Let's Do Lunch: Work-related Outcomes of a Food Event

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Abstract

Let's Do Lunch: Work-related Outcomes

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We all had the experience of sharing meals with coworkers and managers at workplace events. But why is food served during those events? This study aims to examine the effects of food on employees during workplace events. This study built on the impression management framework and the mealtime conversation to investigate the effects of organizational food events on employees' work engagement levels and affective emotions. The interviews with nine female participants in Canada showed that employees did not focus on work during organizational events after the pandemic. However, sharing food with coworkers left favorable emotions in employees, and stronger ties were built during those workplace events. The results pushed us to explore the effects of workplace events on employees' attentional focus and energy. Building on the attention restoration theory, this study investigated the effects of food and the different types of interactions during workplace events, work-related versus non-work-related interactions, on employees' attentional focus and their cognitive, emotional, prosocial, and physical energy. The 133 surveys have shown that employees' soft attentional focus was stimulated during work-related events compared to non-work-related events. The hard attentional focus was linked to higher reports of prosocial energy. Furthermore, the results also showed that food served during workplace events restored employees' cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy. Our study contributed to the understanding of the reason behind serving food during workplace events and demonstrated that corporate events provide an opportunity for employees to build stronger relationships with their coworkers and restore their cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy.

Acknowledgments or Dedications

Let's Do Lunch: Work-related Outcomes

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Let's Do Lunch: Work-related Outcomes of a Food Event

Organizations frequently provide food and snacks for employees during their meetings and events. But why? Does food increase workers' engagement, energy, and positive emotions? The rationale for having food as part of workplace gatherings has been given little attention in the literature. The assumption seems to be that employees will feel more appreciated and tend to work harder if fed. This research aims to examine the assumed and actual impact of food events in organizations.

"Foods mean different things to different people. Foods may also mean different things to the same person in different contexts" (Blake et al., 2007, p. 500). Food conveys meaning to people and plays a part in our daily activities, such as school, work, meetings, gym, or clubs (Cornil et al., 2020).

This research aims to fill a gap in the literature related to the functions of food in the workplace. Previous studies have researched the role of food as an energy enhancer, social event, and health predictor (Garbinsky & Klesse, 2021; Cornil et al., 2020; Neves et al., 2022), yet its function in the workplace has not been thoroughly studied. The limited literature suggests that although food may be available as part of a daily organizational routine, at corporate events, or corporate meetings, the focus is usually on the corporate occasion rather than on the type of food served in the workplace and its impact on employees (Marshall, 2005). For example, Blake et al. (2007) showed that "healthy food" is valuable when individuals categorize food, yet the workplace inhibits or limits access to food such as fruits and vegetables. In the same vein, Baskin et al. (2016) found that easy access to snack food at work increases employee satisfaction but could negatively affect employee health.

This study investigates the meaning of food consumption at work gatherings and the effect on employees, more precisely, their emotions, energy, and work engagement. This research will also explore employees' food choices at work and the impressions these choices convey to others.

Functions of Food

Food science and nutrition show that biological and physiological concerns drive people's food habits, such as dietary recommendations, health conditions, and sensory stimulation (Marshall, 2005). Social and cultural factors are also as important as biological responses to food consumption (Marshall, 2005). Individuals also categorize food in ways other than the nutrient composition, focusing on items like the location, time of the day, meal partner, and preference (Blake et al., 2007). Thus, food can be used as a symbol and create a connection between people that intensifies the experience of an event (Boothby et al., 2014). Most cultures, countries, and communities celebrate birthdays, family get-togethers, or parties at calendar events like Thanksgiving with a particular food (Marshall, 2005). Rozin et al. (1999) reported significant country differences in choosing food and meals; for example, French people prefer to consume fewer calories from a variety of food than Americans.

Hasford, Kidwell, and Lopez-Kidwell (2018) examined a meal partner's influence on food choices, showing that the relationship between the dining partners will affect the chosen meals. Depending on the relationship stage or partner's authority, dining partners affect one's meal

choice. For example, the food decisions of lower-level employees are affected by the boss's preference when dining with a boss (Hasford et al., 2018).

People in various cultures react differently to the functions of food. For example, Americans worry most about the type of food they consume and its fat and salt content. On the other hand, French people give the most importance to the pleasure they get from a meal they eat (Rozin et al., 1999). Not only might the functions of food differ between one country and another, but also the preference of the type of food might vary, such as a culture's preference for serving shark fin or jellyfish on the sixteenth birthday (Marshall, 2005). Food choices might give an idea of one's culture. However, in some instances, individuals live in a different country and are involved in a community and culture diverse from their origin. This means that the country could be a minor factor in influencing food choices for some individuals; for instance, the workplace may consist of employees from different countries and cultures. Therefore, this study will examine food habits in the workplace culture.

Many studies on food focused on its health effects and pleasurable feelings, but other researchers have considered the energetic, physical, and social outcomes of eating. For example, Cornil, Gomez, & Vasiljevic (2020) note that people's assumption about food as an energy source makes them choose food that will boost their energy levels; for example, studies done on individuals in the United States and France showed that in preparation for challenging physical or mental activities, individuals would choose high calorie, non-nutritious food products. On the other hand, Schulte-Mecklenbeck et al. (2013) found that the fuel effect of food decreases when a visual image is present because individuals tend to disregard the food's energy or caloric effect when they see the image.

Blake et al. (2017) study included individuals who focused on the after-eating effect of food when choosing meals, such as those who categorized their preferences based on their well-being, i.e., medicinal food, refreshing food, heavy food. Those individuals chose the meal that led them to the desired condition. In addition, many adults in the USA emphasized their concern about the effects of food on their health, such as in the case of junk food and high-fat food (Rozin et al., 1999).

Eating disorders and dieting are becoming more common among women in American society, especially with the attention, concern, and praise society gives for skinniness and physical fitness (Mori et al., 1987). Women eat smaller portions to limit their weight gain, but men, on the other hand, avoid plant-based diets and pick larger meals to boost their masculine image (Mori, Chaiken, & Pliner, 1987; Vartanian, 2015). Both men and women are building their food preferences based on their perspectives of masculinity and femininity. Thus, men and women adjust their eating behaviors to present themselves in the image they value. This is often referred to as "impression management" (Mori, Chaiken, & Pliner, 1987; Vartanian, 2015). Workplaces encompass employees that differ in gender, age, and job position. Workers build relationships with most employees working in their organization, but the relationships often vary according to the hierarchical position, such as managers, colleagues, or subordinates. Therefore, workers manage their actions to give other employees a particular impression. For instance, the impression displayed to a boss may be different from that given to a co-worker because one might want to show his boss that he is a hard worker and diligent but want to give his co-worker the impression that he is likable and friendly.

Impression Management

Impression management, or self-presentation, is the act of individuals modifying or constructing their behavior to create a desired image for others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Leary & Kowalski (1990) distinguished between two perspectives of impression management, impression motivation, and impression construction. The first, impression motivation, refers to an individual's motivation to alter his behavior to give a particular image, but the individual may or may not end up altering his behavior (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). On the other hand, impression construction is when people change their actions to display a desired image (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Researchers identified five aspects of impression management (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). The first, "self-promotion," encompasses people who want to promote their talents in front of others (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). The second, "ingratiation," is used when one wants to be liked by others. A third aspect, "exemplification," refers to individuals who wish to show they are perfectionists and hardworking (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Other aspects of impression management are "intimidation," where people use aggressive behavior to reach their goal, and "supplication," which refers to people who show pathetic actions to gain the help they want (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Therefore, impression management might be used for different purposes that allow people to reach their target goals.

Food consumption has been recently viewed as a social activity, and people are more often eating with a partner rather than eating alone (Marshall, 2005; Hasford et al., 2018). Boothby, Clark, & Bargh (2014) studied the function of food after its consumption and found that food eaten with someone else will affect the whole experience by either worsening or enhancing it. For example, individuals found chocolate is more flavorful when shared with someone else. In contrast, unpleasant chocolate tastes worse when consumed with someone else compared to when the individual consumes it alone (Boothby et al., 2014). Since this activity is part of our daily life and involves more than one person's presence, people might use food to reach a target goal or to show a desired image. For instance, as an indicator of femininity and for women to promote this image of themselves, they altered their food intake into smaller portions and chose lighter meals (Mori et al., 1987). Likewise, women who went out for a dining experience with a desirable man tried reinforcing their feminine nature by choosing lighter and healthier meals (Mori et al., 1987). Hence, they were trying to follow self-promotion behavior to attract the desired partner and give the impression they wanted (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Likewise, men could use self-promotion to exhibit the image they wanted for people they were trying to attract by consuming meat as a sign of masculinity (Vartanian, 2015; Bolino & Turnley, 1999). If we want to focus more on the workplace, Hasford et al. (2018) study showed that employees made their boss choose his meal before them and picked a similar healthy or unhealthy meal to give their boss a sense of importance. In such cases, employees might follow the ingratiation technique to impress their higher boss and gain his likeability.

Some employees might choose sustainable food to give others the "right" impression. However, the food industry has been suffering lately from concerns about social and environmental sustainability (Pullman et al., 2009). Social and environmental sustainability issues include the abuse of immigrant workers, food safety, and the environmental effects of using fertilizers and pesticides (Pullman et al., 2009). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defined sustainable diets as environmental-friendly, nutritionally adequate, safe to consume, and economically affordable (Perignon et al., 2017). Sustainable diets consider the nutritional quality of food, affordability, cultural acceptance, and environmental concern (Perignon et al., 2017). For

instance, individuals will reduce their meat consumption to increase diet sustainability (Perignon et al., 2017). In the US, it has been found that replacing meat and animal food products with plant-based food products has potentially positive effects on the environment, such as a decrease in land use and greenhouse gas emissions (Rose et al., 2019). However, food sustainability is gaining attention and affecting individuals' food choices. Given the importance of sustainable diets on the environment, nutrition, and affordability, individuals may choose sustainable foods to give a specific impression to society. Individuals might choose sustainable food products to show others their carefulness about the environment or to display the image that they are aware of nutritious products.

Food has been used to impress or designate a desired image, yet the way food could be used to give a specific impression in the work field has yet to be explored. Newer employees may try to give their manager an ideal image of their value, encompassing self-promotion techniques. Other employees might be trying to gain the appreciation of other workers by following the ingratiation type of impression management. Supplication may take part in impression management in the workplace when one wants another worker's help.

The meal partner will influence the food choice of the other depending on factors like the type of the relationship, stage of the relationship, or authority of the other person (Hasford et al., 2018). For example, the meal partner might be a manager, work colleague, or subordinate. Therefore, the food choice may reflect the impression the employee wants to give to this work colleague, manager, or subordinate.

Meal Partner

Social psychology has given attention to the effects of sharing food experiences with another person when communication between dining partners exists or does not exist (Boothby et al., 2014). For example, Boothby et al. (2014) experimented with shared experiences showing that sharing an experience, such as eating chocolate, will result in an amplified liking or disliking of the chocolate even if communication is weak, unlike when one eats alone, and the other person is not doing the same activity.

Hasford et al. (2018) demonstrated that an employee's meal would be chosen based on his boss's meal. The reason behind an employee choosing a meal similar to his boss may be a sign of "self-promotion" to get his attention when discussing his qualification, or it may be resembling "ingratiation" to show his boss that he is likable and friendly. Similarly, if an employee is dining with her work colleague, she may choose food similar to her co-worker to appear friendly, even if she does not prefer this food. In other cases, dining with a co-worker might lead a neophyte employee to be a meal preference follower to gain a co-worker's help, thus, following a "supplication" dimension of impression management. Self-promotion is an ordinary impression people want to give, and it could drive colleagues' food choices in a shared meal experience. Employees try to gain subordinates for their side, and they might follow a supplication or ingratiation technique in a shared meal event to reach their goal. Those propositions have not been studied in the literature. Thus, this research will explore how food choices may be linked to the impression one wants to give to a boss, colleague, or subordinate.

Cornil, Gomez, & Vasiljevic (2020) showed that individuals performing physical or cognitive efforts would consume "food as fuel" to increase their energy. This study will explore employees' food choices when they expect a need for high physical or cognitive energy at work.

Engagement Levels and Affective Reactions

In previous studies, food has been shown to affect mood, emotions, and mental well-being. Food choices are affected by social life and the psychological and physiological cues of the body (Desmet et al., 2008). Food consumption has projected and elicited various emotions in different individuals; some are positive such as hope, love, satisfaction, enjoyment, and others are harmful such as boredom, fear, jealousy, or shame (Desmet et al., 2008). People associated enjoyment with food like sweets or alcohol, *"beer is fun,"* hope is elicited when people are going to a social event hoping to eat a specific food item; on the other hand, people reported feelings of boredom from eating the same food regularly or sometimes preferred to eat when they are bored *"licorice when you have nothing to do,"* or felt ashamed from the quantity of food they eat (Desmet et al., 2008). In another example, individuals who attended a food festival had a higher engagement towards local food (Organ et al., 2015). The researchers concluded that food engagement levels had increased because people had shared meals during the festival. Firth et al. (2020) showed that Mediterranean and healthy food are associated with better mood than unhealthy food styles. However, there may be an implicit assumption that consuming food at work will positively affect employees' emotions. Few studies have studied explicitly how the feelings elicited from food can project into our work activities and relationships. This study will focus on the affective emotions evoked after sharing food with a co-worker.

Workplace meetings are set up to improve work performance or enhance employee relationships. The work partner, impression goal, and mealtime conversation may influence food choices and employees' affective reactions to the meeting. The impact of those affective reactions on engagement with the topic discussed, projects, or relationship with other employees is a gap in the literature. Therefore, in the scope of this study, we aim to investigate the engagement levels after consuming food with work partners and the impact of food on the level of work engagement.

Research Questions

This study will explore how sharing food during workplace events affects employees. Building on Hasford et al. (2018) findings that employees will choose their meals based on their boss's meal choice, this research will study how relationships with meal partners affect workers' food choices based on the impression they want to project. This study will further explore the image the employee wants to display to his boss, colleague, or subordinate, focusing on the impression management techniques of self-promotion, ingratiation, and supplication (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the following:

RQ1: *To what extent do interpersonal relationships with coworkers affect food choices?*

Individuals' decisions about food consumption will differ substantially depending on their cognitive and physical activity; "food as a fuel" suggests that people tend to choose high-caloric meals when performing high cognitive or physical energy-dependent tasks (Cornil et al., 2020). This study explores whether the mealtime conversation may suggest a need for different energy levels depending on whether the discussion is work-related or non-work related. Will work-related conversations require more cognitive energy than other conversations? Hence;

RQ2: *To what extent does the conversation during the food event affect food choices?*

Finally, the research will investigate the impact of the chosen food on employees' positive or negative emotions and engagement levels toward the work topic discussed. As suggested by previous findings by (Desmet et al., 2018; Organ et al., 2015):

RQ3: To what extent do food choices impact work engagement levels and affective reactions?

Method

Participants

The participants were nine female employees working in Canada in June 2022. The employees were recruited through the researcher's connections. Out of the nine participants, seven were full-time employees, one part-time employee, and another intern. All female participants were between the age of 20 to 35 years old. In addition, six participants were working-from-home, and three had a hybrid job position. Hybrid participants were flexible and worked partly in the workplace and partly remotely outside the workplace. The participants' roles varied between consultant, marketing, customer service, engineering, and teaching. Participants had entry-level positions or specialists, but none had managerial positions. They all had recently shared food with one or more coworkers.

The global pandemic restrictions of 2020 occurred after the research study had been planned. This had a considerable effect on the recruitment of participants. Many employees refused to attend social and workplace events during the pandemic. In addition, many organizations have stopped in-person meetings and events to ensure the safety of their employees. We did not interview participants who had shared food with coworkers before the pandemic because the participants may not recall the accurate details of the event.

Interview Measures

The interviews were expected to be 30 minutes at maximum. The interview guide consisted of background questions, discussions about the food event, food choices, mealtime conversation, affective emotions, and engagement levels.

The interviewer began with basic background questions to know the participants' role in the organization, job position, and tenure in the job position and company. Following the background questions, the interviewer examined the food event by questioning the last time they consumed a meal with a colleague, subordinate, or boss. Then the interviewer asked to focus on an event or meeting the participant recalled the most or the most recent meal gathering.

The food event was further investigated by asking in-depth questions about the event's setting, the location and time, the number of dining partners involved, job positions, and how long the participant had known them. The reason behind the outing also took part in interview questions. The participants were also asked whether they were invited or paid for their meals. After knowing the number of dining partners involved, the participants were asked with whom they chatted the most and the relative position of this employee to the interviewee. The interviewer was expected to probe based on the participants' responses.

After the discussion about the food event, the interviewer focused on the food choices consumed by the participant and the dining partners' meals during this event. First, the participants were asked whether they picked their meal or a set menu was provided for them. Next, participants were asked to mention who ordered before them. The order of choosing the meals was needed to examine whether the participants modified their food choices to impress the dining partners. To further explore the food choices, the participants were asked to describe what they consumed, what the other dining partners consumed, and the food consumed by the person they chatted with the most. The participants were also asked about their usual food preferences to determine if their meals differed from their everyday choices.

The third part of the interview included questions about the mealtime conversation. Those questions were used to examine whether the participants discussed the job, upcoming activities, or non-work-related discussions during the food event. In cases where the topic discussed was related to the work, further questions were asked to know more details about the type of work discussion, such as a celebration, talk of an upcoming project, or a problem solution conversation. Again, the goal was to determine the cognitive effort implied by the discussion.

Lastly, to investigate whether the meeting impacted the work engagement levels and the relationship between the dining partners, the participants were asked whether they felt more excited about the topics discussed. The researcher probed on how they felt about their relationship with the dining partners after the meeting.

Survey Measures

After the interview, participants responded to a brief survey that requested details about their specific food choices, affective reactions after the food event, topics of conversation, and related motivation levels. Below is the description for each of the survey measures used.

Food Choices

We adapted the food frequency questionnaire (FFQ) built by Davison et al. (2021), encompassing a full range of food choices. This 17-item questionnaire allowed participants to select all the food items that they consumed: "sweets/chocolate/biscuits; buns/cakes/pastries; fizzy/sugary drinks; diet drinks; crisps; chips/fried potatoes; boiled/backed potatoes; fried foods (sausage, eggs, bacon); meat products; meat/meat dishes; fish (not fried); beans/pulses; fruits; vegetables/salads (except potatoes); bread; rice/pasta; milk (to drink; on cereal; puddings) cheese/yogurt." The FFQ was tested for reliability and validity and is reliable and valid for young people and adults (Davison et al., 2021).

Impression Management

This measure drew on the impression management scale developed by Kacmar et al. (2007). The five subscales of the impression management scale are self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication. The five subscales were rated between "1: never behave this way" and "5: often behave this way" (Kacmar et al., 2007). Only the self-promotion, ingratiation, and supplication subscales were included in this study. The researcher did not assume that other exemplification and intimidation subscales may be used during a workplace event. Exemplification indicates employees' doing extra work to appear as model employees, examples include "Stay at work late so people will know you are hard working," and "Come to the office at night or on weekends to show that you are dedicated." Intimidation occurs when an employee creates danger with coworkers, examples include "Deal strongly or aggressively with coworkers who interfere in your business," and "Deal forcefully with colleagues when they hamper your ability to get your job done." The researcher did not expect employees to follow exemplification or intimidation techniques during the workplace event; therefore, they were not measured in the survey.

The participants were asked to rate their interactions during the meal. Examples of the self-promotion subscale included "Talk proudly about your experience or education" and "Make people aware of your talents or qualifications." The ingratiation measure had ratings for "Compliment your colleagues so they will see you as likable" and "Take an interest in your colleagues' personal lives to show them that you are friendly." Finally, the supplication

dimension included factors like “Act like you know less than you do so people will help you out” and “Try to gain assistance or sympathy from people by appearing needy in some areas.” In this study, the participants were asked to respond to “During the meal, you were able to…” and to rate each statement on a 5 Likert point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Affective Reactions and Engagement Levels

This study used the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) scale developed by Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988) to assess employee affective reactions, which consists of 20 items measuring positive and negative emotions. As for employee engagement, this study adopted the 17-item employee version of the engagement scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). The scale consists of items that measure employees’ dedication, vigor, and absorption in work. For this study and to make the survey time convenient for the participants, we used a shorter version of the engagement and affective emotions scales developed by Kern et al. (2014).

Following Kern et al. (2014), we included only the six highest-loading items of the PANAS. The six items retained for positive emotions were: interested, enthusiastic, alert, inspired, determined, and active. The six negative emotions retained were: distressed, upset, scared, nervous, jittery, and afraid. The items were measured on a 5-point scale (not at all, a little, moderately, very, extremely). The six highest loading items of the engagement scale included “I feel bursting with energy,” “My job inspires me,” “I feel strong and vigorous,” “I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose,” “I am proud of the work that I do,” and “I am enthusiastic about my job.” The engagement scale was measured on a 4 points scale (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree).

Background Questions

The survey included a few background questions related to gender, employee status, work location, and how often the employees share a meal with their work partners.

Results

The interviewees shared their meals mainly with their colleagues or managers. The reasons behind the gathering of employees ranged from lunch hours meetings to celebrations and meeting up with working-from-home employees. For instance, the pandemic stopped employees from meeting newly hired employees.

"...because we have not met, a lot of them that were new. We have not seen them before. They were recently hired. We did not have any company activities since then. So, I thought it would be nice for us to all see each other face to face."

In a hybrid work case, the reason was the lunch hour on days when they are present in the office, *"We are asked to be in the office every Wednesday. We were hybrid workers. We coordinate the day we go into the office together. And so, when we are in the office together, we normally eat lunch together."*

Celebrating holidays was another reason for a work event, *"... the reason was to celebrate Christmas, Christmas 2021."* Thus, there are abundant reasons why workplace meetings could be accompanied by sharing meals.

Interpersonal Relationships

First, we examined the interview transcripts and quantitative measures to answer the first research question about a potential link between interpersonal relationships and food choices. It was uncommon for the interviewees to remember who ordered first; ordering the meals was random. Instead, most participants specified their food and recalled what the other dining partners consumed. In cases when the participants chose the food, they preferred to consume what they liked or the usual type of food they ordered. *"No, you know when the waitress came by, you know, they start at the end of the table, and then just go around. So, it is not that anybody volunteered first,"* said one of the interviewees. In another case, the participant received the menu and chose her food before the event.

"We have been invited. They sent us an email for this event. In the email, there was a menu, and we could choose the appetizer, main course, and also dessert. And then there was kind of catering. The catering was there. So you go, you tell them your name, and then they give you the lunch box like the appetizer and everything."

As per the interview discussions, it was shown that the participants were not trying to display a particular image, nor were they imitating their boss's or coworkers' food choices. *"And my favorite meal is a vegetarian burger. That is why I ordered it another time because it was my favorite,"* said one of the interviewees. In another case, the company chose the meal: *"No, it was purely the company who got like a bunch of pizzas; they were all on a table."*

All interviewees went with a group of coworkers and a manager, but none had a one-on-one meeting. In many cases, the coworkers were from different departments, *"Two of them are in marketing. One is in product development. One is in business development sales. And the one who could not make it. She's in accounting."* Some cases had all the employees invited, *"Yeah, I would say like 65 to 70 people."* In other cases, simple lunch gatherings were with the manager

and coworkers, *"so one is the head of the archive work we are doing. The other was my classmate, that is also a research assistant."*

The impression management scale in the survey showed that the employees used the meal gathering to self-promote themselves, less on the ingratiation scale. Still, none used the gathering as an act of supplication. On the other hand, the interviews showed that very few interviewees used the event as a self-promotion or ingratiation, and none used it as a supplication. For example, a new employee wanted to self-promote herself, *"It is kind of a new role for me, and I am jumping, and I am closing deals…The first month was busy because I was on board. After that, it was a lot easier."*
One of the interviewees wanted to be liked by her manager through admiring his career experience and success, encompassing ingratiation techniques *"…So he was telling me how am I able to grow in the future, and I told him what my goals are, and if he can coach me what to do, what to do in order to be a senior consultant in the future."* Another interviewee preferred to play games with her manager and coworkers during lunch break to gain their likability, *"When my boss joins, sometimes we can play it with two people or three people. It was really nice. I liked chatting with him. And I think playing a game was a really fun way to spend the lunch break. But I always think it is nice even when I lose the game; I like playing."*

The survey also assessed food choices, in which the participants were shown a list of food items. The participants selected more food items they consumed than they had recalled during the interviews. The survey showed that the highest intake was vegetables/salad and bread, indicating that the preference might be for lighter and healthier meals. Only one participant picked fried food and sugary drinks, suggesting the employees avoided junk food.

Mealtime Conversation

Second, we reviewed the interview transcripts and quantitative measures to answer the second research question related to the link between mealtime conversation and food choices. Most of the participants did not discuss work during the food event. The participants recalled the main topic of discussion, and most of them chatted about general issues or personal life. For instance, one of the interviewees said:
"I think we talked about hair. We talked about lifestyle preferences and things like that. Who cooks at home? I talked about the dog that I am going to get, you know, and we talked about pets, some cats; we talked about veganism. And, food, you know, just general conversation, it was like more introductory about each one's personality, you can say. Because, you know, even though we chat at work but it is not the same when you can chat in person."
Work-related conversations were not the only focus of the discussion, *"Um, I think that there were two main topics that I recall. One was personal relationships. And the other one was our workload."* The interviews also showed that work-related conversations were not very relevant to the everyday work they have to do. For example, one of the interviewees considered herself to have a work-related conversation when she was chatting with her manager,
"When I had a discussion with my manager because he has been working at IBM for almost seven years. Oh, he talked about his experience and how he loves his job. And he also guided me

on what to do in the next steps. I found that is an interesting conversation because I now know what I am exactly doing and what I should expect in the future."
Although this was considered a work-related conversation by the participant, since it does not require high cognitive effort, we will not consider it a work-related conversation in this research.

Engagement Levels and Affective Emotions

Finally, the quantitative measures and interview transcripts were used to assess the third research question related to the possible link between food choices, work engagement levels, and affective reactions. In addition, when asked about their engagement levels towards the work after the meeting, none of the participants clearly expressed increased engagement. According to the interviews, the food event meals had a neutral effect on engagement levels during work. Most participants' responses were similar, *"Well, I mean, it was probably neutral. I was not more excited or less excited than before, but it is just good to keep the flow of information and what is happening."*
On the contrary, the engagement scale in the survey showed very positive results. All participants strongly or somewhat agreed with the engagement scale, and none disagreed with any items. This means the participants were all engaged and excited about their work, but not necessarily due to the food event.

In terms of affective emotions, most of the participants ranked positive emotions higher than negative ones. This implies that the meal event enhanced the participants' emotions and did not elicit any negative emotions. Interestingly, all participants mentioned that the food event helped them build a stronger relationship with the dining partners. In addition, they all said that the food event positively impacted their social relationships with other workers. *"Well, I think, you know, meeting together gives you more of a bond. I think we will definitely do this again every month. Let us make it a ritual, you know."*
One of the interviewees expressed the stronger bond she developed after the food event. The food event made communication between workers more convenient,
"Because I did feel l more comfortable to talk about myself and to reach out and to ask about them. So yeah, because if I did not feel that they do have this, like a friendly environment and relationship. I would not have felt comfortable like sharing things about myself or even asking them about their interests. So, I would say it impacted. Yes, but in a good way."

Discussion

The results of the interviews and survey showed that all of the participants attended non-work-related events. Non-work-related events were those events that did not have any work purpose. When employees attend an event in the workplace that does not have a work-related goal, such as meetings, work discussions, project planning, or problem-solving, then they are attending a non-work-related event. The goal of the non-work-related events is unrelated to work, for example, a birthday celebration, lunch break, or Christmas celebration. Thus, it is a social event that an employee attends with coworkers and managers.

The results from *the interviews demonstrated that, for these participants, impression management did not play a significant role in modifying the participants' food choices*. In addition, the impression management scale used in the survey showed that self-promotion and ingratiation might be seldom used to display a particular image. During the interviews, the participants did not adopt an impression management technique to display a certain image; this may result from having conversations with multiple people. It may also be due to participants' ability to suppress their intentions to self-promote their qualifications when dining with coworkers and managers. On the other hand, the results from the survey showed that the participants might use self-promotion or ingratiation techniques, which may sort of alter their behavior when dining with coworkers and managers. The opposing results from interviews and surveys may be due to participants' inability to express their behavior modification or the impression they wanted to display was not given as much importance as we assumed. For instance, none of the employees imitated their food choices to fit their boss's or coworkers' preferences, unlike the Hasford et al. (2018) results. The results may be due to the other factors accompanying the food event, such as having a group rather than a one-on-one meeting, the waitperson taking the orders randomly or having a set menu.

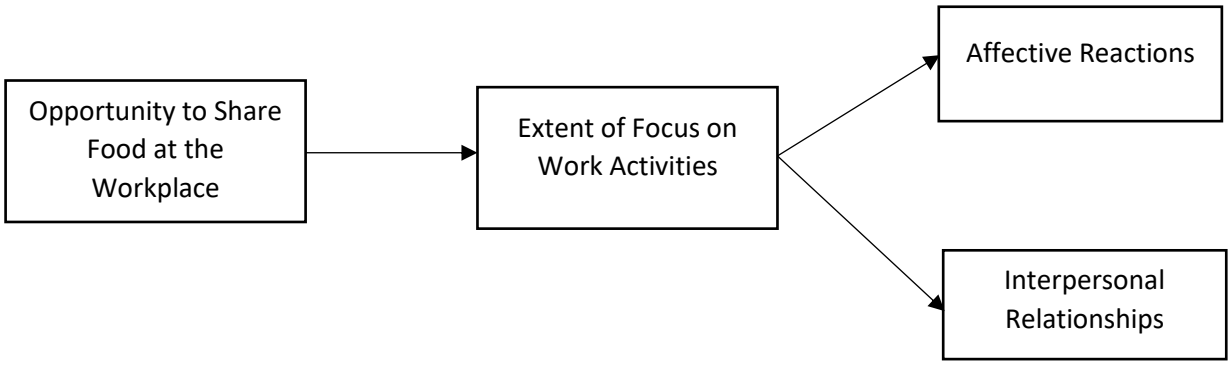
The results from *these interviews failed to show that the food choices had increased participants' engagement towards the topic discussed*, although the results showed very advantageous effects on affective emotions. The failure of the engagement assumption may be because the mealtime conversations were unrelated to work. This may be due to the impact of the pandemic on social events, which made employees very involved in the event after a lengthy lockdown, so they did not discuss the work during the food event. However, we can also infer that the nonwork topics did not need much cognitive effort, and the participants did not pick the food as fuel. Although studying the actual food health concern and dietary habits of participants were beyond the scope of this study, the results from the interviews and survey both showed a preference for lighter meals. This shows again that they did not consume energy-dense food and did not consider "food as a fuel." The mealtime nonwork conversations could result from the post-pandemic situation where people have not met each other for a while.

The post-pandemic situation has led the work events in a different direction, like meeting newly hired employees or socializing again with the managers and coworkers. *Therefore, the meal partner is less important than we assumed* for participants in this study. In addition, the participants of this study were invited to an event with several colleagues and managers, so the participants were not influenced by one person as expected. Thus, in this study, participants were not influenced by their boss or co-worker since they attended large events with various coworkers and managers.

The assumption that *work-related conversations will impact engagement levels was not supported.* This might be because the participants were not involved in work-related discussions as assumed. On the other hand, the survey showed that engagement levels were elevated. The contradictory results of engagement levels may be due to participants' assertion that engagement during interviews was related to the topic discussed. In contrast, the survey's engagement results may be related to participants' general engagement with their job. For the intent of this study, we are concerned with engagement levels towards the topics discussed during dining with coworkers and managers. Therefore, engagement levels were not elevated when sharing meals during workplace events. Our interviews included participants who attended workplace social events that elevated their positive emotions and allowed them to build stronger relationships with their coworkers. Thus, the effects of food events on employees may have a broader impact than impression management and conversations that influence food choices. It is more likely that the effect of food events on employees and employers may occur in less direct ways to have an impact on emotions and relationships.

The results from the interviews and survey manifested that food in the workplace exists and that food events take part of the work field. However, the focus during work events may be on work such as work discussions and problem-solving but may not always be on work activities, similar to the case of our participants. Our participants discussed general topics, but employees, in other cases, may discuss work-related topics such as upcoming projects or current challenges within a team. Most importantly, our study showed that positive emotions emerged from workplace events, as well as relationships that were strengthened from those events. Figure 1 summarizes the results inferred from the interviews and surveys.

Figure 1: Framework



In conclusion, the interviews and survey measures did not support our beliefs that interpersonal relationships and mealtime conversations with coworkers affect food choices. Therefore, *our assumption that food choices affect work engagement levels was not supported.* On the other hand, *an interesting finding that emerged from the interviews was the positive emotions aroused and employees' eagerness about the relationships built through those events.* It is possible that the events took a social direction rather than a work one and that the interactions between the

participants and other workers were led by the social atmosphere. It may be that the employees wanted to avoid having a work-related conversation when sharing food with colleagues and may not have wanted to expend energy on work duties in a food gathering. Ideally, they were attending such events because of their affirmative impact. Perhaps the positive effect of the food event found on building stronger relationships and affective emotions was due to the low focus on work. The employees and employers may have been using those events to disconnect from the demanding and stressful job duties. Employees in workplace food events did not focus on work or address work-related conversations as expected. It seems that *workplace food events may have shifted employees' attention to issues beyond work-related topics; their attention was centered on enjoyable moments and developing relationships with coworkers*. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships deduced from the results of our study.

The results revealed that employees did not focus on "food choices," as we assumed at the beginning of the study. When attending events with a large group of colleagues and managers, employees did not try to display a specific image as expected. In addition, since our study was limited only to participants who attended social workplace events and the conversations were unrelated to their job, we did not support our assumption that mealtime conversations would lead to the consumption of certain food choices. We concluded that sharing food in the workplace has a broader influence than food choices. We deduced that the general positivity and optimism from the interviews and surveys might be due to several factors, such as having a break from work and socializing with coworkers and managers.

The broader aspect of the workplace food event may lie in the fact that employees did not focus on work; instead, they took a break and allowed their minds to wander. Interestingly, Kaplan (1995) theorized the relationship between direct attention and restoring energy in his attention restoration energy (ART). The effectiveness of energy restoration occurs when individuals reduce their fatigue from intense concentration; instead, they give their brains a break to replenish their energy (Kaplan, 1995). Similarly, our results suggested that workers did not attend workplace events to increase their engagement towards specific tasks; instead, they might be restoring their energy to continue their work later. Our qualitative study affirmed that the workplace events had allowed participants to build close ties with other workers, making communication smoother when working virtually. The positive emotions developed during those post-pandemic workplace events may be due to the break they took from work that allowed employees to restore their energy. Although the interviews manifested that workplace events were generally positive experiences, the experiences were unrelated to work tasks or job duties. Therefore, we will quantitatively explore workplace food events and build on Kaplan's (1995) restoration of energy theory. Our quantitative research will study workplace food events as a break that will pause employees' concentration on work, instead attending an event where they can relax and enjoy their time with other workers. Hence, the positive effects of the food event may be the restoration of energy the employees are gaining from the food event.

Limitations

The limitations of this study must be mentioned. Our research was an exploratory study about the effects of workplace food events on employees. The sample of this study was small and all-female participants. It was difficult for the researcher to find participants and received no responses from sharing it on social media networks such as LinkedIn. Therefore, we cannot generalize the results based on our small and all-female sample. Although we cannot generalize the results based on nine female participants, our participants' amusement in workplace events

assured us that a follow-up quantitative study with a larger sample will allow us to explore workplace food events further.

Our research occurred during the global pandemic, which impacted eating out with coworkers. The pandemic imposed a different meaning on workplace events. Most work-related meetings shifted to online meetings during the pandemic to ensure the safety of employees. The organizations planned workplace events once in-person gatherings were allowed to gather the employees again. The return to in-person gatherings influenced the events and conversations; for example, new employees who had never met their work colleagues because of the pandemic were more enthusiastic about having an introductory conversation than a work-related one. The pandemic gave the notion that work could be completed virtually; hence, social and nonwork-related discussions dominated once the return to in-person gatherings occurred. Therefore, it had emerged that a meal with a single colleague or small group is not a primary form of food sharing at the workplace, particularly in post-pandemic months when employees last met each other a while ago. During the pandemic, work-related meetings primarily took the form of online meetings, and most employers adopted this form of engagement. There are many reasons why organizations plan meetings, and the number of meetings that occur in one business day in the United States is around 55 million meetings (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2018). The reasons for the numerous workplace meetings are often outcome-related, such as problem-solving or generating ideas. In other cases, meetings are done to improve interpersonal relationships or for team building (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2018). In addition, a considerable amount of work is achieved during scheduled meetings, including brainstorming, discussions, and presenting accomplishments (Allen et al., 2014). Still, many of those meetings became virtual rather than in-person during the pandemic. In-person workplace events are taking the social form. According to Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2018), a workplace event may be arranged to enhance employee relationships, build more substantial organizational commitment, or improve team dynamics. Therefore, the interactions at workplace food events may or may not be related to work duties.

Although post-pandemic events include a group of workers rather than one-on-one meetings, our study showed that workplace food events positively influence employees. Our follow-up research would examine the broader perspective of workplace food events. Thus, our quantitative study will explore workplace food events as occasions that reduce employees' concentration on work, giving them a break that will help restore their energy for future performance.

We concluded from the interviews and survey that in some cases, sharing food at workplace events was a common strategy employers used to gather employees, such as serving pizza for workers and in the cases of events with workers from other countries. In other cases, the employees coordinated the event, similar to employees who planned a gathering to meet the new employees hired during the pandemic. Almost all of our participants who attended a workplace event planned by their employer or employees had enhanced their relationship with their colleagues and socialized with them. In the post-pandemic situation, employees attended workplace events to fulfill their reduced social life for the past few months. Once in-person gatherings returned, workplace events reinforced workers' excitement to socialize and get to know new employees rather than to focus on specific work tasks. Given the situation where employees had to work online for an extended period, they found that the event was an escape from work and a break for them to relax. Therefore, study 2 will explore sharing food in workplace events through a broader lens. Workplace events will be studied as an escape and interruption from the demanding work duties that employees utilize to restore their energy.

Study 2

In this study, I approached food in the workplace through a broader lens, examining how attending a food event at work might positively revitalize and re-energize employees. The research also explores why such a positive effect might be expected. According to the attention restoration theory (Kaplan, 1995), employees benefit from time spent in a state with low physical and mental strength. This break from focused attention ultimately restores their energy levels. Short breaks during work workshops or training allow employees to re-energize for future work. For example, umpires in baseball games recognize short breaks as essential to their job (Archsmith et al., 2021). Umpires' mentally demanding job requires them to stay focused; thus, they take short breaks to replenish their minds (Archsmith et al., 2021). For example, Klotz & Bolino (2021) suggested that spending time in the natural environment allows employees to enjoy the sound of birds and natural water with minimal cognitive effort, unlike when they enjoy a conversation with a co-worker that requires some attentional effort. Similarly, the food event might be enjoyable because of the lack of focus on work, and thus restorative of the energy needed for future effective work.

Four types of energy restoration are predicted – cognitive, prosocial, emotional, and physical. A restoration of cognitive energy implies that after a period of low attentional focus, employees may regain the ability to concentrate on task information, analyze the situation and solve organizational problems efficiently. Restoration of physical energy indicates that employees may regain their physical strength after a short break to continue physically demanding duties. Restoring prosocial energy signifies that employees' social relationships and networks may be enhanced after a social event, promoting collegiality and bonding between workers. Finally, restoring emotional energy boosts positive feelings of happiness, joy, and a sense of belonging towards the organizational community.

In this study, I propose that attending food events at work will determine employees' attentional focus and restore their energy. Following attention restoration theory, I examine the impact of workplace food events on employees' restoration of energy.

Basu, Duvall, & Kaplan (2019) distinguished two modes of attentional focus. First, soft focus is the mode of attention that does not require all of an individual's attention, leaving space for other thoughts to come along and reflect on other things, such as walking in the wood, where walking is not an activity that demands all of one's focus, leaving mental space to reflect on other issues (Basu et al., 2019). Soft focus occurs in our daily activities giving human brains a break to relax from excessive mental functions; for instance, taking a shower is a relaxing activity that utilizes one's soft focus, allowing thoughts to emerge simultaneously. On the contrary, hard focus requires all of a person's attention, leaving no area for other mental activities. Watching television, for example, is considered a relaxing activity but demands full attention without allowing one's mind to wander (Basu et al., 2019). Similarly, we often see social media as therapeutic and restorative activities since they enable one to escape daily stress, anxiety, and responsibilities. However, social media forcefully demands all of one's attention, employing one's hard focus (Basu et al., 2019). People find that the distraction from a tiring routine recreates and re-energizes their souls. Therefore, humans respond to activities requiring soft or hard focus to restore their energy.

Workplace events could be either work-related events or non-work-related events. For example, employees would attend work-related events to fulfill work duties, such as attending work meetings, training, or workshops. Therefore, work-related events aim to accomplish work tasks and job duties or finish assignments and projects. However, workplace events could also be non-work-related events. Non-work-related events include gathering with work colleagues, managers, or subordinates for reasons unrelated to their job. Examples of non-work-related events' purpose included birthday celebrations, Christmas events, end-of-year gatherings, or lunch hour gatherings.

Soft and hard focus may occur in different scenarios of a workplace food event. For example, some workplace events are made to rest from tedious and challenging work duties. Food events may allow employees to take a step back from work activities. Instead of concentrating on their tasks, draining their energy, and making it harder for them to stay efficient, they engage in activities requiring less attention during workplace food events. In such events, employees would wander around for good food and talk to people about general topics. The restful environment would allow employees to use their soft focus, interrupting their attention from work tasks and due dates. Soft focus enables employees to wander around other workers, socialize, and eat food, leaving space for other thoughts to emerge. This type of workplace event will direct employees' attention into soft focus that ultimately regains their energy after a period of relaxation, socialization, and tranquility. Workplace events that revolve around non-work-related conversations are prone to be social events that restore employees' prosocial energy and increase their commitment to the organization, restoring their emotional energy. Those events would relax employees' mental brain functions, restoring their cognitive energy. In addition, the soft focus may be triggered during work-related events. For instance, suppose a break is given during a work-related event for employees. In that case, the soft focus may be stimulated, and their minds may wander about other issues regarding their personal life. Therefore, the soft focus may be triggered during non-work-related and work-related events; however, soft is more stimulated during non-work-related events than work-related ones.

On the other hand, some workplace events revolve around work, training, or conferences. This type of work event would force employees to centralize their focus on learning new information or having a meaningful conversation with a manager. In such events, hard focus controls employees' brains, barely leaving room for other thoughts. As a result, hard focus, in this case, would restore employees' energy, as it may encourage their engagement and enthusiasm about new knowledge. However, hard focus does not allow employees' brains to wander like soft attentional focus. Therefore, it is expected that hard focus is less likely to restore energy compared to soft attentional focus. The hard focus could also prevail in different circumstances in a workplace event. For instance, the hard focus would dominate if employees were consuming great food and intensely involved in food and food discussions. This hard focus on food would ultimately restore employees' energy by food's impact on mental energy. Workplace events are work events if their aim is training, problem-solving, or a work discussion. In this type of work event, the employees use their hard attentional focus to restore their cognitive energy. Employees may restore their prosocial energy if they widen their network with other workers and restore their emotional energy if they feel more committed to their organization. Hard focus may also be stimulated during non-work-related events. For example, suppose employees are focused on conversation with a work colleague and involved in a discussion. In that case, their brain may leave no room for other thoughts to come along, triggering employees' hard focus. Therefore, the

hard focus may be stimulated during non-work-related and work-related food events. However, the hard focus is assumed to be more triggered during work-related than non-work-related events.

The numerous reasons for workplace food events expose employees to different types of interactions, such as work or nonwork interactions. Therefore, in this research, I hypothesize that the type of interactions during a food event would direct the kind of attentional focus as hard or soft focus. When work interactions dominate in workplace events, it is more likely that the employees will use their hard focus. On the other hand, employees will probably use their soft focus when interactions in workplace events are nonwork and social. The type of attentional focus would ultimately restore employees' energy. Soft attentional focus supremacy hard focus in restoring employees' energy since it disrupts humans' brains from being occupied, giving employees' brains a break to rest and de-stress. Therefore, I expect the soft attentional focus to lead to more cognitive, physical, emotional, and prosocial energy restoration.

The hypotheses follow:

H1a: Employees' attention will be on "hard focus" during a work-related food event compared to a non-work-related event.

H1b: Employees' attentional focus will be on "soft focus" during a non-work-related food event compared to a work-related event.

H2: Soft attentional focus will be linked to higher levels of perceived restoration of 2a) cognitive energy; 2b) emotional energy; 2c) prosocial energy; 2d) physical energy.

H3: Hard attentional focus will be associated with lower levels of perceived restoration of 3a) cognitive energy; 3b) emotional energy; 3c) prosocial energy; 3d) physical energy.

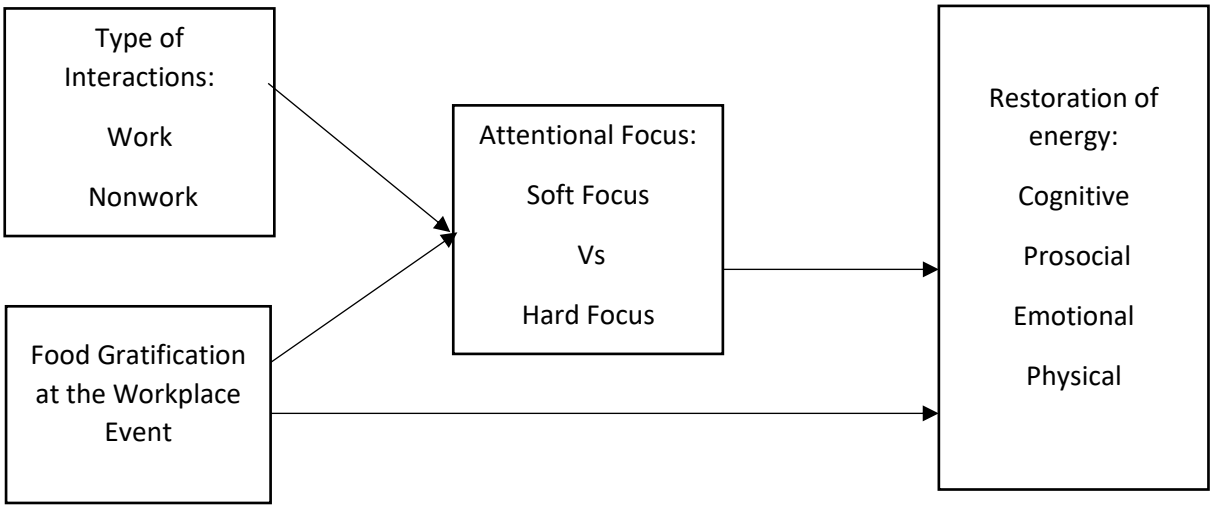
Food consumption is a part of both work and non-work-related food events. Our qualitative findings showed that food consumed with other workers elicited positive emotions, but the rationale behind food gratification during workplace events still needs to be fully explored. Uses and gratification theory (U&G) interprets why and how people choose a particular social media form to satisfy their needs (Ray et al., 2019). This study will adopt the uses and gratification theory as food gratification to understand how food in workplace events satisfies employees' needs. It may be possible that employees, after food gratification, can direct their attentional focus more. Food of high quality may affect employees' attentional focus. In addition, workplace events may serve food to affect employees' energy restoration directly. Food may restore employees' energy by influencing the restoration of energy categories: cognitive, prosocial, physical, or emotional. First, food may restore mental and physical energy because employees may consume food as fuel and would return energized to continue their work discussion or physical work. This aligns with the Cornil et al. (2020) findings that food restores individuals' cognitive and physical energy. In work-related events, such as training or conference, the employees take a break to consume food. In this case, food would re-energize workers' mental strength to continue their work. Second, employees would have an amplified positive experience when they consume food with another person, restoring their prosocial energy (Boothby et al., 2014) because they will socialize and network with workers from different departments that otherwise they would not have the chance to communicate or build a relationship with them. Third, food can restore emotional energy when it triggers positive emotions (Desmet et al., 2008)

since a food event can manifest an organization's appreciation for its employees, intensifying employees' optimism and sense of belonging. The role of food in directing employees' attention or restoring their energy has not been studied. Food gratification in a workplace event could be allocated to the quality of food served and employees' general involvement in food. This study will explore the association between food gratification in a workplace event and employees' soft and hard attentional focus and energy restoration. Therefore, this study will examine the following research question:

RQ: Is food gratification during a workplace event linked to employees' attentional focus and restoration of energy?

This study will focus on two types of interaction during workplace events: work and nonwork interactions. Work interactions occur during work-related events, and nonwork interactions occur during non-work-related events. The interactions during workplace events are expected to trigger the attentional focus, where the hard focus will be triggered more during work-related events, and the soft focus will be more stimulated during non-work-related events. Ultimately, the attentional focus restores employees' cognitive, emotional, prosocial, and physical energy. The first goal of this research was to explore food in workplace events. Therefore, this study will also explore food during workplace events as an activity that restores employees' energy directly or indirectly by stimulating employees' attentional focus. In this study, the researcher will explore the widespread presence and consumption of food during workplace event rather than focusing on food choices. Figure 2 summarizes the framework of the study.

Figure 2: Framework



Method

Participants

The participants were recruited through the researchers' network and by posting the recruitment poster on the researchers' LinkedIn accounts. To further grow the sample group, the recruitment continued through snowball sampling, in which current participants were asked to recruit future subjects. Another method to recruit participants was spreading the survey online using the Prolific panel to reach more participants in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom at the end of December 2022. For participants to participate in this survey, they must have attended a workplace event where food was served and consumed.

The sample consisted of 131 participants, 75 females (58%) and 55 males (42%), with 66 under 35 years old (50%), 44 between 35 and 49 years old (35%), 16 participants between the age of 50 and 65 years old (12%), and only 4 participants were above 65 years old (3%). The sample included 123 full-time employees (95%) and seven part-time employees (5%). The tenure in the organization ranged from a minimum of five months to a maximum of 40 years, with a mean tenure of six years and five months. The participants were working in different types of organizations: 28 of the 131 participants were working in the education sector, 18 in the healthcare, 14 in the government, 12 in finance, 4 in food service, 1 in agriculture, and 53 in other types of organizations such as IT, manufacturing, retail, customer service, and consulting.

Survey Measure

Work and Non-work-related Events

The participants were asked to describe the event's purpose to assess the type of interactions in workplace events. Participants responded to the open-ended question, "Briefly describe the purpose for this meeting or event." The researcher then coded their responses as task-related or non-task-related workplace events. The researcher used this question to separate the events that were work-related versus non-work related. Employees who mentioned that the purpose of attending the workplace event was task-related had been grouped under participants who attended work-related events. Employees' who mentioned that the purpose of attending the workplace event was non-task-related were grouped under participants who attended non-work-related events.

Soft Focus

This study used the mental bandwidth scale from Basu, Duvall, & Kaplan's (2019) research to measure soft focus. The mental bandwidth (MB) scale measured mental activities, which helped assess the soft focus of the participants. The scale was tested for reliability and attained Cronbach's alpha score of 0.751, reflecting high internal consistency and reliability. The scale consisted of a 7-items rated on a scale of 1 to 5 (1: not at all – 5: extremely). The mental bandwidth scale was developed to fit default activities like daydreaming (Basu et al., 2019). Therefore, this study modified MB scale items to fit employees during workplace food events. Examples of the modified MB scale items were "During the event, I was aware of things going on around me" and "During the event, I made plans for the future."

Hard Focus

The perceived restorativeness (PR) scale from Basu, Duvall, & Kaplan (2019) was adapted to measure the hard focus of the participants because it showed if participants were drawn into the

activity. The PR scale consisted of 9 items measured in a 5-point rating scale. Cronbach's alpha for this scale scored 0.875, reflecting the high reliability of the scale items. In addition, this study modified the items in the scale to represent the food event rather than an activity. Examples of the modified items in the PR scale included "Once this event started, I easily got pulled in," "Participating in this event was a captivating experience," and "This event was an escape for me."

Perceived Restoration of Energy

The restoration of energy was measured qualitatively through an open-ended question that asked the participants to describe the possible benefits of food events at the workplace. More precisely, they were asked: "In your view, does the organization benefit from serving food at events like this? Please explain." The responses were then coded by the researcher as one or more of the following: 1= restores cognitive energy, 2= restores emotional energy, 3= restores prosocial energy, 4= restores physical energy, and 0= no benefit/ none of the above.

Enjoyment of the Food Event

The researchers developed an 8-item scale to measure participants' overall enjoyment of the food event. This scale would be helpful to assess participants' experience, whether it was an entertaining or a dull food event. When tested for reliability, the developed scale showed a high value of Cronbach's alpha, 0.913. Examples of the developed scale included, "Overall, I enjoyed this event," "Overall, I enjoyed my interactions with others," "Overall, I enjoyed the food," and "Overall, I felt enthusiastic." The scale was measured by rating the items from 1: Not at all to 5: Very much.

We also wanted to explore the types of food available at these events and the participants' general level of interest in the food.

Food Choices

Food choices were assessed qualitatively through an open-ended question. The participants were asked to list all the food they consumed during the event.

Food Gratification

This research will assess food gratification by measuring two variables: the quality of food and food involvement.

Quality of Food

The quality of food was studied to understand employees' likeability of the food and whether they found it appealing through its taste and appearance. This study adopted the PSSQ (Parameter Specific Sensory Quality) scale developed by McKenzie et al. (2010) to measure the quality of food consumed. A group of professionals and nutritionists developed the PSSQ scale to measure the sensory dimensions of individual food items. The scale selected three main sensory food dimensions: appearance, texture, and flavor (McKenzie et al., 2010). For this study, the PSSQ scale measured the food quality in the events, measuring the following dimensions: flavor, texture, appearance, and overall quality of food. The scale was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1: very poor – 5: very good). In addition, the scale recorded Cronbach's alpha value of 0.938, representing highly reliable items.

Food Involvement Scale

The food involvement scale (FIS) used in this survey was developed by Bell & Marshall (2003) by asking participants to generate items for food involvement. The scale retained 12 items with the highest reliability, "r," that measured food involvement (Bell & Marshall, 2003). The items of the FIS cover five dimensions: acquisition, preparation, cooking, eating, and disposal (Kenneally & LeBel, 2009). The intent of this study includes only the activity of "eating" food; therefore, items from acquisition, preparation, cooking, and disposal were not used. For this study, the survey only included the three most relevant items related to eating during the workplace event, items 3, 5, and 8; "Talking about what I ate or am going to eat is something I like to do," "When I travel, one of the things I anticipate most is eating the food there," and "When I eat out, I don't think or talk much about how the food tastes." The rest of the nine items of the original scale were excluded; unfortunately, this resulted in lower internal consistency reliability of the scale items. Thus, Cronbach's alpha score was 0.636. Although the scale missed traditional levels of reliability, it was decided to continue to use the measure in the analysis. The scale was measured by rating the participant's agreement with the items from 1: disagree totally to 7: agree totally.

Descriptive Data

Finally, the survey included background questions about the participants and the food event. The participants were asked about their job industry, tenure, and employment status. They were also asked about the food event, including questions regarding the time of the event, mealtime conversation, dining partners, and food choices.

Results

Work-related and Non-work-related Events

Of the 131 participants, 129 responded to a question regarding the event's purpose. Their responses were then categorized as either work-related or non-work-related events. The sample comprised 56 participants (43%) who attended work-related and 73 (57%) non-work-related events. Work-related events that had work-related purposes were meetings, end-of-year meetings, or workshops. Work events took place either inside (35, 62.5%) or outside (21, 37.5%) the organizational premises, mostly between 11:00 AM and 2:00 PM (30 cases, 53%), sometimes between 8:00 AM and 11:00 AM (14 cases, 25%), and occasionally between 2:00 PM and 5:00 PM (6 cases, 11%), or between 5:00 PM and 8:00 PM (6 cases, 11%). Work events mainly occurred every three months (25 cases, 53%) or twice a year (15 cases, 32%), and monthly events were rare (7 cases, 15%).

Work events usually involved 11 to 20 other people, sometimes more than 21 people or 6 to 10 other attendees, but seldom with only 3 to 5 different people or fewer. In most cases, other attendees were the participants' managers and colleagues, often the company's CEO, and rarely employees from another company. Work events lasted 3 to 4 hours or more than four hours; in a few cases, they were as short as 1 to 2 hours. During work events, all participants interacted with several other workers, except one who only spoke with one other person. The participants prioritized conversing with their colleagues, with 43 out of 56 participants (77%) communicating with coworkers. The conversations revolved around work and non-work-related topics or only work-related ones. In very few cases, participants discussed only non-work-related issues and rarely spoke with a manager or subordinate.

The organization usually paid for meals during work events, serving foods such as buffet in 27 cases (48%), savory finger food in 22 instances (39%), sit-down meals in 19 cases (34%), and desserts in 16 cases (28%). The participants' descriptions of the food consumed included sandwiches, quiche, sushi, pizza, bacon, eggs, cakes, etc. Work events infrequently served alcohol, with 21 cases (37%) serving alcohol and 35 cases (63%) not serving alcohol. However, participants preferred to drink alcohol when it was available.

Non-work events The participants who attended non-work-related events reported that the purpose of these events was unrelated to work duties, such as Christmas parties, end-of-year gatherings, or birthday celebrations. Non-work-related events occurred mainly on organizational premises in 45 cases (62%). Most participants reported attending these events about twice a year (37 cases, 51%) and every three months (15 cases, 21%), but it was rare for participants to participate in such events monthly or weekly. These events mainly occurred between 11:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. (30 cases, 41%), sometimes between 2:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. (14 cases, 19%) or 5:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. (15 cases, 21%), and very often in the morning between 8:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M. (14 cases, 19%).

Participants spent one to two hours during non-work-related events, some taking three to four hours, but it was rare for events to last more than four hours. Non-work-related events included

the presence of many other attendees, with 21 to 50 other workers in 23 cases (32%), 11 to 20 in 19 cases (25%), more than 50 attendees in 16 cases (22%), and 6 to 10 other workers in 13 cases (18%). Only 2 cases (3%) had just 3 to 5 other attendees. The large events allowed participants to communicate with several people, with 23 participants (32%) reporting interacting with 5 to 7 other attendees, 20 (27%) had conversations with more than ten people, 16 (22%) communicated with 2 to 4 workers and 14 (19%) interacted with 7 to 10 people. Almost all participants communicated with their colleagues (67 participants, 92%); only five (7%) conversed with their immediate supervisor, and one (1%) spoke with a subordinate.

All conversations could be either work-related or nonwork-related. However, to distinguish between participants who preferred to chat about the job during the event or discuss general issues, they were asked to specify whether they spoke about work or non-work-related issues. The results showed that during non-work-related events, most participants discussed work and non-work-related topics (42 cases, 58%), 25 participants (34%) stated that they only chatted about non-work-related conversations, yet only 6 participants (8%) spoke about work-related issues.

Most participants were invited by the organization to these events (54 cases, 74%); however, 19 participants (26%) paid for their meals. Non-work-related events served several types of food, such as buffet in 36 instances (49%), sit-down meals in 34 cases (46%), desserts in 30 cases (41%), and savory finger foods in 21 cases (29%). Participants described the food consumed as abundant: turkey, pigs in a blanket, ham, pork, roast chicken, cheesecake, doughnuts, etc.

In non-work-related events, around half of the participants reported that alcohol was served; out of the 38 cases (52%) where alcohol was served, 30 participants (79%) drank. Only eight did not drink (21%), and the other 35 (48%) were not served alcoholic drinks.

Hard Focus and Soft Focus

The first analysis examined the level of hard focus of participants attending work-related events where activities were work-related and compared this with the level of hard focus when the event activities were non-work related. The results indicated that participants reported a mean hard focus of 2.68 when attending non-work-related events; a mean hard focus during work-related events was 2.59. In both cases, the mean values fell in the middle of the five-point scale, such that participants were moderately focused on the event activities. Hypothesis 1a is rejected; there was no significant difference between hard focus when employees attended work-related events compared to non-work-related events ($t = -.63$; $p = .53$).

The second analysis examined the level of soft focus of employees attending work-related events compared to participants attending non-work-related events. The results showed that participants who attended work-related events reported a mean soft focus of 2.74; a mean soft focus of 2.43 for participants who attended non-work-related events. The responses in both types of events fell in the middle of the five-point scale. Surprisingly, the mean soft focus was higher when participants attended work-related events than those who attended non-work-related events, unlike our predictions leading us to reject our original hypothesis and accept the alternative

hypothesis that employees' attentional focus was on soft focus during work-related events compared to non-work-related events (t = 3.09; p = .002).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Independent *t*-tests for Attentional Focus

	N	Mean	SD	*t*-value	*p*-value
Hard Focus During Work-Related Events	56	2.59	0.87	-0.63	0.53
Hard Focus During Non-Work-Related Events	73	2.69	0.89		
Soft Focus During Work-Related Events	56	2.74	0.55	3.09	0.002*
Soft Focus During Non-Work-Related Events	73	2.43	0.59		

One-tailed Test.
* $p < .05$

Perceived Restoration of Energy

Perceived restoration of energy was studied through an open-ended question. The researcher then coded the responses as restoration of cognitive energy, restoration of emotional energy, restoration of prosocial energy, restoration of physical energy, or no benefit. Interestingly, none of the responses fell under restoration of physical energy.

The results showed that there were more participants who identified food as restorative of energy (69%) than those who did not find any benefit in serving food at events (31%). Participants who did not list any restoration of energy benefit from food responded with answers such as people were more likely to attend if the food was present, there were no benefits, they did not have to buy lunch, or it was needed in a full day meeting.

Cognitive energy was restored during workplace food events. Food restored participants' mental energy by helping them to relax mentally, process new information, and focus on the next session. Cognitive energy was restored during work-related events in 15 cases (27%) compared to only five participants (7%) who reported that a non-work-related event restored their cognitive energy. Work-related events restored employees' cognitive energy mainly by making them more focused on work; for instance, *"Having refreshment of meal in the middle of the meeting, help people to have a break to process the new information present within the meeting,"* "*It makes people more likely to pay attention,"* and *"I think it does yes because it allows people to eat and gain energy to give their input in the meeting."* On the other hand, non-work-related events made employees more relaxed, hence restoring their cognitive energy. For example, *"I think so - it allows us to spend time together and relax from the demands of the job," "Serving food makes*

people relax," and *"Yes, as it is a good opportunity to socialize with the rest of the team in a more relaxed and work focused environment."*

Emotional energy was restored from the food provided at workplace food events. Participants who stated that the event had restored their emotional energy said that having food at the events boosted their morale, showed appreciation, made them feel valued and happy, and strengthened their sense of community. Emotional energy was reported by 11 participants (20%) during work-related events and by 18 participants (25%) in non-work-related events. Participants in work-related events said their emotional energy restored mentioned in most cases that it boosts morale; *"Yes, it is an incentive to boost morale."* In addition, work-related events elevated certain emotions in employees, *"Yes, it makes people more enthusiastic about attending," "Yes, keeps us happy and energized for the meeting,"* and *"Benefits because it makes people more happy."* Food also made employees feel valued in work-related events, *"yes, makes people feel like they are worth investing in,"* and *"Yes, I think people feel slightly more appreciated when food is provided for them."* Non-work-related events restored employees' emotional energy by strengthening their sense of belonging, *"Yes, they strengthen their sense of community,"* and *"Yes, it brings everyone together and makes you feel part of the organization."* Participants in non-work-related events mentioned similar reasons to those in work-related events, such as boosting morale and making them feel happier. Examples include:

"Yes, it puts the employee in a good mood and employees tend to have a better opinion about the company."

"Yes, it is a thank you and a morale booster."

"Yes. The giving of meals or food is always appreciated by the staff. It also gives the appearance that the company cares about you."

"Yes, it helps employees feel valued. An employee that feels valued will be more productive than someone who does not feel valued."

"Yes, keeps everyone happy."

Restoration of prosocial energy was the most common response for employees who attended workplace food events. Prosocial energy was restored because food brought colleagues together, allowed employees to get to know each other outside work, made networking easier, allowed team bonding, and entitled employees to socialize and build relationships with workers from other departments. Restoration of prosocial energy was mentioned by 18 participants (32%) in work-related events and by 35 participants (48%) in non-work-related events. Prosocial energy was restored during work-related events by helping people get together, such as *"I think it helps people bond over food that is served and acts as a bit of an ice breaker,"* and allowed the flow of conversations, *"Yes I think it helps people to relax and find connections outside of work as well as discussing work-related topics," "Yes because it promotes communication between attendees whilst they are having lunch,"* and *"help facilitate communication between staff from different departments or divisions."* Work-related events also encouraged employees to expand their network, for example, *"Yes. The food events provide a more casual setting for employees and*

stakeholders to interact, network, and build relationships beyond business settings." Non-work-related events restored prosocial energy by encouraging participants to socialize, *"I believe that it encourages collegiality,"* and *"Yes, it's an opportunity to socialize with colleagues."* Participants also used non-work-related events as an opportunity to connect with colleagues outside work and build relationships, for instance,

"Yes, definitely a time to speak with work colleagues out of work,"

"Yes because it allows coworkers to socialize and build relationships,"

"Yes it does as it promotes collaboration and a way to speak to work colleagues about non-work-related topics."

"We mingle with people outside our department."

Soft Focus and Perceived Restoration of Energy

The study examined the level of soft focus for employees who reported that the workplace event restored their cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy. The results include all participants who attended work-related and non-work-related events. The aim was to study the link between soft attentional focus and perceived restoration of cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy during workplace events. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Soft Focus and Restoration of Cognitive Energy

The study examined the level of soft focus for employees who reported that the workplace food event restored their cognitive energy compared to the level of soft focus for employees who did not find the event to be restorative of their cognitive energy. The mean soft focus for employees who said that event had restored their cognitive energy was 2.55 compared to the mean soft focus of 2.57 for employees who could not allocate the event as restorative for their cognitive energy. The results showed that hypothesis 2a is not supported; the soft attentional focus was not linked to higher levels of perceived restoration of cognitive energy ($t = .13$; p - .90).

Soft Focus and Restoration of Emotional Energy

The study investigated the level of soft focus for participants who said that their emotional energy was restored during workplace food events compared to the level of soft focus for participants who did not say that their emotional energy was restored. The mean soft focus for employees who reported that their emotional energy was restored was 2.54; a mean soft focus of 2.57 for participants who did not find the workplace food event to be restorative of their emotional energy. Hypothesis 2b is rejected; the soft attentional focus was not associated with higher levels of perceived restoration of emotional energy ($t = .27$; $p = .79$).

Soft Focus and Restoration of Prosocial Energy

This study examined the level of soft focus for participants who said that their prosocial energy was restored during the workplace food event, with the level of soft focus for employees who did not report that their prosocial energy was restored. The mean soft focus for participants who said that the event restored their prosocial energy was 2.52 compared to a mean soft focus of 2.60 for participants who did not say that the event restored their prosocial energy. Hypothesis 2c is

rejected; the soft attentional focus was not linked to higher reports of perceived restoration of prosocial energy (t = .74; p = .46).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Independent *t*-tests for Soft Focus and Perceived Restoration of Energy

	N	Mean	SD	*t*-value	*p*-value
Soft Focus		2.56	0.59		
Restores Cognitive Energy	110	2.55	0.59	0.13	0.9
Does not Restore Cognitive Energy	19	2.57	0.61		
Restores Emotional Energy	30	2.54	0.54	0.27	0.79
Does not Restore Emotional Energy	99	2.57	0.61		
Restores Prosocial Energy	53	2.60	0.62	0.74	0.46
Does not Restore Prosocial Energy	76	2.52	0.58		

Hard Focus and Perceived Restoration of Energy

The study explored the level of hard focus for participants who reported that their cognitive, emotional, or prosocial energy was restored. The results include both work-related and non-work-related events. For the intent of this study, we were interested in examining the link between hard attentional focus and perceived restoration of cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy during workplace events. Table 3 summarizes the results found.

Hard Focus and Restoration of Cognitive Energy

This study examined the level of hard focus for participants who reported that their cognitive energy was restored during the workplace food event, with the level of hard focus for employees who did not say that their cognitive energy was restored. The mean hard focus for participants who reported that the event restored their cognitive energy was 2.50; a mean hard focus of 2.67 for participants who did not say that the event restored their cognitive energy. Hypothesis 3a is rejected. The hard attentional focus was not linked to lower levels of perceived restoration of cognitive energy (t = .74; p = .46).

Hard Focus and Restoration of Emotional Energy

This study examined the level of hard focus for participants who reported that their emotional energy was restored during the workplace food event with the level of hard focus for participants who did not mention that their emotional energy was restored. The mean hard focus for participants who reported that the event restored their emotional energy was 2.79, compared to a mean hard focus of 2.56 for participants who did not say that the event restored their emotional energy. Therefore, hypothesis 3b is rejected; the hard attentional focus was not associated with a lower perceived restoration of emotional energy (t = -1.03; p = .31).

Hard Focus and Restoration of Prosocial Energy

This study examined the mean hard focus for participants who reported that their prosocial energy was restored during the workplace food event with the mean hard focus for employees who did not report that their prosocial energy was restored. The mean hard focus for participants who said that event restored their prosocial energy was 2.84, compared to a mean hard focus of 2.51 for participants who did not say that the event restored their prosocial energy. Interestingly, the mean hard focus for participants who reported that their prosocial energy was restored is higher than that for participants who did not find the event restorative of their prosocial energy leading us to reject our original hypothesis 3c and accept the alternative hypothesis that the hard attentional focus was linked to higher reports of perceived restoration of prosocial energy ($t = -2.41$; $p = .03$).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Independent *t*-tests for Hard Focus and Perceived Restoration of Energy

	N	Mean	SD	*t*-value	*p*-value
Hard Focus		2.64	0.88		
Restores Cognitive Energy	110	2.5	0.83	0.74	0.46
Does not Restore Cognitive Energy	19	2.67	0.89		
Restores Emotional Energy	30	2.79	0.67	-1.03	0.31
Does not Restore Emotional Energy	99	2.60	0.93		
Restores Prosocial Energy	53	2.84	0.87	-2.14	0.034*
Does not Restore Prosocial Energy	76	2.52	0.87		

* $p < .05$

Food Gratification and Attentional Focus

This study explored food gratification and attentional focus during workplace events. The researcher checked food in work-related events versus in non-work-related events. Overall, the findings were the same. The hard focus was correlated to the quality of food during work-related and non-work-related events. The soft focus did not show any correlation with the quality of food during any type of event. The food involvement scale did not show a correlation between hard focus and soft focus during any type of event. The only difference was the positive correlation of food involvement with the enjoyment of the event during non-work-related events; however, it did not show the same correlation result during work-related events.

The study did not show a significant difference between food in work-related events versus non-work-related events. Therefore, for the intent of this study, we were interested in the general effect of food consumption on employees' attentional focus during workplace events. All the correlation results include both work-related and non-work-related events. Table 4 summarizes the correlation results.

Quality of Food

Quality of Food and Soft Focus

The study explored the relationship between the quality of food and participants' soft attentional focus during workplace events. The mean quality of food recorded a value of 3.80, which fell at the high end of the 5-point scale. The mean soft focus was 2.56. There is no significant association between soft attentional focus and food quality during workplace events ($p = .83$).

Quality of Food and Hard Focus

This study explored the relationship between hard attentional focus and food quality. The mean hard focus indicated a value of 2.64. There was a positive correlation of 0.39 between the quality of food served and hard attentional focus during workplace food events ($p = .01$).

Food Involvement

Food Involvement and Soft Focus

This study explored the relationship between soft attentional focus and food involvement during workplace events. The mean for the food involvement scale reported a value in the middle of the 7-point scale of 3.85. There was a positive correlation of 0.24 between soft attentional focus and food involvement during workplace events ($p = .007$).

Food Involvement and Hard Focus

This study examined the correlation between mean hard focus and mean food involvement during workplace food events. The mean hard focus was 2.64, and the mean food involvement was 3.85. There was a positive correlation of 0.42 between hard attentional focus and food involvement during workplace food events ($p < .01$).

Enjoyment of the Food Event

Enjoyment of the Food Event and Quality of Food

This study also investigated whether there was a link between the quality of food and participants' general enjoyment of the event. The mean enjoyment of the event reported a value in the middle of the 5-point scale of 3.49, and the mean quality of food was 3.80. The positive correlation of 0.61 indicated that the food quality was linked to participants' general enjoyment of the event ($p = < .01$).

Enjoyment of the Food Event and Food Involvement

This study examined the correlation between mean enjoyment of the event ($M=3.49$, $SD=0.82$) and food involvement scale ($M=3.50$, $SD=0.92$). The correlation test results reported a p-value below 0.01, indicating a positive correlation of 0.62 between enjoyment of the event and food involvement during workplace food events.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Soft Focus	2.56	0.59	1.00				
2. Hard Focus	2.64	0.88	0.48**	1.00			
3. Quality of Food	3.8	0.84	0.02	0.39**	1.00		
4. Enjoyment of the Food Event	3.49	0.82	0.23*	0.74**	0.61**	1.00	
5. Food Involvement	3.85	0.92	0.24**	0.42**	0.38**	0.62**	1.00

Two-tailed tests.

N = 129. * p< .05. ** p<.01.

Discussion

Our initial assumption that employees would maintain hard focus during work-related events compared to non-work-related events was rejected. Perhaps, employees' hard attentional focus was stimulated similarly during both types of events. It may be that work-related events aroused employees' hard focus to process the information provided and to concentrate on work discussions. Activities in non-work-related events may have also activated participants' hard focus, such as during an interesting conversation with a co-worker. Therefore, the type of activities in workplace events did not affect hard attentional focus as expected. Both work and non-work activities may stimulate hard focus.

Our belief that employees would maintain a higher level of soft focus during non-work-related events compared to work-related events was also rejected. Surprisingly, we observed that a higher level of employees' soft focus was stimulated during work-related events compared to non-work-related events. There may be several reasons for this unexpected result, possibly due to work stress, as employees may have preferred to let their minds wander during the meeting to relax from intense mental functions. Additionally, our study took place in late December when many individuals were preparing for the holidays and may have found it difficult to focus entirely on work tasks.

The dominance of soft focus during work-related events may also be attributed to the fact that work-related events were more extended than non-work-related events, which may have forced participants' brains to take a break and allowed their minds to wander; therefore, soft focus provoked. For instance, individuals' soft attentional focus was triggered during activities like long walks in nature, and similarly, prolonged work events may have elicited soft focus in participants. Previous literature has given a range of work-related outcomes of workplace meetings, such as generating ideas, problem-solving, or decision-making. However, most importantly, effective meetings involve leaders "being time-courteous when executing the meeting" (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2018). Our study showed that soft focus might be stimulated if employers were planning longer-duration meetings; thus, leaders must consider the effects of the duration of meetings on employees' attentional focus. According to Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2018), a successful long meeting setup must include providing refreshments for employees to give them time and energy needed to recharge; this aligns with our findings of high levels of soft focus where employees took a break during work-related meetings to regain their energy. Although the soft focus was highly stimulated during work-related events, the hard focus was also stimulated. Hard focus may be useful when actual work discussions occur, questions arise, or feedback is given, especially because effective meetings require focusing on solutions, the contribution of all participants, and information sharing (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2018). Therefore, soft focus and hard focus are both practical during work-related events; the soft focus may be triggered during the break employees take to recharge and continue their productivity, and hard focus may be helpful to accomplish the actual work tasks.

Our findings did not support our expectations that soft attentional focus would be linked to higher levels of perceived cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy restoration. Perhaps, workplace

food events restored employees' cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy, but not necessarily due to the soft attentional focus. In addition, the hard attentional focus was not associated with lower levels of perceived cognitive and emotional energy restoration. Interestingly, the findings of our study suggested that hard attentional focus was linked to higher levels of perceived restoration of prosocial energy. Although this contradicted our original hypothesis, it seems reasonable, as Perlow, Hadley, & Eun (2017) mentioned that organizational meetings are crucial to enable collaboration and encourage relationships. As previous literature confirmed the importance of socialization and relationship building during workplace meetings, along with our findings that prosocial energy was the most common form of energy restoration during workplace events, it may be possible that hard focus was triggered to assess employees to socialize with new colleagues and foster relationships with former coworkers. In addition, when employees socialized, aiming to expand their business network, it may have sparked their hard attentional focus. Therefore, the hard attentional focus was linked to higher levels of restoration of prosocial energy.

We also observed that food quality was positively correlated with hard attentional focus, whereas quality was unrelated to soft focus. This supports the idea that the quality of food matters since it draws the employees' attention to the ongoing activities. These findings align with the results of a study by Cornil et al. (2020), which found that individuals may consume food as fuel. Employees' hard attentional focus was triggered when consuming high-quality food during workplace events to help them regain the mental energy necessary to resume productivity. Additionally, food consumption was linked to the restoration of cognitive energy, as some participants reported that food was needed to regain the mental energy required to continue working. Therefore, organizations should plan on catering high-quality food to boost the employees' energy and support their mental recharge.

Our study found that food involvement was positively linked to soft and hard attentional focus. During workplace events, the employees' attentional focus triggered them to be more involved in food. This means that food stimulated workers' attentional focus. The study also observed a positive association between employees' general enjoyment of the event and the quality of food consumed, as well as food involvement. Those findings manifest that food served during workplace events increased employees' general interest in the event.

The descriptive responses demonstrated that food served during workplace events triggered employees' emotions. Employees suggested that providing meals during workplace events had created a sense of belonging to the organizational community. The results also supported the findings of Desmet et al. (2008) that food can boost positive emotions during events, and high-quality food such as beefsteak or duck can even evoke admiration. Food served during work-related events may have signaled employees that their employer values them.

Our study found that participants associated food with restoring prosocial energy during workplace food events. This finding may be explained by the fact that sharing meals during workplace events provided more opportunities for employees to engage in general conversations and helped them build stronger relationships with their colleagues. Additionally, sharing food with someone else, as found in Boothby et al. (2014), may have amplified the pleasantness of the

event and further restored prosocial energy during both work and non-work events. Furthermore, workplace events helped restore participants' prosocial energy by providing opportunities to expand their business network.

The study also observed some participants who did not link the workplace with energy restoration. It is possible that some participants did not experience energy restoration during the events for various reasons. For instance, some employees may have attended work events because they were required to, without actually enjoying them. Others did not like the food served at the events or did not eat. Additionally, participants' personalities may have played a role. For example, an introverted employee may have found a non-work-related event more stressful than energy restorative. Therefore, the provision of food does not always make events more pleasurable.

Some survey responses, such as the food choices, dining partner, and mealtime conversation, were not given attention during the analysis. Those responses were discarded because the second study aimed to explore the general effects of consuming food at workplace events, regardless of the type of food consumed. In addition, the mealtime conversation was not given attention since we were not assessing impression management; instead, the main goal was to examine the restorative effects of workplace events.

Overall, workplace food events can play an essential role in restoring employees' energy and promoting a positive experience for their employees. Organizations can plan more effective and beneficial events for their employees by understanding the factors contributing to energy restoration. Additionally, organizations should consider the duration of events to optimize attentional focus and energy restoration. The hard focus was not stimulated more during work-related events compared to non-work-related events. Holding shorter work-related events may trigger employees' hard focus for the duration of the event. The long work-related events may have provoked employees' soft attentional focus more than in non-work-related events, which has allowed employees to relax their mental activities and restore their energy fully. Hard attentional focus did not show a significant difference during different types of events, yet prosocial energy was linked to higher reports of hard focus. Our findings suggest that hard focus benefits compromise fostering relationships during workplace events. Hence, the hard attentional focus may be stimulated when employees want to build close ties with their colleagues, for instance, to expand their business network in work-related meetings or to build relationships with coworkers during non-work-related events.

On the other hand, the soft attentional focus showed a significant difference in supporting its stimulation during work-related events. Soft attentional focus may be advantageous when employees want to relax and give their minds a break from work stress during work-related meetings. Indeed, there is a range of breaks employees take during workplace events. For example, during work-related events, the break may be a quick distraction from work discussions stimulating soft focus, or it may be a break to have some refreshments and recharge for future performance. Both breaks may restore energy, the first quick break may allow employees' minds to refocus on work, and the latter may consist of food consumption that restores cognitive, emotional, or prosocial energy. On the other hand, non-work-related events showed a high level

of hard focus stimulation; thus, those events would include long breaks from work that restore the energy needed to socialize with colleagues. Therefore, all breaks in workplace events may restore energy depending on the type of event and whether the break was a quick distraction or a longer one that involves food consumption.

Limitations

This study has some potential limitations. First, this study tested the restoration of energy once on participants after the workplace event to examine the effects of variations of perceived energy restoration between individuals. Future research could replicate this study as a longitudinal study. In a longitudinal study, researchers could examine the effects of events on employees' energy restoration both during and after the event. In addition, the researcher of this study coded participants' responses as restoration of cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy, which may have resulted in some inaccuracies in the results. Future research can include better cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy measures to further validate our findings. Our study could also be replicated in an experimental design. For example, comparing the cognitive, emotional, and prosocial energy restored by employees who consumed food during a workplace event with those who did not consume food. Employees' relationships with other coworkers after a workplace event could be compared with employees who refused to attend the workplace event. Work-related events could also be studied by comparing attentional focus and energy restoration during short work meetings versus longer ones. Another limitation is the impact of the pandemic on sharing food. Some individuals have not returned to their pre-pandemic routines, and one-on-one meetings have become rare. The pandemic may still affect consuming food with another person and attending social events. Therefore, replicating this study during a non-pandemic situation could further validate the results.

Other limitations of the study include that individual differences were not taken into account. The personality of the participants may have an impact on their responses. For instance, an introverted employee may have found the event stressful, which may have impacted his response to the questions related to energy restoration. The personality may stop the employee from consuming food or socializing with co-workers during the event. On the other hand, the extroverted personality may have led some employees to have positive responses that validated our hypotheses concerning energy restoration. Future studies should consider the different personality types that may impact employees' perception of a workplace food event. Another limitation includes that the researcher did not ask whether the event was mandatory or optional. For instance, some employees who mentioned not consuming food may have attended because the event was obligatory. Therefore, the requirement of attendance must also be considered in future research.

Some limitations of this study include controlling for factors related to food. For instance, the researcher did not control for the participants' hunger at the moment of the event. Employees may not have consumed food because they were not hungry or in the mood during the event. The mood has not been controlled too. The researcher did not also take into account the time since the last meal of the participants. In addition, some employees may have food neophobia which stopped them from consuming food during the workplace event. Other factors that could have been controlled include employees' health conditions and dietary habits; examples include

employees with diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, pregnant women, or vegetarianism. Therefore, future research could control individual and food factors to further validate our results.

Future Research

Food in the workplace has not been given much attention; this study began exploring food in the workplace. Future studies can build on this study to further investigate this area of food in the workplace. First, future studies could explore smaller events and one-on-one meetings. During smaller events, employees may be in direct contact with their managers or boss, which may lead to different results and food choices. In addition, focusing on the different types of food served, healthy versus unhealthy, a meal rich in carbohydrates, proteins, fat or mixed could all be investigated. The style of service, such as buffet, table service, cocktail, or sit-down meal, could be further explored, as well as focusing on employees who had the opportunity to choose their meal versus those restricted to the provided food items.

Future research could also consider employee-level factors such as the participant's hierarchical position and compare entry-level employees' responses with those of professional and managerial employees. In addition, the length of employment with the firm could be examined; for instance, newer employees trying to prove themselves in front of their new managers and colleagues may have different responses from older employees. Ethnic origin is another factor that may impact responses. For example, employees working in a country different from their origin may judge workplace events differently from other employees. In addition, the employee's ethnicity may impact his food choices and preferences.

Future research could take into account employer levels factors. For example, the organizational culture that regularly meets may differ from those that seldom meet. A centralized firm may impact the food served and the event compared to a decentralized firm. The company's size could be considered; for instance, large firms may lead workplace events differently from smaller firms.

This study was done during the holiday period; thus, future research could explore workplace events during different times of the year and compare workplace events during the holiday and non-holiday seasons. In addition, the time of the event could be considered since it may impact the type of food served.

Managerial Implications

This research was able to reveal the positive effects of workplace events. The interviews in the first study showed that employees enjoyed workplace events, and the positivity of the event was indicated by building stronger relationships with co-workers. Employees who want to enhance their relationships with coworkers must attend workplace events. The enhanced relationships with colleagues may impact employees' commitment toward organizations and make their daily tasks smoother when working with those colleagues. The survey from the second study demonstrated that workplace events might restore employees' energy. Organizations must consider including food during work-related meetings because many employees consider it to replenish them to continue working and concentrating on the required tasks. In addition, the employees prefer a break during work-related events to consume food, chat with their colleagues,

or expand their business network. Many employees mentioned that non-work-related events were restorative of their prosocial energy. Our study took place during the holiday period; therefore, organizations could include more non-work-related events during different times of the year to enhance the restorative effects of employees' prosocial energy. Employees felt appreciated when the company provided food. Thus, corporate companies may include more food during regular meetings or events to increase their employees' commitment to the organization. To enhance the restorative value of workplace events, organizations could consider adding various food options. They could pick good restaurants or catering since some of our participants mentioned that they disliked the food or had no healthy options.

Conclusion

This research confirms the benefits of workplace food events in restoring employees' energy. Although attentional focus did not impact employees' energy restoration levels as expected, the food served at the events was linked to employees' attentional focus and energy restoration. Most importantly, this study explained why food is served in workplace events. Food during workplace events played a significant role in restoring employees' energy. Therefore, organizations could consider planning food events to help restore their employees' energy levels. In addition, employees must make use of workplace events to build strong relationships with their coworkers and regain the energy needed to resume work.

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Appendix

Interview Guide for Study 1

TOPIC	GUIDING QUESTIONS	POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS
BACKGROUND QUESTIONS	Tell me about your job position and role in the organization.	How long have you been working for this company? How long have you been in this position?
EATING EVENT	Tell me when was the last time you went out with your colleague or boss. With whom did you go? What is his/her job position? Tell me where and when did you go. Tell me the reason behind the outing. Who paid for the meal?	How many people went out during this gathering? With whom did you chat the most? How long have you known this co-worker? Is he/she your new manager?
FOOD CHOICES	Who started ordering the meals Tell me what "the first person" order is. Tell me what "the other person" order	What is your favorite meal at this place? Do you usually order this type of food?
TOPIC DISCUSSED	Tell me what the main topic of discussion was?	What other issues did you talk about? What is the timeline for these activities?
ENGAGEMENT AND AFFECTIVE REACTIONS	Tell me how did you feel towards the topic discussed after the meeting. Tell me how did this meeting impacted your relationship with the dining partner(s).	Did you feel more excited about the upcoming project? Did you build a stronger relationship with the dining partners?

Survey of Study 1

Q1 Select all the food choices that you have consumed during the work-related event or meeting.

- [ ] Chips/Fried Potatoes
- [ ] Crisps
- [ ] Fried Food (sausage/bacon/egg)
- [ ] Fish (not fried)
- [ ] Beans/Pulses
- [ ] Vegetables/Salad (Not Potatoes)
- [ ] Bread
- [ ] Sweets/Chocs/Biscuits
- [ ] Fizzy/Sugary Drinks
- [ ] Diet Drinks
- [ ] Meat Products (Fried)
- [ ] Meat Dishes (Not Fried)
- [ ] Rice/Pasta
- [ ] Fruits
- [ ] Milk/Cheese/Yogurt
- [ ] Buns/Cake/Pastries
- [ ] Boiled/Baked Potatoes

Q2 Please rate how you felt after the meal:

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Moderately (3)	Very (4)	Extremely (5)
Interested	○	○	○	○	○
Distressed	○	○	○	○	○
Upset	○	○	○	○	○
Scared	○	○	○	○	○
Enthusiastic	○	○	○	○	○
Alert	○	○	○	○	○
Inspired	○	○	○	○	○
Nervous	○	○	○	○	○
Determined	○	○	○	○	○
Jittery	○	○	○	○	○
Active	○	○	○	○	○
Afraid	○	○	○	○	○

Q3 Please describe your interactions during the meal, "During the meal, you were able to:"

	Strongly Agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
Let your meal partner know that you are valuable to the organization.	○	○	○	○	○
Take an interest in your meal partner's personal lives to show them that you are friendly.	○	○	○	○	○
Talk proudly about your experience or education.	○	○	○	○	○
Make your meal partner aware of your accomplishments.	○	○	○	○	○
Compliment your meal partners so they will see you as likable.	○	○	○	○	○
Pretend not to understand something to gain your meal partner's help.	○	○	○	○	○
Pretend to know less than you do so you can avoid an unpleasant assignment.	○	○	○	○	○
Do personal favors for your meal partners to show them that you are friendly.	○	○	○	○	○

Make your meal partners aware of your talents or qualifications.	○	○	○	○	○
Praise your meal partners for their accomplishments so they will consider you a nice person.	○	○	○	○	○
Act like you need assistance so your meal partners will help you out.	○	○	○	○	○
Try to gain assistance or sympathy from your meal partners by appearing needy in some areas.	○	○	○	○	○
Act like you know less than you do so your meal partners will help you out.	○	○	○	○	○

Q4 Please rate the extent to which these statements are representative of you in general:

	Strongly agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Strongly disagree (4)
I feel bursting with energy.	○	○	○	○
My job inspires me.	○	○	○	○
I feel strong and vigorous.	○	○	○	○
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	○	○	○	○
I am proud of the work that I do.	○	○	○	○
I am enthusiastic about my job.	○	○	○	○

Q5 What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Non-binary / third gender
- ○ Prefer not to say

Q6 What is your current employment status?

- ○ Intern
- ○ Part-time Employee
- ○ Full-time Employee

Q7 During the last year of 2021, where were you primarily working?

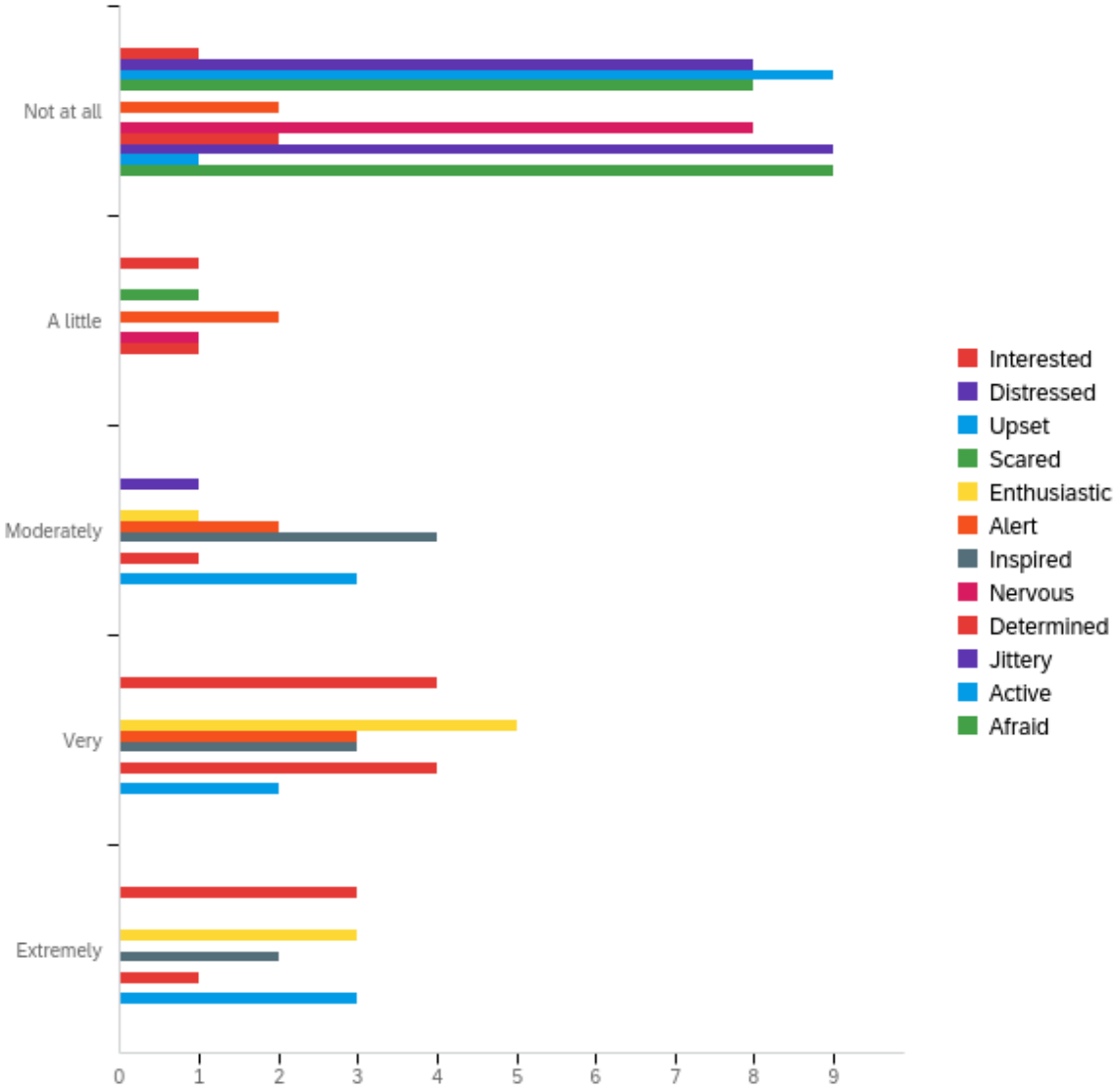
- ○ Home
- ○ Workplace - corporate office
- ○ Hybrid
- ○ Elsewhere

Q8 In the last year, how often did you share a meal with your work partner(s)?

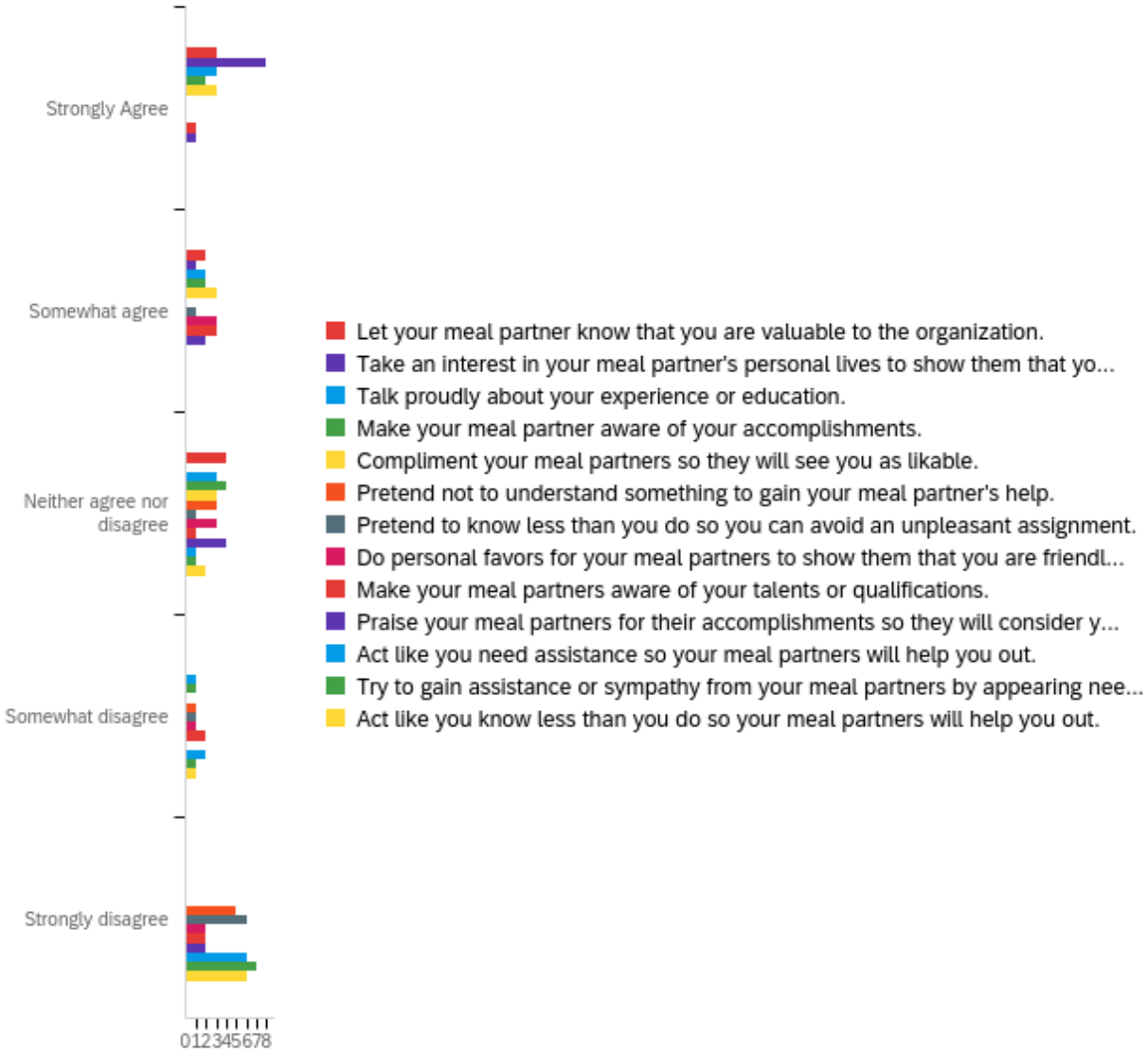
- ○ Once per week
- ○ Once per month
- ○ Once per 3 months
- ○ Once per 6 months
- ○ Once per year
- ○ None of the above

Results from Study 1

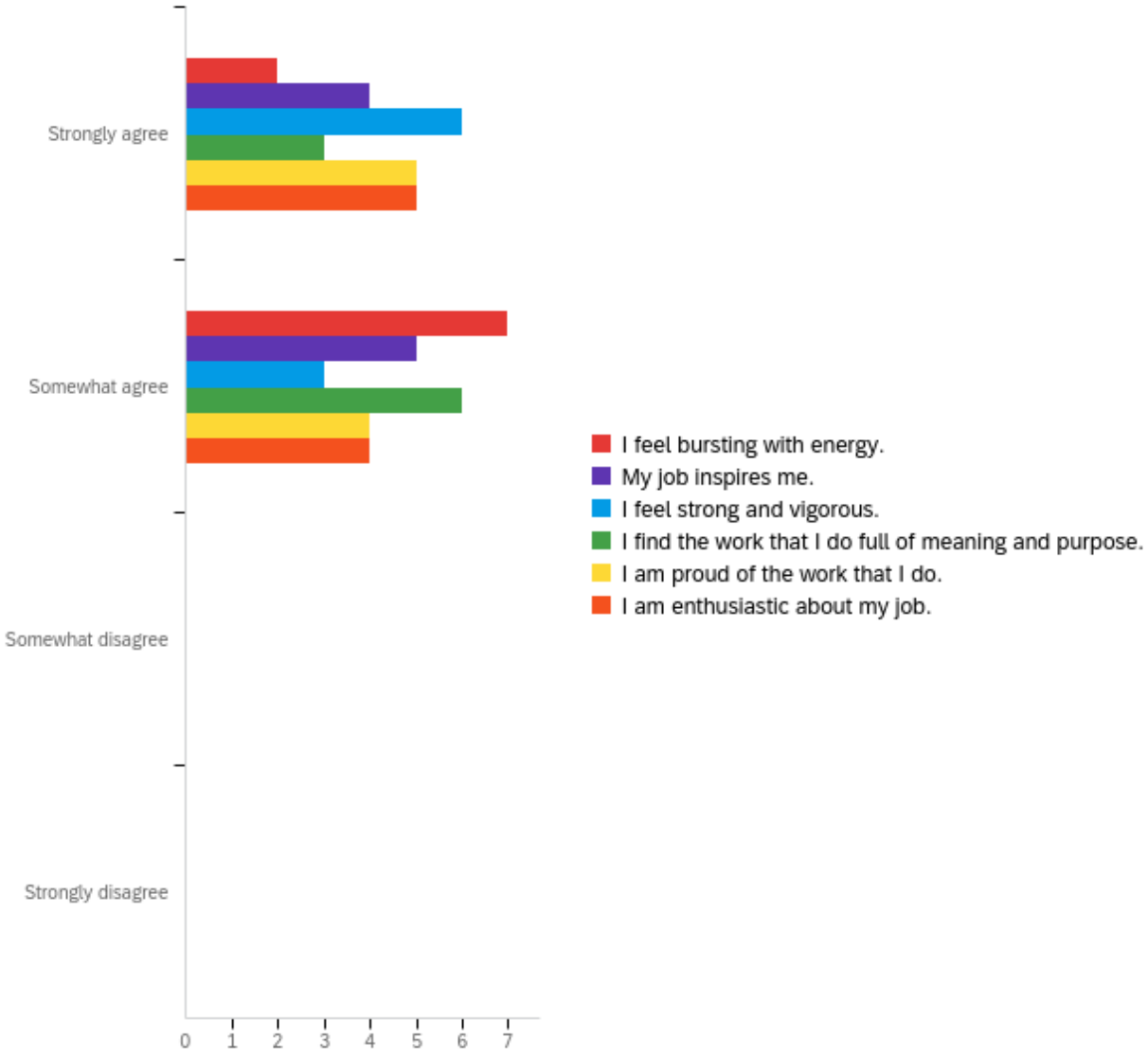
Q2 - Please rate how you felt after the meal:



Q3 - Please describe your interactions during the meal, "During the meal, you were able to:"



Q4 - Please rate the extent to which these statements are representative of you in general:


Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
I feel bursting with energy.
My job inspires me.
I feel strong and vigorous.
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.
I am proud of the work that I do.
I am enthusiastic about my job.

Survey for Study 2

Please think of one meeting or other work-related event at which food was served and consumed. It might have been a workshop, an information session, a regular meeting of your department or unit, a celebration or welcome to guests, a formal meal to discuss a project, an informal get-together with colleagues etc... The following questions ask you to describe the event.

Q1 Where was the food-related event located?

- ○ In the organization's premises
- ○ Outside the organization

Q2 What time period did this event take place?

- ○ 8:00 - 11:00 A.M.
- ○ 11:00 - 2:00 P.M.
- ○ 2:00 - 5:00 P.M.
- ○ 5:00 - 8:00 P.M.
- ○ 8:00 - 11:00 P.M.

Q3 How many hours did you spend at this event?

- ○ 1-2 hours
- ○ 3-4 hours
- ○ More than 4 hours

Q4 How many employees were present in this food-related event?

- ○ 1 other person
- ○ 3-5
- ○ 6-10
- ○ 11-20
- ○ 21-50
- ○ More than 50 people

Q5 Who was present at the food event? (Check as many as apply)

- ☐ CEO of the company I work for
- ☐ My manager/ immediate supervisor
- ☐ My colleagues
- ☐ My subordinates
- ☐ CEO/ President of another company
- ☐ Manager(s) from another company
- ☐ Employees from another company

Q6 Briefly describe the purpose for this meeting or event.

_____

The Food Served

Q7 What type of food was served? (Please check as many as apply)

- [ ] Sit down meal
- [ ] Desserts
- [ ] Buffet
- [ ] Savory finger food

Q8 List all the food items that you consumed during this event. Please be as detailed as possible.

_____

Q9 Was alcohol served or consumed during this event?

- ○ Yes it was served and I consumed
- ○ Yes it was served but I did not consume
- ○ No it was not served or consumed

Q10 Who paid for the food or alcohol?

- ○ The organization
- ○ Each one paid for his own food or drink

Q11 Please rate your perception of the quality of food you consumed.

	Very Poor	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good
Overall	○	○	○	○	○
Flavour	○	○	○	○	○
Texture	○	○	○	○	○
Appearance	○	○	○	○	○

Your conversations

Q12 Approximately how many people did you talk to during this event?

- ○ 1 person
- ○ 2-4 people
- ○ 5-7 people
- ○ 7-10 people
- ○ More than 10 people
- ○ I did not talk to anyone (please go to Q#15)

Q13 Please select one person from your organization with whom you talked the most during the event. What is the person's position in the organization?

- ○ My Boss or Manager
- ○ My Colleague
- ○ My Subordinate
- ○ Other (Please Specify) _____

Q14 For the most part, what did you talk about?

- ○ Work-related topics
- ○ Non-work related topics
- ○ Both work and non-work related topics

Q15 Please rate the following based on your meeting or food event.

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Extremely
During the event I was aware of things going around me.	○	○	○	○	○
This event was an escape for me.	○	○	○	○	○
During the event I was lost in thought.	○	○	○	○	○
This event had qualities that drew me further in.	○	○	○	○	○
During this event, my attention was drawn to many interesting things.	○	○	○	○	○
I was able to take note of my thoughts or feelings.	○	○	○	○	○
Participating in this event was a captivating experience.	○	○	○	○	○
This event had many fascinating qualities.	○	○	○	○	○
During the event I made plans for the future.	○	○	○	○	○

This event helped me get relief from unwanted demands on my attention.	○	○	○	○	○
I let my mind wander.	○	○	○	○	○
Once this event started, I easily got pulled in.	○	○	○	○	○
This event sustained my interest.	○	○	○	○	○
During the event I thought about things I need to do.	○	○	○	○	○
This event helped me get away from it all.	○	○	○	○	○
During the event I reflected on things that happened in the past.	○	○	○	○	○

Q16 Please rate your enjoyment of the event.

	(1) Not at all	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) Very much
Overall, I enjoyed this event.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I enjoyed the food.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I enjoyed my interactions with others.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I would like to attend food events more often.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I felt strong and vigorous.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I felt enthusiastic.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I felt inspired.	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I felt appreciated.	○	○	○	○	○

Q17 What top 3 positive things (if any) do you remember about the event?

_____

Q18 What top 3 negative things (if any) do you remember?

_____

Q19 How frequently do you attend work-related at which food is served?

- ○ Weekly
- ○ Bi-weekly
- ○ Monthly
- ○ About every 3 months
- ○ About twice a year
- ○ Once a year or less

Q20 In your view, does the organization benefit from serving food at events like this? Please explain.

_____

Q21 Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

	Disagree Totally (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Agree Totally (7)
Talking about what I ate or am going to eat is something I like to do.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I travel, one of the things I anticipate most is eating the food there.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I eat out, I don't think or talk much about how the food tastes.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q22 What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other or prefer not to say

Q23 What is your age?

- ○ Under 35 years old
- ○ 35-49 years old
- ○ 50-65 years old
- ○ Over 65 years old

Q24 What is your current employment status?

- ○ Part-time or temporary Employee
- ○ Full-time Employee

Q25 How long have you worked for your current organization?

Years _____

Q26 What best describes the type of organization you work for?

- ○ Agriculture
- ○ Finance
- ○ Government
- ○ Health Care
- ○ Education
- ○ Food Services
- ○ Hotel Services
- ○ Military
- ○ Other (Please Specify)