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An Examination of the Unanticipated Outcomes of Having a Fun Organizational
Culture

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Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee Chattanooga
Management

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Abstract

Fun organizational cultures break the social constructs of the traditional work environment. Fun organizational cultures have been gaining popularity over the past couple decades. Since fun cultures are gaining attractiveness due to reports focused primarily on the positive aspects of fun cultures, this study examined if there were any unanticipated negative outcomes of a having a fun organizational culture. Qualitative data was pulled from interviews conducted with various members of fun organizational cultures. This study focused on negative outcomes primarily in three areas: productivity, work-life balance, and relationships among members in the organization. The findings in this study did not reveal consistent negative outcomes from having a fun organizational culture. However, the study did reveal reports on uncertainty from management and policies, discrimination against people who lack social skills, and entitled behavior toward perks provided by the employer.

Introduction

This study will examine the perceptions and impacts of fun organizational cultures. Information was collected through interviews with employees who work in fun organizational cultures. Culture is very powerful as it influences the perceptions and behavior of those within the culture (Groysberg). Fun organizational culture are unique as they entice behaviors such as humor and play in the office (Fleming 287). This study will examine the complex levels of culture, as well as, its influences on those within the organizations.

Literature Review

Organizational culture can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that is learned by a group's experience with solving problems (Schein 2010, 18). These

organizational problems can vary from external adaptation to internal integration. If the solutions of the problems work well, then they are passed on to new members. These patterns of behavior help people know the correct way to perceive, think and feel when facing those problems (Schein 2010, 18). Organizational culture represents the accumulated learning of a group and drives daily behavior. Employees of an organization base their behavior on underlying assumptions of the culture. Employees are able to rely on the assumptions of the culture to decide their actions (Schein 2009, 27-28.)

Organizational culture helps address the human need for stability, consistency, and meaning (Schein 2010, 18.) Culture creates boundaries and structure, allowing a pattern of normal behavior to be created. It can also help create an unofficial protocol for employees when facing various challenges (Balthazard 711). By culture organizing and shaping behavior, members experience shared assumptions of behavior within the organization. Once these assumptions are established, they are difficult to change as they are deeply held within the culture (Frost, Moore, et al 15).

Culture shapes attitudes and behavior of those within the organization. It informs the members of the organization the values and beliefs through shared assumptions and social norms thereby providing social order within an organization. Being aware of the culture can be powerful for those within it, affecting the overall company and those persons working within the company. Culture can help determine a company's capacity to thrive amongst competitors (Groysberg). Culture is a critical success factor when implementing new strategies or conducting mergers and acquisitions (Balthazard 711).

Company culture plays a vital role in employee's everyday decision making, which ultimately impacts the company's success. Various factors encouraged by the company affect decision making, such as, team or individual work, innovative thinking

processes, risk-taking, aggressiveness, etc. (Robbins and Judge 527). The influence of culture can be both positive and negative (i.e., functional and dysfunctional) as it affects the behaviors and job performance of employees (Haasen and Shea 1). For example, there was a fabric company that wanted to address the problem yarn breakage during production. A new executive, who believed in the innovative process, reached out to the employees for a solution. A veteran worker timidly approached the new executive with her solution. The idea worked, saving the company a lot of time and money in production. When the worker was asked how long she had the idea, she stated, "thirty-two years (Drucker 108)." Despite the woman working there since she was a teenager, she did not feel comfortable speaking up about her own ideas due to the company's non-participative culture and previous process for solving problems. It was not until she was given the opportunity by a new leader within the company who believed in the innovation process that she took the risk to speak up, thus costing the company several years of wasted time and money.

National Culture Impact

According to Edgar H. Schein, culture is a force within us that impacts our decision making both inside and outside the organization. National culture is steady and is concerned with basic values (Atkinson 25). National culture is deeply held by the people who are from a nation. This means the people of the nation have been indoctrinated to share norms, beliefs, values and underlying assumptions. These beliefs of the national culture are not easy to change as they have been passed down for generations. National culture can help decipher which company actions should be considered good or evil (Granered). With national culture's impact on basic values, organizations have the opportunity to seek various types of company cultures that project different priorities

and practices (Atkinson 25). A person in a company culture can adapt to the processes, but if the company culture has traits that go against the national culture then the corporate values will be undermined (Granered). National culture is important in influencing company culture in that a company's culture is typically consistent with national culture. However, company culture is more proximal to an employee's daily work routines and thus has more impact on the daily practices of the individuals working for a company.

Study of Organizational Culture

Understanding what culture is and how it impacts the company, allows leaders to effectively manage within the culture to further progress the companies' success (Schein 2009, 3). To understand culture, researchers will need to focus less on the superficial aspects of the organization and start asking deeper questions about how people within the organization feel and respond with their work environment.

Organizational culture was not a concept discussed in the field of management until the late 1970's; however, the concept did not gain popularity among scholars until the 1980s (Glynn et al). This new theory within the management field was very appealing as it promised loyalty, productivity, and profitability to those who understood the culture (Frost, Moore, et al 7). As researchers conducted both qualitative and quantitative studies, their understanding of the concept and its influences within the workplace became more in-depth. In the beginning, researchers believed employees perceived organizational culture the same at various levels and departments. As more studies were published, it became evident organizational culture was more complex than originally believed (Glynn et al).

To simplify culture is a common mistake among leaders, employees, and outsiders of the company (Schein 2009, 3). Some researchers stated a simple explanation for culture is “how things get done around here (Haasen and Shea 1).” Addressing culture in such a simplistic manner can be perceived as an insult as the simplified definition is only touching the tip of the iceberg. Culture is complex to define because it is a descriptive term based on the perceptions of the employees on the characteristics of the organization (Robbins and Judge 527). In addition to culture being evaluated through the perceptual process, climate will distort the information perceived. “Climate is that feeling that is conveyed in a group by the physical layout and the way in which members of the organization interact with each other, with customers, or with other outsiders (Schein, 2010, 15).” Climate can be evaluated based on the relationship of the culture to the environment in which it exists. This often causes the confusion of what culture is and what it ought to be. Some researchers believe culture and climate are the same; however, Schein believes climate is a product of the underlying assumptions of the culture and can vary by department or even region of the organization (Schein 2010, 13-14, 25). Climate is more malleable than culture, making it ideal for short-term goals. Climate is shaped by the observable patterns of interactions of those inside the organization, while culture is what influences the interactions based on symbols, values, and norms (Moran and Volkwein). Although culture is challenging to define, understanding organizational culture will allow a person to understand how decisions are made and see how the perceptions of the organization affect the employees.

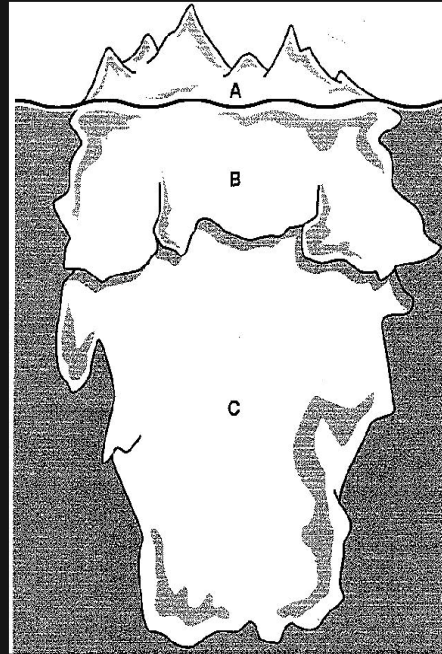
Iceberg Theory

The Iceberg Theory was first introduced by Edward T. Hall in the 1950's. Since culture is intangible, Hall compares culture to the form of an iceberg. Like an iceberg,

only the tip is visible. The visible part of culture would be aspects such as dress and architecture of the work environment. Most people associate the entire culture to only the tip; however, the most powerful elements of culture are not as easily visible. Hall labels the aspects of culture underneath the water as formal and informal culture. Formal culture consists of procedures, rule, and traditions. These routines are taught to new members and teach a lesson of norms of the social behavior of the culture, such as saying "Thank you," when given something. Most people are aware they are being taught a lesson on, "the way we do things (Katan 46.)" According to Hall, outsiders to an organization can learn about the formal culture through trial and error, as people have awareness of his or her actions. Informal culture is more complex as it addresses a level of "out-of-awareness (Katan 46.)" Informal culture is not learned or taught. People react out of awareness at this level. Typically, the person's reaction is influenced by the unwritten rules of the informal culture. To a person outside of the culture, the reactions within a culture stand out if they vary from one's own (Katan 46-47).

Hall's Iceberg

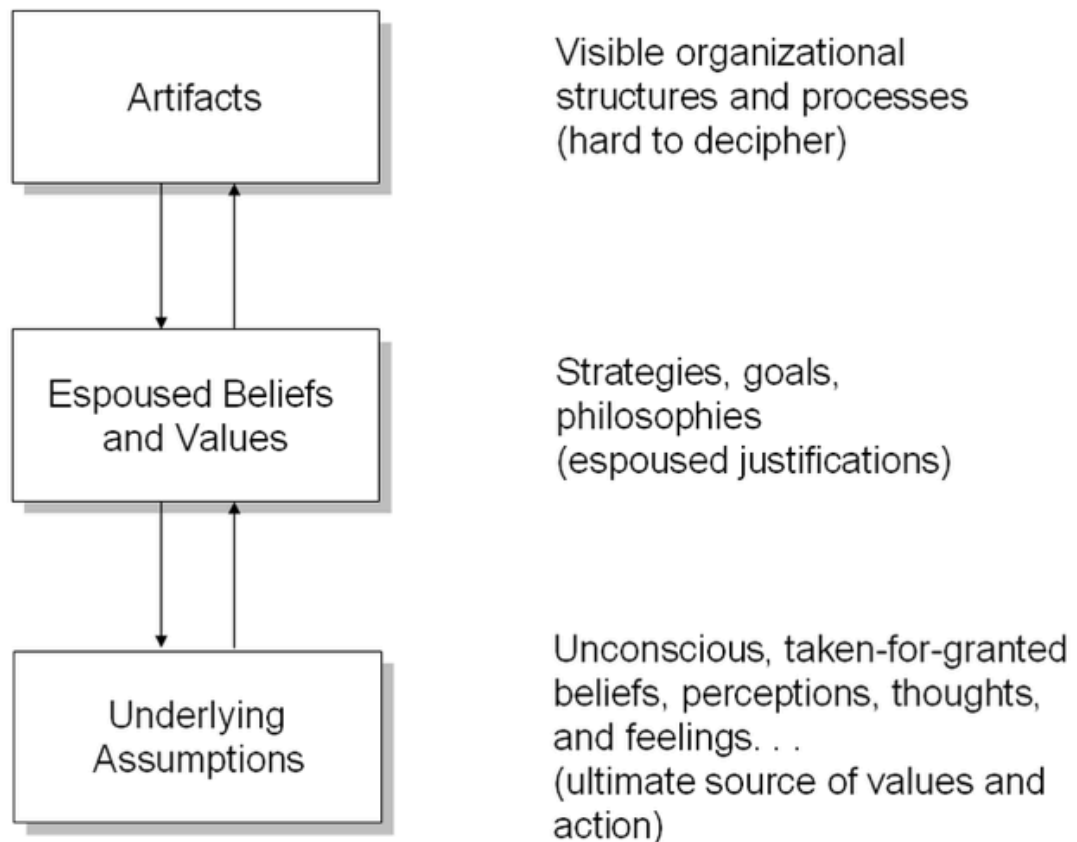
- A= TECHNICAL
 - Music, art, food and drink, dress, architecture, institution, visible behaviour, LANGUAGE
- B= FORMAL
 - Appropriacy, rituals, customs, ways/styles (of discourse, dress etc)
- C= INFORMAL
 - Orientations, action communication, environment, time space, power individualism, Competitiveness, structure, thinking



("Hall's iceberg - technical - formal - informal.")

Edgar Schein's Model of Culture

Edgar Schein who is considered to be a leader in the study of organizational culture created a model to more fully explain the complexities of organization culture. Schein simplified the description of culture into three levels: Artifacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values, and Basic Underlying Assumptions. Schein stated that in order to understand the abstract nature of organizational culture, one must be able to differentiate the levels within culture. Schein defines the term "level" as meaning the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to the observer (Schein 2010, 23). Culture has several influencing dynamics and cannot be taken for its face value.



("Research Gate")

Artifacts

The first level of Schein model of organizational culture is artifacts. This is the first level that people can easily detect of an organization's culture. People typically stop at this level when describing company culture. Artifacts include what one sees, hears, and feels about a culture. Artifacts are easily detectable if you have experienced a different culture. Organization cultures can be different in the language people use, clothes and style that people wear, and the emotions that people allow themselves to show. This superficial level of culture is often described as climate as these factors may vary by department and location of the company; however, Schein states that observed behavior

should be defined as a manifestation of culture due to it being a product of underlying assumptions (Schein 2010, 24). In fact, observed behavior is viewed as an artifact because the behavior is made routine. Therefore, it is best to think of observed behavior as an artifact in organizational culture.

Zappos, an online shoe company known for its customer service, has a lot of artifacts that naturally stand out among other cultures. For example, the office spaces are very cluttered with personal items of the employees. There are party decorations stringing across the office, connecting to each colorfully decorated cubicle. Unlike most corporate offices, who encourage minimal personal items at work, the Zappos workspaces are very cluttered with fun, decorative items and seem to reflect individual personalities (Langley). In addition to the physical workspaces, the behavior of the people within the office stand out as unique among most companies in the national culture. It is rare not to see a smiling face at Zappos (Pontefract). The culture seems to be fun as employees are encouraged to wear costumes and throw parades in the office (Tolley-Stokes 289). Overall, based on the artifacts, the culture seems to be very fun and energetic, but one might argue that it also lacks professionalism.

A key point to note is that one cannot decipher an organization's culture solely on artifacts. The issue with this pattern is that people tend to tie their own personal and predetermined opinions with the artifact. For example, if employees are dressed casually at work then a person observing the culture may view it as a relaxed and lazy culture when in fact the comfortable atmosphere may lead to higher productivity (Schein 2010, 23-25). The first level of culture is easy to recognize; however, personal assumptions of the artifacts may lead a person down the wrong path when deciphering the culture. Thus, the two other levels of culture, Espoused Beliefs and Values and Underlying Assumptions must be examined.

Espoused Beliefs and Values

In order to analyze the culture and the meaning of the artifacts effectively, it is necessary to speak to insiders of the culture. These employees will be able to paint a more realistic picture of their average day to day experience and explain what is expected of their behavior from the organization. The second level to the Schein model of culture is labeled as Espoused Beliefs and Values. Schein emphasized that beliefs and value of a group are based on the individual's sense of what ought to be and not what is (Schein 2010, 25). Perceptions play a role into defining a culture by an individual. Employees of an organization may view core values and beliefs of the organization posted on the office walls or slipped into the employee handbook; however, once one is inside the organization perceptions change as actions do not line up with the projected image of the organization. The artifacts of the company may mislead the individual of the company's beliefs and values (Eucker 67). Since beliefs and values are not tangible, it can be challenging to see the difference among cultures and thus the researcher needs a better explanation of the abstract idea of how an organization or culture forms its beliefs and values.

In order to have culture, you must first form an organization based on shared goals, mission, or beliefs of the group. In an organization, there is a clear founder or a natural leader will rise within the organization. The organization is created because these people have common goals or ideas leading to need for collaborative work to accomplish these desired goals. Typically, a founder recruits and attracts people that have similar goals of the leader. As the organization is growing, individuals adapt their behavior to fit into the organization. Ideally, the founder is the one who establishes the beliefs and values of the group or organization. Individuals within the organization may not initially

agree with the decisions being made by the leader, but once the individuals see and understand how the decisions help the organization, they typically come to agree with the leader and the rest of the group. However, with a small organization that closely aligns with the leaders' ideal, the adjustment period should be rather short (Schein 2010, 24-26).

Tony Heisch, joined Zappos as the CEO and is responsible for the company growing to become a billion-dollar industry in only ten years. Heisch influenced the organization due to his belief in a happy workforce leads to a more profitable business (Pontefact). Heisch believes that by removing restrictions in the call centers, he allows employees to get an emotional connection with the customers, thus promoting a friendly brand (Yohn). Zappos has ten core values that represent that Heisch believes will keep the employees on track to properly represent the Zappos brand. The values heavily focus on customer service, creativity, teamwork, and keeping a learning environment ("Zappos 10 Core Value"). By employees internalizing these values, Zappos has been able to stay ahead of the competition by creating exceptional customer service and by keeping a friendly, healthy work environment (Tolley-Stokes 289). Due to Heisch's focus and dedication to creating a strong culture, employees of the organization are able to strongly associate the culture's artifacts to the organizations' actual beliefs and values that are reflected in the daily life of Zappos employees. Zappos' core values are not what people believe the culture ought to be but how the culture is, thus accurately representing the beliefs and values of the culture to the artifacts.

Basic Underlying Assumptions

As Schein looks further into a company's culture, past artifacts and beliefs, he comes to the third level of culture: Assumptions. When it comes to company culture,

assumptions influence one's behavior and responses to various situations. For example, in some organizations, it is a common assumption that if an employee is not at his or her desk, then they not working. While assumptions and beliefs may seem similar as they are heavily based on perception, they vary based on how strongly they are a part of someone's unconscious behavior. Assumptions are unconscious thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, while values are goals, strategies, and philosophies of an organization. Assumptions typically arise from the influences of the founder's beliefs and values. When the values and beliefs are widely shared among the organization, then members assume everyone will act in the same manner. Values and beliefs are reflected in the goals and strategies of the company, but assumptions create cultural norms among the organization. These norms create structure and stability for members of the culture. Schein's third level of underlying assumptions really create the foundational structure of behavior for the culture, thus influencing decisions made unconsciously by other members within the culture (Schein 2010, 24-28). Considering again Zappos, it is assumed one should display quiet confidence at work. Being humble is the cultural norm, and those who boast easily stick out among the organization (Tolley-Stokes 291). Assumptions of the culture create cultural norms and provide structure for all people within an organization.

For example, if a person wanted to start a company that produces high-quality rugs, then the founder will need to recruit people who have the same beliefs in the founder's goal for the rug company. If the founder's values and beliefs match up with the other members of the organization, then a culture is created. Digging deeper into the culture, assumptions play a dominant role in behavior. If the founder of the high-quality rug company believed in transparency, then behaviors representing transparency would be present in the everyday workplace. As this behavior is encouraged from other

members of the group, honesty will become an unconscious behavioral norm and it will manifest in meetings, presentations, and daily work. Artifacts of transparency may include, a lack of doors on upper management's offices, clear glass meeting rooms, and statements promoting honesty painted on the walls. Ultimately, culture plays a large role in the choices made by all levels within the organization and how the organization is viewed from the outside.

Dominant Culture

The founders, or founders, normally establish the dominant culture. Nonetheless, dominant cultures occur when the majority of the members within the organization agree to and express common core values. These core values are widely accepted throughout the organization (Robbins and Judge, 528-529). Core values are typically encouraging to individuals and help employees stay on track to meet company goals. For example, Zappos has core values such as, "Deliver WOW Through Service" and "Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit (Zappos Insights)." By promoting the core values, the leaders of Zappos make employees aware of the goals of the company and provide an idea of the underlying cultural norms. Zappos is an example of a strong company culture. Zappos believes so strongly in keeping the company culture alive that even employee must first go through a rigorous hiring process. After being hired, every employee must spend three to four weeks in the call center, as experiencing customer service is highly important to maintain Zappos' customer service goals. After the employee has been in the call center, Zappos offers the employee \$3,000 to leave the company. This seems outrageous to the average employer, but it demonstrates Zappos' dedication to having employees who fit in the culture (Heathfield).

By having a dominant culture that has shared beliefs and values, employees can feel unified within their work, thereby creating a force of power within the organization. The power created by a unified group can influence behavior of members in order to stay within group norms. In addition, a dominant culture can promote workforce stability. Employee turnover is reduced as there is high agreement among members on what the company represents, thus emotionally tying people to the organization and influencing daily behavior (Judges and Robbins 529).

Dysfunctional Culture

Unfortunately, not every company has a strong culture that creates support for their employees, like Zappos. Dysfunctional organization cultures that limit individual and group capabilities and that encourage mediocre behaviors are present in the modern day workforce, creating a strain on an organization's image compared to its peers. A dysfunctional culture that lacks clear organizational goals and values, leads to social norms that are not always beneficial to the company and can lead to deviant behavior. Without a lack of guidance and structure that comes from assumptions and core values and beliefs within an organization, the culture can lead to untrusting attitudes, unclear performance feedback, and perceived unfair treatment (Van Fleet and Griffin 700-702). Dysfunctional cultures create problems with efficiency, effectiveness, and performance which overall can increase the turnover rate and hurt the bottom line. For the employees, a dysfunctional environment can create stress and job insecurities (Balthazard et al. 710-711). Conversely, a strong and cooperative culture is important, as having a unified workforce can lead to growth and a good reputation of the organization.

Uber, a disruptive, innovative company in the transportation industry, had its reputation turn sour when a former employee wrote on a blog describing the challenges

she faced working for Uber. Susan Fowler, an engineer at Uber, reported a case of sexual harassment to human resources. When Uber's Human Resources made excuses for the deviant behavior, she turned to the internet to get her story out. After this story broke out, Mike Issac from the New York Times, interviewed thirty former and current employees of Uber. Issac reported that several employees reported the same behavior from executives and that it was normal to turn a blind eye to misbehavior from top performers. Uber's has fourteen stated core values; however, the values are vague in reference to behavior and goals of the organization. Since their values presented by the company are vague, members in the organization create their own interpretation of the meaning of the values. By members of the organization interpreting the values themselves, individuals may use their own assumptions of the company culture to determine acceptable behaviors. Unfortunately, by allowing the interpretation to the individuals, leaders lose control of the behavior of those within the organization which can lead to deviance within the organization.

For example, one of the core values is "always be hustlin." This core value shows that Uber values competition; however, it does not seem to care if the methods carried out by the employee are always ethical. This core value does seem to be widely held in the organization as misbehavior by top performers is ignored since they are valuable to the company's growth. The values were set in place by the CEO, Tyler Kalanick, who once referred to Uber as "Boob-er" due to the amount of attention he was getting from ladies. It is evident inappropriate behavior is dismissible within the organization as professionalism and trust are not core values within Uber's culture. Unfortunately, due to the culture's allowance for deviant behavior, several employees in Issac's interviews mentioned leaving the company (Issac). Dysfunctional culture can create a toxic

atmosphere, negatively affecting the behaviors and perceptions of the employees of that culture.

Culture Socialization

Based on the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework, both individuals and organizations can be attracted to one another because they create a connection through the similarity in their goals and values. When applying for a job, applicants are able to self-select organizational fit, weeding out obvious culture misfits, thus allowing individuals with a stronger connection to the organization get into the position (Cable and Parsons 1). When people are hired into a company, typically, the human resources department is responsible for informing the new hire of the company's beliefs, values, and social norms. However, the core values distributed in the employee handbook, may not align with the behavior of those within the company (Sternberg). Leaders of the organization are the persons ultimately responsible for managing the initial interactions with the job applicant and other organizational members in order to reduce anxiety, and shape the reactional experiences of the new hires as they face new challenges. Organizations manage this integration process differently, but as the first major introduction to the culture, new employees have the opportunity to change their perception and adapt to the organization (Cable and Parson 2).

By observing the work environment, the new hires learn to adapt to the social norms (Sternberg). In addition to initial observations, socialization allows employees to evolve into their fit within the organization. "Socialization refers to the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and knowledge need to participate as an organizational member (Cable and Parsons 2)." It is human nature to sense and responds to culture, which leads to a change in one's behavior in order to not stand out among the

organization (Groysberg). As an individual has an inclination to adapt and learn about his or her environment in order to blend it, culture has the tendency to resist change.

Socialization is powerful for an organization. It ensures the core values and norms of the organization are passed down to new hires. Socialization creates a framework for new hires to respond to the environment and interact with other employees (Cable and Parson 2). If an individual feels as if he or she does not “fit” into the culture, then it is likely they will leave the organization. By having people who do not represent the culture leave, culture itself reinforces the social pattern that allows itself to grow resistance to change and outside influences (Groysberg). For those who stay within the organization, the socialization processes will encourage employees values and beliefs to closely align with the organizational culture. By having an alignment of values, employees will less likely leave the organization thus increasing the retention rate and reducing costs of rehiring and retraining (Cable and Parsons 2).

History of Fun in the Workplace

Ideas about the nature and role of organizational culture have evolved over time as more research and practice has been available to managers. Prior to the industrial revolution, most people worked in the same area they lived which is where they experienced leisure. The industrial revolution led to factories luring workers into condensed workspaces that created a culture of discipline that clearly established a division of work and play. As decades from the industrial revolution have passed, the standard work environment has changed (Fleming 285-228). When the Generation X and then Generation Y entered the workforce, they did not have the same ideals as previous generations. Generation X employees had different styles of work ethic and did not feel indebted to their employer. Generation Y was considered a different breed of workers.

Due to this mindset of the new generations of employees, employers felt as if they needed to introduce fun into the workplace in order to retain employees (Redman and Matthews 52; Owler et al. 341).

Later in the 20th Century, scholars and practitioners began to acknowledge culture in corporations, thus leading to more systematic study of the impact on an organization. Leaders of organizations began to understand that by controlling or at least influencing the company culture, company strategies, communications, and employee behaviors would be more easily manageable (Owler 339).

As leaders became aware of the strength and influence their culture has on individuals within the organization, leaders began to experiment with different organizational culture paths to effectively share their goals for the organization. Researchers and practitioners looked for ways to progress the work environment. Managerial fads promising the increased quality of an organization would leave as quickly as they have arrived. It is typical for managerial fads to be promoted, and in the 1980's, publications promoting fun at work began. Most of the new managerial crazies are short-lived; however, several decades later and research for fun at work is still relevant (Owler 339).

In the 1980's, workplaces began to adapt, "cultures of fun." These companies immersed fun into their management programs. These fun programs began to challenge the previously well-divided line of work and play. By adding fun to their work environment for employees, organizations were expecting a return of flexibility, competitive advantage, and increased workforce motivation. All of these aspects of the organizational culture play a huge part in the bottom line for a business. In the 1990's, the push for fun continued, but in addition to the benefits promoted in the prior decade, companies were promised customer service, innovation, empowerment, and creativity.

To this day, practitioners, consultants, and scholars are interested in this topic as it promotes a solution for several organization weaknesses. These organizational weaknesses include poor communication, sluggish innovation, absenteeism, anti-management sentiment, stress, and lack of creativity (Fleming 285-286). These weaknesses within an organization can slow down a company's production and affect the bottom line. Since encouraging fun work cultures has lasted more than the normal lifestyle of a managerial fad, it seems that a fun work culture will continue to gain popularity, especially if the benefits from the culture change hold true.

Despite being around for several decades, there is no clear consensus about the impact fun has on the workplace. There has been little research on the nature or consequences of having fun in the work environment and in fact, there is no consensus on the definition or characteristics for what constitutes fun at work. Also, there is no concise agreement on what an organization can or should do to promote and implement fun into their work environment (Ford et al 19). Due to the tempting nature of encouraging fun at work, research has predominately focused on the positive outcomes of this practice (Peteclycz 161-162). While having fun at work seems like a good idea, it is evident that an analysis of the benefits and consequences of a fun work environment needs to be more heavily researched as there may be some unanticipated negatives outcomes that could arise from these work environments.

Traditional Work Environment

Fun work cultures challenge the traditional role of work environments. In order to compare fun at work, one must understand the expectations of traditional work environments. The traditional work environment has a hierarchical chain of command that all employees must adhere to in order to fit into the culture. There is little flexibility in a traditional work environment as behavior that strays away from the business strategy

or company goals is seen as an act of rebellion. Traditional work environments are very organized and have clear disciplinary action plans. As traditional environments tend to be more rigid and emotionally reserved, employers are more person-job fit oriented and less focused on person-organization fit (Jahan). Traditional work environments are less team oriented and encourage more individualist behavior. It is common for rewards to be based on individual performance. Employees in a traditional work environment are not encouraged to take risks. Taking risks can often lead to consequences of punishment thus reinforcing a belief that change is bad. In addition to discouraging risk and thinking outside the box, upper leadership is responsible for determining and planning the work for most of the lower level employees (Zener et al.).

The beliefs and values of a traditional work culture seem to be based on strict and rigid structural organization. The environment seems to be controlled thus leading to a culture that encourages serious and strictly professional behavior. Traditional work environments can be associated with a set schedule for employees to be in the office at their desk from 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. A common artifact of the traditional work culture is employees working in individual workspaces such as cubicles or isolated offices. Also, employees can be seen wearing formal dress or suit and tie. One observed behavior of a traditional work environment is the consistency of saying yes to the boss and not questioning the ideas of a superior ("Pioneer in the Workplace..."). The culture of a traditional work environment can be seen a rigid, but there are varying opinions on a traditional work environment that encourages structure and control in order to achieve business goals and strategies.

Theodore Roosevelt stated, "When you play, play hard; when you work, don't play at all (Peteclyc 162)." While it has been quite a while since President Roosevelt has been in an office, many people still agree with his statement. Since traditional work

environments pride themselves on being organized and having structure, people who are only familiar with traditional work cultures would see the fun in the work environment as inefficient and chaotic. In fact, fun in work environments has been found to lead to poorer task performance and decreased organizational involvement, which is opposite of the benefits promoted by the scholars who started these studies in the 1980's (Peteclyc 162). Fun can also lead to the undermining of organizational control and order which weakens the power of the traditional work environment. Since play and fun are spontaneous and unscripted, it can be viewed as counterproductive and disruptive to the employees. Fun in the traditional work environment would be seen as a large challenge to the leaders within the organization as they try to control "fun (Peteclyc 162)." The definition of fun varies by person meaning the distraction of fun in the workplace would vary per individual; however, due to its popularity, fun at work seems to be a concept people are not going to easily give up. Traditional work environments do not seem to be working for the average person as their cultures tend to be rigid. Since people spend at least half of their waking hours a day at work, it is plausible that employees want a break from their mundane tasks.

Due to the lack of research and knowledge of organizational culture, when fun was first introduced to traditional work cultures, it was very mild in terms of spontaneity. Fun at work was described as participating in celebrations, birthday parties, or work camping trips (Tang et al. 1788). Since non-work related activities such as relaxation and recreation have been suppressed in the work environment, employees typically have trouble adjusting to the new support from management for fun at work (Fleming 289). The slow growth of implementing fun in the workplace has to do with the concept that play in adulthood is not socially acceptable. The national culture includes the commonly held belief that adults should not have fun, especially in serious situations such as work,

which has influenced organizational cultures to mirror the same path. Since traditional work cultures are not known for taking risks, most companies would not want to be an outlier in the national culture that encourages serious behavior with business. Despite play being perceived as irresponsible and too frivolous for the workplace, play has a large role in social and emotional development. Since employees spend a large part of their life at work, one can justify the need to play at work due to its role in social and emotional wellness (Vleet and Feeney 630-631).

Defining Fun

Although there is little consensus for an official definition of workplace fun from scholars, it is oftentimes defined as, "a working environment that intentionally encourages and supports variously enjoyable, playful, and pleasurable activities such as humor, games, parties, awards and playing competitions (Tang et al. 1788)." Fun at work can come in various forms including activities sponsored by organizations, activities that are initiated by employees, inside or outside of the office, and activities among colleagues after and outside of work in order to strengthen relationships (Tang et al. 1789). However, for this study, fun activities organized by the organizations either conducted inside or outside of the office during either regular or after office hours will be examined as they will give insight into companies' struggle for organizational strategy control while implementing fun in the workspace. Fun activities initiated by employees inside or outside of the office were not examined.

Since having fun requires a non-serious approach to a task, one may feel uncomfortable having fun in an environment that is typically associated with being serious. In fun work environments, employees are encouraged to practice behaviors typically reserved for situations outside of work (Fleming 286-289). Fun at work can be

enjoyable as it allows an escape from the stressors at work. Fun and play require one to focus on the process, thus allowing one to not focus on the end goals of the activity. In order to have the definition of play at work, one must approach an activity with the goal to have fun. The individual may have other goals for the activity, such as learning something new or meeting people. (Vleet and Feeney 631). In the workforce, these fun activities could be seen as ways to network within the organization.

Fun at work does not always have to be work related or project oriented. Fun activities are supposed to make an individual feel amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure. Fun at work is believed to positively impact the attitude of those within the environment. Fun at work is broad and can have various interpretations. Fun can range from an office party to a full-scale business model revolved around fun (Fluegge 15-16). Organizational leaders can choose a variety of possible fun activities; however, these activities normally focus on "traditionally celebratory events involving food (Ford 22)." In the early 2000's, a fun work environment typically included recognition of personal milestones, social gatherings, and public celebrations of professional achievements. These fun initiatives made little effect on the overall organizational culture. These subtle changes to the environment were only able to affect the artifacts of the culture. Although the transition from a strictly traditional work environment to an environment that encourages and promotes fun at work may seem minuscule in the scale of organizational culture, this act of allowing fun at work opened the door to many more opportunity to include and eventually implement fun into organizational cultures.

While smaller fun activities are important, some companies are adopting more extensive business models to fully extend the definition of fun at work. These business models revolve around the strategic importance of a fun culture. A fun culture has a strong impact on those within the organization than planned office parties. These models

focus more on organizational socializing, celebrating, and personal freedoms (Fluegge 15-16). By focusing on these aspects of fun at work, organizations are able to influence the beliefs and values of the organizational culture. By implementing fun into more aspects of the organization, such as socializing and personal freedoms thus affecting social norms, organizations are able to have their cultures take shape into being defined as fun cultures.

Fun Culture

Organizations with a dominant culture emphasizing fun are able to incorporate elements of fun into multiple roles and aspects of the organization. Fun organizational cultures value light-heartedness, humor, and play. Fun cultures lead to the belief that if the employees are happy then the customers are too. Since fun cannot mean the same for every individual within an organization, fun cultures are not necessarily fun in and of themselves (Fleming 287).

Reasoning for Organizational Fun

As it has been a few decades since fun at work was introduced, it is evident this is more than just another managerial fad. With the changes in the national culture through the generations influencing the rising workforce values, managers need to be aware of the needs of their employees. Fun at work has been promoted as a cure-all for common organizational problems such as communication, stress, and motivation (Fleming 286-288).

The transition to a fun work environment would not come without some underlying motives from organizational leadership. Humor and amusement in the workplace are now seen as a serious business undertaking. Organizations that habitually plan fun activities do so with great intent to great joy in the office. As organizations create

activities for employees, employees may feel as if they are spontaneous, as humor and fun are actions that are typically spontaneous; however, institutionalized organizational fun is unnatural because it is not spontaneous and one subconsciously chooses their actions based on their surroundings. Overall, the effects of organized fun depend on the perceptions of the individual. By implementing fun into an organization there may be several benefits. For example, humor has been used to break the ice in terms of communication with leaders and their subordinates. Humor allows for individuals to gain trust and open up lines of communication leading to more participation and quicker responses to organizational needs (Fleming 288).

In addition to fun helping communication issues within an organization, fun can relieve stress from work for employees. By having a culture that encourages disrupting monotonous work with a fun activity, employees are able to feel comfortable taking a break from their work. Organizations that have incorporated fun at work have seen decreases in emotional exhaustion from work (Owler 341). When a person experiences humor and laughs, their body releases a hormone that reduces the amount of stress in their body, breaking up tension from stress (Gibson and Jeffcoat 30). While having a reduction in stress is mainly beneficial for the employee, it can be beneficial for employers as it increased retention employee rate. By participating in a fun work culture, employees are more likely to commit themselves to the organization. When employees emotionally invest themselves in their work, they are more likely to stay with the company (Fleming 286). Stress relieving activities such as massages and exercise facilities provided by the organization can improve employee satisfaction thus reducing employee turnover due to work-related stress (Ford 20-21). Stress from work can negatively impact an individual's job satisfaction, which is one of the many reasons why employers implement fun in the workplace.

An important benefit of fun at work is increases in employee motivation, which in turn can increase productivity for the organization. Fun creates intrinsic motivations for individuals within an organization. Intrinsic motivation is when an individual is satisfied with the activity itself and not from a physical or monetary reward (Bigliardi et al. 37). Fun work cultures are intended to help the individuals with their spirit, mind, and soul. One way organizations can help employees feel engaged is by promoting more stimulation and excitement at work than traditional work environments (Owler 340 -341). Motivation is influenced by play at work because it “creates a sense of effortless flow between learning and acquiring skills (Petelczyc et. al 172) Fun at work is beneficial for employers who are looking to train their staff new skills or employees who are looking to further their education. Fun has been found to positively affect task performance (Petelczyc et. al 176).

Organizations, such as Southwest Airlines, who are predominately known for implementing a strong culture of fun, argue that their success is in part due to their fun work culture. Southwest Airlines employees are encouraged to perform outrageous customer service experiences by keeping a fun spirit. Southwest Airlines is considered to have a fun culture more than a fun work environment because fun can be seen at all levels of the organization. When observing the artifacts of their culture, evidence of fun is all over. Southwest Airlines have dress up days for their employees, encourages employees to tell jokes, and sing to passengers. There have even been reports of Southwest employees popping out of baggage compartments and sneaking rubber cockroaches into passengers’ drinks (Redman and Matthews 53). These silly behaviors encouraged by the organization show that the culture promotes fun as a social norm.

Southwest expresses its values by encouraging extraordinary customer service. This organization’s core principle is to not only meet the needs of their customers but to

“make flying fun (Ford 19).” However, Southwest believes that in order to achieve a fun experience for its consumers, it must first establish a fun work environment for its employees. This effort starts with the hiring process, Southwest looks for people with a good sense of humor. Southwest does not want to hire people who take themselves too seriously as they will not fit in with the fun organizational culture. Southwest’s goal is to make individuals feel as if they are part of a family (Ford 19). By doing this, the organization encourages a sense of community and belonging among the employees.

With the influence of fun at work and the creation of a community among employees, Southwest is able to create strong organizational culture. Southwest’s CEO, Gary Kelly acknowledges that in order to have a strong fun culture, employees must feel empowered by their employer. Southwest has empowered their employees to consider themselves as champions. Southwest has been able to create a culture that leads to the assumption by those within the organization that all of the employees are champions and should not be valued as less than one another (Stevenson).

Though the artifacts are visible, it is the underlying values and assumptions of Southwest’s unique culture that have created a competitive advantage. Due to the devotion to make employees enjoy their work, Southwest has not suffered from a layoff or pay reduction in its forty-five-year history. Kelly credits the fantastic people within the organization for establishing a competitive advantage in the industry. Southwest has been profitable every year since beginning operations (Stevenson). Since Southwest credits its fun work culture for its success, there are a lot of positive correlations related to the development of fun work cultures.

As the popularity of these fun cultures has grown, companies have become competitive in the of perks offered to employees to ensure there is fun at work. The epicenter for these fun work cultures is Silicon Valley located in Northern California.

Silicon Valley companies go above and beyond the standard employee benefits, including healthcare and disability insurance. In order to keep up with the competition to attract the best candidates, these companies are pressured to offer the best benefits (Goodman). Google LLC., which has been deemed one of the top companies to work for has classic arcade games such as Pac-Man available for employees. Apple, Inc. host a regular event called “Beer Bash” where employees can enjoy a festival with performances from famous performers, such as Demi Lavato (Manning). Asana, another tech company, implemented many programs to keep their employees happy such as midday yoga classes, treadmills overlooking the valley, organic meals, and \$10,000 to customize and decorate their workspace. Microsoft Corporation offers its employees wellness packages that include acupuncture, chiropractic, massages, and wellness coaching. In addition to this wellness program, designed to keep employees happy and healthy, Microsoft also offers a wide variety of sports fields for Frisbee, basketball, soccer, football, volleyball, dodgeball, and bocce-ball games. For those less athletically inclined, Microsoft offers social clubs such as theater and photography (Inglese). All of these companies have provided unique perks to their employees in order to attract and retain people to their fun culture.

Providing these perks has become a norm for companies in the Silicon Valley region. In fact, the company LiveRamp describes their benefits on their company website as “silicon valley basics,” which includes a fully-stocked kitchen, catered lunch, and ping pong table (“Careers”). In addition to the “basics” Live Ramp provides dog-friendly workspaces and unlimited paid time off in order to help their employees re-energize themselves (“Careers”). Although these fun cultures appear to be a better alternative than traditional work environments as they provide many benefits to the organization,

such as stress relief and motivation, the boundary-less culture may create some issues for the organization.

Dysfunctions within Fun Cultures

While the aspects of a fun culture are appealing to both employers and individuals with the organization, these cultures may not be the panacea these companies were looking to acquire. Company cultures that promote fun may be able to fix issues with communication and motivation, but they may also create more issues within the organization. Overall, the idea of fun at work has not been rigorously researched by scholars and practitioners. It appears leadership has been drawn to fun as a quick fix to many employer issues; however, a closer analysis of a fun culture may reveal some unanticipated negative outcomes of a fun work environment (Redman and Matthews 54).

In the attempt to make work fun, managers have often left employees feeling uncomfortable as they feel forced to participate in the activities. This occurs most often when leaders are encouraged to interject fun activities in regular work practices. While most extraverted employees readily participate in outgoing activities, not all employees enjoy or have the same definition of fun at work, thus creating outliers within the organization (Redman and Matthews 58). Fun is about spontaneity and even rebellion in the workplace, so by having fun encouraged by managers, employees lose the quality of fun. This means the fun is not as authentic at work as it is outside of the office with different social constructs. While fun can create a “freeing” feeling, there will always be pressure from the organizational and social norms on how to behave while having fun (Owler et al. 348). Overall, fun at work can seem unnatural and unauthentic.

Dr. Newman, a people’s analytics manager at Google, claims that the spontaneity of fun at work is “anything but (Stewart).” Through careful analysis of human

psychology, Google has been able to manipulate the actions of their employees. Although Google is much like the rest of the companies who provide fully stocked kitchens full of free snacks and beverages, Google manipulates their environment by putting the high-calorie snacks in opaque containers and the lower calorie/higher protein in highly visible clear glass jars. The goals are that employees will see the healthier snack first and be more inclined to take it (Stewart). While it appears Google has invested a lot of time and money in shaping its culture to be fun, there also seems to be manipulation of the environment to ensure employees feel as if they are having fun. Google seems to have mastered the indoctrination of a strong fun work culture to ensure employees are loyal to the company.

According to a top executive at Brady Corporation, humor is considered a serious business. The executive expressed the difficulty of institutionalizing a fun work environment as fun is a spontaneous experience. While activities at work may feel spontaneous, they are typically well managed to ensure company goals are achieved. The concerns with this environmental control depend on how the employee perceives the situation which is hard to control as perceptions vary per individual (Fleming 288).

Since fun at work has a vague definition, the interpretation of the term can vary. Social behaviors at work should represent the company culture. When the culture is defined as fun, one tends to perceive the organization as relaxed and easy going. This assumption reflects in the behavior of the individuals leading to relaxed behavior among professional relationships. While informality can seem positive as it feels more natural among their peers, this break in the boundary of professionalism can lead to some unwanted behavior. In some organizations, flirting among colleagues is not only happening during office sponsored fun activities but is also encouraged by management as a sign of healthy informal culture (Fleming 294). However, the act of flirting at work draws a thin line for a sexual harassment case. Companies who encourage or ignore

flirting in the work environment could easily end up with complaints to Human Resources about the behavior of other colleagues. Unfortunately, by blurring the line of a professional and fun atmosphere, employees and leadership can be left feeling confused on how to address the situation. While one employee may be thinking they are talking to a friend about their weekend sexual experiences, another employee could perceive the conversation as sexual harassment (Petelczyc et al. 179). Although it is appealing to work with people who one considers their friends, a professional boundary should remain intact in order to refrain from tarnished reputations and damaged lives.

These fun cultures attract young individuals who are at the start of their career. These cultures desire people who know how to have fun, thus excluding older generation workers that are not accustomed to fun at work. In addition to hosting fun activities to keep the young employees entertained, companies try to create their culture to make employees feel included. They encourage employees to rely on one another and create a family-like atmosphere through the informal relationships at work. By employees establishing an emotional bond with their coworkers and work environment, they are more likely to be devoted to the organization, thus reducing turnover rates (Fleming 293-294).

These fun organizations wish to attract young individuals who will have fun with others in the culture. Unfortunately, these fun organizations forget about the responsibilities that parents have outside of work. Many fun work cultures are embedded in startups in Silicon Valley, and typically, there is no paternity leave plan until someone gets pregnant. In addition to neglected paternity plans, employees who are parents can face long hours away from home. These fun cultures encourage after hour bonding activities, such as laser tag weekend getaways. The former chief technology officer at Facebook, Bret Taylor, stated, "The culture is not necessarily friendly to families, and I

think that's not really realized (Miller)." While neglecting family oriented individuals may not be the intent of these fun organizations, these long hours and work retreats have a negative effect on employees as not all individuals have the same background. These organizations tend to make it easier for individuals to create a family inside work than it is to see their real family outside of work.

Keeping up the competition for these fun employee programs and perks can be expensive for these organizations. To address the work-life balance, some companies offer house cleaning services, babysitters, and take home family sized meals (Goodman). As these organizations want to attract the best talent, they are left with the responsibility of promoting themselves as the organization with the most fun and the best employee perks. The design behinds these perks are to reduce stress and create comradery among employees; however, some companies go above and beyond with their perks create a financial problem.

These fun organizations can provide expensive perks such as climbing walls and vacation money. Ruch, the CEO at Rocketrip, stated that employers are incorrectly approaching the rationale for providing the best employee perks. Instead of establishing the value of providing these programs, employers often get caught up in the pride of providing desirable benefits. The payoff for these perks is not concrete, thus creating an issue for employers as they are unable to determine an effective cost-benefit analysis.

As luxurious employee perks are becoming the social norm for fun work cultures, companies are unable to keep up with the demand. Employers are being forced to reduce these perks, creating a significant drop in employee morale. Unfortunately, these employee perks are likely to create a sense of entitlement among the employees of fun organizations. According to William Davies, a political economist, the best employee perk is "a system where employees can go to work, and just do the work (Purtill)." For

instance, an empowered workplace does not create a financial burden on companies like the various fun activities do to the organization.

While there is a growing chorus of appeals to have fun at a place that is not traditionally associated with fun, there seems to be a lot of unanticipated negative outcomes for organizations adopting fun cultures. By having these activities sponsored by organizations, individuals may feel pressured to have fun at work (Redman and Matthews 58). As fun is left to the interpretation of the individual, employees may have various opinions on what is considered fun at work. This can lead to a miscommunication among individuals and their superiors as to what is considered fun at work (Petelczyc et al 179). In addition, fun cultures that promote an environment that treats everyone like family tend to perform badly when it comes to employees who have families outside of the organization. While this type of atmosphere is desirable for a younger crowd, employees with children can feel like outcasts in their organizational culture (Miller). Unfortunately, in order to be competitive with other fun organizations, some companies have pushed their financial budget too far. This has caused these companies to take away some of the perks they originally offered. By doing this, organizations face a reduction in employee morale due to entitled employees who become accustomed to the perks these fun organizations provide to ensure they are happy (Purtill). Overall, it is easy a leader of an organization to view fun organizational cultures as a simple way to fix employee morale and productivity; however, leaders need to take a full account of factors affecting the bottom line.

Although researchers have suggested that productivity increases in fun work cultures in comparison to a traditional work environment, the activities sponsored by these fun work cultures may create distractions from their work for employees, thus negatively impacting productivity (Bigliardi et al. 37). While these organizations are

determined to make their employees feel like they are a family, the activities lead to longer hours at the office or with co-workers. When the boundary of work and play are blurred, it may be difficult to clearly define work hours (Miller). My examination will reveal the perception of employees in fun work cultures and how this affects their home life. Lastly, I will examine the relationships employees have in these fun cultures. Since these fun cultures lack a sense of formality in the communication among co-workers, a lack of professionalism can lead to unwanted behavior at the office (Fleming 294). This study will examine the perceptions of the relationships employees form with their leadership and their colleagues. Overall, the purpose of this study is to determine whether fun work cultures are the panacea researchers proclaim them to be, or if they have developed unforeseen negative outcomes.

Methodology

Due to the lack of research on the negative outcomes of a fun work environment, I wanted to conduct a study gaining the perspective of these individuals in these fun work cultures to determine if these cultures are as fun and beneficial to the company and its employees as they have been promoted by past researchers (Tang et al. 1788). In this study, I have conducted interviews in order to examine possible negative outcomes of a fun work environment. This study focused on the productivity, work-life balance, and relationships employees have in these fun cultures. The data for this study has been collected through interviews. Asking employees about their work culture is believed to be the best way to get an understanding of workplace behavioral expectations (Schein 2010, 25). By conducting interviews, I have been able to gain the perspective of these employees within the fun cultures in order to collect qualitative

data that provides insights to the artifacts, behaviors, and underlying assumptions of these fun cultures.

Data Collection

I conducted eight phone interviews with people from seven companies (see Table I). These interviews ranged in lengths from twenty to forty-five minutes long, with an average of thirty minutes for each interview. The participants in this study were introduced to the researcher through family members and business connections. Through the course of the study, some participants provided connections to more people who work in fun cultures, thus providing access for more qualitative data. All subjects in this study worked in the West Coast. Each interviewee worked for a company that promoted fun activities with co-workers at events organized by the organization.

Each interviewee was asked that same nineteen questions about his or her work culture (see Appendix A). Some interviews had additional follow up questions for clarification of the meaning of his or her answers. The participants in this study were informed that the purpose of the interview was to gain insight of the fun work culture. The questions asked were general for the purpose of obtaining basic background information and an overall summary of his or her interpretation of the culture, focusing on descriptions the artifacts and behaviors within the culture. Questions were intentionally neutral in an attempt to not bias or sway responses positively or negatively. The participants were asked to describe what type of people the culture attracts to the company and how the company selects those people. Participants were asked questions about the impact of work on their home life. The reasoning behind these questions were to see if the extra time in the office to build relationships has created a strain with the employee's relationships outside of work. In addition, participants were requested to

describe the fun perks and activities provided by their employer and explain how their environment affected their behavior. The purpose of explaining the perks is to give an idea as to what the participants consider fun. It also gives the participants an opportunity to explain the behavior and reactions that come from using or participating in these fun perks or activities. Participants were asked to explain their relationships with colleagues and managers to gain an insight to the boundaries that are placed with these professional relationships. Lastly, participants were requested to describe any negative behavior or outcomes that have come from the people inside these fun cultures. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to accurately provide qualitative data.

Data Analysis

After obtaining the qualitative data, I researched for repeated words and themes in each interview. Then, I compared the themes found in the individual interviews with the themes found in the other interviews. The pattern of the themes in the interviews show common characteristics shared among these fun cultures. These shared beliefs and behaviors described in the interviews allow me to deduce the common practices of these fun cultures. The perception of the employees in these interviews allowed me to determine whether or not these cultures have a negative impact of productivity, work-life balance, and relationships with those within the culture. Data analysis produced the findings described in the next section and summarized in Table II.

Findings

To preview the findings, evidence shows that the many companies with fun work cultures share the same type of open workspace with the goal of easing collaboration within the departments; however, these workspaces have the negative outcome of being loud and annoying to those within the environment. These work environments vary per

company as far as perks provided, however, most of the interviewed subjects enjoy the perks and have not observed a lot of negative outcomes. There are mixed opinions within these companies on the culture's impact on productivity. Some believe that a traditional work environment would increase productivity, while others believe that the productivity would be worse or remain the same in the different environment. Relationships within the fun cultures are typically friendly among colleagues and managers. However, with the friendly culture came unclear policies and unstructured management which led to confusion as to how to behave in situations such as reporting and requesting vacation time. The majority of participants reported transparency in their culture which lead to positive open communication. The fun cultures tend to attract young, intelligent, and outgoing people; but their exclusivity leads to introverts missing out on the fun cultures. Lastly, it was expressed that fun cultures lead to some employees displaying entitled behaviors. In the section that follows, I present detailed evidence supporting these themes.

Workspace

The physical layout of the offices of all the companies were very similar in that they had an open layout and creative office designs. For example, Jacob from Epsilon stated:

"We're seated in pods, so it would be groups of about six people. Then the walls that divide those pods are short walls. They're only like up to your waist. You can literally just stand up and see everyone on your floor, so that probably creates more collaboration and transparency and openness."

Some offices were designed to reflect environments from all over the world to allow people to escape from their everyday environment. On the opposite side, other offices designs were intended to remind people of home and make them more comfortable in

their environment. The company Eta used both types of designs in their workspaces.

For instance, Evelyn stated:

“We have little mini offices that aren't occupied. [...] One of them is a beach theme and it has wallpaper of a beach. It's actually really cute. They have a theater room, they all kinds of things, a kids room. It's endless.”

In addition, Claire described the work environment of Eta as:

“Okay, so every pod has a living room in it, so like we have a sofa and decorative pillows and decorative lamps and like a decorative rug and a little pouf [...] so the décor is very fun and simple, which is really nice, and there's also green walls, the ones with the plant walls, which is really fun, [...] It's kind of like being in your home and in nature, which is really fun.”

In addition to the unique workspace design, Eta has a slide that connects its floors and departments. Claire stated “[The slide] was to symbolize unity and connection and fun.” Not every company was large or enough to have a slide in their workspace, like Eta, or a beach volleyball court, like Epsilon. Some of these organizations rely on “off sites” and “team outings” to promote fun at work. In addition to open floor plans and unique, fun office designs, providing free food and drinks for all employees seemed to be a common theme among these organizations.

When describing the open layout of the office, 75% of interviewees stated that they thought the open workspace was too loud and distracting; however, when asked if they would prefer a more traditional work environment, with individual offices spaces, 75% of interviewees stated they would prefer to stay in their current environment as they fear they would lose communication and the ability to easily collaborate.

When describing their workspace, 63% of interviewees described their environment as comfortable. While some companies were only able to provide leather couches to create a comfortable space for their employees, other companies were able to be more extravagant in creating comfort. Alpha and Delta both provide nap rooms for

employees to get a break from work and rest their eyes for a few minutes. Alpha provides comfortable seating such as rocking chairs, bean bags, and hammocks. Eta tried to mimic the aspects of a comfortable home by having a living room set up with couches and decorative lamps near the working pods.

When asked to describe distractions at work, 75% of interviewees blamed the open layout. The layout was considered to be distracting by several individuals because of other co-worker's conversations. At Beta, the engineering department was co-located with the call center which created a lot of distractions for Ian who was used to quieter environments. In addition to the distractions of co-worker's conversations, some people employees had more unique complaints. Seth stated that in addition to non-work related chatting, he can get distracted by dogs in the office. Claire complained that their largest distraction is music being played over the speakers in the office. Claire stated, "[The music is] really frustrating because it's literally electric guitar solos or rap music or just something that's really distracting."

To summarize, workspaces at these fun cultures share a theme of being comfortable and aesthetically pleasing for members within the organizations. These organizations share the idea of having an open layout for their workspaces. Participants reported that a distraction for them at work is the open layout of workspaces due to overhearing conversations of co-workers.

Social Pressure from Perks

Participants in this study were asked a few questions about their experiences with the perks provided by their employers. Every interviewee perceived some or all of the perks positively. Eighty-eight percent of participants stated that they felt little to no pressure from others to participate in employer sponsored activities. Most participants

viewed the activities as opportunities to connect with their co-workers. Seth and Jacob stated that they view these perks as a part of their compensation. However, not all of the participants viewed the employer provided perks as beneficial to the organization. Evelyn stated described their culture as “It's pretty much like a big sorority in that you're not in, then you're not in.” Evelyn was referring to the cliquy environment in her office where there are outcasts within the community. This behavior tends to transition into the activities sponsored by the employer. Evelyn expressed that they do feel pressure to participate in these activities otherwise; co-workers will be nosy and wonder why that person is not participating. In an alternative view, Morgan explained the popularity behind the fun culture and its activities by saying, “Because we're all kind of drinking the Kool-Aid, and we like the taste, I think that creates kind of an engaged environment for all of us.”

To summarize, the perks and fun activities provided by their employers did not appear to pressure a majority of the participants in this study to behave in an uncomfortable manner. Overall, the perks were viewed positively among the participants. The outlier to this study is Evelyn who associates the culture with cliquy and nosy behavior, thus removing the joy from these fun activities for Evelyn.

Productivity

Each participant of this study provided various responses about the level of productivity and engagement of those within their organizations. Jacob described the people with the organization as, “hyperproductive.” Jacob explained that the company tends to hire people who have pushed themselves their whole life, and they continue to push their performance at work. On the other side of the spectrum, Evelyn stated the people within their organization are not very productive, except for the exception of a

few outliers. Evelyn described these individuals to be missing from their desks, on their phones, and producing low call volumes. Jessica described the effects of the fun culture on productivity and engagement below:

“Like the whole statistics around how engagement, actually teams that are highly engaged are 7.8% times more likely to be productive. I think that aspect of truly caring about one another, the work we did, and generally just enjoying our day to day, made us very productive. More so than I've experienced in kind of corporate environments, where you're just a number.”

Although the responses to the productivity levels varied in each fun culture, the responses regarding how productive the employees would be in a traditional work environment were very similar. Seventy-five percent of participants believed the employees in the current fun culture would be less productive or have no difference in productivity if the employees were in a traditional work culture. Seth believes that there is no change in the productivity levels in the different culture because distractions are in both cultures, such as checking being on the phone for personal use. Jacob stated that the productivity of his team would be hindered in a traditional work space because members would not be able to easily collaborate. Morgan stated that “productivity comes from a result of motivation.” Morgan has experienced various work cultures, including traditional work environments. Morgan stated, “I think every company has a different way of measuring productivity, and to that end, productivity is an outcome of a positive and a good culture, not necessarily the other way around that.”

In summary, the reported productivity level varied per organization. There was very little pattern in the participants reporting of the productivity in their organization. However, the majority of participants agreed that if they were in a traditional work culture, productivity would either decrease or stay the same.

Work-Life Balance

Sixty-five percent of participants in this study reported that their work had no interference with their home life. Morgan described his work relationship best by saying, "I don't think that at any point, I feel as if there's a competition for my attention. I don't think that's the expectation, that I should be spending more time at work." Alex was one of the three people who agreed that work did interfere with the home life; however, she was concerned with the amount of time she spent away from home commuting to work every day. Although Claire did not work more than forty hours a week, she would take the stress of work home with her thus affecting her home life. Seth, who agreed work did affect his personal life, seemed to spend the most amount of time working outside of the office compared to the other participants. Seth stated,

"I mean; people do check their email into the night here. Like, I have my email on my phone. I check my email up until the time I go to bed. I usually work when I do get home. So, even though I might not be in the office for a full eight hours, I usually do some additional work when I get home, because it's kind of the culture. People are working and online and available outside of the normal work hours. [...] I mean; I have a ton of fun at work. People are very sociable. You're not expected to only talk about work all day. You can be having conversations with your coworkers about non-work related tasks and activities. That's not an issue."

To summarize, the majority of participants reported little to no effects from work on their home life. Alex, who had a flexible work schedule, reported working at non work hours to be normal and expected behavior from the culture.

Relationships in the Office

When the participants were asked to describe their relationships with their managers and co-workers, the majority of responses were positive. Besides Eta, the relationships among management at all other organizations were described as friendly. Ian explained that the managers work besides you and are not seem simply as supervisors. Within all organizations, the relationships among co-workers were labeled

as friendly or described friendly behavior. Morgan stated that in Gamma's culture, "...there's almost a sense of no one really is better than anybody..." Even though Claire's department was busy making calls, Claire described casual and friendly interactions among her co-workers such as saying hello and doing small talk.

Seth, Alex, and Jessica described their relationships with their managers and co-workers as open and transparent. Seth described being comfortable asking management questions or setting up meetings. Alex stated that there is open communication available at all times and that the people within the organization are approachable. According to Jessica the CEO of Zeta valued transparency and honesty in the workplace and called it, "Caring with Candor."

Claire stated the management at Eta was not transparent. Both Claire and Evelyn expressed concerns over changes happening in the office that left both of them feeling insecure about their position at the company. Claire described her manager as an "authority and sociable." Evelyn stressed that her manager obviously had favorite subordinates which made her uncomfortable. In addition to the non-transparent decisions from management, both Claire and Evelyn were the only participants to mention employees leaving the company.

In addition to the friendly management, another theme appeared through the answers of participants. Some of the participants did not experience a clear hierarchical structure in the organization like one would experience in a traditional work environment. Morgan stated, "I have a manager, but my manager isn't really my boss. My manager is more just responsible for the people in my role across my region." Morgan then explain that the support he would find through a manager was found through a mentor within the company and a manager was who you report your work too. People within the same department have different mentors but the same manager. Matt does not

see other people as managers but due to the candid and friendly atmosphere, he views these people as someone simply the people in charge of reporting to the company. In addition to Morgan's confusion with leadership, Jessica stated, "I don't even know who my manager is." Jessica described the organization leadership as "loosey-goosey hierarchy."

In addition to the confusion of the roles of the leadership within the organization, policies were often not clear leading to chaos of promised perks. In Jessica's organization, she reported half of the company believed employees only had a couple of weeks of paid time off (PTO) while the other half believed there was unlimited PTO. In regards to the PTO, Morgan also expressed confusion with the perks in his organization. He expressed that there were not any clear standards for PTO. Despite people having unlimited PTO, Ian reported his co-workers taking less time off because they do not want to be perceived as lazy among the other members in the organization.

In most of the companies, participants reported their organization had a clear policy as to address disciplining employees; however, some participants were ultimately unfamiliar with the disciplinary policies established at their organization. Jessica was the only participant to report an issue with the disciplinary actions of management at her organization. Jessica stated that although her organization poorly tracked vacation time, she believed there were a few employees abusing the perk and high trust environment. Jessica gave an example of an employee seemed to have an abundance of excuses for missing work. An irritated co-worker kept a log of his absences expressed their concern that the employee be fired; however, no actions were taken on the employee. Overall Jessica stated, "I would say generally this [disciplining] wasn't our strong suit."

In summary, the majority of participants agreed that the relationships with both their co-workers could be described as friendly. The relationships among some

participants were positive as the organizational culture and managers valued transparency in the workplace. In the organization that the participants described the relationships to not be transparent, both employees of the organization spoke of employees leaving the company. A few participants in the study stated the relationships with their managers were casual and lacked authority. Some organizations did not have a strict hierarchical leadership path, leading to the confusion among employees for reporting and understanding company policies.

Youthful Employees

Another theme that appeared through this study is that these fun organizations attract young and intelligent employees. Morgan stated that his company was attracted to curious individuals who are “hungry to learn.” Jessica stated that the company attracted emotionally intelligent people. Seth described the people at his company as young and outgoing. Evelyn stated her company, Eta, typically hired recent college graduates. Evelyn stated the majority of new hires came from the same sorority group in college. Claire stated Eta typically hires young, smart and driven individuals. She believes her company is attracted to those with social skills. Claire shared her concerns that people who lack social norms are “very discriminated against in modern tech companies.” Claire provided an example of a strange man who was hired at her company. If it was not for his friendly demeanor, she believes he would not have been offered the position. Claire explained that upholding the culture is very important to Eta, so members of the organization are not only hired on for their technical skills but also for their ability to positively reflect the company culture.

To summarize, choosing to hire younger individuals was a common theme among these fun organizations. Other characteristics desired by these companies were for employees to be intelligent, driven, and curious about their work. While the majority of the participants shared positive aspects of the selection process for their organizations,

Claire expressed a concern that her company and other modern tech companies discriminate against those who are not as sociable or outgoing.

Entitlement

A few participants reported a sense of entitlement among the employees who work in these fun cultures. Alex stated that while she feels not every employee acts entitled at work, she has overheard some negative complaints from her colleagues about the perks provided by their employer. Alex reported that employees have complained about wanting different snacks or not liking the meals provided at lunch, all of which are provided for free to the employees. While some employees are complaining about the snacks, others are taking them home. Alex stated these snacks are free at work, but employees are not supposed to fill their backpacks full of snacks to take home. Seth expressed the same concerns when he stated:

“...there's a sense of entitlement now that we have the perks that we do have. People feel really entitled to them and don't realize that we're lucky to have and be offered what we are offered. Instead, people kind of just have a more, more, more attitude, or complain, 'Oh, the snacks aren't healthy enough,' or, 'Oh, I don't like the yoga instructor,' and things like that when it's like, in reality we're lucky to be offered the things that we are.”

In addition, Alex and Seth agreeing that these perks are making employees entitled, Evelyn expressed her concerns that the perk employer paid health care is not giving the younger employees a sense of reality in the workforce.

In summary, some participants expressed concern over the affects the perks are having on the employee's attitude towards the perks. Despite the perks being free, some employees portray attitudes of entitlement. Participants expressed concerns of fear the employer provided perks are not giving employees a sense of reality and are worsening employee attitudes.

Discussion

This study focused on the unanticipated negative outcomes of a fun work culture. The findings indicate that there is little negativity associated with the fun cultures in regards to productivity, work-life balance, and relationships among managers. While the purpose of the study was to expose possible unconsidered negative experiences with the fun cultures, the findings did not reflect a heavy consensus. However, through the interviews, participants revealed negative experiences in other areas of their fun work cultures, such as entitled attitudes from colleagues and unclear policies or social norms.

A shared artifact of culture among these fun organizations is the use of an open layout floor plan for the workspace. Despite the open layout creating distractions for the employees within the fun cultures, the participants expressed their concern that there would be a decrease in productivity if employees were placed in more traditional work environments, such as working in cubicles. The findings show that overall employees in fun work cultures would prefer to be in an open and collaborative space than be placed in a cubicle.

The productivity level of the employees in fun organization varied per organization, thus creating inconsistent qualitative data. Due to the lack of consistency of reports about productivity levels from these fun organizational cultures, this study was unable to determine if fun work cultures affect productivity in the office.

However, the majority of participants believed that if the company shifted to a traditional work culture, then employees would be less productive. Although the participants reported various levels of productivity, the majority of participants had the same negative perception of the effect the traditional work cultures have on productivity.

The findings from this study revealed a high percentage of employees from fun work cultures reporting little to no issue with work-life balance. Seth was the only participant who reported working late into the night; however, he seemed content with the blurred lines of home and work. Seth described working outside of the office as a normal behavior practice within the culture. Within Delta's fun culture, there is a shared assumption that their employees will check their emails late into the night. It is evident Seth shares the belief with his company that it is acceptable to expect work be done by individuals outside of normal office hours. Overall, work did not interfere with the majority of the participants in this study, indicating that the fun cultures do not create an uncomfortable high demand of performance or participation outside of normal office hours.

While previous studies have presented inappropriate behavior among colleagues and the managers due to the casual demeanor in fun cultures, this study could not report any inappropriate behavior from the fun work cultures (Fleming 294). In this study, the majority of the relationships within the various organizations were described as friendly. In addition to friendly behaviors, some participants reported their managers valuing transparency. It is evident transparency is a part of the culture in some of these fun organizations as it is reflected in both the physical, open design of the office spaces and the observed behaviors of the members within the organization. Since the majority of participants reported friendly and helpful relationships with their managers and co-workers, this study indicates that fun work cultures lead to stronger relationships within the organization.

While the relationships may be friendly in fun organizations, some organizations lack clear guidelines for policies and hierarchical paths. The casual atmosphere of the fun cultures has led to some interesting relationships among managers. Jessica reported

experiences of times at work where she did not know who her manager was because the management shifted so often. In addition to uncertainty of the role of management, Jen reported that policies such as unlimited paid time off was unclear to employees in the organization as there was not clear path for communicating policies. A common perk in these fun work cultures is unlimited paid time off. While this concept may be appealing in theory, Morgan stated he felt employees took less time off because they did not want to be viewed as lazy. While most participants either reported that they did not know or that their organization had a clear plan in place for taking disciplinary actions, a few other organizations were not as organized. Jessica stated the her company poorly performed when it came to taking disciplinary actions, especially when addressing unlimited paid time off. Although these fun cultures emphasize the importance of communication, the lack of structure among leadership, policy guidelines, and disciplinary actions within the organizations in this study may lead to some unanticipated negative outcomes (Fleming 286).

Since the fun organizational cultures were designed to attract and retain younger employees, it is not a surprise that study participants reported that young, driven individuals were attracted to their companies (Miller). Few negative remarks were made about the young talent; however, Claire stated in her interview that employers in the modern technology companies were discriminating against individuals who lack social skills. By refraining from these individuals, employers may be missing out on talents and skills provided by those individuals who are not as outgoing or sociable in a work environment.

Lastly, an unanticipated negative outcome for these fun work culture is that the entitled behavior shared among some colleagues at a few of the participants' organizations. By providing these unique perks, employers intend to make the

experience at work easier for the members of the organization (Miller). For some of the employees that have acquired an entitled attitude their actions have led to deviant behavior, such as taking home free snacks. Twenty- five percent of participants directly reported entitled behavior among their co-workers, this finding shows there are unforeseen negative outcomes of a fun work culture.

Overall, while this study was intended to provide insights into possible negative outcomes of a fun work culture in the areas of productivity, work-life balance, and relationships among managers and co-workers, it ended up providing more insights to other parts of the culture that are less obvious. In the friendly and casual atmospheres produced by fun work cultures, clarity of organization structure and communication of policies tend to be gray areas of the organizational culture. While it is important for employees to have organizational fit, fun cultures tend to discriminate against people who lack social skills. Lastly, this study indicates that as employees become accustomed to the perks provided by their employers, they become dissatisfied and demand more from their employer.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There were a few limitations with this study that hindered the ability to collect high quality qualitative data. Since the study consisted of a convenience sample, there was no flexibility in selecting participants for the study. While all participants in the study worked in fun work cultures, the organizations varied by size and stages of company growth. In addition to the variance in size, some of the participants from each organization worked in different departments. Since the roles varied per participant, the responses about his or her concerns and responsibilities were inconsistent.

In this study, I was only able to conduct phone interviews as all the participants in the study were in a different region of the United States than me. It would have been beneficial if I were able to observe the artifacts and behaviors of each culture. This would be beneficial as I would be able to observe if the artifacts lined up with the employee's perceptions of the company's beliefs and value. In addition, since culture is based on a shared system of beliefs and values, it was difficult to determine the certainty about the organization culture as it was based on a single person's perspective. Also, it would have been beneficial to gain the perspective of the managers within these fun organizations in order to see how effective they believe the culture is or what could be improved.

Lastly, through this study a risk of ageism was flagged throughout the interviews with those from these fun organizational cultures. Because the companies seemed to attract and hire younger employees, there were signs of discrimination against hiring older people. It would be interesting to see future studies on the impact age has during the selecting process with fun organizations as it seemed to be a subtle theme throughout my study.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Based on the consent form sent to you prior to this phone conversation, do you consent to be a participant in this interview?
2. Can you please tell me your name, department, how long you have been at the organization and what your role is here?
3. Tell me about your culture.
4. What physical aspects about your culture stand out to you?
5. How would you describe the people your company attracts?
6. Does your company hire strictly on technical skills?
7. How many hours do you work per week?
8. Do employees feel as if they have to work a certain amount of hours?
9. Do you believe work interferes with your home life?
10. Business consultants are talking about the popularity of fun work culture. Do you believe your company subscribes to that?
11. What are some of the perks provided by your company?
12. How do you feel about participating in the perks provided by your employer?
13. Do you feel like you have to participate in the fun at work?
14. What relaxes you at work?
15. What distracts you at work?
16. How would you describe the average relationship among managers and their subordinates?
 - a. Relationship among co-workers?
17. How does your company discipline employees?
18. How productive do you think people are at your company?
 - a. Do you think this would be different in a more traditional work place?
 - b. Do you feel like employees are engaged?
19. Are there any unanticipated negative outcomes of the employee perks or within the culture?

Industry	Company	Originator	Department	Length of Time at Organization	Location (U.S.)
TECHNOLOGY	Epsilon	Jacob	Business Operations	5.5 years	West Coast
	Eta	Evelyn	Sales	6 months	West Coast
	Alpha	Alex	Reception	10 months	West Coast
	Beta	Ian	Engineering	7 months	West Coast
	Gamma	Morgan	Sales	3 months	West Coast
	Delta	Seth	Product Organization	2 years 2 months	West Coast
	Eta	Claire	Sales	5 months	West Coast
SERVICE	Zeta	Jessica	Customer Success	>2 years	West Coast

Themes	Sub-Themes	Originator	Quotes
WORKPLACE	Artifacts	Jacob	"We're seated in pods, so it would be groups of about six people. Then the walls that divide those pods are short walls. They're only like up to your waist. You can literally just stand up and see everyone on your floor, so that probably creates more collaboration and transparency and openness."
		Evelyn	"We have little mini offices that aren't occupied. [...] One of them is a beach theme and it has wallpaper of a beach. It's actually really cute. They have a theater room, they all kinds of things, a kid's room. It's endless."
		Seth	"So, we have a very open ... This kind of just goes with everything that I said, but our floor plan's completely open. Most of our executives don't have offices. We have a lot of areas that are meant to be collaborative and make you feel comfortable all throughout the office."
		Claire	"Okay, so every pod has a living room in it, so like we have a sofa and decorative pillows and decorative lamps and like a decorative rug and a little pouf [...] so the décor is very fun and simple, which is really nice, and there's also green walls, the ones with the plant walls, which is really fun, [...] It's kind of like being in your home and in nature, which is really fun."

SOCIAL PRESSURES FROM PERKS	Artifacts	Morgan	"Because we're all kind of drinking the Kool-Aid, and we like the taste, I think that creates kind of an engaged environment for all of us."
		Evelyn	"It's pretty much like a big sorority in that you're not in, then you're not in."
		Alex	"They definitely encourage [participating in perks], but I don't feel like I have to... I definitely don't feel like I need to do like more if I don't want to."

PRODUCTIVITY	Artifacts	Jessica	"[...] Like the whole statistics around how engagement, actually teams that are highly engaged are 7.8% times more likely to be productive. I think that aspect of truly caring about one another, the work we did, and generally just enjoying our day to day, made us very productive. More so than I've experienced in kind of corporate environments, where you're just a number."
		Seth	"I would say it varies by team, but I would say I don't think we're more productive than any other company but I don't think we're less productive either, you know? Just because we do have the ability to communicate and chat throughout the day, I don't think that makes us less productive. I think it's just more open about the fact that we're not always being productive."
		Jacob	"I think they're very productive, like hyperproductive, I would say."
WORK-LIFE BALANCE	Espoused Beliefs and Values	Seth	"I mean; people do check their email into the night here. Like, I have my email on my phone. I check my email up until the time I go to bed. I usually work when I do get home. So, even though I might not be in the office for a full eight hours, I usually do some additional work when I get home, because it's kind of the culture. People are working and online and available outside of the normal work hours. [...] I mean; I have a ton of fun at work. People are very sociable. You're not expected to only talk about work all day. You can be having conversations with your coworkers about non-work related tasks and activities. That's not an issue"
		Morgan	"I don't think that at any point, I feel as if there's a competition for my attention. I don't think that's the expectation, that I should be spending more time at work."

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE OFFICE	Espoused Beliefs and Values	Alex	"There's always a sense, too, that you can put time on someone else's calendar if you want to talk to them, if you want to learn about what they do. I think that just kind of goes through every part of the company, that communication is open and people are approachable."
		Ian	"I feel like it's generally a pretty supportive environment where we're all trying to help each other out rather than competing."
		Jessica	"Again, it's [relationships with coworkers] sort of blurred lines a little bit, but I think generally it was quite strong. Again, people at work kind of knew my personal life and vice versa. We were all pretty open about that."
		Jacob	"I'd say definitely friendly. It's clear that managers want the best for their subordinates, and this is coming from my experience. They also know that happy subordinates work better. The managers will be more successful if their subordinates feel utilized, feel valued, so they try to do that."
		Morgan	"...there's almost a sense of no one really is better than anybody..."
YOUTHFUL EMPLOYEES	Artifacts	Jessica	"Very emotionally intelligent people. It attracted people who really cared. It also attracted people who were very committed to personal growth."
		Evelyn	"At my particular location, or company-wide, actually, it seems like they really focus or they focus on hiring newly graduated college students."
		Seth	"Young, I mean, very, very fun, very outgoing."
		Claire	"I would say that they attract smart, driven people. They also skew younger and female and white and blonde, overwhelmingly"
ENTITLEMENT	Underlying Assumptions	Seth	"...there's a sense of entitlement now that we have the perks that we do have. People feel really entitled to them and don't realize that we're lucky to have and be offered what we are offered. Instead, people kind of just have a more, more, more attitude, or complain, 'Oh, the snacks aren't healthy enough,' or, 'Oh, I don't like the yoga instructor,' and things like that when it's like, in reality we're lucky to be offered the things that we are. "
		Alex	"Not just at this company, but other companies. ... certain ideas that people have of like entitlement. Now, that's not to say that everyone here is like that, but there are cases. There have been some negative cases where people will complain about something, and they totally forget that this is free. They'll complain about the lunch one day, and it's like, 'Well, fine, don't eat it. There's a restaurant down the street. Go get your lunch there if you don't like what's on the menu.'"