

Empowerment for Creativity in Higher Education: Testing Mental Well-Being and Workplace Fun as Mechanisms

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Abstract

The work creativity of employees is becoming more critical to the higher education institutions (HEIs) in terms of the increased competition, limited resources, and increased demands on the teaching and research output. Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this paper focuses on the hypothesis that psychological empowerment is a predictor of the work creativity of employees and the relationship between them is mediated by employee mental well-being and relies on workplace fun. In this study, the cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data based on 299 faculty members in the Anhui University, Hefei, China. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS was utilized to test the hypothesized model, the reliability and validity of the model were evaluated, and the bootstrapped structural path testing was conducted. The findings indicate that psychological empowerment is a major positive factor influencing employee work creativity ($b = 0.180$, $p < .001$). Psychological empowerment also has a positive relationship with employee mental well-being ($b = 0.137$, $p = 0.016$), mental well-being positively correlates with work creativity ($b = 0.175$, $p = .001$). Nevertheless, the mediated effect of empowerment on creativity via mental well-being, is not statistically significant ($b = 0.026$, $p = .081$), which suggests that empowerment has an impact on creativity via a direct path and/or other proximate means. The result of the interaction analysis reveals that workplace fun enhances the relationship between empowerment and well-being considerably ($b = 0.102$, $p = .050$). The results identify the relevance of empowerment-based management practices and favorable work environments in cultivating creativity in HEIs, and recommend the possibility that well-being is not the only avenue by which empowerment can be turned into creativity in the same scenario.

Keywords: Psychological Empowerment, Mental Well-Being, Workplace Fun, Conservation of Resources Theory, Higher Education Institutions

1 Introduction

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In contemporary and competitive organizational world, work creativity among employees has assumed an essential organizational flexibility, efficiency and sustainability. There is growing reliance of organizations on creativity of workers in generating new and useful ideas towards enhancing processes, services and performance outcome especially in times of uncertainty and limited resources. According to recent results, creativity is not only a personal quality, but also a situational one, determined by the conditions of the workplace that allow experimentation, learning, and the implementation of ideas (Sahadev, [2024](#); Ye et al., [2024](#)). This applicability is enhanced in institutions that are knowledge-intensive and where innovation is a part of daily work, and unsuccessful employees are supposed to constantly enhance results without corresponding expansions in time and resources (Demerouti, [2025](#); Sarkar et al., [2024](#)). The role of creativity is particularly high in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) faculty is at the center of the knowledge production, novel pedagogy, research output, and institutional prestige. In most situations in HEIs, the roles of the faculty are growing because of the heightened responsibilities in terms of publications, the quality of teaching, accreditation requirements, and administrative service. This intensification, in turn, can both promote the necessity of creativity and the psychological pressure that negatively affects the mental flexibility needed to perform creativity-related tasks (Sarkar et al., [2024](#)). The competitive pressures associated with rankings, enrollments, and performance indicators in the sector of Anhui University, only add to the necessity to establish enabling conditions that help to contribute well-being and creatively (Ejaz et al., [2025](#)).

In this regard, psychological empowerment is getting more accepted as an important organizational asset that may lead to creativity. Psychological empowerment demonstrates the perception of the employees of the meaning, competence, self-determination, and influence of which all contribute to increased intrinsic motivation, initiative and proactive approach to work challenges. Employees that experience a feeling of empowerment are better positioned to look into different methods of working, invest in the development, and continue to be creative in their approaches to problem-solving (Hasanein & Elrayah, [2025](#); Sahadev, [2024](#)). As modern studies also demonstrate, empowerment is conducive to creativity by supporting resource-based processes, namely the expansion of the sense of control and competence of employees, the decrease in helplessness, and the promotion of positive risk-taking (Mirza et al., [2024](#); Sahadev, [2024](#)).

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers an appropriate theory that can be used to explain these linkages. COR theory assumes that people are aiming to obtain, defend, and accumulate desirable resources, and stress arises when the resources are at risk or when they are depleted. On the other hand, in cases where resources are offered by organizations to create capacity and lessen threat, individuals tend to allocate their efforts in growth-oriented behaviors like creativity (Demerouti, [2025](#)). Psychological empowerment is a psychological resource that enhances perceived ability to cope with demands among the employees, builds confidence to take initiative, and aids in maintaining commitment to creative endeavor particularly when employees are strained by resource demands.

Moreover, this paper puts mental health as a pivotal conduit by which psychological empowerment can be transformed into creativity among employees. Mental health affects concentration, persistence, emotional control, and interpersonal functioning-abilities, which have a direct impact on the capacity of employees to create and apply creative ideas. The findings of mental health at the workplace are presented regularly, which proves that the poorer the well-being, the greater burnout, performance decline, and cognitive and motivational reserves required to make discretionary outcomes like creativity (Sarkar et al., [2024](#)). Employees in empowered settings tend to have greater levels of psychological functioning, as perceptions of autonomy, meaning and competence lower stress appraisals and positively affect positive psychological states making creativity more sustainable in the long run (Hasanein & Elrayah, [2025](#); Sahadev, [2024](#)).

Furthermore, this paper claims that fun in the work place can reinforce the empowerment-well-

being-creativity process by establishing positive affect, social connection, and recovery that renews emotional resources. According to recent research, fun at work is potentially effective in promoting psychological well-being and other work-related outcomes through the enhancement of interpersonal bond and the decrease of stress experiences (Yang & Chen, [2023](#); Zhang et al., [2024](#)). It is also found that fun is significantly correlated with engagement and outcomes related to burnout which means that it is relevant to keeping up with psychological resources capable of driving creativity (Changaranchola & Samantara, [2026](#); Tzioti et al., [2025](#)). Workplace fun can be viewed as a resource in terms of resource-based, namely the contextual resource contributing to the resource gain cycles that can advance the positive influence of empowerment on well-being and, eventually, creativity (Demerouti, [2025](#); Tzioti et al., [2025](#)).

Based on this, the given research is expected to make certain contributions to the body of literature related to the investigation of the manner in which psychological empowerment correlates with work creativity among employees, in what way these phenomena are connected by the means of mental well-being, and how fun at work influences these outcomes in the reality of the Anhui University. The study aims to establish the theoretically based findings and practical implication to the management of the HEI by combining empowerment, well-being, and fun into one model and designing the favorable climate that fosters contribution of creativity and safeguard the psychological functioning of the employees. Faculty creativity is being more and more important by HEIs to enhance teaching innovativeness, research productivity and institutional competitiveness, but faculty creativity tends to decrease as work roles and demands are increased and limited resources undermine mental well-being. Although psychological empowerment may make faculty feel more independent, competent, and influential, which in turn may inspire proactive experimentation and creative problem-solving, the processes of how an empowerment is transformed into work creativity have not been described well in most resource-limited colleges and universities. Specifically, mental well-being can serve as an explanatory factor since empowered workers have higher chances of having positive psychological functioning that promotes cognitive flexibility and enduring creative work. In addition, fun in the workplace can also contribute to the development of these dynamics due to its ability to restore socio-emotional resources and establish a positive climate that improves well-being and facilitates creativity. Although these relationships may be applicable in practice, various empirical studies have not analyzed the relationships between psychological empowerment, mental well-being, and workplace fun as a collective explanation of the faculty work creativity in the Anhui University, Hefei, China.

Research Objectives

To examine how psychological empowerment influences employee work creativity.

1. To examine the mediating role of mental well-being in the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee work creativity.
2. To examine whether workplace fun strengthens (moderates) the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee work creativity, particularly through mental well-being (i.e., a conditional indirect effect).

2 Literature Review

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is based on the assumption that individuals seek to acquire, defend, and accumulate the resources, which they value and that when the resources are threatened, lost, or are inadequate to satisfy demands, stress happens (Hobfoll, [1989](#)). Personal characteristics (e.g., competence), conditions (e.g., autonomy), social resources (e.g., supportive climate) and energies are resources that help individuals to work effectively. One of the primary beliefs in COR is the fact that resource loss is more conspicuous than resource gain and people need to invest resources more frequently in order to protect themselves against the additional loss

or to recover and create new resources. Thus, COR anticipates gain spiral in high-resource settings and loss spiral when the depletion of resources persists over a long period of time.

The recent theorizing incorporates COR in conjunction with modern work design and well-being studies with the need to conceive work places as resource systems where demands and resources interactively determine employee health and performance outcomes. To this perspective, such resources as autonomy, meaning, and supportive climates are not only desirable but serve as protective and motivational mechanisms that lessen strain and permit discretionary actions such as creativity (Demerouti, [2025](#)). This becomes particularly significant in knowledge-intensive situations where creative output involves prolonged cognitive and emotive investment, and in which stressed employees will be able to conserve resources by refusing to make high-risk decisions and innovations.

Psychological Empowerment and Employee Work Creativity

Psychological empowerment demonstrates the perceptions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, which are combined to reflect a psychologically resourceful state and enhance intrinsic motivation and proactive behaviour. In terms of COR, empowerment is an effective personal resource in that it increases the perceived control, capability, and purpose of employees so that they can engage effort towards challenging tasks without feeling the same degree of threat or strain associated with employees who are not empowered (Demerouti, [2025](#)). Employees will experiment more, challenge stereotyping and persevere in coming up with new solutions when they feel empowered, which are the very attributes that directly support employee work creativity.

Recent years prove to have an increasing empirical evidence in favor of empowerment as a precondition of creative outcomes. Indeed, as an example, recent results indicate that psychological empowerment is positively, but significantly, related to employee creativity and creative performance, and researchers' state that empowerment increases the readiness of employees to work on innovative projects by increasing their inner motivation and level of competence (Sahadev, [2024](#)). Direct effects of empowerment-creativity are also documented in sector studies that report that empowered employees are more likely to make creative suggestions and work advancements in their work positions (Hasanein & Elrayah, [2025](#)). Moreover, more general HR and work design findings show that practices of empowerment and engagement remain to be a source of creative performance by providing stimuli like increased engagement and discretionary efforts (Gürbüz et al., [2024](#)). Thus, the positive correlation of psychological empowerment and work creativity of employees should be established.

H1: Psychological empowerment has a positive and significant relationship with employee work creativity.

Mental Well-Being as a Mediator between Psychological Empowerment and Work Creativity

Mental health is becoming a fundamental psychological ability that influences the way employee think, manage emotions, and maintain the performance in the long run. Recent syntheses note that mental ill health and loss of well-being may result in burnout, diminished work functioning, and compromised performance outcomes, and better well-being may facilitate coping, thinking, and permanent effectiveness (Sarkar et al., [2024](#); WHO, [2024b](#)). Likewise, the evidence of systematic review indicates that the context of work also determines the employee well-being and is highly linked to organizational results through motivation and cognitive channels (Pandey et al., [2025](#)).

In enhanced working conditions employees tend to have better psychological functioning since they get autonomy and perceived control, less helplessness, and encouragement of significance and competence. This is explained by the COR theory that posits that workers have more resources

on board due to empowerment and hence less stress appraisal and resulting into recovery and growth. Improved well-being also allows employees to devote additional cognitive resources to exploration and idea-generation and to be better able to deal with uncertainty and setbacks-situations that are necessary in creativity (Demerouti, [2025](#); Sarkar et al., [2024](#)). In this way, the psychological well-being can be used to explain the potential impact of empowerment on creativity: employees who feel empowered have increased chances of being psychologically healthy and energized, and the specified psychological condition contributes to the development of flexible thinking and creative work.

H2: Mental well-being mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee work creativity.

Moderated Mediation: The Role of Workplace Fun

Workplace fun describes socially and emotionally positive affective experiences in the workplace (e.g. celebrations, humor, friendly treatment, pleasant activities) that increase interpersonal connection and positive affect. Based on COR theory, workplace fun may be viewed as a contextual condition that generates resources: it restores emotional energy, facilitates social bonding, and decreases tension and allows employees to replenish the psychological resources, which could otherwise be exhausted due to demands (Demerouti, [2025](#)). The modern evidence indicates that fun in the workplace can lead to improvements in psychological conditions and potentially to an increase in positive experiences and less stress-induced strain (Zhang et al., [2024](#)).

In closer relation, recent empirical studies show that fun in the workplace is positively correlated with creative behaviours because fun enhances positive affect and openness and suppresses social rigidity and fear of evaluation- which may inhibit creativity (Yang & Chen, [2023](#)). There is also evidence that fun is connected to some of the most important well-being-related outcomes (e.g., engagement and low burnout risk), which supports its position as a psychological resource, which allows maintaining a sustained functioning and discretionary effort (Tzioti et al., [2025](#)). Furthermore, there is new research that fun may facilitate interpersonal activities like learning and sharing of knowledge, which are important in creativity, by motivational and social processes (Ahmed et al., [2026](#)). Hence, within the framework of psychological empowerment being the case, workplace fun can reinforce its beneficial influence by improving the emotional and social atmosphere where empowerment can be converted to better well-being and creativity.

To that extent, fun in the workplace is likely to enhance the well-being - empowerment - creativity process. The well-being gains among employees empowered in terms of workplace fun would be stronger when the workplace fun is high (resources are replenished and social climate is positive), thus the chances that empowerment leads to greater creativity are increased. There is also the possibility of the employees' hoarding resources because of a lack of fun caused by emotional barrenness or poor social atmosphere, which weakens the indirect impact.

H3: Workplace fun moderates the indirect relationship between psychological empowerment and employee work creativity through mental well-being (i.e., a moderated mediation effect), such that the indirect effect is stronger when workplace fun is high.

3 Research Methodology

This paper used a positivist research paradigm and a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to facilitate hypothesized relationships among latent constructs. The cross-sectional design was suitable since the research centers on the discussion of correlations between empowerment, fun in the workplace, mental health, and creativity of employees at work in the context of standardized measures at one time (Hair & Alamer, [2022](#)). The study population was the individual faculty member.

The sample of the study comprised faculty members working in Anhui University, and the data

used in the study was mostly obtained in Lahore and Sargodha based institutions. The choice of HEIs was due to the fact that the work of faculty is knowledge-based by nature, and it needs unceasing innovations in the field of teaching, research, and academic service (Ng, [2024](#)). The intensity of workload, pressure to conduct research and publish materials, accreditation pressures, and resource limits are becoming an increasingly important factor in the work of a faculty member in most private universities, which is why psychological resources and well-being are especially applicable to creativity and innovation outcomes (Klofsten et al., [2024](#)). The study adopted a non-probability sampling method (e.g., convenience sampling via professional networks) due to the lack of an exhaustive sampling frame of the population of interest, which in this case is the universities of the private sector, and the constraints of access. The self-administered questionnaire was provided through the online and face-to-face methods of data collection. Respondents were given the freedom to participate and they were assured that their answers would remain confidential and used in our research. Ethical safeguards were implemented by providing participants with clear information about the study purpose, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, and allowing withdrawal at any time. These procedures are aligned with global guidance that emphasizes minimizing psychosocial risk and protecting workers' mental health in workplace-related research (World Health Organization, [2024a](#)).

Instrument and measurement scale

The questionnaire had two parts (1) demographics (e.g., gender, age, qualification, experience, designation), and (2) questions which measured the constructs. The measurements of all constructs were done on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A small pilot test (e.g., 20-30 faculty) and an expert review can be taken to increase the content validity and clarity and subsequently full deployment may be made to take place (Hair & Alamer, [2022](#)).

Measures and scale sources

The D.V. scale measured Employee Work Creativity, which comprised 15 items based on the Suifan et al. ([2018](#)) scale, which included aspects of the creation and application of innovative and helpful ideas in the workplace. The measurement of Psychological Empowerment (I.V.) was conducted with the Psychological Empowerment Scale (meaning, competence, self-determination, impact) consisting of 12-items that were designed by Spreitzer ([1995](#)). The 12-item, 4-dimension structure has been psychometrically justified in education-related samples in the recent past, and it is plausible that it is applicable in the context of faculty (Bhattacharya, [2024](#)). The measurement of Employee Mental Well-Being (Mediator) was done through 14-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) (Tennant et al., [2007](#)). WEMWBS boasts of a rich psychometric support across cultures with recent reviews and cross-cultural validity evidence published in the past two years (Yadav et al., [2025](#)). The 5-item scale of Karl et al. ([2005](#)) was used to measure Workplace Fun (Moderator). This implies scale has been applied in studies related to workplace-fun and the recent studies operationalize fun at work through this method (Karl et al., [2005](#); Chan & Mak, [2016](#)).

Data analysis strategy

Missing values, outliers, normality checks, descriptive statistics were done with SPSS (v26). To test the hypothesis the model can be tested by using either: PLS-SEM (preferred) to estimate the measurement model, as well as test direct, indirect (mediation), and interaction (moderation) (Hair & Alamer, [2022](#); Hair, [2022](#)). Conditional process analysis (Hayes PROCESS) is a regression-based test of mediation and moderated mediation with bootstrapped confidence interval (Hayes, [2022](#); Ng, [2024](#)). The analysis in PLS-SEM will be conducted in two steps: Measurement model: internal consistency (Cronbachs alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT). (b) Structural model: bootstrapping, indirect effects (mediation),

and testing of an interaction term (moderation); the conditional indirect effect is tested in order to assess moderated mediation (Hair & Alamer, [2022](#)).

Common method bias (CMB)

Since the respondents used in the study were the same in the same survey, the research has overcome common method bias with procedural remedies (anonymity assured, better wording, construct blocks separation) and statistical tests. Full collinearity (VIF-based) assessment is a popular diagnostic tool in PLS-SEM research (Kock, [2015](#)), and the more recent studies, too, discuss the treatment of CMB in PLS-SEM studies (Kock, [2015](#); Castillo et al., [2026](#)).

4 Results

Respondents Profile

Table 1 - The Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 299)

Profile	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	73%
	Female	27%
Age	Less than 25	45%
	25–34	24%
	35–44	23%
	45 and above	8%
Qualifications	Intermediate	7%
	Bachelors	27%
	Masters	57%
	Others	9%
Experience	<1 year	11%
	1–3 years	33%
	3–5 years	38%
	5+ years	18%

Descriptive statistics were used to initially screen the data in SPSS. Further, to test the measurement and structural model, Smart-PLS 4 was used to encode the data. To assess the data normality, skewness and kurtosis were applied. For both skewness and kurtosis, a value between ± 2 has been considered acceptable (Hair et al., [2013](#)), and the estimates for both are within the range as reported in Table 4.2.

Structural Equation Modelling

The structural model was calculated and the hypotheses were tested after the first screening of the data collected. Smart-PLS has been deemed as a potent tool to eminent the constructs and examine the predictions (Hair et al., [2016](#)). Its standard measures comprise estimates of both a measurement model and structural model both in terms of factor loadings/ cross loadings, path coefficients, correlations, reliability/ validity estimates etc. The current study was methodological in that it was using an approach to examine the outer loading and deleting indicators with the values of the loading under .70 (Hair et al., [2011](#)).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Items

Latent variable	Items	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness	α
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	PE1	2.090	1.003	-1.233	0.278	0.960
	PE2	2.097	0.978	-1.436	0.106	
	PE3	2.261	1.053	-0.575	0.395	

Latent variable	Items	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness	α
PE4		2.207	1.023	-0.776	0.309	
Employee Work Creativity (EWC)	EWC1	3.097	1.493	-1.478	-0.070	0.967
	EWC2	3.087	1.556	-1.563	-0.028	
	EWC3	3.234	1.573	-1.602	-0.117	
	EWC4	3.227	1.526	-1.547	-0.088	
	EWC5	3.247	1.547	-1.559	-0.147	
	EWC6	3.207	1.549	-1.599	-0.057	
	EWC7	3.217	1.500	-1.513	-0.124	
	EWC8	3.197	1.547	-1.549	-0.126	
	EWC9	3.077	1.492	-1.494	0.050	
Employee Mental Well-being (EMW)	EMW1	3.140	1.371	-1.345	-0.005	0.925
	EMW2	3.351	1.359	-1.393	-0.093	
	EMW3	3.308	1.411	-1.431	-0.070	
	EMW4	3.348	1.458	-1.493	-0.132	
	EMW5	3.334	1.466	-1.500	-0.145	
	EMW6	3.415	1.434	-1.418	-0.214	
	EMW7	3.291	1.460	-1.489	-0.120	
	EMW8	3.351	1.447	-1.474	-0.170	
	EMW9	3.278	1.449	-1.485	-0.109	
	EMW10	3.361	1.453	-1.455	-0.206	
Workplace Fun (WF)	WF1	2.839	1.400	-1.343	0.024	0.931
	WF2	2.866	1.448	-1.438	0.009	
	WF3	2.783	1.420	-1.419	0.072	
	WF4	2.990	1.325	-1.222	-0.060	
	WF5	3.124	1.403	-1.272	-0.236	

Under this process, 6/15 items of Employee Mental well-being and 4/14 items were removed in the further analysis because of the low loading of the factors. Internal consistency was validated with the Cronbachs Alpha values with each construct Psychological Empowerment (PE), $\alpha = 0.960$; employee mental well-being (EMW), $\alpha = 0.925$; employee work creativity (EWC) $\alpha = 0.967$ and fun at work (WF), $\alpha = 0.931$.

Table 3: Result Summary of the Reflective Measurement Model

Constructs	Items	Outer Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	PE1	0.960	0.967	0.892
	PE2	0.952		
	PE3	0.925		
	PE4	0.940		
Employee Mental Well-being (EMW)	EMW1	0.876	0.971	0.771
	EMW2	0.863		
	EMW3	0.831		
	EMW4	0.879		

Constructs	Items	Outer Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
EMW5		0.854		
EMW6		0.872		
EMW7		0.894		
EMW8		0.905		
EMW9		0.889		
EMW10		0.915		
Employee Work Creativity (EWC)	EWC1	0.804	0.937	0.624
	EWC2	0.738		
	EWC3	0.768		
	EWC4	0.770		
	EWC5	0.793		
	EWC6	0.826		
	EWC7	0.806		
	EWC8	0.821		
	EWC9	0.781		
Workplace Fun (WF)	WF1	0.914	0.946	0.785
	WF2	0.941		
	WF3	0.925		
	WF4	0.798		
	WF5	0.843		

Measurement Model

Four variable constructs consisting of reflective measurement models (PE, EMW, EWC, and WF) make up this study. With the items having a lower loading, the rest of the 28 items with factor loading values of above 0.70 were utilized in the further analysis. All constructs have internal consistency and reliability because the composite reliability value of PE is 0.967 that of EMW is 0.971, EWC is 0.937, and the WF is 0.946. AVE values were studied to determine convergent validity: PE = 0.892, EMW = 0.771, EWC = 0.624, and WF = 0.785. Convergent validity is assured as all the values are above the threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2013). Lastly, HTMT and the Fornell-Larcker were used to determine the discriminant validity.

Table 4: HTMT Ratio

Construct	EMW	PE	EWC	WF	WF × PE
PE	0.146				
EWC	0.201	0.210			
WF	0.207	0.031	0.244		
WF × PE	0.096	0.058	0.067	0.074	—

Note. EMW = employee mental well-being; PE = psychological empowerment; EWC = employee work creativity; WF = workplace fun.

Table 5: Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	EMW	PE	EWC	WF
EMW	0.878			

Construct	EMW	PE	EWC	WF
PE	0.141	0.945		
EWC	0.200	0.205	0.790	
WF	-0.201	0.005	-0.231	0.886

Note. EMW = employee mental well-being; **PE** = **psychological empowerment**; EWC = employee work creativity; WF = workplace fun.

Structural Model

Before examining the structural model, collinearity concerns were addressed. The VIF against each predictor should be less than 5 (Hair et al., [2011](#)). The results met the criteria, indicating no collinearity problem.

Table 6: Collinearity Assessment (Employee Work Creativity: Dependent Variable)

Constructs	VIF
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	1.003
Employee Mental Well-being	1.020
Workplace Fun	1.006

Table 7: Direct Path Coefficients

Relationship	β -Value	t-value	p-value
1 PE $\rightarrow$ EWC	0.180	3.833	0.000
2 PE $\rightarrow$ EMW	0.137	2.410	0.016
3 EMW $\rightarrow$ EWC	0.175	3.247	0.001
4 WF $\rightarrow$ EMW	0.209	3.879	0.000
5 WF $\times$ PE $\rightarrow$ EMW	0.102	1.966	0.050
6 PE $\rightarrow$ EMW $\rightarrow$ EWC	0.026	1.748	0.081

To investigate mediation (Hypothesis 2), the indirect effect of **psychological empowerment (PE)** on employee work creativity (EWC) via employee mental well-being (EMW) was examined. The indirect effect was 0.026 with $p > 0.05$, indicating that mediation was not supported; therefore, Hypothesis 2 was rejected. To assess moderation, the interaction term **WF** $\times$ **PE** had a positive effect on EMW ($\beta = 0.102$), suggesting that workplace fun strengthens the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee mental well-being.

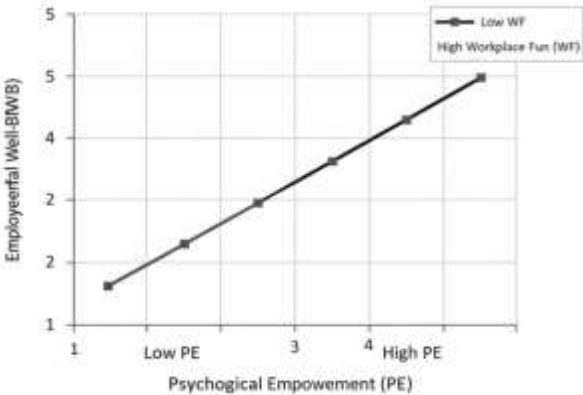


Figure 1: Interaction between EE and WF

5 Discussion

This research paper has explored the question of psychological empowerment on work creativity among employees in the Anhui University, faculties by considering employee mental well-being acting as an intermediary variable, and fun as a moderator in the workplace. The general thesis is based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory that suggests that when employees own and can defend valuable resources (e.g., autonomy, competence, meaning, and positive affect) that are necessary to maintain cognitive flexibility, perseverance, and readiness to experiment, they will be more likely to behave creatively (Hobfoll, [1989](#); Demerouti, [2025](#)).

Employee creativity in their work and psychological empowerment

The findings show that psychological empowerment produces the strong positive direct impact on the employee work creativity (PE - EWC: $b = 0.180$, $p < .001$). This observation confirms the notion that a faculty that sees their efforts as significant, they feel capable, self-determined, and believes that they make a difference are more likely to put discretionary effort into developing and putting new ideas into practice. It agrees with the modern research that indicates that empowerment leads to creative performance via resource-based and motivational mechanisms, especially in a workplace where employees are required to develop solutions proactively within limited resources (Sahadev, [2024](#)). Within HEIs, it is possible that the idea of empowerment raises creativity since the best-empowered faculty will be more assertive to accomplish redesigning teaching approaches and take new research paths and to break the pattern of routine that can suppress innovativeness--behaviors that can immediately be associated with effort, uncertainty, and reputation.

In terms of COR, empowerment serves as a resource reservoir: it enhances the perceived control and competence of the employees, thereby decreasing the threat of the challenging positions they must undertake and allowing the resource investment in the creative action instead of the resource protection (Demerouti, [2025](#)). This is especially noteworthy in the context of the private universities where faculty members tend to experience role overload and performance pressure; empowerment may be the answer to rebrand these circumstances as manageable and may serve to keep the innovation going.

The contribution of the mental well-being: substantial correlations, however not mediation

The results also indicate that psychological empowerment has a positive relationship with employee mental well-being (PE - EMW: $b = 0.137$, $p = .016$) and that mental well-being has a positive relationship with creativity (EMW - EWC: $b = 0.175$, $p = .001$). Such findings are consistent with the current literature on the topic of well-being and mental health, which has demonstrated mental health and well-being as determinants of work functioning via cognitive, motivational and interpersonal pathways, including attention control, emotion regulation, resilience and proactive engagement (Khalid et al., [2024](#)). Academically, the better-adjusted faculty can better hold on to deep work, withstand disappointments (e.g., the rejection of a manuscript), and the cognitive flexibility needed to generate ideas and solve creative problems.

Nevertheless, this dataset did not support the indirect (mediated) effect (PE - EMW - EWC: $b = 0.026$, $p = .081$). The trend indicates that the impact of empowerment on creativity is not working necessarily by the general well-being alone, but either directly or alternatively. This is theoretically plausible since the idea of empowering people will prompt creativity via more proximate mechanisms, including intrinsic motivation, involvement in creative processes, proactive problem solving, and voice behavior-mechanisms that might be more effective and immediate than mental well-being itself, and this is particularly true with cross-sectional designs (Sahadev, [2024](#); Hasanein & Elrayah, [2025](#)). The unpractical significance of mediation can also be a

methodological consequence of contextual constraints in HEIs (i.e., structural autonomy won't accumulate to well-being gains converted into creativity later) and cross-sectional nature of data, which might fail to capture the gradual accumulation of empowerment into well-being gains that would be reflected in creativity later.

The workplace fun as a boundary condition: enhancing the well-being pathway of empowerment

The moderation findings show that fun at the work place enhances the empowerment- well-being relationship (WF x PE - EMW: $b = 0.102$, $p = .050$). This confirms the fact that workplace fun is a contextual resource (in terms of positive affect and social bonding and recovery experiences) that enables employees to transform the empowerment into enhanced psychological functioning (Yang & Chen, 2023; Tzioti et al., 2025). A pleasant atmosphere can alleviate the daily human stress, and give micro-breaks, which is particularly necessary in HEIs where emotional work, assessment pressures, and ever-present deadlines can drain resources rapidly.

Notably, the implication of your interaction pattern is that fun can have threshold or diminishing-return dynamics: in high-need environments, even small amounts of fun can create significant restoration and social support, but there are small decreasing returns to higher levels of fun once a psychologically good enough climate is achieved. This can be put in line with the gain-spiral logic of COR, resources are most important when they help to stop a loss or refresh a depleted reservoir, and when the reservoir is already sufficiently replenished and further resources can produce weaker marginal benefits (Demerouti, 2025).

6 Implications

6.1 Theoretical implications

First, the research supports an account of COR that psychological empowerment is an important resource, which directly forecasts creativity in knowledge-intensive environments. Second, the non-significant mediation suggests that the empowerment-creativity associations can be more effectively described in terms of the proximal motivational/behavioral processes as opposed to the well-being alone-another critical point to empowerment theory when it comes to challenging academic settings (Sahadev, 2024; Hasanein & Elrayah, 2025). Third, workplace fun comes out as an engaging boundary condition that contributes to the translation of empowerment into psychological functioning, which is consistent with the current fun-at-work evidences syntheses (Tzioti et al., 2025; Pap et al., 2025).

6.2 Practical implications

The leadership of universities must focus on job design and governance that is oriented towards empowerment: actual autonomy in teaching/research choices, opportunities to develop and enhance competence, and participatory systems that cause faculty to feel that their input is felt. These are practices which are likely to produce creativity rather than just increasing pressure or control. Concurrently, since mental well-being predicts creativity, universities ought to manage well-being as a performance-facilitating asset by establishing evidence-based aids (e.g., access to counseling, workload management, supportive supervision), in line with workplace mental health recommendations, and syntheses of evidence. Lastly, inclusive culturally appropriate workplace fun (e.g., collegial social events, recognition rituals, informal peer bonding) should not be used as distraction by the universities but as a source-restoring climate characteristic that exacerbates the impact of empowerment on well-being and contributes to maintaining creative functioning.

6.3 Limitations and research future

The cross-sectional design of the study precludes cause-effect conclusions; time-lagged or longitudinal designs with semester-accumulation of empowerment resources and well-being

would be appropriate in future studies. Other mediators (e.g. intrinsic motivation, engagement in creative processes, sharing knowledge, voice behavior) that might better explain empowerment-induced creativity should also be tested in future research, and more sophisticated interaction modeling should also be used to test whether fun has a non-linear relationship (threshold/diminishing returns).

Author Contributions

Lamarana Balde and Xiaolei Ruan contributed to the study conception and design, methodology, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the results, and preparation and critical revision of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the work.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, commercial, professional, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest related to this article.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to participant confidentiality and applicable ethical requirements.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

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