

## Article

# Expatriate Academics' Positive Affectivity and Its Influence on Creativity in the Workforce Indigenization Context: Revealing the Role of Perceived Fairness

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**Abstract:** Workforce indigenization in Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) countries is under-researched in international business literature, especially among expatriate academics from the Middle East and North Africa regions working in GCC countries. Therefore, drawing from the social exchange and conservation of resources theories, this study examines the moderating effect of perceived fairness on the relationship between positive affectivity (PA) and creativity in the context of enhanced indigenization of human resource (HR) policies in GCC countries. This study collects data from 228 mobile academics working in Saudi universities. Principal least squares structural equation modeling results show that PA positively impacts creativity. Further, perceived fairness is found to reinforce the connection between PA and creativity. This study's results indicate that host universities must build appealing HR policies to cope with the diverse challenges related to the indigenization of HR policies. Furthermore, this study highlights the role of positive personality traits in enhancing creativity.

**Keywords:** indigenization; perceived fairness; positive affectivity; creativity; expatriate academics



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## 1. Introduction

Higher education institutions consider academics' skills and creativity as key assets (Khan et al. 2023; Stoermer et al. 2020) in the context of the competition for talent where skill shortages are accentuated (Amari et al. 2023). Creativity involves the brainstorming of useful and novel ideas in any domain emanating from individuals or teams (Amabile et al. 1996). Saudi Arabia (KSA) higher education institutions have strived to enhance their competitiveness to meet international standards of quality (Ghali and Amari 2023; Gill et al. 2022; Amari et al. 2022) and align with the Saudi Vision 2020–2030 program. Therefore, fostering creative behavior among academics, including expatriate cohorts, has become a significant challenge for universities.

Concomitantly, workforce indigenization in organizations within Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) countries, including higher education institutions, has accelerated during the last decade (Jabeen et al. 2018). Indigenization refers to the adaptation or localization of human resource (HR) policies and practices to suit the cultural context of particular countries or regions (Amari et al. 2023; Darwish et al. 2022) and align with local norms, values, and legal requirements, which ensures that HR practices are relevant, effective, and respectful of the local culture. Then, inclusive HR policies (e.g., training and recruitment) are employed to activate the localization agenda in KSA, called "Saudization". Saudization aims to reduce the number of international employees in KSA, which currently represent 41% of the workforce (GASTAT 2022), and provide employment for KSA nationals (e.g., the Nitaquat program in the Saudi private sector). In line with Saudization, the Saudi General Authority for Statistics reports that 1.2 million expatriates left the country in 2020 (Darwish et al. 2022).

In host countries, expatriates are facing a myriad of challenges, especially in the post-COVID-19 era. These challenges have changed their abilities to enhance their performance (Bader et al. 2022; Caligiuri et al. 2020). Among these challenges, expatriation scholars point out the hostility and discrimination against international workers (Bader et al. 2018; Peltokorpi et al. 2021; Amari et al. 2021), turnover intention (Davies et al. 2019; Amari 2022); mental health problems (Selmer and Luring 2014; Amari et al. 2023; Tripathi and Singh 2021), and indigenization of the workforce (Darwish et al. 2022; Jabeen et al. 2018; Amari et al. 2023). Yet, in spite of this abundant research, little is known about how expatriates experience these challenges (Bader et al. 2022). For most of these challenges, indigenization, as a lived experience, remains highly uncharted.

Recently, scholars have argued that exposure to the indigenization of HR policies could prevent expatriates from expressing their creativity (Amari et al. 2023). In other words, a two-tier HR system may reinforce feelings of discomfort among individuals at work and subsequently lower organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Sanchez and Brock 1996), thereby compromising their potential, especially in terms of creativity (Amari et al. 2023). However, few studies focus on the effects of workforce indigenization on expatriate performance, including creativity. Existing studies reveal that personal traits help predict employee creativity (Rego et al. 2012; Swalhi et al. 2023; Stoermer et al. 2020; Ghafoor and Haar 2020; Georgiadou et al. 2024). Building on nascent studies, this study focuses on positive affectivity (PA) and its role in predicting expatriates' creativity within host organizations. PA can be described as a person's tendency to respond positively to environmental stimuli, entailing emotional responses such as interest, enthusiasm, excitement, or attentiveness (Watson et al. 1988; Cropanzano et al. 1993; Stoermer et al. 2020). International academics face countless challenges owing to volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments (Caligiuri et al. 2020; Bastida et al. 2023; Bader et al. 2022) that threaten their mental abilities (Amari et al. 2023). This context may further stifle international workers' aptitudes in terms of creativity for goal achievement (Gociowska et al. 2018; Amari et al. 2023). Within this framework, this study examines how PA helps highly skilled individuals face this adversity (Stoermer et al. 2021a) and fulfill their personal and professional goals. Surprisingly, how PA interacts with creativity among expatriate cohorts is yet to be explored (Stoermer et al. 2020).

In addition, this study focuses on perceived fairness. The perception of fairness can be viewed as a global perception of fair judgments inspired by an employee's or others' experiences (Aryee et al. 2015). Thus, this study explores whether the perception of fairness within host organizations has a moderating effect on the relationship between PA and creativity, as the direct link between these variables is rarely explored in the literature. Previous studies show a positive connection between employees' perceptions of fairness and their attitudes and behaviors (Mert et al. 2022; Amari et al. 2023).

This study has several contributions to the literature on international business. First, the concept of HR policy indigenization in GCC countries is going to become more popular among international management scholars (Jabeen et al. 2018; Darwish et al. 2022; Amari et al. 2023; Amari 2023) the moment it becomes a real challenge for guest organizations, which are caught between "a hard place and a rock", as they must reduce the number of expatriates while increasing the skill level to maintain their competitiveness. This study is the first to focus on the challenges of indigenizing HR policies in GCC organizations and its potential influence on expatriate outcomes. Second, several scholars state that more focus is required on personality traits to fully understand their impact on expatriate outcomes (Stoermer et al. 2021a; Richardson et al. 2018; Georgiadou et al. 2024). This study focuses on a facet of personality traits that is rarely explored in the expatriation field, namely PA (Selmer and Luring 2013; Stoermer et al. 2020; Stoermer et al. 2021a). To bridge this gap, the conservation of resources (COR) theory is integrated into this study's conceptual model (Hobfoll et al. 2018). COR theory furnishes new ground as PA is conceptualized as "emotional resource caravans" (Hobfoll 2002; Hobfoll et al. 2018). These resources would make expatriates less anxious about the indigenization of HR policies and ensure

that they deliver the expected performance by their host organizations. Therefore, having positive resources (e.g., PA) encourages expatriates to gain fresh resources, making them more creative. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by scrutinizing expatriates' creativity. It adds to the literature on multicultural experience and creativity (Stoermer et al. 2020; Ali et al. 2019; Gocłowska et al. 2018; Amari et al. 2023), as well as on the respective role of personality by focusing on PA as a relevant antecedent of creativity. Third, this study builds on the findings of Kim et al. (2017) and Shalley et al. (2004) and provides a more holistic view of the determinants of creativity by combining organizational resources (e.g., perception of fairness) and personal resources (e.g., PA). Previous studies do not examine the trinomial relationship between fairness, PA, and creativity. Lastly, this study extends cross-cultural justice research by investigating whether employees from Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries would react to justice norms, allowing for a better understanding of the employees' attitudes and behaviors within host organizations. This study's results are meaningful for Saudi universities that host a high proportion of professors from MENA countries, as the results demonstrate the conditions in which mobile academics might become creative.

## 2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

### 2.1. Positive Affectivity and Creativity

Creativity involves the brainstorming of useful and new ideas from individuals or teams (Amabile et al. 1996; Shalley et al. 2004). Creativity helps maintain and enhance the competitive advantages of guest organizations, including higher education institutions that are starving for high competitiveness (Ali et al. 2019; Swalhi et al. 2023; Amari et al. 2023). Recent studies have put more attention on expatriation and creativity and have highlighted that creativity can emerge from multiple contextual and personal sources (Oldham and Cummings 1996; Shalley et al. 2004; Khassawneh et al. 2022), such as dispositional affectivity (Stoermer et al. 2020). For instance, Ali et al. (2019) underline the role of knowledge sharing as a vector of creativity under the mediating role of cultural intelligence. Furthermore, Stoermer et al. (2020) state that expatriates with higher PA should utilize the challenging environment to display creative behaviors. Similarly, Amari et al. (2023) state that expatriates who are in a fair working environment and have high levels of cross-cultural psychological attitudes are more predisposed to developing creative thinking. However, studies related to positive emotions (e.g., PA, happiness, and well-being) and creativity are rarely explored, particularly in the expatriation context (Bastida et al. 2023; Stoermer et al. 2020). This study aims to fill this gap.

PA, specifically subjective well-being (Stoermer et al. 2020), is the predisposition to respond positively to environmental stimuli. Individuals with high PA are inclined to display positive moods; experience higher levels of determination, concentration, and enthusiasm; and enjoy life (Selmer and Luring 2013; Dwivedi and Selvanayagam 2021; Stoermer et al. 2020; Watson et al. 1988), thereby enhancing their openness to change (Vulpe and Dafinoiu 2011) and even face critical situations (Fredrickson 2001). Subjective well-being is positively linked to mental abilities, specifically creativity (Amabile et al. 2005; Davis 2009; Yuan 2015; Tan et al. 2021). Additionally, life satisfaction, as a positive emotion, may strengthen individual creativity skills. That is, people who are more satisfied with their lives are more likely to exert more effort into completing their jobs and solving problems (Akan 2015). Thus, having positive mood resources enhances the individual's willingness to take risks and test novel pathways that improve their performance in creative problem-solving tasks (Jovanović et al. 2016). The connection between PA and creativity can be explored using a broaden-and-build model, which suggests that the experience of positive emotions expands the "momentary repertoire of thought-actions" of individuals and strengthens their personal resources (Fredrickson 1998). Resources such as self-determination, enthusiasm, and attentiveness encourage employees to inspect new ideas and accept new knowledge, which can improve the flexibility of cognition and creativity (Fredrickson 2001). Thus, high levels of personal resources such as PA foster creative behaviors at work (Tan et al.

2021; Stoermer et al. 2021a), while low levels of PA decrease expatriates' satisfaction, which might undermine individual performance (Selmer and Lauring 2014), such as creativity.

Since PA is conceptualized as positive personal resources (Fredrickson 1998) that facilitate access to novel resources (e.g., creativity), COR theory (Hobfoll 1989) serves as a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the link between PA and creativity. Indeed, COR theory "is a motivational theory that explains much of human behavior based on the evolutionary need to acquire and conserve resources for survival, which is central to human behavioral genetics" (Hobfoll et al. 2018, p. 104). Resources (in the form of objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies) are valuable to individuals because their availability facilitates their ability to accomplish goals (Hobfoll 1989). COR theory principles (Hobfoll 1989; Hobfoll et al. 2018) suggest that individuals with more resources are more capable of gaining more resources and are less inclined to resource loss. Indeed, resources generate other resources (Hobfoll 2002), and individuals with positive emotions (e.g., PA) are predisposed to develop novel resources (e.g., creative thinking) for handling any potential resource loss (Ghafoor and Haar 2020). Following this logic, individuals experiencing PA are motivated to acquire novel knowledge (Fredrickson 2001), thereby investing in creative pathways (Stoermer et al. 2020; Rego et al. 2012; Jovanović et al. 2016; Tan et al. 2021) to overcome potential repatriation due to the indigenization of HR policies (Amari 2022; Amari et al. 2023).

In line with COR and broaden-and-build theories, PA can be viewed as an "emotional resource caravan" (Hobfoll et al. 2018) that reinforces expatriates' mental capabilities (Fredrickson 2001; Tan et al. 2021), which accompany them when overcoming indigenization-related challenges. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1.** *PA positively influences expatriates' creativity.*

## 2.2. The Moderating Effect of Perceived Fairness

Perceived fairness may be conceptualized as a general perception of fair judgments inspired by various experiences (Cropanzano and Greenberg 1997; Ambrose et al. 2015; Aryee et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2017). Previous studies reveal the importance of examining employee perceptions of HR practices as predictors of employees' emotions and behaviors, which eventually impact their performance (see Van Beurden et al. 2021; Wang et al. 2020; Amari et al. 2023). Nevertheless, the effects of individuals' perceptions of HR fairness require further investigation (Amari et al. 2023; Dahanayake et al. 2018), particularly in the context of indigenization.

Workforce indigenization within host companies could cause uncertainty to expatriates, as it increases their insecurity due to the potential termination of their contracts (Amari et al. 2023; Darwish et al. 2022; Amari 2023). Uncertainty is associated with psychological discomfort and anxiety (Herr et al. 2018; Kraus et al. 2023; Mumtaz and Nadeem 2022). Theories on uncertainty define uncertainty as a condition under which something is unknown or in doubt (Lind and van den Bos 2002). Uncertainty management theory (UMT) stipulates that individuals think about fairness because it helps them cope with any kind of uncertainty (Colquitt and Zipay 2015; Colquitt et al. 2006), even uncertainty that has no logical connection to justice rules (Lind and van den Bos 2002). Lind and van den Bos (2002, p. 216) state "What appears to be happening is that people use fairness to manage their reactions to uncertainty, finding comfort in related or even unrelated fair experiences and finding additional distress in unfair experiences". Thus, in the context of uncertainty (e.g., indigenization), individuals gather all available justice-related information (Adamovic 2023). Accordingly, when expatriates are uncertain or attend uncertain events related to indigenization, they become more concerned about fairness and justice issues (Lind and van den Bos 2002).

van den Bos (2001) demonstrates that perceived fairness has a stronger effect on the reactions of individuals who experience uncertain events. The more expatriates perceive fairness within their host organizations, the stronger their reactions in the context of



indigenization. Hence, consistent with UMT, perceived fairness might have a moderating effect on the relationship between PA and creativity. In addition, the mechanism by which PA affects creativity requires further investigation, as suggested by [Tan et al. \(2021\)](#), notably in the expatriation field ([Stoermer et al. 2020](#)).

### 2.2.1. Perceived Fairness and PA

Equity theory ([Adams 1963](#)) stipulates that perceptions of fairness are job-related motivational bases that can affect individuals' behaviors and performance. It states that employees assess their exchange relationships with their companies in terms of the ratio between job rewards (including monetary and nonmonetary rewards) and job efforts (e.g., experience, training, and achievement tasks). The more the discrepancy between job efforts and job rewards is reduced, the higher the perceived fairness.

[Janssen \(2001\)](#) underlines that perceptions of fairness reinforce individuals' self-regulatory functions; increase their sense of mastery, efficacy, and esteem; and therefore serve as a positive condition for affective job responses. Specifically, a high level of perceived fairness indicates that expatriates are respected and esteemed group members ([Herr et al. 2018](#)), making them more confident and enthusiastic within the workplace as fair treatment reduces their anxiety ([Colquitt et al. 2006](#)). Drawing upon social exchange theory (SET) ([Blau 1964](#)), individuals who feel that they are fairly treated by their organization would feel indebted and try to reciprocate these "good treatments" by showing higher satisfaction ([Adams 1963](#); [Janssen 2001](#)) and positive moods ([Inam et al. 2021](#); [Caesens et al. 2017](#)), even in the context of workforce indigenization. In contrast, people are less willing to display positive moods when they feel that they are treated unfairly. Discriminatory treatment impedes expatriates from being fulfilled in the workplace ([Chen and Hong 2016](#); [Harry et al. 2017](#)) and may result in social exclusion ([Stoermer et al. 2021b](#); [Amari et al. 2021](#)). Scholars argue that any differentiation in HR policies based on social status related to nationality, notably in developing countries ([Bader et al. 2017](#)), or wages ([Leung et al. 2009](#)) makes individuals uncomfortable and creates distress and confusion ([Lind and van den Bos 2002](#)). For instance, [Dietz et al. \(2015\)](#) point out the concept of skill discounting in which expatriates' skills are perceived to be worse than those of locals even if they are of the same quality. This indicates that the more highly skilled the expatriates are, the more difficult it is for host institutions to recognize their creative abilities. As such, the perception of fairness may generate positive emotions among expatriates, which enhances their PA levels. Furthermore, fairness and PA presumably interact. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2.** *Perceived fairness positively influences PA.*

### 2.2.2. Perceived Fairness and Creativity

The extant literature reveals that the perception of fairness plays a crucial role in fostering positive outcomes in terms of attitudes and behaviors ([Peltokorpi et al. 2021](#); [Almazrouei and Zacca 2021](#)), including creativity ([Amari et al. 2023](#); [Kim et al. 2017](#)). For instance, [Chaudhry et al. \(2021\)](#) found a positive connection between inclusion practices and organizational innovation in the Emirati context. The latter advocates that fair HR practices focused on cultural diversity minimize bias and discrimination. This can only propel creativity and individual performance.

The interplay between fairness and creativity can be explained by the norm of reciprocity, as predicted by SET. Equitable values shaped in host organizations would enhance the trust level among expatriates who are more relaxed in their workplace ([Miao et al. 2021](#)) and are more likely to display positive attitudes and behaviors ([Amari et al. 2023](#)). This attitude helps expatriates interact with their colleagues from different cultures, fostering their engagement with their host companies ([Stoermer et al. 2021a](#); [Kim et al. 2017](#); [Almazrouei and Zacca 2021](#)) and enabling them to reciprocate the "good treatments" received from their organization by engaging in creative pathways ([Kim et al. 2017](#)). In contrast, when

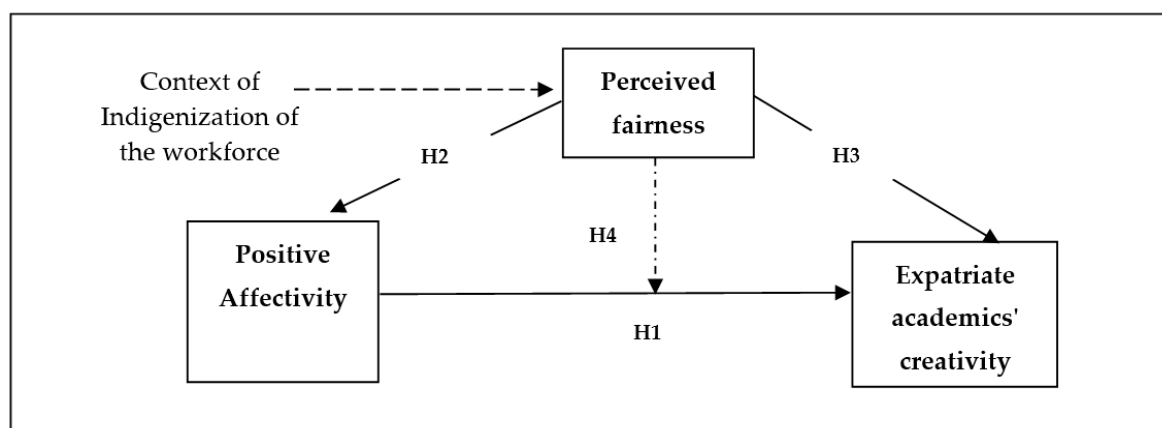
expatriates are uncomfortable because of their group affiliation, they tend to be discontented and become upset. This negatively impacts vocational behavior and consequently reduces organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Sanchez and Brock 1996), which, in turn, could suppress their innovativeness (Amari et al. 2023). Drawing upon the SET model, employees who feel that they are fairly treated by their managers are expected to reciprocate their support by demonstrating creative behaviors. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**H3.** *Perceived fairness positively influences creativity.*

Presumably, a high perception of fairness fosters PA among individuals, thereby encouraging them to be more creative. Specifically, a working environment in which fairness is the norm makes expatriates more open to novel ideas and overcome indigenization constraints. In the absence of fairness, uncertainty, discomfort, and anxiety are enhanced (Herr et al. 2018), which negatively affects mental health and reduces creativity (Amari et al. 2023; Swalhi et al. 2023). Taken together, perceived fairness presumably amplifies the influence of PA on the creativity of academic expatriates. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4.** *Perceived fairness moderates the positive association between PA and creativity, such that this relationship would be stronger (weaker) at a high (low) level of perceived fairness.*

The hypothesized model of this study is illustrated in the following (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Hypothesized conceptual model. Source: the author.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

During the Arab Spring, KSA has welcomed a massive number of expatriates from MENA countries, such as Tunisia and Egypt. Since 2010, more than 6700 Arab university professors have left their home countries and have gone to GCC countries (Hellal 2020).

Therefore, data are gathered from academic expatriates working in four Saudi universities in Riyadh during the summer and fall of 2023 (August, September, and October). Screening questions are formulated at the beginning of the survey to ensure that only expatriates are involved. The survey's study variables include questions pertaining to the expatriates (e.g., country of origin, work experience, and length of stay in the host country) and demographics (e.g., gender and education). Following Podsakoff et al. (2012), the items are randomly ordered to reduce the likelihood of common method variance (CMV). For clarity, minor amendments are made to the questionnaire following a pilot study conducted with academic expatriate colleagues (one professor and two associate professors in management). A snowball technique is applied to ask the first survey respondents to disseminate

the link to colleagues who are interested in participating (Panda et al. 2022; Amari et al. 2023). Questionnaires are sent through social networking platforms (e.g., WhatsApp and Facebook), LinkedIn accounts, and the university's professional email group. A total of 32 responses were eliminated because the respondents' home countries do not correspond to the target population (MENA expatriates). The final sample includes 228 international academics.

All participants are PhD holders from Tunisia (47.36%), Egypt (33.34%), Sudan (8.34%), and other MENA countries (10.96%). Of the total participants, 62.28% are male, and 93.42% are married. The average work experience of the participants is more than 10 years (83.77%), while the average length of stay in Saudi Arabia is 5–10 years (51.32%). Table 1 illustrates the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1.** Sample Profile.

Control Variables	Items	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	142	62.28
	Female	86	37.72
<b>Marital status</b>	Single	9	3.95
	Married	213	93.42
	Divorced	6	2.63
	Widowed	-	-
<b>Nationalities</b>	Tunisian	108	47.36
	Egyptian	76	33.34
	Soudan	19	8.34
	Other (MENA countries)	25	10.96
<b>Length of stay in the host country</b>	0–4	83	36.40
	5–10	117	51.32
	>10	28	12.28
<b>Work experience</b>	0–4	8	3.51
	5–10	29	12.72
	>10	191	83.77

Note: N = 228.

### 3.2. Measurement Instruments

In the online questionnaire, a five-point Likert scale was applied for all the survey variables (from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'). The positive affectivity was assessed using the 5-item version of I-PANAS developed by Thompson (2007). Examples of items measuring PA are "interested", "excited", "enthusiastic", "alert", and "determined". Because moods fluctuate, a preamble to these affects was introduced in sentences in order to target a more lasting state of mood felt by the respondents as recommended by Stoermer et al. (2021a): "Generally speaking, I normally feel that I am...". Cronbach's alpha is 0.704.

Further, individual creativity was measured using the scale of Zhou and George (2001), which comprises 13 items, according to which participants were asked to self-evaluate their ability to demonstrate creativity in the workplace. Sample items were as follows: "I usually search out new creative elements and inspiration and then utilize those ideas in my creative business". The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) is about 0.916.

Regarding the moderator variable, perceived fairness, this variable was measured according to the six items developed by Ambrose and Schminke (2009). Sample items included: "Overall, I'm treated fairly by my host organization". Cronbach's alpha is 0.905.

Lastly, work experience was inserted as a control variable to account for its potential impact on the dependent variable.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

Following Hair et al. (2020), a confirmatory factor analysis was performed to identify the indicators to be used for the appraisal of the measurement model, the type of analysis to be conducted, and the manner in which to present the partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) results. The PLS-SEM approach is used because it can efficiently test moderating and mediating links. Additionally, PLS-SEM allows the separate evaluation of the measurement and structural models and is suitable for studies with restrictions on sample size.

The reliability of this study's variables is assessed to determine the extent to which each item is consistent with the other items belonging to the same variable. Owing to their low loadings (less than 0.7), some items<sup>1</sup> are removed after the first round of the PLS algorithm. The analysis is repeated after the removal of these items. All outer loadings are satisfactory and significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, Cronbach's alpha and rho\_A values are above the threshold of 0.7. Therefore, the results confirm the reliability of the construction (Hair et al. 2020). Table 2 presents Cronbach's alpha rho\_A ( $\rho_A$ ) values.

**Table 2.** Reliability and convergent validity of the variables.

Variables	Mean	SD.	Number of Items	Range of Loadings	$\alpha$	$\rho_A$	AVE
Positive Affectivity	3.116	1.266	2	0.791–0.905	0.704	0.788	0.723
Individual creativity	3.979	0.847	9	0.716–0.879	0.916	0.935	0.597
Perceived of Fairness	3.497	1.002	4	0.823–0.938	0.905	0.931	0.779

Convergent validity is assessed to verify whether the average variance extracted (AVE) for all variables is greater than 0.5. Table 2 presents the AVE values for all variables, which demonstrate satisfactory reliability and convergent validity. Furthermore, consistent with Podsakoff et al. (2003), the results reveal that CMV is not an issue in this study since the first factor accounts for less than 50% of the overall variance.

Finally, the discriminant validity, which relates to the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) method of correlation (Hair et al. 2020), was carried out. Table 3 highlights that the HTMT values are less than 0.85 and statistically different from 1. According to Hair et al. (2017), the results allow us to conclude that discriminant validity has been established.

**Table 3.** Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

	IC	PA	PF	PF × PA
IC				
PA	0.084 *			
PF	0.289 *	0.118 *		
PF × PA	0.074 *	0.080 *	0.051 *	

Notes: PA = positive affectivity, PF = perceived fairness, IC = individual creativity, and \* = statistically.

### 4.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

The PLS-SEM technique with the SMART PLS 4 software is used to test the measurement and structural models. This technique is considered adequate for testing the research model, which includes a moderator effect and variables measured using multi-item scales (Hair et al. 2020). Empirical research regarding the link between the studied variables among expatriates is limited; thus, PLS-SEM is suitable due to the exploratory nature of this study (Amari et al. 2023).

The quality of the structural model is assessed using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$  value) for the dependent variables, which should exceed 10% (Hair et al. 2020). The  $R^2$



values are significant for both PA (0.61) and creativity (0.73). Moreover, the VIF values for the independent variables are also less than 3, indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue in this study (Hair et al. 2020).

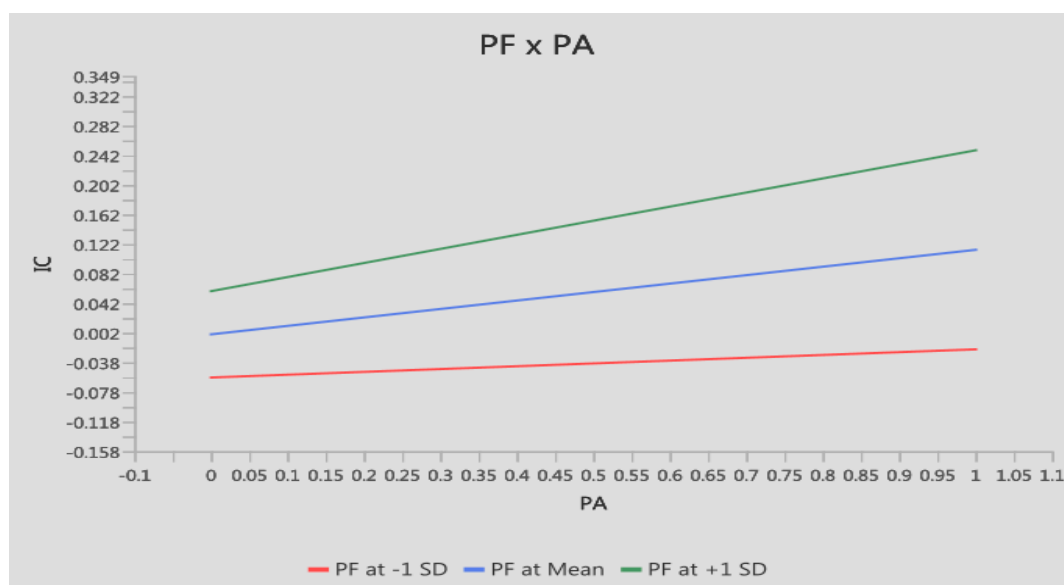
Table 4 presents the structural model results, which show that the PA is positively associated with expatriate academics' creativity ( $\beta = 0.023$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, H1 is supported. Further, perceived fairness has a significant and positive impact on both PA ( $\beta = 0.093$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and creativity ( $\beta = 0.281$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, H2 and H3 are supported. In addition, the findings indicate that the effect of the control variable (expatriates' work experience) is weak and insignificant ( $\beta = 0.066$ ,  $p > 0.1$ ).

**Table 4.** Results of the structural model.

Hypotheses	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	$\beta$	T.S.	$p$ Value	Results
H1	Positive Affectivity	Individual Creativity	0.023 **	2.554	0.014	Supported
-	Work Experience		0.066	1.023	0.307	NS
H2	Perceived fairness	Individual Creativity	0.281 ***	4.564	0.000	Supported
H3		Positive Affectivity	0.093 ***	3.402	0.002	Supported
H4	Perceived Fairness $\times$ Positive Affectivity	Individual Creativity	0.076 ***	4.551	0.000	Supported

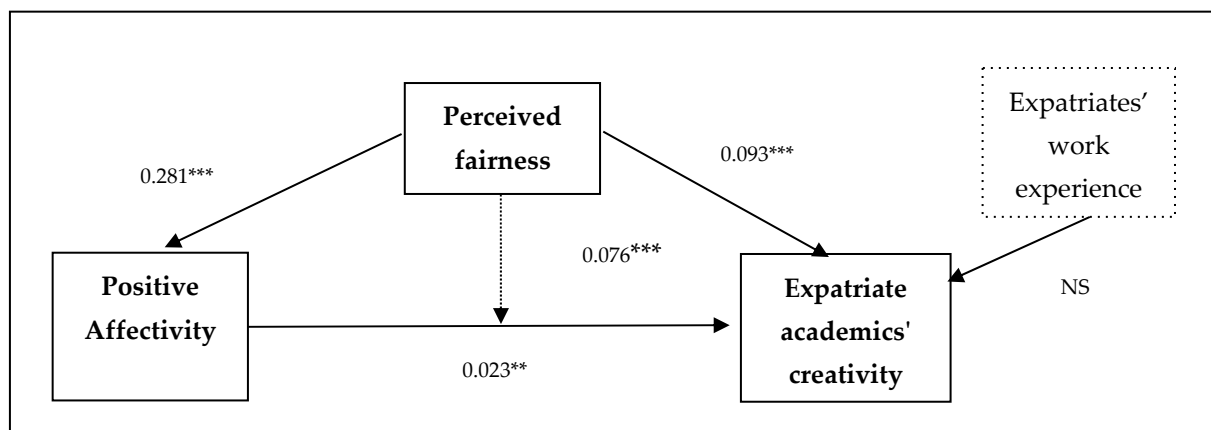
Notes:  $\beta$ : standardized regression coefficient. T.S.: T statistics.  $p$ : significance level, \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; NS: not supported.

Finally, PLS 4 proposes a product indicator approach to measure the moderating effect. This effect is tested on two levels. First, the degree of the explanatory model can be evaluated by comparing the proportion of  $R^2$  without moderating effect with the  $R^2$  of the model with moderating effect using the formula recommended by Cohen (1988) ( $R^2 = 0.64$  vs.  $0.73$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = 9$ ). Second, the importance of the effect of PA on creativity increased from 2.3% to 7.6%, respectively, before and after moderation. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was supported, and this revealed that perceived fairness positively moderates the relationship between PA and creativity among academic expatriates (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The interaction between PF and PA.

The results of the evaluated structural model are illustrated in the following (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Results of the evaluated structural model. Notes: \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; NS: not supported. Source: the author.

## 5. Discussion

In the context of adversity, calls to leverage human capital and creativity to ensure organizational competitiveness are increasing, but not to the detriment of well-being (Bastida et al. 2023; Caligiuri et al. 2020). Since the Arab Spring, thousands of academics have left their home countries to seek a better quality of life. Nevertheless, these mobile academics' international experiences are associated with various negative events (e.g., wars, global recession, and pandemics), including those related to workforce indigenization, thereby affecting their mental health (Tripathi and Singh 2021; Amari et al. 2023; Swalhi et al. 2023; Kraus et al. 2023).

Therefore, this study explores PA and creativity among expatriate academics from the MENA region who are working in Saudi universities. Furthermore, it explores the indirect links between these variables through the moderating role of perceived fairness, as these expatriates are facing challenges related to the indigenization of the Saudi workforce. However, studies on expatriates' academic creativity remain limited despite their relevance to the host educational institutions' attempts to reach international standards.

This study's results show that PA is positively and significantly related to creativity, which supports studies that identify PA as a critical predictor of expatriates' engagement in creative pathways (Amabile et al. 2005; Rego et al. 2012; Stoermer et al. 2020; Tan et al. 2021). The findings can also be explained through the COR theory lens, which stipulates that mobile academics who experience high levels of PA tend to acquire novel resources, notably creativity, to avoid potential repatriation due to the indigenization of HR policies in KSA.

Furthermore, the results show a positive association between perceived fairness and PA. The results are similar to those of Amari et al. (2023), who find that expatriates feel motivated by positive psychological resources when they perceive the benefits of a just climate; thus, they show positive behaviors. This finding is in line with those of Inam et al. (2021) and Caesens et al. (2017), who conclude that individuals tend to display positive moods when they feel that they are treated well by their organizations, and it aligns with SET principles. Additionally, the findings reveal a positive association between perceived fairness and creativity, which indicates that expatriates reciprocate the fair treatment experienced in host organizations by engaging in creative pathways (Kim et al. 2017). In addition, these findings align with the conclusions drawn by Amari et al. (2023) and Chaudhry et al. (2021), whose research was conducted within the framework of cultural diversity. Respondents in this study, although they speak a multitude of native languages and represent diverse ethnic backgrounds, actively contribute to fostering a creative working environment.

Lastly, the findings indicate that perceived fairness strengthens the positive association between PA and creativity. The interplay between fairness and PA enhances creativity, em-

phasizing the predominant role of fairness in generating positive work outcomes. Moreover, the results reveal the synergy between these variables, indicating that creativity emanates simultaneously from personal (e.g., PA) and organizational factors (e.g., perception of fairness). Academic expatriates who feel fairly led tend to display positive attitudes and are more open to organizational learning (Stoermer et al. 2020; Fredrickson 2001), thereby enhancing their creativity. Further, the results imply that the perception of fairness overcomes the indigenization challenges of the workforce, helping expatriates have a positive outlook on their host organizations and adopt sustainable creative behaviors.

## 6. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study makes several theoretical and managerial contributions to the literature on international business. First, this study's findings advance the justice literature by investigating whether academic expatriates from MENA countries experience the indigenization of HR policies in their host universities. However, the literature examining the effects of indigenization on expatriates' work outcomes remains limited (Amari et al. 2023), and the role of perceived fairness in this vein is disregarded, particularly in its interplay with PA and creativity. This study shows that fairness plays a pivotal role in driving positive emotions and creative behavior. This study proposes that the moderating effect of fairness intensifies the connection between PA and creativity. It reveals that perceived fairness is a boundary condition for expatriate professors to have a positive outlook on their guest universities and a driver to fulfill their creative goals in a cognitively draining environment (Stoermer et al. 2020; Amari et al. 2023; Gocłowska et al. 2018). Accordingly, university leaders may consider that the well-being of international academic staff may hold the key to improving the expatriates' creative abilities. Specifically, HR managers may revise their HR policies by promoting inclusivity, thereby gaining an additional competitive advantage. Similarly, encouraging local academics to show support and empathetic behaviors towards expatriates can mitigate perceptions of injustice in the workplace. This could also amplify the beneficial effects of perceived fairness on expatriates' work outcomes. As suggested by Davies et al. (2019), establishing a prevailing culture of diversity is essential for cultivating an inclusive work climate. Therefore, within Saudi host organizations, which are characterized by high levels of uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and power distance (as noted by Hofstede 2001), the inclusiveness of HR practices hinges greatly upon the leaders' dedication to fostering inclusion through actions. In this vein, promoting, rewarding, and compensating inclusivity efforts can serve this end. Additionally, their commitment to adopting an inclusive leadership style is pivotal in this regard. Therefore, it is important to convince university authorities of the potential benefits of inclusive HR practices. Moreover, it is equally important to discourage exclusionary behaviors that can only erode collective cohesion and, in turn, stifle creativity. In this vein, training programs should be implemented to reinforce cultural intelligence among academic staff to mitigate the potential risk of cultural tensions between expatriate and host academic staff. In addition, a cultural intelligence test (Stoermer et al. 2021b) can be implemented in the selection of the most suitable international candidates. This measure aims to ensure that selected candidates possess the necessary cross-cultural competencies and motivation. This can enhance the likelihood of successful integration and contribution within the university's diverse environment. Moreover, promoting informal gatherings and pairing newcomers with experienced mentors can promote strong connections with local colleagues, as suggested by Setti et al. (2022). These initiatives would build strong bonds with local colleagues.

Second, this study's results document the benefits host universities can have from expatriate academics' PA, which can be considered as a powerful personal resource that positively influences their capital of creativity. Although the literature provides an adequate understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of expatriate creativity (Ali et al. 2019; Amari et al. 2023; Stoermer et al. 2020), international studies on this topic are limited. This study provides novel insights into the literature on creativity within the context of expatriation. This study's results imply that host universities can improve their competitiveness by

strengthening PA to enhance creativity among international academics, particularly those coming from MENA countries. In this respect, host universities should strongly encourage international academic staff to socialize in events to help bridge cultural differences and enhance their subjective well-being (Stoermer et al. 2021a). This might also help expatriate academics capitalize on the positive outcomes of PA and thereafter enhance their work attitudes and subsequent behaviors. Additionally, providing training programs within host institutions reinforces cross-cultural interactions between expatriate academics (Amari et al. 2023) and facilitates expatriates' understanding of how they can obtain psychological support from their host universities (Mumtaz and Nadeem 2022; Bastida et al. 2023). These training programs would prepare expatriate academics on how to leverage PA as a coping mechanism that helps mitigate the detrimental consequences of being involved in VUCA environments.

Third, this study contributes to the COR theory (Hobfoll et al. 2018). It extends the idea of the "cross-level resource caravan" (Amari et al. 2023; Kraus et al. 2023), in which resources gathered from different levels could cohabit, thereby reinforcing individuals' work outcomes. Specifically, the interplay between organizational (e.g., fairness) and personal resources (e.g., PA) provides sustainable well-being among expatriates, which in turn enhances their creativity, even in critical circumstances.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, this study's sampling methodology is limited. This study's sample is mainly comprised of respondents from MENA countries; thus, generalizing the results to other ethnic groups requires caution. Future research should investigate the impact of culture on the relationship between the studied variables. In addition, the findings are applicable in the KSA context. Although similar indigenization programs are implemented in other GCC countries, such as the UAE, this study's results cannot be extrapolated to the entire Gulf region. Second, this study uses a cross-sectional design, in which the risk of CMV may be high. Several actions were undertaken throughout the data collection procedure and the subsequent statistical analysis to minimize this bias and reduce the risk of contamination across interpretations. Lastly, this study does not address the bidirectional link between PA and creativity, as suggested by Tan et al. (2021), who found that the relationship between PA and creativity is reciprocal rather than unidirectional. Future studies can explore this bidirectional link.

## 8. Conclusions

This study underscores the importance of perceived fairness as a moderator in the connection between positive affectivity and creativity among MENA expatriate academics employed in KSA. Drawing from social exchange and COR theories, the findings have confirmed that fair HR practices indeed play a critical role in strengthening the relationship between positive emotions and creativity in the context of workforce indigenization, especially in GCC countries. Workforce indigenization is considered an additional challenge by expatriates, affecting their fairness perceptions and disrupting their cognitive abilities. This study explores a relatively unexplored area of research and provides new grounds for fostering academic expatriates' "creativity". This can be achieved by relying on their well-being as a coping mechanism in a highly uncertain environment. It also highlights the need for university authorities to develop inclusive and fair HR policies to help expatriates overcome these challenges. These policies can only enhance their competitiveness.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** In this study, I collected data from international academics, who belong to different cultures and work in different universities, regarding their perceptions of the variables studied (notably on creativity, positive affectivity and fairness). Ethical statements were underlined in the on-line survey. Indeed, all participants are fully informed whether anonymity is

assured, why this research is being conducted, how their data will be used for the purposes of this research.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data are available upon request from researcher.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> PA1, PA4, PA5; IC1, IC3, IC4, IC6; PF4 and PF6.

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