

# **Navigating Pandemic with ‘Flow’: How Creativity and Psychological Empowerment Cultivate Happiness at Work amidst COVID Crisis?**

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### *Extended Abstract*

**Purpose:** Most adults spend a significant amount of time working, and therefore how they feel about their work can have a significant impact on their life and happiness. Drawing on the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), the present study aims to examine the association between the level of flow at work of the employees and their workplace happiness whilst investigating the serial mediating mechanisms of creativity and psychological empowerment in the aforementioned relationship.

**Methodology:** The participants in the present study were individuals of Indian nationality working in various service industries namely information technology, hotel, and retail. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select an initial sample of 514 respondents which culminated in an effective sample of  $N = 433$  after the data cleaning process. The sample characteristics included gender (59% men), age (range = 24 - 56 year, mean = 32.7 year), education (graduate 58%, postgraduate 39%, and PhD 3%), level of management (junior 62%, middle 32% and senior 6%), work experience (average = 12.5 years), and inclusion criteria (service sector). The data were collected using standardized questionnaires on an online platform i.e., Google Form, keeping in mind the pandemic times' constraints. The nature and purpose of the study were explained to the participants whilst seeking their voluntary participation. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' responses were ensured by the authors.

In order to obtain the participants' responses, the following instruments were administered:

*Work-Related Flow Inventory* (Bakker, 2008): This instrument measures an individual's level of flow at work by using 13 items. The scale consists of three

dimensions namely absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation. A sample item is “I work because I enjoy it.” The participants provide their responses on a five-point Likert scale with response categories ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

*Happiness at work scale* (Salas-Vallina, & Alegre, 2021): The scale measures the employees’ level of workplace happiness through 9 items evenly distributed under three dimensions (engagement, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment). A sample item is “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”

*Employee Creativity scale*: We measured employees’ creativity by using 13 items scale developed by (Zhou & George, 2001). Sample items include “Suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives” and “Comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance.”

*Psychological empowerment scale* (Spreitzer, 1995): To assess the participants’ perceptions regarding empowerment, we used the scale developed by Spreitzer. The scale comprises twelve items such as " The work I do is important to me".

***Statistical Analysis and Major Results:*** Non-parametric bootstrapping analyses were deployed to test the mediational model of creativity and psychological empowerment as the serial mediators in the relationship between flow and happiness at work. All involved variables in the analyses were standardized (z scores) before running the analyses, hence standardized coefficients are reported for the total, direct and indirect effects. Analysis was performed by using the PROCESS function V.3. in SPSS V.24. The model 6 (model as a parameter in the PROCESS function) was used for the serial mediation model.

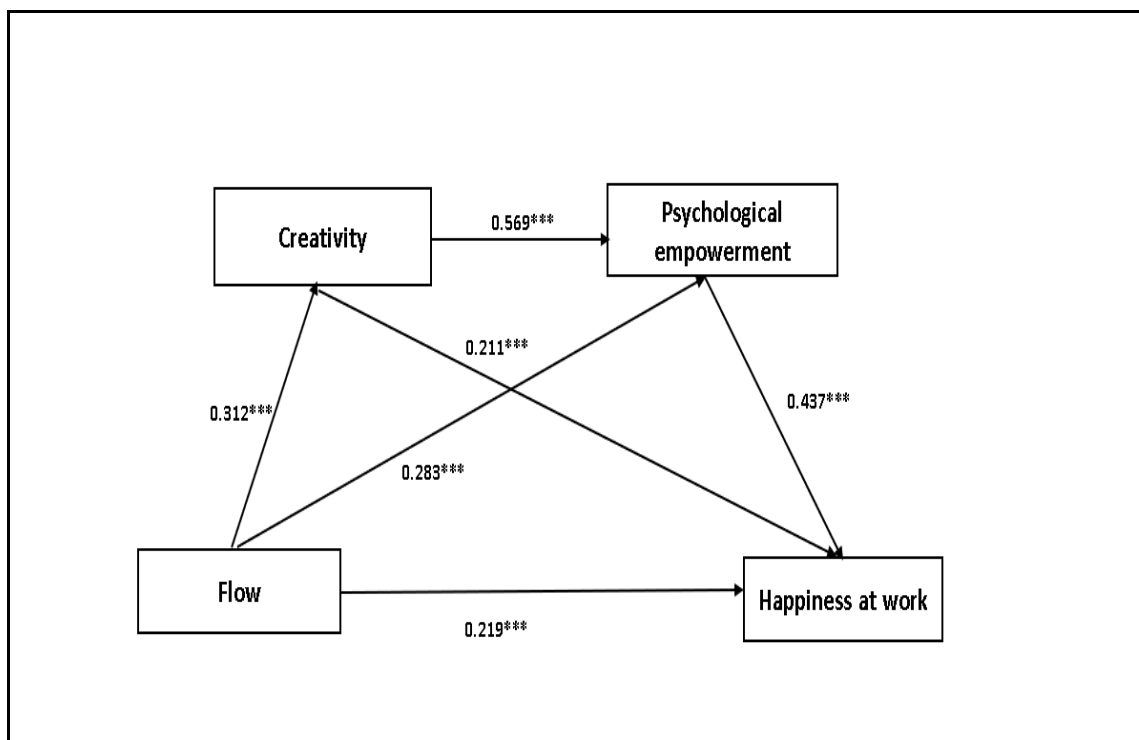
In order to address the concern of common method variance, common latent factor method (Podsakoff et al., 2003) was used. It was found that the common latent factor had a measurement factor loading of .49 meaning that only 24.09% of variance among measures was accounted for by the common factor. This value is below the threshold of 50% thus indicating the data to be free from possible biases of social desirability or shared variance among measured variables.

To examine the convergent and discriminant validity of all the four constructs (i.e., flow at work, creativity, psychological empowerment, and happiness at work), and to ensure model fit, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed by considering all the variables in the model. Absolute and relative indices were taken as the parameters to make a judgment about the goodness-of-fit of the CFA models (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). The result of the individual confirmatory factor analyses showed a good model fit for all the constructs. Following this, a measurement model was subjected to the confirmatory analysis. The results of the measurement model CFA ( $\chi^2 = 917.54$ ,  $\chi^2 / df = 2.11$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , GFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04) produced satisfactory model fit for the empirical data.

The convergent and discriminant validity were computed to ensure that the constructs measured in the empirical model were valid (Hair et al., 2017). The criteria such as standardized estimates, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) with their permissible cut-off values, respectively, were taken in to consideration for drawing conclusions about the convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). The CR values exceeded 0.70 and the AVE values were greater than 0.50, thus the convergent validity was satisfactorily established in the study. The discriminate validity in the current study was computed by means of the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). A value below 0.85 indicates the presence of

discriminant validity (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). The HTMT ratio values reveal that the discriminant validity is established for the constructs under investigation.

Serial mediation hypothesises a causal chain linking of the mediators (creativity and psychological empowerment), with a specified direction. All the direct paths yielded significant results (Figure 1). The results show that the two mediators in a serial causal order mediate the relationship between flow and happiness (Indirect effect = 0.394, 95% CI: LL=0.59 to UL=0.98).



**Figure 1:** Path analysis of flow, creativity, psychological empowerment, and happiness at work among Indian service sector employees (N = 433). Parameters displayed are standardized estimates of the direct effect on each pathway. \*\*\*p < 0.001

**Discussion and Implications:** This study is the first to explore the relationships among flow, creativity, psychological empowerment, and happiness at work among the employees. We found a serial multiple mediation effect of creativity and psychological empowerment on the pathway from flow to happiness. Creativity first played a partial mediating role in the association between flow and psychological empowerment, then

psychological empowerment also partially mediated the pathway from creativity to happiness.

The study uses broaden and build theory of positive emotions framework in the context of a global humanitarian crisis. The resource-oriented approach underscores the importance of positive attributes and personal strengths of flow, creativity, and psychological empowerment in an upward spiral fashion to deal with the adversity of the pandemic. The study elucidates the theoretical underpinnings of cognitive and emotional elements of human behavior in successfully navigating through, staying resilient, and maintaining optimal functioning and well-being in the face of unprecedented challenges posed by the threatening calamity.

The findings showed that the employees who experienced more flow at work demonstrated a higher level of happiness at the work. The PROCESS macro analysis revealed that the creativity and psychological empowerment acted as significant serial mediators in this relationship. The study highlights the importance of flow, creativity, and empowerment in ensuring happiness of the employees at their workplace. Thus, a careful consideration and understanding of the various factors contributing to the happiness at work in the unprecedented context of the 'new-normal', rooted in the positive organizational scholarship, is the main theoretical contribution of this work. Further, it is suggested that the service organizations should implement and promote employee creativity and employee empowering organizational activities to cultivate happiness at the workplace. The present study provides important insights for the organizational leaders and the human resource managers in the service industry who seek to foster empowered, engaged, and happy employees. In sum, it is recommended that the interventions for flow, creativity, and psychological empowerment should be

strengthened to enhance happiness at work, particularly, in the times of a crisis like the ongoing pandemic.

*Keywords:* Happiness, Flow, creativity, Empowerment, Indian employees

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