

 bright^{hr}

**It Pays
To Play**

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Foreword by Sir Cary Cooper CBE, distinguished Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health, University of Manchester and Founding Director at Robertson Cooper

Work is such a large part of people's lives and is becoming more so as working hours increase and our ability to remotely complete work tasks develops too. When we spend so much of our time at work, it's important to ensure that it's an environment conducive to a healthy and happy lifestyle.

Research and work carried out by my university spin-off company, Robertson Cooper, for BrightHR shows that being connected to, and excited about, your role at work, is an important aspect of people's ability to be happy, healthy and productive. But that is only part of the picture; whether or not people experience more positive than negative emotions at work is equally important.

Much of my experience with companies over the last forty years focuses on how you can prevent stress and help people to flourish. This means focusing on developing a culture that prioritises employee experience and wellbeing as a key driver for increased performance.

We know that experiencing positive emotions not only protects people against stress, but actually helps them to become more productive at work, excel at what they do and remain with their employers for longer periods of time. For this reason, it is important to foster a culture of positive emotions towards the workplace.

As a leader, think about what you have done today to help your people to feel happy, excited and inspired. Your ability to encourage positive emotions in your team will become increasingly important in the years to come as the millennial generation starts to make up a larger proportion of your workforce.

This study indicates that more millennials expect fun to be an integral part of their lives at work than any other demographic. But this contrasts sharply with the very small number of business owners who think the same. The millennial presence in our workforce is only going to continue to grow over the next five years, and employers need to acknowledge their expectations and ensure that decision-making is informed by the needs of this group rather than past habits.

But it's important to remember that introducing fun in the workplace isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Positive emotions are driven by different factors for different people. While men prefer computer games, for instance, women want a more social orientation. Fun is a really personal thing, and, generally speaking, people don't have very high expectations about what employers should provide – instead, it's more about employers and managers giving their teams permission to take the lead and initiate play.

However, although many people need little support from their employers, with pressure and pace at work increasing, organisations expecting high performance from their people need to invest in their experiences at work if they want to attract and keep the best talent.

I urge employers to look at fostering a culture of positive psychological wellbeing. We know positive emotions help make people happy and that, in turn, happy people are productive, loyal and generally have higher levels of wellbeing than those who aren't. Looking at the findings of this report, if we know that fun can increase effectiveness and productivity at work, why aren't we doing more to bring fun and play into the workplace?



Introduction

The workplace is changing. As 'Millennials' – people born between 1980 and 2000 – enter the workforce, many offices will soon comprise three generations – if they don't already.

This report investigates the impact of positive emotions, introduced by fun and play, in the ever-changing workplace. It reveals that those employers who don't invest time and resources in helping employees to feel empowered to have fun at work, could be losing out.

Working with world-leading expert on wellbeing at work, Professor Sir Cary Cooper, and the team at his university spin-off company, psychological wellbeing consultants Robertson Cooper, we carried out a survey of 2,000 employees from all over the UK. The data revealed some remarkable insights as to how employers can introduce more positive emotions to the workplace through fun and playful activities.

As well as understanding policy to get the best out of its workforce, employers who don't think about the culture of the workplace – and the importance of fun at work – are in danger of being left behind, and, before diving into this report, there are some important questions the modern business owner needs to ask.

Are you having enough fun in the workplace? Are your staff putting enough 'play time' into their working day?

Are you creating a culture where employees feel trusted, valued and empowered through play?

Sir Cary and the Robertson Cooper team told us that the winning formula for a happy, healthy and high-performing workforce is to focus on two things: first, to ensure that people feel connected to, and interested in, the things they do at work; and secondly, to give them the opportunity to experience more positive emotions than negative ones.

This research supports this formula and demonstrates that when it comes to getting the best out of your workforce, it pays to play. Fostering a culture of play at work can save your company money through reduced absence, higher productivity and enhanced levels of creativity.

Yet not everybody seems to know that it's possible to be professional and playful at the same time. This is despite the notions of 'fun' and 'play' at work becoming increasingly important to workers who want to be creative, committed and motivated – especially among your younger employees.

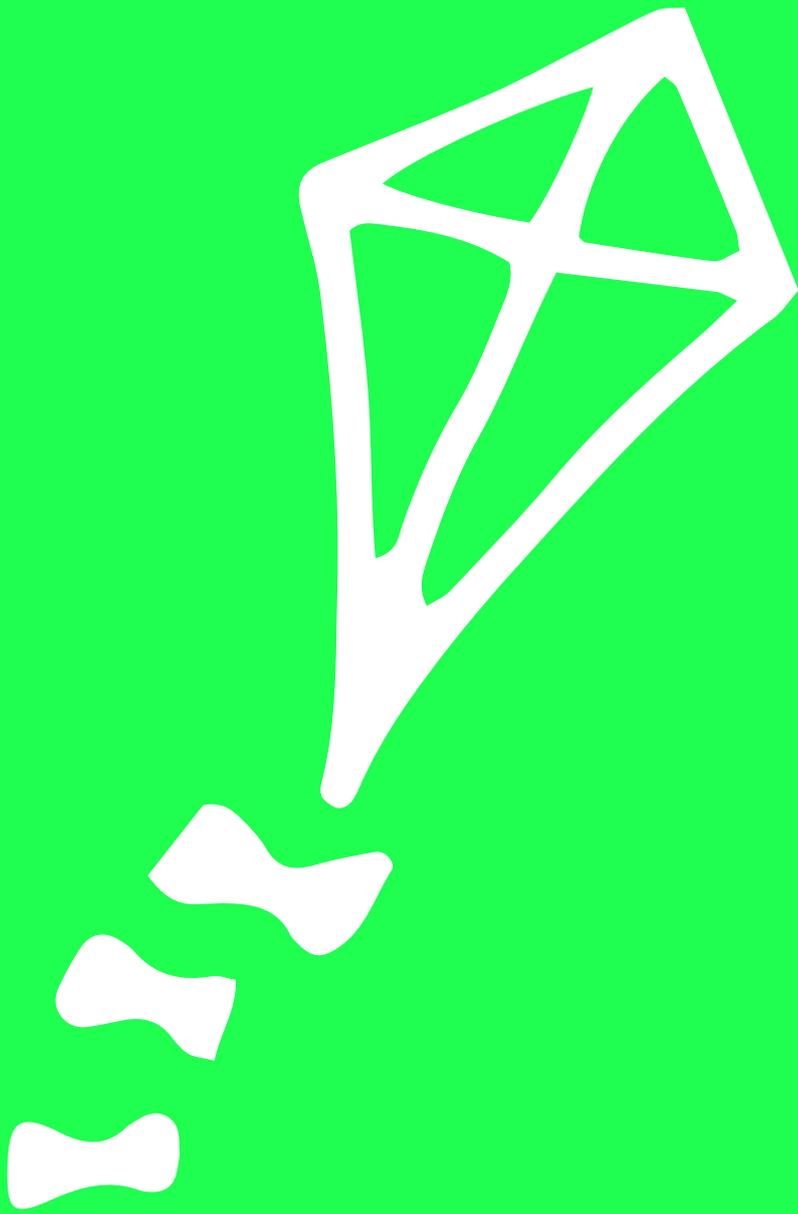
But how do you turn theory into practice and bring fun to life inside your organisation? To find out, we asked workers and their managers what they want from work, and if they are getting enough of it. From massage days to office pets, we uncovered a variety of ways that modern, progressive companies can help their staff to be happier, more productive and more satisfied at work.

If you want to keep your best people, you'll need to find out what motivates them. Encourage them to be brilliant and think differently by giving them the freedom to express themselves, and create a working environment in which everyone feels valued and important.

Fun plays a key role in all of this. It can bring together people of different ages, genders and backgrounds. It can also inspire them to be creative and develop loyalty for their job and their company, meaning they want to stay, and making play a valuable tool for improving staff retention.

It's important for fun not to feel scheduled or planned-in. Nor should it be offered as a gimmick or a one-off. It certainly shouldn't be viewed as another meeting, or a task on the to-do list. Play at work should be down to the individual as and when they feel they need it. Placing trust in the employee to use play in the right way – to make them more productive, more creative, more in-spired – empowers them.

Laughing and having fun won't detract from all the amazing work you do. Instead, it will actually help you to improve on the great things you're already doing, and to think differently about some of the challenges you face. Life is too short to take work too seriously.



**So what is
fun at work?**

What our survey said:

Most of the employees we spoke to described workplace fun as 'having great colleagues who they enjoy spending time with' and 'doing work-related tasks that are interesting and fulfilling'.

But it was varied. Others described workplace fun as:

- Having a physical environment that feels fun and relaxed
- Achieving work goals
- Celebrating colleagues' special occasions
- Clocking-off time
- Non-work activities, such as games or social events provided by the company

In the experience of psychological wellbeing experts, Robertson Cooper, who we worked with on this survey, it's well known that one of the essential factors to contribute to a successful workplace is that of relationships. Good working relationships are one of the most important sources of wellbeing. And, after all, we spend more time with our colleagues than we do our friends and family.

People want to be recognised for their own achievements but also want to celebrate the successes of their colleagues. These are small and relatively easy ways of ensuring an everyday element of fun in the workplace.

By helping them to be more creative, staff are inspired to think differently and will achieve more of their professional goals. If you've got employees who see home time as the best part of the day, you need to ask yourself – "why?" And "what should you be doing to change that?"

We were sad to hear that more than a third of the people we surveyed hadn't taken part in any 'fun' activities over the last six months. Especially when introducing the idea of fun at work doesn't have to be difficult. The most popular way of making work a more fun place was 'dress down Friday'. Empowering employees to dress appropriately depending on their working day, which might include important meetings, is all about placing trust in staff – and treating them like adults.

The top five activities that were felt to make work a more fun place to be were:

- Dress down Friday (25%)
- Office parties/nights out (21%)
- A pool table (19%)
- An office pet (18%)
- Wellbeing massage days (17%)
- Other activities (in order of importance selected by employees) were a lottery syndicate (15%), charity

fundraising days (15%), work bake-off (14%), table tennis (12%), computer consoles (12%), fancy dress days (11%), team sports (11%), yoga/pilates (10%), board games (9%), fantasy football league (9%), karaoke (8%), nerf gun wars (6%), a work choir (5%), swingball (5%) and a knitting club (4%)

But what are the psychological reasons that these activities appeal? The team at Robertson Cooper has some thoughts;

- Dress Down Friday: Shows that an employer trusts staff's judgement and also values their comfort.
- Office parties/nights out: Social support is a key part of resilience. Informal gatherings allow people to form bonds and get to know each other to a level that will build opportunities to both provide and receive social support. Also, if people have non-work issues affecting their performance at work, they'll be more likely to raise these and gain valuable support in a less formal environment.
- A pool table: Provides the opportunity for a sense of mastery and achievement (for the winners anyway!), which is a great way to build confidence – a key element for resilience and a protector against stress.
- An office pet: Bring-your-pet-to-work schemes have been proven to reduce stress and increase satisfaction with work. Petting an animal reduces average heart rate in pet owners too, so this is probably an intuitive choice. It creates a joint focus and also brings health benefits.
- Wellbeing massage days (17%): This is a real example of yearning for down-time. The ability to rest and refocus is important in the fight against stress and the drive to maximise effectiveness at work. The 'always-on' culture makes it hard for people to really take a break, so this is a very desirable choice.

Not surprisingly, the idea of fun differs between generations. Almost as many people surveyed wanted a more traditional and established form of fun with their colleagues – a lottery syndicate – as much as they did a computer console, something that appeals to workers under the age of 35. While some older workers might be looking for an activity that will benefit the whole of the group financially, younger workers might place more importance on a simpler version of 'play' – so you need to consider the social make-up of your office.

This also has an impact on how you encourage and develop 'play' among your workers. Older workers might see it as childish and find it difficult to connect with. The idea of 'fun', however, is ageless – even though the things that people perceive as fun will change over time.

Gender

When it came to gender, we found that both men and women considered fun to be an important part of their work.

However, women placed more importance than men on using fun to reduce workplace stress, as well as ensuring mental and emotional wellbeing. (55% of women said that workplace fun would have a positive impact on levels of stress compared to 44% of men). It helps them to build relationships and creates a supportive atmosphere in the office.

But while we found little difference in how men and women perceived what fun at work actually is, or its importance, there were big differences in the 'fun' things they wanted to do. Men like pool tables, Xbox and fantasy football leagues; women tend to prefer bake-offs, office pets and massages.

Interestingly, women were more likely to say that workplace fun was simply 'having great colleagues who I enjoy spending time with' (63% female compared to 56% male).

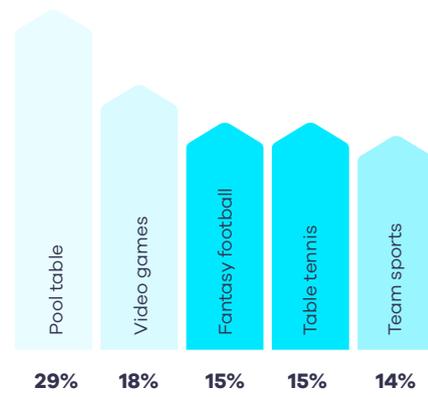
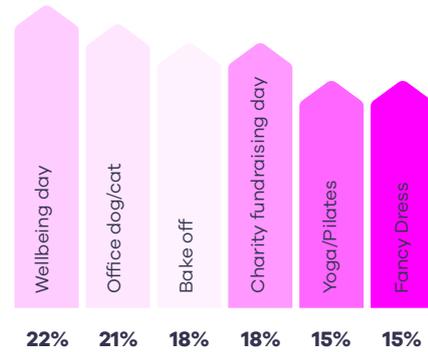
Gender stereotypes may still be alive and well, but you don't have to feed into them. Make sure the activities you plan don't favour one gender over the other. An activity that might be perceived as fun for one sex may not be for the other. When you have developed the right culture of play in your workplace, though, you should see any gender differences broken down and an empowered team all participating in a range of activities.

Activities in which both genders shared a common interest were:

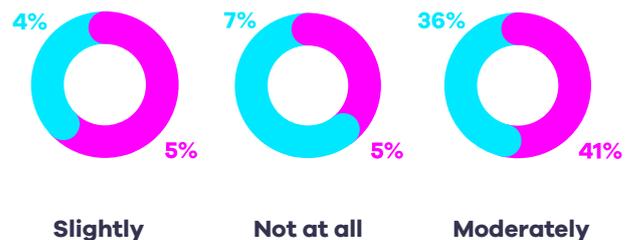
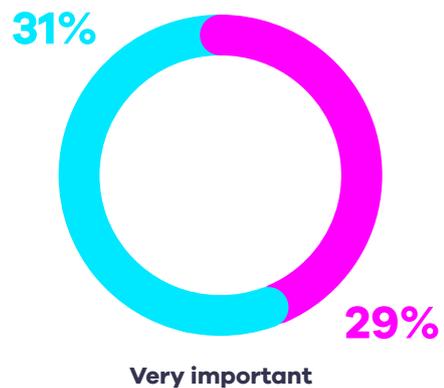
- Office parties/nights out (21% for each gender)
- A lottery syndicate (16% males & 15% females)
- Board games (9% for each gender)
- Karaoke (6% males & 9% females)
- Nerf gun wars (8% males & 5% females)
- A work choir (5% males & 6% females)
- Swingball (4% males & 6% females)

In the last 6 months, there were only small gender differences in whether or not employees had undertaken different fun activities in the workplace. For example, females were slightly more likely to have celebrated colleagues' birthdays/engagements/promotions through small office gatherings (38% & 30% respectively) and spent time having fun with work colleagues whilst completing work activities (30% & 26% respectively). However, there was little variation for all other activities.

What would make work more fun?



How important is fun at work?



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Age

So what about age?

In terms of age groups, the workplace has never been more mixed. According to the latest Labour Market Statistics, the largest proportion of the UK's 25 million workers is in the 35-49 age group – around 10.7 million. That's followed by the 8 million workers in the 50-64 category.

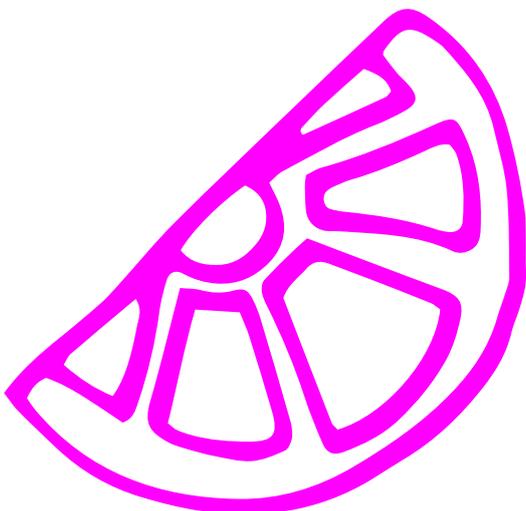
The next largest age group is 25-34 (6.9 million), then 18-24 (3.5m). More workers are aged over 65 (1.1 million) than 16-17 (319,000).

In our survey, 62% of people who didn't consider any of the activities we outlined as fun were aged 45 or over, and 39% of people aged 45-54 thought there was 'no such thing as fun in the workplace.'

That's a worrying find, and one that indicates senior management or business owners may not be creating cultures of fun in the workplace, even though they have the power to do just that.

That attitude will also deter employees from creating their own fun at work if they think it's either frowned-upon by the bosses or not part of the company culture. Half of all business owners we surveyed do not want play at work, but 45% of graduates – the younger end of the workplace, who will effectively shape its future – think it would make them work harder.

Older generations tend to see work as functional. It's all about 'getting the job done'. Play is for kids, isn't it? Younger workers expect a level of fun at work, as the lines between work life and social life are blurred through longer working hours and the continual technological developments that mean workers are rarely away from office e-mails or contact with their colleagues on social networks. This younger generation has never known it to be any different, and the changing nature of people's work habits may contribute to this change over time.



16-24 year olds



68% described workplace fun as 'having great colleagues I enjoy spending time with'



8% described fun at work as clocking off time.'



51% would definitely like allocated time to have fun/play at work



22% have engaged in play at work over the last six months (dress down Friday, office parties/nights out, pool table, an office pet, charity fundraising days, work bake-off, table tennis, computer consoles, fancy dress days, team sports, board games, karaoke and nerf guns)



79% rated the importance of fun at work as very/moderately important



12% would definitely not like allocated time to have fun/play at work



44% feel that workplace fun would improve their productivity



40% feel they are stressed all or a lot of the time



90% feel that workplace fun would slightly alleviate stress



1% believe there is no such thing as fun in the workplace



62% believe that a good belly laugh in work would definitely make their work life better



25% currently have allocated time for fun/play at work

Age (continued)

The average age of withdrawal from the labour market increased from 64 years in 2004 to 65 years in 2009. For women it increased from 61.2 years in 2004 to 62.0 years in 2009. (ONS, February 2011).

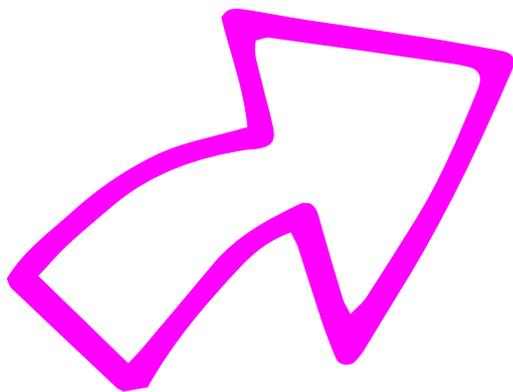
All ages we surveyed placed a high importance on 'having great colleagues' – fun in the work-place is an effective tool for building those relationships. They don't happen on their own.

The activities that take place in your workplace have to be appealing to your entire workforce, but it's more about creating a culture that lets them play when they want, how they want. Understand your audience. Some older workers may feel guilty having 'fun' at work. Find something that can help them to be creative.

The idea of 'having a laugh' may jar with the older worker. The concept of 'play time' might also be alien to them – if they don't know what it means, they are less likely to engage. You need to show them that fun can inspire them to work better. Younger workers are more likely to perceive fun and play at work as being linked to the tasks they are expected to achieve.

Play at work is not always a stress-buster for the older generation either, when they have learnt to manage the added pressures of children and mortgages over a long period. Some younger workers see 'play' at work as a natural way of bringing their stress levels down and making them more productive.

By using play to bring these groups closer together, senior leaders in the workplace will develop a better understanding of the expectations of their workers. In turn, employees will feel more empowered and trusted to choose to play how and when they need to. They, rather than management, will begin to lead the culture of fun in the workplace.



55-60 year olds



52% described workplace fun as 'having great colleagues I enjoy spending time with'



17% described fun at work as 'clocking off time'



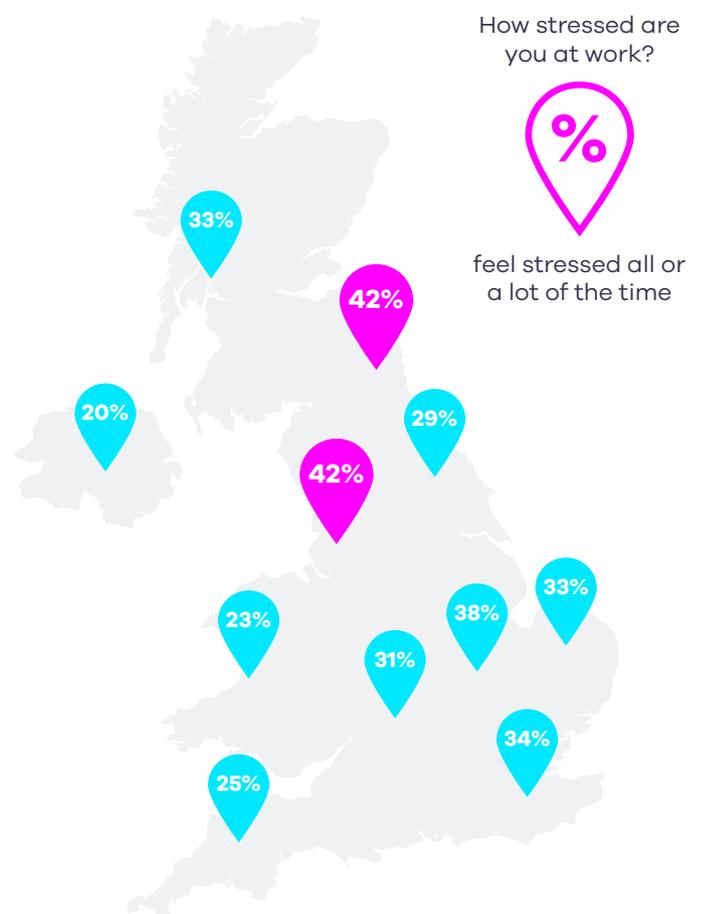
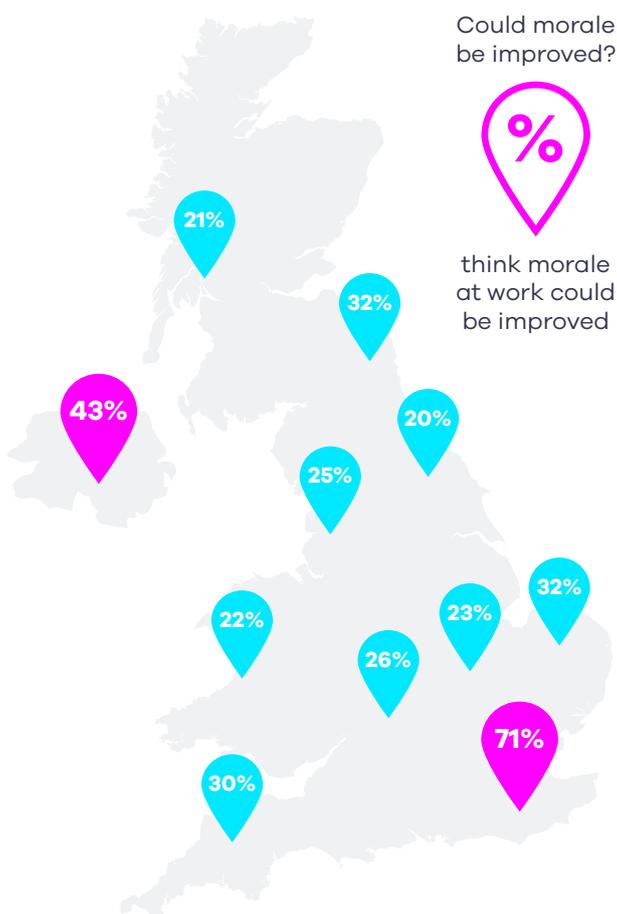
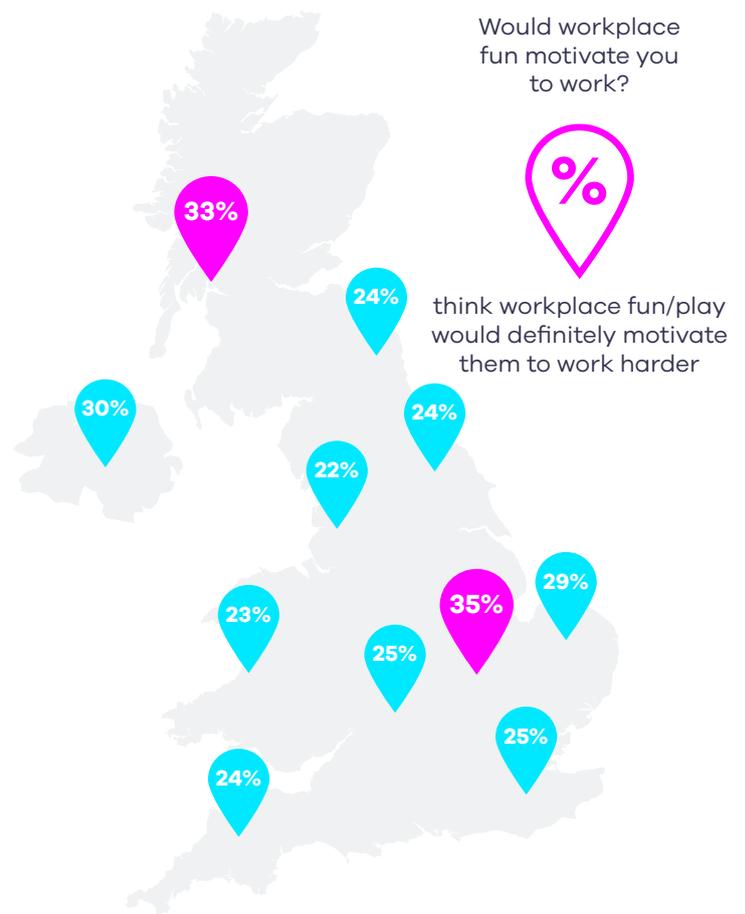
19% would definitely like allocated time to have fun/play at work

- 5** 5% have engaged in play at work over the last six months (dress down Friday, office parties/nights out, pool table, an office pet, charity fundraising days, work bake-off, table tennis, computer consoles, fancy dress days, team sports, board games, karaoke and nerf guns)
- 56** 56% rated the importance of fun at work as very/moderately important
- 21** 21% would definitely not like allocated time to have fun/play at work
- 14** 14% feel that workplace fun would improve their productivity
- 25** 25% feel they are stressed all or a lot of the time
- 63** 63% feel that workplace fun would slightly alleviate stress
- 6** 6% believe there is no such thing as fun in the workplace
- 40** 40% believe that a good belly laugh in work would definitely make their work life better
- 7** 7% currently have allocated time for fun/play at work

Regional Differences

Our survey showed that:

- **Wales** and the **North East** contain the greatest number of people having 'no fun' at work.
- **London** workers have the most fun.
- **Northern Ireland** is the area where fun is seen as most important.
- Workers in **Wales** don't schedule fun time at work (but they do want a belly laugh); but **NI, Scotland** and **London** do make time for play.
- The highest proportion of employees who felt that having a belly laugh at work would make work life better, came from **Cardiff**.
- **Yorkshire** workers don't want to have a 'belly laugh' at work as much as other regions – although everyone agrees that laughing at work is a good thing.
- **Northern Ireland** has the least stressed workforce; the **North East** has the most stressed.
- Workers in **Belfast** place the most importance on fun; **Sheffield** workers the least.
- **Newcastle** has the least fun in the workplace, but also has the most stressed workers.
- **Edinburgh** and **Plymouth** have the most workers who think fun helps to relieve stress.



Salary

We found that perceptions of fun changed with growing salaries. The higher the salary, for example, the more we found that fun was defined as 'doing work-related tasks that are interesting and fulfilling'.

With increasing salary bands, the proportion of employees who indicated they didn't do any fun activities at work decreased – **40%** of those earning under **£15,000** indicated that they didn't do any fun activities; **33%** earning **£15-25k**; **24%** earning **£25-35k**; **21%** earning **£35-45k**; **16%** earning **£45-55k** and **21%** of those earning **£55,000** or more).

- The number of employees who had taken part in some fun activity in the last six months was much higher for those on a salary of over **£15,000**.
- We found that **20%** of those on lower annual salaries – under **£15k** – saw 'clocking off' as a fun part of work – not a good statistic for senior leaders.
- Employees earning less than **£15,000** were least likely to rate workplace fun as very/moderately important compared to those on a higher income – **62%** of those earning less than **£15,000** perceived workplace fun as very/moderately important, **71%** earning **£15-25k**, **72%** earning **£25-35k**, **72%** earning **£35-45k**, **73%** earning **£45-55k** and **72%** of those earning more than **£55,000**.
- Even though people earning less than **£15,000** were the least likely to indicate that they had fun at work in the last 6 months, more than half (**54%**) of them said they would like allocated play time. In other salary brackets, **57%** earning **15-25k**, **54%** earning **25-35k**, **60%** earning **35-45k**, **58%** earning **45-55k** and **52%** of those earning over **£55,000**, wanted to see allocated play time at work.
- Those with a salary under **£15,000** were least likely to perceive that managers would benefit (definitely or slightly) from workplace fun, compared to those in higher salary brackets (under **£15,000** **62%**, **15-25k** **71%**, **25-35k** **72%**, **35-45k** **74%**, **45-55k** **72%** and **55k+** **71%**).

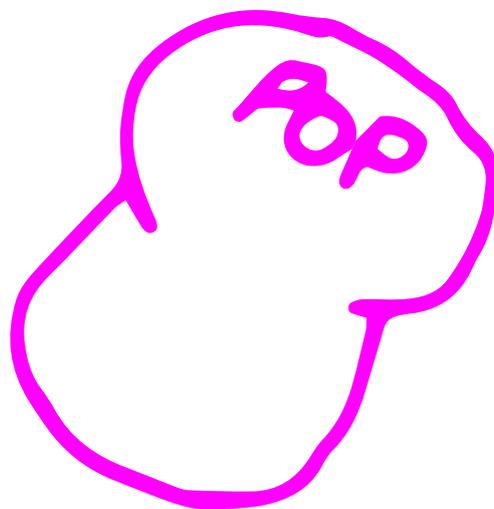
One possible explanation for this is the level of control an employee feels they have over their job and company. Those on higher salaries may have more input and therefore feel more fulfilled by their job; those on lower

salaries might feel they have little control over what they do during their working day and therefore not enjoy it as much.

Introducing play to their day could help to stop lower-skilled or lower-earning workers – the group that classes 'clocking off' as workplace fun – from watching the clock and sprinting for the door when 5pm comes around.

Higher earners saw fun as being more tied to the tasks they carry out at work. This could be because people on higher salaries use the enjoyment of their job as justification for the time they invest in it, or because they spend more time 'on duty'. They tended to be older, longer-serving workers.

The danger here is that those higher earners are becoming slaves to the task, which trickles down the chain of command. Senior managers have an impact on the culture of the business. The fun should be driven by the staff, but the culture of play needs to be facilitated by the leaders. Senior management needs to facilitate the kind of culture that will encourage and enable fun in the workplace.

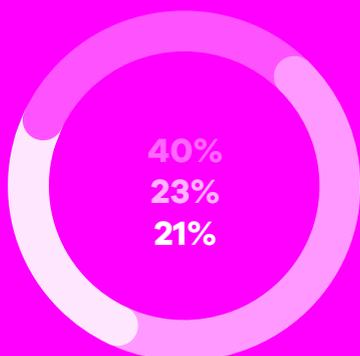


Salary

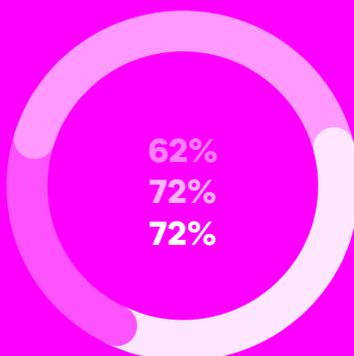
Under
£15k

£25-45k

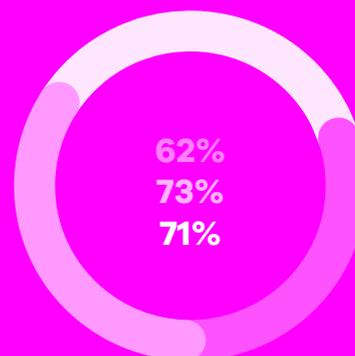
£55k+



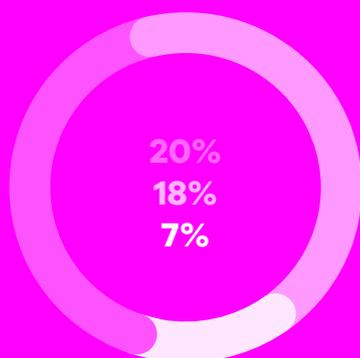
Don't do any fun activities at work



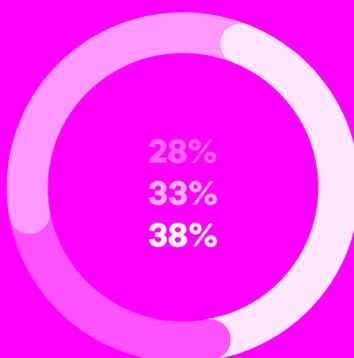
Perceive fun at work to be very/moderately important



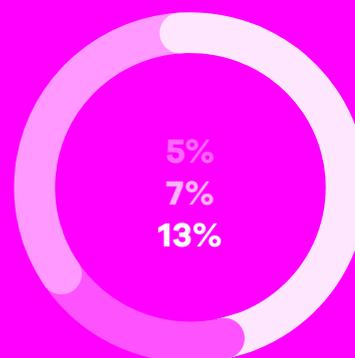
Felt that managers would benefit from more fun in the workplace



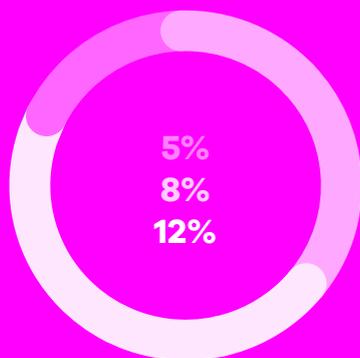
Describe fun at work as clocking off time



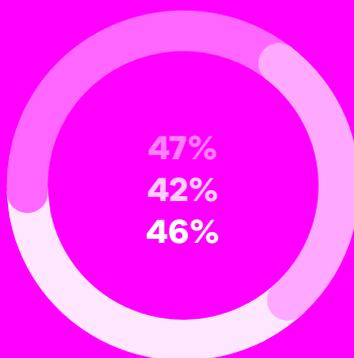
Believe fun at work would have a positive impact on their home life



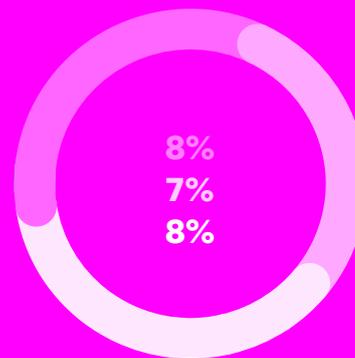
Felt very inspired at work over the last three months



Felt very excited at work over the last three months



Believe fun at work would have a positive impact on their mental health



Believe fun at work would have a positive impact on their parenting

Level of Employment

Our survey also showed a disparity between business owners and their employees over what constitutes 'workplace fun'.

'Having great colleagues I enjoy spending time with' registered with 38% of business owners compared to an average of 58% among all workers.

Business owners were most likely (63%) to perceive workplace fun as 'doing work-related tasks that are interesting and fulfilling'. But their idea of fun varied from, say, graduates, who wanted dress-down and massage days from the list of options we put in front of them.

Workers are unlikely to have the same level of emotional and financial investment in the business as the owner, but both sides need to understand that commitment is demonstrated in different ways. Workers can always move on to a new job or workplace, so retaining talent through a culture of play should be an essential part of any businesses strategy. Interestingly, graduates saw 'achieving their work goals' as fun more than other levels of employment (44%), as well as celebrating colleagues' birthdays and work achievements (29%).

'Having great colleagues I enjoy spending time with' registered highest with clerical staff and middle management (66%). Middle managers also scored highest for defining fun as 'having a physical working environment that feels fun and relaxed'.

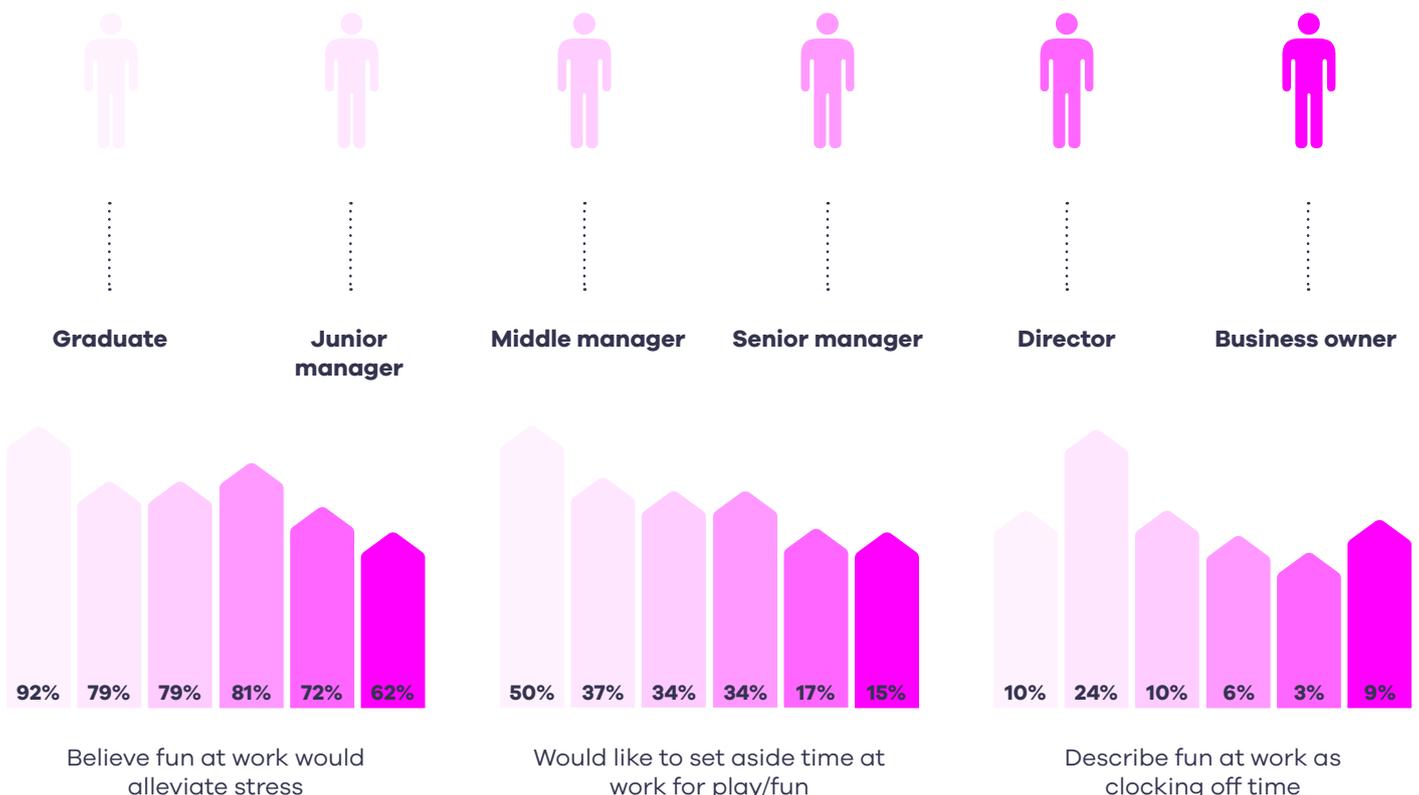
Apart from those in manual, unskilled roles, business owners registered the highest proportion of respondents who said they didn't engage in any fun activities at work (39% & 40% respectively).

When it came to viewing fun as something that would definitely help them to work harder and be more productive, those in graduate positions scored the highest (45%); business owners the lowest (21%).

Ten per cent of directors felt there was 'no such thing as fun in the workplace', higher than any level of employment included in the survey, and half of all business owners surveyed said that they would not like dedicated time in the day for fun/play.

Business owners, however, registered as the smallest group to feel stress either all or a lot of the time (15%). Graduates were the most likely to indicate that having fun at work would alleviate stress (92%) and business owners the least likely (62%).

Level of employment

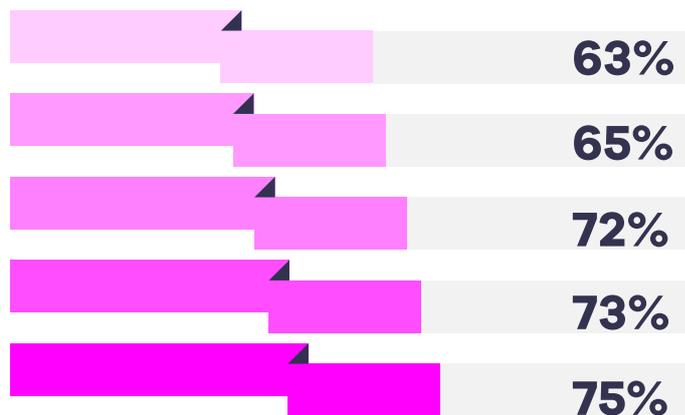


Size of Company

The idea of fun can differ depending on the size of a company. Our survey found that bigger firms had a better grasp of the value of fun as play.

Smaller companies viewed fun as more work-related, but 41% of respondents in companies of 1-9 people said they didn't engage in any fun activities at work. The greatest proportion of those who had partaken in a number of fun activities in the last 6 months worked in organisations with between 250 and 500 staff, and 75% in those companies rate workplace fun as very or moderately important.

The fact that play has been shown to improve trust and creativity, and inspire workers to feel valued, means that a culture of fun in the workplace has been adopted by many companies that might be too big to give regular contact with senior leaders, or may appear to have a large and sometimes faceless management structure.

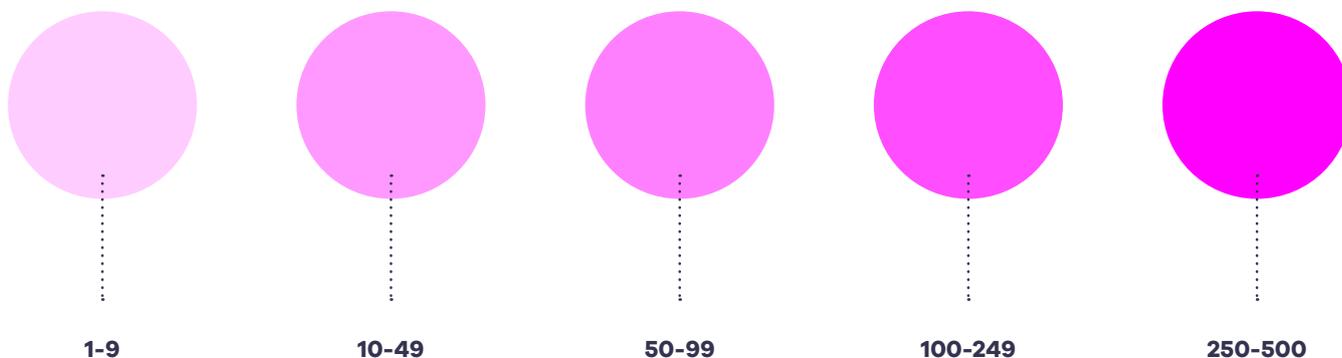


Rate workplace fun as very/moderately important



Definitely or possibly need workplace fun to help them work harder/improve productivity

Number of employees



Number of hours spent in the office

The more you work, the less fun you have. That's what our survey suggested. But it shouldn't have to be that way.

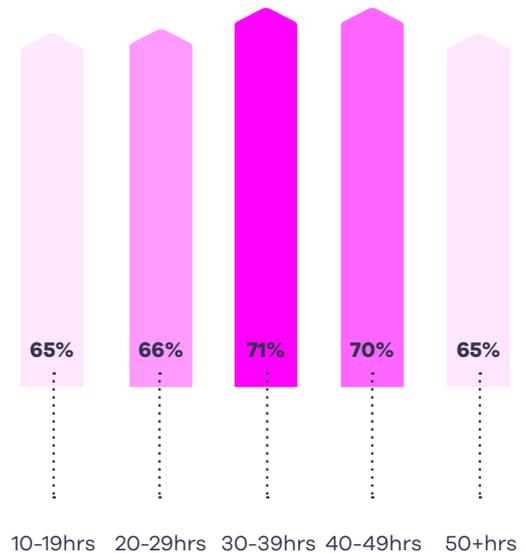
The highest number of people who said they didn't do any fun activities at work were those working more than 50 hours (43%). Which is a crying shame. People working 0-10 hours were least likely to rate workplace fun as important, however (53%) – perhaps because they have more time for fun elsewhere.

Seventy-one per cent of those working 30-39 hours (the current average), rated workplace fun as important; 70% working 40-49 hours; 66% working 20-29 hours, and 65% of those working 50+ hours and 10-19 hours.

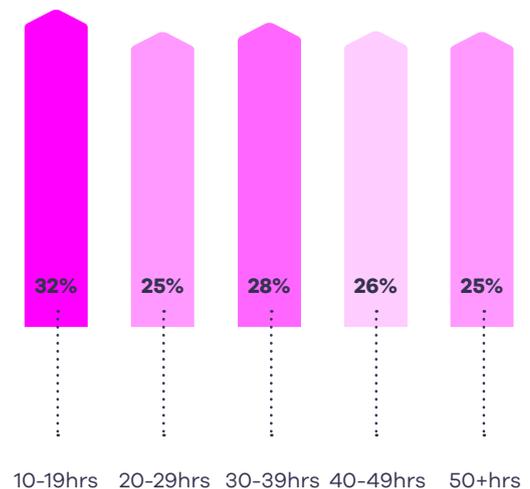
People working 0-10 hours were least likely to rate workplace fun as important, however (53%) – perhaps because they have more time for fun elsewhere.



%
view fun/play in the workplace as important



%
need workplace fun to help them work harder



**IT PAYS
TO PLAY**



Occupation

Spare a thought for the accountants out there. Respondents from the world of finance were least likely to think that fun at work would help them to manage stress better (67%) or that they would benefit from a good belly laugh at work (73%).

People working in healthcare and travel and transport were least likely to do any fun activities at work (43% & 44% respectively). Perhaps not surprisingly, the lowest proportion was from HR professionals (7%), who, along with those in professional services, were the most likely to indicate that they had partaken in fun activities in the past 6 months. We understand workplaces, you see. This also suggests the HR profession is in tune with the needs of the modern and changing workforce, and makes HR stand out as an occupation to pay more attention to.

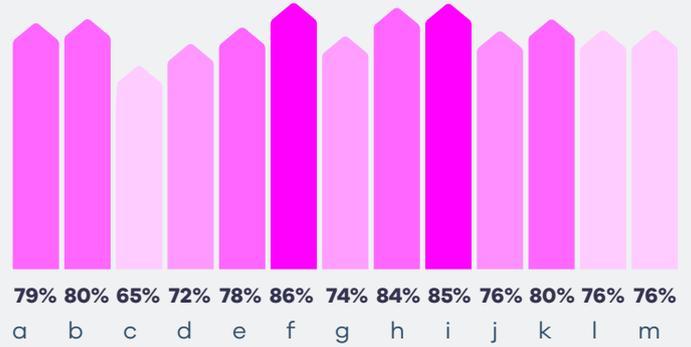
Employees working in Arts & Culture placed the greatest importance on workplace fun (78%), confirming a long-established link between fun and creativity and innovation.

Those working in Professional services, Legal and IT & Telecoms reported the greatest level of stress (44%, 43% & 45% feeling stressed either all or a lot of the time), compared to those working in Manufacturing & Utilities, which had the lowest (24%).

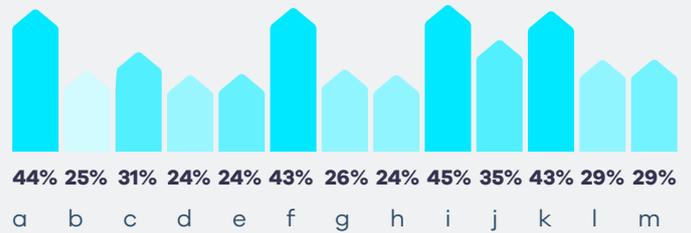
Furthermore, the highest proportion of those indicating that they felt workplace fun would help to alleviate stress (85%, 86% & 87% respectively) worked with Professional Services, HR and IT & Telecoms.

Employees working in Arts & Culture, Legal, HR and IT & Telecoms were the most likely to indicate that they would definitely like dedicated time in their work for fun/play (37%, 47%, 41% & 38% respectively). 41%, 27% & 44% of each sector respectively reported working 30-39 hours.

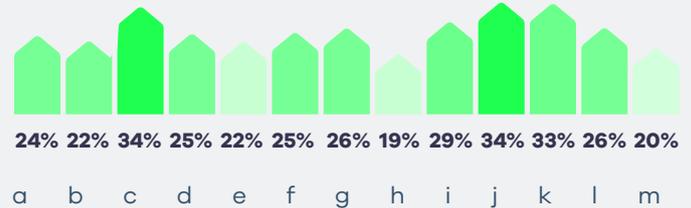
Believe having workplace fun or play would motivate them to work harder



Feel stressed all or a lot of the time



Believe the main things that could be improved in the workplace is morale



Occupation

- (a) Professional services
- (b) Arts and culture
- (c) Finance
- (d) Manufacturing
- (e) Education
- (f) HR
- (g) Architecture
- (h) Sales/media/marketing
- (i) IT and Telecomms
- (j) Healthcare
- (k) Legal
- (l) Travel and tourism
- (m) Retail

Fun and workplace wellbeing

Fun in the workplace is good for your state of mind, according to our survey. Employees who took part in fun activities in the workplace were 'significantly more likely' to feel a greater level of psychological wellbeing than those who hadn't.

Robertson Cooper defines psychological wellbeing as the combination of a sense of purpose and positive emotions. When both come together at work, they contribute to a wide range of both individual and organisational outcomes.

So, by creating positive emotions – and fun – it can even benefit those who don't value it as highly as others, who will either feel the benefit directly or witness it in those around them.

In addition, significant positive effects were observed on a number of scales relating to other positive work behaviours, including creativity, collaboration, support and trust. Those who had taken part in fun activities scored better on every positive behaviour.

Creativity

Our study revealed significant evidence for the positive effect that workplace fun has on improving levels of creativity.

This is not just important for those that work in the creative industries, either. Being more creative helps you to solve problems and come up with new ideas, something that would benefit people from a whole raft of occupations.

Our study suggests that those who experience fun activities (particularly on a more frequent basis), those that place a higher value on workplace fun and those who have a role in organising fun activities are significantly more likely to have higher levels of creativity, which in turn is positively associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing.

The greatest impact of workplace activities was observed for creativity with a mean score of 33 observed for those who had not taken part in a fun activity in the last 6 months, and 55 for those who had.

Taken part in fun activity
in last 6 months:



5545	Motivated to work hard
5751	Productive
5446	Connected to my purpose at work
5533	Creative
5037	Collaborative
5643	Supportive
4836	Valued
6052	Trusted
5846	Committed to my organisation
6558	Committed to delivering my goals

Infographic: Mean scores on a number of different scales

Sickness and absence

Fun in the workplace can also help to significantly reduce sickness and absence. Our survey showed that 62% of employees who had no sick days in the last three months experienced some form of fun in the workplace, compared to 38% of those who hadn't.

We also found 58% of people who hadn't experienced workplace fun had been off sick 11 or more days, compared to 42% of those who had experienced workplace fun.

Our survey said employees who feel stressed are more likely to have sickness absence. 50% of those who felt stressed all of the time had no sickness absence days in the last 3 months, compared to 85% of those who never felt stressed. We talk about stress a bit more below.

Making work a fun place to be can have a positive impact on your bottom line, by keeping your staff happy, healthy and motivated to give their best. Also, when staff are absent, it increases the time they have to look for another job – another good reason to reduce their time away from work.

Stress

Too much stress at work is bad for our health and can be responsible for poor performance, lack of productivity, increased absenteeism and a generally negative attitude to work.

Our study revealed that there was a significant interaction between reported levels of stress and whether employees had experienced some form of workplace fun in the last 6 months in relation to the level of psychological wellbeing experienced in the last 3 months.

Those who had taken part in some form of workplace fun reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing, with the greatest difference being among those who reported feeling stressed all of the time (difference - 8.92).

Further significant relationships were also found in that employees who reported a greater level of stress:

- Were more likely to report that workplace fun would help to alleviate stress, e.g. 54% of those who felt stressed all of the time felt that workplace fun would help to alleviate stress, compared to 20% of those who almost never felt stressed.
- Were more likely to want to have allocated time in their day for workplace fun, e.g. 63% of those who never felt stressed in work indicated that they would not want dedicated time for play, compared to just 24% of those who felt stressed all of the time.
- Were more likely to place a higher value on workplace fun, e.g. 50% of those who felt stressed all of the time perceived workplace fun to be very important, compared to just 29% of those who never felt stressed.

The common strand here is the perceived benefit of fun in the workplace, although allocating time should be avoided in favour of building a culture of play that is controlled by staff themselves.

Who's in charge of fun?

Managers and team members were found to be the most likely to organise team activities (21% & 20% respectively). But 17% of people surveyed thought fun 'just seemed to happen' – known as organic fun. 9% thought it was the responsibility of HR, 8% organised activities themselves and 5% indicated that activities were organised by business owners (31% said they don't do fun activities at work).

People who saw organic fun happening in their workplace reported higher levels of perceived trust in their employer than those who didn't. Whether organised by staff or management, or just allowed to happen through an established culture of fun, our figures showed a significant positive effect on psychological wellbeing when fun happens in the workplace. Creating an environment for 'organic fun' can lead to a more accepting environment for more structured workplace fun.

Empowering staff to come up with their own activities in the workplace creates a culture of trust, and a more relaxed and engaged workforce.

'Organic' vs 'inorganic' fun

The good news is that fun is beneficial to your workers whether it's organised or it just happens.

You don't need to structure fun or make sweeping changes to the workplace. Make small changes to the culture of your workplace. Manage that change. Make it a place where fun just...happens. Empower staff to organise their own activities. Mix them with work-based tasks.

Our study revealed a significant interaction between reported levels of stress and workplace fun. Workers who had taken part in some form of workplace fun reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing – whether they admitted to being stressed or not.

A less stressed, more engaged workforce, who are inspired and become more creative through play, will be more productive – and ultimately have a positive impact on your bottom line.



**IT PAYS
TO PLAY**





**So what do
we learn from
all that?**

Professor Sir Cary Cooper has dedicated his career to demonstrating the importance of positive emotions at work for creativity and productivity. The research we undertook for this report with him reveals employees' perceptions of fun at work and the factors that need to be present to make it a reality.

People are spending more time at work and are more flexible towards the demands of their job. Increased reliance on technology in people's personal and professional lives has blurred the boundaries between home and work.

When we asked people about fun at work, most people described it as being related to activities that are integral to their actual work rather than activities outside their normal work tasks. We also discovered most workers do not connect with the term "play time"; the majority see this as relating to school. This included business owners as well as younger workers.

The research told us that the most-valued fun activities were relatively simple, inexpensive and easy to implement.

People from different age groups have different attitudes towards workplace fun, but there was no real gender difference between perceptions of fun and the importance they place on it, even though men and women tend to favour different activities.

The industries in which people most felt that fun at work would help to alleviate stress were Professional Services, HR and IT & Telecoms and the highest number of people who said they didn't do any fun activities at work were those working more than 50 hours a week.

Over the years, Robertson Cooper's work has established the now indisputable link between psychological wellbeing and overall productivity. In this report, we found that taking part in fun activities at work has a positive effect on the level of employees' psychological wellbeing – leading to higher productivity, lower sickness levels and increased creativity.

Fun at work was found to have the greatest impact on creativity, supporting the literature finding that having a fun work environment can be a catalyst for creativity.

Essentially, most people want to have fun while they are doing their actual work.

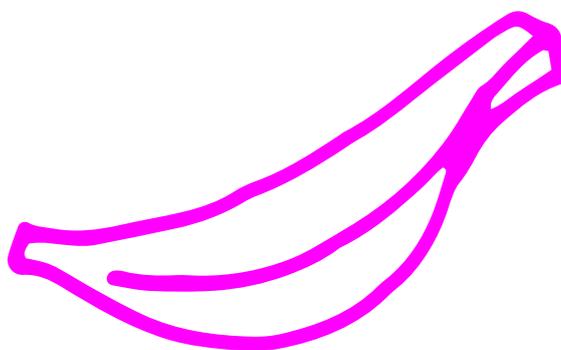
Business owners need to think about the changing demographic and culture of the workplace, one of the biggest issues for HR and a major consideration for employers.

The workplace is multi-generational and more diverse than ever before, and that trend will continue in years to come. Millennials are set to make up 75 per cent of the workforce by 2025. An ageing workforce could also mean three generations working in the same company. These trends are something businesses cannot ignore.

Employers must decide how to deal with a multi-generational workforce and how to educate their senior leaders, most of whom will probably have been born before 1980, about the evolving expectations of the younger workforce. In companies that have engendered a positive culture around play, where staff are empowered by it, those differences are eroded, and the workforce can come together to be more effective.

Using fun activities or play in the workplace to create an environment of trust, empowerment and wellbeing is crucial to this integration, as well as understanding the expectations of employees.

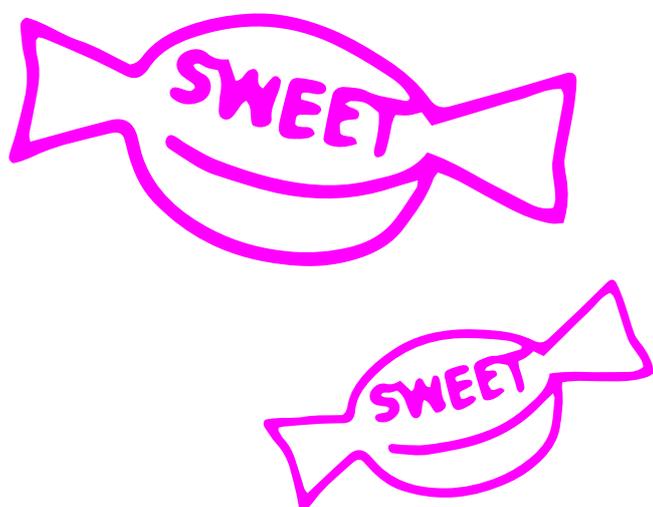
Fun in the workplace doesn't have to cost a lot, but its value could be priceless.



About Bright HR

We're a people management software company, and we're blazing a trail for brilliant workplace cultures. We understand "It Pays to Play" and provide businesses with the tools to become a part of this cultural shift.

Our solution enables you to effortlessly implement HR admin processes, from approving holidays, logging sickness and tracking lateness, to running reports and document management whilst also providing you with access to specialist expert knowledge, on topics ranging from employment law to happiness. We're about to ignite a fire in the HR industry that will reveal a brilliant new normal.



About Robertson Cooper Ltd.

Robertson Cooper are leading experts in the fields of psychological wellbeing, employee engagement, leadership-mapping and resilience in the workplace. Founded in 1999 by Professor Ivan Robertson and Professor Sir Cary Cooper, they aim to provide outstanding support to organisations and promote the benefits of employee wellbeing.

It is their mission to make wellbeing part of everyday working life, for everyone, everywhere. Robertson Cooper also run the 'Good Day at Work' network – a community of over 50,000 individuals that promotes and supports wellbeing at work.

A key part of Good Day at Work is the annual event - The Good Day At Work Conversation, where thought leaders and senior practitioners from global organisations meet to debate modern health, wellbeing and work.

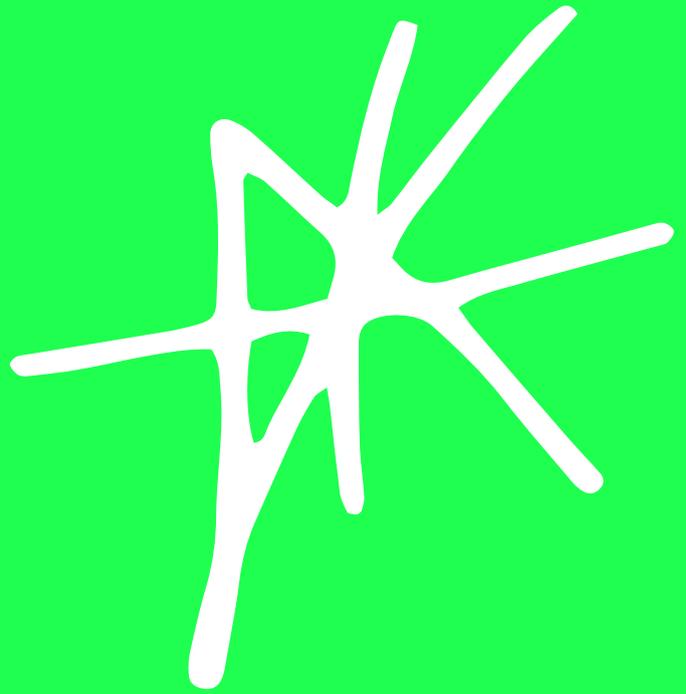
www.robertsoncooper.com

www.gooddayatworkconversation.com

About Sir Cary Cooper CBE, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health, University of Manchester, and Founding Director of Robertson Cooper

Cary set up Robertson Cooper with Ivan Robertson in 1999. A Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at University of Manchester, he is recognised as a world-leading expert on wellbeing.

Cary has been spear-heading the movement that's calling on practitioners to understand the impact of HR on business outcomes and the bottom-line. Since founding Robertson Cooper, he has championed organisational wellbeing as a means to improve our productivity and engagement at work. In 2015, he was voted HR's most influential thinker for the second year running.



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It Pays To Play

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