



# OPTIMIZING EMPLOYEE SCHEDULING: IMPACTS ON PRODUCTIVITY, SATISFACTION, AND WORK LIFE BALANCE IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This qualitative study delves into the intricate relationship between employee scheduling practices and outcomes in the hotel industry, focusing on productivity, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Guided by Social Exchange Theory, this paper combines primary and secondary data to unveil crucial insights through thematic analysis. The study highlights flexible scheduling positive impact, particularly through flextime, enabling employees to effectively balance personal and professional commitments, thereby enhancing commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction. Conversely, irregular schedules create dissatisfaction and work-family conflicts. Also, transparent communication, fair task distribution, and proactive management of unforeseen circumstances foster a positive social exchange dynamic between employees and organizations. It is recommended to implement clear flexible work policies, adopting workforce management software, fostering open communication channels, cross-training employees for versatile roles, offering fair rotating shifts, part-time/job-sharing opportunities, and conducting regular policy reviews. Despite some limitations in gathering data, this study offers valuable insights for policymakers, practical guidance for hotel management, and contributes to bridging the research gap in the literature, enriching the understanding of employee scheduling's impact in the hotel industry.*

**Keywords:** *Employee Scheduling, Productivity, Satisfaction, Work-Life Balance*

## **1. Introduction**

Efficient task performance depends on having a well-organized schedule, whether the tasks are formal or informal (Åkerstedt et al., 2015). Imagine the challenges of doing work with irregular hours, limited resources, different activities, and inadequate facilities (Soriano et al., 2020). A schedule acts as a plan for activities, resource use, and space allocation, guiding when tasks happen, resources are used, and space is assigned (Jacobs and Chase, 2018). The main goal of scheduling is to use available resources like machinery, equipment, and labor effectively to finish tasks on time (Soriano et al., 2020).

Efficient scheduling and coordinating employees or tasks reduce idle time, minimize bottlenecks, optimize resource use, and maximize productivity (Thompson, 2004). It ensures meeting production targets, fulfilling customer orders on time, and improving operational efficiency (Jacobs et al., 2014). The thing is, workflow directly affects cash flow, with scheduling playing a crucial role in this process (Jacobs et al., 2014). Scheduling encompasses employee scheduling and production scheduling, focusing on managing staff and optimizing equipment, materials, and labor (Sousa et al., 2017). The focus of this paper lays on employee scheduling.

Many authors stress the importance of work hours and timing because they not only determine the duration of exposure to different working conditions but also the availability of time for recovery, leisure activities, and personal obligations (Brauner et al., 2019; Ünsal, 2019). In that sense, different studies have shown various types of work schedules including

fixed shifts (consistent hours), flexible schedules (within set limits), rotating shifts (different shifts on a cycle), split shifts (multiple work periods with breaks), on-call schedules (work when called in), part-time schedules (fewer hours than full-time), compressed workweeks (full-time hours in fewer days), shift bid schedules (employees bid for shifts), ad hoc scheduling (irregular hours based on demand), and self-scheduling (employees create own schedules within limits). (e.g., Albrecht et al., 2017; Arlinghaus et al., 2019; CyganRehm and Wunder, 2018; Moreno et al., 2019; Nijp et al., 2012). Moreover, previous research also looked at specific work hours, ignoring that schedules involve specific combinations of demands and resources (Tucker and Folkard, 2015; Van Aerden et al., 2014).

In the challenging realm of the hospitality industry, especially within hotels, employees often find themselves navigating the complex terrain of human emotions. Even though there are studies on scheduling in the hospitality industry, like Thompson (2014) "Workforce Scheduling for the Hospitality Industry" and Chen (2017) "Service Innovation Performance in the Hospitality Industry" (2017), and the shift scheduling model introduced by Fujita et al. (2016), there hasn't been much research on how employee scheduling affects productivity, satisfaction, and work-life balance in the hotel industry. This study aimed to cover that gap with the main question: How does employee scheduling impact productivity, employee satisfaction, and work-life balance in the hotel industry?

To answer this question, this study used qualitative research methods, gathering primary and secondary data. Primary data came from email interviews with ten participants from the hotel industry, providing detailed insights on employee work scheduling's impact. Secondary data from online and offline publications such as academic articles, books, and reports added theoretical frameworks and context. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data, looking for patterns in the meaning of the data obtained to find themes. Moreover, this study informs policymakers such as labor unions, offers practical advice for hotels to enhance scheduling practices, and contributes to the literature by exploring the link between employee scheduling and outcomes in the hotel industry.

## 2. Literature Review

Assigning employees to work schedules is critical in service industries, like hotels, that rely on labor-intensive tasks (Rocha et al., 2012). Unlike manufacturing, services, such as hotel experiences, are unique and influenced by subjective factors like staff mood (Roy, 2011). In manufacturing, companies can adjust stock to meet demand changes, but in services, the "product" is both produced and consumed simultaneously (Rocha et al., 2012). The complexity of staff scheduling in service activities primarily stems from the variability in demand and the associated constraints (Ağralı et al., 2017). These constraints include employees' preferences for working or rest days, incompatibilities between staff members or tasks, workload balance, and fairness considerations in scheduling (Ağralı et al., 2017). These factors directly impact employee productivity and are particularly important in service organizations where performance directly affects service delivery (Noorain et al., 2022). Sadly, these constraints are often treated as non-mandatory or soft constraints (Noorain et al., 2022).

Scheduling in various industries, including hotels, involves complex tasks like demand prediction and staff assignment (Rocha et al., 2012). Demand modeling is crucial, translating customer needs into staff requirements for different periods and tasks (Rocha et al., 2012). This process, often part of strategic planning, is essential in service operations with random customer arrivals. Techniques like forecasting, queuing theory, and simulation help estimate demand and staff needs (Bard, 2004).

Furthermore, different sectors handle scheduling differently. Transportation uses task lists for employees like drivers, while healthcare determines staff needs based on predefined ratios like nurse-to-patient ratios (Ernst et al., 2004; Rosocha et al., 2015). In hotels, only some

demand, like confirmed reservations, is known; the rest is estimated using historical data and forecasting, considering daily check-ins, making scheduling more complex (Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García, 2013).

Moreover, the crucial thing is that, schedules should balance coverage, quality, stability, flexibility, fairness, and cost. Coverage ensures fulfilling requirements, and quality is assessed by employees based on their satisfaction with the schedule (Lambert, 2020; Ernst et al., 2004). Stability means a predictable sequence, while flexibility accommodates unexpected changes (Aykin, 2000). Fairness ensures workload balance, and cost measures the resources needed (Aykin, 2000). These characteristics, especially quality, fairness, stability, and flexibility, are crucial for motivated and productive employees in customer-oriented industries like hotels (Kohl & Karisch, 2004; Musliu, 2006). Remember, employee performance significantly influences customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of considering staff well-being through effective scheduling (Lambert, 2020).

### *2.1 Theoretical Frame Work: Social Exchange Theory*

The exchange-based view of social behavior, introduced by Homans (1958) and Blau (1964) in psychology and Thibault and Kelley (1959) in sociology, emphasizes the interdependence of people in relationships. This theory, applied in management (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), focuses on social exchange, where people exchange different things, like tangible items or intangible benefits, depending on positive reactions from others. Social Exchange Theory (SET) suggests that people make decisions based on social costs and rewards. They enter relationships expecting more rewards than costs (Cortez & Johnston, 2020).

SET states that people are rational and weigh the pros and cons before starting, continuing, or ending a relationship. They assess the rewards and costs involved and make decisions based on this balance (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). Rewards are positive outcomes from a relationship, while costs are negative aspects or sacrifices. SET also introduces concepts like comparison level (CL) and comparison level for alternatives (CLalt) (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). CL is an individual's personal standard or expectation of what they should receive in a relationship, while CLalt is their evaluation of other available options (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). Equity and fairness in relationships in SET are also considered, as individuals seek a balance between rewards and costs (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964).

Moreover, SET provides a framework for understanding how individuals make decisions in social relationships, aiming to maximize their satisfaction. This theory has been applied in various areas like romantic, family, and work relationships, as well as friendships (Emerson, 1976; Lambe et al., 2001; Blau, 1964; Lee & Cadogan, 2009; Homans, 1958; Thibault and Kelley, 1959; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Nowadays, researchers use this theory to study interactions not just between people, but also between businesses, groups, and entities (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Lee & Cadogan, 2009; Cortez & Johnston, 2020).

In the context of this study, rewards like a good schedule and flexibility can make employees happy. On the other hand, drawbacks such as irregular hours and varying activities can make them unhappy and affect their productivity, satisfaction, and work-life balance negatively. The theory also talks about comparison level, which represents an individual's expectations or standards for rewards in a relationship. In the context of this study, employees may have certain expectations regarding the duration and timing of work, availability of time for recovery, leisure activities, and personal obligations. If the actual work schedule meets or exceeds these expectations, it is likely to contribute to higher satisfaction, productivity and work-life balance. On the other hand, the comparison level for alternatives, in the context of this study, can relate to the availability of alternative job opportunities with better schedules or work-life balance. Comparing the current situation with other options, it means employees

might compare their job with other jobs that offer better schedules. If they find their current schedule lacking, they might feel dissatisfied and might leave their jobs. Additionally, fairness is crucial. If employees feel their workload is fair and their preferences are considered, they are more likely to be satisfied.

SET guides this study from data collection to analysis and interpretation, by focusing on the elements derived from this theory such as expectations, rewards, costs and comparison level for alternatives of individuals' working in the hotel industry, offering valuable insights into the impacts of employee scheduling on productivity, satisfaction, and work-life balance in the hotel industry.

### **3. Research Methods**

This research study utilized a qualitative research approach and incorporated primary and secondary data from diverse sources. The primary data collection technique employed in this study was email interviews, which offered convenience and flexibility for gathering qualitative data. Participants had the freedom to respond at their convenience, allowing for thoughtful and detailed responses (Hawkins, 2018). To explore the research study's aims, a set of open-ended interview questions was distributed (See Appendix). Due to the interviewees preferences, all the questions were sent at once, enabling them to prepare comprehensive answers. This approach was also influenced by time constraints, resulting in the decision to send only five questions to the interviewees, all at once. Ten participants from the hotel industry were purposively selected basing on their reliability. Initially, the recipients were contacted via WhatsApp to request their participation in the study and to collect their email addresses.

In addition to collecting primary data, this research study incorporated various publications as secondary data sources. The researcher utilized online and offline publications such as academic articles, books, and reports pertaining to the topic in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding. The researcher conducted a critical analysis and synthesis of the information gathered from these secondary sources to support and contextualize the primary data collected through email interviews.

Moreover, data analysis and interpretation was conducted by thematic analysis where data was systematically organized and interpreted to uncover underlying themes and patterns. Categorization was used to identify recurring ideas, concepts, and topics in the data. Once the themes were identified, interpretation involved making sense of these patterns by exploring their implications, relationships, and significance within the context of the research question.

From data collection to analysis and interpretation, the social exchange theory was utilized to deciding the content of the collected data, content analyzed and finally reviewing data and arrive at a conclusion. The theory was utilized to summarize the findings obtained in order to answer the critical question of this study: How does employee scheduling impact productivity, employee satisfaction, and work-life balance in the hotel industry? By combining primary and secondary data, this study achieved a robust exploration of the researched topic, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of this study's findings.

### **4. Research Findings and Discussion**

This study unlocked the findings in the following themes guided by the social exchange theory:

#### *4.1 Employee Scheduling and Workforce Flexibility*

Authors reveals significant shifts in the workforce composition, with the rise of dual-earner couples and the challenge faced by young workers in balancing work and personal lives in the hotel industry (Chen, 2017; Hill et al., 2001; Twenge et al., 2010). These changes emphasize the necessity for hotels to adopt greater flexibility in employee scheduling to attract

and retain a high-quality workforce. Studies have shown that flexible job scheduling positively influences employees' commitment to their work environment (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). Flexible scheduling practices, such as flextime, enhance job performance, offer career development opportunities, and reduce turnover intentions (Kim et al., 2016). Respondents commented:

*“When I have a flexible schedule, it positively impacts my productivity. It helps me maintain high productivity and ensures the quality of my daily activities. With flextime, I can choose my preferred start and end times based on my personal needs, especially during the period I was pregnant and now having an infant”.*

*“My work schedule does not undermine me as an employee nor my employer. It maintains a healthy work-life balance, ensuring tasks are performed perfectly for the benefit of both parties. Flexibility makes the working environment more realistic”.*

*“Clear structure in the schedule makes it easier to prioritize tasks within allocated time. Poor scheduling, like unrealistic deadlines or frequent changes, can lead to stress and hinder productivity. A balance between scheduled tasks and flexibility creates a realistic working environment.”*

Deducted meaning: The shifting landscape of the workforce, characterized by the rise of dual-earner couples and the challenges faced by young workers, necessitates greater flexibility in scheduling practices. Employees' positive response to flexible scheduling, exemplified by their ability to balance personal and professional life, highlights the reciprocity between their needs and organizational accommodations. Flexible job scheduling, particularly through practices like flextime, serves as a tangible reward, enhancing employees' commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction.

#### *4.2 Negative Impacts of Irregular and Unstable Work Schedules*

Irregular and unstable work schedules negatively affect employee satisfaction, productivity, and work-life balance (Golden, 2015; Lambert et al., 2012; Standing et al., 2011; Dickson et al., 2018). Approximately 17% of the workforce experiences irregular or on-call shifts, leading to longer work hours, increased work-family conflict, and stress. Mandatory overtime work exacerbates work-family conflict and stress, highlighting the need for flexible work schedules and protection against retaliation (Golden, 2015). It was commented by respondents:

*“Regular schedules allow me to plan my personal life better, giving me control over what I'm doing. Irregular working hours or inconsistent scheduling can lead to dissatisfaction and feeling overwhelmed.”*

*“Improving work scheduling for employees increases productivity. It leaves employees with satisfactory time for personal affairs and helps maintain focus and productivity at work, benefiting both the employee and the organization.”*

Deducted meaning: Irregular and unstable work schedules act as social costs, adversely affecting employee satisfaction and work-life balance. Employees value regular schedules for the stability they provide, allowing them to plan their personal lives effectively. Improving scheduling practices emerges as a crucial organizational investment, reducing stress and increasing focus, thereby fostering a positive social exchange relationship.

#### *4.3 Benefits of Flextime to Working Parents*

Flextime enables employees, especially working parents, to tailor their schedules to balance professional and family life effectively. It eliminates the need for working parents to sacrifice income or productivity while maintaining an active family life (Chen, 2017). It was commented:

*“My work schedule influences my job satisfaction because it allows me to rest and maintain good physical and mental states, crucial for providing proper service. Flexitime provides time for rejuvenation, enhancing my efficiency at work.”*

*“In my role as a hotel industry consultant, I frequently hear clients’ express concerns about high employee turnover rates and the increasing costs of human labor. Employees demand work-life balance. Unlike manufacturing, predicting service demand in hotels is challenging due to the nature of guest interactions. Consequently, scheduling becomes difficult. Clients are considering investing in artificial intelligence and robotics to address these challenges. However, a crucial question remains: Can these technologies truly provide the authentic human experience that guests seek? This uncertainty leaves hoteliers contemplating the future of their industry”.*

Deducted meaning: Flexitime emerges as a significant reward, especially for working parents, allowing them to balance professional demands with family responsibilities. This flexibility becomes a valuable resource, enabling employees to maintain physical and mental well-being, thereby enhancing their efficiency at work. The reciprocal relationship between organizations and employees becomes evident as the provision of flexitime aligns with employees' expectations and fosters a positive social exchange dynamic.

#### *4.4 Negative Effects of Fluctuating Work Schedules and Shift Work*

Fluctuating work schedules and shift work negatively impact worker well-being, leading to work-family conflicts and lower job and life satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2012; Standing et al., 2011; Dickson et al., 2018; Golden, 2015). Extended and night shifts decrease productivity and may lead to mental and physical fatigue, emphasizing the importance of well-designed work schedules. As commented:

*“Long working hours, overtimes, or irregular shifts can make it difficult to allocate time for family, social activities, and self-care. Inadequate rest or inconsistent days off can impact overall well-being and hinder work-life balance, denying workers their social lives.”*

*“There is a difference between being short staffed and not hiring enough people. Maybe the second makes the fluctuating of our work shifts”*

Deducted Meaning: Fluctuating work schedules and shift work disrupt the delicate balance between work and personal life, leading to work-family conflicts and decreased job and life satisfaction. The importance of well-designed schedules in preserving employees' social lives and overall well-being cannot be overstated. Organizations must consider the social costs incurred by employees when designing shift patterns to ensure a fair and equitable social exchange.

#### *4.5 Considerations for Effective Employee Scheduling*

Effective employee scheduling should account for total demand fluctuations, peak demand shifting, and employee absences without incurring extra costs (Parisio & Jones, 2015). Others commented:

*“Knowing my schedule in advance helps me plan my personal life, manage energy levels, and allocate time for rest and rejuvenation. Flexibility in scheduling, like shift swaps or adjusting hours, contributes to well-being by allowing me to address unexpected situations effectively. But in the hotel, schedule might not change in papers but change in practice. You cannot leave the customers hanging”*

*“Improving employee work scheduling practices can enhance productivity and satisfaction. Schedules designed with consideration for employee preferences, skills, and workload lead to better engagement, reduced stress, and increased motivation. Clear communication and fair distribution of tasks foster a sense of fairness and autonomy, resulting in improved job satisfaction and higher productivity.”*

Deducted Meaning: Effective employee scheduling, designed with consideration for employee preferences, skills, and workload, acts as a substantial organizational investment. Clear communication, fair task distribution, and proactive management of unexpected situations foster a sense of fairness and autonomy. These practices enhance job satisfaction and motivation, contributing to a positive social exchange relationship between employees and the organization.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights that flexible schedules, like flextime, make employees happier and more committed, boosting productivity, satisfaction and work-life balance. Irregular schedules, however, lead to dissatisfaction and conflicts. Well-designed, fair schedules and clear communication are crucial. Hotels should invest in technology for proper scheduling, train managers for balancing operations and employee well-being, and work with policymakers for fair scheduling rules. Following these steps will create a positive work environment, benefiting employees and the hotel as well. It is recommended in this study that, clear flexible work policies, using workforce management software, open communication, cross-training employees for versatile roles, fair shifts, part-time options, and regular policy reviews can be consideration strategies in creating an effective employee schedule in the hotel industry.

## 6. Limitations and Implications

The limitations of this study include the small sample size of participants. However, the use of both primary and secondary data enables the two methods to complement one another. Additionally, the study focuses on the hotel industry, so the findings may not be generalizable to other tourism and hospitality enterprises and even other service enterprises. On the other hand, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, suggesting the need for guidelines or regulations to promote fair and flexible scheduling practices in the hotel industry. For hotels management, it offers practical guidance on implementing proper scheduling, fostering communication, and considering individual employee needs. In the literature, it fills a research gap by examining the relationship between employee scheduling and its outcomes in the hotel industry, contributing to the field's knowledge base and serving as a foundation for future research.

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