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Happiness Is 'Being Yourself': Psychological Safety and Fun in Hybrid Work

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Abstract: Our long-term research project is concerned with fun and humour at work and the impacts on employee happiness and well-being. In this study, we explore the relationship between workplace fun and psychological safety and their implications for a positive work context. Our research problem investigates two key questions: *How do the experiences of psychological safety and fun at work intersect in hybrid work conditions? What are the implications for positive workplace relations?* We present qualitative empirical data from our in-depth, ethnographic engagement in two corporate companies. Both companies recently transitioned to hybrid work modes, providing a relevant and contemporary context for our study. Our findings are generated from our structured, thematic analysis, eliciting themes of risk during transitions, unsafe fun, safety to be yourself, and leadership implications. These themes are discussed in relation to the extant literature, and we extend both fun and psychological safety theory by identifying a circular relationship between both constructs specifically related to the modern form of hybrid work. Implications are identified along with the potential for future research.

Keywords: fun; psychological safety; hybrid work; happiness; humour; risk

Happiness is an emotional state that is important to most people in their everyday work lives, and humour and fun can offer one way of attaining this positive state (Ghosh 2018). Although workplace fun and humour can have a positive impact and create happiness (Plester 2016), they require safe conditions and a supportive work climate to flourish. Our empirical research specifically explores the relationship between psychological safety and organizational fun in the context of hybrid work models.

Scholarly work on workplace fun is focused upon how organizational actors manage, experience, and engage in fun at work. This holds significant relevance for both management practitioners and scholars due to its positive links with job satisfaction (Karl and Peluchette 2006), commitment (McDowell 2004), embeddedness (Tews et al. 2015), enhanced motivation and stress reduction (Karl et al. 2005), and the attraction and retention of employees (Tews et al. 2012). Much of this literature has focused specifically on various forms of 'experienced fun', defined as 'whether individuals generally perceive the existence and presence of fun in the workplace' (Tews et al. 2015, p. 250). Overall, workplace fun has been found to influence the 'thought-action tendes of people, which lead to the development of intellectual, psychological, social, and physical resources' (Michel et al. 2019, p. 99), enhancing organizational effectiveness.

Notably, experiences of fun and their impact on organizational performance is familiar territory for researchers (see Michel et al. 2019) and is therefore not the focus of our study. We draw from this work but focus specifically on unpacking the various ways fun is experienced in hybrid forms of work and how experiences of fun intersect with psychological safety. The relationship between fun at work and other conceptual domains is rarely explored, yet we contend it provides rich insight into how fun at work manifests in organizations.

In exploring the novel combination of workplace fun and psychological safety, our research contributes to the respective literature and offers managerial implications derived

from our discussion on how employees' experiences of fun and safety at work intersect. In the empirical context of hybrid work, we highlight the importance of psychological safety and fun when transitioning between office and online workspaces. Our emphasis on managing the uncertainties and potential challenges of hybrid work underscores the practical relevance of the findings for organizations navigating evolving work contexts post-COVID.

Specifically, our findings generate the following four themes: 'risk during transitions', 'unsafe fun', 'safety to be yourself', and 'leadership influences'. We interweave these themes in our discussion to provide new theoretical perspectives and practical implications that consider the relationship between psychological safety and managed and organic forms of fun. We emphasize that fun activities cannot be uniformly enforced or encouraged. Rather, they require a nuanced understanding of individual preferences and psychological safety considerations. We highlight the role of leadership in creating psychological safety climates that support employees to opt out of fun at work if desired. We argue that engaging in riskier forms of fun may establish new and enduring norms around workplace fun in hybrid work contexts.

Our paper proceeds with reviews of the literature on organizational fun, psychological safety, and hybrid work, culminating in our research question. Our interpretive methodological approach and analysis process are thoroughly outlined, preceding our findings, which are presented as four themes. Our discussion outlines our theoretical contribution and includes managerial implications, and we conclude with suggestions for innovative future studies.

1. Organizational Fun

Fun is experienced subjectively at the individual level, and therefore, what constitutes fun is different for each person (Michel et al. 2019). Fluegge (2008, p. 15) provides a broadly accepted definition conceptualizing fun as comprising 'social, interpersonal, or task-related activities in a work milieu characterized by playfulness or humour, thereby affording individuals a sense of amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure'. Within workplace contexts, fun encompasses diverse engagements such as shared laughter, social gatherings, post-work celebrations, acknowledgment ceremonies, communal barbecues, fishing excursions, and exuberant hula hooping, collectively fostering employee affective experiences characterized by joy, contentment, and humour (Mousa 2021). Similarly, Bolton and Houlihan (2009, p. 557) catalogue a spectrum of activities commonly associated with the instantiation of fun within the workplace, such as fancy dress, 'wacky Fridays', competitive karaoke, laughter workshops, exotic training programmes, and incitements to embrace playfulness and 'one's inner clown'.

'Fun at work' and 'having fun' are differentiated whereby 'fun in the workplace reflects features or aspects of the work environment' versus 'having fun' reflects 'a state internal to an individual, that is, the actual experience of enjoyment, amusement, and pleasure' (Michel et al. 2019, p. 100). This distinction impresses on scholars the importance of acknowledging an environment for fun in the workplace while not assuming that fun is necessarily experienced by all employees in the same way or to the same extent. Plester et al. (2015) offer further complexity as they find that workplace fun is 'a paradox experienced by organizational members who have simultaneously competing views of what constitutes workplace fun, as well as some synthesized views where they agreed upon facets of the concept which they link to enjoyment, humor and relaxation' (Plester et al. 2015, p. 392).

Researchers exploring fun at work must recognise both the organizational context for fun as well as the varied experiences of employees and their engagement and perceptions pertaining to fun. Mousa (2021, p. 687) draws from Plester (2009) to argue that 'Workplace fun is a complex social and organizational activity, as what one employee perceives as fun may be perceived as demeaning or offensive by colleagues. Accordingly, fun cannot be delivered as a package to all employees'. Often successful and effective workplace fun requires both management support as well as employee interest coupled with personal freedoms (Tews et al. 2014; Michel et al. 2019). However, even in the most supportive

of environments, some may see fun activities in organizations as a waste of time or silly (Aldag and Sherony 2001). Further research highlights the variance in how fun activities are experienced, finding that employees in public, non-profit, and private sectors most often view workplace fun as important, desirable, and related to positive consequences. However, fun activities experienced as wild and wacky were categorized as the least fun by all groups (Karl et al. 2005).

There are risks in managing fun in ways that are seen as 'packaged' to organizational members. Managed fun has 'a repertoire of engagement mechanisms' (Bolton and Houlihan 2009, p. 558), which are predominantly physical, including games such as Jenga or foosball. This form of fun is dichotomous to more 'organic' fun, which is fun embedded in organizational life. Organic fun has autonomous elements and is considered 'naturalistic and socially produced' (Bolton and Houlihan 2009, p. 557), while managed fun provides a 'repackaging of the informal rules of fun on management's terms [so that] fun is not frivolous anymore' (Bolton and Houlihan 2009, p. 561), organic fun is less instrumental, and is instead emergent and often spontaneous (Plester et al. 2015; Plester and Hutchinson 2016). Scholars have further synthesised the literature to offer a tripartite model of fun, which identifies both managed fun and organic fun while also recognising a third category of 'task fun' (Plester et al. 2015). This category recognises the intrinsic fun that comes from undertaking work tasks and further highlights how fun is a multifaceted concept (Tews et al. 2012).

We next turn to the concept of psychological safety and identify theoretical overlap linking this concept to organizational fun.

2. Psychological Safety

Psychological safety has emerged as a critical concept in management studies, gaining substantial attention in the last decade. The term, introduced by Amy Edmondson (1999), refers to the perceived freedom to express oneself without fear of negative consequences such as punishment, humiliation, or exclusion. More recently, it is understood to refer to a shared belief within a team or organization that individuals can speak up, ask for help, take risks, and express their ideas or concerns without fear of embarrassment or punishment (Frazier et al. 2017). Similar to organizational fun, psychological safety has been linked to climates of trust, ethics, and cognitive safety (Edmondson and Lei 2014; Ferrère et al. 2022; Sumathipala 2020), as well as numerous positive organizational outcomes such as the sharing of information and ideas (Edmondson and Lei 2014), organizational and team learning (Bresman and Zellmer-Bruhn 2013), team performance and innovation (Edmondson and Roloff 2008; Edmondson and Mogelof 2008; Liu et al. 2023), and risk-taking (Newman et al. 2017). Psychological safety has also been positively correlated to individual outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement (see Frazier et al. 2017 meta-analysis).

As a 'shared belief' (Frazier et al. 2017), psychological safety is strongly influenced by the work environment, which includes leadership, team dynamics, and the cultural context and climate (Newman et al. 2017). Early work looked specifically at 'psychological climates', which referred to the shared perceptions and attitudes of employees about organizational values, norms, and the overall work atmosphere (Brown and Leigh 1996). The concept of a 'Psychological Safety climate' (PSC) refers to the extent to which employees perceive their work environment as psychologically and socially supportive and safe (Bond et al. 2010), and this extends to flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid work and virtual teams (Barton 2021; Dzandu et al. 2023; Juutinen et al. 2023; Lee 2021; Parkin et al. 2022; Radu et al. 2023; Sjöblom et al. 2022). A positive PSC indicates that the organization prioritizes employees' well-being, fosters a healthy work environment, and is associated with positive work cultures (Dollard et al. 2017) and ethical cultures of trust (Ferrère et al. 2022). Additionally, PSCs have been found to be more open (Brinsfield 2013), adaptable, innovative, and resilient (Edmondson and Lei 2014), and better at organizational learning

and knowledge exchange (Bresman and Zellmer-Bruhn 2013; Carmeli 2007; Carmeli and Gittell 2009).

Next, we examine three theoretical areas where psychological safety and fun interrelate most strongly: organizational climate, risk, and leadership.

3. Connecting Fun and Psychological Safety

The literature on both psychological safety and fun highlight the importance of organizational climate and culture. Fun at work has been firmly linked to organizational culture, with the work environment and climate recognised as important to the experience of fun (Peluchette and Karl 2005; Karl and Peluchette 2006; Plester 2009; Baldry and Hallier 2010). A fun climate is defined as a 'work environment that intentionally encourages, initiates, and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities' (Ford et al. 2003, p. 22). This is salient when considering managed fun, as work environments can be designed in planned ways, so managerially sanctioned forms of fun (Bolton and Houlihan 2009) may occur. In organic fun, the work environment is assumed to be a co-locational and social place, providing space for fun through co-worker socialisation (Tews et al. 2014) and small interactions conducive to spontaneous, casual, and often off-task forms of organic fun (Plester et al. 2015). As such, organic forms of fun often manifest naturally in a 'work climate conducive to fun' (Plester et al. 2015, p. 383 citing Tews et al. 2012). Corporate cultures may advertently or inadvertently support the emergence of various forms of fun, especially if they make fun a part of their cultural identity (Karl et al. 2005; Plester 2009; Plester et al. 2015). Such cultures are likely to communicate management support and indicate to employees that fun is appropriate.

Research also highlights how organizational leadership plays an important role in the development of psychologically safe cultures and concomitant risk-taking behaviours (Zeng et al. 2020). Edmondson and Lei (2014) highlight the crucial role of leadership in cultivating psychological safety within teams and organizations. They show that leaders must create an environment that encourages collaboration, supports risk-taking, and values diverse perspectives. Overall, a PSC requires that leadership teams prioritize organizational culture and employee well-being (Law et al. 2011). Therefore, leadership support involves creating inclusive environments, where positive culture, trust, transparency, and accountability is promoted (Edmondson and Roloff 2008). Without strong leadership, employees are less likely to engage in pro-social work behaviours (Bienefeld and Grote 2014), such as collaboration and fun. When leadership firmly supports and models supportive behaviour, workers may perceive less risk in participating fully in interpersonal activities. This raises questions about psychological safety, leadership, risk, and fun, such as: do PSCs support riskier forms of fun at work? For employees, risky fun at work may range from inappropriate humour to activities that are in some way considered off-task (see Plester 2016). We speculate that organic fun may offer unexpected risk as it is more commonly unsanctioned, spontaneous, and unmanaged, and that judgments about the suitability of fun at work will vary greatly within different work contexts (Plester 2016). In a warning to organizational leaders about forced fun, Plester et al. (2015, p. 384) caution 'although fun creation is seemingly an innocuous and aspirational objective... contrived fun creation can cause cynicism in employees who may feel patronized by management'. Therefore, we cannot assume that fun is enjoyable for everyone, and we highlight the continual presence of risk in relation to workplace fun.

However, risk-taking is a coveted outcome of psychologically safe organizations, as psychological safety is well-researched as a requirement of innovative and creative workplaces (Edmondson and Mogelof 2008). Psychological safety has been specifically linked to interpersonal risk (Baer and Frese 2003), such as speaking up, sharing ideas, and questioning the status quo without the fear of negative consequences. While we may think about how psychological safety could encourage more fun at work, there may also be an inverse relationship, where fun may undermine psychological safety. For example, 'fun at work' may have a forcefulness that can intensify work, eroding work and life boundaries,

and even causing distress and challenges to well-being. A compulsory and normative requirement for employees to engage in fun activities without a means to opt out can cause stress and tension, as 'fun cultures are very much about working and playing hard, and an associated pressure to conform and act the part' (Bolton and Houlihan 2009, p. 562). If such approaches to fun are experienced as unsafe or unethical, employees may speak out against their use in psychologically safe environments. This aligns with research showing that reporting misconduct, expressing dissenting opinions, and questioning decisions with ethical implications are more likely to occur in psychologically safe environments because employees feel comfortable voicing their concerns and debating ethical dilemmas, knowing that they will be respected and taken seriously (Ferrère et al. 2022).

A business review of humour, happiness, and psychological safety found that a leader making a self-deprecating joke is seen as more supportive and open, which promotes psychological safety in subordinates. The use of humour can also make failure appear less threatening and worrisome, and thus, humour and psychological safety are potentially a 'virtuous circle', 'fostering safety, collaboration, and inclusion' (Almeida and Josten 2021).

We see significant possibilities in the intersection of psychological safety and organizational fun, especially in terms of supportive cultures, leadership, and risk taking. The paucity of research integrating these concepts provides us with an explorative opportunity to examine how these concepts interrelate. The current movement to hybrid work provides us with a novel, emerging context in which to explore psychological safety and fun.

4. Hybrid Work

Hybrid work refers to a flexible work arrangement where employees split their work time between both the physical office and remote locations, such as their homes or other offsite locations. This arrangement combines in-person and remote work, allowing employees a balance between the advantages of in-office collaboration and the flexibility of remote work. The recent COVID pandemic has significantly accelerated the move to online work and has been followed by a sustained use of hybrid arrangements across the globe. We argue that this significant change in work may result in a range of novel benefits and adverse effects for workplaces. Hybrid work may also include solitude, detachment, and the lack of social interaction and office-based fun (Babapour Chafi et al. 2022). Fun in virtual workplaces was investigated in relation to the decline in opportunities for social interactions due to the lack of social proximity and face-to-face engagement (Ghosh et al. 2023). Subsequently, Stanko et al. (2022) found a scarcity of sensory encounters in online play due to the absence of sensations such as touch, taste, and non-verbal behaviour.

There has been very little research to date on psychological safety in remote work, but one study explored the perception of individuals in a virtual community finding a significant positive relationship between psychological safety and the intention to share knowledge in virtual communities. A higher level of psychological safety resulted in greater knowledge sharing and community engagement (Zhang et al. 2010). Gender differences may influence the experience of psychological safety in virtual teams as communication styles and preferences impact perceptions of psychological safety differently for men and women (Lim 2022).

This current study is timely and exploratory in its scrutiny of the intersections between organizational fun and psychological safety in hybrid work. The emergence of hybrid work, spurred by global events and shifts in work norms, has introduced a novel context for evaluating how employees engage with fun at work and how this might interrelate both positively and negatively with perceptions of psychological safety. As this study endeavours to unravel the connections and tensions between these concepts in the context of hybrid work, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how work experiences are evolving and being renegotiated in the digital era. In doing so, it underscores the pivotal role of leadership, the intricacies of risk, and the broader organizational cultures and climates that shape the dynamics of psychological safety and the multifaceted experiences of fun at work, highlighting implications for worker well-being and happiness. From

the literature, we perceive tensions pertaining to psychological safety and fun as both employees and organizational leaders try to effectively manage, support, and find fun and happiness in hybrid work modes. Thus, our research questions ask the following:

> *How do the experiences of psychological safety and fun at work intersect in hybrid work conditions?*
>
> *What are the implications for positive workplace relations?*

5. Methodology

5.1. Interpretive Approach

Our interpretive approach highlights the contextual nature of our research, co-constructed by participants and researchers (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Interpretivism, rooted in hermeneutics (Heidegger 1927) and phenomenology (Yanow and Ybema 2009), incorporates symbolic meanings, sensemaking, intersubjectivity, and lived experience. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are often interchangeable when investigating complex, multi-meaning, ambiguous experiences in context (Frechette et al. 2020). Phenomenology may illuminate concealed insights of everyday existence (Frechette et al. 2020, p. 2). A strength of interpretive research is 'polyphony', which can allow multiple voices in the process of sensemaking (Eatough et al. 2008). The flexibility of interpretivism is enhanced by iteration, which may include multiple analysis stages (Eatough et al. 2008). Interpretivism recognizes the researcher's role in understanding participants' experiences, and this integration of hermeneutics and phenomenology can reveal intricate layers of meaning (Frost et al. 2010).

Reflexivity acknowledges the researcher's role, world view, and influence on their research. (Dowling 2006; Frechette et al. 2020). It demands self-awareness and a recognition that researchers are integral to the studied context (Ackerly and True 2010). In our reflexive stance, we acknowledge that our interpretations stem from our ontological beliefs and epistemological positioning (Palaganas et al. 2017). Reflexivity requires self-knowledge as well as an 'openness to others' (Frechette et al. 2020, p. 4). Our research design and analysis processes included a field researcher reflexive diary, member-checking, and collaborative debriefing aimed at recognizing and addressing our own impacts.

5.2. Study Design

Pluralistic methods offer diverse perspective dimensions and layers of meaning and may enhance transparency (Frost et al. 2010). Our use of several data-generating methods reflects our commitment to 'the complexity and variability in the dimension of organizational life' (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008, p. 423). Our priority lies in establishing a close connection 'to the life worlds of those studied' (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008, p. 423), emphasizing depth over data quantity.

Data were gathered from two organizations. Both studies were conducted over a period of four weeks. Study one took place in technology company, Gecko, while the second occurred in a manufacturing organization (Firefly). A single researcher was fully immersed in both companies, achieving 31 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with workers (see Appendix A). The interviewees comprised the whole senior leadership team at Gecko, with seven senior leaders in Firefly, along with workers from lower organizational levels. More than 20 h of audio recording were transcribed using Otter.ai software. Participant observations were conducted in both organizations (over 50 h), and data from online communication platforms were also collected (analysed in other works). The data underpinning this paper were taken primarily from the interview transcripts, with observational data enriching the contextual background. Our researcher signed non-disclosure agreements (NDA) on both sites, protecting the companies' intellectual property and confidentiality.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews align with the interpretative focus of this study, allowing participants to share experiences in their own words (Cochran 1990). The interview agenda was developed collaboratively by both researchers, drawing from the literature on psychological safety, fun, and hybrid work. Interviews are a primary means of collecting data, offering participants a platform to provide detailed insights on specific

topics. They are the most common qualitative data collection method (Taylor 2005), with semi-structured interviews being the most prevalent format (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Interviews can generate nuanced insights and allow sensitivity in intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics (Fox and Spector 2000). The interviews were recorded on an iPhone and transcribed using Otter.ai. software (Otter.ai, Mountain View, CA, USA). Their duration ranged from 20 to35 min.

Our field researcher maintained a reflexive journal, enabling additional reflections on the research dynamics and factors that impacted the study while in the field. Regular debriefings with her research colleague occurred, with both researchers collaborating on crafting comprehensive reports for both companies following the initial coding and analysis phases. The reports concentrated on company culture, psychological safety, fun, humour, and play. These on-going reflections assisted in remaining 'reflexive about the field work through regular engagement and disengagement phases of research' (see Powdermaker 1966; Woolgar 1988; Cohendet and Simon 2007, p. 589).

Both researchers presented reports to both companies as 'member checking', enabling the validation or revision of the initial interpretations through feedback from company participants. Member checking allows participants or key informants to review findings, ensuring the authenticity of interpretations (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This process contributes to enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of a study (Doyle 2007; Fine et al. 2009). Notably, the senior representatives from both companies expressed favourable responses towards the reports, acknowledging the accuracy of the depictions.

5.3. Analysis Process

The analysis was manual and organized through a system of tables at each phase. While the analysing of qualitative data may follow a non-linear trajectory in some studies (Lester et al. 2020), we implemented a highly structured approach to ensure transparency in our analysis, coding, and categorizations. We began by meticulously organizing our audio recordings, field notes, online data capture, and transcriptions. Once the data were transcribed into textual documents, we initiated our three-phase coding process.

5.4. Open Coding

Phase one involved 'open coding', where we identified broad domains of categorization that were refined in multiple iterations, coding sections of transcripts into 'units of meaning' as we identified 'concept-indicators', and repeatedly re-reading transcriptions trying to establish 'thematic connectivity leading to thematic patterns' (Williams and Moser 2019, p. 48). Our coding specifically sought explications of fun, humour, psychological safety, and the impacts of hybrid work. Open coding involves creating data sub-categories, and, for example, we coded examples of psychological safety into two categories denoting 'safety' and' unsafety' in this early process. Consequently, our open coding yielded both striking and obvious initial categorizations before we advanced to our second level of coding refinement—axial coding.

5.5. Axial Coding

Axial coding is where data undergo a more intricate process of sifting, refining, and realignment. Researchers commence the task of categorizing pivotal themes in this phase (Williams and Moser 2019). During axial coding, we began the identification of relationships among categories as we organized interconnected and sometimes overlapping coded extracts. This coding phase involved a continuous cycle of analysis, cross-referencing, and refinement of our categorizations (Williams and Moser 2019). We immersed ourselves deeply in the text, meticulously examining transcripts line-by-line and seeking dominant concepts, capturing nuance, and identifying interlinkages among categories and themes, thus enabling the construction of meaning from our categorizations (Eatough et al. 2008). During this phase, we worked independently, prioritizing 'reflective and thoughtful engagement' with the data over consensus (Braun and Clarke 2019, p. 595).

5.6. Selective Coding

In our third tier of coding, we selected and merged our data categories, seeking a 'higher level of abstraction' (Williams and Moser 2019, p. 52) as we began to formulate our data story. Here, we shared interpretations as we challenged and extended each other's analyses, bolstering the refinement of our insights. Searching for nuanced, intricate, and even contradicting insights, we embraced flexibility as we collectively constructed meaning from our data. 'Coding promotes thematic integration and organizational strength, enabling researchers to be reflective and reflexive in joining the data in nuanced and intimate ways and employing the outcomes from the coding process to create meaning' (Williams and Moser 2019, p. 54). Multi-levelled coding is systematic, robust, and may uncover patterns that researchers can interpret and link back to the research question (Clarke et al. 2015). Following recommendations (Eatough et al. 2008), we compiled lengthy tables at each coding phase as we organized higher-order themes and subthemes, and selective coding brought our separate axial codings together in a final synthesis of data categorization.

We both identified the notion of 'risk' as important in our axial coding, as articulated by multiple participants. Thus, we agreed that this would become a theme in our selective coding. From this concept, we noted that interviewees had also included contrasting ideas of 'non-risk', 'safety', 'unsafety', and 'being yourself', indicating overlapping and opposing ideas about 'risk' versus 'no risk'. Thus, our second key theme is 'unsafe fun', and our third is 'safety to be yourself'. Our fourth theme is 'leadership influences' as we identified examples of leaders feeling responsible and initiating actions towards psychological safety and fun. Subordinate staff also noted how leaders' model and display acceptable fun and linked this to psychological safety.

Our four themes are nuanced, complex, and interconnected in the context of hybrid work. We open our findings section with contextual information from both companies.

6. Findings

6.1. Gecko Context

Gecko is a digital design and technology company thriving on innovative solutions with a mission to enhance people's lives. With a rich 13-year history, the company is privately owned with a board of shareholders and a workforce of 70. The founder and CEO, both in their early forties, take pride in fostering a vibrant, dynamic culture in this trendy workspace. Recently, Gecko has formalised a hybrid work framework, empowering employees to allocate portions of their work week between the office and home, enabling a personalized work rhythm aligned with their lifestyles and family needs. Most staff choose to work two or three days at home and the rest of the week in the office. Tuesdays are 'all staff' days where office presence is required by 9am for a company meeting.

Gecko staff unanimously label their workplace as a 'fun' company and highlight the importance of this cultural feature. The office is contemporary with an industrial-inspired design with exposed ductwork and open spaces conducive to collaborative work. Vivid colours enhance the enclosed rooms used for client or team meetings. The workplace is enriched with recreational elements, including a table tennis table, netball hoop, juke box, popcorn machine, and an advanced industrial-grade coffee maker in the kitchen. Complimentary fruit and beverages are supplied. Leisure activities such as games, puzzles, and a guitar are provided for staff enjoyment. Gecko also welcomes pets and, on several days, canine visitors grace the office. Gecko's walls are adorned with inspiring mottos and essential security reminders. The boardroom displays company values as the People and Culture team sustains and promotes company culture. The kitchen has a popcorn maker that emits tantalizing aromas, enticing staff to congregate in the kitchen area for moments of camaraderie and respite. The workflows are informal and punctuated by joking, swearing, and laughter. With no fixed workstations, Gecko workers select their daily workspace according to their inclination or team needs for that day, and this informal space allocation inspires playfulness, interaction, and purposeful collaboration.

6.2. Firefly Context

Firefly is a sizeable food manufacturing organization boasting a workforce exceeding 600 staff, including permanent employees and contractors. The company's operations include a busy factory hosting 300 personnel spread across three daily shifts. Complementing this manufacturing operation are several office-based teams, including a research and development (R and D) division and corporate teams such as 'People and Culture'. Our researcher accessed two key spheres of the business, these being the R and D team in its own specialised building and the 'people and culture' team situated within the corporate headquarters. The physical office spaces abound with slogans in bright colours and decorative patterns.

In line with evolving work trends, Firefly has also adopted a hybrid work paradigm, granting office employees the opportunity to work from home for two days while dedicating three days to on-site engagement. This hybrid approach has been formally adopted as a company policy for office workers. Notably, specific days are assigned as 'anchor days', compelling staff to meet and participate in-person. Most office-based staff opt to work remotely on Mondays and Fridays, making Tuesdays–Thursdays the busy in-person office days. Staff explained this work dynamic in interviews, and our observational research confirmed this fluid work pattern, with interviewees extolling the benefits of flexibility and freedom in how they worked.

The interviewees articulated many aspects of psychological safety, including the ability to 'be yourself', the facility to voice opinions and ideas freely, flexibility in work patterns, and trust in leadership. However, our focus was not on confirming the construct of psychological safety but in exploring the relationship between psychological safety and fun within hybrid work conditions. Our three-tiered coding system established four themes from our data that influence the relationship between fun and psychological safety in hybrid work and these are as follows:

1. Risk during transitions;
2. Unsafe fun;
3. Safety to be yourself;
4. Leadership influences.

In each thematic section, we present a series of representative data extracts that illustrate the theme, and we intersperse these extracts with our interpretive analyses, emphasizing the significance of key ideas gleaned from our months of iterative work, coding, and recoding our comprehensive data set. The chosen extracts are segments of longer narratives about the topics of workplace fun, psychological safety, and hybrid workplace dynamics.

6.2.1. Theme 1: Risk during Transitions

Our first data theme is anchored on the notion of 'risk' as a factor that is related to both psychological safety and fun. Risk was particularly evident in our data when participants spoke about their experiences of transitioning to hybrid forms of work. The first extract below illustrates risk factors in fun that relate to social acceptance and 'judgement'. The following three extracts more specifically speak to a heightened sense of risk because of changing norms and expectations. Jasper talks about table tennis becoming less acceptable and 'reflecting badly', while Andy highlights increasing fear in play, and Dana denotes the discomfort felt in online fun. Dev points out the 'new awkwardness' experienced in hybrid work, suggesting that everyone is uncomfortable as they work out the new ways of being safe when sharing fun in hybrid mode. As a senior manager, Dev tries to position this discomfort as a new kind of fun. All these extracts suggest that there are decreasing levels of psychological safety pertaining to fun activities, as participants perceive risk negatively and subsequently hold back their participation and voice, as shown by Andy, who warns that people could get too 'frightened to say anything'.

Because it's almost like you're kind of because there's a judgement element of fun. It's like I want to join in. But will I be accepted and will it be okay. I think it is like sometimes I think it's risky. (Hamish, 37, Firefly)

But I think some people might worry that if they're seeing playing table tennis, even if it's a lunchtime, because there's fewer people around to make it sort of acceptable. You know, it used to be lots of people in the table tennis area. So, it was like, you know, ok. Now, it's like (people are) maybe self-conscious or, or like, you know, worried that it reflects badly (Jasper 25, Firefly)

The trouble is the world's changing, too. And I think if we are not careful, we will knock the playfulness out of anything that we do. Because everything becomes a taboo that we're not allowed to do or talk about and I think we are on the cusp of, if we're not careful, you know, that we are going to become too frightened to say anything. (Andy, 50, Firefly)

So all of our fun and enjoyment has been done online. So when we come together as a team, it's merged. Usually, the best parts are just the quick chat beforehand where everyone's just checking in carrying on and then they try to force their structure onto that and it doesn't feel comfortable, it's not a comfortable way to meet people or interact with them, especially if you've never met them before in person. (Dana, 43, Firefly)

I think we want to get used to the new awkward. ... People talking when the microphone's muted, cats walking across friends and things like that. But it is all just part of the fun. I think it's just a, sort of a re-acclimatisation that we just all have to go through (Dev, 35, Founder, Gecko)

6.2.2. Theme 2: Unsafe Fun

In this next tract of data extracts, the interviewees call our attention to specific types of fun that have felt unsafe for them, challenging their psychological safety as they re-engage with the changes in fun brought about by hybrid work. Jasper's event was organized to celebrate the way that staff dressed when working in hybrid mode, such as formal business top half with pyjamas below. This highlights how forced fun at work can have negative repercussions on the comfort and well-being of employees if the psychological safety of employees is not considered. Jasper notes the 'struggle' he experienced as he was feeling pressured to take part in something he experienced as 'punishing' for himself and others, with no clear option to withdraw or opt out. Fun research indicates that being forced to participate in fun that feels uncomfortable can be highly detrimental (Plester and Hutchinson 2016). We posit that forced fun does not feel psychologically safe for some people, especially when navigating between in-person and online work interactions.

I mean, like, there is space to have fun. Yeah. However, however you want. There's a lot of what I'd call 'forced fun'. Sometimes they make you do things in the name of fun that I don't find fun. Yeah, I feel like that's a pretty standard workplace. thing, right... maybe a couple of months ago, there was this catwalk—scenario thing, I don't know if people were dressed up or not, just, I wanted no part of it. But it was all just happening, like right down here. And we were being pressured to take part in the name of fun. And not remotely. Really punishing. Yeah. And you were notable if you avoided it. I put a minimal effort. Yeah. That's but you know, I can see it being a little more difficult for somebody who is not really interested in that particular sort of thing. But I can see if that is a new person's idea of not fun, then they might struggle. They might have struggled in that. What one person finds fun there's often not what everybody likes—I would call it 'horrors'. Like I didn't see the point. It wasn't fun, and there wasn't a benefit. There wasn't a benefit... It's always forced. It's very like—'performative'. Like—'look, everybody- look how fun we are. Look how much fun we're having'...But just, that particular incident was really like, yeah,

they made everybody get up and do this catwalk in front of everybody. And I can very much see that not being everybody's idea of fun that they struggle with. (Jasper 25, Firefly)

In the extracts below, both Jack and Naomi highlight the subjective nature of fun and how fun can go sour as people struggle to feel comfortable with some humour. Whereas above, Jasper highlights the ways managed fun can undermine psychological safety, the quotes below speak more specifically to organic forms of fun at work that emerge from social interactions with others. These excerpts emphasize the balance needed in psychological climates to enable people to be themselves at work and take risks (in humor and fun), but that such risks can also undermine safety.

I make jokes. I always try and be real careful not to make personal jokes. 'Cause, I like making jokes, you kind of learn, like, what kind of jokes are okay. And, I know what kind of jokes aren't okay and I don't say them. And so, I'll definitely push the boundaries but in a, like, a very thought-out controlled way. But, people don't always pick up on that, and so because people see me as, like, you like making jokes they'll make personal jokes at me. In a way to kind of do what I do, and I, sort of, get, like, I'm kind of sensitive, I'll be, like, that's, like, that's just, like, a personal dig guys as a joke, like, that's not what I'm doing... And so, it tends to just be, like, people go, you're the joke guy I can make fun of you and you can take it. Or, like, you're a tall, you know, you're a tall white dude, like, I can make jokes about you, that's fine. And, sometimes it does kind of get to the point where I'm, like that's just not funny. But, it rarely happens and it's not so much at work, but when it does I'll kind of just shrug it off 'cause it's not that big of a deal. But, when I'm having a quiet day it does kind of upset me a little bit more. (Jack, 25, Gecko)

Max—has you know that sense of humor? Like, it's a bit more of a dark kind of sense of humor. You know, it's like kind of sarcastic you know, that kind of sarcastic calling people down- that kind of way. So targeted at someone maybe a little bit more targeted. So, some people in the office love that. I know a lot of people do love that kind of humor, but I struggle. I struggle with it. I'm quiet. I have a light, very light, childlike kind of nice humor. (Naomi, 40 Firefly)

6.2.3. Theme 3: Safety to Be Yourself

Contrasting with our first themes, this third interrelated theme presents data that display positive aspects of the relationship between workplace fun and psychological safety. A key idea expressed by multiple interviewees was the ability to 'be yourself' at work. Participants from both companies continuously expressed 'being yourself' as a key feature of workplace psychological safety and as central to their ability to enjoy fun at work. It is the articulation of the interrelationship of both concepts that allow us to postulate a significant relationship between these two concepts. Firstly, Naomi clearly notes that 'being yourself' allows her to be 'silly and playful' as part of her conceptualization of workplace fun. Senior manager Andy specifically connects psychological safety in relation to trust, which enables fun, and in his view, this creates 'happiness'. Daniel also articulates that the 'being yourself' ethos relates to joking; although he invokes our first theme, he also identifies the risk of offence. Jack talks about 'dropping his guard', indicating that this creates the safety needed to enjoy fun with colleagues, who he perceives as friends.

I just feel like I can be my true self at work and hopefully allow others to be their true selves... it's quite comfortable, isn't it? If you can be your true self at work?... you can express yourself through fun and your play at work... it's amazing. I can be silly and playful, which is my true kind of nature. (Naomi, 40 Firefly)

Because happiness for me is that you have fun while you're at work, you trust the people you work with. But I can say that, you know, that if we if we stick to these principles of psychological safety, you know, and psychosocial risk assessments,

and just general, nice operating standards, then, I think by-product of that is the bigger the happier workforce. (Andy, 50, Firefly)

And everybody can just be themselves and, and crack jokes and people swear a lot as well. Yeah, it's not, it's not, you know, frowned upon. As long as you're not, you know, offending anyone directly. and I feel like people who swear a lot are somewhat more trustworthy as well because they just, you know, they show their emotions, they're not hiding it, you know. (Daniel, 35, Gecko)

(We have) more classic fun which is, like, you know, social events and hanging out with people at lunch. Which generally is, you know, as frequent as I could ever want it, and that's always a lot of fun. Like, the people at Gecko I get along with very well. A lot of them I, sort of, call them friends and, yeah, we generally have a good time and are able to, sort of, put the guard down a little bit and just kind of enjoy being human which is nice. (Jack, 25, Gecko)

The final extracts in this section introduce a further idea, that of having the ability to 'opt out' of fun whenever it feels necessary. Irene reveals her introverted personality and positioning in fun, acting as an audience rather than actively participating. We note that she perceives psychological safety as the choice to either join the fun or 'take a step back—her obvious preference. For Irene, others enjoying fun is pleasurable; she experiences happiness, and she appreciates being able to only participate minimally while feeling 'happy inside'. Naomi, who enjoys workplace fun, also identifies that fun can be 'too much' and sometimes she avoids it. It seems that having the choice to disengage from fun is an additional factor that is important to the relationship between psychological safety and fun, and this factor reinforces the risks to psychological safety in forced fun experiences (illustrated in theme one).

My personality is that I like to stand back in the dark and watch people have fun. So like, I don't, yeah, I don't really join in or you know, self-express too much. But when I see people having fun. I feel happy inside. Oh, so yeah, I stay back and I watch people have fun. . . They don't force you. But they invite you. . . I feel like our whole team as a whole is very, very cheerful and happy. Like, the reason why I like to go to work every day. You know, it's like informal, but like still professional. They overwork themselves. I have to say they work very hard. But I'm happy that they have a little bit of fun. they work hard and play hard. . . Everyone says they feel safe, safe to be themselves, safe to join the fun or safe to take a step back. (Irene, 25, Firefly)

I almost feel like there's a bit too much of it (fun) at the moment and workloads are quite high and I've kind of been actively avoiding it. . . so that was a choice, all those things happening in that week, that was just a choice if you wanted to be in it fine. If you're busy. Just get on with things. (Naomi, 40, Firefly)

6.2.4. Theme 4: Leadership Influences

Our final theme arose from data garnered from company leaders as well as subordinate employees. The first comment is extracted from a lengthy transcript with Gecko company founder Dev, who reflects that psychological safety requiring trust permits fun in work teams. Contrastingly, senior HR manager Andy discusses unacceptable joking, declaring that he protects workers' safety by regulating humour in a quiet way and shielding staff from offence and potential harm. Andy feels a responsibility to keep staff psychologically safe and therefore sometimes must constrain or limit some forms of so-called fun. Joseph identifies champions and jokers who 'step up' and make fun happen, suggesting that they are 'permitted' to do this, implying some leadership influences in fun. Odette notes the importance of psychological safety in her example of the CEO joking, laughing, and making her feel 'safe'. These reflections reaffirm the relationship between psychological safety and fun while also suggesting some significant leadership aspects whereby if a senior manager, such as the CEO, makes jokes, then they model that workplace fun is safe and acceptable.

This is further articulated by company founder Dev, who notes that safe teams can have fun together.

> We've lost that opportunity for pulling teams together, and seeing teams grow together. And building that sense of sort of psychological trust in a team that says, we're allowed to have fun, we're allowed to have a crack, break, because we're a team. And we can do we can say things and do things that are only a good, strong, safe team can do. And I think it's a shame that we've, where we've, I think we want it. But it's almost like we're having to start again. (Dev, 35, Founder, Gecko)

> So, there's a few jokes that have been made, which is potentially not PC- we need to be we need to be PC in the workplace, to accept all different cultures, people's beliefs and everything as well. So, if we step over the line, there's one or two people, which might be really offended by that. Yeah. And then we just kind of pull them aside, say, hey, look, just letting you know the management team's onto it. You might have a quiet word... So, it's like, I think one example of someone come through on WhatsApp group for work. A comment was made. And I just said, probably that's not okay. I think. No, no, I talked to them individually. Yeah. And then it was almost like, maybe remove the comment. I think that's not not something you really want recorded in a place and maybe we need a policy to proactively send an apology rather than wait for that... So, if you're on the management team? It's kind of it's part of your responsibility to make sure people are appropriate. I think even from a management lens, we try not to be the police even though people do say it's like the police sometimes... We're not policing people. We're policing respect... If people do something a little bit cheeky, a little bit fun, a little bit playful, like, don't pull it up. But if it's that starts to affect someone else, that's when you step in. (Andy, 50, Firefly)

> So like, so we ended up having these, like, sort of informal, you know, like culture champions? I mean, we don't Yeah, so they're informal. That's good. Yeah. I mean, I mean, like, people have permissibility to, to do that. And so so you really see like people who sort of step up... Those people, either the culture champions or the Jokers the ones who were kind of quite keen on making it all happen. (Joseph, 32, Firefly)

> I don't think I'd stay in a job if I didn't feel safe, or I'd like to think I wouldn't anyway. I think it was day one and I was sitting, like, my first ever role day one intern and I was sitting opposite the CEO. And I was scared, like, I was scared, I was nervous on my first ever day 'cause I'd heard what CEOs were meant to be. But within five minutes, he was like, laughing and joking around ... he always asks me to tell him when someone new is starting so he can go over and, like, personally introduce himself which is nice. And kind of make sure that they know who he is and that they can go to him, as well... when I was interning here, like, I felt completely safe, as well. (Odette, 22, Gecko)

Dev and Andy feel leadership responsibility to maintain a PSC for staff by 'building' safety and constraining online joking for the benefit of all. Odette recognizes that leaders take responsibility for inducing a safe climate conducive to fun through modelling it themselves. These collective aspects imply a leadership responsibility for fostering fun and safety in the changing hybrid work environment.

7. Discussion

Our study asks the following: how do the experiences of psychological safety and fun at work intersect in hybrid work conditions and what are the implications for positive workplace relations? To answer these questions, our findings present four themes in order of significance to our participants. These are 'risk during transitions', 'unsafe fun', 'safety to be yourself', and 'leadership influences'. Our four themes represent the complex ways

psychological safety and fun at work intersect and connect. In the discussion that follows, we weave our analysis of these themes together to show how a better understanding of psychological safety and fun can provide managerial insights for those wanting to protect and strengthen PSCs and fun in organizations. We organize our discussion around 'managed fun' and 'organic fun'—two different forms of fun established in the literature. Notably, our findings illustrate these forms of fun in ways that bring different elements of our themes together with distinct managerial implications.

7.1. Managed Fun and Psychological Safety

Many of our participants spoke about their experiences of managed fun, which is defined as a 'packaged' form of fun, often organized, encouraged, and demarcated by organizational leaders (Bolton and Houlihan 2009; Plester et al. 2015). Our theme of risk illuminates the challenges associated with psychological safety in relation to managed fun because engaging in forced workplace fun can feel risky, may be detrimental to well-being, and may make workers feel unsafe. This risk pertains to both management and employees, and some workers described specific forms of fun as unpleasant and confronting. If workers feel forced to participate, especially at an in-person event, they feel unsafe and experience anxiety. Indeed, forced fun events may impact upon the PSC (Bond et al. 2010), thereby fostering negative emotions and discomfort for a group, team, or the wider organization. Although many workers enjoy and benefit from arranged fun, research clearly notes that there are always some workers who do not want to join activities (Plester et al. 2015; Plester and Hutchinson 2016). In theme two, 'unsafe fun', our data clearly depict a specific situation intended to lightly mock how staff dress when working at home, and staff were made to parade their outfits on a 'catwalk' during an in-person office day. This activity challenged one worker's feelings of well-being and safety, and he felt horrified at this fun—yet unable to withdraw.

We perceive a circular relationship between psychological safety and fun. On the one hand, people need to feel a sense of safety before they participate in fun, needing to know that it is both appropriate and acceptable. On the other hand, light-hearted fun and joking can make a workplace feel safer and more positive. While workplace psychological safety is linked to freedom in sharing ideas and opinions (Edmondson and Lei 2014), enjoying fun at work may include more revealing of the 'self'. In our third theme, many workers were enjoying having fun and being silly while also opting out when work needed to be prioritized. The safety to opt out seems to be an important feature so that when a fun activity impinges on work or when it is not enjoyable for that worker, then opting out is an unquestioned preference. The freedom to choose one's own actions and positioning is important in fun (Tews et al. 2014; Michel et al. 2019) and, we contend, a significant element in the relationship between fun and psychological safety. This could be further elucidated in future research.

Workers indicated that fun needs to be championed, and a range of leaders were implicated here—for example, people and culture managers, senior leaders, and CEOs. If fun is modelled by senior staff, this creates psychological safety for lower-level workers. Such modelling may need to occur in both work modes, that is, in-person and online, so that both environments are perceived as safe. Furthermore, as indicated in our data, senior leaders may also need to step in and constrain some activities to maintain psychological safety and well-being through the promotion of positive and ethical cultures (Dollard et al. 2017; Ferrère et al. 2022) if fun and/or humor crosses the line and becomes risky (see Plester 2009, 2016). When leaders understand the nuance and complexity of fun, endorsing it as a safe, discretionary experience that workers are free to join or not, we contend that the relationship between fun and psychological safety is valuable in both online and in-person work (hybrid) and conducive to workplace well-being and happiness, again offering opportunities for future research.

7.2. Managerial Implications

To support psychological safety, we argue that the design and operationalisation of forced and managed fun must provide opt-out options, and management must respect employees' preferences regarding participation in fun activities. Allowing employees to opt out without any negative consequences (Plester and Hutchinson 2016) can contribute to a more inclusive and psychologically safe environment. Our findings also highlight the importance of organizational leadership in the establishment of PSCs that support the reestablishment of fun norms during transitions, such as the movement to hybrid work contexts. Managers should recognize that the hybrid work environment might impact the dynamics of fun and psychological safety, requiring intentional efforts to create a supportive atmosphere. Finally, we argue that there should be managed boundaries on fun and humour to maintain psychological safety and well-being. Managers need to step in when fun activities cross the line and become risky or uncomfortable for individuals or groups. This requires a nuanced understanding of what is appropriate and acceptable in the context of the organization's culture.

7.3. Organic Fun and Psychological Safety

Organic fun is often spontaneous and emergent (Plester and Hutchinson 2016) and tends to manifest naturally in a 'work climate conducive to fun' (Plester et al. 2015, p. 383 citing Tews et al. 2012). In terms of organic fun, our data highlight an important relationship between PSCs and the navigation of risk associated with re-establishing fun and forming new routines of fun at work. A climate of psychological safety can foster positive risk-taking (Newman et al. 2017) and encourage voice and authenticity in workers as they feel free to speak up and share their ideas. We argue that when a fun activity is not actively forced or managed by an organization, the rules of 'fun' are more fluid and ambiguous, and thus, there is potentially more risk associated with fun activities that are not specifically task-related or mandated. In such instances, we argue that psychological safety should become an important consideration of management as, particularly during transitions, we see in our data that employees need to feel safe to take risks in order to find and stabilize a 'new awkward'. PSCs therefore offer a way for organizations to lessen the perceived risk of engagement in fun.

To establish a PSC that supports organic fun at work, our findings suggest that leaders hold responsibility for creating a safe environment where fun can flourish. Management support and the modelling of fun (such as joking) signalled psychological safety to employees who may look for cues from management that engagement in fun is appropriate (see Michel et al. 2019). Theme three also highlighted the importance of workers feeling like they can be their authentic selves at work, allowing them to be 'silly and playful', 'crack jokes', and have more 'classic fun', which arises organically in social interactions, such as group lunches. The safety to be yourself supports the emergence of fun at work and is also a product of psychological safety. Online work contexts can exacerbate the issue here, as online fun activities frequently lack sensory, in-person cues (Ghosh et al. 2023; Stanko et al. 2022) that can indicate colleagues' or managers' responses, making it feel laden with risk and uncertainty. Spontaneity can often get lost as hybrid work interactions are highly task-orientated, with less social space available for off-task activities (unless they are scheduled fun activities). The resultant dearth of group and individual cues makes online fun seem riskier. However, one advantage of the online component of hybrid work is that workers may be able to more easily avoid fun interactions, which may seem like a safer option.

7.4. Managerial Implications

During periods of transition, such as the shift to hybrid work, employees might need to establish new routines of fun. Managers play a crucial role in fostering psychological safety to help employees navigate the uncertainties and risks associated with trying out new forms of fun. Organizational leadership that encourages experimentation and adaptation

can lead to a smoother transition. Managers should be aware that online work interactions may limit opportunities for spontaneous fun. Providing time and space for employees to engage in unplanned interactions and activities can help alleviate this issue. While online interactions might lack the same spontaneity as in-person interactions, they also offer the advantage of allowing employees to opt-out of fun interactions more easily. To reinforce psychological safety, organizations should ensure that employees feel comfortable making that choice without facing negative consequences. These implications may offer a starting point for further research projects that identify new forms of fun and the risks and impacts on worker well-being and happiness.

8. Conclusions

The current literature on psychological safety does not include safety in fun activities, and similarly, the fun literature does not incorporate the notion of psychological safety. Therefore, we extend both literatures by depicting the complex, circular relationship between these two constructs and noting the influential elements of risk and leadership that impact this relationship. Our synthesis of concepts offers a comprehensive foundation for scholars, practitioners, and organizations to deepen their understanding and approach to creating positive and happy work environments and to create new, innovative research projects in these correlated constructs.

Our study recognizes that fun activities cannot be uniformly enforced or encouraged; instead, they require a nuanced understanding of individual preferences and psychological safety considerations. This understanding adds depth to managerial dynamics and extends current theoretical knowledge by depicting the relationship between fun and psychological safety. Additionally, we show how hybrid work may foster greater interpersonal ambiguity as embodied cues are missing from in-person interactions. This creates challenges for generating psychological safety and for fostering fun at work, as interpreting the experience of fun and understanding what is safe may be increasingly hard to navigate. This seems to be resulting in less fun or more opting out of fun, both online and in-person, due to uncertainty and confusion about what is now acceptable.

Ultimately, our study suggests that understanding the connection between fun and psychological safety contributes to workplace well-being and happiness. Promoting a positive and inclusive environment where fun is seen as a discretionary, safe experience can lead to improved morale and employee satisfaction. Additionally, by nurturing psychological safety, encouraging authentic self-expression, and finding creative ways to promote spontaneous interactions, managers can contribute to a workplace culture where fun emerges naturally and enhances overall happiness.

Appendix A

Table A1. Fun project interview participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Role	Company
Amir	40	CEO	Gecko
Andy	50	People and culture team	Firefly
Angel	40	Marketing manager	Gecko
Bao	24	Engineer Previously an intern	Gecko
Daisy	20	Receptionist	Gecko
Daria	43	Communications Manager	Firefly
Dev	35	Company founder	Gecko
Daniel	35	Engineer	Gecko
Fiona	24	Digital worker	Gecko
Gail	54	HR worker	Firefly
Hamish	37	Packaging manager	Firefly
Irene	25	Technician	Firefly
Jack	25	Analyst	Gecko
Jasper	20	Technician	Firefly
Jason	22	Digital worker	Gecko
Joseph	32	Project manager	Firefly
Josie	45	Product developer manager	Firefly
Kyle	28	CFO (SLT)	Gecko
Lucia	39	Product manager	Gecko
Marnie	33	People and Culture Manager (SLT)	Gecko
Naomi	40	Technician	Firefly
Nihal	40	Product manager	Gecko
Odette	22	People and culture team	Gecko
Priya	32	Technician	Gecko
Rose	45	R and D Manager (SLT)	Firefly
Scott	35	Chief Product Officer (SLT)	Gecko
Vlad	28	Senior engineer	Gecko
Yoshi	30	Digital worker	Gecko

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