

The Dark Side of Being Proactive: Trapped in Rumination – A Mediated Model

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Abstract

Previous research in the organizational behaviour domain is dominated by research on the positive consequences of proactive work behaviour (PWB) while completely ignoring its dark side. Given that, this study investigates the dark side of PWB through the stress and strain caused by rumination. Relying on conservation of resources theory, this study proposes that proactive behaviour is a resource-consuming activity that causes rumination, which, in turn, results in WLC. Further, the paper hypothesizes that external motivation towards proactivity caused by peer pressure has a multiplier effect. A quantitative approach was taken to verify associations through covariance-based structural equation modelling using SPSS AMOS (v.23) and the mediating effect was investigated using a bootstrapping technique (Hayes, 2012). The study's findings are based on a survey conducted on 220 tech employees from IT organizations. Analyses revealed that on the one hand reflection (reflective pondering) weakens the impact of PWB on WLC but on the other hand brooding strengthens the aforesaid relationship. This study offers various avenues for further research and will help organizations in several ways. There is a scarcity of research work examining the mediating effect of rumination on the relationship between proactive personality and work-life conflict. Therefore, this study contributes to the knowledge regarding the dark side of being proactive at work. The results deepen theoretical understanding of the consequences of proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict. The current study also contributes to the literature by identifying work related rumination (reflective pondering and brooding) as a mediating mechanism explaining the relationship between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict. The findings could help organizations to identify the employees with proactive behaviour and form supportive policies for them so that the negative spillover of rumination of work to life (the home) can be prevented.

Keywords: proactive work behaviour, rumination, reflective pondering, reflection, brooding, work-to-life conflict

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Submitted: 2023-05-23 / Published: 2023-11-04

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers are showing more interest in individuals' negative aspects in the organizational context. The negative factors of individuals include incivility, abusive supervision, harassment, workplace bullying, deviance, social undermining, and emotional abuse. Similarly, researchers are also showing more curiosity in individuals' positive aspects such as happiness at the workplace (HAW)-innovative work behaviour (IWB), proactive work behaviour (PWB) and organization citizenship behaviour (Al-shami et al., 2023). One of these positive aspects at the workplace is PWB. PWB at work is generally considered as a positive trait, desirable for organizations, as it benefits organizations by increasing organizational effectiveness (Saleem et al., 2023), contributing to the individual's career success and also the organization's success (Cai et al., 2023). This behaviour generally involves challenging the status quo (Mehmood et al., 2023), by taking the initiative to improve current circumstances or create new things, rather than passively adapting to current conditions. It entails actions which are self-directed and future-oriented to change or improve oneself and situations (Unsworth & Parker, 2008). Individuals that exhibit this behaviour can go above and beyond the specified work, establish targets, and take a long-term approach to avoid conflicts (Frese et al., 2007). In short, the extant literature hints that a proactive employee has career success and contributes more to organizational success. However, PWB comes at a price (Belschak, Den Hartog, & Fay, 2010).

Today's jobs are typically characterized by rapid changes including the introduction of innovations and new technologies (Thatcher et al., 2006; Galanti et al., 2023). In addition, many employees work in companies with decentralized management and teamwork arrangements (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Therefore, it is increasingly important that employees do not just fulfil their jobs and react passively to new situations but that they become more flexible and active, and that they address problems that occur in a proactive way (Jiang et al., 2023). Therefore, based on conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, Hobfoll, 2001) in general, and the resource depletion perspective in particular, the present study delves more into this 'dark' side of PWB, and explores the spillover that probably follows from an individual's work-to-life conflict (WLC) (Cangiano et al., 2020). PWB also leads to rumination. Previous studies have largely focused on the positive outcomes of PWB with limited indicators of well-being indicators (affect-related: Strauss et al., 2017; Zacher et al., 2018 or physiological indicators of strain: Fay & Hüttges, 2017). This study goes beyond previous research by incorporating cognitive strain, viz. rumination, as an outcome of PWB. Rumination can be considered as a cognitive strain, as individuals are unable to mentally disconnect from work-related problems, even during non-working hours (Mohr et al., 2006; Pauli et al., 2023).

Deepening knowledge on the PWB-rumination relationship is pertinent in this study because mentally disconnecting from work-related issues beyond working hours (off-working hours) is a prerequisite for lowering stress and strain, resulting in lessened WLC and enhanced well-being (Querstret & Cropley, 2012; Williams et al., 2023). A few scholars have investigated the mediating effect of rumination between PWB and WLC (exception see Cui & Li, 2021), but it is rare to see an empirical study in the existing literature that has checked if rumination mediates the association among PWB and WLC—despite the fact that rumination is allied with greater WLC. Zhang et al. (2017), along with Pensar & Rousi (2023), also reported that most (but limited) empirical studies on rumination were directed at testing its impact on WLC and were found to be engendering. Therefore, this article focuses on making a key contribution to the COR theory, which predicts the relationship amongst PWB and WLC using a key mediating variable—rumination.

Organizations are confronted with the challenge that today employees are more likely than ever to struggle with the competing demands of work and life that they experience (Cui & Li, 2021). Additionally, the negative consequences of proactive behaviour are much less researched (Liu et al., 2019). This research intends to make a noteworthy contribution to the current literature and COR theory through the exploration of the negative effects of PWB on the WLC workplace context. This article further contributes to the existing literature by addressing the following question: Does rumination mediate the relationship between PWB and WLC? The subsequent sections provide the literature review of this paper, then the research method and an analysis of the results are presented. Finally, the article ends with a discussion, implications, conclusion, limitations, and suggestions for forthcoming studies.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The relationship between PWB, WLC and Rumination can be best elucidated on the basis of COR theory, as detailed in Table 1. Hobfoll et al. (2002) summed up the application of COR theory as a base theory for work-specific or organizational stress and its consequences for WLC (Zhang et al., 2017). According to COR theory, when employees anticipate or experience a loss of valuable resources, they are likely to mobilize their scarce resources (e.g. time and energy) in fulfilling life responsibilities that help in refilling resources. However, if they fail to refill the lost resources, conflict ensues and grows (Hobfoll, 2002). The COR theoretical framework brings together findings from previous research and has confirmed the justification for employees to save resources to reduce WLC (Trougakos et al., 2020). Moreover, when employees anticipate or experience a

loss of valuable resources through PWB, they engage in rumination (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011). Table 1 sets out all the linkages with the variables under study using the COR framework. This enables us to draw up a conceptualized model (Figure 1) and develop hypotheses for further analyses.

2.1 Proactive Work Behaviour and Work-to-Life Conflict

PWB is employees’ self-started behaviours that go beyond their work role and aim at bringing about change in organizations (e.g., Bindl & Parker, 2011). It has been found to positively relate to several desirable outcomes, such as individuals’ job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (e.g., Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010). One perspective on how PWB can make individuals more successful in their jobs is that PWBs such as taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999) or personal initiative (Frese & Fay, 2001) can be a way of coping with work stressors, such as time pressure or situational constraints (e.g. Searle & Lee, 2015).

More recent approaches, however, suggest that PWB can also have costs for the proactive individual, because being proactive consumes resources above and beyond performing regular work tasks (Cui & Li, 2021; Cangiano et al., 2020). The results of the few empirical studies on this potential ‘dark side’ of PWB support the suggestion that PWB is related to elevated levels of strain and exhaustion (Pingel, Fay, & Urbach, 2019). A resource depletion perspective on COR theory explains the dark side of PWB (Wei et al., 2021). For instance, PWB being a coping mechanism (Searle & Lee, 2015), is a double-edged sword. Along with its benefits, as evidenced by the extant literature, PWB has the negative consequence of being associated with mental strain (Strauss et al., 2017), increased stress (Fay & Hüttges, 2017) and ego depletion (Lin & Johnson, 2015). Higher PWB is also said to be associated with succumbing to peer pressure (Cai et al., 2022) because of perceived role overload, stress (Didla et al., 2009), lower job performance (Cheng & Mccarthy, 2018) and enhancing WLC, which is well explained by COR theory (Fay & Hüttges, 2017).

Table 1. Theoretical linkages with variables

Theory	Axiom	Variable and its relationship	Theoretical Linkage	Source
COR Theory	Resources are limited and stress and strain will emerge whenever a resource is exhausted or the benefit obtained is exceeded	PWB-WLC	Resource depletion resulting from PWB will lead to conflict in life domain	Hobfoll, 1989; Fay & Hüttges, 2017; Strauss et al., 2017
COR Theory	Resources are limited and thus it describes how people strive to conserve, protect and build the resources which they value	PWB-Rumination	Loss of resource due to PWB will lead to rumination	Mohr et al., 2006; Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011;
COR Theory	“people are motivated to acquire and protect resources”	Rumination-WLC	Preoccupation with task related thoughts leads to resource drain, causing further anxiety and conflict	Goldberg &, Grandey, 2007; Trougakos et al., 2020

In order to be proactive, employees are inclined to focus more on work than the life domain (Altura et al., 2021), and have less time and energy to spare to cater to life demands. PWB also includes higher initiative taking, and it leads to greater work-life conflict (Bolino & Turnley, 2005). Researchers have also observed that job crafting, a specific proactive behaviour, positively impacts work-life conflict (Zito et al., 2019). Drawing on conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which states that resources are limited and stress and strain occur whenever they are lost or threatened, the study concludes that engaging in proactivity causes resource drain, and thus WLC. Further, Altura et al. (2020) reported that proactive individuals are more inclined to prioritize their work needs, resulting in greater WLC. Bolino and Turnley (2005) suggested that higher levels of individual initiative are associated with higher levels of WLC. Zito et al. (2019) argued that job crafting, which is considered a specific proactive behaviour, is positively correlated with WLC. Taken together, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Proactive work behaviour will positively influence work-to-life conflict.

2.2 Proactive Work Behaviour and Rumination

Nolen-Hoeksema (1991) originally proposed the concept of rumination. Rumination is defined as a preservative self-focus that is recursive and persistent (Spasojević et al. 2004). A recent study by Garcia et al. (2017) argued that four types of rumination (brooding, reflection, intrusive, and deliberated rumination) were differentiated constructs and representatives of a stressful event. The reflection component of rumination was proposed as having an adaptive pondering effect (Joormann, Dkane and Gotlib, 2006) and involves analytical thinking and problem-solving, making it a healthier subtype. Problem-solving pondering has similar

characteristics to the ‘reflective pondering’ component of the Response Styles Questionnaire (RSQ; Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991). In a further analysis of the RSQ, Treynor and colleagues identified two factors, which they called ‘reflective pondering’ and maladaptive ‘brooding’ (Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003). Reflective pondering is an adaptive cognitive problem-solving strategy and is utilised by the individual to confront and alleviate depressive symptoms. In the long term, reflective pondering may be more goal directed and lead to more effective problem solving (Treynor, et al. 2003). In contrast, brooding entails passive comparisons to unachieved standards, leading to negative self-talk and mental health issues. It impedes individuals from taking action by making them perseveringly focus on obsessive and passive thoughts about their current situation (Treynor et al., 2003).

Different forms of work-related rumination have been discussed in the literature (e.g., affective and problem-solving) (Smith & Alloy, 2009). Rumination at the workplace is defined as “thoughts directed to issues relating to work, that are repetitive in nature” (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011, p.6). Following this increasing interest in work-related rumination, Cropley et al. (2012) recently developed an instrument to measure different dimensions of work-related rumination. They distinguish between affective rumination, which describes the negative emotional experiences (brooding) evoked by job-related thoughts during off-job time, and problem-solving pondering, which captures the cognitive reflection of work-related issues during free time (Cropley et al., 2012). This implies that rumination may manifest itself in different forms.

The present study, however, focused on work-related rumination and not on the post-traumatic rumination model (intrusive and deliberated) as it has evidence of impacting the life domain in general even after working hours. I focus on work-related rumination, as it impairs employees’ ability to switch off during their off-work time (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011). Incorporating these notions, the study focused on work-related rumination. Of the different manifestations, the study relies on affective rumination (brooding) and cognitive rumination (reflective pondering), derived from the conceptualizations of rumination in Cropley et al., 2012.

I argue that engaging in proactivity might cause rumination with respect to pondering for one reason. First, proactive work behaviour is usually self-relevant because employees are initiators and conductors of their proactivity, carrying full accountability for its consequences. This implies that – to some degree – individuals’ self-esteem and self-worth are contingent upon the outcomes of proactivity, thereby experiencing difficulties of leaving work issues behind during off-work time. This has been supported by a study by (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011), where it is argued that rumination will occur in situations where high personal responsibility is accompanied by a sense of uncertainty. Second, PWB might lead to brooding due to constant worries about not meeting work expectations because engaging in proactivity depletes employees’ life resources. As the theoretical literature (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011) and a number of studies (e.g. Zoccola, Dickerson, & Lam, 2012) have suggested that social tensions trigger rumination, I expect that engaging in PWB might cause pondering about finding alternatives to get the work done and save resources and brooding over the depletion of resources. The interface between work, life and unwinding are clearly linked (Nylen, Melin, & Laflamme, 2007). Thus, it is hypothesized as follows:

H2: Proactive work behaviour will positively influence reflective pondering.

H3: Proactive work behaviour will positively influence brooding.

2.3 Rumination and Work-to-Life Conflict

Rumination has two separate aspects, RP and brooding (Treynor et al., 2003). Reflective pondering involves understanding the reason behind something, while brooding involves the tendency to dwell on negative consequences (Miranda & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2007). Researchers have observed that ruminating about work at home was positively related to work-to-life conflict (Zhang et al., 2017), as such individuals, strained by constant work-related thoughts, are more likely to react negatively to life demands (Kinman et al., 2017; Green et al., 2011). RP is more problem-solving pondering (cognitive). The ability to solve a problem creates positive emotions (sense of achievement, optimism), hence is likely to lessen strain by generating resources. The ability to take a helicopter view of a problem, focusing on the broader picture, helps the individual to be objective and move away from the negative aspects of rumination (brooding). This notion found support from Kim and Kang (2022), who found that while brooding was negatively associated with life satisfaction, reflection was positively associated with life satisfaction. These notions of RP reducing work-to-life conflict assume that reflective pondering is the tendency to “purposefully turn inwards for cognitive problem-solving and is more forward-looking to alleviate one’s depressive symptoms” (Treynor et al., 2003). It has been considered a more adaptive form of rumination to cope with especially negative experiences (Öner & Gülgöz, 2018). Therefore, RP is a more positive cognitive process and hence reduces work-to-life conflict.

Though some researchers opined that individuals who ponder over work problems at home may perceive interruptions (home demands) as undesirable, this is not supported empirically (see Junker et al., 2021). Given that the links between the work-related rumination and work-to-life conflict have not much been studied empirically, I speculate that brooding—due to its negative affective quality—will yield a negative association

with work-to-life conflict while reflective pondering may also include making progress towards significant personal goals, thereby reducing work-to-life conflict (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). Hence, based on the above, I posit that Rumination will be related to work-to-life conflict in such a way that

H4: Reflective pondering will negatively influence work-to-life conflict, whereas

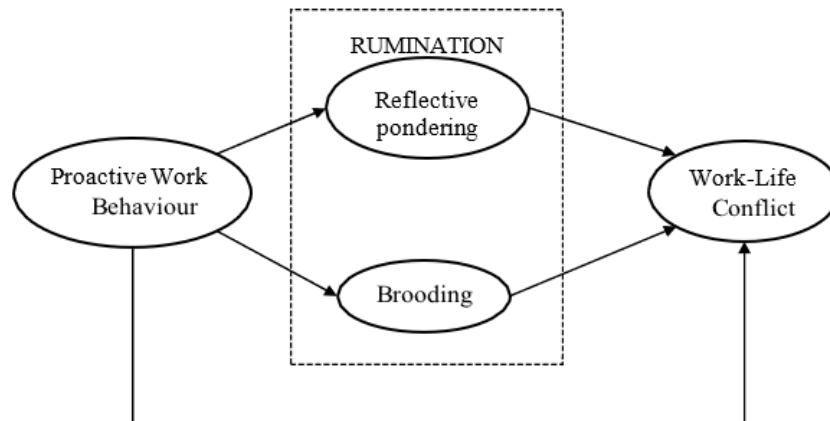
H5: Brooding will positively influence work-to-life conflict

2.4 Mediation Relationship

I posit that the importance of the relationship between RP and work-to-life conflict also depends on strength and direction. In the short term, RP enhances work-to-life conflict due to increased demands, disconnect, cognitive demands, etc. However, over time, RP would lessen inter-role conflict due to reduced dissonance and the resulting positive effect. Thus, I speculate that proactive work behaviour has indirect effects on work-to-life conflict through rumination (reflective pondering and brooding). These notions are supported by the basic assumptions of COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), so I postulate that engaging in proactive work behaviour is likely to cause rumination. Rumination, however, depending on the type e.g. reflective pondering or brooding, is likely to increase or decrease conflict, thereby strengthening or weakening the relationship between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict. Rumination, being an indicator of mental strain (Mohr et al., 2006), when it is reflectively done (reflective pondering), helps decrease strain as it is aimed at finding solutions, thus it is expected to decrease work-to-life conflict. Brooding, on the other hand, is likely to increase strain as it focuses on ‘what went wrong’ rather than ‘what could be the solution/ learning’, and thus is expected to increase work- to-life conflict. Hence, I posit that

H6: The association between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict will be mediated by (a) reflective pondering and (b) brooding

Figure 1: Conceptual model



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

The data was collected during the year 2022-23. The sample of participants included were from the service sector of the country comprising of IT/ITES. For the present study, using LinkedIn for data collection provided opportunities for quick access to respondents across India, enabling the fast realization of surveys at low costs (Kaliszewski et al., 2021). The study used a convenient sampling method for good coverage from different departments of the organizations. There were in total 18 indicators for three variables. Thus, the minimum sample size was fixed at 200, ten times the number of indicator variables (Kline, 2011, pp: 11-12; Hair et al., 2017). Kline (2011) suggested a sample size of 10 to 20 respondents per estimated parameter as a sufficient sample size. Going by the standard set, the final sample size was 210.

The researcher followed the suggestions of Podsakoff et al. (2003) about randomly arranging the items, and the relationship between the constructs, to minimize common method bias (CMB). Second, the researcher also followed Harman’s single factor method to deal with the problem of CMB. The first factor explained 35.7% of the variance, which is below the threshold of 50% and hence CMB was ruled out. The participants were assured of confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses in order to prevent social desirability bias.

3.2 Control Variables

Considering that demographic variables may affect employees' proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict, I controlled gender, age, marital status, tenure and family type (Tang et al., 2017). In order to control the influence of demographic variables, gender was categorized as male = 0, female = 1. Marital status was categorized as married = 0, unmarried = 1; Tenure was categorized as under 1 year = 0, 1 yr- 5 yrs. = 1, 6 yrs. - 10 yrs. =2, 11 yrs.-15yrs. = 3, and over 15 yrs.= 4. Age was also categorized as below 20 yrs. = 0, 20 yrs. - 3 yrs. =1, 31yrs.-40yrs. = 2, 41–50 yrs.= 3 and above 50 yrs.= 4.

3.3 Demographic Information and Participant Summary

Of the 340 questionnaires that were given to respondents, 270 were returned (a response rate of 70.5%). Of the 240 employees who were surveyed, 178 (65.9%) were married, 91 (33.7%) were unmarried. Regarding experience, 79 (29.3%) had less than 5 years of experience, 68 (25.2%) had experience between 5 and 10 years, 72 (26.7%) had experience ranging between 11 and 15 years, 25 (13 %) had experience in the range of 16-20 years and the remaining 16 (5.9%) had experience above 20 years. Regarding age, the majority of the respondents, 96 (35.6%) were in the age range of 20–30 yrs., 72 (26.7%) were in the age range of 31–40 yrs., 63 ((23.3%) belonged to 41–50 yrs., 33 (12.2%) respondents were in the age range of 51–60 yrs. and the remaining 6 (2.2%) were aged over 60. Regarding gender, 63% of the respondents were male. Regarding family type, 120 respondents (50 %) were residing in a nuclear family.

3.4 Measures

This study proposed three facets, one independent (proactive work behaviour), one dependent (work-to-life conflict) with the interplay of a single mediator having two constructs measured separately (Rumination: reflective pondering and brooding). Table 1 shows that these four constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”, along with reliability criteria as indicated by Cronbach α .

Table 2. Measures of the study

	Construct	Scale	No. of Items
Independent Variable	Proactive work behaviour	Griffin et al., 2007 (Individual task proactivity subdimension)	3 items
Dependent Variable	Work-to-Life Conflict	Fisher et al., 2009	5 items
Mediator	Reflective Pondering	Cropley et al. (2012)	5 items
Mediator	Brooding	Cropley et al. (2012)	5 items

3.5 Data Analysis

Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity

A measurement model was developed and tested to check model fit. Items that had a loading of less than 0.6 were removed. Following the recommendation by Kenny (2016), at least two items were retained for each of the study variables. EFA was conducted following the suggestion of Kara et al. (2013), who suggested that, before investigating the hypothesized model, a measurement model should be examined to validate the constructs under study to check model fit in order to validate the constructs under study.

As can be observed from Table 3, χ^2 / df value for the measurement model and structural model was less than the acceptable value of 3 (Klem, 2000). Schermelleh – Engel et al. (2003) have stated that in the model compatibility tests, any values less than .08 in the Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA), and higher than 0.90 in the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), were acceptable compatibility standards. Moreover, any value higher than 0.90 in the Normated Fit Index (NFI) as suggested by Hu & Bentler (1999), Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI), also named the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) by Tucker & Lewis, 1973), are considered as acceptable. In the present study, the measurement and structural model achieved a good fit for further analyses.

From table 3, it could easily be inferred that NFI for the measurement and structural models were found to have an acceptable fit or reasonable fit, with 0.881 and 0.858 respectively. TLI for the structural model was found to show an acceptable fit, with 0.888.

Table 3. Goodness of fit for measurement and structural model

Models	χ^2	Df	χ^2 / df	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	TLI
Measurement Model	252.31	113	2.233	0.06	0.881	0.930	0.915
Structural Model	302.53	115	2.631	0.08	0.858	0.906	0.888

Source: Author's findings

Table 4 depicts acceptable reliability, and convergent validity based on the recommendation by Hair et al. (2017). The metric used to evaluate the convergent validity of a structure is the extracted average variance (AVE) for all elements in each structure and factor loading. The accepted AVE value is > 0.50 and no factor loadings were below 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). Composite reliability ranged from 0.76 to 0.91, Cronbach's alpha ranged between 0.81 and 0.86, while the value of AVE was above 0.6 and all the factor loadings exceeded 0.6.

Table 4. Measurement model result

Constructs and scale items	Mean	SD	Factor Loading	CR	Cronbach Alpha	AVE
Proactive Work Behaviour				0.912	0.868	0.71
PWB1: I initiated better ways of performing my core tasks	3.68	0.933	0.895			
PWB2: I come up with ideas to improve the way in which my core tasks are done	3.40	1.008	0.889			
PWB3: I made changes to the way my core tasks are done	3.53	1.027	0.884			
Reflective Pondering				0.897	0.845	0.70
RP1: After work I tend to think of how I can improve my work-related performance	3.11	1.160	0.827			
RP2: In my free time I find myself re-evaluating something I have done at work	3.05	1.189	0.817			
RP3: I think about tasks that need to be done at work the next day.	3.15	1.172	0.812			
RP4: I find thinking about work during my free time helps me to be creative	3.54	1.154	0.748			
RP5: I find solutions to work-related problems in my free time	3.45	1.049	0.724			
Brooding				0.76	0.810	0.72
B1: I become tense when I think about work related issues during my free time	3.37	1.311	0.846			
B2: I get annoyed by thinking about work-related issues when not at work	3.65	1.066	0.822			
B3: I get irritated by work issues when not at work	3.60	1.072	0.791			
B4: I experience fatigue by thinking about work related issues during my free time	3.48	1.199	0.780			
B5: I get troubled by work-related issues when not at work	3.50	1.215	0.702			
Work-to-Life Conflict				0.89	0.858	0.76
WLC1: I come home from work too tired to do things I would like to do.	3.85	0.784	0.895			
WLC2: My job makes it difficult to maintain the kind of personal life I would like.	3.61	0.656	0.847			
WLC3: I often neglect my personal needs because of the demands of my work.	3.67	0.650	0.838			
WLC4: My personal life suffers because of my work.	3.73	0.591	0.825			
WLC5: I have to miss out on important personal activities due to the amount of time I spend doing work.	3.80	0.690	0.789			

To satisfy the Fornell-Larcker criterion of discriminant validity, the square root of each construct's AVE needs to be higher than its correlation with the other constructs (Table 5). This was the case for all constructs, thus discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion can be claimed (Hair et al., 2017). Table 5 reports that proactive work behaviour was positively related to work-to-life satisfaction ($r = 0.783, p < .001$). Despite the positive correlation between reflection and brooding ($r = 0.392, p < .001$), only reflective pondering and work-to-life conflict were negatively correlated ($r = -0.244, p < .001$) and brooding had a positive correlation with work-to-life conflict ($r = 0.465, p < .001$).

Table 5. Correlation coefficients and Fornell–Larcker criterion of discriminant validity

Variables	PWB	RP	B	WLC
PWB	0.83			
RP	0.435	0.83		
B	0.648	0.392	0.85	
WLC	0.783	-.244	0.465	0.87

Note. n= 240;

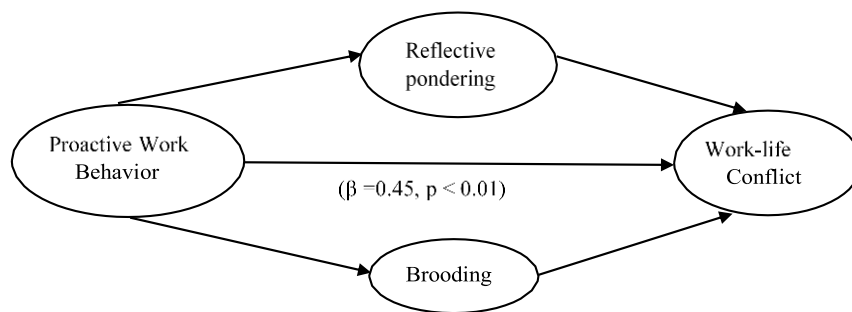
The bold number is the square root value of AVE in the same construct. Non-diagonal figures are the correlations between the factors.

Indicates a significant correlation at the 0.01 level.

3.6 Hypothesis Testing

Figure 2 demonstrates the hypothesized results derived from the study. Results in Table 6 depicts direct relationships between the variables. As depicted in Table 4, a significant and positive association was found between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$), thus supporting the first hypothesis of the study. H2 of the study, that there is a positive association between proactive work behaviour and reflective pondering, is also by the result ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$). The result also revealed a positive association between proactive work behaviour and brooding ($\beta = 0.11, p < 0.01$), thus supporting H3 of the study. H4 of the study was also supported when the results showed a negative association between reflective pondering and work-to-life conflict ($\beta = -0.120, p < 0.01$). A positive association between brooding and work-to-life conflict ($\beta = 0.521, p < 0.01$) supported H5 of the study.

Figure 2: SEM model (n = 240)



3.7 Mediation Analysis

To study the mediating effect, a bootstrapping method (Jose, 2013) was used to test the mediating effects of reflective pondering and brooding to work-to-life conflict. A two-step process was used to test the mediating effects, as suggested by Baron & Kenny (1986). In the first step, the conceptual model was assessed, without using reflective pondering and brooding as mediators. In the second step, reflective pondering and brooding were entered as mediators; the indirect effect was estimated. A confidence level of 95% and the number of bootstraps at 5000 were fixed.

Table 7 depicts the results of mediation analysis, where indirect effects, the confidence level (95%) and p values (Macho & Ledermann, 2011) of the mediating variables are depicted. Results suggest that reflective pondering and brooding partially mediated the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables. The reason for partial mediation was that both the paths (direct and indirect) were statistically significant (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Reflective pondering mediated the relationship between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict (WLC) (H6a), and brooding mediated the relationship between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict (WLC) (H6b).

Table 6. Structure equation model evaluation indices

Hypotheses	Structural relationship	Beta Coefficient	t-Value	Outcome
H1	PWB→WLC	0.45	9.123	Supported
H2	PWB→RP	0.28	11.992	Supported
H3	PWB→B	0.11	2.689	Supported
H4	RP→WLC	-0.176	-2.971	Supported
H5	B→WLC	0.521	6.756	Supported

Table 7. Mediation analysis

Mediation paths	Indirect effects	LLCI	ULCI	p-value
H6a partial PWB → RP → WLC	0.24	0.131	0.305	p<0.01
H6b partial PWB → B → WLC	0.18	0.048	0.261	p<0.01

Notes: WLC = work-to-life conflict; PWB = proactive work behaviour; RP = Reflective pondering; B = Brooding

Source: Author’s survey; LLCI - lower level of confidence interval; ULCI - Upper level of confidence interval

4. DISCUSSION

Proactive work behaviours were originally conceptualized as constructive behaviours that contribute to superior employee and organizational functioning. Only recently has attention turned towards the dark side of proactivity. Extending this emerging line of research, I tested the adverse cognitive and affective effects incurred through proactive work behaviour that would lead to work-to-life conflict. Drawing upon COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we developed and tested a moderated mediation model explaining how and when proactive behaviour affects work-family conflict. In this study, we identified a positive theoretical link between proactive behaviour and work-family conflict that strengthens the understanding of the outcomes of proactivity. The study’s empirical results support the proposition that proactivity is positively linked to workplace rumination (reflective pondering and brooding). I also found a mediating effect of reflective pondering and brooding on the relationship between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict. My findings contribute to the theory and research on proactivity and the work-life conflict in two ways.

4.1 Theoretical Implications

Firstly, my study shows that proactive behaviour is positively associated with work-to-life conflict. To my knowledge, behavioural based conflict in the work-to-life conflict model by Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) has been relatively little examined in recent studies (Dierdorff & Ellington, 2008). Results provide empirical support for the suggestion that proactive work behaviour spills over to the life domain and leads to work-to-life conflict. This result is attuned with those of previous studies and confirms the positive relationship between proactive behaviour and work-to-life conflict (Zito et al., 2019). Furthermore, most previous studies have focused on the benefit of proactive behaviour in organizations. My results contribute to proactivity research by revealing the “dark side” of proactive behaviour on the work-to-life interface. The findings also answer the calls from Liu et al. (2019) and deepen our understanding of the consequences of proactive work behaviour.

Secondly, taking the COR theory as our primary theoretical lens, I demonstrate through our study results that both reflective pondering and brooding play a mediating role in the relationship between proactive behaviour and work-to-life conflict. Although past studies have examined the relationship between specific proactive behaviour and work-to-life conflict, investigation of the underlying mediating mechanism of the relationship between proactive behaviour and the work-family interface has been neglected (Bolino & Turnley, 2005; Harrison & Wagner, 2016; Zito et al., 2019). By examining the mediating effect of the strain caused by work related issues (Mohr et al., 2006), I provide empirical support for the idea that proactive work behaviour requiring resource consumption can lead to work strain and anxiety, which is more likely to spill over to the life domain and cause work-to-life conflict. Our results also extend and are consistent with the findings of Lin & Johnson (2015) and Pingel et al. (2019) suggesting that proactive work behaviour leads to resource loss, which results in anxiety and, ultimately, work-to-life conflict. Moreover, I found that proactive behaviour is not conserving or adding resources; hence, behaving proactively has detrimental effects for employees. This result extends and highlights the findings by Cangiano et al. (2019) indicating that proactive behaviour was positively linked with work-related ruminating and work-life conflict. To the best of my knowledge, this study is one of the few studies to provide meaningful insights into the interaction between proactive work behaviour and work-related rumination, viz. reflective pondering and brooding, in predicting work-to-life conflict.

4.2 Managerial Implications

The present study’s findings highlight some significant managerial implications for organizations. Firstly, the results suggest that proactive behaviour spills over to the life domain and proactively correlates with work-to-life conflict both directly and indirectly. Hence, it is vital for organizations to realize that employees’ proactive behaviour may have detrimental effects on their life domain. Managers need to consider the “dark side” of proactive behaviour and formulate supportive family policies for proactive employees, such as flexitime, which can lower the impact of work on the life domain (Cui & Li, 2021). Secondly, the results show that proactive behaviour is resource-consuming, which causes proactive individuals to experience workplace strain. Thus, organizations could formulate policies and provide resources for proactive employees; for example,

organizational line managers should be encouraged to provide support such as flexible work options consisting of job autonomy, and emotional support that conveys compassion and understanding to support proactive employees. Organizations can also create a culture of inclusion to reduce or discourage proactivity beyond what is required. Another potential solution is to create a just, fair, and open work climate to inhibit work-related rumination. The enterprise should encourage team building and interpersonal understanding so that work at hand is done in the most innovative ways and employees do not have to ruminate about work beyond working hours (Zhang et al., 2017). For instance, teamwork can be explicitly recognized by the formal reward system for both subordinates and their immediate supervisors, and formal/informal gatherings among employees can be carried out to facilitate interpersonal interaction and understanding, which can go a long way to eliminating rumination and reducing work-to-life conflict.

The present study indicates that rumination mediates proactive work behaviour's harmful effects in terms of work-to-life conflict. This finding will help management to better understand and encourage them to implement organizational interventions aimed at directly influencing the cognitive processes of employees. Employers can instruct employees on ways of blocking their own ruminative thoughts to prevent prolonged effects on the work-life domain. Evidence has shown that, apart from taking leave, daily practices can help individuals recover from work-related stress (Kühnel & Sonnentag, 2011). Furthermore, non-work environments play an important role in people's psychological detachment from work for some time (Sonnentag & Bayer, 2005). Thus, employers may establish such non-work space within the organizations. For instance, employers can offer employees recreation facilities (e.g., rooms for movies/ coffee/reading) to use during work breaks, which may help them to mentally disconnect from work related issues and stressors.

For employees themselves, the finding that the deleterious effects of proactive work behaviour may linger, as a result of their ruminative tendencies, may enable them to recognize the potential negative consequences of a failure to detach themselves from work beyond working hours, thus encouraging them to take an adaptive way to cope with proactivity. Disconnecting mentally from the work situation is deemed an adaptive strategy for someone's restoration from job stressors (Allen, Holland, & Reynolds, 2015). Practically speaking, daily transition rituals or routines can be a way to restrain people from lingering on the perception of being discriminated against (i.e., ignored or excluded) by peers. For instance, individuals can play games on their cellphones/tablets or listen to music when commuting rather than thinking about work-related matters. Research has also shown that being engaged in meaningful activities outside work (e.g., volunteering or having hobbies) can facilitate the reduction in proactivity and ruminating over work matters (Etzion, Eden, & Lapidot, 1998). As such, using non-work time in a healthy and relaxing way is an effective way for employees to detach themselves psychologically from job stressors. For instance, employees may take short trips with family members at weekends, or go to the cinema after work.

Last, the mediating role of rumination, viz. reflective pondering and brooding, in proactive work behaviour–work-to-life conflict relationships may also have some management implications. By illustrating that the adverse effects of proactive work behaviour are indirectly transmitted to the life domain via negative spill-over rumination, the study informs practitioners about the importance of the work–life balance for organizations and employees. In an effort to encourage helping behaviours among employees, management needs to seek ways of reducing the likelihood of work interfering with their families. Cloninger, Selvarajan, Singh, and Huang (2015) argued that non-work domain practices can actually increase employees' resource base and withhold resource drain, thus engendering a positive influence on their behaviours. By minimizing work interference in life and the family and assisting employees in managing their work and non-work roles well, organizations can supplement employees with resources that might offset any resources lost. Popular practices that organizations can adopt include working at or from home during normal working hours, flex-time working, a workplace nursery, job sharing, and so forth.

4.3 Limitations and Future Scope

I believe the findings from our current study will help take the next steps in research in this domain, that of establishing causal inferences. Despite the findings and the contributions made to the field, this study had some limitations that should be addressed. Firstly, the potential threat of common method bias still cannot be excluded because work-to-life conflict may also affect proactive work behaviour. Thus, I encourage future research to use a longitudinal design to investigate the reciprocal relationship between proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict to clarify and unearth causal relationships. This can help us go a long way in understanding the relationships between the constructs (proactivity, rumination, work-to-life conflict) much better. A cross-cultural, longitudinal study should be conducted to establish (or refute) the causations. As a further step, collecting data from other sources (supervisors, peers – related to an individual's proactivity, and spouse – related to their work-to-life conflict), is also envisaged, in order to draw conclusions more strongly from the results. Finally, researchers can also explore other indirect pathways from proactive work behaviour to work-to-life conflict, to expand knowledge on these domains.

5. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the study elucidates the connections and interplay of the variables via employees' proactive work behaviour that can affect their work-to-life conflict. This study deals with the complex phenomenon of resources being invested (i.e. in proactive work behaviour), conserving resources (reflective pondering) and depleted or exhausted resources (brooding). This study confronts the issue with a robust model of mediation between the relationship between employees' proactive work behaviour and work-to-life conflict. COR Theory highlighted resource depletion aspects of proactive work behavior which can be useful to debate and address various management related issues.

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