

# Play at Work-The Role of Corporate Celebrations

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## Abstract

*Celebrations infuse life with passion and purpose. They summon the human spirit, reattach us to our roots, and help us soar toward new visions. Celebrations touch our hearts and fire our imaginations, bonding people together and connecting us to shared myths and values. Corporate Celebration shows how the ceremony and ritual of celebration can be brought to the workplace to restore company spirit, reinvigorate employee morale, build commitment and loyalty, improve quality and financial performance, and instill work with meaning and joy. Ceremony and ritual in the workplace can boost spirits, build loyalty, increase quality and, ultimately, improve bottom-line performance. Making the daily work interesting and challenging for employees has become a norm for organizations today. They are now coming up with different activities on a daily basis to motivate their employees. Offices are now termed 'home away from home'. Employees spend most of their daily hours at the work place and there are times where the work gets extremely challenging, in addition to being highly stressful. This can have an adverse impact on employee productivity. The objective of this paper is to focus on corporate celebrations and the role they play in building long lasting relationships with employees.*

**Key words:** celebration, corporate celebrations, corporate events, festivals in organizations, role and relevance of corporate celebrations

## Introduction

Celebrations infuse life with passion and purpose. They summon the human spirit, reattach us to our roots, and help us soar toward new visions. Celebrations touch our hearts and fire our imaginations, bonding people together and connecting us to shared myths and values. Corporate Celebration shows how the ceremony and ritual of celebration can be brought to the workplace to restore company spirit, reinvigorate employee morale, build commitment and loyalty, improve quality and financial performance, and instill work with meaning and joy.

Gone are the days when celebrations used to be confined within the boundaries of home. Employees, today, savor the festive time even at their workplaces. Making workplace more lively often involves celebrations at various occasions so that a joyous ambience is created. The fact that the workplace is as important as the work itself can't be ignored. Companies, nowadays, are finding festivals the best way to reach to their employees in that way creating a casual environment to make them feel at home even while working. Such a culture fosters an environment of love and trust and enhances the bonding as well as team spirit in the overall professional environment. It reflects how much an employer cares for his employees.

In a time when many organizations are suffering from eroded cultural values due to restructuring, reengineering, and downsizing, Corporate Celebration offers a refreshing approach to creating community in the workplace and revitalizing business. The corporate events and celebrations have the power to pull people together. They make the work atmosphere friendly which in turn results in excellent job performance.

With companies finding festivals the best way to reach out to their employees informally, festivities are making inroads to workplaces. Employers are realizing the fact that the workplace itself is as important as the work one does and so having such a culture fosters firms in making employees 'feel at home' even in the confines of their workplaces. Not only is it viewed as a reflection of 'caring' for peoples' sentiments, but also ushers in great bonding as well as team spirit in the overall professional environment. This is indeed a welcome gesture in the Indian milieu. Being an emotional country with very high sensitivity towards religious/social festivals, the celebration of the same within the work environment triggers high and positive feelings amongst all.

Moreover, in a diverse environment, such as that is seen in multinational companies, it helps in workforce integration and creating a congenial atmosphere in the workplace. Most firms across sectors have special celebrations on various festivals including Holi, Diwali, Independence Day, Christmas, New Year, Eid, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Navratri, Onam, Pongal. Some infact go out of their way to keep a festive theme every month like Mafoi Management Consultants Ltd.

## Objective of the paper

Making the daily work interesting and challenging for employees has become a norm for organizations today. They are now coming up with different activities on a daily basis to motivate their employees. Offices are now termed 'home away from home'. Employees spend most of their daily hours at the work place and there are times where the work gets extremely

challenging, in addition to being highly stressful. This can have an adverse impact on employee productivity. The objective of this paper is to focus on corporate celebrations and the role they play in building long lasting relationships with employees.

### Celebration – Meaning

A celebration is a joyful occasion for special festivities to mark some happy event. Celebration is performance: 'it is, or entails, the dramatic presentation of cultural symbols.' Celebration is public, with no social exclusion, is entertainment for the fun of it, and is participatory – actively involving the celebrant who takes time out of ordinary routine, and 'does so openly, consciously and with the general aim of aesthetic, sensual and social gratification.' According to Sola Odumosu-the Father of Celebrology and the World Leading Celebration Pragmatic Theorist, celebration can be defined as any activity of fun in which people indulge as a thing of remembrance to mark a given event that makes a given day memorable, evaluating it in terms of its message. According to him, there are two major types of celebration: (1) Open ground celebration (2) close ground celebration. An open ground celebration can be (a) world stage (b) continent stage (c) nation stage (d) ethnic stage. Close ground celebration refers to any sort of celebration that takes place in a confined social setting of small geographical environment in which people are being restricted except they are invited. Close ground celebration takes place in the following places: (a) Residential areas (b) Halls (c) club houses (d) churches (e) mosques. Close ground celebration exists in the mono person stage, where only one party is involved; an individual restricts celebration to himself or herself e.g. marking a birthday alone without having to invite anyone to one's residence in a sober mood to reflect on the past challenges and future expectations. Close ground celebration also exists in the poly person stage where two or more parties are involved. It is group-restricted e.g. Lovers' togetherness; friends' togetherness etc.

There are nine classes of celebration. In Celebrology, these are all together known as novemites: 1.Irepedic celebration 2.Patriotic celebration 3.Cultural celebration 4.Religious celebration 5.Love celebration 6.Life celebration 7.Success/achievement celebration 8.Professional celebration 9.New Year celebration. Sola Odumosu-the Father of Celebrology postulated his Universal Declaration of Celebration Principles (UDCPs) on the novemites. UDCPs contain 9 principles and 39 sub principles on celebration. In the theory of celebration, pentapurpose reasoning was suggested based on the apewarics (five logical questions that enable us to arrive at the pentapurpose reasoning): Why should we celebrate? This apewarics leads to

- (1) Conditionality of celebration - What should we celebrate?
- (2) Essentiality of celebration - When should we celebrate?
- (3) Occasionality of celebration - Where should we celebrate?
- (4) Territoriality of celebration - How should we celebrate?

### (5) Specificity of celebration

Now the following are seen at work: The conditionality of celebration, the essentiality of celebration, the occasionality of celebration, the territoriality of celebration and the specificity of celebration; these are what we logically know in Celebrology as the pentapurpose reasoning because they are the five basic thoughts and logical facts which help us in understanding celebration properly.

### Role that ritual and ceremony play in human organizations

Ceremonies can be used to build relationships, relieve tension; level the hierarchy, create excitement, transform losses into gains, and provide access to life's deeper lessons. Research has shown that celebrations increase job productivity and also helps in rise of quality. Most of the businesses pay inordinate attention to the technical side of business, but little attention to the people side. But the real business lies in companies where people feel better about their workplace, when they feel a connection to it, when they enjoy their relationships with coworkers, and, once in a while, have an opportunity to step back and relish in their accomplishments.

Holiday parties provide a great opportunity to reflect on why it is important for co-workers to celebrate with one another. These celebrations in personal and social life help us mark milestones, share our successes, and feel good about reaching life's little dreams and aspirations. They help remind us that not only do struggles and hard work pay off, but when we do reach our goals, they are even sweeter when shared with others. These sentiments can also be incorporated in workplaces too as workplace celebrations foster relationship building, improve morale, enhance retention, and encourage employees to achieve results. Celebrating doesn't have to mean a big party that takes a lot of planning or necessitates a huge expense; the little things can be celebrated by providing coffee for the employees or giving them a half-hour longer for their lunch breaks. Celebrating these small accomplishments helps employees (and their leaders!) realize that there are more good weeks than bad and that the workplace can be a place where they can actually enjoy themselves. For example Southwest Airlines is famous for honoring individuals, groups, significant events, and important accomplishments in creative, festive, and often positively outrageous ways and this has enabled it to remain alone at the top of the list of companies whose stock has returned the highest return to investors since 1972, and it was the only airline to remain profitable during the difficult years of 1990 through 1994 when the industry as a whole lost \$12.8 billion.

### Examples of events and celebrations organized in companies

Apart from the religious festivities like Holi, Eid, Diwali, Christmas, etc. companies also celebrate events like Independence Day, New Year, or the organization's foundation day. Some organizations like Mafoi Management Consultants Ltd even go out of their way to keep a festive theme every month. Some even incorporate annual celebrations as part of their corporate culture. Planning on-going fun and celebration at work, with family or friends is an

excellent way to do group mental flossing and these ideas have been known to improve relationships, enhance creativity, make people feel appreciated, and build an invisible web of goodwill. In some companies, even the birthdays are celebrated or an off is given on the day.

**24/7 Customer** has designed specific 'employee fun in the organization' programs that energize and motivates employees and add fun in their work life. Every quarter, half a day of fun, games and competition is organized, to bring together employees from various departments. Various clubs pertaining to different hobbies like sports, music, dance, drama, movie and book reading, have been formed. Employees with common interest use these clubs as platforms to share and interact formally. Team outings, celebration of festivals, recognition programs and annual day of fest are some ways that add fun in everyday work life.

Challenging, vibrant and fun-filled work culture automatically motivates employees and they look forward to coming office to everyday. **Infogain** had established Centers of Excellence (CoE) for employees so that they can keep themselves updated about their respective areas of technology interests. They also organize a monthly 'Work with fun' event wherein all Infogainers get together to enjoy the cultural show put up turn-wise by different projects, and 'eat and dance together' aids in elevating the motivation levels.

**Mindteck** has a dedicated HR employee relations team that is responsible for designing various recreational programmes internally to keep its employees engaged, informed and motivated. These activities/programs help enrich the work experience of every employee at Mindteck to a large extent. Under these engagements, various levels of continuous opportunities are provided to employees; all religious/national festivals are celebrated with equal spirit; professional successes of individuals and employee birthdays are celebrated with vigor and enthusiasm, managers are encouraged to celebrate project successes by taking their respective teams out for entertainment; various technology/leadership trainings are provided internally on a regular basis; and lastly, employees are engaged for R & D initiatives depending on their skill-sets.

At **Patni**, 'fun at work' teams ensure that the element of fun is maintained as employees put in their hard work to attain their goals.

At **Unisys**, numerous initiatives are taken to make the work environment a fun-filled and interesting one. They also arrange regular workshops and seminars that are interactive in nature and allow employees to get to know one another better, in addition to increasing their knowledge base.

At **Tulip telecom**, the company believes that an employee really needs to love his job and enjoy his day-to-day work. They acquire talent that is ready to take up challenges and at the same time ensure that a person's individual goal is also met with. The purpose behind all this is

not just to create a great work culture but also to motivate the employees and inculcate a sense of belongingness among them. This will enhance loyalty and motivate employees for a longer stay with the company, thus in turn, reducing the attrition rates of the organization. These celebrations also pave the path for social interactions among employees with diverse backgrounds. Such interactions also break the barriers created by management hierarchies.

#### Fun Rituals:

1. **Celebrating success** – Success and big achievements in offices are celebrated through parties.
2. **Kazoo Applause** - At Apple Computers, during a quarterly meeting, they gave out kazoos to the whole group. Rather than applauding by clapping hands, they hummed their acknowledgment with kazoos.
3. **Noses** - Wearing a variety of rubber animal noses and red foam or plastic clown noses— for staff meetings, tough times, on Fridays, etc.
4. **Laugh a Day**- The corporate office of Bank of America issued a "Laugh a Day Challenge" to all its Northern California employees. For the entire month of April, employees were challenged to bring in a joke or cartoon every day to share with their co-workers. Those people successfully completing the Challenge were given a Corporate Challenge T-Shirt, and a book, internally published, filled with the best responses.
5. **Contests** – like Worst Hair Day, Balloon shaving, Lip synch, Air band (or air orchestra), Giant bubbles, Golf course.

#### Theme Days

1. **Clothes** – having Casual Dress Day once a week / month. Also crazy T-shirts; pajamas; eccentric accessories, certain colors (e.g. one color, or color family only, ebony & ivory, etc.)
2. **Food** - senior management cooks and serves food to employees.
3. **Celebrate**: Special holidays; un-birthdays; standing ovations (at meetings, in the cafeteria); crazy awards (to bosses, to employees, part-time staff); a person's first day on the job; airport arrivals; celebrity for a day; deco rating boss' office with streamers, flowers and balloons.
4. **Photos**: (baby, pets, cars, kids) For the bulletin board; for newsletters; awards meetings; the training room.
5. **Special Person Days** like Secretaries Day celebrations; Family Day: bringing photos or bringing the family for lunch, having a lunch out; special office picnic day;
6. Awards like 'Most legible handwriting' ... pen embossed with their name and company name.
7. Lunchtime Fun
8. Caption Contest

9. Picnics or movies after a regular interval.
10. Best performer awards (monthly/quarterly).
11. Organizing events like antakshari, sports, festival celebration, birthday, anniversary celebration, organizational trip.
12. **Management Feedback Day** on which employees ask the management about the issues that they face, know about the company's strategy; basically ask the management anything that they want to know about the company or convey their grievances.
13. **Thank you program** – wherein everybody will vote thanks in secret ballot and the most thanked person can be nominated winner.
14. Dinner with Boss (Team lunch).
15. Family get together
16. Competitions organized for employees children.
17. Employee wellness programs.
18. Fun games and contests.
19. Employee speaks sections on notice boards or newsletters, where employees can write something – grievance, suggestion or appreciation.
20. **Monthly competitions** – theme days (traditional attire, mix and match day, national integration day where teams have to dress up and represent various states, cubicle decorations etc.
21. **Pot lunch** – where everyone in the team should prepare one special interesting dish from home and have lunch together.
22. Foreign tour, gift voucher, organizing family party, family visit, pizza meeting etc.
23. Giving a greeting card to employee by HR on behalf of company for special events like birthdays, any special achievements etc which will give personal touch.

Recognizing the prominent role that corporate events and celebrations play in the organizations, most of the business organizations are conducting various activities to increase the employees' involvement, which is a very essential factor that contributes to the growth and success of the organization. A few examples of the interesting events include: Fishing tournaments, tennis clinic, 10-kilometer run, softball tournament, essay contest that even includes family member, photo contest, volleyball tournament, bowling outings, picnic at a local park, arm wrestling contest, weight-loss contest. In addition to the events, numerous celebrations are being held to show appreciation for accomplishing important milestones and to generally pay tribute to their workforce. These celebrations include: Honoring the senior employees, appreciation day with mementos for everyone, recognition awards for individual and team accomplishments, 200 suggestion awards, milestone achievements.

### Corporate events

Corporate events are the nicest way to make cordial relationships with the employees of a company. It is very much beneficial for the working of a company and its related business activity. These types of events can come in so many different shapes and sizes, level of adventure such as bungee jumping, sailing a boat etc. Indeed, no one can deny the role of corporate events in the lifetime of a business entity. It simply indicates that everyone has to come out of their comfortable zone and put in lots of efforts to make a space that can be shared by all. It is always treated as a positive role for an organization where employees help each other and approach themselves to find concrete solutions for their issues and for the betterment of the whole entity.

### Festival Celebrations

Festivals are one of the most frequent and universal forms of cultural celebration, and while many are religious or traditional with long histories, the majority has been created in recent decades. Parades and processions are common elements in festivals, but those that are held on their own also display many celebratory elements. Many of the other major types of event, especially art and entertainment, are frequently found within or as the theme of festivals, and sport and recreational events also commonly add festive elements. Festivity is generally recognized as embodying gaiety, joyfulness, playfulness, or revelry and liberation from normal moral constraints, but these attitudes and behaviors are not exclusive to formal events.

Falassi (1987, p. 2) has summarized contemporary English-language definitions of 'festival,' of which the most pertinent is 'a sacred or profane time of celebration, marked by special observances.' While traditional festivals often retain religious or mystical roots, contemporary festivals are primarily 'profane,' or secular. Getz (1997) defines, "A festival is a public, themed celebration." Unless the public is invited to participate, the event is a private party. Turner (1969) described festivals as occasions that bring together and interpret or reinterpret the symbolic elements of a group or community, thereby laying the foundation of everyday life.

### Festivals in organizations

Festivals are also created by organizations with focused mandates. For example, the Arts Festivals network in the UK describes the following thematic types of arts festival: opera; literature; early music; dance; new festivals; anniversaries and celebrations; festival commissions and premieres; family and children's events; classical music; theatre and performance; jazz and music world; community and street arts.

For-profit festivals are a growing trend, particularly for those with entertainment as the core, while tourism and economic development agencies also produce them as image-makers and tourist attractions. Corporate sponsorship is often vital, and the corporate presence at many festivals is intense, so the commercial world is closely identified with many

festivals, even to the point of title sponsorship. Many others are linked to causes as fund raisers and profile raisers. Festivals are increasingly featured in tourism development strategies and promotions.

### Relevance of organizational celebrations

Most of the managers may be experiencing tough situations like there has been lots of change, morale is low, and everyone is stressed out. The best way to deal with many of the major issues in today's business environment: employee commitment, effective leadership, continuous change, high quality teams, etc. is "Celebrate!" Thoughtfully planned and meaningful celebrations can pump life back into the workplace. Through celebrations organization's can improve employee morale, increase productivity, and boost the bottom line all at the same time. It can restore company spirit, reinvigorate employee morale, create community, and ultimately improve quality and financial improvement. Hence the organizations need to establish various types of celebrations for creativity and innovation performance.

Recreational activities are relevant in making the employees more comfortable and thus more productive. A majority of today's workforce comprises of youngsters who tend to get bored with repetitive work very easily and quickly. So it is important that some change in the daily grind is introduced in different forms. Recreational activities play a very significant role in making employees comfortable and infusing high energy levels in them.

### To celebrate or not to celebrate?

The companies in today's business world cannot opt to abstain themselves from corporate celebrations. The question is not whether to celebrate or not to celebrate. Celebrations are an important part of everybody's lives, more specifically to the employees who spend greater part of their time in workplaces. The employees are engaged to the companies and are tied up to their tasks and contribute their life in doing their jobs and performing their duties. The task of the management is to decide the best form of celebration that will achieve specific desired results.

### Importance of celebrations at work places

"All work and no play make Jack a dull boy". A workplace that has nothing exciting to offer but the usual mundane work all throughout the year makes an employee disinterested. It is practically impossible to lead such a monotonous life with no excitement. Celebrations as a result are a welcome distraction to look forward to amongst employees. It is, in many ways, a stress buster and a common meeting ground for the employees.

Celebrations are a great way to improve the workplace. At a time when downsizing, "leaner and meaner" and no-frills are the order of the day, the companies should periodically celebrate both their successes and their employees.

1. Ceremony and ritual in the workplace can boost spirits, build loyalty, increase quality and, ultimately, improve bottom-line performance. Celebrations create an important sense of community in both good and bad corporate times.
2. These celebrations whether acknowledging someone's birthday or a corporate anniversary draw employees together and forge community in the workplace. Even coming together to grieve when a product or mission fails is good for everyone involved.
3. Celebrations also act as a healing measure between two parties. It is a good opportunity to dissolve office conflicts, call for a truce and renew relationships for a healthy working style.
4. Corporate celebration is not only good employee relations but also good business.
5. The tradition of annual celebrations in the company enhances employee motivation.
6. Celebrations allow employees to relax and recharge. Such celebrations send a positive message that you value and respect your employees.
7. Apart from organization wide celebrations, companies also indulge in department or team celebrations. Acknowledging the target achieved and sharing the moment together with the team improves team spirit.
8. Celebrations are a means to thank employees, a means for them to meet outside the work atmosphere, let down their hair and have fun.
9. Celebrations in office are important as it helps in striking a balance between work and life.

### Impact of celebrations in workplace

The idea behind all this is not just creating a great work ethos and bonhomie between employees but also to motivate them and create a brand loyalty. Many firms in fact believe that this leads to longevity of the employee's stay within a firm and better retention by creating a sense of belonging within them. Such events aid interaction amongst members hailing from diverse communities and states and there is scope for cultural learning and social mingling which in turn bring members together as one team.

1. Celebrations at workplace directly correlate to productivity, loyalty and job satisfaction. Workplace celebrations are an important component in keeping employees happy and focused.
2. Moreover, in a diverse environment, such as that is seen in multinational companies, it helps in workforce integration and creating a congenial atmosphere in the workplace.
3. Annual events reaffirm the company's belief that all employees are like one big family. It is worth making budget allocations for such celebrations.

4. Motivated employees lead to greater productivity and organizational success. These social events enhance employee loyalty too.

5. There is a purpose for parties and celebrations at work and it directly correlates to productivity, output, energy, and job satisfaction.

6. Celebrations not only offer a break in the tedious schedule but also allow exchange of plans and gossip amongst co-workers.

Workplace celebrations are an important component in keeping employees happy and focused. The role of workplace celebrations can be understood from the analysis of the inter relationship of celebration with the various aspects of organization like motivation, productivity, team building, leadership etc. Jack Welch, respected business leader and writer opines that business has to be fun since celebrations energize an organization.

### Conclusion

It has to be realized that the corporate events and celebrations are not intrusions to the work, but, in fact, necessary ingredients in its performance. We can throw people together into any group, give them a mission, and have them produce a result. But if we expect that result to be extraordinary, and if we expect it to last over time, then we must pay homage to the spirit that resides within us. The ideas of fun at companies have been accepted with joy and appreciation and have produced positive results for the organizations that tried them. Using these ideas or customizing them to suit the requirements of organizations depending on their group environment is necessary. Most of them cost little or nothing and require virtually no time beyond informing people about what's happening. The most important thing is to not just talk about these ideas, but actually do them.

The HR department plays a big role in galvanizing the initiatives to a more departmental or functional level as their task is to interact with a cross-section of people from various departments and across all levels.

Different initiatives at the departmental and functional levels help in encouraging innovation and promoting team spirit. HR can help in identifying the requirements and internal dynamics of each team and propose activities or suggestions that will facilitate mutual respect and improve relations among members. This will in turn improve productivity.

Supervisors too play an important role to ensure that their team is engaged and productive. As they work closely with their employees they can customize their work to ensure that there is learning, knowledge sharing, brainstorming, ownership and a sense of achievement or delivery. All these elements and embankments put together make the work interesting on a daily basis.

Today organizations across all the sectors are emphasizing on making daily work interesting and

challenging by introducing new elements of surprise so that their employees are motivated to come to office and look forward to a new day and an enriched experience. An organization needs to ensure that the work people do gives them that sense of happiness and satisfaction.

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