Laughing With You or Laughing at You: The Influence of Playfulness and Humor on Employees' Meeting Satisfaction and Effectiveness

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Employees spend a significant amount of work time in meetings that they find dissatisfying and ineffective. We examined the influence of play and humor on perceptions of meeting effectiveness and satisfaction. Specifically, a Meeting Playfulness scale was developed to measure the relationships between playfulness (as a state) and meeting effectiveness and satisfaction. Findings indicated that positive humor, negative in-group humor, negative out-group humor, and play contributed to perceptions of meeting effectiveness. Meanwhile, positive humor, negative out-group humor, and play contributed to meeting satisfaction. The results from this study suggest that play and certain aspects of humor can contribute positively to meeting outcomes. Future research directions include examining play and humor in virtual meetings and the influence of cultures and norms on participants' willingness to engage in play and humor in group settings.

Keywords: work meetings, team meetings, meeting satisfaction, meeting effectiveness, playfulness, humor

INTRODUCTION

Imagine your last meeting… Were you satisfied with how the meeting was conducted and its outcomes? If you were not satisfied with how your meeting proceeded, you're not alone. While employees spend a tremendous amount time in meetings, many employees are dissatisfied with their meeting experience (Rogelberg, 2019). In the U.S., it is estimated that there are 55 million meetings a day with an annual cost of $1.4 trillion (about $4,300 per person in the US) or 8.2% of the 2014 U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Rogelberg, 2019, p. ix).

While there are high costs and time devoted to this workplace activity, Perlow et al. (2017) reported that employees generally dislike meetings. Seventy-one percent of 182 senior managers surveyed said that their meetings were unproductive and inefficient. One interviewee described stabbing her leg with a pencil to stop from screaming during a torturous staff meeting. Others reported feeling suffocated during the week because of the overwhelming number of scheduled meetings. In addition, 65% of participants said meetings keep them from completing their own work, 64% said meetings come at the expense of deep thinking, and 62% said meetings miss opportunities to bring the team closer together. These comments and statistics paint a picture of meetings as unproductive, time-consuming, and inefficient. Furthermore, "too many meetings" is considered the biggest time waster at work, indicated by 47% of 3200 workers in a study conducted by salary.com (2018), which translated into $250 billion a year wasted on bad meetings.

If meetings are so unproductive and employees dislike them so much, why are they such a prevalent part of the workplace? Are meetings simply a "necessary evil," a part of the job that even though hated, people have to endure? Rogelberg (2019) stated that meetings serve two important organizational goals. First, as the organizational structure becomes flatter and less hierarchical, leaders see the need to bring people together, gain input, promote discussion, provide voice, explain things, coordinate, etc. (Rogelberg, 2019). Secondly, company beliefs and values about employee job satisfaction, empowerment of teams, employee buy-in, and employee engagement are considered important in achieving short-term and long-term organizational strategies. Meetings can influence these organizational outcomes (Rogelberg, 2019). For instance, research shows that meeting satisfaction is a distinct aspect of job satisfaction (Rogelberg et al., 2010). Increasing meeting satisfaction can positively influence job satisfaction. Meeting outcomes also have been shown to be related to employee engagement, empowerment, well-being and team performance (Allen et al., 2016; Allen & Rogelberg, 2013; West, Hoff, & Carlsson, 2013). These are important organizational factors that ultimately benefit the organization. Thus, studying meetings and specifically, the predictors of good meetings contribute to the well-being of employees and organizations.

Given the reasons above, the aim of this study is to examine predictors that influence meeting outcomes. We examined factors that could potentially contribute to meeting satisfaction and effectiveness: positive humor, negative humor and playfulness. Positive humor can be defined as "amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization" (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006, p. 59). In contrast, negative humor is the delivery of humorous messages with the intent to cause emotional harm or is interpreted as aggressive and/or humiliating by the audience (Cann et al., 2014). While harder to conceptually define, play can be understood as a behavioral approach to any activity that is intrinsically motivating, self-chosen, and produces an alert yet non-stressed frame of mind (Gray, 2009).

We are interested in studying negative humor in relation to meeting outcomes because previous literature has extensively focused on positive humor (Blanchard, Stewart, Cann, & Follman, 2014; Dwyer, 1991; Holmes & Marra, 2002; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Studying negative humor can broaden the scope of understanding about the complex influence of humor in organizational settings. We are also interested in supporting the humor literature with our positive humor hypotheses. In everyday lives, individuals can often be seen displaying playful behaviors in normal group settings. Yet, in organizations, play is often discouraged because it can be perceived as "unprofessional." However, advocates suggested that play could have beneficial effects on team performance. We developed a playfulness measure to assess how often playful behaviors occur in meetings and if playfulness frequency would correlate with meeting effectiveness and satisfaction.

What Are Meetings?

Meetings vary in sizes, purposes, length, and format. In meetings, individuals typically aim to coordinate, communicate, monitor, and make decisions (Rogelberg, 2019). A few examples of meetings are weekly meetings, strategy meetings, planning meetings, task force meetings, troubleshooting meetings, brainstorming meetings, and debriefing meetings. Meetings can be in a single format (face to face), or mixed (conference room with one or more participants connected via video or telephone). Meetings are typically scheduled in advance and could be formal or informal. They can be extremely brief (e.g., 5 minutes), to a full day or days in length (e.g., full day training, board member retreat).

While non-managers might attend eight meetings per week on average, the average number of meetings managers attended can be up to twelve per week (Keith, 2015). This average, however, might be even higher for white collar jobs as meeting demands increase for those in the higher echelon of the organizational hierarchy (Rogelberg, 2019).

The Executive Time Use Project (2016) is an international data collection effort which investigated and analyzed how corporate leaders in the U.S., Europe, and Asia organize their working time. One of the studies examined 94 CEOs in top Italian firms and 357 corporate leaders in India. This specific study found that 60% of CEO's working hours, and 56% of corporate leaders' working hours are spent in meetings, not including conference calls. This evidence supports the prevalence of meetings described above. Two important meeting outcomes are effectiveness and satisfaction.

Meeting Effectiveness

Meeting effectiveness is the extent to which meetings successfully help achieve the goals of the meeting attendees (i.e., employees) and the organization (Allen et al., 2014; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). The literature indicates that good meeting procedures, meeting structural and process characteristics and functional behaviors are linked to meeting effectiveness (Cohen et al., 2011; Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2011; Leach, et al., 2009; Nixon & Littlepage, 1992). Nixon and Littlepage (1992) found that functional meeting behaviors are such as having open communication, being task-oriented, adopting a systematic approach, and adhering to timeliness relate to meeting effectiveness. On the other hand, dysfunctional behaviors such as complaining that gets out of control and members exerting negativity, are linked to meeting ineffectiveness (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Meeting structural and process characteristics also contribute to meeting effectiveness. When an agenda is used, a meeting facilitator is present and the meeting is carried out in a good quality environment, meeting effectiveness may increase (Cohen et al., 2011; Leach et al., 2009). The researchers presume that meeting effectiveness affects meeting satisfaction. How the attendees assess the outcomes of their meetings will affect how satisfied they are with the experience.

Meeting Satisfaction

Meeting satisfaction describes the employee's overall meeting experience. Rogelberg et al. (2010) established meeting satisfaction as a distinct and significant facet of job satisfaction and defined it as "a positive or pleasurable affective state stemming from assessments of the respondents' meetings or meeting experiences" (p. 153). In other words, meeting satisfaction can be understood as the degree to which the meeting experience measures up to or exceeds one's expectations. As a result, the individual derives a pleasant, enjoyable, and stimulating experience from attending the meeting. Rogelberg and his colleagues assessed the individual's meeting experience in the workplace by focusing on the affective orientation rather than a cognitive orientation. It means that instead of a cognitive assessment of the meeting (i.e., meeting effectiveness), they measured participants' feelings about the meeting.

Some notable variables that significantly contribute to meeting satisfaction are good meeting leadership and facilitation, positive group interactions within the meeting, and contextual factors such as member preparedness, and meeting settings (Allen et al., 2018; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2018; Rogelberg, 2019). The ways a leader takes charge, for instance, to interrupt off topic conversations, and actively engaging members in the discussion, are shown to influence members' ratings of meeting satisfaction (Baran et al., 2012).

Good meetings improve the participants' experience and positively influence the outcomes of the meeting. Research shows that implementing suggested meeting preparation, as well as the within-meeting factors, improves group consensus and decisions, and team creativity (Allen, et al., 2015; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2018). Driven by the interest in meeting science and the research directions recommended by Allen et al. (2016) and Rogelberg et al. (2010), the proposed study examines two predictors that haven't been identified before that could potentially influence meeting outcomes: negative humor and play.

Humor

Martineau (1972) defined humor as "any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties." (p.114). In other words, humor can be understood as verbal or nonverbal messages that invoke laughter and amusement. Humor acts as a social and communication mechanism in which individuals use humor to shape interactions with others.

Humor climate is a mutual understanding or shared perception about the usage of humor and how it is expressed within a group (Blanchard et al., 2014; Martineau, 1972). With this definition, people in the same situation and setting may have a mutual understanding of how jokes are being used, something that might not be very apparent to an outsider of the group. Certain members may not necessarily identify with the group humor, however, such as when the humor is being used in a negative way within the group and it

bothers them. But they can still understand the general climate of the humor usage. Cann et al. (2014) found that humor climate can influence an employee's overall work experience.

Positive Group Humor

Organizationally, positive humor can be defined as "amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognition in the individual, group, or organization" (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006, p. 59). Positive humor can serve several purposes in group interaction. Affiliative humor aims to promote a positive environment and can aid relationship-building and increase group affiliation and cohesion. Self-enhancing humor involves the use of humor to project outward and enhance one's positive image to others and can be used as a stress-reducing mechanism. Positive group humor is beneficial when dealing with stressful situations. Radcliffe-Brown (1940) theorized that positive group humor can be used as a way for members to express disagreement and tensions in non-confrontational ways. For instance, when an individual teases another gently, it can signal to the other person about the individual's view on a particular issue or allow the person to express an opinion that is different. However, since the message is packaged as a joke, tension within the group is often reduced.

Positive Humor on Team Performance

Team interaction researchers examined humor as a positive socioemotional behavior that enhances team communication in organizational contexts such as meetings (Keyton & Beck, 2009; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2013). Positive socioemotional behaviors are acts that show positive feelings towards another person (Keyton & Beck, 2009). Acts of humor are often positive socioemotional behaviors and encourage members to build on each other's ideas and take initiatives to develop and implement new ideas (Gruner, 1976; Lyttle, 2001). In meetings, positive humor facilitates meeting progress by promoting procedural behaviors (e.g., making sure all agenda items are addressed, staying on relevant meeting topics), and increases meeting satisfaction and productivity (Lehmann-Willenbrock & Allen, 2014). The two researchers examined behavioral patterns of humor and laughter in real teams in industrial organizations in Germany. A humorous instance followed by a response from others establishes a pattern. It could be one joke followed by a single burst of laughter, or a sequence of several humorous remarks followed by various bursts of laughter. The researchers videotaped and coded humor and laughter during 54 regular organizational team meetings and looked for problem-solving behaviors, positive procedural behaviors, and positive socioemotional statements. Examples of positive socioemotional statements mentioned in the study were "Ana, you haven't said anything…" or "Steve, you made a great suggestion" (p. 1282). In this longitudinal study, the supervisors were surveyed immediately after the meeting and two years after. The results revealed that humor patterns triggered functional behaviors such as procedural statements (e.g., "Let's talk about…next", "Alright, back to our topic", "ok so far we've talked about…"), positive socioemotional statements and new ideas. This suggests that humor patterns prompt the team members to focus back on tasks, engage team members and encourage ideation. Based on previous research, we establish the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: *Positive humor will be positively related to employees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness.*

Hypothesis 1b: *Positive humor will be positively related to employees' meeting satisfaction.*

Negative Group Humor

In contrast to positive humor, negative humor in an organizational environment can be understood through various humor messages/acts initiated by an employee that could cause emotional harm to other employees in the organization. Holmes and Marra (2002) define negative humor as "the process of conveying critical or negative intent which undermines existing power relationships" (p. 66). Ethnic jokes, disability-oriented jokes, and practical jokes are examples of negative humor (Cruthirds et al., 2013; Dreyfack, 1994; Holmes & Marra, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Negative humor often leads to humiliation, emotional stress, and physical conflict (Cruthirds et al., 2013). In the workplace, negative humor causes

lawsuits, and is linked to employee turnover and low productivity (Duncan, et al., 1990; Mueller et al., 2002).

Two types of negative group humor are of interest to this study. *Negative in-group humor* entails members directing jokes towards other members within the group. Employees in the meetings can make jokes about other members in the meeting in a disparaging manner or to assert domination. This type of humor is also understood as putdown humor (Terrion & Ashforth, 2002). Alternatively, *negative out-group humor* is directed towards others outside of the immediate group and could serve as a way of expressing feelings about the working conditions and organizational policies (Dwyer, 1991; Taylor & Bain, 2003) or the larger organizational community to which the group belongs (Holmes & Marra, 2002). For instance, within a meeting, members can make jokes that would mock their managers, upper management and other individuals not attending the meeting.

Negative In-Group Humor

Negative in-group humor has been deployed as a tactic for forcing conformity in a tough environment and when rigorous standards are expected. For instance, U.S. drill sergeants would use negative humor in military training to motivate recruits to comply and to create a sense of belonging (Cruthird et al., 2013). Difficult military training requirements may demand more extreme methods of motivation than praise and rewards to establish hierarchical dominance and to secure recruits' compliance. In addition, recruits need to undergo massive transformation from civilians to soldiers in a short period of time. Teasing and ridicule, thus, are claimed to be highly effective forms of motivation and mental conditioning. Other examples where negative in-group humor is used as a training technique are with police officers and firefighters, and stock and commodity traders. In a cohesive group of mature adults, light negative humor is sometimes used for fun, member initiation, and pointing out behaviors that need correction (Cruthirds et al., 2013).

Negative In-Group Humor and Meeting Outcomes

Negative ingroup humor could both be good and bad for group outcomes. Specifically, for meeting effectiveness, negative humor could help shut down unproductive dialogues. However, negative emotions resulting from the members feeling targeted could distract them from the tasks at hand. Therefore, we formulate the following research question.

Research Question 1: *How does in-group negative humor relate employees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness?*

As for meeting satisfaction, negative humor used within groups can hinder group interaction and members' integration with one another (Blanchard, et al., 2014; Collinson, 1988; Meyer, 1997). Trust and mutual respect among team members may also deteriorate in the presence of negative in- group humor (Blanchard et al., 2014). In meetings, negative in-group humor can create a climate of distrust and disrespect among members. When members attempt to dominate and denigrate others through the use of negative humor, employees within the meetings may feel divided and demotivated. Those negative impacts can influence the employees' satisfaction of the meeting.

Hypothesis 2: *Negative in-group humor will be inversely related to employees' meeting satisfaction.*

Negative Out-Group Humor and Meeting Satisfaction

Making jokes regarding other individuals outside of the group can help foster group cohesion in which members see the situation as "us versus them," group members against the organization at large (Taylor & Bain, 2003). While out-group negative humor can enhance group identity, we hypothesize that the general negative climate of the group within the meeting can negatively impact an individual's attitude about the meeting. While the jokes are not intended to inflict harm on members within the meeting, those witnessing the negative out-group humor can be negatively affected by it. They can feel offended, angry, and frustrated. However, since the jokes are not directly targeted towards any individual within the meetings, we suspect

that the impact of negative out-group humor on meeting members may be weaker compared to negative in-group humor. On the other hand, negative out-group humor can potentially encourage group bonding when members share similar sentiments about certain individuals who are not present in the meeting or the organization at large. However, it could also potentially induce a negative mood in the group when it's not well received by other meeting members. Thus, we establish the following research questions:

Research Question 2: *How does negative out-group humor relate to employees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness?*

Research Question 3: *How does negative out-group humor relate to employees' perceptions of meeting satisfaction?*

Play

The second variable that is of interest in this study is play. While humor might be hard to define, play can be even harder to capture conceptually. When talking about play and playfulness, one might imagine putting LEGO pieces together, playing in a music band, or competing in a potato sack race. Play is one of those constructs that is more easily experienced than defined (Kruger, 1995; West et al., 2013). There seems to be little consensus among scholars on one single definition of play. Brown & Vaughn (2009) observed play through the lens of motivation and intrinsic reward by defining it as an activity that is purposeless and provides enjoyment coupled with a suspension of self-consciousness. Although somewhat similar, Gray (2009) characterized play as an activity that promotes an active yet non-stressed frame of mind, where the activity itself is more valued than the results.

In an effort to define play, West et al. (2013) surveyed the literature and proposed a new definition. Instead of defining play itself, they described play as a behavioral approach to an activity, which can be defined by its basic elements; the more play criteria an activity meets, the greater its degree of playfulness. With this approach, an activity can be seen as "playful" or not depending on how the person carries out the activity. The five proposed elements that characterize play are: self-chosen, fun, frivolous, imaginative, and somewhat bound by structure or rules. To demonstrate the idea, West et al. (2013) gave an example of a post-it artwork activity, where employees can write or draw on an adhesive note and stick it to a designated area on the wall. Together, all the sticky notes make up some artwork. The activity is self-chosen because the office workers took the initiative to be involved in the activity. The activity was deemed as engaging and fun by the employees and did not necessarily need to meet any organizational objectives. The purpose of the activity was to promote fun, and the content could be silly and imaginative. The activity, however, is limited to a certain space (office wall) and lasted for a brief time.

When viewed as a behavioral approach, play is not limited to any set of activities, and "normal" activities can be transformed into play by changing the perspective or state of mind toward that activity. For instance, an activity as mundane as sorting office papers can be done playfully when the person incorporates sorting to the rhythm of the music or by colors and the person can even time how long it takes to sort a hundred pieces of paper. As another example, stocking shelves at a grocery store becomes play when the task is done Kung Fu-style along with appropriate kicks and screams (West et al., 2013). A work meeting can become playful when individuals toss a light-weight ball to one another when one person wants to speak. Additionally, the playful element can be demonstrated by the way the room is set up (participants sitting on yoga balls), a group game at the beginning of the meeting, or how participants interact with each other. One can begin to understand that a boring activity can become play and a playful activity can lose its playfulness. West et al. (2013) pointed out that a game of Monopoly can stop being fun when taken too seriously.

Examples of Play in Meetings

A type of playful activity commonly used in group settings such as in meetings is an icebreaker. As the name suggested, icebreaker games are intended to help "break the ice," by facilitating exchanges between individuals, and getting new group members to engage in initial interactions with each other. Icebreakers

can serve many purposes (Chlup & Collins, 2010). They can help new group members get to know each other, relieve initial tension between strangers, and promote the initial building of trust and collaboration. Icebreakers can also create connections between members by encouraging participation from all.

Icebreakers have been a popular tool for group activities and can be used in various settings. For instance, they have been used by teachers in educational settings to increase students' engagement (Chlup & Collins, 2010), or by meeting facilitators to increase engagement and participation from members. Rogelberg (2019) recommended the use of icebreakers for starting meetings. Specifically, he stated that thought- provoking icebreakers such as "Name the Best Movie and Why" can encourage creativity.

While icebreakers are typically used at the beginning of a meeting, re-energizers are used during transitions of one activity to another, a way to "clear the mind" and re-engage individuals (Chlup & Collins, 2010). Activities that can infuse the room with positive and upbeat energy can be great re-energizer activities. For instance, the facilitator can initiate a group cheer that gets louder and louder time after time and by the end, the group is shouting and jumping about. To start, members can gather in a circle and begin to whisper, "Go bananas – B-A-N-A-N-A-S" and finish up with everyone screaming "Go Bananas" as loud as they can. The cheer can be tailored to specific topics of interest such as the group's favorite sports team or the group's common workplace slogan, or the mascot of the university where members attend. Another re-energizer activity that could hone communication skills is PowerPoint Karaoke. As interesting as the name may sound, it is an improv game where a participant is given a small slide deck and has to give a presentation on the spot. The twist is that the participant does not know the information beforehand. After all volunteers have presented, a winner can be decided by a panel of judges or by a popular vote.

Icebreakers and re-energizers can add playfulness to a meeting and allow members to mentally "transition" from their previous activities (e.g., coming from another meeting) as well as re-engage members and get them ready for the meeting discussion. When members are asked to do silly things or they mess up while engaging in the game, icebreaker games can invoke humor among the group. The laughter resulting from the games can further help facilitate group cohesion and relieve tension. These group activities have also been reported to facilitate "trust, teamwork, and positive, effective communication within groups" (Ludwig et al., 2005, p.79).

Besides incorporating fun activities into the meetings like icebreakers and re-energizers, playfulness could also be encouraged through subtle prompts that signal the permission to be playful. The signal that play is allowed promotes creativity and meeting productivity (i.e., effectiveness). West, et al. (2016) investigated whether play cues would influence the creative climate, playfulness, and productivity of work meetings. Play cues can be games, toys, sweets, or playful re-arrangement of furniture to make a meeting more informal. A meeting facilitator can convey permission to play by incorporating these contextual cues. Participants from eleven different organizations were randomly placed into the play-cued and controlled conditions. The participants would meet for an hour or two and during their breaks, play cues (e.g., games, toys, sweets) were introduced. The control condition did not receive those props. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire during the break and again at the end of the meeting. The results indicated that play cues modestly increased the creativity climate of the meeting. In addition, the results also suggested that playful meetings do not harm productivity, but instead slightly increased it.

Play and Meeting Satisfaction

In the workplace, play might seem as promoting inefficiency and a waste of time. Specifically, given its frivolous nature, play might not be welcomed in meetings, where the pursuit of efficiency and focus on results are priorities. In many organizations, play is viewed as a threat to productivity and something to be minimized (West, 2014).

However, play advocates argue that play and having fun at work enhances productivity because "playful activities allow employees to develop cognitive, social, and emotional capacities conducive to a productive work environment" (West et al., 2016). A preliminary study using self-report assessment indicated that those characterizing themselves as being playful also think of themselves as being creative and innovative (Bateson & Nettle, 2014).

West and colleagues (2016) study, however, did not explicitly establish the relationship between play and meeting satisfaction. One of the aims of the present study is to examine the relationship between play, meeting satisfaction and effectiveness. Based on the five elements of play established by West et al. (2013), and the potential of play to be a predictor of meeting outcomes, two hypotheses are established.

Hypothesis 4a: *Meetings that have playful activities such as icebreakers and re-energizers will have a higher effectiveness rating than those that do not contain playful activities.*

We presume that meeting satisfaction will correlate positively with meeting effectiveness since the quality of the meeting might influence the participants' satisfaction. Since playful activities are predicted to correlate positively with meeting effectiveness (West et al., 2016), the proposed study also hypothesizes that they will correlate positively with meeting satisfaction:

Hypothesis 4b: *Meetings that have playful activities such as icebreakers and re-energizers have a higher satisfaction rating than those that do not contain playful activities.*

METHOD

Participants

Participants were workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online crowdsourcing platform that is often used as an alternative method of data collection for research purposes (Chambers et al., 2016). MTurk is considered a cost-effective method for conducting survey research and the cost per survey response typically ranges from $0.30 to $1.00. The financial incentives, nevertheless, increase participation rates without decreasing data quality (Chambers et al., 2016). While it provides a wide pool of applicants, MTurk also allows researchers to screen participants in order to target certain populations. A point of caution for MTurk is that the worker demographics tend to lean toward younger individuals where more than 50% are millennials (born between 1981-1996), with more than 50% having college degrees, and income levels ranging from $20,000 to $29,999. However, data obtained from the online crowdsourcing platform is shown to be as good or even better than traditional survey methods (Chambers et al., 2016).

One hundred fifty participants were required to live and work full time (at least 32 hours per week) in the U.S. Participants also had to be involved in work meetings on a regular basis (at least once a week). Participants' information collected included industry (e.g., sales, software development, etc.), gender, age, ethnicity, work tenure, and type of meetings the participants most frequently attended. In addition, the survey asked participants to report the average number of participants in their typical meetings. The final sample was 143 participants, with seven participants being dropped due to failing the attention check.

Procedures

Participants were provided with a survey link to Qualtrics (survey platform) to participate. Participants first answered demographic questions before giving their responses to the Negative Humor, Playfulness, Meeting Effectiveness, and Satisfaction scales. Participants were thanked and provided the code to receive payment from MTurk.

Measures

This study measured the correlational relationships between Negative Humor, Playfulness, Meeting Satisfaction, and Meeting Effectiveness. Participants were instructed to complete the following rating scales regarding their most frequently attended meetings.

Use of Negative Humor in Meetings

The Humor Climate Questionnaire (HCQ), which contained 16 items, assessed the positive and negative styles of humor in the workplace. For this study, we only used the Negative InGroup Humor (4 items) and Negative Out-group Humor (4 items) dimensions of the questionnaire.

A sample item for negative in-group humor subscale was "The humor used by my coworkers makes someone in the group feel bad." A sample item for negative out- group humor subscale was "We enjoy laughing together about management policies we do not agree with." While Cann et al. (2014) measured participants' levels of agreement (i.e., Totally Disagree to Totally Agree), we modified the scale to measure frequency (i.e., Never to Always) to measure how often negative humor occurs within meetings to assess the prevalence of negative humor in meetings and its relationship with meeting satisfaction. Therefore, measuring frequency of negative humor is a better fit than measuring the participants' levels of agreement. The participants rated the frequency of negative in-group and outgroup humor in their meetings on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = Never to 7 = Always.

The HCQ had good internal reliability for each of its dimensions and has been shown to predict job satisfaction and commitment (Cann et al., 2014). Cann et al. (2014) also demonstrated that the HCQ explained 71% of the variance in humor climate. All dimensions of the HCQ showed strong internal consistency reliabilities. Negative in-group and out-group humor dimensions had Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .83 and .89, respectively.

Playfulness in Meetings

West et al. (2016) believed that playfulness could be viewed as both a trait and a state. As a trait, playfulness is found to be stable over time, but when viewed as a state, playfulness "appears a frame of mind strongly influenced by context" (p.72). Measuring playfulness as a state fit the aim of our study since we examined the influence of external factors (e.g., games, play cues) on the participants' fun and lively mood. The Adult Playfulness Scale is a common tool that measures playfulness as a trait (Glynn & Webster, 1992) and would be unsuited for this study. Instead, we developed a measure to assess the occurrence of playfulness within meetings. This scale had 10 items. On a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = Never and 7 = Always, participants rated the frequency of playful occurrences within their meetings. Sample items of this measure were "Our meetings may start with a fun activity" and "You might see playful items (e.g., balls, fidget toys) in our meetings." The playfulness scale had an internal consistency, α=.97.

Perceived Meeting Effectiveness

Participants rated their perceptions of meeting effectiveness using Leach et al.'s (2009) measure. This three-item scale asked participants to assess the effectiveness of the meeting in terms of goal achievement: "achieving your own work goals," "achieving your colleagues' goals," and "achieving your department's/section's/unit's goals." Participants rated meeting effectiveness on a 5-point continuum from "Extremely ineffective" to "Extremely effective." This scale had an internal consistency reliability coefficient estimate of α = .89.

Meeting Satisfaction

Participants were asked to indicate how the following adjectives describe their meetings: stimulating, boring, unpleasant, satisfying, enjoyable, and annoying (Cohen-Powless et al., 2003; Rogelberg et al., 2010). According to Rogelberg et al. (2010), the adjectives are nearly identical to how satisfaction is assessed in the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) commonly used to assess job satisfaction. Just like on the JDI (Bowling Green State University, 2009), the participants rated these adjectives on a 3-point scale: Yes, No, or "?" (Question Mark). In this study, the internal consistency was high (α = .91).

Attention Checks

Two attention checks were incorporated to determine whether participants were paying attention to relevant elements of the study. The attention check statements were, "If you are reading this, please choose 'Occasionally'" and "If you are reading this, please choose 'Usually.'" Responses from seven participants who provided responses which indicated that they were not paying adequate attention to the study were removed, leading to a final sample of 143 participants.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and coefficient alphas can be found in Table 1. Reliability analyses indicated that all measures had internal consistencies above .85. Gender had a significant negative relationship with negative in-group humor, $r(143) = -.17$, $p = .02$, and with negative out-group humor, $r(143) = -.20$, $p < .001$. Men reported a stronger association with negative in-group humor and out-group humor in meetings than women. Additionally, age had a significant negative relationship with negative in-group humor $r(143) = -.25$, $p < .001$, negative out-group humor, $r(143) = -.25$, $p < .001$, and meeting playfulness, $r(144) = -.20$, $p < .001$. As age increases, the experience of negative humor and playfulness tends to decrease. Both average meetings per week and length of meetings had significant, but weak positive relationships with negative in- group humor, $r(143) = .14$, $p = .05$, and $r(143) = 15$, $p = .03$, respectively. Individuals tended to report more negative in-group humor as they attended more meetings and spent more time in meetings. Meeting size had a significant positive relationship with positive humor, $r(143) = .18$, $p = .02$. As meeting size increased, occurrence of positive humor tended to increase. As expected, results also showed that meeting effectiveness had a significant positive relationship with meeting satisfaction, $r(141) = .60$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Testing

The predicted model investigated the relationship between four predictors (positive humor, negative in-group humor, negative out-group humor, and meeting playfulness) of meeting effectiveness and meeting satisfaction. Hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression analyses.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVES AND INTERCORRELATIONS

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	39.27	11.9	-										
2. Gender[1]	1.46	.51	-.00	-									
3. Average Meetings Per Week	2.86	2.56	-.11	-.22**	-								
4. Length of Meetings[2]	2.56	.85	-.04	.02	.10	-							
5. Meeting Size	12.03	17.57	-.06	-.04	.14	.42**	-						
6. Positive Humor[3]	4.23	1.47	.00	.08	-.03	-.13	.18*	(.91)					
7. Negative In-Group Humor[3]	1.95	1.38	-.25**	-.17*	.14*	.15*	.07	.06	(.94)				
8. Negative Out-Group Humor[3]	2.47	1.42	-.25**	-.20**	.08	.09	-.00	.22**	.73**	(.94)			
9. Meeting Playfulness[3]	2.77	1.56	-.20**	.02	-.06	.14	.13	.56**	.49**	.43**	(.97)		
10. Meeting Effectiveness[4]	3.84	.97	.03	.00	-.03	-.03	.08	.43**	.09	-.07	.39**	(.89)	
11. Meeting Satisfaction[5]	1.12	.80	.05	.01	-.01	-.07	.10	.48**	.05	-.09	.43**	.60**	(.91)

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed). Coefficient alphas are listed all for measures, n ranges from 141 to 143.

1. Male =1, female =2
2. 1= 5 minutes, 2= 30 minutes, 3= 60 minutes, 4= 90 minutes, 5=120 minutes, 6= More than 120 minutes
3. Scale from 1=Never to 7=Always, with higher ratings indicating higher frequency of occurrence
4. Scale from 1=Extremely Ineffective to 5 = Extremely Effective with higher scores indicating higher effectiveness
5. 0 = No, 1 = ?, 2 = Yes

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict meeting effectiveness based on positive humor, negative in-group humor, negative out-group humor, and playfulness (See Table 2). A significant regression model was found, $F(4,137)=15.28$, $p < 0.001$, with an R^2 of .30. As positive humor ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$), negative in-group humor ($\beta = .30$, $p = .01$), and playfulness ($\beta = .22$, $p = .003$) increased, meeting effectiveness would tend to increase. However, as negative out-group humor ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$) increased, meeting effectiveness would tend to decrease. Hypothesis 1a predicted that positive humor would be positively related to employees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness. Hypothesis 1a was supported. Research question 1 asked how in-group negative humor is related to employees' perception of meeting effectiveness. Results indicated that negative in-group humor has a significant positive correlation with meeting effectiveness. Research question 2 examined how negative out-group humor was related to employees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness. Results indicated that negative out-group humor was negatively related to meeting effectiveness. Hypothesis 4a predicted that meetings with playful activities such as icebreakers and re-energizers would be rated as more effective than those that do not contain playful activities. Hypothesis 4a was supported.

Another multiple linear regression was performed to predict meeting satisfaction based on positive humor, negative in-group humor, negative out-group humor, and playfulness (Table 3). A significant regression equation was found, $F(4,138)= 20.64$, $p = 0.00$, with an R^2 of .37. As positive humor ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) and playfulness ($\beta = .30$, $p = .003$) increased, meeting satisfaction would tend to increase. However, as negative out-group humor ($\beta = -.46$ $p = .00$) increased, meeting satisfaction would tend to decrease. Hypothesis 1b predicted that positive humor would be positively related to employees' meeting satisfaction. Hypothesis 1b was supported. Hypothesis 2 predicted that negative in-group humor would be inversely related to employees' meeting satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Negative in- group humor did not have a significant effect on meeting satisfaction ($\beta = .20$, $p = .06$). Research question 3 examined how negative out-group humor was related to employees' perceptions of meeting satisfaction? Results indicated that negative out-group humor was negatively related to meeting satisfaction. Hypothesis 4b predicted that meetings that had playful activities such as icebreakers and re-energizers would have a higher satisfaction rating than those that did not contain playful activities. Hypothesis 4b was supported.

TABLE 2
LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS PREDICTING MEETING EFFECTIVENESS (N=141)

Variable	*B*	*SE (B)*	*β*	*T*
Positive Humor	.25	.06	.39	4.16*
Negative In-group Humor	.21	.08	.30	2.56**
Negative Out-group Humor	-.32	.07	-.46	-4.32*
Playfulness	.14	.06	.22	2.15**

Note: *$p < .01$, **$p < .05$.

TABLE 3
LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS PREDICTING MEETING SATISFACTION (N=142)

Variable	*B*	*SE (B)*	*β*	*t*
Positive Humor	.22	.05	.40	4.60*
Negative In-group Humor	.12	.06	.20	1.85
Negative Out-group Humor	-.26	.06	-.46	-4.5*
Playfulness	.15	.05	.30	3.07*

Note: *$p < .01$, **$p < .05$.
$R^2 = .37$

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to measure the influence of positive humor, negative humor, and playfulness on meeting effectiveness and satisfaction. Participants were asked to rate how often positive humor, negative humor (in-group and out-group), and playfulness happened in their most frequent meetings. They also rated their perceptions of meeting satisfaction and effectiveness.

Hypotheses and General Implications

Hypotheses 1a and 1b predicted that positive humor would be positively related to meeting outcomes. This was supported by our results and previous research. Positive humor had a strong positive influence on meeting effectiveness and satisfaction. Positive humor may happen more frequently than negative humor and playfulness in meetings. The effect of positive humor on meeting outcomes suggests that meeting participants used humor to cheer and encourage each other. Humor was something they enjoyed sharing in the meetings and it made the meetings more enjoyable. Positive humor may increase meeting satisfaction by improving the meeting climate and participants' moods. It may also increase meeting effectiveness by acting as a positive socioemotional behavior and encouraging members to build on each other's ideas and take initiative to develop and implement new ideas (Gruner, 1976; Lyttle, 2001). In addition, positive humor may promote procedural behaviors such as making sure all agenda items are addressed and staying on relevant meeting topics (Lehmann-Willenbrock & Allen, 2014).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that negative in-group humor would be inversely related to meeting satisfaction. Our results did not show a significant relationship between the two variables. This means that negative in-group humor seemingly did not impact meeting satisfaction. Blanchard et al. (2014) reported that negative in-group humor could hinder group interaction and members' socialization with one another. Trust and respect would also tend to deteriorate in the presence of negative in-group humor. The results from our study did not support this previous research. There was a low frequency of negative in-group humor reported by participants. However, it's not entirely accurate to theorize that a low frequency of reported negative in-group humor was responsible for the nonsignificant relationship. Negative in-group humor, while not significantly related to meeting satisfaction, was a significant contributor of meeting effectiveness, which will be discussed below. One possible explanation could be that in a group setting, members feel the social pressure to not engage in behaviors that would lead to a negative mood in the group. The relationship between negative in-group humor and meeting satisfaction should be studied further.

Research question 2 examined how negative in-group humor impacts employees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness. The results revealed a significant positive relationship. This means that as negative in-group humor increased, meeting effectiveness increased. While the literature indicated that negative in-group humor could be both good and bad for group outcomes, the results favor the former (Cruthirds et al., 2013; Dreyfack, 1994; Holmes & Marra, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Cruthirds et al. (2013) reported that negative in-group humor sometimes was used to train police officers, firefighters, and stock and commodity traders. It encouraged compliance and obedience. In addition, they reported that negative in-group humor could be used for fun by members, as a form of initiation, and even pointing out behaviors that would need correction. In a mature and well-established group, a colleague might use negative in-group humor to suggest that another employee did something wrong or that the person disagreed with how the situation was handled. This way, the remark can be packaged in a less confrontational manner but would still deliver the message. This result from our study was surprising but does align with the study of Cruthirds et al. (2013). To summarize, while negative in-group humor did not impact participants' meeting satisfaction, it promoted meeting effectiveness. Participants may not enjoy negative in-group humor, but they may think it is functional and improves perceived meeting effectiveness.

Research question 3a examined the influence of negative out-group humor on meeting effectiveness. Our results showed that negative out-group humor has a strong negative influence on meeting effectiveness. As negative out-group humor increased, meeting effectiveness decreased. This was an interesting finding. Besides Cann et al. (2014) briefly theorizing that negative out-group humor would have little to no adverse impact on group members, there has been almost no discussion of negative out-group humor on group

productivity. Our study showed that making jokes about management or other external groups could potentially lead to an unproductive meeting. One explanation could be that members might feel that the meetings were off track when members dissed individuals outside of the group such as instead of focusing on tasks. Thus, making jokes about outsiders could have hindered more productive meeting behaviors.

Research question 3b examined the influence of negative out-group humor on meeting satisfaction. Our results indicated that negative out-group humor has a strong negative influence on meeting satisfaction. As negative out-group humor increased, meeting satisfaction decreased. This was a surprising finding as well and it contradicted previous research (Cann et al., 2004; Taylor & Bain, 2003). While we expected negative in-group humor to reduce meeting satisfaction, it turned out to be negative out-group humor that has this negative effect. Taylor and Bain (2003) reported that negative out-group humor fostered group cohesion by promoting an "us versus them" mentality. Cann et al. (2014) argued that negative out-group humor could be seen as positive humor within the group. The results from this study were a contrast to those previous reports. In our study, positive humor promoted meeting satisfaction while negative out-group humor discouraged meeting satisfaction. One rationale could be that members disliked when individuals spoke ill of those not present. That distaste tainted members' meeting experience resulting in lower satisfaction. Meeting participants may be concerned that negative remarks about others might be shared outside the meeting or that negative outgroup humor indicates that their group is not committed to the organization.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b predicted that playfulness would have a positive influence on meeting effectiveness and satisfaction. These hypotheses were supported and consistent with previous research (Chlup & Collins, 2010; Rogelberg, 2019; West et al., 2016). DeKoven (2014) argued that play would enhance productivity in the workplace by making work tasks more fun and engaging (as cited in West et al., 2016). In the context of meetings, West et al. (2016) also showed that play cues (e.g., sweets, games, fidget toys) slightly increased effectiveness. One explanation for play's positive effect on meeting effectiveness is that it could have helped participants to mentally transition so they could focus on the task at hand. Play would also engage participants in the meeting, thus increasing their participation and promote productive meeting behaviors. On the other hand, this study was the first to establish a relationship between play and meeting satisfaction. The literature has been looking at play's effect on creativity (West et al., 2013; West et al., 2016) but not participants' affective experience. The positive influence of play on satisfaction indicated that when participants were being playful and having fun, not only that they felt the meetings were productive, but they would also enjoy their meetings more and find them pleasant to attend.

The positive effects of playfulness on meeting outcomes found in this study also provided support for the concept of *serious play* at work. Roos et al. (2004) defined serious play as "a mode of activity that draws on the imagination, integrates cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of experience and intentionally brings the emergent benefits of play to bear on organizational challenges" (p.563). *Serious play* can help generate new ideas, shared meaning, and deeper commitment in strategy and scenario development processes (Statler et al., 2009). Our study contributes to this line of serious play research by providing evidence for the role of play in a group setting like meetings. When meeting participants engaged in playful activities such as icebreakers and re- energizers, they were engaging in serious play. The participants felt more satisfied, and their meetings were more effective when there was an element of play. In a larger context, playfulness is related to positive humor because they are both distinct types of fun in the workplace. Michel et al. (2019) defined fun in the workplace as "characteristics or features of the work environment of a social, playful, and humorous nature, which have a potential to trigger feelings of enjoyment, amusement, and lighthearted pleasure in individuals" (p. 99). Not all types of fun in the workplace rely on humor or play because fun at work comprises a wider range of activities and interactions. For instance, fun activities could include non-play and non-humor activities such as public celebrations of achievement, sharing personal stories or sharing food with one another. Thus, humor and play are more narrow constructs and can be included under the umbrella construct of fun. Our results (See Table 1) showed that positive humor and playfulness are correlated.

Overall, meeting effectiveness was strongly influenced by positive humor, negative in-group humor, negative out-group humor, and playfulness. On the other hand, meeting satisfaction was strongly influenced

by positive humor, negative out-group humor, and playfulness. Negative in-group humor was not a significant predictor of meeting satisfaction.

Practical Implications

We have several suggestions for practitioners. First, meetings that contain more playful elements and positive humor will likely result in higher perceptions of meeting satisfaction and effectiveness. With playfulness, the meeting facilitator can encourage more fun activities and informal interactions. The meeting can start with an ice-breaker type activity or if the meeting continues for a long time, the facilitator could interject a re-energizer exercise. for a re-energizer, it could be game that gets individuals to stand up or move around the room because they might have been sitting throughout the meeting. Though with shorter meetings such as a brief status meeting, the facilitator should be mindful of the appropriateness of playful activities. This study and research by West et al. (2016) showed that introducing fidget toys and sweets could increase the perception of play. The meeting environment can also be set up in a more playful manner such as the arrangement of the furniture. In addition, the meeting discussions could be carried out in a playful way such as members catching a ball when wanting to speak. Again, the appropriate amount of play should be considered depending on the type of meeting and the participants. Future research should look at the appropriateness of play and how different groups respond towards play.

Besides a playful environment, participants also enjoyed lighthearted humor. As a common part of group socialization, verbal and non-verbal humor happen. Positive humor, thus, could be encouraged and not shunned in meetings. Positive humor might be enjoyed by the group and could be used to boost mood. Of course, a joke that is well intentioned could potentially be viewed as hurtful. Context matters. As mentioned earlier, a mature and well-socialized group of adults may tolerate and welcome some amount of negative humor such as teasing and sarcasm. Thus, the meeting facilitator and participants should use good judgement when making humorous statements or gestures. On the other hand, negative out-group humor has strong negative correlations with meeting outcomes. This means that jokes about individuals not in the meeting, and especially jokes about management should be discouraged as they might decrease perceptions of meeting satisfaction and effectiveness.

Limitations and Future Research

This study assessed meeting outcomes in participants mostly attending face to face meetings. Future studies should examine the influence of humor and playfulness in virtual meeting contexts. Meeting technology might influence how individuals communicate and connect with each other. Perhaps in virtual meetings like through Zoom and other platforms, individuals might be more mindful of how they come across to others. Thus, individuals might be more task-focused while limiting the use of humor or playful remarks. One major aspect of playful interaction includes body language such as facial expressions or body movements. Virtual meetings might limit members' ability to easily detect these play cues from others.

In addition, we limited participation to those who worked in the U.S. There may be different cultural norms associated with meetings in other cultures. For instance, Kazarian and Martin (2011) found that affiliative and aggressive humor styles were positively correlated among Canadian participants, but uncorrelated among Lebanese and Belgian participants. Kazarian and Martin (2011) suggested that Canadian participants might joke and tease one another more in both affiliative and aggressive ways, while their Belgians and Lebanese counterparts might not. While our results indicated that some negative humor could facilitate meeting effectiveness for meetings in the U.S, participants in other countries might completely disapprove of any types of negative humor.

There are two additional recommendations for future research. First, this study only relied on self-report ratings from MTurk participants. This might lead to common method error. Results might be different if researchers use multisource data collection methods such as observation combined with self-report. Regarding negative humor in meetings, this study was the first to empirically examine its relationship with meeting effectiveness and satisfaction. Negative in-group and out-group humor yielded different results. Replication from future research would be beneficial.

CONCLUSION

This study examined factors that influence meeting outcomes. Specifically, we found that perceptions of meeting effectiveness are predicted by positive humor, negative in-group humor, negative out-group humor, and playfulness. Meanwhile, meeting satisfaction is predicted by positive humor, negative out-group humor, and playfulness. These findings support previous research about the positive influences of humor and play in the workplace. Therefore, playfulness and humor can and should be encouraged in workplace meetings to enhance participants' affective experiences and meeting productivity.

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