

Coping with interest incongruence: the joint roles of proactive personality and job crafting

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the conservation of resources (COR) theory, we propose a mediated moderation showing how proactive personality (PP) and job crafting toward interests (JC-interests) influence the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing.

Design/methodology/approach – We used a three-wave survey and collected data from 429 full-time employees working in different industries in China.

Findings – We found that interest incongruence was positively related to cyberloafing. Furthermore, this positive relationship was more significant when employees were low in PP or engaged in low levels of JC-interests. In addition, the moderating effect of PP was mediated by JC-interests.

Practical implications – These findings are helpful for organizations in figuring out how to mitigate the detrimental effects of interest incongruence by providing more support to proactive employees and implementing various JC interventions.

Originality/value – This study suggests that PP and JC-interests (resource gain strategy) could mitigate the positive effect of interest incongruence on employees' cyberloafing.

Keywords Interest incongruence, Proactive personality, Job crafting, Cyberloafing

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Vocational interests reflect stable individual differences in preferences for specific work activities and environments (Holland, 1997). Holland (1997) proposed that individuals are attracted to certain types of work environments that are congruent with their interests. A growing body of empirical evidence has demonstrated the positive links between interest congruence and employee job satisfaction (Nye *et al.*, 2021) and job performance (Nye *et al.*, 2017). However, employees' choice for a specific job is often driven by various factors (e.g. pay, family needs, and location preferences) other than matching their vocational interests (Nye *et al.*, 2021). Thus, interest incongruence is prevalent in the workplace (Li *et al.*, 2022b). Follmer *et al.* (2018) indicated that employees often viewed the person-environment (P-E) misfit as an unpleasant condition and thus were highly motivated to resolve it. However, existing research mainly highlights poor attitudes (e.g. job dissatisfaction and frustration; Iliescu *et al.*, 2015; Li *et al.*, 2022a), absenteeism (Li *et al.*, 2022a), and turnover (Holland, 1997) as typical responses to interest incongruence. Since absenteeism and turnover are not wise and available options for many employees (Follmer *et al.*, 2018), the critical question remains: "What do employees do in response to interest incongruence when they decide to stay in the workplace?" By exploring how employees who decide to stay or who do not have the immediate option to leave cope with interest incongruence, we would draw a complete picture of the impacts of interest incongruence on employees' behaviors (e.g. counterproductive work behaviors; CWB) and provide valuable suggestions to employees and organizations on how to handle this problem more efficiently (Follmer *et al.*, 2018).

The conceptualization of vocational interests falls within the broader definition of individual needs, which is defined as "individuals' psychological, biological, learned, and socialized requirements for certain types of work, activity, and interaction" (Wiegand, 2018, p. 11). Consequently, some scholars (Nye *et al.*, 2021; Wiegand, 2018) have proposed that



interest incongruence represents a specific type of needs-supplies misfit. When vocational environments fail to satisfy employees' interest needs, employees may feel compelled to work in uninteresting or unpleasant ways and interact with others who share dissimilar interests in their work (Chen *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, employees who encounter interest incongruence would experience autonomy and relatedness frustration. The experience of need frustration has been demonstrated to deplete limited psychological resources, leading to ego depletion (Mills and Allen, 2020). Conservation of Resources (COR) theory defines the resource as "anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals" (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014, p. 1338). Stress occurs when there is a threat and/or actual loss of resources or a lack of resource gain (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, scholars (Chen *et al.*, 2024; Li *et al.*, 2022a, b) have identified interest incongruence as a workplace stressor. Furthermore, COR theory posits that individuals select appropriate behaviors based on their existing resources to maximize resource returns and minimize further resource losses. This study sought to examine how employees cope with interest incongruence through the lens of COR.

Cyberloafing refers to non-work-related Internet use during work time (Lim, 2002). Common cyberloafing behaviors include shopping, playing online games, and browsing Facebook during work hours (Lim and Chen, 2012). In contrast to traditional forms of loafing (e.g. taking long lunches, coming later, and leaving early; Lim, 2002), cyberloafing is considerably more difficult to detect and easier to conceal (Koay, 2018). For example, cyberloafers can minimize their non-work-related websites and display their monitor as work-related when supervisors or coworkers are nearby with just a few clicks of a button (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). Engaging in non-work-related internet activities can temporarily divert the attention of interest-incongruent employees away from these uninteresting work demands (She and Li, 2022), preventing further resource depletion. Cyberloafing has been identified as a defensive withdrawal strategy to protect individuals from further resource depletion when faced with workplace stressors, such as workplace ostracism (Koay, 2018) and workplace boredom (Pindek *et al.*, 2018) [1]. To continue this research stream, the first aim of this study is to assess whether interest incongruence is related to cyberloafing.

The second aim of this study is to discover the moderators of the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing. Various managerial control mechanisms have been implemented to prevent employees from cyberloafing (Lim and Teo, 2024), including implementing internet regulation policies, installing electronic monitoring, and imposing strict sanctions. However, scholars have warned about the downside of managerial control mechanisms. For example, Jiang *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that internet monitoring signaled a lack of sufficient trust on the part of employers, which subsequently reduced employees' intrinsic work motivation and affective organizational commitment. Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara *et al.* (2006) stated that exerting control and implementing prohibitive procedures may cause employees to develop hostile attitudes toward organizations, resulting in these employees engaging in more cyberloafing behaviors to rebel. Consequently, scholars have suggested that organizations should expect employees to exercise self-regulation to manage their cyberloafing behaviors (Spector, 2024) and have advocated for a focus on individual characteristics (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Viera-Armas, 2017). COR theory posits that certain personality dispositions are important resources that can stimulate greater efforts to cope with work stressors (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). In particular, the present study focuses on the moderating role of proactive personality (PP).

PP refers to an individual's behavioral tendency to create opportunities and initiate change until meaningful change occurs (Seibert *et al.*, 1999). It represents a dispositional tendency to intentionally modify environments for the better. This drive is fueled by an individual's desire to accumulate structural and social resources (Bakker *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, individuals with high PP tend to employ proactive coping behaviors that facilitate the acquisition of additional resources, such as positive emotions, perceived strengths use, and adaptability (Yi-Feng Chen *et al.*, 2021). Research has found that employees high in PP are less vulnerable to stressors (Striler and Jex, 2023). COR theory (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014) postulates that when faced with the threat of losing resources or actual resource loss, individuals tend to cope with it

by preventing further resource loss (the “resource conservation tenet”) or by acquiring new resources (the “resource investment tenet”). Given that resource conservation is more central than resource acquisition (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014), individuals tend to prevent further resource loss and protect their existing resources rather than invest existing resources for further resource gains. Therefore, we argued that employees faced with interest incongruence tend to choose cyberloafing as a defensive withdrawal strategy to avoid resource depletion and protect their existing resources. However, employees with a high level of PP often seek to engage in their work to acquire additional resources (Caniëls *et al.*, 2018). Tisu *et al.* (2020) also found that PP can help individuals overcome the resource conservation tendency and proactively invest existing resources for further gains. Therefore, we postulate that when confronted with interest incongruence, employees with high PP are likely to invest resources to cope with interest incongruence rather than conserve current resources by avoiding work tasks through cyberloafing.

The third aim of this study is to shed light on the process through which PP moderates the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing. We argued that job crafting (JC) would mediate the moderating effect of PP. Holland (1997) stated that employees can resolve interest incongruence by changing their environments. Individuals with PP are inclined to change their environments rather than accept the state of being shaped by their circumstances (Crant, 2000). One way that employees choose to change their environments is through JC (Follmer *et al.*, 2018), defined as self-initiated behaviors whereby employees redesign their work within the context of a predefined job (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Prior studies have demonstrated that PP is positively related to JC (e.g. Bakker *et al.*, 2012).

Specifically, Wrzesniewski and Dutton’s (2001) seminal work has identified three distinct JC strategies: task crafting (e.g. adjusting the frequency and scope of job tasks), relational crafting (e.g. adjusting the quality or the amounts of interactions with others), and cognitive crafting (i.e. adjusting the view of the job). The three JC strategies represent unique ways in which employees redesign their jobs to improve their work experience. In their proposed JC model, motives for engaging in JC include satisfying a positive self-image and interpersonal connection (Berdicchia *et al.*, 2016). Building on Wrzesniewski and Dutton’s (2001) work on JC, Li *et al.* (2022b) propose that employees can use JC as a resource investment strategy to proactively obtain resources and mitigate resource depletion caused by interest incongruence. Particularly, the current work focuses on the goal of JC and argues that when experiencing interest incongruence, proactive employees would use a specific type of JC aimed at crafting jobs to match employees’ vocational interests (Kooij *et al.*, 2017), namely, JC towards interest (JC-interests). JC-interests can facilitate the creation of more personally meaningful jobs for employees, thereby increasing their vitality at work (Chen *et al.*, 2024) and work engagement (Kuijpers *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, employees who engage in JC-interests can foster or intensify social relationships with coworkers who share similar interests, satisfying their relatedness needs (Chen *et al.*, 2024; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). The resources (e.g. work meaningfulness) generated by JC-interests can increase employees’ expectations that they can benefit from investing existing resources in their work and make them feel comfortable at work (Kooij *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, JC-interests may serve as a proactive resource gain strategy through which employees could proactively amplify their resources at the workplace, such as achieving greater self-control over jobs, building social networks, and enhancing psychological empowerment (Alwali, 2023b). Consequently, with the availability of resources from JC-interests, they are less likely to engage in cyberloafing to conserve resources.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1 Vocational interest

Holland’s (1997) RIASEC model is the most widely used theory of vocational interests. Holland outlined six interest types. Specifically, individuals with *Realistic* interests like working with tools and machines or in the outdoors. *Investigative* individuals enjoy

intellectual and scholarly activities. Individuals with *Artistic* interests prefer creative, unsystematic, and ambiguous activities. *Social* individuals enjoy activities that involve interactions with others. *Enterprising* individuals enjoy activities that involve leading or persuading others. *Conventional* individuals prefer well-ordered and routine activities. The interrelatedness of these six types follows a hexagon, with each angle representing an interest type (in the R-I-A-S-E-C order). Within the hexagon, adjacent types (e.g. R-I) share more similarities, alternative types (e.g. R-A) show smaller correlations than the adjacent pairs, and opposite types (e.g. R-S) are the most discrepant. Individuals may have a pattern of interest profile consisting of two or three predominant interest types. In addition, Holland postulated six corresponding types of environments that support individuals in engaging in specific activities. Holland's theory (1997) emphasized the congruence between employees and their environments [2].

While previous studies have extensively documented the positive effects of interest congruence (Van Iddekinge *et al.*, 2011; Nye *et al.*, 2021), few studies have investigated how employees respond to interest incongruence (Su, 2020). Only a few empirical studies have begun to link interest incongruence to specific withdrawal behaviors, such as absenteeism (Li *et al.*, 2022a) and turnover (Holland, 1997). However, Koslowsky (2009) proposed that withdrawal behaviors in the modern workplace should include cyberloafing. Furthermore, Koslowsky (2009) suggested a potential sequence of withdrawal behaviors in which cyberloafing may predict more overt withdrawal behaviors, such as lateness, absence, and turnover. It is important to note that cyberloafing may lead to more detrimental consequences for organizations, such as bandwidth loss, network congestion, and potential legal liability (Koay, 2018). Cyberloafing can also have adverse consequences for employees over time. For example, it could disrupt employees' normal workflows and make it challenging to resume work, impairing their performance (She and Li, 2022). Zhong *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that informational cyberloafing diverts employees' limited resources (e.g. time and energy), increases job anxiety, and decreases innovation performance. Finally, due to the relatively greater focus on the negative relationships between interest congruence and employees' task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g. Li *et al.*, 2022b; Nye *et al.*, 2021), Iliescu *et al.* (2015) have called for more research on the effect of interest incongruence on CWBs (another major dimension of work performance). Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effect of interest incongruence on employees' cyberloafing, a specific form of withdrawal behavior or CWBs.

2.2 Interest incongruence and cyberloafing

As previously stated, interest incongruence represents a specific form of needs-supplies misfit (Nye *et al.*, 2021; Wiegand, 2018). Ryan and Deci (2008) observed that when employees engage in activities that do not satisfy their psychological needs (e.g. the need for autonomy and relatedness), they experience reduced vitality or energy. Cheng *et al.* (2020) also found that employees are more likely to experience negative emotions when psychological needs are not met. Particularly, when employees are confronted with interest incongruence and remain in their positions, they must suppress their vocational interests and engage in work activities that are discordant with their vocational interests (Deng *et al.*, 2016), which depletes their self-regulatory resources and energy. Iliescu *et al.* (2015) have found that when employees are faced with interest incongruence and try to rectify discrepancies between their personal interests and those supplied by their occupational environments, they might encounter resistance from their supervisors or colleagues and experience negative affective states (e.g. frustration). Therefore, interest incongruence might be cognitively evaluated as an unsatisfying resource situation.

According to the resource conservation tenet of COR theory, those experiencing negative resource situations tend to protect their resources, which, in our case, should manifest as increased cyberloafing. Engaging in non-work-related internet activities may temporarily

divert interest-incongruent employees' attention away from these uninteresting work demands (She and Li, 2022), preventing them from further resource depletion (Peng *et al.*, 2023). Specifically, the effort-recovery model postulates that employees who invest effort in meeting work demands will experience load reactions, such as fatigue and stress (Meijman and Mulder, 1998). To restore their performance capability, employees require opportunities to recover from their effortful experiences at work (She and Li, 2022). Typically, when employees are no longer exposed to work demands, their previously experienced load reactions are reversed, and recovery occurs. Cyberloafing behaviors may temporarily disengage employees from uninteresting work demands (Lim and Chen, 2012) and facilitate recovery experiences, such as relaxation (She and Li, 2022). Furthermore, cyberloafing allows employees experiencing interest incongruence to replenish their emotional resources (i.e. restore positive emotions; Zhong *et al.*, 2022) and meet their psychological needs. For instance, by engaging in cyberloafing behaviors, employees experiencing interest incongruence have the freedom to engage in any type of cyber activity, which helps them regain a sense of self-control and satisfy their needs for autonomy (Koay, 2018). Social cyberloafing can provide a means for employees experiencing interest incongruence to connect with their friends or family, thereby satisfying their needs for relatedness (Hu *et al.*, 2023). In sum, the present study postulated that cyberloafing may serve as a defensive withdrawal strategy for employees faced with interest incongruence. In sum, we hypothesized that:

H1. Interest incongruence is positively associated with cyberloafing.

2.3 The moderating role of PP

The tenet of resource investment in COR theory posits that when faced with a threat and/or actual loss of resources, individuals are also likely to combat resource depletion by seeking new resources rather than simply conserving their remaining resources (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). If individuals succeed at resource investment and acquiring additional resources, they will enter a spiral of resource gain in which initial gain begets future gain. However, given that resource protection is more central than resource acquisition (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014), individuals tend to prevent further resource loss and conserve their existing resources rather than invest existing resources for further resource gains. Thus, a corollary of the resource investment tenet holds that individuals with more resources tend to reinvest remaining resources in work to acquire new resources and protect against resource losses. Due to the mobilizing effects of PP on other resources (e.g. time and energy; Nielsen *et al.*, 2023), individuals with PP tend to make larger resource investments than passive individuals. Therefore, when confronted with interest incongruence, employees with high PP would overcome their resource conservation tendencies, which are aimed at preventing the loss of existing resources (Tisu *et al.*, 2020), and show more resource investment tendencies to strive for additional resources (Crant, 2000). In addition, when experiencing interest incongruence, those high in PP have stronger inherent desires to pursue constructive changes in their surroundings (Crant, 2000) to achieve fit with environments. Employees with high PP would seek opportunities and take initiatives to align work environments with their vocational interests and improve the resource-depleting situation. Thus, we hypothesized:

H2. PP moderates the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing, such that the relationship is more positive for employees low in PP.

2.4 The role of JC-interests

Existing research on JC is dominated by two perspectives (Kuijpers *et al.*, 2020). The first perspective is based on the seminal work of Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), identifying three types of JC: task, relational, and cognitive JC. The second perspective stems from Tims *et al.* (2012), conceptualizing JC as increasing challenging job demands, increasing (structural or social) job resources, and decreasing hindering job demands. However, Kooij *et al.* (2017)

recently argued that the predominant focus on ways of JC (i.e. task, relational, and cognitive crafting) or external job characteristics that are crafted (e.g. increasing challenging job demands) has resulted in a neglect of incorporating the goal of the employee in JC conceptualization. In particular, [Kooij et al. \(2017\)](#) conceptualized JC as employees altering job tasks to match their interests and strengths. This study focused on JC-interests, which refers to employees adapting job tasks to match their interests.

JC-interests consumes time and energy ([Kuijpers et al., 2020](#)) and might be resisted by leaders or colleagues because it challenges the status quo. Thus, employees with few resources may be reluctant to take action to craft their work tasks ([Alwali, 2023a, b](#)). COR theory suggests that abundant resources make individuals less vulnerable to future resource loss and more capable of acquiring additional resources. Employees with high PP tend to be change-oriented and future-focused ([Crant, 2000](#)). When experiencing interest incongruence, individuals with high PP may report strong intrinsic motivation to proactively initiate change and shape work tasks to achieve congruence with their environments ([Wu et al., 2019](#)). Moreover, due to the mobilizing effects of PP on other resources ([Nielsen et al., 2023](#)), employees with high PP are more confident in their abilities to shape undesirable environments ([Crant, 2000](#)) and thus perceive high self-efficacy to craft job tasks. Extant research (e.g. [Bakker et al., 2012](#)) has demonstrated that PP was positively related to JC behaviors conceptualized by two prior dominant perspectives. Thus, we hypothesized:

H3. PP is positively related to JC-interests.

[Su \(2020\)](#) pointed out that individual vocational interests serve as motivational factors determining the direction, vigor, and persistence of their workplace behaviors [3]. Therefore, according to the resource investment tenet of COR theory, JC-interests could be a resource acquisition strategy through which employees experiencing interest incongruence could proactively increase their resources. JC-interests helps employees to redesign more personally meaningful work ([Kuijpers et al., 2020](#)), which results in a sense of authenticity, self-identity, and subjective vitality ([Kooij et al., 2017](#)). Thus, the use of JC-interests leads employees to invest more effort and immerse themselves in their work, which would result in low levels of cyberloafing. In addition, [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) proposed that JC-interests allows employees to interact with coworkers who share similar vocational interests or establish new interpersonal relationships, which satisfies employees' need for relatedness and makes them engage in less online social activities ([Koay, 2018](#)). Thus, we expect that JC-interests might represent a proactive resource acquisition strategy to help employees obtain additional resources, thereby mitigating the positive effects of interest incongruence on cyberloafing.

H4. JC-interests moderates the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing, such that the relationship is more positive at low levels of JC-interests.

We further propose a mediated moderation model where (1) PP weakens the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing, (2) PP drives JC-interests, (3) JC-interests moderates the interest incongruence-cyberloafing link, and (4) JC-interests then takes the mediating function that transmits the moderating effect of PP. Thus, we hypothesized:

H5. JC-interests mediates the moderating effect of PP on the association between interest incongruence and cyberloafing.

3. Methods

3.1 Samples and procedure

To minimize common method variance (CMV) biases, we collected three-wave data from full-time employees working in different industries in China. We sent participants links to questionnaires via QQ and WeChat, two widely used messaging applications in China. At Time 1, participants provided demographic information and completed measures of vocational

interests and PP. At Time 2, two weeks after Time 1, participants completed the JC-interests scale. Another two weeks later, at Time 3, participants rated their level of cyberloafing. A special coding scheme was used to match participants' responses in three waves.

The final valid sample size in our study was 429. Among the final sample, females accounted for 41.26%. Participants' average age and organizational tenure were 28.84 years ($SD = 4.88$) and 3.69 years ($SD = 3.27$), respectively. A total of 72.73% of the participants held a bachelor's degree or above, and 52.21% worked in managerial positions. Participants were from various industries, including information and technology (15.4%), services (10.3%), sales/retail (10%), healthcare (7.7%), trading (4.4%), education (4.2%), finance (4.0%), construction (3.0%), manufacturing (2.8%) and others. In sum, our participants yielded high heterogeneity in terms of industry types and occupations (93 different Holland profile codes).

3.2 Measures

All measures were originally developed in English. Therefore, we followed [Brislin's \(1980\)](#) translation and back-translation procedures to translate all English items into Chinese. Specifically, one bilingual researcher and two graduate students translated the English items into Chinese. The Chinese version was then back-translated into English by another bilingual researcher and three master's students. Any discrepancies in translation were resolved through further discussion.

3.2.1 Interest. The sixty-item scale from [Rounds et al. \(2010\)](#) was employed to assess employees' vocational interests, which has been utilized by [Li et al. \(2022a, b\)](#) and [Chen et al. \(2024\)](#) in a Chinese context (1 = strongly dislike, 5 = strongly like). Sample items are "Assemble electronic parts" (R), "Study the movement of planets" (I), "Sing in a band" (A), "Teach a high-school class" (S), "Start your own business" (E), and "Keep inventory records" (C). Response choices of participants ranged from strongly dislike (1) to strongly like (5). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.92 (R), 0.91 (I), 0.91 (A), 0.90 (S), 0.90 (E), and 0.93 (C), respectively.

3.2.2 Interest incongruence. We used the first-letter hexagonal distance method ([Holland, 1997](#)) to calculate the interest incongruence index. The single RIASEC interest dimension with the highest score in each individual's interest profile is taken as its first-letter code. Similarly, the single RIASEC interest dimension with the highest score for an environment is considered the environment's first-letter code. For example, an individual may be assigned an interest code of "Social" (S) and his/her environment a code of "Realistic" (R). An incongruence index was then calculated based on the extent to which these two first-letter interest codes match between an individual and his/her environment. Specifically, based on [Holland's \(1997\)](#) hexagonal model, the incongruence index is four if these two codes are opposite, three if the codes are alternative, two if the codes are adjacent, and one if the codes are identical.

As each occupational environment is linked to a RIASEC profile in the O*NET database, we followed prior research ([Iliescu et al., 2015](#)) and identified the interest profile and RIASEC codes for each occupational environment based on the participants' reported occupational titles. Extant studies have demonstrated that O*NET occupational data can be applied to the Chinese context ([Li et al., 2022a, b](#)).

3.2.3 PP. The PP construct was assessed using ten items from [Seibert et al. \(1999\)](#), which were subsequently utilized by [Wu et al. \(2024\)](#) in a Chinese context (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Example items include "I am always looking for better ways to do things." The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.93.

3.2.4 JC-interests. The JC-interests construct was assessed with five items adapted from [Kooij et al.'s \(2017\)](#) scale, which has been used by [Chen et al. \(2024\)](#) in a Chinese context (1 = never, 5 = often). A sample item is "I actively looked for tasks that match my own interests." The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.79.

3.2.5 Cyberloafing. A five-item scale was utilized to assess cyberloafing based on [Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara et al. \(2006\)](#), which was subsequently utilized by [Cheng et al. \(2020\)](#) in a

Chinese context (1 = never, 5 = often). Sample items include “I use the Internet at work to surf the net and so escape a little.” The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was 0.90.

3.2.6 Control variables. Generation Y is more technologically equipped and uses the internet more than their older counterparts, so young employees are more likely to engage in cyberloafing (Lim and Teo, 2024). Lim and Chen (2012) found that men are more likely to engage in cyberloafing than women, who often view such behavior as more unacceptable in the workplace. Andreassen *et al.* (2014) suggested that the positive correlation between educational level and social cyberloafing may reflect that employees with higher socioeconomic status are less concerned about losing their jobs or emphasize the role of social relationships in career advancement. The detrimental effects of cyberloafing behaviors on organizational performance have led managers to adopt a negative stance towards such behaviors, especially compared to those without managerial responsibilities (Andreassen *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, Cheng *et al.* (2020) proposed that organizational tenure may influence employees’ intentions to engage in cyberloafing. Therefore, the current study controlled for the following variables: age, gender, educational level, employment position, and tenure.

3.3 Analytic strategy

Although data were collected using a three-wave design, CMV remained a concern as all variables were self-reported by employees. Therefore, we conducted a series of factor analyses before testing the hypotheses. We employed Harman’s one-factor test to address concerns about CMV and conducted confirmatory factor analyses to assess the distinctiveness of our study variables. This study then conducted hierarchical regression analyses to examine our hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1 Harman’s Single-Factor Test

The Harman’s Single-Factor Test revealed that the first principal component explained only 28.26% of the total variance, far below the cutoff point of 50% typically used to judge whether the CMV was a serious problem.

4.2 Confirmatory factor analyses

As shown in Table 1, the results supported a satisfactory discriminant validity of our variables.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis and model comparison

| Model test | Descriptions | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | χ^2/df | IFI | TLI | CFI | RMSEA |
|------------|---|----------|-----------|-------------|------|------|------|-------|
| Model 1 | Three factors: PP, JC-interests and cyberloafing | 387.875 | 167 | 2.32 | 0.95 | 0.94 | 0.95 | 0.06 |
| Model 2 | Two factors: PP and JC-interests were combined into one factor | 796.487 | 169 | 4.71 | 0.86 | 0.84 | 0.86 | 0.09 |
| Model 3 | Two factors: JC-interests and cyberloafing were combined into one factor | 969.564 | 169 | 5.74 | 0.82 | 0.80 | 0.82 | 0.11 |
| Model 4 | Two factors: PP and cyberloafing were combined into one factor | 1504.101 | 169 | 8.90 | 0.70 | 0.66 | 0.70 | 0.14 |
| Model 5 | One factor: PP, JC-interests and cyberloafing were combined into one factor | 1946.369 | 170 | 11.45 | 0.60 | 0.55 | 0.60 | 0.16 |

Source(s): Authors’ own work

4.3 Descriptive statistics

Table 2 lists the descriptive statistics and the correlations among all variables.

4.4 Hypotheses testing

In Table 3, interest incongruence was positively associated with cyberloafing ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$, M_4), supporting Hypothesis H1. The interaction between interest incongruence and PP was negatively related to cyberloafing ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.05$, M_5), supporting Hypothesis H2. As shown in Figure 1(a), the effect of interest incongruence on cyberloafing was significant and positive for employees low in PP ($\beta_{simple} = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$) but was not significant for employees high in PP ($\beta_{simple} = 0.07$, *ns.*).

The results from Model 2 of Table 3 indicated that PP was positively related to JC-interests ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$, M_2), supporting Hypothesis H3. Model 6 showed that the interaction between interest incongruence and JC-interests was negative ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$, M_6). Simple slopes analyses in Figure 1(b) showed that the effect of interest incongruence on cyberloafing was more significantly positive when JC-interests was low ($\beta_{simple} = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) but not high ($\beta_{simple} = 0.08$, *ns.*), supporting Hypothesis H4.

Model 6 showed that the effect of the interaction between interest incongruence and PP on cyberloafing became insignificant ($\beta = -0.06$, *ns.*, M_6) when the interaction term between interest incongruence and JC-interests was included in the regression equation. These results indicated that the moderating effect of PP was fully mediated by JC-interests. To further test Hypothesis H5, we applied bootstrapping procedures to construct bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 5,000 iterations. The indirect effect was -0.06 , and the 95% confidence intervals ($[-0.11, -0.04]$) excluded 0. Therefore, Hypothesis H5 was confirmed [4].

5. Discussion

Drawing on COR theory, we argued that cyberloafing is a defensive withdrawal strategy to avoid resource loss and protect or replenish employees' existing resources. Specifically, engaging in non-work-related Internet activities can temporarily divert the attention of interest-incongruent employees away from those uninteresting work demands (She and Li, 2022), thus preventing further resource depletion (Peng et al., 2023). Furthermore, cyberloafing allows employees experiencing interest incongruence to replenish their emotional resources (i.e. restore positive emotions; Zhong et al., 2022) and meet their psychological needs. In addition, as one reviewer noted, cyberloafing itself may be a source of stress due to fear of punishment and privacy concerns in internet-monitored work environments (Lim and Teo, 2024). However, Spanouli and Hofmans (2021) found that when employees have fewer resources at work (e.g. low vitality), the momentary relief that minor CWBs (e.g. cyberloafing) can provide may outweigh the uncertainty of potential consequences following such behaviors. Furthermore, cyberloafing is relatively easy to conceal and more difficult to detect, as individuals can present themselves as diligent employees by merely clicking a mouse (Koay, 2018). Consequently, employees with fewer resources at work may perceive such risk-taking behaviors as viable options.

COR theory postulates that the resource investment process is related to the pool of resources and resource accumulation (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 2002). In the present study, the mobilizing effect of PP on other resources (Crant, 2000) suggests that proactive employees have a larger pool of resources from which to draw and, therefore, have greater opportunities to adopt an engagement coping strategy and invest resources to obtain additional resources. Furthermore, the availability of resources generated by JC-interests makes employees who engage in JC-interests less susceptible to interest incongruence and better positioned to pursue more proactive resource strategies to acquire additional resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Consequently, employees who are high in PP or engage in more

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|--------------------------|-------|------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| 1. Gender | 1.41 | 0.49 | – | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 28.84 | 4.88 | 0.21 ^{***} | – | | | | | | | |
| 3. Education | 2.77 | 0.60 | 0.14 ^{**} | –0.03 | – | | | | | | |
| 4. Position | 1.74 | 0.83 | –0.01 | 0.04 | 0.15 ^{***} | – | | | | | |
| 5. Organizational tenure | 3.69 | 3.27 | 0.30 ^{***} | 0.48 ^{***} | –0.03 | 0.16 ^{**} | – | | | | |
| 6. Interest incongruence | 2.37 | 0.92 | 0.00 | –0.04 | 0.01 | 0.03 | –0.11 [*] | – | | | |
| 7. PP | 3.71 | 0.80 | –0.01 | 0.00 | –0.05 | 0.01 | 0.03 [*] | –0.35 ^{***} | – | | |
| 8. JC-interests | 3.85 | 0.74 | 0.03 | –0.01 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.03 | –0.37 ^{***} | 0.37 ^{***} | – | |
| 9. Cyberloafing | 3.25 | 0.99 | –0.03 | –0.06 | –0.06 | –0.01 | –0.02 | 0.22 ^{***} | –0.25 ^{***} | –0.12 [*] | – |

Note(s): Gender: male = 1 and female = 2

Education level: high school diploma or less = 1, junior college degree = 2, bachelor degree = 3 and graduate degree = 4

Position: non-managerial employees = 1, entry-level managers = 2, mid-level managers = 3, and senior-level managers = 4

Age and organizational tenure are reported in years

^{*} $p < 0.05$, ^{**} $p < 0.01$, ^{***} $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis

| Variable | JC-interests | | Cyberloafing | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | M ₁ | M ₂ | M ₃ | M ₄ | M ₅ | M ₆ |
| Gender | 0.03 | 0.03 | -0.03 | -0.05 | -0.05 | -0.05 |
| Age | -0.00 | -0.00 | -0.02 | -0.02 | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| Education | -0.06 | 0.08 | -0.10 | -0.10 | -0.14 | -0.15 |
| Position | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.01 | -0.01 | 0.02 | 0.02 |
| Organizational tenure | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Interest incongruence | | | | 0.24*** | 0.17** | 0.19*** |
| PP | | 0.34*** | | | -0.19** | -0.21** |
| Interest incongruence × PP | | | | | -0.12* | -0.06 |
| JC-interests | | | | | | 0.08 |
| Interest incongruence × JC-interests | | | | | | -0.16*** |
| R ² | 0.01 | 0.14 | 0.01 | 0.06 | 0.10 | 0.12 |
| F | 0.44 | 11.62 | 0.73 | 4.22 | 6.05 | 5.78 |

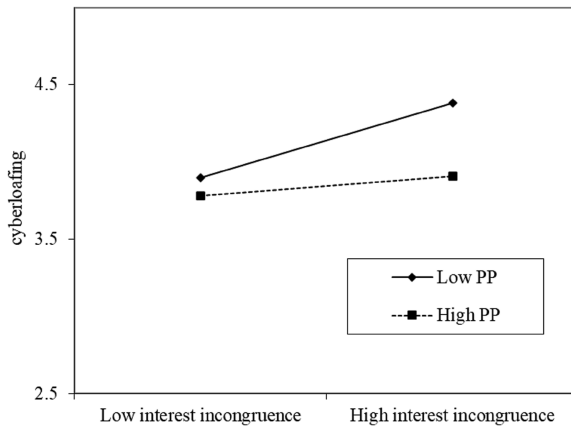
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source(s): Authors' own work

JC-interests are less likely to adopt a defensive resource conservation strategy (e.g. cyberloafing). The present study demonstrated the moderating effects of PP and JC-interests.

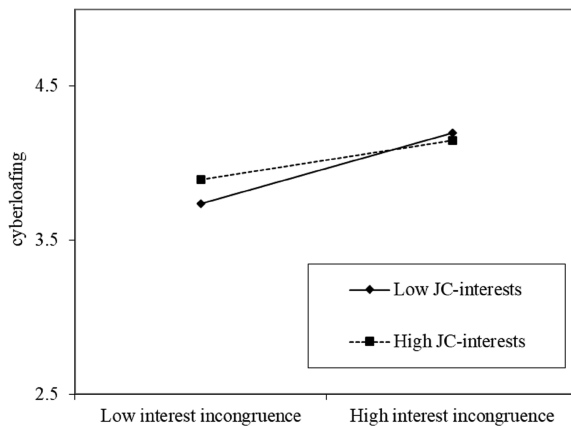
5.1 Theoretical implications

First, this study goes beyond previous studies by finding a more specific behavioral consequence of interest incongruence, namely, cyberloafing. Such a finding is important because, although previous research has highlighted the negative impact of interest incongruence on employee well-being and work attitudes (Li *et al.*, 2022a; Wiegand *et al.*, 2021), little is known about its effect on employee behaviors (Iliescu *et al.*, 2015). Koslowsky (2009) proposed a potential sequence of withdrawal behaviors in which minor withdrawal (e.g. cyberloafing) may predict more severe forms of withdrawal (e.g. absenteeism and turnover). While some scholars have demonstrated that interest incongruence leads employees to physically withdraw (e.g. absenteeism and turnover) to conserve resources (Li *et al.*, 2022a, b), this study further demonstrated that employees would also engage in mental withdrawal through cyberloafing to cope with the threat of resource loss due to interest incongruence. Thus, by clarifying the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing, this study advances our understanding of the relationship between interest incongruence and employee withdrawal behaviors and helps managers intercept employee withdrawal behavior at a relatively early stage. The findings also lay the groundwork for further research into the relationship between interest incongruence and other minor withdrawal behaviors.

Second, this study responds to calls for taking a P-E (mis)fit perspective to focus on the antecedents of cyberloafing (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, this study extends the nomological networks of cyberloafing by including interest incongruence as an antecedent. A fundamental tenet of person-environment (P-E) (mis)fit theory suggests that the person and environment collectively predict individual outcomes more accurately than either entity alone (Van Vianen, 2018). Although previous studies have significantly advanced our understanding of employee cyberloafing, they have primarily focused on individual (Lim and Chen, 2012; Andreassen *et al.*, 2014) and organizational factors (Koay, 2018; Peng *et al.*, 2023), respectively. Thus, our work extends and deepens the knowledge in the cyberloafing literature by adopting a P-E misfit perspective. Our work differs from those that examine the effect of overqualification on employees' cyberloafing (e.g. Andel *et al.*, 2022; Cheng *et al.*, 2020) because overqualification only represents a specific narrow facet of misfit between person and job. We add to the literature by focusing on a broader level of environments (i.e. vocations;



(a)



(b)

Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Moderating effect of PP (a) or JC-interests (b) on the relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing

Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005) and showing whether interest incongruence leads to employee cyberloafing. Our work also provides interesting avenues for further studies exploring other possible antecedents (e.g. value incongruence) of cyberloafing from the P-E misfit perspective.

Finally, based on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), this study identifies PP and JC-interests as boundary conditions under which interest incongruence exerts different effects on cyberloafing. Consistent with previous research (Xie *et al.*, 2019), our study supports the argument that personality traits (i.e. proactive personality) or coping strategies (i.e. JC-interests) play an important role in mitigating the negative effects of workplace stressors (i.e. interest incongruence). More specifically, unlike Li *et al.*'s (2022a) work, which found that autonomy support could serve as a conditional resource that mitigates the adverse effects of interest incongruence, our study further highlights the buffering role of personal resources (i.e. PP). Future research can extend our findings and explore other personal personalities that

buffer the adverse effects of interest incongruence. Furthermore, by examining the moderating effect of JC-interests, this study responds to the call to incorporate personal goals into the JC concept and focus on the roles of these special types of JC (Kooij *et al.*, 2017), thereby advancing knowledge in the field of JC literature. In addition, prior research (e.g. Xie *et al.*, 2019) has investigated the roles of personality traits and coping strategies independently in responding to workplace stressors. This study builds on this work by demonstrating that a specific coping strategy (i.e. JC-interests) serves as a mediating mechanism for the moderating effects of a personality trait (i.e. PP) in responding to interest incongruence, which contributes to a richer understanding of the interest incongruence-cyberloafing relationship.

5.2 Practical implications

First, given the positive relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing, it is recommended that managers should pay more attention to the phenomenon of interest incongruence. Wille and De Fruyt (2023) have suggested that vocational interest assessment should be used at different stages of the human resource cycle, including employee recruitment, selection, retention, and development. Specifically, at the recruitment stage, recruiters should highlight interest-related activities, the contexts in which these activities occur, and the potential outcomes associated with these activities to attract job applicants with aligned interests. Interest assessment should be incorporated into the selection process, as it can assist organizations in identifying applicants who are genuinely interested in the work they will be doing in the workplace (Li *et al.*, 2022a). In addition, organizations should facilitate employees' self-exploration of their interests and guide how to better align their work with their interests.

Second, our findings pose an interesting dilemma for managers, as cyberloafing may, in some cases, benefit their employees. That is, the behaviors that managers consider counterproductive may be perceived by employees as productive ways to achieve important goals. The definition of cyberloafing is clear in workplaces with fixed work and break schedules. However, in other workplaces where employees are allowed to manage their work schedules, it can be difficult to distinguish cyberloafing behaviors from legitimate breaks. Scholars have suggested that organizations can reduce cyberloafing behavior by enhancing employees' self-regulation ability (Spector, 2024). Cyberloafing appears to be 'manageable' through self-management rather than external managerial control systems (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Viera-Armas, 2017). Consequently, organizations need to help employees understand the negative effects of cyberloafing and guide them to find more effective strategies to use and acquire resources. Despite the potential drawbacks of managerial control systems, all organizations also need to establish clear policies on appropriate internet use, even in workplaces with ambiguous work hours and boundaries. These policies can emphasize the importance of maintaining focus and fulfilling work responsibilities while allowing for necessary breaks (Lim and Teo, 2024).

Thirdly, the present study demonstrated the moderating effects of PP. Therefore, during selection processes, screening applicants based on their PP traits could be a potential method to mitigate the occurrence of cyberloafing when they experience interest incongruence after entering the organizations in the future. Furthermore, McCormick *et al.* (2019) suggested that organizations could adopt a developmental perspective on employees' proactivity and provide training programs on activating and triggering proactivity. Managers could also cultivate an organizational culture that encourages employee proactivity, sending signals to employees that their managers expect and reward them for seeking opportunities and stimulating meaningful change.

Finally, the present study demonstrated the moderating effect of JC-interests. Previous scholars (Kooij *et al.*, 2017; Kuijpers *et al.*, 2020) have proposed that employees who participate in JC interventions develop higher levels of JC-interests, increasing their work engagement and improving their fit with jobs. JC workshops can provide a bottom-up

intervention that helps employees understand how to deconstruct job tasks, identify their interests, and find meaningful ways to improve the fit between tasks and their interests (Kooij *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, JC interventions may be a valuable tool to help employees derive more enjoyment from their work or occupations, thereby reducing their dependence on the organizations' work resources (Kuijpers *et al.*, 2020). In addition, managers should consider the impact of employees' JC-interests on organizations (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, managers should support employees when these behaviors can lead to positive organizational outcomes. Conversely, managers need to discourage employees when these behaviors may yield adverse organizational outcomes in the short or long term. Finally, when these behaviors may lead to negative organizational outcomes in the short term but positive outcomes in the future, managers must consider the extent to which they can provide latitude and support to employees and the extent to which they can tolerate some loss of performance.

5.3 Limitations and future directions

First, although CMV was not a problem in our study, we suggest that future studies use a multi-source design to further mitigate CMV. Future studies could objectively measure cyberloafing (Peng *et al.*, 2023). Second, future studies should use different approaches to index interest incongruence and further replicate our findings. For example, they could calculate the C-index (Brown and Gore, 1994), which is determined by comparing the first three letters of the individual and environmental RIASEC interest profiles. Third, it is promising to explore other boundary conditions, such as autonomy support and positive reframing. For example, Li *et al.* (2022a) found that autonomy support gives employees freedom and opportunities to craft their work. Follmer *et al.* (2018) found that framing misfit as an opportunity for personal learning and growth could lead to positive outcomes. Fourth, future studies could further our understanding of how interest incongruence affects cyberloafing by adopting other theoretical perspectives and investigating the underlying mechanisms (e.g. ego depletion). For example, according to ego depletion theory (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998), when employees' self-regulatory resources are depleted due to interest incongruence, they may experience ego depletion and cannot resist the temptation of the Internet. Finally, in addition to increased cyberloafing behaviors, we proposed that lower extra-role behaviors (e.g. innovative work behaviors and voice behaviors) could conserve resources for employees confronted with interest incongruence. Alwali (2023a, b) has demonstrated that JC was positively related to employee innovative work behaviors. Consequently, future research should examine the relationships between interest incongruence and employees' extra-role behaviors and the moderating effects of PP and JC-interests.

Notes

1. It should be noted that not all cyberloafing is a deliberate coping strategy. Specifically, Lim and Teo (2024) have proposed that there is a lack of consensus on whether employees' cyberloafing is an unconscious behavior resulting from habit formation and poor self-control or a deliberate response to adverse work conditions. Indeed, employees may engage in cyberloafing without conscious deliberation, as it has been a common practice in the past (Koay *et al.*, 2018). In particular, some employees check their smartphones with little or no awareness of the frequency of their own actions. However, cyberloafing is generally regarded as a CWB that is intentional and detrimental to organizations and organizational stakeholders (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; She and Li, 2022). In the present study, we regarded cyberloafing as a deliberate coping strategy.
2. Building on Holland's RIASEC model, other interest models have been developed. In particular, Prediger (1982) adapted Holland's six interest types into two bipolar and orthogonal dimensions to reflect the underlying structure of Holland's RIASEC interest types. Specifically, the first dimension, data/ideas, is a vertical dimension in which "data" is associated with Holland's enterprising and conventional interest types, and "ideas" is associated with artistic and investigative interest types. The second dimension, thing/people, is a horizontal dimension corresponding to realistic and social interest types. In addition, Tracey and Rounds (1996) introduced a spherical model of interests. In this

spherical model, the interest circumplex, defined by Prediger's (1982) Things-People and Data-Idea axes, is extended by an orthogonal axis representing a person's preference for vocational activities or occupations at different levels of prestige. Nevertheless, Holland's (1997) framework is still the dominant model for interest studies today (Wiegand, 2018). The Occupational Information Network (O*NET) website provides a publicly accessible vocational interest assessment based on Holland's RIASEC framework. The website receives approximately one million visits per month (Employment and Training Administration, 2018). The generalizability of Holland's RIASEC model has been demonstrated in the Chinese context (e.g. Chen *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, this study also examined the effects of interest incongruence based on Holland's interest models.

3. Holland's (1997) RIASEC interest dimensions are built at the general level and reflect the general tendencies of an individual to be drawn to broad types of work activities and environments (Su *et al.*, 2019). In seminal research on JC-interests, Kooij *et al.* (2017) cited Holland's (1997) work and considered interests as essential parts of one's identity. Specifically, "interests" in the term "JC-interests" also refers to activities and objects into which individuals are motivated to invest time and energy (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, in the current study, we focused on Holland's model rather than other interest frameworks.
4. Further information on the reliability (e.g. composite reliability and rho_A coefficient) and validity (e.g. cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker criteria and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios) of the key constructs is available on request. All hypotheses were confirmed by examining the hypothesized model without the control variables, which excluded these variables as potential explanations for the findings. Further details on the data analysis without the control variables are available on request.

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