At first thought, it seems hard to take a book about having fun seriously. However, the authors of *The Levity Effect: Why It Pays to Lighten Up* make a compelling case for the necessity of levity (i.e., “lightening up”) in the workplace. They provide both anecdotal and empirical evidence to attest to the existence of strong relationships between workplace levity and a host of organizational and individual outcomes. It is well written and enjoyable to read, thanks to the fact that the authors practice what they preach. So, levity is integrated and thus illustrated in the flow of the book.

*The Levity Effect* reflects the contemporary trend toward refocusing on the role of affect in the workplace. It basically links corporate affect to individual affect. While the authors do not make extensive use of the organizational culture or climate constructs (see Dickson & Mitchelson, 2007), one could suggest that they are arguing for a culture/climate change. Many organizational cultures appear characteristic of traditional bureaucracies
where efficiency and effectiveness are valued and prioritized above the socioemotional
needs of employees. This kind of organizational culture has proven relatively toxic to “fun.”

Of course, what is key to such a culture transformation is leadership. Thus, the authors
argue that in order to create levity in the organization, leaders must lighten up. Leaders need
not necessarily be funny but rather facilitate or at least tolerate fun. Hence, this book could
easily be referenced under leadership as well.

The primary audiences for this book are organizational practitioners. While the
authors do provide compelling survey data to support their conclusions, readers are not
likely to find reports of laboratory-based studies whereby variables have been manipulated
or isolated and other extraneous factors have been controlled. Thus, academicians and other
cerebral types are likely to find themselves befuddled with the “yes, buts” as they attempt to
sniff out the moderators and mediators between levity and its attributed outcomes. However,
researchers looking for a fresh new concept to place under the microscope are likely to find
the levity effect an interesting and promising prospect.

When addressing a largely practitioner audience, it is important to make the business
case for why a particular program or intervention should be invested in. This typically
involves pointing out the ratio of potential outcomes relative to potential costs. The chapters
in the book are organized around the potential outcomes. These outcomes include better
intraorganizational communication, increased innovation, heightened respect and trust for
leadership, higher quality of physical and mental health, reduced turnover, and increased
organizational and individual profitability. For the most part, the costs are typically
associated with doing it wrong. That is, a lack of genuineness on the part of leadership and a
lack of respect and trust on the part of employees can undermine any attempt at levity. Thus,
they make the business case for why organizations ought to seriously consider levity.

The idea that having a sense of humor might lead to greater success is beginning to
catch on. Several organizations with household names like Nike, Boeing, Nextel, Qwest,
Yamaha, U.S. Bank, and Dairy Queen use humor strategies that include having employees
participate in game shows, carnivals, and movie outings. Furthermore, many of these
organizations are beginning to institutionalize having fun into their core operations and
human resource processes. For example, some of them are beginning to make “having a
sense of humor” a competency to hire and train their executives around.

Practitioners wanting to implement levity into their organizations should find Chapter
7 especially helpful. The authors present “142 Ways to Have Fun at Work” (p. 151). Many
of these techniques seem easy to apply to virtually any office atmosphere. There are also
specific testimonials of what organizations have actually tried sprinkled throughout the
book. Common objections are addressed throughout the book, but more directly in Chapter
8. Organizations that might have tried and failed at levity in the past might start with that
particular chapter.

In sum, The Levity Effect is a well-written book that makes the business case for why
organizations ought to seriously consider adopting levity-related practices and programs. It
also adds to the chain of recent literature in industrial/organizational psychology highlighting the importance of workplace affect for not only individual well-being, but for organizational well-being (i.e., efficiency and effectiveness) as well (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Grawitch, Block, & Ratner, 2005). The book also includes plenty of useable examples and guidelines for how levity should be implemented.

References

