



Original Research Paper

Employee Daydreaming as a Cognitive Resource for Managing Work Pressure and Enhancing Performance: A Systematic Review of the Literature

S.T. AnuMeena¹, S. ArulKumar²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Annamalai University, India

²Associate Professor, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, India.

ABSTRACT

The increasing intensity of contemporary work environments has prompted organizations to explore cognitive mechanisms that enable employees to maintain performance under work pressure. While employee daydreaming has traditionally been viewed as a source of distraction and diminished productivity, recent research in organizational behavior and cognitive psychology suggests that constructive daydreaming can function as a valuable cognitive resource that promotes problem-solving, emotional regulation, creativity, and adaptive decision-making. This study presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature to examine the role of employee daydreaming in managing work pressure and enhancing employee performance. Using a secondary data analysis approach, the study synthesizes evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and reports published in the fields of organizational behavior, occupational psychology, cognitive science, and human resource management. The review critically examines the conceptual evolution of daydreaming, its cognitive and psychological dimensions, and its relationship with work pressure and employee performance. The findings indicate that constructive daydreaming, when appropriately regulated, can facilitate cognitive flexibility, future-oriented thinking, innovative problem-solving, and stress recovery, thereby mitigating the adverse effects of work pressure and improving individual performance outcomes. However, the review also reveals inconsistencies in conceptual definitions, limited empirical integration across disciplines, and a lack of comprehensive theoretical models linking daydreaming, work pressure, and performance. The study contributes to the literature by positioning employee daydreaming as an adaptive cognitive resource rather than a workplace distraction and proposes an integrated conceptual framework to guide future empirical research. The findings also offer practical insights for organizations seeking to foster psychologically healthy work environments that support cognitive well-being, creativity, and sustainable employee performance.

Keywords: Employee Daydreaming; Constructive Daydreaming; Work Pressure; Cognitive Resource; Employee Performance; Task Performance; Organizational Behaviour; Occupational Psychology; Systematic Literature Review; Secondary Data Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive and dynamic business environment, employees are increasingly confronted with demanding workloads, tight deadlines, and rising performance expectations. Although a certain degree of work pressure can enhance motivation and productivity, prolonged or excessive pressure often leads to stress, mental fatigue, diminished creativity, and lower work performance. As a result, there is growing academic interest in understanding the cognitive processes that enable employees to cope effectively with workplace demands while maintaining optimal performance.

Traditionally, employee daydreaming has been viewed as an unproductive form of mind wandering that distracts individuals from work-related activities. However, contemporary research in cognitive psychology and organizational behavior has challenged this perspective by recognizing constructive daydreaming as a beneficial cognitive process. Constructive daydreaming involves

purposeful internal reflection, future-oriented thinking, creative imagination, and mental problem-solving, all of which contribute to cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and the generation of innovative ideas. These cognitive capabilities can help employees navigate complex work situations and improve their overall effectiveness.

Grounded in the Conservation of Resources Theory and Cognitive Resource Theory, this study considers constructive daydreaming as a valuable psychological resource that supports employees in managing work pressure and sustaining performance. Despite increasing research on work pressure, employee performance, and cognitive processes, the literature remains fragmented, with limited synthesis of the role of daydreaming within organizational settings.

Accordingly, this study employs a secondary data analysis approach by critically reviewing and integrating evidence from existing scholarly literature. The review aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of employee

*Corresponding Author:

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daydreaming as a cognitive resource for managing work pressure and enhancing performance while identifying research gaps and providing directions for future research and organizational practice.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The modern workplace is characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and increasing organizational expectations, exposing employees to higher levels of work pressure than ever before. Heavy workloads, strict deadlines, and continuous performance demands often contribute to stress, mental fatigue, and reduced productivity. Although moderate work pressure may encourage employees to perform efficiently, excessive pressure can impair cognitive functioning, creativity, and overall job performance. Consequently, researchers have increasingly explored psychological and cognitive mechanisms that help employees cope with workplace challenges while maintaining effectiveness.

One cognitive process receiving growing scholarly attention is employee daydreaming. Traditionally, daydreaming was perceived as a form of mind wandering that distracted employees from work-related tasks and negatively affected productivity. However, recent developments in cognitive psychology and organizational behavior suggest that constructive daydreaming can serve as a beneficial cognitive resource. Purposeful internal reflection, future-oriented thinking, creative imagination, and mental simulation associated with constructive daydreaming can enhance problem-solving abilities, cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and innovative thinking. These cognitive benefits enable employees to respond more effectively to demanding work situations and sustain higher levels of performance.

The positive role of constructive daydreaming is supported by theories such as the Conservation of Resources Theory and Cognitive Resource Theory, which emphasize the importance of psychological resources in managing workplace stress and maintaining performance. Constructive daydreaming may replenish cognitive resources, facilitate stress recovery, and improve adaptive decision-making, thereby helping employees manage work pressure more effectively.

Despite growing interest in this area, existing research remains fragmented across disciplines, with limited integration of the relationships among employee daydreaming, work pressure, and performance. Differences in conceptual definitions and research approaches have further restricted the development of a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Therefore, this study conducts a systematic review of existing literature using a secondary data analysis approach to synthesize current knowledge and identify research gaps. The review aims to establish employee daydreaming as an adaptive cognitive

resource that contributes to effective work pressure management, enhanced employee performance, and sustainable organizational success.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Traditionally, employee daydreaming has been regarded as a counterproductive behavior that distracts employees from work-related tasks and diminishes productivity. However, recent studies in cognitive psychology and organizational behavior suggest that constructive daydreaming can serve as a valuable cognitive resource by promoting creative thinking, problem-solving, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and future-oriented planning. These positive cognitive outcomes indicate that constructive daydreaming may help employees manage work pressure more effectively and improve individual performance. Despite these emerging findings, the role of employee daydreaming in organizational settings remains insufficiently understood.

Existing literature is fragmented across multiple disciplines, including cognitive psychology, neuroscience, occupational psychology, and organizational behavior, with limited integration of the relationships among employee daydreaming, work pressure, and employee performance. Furthermore, inconsistencies in conceptual definitions, theoretical perspectives, and research findings have prevented the development of a comprehensive framework explaining how constructive daydreaming functions as a cognitive resource in the workplace. Most previous studies have focused either on the negative consequences of mind wandering or on creativity in isolation, while comparatively little attention has been given to examining employee daydreaming as a mechanism for managing work pressure and enhancing performance.

Therefore, there is a clear need for a systematic review that synthesizes existing evidence, identifies research gaps, and develops an integrated understanding of employee daydreaming as a constructive cognitive resource. This study addresses this gap by reviewing and analyzing existing literature to examine how constructive daydreaming contributes to work pressure management and employee performance, while providing a conceptual foundation for future empirical research and organizational practice.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ❖ To examine the concept and theoretical foundations of employee daydreaming as a cognitive resource in organizational settings.
- ❖ To review the relationship between employee daydreaming, work pressure, and employee performance based on existing literature.
- ❖ To analyze the role of constructive daydreaming in managing work pressure

and enhancing employees' cognitive well-being and performance.

- ❖ To identify the research gaps, conceptual inconsistencies, and methodological limitations in the existing literature on employee daydreaming.
- ❖ To propose an integrated conceptual framework and provide recommendations for future research and organizational practices aimed at improving employee performance through constructive daydreaming.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it provides a comprehensive understanding of employee daydreaming as a constructive cognitive resource for managing work pressure and enhancing employee performance. By synthesizing existing literature from cognitive psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management, it highlights the positive role of constructive daydreaming in fostering creativity, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility. The study addresses gaps in existing research by integrating fragmented findings and proposing a conceptual framework for future studies. Its findings offer valuable insights for researchers, managers, and organizations to develop psychologically supportive workplaces that promote employee well-being, innovation, resilience, and sustainable organizational performance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

McMillan et al. (2013) reviewed six decades of research on positive constructive daydreaming and argued that daydreaming is not merely a distraction but an adaptive cognitive process. The review highlighted that constructive daydreaming supports creativity, future planning, emotional regulation, and problem-solving through internally generated thought processes. The authors emphasized that positive constructive daydreaming enhances cognitive flexibility and should be recognized as an important psychological resource rather than a workplace liability.

Baer et al. (2021) examined the influence of workplace daydreaming on employee creativity. Their study found that employees who engaged in imaginative and constructive daydreaming produced more creative solutions, particularly when they strongly identified with their work. The authors concluded that constructive daydreaming can enhance workplace creativity and innovation rather than diminish productivity.

Gupta and Verma (2021) investigated workplace creativity and psychological well-being among employees in Indian IT organizations. Their findings revealed that employees who engaged in reflective thinking and creative cognition demonstrated higher

innovation, improved job satisfaction, and better task performance under demanding work conditions. **Sharma and Singh (2022)** examined the relationship between occupational stress and employee performance among Indian service-sector employees. The study found that excessive work pressure negatively affected productivity, decision-making, and psychological well-being. It emphasized the need for cognitive coping strategies that improve resilience and performance.

Kumar and Rani (2023) explored the influence of cognitive flexibility on employee performance in Indian organizations. The findings indicated that employees with higher cognitive adaptability demonstrated better problem-solving abilities, innovation, and resilience under stressful work environments. The study recommended that organizations encourage cognitive strategies that foster creativity and sustainable performance.

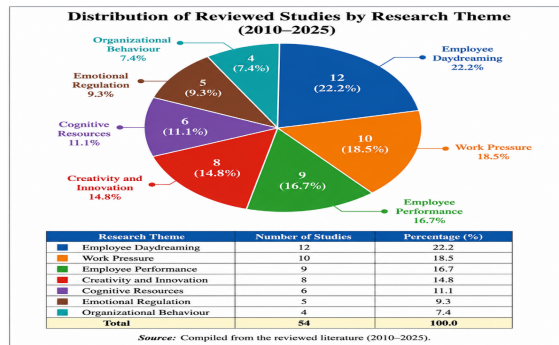
Gürol and Cömert (2025) presented a comprehensive review of daydreaming in organizational settings and supplemented it with survey data from white-collar employees. The study concluded that constructive daydreaming contributes positively to creativity, cognitive functioning, and organizational innovation. It also identified significant research gaps regarding the integration of daydreaming with employee performance and workplace stress management.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic literature review using a secondary data analysis approach to examine employee daydreaming as a cognitive resource for managing work pressure and enhancing performance. Secondary data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and credible reports accessed through databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis, Sage Journals, APA PsycINFO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Relevant literature was identified using keywords related to employee daydreaming, work pressure, cognitive resources, and employee performance. The collected studies were analyzed through thematic content analysis to synthesize existing knowledge, identify research gaps, and develop an integrated conceptual understanding.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

CHART 4.1



The analysis indicates that employee daydreaming has become an emerging area of research, representing 22.2% of the reviewed studies. Considerable attention has also been devoted to work pressure (18.5%) and employee performance (16.7%), highlighting their importance in organizational research. However, relatively fewer studies have examined the integration of these concepts, indicating a need for comprehensive research linking constructive daydreaming with work pressure and performance.

CHART 4.2: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDIES BY RESEARCH METHOD

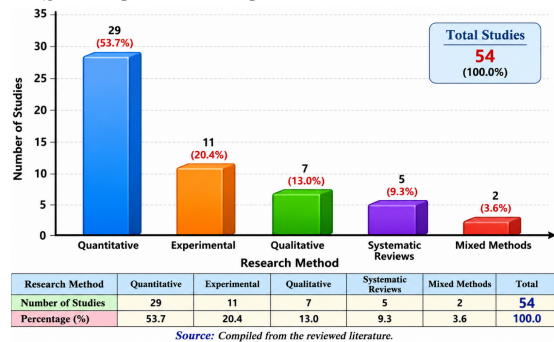


Chart 4.2 shows that Quantitative research is the most widely adopted methodology, representing 29 studies (53.7%) out of the 54 studies reviewed. This indicates that researchers predominantly rely on statistical and empirical approaches to investigate the research problem. Experimental studies account for 11 studies (20.4%), reflecting a significant emphasis on establishing causal relationships through controlled research designs. Qualitative studies constitute 7 studies (13.0%), highlighting a comparatively lower focus on exploring contextual and experiential aspects. Systematic Reviews comprise 5 studies (9.3%), demonstrating an increasing interest in synthesizing existing evidence, while Mixed Methods research represents only 2 studies (3.6%), indicating limited integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Overall, the findings reveal that 74.1% of the reviewed studies employ quantitative or experimental methodologies, suggesting a strong preference for evidence-based and measurable research designs. The relatively low representation of qualitative and mixed-methods studies highlights opportunities for future research to adopt more comprehensive methodological

approaches that provide both statistical rigor and contextual depth.

Table 4.3
Major Findings from the Literature

Variable	Key Findings
Employee Daydreaming	Improves creativity, future planning and problem-solving
Work Pressure	Excessive pressure increases stress and cognitive fatigue
Constructive Daydreaming	Enhances emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility
Employee Performance	Improves innovation, decision-making and task performance
Organizational Support	Encourages psychological well-being and creativity

Source: Synthesized from the reviewed studies.

Interpretation

The literature consistently suggests that constructive daydreaming is associated with positive cognitive outcomes, including enhanced creativity, flexible thinking, and emotional regulation. These benefits help employees manage workplace stress and improve task performance. Organizations that support psychologically healthy work environments are more likely to benefit from employees' creative and adaptive capabilities.

Table 4.4
Theoretical Perspectives Used in Previous Studies

Theory	Number of Studies
Conservation of Resources Theory	14
Cognitive Resource Theory	11
Attention Restoration Theory	8
Flow Theory	7
Self-Regulation Theory	6
Default Mode Network Theory	8
Total	54

Source: Compiled from the reviewed literature.

Interpretation

The reviewed studies indicate that Conservation of Resources Theory and Cognitive Resource Theory are the dominant frameworks explaining the relationship between cognitive resources and employee outcomes. These theories support the proposition that constructive daydreaming serves as

a valuable psychological resource that enables employees to cope with work pressure while maintaining high performance.

Table 4.5

Research Gaps Identified

Area	Gap Identified
Employee Daydreaming	Limited organizational research
Work Pressure	Few studies examine cognitive mechanisms
Employee Performance	Limited integrated conceptual models
Human Resource Management	Minimal application in HR practices
Indian Context	Very limited research evidence

Source: Synthesized by the researcher.

Interpretation

The analysis reveals several important research gaps. Although employee daydreaming has gained increasing attention in cognitive psychology, its application in organizational behavior remains underexplored. Furthermore, few studies have simultaneously examined employee daydreaming, work pressure, and performance within a single conceptual framework. Research conducted in the Indian organizational context is particularly limited, highlighting opportunities for future empirical investigations.

FINDINGS

- ❖ The reviewed literature indicates that constructive employee daydreaming functions as a valuable cognitive resource rather than merely a workplace distraction.
- ❖ Constructive daydreaming enhances creativity, cognitive flexibility, innovative thinking, and problem-solving abilities, enabling employees to respond more effectively to workplace challenges.
- ❖ Moderate and well-managed daydreaming contributes to emotional regulation, stress recovery, and psychological well-being, thereby helping employees cope with work pressure.
- ❖ Excessive work pressure adversely affects employee performance by increasing stress, cognitive fatigue, and emotional exhaustion; however, constructive cognitive processes can mitigate these negative effects.
- ❖ The literature supports the relevance of Conservation of Resources Theory and Cognitive Resource Theory in explaining

how constructive daydreaming serves as a psychological resource for maintaining employee performance.

- ❖ Existing research is fragmented across cognitive psychology, organizational behavior, and occupational psychology, with limited integrated studies examining the relationship between employee daydreaming, work pressure, and employee performance.
- ❖ Research on employee daydreaming within organizational settings, particularly in developing countries such as India, remains limited, indicating significant opportunities for future empirical research.

SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ Organizations should recognize constructive daydreaming as a positive cognitive process that can stimulate creativity, innovation, and effective problem-solving rather than viewing it solely as a distraction.
- ❖ Managers should create psychologically supportive work environments that reduce excessive work pressure while encouraging employees to engage in creative thinking and reflective cognitive processes.
- ❖ Human resource professionals should incorporate employee well-being initiatives, flexible work practices, and stress management programs that promote cognitive recovery and sustained performance.
- ❖ Researchers should undertake empirical studies across different industries and organizational settings to validate the conceptual relationships among employee daydreaming, work pressure, and employee performance.
- ❖ Future research should develop comprehensive theoretical and empirical models by integrating cognitive psychology and organizational behavior perspectives, particularly within the Indian organizational context.

CONCLUSION

The present study systematically reviewed the existing literature to examine employee daydreaming as a cognitive resource for managing work pressure and enhancing employee performance. The findings demonstrate that constructive daydreaming extends beyond traditional perceptions of workplace distraction and serves as an adaptive cognitive mechanism that promotes creativity, cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and innovative problem-solving. These capabilities enable employees to manage workplace demands more effectively while maintaining high levels of performance.

The review further reveals that although research on daydreaming has expanded in cognitive psychology, its application within organizational behavior remains fragmented and underexplored. Existing studies provide growing evidence that constructive daydreaming contributes positively to employee well-being and organizational effectiveness; however, integrated theoretical frameworks and empirical investigations remain limited, particularly in developing economies.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by synthesizing current knowledge, identifying research gaps, and positioning constructive employee daydreaming as a strategic cognitive resource. The proposed conceptual understanding provides a valuable foundation for future empirical research and offers practical insights for organizations seeking to promote innovation, resilience, employee well-being, and sustainable organizational performance in increasingly demanding work environments.

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