



## Navigating Workplace Fun in the Midst of Crisis: A Study on Employee Engagement Strategies in the Hospitality Industry Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The perception of “workplace fun” is gaining hold in the hospitality sector as individuals realize how crucial it is to have fun at work. This study employed an “employer-push, employee-need” technique to thrive a conceptual model of the elements influencing workplace fun during COVID-19. Antecedents were characterized as duo of “employee-pull” (employee anticipation along with the satisfaction with the working environment) and duo of “employer-push” (Comparative dominance and open communication channel) factors. At COVID-19 in Multan, 19 frontline personnel (5 frontline managers and 14 frontline staff) from the hospitality industry participated in in-depth, one-on-one interviews in a qualitative format. The findings validated the perspectives of both the employer as well as staff on the workplace fun. The concluding section of this research highlights the key research study consequences and future research aims at workplace fun.

**Keywords:** Comparative advantage, Communication, Expectation, COVID-19, Hospitality

### 1. Introduction

From past ten years, hotel firms have come to understand the importance of having fun at work (Tunku and Rahman, 2014), and studies have supported this notion (Khan, Mahmood, Ayoub, and Hussain, 2011). Companies want to change the parameters and expectations of traditional jobs by making their workforce more fun (Yang, Wang and Yang, 2020). In today’s dynamic and competitive work climate, employees look for opportunities to enjoy their work in a variety of ways. According to Rabbi, Ali, Ali, and Khan (2014), the researchers also looked at ways to encourage employees to have fun at work and offered numerous instances of enjoyable events hosted by businesses. Enjoying oneself at work enhances employee productivity, well-being, and performance, and helps businesses recruit and retain talent (Su, Swanson, Hsu & Chen, 2017). You can deepen your knowledge of hotel management and develop new methods to promote innovation (A, 2017).

Research has examined the effects of joy in the workplace and emphasized its significance (Ding, 2015). The results indicate that joy enhances work quality and team performance. Enjoyment of work also improves employee performance (Eunice, Korir, Buyeke, Wafula, and Musyoki, 2015; Ali and Rehman, 2015), contributes to increasing customer satisfaction (Phillips, Barnes, Zigan, and Schegg, 2017), and attracts potential applicants. Business (Nimri, Patiar & Kensbock, 2017; Ali, 2022). A change in the hospitality industry has resulted from the realization of how important it is to enjoy one’s work since it promotes enjoyment and enhances team and individual performance. Businesses can find methods to attain job satisfaction when they provide an enjoyable work environment for their staff. According to Han et al. (2016), engaging in enjoyable workplace activities fosters group cohesion, lowers intra-group conflict improved team performance.

However, since the focus has been on the obvious benefits thus far, a qualitative study is required to define the context of the delight of working in the hospitality business. This study employed the “push-pull” theory (Zmud, 1982, 1984). This study intends to investigate the characteristics that underpin workplace satisfaction in the hotel industry during COVID-19 by employing the “push from employer, needs of workers” method. The study specifically sought the following scientific objectives:

1. Create a theoretical model of the factors influencing workplace fun.
2. Determine the components influencing workplace fun from the perspectives of staff and employers (employer push and employee pull factors).
3. Use a qualitative method to validate the model in the hospitality sector.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. Workplace fun

A current research study on management and marketing in the hospitality industry has focused on business and human resource management components (Abdullah, Jayaraman, 2016). The impact of connecting businesses, employees, and clients is significant in the hotel and tourism industry (Umasuthan, Park & Ryu, 2017). Fun at work is explained as “a variety of entertaining and entertaining activities that have a positive impact on the attitudes and productivity of individuals and groups” or further concisely as “a work environment that makes you smile” (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2009). Businesses can deliberately promote, support, and initiate a variety of entertaining and entertaining actions, including B. serving meals both on field excursions and at work (Kwakye, 2012).

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Employees who take part in these activities may feel happy, content, or joyful (Tunku & Rahman, 2014). Fun at work encourages sociability among workers in addition to enjoyment, play, and leisure (Ali and Ahmad, 2012). A range of events that are held in the workplace to encourage sociability between organization, workers, and consumers are referred to as entertainment activities. Companies can offer various activities and events of this type in the workplace (Seth & Khan, 2015). According to Ford et al. (2003), enjoyable workplace activities include company-provided food and drinks, employee appreciation and award days, and dress code policies. These events in the hospitality industry include competitions for productivity, social gatherings, teamwork, and open celebrations of professional and personal accomplishments (Wu and Chen, 2014). Hotel firms consider the benefits of having fun at work and make sure that the activities align with the goals and the personality traits of the staff. Three types of pleasure in the workplace have been identified: managed pleasure, task fun, and fun at work (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, and Paladino, 1944). Managed Fun refers to formal amusement packages that are planned to fulfill a business's strategic goals. Task fun occurs naturally in individuals. Fun at work is created when work is inherently fun or fun (Yasin, Ghafoor, Lodhi, Ahmed, and Kausar, 2015). Bolton and Houlihan (2009) used the categories reward for progress, pleasure as commitment, relief from pain, and confinement to create a leadership incentive matrix for fun at work. Similar to this, Fisher (2010) described contentment at work as a brief, unified state of mind, pleasant feelings, and positive attitudes that arise at work.

## **2.2. An employer-push and employee-pull method**

The elements impacting workplace fun were analyzed using an updated employer-push-employee-pull model based on Schon's (1967) TP and NP theories. The employer-push, employee-pull strategy was utilized to develop a framework for having fun at work.

**Employer-push: Comparative advantages of workplace fun:** According to Sheikh, Mirza, Aftab, and Asghar (2014), the Comparative benefits of workplace fun include gratification of activities, pleasure, and play. Employers can benefit from having fun at work by increasing employee job satisfaction and improving performance (Reddy, 2017). Workplace fun may reduce employee productivity if it does not produce comparable benefits for businesses. Employee motivation to improve the work environment for their coworkers is one of the benefits of workplace fun. Employees are more likely to participate in happy and enjoyable activities when they are enjoying themselves at work. Through these activities, employers can boost their reputation among their staff. Workplace fun boosts job satisfaction, creates challenging goals, and encourages positive feedback.

**Employer-push: Open communication channel:** A corporation provides staff with an open communication channel to express their thoughts, particularly regarding work practices (Aibek & Ariffin, 2015).

These channels ensure that supplies and information are moved as efficiently as possible between units. Many stakeholders in the workplace can provide a diverse range of perspectives, and a constant responsiveness to criticism evolves. Employees are more inclined to trust their employer because of this open line of communication (Aday & Yener 2014). Companies can promote social processes by providing vital information and redefining the evolving nature of enjoyable work activities. The level of workplace fun is increased by open communication between employers and employees. It offers protection, equitable treatment, and appreciation for employees' openness to participation and idea sharing.

**Employee-pull: Employee Expectations:** The majority of working area of organizations are not as great as workers think they are. Most of the employees want to have a positive impact on their businesses and still enjoy their work. Staff work-life balance has improved in large part due to an increase in fun events that satisfy employee expectations. Employee expectations are an assessment of the value of a workplace based on the company's willingness to fulfill staff members' requirements while they are at work. Staff and management are more likely to be in a fun workplace when they work for a company they are enthusiastic about, according to Weber, Baier, and Willers (2015).

**Employee-pull: Satisfaction with working Environment:** Changes to workplace surroundings have potential toward boost employee productivity. To encourage work-life harmony, workplace settings must be developed and structured to support staff comfort levels. A fun and affianced staff helps employees to reformulate workplace surroundings seeing that pleasant, which is a fantastic technique for firms to deliver pleasure and enjoyment to their employees. Employees are more likely to offer their best effort in a nice environment, and they also prefer to work in a calm and fun environment (Anvar, 2014).

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Sample**

Qualitative technique was used to generate deeply prime information for the investigation of complex occurrences in corporate factors, specified investigative nature of workplace fun (Sen, 2014). This enabled full documentation of the facts as well as analysis of workplace business procedures. As a result, consequence of research study questions along with particular points of view about workplace enjoyment during COVID-19 may be assessed.

Interviews provide important chances for in-depth studies and show each participant's unique perspective, which may be critical to comprehending the situation.

The sample was provided by the Multan hospitality industry, which includes 19 frontline staff (5 frontline managers and 14 frontline staff).

### 3.2. Instruments

The data for this study were acquired and evaluated using an inductive technique. In addition to choosing how to answer open-ended questions, participants were asked to respond audibly to inquiries on workplace fun (Creswell, 2003). Four open-ended questions regarding the factors influencing workplace fun were posed to them: (i) In your organization, how would you characterize workplace fun during COVID-19? (ii) What factors, in the employer's opinion, influence workplace fun at the business during COVID-19? (iii) How do the factors influencing workplace fun at the firm during COVID-19 affect employees' perceptions of it? (iv) Concerning your position as a frontline supervisor or frontline worker, what does a company do that satisfies your expectations? These research study inquiries and their classification of data were predicated on the idea of the factors influencing workplace fun. Two months of phone interviews with participants yielded the data. The in-depth interviews were done over the phone because of COVID-19.

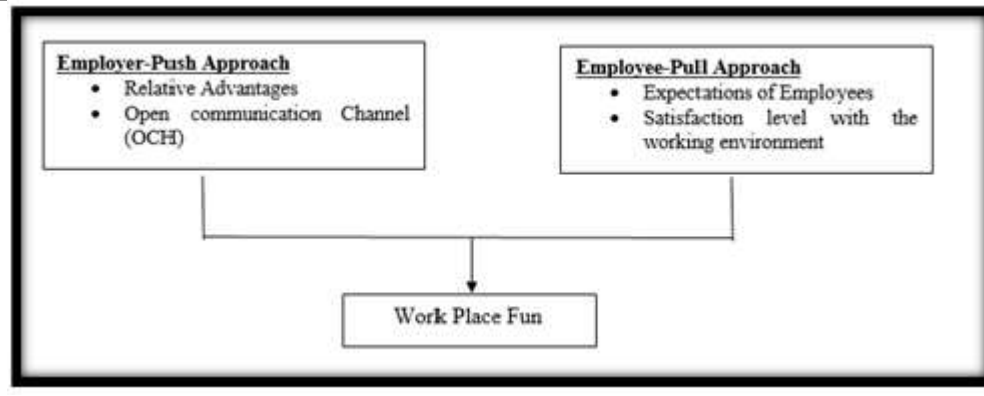
## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Demographic profile of respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the 19 respondents. According to the table, there were five frontline managers and fourteen frontline staff.

The identified elements determining workplace fun were validated using information from the interviews, and quotes that corroborated the qualities presented as well as the Comparative relevance of each item were chosen. The results showed that the variables that determined workplace fun were two employee-pull elements, employee expectations and satisfaction with the working environment, and two employer-push aspects, Comparative advantages, and open communication channels.

### 4.2. Conceptual Model



The figure shows the framework developed for workplace fun

**Table-1**

Job description	No	%
Frontline supervisors	5	26.3
Frontlineworkers	14	73.7
Age		
18-23	3	15.7
24-26	5	26.3
27-30	4	21.1
30-34	3	15.8
35-38	2	10.5
39 & above	2	10.5
Education		
Bachelors	6	31.5
Diploma	4	21.1
Matric	9	47.4
Service tenure		
1-3 years	3	15.8
4-6	7	36.8
6-9	5	26.3
10 & more years	4	21.1

### 4.3. Themes

#### 4.3.1. Comparative advantages of workplace fun

Employers have worked incredibly hard to enhance workplaces during the past 10 years. During COVID-19, many of the

employees who participated in the interviews reported positive properties of workplace fun, such as productivity performance, increased improvement, support for increased enjoyment of work duties, and the development of associations with colleagues and supervisors. Front-line workers can reduce stress by having fun at work. Staff members can have fun together by participating in enjoyable office activities.

Customers who share their great retail experiences with COVID-19 are more likely to respond when they are having a good time at work. Employees can deliver an entirely different level of customer service to clients. (M1: Comparative Advantage)

Coworkers sharing their emotions is one benefit of workplace fun. For frontline staff, this is an excellent feature. Especially during COVID-19, their good emotions have the power to entice and inspire clients, increasing their propensity to make a purchase. (M3: Comparative Advantage) Having fun at work can boost both the volume and quality of employee production dramatically. Even more importantly, during COVID-19, workplace fun increases company commitment and job satisfaction. Workplace enjoyment has the potential to improve our company's reputation for providing excellent customer service and displaying that it values its employees. (M4: Comparative Advantage)

Employees can laugh and joke around in fun workplaces, which may be additional flexible and well-situated than typical work arrangements. A lively workplace generates greater employee interactions. Employees who have fun at work are more likely to interact with their job, that can improve customer service. Important quotes from the interviews are as follows:

With the help of workplace fun during the pandemic, the problems offered by tedious and uninteresting work duties can be overcome. Employers can improve staff management in today's volatile business environment by cultivating a positive work environment. The staff understands that management will assist them in providing excellent customer service. (M3: Comparative Advantage)

It is more adaptive and useful to have fun at work than to adhere to standard work procedures. Employee autonomy and responsibility at work will increase as a result. Workers think this will allow them to have more decision-making authority. (M5: Comparative Advantage) We have a wonderful time at work and wish to take on more hard tasks. (S7: Comparative Advantage)

Still, businesses are likely concerned about the cost of creating a stimulating work atmosphere. It takes more time, money, and effort to build engaging work practices over time. Prospective employees are more inclined to apply if there is workplace fun during COVID-19, but firms must invest in and encourage this trend.

Through the promotion of the idea of workplace fun, a cost-based strategy raises the value of human resources to the firm and is consistent with the soft management ethos. (M1: Comparative Advantage) At present, the nature of work agreements is transforming. Every business, in my opinion, should allow its people to work pleasantly. A high turnover of frontline staff would charge a lot in the near run due to this pandemic condition. Making the workplace fun may help companies attract new staff! (M2: Comparative Advantage)

Maintaining a competitive edge in the highly competitive corporate world of today can only be achieved via continuous improvement. We need to be prepared for the challenge since the business market is full of uncertainties, particularly in the wake of COVID-19 (M4: Comparative Advantage)

A well-known advantage of workplace fun was peer support, which added to the Comparative advantage. Interacting with coworkers through engaging in interesting office activities could facilitate communication. Workers are free to communicate their feelings to their peers and talk about their working duties. Fun at work can enhance work-life balance and enable workers to give their all in workplace.

The results of a return on employee attitudes examination combined with information about their job performance would probably provide the most accurate evaluation of achievement of fun at work. Sentiment analysis is a critical component of employee evaluations. (M4: Comparative Advantage) If difficulties arise, peer assistance can be sought. We all have faith in each other and the self-assurance to lead more fulfilling lives at work. (S1: Comparative Advantage) Numerous staff events, like baking workshops and hiking excursions, were planned, and we extended the invitations to the friends and family of staff members. This strategy aims to promote good work-life stability among family, career, along with life. (M5: Comparative Advantage)

#### **4.3.2. Open communication channel**

Employers who work to make their workplaces enjoyable for their employees provide more than just comparative benefits; they also facilitate improved and transparent communication. Open lines of communication can contribute to a friendly work atmosphere. Employees who work in an open communication atmosphere are more psychologically invested and keen to share current information. With the help of workplace enjoyment during COVID-19, strong future social exchange relationships, which are relational signals expressed in interpersonal interaction and conversation, can be developed.

The most essential benefit of possessing fun on work, when collate to a secure work environment, is the development of the interaction between supervisors and frontline staff.

We have several enjoyable events at work that all revolve around the theme of "having fun and being happy." (S3: Open Communication).

We at present have a fantastic work culture with a comfortable working atmosphere. This can improve both intra- and inter-departmental communication. We invite our teammates to share our joy and feelings with them (M2: Open Communication)

According to employee feedback, having fun at work during COVID-19 makes better the channels of

communication that employees use to communicate. In many settings, having fun at work increases overall communication among coworkers since it allows them to communicate their emotions to one another directly. Nowadays, fun workplace activities serve to develop a strong culture and a productive firm. (M4: Open Communication) Employers who are successful employ tactics such as peer-to-peer, bottom-up, and top-down communication. Stakeholders in a firm can participate in their workplace's enjoyment. Employees are better equipped to communicate at work.

All of our employees have open channels of communication with one another and with managers at all levels, which allow them to talk in front of superiors more easily.

(M1: Open Communication)

Having fun at work encourages both vertical and horizontal employee participation and creates efficient communication channels (S2: Open Communication)

Happiness at work, in my opinion, helps to some extent with greater communication among coworkers, but it is mostly dependent on increased departmental communication. (S11: Open Communication)

Having fun at work increases the communication connects among the employer and the employees. Open communication at work is novel for Chinese employees. (S12: Open Communication)

#### **4.3.3. Employee expectations**

Staff expectations and levels of job satisfaction have an impact on employees' ability to have fun at work during COVID-19 from both an employer-push and an employee-pull angle. One of pull factors in this regard is employee hope. Having fun at work leads to boost the employee activity. Creating a fun work atmosphere may help to meet employee expectations. Employees can, for example, contribute in social events and tasks with their coworkers and families, and their integrated work responsibilities can meet staff expectations by creating a cheerful work environment.

Because retail customer service is highly demanding and consumers' expectations are constantly changing, having fun at work might help us retain our work ethic. Delivering a significance of enjoyment at work and ensuring that employees do work pleasantly in an office is critical. (S5: Employee Expectations)

We are pleased by means of our company's new work structure and actions. We enjoy participating in these activities since they give us happiness at work.(S6: Employee Expectations)

Because of the epidemic, our company is not only searching for new ways to manage its workforce, but it also sees having fun at work as a new culture that coworkers may adopt. As a result, the nature of work and its duties will alter.(S8: Employee Expectations)

Employees may be shocked to learn that employers are amenable to the concept of having fun at work. This might assist industrial businesses in competing for talent. Having fun at work energizes employees and reinforces their belief that the organization meets their requirements.

Companies can help their business strategy by encouraging a flexible life at work balance that's guided by employee enjoyment on work. (S4: Employee Expectations)

Most employees enjoy the benefits and flexibility that come with workplace fun. People appreciate having fun at work, especially when it comes to COVID-19. I believe our company's employees are pleased with the modifications. (S9: Employee Expectations)

The primary issue in management is the human factor. In a pandemic, I don't think companies would object if they provided their employees with a comfortable workplace. They would even be devoted to the company and enjoy spending their time here at work. (S10: Employee Expectations)

#### **4.3.4. Satisfaction with working environment**

According to research, employees' enjoyment on work is likely to be influenced by their level of workplace satisfaction. Employee happiness in the workplace has a substantial impact on performance and is thus crucial from the aspect of employee pull.

Large corporations, I believe, are more inclined to plan workplace fun as long as they have the wherewithal to hold the actions. Human capitals can bring about variations in a workplace. (M3: Level of Satisfaction with the Working Environment).

An employer takes the effort to collect and evaluate data to more clearly define how to implement fun at work. An employer is keen to make all necessary changes to the new working environment. (S13: Workplace contentment Concerns about workplace enjoyment are influenced by the staff's varying levels of satisfaction with their jobs. Typically, management looks to the current workplace for extra assessment. (M4: Level of Satisfaction with Working Environment)

### **5. Limitations and Future Research Study**

Amusing workplace activities have been examined in the past for their effects on constituent attachment, employee engagement, pressure, burnout, and company impacted (Becker & Tews, 2016). More definitions of workplace fun must be found in literature as well as in business sector. Future research studies must better understand and clarify the chain of effect interactions relating to workplace fun during COVID-19. This study collected data from 19 hotel employees in Pakistan, but due to the small sample size and convenience sampling technique, the conclusions cannot be generalized. A thorough survey would be another option to collect more evidence on the effects of workplace fun features.

Furthermore, only characteristics connected with workplace fun in a specific situation are evaluated. While workplace fun is a key issue in modern enterprises in Pakistan, experts should also investigate workplace fun in other countries. For many firms and employees in the hospitality industry, this would be a novel concept. Future research should concentrate on how the workplace fun policy might support family-friendly work environments. This research has consequences for hotel-related businesses. Finding contentment at work is a critical business activity with substantial ramifications for hotel personnel. (Tews, Stafford, and Michel, 2014).

## 6. Conclusion

A conceptual model that illustrates the context of joy in the workplace has been established following the theory of TP and NP (Zmud, 1982, 1984) based on a model to support employers and draw employees during COVID-19. This study expands our conceptual understanding of the main aspects underpinning work pleasure in COVID-19. An analysis of case study data and literature identifies the parameters that influence the level of enjoyment at work during COVID-19. These characteristics are then classified into incentive categories for both hotel employers and staff. The findings provide a summary of numerous theoretical claims and result in a conceptual model of the components that allow businesses to operate in the middle of a pandemic.

This research covers the research study quarries by recognizing the two factors that drive employers (the Comparative benefits of job satisfaction and an open communication channel) and attract employees (employee hope along with work environment agreement) to create a joyful work environment during COVID-19. The results assess the aspects that contribute to work satisfaction in the hotel industry and expand the applicability of the TP-NP theory. Employers can be driven by two reasons, according to this paradigm: an open channel of communication and the Comparative benefits of job satisfaction. They provide a better grasp of why companies attempt to provide enjoyable jobs. Companies benefit from having fun at work during COVID-19, as evidenced by high candidate attractiveness, greater commercial engagement, and higher professional engagement (Tews et al., 2012). Employees desire to work in a pleasant environment where they may develop into their best selves, according to the two dimensions of employee attraction studied, namely employee expectations and job satisfaction. Businesses may support enjoyable events such as sharing Christmas gifts, serving meals to coworkers, and sponsoring pleasant contesting to encourage pleasure and enjoyment at work (Becker and Tews, 2016). Employees may like working in a customer-focused workplace.

To meet employee expectations, firms must establish common values and beliefs to build a positive workplace culture. Supervisors who model engaging storylines, recurring patterns of amusing chores, lively behavior, and humor in the workplace may be able to instill such a culture. Businesses can also give employees clear recommendations on how to have fun at work during COVID-19, such as drafting a policy that supports supervisors in having fun. Managers can improve the environment by planning social events such as charity outings, entertainment, and community service. Peer socialization provides managers and front-line employees with greater opportunities to create relationships at work, such as through working sessions, lunches with coworkers, and celebrating personal and professional accomplishments. Birthdays are being exchanged. However, to meet expectations and maintain a high level of service, it is critical to find a balance between work and leisure.

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