2003). Despite authors seeming to be in agreement about the positive outcomes of workplace fun; fun itself, in a workplace setting, is seldom adequately defined. Fun is, however, generally characterised as superficial socialising, akin to childlike play and frivolity (Owler, Morrison, & Plester, 2010; Warren & Fineman, 2007). In some cases employees are also encouraged to 'be themselves', inferring behaviour they would ideally engage in if they were not confined by the constraints and formality required within many workplaces (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009).

There is a growing body of scholarly research designed to study the phenomenon of fun at work. A limited number of studies have found that fun at work can indeed promote positive workplace outcomes. For example fun at work has been found to improve productivity, enhance worker attitudes and be beneficial to work teams (Ford, McLaughlin, & Newstrom, 2003; Mcdowell, 2005); it can lead to higher job satisfaction (Abramis, 1999), mitigate emotional exhaustion (Karl, Peluchette, & Harland, 2007), relieve stress and improve sales

(Redman & Mathews, 2002). Most of these studies have not attempted to define the experience of fun however.

Scholars researching fun at work do not attempt to define what is 'essential' to fun, instead assuming it is quite self-explanatory. One of the closest attempts at a definition we have come across is given by Fineman in the context of discussing the kinds of fun that employees find most genuine. Fineman (2006) explains that "*[f]un gains its 'funness' from its spontaneity, surprise, and often subversion of the extant order*" (p. 290). This statement highlights the light-hearted, impulsive and gently subversive nature of fun.

While we have come across no rigorous attempts to define fun, other research on fun at work does allow us to begin to develop an understanding of certain elements of 'fun' within the experience of work. For instance Ford, Newstrom and McLaughlin (2004) conducted a survey of human resource managers in the United States. As a result, they were able to list the various programmes and events offered by organisations which were intended to be fun for employees. These generally included some form of socialising such as celebrating personal events, humour, games and competitions. On the other hand, Karl, Peluchette and Harland (2007) offer another perspective, contending that individual personality differences play a role in what activities are considered fun.

Other studies have examined employee responses to management-led fun at work initiatives. Such initiatives include redecorating workplaces to create a more playful atmosphere (Fleming 2005; Warren & Fineman, 2006), organising events and awards (Fleming, 2005) and publishing fun newsletters and implementing fun sales campaigns (Redman & Mathews 2002). Results of these studies tend to reveal ambivalent and sometimes cynical employee responses to management initiatives, particularly if they are felt to be imposed on staff (Fleming 2005; Warren & Fineman 2006). Because of the difficulty of manufacturing fun, Fleming (2005) argues that authentic fun is most likely to be experienced when workers create their own fun, independent of, or even against, management. In contrast, research by Karl et al (2005) suggests that fun at work activities are experienced most positively within workplaces where workers feel they can trust their supervisors.

The accounts above begin to address what fun at work actually is; what it means to people and some of the conditions that make fun possible. The current study aims to create a deeper and more thorough understanding of the experience of fun at work. This involves going directly 'to the people' and examining the multiple meanings and differing values that employees attach to 'fun at work' in a large call-centre.

THE CURRENT STUDY
Our research was carried out in a large (180-200 person), multi-cultural call centre in a New Zealand communications company. This call-centre specifically markets itself to potential employees as a fun and flexible place to work and has high rates of employee engagement as measured by internal staff surveys. It is situated in a large open plan space that is divided into work-spaces for 12 teams of around 15 people. The outbound nature of the call-centre makes it possible for everyone on the site to be off the phone at times, in order to take part in site-wide planned events.

Research took place over a one month period. It drew on qualitative strategies and included work-place observation and in-depth interviews with staff and management. Observations were conducted with three teams, following a structured format. Observational data was only used to provide a context for interviews so that the interviewer could understand the atmosphere and culture. Forty-five minute interviews were then conducted with eight call-centre representatives

(3 male, 5 female) and two team leaders (1 male, 1 female). Only three of the eight people interviewed were born in New Zealand. Others had immigrated as adults from India, South America, the Philippines and Europe. All but one participant had a University degree and some had graduate degrees. These interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and later transcribed. For reasons of confidentiality, participants' names have been changed in this paper.

The study used a phenomenological approach in order to examine employee experiences of fun at work. This involved directly engaging in dialogue with employees in order to explore their own experience of fun and the meanings they attach to it. Phenomenology is a mode of philosophical enquiry that has been used in many different ways, in a variety of disciplines and by numerous scholars. Famous practitioners have included Husserl, Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Put simply, phenomenology is the study of lived experience. Participants were asked questions such as: "What does fun mean to you?", "Do you have fun at work?", "What kind of things are fun at work?" and "What are the conditions that allow you to have fun at work?" Responses were then categorised and summarised in order to transform lived experience into its written expression. To some extent this writing inevitably involves a reflective appropriation of people's lived experience. However, taking seriously other people's experience also allows for rich learning. On the one hand it provides us with the opportunity to test commonly held assumptions about the meaning and value people give to the experience of fun at work. On the other hand it allows us to develop new and insightful ways of understanding the experience of fun at work.

RESULTS – EXPERIENCING 'FUN AT WORK'
The opportunity for one on one interviews with the employees and team leaders in this study provided a context for rich discussion of the meaning and value of fun at work to individuals. While all those interviewed were able to initially describe their own understanding of fun; as the meaning of fun was explored and more questions asked, it became evident to some of those interviewed that what they thought was an easy concept to define, was actually a multi-faceted experience. We discuss the four most commonly identified components of fun at work below.

1. Having Fun Involves 'Doing' Something Exciting:
For most people interviewed, fun was an activity-based experience, involving a sense of excitement and a break from the ordinary. In discussing the activity-based nature of fun, participants often referred to site-wide organised activities including competitions between teams such as St Patrick's Day (where there was a prize for the best display of green painted potatoes); or Halloween (when people dressed up and there was a prize for the best decorated team space), casual Friday or BBQ's cooked by management. Other activities mentioned included free chair massage, a car pull at Christmas and a male versus female tug of war. Several staff commented that there were numerous events organised. For example, one stated that *"there is always something going on"* (Abdul), referring to some fun activity either taking place or being planned on the site. Site-wide events included individual competitions, such as poetry or art competitions. Fun at work events were not only site wide but also included those organised within a particular team, including shared lunches. Fun activities could also include events of a more spontaneous nature, such as a walk at lunch-time with a friend.

People tended to associate the experience of activity based fun with a sense of excitement and a break from the ordinary. As one woman explained, *"fun is a reliever because we need a break from work"* (Carmen). One participant had recently graduated from University and was the youngest person interviewed. She described fun as *"something exciting, something different from what you have been doing ... It just makes your heart pump faster, when you're having fun"*. This kind of fun provides a break from the relentless and repetitive nature of in-bound

calls. She states that, *"the chatting, the activities, shared lunch are good. If I didn't have these I'd be thinking that I'm doing the same thing over and over again"* (Susan).

For one of the team leaders, fun is a physical, 'guttural' experience that creates a mental or emotional 'shift in people':
[Promoting fun involves] getting people engaged in a very happy sort of way, so that their happy emotions are the things that come out and it helps them to move to whatever the next stage is in their daily life. It allows them to move through some difficult patches that they might be having in a day. It allows them to release some of the…negative energy that people might have. It allows them to have a different view of the world at that particular time (Jeremy).

Jeremy deliberately uses fun to create a shift in people during team debriefs and breaks. During these times the team are noisy and might play active games such as 'Simon Says'. This often involves humour and laughter.

The association of fun with laughter was made either directly or indirectly by most people interviewed. However, only one person saw humour as essential to fun: *"fun definitely has an element of humour to it"*. His kind of fun included face to face banter and internet humour where *"...you look for stupid things on the internet and email them to your friends"* (Brodie).

While fun was often viewed as activity-based and exciting, participants felt that fun could be simultaneously relaxing *and* exciting and energising. One participant explained that fun is *"whatever gives you pleasure, relaxation, motivation, rejuvenation"* (Amber). A team leader described how he used a sense of fun to provide *"a sense of safety"* and relaxation for his team (Jeremy).

Several participants mentioned that fun helped to alleviate stress in their jobs. One explained that *"when we are doing in-bound calls it is quite stressful and it's quite busy. So it's really important to have some fun at work, otherwise you feel so tired at work and you go home and then get up again and say, oh my God another day"* (Anna).

2. Having Fun Involves a Light-Hearted Expression of Self
Participants were asked to compare 'fun' to other similar experiences such as 'enjoyment'. While fun and enjoyment were different for most people they were also connected, and one person stated that they could be ranked *"somewhere along the [same] line as each other"* (Susan). Fun appeared to contribute to enjoyment. She explained that *"fun will lead to happiness and enjoyment"*. Fun therefore existed along the continuum of pleasant and enjoyable experiences. However, most of the participants said that fun was also slightly different from enjoyment. There were several factors that made fun distinct: it had a sense of immediacy (because it involved action); it was light-hearted rather than serious; and appeared linked to the experience of *"being oneself"*.

Several people felt that fun was more immediate and active than enjoyment. One explained that *"you might feel enjoyment simply looking at things that you enjoy. Like, you know, the movies, your children, just looking at them, you enjoy that. Fun for me is more likely doing things. Or activities, or the action of it"* (Anna). For another person enjoyment was connected to passion and could be expressed over time (such as creative writing), whereas fun had to be *"immediate"*, *"guttural"* and *"spontaneous"* (Jeremy). And for another, fun was something that happened in the present, connected to a *"positive atmosphere"*, whereas enjoyment can be *"something in the future that you look forward to"* (Abdul).

Fun was also characterised as a more light-hearted experience than enjoyment. One person described enjoyment as *"more serious"* and *"more settled"* than fun (Susan). For another fun required something *"humorous or zany"*, whereas enjoyment involved something more settled such as cuddling on the couch with his wife on a Friday night, watching her favourite TV show (Brodie).

Fun also appeared connected to an experience of being oneself. This was sometimes linked to a sense of creative self-expression. One of the employees regarded some of the organised activities as fun because they gave her the opportunity to show a different, creative side of herself: *"In decorating something at work or writing a poem you can show others that you can decorate or write, rather than just tell them you can do these things"* (Anna). One of the team leaders regarded herself as a *"fun-loving"* person who loved engaging and mingling with people. However, there were also some elements of desk work that she found fun. This included creating power-point presentations *"because they are artistic"* and gave her an opportunity to express herself creatively (Susanna).

One employee specifically characterised fun at work as an opportunity to be himself. He stated that *"fun for me at work is just being yourself. You get to do what you want to do"* (Eduardo). This same employee appreciated the freedom that he had to structure his work and his interactions with customers. This helped him to have fun at work: *"You have centres which have structured call flow... you have to do this, you have to say that. But in our centre, we do have call flow but you structure that the way you want. We can pattern our own opening spiel. It's really fun here compared to other sites where you don't have the same freedom"* (Eduardo).

3. Fun Involves Positive Collegial Relationships

The third and most common aspect of fun was its social content. Fun involved opportunities to socialise and engage with friends at work and other friendly colleagues, managers, team leaders and customers. When asked what fun meant to them, most people began by giving social examples, referring to their interactions and relationships with work colleagues. They went on to describe a particular atmosphere or culture of fun in the call centre that included friendly and supportive relationships.

Comments about relationships were generally spontaneous. For instance, six of the employees interviewed specifically mentioned the importance of *"great colleagues"*; being able to turn around and talk to colleagues or talk in breaks; and about the *"friendly atmosphere"*. One talked about the importance of *"relationship building"* (Eduardo) and another talked about *"being greeted with big smiles in the morning"* (Penelope). Another explained that positive contact with others was always fun: *"it all comes under the fun part, talking to the customers, talking to your colleagues, talking to your team leader"* (Abdul). For the youngest respondent, fresh from University, it was her colleagues that provided all the fun at work: *"the people here, they motivate me more than the work itself. So I think 'oh I'm going to see them, OK I'll come to work'"* (Susan). Many of those interviewed commented on the fact that as they worked a 12 hour shift, they often saw their colleagues more than their families. This made it really important that they had good collegial relationships.

Most of the employees we spoke to were in their thirties or older. Nine of those interviewed had partners, five had children and one of these was also a grand-parent. Several participants appreciated the maturity of their colleagues. One explained that working with other mature colleagues meant that they shared a lot in common:

One of things I enjoy is I'm having all the mature 30 plus people in my team. There are 10 of us and they are all married or have a partner or kids. They are all, I would say, between the 28 to

35 age range. So we all have the same thinking. It's not like you're having an 18 year old in your team, that's always like into music and other things. We'll talk about gardening. We'll talk about fishing. What are we going to do this weekend? That sort of thing (Abdul).

This employee was also grateful that he worked with mature aged people because they were openly able to discuss conflict when it occurred.

Three out of the four male staff interviewed referred to the importance of personal banter amongst colleagues. One explained that:
In regards to my team, I do have fun with my team mates. Especially I have a buddy, ... yeah (**You're quite close. Good friends?**) *Yeah sure. We throw jokes at each other. Call each other names* (**So do you feel like you know each other quite well?**) *Mm. We're really at home with each other. He doesn't get offended. We're on the same page, on the same plane. He can call me names (laughs) and I can call him names back* (Eduardo).

Another of the male staff shared banter with a particular good friend at work, which often revolved around their favourite internet sites:
If I've had a pain in the ass phone call and I'm like arggh, [my good friend] *will like start taking the piss out of me (laugh) ... In the internet, there's a couple of internet sites, you know you just check every day like DemotivateUs.com ...* [My friend] *likes the program Twilight and there was an absolute piss take of Twilight I found ... So I set it up as her screen saver. It's just like an inside joke. ... just little things like that make work fun* (Brodie).

This employee also found the personal banter and humour he shared with customers really fun and enjoyable to him: *"I like talking to customers, I like joking, you know it's like if you can get away with it, go for it...* (**So humour is part of your sales strategy?**) *Oh definitely. I think I'm really casual compared to a lot of other people. It's like gidday. It's like first names"* (Brodie).

While it was evident that the women on the site shared humour together as part of friendship and collegiality, they often stressed the multiple elements of collegiality, including looking after each other. One fairly new employee explained that *"one of the girls is leaving so we're going to have a shared lunch on Friday. And one of my other colleagues brought a few things, like Revlon ... and you know what I mean... people just want to do nice things, yeah and it's lovely"* (Penelope).

The staff we interviewed appeared proud of the fun and friendly atmosphere in their particular call-centre. Several had been seconded at times to other call-centres in the company and had found the culture very different. For instance, one described how she had *"tried doing faults* [on the top floor] *and I tried doing the technical help desk as well ... and there's nothing like the energy here"* (Carmen). Another explained how the opportunity to have fun and socialise with peers made all the difference to him: *"When I was being seconded, my team moved to faults ... and I really saw the difference between the two sites ... Here you have a choice to play around ... to be yourself, talk to your peers, have fun"* (Eduardo).

All of the staff alluded to a positive work culture in the call-centre that involved trust, acceptance and collegiality. In this work-place, it wasn't just individual relationships or even relationships with the team that were important. Participants were referring to a general culture of collegiality. All suggested that they found the culture positive and the people friendly. There were quite a few examples of this. For instance, a fairly new employee explained how important it was as a *"newby"* to have fun times outside of normal work tasks in order to get to know other team members and *"feel free to talk"*. Feeling comfortable with colleagues and her

environment made her work easier. She can now feel free to ask for help when she needs it from someone who had been there longer (Anna).

Another participant had actually chosen to return to the call-centre after working in another role in a different company. While the work at the other company had been interesting and used her qualifications, she had chosen to come back to this environment which she finds fun. She currently feels comfortable with her work environment because *"one on one"* communication is supported. This was in contrast to her former work-place where collegial relations were not encouraged (Carmen).

One of the employees originally came to the company as a temp and describes feeling *"excited"* about the fun, friendly culture of the company and wanting a permanent role so that she could be part of it. She spoke about the pleasure she gains in working with new colleagues in her team. This includes offering them a warm welcome and sitting with them initially so they can observe her calls and the rapport that she has with the customer (Amber).

The positive, trusting environment in this call-centre appeared to extend to team leaders and management. There was a flat management structure that was unique to the site and appeared popular. All those working in the call-centre, sat on the floor and no-one had a personal office. Managers were therefore always available for advice or feedback. One participant explained:
[On this site management involves] *"one on one, you know face to face communication. It's also a good thing because you can see them on the floor. They're not hiding inside a room and you know, just being the boss"* (Carmen).

This form of management practice was very different to the one that she had experienced in the past in her country of origin:
*In the Philippines I used to be a team leader. Over there team leaders are really team leaders. Like you call them, Miss, Mam. But here it's more personal, which I'm liking. Although someone is your team leader here, you're kind of on the same level (**So you can still share and discuss?**). Yes. In the Philippines there's like a barrier between you and I, if I am your boss. If I tell you to do this, you do it* (Carmen).

Another participant explained that the management structure was very important to how things operated in the call-centre. She believes that the fact that management are visible and accessible on the floor and *"not just behind the scenes"* is significant to the open and collegial atmosphere of trust and support (Penelope).

There were some management practices that did generate frustration for the participants. These included being put onto a different queue without consultation (such as being moved from outbound sales to faults or technical support), or being promised bonuses that were not paid out. The employees interviewed were generally able to resolve these issues, or at least not hold grudges. Many spoke to their team leaders about their concerns and were generally satisfied with the explanation. One explained that *"if you work for a company, you do things for the good of the company"* (Anna).

4. Fun is Best Balanced with Other Rewards
The fun element of the job was significant to all of the participants interviewed and appeared to be a big part of why they stayed in their role. Most also believed that fun at work had the potential to support business. However, there were also other benefits that were important for keeping them engaged and wanting to stay in the job. Fun was therefore important, but not paramount. It appeared that a balance of fun and other rewards was the best case scenario to create a positive working experience.

All of the participants believed that fun at work was very important for them. For instance, one person explained that fun at work *"pulls me to work (laughs). If I think about a really dull day at work, that's hard to wake up and get up and go to work"* (Susan). A team leader explained that *"Fun at work is hugely important [...] to your whole sort of inner well-being"* (Jeremy). The other team leader interviewed believed that it is *"very, very"* important for her staff to have fun at work. If she notices something is bothering one of her staff members she'll talk to them to help them change how they *"feel for the day"*, because if someone is *"not in a good headspace"* it can be *quite contagious"*. She understands the importance of mood to job performance and wellbeing generally and explains that *"I just want my people to have fun every single day, you know"* (Suzanna).

While fun was important and even essential for participants, it was not the only thing that kept people working hard and wanting to continue to work with the company. Other benefits included training and career opportunities, good management (being listened to), appreciation (including work-place awards), good salary (and commission), discounts on company products, being looked after (workstation assessments, on-site massage etc.) and flexibility to study. On the whole participants spoke of the need for a balance being required between fun and other rewards, in order to keep them happy. All of the call-centre representatives believed that fun in the company made a difference in terms of attrition, turnover, less sick leave and sales. However, it was clear that fun activities were not enough. Being appreciated and listened to were particularly important to people. Participants inferred that without these benefits, the workplace would not be so fun.

DISCUSSION – DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF 'FUN AT WORK'
The research results have allowed us to develop a greater understanding of how fun is experienced and its meaning and value for participants in this study. We discuss the findings below in relation to other management research, discussing the four components of fun at work in turn. This allows us to conclude with a summary of the value and benefits of fun at work that should be of use to human resource managers.

Having Fun Involves Doing Something Exciting
In our research fun was primarily viewed as an activity based experience, associated with excitement and a break from the ordinary; not something boring. Nor was it about everyday routine. Nor was it serious. As Fineman (2006) claims *"Fun gains its 'funness' from its spontaneity, surprise, and often subversion of the extant order"* (p.290). We have found in our research that fun effects a subtle light-hearted shifting of the order of things, rather than any resolute attempt to revolt or create upheaval.

The ability for fun to create a subtle and potentially positive shift in a person's mind-set suggests that it may be a more significant social phenomenon than is generally thought. While it is light-hearted, it can effectively cut through the serious, so that we might gain another perspective on a situation. As a consequence, fun can arguably play a powerful role in promoting positivity in an organisation as well as effecting different and creative solutions to a situation, team dynamic or business challenge.

Fun is Experienced As a Light-Hearted Expression of Self
In this study fun was experienced by participants as an immediate, spontaneous, light-hearted expression of self. However, our data suggests that fun in this call-centre was experienced predominantly in the context of good collegial relationships. In other words, fun experienced as self-expression, emerged within (and possibly contributed to) a context of mutual trust and support.

As discussed in the first section of the paper, fun at work has sometimes been characterised in practitioner literature as the opportunity for 'being yourself' at work through the expression of fun and individuality (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009), inferring a freedom that is not available in every work-place. Much has been written about the ways in which organisational cultures create norms for employees of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours and ways of conducting their work. In these accounts traditional rigid norms of behaviour are sometimes contrasted to values, norms and beliefs that promote creativity and innovation (Martins & Terblance, 2003). Some cultural commentators have argued that there is a growing desire amongst people in affluent countries to be free of conventional norms and expectations at work. They refer to a desire to attain happiness and self-actualisation in all aspects of life, including work. One argument is that *"adults are [now] encouraged to find and preserve the 'inner child', to give up adult reserve and treat life as continuous play and play as the important opportunity for free self-expression"* (Costea et al., 2005, p.148). These cultural theorists contend that we seek more fun at work than ever before, as a result of a growing desire to live aesthetically. We no longer view work primarily as a domain of service, but rather as a mechanism for self-actualisation (Costea et al., 2005; Warren & Fineman, 2007). Costea et al. (2005) argue that the shift to consumption cultures of the twenty first century involves *"new dimensions of citizenship which include both an 'entitlement to happiness' (through choice and consumption) and the 'duty to be happy' as consumers and as workers"* (p.147). They refer to an ethos of *"continuous happiness"* that is unique to our time and which has *"colonised the imagination and vocabularies of both work and non-work spheres"* (p.148).

On the one hand, the results of our study challenge the argument that for most people work is primarily a vehicle for freedom and self-actualisation. Our research has shown that while people may have their own best interests at heart in being in a job, they are also strongly conscious of, and grateful for, the social interactions they have with their colleagues. And they certainly both recognise and appreciate the role that collegial relationships have in the fun they have at work. Participants are therefore committed to maintaining these relationships. In addition, participants also seemed to appreciate the personal contribution that they make to the company. Many also saw the extrinsic value of their work, i.e., providing them and their families' livelihood, as very significant. They also recognised that one of the important reasons for making sure that they enjoyed their work was to avoid adverse stress at work impacting family life. Therefore, while fun and enjoyment were crucial to the employees that we interviewed, personal happiness and self-development were not their only priorities.

On the other hand, what cultural theorists have to say about the increasing desire for fun at work and self-actualisation, may well be true. All the people interviewed in this study indicated that they would not remain in their job if they were not enjoying some aspect of the work or environment. In other words, their loyalty to the company was contingent upon some degree of fun. We might conclude then that the emphasis on what is most important at work has shifted. While service, duty and extrinsic motivation may have held more weight twenty to thirty years ago, intrinsic motivation and fun may hold more weight today.

However, while it might be the case that we pursue 'fun' linked to self-fulfilment and self-actualisation more than our parents and grandparents, fun is still dependent on our sense of belonging somewhere. Workers still desire to work in an environment of mutual trust and support (Winter-Collins & McDaniel, 2000). This has led for instance to the increased popularity of mentoring programmes where experienced staff members offer support, encouragement and friendship to new staff members (Guhde, 2005). The balance may have shifted towards self-actualisation. Nonetheless for individuals, human resource practitioners

and managers who want to capitalise on the benefits of fun at work, a sound environment of trust and acceptance, where people feel valued, still needs to occur.

Fun is Experienced Within a Positive, Trusting Environment

In this call centre, fun appeared to emerge within an inclusive, trusting environment. It may also play a role in promoting this environment. Other research on fun at work backs the finding that fun can emerge amongst workers who like and trust each other (Strömberg & Karlsson, 2009; Wetlaufer, 1999). However, sometimes fun shared within a work group or amongst colleagues can poke fun at or be subversive towards management (Strömberg & Karlsson, 2009; Warren & Fineman, 2007). In the current research project management did not appear to habitually be the butt of humour. Rather, they appeared (on the whole) to be included within the sense of collegiality.

Research into friendships and collegial relationships at work provides a useful way to begin to contextualise fun as socialising in the work-place. There is little doubt that individuals who have friends in their workplace have an increased enjoyment of work and this finding has become quite robust in the relatively new field of workplace friendships. The empirical studies on friendship that exist generally highlight the positive outcomes of these relationships (e.g., Fleming, 2005; Morrison 2004; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995).

In our research, participants emphasised the general culture of collegiality in the call-centre, although some spoke about specific friendships. A paper by Morrison (2006) outlines and discusses the construct of *friendship opportunities* in the workplace (as distinct from the number or quality of actual friendships). Morrison's research found that any environment that provides the *opportunities* for people to make friends (whether they actually do or not) is likely to be more consistently positive for employees. In previous research by Morrison, respondents who reported having opportunities for friendship in their work environments also reported being more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to their organisation, being part of more cohesive workgroups and being less likely to be intending to leave their organisation (Morrison, 2004; Morrison, 2006).

Opportunities for friendship in organisations are related to factors such as the opportunity to communicate with and get to know co-workers, and the opportunity to collectively solve problems. Thus, any intervention aimed at increasing opportunities for friendships in the workplace could logically include changes that would allow employees to engage in these behaviours. In other words, both previous research (Morrison, 2004; Morrison, 2006) and our own findings suggest that factors within a workplace which could improve employees' perceptions of fun and enjoyment at work are those that would create perceptions of the *opportunities* for friendship or collegiality at work (i.e. a friendly/fun work environment) rather than the organisation attempting to encourage or "force" the formation of actual relationships.

To summarise, friendship opportunities appear one way of making work both more enjoyable and fun. In this current study, fun is made possible as a result of opportunities for collegiality and friendship. This does not support the assumption made in some fun at work literature, that fun merely involves superficial socialising. On the contrary, a genuine trusting environment, which allows for respectful collegial relationships and friendships, is necessary for fun to flourish.

Fun is Best Balanced with Other Rewards

Our data suggests that fun at work is very important to the participants in this research. However, there were other rewards that were equally valued and that helped to make fun at work possible. The finding that fun at work is not always valued for its own sake is consistent

with other research that highlights the complexity of promoting fun at work (Owler, Morrison & Plester, 2010). Other studies have shown that while staff often appreciate management attempts to promote fun at work, they are less appreciated if they are viewed as having been imposed on staff promoted at the expense of other aspects that would improve working conditions i.e. open communication, respect and essential facilities (Fleming, 2005; Warren & Fineman, 2007), or if linked to performance (Redman & Matthews, 2002).

CONCLUSION
This research has contributed to a richer understanding of the phenomenon of fun at work. We have identified four components of fun at work: (1) 'doing' something exciting (2) a light-hearted expression of self (3) positive collegial relationships (4) best balanced with other rewards. Our research has highlighted some of the benefits of fun at work and the conditions that make it possible. This information should be useful to Human Resource Managers in helping them decide whether they should promote fun at work.

In terms of benefits, our research suggests that the fun had in this workplace was appreciated by employees. Staff appreciated fun as a spontaneous break in their day, a stress relief and an opportunity to express themselves. They believed that it enhanced their day and gave them another reason to be at work. As a result, they believed that it made a difference to the company in terms of attrition, turnover, less sick leave and sales. However, it appeared that one of the preconditions of fun was a trusting and collegial work-place, with good management practice including open communication and managers who were readily available and listened to staff. Participants also considered other benefits as equally important including training and career opportunities, appreciation, good remuneration, discounts, being looked after (workstation assessments, on-site massage etc.) and flexibility to study. All these benefits contributed to making the call-centre a fun place to work.

It should be noted that this research is limited to a relatively small sample in a call-centre environment. Although we found that fun was both valued and quite clearly articulated by those interviewed, this was limited because management selected those who participated in the study. It could well be that they selected people based on their positive personality and interest in fun at work. The call-centre environment is also quite a unique work environment; being inherently social and employing primarily sales staff who enjoy talking to other people. Therefore, findings in this paper could be usefully tested with other groups of workers and in other (perhaps less inherently social) work environments and industries.

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