

"Overqualified" ? Research on the Influence Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on Employees' Creative Performance

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Abstract: As a new type of stressor in the workplace, illegitimate tasks (IT) bring some confusion to employees' rational allocation of resources, and reduce employees' work passion because of their offensive professional identity. In turn, it reduces the creative performance that can benefit the long-term development of the organization and the individual. Based on the conservation of resources theory and the stress-as-offense-to-self theory (SOS), using the method of multi-period survey data, this paper discusses the influence mechanism of illegitimate tasks on employee creative performance (CP) from a cognitive perspective. The results show that IT are negatively related to employee CP, and can be indirectly related through organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), that is, OBSE plays an intermediary role between IT and employee CP. In addition, the study found that psychological resilience (PR) plays a double moderating role in the direct or indirect relationship between IT and employee CP. This study expands and deepens the discussion of the mechanism between IT and employee CP, and lays a foundation for promoting the follow-up research of IT.

Keywords: Illegitimate tasks; organization-based self-esteem; psychological resilience; creative performance.

1. Introduction

Employee-level innovation, as the key element of the core competitiveness of the organization, is the source of enterprise innovation. Therefore, how to stimulate employee innovation vitality and promote employee innovation is an important problem that enterprises are facing.

Previous studies have shown that job characteristics have a direct impact on employees' innovation behavior [1,2]. However, most of the existing studies focus on the formal work characteristics that are in line with legal norms and clear regulations in the organization, and seldom take into account some informal work content that does not conform to the regulations of the organization, it will also have an impact on the work behavior of employees.

The study points out that in the context of high power distance in China, the phenomenon of non-compliance is common. The characteristics of task illegitimate will make employees feel that they are not valued in the organization, feel that their professional identity is offended and not respected, break the existing role cognition of employees, and threaten their identity [3]. However, at present, domestic scholars pay less attention to IT, and the relationship between IT and employee innovation still needs to be further clarified. OBSE is a kind of self-cognition based on organizational context. when employees are often under IT and feel worthless and offended by their professional identity in the organization for a long time, it will reduce their perception of OBSE, and reduce the investment of resources in innovative activities.

At the same time, the effect of illegitimate tasks on employees' organization-based self-esteem to creative performance may also be affected by different situations. Previous studies have shown that the impact of negative states on individuals can often be adjusted by psychological resilience [4]. Illegitimate task, as a new type of workplace stressor, will bring certain troubles and threats to employees' mood and normal work [5]. It is possible to play a regulatory role in the impact of illegitimate tasks on organization-based self-esteem to creative performance.

To sum up, this paper will use Conservation of resource theory (COR) and SOS to explore the influence mechanism of IT with illegitimate characteristics on employees' organization-based

self-esteem and creative performance in the workplace, and introduce OBSE as an intermediary to deeply analyze the internal mechanism of IT affecting employee CP. In addition, this paper introduces PR as an adjustment variable to further explore the boundary conditions of the effect of IT on employees' OBSE to CP.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypothesis

2.1 Illegitimate Tasks and Employees' Creative Performance

IT refer to work tasks that do not meet the reasonable expectations of employees and will offend employees and their professional status [6]. There are two main types of IT: Unreasonable Tasks and Unnecessary Tasks. Studies have pointed out that legal and compliant job characteristics such as job autonomy and job feedback will have a direct impact on employees' innovative behavior [7,8]. As a new source of work stress in the workplace, IT with illegal and non-compliant work characteristics may also have a direct impact on employees' innovative practice activities. Employee's CP refers to the process of employees' innovative behavior in order to keep their own competitiveness in the enterprise, which can be valuable products, processes, methods and ideas for the organization, and it is a kind of extra-role performance [9].

COR pointed out that individuals have a tendency to preserve, protect and acquire resources. Specifically, on the one hand, IT put forward new job requirements for employees outside the scope of their own work. Employees need to allocate some of their existing resources to deal with these tasks, which correspondingly reduces the limited resources allocated by employees to CP. On the other hand, innovation requires employees to invest enough time and energy. However, when employees deal with IT, they have already taken up part of their energy and resources within the scope of their own work, which makes it difficult for them to complete their own work, and they have no energy to actively acquire additional resources for innovative practice.

IT will waste employees' energy and time resources because of their non-compliance with professional norms and lack of rationality, and at the same time reduce employees' recognition of their status in the organization. Therefore, the following assumptions are put forward:

H1: Illegitimate tasks have a significant negative impact on employees' creative performance.

2.2 The Mediating Role of Organization-based Self-esteem

OBSE is self-esteem in the organizational context, which is the value perception and self-judgment of employees about their ability and importance in the organization [10]. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, when the individual's respect needs are met, the individual will be full of confidence in himself, full of enthusiasm for his work and society, and realize his personal value [11]. OBSE is not only related to employees' individual characteristics, but also may be influenced by other objective factors. Job stress is one of the important factors affecting employees' OBSE [12]. As a new common stressor in the workplace, IT have the characteristics of offending individual's professional identity, and will convey social information that is not respected and appreciated to employees, thus affecting individuals' cognition of others' evaluation and leading to the reduction of self-esteem level [13]. At the same time, IT will also reduce employees' work enthusiasm. Motivation theory points out, when employees think that the working environment provided by the organization can't meet their basic needs, their initiative and enthusiasm for work will be reduced, and their intrinsic motivation for innovation will be weakened. Therefore, they will not take the initiative to think creatively, and actively put their ideas into the practical activities of new product development, which has a negative impact on the improvement of creative performance [12].

It is found that OBSE promotes innovative behavior from the following two aspects. On the one hand, employees with high organization-based self-esteem have positive cognition of personal ability and job competence, are more adventurous, and are more likely to adjust the negative impact of difficulties or setbacks at work, actively adjust their mentality and restore their psychological

balance [14], thus showing more innovative behaviors and having higher innovative performance [15]. On the other hand, when employees' self-esteem needs are met, employees will be driven by subconscious, resulting in the pursuit of higher-level self-realization needs. When employees have a high recognition of their own value and importance, it means that their internal self-esteem needs have been met to some extent, and then they tend to pursue self-development and higher-level self-realization through innovative practice activities, thus resulting in higher innovative performance. Employees with high organization-based self-esteem are more willing to innovate to show their own value and keep self-evaluation of their importance in the organization. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is put forward:

H2: Organization-based self-esteem has a mediating effect between illegitimate tasks and employees' innovative performance.

2.3 Psychological Resilience Adjustment Function

Resilience is a kind of ability of individual employees, and it is the ability of individuals to bear high-level destructive changes while reducing the occurrence of bad behaviors. Illegitimate tasks, as a new source of work stress in the workplace, will break the original psychological balance of employees and lead to the increase of employees' bad mood. Resilience, as an individual's general self-recovery and adjustment ability to cope with stress [16], will trigger the self-resilience system to play a role when employees feel work stress, which can then adjust the negative state's influence on individuals [4].

However, there are individual differences in the size of employees' PR. Employees with high PR will have higher OBSE. According to the theory of self-assessment, people have the motivation to know their true selves, so people always want to get objective and accurate information to reduce the uncertainty about their self-characteristics [13]. Besides, employees with high PR tend to take a positive attitude towards unfair and unreasonable things encountered in their work and life, and have strong bearing capacity for external pressure. Faced with the IT assigned by their superiors, they are more inclined to choose to understand this kind of behavior. In a word, PR can regulate the relationship between IT and OBSE.

In addition, PR also has some influence on the relationship between OBSE and CP. On the one hand, existing research studies have found that there is a significant correlation between individual psychological resilience and self-esteem [14,17]. Employees with high OBSE can better cope with the negative impact of difficulties or setbacks at work, adjust their mental state faster to restore their balance and enhance their PR[14]. On the other hand, PR can alleviate the influence of external bad stimuli such as risks on employees' psychological state to a certain extent, and reduce the consumption of psychological resources used to control cognition, emotion and behavior, so that resources can be invested in innovation activities. Therefore, employees with high PR are more willing to invest certain resources in innovative activities. Therefore, the hypothesis is put forward:

H3: Psychological resilience plays a moderating role in the direct or indirect relationship between illegitimate tasks and employees' innovative performance.

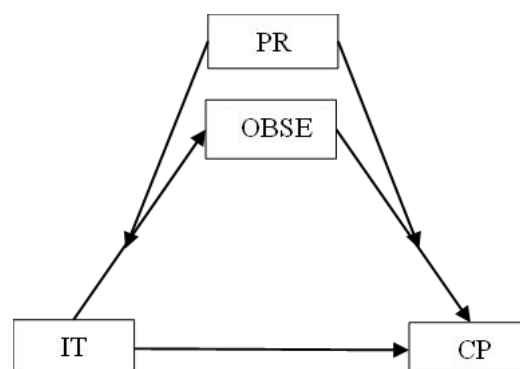


Fig. 1 Conceptual model

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Object and Data Collection

The survey samples in this paper are from enterprises in 32 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) in China, and the sample range covers many industries. In order to reduce the deviation of common methods, the time-lag method was used to collect employee data in three stages. In the first stage, employees fill in basic personal information and report their PR and IT. In the second stage, the questionnaire of OBSE was distributed to the respondents. In the third stage, the respondents reported their CP. A total of 608 questionnaires were distributed, and 500 valid questionnaires, with an effective recovery rate of 82.23%. On gender, male employees are more, accounting for 60.8%; The age distribution is mainly 31-35 years old, accounting for 38%, with employees aged 26-40 accounting for 88.6%; The education level is mainly bachelor degree, accounting for 70.4%; Most of them work for 4-6 years, accounting for 48% and 1-6 years accounting for 72%.

3.2 Variable Measurement

This paper adopts the mature scale which is widely used at home and abroad. The scales are all measured by Likert1-5 scale. Referring to the existing research, gender, age, level of education and Tenure are selected as control variables.

IT is the 8-item Bern illegitimate task Scale (BITS) revised by Semmer is adopted, which includes 8 items [18]. The OBSE is a one-dimensional scale developed by Pierce et al. (1989) is adopted, with 10 items in total, such as: The company values me very much [10]. CP is the three-dimensional scale developed by Han Yi (2007), a domestic scholar, is adopted, including innovation willingness, innovation behavior and innovation results. PR is a Self-Resilience Scale (Chinese version) developed by Block and Kreman(1996) is adopted, with a total of 12 items, which is also widely used by scholars at home and abroad at present [19].

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Data analysis were conducted using the SPSS 26.0 and AMOS24.0 statistics software. The CR value of each scale is greater than 0.8, and the AVE value is greater than 0.5, which indicates that this scale has good reliability and aggregation validity. The results show that the data provided by the four-factor model is better than other models ($\chi^2/df = 3.097$, CFI = 0.884, IFI = 0.884, RMSEA = 0.065), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis

model	factors	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	IFI
Four factors	IT、OBSE、PR、CP	3.097	0.065	0.884	0.884
Three factors	IT、PR+OBSE、CP	3.736	0.074	0.848	0.848
Two factors	IT+PR+OBSE、CP	7.244	0.112	0.651	0.652
One factors	IT+PR+OBSE+CP	7.584	0.115	0.632	0.609

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2 is descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis of the variables concerned in this study. The results showed that IT were negatively correlated with OBSE ($r=-.191$, $p<0.01$) and CP ($r=-.155$, $p<0.01$). There is a significant positive correlation between OBSE and CP ($r=.714$, $p<0.01$). The above analysis provides preliminary support for verifying the research hypothesis.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient table

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Gender	1.39	.489							
2 Age	2.81	1.011	-.020						
3 level of education	1.99	.561	-.008	-.007					
4 Tenure	2.94	.884	.03	.432**	.108*				
5 IT	2.85	1.005	.012	-.082	-.002	-.156*			
6 OBSE	4.11	.585	.080	.105*	.156**	.196**	-.191*		
7 PR	3.95	.638	.137**	.043	.068	.183**	-.036	.714**	
8 CP	4.11	.618	.067	.093*	.039	.204**	-.155*	.714**	.743*

4.3 Hypothesis Test

4.3.1 Main effect test and intermediary effect test

Before the hierarchical regression, the multicollinearity and autocorrelation of variables were tested. The results showed that the VIF was less than 10, and the D-W coefficient was 1.982 close to 2, so there was no serious multicollinearity and autocorrelation problem. According to the results of hierarchical regression, there is a significant negative correlation between IT and CP ($\beta=-0.128, p<0.01$), assuming H1 is verified; IT are negatively correlated with OBSE ($\beta=0.167, p<0.001$), assuming H2 is verified; There is a significant positive correlation between OBSE and CP ($\beta=0.712, p<0.001$), assuming H3 is verified; After the introduction of OBSE, the negative impact of IT on CP is weakened, which indicates that OBSE has an intermediary effect between IT and CP. Assuming H4 is verified.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis results

Variables	OBSE					CP				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10
Gender	.077	.08	-.012	.000	.061	.063	.007	.006	-.029	-.027
Age	.037	.034	.059	.053	.009	.007	-.017	-.017	.012	.013
Level of education	.140*	.142	.108**	.099**	.019	.02	-.081*	-.081	-.057	-.055
Tenure	.163*	.138	.007	.044	.197**	.177*	.08*	.081	.046	.048
IT		-.167***	-.159**	-.231**		-.128**	-.009*			
PR			.699**	.731***					.471**	.49**
IT*PR				.196***						
OBSE							.711**	.712***	.379**	.403**
OBSE*PR										.097**
R2	.064	.091	.553	.583	.046	.062	.521	.521	.627	.634
ΔR^2	.056	.082	.548	.577	.038	.052	.515	.516	.622	.629
F	8.435***	9.903***	101.821***	98.179**	5.952**	6.502***	89.342***	107.398**	137.842***	121.86***

Introducing control variables, using Process to test the Bootstrap mediation effect of OBSE. The results show that the confidence intervals of indirect effects ([-0.1265, -0.0466]) and direct effects ([-0.0535, -0.0296]) of IT on CP do not contain 0 (see Table 4). The mediating role of OBSE between IT and CP has been further verified.

Table 4. Direct and indirect effects of IT on CP

	Effect	SE	Bootstrapping 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Total Effect	-.0953	.0272	-.1487	-.0419
Direct Effect	-.0119	.0196	-.0505	-.0266
Indirect Effect	-.0833	.0203	-.1245	-.0459

4.3.2 Adjustment function test

In order to further intuitively show the moderating effect of PR between IT and CP, a simple slope moderating effect diagram is drawn (see Fig.2 and Fig.3). As shown in Fig.2, the interaction between IT and PR has a significant positive regulating effect on OBSE ($\beta=0.196$), assuming H3 is verified. At the same time, as shown in Fig.3, the interaction between OBSE and PR has a significant positive moderating effect on CP ($\beta=0.097$), assuming H3 is further verified.

4.3.3 Mediating effect test of regulation

Using the Process, we continue to verify the mediated effect, and check whether there are differences in the mediated effect at different levels of resilience. For low PR, the indirect effect of IT on CP through OBSE is -0.0837(95% confidence interval is [-0.1525, -0.0312], CI does not include 0); For high PR, the indirect effect of IT on CP through OBSE is -0.014(95% confidence interval is [-0.0334, -0.0010], and its CI does not include 0).

Table 5. Adjusted Intermediary Effect Test

Outcome variable	effect coefficient	SE	Bootstrapping 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
PR-1SD	-.0837	.0321	-.1525	-.0312
PR	-.0554	.0146	-.0886	-.0303
PR+1SD	-.0140	.0082	-.0334	-.0010

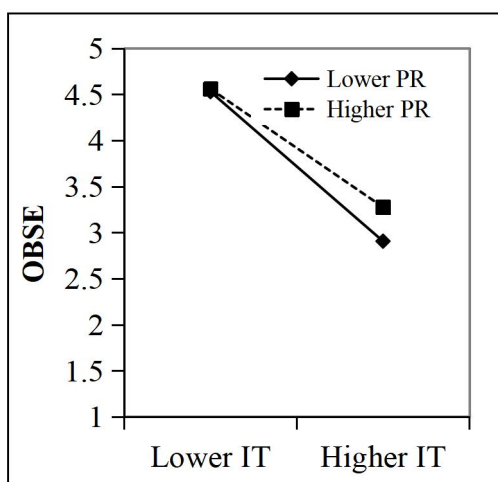


Fig.2 Adjustment effect diagram (1)

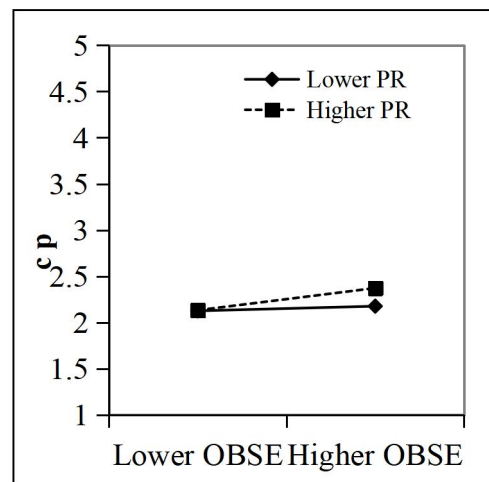


Fig.3 Adjustment effect diagram (2)

5. Summary

Based on the resource conservation theory and the stress offense theory, this study constructed and tested the multiple impact model of Illegitimate tasks on employees' creative performance, and

revealed the mechanism of the above relationship from the perspective of OBSE. Research conclusions are as follows: (1) Illegitimate tasks have a negative impact on creative performance; (2) OBSE mediates the relationship between IT and CP; (3) PR plays a moderating role in the direct or indirect relationship between IT and employees' CP. Theoretical contributions are as follows: Expanding and deepening the research on the relationship between IT and CP; The research on PR is discussed, and the boundary conditions of IT are clarified; Enriched the relevant empirical research on OBSE, and broadens the research perspective and scope of OBSE and lays a certain foundation for further research. Practical contributions are as follows: This study points out the direction for enterprises to effectively improve employees' creative performance. (1) Managers can realize that they should constantly optimize and adjust the work structure and reasonably arrange the work content. (2) Managers should be good at using incentive theory to stimulate employees' working enthusiasm and internal motivation for innovation by creating a good working environment or appropriate material incentives. (3) For employees, they should improve their psychological resilience and enhance their adaptability to the environment, and learn to refuse the illegitimate tasks. Limitations and future research are as follows: (1) In the future, it is necessary to adopt the evaluation method of combining self-evaluation with other evaluation on the basis of paying attention to time dynamic factors, so that the collected questionnaire data will be more objective. (2) Whether illegitimate tasks have "double-edged sword" effect is worth further discussion.

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