

COMPRESSED WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT OF FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between compressed 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 compressed work arrangements and employee engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt. The study concluded that compressed 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.

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

INTRODUCTION

There are times where employees are not fully engaged in their work. This ranges from physical to cognitive and emotional engagement. There are times employees lack enthusiasm, energy, and involvement in physical activities related to their job. They also tend to lack the mental connection to their work, resulting in reduced productivity, job dissatisfaction, and overall well-being. More so, some employees experience a lack of emotional connection, enthusiasm, and commitment towards their work. The study of Anyanwu (2020) found that 40 to 65% of employees in fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt are not satisfied with their jobs. They asserted that this could be attributed to poor working environment and lack of staff welfare. The above implies that such workers would poorly engage in their job, thus increasing low employee engagement. However, among others, disengaged employees or low levels of employee engagement could be traceable to the flexible work arrangements incorporated in the workplace.

Expectedly, the absence of flexible work arrangements could make some employees inactive. This is worrisome because lack of part-time work, compressed work and work shift. The implication is that attracting innovative-minded employees in a non-flexible workplace may be an uphill task. Further, Nigerian scholars like Mgbemena et al. (2022) Though most managers of Nigerian businesses have failed to fully embrace flexible work arrangements, the experience of most businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic calls for a rethink.

When employees are unable to balance their work schedules with personal commitments, it can lead to increased stress and dissatisfaction. This lack of flexibility often results in high turnover rates, as workers seek environments that accommodate their needs, even while others may disengage themselves during work hours. Consequently, disengaged employees may exhibit lower productivity levels and diminished customer service quality, ultimately affecting the restaurant's overall performance. Therefore, adopting flexible work arrangement is crucial for fostering a more engaged

and motivated workforce in the fast food industry. The foregoing gives credence to examine the relationship between flexible work arrangement and employee engagement of fast-food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H1: There is no significant relationship between compressed work and employee physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between compressed work and employee cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between compressed work and employee physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Compressed Work

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). Compressed work schedules are designed to provide flexibility for both employers and employees, allowing for improved work-life balance and potentially increased productivity (Umukoro et al., 2020). In the light of the above, one common type of compressed work schedule is the 4/10 schedule, where employees work four 10-hour days each week instead of the traditional five 8-hour days. Another example is the 9/80 schedule, where employees work eight 9-hour days and one 8-hour day over a two-week period, resulting in every other Friday off.

Employers may implement compressed work schedules to reduce overhead costs, increase employee satisfaction, and attract top talent. However, there are challenges associated with compressed work arrangements, such as potential impacts on employee health and well-being, difficulties in coordinating schedules among team members, and ensuring adequate coverage during business hours (Japan Times, 2018). In addition, compressed work schedules can be beneficial for both employers and employees when implemented thoughtfully and with consideration for the specific needs of the organization and its workforce.

In the modern fast-food restaurants, compressed work is practiced to maximize efficiency and productivity by streamlining processes, reducing waste, and optimizing resources. This approach is essential where speed and accuracy are crucial for meeting customer demands and maintaining profitability (Dayon & Manigo, 2024). One key aspect of compressed work is the implementation of standardized procedures and protocols to ensure consistency in food preparation, customer service, and overall operations. By establishing clear guidelines and training employees to follow them rigorously, firms can minimize errors, reduce wait times, and enhance the overall dining experience for customers.

Another important element of compressed work in the hospitality industry like fast-food restaurants is the use of technology to automate routine tasks and facilitate communication between different areas of the restaurant. For example, automated ordering systems, kitchen display monitors, and inventory management software can help streamline operations, improve accuracy, and reduce the time required to fulfill customer orders (Anya et al., 2021). Additionally, compressed work in fast-food restaurants often involves cross-training employees to perform multiple roles within the establishment. This flexibility enables managers to deploy staff more efficiently based on fluctuating demand levels and ensures that operations run smoothly even during peak hours or unexpected circumstances. Overall, compressed work in fast-food restaurants is a strategic approach that aims to increase productivity, reduce costs, and enhance customer satisfaction by optimizing processes, leveraging technology, and empowering employees to perform at their best (Nielen & Schiersch,

2016). In the light of the above, multi-tasking and teamwork were used as indicators of compressed work in this study.

Concept of Employee Engagement

In the light of the above, employee engagement is harnessing employees or workers to their work roles where they physically, cognitively, and emotionally involve themselves during role performances in the organization. It also refers to creating an enabling environment to enhance individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work. The above implies that employee engagement is critical to any organization. However, considerable attention is given to the notion of employee engagement strategy in contemporary organizations due to the recently reported positive relationship between engagement and direct measures of organizational effectiveness as job performance, output, quality, customer satisfaction, profits, and business market effectiveness (Sundaray in Kerdpitak & Jermsittiparsert, 2020). Therefore, engaged employees nowadays is at the central focus of various organizations.

The failing global economy has created a huge shift in the way business takes place. Employee engagement matters to both the employee as well as the organization. Employees can utilize contract agreement provisions to impede the attainment of the organizational goals and objectives. Management's capability to leverage employee engagement is essential in an organization. Cooper-Thomas et al. in Britto and Magesh (2018) establishing that high levels of expectations and frequent performance reviews can increase employee participation and cooperation. The scarcity of resources has lead organizations to think more about reducing costs and increasing operational effectiveness and efficiency. Reduced variation in processes can reduce cost over time as it relates to process improvement (Emrouznejad in Daniel, 2023); however, an organization must continue to incorporate processes that enhance employee engagement. Mishra et al. in Ganu et al. (2017) noted short-term cost cutting processes are not uniformly successful.

Employee engagement has emerged as one of the greatest challenges in today's workplace. With complexities and stringent regulations in many organizations, employee engagement will continue to challenge organizations in the future (Mishra et al. in Ahmed et al., 2020). This aspect challenges management because engagement is a critical element in maintaining the organization's vitality, survival, and profitability (Gorgenyi-Hegyes et al., 2021; Kaisa et al., 2019). Organizations that have highly engaged employees have greater profits than those that do not. Organizations with highly engaged employees experience increased customer satisfaction, profits, and employee operational effectiveness (Davidson et al., 2019).

Furthermore, no matter which definition is used, even before corona time, academics, as well as practitioners, placed the spotlight on employee engagement strategies. And rightfully, as there are many reasons for that. One of the first is a strong link between employees' engagement and operational effectiveness, so no wonder that profitability, operational effectiveness and customer satisfaction is higher in the companies with high employee engagement strategies than in those with low engagement strategies. Secondly, as research indicates, engaged employees are less likely to leave their job (Wesley & Krishnan in Lubis et al., 2023), they have significantly lower absenteeism rate, as well as higher safety incidents (Sorens in Md Karim et al., 2023). Also, highly engaged employees feel important, enthusiastic, happy about the work, and valued, and have a perception that working time passes very fast (Truss et al. in Omkar, 2020). All the above mentioned highlight the importance of creating an environment that reinforces and drives employee engagement.

Compressed Work and Employee Engagement

It is no doubt compressed work schedules can positively impact physical engagement by providing employees with longer periods of rest between workdays. This can result in employees feeling more refreshed and energized when they are at work, leading to higher levels of physical engagement in completing tasks efficiently (Kiprono, 2018). More so, compressed work schedules can enhance cognitive engagement by allowing employees to have more uninterrupted time for deep work and

problem-solving. With longer stretches of time off from work, employees may experience reduced cognitive fatigue and improved focus when they return to work, leading to higher levels of cognitive engagement (Dayon & Manigo, 2024).

Compressed work schedules can influence emotional engagement by promoting a better work-life balance for employees. Having more consecutive days off can allow employees to recharge emotionally, spend quality time with family and friends, pursue personal interests, and engage in self-care activities. This improved balance between work and personal life can lead to higher levels of emotional engagement as employees feel more satisfied and fulfilled both inside and outside the workplace (Aliaga et al., 2021; Mayhew, 2014). In conclusion, compressed work schedules can have a positive impact on employee engagement across physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions by providing opportunities for rest, focus, and personal fulfillment. By understanding how different aspects of employee engagement are influenced by compressed work schedules, organizations can design policies that support employee well-being and performance (Wang et al., 2020). In line with the above, the following hypotheses were raised:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between compressed work and employee physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between compressed work and employee cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between compressed work and employee emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

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.

Compressed work and Physical Engagement

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between compressed and physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Correlation of Compressed work and Physical Engagement

		Compressed work	Physical Engagement	
Spearman's rho	Compressed work	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.700**	
		N	.000	
	Physical Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.700**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	175	175

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

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Table above shows r value of 0.700 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to compressed work and physical engagement. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) which states that there is no significant relationship between compressed 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 compressed work and physical engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Compressed Work and Cognitive Engagement

H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between compressed work and cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Correlations of Compressed Work and Cognitive Engagement

		Compressed work	Cognitive Engagement
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.405**
	Compressed work Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	175	175
	Correlation Coefficient	.405**	1.000
	Cognitive Engagement Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	175	175

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

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Table above shows r value of 0.405 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to compressed work and cognitive engagement. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) which states that there is no significant relationship between compressed 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 compressed work and cognitive engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Compressed Work and Emotional Engagement

H_{03} : There is no significant relationship between compressed work and emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Correlations of Compressed Work and Emotional Engagement

		Compressed work	Emotional Engagement
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.611**
	Compressed work Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	175	175
	Correlation Coefficient	.611**	1.000
	Emotional Engagement Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	175	175

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

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Table above shows r value of 0.611 at significance value of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to compressed work and emotional engagement. Since the significant value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) which states that there

is no significant relationship between compressed 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 strong positive significant relationship between compressed work and emotional engagement of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt.

Compressed Work and Employee Engagement

The test of hypotheses one, two and three revealed that there is a significant relationship between compressed 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 Kiprono (2018) which asserted that sometimes works are compressed just to make sure employees and likewise organisations deliver their services at the expected time. More so, the findings is in line with that of Weideman and Hofmeyr (2020) which confirmed that flexible work arrangements (compressed work) are positively associated with employee engagement.

Drawing from the above, it is no doubt compressed work schedules can positively impact physical engagement by providing employees with longer periods of rest between workdays. This can result in employees feeling more refreshed and energized when they are at work, leading to higher levels of physical engagement in completing tasks efficiently (Kiprono, 2018). More so, compressed work schedules can enhance cognitive engagement by allowing employees to have more uninterrupted time for deep work and problem-solving. With longer stretches of time off from work, employees may experience reduced cognitive fatigue and improved focus when they return to work, leading to higher levels of cognitive engagement (Dayon & Manigo, 2024).

Compressed work schedules can influence emotional engagement by promoting a better work-life balance for employees. Having more consecutive days off can allow employees to recharge emotionally, spend quality time with family and friends, pursue personal interests, and engage in self-care activities. This improved balance between work and personal life can lead to higher levels of emotional engagement as employees feel more satisfied and fulfilled both inside and outside the workplace (Aliaga et al., 2021; Mayhew, 2014). In conclusion, compressed work schedules can have a positive impact on employee engagement across physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions by providing opportunities for rest, focus, and personal fulfillment. By understanding how different aspects of employee engagement are influenced by compressed work schedules, organizations can design policies that support employee well-being and performance (Wang et al., 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analyses and discussion of findings, the study concluded that compressed 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 establish clear guidelines and expectations regarding performance and availability during compressed workweeks as such would make employees understand what is expected of them thus enhance their physical engagement.
2. Management of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should promote a healthy work-life balance within compressed schedules. This can be achieved by encouraging employees to take breaks, utilize their time off effectively, and avoid overworking themselves during longer days as such would increase their cognitive engagement.
3. Management of fast food restaurants in Port Harcourt should create channels for regular feedback allows employees to voice their concerns or suggestions regarding the compressed work schedule. Managers should actively solicit input from their teams about how the arrangement is

working for them and be open to making adjustments based on this feedback as such enhance their emotional engagement.

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