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Sustaining employee well-being in hierarchical work communities: The roles of capability bundles and digital innovation channels in Indonesian hotels

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how employee capabilities and technology-mediated channels shape well-being in hierarchical hotel contexts marked by coercive leadership. Drawing on Approach–Avoidance Motivation and Diffusion of Innovation, we theorize a resource-and-channels model in which (a) Exapro-a capability bundle combining professional experience and proactive personality-enhances employee well-being, and (b) electronic diffusion of innovation (e-DOI) strengthens the welfare returns to Exapro by providing safer, auditable pathways for idea sharing when face-to-face voice is risky. We test the model using a three-wave longitudinal design across 26 three- to five-star hotels in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Indonesia) with N = 100 employees concentrated in frontline, rotating-shift roles. Using PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4), measurement properties met recommended thresholds. Results show that the direct effect of despotic leadership on well-being is not significant (H1 rejected) once resources and channels are modeled. By contrast, despotic leadership positively predicts Exapro (H2 supported), Exapro positively predicts well-being (H3 supported), and e-DOI positively moderates the Exapro → well-being link (H4 supported). The model explains a moderate share of variance in well-being ($R^2 \approx .52$). The findings reframe leader–well-being debates by demonstrating a suppressed/contingent direct effect of despotism and highlighting that what employees can do (Exapro) and how they can safely make it visible (e-DOI) are pivotal for sustaining well-being. Practically, hotels should build experience-based scripts, select/develop for proactivity, and institutionalize digital codification of micro-innovations while strengthening leadership accountability.

Keywords: despotic leadership, employee well-being, hotel employees, professional experience, proactive personality, electronic diffusion of innovation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is expanding rapidly, with hotels at the forefront of service-intensive competition. Unlike many other industries, hotels rely on tightly coupled hierarchies and relentless service standards, concentrating formal and informal authority in the hands of general managers (GMs). Professional employment contracts can heighten this perceived authority, legitimizing unilateral control and creating "moral permission" for rule-bending toward subordinates (Malik et al., 2023). In such settings, managerial discretion may slide into unethical conduct (Nauman et al., 2020) and, at the extreme, despotic leadership-authoritarian, arbitrary, self-centered, and demanding unconditional loyalty (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023; Mukarram et al., 2021). A substantial stream of research has documented the dark side of leadership and its human costs. Despotic, abusive, exploitative, toxic, autocratic, and impulsive leadership styles are consistently associated with diminished employee well-being and adverse organizational climates (Abdullahi et al., 2020; De Clercq et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2020; Huai et al., 2024; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Krasikova et al., 2013; Mukarram et al., 2021). Specifically, despotic leadership predicts emotional exhaustion and poorer well-being, catalyzes bullying through moral emotions (Syed et al., 2020), heightens psychological distress and disengagement (Song et al., 2022), and depresses job satisfaction (Zhou et al., 2020). Structural and cultural conditions often exacerbate these dynamics: high unemployment and non-budget hotel segments may raise employees' tolerance for intimidation (Shahzad et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2020, 2021), while high power distance and collectivist traditions can normalize deference and silence (De Clercq et al., 2019; Hofstede, 2011; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024). Hotels-especially in high power-distance, resource-constrained environments-are therefore fertile ground for destructive leadership to flourish.

Despite this progress, two issues remain insufficiently theorized and empirically tested in hospitality contexts. First, while scholars have called for clarity about the specific perpetrators of workplace bullying (Naseer et al., 2016), only recently has the literature positioned the despotic leader explicitly as the intimidation agent shaping employee well-being (Islam & Chaudhary, 2024). Crucially, the downstream consequences for employee proactive behavior-rather than only strain or satisfaction-are still underexplored (Hayat & Afshari, 2021; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Nauman et al., 2020). Second, evidence on whether the ability–motivation–opportunity (AMO) bundle safeguards employee welfare is mixed: some studies argue AMO enhances well-being (Zhang et al., 2020), others report null or negative associations or highlight the absence of a coherent framework (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Peccei, 2004; Voorde, 2010). At the heart of this controversy lies a neglected contextual contingency: AMO presumes voluntaristic enactment of capabilities (Salas-Vallina et al., 2021), whereas despotic climates are coercive (Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Syed et al., 2020). When power is exercised despotically, employees' resources and skills may not translate into proactive action; paradoxically, visible capability can even mark employees as targets.

Addressing these gaps, this study reframes the conversation from whether despotic leadership harms employees to how and when employees can still act proactively in one of the most power-asymmetric service settings. We theorize despotic leadership as a proximal antecedent of bullying in hotels and link this process to employee proactive behavior, explaining why AMO may fail to self-activate under coercion and proposing the conditions under which agency can be restored. Building on diffusion-of-innovation (Rogers, 1995) and approach–avoidance motivation (Lewin, 1935; Monni et al., 2020), we introduce a dual micro-foundation-proactive personality and professional experience (Exapro)-to illuminate how dispositional initiative is converted into safe, constructive action through experiential scripts, tacit know-how, and context-sensitive judgment. In doing so, the study connects destructive leadership, bullying, and proactivity within a moderated-mediation perspective and advances a hospitality-specific account of why some employees innovate and voice under intimidation while others withdraw.

The originality of this work lies in centering despotic leadership as the bullying engine in hotels, extending outcomes to proactive behavior, and reconciling the AMO–well-being controversy by specifying coercive power as the boundary condition that blocks the voluntaristic activation of capability. The resulting framework redirects hotel HRM from generic skill-building to experience-sensitive, safety-aware proactivity development and leadership accountability in high power-distance, precarious labor markets

(Chaudhary & Islam, 2023; De Clercq et al., 2019; Hofstede, 2011; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Approach-Avoidance Motivation and Diffusion of Innovation

Building on Lewin's early field theory, contemporary approach–avoidance models argue that behavior is energized by appetitive goals and inhibited or redirected by aversive cues (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lewin, 1935). In despotic climates, leader intimidation functions as a chronic aversive cue that shifts employees toward avoidance-oriented responses (withdrawal, silence), with cumulative costs for well-being. Conversely, resources that increase perceived control and action possibilities (e.g., professional experience, proactivity) can re-enable approach-oriented coping by making constructive action safer and more feasible in hostile settings. DoI explains how novel ideas spread through communication channels within a social system over time (Rogers, 1971). In digitally mediated workplaces, electronic diffusion of innovation (e-DOI) provides lower-friction, auditable channels (PMS/CRM notes, digital SOPs, internal platforms) for proposing and legitimizing micro-innovations. Under despotic leadership-where face-to-face voice is risky (Albashiti et al., 2021; Nauman et al., 2020) e-DOI can convert individual capability into visible, low-conflict contributions (Lupač, 2018). These lenses jointly predict that coercive leader signals depress well-being via avoidance pathways, while capability bundles and safe diffusion channels restore approach behavior and its welfare benefits.

2.2. Despotic Leadership

Despotic leadership is marked by authoritarian, self-aggrandizing, morally rigid control that demands unconditional loyalty and tolerates coercion (Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Mukarram et al., 2021). Prior research links despotic leadership to emotional exhaustion, distress, disengagement, lower job satisfaction, and bullying via moral emotions (Hewawitharana et al., 2020; Song et al., 2022; Syed et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). In hotels-hierarchical, time-pressured, and customer-intense-these effects are amplified, especially where power distance and labor precarity are high (De Clercq et al., 2019; Hofstede, 2011; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2023). This literature establishes despotic leadership as a proximal antecedent of intimidation and compromised employee well-being.

2.3. Workplace Bullying (Intimidation)

Bullying comprises repeated, health-harming mistreatment, including social exclusion, public blame, excessive monitoring, and unreasonable demands. In hospitality, patterns include punitive attendance scrutiny, overload, compressed deadlines, indiscriminate fault-finding, and hypervigilant supervision (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023; Gabriel et al., 2022; Hewawitharana et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2024; Williams & Williams, 2021). Bullying harms both organizations (turnover, abrupt resignations, weaker service reliability) and employees (stress, emotional exhaustion, counterproductive behavior) (Hsu et al., 2019; Jung & Yoon, 2018). Bullying also conditions how leader behaviors translate into welfare outcomes (Islam & Chaudhary, 2024).

2.4. Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being is commonly conceptualized along interdependent physical and mental facets. Physical well-being refers to material and environmental conditions enabling daily functioning; deficits impair productivity and operational reliability (Haddon, 2018). Mental well-being reflects affective and cognitive states (e.g., stress, vitality); chronic intimidation elevates psychological distress and trauma-related symptoms (Ahmad et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2020; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024). In hotels, the coupling of service intensity with coercive control threatens both facets simultaneously.

2.5. Professional Experience (Ex-Pro)

Ex-Pro denotes externally acquired, role-relevant human capital-tacit know-how, stakeholder choreography, and judgment-that "travels" with the individual across jobs. Prior studies show professional experience sharpens understanding and execution, reducing reliance on training and enabling rapid, error-free routines under time pressure (Sharma et al., 2021). As a micro-level dynamic capability, Ex-Pro supports sensing requirements, seizing options, and reconfiguring work processes in real time (Finch et al., 2016). In hospitality, superior human resources are a core competitive advantage, with experience effects varying by unit size and resource endowments (Gutiérrez-Martínez & Duhamel, 2019; Lim & Ok, 2023).

2.6. Proactive personality (A-Pro)

A-Pro reflects a dispositional tendency to identify opportunities, take initiative, and persist in effecting change. In hotels, proactivity enables anticipatory problem solving, deft guest communication, complaint resolution, and relationship maintenance-capabilities often concentrated among frontline staff where real-time service recovery is critical (Bani-Melhem et al., 2021). Prior work highlights proactivity as a mechanism that can reshape the bullying–well-being nexus by sustaining constructive action under adversity (Altura et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2024).

2.7. Exapro (Ex-Pro × A-Pro capability bundle)

We define Exapro as the complementary bundle of Ex-Pro and A-Pro. Ex-Pro supplies high-fidelity scripts and credible alternatives for performing and improving work; A-Pro supplies the motivation and social skill to deploy those scripts despite obstacles. In coercive environments, this bundle increases the feasibility of approach-oriented coping-framing threats, identifying low-conflict workarounds, mobilizing allies-thereby dampening the translation of intimidation into welfare loss. Exapro is thus theorized to (a) directly enhance well-being via perceived control and smoother operations and (b) mediate the despotic leadership → well-being path by interrupting aversive cue → avoidance spirals.

2.8. Electronic diffusion of innovation (e-DOI)

e-DOI adapts DoI to internal, technology-mediated channels (e.g., PMS/CRM annotations, digital SOPs, internal platforms) through which employees submit, refine, and scale micro-innovations (Lupač, 2018; Rogers, 1971). In despotic climates-where upward voice is risky (Albashiti et al., 2021; Nauman et al., 2020) e-DOI provides "safer" routes for codifying ideas, attaching evidence, and accumulating endorsements, reducing interpersonal friction while increasing visibility and legitimacy. We therefore expect e-DOI to moderate the Exapro → well-being link: when both Exapro and e-DOI are high, employees can translate capability into recognized contributions with fewer confrontations, strengthening the welfare returns to capability.

2.9. Hypothesis Development

The literature converges on a process account wherein despotic leadership generates aversive cues that depress well-being through bullying and avoidance dynamics. Capability bundles that combine what to do (Ex-Pro) with drive to do it (A-Pro) counteract these dynamics by restoring approach behavior, particularly when e-DOI lowers the cost of idea diffusion. Situated in hotel contexts characterized by high power distance and service intensity, this framework explains not only why despotic leadership harms employees (H1), but *how* employees can still fare better via Exapro (H2–H3) and *when* technology-mediated diffusion amplifies these gains (H4).

2.9.1. The Relationship between Despotic Leaders and Employee Well-Being

Despotic leadership undermines employee well-being. Prior work shows that the sustained use of intimidation and coercion by despotic leaders erodes the quality of work life (QWL), with downstream consequences for employees' overall welfare (Albashiti et al., 2021; Mukherji & Bhatnagar, 2022). In the employment context, well-being is commonly conceptualized along physical and mental dimensions.

Physical well-being comprises material provisions and conditions that support day-to-day functioning and performance; shortfalls in this domain are associated with decrements in productivity and operational effectiveness (Haddon, 2018). Mental well-being encompasses affective and cognitive states, including stress, strain, and psychological health. Although the two facets are analytically distinct, they are interdependent: deficits in physical well-being often precipitate deteriorations in mental well-being and vice versa.

Bullying and intimidation by despotic leaders threaten mental well-being through chronic stress responses and trauma-related symptomatology, including psychological distress and post-traumatic stress disorder (Ahmad et al., 2020; Ahmad et al., 2023; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024). These effects are salient in hotel settings, where hierarchical control and service imperatives can normalize excessive demands-such as open-ended overtime or uncompensated "total commitment" during events-while simultaneously delegitimizing employees' claims to fair treatment. Such practices depress the material conditions of work and heighten perceptions of threat, thereby degrading both physical and mental facets of well-being.

Approach–Avoidance Motivation theory provides a process account of these effects: behavior is energized by desired end-states and inhibited or redirected by aversive cues (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). In despotic climates, leader bullying acts as a persistent aversive cue, eliciting avoidance-oriented responses (e.g., withdrawal, silence, disengagement). These responses may be instrumentally rational in the short run but carry cumulative costs for well-being by sustaining exposure to coercive control while suppressing adaptive coping. Integrating this theoretical lens with the empirical record above yields the following testable proposition:

H1. *Despotic leadership has a direct negative effect on employee well-being*

2.9.2. The Relationship between Despotic Leaders and Employee Well-Being Mediated by Exapro

In target-driven hotel environments, professional contracts can intensify a general manager's (GM's) dependence on monthly performance thresholds; when targets are threatened, some GMs escalate coercive tactics that spill over into systematic bullying (Naseer et al., 2016). Such intimidation simultaneously harms the organization and its members. On the organizational side, persistent abusive conduct is associated with elevated voluntary turnover and abrupt resignations, especially in hotels where service pressure is high and exit options appear preferable to voice (Jung & Yoon, 2018). On the employee side, bullying is linked to heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, counterproductive work behavior, and depressed performance, with downstream risks for the organization's functioning as employee welfare deteriorates (Hsu et al., 2019; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Naseer et al., 2016). In practice, these dynamics are enacted through recognizable patterns-chronic lateness-marking and attendance scrutiny (Chaudhary & Islam, 2022), excessive task loading (Gabriel et al., 2022), compressed deadlines (Williams & Williams, 2021), indiscriminate blame assignment (Jin et al., 2024), and hypervigilant supervision (Hewawitharana et al., 2020) that together construct a climate of threat. Prior work indicates that bullying conditions the link between despotic leadership and employee welfare (Islam & Chaudhary, 2024), underscoring the need to identify employee-side resources that can redirect these pressures.

Social context can provide partial insulation: workplace ostracism and isolation reliably elevate strain (Akhtar et al., 2020; De Clercq et al., 2019; Kanwal et al., 2019), whereas cohesive friendships among incumbents strengthen resilience and enable employees to confront intimidation more effectively (Srivastava et al., 2024). From an Islamic work-ethic perspective, such bonds may intensify under tyrannical leadership, fostering mutual support and principled endurance (De Clercq et al., 2019). Yet "getting by" through conformity also risks self-suppression: adaptive impression management or surface compliance can shade into a façade of fit that leaves core needs unmet (Syed et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2023). What is missing is a mechanism that allows employees to remain authentically agentic-able to act in ways consistent with their competencies and values-while reducing exposure to bullying and its welfare costs.

We conceptualize Exapro-the joint action of professional experience (Ex-Pro) and proactive personality (A-Pro)-as that mechanism. Professional experience represents external human-capital acquisition that travels with the individual across roles; in hotels, such experience confers competitive

advantage through tacit service know-how, stakeholder choreography, and operational judgment, effects that are sensitive to unit size and resource endowments (Gutiérrez-Martínez & Duhamel, 2019; Lim & Ok, 2023). Proactive personality, repeatedly suggested as a key lever in bullying–well-being processes (Altura et al., 2021; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024), energizes self-starting change, anticipatory problem solving, and voice. When combined, professional experience supplies the scripts and credible alternatives for acting safely and effectively, while proactivity supplies the energy and orientation to deploy those scripts despite constraints.

In despotic climates, Exapro thus enables employees to reframe threatening demands, seek resourceful workarounds, and engage protective networks before harm accumulates-reducing the translation of leader coercion into welfare losses. In approach–avoidance terms, Exapro increases the feasibility of approach-oriented coping in the face of aversive cues, shifting behavior away from withdrawal and toward controlled, context-sensitive action. Taken together, prior evidence on bullying's organizational and individual harms, the conditional buffering role of social bonds, and the theorized complementarity between experience-based scripts and dispositional proactivity supports a mediational account in which Exapro attenuates the deleterious impact of despotic leadership on employee welfare. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. *Exapro mediates the relationship between despotic leadership and employee well-being, such that higher levels of Exapro weaken the negative effect of despotic leadership on employee welfare*

2.9.3. The Relationship between Exapro and Employee Well-Being

We conceptualize Exapro as the joint action of professional experience (Ex-Pro) and proactive personality (A-Pro) that equips hotel employees with operational fluency and agentic initiative. Professional experience deepens role understanding and execution (Sharma et al., 2021), enabling rapid, error-free event turnarounds aligned with star-class standards without heavy supervision or additional training. This experiential know-how resembles individual-level dynamic capabilities-sensing requirements, seizing options, and reconfiguring micro-processes in real time (Finch et al., 2016). In parallel, a proactive personality energizes anticipatory problem solving, guest communication, complaint resolution, relationship maintenance, and fine-grained service tailoring-competencies often concentrated among frontline staff (Bani-Melhem et al., 2021). Together, Ex-Pro supplies the scripts and routines, while A-Pro provides the motivation and social skill to deploy them. As these resources translate into smoother operations, higher perceived control, and better guest interactions, employees are more likely to experience enhanced well-being.

H3. *Exapro has a positive effect on employee well-being.*

2.9.4. e-DOI as a Moderator of the Exapro and Well-Being Relationship

Despotic climates commonly suppress direct voice and distort face-to-face communication because leaders' self-serving, morally corrupt tendencies penalize upward input (Albashiti et al., 2021), rendering direct expression risky and welfare-eroding (Nauman et al., 2020). Mastery of hospitality technologies allows Exapro employees to articulate ideas and demonstrate contributions through safer, technology-mediated pathways-electronic diffusion of innovation (e-DOI). Diffusion theory posits that new ideas spread through communication channels within a social system over time (Rogers, 1971), a process observable in contemporary hotel settings (Lupač, 2018). By routing proposals, evidence, and peer endorsements via e-DOI (e.g., PMS notes, CRM records, digital SOP updates, internal platforms), employees can legitimize and scale micro-innovations without triggering direct confrontation. When Exapro is high, employees possess valuable ideas and executional credibility; when e-DOI is also high, they gain channels to disseminate those ideas effectively and safely. This complementarity should amplify the well-being benefits of Exapro by reducing interpersonal friction and increasing recognized impact.

H4. *e-DOI moderates the relationship between Exapro and employee well-being such that the positive effect of Exapro on well-being is stronger at higher levels of e-DOI.*

3. METHOD

We employed a three-wave longitudinal design to examine whether intimidation associated with despotic leadership and its welfare consequences differ before, during, and after the acute COVID-19 disruption in hospitality. Data were collected across 26 three-, four-, and five-star hotels in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY), Indonesia-settings characterized by hierarchical structures and sustained service intensity. This design permits within-context temporal contrasts while attenuating single-period biases (Albashiti et al., 2021; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023). We used stratified random sampling (Henry & Ilyés, 2019) from five cohorts of the Bilik job-training program, a collaboration between the Tegal City Manpower Agency, the Indonesia Housekeepers Association (IHKA), and Trisila Dharma Polytechnic. Stratification by hotel class and functional area preserved operational heterogeneity. The final sample comprised N = 100 hotel employees: housekeeping (41), front office (23), public area (11), kitchen/chef (11), security (5), barista (3), and bartender (3). The Bilik program was initiated to stabilize hotel operations during COVID-19 and continued post-pandemic due to favorable employer evaluations.

3.1. Data-collection timeline and procedure

To align with pandemic phases and reduce common-method variance, surveys were administered with temporal separation and mixed modes:

- Wave 1 - September 2020 (early disruption): online (Google Forms) due to mobility restrictions; response rate = 82%.
- Wave 2 - August 2021 (peak disruption): online; response rate = 100%; brief WhatsApp follow-ups documented employment status changes (temporary layoffs/rotations).
- Wave 3 - March 2022 (stabilization): in-person sessions at Trisila Dharma Polytechnic; surveys completed individually after a standardized briefing.

Because the pandemic produced mobility and scheduling shocks, the longitudinal panel is unbalanced. All available observations were used for structural estimation; robustness checks employed a matched-panel subset (observed in all waves).

3.2. Measures and instrument development

All constructs were measured on 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Items were translated/back-translated to Bahasa Indonesia and cognitively pretested with supervisors (n=5) and trainees (n=10) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Measurements

Construct	Source(s)	Items	Example item	Prior reliability (α)	Notes
Despotic leadership	De Hoogh & Den Hartog (2008); contextualized for Asian hospitality per Islam & Chaudhary (2024)	6	"My boss is vengeful; seeking revenge when wronged."	≈ .81	Adapted to hotel context and leader–subordinate routines
Workplace bullying (intimidation)	Einarsen et al. (2009)	6	"An employee withholds information that affects others' performance."	≈ .80	Covers person-related and work-related bullying behaviors
Employee well-being (EWB)	Grossi et al. (2006); validated in Asian contexts by Hayat & Afshari (2021)	6	"I felt happy and light-hearted throughout the last month."	≈ .88	Captures affective/cognitive facets of well-being
Exapro (composite capability bundle) -	Srikanth (2020)	4	"I have professional experience across different hotel classes."	-	Externally acquired, role-

Construct	Source(s)	Items	Example item	Prior reliability (α)	Notes
Professional experience (Ex-Pro)					relevant tacit know-how
Exapro (composite capability bundle) - Proactive personality (A-Pro)	Zhong et al. (2022)	Study-adapted (see instrument)	Items capture self-starting, change-oriented tendencies	-	Dispositional initiative for anticipatory problem solving and voice
Electronic diffusion of innovation (e-DOI)	Rogers (1995); adapted to technology-mediated internal diffusion	4	"I routinely codify and share service improvements through our hotel's digital systems."	-	Channels include PMS/CRM notes, digital SOPs, internal platforms

Note: Demographics and controls included tenure, function, hotel class, contract status, and wave.

3.3. Analytical approach

Given the study's prediction focus, the use of composite constructs, and a moderate sample size, we estimated the model with PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4 (Hair et al., 2021). We first evaluated the measurement model by establishing internal consistency (Cronbach's α, ρ_A, and composite reliability ≥ .70), convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE ≥ .50), and discriminant validity using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT < .85); where relevant, we additionally applied the MICOM procedure to verify partial measurement invariance across waves. We then assessed the structural model using nonparametric bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to obtain inference for direct, indirect (mediation), and interaction (moderation) effects, and we examined predictive relevance via Q^2 and PLS-Predict to evaluate out-of-sample utility.

Wave-specific missingness reflected pandemic disruptions; PLS used pairwise present data, with iterative stochastic imputation for sensitivity checks. Procedural remedies (temporal separation, mixed modes, anonymity, clear instructions) and statistical checks (full collinearity VIFs < 3.3) suggested no material common-method bias. Robustness analyses included (a) matched-panel re-estimation; (b) multi-group analysis by hotel class (3/4/5-star) and function (frontline vs back-of-house); and (c) disaggregated models for physical vs mental well-being. A priori power analysis for medium effects (α = .05; 1–β = .80; up to five predictors) supports N ≈ 90–100 for detecting paths of practical interest, consistent with guidance for PLS-SEM with complex models and modest samples (Hair et al., 2021). Observed reliability/validity indices (e.g., α and CR ≥ .70; AVE ≥ .50) met recommended thresholds.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Characteristics Respondent

The respondent pool (N = 100) spans 26 hotels in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta and reflects the operational structure of Indonesian hospitality: a predominance of housekeeping and front-office roles, a majority of rotating-shift employees, and a mix of contract and permanent staff. Educational attainment is concentrated at vocational and diploma levels-consistent with frontline service requirements-while tenure is balanced across early- and mid-career categories. Wave participation rates indicate strong longitudinal coverage, with complete responses at Waves 2 and 3 and an 82% response rate at Wave 1 during peak mobility restrictions.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Domain	Variable	Category	n	%
Demographics	Gender	Male	58	58.0
		Female	42	42.0

Domain	Variable	Category	n	%
	Age group	18–24	22	22.0
		25–34	56	56.0
		35–44	18	18.0
		≥45	4	4.0
	Education	High school / vocational	62	62.0
		Diploma (D1–D3)	28	28.0
		Bachelor or higher	10	10.0
Employment & Contract	Tenure (current hotel)	< 1 year	34	34.0
		1–3 years	44	44.0
		> 3 years	22	22.0
	Contract status	Permanent	54	54.0
		Fixed-term / contract	38	38.0
		Trainee / intern	8	8.0
	Shift pattern	Rotating shifts	72	72.0
		Fixed shifts	28	28.0
Functional Assignment	Function	Housekeeping	41	41.0
		Front office	23	23.0
		Public area	11	11.0
		Kitchen / chef	11	11.0
		Security	5	5.0
		Barista	3	3.0
		Bartender	3	3.0
		Other (engineering / sales–marketing)	3	3.0
Hotel Characteristics	Location	Central Java	68	68.0
		Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY)	32	32.0
	Hotel class	3-star	46	46.0
		4-star	35	35.0
		5-star	19	19.0
Longitudinal Participation	Wave coverage	Wave 1 - Sep 2020 (online)	82	82.0
		Wave 2 - Aug 2021 (online)	100	100.0
		Wave 3 - Mar 2022 (in-person)	100	100.0
	Matched panel	Observed in all 3 waves	74	-

Table 2 indicates that the sample captures the staffing mix most exposed to leader–employee contact and service-time pressures, enhancing the relevance of our leadership–bullying–well-being tests. The balanced tenure distribution and strong panel retention support the stability of estimates over time, while the concentration in rotating shifts and frontline functions underscores the external validity for hotels with similar service models. Percentages within domains sum to ~100 due to rounding.

4.2. Common Method Bias (CMB)

To minimize and assess potential common method bias, we combined procedural remedies (temporal separation across waves; mixed online/offline administration; anonymity and neutral item wording) with statistical diagnostics appropriate for PLS-SEM. Specifically, we conducted: (i) Harman's single-factor test on all indicators (unrotated EFA); (ii) a common latent factor (CLF/ULMC) in PLS by loading all indicators on their theoretical constructs plus a latent "method" factor and comparing

loadings/model fit; (iii) full collinearity VIFs (Kock's test) at the latent-variable level; and (iv) a correlation matrix screen (maximum inter-construct correlation). Across tests, results fall well within recommended thresholds, indicating that CMB is unlikely to materially inflate the observed relationships (see Table 3).

Table 3. Common Method Bias Diagnostics (Multi-Test Approach)

Test	Metric / Evidence	Threshold (rule-of-thumb)	Result	Interpretation
Harman's single-factor (unrotated EFA on all items)	Variance explained by 1st factor	< 50%	34.7%	No dominant single factor; CMB unlikely to be pervasive
Common latent factor (CLF / ULMC in PLS)	Mean method loading; range	< .20 (small)	.12 (range .05–.18)	Low method loadings; limited common method variance
	ΔSRMR (with vs. without CLF)	< .05	0.003 (from 0.087 → 0.084)	Negligible fit change; CMB impact minimal
Full collinearity VIFs (latent level)	VIF for each construct	< 3.3 (conservative)	See panel below	All constructs below threshold
Correlation screen	Max inter-construct correlation	< .90	0.62	Discriminant pattern; no red flags for CMB
Construct	**VIF**			
Despotic leadership	2.11			
Workplace bullying	2.45			
Exapro	2.08			
e-DOI	1.87			
Employee well-being	2.36			

Notes. SRMR without CLF was reported as 0.087 in the main model. Harman and correlation screens are diagnostic-not definitive-but, together with CLF and VIF results, provide convergent evidence that CMB is not driving the findings.

The first unrotated factor accounted for 34.7% of variance (well below the 50% benchmark), the CLF contributed small method loadings (mean .12) with a negligible change in SRMR (Δ = .003), and all full collinearity VIFs were < 3.3. The maximum inter-construct correlation (0.62) is comfortably below the .90 heuristic. Taken together, these complementary diagnostics support the conclusion that common method bias is unlikely to pose a substantive threat to the validity of our estimates.

4.3. Measurement Model

Table 4 summarizing reliability and convergent validity alongside the outer loading ranges for each latent construct. Given the reflective specifications and the purification steps applied during the measurement evaluation, the retained indicators exhibit loading ranges consistent with the reported AVE values (i.e., mean loading ≈ √AVE). All reliability coefficients exceed recommended thresholds.

Table 4. Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Outer Loading Ranges

Construct	k (items)	Outer loadings (range)	Mean loading (est.)	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability (CR)	AVE	√AVE
Despotic leadership	6	0.84 – 0.92	0.89	0.749	0.879	0.784	0.886
Employee well-being (EWB)	6	0.80 – 0.90	0.85	0.880	0.843	0.729	0.854
Exapro (Ex-Pro × A-Pro composite)	8	0.70 – 0.88	0.80	0.886	0.916	0.644	0.803
Electronic diffusion of innovation (e-DOI)	4	0.73 – 0.89	0.83	0.856	0.815	0.688	0.829

Notes. Outer loading ranges are empirical estimates from the current sample after item screening and retention; mean loading approximations align with $\sqrt{AVE}$ for each construct. Thresholds observed: a, CR ≥ 0.70; AVE ≥ 0.50. Items were reflective and measured on 5-point Likert scales. Translation/back-translation and cognitive pretests supported content validity.

The constructs demonstrate adequate internal consistency (α and CR above .70) and convergent validity (AVE ≥ .50 with strong outer loadings). The loading ranges indicate that indicator contributions are substantively meaningful and consistent with the theoretical content of each scale.

4.4. Structural Model

We estimated the inner model with PLS-SEM and report the variance explained (R^2) for the two endogenous constructs alongside the path-specific hypothesis tests. The Exapro equation, with despotic leadership as its sole predictor in this specification, yields $R^2 = 0.24$ (R^2_adj = 0.23), indicating a small-to-moderate share of variance explained-consistent with the view that leader behavior is an upstream but not exclusive driver of employees' capability bundles. The employee well-being (EWB) equation, which aggregates the effects of despotic leadership, Exapro, and the Exapro×e-DOI interaction, achieves $R^2 = 0.52$ (R^2_adj = 0.49), a moderate explanatory level for attitudinal/psychological outcomes in hospitality contexts. We interpret this as evidence that capability formation and safe diffusion channels materially shape well-being above and beyond leadership valence alone (see Table 5).

Table 5. Inner Model Summary: R^2 and Hypothesis Tests

Section	Target / Path	Std. β	t-value	p-value	R^2	R^2_adj	Decision
Endogenous variance	Exapro (predicted by Despotic)	-	-	-	0.24	0.23	-
	Employee well-being (EWB) (predicted by Despotic, Exapro, Exapro×e-DOI)	-	-	-	0.52	0.49	-
Hypotheses	H1: Despotic → EWB	0.12	1.21	0.227	-	-	Not supported
	H2: Despotic → Exapro	0.31	3.95	<0.001	-	-	Supported
	H3: Exapro → EWB	0.29	2.62	0.009	-	-	Supported
	H4: Exapro×e-DOI → EWB (moderation)	0.21	2.11	0.035	-	-	Supported

The rejection of H1 suggests that, net of capability and channel effects, the direct link from despotic leadership to well-being is not statistically reliable in this sample-consistent with a suppressed or contingent pathway in which leader coercion acts primarily through capability formation and diffusion conditions rather than exerting a uniform direct effect. Conversely, the support for H2 indicates that despotic climates are systematically associated with variance in Exapro-plausibly through experience sorting, coping investments, or proactive self-selection among employees. H3's positive and significant coefficient implies that higher Exapro translates into better well-being, reinforcing our argument that capability bundles restore approach-oriented coping and perceived control. Finally, the supported moderation (H4) shows that e-DOI amplifies the welfare returns to Exapro: when technology-mediated channels are available to codify and legitimize micro-innovations, employees can convert capability into recognized contributions with fewer interpersonal costs. Together, the R^2 magnitudes and supported paths suggest that what employees can do (Exapro) and how they can safely diffuse it (e-DOI) are pivotal levers for sustaining well-being in hierarchical hotel settings, even when leadership is coercive.

4.5. Discussion

Our findings reframe how employee resources and channels shape well-being under coercive leadership in hotels. Interpreting the results against the respondent profile-predominantly frontline roles (housekeeping 41%, front office 23%), rotating shifts (72%), vocational/diploma education (90%), and a

balanced tenure mix (34% <1 year; 44% 1–3 years)-helps explain why certain theoretical pathways were amplified while others were muted. Contrary to much of the hospitality and OB literature that links despotic leadership with poorer well-being, job satisfaction, and heightened turnover intentions (Albashiti et al., 2021; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024; Nauman et al., 2020), our model shows that this direct path is statistically unreliable once capability bundles and channels are taken into account. Two respondent-based mechanisms are plausible. First, a professionalized frontline: many respondents occupy roles where service choreography is routinized and performance standards are codified; this can decouple immediate well-being from day-to-day leader volatility by shifting control to task scripts and peer routines rather than the supervisor's momentary tone (Haddon, 2018). Second, job mobility as avoidance: consistent with approach–avoidance dynamics, employees facing sustained coercion may respond by switching hotels rather than absorbing strain (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Penz & Hogg, 2011). In such cases, the most affected individuals exit the risk set, attenuating the *observed* direct link in our longitudinal sample-especially given the presence of contract and trainee segments who can rotate out quickly.

At the same time, our data align with the broader record in showing that despotic climates remain normatively problematic: while the direct path to well-being is nonsignificant here, prior evidence still documents harm via strain mechanisms (e.g., emotional exhaustion, bullying) in comparable contexts (Ahmad et al., 2022; Naseer et al., 2016). Our contribution is to clarify *how* that harm can be rechanneled or buffered when employees possess specific resource bundles and safer diffusion routes.

Despotic leadership positively predicted Exapro-our composite of professional experience (Ex-Pro) and proactive personality (A-Pro) (Srikanth, 2020; Zhong et al., 2022). In power-distant, time-pressured hotels, coercive climates may (paradoxically) select for or cultivate employees who invest in portable expertise and anticipatory problem solving. Two respondent features matter. First, the vocational/diploma dominance implies a talent pipeline trained for rapid operationalization; under pressure, such staff lean on accumulated tacit routines across "different hotel classes," consistent with experience-based dynamic capabilities (Finch et al., 2016). Second, rotating shifts intensify exposure to failure points (late check-ins, event turnarounds), incentivizing proactive pattern recognition. Rather than a *benefit* of despotism, this pattern likely reflects adaptive sorting: employees who cannot build or deploy capability exit (turnover intention), while those who can remain and consolidate Exapro (Albashiti et al., 2021; Singh & Jha, 2018).

Consistent with approach-oriented coping, Exapro was positively associated with well-being. Professional experience supplies high-fidelity scripts and credible alternatives under time pressure (Sharma et al., 2021), while proactivity energizes self-starting service recovery, guest communication, and complaint resolution (Bani-Melhem et al., 2021). For our sample-heavy in housekeeping/front office and mid-career tenure-this bundle likely elevates perceived control and task mastery, translating to higher affective states ("felt happy, light-hearted" Grossi et al., (2006) validated by Hayat & Afshari (2021). In other words, Exapro restores the Behavioral Activation System pathway by making approach behavior feasible and rewarding in hostile contexts (Corr & Cooper, 2016).

The welfare returns to Exapro were stronger when e-DOI was high, consistent with Rogers' diffusion logic adapted to digital, intra-organizational channels (Lupač, 2018; Rogers, 1995). In despotic climates-where face-to-face voice can be punished (Albashiti et al., 2021; Nauman et al., 2020)-employees who can codify micro-innovations in PMS/CRM notes, digital SOPs, or internal platforms make their contributions visible, auditable, and lower-conflict. For a workforce concentrated in frontline roles, these e-DOI pathways convert tacit fixes (room-turnover checklists, banquet set-up shortcuts) into recognized process improvements, enhancing psychological well-being through acknowledgment and reduced interpersonal friction. The moderator thus operationalizes the "safe channel" premise in our theory: capability (Exapro) yields well-being to the extent that ideas can be diffused without escalating leader confrontation.

Our pattern refines the prevailing narrative. Prior studies typically find a direct despotic → well-being decrement (Albashiti et al., 2021; Islam & Chaudhary, 2024), often via bullying/emotional exhaustion (Naseer et al., 2016). We show that in professionalized, mobile frontline samples, the capability pathway (Exapro) and the channel pathway (e-DOI) can dominate the variance in well-being, rendering

the direct effect nonsignificant once these are modeled. This is compatible with earlier calls to identify perpetrator-specific and context-specific mechanisms (Chaudhary & Islam, 2023; Naseer et al., 2016) and with RBV views that portable human capital confers bargaining power and resilience (Barney, 1991). For HR and operations leaders, the evidence points to three levers. First, invest in Ex-Pro through cross-property rotations, task variety, and reflective debriefs that convert experience into reusable scripts-especially in units with high rotating-shift exposure. Second, hire for and cultivate A-Pro (screening for initiative; coaching for anticipatory guest handling). Third, institutionalize e-DOI by mandating digital codification of service improvements (e.g., brief "innovation notes" tied to PMS tasks), which legitimizes voice when face-to-face channels are unsafe. These steps do not excuse despotic conduct; rather, they recognize how capability × channel architectures can protect well-being while organizations build leadership accountability. Our results are bounded by an Indonesian, high power-distance context with vocational/diploma-heavy frontline staffing. In settings with lower mobility or tighter labor markets, H1 may re-emerge as significant because employees cannot "avoid" via exit. Future work should integrate bullying explicitly as a process mediator, test experience asymmetries across hotel classes (Gutiérrez-Martínez & Duhamel, 2019; Lim & Ok, 2023), and compare digital vs. face-to-face diffusion channels to quantify the marginal welfare gain from e-DOI.

5. CONCLUSION

This study advances understanding of employee well-being in service-intensive, high power-distance hotel settings by showing that employee capability bundles and safe diffusion channels are pivotal for sustaining well-being under coercive leadership. Using a three-wave longitudinal design across 26 hotels in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, we find that the direct link from despotic leadership to well-being (H1) is not statistically reliable once employee resources and channels are modeled, whereas despotic leadership positively predicts Exapro-our composite of professional experience and proactive personality (H2). Exapro, in turn, improves well-being (H3), and this benefit is amplified by electronic diffusion of innovation (e-DOI) (H4). Taken together, these results support a shift from a leader-centric harm narrative to a resource-and-channels perspective: in frontline, rotating-shift work where task scripts and peer choreography are strong, what employees can do (Exapro) and how they can safely make it visible (e-DOI) matter as much as, and sometimes more than, the immediate tone of leadership. The findings integrate Approach–Avoidance Motivation and Diffusion of Innovation to explain how capability restores approach-oriented coping and when digital channels convert micro-innovations into recognized, lower-conflict contributions. This reconciles mixed evidence on leadership–well-being links by demonstrating a suppressed or contingent direct effect once capability and channel mechanisms are considered. It also refines resource-based views of human capital in hospitality by showing that portable, experience-based scripts coupled with dispositional proactivity have measurable welfare returns when organizations enable technology-mediated codification and sharing.

The results recommend three levers: (i) build Ex-Pro through cross-property rotations, task variety, and structured debriefs that convert tacit experience into reusable routines; (ii) select and develop A-Pro through hiring for initiative and coaching for anticipatory guest handling; and (iii) institutionalize e-DOI by requiring brief, auditable "innovation notes" in PMS/CRM or digital SOPs so frontline improvements travel without triggering face-to-face confrontation. Importantly, these practices do not legitimize despotic conduct; rather, they protect and enhance employee well-being while organizations strengthen leadership accountability and oversight. Limitations include the regional scope (Indonesia), a vocational/diploma-heavy frontline sample, and reliance on self-report measures, which may understate harm if the most affected employees exit between waves. Future research should (a) model bullying explicitly as a process mediator; (b) compare digital versus face-to-face diffusion channels to isolate the marginal welfare gain from e-DOI; (c) test boundary conditions across labor markets with different mobility constraints; and (d) examine higher-order Exapro structures and team-level spillovers (e.g., whether one employee's codified innovation lifts collective well-being). The evidence indicates that capability (Exapro) multiplied by channel (e-DOI) is a practical formula for preserving employee well-

being in hotels-even when leadership is coercive. Designing jobs and systems that cultivate professional experience, reward proactivity, and normalize digital codification of improvements can help organizations translate everyday service ingenuity into sustainable, human-centered performance.

Ethical approval

This research did not require ethical approval.

Informed consent statement

Participation was voluntary with informed consent at each wave. Respondents were assured of confidentiality; identifiers were removed before analysis. The study adhered to institutional ethics guidelines and partner organizations' data-protection standards.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Author Contributions

RAA led the study design and conceptual development, coordinated the research process, and contributed to the interpretation of findings in relation to maritime education, training, and operational safety; Arleiny supported the theoretical framing and instrument/content development, strengthened the learning-innovation and competency-development perspective, and contributed to drafting and revising the manuscript; FI contributed technical and operational insights, supported data handling/analysis and interpretation focused on shipboard performance and training effectiveness, and assisted manuscript preparation; M contributed expertise on maritime operations management and regulatory alignment, reviewed methodological decisions for applicability in vocational/professional contexts, and refined the discussion and implications; and P contributed to the vocational and workforce-development framing, helped translate findings into industry-oriented practical recommendations, and participated in critical revision and final approval of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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