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## The Relationships between Perceived Organizational Support, Workplace Happiness, Organizational Trust, and Positive Meaning of Work: A Moderated-Mediation Model<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between perceived organizational support (POS), workplace happiness (WH), organizational trust (OT), and positive meaning of work (PMW) by applying a moderated mediation model. 394 firefighters (96.2% male; 3.8% female) working in metropolitan municipalities in Türkiye participated in a survey consisting of POS, OT, WH, and PMW scales. IBM SPSS, IBM SPSS plug-in Process Macro, and Amos Package programmes were used for data analysis. The mediation model demonstrated that POS predicted PMW. At the same time, WH mediated the effect of POS on PMW. Moreover, OT positively moderated the relationship between POS and

WH. In addition, the contingent effects of OT positively moderated the effect of POS on WH in all three conditions (one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean). The study demonstrated that POS, OT, and WH can increase the PMW. These findings provide important clues to increase the PMW, which is an important issue for employees.

**Keywords:** Perceived Organizational Support, Organizational Trust, Workplace Happiness, Positive Meaning of Work.

**JEL Codes:** D23, M12, M14

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## 1. Introduction

Firefighters work in many different disasters and emergencies, especially fires. Firefighters are exposed to high stress due to the nature of their work, experience time pressure, and can be physically and psychologically worn out. Firefighters contribute to their organizations with a collective approach, both aligned with the mission and vision goals of the organizations and aligned with their own career goals. Firefighters, like other employees, want to feel support from their colleagues and the organization in general for the work they do (Çelik, 2023). In this context, perceived organizational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986) has gained importance for firefighters, as it has in many different lines of work (Choi, 2020; Çelik, 2023). Employees contribute to their organizations, where they spend a significant amount of time in their lives. In this context, employees want to be valued by their organizations. For POS, the well-being, happiness, and perception of being valuable of the employee are important. When POS is evaluated from a general perspective, it is based on the relationship between the work the employee does and their expectations from the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1997; İplik et al., 2014; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Özdevecioğlu, 2003; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). İnan and Dönmez (2025) stated that POS acts as a buffer against negative situations within the organization. POS has played a positive role in the relationships between various variables in organizational management. Examples of some of these studies are: organizational commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Loi et al., 2006; Riggie et al., 2009), decrease in turnover intention (Anafarta, 2015; Perryer et al., 2010), job satisfaction (Akkoca, 2023; Çelik, 2023), job performance (Riggie et al., 2009; Uçar and Kerse, 2022), OT (Polat, 2010), and WH (Novliadi and Anggraini, 2020; Salsabila and Febrianti, 2022). Studies in the literature reveal the importance of POS.

With positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) coming to the fore in recent years, studies focusing on the positive mental well-being aspects of employees such as workplace happiness (WH) have become important (Fisher, 2010; Rodríguez-Muñoz & Sanz-Vergel, 2013). Happiness, which is one of the most basic emotions for people and is evaluated subjectively (Fisher, 2010), is considered a fundamental goal in terms of people's meaning in life and work (Diener, 2000). WH has an important place in the daily lives of individuals. In this context, WH is an important issue for both organizations and employees (Simmons, 2014; Turan, 2018). Muthukumar Mariapan et al. (2023) found that the satisfaction levels of firefighters have a positive effect on WH. If the personnel working in an organization are

happy and satisfied with their work, they can more easily cope with the difficulties they encounter in the organization compared to unhappier employees. Thus, it makes a significant contribution to performance from an organizational perspective (Gupta, 2012). In this context, as Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) stated in their study, it is understood that the happiness, welfare, and well-being of the employee are important elements in achieving the goals set by the organization in line with its mission and vision.

One of the important variables of our study, organizational trust (OT), has become remarkable in terms of organizational studies. The mutual dependence of employees on their superiors, coworkers, and therefore on the organization they work for is inevitable in terms of achieving individual and organizational goals and objectives. At this point, the concept of OT gains importance in terms of employees acting in cooperation and being effective and efficient (Mayer et al., 1995; McAllister, 1995). In studies conducted by researchers from different periods and disciplines, a widespread view has prevailed regarding the positive contributions of trust to organizations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Trust is the employee's tendency and desire to take risks instead of taking risks completely under all circumstances. This is the desire to be vulnerable (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust, from the perspective of a contemporary interdisciplinary approach, has been considered as a psychological phenomenon of accepting vulnerability based on positive expectations about someone (Rousseau et al., 1998). Although trust is sometimes considered similar to cooperation in organizations and is thought to provide cooperative behaviors, it is not considered one of the prerequisites of cooperation (Mayer et al., 1995). Risk and interdependence are seen as prerequisites of trust, which is the psychological state underlying behaviors such as cooperation and risk taking within the organization (Rousseau et al., 1998). In studies on firefighters, OT has been discussed in different contexts and in limited numbers (Colquitt et al., 2011; Flinchbaugh et al., 2024; Pratt et al., 2019; Rotenberg & Renhard, 2022). Shockley-Zalabak et al. (2000) stated that higher degrees of OT in terms of organizational trust climate will make organizations more advantageous in terms of success, adaptation, and innovation. Organizational crisis situations and organizational downsizing periods are the periods when the OT feeling is at the lowest level (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). In this respect, the effectiveness of OT in achieving organizational goals and objectives is understood (Özler & Yıldırım, 2015).

Finally, when positive meaning of work (PMW), which is the dependent variable of our study, is considered, as understood from the other variables above, working life has reached an important point in the lives of individuals (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1997). Posi-

tive psychology has increasingly become important in terms of organizational management regarding working life. Among the positive psychology variables, PMW stands out as well as happiness and the meaning of life (Akçakanat & Kılınç, 2021). In organizational research, the interpretation of PMW is evaluated within the framework of cognitive, individuals' feelings and experiences (Rosso et al., 2010). The basis of the employee's perceptions towards PMW is the employee's own subjective evaluation (Wrzesniewski, 2003). Rosso et al. (2010) stated that the word meaning is generally perceived positively in the business literature, and PMW is the positive perceptions that the employee shows towards his/her job, and categorized PMW under four headings (the self, other persons, spiritual life, and the work context). It is understood that PMW buffers negative behaviors within the organization, in addition to leading to positive organizational behaviors (Alparslan et al., 2022). PMW has been investigated in different contexts with positive effects in terms of firefighters, but in limited studies (Dan et al., 2020; Roşca et al., 2021). In this context, PMW has been discussed in different organizational areas. In these studies, PMW has been found to be positively correlated with positive variables and negatively correlated with negative variables (Daniel, 2015; Fairlie, 2011; May et al., 2004; Steger et al., 2012). As understood from some of the studies given as examples, PMW is important in terms of organizational behavior.

## 2. Conceptual Model

In addition to the effect of individual factors, the organizational factors in which individuals evaluate their jobs as meaningful also have a significant effect. In this context, individuals working in organizations, managers in the organization they work in, their colleagues, and perceived organizational support (POS) in general can contribute to positive meaning of work (PMW) (Seçkin, 2018). We can also evaluate the relationship between the POS and the PMW in terms of "social exchange theory" (Blau, 1964) and "Organizational Support Theory" (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In this line, employees, thanks to POS, may find their jobs more meaningful and contribute more to the benefit of the organization. The positive impact and relationship of POS on PMW have been discussed in various studies (Akgunduz et al., 2018; Karagöz & Uzunbacak, 2024; Nair, 2020; Novanto et al., 2021). Within the framework of literature knowledge, it is thought that POS will have a positive contribution to PMW in terms of firefighters, and the H1 hypothesis is proposed in this line.

POS in organizations has a positive effect on the attitudes and behaviors of employees, their level of commitment to their organizations, and their perceptions of happiness. This situation can be evaluated in terms of "social exchange theory" (Blau, 1964; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Akgunduz et al.

(2023) stated that this theory provides an important theoretical basis for the effect of POS on happiness. The thought that individuals are supported by the organization they work for contributes to their development of positive emotions (the organization commitment and job satisfaction, etc.) about the organization, which increases their workplace happiness (WH) levels (Joo & Lee, 2017; Akgunduz et al., 2023). The effect of POS on WH has been discussed in different studies (Akgunduz et al., 2023; Al-Taie, 2023; Novliadi & Anggraini, 2020). There are studies in the literature on the relationships between WH and PMW. However, these studies have generally studied the positive effect of PMW on WH (Charles-Leija et al., 2023; Mohsin et al., 2023; Yap & Badri, 2020). In our study, it is suggested that WH may also affect PMW. For firefighters, it is thought that WH will mediate POS and PMW, and hypothesis H2 is put forward.

Studies examining the relationship and effects between organizational trust (OT) and WH are very limited in number. Rahayuningsih (2019) explained the critical role of trust in the systematic review study on the positive effects of OT on organizations, as the development of working relationships to success the aims of the organization in line with its mission and vision. In her review, he found that OT provides positive results such as organizational citizenship, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work performance, security motivation, increased levels of effective organizational communication, and reduced intention to leave the job. Januwarsono (2015) stated that employees who are happier at work have higher job satisfaction than other employees and found that OT is one of the determining factors for happiness at work. Çaçan & Demirtaş (2023) found that OT and WH are highly and positively correlated in their study on teachers. We can evaluate the basis of the relationship between OT and WH, as in the other two hypotheses, with regard to "social exchange theory. According to literature information, it is thought that OT perceived by firefighters will increase the relationship between POS and WH, and in this direction, H3 hypothesis was put forward.

The information given regarding the variables we discussed in the study reveals the importance of the study in terms of firefighters being more effective and efficient. In this context, it was aimed to investigate the effect of the support perceived by firefighters who intervene in disasters and emergencies and work within the framework of a hierarchical structure on the positive meaning of the work, as well as the mediating and moderating roles of their perception of organizational trust and workplace happiness.

### 2.1. Research Hypotheses

**H1:** Perceived organizational support (POS) predicts positive meaning of work (PMW).

**H2:** Workplace happiness (WH) will mediate the relationship between perceived organizational sup-

port (POS) and positive meaning of work (PMW).

**H3:** Organizational trust (OT) will increase the rela-

tionship between perceived organizational support (POS) and workplace happiness (WH).

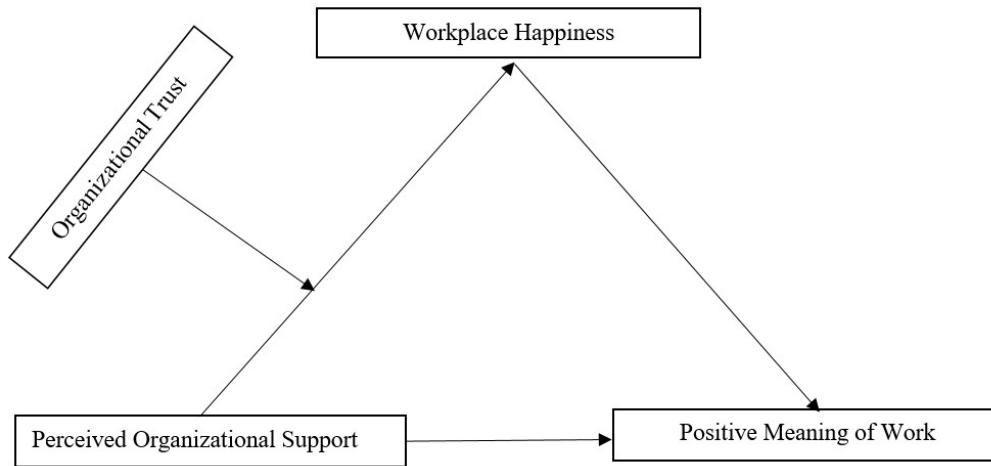


Figure 1. Research Model

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Measures

**Perceived organizational support scale:** To assess firefighters' perceived organizational support, this study used the abbreviated version of the scale originally developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) and later refined by the same authors in 1997. Whereas the original scale contains 36 items, the short version contains 8 items, 2 of which are reverse-coded. The short form was preferred because of its previously established validity and reliability. The Turkish adaptation was carried out by Akalın (2006). In the current research, the scale showed high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95.

**Organizational trust scale:** To assess the level of organizational trust among firefighters, this study used the Organizational Trust Scale originally developed by Tyler and Bies (1990) and later translated into Turkish by Polat (2009). The scale is unidimensional and consists of 4 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. In the context of this research, the scale showed high internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90.

**Workplace happiness scale:** Firefighters' level of work happiness was measured using the short version of the Work Happiness Scale, developed by Polatçı and Ünüvar (2021). This one-dimensional scale comprises 8 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale. In the present study, the scale showed a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.88.

**Positive meaning of work scale:** Developed by Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012) to capture the positive meaning individuals derive from their work, this scale was adapted into Turkish by Durmuş (2023). It features a single-dimensional structure with 4 items

rated on a 5-point Likert scale. In the scope of this research, the scale demonstrated acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84.

#### 3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The study data were applied to firefighters actively working in metropolitan municipalities in Türkiye, who were reached by convenience and snow-ball sampling methods between 29.03.2025 and 20.04.2025, via Google Forms. Data were obtained from 394 samples in the study universe. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) stated that 384 samples would be generally sufficient. In this context, it can be said that the sample is sufficient.

The study checked the normality of all variables prior to data analysis. The normality assumption was checked to see if the skewness and kurtosis values were within the  $\pm 2$  range (George & Mallery, 2010). All assumptions were found to be met. Bootstrapping mediation tests were conducted to determine whether workplace happiness (WH) mediated between perceived organizational support (POS) and positive meaning of work (PMW). For both direct and indirect effects, 95% confidence intervals were used using 5000 bootstraps. Analyses with non-zero confidence intervals were considered significant. Moderated mediation, also known as conditional process analysis, was conducted using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2018) and implemented in SPSS version 27, following the approach outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

#### 3.3. Ethical Considerations

Permission (28.03.2025 - E-95531838-050.99-130106) was obtained from Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University Ethics Committee for this study.

#### 4. Findings

Table 1. Demographic Information

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	379	96,2
Female	15	3,8
<b>Age</b>		
≤ 25	86	21,8
26-30	99	25,1
31-35	66	16,8
36-40	62	15,7
41 ≤	81	20,6
<b>Education</b>		
High School	91	23,1
Associate Degree	231	58,6
Undergraduate	64	16,2
Graduate	8	2,0
<b>Duration of employment</b>		
≤ 5	210	53,3
6-10	67	17,0
11-15	66	16,8
16 ≤	51	12,9
<b>Salary status</b>		
Inadequate	144	36,5
Moderate	197	50,0
Adequate	53	13,5

A total of 394 participants, 379 (96.2%) male and 15 (3.8%) female, were included in the study. Almost every age group participated in the study in close proportion to each other. When the education level of the participants is analysed, it is seen that the highest participation is at the associate degree level with 231 people (58.6%), and the lowest participation is at the graduate level with 8 people (2%). When

the experience of the participants in the workplace is analysed, it is seen that the majority of them (210 people, 53.3%) have 5 years or less of work experience. When the participants' interpretation of the salary they receive in return for their work is analysed, it is understood that 86.5% (341 people) evaluate the salary they receive at an inadequate or medium level. An analysis of Table 2 indicates that the model's

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Measurement Model Results

Indexes	Values	Acceptable values
CMIN/DF	3,531	<5
NFI	0.925	>0.90
IFI	0.945	>0.90
CFI	0.945	>0.90
TLI	0.936	>0.90
RMSEA	0.080	≤0.08

fit indices fall within acceptable ranges, suggesting an adequate alignment between the model and the data set (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018).



Table 3. Correlation and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. POS	-			
2. OT	0.865**	-		
3. WH	0.836**	0.877**	-	
4. PMW	0.455**	0.450**	0.538**	-
M	3.08	3.02	3,27	4.13
SD	1.22	1.24	1.08	0.97
Skewness	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	-1.22
Kurtosis	-1.13	-1.11	-0,97	0.94

\*\* p < 0.01.

In the study, the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables ranged from -1.22 to 0.94, indicating that the data distribution remained within acceptable limits for normality. This finding shows that the variables exhibit a distribution close to a normal distribution. According to Pearson correlation analysis results, there are significant and positive relationships between all variables. The correlations between POS and OT ( $r = 0.865$ ), POS and WH ( $r = 0.836$ ) and OT and WH ( $r = 0.877$ ) are quite high. This shows that the variables have a strong structural relationship with each other (Field, 2018). The PMW variable is moderately correlated with the other variables (between  $r = 0.455$  and  $r = 0.538$ ). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics along with the correlation coefficients for all the variables included in the study.

#### 4.1. Mediation Analysis

Before determining whether there is a mediating effect, it was determined whether there is a direct effect. Perceived organizational support (POS) was found to directly affect positive meaning of work (PMW) ( $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, when the mediating variable workplace happiness (WH) is included in the model, the effect of POS on PMW disappears ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). POS is also a positive predictor of WH ( $\beta = 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). POS has a significant indirect effect on PMW through WH (indirect effect = 0.35,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% CI = [0.23, 0.46]). These results support hypotheses H1 and H2 (Table 4). The results showed that WH influenced PMW. Moreover, the relationship between POS and PMW was mediated by WH.

Table 4. Analysing the Indirect Effect of POS on PMW through WH

Path	Coefficient	95% Confidence interval	
		Lower limit	Upper limit
POS --> WH --> PMW	0.35	0.23	0.46
Total effect	0.36	0.29	0.43
Direct effect	0.01	-0.11	0.14

#### 4.2. The Analysis of Moderated Mediation

The situational mediation model was examined to determine whether there is a regulatory role of organizational trust (OT) in the positive meaning of work (PMW) effect of perceived organizational sup-

port (POS) via workplace happiness (WH). The proposed situational mediation model showed that OT mediated the PMW effect of POS through WH (see Table 5). According to the results, Hypothesis 3 was supported (Index of moderated mediation = 0.019,  $SE = 0.008$ , 95% CI = [0.003, 0.038]).

Table 5. The Analysis of the Moderated Mediation Model

		Consequent M (WH)			
Antecedent		Coeff.	SE	t	p
X (POS)	a1	0.27	0.04	6.74	<.001
W (OT)	a2	0.53	0.04	13,38	<.001
XW (POSXOT)	a3	0.04	0.02	2.31	<.05

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Constant	iM	3.21	0.03	94.38	<.001
R <sup>2</sup> = 0.80					
F = 506.26; p < .001					
Y(PMW)					
X (POS)	c'	0.01	0.06	0.22	>.05
M (WH)	b1	0.47	0.07	6.74	<.001
Constant	iy	2.59	0.23	11.17	<.001
R <sup>2</sup> = 0.29					
F = 79.76; p < .001					
Conditional indirect effect(s) of POS on PMW					
OT	Bootstrapped indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
-1 SD	0.10	0.03	0.04	0.17	
M	0.13	0.03	0.07	0.20	
+1 SD	0.15	0.04	0.08	0.24	
Index of moderated mediation					
	İndeks	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
OT	0.0197	0.0089	0.0034	0.0386	

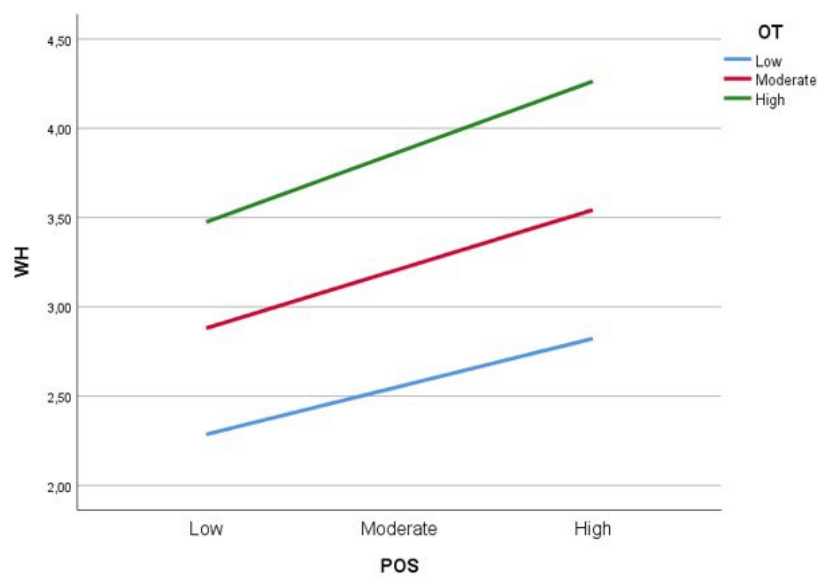


Figure 2. Moderating Effect for the Organizational Trust

The research explored how OT shaped the link between POS and WH by evaluating its effect at three points: below average, average, and above average levels. The results indicated that OT played a regulatory role in this relationship across all levels. The moderation effect was statistically significant across all three levels—low ( $\beta = 0.10$ , 95% CI [0.04, 0.17]), average ( $\beta = 0.13$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.20]), and high ( $\beta = 0.15$ , 95% CI [0.08, 0.24])—as presented in Table 5.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between the variables of perceived organizational support (POS), workplace happiness (WH), organizational trust (OT), and positive meaning of work (PMW) within the situational mediation model. Conducted among firefighters employed by metropolitan municipalities in Türkiye, the study revealed that workplace happiness fully mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and positive meaning

of work, and that organizational trust significantly strengthens this process.

The firefighting profession requires special consideration in terms of employee well-being due to its high stress levels, risk of physical and emotional exhaustion, and need for constant emergency response (Dan et al., 2020; Roşca et al., 2021). In this context, the support that employees perceive from their organizations is critical for both work-related aspects and their psychosocial well-being. As our study shows, firefighters who perceive high organizational support find their work more meaningful; this effect stems from the positive meaning they attribute to their work. This finding shows that employee happiness is not just an individual emotion, but also an important part of how people make sense of things (Steger et al., 2012; Charles-Leija et al., 2023).

Research has revealed that trust in an organizational context is a driving force for employee happiness, significantly increasing the impact of perceived organizational support on the positive meaning of work. For those working in high-risk jobs in particular, a sense of organizational trust protects emotional resources, reduces burnout, and promotes happiness (Flinchbaugh et al., 2024). Examining this topic in the context of firefighters specifically, it has been observed that trust in colleagues and management can indirectly enhance the meaning of work (Colquitt et al., 2011; Pratt et al., 2019).

These findings are consistent with social change theory (Blau, 1964). Employees who feel supported and trusted within an organizational context reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviours. This sense of happiness, developed through organizational support and trust, enables employees to value their work (Akgunduz et al., 2023).

It is important for organizations to strengthen the perceived support mechanisms for their employees. Particularly in high-stress occupations, managers' open communication, appreciation of employees' achievements, and sensitivity to individual needs will increase perceptions of support (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Based on these findings, it is recommended to develop organizational policies to support employee happiness. Providing work-life balance programmes, psychological counselling services, and opportunities for social interaction within the team will increase employees' happiness levels (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), thereby enhancing PMW. Lutgen-Sandvik et al (2011) stated that positive emotions in the workplace reveal the communicative structure and micro-processes, which are explained with examples.

Based on the findings, it can be said that OT should be systematically built. In this direction, fair management practices, transparent decision-making processes, and ethical leadership behaviour should be

brought to the fore. Studies by Tan and Tan (2000) and Kramer (1999) also demonstrate that high levels of organizational trust contribute to employees' higher levels of identification with their organizations and to their finding more meaning in their work.

The restriction of the study's scope to a sample of firefighters may impede the generalizability of the findings. Further research is required to test analogous models in diverse sectors and with different samples, particularly those working under high stress, such as healthcare workers, law enforcement officers, and educators. This will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the organizational factors that influence the positive meaning of work. Indeed, as Schnell et al. (2013) have noted, the positive meaning of work can be examined at the individual, organizational, or societal level. Recent studies have also demonstrated that the concept of work is subject to variation across different sectors, with the organizational context being identified as a critical factor in shaping this meaning (Allan et al., 2019).

In addition, subsequent studies may wish to take into consideration the interaction between individual characteristics (for example, psychological resilience, subjective well-being) and organizational factors. In particular, the development of intervention-based models and the use of experimental designs may clarify causal relationships.

In conclusion, the present study has revealed that a supportive, trust-based work environment that prioritises employee happiness contributes significantly to employees finding meaning in their work. The findings obtained from the sample of firefighters, who undertake high-stress and high-risk tasks, indicate that such organizational conditions are decisive in terms of employees' psychological well-being and the meaning they derive from their work. In this context, organizations that fail to establish a supportive and trusting environment risk not only employee engagement but also their long-term performance, organizational sustainability, and institutional resilience in times of crisis. It is recommended that future studies across different sectors test the generalisability of these findings. This should be achieved by experimentally testing the effects of organizational intervention programmes.

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# The Relationships between Perceived Organizational Support, Workplace Happiness, Organizational Trust, and Positive Meaning of Work: A Moderated-Mediation Model

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