

Study quantifies office Christmas parties and employee happiness

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A bad-tempered or overly complimentary boss, colleagues who drink too much alcohol and behave badly, an awkward atmosphere, forced festivities or a party in a random pub in the middle of nowhere—there

are many factors that can turn any office Christmas party into a disaster. But there are a few basic rules that will make your end-of-year party with colleagues a memorable and fun event.

Organizational psychologist Professor Hannes Zacher from Leipzig University has conducted research into what these are and what Christmas parties mean for teams, and he has [published](#) his findings in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

"The Christmas party as a ritual is a reflection of the organization's culture and should be something that celebrates the past year," he says, adding that these rituals have received little scholarly attention from experts in the past. This is why, in January 2019, Zacher asked a total of 359 employees of different ages and salary brackets—from a wide range of industries across Germany—what it is that makes a company Christmas party successful and what can dampen the mood. The findings, he says, are "more relevant than ever."

In the survey, Zacher identified a number of satisfaction-related factors that contribute to the success of the company Christmas party. For example, the party should reflect a positive organizational culture focused on [human relationships](#), be held in an off-site location rather than in the office, be informal rather than formal, include fun activities such as games or karaoke, and use symbolism that links the party to the organization's values.

There should be non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages. However, the latter should only be enjoyed in moderation, as [excessive alcohol consumption](#) is a no-no, as is sex with colleagues at the end-of-year team party.

"The party should be a ray of hope at the end of the year, a nice tradition," he stresses. This does not mean spending an excessive amount

of money. However, it is always good when employees don't have to pay for their own party, but have it paid for by their organization. More important, says Zacher, are creativity and authenticity.

What this means in the specific case depends entirely on the team, which should definitely be involved in planning the party. Apart from visiting an escape room, this could include setting up a photo box, which can often lighten the mood, or a surprise for colleagues, such as a game of Secret Santa.

Ideally, gifts should have some connection to the employees' day-to-day work. At his institute's Christmas party last year, some of Zacher's colleagues played PowerPoint karaoke and gave spontaneous PowerPoint presentations on topics they were completely unfamiliar with.

For many respondents, it was important to have informal conversations with colleagues about both work and personal matters, to eat and drink well, and to put hierarchies aside, at least for the evening. Here, age and gender were as unimportant as the person's position within the organization. According to Zacher, the size of the party was also not an issue.

Having analyzed his survey, the organizational psychologist advises managers to keep their speeches short and entertaining, to speak appreciatively about the whole team and not to single anyone out. The party organizers should ask all their colleagues for their ideas and wishes well in advance and then also get feedback from them so that next year's party can be even better.

As is the case almost everywhere, there are trends when it comes to work Christmas parties that usually spill over from the U.S. For example, more and more companies in Germany are deciding to move their Christmas party from December—when people are often very busy and

stressed—to January and celebrate the New Year instead.

"The Christmas atmosphere is not absolutely necessary. It's about getting together in an informal setting and not just talking about work. This maintains the social glue," says Professor Zacher, who adds that it is important to get away from the usual work environment to celebrate and perhaps try something new and different, such as making chocolate together.

In one of his next studies, the researcher would like to look at other aspects of working life that have not been studied much to date, such as company outings and how team members' birthdays or weddings are handled. "They are an expression of team spirit," emphasizes Zacher.

More information: Hannes Zacher, The company Christmas party and employee happiness, *Scientific Reports* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-023-27473-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-27473-y)

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