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From Passion to Innovation: The Mediating Role of Workplace Happiness among the UAE Academics

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between the Passion for Work (PFW), Happiness at Work (HAW), and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) among the UAE academics. Using survey data from 359 academics, the study tests direct and mediating effects among these variables. Findings reveal that while Passion for Work significantly predicts Workplace Happiness, it does not directly influence Innovative Behavior. Instead, Happiness at Work fully mediates this relationship, indicating that Passion alone is insufficient to drive Innovation without a supportive and fulfilling work environment. These results contribute to Self-determination theory and the Role-based passion framework by highlighting the psychological conditions necessary for passion to translate into innovation. Practically, organizations should foster job satisfaction, engagement, and leadership support to enhance both well-being and creativity. Due to a few limitations, the need for future research using longitudinal methods and exploring additional mediators across diverse industries is suggested.

Keywords: Passion for Work, Happiness at Work, Innovative Work Behavior, UAE Academics.

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1.Introduction

Innovation is a fundamental driver of organizational success (Abidur Rahman et al 2025), particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors like higher education. In an era of rapid change, universities are expected to foster an environment that encourages creativity and continuous improvement. However, the factors that contribute to innovative work behavior (IWB) among university faculty remain insufficiently understood. While passion for work (PFW) is often regarded as a catalyst for innovation (Pollack et al., 2020), recent research suggests that passion alone may not be enough. Instead, happiness at work (HAW)—which encompasses job satisfaction, engagement, and emotional well-being—can play a crucial mediating role in translating passion into innovation (Salas-Vallina et al., 2017). This study aims to examine these relationships, addressing a significant gap in the literature.

Prior studies have explored the relationship between passion and work outcomes such as job performance, engagement, and well-being (Vieira dos Santos et al., 2023). Similarly, research has linked workplace happiness to employee creativity and productivity (Bellet et al., 2020). However, there remains limited empirical evidence on how happiness mediates the link between passion and innovation in academic settings. While some scholars argue that passion drives creativity, others emphasize that positive emotions and workplace well-being are essential for fostering innovative behaviors (Lin et al., 2024). This study contributes to this debate by investigating whether happiness at work is a necessary psychological mechanism that enables passionate employees to engage in innovative behaviors.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature has focused on corporate environments, neglecting the unique dynamics of the higher education sector. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), higher education has experienced rapid expansion, with over 100 institutions catering to a diverse and growing student population. The government's emphasis on academic excellence and research-driven innovation underscores the need to understand how faculty members contribute to institutional innovation (Jatoi et al., 2023). However, few studies have examined the psychological factors that influence faculty innovation in this context. Given the increasing pressure on university faculty to engage in research, develop new teaching methodologies, and contribute to institutional advancements, understanding the interplay between passion, happiness, and innovation is both theoretically significant and practically relevant (Upadhayay et al., 2024).

This study aims to examine the direct and indirect relationships between passion for work, happiness at work, and innovative work behavior among university faculty in the UAE. Specifically, it seeks to assess whether passion for work directly influences innovative work behavior, investigate the impact of workplace happiness on innovation, and determine whether workplace happiness mediates the relationship between passion and innovative work behavior.

To reach this aim, this study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

Does passion for work positively influence innovative work behavior among university faculty?

How does happiness at work affect innovative work behavior?

Does happiness at work mediate the relationship between passion for work and innovative work behavior?

The findings of this study contribute to self-determination theory by exploring how workplace well-being influences motivation and creativity. Additionally, the study extends the role-based passion framework (Pollack et al., 2020), emphasizing the conditions under which passion leads to innovation. Practically, the insights from this research can inform higher education institutions in the UAE and beyond, helping them create policies and leadership strategies that foster both faculty well-being and institutional innovation.

By addressing these critical gaps, this study enhances the understanding of how psychological well-being shapes workplace creativity, offering both theoretical contributions and actionable insights for academia.

These remaining parts of this paper are structured as follows. First, the relevant literature related to Passion for Work, Happiness at Work, and Innovative Work Behavior is reviewed and several hypotheses is formulated based on the literature. Next, the research methodology adopted in this study is described in terms of the research design, sampling, and measures. After that, the results of the data analysis of the survey responses of 359 UAE academics are presented and discussed. Finally, managerial and practical implications based on the key findings of this study are suggested and the limitations and future research are discussed.

2. Literature and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Passion for Work

Passion is a multidimensional construct that refers to a strong inclination towards a self-defining activity that one likes, finds important, and in which one invests considerable time and energy (Bento et al., 2024). It is important to note that passion is not simply a matter of liking or even loving an activity, but rather refers to a much stronger and more persistent emotional state. Thus, passion is characterized by a high level of energy and immersion in an activity, as well as a sense of importance and self-identification with the activity (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2019). Passion for work (PFW) is a focused form of passion relating to work tasks, environment and roles. The nature of the construct and its contextual interactions have been noted as complex. For instance, one study finds that antecedents of work passion including conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism tend to interact with specific work environments and drive different forms of work passion behaviors and feelings (Breu & Yasseri, 2023).

Passion for work represents a persistent positive work-related state of mind held by employees, characterized by feelings of dedication and absorption in their work, leading to feelings of happiness (Pollack et al., 2020). Passion is a complex emotional and psychological state, often dualized into positive outcomes (intense interest, focus and persistence) and into negative ones (obsession, workaholism and self-destructiveness).

Harmonious passion is marked by an affective commitment to work and integration of work into the self (i.e., autonomous internalization of work). Although this form of passion is experienced with less depth and intensity than obsessive passion, it is more enduring, and the underlying

emotions tend to be more positive than negative and more self-determined than controlled (Bento et al., 2024). Hence, harmonious passion is self-driven, energizing, and supportive of a constructive work identity, whereas obsessive passion is based on an external drive, drags, and is associated with a destructive work identity.

Leaders at all organizational levels have an important role in generating passionate contexts and employees (Ho & Astakhova, 2020; Xiao et al., 2022). Creating contexts where passion is developed and sustained is a key role of effective leaders in organizations where commitment and persistence is important, and both of these outcomes are supported by employee happiness (Ho & Astakhova, 2020; Pollack et al., 2020).

2.2 Happiness at Work

HAW is a multidimensional construct encompassing job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment, all of which contribute to employee and organizational performance. Employees experiencing high levels of HAW typically demonstrate greater energy, creativity, and commitment to their work.

Job satisfaction refers to the emotional and cognitive evaluation of one's job, characterized by favorable or unfavorable feelings (Mandala et al., 2024). Organizational commitment represents a psychological state that influences an employee's attachment to the organization and intent to remain. Engagement, another core component of HAW, is a positive, fulfilling work-related state marked by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Abidin et al., 2021). Employees who are highly engaged invest effort in their work, persist through challenges, and derive a sense of significance and enthusiasm from their tasks.

Several factors influence HAW, including leadership style, organizational culture, and employee recognition. Transformational and inspirational leadership styles have been found to enhance workplace happiness and commitment, whereas employees experiencing high levels of stress and burnout tend to exhibit lower levels of happiness and reduced organizational contributions.

2.3 Innovative Work Behaviors

Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), introduced by Scott and Bruce (1994), is a multi-faceted construct that describes employees' engagement in opportunity recognition, idea development, promotion, and implementation of new concepts, products, or processes (Volery & Tarabashkina, 2021). It reflects a proactive attitudinal state, where employees actively seek workplace improvements, problem-solving strategies, and contributions to organizational innovation. IWB has been positively linked to job performance, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness, while also reducing turnover intentions and enhancing organizational commitment. It can be fostered through leadership development, employee training programs, and organizational culture initiatives that encourage creative thinking and knowledge-sharing.

2.4 Passion for Work and (PFW) to *Innovative Work Behavior (*IWB)

The role-based passion (RBP) framework (Pollack et al., 2020) posits that passion is shaped by an individual's specific work role, such as that of an employee, entrepreneur, or manager. It categorizes passion into three types—harmonious, obsessive, and inharmonious—based on the degree of alignment between one's identity, goals, and values with their organizational role. Passion operates on a dual continuum, balancing positive and negative

emotional responses to work and a healthy versus unhealthy focus on professional goals. These forms of passion are not mutually exclusive, as individuals may experience varying intensities of passion throughout their careers (Sulistiawan et al., 2022). While high initial passion can be beneficial, excessive intensity may lead to self-destructive tendencies unless moderated through adaptive coping strategies.

Obsessive passion is characterized by compulsive work-related thoughts and behaviors that interfere with other life roles. This type of passion is often associated with negative emotional states, reduced self-determined motivation, and an excessive task-oriented approach that diminishes overall work identity (Reed et al., 2022). The dualistic model of passion is grounded in self-determination theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Bento et al., 2024). Intrinsically motivated individuals pursue activities for personal fulfillment, fostering identity development, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or pressures, which can lead to depletion and disengagement (Morris et al., 2022).

Certain forms of intrinsic motivation can lead to an immersive state where individuals lose self-consciousness and become deeply engaged in their work (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). In contrast, framing work as a vocation that sustains long-term positive passion can provide a stable source of motivation (Reed et al., 2022). Self-determination theory suggests that fulfilling three basic psychological needs—relatedness, competence, and autonomy—promotes innovative work behavior (Olafsen et al., 2025). A supportive work environment that meets these needs enhances IWB, while environments that fail to do so are unlikely to foster creativity (Messmann et al., 2022). Positive emotions linked to workplace passion contribute to

innovation by expanding attentional focus, promoting cognitive flexibility, and increasing persistence (Razinskas, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023)

Passion for work enhances IWB through three mechanisms. First, it generates high task-related interest, broadening employees' attention and enabling them to recognize opportunities for innovation (Zhang et al., 2022). Moreover, passion stimulates positive affect and enthusiasm, fostering cognitive flexibility and creative exploration (Wang et al., 2023). Passionate employees also exhibit greater persistence, overcoming obstacles and investing significant effort in their tasks, ultimately driving innovation (Vallerand et al., 2023).

Given the complexity of passion's influence on IWB, researchers emphasize the importance of including passion as a predictor in workplace innovation models. The existing literature suggests that passion can facilitate IWB, but its effects depend on individual motivation and organizational conditions. Based on these insights, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: Passion for work (PFW) is positively related to innovative work behavior (IWB).

2.5 Passion for Work and Happiness at Work

Passion is a multidimensional construct that refers to a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that an individual enjoys, values, and dedicates significant time and energy to (Bento et al., 2024). Unlike mere liking or interest, passion represents a persistent and intense emotional state characterized by high levels of energy, deep immersion, and a strong sense of personal identification with the activity (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2019).

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between passion for work and happiness or well-being at work (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). However, the extent of this relationship depends on how passion is conceptualized. When framed as a harmonious and enduring state of interest, passion enhances well-being and job satisfaction. Conversely, when it manifests as obsessive passion, it may lead to increased stress and work-life conflict.

Harmonious passion is characterized by an affective commitment to work and an autonomous internalization of professional goals. It integrates work into an individual's self-concept in a balanced manner, allowing for greater flexibility and emotional regulation (Benitez et al., 2023). Although less intense than obsessive passion, harmonious passion is more sustainable over time and fosters a positive emotional experience at work. In contrast, obsessive passion is externally driven, rigid, and more likely to lead to burnout or negative work identity development.

Organizational leadership plays a critical role in shaping the conditions under which passion for work develops and flourishes. Effective leaders create work environments that encourage passion, support commitment, and promote persistence, all of which contribute to employee happiness (Ho & Astakhova, 2020; Xiao et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). By fostering supportive work climates and recognizing employee contributions, leaders can sustain workplace passion and enhance well-being (Pollack et al., 2020).

Based on this theoretical foundation, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Passion for work (PFW) is positively related to happiness at work (HAW).

2.6 Happiness at work (HAW) and innovative work behavior (IWB)

In several ways, philosophers and social psychologists have defined happiness. Fisher (2010) believed that in organizational studies, happiness-related structures differ in many significant ways. First, the extent to which they are seen to operate, second, their length or consistency over time, and third, their particular content. The concept has evolved from psychological and philosophical perspectives defining satisfaction with one's personal life, low levels of negative emotions and global judgments of one's life (Chirkina et al., 2021). HaW is defined as an experience of subjective well-being at work reflected through a high amount of positive individual and organizational experiences and low amount of negative individual and organizational experiences (Jaiswal & Arun, 2022).

Hence, organizations striving for excellence require employees who are collaborative, proactive, and committed to high performance (Meyers, 2020). A key driver of this commitment is workplace happiness, which is impacted by variables such as job satisfaction, meaningful work relationships, and professional development opportunities. Employees who experience greater well-being at work are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors, contributing to a dynamic and creative organizational culture. Research suggests that when organizations prioritize employee well-being, they not only enhance job satisfaction but also create conditions that foster innovation and sustained competitive advantage (Hill et al., 2024).

Furthermore, workplace happiness has been linked to increased cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities, and motivation, all of which are essential for fostering innovative work behavior. As organizations navigate rapidly evolving industries, cultivating an environment that nurtures employee happiness becomes a strategic imperative for driving both individual and collective innovation (Almazrouei et al., 2024). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that

H3: There is a positive relationship between employee happiness at the workplace and their innovative behavior

2.7 Mediating role of HAW on PFW to IWB

The potential causal relationship between passion for work and innovative work behavior, with happiness at work serving as a mediator, was examined in this study. Recent research has explored the interactions among these variables, with mixed findings. While some studies have found no significant direct relationship between happiness at work and innovative work behavior (Etikariena, 2018), others have identified meaningful connections between these constructs and related variables. In general, organizational practices prioritizing employee well-being have been shown to foster innovative work behavior, with harmonious work passion playing a mediating role (Salas-Vallina et al., 2020).

Recent evidence also suggests that happiness at work positively influences innovative work behavior through the moderating role of organizational citizenship behavior (Unanue et al., 2021). These findings indicate both a direct linear relationship between happiness at work and innovative work behavior and the possibility that this relationship is influenced by additional workplace factors that shape employee attitudes and organizational climates.

Related constructs, such as ambidextrous leadership, have been found to enhance innovative work behavior through workplace happiness, reinforcing the idea that happiness plays a crucial role in shaping employee innovation (Kebede et al., 2024). Furthermore, both happiness at work and innovative work behavior have been linked to job satisfaction, suggesting that increased happiness may serve as a pathway through which passion for work leads to innovation (Rosdaniati & Muafi, 2021).

The mediating role of happiness at work in the relationship between various workplace factors and innovative work behavior is further supported by research examining the effects of coworker ostracism and leadership support on employee innovation. Studies have found that workplace happiness mediates the negative effects of ostracism and the positive effects of supportive leadership on innovative behavior (Wang et al., 2022). These findings highlight the importance of workplace happiness as a key mechanism that facilitates the translation of workplace motivation into creative and innovative outcomes.

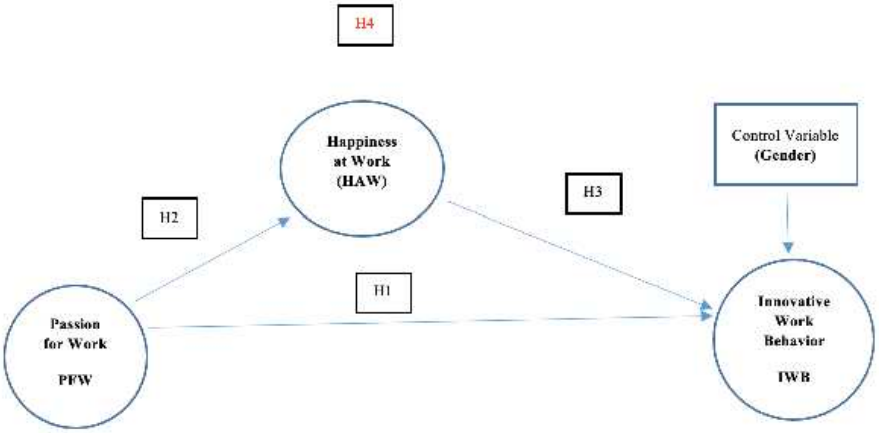
Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Happiness at work (HAW) mediates the relationship between passion for work (PFW) and innovative work behavior (IWB).

While the primary focus of this study is on the relationships between passion for work, happiness at work, and innovative work behavior, it is important to account for potential confounding factors. Prior research suggests that demographic variables, such as gender, may influence workplace attitudes and innovation-related behaviors. To ensure that the observed relationships are not unduly influenced by such factors, gender is included as a control variable in this study. This allows for a more precise

assessment of the hypothesized relationships by isolating the effects of passion and happiness on innovative work behavior.

Figure 1. Research Model



3. Methodology

3.1 Data and sample

A quantitative/positivist research design, based on the survey method, was used to test the hypothesized relationships. Data for this research were collected through an online participant's recruitment platform: Dun & Bradstreet in September 2019. The targeted population comprises of 18600 academics working on 124 higher education providers in the UAE seven emirates. Using Qualtrics sample size calculators, the typical sample size based on a population size of 18,600 and a confidence level of 95% was advised to be 370 responses. Reaching a target sample size to ensure statistically representative results, and using structural equation modelling, was a clear goal. To achieve this, an online survey along with a cover letter was sent by email to all academics in the recruiter database in order to

secure a stratified convenience sample. In compliance with the university code of ethics in research, the researchers explained the purpose of the research and emphasized the confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary nature of this survey. A total of 397 surveys were received, however, 38 of them were incomplete, therefore they were excluded. The remaining 359 usable questionnaires were used to test the hypothesized relationships presented in the research model. The number was close to the target sample size of 370.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire for this study consisted of two sections. The first allocated section was for the participant's demographics such as: marital status, gender, academic rank, work location, and nationality. The second, on the other hand, comprised of the continuous variables examined in this study. These continuous variables were measured using a six-point Likert scale to avoid neutral responses. The four continuous variables were operationalized as follows:

3.2.1 **Passion** *for work (PFW)*

PFW was measured using the five items developed by Baum and Locke (2004). This scale is widely used to measure harmonious passion (De Clercq et al. 2022).

3.2.2 Happiness at work (HAW)

The HAW construct was modelled as a second-order variable that consists of three first-order dimensions: (1) engagement; (2) job satisfaction; and (3) affective commitment. The study incorporated three previously developed and validated scales that shape employees' HAW in one second-order construct with 23 items. Job satisfaction was measured using a six-item

scale developed by Tsui *et al.* (1992). A nine-item shortened organizational commitment questionnaire developed by Mowday et al. (1979) was used to measure the organization's commitment. Finally, a UWES-9, developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006), was used to measure work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

3.2.3 Innovative Work Behaviours (IWBs)

IWBs were measured using the nine-item scale (Janssen, 2000). This measure is widely used in the literature as well to measure IWB in different organizational contexts (Javed et al., 2021).

4. Analysis and results

4.1 Respondents' profile

67% of the 359 participants were male and 33% were female. As far as the marital status is concerned, married participants represented 85% while those who were not was 15%. With regards to the academic rank, lecturers were representing (23%), assistant professors (39%), associate professors (20%), and full professors (18%). Of them, 98% were expats and (2%) were locals. As far as the location of the participants, (21%) were from Abu Dhabi, (26%) from Dubai, (40%) from Sharjah, (3%) from Ajman, (2%) from Al Fujairah, (5%) from Umm Al-Quwain, and (3%) from Ras Al Khaima.

4.2 Preliminary analysis

Directions provided by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) were followed, the survey data were prepared by addressing outliers and missing values, as well as assessing normality and multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, a common method bias

(CMB) check was conducted using a full collinearity assessment following the recommendations of Kock in SmartPLS (Kock, 2015). We found that all variance inflation factors (VIFs) for the latent variables in this study were below the threshold of 3.3, which mean that CMB was not a concern in this study.

Since gender, a categorical variable, was included as a control variable, an ANOVA analysis was performed to examine its potential impact on innovative work behavior (IWB). Gender was considered as the independent variable, while IWB acted as the dependent variable. The results indicated that the variance between male and female participants was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.21$). Consequently, gender was excluded from further analysis due to its lack of significant influence on the dependent variable.

4.3 Measurement Model Test

To ensure the validity and reliability of the constructs, the psychometric properties of the measurement model, which was reflectively modeled, were assessed. Following the guidelines provided by Hair et al., internal consistency reliability was first examined through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Hair Jr et al., 2021). As shown in Table 1, both measures met the acceptable criteria, with values exceeding 0.7 but remaining below 0.95, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability.

Convergent validity was then assessed using the indicators' outer loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE). The outer loadings for the majority of indicators ($n = 37$) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708, except for 13 items (see Table 1). Among these, 12 items had outer loadings ranging between 0.506 and 0.700, while a single item

(HAW-E9) had an outer loading below 0.5. Hair et al. advised that weak indicators should not be removed indiscriminately but should instead be evaluated for their impact on internal consistency reliability before elimination (Hair Jr et al., 2021). In line with this recommendation, the 12 items with outer loadings above 0.5 were retained, as their removal did not improve composite reliability or AVE, and their content validity was deemed valuable. However, the single item with an outer loading below 0.5 (HAW-E9) was excluded from further analysis. The AVE values for all constructs, as presented in Table 1, exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.5, confirming the establishment of convergent validity.

To assess discriminant validity, traditional methods such as cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criterion have often been used. However, Henseler et al. argued that these measures are not always reliable in detecting discriminant validity issues (Henseler et al., 2015). As an alternative, they recommended the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) as a more effective measure. Table 2 presents the HTMT values for all research constructs, obtained using bootstrapping procedures. Since all HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.85, discriminant validity was confirmed.

4.4 Structural Model Test

After confirming the validity and reliability of the research constructs, the next step involved testing the structural model. Hair et al. outlined six key indicators for evaluating structural models: variance inflation factors (VIFs) for predictor variables, beta values, t-values, coefficients of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and effect sizes (f^2) (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

Collinearity levels were first assessed using SmartPLS, which provided VIF values for all predictor variables. The results indicated that all VIF values were below the threshold of 5, confirming that collinearity was not a concern in the structural model. Table 3 and Figure 2 present the remaining results of the structural analysis.

Regarding direct effects, the results demonstrated that passion for work had a positive and significant relationship with happiness at work ($\beta = 0.682$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for hypothesis H2. However, hypothesis H1 was not supported, as passion for work did not exhibit a significant relationship with innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.105$, $p = 0.153$). Conversely, the results confirmed hypothesis H3, as happiness at work was found to have a positive and significant relationship with innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.001$).

The model also demonstrated substantial explanatory power. Passion for work explained 46.5% of the variance in happiness at work ($R^2 = 0.465$), while passion for work and happiness at work together explained 28.0% of the variance in innovative work behavior ($R^2 = 0.280$). According to Cohen (1988), these R^2 values indicate a strong model fit. The effect size (f^2) for the paths from passion for work to happiness at work ($f^2 = 0.868$) and from happiness at work to innovative work behavior ($f^2 = 0.152$) were large, while the effect size for the direct relationship between passion for work and innovative work behavior was small ($f^2 = 0.008$).

Predictive relevance (Q^2) was assessed using cross-validated redundancy procedures. The results indicated that both endogenous variables had Q^2 values greater than zero (happiness at work = 0.267; innovative work behavior = 0.187), confirming acceptable predictive relevance.

Regarding mediation effects, the analysis revealed that happiness at work significantly mediated the relationship between passion for work and innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.308$, $p < 0.001$). Given that the direct effect of passion for work on innovative work behavior was not significant, happiness at work was found to fully mediate this relationship. Thus, hypothesis H4 was supported.

Figure 2. PLS Results for the structural model

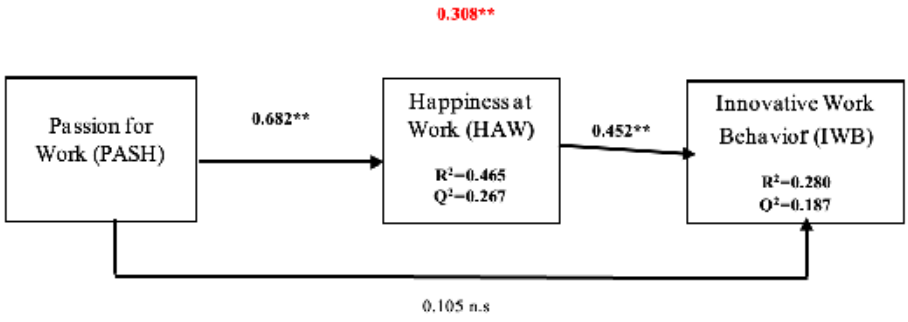


Table 1. Construct reliability and validity & descriptive statistics

Factors	Item loading	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
IWB		4.23	1.01	0.931	0.932	0.643
IWB1	0.743					
IWB2	0.789					
IWB3	0.771					
IWB4	0.842					
IWB5	0.775					
IWB6	0.823					
IWB7	0.848					
IWB8	0.830					
IWB9	0.791					
PASH		4.71	1.08	0.837	0.884	0.605
PASH1	0.742					
PASH2	0.831					
PASH3	0.784					
PASH4	0.792					
PASH5	0.737					
HAW		4.75	1.18	0.937	0.929	0.532
HAW-C1	0.633					
HAW-C2	0.766					
HAW-C3	0.581					
HAW-C4	0.780					
HAW-C5	0.772					
HAW-C6	0.768					
HAW-C7	0.788					
HAW-C8	0.612					
HAW-C9	0.708					
HAW-E1	0.621					
HAW-E2	0.722					
HAW-E3	0.698					
HAW-E4	0.802					
HAW-E5	0.784					
HAW-E6	0.590					
HAW-E7	0.725					
HAW-E8	0.660					
HAW-E9	0.472					
HAW-S1	0.510					
HAW-S2	0.542					
HAW-S3	0.596					
HAW-S4	0.514					
HAW-S5	0.609					

Note: Shaded item representing weak item which is eliminated from further analysis
SD = Standard Deviation AVE = Average Variance Extracted CR= Composite Reliability

Table 2. Heterotrait- monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Con-struct	HAW	IWB	PASH
HAW			
IWB	0.545		
PASH	0.744	0.457	

Table 3. Direct and Indirect effect results in the structural model

Path	(β) Direct Effect	%95 Confidence Interval of the Direct Effect	T Statistics*	Significant (P > 0.05)	Path	(β) Indirect Effect	%95 Confidence Interval of the Indirect Effect	T Statistics	Significant (P > 0.05)	Type of Mediation
HAW → IWB	0.452	(0.017, 0.377)	6.559	Yes						
Passion → HAW	0.682	(0.608, 0.738)	20.415	Yes	Passion → HAW → IWB	0.313	(0.011, 0.260)	6.205	Yes	Indirect only Full Mediation
Passion → IWB	0.105	(-0.055, 0.210)	1.482	No						

* Notes: Critical t-values. 1.96 (P < 0.05)

5. Discussion

The study examined the relationship between passion for work (PFW), happiness at work (HAW), and innovative work behavior (IWB) among university professors in the UAE. The results indicate that passion for work does not directly predict innovative work behavior**;** rather**,** happiness at

work mediates this relationship. These findings suggest that while passion is an essential motivational force in the workplace, it does not necessarily translate into innovative behavior unless employees experience a positive emotional state at work. The mediating role of happiness highlights the importance of psychological well-being in enabling passion-driven employees to engage in innovation, reinforcing the notion that a fulfilling and supportive work environment is critical for fostering creativity**.**

This study's results align with prior research indicating that happiness at work is a significant predictor of innovative work behavior (Almazrouei et al., 2024). The strong positive association found between happiness at work and IWB ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.000$) supports the argument that employees who feel engaged, satisfied, and committed to their organizations are more likely to engage in creative problem-solving and the implementation of new ideas (Miller & Miller, 2020). However, this study challenges the assumption that passion alone is a sufficient driver of innovation. While previous studies have found direct positive relationships between work passion and innovative behavior (Ho & Astakhova, 2020), the present findings indicate that passion only influences innovation when mediated by happiness at work ($\beta = 0.308$, $p < 0.000$)**.** This nuance suggests that passion may be necessary but not sufficient for innovation an insight that refines existing conceptualizations of motivation and creativity in the workplace.

The study also found that passion for work strongly predicts happiness at work ($\beta = 0.682$, $p < 0.000$)**,** supporting the argument that passionate employees are more likely to experience positive workplace emotions and well-being (DANDENEAU, 2021). In addition, it aligns with previous findings indicating that harmonious passion fosters positive emotional states that contribute to job satisfaction and engagement (Pollack et al.,

2020). However, unlike some prior studies that have suggested a direct link between passion and performance outcomes (Tran & Nguyen, 2020), the current findings suggest that happiness at work is the key mechanism that enables passion to manifest in innovative behavior**.**

The model tested in this study explains a substantial portion of the variance in happiness at work ($R^2 = 0.465$) and innovative work behavior ($R^2 = 0.280$), reinforcing the importance of these constructs in workplace innovation. The predictive relevance (Q^2) values further confirm the explanatory power of the model, with happiness at work ($Q^2 = 0.267$) and innovative work behavior ($Q^2 = 0.187$) demonstrating meaningful predictive validity. These findings underscore the theoretical and practical significance of understanding how psychological well-being mediates the relationship between motivation and creativity in professional settings.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study offers new insights into established theories of workplace motivation and innovation in several ways. The results initially expand upon SDT by showing that intrinsic motivation, in the form of passion for work, requires the fulfillment of psychological needs related to happiness to drive innovation**.** While SDT posits that intrinsically motivated individuals engage in self-directed, creative behaviors, the current findings suggest that this process is contingent on affective workplace experiences. This refinement challenges linear interpretations of motivation and performance by emphasizing the mediating role of well-being in translating passion into action**.**

In addition, the study supports the Role-Based Passion (RBP) framework (Pollack et al., 2020), which suggests that passion is shaped by work environments and role expectations. Prior research on RBP has distinguished between harmonious and obsessive passion, with harmonious passion linked to positive work outcomes (Vieira dos Santos et al., 2023). The present findings align with this distinction by demonstrating that passion is only beneficial when coupled with a positive affective state at work, reinforcing the notion that passion alone does not automatically translate into workplace innovation**.**

Moreover, the literature on Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) was extended by confirming the significant role of workplace happiness in fostering creativity and idea implementation. While prior studies have emphasized the role of leadership, organizational culture, and psychological capital in supporting innovative behavior (Brunetto et al., 2024), this study highlights the importance of individual emotional experiences. By identifying happiness as a key mediator, the findings offer new insights into how psychological well-being functions as a catalyst for workplace innovation.

5.2 Practical implications

The findings have direct implications for organizations, particularly in higher education and other knowledge-based sectors where innovation is crucial. Given that passion alone does not drive innovation, institutions must invest in creating environments that foster workplace happiness to unlock employees' creative potential.

It should be noted that universities and research institutions may develop policies that enhance job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment

among faculty members. Since passion for work significantly predicts happiness at work, organizations can support academic staff by offering greater autonomy in research activities, reducing administrative burdens, and recognizing innovative contributions**.** Such initiatives can create an enabling environment where passionate employees experience the psychological well-being necessary for innovation**.**

Moreover, leadership training programs can emphasize the role of transformational leadership in fostering happiness and innovation**.** Research suggests that leaders who provide encouragement, autonomy, and positive reinforcement can enhance both work passion and happiness (Xiao et al., 2022)**.** Academic leaders should be trained to cultivate supportive work environments where faculty members feel valued and motivated to pursue creative endeavors.

In addition, performance evaluation metrics should be restructured to balance research productivity with employee well-being. The pressure to publish frequently can lead to burnout, undermining workplace happiness and ultimately reducing innovative capacity. Universities should adopt holistic performance assessment models that incorporate measures of workplace well-being, collaboration, and creative engagement.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Although this study yields valuable insights, it is not without limitations that warrant consideration in future research. The study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between passion, happiness, and innovation**.** Future studies should use longitudinal methods to examine how these relationships evolve over time. In addition, the study is limited to higher education institutions in the UAE, which may restrict

generalizability to other industries and cultural contexts**.** Prior research has shown that organizational culture and national work norms influence the passion–innovation relationship (Tao & Ucbasaran, 2024)**.** Future research should explore whether similar patterns hold in corporate, healthcare, and technology sectors across diverse cultural settings.

Another limitation is the use of self-reported surveys, which may be subject to social desirability or recall bias. Future research should incorporate multi-source data collection methods, such as supervisor evaluations, peer assessments, and objective performance indicators, to strengthen validity**.**

6. Conclusion

This study explored the interplay between passion for work (PFW), happiness at work (HAW), and innovative work behavior (IWB) among UAE university professors. The findings confirm that while passion enhances workplace happiness, it does not directly drive innovation. Instead, happiness at work fully mediates this relationship, emphasizing the critical role of emotional well-being in fostering creativity. In addition, it contributes to self-determination theory and the role-based passion framework by demonstrating that passion alone is insufficient for innovation without a positive work environment. Practically, organizations should prioritize job satisfaction, engagement, and supportive leadership to translate employees' passion into meaningful innovation. While insightful, the study's cross-sectional design and sector-specific focus limit generalizability. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches and explore additional mediators and industries to deepen understanding of these dynamics.

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من الشغف للابتكار: الدور الوسيط للسعادة في مكان العمل بين أكاديميي الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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ملخص البحث:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في العلاقة بين الشغف بالعمل، السعادة في مكان العمل، والسلوك الابتكاري في مكان العمل بين أساتذة الجامعات في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. باستخدام بيانات المسح تم جمعها من 359 أكاديميًا، تختبر الدراسة الآثار المباشرة والوسيطة بين هذه المتغيرات. تكشف النتائج أنه في حين أن الشغف بالعمل يتنبأ بشكل كبير بالسعادة في مكان العمل، إلا أنه لا يؤثر بشكل مباشر على السلوك المبتكر. بدلاً من ذلك، فإن السعادة في العمل تتوسط هذه العلاقة بشكل كامل، مما يشير إلى أن الشغف وحده لا يكفي لدفع الابتكار دون بيئة عمل داعمة ومرضية. تسهم هذه النتائج في نظرية تقرير المصير وإطار الشغف القائم على الدور من خلال تسليط الضوء على الظروف النفسية اللازمة لترجمة الشغف إلى ابتكار. من الناحية العملية، يجب على المؤسسات تعزيز الرضا الوظيفي والمشاركة ودعم القيادة لتعزيز كل من الرفاهية والإبداع. ونظرًا لبعض القيود، فإن الحاجة إلى إجراء أبحاث مستقبلية باستخدام الأساليب الطولية واستكشاف متغيرات وسيطه أخرى عبر مختلف الصناعات أصبحت متطلبا واعدا.

الكلمات الدالة: الشغف للعمل، السعادة في مجال العمل، السلوك الابتكاري، أكاديميي الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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