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How Toxic Workplaces Fuel Emotional Exhaustion and Hurt Productivity in Hospitality and Tourism Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Job productivity is of paramount importance to the hospitality and tourism sector, critically influencing operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and overall economic growth. A significant human resource challenge that frequently undermines this productivity is a toxic workplace environment (TWE). This study was therefore conducted to investigate the direct and indirect impacts of TWE on job productivity (JP), explicitly examining emotional exhaustion (EE) as a potential mediating factor in this relationship. Employing a PLS-SEM approach, data were meticulously collected from 457 employees operating within five-star hotels and travel agencies in Greater Cairo, Egypt. The empirical findings consistently reveal a significant negative impact of TWE on JP. Furthermore, the study confirmed that TWE exerts a positive influence on employees' emotional exhaustion. Crucially, emotional exhaustion was found to act as a significant mediating factor in the relationship between TWE and JP, explaining a substantial pathway through which workplace toxicity impedes productivity.

KEYWORDS

Toxic work environment, job productivity, emotional exhaustion, hotels, travel agencies.

كيف تؤدي أماكن العمل السامة إلى تفاقم الإرهاق العاطفي والإضرار بالإنتاجية في مؤسسات الضيافة والسياحة

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الملخص

تُعد إنتاجية العمل ذات أهمية قصوى لقطاع الضيافة والسياحة، حيث تؤثر بشكل حاسم على الكفاءة التشغيلية ورضا العملاء والنمو الاقتصادي العام. ومن التحديات الكبيرة للموارد البشرية التي تقوض هذه الإنتاجية بشكل متكرر بيئة العمل السامة. لذلك، أجريت هذه الدراسة للتحقيق في الآثار المباشرة وغير المباشرة لبيئة العمل السامة على إنتاجية العمل، مع فحص صريح للإرهاق العاطفي كعامل وسيط محتمل في هذه العلاقة. وباستخدام نهج نمذجة المعادلات الهيكلية ذات المربعات الصغرى الجزئية، تم جمع البيانات من 457 موظفًا يعملون في فنادق خمس نجوم ووكالات سفر في القاهرة الكبرى، مصر. تكشف النتائج التجريبية باستمرار عن تأثير سلبي كبير لبيئة العمل السامة على إنتاجية العمل. علاوة على ذلك، أكدت الدراسة أن بيئة العمل السامة تؤثر إيجابيًا على الإرهاق العاطفي للموظفين. والأهم من ذلك، وُجد أن الإرهاق العاطفي يعمل كعامل وسيط مهم في العلاقة بين لبيئة العمل السامة وإنتاجية العمل، مما يفسر مسارًا هاماً تعيق من خلاله سمية مكان العمل الإنتاجية.

الكلمات الدالة

بيئة العمل السامة، إنتاجية العمل، الإرهاق العاطفي، الفنادق، وكالات السفر.

Introduction

Job productivity is a cornerstone of success within the hospitality and tourism sector, directly influencing profitability, guest satisfaction, and competitive advantage (Mendrofa et al., 2021; Obinwanne & Kpaji, 2022). Its significance extends to the formulation of organizational strategies across various domains, including production, marketing, and finance. Enhanced labor productivity is posited to indirectly foster employee satisfaction and elevate worker motivation, thereby driving improved performance (Hapsara et al., 2024). Conceptually, job productivity is defined as the process by which human resources efficiently generate outputs, reflecting the relationship between inputs and outputs while emphasizing optimized performance actions (Wahyuni et al., 2023). This construct encompasses both individual employee productivity and broader organizational productivity, with quality considerations serving as a key metric for its measurement (Newmann-Godful, 2013). The level of job productivity is contingent upon a multifaceted array of determinants. These factors include, but are not limited to, individual ability, the prevailing working environment, human resource motivational policies, supervisory support, and adherence to organizational standards (Ahammad et al., 2015; Anjum et al., 2018; Djazilan & Arifin, 2022). Beyond individual capabilities, an employee's social network and the ambient work environment significantly contribute to their productivity. Research indicates that employees who find enjoyment in their work environments tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement, productivity, happiness, and overall well-being (Larasati & Prajogo, 2022). Consequently, it is imperative for organizations to cultivate a workplace conducive to employee well-being (Mohamed & Deraz, 2024). Proactive efforts to provide a supportive and comfortable environment can foster greater commitment among employees, which in turn directly contributes to increased productivity (Agber et al., 2025).

The contemporary workplace is frequently characterized by significant individual and collective strain on employees, with toxic environments and emotional exhaustion commonly identified as critical contributors to diminished employee well-being (Thapa et al., 2023). These factors are intricately linked and collectively precipitate adverse organizational outcomes, including job dissatisfaction, reduced performance, and decreased productivity (Larasati & Prajogo, 2022; Ilyas et al., 2025). The workplace environment is conceptualized as the aggregate of interrelationships among individuals within an organizational setting, encompassing technical, human, and organizational dimensions (Osazevbaru & Amawhe, 2021). The intricate intra- and interrelationships among workers offer a clear representation of this environment (Yang & Treadway, 2018). Researchers typically delineate two primary types of workplace environments: collaborative and toxic. A collaborative workplace environment is characterized by a pervasive sense of agreeableness, pleasure, and high employee involvement, often fostering empathy and organizational citizenship behavior (Manca, 2022). Conversely, a toxic workplace is marked by the proliferation of narcissistic behavior, abusive leadership, threatening conduct, harassment, humiliation, and bullying among employees. Such an environment is highly susceptible to elevated absenteeism, depression, job burnout, and severe psychological health issues, including work strain and counterproductive work behavior (Sulaeman

et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2024). Ultimately, these negative manifestations culminate in a significant loss of organizational efficiency and reputational damage.

A salient characteristic of a toxic workplace environment is emotional exhaustion, defined as "the feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted" (Nápoles, 2022). This state, frequently a symptom of psychological overwork, can significantly impair employees' well-being and deplete their emotional and psychological resources (Chaves-Montero et al., 2025). Emotional exhaustion often emerges when workers perceive threats or challenges to their essential resources. Toxic workplace environments serve as a prominent stressor, detrimental to mental health and a direct hazard to these resources. Employees subjected to such environments frequently experience a deterioration in their emotional relationships with loved ones, a noticeable reduction in motivation, and a decline in job productivity (Ibrahim & Olaleye, 2025; Ilyas et al., 2025).

While previous research demonstrated the negative effects of toxic workplace environments on productivity across some sectors globally, including universities (Anjum et al., 2018), banks (Rasool et al., 2019), and public institutions (Agber et al., 2025). However, there's a notable gap in understanding how these environments specifically contribute to emotional exhaustion within the hospitality and tourism sector, particularly in the unique cultural context of Egypt. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity within the Egyptian hospitality and tourism industry. By exploring this dynamic, the research seeks to offer significant insights for both academic understanding and practical application in managing and mitigating the impact of toxic workplaces in this vital sector.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Toxic Work Environment and Job Productivity

Organizations are fundamentally structured to foster efficient group dynamics and optimize workforce output, acknowledging the inherent social nature of human capital. However, the pervasive issue of toxic workplace environments frequently disrupts this intended order, generating distress and hindering effectiveness (Wang et al., 2020). This is particularly salient in contemporary workplaces characterized by increasing workforce diversity and reliance on teamwork, where effective communication is crucial for cohesion among employees, colleagues, and stakeholders (Sprigg et al., 2019). Despite the widely recognized understanding that human capital is a cornerstone for an organization's sustainable growth and innovation, toxic workplaces persist, often typified by dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics. Such environments significantly impede an employee's professional life and demonstrably reduce their job performance (Larasati & Prajogo, 2022).

The detrimental effects of a toxic workplace extend beyond individual performance, fostering lower job satisfaction, negative organizational commitment, and elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and turnover (Anjum et al., 2018; Rasool et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2022). Furthermore, by eroding psychological well-being and positive job-related attitudes, toxic workplaces critically undermine overall worker productivity through several mechanisms. First, these environments directly threaten employees' fundamental needs and deplete their psychological resources (Yang & Treadway,

2018). To recover or replenish these vital resources, employees are compelled to divert significant time, effort, and energy towards managing interpersonal conflicts and personal issues, thereby detracting from their ability to focus on core job tasks and enhance work productivity (Labrague, 2024). Second, toxic workplace elements, like workplace ostracism, actively disrupt employee goal attainment and sever social unity with organizational peers (Lee et al., 2024). In such isolating circumstances, employees are often denied access to crucial work-related information and resources due to broken social ties, which invariably culminates in diminished individual and organizational productivity (Sari & Dudija, 2024).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates a negative relationship between various manifestations of a toxic workplace environment—such as harassment, bullying, ostracism, incivility, and mobbing (Anjum & Ming, 2018; Rasool et al., 2019; Agber et al., 2025)—and employee productivity. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Toxic workplace environment negatively impacts job productivity.

Toxic Work Environment and Emotional Exhaustion

Management scholarship defines toxic workplace environments as organizational cultures characterized by unethical, unsupportive, and overtly negative dynamics. These environments exacerbate detrimental effects on employee well-being by normalizing hostility, fostering dysfunctional relationships, and eroding psychological safety (Anjum & Ming, 2018). Consequently, organizations seeking to implement effective intervention strategies to curtail the proliferation of such behaviors must thoroughly comprehend the multifaceted nature and impact of toxic workplaces. Fundamentally, a toxic workplace environment is delineated as a work setting marked by pervasive negative behaviors, inadequate leadership, insufficient support, and elevated levels of stress and conflict (Einarsen et al., 2020).

The ramifications of a toxic workplace environment have garnered considerable attention from contemporary management experts. This heightened interest stems from the profound and often pervasive negative effects these environments impose not only on individual employees but also on the broader organizational culture, policies, and strategic programs (Koç et al., 2022). Specifically, a toxic workplace can precipitate severe challenges in professional life, lead to a noticeable decline in employee performance, and significantly escalate levels of emotional exhaustion and other psychological problems (Sulaeman et al., 2024).

Empirical evidence consistently indicates that individuals subjected to chronic exposure to toxic workplace environments experience heightened frustration and emotional exhaustion (Khakpour, 2019). By instilling negative cognitive patterns and generating chronic stress, toxic workplaces profoundly impair employee well-being, ultimately culminating in states of deep exhaustion (Khan et al., 2019). Employees embedded in such environments are prone to increased psychological distress, diminished job satisfaction, and an amplified propensity for turnover (Rasool & Shafique, 2022). Furthermore, recent empirical work by Ilyas et al. (2025) provides strong support for the salient role of toxic workplace environments in driving increased emotional exhaustion. Based on this robust body of evidence, we posit that

toxic workplace environments are a primary contributor to emotional exhaustion among employees. Hence, it was proposed that:

H2: toxic workplace environment positively impacts employees' emotional exhaustion.

Emotional Exhaustion and Job Productivity

The concept of emotional exhaustion, recognized as a core dimension of burnout (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007), was initially elucidated by Maslach (2003) as a pivotal explanatory element within the broader burnout syndrome. Emotional exhaustion signifies the profound depletion of both inner and outer energy reserves (Eker et al., 2007). It is theorized to emerge from sustained exposure to intense physical and cognitive job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001), with the excessive exertion of emotions identified as a primary antecedent (Maslach et al., 2001). This state is particularly prevalent in professions requiring significant emotional labor, where individuals are consistently confronted with overwhelming emotional demands (Liu et al., 2020). Consequently, emotional exhaustion is a common challenge within the hospitality and tourism sector, given its inherent reliance on intense, face-to-face interpersonal interactions (Shatnawi et al., 2024).

The relationship between emotional exhaustion and productivity has been a subject of scholarly inquiry, yielding some varied findings. While a limited number of studies, such as that by Smith et al. (2017), have concluded that there is no significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and job performance, the predominant body of research indicates a negative impact of emotional exhaustion on perceived and actual productivity. For instance, Gusy et al. (2021) empirically demonstrated that emotional exhaustion is a significant predictor of health-related productivity loss. Similarly, Kalra et al. (2021) found a significant negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and sales performance, asserting that higher levels of exhaustion lead to reduced sales outcomes. In this vein, Maslach and Leiter (2022) argue that emotional exhaustion precipitates psychological imbalances that ultimately diminish the individual productivity of economic agents, thereby adversely affecting overall business performance. More recently, Lanchimba et al. (2025) posited a significant negative effect of emotional exhaustion on employee performance, specifically within the context of Ecuadorian entrepreneurs. Based on the preponderant evidence supporting a negative link, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H3: Emotional exhaustion negatively impacts job productivity.

The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion stands as a critical dimension of job burnout, instilling in individuals a profound sense that their valuable resources are imperiled or being rapidly depleted. In a parallel vein, a toxic workplace environment inherently generates substantial stress, stemming from factors such as a palpable lack of support from both colleagues and supervisors, coupled with an erosion of meaningful emotional connections among team members. Consistent with this, Jiang et al. (2020) empirically demonstrated a positive correlation between toxic workplace environments and heightened emotional exhaustion. Conversely, the diminished job productivity observed among employees in a toxic workplace environment often mirrors their state of emotional exhaustion, manifesting as a pervasive negative mood.

Elevated levels of toxicity in the workplace frequently propel emotionally exhausted employees to engage in counterproductive behaviors. For instance, they may exhibit tendencies to hoard knowledge rather than share it with colleagues, a disposition that, when reciprocated by others, negatively impacts overall productivity (Khalid et al., 2022).

Further reinforcing this perspective, Mashoush and Farea (2022) contend that toxic workplace environments are direct antecedents of a cluster of adverse outcomes, including deviant behaviors, withdrawal, reduced job satisfaction, increased emotional exhaustion, and ultimately, diminished productivity. Similarly, Ibrahim et al. (2025) highlight the involuntary psychological and physiological reactions of employees in toxic settings, such as elevated blood pressure, decreased job satisfaction, profound emotional exhaustion, and clinical depression. Building on this, Ibrahim and Olaleye (2025) posit that employees subjected to social stressors (i.e., a toxic workplace environment) experience severe exhaustion, which in turn leads to cognitive fatigue, impaired task performance, and a reduction in self-control, memory perception, motivation, and overall job productivity.

Drawing upon these compelling arguments, the study hypothesizes that emotional exhaustion serves as a crucial intermediary mechanism through which a toxic workplace environment influences employee productivity. So, the following hypothesis was:

H4: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity.

Figure 1 represents the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships within the proposed structural model of this research.

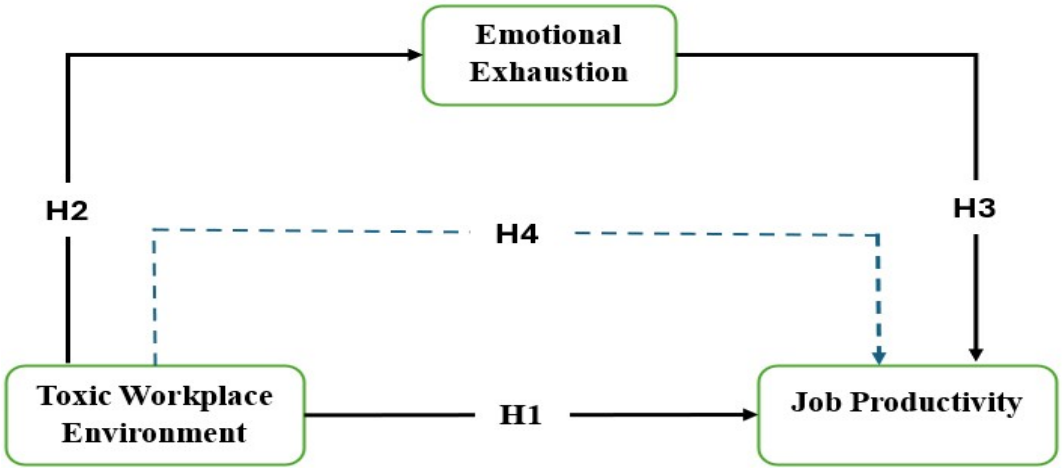

Figure 1. Proposed structural model

Methodology

Research approach

The questionnaire survey approach offers a practical investigation of circumstances, thereby complementing quantitative research methods (Heeringa et al., 2017). Typically, quantitative methodology initiates with questionnaire design and data collection guided by a hypothesis, followed by the application of descriptive or

inferential statistics (Ryser, 2021). Consequently, Rizos (2017) defines surveying as a research technique enabling direct data collection from participants through a structured set of questions. As one of the most frequently employed quantitative techniques, surveys gather insights into a phenomenon by eliciting the opinions, perceptions, and behaviors of a specific group of individuals (Rasool et al., 2019). Quantitative surveys offer several advantages, notably their high representativeness of the target population and relatively low cost compared to alternative methods, factors that informed its selection for this study. Conversely, the reliability of survey data depends on both the survey's structural integrity and the accuracy of respondent answers (Braun et al., 2021).

Instrument Development

The primary objective of this investigation was to investigate the direct and indirect influences of a toxic workplace environment on job productivity, specifically examining emotional exhaustion as a mediating variable in this relationship. The questionnaire developed for this study comprised a total of 16 items designed to measure the core variables, alongside 6 items for collecting demographic characteristics of the participants. All items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

- Toxic workplace environment (independent variable): This construct was measured using seven items adapted and modified from previous research, as cited in Larasati and Prajogo (2022). These items aimed to capture various facets of a detrimental work setting.
- Job productivity (dependent variable): Six items were employed to assess job productivity, adopted directly from the scale used by Ibrahim and Olaleye (2025).
- Emotional exhaustion (mediating variable): To capture the mediating effect, three items were adopted from Xu et al. (2023). These items specifically targeted the psychological strain and fatigue associated with emotional demands in the workplace.

Prior to full-scale data collection, a pilot study was meticulously conducted. The primary purpose of this pilot was to rigorously evaluate the reliability and validity of the entire research instrument. This involved administering the initial questionnaire to a representative sample of potential respondents. Feedback gathered during the pilot phase proved invaluable, as participants identified areas for improvement and suggested modifications to the instrument's wording and clarity. Consequently, the questionnaire underwent a thorough revision process based on this crucial feedback, ensuring enhanced comprehensibility and accuracy. The refined instrument was then disseminated to the selected population for the main data collection phase.

Sampling and data collection

To test the proposed model, this study focused on employees working within five-star hotels and travel agencies located in Greater Cairo, Egypt. This specific geographical and industry focus was strategically chosen given that the Greater Cairo area officially hosts 28 five-star hotels and 1235 travel agencies, as reported by the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (2024). The rationale for selecting these

establishments is multi-faceted. Firstly, the nature of work in these sectors demands intensive emotional labor, requiring employees to consistently regulate and display specific emotions during customer interactions. This makes them particularly susceptible to emotional exhaustion, especially when confronted with negative workplace dynamics (Cherlyn & Sentoso, 2022). Secondly, these environments are characterized by high stress and demanding conditions, including irregular hours, challenging customer interactions, and stringent service standards, all of which can exacerbate the detrimental impact of a toxic culture on employee well-being (Touni & Hussien, 2023). Thirdly, within these service-oriented industries, a direct correlation exists between employee well-being and the quality of customer experience. Consequently, a toxic workplace can significantly impair performance, leading directly to diminished service quality and reduced organizational productivity (Mohamed & Deraz, 2024). The data collection process involved the distribution of self-administered questionnaires to employees through the Google Forms website. This process was conducted between January and April 2025.

To recruit participants, this study employed a snowball sampling technique, a methodological approach frequently utilized in social science research for its efficacy in accessing populations that are otherwise challenging to reach (Abdel Majeed et al., 2025). This cost-effective method commenced with the distribution of a questionnaire link via various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and LinkedIn, to an initial cohort of 75 colleagues actively working within the hotel and travel agency sectors. These initial participants were subsequently requested to disseminate the link further to their professional networks and coworkers within the industry. Ultimately, a total of 471 electronic questionnaires were collected. Following a rigorous screening process to eliminate invalid responses characterized by irregular answer patterns, the final sample designated for analysis comprised 457 participants. This yielded a remarkable response rate of 97%. This achieved sample size substantially surpassed the minimum requirements outlined by Hair et al. (2010), who recommend a minimum of 10 participants per item for robust statistical analysis. Given that this study incorporated 16 items about its core constructs (TWE, JP, and EE), the final sample size of 457 participants significantly exceeded this stipulated guideline, ensuring adequate statistical power. The final demographic composition of the sample accurately reflected the industry distribution, with 49.5% (n=226) of participants being employed by five-star hotels and 50.5% (n=231) working for travel agencies. A comprehensive overview of the participant demographics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographics (N=457)

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	305	66.7
	Female	152	33.3
Age	≤ 30	222	48.6
	31- ≤40	134	29.3
	41- ≤50	101	22.1
	>51	-	-
Education	High schools	126	27.6
	Bachelor	331	72.4

	Postgraduate degree	-	-
Experience	< 6 years	172	37.6
	6-12 years	126	27.6
	>12 years	159	34.8
Employer	Hotel	226	49.5
	Travel agency	231	50.5

Data analysis

To analyze the postulated research hypotheses, this study hired partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This quantitative approach is well-established and particularly suited for research within the hospitality and tourism sectors, as evidenced by its application in recent scholarly work (e.g., Abd El-majeed et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025). The PLS-SEM analysis was conducted using WarpPLS version 7.0 software.

Results

Research model's reliability and validity

An exhaustive assessment of the measurement model was undertaken to rigorously ascertain the reliability and validity of the latent variables. The results, as detailed in Table 2, unequivocally support the robustness of the measurement model. Convergent validity was initially established through an examination of factor loadings. All factor loadings ranged from 0.610 to 0.946, consistently exceeding the widely recommended threshold of 0.5 (Sarstedt et al., 2021). This consistently high loading indicates that the observed items strongly converge on their respective latent constructs. Furthermore, internal consistency was robustly confirmed by the values of Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). All computed values for both CA and CR surpassed the commonly accepted benchmark of 0.7 (Kock, 2021), thereby demonstrating a high degree of consistency among the items measuring each construct. In addition to factor loadings, convergent validity was further substantiated by the average variance extracted (AVE) values, also presented in Table 2. All AVE values were found to exceed the minimum recommended threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2021), signifying that more than half of the variance in the indicators is accounted for by their respective latent constructs. The study also meticulously verified the absence of both multicollinearity and common method bias. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values, as shown in Table 2, consistently remained below the critical threshold of 3 (Kock, 2021). This outcome effectively indicates that there are no significant collinearity issues among the predictor latent variables, thereby ensuring the stability of the regression coefficients.

Table 2. Factor loadings, Cronbach alpha, CR, AVE, and VIF.

	Item Loading	CR	CA	AVE	VIF
Toxic Workplace Environment (TWE)	-	0.905	0.873	0.616	1.534
TWE-1	(0.840)				
TWE-2	(0.777)				
TWE-3	(0.821)				
TWE-4	N/A*				

TWE-5	(0.799)				
TWE-6	(0.838)				
TWE-7	(0.610)				
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	-	0.951	0.922	0.866	1.539
EE-1	(0.946)				
EE-2	(0.939)				
EE-3	(0.905)				
Job Productivity (JP)	-	0.918	0.893	0.651	1.499
JP-1	(0.821)				
JP-2	(0.773)				
JP-3	(0.815)				
JP-4	(0.811)				
JP-5	(0.823)				
JP-6	(0.798)				
*N/A: not applicable					

Firstly, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied. According to Franke and Sarstedt (2019), discriminant validity is established when the AVE for each individual construct is demonstrably greater than the highest squared correlation between that construct and any other construct within the hypothesized model. As illustrated in Table 3, the analysis revealed that the square root of the AVE for each latent variable consistently surpassed its highest squared correlation with all other constructs. This finding provides strong empirical support for the discriminant validity of the constructs, indicating that each construct measures unique variance not shared by other constructs in the model. Secondly, an additional and increasingly preferred assessment of discriminant validity was conducted using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The HTMT ratio serves as a more robust indicator of discriminant validity compared to traditional methods. Hair et al. (2017) recommend that an HTMT ratio below 0.85 indicates good discriminant validity, suggesting that there is sufficient distinctiveness between constructs. As presented in Table 4, all calculated HTMT ratios in this study ranged from 0.556 to 0.575. Critically, every one of these values falls well below the recommended threshold of 0.85, further reinforcing the distinctiveness among the latent variables.

Table 3. Fornell– Larcker results

	TWE	EE	JP
Toxic Workplace Environment (TWE)	**0.785**		
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0.521	**0.930**	
Job Productivity (JP)	-0.502	-0.505	**0.807**

Table 4. HTMT ratio

(good if < 0.90, best if < 0.85)	TWE	EE	JP
TWE	**-**	-	-
EE	0.575	**-**	-
JP	0.567	0.556	**-**

Model fit

An exhaustive evaluation of the research model's overall fit and quality was meticulously performed. This assessment leveraged ten well-established model fit and

quality indices, precisely as recommended by Kock (2021) for robust structural equation modeling. The results of this comprehensive evaluation, presented in detail in Table 5, demonstrate that the proposed structural model successfully met the stringent criteria for all ten indices. This consistent adherence to the recommended thresholds for these fit indices provides compelling evidence of a strong overall fit for the model, indicating that it adequately represents the relationships hypothesized among the latent variables and aligns well with the observed data structure. Such a strong fit lends significant confidence to the model's explanatory power and its ability to accurately reflect the underlying theoretical relationships.

Table 5. Model fit results

	Assessment	Criterion	Decision
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.396, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.307, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.292, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average block VIF (AVIF)	1.417	acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3	Supported
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.524	acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3	Supported
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.467	small >= 0.1, medium >= 0.25, large >= 0.36	Supported
Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.7, ideally = 1	Supported
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.9, ideally = 1	Supported
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.7	Supported
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.7	Supported

Results of testing hypotheses

The empirical findings concerning the postulated research hypotheses are comprehensively presented in Figure 2 and Table 6. These results provide robust insights into the relationships between a toxic workplace environment, emotional exhaustion, and job productivity.

As depicted in Figure 2, a significant negative relationship was observed between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity ($\beta=-0.32$, $p<0.01$). The negative standardized path coefficient (β) of -0.32 indicates that for every one standard deviation increases in a toxic workplace environment, job productivity is predicted to decrease by 0.32 standard deviations, holding other variables constant. The associated p-value of less than 0.01 signifies that this observed relationship is statistically significant, ruling out the possibility of it occurring by chance. This compelling finding therefore supports hypothesis 1, confirming that the presence of a toxic workplace environment detrimentally impacts employees' job productivity.

Besides, the results indicate that a toxic workplace environment exerts a significant positive influence on employees' emotional exhaustion ($\beta=0.53$, $p<0.01$). The positive standardized path coefficient of 0.53 suggests that a one standard deviation increase in a toxic workplace environment is associated with a 0.53 standard deviation increase in emotional exhaustion. With a p-value below 0.01, this relationship is also statistically

significant. This outcome provides strong evidence in support of hypothesis 2, implying that as the workplace environment becomes more toxic, employees are increasingly prone to experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion.

Furthermore, a significant negative relationship was also identified between emotional exhaustion and job productivity (β=−0.33, p<0.01). The negative standardized path coefficient of -0.33 indicates that a one standard deviation increase in emotional exhaustion is predicted to result in a 0.33 standard deviation decrease in job productivity. The statistical significance of this relationship (p<0.01) further corroborates this finding. Consequently, this result provides firm support for hypothesis 3, indicating that employees grappling with elevated levels of emotional exhaustion tend to exhibit diminished productivity at work.

The path coefficient analysis, summarized in Figure 2, also elucidates the explanatory power of the model. The toxic workplace environment was found to explain 28% (R^2=0.28) of the variance in emotional exhaustion. According to Kock's (2014) criteria, an R 2 value of 0.28 is considered a moderate effect, suggesting a meaningful portion of the variability in emotional exhaustion is accounted for by the toxic workplace environment. When considering the combined influence of both the toxic workplace environment and emotional exhaustion on job productivity, the model accounts for a substantial 34% (R^2=0.34) of the variance in job productivity. This R^2 value, falling within the range for a moderate effect as per Kock's (2014) standards, indicates that these two antecedent variables collectively provide considerable explanatory power for the observed variations in job productivity.

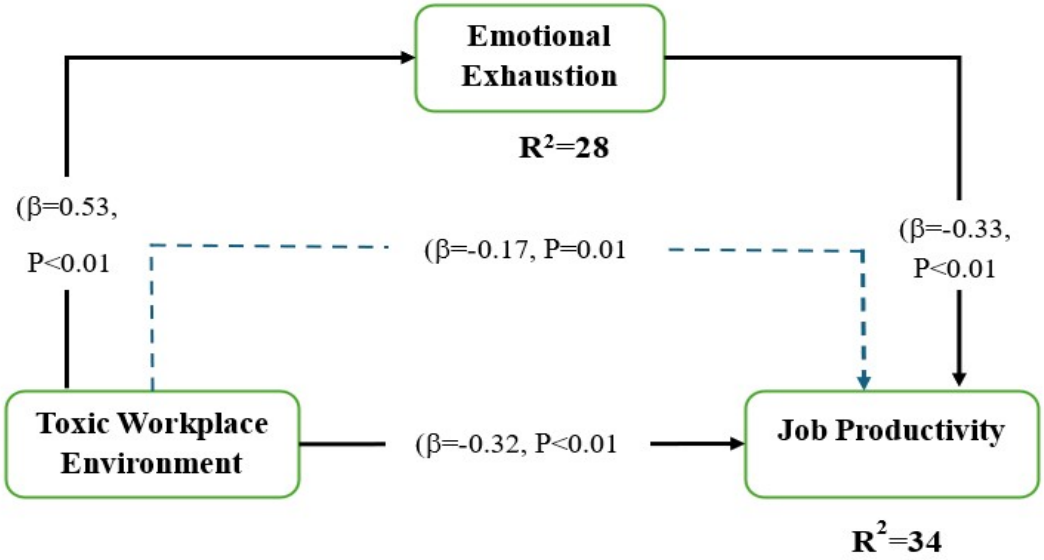

Figure 2. Final model of the study

To comprehensively explore the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity, a rigorous bootstrapped confidence interval analysis was conducted. The detailed results of this analysis are presented in Table 6. The analysis revealed a statistically significant negative indirect effect (β=−0.173). This indirect effect quantifies the influence of a

toxic workplace environment on job productivity through emotional exhaustion. This value was derived from the product of the two relevant path coefficients: the effect of toxic workplace environment on emotional exhaustion (β=0.525) multiplied by the effect of emotional exhaustion on job productivity (β=−0.329), i.e. −0.329×0.525=−0.173. The statistical significance of this indirect effect was further confirmed by a t-value of -2.186.

Crucially, the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval for this indirect effect (LL= -0.328, UL= -0.018) did not encompass zero. According to Kisbu-Sakarya et al. (2014), the exclusion of zero from the confidence interval provides compelling evidence for the presence of a statistically significant indirect effect, thereby confirming the existence of mediation. This robust finding provides strong empirical support for hypothesis 4, which posited that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity. Based on these findings, it can be conclusively stated that emotional exhaustion acts as a complementary partial mediator in the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity. This specific classification of mediation is justified because both the direct effect (toxic workplace environment on job productivity) and the indirect effect (via emotional exhaustion) were found to be statistically significant and, crucially, share the same directional influence (negative in this context), as stipulated by the guidelines for mediation analysis (Hair et al., 2017). This implies that while a toxic workplace environment directly diminishes productivity, a significant portion of this negative impact is also channeled through the emotional toll it exacts on employees.

Table 6. Mediation analysis results

H4	Path a	Path b	Indirect Effect	SE	t-value	95% LL	95% UL	Decision
TWE→EE→JP	-0.329	0.525	-0.173	0.079	-2.186	-0.328	-0.018	Partial Mediation

To ascertain the generalizability of the findings and investigate potential variations in employee responses attributable to distinct workplace types (i.e., travel agencies versus five-star hotels), a multi-group analysis was systematically conducted. This advanced statistical technique allows for the assessment of whether the hypothesized relationships within the structural model hold true across different predefined groups. As comprehensively presented in Table 7, the results of the multi-group analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in the estimated path coefficients between the two distinct groups (employees from travel agencies and employees from five-star hotels). This critical finding indicates that the structural relationships examined in this study, including the direct and indirect influences between toxic workplace environment, emotional exhaustion, and job productivity, are invariant across these two types of hospitality and tourism establishments.

The absence of statistically significant differences in path coefficients between the groups implies that the patterns of relationships among the latent variables are remarkably similar, irrespective of whether employees work in a travel agency or a five-star hotel. Consequently, this outcome provides strong empirical justification for

the generalizability of the study's conclusions across these segments of the Greater Cairo hospitality and tourism sector, bolstering confidence in the consistency and broad applicability of the derived insights.

Table 7. Multi-group analysis

Group pair results (Hotels=1 (N=226); Travel Agency=2 (N=231))						
Path coefficient	Path coeff. (Hotel)	Path coef. (Travel Agency)	Absolute path coeff. Diff.	p-values	T-statistic	**Decision**
TWE→EE	0.562	0.336	0.084	0.233	0.728	Not significant
TWE → JP	-0.375	-0.244	0.121	0.142	1.071	
EE→JP	-0.351	-0.363	0.101	0.188	0.884	

Discussion

This study investigated the profound impact of a toxic workplace environment on job productivity, alongside the consequential role of emotional exhaustion. Our comprehensive data analysis consistently supported all proposed hypotheses. Firstly, focusing on the direct relationship, the results unequivocally demonstrated a significant negative impact of a toxic workplace environment on job productivity. This finding aligns precisely with our initial intuition and provides strong empirical support for hypothesis 1. This outcome resonates deeply with prior scholarly works that have consistently reported a detrimental association between a toxic workplace and worker productivity (Anjum & Ming, 2018; Anjum et al., 2018; Rasool et al., 2019; Larasati & Prajogo, 2022). The observed negative effect on employee productivity can be attributed to several critical factors inherent in an unpleasant work setting. Such environments frequently precipitate higher levels of employee absenteeism, as individuals seek to disengage from distressing conditions. Moreover, a toxic atmosphere can foster feelings of insecurity or shame, eroding employees' psychological safety and their willingness to fully engage. This often leads to a decreased concentration or focus on work tasks, as cognitive resources are diverted to coping with the negative environment rather than solely on productive output. Supporting this, a study by Agber et al. (2025) involving 384 non-academic staff across two public universities in Benue State, Nigeria, also concluded that a toxic workplace environment is directly and negatively linked to worker productivity.

Within the specific context of the hospitality and tourism industry, where the majority of tasks are inherently operational, and the working culture is intensely modern and customer-oriented, these findings gain particular salience. Unlike project-based roles, operational activities in hospitality often place workers under immense pressure to complete tasks within stringent time limits (Touni & Hussien, 2023; Mohamed & Deraz, 2024). This pervasive demand for rapid task completion within limited timeframes can, paradoxically, foster a 'natural toxic environment' due to heightened pressure and potential for interpersonal strain, which ultimately serves to diminish overall job productivity. Thus, our findings not only confirm established relationships but also provide contextual nuances pertinent to the unique dynamics of the hospitality sector.

Secondly, the empirical findings of this study robustly confirm that employees operating within highly toxic workplace environments are significantly more prone to

experiencing emotional exhaustion, thereby providing strong support for hypothesis 2. This positive association between a toxic workplace environment and increased emotional exhaustion is highly consistent with a substantial body of prior research. Numerous studies corroborate this relationship, including the work by Jiang et al. (2020), which similarly identified a positive correlation between these two variables. Further reinforcing this link, Mirza et al. (2020) demonstrated a clear positive association between workplace ostracism—a specific manifestation of a toxic workplace environment—and emotional exhaustion. Consistent findings were also reported by Khakpour (2019) and Khan et al. (2019), both of whom observed a strong relationship between toxic elements in the workplace and heightened emotional fatigue. More recently, Koç et al. (2022) and Ilyas et al. (2025) provided compelling evidence for the prominent role of toxic workplace environments (e.g., abusive supervision) in precipitating increased emotional exhaustion. Their research elucidates the underlying mechanism, suggesting that a toxic environment cultivates an atmosphere of violence and intimidation. In such conditions, employees often feel unappreciated, unprepared, and compelled to work under duress. This sustained psychological pressure invariably leads to considerable psychological distress, which, in turn, can intermediate dynamics such as reduced teamwork and diminished productivity within the workgroup. These cascading negative effects ultimately culminate in elevated levels of emotional exhaustion among employees.

Thirdly, the empirical findings of this investigation unequivocally demonstrate a significant negative impact of emotional exhaustion on job productivity, thereby providing robust support for hypothesis 3. This outcome is highly consistent with a substantial body of existing literature that explores the detrimental consequences of emotional fatigue on performance and productivity. For instance, Gusy et al. (2021) empirically established that emotional exhaustion serves as a significant predictor of health-related productivity loss, highlighting the broader impact of psychological strain on an individual's capacity to perform effectively. Similarly, Kalra et al. (2021) observed a significant negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and sales performance, asserting that elevated levels of exhaustion directly lead to diminished sales outcomes. This aligns with the theoretical arguments put forth by Maslach and Leiter (2022) and Lanchimba et al. (2025), who contend that emotional exhaustion precipitates psychological imbalances within individuals. These imbalances ultimately impair the productive capacity of staff, consequently affecting overall business performance. Collectively, these congruent findings from both the current study and previous research underscore that emotional exhaustion is not merely a state of personal distress but a critical antecedent to reduced professional output. The consistent negative association observed reinforces the notion that prolonged emotional strain depletes an individual's resources, directly hindering their ability to concentrate, engage, and execute tasks efficiently, ultimately resulting in decreased job productivity.

Finally, a cornerstone finding of this study is the empirical validation that emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity, thereby providing robust support for hypothesis 4. This crucial result illuminates a key pathway through which a detrimental work setting

translates into reduced output. This finding is strongly corroborated by existing literature. For instance, Mirza et al. (2020) similarly found that emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism—a specific facet of a toxic environment—and job performance, noting a significant direct effect alongside the indirect pathway. Further empirical support for this mechanism is provided by Koay (2018) and Ibrahim & Olaleye (2025). Their work consistently demonstrates that elements of a toxic workplace, such as ostracism, substantially contribute to heightened emotional and mental exhaustion. This exhaustive state, in turn, precipitates considerable psychological distress among affected employees, ultimately leading to a demonstrable negative impact on their productivity.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study significantly contributes to the existing body of knowledge concerning the intricate relationships among toxic workplace environments, job productivity, and emotional exhaustion. Notably, it provides novel empirical insights within the distinct Egyptian cultural context, specifically within the hotel and tourism industry. By demonstrating that emotional exhaustion mediates the link between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity, this research expands upon previous studies that have predominantly relied on Western European and Asian datasets, thereby offering a more globally representative understanding of these dynamics.

Moreover, the empirically proven significance of the mediating role of emotional exhaustion carries profound critical implications for organizational practice. The unequivocal finding that emotional exhaustion serves as a mediator strongly suggests that early and proactive intervention by managers and leaders is imperative for effectively limiting or preventing employee exposure to negative emotions, which, in turn, mitigates counterproductive work behaviors. This can be strategically accomplished through concerted efforts aimed at cultivating a supportive and appreciative work climate. Specifically, the consistent appraisal of employees' performance and the genuine recognition of their contributions to organizational success can serve as potent buffers against emotional depletion. As highlighted by Jiang et al. (2020), the perception of being valued by supervisors can profoundly influence employees' psychological well-being, thereby safeguarding them from the insidious onset of emotional exhaustion and preserving their productivity.

In such a dynamic organizational setting, the implementation of an early warning system for detecting toxic environments would be highly beneficial in reducing the occurrence and severity of this pervasive problem. Based on our findings, we propose the following practical recommendations:

- Prioritize an optimum work environment: Managers must prioritize establishing an optimum work environment where employees are unequivocally regarded as the organization's pivotal asset. This foundational respect is imperative for fostering overall productivity.
- Cultivate a sense of ownership: Organizations should strive to instill a profound sense of ownership among workers. This psychological investment can significantly diminish emotional exhaustion, ultimately translating into more productive outcomes.

- Implement strict HR policies and training: HR departments are advised to introduce and rigorously enforce strict policies against various manifestations of a toxic workplace environment, including but not limited to workplace harassment, bullying, incivility, and ostracism. Furthermore, HR should conduct regular training needs assessments at the organizational level. Where high levels of toxicity are identified, targeted training programs on preventing and addressing workplace harassment, bullying, incivility, and ostracism should be organized.
- Foster a positive work culture: Managers are encouraged to actively promote a positive work environment and culture that nurtures teamwork, friendliness, and interpersonal cooperation among employees. For instance, organizing social events such as sports tournaments or family fairs for workers can significantly contribute to building camaraderie and a healthier work atmosphere.

Collectively, these strategic interventions can substantially contribute to reducing the prevalence of a toxic workplace environment, which will, in turn, mitigate social dysfunction and emotional exhaustion among employees, ultimately leading to a significant enhancement in job productivity.

Limitations and further research

While this study offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its inherent limitations, which concurrently pave the way for promising avenues of future research. The primary limitation of this study pertains to its generalizability. The findings are exclusively derived from data collected within five-star hotels and travel agencies located in the Greater Cairo region of Egypt. Consequently, the direct applicability of these results to other segments of the hospitality and tourism industry, or to different geographical and cultural contexts, may be constrained. Therefore, future research should systematically broaden the scope by:

- Diversifying industry segments: Including different hospitality and tourism sub-sectors such as three and four-star hotels, supply chain entities, various restaurant types, and aviation companies. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena across the entire industry.
- Expanding geographical scope: Conducting similar investigations in diverse countries, particularly other nations within the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as Western countries. Such cross-cultural studies would enhance the external validity and generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, a significant limitation of this study's quantitative approach is the inherent lack of detailed explanations for observed results and the absence of direct participant suggestions. While quantitative data reveals relationships, it does not fully elucidate the underlying reasons or offer nuanced perspectives from the employees themselves. To address this, future research should adopt a qualitative methodology, or ideally, a mixed-methods design. Qualitative research, through in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into: The specific antecedents and manifestations of a toxic workplace environment from the employees' perspectives.

Other contextual and individual factors significantly affect job productivity within these settings.

Finally, while this study meticulously examined emotional exhaustion as a key mediator between a toxic workplace environment and job productivity, the model is not exhaustive. The complex interplay of psychological factors suggests that other individual variables and personality qualities may also function as significant mediators or moderators in this relationship. Future research should therefore explore the roles of constructs such as self-esteem, work passion, organizational justice perceptions, and employee conscientiousness. Investigating these additional variables could provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the pathways through which toxic environments influence employee well-being and productivity.

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