

## A structural model of relationships between conflict management styles and innovative behaviors with the mediation of work conscientiousness

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<b>Keywords:</b> <i>Conflict management styles, innovative behaviors, conscientiousness</i>	<b>Abstract</b> <b>Background and purpose:</b> innovative behaviors as behaviors that bring change with themselves are related to organizational transformation and are considered the growth and development factor of all organizations. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the structural relationships between conflict management styles and innovative behaviors with the mediation of work conscientiousness in Lorestan University of Medical Sciences employees. <b>Methodology:</b> This research was a descriptive (non-experimental) correlational research. The statistical population includes all Lorestan University of Medical Sciences employees, and the sample size includes 248 employees selected through simple random sampling. Research data were obtained through the questionnaires on the conflict management styles of Thomas (1974), the work conscientiousness of Costa McGrath (1992), and the innovative behavior of Cross (2004). They were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and path analysis. <b>Results:</b> The findings from the path analysis showed that conflict management style, problem-solving style, compromise style, and flexibility style have a positive effect. However, the avoidance and control styles negatively affect work conscientiousness; work conscientiousness has a positive effect on innovative behavior, and work conscientiousness has a mediating role in the relationship between conflict management and innovation. Based on this, the results generally showed that the tested or conceptual models fit well. In addition to confirming the assumed paths, the role of conscientiousness in the relationship between conflict management and innovative behaviors is confirmed ( $p < 0.01$ ). <b>Conclusion:</b> Managers who use problem-solving, flexible, and compromise styles increase work conscientiousness by influencing the psychological needs of employees, and managers who use domineering and deterministic conflict management styles always have unmotivated and irresponsible employees.
<b>Article Type:</b> Research Article	
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### How to Cite:

Taherian, M., Ghalavandi, H., Ghalei, A., & Hosseini, M. (2021). A structural model of relationships between conflict management styles and innovative behaviors with the mediation of work conscientiousness. *International Journal of Innovation in Management and Organizational Behavior*, 2(3), 25-37.

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## **Introduction**

In every country, the educational system is one of the most complex social, economic, and cultural sub-systems, which always involves many people as learners and teachers directly or indirectly in some way with its activities (Maqdasi, Mohammad Khani, and Dawoodi, 2016). Universities, as one of the significant centers of science, are of special importance; for this reason, the main management of any country is the responsibility of its universities as the center of production of science and training of specialized personnel (Aghapour, Mohd Mohammadi, Alam Beigi and Shabanali Femi, 2012). Therefore, attention to organizational agility with the major role of human resources and attention to the importance of growth and promotion of employees in the form of human resource agility has become more visible in the university and should be given serious attention (Maghdasi et al., 2016).

Today, technological and technological transformations, informational and educational, globalization and instability, the diversity of learners' needs and expectations, the faster process of change, the need for universities to be accountable, their social and moral responsibility towards society, etc. have created conditions that the traditional methods and paradigms of universities, as in the past, can no longer adequately respond to their client's needs (Bagheri & Abbaspour, 2012). By studying the current situation in the Islamic Azad Universities of our country, it is clear that successful efforts have been made by their officials to identify changes and transformations to create effective challenges in this field and to take advantage of these changes and transformations in order to improve and develop their human resources. In other words, our educational system is a non-dynamic and single-centered system with a traditional and quantitative structure (Sahami, 2012). The question is how organizations (especially universities and scientific centers) can achieve agility. By examining previous studies in organizational agility, it has been determined how an organization can gain and maintain the advantage of agility. From the tools mentioned by the specialists of these organizations to achieve agility, we can mention flexible structure, human resources development, technology, information technology, innovation, and creativity. Despite the importance of these factors and tools for making the organization agile, researchers have emphasized that the development of human resources is one of the most important of them (Dair & Shafer, 2003). The concept of agility in the dictionary means fast movement, agile, active, and the ability to move quickly and easily and think quickly and intelligently (Hornby, 2000). Agility means the ability of any organization to feel, perceive and anticipate changes in the business environment. Such an organization should be able to recognize environmental changes and see them as factors of growth and prosperity (Sharifi & Zhang, 1999). The problem of how organizations can succeed in a dynamic and unpredictable environment is an issue that is known as the most important

challenge in today's world. In such an environment, agility has become an important capability that affects the organization's performance (Roichandran, 2007).

In this way, one of the most basic mistakes is ignoring the prominent role of human resources in improving agility. Although human resource agility has been declared as a profitable strategy in the business environment, still, the lack of agile human resources has been identified as one of the main reasons for the failure of organizations to keep pace with market and technology changes (Tureng, 2005).

Agile organizations try to enrich their product to increase the value customers receive from the product. This makes the position of agile organizations inaccessible to competitors (Christo & Youssef, 2003). The foundation of an agile organization is to align information technologies, employees, work processes, and facilities in a flexible organization. Quickly responding to changing conditions will complement these capabilities (Dyer & Shafer, 2003). Also, agility is the organization's ability to balance and maintain compliance and commitment. Agile organizations do not commit themselves to the rigid conditions of an aimless perspective focused on routine actions. According to Doz and Kosonen (2010), strategic agility results from three organizational characteristics. The term hyper capability has been used to describe these three characteristics closely aligned with the concept of dynamic capability. These three meta-capabilities include strategic sensitivity, resource fluidity, and collective commitment. Dyer and Shafer (2003) investigated the behavioral factors for organizational agility by employees and concluded that organizational agility requires a change in behavior in the organization's human resources. Sherehyi et al. (2007) have considered a range of inclusive agility capabilities: 1) Flexibility 2) Responsiveness 3) Change culture 4) Speed 5) High integration and low complexity.

Ambrose and Morilla (2004) consider agile organization design possible by balancing order and change in the business environment. They declared: that formulation of sourcing strategy, management of resources, creation and strengthening of competence in employees, training and identification of leaders, central process, the establishment of structure based on the information system, and coherence in the field of preparation for change are essentials of the agile organization. Sumokados and Savoni (2014) presented a theoretical model that showed the impact of human resource management measures on human resource agility. In fact, the impact of actions that lead to involving employees in work (which is called IE actions for short) and increases their motivation and commitment; The results of the research showed that organizational power-sharing methods, including job enrichment and development, self-management teams, quality circles, and suggestion systems have a strong and significant impact on human resource agility.

On the other hand, in traditional management texts, human resources development is considered a set of individual and organizational actions, the purpose of which is to increase the potential contribution of people in the organization. In the current dynamic

environment, knowledge-based organizations demand that organizations develop their learning capacity more effectively and faster than their competitors and find methods and skills to solve complex problems. Therefore, relying on human and intellectual capital is a sustainable competitive advantage in a knowledge-based economy and requires developing skills and empowering the organization's human resources (Zha, 2004). Human resource development believes that organizations are artificial institutions that rely on human expertise that was formed in order to determine and achieve their goals. Meanwhile, human resource development supports the organizational, group, and individual cohesion and work processes. (Abtahi, 2004). Human resource development functions are different from HR functions. Rao (2007) enumerates the following roles for the human resources development manager: 1) development of empowerment capabilities in people and systems; 2) integration of individual development and organizational development; 3) maximizing the learning opportunities of people in the organization through various mechanisms; 4) working autonomy and shared responsibility; 5) creating a balance between change and adaptation; 6) Providing feedback and reinforcement mechanisms, etc. (Rao, 2007).

This research seeks to answer the following questions: 1) What are the different components affecting organizational agility based on human resource development? 2) What are the different dimensions affecting organizational agility based on human resource development? 3) How is the model of organizational agility based on the development of human resources in Islamic Azad University of Tehran province? 4) How valid is the model presented in Islamic Azad University of Tehran province?

## **Methodology**

The current research method is descriptive (non-experimental), and the correlation research design is of the path analysis type because, in this research, the relationships between variables are investigated in the form of a causal model. The statistical population of this research included all the employees of Lorestan University of Medical Sciences in the academic year 2016-2017, numbering 689 people. Based on the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and by simple random sampling method, 310 people were selected as a sample; after removing incomplete questionnaires, 248 were finally selected.

## **Materials**

**1. Innovative Behaviors Questionnaire.** In this research, a questionnaire designed by Cross 2 in 2004 is used. This questionnaire has eight items and consists of two dimensions generating ideas and implementing new ideas. The items are graded from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5). Cross (2004) obtained the reliability of the idea generation dimension by Cronbach's alpha method of 0.78 and the reliability of the implementation of ideas dimension of 0.81. The reliability coefficients of this questionnaire

in the research of Noami et al. (2013) were obtained by two methods, Cronbach's alpha and Tasneef, respectively, 0.82 and 0.74. They also examined the correlation of this questionnaire with the three dimensions of openness of the Neo-4 personality questionnaire to obtain convergent validity. The correlation coefficients of scores of the innovative behaviors questionnaire with the scores of the openness dimension of the NEO questionnaire were reported as 0.40, which was significant at an alpha of 0.01. In Fazullah Shenavar's research (2015), the calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported as 0.83; in the present study, Cronbach's alpha test was used to check the reliability, which was 0.79 for this variable.

**2. Work Conscientiousness Questionnaire.** In this research, work conscientiousness is measured by the 16-question questionnaire of Costa and McGrath (1998). This questionnaire has two sub-scales: reliability and success. The items are graded from completely disagree (zero) to completely agree (4). The validity of this questionnaire has been reported as 0.76. In the research of Ghasemzadeh et al. (2015), the reliability rate was reported as 0.72, in the present study, Cronbach's alpha test was used to check the reliability, which was 0.81 for this variable.

**3. Questionnaire of conflict management styles.** The conflict management style of Thomas (1974) has 30 questions based on a 5-point spectrum. The validity of the questionnaire was reported by Hosseinpour (2004) as 0.74, Azizi (2008) as 0.85, and Mohammadi Talab (2009) as 0.83. Scoring of Thomas's conflict management styles questionnaire: five conflict management styles are dominance style, problem-solving, compromise, avoidance, and flexibility. Items related to dominance style are 1-6-11-16-21-26. Items related to problem-solving style, including questions 2-7-12-17-22-27. Items related to compromise style, including questions 3-8-13-18-23-28. Items related to avoidance style 4-9-14-19-24-29. Items related to flexibility style are 5-10-15-20-25-30. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha test was used to check the tool's reliability, which is (0.80, 0.86, 0.79, 0.89, 0.83) for the dimensions of problem-solving, compromise, flexibility, control, and avoidance, respectively.

## Results

The analysis of the collected data is reported in the form of descriptive and inferential findings in the following tables. The correlation matrix was first used to test the theoretical model through structural equation modeling using the path analysis method to check the direct relationship between the mentioned variables.

**Table 1: Descriptive indices of research variables**

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
problem solving style	14/52	5/77	0/03	-1/31
Compromise style	14/98	5/62	-0/22	-1/13
Flexible style	14/80	5/32	0/18	-1/24
Dominating style	15/22	6/54	-0/24	-1/45
Avoidance style	12/35	5/80	0/74	-0/71
work conscientiousness	42/62	9/66	0/10	-0/80
Innovative behavior	31/01	7/29	-0/69	-0/52

Table 1 shows the results of the descriptive indices related to the research variables. The mean values and standard deviation of the variables indicate the proper dispersion of the data, and the skewness and kurtosis values indicate the normality of the distribution of the research variables.

In the table below, before testing the theoretical model, the correlation matrix between the hidden/implicit variables of the research is presented along with their correlation coefficients and significance level to examine the relationship between the variables.

**Table 2: Correlation matrix of the variables of the research theoretical model**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 problem solving style	1						
2 Compromise style	0/64**	1					
3 Flexible style	0/43**	0/50**	1				
4 Dominating style	-0/42**	-0/45**	-0/50**	1			
5 Avoidance style	-0/31**	-0/32**	-0/29**	0/59**	1		
6 work conscientiousness	0/54**	0/53**	0/53**	-0/52**	-0/42**	0/61**	1
7 Innovative behavior	0/61**	0/70**	0/50**	-0/43**	-0/33**	0/61**	1

Based on the above table, the results show the two-by-two correlation between the research variables. According to the above table, the relationship between innovative behavior with problem-solving style (0.61), compromise style (0.70), and flexible style (0.50) is positive. However, it is negative with control style (-0.42), and avoidance (-0.32), and the relationship between innovative behavior and work conscientiousness (0.61) is positive. The relationship between work conscientiousness behavior with problem-solving style (0.54), compromise style (0.52), and flexible style (0.53) is positive. However, it is negative with dominance style (-0.52) and avoidance (-0.42). Also, the relationship between avoidance style and problem-solving style (-0.31), with compromise style (-0.32), flexibility style (-0.29) is negative and with dominance style (0.59) is positive. The relationship between the dominance style with problem-solving style (-0.42), compromise

style (-0.45), and flexibility style (-0.50) are negative. The relationship between the flexible style with the problem-solving style (0.43) and the compromise style (0.50) is positive. This research used Giffen et al.'s fit indices (2000) to check the model's fit. The results of the model test in the form of direct and indirect paths are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Direct and indirect coefficients and t value**

Variables	Direct	Indirect	t	sig
to the conscientiousness of the work from	-		-	-
problem solving style	0/23	-	3/75	0/01
Compromise style	0/15	-	2/31	0/001
Flexible style	0/24	-	4/11	0/001
Dominating style	-0/15	-	-2/24	0/001
Avoidance style	-0/14	-	-2/47	0/05
to innovation from	-		-	0/01
work conscientiousness	0/24	-	5/04	0/001
to innovation from				
problem solving style	-	0/22	2/19	0/01
Compromise style	-	0/23	3/11	0/01
Flexible style	-	0/13	2/23	0/01
Dominating style	-	-0/16	3/09	0/01
Avoidance style	-	-0/09	3/11	0/01

According to the above table, problem-solving conflict style with a coefficient (of 0.23), compromise style with a coefficient (of 0.15), and flexible style with a coefficient (of 0.24) have a direct positive effect on work conscientiousness. Dominating style with a coefficient (of -0.15) and avoidance style with a coefficient (of -0.14) negatively affect work conscientiousness. Also, conscientiousness has a significant positive direct effect on innovation, with a path coefficient (of 0.24). Also, the above table shows that the problem-solving style with a coefficient (of 0.22), compromise style with a coefficient (of 0.23), and flexible style (0.13) have a positive and significant effect on innovation. However, dominance style (-0.16) and avoidance style (-0.09) significantly negatively affect innovation. Considering that work conscientiousness variables estimate these indirect coefficients. Therefore, work conscientiousness mediates the relationship between conflict resolution styles and innovative behaviors. On the other hand, based on the conceptual model test, management styles can predict 47% of the variance of work conscientiousness, and work conscientiousness has 60% of innovative behavior.

**Table 4: General fit indices of the tested model**

	estimate	Appropriate value
Chi-square ratio to degrees of freedom (X <sup>2</sup> /df)	1/45	Less than 3
root mean square error estimate (RMSEA)	0/02	Less than 0.5
goodness of fit index (GFI)	0/94	More than 0.90
Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)	0/96	More than 0.90
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0/93	More than 0.90

The fit indices of the tested model are reported in the above table. According to the above indicators, the tested model has a good fit with the investigated data. Based on this, the tested theoretical model is a valid and valid model in society and the sample used in this research.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

One of the findings of the current study was that problem-solving style, compromise style, and flexibility style have a positive effect, but avoidance and control style negatively affect work conscientiousness; the relationship between conflict management styles and happiness has been examined in many studies (Rahimi Rad, 2004; Fayazi, 2009; Nistani & Monfardi Raz, 2009; Torabipour, Ebrahimi Dastgard, Haghizadeh, 2010; Leo, Fu and Leo, 2011; Lin, 2010; Postuma, 2011). In the context of the relationship between conflict management styles and work conscientiousness, other studies (Saroukhani & Talebian, 2002; Karimi, 2016; Dang et al., 2010) have reached similar results. Dang et al. (2010) concluded that managers with domineering and deterministic conflict management styles always have unmotivated and irresponsible employees. While managers who pay attention to the psychological needs of employees have high job satisfaction and responsibility among their employees, this is the point that can be pointed out in explaining these relationships.

In explaining the relationship between conflict management styles and work conscientiousness, it is possible to mention managers' personalities and psychological characteristics as well as their effect on the psychological needs of employees. In this context, Najafi (2006), in his study, has concluded that managers' personality is related to their conflict management strategy; Managers who have a passive and passive personality use the non-confrontation strategy more when facing conflict; Managers with strong and proactive personality use more solution-oriented strategies when facing conflict; Managers with an aggressive and aggressive personality are more likely to use the strategy of control and dominance when facing conflict. Based on this, managers with flexible and compromising personalities use more compromise, problem-solving and flexibility styles. This can bring freshness to the organization's atmosphere, and each of these characteristics can increase or decrease the organization's mental health. According to the self-determination theory (Desi & Ryan, 2000), managers who use problem-solving, flexible, and compromise styles by affecting employees' psychological needs and job satisfaction also increase the level of cheerfulness and work conscientiousness. In contrast, managers who use deterministic styles have unmotivated employees.

Another finding of the present study was the effect of work conscientiousness on innovative behavior among employees; the relationship between happiness and creativity, and innovation has been confirmed in many studies (Sanei, Moghimi, 2015; Ahmadi Beigi, 2015; Norouzzadeh & Soleimani, 2017; Gavin, Ko and Takchuki, 2013). Also, the relationship between work conscientiousness and responsibility for organizational innovation or organizational creativity has been supported in various studies (Saroukhani and Talebian, 2002; Saifuddin Assal; Salimi and Seyed Esfahani, 2006; Vakili, 2008; Nashi Far and Habibi Badrabadi and Habibi Badrabadi, 2010; Moradi et al., 2012; Mario et al.,



2011; Miriam et al., 2011). As previously discussed, increasing satisfaction in the organization increases self-confidence, fulfilling psychological needs, increasing self-efficacy, and increasing creativity, and innovation. For example, in his study, Ahmadi Beigi (2015) showed that teaching management skills related to motivation and job satisfaction increases innovation and creativity among university employees. Regarding work conscientiousness, Nashi Far et al. (2010) showed in their study that it is one of the factors of creativity and innovation in organizations. Therefore, work conscientiousness as a motivational variable is effective in organizational productivity, innovation, and creativity. Another finding of the present study was the mediating role of work conscientiousness in the relationship between conflict management and organizational innovation. The structural model showed that problem-solving, compromise and flexible style positively affect innovation due to conscientiousness. At the same time, the indirect relationship between avoidance style and dominance in innovation was negative. Investigating multiple relationships between conflict management styles and psychological variables such as work conscientiousness, creativity, and innovation has been supported in many studies, which are in line with the present study's findings (Rahimi Rad, 2013; Fayazi, 2018; Nistani & Monfardi Raz, 2018). Khaef, 1375; Afjeei, 1376; Salimi Daneshgar, 1378; Karimi, 1395; Denag et al., 2010; Leo, Fu and Leo, 2011; Lin, 2010; Postuma, 2011). For example, Mario et al. (2010) concluded that the management styles of the leader and manager could be effective in innovative behavior and organizational productivity through psychological variables such as job motivation, job satisfaction, mental health, and vitality. In explaining these relationships, we can refer to the view of Kenneth Thomas (1999) in the context of the characteristics of different conflict styles. Kenneth Thomas (1999) believes that in a competitive or dominant style, one of the parties suppresses the other party and wants to increase their interests. Therefore, it reduces motivation and consequently reduces innovation in the organization. In the avoidance style, employees assume a state of indifference, that is, while they are aware of the conflict, they ignore it. In other words, in this situation, the person tends to withdraw or avoid conflict; this situation is similar to the dominant or competitive style. However, other styles, i.e., compromise and flexibility, encourage activity and motivation, which, in turn, can generate innovation. Therefore, the styles of compromise, flexibility, and problem-solving can be effective on employees' innovation due to the creation of favorable psychological conditions by affecting psychological needs and mental health through happiness and work conscientiousness. Finally, the present study, like other studies, has limitations and strategies for the future; among the limitations of this study was the use of measuring tools in the form of a questionnaire based on self-reporting and the sample being limited to employees of Lorestan University of Medical Sciences. Therefore, caution should always be observed in drawing conclusions and generalizing the results. However, due to the positive effect of

conflict management styles of compromise, problem-solving, and flexibility, managers in organizations should use these types of styles. Also, considering the positive effect of conflict management styles, compromise, problem-solving, and flexibility, it is better to provide them with training courses while serving educational workshops. However, future studies can also address the moderating role of gender and other demographic variables in the relationships between conflict management styles and organizational innovation.

### **Ethics**

This research observed ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Also, while completing the questionnaires while emphasizing completing all the questions, the participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time and provide individual information. They were assured that the information would remain confidential, which was strictly adhered to.

### **Acknowledgement**

All participants in the research are thanked and appreciated.

### **Conflict of Interest**

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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