

When do positive leader emotions spark employee innovation? The critical catalytic role of humor in transforming affect into meaningful action

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study examines how leader-triggered positive emotion influences employee innovative work behavior (IWB) through work meaningfulness, and whether leader humor strengthens this indirect relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – Three-wave, multi-source data were collected from 349 matched employee–supervisor dyads in Indonesian organizations. Process macro moderated mediation analysis was employed.

Findings – Leader-triggered positive emotion enhances IWB via increased work meaningfulness. This indirect effect is stronger when leaders frequently use humor, as humor facilitates the conversion of affective resources into meaningful work.

Originality/value – This study advances affect-innovation research by identifying leader-triggered positive emotion as a novel antecedent of IWB, positioning work meaningfulness as the mediating mechanism and reconceptualizing leader humor as a contextual catalyst that amplifies resource gain spirals. Theoretically, it contributes a nuanced moderated mediation framework grounded in the COR theory, revealing that humor’s amplifying effect is contingent upon congruent positive emotional signaling – a finding that extends the theoretical understanding of how leader-triggered positive emotion translates into innovation and offers practical guidance for leadership development.

Keywords Leader-triggered positive emotions, Leader humor, Work meaningfulness, Innovative work behavior, Conservation of resources (COR) theory

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

In organizational settings, leaders’ emotions are contagious, making their capacity to generate positive affect a critical determinant of organizational climate and effectiveness. While prior research has focused primarily on the valence of leader emotions or specific discrete emotions (e.g. anger, enthusiasm), the role of subordinates’ beliefs about these emotions remains underexplored (Sy and van Knippenberg, 2021). This gap is significant, as such appraisals

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likely shape how emotional cues are internalized. We address this gap by examining leader-triggered positive emotion – a subordinate’s conscious, remembered and accumulated positive affective experience attributed to the leader (Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012). This construct serves as a key psychological resource, enabling employees to counteract negative emotions (Fredrickson *et al.*, 2000), sustain emotional well-being (Sekerka *et al.*, 2012) and enhance resilience under stress (Ong *et al.*, 2010).

Since its introduction, research on leader-triggered positive emotion has been limited to newcomers’ affectivity (Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012), and its mediating role between leader humor and organizational citizenship behavior (Cooper *et al.*, 2018). A significant and unexplored gap remains: how leader-triggered positive emotion influences employee innovative work behavior (IWB). This is critical because IWB represents a vital organizational asset, especially in dynamic environments (Wojtczuk-Turek and Turek, 2015). By harnessing employees’ creative potential, IWB serves as a key determinant of an organization’s financial and operational success (Woods *et al.*, 2018).

This study examines how and when the leader-triggered positive emotion can fuel employee IWB. We anchor our investigation in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to explain this relationship’s mechanism and boundary conditions. We propose that leader-triggered positive emotion serves as social-affective resource that employees convert into work meaningfulness – an employee’s subjective perception of the value and significance of their work (Martela and Pessi, 2018; Rosso *et al.*, 2010). The COR theory posits that access to resources not only mitigates the adverse psychological and physiological effects of stress but also fortifies individuals against resource depletion during adversity and increases their problem-solving efficacy in demanding contexts (Hobfoll, 2002). When employees consistently experience positive affect attributed to their leader, they appraise their work environment as supportive and engaging, which elevates their perception of work as significant and purposeful (Martela and Pessi, 2018). Positive emotions broaden cognitive-emotional awareness and build psychological resources, allowing individuals to connect their daily tasks to a larger sense of contribution (Fredrickson, 2001). This meaningful work fulfills core psychological needs for purpose and impact, generates autonomous motivation to generate, promote and implement novel ideas (Deci and Ryan, 2000). It acts as the key psychological conduit that transforms leader-provided affective resources into observable innovative actions.

We further identify the boundary conditions that strengthen or weaken this relationship. COR theory provides a useful lens, suggesting that the transfer and efficacy of resources – such as the positive affect provided by a leader – can depend on the presence of other supportive resources in the environment (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). We propose that employee perceptions of leader humor acts as one such critical contingent resource. Following Cooper *et al.*’s (2018) conceptualization, we view supervisor humor – the tendency to amuse others and engage in playful communication (Li *et al.*, 2024) – as a potent interpersonal resource. Humor actively reduces the social barriers and psychological distance inherent in formal hierarchies (Cooper, 2008). When employee perceived higher leader humor, it builds a secure and egalitarian climate, enhancing receptivity to the leader’s positive emotions and strengthening their effect on work meaningfulness. Conversely, when employee perceived low leader humor, the persistence of formal hierarchy weakens this receptivity, attenuating the emotional resource’s impact on meaningfulness and the subsequent pathway to innovation.

This study makes three integrated contributions. First, for an extended period, scholarly inquiry has predominantly centered on the technical aspects of incentivizing employee innovative behavior, such as fostering psychological safety and cultivating effective leadership (Sun *et al.*, 2024). Yet, recent years have seen growing calls to examine the role of leaders’ discrete characteristics and traits (Hughes *et al.*, 2018). In response, we introduce *leader-triggered positive emotion* as a novel antecedent to employee IWB. This contribution is timely, as it bridges two distinct but interrelated gaps. First, the innovation literature, while extensively investigating active leadership styles (e.g. transformational, empowering), has

called for exploration beyond styles to leader traits (Hughes *et al.*, 2018). Second, the affect literature acknowledges that while followers' *beliefs about* leader emotions are crucial (Sy and van Knippenberg, 2021), such schemas remain under-conceptualized, with research still relying heavily on the broad positive/negative valence of leader emotions (Van Knippenberg And Van Kleef, 2016). Our construct bridges these gaps by defining a specific, socially sourced leader characteristic – the positive emotion consciously attributed to the leader by the follower (Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012). This moves beyond studying general leader mood or broad styles, offering a precise, relational affective trait that answers the call for specificity (Madrid *et al.*, 2014).

Second, we advance theory by positioning *work meaningfulness* as the core psychological mechanism, illuminating the “trickle-up” construction of meaning from leader–employee affect. Although meaningful work is recognized as fundamental, its antecedents – particularly those originating in the leader–follower dyad – are theoretically underdeveloped (You *et al.*, 2021). Our model heeds Ferris *et al.*'s (2009) assertion that a relationship cannot be understood without its affective tone, positing that leader-triggered positive emotion is a critical relational input that fuels the construction of work meaningfulness. This addresses Bailey *et al.*'s (2019) call to better understand “trickle-up” meaning-making processes and shifts the scholarly focus on meaningfulness from its well-established downstream outcomes (e.g. performance) to its vital role as a mediator that channels leader-driven affective resources into innovation. This extends prior study that has explored meaningful work as a mediating role in the relationship between employees perceived social impact and task variety on IWB (Sun *et al.*, 2024).

Third, we provide a pivotal contextual contribution by reconceptualizing *leader humor* as a critical relational moderator that amplifies the mediated pathway, addressing the under-appreciation of context in both humor and innovation research. Prior humor studies often examine its unconditional effects or its contingency on individual differences, or its direct relationship with outcomes such as on creativity and IWB (Yang *et al.*, 2021; Pundt, 2014, 2024). This body of work largely overlooks that humor is a dynamic social signal whose impact is inseparable from its relational context (Yang *et al.*, 2024) – a neglect echoing broader critiques about context in organizational research (Johns, 2006). We theorize humor not as a direct driver but as a contextual “resource caravan passageway” (Hobfoll, 2011) that shapes how the leader's emotional resource is interpreted and converted. This directly answers the call to identify factors that influence how receivers interpret humor as a signal (Karakowsky *et al.*, 2020), positioning it as a catalyst that strengthens the link between leader emotion and follower meaning, thereby clarifying a critical condition for successful innovation leadership.

In this manner, we extend prior work (e.g. Yang *et al.*, 2021), which examined leader humor as a direct antecedent of creativity, with relational energy as the mediating mechanism and traditionality as a cultural boundary condition. By contrast, our study adopts a distinct theoretical framing: we position leader-triggered positive emotion as the focal antecedent of IWB, identify work meaningfulness as the core psychological mechanism and reconceptualize leader humor not as a predictor but as a contextual moderator. This shift from humor-as-antecedent to humor-as-moderator, combined with our focus on meaningfulness as the mediating state, offers a complementary perspective that extends the nomological network of leader affect and innovation. Figure 1 portrays our proposed research model.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Conservation of resources theory

To provide a coherent theoretical foundation, we anchor our framework in the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The COR theory frames well-being in terms of the acquisition, retention and protection of resources – defined as valued objects, personal attributes, conditions or forms of energy (Hobfoll, 2001). The theory posits that individuals strive to obtain and safeguard resources, experience stress when resources are threatened or lost and are motivated to build resource reservoirs to mitigate such stress (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). In our model, we specifically

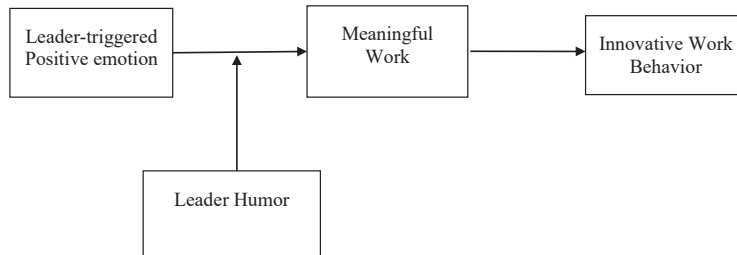


Figure 1. Proposed research model

draw upon three key COR tenets: (1) resource possession reduces susceptibility to stress and enhances coping capacity; (2) resource gains can initiate gain spirals, wherein initial resources beget further resource accumulation (Hobfoll, 2001) and (3) the environment can either foster or constrain resource cultivation (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). These principles collectively inform our understanding of how affective and social resources flow, convert and enable behavioral investment within organizational contexts.

Applying the COR theory, we conceptualize the relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and IWB as a resource gain spiral, through work meaningfulness. This spiral begins when leader-triggered positive emotion serves as an initial *affective resource gain*. Consistent with COR's first tenet, this gain enhances an employee's capacity to manage psychological demands. We posit that employees *invest* this affective resource to cultivate a more stable and foundational asset: work meaningfulness. This conversion illustrates COR's second tenet: an initial resource is strategically transformed into another, more enduring resource, initiating a gain spiral. This accrued reservoir of meaningfulness provides the motivational capital necessary for employees to confidently invest their resources into the demanding, multi-stage process of IWB. This aligns with Hobfoll's (2002) assertion that individuals with ample resources are not only better shielded from stress and resource loss but are also more capable to engage proactively with complex challenges – such as the pursuit of innovation.

Furthermore, the moderating role of leader humor is explained by COR's third tenet: the environment's role will cultivate or constrain the resources. Humor functions as a critical contextual resource that shapes the relational environment. When leader humor is high, it creates a resource-rich environment characterized by psychological safety and reduced hierarchical distance. This environment promotes and cultivates the initial resource conversion process: it enhances the employee's receptivity to the leader's positive emotion and facilitates its internalization as deep meaningfulness. Conversely, when leader humor is low, the environment is more resource-constraining. Although employees notice their leader positive emotion, the persistent formal hierarchy restricts and hinders the same conversion, weakening the link between the leader's affective resource and the employee's sense of meaning. Thus, humor moderates our mediated model by determining the efficiency of the resource gain spiral, yet also extending the concept of resource caravans, wherein interrelated resources travel together and reinforce one another (Hobfoll, 2011).

2.2 Mediating role of work meaningfulness

We posit that leader-triggered positive emotions are a critical resource that enhances employee work meaningfulness. This proposition is grounded in COR theory, which posits that resources accumulate in interrelated “caravans” that mutually reinforce one another (Hobfoll, 2011). The flow and protection of these resources depend on supportive contextual conditions or “passageways” (Hobfoll, 2014). In the leader–follower dynamic, a leader's positive emotional expression constitutes such a key resource and passageway. This is consistent with research

indicating that leaders deliberately use emotional displays to influence followers, guided by shared beliefs about which emotions are appropriate and effective (Fein and Isaacson, 2009).

When a leader consistently expresses positive emotions, it creates a powerful interpersonal regulation effect. Such regulation is known to directly shape the interaction of affective experience, well-being and relational quality, with parallel evidence from performance contexts like sports (Tamminen and Crocker, 2013). Applied to the workplace, a leader's positive emotion positively influences an employee's cognitive-affective state, fostering enjoyment and a more positive appraisal of work tasks (Caniëls *et al.*, 2022). Critically, this consistent, positive emotional signaling is interpreted by employees as a sign of respect and validation and embedded within a supportive relational passageway, enables the initial affective resource (positive emotion) to be converted into a deeper, more stable psychological resource: the perception that one's work is valuable and significant. Thus, the leader's positive emotion initiates a resource gain caravan, where the affective resource travels alongside and cultivates the key resource of work meaningfulness.

H1. Leader-triggered positive emotion is positively related to employee work meaningfulness.

In recent years, scholarly attention has increasingly turned to the temporality of meaningful work, illuminating it not as a static condition but as an episodic and dynamic experience (Bailey and Madden, 2017). This perspective recognizes that an employee's sense of meaning fluctuates daily, functioning as a variable state sensitive to environmental cues, psychological shifts and specific work conditions (Bailey *et al.*, 2019; Lysova *et al.*, 2023). In the heightened meaningfulness, employees are theorized to be more open to exploration and skill development, as they directly link their personal growth to significant organizational and societal contributions (Wallace *et al.*, 2016). Building centrally upon this foundation, we posit that an employee's perception of work meaningfulness serves as a pivotal psychological resource that directly fuels engagement in IWB. The proposed mechanism is that meaningful work fundamentally amplifies employee vitality and agency by creating a powerful alignment between an individual's daily tasks and their core personal values, as well as the broader mission of the organization (Lu *et al.*, 2025). This alignment does more than just invigorate; it fosters a resonant, authentic connection with work that catalyzes deep-seated intrinsic motivation (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005).

When work is perceived as meaningful, it transcends mere duty and becomes a channel for purpose, energizing employees to invest discretionary effort and cognitive resources. This perspective is grounded in the COR theory, resource gain spirals, where initial resource acquisitions enable and motivate the pursuit of further resources, creating a compounding, upward trajectory (Hobfoll, 2001). That is, the resource gain derived from work meaningfulness begets another resource gain, culminating in the generation and pursuit of innovative ideas. Meaningful work not merely as a passive attitude or a pleasant feeling, but as an active, foundational psychological resource that satisfies profound human needs for purpose, contribution and existential significance (Steger *et al.*, 2012). While the possession of this resource has been shown to correlate with greater job satisfaction and commitment (Geldenhuis *et al.*, 2014), more critically for our model, it also empowers employees to confidently invest their personal resources – such as time, cognitive effort and social capital – into the risky and effortful multi-stage process of innovation. Employees who perceive their work to be meaningful tend to show positive psychological states such as vitality and self-esteem, which directly contribute to IWB (Sun *et al.*, 2024).

H2. Employee work meaningfulness is positively related with their IWB.

Fostering innovation represents a critical leadership priority, rendering the connection between leadership characteristics and innovative outcomes both theoretically and practically vital (Hughes *et al.*, 2018). The COR theory posits that the acquisition and preservation of personal and contextual resources are fundamental to motivation and performance.

In organizational settings, supportive resources – such as opportunities for professional growth and a positive work environment – nurture employees' internal resources, initiating a resource gain spiral wherein initial resources enable the accumulation of further resources, thereby promoting continuous improvement and sustained engagement (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002).

Building on this perspective, we propose that employee work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and IWB. Leader-triggered positive emotion functions as a key affective resource within the COR framework that unfolds through three interrelated mechanisms. First, positive emotions signal environmental safety and conducive conditions (Fredrickson, 2001). Such safety is essential for creativity, as it encourages individuals to engage in proactive, risk-tolerant behaviors like innovation (Carmeli and Spreitzer, 2009). Second, positive emotions promote heuristic and creative cognitive processing, which directly supports the generation of novel ideas and solutions. This positive perception functions as a valued psychological resource that employees are motivated to pursue, as it enables individuals to build the conditions necessary for further resource accumulation (Sun *et al.*, 2024). Third, by broadening an individual's scope of attention (Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005), positive emotions enhance cognitive flexibility, improve goal-setting – often toward more challenging objectives (Cardon *et al.*, 2009) – and galvanize the effort required for innovative action (Caniëls *et al.*, 2022). Together, it illustrates how a leader-provided affective resource is converted into the psychological resource of employees work meaningfulness, which in turn fuels the resource investment necessary for IWB, completing a generative resource gain spiral.

H3. Employee work meaningfulness mediates the relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and employee IWB.

2.3 Moderating role of leader humor

The COR theory provides a critical lens for understanding how the transfer and efficacy of emotional resources depend on supportive environmental conditions (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). We propose that leader humor functions moderates the relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and work meaningfulness. While positive emotions from a leader constitute an initial affective resource gain, their successful conversion into a deeper psychological resource of meaningfulness requires a conducive relational climate – a resource caravan passageway (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). Leader humor creates this climate by operating through three interrelated mechanisms. First, an affective process: humor generates immediate positive affect that, over time, generalizes into a persistently positive atmosphere conducive to innovative thinking and behavior. Second, a cognitive process: the incongruity and surprise inherent in humor stimulate novel associations and creative cognitive processing. Third, a social process: humor reduces hierarchical distance and fosters psychological safety, enabling open communication and risk-taking essential for innovation (Pundt, 2014, 2024).

These mechanisms collectively determine the strength of the moderated relationship. When leader humor is high, the frequent use of affiliative humor fosters a relaxed, egalitarian and joyful atmosphere (Robert and Wilbanks, 2012). This atmosphere signals psychological safety and encourages open communication (Hu *et al.*, 2018). In this supportive context, employees are more receptive to the leader's positive emotions, view them as authentic and significant and are more likely to integrate them into their cognitive-affective appraisal of work (Yang *et al.*, 2024). This enhanced receptivity and attribution amplify the effect of leader-triggered positive emotion on work meaningfulness. Conversely, when leader humor is low, the relational climate remains more formal and distant. The lack of this contextual resource means the leader's positive emotional expressions are less likely to be perceived as personally significant or psychologically safe to internalize. The hierarchical gap persists, attenuating the employee's receptivity and attribution, which weakens the impact of leader-triggered positive emotion on meaningfulness.

- H4. The positive relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and employee work meaningfulness is moderated by leader humor, such that the relationship is stronger in the high level of leader humor.

Integrating our mediation and moderation propositions leads to moderated mediation hypothesis: leader humor moderates the strength of the indirect relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and IWB through work meaningfulness. This hypothesis aligns with the understanding that specific leadership behaviors – such as humility, which opens space for team voice and innovation (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2011) – create the relational context necessary for complex processes to unfold. The level of leader humor is theorized to critically shape this context, thereby determining the potency of the mediated resource pathway.

Under conditions of high leader humor, the frequent use of affiliative and positive humor fosters an egalitarian and secure relational climate. This climate enhances a subordinate's receptivity to, and attribution of, the leader's positive emotions, transforming a fleeting affective exchange into a significant interpersonal experience. This process amplifies the effect of leader-triggered positive emotion on the employee's sense of work meaningfulness and cultivates the psychological safety necessary for the risk-taking inherent in IWB (Edmondson, 1999). Conversely, under conditions of low leader humor, the relational climate remains formal and hierarchical. The persistent psychological distance diminishes the employee's receptivity and attribution, making the leader's positive emotional expressions less likely to be internalized as personally significant. Consequently, the effect on work meaningfulness is attenuated, and lower perceived psychological safety may inhibit the full engagement in IWB.

- H5. The positive indirect relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and IWB through employee work meaningfulness is moderated by leader humor, such that the relationship is stronger in the high level of leader humor.

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and procedure

Data were collected in three waves, spaced one month apart, from employees and supervisor working in four distinct sectors – financial services, education, automotive and manufacturing – located across four different provinces in Indonesia. Participation was voluntary, and respondents' confidentiality was strictly protected. To reduce the likelihood of social desirability and acquiescence biases, participants were assured that their rights were protected (Spector, 2006). Each paper-and-pencil questionnaire was assigned a unique code to enable reliability within-person matching across time points. With the assistance of the heads and staff of each firm's human resources department, members of the research team distributed and later retrieved the surveys on-site during regular working hours.

At Time 1, employees provided demographic information and rated their immediate supervisor's positive emotion. Four weeks later (Time 2), the same employees evaluated the study's mediators and moderator variables – namely, perceived work meaningfulness and their supervisor engagement in humor. Last, direct supervisors were asked to evaluate each employee IWB. The temporal separation between data collection points was intentionally designed to mitigate common method and expectancy biases, reducing the likelihood that employees might infer the research hypotheses by assessing key constructs simultaneously (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Of the 500 employees invited, 423 completed the Time 1 survey, 394 participated in the Time 2 survey and supervisor rated 354 of their employees' IWB. After excluding unmatched or incomplete pairs, 349 (69.8%) useable responses remained. The questionnaires were translated into Indonesian following the back-translation procedure developed by Brislin *et al.* (1972). This method involves translating the original questionnaires into Indonesian and then back-translating them into the source language by a different

translator. The two versions are then compared to identify and resolve any discrepancies. This method ensured the translated tools maintained the original items’ intent, enhancing their validity and applicability in the target cultural setting. Table 1 shows that: demographically, participants were predominantly female (70.5%). In terms of education, 63.0% held bachelor degrees, while 35.2% had above six years of work experience. The largest age group was 25–34 years (39.0%).

3.2 Measures

All measurement instruments adopted from validated scales published in peer-reviewed journals.

Leader-triggered positive emotion. Subordinates indicated their leader-triggered positive emotion using eight item (e.g. “Whenever I meet my supervisor, I feel happy” and “My supervisor brings joy to me by his or her behaviors”) developed by Nifadkar *et al.* (2012) on a five-point scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). $\alpha = 0.971$, $\omega = 0.971$.

Leader humor. Subordinates responded to the three-item by Cooper *et al.* (2018), measure on a five-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much so). Subordinates indicated their perceptions of their leader using the following statements: “How frequently does your manager express humor with you at work, overall?” and “My manager jokes around with me” $\alpha = 0.563$, $\omega = 0.674$ [1].

Work meaningfulness. We asked employee to rate the extent to which they consider their work is meaningfulness using a three-item scale from Spreitzer (1995) on a five-point scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). This survey version has also been used in previous studies (e.g. Peng *et al.*, 2024). Employees were asked to rate their agreement with statements such as: “You feel that you are doing meaningful work” and “Your job activities are personally meaningful to you.” $\alpha = 0.891$, $\omega = 0.891$.

Innovative Work Behavior. Supervisors rated the focal employee’s IWB using the nine-item scale developed by Janssen (2000), originally from Scott and Bruce (1994) on a five-point

Table 1. Demographics details

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	103	29.5%
Female	246	70.5%
<i>Education</i>		
Below high school level	5	1.4%
High school	78	22.3%
Undergraduate	220	63.0%
Master	44	12.6%
Ph.D.	2	0.6%
<i>Age</i>		
18–24 years	99	28.4%
25–34 years	136	39.0%
35–44 years	71	20.3%
45–54 years	35	10.0%
55–64 years	8	2.3%
<i>Tenure</i>		
Less than one year	60	17.2%
1–2 years	78	22.3%
2–4 years	59	16.9%
5–6 years	29	8.3%
More than 6 years	123	35.2%

scale from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Always”). Sample items are, “How often does this employee create new ideas for difficult issues” and “How often does this employee transform innovative ideas into useful applications.” $\alpha = 0.881$, $\omega = 0.881$.

Control variables. Following prior study, we controlled for several employee demographic variables. Given previous findings that employees who have worked longer in an organization are less committed – or even resistant – to change (Shin *et al.*, 2012), we controlled for employees’ organizational tenure. Prior research notes that females tend to be assessed, overall, as better performers than males (Roth *et al.*, 2012). Various studies have found that supervisors evaluate older subordinates lower than their younger peers (Bouckennooghe *et al.*, 2015). Prior research demonstrates that employee education is identified with various ratings of the employee’s characteristics (Li *et al.*, 2020).

Common Method Bias. We assessed the potential influence of common method bias using multiple complementary approaches. Following recommendations by Fuller *et al.* (2016), we first performed Harman’s single-factor test on all variables. The results revealed that a single factor accounted for 35.1% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias is not a pervasive issue. We further conducted a latent common method factor analysis by adding a common method factor to our four-factor measurement model, allowing all indicator variables to load on both their respective theoretical constructs and the latent CMV factor (Williams *et al.*, 1989). The results revealed that the common method factor marginally improved model fit ($\chi^2 = 416.612$, $df = 224$; $\chi^2 = 395.812$, $df = 223$; $\Delta\chi^2 = 20.800$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). The method factor accounted for only 14% of variance, less than 25% as the threshold suggested by Williams *et al.* (2010). These results show that the standardized loadings on the method factor were relatively small, and the pattern and significance of relationships among substantive constructs remained unchanged. These results indicate that while a minor method effect exists, it does not substantively threaten the validity of our conclusions (Fuller *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, CMV tends to attenuate rather than inflate interaction effects (Siemens *et al.*, 2010), suggesting that our significant moderation finding is a conservative estimate. Collectively, these tests provide confidence that our findings are not artifacts of common method variance.

3.3 Analytic technique

We tested our hypotheses using multiple regression analysis and Hayes *et al.* (2017) PROCESS macro (Version 4.0), which employs a bootstrapping approach that does not require normally distributed indirect effects (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2004). The analysis proceeded in three stages: First, we examined the direct relationships between (1) leader-triggered positive emotion and employee work meaningfulness (H1) and (2) work meaningfulness and IWB (H2). Next, we tested the mediation hypothesis (H3) using PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples to generate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for the relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion on IWB. Finally, we evaluated the moderating role of leader humor (H4 and H5) through two complementary analyses: (1) a multiple regression examining the leader-triggered positive emotion $\times$ leader humor interaction on work meaningfulness, and (2) PROCESS Model 7 to assess moderated mediation, where leader humor moderates the first-stage path (leader-triggered positive emotion on work meaningfulness) but not the second-stage path (work meaningfulness on IWB). For this analysis, we computed conditional indirect effects at three levels of leader humor: -1 SD (low), mean (average) and $+1$ SD (high) from the mean, with significance determined through 5,000 bootstrap samples.

4. Results

We tested discriminant validity through confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 22.0. The hypothesized four-factor model (leader-triggered positive emotion, leader humor, work meaningfulness and IWB separately) demonstrated good fit: $\chi^2(224) = 1860$, CFI = 0.968,

TLI = 0.964, IFI = 0.968, RMSEA = 0.050, SRMR = 0.039 compare with the three-factor model (combined leader humor and work meaningfulness): $\chi^2(227) = 3034$, CFI = 0.923, TLI = 0.914, IFI = 0.923, RMSEA = 0.076, SRMR = 0.066. and two factor model (combined leader-triggered positive emotion, leader humor and work meaningfulness): $\chi^2(229) = 4716$, CFI = 0.858, TLI = 0.843, IFI = 0.858, RMSEA = 0.103, SRMR = 0.063.

We established robust construct validity by examining both convergent and discriminant validity following [Hair et al.'s \(2006\)](#) guidelines. All measurement items demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with standardized factor loadings exceeding the recommended 0.50 threshold across constructs. The scales showed excellent internal consistency, with all composite reliability values surpassing the 0.70 benchmark. Average variance extracted estimates are more than 0.50 except for leader humor (0.468). Previous research suggests that AVE values lower than 0.50 but higher than 0.40 are acceptable in under-explored country settings (e.g. [De Clercq and Pereira, 2019](#); [Fornell and Larcker, 1981](#)). [Table 2](#) shows the results.

[Table 3](#) presents the means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among study variables, with all predictors mean-centered to facilitate interpretation ([Aiken et al., 1991](#)). The correlation matrix revealed theoretically consistent patterns: leader-triggered positive emotion positively related with meaningful work ($r = 0.506, p < 0.01$), while meaningful work was positively related to IWB ($r = 0.238, p < 0.01$). Leader humor also positively related with meaningful work ($r = 0.155, p < 0.01$) and IWB ($r = 0.118, p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Validity results

	Factor loading
<i>Leader trigger positive emotions (CR = 0.975; AVE = 0.832)</i>	
	0.908
	0.933
	0.924
	0.919
	0.937
	0.936
	0.848
	0.888
<i>Leader humor (CR = 0.721; AVE = 0.468)</i>	
	0.578
	0.638
	0.814
<i>Meaningful work (CR = 0.932; AVE = 0.820)</i>	
	0.883
	0.913
	0.921
<i>Innovative work behavior (CR = 0.915; AVE = 0.546)</i>	
	0.734
	0.696
	0.749
	0.743
	0.710
	0.750
	0.755
	0.775
	0.738

Table 3. Means, standard deviation and correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	–							
2. Age	–0.046	–						
3. Education	–0.027	0.326**	–					
4. Tenure	–0.075	0.674**	0.257**	–				
5. LTPE	0.014	0.143**	–0.016	0.119*	–			
6. Leader humor	–0.088	–0.118*	–0.078	–0.013	0.400**	–		
7. Meaningful work	0.026	0.260**	0.122*	0.236**	0.506**	0.155**	–	
8. IWB	–0.174**	0.235**	0.238**	0.290**	0.104	0.118*	0.238**	–
Mean	0.705	2.189	2.885	3.221	3.695	3.581	4.226	3.628
Standard deviation	0.457	1.030	0.646	1.537	0.803	0.636	0.716	0.807

Note(s): $n = 349$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$. LTPE = Leader-triggered positive emotions

As presented in Table 4, our analyses yielded strong support for the hypothesized relationships. First, we found a significant positive relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and employee work meaningfulness ($\beta = 0.481$, $p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 1. Supporting Hypothesis 2, work meaningfulness demonstrated a positive relationship with IWB ($\beta = 0.176$, $p < 0.001$). The mediation analysis (Hypothesis 3) revealed a significant indirect effect of leader-triggered positive emotions and IWB through employee work meaningfulness (effect size = 0.086, 95% CI [0.034; 0.145]). Since the direct effect of leader-triggered positive emotion on IWB is not significant ($\beta = -0.155$, n.s.): we fully concur that this indicates full mediation. Crucially, we found a significant positive interaction between leader-triggered positive emotion $\times$ leader humor on work meaningfulness ($\beta = 0.996$, $p < 0.01$). Figure 2 also illustrates a crossover interaction pattern: when leader-triggered positive emotion is high, high leader humor is associated with greater work meaningfulness than low leader humor. However, when leader-triggered positive emotion is low, high leader humor is associated with lower work meaningfulness than low leader humor. This pattern indicates that leader humor serves as an amplifier only when accompanied by congruent positive emotional signals from the leader, but may paradoxically suppress meaningfulness when such signals are weak. Hypothesis 4 is supported. Last, the moderated mediation pattern was further confirmed through conditional process analysis: the indirect effect was strongest at low leader humor levels ($\beta = 0.072$, 95% CI [0.025, 0.127]), at mean levels ($\beta = 0.094$, 95% CI [0.036, 0.151]) and at high levels ($\beta = 0.116$, 95% CI [0.044, 0.187]). The results show statistically significant index of moderated mediation ($\beta = 0.033$, 95% CI [0.002, 0.072]). This thereby supports Hypothesis 5 and our integrated theoretical framework.

5. Discussion

While prior research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of positive leadership and affect for employee performance and creativity, the specific pathways and conditions that enable *leader-triggered positive emotion* to translate into IWB remain underexplored. In particular, the resource-based mechanisms and relational contingencies that determine when this effect is strongest are not well-understood. To address this gap and respond to calls for deeper inquiry into the generative mechanisms of positive emotion (Madrid *et al.*, 2014), we applied the COR theory (Hobfoll, 2002). Our findings reveal that leader-triggered positive emotion fuels IWB indirectly by building the psychological resource of work meaningfulness. Furthermore, this indirect effect is significantly strengthened by leader humor. By empirically testing this moderated mediation model in an organizational setting, our study offers nuanced theoretical insights and actionable implications for how leaders can more effectively catalyze innovation.

Table 4. Hypotheses results

	Meaningful work		Step 2 b	VIF	Step 3 b	VIF	Innovative work behavior		Step 2 b	VIF
	Step 1 b	VIF					Step 1 b	VIF		
Gender	0.044	1.006	0.033	1.006	0.033	1.018	−0.151**	1.006	−0.159***	1.008
Age	0.173*	1.920	0.108	1.939	0.100	2.015	0.026	1.920	−0.005	1.953
Education	0.038	1.122	0.073	1.128	0.057	1.141	0.169**	1.122	0.162**	1.124
Tenure	0.113	1.844	0.091	1.846	0.091	1.858	0.218***	1.844	0.198**	1.858
LTPE			0.481***	1.027	−0.155	1.273				
Leader humor					−0.553**	1.265				
LH x LTPE					0.996**	1.044				
Work Meaningfulness									0.176***	1.084
F	7.233***		29.734***		22.944***		13.520***		13.510***	
R ²	0.078		0.302		0.320		0.136		0.165	
Δ R ²			0.224		0.018				0.029	
			Effect size		Bootstrap SE		LLCI		ULCI	
<i>Bias corrected 95% confidence interval^a</i>										
Indirect effect			0.086		0.028		0.034		0.145	
<i>Conditional indirect effect for meaningful work</i>										
−1 SD			0.072		0.026		0.025		0.127	
Mean			0.094		0.029		0.036		0.151	
+1 SD			0.116		0.036		0.044		0.187	
Index of moderated mediation			0.033		0.018		0.002		0.072	
Note(s): <i>n</i> = 349. Standardized beta coefficients are presented,										
* <i>p</i> < 0.05; ** <i>p</i> < 0.01; *** <i>p</i> < 0.001, ^a 5000 bootstrap samples were employed										

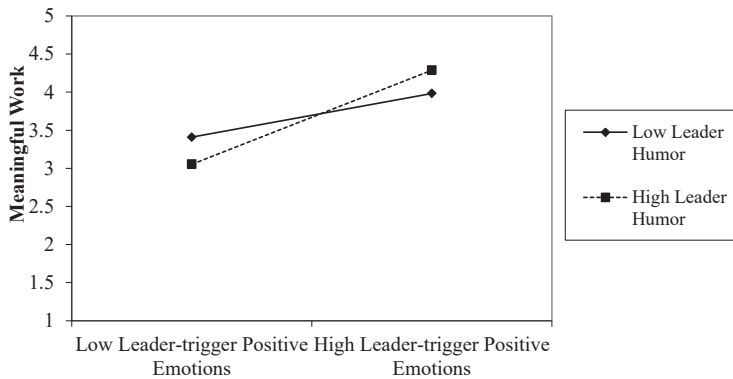


Figure 2. Moderating plot of leader humor

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study offers several theoretical implications. First, we advance understanding of the affect-innovation nexus by introducing leader-triggered positive emotion as a novel, socially sourced antecedent of IWB. Prior studies have predominantly focused either on how emotional valence explains innovation-related performance metrics, often overlooking the behavioral process of IWB (Madrid *et al.*, 2014), or have relied on general, composite measures of IWB (Madrid *et al.*, 2014). While the broad dimension of positive affect – encompassing various positive feelings and moods (Watson *et al.*, 1988) – has been shown to foster creative performance (e.g. Amabile *et al.*, 2004), our study refines this conceptualization by specifying a discrete, relational source of positive affect: the positive emotion consciously attributed to the leader (Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012). In doing so, we respond to calls for greater precision in leadership trait research (Hughes *et al.*, 2018) and address the under-conceptualization of followers' beliefs about leader emotions (Sy and van Knippenberg, 2021). Our findings demonstrate that this specific affective resource serves as a meaningful antecedent to the full, multidimensional process of IWB, responding to the call for research examining the impact of positive emotions on specific innovative behaviors (Madrid *et al.*, 2014).

Second, we illuminate work meaningfulness as the core psychological mechanism. The full mediation observed in our model – whereby leader-triggered positive emotion exerts no significant direct effect on IWB but operates entirely through meaningfulness – provides strong empirical support for this theoretical position. While meaningful work is recognized as fundamental to employee development (Bailey *et al.*, 2019), its antecedents – particularly those stemming from the leader-employee dyad – remain theoretically underdeveloped (You *et al.*, 2021). Our model explicitly addresses this gap by heeding Ferris *et al.*'s (2009: 1384) assertion that “There is little about a relationship that can be understood without understanding its affective tone.” By positing leader-triggered positive emotion as a critical relational input that fuels the construction of work meaningfulness, we answer Bailey *et al.*'s (2019) call to better understand the “trickle-up” meaning-making processes. Furthermore, we extend the meaningful work study which mostly focused on its downstream outcomes (e.g. engagement, performance; Allan *et al.*, 2019; Lysova *et al.*, 2019), by positioning it as a vital mediator that channels leader-driven affective resources into the proactive, multi-stage efforts of innovation.

Third, we offer a refined theoretical understanding of leader humor by reconceptualizing it as a critical contextual moderator that amplifies the resource conversion process from leader-triggered positive emotion to IWB. Our findings reveal that humor functions as a resource caravan passageway (Hobfoll, 2011) that shapes the efficiency of converting affective resources into meaningful work. This addresses a significant limitation in the literature, where

humor is often examined for its unconditional main effects or contingent upon stable individual differences (e.g. [Carnevale et al., 2022](#)). Such approaches overlook the fact that humor is a dynamic social signal whose meaning and impact are inseparable from the relational context in which it is embedded ([Yang et al., 2024](#)) – a concern echoing [Johns's \(2006\)](#) broader critique about the under-appreciation of context in organizational research. Consistent with our *a priori* hypothesis ([H4](#)), we found that when leader humor is high, the positive relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and work meaningfulness is significantly stronger (steeper slope) compared to when leader humor is low, confirming humor's amplifying role.

Interestingly, the interaction plot revealed an unexpected crossover pattern. When leader humor is high, the positive relationship between leader-triggered positive emotion and work meaningfulness is stronger (steeper slope) compared to when leader humor is low, supporting our amplification hypothesis. However, an unanticipated finding emerged: at low levels of leader-triggered positive emotion, high leader humor was associated with lower work meaningfulness than low leader humor, suggesting that humor may paradoxically backfire when positive emotional signals from the leader are weak. We theorize this effect through an incongruence or “backfire” lens: when leader employ humor in the absence of genuine positive emotional signaling, subordinates may perceive such humor as inauthentic, dismissive or superficial ([Cooper et al., 2018](#)). This incongruence can undermine the relational climate and paradoxically diminish the perceived significance of work. We acknowledge this as an exploratory finding that was not anticipated in our original hypotheses but emerged during data analysis. Rather than diminishing our core contribution, we believe this discovery enriches our understanding of humor's contextual effects by revealing that leader humor amplifies the beneficial effect of leader-triggered positive emotion when leader-triggered positive emotion is present, but may suppress meaningfulness when leader-triggered positive emotion is weak. This finding extends humor research beyond dominant frameworks of social exchange or stress relief (e.g. [Cooper et al., 2018](#)) and answers the call to identify factors that shape how receivers *interpret* humor as a social signal ([Karakowsky et al., 2020](#)). It positions leader humor not as an amplifier but as a contextual signal whose effect is contingent upon the presence of congruent positive emotional cues from the leader. This nuanced perspective offers a more complete account of when and why leader humor facilitates – or undermines – the meaning-innovation pathway, while opening new avenues for future research to explicitly test the boundary conditions under which humor may become counterproductive.

Fourth, our findings contribute to the cultural contextualization of leadership and innovation research by examining these relationships within Indonesia's high power distance context (Hofstede score of 78; [Hofstede, 1980](#)). In such settings, subordinates maintain social harmony and exhibit deference to superiors ([Sofyan et al., 2024](#)), making them particularly attuned to leaders' emotional cues. This suggests that leader-triggered positive emotion may be especially consequential, as employees interpret such signals as indicators of respect and inclusion. Conversely, when humor is deployed without genuine positive emotional backing, the incongruence may be particularly damaging – perceived as a violation of hierarchical respect and thus amplifying the “backfire” effect. This cultural dynamic underscores the importance of emotional authenticity in leadership, suggesting that the mechanisms we identify may be particularly potentially more precarious in high power distance contexts of Indonesia.

Finally, our findings offer theoretical insights for understanding how organizations can scale innovation capacity. At the individual level, our results suggest that cultivating work meaningfulness is essential for channeling leader affective resources into innovation. At the relational level, we theorize that organizations should develop leaders' capacity for authentic, affiliative humor as a complement to genuine positive emotion, not as a standalone tactic; which reveals that humor without authentic positive affect can paradoxically reduce meaningfulness. At the systemic level, we propose that organizations should design innovation ecosystems – incorporating mechanisms for idea generation, promotion and

implementation – underpinned by psychological safety and positive relational exchange (Edmondson, 1999). In high power distance contexts, deliberate mechanisms such as anonymous submission and structured upward feedback may be necessary to counteract hierarchical deference. By connecting our micro-level findings to these organizational design implications, we demonstrate how our model informs the broader challenge of building innovation capacity at scale – a core concern of innovation management scholarship.

5.2 Managerial implications

The results of this study also offer several practical implications for both organization and employees, grounded specifically in our empirical findings. First, we found leader-triggered positive emotions enhances IWB through work meaningfulness (full mediation) carries a critical practical implication: leaders cannot simply “cheer up” employees and expect innovation to follow. Instead, the emotional spark must be translated into a genuine sense of purpose. For organizations, this implies moving beyond evaluating leaders solely on technical or results-based metrics to include their affective influence – affective influence – specifically, their capacity to generate positive emotions that employees consciously attribute to them (Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012). Leadership development programs should train managers in emotional granularity – the ability to recognize, label and intentionally express a range of positive emotions (e.g. enthusiasm, pride, serenity) to authentically inspire their teams (Barsade and Gibson, 2007). Systems that promote regular, positive leader-member interactions, such as structured check-ins focused on support and recognition, can institutionalize this resource flow. For employees, the implication is to actively seek and recognize these emotional resources. This involves practicing affective receptivity – consciously acknowledging and internalizing positive cues from leaders – and providing feedback to reinforce effective emotional leadership, thereby participating in the co-creation of a resource-rich environment.

Second, our study shows that leader humor strengthen the leader-triggered positive emotions–IWB relationship only when accompanied by congruent positive emotional signals offers a more nuanced practical implication than simply “use more humor.” Organizations should legitimize and skillfully integrate humor as a leadership tool, but with clear caveats. Training should differentiate positive, affiliative humor from sarcastic or aggressive styles (Martin *et al.*, 2003), and by coaching leaders on contextual appropriateness – using humor to reduce tension, build cohesion and reframe challenges (Pundt, 2015). Critically, our crossover interaction reveals that humor without authentic positive emotional backing can backfire, reducing meaningfulness. Therefore, leadership development should emphasize emotional authenticity alongside humor, ensuring that humorous behaviors are perceived as genuine rather than dismissive or superficial (Cooper *et al.*, 2018). Companies can foster a light-heartedness culture by allowing informal interactions and celebrating team wins playfully. For leaders (as employees themselves), the practical takeaway is to cultivate authentic, relational humor. This does not mean becoming a comedian, but rather developing a mindful practice of using light-heartedness to connect, signal safety and humanize the workplace, thereby building the relational “conduit” through which other resources flow more effectively.

Third, the results also show that the perception of work meaningfulness also important in mediates the leader-triggered positive emotion-IWB relationship. This implies that organizations must move beyond surface-level emotional leadership to actively architect roles and craft narratives that connect daily tasks to a larger purpose (Rosso *et al.*, 2010). This involves job crafting initiatives – encouraging employees to proactively reshape their tasks, relationships and cognitive perceptions of work to enhance meaning (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) – alongside clear communication of how individual work impacts organizational goals and societal benefits (Grant, 2007). Creating platforms for employees to share stories of impact can reinforce this connection (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Structuring work to provide autonomy, feedback and connection to beneficiaries directly fosters meaningfulness (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). For the individual employee, the implication

is proactive sense-making and job crafting (Berg *et al.*, 2010). Employees can enhance their own sense of meaning by deliberately reflecting on and articulating the value of their contributions, seeking tasks that align with personal values and building relationships with colleagues and clients who benefit from their work, thereby taking ownership of their psychological resource reservoir.

Finally, our full mediation finding underscores that innovation cannot be mandated – it must be enabled through meaningful work. The key organizational implication is to create a culture and infrastructure that supports the entire innovation process, not just idea generation. This requires establishing psychologically safe team climates where risk-taking is encouraged (Edmondson, 1999), implementing formal idea incubator programs with dedicated resources and sponsorship (West, 2002) and recognizing both successful implementations and valuable learned failures. Performance management systems should reward promotive and implementation behaviors, not just outcomes (Janssen, 2000). For employees, the implication is to adopt a proactive, resource-investment mindset. Understanding the fact that IWB is a resource-intensive process (Hobfoll, 2001), employees should strategically leverage their sense of meaningfulness and psychological safety to champion ideas, build coalitions and persevere through setbacks, thereby actively investing their personal resources for growth and impact.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This study is subject to limitations that offer valuable avenues for future research. First, our focus on leader-triggered positive emotion, while providing necessary depth, exclude other consequential affective states. Future research should examine whether other positive psychological resources, such as employee resilience (Caniëls *et al.*, 2022) or leader-expressed gratitude (Li *et al.*, 2022), function as similar antecedents. Furthermore, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of leadership affect, scholars should test the differential impacts of emotional valence and discrete emotions. Comparing the effects of leader-triggered positive emotion against those of negative emotions (e.g. anger, contempt, sadness), as well as other specific positive states (e.g. enthusiasm, compassion, relaxation), would clarify the unique role of positive affective attribution within the broader nomological network outlined by van Knippenberg and Van Kleef (2016).

Second, our focus on a single moderator limits the model's boundary conditions. Future research could incorporate organizational-level climates, such as climates for innovation or psychological safety, which may similarly strengthen or supersede the relational mechanisms we identified. Additionally, our operationalization of general leader humor, while parsimonious, overlooks meaningful nuances in humor expression. Prior research demonstrates that effects are often contingent on specific humor types, such as self-enhancing or coping humor (Sliter *et al.*, 2014). Future studies could dissect whether affiliative, self-defeating or other humor styles differentially impact the resource conversion process, offering a more granular understanding of how humor functions as a leadership tool.

More specifically, our exploratory finding that leader humor backfires when LTPE is low raises several compelling questions. First, researchers should test whether this backfire effect replicate across different cultural contexts. Given that our findings emerged in Indonesia's high power distance setting, it remains unclear whether the same pattern would hold in low power distance cultures where hierarchical expectations differ. Second, future studies could examine whether specific humor styles – particularly aggressive or self-defeating humor – amplify the backfire effect, while affiliative humor may mitigate it. Third, longitudinal designs could track whether the backfire effect is temporary or accumulates over time, potentially eroding meaningfulness and innovation capacity. Fourth, researchers could investigate whether individual differences – such as employee trait affectivity, regulatory focus or humor orientation – moderate the backfire pattern, identifying who is most susceptible to humor's negative effects. Fifth, experimental designs could manipulate both LTPE and leader humor to establish causality and isolate the underlying effect.

These avenues would strengthen the robustness of our findings and provide practical guidance for when and how leaders should deploy humor.

Third, our focus on work meaningfulness as the primary outcome presents a limitation in scope. The resource depletion process outlined by our model likely has broader implications for employee well-being. Future research could examine other critical well-being indicators, such as happiness, life satisfaction or psychological thriving. Additionally, a compelling avenue would be to investigate work meaninglessness as a distinct state of alienation and cynicism, rather than merely the low end of a meaningfulness scale, could offer a more nuanced understanding of the destructive end-point of the toxic leadership “loss spiral.”

Fourth, several methodological and contextual limitations should be acknowledged. Our reliance on employee-supervisor survey data, despite procedural remedies to minimize common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012), could be complemented by multi-method designs incorporating objective measures and longitudinal data. While our Indonesian context offers rich insights into emerging economies, the generalizability of findings across cultural settings merits systematic investigation. Cultural dimensions – particularly uncertainty avoidance, power distance, collectivism and family orientation – may significantly alter how leader-triggered positive emotion translates into IWB. Additionally, the leader humor measure demonstrated marginal internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.563$, $\omega = 0.674$). While short scales can produce lower alpha values (Lance *et al.*, 2006), and omega coefficients are less sensitive to scale length (Hayes and Coutts, 2020), we acknowledge this as a limitation. Future research should employ more comprehensive measures of leader humor to replicate our findings.

Last, while our multi-wave, multi-source design mitigates many common method concerns, both the mediator (work meaningfulness) and moderator (leader humor) were measured from the same employees at Time 2. Although our post-hoc tests indicated that common method bias is unlikely to be a pervasive issue – and the complexity of moderated mediation models makes it difficult for participants to anticipate hypotheses – we recognize this as a transparent limitation. Future research could collect leader humor ratings from peers or subordinates at a separate time point, or by employing an experimental or longitudinal design to more firmly establish causality and further rule out alternative explanations.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that a leader’s positive emotional spark can do more than just create a pleasant moment; under the right conditions, it can initiate a powerful resource-building cycle that fuels the entire innovation process. This study suggests that positive affect may increase work meaningfulness – a conversion increased by leader humor – providing employees with psychological capital to invest in the risky journey from idea generation to implementation. This process cultivates a generative spiral where emotional resources are not spent but multiplied, turning potential into progress and purpose into innovation. Ultimately, fostering leaders who skillfully pair positive emotion with humor can become a tactical advantage in creating sustainable innovative capacity within teams. We hope this study provides a foundational model for future research exploring the nuanced interplay between leadership, affect and IWB vitality.

Ethical approval

All procedures in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable standards.

Inform consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to author's request but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Note

1. [Lance et al. \(2006\)](#) demonstrates that Cronbach's alpha is sensitive to scale length; shorter scales (≤ 4 items) may have lower α (even < 0.6) while still being reliable in practice. Moreover, [Taber \(2018\)](#) mentioned that the score for Cronbach Alpha is acceptable in the range between 0.45 and 0.98. Despite this, we also report omega coefficients that are less prone to be inflated by higher number of items ([Hayes and Coutts, 2020](#)).

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