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Riding the Waves of Power: Power Fluctuation, Cognitive Energy, and Goal Pursuit

Hae-Lyeng Rose Kim¹ | Trevor A. Foulk² | Michael Schaerer³ | Jake Gale⁴ | Eric M. Anicich⁵

¹Darden School of Business, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA | ²Warrington College of Business, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA | ³Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University, Singapore, Singapore | ⁴Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA | ⁵Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, USA

Correspondence: Hae-Lyeng Rose Kim (kimh@darden.virginia.edu)

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ABSTRACT

A central finding in the power literature is that experiencing elevated power facilitates employees' goal-relevant cognitions and behaviors. In this work, we suggest that the relationship between power and goal pursuit is more complex than previously assumed. Specifically, we examine how experiencing power *fluctuation*—alternating states of high and low power during the workday—can uniquely promote employees' goal-relevant behaviors beyond the effect of static power. Integrating insights from the Dynamic Equilibrium Model of Organizing (DEMO) and the Model of Proactive Motivation (MPM), our work demonstrates that power fluctuation can facilitate employees' cognitive energy, in a way that enhances their goal-relevant cognitions and behaviors (goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress). Furthermore, our work considers for whom these benefits are most pronounced, showing that power fluctuation is more strongly associated with cognitive energy (and subsequent goal-relevant outcomes) for employees higher (vs. lower) in trait mindfulness. Taken together, our findings offer new insights and challenge traditional static conceptions of power by illustrating how daily fluctuations in power can serve as a motivational force that enhances goal pursuit in the workplace.

1 | Introduction

One of the dominant conclusions that has shaped our understanding of employee reactions to feeling powerful is that power facilitates goal pursuit (Guinote 2007, 2017). In other words, when employees feel powerful, they are both more likely to devote attention and energy to their goals and be more effective in the pursuit of these goals. For example, power is associated with a focus on goal-relevant stimuli (Guinote 2007), increased approach-oriented behavior and diligence when pursuing goals (e.g., DeWall et al. 2011; Smith and Bargh 2008), and reduced attention toward stimuli that prevent goal progress (Whitson et al. 2013). Moreover, power promotes the pursuit of *any* goal an individual sets (Gollwitzer and Oettingen 2012; Guinote 2007, 2017)—not just goals that are explicitly associated with power (Bargh and Raymond 1995; Keltner et al. 2003). Thus, scholars

largely consider power to be one of the “key determinants of unequivocal goal pursuit” (Guinote 2007, 1085).

Although there is a strong consensus that power has a positive and linear relationship with goal pursuit outcomes (i.e., more power leads to more goal-relevant cognitions and behavior), we argue that the existing literature paints an overly simplistic view of a more complex phenomenon. Specifically, research on the relationship between power and goal pursuit has primarily focused on the effect of employees' *static* power levels on goal-relevant behaviors (for reviews, see Anderson and Brion 2014; Magee and Galinsky 2008; Magee and Smith 2013; Sturm and Antonakis 2015). However, recently, scholars have begun to focus on how *dynamic* power experiences can provide an enhanced understanding of power's effects in the workplace. For example, past work has demonstrated that most employees experience both

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high- and low-power episodes at work on a daily basis (Smith and Hofmann 2016; Weiss et al. 2021), suggesting that a fluid perspective on power more accurately reflects organizational reality (Anicich and Hirsh 2017; Schaerer et al. 2018). Specifically, power fluctuation—defined as experiencing alternating episodes of powerfulness and powerlessness throughout the workday—is a dynamic experience that can influence important employee outcomes (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021). Leveraging this emerging perspective, we add nuance to the relationship between power and goal pursuit by demonstrating that experiencing a fluctuating sense of power, which involves experiencing *both* high- and low-power experiences, uniquely predicts employees' goal-relevant cognitions and behaviors *above and beyond* the effect of static power levels.

Our theorizing draws on the Dynamic Equilibrium Model of Organizing (DEMO; Smith and Lewis 2011) and the Model of Proactive Motivation (MPM; Parker et al. 2010) to argue that power fluctuation increases employees' cognitive energy—a mental capacity for alertness, attentional focus, persistence, and constructive problem solving (Cole et al. 2012; Lykken 2005)—which in turn boosts their goal-relevant behaviors. DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) proposes that effectively navigating experiences characterized by contradictory tensions—such as fluctuating between feeling powerful and powerless at work—fuels cognitive energy, as managing those tensions enables individuals to become more flexible and resilient and “experience positive energy and success in response to...the juxtaposition of contradictory tensions” (Smith and Lewis 2011, 394). We further propose that employees' cognitive energy is a key mechanism that helps explain how power fluctuation facilitates goal pursuit. MPM stipulates that being “energized to” (Parker et al. 2010, 827) engage in goal-directed actions is a key pathway to goal pursuit. Specifically, MPM (Parker et al. 2010) articulates that individuals' goals are organized into two broad systems (Kanfer and Ackerman 1989): (1) the goal generation system, which requires envisioning and planning (Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001; Grant and Ashford 2008; Locke and Latham 1990), and (2) the goal striving system, which involves enacting and reflecting (Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001). Hence, we examine goal clarity (envisioning), resource acquisition (planning), personal initiative (enacting), and goal progress (reflecting) as the downstream consequences of power fluctuation-induced cognitive energy.

Finally, our integrated theoretical model considers how individuals' dispositional mindfulness shapes the relationship between power fluctuation on cognitive energy and subsequent goal-relevant behaviors. Specifically, DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) highlights how traits aligned with an acceptance-oriented approach and a focus on the present moment enable employees to harness the energizing potential of navigating contradictory tensions. Building on this perspective, we argue that mindfulness—defined as “monitoring one's present-moment experiences with acceptance” (Creswell and Lindsay 2014, 402)—enhances individuals' ability to navigate the tensions associated with power fluctuation with a non-defensive, accepting attitude (Creswell and Lindsay 2014), thereby strengthening their effect on cognitive energy. Our theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

Our paper makes several important contributions. First, we contribute to the literature on employee power by demonstrating that

power fluctuation can have unique effects on employees' goal-relevant behaviors above and beyond the effect of static power. This is important, as prior work has tended to focus narrowly on the relationship between static power and goal pursuit (DeWall et al. 2011; Guinote 2007, 2017; Slabu and Guinote 2010; Smith and Bargh 2008; Smith et al. 2008; Van Dijke and Poppe 2006; Whitson et al. 2013). Leveraging emerging work demonstrating that employees' daily power fluctuation can impact their work-related behaviors (e.g., Anicich et al. 2021, Sabey et al. 2021), our work offers a more nuanced view of the relationship between power and goal-relevant cognitions and behaviors. Specifically, by demonstrating that power fluctuation can be energizing in a way that facilitates employees' goal pursuit, we refine the consensus in the extant power literature that more power should be associated with more goal-relevant behaviors (Guinote 2007; 2017). In other words, alternating experiences of high and low power can be energizing and facilitate goal pursuit, above and beyond the effect of static power.

Second, we expand the discourse on the outcomes of power fluctuation by demonstrating its potential to enhance employees' cognitive energy. Although existing research emphasizes that power fluctuation can be depleting and taxing—leading to frustration, emotional exhaustion (Sabey et al. 2021), and psychological distress (Anicich et al. 2021) due to the challenges of managing competing role demands from incompatible power states—some evidence also suggests that power fluctuation can yield positive outcomes. For instance, prior work has shown that it can foster perspective taking and improve performance (Sabey et al. 2021), highlighting that its effects in organizational settings are not uniformly negative. Our work advances this emerging understanding by revealing how the contradictory tensions inherent in power fluctuation can be resource-enhancing, specifically by building cognitive energy among employees, even as these experiences may simultaneously evoke frustration and exhaustion (e.g., Sabey et al. 2021).

Third, by examining the moderating role of employees' mindfulness on the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy (and subsequent goal pursuit behaviors), our work extends DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) by identifying the individuals for whom its predictions are most pronounced—specifically, those high in trait mindfulness.

Fourth, while much of the literature on contradictory tensions has focused on organizational-level phenomena, such as firms' exploration and exploitation decisions (for reviews, see Putnam et al. 2016; Schad et al. 2016), we adopt an individual-level perspective. In doing so, we build on prior research that highlights the importance of understanding tensions at the individual level (e.g., Lüscher and Lewis 2008; Miron-Spektor et al. 2018; Waldman et al. 2019).

Lastly, our investigation offers practical implications for organizations and their leaders. By identifying and understanding the conditions under which power fluctuation leads to positive outcomes, we provide a roadmap for harnessing these dynamics to foster a more motivated, engaged, and productive workforce. This insight enriches our understanding of the mechanisms through which employees manage and are affected by the inherent contradictions in their work environments.

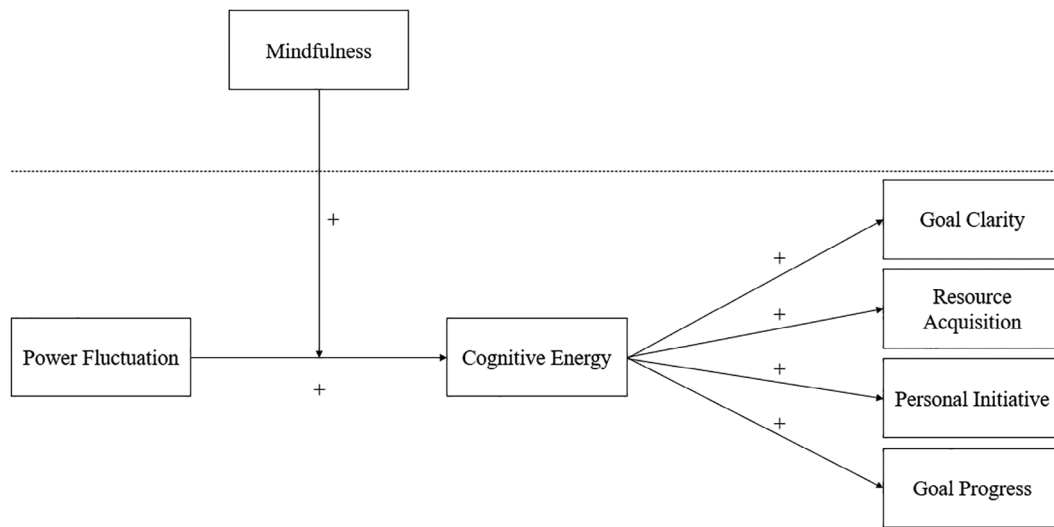


FIGURE 1 | Conceptual model.

2 | Theoretical Background and Development

2.1 | Power Fluctuation and Cognitive Energy

We propose that experiencing more (vs. less) power fluctuation is associated with elevated cognitive energy, which is characterized by alertness, attentional focus, and the capacity to think constructively and persist in search of solutions to work-related problems (Cole et al. 2012). In developing this hypothesis, we draw on DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) to conceptualize power fluctuation as a *contradictory tension*, characterized by opposing yet interrelated elements that persist over time. DEMO suggests that experiencing such tensions can elicit both positive and negative responses as the constant recalibration between the contradictory factors (in our case, high vs. low power) requires individuals to adapt continuously, which can be both taxing and energizing (Smith and Lewis 2011).

Power fluctuation aligns with the way DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) conceptualizes contradictory tensions in two key ways: (1) it involves contradictory yet interrelated elements, as individuals alternate between psychological states of powerfulness and powerlessness—experiences that inherently contradict one another (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021); and (2) it manifests as a persistent dynamic, as power fluctuation is not a one-time occurrence but an ongoing aspect of workplace relationships and organizational hierarchies (Smith and Hofmann 2016; Weiss et al. 2021). Indeed, power fluctuation inherently embodies contradictory tensions by simultaneously encompassing both the presence and absence of power—a paradoxical interplay that persists over time. Powerfulness involves control, assertiveness, autonomy, and agency, while powerlessness is marked by a lack of control, submissiveness, constraint, and inhibition (Anicich et al. 2021; Keltner et al. 2003; Magee and Galinsky 2008)—characteristics that fundamentally contradict each other. Such contradictory tensions “seem logical when considered in isolation, but irrational, inconsistent, and absurd when juxtaposed” (Smith and Lewis 2011, 387). Because power fluctuation is an ongoing experience (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021), employees must continually navigate these competing psychological states, further reinforcing

its contradictory nature. In other words, feeling like a powerful supervisor *and* a powerless subordinate throughout the workday (i.e., high power fluctuation) elicits more contradictory tensions than consistently feeling like *either* a powerful supervisor *or* a powerless subordinate throughout the workday (i.e., low power fluctuation).

Although experiencing contradictory tensions can be taxing (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021), DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) offers a valuable framework for understanding how such tensions in organizations can also be cognitively energizing. According to DEMO, the presence of opposing forces compels individuals to continuously adapt—a process that, although potentially stressful, can offer cognitive benefits. Specifically, *sequential* engagement with the opposing poles of a contradictory tension—an inherent aspect of power fluctuation—enables individuals to harness heightened cognitive energy (Smith and Lewis 2011). This strategy, referred to as “temporal separation” (Poole and Van de Ven 1989), facilitates cognitive energy in the moment as individuals address and engage with each pole of the tension in turn, without compromising the integrity or formal expectations associated with either pole (Smith and Lewis 2011). In other words, “short-term fluctuations, considered as a set, respect both orientations, even if each alternation seems to abandon one orientation for the other” (Ashforth et al. 2014, 1464). This allows individuals to not only recognize the differences between the contradictory tensions but also realize opportunities for synergies (Langer 1989; Suedfeld et al. 1992) which enables them to “experience positive energy and success” (Smith and Lewis 2011, 394).

Several closely related perspectives provide converging support for our theorizing. For example, Mitchell and colleagues (2019, 534) found that performance pressure as a stressor elicits “seemingly contradictory states of energy,” leading to fluctuations in attention that can result in both functional and dysfunctional outcomes (Mitchell et al. 2019). In addition, Ashforth and colleagues (Ashforth et al. 2024) proposed that navigating and oscillating between contradictory tensions associated with different role identities can be energizing, and lead to more expansive thinking

than either the avoidance or favoritism strategy (Ashforth et al. 2024; Marks 1977). Other scholars have noted that vacillating between conflicting alternatives (Kleiman and Enisman 2018) or priming people with conflicting goals (Savary et al. 2015) produces a “conflict mindset” (Kleiman and Enisman 2018, 1), which can expand cognitive scope (Kleiman and Enisman 2018; Kleiman and Hassin 2013) and facilitate fluid and effective decision making (Fishbach and Zhang 2008; Savary et al. 2015). Finally, experiencing conflicting job demands and roles (Fong and Tiedens 2002) facilitates energy (Marks 1977), which can productively enhance the scope of their attentional span (e.g., see Rothman and Melwani 2017).

To illustrate our theorizing, consider Sarah, a middle manager at a large organization. Her role inherently involves significant power fluctuation as she alternates between interacting with higher-power executives and lower-power frontline workers to fulfill her organizational responsibilities (Anicich and Hirsh 2017). Throughout her day, Sarah must frequently adapt mentally, navigating the contradictory tension of feeling powerful in one moment and powerless the next. Although this dynamic can be taxing and stressful, it also sharpens her cognitive focus and problem-solving abilities—hallmarks of heightened cognitive energy. By sequentially engaging with each pole of this tension (powerfulness and powerlessness), Sarah preserves the integrity of both roles and finds opportunities for synergy, enabling her to reconcile the contradiction and experience increased cognitive energy as a result (Smith and Lewis 2011).

Overall, DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) suggests that the process of navigating and balancing fluctuating power experiences can serve as a source of cognitive alertness that enhances employees’ ability to direct their constructive attention toward work-related challenges. Building on this framework, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1. *Power fluctuation is positively associated with cognitive energy.*

2.2 | The Moderating Effect of Mindfulness

Although power fluctuation can have positive implications for employees, such as enhancing cognitive energy, not all employees respond to these experiences in the same way. Reactions to power fluctuation may vary significantly based on individual differences (e.g., Foulk et al. 2018). According to DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011), the ability of contradictory tensions (e.g., power fluctuation) to facilitate beneficial outcomes depends on an individual’s capacity for acceptance. Acceptance gives meaning to apparent contradictions (Smith and Berg 1987), facilitates effective sense-making (Lüscher and Lewis 2008), and elicits “a positive regard for the co-presence of opposites” (Clegg et al. 2002, 483; Rothenberg 1979). Accordingly, we propose that mindfulness—defined as purposefully and non-judgmentally accepting one’s present-moment experiences (Creswell and Lindsay 2014; Kabat-Zinn 2003, 2005; Kudesia 2019; Reb et al. 2020)—strengthens the positive relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy.

Mindfulness involves a heightened awareness (Garland et al. 2015; Kabat-Zinn 2015) that enables individuals to approach

power dynamics and their accompanying tensions with a non-defensive, accepting attitude (Creswell and Lindsay 2014). Through “consistent and mindful shifting of cognition” and “restructuring of resources” (Smith and Lewis 2011, 394; Weick et al. 1999), individuals with higher mindfulness are better equipped to navigate situations characterized by power fluctuation in a constructive manner (Frewen et al. 2008; Michel et al. 2014; Rönnlund et al. 2019; Wells 2002). Supporting this view, research indicates that mindfulness enhances individuals’ capacity to observe, become aware of, and accept their surroundings without judgement (Baer et al. 2004; Segal et al. 2002), and is associated with increased vitality (Allen and Kiburz 2012; Wu and Buchanan 2019). These findings suggest that employees higher in mindfulness are particularly well-suited to take advantage of power fluctuation by translating it into cognitive energy. In sum, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. *Mindfulness moderates the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy, such that this relationship is stronger for employees higher (vs. lower) in mindfulness.*

2.3 | Power Fluctuation, Cognitive Energy, and Goal Pursuit

Our model also considers how increased cognitive energy, elicited by daily power fluctuation, can affect employees’ goal-relevant behaviors at work. To deepen our theoretical understanding of this relationship, we integrate DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) with the MPM (Parker et al. 2010). Although DEMO provides a macro-level perspective on navigating contradictory tensions (Smith and Lewis 2011), MPM offers an individual-level process framework that explains how cognitive energy translates into proactive, goal-directed behaviors. Specifically, MPM posits that motivational states such as feeling energized facilitate “goal generation and striving across a range of proactive goals” (Parker et al. 2010, 839). In addition, MPM delineates two broad goal systems (Kanfer and Ackerman 1989), each with two sub-systems: goal generation, which involves *envisioning* and *planning* (Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001; Grant and Ashford 2008; Locke and Latham 1990), and goal striving, which encompasses *enacting* and *reflecting* (Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001). By positioning cognitive energy as a key mediator that bridges DEMO and MPM, our model highlights how power fluctuation may influence goal-relevant behaviors (Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001), above and beyond any effect of static power.

Drawing on this framework, we examine four dimensions of goal pursuit: (1) *goal clarity* as envisioning, because envisioning involves broadly assessing current or future challenges and opportunities (Grant and Ashford 2008); (2) *resource acquisition* as planning, because planning entails determining the specific actions needed to achieve one’s goals (Bindl and Parker 2009); (3) *personal initiative* as enacting, as enacting refers to the “overt action individuals engage in” (Parker et al. 2010, 833) to achieve their goals; and (4) *goal progress* as reflecting, because reflecting involves evaluating the success, failure, or consequences of goal-pursuit behavior (Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001). This conceptualization aligns with the view that a holistic understanding of goal pursuit requires attention to both the

generative and striving dimensions of the process¹ (Grant and Ashford 2008; Locke and Latham 1990).

2.3.1 | Goal Clarity

First, we posit that cognitive energy positively predicts goal clarity, defined as a state in which goals are precisely defined, with unambiguous objectives and desired outcomes (Peralta et al. 2015). We argue that cognitive energy enhances individuals' ability to clarify goals by bolstering their ability to vividly and concretely perceive and mentally represent potential future states, thereby facilitating goal clarity. Cognitive energy provides the necessary resources for regulating thoughts and behaviors, enabling individuals to better identify and understand their valued goals (Dang et al. 2015; Koole et al. 2012; King and Hicks 2021). Accordingly, employees experience fluctuation-induced cognitive energy, they are better equipped to channel this energy and attention toward evaluating alternatives and selecting precise, meaningful goals. Supporting this view, research demonstrates that cognitive energy increases the ability and desire to focus attention (Cole et al. 2012) and serves as a critical foundation for goal attainment (Kruglanski et al. 2012). Thus, we hypothesize that cognitive energy derived from power fluctuations activates and motivates employees to facilitate precise goal definition:

Hypothesis 3. *Cognitive energy (a) is positively associated with goal clarity and (b) mediates the indirect effect of power fluctuation on goal clarity.*

2.3.2 | Resource Acquisition

Second, we argue that cognitive energy facilitates resource acquisition by enabling employees to recognize and seize opportunities to secure goal-relevant resources (Halbesleben et al. 2014; Heckhausen 2007; Hobfoll 2001; Weer et al. 2010). Cognitive energy enhances individuals' ability to assess the intentions, timing, and opportunities associated with goal pursuit, as well as to effectively invest in and attain additional resources (Halbesleben et al. 2014; Heckhausen 2007; Hobfoll 2001). In support of our argument, research has found that energy enables individuals to better identify opportunities and resources, while also recognizing potential obstacles and liabilities (Quinn et al. 2012). In addition, research suggests that resources in one domain can enable the acquisition of additional resources even in unrelated domains (Hakanen et al. 2011; Xanthopoulou et al. 2009). Therefore, we hypothesize that cognitive energy induced by power fluctuation will allow individuals to acquire resources needed for their goal pursuits:

Hypothesis 4. *Cognitive energy (a) is positively associated with resource acquisition and (b) mediates the indirect effect of power fluctuation on resource acquisition.*

2.3.3 | Personal Initiative

Third, we propose that cognitive energy generated through power fluctuation positively influences personal initiative, defined as self-starting, proactive behaviors aimed at achieving work goals

(Frese et al. 1997). We argue that power fluctuation-induced cognitive energy provides individuals with the resources needed to become more action- and implementation-oriented (Cole et al. 2012; Kazén et al. 2008). In addition, cognitive energy allows individuals to self-regulate their thoughts and behaviors, overcome setbacks (de Lange and Van Knippenberg 2009; Frese et al. 1997), and sustain the proactive engagement required for personal initiative (Frese et al. 1997). Supporting this view, research has found that energy positively impacts work engagement, personal initiative (Hakanen et al. 2008), and goal pursuit (Jostmann and Koole 2009). Thus, we propose that cognitive energy facilitates personal initiative by empowering employees to take action and helping them overcome obstacles to goal achievement:

Hypothesis 5. *Cognitive energy (a) is positively associated with personal initiative and (b) mediates the indirect effect of power fluctuation on personal initiative.*

2.3.4 | Goal Progress

Finally, we propose that cognitive energy facilitates goal progress, defined as individuals' subjective perception of the progress they have made toward achieving their goals (Wanberg et al. 2010). Cognitive energy supports goal progress by helping individuals to allocate their resources more effectively toward important objectives and to recognize when progress is being made (Cole et al. 2012; Dang et al. 2015; Hobfoll 2001; Koole and Jostmann 2004; Koole et al. 2012). Moreover, cognitive energy enhances situational assessment, allowing individuals experiencing fluctuation-induced cognitive energy to more accurately identify the progress they made on their goals during the workday (Kanfer 1970, 1971; Spates and Kanfer 1977). In support of our argument, prior research identifies energy as an important enabler of goal progress (Baumeister et al. 1998; Heslin and Klehe 2023; Hope et al. 2016; Koopman et al. 2016; McClean et al. 2021). In addition, cognitive energy facilitates effective self-evaluation (Koole 2004; Koole and Jostmann 2004), and frequent assessments have been shown to promote greater goal progress and attainment (Harkin et al. 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize that cognitive energy recruited from power fluctuation will positively predict goal progress:

Hypothesis 6. *Cognitive energy (a) is positively associated with goal progress and (b) mediates the indirect effect of power fluctuation on goal progress.*

Combining the idea that power fluctuation-induced cognitive energy will mediate the indirect effect of power fluctuation on goal-relevant behaviors and that mindfulness will moderate the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy, we also propose and test the full moderated mediation model, such that mindfulness moderates the indirect effect of power fluctuation on goal-relevant behaviors, mediated by cognitive energy. Therefore, we hypothesize,

Hypothesis 7. *Mindfulness will moderate the indirect effect of power fluctuation on (a) goal clarity, (b) resource acquisition, (c) personal initiative, and (d) goal progress, via cognitive energy, such that these indirect effects will be stronger for employees higher (vs. lower) in mindfulness.*

3 | Overview of Studies

We tested our theoretical model using three studies. In Study 1, we conducted a field study using experience sampling methodology (ESM), which provided several advantages. First, assessing the subjective power experiences of employees in their actual work environment multiple times each day provides a level of external validity that is difficult to attain with alternative research methods (Tost 2015; Tost et al. 2015). Second, this design allowed us to operationalize power fluctuation in a way that has a high level of internal validity, as we could observe employees' momentary power experiences multiple times each day and assess power fluctuations based on the variance in these daily experiences. In Study 2, we replicated the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy and subsequent goal-relevant behaviors in a three-wave study using a different operationalization of power fluctuation. Additionally, Study 2 demonstrated that the theorized relationship between power fluctuation and goal-relevant behaviors through cognitive energy persists when accounting for a negative mechanism identified in past work (i.e., frustration; Sabey et al. 2021). In Study 3, we examine power fluctuation as a contradictory tension by including experienced tension as a mediating mechanism that links power fluctuation to both cognitive energy and emotional exhaustion (Sabey et al. 2021). Syntax and output for the studies are available through the Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/4ukqg/?view_only=626a614efca944a583ab5d9fc456693b.

4 | Study 1

4.1 | Participants and Procedure

We recruited full-time working adults (e.g., working 20 or more hours per week) who had been in their current jobs for at least 3 months from a part-time MBA program at a large Mid-Atlantic university in 2020 (University of Maryland IRB #1471635, "Daily Work Perceptions & Behaviors"). Because participants were offered course credit as compensation for participation, the sample size was determined exogenously based on voluntary enrollment and before any data analysis. Furthermore, following recent recommendations for best practices in ESM studies, we removed six participants who did not complete at least 3 days of the study (Gabriel et al. 2019; Matta et al. 2020; Sabey et al. 2021; Trougakos et al. 2014), resulting in a between-person sample size of 111 participants (39.6% female; age: $M = 32.40$, $SD = 7.56$). These participants worked an average of 43.6 h each week ($SD = 9.82$) in industries including Finance, Manufacturing, and Education. In addition, participants had been working for their respective companies for an average of 48.30 months ($SD = 45.38$).

Data were collected over 3 consecutive work weeks. In the first week, participants were asked to complete a background survey, which included the informed consent release, a measure of mindfulness, and demographic information. During the second and third weeks of the study, participants received five emails each workday (Monday–Friday) that contained links to a survey: one in early-morning (6 a.m.), one in mid-morning (10:30 a.m.), one in early-afternoon (1:30 p.m.), one in late-afternoon (4 p.m.), and one in the evening (8 p.m.). A momentary measure of subjective power was included in the early-morning, mid-morning, early-

afternoon, and late-afternoon surveys. Cognitive energy was included in the late-afternoon survey. Finally, the evening survey included measures of goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress. Following standard conventions for ESM designs such as ours, some scales were shortened to reduce the burden for respondents (Fisher and To 2012; Gabriel et al. 2019). The 111 participants included in our sample provided a total of 708 usable day-level observations (63.78% response rate).

4.2 | Measures

Unless otherwise specified, participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

4.2.1 | Power Fluctuation

We measured participants' daily power fluctuations by capturing their subjective sense of power four times during the workday. Specifically, participants responded to the question, "Right now, I feel powerful" in the early-morning, mid-morning, early-afternoon, and late-afternoon. Consistent with prior research that has explored daily power fluctuations, we operationalized daily power fluctuations as the standard deviation of these four indicators of daily power (e.g., Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021).

4.2.2 | Cognitive Energy

Cognitive energy was measured using three items, which were adapted from the measure developed by Cole et al. (2012). Sample items include "Today at work, I was on the lookout for new opportunities to contribute," and "Today at work, I was ready to act at any given time" ($\alpha = 0.82$).

4.2.3 | Goal Clarity

We measured goal clarity using three items, which were adapted to the daily level (Jennings et al. 2023) from the scale developed by King et al. (2006). Items include "Today, my life had very clear goals and aims," and "Today, my personal existence was very purposeful and meaningful" ($\alpha = 0.93$).

4.2.4 | Resource Acquisition

We measured resource acquisition using four items adapted from the scale developed by Weer and colleagues (2010). Participants responded to each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*None at all*) to 5 (*A great deal*). Items include "Today, I acquired new information," and "Today, I increased my social contacts" ($\alpha = 0.91$).

4.2.5 | Personal Initiative

We measured personal initiative using three items adapted from the scale developed by Frese et al. (1997). Items include "Today,

I took initiative,” and “Today, I used opportunities to attain my goals” ($\alpha = 0.90$).

4.2.6 | Goal Progress

We measured goal progress using three items, which were adapted from the scale developed by Wanberg et al. (2010). The items include “Today, I made good progress on my work goals,” and “Today, I moved forward on my work goals” ($\alpha = 0.92$).

4.2.7 | Mindfulness

We measured mindfulness using Brown and Ryan’s (2003) 15-item Mindful Attention Awareness Scale. Example items include “It seems I am ‘running on automatic,’ without much awareness of what I’m doing,” and “I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing.” All 15 items were reverse-coded so that higher values reflect greater mindfulness ($\alpha = 0.86$).

4.2.8 | Control Variables

When operationalizing dispersion (i.e., fluctuation) of a construct, it is important to control for the mean level of the construct, otherwise observed variance may be a spurious by-product of the absolute level (Bliese and Britt 2001). Further, dispersion and absolute levels of a construct are interdependent such that at low and high absolute points of a scale, the variable dispersion decreases (Dineen et al. 2007; Lindell and Brandt 2000). This is particularly important within the context of power fluctuations, as without controlling for the mean level of power it is possible that the observed effects could be driven by power level rather than power fluctuation. Thus, to account for any potential confounding effects of average subjective power (Cole et al. 2011), consistent with other studies using designs similar to ours (e.g., Anicich et al. 2021; Matta et al. 2017; Matta et al. 2020), and to demonstrate the unique effects of power fluctuations above and beyond average power, we controlled for the average level of power across the four daily measurements.

As well, prior research suggests that mood has conceptual overlap with cognitive energy (e.g., Fredrickson and Branigan 2005; Fredrickson and Losada 2005) as well as power states (Keltner et al. 2003). Therefore, we added mood as a control variable to our tested model. Mood was measured in the late-afternoon survey, at the same time as cognitive energy. Participants were shown a series of faces, ranging from frowning to smiling, and asked to indicate which face captured the way they felt at that moment (e.g., Wanous et al. 1997; Fisher 2000).

4.3 | Study 1 Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and within- and between-person correlations for all study variables. To verify the distinctiveness of the variables in our model we conducted a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis. In our proposed model, we loaded the respective indicators for each construct in our model onto their own factor. Our power factor with the four measure-

ment indicators, mood, cognitive energy, goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress were specified at the within-person level, and mindfulness was specified at the between-person level. Model fit indices indicated that our proposed model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 951.08$, $df = 265$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, Within-SRMR = 0.09, Between-SRMR = 0.08). This model was compared to alternative models, using the Satorra-Bentler χ^2 difference test which incorporates the Maximum-Likelihood Restricted scaled correction factor, adjusting the chi-square values of multilevel models to ensure they can be adequately compared (Satorra and Bentler 2001). We compared our model to three alternative models. For the first comparison model, all items loaded on their respective factors, except that our endogenous variables (cognitive energy, goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress) were loaded onto a combined factor ($\chi^2 = 3760.80$, $df = 279$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.13, CFI = 0.57, TLI = 0.52, Within-SRMR = 0.14, Between-SRMR = 0.08). Results indicated that our proposed model fit the data better than this alternative model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1665.74$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.001$). For the second comparison model, all items loaded onto their respective factors, with the exception of the dependent variables (goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress) which were loaded onto a combined factor ($\chi^2 = 3330.74$, $df = 277$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.13, CFI = 0.63, TLI = 0.57, Within-SRMR = 0.13, Between-SRMR = 0.08). Results indicated that our proposed model fit the data better than this alternative model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1254.05$, $df = 12$, $p < 0.001$). For the final comparison model, we separated our dependent variables into the goal generation (i.e., goal clarity and resource acquisition) and the goal striving (i.e., personal initiative and goal progress) systems (Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001; Grant and Ashford 2008; Locke and Latham 1990). Goal clarity and resource acquisition were loaded onto one factor, while personal initiative and goal progress were loaded to a different factor ($\chi^2 = 2583.70$, $df = 274$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.11, CFI = 0.72, TLI = 0.68, within-SRMR = 0.13, Between-SRMR = 0.08). Results indicated that our proposed model fit the data better than the final alternative model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1110.21$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, we retained our proposed model for analysis.

Before conducting our analysis, we examined the variance decomposition of our focal variables to ensure that multilevel modeling was appropriate. In Mplus 8.10 (Muthén and Muthén 2023), we estimated a null model for each variable to partition its variance into within- and between-person components. Results showed that all focal variables had substantial within-person variance (power fluctuation = 75%; cognitive energy = 54%; goal clarity = 33%; resource acquisition = 38%; personal initiative = 59%; goal progress = 62%), suggesting that multilevel analysis was appropriate. Unstandardized results of a multilevel path model estimated in Mplus 8.10 (Muthén and Muthén 2023) are presented in Table 2. Hypothesized paths were estimated with random slopes while the control paths were estimated with fixed slopes (Enders and Tofghi 2007). Following Hofmann et al. (2000), all Level-1 variables were group-mean centered to remove potential between-person confounds, and Level-2 variables were grand-mean centered. Indirect effects were tested using a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to construct bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for each indirect effect (Preacher et al. 2010).

TABLE 1 | Within- and between-person descriptive statistics and correlations (Study 1).

Statistic	M	Within-		Between-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		SD	SD										
1. Power fluctuation	0.48	0.43	0.30			0.04	−0.27**	0.18	−0.15	−0.19*	−0.13	−0.14	0.07
2. Cognitive energy	3.87	0.83	0.64	−0.04	(0.82)	0.42**	0.45**	0.46**	0.55**	0.46**	0.52**	0.44**	0.28**
3. Goal clarity	3.95	0.89	0.83	−0.11**	0.39**	(0.93)	0.36**	0.60**	0.60**	0.58**	0.60**	0.37**	0.29**
4. Resource acquisition	2.57	0.98	0.87	0.02	0.36**	0.41**	(0.91)	0.48**	0.48**	0.44**	0.54**	0.40**	0.15
5. Personal initiative	3.93	0.83	0.61	−0.03	0.50**	0.47**	0.49**	(0.90)	0.81**	0.81**	0.48**	0.28**	0.16
6. Goal progress	4.02	0.85	0.63	−0.04	0.42**	0.49**	0.44**	0.72**	(0.92)	0.45**	0.45**	0.29**	0.16
7. Power (mean)	3.61	0.78	0.66	−0.25**	0.43**	0.52**	0.40**	0.35**	0.33**	0.63**	0.63**	0.30**	0.30**
8. Mood	3.75	0.84	0.57	−0.21**	0.34**	0.32**	0.27**	0.23**	0.23**	0.54**	0.54**	0.40**	0.40**
9. Mindfulness	3.18		0.71										(0.86)

Note: Variables 1 through 8 are within-individual (Level 1) variables. Variable 9 is a between-individual (Level 2) variable. Within-individual correlations are shown below the diagonal and are based on within-individual scores ($N = 708$). Between-individual correlations are shown above the diagonal and are based on between-individual scores ($N = 111$). Mood is coded where higher values reflect a greater positive mood. Alpha reliabilities are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 2 | Multilevel path model results for the cross-level moderating effects of mindfulness (Study 1).

	Cognitive energy			Goal clarity			Resource acquisition			Personal initiative			Goal progress		
	<i>B</i>	SE		<i>B</i>	SE		<i>B</i>	SE		<i>B</i>	SE		<i>B</i>	SE	
<i>Intercept</i>	3.88**	0.06		3.20**	0.18		1.53**	0.19		2.32**	0.19		2.49**	0.20	
Level 1 predictors															
Power fluctuation	0.16*	0.08		0.06	0.07		0.08	0.08		0.11	0.09		0.14	0.10	
Cognitive energy				0.18**	0.05		0.28**	0.05		0.42**	0.05		0.39**	0.05	
Power (mean)	0.29**	0.07		0.20**	0.06		0.13	0.07		0.07	0.06		0.16*	0.07	
Mood	0.12*	0.05		0.03	0.04		0.07	0.04		0.06	0.05		0.05	0.05	
Level 2 predictor															
Mindfulness	0.25**	0.08													
Cross-level moderator															
Power fluctuations × mindfulness	0.26*	0.11													

Note: Within-individual (Level 1) $N = 7080$. Between-individual (Level 2) $N = 111$. Level 1 predictors were group mean centered. Mindfulness was grand mean centered.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

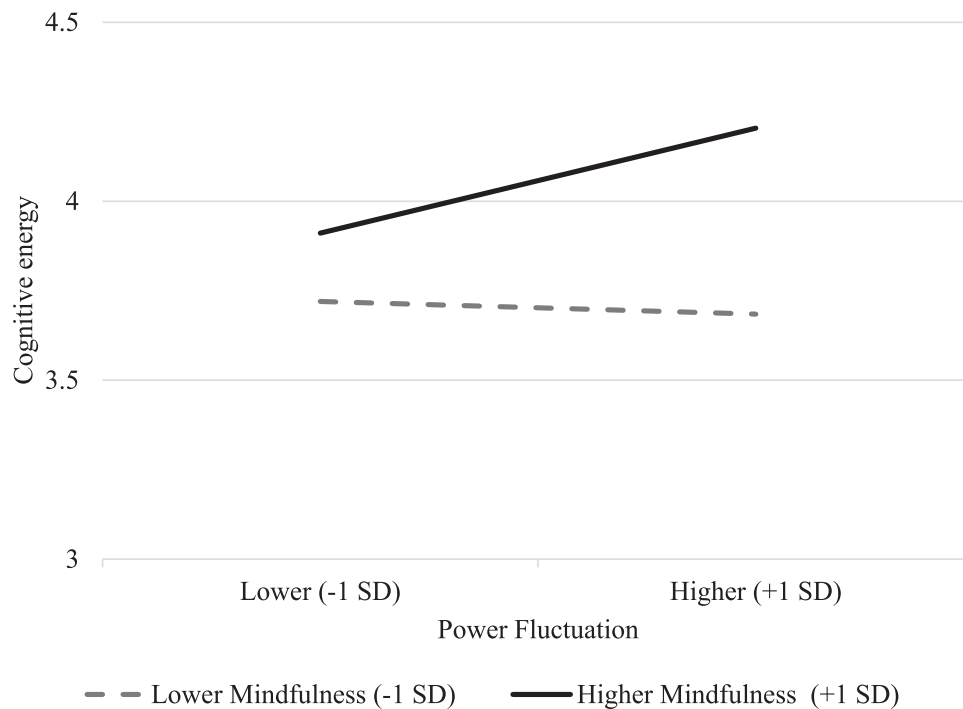


FIGURE 2 | Plot of power fluctuation $\times$ mindfulness interaction on cognitive energy (Study 1).

Hypothesis 1 predicted that power fluctuation would be positively associated with cognitive energy. This relationship was positive and significant ($B = 0.16$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = 0.045$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 predicted that mindfulness would moderate the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy. As hypothesized, mindfulness positively and significantly moderated the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy ($B = 0.26$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.014$), providing support for Hypothesis 2. To ease the interpretation of this relationship, following the recommendation of Cohen et al. (2003), we plotted the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy at higher (+1 SD) and lower (−1 SD) levels of mindfulness (see Figure 2). As expected, when mindfulness was higher (+1 SD), power fluctuation had a significant positive effect on cognitive energy ($B = 0.34$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$). However, when mindfulness was lower (−1 SD), power fluctuation had a nonsignificant effect on cognitive energy ($B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.79$).

Next, we examined our predictions that cognitive energy would facilitate goal-relevant behaviors and mediate the relationship between power fluctuation and those behaviors (Hypotheses 3–6). Cognitive energy had significant positive association with all predicted outcome measures: goal clarity (Hypothesis 3a: $B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), resource acquisition (Hypothesis 4a: $B = 0.28$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), personal initiative (Hypothesis 5a: $B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), and goal progress (Hypothesis 6a: $B = 0.39$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypotheses 3a–6a. We also examined indirect effects where cognitive energy mediates the positive effect of power fluctuation on the outcome variables. Significant indirect effects were found for goal clarity (Hypothesis 3b: 0.03, 95% CI [0.003, 0.073]), resource acquisition (Hypothesis 4b: 0.04, 95% CI [0.004, 0.098]), personal initiative (Hypothesis 5b: 0.07, 95% CI [0.003, 0.138]) and goal progress (Hypothesis 6b: 0.06, 95% CI [0.003, 0.128]), as the 95% CI did not include 0. The findings provide support for Hypotheses 3b–6b

and show cognitive energy mediates the positive effects of power fluctuations on goal-relevant behaviors.

Hypothesis 7 predicted that mindfulness would moderate the indirect effect of power fluctuation on (a) goal clarity, (b) resource acquisition, (c) personal initiative, and (d) goal progress, via cognitive energy. Accordingly, we tested these indirect effects at higher (+1 SD) and lower (−1 SD) levels of mindfulness, and the difference between the two, on each of the four goal pursuit behaviors. In support of Hypothesis 7a (i.e., goal clarity), the indirect effect at higher (+1 SD) levels of mindfulness (0.07, 95% CI [0.021, 0.134]) did not contain zero, while at lower (−1 SD) levels of mindfulness (−0.01, 95% CI [−0.051, 0.035]) the indirect effect did contain zero, and the difference between the two levels (0.07, 95% CI [0.013, 0.151]) did not contain zero. Similarly, in support of Hypothesis 7b (i.e., resource acquisition), the indirect effect at higher (+1 SD) levels of mindfulness (0.10, 95% CI [0.039, 0.176]) did not contain zero, while at lower (−1 SD) levels of mindfulness (−0.01, 95% CI [−0.076, 0.053]) the indirect effect did contain zero, and the difference between the levels (0.11, 95% CI [0.023, 0.216]) did not contain zero. In support on Hypothesis 7c (i.e., personal initiative), the indirect effect at higher (+1 SD) levels of mindfulness (0.14, 95% CI [0.054, 0.247]) did not contain zero, while the indirect effect at lower (−1 SD) levels of mindfulness (−0.01, 95% CI [−0.106, 0.079]) did contain zero, and the difference between the two levels (0.16, 95% CI [0.033, 0.302]) did not contain zero. Lastly, in support of Hypothesis 7d (i.e., goal progress), the indirect effect at higher (+1 SD) levels of mindfulness (0.13, 95% CI [0.054, 0.228]) did not contain zero, while at lower (−1 SD) levels of mindfulness (−0.01, 95% CI [−0.099, 0.073]) the indirect effect did contain zero, and the difference between the levels (0.15, 95% CI [0.031, 0.281]) did not contain zero.

Finally, following the recommendations of Kreft and de Leeuw (1998) and Singer (1998), we calculated the pseudo- R^2 for each of

the endogenous variables in our model. The results indicated that our model accounted for 11% of the variance in cognitive energy, 37% of the variance in goal clarity, 47% of the variance in resource acquisition, 34% of the variance in personal initiative, and 27% of the variance in goal progress.²

4.4 | Supplemental Analysis

To reduce concerns regarding alternative explanations for our hypothesized effects, we ran a series of supplemental models. First, in order to further isolate the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy, we ran a series of models accounting for potential alternative explanations for this relationship. Given that absolute and dispersion measures of a construct are empirically interrelated (Bliese and Britt 2001), one concern is that power fluctuation only influences cognitive energy at higher levels of power (i.e., power shifting from +1 SD to +2 SD throughout the day) or lower levels of power (i.e., power shifting from -1 SD to -2 SD throughout the day). To test this, we re-ran our hypothesized model, but added a within-person interaction term for the interaction between power fluctuation and mean power. Results indicated that the interaction term was nonsignificant ($B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = 0.56$). These results suggest that the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy is not dependent on the level of absolute power at which the fluctuation is occurring.

Another possibility is that it is a linear trend in power, rather than power fluctuation, that is influencing cognitive energy. In other words, it is possible that employees' sense of power steadily increases (decreases) during the day, and that it is this increase (decrease) in power that is associated with cognitive energy. To account for this, we estimated a latent growth curve model (Chan and Schmitt 2000) that accounted for the linear trend in power during the workday. This model estimated the rate of change in employees' power throughout the workday, and results indicated that the positive trend in power over the course of the day was significant ($B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = 0.005$). Furthermore, we entered the parameter for the daily trend in power into our model as a control, and when accounting for any linear trend in power, the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy remained positive and significant ($B = 0.19$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = 0.023$).

4.5 | Study 1 Discussion

In Study 1, we found support for our full theoretical model, such that cognitive energy mediated the effect of power fluctuation on goal pursuit. Further, we found that the relationship between daily power fluctuation and cognitive energy was stronger for individuals higher (vs. lower) in mindfulness. However, there are limitations worth noting in Study 1. First, while participants completed four measures of power each day, we utilized a single-item measure for power. Although single item measurements reduce participant burden and can be appropriate for psychological constructs when researchers seek to reduce content contamination and increase face validity (Fisher et al. 2016; Gabriel et al. 2019), internal consistency cannot be calculated and they can suffer from criterion deficiency (Nunnally and Bernstein 1978; Nagy 2002; Fisher et al. 2016). Therefore, in Study 2 we replicated the effects reported in Study 1, using a multi-item measure of power

fluctuation.³ Second, while we find support in Study 1 that power fluctuation can have positive downstream consequences through cognitive energy, recent work on power fluctuation (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021) suggest that fluctuation can lead to negative downstream consequences. Therefore, to demonstrate that power fluctuation can be cognitively energizing, even in the presence of the negative affective outcomes uncovered in prior work, we simultaneously consider the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy as well as frustration (Sabey et al. 2021).

5 | Study 2

5.1 | Participants and Procedure

We recruited undergraduate business students from a subject pool maintained by a large, private university in the Western United States (University of Southern California IRB, #UP-19-00542, "Consequences of Power Fluctuation") in 2023 to participate in a three-wave study in exchange for course credit. A total of 264 participants completed the Wave 1 survey, of which 225 completed the Wave 2 survey, and 179 completed the Wave 3 survey, resulting in a final response rate of 67.8% (57% female; age: $M = 19.33$, $SD = 2.03$).

All participants were enrolled in a required Organizational Behavior and Leadership course. As part of the course, students worked in 6-person teams on a semester-long project that accounted for 30% of their overall course grade. The assignment required teams to conduct an in-depth analysis of one or more organizations while identifying and applying class concepts and frameworks in their analysis. Students were randomly assigned to their project teams in September and completed three deliverables: (1) project proposal and team contract (due in October), (2) final paper (due in November), and (3) in-class presentation (due in November).

We surveyed participants about their team project experience at three different time points throughout the semester. In the first survey, which participants received roughly 2 weeks after they were assigned to their project teams, participants consented to participate in the study and completed a sense of power measure.⁴ Roughly 4 weeks later, participants received the second survey, which included the same sense of power measure we used in the first survey. Roughly 3 weeks after that, participants received the third and final survey, which included the same sense of power measure used previously, followed by measures of cognitive energy, frustration, and our dependent variables.

5.2 | Measures

Unless otherwise specified, participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

5.2.1 | Power Fluctuation (Constructed From Responses Collected in Each of the Three Surveys)

We measured participants' power fluctuation by first capturing their personal Sense of Power (Anderson et al. 2012) at each of the three measurement points. We adapted the items to the team

project context, instructing participants to respond based on how they felt about their project team in the current moment (example items were “I can get my teammates to listen to what I say”, and “I think I have a great deal of power.”). The reliability of the three measurements of sense of power was acceptable, ranging from 0.78 to 0.87. Consistent with prior research that has explored daily power fluctuations, we operationalized power fluctuation as the standard deviation of these three indicators of daily power (e.g., Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021).

5.2.2 | Cognitive Energy (Measured in Wave 3 Survey)

We measured cognitive energy using the full measure by Cole et al. (2012). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected how they felt about their project team at that current moment ($\alpha = 0.84$).

5.2.3 | Frustration (Measured in Wave 3 Survey)

We measured frustration by adapting a four-item measure developed by Sabey et al. (2021). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected how they felt about their project team at that current moment. Sample items include “In my project team, I feel unhappy,” and “In my project team, I feel frustrated” ($\alpha = 0.90$).

5.2.4 | Goal Clarity (Measured in Wave 3 Survey)

We measured goal clarity by adapting a four-item measure developed by Lee et al. (1991). For all four of the goal-pursuit measures, participants were instructed to consider the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected how they felt about their project team at that current moment, rather than focusing on a specific aspect or goal within the project. Sample items include “I understood exactly what I was supposed to do for my team project,” and “I had specific, clear goals to aim for with my team project” ($\alpha = 0.82$).

5.2.5 | Resource Acquisition (Measured in Wave 3 Survey)

We measured resource acquisition by adapting the measure used in Study 1. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected how they felt about their project team at that current moment ($\alpha = 0.86$).

5.2.6 | Personal Initiative (Measured in Wave 3 Survey)

We measured personal initiative by adapting the 7-item measure developed by Frese and Fay (2001). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected how they felt about their project team at that current moment. Example items were “I took initiative” and “I searched for solutions for things that went wrong” ($\alpha = 0.86$).

5.2.7 | Goal Progress (Measured in Wave 3 Survey)

We measured goal progress by adapting the measure used in Study 1. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected how they felt about their project team at that current moment ($\alpha = 0.90$).

5.2.8 | Control Variable (Constructed From Responses Collected in Each of the Three Surveys)

Similar to Study 1, to avoid any confounding effects, we controlled for the average level of sense of power across the three measurements.

5.3 | Study 2 Results

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables. We tested our model using a simultaneous path model in Mplus 8.10 (Muthén and Muthén 2023), and these results are presented in Table 4. In our path model, we modeled power fluctuation and average power as independent variables, cognitive energy and frustration as mediators, and goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress as dependent variables. To test the indirect effect of power fluctuation on our goal-related dependent variables through cognitive energy and frustration, we used the bootstrapping procedure recommended by Selig and Preacher (2008) with 5000 iterations to calculate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effects.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that power fluctuation would be positively associated with cognitive energy. As predicted, this relationship was positive and significant ($B = 0.50$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = 0.023$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. We also tested the relationship between power fluctuation and frustration. This relationship was positive and marginally significant ($B = 0.59$, $SE = 0.34$, $p = 0.08$).

As predicted, cognitive energy had significant positive association with all predicted outcome measures: goal clarity (Hypothesis 3a: $B = 0.43$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$), resource acquisition (Hypothesis 4a: $B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < 0.01$), personal initiative (Hypothesis 5a: $B = 0.51$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$), and goal progress (Hypothesis 6a: $B = 0.43$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypotheses 3a–6a. Meanwhile, frustration had a significant negative effect on goal clarity ($B = -0.17$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), resource acquisition ($B = -0.32$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$), goal progress ($B = -0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.027$), and a significant positive effect on personal initiative ($B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$).

We also computed indirect effects where cognitive energy mediates the positive effect of power fluctuation on the outcome variables. Significant indirect effects were found for goal clarity (Hypothesis 3b: 0.21, 95% CI [0.021, 0.444]), resource acquisition (Hypothesis 4b: 0.20, 95% CI [0.021, 0.457]), personal initiative (Hypothesis 5b: 0.24, 95% CI [0.016, 0.485]) and goal progress (Hypothesis 6b: 0.22, 95% CI [0.022, 0.430]), as the 95% CI did not include 0. The findings support our prediction that cognitive energy mediates the positive effects of power fluctuations on goal pursuit. In contrast, frustration did not mediate the relationship

TABLE 3 | Descriptive statistics and correlations (Study 2).

Statistic	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Power fluctuation	0.36	0.22							
2. Cognitive energy	4.13	0.65	0.11	(0.84)					
3. Frustration	1.97	1.02	0.19*	−0.22**	(0.90)				
4. Goal clarity	4.00	0.72	−0.02	0.47**	−0.36**	(0.82)			
5. Resource acquisition	3.41	0.91	−0.03	0.39**	−0.40**	0.39**	(0.86)		
6. Personal initiative	4.00	0.62	0.06	0.52**	0.06	0.39**	0.27**	(0.86)	
7. Goal progress	4.33	0.63	0.00	0.54**	−0.30**	0.50**	0.37**	0.55**	(0.90)
8. Power (mean)	3.74	0.49	−0.25**	0.18*	−0.27**	0.29**	0.29**	0.36**	0.39**

Note: *N* = 179. Alpha reliabilities are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

TABLE 4 | Path model results for the mediating effects of cognitive energy and frustration on goal pursuit (Study 2).

	Cognitive energy		Frustration		Goal clarity		Resource acquisition		Personal initiative		Goal progress	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	2.85**	0.40	3.62**	0.62	1.66**	0.48	1.37*	0.65	−0.19	0.45	1.33**	0.39
Predictors												
Power fluctuation	0.50*	0.22	0.59	0.34	0.06	0.22	0.13	0.29	0.11	0.20	0.13	0.18
Cognitive energy					0.43**	0.07	0.42**	0.10	0.51**	0.07	0.43**	0.06
Frustration					−0.17**	0.05	−0.32**	0.06	0.18**	0.04	−0.09*	0.04
Power (mean)	0.30**	0.10	−0.50**	0.15	0.24*	0.10	0.23	0.13	0.43**	0.09	0.36**	0.08
<i>R</i> -squared	0.06		0.09		0.28		0.25		0.44		0.37	

Note: *N* = 179.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

between power fluctuation and our dependent variables, as all 95% CI results included 0.

5.4 | Study 2 Discussion

In Study 2, we replicated our findings from Study 1, showing that cognitive energy mediates the positive relationship between power fluctuation and goal-relevant cognitions and behaviors. Additionally, we modeled frustration, a negative downstream consequence of power fluctuation (Sabey et al. 2021), as a parallel mediator. Here we find that while accounting for the negative consequences of power fluctuation that have been documented in past work (Sabey et al. 2021), power fluctuation still has downstream benefits via cognitive energy. Moreover, the positive indirect effects of power fluctuation on goal pursuit via cognitive energy are statistically significant, while the negative indirect effects of power fluctuation on goal pursuit via frustration were non-significant, further supporting our conceptualization of the benefits of power fluctuation on goal pursuit, while accounting for negative pathways.

Although Studies 1 and 2 provide consistent support for our model and establish external validity, Study 3 aims to test a key assumption of our theorizing: that power fluctuation is a form of contradictory tension. Specifically, we examine power fluctuation as a contradictory tension by including experienced tension as a mediating mechanism linking power fluctuation to cognitive energy. Furthermore, guided by DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011), which suggests that contradictory tensions can explain both positive and negative effects of power fluctuation, we investigate whether fluctuation-induced tensions predict emotional exhaustion (Sabey et al. 2021) as well as cognitive energy, and explore whether emotional exhaustion mediates the indirect effect of power fluctuation on goal-relevant behaviors, alongside cognitive energy.

6 | Study 3

6.1 | Participants and Procedure

We recruited undergraduate business students enrolled in a subject pool from a large, private university in the Western United States (University of Southern California IRB, #UP-24-00797, “Consequences of Experiencing a Fluctuating Sense of Power”) in 2024 to participate in a two-wave study in exchange for course credit.⁵ Altogether, 208 participants completed both parts of the study and thus were included in the final sample. Out of the 208 participants, the average age was 19.84 years ($SD = 1.78$), and 53% were women.

We surveyed participants about their general experiences at two different time points throughout the semester. In the first survey, which participants received at the beginning of the semester, participants consented to participate in the study and completed measures of power fluctuation, sense of power, and experienced tensions. Roughly 8 weeks later, participants received the second survey, which included the same sense of power measure we used in the first survey, as well as measures of cognitive energy, emotional exhaustion, and our dependent variables.

6.2 | Measures

Unless otherwise specified, participants responded to each item using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

6.2.1 | Power Fluctuation (Measured in Wave 1 Survey)

We measured participants’ power fluctuation by adapting the six-item measure developed by Anicich et al. (2021). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected their regular, day-to-day experiences. Sample items were “My perception of how much power I have in relation to others changes throughout the day” and “The amount of power I feel like I have tends to vary” ($\alpha = 0.92$).

6.2.2 | Experienced Tensions (Measured in Wave 1 Survey)

We measured experienced tensions using a seven-item measure developed by Miron-Spektor et al. (2018). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected their regular experiences. Sample items were “I often have competing demands that need to be addressed at the same time,” and “I often have to meet contradictory requirements” ($\alpha = 0.88$).

6.2.3 | Cognitive Energy (Measured in Wave 2 Survey)

We measured cognitive energy using the full measure developed by Cole et al. (2012) used in Study 2. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected their regular experiences ($\alpha = 0.84$).

6.2.4 | Emotional Exhaustion (Measured in Wave 2 survey)

Emotional exhaustion was measured using the measure developed by Lanaj et al. (2016). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected their regular experiences. Sample items were “I feel emotionally drained” and “I feel burned out” ($\alpha = 0.92$).

6.2.5 | Goal Clarity (Measured in Wave 2 Survey)

Goal clarity was measured with the scale used in Study 2. To ensure that participants considered goals in general, for all four goal-relevant measures, participants were given the following prompt:

Think about your regular experiences with multiple goals you may be pursuing at the same time, whether they are short-term or long-term. These goals might vary in importance and be at different stages of progress. When answering the following questions,

please consider how you typically think, feel, and act across this range of goals in your daily work.

Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected their regular experiences ($\alpha = 0.77$).

6.2.6 | Resource Acquisition (Measured in Wave 2 Survey)

We measured resource acquisition, adapting the measure used in Study 2 ($\alpha = 0.86$).

6.2.7 | Personal Initiative (Measured in Wave 2 Survey)

We measured personal initiative, adapting the measure used in Study 2 ($\alpha = 0.89$).

6.2.8 | Goal Progress (Measured in Wave 2 Survey)

We measured goal progress by adapting the measure used in Study 2. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected their regular experiences ($\alpha = 0.90$).

6.2.9 | Control Variable

Similar to Study 1, to avoid any confounding effects, we controlled for the average level of sense of power across both measurements. Sense of power was measured using the eight-item measure developed by Anderson et al. (2012). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that each statement reflected their relationships with others. Sample items were “I think I have a great deal of power” and “I can get them to do what I want” ($\alpha = 0.79$).

6.3 | Study 3 Results

Table 5 provides descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables. We tested our model using a simultaneous path model in Mplus 8.10 (Muthén and Muthén 2023), and these results are presented in Table 6. In our path model, we modeled a serial mediation model, with power fluctuation and average power as independent variables, experienced tensions, cognitive energy, and emotional exhaustion as mediators, and goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress as dependent variables (see Figure 3). To test the indirect effect of power fluctuations on our goal pursuit dependent variables through our serial mediators, we used the bootstrapping procedure recommended by Selig and Preacher (2008) with 5000 iterations to calculate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effects.

Aligned with our theoretical logic for Hypothesis 1 as to why power fluctuation is positively related to cognitive energy, we predicted that power fluctuation would be positively associated with experienced tensions. This relationship was positive and significant ($B = 0.43$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$). We also tested the

TABLE 5 | Descriptive statistics and correlations (Study 3).

Statistic	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Power fluctuation	4.58	1.17	(0.92)								
2. Experienced tensions	4.14	1.01	0.48**	(0.88)							
3. Cognitive energy	5.71	0.85	0.11	0.16*	(0.84)						
4. Emotional exhaustion	4.07	1.49	0.25**	0.25**	−0.09	(0.92)					
5. Goal clarity	5.25	0.95	−0.01	0.05	0.47**	−0.09	(0.77)				
6. Resource acquisition	5.58	0.85	−0.07	0.08	0.51**	−0.10	0.55**	(0.86)			
7. Personal initiative	5.53	0.83	0.08	0.15*	0.65**	−0.13	0.56**	0.68**	(0.89)		
8. Goal progress	5.40	1.05	−0.01	0.19**	0.59**	−0.14*	0.65**	0.62**	0.73**	(0.90)	
9. Power (mean)	4.71	0.65	−0.08	−0.15*	0.27**	−0.32**	0.29**	0.36**	0.35**	0.24**	(0.79)

Note: $N = 208$. Alpha reliabilities are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

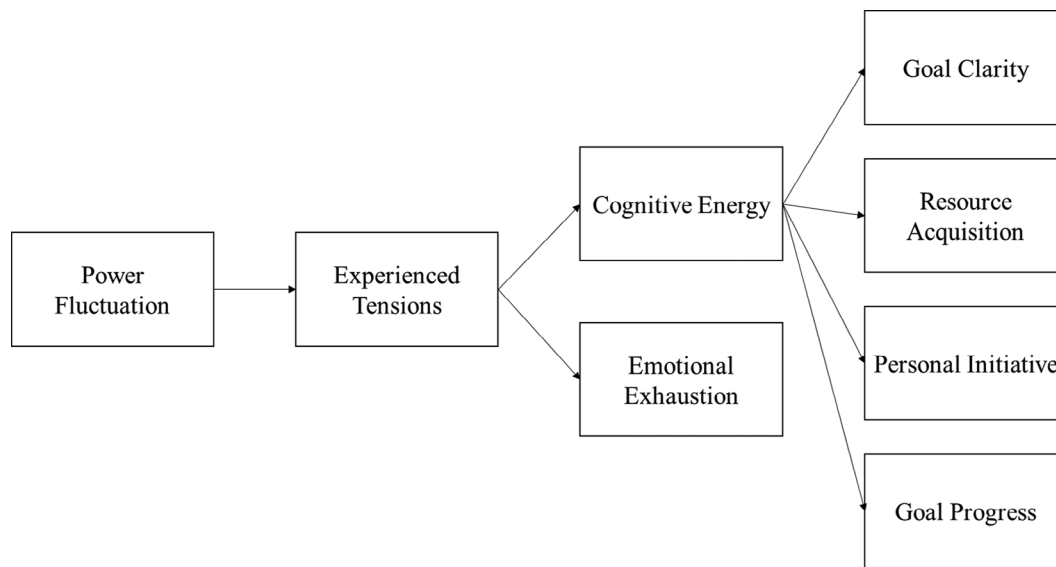


FIGURE 3 | Conceptual model of Study 3.

relationship between experienced tensions and cognitive energy. This relationship was positive and significant ($B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.02$). We also tested the relationship between experienced tensions and emotional exhaustion. This relationship was positive and marginally significant ($B = 0.20$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.07$).

We also tested whether experienced tensions mediate the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy. The indirect effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy via experienced tensions was also significant, as the 95% CI for this relationship did not include 0 (0.06, 95% CI [0.009, 0.120]). Alternatively, the indirect effect of power fluctuation on emotional exhaustion via experienced tensions was non-significant (0.08, 95% CI [-0.005, 0.191]). Thus, we find support for our theoretical argument grounded in DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) that experienced tensions explain the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy.

As we predicted, cognitive energy had significant positive association with all predicted outcome measures: goal clarity (Hypothesis 3a: $B = 0.48$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$), resource acquisition (Hypothesis 4a: $B = 0.45$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$), personal initiative (Hypothesis 5a: $B = 0.56$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$), and goal progress (Hypothesis 6a: $B = 0.67$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypotheses 3a–6a. In contrast, emotional exhaustion had non-significant effects on all outcomes ($0.17 < ps < 0.90$).

We also computed serial indirect effects where experienced tensions and cognitive energy sequentially mediate the positive effect of power fluctuation on our dependent variables. Significant serial indirect effects were found for goal clarity (0.03, 95% CI [0.003, 0.074]), resource acquisition (0.03, 95% CI [0.003, 0.068]), personal initiative (0.04, 95% CI [0.003, 0.079]) and goal progress (0.04, 95% CI [0.005, 0.091]), as the 95% CI did not cross 0. These findings support our theoretical framework that experienced tensions and cognitive energy mediate the positive effects of power fluctuations on goal pursuit. Emotional exhaustion was excluded as a sequential mediator due to its non-significant effects on the dependent variables.

6.4 | Study 3 Discussion

Our findings in Study 3 provide additional support for our theoretical assertion that power fluctuation should be understood as a contradictory tension that exerts cognitively energizing effects beyond its emotionally taxing impacts. By examining the mediating effect of experienced tension, we showed that power fluctuation simultaneously triggers emotional exhaustion and cognitive energy. However, only cognitive energy served as a significant mediator linking power fluctuation to goal-relevant behaviors, underscoring its role in driving proactive outcomes. Collectively, these results suggest that while power fluctuation can be undeniably demanding, it also serves as a catalyst for focused, goal-directed action, enriching our understanding of how power fluctuation shapes work behavior in dynamic organizational contexts.

7 | Discussion

Although a dominant consensus in the power literature is that power is positively associated with goal-relevant cognitions and behavior (Guinote 2007; Magee and Smith 2013), recent advancements in our understanding of power dynamics at work allow us to refine and extend this perspective. Specifically, leveraging recent insights indicating that (a) employees experience power fluctuation on a regular basis at work (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021; Smith and Hofmann 2016; Weiss et al. 2021) and (b) that these fluctuations can have important implications for employees' well-being and performance (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021), we refine our understanding of the relationship between power and goal pursuit by highlighting that power fluctuation can facilitate goal-relevant behaviors above and beyond the effect of static power. Specifically, by integrating DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) with MPM (Parker et al. 2010), our work shows that power fluctuation represents a type of experienced tension that can lead to increased cognitive energy, in a way that facilitates employees' goal-relevant behaviors (i.e., goal clarity, resource acquisition, personal initiative, and goal progress). Further leveraging insights

TABLE 6 | Path model results for the serial mediating effects of experienced tensions, cognitive energy, and emotional exhaustion on goal pursuit (Study 3).

	Experienced tensions			Cognitive energy			Emotional exhaustion			Goal clarity			Resource acquisition			Personal initiative			Goal progress		
	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE		B	SE		B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Intercept	2.99**	0.53		3.07**	0.52		5.35**	0.88		1.40*	0.62		1.57**	0.52		0.92*	0.46		0.92	0.62	
Predictors																					
Power fluctuation	0.43**	0.06		0.04	0.06		0.21*	0.10		-0.06	0.06		-0.13*	0.05		-0.01	0.04		-0.13*	0.06	
Power (mean)	-0.17	0.10		0.40**	0.09		-0.65**	0.15		0.26**	0.10		0.33**	0.08		0.25**	0.07		0.13	0.10	
Experienced tensions				0.15*	0.06		0.20	0.11		0.04	0.07		0.10	0.06		0.08	0.05		0.21**	0.07	
Cognitive energy										0.48**	0.07		0.45**	0.06		0.56**	0.05		0.67**	0.07	
Emotional exhaustion										0.01	0.04		0.02	0.04		-0.02	0.03		-0.06	0.04	
R-squared			0.24			0.12			0.16			0.26			0.34			0.46			0.39

Note: N = 208.

*p > 0.05.

**p > 0.01.

from DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011), we also show that these effects are stronger (weaker) for employees higher (lower) in mindfulness.

7.1 | Theoretical Implications

Our findings make several theoretical contributions. First, we refine and extend consensus in the social power literature that goal pursuit is associated with high-power individuals and states (e.g., Keltner et al. 2003; Magee and Smith 2013). Although this perspective suggests that having more (vs. less) power should be associated with more effective goal-relevant behaviors (DeWall et al. 2011; Guinote 2007, 2017; Van Dijke and Poppe 2006; Whitson et al. 2013), our findings demonstrate that employees may also recruit cognitive energy by experiencing power *fluctuation*, that is, alternating between feeling powerful and powerless throughout the workday. By showing that the acquired energy in turn facilitates goal pursuit, we provide a more nuanced mapping of the relationships among different power states and their downstream consequences. In addition, our experience sampling approach in Study 1 answers calls for more work on the contingent and dynamic nature of power (Anicich 2021; Anderson and Brion 2014; Schaefer et al. 2018; Smith and Magee 2015) and contributes to a more systematic understanding of the implications of power fluctuation. Thus, we provide a more balanced understanding of social power by demonstrating that power fluctuation is associated with desirable goal-relevant behaviors that operate above and beyond the well-documented benefits of possessing static power on individual goal pursuit (e.g., Guinote 2007; Magee and Smith 2013).

Relatedly, we extend our emerging understanding of the effects of power fluctuation by demonstrating that it can build cognitive energy for employees. Existing work has shown that experiencing power fluctuation can be taxing, as it can result in frustration, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021). In contrast, we show that power fluctuation can also be cognitively energizing, even in the presence of frustration (Study 2) and emotional exhaustion (Study 3). In other words, while prior work has shown that dealing with power fluctuation can drain resources because of the competing expectations and demands associated with vacillating between high- and low-power states (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021), our work shows that these fluctuations can simultaneously recruit cognitive resources that can be devoted toward employees' tasks. Indeed, evidence indicates that cognitive energy and exhaustion are only modestly correlated ($r = -0.22$; Cole et al. 2012), and this finding is aligned with prior work that shows other organizational phenomena, such as stretch goals, can simultaneously be taxing while also being cognitively energizing (Ashforth et al. 2024; Sitkin et al. 2011).

We further contribute to the power fluctuation literature by clarifying how power fluctuation manifests as a contradictory tension that produces both taxing and cognitively energizing outcomes. Specifically, in Study 3, we expand on prior work (Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021) by demonstrating that power fluctuation predicts experienced tension, which in turn fosters both emotional exhaustion and cognitive energy. Critically, only cognitive energy had a positive and significant relationship with

goal-relevant behaviors. These findings expand our conceptualization of power fluctuation and enrich our theoretical understanding by underscoring the importance of capturing the dynamic interplay of power fluctuation's contradictory forces—a perspective that recognizes both the burdens and the benefits of navigating fluctuating power states in organizations.

In addition, research on cognitive energy has primarily examined static constructs, such as job characteristics and organizational resources, as its antecedents (for a review see, Shirom 2010; Quinn et al. 2012), and some researchers have lamented the static nature of the predictors as a “major limitation” (Shirom 2010, 78) of the literature. Our work examines how dynamic experiences of power can positively predict cognitive energy, thereby providing valuable insights into the factors influencing individuals' energy levels and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between power and energy in goal pursuit.

Finally, our work contributes to DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) and more broadly, the literature on contradictory tensions. Although much of the work on contradictory tensions focuses on organizational-level analyses, such as a firm's decisions regarding exploration and exploitation, or the tensions between business and society (see Putnam et al. 2016; Schad et al. 2016 for reviews), we adopt an individual-level perspective on such tensions (see also Lüscher and Lewis 2008; Miron-Spektor et al. 2018; Waldman et al. 2019). Moreover, by arguing and demonstrating that employees who exhibit higher levels of mindfulness are better positioned to accept and recognize the benefits associated with experiencing a fluctuating sense of power, our work responds to Schad and colleagues' (2016, 37) call for future research to explore “the conditions under which... oscillating between contradictory poles can be most effective” and Shahbaz and Parker's (2021) invitation for researchers to investigate mindfulness as a moderator rather than solely a predictor of employee behaviors. This perspective deepens our understanding of the ways in which employees handle and are influenced by the inherent tensions present in their work settings.

7.2 | Practical Implications

Our findings have practical implications for leaders and organizations. First, our findings suggest that organizational leaders should look for opportunities to put employees in situations with varying power dynamics, such as by matching employees with both lower-power mentees and higher-power mentors. Such arrangements to foster structural diversity not only stimulate a dynamic environment where power fluctuation occurs naturally but also promote cognitive energy that allows individuals to make progress on their work goals. In a similar vein, higher-level supervisors should prioritize checking in with their frontline workers and managers, especially those for whom interactions with higher-power employees are rare, as doing so may energize those individuals to achieve their goals.

At the same time, we urge organizational leaders to be cognizant of the taxing effects of power fluctuation documented in earlier research (e.g., Anicich et al. 2021; Sabey et al. 2021) and replicated in the current work. Although our work suggests power fluctuation may help employees attain goals via cognitive

energy, it also recognizes the potential damaging effects of power fluctuation on employee well-being. Therefore, we urge practitioners to incorporate interventions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of power fluctuation to improve the net effect of power fluctuation on employee performance and well-being. In addition, development of training programs aimed at enhancing power fluctuation awareness among leaders and managers could help equip them with the necessary tools to recognize and understand the manifestation of power dynamics within their teams, enabling them to strategically intervene to mitigate negative effects while amplifying positive outcomes.

Additionally, our findings suggest that the benefits associated with experiencing power fluctuation may be especially likely to outweigh the drawbacks among employees higher (vs. lower) in mindfulness. Thus, managers may benefit from paying particular attention to person-job fit (Edwards 1991) as it relates to the fit between employees' dispositional mindfulness levels and the degree to which certain jobs are likely to elicit more (vs. less) power fluctuation. In addition, implementing training programs aimed at promoting elevated mindfulness levels may benefit employees. Although research suggests that without intervention, trait mindfulness remains stable (Brown and Ryan 2003), several studies have shown that mindfulness-based interventions contribute to positive changes in trait mindfulness (e.g., Kiken et al. 2015; Shahar et al. 2010; Shapiro et al. 2008). Therefore, incorporating such practices, including meditation, journaling, or structured debrief sessions, into the workplace may help employees become more mindful over time, which would allow them to understand and respond more constructively to experiences of power fluctuations. Ultimately, such practices may enable more effective strategies for recruiting cognitive energy in pursuit of important work goals.

7.3 | Limitations and Future Directions

Our studies have several notable strengths. First, our ESM design in Study 1 offers high ecological validity for our theoretical model. Most notably, we studied employees in their natural work environments as they worked on their regular work tasks, and we measured power fluctuation by capturing employees' momentary power four times each workday instead of using a retrospective survey. Also, we separated the measurement of our independent and dependent variables in time, which increases the confidence of the causal relationships in our model (Gabriel et al. 2019). Study 2 replicates the findings of Study 1 using a different operationalization of power fluctuation and further strengthens our conclusions by reconciling our model with previous findings by demonstrating that power fluctuation can lead to both negative (i.e., frustration) and positive (i.e., cognitive energy) outcomes. In Study 3, we examine experienced tension as the mediating mechanism between power fluctuation and cognitive energy, thereby providing additional support for our theoretical argument that power fluctuation is a form of contradictory tension that enables cognitive energy beyond its emotionally exhausting impacts. In doing so, we show that managing contradictory tensions can be both taxing and energizing.

Despite these strengths, our work has several limitations. First, all the variables in our model are self-reported, potentially raising

concerns about common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). That is, this design raises concerns about potential confounding factors such as employees' daily experiences, including mood, work motivation, job demands, and other temporal influences, which may simultaneously shape their perceptions of power, energy, and goal pursuit. To mitigate these concerns, we employed different operationalizations of power fluctuation to replicate our findings using additional data collections (Isen and Erez 2007). Additionally, in Study 1, we group-mean-centered our Level-1 predictors to remove person-level variance. Thus, variance associated with social desirability and other person-level confounds cannot explain our results (Beal 2015; Zhang et al. 2009). Moreover, we argue that the focal employee is in the best position to rate their own cognitive energy and goal-relevant cognitions and behaviors, because observers would be unable to accurately capture a focal employee's psychological experiences throughout the day (Courtright et al. 2016). Although these characteristics should reduce concerns regarding common method bias, we encourage future research to replicate our findings using other operationalizations (e.g., for additional options for measuring power fluctuation, see Anicich 2021, Anicich and Hirsh 2017; Anicich et al. 2021).

Second, our sample in Study 1 consisted of part-time MBA students, while our sample in Studies 2 and 3 consisted of business school undergraduate students who may differ in meaningful ways from employees in earlier or later career stages, as well as employees for whom an MBA degree or a business degree is irrelevant or infeasible. For example, employees in later career stages may be more adept at navigating power fluctuation throughout the workday as they may have developed effective scripts or routines to cope with the potential burdens and reap the rewards associated with experiencing power fluctuation more effectively (Anicich et al. 2021). Future research may examine whether employees can learn to harness the benefits and buffer the potential negative consequences of frequent power fluctuation. In addition, our studies did not include an experimental design, which could have enhanced the internal validity of our model. Although we conducted multiple field studies—including an ESM study—to achieve ecological validity and capture the authentic dynamics of power fluctuation and its impact on individuals' cognitive energy and outcomes (Schaerer et al. 2018; Sturm and Antonakis 2015), future research could complement these efforts by employing controlled experimental approaches. Such methodologies would allow for greater triangulation of findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of power fluctuation's multifaceted effects.

Third, although our theoretical model considers that power fluctuation is not equally beneficial for all employees, future research may consider alternative moderators of the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy beyond mindfulness. For example, we speculate that the effect of power fluctuation on cognitive energy may be strengthened by dispositional factors such as individual ambidexterity (Bledow et al. 2009) or psychological flexibility (Hayes et al. 1999), both of which have been shown to increase individuals' ability to cope with conflicting situational expectations and affordances. Similarly, it is possible that the effect may be weakened by a need for control (Fiske 1993; Lammers et al. 2016), which could cause employees to experience power fluctuation in a more negative

way, such that power fluctuation may be depleting rather than energizing. Relatedly, other mediators beyond cognitive energy (e.g., proactive motivation or future-focused planning) might also capture how power fluctuation drives proactive goal-oriented behaviors. In addition, our cognitive energy scale is part of a larger measure of energy that encompasses affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. Although our decision to focus on cognitive energy was informed by DEMO (Smith and Lewis 2011) which emphasizes the cognitive aspects of navigating contradictory tensions, future research might benefit from exploring additional mediators to develop deeper understanding of when and how power fluctuation fosters (or hinders) positive outcomes.

Fourth, our model uses MPM's (Parker et al. 2010) two systems approach of goal-pursuit consisting of goal generation (envisioning and planning; Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001; Grant and Ashford 2008; Locke and Latham 1990) and goal striving (enacting and reflecting; Bindl and Parker 2009; Frese and Fay 2001) to examine the relationship between power fluctuation and goal-relevant behaviors via cognitive energy. Because we adopt Guinote's (2007) process approach when examining the relationship between power fluctuation-induced cognitive energy and goal pursuit, we do not focus on the content of specific goals at specific phases. Moreover, we assume employees can have multiple goals at any given moment at work based on research on multiple goal pursuit that suggests that pursuing multiple goals is not only common but also a necessary aspect of organizational life and personal productivity (e.g., Ballard et al. 2018; Louro et al. 2007; Neal et al. 2017; Schmidt and DeShon 2007; Vancouver et al. 2010). Therefore, we believe that future research may benefit from examining the content of goals to determine if the pursuit of certain types of goals is especially affected by power fluctuation. For example, power fluctuation may have stronger effects for power-related goals above and beyond static power, and weaker effects for power-unrelated goals. In addition, the operationalization of our outcome variables, including goal clarity and goal progress, adopts a retrospective component (i.e., end-of-day, semester). Although the decision to do so is consistent with the dynamic nature of goal setting in organizational contexts (Latham and Locke 2007) and aligns with the reflecting phase in MPM (Parker et al. 2010), where individuals evaluate their progress to adjust future actions accordingly (Sonnentag and Fritz 2007), future research might benefit from developing measures that more fully capture the nature of these constructs.

Finally, our work considers power fluctuation as an exogenous variable. Future work could explore the antecedents of power fluctuation. For example, leaders' choices about how to assign daily duties or how to structure a team hierarchy may influence the degree to which employees experience daily power fluctuation. Research on the influence of leaders on employees' dynamic power experiences would provide additional theoretical clarity about the ways in which employees experience the phenomenon and could inform practical strategies for enabling employees to reap the energizing benefits of daily power fluctuation.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Endnotes

¹ Importantly, we examine the downstream consequences concurrently as employees are often engaged in the pursuit of multiple goals, necessitating a simultaneous rather than sequential examination of these pursuits (Neal et al. 2017; Schmidt and DeShon 2007). This approach acknowledges the complex and dynamic environment of the workplace, where individuals continuously balance and navigate through a spectrum of concurrent goals. In support of our approach, work on multiple goal pursuit illustrates the commonality and necessity of juggling multiple objectives within organizational life and personal productivity (Ballard et al. 2018; Louro et al. 2007; Vancouver et al. 2010).

² In addition, we examined whether power fluctuation could explain changes in cognitive energy beyond what stable (average) power alone accounts for. Specifically, we estimated the pseudo- R^2 for power fluctuation (i.e., the variance explained in just this predictor, in a model that contains all other predictors; Rights and Sterba 2020, equation 21). Results showed that the power fluctuation model explained 1.9% of the variance in cognitive energy, above and beyond that of static power. Although the additional 1.9% variance in cognitive energy explained by power fluctuation may seem modest, power fluctuation is not a rare or isolated phenomenon; it is an experience that affects nearly everyone on a daily basis (Smith and Hofmann 2016; Weiss et al. 2021). Unlike singular events such as promotions, these routine fluctuations in power can accumulate over time, making even small effects consequential (Roberts et al. 2007; Rosenthal 1990). Moreover, as these small influences spread across many individuals, their aggregate impact on productivity and well-being can be significant (Abelson 1985; Greenwald et al. 2015). Thus, by repeatedly shaping cognitive energy, power fluctuation can influence workplace attitudes and behaviors, ultimately affecting goal attainment.

³ To further triangulate and replicate the relationship between power fluctuation and cognitive energy, we used a different operationalization of power fluctuation in an additional data collection as part of a larger data collection opportunity with the same design used in Study 1. To measure power fluctuation, we used a single item indicator, "Right now, I have had a lot of power fluctuation" across four different indicators each day. These indicators were averaged together to reflect average power fluctuation throughout one's workday. Cognitive energy was measured using the same measure used in Study 1. Similar to Study 1, we also controlled for average power using the same measurement used in Study 1. Results showed that average power fluctuation had a significant positive effect on cognitive energy ($B = 0.31$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = 0.001$), replicating our findings in Study 1. A full description of the study is available in online supplemental material.

⁴ We linked participants' responses to their demographic information that they provided when they registered for the subject pool at the beginning of the semester.

⁵ Note, data in Study 3 were collected in the Fall 2024 semester with a different group of students from those who participated in the data for Study 2, which was collected in the Fall 2023 semester.

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