ISSN 2616-5902 Vol. 5, Issue 25: 189-196, DOI: 10.25236/AJBM.2023.052529

The Effect of Job Stress on the Innovative Performance of Employees with Different Academic Qualifications—Mediated by Job Withdrawal

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Abstract: *260 employees at the grassroots and management levels of enterprises in Hefei City were selected as research subjects to explore the relationship between work pressure and innovative performance, and the role of work withdrawal between the two through questionnaire surveys. The results show that (1) job stress significantly affects employees' innovative performance. Specifically, challenging job stress positively affects innovative performance, and hindering job stress negatively affects innovative performance; (2) job withdrawal plays a mediating role between job stress and innovative performance; (3) Challenging stress has a greater impact on innovation performance for highly educated employees, while hindering stress has a greater impact on innovation performance for less educated employees. (4) For highly educated employees, job withdrawal plays a stronger mediating role between job stress and innovative performance.*

Keywords: *Challenging Job Stress; Hindering Job Stress; Job Withdrawal; Innovative Performance*

1. Introduction

In today's society, innovation is a key factor in the survival and development of enterprises. With the rapid development of science and technology and the intensification of market competition, relying only on traditional methods and old business models can no longer meet the needs of enterprises. Whether it is today's fast-growing Internet companies or traditional manufacturing industry, all need to gain a competitive advantage through the continuous introduction of new technologies and new products. The innovation of the enterprise can not be separated from the innovation of employees, only employees can play their own creativity, and the innovative development of the enterprise can be guaranteed. Therefore, if enterprises want to obtain sustainable development, it is especially important to explore the factors affecting the innovation performance of employees and improve the innovation performance of employees.

Nowadays, work systems such as "996" and "007" are prevalent in some enterprises, and compared with the past, employees face greater work pressure and time encroachment, which has a certain degree of impact on employees' innovative activities. In the past, most scholars believed that work stress would have a negative impact on innovation performance, however, with the deepening of research, more and more scholars realize that there is a complex relationship between the two. Cavanaugh categorized work stress into challenging stress and hindering stress [1]. Even so, there is still no unified conclusion on the effects of challenge-hindering stress. For example, Ding Lin et al. showed that challenge-type stress was significantly and positively related to creativity [2], while Rodel and Judge's study showed that challenging stressors may elicit both positive and negative or neutral emotional responses [3]. Consequently, more research needs to be done to delve deeper into the relationship between job stress and innovative behavior. In this study, it is believed that the different effects of job stress may be due to some personal characteristics of employees, so when discussing the influence mechanism of job stress, the comparison of the relationship between the two under different employee characteristics is introduced to explore what kind of employees will have higher innovative performance under job stress. Meanwhile, in order to comprehensively recognize the logical relationship between job stress and employee innovation performance, this study focuses on the internal mechanism of challenge-hindering stress affecting innovation performance. Based on the psychological resources theory, the current study focuses on how some individuals' own characteristics regulate the relationship between job stress and employees' innovative performance, while few studies have explored this issue from the perspective of the mediating relationship. Based on this, this study explores the mediating mechanism between job stress and

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innovative performance, which is helpful for enriching related research. March et al. believe that job withdrawal is the extension and development of withdrawal behavior in the field of organizational management, which refers to the negative behavioral responses of employees in response to the imbalance between their own efforts and organizational rewards [4]. There is no unanimity among scholars on how job stress affects job withdrawal, and whether this variable mediates the relationship between job stress and innovation performance will also be the focus of this study.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Hypotheses

2.1 The Effect of Job Stress on Employee Innovation Performance

Research has shown that the innovative activities of employees are important factors in the survival and development of an organization, which needs to pay attention to the innovative performance of each employee if it wants to achieve long-term and stable development [5]. Job stress, which is considered an important workplace characteristic that affects employee performance, is a topic of wide interest to researchers and practitioners [6]. Cavanaugh et al. proposed challenging stress and hindering stress [1]. According to the job requirement-control model, job requirement is the source of employee stress and job control is the motivational support for employee development. Challenging pressure is manifested as a strong workload, heavy role responsibilities, etc., presenting high requirements and high control, which promotes and motivates employee performance; hindering pressure is manifested as role ambiguity, poor job stability, etc., presenting high requirements and low control, which negatively affects employee performance [7].

Contemporary companies value the creativity of their employees, and leaders will present high innovative expectations for their employees. In this high-demand and high-control situation, although employees will produce a sense of tension, the control conditions that the position has and the growth benefits of completing the task will form a strong intrinsic incentive, which is the antecedent condition to stimulate the innovative behavior of employees [8], and at the same time, the pressure of the leadership forms a kind of extrinsic stimulus. Under the motivation of internal and external factors, employees will produce an innovative willingness to produce innovative behavior, and when the task requires competencies that do not match their own, employees tend to spend more energy to improve their knowledge and skills, and play a higher level of creativity [9]. In the context of high demand and low control, job stress manifests itself in a negative way. According to the theory of resource conservation, people regard the mental and physical effort put into work as the consumption of resources, which generates a kind of psychological pressure, and if the corresponding consumption is not balanced by the gain, the pressure forms a kind of hindrance, and the employees will not put in innovative behaviors [10]. Obstructive stress causes employees to become emotionally depleted, diminishing motivation and creativity at work [11]. In addition, Montani et al. proposed an inverted U model of stress and performance, which showed that excessive workload negatively affects employees' innovative performance performance even when good control conditions are provided [12]. As a result, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H1: Job stress significantly affects innovative performance

H1a: Challenging job stress significantly and positively affects employee innovation performance;

H1b: Obstructive job stress significantly and negatively affects employee innovative performance.

2.2 The mediating role of work withdrawal

Job withdrawal is an employee's behavior of avoiding work due to dissatisfaction with job personnel. Previous scholars have utilized theories such as resource conservation and social exchange to demonstrate the principle of the role of challenge-impediment type pressure on job withdrawal [13][14]. The attitude of knowledge and skills needed in the work is regarded as a resource, a work task needs to be matched with an employee who has the appropriate qualifications, and the employee completes the task and receives the pay, bonus, or honor, the process is a resource exchange, and the minimum acceptance of the employee is an equivalence exchange. COR theory indicates that the employee will have psychological pressure when the resource is lost as well as the reward is not increased, if the reward and gain received are less than the employee's contribution, the pressure will form an insurmountable obstacle, employees will choose to leave, lazy, late and early retirement and other work withdrawal behavior, tend to resource conservation. Enterprises are also unable to achieve innovative performance

ISSN 2616-5902 Vol. 5, Issue 25: 189-196, DOI: 10.25236/AJBM.2023.052529

because employees do not provide the appropriate resources [15]. Yang Yazhong scholars also indicated that work withdrawal behavior weakens employees' self-efficacy, employees' motivation decreases, and thus individual performance further declines [15]. On the contrary, if the work can get more benefits, employees will tend to invest in resources, increase their work input [16], enhance creativity, and thus show good innovation performance. Thus, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H2: Job withdrawal mediates the relationship between job stress and innovative performance

H2a: Job withdrawal mediates the positive effect of challenging job stress on innovative performance;

H2b: Job withdrawal mediates the negative effect of hindering job stress on innovation performance.

2.3 The mediating role of work withdrawal

The relationship between job stress and employee innovation performance may be affected by different characteristics of employees. Academic structure is an important element of the enterprise's employee structure [17], and enterprises tend to take academic qualifications as the primary threshold for employees to join the company. Although academic qualifications are not equivalent to competence, high academic qualifications often represent higher insight and experience, and highly educated employees have stronger innovative thinking and higher innovation performance. Innovation is a necessary condition for the survival and development of today's enterprises, and leaders have higher innovation expectations for their employees and set up challenging work tasks. According to goal-setting theory, highly educated employees consider this kind of work as an opportunity to improve their abilities and prove themselves, and will accurately grasp the opportunities in the risks. At the same time, highly educated employees can improve the efficiency of information transfer within the organization and improve information communication channels [18]. Highly educated employees, with a degree of acceptance of new things and innovative thinking, is better than less educated employees, they can more accurately obtain, understand, and grasp valuable information to apply to the actual work, managers use the effective information provided by employees to improve the allocation of resources, seize the opportunity to promote the innovative development of enterprises [19]. Facing obstacle-type work pressure, managers hope that employees have better psychological adjustment ability, tend to take education as the first criterion, that highly educated employees have a stronger ability to adapt to the environment, which can be in a critical moment to turn the crisis into a safe [20], so in the face of the obstacle-type pressure, will not be excessively affected, to maintain the due work efficiency. In contrast, employees with poor psychological quality are easily affected by environmental factors and slacken off, thus presenting a lower level of performance.

For the definition of high education, scholars consider employees with bachelor's degrees and above to be highly educated employees [18], from which our study divides employees into two categories. Existing scholars' research on employees' education is rare, and the exploration of employees' characteristics focuses on gender, age, parents' educational background, etc. This study has theoretical value and practical significance in enriching the mechanism of influencing the innovation performance of employees with different education levels. Thus, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H3: The impact of work pressure on the innovative performance of employees with different academic degrees is different.

H3a: Challenging work pressure has a greater impact on the innovative performance of highly educated employees and a smaller impact on the innovative performance of low-educated employees;

H3b: Obstructive job stress has a greater impact on the innovative performance of low-educated employees and a smaller impact on the innovative performance of low-educated employees.

Job withdrawal is a kind of negative counterproductive behavior of employees at work, which indicates that "when the work accomplished by the employee is not equal to the due reward, the employee shows negative slacking behaviors such as not paying for the work and not complying with the work guidelines" [21]. Job stress affects employees' withdrawal behavior, specifically, challenging job stress reduces withdrawal; hindering job stress increases withdrawal. Highly educated employees present a positive attitude when facing challenging work tasks, and are often able to turn risks into opportunities, with less work withdrawal behavior compared to less educated employees. Similarly, highly educated employees are highly concerned about the development brought by their jobs, and they are more interested in the improvement of their skills and abilities than the salary and benefits of their jobs, and they are highly goal-oriented [20]. If the job brings more obstacle-type pressure and fails to meet the growth needs of highly educated employees, it will accelerate the occurrence of withdrawal behavior,

ISSN 2616-5902 Vol. 5, Issue 25: 189-196, DOI: 10.25236/AJBM.2023.052529

which is manifested in the phenomena of tardiness and early departure, leaving the job, and so on. Accordingly, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H4: Job withdrawal plays a mediating role in the relationship between job stress and innovation performance, with a stronger mediating effect on highly educated employees and a weaker mediating effect on low-educated employees.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Investigation process

In this study, a pre-survey questionnaire was first designed and visited 2 local businesses and distributed to about 30 people for completion. After recovering the questionnaire and finding that the reliability meets the requirements, the questionnaire was distributed online in the form of random distribution of the questionnaire in the circle of friends. Employees aged 20-60 years old were selected, a total of 291 questionnaires were distributed, and 260 valid questionnaires were recovered, with a valid recovery rate of 89.34% of the data. Among them, 118 are male, 142 are female, 142 are 35 years old and below, and 118 are above 35 years old. There are 120 people with a junior college degree or below and 140 people with an undergraduate or above.

3.2 Research tools

Challenging-Hindering Job Stress Scale:

This study used the Challenging and Impeding Stressors Scale developed by Cavanaugh et al. The scale has 10 items and is scored on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5, ranging from 1, "very much does not meet," to 5, "very much meets," with higher scores indicating that the dimension is more distinctly characterized. The higher the score, the more distinct the characteristics of the dimension. The first 6 questions of the scale are used to measure challenging job stress, and representative questions include "I am engaged in a large number of work projects or tasks", etc. The last 4 questions are used to measure hindering job stress, and representative questions include "I am unable to clearly understand what is expected of me in my job. Typical questions include "I cannot clearly understand what is expected of me at work. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the two dimensions of Challenging Work Stress and Impeding Work Stress were 0.897 and 0.822, respectively.

Job Withdrawal Scale:

For the assessment of job withdrawal, most of the domestic researchers have revised the job withdrawal scale developed by Lehman et al. according to our organizational situation. In this study, the revised scale was adopted by Yang Yazhong, who eliminated two items in the original scale that did not fit well with the Chinese cultural context and re-categorized some items, and the reliability of the scale was tested to be good. The altered scale consists of 10 items, including two dimensions: psychological withdrawal and behavioral withdrawal. Typical questions for psychological withdrawal are "Thinking about absence" and representative questions for behavioral withdrawal are "Leaving early without permission". In this study, we used a five-point scale from 1 to 5, ranging from 1, "never", to 5, "often", with higher scores representing more distinctive characteristics of the dimension. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the dimensions of psychological withdrawal and behavioral withdrawal were 0.826 and 0.901, respectively, and the total Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.921.

Innovation Performance Scale:

This study mainly used the Innovative Performance Scale developed by Janssen and Yperen, which consists of 10 items, with representative questions such as "I look for new work methods, skills and tools in my work". It is scored on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5, ranging from 1 "not at all" to 5 "very much", with higher scores representing more distinctive characteristics of the dimension. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.937.

3.3 Data processing

The reliability of the scales was tested using spss 26.0 software, and the data were analyzed using stata software for correlation and descriptive statistics, regression analysis, mediation analysis, and heterogeneity test.

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4. Description of results

4.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

The means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients between the variables are shown in Table 1. The results showed that challenging job stress was significantly positively correlated with innovative performance (r=0.594, p<0.001) and negatively correlated with job withdrawal (r=-0.144, p<0.001), while hindering job stress was significantly negatively correlated with innovative performance (r=-0.297, p<0.001) and positively correlated with job withdrawal (r=0.536, p< 0.001).

Table 1: Descriptive statistical results and correlation analysis of each study variable

	1	2	3	4
Challenging work pressures	—			
Obstructive work stress	-0.145***	—		
withdraw from work	-0.144***	0.536***	—	
Innovation performance	0.594***	-0.297***	-0.348***	—
M	3.420	2.807	1.937	3.545
SD	0.816	0.812	0.671	0.801

4.2 Regression analysis

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analysis of the effects of challenging and hindering stress on innovation performance. As shown in Table 2, after controlling for the regression effects of the demographic variables of gender, age, education, years of experience, and rank, employees' challenging stress had a positive effect on their innovative performance (β = 0.546, p<0.001), while employees' hindering stress had a negative effect on their innovative performance (β = -0.207, p<0.001). This verifies Hypothesis 1 of this study, which states that challenging job stress significantly and positively affects employees' innovative performance and hindering job stress significantly and negatively affects employees' innovative performance.

Table 2: The Effect of Job Stress on Employee Innovation Performance

variant		Coefficient	Standard error	t	Significance
(Constant)		2.230	0.254	8.75	0.000
Pressures	Challenging pressures	0.546	0.048	11.30	0.000
	Obstructive pressure	-0.207	0.048	-4.29	0.000
Genders	Male				
	Female	-0.053	0.081	-0.66	0.51
Age	35 years old and below				
	Over 35 years old	0.191	0.095	2.00	0.046
Educational experience	Junior college and below				
	Undergraduate and above	-0.106	0.091	-1.16	0.245
Years of experience	One year and less				
	1-5 years	-0.081	0.112	-0.72	0.473
	More than 5 years	-0.084	0.118	-0.71	0.479
(Job) Position	General staff				
	Managerial staff	-0.188	0.092	2.05	0.042
R2		0.4380			
Adjusted R2		0.4201			
F		24.46(P<0.001)			

4.3 Intermediary analysis

The mediating role of work withdrawal behavior was tested and the results are shown in Table 3. in the relationship of the influence of challenging stress on innovation performance, the mediating role of work behavior was not significant with an indirect effect value of -0.030 (p>0.05) and a 95% confidence

ISSN 2616-5902 Vol. 5, Issue 25: 189-196, DOI: 10.25236/AJBM.2023.052529

interval of (-0.011, 0.071). In the relationship of the influence of hindering stress on innovation performance, the mediating effect of job withdrawal behavior was significant, with an indirect effect value of -0.111 ($p<0.05$) and a 95% confidence interval of (-0.212,-0.009), and the mediating effect accounted for 40.07% of the total effect.

Table 3: The Mediating Role of Job Withdrawal Behavior

Independent variable	intermediary variable	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect	95% confidence interval	
					lower limit	limit
Challenging pressures	withdraw from work	0.573	0.543***	0.030	-0.011	0.071
Obstructive pressure	withdraw from work	-0.277	-0.166	-0.111*	-0.212	-0.009

4.4 Heterogeneity discussion

Table 4 shows the different effects of job stress on innovation performance for employees with low and high education. After controlling the variables of gender, age, years of working experience and grade, it can be found that for employees with different education levels, the positive impact of challenging pressure on innovation performance is very obvious, while the negative impact of hindering pressure on innovation performance is significantly different. Specifically, the negative impact of hindering pressure on innovation performance is very strong for employees with low education, but for employees with high education, this relationship is not statistically significant. And Table 5 lists the mediating effects of job withdrawal behaviors to different degrees between job stress and innovation performance for employees with different academic qualifications. From the table, it can be seen that for both challenging stress, job withdrawal behavior has no significant mediating effect, while for hindering stress, job withdrawal behavior plays a mediating role among the highly educated, but not significantly among the low educated.

Table 4: Heterogeneity analysis of regression

Dependent variable: employee innovation performance	poorly educated	highly educated
Challenging pressures	0.447***	0.672***
	0.077	0.062
Obstructive pressure	-0.328***	-0.086
	0.080	0.058
Gender (female)	0.013	-0.041
	0.143	0.094
Age (over 35 years)	0.207	0.177
	0.144	0.132
Years of experience (1-5 years)	-0.149	-0.080
	0.228	0.124
Years of experience (more than 5 years)	-0.198	0.089
	0.216	0.142
(job) position	0.286	0.046
	0.147	0.115

Table 5: Heterogeneity analysis of intermediation

Independent variable	Intermediary variable	Education (Junior college and below)				Education (Undergraduate and above)			
		Direct effect	Indirect effect	95% confidence interval		Direct effect	Indirect effect	95% confidence interval	
				lower limit	limit			lower limit	limit
Challenging pressures	withdraw from work	0.446***	0.034	-0.036	0.103	0.656***	0.034	-0.022	0.089
Obstructive pressure	withdraw from work	-0.091	-0.285	-0.234	0.053	-0.060	-0.147*	-0.270	-0.023

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5. Conclusions and discussion

This study focuses on analyzing the relationship between job stress and innovation performance using data obtained from a random sample of employees in Anhui Province enterprises, using the ordinary least squares method, ,. Specifically, the conclusions are as follows:

First, work pressure is significantly related to employees' innovative performance, challenging work pressure promotes employees' innovative performance, and hindering work pressure reduces employees' innovative performance. Positive pressure puts time pressure on employees also stimulates the need for growth and accordingly these tasks require employees to utilize innovative skills [22]. For negative stress this study concluded that the level of employee performance decreases. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of previous studies on challenge-hindering stressors by scholars [10][6]. In the contemporary competitive business environment, employees are faced with a variety of pressures, which are not all negative, and managers should be able to identify the hindering type of pressure and motivate them to complete their work on time and in quantity with a positive mindset.

Second, job withdrawal mediates the positive effect of challenging job stress on innovation performance, and the mediating role in the relationship between challenging job stress and innovation performance is not obvious. Job withdrawal stems from employees' feelings of dissatisfaction and disgust at work, and they take such actions as being late for work and leaving early and slacking off negatively [23]. Obstructive stress, as a type of negative stress, increases employees' negative emotions at work, which in turn increases job withdrawal behaviors and decreases their commitment to work. The findings of this study on challenging stressors are inconsistent with the hypothesis. The sampling of this study is narrow and the measurement of employees' job stress is based on employees' self-assessment, which may cause inaccuracy of the results to some extent.

Third, there is heterogeneity in the effects of job stress on the innovative performance of employees with different levels of education, with challenging job stress having a greater impact on the innovative performance of highly educated employees, and hindering job stress having a greater impact on the innovative performance of less educated employees. Educational attainment is positively correlated with ability level, and employees with high educational attainment are more capable of accepting challenging tasks, so challenging jobs are more attractive to employees with high educational attainment. The heterogeneous effect of job stress on educational attainment may be that educational attainment, as an important threshold for talent selection in contemporary enterprises, has a greater degree of variation in response behavior to job stress. The nature of stress affects employees' attitudes toward work, and work mood is an important factor affecting performance performance.

Fourth, job withdrawal plays a stronger mediating role for highly educated employees in the relationship between job stress and innovation performance. For challenging work pressure, highly educated employees have stronger adaptive ability and see crisis as opportunity; for hindering work pressure, highly educated employees have stronger adjustment ability and even if they face big work pressure, it generally does not have negative impact on performance, so the mediating role is more significant than that of low-educated employees.

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