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Does Fun Promote Learning?**The Relationship between Fun in the Workplace and Informal Learning**

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Abstract

Although research has demonstrated that workplace fun has important benefits, we have an incomplete understanding of the role of fun in the learning domain, especially informal learning. To address this need, the present study examined the influence of fun activities and manager support for fun on informal learning among 206 managers. Fun activities were significantly related to overall informal learning, but manager support for fun was not. Examination of the dimensions of informal learning found that manager support for fun was significantly related to learning from oneself, while fun activities were significantly related to learning from others and learning from non-interpersonal sources. Furthermore, a negative interaction between core-self evaluations and fun activities in predicting learning from oneself was found, suggesting that fun may not be beneficial for all individuals. The key practical implication is that organizations should consider fun as a viable strategy to promote informal learning beyond traditional learning supports. At the same time, organizations should consider the personality of their learners to ensure fun has its intended impact.

Key words: fun in the workplace; core self-evaluations; informal learning

Does Fun Promote Learning?

The Relationship between Fun in the Workplace and Informal Learning

Much has been written about fun in the workplace as an important means to engage employees and foster productive work cultures. In their book *Built to Last*, Collins and Porras (1997) found that two great companies, Marriott and Walt Disney World, have strong corporate cultures that emphasize fun. Marriott's core ideology statement is "work hard, yet keep it fun" (p. 89), and Walt Disney World's annual report contained words such as "fun, excitement, and joy" (p. 129). Moreover, a number of Fortune's *100 Best Companies to Work For*, such as The Container Store, Google, SAS, Starbucks, Wegmans, and Zappos, promote fun to enhance their workplaces (Collinson, 2002; Karl, Peluchette, Hall, & Harland, 2005).

A growing body of research has shown that fun in the workplace has important consequences. For example, Karl and colleagues illustrated that fun is significantly related to job satisfaction (Karl & Peluchette, 2006; Peluchette & Karl, 2005), emotional exhaustion (Karl, Peluchette, & Harland 2007), and turnover intentions (Karl, Peluchette, & Hall, 2008). Furthermore, Tews and colleagues found that fun is related to applicant attraction (Tews, Michel, & Bartlett, 2012), job embeddedness (Tews, Michel, Xu, & Drost, 2015), job performance (Tews, Michel, & Stafford, 2013), and employee retention (Tews, Michel, & Allen, 2014). In the learning domain, Tews, Jackson, Ramsay, and Michel (2015) found that fun delivery of instruction was positively related to learner engagement.

The present study extends research on fun in the workplace by examining the impact of fun on informal learning. Informal learning typically occurs outside of the formal classroom, is not highly structured, is learner-initiated and controlled, and involves a conscious intent to engage in independent actions and interactions (Marsick, Volpe, & Watkins, 1999; Watkins &

Marsick, 1990). Informal learning encompasses a variety of behavior to learn new knowledge and skills, such as self-reflection, experimenting with new ways of performing work, interacting with others, and reading job relevant material (Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013). Such learning is particularly important to help individuals acquire new knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis in today's dynamic and competitive business environment. Because informal learning is largely volitional and under an individual's control, it is important to determine which features of the work environment lead to informal learning. Toward this end, research has demonstrated that a number of workplace characteristics facilitate informal learning, such as management's commitment to learning, a learning culture, access to resources, and positive work relationships (Ellinger, 2005; Berg & Chyung, 2008; Doornbos, Simons, & Denessen, 2008; Kyndt, Dochy, & Nijs, 2009). Notwithstanding these findings, much is yet to be learned.

The fundamental premise of this research is that fun is a key antecedent of informal learning. Given that fun may be considered recreational and non-task oriented, one may not necessarily make the link between fun and instrumental benefits, such as informal learning. As will be discussed later, several arguments can be made to support the relationship between fun and informal learning, drawing on Kahn's (1990) theory of psychological engagement. Examining the fun-informal learning relationship expands the nomological network of informal learning and provides a finer-grained analysis of how context contributes to informal learning.

Specifically, this research will examine *fun activities* along with *manager support for fun* as antecedents of informal learning. In addition, this study will assess the extent to which *core self-evaluations* (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997) moderates the fun-informal learning relationship. Not all individuals may be equally receptive to fun, and individuals with greater core self-evaluations might be more receptive to a fun workplace, which in turn enhances their

motivation to pursue beneficial opportunities, such as informal learning (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012). Core self-evaluations is a high-order construct that encompasses broad evaluative traits, including self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control (Judge et al., 1997). Furthermore, this study will examine the influence of fun on informal learning above and beyond manager support for learning, a feature of the work environment that has consistently been demonstrated to be important in training contexts (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Tracey, Tannebaum, & Kavanaugh, 1995).

Theoretical Background and Study Hypotheses

The present study focuses on fun features of the work environment, which Fluegge (2008) defines as “any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of a playful or humorous nature” (p. 15). This research focuses on two characteristics of the workplace that fall under the fun umbrella: *fun activities* and *manager support for fun*. Fun activities encompass a range of group and social endeavors promoted by a company to enhance employee enjoyment and well-being, such as social outings with coworkers, team building events, and celebrations of milestones and achievements (Ford, McLaughlin, & Newstrom, 2003; Karl et al., 2005). In turn, manager support for fun is characterized as the degree to which individuals’ supervisors permit and encourage them to have fun on the job (Tews et al., 2014). Fun activities and manager support for fun are similar yet distinct. Both are designed to enhance employee enjoyment, create better working relationships, and promote engagement and organizational commitment (Tews et al., 2014). However, fun activities are more discrete experiences with a defined beginning and end; whereas manager support for fun is more pervasive and continuous. Not only are both dimensions of fun conceptually distinct, but previous research has demonstrated that they exhibited different relationships with employee outcomes (e.g., Tews et al., 2013, 2014).

The overarching framework to support these relationships is Kahn's theory of psychological engagement. In his seminal work, Kahn (1990) describes psychological engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 964). Kahn proposes three requisite psychological conditions to engage individuals in any given task: *safety*, *availability*, and *meaningfulness*. Safety relates to the psychology security to express one's self without negative repercussions. Availability relates to the possession of psychological and physical resources to devote toward task endeavors. Meaningfulness relates to the importance of the endeavor and the perceived return for one's investment in effort. Noe, Tews, and McConnell Dachner (2010) drew on Kahn's work to describe the relevance of the conditions of engagement for learning. Safety is important as it allows people to make mistakes inherent in acquiring expertise. Availability provides energy to devote to learning, a process that requires sustained attention. Meaningfulness instills a belief that one's effort toward learning new knowledge and skills will yield benefit.

Safety is important for informal learning because inherent in learning is the risk of making mistakes and appearing incompetent. To a degree, fun fosters open communication and camaraderie. When fun is present, individuals may be less concerned with protecting their images and be more open to exploration and making mistakes. Further, fun promotes positive emotions, which may facilitate better relationships and reduce anxiety for learning. Similarly, fun helps build better relationships by putting employees in greater and more frequent contact with one another, often in a non-task context. Furthermore, fun likely creates an atmosphere that encourages friendly interactions without fear of negative repercussions. Because informal learning involves asking questions and seeking expertise, individuals are more likely to seek out

others with whom they have good relationships. Learning involves a degree of vulnerability, and individuals will likely seek to learn from those who will not judge them negatively.

Availability is needed for informal learning because informal learning requires time and attention as with any performance demand. Informal learning may be conceptualized as a form of extra-role behavior. As such, individuals may not engage in informal learning when confronted with multiple, time-intensive performance demands. The prevalence of such demands is often the case for employees today who continually need to do more with less. Informal learning is largely discretionary behavior under an individual's control, and given the demands of today's workplace, psychological availability is needed to facilitate informal learning. It could be argued that fun detracts from informal learning because it diverts from other responsibilities. However, fun has the potential to increase positive emotions, which creates greater energy and increases a person's optimism and resiliency needed to engage in other endeavors such as informal learning (Fredrickson, 2001). Furthermore, a more relaxed business attitude afforded by fun may signal to individuals that they may direct their energy and resources away from other responsibilities toward informal learning.

Lastly, fun may help individuals to engage in informal learning because fun may increase the meaningfulness of informal learning. Individuals are not always intrinsically motivated to learn, but fun could increase individuals' perception of the value of informal learning through its influence on positive affect and creativity. Employees likely experience enjoyment from the "play" involved in fun. These feelings of enjoyment foster creativity by fueling brain development (Panksepp, 1998) and prompting exploration, which help create knowledge and intellectual complexity (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008). By stimulating creativity, fun could promote informal learning to help individuals flesh out ideas and solve work-related problems.

That is, once individuals begin thinking creatively about work related issues and problem solving, they will then engage in informal learning. In addition, by promoting overall attachment to the organization, fun could promote informal learning because one may seek to engage in proactive behavior, such as informal learning, for its betterment. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a: Fun activities will be positively related to informal learning.

Hypothesis 1b: Manager support for fun will be positively related to informal learning.

While both dimensions of fun are hypothesized to have a positive impact on informal learning, manager support for fun is thought to have a stronger influence. Tews et al. (2013, 2014) found that manager support for fun was significantly related to employee retention while fun activities were not, suggesting that the influence of manager support for fun is more generalizable. Manager support for fun may be more important because it contributes to a climate that permits an ongoing experience of fun. Fun activities are more discrete experiences with a more defined duration, and their benefit may be less enduring. Researchers have noted that organizations should not solely focus on fun activities and lose sight of organic and informal fun (Redman & Mathews, 2002; Stromberg & Karlsson, 2009). We believe that manager support for fun will exhibit a stronger effect with informal learning because managers have more frequent opportunities to impact the quality of individuals' experiences on the job.

Hypothesis 2: Manager support for fun will exhibit a stronger positive relationship with informal learning than fun activities.

Finally, this study will address whether the relationship between fun and informal learning is moderated by core self-evaluations. Core self-evaluations is a broad personality construct that includes self-esteem, or one's belief of their overall value or self-worth; generalized self-efficacy or an individual's beliefs that he or she can be successful in any task

and performance context; emotional stability or one's tendency to be relaxed, secure, and worry free; and locus of control or one's beliefs that events are caused by their own rather than others' behavior (Judge et al., 1997; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). Research has demonstrated that those higher in core self-evaluations are involved in more formal and informal learner opportunities (Kim, Oh, Chiaburu, & Brown, 2012; Stanhope, Pond, & Surface, 2013; Tews, Noe, & Scheurer, & Michel, 2016).

Not all individuals are necessarily open to fun and, in fact, may be resistant to it (Fleming, 2005; Fleming & Sturdy, 2009), suggesting the need to examine moderators when examining the potential impact of fun. Core self-evaluations is thought to strengthen the relationship between fun and informal learning because individuals higher in core self-evaluations might be more receptive to fun. Harris, Harvey, and Kacmar (2009) demonstrated that core self-evaluations reduced the negative influence of social stressors on job satisfaction and turnover intentions, suggesting that core self-evaluations helps one to cope with negative situations. Because individuals with greater core self-evaluations are more adept at responding to stress, they may view fun as less distracting. They also are less apt to feel overwhelmed and better able undertake additional endeavors in stride. Because individuals with greater core self-evaluations are more positive and view their jobs in a favorable light (Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005; Judge & Hurst, 2008), they may be more amenable to fun. As such, they benefit more from fun to engage in informal learning.

Hypothesis 3a: Core self-evaluations will strengthen the positive relationship between fun activities and informal learning.

Hypothesis 3b: Core self-evaluations will strengthen the positive relationship between manager support for fun and informal learning.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study include 206 managers from an organization that owns and manages approximately 80 casual dining restaurants throughout the U.S. The managers work in teams of three to four to manage the day-to-day operations of their restaurants with responsibilities including guest relations, staff management, adherence to health and safety standards, budgeting and forecasting, and meeting financial goals. In this organization, managers have the opportunity to experience fun because “fun at work” is one the organization’s core values and because managers have a large amount of discretion in how they perform. These managers work in decentralized restaurants with limited opportunities to attend formal classroom training, and thus, informal learning is particularly germane to learn new knowledge and skills. The participants were 87% Caucasian and 72% male. Furthermore, on average they were 42.26 years old ($SD = 10.13$) and employed by the organization 9.44 years ($SD = 5.84$) at the beginning of the study.

This study employed a survey research design with data collected in two waves to counter common method bias. The data were collected through an online assessment as a part of the organization’s ongoing management attitude survey efforts, administered by members of the research team. The managers’ participation in the study was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured. During wave one, data were collected on the three focal independent variables (i.e., fun activities, manager support for fun, and core self-evaluations) and four control variables (age, gender, tenure, and manager support for learning). Approximately six months afterwards, wave two data were collected on informal learning. Two hundred forty-eight employees provided data during wave one, and of these individuals, 206 provided data during wave two. The managers’

responses from the two data collection periods were linked by a unique identifier. Once the data were merged, any personally identifying information from the dataset was removed. There were no statistically significant differences in the demographic characteristics of the final group of participants ($n = 206$) and those who did not participate in wave two ($n = 42$). The managers who participated in the study represent approximately two-thirds of the managers in the organization.

Measures

Fun activities. Tews et al.'s (2014) five-item measure was used to measure fun activities. This measure directed respondents to indicate how frequently different activities occur in their workplaces. Specifically, the five activities included: social events, team building activities, competitions, public celebrations of work achievements, and recognition of personal milestones. Examples of each type of activity were also provided for the respondents. A five-point scale was used with anchors of 1 = *never* and 5 = *all the time*. The internal consistency reliability estimate for the measure was .77. It should be noted that in the present study a particular fun activity could have been designed and implemented by a study participant. Even in this case, however, the respondent was still likely involved in the activity (e.g., an employee softball game or company party).

Manager support for fun. Four items were used to measure manager support for fun (Tews et al., 2014). The respondents were instructed to answer these questions regarding their boss. Sample items included: *My boss encourages employees to have fun on the job* and *My boss jokes around with employees*. The scale items were accompanied by a five-point scale with anchors of 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency reliability estimate for the measure was .94.

Core self-evaluations. Judge, Erez, Bono and Thoresen's (2003) scale was used to assess core self-evaluations. This 12-item measure includes items such as *Most of the time, I am optimistic and hopeful* and *I'm generally in a good mood*. The scale items were accompanied by a five-point scale with anchors of 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency reliability estimate was .92.

Informal learning. For this study, we adopt Noe et al.'s (2013) conceptualization and measure of informal learning. Noe et al. propose that informal learning includes cognition and behaviors that fall into three categories. The first category is learning from oneself, which includes reflecting on how to improve one's performance and experimenting with new ways of performing ones' job responsibilities. The second category is learning from others, such as peers and supervisors, to obtain performance feedback, discuss new ideas, and learn new technologies. Finally, the third category is learning from non-interpersonal sources, whereby the individual acquires new knowledge and skills by searching and reading published material, either in-print or online. Each of the dimensions of informal learning was measured with three items. The scale included items such as *reflecting on how to improve performance* for learning from oneself, *interacting with supervisors to learn new knowledge and skills* for learning from others, and *searching online for job relevant information to learn new knowledge and skills* for learning from non-interpersonal sources. Using a five-point scale with anchors ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *all the time*, the respondents indicated how often they engaged in the behaviors during a typical week over the preceding three-month period. The internal consistency reliability estimate was .84 for the overall measure, .80 for learning from oneself, .86 for learning from others, and .84 for learning from non-interpersonal sources.

Regarding level of analysis, the two fun constructs and manager support for learning were treated at the individual level of analysis as opposed to a higher level (e.g., group). From a theoretical perspective, treating these variables as individual-level constructs was appropriate as the participants did not necessarily work the same days of the week and shifts, and they likely had different working relationships with their superiors. As such, there should be variability in the level of experienced fun and training support from participant to participant.

Control variables. We controlled for participants' age, gender, tenure, and manager support for learning because of their relationship with informal learning. Age has been shown to be negatively related to motivation to learn and willingness to participate in learning and development activities (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Maurer, 2001; Van Vianen, Beatty, & De Pater, 2011). Gender was controlled for to account for possible differences in male and female's learning styles (Severiens & Ten Dam, 1994). Also, research suggests that women may have more difficulty than men finding supportive people to talk to and developing social networks at work (Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994), which is related to the learning from others dimension of informal learning. Tenure was controlled for to ensure that length of service did not influence the results. Because we were interested in the relationship between managerial support for fun on informal learning, we controlled for managerial support for learning, a related construct that has found to be positively related to informal learning (Lohman, 2005). Three items from the developing employee skills dimension of Yukl's *Managerial Practices Survey* (2012) were used to assess manager support for learning. A sample item is: *My boss encourages me to take advantage of opportunities to develop new skills*. The scale items were accompanied by a five-point scale with anchors of 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. The internal consistency reliability estimate was .95.

Discriminant Validity

In order to determine the discriminant validity of the study's variables, two different confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were computed using a maximum likelihood solution in *Mplus6* (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). In the first CFA, we assessed the discriminant validity of the independent variable scales (i.e., the two fun scales, manager support for learning, and core self-evaluations) by loading the items onto their respective constructs. Overall, despite a statistically significant Chi-square statistic [$\chi^2(243, n = 206) = 449.92, p < .01$], the individual fit statistics provided support for four distinct factors CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .06 (90% confidence interval ranging from .06 to .07), and SRMR = .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, good overall model fit was supported because the Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio was less than 2.0 (Byrne, 1989). To further establish discriminant validity, pair-wise Chi square difference tests, comparing the fit of each two-factor pair to a general factor model for each pair of latent variables, were conducted (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). For each pair-wise comparison, the individual fit indices and Chi-square difference tests indicated that the two-factor models possessed significantly better model fit. This process helped to ensure that models fit the data better when items load onto their respective latent constructs than when all items load onto a general Harmon factor for every possible pair of factors.

A second CFA was performed to examine discriminant validity of the three informal learning sub-dimensions. Despite a statistically significant Chi-square statistic [$\chi^2(22, n = 206) = 46.41, p < .01$], the three-factor model fit the data generally well [CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .07 (90% confidence interval ranging from .04 to .10), SRMR = .04], with a Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio of less than 2.0. As with the first CFA, comparing the pair-wise Chi square difference tests between a two-factor model (e.g., learning from oneself and learning

from others as separate factors) and a general factor model provided support for the discriminant validity of the informal learning dimensions. Based on these results, we focused on the three sub-dimensions of informal learning in addition to informal learning as an overall construct.

Analytic Strategy

Since participants were nested in restaurants, we tested the hypothesized relationships using random coefficient modeling (RCM), so that we could control for non-independence by separating the total variance into its within-and between-group components (Bliese & Hanges, 2004). The null model for overall informal learning had an ICC(1) of .17, $F_{(81, 124)} = 3.49, p < .01$, signifying that 17% of the total variance in overall informal learning could be explained by restaurant. The ICC(1) for learning from self was .02, $F_{(81, 124)} = 3.82, p < .01$; the ICC(1) for learning from others was .11, $F_{(81, 124)} = 3.50, p < .01$; and the ICC(1) for learning from non-interpersonal sources was .14, $F_{(81, 124)} = 3.13, p < .01$ indicating that 2%, 11%, and 14% of the total variance in the different dimensions of informal learning respectively, was explained by restaurant. In all, these results suggest that RCM is appropriate for testing the hypothesized relationships. As such, we tested the hypotheses with the nonlinear and linear mixed effects (NLME) package for R and S-Plus (Pinheiro & Bates, 2000).

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics, correlations, and partial correlations (controlling for restaurant location) among the study variables. Table 2 displays the direct and interaction effects for overall informal learning. The direct effects explained 4% of the variance in overall informal learning; whereas the direct effects and interaction effects explained 5% of the variance in overall informal learning.¹ Table 3 presents the direct and interaction effects for sub-dimensions of informal learning. The direct effects explained 18% of the variance in

¹ McFadden's Pseudo R^2 was calculated to estimate the percentage of variance explained.

learning from oneself, 10% of the variance in learning from others, and 2% of the variance in learning from non-interpersonal sources. The combined direct and interaction effects explained 21% of the variance in learning from oneself, 9% of the variance in learning from others, and 3% of the variance in learning from non-interpersonal sources.

Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here

Hypothesis 1a, which proposed that fun activities would be positively related to informal learning, was partially supported. Fun activities were significantly related to overall informal learning ($b = .17, p < .05$), learning from others ($b = .22, p < .01$), and learning from non-interpersonal sources ($b = .20, p < .05$). With respect to learning from oneself, there was no significant direct effect ($b = .08, p > .05$).

Hypothesis 1b, which proposed that manager support for fun would be positively related to informal learning, was partially supported. Manager support for fun was significantly related to learning from oneself ($b = .17, p < .05$). However, manager support for fun was not significantly related to overall informal learning ($b = .09, p > .05$), learning from others ($b = .09, p > .05$), and learning from non-interpersonal sources ($b = .01, p > .05$).

Hypothesis 2, which proposed that manager support for fun would have a stronger relationship with informal learning than fun activities, was only supported with respect to learning from oneself. The manager support for fun coefficient was significant ($b = .17, p < .05$), but the fun activities coefficient was not ($b = .08, p > .05$), providing support for this hypothesis. Fun activities were found to exhibit a stronger relationship with overall informal learning,

learning from others, and learning from non-interpersonal sources because the fun activities coefficients were positive and significant in comparison to the non-significant manager support for fun coefficients.

Hypothesis 3a proposed that core self-evaluations would moderate the relationship between fun activities and informal learning, and *Hypothesis 3b* proposed that core self-evaluations would moderate the relationship between manager support for fun and informal learning. Neither hypothesis was supported. The core self-evaluations x fun activities interaction term was non-significant for overall informal learning ($b = -.14, p > .05$), learning from others ($b = -.12, p > .05$), and learning from non-interpersonal sources ($b = .04, p > .05$). However, there was a negative and significant core self-evaluations x fun activities interaction term for learning from oneself ($b = -.32, p < .01$). The core self-evaluations x manager support for fun interaction term was non-significant for overall informal learning ($b = -.14, p > .05$), learning from oneself ($b = .06, p > .05$), learning from others ($b = .01, p > .05$), and learning from non-interpersonal sources ($b = -.21, p > .05$). Figure 1 provides a plot for the interaction between core self-evaluations and fun activities on learning from oneself. The simple slope analysis showed that the region of significance for the relationship between fun activities and learning from oneself was more positive for employees with low ($.31, t = 2.67, p < .01$) rather than high ($-.07, t = -.65, p > .10$) core self-evaluations.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Discussion

Many organizations have created fun workplaces to promote employee wellbeing, engagement, and retention. A growing body of research has validated that fun has a favorable benefit for individuals and organizations. Building on Kahn's (1990) theory of work engagement, this study has enhanced our understanding of the role of fun in the context of informal learning. Providing evidence for the fun-informal learning relationship has further validated the generalizability of the positive impact of fun, and the findings from this study may help counter some of the voiced criticism regarding workplace fun. The results from this investigation signal that scholars and practitioners should consider factors beyond traditional learning support (e.g., manager support for learning) to enhance informal learning. When there is "all work and no play," individuals are less likely to direct their efforts toward informal learning, which may ultimately have a negative impact on performance and an organization's ability to remain competitive.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is that fun has a significant impact on informal learning. All the same, not all fun is equal, and researchers should not necessarily focus on fun as a unidimensional construct. We found that the two dimensions of fun exhibited different relationships with overall informal learning and with each of the three informal learning sub-dimensions. The significant relationships for fun activities relative to manager support for fun are noteworthy given that the impact of manager support for fun has been shown to be more generalizable in previous studies (e.g., Tews et al., 2013, 2014). However, manager support for fun was found to have a significant influence on learning from oneself, the only informal learning dimension not affected by fun activities. This pattern of results suggests that different

aspects of fun operate in different ways and that different aspects of informal learning may have different antecedents. Researchers should continue to examine how different aspects of fun influence different outcomes of interest.

The results also emphasize that value is to be gained by researching different dimensions of informal learning, rather than only focusing on informal learning as a single construct. Examining relationships between each dimension of informal learning and fun activities and manager support for fun provides important insights into how fun might operate to enhance learning. The significant relationship between fun activities and learning from others may be attributed to fun activities putting employees in more frequent contact with others in a non-task context. When employees are afforded opportunities to socialize with one another, higher quality relationships are more likely to develop, which can open the door for the exchange of ideas. A likely explanation for the relationship between fun activities and learning from non-interpersonal sources is that fun activities may put employees in new and novel situations, which likely stimulates creativity and analyzing problems from different perspectives. Employees may then be motivated to seek out new information through such avenues as trade journals and the internet to further expand upon their knowledge and flesh out new ideas. The positive relationship between manager support for fun and learning from oneself suggests that employees need managers to adopt a less rigid business attitude to motivate experimentation and self-reflection. Perhaps, sometimes the best support that management can give employees to encourage learning from experimentation and self-reflection is remaining in the background and allowing employees to be themselves, rather than directly providing aid and assistance.

The findings also enhance our understanding of how core self-evaluations interact with contextual factors to influence informal learning. In previous research, Tews et al. (2016)

assessed the relationships of work-family conflict and core self-evaluations with informal learning. Interestingly, managers higher in core self-evaluations engaged in less informal learning as work-family conflict increased. Similar to their results, but contrary to our hypothesis, we found a negative interaction between core self-evaluations and fun activities in predicting learning from oneself. This finding highlights that individuals with greater core self-evaluations may be less likely to engage in learning from oneself when there is a greater frequency of fun activities. One possible explanation for the negative interaction found in the present study is that individuals higher in core self-evaluations value fun more than informal learning and direct more of their attention toward fun. Another possible explanation is that individuals with greater core self-evaluations may have less need to engage in learning from oneself because they are higher performers. Higher performers may have less need to engage in learning from oneself and are free to be involved in fun activities. Based on this argument, the negative interaction between core self-evaluations and fun activities may be attributed to less need for performance improvement and, therefore, less need to learn from oneself. When considered along with Tews et al. (2016), the results from the present study signal that additional research should examine interactions between core self-evaluations and workplace situational factors to further understand how they influence individuals' performance in different domains.

From a practical perspective, our results highlight the benefits of creating and maintaining a fun workplace for promoting informal learning. In addition to providing resources and support directly related to training and learning (e.g., time, financial incentives, and a positive learning climate), fun should be considered as a viable strategy to promote informal learning. Informal learning may be constrained when fun is absent from the workplace, which may ultimately have a detrimental impact on innovation, creativity, and performance.

Practitioners should recognize that not all fun is equal and determine what aspects of informal learning are most important in their organizational context. If the goal is to promote learning from oneself, manager support for fun appears more beneficial than fun activities. However, if the goal is to promote learning from others and non-interpersonal sources, fun activities are more central. Thus, fun should be strategically employed. It should be highlighted that employees likely have divergent preferences for different fun activities, and those responsible for planning these activities should take these preferences into consideration to help ensure maximum participation. Fun should not be employed as a “magic bullet” to promote informal learning, but rather as a component of a broader set of training, development, and learning support.

Study Limitations and Future Research

The study results should be interpreted in the context of four limitations. One limitation is that this research was conducted with managers in the hospitality industry. Research on fun and informal learning would be worthwhile with entry-level employees to strengthen the generalizability of our findings. The relationship between fun and informal learning may be even stronger for entry-level employees because these individuals are often younger, and younger individuals are more motivated by fun (Alsop, 2008; PwC, 2013). Research should also examine fun and informal learning in other types of organizations with significant needs for ongoing skill acquisition and knowledge sharing such as high-tech industries. A second limitation is that the study participants rated the frequency of fun activities with the assumption that they participated. It would be valuable in future endeavors to evaluate frequency of participation in addition to whether fun activities were present or not. A third limitation is that fun was assessed through survey ratings. Additional research should experimentally manipulate fun to further validate fun-informal learning relationships. A fourth limitation is that only two aspects of fun in the

workplace were examined in this study—fun activities and manager support for fun. Additional research would be valuable that assesses other aspects of fun with informal learning, such as fun job responsibilities and coworker socializing (Tews et al., 2014, 2105).

Three additional research avenues are also worth pursuing. Although we did examine the relationship of fun and informal learning relative to managerial support, studies are needed to examine fun relative to other forms of organizational support, such as training climate (Tracey & Tews, 2005) and perceived organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Doing so is necessary help to determine the relative importance of fun vis-a-via these other constructs in influencing informal learning. A second avenue is examining mediators in the fun-informal learning relationship. We have argued throughout that fun may promote informal learning via the psychological conditions of safety, availability, and meaningfulness. In the present study, only direct effects between fun and informal learning were analyzed. As such, future research should examine the extent to which fun relates to informal learning through these potential mediators to help answer more precisely how fun impacts informal learning. A final suggestion for future research is investigating whether informal learning is the mechanism through which fun influences outcomes such as prosocial organizational behaviors. Perhaps, fun creates a positivity that leads to informal learning, a proximal outcome, which in turn leads to distal outcomes such nurturing behavior toward others (e.g., helping, courtesy, and civic virtue).

Informal learning is important for individuals to remain current and competitive in an ever-changing and dynamic labor market. Previous studies have suggested that informal learning can be encouraged by facilitating a learning goal orientation and developing a positive learning culture. This study highlights that fun in the workplace is another important way organizations can enhance informal learning. We encourage researchers to build on the study results by further

investigating the relationship between fun and formal and informal learning activities and learning outcomes.

ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Partial Correlations (Controlling for Restaurants)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Overall informal learning	3.48	.65	(.84)										
2. Learning from oneself	3.82	.70	.73**	(.80)									
3. Learning from others	3.49	.90	.85**	.60**	(.86)								
4. Learning from non-interpersonal sources	3.14	.93	.72**	.19**	.37**	(.84)							
5. Fun activities	2.60	.75	.33**	.22**	.31**	.22**	(.77)						
6. Manager support for fun	3.75	.80	.28**	.31**	.29**	.08	.29**	(.94)					
7. Core self-evaluations	4.30	.59	.33**	.32**	.28**	.18*	.34**	.28**	(.92)				
8. Manager support for learning	3.66	1.09	.32**	.27**	.40**	.08	.32**	.53**	.39**	(.95)			
9. Tenure	9.44	5.84	-.04	.00	-.09	.00	.04	.06	-.01	-.10	—		
10. Age	42.26	10.13	-.02	-.09	-.11	.15*	.07	-.01	.09	-.11	.20**	—	
11. Gender	.72	.45	-.10	-.24**	-.12	.09	.06	-.03	.01	-.07	-.02	.40	—

Note. $n = 206$. Gender: male = 1 and female = 0. Internal consistency reliability estimates are presented in parentheses on the diagonal.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Results of Random Coefficient Modeling for Overall Informal Learning

Variables	Overall Informal Learning	
	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Main effects</i>		
Tenure	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Gender	-.16 (.10)	-.16 (.10)
Fun activities	.17* (.06)	.77 (.48)
Manager support for fun	.09 (.06)	.30 (.40)
Core self-evaluations (CSE)	.20* (.08)	.68* (.33)
Manager support for learning	.07 (.05)	.07 (.05)
<i>Interactions</i>		
CSE x fun activities		-.14 (.11)
CSE x manager support for fun		-.05 (.09)
Pseudo R^2	.04	.05

Note. $n = 206$ managers working in 82 restaurants. Unstandardized estimates are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R^2 values estimate total variance in the dependent variable captured by the predictors (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). Gender: male = 1 and female = 0.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Results of Random Coefficient Modeling for the Informal Learning Sub-Dimensions

Variables	Learning from Self		Learning from Others		Learning from Non-Interpersonal Sources	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Main effects</i>						
Tenure	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Gender	-.37**(.11)	-.39**(.11)	-.18 (.13)	-.19 (.14)	.08 (.05)	.09 (.15)
Fun activities	.08 (.06)	1.50**(.51)	.22**(.08)	.74 (.67)	.20* (.09)	.04 (.74)
Manager support for fun	.17**(.07)	-.07 (.42)	.09 (.08)	.05 (.55)	.01 (.09)	.93 (.62)
Core self-evaluations (CSE)	.28**(.08)	.81* (.35)	.15 (.11)	.39 (.45)	.17 (.12)	.82 (.50)
Manager support for learning	.01 (.05)	.00 (.05)	.20**(.07)	.20**(.07)	-.01 (.07)	.00 (.07)
<i>Interactions</i>						
CSE x fun activities		-.32**(.11)		-.12 (.15)		.04 (.17)
CSE x manager support for fun		.06 (.09)		.01 (.12)		-.21 (.14)
Pseudo R^2	.18	.21	.10	.09	.02	.03

Note. $n = 206$ managers working in 82 restaurants. Unstandardized estimates are reported with standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R^2 values estimate total variance in the dependent variable captured by the predictors (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

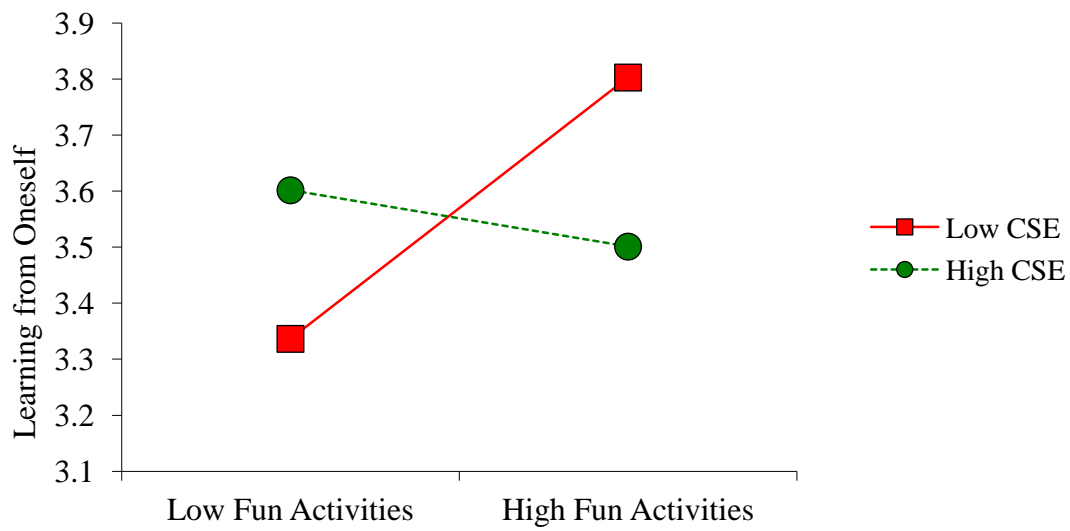


Figure 1. Interaction between Core Self-Evaluations (CSE) and Fun Activities on Learning from Oneself

Highlights

- Fun activities were significantly related to overall informal learning
- However, manager support for fun was not significantly related to overall informal learning
- Manager support for fun was significantly related to learning from oneself
- Fun activities were significantly related to learning from others and non-interpersonal sources
- Core-self evaluations interact with fun activities in predicting learning from oneself