

## PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYEES' RESPONSES TO NEGATIVE WORK EVENTS IN RESTAURANTS AND FAST FOOD OUTLETS IN BAYELSA STATE

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### Abstract

*This study examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee responses to negative work events among employees of restaurants and fast food outlets in Bayelsa State. The cross-sectional and correlational research designs were employed in the study. A structured questionnaire for psychological empowerment and employee responses to negative work events with Chronbach alpha reliability coefficients greater than .70 was used to generate primary data for the study. The respondents involved 220 drawn from 35 restaurants and fast food outlets in Bayelsa State. Data so collected were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Hypotheses formulated for the study were analysed with the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance. The results for all the hypotheses are  $r = .656, -.887, .716, -.604, .818, -.724, .746$  and  $-.864$  respectively for hypotheses 1 to 8 which are all significant @  $p = .000 < .05$  for all hypotheses. These results indicated that there is a significant relationship between all the dimensions of psychological empowerment and employees' positive or negative responses to unpleasant work events. Given these findings, it was concluded that there is a significant empirical relationship between psychological empowerment and employee responses to negative work events among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State. Based on this conclusion, it was recommended among others that managers of restaurants and fast food outlets should therefore focus on crafting work environments that stimulate psychological empowerment by making tasks meaningful, offer prospects for skill improvement, permit job autonomy, and emphasizing the impact of employees' contributions so as to increase positive responses and reduce negative responses.*

**Keywords:** *psychological empowerment, negative work events, meaning, competence, autonomy, impact*

## Introduction

New entrants to the restaurants and fast food business in Nigeria and Bayelsa State have increased competition, forcing firms to become more aggressive in their pursuit of market share. Hospitality workers

want to keep their best workers to stay on top. However, like most companies, many in the sector struggle to retain talented workers. Obtaining complete employee commitment and engagement is difficult due to various causes. Thus, firms must prioritize employee commitment or engagement because losing one talented individual might worsen the problem. This might worsen during unfavorable work experiences. Workplace problems can lower morale and performance. It could damage an organization's reputation and ability to recruit.

NWEs from poor management, gossip, work conflicts, abusive supervision, and others undermine employee confidence, commitment, morale, and engagement (Picincu, 2020, para. 2). These may become toxic if not addressed appropriately because affected personnel will react physically and psychologically in a positive or negative way. Employees who respond negatively frequently leave or are neglected, while those who respond positively gain voice and loyalty.

Thus, firms should encourage employees to respond positively and constructively to NWEs rather than adversely and destructively with exit and neglect, which harms the organization. Psychological empowerment (PE) can boost positive responses and decrease negative ones. PE, a construct that illuminates a drive to believe that work tasks serve a higher purpose (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990), is empirically linked to several workplace outcomes. Thus, convincing employees that their work activities might help achieve a greater purpose may motivate them to perform harder and respond positively to NWEs. PE motivates intrinsically since completing a task rewards itself and provides various intrinsic benefits (Colquitt et al., 2011). Four cognitive concepts—meaningfulness, self-determination, competence, and impact—can be intrinsically motivating (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and may encourage positive responses to NWEs, according to PE construct models.

Restaurant attendants have a difficult and dangerous job, yet unfavorable work occurrences are common. Hospitality workers must face criticism from managers and everyday insults from clients, which can emotionally exhaust them. Therefore, such employees naturally react badly to stressful NWEs. PE, like other workplace outcomes, will help reduce these negatives by making work relevant and rewarding and reassuring employees that their efforts matter. When psychologically empowered, employees have some control over how they complete their jobs, making them self-reliant and self-regulating. They're motivated to take on imminent tasks because everyone in the workplace trusts them to be competent. Thus, rather than wallow in self-pity after unfavorable work occurrences, employees will likely to voice and loyalty and reduce exit and neglect as NWE responses.

PE may promote favorable NWE reactions and reduce negative ones. Sadly, there are little empirical studies in Nigeria on psychological empowerment and employee responses to unfavorable work situations. There is however a dearth of studies that has examined the relationship between PE and employees' responses to NWEs. This had left a vacuum in the literature of psychological empowerment and employee responses to NWEs. This study examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee responses to negative work events using employees of restaurants and fast food outlets in Bayelsa state to address this gap.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES**

### **2.1 Psychological Empowerment**

Psychological empowerment is acknowledged as a key concept that affects diverse employee attitudes, outcomes and behaviors, especially in reaction to NWEs in the work place. Psychological

empowerment comprises a throng of motivational cognitions swayed by an employee's work environment, having of four cognitive dimensions: meaningfulness, competence, autonomy, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). Each of these dimensions of improving an employee's confidence in task completion, manage challenges and contribute to overall organizational outcomes.

Meaningfulness pertains to the value that individuals assign to their work, influenced by their personal ideals or standards (Spreitzer, 1995). Employees who perceive their tasks as meaningful are more inclined to demonstrate resilience when confronted with adversity. Recent studies indicate that employees who view their work as meaningful are more adept at managing negative experiences, thereby decreasing the risk of stress and burnout (Martela & Riekkı, 2018). Moreover, meaningful work serves as a protective factor against negative emotions, promoting positive responses to challenges (Van Wingerden et al., 2017).

Competence reflects the employee's confidence in his/her ability to execute work-related tasks effectively (Spreitzer, 1995). Heightened perceptions of competence can improve an employees' ability to manage negative work events, as they demonstrate greater confidence in handling challenges and learning lessons from failures (Kim & Beehr, 2020). Competence promotes adaptive coping techniques which keeps them actively engaged rather than engage in withdrawal behaviours (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Autonomy, otherwise known as self-determination, is the extent to which employees believe that they exercise control over how they do their work and the decision-making processes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Such control could enhance the employees' ability to manage stressful work situations. Employees who enjoy autonomy have a higher tendency to demonstrate preemptive behaviors in response to challenges (Hon & Chan, 2013). Furthermore, autonomy is associated with reduced emotional exhaustion and negative affect in the aftermath of stressful work events (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Hence, having job autonomy could foster positive responses while reducing negative responses to NWEs.

Impact, reflects to employees' perceptions of the significance of their efforts on organizational outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995). Employees who believe they their efforts and contributions have a significant impact on organisational outcomes are more likely to respond positively to unfavorable work events, interpreting challenges as prospects for growth and advancement (Seibert et al., 2011). Research indicates that employees who perceive a greater impact are more inclined to respond constructively to negative feedback or work failures, actively seeking methods to improve performance and positively contribute to the organization (Xanthopoulou et al., 2012).

## 2.2 Employees Responses to Negative Work Events

Negative work events (NWEs) are a collection of all distressing occurrences at work. NWEs cover a wide range of occurrences that makes work unpleasant and boring. They may result from abusive supervision, uncooperative and unsupportive coworkers, poor remuneration, inadequate or no level of self-determination/autonomy and a whole lot more. When such occurrences become a common place at work, employees tend to respond in a way that will be alright for them.

Research on reactions to negative events at work show/suggest that employees might respond in one of four general ways (Farrell, 1970 in Colquitt, et al., 2011). First, the employee might try to remove him/herself from the situation by either being absent from work more often than necessary or voluntarily leave the organization (exit). Secondly, the employee may try to change the situation by meeting and collaborating with management to seek ways to improve the situation (voice). Thirdly, the employee may just smile and endure it while maintaining his/her efforts although unhappy (loyalty). And fourthly, the

employee may simply go through the gestures, deliberately allowing performance to deteriorate gradually as he/she mentally phases out (neglect). These four responses could be grouped into positive or negative responses. Voice and loyalty are positive responses to NWEs and are constructive and good to the overall functioning of the organization. Voice is an active and productive reaction in that the employee tries to mend the situation. Meanwhile, loyalty is a passive and constructive response in which an employee maintains unrestricted support for the situation while hoping privately for the situation to improve. On the other hand, exit and neglect are negative responses to NWEs and are destructive and bad for the overall functioning of the organization. Exit is a vigorous and vicious response to NWEs in which an employee either end or restrict his/her membership in the organizational. Neglect however, is a reflexive and damaging response in which an employee's interest and efforts in the job declines.

## **2.3 Psychological Empowerment and Employees' Responses to NWEs**

### **2.3.1 Meaningfulness and Employees Responses to NWEs**

Meaningfulness is the employees perceived worth of his work which agrees with his ideals and views. Employees that perceive meaning in their work have a higher tendency to be resilient during challenging times. van Zyl et al. (2022) found that employees with higher perceptions of meaning record reduced stress and views NWEs as prospects for growth and advancement. Jiang et al. (2021) also reported that employees with an adequate sense of meaning in their job are more likely to display positive coping strategies, like problem-solving while seeking social support, instead of engaging in withdrawn behaviors. It thus expected that meaningfulness will enhance positive responses to NWEs while reducing negative responses to NWEs at work. We thus, propose that:

*Ho<sub>1</sub>. Meaningfulness will not have a significant inverse relationship with employees' negative responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

*Ho<sub>2</sub>. Meaningfulness will not have a significant positive relationship with employees' positive responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

### **2.3.2. Competence and Employees Responses to NWEs**

Competence is the individual's trust in his or her ability to successfully complete assignments. It has the ability to shield the impact of NWEs, as competent employees capable and more likely to be engaged in adaptive and coping behaviors (Seibert et al., 2019). A longitudinal study by Kim et al. (2020) found that employees with higher feelings of competence are more preemptive in addressing work challenges via the use of feedback and the initiation of conflict resolution dialogs. Such employees re also less likely to experience fatigue and burnout when responding to stressful events. This shows that perceived competence simplifies adaptive coping strategies and behaviours. It could be plausible to assume that competence will encourage positive responses to NWEs and possibly stop negative responses from occurring even in the face of distressing work place occurrences. We therefore propose again that:

*Ho<sub>3</sub>. Competence will not have a significant inverse relationship with employees' negative responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

*Ho<sub>4</sub>. Competence will not have a significant positive relationship with employees' positive responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

### **2.3.3. Autonomy and Employee Responses to NWEs**

Autonomy, is the nous of having control over one's work and decisions. It is fundamental in determining employee responses to NWEs. Autonomy empowers employees to take ownership of work problems and find alternate solutions that agree with their personal and official goals. Zhang and Bartol

(2020) showed that employees with increased perceptions of autonomy enjoys better job satisfaction and are resilient in the face of distress and NWEs. They are likely to use innovative problem-solving mechanisms while taking the lead in combating the adverse impact of such events. Additionally, Erdogan et al. (2021) discovered that autonomy moderated the relationship between job stressors and emotional exhaustion, suggesting that employees who had more control over their work were less susceptible to the negative consequences of negative work events. We, thus propose again that:

*Ho<sub>5</sub>. Autonomy will not have a significant inverse relationship with employees’ negative responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

*Ho<sub>6</sub>. Autonomy will not have a significant positive relationship with employees’ positive responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

### 2.4.3. Impact and Employees Responses to NWEs

Impact, the fourth dimension of psychological empowerment, refers to the extent to which employees feel their work contributes to the organization’s goals. Employees who perceive their work as impactful are likely to display higher engagement, even in the face of distressing work events. Spreitzer (2020), noted that employees who trust that they make a significant difference in their work have a higher tendency to remain inspired and committed when exposed to negative work events. They seldom display withdraw behaviours or are actively disengaged, as they are aware of the larger significance of their efforts and contributions. Morgeson et al. (2021), found that employees with a deep sense of impact re more resilient when the organization implements change and, actively participate in problem-solving endeavors and helps others scale such transition. All of these show that impact is motional and thus inspires commitment on the part of employees. This will in effect spur voice and loyalty the basic forms of employees’ positive responses to NWEs. Impact can therefore, encourage positive responses and minimizes negative responses to NWEs. Given these submissions, we propose that:

*Ho<sub>7</sub>. Impact will not have a significant inverse relationship with employees’ negative responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

*Ho<sub>8</sub>. Impact will not have a significant positive relationship with employees’ positive responses to NWEs among restaurants and fast food employees in Bayelsa State.*

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The current study sought to examine the empirical link between PE on employees’ responses to NWEs. The cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Data for the study was generated through the use of a structured questionnaire. The populations sample comprised 220 employees from 35 restaurants and fast food outlets in Bayelsa State. Scales for PE were adapted from Spreitzer (1995) and the scales for employee responses were developed by the researchers. The Cronbach’s alpha test for instrument reliability was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument. The Pearson product moment correlation was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significant. The reliability test results are displayed in the tables below.

## 4.0 Results

The results of the tests are presented in this section. Items in bold are reliability coefficients.

**Table. 1 Correlation outcome of meaningfulness and employee responses to NWEs**

	Mean	1	2	3
Meaningfulness	4.446	<b>.874</b>		

Positive Responses to NWEs	4.633	.656**	<b>.702</b>	
negative Responses to NWEs	1.442	-.887**	.460**	<b>.878</b>

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

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The results of hypotheses 1 & 2 indicate that  $r = .656$  for positive responses and  $-.887$  for negative responses. Both are significant @  $p = .000 < .05$ . This implies a significant relationship between meaningfulness and employee responses to NWEs. While the relationship is positive with positive responses as increase in meaningfulness perceptions will result in a corresponding increase in positive responses, the link with negative responses is invers indicating that increased perceptions of meaningfulness will reduce negative responses. Given these findings, the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternate hypotheses are accepted.

**Table. 2 Correlation outcome of competence and employee responses to NWEs**

	Mean	1	2	3
Competence	3.826	<b>.882</b>		
Positive Responses to NWEs	4.633	.716**	<b>.702</b>	
negative Responses to NWEs	1.442	-.604**	.460**	<b>.878</b>

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

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The results of hypotheses 3 & 4 indicate that  $r = .716$  for positive responses and  $-.604$  for negative responses. Both are significant @  $p = .000 < .05$ . This implies a significant relationship between competence and employee responses to NWEs. While the relationship is positive with positive responses as increase in competence perceptions will result in a corresponding increase in positive responses, the link with negative responses is invers indicating that increased perceptions of competence will reduce negative responses. Given these findings, the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternate hypotheses are accepted.

**Table. 3 Correlation outcome of autonomy and employee responses to NWEs**

	Mean	1	2	3
Autonomy	3.406	<b>.822</b>		
Positive Responses to NWEs	4.633	.818**	<b>.702</b>	
negative Responses to NWEs	1.442	-.724**	.460**	<b>.878</b>

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

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The results of hypotheses 5 & 6 indicate that  $r = .818$  for positive responses and  $-.724$  for negative responses. Both are significant @  $p = .000 < .05$ . This implies a significant relationship between autonomy and employee responses to NWEs. While the relationship is positive with positive responses as increase in autonomy perceptions will result in a corresponding increase in positive responses, the link with negative responses is invers indicating that increased perceptions of autonomy will reduce negative responses. Given these findings, the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternate hypotheses are accepted.

**Table. 4 Correlation outcome of impact and employee responses to NWEs**

	Mean	1	2	3
Impact	4.22	<b>.892</b>		
Positive Responses to NWEs	4.633	.746**	<b>.702</b>	
negative Responses to NWEs	1.442	-.864**	.460**	<b>.878</b>

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

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The results of hypotheses 7 & 8 indicate that  $r = .746$  for positive responses and  $-.864$  for negative responses. Both are significant @  $p = .000 < .05$ . This implies a significant relationship between impact and employee responses to NWEs. While the relationship is positive with positive responses as increase in impact perceptions will result in a corresponding increase in positive responses, the link with negative responses is invers indicating that increased perceptions of impact will reduce negative responses. Given these findings, the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternate hypotheses are accepted.

### 5.0 Discussions of Findings

Meaningfulness of a job enables employees to see NWEs as challenges rather than threats. Hence employees with a high sense of meaningfulness are able to remain calm and focused even in the face of negative work events thereby reducing negative responses to unfavorable work situations. The study found that while meaningfulness is inversely related to employees' negative responses to NWEs, it is positively related to employees' positive responses. This finding corroborates Spreitzer et al. (2020) that meaningfulness enhances employees level of emotional resilience, which helps them to surmount unfavorable work situations with ease. Employees who perceive high meaning in their jobs have higher expectations from their roles and also from the organization. Spreitzer et al (2020) submitted that if such expectations are not met adequately, it would be frustrating and could even reduce positive responses. Hence in the face of NWEs, employees who perceive their jobs to lack meaning will feel that the job is purposeless which will make it harder to remain positive or even make adjustments to adapt.

Employees who are competent can deal work stress better than incompetent employees because they trust their abilities and proficiencies. The study found that higher competence perceptions will increase positive responses while reducing negative responses to NWEs. This finding agrees with Thomas and Velthouse (2021) that employees who are confidence of their abilities are likely to respond positively to NWEs and those with lower competence are likely to respond negatively to NWEs. Competence therefore escalates the employee's confidence in his ability to handle challenging situations while reducing feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. NWEs are capable of endangering competent employees by making NWEs to appear as direct challenges to their skills (Zhang & Bartol, 2019).

Empowered employees, with higher feelings of competence/self-efficacy, are more resilient to negative events because they have the needed job autonomy which allows them to swiftly make decisions affecting how they perform their duties rather than feeling inert. Such autonomy raises felt control, plummets dissatisfaction and pressure during trying instances (Spreitzer, 2022). Employees who are autonomous are likely to use preemptive coping schemes to diminish hostile emotional responses to NWEs. Negative work experiences may make employees to be helpless or indignant. Hence, autonomy is crucial in

combating negative work events as its disruption might lead to active disengagement or defensiveness, (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Employees with perceptions of impact might see hostile work situations as as temporary impediments to their contributions in the organization. Thus feelings of impact can enable employees to mitigate bad events' by reducing setbacks and while enhancing their forward-thinking abilities (Zhang & Bartol, 2023). When employees believe that their jobs are impactful, they see setbacks as opportunities to learn new things. There is however, need to help employees to have adequate feelings of impact. Seibert et al., (2021) noted that a lack of feelings of impact might make employees to feel powerless in the face of NWEs. Such decrease in felt impact could dissuade employees from performing positively because they believe that their efforts does not matter.

## 5.2 Practical Implications and Conclusion

Although psychological empowerment is largely noted as valuable, these findings submit that it might have inadvertent concerns when employees had to deal with NWEs. Restaurants and fast food outlets should thus be alert to how empowerment can sway employees' responses to NWEs. A foremost implication of the findings is the need for balance in empowering employees while also offering adequate support and resources to help employees traverse challenges arising from NWEs. Managers of restaurants and fast food outlets should therefore focus on crafting work environments that stimulate psychological empowerment by making tasks meaningful, offer prospects for skill improvement, permit job autonomy, and emphasizing the impact of employees' contributions. Doing so may assist in reducing employees' negative emotional responses in the face of difficult work situations (Spreitzer et al., 2020).

To alleviate the inverse relationship, hospitality organizations should focus on nurturing resilience together with empowerment. Training employee to be resilient can help them develop strategies for coping with negative events without compromising felt empowerment (Luthans et al., 2015). Hence, when employees are equipped with resilience building tools, restaurants and fast food outlets can enhance positive responses to NWEs while sustaining the gains of psychological empowerment. Management of restaurants and fast food outlets such could implement training programs to assist employees in building competence and create coping mechanisms for NWEs. Training that enhances problem-solving skills and resilience can reduce the intensity of negative responses (Thomas & Velthouse, 2021).

In conclusion, psychological empowerment plays a decisive role in determining how employees respond to NWEs. Employees who enjoy higher perceptions of meaningfulness, competence, autonomy, and impact are likely to display decreased negative responses, signifying that organizations should actively stimulate these empowerment dimensions to promote resilience in the workforce.

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