

# Beyond Difficult Co-Workers: How Individual Characteristics Shape Negative Encounter Attitudes and Turnover Intention in Service Organizations

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## Abstract

Despite organizational turnover costs reaching 20-200% of annual salary per departing employee, the mechanisms driving departure intentions in collectivist cultures remain poorly understood. This study examines how Difficult Co-workers (DCW) and Individual Characteristics (IC) influence Turnover Intention (TI) through Negative Encounter Attitudes (NEA) among Indonesian hotel employees. Using social exchange theory, we surveyed 258 employees across 25 three-star hotels in Medan, Indonesia, analyzing data through PLS-SEM to test direct relationships and mediation effects. Findings challenge conventional assumptions about workplace relationships. Individual characteristics strongly predict negative encounter attitudes ( $\beta = 0.931, p < 0.05$ ), while difficult co-workers surprisingly do not ( $\beta = 0.053, p > 0.05$ ). Both variables influence turnover intention via distinct pathways—difficult colleagues directly increase departure likelihood ( $\beta = 0.445, p < 0.001$ ), whereas certain individual traits appear protective ( $\beta = -0.287, p < 0.05$ ). Crucially, negative encounter attitudes mediate only the individual characteristics-turnover relationship ( $\beta = 0.371, p < 0.05$ ), indicating fundamentally different causal mechanisms. Cross-sectional design and geographic limitation restrict generalizability, necessitating longitudinal validation across diverse contexts. These patterns have implications for service industries where employee retention directly affects operational costs and service quality. Practically, hospitality managers should prioritize understanding employee psychological vulnerabilities over managing problematic colleagues, emphasizing person-environment fit during recruitment rather than conventional conflict resolution. These results advance social exchange theory while offering novel retention strategies tailored to collectivist environments.

**Keywords:** Difficult Co-Worker; Individual Characteristics; Negative Encounter Attitudes; Turnover Intention.

## 1. Introduction

Employee turnover costs organizations 20-200% of annual salary per departing employee (Rubenstein et al., 2022), with hospitality facing particularly acute challenges where turnover rates consistently exceed 75% annually—significantly higher than other service sectors (Park & Min, 2020). Given that labor costs represent 29-35% of total hotel revenue (Mandelbaum, 2016) and account for 50-60% of total operating costs (The Reputation Lab, 2025), high turnover rates create substantial economic pressure on profitability and service consistency. While considerable research examines organizational and job-related turnover antecedents, the role of interpersonal workplace dynamics—particularly the complex interplay between difficult colleague relationships and individual psychological differences—remains inadequately understood, especially in emerging market contexts where cultural values may fundamentally alter how interpersonal stressors translate into employee attitudes and behavioral intentions.

The hospitality industry provides a compelling context for examining these dynamics. Hotel operations depend heavily on coordinated teamwork and positive interpersonal relationships (Chen & Choi, 2022) yet consistently report turnover rates exceeding other service sectors (Li et al., 2023; Zhang & Lee, 2022). This presents economic challenges as recruiting and training replacement staff requires significant investment, while service disruptions can negatively impact guest satisfaction and revenue.

In Indonesia's rapidly expanding tourism economy, hotels face unprecedented retention challenges (Nguyen et al., 2023), making an understanding of turnover antecedents critically important for sustainable competitive advantage. Contemporary turnover theory has evolved beyond traditional unfolding models to embrace multidimensional frameworks recognizing diverse turnover pathways. Recent comprehensive reviews identify four primary routes: job dissatisfaction-driven, shock-initiated, script-driven, and image-violation pathways, each requiring different retention interventions (Hom et al., 2021). In hospitality contexts, job embeddedness—the web of connections anchoring employees to organizations—emerges as a particularly powerful predictor, often outperforming traditional attitudinal predictors (Mitchell et al., 2023). However, interpersonal workplace dynamics may play equally important roles in shaping retention decisions (Schilpzand et al., 2020).

The presence of Difficult Co-workers (DCW)—colleagues whose behaviors interfere with others' work effectiveness or create interpersonal tension—has emerged as a significant predictor of employee disengagement and voluntary turnover across organizational contexts (Wang et al., 2021; Cortina et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2020). Yet empirical findings regarding DCW effects remain inconsistent. While some studies report strong direct relationships between problematic colleague behaviors and negative employee outcomes (Andersson & Pearson, 2022), others find weaker or nonsignificant effects (Beal et al., 2023). This inconsistency suggests DCW–turnover relationships may be more complex than previously assumed, potentially mediated by attitudinal variables or moderated by individual differences (Shaw et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023).

Individual Characteristics (IC)—the relatively stable personality traits, cognitive styles, and behavioral tendencies distinguishing individuals—represent a particularly promising but underexplored boundary condition in turnover research (Barrick & Mount, 2022; Kristof-Brown et al., 2020). Employees with different personality profiles may interpret identical workplace situations differently, leading to divergent attitudinal and behavioral responses. Those high in emotional stability and agreeableness might maintain positive workplace attitudes despite challenging interpersonal environments (Wang et al., 2021; Schilpzand et al., 2020), while others might develop persistent negative attitudes from relatively minor incidents.

Negative Encounter Attitudes (NEA) capture employees' generalized negative affective and cognitive responses to workplace interpersonal interactions. Unlike temporary emotional reactions to specific events, these attitudes represent relatively stable negative dispositions persisting across situations and time (Cortina et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2020). According to Social Exchange Theory, workplace relationships operate on reciprocity and mutual benefit principles, where unfavorable exchanges create psychological costs motivating withdrawal behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2022). Recent theoretical developments emphasize that social exchange relationships exist within nested organizational support systems, with employees simultaneously managing multiple exchange relationships that collectively influence attachment and departure decisions (Lee et al., 2023).

Despite growing recognition of interpersonal factors in turnover processes, three significant gaps remain. First, most research treats DCW as uniformly problematic without considering how IC might influence perceptions and responses to challenging colleagues. Second, while evidence exists for mediation mechanisms linking interpersonal conflict to turnover intention through psychological well-being (Nguyen et al., 2023) and organizational communication (Namin et al., 2022), the specific mediating mechanisms through which workplace interpersonal stressors translate into turnover intention remain poorly understood, particularly regarding encounter attitudes. Third, limited research examines these relationships within emerging markets' cultural and organizational contexts, where collectivist values and hierarchical structures may alter interpersonal dynamics (Chen & Choi, 2022) compared to Western contexts, where most research has been conducted.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how DCW and IC influence Turnover Intention (TI) through NEA's mediating role among Indonesian hotel employees. Our investigation makes three key contributions. First, we provide empirical evidence for the differential effects of interpersonal stressors and individual differences on employee attitudes and TI. Second, we illuminate NEA's mediating role in linking IC to turnover outcomes. Third, we extend turnover research to an underexplored cultural context, providing insights into Western-derived theoretical models' generalizability.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical foundations and framework integration

This study integrates Social Exchange Theory, Affective Events Theory, and Cultural Context Theory to understand workplace interpersonal dynamics. Social Exchange Theory suggests workplace relationships operate on reciprocity principles, where unfavorable exchanges create psychological costs motivating withdrawal behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2022). Recent theoretical developments emphasize that social exchange relationships exist within nested organizational support systems, with employees managing multiple exchange relationships that collectively influence attachment decisions (Lee et al., 2023).

Affective Events Theory complements this framework by explaining how recurring negative social interactions act as emotional events shaping employee attitudes and behaviors (Junça-Silva & Lopes, 2023). Contemporary evidence demonstrates that emotional workplace experiences create both immediate affective reactions and stable attitudinal changes influencing long-term outcomes (Williams et al., 2024). Conservation of Resources theory further explains resource dynamics underlying exchange relationships, with Halbesleben et al.'s (2014) comprehensive review establishing COR as foundational for organizational psychology, while Sonnentag & Meier's (2024) critical examination provides updated perspectives on gain/loss cycles and resource conservation processes.

### 2.2. Difficult co-workers: effects and empirical inconsistencies

DCW—characterized by hostility, uncooperativeness, gossiping, passive aggression, or poor communication—significantly deteriorates work environments through interpersonal tension, reduced trust, and psychological strain (Han et al., 2022; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Namin et al., 2022). Contemporary meta-analytic evidence demonstrates workplace incivility affects approximately 98% of employees, with Han et al.'s (2022) analysis of 253 samples showing significant prediction of turnover intention through systematic emotion-cognition processes. In hospitality settings, customer and coworker incivility create dual stressors compounding emotional exhaustion and accelerating departure intentions (Wang et al., 2021).

However, empirical findings regarding DCW effects remain inconsistent. While some studies report strong direct relationships between problematic colleague behaviors and negative outcomes (Andersson & Pearson, 2022), others find weaker effects (Beal et al., 2023), suggesting complex relationships potentially mediated by attitudinal variables or moderated by individual differences (Shaw et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023). Namin et al.'s (2022) meta-analysis of 46 studies confirms strong positive relationships between workplace incivility and turnover intentions ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with targets experiencing “considerable human costs, such as emotional exhaustion, depression, and increased fear, sadness, and anger.”

Importantly, DCW perception remains subjective and influenced by individual differences. Personality traits, cultural background, conflict resolution skills, and past experiences influence how employees interpret colleague behaviors (Zell et al., 2022; Alderotti et al., 2023). What one employee perceives as assertiveness, another may interpret as aggression, reflecting individual differences in personality traits and cognitive processing styles (Cortina et al., 2001). When coworker behavior repeatedly causes stress across teams, it becomes systemic, fostering cultures where toxic communication patterns become normalized (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

### 2.3. Individual characteristics as boundary conditions

IC encompasses enduring personal attributes, including personality traits, emotional intelligence, resilience, coping styles, and demographic factors, influencing how employees process social cues, manage stress, and engage with coworkers during adversity (Zell et al., 2022; Möttus & Rozgonjuk, 2021; Doğru, 2022). The Big Five personality traits demonstrate substantial predictive validity for workplace outcomes, with meta-analytic evidence indicating emotional stability and conscientiousness significantly predict lower turnover intention across occupational contexts (Barrick & Mount, 2022). Person-environment fit theory suggests that congruence between individual characteristics and organizational demands is particularly crucial in service industries where interpersonal interactions are central to job performance (Kristof-Brown et al., 2020).

Recent 2025 empirical evidence confirms the critical role of personality traits in shaping workplace outcomes and retention decisions. Research demonstrates that responsible leadership, characterized by light-triad personality characteristics, significantly enhances job embeddedness among hospitality employees, with embedded employees showing substantially lower turnover intentions (Özkan et al., 2025). This aligns with broader evidence that person-environment misfit, particularly when combined with problematic personality traits such as Dark Triad characteristics, can lead to deviant behaviors that often precede departure intentions (Yi & Zhang, 2025).

Individuals high in neuroticism or low in agreeableness may perceive workplace interactions as hostile, developing NEA even in moderately challenging environments (Zell et al., 2022; Miková et al., 2023). Conversely, those with high emotional stability, self-regulation, and interpersonal sensitivity may interpret identical interactions with greater tolerance, mitigating negative emotional impact (Doğru, 2022; Toyama et al., 2021). This aligns with Cognitive Appraisal Theory, suggesting people's emotional responses are shaped by subjective evaluation of events rather than events themselves (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Spătaru et al.'s (2024) longitudinal examination provides robust support through cross-lagged panel network analysis, demonstrating that secondary appraisal significantly predicts future coping strategies, validating that individuals exposed to identical difficult situations may form vastly different emotional responses depending on underlying personal traits.

Employees with a proactive personality or high self-efficacy may seek constructive solutions when faced with negative encounters, preventing long-term resentment buildup (Thomas et al., 2022). Thomas et al.'s (2022) meta-analysis of 101,131 employees confirms proactive personality's positive relationship with work engagement and career adaptation. Conversely, individuals with passive coping styles may internalize frustration and develop persistent NEA toward colleagues or organizational climate (Spătaru et al., 2024).

### 2.4. Negative encounter attitudes as mediating mechanisms

NEA represents employees' generalized negative affective and cognitive responses to workplace interpersonal interactions, distinguishing them from temporary emotional reactions through stability across situations and time (Cortina et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2020). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), attitudes influence behavioral intentions, with NEA serving as a proximal predictor of withdrawal behaviors. Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) further explains that DCW presence influences individuals' intention to act, including turnover intention, through attitude formation processes.

Recent meta-analytic evidence supports these theoretical foundations. Lesener et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis represents the first comprehensive longitudinal validation of Job Demands-Resources model assumptions, finding reciprocal relationships between job characteristics and well-being. Bakker et al.'s (2023) updated JD-R framework confirms dual pathways (health impairment and motivational processes) with an expanded theoretical framework including personal resources as crucial moderators. This suggests that when job demands such as interpersonal conflict exceed available resources, employees develop negative attitudes culminating in turnover intention. Hospitality research supports these mediation mechanisms. Chen et al. (2021) demonstrate that emotional exhaustion mediates relationships between workplace incivility and turnover intention, while Nguyen et al. (2023) show psychological distress mediates links between workplace ostracism and departure intentions. Namin et al. (2022) provide additional evidence that burnout mediates role stress-turnover intention relationships, suggesting psychological states serve as crucial intermediary mechanisms linking individual experiences to behavioral outcomes.

### 2.5. Cultural context and industry dynamics

Understanding the Indonesian cultural context is crucial for interpreting workplace relationship dynamics. Indonesia's organizational culture is shaped by high power distance (78) and collectivist values (14 on individualism), creating hierarchy dependence, centralized power, indirect communication, and group decision-making priority (Hofstede et al., 2010). The concept of *kekeluargaan* (kinship) serves as a foundational organizational culture, built on Javanese values of *hormat* (respect) and *rukun* (harmony), creating family-like workplace relationships (Hofstede et al., 2010). This cultural emphasis on harmony may lead employees to psychologically compartmentalize DCW behaviors rather than allowing them to influence broader workplace attitudes.

Hofstede et al. (2010) note that the Indonesian workplace hierarchy requires careful navigation, with indirect communication preferred to maintain harmony and face-saving. This cultural preference for conflict avoidance may explain why employees demonstrate resilience to peer-level interpersonal difficulties in attitude formation while still being affected behaviorally through instrumental pathways. Steel et al.'s (2021) meta-analysis of 152 samples across 18 nations provides crucial cross-cultural evidence, demonstrating significantly stronger turnover intention-behavior links for countries higher in individualism, suggesting collectivist cultures may have higher thresholds for turnover despite negative encounters.

The hospitality industry's unique characteristics—high interpersonal demands, emotional labor requirements, and team-based service delivery—create conditions where job embeddedness becomes particularly crucial for retention. Setthakorn et al.'s (2024) meta-analysis of 22 South-East Asian samples shows significant negative associations between job embeddedness and turnover intention, while Ampofo & Karatepe's (2022) study found job embeddedness negatively related to turnover intentions through organizational commitment and work engagement mediation.

Emotional labor theory (Hochschild, 1983) suggests that hospitality employees are professionally trained to manage emotional expressions, with meta-analytic evidence confirming that emotional intelligence and personality traits significantly affect emotional labor strategies (Doğru, 2022). Longitudinal research indicates that surface acting increases anxiety and depression among hospitality employees, suggesting employees unable to authentically engage with emotional labor requirements may be particularly vulnerable to developing NEA (Wang et al., 2021). Paparoidamis et al. (2021) demonstrate that cultural intelligence moderates emotional labor effects, with deep acting enhancing job satisfaction when combined with high cultural intelligence, particularly relevant for understanding how individual characteristics influence emotional labor processes and subsequent attitude formation in diverse hospitality workplaces.

### 3. Hypotheses Development

Building upon Social Exchange Theory and the preceding literature review, we develop a theoretical model examining the relationships between DCW, IC, NEA, and TI. Our model proposes both direct relationships and mediation effects, reflecting the complex pathways through which interpersonal workplace dynamics influence employee retention (Cropanzano et al., 2023).

#### 3.1. Direct effects of difficult co-workers

According to Social Exchange Theory, workplace relationships operate on principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit, where unfavorable exchanges create psychological costs that motivate withdrawal behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2022). When colleagues engage in behaviors that create costs for others—such as interference with work tasks, creation of interpersonal tension, or failure to provide necessary cooperation—they violate the fundamental norm of reciprocity that underlies effective workplace functioning (Ahmad et al., 2023). Such violations can trigger both attitudinal and behavioral responses as affected employees seek to restore balance in their social exchange relationships. DCW, characterized by behaviors such as hostility, uncooperativeness, or task interference, represents a direct source of costs in workplace social exchanges (Han et al., 2022). These behaviors can manifest in multiple ways: refusing to share necessary information, creating unnecessary conflict, failing to complete assigned tasks, or engaging in gossip and political maneuvering that undermines team effectiveness (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). When such behaviors persist, they create ongoing negative experiences that can shape both employee attitudes and behavioral intentions (Namin et al., 2022).

The relationship between DCW and NEA reflects employees' cognitive and emotional processing of repeated negative interpersonal experiences (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). According to Affective Events Theory, workplace events—particularly interpersonal encounters—generate affective reactions that accumulate over time to influence stable attitudes (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Recent theoretical developments emphasize that emotional experiences at work create both immediate affective reactions and stable attitudinal changes that influence long-term workplace outcomes (Ashkanasy et al., 2017). Employees who regularly interact with DCW experience ongoing negative events that gradually coalesce into generalized negative attitudes toward workplace relationships (Fisher, 2002). Research in hospitality contexts demonstrates that DCW creates stress and unpleasant work environments, leading to negative attitudinal responses among employees (Wang et al., 2021), while workplace anxiety from interpersonal stressors contributes to emotional exhaustion and negative work attitudes (Chen & Choi, 2022).

H1: DCW positively influences NEA among hotel employees.

The direct relationship between DCW and TI reflects the immediate behavioral consequences of ongoing interpersonal difficulties (Hershcovis, 2011). When colleague behaviors create significant costs—whether through task interference, increased stress, or reduced work enjoyment—employees may decide to seek alternative employment opportunities regardless of their general attitudes toward the workplace (Spector & Fox, 2005). This direct pathway suggests that some interpersonal stressors operate through instrumental rather than attitudinal mechanisms (Cortina et al., 2001). Research in hospitality contexts demonstrates that DCW significantly impacts employees' turnover intentions through direct effects on workplace stress and job satisfaction (Zhang & Lee, 2022), while customer incivility and coworker difficulties create job stress that directly predicts turnover intentions among hotel employees (Li et al., 2023).

H2: DCW positively influences TI among hotel employees.

#### 3.2. Direct effects of individual characteristics

IC encompasses the stable personality traits, cognitive styles, and behavioral tendencies that influence how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to their work environment (Costa & McCrae, 1992). These characteristics serve as important boundary conditions in social exchange relationships, determining the threshold at which negative interactions translate into adverse attitudes and behaviors (Barrick & Mount, 2022). Research in personality psychology has identified several traits that particularly influence workplace relationships and outcomes (Judge et al., 2013). Neuroticism, characterized by a tendency toward negative emotions and stress reactivity, predisposes individuals to interpret ambiguous social situations more negatively (Watson & Clark, 1984). Agreeableness, reflecting concern for social harmony and cooperation, may buffer against the negative effects of interpersonal friction (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997). Emotional stability and resilience influence how effectively individuals cope with workplace stressors and maintain positive attitudes despite challenging circumstances (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, IC influences both the perception of exchange imbalances and the behavioral responses to such imbalances (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employees with certain personality profiles may be more sensitive to interpersonal slights, experiencing greater disruption to their social exchange relationships and subsequently developing more NEA (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995). Conversely, those with high emotional stability and interpersonal skills may maintain more positive attitudes despite objective workplace challenges (Suls & Martin, 2005). Research demonstrates that personality traits significantly influence attitude formation, with meta-analytic evidence from 54 independent studies showing that neuroticism correlates with negative workplace attitudes while openness and extraversion are associated with more positive interpersonal outcomes (Zell et al., 2022). Additionally, individuals vary in how they weigh positive versus negative information during attitude formation, with those having a negative weighting bias tending to maintain negative attitudes and avoid testing associated stimuli (Baumeister et al., 2001).

H3: IC significantly influences NEA among hotel employees.

IC also directly influences TI through person-environment fit mechanisms (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). When employees' personality traits, values, or behavioral preferences align poorly with their work environment, they experience ongoing stress and dissatisfaction that directly motivates departure intentions (O'Reilly et al., 1991). This relationship may operate independently of specific interpersonal experiences, reflecting a more fundamental mismatch between individual needs and organizational characteristics (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Meta-analytic evidence from comprehensive reviews demonstrates that higher levels of neuroticism and lower levels of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness significantly predict higher turnover intentions across occupational contexts (Zimmerman, 2008).

H4: IC significantly influences TI among hotel employees.

#### 3.3. The role of negative encounter attitudes

NEA represents employees' generalized negative affective and cognitive responses to workplace interpersonal interactions (Lazarus, 1991). These attitudes emerge from the accumulation of negative social exchange experiences and serve as proximal predictors of withdrawal behaviors (Cortina et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2020). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, attitudes toward specific behaviors strongly

predict behavioral intentions, with negative attitudes increasing the likelihood of withdrawal behaviors such as turnover (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The relationship between NEA and TI reflects the psychological mechanism through which interpersonal workplace experiences translate into behavioral outcomes (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Employees who develop persistent negative attitudes toward workplace relationships experience ongoing psychological costs that eventually motivate them to seek more favorable social exchange relationships elsewhere (Mobley et al., 1979).

H5: NEA positively influences TI among hotel employees.

### 3.4. Mediation effects

The theoretical model proposes that NEA serves as a key mediating mechanism linking both DCW and IC to TI (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). This mediation reflects the cognitive-affective processes through which workplace experiences are internalized and translated into behavioral intentions (George & Brief, 1996). For DCW, the mediation pathway suggests that problematic colleague behaviors influence TI primarily through their effects on employee attitudes toward workplace relationships (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Rather than directly motivating departure, DCW creates negative interpersonal experiences that gradually accumulate into NEA, which in turn increases TI (Tepper, 2000). This pathway is consistent with Social Exchange Theory's emphasis on the role of relationship quality in determining exchange continuation (Settoon et al., 1996). Research in hospitality contexts supports this mediation mechanism, showing that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and turnover intention (Chen et al., 2021), while psychological distress mediates the link between workplace ostracism and departure intentions (Nguyen et al., 2023).

H6: NEA mediates the relationship between DCW and TI among hotel employees.

For IC, the mediation pathway reflects the process through which personality traits influence behavioral outcomes through their effects on attitude formation (Watson & Clark, 1984). Rather than directly predicting TI, IC influences how workplace experiences are perceived and internalized, leading to the formation of NEA that subsequently influences departure intentions (Judge & Larsen, 2001). This pathway highlights the importance of individual differences in the attitude formation process (Weiss & Adler, 1984). Evidence from meta-analytic research demonstrates similar mediation patterns, where negative affective states mediate the relationship between personality traits and behavioral outcomes (Thoresen et al., 2003), suggesting that psychological states serve as crucial intermediary mechanisms linking individual experiences to behavioral outcomes (Judge et al., 2001).

H7: NEA mediates the relationship between IC and TI among hotel employees.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework tested in this study.

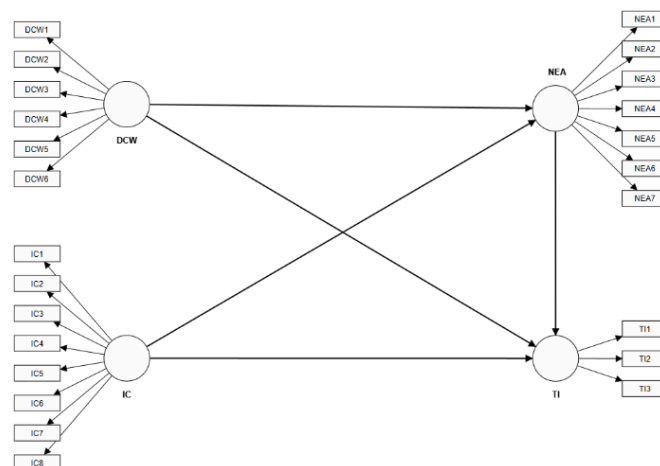


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Research design and context

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine structural relationships among DCW, IC, NEA, and TI, aligning with theory-testing objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was conducted in three-star hotels in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. This context was strategically selected as these establishments represent mid-market operations with 50-150 staff across multiple departments, creating meaningful interpersonal dynamics while providing operational diversity within cultural homogeneity. Indonesian collectivist culture and hierarchical organizational structures offer unique perspectives on workplace relationship dynamics (Hofstede et al., 2010).

### 4.2. Sampling strategy and participants

The target population comprised employees in three-star hotels in Medan, with the sampling frame constructed using the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association North Sumatra branch membership directory. Sample size determination followed Sarstedt et al.'s (2022) PLS-SEM recommendations. TI receives paths from three predictor variables, requiring a minimum sample size of 119 observations for medium effect sizes ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ) with statistical power of 0.80 and significance level of 0.05 (Cohen, 1988). Targeting 400 participants, we achieved 258 complete responses (64.5% effective response rate). Stratified random sampling ensured representativeness across hotel characteristics and employee demographics. Hotels were stratified by size (50-100, 101-150, 151+ rooms) and employees by department (front office, housekeeping, food & beverage, back office). Systematic sampling within each stratum used employee rosters during multiple shifts to capture diverse work schedules, minimizing selection bias while ensuring representation across organizational roles and working conditions.

### 4.3. Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using established scales adapted for Indonesian hospitality contexts, assessed via seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to provide sufficient variance while maintaining cognitive manageability. DCW were measured using a six-item scale adapted from Andersson & Pearson (2022) and Wang et al. (2021), focusing on behavioral manifestations rather than subjective personality judgments to enhance objectivity and cross-cultural validity. Sample items include "Some of my coworkers make my job more difficult than it needs to be" and "Certain colleagues create problems that interfere with my work performance." The scale demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ) and was unidimensional. IC was measured using an eight-item composite scale incorporating Big Five personality framework elements (Barrick & Mount, 2022) alongside workplace-specific individual differences. Rather than a comprehensive personality assessment, we focused on traits most relevant to workplace social dynamics: emotional stability, agreeableness, and stress reactivity. Sample items include "I tend to worry about workplace problems" (reverse-coded) and "I find it easy to get along with most people." The scale achieved acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ) and demonstrated convergent validity with established personality measures. NEA was measured using a seven-item scale developed specifically for this study, building on conceptual foundations from Cortina et al. (2021) and validated through pilot testing. The scale captures generalized negative feelings toward workplace interactions rather than reactions to specific incidents. Sample items include "Most of my interactions with colleagues are unpleasant" and "I often feel frustrated after talking with certain coworkers." The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) and appropriate factor structure. TI was measured using Mitchell et al.'s (2023) well-validated three-item scale, demonstrating consistent reliability across cultural contexts. Items include "I frequently think about quitting this job," "I am actively searching for alternative employment," and "As soon as I find a better job, I will leave this organization." The scale achieved excellent reliability ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

Control variables included age, gender, education level, organizational tenure, and department, measured using standard demographic questions and included in analyses to account for potential confounding effects.

### 4.4. Data collection procedure

Data collection utilized a structured questionnaire developed through multi-stage processes. Items were adapted from established scales with careful attention to construct validity and cultural appropriateness, underwent translation and back-translation procedures by bilingual experts ensuring linguistic equivalence, and were refined through a pilot study with 45 hotel employees assessing item clarity, response patterns, and psychometric properties. Data collection occurred over six weeks (March–April 2024) using trained research assistants visiting each hotel multiple times for comprehensive coverage. Participants were approached during breaks or shift changes to minimize work disruption, with voluntary participation emphasized and written informed consent obtained. Questionnaires were self-administered, ensuring response privacy, with research assistants available for clarification without influencing responses. Completed questionnaires were immediately sealed in envelopes, ensuring confidentiality.

### 4.5. Common method bias assessment

Given the single-source, self-report data nature, several procedural and statistical remedies addressed potential common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Procedurally, we assured respondent anonymity, used clear item wording, varied response formats where possible, separated predictor and criterion variables in questionnaires, and emphasized no right or wrong answers. Statistically, we employed Harman's single-factor test and marker variable technique. Harman's test examined whether single factors emerged from exploratory factor analysis or one general factor accounted for the majority of the covariance. Results showed the largest factor explained 31.2% of variance, well below the 50% threshold, suggesting problematic common method bias. Additionally, we included a theoretically unrelated marker variable (preference for outdoor activities), finding negligible correlations with focal constructs, supporting the absence of significant method bias.

### 4.6. Analytical strategy

Data analysis employed a two-stage PLS-SEM approach using SmartPLS 4.0 software. PLS-SEM was selected following current methodological recommendations for exploratory theory development in emerging contexts (Hair et al., 2024), particularly appropriate for: (1) complex models requiring simultaneous relationship estimation, (2) relatively small sample sizes ( $n = 258$ ) where maximum likelihood estimation may lack stability, and (3) predictive-oriented research objectives maximizing explained variance in outcome variables (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Stage one involved a comprehensive measurement model assessment evaluating: (1) internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability; (2) convergent validity through factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE); and (3) discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. Stage two assessed the structural model examining: (1) path coefficients and significance; (2) effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) assessing practical significance; (3) coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) values for endogenous constructs; (4) predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) using blindfolding procedures; and (5) model fit using appropriate PLS-SEM indices. Mediation effects were tested using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, generating confidence intervals for indirect effects. This approach provides more robust estimates than traditional methods and is particularly appropriate for PLS-SEM contexts. Mediation was considered significant when confidence intervals for indirect effects excluded zero.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Sample characteristics and descriptive statistics

The final sample comprised 258 hotel employees, representing a 64.5% effective response rate from the original 400 distributed questionnaires. The demographic profile of respondents is presented in Table 1. The sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender, with 52.3% female participants. Age distribution showed concentration in younger age groups, with 31.4% aged 18–25 years and 43.8% aged 26–35 years, reflecting the demographic profile typical of Indonesia's hospitality workforce. Educational attainment varied considerably, with high school graduates representing the largest group (41.5%), followed by diploma holders (35.7%) and bachelor's degree holders (20.9%). Organizational tenure averaged 3.2 years ( $SD = 2.8$ ), indicating moderate employee retention in the sample. Departmental representation

achieved the intended stratification goals: front office (28.3%), housekeeping (26.7%), food & beverage (25.2%), and back office (19.8%). This distribution ensures that findings reflect experiences across different functional areas within hotel operations.

**Table 1:** Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	123	47.7%
	Female	135	52.3%
Age	18-25 years	81	31.4%
	26-35 years	113	43.8%
	36-45 years	48	18.6%
	>45 years	16	6.2%
Education	High School	107	41.5%
	Diploma	92	35.7%
	Bachelor	54	20.9%
	Postgraduate	5	1.9%
Department	Front Office	73	28.3%
	Housekeeping	69	26.7%
	F&B	65	25.2%
	Back Office	51	19.8%
Tenure	Mean = 3.2 years, SD = 2.8		

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are shown in Table 2. Mean scores revealed moderate levels across all constructs, with DCW showing the lowest mean ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ), suggesting that severe colleague difficulties were not universally prevalent. IC demonstrated the highest mean ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ), indicating generally positive self-assessments of personality traits. NEA ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) and TI ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) showed moderate levels, consistent with expected patterns in functioning organizations.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. DCW	3.42	1.18	(0.88)			
2. IC	5.23	0.89	-0.23**	(0.92)		
3. NEA	3.78	1.34	0.34**	-0.41**	(0.91)	
4. TI	3.96	1.47	0.52**	-0.38**	0.47**	(0.89)

\*Note: Values in parentheses represent Cronbach's alpha coefficients. \* $p < .01$ .

## 5.2. Measurement model assessment

Following the two-stage approach in PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling), we first evaluated the measurement model's reliability and validity before proceeding to structural model assessment. All constructs demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.84 to 0.92, well above the recommended threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.89 to 0.94, exceeding the 0.70 benchmark and indicating strong internal consistency. These results provide confidence in the reliability of our measurements. Convergent validity (how well items measure the same concept) was assessed through factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All item loadings exceeded 0.70, ranging from 0.743 to 0.918, demonstrating that indicators reliably measure their intended constructs. AVE values for all constructs surpassed the 0.50 threshold: DCW (0.773), IC (0.836), NEA (0.834), and TI (0.804). These results confirm that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators, supporting convergent validity. The detailed measurement model results, including factor loadings, reliability coefficients, and AVE values, are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Measurement Model Results

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
DCW	6	0.743-0.891	0.876	0.893	0.773
IC	8	0.798-0.918	0.924	0.941	0.836
NEA	7	0.756-0.902	0.918	0.935	0.834
TI	3	0.867-0.923	0.887	0.929	0.804

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Discriminant validity (how well constructs are distinct from each other) was established using multiple criteria. First, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was satisfied, with the square root of each construct's AVE exceeding its correlations with other constructs. Second, all HTMT ratios remained below 0.85, confirming that constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another. The discriminant validity assessment results are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Discriminant Validity Assessment

Variable	DCW	IC	NEA	TI
Fornell-Larcker Criterion				
DCW	0.879			
IC	-0.234	0.914		
NEA	0.342	-0.412	0.913	
TI	0.521	-0.381	0.473	0.897
HTMT Ratios				
DCW	—			
IC	0.264	—		
NEA	0.387	0.445	—	
TI	0.581	0.415	0.518	—

### 5.3. Structural model assessment

With measurement model validity established, we proceeded to evaluate the structural model and test our hypotheses. The structural model demonstrated acceptable fit according to PLS-SEM criteria. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR, a measure of model fit) was 0.068, below the 0.08 threshold for good fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) reached 0.892, approaching the 0.90 benchmark for acceptable fit. These indices suggest that our model adequately represents the underlying data structure. The model explained substantial variance in both endogenous constructs: 52.7% in NEA and 48.3% in TI. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, these represent large effect sizes, indicating strong explanatory power. Stone-Geisser  $Q^2$  values confirmed adequate predictive relevance: NEA ( $Q^2 = 0.431$ ) and TI ( $Q^2 = 0.385$ ). The results of hypothesis testing for direct effects are presented in Table 5. Path coefficients (strength of relationships between variables) were assessed using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to generate t-statistics and confidence intervals.

**Table 5: Direct Effects Results**

Code	Path	B	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	f <sup>2</sup>	Decision
H1	DCW → NEA	0.053	0.423	0.125	0.900	[-0.783, 0.889]	0.003	Not Supported
H2	IC → NEA	0.931**	0.414	2.251	0.024	[0.118, 1.744]	0.102	Supported
H3	DCW → TI	0.445***	0.123	3.630	0.000	[0.206, 0.684]	0.183	Supported
H4	IC → TI	-0.287*	0.144	1.992	0.046	[-0.569, -0.005]	0.076	Supported
H5	NEA → TI	0.399***	0.088	4.539	0.000	[0.227, 0.571]	0.147	Supported

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

The results reveal mixed support for our hypotheses, with some findings challenging conventional expectations. Most surprisingly, H1 was not supported - difficult co-workers showed no significant relationship with negative encounter attitudes ( $\beta = 0.053$ ,  $p = 0.900$ ), suggesting they do not directly translate into negative workplace attitudes among Indonesian hotel employees. In contrast, H2 received strong support, with individual characteristics demonstrating substantial influence on encounter attitudes ( $\beta = 0.931$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that personality traits play a crucial role in determining how employees perceive workplace interactions. Direct effects on turnover intention present an intriguing dual-pathway pattern. H3 was supported, showing that despite not affecting attitudes, difficult colleagues directly motivate departure intentions ( $\beta = 0.445$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) through what we term instrumental mechanisms. Conversely, H4 also received support, with certain individual characteristics serving as protective factors ( $\beta = -0.287$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, H5 was strongly supported, confirming that negative encounter attitudes represent a key psychological mechanism linking individual differences to behavioral intentions ( $\beta = 0.399$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) provide insight into practical significance. Following Cohen's (1988) guidelines (0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large), most significant relationships demonstrated medium to large effect sizes, confirming the practical importance of these findings beyond statistical significance.

### 5.4. Mediation analysis

Mediation effects (indirect influences through intermediate variables) were tested using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The results for indirect effects are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Mediation Analysis Results**

Code	Indirect Path	$\beta$	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Decision
H6	DCW → NEA → TI	0.021	0.173	0.122	0.903	[-0.325, 0.367]	Not Supported
H7	IC → NEA → TI	0.371*	0.151	2.465	0.014	[0.075, 0.667]	Supported

p < 0.05 (statistically significant at 95% confidence level)

The mediation analysis reveals a striking asymmetry in how different workplace stressors operate. H6 was not supported - the indirect effect of DCW on TI through NEA proved nonsignificant ( $\beta = 0.021$ ,  $p = 0.903$ ), with confidence intervals spanning zero [-0.325, 0.367] (indicating no statistical significance). This absence of mediation aligns with our earlier finding that DCWs do not significantly influence NEA, reinforcing that difficult colleagues operate through direct, instrumental pathways rather than attitudinal mechanisms. H7 demonstrates a contrasting pattern. IC showed a significant indirect effect on TI through NEA ( $\beta = 0.371$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with confidence intervals clearly excluding zero [0.075, 0.667] (indicating statistical significance). This mediation pattern reveals that personality traits influence turnover intentions partially through their effects on how employees perceive and internalize workplace interactions, highlighting the cognitive-affective pathway through which individual differences translate into behavioral outcomes.

### 5.5. Control variable effects

Control variables (demographic and organizational factors) were included in all analyses to account for potential confounding effects. Age showed a significant negative relationship with TI ( $\beta = -0.167$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), consistent with research indicating that older employees are less likely to consider leaving their organizations. Organizational tenure also negatively predicted TI ( $\beta = -0.143$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that longer-tenured employees develop stronger organizational attachment. Gender, education level, and department showed no significant effects on any endogenous variables (all  $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that the relationships of interest are not substantially influenced by these demographic characteristics. This enhances confidence in the generalizability of our findings across different employee profiles within the hospitality context.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Key findings and theoretical implications

Our findings reveal a dual-pathway model that fundamentally challenges Social Exchange Theory's assumption that interpersonal difficulties uniformly translate into negative attitudes. Rather than operating through uniform attitudinal mechanisms, workplace stressors follow distinct routes: difficult co-workers operate through instrumental cost-benefit calculations while individual characteristics work through



cognitive-affective processing. This theoretical refinement explains why previous research on difficult colleagues yielded inconsistent results and suggests that person-centered factors may be more predictive of workplace attitudes than previously recognized.

These findings align with emerging 2025 research showing that personality-leadership interactions create differential workplace outcomes, with Dark Triad characteristics under certain leadership styles increasing withdrawal behaviors and turnover risks in organizational contexts (Ma et al., 2025). The protective effects of certain individual characteristics observed in our study support recent evidence that managers' personality traits, particularly light-triad characteristics, can enhance employee job embeddedness and reduce turnover intention in hospitality settings (Özkan et al., 2025).

The asymmetric mediation pattern—where negative encounter attitudes mediate individual characteristics but not difficult co-worker effects—represents a novel contribution to turnover theory. This suggests that attitude formation processes are primarily driven by internal psychological factors rather than external interpersonal events, at least in collectivist cultural contexts where harmony values may buffer against peer-level stressors.

These findings have significant implications for service industries beyond hospitality. The dual-pathway model suggests that employee retention strategies should be differentiated: addressing instrumental concerns (workplace efficiency, task interference) for difficult colleague situations while focusing on person-environment fit for attitude-related turnover risks.

The Indonesian cultural context provides crucial insight into how collectivist values may enable psychological compartmentalization, allowing employees to separate peer difficulties from broader workplace attitudes. Professional emotional labor training in hospitality may further enhance this compartmentalization ability, explaining the surprising resilience to difficult colleague behaviors in attitude formation.

## 6.2. Economic implications and cost-benefit analysis

Our findings suggest that organizations may benefit from differentiated intervention strategies rather than uniform approaches to retention. Given that labor costs represent 29-35% of total hotel revenue (Mandelbaum, 2016) and account for 50-60% of total operating costs (The Reputation Lab, 2025), targeted interventions based on our dual-pathway model could potentially improve retention efficiency through two distinct mechanisms: addressing difficult colleague behaviors for immediate instrumental benefits, while personality-based recruitment provides longer-term value through attitude prevention. To illustrate the potential economic implications, we provide hypothetical cost calculations based on Indonesian hospitality industry data. According to BPS (2024), the average annual compensation for accommodation sector workers reached IDR 72.84 million per worker in 2023. Market data show hotel employee salaries vary by position: receptionists earn approximately IDR 3.5-5.0 million monthly (JobStreet, 2025a), front desk staff average IDR 4.24 million monthly (Indeed, 2025), and Front Office Managers earn IDR 5.5-8.0 million monthly (JobStreet, 2025b).

Indonesian human resource studies indicate that direct turnover costs typically range from 50-60% of annual salary, with total costs reaching 90-200% of annual salary per departure (Mekari Talenta, 2020; SHRM, 2017). Using these industry benchmarks, a hypothetical three-star hotel with 50 employees experiencing 75% annual turnover (Park & Min, 2020) would face substantial replacement costs ranging from IDR 2.46-5.46 billion annually. While our cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal predictions, the dual-pathway model suggests differentiated interventions could offer economic value. The strong IC→NEA→TI mediation relationship ( $\beta = 0.371$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that personality-based recruitment may help reduce attitude-driven turnover, though the magnitude of such reductions requires empirical validation through longitudinal studies or pilot implementations. Similarly, direct interventions addressing workflow inefficiencies could potentially mitigate the instrumental pathway effects, though specific cost savings would depend on organizational context and implementation effectiveness. These theoretical calculations demonstrate the potential economic significance of understanding dual-pathway mechanisms in retention management. Organizations implementing evidence-based, differentiated strategies may achieve competitive advantages through more efficient human resource allocation, particularly relevant as Indonesia's tourism sector continues expanding. However, actual cost benefits will depend on the successful translation of research insights into effective organizational interventions.

## 6.3. Cultural and cross-cultural considerations

Recent cross-cultural research confirms that personality-environment interactions vary significantly across cultural contexts, with Dark Triad traits and achievement orientations showing different behavioral outcomes depending on leadership styles and organizational psychological safety levels (Yi & Zhang, 2025). This supports our findings that Indonesian cultural values may create unique patterns of personality-workplace relationship dynamics. Cultural analysis reveals that collectivist values create unique psychological processing patterns not captured in Western-derived theories. The psychological compartmentalization demonstrated by Indonesian employees suggests remarkable resilience to peer-level interpersonal stress while remaining sensitive to individual-environment misfit. This cultural capacity represents both theoretical opportunity and practical advantage for organizations able to leverage it. However, application to individualistic cultural contexts requires empirical validation, as direct conflict resolution approaches may be more effective where authentic self-expression is culturally valued over harmony maintenance. For multinational hospitality organizations, standardized global HR practices may be culturally inappropriate and economically inefficient. Retention strategies effective in individualistic cultures may be ineffective in collectivistic contexts, prioritizing harmony maintenance over authentic expression.

## 6.4. Limitations and future research

Cross-sectional design limits causal inference, though the theoretical foundation and cultural context provide strong support for the proposed causal mechanisms. The single-city focus restricts generalizability across Indonesia's diverse cultural regions, necessitating validation across different collectivist contexts. Future research should examine whether the psychological compartmentalization demonstrated here represents stable cultural traits or dynamic adaptation processes. Longitudinal designs tracking employees across multiple years could illuminate how these cultural psychological mechanisms evolve. Additionally, cross-cultural validation across individualistic versus collectivistic contexts would establish theoretical boundaries for the dual-pathway model.

The cross-sectional nature prevents examination of how these relationships develop over time, particularly whether the compartmentalization ability strengthens or weakens with tenure. Future studies should also investigate whether different personality profiles moderate the effectiveness of various intervention strategies, enabling more precise person-intervention matching.

## 7. Conclusion

This exploratory study provides preliminary evidence that personality-based factors and interpersonal workplace stressors may operate through different pathways in influencing turnover intention among Indonesian hotel employees. The findings suggest a dual-pathway pattern where difficult colleagues appear to influence departure intentions through direct, instrumental mechanisms, while individual characteristics work through attitude formation processes. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously, given the cross-sectional design and limited geographic scope.

The results add complexity to workplace relationship research by suggesting that not all workplace stressors operate through uniform attitudinal mechanisms. In this specific sample of Indonesian hotel employees, difficult co-worker behaviors did not significantly predict negative encounter attitudes, while individual characteristics showed stronger relationships with attitude formation. This pattern diverges from typical Social Exchange Theory predictions and challenges Affective Events Theory assumptions about how negative workplace events translate into persistent attitudes, though the mechanisms underlying this apparent difference require longitudinal investigation to establish causality.

For hospitality practitioners in similar contexts, these preliminary findings suggest potential value in considering personality factors during recruitment processes. However, organizations should be cautious about implementing major changes to HR practices based on a single study. The correlational nature of these findings means that the effectiveness of personality-based recruitment versus traditional conflict resolution approaches remains empirically unvalidated.

The application of Social Exchange Theory, Affective Events Theory, and Cultural Context Theory to this specific organizational setting provides initial insights for understanding workplace dynamics in Indonesian hospitality contexts. However, significant limitations constrain the generalizability of these findings. The single-city, single-industry design means that extensions to other cultural contexts, industries, or even other regions within Indonesia require empirical validation. Claims about cultural mechanisms remain speculative without comparative cultural data or longitudinal evidence.

Future research should prioritize replication across diverse cultural and industry contexts before drawing broader conclusions about Social Exchange Theory applications in collectivist settings. Longitudinal studies are particularly needed to establish whether the observed patterns reflect stable processes or temporary situational factors. Cross-cultural comparative studies could help determine whether the apparent divergence from Affective Events Theory predictions represents genuine cultural differences or methodological artifacts. Additionally, intervention studies would be necessary to validate practical recommendations about recruitment practices.

These preliminary findings suggest that workplace relationship dynamics may vary across cultural contexts in ways that challenge universal applications of established theoretical frameworks developed primarily in Western contexts. However, the transition from current practices to alternative approaches should be evidence-based and implemented cautiously. Understanding potential cultural variations in how Social Exchange Theory and Affective Events Theory operate represents an important research direction, though practical applications should await more robust empirical validation across diverse organizational and cultural settings.

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