

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

APPLIED
PSYCHOLOGY

From playful work design to playful family design: How personality and compassionate love shape playfulness across domains

Siqi Wang¹ | Yasin Rofcanin^{2,3} | Mireia Las Heras⁴ |
Yuri Scharp⁵ | Arnold Bakker^{6,7,8,9,10} | Can Ererdi¹¹ |
Maria Jose Bosch¹²

¹Aston Business School, Aston University, Birmingham, UK

²School of Management, University of Bath, Bath, UK

³Sabancı Business School, Sabancı University, Istanbul, Turkey

⁴IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Barcelona, Spain

⁵Department of Human Resource Studies, University of Tilburg, Tilburg, the Netherlands

⁶Center of Excellence for Positive Organizational Psychology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, the Netherlands

⁷University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland

⁸School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

⁹Department of Psychology, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong

¹⁰Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

¹¹Henley Business School, University of Reading, Reading, UK

Abstract

Play is a universal phenomenon—but how universal is it across life domains? Playful work design (PWD) refers to self-initiated play during work activities to make tasks more fun and challenging. Drawing on the work–home resources model, we investigate whether PWD reduces job boredom and spills over into the home domain. To conceptualize this cross-domain dynamic, we introduce playful family design (PFD) as a novel construct that reflects the self-initiated pursuit of playfulness in family life. We also examine whether personal (playful personality) and relational (compassionate love) resources moderate the relationship between PWD and job boredom. We tested our hypotheses using a 10-day daily diary study with 706 full-time employees across nine countries ($N = 4110$ observations). Multilevel analyses showed that PWD significantly reduced job boredom and was positively associated with PFD. Furthermore, playful personality and compassionate love emerged as significant moderators. Our findings advance the playfulness literature by introducing PFD as a novel construct and by showing

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2026 The Author(s). *Applied Psychology* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of International Association of Applied Psychology.

¹²ESE Business School, University of the Andes, Chile

Correspondence

Yasin Rofcanin, School of Management,
University of Bath, Bath, UK.
Email: y.rofcanin@bath.ac.uk

that playfulness may extend across work and family life while helping to reduce job boredom.

KEYWORDS

compassionate love, job boredom, playful work design, playfulness, work–home resources

INTRODUCTION

Changes in technology, culture, and employee values have reshaped the workplace. In recent years, the defining features of work and office have been shifting substantially (Awada et al., 2021), as working from home has become more common and employees increasingly value work–family balance. In parallel, play has received growing scholarly attention as a work design approach for enhancing employees' motivation and engagement at work (Dishon-Berkovits et al., 2024; Scharp et al., 2021; Celestine & Yeo, 2021). Play in organizational settings has long been associated with beneficial work experiences, including coping with monotonous work (Roy, 1959), greater job satisfaction (Abramis, 1990), and more positive work-related outcomes (Bakker et al., 2020). Reflecting this broader development, playful work design (PWD) refers to self-initiated strategies that incorporate fun and challenge into work tasks to create more stimulating and engaging experiences (Bakker et al., 2020; Scharp et al., 2023). Play has been conceptualized as a self-regulatory strategy through which individuals actively shape their experiences at work (Celestine & Yeo, 2021; Mukerjee & Metiu, 2022). Building on the play and proactive work behavior literatures, PWD positions employees as active agents who integrate play into their work activities to foster energy and engagement (Bakker et al., 2020). Although evidence has increasingly shown that PWD contributes to positive work outcomes, important gaps remain in understanding when, how, and beyond which domain these effects unfold.

First, limited research has examined whether PWD helps employees cope with job boredom, a distinct and theoretically important workplace experience. Although prior studies have linked PWD to positive outcomes such as engagement and performance (Scharp et al., 2022), such findings do not directly explain whether PWD alleviates boredom. Job boredom is not merely the absence of positive work experiences but a qualitatively distinct affective state marked by monotony and insufficient stimulation. This issue is particularly relevant to PWD because play is often initiated to restore stimulation and counteract monotony (Petelczyc et al., 2018). Examining the relationship between PWD and job boredom therefore offers a more theoretically precise understanding of the self-regulatory function of play at work.

Second, existing research on PWD remains largely confined to work-related experiences, offering a limited understanding of whether and how playfulness may operate beyond the workplace. Although scholars have started to explore playful design in other non-work settings, such as playful sport design (Verwijmeren et al., 2024) and playful leisure design (Wang et al., 2025), demonstrating that play can be intentionally cultivated to foster engagement and performance in non-work contexts, the family domain has received no attention. Understanding whether and how playfulness extends into family life is therefore a critical next step for both playfulness and work–home interface research. To capture this possibility more precisely, we introduce playful family design (PFD) as a new construct. PFD extends the idea of self-initiated

play from the work domain into the home domain and refers to a proactive behavior through which individuals deliberately incorporate fun, humor, or light competition into family activities, thereby making everyday family activities more engaging and enjoyable. Similar to PWD, PFD may manifest in two primary ways: first, by creating a more playful atmosphere around family tasks and chores through the introduction of play elements, and second, by adding a light competitive edge to mundane activities, such as setting time-based challenges for household responsibilities and assigning playful rewards or consequences to enhance motivation. In this way, PFD reflects the intentional enactment of playfulness in family life and provides a more precise lens for examining whether and how playful orientations developed at work may extend into the home domain.

Third, addressing this question requires greater attention to the dynamic and fluctuating nature of both PWD and work-home processes. PWD could be episodic, varying from day to day as employees respond to changing demands, moods, and energy levels. Although recent diary studies have shown that daily PWD is associated with work-related outcomes such as flow and creativity (Liu, Bakker, et al., 2023; Liu, Zhang, et al., 2023), they have not examined whether these daily fluctuations spill over into family life. Moreover, because work and home are interdependent domains in which resources are gained, depleted, and transferred across boundaries (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), these processes can fluctuate substantially from day to day (Du et al., 2018). A daily perspective is therefore particularly relevant for understanding how engaging in PWD may extend into the family domain. On days when employees generate greater positive affect and motivation through PWD, they may be more likely to carry similar playful orientations into family life. A daily diary design is therefore especially well-suited to capturing these short-term cross-domain dynamics.

To address these gaps, we draw on the work-home resources (W-HR) (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) and the spillover compensation perspective (Champoux, 1978; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) to investigate how PWD influences daily job boredom and how playfulness extends beyond the workplace into the home domain. The W-HR model provides the overarching framework for our study by explaining how resources generated or depleted at work may influence functioning and well-being across work and home domains (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). This perspective is especially relevant for understanding how PWD, as a proactive and playful work behavior, may generate psychological resources that reduce job boredom and shape employees' experiences beyond the workplace. In addition, the spillover-compensation perspective helps explain two possible cross-domain processes through which work experiences may relate to family life: spillover, whereby positive experiences and resources continue across domains, and compensation, whereby individuals respond to resource loss or depletion in one domain by seeking fulfilment in another (Champoux, 1978)

Drawing on these perspectives, we propose that daily PWD relates to daily PFD through its influence on job boredom. On the one hand, when employees engage in playful strategies at work, they may experience reduced boredom and enhanced positive activation, which can spill over into family life and support the enactment of playfulness at home. On the other hand, when employees experience boredom at work, they may be motivated to initiate playfulness at home to restore stimulation and positive mood. In this way, spillover and compensation offer two perspectives for understanding how daily work experiences may shape playful behavior in the family domain. By doing so, this study extends the idea of self-initiated play beyond the workplace into the family domain. Although prior research has examined proactive behaviors in family life through concepts such as home crafting (Demerouti et al., 2020) and home

engagement (Rofcanin et al., 2019), PFD differs in its emphasis on playful enactment, intrinsic enjoyment, and affective reappraisal rather than role adjustment. In addition, beyond explaining the focal relationships, our study also examines the boundary conditions under which PWD is more or less effective. Moreover, consistent with the W–HR model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), resource generation and transfer processes are shaped by structural resources that individuals possess within and across life domains. We therefore consider trait playfulness as a personal structural resource and compassionate love as a relational structural resource, both of which may influence the extent to which employees benefit from PWD and carry playfulness across domains.

The present study aims to advance the literature in several ways. First, we clarify how playfulness helps employees cope with job boredom by examining the role of PWD in alleviating an understimulating work experience while also identifying the personal and relational conditions under which this effect is more or less likely to unfold. Prior studies have largely focused on the positive outcomes of PWD (e.g., engagement and creativity) while overlooking whether and when playfulness helps employees manage boredom at work. Building on the W–HR model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), by examining boredom alongside trait playfulness and compassionate love as boundary conditions, our study offers a more nuanced understanding of the self-regulatory role of PWD in managing boredom at work. Second, this study extends the literature beyond the workplace by introducing PFD as a novel construct that captures the self-initiated enactment of playfulness in family life. By examining the relationship between PWD and PFD, we show that playfulness may extend across work and home domains. In this way, our study broadens current understanding of playfulness as a cross-domain, self-regulatory resource strategy. Third, by adopting a daily diary design, this study captures the short-term and fluctuating nature of playful work behavior and its implications within and across domains. In doing so, we provide a more fine-grained understanding of how daily PWD relates to employees' work and family experiences and show why a within-person lens is important for examining these processes. Figure 1 presents our conceptual model.

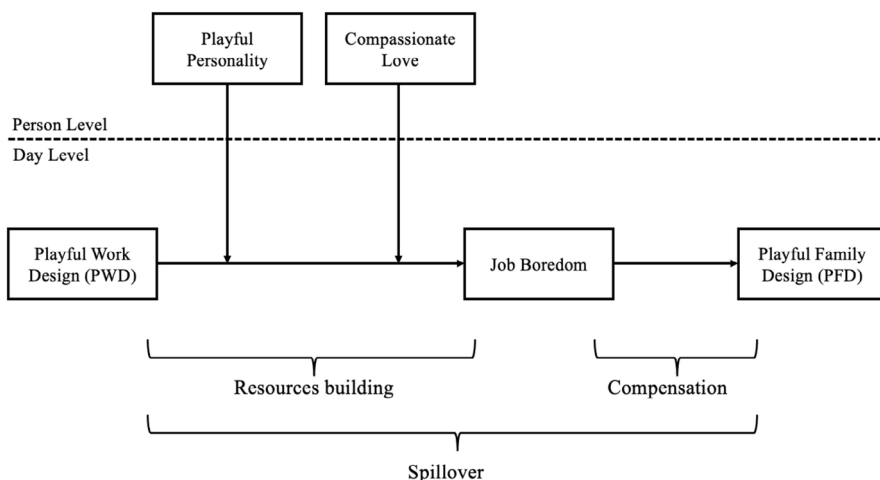


FIGURE 1 Conceptual model of the study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The W–HR model

The W–HR model provides a useful framework for understanding how experiences in the work domain shape functioning in the home domain through processes of resource gain and resource loss (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). According to this model, personal resources, such as energy, positive affect, and motivation, serve as key linking mechanisms between work and home. When individuals gain resources in one domain, these resources can enhance functioning in the other domain, resulting in work–home enrichment. By contrast, when demands in one domain deplete personal resources, functioning and well-being in the other domain may be undermined.

Drawing on this model, our study primarily focuses on the enrichment-oriented resource process through which PWD may shape PFD. Specifically, we argue that when employees engage in PWD, they generate psychological resources at work, such as energy, enjoyment, and cognitive engagement, which may reduce job boredom and support more positive functioning across domains. In this sense, PWD is conceptualized as a proactive, resource-generating behavior whose implications may extend beyond the workplace into family life. In addition, consistent with the W–HR model, we examine trait playfulness and compassionate love as personal and relational structural resources that may shape the extent to which employees benefit from PWD and carry playfulness across domains.

The spillover and compensation perspective

To further explain how these work-generated resources may translate into family playfulness, we draw on the spillover perspective. Spillover refers to the within-person transmission of psychological states, behaviors, and resources from one domain to another due to behavioral consistency and resource continuity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Champoux, 1978; Demerouti, 2012). Applied to the present study, this perspective suggests that the positive activation and playful orientation generated through PWD may carry over into the home domain, making employees more likely to engage in PFD. Thus, spillover provides the primary cross-domain logic through which we explain the relationship between PWD and PFD. At the same time, compensation theory offers a complementary perspective by suggesting that individuals may sometimes seek fulfilment or restoration in one domain when experiences in another domain are lacking (Champoux, 1978; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). In the present context, this implies that when employees experience boredom at work, they may also initiate playful behaviors at home as a way of restoring stimulation or positive affect. We view it as a distinct restorative response that may coexist with the primary spillover-based process proposed in this study.

Therefore, in our study, the W–HR model serves as the overarching resource-based framework, as it explains both how resources generated at work may extend across domains into family life and why personal and relational structural resources may shape these processes. Within this broader framework, spillover explains the primary pathway through which PWD may extend into family life, whereas compensation offers a supplementary lens for understanding why playfulness may sometimes also be enacted at home in response to understimulating work experiences.

PWD and job boredom

PWD is a proactive work strategy that enables employees to infuse playfulness into their daily tasks, creating a more engaging and stimulating work experience (Scharp et al., 2022). Positioned at the intersection of playfulness and proactive work behavior (Bakker et al., 2020), PWD involves self-initiated efforts to integrate fun and challenge into work activities through mechanisms such as humor and competition (Scharp et al., 2023). Employees engage in PWD for various reasons, including achieving flow (Liu, Bakker, et al., 2023) and recuperating from work demands (Scharp et al., 2021). Empirical studies have also shown that PWD fosters work engagement (Scharp et al., 2019, 2022), suggesting that playfulness at work is an effective strategy for sustaining motivation and cognitive focus.

Job boredom is a negative, deactivating emotional state that arises when employees perceive their tasks as repetitive, unstimulating, or lacking challenge (Van Hooff & Van Hooff, 2014; Wihler et al., 2022). Research shows that boredom is a resource-depleting experience, draining energy and reducing motivation (Loukidou et al., 2009). Within the W–HR model, engaging in PWD can serve as a resource generation strategy, allowing employees to build positive affect, cognitive flexibility, and motivation that counteract boredom.

Consistent with the W–HR model, we argue that employees who engage in PWD generate psychological resources, such as energy, flow, and motivation, that sustain cognitive engagement and emotional well-being. These resource gains help prevent job boredom by maintaining employees' activation and involvement in work tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). From a within-person perspective, on days when employees engage more in PWD, they are more likely to experience these psychological resources, which in turn reduces feelings of boredom. Within the W–HR framework, resource generation through PWD may therefore create a self-reinforcing cycle in which playfulness fuels engagement and helps minimize boredom. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1. On days when employees design work activities to be playful, they experience less job boredom.

PWD and PFD

PFD extends the idea of self-initiated play from the work domain into the home domain and refers to individuals' proactive efforts to make family activities more playful, enjoyable, and engaging through fun, humor, or light competition. In this way, PFD captures the intentional enactment of playfulness in family life.

The spillover process (Champoux, 1978) explains how behaviors enacted in one domain influence behaviors in another due to behavioral consistency and resource continuity. Specifically, spillover is defined as the within-person transmission of psychological states, behaviors, and attitudes from one domain to another (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Demerouti, 2012; Demerouti et al., 2020). For example, Demerouti et al. (2020) found that employees who engaged in resource and challenge job crafting at work were also more likely to engage in similar resource and challenge crafting at home, highlighting a cross-domain transfer of proactive behaviors. Similarly, Sanz-Vergel et al. (2012) demonstrated that surface acting at work was associated with surface acting at home at the daily level, reinforcing the idea that work behaviors are often mirrored in the home domain. Applied to the present study, this perspective

suggests that greater engagement in PWD may extend into family interactions in the form of similar playful enactment. By making work activities more enjoyable and stimulating, employees may sustain a play-oriented mindset that extends into the home domain and supports the enactment of PFD. Accordingly, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2. On days when employees engage more in PWD, they are more likely to engage more in PFD.

The mediating role of job boredom between PWD and PFD

Drawing on the spillover and compensation perspectives, we propose that the relationship between PWD and PFD may involve two distinct but coexisting cross-domain processes. On the one hand, PWD may directly foster PFD through a spillover process: when employees enact playfulness at work, they may carry a similar playful orientation into family life (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Champoux, 1978). Compensation theory suggests that individuals may engage in behaviors in one domain to offset deficiencies experienced in another (Champoux, 1978; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). In the present context, this implies that when work remains understimulating, employees may sometimes initiate playful family activities as a restorative response to regain stimulation or positive affect (Celestine & Yeo, 2021; Petelczyc et al., 2018). Support for compensation processes between work and home domains remains limited (Staines, 1980), yet emerging research suggests that individuals engage in play to recover from adversities and release negative emotions (Celestine & Yeo, 2021; Petelczyc et al., 2018). Specifically, play is a self-regulatory strategy that helps individuals replenish depleted psychological resources and reduce stress (Butler, 2015; Giddens, 1964). In this sense, PFD may function not only as an extension of playfulness from work to home but also as a compensatory response to boredom at work. Because PWD is expected to reduce job boredom, whereas job boredom may in turn be positively associated with PFD as a compensatory response, the indirect pathway through boredom is expected to be negative. We thus hypothesize

Hypothesis 3. Job boredom mediates the relationship between PWD and PFD, such that PWD is associated with lower job boredom, whereas job boredom is positively associated with PFD.

Structural resources as boundary conditions

Expanding on the W–HR model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), we examine how resources at different levels moderate the effects of PWD on job boredom. The W–HR model proposes that personal and contextual resources enhance individuals' capacity to generate, maintain, and transfer psychological resources between work and home, thereby supporting positive functioning across domains. These resources facilitate resource gain processes by strengthening the link between resource-generating behaviors (such as PWD) and affective outcomes (such as reduced boredom). In line with this framework, we investigate two key moderators: trait playfulness, representing a personal resource that helps employees integrate enjoyment and creativity into their work, and compassionate love between employee and spouse, representing a contextual home domain resource that supports emotional restoration and cross-domain resource transfer.

A clear and comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms through which PWD operates is central to the selection of moderators in our research. This focus stems from the recognition that both psychological (personal) and relational (social) resources play a crucial role in facilitating the implementation and effectiveness of PWD. The ability to engage in PWD—by proactively integrating play and challenge into work tasks—varies across individuals and contexts, making it essential to examine key factors that shape the extent to which employees can fully benefit from these playful strategies.

The role of playful personality

Playful personality refers to an individual's predisposition to frame or reframe situations in a way that fosters amusement, humor, and entertainment (Proyer, 2012). As a stable personal resource, it enables individuals to proactively shape their work environment into a more engaging and enjoyable experience (Glynn & Webster, 1992). Playful individuals are typically characterized by humor, spontaneity, energy, and social engagement, making them more likely to engage in light-hearted interactions such as joking and creative problem-solving (Barnett, 2007; Proyer, 2012). These tendencies suggest that highly playful employees may be uniquely positioned to leverage PWD more effectively, enhancing their ability to combat boredom and sustain engagement at work.

Drawing on the W–HR model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), we propose that playful personality functions as a personal resource that strengthens the effect of PWD on reducing job boredom. The W–HR model suggests that individuals with abundant personal resources are better able to accumulate, utilize, and transfer resources across domains. In this context, playful personality acts as a resource-enabling trait that allows employees to engage in PWD more naturally and benefit more fully from its boredom-reducing potential. Because highly playful individuals tend to seek novelty and enjoyment spontaneously, they are likely to experience more frequent and sustained gains in positive affect, cognitive flexibility, and creativity—thus reinforcing the boredom-reducing effects of PWD through a resource gain spiral.

Conversely, employees low in trait playfulness may struggle to translate PWD into meaningful engagement. Although they might occasionally adopt playful strategies, their limited personal resources restrict their capacity to generate and sustain positive affect or creative energy. For these employees, PWD may serve only as a short-term coping tactic rather than a sustained motivational strategy, resulting in weaker or less enduring boredom reduction.

In sum, playful personality enhances employees' capacity to accumulate and sustain psychological resources, amplifying the benefits of PWD in reducing boredom. Building on the W–HR model and the gain spiral principle of resource accumulation, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4. Individuals with higher levels of trait playfulness will experience a stronger reduction in job boredom from engaging in PWD than those with lower levels of trait playfulness.

The role of compassionate love

The W–HR model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) highlights that personal and contextual resources facilitate the generation, maintenance, and transfer of psychological resources across

domains. In particular, relational resources—such as supportive and loving partnerships—provide individuals with emotional stability and security that enable resource accumulation and adaptive functioning in both work and home settings. Within this framework, compassionate love—defined as deep affection, mutual care, and an enduring concern for a partner's well-being—represents a critical contextual resource that enhances emotional resilience, social responsiveness, and prosocial behavior (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Individuals who experience high levels of compassionate love tend to exhibit greater emotional stability, empathy, and positive affect, which can translate into more constructive interpersonal interactions at work and at home (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005; Stollberger et al., 2022; Tasselli, 2019).

We argue that compassionate love functions as a contextual home domain resource that strengthens the effect of PWD on reducing job boredom. According to the W–HR model, individuals embedded in resource-rich relational environments are better positioned to generate and sustain energy, engagement, and well-being across domains. Compassionate love provides a reservoir of positive emotions and emotional security that enables employees to channel playfulness more effectively in their work activities. Through this mechanism, relational support at home reinforces resource gain processes at work, creating favourable conditions for employees to fully benefit from PWD.

Conversely, employees with lower levels of compassionate love may find it harder to sustain playful engagement. Without strong emotional and relational support, they may have fewer psychological resources to buffer against monotony and disengagement, thereby experiencing weaker boredom-reducing effects from PWD. This aligns with the W–HR principle that individuals with limited contextual resources are less capable of converting available opportunities into sustained well-being. Taken together, compassionate love provides the emotional and relational foundation that facilitates the resource gain spiral initiated by PWD. Although trait playfulness determines an individual's intrinsic capacity to initiate playful behaviors, compassionate love reflects the quality of their relational context that enables such behaviors to thrive across domains. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 5. Individuals reporting higher levels of compassionate love from their partner will experience less boredom on days when they use PWD than those reporting lower levels of compassionate love from their partner.

METHOD

Procedure and participants

Participants were recruited through MBA students at the authors' university in Latin America, who were invited to participate in the study and encouraged to share the opportunity with their professional networks. Prior to participation, all individuals were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. Participants were required to sign an informed consent form, which outlined their rights, assured confidentiality, and emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary. We created and shared an online page where those who agreed to participate could sign up with an email address. In the invitation, we explained that participation consisted of a general questionnaire (i.e., demographics and structural resources) and daily surveys regarding their day-to-day work and family experiences. Specifically, the study lasted for 10 working days. On the first day, participants filled out

the general questionnaire. In line with previous research that used a similar design (e.g., Scharp et al., 2021), participants received an email with a link to the daily survey at 8 p.m. We gave them 4 h (until midnight) to fill out the questionnaire. Participants who did not fill out the survey received a reminder 2 h later. Participants who provided responses for fewer than 3 days were excluded from the data analysis to ensure the robustness of our findings. Responses were collected using an online platform called CVENT. Participants were full-time employees from Spain, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, El Salvador, Bolivia, Panamá, and México. The final sample consisted of 706 individuals who completed a total of 4110 daily surveys. Of these participants, 289 were men (40.9%), and 417 were women (59.1%). Most participants held a master's degree (46%), a bachelor's degree (39%), or a Ph.D. (4%). Their mean age was 42.6 years ($SD = 10.6$), and their mean organizational tenure was 3.9 years ($SD = 2.25$). Most participants held managerial responsibilities (63%) and were married (66%). Among the married participants, 62% reported that their partner worked full-time, 22% reported that their partner did not work, and 17% reported that their partner worked part-time. Finally, 503 participants had children (65%), whereas 203 (35%) did not.

Measures

All statements in the questionnaires were translated into Spanish. We translated the original items from English to Spanish following the back-to-back translation procedures (Brislin, 1986). Participants rated statements regarding their experience at work and at home on that specific workday. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

General level measures

Playful personality

To measure playful personality, we used the five items of the playfulness scale developed by Proyer (2012). One example item is as follows: "I am a playful person" ($\alpha = .85$).

Compassionate love

Compassionate love was measured using the four items of the love attitudes scale adapted from Hendrick et al. (1998). One example item is as follows: "My partner would rather suffer than let me suffer" ($\alpha = .89$).

Day-level measures

Playful work design

We measured daily PWD with six items from the 12-item scale developed by Scharp et al. (2019). One example item is as follows: "Today, I approached my tasks creatively to make them more interesting" ($\alpha = .96$).

Playful family design

To measure day-level PFD, we contextualized six items from the scale developed by Scharp et al. (2019) to the home domain. One example item is as follows: "Today, I approached my family interactions in a playful way" ($\alpha = .96$).

Job boredom

Day-level job boredom was measured with the five items proposed by van Hooff and van Hooff (2017). One example item is as follows: “Today, I thought my job was boring” ($\alpha = .95$).

Control variables

In this study, we initially controlled for participants' gender, age, tenure, and number of children, as these demographic factors could potentially influence work-related boredom and engagement in PWD. All control variables were measured as continuous variables. We conducted analyses both with and without these controls to assess their impact on our findings. The results remained consistent and robust regardless of the inclusion of control variables. Given that their inclusion did not meaningfully alter the results, we opted to remove them from the final analyses to maintain model parsimony and avoid unnecessary statistical complexity.

Analytical strategy

We conducted multilevel path analysis to test our hypotheses in Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2019), accounting for the nested data, where daily observations (Level 1) were nested within individuals (Level 2) (10 days nested in 706 employees). To evaluate whether multilevel modelling was appropriate, we partitioned the variance of each daily variable into within- and between-person components. We computed intraclass correlation (ICC) for day-level variables, including PWD (28.8%), job boredom (44.9%), and PFD (35.6%). The results support that the multilevel path analysis is applicable in this study. To further reduce potential multicollinearity, we person-mean-centered all predictors and control variables at the day level, and grand-mean-centered the moderators at the person level (Ohly et al., 2010). In our model, slopes and intercepts were randomly estimated. Finally, we tested the indirect effect hypothesis with the online tool developed by Selig and Preacher (2008), which calculates the confidence intervals of the proposed indirect effect. We conducted Monte Carlo simulations with 20,000 iterations. To test the moderation hypotheses, we conducted simple slope analyses to assess the effects of the predictor for one standard deviation below and above the mean of the moderators.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations of the study variables.

Preliminary analyses

Before testing the hypotheses, we applied multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) in Mplus 8.3 to assess the distinctiveness of the study variables. Our measurement model distinguished among five factors: PWD, job boredom, PFD at the day level, playful personality, and compassionate love at the between-person level. The results demonstrated acceptable fit: $\chi^2(142) = 1742.706$, $p < .001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.95, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI)

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and reliabilities (on the diagonal between brackets) of the study variables.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Level 1 variables							
1. Playful work design	4.96	1.49	(.96)				
2. Daily job boredom	2.35	1.39	−.19***	(.95)			
3. Playful family design	4.96	1.50	.22***	−.12***	(.96)		
Level 2 variables							
4. Playful personality	4.54	1.36	.23***	.10**	.25***	(.85)	
5. Compassionate love	4.33	1.50	.10*	−.07	.17***	.09*	(.89)

Note: Level 1 sample size = 4110. Level 2 sample size = 706. Correlations for the Level 1 variables show group-mean centered. Relationships among the within-individual variables. Level 1 variables were aggregated to provide correlations with Level 2 variables.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

= 0.94, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)_{within} = 0.03; SRMR_{between} = 0.05. We compared this model with three alternative models. In Alternative Model 1, PWD and PFD were combined into a single factor. This model showed a substantially worse fit to the data, χ^2 (144) = 9445.451, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.73, TLI = 0.68, RMSEA = 0.13, SRMR_{within} = 0.12; SRMR_{between} = 0.05. In Alternative Model 2, compassionate love and playful personality were combined into one factor. This model also fit the data worse than the proposed five-factor model, χ^2 (143) = 2218.2, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR_{within} = 0.03; SRMR_{between} = 0.22. In Alternative Model 3, PWD, PFD, and job boredom were combined into a single factor. Again, the results indicated a substantially worse fit, χ^2 (145) = 26,362.606, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.48, TLI = 0.38, RMSEA = 0.21, SRMR_{within} = 0.20; SRMR_{between} = 0.05. Taken together, these results suggest that the proposed five-factor model provided a better fit to the data than the alternative models.

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted that on days when employees design work activities to be playful, they would experience less job boredom. Supporting Hypothesis 1, multilevel modelling revealed that PWD was negatively associated with job boredom at the day level ($b = -.344$, $SE = 0.014$, $p < .001$; see Table 2 and Figure 2). Hypothesis 2 predicted that on days when employees engage more in PWD, they would also report higher levels of PFD. Supporting Hypothesis 2, PWD was positively associated with PFD ($b = .672$, $SE = 0.013$, $p < .001$). Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicted that job boredom would mediate the relationship between PWD and PFD. The results showed that job boredom was positively associated with PFD in the structural model ($b = .032$, $SE = 0.012$, $p < .01$). In addition, the indirect effect of PWD on PFD via job boredom was significant and negative ($b = -.011$, 95% CI [−.021, −.002]). These findings support Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the negative daily relationship between PWD and job boredom would be stronger among individuals higher (vs. lower) in playful personality. Supporting Hypothesis 4, the interaction between PWD and playful personality was significant ($b = -.034$, $SE = 0.009$, $p < .001$). Simple slope analyses showed that the negative relationship between

TABLE 2 Multilevel path analysis results.

	Daily boredom			Playful family design		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	2.352	.020	118.00***	4.960	.018	276.00***
Independent variables						
Playful work design	−.344	.014	−24.571***	.672	.013	51.692***
Mediator						
Daily boredom				.032	.012	2.67**
Level 1 intercept variance	.785	.048	16.354***	.639	.040	15.975***
Level 2 intercept variance	1.089	.080	13.613***	1.394	.085	16.400***

Note: Level 1 sample size = 4110. Level 2 sample size = 706.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

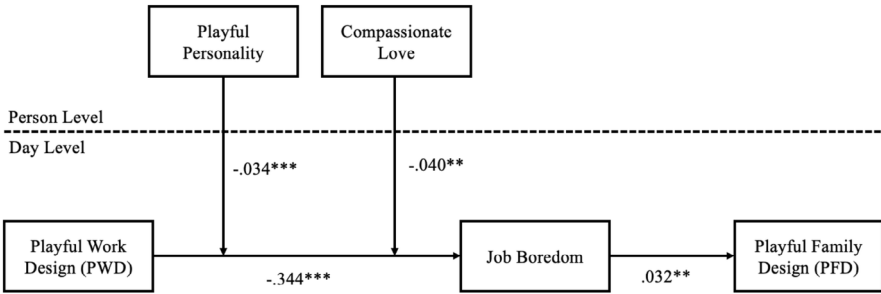


FIGURE 2 Results for the hypothesized model. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

PWD and job boredom was stronger for employees with higher levels of playful personality ($b = -.594$, $SE = 0.065$, $p < .001$) than for those with lower levels of playful personality ($b = -.501$, $SE = 0.040$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. Figure 3 illustrates this interaction pattern.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that the negative daily relationship between PWD and job boredom would be stronger among individuals higher (vs. lower) in compassionate love from their spouse. Supporting Hypothesis 5, the interaction between PWD and compassionate love was significant ($b = -.040$, $SE = 0.020$, $p < .01$). Simple slope analyses showed that the negative relationship between PWD and job boredom was significant at both low and high levels of compassionate love and was slightly stronger among those higher in compassionate love. Specifically, for employees reporting lower levels of compassionate love, the relationship between PWD and job boredom was negative and significant ($b = -.08$, $SE = 0.020$, $p < .01$), whereas for those reporting higher levels of compassionate love, the relationship was stronger and remained significant ($b = -.18$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .01$). These findings provide support for Hypothesis 5 and suggest that compassionate love modestly strengthens the boredom-reducing effect of PWD. Figure 4 illustrates this interaction pattern.

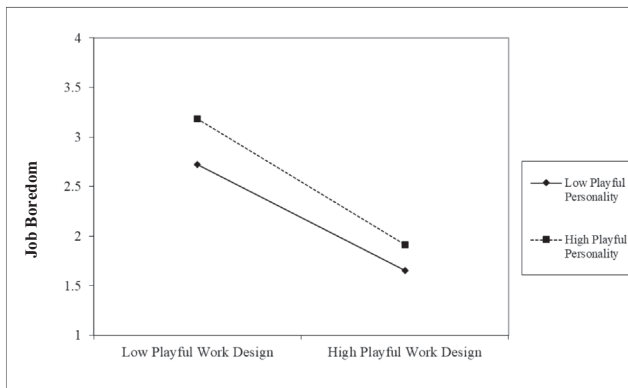


FIGURE 3 Interaction of PWD with playful personality on job boredom.

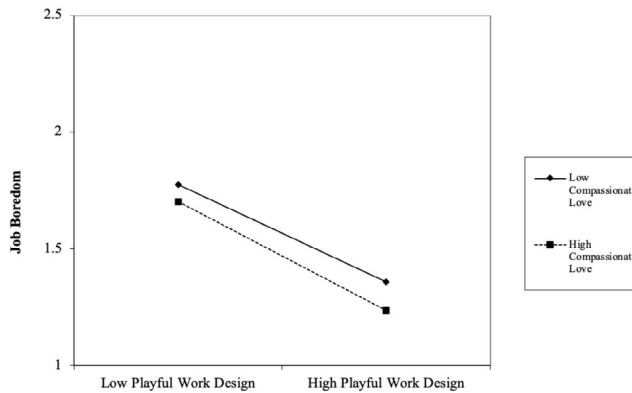


FIGURE 4 Interaction of PWD with compassionate love on job boredom.

Post hoc study: Relationship between PWD and PFD

To further explore the relationship between PWD and PFD, we conducted a post hoc qualitative exploratory study using semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed us to gain deeper insights into how employees perceive and experience the spillover of playful behaviors between work and home domains. To achieve this, we recruited 10 full-time employees from diverse industries across China, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Turkey. Several key themes emerged from the interviews related to the relationship between PWD and PFD.

First, a recurring theme among participants was that engaging in playful activities at work encouraged them to bring similar playful elements into their home life. One participant explained how playfulness at work naturally extended to family interactions:

“At work, we have this tradition of setting small challenges for ourselves, like completing a task in a set time or making a mundane report fun by turning it into a game. I realized that I was doing the same at home without even thinking about it, like turning dinner prep into a fun challenge.”

Second, participants highlighted how engaging in playful behaviors at work left them in a positive emotional state, which in turn made them more likely to initiate playfulness at home. For example,

“When I’ve had a good day at work and I’ve enjoyed what I’m doing and had some fun, I come home with that same energy. Instead of just sitting on the couch, I’m more likely to start a game with my kids or do something fun together.”

Third, participants indicated that the competitive elements of PWD, such as setting personal challenges or engaging in friendly rivalries at work, influenced how they structured fun at home. One participant shared:

“At work, we do these little team competitions, for example, who can come up with the most creative idea, who can finish a task first. I started applying the same thing at home. Now we have a leaderboard for who finishes their chores first, and we even have prizes for the winner. It makes things more fun for everyone.”

Moreover, participants described how playfulness enacted at work appeared to carry over into the tone and style of their family interactions. For example, one participant explained:

“Sometimes, I joke around a lot with my colleagues, and you know, it makes the day more enjoyable. I noticed that I do the same at home, joking with my kids or coming up with silly stories during dinner.”

Overall, these qualitative findings enrich our understanding of the relationship between PWD and PFD by showing how playfulness developed at work may be enacted in family life. In this sense, the interviews illustrate that PWD may extend beyond the workplace not only as a general positive state, but also as a more concrete way of approaching and shaping family interactions. These insights complement our quantitative findings and provide further support for viewing playfulness as a cross-domain phenomenon that can be proactively enacted across work and home life. Please refer to the online-only Supporting Information, Appendix A, for the details of the interview.

DISCUSSION

Over the past decades, work design research has increasingly recognized the importance of employee proactivity and flexibility in shaping meaningful work experiences (Anand & Rofcanin, 2022; Bal & de Lange, 2014; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014; Thomas et al., 2010). Employees seek not only engagement and immersion in their work (Ersoy et al., 2022) but also opportunities for playfulness and enjoyment. With the rise of proactive work practices, PWD has gained increasing scholarly attention (Caracuzzo et al., 2024; Dishon-Berkovits et al., 2024). Building on this emerging research and drawing from the W–HR model, our study examined how PWD influences job boredom and whether its effects extend beyond the workplace into the home domain in the form of PFD. Our findings show that PWD reduces job boredom and is positively associated with playfulness in family life, a pattern that is primarily consistent with spillover across domains. At the same time, the small negative indirect effect through job

boredom points to a more modest compensatory dynamic, suggesting that boredom at work may, under some conditions, be associated with greater playful enactment at home. Moreover, we show that employees with a highly playful personality or strong relational support experience greater benefits from PWD. By uncovering these dynamics, our study contributes to research on PWD, work-home interactions, and the broader understanding of proactive work design.

Theoretical contributions

Our study makes several theoretical contributions to the growing body of research on PWD, boredom, and proactive behaviors across life domains. Specifically, we advance the literature by (1) providing empirical support for the link between PWD and job boredom, (2) introducing PFD as a new construct while establishing its link with PWD, and (3) identifying structural boundary conditions that shape the effectiveness of PWD in mitigating boredom.

First, our study contributes to the PWD literature by strengthening the link between playfulness and boredom reduction. A core assumption in the literature is that play serves as a strategy for reducing boredom (Petelczyc et al., 2018; Roy, 1959; Scharp et al., 2021). However, prior findings on the relationship between PWD and job boredom have been inconclusive, largely due to methodological limitations that relied on between-person approaches (Scharp et al., 2022). Our study advances this by incorporating a within-person approach, revealing that PWD significantly lowers job boredom.

Our findings highlight the importance of adopting a daily perspective when examining the relationship between boredom and playfulness across domains. Specifically, on days when employees engage more in PWD, they experience less job boredom and report higher levels of PFD. These findings suggest that the links between PWD, boredom, and PFD are not static tendencies but short-term processes that fluctuate from day to day. This daily perspective is also consistent with recent PWD research, which has increasingly used diary designs to capture the within-person dynamics of PWD and its day-level implications for outcomes such as flow, creativity, and performance (e.g., Liu, Bakker, et al., 2023; Ștefan et al., 2025). In this sense, our study extends this line of work by showing that the daily effects of PWD may not only unfold within the work domain but may also extend into family life across daily experiences.

Our second major contribution is the introduction of PFD as a novel construct, alongside establishing its link with PWD. Although prior research has examined proactive behaviors in family life, such as home crafting (Demerouti et al., 2020) and home engagement (Rofcanin et al., 2019), the specific application of self-initiated play in the home environment remained unexplored. Our study addresses this gap by demonstrating that employees not only engage in PWD to redesign work tasks but also transfer similar playful strategies to family interactions (Philipp et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018). Through our two studies, including a daily diary study and a qualitative study, we uncover the link between PWD and PFD. Our findings indicate that employees reported that experiencing a playful and engaging workday fosters a positive mindset that spills over into family life, leading them to initiate playfulness at home. This supports the idea that play is not confined to work settings but serves as a broader self-regulatory strategy for enhancing engagement across life domains.

Third, our study highlights the moderating roles of playful personality and compassionate love in shaping the effectiveness of PWD. Playful personality serves as a personal structural resource that amplifies the benefits of PWD, as individuals who are naturally inclined toward

playfulness experience stronger reductions in boredom when they engage in playful work strategies. This finding extends prior research showing that playfulness enhances engagement and positive affect at work (Scharp et al., 2019) and reinforces the importance of trait-based differences in shaping proactive behaviors. In addition to personal traits, compassionate love moderates the link between PWD and boredom. Employees who experience strong, compassionate love benefit from an enriched emotional resource base, making them more inclined to engage in PWD and derive greater enjoyment from playful activities at work. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that strong social connections facilitate proactive behaviors (Casper et al., 2019) and underscores the importance of considering relational dynamics in work-home research. By integrating these structural resources, we move beyond a static view of PWD and demonstrate that its effectiveness depends on both individual dispositions and relational contexts.

A final key contribution of our study lies in expanding the geographical and cultural scope of research on PWD. Although existing studies on PWD have primarily focused on Western and highly developed contexts (e.g., Norway, Europe, and the United States; Bakker et al., 2020), our research provides empirical evidence from non-Western and less-developed economies. By incorporating a diverse sample from Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, El Salvador, Bolivia, Panamá, and México, we demonstrate that the mechanisms underlying PWD are not confined to Western workplace cultures but are also relevant and applicable in other socioeconomic contexts. This contribution is particularly important as it challenges the implicit assumption that playful work behaviors are predominantly a phenomenon of developed economies where job autonomy, innovation-driven cultures, and discretionary work design are more common. Our findings indicate that employees in less-developed countries also actively engage in PWD to enhance their work experiences, suggesting that playful work's psychological and motivational benefits transcend cultural and economic differences.

Practical implications

Our findings provide valuable HR implications for organizations aiming to cultivate a culture of playfulness and competition while encouraging positive spillover into employees' personal lives. Although contemporary job design research highlights the benefits of bottom-up approaches such as job crafting (Zhang and Parker 2018), many employees still find themselves in standardized, highly controlled roles that limit self-initiated engagement and playful opportunities. Because workplace boredom can lead to disengagement, HR initiatives should actively support and encourage employees to integrate playfulness into their daily tasks, reinforcing the importance of autonomy and proactive work behaviors (Anand & Rofcanin, 2022; Bal & de Lange, 2014; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014). A critical HR strategy in fostering PWD is granting employees greater autonomy, allowing them to redesign their work experiences to align with their strengths and interests. Organizations can implement targeted training interventions that help employees incorporate fun and challenge into their work routines (Proyer et al., 2021). Drawing from research on playfulness at work (Pham & Bartels, 2021; Unger, 2021), these interventions can introduce structured opportunities for employees to embrace playfulness as a tool for creativity.

Beyond training and autonomy-enhancing initiatives, organizations can further support PWD by helping employees cultivate a more playful mindset. Our findings suggest that employees higher in playful personality derive greater benefits from PWD, indicating

that playfulness-oriented interventions may be particularly effective when aligned with employees' personal tendencies. Providing digital learning materials, self-assessment tools, and guided workshops on playfulness may help employees develop the mindset and techniques needed to incorporate fun and challenge into their work (Thomas et al., 2010).

Limitations and future research directions

The present study has several limitations that merit consideration while interpreting the findings. First, despite the theoretical and empirical justifications provided in this study, our research design does not allow for definitive causal inferences regarding the relationship between PWD and PFD. Although our qualitative findings provide additional support for the idea that PWD contributes to PFD, they also suggest that PFD may, in turn, influence PWD, potentially creating a reciprocal relationship between these constructs. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the directionality and strength of these relationships.

Second, another limitation of this study is the reliance on self-report data, which may introduce common method bias. However, we addressed this concern by person-centering the Level-1 predictors in our models, a technique that helps reduce the influence of individual response tendencies (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, common method variance typically inflates relationships rather than suppressing them, making it more difficult to detect significant cross-level interactions (Lai et al., 2013). Given that we found significant interaction effects, this suggests that common method bias was unlikely to be a major issue in our study. Nevertheless, to further strengthen the validity of research on playfulness at work and home, future studies could incorporate multisource data.

Third, the boredom–PFD relationship should be interpreted with caution. Although this pattern may be consistent with a compensatory interpretation, the effect was relatively small. One possible explanation is that this pattern reflects a suppression effect or a more complex partial relationship that only emerges once shared variance with PWD is taken into account. For this reason, we do not interpret the positive boredom–PFD path as straightforward evidence of a general compensation process. Instead, it may suggest that boredom-related playfulness at home is a small and context-dependent dynamic that requires further investigation. Future research could examine alternative mediators and moderators, as well as use designs that allow a more precise test of these competing explanations.

Fourth, we did not measure task characteristics that may facilitate or hinder redesigning playfulness at work. It is conceivable to expect that employees working on unchallenging and unvaried tasks may find it easier to introduce and design fun in their tasks. Similarly, employees with a high workload and challenging job demands may find it difficult to design and implement playfulness. In relation to this and as we discussed, certain individual types are likely to lead to more playfulness at work and at home. Future research is therefore recommended to investigate the inquiries relating to the contextual conditions, personality, and various job characteristics that are likely to influence the effectiveness and implementation of the playful redesign at work and home.

We acknowledge an important limitation regarding the newly introduced construct of PFD. Although we developed PFD by building on the conceptualization of PWD and provided some initial support for its relevance, the present study does not directly examine its downstream outcomes. As a result, the meaningfulness of PFD is inferred rather than fully demonstrated

through outcome-based evidence. Future research is therefore needed to further validate this construct and establish its broader nomological network. In particular, future studies could examine whether and how PFD contributes to positive outcomes in the family domain, such as family engagement, family functioning, relationship quality, and communication with significant others, as well as broader indicators of well-being and work–family balance. A potential area of further inquiry will also be to explore the hindering contextual conditions such as chores, cognitive workload at home, or a broken relationship with one's partner, in understanding the consequences of PWD.

A fundamental motive explaining why employees engage in playfulness at work is to reduce boredom (Petelczyc et al., 2018), which forms the basis of our focus on this concrete emotion. To expand knowledge regarding the consequences of PWD, future research could focus on a wide range of employee emotions, including feeling energized, excited, and enthusiastic. Moreover, although our study enhances the external validity of PWD research, we acknowledge that we do not explicitly test cultural dimensions (e.g., Hofstede's or GLOBE's cultural frameworks) as potential moderators. Future research could build upon our findings by incorporating individual or national-level cultural factors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Siqi Wang: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, project administration; **Yasin Rofcanin:** Conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, supervision, project administration; **Mireia Las Heras:** Conceptualization, writing—review and editing, supervision; **Yuri Scharp:** Writing—review and editing, supervision; **Arnold Bakker:** Writing—review and editing, supervision; **Can Ererdi:** Writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing; **Maria Jose Bosch:** Writing—review and editing, supervision.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors have nothing to report.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Supplementary material for this article is available in the online supplementary section.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the authors' university. All data were collected anonymously and treated confidentially.

CONSENT

All participants were informed about the voluntary nature of participation and the anonymity of their responses.

ORCID

Siqi Wang  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3331-6151>

Yasin Rofcanin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9945-1770>

Mireia Las Heras  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7509-8669>

Yuri Scharp  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8154-7443>

Arnold Bakker  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1489-1847>

Can Ererdi  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9474-8009>

REFERENCES

- Abramis, D. J. (1990). Play in work: Childish hedonism or adult enthusiasm? *American Behavioral Scientist*, 33(3), 353–373.
- Anand, S., & Rofcanin, Y. (2022). *Idiosyncratic deals at work*. Springer.
- Awada, M., Lucas, G., Becerik-Gerber, B., & Roll, S. (2021). Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impact on office worker productivity and work experience. *Work*, 69(4), 1171–1189. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-210301>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2018). The spillover–crossover model. In *Current issues in work and organizational psychology* (pp. 140–152). Routledge.
- Bakker, A. B., Hetland, J., Olsen, O. K., Espevik, R., & de Vries, J. D. (2020). Job crafting and playful work design: Links with performance during busy and quiet days. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 122, 103478. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103478>
- Bal, P. M., & De Lange, A. H. (2014). From flexibility human resource management to employee engagement and perceived job performance across the lifespan: A multisample study. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 88(1), 126–154.
- Barnett, L. A. (2007). The nature of playfulness in young adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 43(4), 949–958. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2007.02.018>
- Brislin, R. W. (1986). The wording and translation of research instruments. In W. J. Lonner & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Field methods in cross-cultural research* (pp. 137–164). Sage.
- Butler, E. A. (2015). Interpersonal affect dynamics: It takes two (and time) to tango. *Emotion Review*, 7(4), 336–341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073915590622>
- Caracuzzo, E., Caputo, A., Callea, A., Cortese, C. G., & Urbini, F. (2024). Playful work design in fostering organizational citizenship behaviors and performance: Two studies on the mediating role of work engagement. *Management Research Review*, 47(9), 1422–1440. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-05-2023-0354>
- Casper, A., Tremmel, S., & Sonnentag, S. (2019). The power of affect: A three-wave panel study on reciprocal relationships between work events and affect at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 92(2), 436–460. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12255>
- Celestine, N. A., & Yeo, G. (2021). Having some fun with it: A theoretical review and typology of activity-based play-at-work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 42(2), 252–268. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2444>
- Champoux, J. E. (1978). Perceptions of work and nonwork: A reexamination of the compensatory and spillover models. *Sociology of Work and Occupations*, 5(4), 402–422.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). The contribution of flow to positive psychology. In J. E. Gillham (Ed.), *The science of optimism and hope: Research essays in honor of Martin E. P. Seligman* (pp. 387–395). Templeton Foundation Press.
- Demerouti, E. (2012). The spillover and crossover of resources among partners: The role of work–self and family–self facilitation. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 17(2), 184–195. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026877>
- Demerouti, E., Hewett, R., Haun, V., De Gieter, S., Rodríguez-Sánchez, A., & Skakon, J. (2020). From job crafting to home crafting: A daily diary study among six European countries. *Human Relations*, 73(7), 1010–1035. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719848809>
- Dishon-Berkovits, M., Bakker, A. B., & Peters, P. (2024). Playful work design, engagement and performance: The moderating roles of boredom and conscientiousness. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 35(2), 256–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2023.2227920>

- Du, D., Derks, D., & Bakker, A. B. (2018). Daily spillover from family to work: A test of the work-home resources model. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 23*(2), 237.
- Edwards, J. R., & Rothbard, N. P. (2000). Mechanisms linking work and family: Clarifying the relationship between work and family constructs. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 178–199. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259269>
- Ersoy, N. C., Erdogan, B., Anand, S., & Rofcanin, Y. (2022). I-deals in context: A summary and critical review of I-deals literature around the globe. In S. Anand & Y. Rofcanin (Eds.), *Idiosyncratic deals at work: Exploring individual, organizational, and societal perspectives* (p. 257). Springer.
- Giddens, A. (1964). Notes on the concepts of play and leisure. *The Sociological Review, 12*(1), 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1964.tb01247.x>
- Glynn, M. A., & Webster, J. (1992). The adult playfulness scale: An initial assessment. *Psychological Reports, 71*(1), 83–103. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1992.71.1.83>
- Hendrick, S. S., Dicke, A., & Hendrick, C. (1998). The relationship assessment scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 15*(1), 137–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407598151009>
- Lai, X., Li, F., & Leung, K. (2013). A Monte Carlo study of the effects of common method variance on significance testing and parameter bias in hierarchical linear modeling. *Organizational Research Methods, 16*(2), 243–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112469667>
- Liu, W., Bakker, A. B., Tse, B. T., & Van der Linden, D. (2023). Does playful work design ‘lead to’ more creativity? A diary study on the role of flow. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 32*(1), 107–117.
- Liu, W., Zhang, W., Van der Linden, D., & Bakker, A. B. (2023). Flow and flourishing during the pandemic: The roles of strengths use and playful design. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 24*(7), 2153–2175. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-023-00670-2>
- Loukidou, L., Loan-Clarke, J., & Daniels, K. (2009). Boredom in the workplace: More than monotonous tasks. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 11*, 381–405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00267.x>
- Mukerjee, J., & Metiu, A. (2022). Play and psychological safety: An ethnography of innovative work. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 39*(3), 394–418. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12598>
- Muthén, L. K., & Muthén, B. O. (1998–2019). Mplus (Version 8.3) [Computer software]. Muthén & Muthén.
- Ohly, S., Sonnentag, S., Niessen, C., & Zapf, D. (2010). Diary studies in organizational research. *Journal of Personnel Psychology, 9*(2), 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000009>
- Petelczyc, C. A., Capezio, A., Wang, L., Restubog, S. L. D., & Aquino, K. (2018). Play at work: An integrative review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management, 44*(1), 161–190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317731519>
- Pham, T. H., & Bartels, L. K. (2021). Laughing with you or laughing at you: The influence of playfulness and humor on employees' meeting satisfaction and effectiveness. *Journal of Organizational Psychology, 21*(5), 1–18.
- Philipp, D. A., Cordeiro, K., & Hayos, C. (2018). A case-series of reflective family play: Therapeutic process, feasibility, and referral characteristics. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 27*(10), 3117–3131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1192-3>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879–903. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879>
- Proyer, R. T. (2012). Examining playfulness in adults: Testing its correlates with personality, positive psychological functioning, goal aspirations, and multi-methodically assessed ingenuity. *Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling, 54*(2), 103–127.
- Proyer, R. T., Gander, F., Brauer, K., & Chick, G. (2021). Can playfulness be stimulated? A randomised placebo-controlled online playfulness intervention study on effects on trait playfulness, well-being, and depression. *Applied Psychology. Health and Well-Being, 13*(1), 129–151. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12220>
- Radcliffe, L. S., & Cassell, C. (2014). Resolving couples' work-family conflicts: The complexity of decision making and the introduction of a new framework. *Human Relations, 67*(7), 793–819. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713506022>
- Rofcanin, Y., Las Heras, M., Bosch, M. J., Wood, G., & Mughal, F. (2019). A closer look at the positive crossover between supervisors and subordinates: The role of home and work engagement. *Human Relations, 72*(11), 1776–1804. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718812599>

- Roy, D. (1959). "Banana time": Job satisfaction and informal interaction. *Human Organization*, 18(4), 158–168.
- Sanz-Vergel, A. I., Rodríguez-Muñoz, A., Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2012). The daily spillover and crossover of emotional labor: Faking emotions at work and at home. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 81(2), 209–217. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.07.003>
- Scharp, Y. S., Bakker, A. B., & Breevaart, K. (2022). Playful work design and employee work engagement: A self-determination perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 134, 103693. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2022.103693>
- Scharp, Y. S., Bakker, A. B., Breevaart, K., Kruup, K., & Uusberg, A. (2023). Playful work design: Conceptualization, measurement, and validity. *Human Relations*, 76(4), 509–550. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267211070996>
- Scharp, Y. S., Breevaart, K., & Bakker, A. B. (2021). Using playful work design to deal with hindrance job demands: A quantitative diary study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 26(3), 175–188. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000277>
- Scharp, Y. S., Breevaart, K., Bakker, A. B., & Van der Linden, D. (2019). Daily playful work design: A trait activation perspective. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 82, 103850.
- Selig J. P., & Preacher K. J. (2008). Monte Carlo method for assessing mediation: An interactive tool for creating confidence intervals for indirect effects [Computer software].
- Sprecher, S., & Fehr, B. (2005). Compassionate love for close others and humanity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(5), 629–651. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407505056439>
- Staines, G. L. (1980). Spillover versus compensation: A review of the literature on the relationship between work and nonwork. *Human Relations*, 33(2), 111–129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678003300203>
- Ștefan, A. D., Pap, Z., & Virgă, D. (2025). A diary study of playful work design, flow, and performance at work: The moderating role of organizational support for playful work design. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 98(4), e70070. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.70070>
- Stollberger, J., Las Heras, M., & Rofcanin, Y. (2022). Sharing is caring: The role of compassionate love for sharing coworker work–family support at home to promote partners' creativity at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 107(10), 1824–1842. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000985>
- Tasselli, S. (2019). Love and organization studies: Moving beyond the perspective of avoidance. *Organization Studies*, 40(7), 1073–1088. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617747924>
- Ten Brummelhuis, L. L., & Bakker, A. B. (2012). A resource perspective on the work–home interface: The work–home resources model. *American Psychologist*, 67(7), 545–566.
- Thomas, J. P., Whitman, D. S., & Viswesvaran, C. (2010). Employee proactivity in organizations: A comparative meta-analysis of emergent proactive constructs. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83(2), 275–300. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317910X502359>
- Unger, L. (2021). Mixing business with pleasure: Play in the world of work. In *Play from birth to twelve and beyond* (pp. 485–492). Routledge.
- van Hooff, M. L., & van Hooft, E. A. (2014). Boredom at work: Proximal and distal consequences of affective work-related boredom. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 19(3), 348–359.
- van Hooff, M. L., & van Hooft, E. A. (2017). Boredom at work: Towards a dynamic spillover model of need satisfaction, work motivation, and work-related boredom. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 26(1), 133–148.
- Verwijmeren, S., De Vries, J. D., & Bakker, A. B. (2024). Playful sport design: A game changer? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 36(1), 45–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2023.2185698>
- Wang, B., Taylor, L., & Sun, Q. (2018). Families that play together stay together: Investigating family bonding through video games. *New Media & Society*, 20(11), 4074–4094. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818767667>
- Wang, S., Rofcanin, Y., Las Heras, M., & Yalabik, Z. Y. (2025). Playful leisure design: A study on the intersection of play, work and leisure among dual-earner couples. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 98(4), e70062. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.70062>
- Wihler, A., Hülsheger, U. R., Reb, J., & Menges, J. I. (2022). It's so boring—or is it? Examining the role of mindfulness for work performance and attitudes in monotonous jobs. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 95(1), 131–154. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12370>
- Zhang, F., & Parker, S. K. (2018). Reorienting job crafting research: A hierarchical structure of job crafting concepts and integrative review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 40(2), 126–146. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2332>

How to cite this article: Wang, S., Rofcanin, Y., Heras, M. L., Scharp, Y., Bakker, A., Ererdi, C., & Bosch, M. J. (2026). From playful work design to playful family design: How personality and compassionate love shape playfulness across domains. *Applied Psychology*, 75(4), e70123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.70123>

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interview protocol for this study was developed in three cohesive steps to ensure consistency and depth in data collection. During the preparation phase, participants were recruited by coauthors using our networks from diverse industries—service, manufacturing, and education—across China, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Turkey, focusing on full-time employees in mid-level positions who reported to higher level managers. The sample consisted of 10 participants, with an average age of 35.6 years and 65% identifying as female. Geographically, one participant came from the United Kingdom, three from Spain, three from Turkey, and three from China. Interviews were conducted either in person or online using Teams or email platforms. Each interview was designed to last approximately 1 h. All interviews were held in English, and participants were informed about confidentiality and the study's purpose. The interview questions were thoughtfully crafted to explore playful work and leisure behaviors and their interconnections, with additional prompts to encourage detailed responses.

During the interview phase, the process began with an introduction to the study's objectives, assurance of confidentiality, and consent collection. The interviews were structured into three sections: the first focused on understanding participants' experiences with PWD, the second examined their approaches to PFD, and the third explored the potential spillover effects and links between the two domains.

In the postinterview phase, all responses were transcribed and anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Data were organized by participant, industry, and country for thematic analysis, with recurring patterns and relationships between PWD and PFD coded systematically. This comprehensive protocol ensured that the interviews yielded in-depth data to explore the relationship between playful work and family design.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Playful work design (PWD)

Definition provided to participants:

“Playful work design refers to strategies you use to make your work tasks more challenging or fun, without changing the actual structure of the job. This could involve adding elements of play, humor, or challenge to your work tasks to make them more interesting or challenging.”

Example of PWD:

“For instance, imagine you have to fill out a long report. You might challenge yourself to complete it within a specific time, as if it's a race, or you could add humor by creating playful labels for different sections. These are ways you might make a work task feel more playful.”

Example questions:

1. How do you make sense of this concept? Are there any aspects of it that you find unclear or intriguing about PWD?
2. We want to understand if and how you incorporate playful elements into your work tasks. For example, do you ever try to make routine tasks more fun or treat them like a game?
3. Why do you choose to integrate playful elements into your daily work tasks?
4. Could you describe a recent work activity where you added an element of fun or challenge?
5. How did it change your experience of the task?
6. How do you feel after engaging in playful activities at work?
7. How does implementing playful behavior into your work influence your productivity and motivation?
8. Playful family design (PFD)

Definition provided to participants:

“Playful family design refers to the constellation of self-driven proactive behaviors aimed at fostering fun and competition in the family domain.”

Example of PFD:

“Examples include approaching family interactions in a fun manner and using imagination to make time at home more interesting. For example, introducing play elements, such as weekly scoreboards, to daily chores. Or introducing a competitive edge to mundane tasks (for example, setting a time limit for family tasks and introducing fun rewards and punishments).

Example questions:

1. How do you make sense of this concept? Are there any aspects of it that you find unclear or intriguing about PFD?
2. How do you bring playfulness into your family interactions? Like, introduce fun challenges, competitions, or humor into daily family activities?
3. Why do you choose to integrate playful elements into your daily work tasks?
4. Could you describe a recent work activity where you added an element of fun or challenge? How did it change your experience of the task?
5. How do you feel after participating in a playful family activity?
6. Exploring spillover and resource transfer between PWD and PFD

Purpose:

“This section focuses on understanding whether the playful strategies or mindsets you use at work influence your family activities, or vice versa. We’re interested in whether your experiences in one area (work or family) inspire or enhance your behavior in the other.”

•Work influencing family: “Imagine an employee who enjoys making their work environment more engaging by introducing friendly competitions, using humor in the workplace, or setting creative challenges for themselves and their colleagues. After a day of playfully tackling tasks at work, they come home feeling energized and in a positive mood. This playful mindset spills over into their family interactions—for instance, they might turn dinner preparation into a cooking contest with their children, introduce a storytelling game during family time, or use humor to lighten up household discussions”

•Family influencing work: “Imagine a parent who regularly creates playful challenges for their children at home, such as turning household chores into a game, storytelling at dinner, or having friendly competitions while cooking. Over time, this playful approach to family interactions may shape how they approach tasks at work. For example, they might start introducing

small competitions or fun challenges into their work environment, such as setting playful deadlines for completing reports, using humor to engage colleagues in meetings, or creating team-based games to enhance motivation.”

Example questions:

1. Do you think your experiences at work influence how you engage with your family? Why or why not?
2. Do you notice that on days when you are more playful at work, you tend to be more playful at home? Why or why not?
3. What are some ways that the energy or mindset from playful work activities carries over into your family time?
4. Are there times when playfulness at work does not translate into playful family interactions? What prevents it?
5. How do work stress, exhaustion, or other work demands affect your ability to bring playfulness into your family life?
6. Does your family's response to playfulness affect whether you engage in playful family activities?
7. Thinking about our discussion, do you see a connection between your playful work behaviors and playful family interactions?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to share about how playfulness moves between work and family life?

Exploring the link between work boredom and PFD

1. When you feel bored or unchallenged at work, how does it affect your mood and energy when you return home?

(Follow-up: Do you feel a need to seek stimulation or engaging activities after a boring workday?)

2. Do you think experiencing boredom at work makes you more likely to create playful moments with your family?

(Follow-up: Can you share an example where work boredom led you to engage in fun or lighthearted activities at home?)