



## Success can be a game with many players.

One of the side effects of the free food for Google staff is what is known as the “Google 15” – the number of pounds that employees typically gain after joining the internet company. But whether it is providing snacks and gourmet meals in the canteen, annual skiing trips or games rooms at the office, the philosophy behind such perks is the same – encouraging staff to meet each other, interact in informal settings and encourage teamwork.

One way the company does this is to hold competitions in everything from office decorating to dancing and football, with prizes for the winners. Managers also receive a quarterly “celebratory fund” either to reward accomplishments, or to build teamwork by going bowling, go-carting or dining out. In the Paris office, sales teams end each quarter with some kind of outing, such as an evening of cocktails and dancing or a team dinner at a restaurant.

The Best Workplaces survey indicates that such initiatives have a powerful effect. At Google Italy, for example, 90 per cent of the employees agreed that “people celebrate special events around here”. Also in Italy, 100 per cent agreed that “this is a friendly place to work, and 96 per cent agreed that “there is a ‘family’ or ‘team’ feeling here”.

Another part of Google’s objective is to make its workplace feel fun. Massage chairs, table tennis tables, video games, lava lamps, hammocks, beanbags, bicycles, large rubber balls, couches, and scooters are all part of the furniture in Google offices.

However, when it comes to the serious business of work, great emphasis is placed on engaging employees. “What makes Google a great workplace

is that the nature of the work itself is very challenging and interesting,” says Nick Creswell, the company’s university programmes manager for Europe, the Middle East and Africa. “And for the type of people who really enjoy an intellectual challenge, that’s the biggest appeal of working here.”

Fostering this intellectual activity is a policy giving employees a large degree of independence in deciding how to work – both in terms of the hours they work and how they do their jobs. “There’s a real culture of autonomy and empowerment,” says Mr Creswell. “Individuals within the business understand what their own goals are within the context of their teams, and they have a lot of freedom to go out and make those happen.”

Even when it comes to learning and development, many programmes are voluntary and informal. Often it may be a case of inviting university faculty in to discuss their latest research. Some programmes may not even directly relate to employees’ work, such as the Authors@Google series, through which prominent writers are invited to give lunchtime talks about their books.