

Wacky Workplace: Master Topic Outline

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An outline of potential topics and formats to help you share more Wacky in your organization or business through workshop, lecture or keynote.

Wacky Workplace

Are you working for the weekend? Join the growing workplace movement to make the office more productive, more engaging and more fun. Learn how to unlock motivation and creativity in your organization using the fundamental ideas underlying everything from Disneyland to videogames.

Format:

Presentation of Wacky Workplace flexes between a keynote address and a full-day design workshop. In most cases, the workshop is a 90-minute experience combining keynote elements with interactive activities and exercises. In terms of planning, groups of more than 50 are best suited for a 60-minute keynote format. Smaller groups work well in a variety of workshop formats, depending on size and interest.

The topical outline below illustrates the type, scope and range of the workshop formats. For example, a 90-minute workshop will cover the key concepts but not delve into some of the other content. Likewise, a keynote could develop around one or two of the outline topics, based on interest

Outline

Introductory concepts

Every workshop kicks off with these key questions:

- Is work more like a puzzle or a game?
- Why play games?
- Why fun?
- Why not fun?
- Why fun is important at work when work is serious business?

Activities and examples orient the audience and move them into a creative space and encourage the curiosity needed to tackle the workshop concepts.

MICE

In most of life, we don't need a justification for having fun. But in a work environment, clearly understanding the benefits of integrating a little wacky into business process helps sharpen the focus on ROI. Key topics in this section include:

- The fruits of fun: Motivation, innovation, creativity and engagement, the MICE framework.
- Shifting cultures of work (From the Protestant Work Ethic to the Hacker Ethic)

Fun Theory

What is fun? A quick dip into the theory of fun shows how everything from fish tanks and costumes to Disneyland and magic tricks all fit into a comprehensive aesthetic theory of fun. Two primary theoretical resources frame these ideas:

- Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Fantasy and Play" and the is/is not
- Arthur Koestler, "Acts of Creation" and bisociation

While this section touches on a rich vein of theory, the treatment focuses on examples and provides simple models that the audience can use to identify, think about and eventually design fun.

The Culture of Play

For some, the concept of fun remains too abstract to seem useful. In these cases, a turn toward play can help cement the underlying ideas. Children play, animals play and even adults play. Focusing on some of the basic concepts of play and moving quickly into examples of playful workplaces in successful companies, this section concludes by tying the concept of play to fun and then into research on trust in organizations.

- Brian Sutton-Smith and the purpose(s) of play
- How to build a culture of play at work
- Examples of Wacky Workplaces, work at play
- How fun builds trust: From "The Speed of Trust" to trust catalysts

All Work and No Play

How did fun get such a bad reputation? Why can't we just relax and play a little? From the Pilgrims to Weber's spirit of capitalism and the Protestant work ethic, we can trace cultural precedents for the focus on labor and the shame in leisure. Looking into the future, the Open Source movement, makers and hackers show a new form of productive work that marries getting things done with fun.

- The Hacker Ethic
- Linux and Linus' Law
- Whistle while you work with a spoonful of sugar
- Play Anything

Fun Style

Fun is a universal human experience, but not everyone experiences fun the same way. Some people like roller coasters. Other people like plays. Some people enjoy video games. Others prefer reading poetry. Understanding the notion of "fun style" improve management of fun in the workplace. Several key ideas are applied to the fun theory already described:

- Personality and how it interacts with fun style
- Organizational and personal comfort
- Perceived fit and child's play

The Economics of Fun

Largely a standalone section, this part of the workshop ties the work of Gilmore and Pine on the experience economy into the notion of fun. Blending basic economic insight with fun design shows the underlying mechanics of how fun creates unique experiences that can radically change the value equation for products and services in a positive direction.

Designing Fun

For some audiences, a deep dive into design brings these ideas to life. Turning business problems into design exercises, this section covers basic game design, iterative design theory and the fun design frameworks with a focus on producing practical, implementable games, puzzles, pranks, events and more.

Fun in the Wild Kingdom

Do animals have fun? They certainly play, and to body of biologists, it looks like the pleasure they have in play fits the definition of fun. In this sidebar talk, learn about animals as diverse as swans and spiders appearing to have fun and what this might say about the evolutionary value of play.

Wacky Architecture

Architecture surrounds us and fun architecture inspires delight. From Disneyland's whimsical lands to serious architectural flights of fancy, the design of fun oscillates between the deadly serious and the amazingly playful. This lecture explores how fun penetrates the built environment and creates a more engaging and imaginative landscape. Key topics include:

- Playful design
- Architects at play

- Folly: the architecture of fun

A History of Fun

The word “fun” is a relatively recent term, only coming into its contemporary usage in English about 150 years ago. But fun as a human experience is much older than that. This talk provides a synoptic etymology of the word fun blended with a bit of historical detective work to explain how we reached the concept of fun we have today and why fun is such a funny word.

Activities

These activities work within the context of the major topic types. Most activities can be used in support multiple topics or as warm-up exercises.

- 120 Second Game: Have fun designing a game in less than two minutes.
- 122 Second Game: The two-minute game activity, with a design twist.
- Office Supply Design Challenge: Build a game with stuff around the office.
- Personal Pointless Project: A simple design activity that shows how easy it is to turn the mundane into fun.
- Work as a puzzle or a game puzzle game: An introduction to thinking about work as both a puzzle and game, by playing a game with puzzles.
- Fun organization identification game: An interactive illustration of how fun engages people.
- Wacky Workplace Fun Generator: A Mab Lib-inspired prompt for your next office activity.
- Fun objects design charrette: Work through the fun objects design framework to come up with your own fun designs.
- Failure resume: Learn how fun works by building a resume of everything you’d done wrong.
- Potluck repair and Chocolate-covered Whaaaaat?: Moving from the boring office potluck to the amazing office event. An imaginative design exercise.
- Rhyming business communication: What if you had to rhyme your next email to your boss requesting a promotion? Today you get to try.
- Personal play plan: When the workshop ends, how will you bring more fun to your life and workplace. The Play Plan is your first step in wacky accountability.