

## **PART TIME WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT OF FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS IN PORT HARCOURT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study examined the relationship between part time work arrangements and employee engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt. The cross sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of 373 employees from 10 Fast Food Restaurants in Port Harcourt. A sample of 191 was used for the study. A structured questionnaire with consideration to face and content validation for the collection of primary data was adopted for the study after a reliability coefficient test which its least result was above 0.70 through the adoption of Cronbach Alpha. Descriptive statistics (pie chart, mean and standard deviation) were used to analyze demographic data and research questions. While inferential statistics (Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient) were used for the test of hypotheses. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between part time work arrangements and employee engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt; Organisational culture significantly moderates the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that part time work arrangements with employee engagement and is being moderated by organizational culture. The study recommended amongst others that management of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should allow part-time workers to have a say in their schedules. This could involve offering options for shift swapping, providing a range of hours to choose from, or accommodating personal commitments as such would increase their job satisfaction and physical engagement; Management of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should prioritize inclusive communication strategies that ensure part-time workers are kept informed about company news, changes, and opportunities for involvement as such would enhance their cognitive engagement.

***Keywords: Compressed Work, Employee Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, Affective Engagement***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Employees are considered as the most important aspect amongst many key resources in an organisation. Hence, the management of the organization are putting enormous effort to get the most out of them. This is because if employees are contented with the actions and decisions of their employer, they are more likely to work accordingly and acquire the best for the organization (Lee et al., 2024). If they are not in that state however, it is unlikely that they would put a valiant effort towards their job: a major loss for the organization. Thus, managing employees to ensure they engage in their jobs is essential in the life of an organisation. Employee engagement refers to a state where employees harness their work roles by physically, cognitively, and emotionally involving themselves towards the performance and success of the organization. Employees that are highly engaged are more content, productive and unlikely to quit (Anyu et al., 2021). In line with above, this study measured employee engagement in terms of physical engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement.

It is important to note that employees who are physically engaged expend their efforts, both physical and mental, as they go about their jobs. Those who are cognitively engaged know what their employer's vision and strategies are, and what performance they need to deliver to contribute to them as much as possible (Hmedan, 2023). While the emotionally engaged employees build relationship blocks with their employers, customers, suppliers and clients, etc. all to ensure that the organization achieve its predetermined goals and objectives.

Employees need a comfortable environment for high engagement. It is important to note that in this Post Covid-19 era, work systems are changing on daily basis to satisfy employees and reduce job turnover while increasing their engagement (Kiprono, 2018; Mgbemena et al., 2022). This has made management to seek for ways through which work can be arranged in a friendly manner to help both the individual and organisation achieve their goals and objectives. Therefore, employee engagement could be traceable to arrangements adopted by management to make work flexible for workers. Flexible work arrangements are work structures that give an employee flexibility on how long, where, and when the employees work or the work structures that alters the time and/or place that work gets done regularly (Watson & Swanberg in Sourabh & Anooja, 2022) and provide the opportunity to the employees to select their work schedules, place, and quantity of the work (Bal & De Lange, 2015). These provide alternative work schedules or locations that allow employees to have more control over when and where they work. However, this study dimensionalised flexible work arrangements into part-time work, compressed work and work shift.

Part-time work is considered as a minimum a half-day of work in a week under the number of working days full-time. The effects of Part-time employment for the employees and the organization have not been fully established yet, because there are many variables that can affect the observed outcomes (Umukoro et al., 2020). Apart from these individual performance effects, part-time employment can also affect firm productivity through allocation efficiencies. Compressed work refers to a type of flexible work arrangement where employees work longer hours on fewer days per week, resulting in a compressed workweek. This arrangement allows employees to have more consecutive days off while still working the same total number of hours as a traditional workweek (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). A work shift refers to a specific period of time during which an individual is scheduled to work (Kumar & Saxena, 2024). Work shift is also known as shift-work. Work shifts are common in various industries and organizations, allowing for continuous operation and coverage of tasks throughout the day or night. All these work arrangements tend to enhance employee engagement in an organisation.

Studies related to flexible work arrangements and employee engagement has been locally and internationally carried out. Lee et al. (2024) examined the Influence of workplace flexibility on employee engagement among young generation. The study found that workspace flexibility and operational flexibility have significant positive relationships with employee engagement. Dayon and Manigo (2024) examined the relationship of flexible work arrangements and organizational commitment toward employees' organizational performance in King Multi-Purpose Cooperative during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results revealed that the employees of King Multipurpose Cooperative had a high overall level of flexible work arrangements and organizational commitment. Sourabh and Anooja (2022) examined the impact of flexible work arrangements on the work-life integration of employees in the service industry. Results show that when employees utilize the FWAs, are more effective in integration and experience fewer conflicts irrespective of gender. In the case of flexi time and part-time work, options are more effective in reducing stress.

### Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and employee physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and employee cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and employee emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

### Part-Time Work

Part-time work is also known as part-time employment. Part-time employment is generally considered as a minimum a half-day of work in a week under the number of working days full-time. In a five day week, part-time work should be below nine-tenths of the duration worked full-time. Some of the examples of definitions and agreements of part-time employment are as under. Part-time employment is perceived as resulting from continuous changes in the working arrangement around the world and has become a key concern in the last three decades (Foote in Mgbemena et al., 2022). The effects of Part-time employment for the employees and the organization have not been fully established yet, because there are many variables that can affect the observed outcomes. Apart from these individual performance effects, part-time employment can also affect firm productivity through allocation efficiencies.

There is actually no international standard on how to define part-time work. However, van Bastelaer, et al. in Muhammad and Henndy (2019) have tried to make an international comparison of part-time work and stated that part-time work definitions can be based on the working hour threshold, the nature of the job, or a combination of both—whether it is a paid employment or not. The report compares results gathered from OECD member countries where each country shows a slightly different measurement of part-time working hours ranging from 30 – 37 per work with some additional criteria applied in certain countries. As a result, the OECD decided to define part-time work based on 30 working hours per week threshold for international comparison. On the other hand, Nardone in Weideman and Hofmeyr (2020) stated that part-time working hours are less than 35 working hours a week, which is the boundary between full-time and part-time employment. Therefore, it is quite safe to say that a part-time worker is defined as the person who works under 35 hours per week, be it for economic reasons, paid or unpaid.

To Japan Times (2018), the number of people with an irregular job status, such as part-timers and temporary workers—those who are easier to contract and terminate than full-time employees—, has increased since the 1990s and represents nearly 40 percent of Japan's workforce today. The quantity of workers on fixed-term contracts has achieved 15 million, of which around 4.5 million is estimated to have worked in the same company for over five years—indicating that regardless of their temporary job status, numerous businesses depend on them as an imperative source of long-term labor. There are several reasons why people who work part-time for economic reasons choose to do so, and it sometimes varies based on different demographics. For instance, Pollart et al. (2015) did a research on reasons why people work part-time at U.S. Medical Schools. The results indicated that male part-time workers most often work part-time to accommodate their work at another place (or another professional position), while female part-time workers work part-time to provide care for dependent children. Other reasons are health-related or due to lifestyle. In addition to that, other reason why people choose to work part-time can be economic; the low level of work difficulty, material shortages, beginning or

ending a job, or because they could only find part-time job in the market, and non-economic; holiday, vacation, illness, or bad weather.

### **Concept of Employee Engagement**

The concept of employee engagement refers to a state of mind in which employees feel connected to their work and organization. It involves a sense of purpose, autonomy, and personal growth (Rich et al. in Tim et al., 2022). It is also the harnessing of organizational members selves to their work roles. People employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances in engagement. The term engagement refers to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work. When employees are engaged, they are emotionally connected to others and cognitively vigilant to the direction of the team. Engagement occurs when employees know what to expect, have the resources to complete their work, participate in opportunities for market effectiveness and feedback, and feel that they contribute significantly to the organization.

Although engaged employees have consistently shown to be more productive, profitable, safer, healthier, and less likely to leave their employer, only 30% of the global workforce is estimated to be engaged (Saks in Umukoro et al., 2020). Most often employee engagement has been defined as an emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization; it is the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employees in their job. The existence of different definitions makes the state of knowledge of employee engagement difficult to determine as each study examines employee engagement under a different protocol. Further to this, unless employee engagement can be universally defined and measured, it cannot be managed, nor can it be known if efforts to improve it are working.

Deci and Ryan in Berens in Keller et al. (2022) stated that competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness which are psychological needs, motivate the individual to initiate behavior essential for psychological health and well-being of an individual and if satisfied may lead to optimal function and market effectiveness. The basic needs of satisfaction have been found to directly relate to dedication of employees (Chapman, 2016). Dedicated and meaningful work enables employees to realize how valuable they are within the organization and makes them engaged. Bolman and Deal (2014) suggested there is an opportunity for employees' autonomy when SDT is leveraged, and furthermore, employees can influence those around them. This influence transcends to the benefits of intrinsic rewards. Meaningful work will allow for an increase in employees' participation; however, it does not guarantee that the employee will be engaged. The need for autonomy, intrinsic rewards, and influence are required to achieve employee engagement (Bolman & Deal in Grawitch et al., 2017).

### **Relationship between Part-Time Work and Employee Engagement**

Part-time employees may experience lower levels of physical engagement compared to full-time employees due to their reduced hours at work. This can result in a lack of continuity in their workflow and interactions with colleagues, potentially impacting their overall engagement with the organization (Anya et al., 2021; Chung & van der Horst, 2018). It is important to note that part-time employees may face challenges in maintaining high levels of cognitive engagement due to their limited time at work. They may have less opportunity to fully immerse themselves in complex projects or long-term goals, which could affect their sense of accomplishment and motivation at work (Lee et al., 2024).

Part-time employees may experience varying levels of emotional engagement depending on factors such as job satisfaction, organizational culture, and opportunities for growth and

development. Limited hours at work may impact the sense of belonging and loyalty that part-time employees feel towards the organization, potentially affecting their overall emotional engagement (Pollart et al., 2015; Sourabh & Anooja, 2022). Finally, the relationship between part-time work and employee engagement is complex and multifaceted, influenced by various factors such as job design, organizational support, communication channels, and individual preferences. Organizations need to consider these dynamics when managing part-time employees to ensure high levels of physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement across all workforce segments (Wang et al., 2020). However, the following hypotheses were raised in line with the discussion above.

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and employee physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and employee cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and employee emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

## **Compressed Work and Employee Engagement**

### **Social Exchange Theory**

The Social Exchange Theory was proposed by George Casper Homans in the year 1958. The theory postulates that give and take forms the basis of almost all relationships though their proportions might vary as per the intensity of the relationships. Therefore, the social exchange theory is about giving something of more value to others than what has been given to you and also receiving something of higher value than you have given out (Micah & Urebuchi in Dayon & Manigo, 2024). The theory assumes that in a relationship, every individual has expectations from his/her partners. A relationship without expectations is meaningless. It also assumes that good relationships are mutually beneficial and not supposed to be one sided. An individual invests his time and energy in relationship only when he gets something out of corresponding or higher value from it (Bal & De Lange, 2015).

### **Implications of Social Exchange theory to the Study**

Social exchange theory explains the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee engagement by emphasizing the give-and-take dynamic in social relationships. According to this theory, individuals engage in relationships based on the expectation of mutual benefits. In the context of the workplace, when organizations offer flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, flextime, or compressed workweeks, employees perceive these offerings as valuable resources provided by the organization. In return, employees are more likely to reciprocate by investing more effort and commitment into their work, leading to higher levels of engagement.

Flexible work arrangements can enhance employee engagement through various mechanisms outlined by social exchange theory. Firstly, offering flexibility demonstrates that the organization values and trusts its employees, which fosters a sense of reciprocity and loyalty among employees. This perception of support from the organization can lead to increased job satisfaction and motivation among employees. Secondly, flexible work arrangements enable employees to better balance their work and personal lives, reducing stress and enhancing overall well-being. As a result, employees may feel more committed to their jobs and exhibit higher levels of engagement.

Moreover, flexible work arrangements can also promote a positive organizational culture characterized by trust, autonomy, and respect for individual needs. When employees feel empowered to manage their own schedules and work environments, they are more likely to feel valued and respected by their organization. This positive work environment can contribute to higher levels of employee engagement as individuals are motivated to reciprocate the supportive gestures from the organization.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The researcher adopted cross-sectional survey research design for the study.

### **Population of the Study**

The target population of the study consisted of Three Hundred and Seventy Three (373) employees from Ten (10) fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

### **Sample/Sampling Techniques**

The sample size of this study is One Hundred and Ninety One (191). The above sample size was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination of 1970. Based on the sample size of 191, the branch unit is determined using the Bowley's (1960) population proportionate allocation formula.

### **Instrumentation and Measurement**

The instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

Univariate analysis (mean and standard deviation), bivariate analysis (Spearman Rank Order Correlation), and multivariate analysis (Partial Correlation) were used to analyze collected data. This was done with the aid of Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS Version 22.0). The Spearman Rank Order (Rho) was considered to be the most appropriate for the study as it measured the degree of relationship between the two sets of ranked observations. The reason for its choice was due to the fact that, it signified if a relationship exist or not and the magnitude of the relationship. It depicts a degree of effectuality in predicating one ranked variable based on another ranked variable. This status of the tool justifies its adoption to test the association among our study variables. If our statistical analysis shows that the significance level is below the cut-off value we have set (which is 0.05), we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis. Alternatively, if the significance level is above the cut-off value, the null hypothesis is accepted. For the coefficient values, the following interpretation scheme were applied is stated below, (a) No Relationship = 0, (b) Low/Weak Relationship = 0.1-0.2, (c) Moderate or Relatively Strong Relationship = 0.3-0.5, (d) High/Strong Relationship = 0.6-0.7, (e) Very High/Very Strong Relationship = 0.8-0.9, (f) Perfect Relationship = 1.

### **Part-time work and Physical Engagement**

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Table 4.19: Correlation of Part-time work and Physical Engagement**

		Part-time work	Physical Engagement
Spearman's rho	Part-time work	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	175
	Physical Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.661**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	175

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Survey Data, 2024

Table above shows r value of 0.661 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to part-time work and physical engagement. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho<sub>1</sub>) which states that there is no significant relationship between part-time work and physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is a strong positive significant relationship between part-time work and physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Part-Time Work and Cognitive Engagement**

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Correlations of Part-Time Work and Cognitive Engagement**

		Part-time work	Cognitive Engagement
Spearman's rho	Part-time work	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	175
	Cognitive Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.340**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	175

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Survey Data, 2024

Table above shows r value of 0.340 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to part-time work and cognitive engagement. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho<sub>2</sub>) which states that there is no significant relationship between part-time work and cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is a moderate positive significant relationship between part-time work and cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Part-Time Work and Emotional Engagement**

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between part-time work and emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Correlations of Part-Time Work and Emotional Engagement**

		Part-time work	Emotional Engagement
Spearman's rho	Part-time work	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.563**
		N	.000
	Emotional Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.563**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	.000

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Survey Data, 2024

Table above shows r value of 0.563 at significance value of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to d part-time work and emotional engagement. Since the significant value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H<sub>03</sub>) which states that there is no significant relationship between part-time work and emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is a moderate positive significant relationship between part-time work and emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study are discussed under the following headings:

**Part-Time Work and Employee Engagement**

The test of hypotheses one, two and three revealed that there is a significant relationship between part-time work and employee engagement (physical engagement, cognitive engagement and emotional engagement) of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt. These findings are in line with the views of Lee et al. (2024) and Weideman and Hofmeyr (2020) which found a positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee engagement. Specifically, they asserted that part-time work is significantly related to employee engagement. Their studies also revealed that flexible work arrangements were positively associated with various employee engagement constructs found in the literature, with the most prominent finding showing positive influence of flexible work arrangements on employee well-being.

Taking a leaf from the above, it is imperative to note that part-time employees may experience lower levels of physical engagement compared to full-time employees due to their reduced hours at work. This can result in a lack of continuity in their workflow and interactions with colleagues, potentially impacting their overall engagement with the organization (Anya et al., 2021; Chung & van der Horst, 2018). It is important to note that part-time employees may face challenges in maintaining high levels of cognitive engagement due to their limited time at work. They may have less opportunity to fully immerse themselves in complex projects or long-term goals, which could affect their sense of accomplishment and motivation at work (Lee et al., 2024).

Part-time employees may experience varying levels of emotional engagement depending on factors such as job satisfaction, organizational culture, and opportunities for growth and development. Limited hours at work may impact the sense of belonging and loyalty that part-time employees feel towards the organization, potentially affecting their overall emotional engagement (Pollart et al., 2015; Sourabh & Anooja, 2022). Finally, the relationship between part-time work and employee engagement is complex and multifaceted, influenced by various factors such as job design, organizational support, communication channels, and individual preferences. Organizations need to consider these dynamics when managing part-time employees to ensure high levels of physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement across all workforce segments (Wang et al., 2020)

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analyses and discussion of findings, the study concluded that part time work arrangements correlate with employee engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt. The study also concluded that organisational culture moderates the relationship between flexible work arrangements and employee engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Management of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should allow part-time workers to have a say in their schedules. This could involve offering options for shift swapping, providing a range of hours to choose from, or accommodating personal commitments as such would increase their job satisfaction and physical engagement.
2. Management of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should prioritize inclusive communication strategies that ensure part-time workers are kept informed about company news, changes, and opportunities for involvement as such would enhance their cognitive engagement.
3. Management of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should consider offering workshops, mentorship programs, or access to online courses that allow part-timers to develop new skills relevant to their roles or future career aspirations as such would enhance their emotional engagement.

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