



An investigation of fun and taking charge behavior: A mechanism of psychological empowerment and promotion focus

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Article Information	Abstract
Article history: Submitted: 11 th Nov, 2024 Accepted: 20 th Dec, 2024 Published: 31 st Dec, 2024	<i>Purpose</i> – Human resources perform better when treated to enjoy their work. Building on this premise, the core aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between fun at work and employees' taking-charge behavior through the mediation of psychological empowerment and the moderating role of promotion focus. <i>Methods</i> – Data for the current study is collected from employees of service sector using lags approach. Overall, 375 useful responses were received and used for analysis. <i>Findings</i> – Findings reveal that fun at work positively influences employees' taking-charge behavior, while psychological empowerment partially mediates this relationship. Additionally, promotion focus strengthened the relationship between fun and taking-charge behavior. <i>Contribution/Value</i> – Building upon the conservation of resources and evolutionary emancipation perspectives, this study adds value to the existing body of knowledge by conceptualizing and empirically testing an unexplored relationship (fun and taking-charge behavior) through a novel explanatory mechanism of psychological empowerment and promotion focus.
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Introduction

Increased competition and environmental dynamism demand higher levels of organizational performance (Moon et al., 2008), which can be achieved through the better utilization of human resources. Organizations demand and cherish human resources that work proactively (Islam et al., 2021; Kaštelan Mrak & Grudić Kvasić, 2021). One such proactive behavior that has gained researchers' attention is taking-charge behavior (Lyu et al., 2022; Redhead et al., 2021), which is defined as employees' constructive and voluntary efforts focused on functional change with respect to individual, team, and organizational work (Morrison and Phelps, 1999). Managers always need employees' volunteer efforts to foreknow their future needs, implement plans, and achieve desired goals (McAllister et al., 2007; Morrison and Phelps, 1999). Although taking charge is a desired behavior because it increases employees' performance, promotes innovation, enhances the adaptability of organizations (Crant, 2000; Fuller et al., 2012; Parker and Collins, 2010), and offers a competitive advantage (Fuller & Marler, 2009; McAllister

et al., 2007; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Parker & Collins, 2010), it is still considered a deterrent because it challenges the status quo, reduces the pace of work (e.g. Bindl & Parker, 2011; Fuller et al., 2012; Grant and Ashford, 2008; Grant et al., 2009), and leads to work-to-family conflicts (Cangiano et al., 2021). Hence, studying what makes employees involved in such proactive behaviors and how they consider their positive domain instead of their negative consequences is of theoretical and practical significance (Kim and Liu, 2017; Li et al., 2019).

A profound look at the literature highlights that employees' taking charge is influenced by numerous factors, the most influential of which are organizational and work-related determinants are the most influential (Li et al., 2019). Among these factors, the working environment is believed to have a significant impact on employees, and workplace fun is an important element (Michel et al., 2019; Tews et al., 2020). Workplace fun encompasses all social, interpersonal, and task-related activities that are playful and humorous in nature, and result in feelings of enjoyment, pleasure, and amusement (Fluegge-Woolf, 2008). It can offer numerous positive outcomes, such as learning opportunities (Tews et al., 2017), increased trust among employees (Karl et al., 2005), increased attraction to new applicants (Tews et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Karl and Peluchette, 2006; Kim and Liu, 2017; Peluchette and Karl, 2005), commitment (Kim and Liu, 2017), job embeddedness (Tews et al., 2015) and the performance of existing employees (Kim and Liu, 2017). Fun also reduces negative workplace outcomes such as emotional exhaustion (Karl et al., 2007) and turnover intentions (Karl et al., 2008; Tews et al., 2014).

The literature on the outcomes of workplace fun focuses on its immediate effects (in terms of emotions, attitudes, and behaviors) while ignoring future-focused and change-oriented behaviors (e.g., taking charge). Taking charge is one such future-oriented behavior that focuses on efforts to challenge the status quo, system improvements, and making changes while considering future organizational needs (Morrison and Phelps, 1999). However, the relationship between fun and taking charge seems logical, as workplace factors have been found to influence this behavior (Griffin et al., 2010; Li et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020), and workplace fun is also a manifestation. Against this backdrop, the current study aimed to investigate the relationship between fun at work and employees' taking-charge behavior.

Another aspect that has not gained the attention of researchers is the investigation of the explanatory mechanisms between workplace fun and taking-charge behavior. Previous studies have highlighted the need to investigate the various mechanisms of fun and its outcomes. For example, Tews et al. (2021) recommend investigating the mediators between workplace fun and turnover relationships. Similarly, Tsaur et al. (2019) recommended considering the explanatory mechanisms between fun and employee engagement. As literature on the relationship between fun and taking charge is scarce, this study also contributes by proposing the inclusion of psychological empowerment as a mediator. Empowerment is the provision of authority to act in a certain way to someone else, whereas psychological empowerment is the state in which employees believe that they can influence an organization's work (Saif and Saleh, 2013; Spreitzer, 2006). While looking at its determinants it has been observed that being a psychological state, which can be influenced by intuitive level workplace factors e.g. fun (Plester and Hutchison, 2016). On the other hand, psychologically empowered employees put more effort and energy, and even go beyond their job to achieve organizational goals (e.g. Liu et al., 2021; Yagil and Oren, 2021), therefore the relationship between fun and taking-charge behavior seems organic (the second objective of the study).

Furthermore, Tews et al. (2020) highlighted that the outcomes of fun are dissimilar, as people may translate it in different ways, as the one who takes fun positively may bring positive outcomes compared to their counterparts. Therefore, this study proposes the boundary condition of promotion focus, which is a form of self-regulatory mindset (Higgins, 1997, 1998) and the

process of aligning oneself with organizational goals (Brockner and Higgins, 2001; Wallace et al., 2016). It deals with regulatory efforts focused on needs, aspirations, and hopes for something (Kark and Van Dijk, 2007). The researcher proposes that promotion focus aligns with the environment (Li et al., 2019) and therefore fun would foster positive outcomes (e.g., taking charge). Overall, this study proposes, develops, and empirically investigates the mechanisms of workplace fun and taking charge. Specifically, we conjecture the mediating role of psychological empowerment and moderating role of promotion focus (See figure-1).

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in several ways. First, it proposes and investigates the effects of workplace fun on taking-charge behavior, which has been largely ignored. Second, this study proposed and investigated the explanatory mechanisms of psychological empowerment and regulatory focus. Using the Conservation of resources perspective, this study highlights that fun and regulatory focus work as workplace resources and influence employee outcomes. Third, the study was conducted on a sample of employees from the service sector, which is a flourishing sector. Such people-centric sectors require employees who may work extra miles for the organization (Tuan et al., 2019). Fourth, this study is useful for human resource managers, as the inclusion of fun activities in workplace employees may motivate them to work in the future. The following section covers the development of the hypotheses, followed by the methodology, analysis, and conclusion.

Hypotheses Development

Fun at work and taking charge behavior:

Workplace fun includes all activities that foster socialization and interpersonal relations by promoting enjoyment, amusement, friendliness, amity, and kindness (Chaiburu and Harrison, 2008; Ford et al., 2003; Karl et al., 2005). Such an environment is important for customer-focused firms, where employees must deal with human emotions regularly basis (Chan and Mak, 2016). Fun also tends to create positive employee states and behaviors such as satisfaction (Chan and Mak, 2016), commitment (Kim and Liu, 2017), trust in management (Chan and Mak, 2016), embeddedness (Tews et al., 2015), attachment to the organization (Becker and Tews, 2016), performance (Choi et al., 2013; Tews et al., 2013) and career satisfaction (Islam and Ahmed, 2023). Looking at the reality of fun, it is observed to be a holistic approach to doing things and includes three major activities: fun activities, coworkers' socialization, and management support for fun (Tews et al., 2014).

Taking charge behavior is a form of proactive behavior that focuses on change, challenging the status quo, and adopting change for the future needs of the organization (Lyu et al., 2022; Redhead et al., 2021).

A profound review of the literature highlights that employees' proactive behavior is influenced by numerous factors, the most influential of which are organizational and work-related determinants are the most influential (Li et al., 2019). Among these factors, the working environment is believed to have a significant impact on employees, where workplace fun is an important element (Michel et al., 2019; Tews et al., 2020), there is an absence of empirical evidence on this relationship.

This study proposes that fun and taking charge are positively related, because fun and amusement (humor) at work can reduce the difference in employees' status and foster socialization, cooperation, and inclusion (Clouse and Spurgeon, 1995). Karl and Peluchette (2006) and Tremblay and Gibson (2016) also highlighted that fun at work reduces the influence of negative states and factors of work. Such workplace aspects influence overall psychological safety of employees and in response they tend to adopt charge behavior (Zeng et al., 2020), as in presence of various supportive organizational factors employees tend to indulge in such behaviors more

often (Liu et al., 2021). The same can be assumed based on COR (Hobfoll, 1989), which proposes that humans tend to safeguard and preserve their resources while providing energy and improving workplace outcomes. Workplace fun is translated as a workplace resource, and human resources tend to offer positive outcomes, such as taking-charge behavior. Based on this discussion, the following assertions were made:

H1: Fun at work and taking charge behavior are positively related.

Mediating role of psychological empowerment:

Due to its broader nature, fun activities at work influence employee outcomes through various mechanisms (Becker and Tews, 2016). For example, Tews et al. (2021) recommend investigating the mediators between workplace fun and turnover relationships. Similarly, Tsaur et al. (2019) proposed and considered explanatory mechanisms of fun and employees'. As literature on the relationship between fun and taking charge is scarce, this study also contributes by proposing the inclusion of psychological empowerment as a mediator. Psychological empowerment (hereafter, PE) is a state where one psychologically perceives a presence of empowerment by the organization (Spreitzer, 1995), and covers dimensions of competence, impact, meanings and self-determination (Meyerson and Kline, 2008).

The relationship between fun and psychological empowerment seems organic, as fun is considered an endeavor of leadership and management that aims to improve the working environment (Javed et al., 2019; Shapirallishchinsky and Tsemach 2014; Valsania et al. 2016; Zaabi et al. 2016), and is expected to influence employees' psychological empowerment. Recently, Kenah et al. (2022) observed that socialization (one dimension of fun) influences one's level of comfort at work and attitude towards the workplace. Similarly, fun activities can create feelings of enthusiasm, satisfaction, and increased cohesiveness between an organization and its members (Islam and Ahmed, 2023; Ford et al., 2004). Fun in the workplace can reduce stress, as enjoyment stimulates feelings about the workplace (Sakr, et al., 2019). Workplace events of fun (another dimension of fun) further influence employees at the psychological level and create more pleasant and affective relationships with their work, as they consider themselves capable of doing their job in a befitting manner (Ahmed, 2023; Airila et al., 2012; Islam and Ahmed, 2023). Support for fun (an element of fun) is yet another enabler, as it can be considered an external resource that meets one's workplace needs, and fulfillment of such needs influences employees at the psychological level (Jaiswal and Dhar, 2016).

This study further asserted that fun at work can positively influence employees' taking charge through psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment covers individual cognitions that foster psychological investment at work (Spreitzer, 2007). It asserts that one's control over work events is expressed in the form of capabilities to mobilize cognitive, motivational, and other personal resources at work (Ozer and Bandura, 1990). As fun influences employees' cognition and improves their psychosocial empowerment, employees tend to utilize their resources to make significant changes to their work, job, and organization (Kim et al., 2017). In the presence of support at work, as perceived by fun, employees feel confident about their abilities and tend to put effort beyond their conventional roles (Koberg et al., 1999). One such unconventional role is the propensity to take charge, which is a type of discretionary behavior (Ahmed et al., 2023; Crant, 2000; Morrison & Phelps, 1999), and covers steps such as improving working methods and challenging the status quo (Ahmed et al., 2023). Such behavior also involves some forms of associated risks and costs associated with that (Morrison and Phelps, 1999), such as there may arise antagonism and resistance to such actions, and distortion of reputation and personal image in case of failure to achieve the desired goals (Li et al., 2018; Parker et al., 2010). According to Ahmed et al. (2021), such behaviors can only be adopted by employees who feel empowered because of a supportive working environment. As fun is considered a form of support

(due to a high level of socialization and support for fun and fun activities), it is expected to offer psychological empowerment, and employees may charge the future needs of the organization (McAllister et al., 2007; Li et al., 2018; Raub and Robert, 2010), as socialization can promote an environment of welfare and trust (Li et al., 2018).

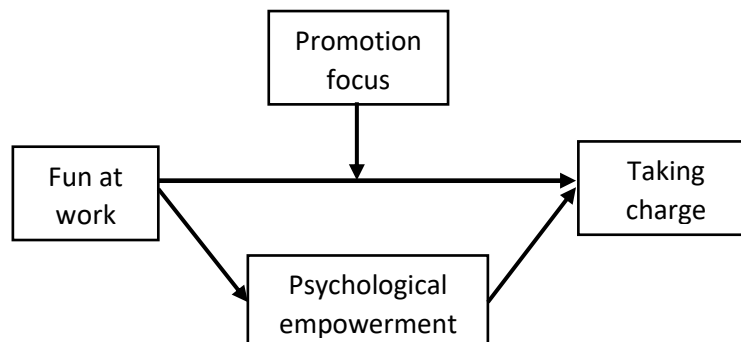
This relationship can be assumed using the assertions of Conservation of Resources Theory (COR, Hobfoll, 1989), as fun can be viewed as a resource provided by the organization, which reduces the chances of stress rather than increasing positive feelings (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees also tend to translate fun as a resource offered by the organization and thus respond positively by showing taking-charge behavior. Based on the theoretical and empirical findings, the following mediation mechanism was assumed:

H2: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between fun and employee charge behavior.

Moderating role of promotion focus:

Promotion focus is an element of the self-regulation process of aligning goals (Brockner and Higgins, 2001), self-regulation covers two mindsets: promotion and prevention focus (Higgins, 1997, 1998). Promotion focus covers the efforts aimed at growth and developmental needs, while prevention focus aims to defend and safeguard from negative events (Higgins et al., 1997, 1998). We took the promotion focus perspective of self-regulation, as it is more relevant to fun because it focuses on hopes, aspirations, and accomplishments (Kark and Van Dijk, 2007). Individuals with a promotion focus are more likely to be involved in change, creativity, and innovation (Cowden and Bendickson, 2018; Lanaj et al., 2012; Neubert et al., 2008) and exhibit exploratory and change-focused (Förster et al., 2004). We considered promotion focus as a moderating variable between fun and psychological empowerment. Fun at work (socialization, fun activities, and support for fun) influences the overall perception of work settings and creates a flourishing climate (Li et al., 2019). In response to such support and the work environment, employees exhibit a high level of enthusiasm and energy for work outcomes beyond their roles (Shin et al., 2017). As fun at work influences employees at the psychological and emotional levels (Becker and Tews, 2016; Chan and Mak, 2016; Tews et al., 2014) and fosters psychological empowerment, the outcomes are expected to be different for individuals with different self-regulation. For instance, when there is fun at work and individuals are promotion-focused (indulge in creativity and innovation), it is expected that such individuals will indulge in more change-oriented actions and would even work beyond their conventional roles (i.e., taking charge behavior). The same could be assumed on the basis of COR (Hobfoll, 1989), as promotion focus (personal resources) tends to increase the outcome propensity of fun at work (organizational resources) and employees would tend to unleash their energies (taking charge). Thus, the following assertion is made.

H3: Promotion focus moderates the relationship between fun and taking-charge behavior such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with higher promotion focus than for those with low promotion focus.



Research Methodology

Participants and methods:

The data for this study were collected from service employees' human resources (retail, banking, call centers, and IT firms) located in a metropolitan city. The human resource department/management of the 20 organizations was contacted before data collection and permission was obtained, but HR/management of only 12 firms (three retail stores, two banks, three call centers, and four IT firms) agreed to provide a list of employees and access to them, which enabled researchers to create a sampling frame for the study. A total of 465 employees were randomly selected from the given population. It was ensured that employees could understand English; thus, we were left with only 423 employees who met the inclusion criteria. The sample size was confirmed using a sample-to-item ratio of 10:1 (Costello and Osborne, 2005), which confirmed the adequacy of sample size. Questionnaires were distributed to employees who were randomly selected from the list of employees.

The data were collected in three lags, with a one-month interval, where human resource/employees responded for fun at work at time-1, psychological empowerment and regulatory focus at time-2 and taking charge behavior at time-3. This procedure is a commonly used and accepted method for reducing the chance of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012). A team of trained researchers was hired for the data collection process. Employees working in organizations for at least one year were selected for the study because they were aware of organizational culture and could depict their responsive behaviors (Islam et al., 2022). At time-1, 423 questionnaires were distributed to employees and 411 completely filled responses were received. At time-2, of 411 employees, 397 were on duty, but only 391 useful responses were received. At time-3, only 389 employees were available, while 375 completely filled responses were received. A check question was added thrice to ensure that the same employee completed the questionnaire. The majority of the employees were male ($n=255$, 68%), with an average age of 27.50 years, unmarried ($n=274$, 73%), with high school certification ($n=204$, 54%), and had less than five years of work experience ($n=287$, 77%). The sample was distributed almost equally among all types of firms (21.87-29.06%) (see table-1).

Measurement:

Each questionnaire was comprised of two common sections, the first of which was a check question and items about the variables of the study. The demographic profile was only asked at time-3 to fetch recent information about respondents. The details of each measure are provided below:

Fun at work:

Fun at work was operationalized using 16 items Tews et al. (2014) scale, which covers three dimensions: manager support for fun, coworkers' socialization, and fun activities. Managers' support for fun was based on a six-item scale that included items such as, "My manager allows employees to have fun on the job". The reliability score for this measure was 0.89, indicating a high interitem correlation value. Coworker's support for fun comprised five items, like "my coworkers and I socialize at work." Six items scale of fun activities covered items like "team building activities," and "parties for work achievement." A five-point scale was used to operationalize these measures from 1-never to 5 (always or all the time).

Psychological empowerment:

Spreitzer (1995) 12 items scale was used to measure psychological empowerment. It is a four-dimensional scale covering the competence, impact, meaning, and self-determination dimensions. Employees reported their psychological empowerment on a five-point scale. The

sample items covered “I have significant influence over what happens in my organization/department”, “the work I do is very important to me,” “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job” and “I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.”

Promotion focus:

We measured promotion focus using the 9-item scale developed by Neubert et al. (2008). Examples of items include “I focus on completing my work tasks correctly to increase my job security” and “I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations” ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Taking charge:

The scale of taking charge consisted of 10 items developed by Morrison and Phelps (1999) and covered items such as, “I often try to change how my job is executed to be more effective. ”

Table 1: Respondents profile

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	255	68.00
	Female	120	32.00
Age	21-35	232	61.86
	36-50	102	27.20
	>50 years	41	10.94
Marital Status	Married	101	26.94
	Unmarried	274	73.06
Qualification	School/College certification	204	54.40
	Bachelor degree	152	40.54
	Master degree	19	5.06
Job experience	<5 years	287	76.53
	5 – 10 years	66	17.60
	11 – 15 years	22	5.87
Organization type	Retail	89	23.74
	Banking	82	21.87
	Call-centers	95	25.33
	IT firms	109	29.06

Findings

Preliminary data analysis:

Before testing the hypotheses, the data were analyzed for missing values, outliers, and normality. Using the guidelines of Sekaran (2003), nine responses were removed from the analysis due to 15% or more missing values. Outliers were assessed using the Mahalanobis Distance Test ($p < 0.001$) (Kline, 2005), but no outliers were present in the data. According to the guidelines of Byrne (2010), normality was assessed using Skewness and Kurtosis (standard values of +1 and +3, respectively), and the data met the assumption of normality. Although the data were collected in three lags, the CMV was confirmed using Harman’s single-factor test, where a single factor accounted for 29.5% variance (<50%) (Podsakoff et al., 2003), thus CMV issues of CMV was not present. These preliminary tests helped us move further through a confirmation factor analysis and hypothesis testing.

Structural equation modelling (SEM):

The hypothesized relationships were tested using a two-stage SEM technique, where, at the first instance, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out to determine the factor loadings and validity of the measures. We used the previously accepted threshold values for model fitness, such as Hair et al. 's(2010) guidelines for factor loadings (>0.50), average variance extracted (AVE >0.50), and composite reliability (CR >0.60). Additionally, we used the guidelines of Williams et al. (2015) for other indices: chi-square/df (<0.30), CFI (>0.90), SRMR (<0.10), and RMSEA (<0.80). The measurement model results showed acceptable model fitness values ($\chi^2/df=2.27$, RMSEA=0.070, SRMR=0.068, CFI=0.92), CR (0.77–0.91), and AVE (0.59–0.73), all of which exceeded the standard range (Table-2). AVE and CR values validated these measures. Furthermore, the measures were found to be reliable, as both Cronbach's alpha values (given on diagonal lines) and CR were above the threshold values.

Table-2 also covers the results of the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The correlation scores highlight that the fun at work (FW) was positively related with psychological empowerment and taking charge ($r=0.43$, $p<0.001$; $r=0.36$, $p<0.05$, respectively), while psychological empowerment was correlated with taking charge ($r=0.29$, $p<0.05$). Further analyses were performed using the structural model in SEM.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Correlation and & Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	Correlation				Descriptive	Factor analysis		
	FW	PE	RF	TC	Mean (SD)	Loading	CR	AVE
FW	0.79				3.09 (0.684)	0.61 – 0.79	0.83	0.59
PE	0.43*	0.81			3.55 (0.743)	0.59 – 0.81	0.88	0.68
PF	0.09	0.03*	0.89		2.89 (0.562)	0.63 – 0.90	0.79	0.73
TC	0.36**	0.29**	0.14*	0.72	4.32 (0.442)	0.60 – 0.88	0.81	0.71

Model Fitness Indices: $\chi^2/df=2.27$; RMSEA=0.070; SRMR=0.068; CFI=0.92

Reliability values in diagonal line; * $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.05$; FW=fun at work, PE=psychological empowerment, RF=regulatory focus, TC=taking charge

The hypothesis testing results are shown in table-3, which covers the results of 5000 bootstraps to obtain lower- and upper-class boundaries with a 95% confidence interval. Table-2 shows that both H1 are supported, as fun at work positively influences employees' psychological empowerment ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$, respectively), and psychological empowerment positively influences taking-charge behavior ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). The findings highlight that all the direct paths are significant. For the mediation analysis, indirect paths were computed, and the table shows that the fun at work and taking charge relationship through psychological empowerment (mediator) was also significant ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$); thus, the mediation hypothesis (H2) was also supported.

The results for moderation are also presented in table-3, where it is evident that the interaction between fun at work and regulatory focus (moderator) significantly predicted psychological empowerment ($\beta = .23$, $p < .05$). The results highlight that regulatory focus is in action and employees' promotion focus works as a drive that positively influences the outcomes of workplace fun. The interaction term (FW \times PF) highlights that the inclusion of the conditional variable/moderator strengthens the positive relationship between fun at work and psychological

empowerment (H4), thus highlighting that one's personal dispositions help an individual to translate fun and define its outcomes (see figure-2).

Table-3: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Relationships	β	SE	t-value	Bootstraps @ 95%		p
				LLCI	ULCI	
FW → TC	0.39	0.034	12.03	0.652	0.924	0.000
FW → PE	0.43	0.098	4.39	0.409	0.851	0.000
PE → TC	0.29	0.067	4.32	0.562	0.928	0.000
PF → PE	0.09	0.074	1.22	0.430	0.815	0.000
Indirect effects						
FW → PE → TC	0.13	0.054	2.41	0.527	0.998	0.001
Interactional effects						
FW × PF	0.23	0.098	2.37	0.742	0.998	0.024

U=upper limit, L=lower limit, CI=confidence interval, Bootstrap sample size 5,000

FW= Fun at Work, PE=Psychological Empowerment, TC=Taking charge, PF=Promotion Focus

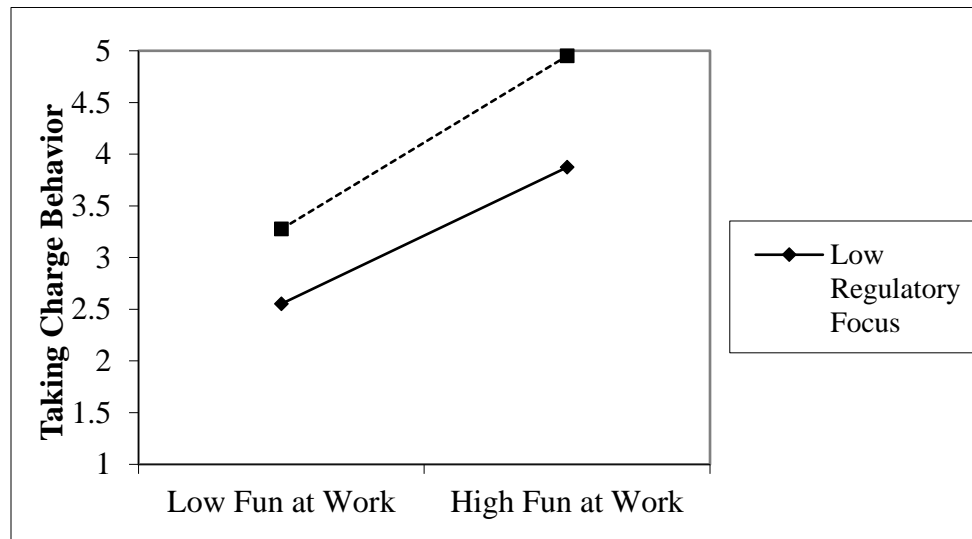


Figure-2: Slope of moderation

Discussion

Considering the value of proactive behaviors of human resources, the core aim of this study was to investigate the impact of workplace fun in predicting employees' taking-charge behavior (a form of proactive behavior). Taking charge has been considered an important employee behavior because it can offer competitive advantage (Full & Marler, 2009; Parker & Collins, 2010), but can also be damaging because it can have detrimental effects on employees' family domains. Therefore, the investigation of its determinants has been called for investigation (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2023; Kim and Liu, 2017; LI et al., 2019), which is answered by the current study. We assumed the role of workplace fun (an important element of the working environment, Tews et al., 2020) in predicting employees' taking-charge behavior through the explanatory role of psychological empowerment. The study further valued the role of promotion focus as the boundary condition between fun and its outcomes (i.e., taking charge), which has also not gained due attention in the literature.

To investigate these relationships, three hypotheses were proposed, and data were collected from employees of superstores. Statistical analysis revealed that fun at work was positively associated with employees' taking-charge behavior (H1). These results are in line with the findings of previous studies, where fun was expected to reduce employees' stress (Sakr et al., 2019), increase their psychological state (Ahmed, 2023; Airila et al., 2012; Jaiswal and Dhar, 2016), and foster enthusiasm and cohesiveness (Ford et al., 2004). Employees' psychological empowerment further works as an explanatory mechanism or mediator between fun at work and their taking-charge behavior (H2, supported). Again, these results support the hypotheses, theoretical assumptions (based on COR theory), and past studies that observed that employees' proactive behaviors are outcomes of psychological and emotional aspects (e.g. Li et al., 2018; Raub and Robert, 2010), alignment with organizational goals (Parker et al., 2010), and resource provision (Kim et al., 2017). Although this relationship has not gained the attention of researchers, the statistical results support relevant literature. For instance, Ozer and Bandura (1990) highlighted that psychological states increase employees' control over work and tend to mobilize cognitive, motivational, and personal resources at work. Ahmed (2023) and Kim et al. (2017) also identified that fun tends to influence employees at the psychological level, and that they utilize their resources (psychological and emotional) for work and organization. Ahmed et al. (2023) further highlighted that employees feel empowered when they have support at work (e.g., support for fun) and tend to indulge in future-focused, change-oriented behavior (i.e., taking charge).

Another important consideration was promotion focus, as the boundary condition between fun at work and employees' taking-charge behavior (H3). The findings of this study support the notion that promotion focus strengthens the relationship between fun and psychological empowerment. Previous studies have also asserted that fun leads to hopes, aspirations, and accomplishments (Kark and Van Dijk, 2007), thus the promotion perspective is valid. The findings also highlight that fun is translated as a supportive environment that nurtures flourishing and inclusion (Islam and Ahmed, 2023; Li et al., 2019), and in turn, employees depict high levels of enthusiasm and energy at work (Shin et al., 2017). In such an environment, employees would focus on promotion (change and creativity), which is depicted in the form of change-oriented actions (i.e., taking charge).

Although there is a dearth of empirical literature on this relationship, the same was assumed based on COR (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees consider fun (activities, support, and socialization) as an organizational resource that increases their personal resources; they feel positive about the work (Hobfoll, 1989), and thus, psychological empowerment comes into existence. In addition, promotion focus increases the effects of fun because promotion focus, being a personal resource, adds to organizational resources to create synergy and offers better outcomes in terms of change-oriented volunteer behaviors (here taking charge).

Theoretical implications:

This study's findings have several theoretical implications. First, by adopting COR (Hobfoll, 1989) this study proposed, developed, and tested a conceptual model of the relationship between fun and taking-charge behavior based on calls from past studies (e.g. Zhang et al., 2020). The results emphasized the role of fun at work in fostering employees' taking-charge behavior; thus, the results broaden the understanding of ways of improving employees' discretionary behaviors through fun. Accordingly, the findings provide a complete picture of 'how employees' taking-charge behavior can be fostered. or 'How can fun lead to employees' taking charge behavior?'. The literature has valued the role of the work environment (Michel et al., 2019; Tews et al., 2020), but how fun at work (an element of the working environment) influences employees' taking-charge behavior has not gained attention. The findings of the current study offer a novel explanation that helps predict employees' discretionary behaviors such as taking charge. Second,

this study conceptually assumed and tested the mediating role of psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment as a mediator not only provides a better understanding of the phenomenon, but also reveals the ‘black box’ of the process through which fun can influence employees’ taking-charge behavior. The literature linking fun at work and employees’ taking-charge behavior through the mediation of psychological empowerment is scant.

Third, this study reveals that promotion focus is a possible boundary condition between fun and employees’ taking-charge behavior. Specifically, the presence of a promotion focus strengthened the relationship between fun and taking charge. Hence, this study adds value to the literature by considering promotion focus as a moderator rather than a predictor of various job outcomes. The findings also highlight that the combination of fun (organizational factor) and promotion focus (individual factor) improves an individual’s actions/behaviors, thus offering a blend of variables that can be of greater value in the literature.

Fourth, this study fills these gaps and provides empirical evidence for a novel conceptual model to broaden the theoretical premise of COR (Hobfoll, 1989). The findings reveal that fun improves the psychological empowerment of employees and they indulge in taking-charge behavior, while the promotion focus strengthens the relationship between fun and taking charge. Fun is translated as a resource bestowed by the organization that works in a befitting manner when combined with the personal resources of promotion focus (COR perspective).

Practical & Managerial implications:

The findings of the current study are equally useful for human resource managers as they provide ways to improve employees’ charge behavior. First, it highlights that the human resources department should make efforts to improve its working environment. The findings reveal that human resource managers can improve fun at work through various fun activities, support for fun, and employee socialization. If managers ensure the provision of such an environment, employees’ propensity to take charge increases. The human resources department should also make efforts to nurture an environment where supervisors provide fun support, and employees are encouraged and even rewarded for their socialization efforts. Furthermore, fun activities initiated by employees should be encouraged and supported. The findings are more valuable in Eastern, power-distant, and collectivist cultures where socialization can have organic growth, and managers may also be more closely involved in fun acts. The human resource department should consider these activities while appraising performance, designing training modules, and even planning rewards for their employees. This study also adds value by focusing on the mediating role of psychological empowerment, which is an important determinant of employee actions and behaviors. Finally, this study considers the moderating role of promotion focus between fun and employees’ taking-charge behavior. The results revealed that managers should also emphasize the personality of employees, as their personal dispositions play an important role in translating organizational interventions and selecting responses. The findings reveal that fun is more productive and fruitful when employees are more promotion focused. Therefore, employees with such personal dispositions adopt charge behavior.

Limitations and future directions:

Despite rigorous research, this study has several limitations. The foremost issue is the use of a cross-sectional, lagged approach. Although this approach offers an adequate remedy for common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012), a longitudinal study could offer better results in the form of causality. Second, this study considered fun as a predictor of employees’ taking-charge behavior while ignoring other work-related outcomes. The study results are also based on a sample from the service sector only, while the findings may depend on the type of organization or industrial sector. Future studies should also consider other explanatory and boundary conditions.

For instance, according to Turnipseed and VandeWaa (2020), the dimensions of psychological empowerment and their independent role in predicting employees' extra-role behaviors relate differently in various settings. Therefore, future researchers should investigate various dimensions of empowerment and their relationships with outcomes. Furthermore, fun is a multidimensional construct covering fun activities, support for fun, and employee socialization. All these dimensions may have varying effects on psychological empowerment; thus, future studies should consider this aspect. Fun may not always be considered a positive environmental aspect, and employees may translate it differently. Therefore, future studies should consider the experience of fun as a boundary condition between fun at work and its outcomes.

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