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Title

Taking Fun Seriously: Defining Fun and its Correlates in Pursuit of Greater Harmony in the Investigation of Fun

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Systematic review, meta-analysis, or scoping review

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: Fun is almost universally thought of as a sought-after state. Adults and children are motivated to select activities they predict will be fun, and engagement in fun activities is associated with pleasant feelings and a positive affect. Moderate-quality evidence associates fun with improved social connection, higher job satisfaction, decreased emotional burnout, improved learning in children, and decreased stress. Inconsistent, low-quality evidence associates fun with increased task motivation, decreased employee turnover, improved morale, job applicant attraction, improved learning in adults, reduced absenteeism, and creativity. The ability to obtain high-quality evidence has been limited by inconsistent and imprecise methods of operationalizing fun. This imprecision in science exploring fun limits the ability of investigators to make meaningful predictions about what activities would be considered fun and why.

Objective: Develop a model of fun that can be useful in guiding scientific inquiry. The model should incorporate a definition based off existing cognitive frameworks and include factors that may correlate with fun or its absence.

Study Design: Scoping review of fun literature using the method outlined by Arksey & O'Malley that was further developed by Levac et al.

Dataset: We searched multiple databases for fun literature with forward and backward citation searching as appropriate.

Results: We discovered that fun can be defined as any positive emotion experienced in relation to an activity, typically associated with the presence of the following seven factors: safety, playfulness, novelty, autonomy, immersion, social connection, and purpose.

Conclusions: Fun is not a single emotion per se, but is reflected as any number of positive emotions such as joy, humor, or happiness. When these emotions are described as fun, it is when they are experienced in relation to an activity. Since not all people find the same activities to be enjoyable, fun is necessarily

relative and situational. The seven factors we identified appear to underlie these differences. While previous models of fun have incorporated some of the seven factors we describe, all prior definitions have omitted one or more of them. This new understanding of fun can help create predictive and descriptive models and strengthen the science behind this important concept.