



Unraveling the Pathways to Creative Performance: The Serial Mediation of Career Optimism and Career Commitment Between Core Self-Evaluation and Employee Creative Performance in the IT Sector

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ABSTRACT

Organizations seeking to innovate and gain a competitive edge must unleash creative potential in the workplace. The current study is aimed at assessing the serial mediation of career optimism and career commitment in the relationship between core self-evaluation (CSE) and employee creative performance. 458 employees from the IT sector participated in the study belonging to Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Data was collected using adopted questionnaires. SPSS PROCESS Macro was used for data analysis. The findings showed that individuals with higher levels of CSE also had higher levels of career optimism, which affects their commitment to their careers. Consequently, higher levels of career commitment have a positive impact on their ability to produce creative work. These findings highlight the need of taking career optimism and career commitment into account as sequential mediators of CSE's influence on creative performance. Furthermore, this work provides the door for future research into the underlying mechanisms and the examination of new aspects that could add to the complex dynamics of creativity.

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1. Introduction

Organizations are emphasizing creativity in response to rapid changes in the business world. Managers today are attempting to determine how to encourage their employees to be more creative as creativity has changed from a "good to have" to a "must have" element in productive workplaces (Dyer, Larson, Steele, & Holbeck, 2015).

According to past research, an employee's creativity is greatly influenced by their personality characteristics. One's personality, cognitive abilities, knowledge, intellect, and motivation are an example of these kinds of personal characteristics. Personal traits are perhaps the most significant of the aforementioned individual characteristics because they show greater endogeneity and consistency than elements like motivation, cognitive styles, etc. (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). An increasing body of research has examined the correlation between personality and creativity. For instance, openness and extraversion, two of the Big 5 personality traits have proven to be excellent, favorable indicators of creativity (Furnham, 2015; Puryear, Kettler, & Rinn, 2017).

In today's changing climate, organizations have become more reliant on employee creativity for their continued prosperity and survival (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014). It is imperative to broaden research regarding Core self evaluation to look at how it affects creativity. CSEs, which tend to be thought of as higher-order traits, indicate an individual's intrinsic tendencies that cause them to feel and respond in particular manners. CSE has continued to gain attention as a subject of study in the realm of organizations since it has been discovered to be connected to several circumstances. Scholars have consistently shown high associations between Core self evaluation and job satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2017). People's judgments about the outside world (e.g., their employment) are influenced by perceptions they have about

themselves, as per Judge, Locke, Durham, and Kluger (1998). Despite the overwhelming indication that CSEs are significant contributors to the workplace, much less research has been done on the indirect relationships between CSEs and how they affect organizational results (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012).

This study makes several contributions to our understanding of CSEs and creative behavior among employees. First, there is currently very limited research concerning how increased CSE-induced behavior can improve creativity so there is a need for research into the intervening mechanisms by which CSEs alter career and work-related outcomes. To address the scarcity of research on the mediating processes relating CSEs to results obtained at work, this study is focusing on mediators (career optimism and career commitment) and their effect on their relationship. A serial mediation model was tested that investigates the methods used to identify how a person's CSE presents itself at work. It further gives a much more in depth comprehension of the way a person's personality influences and shapes their creative behavior. The way that individuals interact at work is significantly impacted by CSEs. Employees who have elevated CSEs are more expected to assume the duties of one's careers by evaluating their surroundings and acting in more constructive ways at work.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Core self-evaluation and Employee Creative Performance

Tims and Akkermans (2017) define CSE as a person's subconscious and underlying traits of self-evaluation of a person's capacity and control. It fosters the development of positive or negative characteristics about oneself, particularly in terms of intellectual abilities and confidence in themselves. Organizational psychology has paid close attention to the relationship between personality and performance (Debusscher et al. 2015). A novel idea of personality traits is core self-evaluations. Chang et al. (2012) concluded in their research that CSE was favorably connected with task performance and OCB and negatively correlated with counterproductive work behaviors in a meta-analysis. However, studies hardly investigate the relationships between core self-evaluations and other aspects of performance, such as creativity (Chang et al., 2012).

Workplace creativity can be defined in terms of a cognitive and behavioral thought process and can be relied on to generate creative concepts (Minh-Duc & Huu-Lam, 2019). Contrarily, creativity has recently been defined as an unconventional behavior that is already present in a system (Liu, Wang, Chen, & Chao, 2020). The main goal of creativity is on generating and implementing novel concepts based on knowledge, a plan of action, and synergy (Tse, To, & Chiu, 2018). Employee creativity necessitates a high level of mental effort, thus it is important to motivate them to put in extra effort to make progress. Creative workers can contribute by bringing innovative and novel ideas to make the required adjustments to the goods and services (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). According to Da Costa, Páez, Sánchez, Garaigordobil, and Gondim (2015), it's an entire innovation that encompasses introducing unique procedures and products. Those employees with high CSE may be "wired" to view more constructive and optimistic sides of creative pursuits. They are more inclined to participate in creative behaviors because they are more confident in achieving favorable outcomes (Judge et al., 1998). According to a research study (Chiang, Hsu, & Hung, 2014), employees who scored well on CSE exhibited more behaviors that increased their understanding of their jobs and their intrinsic motivation, both of which were significantly connected to higher levels of creativity. In light of this, it was proposed.

H₁: Core self-evaluation has a positive impact on Employee Creative Performance

2.2. Career optimism as a mediator between Core self-evaluation and Employee Creative Performance

According to (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005), "career optimism" is the propensity for people to focus on or anticipate achieving the best possible result in their future career advancement. CSE is a person's subconscious and underlying traits of self-evaluation of a person's capacity and control. It fosters the development of positive or negative characteristics about oneself, particularly in terms of intellectual abilities and confidence in themselves. Individuals with high CSE have a more optimistic attitude toward their career and life experiences (Debusscher, Hofmans, & De Fruyt, 2017), making stressful situations less likely to be perceived as a challenge. The significance of CSE is that it assists an employee in subjectively becoming aware of himself or herself in how they or interact with their job's

demands, which can keep the employee focused, deciding the employee's capacity to perform effectively, and having positive feelings about the job and the career, this self-evaluation, may enhance employees' creative performance via become optimistic about their career, therefore, this research hypothesized that

H₂: Career optimism mediates the relationship between Core self-evaluation and Employee Creative Performance

2.3. Career commitment as a mediator between Core self-evaluation and Employee Creative Performance

Commitment is vital in today's workplace since it has the potential to influence productivity and effectiveness. Commitment is a move or action performed in favor of specific preferences for them to be undertaken consistently beyond coercion (Tierney et al., 2021).

Within the workforce research, the words occupational commitment, professional commitment, and career commitment are utilized fairly interchangeably. Research studies show that individuals frequently transition between occupations at various phases throughout their careers (Fu & Chen, 2015). According to Blau (1985), the term "career commitment" relates to an employee's contentment with their existing career and their willingness to stay in it.

According to Barać, Prlić, Plužarić, Farčić, and Kovačević (2018), CSE is referred to as a high-order construct that consists of the following four personality traits: locus of control, general self-efficiency, self-esteem, and neuroticism, which refers to a person's initial assessment of his or her worth. CSE addresses an individual's primary perception and bottom-line assessment of himself or herself, other people, and the universe (Judge et al., 1998).

High CSE individuals feel in charge and competent in handling situations. These individuals exhibit good attitudes and behaviors while at work (Kluemper et al., 2019). So, employees become less inclined to give up on their professions and more likely to invest time and money in improving their abilities if they are extremely committed to their current careers (Aryee & Tan, 1992). As a result, employee creative behaviors are encouraged because people who are highly committed to their careers will endeavor to fully comprehend the necessities of the organization and implement proactive changes that connect what they want in life with organizational goals (Wang & Kim, 2017). Chang et al. (2012) discovered that employees with high career commitments were more motivated (as compared to employees with low career commitments) when the expectations were endorsed and recognized by the organization as a whole. Following the preceding debate, we hypothesize:

H₃: Career commitment mediates the relationship between Core self-evaluation and Employee Creative Performance

2.4. Career optimism and career commitment as a serial mediator

It is uncertain whether any mediating mechanisms exist between CSE and creative job performance. As a result, the current study aims to assess the impact of CSE on employee creative performance, as well as to analyze potential mediating mechanisms to enhance our knowledge of the relationship between CSE and employee creative performance.

A previous study has found that those with higher levels of CSE are more optimistic about their careers (Debusscher et al., 2017). This relationship can be explained by the fact that people who have good self-perceptions are more likely to expect favorable career outcomes and believe they are capable of reaching their career objectives.

Career optimism is defined by career construction theory as hoping for the best potential outcome and completing career planning duties for the future of a person's career advancement (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). People who are hopeful about their careers are very worried about the future. They remain enthusiastic about committing to their chosen future and believe they are on the right track for career achievement (McIlveen, Beccaria, & Burton, 2013) While Low career optimism is linked with apathy, a lack of dedication to one's career, and ineffective planning (Perera & McIlveen, 2014). Employees with a high level of career optimism are considered to be extremely committed to their chosen careers.

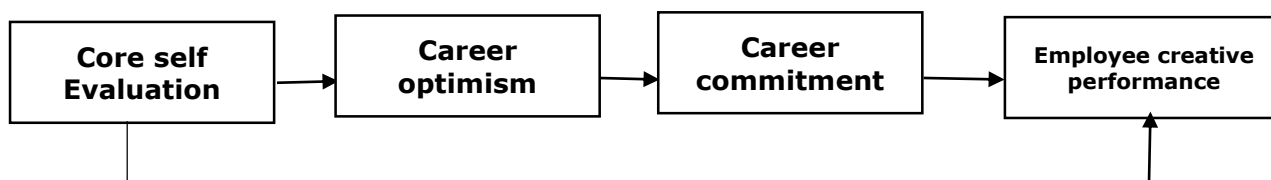
Career-committed employees, according to Colarelli and Bishop (1990) will create career goals after which they associate with and participate in those objectives. In contrast, workers with poor career commitment are probably to have lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Pei & Zhao, 2015), which makes it difficult to achieve meaningful individual performance.

According to Lee, Carswell, and Allen (2000), employees with strong career commitments are more willing to take an active part in their jobs and attain higher job performance compared to those who have minimal career commitment.

Secondly, Individuals with higher degrees of career optimism are more likely to have a strong commitment to their careers as a result of their high expectations for future success. In turn, useful work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance have been linked to career commitment. based on this career commitment serves as a second-stage mediator between career optimism and employee creative performance. Higher career optimism as a result of higher CSE levels may result in higher career commitment, which in turn enhances employee creative performance. Therefore, this research hypothesized:

H4: Career commitment and career optimism are sequential mediators of the relationship between core self-evaluation and employee creative performance.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



3. Methodology

This survey included 458 employees from Pakistan's IT sector. Purposive sampling was used to choose participants, with the goal of including persons with relevant expertise in the IT business.

The adopted questionnaires were created for investigating all the variables. Participants were informed about the study objectives, voluntary participation, and privacy of their responses. Before taking part in the survey, each individual provided informal consent. Five-point Likert Scale was used (Strongly disagree = 1 to and strongly agree =5). As a unit of analysis Dyad sample(employee-supervisor) was taken as questions regarding IV and mediator were filled in by employees while questions regarding DV were filled in by their immediate supervisor/boss.

3.1. Measures

3.1.1. Core self-evaluation

CSE was measured by 12 items scale developed by Judge et al. (1998). Sample item includes "I determine what will happen in my life".

3.1.2. Career optimism

Career optimism was measured by using 11 items scale developed by (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). The sample item is "Thinking about my Career inspires me". This scale is reliable and has recently been used by many researchers(Aymans,Kortsch and Kauffeld,2019).

3.1.3. Career commitment

A scale regarding career commitment was developed by Blau (1985) with 8 items. Sample item includes "This is the ideal vocation for a life work"

3.1.4. Employee creative performance(supervisor rating)

Employee Creative performance was measured with 4 Items. Sample items include "This employee is a good role model for creativity" (Tierney et al., 2021).

3.2. Sample Characteristics

Age, gender, education, and experience were among the sample characteristics of the participants in this study. The findings revealed that the majority of the participants were male, and a sizable proportion of the employees were between the ages of 20 and 30. Furthermore, the majority of the employees were in their early careers and had earned a bachelor's degree.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	Classification	Amount	Percentage
Age	20-25	191	41.7
	26-30	155	33.8
	31-35	72	15.7
	36-40	33	7.2
	41 and above	7	1.5
Gender	Male	330	72.1
	Female	128	27.9
Education	Bachelor	217	47.4
	Masters	175	38.2
	MS/PhD	66	14.4
Experience	1-3 years	183	40.0
	4-6 years	134	29.3
	7-9 years	100	21.8
	10-12 years	32	7.0
	13 and above years	9	2.0

Total Sample Size=458

4. Reliability and Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis examined the relationships between core self-evaluation (CSE), career optimism (CO), career commitment (CC), and employee creative performance (CP). The correlation between CSE and CO is positive ($r=0.269$) and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). CSE and CC are positive ($r=0.157$), but it is relatively weaker compared to other correlations. While statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), the relationship suggests a modest association between an individual's CSE and their commitment to their career. This implies that higher levels of core self-evaluation may have a slight influence on career commitment. Further, the correlation between CSE and CP ($r=0.212$), CO and CC ($r=0.345$), CO and CP ($r=0.429$), and CC and CP ($r=0.363$) are all positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Reliability analysis shows that all the scales are reliable as Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.07 which is the cut-off criterion.

Table 2: Reliability and Correlation Analysis

Construct	N	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Core self-evaluation	Career optimism	Career commitment	Employee creative performance
Core self-evaluation	458	0.929	1			
Career optimism	458	0.912	0.269**	1		
Career commitment	458	0.896	0.157**	0.345**	1	
Employee creative performance	458	0.838	0.212**	0.429**	0.363**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4.1. Hypothesis Testing

The serial mediation model was tested on SPSS by using Model no 6 of Hayes process macro (Hayes, 2013). Direct, indirect, and total effects was presented in the Table below. These findings suggest that core self-evaluation positively predicts employee creative performance ($\beta=0.0901$, $t=2.0655$, $p<0.001$) supporting H_1 and confirming that employees that have a higher degree of core self-evaluation tend to perform better creatively at work. For instance, people who have a better evaluation of their selves have higher degrees of self-confidence and self-belief. This assurance allows them to take risks, think outside the box, and produce creative concepts without fear of failure or judgment.

Secondly, it was hypothesized that career optimism mediates the link between core self-evaluation and employee creative performance. Results confirmed H₂ that career optimism acts as a mediator between their relationship with a significant indirect effect [$a_1 \cdot b_1 = 0.0892$, S.E=0.0279, CI(0.0400, 0.1521)].

Thirdly, it was hypothesized that career commitment mediates the link amongst core self-evaluation and employee creative performance. The result shows that the indirect effect of career optimism on the relationship between core self-evaluation and employee creative performance was insignificant. [$a_2 \cdot b_2 = 0.0168$, S.E=0.0140 , CI(-0.0082 , 0.0479)]. Hence H₃ is rejected

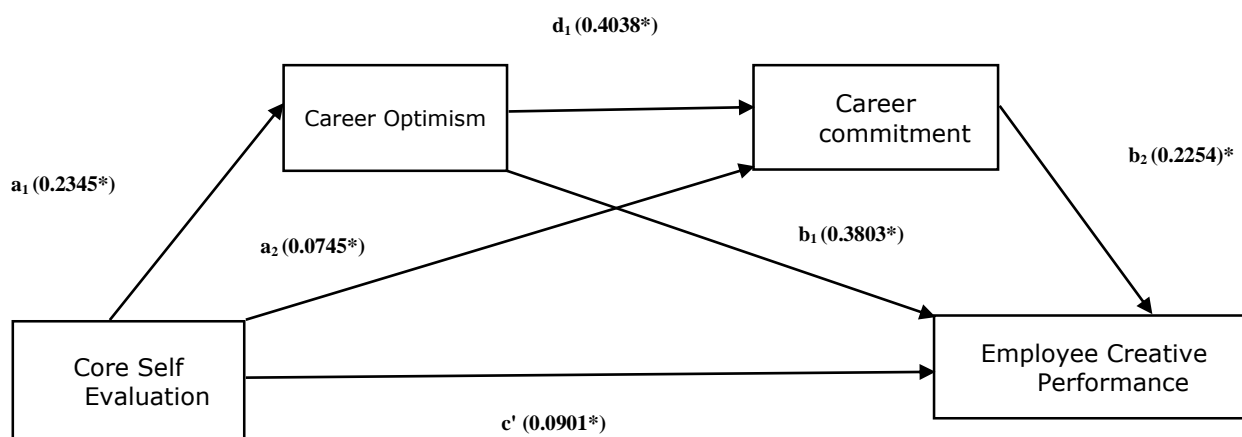
Career commitment failed to independently mediate the relationship between core self-evaluation while career optimism emerged to be an independent mediator.

Fourthly, career optimism and career commitment as a serial mediator among core self-evaluation and employee creative performance were tested and the result shows a significant indirect effect [$a_1 \cdot d \cdot b_2 = 0.0213$, S.E=0.0080, CI(0.0088, 0.0396)]. that means these two mediators partially mediated the relationship between IV and DV and H₄ is accepted.

Table 3: Analysis of the intermediary effect

Indirect Effects	Point Estimates	Standard Error	BC 95% Lower	CI Upper
CSE – CO--CP	0.0892	0.0279	0.0400	0.1521
CSE-CC-CP	0.0168	0.0140	-0.0082	0.0479
CSE-CO-CC-CP	0.0213	0.0080	0.0088	0.0396
Direct Effects				
CSE-CP	0.0901	0.0436	0.0044	0.1757
Total Effect				
CSE-CP	0.2174	0.0470	0.1251	0.3097

Figure 2: Analysis of the coefficients of the mediated pathways (*p < 0.001)



5. Discussion

The study found that core self-evaluation is favorably linked with employee creative performance. The findings are consistent with past research (Chang et al., 2012; Debusscher et al., 2017). Individuals who have favorable self-evaluations are more likely to set higher-level goals and are very much enthusiastic while bringing creative ideas that enhance their performance.

The second hypothesis, that career optimism mediated the influence of CSE on employee creative performance, was accepted. Consistent with earlier research, those with higher CSE have higher self-confidence, self-belief, and self-perceived competence, all of which are conducive to creative thinking and problem-solving. Higher CSE further can translate into higher confidence in their abilities to achieve career development and they become optimistic about their career. Career optimism can promote a positive outlook, perseverance, and a willingness to accept changes, all of which are connected with creative thinking and new idea discovery.

Thirdly, another objective of this study was to look at the part of career commitment as a mediator in the relationship between core self-evaluation (CSE) and employee creative performance. Research, however, found that a career commitment did not significantly mediate this relationship. These findings add to the awareness that other elements or methods may be more effective in driving employee creative performance, requiring additional research to investigate other mediators in this relationship.

According to the findings of this study, career optimism and career commitment have a sequential mediation effect on the association between core self-evaluation (CSE) and creative performance. Individuals with higher levels of CSE had higher levels of career optimism, which influences their career commitment. As a result, greater degrees of career commitment are related to improved creative performance. According to this sequential mediation, the good influence of CSE on creative performance is explained partially by the sequential mechanism of career optimism and career commitment. These findings emphasize the need of taking both career optimism and career commitment into account as important elements in transmitting the influence of CSE on creative performance. Organizations that want to nurture creativity in their workforce could benefit from interventions that boost employees' basic self-evaluation, career optimism, and career commitment, as these variables contribute to the development of creative concepts and solutions.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the association between CSE and employee creative performance can be explained by the role of career optimism and career commitment as serial mediators. The results show that those with Career optimism are increasing with greater levels of CSE which influences their career commitment. A high degree of commitment has an advantageous impact on creativity. Our results highlight the importance of taking career optimism and career commitment into account as important pathways by which CSE promotes creative performance in the workplace. The findings imply that initiatives aiming at improving employees' CSE, career optimism, and career commitment may build an atmosphere favorable to creativity and innovation. Organizations can build methods to improve individuals' self-perceptions, career outlooks, and commitment by understanding these sequential mechanisms, ultimately driving creative outcomes.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

First and foremost, our study adds to the body of knowledge regarding CSE by providing additional confirmation about CSE, as a significant and distinctive broader personality construct that played an important part in foreseeing individual creativity (Chiang et al., 2014). The association between CSE and employee creative performance was confirmed using samples from the IT sector. We concluded that career optimism and career commitment acted as mediating factors and that core self-evaluations did not directly affect employee creative performance.

Although previous research has looked at a variety of personality factors (Anderson et al., 2014) and the componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 1988) states that personality has a strong influence on a person's involvement in creative and imaginative activities, very few studies have been conducted to investigate the significance that personality trait (CSE) plays in the process of creativity. By demonstrating that assessments of one's self can identify a specific personality trait that aids in coming up with creative ideas, the current studies address a gap in the creativity literature and add to it.

6.2. Practical Implications

Managers might think about employing people with an advanced understanding of CSE if the position requires creativity as well as if additional selection criteria are met. Organizational leaders have to focus on their employee's career development plans and check whether they are in line with their existing roles.

Managers additionally have to look at employee career commitment levels. Managers should offer vocational education or request career developers to provide direction to employees who lack career commitment to explain career orientation to their employees and increase their concentration on their chosen field.

6.3. Limitations and Future Recommendations

Future studies are recommended to make use of a bigger sample size to assess the model. Furthermore, we employed supervisory ratings to assess employee creative performance. (Anderson et al., 2014). To avoid rater bias, future studies should employ more unbiased and objective indices that measure creativity (e.g., the total no of patents) (Park, Chun, & Lee, 2016). Using rigorous longitudinal designs and data from several sources will be a good attempt to verify our findings. Here in this study data was collected from IT organizations located in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. In the future, researchers should include other cities as well as any other sector.

Since persons with high CSE tend to be more devoted, which may result in better creativity, additional moderators and mediators could also be helpful to comprehend the links among CSE and employee creative performance

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