

The Double-Edged Sword Effect of Performance Pressure on Employee Boundary-Spanning Behavior

Haomin Zhang, Jiyan Liu*, Jiawen Chen

School of Management Shanghai University, Shanghai 200444, China

ABSTRACT

With the emergence of "boundaryless organizations" and the increase in boundary-spanning activities, the sustainable development of organizations has been affected. Effectively promoting employees to engage in boundary-spanning activities has become of great practical significance. Besides, performance pressure has become a prevalent workplace stressor, significantly impacting employees' work behaviors. Therefore, drawing upon the cognitive-affective processing system theory and stressor-strain relationship theory, this study aims to investigate the mechanisms and boundary conditions of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior. Data collected from 336 questionnaires at two different time points is analyzed using bootstrapping and hierarchical regression to test hypotheses. The results indicate that performance pressure boosts employee boundary-spanning behavior by enhancing cognitive flexibility, while hindering this behavior by producing obsessive work passion. Moreover, achievement orientation plays a key role in moderating the impact of performance pressure on cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion. Specifically, achievement orientation positively moderates the link between performance pressure and cognitive flexibility, while negatively moderating the relationship between performance pressure and obsessive work passion. Additionally, achievement orientation is found to moderate the indirect influence of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior through these two mediators. This study reveals that employees with high achievement orientation under performance pressure tend to develop cognitive flexibility, which motivates them to engage in more employee boundary-spanning activities. This paper also provides practical guidance for enterprises to promote employee boundary-spanning behavior. This study not only expands the research on the antecedents of employee boundary-spanning behavior but also confirms the double-edged sword effect of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior from both cognitive and affective perspectives.

KEYWORDS

Employee boundary-spanning behavior; Performance pressure; Cognitive flexibility; Obsessive work passion; Achievement orientation

1. Introduction

Currently, the ongoing digital transformation in various industries, along with the continuous advancement of technologies such as artificial intelligence, 5G, and big data, is leading to the emergence of new business models. This trend is giving rise to "borderless organizations." In order to maintain sustainable competitive advantages, break boundaries, and achieve innovation, enterprises must establish connections with external parties by continuously crossing organizational and team boundaries to obtain key external resources and support (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Marrone, 2010).

Employee boundary-spanning behavior encompasses a range of activities, including communicating with leaders for decision support, interacting with stakeholders, and continually gathering external knowledge and resources to accomplish work objectives (Katz & Tushman, 1983; Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Marrone et al., 2007). The development of enterprises is closely related to employee boundary-spanning activities, and more and more enterprises encourage employees to engage in boundary-spanning activities. Previous studies found that employee boundary-spanning behavior promotes work attitudes and behaviors such as job satisfaction (Marrone et al., 2022), innovation performance (Zhang & Li, 2021). Therefore, it is of great practical significance to effectively promote employee boundary-spanning activities and to expand the research on the antecedents of employee boundary-spanning behavior.

However, employee pressure stands out as a major challenge for organizations today. The Robert Walters China 2023 survey revealed that 90% of the workforce surveyed experiences work-related pressure. Approximately 60% of employees reported being impacted by work-related stress. Of these, 17% experienced prolonged high-pressure situations, while 40% mentioned feeling stressed more frequently. Performance pressure, the most obvious source of task pressure perceived by employees, has garnered significant attention from scholars regarding employees' behavioral performance under high performance requirements. Previous studies have demonstrated that performance pressure significantly affects employees' work attitudes, psychology, and behavior (Mitchell et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2019; Kundi et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023), but currently there is no research examining its impact on boundary-spanning behavior. In the existing literature, Mitchell et al. (2019) found that performance pressure positively influences task proficiency and citizenship when perceived as a challenge, and Li et al. (2022) also found a positive relationship between performance pressure and innovative behavior. Therefore, performance pressure emerges as a critical stressor that has the potential to encourage boundary-spanning behavior among employees. Previous research has highlighted that role stressors, including role conflict and role ambiguity, are associated with adverse impacts on boundary-spanning behavior. However, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the examination of potential positive effects. Notably, it has been suggested that stressors may also incentivize employees' engagement in role behavior, as demonstrated by studies conducted by Xu et al. (2021), Ren et al. (2022), and Li et al. (2022). Marrone et al. (2007) emphasized the complexity of boundary-spanning behavior and proposed that research should concentrate on employees' psychological states, including cognition, emotion, and motivation. They suggested integrating a systematic framework to thoroughly comprehend how work situational factors influence employee boundary-spanning behavior. However, the related literature only examines how performance pressure affects employees' work behavior through emotional or cognitive pathways. For example, Li et al. (2018) suggest that performance pressure can induce anxiety, leading to unethical pro-organizational behavior. Similarly, Chen and Chen (2021) indicate that performance stress can promote employee unethical pro-organizational behavior through moral justification. Currently, there is no systematic research on integrating both cognitive and emotional dual pathways. Employee responses to performance pressure are intricate, making it challenging for a single study to accurately capture the true impact of performance pressure on employee behavior. In summary, it is necessary to further explore the relationship and mechanism between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior.

The Cognitive-Affective Processing System Theory offers a systematic framework that highlights how external situations interact with cognitive and affective components within the processing system to shape individual behavioral choices (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). And The Cognitive-Affective Processing System Theory also integrates contextual, cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements into a comprehensive framework. This theory is systematic, possessing robust explanatory capabilities, and serves to address the limitations of prior research that often adopted a singular perspective. However,

the cognitive-affective processing system theory does not specifically explain how individuals cope with external situations, and the stressor-strain relationship theory suggests that stressful situations will be perceived by individuals as challenge stressors and hindrance stressors, which further leads to positive and negative coping styles (Koeske & Koeske, 1993; Yu et al., 2021). The stressor-strain relationship theory helps explain mechanisms within the cognitive-affective processing system theoretical framework. Performance pressure, as the most obvious task stressor perceived by employees, can have a significant impact on employees' cognition, emotions, and behaviors (Mitchell et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2019). And boundary-spanning activities are also largely influenced by employees' cognitive, emotional and other factors (Yoo et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion are chosen as cognitive and emotional mechanisms. Cognitive flexibility characterizes an individual's cognitive unit, which measures an individual's ability to adapt and respond flexibly to challenges (Martin & Rubin, 1995), playing a crucial role in managing temporary stress and anxiety in life (Wen et al., 2021); whereas obsessive work passion is characterized by an individual's strong emotions aimed at avoiding the adverse consequences of stress. This emotional experience is internalized and controlled by external or internal pressures, leading to a mental state of inner tension and defensiveness (Vallerand et al., 2003). So cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion can act as both positive and negative coping mechanisms for employees experiencing pressure. Thus, based on the perspectives of "stressor-cognitive/affective-behavioral response" and "challenge-hindrance stressor-positive coping/negative coping", this study constructs the "positive coping path: performance pressure (stressor) → cognitive flexibility (cognitive unit) → employee boundary-spanning behavior (behavioral response)" and the "negative coping path: performance pressure (stressor) → obsessive work passion (affective unit) → employee boundary-spanning behavior (behavioral response)" double-edged sword path model to explore the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior.

The Cognitive-affective processing system theory states that individual characteristics, cognition, and affect influence personal behavioral choices by interacting with one another (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Achievement orientation, an important trait that influences how employees assess stressful events at work (Yi & Wang, 2015), has not been examined as a potential moderator. In the face of stressful events, employees with high-level achievement orientation tend to view stress as challenges that are necessary for personal growth and development (Mitchell et al., 2019). On the contrary, employees with low-level achievement orientation tend to experience psychological burden and anxiety when dealing with stressful situations (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1994), requiring them to develop coping mechanisms. Therefore, this study introduces achievement orientation traits as a moderating variable to enhance the understanding of how performance pressure impacts and to examine the significant differences in the impact of performance pressure on employees with different levels of achievement orientation.

In summary, based on the cognitive-affective processing system theoretical framework and stressor-strain relationship theory, this study integrates cognitive and affective mechanisms into the research model on how performance pressure affects employee boundary-spanning behavior. This study explores whether performance stress can have opposite effects on boundary-spanning behavior through two different paths: cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion from the perspectives of challenging performance pressure assessment and hindering performance pressure assessment. Additionally, it tests the moderating effect of achievement orientation. The aim is to provide theoretical explanations and empirical analyses for investigating the dual effects and boundary conditions of performance pressure on boundary-spanning behavior, as illustrated in Figure 1. This study not only expands the research on the influencing factors of employee boundary-spanning behavior, enriching the related theoretical research, but also reveals the mechanism between performance pressure and

employee boundary-spanning behavior. By doing so, it provides practical guidance for managers on how to effectively utilize performance pressure to stimulate and promote boundary-spanning activities.

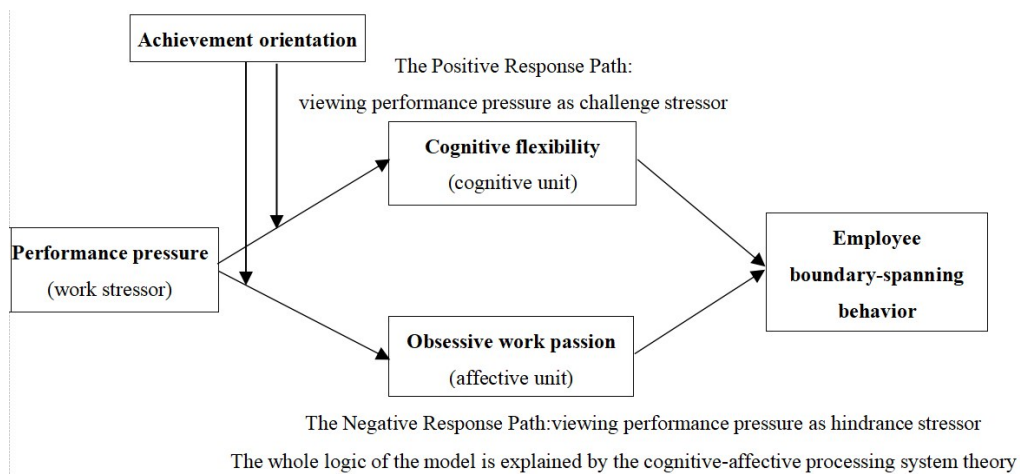


Figure 1 Theoretical model

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1 The mediating effect of cognitive flexibility

Cognitive flexibility is a cognitive state that measures an individual's ability to adapt positively and flexibly in response to difficulties. It reflects the ability of an individual to adopt flexible and effective cognitive strategies to adapt to changing situations (Martin & Rubin, 1995; Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010). Cognitive flexibility is a multifaceted concept consisting of three main dimensions: awareness of seeking alternatives to address challenges, willingness to adapt to the environment, and confidence in one's ability to adapt effectively. Cognitive flexibility plays a significant role in dealing with temporary stress and anxiety, serving as a key factor in how individuals cope with these challenges (Wen et al., 2021). Bonanno (2004) discovered that individuals with strong cognitive flexibility exhibited improved recovery from negative events.

According to cognitive-affective processing system theory, specific work situations can stimulate cognitive responses in individuals (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). In the workplace, stressors are work-related factors that significantly affect employees (Bliese et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Performance pressure, is the most obvious task stressor perceived by employees, that is, the high-performance requirements given by the organization create a sense of urgency to improve performance in order to obtain desired results or avoid negative consequences (Lazarus, 2000; Mitchell et al., 2019). According to the stressor-strain relationship theory, when employees experience performance pressure as a stressor, their reactions can be classified as positive or negative (Koeske & Koeske, 1993; Yu et al., 2021). In response to performance pressure, employees view it as a challenging stressor in a positive light. They actively engage in shifting their thinking to find solutions to cope with this pressure, increasing their cognitive flexibility. Employees focus on the opportunities and favorable outcomes presented within the stressful situation. This study demonstrates that performance pressure enhances employees' cognitive flexibility. Regarding the conceptualization of cognitive flexibility, first, consider the awareness aspect. Employees realize that the high-performance requirements given by the organization (e.g., high task volume, high difficulty factor, etc.) cannot be achieved in the regular work mode (Ma et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2019), they must engage in exploratory thinking, search for alternative options or solutions, and embrace diverse perspectives and novel approaches to fulfill these heightened performance demands. By doing so, employees can enhance their capacity to adapt their perspectives and adeptly address problems with flexibility. Second, regarding willingness, high

performance requirements are associated with promotion, salary increase, and benefits, which serve as incentives for employees to enhance their performance. This performance pressure provides employees with an opportunity to re-organize their abilities and progress in their careers, leading to personal growth. According to Mitchell et al. (2019), these positive outcomes encourage intrinsic motivation among employees to strive for improved performance. Consequently, employees develop a willingness to adeptly manage organizational performance pressure. Finally, the aspect of efficacy. High performance pressure actually implies the organization's recognition and expectation of the employee's work ability and value (Wang et al., 2019; Song et al., 2022), for example, the greater the ability, the greater the responsibility, which shows the organization's trust and support for the employee. And under performance pressure, the organization will give more material resources to the employee, believing in the employee's capability to achieve a higher level of performance. This increase in psychological and material resources enhances employees' sense of efficacy in handling stressful situations. Consequently, employees' cognitive flexibility is enhanced when dealing with performance pressure.

According to the cognitive-affective processing system theory, cognitive flexibility, as an essential cognitive element of an employee, serves as a crucial link between performance pressure and boundary-spanning behavior, motivating the employee to employ proactive strategies to deal with the pressure. The theory posits that the activation of an individual's cognitive unit impacts their behavior (Mischel & Shoda, 1995), with cognitive flexibility playing a significant role in this process. First, cognitive flexibility allows employees to effectively adapt to changing environments by being responsive, confident, and insightful (Wu et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2023). This adaptability involves considering various options and behaviors, such as adopting boundary-spanning strategies like persuading managers for support, collaborating with team stakeholders, gathering external information and ideas, and adjusting perspectives to effectively cope with stress. Kiss et al. (2020) further verified that individuals with cognitive flexibility are more inclined to engage in information-seeking activities and depend on external information acquired through search activities. Second, cognitive flexibility is an important component of communication skills (Curran & Andersen, 2017). A study by Martin and Anderson (1998) identified a positive correlation between cognitive flexibility and confidence in executing communication behaviors. Cognitive flexibility plays a crucial role in enhancing employees' positivity, confidence, and empathy in communication, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving social interaction goals across diverse situations. Cognitive flexibility provides employees with an advantageous position in communication and enhances their ability to deal with the complexity of interpersonal relationships in boundary-spanning activities, where employees are required to maintain contact with internal and external stakeholders (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Finally, cognitive flexibility helps in resolving work conflicts arising from boundary-spanning behavior by maximizing the potential benefits from conflicting elements (Ramarajan et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2020). Employees have higher adaptability to boundary-spanning behavior as they actively cope with the pressure and challenges in the boundary-spanning process. They are willing to try different boundary-spanning roles and explore valuable resources and new opportunities to meet the demands of their job roles and high-performance requirements. In addition, Wei et al. (2019) discovered that cognitive flexibility can encourage individuals to perceive stress positively and utilize positive coping strategies according to stress growth theory, thereby fostering employee boundary-spanning behavior. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: Cognitive flexibility mediates the relationship between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior, that is, performance pressure increases employees' cognitive flexibility and thus promotes employee boundary-spanning behavior.

2.2 The mediating effect of obsessive work passion

Obsessive work passion is an affective experience at work that is motivated by internal or external stressors. Vallerand and colleagues (2003) defined work passion as an employee's strong inclination to invest time and energy into their work. According to Vallerand et al. (2003), employees' work passion

can be understood through a dichotomous model based on self-determination theory. Harmonious work passion is described as autonomously internalized, where employees actively acknowledge and value the importance of their work, leading them to willingly dedicate themselves to their tasks. On the other hand, obsessive work passion is characterized by a controlled internalization, driven by strong external or internal pressures such as social recognition, self-esteem, performance pressure. Previous research has highlighted the significant impact of work environment factors on shaping employees' levels of work passion. For instance, Song et al. (2020) discovered that time pressure can enhance both obsessive and harmonious work passion among individuals. Additionally, they noted that inadequate work autonomy and high work demands may contribute to obsessive work passion. Simultaneously, obsessive work passion may have a negative impact on employees' psychology, behavior, and performance.

According to the cognitive-affective processing system theory, certain work situations can trigger emotional responses in individuals (Mischel and Shoda, 1995). According to stressor-strain relationship theory, employees experiencing performance pressure will perceive it as a hindering stressor, leading to negative emotional reactions. Obsessive work passion is influenced by both external and personal factors. When employees experience pressure from external sources or feel internal pressure, they tend to exhibit obsessive work passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). First, the sense of urgency within the employee, caused by the organization's requirements and expectations, leads to the internalization of the subjective experience and the formation of internal pressure perception (Li et al., 2018). Obsessive work passion arises from either internal or external pressure (Vallerand et al., 2003). Song et al. (2020) discovered that as external time requirements, time pressure leads individuals to develop an obsessive work passion through internally controlling external work demands. Additionally, performance pressure and time pressure are classified as the same external task stressor. Second, employees will assess performance pressure as a hindrance due to concerns about their organizational status and the adverse consequences of the pressure. This pressure indicates that the current level of employees' competence is not sufficient to meet the organization's performance requirements (Mitchell et al., 2018). They are controlled by the social recognition, self-esteem, or performance requirements associated with their work (Vallerand et al., 2003; Liao et al., 2022). Additionally, external motivation leads to a process of controlled internalization towards their identity, resulting in obsessive work passion. Finally, performance pressure limits job autonomy, as employees feel controlled by their work, are forced to participate in their work, and exhibit a high level of "passion" for their work, with no autonomy in deciding when to participate or terminate their work. It has been pointed out that work autonomy is an important influence on work passion, and the lack of work autonomy can lead to obsessive work passion (Vallerand, 2016).

The Cognitive-Affective Processing System Theory suggests that individual behavior is influenced not only by rational thinking but also by emotions. It explains how emotions, as responses to workplace stress, play a significant role in shaping an individual's work behavior (Mischel and Shoda, 1995). Employees with obsessive work passion feel compelled to work due to external and internal pressures, which may decrease their engagement in boundary-spanning activities. On the one hand, employee boundary-spanning behavior requires more autonomous and voluntary participation of employees (Marrone et al., 2007; Marrone, 2010), and obsessive work passion makes employees lack initiative and willpower towards their work (Vallerand et al., 2010), and they perform their work not out of genuine passion, but due to organizational expectations or self-interest (Perrewé et al., 2014). Employees tend to take the lead in completing their role-related work but may not proactively engage in boundary-spanning behavior with other employees. On the other hand, employees experiencing obsessive work passion find it challenging to complete boundary-spanning activities such as external information gathering and coordinating relationships with stakeholders due to the influence of external or internal control. This state of inner defense hinders their ability to dedicate all their energy to work,

impacting their performance (Marrone et al., 2007; Vallerand, 2010). Furthermore, employees with obsessive work passion are more likely to experience role pressure and conflict due to their boundary-spanning behavior (Ramarajan et al., 2011), leading them to decrease such activities. In conclusion, performance pressure can result in obsessive work passion, employees feeling controlled by their work, exhibiting defensive tendencies, and refraining from engaging in boundary-spanning activities for self-protection. Based on this, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Obsessive work passion mediates the relationship between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior, that is, performance pressure leads to obsessive work passion and thus reduces employee boundary-spanning behavior.

2.3 The moderating effect of achievement orientation

The Cognitive-Affective Processing System Theory suggests that an individual's emotional and cognitive processes towards situations are influenced by their traits. The interaction between stressors and individual traits affects an individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Research also indicates that stress responses are influenced by individual characteristics, with individual traits affecting how individuals assess and cope with stressful situations (Lazarus, 1966; Mitchell et al., 2019). Achievement orientation refers to the motivation and desire to enhance personal abilities, increase work efficiency, and strive for excellence in work (Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004). Individuals with high achievement orientation possess strong motivation and internal drive to seek challenges and enhance their abilities. Therefore, this study suggests that achievement orientation moderates the effects of performance pressure on employee cognition and emotions.

When the level of achievement orientation is high, employees are more likely to view performance pressure as a challenging stressor that contributes to their growth and development (Mitchell et al., 2019). They become more focused on improving their flexibility of thinking, problem-solving skills, and prospects for promotion and pay raises, rather than excessively dwelling on the negative impacts of performance pressure. Additionally, individuals with high achievement orientation tend to perceive high performance requirements as an affirmation and support for their competence and value within the organization (Wang et al., 2019; Song et al., 2022). Additionally, achievement-oriented employees are identified as performance-oriented (Dweck, 1986, 1989). These employees have high expectations for high performance outcomes because performance pressure is also seen as a way to demonstrate ability and receive recognition (Kanfer, 1990; Kukla, 1972), further reinforcing the positive impact of performance pressure on cognitive flexibility. Conversely, when employees have low achievement orientation, they are more likely to experience work overload in response to performance pressure (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1994). In such situations, employees tend to focus more on the burdens and risks associated with performance pressure (Ellis, 2006; Gardner, 2012b), viewing it as a hindrance. This leads them to worry about their ability to meet performance expectations, thereby diminishing the positive impact of performance pressure on their cognitive flexibility.

On the other hand, when employees have a high level of achievement orientation, they are driven more by intrinsic motivations for accomplishment rather than external pressures to perform their tasks. Employees tend to view performance pressure as a challenge, driven by intrinsic motivation to achieve high levels of performance. They actively seek ability assessments and performance feedback (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1994), focusing more on the positive outcomes of performance pressure. They make efforts to overcome the stress and urgency brought on by high performance demands (Gardner, 2012b; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015), transforming from passive acceptance to proactive engagement, thus further weakening the positive relationship between performance pressure and obsessive work passion. Conversely, when employees have lower levels of achievement motivation, performance pressure is more likely perceived as hindrance stressors, leading to lower intrinsic motivation at work (Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992). Instead, employees are driven more by external performance demands and inner sense of urgency, lacking job autonomy. Employees tend to avoid performance evaluations and

performance pressure, leading to a higher likelihood of experiencing anxiety (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1994). Consequently, they struggle to have positive work experiences and are more prone to experiencing compulsive work passion, thus reinforcing the positive effects between performance pressure and obsessive work passion. Therefore, this study proposes the following research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3: Achievement orientation moderates the positive relationship between performance pressure and cognitive flexibility, that is, the higher the achievement orientation, the stronger the positive effect of performance pressure on cognitive flexibility.

Hypothesis 4: Achievement orientation moderates the positive relationship between performance pressure and obsessive work passion, that is, the higher the achievement orientation, the weaker the positive effect of performance pressure on obsessive work passion.

Further, combining hypothesis 1 and 2, this study suggests that the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion is also moderated by achievement orientation. Research shows that various achievement orientations can help account for individual behavioral differences in the workplace. The trait of achievement orientation can predict individual behavioral responses. In particular, employees with a high achievement orientation are more likely to view performance pressure as a challenge. They actively shift their cognitive mindset, seeking new ways to flexibly meet performance demands, believing in their ability to adapt, focusing on growth, development, and positive outcomes under pressure. They take initiative and internalize work motivation voluntarily rather than feeling compelled to work (Vallerand et al., 2003). As a result, they exhibit greater cognitive flexibility and less obsessive work passion, which further impacts the increase or decrease of boundary-spanning activities.

On the contrary, when employees have low levels of achievement orientation, their intrinsic motivation is lacking. High performance demands become obstacles for them, as they fear their abilities might not meet the requirements and thus develop avoidance tendencies. The outcomes of performance levels affect their salary and organizational status, making them feel controlled by their work. This pressure leads them to have a strong inclination towards work due to performance demands, social recognition, income, among other reasons (Vallerand et al., 2003; Liao et al., 2022). In this state, employees find it difficult to generate cognitive flexibility for promoting boundary-spanning activities and tend to exhibit obsessive work passion. Their defensive mindset leads them to prefer completing routine job tasks rather than engaging in challenging and risky boundary-spanning activities voluntarily. Hence, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5: Achievement orientation moderates the mediating role of cognitive flexibility between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior, that is, the higher the level of achievement orientation, the stronger the positive indirect effect of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior through cognitive flexibility.

Hypothesis 6: Achievement orientation moderates the mediating role of obsessive work passion in the relationship between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior, that is, the higher the level of achievement orientation, the weaker the negative indirect effect of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior through obsessive work passion.

3. Methods

3.1 Samples and procedures

The survey for this study is conducted from June to August 2023 using the Questionnaire Star platform to generate survey posters and links. The survey targets activities in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Zhejiang, as well as several internship placements. Questionnaires are distributed via social media and through the help of acquaintances such as colleagues, friends, and MBA classmates to increase the sample size. Participants are briefed on the purpose and significance of the survey, and are encouraged to provide truthful responses to ensure the validity of each questionnaire. To address

potential bias from the same data source, this study employs a two-phase questionnaire design. In the first phase (Time 1), participants are asked to evaluate performance pressure, cognitive flexibility, and obsessive work passion, and provide demographic variables along with the last four digits of their phone numbers for data categorization. Two weeks later, a second phase questionnaire is distributed to participants who completed the first phase survey (Time 2), focusing on employee boundary-spanning behavior, achievement orientation, and the last four digits of their phone numbers.

At time 1, 420 questionnaires are distributed for the research survey, and 368 valid questionnaires are returned, with an effective recovery rate of 87.62%; at time 2, 368 questionnaires are distributed to participants who completed the first phase of the questionnaire, and 352 questionnaires are recovered, with a recovery rate of 95.65%. After excluding some questionnaires with short answer time and regularity of answers, 336 valid research questionnaires are finally obtained. In terms of sample characteristics, there are 162 males (48.21%) and 174 females (51.79%); in terms of age, there were 83 people under the age of 25 (24.70%), 122 people between the ages of 26-30 (36.31%), 43 people between the ages of 31-35 (12.80%), and 88 people aged 36 years old and above (26.19%); In terms of education, 42 people (12.50%) are college graduates or below, 129 people (38.39%) are undergraduates, 148 people (44.05%) are masters, and 17 people (5.06%) are PhDs or above; in terms of the number of years of working experience in the organization, 85 people (25.30%) have worked in the organization for less than one year, 89 people (26.49%) have worked there for 1-3 years, and 69 people (20.54%) have worked there for 4-5 years, and 93 people (27.68%) have worked more than 5 years.

3.2 Measures

Performance pressure. The measurement uses a four-item scale created by Mitchell et al. (2019). A sample item is "The pressures for performance in my workplace are high." Lastly, Cronbach's alpha was 0.821.

Cognitive flexibility. The scale developed by Martin and Rubin (1995) is used, with 12 items, of which items 2, 3, 5 and 10 were reverse scored, with representative items such as "I am willing to commit myself to creative problem solving". The scale's Cronbach alpha is 0.937.

Obsessive work passion. It is scaled by a seven-item scale from Vallerand *et al.* (2003). A sample item is "I have a feeling of being controlled by my work." Besides, Cronbach's alpha was 0.875.

Employee boundary-spanning behavior. It is assessed using the six-item scale developed by Marrone et al. (2007). A sample item is "I would Persuade outsiders (e.g., faculty, clients) to support the team decisions.", with Cronbach's alpha of 0.885.

Achievement orientation. It is assessed using the four-item scale developed by Baumann et al. (2005). A sample item is "I often volunteer for difficult tasks." The scale's Cronbach alpha is 0.863.

Control variables. Gender, age, education, and organization tenure are controlled according to Marrone *et al.* (2007).

4. Results

4.1 Common method bias test

Although this study utilized a two-stage questionnaire survey design, potential common method bias may still exist. To address this concern, the study employs the Harman single-factor test (Harman, 1976) to examine common method bias. The principal component analysis revealed a cumulative variance of 62.39%, with the largest variance factor explaining 25.34%, which did not exceed 50%. In addition, this study also examines the model with the addition of the common method factor, and Table I shows that the model fit did not improve significantly when compared to the five-factor model ($\Delta\text{RMSEA}=0.008$, $\Delta\text{CFI}=0.014$, $\Delta\text{TLI}=0.014$, $\Delta\text{IFI}=0.015$). Thus, this study does not have a significant common method bias problem.

4.2 Confirmatory factor analyses

This study employs AMOS 23.0 to perform confirmatory factor analysis on five variables. Analysis results, as displayed in Table I, demonstrate that the five-factor model exhibits a higher degree of fit ($\chi^2=674.115$, $df=485$, $\chi^2/df=1.390$, $RMSEA=0.034$, $CFI=0.967$, $TLI=0.964$, $IFI=0.967$) compared to alternative models. This finding supports the strong discriminant validity of the variables under investigation.

Table 1 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Models		χ^2	df	χ^2/df	$RMSEA$	CFI	TLI
Common Method Factor Model		558.404	453	1.233	0.026	0.981	0.978
Five factor model	PP, AO, CF, OP, EBSB	674.115	485	1.390	0.034	0.967	0.964
Four factor model	PP, AO, CF+OP, EBSB	1659.902	489	3.394	0.085	0.794	0.778
Three factor model	PP+CF+OP, AO, EBSB	2024.920	492	4.116	0.096	0.730	0.711
Two factor model	PP+AO+CF+OP, EBSB	2649.194	494	5.363	0.114	0.621	0.595
One factor model	PP+AO+CF+OP+EBSB	3491.999	495	7.055	0.134	0.473	0.438

Notes: N=336; +represents the combination of two factors into one factor.

4.3 Descriptive statistical analysis

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The findings indicate that performance pressure exhibits a positive correlation with cognitive flexibility ($r=0.371$, $p<0.01$), which in turn is positively linked to employee boundary-spanning behavior ($r=0.290$, $p<0.01$). Additionally, performance pressure is positively associated with obsessive work passion ($r=0.268$, $p<0.01$), which conversely demonstrates a negative relationship with employee boundary-spanning behavior ($r=-0.134$, $p<0.05$). These results offer initial empirical support for the study.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and variable intercorrelations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Sex									
2 Age	0.059								
3 Edu	-0.004	0.078							
4 Tenure	0.021	0.760**	0.044						
5 AO	0.079	-0.014	-0.061	0.03					
6 PP	-0.015	-0.03	0.029	-0.039	0.03				
7 CF	0.066	-0.079	-0.058	-0.042	0.126*	0.371**			
8 OP	-0.018	-0.008	0.01	0.081	-0.051	0.268**	0.076		
9 EBSB	-0.029	-0.019	-0.096	-0.079	0.105	0.230**	0.290**	-0.134*	
Mean	1.518	30.682	2.417	2.506	3.807	3.706	3.695	3.676	3.778
SD	0.500	6.588	0.772	1.146	0.869	0.927	0.814	0.715	0.780

Notes: N=336; * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, two-tailed test.

4.4 Hypotheses testing

4.4.1 Mediating effect test

This study employs the PROCESS and Bootstrap methods to analyze the mediation effects. Specifically, Model 4 from the PROCESS is utilized. The corresponding results are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Performance pressure positively impacts on cognitive flexibility ($b=0.327$, $p<0.001$), which is positively related to employee boundary-spanning behavior ($b=0.224$, $p<0.001$). Besides, the indirect effect analysis results report that cognitive flexibility mediates between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior ($b=0.073$, 95% CI = [0.036, 0.152], excluding 0); thus, H1 is supported. Furthermore, performance pressure positively affects obsessive work passion ($b=0.209$, $p<$

0.001), which is negatively associated with employee boundary-spanning behavior ($b=-0.211$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, this study suggests that obsessive work passion mediates between PP and employee boundary-spanning behavior ($b=-0.044$, 95% CI = $[-0.089, -0.023]$, without 0); thus, H2 is supported.

Table 3 Bootstrapping mediation effect test

Model Path	Effect	SE	Confidence Interval of Bias-corrected 95%
PP→CF	0.327	0.045	[0.240, 0.415]
PP→OP	0.209	0.041	[0.130, 0.288]
CF→EBSB	0.224	0.052	[0.121, 0.328]
OP→EBSB	-0.211	0.058	[-0.325, -0.097]
PP→CF→EBSB	0.073	0.025	[0.036, 0.152]
PP→OP→EBSB	-0.044	0.014	[-0.089, -0.023]

Notes: N=336; Bootstrapping randomly sampled 5000 times.

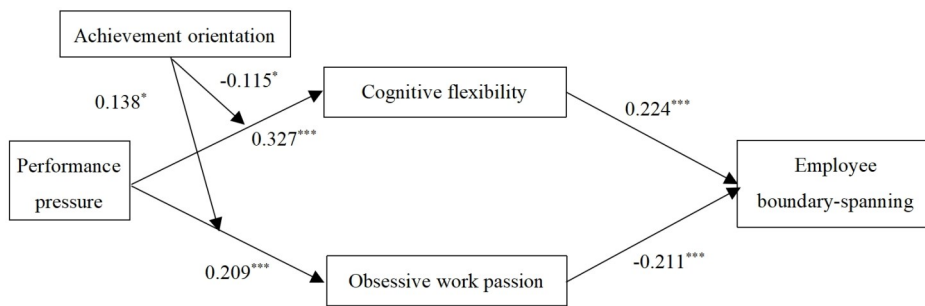


Figure 2 Mediating-moderating model estimation

4.4.2 Moderating effect test

As shown in Table 4, hierarchical regression analysis is used to examine the moderating effect.

Table 4 Regression analysis of moderation

Variables	Cognitive Flexibility			Obsessive Work Passion		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Sex	0.117	0.125	0.121	-0.018	-0.013	-0.013
Age	-0.014	-0.014	-0.012	-0.018	-0.018*	-0.019*
Edu	-0.053	-0.065	-0.051	0.012	0.005	-0.006
Tenure	0.032	0.043	0.021	0.129*	0.135**	0.151**
PP		0.327***	0.314***		0.210***	0.220***
AO			0.106*			-0.064
PP*AO			0.138*			-0.115*
R ²	0.015	0.153	0.180	0.018	0.092	0.111
ΔR ²	0.015	0.138	0.027	0.018	0.074	0.019
F	1.236	11.943***	10.292***	1.553	6.668***	5.858***

Notes: ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, * $p<0.05$.

The interaction term significantly affects cognitive flexibility ($b=0.138$, $p<0.05$) according to model 3. Hence, achievement orientation significantly moderates the relationship between performance pressure and cognitive flexibility. A simple slope test is carried out to better explain the moderating effects. Figure 3 shows that there is a significant effect between performance pressure and cognitive flexibility when achievement orientation is high ($b=0.428$, $p<0.001$) or low ($b=0.198$, $p<0.01$). Therefore, H3 is supported.

Furthermore, Model 6 shows that the interaction term between performance pressure and achievement orientation ($b=-0.115$, $p<0.05$) is significant. Hence, achievement orientation significantly moderates the relationship between performance pressure and obsessive work passion. As shown in

Figure 4, the effect of performance pressure on obsessive work passion is significant ($b=0.129$, $p<0.05$) when achievement orientation is high (mean+1SD) while performance pressure positively affects obsessive work passion ($b=0.301$, $p<0.001$) when achievement orientation is low (mean-1SD). Therefore, the relationship between performance pressure and obsessive work passion is stronger when achievement orientation is low. Therefore, H4 is supported.

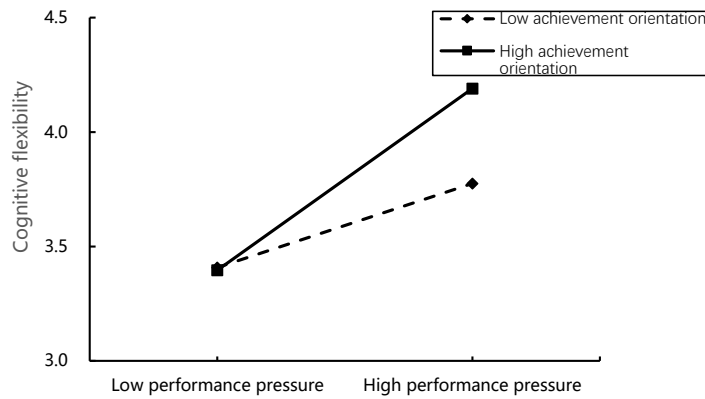


Figure 3 Interaction of performance pressure and achievement orientation on cognitive flexibility

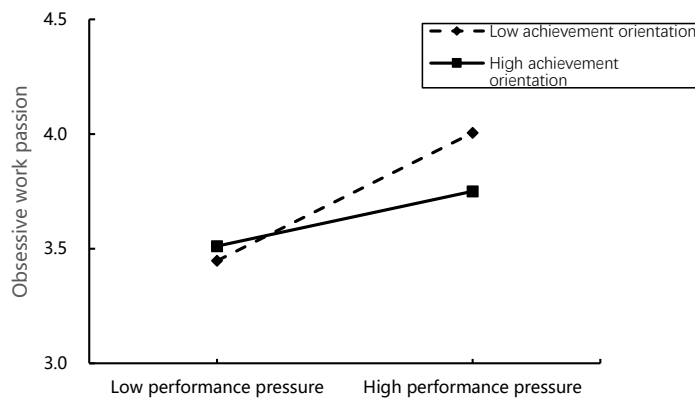


Figure 4 Interaction of performance pressure and achievement orientation on obsessive work passion

4.4.3 Moderated mediating effect test

This study applies the bootstrapping method to analyze the moderated mediation effect. Table V shows that the mediating effect of cognitive flexibility on the relationship between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior is 0.097 (95% CI = [0.037, 0.172], excluding 0) in the high level of achievement orientation (mean+1SD), and 0.043 (95% CI = [0.007, 0.093], excluding 0) in the low level of achievement orientation (mean-1SD). The difference between conditional indirect effects is also significant (difference=0.054, 95% CI = [0.002, 0.124], without 0). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Moreover, the mediation effect of obsessive work passion on the relationship between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior is not significant (95% CI = [-0.058, 0.001], including 0) in the high level of achievement orientation (mean+1SD), whereas -0.067 (95% CI = [-0.112, -0.033], excluding 0) in the low level of achievement orientation (mean-1SD). The difference between conditional indirect effects is significant (difference=0.042, 95% CI = [0.008, 0.091], without

0). Thus, Hypothesis 6 is supported.

Table 5 Bootstrapping estimates for moderated mediation

Path	Moderator	Indirect effect	SE	Confidence interval of bias-corrected 95%
Cognitive path: PP→CF→EBSB	High AO	0.097	0.035	[0.037,0.172]
	Low AO	0.043	0.022	[0.007,0.093]
	Discrepancy	0.054	0.031	[0.002,0.124]
Affective path: PP→OP→EBSB	High AO	-0.025	0.015	[-0.058,0.001]
	Low AO	-0.067	0.020	[-0.112, -0.033]
	Discrepancy	0.042	0.021	[0.008,0.091]

4. Conclusion and discussion

4.1 Conclusion

Emerging business formats and increasing cross-industry activities have become common. The phenomenon of employees engaging in boundary-spanning activities has drawn significant attention in academic circles. Based on cognitive-affective processing system theory and stressor-strain relationship theory, this study explores the influence mechanism and boundary conditions of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior. Combining the perspectives of "stressor-cognitive/affective-behavioral response" and "challenge-hindrance stressor-positive coping/negative coping", this study constructs the "positive coping path: performance pressure (stressor) → cognitive flexibility (cognitive unit) → employee boundary-spanning behavior (behavioral response)" and the "negative coping path: performance pressure (stressor) → obsessive work passion (affective unit) → employee boundary-spanning behavior (behavioral response)" dual-path integration model, confirming the double-edged sword effect of performance pressure, and further explores the boundary conditions for the positive and negative effects of performance pressure by introducing achievement orientation (individual trait) as a moderating variable.

Specific findings are reflected in the mediating and moderating effects: performance pressure promotes employee boundary-spanning behavior by improving employee's cognitive flexibility while reduces employee boundary-spanning behavior by enhancing employees' obsessive work passion. Additionally, achievement orientation positively moderates the relationship between performance pressure and cognitive flexibility, as well as the indirect effect of cognitive flexibility on the relationship between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior. The higher the level of achievement orientation, the stronger the indirect effect; and achievement orientation negatively moderates the relationship between performance pressure and obsessive work passion, as well as the indirect effect of obsessive work passion on the relationship between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior. The higher the level of achievement orientation, the weaker the indirect effect.

4.2 Theoretical implications

First, this study extends the literature regarding the antecedents of employee boundary-spanning behavior. A review of the literature on boundary-spanning behavior indicates that the majority of studies center on team boundary-spanning behavior and its impact effects. However, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding the influencing factors of employee boundary-spanning behavior, such as performance pressure, time pressure, and other task stressors. This study explores the mechanism and boundary conditions of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior, responds to the call of Marrone and other scholars to strengthen the research on the influencing factors of employee boundary-spanning behavior, and enriches the research on the antecedent variables of employee boundary-spanning behavior.

Second, based on cognitive-affective processing system theory and stressor-strain relationship

theory, this study confirmed the double-edged sword effect of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior from both cognitive and affective perspectives. Combining the perspectives of "stressor-cognitive/affective-behavioral response" and "challenge-hindrance stressor-positive coping/negative coping", this study constructs the "positive coping path: performance pressure (stressor) → cognitive flexibility (cognitive unit) → employee boundary-spanning behavior (behavioral response)" and the "negative coping path: performance pressure (stressor) → obsessive work passion (affective unit) → employee boundary-spanning behavior (behavioral response)" dual-path integration model, confirming the double-edged sword effect of performance pressure, which explains how performance pressure affects employee boundary-spanning behavior. Besides, this study confirms the explanatory power of cognitive-affective processing system theory and stressor-strain relationship theory, and provides new theoretical perspectives for the field of boundary-spanning behavior research.

Finally, based on cognitive-affective processing system theory, this study incorporates achievement orientation (individual trait) into the research framework and clarifies the boundary conditions under which performance pressure affects employee boundary-spanning behavior through cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion. Employees with different personality traits also differ in their responses to stressors, which in turn lead to different psychological states and behavioral strategies. Specifically, employees with high levels of achievement orientation focus more on the positive aspects of performance pressure, increase their cognitive flexibility, adopt positive coping strategies, and are also less likely to feel the tension and negative emotional experiences caused by performance pressure. Employees with high achievement orientation tend to develop positive cognitive and affective responses, which in turn influence their subsequent work behavior. This enriches the research on the boundary conditions under which performance pressure exerts positive and negative effects. At the same time, the individual trait introduction perspective of the cognitive-affective processing system theory is a useful addition to the research on the moderating mechanism of the double-edged sword effect of performance pressure.

4.3 Practical implications

First, carefully consider the dual impact of the double-edged sword and resolve the contradictory effects. Managers need to acknowledge performance pressure's dual impact, adopting a balanced perspective without promoting or rejecting high performance expectations for employees. Research has found that performance pressure at work is widespread. Managers need to not only recognize the benefits of high-performance requirements for the organization but also acknowledge the negative impact of performance pressure on employees. Therefore, managers should focus on implementing reasonable systems and strategies to enhance the positive effects of performance pressure, mitigate the negative consequences, and effectively balance the various impacts of performance pressure.

Second, optimizing stress management and guiding challenge evaluation. Business managers should optimize stress management measures in the workplace and effectively use performance pressure to promote employee boundary-spanning behavior. Managers should pay attention to employees' perceptual experience of performance pressure, guide employees to positively assess performance pressure, and avoid negative emotional reactions. Specifically, on the one hand, managers should pay attention to how to communicate performance expectations to employees, emphasize to employees the potential benefits and opportunities of high performance requirements, and reinforce employees' positive assessment of performance pressure to reduce the possibility of performance expectations being negatively interpreted, for example, by setting accessible but challenging goals and promising rewards for achieving performance; on the other hand, while communicating performance requirements, managers should provide employees with the necessary psychological and material resource support, such as appropriate autonomy, financial support, two-way communication and feedback channels, etc., to enhance employees' flexibility of thinking and their awareness of finding solutions to solve problems; in addition, managers should pay attention to the emotional management of employees, and regularly carry out activities such as stress coping training and mental health

training, so as to channel the negative emotions of employees under stress, help employees establish an optimistic work mindset, maintain work vitality, and promote employees to implement more boundary-spanning activities.

Finally, prioritize individual differences and highlight classification management. Managers must thoroughly account for employee individuality and implement tailored management strategies based on each individual's circumstances. Organizations should conduct psychological assessment during the recruitment stage and give priority to employees with high achievement orientation, because positive individual traits will influence employees' psychological cognition and work behavior; in addition, managers should set performance tasks based on employees' achievement orientation levels and individual differences. Managers should encourage employees with high achievement orientation to stimulate their potential, break boundaries, and actively undertake challenging boundary-spanning activities to achieve higher performance goals and promote corporate innovation. On the other hand, for employees with low achievement orientation, providing training opportunities or implementing measures such as transferring and rotating employees can help mitigate negative emotions resulting from performance pressure. This, in turn, can safeguard their psychological well-being and ultimately improve their work performance.

4.4 Limitations and future research

In terms of research design, to address the potential issue of common method bias stemming from relying solely on employees' subjective reports, future studies can enhance the reliability of results by incorporating multiple data sources. One approach could involve inviting leaders to provide their assessments of employees' boundary-spanning behavior.

In terms of research content, this study examined the impact of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior. In future research, other sources of work pressure and organizational-level influences, such as time pressure, work-family conflict, and organizational change, can be explored to enhance the understanding of antecedent variables of employee boundary-spanning behavior. The study demonstrated the mediating role of cognitive flexibility and obsessive work passion between performance pressure and employee boundary-spanning behavior. Future research could investigate alternative mediating variables to better understand the formation mechanism of employee boundary-spanning behavior. Additionally, the study highlighted the moderating role of achievement orientation in the influence of performance pressure. Subsequent research could investigate other moderating variables, such as promotion focus and loss-focused coping, to further elucidate the boundary conditions of the influence mechanism.

As for the theoretical application aspect, this study employs cognitive-affective processing system theory as a theoretical framework and utilizes stressor-strain relationship theory to explain the double-edged sword mechanism of performance pressure on employee boundary-spanning behavior from the perspective of "challenge-hindrance stressor-positive coping/negative coping". The study mainly refers to Yu et al. (2021) on the application of the stressor-strain relationship theory and the assessment mechanism of stressors. Future research can assess challenge assessment and hindrance assessment variables through the cognitive appraisal theory to better understand how they impact psychological and behavioral mechanisms, thus improving the comprehensiveness and persuasiveness of the study.

About the authors

Haomin Zhang, Professor at School of Management Shanghai University. Research field: Organizational behavior and human resource management. Email: zhanghm6998@126.com

Jiyan Liu, Master at School of Management Shanghai University. Research field: Organizational behavior and human resource management. Email: 18726646342@163.com

Jiawen Chen, Master at School of Management Shanghai University. Research field: Organizational behavior and human resource management. Email: 158426208@qq.com

Disclosure statement

The authors declare not conflict of interest.

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