

**PROACTIVE PERSONALITY AS A MODERATOR OF THE
AVOIDING CONFLICT-HANDLING STYLE- PERFORMANCE
RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

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ABSTRACT: Conflict is a routine aspect of organizational life with important implications for employee performance. This study examines the effect of the avoidance conflict-handling style on employee performance and investigates the moderating role of proactive personality among staff in public universities in North-Western Nigeria. Drawing on Dual Concern Theory, data were collected through a cross-sectional survey and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that the avoiding conflict-handling style has a significant influence on performance, while proactive personality not only predicts performance but also strengthens the relationship between avoidance and performance. These results suggest that proactive individuals are better positioned to navigate conflict constructively. The study contributes by integrating personality traits into conflict–performance models and provides practical guidance for enhancing conflict management and performance improvement in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Avoiding, Conflict, Proactive Personality, Employees' Performance

INTRODUCTION

People are at the heart of every organization. Their motivation, engagement, and well-being shape not only present performance but also future success. Studies consistently show that workplaces investing in employees' growth enjoy higher productivity and retention (Jones & Jones, 2023; Smith & Lee, 2022). In higher education, where people are the core resource, understanding what drives employee performance is especially critical.

In Nigeria, public universities face persistent challenges, including limited funding, weak infrastructure, bureaucratic delays, and frequent conflicts (Afolabi & Ogunode, 2021; Tamunomiebi & John-Eke, 2020). Such conditions undermine staff morale and performance. Conflict, in particular, is a pervasive disruptor, often intensified by rigid hierarchies, overlapping roles, and increasing demands (Rahim, 2022). How conflict is handled greatly affects motivation, satisfaction, and institutional effectiveness (Ogunyemi & Okeowo, 2022).

One conflict-handling style common in universities is Avoidance, where individuals withdraw rather than confront issues (Thomas, 2023). While avoidance can sometimes reduce tension, it may also harm collaboration and trust (Mensah & Boateng, 2022). Empirical evidence remains

mixed: some studies link avoidance to maintaining focus (Chinwe & Okafor, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023), while others associate it with weakened teamwork and morale (Ngugi & Wanjiko, 2023; Tariq et al., 2023). This inconsistency suggests that individual traits may shape the effects of conflict styles.

Proactive personality is one such trait. Proactive individuals anticipate challenges, take initiative, and persist in improving situations (Crant, 2022). In conflict situations, they may manage avoidance more constructively, which could explain why performance outcomes vary (Yuan & Wang, 2023). This perspective is especially relevant in North-Western Nigerian universities, where insecurity, poor infrastructure, and excessive workloads create fertile ground for conflict, yet conflict management remains largely reactive (Adebayo & Usman, 2023; Eze & Agbo, 2023).

Therefore, this study investigates whether proactive personality moderates the relationship between avoiding conflict-handling style and employee performance in public universities in North-Western Nigeria. By doing so, it addresses a gap in the literature and provides practical insights for enhancing conflict management and staff performance in higher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this paper:

- i. What is the relationship between avoiding conflict-handling styles and employees' performance in public universities of North-Western Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between proactive personality and employees' performance in public universities of North-Western Nigeria?
- iii. How does proactive personality moderate the relationship between avoiding conflict-handling styles and employees' performance in public universities of North-Western Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a review of the literature related to employees' performance, avoiding conflict-handling styles.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is widely understood as the extent to which individuals meet organizational goals through efficiency, quality, and innovation (Ibrahim & Olayemi, 2023; Chen & Zhang, 2021). Scholars highlight its multidimensional nature, encompassing not only task execution but also teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving (Mensah & Boateng, 2022; Usman & Adebayo, 2023). For this study, employee performance is viewed holistically as the combination of task efficiency, collaboration, adaptability, and innovation that together drive organizational effectiveness.

Avoiding Conflict-Handling Style

Avoidance, characterised by low assertiveness and cooperation, involves withdrawing from conflict through silence, postponement, or topic shifting (Adeleke & Musa, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). It is often culturally reinforced by deference to hierarchy and the pursuit of harmony (Adegbite & Ojo, 2023). Research findings, however, are mixed. On one hand, avoidance can help conserve energy, reduce tension, and prevent unnecessary escalation, allowing employees to stay focused on their work (Chinwe & Okafor, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). On the other hand, it may leave issues unresolved, erode trust, and weaken collaboration, ultimately harming performance (Mensah & Boateng, 2023; Ngugi & Wanjiko, 2023; Tariq et al., 2022). These contradictory outcomes suggest that avoidance does not uniformly hinder or help performance; rather, its effects may depend on contextual and individual factors.

Proactive Personality

Proactive personality reflects a stable tendency to take initiative, anticipate challenges, and persist in shaping one's environment (Li & Zhang, 2021; Olaoye & Adebisi, 2023). Proactive individuals are future-oriented, resilient, and inclined toward innovation and problem-prevention (Chen et al., 2020; Mensah & Boateng, 2022). This trait may be particularly relevant in conflict situations: proactive employees might use avoidance strategically, knowing when to disengage temporarily without compromising long-term effectiveness. Conversely, less proactive individuals may avoid conflict in ways that exacerbate problems.

Taken together, the literature reveals a gap. While avoidance has been linked to both positive and negative outcomes, little is known about the role of personal dispositions in shaping these effects. A proactive personality, with its emphasis on initiative and resilience, offers a promising lens for explaining these inconsistencies. Thus, this study examines whether proactive personality moderates the relationship between avoidance and employee performance, offering insight into why avoidance is effective for some employees but not for others.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interrelated theories, Dual Concern Theory, Trait Activation Theory, and the Interactionist Perspective of Organisational Behaviour, to provide a well-rounded understanding of how conflict-handling styles relate to employee performance and how the proactive tendencies of individuals shape this relationship.

Dual Concern Theory

The Dual Concern Theory, introduced by Pruitt and Carnevale (1993), helps explain how people typically respond when faced with conflict. The theory suggests that individuals consider two main factors: how much they prioritise their own needs and how much they prioritise the needs of others. These concerns combine in different ways to produce five common conflict-handling styles: avoiding, integrating, obliging, and compromising. This theory is fundamental to the current study

because it provides the lens through which we view conflict-handling as a behavioural choice that can significantly impact workplace outcomes, such as employee performance.

Trait Activation Theory (TAT)

Building on the dual concern theory, the Trait Activation Theory (TAT) developed by Tett and Burnett (2003) offers insight into when and why personality traits matter. According to this theory, people do not express all their traits all the time; certain traits become active only when the situation calls for them. In the case of this study, workplace conflict serves as one of those situations that can activate an employee's proactive personality. Proactive individuals tend to take the initiative, assume responsibility, and seek opportunities to enhance their work environment. When conflict arises, these individuals are more likely to respond constructively, using it as a chance to demonstrate leadership or drive change. Thus, proactive personality is positioned in this study as a moderator, a factor that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between how conflict is handled and an employee's performance.

Interactionist Perspective of Organizational Behavior

The third theory, the Interactionist Perspective of Organizational Behavior, provides a broader view of human behavior in the workplace. Rooted in the work of Kurt Lewin (1936), who famously proposed that behavior is a function of both the person and their environment ($B = f(P \times E)$), this perspective reminds us that neither personal traits nor environmental factors alone can explain behavior. Instead, it is the interaction between who someone is and the environment in which they are that truly shapes outcomes. In the context of this research, this means that employee performance is not only influenced by conflict-handling styles or proactive personality in isolation, but by the dynamic interplay between these two factors.

Lastly, Dual Concern Theory sheds light on how conflict is managed, Trait Activation Theory explains when proactive personality is likely to influence behavior, and the Interactionist Perspective ties them together by emphasizing the importance of their interaction in shaping performance. Together, these theories provide a robust and comprehensive framework for exploring how employees respond to conflict and how their personal traits can impact performance outcomes.

Review of Empirical Studies

Avoiding Conflict-Handling Style and Employee Performance

Empirical studies have largely revealed that the avoidance conflict-handling style negatively affects employee performance, particularly in contexts that require collaboration and communication. Zhang et al (2021) found that avoidance reduced task performance among Chinese factory workers due to delayed problem-solving. Similar results emerged in Kenyan county governments (Ngugi & Wanjiku, 2023), Pakistan's textile industry (Tariq et al., 2023), and the Nigerian banking sector (Usman & Adebayo, 2023), where avoidance lowered productivity, morale, and service delivery. Studies in Ghanaian universities (Mensah & Boateng, 2022),

Nigeria's public service (Okoro & Ibrahim, 2022), South Korean logistics firms (Lee & Park, 2022), and Nigerian federal universities (Eze & Nnamdi, 2022) further confirmed avoidance as a predictor of inefficiencies, unresolved tensions, and reduced job satisfaction.

However, some studies suggest avoidance can be strategically beneficial under specific conditions. In Kenya's hospitality sector, Kibet and Langat (2023) found that avoidance enhanced performance by helping staff maintain professionalism in sensitive service interactions. Rahman et al. (2023) reported similar benefits in Malaysian universities, where avoidance reduced workplace tension and allowed academic staff to work independently. In Nigerian hospitals, Chinwe and Okafor (2022) observed that avoidance de-escalated conflicts during patient crises, sustaining short-term performance. Likewise, Johnson and Brown (2021) found that in U.S. remote work settings, avoidance minimized unnecessary disputes, fostering focus and productivity.

Proactive personality and employees' performance

Extensive research shows a strong positive relationship between proactive personality and employee performance. Yusuf et al. (2024), in a study of 360 staff at Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Nigeria, found that initiative-taking, adaptability, and persistence significantly enhanced performance. Similarly, Anderson and Johnson (2023), surveying 400 U.S. IT professionals, confirmed through SEM that proactive traits positively influence performance in technology roles.

Evidence from other sectors reinforces this link. Brown and Green (2022) reported, via regression analysis of 350 Australian retail workers, that proactive behaviors directly improved performance outcomes. Likewise, Davies and Parker (2022), using SEM on 250 U.K. healthcare staff, established proactive personality as a significant predictor of performance in healthcare. Collectively, these findings confirm that proactive personality consistently drives employee effectiveness across diverse organizational contexts.

Moderating Effect of Proactive Personality on the Relationship Between Conflict Handling Styles and Employee Performance

A moderator influences the strength or direction of the link between independent and dependent variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Prior studies have identified several moderators, including emotional intelligence, psychological safety, job autonomy, and organizational climate, in the conflict-handling–performance relationship (Almeida & Silva, 2023; Li et al., 2021; Singh & Sharma, 2021).

Although proactive personality is consistently linked to performance through initiative-taking, anticipation of challenges, and improvement-seeking (Brown & Green, 2023; Singh & Patel, 2023), its role as a moderator in this context has not been tested. Evidence from other domains shows that it moderates links between leadership, motivation, and engagement with performance (Singh & Gupta, 2020; Robinson & Edwards, 2021), and can either buffer or intensify stressor effects such as work overload and job insecurity (Parker & Williams, 2021; Yahaya & Senin, 2021).

Building on this, the present study proposes proactive personality as a moderator between avoiding conflict-handling style and employee performance. Highly proactive employees are expected to mitigate the negative effects of avoidance better, while less proactive employees may be more adversely affected (Yusuf et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, appropriate for collecting accurate data at a single point in time without influencing responses. The population comprised 15,038 academic and non-academic staff across six randomly selected public universities in North-Western Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: first, the region was stratified into three clusters, from which one federal and one state university were randomly drawn in each cluster, ensuring institutional diversity. Proportionate sampling was then applied to distribute questionnaires based on university size and staff categories (academic vs. non-academic), while purposive selection at the final stage ensured inclusion of staff in roles more exposed to workplace conflict.

The required sample size of 377 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. To address potential non-responses and enhance statistical power, 754 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 392 valid responses for analysis (Israel, 1992). Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic information, while Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0 tested the hypothesized relationships. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Measurement of Variables

The study employed validated scales for its constructs. Avoidance of conflict-handling style was measured using five items from Rahim (1983), proactive personality with the Proactive Personality Scale (Crant & Kramer, 1999), and employee performance with the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (Koopmans et al., 2014), adapted as a single-dimensional measure. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

A pilot test with 75 staff of Kaduna State University (10% of the intended sample, per Connelly, 2008) ensured clarity and content validity, with minor adjustments made to the questionnaire. Reliability and validity were further confirmed through measurement model assessment (indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity) and structural model evaluation using PLS-SEM (Ringle et al., 2024) ensuring robustness of the instruments and hypothesized relationships.

RESULTS

Of the 754 questionnaires distributed, 425 were returned (56.3% response rate). After excluding 33 invalid responses, 392 were retained for analysis. This exceeds the minimum sample size of

377 recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), making the dataset adequate for analysis and discussion.

Assessment of Measurement Model

The reflective measurement model was assessed using composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2024). Following Hulland's (1999) guideline, items with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 are removed only if exclusion improves reliability. In this study, all indicators exceeded the threshold, confirming strong item reliability. Figure 4.2 presents the results.

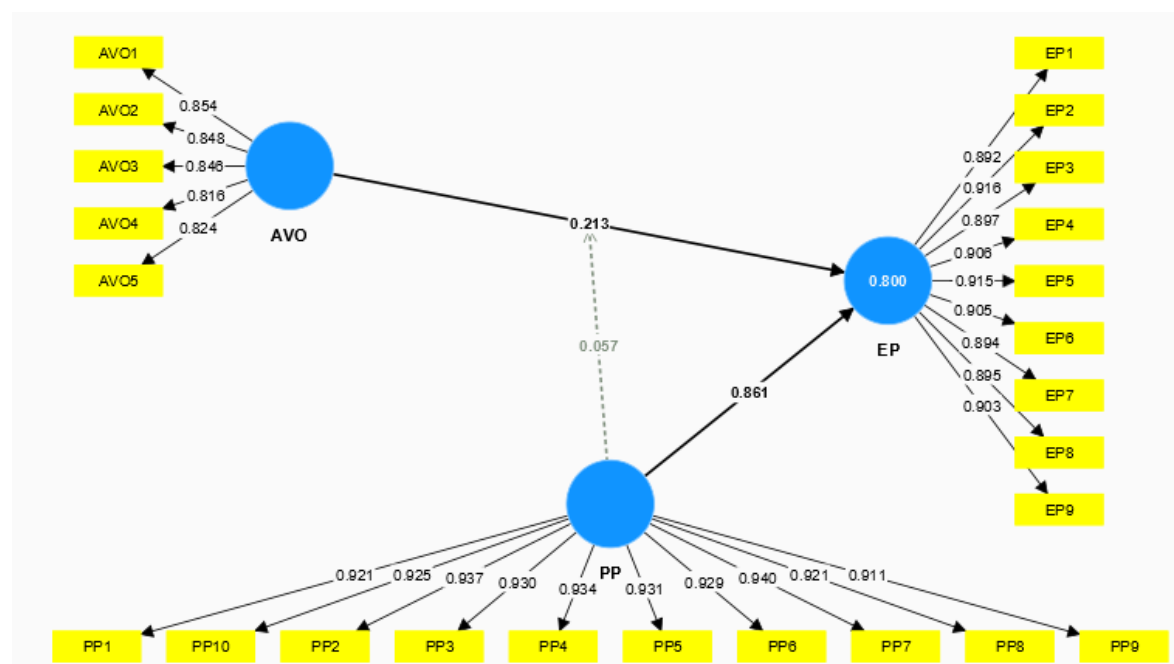


Figure 4.1 PLS Path Model

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Reliability and Validity Assessment

Internal consistency, reliability, and validity are critical for ensuring robust measurement of reflective constructs (Hair et al., 2024). In this study, avoiding conflict-handling style (AVO), Proactive personality (PP), and Employee performance (EP) were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency, and Composite Reliability, rho_A, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for construct reliability and validity. Results are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1: Internal consistency reliability and validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Variance Extracted (AVE)
AVO	0.894	0.897	0.822	0.702
EP	0.872	0.872	0.875	0.815
PP	0.882	0.882	0.884	0.861

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 4.1, the three constructs—Avoiding (AVO), Employee Performance (EP), and Proactive Personality (PP)—demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha and rho_A values exceeding the 0.70 threshold. CR values also surpassed 0.70 for AVO (0.822), EP (0.875), and PP (0.884), confirming strong reliability.

Table 4.2 further shows that all outer loadings were above 0.708, indicating sufficient indicator reliability, ranging from AVO4 (0.816; reliability = 0.666) to PP8 (0.940; reliability = 0.848). AVE values exceeded the 0.50 minimum, with AVO at 0.702, EP at 0.815, and PP at 0.861, thereby establishing convergent validity. Collectively, these results confirm that the measurement model for AVO, EP, and PP is both reliable and valid for further analysis.

Table 4.2: Individual Item Reliability, Internal Consistency Reliability, Convergent Validity

Latent Variable	Indicators	Convergent Validity		AVE	Internal Consistency Reliability		
		Loadings	Indicator Reliability		Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability	Composite Reliability
AVO	AVO1	0.854	0.729	0.702	0.894	0.897	0.822
	AVO2	0.848	0.719				
	AVO3	0.846	0.716				
	AVO4	0.816	0.666				
	AVO5	0.824	0.679				
EP	EP1	0.892	0.796	0.815	0.872	0.872	0.875
	EP2	0.916	0.839				
	EP3	0.897	0.802				
	EP4	0.906	0.823				
	EP5	0.915	0.837				
	EP6	0.905	0.819				
	EP7	0.894	0.799				
	EP8	0.895	0.801				
	EP9	0.903	0.815				
PP	PP1	0.921	0.848	0.861	0.882	0.882	0.884
	PP2	0.925	0.879				
	PP3	0.937	0.865				
	PP4	0.930	0.872				
	PP5	0.934	0.867				

PP6	0.931	0.863
PP7	0.929	0.884
PP8	0.940	0.848
PP9	0.921	0.829
PP10	0.911	0.856

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Discriminant Validity

Table 4.3: Discriminant validity Using Fornell and Lacker criterion

Construct	DOM	EP	PP
AVO	0.838		
EP	0.248	0.903	
PP	0.037	0.766	0.928

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 4.3, the square roots of the AVE for Avoiding (0.838), Employee Performance (0.903), and Proactive Personality (0.928) were greater than their inter-construct correlations, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct. This confirms discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4.4a: Discriminant validity Using the HTMT ratio

Construct	HTMT
EP <-> AVO	0.265
PP <-> AVO	0.040
PP <-> EP	0.786

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

As shown in Table 4.4a, the HTMT value between the constructs falls below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). To strengthen this result, the HTMT inference was further assessed using a 10,000-bootstrap confidence interval procedure, as recommended by Hair et al. (2024), with the outcomes reported in Table 4.4b.

Table 4.4b: Discriminant validity Using HTMT ratio Confidence Interval Bias

Construct	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	5.00%	95.00%
EP <-> AVO	0.265	0.264	-0.001	0.158	0.366
PP <-> AVO	0.040	0.070	0.030	0.020	0.050
PP <-> EP	0.786	0.786	0.000	0.760	0.808

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

As shown in Table 4.4b, the 95% confidence interval values (0.366, 0.050, and 0.808) are all below the conservative HTMT threshold of 0.85 at a 5% significance level. This confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs in the study. Having established the reliability and validity of the reflective constructs, the analysis proceeded to evaluate the structural model.

Assessment of the Structural Equation Model

The assessment of the PLS-SEM structural model emphasizes its ability to explain the variance in the dependent variables. After establishing reliability and validity, the evaluation proceeds by examining several key metrics: the variance inflation factor (VIF) of predictor constructs to detect collinearity issues, path coefficients, the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) (Hair et al., 2022).

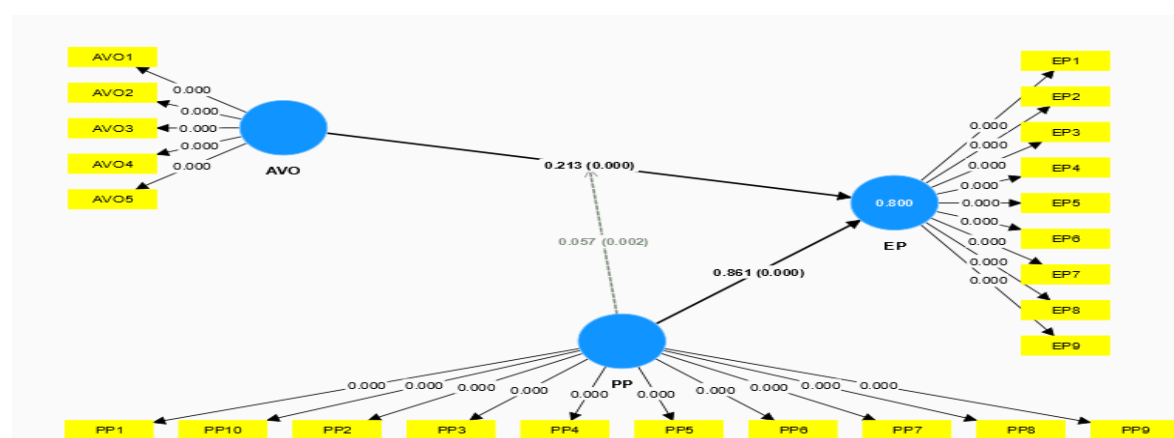


Figure 4.2 Bootstrapping Procedure showing path significance

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Exogenous Constructs Collinearity Assessment

According to Hair et al. (2024), the first step in assessing a structural model is to check for collinearity among predictor constructs in the structural model, as shown below.

Table 4.5: VIF Values for exogenous constructs

Exogenous Constructs	VIF
AVO -> EP	1.003
PP -> EP	1.005
PP x AVO -> EP	1.005

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Table 4.5 above shows the results of collinearity statistics for all sets of predictor constructs in the structural model. As can be seen, all VIF values are clearly below the conservative threshold of

3.3. We therefore conclude that collinearity among predictor constructs is not a critical issue in the structural model.

Coefficients of Determination (R^2 Values)

The R^2 value, also known as the coefficient of determination, represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables in a model. It is a measure of the model's explanatory power, with higher values indicating that more of the variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by the model. The result is presented in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8: Coefficients of Determination (R^2 values)

Construct	R Square	R-square adjusted
EP	0.800	0.798

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

The model's explanatory power was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2). As presented in Table 4.8, the R^2 value for Employee Performance (EP) was 0.800, indicating that 80% of the variance in EP is explained by Proactive Personality (PP), Avoiding (AVO) conflict-handling style, and their interaction ($PP \times AVO$). The adjusted R^2 of 0.798 confirms the model's robustness and rules out the possibility of overfitting. Following Hair et al. (2017), R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 represent substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power, respectively. Accordingly, the model demonstrates substantial explanatory power, while the remaining 20% of unexplained variance may be due to factors outside the model.

Effect Size (F^2)

The f^2 effect size evaluates the practical significance of each independent variable by measuring the change in R^2 when that variable is excluded from the model. Results are shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Effect Size (F^2)

Construct	Employee Performance (EP)	Effect Size
AVO -> EP	0.221	Large effect
PP -> EP	3.672	Large effect
PP x AVO -> EP	0.019	Medium effect

Source: Authors computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Effect size (f^2) was assessed to determine the contribution of each exogenous construct to the variance in Employee Performance (EP) as presented in Table 4.9 above. According to Kenny (2016), interaction term effect sizes of 0.005, 0.01, and 0.025 are classified as small, medium, and large, respectively. Therefore, Proactive Personality ($f^2 = 3.672$) exhibited a large effect, indicating that it is the most dominant predictor of EP in the model. Avoiding conflict-handling style ($f^2 = 0.221$) also showed a large effect. Regarding the moderating effects, the interaction of Proactive Personality with Avoiding ($f^2 = 0.019$) showed a medium effect.

Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Predictive relevance (Q^2) assesses a model's ability to predict the values of endogenous constructs. Calculated using the Stone-Geisser Q^2 statistic, values greater than zero indicate that the model has predictive relevance. This confirms the model's usefulness in explaining variance in the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 4.10 below.

Table 4.10: Predictive Relevance (Q^2),

Construct	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
EP	3528	1254.323	0.644

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

The predictive relevance of the model was assessed using the Stone–Geisser Q^2 value obtained through the blindfolding procedure. As shown in Table 4.9, the Q^2 value for Employee Performance (EP) was 0.644, which is well above the threshold of 0.50, indicating strong predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017).

PLSpredict

While the blindfolding-based Q^2 value indicated strong in-sample predictive relevance, the PLSpredict procedure was also conducted to validate the model's out-of-sample predictive power, aligning with recent PLS-SEM best practices (Shmueli et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022).

The predictive performance of the model was evaluated using the PLSpredict procedure. The $Q^2_{predict}$ values for all indicators of Employee Performance (EP1 to EP9) were substantially greater than zero, ranging from 0.618 to 0.675, thereby indicating strong predictive relevance (Shmueli et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022).

In addition, both the Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) and Mean Absolute Error (MAE) values obtained from the PLS-SEM model were consistently lower than those of the linear regression (LM) benchmark model across all but one indicator. This provides evidence of the model's strong out-of-sample predictive power, reinforcing the reliability of its predictions. (See Appendix A).

Test (CVPAT)_ linear regression benchmark

Additionally, the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT) was conducted to assess whether the PLS-SEM model offers superior predictive accuracy compared to a linear regression benchmark. Results show that the average prediction loss for the PLS-SEM model (0.199) was lower than that of the linear model (0.232), with an average loss difference of -0.011. This difference was statistically significant ($t = 4.909, p < 0.001$), indicating that the PLS-SEM model provides significantly better predictive performance than the linear model. Thus, the model exhibits strong out-of-sample predictive power. (See Appendix A).

Test (CVPAT)_Individual-mean Averaging (IA) benchmark

To further assess predictive validity, the PLSpredict procedure was compared against the Individual-mean Averaging (IA) benchmark using the Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT). Results from Table 4.13 above showed that the prediction loss for the PLS-SEM model (0.199) was substantially lower than the IA benchmark (0.652), with an average loss difference of -0.420. This difference was statistically significant ($t = 11.852, p < 0.001$), indicating that the PLS-SEM model produces far more accurate predictions than a naïve benchmark. Hence, the model demonstrates strong out-of-sample predictive performance. (See Appendix A).

Model Fit

Table 4.14: Model Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.018	0.018
NFI	0.968	0.968

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Model fit was assessed using several goodness-of-fit indices. From the result in Table 4.14 above, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) for both the saturated and estimated models was 0.018, well below the recommended threshold of 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2014), indicating an excellent fit between the model and the data. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.968, surpassing the commonly accepted benchmark of 0.90, further confirming the model's good fit.

Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)



Figure 4.4 Importance Performance Map.

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

The IPMA in Figure 4.4 reveals that Proactive Personality (PP) demonstrates both high importance (≈ 0.86) and relatively high performance ($\approx 60\%$), indicating that it is a key driver of employee performance and is being well-exhibited among respondents. Conversely, avoiding conflict-handling style (AVO) shows low importance (≈ 0.21) and moderate performance ($\approx 43\%$), suggesting it contributes minimally to employee performance and may not require prioritization in managerial interventions. These findings underscore the strategic value of fostering proactive traits in employees to enhance performance outcomes.

Simple Slope Analysis

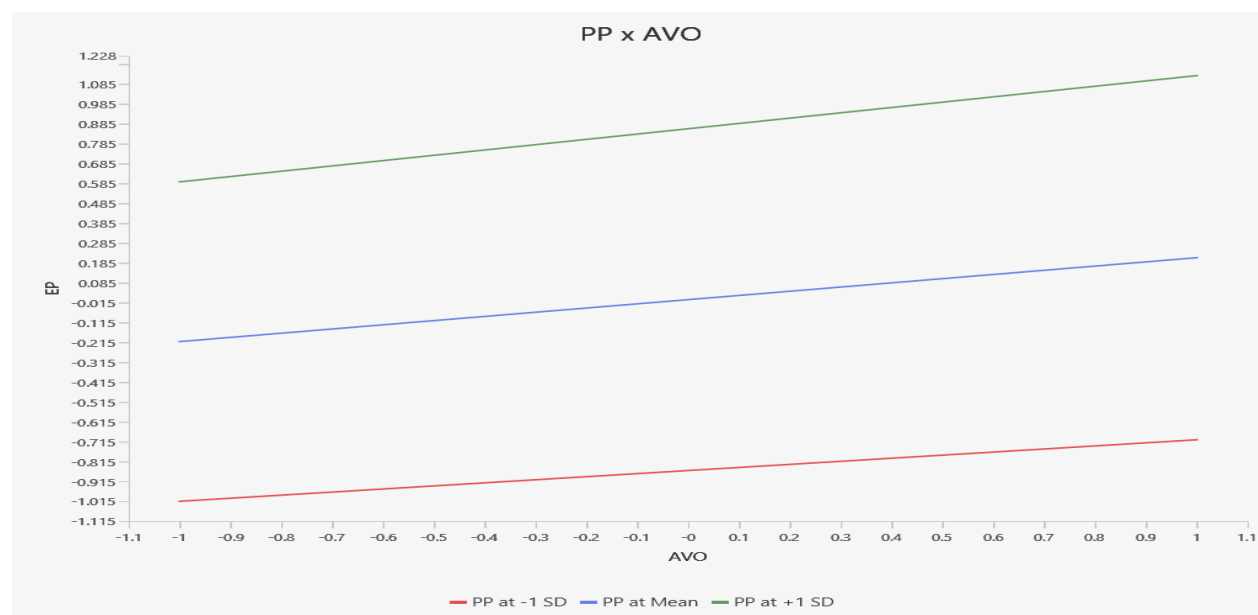


Figure 4.5 Simple Slope Plot (PP X AVO)

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

The interaction plot (Figure 4.5) illustrates that proactive personality moderates the relationship between avoiding conflict-handling style and employee performance. Specifically, the positive relationship between avoidance and performance was stronger among employees with high proactive personality traits compared to those with low proactive personality. This suggests that employees high in proactivity may utilize avoidance more strategically, resulting in improved performance. Thus, a proactive personality enhances the effectiveness of the avoiding style in fostering employee outcomes.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study tested three null hypotheses to determine the relationships among avoiding conflict-handling styles, proactive personality, and employee performance in public universities in North-Western Nigeria. The study also assessed whether proactive personality moderates the effects of conflict-handling styles on performance.

Table 4.15: Size and Significance of the Path Coefficients

Path	Coefficient (β)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
AVO \rightarrow EP	0.213	9.722	0.000	Rejected
PP \rightarrow EP	0.861	52.658	0.000	Rejected
PP \times AVO \rightarrow EP	0.057	3.138	0.002	Rejected

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Path coefficients show the strength and direction of relationships in the structural model. Their size indicates the importance of predictors, while p-values and t-statistics confirm significance. Results are presented in Table 4.15 above.

H₀₁: Avoiding conflict-handling style has no significant effect on employees' performance.

The analysis revealed that the avoiding conflict-handling style had a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.213$, $t = 9.722$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that when employees employ this style in managing conflict, their performance tends to improve. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H₀₁), which stated that avoiding conflict-handling style has no significant effect on employee performance, was rejected.

This result aligns with the Dual Concern Model, which posits that concern for self (low assertiveness) may drive productive outcomes in structured systems. Additionally, they corroborate the findings of Mensah and Boateng (2022), Tariq et al. (2023), Yusuf et al. (2023), and Zhang et al (2021).

H₀₂: Proactive personality has no significant effect on employees' performance.

Similarly, proactive personality exhibited a strong, positive, and statistically significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.861$, $t = 52.658$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that employees with proactive tendencies are more likely to demonstrate higher performance. As such, the second hypothesis (H₀₂), which posited that proactive personality has no significant effect on employee performance, was also rejected. This finding is consistent with studies of (Chen et al., 2020; Mensah & Boateng, 2022; Yusuf et al., 2024).

H₀₃: Proactive personality does not significantly moderate the relationship between Avoiding conflict-handling style and employees' performance.

Furthermore, the interaction term assessing the moderating effect of proactive personality on the relationship between avoiding conflict-handling style and employee performance was significant ($\beta = 0.057$, $t = 3.138$, $p = 0.002$). This result implies that proactive personality strengthens the relationship between avoiding conflict and employee performance. Thus, the third hypothesis (H₀₃), which proposed that proactive personality does not significantly moderate the relationship between avoiding conflict-handling style and employee performance, was also rejected. This

finding aligns with the perspective advanced by Yusuf et al. (2024), reinforcing their argument regarding the moderating effect of proactive personality.

Furthermore, the results showed that avoidance positively predicted performance, proactive personality strongly enhanced performance, and the interaction between the two was significant.

The finding that avoidance can be beneficial contrasts with the dominant view that it undermines problem resolution. In the Nigerian university context, however, avoidance may serve adaptive purposes. Universities are highly hierarchical institutions where norms of deference to authority, respect for seniority, and an emphasis on social harmony shape interpersonal dynamics. In such settings, openly confronting superiors or colleagues may be viewed as disrespectful, potentially escalating tensions and jeopardizing collaborative work. By withdrawing or postponing confrontation, staff conserve psychological energy, maintain professional relationships, and prevent disruptions to task execution. Thus, avoidance operates less as a passive strategy and more as a culturally informed mechanism for preserving workplace stability.

The strong role of proactive personality further clarifies why avoidance was effective. Proactive individuals are not merely withdrawing; they strategically choose when to disengage, when to re-engage, and how to channel their energy into productive tasks. Their forward-looking orientation enables them to transform avoidance into a constructive strategy, avoiding unnecessary conflicts while maintaining a focus on performance. This interaction highlights that the value of avoidance depends not only on cultural norms but also on individual traits that determine whether the strategy is passive or purposeful.

Together, these insights suggest that conflict management in Nigerian universities cannot be universally classified as functional or dysfunctional. Instead, effectiveness depends on the interplay of cultural expectations and personality traits. Theoretically, this extends the Dual Concern Model by showing how avoidance can align with performance when moderated by proactive dispositions within hierarchical cultural systems. Practically, it underscores the importance of developing conflict management training and HR policies that recognize cultural values of respect and harmony, while also fostering proactive tendencies among staff.

Conclusion

This study examined how the avoiding conflict-handling style affects employee performance in Nigerian public universities and tested whether proactive personality moderates this relationship. Findings revealed that avoidance, often perceived negatively, can enhance performance when used strategically by proactive individuals. A proactive personality not only improved performance directly but also strengthened the effectiveness of avoidance, demonstrating that both dispositional traits and cultural norms shape conflict strategies.

Recommendations

1. **Recruitment and Promotion:** Integrate proactive personality assessments into hiring and promotion processes, particularly for leadership and team-based roles.

2. **Training and Mentoring:** Develop conflict management programs that emphasize adaptive use of avoidance alongside other strategies. Pair highly proactive staff with less proactive colleagues through structured mentoring.
3. **Policy Design:** Institutionalize conflict management policies that balance cultural values of respect and hierarchy with mechanisms that encourage constructive engagement.
4. **Leadership Development:** Equip managers with tools to identify and leverage proactive traits during conflict situations to sustain team performance and cohesion.

Contributions

The study extends the Dual Concern Model by demonstrating that avoidance can yield positive outcomes when moderated by proactive traits, advancing interactionist perspectives in organizational behavior. Practically, it provides actionable guidance for universities to embed personality-informed approaches into HR, training, and conflict management policies.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited to public universities in North-Western Nigeria and focused only on the avoidance style. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, expand to other conflict-handling styles, and include qualitative approaches to deepen cultural insights.

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APPENDIX A

Table 4.11: Predictive Relevance (Q2) using PLSpredict

	Q ² predict	PLS- SEM_RMSE	PLS- SEM_MAE	LM_RMSE	LM_MAE
EP1	0.634	0.476	0.380	0.488	0.387
EP2	0.662	0.476	0.386	0.490	0.399
EP3	0.657	0.481	0.390	0.497	0.403
EP4	0.634	0.491	0.391	0.500	0.398
EP5	0.675	0.460	0.365	0.470	0.374
EP6	0.657	0.479	0.388	0.496	0.401
EP7	0.632	0.502	0.396	0.513	0.408
EP8	0.618	0.489	0.394	0.493	0.393
EP9	0.628	0.479	0.381	0.490	0.388

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Table 4.12: Predictive Relevance (Q2) using (CVPAT)_ linear regression benchmark

PLS loss	LM loss	Average loss	difference	t-value	p-value
EP	0.232	0.243	-0.011	4.909	0.000
Overall	0.232	0.243	-0.011	4.909	0.000

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0

Table 4.13: Test (CVPAT)_ Individual-mean Averaging (IA) benchmark

PLS loss	IA loss	Average loss	difference	t-value	p-value
EP	0.232	0.652	-0.420	11.852	0.000
Overall	0.232	0.652	-0.420	11.852	0.000

Source: Authors' computation (2025), using SmartPLS 4.0