
DO HAPPY EMPLOYEES IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM AVOID CONFLICTS AND EXHIBIT LOWER CREATIVITY? AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

Is there a predominant conflict handling behavior (CHB) among employees in the hospitality and tourism (H&T) sector? Does this approach to conflict affect their creativity? The paper answers these questions. Additionally, this paper examines the mediating role of this predominant CHB in the relationship between happiness at work (HAW) and creative performance behavior (CPB) among H&T employees. Data collected from 674 hotel employees was analysed to identify the “predominant CHB”. Then, the structural equation modeling was used to analyze the mediating role of the “predominant CHB” in the relationship between HAW and CPB. The analysis revealed that “conflict avoidance” was the predominant style employed by H&T employees. The study found evidence that conflict avoidance partially mediates the relationship between HAW and CPB. The study contributes to the literature on happiness, conflict management, and creativity in H&T, helping practitioners identify and manage predominant CHB while enhancing employee creativity. It also informs academicians and practitioners that happiness may not always be the ideal attitude in H&T workplaces. Additionally, this paper is aligned with SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure.

Keywords: *Happiness at Work, Conflict Handling, Conflict Avoidance, Creative Performance Behavior, Hospitality and Tourism*

Introduction

Competitive advantage in the hospitality and tourism (H&T) industry hinges on creating memorable guest experiences that meet high service expectations (Jiang et al., 2022). However, maintaining these standards requires employees to manage demanding cognitive and physical tasks, often leading to conflicts among employees and between employees and guests (Belias et al., 2023). Effective conflict management by employees fosters a healthy workplace (Srivastava, 2015), enhancing guest satisfaction and repeat business (Liao, 2007). Studying the conflict-handling behavior (CHB) of H&T employees (Walelign, 2020) and the factors influencing this behavior, such as individual happiness levels (Wang et al., 2024), is important. Additionally, it is crucial to examine how CHB influences guest-centric actions (Özcan & Sevil Oflaç, 2024), such as creativity (Wang et al., 2021). This study aims to: (i) identify predominant CHB of H&T employees, and (ii) study the mediating influence of this CHB in the relationship between employees' happiness at work (HAW) and creative performance behavior (CPB) in the H&T industry.

Conflict management is crucial in H&T (Shehawy, 2022). Employees receive conflict management training during job induction (Raub et al., 2021) and education programs in H&T. Employee demographics influence CHB. For example, medical professionals tend to be collaborative (Cordeiro & Pitacho, 2023), while highly educated employees prefer an avoiding style (Meng et al., 2018). Additionally, in India's collectivist culture, employees may prefer compromise, accommodation, or avoidance to maintain relationships and social cohesion. However, in the service-centric H&T sector, conflict avoidance may not be ideal. A survey of the literature revealed that there are no studies that have examined H&T employees' CHB. Identifying predominant CHB can inform professionals about the effectiveness of their conflict management training and guide targeted programs.

H&T organizations invest in training to improve CHB (Raub et al., 2021). However, academic attention to identifying its precursors in this context is limited (Telecan et al., 2023). Studies in other contexts have shown that employee emotions and attitudes influence their CHB (e.g., Bonache et al., 2017). Given the recent focus on employee happiness, it is necessary to study how happiness influences behavior during conflicts (Dijkstra et al., 2020), especially in the H&T sector (Abdou et al., 2022). Additionally, there is

evidence suggesting that employee happiness may influence their behavior (e.g., Stoia, 2016) in H&T (Rasheed et al., 2020) leading to superior task and service performance (Benitez & Medina, 2022). Contradictory studies suggest that positive emotions may not always lead to positive outcomes; they may instead result in negative consequences (Gruber et al., 2011). This study examines how employee HAW influences their CHB. The results will help professionals understand the importance of fostering a positive work environment, as it may directly impact conflict management among employees.

It is also crucial to examine the outcomes of CHB (Espinoza et al., 2023). Given the importance of creativity in H&T (Baruah & Mukherjee, 2023), understanding the relationship between CHB and creativity is crucial for practitioners. The literature shows mixed results regarding conflict's influence on various employee outcomes (De Wit et al., 2012), and it remains unclear how CHB influence creative behavior (Badke-Schaub et al., 2010). Additionally, the process of developing creative behavior lacks clarity (Sweetman et al., 2011). This study examines the impact of employees' predominant CHB on their CPB.

CHB is considered the mediator in this study for three reasons. Firstly, employers can train and develop employees' conflict-handling approaches (Verwey et al., 2023). Secondly, CHB is found to influence various employee behaviors outside the H&T context (Kay & Skarlicki, 2020). Thirdly, employee emotions and attitudes at work affect their CHB (Jordan & Troth, 2021).

The study is divided into two phases (refer Fig. 1). In Phase 1, researchers identify the predominant CHB of H&T employees using the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Instrument (TKI), categorizing scores as high, medium, or low for specific CHB types (competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, accommodating). This phase includes a literature review, methodology, data analysis using TKI, and discussion of results. In Phase 2, the study measures the degree of the "predominant" CHB with another instrument and tests the relationship between the "predominant" CHB, HAW, and CPB. This phase includes a literature review, hypothesis development, data analysis, and results discussion. The paper concludes with study limitations, future research suggestions, implications, and a conclusion.

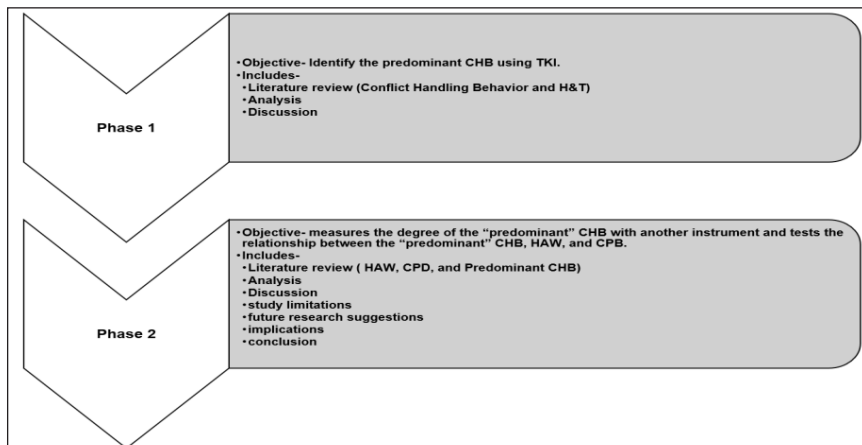


Fig. 1: Structure of the Paper

Phase 1

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

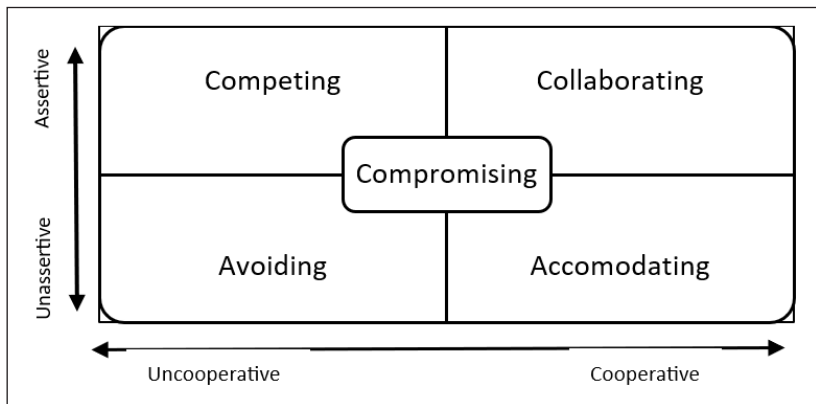
Conflict Handling Behavior and H&T

Conflict naturally arises in human interactions due to differing opinions, needs, or expectations (Rahim, 2023). Managers spend considerable time addressing workplace conflicts, and studies indicate that conflict outcomes heavily depend on CHB (Rahim, 2023). CHB encompasses the behaviors and approaches individuals use to manage conflicts in personal and professional settings, significantly affecting outcomes and relationships (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Limited conflict management studies in H&T reveal CHB positively influences employee behavior and performance (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002).

Thomas and Kilmann (1977) outlined five conflict-handling styles (refer Fig. 2):

- *Competing*: Assertive and uncooperative, prioritizing one's own needs over others.
- *Accommodating*: Unassertive and cooperative, sacrificing one's own needs for others.
- *Avoiding*: Unassertive and uncooperative, ignoring both parties' needs to avoid conflict.

- *Collaborating*: Assertive and cooperative, working together to satisfy both parties' needs through creative solutions.
- *Compromising*: Moderate assertiveness and cooperativeness, finding mutually acceptable solutions.



Source: Thomas, K. (1976). *The Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Fig. 2: Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)

Effectiveness of these styles depends on the situation and the individual's competence (Friedman et al., 2000). Individuals often develop a predominant CHB based on personal bias, situational requirements, or learned strategies (Callanan et al., 2006).

Studies on CHB antecedents have yielded mixed findings. Some show no gender differences (Hasani et al., 2018), while others suggest women are more dominating and men more obliging (Gbadamosi et al., 2014). Profession and seniority also play roles, with senior employees preferring compromise (Mcintyre, 2013) and higher-educated professionals favoring avoiding styles (Rahim, 1986). Age influences CHB, with older professionals often preferring compromise and younger ones tending towards dominating styles (Havenga & Visagie, 2017).

Considering their training towards improving guest satisfaction in H&T and the Indian philosophy of "Atithi Devo Bhavah" (a Sanskrit phrase meaning "Guest is equivalent to God"), employees in the H&T sector are

likely to favor a compromising or accommodating style (Sinha et al., 2020). Additionally, due to the collectivist Indian culture, employees may also prefer the avoiding style as evidenced in China (Hofstede & Bond, 1984); however, this may not be the recommended approach in the H&T context. In contrast, the competing and collaborating styles, which involve a substantial degree of assertiveness, may potentially create a negative experience for the other party involved in the conflict and are not typically recommended or followed in the H&T sector. Thereby we hypothesize,

H01: The predominant conflict handling style among H&T employees will be compromising or accommodating rather than competing, collaborating, or avoiding.

Methodology

Data Collection

Drawing on the researcher's extensive travel experience and professional connections in the hotel industry, they contacted managers at several properties. In April 2023, 64 five- or four-star hotels were approached, including 43 hotels from four chains and 21 stand-alone hotels. Of these, 39 agreed to share the questionnaires with their employees (refer to Table 1). These star-rated hotels were chosen for their structured induction programs and training on guest management, including conflict handling and creativity. Such hotels typically have robust policies (Dang-Van et al., 2023) that may promote employee happiness. They attract diverse international guests, offering employees more opportunities to demonstrate CPB.

In June 2023, both physical and digital copies of the questionnaire were sent to the HR managers of these hotels, who were asked to distribute and collect them from employees. The questionnaire included instruments for both phases: a CHB scale for phase one, and scales for HAW, CPB, and different conflict types (compete, collaborate, compromise, accommodate, and avoid) for phase two. This approach was chosen for two reasons. First, due to potential respondent animosity and high attrition rates in the sector, using the same respondents for both phases was essential. Second, the first phase was expected to last about 5 to 6 months, overlapping with the hotel's peak season (Dec-Jan), making data collection for the 2nd phase challenging.

Table 1: Phase 1 - Distribution of Samples

Hotel Chain	No. of Hotels Approached for Data Collection	No. of Hotels Agreed	Total Employees in These Hotels (approx.)	Data Collected			
				Online	Offline	Total Before Cleaning	Total After Cleaning
Hotel Chain A	11	7	3216	128	12	140	138
Hotel Chain B	12	8	3187	97	21	118	102
Hotel Chain C	12	7	3096	138	24	162	149
Hotel Chain D	8	6	3217	187	12	199	194
Standalone Hotels	21	11	4427	19	138	157	91
	64	39	17143	569	207	776	674

To participate in the study, respondents had to have at least six months of consecutive work experience within the same hotel organization, ensuring familiarity with the hotel's environment, policies, and dynamics. Exclusion criteria included contractual or part-time employees, tourist guides/agents, and freelancers.

Although over 1000 hotel employees were targeted, the exact count was challenging to determine due to the distribution of both digital and physical copies. Regular follow-ups with hotel professionals regarding questionnaire collection began in the first week of July 2023. A total of 569 responses were received online, and 207 responses were obtained offline. Of the offline responses, 102 were incomplete and excluded from the final analysis, resulting in a final sample size of 674 respondents.

In the first phase, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) was used to identify the predominant CHB.

Phase 1

Conflict Mode Instrument (CA)

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1977) assesses individual responses in conflict situations, measuring the frequency of five CHBs: collaborating, accommodating, compromising, avoiding, and competing. This frequency is used to identify the predominant CHB. Sample questions include: "I try to find a compromise solution," "I attempt to address both his/her concerns and my own," etc.

Analysis (Phase 1)

The TKI analysis revealed that conflict avoidance (CA) was the most common style, used by 49 percent of employees (331 individuals). Accommodating was the second most prevalent at 21 percent, followed by compromising at 11 percent, competing at 10 percent, and collaborating at 9 percent (refer Table 2).

Table 2

	Men		Women		Total	
	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean
Avoiding	219		112		331	
HAW		3.91		3.85		3.89
CPB		3.96		4.11		4.01
Age		27.6		26.2		27.13
Accomodating	91		51		142	
HAW		3.71		3.87		3.77
CPB		3.89		3.65		3.8
Age		31.2		34.2		32.28
Compromising	51		24		75	
HAW		4.11		3.69		3.98
CPB		3.95		4.23		4.04
Age		29.6		31.6		30.24
Competing	46		21		67	
HAW		4.19		3.69		4.03
CPB		3.56		4.11		3.73
Age		27.7		28.6		27.98
Collaborating	37		11		48	
HAW		4.11		4.02		4.09
CPB		4.23		3.99		3.73
Age		43.2		39.5		42.35
Total					674	

Discussion (Phase 1)

The study found that CA was the predominant approach among H&T employees. Understanding why individuals choose different CHB requires considering factors such as gender, job role, personality, culture, and group development stage (Rahim, 2023). To explore this further, the authors examined the demographic characteristics of the 331 employees primarily using CA. On

average, they were 27 years old with 3.5 years of work experience. Most (78 percent, 258 individuals) held frontline positions and were early in their careers, learning to manage conflicts using approaches like accommodating and collaborating.

As frontline employees early in their careers, they often lack the authority to make decisions in conflict situations (Boles & Babin, 1996). Thus, they may escalate issues to higher authorities (Northington et al., 2021), limiting their involvement in conflict resolution. Their short average work experience and job insecurity may also contribute to their reluctance to engage in conflicts. Additionally, studies indicate that Indians often perceive conflicts as harmful to their well-being rather than opportunities for generating diverse ideas (Alok et al., 2015).

Phase 2

Data from 331 employees, predominantly exhibiting ‘avoidance’ CHB, were analyzed in the second research stage to study relationships between CA, HAW, and CPB. The sample sizes for other CHB styles were smaller, with ‘accommodating’ being the next highest at 142 employees, making structural equation modeling challenging.

Literature Review (Phase 2)

Happiness at Work (HAW)

HAW refers to “the positive emotional state experienced by employees while they are working” (Fisher, 2010). It involves three dimensions that offer a more holistic understanding of work life: engagement (explaining the enthusiasm at work), job satisfaction (explaining an evaluation of job aspects), and affective organizational commitment (explaining a sense of belonging to the organization) (Fisher, 2010).

In the H&T industry, the role of HAW among employees is crucial (Akgunduz et al., 2023; Rasheed et al., 2020). When employees feel happy, it can have a contagious effect, as described in the emotional contagion theory (Bull Schaefer & Palanski, 2014). This means that if employees are happy, they are likely to pass on this feeling to guests and other staff around. Also, given the industry’s high turnover rate (Mahajan, 2010), it is crucial for top management to help employees feel connected to their work, their colleagues, and the organization.

Creative Performance Behavior (CPB)

CPB denotes individuals' capacity to generate innovative ideas (Lua et al., 2024) or outcomes that add value to their work or organization (Amabile, 2013). It involves divergent thinking, breaking from conventional approaches, and producing original ideas (Shao, 2020), such as proposing innovative solutions or suggesting unique perspectives (Gupta & Singh, 2013).

CPB encompasses four key individual behaviors: problem identification, information search, idea generation, and idea promotion (Montag et al., 2012). Problem identification is the initial step, defining the problem clearly and measurably. The next step is the information search, gathering in-depth data on the issue's depth and breadth. Idea generation follows, utilizing existing knowledge to develop potential solutions and identify effective approaches. Finally, idea promotion involves sharing ideas with colleagues for consideration as creative solutions (Janssen, 1999).

Research in this sector highlights the impact of leadership (e.g., Akgunduz et al., 2023), individual differences (Peng et al., 2023), and environmental factors (Abualigah et al., 2023) on employee creativity.

Conflict Avoidance

The avoiding style, also known as withdrawal or ignoring, involves postponing or withdrawing from a conflict (Rahim, 1986). It is a competitive or uncooperative strategy (Rahim, 2023), characterized by passivity and lack of cooperation (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002). Individuals in this mode refrain from expressing concerns or addressing others' issues, opting to avoid direct conflict (Rahim, 2023). This can include tactfully sidestepping sensitive topics, delaying discussion, or physically leaving uncomfortable situations. Avoidance is seen as suitable in low-importance disagreements (Rahim, 1986).

In collectivist societies like China, where relationships are paramount (Hofstede & Bond, 1984), avoiding conflict is common. Studies in the Chinese H&T sector show employees may avoid management or quickly comply during disputes to maintain harmony (Brew & Cairns, 2004). In such cultures, CA preserves cooperative relationships (Awalluddin et al., 2023).

Happiness at Work and Creative Performance Behavior

HAW can have a profound influence on the CPB of employees. According to the Broaden and Build theory, positive emotions experienced by employees

may lead to a broader perspective (Fredrickson, 1998) and make them more likely to adopt constructive approaches to their work tasks, including problem-solving (Fredrickson, 2004) and displaying CPB. When employees experience happiness in their work environment, they may be motivated and engaged in their tasks. This heightened motivation and engagement can fuel their creativity and inspire them to think outside the box.

Additionally, to reciprocate for the experience provided by the organization, employees may be driven by a genuine interest in their work. This can lead to a greater willingness to explore innovative solutions and generate novel ideas. They may closely examine the organization's operations and dedicate time to creating ideas beneficial to the organization (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Moreover, employees who derive satisfaction from their work are likely to be more engaged in their tasks, resulting in a heightened sense of competence and mastery. These employees are better positioned to gather pertinent information (one of the basic tenets of CPB), having developed expertise in their roles. Thereby, we hypothesize that,

H02: There will be a positive influence of happiness at workplace of employees on their creative performance behavior.

Conflict Avoidance and Creative Performance Behavior

Employees who choose to exhibit conflict avoidance behavior often avoid disagreements (Sinha et al., 2020) by either removing themselves from the scene of conflict or changing the topic of discussion (Rahim, 2002). This avoidance may result in their failure to acknowledge the existence of a conflicting situation that needs addressing (Rahim, 2023). One of the fundamental aspects of creative performance behavior is effective communication for transmitting ideas, is hindered in such scenario. This uncooperative behavior can further lead to poor relationships and other undesirable employee behaviors (Rasool et al., 2021), ultimately harming the creative environment.

Xie et al. (1998) found that environments fostering conflict avoidance negatively impact the success of new products, whereas collaborative conflict-handling behavior has a positive influence. The strategy of avoiding conflict negatively affects constructive conflicts (Rahim, 2023), thereby negatively influencing innovative performance (Rahim, 1986). During the development of creative ideas, groups may encounter conflicting situations. Employees who prefer to stay away from these conflicts may have low motivation to seek out information that could aid in the development of creative ideas. Therefore, we hypothesize,

H03: There will be a negative influence of conflict avoidance on the creative performance behavior of employees

Happiness at Work and Conflict Avoidance

Happiness enhances individuals' ability to regulate their emotions (Fisher, 2010), making them better positioned to stay engaged at the workplace. Employees who experience happiness are more likely to approach challenging situations with a positive mindset.

According to the Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2004), experiencing happiness expands individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires. Consequently, employees who feel positive emotions at work are more likely to adopt constructive approaches to managing conflicts. They can better maintain self-control, express their concerns, actively listen to others, and find mutually beneficial resolutions.

Happier employees are also more inclined to support their colleague (Alshurideh et al., 2023), engage in teamwork, and seek win-win outcomes. This positive environment fosters a culture of cooperation and understanding, where conflicts are seen as opportunities for growth rather than sources of hostility. Positive social bonds among happy employees contribute to effective communication, trust, and mutual respect, facilitating conflict resolution.

Additionally, happiness enhances psychological well-being, self-confidence, and problem-solving abilities, allowing individuals to approach conflicts with a proactive and solution-oriented mindset. Happy employees are more likely to explore creative alternatives (Bellet et al., 2023), consider multiple perspectives, and seek compromises. They view conflicts as chances to strengthen relationships, collaborate on solutions, and maintain harmonious working relationships. Therefore, these employees are likely to favor a collaborating style for conflict resolution, as it aims to find a solution that fully satisfies everyone's concerns, ensuring both sides get what they want and minimizing negative feelings. They may also consider a compromising or accommodating style, which seeks a quick, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties and helps maintain relationships. In contrast, these satisfied employees will not choose to display the competing or avoiding styles, which can create a toxic atmosphere. Therefore, we hypothesize,

H04: There will be a negative influence of happiness at workplace on the conflict avoidance behavior of employees.

Conflict Avoidance as Mediator

CA may act as a mediator between HAW and CPB. HAW fosters a positive environment where individuals feel connected, engage with peers,

and are task-committed (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023). Employees in such environments may approach conflicts positively, potentially avoiding CA. Hence, HAW may dampen CA, which, in turn, hinders creativity, as constructive CHB promotes creativity. Therefore, CA may negatively affect CPB. Therefore, we hypothesize,

H05: Conflict handling behavior serves as a mediator in the relationship between happiness at workplace and creative performance behavior of employees.

Analysis (Phase 2)

In this phase, the researcher analyzed data from 331 employees predominantly utilizing CA. This dataset, along with HAW and CPB data, explored their relationships. Table 3 displays mean, median, and Pearson correlations. The questionnaire contained 29 items, with the sample size meeting (Hair et al., 1998) “10-times rule” for acceptability.

Instruments Used

Happiness at Work

The current study employs the “Shortened Happiness at Work” (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021) scale, measuring HAW. This scale was deemed appropriate for this research given their prior validation in the Indian setting (e.g., Singh et al., 2017) therefore, no pilot testing was conducted. This scale includes job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational commitment dimensions, uniquely integrating and clarifying them while introducing a general attitude measure (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021). Responses were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample questions include statements like, “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous” and “I am enthusiastic about my job,” among others.

The reliability of the scale was found to be 0.73. Given that the scale has been widely used in previous studies within the Indian context, the authors opted not to conduct a pilot study. CFA was used to validate the structure of each measurement instrument and to ensure that the data aligns with the expected theoretical constructs (Sureshchandar, 2023). Moreover, conducting CFA for each variable individually aligns with the methodology commonly followed in papers published in top-tier journals (e.g., Gupta & Singh, 2013; Sujatha et al., 2023). The model, consisting of three primary factors, demonstrated strong interrelationships (average $r = 0.63$) and showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2[18] = 28.41$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.93; NNFI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.06). These findings indicated the presence of a higher-order common factor.

The model comprising of three first-order factors plus one second-order factor of HAW showed good fit with the data ($\chi^2[20] = 30.15$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.03; SRMR = 0.03; GFI = 0.92). None of the items were removed from the questionnaire.

● Creative Performance Behavior

In this study, the assessment of CPB was done by using the scale developed by Gupta and Singh (2014). This scale was deemed appropriate for this research given their prior validation in the Indian setting (e.g., Sujatha et al., 2023) therefore, no pilot testing was conducted. Sample questions include statements such as, “I engage in generating original solutions to problems” and “I consider diverse sources of information when generating new ideas,” among others. Participants’ feedback was obtained utilizing a five-point Likert scale, spanning from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very frequently). The reliability of the scale was found to be 0.84.

The model, which consisted of four primary factors, demonstrated strong interrelationships (average $r = 0.59$) and showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2[29] = 44.31$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.97; NNFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.05). These findings indicated the presence of a higher-order common factor.

Additionally, a model incorporating the four primary factors along with a second-order factor representing CPB also demonstrated a good fit with the data ($\chi^2[31] = 64.21$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.03; SRMR = 0.04; GFI = 0.93). None of the items were removed from the questionnaire. This model provided further support for the relationship between the primary factors and their collective influence on CPB.

● Conflict Avoidance

The researcher employed an adapted version of the 6-item scale developed by Indvik and Fitzpatrick (1982) to measure the participants’ degree of CA. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item using a 5-point scale, where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 5 represented “strongly agree.” Some sample questions include: “If I can avoid a conflict, the conflict will disappear,” and “I express anger toward others during conflict,” among others. The reliability of the scale was found to be 0.77.

Control Variables

The study included control variables to address potential influences, including employee age, gender, education, and job tenure. Age was measured continuously, while gender, education, and job level were categorical.

Graduates were coded as two, postgraduates as one, and PhD holders as zero. Job tenure, representing years of service, was measured on a continuous scale.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Convergent and Discriminant Validity

The study carried out a series of CFA to examine whether the three constructs of the study capture distinct versus common source effects. The three-factor model consisting of HAW, CA, CPB as separate constructs fit the data well ($\chi^2[54] = 93.15$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.05; GFI = 0.97). The study tested three alternate models: (1) a two-factor model formed by combining HAW and CPB did not fit the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2[52] = 433.25$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.21); (2) a two-factor model formed by combining HAW and CA also did not fit the data well ($\chi^2[78] = 639.31$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.39, RMSEA = 0.21); and (3) a one-factor model, created by merging all three constructs, also did not fit the data adequately ($\chi^2[102] = 528.61$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.27, RMSEA = 0.14).

The authors conducted an average variance extracted (AVE) analysis to confirm discriminant validity, with values exceeding 0.5 for each construct, indicating convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (refer Table 3). Couchman and Fulop (2006) suggest that AVE's value for a variable should be higher than the average variance shared between variables, especially with other variables. The square of correlations between constructs does not surpass individual constructs' AVE, confirming adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Internal consistency was assessed using composite reliability, ranging from 0.67 to 0.88, exceeding the 0.60 benchmark (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (refer Table 4).

Table 3: Phase 2 - Mean and Standard Deviation of 331 Samples

Variables	M	SD	WE	Gen	HAW	CPB	CA
WE	4.2	3.3					
Gen	0.8	0.4	-0.12*				
HAW	4.1	0.4	-.15**	.24**	(0.68)	0.44	0.06
CPB	4.2	0.3	-.22**	.24**	.67**	(0.71)	0.09
CA	4.1	0.4	0.09	-.16**	.24**	.30**	(0.56)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is provided in parenthesis along the diagonal in brackets. Values on the left of the diagonal are interconstruct correlations; values on the right of the diagonal (i.e., AVE) are square of correlations/* ($n=331$).

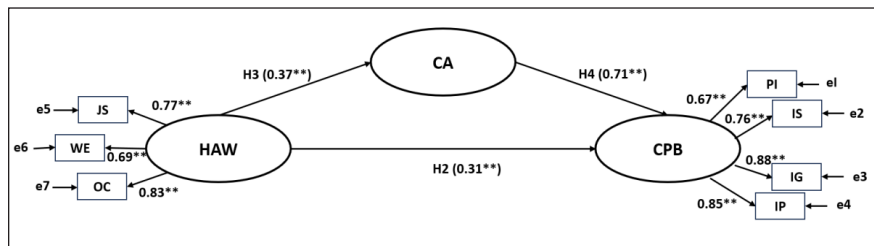
Table 4: Phase 2- Reliability and Validity Statistics. CA- Cronbach Alpha, CR- Composite Reliability, Act- Actual, AL- Accepted Level

Scale	CA		CR		CFI		NNFI		RMSEA		P Value
	Act	AL	Act	AL	Act	AL	Act	AL	Act	AL	
HAW	0.73	>0.70	0.88	>0.6	0.93	>0.9	0.91	>0.9	0.06	<0.1	<0.001
CPB	0.67	>0.70	0.67	>0.6	0.97	>0.9	0.96	>0.9	0.05	<0.1	<0.001
CA	0.78	>0.70	0.78	>0.6							

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results

To address potential common method bias, we implemented procedural and statistical controls (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Procedurally, we guaranteed respondent anonymity and confidentiality. Statistically, we used SEM, linking all indicator variables to their respective latent constructs, and conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess convergent and discriminant validities.

Fig. 3 presents SEM results, indicating a strong model fit: $\chi^2(102) = 211.31, p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.06; GFI = 0.96. The acceptable values are as follows: CFI ≥ 0.9 , RMSEA ≤ 0.1 , SRMR ≤ 0.1 , and GFI ≥ 0.9 (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Jana et al., 2024). All model paths are statistically significant. Firstly, HAW positively relates to CPB ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 2. Secondly, HAW positively correlates with CA ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 3. Lastly, CA positively associates with CPB ($\beta = 0.71, p < 0.001$), confirming hypothesis 4 (refer Table 5).



Note: JS, job satisfaction; WE, work engagement; OC, organizational commitment; PI, Problem Identification; IS, Information search; IG, Idea Generation; IP, Idea Promotion. * $p < 0.001$; $N=331$.

Fig. 3: Structural Equation Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

The total effect of HAW on employee CPB was 0.57 ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, the indirect effect of HAW on CPB, computed by multiplying the path coefficients between HAW and CA, and between CA and CPB (Baron & Kenny, 1986), was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that HAW influences CPB directly and indirectly through CA, supporting hypothesis 5.

Table 5: Phase 2 - Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis Number	Hypothesis Description	Path-Coefficients	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P-Values
H02	HAW--> CPB	0.31	0.051	0.91	< 0.001
H03	CA --> CPB	0.71	0.068	2.36	< 0.001
H04	HAW --> CA	0.37	0.061	3.94	< 0.001

Discussion (Phase 2)

The results of the study suggest that conflict avoidance acts as a mediator in the relationship between workplace happiness and employees' creative performance behavior. This implies that employees experiencing higher levels of workplace happiness are prefer to avoid conflict, yet they exhibit creative performance behavior. Additionally, workplace happiness also directly influences creative performance behavior. Thus, this represents a case of partial mediation, wherein workplace happiness affects creative performance behavior through two pathways.

The study reveals that HAW positively influences their CPB. Our research outcomes support the findings of Tan et al. (2019), Pannells and Claxton (2008), and Jalali and Heidari (2016), reinforcing the notion that there exists a positive relationship between the happiness of employees and their creativity. In contrast, our findings diverge from the conclusions drawn by Rego et al. (2009) and Khan and Abbas (2022), who observed a negative correlation between employee happiness and creativity. Additionally, as per the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions widen individuals' momentary thought and action options, encouraging the exploration of fresh and innovative ideas and behaviors (Fredrickson, 1998). Positive emotions enhance an individual's capacity for thinking and problem-solving, facilitating the emergence of innovative ideas and alternative approaches (Fredrickson, 2000). Consequently, happy employees are more likely to devote effort to problem identification, information search, and idea generation. Moreover, as positive emotions foster positive social interactions and collaboration, they also encourage employees to advocate for their ideas among peers and supervisors.

The results of the study also revealed an influence of HAW on CA. This finding indicates that employees are more likely to avoid or minimize conflicts when they experience higher levels of happiness, which is a unique insight provided by this study. Earlier studies have found that in certain contexts, negative emotions provide better results than positive ones (Gruber et al., 2011). Forgas (2007) found that individuals in a positive mood exhibited significantly fewer arguments compared to individuals in negative and neutral mood states. Experimental studies have also shown that happy individuals performed worse on tasks than those in other states, including anger (Tamir et al., 2008; Tamir & Ford, 2010). Engaging in other conflict management techniques like collaboration, competition, or accommodation often entails interacting with the opposing party involved in the conflict (Thomas & Kilmann, 1977). Such interactions may not be friendly or gentle, and thus have the potential to disrupt individuals' current emotional states (cite). Therefore, they may choose to avoid such interactions. This behavior can be attributed to the desire to maintain their positive emotional state (Gruber et al., 2011).

Avoiding conflict may not always be the most appropriate course of action, especially in serious situations in H&T, as it could potentially damage the organization's reputation. This could be seen as one of the adverse consequences of workplace happiness. At times, happiness may also have negative effects (Gruber et al., 2011). Finkenauer and Vohs (2001) observed that individuals experiencing high levels of positive emotions might overlook significant threats and dangers.

The analysis in the study also suggests a positive influence of conflict avoidance behavior on the creative performance behavior of employees. Our study indicates that employees who avoid conflict may effectively preserve their positive emotions, enabling them to maintain a mindset conducive to problem identification, idea generation, information search, and idea promotion. The existing literature suggests that specific CHB can have a detrimental impact on workplace creativity (e.g., Kryshtanovych et al., 2022; Bavik, 2022). Their studies indicate that certain approaches to managing conflict can stifle creative thinking and innovation within an organization. However, our research aligns with studies conducted by Rahim (2023), Yong et al. (2014), and Troyer (2009), which propose that conflicting situations can actually contribute to fostering creativity in the workplace. These studies indicate that when conflicts are appropriately managed and resolved, they can stimulate divergent thinking, encourage different perspectives, and ultimately lead to increased creativity and innovation among employees.

An employee who avoids conflict can still maintain a mindset conducive to problem identification, idea generation, information search, and idea promotion by employing several strategies. By avoiding conflict, the employee can concentrate on identifying and solving problems without the distractions or emotional upheavals that conflicts often bring, allowing for a clear and objective analysis of issues. Additionally, such employee might prefer gathering information quietly, leading to thorough and unbiased information collection crucial for well-informed decision-making. Steering clear of direct conflict can foster a more collaborative approach to problem-solving, bringing different perspectives together non-confrontationally and encouraging a team-based approach to idea generation and problem identification. Furthermore, instead of engaging in confrontational debates, the employee can use diplomatic and tactful communication to promote ideas, framing suggestions positively and seeking common ground to gain support from colleagues. Employees who avoid conflict may develop high emotional intelligence, allowing them to navigate workplace dynamics effectively and use this skill to understand and address the concerns of others, which helps in promoting ideas and driving consensus without direct confrontation.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

This study contributes to the literature on happiness, conflict, and creativity in H&T. However, further research is needed due to the importance of these areas. While the findings align with existing theory, there are limitations that future studies should address. The cross-sectional design hinders causal inferences; longitudinal or experimental designs are suggested for exploring the relationships. Despite efforts to mitigate common method bias, it cannot be entirely eliminated, potentially inflating relationships between variables.

The study evaluated employee CPB, but assessing actual CPB through office records would be beneficial. Additionally, the study concentrated on CA as a mediator between HAW and CPB. Future research could investigate different CHBs, mediators, and moderators at various levels to enhance our understanding.

Future research could explore HAW at the team level to understand its impact on departmental creativity. Subsequent studies can investigate various forms of conflict in diverse workplace settings. Understanding why employees choose specific CHBs is also important. Examining happiness, conflict management, and creativity across different team, organizational, and national cultures is essential for a comprehensive understanding. Comparative

studies across sectors, organizational cultures, and structures are valuable for advancing workplace attitudes and behaviors research.

Implications

This study makes essential contributions to both theory and practice, identifying conflict avoidance as the predominant conflict-handling behavior among employees in the H&T sector. Although organizations, particularly in H&T due to frequent guest interactions and high stress, invest significantly in training to improve employees' conflict-management skills, no prior study has identified the prevailing conflict-handling style among these employees. By addressing this gap, the study provides valuable insights for professionals to assess the effectiveness of current conflict-management training and guide the development of more targeted, impactful programs.

The study reveals how happiness at work shapes conflict-avoidant tendencies, which can, in turn, enhance creative behaviors in the workplace. While previous research has shown the impact of positive emotions on employee creativity (Baruah & Mukherjee, 2023; Peer & Mukherjee, 2023; Sujatha et al., 2023), this study uniquely examines the specific mechanisms through which workplace happiness fosters creativity. By addressing gaps in understanding creative behavior development (Sweetman et al., 2011) and identifying precursors to conflict-handling styles, like individual happiness levels, the findings provide actionable insights. Managers can use this knowledge to build a positive environment that boosts morale and job satisfaction while channeling employees' energy into creative problem-solving and innovation.

The study's identification of conflict-avoidance behavior as a catalyst for creative performance addresses inconsistencies in the literature on conflict's impact on employee outcomes (De Wit et al., 2012) and the nuanced role of conflict-handling in fostering or inhibiting creativity (Badke-Schaub et al., 2010). This research further enables managers to recognize and leverage conflict-avoidance as a strategic advantage. In conflict management training and coaching, professionals can use these findings to guide employees, highlighting that conflict avoidance may be suitable when issues are minor, more pressing matters require attention, the costs of conflict outweigh potential benefits, more information is needed, or cooling-off time is advisable. However, employees should also be encouraged to assess the context and consider alternative conflict strategies, fostering a balanced, context-sensitive approach to managing workplace conflicts.

The current study also addresses the need to examine how happiness shapes outcomes like conflict behaviors, particularly in the H&T sector (Dijkstra et al., 2020). While many studies highlight the positive impacts of workplace happiness, Gruber et al. (2011) identifies unique negative effects, positioning this research within an emerging discourse on potential downsides. Our findings indicate that HAW can promote conflict-avoidance behaviors among employees, which may not always be ideal. Organizations should consider these insights when evaluating happiness initiatives, as bridging the gap between intended and actual behaviors requires targeted training interventions.

This study applies the broaden-and-build theory to explore workplace relationships, extending its relevance to the H&T industry. As a key contributor to the global economy, the H&T sector provides an ideal setting for examining these dynamics. Conducted within an Indian cultural context, this research offers valuable insights for scholars exploring the roles of happiness, conflict, and their impact on employee creativity in India's H&T sector.

Additionally, the study aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2016), examining how conflict management influences happiness. It aims to identify factors that improve workplace experiences, fostering a supportive culture essential for SDG 8. By identifying creativity antecedents, it also enables organizations to enhance innovative capacity and develop sustainable infrastructure, key elements of SDG 9.

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