The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety in the Impact of Workplace Friendship on Creativity* **

İş Yeri Arkadaşlığının Yaratıcılığa Etkisinde Psikolojik Rahatlığın Aracı Rolü

Asya Studies

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Abstract

In today's demanding working conditions, it is of considerable importance for employees to feel safe and happy in their workplaces in terms of their performance. Since employees spend a significant portion of their time in the workplace, the encouragement and development of personal relationships among colleagues and the establishment of communication related to work contribute to the emergence of workplace friendships. These friendships also lead to employees receiving support, feeling relaxed, and experiencing a sense of security. Employees who freely express their ideas in the workplace are more comfortable in implementing their creative ideas. This sense of confidence they feel is also reflected in their psychology as "safety." Therefore, through the workplace friendships they establish, employees can feel psychologically secure. As a result, their performance, especially in terms of creativity, improves. The aim of this study is to determine the mediating role of psychological comfort in the impact of workplace friendships on employee creativity in organizations. To achieve this goal, data was collected through a survey technique from 500 full-time white-collar employees working in companies operating in the furniture sector in Kayseri. The surveys were conducted through face-to-face interviews, and incomplete responses were eliminated, resulting in a total of 428 valid survey responses. Firstly, Cronbach Alpha values were calculated and confirmatory factor analysis was applied to assess the validity and reliability of the collected data. Additionally, skewness and kurtosis values were examined to determine whether the data followed a normal distribution. IBM SPSS, IBM AMOS, and PROCESS 3.2 software programs were utilized for data analysis. NBased on the findings, it has been revealed that psychological comfort plays a partial mediating role in the impact of workplace friendships on creativity. In this context, it has been concluded that workplace friendships not only support creativity but also serve as a mediator in enhancing psychological comfort.

Keywords: Workplace Friendship, Creativity, Psychological Comfort

Öz

Günümüz yoğun çalışma koşullarında çalışanların işyerlerinde güvende ve mutlu hissetmeleri performansları açısından oldukça önemlidir. Çalışanların zamanlarının büyük bir kısmını çalıştıkları yerde geçirmeleri ve iş arkadaşları arasındaki kişisel ilişkilerin teşvik edilip geliştirilmesi ve işle ilgili kurulan iletişim arkadaşlıkların ortaya çıkmasını sağlamaktadır. Kurulan arkadaşlıklar da çalışanların destek görmelerine, rahatlamalarına, güvende hissetmelerine yol açar. İş yerinde fikirlerini özgürce eden çalışanlar da yaratıcı fikirlerini hayata geçirmek konusunda daha konforludur. Duydukları bu güven psikolojilerine de "safety" olarak yansır. Dolayısıyla çalışanlar kurdukları iş yeri arkadaşlıkları sayesinde psikolojik olarak güvende hissedebilirler. Bunun sonucunda da yaratıcılık başta olmak üzere performansları da artar. Bu çalışmanın amacı örgütlerde iş yeri arkadaşlığının çalışanların yaratıcılığa etkisinde psikolojik rahatlıkların aracı rolünü tespit etmektir. Bu amaçla Kayseri'de mobilya sektöründe faaliyet göstermekte olan işletmelerde çalışmakta olan 500 tam zamanlı beyaz yakalı çalışan üzerinde anket tekniğiyle veri toplanmıştır. Anketler yüz yüze görüşerek toplanmış ve eksik değerlendirilenler elenerek toplam 428 anket değerlendirmeye tabi tutulmuştur. Öncelikle elde edilen verilerin geçerli ve güvenilir olup olmadıklarını ortaya koyabilmek amacıyla Cronbach Alpha değerleri hesaplanmış ve doğrulayıcı faktör analizi uygulanmıştır. Ayrıca verilerin normal dağılıp dağılmadıklarını belirleyebilmek için çarpıklık ve basıklık değerleri incelenmiştir. Analizlerin yapılmasında IBM SPSS, IBM AMOS ve PROCESS 3.2. programlarından faydalanılmıştır. Bulgulardan yola çıkarak iş yeri arkadaşlığının yaratıcılık üzerine etkisinde psikolojik rahatlığın kısmi aracı rol oynadığı ortaya koyulmuştur. Bu bağlamda iş yeri arkadaşlığının yaratıcılığı desteklerken psikolojik rahatlığın da aracı rolü olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İş Yeri Arkadaşlığı, Yaratıcılık, Psikolojik Rahatlık

INTRODUCTION

The performance displayed by organizations and the variables influencing such performance have been among the central topics of researchers for many years. The fundamental factor underlying this pursuit is to achieve competitive advantage and maintain a consistently innovative stance that sets them apart from competitors. In this context, concepts such as employee well-being, workplace happiness, interpersonal relationships, trust in the organization, trust between employees, conflict, psychological comfort, and creative capacity are deemed worthy of investigation. One of the significant concepts for employees to feel good within the organization and consequently enhance their own productivity and organizational efficiency is workplace friendship. Workplace friendships reflect the level of intimacy and social interactions among colleagues within an organization. These interactions encompass opportunities for forming friendships and the value employees place on such relationships. Effective friendship relationships play a pivotal role in meeting social and emotional needs in the workplace, contributing to the organization's goal attainment, desired performance demonstration, and the development of attitudes like commitment to the organization and job satisfaction.

Given the assumption that many employees spend more time with their coworkers than with their families, it is evident how crucial social relationships established in this context are (Alpaslan et al., 2015). From an organizational perspective, workplace friendships are observed to enhance performance directed toward achieving organizational goals, morale, organizational commitment, and effort, while also reducing employee turnover (Kram & Isabella, 1985:110-132; Morrison & Nolan, 2007:33). Consequently, it is plausible to assert that employees who feel good and secure in their workplace tend to exhibit higher levels of creativity. In organizations characterized by strong workplace friendships, employees are more tolerant of each other's mistakes, provide mutual support, engage more actively in teamwork, encourage knowledge sharing, and decrease conflicts. These outcomes collectively contribute to increased creativity.

Edmondson (1999), emphasizing individuals' tendency to trust, notes that an environment lacking trust harbors uncertainty for individuals, making them uneasy. When an individual cannot predict the reactions of fellow employees, they approach their tasks with unease, considering this uncertainty in every behavior and reaction. With this unease, individuals cannot fully engage in their work, leading to errors. Yener (2015) highlights that an organization's practice of tolerating potentially unfavorable behaviors of new employees in interpersonal relationships fosters trust in those employees. Considering that the apprehension and concerns individuals feel when entering a new environment can be alleviated through the tolerant, embracing, and hospitable approach of others, the significance of a climate of psychological safety becomes more evident. Hence, a work environment in which all employees, including newcomers, trust each other will indirectly influence their creativity. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between perceived levels of workplace friendship and creativity.

Workplace Friendship

In the contemporary landscape, factors such as the lack of trust in social environments and cities, the intrusion of technology into social life altering relationships, people's growing reluctance to trust one another, and the increased time allocation to work have contributed to the weakening of friendship bonds. Hence, there is an observable trend wherein individuals are increasingly forming friendships within the workplace (Shellenbarger, 2000: B1). This inclination is further substantiated by the effects of globalization (Wild et al., 2007), changes in work practices, the preference for group collaboration over individual work, and the evolving nature of businesses over time.

Additionally, the fact that employees spend a considerable portion of their time in the workplace, coupled with the encouragement and cultivation of personal relationships among colleagues and the emergence of communication-based friendships related to work tasks, contributes to this trend (Morrison, 2004). Similarly, organizational practices such as rotation, organizational commitment, social support provided to employees, and policies related to training and development, are often designed in a group context, thereby supporting workplace friendships (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995). Recent research underscores the predominance of workplace friendships formed and sustained within workplaces due to the aforementioned reasons (Morrison, 2004; Dickie, 2009).

Friendship is a personal and emotional relationship that is unique to the parties involved (Wolff, 1950). It is founded upon irreplaceable and distinct emotions (Silver, 1990) and nourishes emotional support, warm exchanges of interest, and shared needs (Takahashi, 2005). Workplace friendship, on the

other hand, is characterized as a mutual connection among individuals within the same workplace, encompassing shared bonds, trust, common values, and interests; it goes beyond mere acquaintance while excluding any romantic elements (Berman et al., 2002; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). Feelings of togetherness (Siantonas, 2019) and positive relational dynamics (Lee et al., 2020) are at the core of workplace friendships. In other words, workplace friendship is a voluntary and individually driven interaction that evolves through personal choices (Rawlins, 1982:343-352). Within this context, the concept of friendship, often expressed as "mutual solidarity between two individuals with a voluntary condition," possesses two fundamental characteristics in the workplace. First, it is based on voluntary choice (Rawlins, 1982), and second, it centers around an individual, focusing not only on them as an employee but as a whole social being, thereby facilitating communication (Sias et al., 2004:322).

According to Sias (2012), the workplace transcends being merely a place of work; it becomes a social arena. Employees establish friendship relationships in the workplace, thereby creating social environments that offer them a life space (Winstead et al., 1995). As a result, in such environments, it is likely that individuals can easily communicate, converge on a common ground that fosters friendship through shared attitudes, life similarities, age, and other factors (Lee, 2005). Riordan and Griffeth (1995) argue that such workplace friendships and social environments should be regarded as a precursor to the competitive advantage organizations offer. This is because the established workplace friendships not only directly influence work focus, motivation, and satisfaction but also have indirect effects on employee commitment and productivity. In summary, effective friendship relationships, which fulfill social and emotional needs in the workplace, act as a precursor to achieving organizational goals, demonstrating desired performance, fostering organizational commitment, and cultivating job-related satisfaction (Alpaslan et al., 2015).

Workplace friendships fulfill a high level of social interaction need for employees. They impact personal happiness and quality of life (Berman et al., 2002; Intelligence, 2014). Employees create a life space for themselves through these social environments within the workplace (Winstead et al., 1995). Consequently, when one faces a challenge, their coworkers provide support, leading to increased satisfaction levels (Robinson et al., 1993; Nielsen et al., 2000). Through workplace friendship, a supportive and innovative organizational climate is cultivated, contributing to increased commitment, enhanced employee motivation, and productivity (Guy, 1992; Ross, 1997; Berman et al., 2002; Crabtree, 2004). Greater communication environments are established, fostering a sense of comfort, well-being, and security in the workplace (Kramer, 1996). Facilitating trust, respect, and collaborative attitudes, workplace friendships also play a role in reducing employee turnover (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Additionally, Wong et al. (2021) argue that shared knowledge, such as "insider stories," is a narrative that strengthens friendships by providing emotional support. Once established, workplace friendships create an environment of trust, intimacy, and openness, offering possibilities for moral learning (Blatterer, 2021). Furthermore, employees with higher levels of workplace friendship self-efficacy can better manage risks and side effects, such as incivility (Fasbender et al., 2023).

Amidst these aforementioned outcomes of workplace friendship, it is crucial to highlight another outcome—its impact on employees' creativity and innovative behavior. Recent research, albeit limited, suggests that workplace friendship exerts a positive influence on innovative behavior (Eva et al., 2019; Cao & Zhang, 2020). Recent investigations into the contributions of workplace innovation and creativity to organizational performance underscore the significance of innovation for organizations in gaining strategic competitive advantage (Banbury & Mitchell, 1995; Mc Grath et al., 1996; Hargadon & Sutton, 2000; Daneels, 2002; Amabile & Khaire, 2008; Cohn, Katzenbach, & Vlak, 2008; Ventura & Soyuer, 2016). Innovation, which is a result of creativity, is a social process (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Zhang & Bartol, 2010) shaped by relational dynamics including regular high-quality interaction and communication (Van Hargadon, 2003) and team cohesion (West & Anderson, 1996). In other words, innovative work is characterized by risk-taking and social interaction, both of which require individuals to perceive their environment as psychologically safe (Baer & Frese, 2003; West & Richter, 2008). Psychological safety is also significantly associated with feelings of vitality and positive mood, which enhance employees' involvement in creative work (Kark et al., 2009). Through the camaraderie conveyed by workplace friendship, employees maintain regular communication, promoting knowledge sharing and consistent feedback. Regular feedback from colleagues enhances the likelihood of engaging in innovative behavior and elevates the quality of innovations (Cao & Zhang, 2020).

Creativity

One of the pioneering researchers associated with the concept of creativity is Torrance. The author who developed the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) (Torrance, 1972, 1973) is known for these tests, which are still in use today and remain valid. Torrance (1966) conceptualized creativity as a process of being sensitive to problems. According to Torrance, this state of sensitivity is a natural process for humans. The author suggests that when a person feels incomplete or incongruous, they experience restlessness and discomfort, prompting them to seek solutions to alleviate or escape from this discomfort. Mucchielli (1967), on the other hand, perceives creativity as a mental and imagistic richness concerning ideas (Cited in: Öncü, 1989: 41). Similarly, Bartlett's (1958) definition of creativity—deviating from the main road, breaking away from patterns, being open to experience, and allowing one thing to guide and influence another—also underscores this point. Definitions provided often emphasize distinctiveness. There are many other definitions that can be accessed. For instance, Thurstone (1952) states, "If a thinker has suddenly reached a solution that ends in a result and signifies innovation for them, this is a creative action." Harris (1998), on the other hand, evaluates creativity as the combination, alteration, and synthesis of existing ideas resulting in new ones (Kesici, 2014: 17).

When examining the literature on creativity, the traditional approach emphasizes that creativity is something accomplished solely by individuals referred to as "creative." This trend predominantly focuses on individual differences (Lloyd-Cox et al., 2022) when discussing creativity. However, while the literature that investigates the distinction between creative individuals and relatively non-creative ones has provided valuable insights, it remains limited in scope. In contrast to the traditional approach, contemporary perspectives believe that individuals with normal capacities are capable of generating at least moderately creative work. This perspective places emphasis on the social environment as well (Amabile, 1996:1).

Looking at studies aiming to determine the relationship between creativity and intelligence, it is emphasized that there is a variable and low correlation between intelligence and creativity (Kim, 2005; Batey & Furnham, 2006). For example, Terman (1917) in his research on gifted children showed that only three percent of gifted children were creative. Similarly, Richards (1976) administered tests on creativity and intelligence, revealing a low correlation between the two.

Certain personality traits contribute to the generation of unusual and plausible solutions for emerging problems by creative individuals. Two of the most significant traits are "a tendency to take reasonable risks" and "the ability to tolerate high levels of complexity and uncertainty." Parsil (2012) suggests that creative individuals are flexible, original, quick thinkers who can utilize different strategies, methods, and tools, establish connections between abstract or concrete objects and concepts, possess rich imagination, quickly discern current situations, have strong social relationships, and possess a high desire to learn and intuitive abilities (Cited in: Kesici, 2014).

In the context of innovation and globalization, organizations require employees who will enable them to remain competitive in the market. Another feature that leads an individual towards creativity is proactivity (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Proactive employees are more likely to make structural changes that will give the organization a competitive edge (Zhou & George, 2001). Like proactivity, creativity is an internal and cognitive process focused on generating ideas. Creativity can be influenced by the individual or the situation. When one examines an individual's creativity in terms of work approach or predictions for the organization, it becomes a unique trait (Runco, 2004). The literature has shown that creativity contributes to organizational innovation, growth, survival (Madjar et al., 2002), new product performance, and employee job performance (Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

In 1988, Amabile introduced an addition to the creativity literature that encompasses creativity and innovation within organizations. In this contribution, while the fundamental model of individual creativity remained the same, an assumption was added that the same four components closely interact to influence the creativity of working teams. According to Amabile, innovation depends on (a) domain-relevant knowledge (similar to individual-level domain-related skills); (b) innovation management skills (similar to individual-level creative processes); and (c) innovation motivation (similar to individual task motivation). These components shape the work environment that affects individuals and teams. Therefore, along with this proposed model, the importance of workplace friendships and the work environment was highlighted (Amabile, 1988).

In an organizational context, workplace friendships are expected to enhance creativity by increasing communication, sharing, and feedback. As summarized above, creativity is an individual skill. However, when individuals feel secure and comfortable in their environment, the sharing, discussion, and

support of ideas will foster a creative environment (Cao & Zang, 2020). Considering the potential benefit of workplace friendships in terms of mutual assistance and support among employees, it is likely that such support will enhance employees' creativity. Additionally, employees' sense of belonging within the organization facilitates open sharing of ideas and the understanding that failure will not be a problem, even if it occurs (Berman et al., 2010). This, in turn, reduces the cost of failed innovative behavior.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Comfort

One of the factors influencing an employee's behavior within an organization is the alignment between oneself and the environment in this regard (Türkoğlu & Misican, 2019). Psychological safety is a significant factor that determines the course of interpersonal relationships in the work environment. Employees have perceptions about the reactions they will receive from their colleagues. These perceptions influence their behaviors. The answer a employee gives to questions like "Will I be criticized if I do this here?" determines their comfort level regarding the situation. If the answer is "No," the employee can take steps related to the issue. This is because having a different viewpoint and fearing exclusion, isolation, or ridicule when expressing it can lead an employee to conceal their thoughts (Edmondson, 2003). Another definition of psychological safety by Kahn (1990) is "the feeling of being able to reveal and utilize oneself without fear of negative consequences for one's image, status, or career."

Eggers (2010:2) suggests that in workplaces where the phenomenon of psychological safety is embedded, employees are rewarded when they take calculated risks at a level resulting in learning. In environments where employees feel psychologically secure, their engagement in the process often leads to more learning and positive change. The concept of psychological safety reduces the stress associated with feedback and help requests in the learning process, enabling employees to do so with less hesitation. This comfort enhances employees' learning experience by making them feel safer (Yener, 2015).

From this standpoint, creativity, which we define as the generation of novel or useful information, has generally been associated in the literature with job performance or organizational competitiveness. Much of this research has focused on the antecedents of creativity. Additionally, the exchange of job-related information and ideas also enhances creativity. Each piece of shared knowledge provides cognitive resources to an employee (Amabile & Khaire, 2008). When employees can communicate with each other confidently, they can perform at a higher level when they feel secure. The comfort provided in the workplace environment minimizes potential fears of failure and reduces the negative outcomes for employees (Hirak et al., 2012). Furthermore, in the literature, mutual trust and understanding in the workplace are thought to have a significant impact on employees' psychological safety (Atkinson, 2004). Workplace friendships offer emotional support and aid in perceiving sufficient resources, enabling individuals to feel secure in coping with challenges and facing stress (Berman et al., 2010; Guchait et al., 2014; Yin et al., 2015).

Due to the relatively recent history of the concept of psychological safety in both national and international literature, only a few studies directly investigating psychological safety have been found. However, there are studies accessible that focus on related phenomena and treat it as a mediating variable. These studies have explored the impact of psychological safety on areas such as job stress, risk-taking, interpersonal trust and perceived recognition in work teams, leadership qualities, and freedom of expression (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Pacheco et al., 2015; Dollard et al., 2012; Eggers, 2011).

Psychological safety provides individuals with greater motivation to communicate and share work-related knowledge with others because they feel less threatened by the recipient's judgment (Liu et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2016). According to Ehrhart (2004), frequent communication and interactions with other colleagues about work events help foster shared meaning and collective judgments about the work environment. Thus, high psychological safety can facilitate open communication among employees and create a knowledge-sharing environment for them to exchange and share work-related information (Siemsen et al., 2009). In conclusion, workplace friendships foster employees' sense of security and increase their willingness to share. The increased sharing is expected to enhance mutual support and exchange of ideas among employees, consequently promoting creativity. In this context, employees feeling secure, comfortable, and free of anxiety indicate their psychological comfort. The psychological safety experienced by employees in the workplace will positively affect workplace friendships and creativity.

METHOD
Research Purpose, Hypotheses, and Model
The purpose of this study is to determine the role of psychological safety in the relationship between perceived workplace friendship levels and employees' creativity. Based on this objective, the research hypothesis and model are presented below.

H1: Psychological safety plays a mediating role in the relationship between workplace friendship and creativity.

Figure 1: Research Model
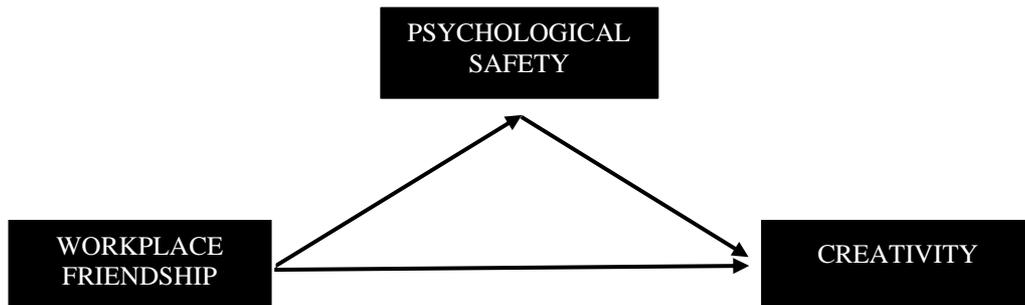
Sample
The data used in this study were obtained from 500 full-time white-collar employees working in the furniture sector in Kayseri, Turkey. Prior permission was obtained to administer the survey form prepared in line with the research objective. Data collection was facilitated by allowing willing participants to complete the survey form on a voluntary basis. Participants' opinions were collected through face-to-face interviews. After identifying missing and erroneous codes, a total of 428 survey responses were considered for analysis. The return rate for the surveys was 85.6%. All statements in the scales were designed to be answered in a 5-point Likert format, and the instructions and printing of the scale were prepared accordingly. The rating scale ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

In terms of demographic characteristics, 152 participants were male (69.7%), and 66 participants were female (30.3%). Regarding marital status, 145 participants were married (66.5%), and 73 participants were single (33.5%). In terms of education, 38 participants had a high school degree (17.4%), 164 participants had a bachelor's degree (75.2%), and 16 participants had a postgraduate degree (7.4%). The mean age of participants was 36.8, with a standard deviation of 12.7.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	152	69,7
	Female	66	30,3
Marital Status	Married	145	66,5
	Single	73	33,5
Education Level	High school	32	17,4
	Bachelor's	164	75,2
	Postgraduate	16	7,4

Procedure and Analysis
To ascertain the reliability and validity of the obtained data, Cronbach's Alpha values were calculated and confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. Additionally, skewness and kurtosis values were examined to determine the normal distribution of the data. In the testing phase of the research model, the bootstrap method proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2004) was employed. This approach enables the

creation of large datasets to test indirect effects, reduces bias, and calculates accelerated confidence intervals. Due to limitations of sensitivity to deviations from normality that require larger sample sizes, Preacher and Hayes' (2004) approach was preferred over the approach by Baron and Kenny (1986). The analysis was performed using IBM SPSS, IBM AMOS, and PROCESS 3.2 software.

Measurement Instruments

Workplace Friendship: To assess participants' perceived levels of workplace friendship, the scale introduced by Nielsen, Jex, and Adams (2000) was utilized. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Şahinbaş (2018). The scale comprises 12 items and two dimensions (opportunity for friendship and value of friendship). Examples of scale items include "Seeing my colleagues is one reason I look forward to work" and "I have the opportunity to form close friendships at work." The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the scale was calculated as 0.772.

Psychological Comfort: To determine participants' level of psychological comfort, the scale developed by Li and Yan (2009) consisting of four items and one dimension was utilized. The items include "I am not afraid to be myself at work," "There is a threatening environment at the workplace (reverse-coded)," "Some people at work intentionally act to undermine my efforts (reverse-coded)," and "If you make a mistake at work, it is usually used against you (reverse-coded)." Li and Yan (2009) reported the reliability of the scale as 0.830, explaining 61% of the variance. The reliability coefficient for the four items was determined as 0.844.

Creativity: To assess participants' creativity level, the 'Creative Behavior' scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994) was employed. The scale consists of six items and one dimension. The items are listed below, and the reliability coefficient is calculated as 0.906.

- I explore new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.
- I generate creative ideas.
- I defend my ideas against others and encourage them.
- I research and secure the necessary resources to implement new ideas.
- I develop appropriate plans and programs for the implementation of new ideas.
- I am innovative.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

To demonstrate the structural validity of the utilized scales in line with the research objectives, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. The fit indices resulting from the analyses are shown in the table below.

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Indices	Perfect Fit	Acceptable Fit	Workplace Friendship	Pstcological Safety	Creativity
CFI	,970≤CFI≤1,000	,950≤CFI≤,970	,958	,995	,997
HOELTER	≥200	75≤HOELTER≤200	239	270	342
IFI	,950≤IFI≤1,000	,900≤IFI≤,950	,958	,995	,997
NFI	,950≤NFI≤1,000	,900≤NFI≤,950	,943	,986	,989
PCLOSE	≥0,05		,298	,432	,548
RFI	,900<RFI≤1,000	,850<RFI≤,900	,912	,973	,982
RMSEA	,000≤RMSEA≤,050	,050≤RMSEA≤,080	,073	,051	,025
TLI	,95≤TLI≤1,000	,900≤TLI≤,950	,948	,990	,994
χ^2/df	,000 ≤ χ^2/df ≤ 2,000	2 ≤ χ^2/df ≤ 3	2,898	1,560	,613

*Source: Bayram, A., Şeker, M., Büyüksivaslıoğlu, N. M., Reyhancan, M., Vyacheslav, T., & Botakarayev, B. (2019). The Mediating Role of Stress on The Relationship Between Organizational Culture and Dysfunctional Attitudes: A Field Study. Elementary Education Online, 19(1), 147-156.

The confirmatory factor analysis results for the variables included in the study are presented in Table 1. The goodness-of-fit indices for all three variables are within acceptable limits. Thus, it can be

concluded that the structures related to the variables are consistent and appropriate with the empirical data used in the analysis. The reliability (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient) and validity (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) analysis results indicate that the obtained data fulfill the necessary conditions for conducting the analyses.

Ethical Committee Statement
Ethical Committee Statement Committee Name: Anadolu Üniversitesi
Date: 03.03.2021
Ethical Committee Decision No: 58/61

FINDINGS
The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability values for the variables of the study are presented in Table 1. The averages of participants' scores for workplace friendship (M = 3.76, SD = 0.62), psychological safety (M = 3.46, SD = 1.11), and creativity (M = 3.58, SD = 1.09) are all above 3.46. Correlation analysis results reveal a significant positive relationship at the 1% level between creativity and workplace friendship (r = 0.534) and psychological safety (r = 0.579).

**Table 3:** Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Values of the Variables

	Mean	Standart Deviation	1	2	3
1.Workplace Friendship	3,7671	,61758	(,832)		
2. Psychological Safety	3,4587	1,11073	,422**	(,893)	
3. Creativity	3,5800	1,08500	,534**	,579**	(,844)

*Correlations are significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

Testing the Research Model
As mentioned under the title "Procedure and Analysis," the PROCESS 3.2 (Model 4) add-on was employed to determine the mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between workplace friendship and creativity. The regression analysis results indicate that workplace friendship significantly affects creativity (b = 0.9378, SE = 0.1011, t = 9.2780, p = 0.000), explaining 28.50% of the variance in creativity. Moreover, both workplace friendship (b = 0.6183, SE = 0.0992, t = 6.2390, p = 0.000) and psychological safety (b = 0.4205, SE = 0.0551, t = 7.6277, p = 0.000) significantly influence creativity, jointly explaining 43.73% of the variance in creativity. The direct and indirect effects are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Regression Analysis Results
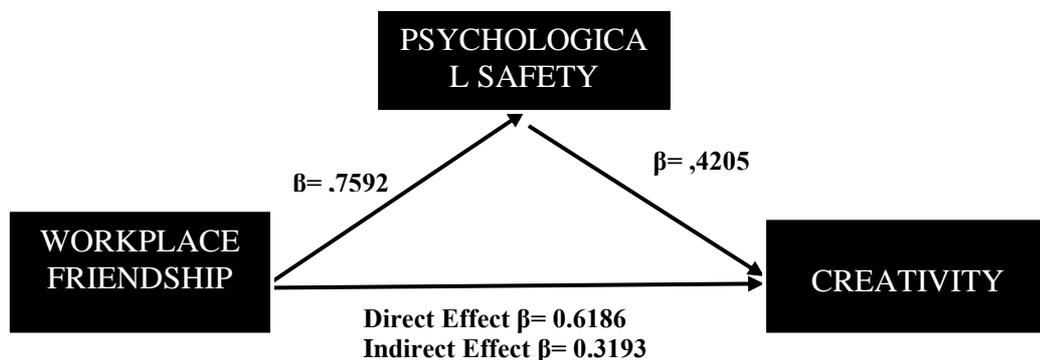
Note: Mediation analysis was conducted with a sample size of 10,000 using the BCa bootstrapped method to achieve a 95% confidence interval.

Based on regression analysis, the direct effect of workplace friendship on creativity was found to be β= 0.9378. Upon the inclusion of psychological safety in the analysis, this effect decreased to β= 0.6186,

and its significance was maintained. Thus, it can be concluded that psychological safety partially mediates the relationship between workplace friendship and creativity.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to understand the relationship between workplace friendships, psychological comfort, and creativity. Workplace friendships refer to the level of intimacy and social interactions among colleagues within an organization. These relationships influence various aspects of organizational life and emerge as a critical component of creativity.

The study encompasses data from 500 full-time white-collar employees in the furniture industry in Kayseri, Turkey. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, with participant responses gathered through face-to-face interviews. After screening for incomplete and erroneous responses, 428 valid responses were analyzed. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliability values for the variables are presented in Table 1. The average scores for workplace friendship, psychological comfort, and creativity were all above 3.46, indicating a moderate to high level of these variables. Correlation analysis indicated significant positive relationships at the 1% level between creativity and workplace friendship (0.534) as well as psychological safety (0.579). The study's hypotheses were tested using regression and mediation analyses. The results showed that workplace friendship significantly predicts creativity (β = 0.9378, p < 0.001) and explains 28.50% of its variance. Upon adding psychological safety to the model, both workplace friendship (β = 0.6183, p < 0.001) and psychological safety (β = 0.4205, p < 0.001) significantly predict creativity, jointly explaining 43.73% of its variance. This suggests that psychological safety plays a partial mediating role between workplace friendship and creativity.

In summary, the findings indicate that workplace friendships positively influence creativity. By enhancing communication, sharing, and feedback among employees, workplace friendships support the development of creative ideas. Furthermore, workplace friendships enhance employees' abilities to support each other and engage in idea exchange, thereby fostering creativity.

Creativity involves the generation of new and valuable ideas in any domain. To be considered creative, a product or idea must differ from what has been done before (Several creativity theorists adhere to the strong view that a creative idea must be entirely unique.) However, a product or idea should not only be different for the sake of being different but should also be appropriate, correct, valuable, or meaningful. Innovation, on the other hand, is the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization (Amabile, 1996:2). Entrepreneurship is a form of innovation. It involves the successful implementation of creative ideas, either in the form of a new business or as a new venture within an existing business. Amabile et al. (1996) introduced a perspective on creativity that underscores the importance of intrinsic motivation. According to the author, although many external motivators in the work environment seem to undermine intrinsic motivation and creativity, some may not. Rewards or other motivators are likely to be undermining if they are presented in a way that makes individuals feel as if they are being bribed or dictated to. However, rewards can enhance intrinsic motivation and creativity when they serve to confirm individuals' competencies (e.g., by recognizing the value of their work) or when they lead them to become more deeply engaged in their work (e.g., by providing additional resources to perform a task effectively). This process is referred to as "motivational synergy" (Amabile, 1993). Furthermore, Amabile and Mueller (2008) argue that emotional states significantly affect individual creativity. Their contribution at this point is to demonstrate that an emotional state influenced by the work environment can, in turn, affect the creative processes. In this regard, our study aligns with the part where the influence of the work environment, workplace comfort, and consequently workplace friendships on intrinsic motivation that affects creativity is reflected. A study by Ferreira et al. (2020) argued that although creativity significantly contributes to performance, the effect may be indirect. This may occur because a new idea, when expressed as a new and successful innovation, can lead to increased performance. Creativity legitimizes creative behavior among organizational members, leading to improved organizational performance (Boso et al., 2017). A study by Riaz and Hassan (2019) also suggests a positive relationship between organizational creativity and performance. When organizational creativity is reflected through various types of innovation, such as innovations in processes, products, or technology, it will lead to improvements in organizational performance (Riaz & Hassan, 2019).

Some research in the literature suggests that workplace friendships enhance trust, emotional support, and security (Pillemer and Rothbard, 2018; Riordan and Griffeth, 1995), leading to desirable work-related outcomes, such as higher job performance (Methot et al., 2016), increased job satisfaction

(Markiewicz et al., 2000), and greater organizational commitment (Riordan and Griffeth, 1995), while also having a positive impact on employee well-being (Craig and Kuykendall, 2019). Therefore, organizations should aim to develop strategies that promote workplace friendships to maximize their employees' creative potential. Taşpınar and Eryeşil (2021) concluded that workplace loneliness has a negative impact on psychological well-being. Turning this negative effect into a positive one aligns with our research, as the emergence of creative ideas through interaction necessitates the expression of divergent ideas in groups and teams (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010; Nemeth, 1986; Paulus and Yang, 2000).

Korber et al. (2023) demonstrate that workplace friendships are an active accomplishment by participating individuals. While they may be habitually enacted at specific times, they require intentional and reflective efforts when stability and balance are threatened. In this sense, our findings align with Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) and Korber et al. (2023).

Consequently, organizations should develop strategies to promote workplace friendships and maximize employees' creative potentials. The findings align with Taşpınar and Eryeşil (2021), who found that workplace loneliness negatively impacts psychological well-being. This negative effect turning positive in the context of workplace friendships is consistent with our study's results.

Moreover, psychological safety plays a significant mediating role in creativity. Feeling secure in the work environment enables employees to openly share their ideas and express innovative thoughts. Psychological safety positively impacts employees' experience of workplace relationships and environment, contributing to the development of creativity. This finding is supported by Gençel et al. (2020), who found significant effects of psychological safety on knowledge sharing and contextual performance. Additionally, this finding aligns with existing research on performance and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Baer & Frese, 2003; Frazier et al., 2017).

In conclusion, the study's results emphasize the impact of workplace friendships and psychological safety on creativity, suggesting that these relationships should be integrated into strategies aimed at enhancing innovation and organizational success potential. Promoting workplace friendships and ensuring employees' psychological safety will help organizations increase creativity and gain competitive advantages. Therefore, organizing workplace culture and environment to support creativity will fully unleash the potential of the workforce. Promoting workplace friendships and ensuring employee psychological comfort will assist organizations in gaining a competitive advantage by enhancing creativity and, consequently, innovation (Mujerke and Metiu, 2020). Therefore, arranging the workplace culture and environment to support creativity will fully unleash the potential of the workforce (Capozza et al., 2020).

The study has certain limitations that need to be considered in future research. Additionally, this study relies on a cross-sectional research design, which evaluates participants' perceptions of a specific topic within a limited timeframe. This limitation complicates causal inferences. Expanding the scope of the study by segmenting it into sectors, conducting it with a larger sample, and performing it separately for different countries or regions will further enrich the research results.

Considering the implications for practice and managers, it would be meaningful for organizations to pay more attention to psychological safety based on the results of this study. As demonstrated by the examination of psychological comfort, it can directly or indirectly influence many issues. Conducting more research and sharing results are crucial for fully understanding these effects.

Ethical Committee Statement
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