# Interpersonal Conflicts at Work and Knowledge Hiding: Moderating Role of Interactional Justice and Mediating Role of Workplace Well-being

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**Abstract**

The objective of this study is to examine the correlation between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding. It also aims to determine the mediating effect of workplace well-being and the moderating impact of interactional justice. The study also explores how interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being are influenced by interactional justice in Pakistan's IT industry. First, the conceptual model that links the research's main elements was theoretically grounded in pertinent literature. Second, data was obtained from 300 marketing managers of IT-based enterprises with a branch in a developing country via a structured questionnaire survey. Finally, analysis is done using SPSS software and to test the hypotheses, regression analysis is used.

Findings of this study demonstrate that interpersonal conflicts at work are positively associated with knowledge hiding. Additionally, the link between interpersonal conflicts at work and well-being is influenced by interactional justice. This paper also provides marketing managers of IT sector with practical advice on how to deal with workplace interpersonal problems.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal conflicts at work, workplace well-being, knowledge hiding, interactional justice, conservation of resource theory.

## 1. Background and Introduction

Knowledge sharing among employees is essential to the company's innovative initiatives. IT companies expect their employees to have specialized skills and knowledge due to the high degree of innovation and rapid change in technology in order to do their tasks. For IT companies, effective knowledge sharing among employees is crucial for driving innovation. However, much of the previous research on organizational behavior has overlooked the issue of knowledge hiding, which is prevalent among employees in the IT sector. Due to the need to safeguard their personal intellectual property, employees may withhold valuable organizational knowledge from their colleagues, hindering effective communication. Such counterproductive behaviors can have a detrimental impact on the overall efficiency and competitiveness of the organization (Carpenter et al., 2021; Kundi & Badar, 2021). In line with Serenko and Bontis (2016) knowledge hiding, which is defined as employees' intentional attempts to withhold critical information from other team members who request it is a counterproductive behavior. Organizational innovation, competitiveness, and profitability are all harmed by knowledge hiding techniques, which have a detrimental effect on how well a company performs overall. To thrive and remain competitive, businesses rely on their employees to impart their knowledge to coworkers (Malik & Garg, 2017; Khalid et al., 2018). Although organizations make enormous efforts to promote knowledge-sharing among employees, the effectiveness of such initiatives depends on the employee's willingness and intent to share knowledge as well as on various organizational events (Riege, 2005; Wang & Noe, 2010; Butt & Ahmad, 2019). A company may spend enough time and money to promote knowledge sharing among its employees, yet many people might not want to contribute their expertise with others. According to Huo et al. (2016) for a broad range of reasons, including knowledge possession and control, expertise domination, and the desire to stand out from other their colleagues, employees are hesitant to disclose their information. A majority of workers, roughly half try to restrict, misrepresent, or hide information that another person is seeking.

Firms, according to Blau and Scott (1962) and Etzioni (1964), are relational networks in which employees are connected to one another and involved in order to achieve the goals of the organization and occasionally this interaction results in conflicts and disagreements because social interactions between people involve people with varied personalities, aspirations, opinions, and desires. A study found that workplace conflicts have been connected to low employee well-being in businesses (De Dreu et al., 2004; Sonnentag et al., 2013). They discovered that these conflicts increase stress, have a detrimental impact on workers' well-being, and may even pose a major health issue.

In recent years, there has been growing concern among businesses about the well-being of their employees, with numerous studies highlighting its importance due to its significant impact on both individual and organizational outcomes (Lieberman, 2019). Workplace well-being is now viewed as a critical factor in achieving business success, leading to positive outcomes such as higher employee retention rates and increased productivity. In

today's fast-paced and competitive environment, ensuring employee well-being is essential for driving company performance, as it promotes better mental and physical health among employees, resulting in improved individual performance and increased organizational efficiency (Wang et al., 2010).

Similarly, most scholars have concentrated on procedural and distributive justice (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019; Kim & Park, 2017; Saks, 2006; Kaltiainen et al., 2018; Biswas et al., 2013; Strom et al., 2013; Haynie et al., 2016; Sarti, 2019). Although a few researchers have focused on interactional justice (Agarwal, 2014; Moliner et al., 2008; Kang & Sung, 2019; Gillet et al., 2013; Babic et al., 2015; Ghosh et al., 2014). Prior research, however, have not yet fully explored the relationship among workplace well-being and interpersonal conflicts at work with interactional justice as a moderator. The present study enriches the existing body of literature by analyzing the relationship among workplace well-being and interpersonal conflicts at work in order to understand the impact of interactional justice (i.e. interpersonal and informational). This study explores if and how workplace interpersonal conflicts are connected to knowledge-hiding behaviors. It also searches for the explanatory mechanisms linking workplace interpersonal conflicts to knowledge-hiding behaviors. This paper focuses on three research questions in particular:

- ➢ RQ1 How do interpersonal conflicts at work affect knowledge hiding?
- ➢ RQ2 What is the mediating role of workplace well-being between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding?
- ➢ RQ3 What is the moderating role of interactional justice between interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being?

This paper aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to knowledge hiding in the context of interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being by addressing these research questions. From a philosophical and practical standpoint, this understanding is beneficial. From a theoretical perspective, this work illustrates a series of conceptual links among a group of factors that, while important, have not yet been examined to explain knowledge hiding. In line with Boz Semerci (2019) workplace conflicts are a common occurrence and managers must seek to improve workplace well-being, the combined impact of these factors on knowledge hiding has not received adequate consideration.

*1.1 Motivation of the Study*

This study delves into the concept of interactional justice and the role of managers in supporting its practices, as well as its impact on achieving high performance and reducing conflicts among employees, drawing on previous literature and studies. By addressing the issue of interpersonal conflicts at work and their negative impact on workplace well-being, including knowledge hiding, this research provides valuable insights for organizational management in taking corrective measures. The significance of this study lies in the

moderating effect of interactional justice between interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being, as it influences managers to communicate fairly, honestly, and empathetically with their staff, which, in turn, fosters positive interactions among coworkers. The study demonstrates how interactional justice can effectively mitigate the negative effects of interpersonal conflicts at work. It is widely recognized that the prominence of justice in organizations enhances individual performance by fostering commitment.

*1.2 Theoretical (General Strain Theory) Relation Among Main Concepts*

A theoretical framework serves as a study plan and a set of guidelines for researchers to follow, connecting all the variables involved in the study. Its purpose is to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the subject matter. The key objective of a theoretical framework is to establish a relationship between variables and indicate the direction of the relationship through arrows, highlighting their connections. It also identifies the dependent and independent meanings of research variables, establishes a specific theory to be investigated in the research, and provides a graphical representation of the theoretical framework.

In accordance with the theoretical framework, employees who experience interpersonal conflicts at work will have reduced workplace well-being, leading to knowledge hiding. To mitigate the negative impact of interpersonal conflicts at work on workplace well-being, interactional justice will act as a moderator, reducing interpersonal conflicts and enhancing workplace well-being. This way, the negative impact of interpersonal conflicts on workplace well-being can be alleviated, strengthening the relationship among variables.

*1.3 Research Gap*

Losada-Otalora et al. (2020) identified a gap in the literature regarding the moderating role of interactional justice (IJ) between interpersonal conflicts at work (ICAW) and workplace well-being (WWB), which the current study aims to address. Specifically, the study investigates the impact of ICAW on knowledge hiding among employees, with IJ as a moderator and WWB as a mediator. By filling this gap in previous research, the study aims to contribute to the field and provide valuable insights for organizational settings.

*1.4 Usefulness of the Study*

Previous studies have examined the connection between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding, however, they have neglected the moderating role of interactional justice between interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being, as noted by Losada-Otalora et al. (2020). In contrast, this study aims to investigate how interpersonal conflicts at work affect knowledge hiding among employees, with workplace well-being serving as a mediator and interactional justice as a moderator.

*1.5 Implications of the Study*

Organizational managers have a responsibility to decrease the impact of interpersonal conflicts at work, which can lead to knowledge hiding. Firstly, managers can minimize

conflict by identifying and addressing its source, to some extent at least. Another approach is to design a compensation package that prioritizes teamwork over intra-office competition. Moreover, managers should determine the workplace attributes that lead to employee dissatisfaction. Sveiby (1997) has noted that knowledge is a valuable resource that people tend to keep hidden from others, and thus management should incorporate pay strategies to encourage employees to share critical information and expertise (Bartol & Srivastav, 2002). Lastly, managers should take proactive steps to provide employees with more resources to help them regain their lost well-being. To support their staff members in regaining job satisfaction or general wellness, managers may provide organizational assistance (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Bradley & Cartwright, 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Managers can also contribute to the significance of interactional justice in the workplace. This can lead to increased employee satisfaction by providing truthful, precise, and timely information to employees, thereby promoting fairness and justice. When employees are treated with respect and managed appropriately by their supervisors during process implementation and result evaluation, they perceive the presence of interactional justice in the workplace. This, in turn, motivates them to strive harder towards achieving individual and organizational objectives. Furthermore, the study of the association between interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being in Pakistani firms provides additional theoretical evidence on interactional justice.

The current study offers several valuable contributions to the literature. Firstly, it uncovers a link between interactional justice and workplace well-being, demonstrating that interactional justice can enhance well-being while mitigating the negative effects of interpersonal conflicts. The study also highlights the positive impact of interactional justice on both workplace well-being and interpersonal conflicts at work. According to Colquitt (2001), a firm displays interactional justice if it treats its employees with respect, honor, and dignity when implementing procedures and evaluating results. Furthermore, employees who work in an environment with transparent and effective communication are better able to comprehend organizational goals.

From managers point of view this research paper explains and provide immediate solutions to managers in addressing and conceptualizing interactional justice at workplace. Moreover this paper deeper insights to managers in addressing conflicts at workplace which leads to knowledge hiding.

There are several sections in this study. Background of research is covered in section 1 first. The literature review of variables on the relationship between variables is explained in Section 2. Section 3 provides a description of the methodology. Section 4 presents the results and discussion. This section includes results, research implications, shortcomings, lines of future inquiry and conclusion.

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## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

*2.1 Conservation of Resource Theory*

According to the COR theory, individuals strive to maintain their current resources while also seeking out new ones (acquisition). This theory, which aims to explain motivation, emphasizes the importance of safeguarding one's assets and knowledge while simultaneously pursuing additional resources. When faced with a potential threat to their valued resources, employees are motivated to take action to protect them. According to Hobfoll et al. (2018), the COR theory suggests that individuals will work to both maintain and acquire resources in response to the loss or potential loss of those resources.

According to Hobfoll's COR theory (1989), people work hard to preserve, develop, and safeguard their resources. Entities that provide worth to people, such as objects, things, situations, and states, are referred to as resources (Hobfoll,1988) that have worth in and of itself or that have value because they facilitate the acquisition or preservation of valuable resources (Hobfoll, 2001) and are a method of gaining further objects, energies, conditions, or personal characteristics (Hobfoll, 1989). Four different resource kinds are identified under the COR model theory. Resources found in objects have value because of their inherent qualities or because they can be employed as status symbols (e.g., luxury items). According to Hobfoll (1989); Hobfoll and Lilly (1993) personal qualities can also be considered as resources since they help the body tolerates stress (for instance self-efficacy, positive sense of self). The growth of greater resources in other categories may be made possible by increasing one's personal characteristic resources. Conditions are seen as subjective resources because people aspire to and value them (e.g. marriage and job seniority). Finally, energies are considered resources since they help in the search for other resources (including time, money, and knowledge).

The COR theory, which serves as a solid theoretical foundation for this research and informs the theoretical framework, explains how employees conceal their knowledge as people try to preserve resources (i.e., knowledge) at work. The primary concept of the COR theory is that people seek to achieve their goals while maintaining their current resources while also bringing in new ones. COR theory has been employed to develop a conceptual model (Hobfoll 1989; Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Zhao et al. (2016) found that employees are more prone to engage in knowledge concealing when they believe they are losing resources. When knowledge is kept secret, employees feel more secure and content psychologically because they can protect their resources (Hernaus et al., 2019). As a result, employees are more likely to practice knowledge hiding in order to keep their value and advantage over the competition at work. Employees often seek to protect their current assets (knowledge), and when they perceive a threat to their knowledge reserves, they behave conservatively and hide their information. Employee may retain knowledge in this situation that other employees may need. As a result, the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is supported by an individual's behavior of keeping information from other workers hidden, and it is likely that interpersonal conflicts at work are related

to reduced workplace well-being. It is believed that employees are naturally inclined to keep their knowledge to themselves. Knowledge hiding conduct of employees aligns with the COR (Hobfoll, 1989). It's stated that workers have the intrinsic aptitude to keep their knowledge to themselves.

According to Serenko and Bontis (2016), most individuals who seek information tend to value it as a resource. Hobfoll's conservation of resource theory, which was introduced in 1989, suggests that employees within organizations prioritize the protection and preservation of their resources, including information. As a result, when they perceive a threat to their stored resources, they may exhibit defensive behaviors and become reluctant to share their knowledge, becoming what is known as knowledge hiders. Interpersonal conflicts at work impact on knowledge hiding can therefore be clarified using COR theory. In this study, people utilize knowledge hiding as a coping mechanism for the competitive workplace. It examines how IT workers might keep their skills (i.e., information) to themselves if they believe workplace conflicts are harming their employees' productivity. The COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) states that interpersonal conflicts at work may be associated with lowered well-being and, for those with lesser levels of resources, may result in a "loss spiral" that would be followed by higher levels of interpersonal conflicts at work. Interpersonal conflicts at work have been characterized for the purposes of the current study as a precursor to decreased well-being.

The COR theory states that people who have a lot of resources are more likely to acquire and hold on to them. Because it is a contextual resource, workers greater likelihood of taking action that uphold organizational justice at work as a result of which they will feel good on the inside and out, such as well-being. Thus, in accordance with Ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012); Colquitt (2001) when employees see that they are treated with respect, decency, and honor while following policies and achieving results, there is interactional justice in the workplace. If people see that the company treats them properly, employees will also feel driven to be more interested, committed, and fully immersed in their work in such an environment.

*2.2 Interpersonal Conflicts at Work and Knowledge Hiding*

Interpersonal conflicts at work refer to poor interactions with coworkers in the workplace (De Dreu Gelfand, 2008). When a person or group perceives opposition or disagreements with another person over matters such as shared interests, resources, values, or behaviors, interpersonal conflicts at work arises. According to De Dreu et al. (2004) employees who experience interpersonal conflicts at work specifically experience lower self-esteem, more negative emotions, less social support, and higher levels of stress and tension at work. In line with Webster et al., (2008) employees who have interpersonal conflicts with coworkers may believe they have the right to usually refuse to provide information upon request, or to conceal their knowledge. Despite organizations investing significant time and resources in knowledge development and sharing activities, a considerable number of employees still

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choose not to share their knowledge with others. This deliberate behavior, known as knowledge hiding, goes beyond a simple lack of knowledge sharing. While it is true that a lack of information or ineffective communication channels can sometimes hinder knowledge sharing, it is important to recognize that knowledge hiding is often a conscious decision by individuals to withhold their knowledge, even when they are fully capable of sharing it.

Other words of Connelly et al. (2012) knowledge hiding refers to "a conscious endeavor by a person to conceal or preserve knowledge that is desired with another person," according to the definition of knowledge hiding. This intentional attempt may have personal, interpersonal, and organizational components (Voelpel et al., 2005).

Connelly et al. (2012) identified three distinct forms of knowledge hiding, namely evasive knowledge hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding. In the case of evasive knowledge hiding, the knowledge hider deliberately provides the knowledge seeker with inaccurate or incomplete information, or makes false promises to provide information at a later time. On the other hand, playing dumb refers to the act of a knowledge hider pretending to be unaware of the knowledge sought by the seeker. Lastly, rationalized hiding involves justifying the decision to withhold knowledge by citing reasons such as protecting intellectual property, avoiding harm to oneself or others, or maintaining job security. Last but not least, rationalized hiding involves blaming other parties for not providing the necessary knowledge or providing an explanation for why they are unable to do so (Butt & Ahmad, 2019). Knowledge sharing is crucial for the growth and success of companies. Conversely, knowledge hiding is a detrimental behavior that hinders innovation, problem-solving, and informed decision-making (Alam et al., 2021). It is important to note that knowledge hiding is not simply the opposite of knowledge sharing or its absence, and both can occur concurrently (Peng 2013). Thus, interpersonal conflicts at work directly and positively impact knowledge hiding behavior of employees. Akhlaghimofrad and Farmanesh (2021) found positive association among interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding. Additionally, Venz and Nesher Shoshan's (2021) research on interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding revealed that these conflicts have a significant impact on knowledge hiding. Given the existing literature and empirical evidence, interpersonal conflicts at work have a favorable influence on knowledge hiding since these conflicts cause knowledge hiding. During the past decade, there has been a growing interest in studying employees' conduct of knowledge-hiding. Previous research has shown that knowledge concealment is not only a threat to the individual who seeks knowledge but also to the organization as a whole (Haar et al., 2022). This behavior can negatively impact employees' job performance by depriving them of important information needed to complete their tasks (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2020). Similarly, studies have examined the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and other variables. For instance, Zahlquist et al. (2022) explored how daily exposure to bullying behaviors at work, moderated by trait anger and trait anxiety, affects the relationship between daily interpersonal conflicts and employee well-being. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

➢ *H₁: Interpersonal conflict at work has a positive impact on knowledge hiding.*

*2.2 Interpersonal Conflicts at Work and Workplace Well-being*

Interpersonal conflicts at work are a bad experience that leaves a bad impression on the employees (Dijkstra et al., 2011). In particular, managing relationships with tense coworkers is a requirement of the job while dealing with interpersonal conflicts at work (Demerouti et al., 2001; Peeters et al., 2005). According to Demerouti et al. (2001) people must put up mental, physical, and emotional energy to resolve disputes with their peers and to gain the favor of others, since employees must uphold relationships to accomplish corporate goals.

Employee well-being has a dimension called workplace well-being. Positive feelings at work and job satisfaction are factors that affect workplace well-beingbecause they reveal how people generally view their jobs (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Slemp et al., 2015). Previous research demonstrates that a favorable emotional balance for the employee is produced by both job satisfaction and favorable workplace effects which according to Delmas and Pekovic (2018) lessens stress and enables people to contribute more at workplace (e.g. emotional resources). Evidence connecting interpersonal conflicts at work to a number of well-being indicators helps to explain the projected workplace well-being influenced by interpersonal conflicts at work. For instance, a number of studies identified a long-term correlation between interpersonal conflicts and depressed symptoms (Black et al., 2019; Dormann & Zapf, 1999; Spector & Fox, 2002). Similarly, such conflicts cause a short-term depressive mood (Meier et al., 2013). Similarly, findings made by who discovered a link between burnout and workplace conflicts (Hacer & Ali, 2020; Richardsen et al., 1992) and furthermore, individuals who have a lot of somatic complaints also have a lot of workplace conflicts (Frone, 2000).

This research paper also makes the case that workplace well-being is influenced by interpersonal conflicts at work since it increases job dissatisfaction as well as elevates unfavorable feelings associated to the job (such as frustration and wrath). The evidence backs up this claim. For instance, workplace conflicts have the potential to lower individuals' job satisfaction by causing them to feel depressed (Hagemeister & Volmer, 2018). Interpersonal conflicts at work have been linked to lower job satisfaction (Spector & Jex, 1998). In accordance with Zhou et al. (2015) and according to Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) workplace conflicts makes employees more negatively affected since it depletes resources like good mood which lowers workplace well-being. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes that:

➢ *H₂: Interpersonal conflicts at work have a negative impact on workplace well-being.*

*2.3 Workplace Well-being and Knowledge Hiding*

There is research that the social environment at work has an impact on employees' well-being. A pleasant working atmosphere enhances well-being whereas a hostile work

atmosphere with substantial interpersonal conflict, on the other hand, detracts from well-being since disagreements with coworkers drain employees' resources at work (Scott et al., 2010). According to De Dreu et al. (2004) employees who experience interpersonal conflicts at work have lower self-esteem, more negative emotions, less social support, and higher levels of stress and tension at work. Employees who deal with poor well-being may lack the resources necessary to perform their job duties in an effective manner (Priesemuth & Taylor, 2016). Employees frequently adopt a "protective posture" (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001) when faced with low resources because it enables them to protect their existing resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). By keeping knowledge to oneself, employees can save time and effort while still feeling competent and in charge of their work and by engaging in knowledge-hiding activities, workers save crucial information to improve additional personal resources, such as self-esteem or value. In conclusion, this research paper hypothesizes that substantial interpersonal conflicts at work negatively affect workplace well-being of employees which negatively affects well-being cause employees to hide knowledge.

According to Connelly et al. (2012) when coworkers ask for a specific piece of knowledge, employees may utilize one of three knowledge-hiding practices. First, people can start disguising their knowledge through evasive knowledge hiding. The offender (person which withholds knowledge either divulges less information than was asked for or provides inaccurate information to coworkers (Connelly & Zweig, 2015; Connelly et al., 2012). As a reaction to poor workplace well-being, substantial interpersonal conflicts at work give rise to knowledge hiding behavior. The culprit keeps his or her acquired knowledge private and upholds their impression of their own skill and significance within the organization by giving only a portion of the information (or the incorrect information). Offering the assurance of a response in the future, holding onto information until it is no longer useful, and then expressing an intention to assist in the future although having no actual plans to do so are further examples of evasive knowledge hiding. Employees can lessen the pressure to give information by adopting these behaviors, which can divert the concentration of their associate who needs the information to pay heed to a promise. According to Balducci et al. (2011) by easing the weight to contribute to knowledge, coworkers can lessen the harmful effects brought on by the demands of their jobs and regain the workplace well-being that was lost due to workplace conflicts.

Playing dumb, which is when employees claim they don't have the requested information, is the second knowledge hiding behavior (Connelly et al., 2012). In this instance, the offender poses as being unaware of or only having a passing familiarity with the pertinent information that his or her coworker has requested (Webster et al., 2008). Similarly, Evans et al. (2014) in his study stated that individuals maintain control over a resource (information) that offers them power at work by refusing to share it and claiming they don't know anything about it. Such command of specific task-related knowledge may aid

employees in reversing the detrimental effects brought on by conflict at work (Kimet al., 2006).

The third type of knowledge hiding behavior that this study is interested in is rationalized knowledge hiding, which is defined as keeping information hidden while providing a justification for not sharing the sought knowledge. In this situation, the offender provides an explanation for why he or she is refusing to divulge the sought information, such as by blaming a third party. Interpersonal conflicts at work can lead to low levels of well-being, which can lead to rationalized knowledge hiding. Employees may decide to conceal knowledge in order to replenish these depleted resources. Additionally, the offenders may influence, build, or uphold a desired reputation (image) between their coworkers by offering justifications for not disclosing knowledge (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). According to Laird et al. (2009) a positive reputation and goodwill at work lowers conflict at work and promotes job satisfaction, Workplace well-being reduced as a result of interpersonal conflicts at work can be preserved or regained by employees who engage in rationalized knowledge hiding. Finally, since this knowledge hiding behavior promotes or maintains workers workplace well-being. In conclusion, workplace well-being is impacted negatively by interpersonal conflicts at work and which results in knowledge hiding as a result of poor workplace well-being. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes that:

➢ *$H_3$: Workplace well-being has a negative impact on knowledge hiding.*

*2.4 Mediating Role of Workplace Well-being*

Conflicts at work are a normal sight in organizational context. According to empirical studies employees who endure workplace conflicts exhibit stress symptoms like sadness, burnout, and somatic complaints (De Dreu et al., 2004; Spector & Jex, 1998; Richardson et al., 1992; Frone, 2000). Conflicts at work might therefore pose a severe threat to workplace ' well-being of employees. Additionally, there is evidence that workplace conflicts make employees more negatively affected since it depletes resources like good mood which lowers workplace well-being (Zhou et al., 2015; Page &Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

According to Priesemuth and Taylor (2016) employees who have poor workplace well-being may lack the resources needed to effectively carry out their job tasks and when resources are scarce employees want to save their existing resources because it allows them to safeguard the resources they do have (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). By cultivating a climate of mistrust among employees and subsequently lowering the organization's productivity and performance, knowledge hiding can seriously harm interpersonal connections in businesses (Hernaus et al., 2019).

According to Evans et al. (2014), employees at workplace adopt knowledge hiding, which is the practice of holding onto information that offers them advantage at work, by refusing to share it and pretended ignorance. Kim et al. (2006) believe that by limiting information

on a subject, employees may be able to undo the negative impacts of conflict at work and restore a sense of direction and fulfillment at work. Employees try to hide their expertise in order to distinguish themselves from the firm and boost their confidence and self-esteem. Employees can save time and effort while still feeling in control of their work by retaining important information to themselves, and by engaging in knowledge-hiding activities, and in this way, employees keep important data for enhancing other individual possessions like self-worth or self-esteem.

Substantial interpersonal conflicts at work might result in knowledge hiding as a reaction to poor workplace well-being. According to the research, interpersonal conflicts at work reduce job satisfaction and heighten negatively linked emotions, both of which have a detrimental effect on workplace well-being.

According to Zhao et al. (2016) employees anticipate to keep their gained knowledge through knowledge hiding, making them a necessity for the business and enhancing their competence and self-worth. In summary, interpersonal conflicts have a negative impact on employees' well-being which encourages knowledge hiding. All types of knowledge hiding may or may not be used by employees simultaneously, hence it is suggested that they do so depending on the situation.

> $H_4$: *Workplace well-being mediates the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding.*

### 2.5 Moderating Role of Interactional Justice

In recent years, both practitioners and social science academics have increasingly emphasized the importance of fairness in all aspects of people's lives (Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001). This has led to the establishment of three distinct categories of organizational justice perspectives, namely procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice (Cropanzano & Schminke, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001).

Organizational justice comprises three aspects, one of which is interactional justice. This component has been further divided into two distinct components, namely interpersonal justice and informational justice, effectively increasing the number of organizational justice components from two to three (Greenberg, 1990; Greenberg, 1993).

Interactional justice primarily concerns the interactions between organizational members, focusing on the process and approaches used in these interactions. The additional components of interpersonal and informational justice provide a more comprehensive understanding of how interactional justice operates within an organization.

The term "interactional justice" refers to interactions between organizational members and approaches of process execution that place an emphasis on executors' views and how they deal with the members such as, taking into account the perspectives of employees,

eliminating prejudice, implementing choices fairly, receiving feedback, having open communication, and providing reasons for decisions.
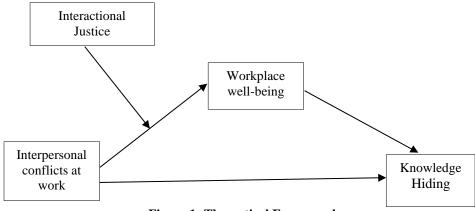
When employees receive an expression that they are treated with honor and with respect, by the authorities, interpersonal justice is present in the workplace (Colquitt, 2001). According to Bies (1987) informational justice relates to employees' opinions of fairness toward information, which is also used in fair judging procedures. The insight of informational justice depends on clear, logical assertions that are supported by adequate justifications and given at the proper times (Bies & Moag, 1986). To put it simply, it focuses on the ratio of correctness and promptness in information provision.

Conflicts between coworkers can result in low levels of justice at work, which can cause knowledge to be hidden. Employees, think that by protecting the knowledge they have acquired, they will stand out from their peers and gain respect (Zhao et al., 2016). By giving their subordinates feedback that is current, honest, and correct information, managers can help improve justice and fairness. As a result, employee satisfaction will thus probably rise. In accordance with Colquitt (2001), there is interactional justice in the workplace when employees are respected and honored when policies are carried out and results are decided. Interactional justice has an impact on those who lack knowledge, or whose professional relationships with their bosses are strained. Consequently, this study considers the significance of interactional justice among interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being in the twin cities of Pakistan's information technology industry.

> ➢ *H5: Interactional justice moderates the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being.*

*2.6 Theoretical Framework*

A theoretical framework is a conceptual blueprint that guides the research design and methodology. It outlines the relationships between variables and their direction, providing a systematic approach to investigating the research question. The main purpose of a theoretical framework is to establish a clear connection between the variables in the study through the use of arrows and other visual aids. By doing so, it helps to clarify the relationships between variables, including their dependent and independent meanings, and provides a specific theory to be tested in the research. Overall, a theoretical framework offers a graphical representation of the study's theoretical constructs, providing a framework for analysis and interpretation of research findings.

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┌─────────────────┐
│  Interactional  │
│     Justice     │
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Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Sampling Procedure

The personnel targeted for this study is especially IT workers (marketing managers) in Pakistan's twin cities. Businesses that work in the IT sector are knowledge-based, highly innovative enterprises. Those marketing managers who frequently interact with knowledge are the focus of the current study because IT businesses are highly innovative knowledge-based organizations which demand that the employees in order to do their tasks effectively, individuals need particular knowledge and abilities. The IT industry faces unique marketing challenges, such as dealing with complex and technical products, addressing rapidly changing market trends and consumer demands, and competing in a crowded and fast-paced industry. Studying marketing managers in the IT sector can shed light on how these professionals navigate these challenges and develop effective marketing strategies. The IT sector is often at the forefront of innovation and marketing trends. By studying marketing managers in this industry, researchers can gain insights into best practices and trends that can be applied to other industries. Overall, studying marketing managers in the IT sector would provide valuable insights into the role of marketing in a rapidly evolving and complex industry, and could have broader implications for marketing strategy and practice across different industries. Due to the nature of their business, they require individuals with talent and skill. Information technology staff must gather accurate and up-to-date data, which determines their performance (Zakariya & Bashir, 2020). The data from a sample of marketing employees at an IT company is ideal for testing hypotheses since knowledge management in such firms are particularly challenging.

A sample of marketing employees from an IT based organization provided the information for hypothesis testing. The study involved reaching out to marketing managers in IT-based firms for data collection, whereby they were provided with information about the study's

objectives and invited to participate. Before the data collection process, the employees were required to give their approval, after which they were provided with self-administered questionnaires to complete. The data collected for the study was cross-sectional and only collected once. To initiate contact with the employees, the investigators provided them with instructions and a link to an online survey, ensuring that they were aware of the study's objectives and how to participate in it. With the assistance of the participating company, the researchers asked permission from the employees for data collection. The contributing company withheld the names of the personnel who have participated in the study from the researchers due to privacy concerns. In addition, the company prohibited the collection of any data that could be used to identify respondents by criteria other than gender, age, education, and experience.

*3.2 Study Measures*

Interpersonal conflicts at work is measured using the scale designed by Spector and Jex (1998) (range from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). For interpersonal conflicts at work the Chronbach Alpha is .874 which is considered good. The scale developed by Connelly et al. (2012) is used to quantify knowledge hiding dimensions. The knowledge hiding dimensions were assessed using four items of each dimension (evasive, rationalized, and acting dumb). The Chronbach Alpha for knowledge hiding is .888. Workplace well-being is assessed using the scale designed by Zheng et al. (2015) which measured six items of workplace well-being. The Chronbach Alpha for workplace well-being is .869. A nine-item, two-dimensional scale is created by Colquitt (2001) to measure interactional justice. The Chronbach Alpha for interactional justice is .781.

## 4. Data analysis and Results

*4.1 Demographic Analysis*

The data for demographic variables, interpersonal conflicts at work (independent variable), knowledge hiding (dependent variable), workplace well-being (mediator) as well as interactional justice (moderator) were collected once. After an initial screening for incomplete or mismatched surveys, 300 of the 400 total responses were selected for the analysis. In the sample, male respondents made up 74% of the respondents, while female respondents made up 26% of the population. Less than 25, 26–30, 31–35, 36–40, and over 40 years old age groups made up 3.3%, 43.3%, 26%, 14.7%, and 12.7% of the population, respectively. In all, 36.7% employees have bachelor's degree, 50.7% have a master's, and 12.7% have an MS/MPHIL degree. In a similar vein, employment experience ranges from less than one year to over ten years. The frequency study of experience shows that 26 percent of employees have experience of less than one year, 22.7 percent have experience of one to five years, and 19.3 percent have experience of six to ten years. Additionally, 32% of workers have ten years or more of experience.

*4.2 Common Method Bias*

A single factor test called the Harman's test is used to investigate common method bias, and single factor confirmatory analysis is used to examine all items that were assigned to one component. The percentage of variance in one factor analysis is 31.4 percent and the cutoff criteria for the percentage of variance should be lower than 50%. As the stated number is less than 50%, so in this analysis, there is no common method bias.

*4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis*

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis**

| Variables | Mean | SD | KH | ICAW | WWB | IJ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KH | 2.7189 | .74095 | 1.000 | | | |
| ICAW | 2.2133 | .80154 | .481** | 1.000 | | |
| WWB | 3.8555 | .73058 | -.153** | -.302** | 1.000 | |
| IJ | 2.5504 | .64544 | .686** | .352** | -.041 | 1.000 |

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). KH=Knowledge Hiding, ICAW=Interpersonal Conflicts at Work, WWB=Workplace Well-being, IJ=Interactional Justice

Table 1 displays the mean value of the variables, and standard deviation as well as the Pearson's correlation illustrates how two variables are related. It also examines the direction in which two variables are related. The correlation value ranges from -1 to +1.

*4.4 Hypothesis Testing and Discussion*

The study's hypotheses are tested through regression analysis, specifically through hierarchical regression. Hierarchical regression is a statistical method that examines the relationship between a predictor variable and a single outcome variable. This technique allows researchers to identify the unique contribution of the predictor variable and evaluate its overall impact on the outcome variable. In the context of studying the effect of interpersonal conflicts at work on knowledge hiding, hierarchical regression is a suitable approach as it allows researchers to analyze the unique effect of the predictor variable on knowledge hiding while controlling for other variables that may influence the outcome variable, such as demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, education level). Using hierarchical regression provides a clear and interpretable measure of the relationship between the predictor variable and the outcome variable.

The study aimed to examine the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding, with a mediating variable (workplace well-being) and a moderating variable (interactional justice). To analyze the collected data, the researchers employed a bootstrapping method with 5000 samples and a 95 percent confidence interval (CI).

The results presented in Table 2 support the first hypothesis (H1) which proposes a positive relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding ($\beta$=.4423, 95% CI=.3453; .5394). This finding is in line with the research conducted by Venz and Nesher Shoshan (2021), who also observed a positive association between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding.

The results presented in Table 2 support H2, which states that interpersonal conflicts at work negatively impact workplace well-being ($\beta$=-.3211, 95% CI=-.4254; -.2168). This finding suggests that individuals who experience a high degree of interpersonal conflicts at work are likely to experience lower levels of workplace well-being. This finding is consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that interpersonal conflicts at work can be a source of resource depletion, leading to lower levels of workplace well-being, especially for those with fewer resources (Hobfoll, 1989).

The results presented in Table 2 support the third hypothesis, which proposes that workplace well-being has a negative impact on knowledge hiding. The regression analysis shows that as workplace well-being decreases, there is an increase in knowledge hiding behavior among employees ($\beta = -.0082$, 95% CI = -.1147; .0983). This finding suggests that employees are more likely to hide knowledge when they experience a decline in workplace well-being due to interpersonal conflicts at work. The study aligns with the viewpoint of Peng (2013), who argued that employees may engage in knowledge hiding to maintain their self-esteem and self-worth.

The study uses three levels of the moderating variable, interactional justice (-1SD, mean, and +1SD), to analyze the conditional indirect influence of interpersonal conflicts at work on knowledge hiding through workplace well-being, as proposed by H4. Table 3 shows the indirect impact of interpersonal conflicts at work at the three levels of interactional justice (i.e., .0041 at one standard deviation below the mean, .0026 at the mean, and .0012 at one standard deviation above the mean). The confidence intervals (CIs) at each of the three levels also include 0 (-.0568; .0590), (-.0367; .0376), and (-.0190; .0184). In accordance with H4 and the overall conceptual framework of the study, the mediation is therefore not significant, indicating that it is fully mediated by interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding.

Table 4 shows that the interaction term between interpersonal conflicts at work and interactional justice has a significant and positive effect on workplace well-being (b=.2774, p<0.05), which supports H5. According to the COR theory, individuals with more resources are more likely to engage in behaviors that help them acquire and retain resources. Thus, employees are more likely to engage in actions that promote organizational justice when they perceive it as a contextual resource, resulting in positive emotional and mental states such as well-being. When employees feel respected and treated fairly in the execution of procedures and outcomes, they perceive the presence of interactional justice in the organization (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012; Colquitt, 2001).

**Table 2: Direct Relationship Hypothesis**

| Variables | Coefficient | SE | t | p | LLCI | ULCI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ICAW → KH | .4423 | .0493 | 8.9675 | .0000 | .3453 | .5394 |
| ICAW → WWB | -.3211 | .0530 | -6.0577 | .0000 | -.4254 | -.2168 |
| WWB → KH | -.0082 | .0541 | -.1521 | .8792 | - .1147 | .0983 |

KH = Knowledge Hiding, ICAW = Interpersonal Conflicts at Work, WWB = Workplace Well-being, IJ = Interactional Justice

**Table 3: Conditional Indirect Effect of X on Y (ICAW → WWB → KH)**

| IJ | Indirect Effect | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| -.6454 | .0042 | .0299 | -.0568 | .0590 |
| .000 | .0026 | .0191 | -.0367 | .0376 |
| .6454 | .0012 | .0090 | -.0190 | .0184 |

IJ = Interactional Justice

**Table 4: Moderation Analysis**

| Variables | Coefficient | SE | t | p | LLCI | ULCI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ICAW → WWB | -.3211 | .0530 | -6.0577 | .0000 | -.4254 | -.2168 |
| IJ → WWB | .0825 | .0654 | 1.2609 | .2083 | -.0462 | .2111 |
| ICAW * IJ → WWB | .2774 | .0764 | 3.6320 | .0003 | .1271 | .4277 |

ICAW = Interpersonal Conflicts at Work, WWB = Workplace Well-being, IJ = Interactional Justice

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding, while also considering the mediating variable of workplace well-being and the moderating variable of interactional justice. Knowledge hiding behavior among employees is consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory proposed by Hobfoll (1989), which suggests that individuals may withhold information from coworkers when their resources are threatened.

The study hypothesized that interpersonal conflicts at work could lead to lower workplace well-being, which in turn could cause knowledge hiding. To further explore this relationship, the study focused on marketing managers in the IT sector and considered the impact of interactional justice as a moderating variable. The findings revealed that interactional justice had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being. Specifically, the relationship was strongest and most significant at a high level of interactional justice, as depicted in Figure 2:
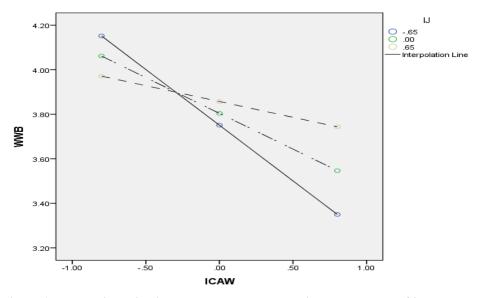
**Figure 1: Interactional justice as a moderator among interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being**

**5. Discussion and Conclusion**

*5.1 Conclusion*

Previous research has mainly focused on procedural and distributive justice (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019; Kim & Park, 2017; Saks, 2006; Kaltiainen et al., 2018; Biswas et al., 2013; Storm et al., 2014; Haynie et al., 2016; Sarti, 2019). Although a few researchers have focused on interactional justice (Agarwal, 2014; Moliner et al., 2008; Kang & Sung, 2019; Gillet et al., 2013; Babic et al., 2015; Ghosh et al., 2014), with only a few studies examining interactional justice. Specifically, this study investigates the relationship between workplace interpersonal conflicts and knowledge-hiding behaviors, as well as the explanatory mechanisms that link the two. The results of this study provide a grounded explanation for how knowledge-hiding techniques arise as a result of the lowered well-being caused by interpersonal conflicts at work. Interpersonal conflicts at work and workplace well-being in Pakistan's IT sector have both been considered in this study's analysis of interactional justice. Workers are treated fairly and with respect while following processes, employees believe that interactional justice is prevalent in the workplace and if people perceive that their employer treats them properly, they will go the extra mile in order accomplish both personal and professional goals and they will be more engaged, committed, and wholly committed to their work. They will be more concerned with the organization's aims, plans, and missions, assisting it in achieving its goals and ensuring it

never finds itself in a vulnerable situation. If an organization's culture values justice, it will help employees develop moral character and self-worth, which will increase their productivity. The presence of productive people will also improve the organization's reputation through knowledge-sharing.

*5.2 Theoretical Contribution*

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers a theoretical explanation for the study's findings on the link between interpersonal conflicts at work and knowledge hiding behaviors. The COR theory posits that individuals are inclined to protect and preserve their personal resources, including knowledge, when they sense a threat or loss of resources. In this context, interpersonal conflicts can be viewed as potential threats to personal resources, which could motivate individuals to resort to knowledge hiding as a way of conserving their resources.

The study's results align with the COR theory by demonstrating that interpersonal conflicts at work have a positive impact on knowledge hiding, implying that individuals may employ knowledge hiding tactics to safeguard their resources in response to perceived threats. Additionally, the study's findings also suggest that interpersonal conflicts can cause a decline in workplace well-being, which may be perceived as a loss or threat to personal resources, further motivating individuals to engage in knowledge hiding behaviors as a means of resource conservation.

Overall, the study's empirical evidence supports the COR theory's predictions about how individuals respond to threats or losses of personal resources by adopting resource conservation behaviors, such as knowledge hiding. The study's insights into the relationship between interpersonal conflicts, workplace well-being, and knowledge hiding add to the knowledge on how individuals manage their resources when faced with workplace stressors.

*5.3 Limitations and Future Studies*

There are certain issues with the current study that the authors should fix in the future. This study is quantitative to begin with; making the study qualitative will enable further investigation by scholars in the future and the results will give more specific details on the variables. Second, the study's sampling is only comprised of marketing managers of IT firms, and the current investigation only focuses on one industry. A cross sectional technique is utilized to collect data from respondents due to a time constraint. Despite the fact that the current data are in line with theories, long-term formation may have distinct effects. The most straightforward approach is to carry out a a long-term study, also known as a longitudinal study. Lastly, even though the study's attention is on the IT sector, researchers in the future might examine the idea of interactional justice in any industry.

Subsequent studies could explore how various forms of workplace conflicts, such as task conflicts and relationship conflicts, impact knowledge hiding behaviors, as this study only focuses on interpersonal conflicts at work as an independent variable. Additionally, future

research could examine other dimensions of well-being, such as psychological well-being, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how different aspects of well-being influence knowledge hiding behaviors in the workplace. Future studies could also take into account the appropriate scales for interpersonal conflicts at work. Future research should examine the relationship between the variables revealed in this study utilizing long-term or experimental methods and cross-sectional data rather than longitudinal data is employed for analysis. In order to figure out whether the relationships here are connected to the organization's size, future study should employ a diverse sample because the current study relied on a single source to obtain a substantial amount of data.

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