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When Teams Become a Burden: A Study of Social Laziness and Work Productivity in Production Employees

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Abstract

Work productivity is a key indicator in achieving organizational goals, particularly in group-based work that requires active individual contributions. One challenge that can hinder productivity is social loafing, a tendency for individuals to exert less effort when working in groups than when working alone. This study aimed to examine the relationship between social loafing behavior and employee productivity. A quantitative approach with a non-experimental correlational design was employed. The study involved 94 production employees selected through purposive sampling, based on criteria: active employment status, a minimum of six months of work experience, and current involvement in team-based tasks. Data were collected using two psychological scales developed based on the theories of Chidambaram & Tung (social loafing) and Simamora (work productivity). Data analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between variables. The results indicated that the hypothesis was accepted, revealing a significant negative correlation between social loafing and work productivity ($r = -0.628$; $p = 0.000$). The coefficient of determination showed that social loafing accounted for 39.4% of the variance in employee productivity. The study concludes that higher levels of social loafing are associated with lower levels of work productivity. These findings underscore the importance of implementing individual-level evaluations within group work to reduce the emergence of social loafing and enhance accountability. This study contributes to the literature by expanding the examination of social loafing into real-world organizational settings, specifically among production employees in Indonesia, and provides practical insights for designing team structures that promote individual accountability.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee productivity is one of the key aspects in the sustainability and progress of a company or agency. Productive employees not only complete tasks in a timely manner but also produce quality output and contribute optimally to the achievement of organizational goals (Almaamari, 2023). In modern work contexts that often involve team collaboration, individual productivity becomes an important indicator of collective success. Teamwork does have the potential to increase efficiency and innovation, but it also poses the risk of dysfunctional behavior if not managed properly. Conversely, low employee productivity can have a significant negative impact on company operations. Decreased productivity can hinder the achievement of production targets, reduce service or product quality, and slow down the overall work process. In the long run, this condition not only results in financial losses but can also worsen morale, increase contribution inequality among team members, and escalate interpersonal conflict within the organization (Cherniack, 2015). Therefore, it is very important to identify the psychological factors that affect productivity in more depth.

Various studies have shown that work productivity is influenced by a number of factors, both internal and external (Pratiwi & Widiyanto, 2018). Internal factors include individual skills, work motivation, physical and mental conditions, and attitude towards tasks. While external factors include superior-subordinate relationships, reward systems, and teamwork structures (Almaamari & Majdalawi, 2024; Suryani & Fitri, 2024). In the context of teamwork, productivity is not only influenced by individual abilities, but also by the dynamics of interaction and shared responsibility between team members. When individual evaluation mechanisms do not work effectively, there is potential for dysfunctional behavior that can reduce collective productivity. One psychosocial factor that has recently attracted attention in the context of group work is social loafing, which is the tendency of individuals to reduce effort when working in groups compared to when working individually (Myers, 2013).

Social laziness is a phenomenon that does not always appear consciously, but has a major impact on team dynamics and the achievement of group performance (Huguet et al., 1999). It often goes undetected because individual contributions are not always directly measurable in collaborative work. Chidambaram and Tung (2005) identified two main causes of social laziness, namely the dilution effect (fusion of responsibilities in large teams) and the immediacy gap (psychological distance between team members). In addition, Evaluation Apprehension Theory (Cottrell, 1972) also explains that individuals will be more motivated to work when they feel that their contributions are observed and valued. In teams without an individualized evaluation system, the potential for social laziness to emerge is greater (Burda et al., 2016). This behavior differs from free-riders who consciously avoid tasks, as social slackers may feel that their contributions are not important or are not recognized (Gabelica et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian work context, especially in the production and manufacturing sectors, teamwork is a common form of work organization to achieve efficiency and meet production targets. Many companies, such as those in the garment, food and beverage, automotive, and electronics sectors, adopt a team-based work system, where employees are divided into work groups with interconnected responsibilities. This system aims to increase coordination, speed up task completion, and improve workflow (Simanjuntak, 2020; Ministry of Industry, 2022). However, practice in the field shows that not all organizations have individual performance monitoring and evaluation systems that work optimally in teamwork. Evaluations are often aggregated based on group achievements, without assessing the contribution of each member. This leads to accountability gaps and raises the risk of social laziness, where individuals feel their contributions will not be personally recognized. This phenomenon commonly occurs in large

work groups with overlapping or non-specific task structures, such as those found in mass production or product assembly lines (Indrawati & Nugroho, 2019).

In this context, social laziness is a real challenge that has a direct impact on work productivity and team effectiveness. Therefore, more in-depth empirical studies in the field of work psychology are needed to understand the dynamics of dysfunctional behavior in teamwork, especially in the context of the world of work in Indonesia. A number of previous studies have linked social laziness with reduced work performance. Wahyu and Sa'id (2020) mentioned that social laziness is one of the main causes of reduced employee productivity in groups. Similarly, Ying et al. (2014) found that individuals with high levels of social laziness tend to have low work contributions in teams. However, most of these studies were conducted in academic or experimental contexts. There is still limited research that specifically explores this phenomenon in production employees, so further studies are needed that can explain the relationship contextually.

This study aims to examine the relationship between social laziness behavior and the level of employee productivity in a teamwork environment. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of work psychology studies, particularly in understanding dysfunctional behaviors in teamwork that impact productivity. Practically, the findings can be used to review teamwork design and individual performance evaluation systems in organizations, so that the potential for social laziness can be suppressed and work productivity remains optimal.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational non-experimental design that aims to determine the relationship between social laziness behavior and employee work productivity levels. The independent variable in this study is social laziness, while the dependent variable is work productivity. Social laziness is defined as the tendency of individuals to reduce effort when working in a group compared to when individually responsible. This variable was measured using the Social Laziness Scale, which was developed based on the theory of Chidambaram and Tung (2005), which includes two dimensions: dilution effect and immediacy gap. The scale consists of 32 statement items with a 4-point Likert model response, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (4). The total score indicates the level of social laziness, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency towards social laziness behavior.

Work productivity is defined as an individual's ability to produce quality, quantitative, and timely work output based on the resources owned. This variable is measured using the Work Productivity Scale, which is compiled based on Simamora's (2004) theory, consisting of three aspects: work quantity, work quality, and timeliness. This scale contains 30 items with a similar answer format, namely a 4-point Likert scale. The total score reflects the level of work productivity, with high scores reflecting high productivity. The subjects in this study amounted to 94 production employees from three manufacturing companies located in Central Java and Yogyakarta. The selection of subjects used a purposive sampling technique, by considering the suitability of the subject's characteristics to the research objectives. The target population in this study is production employees who work in a teamwork system, because this system has collaborative dynamics that are prone to the emergence of social laziness behavior.

The inclusion criteria used included: (1) being an active production employee, as this position generally involves routine work, quantitative targets, and interdependence with teammates; (2) having a minimum tenure of six months, to ensure that subjects have experienced adaptation to the organizational culture and teamwork patterns; and (3) being involved in group work or teamwork, as this study focuses on productivity dynamics in a collaborative context. Data collection was conducted online through the distribution of a digital questionnaire (Google Form), distributed with permission

from the supervisor or HRD of each company. Prior to filling out the questionnaire, participants were given an information sheet and informed consent explaining the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, the right to stop at any time, and confirmation that participation was voluntary. Only participants who expressed consent through the checkbox were allowed to continue filling out the questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using correlation techniques to see the relationship between social laziness and work productivity. Prerequisite tests of analysis, such as normality and linearity, were conducted first to ensure the feasibility of the data. Interpretation of the results was done based on the correlation coefficient value and the significance of the relationship between variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine the relationship between social laziness behavior and the level of work productivity in employees. Data were collected from 94 employees who met the research criteria, then analyzed through a series of stages, namely data description, prerequisite analysis test, and hypothesis testing. The work productivity variable has a minimum score of 58 and a maximum of 82, with a mean of 69.35 and a standard deviation of 5.13. Meanwhile, the social laziness variable showed a minimum score of 33 and a maximum of 73, with a mean of 54.20 and a standard deviation of 8.59. The results are shown in **Table 1.**

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Average	SD
Work Productivity	94	58	82	69,35	5,13
Social Laziness	94	33	73	54,20	8,59

Furthermore, data categorization was carried out based on the mean and hypothetical standard deviation. In the work productivity variable, 75.5% of subjects were in the high category, 24.5% were moderate, and none were in the low category. Whereas in the social laziness variable, 63.8% of subjects were in the low category, 36.2% were moderate, and none were classified as high. Before hypothesis testing, a prerequisite test was carried out in the form of a normality test and a linearity test to ensure that the data met the assumptions of parametric analysis.

Table 2. Normality Test Results (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Variable	K-S Statistics	Sig. (p)
Work Productivity	0,079	0,200
Social Laziness	0,072	0,200

The normality test results show that the significance values of both variables are greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the data is normally distributed. Furthermore, the linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between social laziness and work productivity is linear. The results of the linearity test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Linearity Test Results of the Relationship between Social Laziness and Work Productivity

Test Aspect	F Value	Sig. (p)
Deviation from Linearity	1,1432	0,133

The significance value of the deviation from linearity is greater than 0.05, which means that the relationship between the two variables is linear and qualifies for the correlation test. Hypothesis testing was conducted using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis to determine the relationship between social laziness and work productivity. The results of the analysis show that there is a significant negative relationship between social laziness and work productivity in employees ($r = -0.628$; $p < 0.01$). This means that the higher the social laziness, the lower the work productivity. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.394, which means that social laziness contributes 39.4% to the variation in work productivity. The results showed a significant negative relationship between social laziness and the level of work productivity in employees. This finding directly answers the research objective, which is to examine whether social laziness behavior is related to low work productivity. With a correlation value of -0.628 and a significance value of $p < 0.01$, it can be concluded that the higher the level of social laziness exhibited by employees, the lower their level of work productivity in the context of group work.

This negative relationship can be explained through the social and psychological mechanisms that underlie individual behavior in work teams. One of the main explanations is through the social loafing theory proposed by Myers (2013), namely that in group work, individuals tend to reduce their efforts because they feel that responsibilities are spread. This is reinforced by the dilution effect and immediacy gap concepts of Chidambaram and Tung (2005), which explain that the larger the group, the smaller the perceived individual contribution and the greater the psychological distance between team members, so the motivation to perform optimally decreases. In addition, this dynamic can also be explained through Evaluation Apprehension Theory (Cottrell, 1972), which states that individuals' motivation and performance increase when they feel individually observed and assessed. Conversely, when the evaluation of individuals in the group is unclear or absent, the tendency to decrease effort is greater.

In the context of group work, when performance evaluations are not personally directed, individuals do not feel the need to show maximum effort because there is no social pressure or evaluative expectations directed at them. This opens up space for social laziness, which in turn lowers work productivity. This finding is also in line with Wahyu and Sa'id's (2020) study, which shows that high anonymity in groups and the lack of an individual evaluation system can reduce motivation and work performance. Another study by Ying et al. (2014) also supports that social laziness harms team performance. Thus, this study reinforces the previous findings and extends the scope to the real work environment of production employees in Indonesia, who have been relatively rarely the subject of social behavior at work research.

In group work, individuals tend to feel that responsibility for the end result does not rest entirely on their shoulders, but is shared with other team members. When responsibility feels diffused, motivation to contribute optimally decreases (Karau & Wilhau, 2020). People who experience social laziness tend not to take personal ownership of tasks or outcomes (Singh et al., 2017). This decreases emotional engagement and commitment to work, which in turn results in a decrease in the quality and quantity of work output. In situations where individual contributions are difficult to identify or not valued, social laziness behaviors are more likely to emerge. Without clear accountability, individuals tend to lower their work standards because they feel there are no direct consequences (Yang & Shiu, 2023).

Social laziness not only impacts the perpetrator but also affects the morale of other coworkers. When one person reduces effort, other colleagues may feel unfair or lose motivation to work harder, resulting in decreased overall team productivity (Liu et al., 2024). Scientifically, this study contributes to the industrial and organizational psychology literature by confirming that group dynamics have a real influence on individual work behavior. Although teamwork is believed to increase efficiency, without a structure that supports individual accountability, group work can actually become a context

for the emergence of dysfunctional behaviors such as social laziness. An important implication of these findings is the need for group work designs that facilitate the visibility of individual contributions and enhance the perception of fair and transparent evaluations. Practically, the results of this study underscore the importance of organizational interventions in minimizing social laziness. Measures such as specific task assignment, individual monitoring systems within teams, cooperation training, and strengthening the value of accountability can be preventive strategies. On the other hand, building open communication within the team and strengthening the sense of belonging to the group can also reduce the psychological distance between team members, thereby increasing engagement and productivity.

Nonetheless, this study has some limitations. Firstly, the use of self-report instruments is prone to social bias, where participants tend to provide answers that are perceived as more socially positive. Second, the correlational design does not allow researchers to infer a cause-and-effect relationship. Third, the research subjects were limited to production employees working in a teamwork system, so the results may not be generalizable to other fields of work. For this reason, further research is recommended using a longitudinal or experimental approach to test causal effects and explore the role of mediators or moderators, such as leadership, team cohesion, and organizational culture, in the relationship between social laziness and work productivity.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that there is a significant negative relationship between social laziness behavior and employee work productivity levels. The higher the individual's tendency to engage in social laziness in the context of group work, the lower the level of work productivity he/she show, both in terms of quantity, quality, and timeliness. This finding confirms that social behavior in work groups has a real influence on individual performance in a professional environment.

Based on the results of this study, the scientific development of occupational psychology needs to pay more attention to the psychological and social aspects of teamwork dynamics. Further research is recommended to explore factors that moderate or mediate the relationship between social laziness and work productivity, such as leadership style, team cohesiveness, and individual evaluation systems in groups. The use of experimental or longitudinal approaches is also necessary to strengthen the understanding of the causality of the relationship found, while expanding the population coverage to different types of work and different industrial sectors.

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