

The Mediating Role of Daydreaming in the Relationship between Work Pressure and Employee Innovative Performance and Task Performance

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Abstract: Organizations are increasingly operating in environments characterized by demanding workloads, rapid technological developments, and constant organizational change. These conditions often expose employees to varying levels of work pressure, which can influence both their psychological functioning and workplace performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Although excessive work pressure is generally associated with stress and reduced effectiveness, contemporary organizational research suggests that employees' cognitive responses may alter these outcomes (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005). One cognitive process that has attracted growing scholarly attention is daydreaming, particularly its constructive form, which may support creativity, emotional recovery, and problem-solving (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015).

This study investigates whether daydreaming functions as a mediating mechanism between work pressure and two important dimensions of employee performance: innovative performance and task performance. Drawing upon the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Cognitive Resource Theory (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987), the study proposes that work pressure influences employees' tendency to engage in constructive daydreaming, which subsequently affects their ability to generate innovative ideas while maintaining routine job performance. A quantitative research approach is proposed, and the hypothesized relationships will be examined using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings are expected to contribute to organizational behavior literature by providing a deeper understanding of the psychological processes through which work pressure influences employee outcomes and by offering practical recommendations for managing workplace demands while encouraging innovation and employee well-being.

Keywords: Work Pressure, Constructive Daydreaming, Innovative Performance, Task Performance, Mediation, Organizational Behavior, Structural Equation Modeling.

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizations today operate in a rapidly changing business environment characterized by globalization, digital transformation, technological advancements, and increasing market competition. These developments have significantly increased employees' work responsibilities and organizational expectations, resulting in higher levels of work pressure across various industries (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Employees are frequently required to manage heavy workloads, meet strict deadlines, adapt to continuous organizational changes, and maintain high levels of productivity. Although an appropriate level of work pressure may motivate employees to perform effectively, excessive work pressure can negatively influence psychological well-being, decision-making, creativity, and overall job performance (LePine et al., 2005).

Employee performance is generally evaluated through two important dimensions: **task performance** and **innovative performance**. Task performance reflects an employee's effectiveness in carrying out assigned job responsibilities (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993), whereas innovative performance refers to the generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas that enhance organizational effectiveness (Janssen, 2000). In today's competitive business environment, organizations increasingly recognize that innovation and effective task execution are essential for achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

Recent studies have emphasized that employees' cognitive responses play an important role in determining how work pressure influences performance outcomes. One such cognitive process is **daydreaming**, which has traditionally been considered a form of mental distraction. However, contemporary research suggests that constructive daydreaming can facilitate creativity, future-oriented thinking, emotional regulation, and problem-solving (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015; Baird et al., 2011). Constructive daydreaming enables employees to mentally explore alternative solutions, recover from cognitive fatigue, and develop innovative ideas while coping with demanding work situations.

Although previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between work pressure and employee performance, limited empirical research has investigated the mediating role of daydreaming in explaining this relationship. Most existing studies have focused primarily on the direct effects of work pressure, leaving a gap in understanding the psychological mechanisms through which work pressure influences both innovative performance and task performance.

The present research aims to examine the mediating role of constructive daydreaming in the relationship between work pressure, employee innovative performance, and task performance. The study is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Cognitive Resource Theory (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987). A quantitative research approach employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is proposed to test the hypothesized relationships.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it extends the organizational behavior literature by introducing constructive daydreaming as a psychological mechanism linking work pressure with employee performance. Second, it integrates cognitive and organizational theories to provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee behavior under workplace pressure. Finally, the findings are expected to offer practical implications for managers and organizations in designing supportive work environments that effectively manage work pressure while promoting employee creativity, innovation, and overall performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Work Pressure

Work pressure refers to an employee's perception that job demands require greater effort than the available time, resources, or personal capabilities can comfortably accommodate (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). It commonly arises from heavy workloads, demanding deadlines, role ambiguity, and increased organizational expectations. Research indicates that the effects of work pressure depend largely on its intensity and employees' coping resources. Moderate levels of pressure may stimulate motivation, learning, and engagement, whereas excessive pressure is more likely to result in stress, emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and lower work effectiveness (LePine et al., 2005). Consequently, work pressure has become an important construct for understanding employee behavior and organizational performance.

B. Daydreaming

Daydreaming is an internally generated cognitive activity in which individuals temporarily shift their attention from external events toward personal thoughts, mental images, memories, or imagined future situations (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015). Modern psychological research differentiates constructive daydreaming from maladaptive daydreaming. Constructive daydreaming is associated with creative thinking, future planning, emotional recovery, and the generation of novel solutions (Baird et al., 2011), whereas maladaptive daydreaming may interfere with concentration and productivity (Somer, 2002). Within organizational settings, constructive daydreaming may help employees process workplace challenges, explore alternative strategies, and enhance creative performance.

C. Employee Innovative Performance

Employee innovative performance represents an individual's capability to create, promote, and implement useful ideas that improve organizational products, services, procedures, or work practices (Janssen, 2000). Innovation extends beyond idea generation and includes the successful application of creative solutions to workplace challenges. Employees who

consistently demonstrate innovative performance contribute to organizational adaptability, competitive advantage, and continuous improvement (Amabile, 1996). Organizations therefore increasingly recognize innovation as a critical determinant of long-term success.

D. Task Performance

Task performance refers to the degree to which employees effectively perform activities formally required within their job roles (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). It includes the quality, accuracy, efficiency, consistency, and timeliness with which assigned duties are completed. High task performance reflects an employee's ability to achieve organizational objectives while complying with established performance standards (Campbell, 1990). Since task performance directly influences organizational productivity, it remains one of the primary indicators used to evaluate employee effectiveness across industries.

E. Mediating Role of Daydreaming

Daydreaming has increasingly been recognized as a constructive cognitive process that enables individuals to cope with demanding work situations by facilitating reflection, emotional regulation, and creative thinking. Rather than being viewed solely as a distraction, constructive daydreaming allows employees to mentally disengage from immediate job demands and explore alternative perspectives, future possibilities, and potential solutions to workplace challenges (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015). This temporary shift in attention may help restore cognitive resources, reduce psychological strain, and improve employees' ability to manage work-related stress.

Within organizational settings, employees experiencing work pressure may engage in constructive daydreaming as an adaptive coping strategy. Such internal cognitive processing encourages idea generation, problem-solving, and mental simulation of possible actions, which can enhance innovative behavior while supporting effective completion of routine work tasks (Baird, Smallwood, & Schooler, 2011). Accordingly, daydreaming may act as an intervening psychological mechanism through which work pressure influences employee outcomes.

Based on this perspective, the present study proposes that constructive daydreaming mediates the relationship between work pressure and both employee innovative performance and task performance. By explaining the underlying cognitive process linking workplace demands with performance outcomes, this mediating mechanism contributes to a deeper understanding of employee behavior and extends existing organizational behavior literature.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Previous research has extensively examined the direct relationship between work pressure and employee performance, with findings indicating both positive and negative effects depending on the nature and intensity of workplace demands (LePine et al., 2005). Similarly, studies have demonstrated that daydreaming contributes to creativity, emotional regulation, and future-oriented thinking (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015; Baird et al., 2011). However, limited empirical research has integrated these constructs within a single conceptual framework.

Most existing studies have focused either on the effects of work pressure on performance or on the cognitive functions of daydreaming independently. Very few studies have investigated whether constructive daydreaming explains the mechanism through which work pressure influences employee innovative performance and task performance. Furthermore, research examining this mediating relationship within organizational settings remains scarce, particularly in the Indian context. Addressing this gap will contribute to organizational behavior literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the cognitive processes linking workplace demands with employee performance outcomes.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

The study is designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the influence of work pressure on employee innovative performance.
2. To investigate the effect of work pressure on employee task performance.
3. To determine the relationship between work pressure and constructive daydreaming.
4. To examine the influence of constructive daydreaming on employee innovative performance.

5. To evaluate the influence of constructive daydreaming on employee task performance.
6. To examine the mediating role of constructive daydreaming in the relationship between work pressure and employee innovative performance.
7. To examine the mediating role of constructive daydreaming in the relationship between work pressure and employee task performance.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Independent Variable

- Work Pressure

Mediating Variable

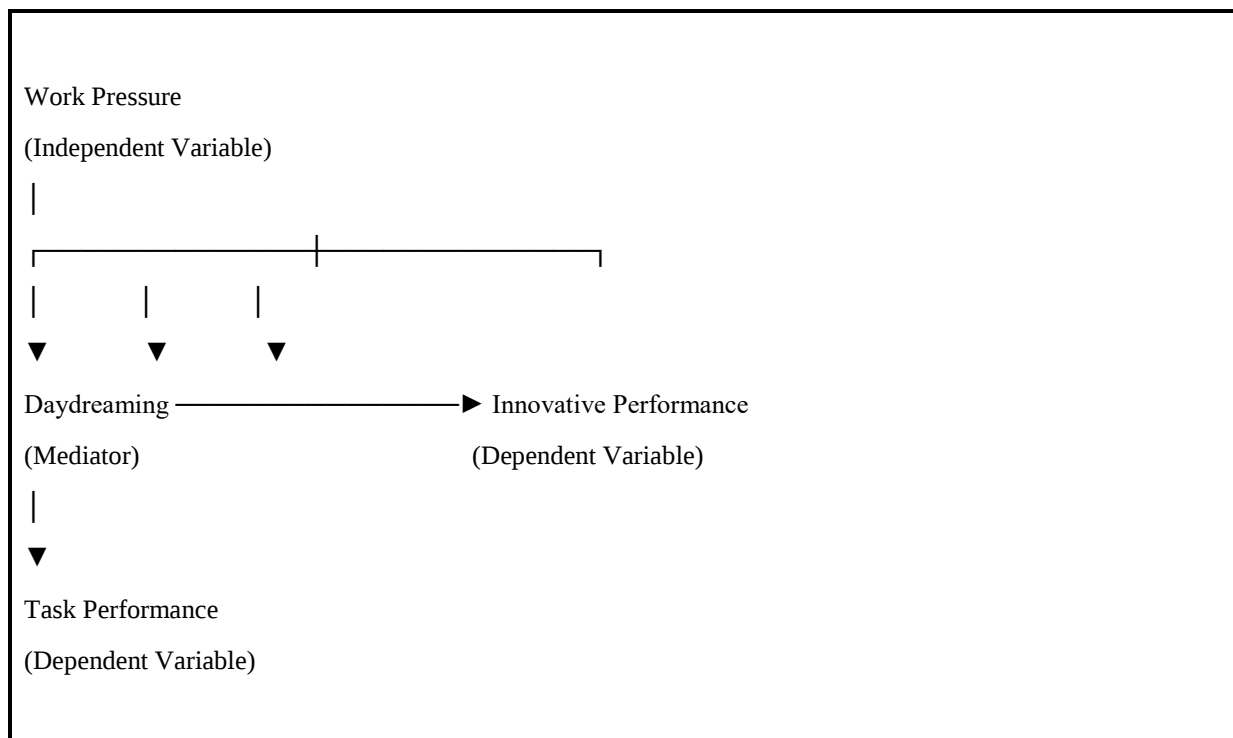
- Daydreaming

Dependent Variables

- Employee Innovative Performance
- Task Performance

The proposed conceptual framework is based on the assumption that work pressure influences employee performance both directly and indirectly through constructive daydreaming. Work pressure serves as the independent variable, while employee innovative performance and task performance represent the dependent variables. Constructive daydreaming is proposed as the mediating variable that explains the psychological process through which workplace demands affect performance outcomes.

The framework is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory and Cognitive Resource Theory. The JD-R Theory suggests that job demands influence employee well-being and performance depending on the availability of personal and organizational resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Cognitive Resource Theory further proposes that employees' cognitive abilities and psychological resources determine their effectiveness in responding to demanding work situations (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987). Constructive daydreaming is expected to enhance emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and creative problem-solving, thereby reducing the negative consequences of work pressure while improving innovative performance and supporting effective task completion.



Direct Effects:

Work Pressure —————▶ Innovative Performance

Work Pressure —————▶ Task Performance

Indirect Effects (Mediation):

Work Pressure —▶ Daydreaming —▶ Innovative Performance

Work Pressure —▶ Daydreaming —▶ Task Performance

V. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: Work pressure significantly influences daydreaming.

H2: Work pressure significantly influences employee innovative performance.

H3: Work pressure significantly influences task performance.

H4: Daydreaming significantly influences employee innovative performance.

H5: Daydreaming significantly influences task performance.

H6: Daydreaming mediates the relationship between work pressure and employee innovative performance.

H7: Daydreaming mediates the relationship between work pressure and task performance.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire. Data will be collected from employees working in manufacturing and service organizations. A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to ensure adequate representation across industries.

The questionnaire will include validated measurement scales for work pressure, daydreaming, innovative performance, and task performance using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS will be employed to analyze measurement reliability, validity, and mediation effects. Reliability will be assessed through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, while validity will be evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), discriminant validity, and model fit indices.

VII. EXPECTED FINDINGS

The proposed study anticipates that work pressure will have both direct and indirect effects on employee performance through the mediating influence of constructive daydreaming. Moderate levels of work pressure are expected to encourage employees to engage in constructive cognitive processing, enabling them to develop creative ideas and innovative approaches to workplace problems (Baird et al., 2011). Conversely, excessive work pressure may exceed employees' coping capacity, resulting in reduced concentration and lower task performance (LePine et al., 2005).

The findings are also expected to demonstrate that constructive daydreaming functions as an important psychological mechanism that helps employees regulate emotions, mentally rehearse solutions, and maintain cognitive flexibility during demanding work situations (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015). Consequently, employees who engage in constructive daydreaming may exhibit higher innovative performance while sustaining satisfactory levels of routine task performance (Amabile, 1996; Janssen, 2000).

Overall, the study is expected to provide empirical evidence supporting the mediating role of daydreaming in explaining how work pressure influences employee outcomes. These findings may assist managers in designing work environments that balance performance expectations with employee well-being, thereby encouraging innovation without compromising productivity.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to organizational behavior literature by investigating the psychological mechanism through which work pressure affects employee performance. By incorporating daydreaming as a mediating variable, the study extends existing theories concerning workplace cognition and employee behavior. Understanding constructive daydreaming may enable organizations to develop supportive work environments that encourage creativity while maintaining high levels of task performance. The findings will provide practical recommendations for managers to design work environments that optimize employee well-being, innovation, and organizational effectiveness. Future research may further explore different forms of daydreaming, industry-specific differences, and longitudinal effects of workplace cognitive processes.

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