

# IBM Research Report

## Fun, Seriously?

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## ABSTRACT

Fun and work are becoming intertwined in employees' experiences. Whether through serious games, social software, best practices, or corporate culture, fun at work is shaping how workers collaborate with each other. This workshop seeks to bring together a diverse community exploring research related to fun in a work context. Through position papers and interactive discussions, participants will discuss what does it mean to "have fun" in a work context, why fun is important at work, how can fun be communicated through design, and how can fun be measured.

## IN THE NAME OF FUN

Both the American and British versions of the comedy show "The Office" convey very bleak representations of working life. Whether the office is in Slough or Scranton Pennsylvania the work is mundane, repetitive and joyless. In Slough Tim disrupts the monotony by placing Gareth's stapler in a jelly mould and does so "in the name of fun"[7]. In Scranton Jim attempts to relieve a sense of boredom so profound that he is dying from it by throwing stationary into Dwight's coffee mug while he is out. He decides to organize an office Olympiad and seeks out other games:

Jim: Stanley, I just played Dunderball with Toby. What about you? You got any games?

Stanley: Yeah, I got a game. It's called work hard so my kids can go to college.

Jim: Fair enough. [9]

Stanley's work ethic is not typical in the Office and other episodes feature workers spending most of their day playing Call of Duty. A manager calls employees away from the game apparently to discipline them; the problem he wants to address is not that they are wasting time but that their

team "are getting slaughtered" [8].

Office computers are not only workstations they are also the most complete entertainment systems ever developed. Opportunities for fun at work go far beyond extended games of solitaire. A recent shop.org survey found that over fifty percent of young adults did their online shopping while at work (8). An article subtitled "Are You Reading This at Work" reports a 2007 survey finding that Americans waste 1.7 hours a day surfing the internet [12].

Although using workstations for shopping or fun may be seen as a waste of time and a drain on productivity some theories of management actively promote fun at work. Indeed the Office alludes to this philosophy when it is discovered that Michael calls his entire staff into a conference room every Monday to watch a movie [8]. Companies like Microsoft and Apple have long promoted the notion of "flat" organizations where employees are provided with comfortable environments and places to play game stations in order to promote creativity. Some theories of psychoanalysis claim that enjoyment is an integral part of any social structure even (or especially) if it is extremely repressive [14].

## MOTIVATION

To some, fun at work appears to be an oxymoron. Traditionally, the emphasis at the workplace has been on productivity and eschewing anything that distracts from it. Yet recently, organizations have been experimenting with various social technologies such as virtual worlds and social networking sites within the context of work. There appears to be three usages of fun within a work context: a) to guide the design of work-related experiences b) to encourage creativity, innovation, learning, or engagement, and c) to encourage positive social behavior through activities such as recognition and celebration of personal milestones and professional achievements, social events, humor etc. [4].

Serious games are an example of using fun to design tools for work-related learning experiences, and to engage audiences in compelling scenarios [7][4]. Practices such as encouraging the use of social media like blogs, social networking sites, and wikis inside the corporation are an example of using fun to stimulate innovation, engagement, and social behavior [3]. Social connections tempered by emotional impressions are an instance of how fun in working relationships can influence behavior [2]. "Fun"

values, where executives are role models for expected “fun behavior”, and the use of dress-up parades and annual yearbooks collecting employees’ thoughts via email are examples of practices and culture encouraging positive social behavior [8].

Researchers have considered fun as a useful aspect of user interface design for some time [1]. However, only recently has there been increased interest in exploring this phenomena to motivate general HCI design [5, 6]. On the other hand, several organizational psychologists have studied the effect of fun in the workplace and its consequences [e.g. 4]. These studies have largely focused on non-technological aspects of fostering fun and positive affect in the workplace. As tools such as serious games and social media are approaching mainstream acceptance to facilitate fun at work at a distributed scale, we believe the time is ripe for a discussion about technologies used to engender fun in a work context. From a social standpoint, these technologies often allow individuals to get a better sense of their co-workers, which makes it easier for them to work together. Consequently, practices have emerged in small start-ups and large corporations to facilitate fun spanning teams to entire organizations.

This workshop proposes to bring together a diverse community exploring research related to fun in a work context. We are interested in tool discussions, design explorations, and empirical studies of fun at work. Contributions include but are not limited to the following topics:

- Novel serious games, alternate reality games, or other game methodologies applied to work contexts
- Crowdsourcing techniques such as human computation and prediction markets to entice employees with fun tasks that generate results relevant to work
- The use of fun in organizational cultures and teams and peoples’ perceptions of it
- Examinations of the interplay and balance between fun and work
- The influence of social connections on employee’s emotional well-being in the workplace
- Social media’s effect on innovation and creativity at work

## **GOALS**

The goal of this workshop is engage participants in discussions around the following questions:

- What is “fun at work”?
- Why is “fun at work” important?
- How can fun be communicated through design?

- How do we measure it?

We aim for the discussions to help inform multiple perspectives, including those of tool-builders, community practitioners, and researchers conducting user studies.

## **ACTIVITIES**

This one day workshop will be structured roughly as follows:

- Introduction to the workshop goals and of the participants
- Sessions focusing on each of the questions defined in the Goals section. Sessions may include presentations or demonstrations, depending on the type of submissions and the backgrounds of the participants.
- A final discussion to summarize the day’s results.

We plan to create a website for the workshop to distribute position papers beforehand.

## **ORGANIZATION**

### **Participation**

We plan to invite a maximum of 15-20 participants based on position papers submitted. Recruiting will be done via a workshop website, announcements on appropriate mailing lists, and contacting researchers known to the organizers.

### **Submissions**

Interested participants will need to submit a position paper before November 20, 2009. Each position paper should be no more than 4 pages in the standard CSCW format for Notes submissions. All submissions will be treated as non-archival, and can include preliminary work intended for archival publication in another venue.

All position papers must include:

1. Titles, names, affiliations, email address of the authors
2. Description of recent, current, or ongoing work in the domain of “fun at work”. The paper must address one or more of the questions: What is “fun at work”, why is it important, how can it be communicated through design, how can we measure it?
3. Short biography of the authors’ backgrounds, areas of expertise, and desired takeaways from the workshop

### **Selection Process**

The organizers will review all submissions and select participants. Selection will be based on relevance to the topic of “fun at work”, how well the paper addresses the questions posed by this workshop proposal, balance of coverage, and potential for generating interesting discussion.

## Timeline

September 7, 2009: Call for position papers

November 20, 2009: Deadline for position papers

January 8, 2010: Notification of acceptance

February 2010: Preparation for workshop

Preparation for the workshop includes setting up a website with the accepted papers, finalizing the agenda and activities, emailing participants of the agenda, and any additional logistics.

## ORGANIZERS

Li-Te Cheng is a research staff member at IBM Research. His recent work includes a self-representation tool augmenting online meetings, web-based and desktop-based virtual worlds for business applications, and tools to support collaborative software development. He has co-organized several workshops at the CSCW, FSE, ICSE, and OOPSLA conferences, including the CSCW 2008 workshop on virtual worlds, the CSCW 2006 workshop on the social side of software development, and the CSCW 2004 workshop on Eclipse as a vehicle for CSCW.

N. Sadat Shami works in the Collaborative User Experience Group at IBM Research. He is interested in the design of innovative social computing technologies and empirically determining their effectiveness. He has organized workshops and SIGs at CHI, and has participated in workshops at CSCW. This is his first CSCW workshop as an organizer.

Mark Blythe is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Computer Science, University of York, UK. He is an ethnographer with a background in literary and cultural studies. He co-edited the book "Funology: From Usability to Enjoyment". His recent work has focused on theory and method for experience centred design. He is currently involved in a project developing engaging technology for a residential care home and a nunnery. He has a tendency to write about himself in the third person, like Caesar.

Nathan Bos is a senior research associate at Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab. He has developed simulation games for training, policy analysis, research, and evaluation. Nathan has been an active participant and author at CSCW and CHI since 1998.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank John Patterson for coming up with the idea behind this workshop and research colleagues at IBM for their input and recommendations.

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