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# **“WORK HARD-PLAY HARD”: USING HUMOUR AT WORK**



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## **Abstract**

This Masters thesis explored the topic of humour in the workplace and investigated the function of humour at work. The key research question asked if people use humour as a tool or strategy in their workplaces. The research objectives were to investigate the functions of humour and determine the different factors that affected this humour. Outcomes and contextual factors were explored as was the potential for humour to have negative outcomes. The research was undertaken inside three local Information Technology (IT) organisations and focussed on differences and similarities of humour uses in similar environments and organisational cultures.

Data were collected using three methods; interviews, participant observation and a critical incident technique. It was intended that these three methods would give a multi-perspective of the observed phenomena and result in triangulation of results. The collected data were analysed using content analysis.

The main finding of the research was that humour was consistently used as a tool or strategy by organisational members and therefore humour was functional in these workplaces. The results also highlighted that humour had multiple functions inside these companies and that many of these functions operated simultaneously depending on the context.

The findings offered potential for future research explorations in several areas such as status, gender and ethnicity effects on workplace humour. The breadth and depth of the functions of humour at work have meant that this thesis may be a mere beginning in larger organisational investigations into this complex and ambiguous topic.

Humour was an important workplace variable for these IT employees and a key component of their organisational culture. They adopted the slogan “work hard-play hard”, in regards to using humour, to offset the intense business pressure under which they worked. This thesis reflects their stories and shares their everyday experiences in their pursuit of the “play hard” half of this workplace dichotomy.

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