

## A study on Psychological Impact of Pleasanteeism on Employees at Workplace

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### **Abstract:**

As per recent survey conducted by Lime Global in February 2022, it is revealed that there is a striking rise in the trend of 'pleasanteeism' at work place. Pleasanteeism, a relatively new term, signifies the phenomenon where employees feel the necessity to look positive, cheerful, and happy, even when they face stress or feeling struggled. Suppression of true emotions under the facade of happiness affect the mental well-being of individuals and show psychological impact on employees negatively. Continuous emotional suppression by employees causes chronic stress, diminished psychological safety and ultimately leads to burnout. Employees experiencing this tendency become emotionally exhausted, leading to decreased motivation, reduced creativity, and potential mental health challenges. This paper tries to present the causes of pleasanteeism, the psychological impact of pleasanteeism on employees at workplace and the suggestions to reduce the psychological impact of pleasanteeism on employees at workplace. The information contained in this paper is just as important to the employees, management and psychological professionals.

**Keywords:** Employees, Pleasanteeism, Psychological impact, workplace.

## Introduction

In recent times, a new trend at workplace has started that raised alarm among employees and employers. This trend is pleasanteeism. Pleasanteeism, a relatively new term, signifies the phenomenon where employees feel the necessity to look positive, cheerful, and happy, even when they face stress or feeling struggled. In this process, workers have to undergo pressure continuously, to present a positive attitude, irrespective of their true emotional state. Though positivity may be helpful in certain situations, pleasanteeism can lead to stress, burnout and lack of authenticity. Suppression of true emotions under the facade of happiness affect the mental well-being of individuals. This is one of the emerging trends which is increasingly becoming a source of concern at workplaces.

As per recent survey conducted by Lime Global in February 2022, it is revealed that there is a striking rise in the trend of 'pleasanteeism' at work place. A 75 per cent of workers in United Kingdom admitted to 'putting on a brave face' at work place in comparison to 51 per cent in May 2021. According to experts, the significant factors behind this behaviour were financial pressures, job insecurities, and societal expectations. In an era where professionalism is often paralleled with unrelenting positivity, a silent yet pervasive workplace trend has emerged — pleasanteeism. When companies thrust for a culture-first environment, employees feel they need to act as if everything is perfect. This trend drives by many names such as coffee badging, hush-cations, silent hybrid work styles, and even hushed holidays. All these terms hint at the same concept—employees are masking their true feelings, pretending everything is rosy when it really is not. The term 'pleasanteeism', coined by Shaun Williams, CEO of Lime Global, in 2021, implies the growing compulsion among employees to cover stress, anxiety, or low mood with a facade of cheerfulness. This behaviour, which based on the outdated culture of presenteeism—the practice of showing up at work even at illness—has become increasingly significant as workplaces adjust to post- Covid 19 pandemic dynamics and hybrid models.

## Pleasanteeism

In terms of Shaun Williams, 'pleasanteeism' can be defined as the stress to exhibit people's best self and express that they are OK notwithstanding whether they are under stress, facing too much pressure, or in want of support." Professionalism encompasses managing emotions by following workplace norms, but pleasanteeism demands suppression of emotions, often at the cost of well-being of an individual.

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Pleasanteeism is a combination of dual terms - 'pleasant' and 'presenteeism,' means the growing tendency of employees in hiding their real emotions and feelings to keep a facade of pleasantness and conformity in the workplace.

The term, appropriately named "pleasanteeism", denotes to the pressure employees at workplace face to hide feelings of stress and anxiety. It refers to the mask of pleasantries people wear when they want to hide their true feelings behind a more "pleasant" facade.

The following signs indicate whether any employee has trapped in pleasanteeism:

1. Saying yes to everything, even when the employee does not want to because he or she become terrified of disapproval.
2. Avoiding disagreements at all costs, even if it means sacrificing his or her own opinion just to keep the peace.
3. Trying to climb the career ladder by saying what others want to hear.
4. To agree with the majority due to fear of being left out or judged.
5. Trying to adjust with situations just to escape conflict.

### **Objectives of study**

1. To study the causes of pleasanteeism
2. To study the psychological impact of pleasanteeism on employees at workplace.
3. To make suggestions to reduce the psychological impact of pleasanteeism on employees at workplace.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is based mainly on the secondary sources of data which is collected from various websites relating to pleasanteeism and its psychological impact on employees at workplace.

### **Hypothesis Development**

The World Health Organization observed psychological well-being as an indicator of health, and it plays a crucial role in pleasanteeism-related productivity outcomes. The employees with a high level of pleasanteeism may have a difficulty to deal with organizational changes and job

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insecurity. This may lead to negative impact on employee psychological health and wellbeing. This shows that there is a significant relation between pleasantness and psychological wellbeing of employees which it would become worse over the time. Therefore, it could possibly be hypothesized that:

H1: There is a significant negative relationship between pleasantness and psychological wellbeing of employees.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between pleasantness and psychological wellbeing of employees.

### Causes of pleasantness at workplace

1. **Workplace expectations:** If the expectations are very high at workplace, the employees may not show their inability to work and instead hide their true emotions and feelings to maintain a facade of pleasantness and conformity in the workplace.
2. **Pressure to Accomplish:** Employees often required to exhibit high enthusiasm and productivity. They fear if they show any sign of struggle may be taken by others as incompetence or weakness.
3. **Organizational Culture of Employees:** In organizations where transparency and psychological safety lacks, employees keep things confidential to them to suit cultural expectations of being overly optimistic and ultimately say "Can do it" even they are overburdened.
4. **Dislike to Stigma:** Mental health issues face important stigmas in any form. Employees may not want to show this issue hoping to lost reputation as "unreliable" or "not that professional" at workplace.

Besides, some other causes of pleasantness include tremendous pressure at workplace, fear of job loss, absence of sick leave policies, or a toxic culture in work environment that discourages openness.

### The psychological impact of pleasantness on employees at workplace

A number of studies, carried over during the past few years, reveal that suppressing emotions can show impact on body and mind. In fact, a study from the International Journal of Psychotherapy

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Practice and Research in 2019 found that an ongoing reliance on hiding or suppressing emotion is a “barrier to good health”.

An earlier study carried on by the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Rochester disclosed people who bottled up their emotions even increased their risk of premature death from all reasons by more than 30 per cent, with their danger of being diagnosed with cancer increasing by 70 per cent.

Further, a study conducted in Italy in 2021 during the first wave of lockdown revealed that when people regulate or ignore their emotions, they can experience short-term mental and physical reactions as well.

A study from the University of California established that a “cultural pervasiveness to seek or value happiness can lead to a risk factor for symptoms and a diagnosis of depression” in adults.

Another American study concluded that youths aged from seven to eighteen years who felt they wanted to value happiness highly were actually found to be “more depressed” as they were not able to reach their expected range of happiness.

The psychological effect of pleasantism extends beyond mere discomfort as practicing a continuous facade of positivity can result in emotional exhaustion, low work productivity, and increased burnout. When workers feel bound to suppress their true emotions continuously, it is not possible for them to exist comfortably at the workplace. Overtime, suppressing real emotions can lead to mental health issues, decreased productivity and a lack of genuine communication among team members.

This tendency can be particularly worse in an hybrid work model, where video calls demand continuous demonstrations of engagement in work and workers feel pressured to appear visibly cheerful during meetings, even if they are suffering from mentally or emotionally.

Recent behavioral studies at workplace show that pleasantism occurs as a response to implicit organizational pressures and due to the rise of "culture-first" workplace philosophies. Employees increasingly report feeling obligated to involve in forced enthusiasm during team meetings, maintain persistent virtual availability, and participate in social activities despite personal or professional stressors. The psychological impact spreads beyond mere discomfort. If employees maintain a continuous façade of positivity, it may lead to emotional exhaustion, reduction in productivity, and increased risk of burnout. When workers feel forced to suppress their genuine emotions, it produces a cognitive difference that needs significant mental energy to sustain.

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Employees practicing pleasantism may mask their true emotions such as exhaustion, anxiety, or burnout and instead, project an outward appearance of enthusiasm and optimism. This suppression leads to emotional conflict, a conflict between inner feelings and outer behaviour, that disrupts emotional balance and aggravates stress. Over time, this dissension erodes resilience, leaving employees to feel disconnected, unsupported and overwhelmed.

Continuous emotional suppression by employees causes chronic stress, diminished psychological safety and ultimately leads to burnout. Employees experiencing this tendency become emotionally exhausted, leading to decreased motivation, reduced creativity, and potential mental health challenges.

## Suggestions

- Regular training programmes like Line Manager Training, Wellbeing Champion Training or Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) are to be implemented. These programmes may be essential to employee psychological wellbeing strategy.
  - MHFA training can be just as significant as physical first aid training and may offer useful knowledge to employees in providing first-line support for their colleagues.
  - A team of Mental Health First Aiders should be deputed at workplace to show employees that the organizations are serious about providing support. This can help the employees to promote awareness and education about mental health.
  - Mental health awareness days are to be celebrated in Organizations and policies such as open-door policies shall be implemented. This can improve their workplace culture and help to check the onset of pleasantism at workplace.
  - Some team-building tasks that are not linked to work shall be arranged. This will help to create a healthier bond among employees, making it convenient for an open conversation about mental health of employees.
  - Annual office events, such as family days, Christmas dinners and office socials, are to arranged. This can help to feel employees that manager is not just their ‘boss’, but also someone who values their mental health and wellbeing.
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- Encouragement to be given for psychological safety. Psychological safety is the basis of a healthy workplace culture. Lead the leaders to model susceptibility and authenticity by allocating own challenges and experiences.

## Conclusion

Leaving the incidents of pleasanteism to rise can be harmful to the overall mental health and wellbeing of employees. This may reflect in lower productivity and staff output. By stimulating a healthier attitude to work, resilience is being strengthened in the workplace and beyond. Pleasanteism is an emerging workplace trend that is to be checked. If left unchecked, Pleasanteism can negatively contribute to mental health and thus reduce productivity and organizational culture as well. HR professionals and business leaders should be able to identify the signs of pleasanteism and take proactive steps in improving psychological safety, enhancing mindfulness about mental health, and encouraging open communication. Hence H1 (There is a significant negative relationship between pleasanteism and psychological well-being of employees) is proved and accepted and H2 (There is a significant positive relationship between pleasanteism and psychological well-being of employees) is rejected.

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