

Fun in the workplace and employee turnover: is less managed fun better?

Fun and
employee
turnover

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite previous research indicating that fun in the workplace has favorable outcomes, the effect of fun on turnover has not been definitively determined. The present study analyzed the direct effects on turnover of three dimensions of fun: fun activities, coworker socializing and manager support for fun, and the moderating influence of managed fun (e.g. whether fun is perceived as contrived).

Design/methodology/approach – Logistic regression was used to analyze the fun in the workplace-turnover relationship with a sample of 491 hourly associates from 141 stores of a US national retailer. Data on the fun were obtained through surveys that were paired with turnover data collected six months afterward from corporate records.

Findings – Fun activities were only found to be associated with a lower turnover when employees perceived fun as less managed. When employees perceived fun as more managed, fun activities had no effect on turnover. Coworker socializing was associated with a lower turnover when fun was perceived as less managed and higher turnover when fun was perceived as more managed.

Research limitations/implications – As the data were obtained from employees from one organization, further research would be valuable with additional samples to substantiate the generalizability of the results.

Practical implications – Given the challenge of turnover and the increasing prevalence of efforts to promote fun in the workplace, organizations should allow fun activities to be less managed (and thus more organic) to help reduce turnover.

Originality/value – While previous research has addressed managed/less managed fun in qualitative research, the present study represents the first investigation to examine this aspect of fun in the workplace from a quantitative perspective and to examine its relationship with employee turnover.

Keywords Fun in the workplace, Managed fun, Employee turnover, Retention, Retail employees

Paper type Research paper

Many notable employers believe fun in the workplace is a key ingredient to promote healthy and engaging workplaces. Southwest Airlines, one of the first companies to embrace fun, continues to believe in its importance today. At the heart of Southwest's values is for employees to "embrace a fun-LUVing attitude" and to "not take themselves too seriously" (Southwest Airlines, n.d.). One way Southwest promotes its fun culture is through a variety of creative events such as spirit parties, chili cook-offs and rallies. Zappos is famous for its relaxed and fun work culture, where one of its core values is to "Create Fun and A Little Weirdness" (Zappos, n.d.). This culture is realized through employee nerf ball wars, ugly sweater days, donut-eating contests, office parades and an open mic in the cafeteria (Ferrell *et al.*, 2013). Richard Branson of the Virgin Brand contends that "Fun is the most important – and underrated – ingredient in any successful venture" (Branson, 2015, p. 376). Branson proudly and unapologetically proclaims that *serious fun* is at the heart of the Virgin way of conducting business. A wide variety of other companies have also embraced fun, including



Acuity Insurance, Adobe Systems, Ben and Jerry's, Fast Enterprises, Hubspot and Lush Cosmetics, among others (Boss Magazine, n.d.).

While on the whole, previous research has validated practitioner beliefs that fun in the workplace has a favorable impact (Michel *et al.*, 2019), two issues remain to be examined. One such issue is the effect of fun on employee turnover. Only three studies to date have examined this relationship, and the results are equivocal (Tews *et al.*, 2013, 2014, 2021). A second issue is whether *less managed* fun is more beneficial than managed fun. Managed fun reflects whether fun is packaged, inauthentic, contrived and forced (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009; Plester *et al.*, 2015). Relative to quantitative research, qualitative research has viewed fun more critically largely because efforts to promote fun may not be organic, resulting in employee resistance to engage in such endeavors (e.g. Bolton and Houlihan, 2009; Plester *et al.*, 2015). One complaint echoing those expressed in qualitative studies is, "Manufactured corporate fun is the killer of souls" (Boss Magazine, n.d.).

For addressing the issues highlighted above, the goals of the present study are to validate the effects of fun in the workplace on turnover, and to examine whether this relationship is moderated by the extent to which fun is managed. Specifically, this research will examine the direct effects of three dimensions of fun on turnover – *fun activities*, *coworker socializing* and *manager support for fun* (Tews *et al.*, 2014). Fun activities relate to social and group activities intended to promote enjoyment among employees, coworker socializing refers to friendly social interactions among fellow employees, and manager support for fun reflects whether managers allow and encourage employees to have fun on the job day-to-day. While these dimensions also may be directly related to turnover, the relationship may be stronger when fun in the workplace is perceived as less managed. By examining the potential moderating impact of managed fun, this research seeks to validate the premise that fun in the workplace needs to be more naturally occurring and authentic to best reduce employee turnover.

The present study was conducted in the context of hourly associates in the retail industry, where employee turnover represents one of the greatest human resource management (HRM) challenges. Based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), annual turnover rates exceed 65%. Such turnover presents a host of challenges for employers, such as excessive replacement and training costs, productivity losses, reduced service quality and teamwork disruptions (Allen *et al.*, 2010). In part, such high turnover in retail environments can be attributed to part-time hours, low pay, limited benefits and routine work (Hudson, 2007; Bewley, 1995). While managers may have limited latitude in modifying HR practices such as these, they may have greater flexibility and opportunities to promote fun. In this regard, fun may be a potentially viable strategy to reduce turnover. By examining the fun-turnover relationship in a retail context, this study responds to recent calls to identify ways retailers can improve workplaces for employees and reduce turnover (Bolton, 2010).

Background research and hypotheses

Michel *et al.* (2019) characterized fun in the workplace as "aspects or features of the work environment that have the potential to promote positive emotional reactions such as enjoyment, amusement, and lighthearted pleasure" (p. 99). Michel *et al.* highlighted that different facets of the work environment are subsumed under the broad construct of fun in the workplace. The present study focuses on fun activities, manager support for fun and coworker socializing. Differentiating among fun activities, manager support for fun and coworker socializing has value since they have been found to exhibit different relationships with work outcomes, where manager support for fun and coworker socializing generally have greater, more favorable influences than fun activities (e.g. Tews *et al.*, 2014; Tews *et al.*, 2013). While related, manager support for fun and coworker socializing are not the same, manager support for fun relates

more generally to encouragement and freedom to have fun on the job, whereas, coworker socializing refers to employees being friendly with each other and may not be on the job.

In general, previous quantitative research has demonstrated that fun in the workplace leads to favorable outcomes. The most consistent evidence is that fun has a positive impact on employee attitudes. Specifically, in a retail context, [Karl and Peluchette \(2006\)](#) and [Chan and Mak \(2016\)](#) found that fun was positively related to job satisfaction. Additional studies have demonstrated that fun leads to increased job satisfaction ([Choi et al., 2013](#); [Karl et al., 2007, 2008](#); [Peluchette and Karl, 2005](#)), organizational commitment ([Tews et al., 2013](#)) and work engagement ([Tsauro et al., 2019](#)), as well as lower emotional exhaustion ([Tsauro et al., 2019](#)) and lower turnover intentions ([Karl et al., 2008](#)). Fun has also been found to have a positive impact on recruiting Millennials ([Tews et al., 2012](#)) and for increasing on-the-job informal learning ([Tews et al., 2017](#)). Furthermore, evidence has been presented that fun increases organizational citizenship behavior and job performance ([Choi et al., 2013](#); [Tews et al., 2013](#)). However, the relationship between fun and job performance has been mixed, as [Tews et al. \(2013\)](#) found that fun activities were positively related to job performance, but manager support for fun was negatively related. In a retail setting, [Sandell \(2015\)](#) found that an organization's climate of fun was positively related to store-level employee engagement and individual-directed organizational citizenship behavior, but not store performance.

Fun and employee turnover

Previous research has also examined the relationship between fun in the workplace and employee turnover, but this research has been relatively rare, and none have included retail employees in the sample. In one such study with a sample of restaurant servers, [Tews et al. \(2014\)](#) found that coworker socializing and manager support for fun both directly reduced turnover and indirectly reduced turnover through constituent (i.e., coworker) attachment ([Maertz and Griffeth, 2004](#)). [Tews et al.'s](#) study failed to demonstrate that fun activities directly affected turnover, but fun activities indirectly influenced turnover through constituent attachment. With a similar sample of restaurant servers that only focused on manager support for fun and fun activities, [Tews et al. \(2013\)](#) demonstrated that manager support for fun directly reduced turnover, but fun activities did not. Yet both fun activities and manager support for fun indirectly reduced turnover through increased affective organizational commitment. More recently, [Tews et al. \(2021\)](#), with a sample of catering servers, found that group-level manager support for fun and coworker socializing were significantly related to turnover, but not group-level fun activities. However, at the individual level, none of the dimensions of fun were significantly related to turnover. Given the relatively limited number of studies addressing the fun-employee turnover relationship, along with some mixed results, additional research is warranted to further validate the relationship between fun and turnover and to identify moderators that may strengthen or attenuate the relationship.

[Mitchell et al.'s \(2001\)](#) turnover and job embeddedness model provides a useful theoretical lens through which to examine the relationship between fun in the workplace and turnover. [Mitchell et al.](#) contend that job embeddedness, and therefore, lower turnover, is a function of *links*, *fit* and *sacrifice*. Links reflect the connections employees have with other individuals. When employees have greater and higher-quality connections, they are more likely to be attached to their places of employment. In turn, the fit is characterized as perceptions of one's capability and comfort with their environment and the organization. When there is greater fit, individuals are more apt to feel both professionally and personally aligned with their places of employment. Finally, sacrifice relates to perceived psychological or material benefits that would be given up should employees leave. The greater the cost of leaving, the lower the likelihood that employees would seek employment elsewhere.

From a *links* perspective, fun in the workplace may reduce turnover because it can lead to the development of better relationships and friendships (Tews *et al.*, 2014). Beyond the work of Mitchell *et al.* (2001), a number of scholars have argued that high-quality interpersonal relationships are a key factor to embed employees in organizations and insulate them from forces that might otherwise dislodge them (e.g. Maertz and Campion, 2004; Maertz and Griffeth, 2004; Mossholder *et al.*, 2005). This contention has also been validated by research examining the relationship between constituent attachment and turnover (e.g. Ellingson *et al.*, 2016; Tews *et al.*, 2014). Fun can facilitate interactions and bring employees in greater contact with each other, which is a necessary condition for the development of friendships. More importantly, fun allows individuals to interact with one another more informally and get to know each other beyond the traditional confines of job roles. Coworker socializing, by its very definition, relates to enhanced friendly communication and congeniality among peers. Thus, when there is greater coworker socializing, greater links are more likely to be forged. With respect to fun activities, these endeavors may provide an architecture for individuals to connect with each other on a more meaningful basis and provide an opportunity for employees who might not regularly interact to do so. Moreover, with respect to manager support for fun, this support could help foster better relationships because a more casual and informal management style can facilitate greater interactions among coworkers.

Turning to *fit*, fun in the workplace can serve as a means to socialize employees, and therefore, help learn the organization's culture and reinforce one's membership in the broader organizational context. Chao *et al.* (1994) articulated a variety of content dimensions of socialization; that is, specific domains that individuals must learn to be compatible and fit within an organization. These specific domains include people, history, language, politics, organization goals and values and performance proficiency. Because fun in the workplace involves social interactions among employees, fun endeavors provide channels for employees to communicate with one another about any of these domains and observe patterns of behavior, customs and language. Fun activities provide a vehicle for management to socialize employees in a larger group context and allow individuals to interact with others who might not otherwise do so. Moreover, manager support for fun and coworker socializing can help employees become well socialized because they are more informal and potentially more regular features of an employee's environment. Socialization enhances fit by exposing employees to the requirements for fit and increasing the likelihood employees meet those requirements. Thus, fun may be instrumental in promoting fit and reducing turnover.

Finally, fun in the workplace could increase *sacrifice* and reduce turnover because it is less substitutable across jobs relative to other terms and conditions of employment. Hourly retail jobs are similar with respect to job responsibilities, wages and benefits. Moreover, these jobs are relatively limited with respect to these terms and conditions of employment due to the inherent nature of part-time, hourly employment (Andersson *et al.*, 2005). Fun in the workplace is not a standard or legally mandated HR practice. In this respect, implementing fun is discretionary and could differentiate employers that might otherwise be perceived as similar. Fun may help to create a unique and favorable employer brand, such as that often associated with *Southwest Airlines*, *Pike Place Fish Market* and *Zappos* (Collinson, 2002; Karl *et al.*, 2005; Yerkes, 2007). It is relatively easy for retail employees to "job hop" because of the geographic clustering of retailers, the large number of retail establishments and the large number of vacancies to fill (Andersson *et al.*, 2005). Nonetheless, fun can potentially create a meaningful and valued work environment for employees, and thus, serve to reduce turnover.

H1a. Fun activities will be negatively related to employee turnover.

H1b. Coworker socializing will be negatively related to employee turnover.

H1c. Manager support for fun will be negatively related to employee turnover.

The moderating role of managed fun

A recurring theme in qualitative research is fun in the workplace resulting in adverse outcomes because frequently, it is *managed* rather than authentic. As noted in the introduction, managed fun is that which is contrived, official and packaged, which can be contrasted with fun that is authentic, organic and spontaneous (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009; Plester *et al.*, 2015). Fleming and Sturdy (2009) articulated that fun is not always welcomed among those whose dispositions are more reserved. Managed fun, therefore, could serve to alienate certain individuals. Managed fun could arise from the best of intentions yet be met with employee resistance and frustration. In this light, fun that is more managed may not be beneficial in reducing turnover.

Fun activities, coworker socializing, and manager support for fun could all differ in the degree to which they are managed. While activities are sometimes equated to managed fun (e.g. Plester *et al.*, 2015), fun activities may not necessarily be overly managed. Fun activities could certainly be artificial, contrived and forced. At the same time, they could also be down-to-earth, causal and voluntary. For example, requiring employees to dress in costume for a Christmas holiday party is substantively different from an impromptu happy hour on a Friday afternoon. Coworker socializing could also be more or less managed. For example, more managed coworker socializing occurs when managers require attendance at a happy hour or lunch and then coworkers do not have a choice with whom they are socializing. This stands in contrast to less managed coworker socializing when co-workers initiate being together and choose in what capacity, when and with whom. Manager support for fun could also differ in the extent to which it is perceived as managed. Managers could encourage fun with a superficial intensity, pressure employees to socialize, or insist that they share their favorite jokes during a pre-shift meeting. Managers could also be more organic and natural in their approach to supporting fun, such as by allowing employees to play around without intervening or providing pizza spontaneously for lunch to celebrate a special occasion.

Many aspects of the experience at work are managed (e.g. attendance and productivity), so the question arises why managed fun is potentially detrimental. In part, the answer resides in the notion that fun is largely about spontaneity, surprise and allowing employees to be their natural selves (Fineman, 2006; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). Plester and Hutchison (2016) discussed the trickiness of implementing fun, and they noted that packaged attempts to promote fun likely have adverse consequences because they run counter to notions of what fun actually is. Genuine fun is largely spontaneous with a liberating element (Plester, 2009), and employees are unlikely to perceive fun that is contrived and forced in this light.

The challenge with managed fun is that it may not necessarily be perceived as fun at all. In one regard, managed fun may backfire because the fun could be perceived as juvenile. Managed fun often includes relatively more extreme fun endeavors; *Wacky Fridays*, fancy dress days, laughter workshops, and calls to embrace one's inner clown are a few examples (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009). Fleming (2005) discussed the ways workplace cultures that attempt to create fun can ultimately undermine an individual's sense of self as a rational, capable and dignified adult. In another regard, managed fun may not be valued by employees because participation is required. Self-determination theory posits that individuals value experiences where they are afforded greater autonomy because individuals seek to be self-directed actors (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Because individuals seek greater autonomy, they resist efforts such as managed fun that constrain their choices and behavior. Moreover, because autonomy, or independence, is associated with adulthood in western culture (Arnett, 2000), efforts such as managed fun could be perceived as infantilizing or subjugating. Based on these arguments, it is hypothesized that the relationships between the three dimensions of fun and employee turnover will be weaker when fun in the workplace is perceived as more managed.

- H2a.* The negative relationship between fun activities and employee turnover will be weaker when fun in the workplace is perceived as more managed.

- H2b.* The negative relationship between coworker socializing and employee turnover will be weaker when fun in the workplace is perceived as more managed.
- H2c.* The negative relationship between manager support for fun and employee turnover will be weaker when fun in the workplace is perceived as more managed.

Method

Sample and procedure

The sample for this research includes 491 hourly associates from a US national retailer. The employees were drawn from 141 stores from two of the retailer's regional districts. The stores sampled for this study represent approximately half of the stores in the company overall. The sample was 94% female and 75% Caucasian. The average age was 42.31 (SD = 18.29) years old. The average organizational tenure at the beginning of the study was 2.86 (SD = 4.69) years. Data on fun in the workplace were obtained through paper-and-pencil surveys. Sixteen hundred employees were initially invited to participate in the study. The employees received a packet containing the survey itself, information about the study and an assurance of confidentiality. Employees completed the surveys during work time. Of the 1,600 surveys distributed, 525 were returned, yielding an initial participation rate of 33%. Of these, 31 participants were excluded due to missing information on one or more variables for an initial sample of 494. Six months following survey administration, turnover data were obtained from organizational records and then matched with the survey responses. At that time, an additional three were excluded from the study due to termination, resulting in the final sample of 491.

Measures

Fun activities. This scale is comprised of six activities based on [Tews et al.'s \(2014\)](#) measure, which drew on the work of [Ford et al. \(2003\)](#). 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 six activities included (1) competitions (e.g. productivity contests), (2) festivities during holidays and other special times, (3) parties for personal milestones (e.g. birthdays and retirements), (4) parties for work achievements, (5) teambuilding activities (e.g. company-sponsored athletic teams, bowling nights), and (6) other social events. The employees indicated how frequently each activity occurred with a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *all the time* ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Coworker socializing. Five items were used to measure coworker socializing based on [Tews et al.'s \(2014\)](#) measure. Sample items include: *My coworkers and I socialize at work*, and *My coworkers and I joke around with each other*. The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a five-point scale with anchors ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree* ($\alpha = 0.83$).

Manager support for fun. Six items were used to measure manager support for fun based on [Tews et al.'s \(2014\)](#) measure. Sample items include: *My managers try to make work fun*, and *My managers allow employees to have fun on the job*. The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a five-point scale with anchors ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree* ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Managed fun. Four items were developed specifically for this study to measure perceptions of managed fun because no measure currently existed in the literature. These items were created based on the discussions of managed fun in the qualitative literature (e.g. [Bolton and Houlihan, 2009](#); [Plester et al., 2015](#)). The four items were: *Fun in my workplace is too structured*, *Fun in my workplace is too planned*, *Fun in my workplace is too artificial*, and *Fun in my workplace is too forced*. The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with

each statement on a five-point scale with anchors ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree* ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were performed to validate the discriminant validity of the fun activities, manager support for fun, coworker socializing, and managed fun scales. A four-factor model in which the items loaded on their respective constructs was assessed using the *lavaan* package in *R* using the diagonally-weighted least squares estimator with robust standard errors (Li, 2016). This model indicated good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999) to the data ($\chi^2(183) = 742.79, p < 0.01, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05, CI_{95\%} RMSEA = [0.05, 0.06]$). The hypothesized four-factor model also provided a significantly better fit than all alternative three- and two-factor models and a single-factor model [1]. Table 1 presents the factor loadings of the scale items, where all items loaded 0.40 or higher on their respective constructs.

Because the data were collected using cross-sectional, self-report surveys, there is the potential for the existence of common method variance that could influence our analyses and results (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, we conducted a Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) in order to examine our data for the presence of common method variance. Although the single-factor test has been criticized (e.g. Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), recent simulation-based research has demonstrated that the test is reliable for detecting common method variance at levels that would lead to concerns about common method bias (Fuller *et al.*, 2016). The results of an unrotated exploratory factor analysis on our data uncovered

	Standardized factor loadings
<i>Fun activities</i>	
Item 1	0.79
Item 2	0.70
Item 3	0.55
Item 4	0.63
Item 5	0.48
Item 6	0.43
<i>Coworker socializing</i>	
Item 1	0.73
Item 2	0.57
Item 3	0.72
Item 4	0.77
Item 5	0.77
<i>Manager support for fun</i>	
Item 1	0.77
Item 2	0.83
Item 3	0.78
Item 4	0.85
Item 5	0.85
Item 6	0.80
<i>Managed fun</i>	
Item 1	0.63
Item 2	0.66
Item 3	0.86
Item 4	0.93

Note(s): ($\chi^2(183) = 742.79, p < 0.01, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05$)
($CI_{95\%} RMSEA = [0.05, 0.06]$)

Table 1.
Confirmatory factor
analysis item loadings

five factors, with the first factor accounting for only 29.44% of the variance, indicating that common method bias is not a substantial concern in our data (Fuller *et al.*, 2016).

Voluntary turnover. Voluntary turnover was coded dichotomously as 1 for leavers and 0 for stayers. For the final sample of 491 employees, 77 employees left and 414 stayed. The voluntary turnover rate for the study period was 16%.

Control variables. Six control variables were included in the analyses, which have been demonstrated in previous research to consistently impact turnover (e.g. Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Rubenstein *et al.*, 2018). These variables included: pre-study tenure, age and four facets of job satisfaction (benefits, coworkers, job responsibilities and pay). Pre-study tenure was measured in years employed with the organization at the beginning of the study period. The facets of job satisfaction were assessed with Nagy's (2002) single-item measures. The respondents rated each facet on a five-point scale with anchors ranging from (1) *not at all satisfying* to (5) *very satisfying*.

Analytic strategy

Mixed-effects logistic regression was used to assess the influence of the independent variables on voluntary turnover (glmer function from lme4 package in R; Bates *et al.*, 2015). A multilevel approach was employed because the employees were nested within stores. The independent variables were entered into the regression in three blocks, resulting in three models. Model 1 included the six control variables. Model 2 included the main effects of fun activities, manager support for fun, coworker socializing and managed fun. Model 3 included the addition of the fun activities $\times$ managed fun, manager support $\times$ managed fun and coworker socializing $\times$ managed fun interaction terms. The coefficients in Model 2 were used to examine the degree of support for Hypothesis 1a, 1b and 1c. The coefficients in Model 3 were used to examine the degree of support for Hypothesis 2a, 2b and 2c. Because the hypothesized relationships are directional, one-tailed tests of significance were employed (McClave and Sincich, 2017). In addition, in order to aid in the interpretation of the interaction effects, all variables were mean-centered prior to analysis (Dawson, 2014).

Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. Table 3 presents the results of logistic regression analyses predicting turnover. The conditional R^2 values (Nakagawa and Schielzeth, 2013) for Models 1, 2 and 3 are 0.36, 0.35 and 0.36, respectively. The main table entries in Table 3 are logistic coefficients, standard errors and exponentiated logistic coefficients, e^b . For e^b , values exceeding 1 indicate an increase in the odds of turnover, and values below 1 indicate a decrease in the odds of turnover.

Hypothesis 1a, which proposed that fun activities would be negatively related to employee turnover, was not supported. The logistic coefficient of -0.25 for fun activities in Model 2, although negative, was nonsignificant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 1b, which proposed that coworker socializing would be negatively related to employee turnover, was not supported. The logistic coefficient of -0.36 for coworker socializing in Model 2 was negative but nonsignificant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 1c, which proposed that manager support for fun would be negatively related to employee turnover, was not supported. The logistic coefficient of 0.26 for manager support for fun in Model 2 was positive and nonsignificant at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 2a, which proposed that the negative effect of fun activities on turnover would be reduced when fun in the workplace is more managed, was supported. The logistic coefficient of 0.46 for the fun activities $\times$ managed fun interaction term in Model 3 was significant at the 0.05 level. Holding constant the other variables in the model, a one-unit

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Voluntary turnover	0.16	0.36	—									
2. Pre-study tenure	2.86	4.69	−0.17**	—								
3. Age	42.31	18.29	−0.25**	0.45**	—							
4. Satisfaction – pay	2.67	1.11	0.06	−0.13**	−0.08*	—						
5. Satisfaction – benefits	2.83	1.03	0.05	−0.10*	−0.11**	0.59**	—					
6. Satisfaction – coworkers	4.10	0.77	0.07	−0.07	−0.11**	0.20**	0.19**	—				
7. Satisfaction – job responsibilities	3.87	0.86	−0.08*	0.05	0.14**	0.38**	0.38**	0.42**	—			
8. Fun activities	1.93	0.65	−0.05	0.03	−0.01	0.23**	0.22**	0.20**	0.19**	—		
9. Coworker socializing	3.65	0.71	0.01	−0.04	−0.20**	0.12**	0.16**	0.51**	0.22**	0.29**	—	
10. Manager support for fun	3.38	0.94	0.06	−0.08*	−0.17**	0.19**	0.38**	0.41**	0.36**	0.41**	0.52**	—
11. Managed fun	1.78	0.80	0.02	0.09*	0.01	−0.06	−0.11**	−0.20**	−0.15**	−0.04	−0.15**	−0.19**
									−0.14*			

Note(s): $n = 491$. Correlations with turnover are point-biserial. Significance levels reflect one-tailed tests. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics
and correlations
among study variables

Table 3.
Results from binary
logistic regression
analysis predicting
voluntary turnover

Predictors	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>b</i>	se	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i>	se	<i>e^b</i>	<i>b</i>	se	<i>e^b</i>
Intercept	−2.16**	0.22	0.11	−2.17**	0.22	0.11	−2.17**	0.22	0.11
Pre-study tenure	−0.02*	0.01	0.99	−0.01*	0.01	0.99	−0.01*	0.01	0.99
Age	−0.03**	0.01	0.97	−0.03**	0.01	0.97	−0.03**	0.01	0.97
Satisfaction – pay	0.16	0.16	1.18	0.21	0.17	1.23	0.19	0.16	1.20
Satisfaction – benefits	−0.00	0.17	1.00	−0.04	0.18	0.96	−0.00	0.18	1.00
Satisfaction – coworkers	0.31	0.20	1.36	0.44*	0.23	1.56	0.50*	0.23	1.65
Satisfaction – job responsibilities	−0.40*	0.19	0.67	−0.44*	0.20	0.65	−0.47*	0.20	0.63
Fun activities				−0.25	0.23	0.78	−0.27	0.23	0.77
Coworker socializing				−0.36	0.25	0.69	−0.42*	0.25	0.66
Manager support for fun				0.26	0.20	1.29	0.28	0.19	1.32
Managed fun				0.12	0.18	1.12	0.15	0.18	1.17
Fun activities <i>x</i> managed fun							0.46*	0.26	1.58
Manager support for fun <i>x</i> managed fun							−0.23	0.18	0.80
Coworker socializing <i>x</i> managed fun							0.51*	0.26	1.66
Random effects									
σ^2/τ_{00}		3.29/0.14	Store		3.29/0.17	Store		3.29/0.5	Store
ICC		0.04			0.05			0.02	
Conditional <i>R</i> ²		0.36			0.35			0.36	
Note(s): <i>n</i> = 491. Significance levels reflect one-tailed tests. * <i>p</i> < 0.05 ** <i>p</i> < 0.01									

increase in managed fun decreased the negative effect of fun activities on the turnover on average by a multiplicative factor of 1.58. As managed fun decreases, the *e^b* value associated with fun activities decreases. Figure 1 graphically presents this interaction. In Figure 1, the line representing more managed fun activities indicates a higher turnover. This line has a slight, positive slope; turnover remains essentially the same irrespective of the frequency of fun activities. The line representing less managed fun activities is steeper and negatively sloped; turnover is higher when there are fewer fun activities and less when there are more fun activities. Thus, Hypothesis 2a is supported.

Hypothesis 2b, which proposed that the negative effect of coworker socializing on turnover would be reduced when fun in the workplace is more managed, was supported. The logistic coefficient of 0.51 for the coworker socializing *x* managed fun interaction term in Model

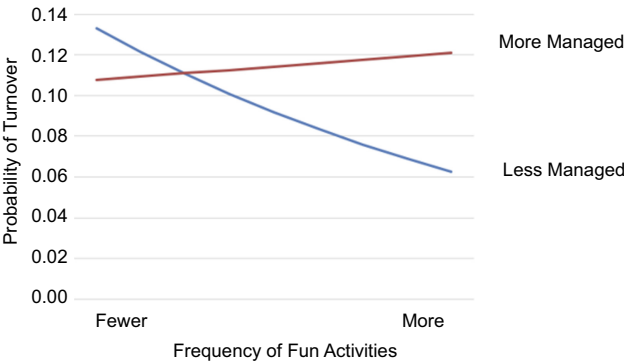


Figure 1.
Interaction between
fun activities and
managed fun
predicting voluntary
turnover

3 was significant at the 0.05 level. Holding constant the other variables in the model, a one-unit increase in managed fun decreased the negative effect of coworker socializing on the turnover on average by a multiplicative factor of 1.66. As managed fun decreases, the e^b value associated with coworker socializing decreases. Figure 2 graphically presents this interaction. The line representing more managed fun indicates higher turnover. This line has a very slight, negative slope; turnover remains essentially the same irrespective of the frequency of coworker socializing. The line representing less managed fun is more steeply negatively sloped; turnover is higher when coworker socializing is low and less when coworker socializing is high. Thus, Hypothesis 2b is supported.

Hypothesis 2c, which proposed that the negative effect of manager support for fun on turnover would be reduced when fun in the workplace is more managed, was not supported. The logistic coefficient of -0.23 for the manager support for fun $\times$ managed fun interaction term in Model 3 was nonsignificant at the 0.05 level.

Posthoc analysis

Given the significance of three of the control variables in Model 1, the logistic regressions were rerun without the control variables in a *posthoc* analysis. In these *posthoc* models, there were significant main effects, unlike the primary analysis, including the control variables. The logistic coefficients of -0.38 and -0.39 for fun activities and 0.34 and 0.35 for manager support for fun were significant at the 0.05 level in Models 1 and 2, respectively, although only fun activities decreased the odds of turnover as hypothesized. Coworking socializing had no significant effect, although it did in Model 3 of the primary analysis. Further, none of the managed fun interaction variables were significant in the *posthoc* analysis. As indicated, the estimated effects of fun on turnover differed with and without the control variables. Greater weight should be given to the results in the primary analysis because in those models, the influence of the control variables has been removed from the estimated effects of fun. Thus, in the primary analysis, the effects of fun can be thought of as “cleaner.”

Discussion

A steadily growing body of research has demonstrated that fun in the workplace has a favorable impact on a number of workplace outcomes. At the same time, fun research focused on predicting employee turnover has been relatively limited. By examining the relationship between fun and employee turnover in the context of retail employees, the present study not only contributes to the extant body of research on fun in the workplace but also to research on

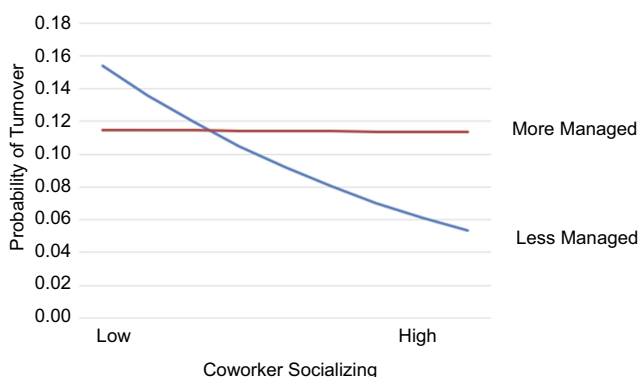


Figure 2. Interaction between coworker socializing and managed fun predicting voluntary turnover

turnover among retail employees. Whereas previous research found significant direct effects between some dimensions of fun in the workplace and turnover (Tews *et al.*, 2014; Tews *et al.*, 2013), in the present study, significant relationships were contingent on the moderating effects of managed fun. Employee turnover is a difficult criterion to predict for all sectors of the economy, and turnover scholars have argued that turnover models should be tailored to specific contexts (Holtom *et al.*, 2008). While fun may certainly be relevant in other employment contexts, the results from the present study and others (Tews *et al.*, 2013, 2014) highlight that fun in the workplace may be important in reducing turnover among employees in low-skill/low-pay jobs.

The novel theoretical contribution of the present study is examining perceptions of managed fun as a moderator in the workplace fun-turnover relationship. While prior quantitative studies have generally found that fun has a favorable impact on work outcomes (Michel *et al.*, 2019), qualitative research has viewed fun through a less favorable lens, given that efforts to promote fun may often be contrived and artificial (e.g. Bolton and Houlihan, 2009; Fleming, 2005; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009; Plester *et al.*, 2015; Plester and Hutchison, 2016). The present study found that fun activities less effectively reduce turnover when fun is perceived as more managed. In this regard, the results of this study are consistent with previous qualitative studies. Fun activities are the most controversial aspect of fun in the workplace in the literature, and the results herein highlight that fun activities only have an impact on reducing turnover when they are less planned, structured, contrived and formal. Put in another way, fun activities should be more naturally occurring and authentic in order to achieve the beneficial impact of reducing turnover. Previous quantitative research has failed to demonstrate a direct relationship between fun activities and turnover (Tews *et al.*, 2013, 2014), and the results herein highlight that focusing on whether fun is perceived as managed or not is an important variable to include when modelling the fun activities-turnover relationship.

Including perceptions of managed fun in the analysis of turnover had greater effects on the influence of coworker socializing than on fun activities. When interactions between the dimensions of fun and managed fun were included in the model, coworker socializing significantly affected turnover both when fun was perceived as managed and when it was not. In contrast to Model 2, the statistical significance of the main effect and the interaction effect for coworker socializing in Model 3 reinforces the relevance of perceptions of managed fun to empirical studies of fun in the workplace. Employers may have relatively little direct control over coworker socializing, but they are able to influence coworker socializing indirectly via such decisions as employee selection, employee scheduling and the physical structure of the workplace, for example. The fit of potential employees with their colleagues, as well as job-specific tasks, should be included in applicant evaluations for these low-skill, low-wage jobs. Perhaps scheduling groups of employees together would facilitate coworker socializing by increasing their time together even with variable schedules. Arranging physical workspaces so that employees are not isolated and can more readily get to know each other may also facilitate coworker socializing. The effects of two of the three dimensions of fun in the workplace on turnover were influenced by employee perceptions of managed fun. Furthermore, for both dimensions of fun, less managed fun had a more beneficial effect on turnover.

As discussed beforehand, only three studies heretofore have examined the relationship between fun in the workplace and turnover (Tews *et al.*, 2013, 2014, 2021). In this light, it is important to highlight where there is convergence across studies and where there is not. Most consistently, fun activities have *not* been found to directly impact turnover. However, the present study demonstrated a moderating effect with managed fun, and Tews *et al.* (2014) found that the relationship between fun activities and turnover was mediated through constituent (i.e., coworker) attachment. Thus, the impact of fun activities on turnover appears to be contingent upon the presence of other specific factors. The greatest inconsistencies

across studies reside in the relationships between turnover and coworker socializing and manager support for fun. In the present study, manager support for fun and coworker socializing had no direct effects on turnover, unlike in the previous studies. The older average age of the sample in the present study is one possible explanation for the nonsignificant results for coworker socializing and manager support for fun. It has often been argued that younger employees particularly value fun and value it more so than their older counterparts (e.g. [Choi et al., 2013](#); [Lamm and Meeks, 2009](#)). Given that the average age of the sample was 42 in the present study, compared to samples with average ages in the 20s in prior investigations, coworker socializing and manager support for fun may have been valued less, and thus, less predictive of turnover.

The key practical implication from this study is that fun in the workplace can be a viable means to reduce turnover and promote retention if judiciously employed. One size does not appear to fit all. A key challenge for organizations lies in not overly managing and orchestrating fun. To help ensure that fun best meets the employee needs and interests, organizations should involve employees in determining which types of activities to coordinate. In addition, management should consider spontaneous activities from time to time, such as impromptu gatherings or outings. Furthermore, when fun emerges organically from employees themselves, management should consider not interfering, so long as fun is not having a detrimental impact on others. Managers should consider the characteristics of employees when encouraging informal fun in the workplace. When organizations conduct employee attitude surveys, they could assess how employees perceive fun in the workplace to determine what is working well, what could be improved, and means to introduce or enhance fun.

The results from the present study should be interpreted in the context of its limitations. One limitation is that the data were obtained from employees of one large retail organization. Future research on fun in the workplace and turnover would thus be valuable with other groups of employees to help validate the generalizability of the results herein. In particular, fun and turnover research would be insightful with nonhourly employees in higher level positions. With respect to the measurement of fun activities, a second limitation is that the participants reported the frequency with which the activities occurred, rather than the frequency of their participation in the activities. Although the frequency of occurrence and frequency of participation are likely positively related, further research could assess and examine the relationship of both with turnover. A further limitation is that the measures of fun in the workplace were obtained through surveys, while common practice in organizational research, experimental manipulations of fun would provide a more definitive test of cause-and-effect relationships. In this respect, a useful extension of the current study would be to conduct field experiments where different types of fun in the workplace are experimentally manipulated.

In addition to addressing the limitations above, other opportunities for further research are worth pursuing. One opportunity for future research is examining mediators in the managed fun-turnover relationship. Given that managed fun was found to reduce the impact of fun activities in reducing turnover, research would be valuable that explores why fun activities that are more managed are less effective in reducing turnover. For example, are they are less successful because of an immediate impact on individuals (e.g. they are less enjoyable) or because of a broader impact (e.g. they are less instrumental in helping foster workplace friendship)? A related opportunity is examining specific features of fun activities that promote employee engagement in these endeavors. Research is needed that examines contextual factors and their relationship with employee engagement in fun activities, such as location (on-site vs off-site), timing (during regular work hours or beyond), those in attendance (managers and employees or just employees), and whether participation is mandatory or voluntary. Interestingly, recent research uncovered an increased incidence of unwanted sexual attention as a potential consequence of mandatory fun activities ([Tews et al., 2019](#)), highlighting the need to consider such contexts. A final recommendation for future inquiry is

examining how fun impacts turnover for employees at different stages of employment. It is possible that fun may be more important for newcomers as a means of initially socializing them into the organization and helping them develop new workplace friendships, but less important for more experienced employees who are more established.

Retaining employees is one of the more significant HRM challenges for organizations that employ individuals in low-skill/low-pay work. The present study has demonstrated that fun in the workplace may be instrumental in reducing turnover in such contexts and has provided insights into how fun can achieve maximum benefit. Given the significant relationships between fun and turnover, fun should play a key part in the overall HR system. It is hoped that the results from the present study will stimulate additional research on fun and employee turnover to determine how to better to foster more engaging and healthier workplaces.

Note

1. Model comparison testing results are available upon request.

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