

Effects of emotional culture of joy on employee happiness: A moderated-mediation model in hospitality

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ABSTRACT

Employee happiness at work is vital for improving performance, engagement, and retention, especially in the hospitality industry. This study explores how an emotional culture of joy (ECJ), a workplace atmosphere that promotes shared feelings of joy and positivity, shapes happiness at work (HaW). Specifically, we examine whether psychological safety (PsySaf) and relational attachment (RA) explain this relationship and whether work autonomy (WA) strengthens these effects. Data were collected from 522 hotel and restaurant employees in Sinop, Türkiye, using a three-wave survey to reduce bias. Results from covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) show that ECJ has both a direct and indirect positive effect on HaW through PsySaf and RA. Furthermore, WA amplifies these indirect effects, indicating that employees experience greater happiness when they have autonomy. Overall, the findings highlight that fostering a joyful emotional culture and supporting employee autonomy can build psychologically safe and connected workplaces that enhance happiness. This study contributes to the Broaden-and-Build and Conservation of Resources theories and offers practical insights for hospitality managers aiming to create positive, resilient, and engaged teams.

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is innately people-oriented and characterized by emotional labor, irregular and long hours, interpersonal interactions, temporary employment relationships, and high expectations for service excellence (Azazz et al., 2024; Elshaer et al., 2025). Hospitality employees regularly engage with visitors under challenging conditions, often demanding that they normalize their feelings, uphold calmness, and project confidently, irrespective of personal feelings (Eyouun, Guo, & Shammout, 2025; Li, Bibi, Kanwel, Khan, & Hussain, 2025). Such persistent emotive struggles can lead to exhaustion, stress, anxiety, and reduced employee well-being if not reinforced by a conducive organizational environment (Azazz et al., 2024; Jiang, Bibi, Lyu, Khan, & Li, 2025). To successfully encounter these challenges, a powerful organizational resource based on a positive emotional culture rooted in joy has emerged (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023). Emotional

culture of joy refers to “a mutual expressions of enthusiasm, appreciation, and warmth, can nurture a sense of ownership, elevate self-esteem, and energize employees even in high-stress service circumstances” (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 26).

For service-focused organizations such as hotels and restaurants, fostering happiness at work not only augments employees' emotional experiences but also improves customer service, reduces turnover, and enhances organizational outcomes (Salas-Vallina, Pozo-Hidalgo, & Gil-Monte, 2020). As the hospitality sector becomes emotionally challenging and highly competitive, fostering a joyful culture is vital for developing resilient, motivated, and happy teams. Recent empirical evidence shows that happiness at work (HaW) has gained scholarly attention and is considered one of the most dominant factors affecting employee well-being (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023), enhanced task performance (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021), firm performance (Sovbetov, 2025) and reduced turnover (Hosie, Willemyns, & Sevastos,

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2012; Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021). Happiness at work refers to “a positive emotional state that results from the alignment between an individual's work experiences, values, and expectations, encompassing feelings of satisfaction, meaning, and emotional well-being in the workplace” (Fisher, 2010, p. 385). Moreover, Salas-Vallina et al. (2017b) defined HaW as “an employee can develop a state of happiness provided that the work environment satisfies his/her psychological needs, such as empowerment, work socializing, work meaningfulness, and personal development or growth” (p. 315).

Happy employees are engaged in positive job-related outcomes, such as high commitment and engagement, sustaining a happy mood at work, being more productive and innovative, and being more efficient and effective in task completion (Bellet, De Neve, & Ward, 2024; Soyalm, 2023; Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2017), which leads to improved overall personal and organizational performance (Bani-Melhem, Zeffane, & Albaity, 2018; Tunsi & Bhalla, 2023). Such employees are more innovative (Bani-Melhem et al., 2018), highly motivated to stay in the organization (Raj, 2023), five times more energetic, and twice as productive (Bellet et al., 2024; Soyalm, 2023). This is consistent with the Broaden-and-Build (BnB) theory of positive emotions, which posits that “positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and lead to actions that build enduring personal resources” (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008, p. 782).

Because of its significant impact on employees and organizational performance, it is worth investigating the antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and boundary conditions that affect HaW. Prior studies have examined various antecedents of HaW, such as HR practices, leadership, and job characteristics (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020), while limited attention has been paid to exploring the psychological and emotional antecedents of HaW (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023; Hartmann, Weiss, Hoegl, & Carmeli, 2021). Therefore, this study attempted to bridge these gaps by investigating the psychosocial and emotional antecedents of HaW. Thus, based on the conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018), we developed a moderated mediation model in which the emotional culture of joy (hereafter ECJ) is treated as the core antecedent of HaW, and relational attachment (RA) (emotional resource) and psychological safety (PsySaf) (psychological resource) serve as parallel mediating variables, along with work autonomy as a boundary condition that strengthens this relationship. We consider ECJ to be a crucial precursor of HaW because emotional resources such as ECJ foster reproductive resources such as PsySaf and relational attachment (RA), which can eventually contribute to HaW (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014).

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in several ways by investigating when and how ECJ affects employee HaW. First, we investigated the emotional and psychological antecedents of HaW, which have been overlooked in high-stress service sectors, such as the hospitality industry. In doing so, this study extends previous research and addresses the call of Aboramadan and Kundi (2023) and Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) to investigate the drivers of HaW. Second, we examine the intervening mechanisms through which the ECJ significantly affects HaW. Specifically, grounded in the BnB and COR theoretical perspectives, we treated PsySaf (psychological resource) and RA (emotional resource) as the two theoretically derived intervening variables that explain how ECJ nurtures employee HaW. Third, grounded in conservation of resources theory, we treated work autonomy as a boundary condition and assumed that the interaction of ECJ and work autonomy strengthens PsySaf and RA, which, in turn, strongly affects HaW. In doing so, we extended Aboramadan and Kundi's (2023) model. Finally, unlike previous research, which mainly focused on the psychological and physical aspects of workplace well-being, we followed Fisher's (2010) approach. Fisher's (2010) approach measures happiness at work in three dimensions: work engagement (the work itself), job satisfaction (job characteristics), and affective commitment (the organization as a whole). The purpose of this research is to examine the ECJ,

along with psychological, emotional, and organizational resources, to augment happiness at work that ultimately benefits both employees and organizations.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Emotional culture of joy and happiness at work

The present digital era and the demanding nature of service-oriented industries, such as hospitality, make it difficult for employees to cope with and meet the desired targets, leading to stress, anxiety, emotional labor, and interpersonal strain (Bibi et al., 2022; Elshaer et al., 2025). Such stressful conditions can adversely affect their motivation, well-being, and performance and even compel them toward bullying (Al-Romeedy & Khairy, 2024; Kamel, 2025). In this scenario, nurturing a joyful emotional culture is essential, as it not only motivates employees to enhance their morale and resilience but also impedes them from exhibiting dysfunctional behaviors (Azazz et al., 2024). In joyful workplaces, employees demonstrate positive emotions through body language, smiling, and cheerful conversations (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014, 2016). Exhibiting such emotions in the workplace not only elevates the work environment but also strengthens group cohesion and commitment. However, establishing and sustaining a joyful work culture is neither quick nor easy (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). Consistent efforts and ample time are required to embed joy into the workplace culture (Owler, Morrison, & Plester, 2010).

Recent empirical evidence shows that ECJ have a profound impact on various personal and organizational outcomes, including job and life satisfaction (Eyel & Akkaya, 2020), team resilience (Hartmann et al., 2021), happiness at work (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023), humor in organizations (O'Neill & Jazaieri, 2024), resilient performance (Adler, Bliese, Barsade, & Sowden, 2022), turnover intention (Charles-Leija, Castro, Toledo, & Ballesteros-Valdés, 2023), and individual happiness and performance (Almeida & Josten, 2021). In recent years, happiness at work, characterized by positive emotions and feelings, healthy behaviors, and good mood, has received considerable scholarly attention (Salas-Vallina et al., 2017; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). HaW covers all features of work that nurture positive emotions, happiness, and pleasantness that make the work rewarding and enjoyable (Fisher, 2010). It is evident that happy employees adopt optimistic behaviors, which in turn, have a positive impact on their job outcomes, such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020), productivity (Bellet et al., 2024), and innovative capability (Al-shami, Al Mamun, & Rashid, 2023). Overall, as described by Fisher (2010), HaW encompasses employees' positive feelings toward their jobs, job characteristics, and the entire organization. This means that the HaW represents job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.

In the present scenario, grounded in the notion of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we believe that the ECJ can nurture HaW. COR postulates that employees' struggles to attain, preserve, and protect valued resources to sustain their well-being. From this standpoint, ECJ functions as an emotional resource by providing employees a joyful experiences at the workplace that motivate them to replenish psychological reserves (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Employees perceive that the work environment is resource-rich when they are encircled by expressions of joy such as encouragement, smiles, expressive support, and hilarity, ultimately lead to decrease emotional stress and enhance their ability to effectively manage daily challenges (Adler et al., 2022). These emotional resources had profound effect on employees belonging, support, and security, which in turn, lead to greater happiness at work (Barsade & Knight, 2015). Additionally, COR proposes that resource gain can activate gain spirals in which initial positive emotional experiences lead to enhanced motivation, interpersonal relations, and emotional resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Thus, ECJ not only safeguards employees from resource reduction (e.g., exhaustion, work stress) but also pledges a cycle of positive emotions that improve

overall workplace happiness (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023). Thus, based on the cited literature, we postulate the following hypothesis.

H₁. Emotional culture of joy is positively related to happiness at work

2.2. The mediating role of relational attachment

The concept of relational attachment was initially introduced by Kahn (2007) and as refers to “the aggregate sense of becoming linked, connected, and attached to others at workplace” (p. 191). Relational attachment (RA) explains employees' psychological ties with other employees in the workplace. Prior studies suggest that RA is significantly correlated with job-related outcomes, such as career success (Kundi, Khoso, & Adnan, 2022), organizational attachment and amusing psychological conditions (Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2019), job satisfaction and performance (Warnock, Ju, & Katz, 2024), and self-regulation (Ren, Topakas, & Patterson, 2024).

Kahn (2007) noted that employees' attachment to one another in the workplace becomes stronger when their shared needs are fulfilled. This perspective is well matched with Harrison's (1978) general fit theory which argues that when an environment fulfils individuals' desires, positive consequences arise. Consequently, linking the fit perspective with Harrison and Kahn's viewpoints, this study foresees that RA is augmented as employees' needs are satisfied through their workplace relations. Thus, based on the BnB (Fredrickson, 2013) theoretical viewpoint of positive feelings, we contend that ECJ will boost employee RA. Moreover, Garland et al. (2010) noted that the BnB build hypothesis posits that gathering positive feelings contributes to positive changes in supplementary resources. As such, positive feelings augment additional resources such as RA, thereby reducing undesirable strains and providing coping mechanisms in taxing events (Fredrickson, 2013). Consistent with this perspective, the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) also proposes that mutual emotions such as ECJ can be motivating and can increase employees' efforts in additional emotional resources such as RA. Therefore, we postulate the following hypothesis.

H₂. Emotional culture of joy is positively related to relational attachment.

The relationship between RA and HaW can be better understood from the prior similar work. For instance, Patrick, Knee, Canevello, and Lonsbary (2007) and Gagne (2003) found a strong positive correlation between psychological need satisfaction and employee well-being. Moreover, Kundi, Khoso, and Adnan (2022) noted that RA fulfilled the need for relatedness, where employees are attached, connected, and close to other employees. Furthermore, grounded in the COR perspective, RA may also be interpreted as a socio-emotional resource which can facilitate employees to effectively manage job demands. This is because good associations are resource generating, which may lead to a condition of well-being characterized by HaW (Rousseau & Ling, 2017).

Dutton and Ragins (2017) noted that well-established working interactions may generate beneficial outcomes. For example, Aboramadan and Kundi (2023) found a strong positive association between relational attachment and HaW, Simmons, Gooty, Nelson, and Little (2009) found that good attachment reduced job burnout, and Rutter (2006) noted that good relationships boosted psychological resilience. Moreover, Rozman and Strukelj (2020) found that good workplace relationships among employees were positively associated with work engagement. Thus, based on the cited literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₃. Relational attachment is positively related to happiness at work.

As highlighted by the BnB theory (Fredrickson et al., 2008), an enhanced sense of positive emotions (manifested as ECJ) augments emotional and social resources (manifested as RA), inspiring employees' emotional well-being. In addition, BnB theory also proposes that engagement with these positive feelings may stimulate the extension of cognitive and behavioral responses and facilitate employees to cultivate

high-quality emotional resources and social contacts, such as those of RA (Fredrickson, 2013). Joyful experiences enable individuals to attach socially interpersonally and advance good social connections. Considering this insight, individuals can feel friendlier and more associated with one another. The development of such interpersonal ties includes commitment, compassion, and common support (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). Subsequently, these connections are reproductive and vital, and train individuals with the essential resources to create emotive resources that could eventually facilitate HaW.

These processes do not operate independently and instead work in connection. This scenario can be best explained within the framework of COR theory resource caravans (Hobfoll, 2011). Resource caravans ascend and develop when resource corridors facilitate the flow and interaction of related resources. These resource corridors can increase BnB mechanisms to produce additional resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Thus, based on the COR perspective, the ECJ may function as a central corridor, which will affect HaW through the reinforcement of BnB dynamics to nurture the growth of RA, eventually leading to augmentation of HaW. Thus, we postulate that the ECJ affects HaW through the development of relational contacts. Hence, we developed the following mediating hypothesis:

H₄. The relationship between emotional culture of joy and happiness at work is mediated by relational attachment.

2.3. The mediating role of psychological safety (PsySaf)

PsySaf refers to “a common belief amongst individuals that it is safe to engage in social risk-taking at work” (Edmondson & Lei, 2014, p. 24). In a PsySaf job environment, employees have positive intentions toward one another, support and trust their colleagues, engage in mutual creative endeavors, maintain long-lasting relationships, engage in constructive conflict, and encourage teamwork (Hsu, Liu, & Tsaur, 2019). Moreover, Khattak et al. (2022) argued that in a PsySaf environment, employees consider that they can openly share their views free from concerns about losing their status, position, or jobs. It would be incorrect to assume that conflicts do not occur in such a safe atmosphere; instead, this suggests that individuals are more involved in productive reasoning and less involved in self-protecting behaviors (Edmondson, Kramer, & Cook, 2004). While addressing organizational problems, such employees are more committed to and highly involved in creative and innovative endeavors because they have little or no fear of reprisal (Shafaei, Nejati, Omari, & Sharafizad, 2024). Previous research has reported numerous outcomes of PsySaf, including creativity, higher performance, subjective well-being, and work engagement (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017; Liu, Lei, & Gan, 2025).

In a joyful emotional atmosphere, employees have a greater tendency to exhibit positive emotions openly, receive support and appreciation, and experience mutual trust and value, which are crucial antecedents to felling PsySaf (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023). Moreover, Barsade and Knight (2015) noted that the ECJ demonstrates behavioral norms that stimulate expressions of eagerness, excitement, and happiness, commonly via hilarity, smiles, and supportive communications. This cultural context nurtures affective bonding and connection, which helps alleviate the panic of retaliation, judgment, and humiliation, which are considered crucial impediments to PsySaf (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014). Similarly, when managers and peers persistently demonstrate positive emotions, they model behaviors that stimulate inclusion and acceptance, thereby decreasing the perceived risk and uncertainty in social connections (Imam, Naqvi, Naqvi, & Chambel, 2020).

Under the BnB framework (Fredrickson et al., 2008), joyful experiences utilize employees' temporary cognitive-action responses, allowing them to shape persistent social and psychological resources (Gardner et al., 2010). Put simply, BnB offers a multifaceted viewpoint, signifying

that a positive feeling embedded in the ECJ can nurture growth in psychological resources, such as PsySaf, through the accretion of rational and behavioral resources (Fredrickson, 2013). In such situations, individuals are more likely to engage in innovative endeavors, take interpersonal risks, and openly communicate without fear of adverse consequences, because joy nurtures plainness and intellectual flexibility. Fundamentally, the emotional culture of joy fosters psychological resources, such as mutual respect, optimism, resilience, and trust, which reinforce the climate of PsySaf (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). Moreover, Men and Robinson (2018) proposed that ECJ affects how individuals interpret social cues, with joyful settings dwindling uncertainty and boosting feelings of belonging. This collective consistency facilitates an individual's sense of safety as employees feel recognized, valued, and emotionally secure (Hartmann et al., 2021). Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. Emotional culture of joy is positively related to employees PsySaf.

Research on PsySaf has grown over the past few decades to gain insight into the outcomes of working in a psychologically safe environment (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023). Typically, the current body of research fails to offer a comprehensive understanding of the effects of PsySaf on HaW. However, several past studies have highlighted the effects of PsySaf on HaW. According to Kahn's (1990) model, employees' engagement levels are affected by their psychological experiences. Among these psychological dynamics, safety was identified as a crucial determinant of engagement. To validate Kahn's model, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) found that PsySaf was significantly associated with work engagement. However, Tiwari and Lenka (2016) argued that the effect of PsySaf is not limited to engagement, as prior research has also found its impact on job satisfaction (Yanchus, Periard, Moore, Carle, & Osatuke, 2015). Both job satisfaction and work engagement are prerequisites for a HaW. Based on these arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6. PsySaf is positively related to happiness at work.

The BnB theory (Fredrickson et al., 2008) provides a better explanation of how psychological resources such as PsySaf intervene in the relationship between ECJ and HaW. In line with the BnB theory, it is reasonable to suggest that employees' experiences of positive feelings will improve HaW through different psychological pathways, such as PsySaf. Joyful experiences can strengthen vital psychological resources by mitigating the adverse effects of negative emotions, a condition in which people are more prone to facing challenges (Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000). Moreover, as per the broadened principle of BnB, the reception of positive emotional cues extends an individual's range of mental and intellectual capabilities, triggering an enhanced psychological sense of safety. Similarly, according to the build perspective of BnB theory (Fredrickson et al., 2008), positive emotions can progressively reinforce and deepen, leading employees to optimistic growth expectations and nurturing increases in other sanguine psychological resources, such as PsySaf (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006). This eventually leads to HaW.

In addition, BnB theory postulates that the effect of positive feelings on the development of employees' personal resources is augmented conditional upon optimistic feelings that are mutually felt and expressed (Fredrickson, 2016). This signifies that positive emotional experiences can decrease workplace strain and undesirable outcomes of mutually experienced strains (Knight, Menges, & Bruch, 2018). These emotions could also facilitate the generation of additional resources, such as PsySaf, potentially leading to HaW. Prior research has documented the mediating role of PsySaf, including organizational culture and innovation (Balli, Ustun, & Balli, 2021), supportive workplace and organizational performance (Jindal, Mittal, Gupta, & Chaudhry, 2024), job resources and affective commitment (Chughtai, 2022), workplace friendship and creativity (Geylan, 2023), employee satisfaction and retention (Paul, 2023), and HR practices and employee engagement

(Rabiul, Mohamed, Patwary, Yean, & Osman, 2023). Although psychological safety and relational attachment both reflect interpersonal aspects of workplace experience, they capture distinct psychological mechanisms in the hospitality context. Psychological safety represents a cognitive appraisal of interpersonal risk, particularly salient in high-contact service environments where employees must express ideas, handle guest complaints, and admit service errors without fear of negative consequences. In contrast, relational attachment reflects an affective bond and emotional connection with colleagues, emphasizing belongingness and emotional closeness rather than risk perception. Thus, psychological safety concerns perceived safety in expression, whereas relational attachment concerns emotional embeddedness within the team. While related, they represent conceptually distinct resource domains—cognitive-interpersonal security versus affective-relational bonding. Therefore, we propose the following mediating hypothesis.

H7. The relationship between emotional culture of joy and happiness at work is significantly mediated by psychological safety.

2.4. The moderating role of work autonomy

Work autonomy refers to “the degree of control and discretion employees have over their job tasks and how they manage interpersonal interactions” (Breugh, 1999, p. 358). Autonomy not only empowers employees to communicate openly, but also enables the sustainable growth of emotional connections in the workplace (Santiago-Torner, 2023). Employees working in joyful workplaces are more prone to interpersonal connections because of their emotional manifestations and mutual positivity (Barsade & O'Neill, 2016). However, these relations ultimately grow into meaningful relational attachments when employees are empowered to involve themselves in relationships without pressure or haste, which may be possible under high-autonomy situations (Batilmurik, Fanggidae, Manafe, & Setyorini, 2025). Autonomy permits individuals to initiate, maintain, and invest in workplace affairs without compulsion, allowing for yawning and more realistic connections that are essential to persistent workplace happiness (Abdillah & Mursalina, 2020). On the other hand, employees with low autonomy can limit joy and interpersonal initiatives because they are worried about role expectations or supervisory control. Moreover, even when working in a joyful environment, employees with low autonomy curb their ability to sincerely respond to emotional nods or significant engagement with colleagues, potentially suppressing the development of interpersonal relations (Sia & Appu, 2015). Similarly, the COR model (Hobfoll, 1989) postulates that autonomy is a vital resource that permits employees to transform positive work experiences into social and emotional gains, thereby improving the impact of a joyful environment on interpersonal connections and, consequently, happiness at work (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023).

Based on these discussions, we believe that work autonomy functions as a facilitator, allowing the change of a positive emotional culture into an important interpersonal outcome. When autonomy is high, the ECJ not only inspires collaboration, but also allows interpersonal connections to be more realistic and emotionally satisfying, eventually leading to greater happiness (Abdillah & Mursalina, 2020; Lu & Ou, 2025). Conversely, when autonomy is low, a joyful culture can fail to establish fruitful networks, thus flagging its indirect impact on employee happiness at work. Therefore, we developed the following moderated mediation hypothesis:

H8. The indirect effect of the emotional culture of joy on happiness at work via relational attachment is moderated by work autonomy, such that the indirect effect is stronger when work autonomy is high rather than low.

Work autonomy influences how employees understand, adopt, and respond to their emotional work environment, which has a significant

impact on interpersonal and organizational outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Sia & Appu, 2015). While the ECJ augments HaW through the enhancement of PsySaf, the strength of this relationship is mainly dependent on the degree of employee autonomy in the workplace. Moreover, Kim (2022) and Peng, Zhong, Liu, Zhou, and Ke (2022) posits that autonomy is the core psychological need, and when this need is satisfied, employees are more intrinsically motivated and engage with their environment in genuine and personalized approaches. In a culture of joy, high autonomy permits employees to indicate how and when to take interpersonal risks, engage in social connections, and exhibit positive emotions. All of these behaviors significantly contribute to PsySaf (Shafaei et al., 2024). This arrangement between the ECJ and autonomy provokes a strong sense of being valued, safe, and accepted at work, leading to greater happiness.

However, employees with low autonomy may perceive joyful culture as artificial or enforced, which may diminish their PsySaf (Guo, Hancock, Cooper, & Caldas, 2023). Moreover, individuals working under constrained autonomy can avoid open expression out of concern for social disapproval and retaliation, thereby weakening the development of PsySaf and undermining its positive effects on happiness (Peng et al., 2022). Thus, work autonomy functions as a boundary condition defining the degree to which an ECJ can transform into work happiness through PsySaf. This moderated mediation model assimilates emotional and physical workplace elements, and focuses on the need to allow employees to completely understand the benefits of a positive emotional culture. All the proposed relationships are highlighted in Fig. 1. Therefore, we develop the following moderated-mediation hypothesis:

H₉. The indirect effect of the emotional culture of joy on happiness at work via PsySaf is moderated by work autonomy, such that the indirect effect is stronger when work autonomy is high rather than low.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and data collection

We contacted 700 employees working in hotels and restaurants in

Sinop, Türkiye using purposive sampling strategy. Sinop is a coastal city located in the Black Sea region that attracts many local and international visitors, especially in summer. To provide the best services, a large chain of hotels and restaurants is operating in full swing and offering Sinop special culinary dishes such as Manti Salono, Izgara, and traditional Pida. We select Sinop based on theoretical and practical grounds as this coastal city represents an emerging hospitality market with a rapidly growing service workforce, making it appropriate for investigating emotional culture, relational dynamics, and happiness at work. Although data collection from a single city may affect the generalizability, our goal was analytical rather than statistical generalization (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013; Welch, Sharp, Gottlieb, Skinner, & Wennberg, 2011). In addition, the researchers collected the data from three waves, so it become difficult to collect the data from multiple regions.

Prior to data collection, we contacted HR managers and owners of hospitality organizations for formal approval. The study objectives were discussed with the participants. The top management or owners of 65 hotels and 83 restaurants consented to participate in the study. Subsequently, we contacted employees working in these organizations, discussed the study objectives, assured confidentiality of their responses, and informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and nonmonetary. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants during data collection.

Survey-based studies are prone to common method bias (CMB), particularly with single-source data; we addressed this by adopting a three-wave design. Thus, to minimize CMB, we followed MacKenzie and Podsakoff's (2012) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) guidelines and collected data at three waves with a one-month gap in each wave. Data collection takes three months, from January 5, 2025, to April 5, 2025. This temporal separation reduces respondents' ability to rely on the same cognitive frame when answering predictor and outcome measures, thereby mitigating method-induced covariance. Moreover, we assigned a unique code to each participant to confirm and match their responses across all three intervals. The code consists of first two letters of the respondent name and last two digits of their phone number. This method is widely recommended for preserving participant

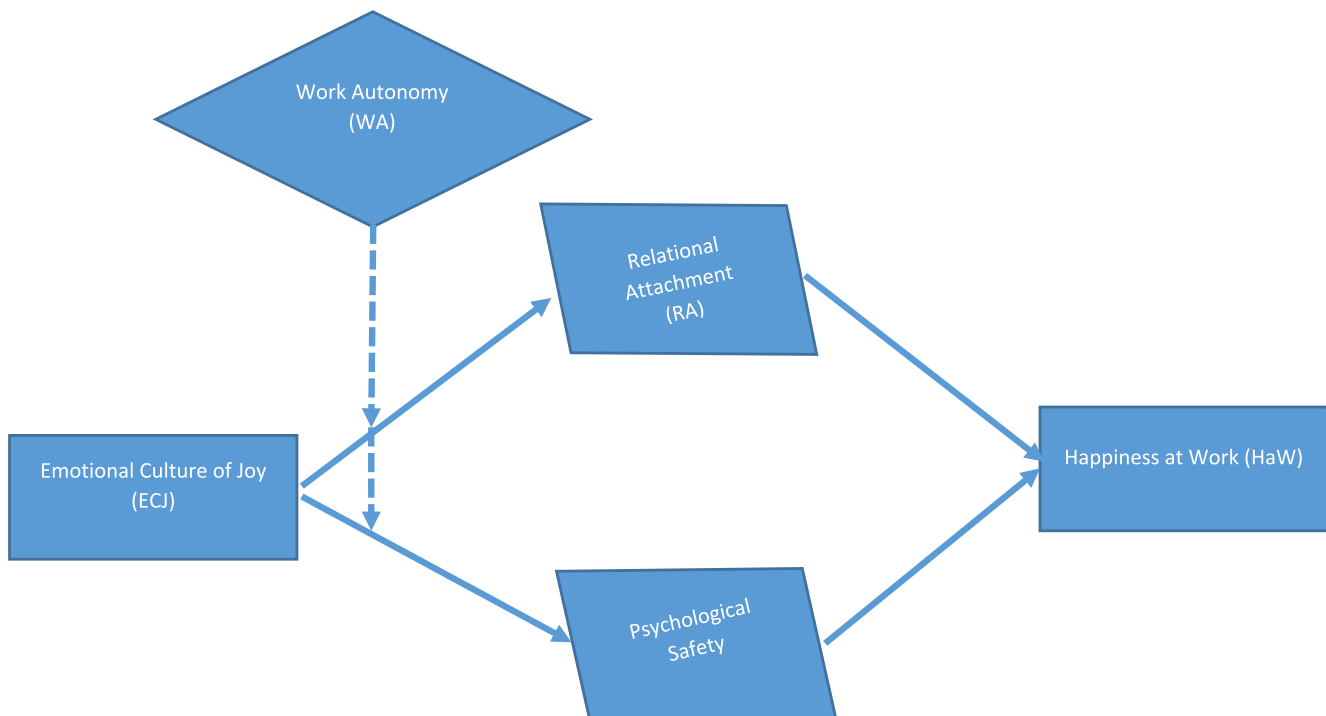


Fig. 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

anonymity while enabling multi-wave matching (Demerouti & Rispens, 2014; Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). The ID codes allowed us to accurately track and match responses across all phases.

In Phase 1, 700 employees were contacted to provide data regarding their demographics, work autonomy, and the emotional culture of joy. In this phase, we obtained 632 responses from the participants. One month later (Phase 2), we contacted the employees who participated in the first survey to collect data on their relational attachment and psychological safety. A total of 574 responses were obtained. Finally, in Phase 3 (one month later from Phase 2), we contacted only those employees who successfully participated in the previous two phases to collect data on happiness at work. A total of 545 responses were obtained. After a thorough review, some questionnaires were found to be incomplete or incorrectly filled and were thus discarded from the study. The final sample comprised 522 responses, with a response rate of 74.57%.

3.2. Measures

Because the study was conducted in Türkiye, all measurement scales were translated into Turkish using the standard translation and back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1980) and Beaton et al. (2000). Two bilingual experts independently translated the scales from English to Turkish, and two different bilingual experts blind to the original items—performed the back-translation. A panel of three scholars compared the original, translated, and back-translated versions to ensure semantic, conceptual, and cultural equivalence. Minor wording adjustments were made to improve clarity without altering the meaning of the constructs. Additionally, the translated questionnaire was pilot-tested with 35 hospitality employees to assess clarity and cultural appropriateness; minor refinements were incorporated based on their feedback. This process ensured accurate cultural representation and linguistic validity of the adapted scales.

3.2.1. Emotional Culture of Joy (ECJ)

ECJ was measured using a 5-item scale developed by Barsade and O'Neill (2014). Following Aboramadan and Kundi (2023) and Hartmann et al. (2021), the scale assessed employees' perceptions of coworkers' joyful expressions. A sample item was: "Employees in my organization express cheerful emotions at work." Items were rated on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Reliability analysis indicated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.91$ and $CR = 0.93$).

3.2.2. Happiness at Work (HaW)

HaW was assessed using a 9-item, three-dimensional scale developed by Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2021) that covers affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and engagement. Sample items included: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization", "I am enthusiastic about my job", and "I am satisfied with the pay I received for my job." Reliability was excellent ($\alpha = 0.94$; $CR = 0.95$).

3.2.3. Work Autonomy (WA)

WA was measured using a 9-item, three-dimensional scale developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006), covering decision-making autonomy, work scheduling autonomy, and work method autonomy. Sample items were: "This job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own" and "This job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work." The reliability values were high ($\alpha = 0.93$, $CR = 0.94$).

3.2.4. Relational Attachment (RA)

RA was measured using a 6-item scale by Ehrhardt and Ragins (2019). A sample item was: "When thinking about my relationship with others at work, I feel committed to them." The scale demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.92$, $CR = 0.94$).

3.2.5. Psychological Safety (PsySaf)

PsySaf was assessed using a 5-item scale developed by Edmondson et al. (2004). Sample items included: "It is safe to take risks in this organization" and "Members of my work unit are able to bring up problems and tough issues." Reliability was strong ($\alpha = 0.90$; $CR = 0.93$).

3.3. Data analysis

The hypothesized model was tested using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. Although SmartPLS is traditionally associated with variance-based estimation, the software's CB-SEM module enables confirmatory model testing using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation (Hair, Babin, Ringle, et al., 2025). Given the deductive, theory-testing nature of the study and the established measurement structure, CB-SEM was considered appropriate.

Maximum likelihood estimation was applied. All latent constructs were modeled as reflective, and identification was achieved using the marker-variable approach, with one factor loading per construct fixed to 1.0 for scaling purposes. Prior to analysis, multivariate normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis statistics. As values were within acceptable ranges (skewness <2; kurtosis <7), ML estimation was deemed appropriate (Hair et al., 2025).

Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices in accordance with established SEM guidelines: chi-square (χ^2), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Acceptable model fit was determined using the following criteria: CFI and TLI ≥ 0.90 , RMSEA ≤ 0.08 , and SRMR ≤ 0.08 .

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model, including factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test direct, indirect, and moderated relationships. Indirect effects were examined using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5000 resamples.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistic and correlation

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelation of the study variables. As shown, all variables demonstrated moderate mean values (ranging from 3.02 to 3.08) with acceptable variability. Consistent with expectations, happiness at work (HaW) was positively and significantly associated with emotional culture of joy (ECJ; $r = 0.450, p < .01$), work autonomy (WA; $r = 0.629, p < .01$), psychological safety (PsySaf; $r = 0.480, p < .01$), and relational attachment (RA; $r = 0.445, p < .01$). Moreover, ECJ correlated strongly with WA ($r = 0.628, p < .01$) and moderately with PsySaf ($r = 0.369, p < .01$) and RA ($r = 0.287, p < .01$). WA also exhibited significant positive correlations with PsySaf ($r = 0.450, p < .01$) and with RA ($r = 0.320, p < .01$). Importantly, PsySaf and RA were strongly correlated ($r = 0.735, p < .01$), suggesting that employees who perceive higher psychological safety also experience stronger relational attachment. Overall, these results provide preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships, indicating that all study constructs are positively interrelated in the expected manner.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlation.

	Mean	Std. Dev.	HaW	ECJ	WA	PsySaf	RA
HaW	3.05	0.905					
ECJ	3.02	0.919	0.450**				
WA	3.08	0.857	0.629**	0.628**			
PsySaf	3.02	0.947	0.480**	0.369**	0.450**		
RA	3.06	0.935	0.445**	0.287**	0.320**	0.735**	

4.2. Measurement model assessment

We first assessed the measurement model to evaluate the validity and reliability of the scales. Table 2 presents the results. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability (CR). All alpha and CR values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming scale reliability. Additionally, rho_A values for all constructs fell between the respective alpha and CR values.

Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). All AVE values were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity. To test for multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined and all were below 5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern.

To establish discriminant validity, both Fornell-Larcker criteria and HTMT ratios were examined (Table 3). The square root of AVE (diagonal, bold & italicized) for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity. Similarly, all HTMT values (above diagonal) were below 0.85, further supporting discriminant validity. Although the HTMT value between psychological safety and relational attachment is a bit high (i.e., 0.798), it remained below the conservative criterion of 0.85, and the 95% confidence interval did not include 1.00, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 4 reports the common method bias (CMB) and model fit indices. Common method bias (CMB) was assessed using the inner model full collinearity model suggested by Kock (2015). All values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) for the inner model were less than 3.33; therefore, CMB was not an issue. The overall structural model demonstrated good fit to the data. The chi-square statistic was significant ($\chi^2 = 1156.9$, $df = 517$), which is common in large samples; therefore, additional fit indices were considered. The normed chi-square ($\chi^2/df = 2.24$) was below the recommended threshold of 3, indicating acceptable fit. Residual-based and incremental fit indices further supported model adequacy: SRMR = 0.038, RMSEA = 0.056, CFI = 0.936, and TLI = 0.930. These values meet established CB-SEM criteria (CFI/TLI ≥ 0.90 ;

Table 3

Fornell and Larcker Criteria and HTMT.

	ECJ	HaW	PsySaf	RA	WA
ECJ	0.865	0.482	0.408	0.312	0.680
HaW	0.450	0.841	0.520	0.477	0.667
PsySaf	0.372	0.480	0.879	0.798	0.480
RA	0.289	0.446	0.729	0.852	0.345
WA	0.630	0.629	0.453	0.327	0.805

Note: Diagonal and italicized are the square root of AVE. Below the diagonal elements are the correlations with other constructs. Above the diagonal elements are the HTMT values.

RMSEA ≤ 0.08 ; SRMR ≤ 0.08), indicating satisfactory model fit.

4.3. Structural model assessment

After measurement model assessment, the structural model was assessed using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) in SmartPLS4 to test the hypothesized relationships among the study variables (Fig. 2). Table 5 reports the direct effects of the ECJ on RA, PsySaf, and HaW. H1 revealed that ECJ was positively and significantly related to HaW. Our findings validate this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.323$, $t = 7.713$, $p < .0001$). H2 revealed that the ECJ has a significant impact on RA. We found support for H2 ($\beta = 0.140$, $t = 1.962$, $p = .025$). H3 stated that RA has a positive and significant relationship with HaW. Our results confirmed this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.186$, $t = 3.283$, $p = .001$). Similarly, H5 revealed that the ECJ is positively related to PsySaf, and we received support for this hypothesis as well ($\beta = 0.139$, $t = 2.132$, $p = .017$). H6 states that PsySaf is significantly related to HaW. We received support for this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.261$, $t = 4.467$, $p < .0001$).

Table 6 shows the specific indirect effects of the ECJ on HaW via RA and PsySaf. H4 states that RA mediates the relationship between the ECJ and HaW. Our findings support this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.059$, $t = 2.200$, $p = .014$). Similarly, H7 revealed that PsySaf mediates the relationship

Table 2

Reliability, validity and collinearity (VIF).

Constructs	Items	Loading	VIF	Alpha	rho_a	CR	AVE
Emotional Culture of Joy	ECJ1	0.887	2.82	0.916	0.921	0.937	0.748
	ECJ2	0.831	2.24				
	ECJ3	0.860	2.60				
	ECJ4	0.867	2.70				
	ECJ5	0.879	2.89				
Happiness at Work	HaW1	0.854	2.98	0.910	0.913	0.922	0.707
	HaW2	0.829	2.55				
	HaW3	0.857	2.88				
	HaW4	0.848	2.82				
	HaW5	0.819	2.48				
	HaW6	0.840	2.68				
	HaW7	0.815	2.40				
	HaW8	0.864	3.03				
Psychological Safety	PsySaf1	0.879	2.62	0.887	0.891	0.909	0.773
	PsySaf3	0.862	2.34				
	PsySaf4	0.888	2.65				
	PsySaf5	0.889	2.76				
Relational Attachment	RA1	0.867	2.82	0.874	0.877	0.886	0.725
	RA2	0.827	2.38				
	RA3	0.842	2.52				
	RA4	0.861	2.71				
	RA5	0.862	2.75				
	RA6	0.850	2.58				
Work Autonomy	WA1	0.798	2.32	0.894	0.896	0.912	0.647
	WA2	0.817	2.43				
	WA3	0.775	2.22				
	WA4	0.852	2.83				
	WA5	0.838	2.67				
	WA6	0.742	2.06				
	WA7	0.827	2.53				
	WA8	0.801	2.36				
	WA9	0.785	2.22				

Table 4
Model fit and inner model collinearity.

	VIF	χ^2	df	χ^2 /df	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
ECJ -> PsySaf	1.658	1156.9	517	2.238	0.038	0.056	0.936	0.930
ECJ -> RA	1.658							
PsySaf -> HaW	2.171	1156.9	517	2.238	0.038	0.056	0.936	0.930
RA -> HaW	2.171							
WA -> PsySaf	1.663	1156.9	517	2.238	0.038	0.056	0.936	0.930
WA -> RA	1.663							
WA x ECJ -> PsySaf	1.004	1156.9	517	2.238	0.038	0.056	0.936	0.930
WA x ECJ -> RA	1.004							

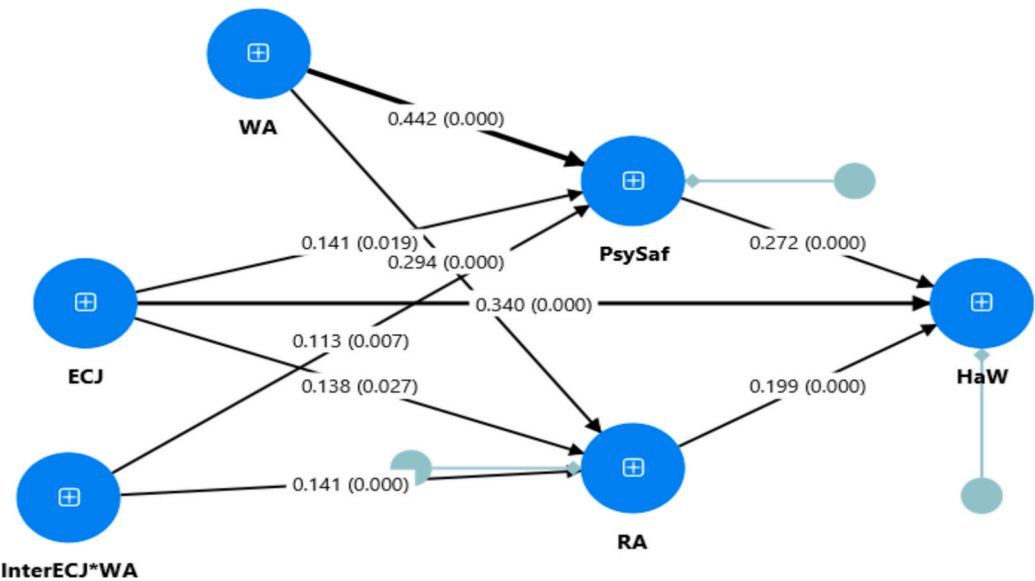


Fig. 2. Structural model using CB-SEM.

Table 5
Direct effects.

Hypothesis	β	SD	t	p
ECJ -> HaW	0.323	0.045	7.113	0.000
ECJ -> RA	0.140	0.072	1.962	0.025
RA -> HaW	0.186	0.057	3.283	0.001
ECJ -> PsySaf	0.139	0.065	2.132	0.017
PsySaf -> HaW	0.261	0.061	4.467	0.000

Note: β = beta coefficients, SD = standard deviation, t = T statistics, p = P values.

Table 6
Specific indirect effects.

	β	SD	t	p
WA -> RA -> HaW	0.059	0.027	2.200	0.014
WA -> PsySaf -> HaW	0.122	0.038	3.186	0.001
WA x ECJ -> RA -> HaW	0.026	0.010	2.656	0.004
WA x ECJ -> PsySaf -> HaW	0.028	0.012	2.357	0.009
ECJ -> RA -> HaW	0.026	0.015	1.744	0.041
ECJ -> PsySaf -> HaW	0.036	0.018	2.049	0.021

between the ECJ and HaW. We also received support for this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.122, t = 3.186, p = .001$).

Moreover, we validate the moderated mediation hypotheses. **H8** states that the indirect effect of ECJ on HaW through RA is moderated by employee WA such that the relationship between ECJ and HaW will be strong when WA is high. We found that WA significantly strengthened the indirect relationship between ECJ and HaW via RA; therefore, we

received support for **H8** ($\beta = 0.026, t = 2.656, p = .004$). Finally, **H9** states that the indirect effect of ECJ on HaW through PsySaf is moderated by employee work autonomy. We found that WA strengthened the indirect relationship between ECJ and HaW via PsySaf; hence, we received support for **H9** ($\beta = 0.028, t = 2.357, p = .009$).

Table 7 shows the total effect of the mediation analysis. As highlighted, all relationships were significant.

We also performed a simple slope analysis for both indirect paths, that is, PsySaf and RA. As reported in **Figs. 3 and 4**, at a high level of WA, the line is steeper than the mean and low levels, confirming our claim that WA at a high level strengthens the indirect relationship between ECJ and HaW via PsySaf (**Fig. 3**) and RA (**Fig. 4**). This indicate stronger indirect effects when employees experience higher autonomy. Although the moderation effects were statistically significant, the f^2 values were small (0.015, and 0.21), demonstrating small effect sizes, consistent

Table 7
Total effects.

	β	SD	t	p
ECJ -> HaW	0.385	0.049	7.781	0.000
ECJ -> PsySaf	0.139	0.065	2.132	0.017
ECJ -> RA	0.140	0.072	1.962	0.025
PsySaf -> HaW	0.261	0.061	4.264	0.000
RA -> HaW	0.186	0.057	3.283	0.001
WA -> HaW	0.181	0.046	3.976	0.000
WA -> PsySaf	0.467	0.072	6.467	0.000
WA -> RA	0.319	0.077	4.129	0.000
WA x ECJ -> HaW	0.054	0.017	3.146	0.001
WA x ECJ -> PsySaf	0.108	0.043	2.513	0.006
WA x ECJ -> RA	0.139	0.040	3.425	0.000

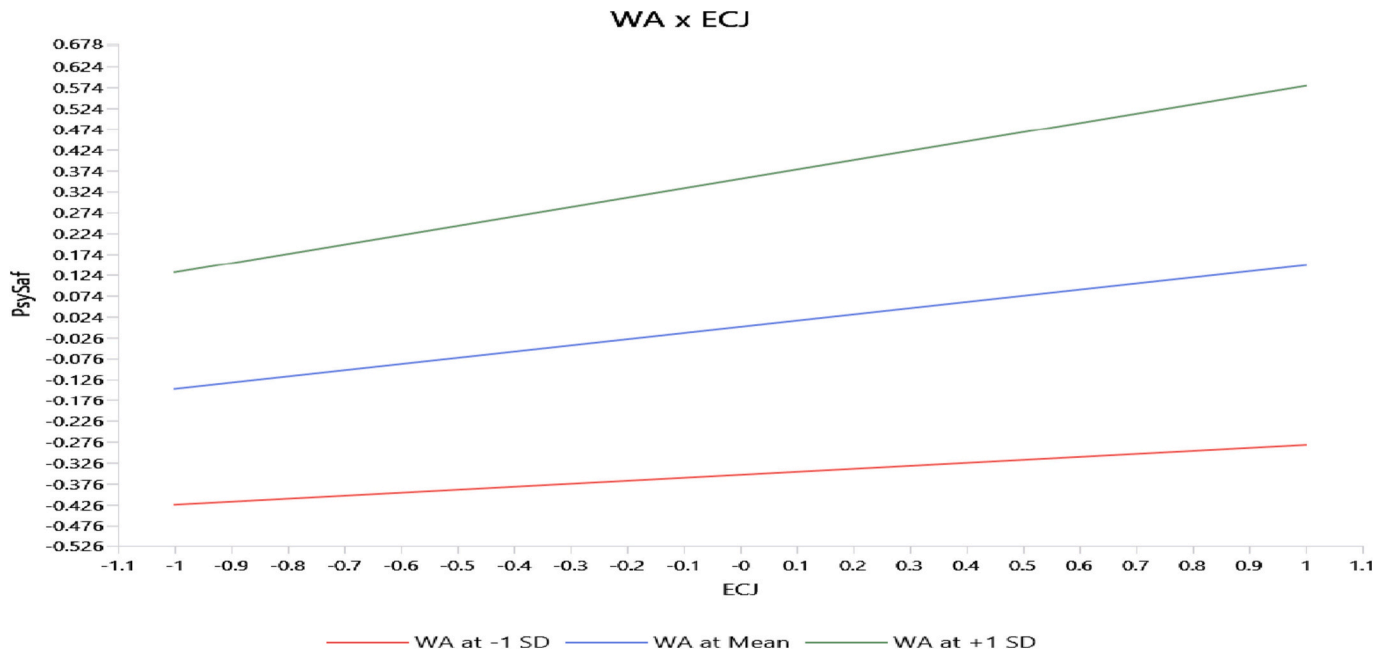


Fig. 3. Simple slope analysis of WA*ECJ via PsySaf.

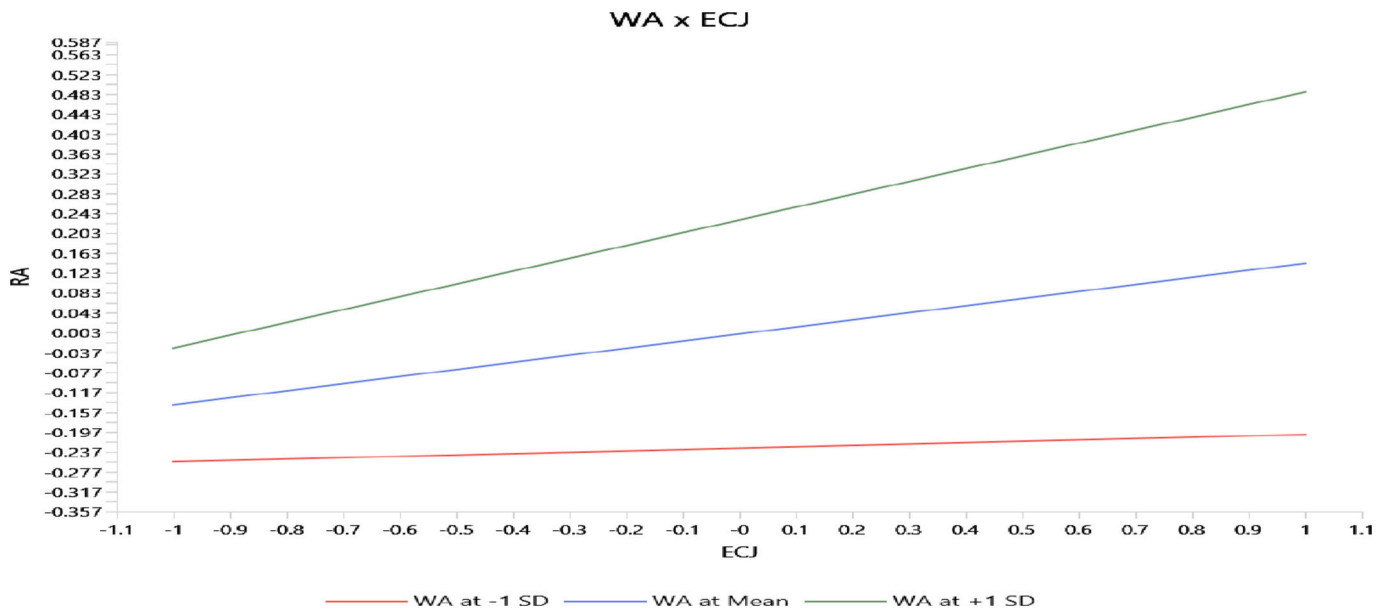


Fig. 4. Simple slope analysis of WA*ECJ via RA.

with normative expectations for moderation in organizational behavior research. This suggests that work autonomy modestly strengthens the relationship between emotional culture of joy and the mediating constructs. While the magnitude of the interaction is limited, it indicates a consistent boundary condition rather than a dominant explanatory factor.

5. Discussion

Grounded in BnB and COR theories, this study developed and empirically tested a conceptual model in which ECJ directly and indirectly via PsySaf and RA impacts HaW. In addition, using COR viewpoint, we introduce work autonomy as a boundary condition to this relationship and assume that together, ECJ and WA will strengthen PsySaf and RA, which in turn will more strongly influence HaW. Our

findings suggest that ECJ serves as a crucial psychological resource that promotes positive work experiences, such as happiness at work. In line with the BnB perspective, our findings confirm that a joyful culture expands employees' emotional and behavioral responses, allowing them to become more closely involved with their work and colleagues (Fredrickson et al., 2008). These findings also support the COR notion by indicating that the ECJ functions as a resource corridor". Such a culture nurtures a pleasing affect and generates persistent interpersonal resources, leading to sustainable HaW. This aligns with prior research findings (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023; Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021; Sovbetov, 2025).

Our findings suggest parallel mediating mechanisms for PsySaf and RA, thereby supporting the notions of the BnB and COR theories. It was found that ECJ positively affected PsySaf, which affirms the theoretical viewpoints implanted in the BnB theory. This aligns with the work of

Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023 and Kundi, Soomro, and Kamran (2022). These results indicate that as a resource corridor, the ECJ boosts employees' psychological resources through the growth of cognitive and behavioral resources. We also found that ECJ positively affected RA, thereby supporting the notion of COR theory. According to the tenets of COR theory, employees' joyful feelings intensify their focus on accumulating further resources, such as RA. Moreover, our findings suggest that both PsySaf and RA are positively associated with HaW. This affirms Kahn's (1990) perspective, demonstrating that PsySaf foresees work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction (a key component of HaW).

Finally, our findings suggest that work autonomy moderates the indirect effect of ECJ on HaW via PsySaf and RA. This supports the COR framework (Hobfoll, 1989). Autonomy is viewed as a key psychological need and a core job resource that augments the motivational potential of emotional culture. Employees with discretion over their task performance are more prone to transform interpersonal and emotional resources into happiness. This collaboration (ECJ + WA) emphasizes that resource-rich atmospheres are an influential tool for nourishing HaW. Although the moderation effects of work autonomy were statistically significant, their effect sizes were small. This suggests that autonomy does not radically alter the influence of emotional culture but rather incrementally enhances the resource-building process. In high-contact hospitality settings, even modest increases in discretionary latitude may meaningfully amplify employees' capacity to translate positive emotional norms into psychological safety and relational attachment. Thus, autonomy operates as a subtle but reliable amplifier rather than a primary driver of workplace happiness.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study offers several notable theoretical implications. First, we move beyond treating the Broaden-and-Build (BnB) theory and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as parallel explanatory lenses by offering an integrated account of how collective emotional experiences translate into individual well-being. Specifically, we conceptualize Emotional Culture of Joy (ECJ) as a meso-level affective climate that activates the broadening mechanisms proposed by BnB theory while simultaneously initiating the resource caravan processes described in COR theory. In doing so, we provide a theoretically unified explanation of how shared positive emotions expand employees' cognitive-behavioral repertoires and accumulate enduring psychological and relational resources that ultimately foster happiness at work.

Second, our findings contribute to COR theory by empirically demonstrating how organizational-level emotional resources function as "resource corridors" that facilitate cross-level resource transmission. While COR has traditionally emphasized individual resource gain and loss cycles, our study shows how a collectively experienced emotional culture can initiate resource caravans that cascade from the organizational context to individual psychological safety and relational attachment. This clarifies an important but underexplored mechanism in COR: how contextual emotional signals become internalized as personal resources.

Third, we refine the theoretical understanding of happiness at work by distinguishing between two complementary mediating pathways: a cognitive-psychological pathway (psychological safety) and a socio-relational pathway (relational attachment). By modeling these mechanisms simultaneously, we demonstrate that happiness at work emerges not solely from internal affective states but from the interaction of perceived interpersonal safety and relational embeddedness. This dual-pathway explanation advances psychological theorizing on workplace well-being by specifying how emotional climates shape both intrapsychic and interpersonal processes.

Fourth, we extend resource-based theorizing by positioning work autonomy as a resource activation condition rather than merely a contextual moderator. Our results suggest that autonomy determines the extent to which emotional culture can be transformed into enduring

psychological and relational gains. In other words, positive emotional climates do not automatically translate into well-being; they require sufficient discretion and self-determination for employees to internalize and utilize these resources. This insight deepens theoretical understanding of when emotional resources generate gain spirals.

Finally, by situating emotional culture within a high-contact service context, this study broadens the psychological scope of ECJ research beyond performance outcomes and toward enduring well-being processes. In doing so, we contribute to emerging scholarship that positions emotional culture as a foundational psychological infrastructure shaping employees' lived experiences at work.

5.2. Managerial implications

The findings offer several actionable recommendations for hospitality organizations seeking to cultivate sustainable employee happiness. First, because Emotional Culture of Joy (ECJ) functions as a contextual resource passageway, organizations should intentionally institutionalize joy-expressive norms rather than relying on spontaneous positivity. Management can operationalize this by (a) integrating positive emotional display norms into onboarding programs, (b) incorporating recognition rituals that celebrate small wins during daily briefings, and (c) designing structured peer appreciation platforms where employees publicly acknowledge colleagues' contributions. These formalized practices help transform episodic positive emotions into stable cultural signals. Second, given that psychological safety mediates the ECJ-happiness relationship, managers should implement structured safety-building mechanisms. Specifically, leaders can conduct "error-learning sessions" where mistakes are discussed without blame, introduce anonymous upward feedback systems to reduce fear of retaliation, and establish team charters that explicitly define respectful communication norms. These practices directly strengthen employees' perceptions that interpersonal risks will not lead to negative consequences. Third, because relational attachment represents a socio-relational pathway to happiness, organizations should invest in relationship-building infrastructure. Rotational team assignments, cross-functional collaborative projects, and structured mentoring programs can increase emotional bonds among employees. Additionally, scheduling informal team interactions (e.g., monthly social gatherings or shared service reflections) can deepen relational embeddedness and strengthen resource caravans. Fourth, the moderating role of work autonomy suggests that positive emotional culture alone is insufficient without discretionary space. Therefore, managers should redesign roles to increase decision latitude in service delivery, allow employees flexibility in handling guest complaints, and minimize excessive procedural micromanagement. Even incremental autonomy enhancements such as permitting employees to personalize customer interaction styles can amplify the resource-building effects of emotional culture. Finally, organizations should monitor these interventions through periodic well-being audits, including validated measures of psychological safety and relational attachment. Tracking these indicators over time enables managers to identify whether emotional culture initiatives are generating genuine resource gain spirals rather than superficial positivity.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Despite its remarkable theoretical and managerial contributions, our study has several crucial limitations that need to be considered and provide avenues for future research. First, we examined the impact of the emotional culture of joy on happiness at work, while ignoring other types of emotional cultures, such as the emotional culture of passion and the emotional culture of love, which might have a significant impact on work happiness. Therefore, future research should investigate the impact of diverse emotional cultures on work happiness. In addition, it would be insightful to investigate all these emotional cultures in a single model to determine their relative importance and magnitude on the

research outcomes. Second, we employed a time-lagged research design that could not fully captured causal conclusions. It would be more beneficial to conduct longitudinal or experimental studies that could better explain the directionality of the effects and inspect vital resource gain or loss over time, as proposed by COR theory. Third, the data were collected from a single source, that is, employees, which may lead to social desirability issues or common method bias. Future research should collect data from multiple levels, such as supervisory ratings, peer evaluations, or objective indicators of joyful culture and happiness at work, to strengthen validity. Fourth, we collected data only from the hospitality industry, that is, hotels and restaurants operated in Sinop, Türkiye, which may affect generalizability. Future research should replicate our model in different cultural and organizational contexts. Fifth, we examined the mediating roles of PsySaf and RA in the association between ECJ and HaW. Future research may utilize other potential mediators, such as resilience, in this relationship (see Hartmann et al., 2021). Finally, as suggested by Salas-Vallina et al. (2020), leadership style has a strong effect on HaW. Thus, future research could examine the impact of different types of leadership, such as inclusive and humble leadership, on happiness at work.

5.4. Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates that a joyful emotional culture acts as a vital organizational resource that enhances happiness at work through psychological safety and relational attachment. High work autonomy strengthens these effects, highlighting the importance of resource-rich work environments in service-oriented settings. The findings advance BnB and COR theories by demonstrating how personal-level emotional resources are translated into individual-level well-being through cognitive, psychological, and social pathways. Hospitality organizations can leverage ECJ, PsySaf, RA, and autonomy to cultivate a resilient, engaged, and happy workforce, providing both theoretical and managerial guidance for sustaining positive workplace experiences.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Muna I. Alyousef: Software, Funding acquisition, Data curation. **Sajid Rahman Khattak:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Belal Mahmoud AlWadi:** Validation, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation. **Ali Turan Bayram:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology. **Suad Dukhaykh:** Visualization, Software, Resources, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation. **Husain Mohammed Al Hakami:** Visualization, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.106619>.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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