

# Studying the Effect of Psychological Safety and Personality Characteristics on Blue-Collar Expatriate Adaptation - Wellbeing as a Mediator and Happiness as a Moderator

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## Abstract

This article aims to study the relationship and effect of psychological safety and personality characteristics on blue-collar expatriate adaptation, with well-being as a mediator and happiness as a moderator. The research includes an in-depth review of literature to derive hypotheses for testing. Data collection is done in the Sharjah emirate of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in the 4- and 5-star hotels. The participants are all blue-collar workers with diverse genders, nationalities, and work experience. The conceptual model clearly highlights the relationships of the factors being studied. SPSS shall be used for analysis after data collection, cleaning, and testing of reliability and validity. The research shall be able to support in fulfilling gaps in blue-collar adaptation-related literature.

**Keywords:** Psychological Safety, Personality Characteristics, Blue-Collar Expatriate Adaptation, Well-Being, Happiness

## Introduction

In today's globalized economy, workforce mobility has expanded rapidly, creating large expatriate populations worldwide. A PWC (2023) report estimates that 30 million expatriates live in the Middle East, including the UAE. With a total population of 11.23 million, only 11.8% are Emiratis, while the rest represent over 200 nationalities (Worldometer, 2025). This diverse labor landscape demands a greater understanding of expatriate experiences. According to *Khaleej Times* (2025), the UAE has seen a rise in entry-level and blue-collar jobs due to new infrastructure projects, emphasizing the importance of studying this segment. The UAE's economy relies heavily on expatriates (Elsayed, 2024), especially blue-collar workers in sectors like hospitality, construction, and retail (Yang et al., 2025). In Sharjah, three to five-star hotels depend extensively on these workers for operational roles.

Despite their importance, blue-collar expatriates' experiences remain under-researched compared to white-collar professionals (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Milligan, 2022). These workers face unique adaptation challenges linked to low income, job insecurity, and stress. Research indicates that psychological safety (Tuorila, 2024) and personality characteristics such as resilience and openness influence adaptation, mediated by well-being and moderated by happiness (Grasso, 2024; Yang et al., 2025). The UAE government has advanced policies promoting happiness and well-being, but mostly for citizens and skilled workers. This study examines the impact of psychological safety and personality traits on blue-collar expatriate adaptation in Sharjah's hotel sector, positioning well-being as a mediator and happiness as a moderator to enhance inclusive workforce policies.

### Background of Research

The UAE Vision 2030 outlines a strategic roadmap positioning the nation as a global leader in innovation, economy, infrastructure, and quality of life. As the UAE's GDP continues to rise, projected at USD 568.57 billion in 2025 and USD 712.69 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2025), so does the demand for a diverse and skilled workforce, particularly blue-collar expatriates. Understanding their adaptation has become essential for sustainable growth. The UAE's labor market is among the most globalized, relying on both highly skilled professionals and low-wage migrant workers (Elsayed, 2024). Blue-collar workers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines dominate construction, retail, and hospitality sectors, particularly in Sharjah, where expatriates form the operational backbone of hotels (Yang et al., 2025). However, adapting to different cultural, social, and organizational contexts poses challenges related to resilience, openness, workplace safety, and social inclusion (Ewers et al., 2021; Viljanen & Vene, 2020). Research shows that psychological traits and workplace factors jointly shape expatriate adjustment (Koveshnikov & Lehtonen, 2024), yet most studies focus on white-collar employees (Milligan, 2022; Yang et al., 2025).

The UAE government has taken progressive steps to promote happiness and well-being through initiatives like the National Program for Happiness and Well-being (Baniabbasi, 2023). Nonetheless, these efforts primarily target citizens and professionals, leaving low-wage expatriates underrepresented (Dona, 2022; Taladiar, 2025). The UAE's commitment is evident through its Ministry of Happiness, which has propelled the nation to 21st in the World Happiness Index 2025, surpassing countries like the US, UK, and France (*Khaleej Times*, 2025). High social trust, philanthropy, and community engagement reinforce this progress, reflecting the UAE's holistic approach to national happiness. Gallup's reports emphasize that UAE happiness stems from trust, connection, and social support, not just wealth (*Khaleej Times*, 2025). The National Strategy for Well-being 2031 builds on these initiatives, aiming to make the UAE a global leader in quality of life through 14 components and 9 strategic objectives focused on healthy lifestyles, mental health, and positive thinking. Similarly, the National Charter for Happiness encourages federal and private institutions to create supportive, productive workplaces through designated happiness officers, councils, and performance metrics (Government of Dubai, 2016). Such policies inspire both the government and the private sectors to integrate well-being into organizational culture.

In *Reflections on Happiness & Positivity*, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (2017) articulates that happiness is a duty of leadership and a foundation of national progress. He argues that positivity and optimism fuel innovation and achievement values embodied in

the UAE's transformative projects, such as the Burj Khalifa and the Mars Mission. His philosophy underscores happiness not as a luxury, but as a strategic tool for human development, productivity, and governance. Globally, research confirms that well-being is critical to expatriate adaptation (Liem et al., 2021). Workers facing adaptation stress depend on coping mechanisms that influence both performance and psychological stability. Stressors like long working hours, low income, and cultural isolation can diminish well-being, whereas supportive work environments and strong social networks enhance resilience and integration (Mustaqeem, 2024). In a country where expatriates form over 85% of the population, understanding these dynamics is crucial for inclusive development.

Therefore, exploring blue-collar expatriate adaptation through variables such as psychological safety, personality characteristics, well-being, and happiness is both timely and essential. By situating this research within Sharjah's hotel sector, it addresses a major scholarly gap and aligns with national priorities of well-being and inclusivity. The study's framework positions well-being as a mediating variable and happiness as a moderator, elucidating how internal traits and environmental factors jointly affect adaptation outcomes. This perspective supports the UAE's vision of a resilient, diverse, and fulfilled workforce, reinforcing the country's status as a leader in human development and sustainable prosperity.

#### *Hotel Sector in Sharjah, UAE, and the Research Problem*

Sharjah's hotel industry provides a crucial context for studying blue-collar expatriate adaptation. As of 2025, the emirate hosts 12 five-star and 25 four-star hotels, among 102 total establishments (SCTDA, 2025). This research focuses on blue-collar workers in 4- and 5-star hotels due to their large and diverse workforce, which remains underrepresented in existing studies. Most research on expatriates in the Gulf has centered on skilled professionals and managers (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Cyrill, 2015), neglecting the adaptation experiences of low-wage hotel staff who are vital to Sharjah's revenue-generating hospitality sector. While previous studies have linked personality traits and psychological safety to expatriate success (Grasso, 2024; Tuorila, 2024), these insights cannot be directly applied to blue-collar workers (Milligan, 2022). Therefore, this study addresses the gap by exploring how psychological safety and personality characteristics influence adaptation among blue-collar expatriates in Sharjah's hotel industry, mediated by well-being and moderated by happiness.

#### *Research Objective*

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the effects of psychological safety and personality characteristics on blue-collar expatriate adaptation, with a mediator role of well-being and a moderator of happiness. To achieve the primary objective of this study, the following research objectives have been identified:

RO1: To examine the relationship between psychological safety and blue-collar expatriate adaptation in hotels in Sharjah.

RO2: To examine the relationship between personality characteristics and blue-collar expatriate adaptation in hotels in Sharjah.

RO3: To examine the mediating role of well-being in the relationship between psychological safety and blue-collar expatriate adaptation in hotels in Sharjah.

RO4: To examine the mediating role of well-being in the relationship between personality characteristics and blue-collar expatriate adaptation in hotels in Sharjah.

RO5: To examine the moderating role of happiness in the relationship between well-being and blue-collar expatriate adaptation in hotels in Sharjah.

Five research questions were framed based on these research objectives that guide data collection, analysis, and related findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the study.

### *Significance of the Study*

This study holds significant academic, practical, and policy relevance. Academically, it addresses a critical gap in understanding blue-collar expatriate adaptation in the UAE, an area often overshadowed by research on white-collar professionals (Milligan, 2022; Yang et al., 2025). Practically, it offers insights for hotel management in Sharjah, where expatriates form the operational backbone (Elsayed, 2024), by identifying ways to enhance psychological safety and well-being through effective HR practices. On a policy level, the study aligns with UAE national strategies on happiness, inclusion, and workforce sustainability (Baniabbasi, 2023), thereby supporting the nation's vision for a productive and inclusive labour market.

## **Review of Literature**

### *Introduction*

This chapter critically reviews literature on blue-collar expatriate adaptation in the UAE's hospitality sector, focusing on psychological safety, personality characteristics, well-being, and happiness as key variables. While expatriation research largely centers on managers and professionals (Milligan, 2022; Cyrill, 2015), low-wage workers remain understudied. The review begins with the socio-economic context of blue-collar expatriates, followed by analyses of intercultural, sociocultural, and work adjustment. It then examines theoretical and empirical studies on the identified constructs, exploring well-being's mediating and happiness's moderating roles in adaptation. The chapter concludes by integrating these insights into a theoretical framework and identifying research gaps.

### *Blue-collar Expatriates and their existence in the UAE Context*

The term *blue-collar* traditionally refers to manual or low-wage labor in sectors like construction, manufacturing, and mining, but has evolved to include physically demanding service roles such as cleaning, security, and food service (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013; Lederer, 1979; Lubrano, 2004). These jobs often involve strenuous working conditions linked to musculoskeletal and respiratory issues (Elser et al., 2018), contrasting with the psychological stress more common among white-collar workers (Berg et al., 2016). Socially, blue-collar work is undervalued, often misperceived as "unskilled," despite requiring technical expertise. Globalization and technology have blurred distinctions between blue- and white-collar work, underscoring the need for updated labor classifications. In the UAE, where expatriates make up nearly 90% of the population (Elsayed, 2024), blue-collar workers form the economic backbone, especially in Sharjah's hospitality sector (Jain, 2025; Dona, 2022). Governed by the kafala system, they face restricted mobility, job insecurity, and cultural barriers (Taladiar, 2025; Yang et al., 2025). Unlike professionals, their well-being depends on financial stability and workplace safety (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021). Examining their adaptation through psychological safety, personality traits, and well-being is essential for shaping inclusive policies and improving welfare in the UAE's evolving labor landscape.

*Dependent Variable: Blue-Collar Expatriate Adaptation*

The concept of *blue-collar work* has evolved significantly from its early associations with masculinity, physical labor, and industrial toughness (Gibson & Papa, 2000). While traditionally linked to men in physically demanding sectors, migration trends show a growing female presence in blue-collar roles across manufacturing and domestic labor (Padavic, 1992; Romero et al., 2014; Lorente, 2018). The term itself, originating in early 20th-century America, became a social marker distinguishing manual workers from “white-collar” professionals (Wickman, 2012). Modern discourse has re-politicized the term most notably through Donald Trump’s references to a “blue-collar boom” (Trip, 2019; Shear, 2020), yet this rhetoric often ignores the migrant laborers who sustain global economies (Castells, 2013; Gonçalves & Schluter, 2020). In the UAE, blue-collar jobs are almost entirely occupied by expatriates from South Asia and Africa, though, unlike the U.S., this workforce is formally documented and regulated.

Global migration continues to redefine blue-collar labor, reflecting historical inequalities and new vulnerabilities in a globalized economy (Britain, 2016). Thus, the term now represents a transnational, diverse, and fluid workforce rather than a narrow industrial archetype. Expatriate workers residing temporarily abroad undergo adaptation, a multidimensional process encompassing psychological, sociocultural, and work-related adjustment (Liem et al., 2021; Grasso, 2024). Psychological adaptation refers to emotional stability and mental health (Koveshnikov & Lehtonen, 2024), sociocultural adaptation to functioning effectively in the host culture (Viljanen & Vene, 2020), and work adaptation to managing job expectations and relationships. Blue-collar expatriates, especially in Sharjah’s hospitality sector, experience complex adaptation challenges tied to economic pressures, social hierarchies, and cultural distance (Milligan, 2022; Yang et al., 2025). Their well-being is often influenced by financial obligations and remittances, which shape their sense of success abroad.

Adaptation is strongly linked to coping mechanisms and problem-focused strategies like social support promote successful integration, while emotion-focused coping may hinder it (Liem et al., 2021). Economic instability, such as during COVID-19, heightens these pressures (Mustaqeem, 2024). Research has largely focused on white-collar professionals (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021), leaving a gap in understanding how psychological safety, personality, well-being, and happiness interact to shape blue-collar adaptation in contexts like Sharjah. Success in expatriation involves individual, organizational, and relational outcomes, including job performance, career development, and cultural integration (Miska et al., 2013; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Cross-cultural competence, especially cultural intelligence (CQ) is a strong predictor of adaptation (Ng, Dyne & Ang, 2009). However, blue-collar workers often face acculturative stress caused by communication barriers, workplace inequality, and limited social networks (Doki et al., 2018).

*Independent Variable: Psychological Safety*

Psychological safety refers to the perception that one can express ideas, ask questions, and take risks at work without fear of negative repercussions. Edmondson (1999) defines it as “a shared belief among team members that it is safe to take interpersonal risks,” a principle vital for learning and performance in organizations. Initially conceptualized at the group level, it has since been applied across industries, including blue-collar environments

(Tuorila, 2024). For expatriates in low-wage roles, psychological safety is pivotal for adaptation, influencing confidence, inclusion, and communication within multicultural workplaces.

Rooted in Schein and Bennis's (1965) early work and expanded by Kahn (1990), psychological safety encourages personal engagement and authentic participation. In hierarchical contexts like the UAE, rigid power structures and cultural divisions can undermine such safety (Viljanen & Vene, 2020). Blue-collar hotel workers in Sharjah, primarily from South Asia, often experience limited communication freedom, reducing learning and adaptive capacity. Studies in manufacturing show that higher psychological safety correlates with stronger commitment and well-being (Tuorila, 2024). Similarly, during crises, expatriates with supportive environments report greater resilience and adaptability (Koveshnikov & Lehtonen, 2024; Yang et al., 2025). At the organizational level, psychological safety underpins team learning, innovation, and communication. Teams with higher safety demonstrate stronger engagement, creativity, and reduced burnout (Kizrak, 2025; Edmondson et al., 2004). It also fosters innovation through open knowledge-sharing and collaborative exchange (Jin & Peng, 2024; Bahadurzada et al., 2024). Moreover, psychologically safe teams resolve conflicts constructively and maintain effectiveness under pressure (Hayat Bhatti et al., 2022). Beyond traditional settings, safety enhances collaboration in scientific, healthcare, and hybrid work contexts (Grailey et al., 2021; Pettersen Buvik & Tkalic, 2021). Even Google's "Project Aristotle" identified it as the single most crucial factor in team success (Jones et al., 2024). Collectively, research confirms psychological safety as a strategic resource vital for innovation, resilience, and expatriate adaptation, particularly in Sharjah's multicultural hotel industry, where it can reduce turnover, boost cooperation, and enhance well-being.

#### *Independent Variable: Personality Characteristics*

Personality refers to the stable patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior that shape how individuals perceive and respond to their environment. In expatriate adaptation, personality traits play a decisive role in determining how effectively individuals adjust to new cultural, social, and occupational contexts. According to Grasso (2024), traits such as openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability consistently predict successful cross-cultural adaptation, enabling individuals to remain flexible, focused, and emotionally balanced when navigating unfamiliar environments. For blue-collar expatriates, personality becomes even more crucial, as their adaptation extends beyond job-related tasks to managing demanding living conditions, limited autonomy, and social isolation. Expatriates with resilient and open personalities are better able to cope with these pressures. Grasso's (2024) study on intercultural communication found that employees with adaptive personalities experienced higher job satisfaction and stronger retention intent, findings that extend to Sharjah's hotel sector, where cultural tolerance and emotional stability are vital to consistent performance.

Personality also shapes coping mechanisms. Liem et al. (2021) observed that personality-driven coping strategies, such as optimism and resilience buffer stress and enhance well-being among migrant workers. Similarly, Koveshnikov and Lehtonen (2024) emphasize that psychological resilience helps expatriates withstand crises and adapt during uncertainty. These insights are particularly relevant to the UAE, where blue-collar expatriates face economic pressures, language barriers, and minimal social support (Dona, 2022). In

hospitality, personality carries additional importance due to the interpersonal nature of service work. Employees regularly interact with guests and colleagues from diverse backgrounds, requiring adaptability, patience, and communication skills. Viljanen and Vene (2020) highlight that openness, agreeableness, and emotional regulation are critical in multicultural service contexts like Dubai and Sharjah. Workers demonstrating these traits show stronger teamwork, conflict resolution, and service quality, while those lacking them may struggle with stress or miscommunication.

Within Sharjah's hotel industry, personality traits influence not only individual adjustment but also organizational outcomes. Workers with stable, positive dispositions are more likely to cooperate, communicate effectively, and stay motivated despite physically demanding tasks. Such traits promote workplace harmony, reduce turnover, and elevate customer satisfaction. Conversely, the absence of these characteristics can hinder adaptation, reduce performance, and increase burnout risk. Therefore, personality characteristics are not merely individual differences; they are key predictors of how blue-collar expatriates experience and respond to adaptation challenges. Integrating personality into analyses of expatriate adjustment offers valuable insight into why workers facing similar conditions achieve different outcomes in satisfaction, engagement, and retention. For UAE hospitality organizations, understanding these dynamics enables HR practices that foster resilience, well-being, and long-term adaptation among blue-collar employees, reinforcing both workforce stability and service excellence.

#### *Mediating Variable: Well-being*

Well-being is a multidimensional concept encompassing individuals' perceptions of their physical, emotional, and social quality of life. The World Health Organization (2001) describes it as a state in which people realize their capabilities, cope with everyday stresses, and contribute productively to their communities. Within organizational settings, well-being influences motivation, resilience, and performance, yet it remains difficult to measure because conventional indicators such as income or living conditions do not fully capture emotional health or workplace satisfaction. In migration and expatriation research, well-being operates both as an outcome and as a mediating mechanism linking personal traits with workplace factors (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021). For blue-collar expatriates, well-being is typically anchored in economic stability, fair treatment, job security, and safe working environments rather than in career development (Yang et al., 2025). In contrast, white-collar expatriates tend to prioritize family stability, career advancement, and psychological adjustment (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021). Studies by Liem et al. (2021) and Mustaqeem (2024) highlight that coping strategies developed under acculturative stress significantly predict well-being and shape subsequent adaptation. When well-being declines due to poor conditions, stress, or insecurity, expatriates often exhibit burnout, withdrawal, and reduced productivity.

Psychological safety further enhances expatriate well-being. Defined by Edmondson (1999) as a shared belief that interpersonal risk-taking is safe, psychological safety enables employees to express concerns, learn from errors, and collaborate more openly. Among blue-collar workers in Sharjah's hotel sector, where hierarchical structures, cultural divides, and physically demanding tasks are common, psychological safety helps reduce anxiety and fosters trust. Well-being functions as a mediator between psychological safety and

adaptation, such that safe environments improve job satisfaction, flexibility, and resilience (Newman et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2001). The Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains this process by proposing that individuals strive to protect and accumulate valuable resources. Psychological safety provides emotional and cognitive resources that sustain well-being, allowing expatriates to invest energy into learning new roles and building cross-cultural relationships. When well-being erodes, adaptation suffers even when structural support is present. Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build theory adds that positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires, enhancing problem-solving and social connection key elements of intercultural adaptation.

Well-being also connects personality traits, such as resilience and openness, with successful adjustment. Individuals who maintain optimism and emotional stability under pressure adapt more readily (Koveshnikov & Lehtonen, 2024). In the UAE, collective well-being shaped through shared accommodation, supportive peer networks, and inclusive social environments plays an essential role, particularly for expatriates separated from their families (Baniabbasi, 2023). In Sharjah's diverse hospitality workforce, strong community ties buffer stress and promote a sense of belonging. Overall, well-being acts as a crucial mediator translating psychological safety, personality factors, and workplace support into effective adaptation. Strengthening well-being through equitable policies, health initiatives, and culturally informed programs enhances blue-collar expatriates' satisfaction, retention, and long-term integration within the UAE's multicultural labor landscape.

#### *Happiness as a Moderator*

Happiness has emerged as a policy priority in the UAE, with the establishment of a Ministry of Happiness and national strategies to promote life satisfaction. At the organisational level, happiness is linked to job performance, retention, and adaptation (Baniabbasi, 2023). For expatriates, happiness may moderate the effects of well-being on adaptation, strengthening the positive influence of psychological health on adjustment outcomes. Yang et al. (2025) highlight that happiness among South Asian blue-collar workers in the UAE is closely tied to subjective well-being and their ability to support families back home. Workers who report higher happiness levels are more likely to perceive adaptation positively, even when facing financial or cultural stress. Similarly, Anwar and Sarfraz (2023) find that subjective well-being and psychological capital buffer the negative effects of job insecurity on performance. These findings suggest that happiness operates as a psychological resource that moderates stress-adaptation relationships.

The aspects of the UAE stressing happiness also mirror structural initiatives that can trickle down to expatriate employees. Baniabbasi (2023), for instance, also states that by prioritizing policy changes towards societal happiness rather than individual happiness, an indirectly favorable environment in which even low-paying expatriates can adapt will be established. This connects with the critique made by Dona (2022) that although the blue-collar workers will continue to be at the periphery, overall cultural changes towards inclusivity could lead to an increase in their adaptive process. Thus, in this research, happiness is theorized as a middle-ground that determines the intensity of the correlation between well-being and adjustment amongst expatriates. Employees in Sharjah hotels' faster adaptation to new conditions is predicted among the happier workers, even in cases when their well-being is challenged.

### Overview of the Theoretical Underpinning

This study draws on several interrelated theoretical perspectives to examine blue-collar expatriate adaptation in Sharjah's hotel industry. Because these workers experience migration differently from corporate or professional expatriates, often facing economic pressure, rigid hierarchies, cultural distance, and demanding physical work frameworks on psychological safety, personality, well-being, and happiness help explain how they adjust to new environments.

Expatriate adjustment is commonly viewed through three dimensions: psychological, sociocultural, and work-related adjustment (Liem et al., 2021). Although originally applied to highly skilled expatriates, these domains are equally relevant to blue-collar workers. Psychological adjustment concerns mental health, stress management, and emotional stability. For low-income expatriates in Sharjah, this often involves managing family separation, long working hours, and anxiety related to job security or contract legitimacy. Sociocultural adjustment involves learning to communicate and interact effectively within a new cultural environment. While corporate expatriates may focus on navigating organisational politics, hotel employees must interact with managers, coworkers, and guests from diverse nationalities. Barriers such as language, food differences, and misinterpretations of cultural norms frequently appear. Work adjustment refers to adapting to job tasks, service standards, schedules, and customer expectations, often very different from those in migrants' home countries.

Yang et al. (2025) note that subjective well-being strongly shapes these adjustment processes, especially among South Asian expatriates in the UAE, where financial obligations and remittances are intertwined with adaptation. Thus, adjustment is multidimensional, requiring simultaneous management of personal, social, and professional demands. A complementary framework is the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment, introduced by Lysgaard (1955). The model proposes four stages: honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment, and mastery. In the honeymoon stage, individuals feel excitement and curiosity (Oberg, 1960). Culture shock follows, characterized by confusion, homesickness, and difficulties in language, work routines, and social norms (Ward et al., 2001). During the adjustment stage, expatriates develop coping skills, form social networks, and establish routines (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). In the mastery stage, they function with confidence and cultural competence. Although widely used, the U-curve has been critiqued for oversimplification and variability across individuals (Church, 1982; Ward et al., 2001).

Psychological safety, defined as a belief that one can express concerns, ask questions, and make mistakes without fear of punishment, plays a crucial role in shaping employee engagement (Tuorila, 2024). For blue-collar expatriates from cultures with rigid hierarchies, entering a UAE hospitality environment managed by supervisors of different nationalities can trigger vulnerability. Fear of negative consequences may discourage workers from reporting safety hazards, discrimination, or unfair treatment. Viljanen and Vene (2020) highlight that cultural hierarchies in diverse workplaces often silence employees. In such conditions, adaptation becomes more difficult: without the ability to speak openly, workers have fewer learning opportunities and limited trust-building. By contrast, psychologically safe environments encourage feedback-seeking, reduce acculturative stress, and support learning

and resilience. This theory demonstrates that adaptation is not only an individual process but heavily dependent on the social climate in which work occurs.

Social Exchange Theory (SET), proposed by Homans (1958) and expanded by Blau (1964), explains social behaviour as a series of exchanges in which individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. In expatriation, exchanges occur between workers and employers, colleagues, host nationals, and family members. For blue-collar expatriates in Sharjah's hospitality sector, SET helps explain how perceived fairness, support, and reciprocity shape well-being and adaptation. When workers experience respect, inclusive communication, and supportive supervision, they reciprocate with loyalty, commitment, and cooperation (Mukherjee, 2019; Patel & Patel, 2019). Conversely, perceived exploitation or discrimination increases psychological costs, undermining well-being and leading to withdrawal consistent with findings by Tuorila (2024) and Yang et al. (2025). SET also clarifies how psychological safety promotes well-being: feeling free to speak without fear of retaliation signals organisational trustworthiness, fostering belonging and emotional comfort (Baniabbasi, 2023). Because expatriate adaptation is influenced by general, work, and interaction adjustment (Black et al., 1991), SET emphasizes how supportive exchanges such as training, mentoring, language help, or fair compensation improve each domain. Host-national support, for example, eases sociocultural adaptation (Shaffer et al., 2012), while family-related support predicts assignment success (Takeuchi, 2010). SET additionally incorporates comparison levels (Thibaut, 2017), meaning expatriates evaluate current experiences against expectations or alternatives. If perceived rewards outweigh the costs, workers maintain engagement, even under pressure. The theory, therefore, provides a relational foundation for understanding why well-being mediates the influence of workplace conditions on adaptation.

Personality shapes how individuals respond to new cultures and workplace stress. The Five-Factor Model openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability is a dominant framework in cross-cultural psychology (Grasso, 2024). Although most studies focus on professional expatriates, these traits are equally relevant among low-wage migrant workers. Openness facilitates acceptance of new norms, language learning, and adjustment to unfamiliar practices. Conscientiousness supports reliability and discipline critical qualities in hospitality roles. Emotional stability protects against stress-related breakdowns, especially under demanding supervisors or customer pressure. Liem et al. (2021) argue that coping strategies linked to personality, such as resilience, strongly influence adaptation outcomes. Thus, personality introduces an internal dimension to the framework, balancing organisational factors like psychological safety. Positive psychology emphasises strengths and flourishing rather than deficits. Well-being often institutionalised in UAE policy (Baniabbasi, 2023), includes emotional balance, job satisfaction, and purpose. For expatriates, well-being is tied to family connections, job stability, community belonging, and the ability to send remittances home.

Well-being also acts as a mediator: supportive, psychologically safe workplaces reduce stress, which enhances well-being; improved well-being then promotes adaptation. Similarly, resilient personality traits foster stronger well-being, facilitating smoother adjustment (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021). Yang et al. (2025) emphasize that for South Asian labour migrants, well-being is deeply connected to economic security, meaning adaptation is

not just psychological but directly tied to livelihood. Happiness is both an outcome of favourable conditions and a resource that strengthens adaptation. In the UAE, happiness is an explicit public policy priority through the National Programme for Happiness and Wellbeing (Baniabbasi, 2023). Research indicates that happiness and psychological capital buffer workers against insecurity and stress (Anwar & Sarfraz, 2023). In this model, happiness moderates the relationship between well-being and adaptation: even when well-being is moderate, high happiness amplifies adaptation outcomes.

For blue-collar expatriates, happiness may stem from communal living, religious or cultural traditions, supportive peers, or positive interactions with supervisors. These experiences act as emotional buffers against financial pressure, homesickness, or cultural distance. Incorporating happiness thus enriches the theoretical framework by highlighting the role of positive emotions in strengthening workers' adaptive capacities. Together, these theories create a comprehensive framework for understanding blue-collar expatriate adaptation in Sharjah's hospitality sector. Expatriate Adjustment Theory and the U-curve explain the stages and domains of adaptation. Psychological Safety Theory reveals the importance of supportive workplace environments. Social Exchange Theory situates adaptation within reciprocal organisational and social relationships. Personality theory highlights internal dispositions affecting coping and learning. Positive psychology shows how well-being serves as a central mediating resource, while happiness strengthens adaptive outcomes. Collectively, these perspectives provide a robust foundation for examining the interplay among psychological safety, personality characteristics, well-being, and adaptation.

### Gaps in Literature

Expatriation research is heavily centered on white-collar professionals, emphasising leadership, cross-cultural management, and global mobility (Cyrill, 2015; Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021). This focus overlooks blue-collar expatriates who dominate Gulf labour markets (Milligan, 2022; Yang et al., 2025). These workers face limited autonomy, restricted communication, financial strain, and harsh living conditions, while receiving little formal adaptation support (Milligan, 2022; Yang et al., 2025). As most of the UAE workforce is low-income (Elsayed, 2024), broader research is needed. Psychological safety and personality traits affect trust, coping, and adjustment (Tuorila, 2024; Koveshnikov & Lehtonen, 2024), yet studies rarely integrate them, especially in culturally diverse, hierarchical hospitality settings (Viljanen & Vene, 2020). Well-being is often treated as an outcome rather than a mediator linking safety and adaptation, despite evidence of its centrality (Gathani & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021; Yang et al., 2025). Happiness—important in UAE policy (Baniabbasi, 2023)—is understudied as a moderator. Finally, hospitality-specific adaptation research remains limited despite sectoral complexity (Dona, 2022; Milligan, 2022).

Based on the above literature review and gaps in the literature, following conceptual model was generated in order to study the independent and dependent variables along with the effect of moderating and mediating variables.

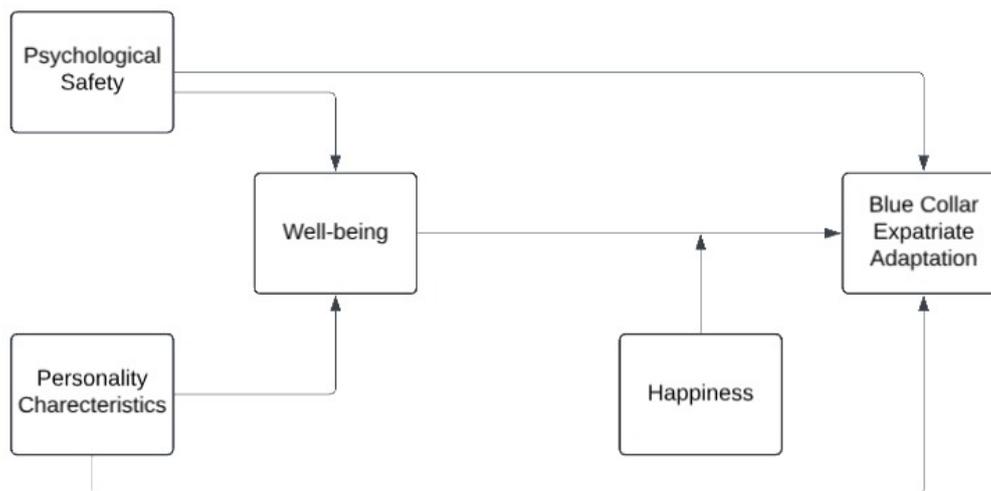


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

### *Development of Hypotheses*

Based on the conceptual model and research framework of the study, five main hypotheses, in addition to sub-hypotheses, are formulated with the aim of determining the relationships among psychological safety, personality, well-being, happiness, and blue-collar expatriate adaptation.

H1: There is a positive relationship between psychological safety and blue-collar expatriate adaptation

H2: There is a positive relationship between personality characteristics and blue-collar expatriate adaptation.

H3: Well-being positively mediates the relationship between psychological safety and blue-collar expatriate adjustment.

H4: Happiness positively moderates the relationship between well-being and blue-collar expatriate adjustment.

Several other sub-hypotheses have been framed to support testing of the conceptual model and relationships.

## **Research Methodology**

### *Introduction*

This section explains the research methods and procedures used to achieve the study's objectives and test its hypotheses. It describes the philosophical foundation, theoretical basis, research design, population, sampling, data collection instrument, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. According to Patel and Patel (2019), research methodology provides a systematic framework that guides how a study is planned, conducted, and evaluated. It helps ensure that findings are logical, valid, and replicable. This study adopts a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire to collect numerical data from blue-collar expatriate employees working in 4-, and 5-star hotels in Sharjah, UAE. The data will be analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to test the hypothesised relationships between psychological safety, personality characteristics, well-being, happiness, and expatriate adaptation.

### *Research Philosophy*

As Flick (2015) explains, the choice of philosophy guides every other methodological decision in a study. This study adopts a positivist philosophy, which assumes that reality is objective and measurable. Positivism is grounded in empirical observation and statistical testing, enabling researchers to identify cause-and-effect relationships. Positivism is especially suitable for this study because it aims to measure the relationships between well-defined variables psychological safety, personality traits, wellbeing, happiness, and adaptation among blue-collar expatriates. These constructs can be operationalised using validated measurement scales. Garg (2016) notes that quantitative studies under the positivist paradigm emphasise reliability, objectivity, and replicability, which ensures that results are free from personal bias.

A research design provides the structure for collecting and analysing data to address the research problem (Mukherjee, 2019). It defines how variables are measured, how samples are selected, and how data are processed. This study uses a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional design. According to Gupta and Gupta (2022), quantitative design is appropriate when research aims to measure relationships using numerical data and statistical tools. Descriptive research allows for detailed documentation of current conditions in this case, the adaptation and well-being of blue-collar expatriates in Sharjah hotels. A cross-sectional design means that data are collected at one point in time rather than over a prolonged period, which is suitable for this study due to time and access constraints. Saharan et al. (2024) note that a cross-sectional quantitative approach is efficient for identifying correlations between multiple variables. This design supports hypothesis testing and allows generalisation to a larger population. The structured design ensures standardisation across respondents, reducing bias and enhancing comparability. Therefore, the design provides a logical pathway for testing the hypotheses derived in Chapter Two and verifying whether the conceptual model holds true in the Sharjah hospitality context.

### *Population and Sampling*

In this study, the target population consists of blue-collar expatriate employees working in 4-star, and 5-star hotels across Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (UAE). This includes individuals employed in operational and service roles such as housekeeping, catering, laundry, front-of-house support, and maintenance. This population was chosen because it reflects one of the largest labour segments within Sharjah's hospitality industry. Blue-collar workers play a critical role in maintaining daily hotel operations and service delivery, yet their experiences of adaptation, well-being, and psychological safety remain underrepresented in empirical research. Most workers in this group are expatriates from South Asian countries, particularly India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines, who migrate for economic opportunities. Their adaptation to Sharjah's multicultural environment involves navigating language barriers, differing management styles, and cultural adjustment challenges.

### *Sampling Technique*

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a smaller, representative group from the population for data collection. The accuracy, generalisability, and reliability of a quantitative study largely depend on how well the sample represents the population (Patel and Patel,

2019). For this research, a stratified random sampling technique will be employed. Under this method, the hotels will first be divided into two strata according to their official classification:

- Stratum 1: 4-star hotels
- Stratum 2: 5-star hotels

The rationale for stratification is that working environments, management systems, and staff expectations can differ significantly across hotel categories. For instance, 5-star hotels may have more structured HR systems, while 4-star hotels might operate with leaner teams and informal practices. Stratified sampling ensures each subgroup is proportionally represented, providing a comprehensive understanding of adaptation across the hospitality hierarchy. Within each stratum, simple random sampling will be used to select participants. Every eligible employee will have an equal chance of being chosen, which reduces selection bias and increases the statistical accuracy of the results. As Gupta and Gupta (2022) emphasise, random sampling ensures fairness and enhances the representativeness of the data.

#### *Sample Size Determination*

Determining an appropriate sample size is essential to ensure that the findings are reliable, statistically valid, and generalisable to the larger population. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table provides a widely accepted statistical formula for determining sample size based on population size.

The formula used in the Krejcie and Morgan approach is:

Where:

- **S** = required sample size
- **X<sup>2</sup>** = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at 0.05 confidence level (3.841)
- **N** = population size
- **P** = population proportion (assumed to be 0.5 for maximum sample size)
- **d** = degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05)

Using this formula, the study estimates the following:

Estimated Population (N)	Calculated Sample (S)	Adjusted Sample (+10% for non-response)
1,000	278	305
1,500	306	337
2,000	322	355
2,500	333	366
3,000	341	375

Given that the estimated total number of blue-collar employees across the selected Sharjah hotels is approximately 2,000, the recommended minimum sample size is 322 respondents. To account for incomplete or non-returned questionnaires, a total of 350 questionnaires will be distributed.

The sampling process will proceed as follows:

1. Obtain permission from hotel management to access employee rosters.
2. Classify hotels into 4-, and 5-star strata.
3. Determine the number of participants required from each stratum based on their proportional workforce size.
4. Randomly select respondents within each stratum using random number generation.
5. Replace non-respondents with alternates drawn from the same stratum.

This structured process ensures that the final sample represents the diversity of Sharjah's hotel workforce and reduces the likelihood of systematic bias. According to Pandey and Pandey (2015), proportional sampling ensures that each subgroup's characteristics are preserved in the overall sample, improving external validity. This study's sampling approach, based on stratified random selection and Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination, ensures that findings accurately represent blue-collar expatriates in Sharjah's hospitality sector. By maintaining statistical rigour and proportional representation, the resulting dataset will allow robust testing of hypotheses using SPSS.

#### **Data Collection Tool: Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire serves as the primary tool for data collection in this study. It is designed to obtain standardised and quantifiable information from a large number of participants within a short period. As Patel and Patel (2019) highlight, questionnaires are highly effective in empirical research because they allow for consistent measurement across individuals and are suitable for statistical analysis. They help researchers gather data on attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural tendencies that can later be examined using quantitative techniques such as correlation and regression analysis. Given the multicultural composition of Sharjah's hospitality workforce, the questionnaire format provides a practical and structured approach for collecting information from blue-collar expatriates who have limited time during their work shifts. It also ensures anonymity, allowing respondents to provide honest feedback about their workplace experiences, psychological safety, wellbeing, and adaptation without fear of reprisal. According to Mukherjee (2019), such anonymity increases the reliability of self-reported data and minimises social desirability bias, which is essential in workplace-based research. The questionnaire will be organised into six main sections, each addressing different aspects of the study's conceptual model. This structure ensures a logical flow from demographic details to the constructs under investigation:

- Section A: Demographic Information – This section will collect data on participants' age, gender, nationality, education level, job title, hotel category, and length of service. These variables will help identify differences in adaptation patterns across demographic groups.
- Section B: Psychological Safety – Items will measure the extent to which respondents feel safe expressing opinions, reporting errors, or offering suggestions without fear of negative consequences. Questions will be adapted from previously validated scales used in workplace studies.
- Section C: Personality Characteristics – This section will measure traits such as openness, emotional stability, and resilience. These traits influence how individuals cope with challenges in cross-cultural work environments.

- Section D: Well-being – Items will focus on emotional and physical well-being, workplace satisfaction, and balance between work and personal life. This helps establish the mediating role of well-being within the research model.
- Section E: Happiness – Statements in this section will capture respondents' sense of positivity, optimism, and life satisfaction while working and living in the UAE.
- Section F: Blue-Collar Expatriate Adaptation – This final section will assess the level of adjustment among expatriate workers across three dimensions: psychological, sociocultural, and work-related adaptation.

Each statement will be measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scaling method allows respondents to express varying degrees of agreement and produces ordinal data suitable for quantitative analysis in SPSS (Gupta and Gupta, 2022).

#### *Pre-testing and Validation*

Before large-scale distribution, the questionnaire will undergo pre-testing with 5-6 people in the industry and teaching field to ensure clarity, simplicity, and cultural appropriateness. Flick (2015) recommends conducting pilot testing with a small group of participants to identify ambiguous or confusing questions. Accordingly, a pilot test with 20 respondents from Sharjah hotels will be conducted. Participants will be asked to comment on the clarity, wording, and length of the questionnaire. Based on their feedback, necessary revisions will be made to improve readability and understanding. To ensure reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Content validity will be established by seeking expert opinions from academic supervisors and HR professionals from selected Sharjah hotels. Their feedback will help verify that the questionnaire items adequately represent the theoretical constructs.

#### *Translation and Administration*

Given the linguistic diversity of the workforce in Sharjah's hospitality sector, it is crucial that participants fully understand the questionnaire. Many blue-collar workers are non-native English speakers; therefore, the instrument will be translated into Hindi, Urdu, and Tagalog to enhance accessibility. Following the back-translation method recommended by Pandey and Pandey (2015), the questionnaire will first be translated by bilingual experts and then retranslated into English by independent translators to verify accuracy and maintain conceptual equivalence. The questionnaires will be distributed both in paper-based format and via Google Forms to increase participation flexibility. Participants will also receive a brief introduction explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and estimated completion time (10–12 minutes). Responses will be collected anonymously, and no personal identifiers will be requested.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Data analysis is a critical stage in the research process as it converts raw information into meaningful and interpretable results. According to Snyder (2019), quantitative data analysis involves a structured process of coding, statistical testing, and interpretation to determine whether the collected evidence supports or rejects the stated hypotheses. In this study, data analysis will be conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

### *Software Used and Data Preparation*

All statistical analyses will be performed using SPSS (version 29). SPSS is chosen because it simplifies the management, transformation, and statistical analysis of large-scale quantitative data. Before analysis, the collected data will be carefully reviewed to ensure completeness and accuracy. Data cleaning will involve identifying and handling missing values, inconsistent entries, and outliers that may distort results. Once verified, data will be coded numerically in SPSS to enable efficient computation. Gupta and Gupta (2022) emphasise that systematic data preparation ensures data integrity and reduces analytical errors. Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage will be used to summarise demographic characteristics (age, nationality, gender, education level, and job category) and describe participants' responses to each construct.

### *Reliability and Validity Testing and Hypotheses Testing*

Testing for reliability and validity ensures that the measurement instruments accurately capture the intended constructs. Reliability will be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the internal consistency of items within each construct. A coefficient value of 0.70 or higher will indicate satisfactory reliability. After validating the dataset, inferential statistical tests will be conducted to examine the research hypotheses outlined in Chapter Two. Correlation analysis will measure the strength and direction of relationships between variables such as psychological safety, personality traits, well-being, happiness, and adaptation. Multiple regression analysis will test the direct effects of psychological safety and personality on expatriate adaptation, determining how much variance in adaptation is explained by these predictors. Mediation analysis will assess whether well-being serves as a mediating variable between psychological safety/personality and adaptation. Moderation analysis will test whether happiness strengthens the relationship between well-being and adaptation, indicating conditional effects.

### **Conclusion**

The research paper is currently being extracted from the initial chapters of the research thesis document of the author. This research work will fill in the research gaps stated above and enable the hotel sector to enhance the blue-collar expatriate adaptation in the country as well as the region.

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