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Working in Uncertain Times: How Illegitimate Tasks Deplete Psychological Resources and Undermine Employee Outcomes in Organisational Settings

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Abstract

This study began as replication of Zong et al.'s study on the impact of illegitimate tasks on work disengagement. This research now provides an extension to Zong et al.'s research as it investigates the effect of illegitimate tasks on employee well-being, work engagement, and organisational commitment. It aims to better understand the effects of illegitimate tasks on employees, in addition to gaining a perspective on how co-worker support moderates the effects of illegitimate tasks on ego depletion. This research utilised an online survey method to gather data from participants in both Australia and New Zealand who work either full-time or part-time and experience illegitimate task assignment.

The results indicate that illegitimate tasks have a depleting effect on employee well-being, organisational commitment, and work engagement. Illegitimate tasks negatively impact employees both directly, in the case of organisational commitment and indirectly, through ego depletion, across all dependent variables. A significant finding of this research is the absence of a moderating effect of co-worker support. The absence of a moderating effect is evident at all levels of co-worker support (low, medium and high).

From the research findings, it is suggested that organisations eliminate or reduce illegitimate tasks. Proactive measures are encouraged as a means to improve employees' overall functioning at work, in addition to contributing positively towards organisational outcomes. Addressing and reducing illegitimate tasks is increasingly important within the current context of global economic pressures and rapid technological change, as these conditions are likely to intensify role demands and expose employees to the related resource depletion.

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Chapter One

Background to the Study and Context

Global economic pressures alongside economic uncertainty have forced organisations to innovate to remain viable and competitive during these uncertain times. In response to the economic uncertainty organisational responses are varied and include numerous actions which include restructuring, cost reduction, digital transformation and downsizing (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020 ; Su et al., 2022; World Economic Forum, 2025). Global trends over the last two years have seen an increase in unemployment, with Forbes in the 2024 August edition stating that tech-related redundancies tallied 124,000 in 2024 alone (Sayegh, 2024). The International Labour Organisation predicts that the global market outlook and global unemployment rate will both worsen. These increasing global unemployment trends reported a rise from 5.1% in 2023 to 5.2% by 2024 (International Labour Organisation, 2024).

New Zealand is not an exception to these global trends with organisations implementing mitigating measures some which include redundancy initiatives. These have resulted in increased unemployment rates, with reports of a 0.2 percentage point increase to 4.6% in the last quarter. Tabulating the total number of unemployed people at 143, 000 in August of 2024, these rates are only 0.6% less than the pandemic highs of 5.2% (Stats NZ, 2024). The World Economic Outlook Database published the unemployment rate in New Zealand at 5.0% in April 2024 (up from 3.7% in 2023). The New Zealand current unemployment rate is reported at 5.3%, documented in March 2026 (Stats NZ, 2026). Overall, these statistics demonstrate the steady increase in unemployment in New Zealand (Ventura, 2024).

Globally, unemployment rates are reported to have remained stable over the last 2 years at 4.9%, the equivalent to 186 million people out of work. It is important to note that many of those who are employed may not be in equitable employment, with approximately 2.1 billion employed in the informal sector and women being 24.2% less likely to be in the global labour force than men (Lennon, 2026). It is however possible that these statistics do not accurately reflect current unemployment, it is important to consider the greater global context and volatility resulting from geopolitical tensions of the Russia-Ukraine war and the escalating friction in Israel and the Middle East, in addition to the rising economic uncertainty seen in the current US, Trump administration (Sayegh, 2024.; Ventura, 2024.; Ferriani et al., 2025).

The focus, however, is not on unemployment as a single result of the global economic uncertainty. The focus is rather on the broader geopolitical context, resulting in uncertainty in the job market which can be attributed to numerous aspects including an increase in AI usage, the global economic downturn, increasing inflation coupled with high interest rates, an increase in outsourcing/offshoring resources in addition to the correction of pandemic over-hiring. Organisations recalibrating in this wider, complex context, with the aim of economic relief have downstream implications on the retained employees. These relief measures see companies striving for immediate cost-based efficiencies by diminishing headcounts, automating roles and consolidating teams. These cost saving measures have been reported to increase employee burnout and decrease work engagement, as companies are asking more of their employees that are retained after the deployment of cost-cutting efforts some which are large redundancy initiatives (Matuson, 2025). The maintained staff are left with the resulting increase in job insecurity, work responsibilities and greater workloads which may include tasks that fall outside of the employees' job description, these changes are associated with numerous negative implications and are experienced in the greater global complex employment landscape.

Context: Unemployment Trends Relating to Illegitimate Tasks

Research by Zeng et al., (2021) highlights illegitimate tasks as work stressors arising from organisational and economic pressures, which require the redistribution of organisational workload among employees to maximise efficiency. The rising unemployment rate and the heightened global economic constraints have forced many organisations to restructure. These restructures result in the reassigning of workloads to best support the organisation through the downturn. The additional workloads have adverse effects on employees. Employees are experiencing these adverse effects within the broader context of global economic pressures with the associated job insecurities, this result in employees experiencing an increase in effort-reward imbalance (Michailidis et al., 2025; Siegrist, 1996). According to Siegrist (1996), this imbalance is a critical stressor that undermines employee well-being and job satisfaction. Additional pressure may be experienced by employees as a result of the increased assignment of illegitimate tasks; these are tasks that are considered unnecessary or unreasonable. These pressures extend beyond the workplace into the home environment, thereby contributing to work–family conflict. Work–family conflicts arise as employees fulfil work requirements by reallocating their personal resources such as time and energy, resulting in insufficient resources for their family commitments. Findings support the view that illegitimate tasks significantly contribute to work–family conflict and the resulting employees’ turnover intentions (Michailidis et al., 2025 ; Syrek et al., 2017 ; Siegrist, 1996 ; Zhou et al., 2020). Recognising and adjusting responsibly to these global work trends is vital for global economics and employees alike. Organisations’ ability and willingness to adapt responsibly to the increased demands is essential for the global workforce which is currently experiencing unpredictable economic times and the resulting compounded workload. Understanding the impact of additional and illegitimate tasks on employees is imperative for both the individual organisation's sustainability and the greater global economic stability.

Reports dating back to 2022 indicate that workers are increasingly taking on roles and responsibilities beyond their formal job description (PwC, 2024; SHRM State of the Workplace Report, 2024). This trend appears to have continued into 2024 with a high rate of HR professionals (vs non-HR professionals) actively seeking alternative employment due to reported overwork, understaffed departments, and the resulting stress (State of the Workplace Study, 2024; Turner, 2024). In the more recent PwC report respondents noted an increase in workload of 45% over the last year (PwC, 2024). In addition to the increased workload, two-thirds of the respondents reported an increase in the pace of change in their work environment, which are a result of technological advancements, organisational transformations, and macroeconomic pressures (Wheeler, 2024). However, these workplace reports do not specify how many of these additional tasks can be classified as illegitimate, namely work duties deemed unnecessary or unreasonable (Zong et al., 2022).

The reports make it evident that employees are facing additional pressures in their work environments, globally. These circumstances present a good opportunity to start investigating and clarifying what extra duties are expected from professionals. With a starting point of identifying tasks that are out of job description scope, then closely examining which of the additional tasks could be categorised as either unreasonable or unnecessary, therefore being identified as illegitimate work tasks.

An additional organisational trend which adds a layer of complexity is the current move towards a skills-based workforce rather than a role-based one, in addition to the increasing trend of employers using workers flexibly for their cross-function skills-set to meet the evolving organisational needs (Pong, 2024). Post-pandemic, additional responsibilities have become increasingly prevalent within organisations worldwide (PWC, 2024; Wheeler, 2024). These trends highlight how employees increasingly engage in responsibilities beyond their designated roles, undertaking diverse and dynamic tasks as and when required by organisational demands.

Additionally, the shift from role-based to skills-based work may further blur the lines or workplace responsibilities and encourage the assignment of illegitimate tasks (Deloitte, 2024). The organisational landscape is further complicated by the reported escalation in the difficulty of recruiting qualified personnel for vacant positions, 58% of human resource professionals say that this is their organisation's most significant challenge (According to the State of the Workplace Study, 2024). The difficulty in recruiting the appropriately qualified personnel for the job may result in scenarios where other employees are taking on responsibilities beyond their own job description to support the organisational needs while recruitment efforts continue.

Given the rising redundancies across industries, escalating unemployment rates, and the growing difficulty in hiring individuals with the appropriate skill levels, coupled with the growing trend of assigning tasks to employees that are beyond their job descriptions and increasing reports of overwork and associated stress (PwC, 2024), it is imperative that global workforce stakeholders prioritise employee well-being. These trends not only impact on organisational dynamics but also significantly affect employees' experiences, including the nature of tasks assigned to them. This underscores the need to prioritise organisational psychology, in-house HR strategies, and global policies to effectively safeguard and support the workforce, while mitigating factors that may erode employee experience and lead to diminished work engagement, organisational commitment, and well-being (SHRM State of the Workplace Report, 2024).

These global shifts in the market and the reports of additional and diverse tasks assigned to employees highlight the need to understand which of these additional tasks should be categorised as unnecessary or unreasonable, thereby identifying which are illegitimate tasks. Monitoring these tasks will help identify the extent of illegitimate tasks employees are experiencing, enabling the organisation to better understand and mitigate the associated stress. Monitoring illegitimate tasks will ultimately enable organisations to better support their

workforce's well-being, organisational commitment, and work engagement, and in doing so will be better positioned to resolve deficiencies, thereby supporting and retaining talent. Talent retention is vital for both the operational and financial success of the organisation (Awu et al., 2025).

Problem Statement

The impacts of employee well-being are so important to industry, that it has warranted an in-depth study by Oxford University including other institutions, culminating in the Global Happiness and Well-being Policy Report 2019 (Global Council for Happiness and Well-being, 2019). In this study employee well-being, productivity and organisational performance were studied. This study intended to get a better understanding of the financial investment that is required to enhance and maintain employee well-being, whether it was viable while considering the impact on the organisation's overall performance (Krekel et al., 2019). The study established that there is a positive correlation between employee well-being and productivity with growing evidence to substantiate that this is a causal effect. According to the study a meaningful increase in well-being yields, on average, an increase of approximately 10% in employee productivity. This study produced strong evidence to suggest that employee well-being has a positive relationship to company performance across various types of industries with particular focus on customer satisfaction and staff turnover both driving the firm's profitability (in this research study, turnover is linked to organisational commitment) (Krekel et al., 2019).

Additional research indicates that employee well-being is shaped by organisational climate, with factors such as autonomy integration, defined as the alignment of employees' decision-making over how work is performed with organisational systems, culture, and goals (Hagström & Backström, 2017), alongside support and opportunities for competence development, emerging as strong correlations of well-being (Janiukštis et al., 2024). Thus, suggesting that the organisational climate, tasks and support have a direct link to employee well-

being and should therefore be carefully considered in each organisation. Amongst these identified aspects a further element that required consideration is the type of tasks assigned to employees, specifically focusing on illegitimate tasks.

Employee engagement is considered one of the essential aspects of organisational success and is linked to several factors such as employee retention, morale, and productivity (Clack, 2021). Work engagement is the vigour, dedication, and absorption an employee experiences while performing a work task (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). According to Clack (2021), there are several reasons that explain employee engagement as a critical part of organisational success. Employees are considered the primary source of competitive advantage for their organisations, higher employment engagement supports employee retention and ultimately leads to better-performing organisations (Clack, 2021). According to Gallup, disengaged employees cost the USA approximately 550 billion U.S. dollars due to the loss in productivity (Clack, 2021). This loss is directly due to 70% of employees not being engaged at work (Clack, 2021).

Organisational commitment has been extensively studied over time, with research dating back to the 1960s (Kell & Motowidlo, 2012). The investment in research is largely due to the important predictive value it has on pertinent organisational factors such as turnover, organisational citizenship behaviour and job performance, all of which influence organisational success. (Kell & Motowidlo, 2012). These three aspects are critical to an organisation, as they carry significant financial implications and may ultimately affect organisational survival. Organisational sustainability is linked to employee turnover costs, encompassing both direct and hidden expenses. The direct costs of turnover include restaffing, additional training requirements and peripheral impacts of vacancies like loss of client relationships. The hidden costs include impacts on the morale of remaining staff, loss of productivity and in extreme cases possible workplace-safety issues resulting from employees' disengagement and lack of focus, more evident in environments that have machinery-based activities. These combined factors make

turnover expensive, disruptive and damaging to the overall organisational success (Wikaningtyas et al., 2023). Conversely, employees who experience organisational commitment feel a sense of belonging to the organisation and are more inclined to be involved in organisational activities, willing to work to attain the organisational goals while feeling that they belong in the organisation. These employees are more concerned with the organisation's success and strategic direction which are critical aspects that benefit the organisation (Xerri & Brunetto, 2013).

Organisational commitment, employee engagement, and employee well-being are crucial to organisational success. It is therefore important to understand what erodes these attributes in an employee. Various stressors have a negative relationship with these components. In this research we will look at illegitimate tasks as a component that depletes an employee of these three success factors. Understanding the specific stressors employees face, such as illegitimate tasks, is crucial in this landscape of an evolving global workforce.

Illegitimate Tasks: Spillover Effects, Stress Perception, and the Role of Support

Research into the impact of illegitimate tasks reports that there is spillover from work-life into personal-life for employees, resulting in reported sleep deprivation, work task rumination and struggling to psychologically detach from work (Michailidis et al., 2025; Syrek et al., 2017). This inability to disconnect from work when employees are home and with their family depletes emotional strength and increases stress, thus negatively impacting the employee's overall well-being (Zhou et al., 2020). Work withdrawal is identified as one of the effects of illegitimate tasks, which may impact negatively on organisational commitment (He et al., 2024). The commonality in the research into illegitimate tasks is the significant negative impact it has on employee well-being, resulting in higher stress levels and negative physiological impacts. Research thus far suggests that illegitimate tasks have a negative impact on employee well-being, with unreasonable tasks having a greater impact than unnecessary tasks. Unreasonable tasks have been closely linked to the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) theory, that explains how

illegitimate tasks have a depleting effect on employees' psychological resources, thereby having a negative impact on employees (Omansky et al., 2016). There is however not enough research on the effects of illegitimate tasks and their impact on work engagement and organisational commitment.

It is essential to highlight the significance of identifying the impacts of illegitimate tasks on employees' well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement, together with the broader objective of determining the supportive structures and factors that can be integrated into organisations globally. This requires careful consideration of the innate complexity of human engagement and its associated implications. Accordingly, these relationships should not be conceptualised as linear or as direct cause-and-effect mechanisms. One such possible divergent perspective that requires consideration is: not all assigned tasks (illegitimate or not) are themselves stressful. Rather it involves a complex human appraisal process of how an employee views or interprets the task, whether it is seen or experienced as stressful or not (Ma & Xie, 2024). Therefore, some illegitimate tasks may be interpreted by individuals in varying degrees of burden. This aspect is dependent on the employee's interpretation of the task and their resulting mindset, in addition to their evaluation of available resources both intrinsic and extrinsic, helping them identify the task as being within or outside their scope and ability. This research suggested that employers should evaluate what an employee's stress mindset is to better craft the perceived task opportunities or stressors that are represented by additional tasks assigned to those employees (Ma & Xie, 2024). Assessing an employee's stress mindset may better inform the supports established for employees, additionally being better positioned to identify who is more susceptible and when illegitimate tasks are best avoided (Omansky et al., 2016). The assessment and implementation of mitigating factors require further research.

Research Objectives

This study investigates the impact of illegitimate tasks (IT) on work engagement (WE), organisational commitment (OC), and employee well-being (W). Despite existing research on illegitimate tasks effects on employee well-being, there is still a notable gap in research relating to illegitimate tasks influence on employee's work engagement and organisational commitment (Zong et al., 2022). The study utilises the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self theory (SOS), the Ego Depletion (ED) theory and the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model to examine employee well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement in the presence of illegitimate tasks demands.

The study includes researching how the mediator, ego depletion is moderated by co-worker support. This research aims to address the existing gap by examining the impact of illegitimate tasks on employee well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement, while also considering the moderating role of co-worker support.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Relevant Theories

There are several theories that have been employed in this study to support the explanation of the effects of illegitimate tasks on employees and the mechanisms involved. Two of these theories used to analyse the impact of the independent variable (illegitimate tasks) on individuals are the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) model and the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model. The SOS model suggests that illegitimate tasks threaten employees' identity and self-esteem. The model explains that illegitimate tasks present a threat to self and are a source of stress because they offend the employees' sense of professional identity. It further states that stress emerges from the perceived disrespect or undervaluation of the employee at work, which

then leads to negative emotions being experienced by employees, including frustration, anger and at times shame (Semmer et al., 2019). The JD-R model explains that conditions at work can be viewed in two broad categories. The first is job demands, these deplete the employee. The second is job resources, which contribute positively to the employee. The model states that if job demands are high then employees experience exhaustion which may lead to burnout. Additionally, when there is a lack of resources then the employee is likely to experience disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Illegitimate Tasks

Illegitimate tasks (IT) are tasks that are deemed to be outside the scope of the employees' work requirements and seen as external to the core occupation or professional identity (Björk et al., 2013). Illegitimate tasks have been delineated into two distinct subcategories, these are unnecessary tasks and unreasonable tasks (Semmer et al., 2010). Unreasonable tasks are tasks that individuals perceive as needing to be completed by others, for example if a lecturer is habitually asked to clean up a lecture room after a day of lecturing instead of having dedicated cleaning staff, this may be deemed as an unreasonable task for the lecturer. Unnecessary tasks are tasks not required at all and are perceived as a waste of time (Zong et al., 2022). An example of an unnecessary task is when staff are asked to keep track of how many times they execute a particular task and that information is not used nor useful.

Illegitimate tasks have been introduced and are deemed an occupational stressor, studies confirm that illegitimate tasks falling outside of what is deemed reasonable for an employee to carry out at work are a threat to the employees' professional identity (Eatough et al., 2016). This perspective is embedded in the Stress-as-an-Offense-to-Self theory (Opstrup & Pihl-Thingvad, 2016). Additionally, illegitimate tasks may be a threat to employees' self-esteem in general and a violation of the justice rule including being linked to lower job satisfaction and mediated by the

reward-effort imbalance rule, illegitimate tasks have been linked to lower job satisfaction and is mediated by a reward-effort imbalance (Michailidis et al., 2025).

Researchers have utilised the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model to explore how illegitimate tasks negatively impact employees' psychological and emotional health. High job demands have been linked to negative effects on employee's health a concept supported by and aligning to the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model. More specifically evidence has shown that illegitimate tasks were found to significantly harm employees' well-being, contributing to the increase of the employees' stress, job dissatisfaction and burnout (Wang, 2024). Wang (2024) further emphasises that illegitimate tasks drain employees' psychological and physical resources, this idea aligns with the JD-R model.

An alternative view to the negative effect of illegitimate tasks on employees is that there is a dual effect of illegitimate tasks on employees, a negative and a positive effect. On the one-hand the research supports the existing ideology that illegitimate tasks are a negative factor which increases employee work withdrawal, noted as the predominant effect. In contrast, the positive effect found in the presence of illegitimate tasks by research, is the increase in employee's creativity in the form of job crafting by reshaping work, this is the weaker of the two effects (He et al., 2024).

Additional support for the negative effects of illegitimate tasks is found in research reporting that illegitimate tasks are a significant workplace stressor, in this research the negative effects of illegitimate tasks have been linked to the SOS theory where stress (illegitimate tasks) is seen as an offence to self and has a depleting effect on psychological resources. In addition to the SOS and the JD-R theory the Role Theory and the Justice theory lend further supporting explanations. The Role Theory states that employees' experience pressure associated with additional demands resulting in a myriad of negative outcomes; and the Justice Theory which

denotes that an employee's attitudes, behaviours and performance are strongly influenced by how fairly they feel they have been treated at work (Anglin et al., 2022; Ding & Kuvaas, 2023). In the context of using the justice theory which posits that employees see illegitimate tasks as unfair or unjust, illegitimate tasks are seen as violating three different points of justice in the workplace, namely procedural justice where task assignment may be seen as unfair. Distributive justice, where employees feel that their effort is not properly rewarded when doing something that is outside of their role and interactional justice where the employees' feel disrespected and undermined by being assigned the unnecessary or unreasonable task. This research states that employees that have illegitimate tasks assigned to them experience lower levels of organisational justice and higher effort-reward imbalance, which lead to greater feelings of employee dissatisfaction and engagement (Ding & Kuvaas, 2023).

The JD-R model and how job demands deplete psychological resources is explored more deeply in the subsequent section, in this work, the Stress-as-an-Offense-to-Self theory has been linked to the depleting quality of job demands. Further details will be shared relating to the consequence of continued demands, particularly the continued demands of illegitimate work tasks and the depleting effect on the employees' sense of self.

Well-being

The World Health Organisation states "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organisation, 2024). Well-being is a multifaceted concept which includes thriving in life both personally and professionally and includes emotional, psychological and social aspects (Baldwin et al., 2021). Well-being is important due to its impact on personal health and professional performance in addition to its overall systemic impact on the individual's environment (Baldwin et al., 2021). Positive well-being is linked to better work environments, increased job satisfaction and a reduction in employee turnover (Baldwin et al., 2021). Some authors believe that well-

being is so important that it should be the measure of societal success rather than having the current economic metrics, such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They further believe that the focus on well-being as a holistic concept would have policy implications resulting in an enhanced work-life balance (Layard & De Neve, 2023). Well-being at work has been found to increase individual's performance at work. Employees who feel positive and satisfied at work are more likely to perform better, this results in a higher rate of employee retention (Imran & Shahnawaz, 2020). Increased retention means lowered turnover, which results in cost-savings for the organisation.

Employee well-being is recognised as being integral to organisational success, this perspective is consolidated in the post COVID working landscape (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). Employees with higher reported rates of well-being perform better and are considered the competitive advantage for their organisation. The significant impact of well-being in the economy has been recognised globally and the “promotion of well-being” is one of the objectives of the World Health Organisation (World Health Organisation, 2025). Well-being is critical both to organisational success as well as the individual's personal success and has been recognised as the third Sustainable Development Goal by the United Nations as part of its 2030 Agenda to improve global well-being and sustainability, well-being is considered as a basic human right (United Nations, 2023).

Illegitimate Tasks and Well-being

Two prominent theoretical models used to explain employee stress and its adverse impacts on health and work outcomes are the Job Demand-Resource model (JD-R) and the Effort-Reward model (Björk et al., 2013). The Job Demand-Resources model proposes that if an imbalance exists between the stress an employee experiences and the resources available to them both internally and externally, where the stressor out ways the resources the employee will experience strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Pelfrene et al., 2001)

Situations involving high job demands and insufficient resources have been shown to contribute to employee burnout, which is characterised by exhaustion and psychological withdrawal from the job (Demerouti et al., 2001). This research will further explore the impact of illegitimate tasks through the application of the JD-R model, examining how these factors contribute to adverse outcomes in employee well-being, diminished organisational commitment and work engagement.

This research will in addition apply the Stress-as-Offense-to-Self (SOS) model to understand the effects of strain on an employee. The theory explains that employees experience negative emotions stemming from the lack of self-efficacy and respect experience when asked to execute illegitimate tasks (Opstrup & Pihl-Thingvad, 2016). Semmer et al., (2019) add to this theory, stating that the impacts on employees may not be limited to diminished self-esteem and may include additional negative outcomes such as burnout, lower job satisfaction, increased intention to quit, and even physical symptoms like high cortisol levels and sleep disturbances which create other long term health implications. These negative health impacts are a result of poor sleep patterns linked to the continued performance of illegitimate tasks (Kottwitz et al., 2013; Pereira et al., 2014.; Semmer et al., 2019). The study by Eatough et al., (2016) further supports these findings and notes the impact of illegitimate tasks on three dimensions of the employee; their self-esteem, emotional well-being and sentiments of anger and depressive mood alongside diminished job satisfaction. Concluding that an employee's continued experience of lower self-esteem due to the perceived disrespect alongside the sentiment of unfairness linked to illegitimate task assignment leads to a decrease in self-worth (Eatough et al., 2016). The SOS model has been chosen for this research as it is well-positioned to explain the depleting effects of illegitimate tasks on the employee and has supporting research to verify the findings.

Research has examined the long-term impact of the continuous assignment of illegitimate tasks on employee well-being, with results indicating that employees in such circumstances are

likely to experience anger and depressive moods as a result of perceived ongoing unfairness (Omansky et al., 2016). Additional results of long-term illegitimate task allocation are counterproductive work behaviour due to the resulting effects of increased stress levels and burnout (Eatough et al., 2016). Eatough et al., (2016) additionally highlight the negative relationship that illegitimate tasks have on job satisfaction, reporting that employees feel less satisfied with their job due to the reduced sense of task satisfaction and fulfilment.

Supporting research reports that illegitimate tasks result in employees experiencing anxiety and depression. Both unreasonable and unnecessary illegitimate tasks are linked to elevated levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Fila & Eatough, 2020). However, it is reported that unreasonable tasks have a more profound negative impact on the employee's mental health outcomes (Fila & Eatough, 2020). Research identifies key mitigating factors in these circumstances, namely the supportive role of supervisors and the use of job crafting (Fila & Eatough, 2020).

Wellbeing is frequently examined in research through the lens of job burnout associated with illegitimate tasks. These studies often highlight the detrimental effects such tasks have on employees' occupational well-being, including decreased job satisfaction and diminished self-esteem. Prolonged psychological distress experienced by employees' manifests in burnout, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, psychological withdrawal from the job and reduced professional efficacy (Ouyang et al., 2022).

The research supports the view that stressors in a work environment have negative impacts on the employee both from a performance perspective and from a well-being perspective (Eatough et al., 2016; Fila et al., 2023; Semmer et al., 2010; Semmer et al., 2015) . Further research states that illegitimate tasks have a negative impact on employees. With these impacts in

mind, the first hypothesis relates to illegitimate tasks and their negative impact on employee well-being.

H1: Illegitimate work tasks have a negative relationship with employee well-being

Work Engagement

Work engagement is described as the level of enthusiasm an employee has while at work (Saha & Iqbal, 2023). Research indicates that illegitimate tasks have a negative impact on employee work engagement. Work engagement is thought to encompass three components Vigour, Dedication and Absorption and is characterised by the employee's eagerness to go to work, their state of happiness while at work and being absorbed by their work (Saha & Iqbal, 2023). Delving deeper, these three core dimensions can be described as follows: Vigour refers to the high level of energy and mental resilience while working, along with the persistent willingness to invest effort in work despite challenges. Dedication is the state of involvement a person feels in their work, characterised by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is the state in which employees feel fully and happily immersed in work, where time passes quickly and where work detachment becomes difficult (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Work engagement has been shown to positively influence both the employee's work performance and their long-term sustainability in the workplace, additionally employees that exhibit high work engagement rates, have low burnout rates (Saha & Iqbal, 2023). Employees that experience high work engagement are more likely to feel energised and enthusiastic about their work, while being deeply involved in work tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Research shows that high work engagement is linked to professional efficacy (Mitra et al., 2017). High work engagement also has a positive impact on the organisation, through reduced turnover rates and less poor employee performance. Additionally, work engagement has been shown to spread within an organisation. For example, employees surrounded by engaged colleagues are more likely to experience higher levels of engagement themselves and develop a stronger connection

to their work and the organisation. Conversely, those working alongside disengaged colleagues are more likely to feel disengaged, which can contribute to poorer performance and increased absenteeism (Mitra et al., 2017). When employees experience work disengagement they report higher burnout rates, including exhibiting burnout behaviours such as cynicism and exhaustion (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Work Engagement and Illegitimate Tasks

Fila et al. (2023) researched how illegitimate tasks impacted work satisfaction and turnover intention. The study concluded that illegitimate tasks lead to increased strain and turnover intentions, in addition the study found that illegitimate tasks have a negative relationship with work engagement. This research demonstrated that employees who are given illegitimate tasks to complete that are not related to their specific role feel frustration, these feelings result in employees experiencing reduced work engagement. Ultimately these employees feel their professional identities are undermined, which result in diminished feelings of meaningfulness for their work. These findings align with SOS theory, which describe the depletion of employees' professional self-identity and its erosion when individuals are required to perform tasks that do not align with their role, including the consequential negative relationship with work engagement (Fila et al., 2023). Additionally, the JD-R model offers support by explaining that when employees continuously perform tasks which exceed their resources it this leads to depletion and burnout. The JD-R model explains that work engagement grows when employees have access to sufficient resources that are both personal and employment related. These resources support the employee in managing their job demands and development at work (Mazzetti et al., 2023). The analysis by Mazzetti et al., reiterates that resources are the most powerful drivers of engagement and that engaged employees are more satisfied, committed, and perform better at work (Mazzetti et al., 2023).

Evidence suggests that the impact of illegitimate tasks on reduced engagement is not confined to paid employment. Even within voluntary work settings, tasks perceived as unreasonable or unnecessary are negatively associated with both work engagement and volunteers' intentions to remain within the organisation. These negative results are unusually noted in volunteers who assume broad roles within the organisation, illegitimate tasks appear to have a significant negative impact on these individuals (van Schie et al., 2014). When employees continuously must undertake illegitimate work tasks which are seen as unrelated to their role, the physical, emotional and cognitive investment in their work decreases. Decreased engagement is attributed to a depletion in personal resources, which included energy and motivation (Koçak & Ünal, 2022).

Illegitimate tasks have regularly been studied in relation to burnout. Work engagement and burnout are two distinct but related concepts. Burnout is understood as a syndrome consisting of exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy, while engagement is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption of work (Ouyang et al., 2022). The impact of decreased employee motivation and emotional investment is substantial, as reduced work engagement over the long term reflects more than temporary fluctuations. It signifies a sustained decline in employees' involvement, commitment, and connection to their work (Ganxalez-Roma et al., 2002). From an organisational perspective, it's imperative that employees are engaged in their work and exhibit vigour, dedication and absorption all of which are crucial to organisational success, in addition to being important to individual employees (Clack, 2021).

Despite the Semmer et al., (2015) study not directly linking illegitimate tasks to work disengagement, illegitimate tasks were linked to stressors and strains which were found to indirectly affect engagement. Semmer et al., (2015) found the key impact areas centred on the threat posed to the employee's professional identity by the assignment of illegitimate tasks with the related experience of burnout and emotional exhaustion in addition to the disrespect and

unfairness experienced by the employee linked to the illegitimate task assignment (Semmer et al., 2015).

Employee engagement is increasingly considered as fundamental in the business world, predominantly in competitive industries employees are seen as critical assets in maintaining productivity and growth within the organisation. Engaged employees are seen as crucial for improving business outcomes such as innovation, customer loyalty and financial performance (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

Considering the importance of employee engagement to organisational success, the second hypothesis is: *H2: Illegitimate tasks have a negative relationship with an employee's work engagement.*

Organisational Commitment

Organisational commitment as defined by Balfour and Wechsler as the measure of emotional commitment an employee has towards the organisation, they identify three distinct commitment components. Identification commitment, which is the employee's attachment to work related mission, affiliation commitment which is the sense of belonging and exchange commitment which is the perceived reciprocity the employee experiences at work. They state that organisation commitment is a direct function of work and organisation-related variables and does not relate directly to the individual's characteristics (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996). Succinctly expressed, organisational commitment refers to the psychological attachment the employee has to the organisation, this sense of attachment impacts how the employee behaves and performs at work (Massoudi et al., 2020). Organisational commitment has been studied over several decades and various components of commitment have been defined and redefined, but Meyer and Allen's definition is still considered to be at the forefront of the organisational commitment field, organisational commitment is considered as a desired component of employees' engagement

with the organisation (Baker, 1995.; Gomes Menezes et al., 2015). Studies have demonstrated that higher organisational commitment levels are linked to greater employee commitment bond to the organisation, which have a positive impact on worker's satisfaction and motivation within the organisation.

Meyer and Allen developed a model in the 1990's that elaborates on organisational commitment, this framework explains how organisational commitment is multilayered (Baker, 1995; Meyer & Allen, 1991). The model conceptualises organisational commitment as comprising of three main components. The first component is: affective commitment (AC), referring to the employees' feelings of emotional attachment and involvement towards the organisation. AC stems from the employee's identification with the organisation's values and goals, which then lead to a desire to stay and support the organisation in its future. This type of commitment is reflective of the individual's personal connection, satisfaction and loyalty to the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Karem et al., 2019; Massoudi et al., 2020). The second organisational commitment component is continuance commitment (CC), which refers to the perceived costs associated with leaving an organisation, including the loss of seniority and diminished opportunities for advancement. Employees with a long tenure at the organisation are more likely to experience continuance commitment (Massoudi et al., 2020). The third component of the model is normative commitment (NC) which refers to the employee's sense of obligation and loyalty to the organisation. NC is associated with feelings of moral duty to remain with the organisation and is driven by a desire to show gratitude while avoiding negative judgments from others (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Organisational commitment is important to organisations, and it carries both an actual and hidden cost for the organisation if an employee lacks organisational commitment. Low organisational commitment is linked to high turnover intention (Massoudi et al., 2020). A study on organisational commitment identified affective and normative commitment (the latter

representing a perceived obligation to remain in the organisation), together with three additional drivers, as being negatively associated with turnover intention. (Ramalho Luz et al., 2018).

Affective commitment, the emotional attachment to the organisation, was found to have the strongest negative correlation to turnover intention, meaning that those employees who feel high emotional attachment to the organisation are less likely to want to leave (Ramalho Luz et al., 2018).

Illegitimate Tasks and Organisational Commitment

Organisational commitment can be viewed as a component of organisational citizenship behaviour, with dedication representing a key subcomponent. This sense of dedication, experienced by employees as part of their organisational commitment, tends to diminish in the presence of illegitimate tasks. One study supporting this view, found that police officers' dedication and willingness to go above and beyond at work was negatively impacted in the presence of illegitimate tasks (Fein & McKenna, 2022).

Additional studies further support the view that illegitimate tasks have detrimental effects on employees' professional identity and self-esteem, as well as reducing levels of organisational commitment (Fein & McKenna, 2022; Semmer et al., 2019). The converse has been suggested that enhancing an employee's self-esteem positively influences organisational commitment (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). This perspective aligns with the Stress-as-an-Offense-to-Self (SOS) model, which states that stressors, such as illegitimate tasks, erodes a professional's sense of self by depleting the psychological resources required to maintain emotional balance and a stable professional identity (Semmer et al., 2019). Therefore, minimising or eliminating illegitimate tasks is critical in sustaining employees' self-esteem and sense of professional identity, in addition to organisational commitment (Fein & McKenna, 2022).

The third hypothesis within the context of the importance of organisational commitment is: *H3: Illegitimate tasks have a negative relationship with organisational commitment*

Mediator Variable

Ego depletion is a psychological state in which an individual's capacity for self-control is diminished following the extensive use of mental resources for self-regulation (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). This depleted state results from individuals expending excessive mental effort in certain settings or if they experience excessive stressors resulting in diminished capacity to control thoughts, emotions, behaviours and impulses. Ego depletion is considered a state where the self is deprived of the normal resources available to it (Yam et al., 2014). Ego depletion is examined here as a mediator, helping us understand why employees experience diminished well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement resulting from illegitimate tasks. Under conditions of high demand, employees experience reduced mental energy, which weakens their self-regulatory capacity and makes resisting impulses and temptations progressively more difficult. In work settings this depleted state (ego depletion) results in lowered work engagement and diminished work engage behaviours. Additionally, ego depletion is linked to increased unethical decision-making in settings with low social consequences (Hagger et al., 2010; Yam et al., 2014; Zong et al., 2022)

Illegitimate work tasks are credited with emotional strain, cognitive load, and loss of motivation, which lead to ego depletion linked to high and sometimes continuous demands on the employee's self-regulation capability (Dong & Zhang, 2022). The evidence is not directly linked to ego depletion, rather the connection is through evidence of linking effects such as employee emotional strain, cognitive load and loss of motivation (Dong & Zhang, 2022). A key component of organisational commitment is the employee's motivation to align with and contribute to organisational goals. When this motivation is undermined by workplace strains, organisational commitment tends to diminish.

The Ego Depletion model further explains that if the individual does not have sufficient time to recover from the continuous demands on their resources and abilities and subsequently continues to exert self-control, this may lead to chronic deficits manifesting in high levels of strain and impaired well-being (Baumeister et al., 1998; Rivkin et al., 2015). Work engagement requires energy and resilience, described as vigour, dedication, and absorption in a work task (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). If employees experience low energy and resilience and have continuous demands placed on them it will result in diminished capacity to exhibit vigour, dedication and absorption.

Ego depletion as a mediating mechanism is associated with reduced well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement. Supporting research further indicates that across different contexts ego depletion is linked to employee withdrawal, particularly employee silence. Employee silence is where employees withhold ideas and information in the work context instead of exhibiting voice behaviour, which is the discretionary and proactive act of offering suggestions or feedback to improve organisational operations. This proactive engagement by employees requires personal energy and carries an element of perceived risk. Limiting proactive engagements constitutes a protective strategy, whereby individuals seek to acquire, maintain, and safeguard their resources to manage stress and preserve well-being. This behaviour is closely linked to instances of ego depletion, which serves as a mediating mechanism between illegitimate tasks and employee silence (Yuan et al., 2024).

The Ego Depletion model has faced criticism, with researchers labelling it as reductionistic. Critics argue that ego depletion should not be conceptualised as a finite resource, instead they propose an alternative perspective which include models emphasising motivational or attention shifts as key drivers of self-control (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012). This perspective suggests that a shift in attention or change in motivation explain a person's change in self-control

behaviour. This implies that the issue is not an inability to exert self-control, but rather a diminished motivation to continue exercising it (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012).

Ego depletion theory suggests that depletion and utilisation of personal resources intensify the negative impacts of ego depletion, whereas replenishing personal resources alleviates negative emotions, thereby reducing the effects of ego depletion (Baumeister et al., 1998). The theory further posits that self-control is a limited resource and exertion of self-control depletes individual capacity for sustained self-regulation. Recent research explores how engaging in illegitimate tasks can lead to ego depletion and subsequent work disengagement. In Zong et al.'s (2022) research illegitimate tasks were found to deplete employees' cognitive and emotional resources through the increase of cognitive load and depletion of psychological resources, leading to work disengagement. Concluding that when there are insufficient self-control resources, individuals are more susceptible to ego depletion, consequently negatively impacting work engagement.

Yuan et al.'s (2024) research investigated the effects of illegitimate tasks on employee silence and voice behaviour. The research found that the assignment of illegitimate tasks was interpreted by the employee to be disrespectful and a violation of professional role expectations, resulting in psychological strain thereby contributing to ego depletion. This depleted state may lead to reduced willingness to speak up or engage in proactive workplace behaviour. Extending this perspective, research by Dong & Zhang (2022) examined the impact of illegitimate tasks on nurses' work engagement. The study confirmed that illegitimate tasks negatively affect work engagement, with ego depletion partially mediating this relationship. This research suggests that the depletion of self-control resources due to illegitimate tasks can diminish nurses' work engagement. These results support the idea that in the presence of illegitimate tasks employees experience ego depletion and diminished self-control which subsequently leads to

disengagement from work-related tasks. These studies highlight the significant impact of illegitimate tasks on decreased work engagement.

Research examining illegitimate tasks and their effects on ego depletion, and the subsequent decline in work engagement and organisational commitment, remains relatively limited. In contrast, there is a more substantial body of literature focusing on the deterioration of employee well-being associated with ego depletion. The research available focusing on illegitimate tasks effects on ego depletion is limited, suggesting that additional research is required to build a comprehensive understanding of the effects of illegitimate tasks on ego depletion and the subsequent negative impacts on work engagement and organisational commitment.

The evidence thus far concludes that stressors impact negatively on ego depletion, resulting in various negative effects on employee well-being and work engagement, therefore the next hypotheses are:

H4: Ego Depletion mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and well-being.

H5: Ego Depletion mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement.

H6: Ego Depletion mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and organisational commitment.

Moderator

Co-worker Support

Ego depletion theory posits that people have a finite amount of self-regulatory resources, and once these resources have been depleted it becomes more difficult for the individual to self-regulate, resulting in more impulsive behaviours in addition to being more prone to negative

behaviours. Studies have shown that co-workers' empathic concerns help mitigate the effects on ego depletion, in the study by Hussain, et al.(2021) the mitigating effects of co-worker support in the form of co-worker empathic concern weakened the direct effect on self-orientated perfectionism on ego depletion. Similar effects have been documented in various studies, where co-worker support or perceived support has been demonstrated to alleviate ego depletion, particularly in situations involving unfair tasks (Sloan, 2012). Additional evidence emphasises co-worker support as imperative for reducing stress and improving employee well-being. Co-worker support helps employees reframe workplace situations by offering different perspectives, resulting in a reduction in impact of emotional strain for the employee (Heaney et al., 1993). Evidence suggests that co-worker support plays a vital role across diverse work environments. When co-workers provide one another with deep emotional support, it significantly enhances job performance and resilience helping cope with stressful conditions, in addition to mitigating workplace stressors it also fosters collaboration (Kim et al., 2017). Co-worker support has widely recognised as a protective factor for employees experiencing workplace stress, including stress arising from illegitimate tasks (Gerhardt et al., 2021). The buffering effects of co-worker support contribute to the employee's overall well-being and positive attitude towards work (Gerhardt et al., 2021). These concepts are further supported by the JD-R model which credits co-worker support as a critical job resource, offering buffering effects in the presence of high job demands while also fuelling motivation and resilience (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Co-worker support refers to the support and encouragement that is provided by work colleagues. It can take various forms such as emotional backing, assistance with information in addition to practical assistance. It has been identified as a significant predictor of job satisfaction, and it serves as a critical buffer against the negative effects of workplace stress (Sloan, 2012). Workplace stress may include workload and perceived unfair treatment by supervisors. In addition to being linked to job satisfaction, co-worker support has been linked to enhanced

psychological well-being, especially when employees experience workplace-related stress (Sloan, 2012).

Further benefits of co-worker support are reductions in cognitive processing burdens, assists in maintaining a positive self-view, and relief from negative emotions all supporting the employee and their well-being (Zong et al., 2022). Co-worker support is credited with significantly reducing psychological strain in work environments, contributing to a more positive work environment, and enhanced coping mechanisms (Beehr et al., 2000). When employees receive various forms of support, including functional assistance through reliable and readily available help, as well as emotional support, they experience significant benefits that enhance both their well-being and work performance (Beehr et al., 2000). In this context the next research hypothesis is: *H7: Co-worker support moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and ego depletion*

Understanding the Moderated Mediation Effect

Illegitimate tasks are considered stressors, increasing employees' ego depletion by lowering employees' resources which diminish employee work engagement, well-being, and organisational commitment. These effects are hypothesised to be moderated by the presence of co-worker emotional support. The level, context and origin of this support or perceived support determines the impact on ego depletion. Positively interpreted co-worker support can reduce employees' work disengagement and enhance their organisational commitment while supporting the employees' well-being.

Co-worker support has been attributed to increased organisational commitment, enhanced job satisfaction, improved team cohesion and collaboration, increased positive organisational culture, greater employee engagement and a reduction in work-related stress (Limpanitgul et al., 2014). Overall, these positive aspects enhance employee retention and create an improved work

environment (Limpanitgul et al., 2014). An additional benefit of co-worker support as a significant moderator is its positive effects of performance management resulting in the added benefits for organisation and their financial performance (Tenakwah et al., 2024).

Research has supported the view that co-worker support has a positive contribution to employee experience, in addition to being buffering resources for employees in the presence of stressors, therefore co-worker support is also included as a moderator in the mediation model. These additional hypotheses are included in this research:

H8: The indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on well-being through ego depletion depends on levels of co-worker support.

H9: The indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on work engagement through ego depletion depends on levels of co-worker support.

H10: The indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on organisational commitment through ego depletion depends on levels of co-worker support.

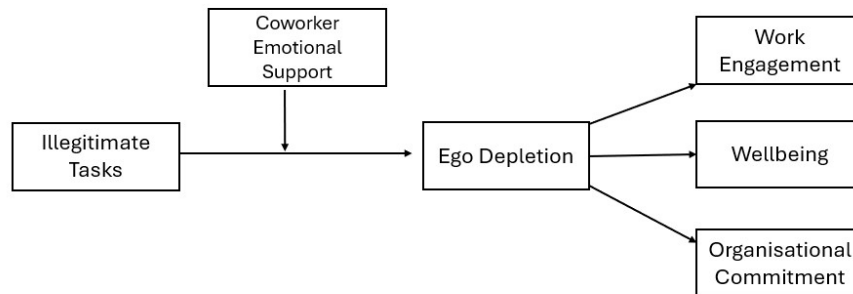
Co-worker Support and Ego Depletion. There are numerous studies identifying the supporting qualities of co-worker support as a resource (Gerhardt et al., 2021). Co-workers' support assists employees gain perspective on workplace challenges, reduce emotional strain, and alleviate the impact of illegitimate tasks (Heaney et al., 1993). It should not however be regarded as a uniform or universally beneficial resource. Co-worker support should rather be evaluated in terms of its level, context, and source. These factors may influence how the support is perceived, as well as whether it ultimately contributes to resource building or, conversely, exacerbates resource depletion for the employee. For example, in environments characterised by limited co-worker support, community-oriented knowledge building may be less effective. This is because it lacks the underlying social foundation that typically facilitates informal interactions, essential for sharing workplace challenges, best practices, and knowledge, including fostering collective

learning. Research additionally supports the view that co-worker support alone is insufficient as the only resource assisting employees manage illegitimate tasks, other aspects such as job crafting and supervisor support also affect employees' ability to manage illegitimate tasks (Fila & Eatough, 2018).

Additionally, studies indicate that low levels of support can also exacerbate employee workload and burnout (Stanley & Sebastine, 2023). Co-worker exclusion can have a detrimental impact on employee performance and decreased citizenship behaviour. Researchers emphasize the importance of understanding the nuances of workplace social support, doing so helps clarify its impact on employees (Cruz et al., 2022).

Additional factors that significantly influence co-worker support are cultural factors. These shape both individual experiences and organisational dynamics. Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework provides a valuable lens for understanding these influences, offering insights into national and organisational cultures through six key dimensions (Hofstede, 2011). The three most relevant dimensions for understanding co-worker support in the context of cultural considerations are individualism vs. collectivism, job-oriented vs. employee-oriented cultures and open vs. closed systems. Individualism vs. collectivism highlights how co-worker support operates. In collectivist cultures, support is deeply rooted in group relationships, with loyalty and cooperation forming the foundation of a strong team culture and a sense of belonging. The second dimension, job-oriented vs. employee-oriented cultures, demonstrates how a focus on employee well-being fosters collaboration and mutual support among co-workers, emphasising people over tasks. The third dimension, open vs. closed systems, underscores the importance of communication and inclusivity. Open systems promote ease of interaction and acceptance, creating an environment where co-worker support flourishes.

Figure 1: Research Concept Model



Chapter 3

Methods

This study replicates Zong et al.'s, (2022) study in an Australian and New Zealand context, however it does offer an extension to the original study as additional dependent variables were included. Selected measures were applied based on information provided in Zong et al., (2022) study, including selecting additional measures based on their coefficient alpha (α) strength.

Procedure

The Prolific platform was utilised to recruit and engage participants. It was selected as it is widely regarded as established and secure research platform, boasting thousands of possible participants globally. The participants registered on the platform fulfilled relevant requirements for this study, namely being from either Australia or New Zealand, currently employed either full-time or part-time and from a sufficient pool of candidates to fulfil the quota required for this study. Ethics approval was granted through Massey University's low-risk process (see Appendix A). Six individual measures were identified, collated and presented as a single integrated survey

with differentiating sections. This survey was then disseminated on the Prolific platform post collation on the Qualtrics platform. This online survey included a cover page that informed participants about the study, provided contact details, and included a consent section enabling participants to decline consent and withdraw from participation (see Appendix B). Additionally, participants were informed that the survey being conducted was done on a voluntary basis, and all responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Once confidentiality and opt-in conditions were established the survey facilitated the recording of demographic style questions in the form of gender, age, work status, and current work location. The survey consisted of sixty-two items over six different measures (see Appendix C). The measures related to ego depletion, co-worker support, organisational commitment, illegitimate tasks, well-being, and work engagement. Participants were instructed to select how strongly they identified with each of the items in the measures, by selecting options presented by the five-point or seven-point Likert scale.

Participants

The participants in this study lived and worked in either Australia or New Zealand. In Prolific both countries were selected to ensure that the ample number of eligible participants for the research were available. Once the selection criteria were entered in Prolific there was a possible eligible participant pool of one thousand and forty-four participants. Of which only two hundred and seventy-five participants were required, this number included a contingency amount in the event of survey rejections. The sample size was selected to achieve adequate statistical power for regression-based analysis while also accommodating the increased sample size demands associated with mediation models (Cohen, 1992; Fritz & MacKinnon, 2003). The participants residing and working in Australia comprised 86% of the study and participants residing and working in New Zealand constituted the remaining 14% of the two hundred and seventy-five participants in the group.

All participants were compensated for their participation at the equivalent of £1.00 (equivalent \$2.28 NZD) per 10 minutes of participation in the survey, with the median time spent by participants on the survey being five minutes and fourteen seconds. Most participants were aged between 25 and 34 years, making up 39% of the total participants. These details are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Age Distribution of Participants

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
18–24	34	13%
25–34	107	39%
35–44	66	24%
45–54	45	17%
55–64	18	7%
65+	2	1%

The survey was open to all genders, male participants were identified as the majority of participants aggregating 52% of the total participants, while female participants aggregated 47% of the participants and only 2% of participants identified as non-binary or third gender individuals. This is represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender	Frequency
Male	143
Female	130

Our participants are all currently employed either on a full-time or part-time basis with over 70% of participants being employed full time. This is represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Employment Status of Participants

Employment Status	Frequency
Full-Time	193
Part-Time	82
Total	275

Measures

Below each measure used for the study has been outlined, described and the internal consistency of the measure shared.

Illegitimate Task Scale. The Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS) consists of eight items in total demarcated into two main sections (Semmer et al., 2010). The first section has four questions focused on unnecessary tasks while the second section with the balance of the questions evaluates unreasonable tasks. The structure of each section begins with a statement that the respondent is required to select an appropriate answer to. This pattern is used in both sets of questions. The respondents are required to answer on a five-point Likert scale anchored by never (1) to frequently (5). BITS had a reported Cronbach's of $\alpha = .83$ to $.88$.

Co-worker Support Scale. The nine-item Ladd & Henry (2000) co-worker support scale is a Likert-type response scale, from 1-5 with strongly disagree or strongly agree anchors. There are two items on the scale that are negatively worded and require reverse scoring. This scale was used in the USA by Ladd & Henry (2000) who confirmed the reliability score of the measure is $\alpha = .94$

Ego Depletion Scale. The ego depletion scale by Johnson et al., (2014) is a five-item measure with a Likert-type response scale from 1-5 with strongly disagree (1) or strongly agree (5) anchors. Examples of some of the questions are “My mental energy is running low” and “I feel like my willpower is gone”. This measure has been used by Lanaj et al., (2016) associated with the University of Florida, who noted the reliability of the scale at $\alpha = .94$.

Work Engagement Scale. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale has been developed to measure vigour, dedication and absorption. The scale has a total of 17 questions and is measured using a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (Never) to 7 (Always) (W. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The scale has been used in several studies, and the internal consistency of the scales has reported a Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .80 to .90 indicating high internal consistency (W. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Organisational Commitment Scale. The Organizational Commitment Scale (OCS), developed by Balfour and Wechsler (1996) is a 9-point scale and is scored on a 7-point Likert-scale anchored by 1 = Strongly disagreed to 7 = Strongly agree. The scale measures three dimensions of organisational commitment: (1) commitment based on affiliation with the organisation, (2) commitment based on identification with the organisation and (3) commitment on satisfactory exchange where the employee perceives the organisations appreciation of their contribution, and it results in the employee being recognised by the organisation (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996). This scale’s reliability Cronbach’s alpha has been reported in research $\alpha = .81$

for affiliation commitment, $\alpha = .72$ for identification commitment and $\alpha = .83$ for exchange commitment. An example of a scale question is “I feel like “part of the family” at this organization”. Most of the questions are framed in the affirmative, while there are three questions framed in the negative and require reverse scoring. An example of a negatively framed question is “The people I work for do not care about what happens to me”. The internal consistency of the scales has reported a Cronbach’s alpha of $\alpha = .81$

Well-being Scale. The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (WEMWBS) was used as part of this survey. It is a 14-point scale that has been widely used across various studies. The internal consistency of the scale has been validated, and the Cronbach’s alpha scores are reported being between $\alpha = .89$ to $.91$ indicating excellent internal consistency (Warwick Medical School, 2008). This widely used scale was developed at the University of Warwick and Edinburgh and it covers both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of mental well-being. It is measured using a five-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (None of the time) to 5 (All of the time) (Warwick Medical School, 2008).

Analysis

Data analysis began with factor analysis, to assess the factor structure of the scales. Following this, correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between variables. In addition, moderated mediation analysis was employed to assess whether the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was influenced by mediating and moderating effects simultaneously.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Data Reduction

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was chosen over Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), given the measures selected for this study have not been utilised in either Australia or New Zealand. Zong et al.'s, (2022) use of the measures was localised to China. The additional measures used have been developed and tested in several countries other than Australia and New Zealand (A & NZ). For instance, The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale was developed and tested in Edinburgh, the Ego Depletion scale was developed and tested by Russell Johnson in the USA. This research as an expansion of Zong et al.'s, (2022) study has explored additional variables and in doing so has required the use of additional measures. These additional scales explore the additional criterion variables of work engagement, organisational commitment and well-being.

Factor Analysis

For all measures, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted in SPSS (version 31.0.2.0 (126)) using the Dimension Reduction module. The eight variables comprising the illegitimate tasks measure were entered, and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of specificity were examined. Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was selected as the extraction method, as this is recommended for EFA (Field, 2018). Direct Oblimin rotation was applied to allow factors to correlate. Missing data were deleted listwise, and factor loadings were sorted by size with coefficients $< .30$ discarded as non-significant. Internal consistency for each dimension of each measure was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Items that raised alpha were excluded from each scale. The EFA solution was selected based on obtaining the most interpretable factor structure, which is, minimal cross-loadings between factors, a reasonable proportion of variance explained, and construct validity based on item content. The final factor

analysis for each measure is presented in the corresponding tables. For each factor, a mean score per item was calculated, and became the input data for the next phase, correlations.

Independent Variable

Illegitimate Tasks. During the analysis, any items with weak loadings ($<.30$) were discarded, and only well-defined factors retained. The EFA for illegitimate tasks revealed two distinct dimensions: Unnecessary Tasks and Unreasonable Tasks, together accounted for 68% of the variance. Unnecessary Tasks explained 54.24% of the variance, while Unreasonable Tasks accounted for 13.51%. This factor structure is consistent with the theoretical expectations of the measure. Reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal reliability for Unnecessary Tasks with a Cronbach's alpha = .833. and Unreasonable Tasks with a Cronbach's alpha = .842, and an overall Cronbach's alpha = .878 for the 8 items. These are represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Pattern Matrix of Illegitimate Task Items

Item	Factor Loading	
	1	2
Factor 1: Unnecessary tasks	$(\alpha = .833)$	
Tasks that don't make sense	.75	—
Tasks that don't need to be done at all	.88	—
Tasks that could be avoided with better organisation	.79	—
Tasks that exist just because someone demands it	.82	—
Factor 2: Unreasonable tasks	$(\alpha = .878)$	
Tasks that go too far (should not be expected from you)	—	-.79
Tasks that are unfair	—	-.86
Tasks that should be done by someone else	—	-.87
Tasks that put you in an awkward position	—	-.71

Moderator

Co-worker Support. During the analysis, only well-defined factors retained. The EFA of co-worker support revealed a singular factor accounting for 61.68% of the variance.

Reliability analysis further demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha = .918. The factor analysis for co-worker support is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Factor Matrix for Co-worker Support

Item	Factor Loading
My coworkers are supportive of my goals and values	.78
Help is available from my coworkers when I have a problem	.75
My coworkers really care about my well-being	.83
My coworkers are willing to offer assistance to help me perform my job to the best of my ability	.79
Even if I did the best job possible, my coworkers would fail to notice	.58
My coworkers care about my general satisfaction at work	.78
My coworkers show very little concern for me	.71
My coworkers care about my opinions	.77
My coworkers are complimentary of my accomplishments at work	.75

Mediator

Ego Depletion. Our EFA revealed a singular factor, Ego Depletion that accounted for 66.48% of the total variance. With a strong reliability with Cronbach's alpha = .908 over the five items.

Table 6:

Factor Matrix for Ego Depletion

Item	Factor Loading
I feel drained	.78
My mind feels unfocused	.86
My mental energy is running low	.86
I feel like my willpower is gone	.80
It would take a lot of effort to concentrate on something	.77

Dependent Variables

Work Engagement. During the analysis, only well-defined factors were retained. The EFA for Work Engagement revealed four factors. The fourth factor had a weak loading and thus three prominent stable factors have been identified, namely Dedication, Absorption and Vigour. Dedication accounting for 49.31% of the Eigenvalues variance, Absorption equating to 9.53% and Vigour 8.2%. The factor Flow was categorised as weak and discounted; its Eigenvalues variance was 5.91%. Internal reliability for Dedication over 6 items is $\alpha = .936$, Absorption with 7 items has Cronbach's $\alpha = .842$ and Vigour with 3 items has a Cronbach's $\alpha = .820$. With an overall Cronbach's $\alpha = .930$. The factor analysis results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Pattern Matrix for Work Engagement Items

Item	Factor Loading		
	1	2	3
Factor 1: Dedication			
My job inspires me	.990	—	—
I am enthusiastic about my job	.956	—	—
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose	.881	—	—
I am proud of the work that I do	.742	—	—
To me, my job is challenging	.346	.351	—
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	.663	—	—
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	.657	—	—
Factor 2: Absorption			
When I am working, I forget everything else around me	—	.618	—
I get carried away when I'm working	—	.747	—
It is difficult to detach myself from my job	—	.618	—
I feel happy when I am working intensely	—	.340	—
I am immersed in my work	—	.476	—
Time flies when I'm working	.334	.393	—

Item	Factor Loading		
	1	2	3
Factor 3: Vigour			
At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well	—	—	.655
At my job, I am very resilient, mentally	—	—	.846
I can continue working for very long periods at a time	—	—	.732
At my work, I feel bursting with energy	.627	—	—

Well-being. Factor analysis revealed a two-factor measure. Factor 1 accounting for 52.7% of the variance and Factor 2 accounting for 7.8% of the variance. The internal consistency of Factor 1 with 7 items has $\alpha = .892$ and Positive Emotions and Relationships with 7 items has a Cronbach's alpha = .877, with an overall Cronbach's alpha = .89. While the original scale consists of hedonic and eudaimonic items, it is intended to be used as a unidimensional scale (Tennent et al., 2007) and will be treated as such, especially because the item loadings did not reveal a clear hedonic and eudaimonic factor solution.

Table 8

Pattern Matrix for Well-being Items

Item	Factor Loading	
	1	2
Factor 1: Resilient Well-being and Functioning		
I've been dealing with problems well.	.876	—
I've been thinking clearly.	.823	—
I've had energy to spare.	.821	—
I've been feeling relaxed.	.702	—
I've been feeling confident.	.666	—
I've been able to make up my own mind about things.	.558	—

Item	Factor Loading	
	1	2
I've been feeling good about myself.	.532	.396
Factor 2: Positive Emotions and Relationships		
I've been feeling close to other people	—	.910
I've been feeling loved.	—	.896
I've been feeling interested in other people.	—	.676
I've been interested in new things	—	.616
I've been feeling optimistic about the future.	—	.589
I've been feeling cheerful.	.320	.564
I've been feeling useful.	.322	.461

Organisational Commitment. Factor analysis revealed a two-factor measure. Factor 1, Positive Organisational Commitment accounting for 58.6% of the variance and Factor 2, Negative Organisational Perception accounting for 13.7% of the variance. The internal consistency of Positive Organisational Commitment with 6 items is $\alpha = .919$ and Negative Organisational Perception with 3 items has a Cronbach's $\alpha = .813$. The scale has an overall $\alpha = .907$ for the 9-items, indicating high reliability for this measure. The two-factor structure found here does not align with the original three-factor structure (Affirmation, Identification and Exchange commitment). However, the scale can also be used calculating a total scale score, which will be used in the present study.

Table 9*Pattern Matrix for Organisational Commitment Items*

Item	Factor loading	
	1	2
Factor 1: Positive Organisational Commitment:		
I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization	.924	—
What this organization stands for is important to me	.898	—
I am quite proud to be able to tell people who it is that I work for	.886	—
I feel like “part of the family” at this organization	.864	—
This organization appreciates my accomplishments on the job	.660	—
This organization does all that it can to recognize employees for good performance	.641	—
Factor 2: Negative Organisational Perception:		
The people I work for do not care about what happens to me	—	.856
My efforts on the job are largely ignored or overlooked by this organization	—	.845
I work for an organization that is incompetent and unable to accomplish its mission	—	.802

These EFAs were run to examine the factor structure of the scales, however, total scale scores instead of subscales will be used for further analysis to examine the hypothesised relationships.

Correlation analysis

A correlation analysis was run for all the factors in the study, using SPSS. The standard deviation and means were extracted for each. The results are represented in Table 10. The results indicate that the illegitimate tasks related negatively to the dependent variables of well-being ($r = -.28$), work engagement ($r = -.27$) and organisational commitment ($r = -.47$). These findings

indicate that employees reporting higher levels of illegitimate tasks tend to have lower levels of well-being, work engagement and organisational commitment.

The correlation analysis additionally showed a significant positive relationship between the illegitimate tasks and the mediator ego depletion, indicating that employees who report high levels of illegitimate tasks tend to also report higher levels of ego depletion ($r = .47$). Additionally, ego depletion correlates negatively with co-worker support ($r = -.34$), indicating that the lower levels of co-worker support are associated with higher levels of ego depletion. The results show that ego depletion is negatively associated with work engagement ($r = -.52$), well-being ($r = -.70$) and organisational commitment ($r = -.45$). These findings indicate that employees who report experiencing higher levels of ego depletion report experiencing lower levels of positive work-related events.

The results indicate that co-worker support is positively associated with work engagement ($r = .39$), well-being ($r = .50$) and organisational commitment ($r = .60$). These findings indicate that employees who report experiencing greater co-worker support have reportedly more positive work-related experiences, specifically with organisational commitment being the predominant outcome of co-worker support. Correlations are represented in Table 10.

Table 10*Correlations*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Illegitimate Tasks	2.71	0.74	—				
2. Co-worker Support	3.79	0.73	-.34**	—			
3. Ego Depletion	3.03	1.04	.47**	-.34**	—		
4. Work Engagement	4.35	0.90	-.27**	.39**	-.52**	—	
5. Well-being	3.18	0.66	-.28**	.50**	-.70**	.56**	—
6. Organisational Commitment	4.00	1.13	-.47**	.60**	-.45**	.62**	.52**

Note Values are Pearson product-moment correlations (two-tailed). ** $p < .001$. $N = 263$

Regression Analysis

Well-being. A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between illegitimate tasks on well-being. The total effect was statistically significant ($F(1, 269) = 24.831, p < .001$). This indicates that illegitimate tasks are a significant predictor of well-being. The model explained 8.5% variance in well-being ($R^2 = .085$). The results indicate a negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and well-being ($B = -0.252, t(269) = -4.98, p < .001$) (see Table 11). These results support *H1: Illegitimate work tasks have a negative relationship with employee wellbeing.*

Table 11*Linear Regression Predicting Well-being from Illegitimate Tasks*

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B	
						LL	UL
Constant	3.88	0.14	—	27.14	< .001	3.60,	4.16
Illegitimate Tasks	-0.25	0.05	-.29	-4.98	< .001	-0.35,	-0.15

CI = confidence interval. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

A moderated mediation analysis was conducted using Model 7 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes & Little, 2022). The analysis tested whether the relationship between illegitimate tasks and well-being is mediated by ego depletion, and whether the path from illegitimate tasks to ego depletion is moderated by co-worker support, this analysis followed the procedure outlined by Clement & Bradley-Garcia, (2022). Indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. All continuous variables were mean-centred. Illegitimate tasks ($B = .57, p < .001$) and co-worker support ($B = -.30, p < .001$), predicted ego depletion, however, the interaction of illegitimate tasks and co-worker support was not significant ($B = .05, p = .53$) as reported in Table 12. Therefore, H7 is not supported (*H7: Co-worker support moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and ego depletion*). Furthermore, ego depletion was a predictor of lower employee well-being ($B = -0.46, t = -14.53, p < .001$). However, the direct effect of illegitimate tasks on well-being was not significant ($B = .06, p = .18$) as shown in Table 13.

The bootstrapped conditional indirect effect of on well-being through ego depletion was significant at all levels of co-worker support, as none of the 95% confidence intervals included zero (see Table 14). This indicates that ego depletion mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and well-being, supporting *H4: Ego Depletion will mediate the relationship*

between illegitimate tasks and wellbeing. The index of moderated mediation was not significant, index = $-.02$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI $[-.13, .07]$, indicating that the indirect effect did not vary as a function of co-worker support. Therefore, there is no support for *H8: The indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on well-being through ego depletion depends on levels of co-worker emotional support.*

Table 12

Regression Results Predicting Ego Depletion from Illegitimate Tasks and Co-worker Support (Model 7 - Process)

Predictor	B	SE B	t	p	95% CI for B	
					LL	UL
Illegitimate Tasks	0.57	0.08	7.19	< .001	0.41	0.72
Co-worker Support	-0.30	0.08	-3.70	< .001	-0.47	-0.14
IT x Co-worker Support	0.05	0.08	0.63	.53	-0.11	0.22

CI = confidence interval. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

Table 13

Regression Results Predicting Well-being from Illegitimate Tasks and Ego Depletion

Predictor	B	SE B	t	p	95% CI for B	
					LL	UL
Illegitimate Tasks	0.06	0.04	1.35	.18	-0.03	0.15
Ego Depletion	-0.46	0.03	-14.53	-	-0.52	-0.40

Note. N = 266. $R^2 = .49$. CI = confidence interval. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

Table 14*Conditional Indirect Effects*

<i>Co-worker Support Level</i>	Effect	Boot SE	95% CI	
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Low (−0.67)	−0.24	0.05	−0.34	−0.13
Medium (0.11)	−0.26	0.04	−0.35	−0.19
High (0.67)	−0.28	0.05	−0.39,	−0.18

Note. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

Organisational Commitment. A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between illegitimate tasks and organisational commitment. The total effect was statistically significant ($F(1, 271) = 79.93, p < .001$), indicating that illegitimate tasks are a significant predictor of organisational commitment. The results explained 22.8% of the variance in organisational commitment ($R^2 = .228$). The results indicate a significant and negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and organisational commitment ($B = -0.75, t = -8.94, p < .001$) (see Table 15). These results align with *H3: Illegitimate tasks have a negative relationship with organisational commitment.*

Table 15*Linear Regression Predicting Organisational Commitment from Illegitimate Tasks*

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B	
						<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	5.93	0.23	—	26.31	< .001	5.48	6.38
Illegitimate Tasks	−0.75	0.08	−.49	−8.94	< .001	−0.91	−0.58

Note. N = 272. $R^2 = .228$. CI = confidence interval.

LL = Lower Limit; *UL* = Upper Limit

A moderated mediation analysis was conducted using Model 7 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes & Little, 2022) to test whether the relationship between illegitimate tasks and organisational commitment is mediated by ego depletion, and whether the path from illegitimate tasks to ego depletion is moderated by co-worker support. Indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. All continuous variables were mean-centred. Illegitimate tasks ($B = .56, p < .001$) and co-worker support ($B = -.30, p < .001$) significantly predicted ego depletion; however, the interaction between illegitimate tasks and co-worker support was not significant ($B = .03, p = .73$), as shown in Table 16. Therefore, *H7: Co-worker support moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and ego depletion*, is not supported. Furthermore, ego depletion significantly predicted lower organisational commitment ($B = -0.33, t = -5.07, p < .001$). The direct effect of illegitimate tasks on organisational commitment remained significant ($B = -0.49, p < .001$), represented in Table 17.

Table 16

Regression Results Predicting Ego Depletion from Illegitimate Tasks and Co-worker Support (Model 7 – Process)

Predictor	B	SE B	t	p	95% CI for B	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Illegitimate Tasks	0.56	0.08	7.19	< .001	0.40	0.71
Co-worker Support	−0.30	0.08	−3.65	< .001	−0.46	−0.14
IT × Co-worker Support	0.03	0.09	0.34	.73	−0.14	0.20

Note. N = 272. CI = confidence interval.

LL = Lower Limit; *UL* = Upper Limit

Table 17*Regression Results Predicting Organisational Commitment from Illegitimate Tasks and Ego Depletion*

Predictor	B	SE B	t	p	95% CI for B	
					LL	UL
Illegitimate Tasks	−0.49	0.09	−5.58	< .001	−0.67	−0.32
Ego Depletion	−0.33	0.06	−5.07	< .001	−0.45	−0.20

Note. N = 268. $R^2 = .29$. CI = confidence interval.

LL = Lower Limit; *UL* = Upper Limit

The bootstrapped conditional indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on organisational commitment through ego depletion was significant at all levels of co-worker support (low levels: ($B = -.18$, 95% *CI* $[-.30, -.09]$), at mean levels: ($B = -.18$, 95% *CI* $[-.29, -.11]$), and at high levels: ($B = -.19$, 95% *CI* $[-.32, -.10]$), with all confidence intervals excluding zero (see Table 18). This indicates that ego depletion partially mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and organisational commitment, supporting *H6: Ego Depletion mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and organisational commitment*. The index of moderated mediation was not significant (index = $-.01$, $SE = .04$, 95% *CI* $[-.10, .06]$), indicating that the indirect effect did not vary as a function of co-worker support. Therefore, H10 is not supported *H10: The indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on organisational commitment through ego depletion depends on levels of co-worker support*.

Table 18

Conditional Indirect Effects of Illegitimate Tasks on Organisational Commitment via Ego Depletion

<i>Co-worker Support Level</i>	Effect	Boot SE	95% CI	
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Low (−0.67)	−0.18	0.05	−0.30	−0.09
Medium (0.11)	−0.18	0.05	−0.29	−0.11
High (0.66)	−0.19	0.05	−0.32	−0.10

Note. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

Work Engagement. A simple linear regression was conducted in SPSS to examine the relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 272) = 29.18, p < .001$, explaining 9.7% of the variance in work engagement ($R^2 = .097$). Illegitimate tasks were negatively associated with work engagement, ($B = -0.38, t = -5.40, p < .001$) (see Table 19). These results indicate a significant negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and employee work engagement, supporting *H2*: *Illegitimate tasks have a negative relationship with an employee's work engagement.*

Table 19

Linear Regression Predicting Work Engagement from Illegitimate Tasks

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B	
						<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Constant	5.38	0.20	—	27.13	< .001	4.99	5.77
Illegitimate Tasks	−.38	0.07	−.31	−5.40	< .001	−0.51	−0.24

Note. N = 272. $R^2 = .097$ CI = confidence interval. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

A moderated mediation analysis was conducted using Model 7 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes & Little, 2022) to test whether the relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement is mediated by ego depletion, and whether the path from illegitimate tasks to ego depletion is moderated by co-worker support. Indirect effects were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. All continuous variables were mean-centred. Illegitimate tasks ($B = .55, p < .001$) and co-worker support ($B = -.29, p < .001$), predicted ego depletion, however, the interaction of illegitimate tasks and co-worker support was not significant ($B = .04, p = .60$) as shown in Table 20. Results here again do not support H7. Furthermore, ego depletion was a predictor of lower employee work engagement ($B = -0.43, t = -8.28, p < .001$). However, the direct effect of illegitimate tasks on work engagement was not significant ($B = -.07, p = .36$) represented in Table 21.

Table 20

Regression Results Predicting Ego Depletion from Illegitimate Tasks and Co-worker Support

Predictor	B	SE B	t	p	95% CI for B	
					LL	UL
Illegitimate Tasks	0.55	0.08	7.13	<.001	0.40	0.71
Co-worker Support	-0.29	0.08	-3.59	<.001	-0.45	-0.13
IT x Co-worker Support	0.04	0.08	0.53	.60	-0.12	0.21

Note. CI = confidence interval. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

The bootstrapped conditional indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on work engagement through ego depletion was significant at all levels of co-worker support (Low ($B = -.23, 95\% CI [-.35, -.12]$), at mean levels ($B = -.24, 95\% CI [-.35, -.17]$), and at high levels ($B = -.25, 95\% CI [-.37, -.16]$) (see Table 22). This indicates that ego depletion mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement, supporting H5: *Ego Depletion mediates the*

relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement. The index of moderated mediation was not significant, index = $-.02$, $SE = .05$, 95% $CI [-.11, .08]$, indicating that the indirect effect did not vary as a function of co-worker support. Therefore, it does not support *H9: The indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on work engagement through ego depletion depends on levels of coworker support.*

Table 21

Regression Results Predicting Work Engagement from Illegitimate Tasks and Ego Depletion

Predictor	B	SE B	t	p	95% CI for B	
					LL	UL
Illegitimate Tasks	- 0.07	0.07	- 0.92	.36	-0.21	0.07
Ego depletion	- 0.43	0.05	-8.28	<.001	-0.53	-0.33

Note. N = 268. $R^2 = .27$. CI = confidence interval. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

Table 22

Conditional Indirect Effects

Co-worker Support Level	Effect	Boot SE	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Low (-0.66)	-0.23	0.06	-0.35	-0.12
Medium (0.12)	-0.24	0.04	-0.35	-0.17
High (0.67)	-0.25	0.05	-0.37	-0.16

Note. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study set out to examine how illegitimate tasks affect employees' work engagement, organisational commitment and well-being in the Australian and New Zealand context. Ego depletion was proposed as a mediating mechanism and co-worker support as a proposed moderator. The findings provide strong support for the mediating role of ego depletion while they challenge the assumption of co-worker support as a buffer to illegitimate tasks.

This study was modelled closely on Zong's study *Not My Job, I Don't Want to Do it: the effects of Illegitimate tasks on Work Disengagement* (Zong et al., 2022). Despite this close modelling on Zong's study, there are some salient differences in the studies, namely; Zong's study was conducted on 260 full-time employed participants across China at two datapoint intervals, using convenience sampling. This study analysed data from 275 full-time and part-time employees across Australia and New Zealand at a singular data point using the Prolific platform. Zong's study focused only on work disengagement as its one dependent variable and evaluated co-worker support and leisure crafting as moderators. Whereas this study looked at the effect of illegitimate tasks on three dependent variables, examining employees' work engagement, organisational commitment and well-being using validated measurable scales and only evaluated co-worker support as moderator. An additional difference is contextual, if we make an assumption based in the available dates and assuming that there were no delays or impediments to the research we can assume Zong's data collection was most likely to have been conducted in late 2020 or early-to-mid 2021 (based on the article submission dates), indicating that the data was collected during the pandemic. The global pandemic would have likely had an impacted-on employees' perspectives, however Zong et al.'s reports state that China was experiencing normal life and work functions in most cities at this time. The temporal context may have shaped

respondents' perceptions of the moderating variables (co-worker support) reported in Zong's study. In contrast, this study's data collection for this thesis took place in post-pandemic 2025.

Moreover, this study was conducted within a broader context of global geopolitical developments that have contributed to significant economic instability. During this post-pandemic context organisations have implemented operational efficiencies leading to growing unemployment rates (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020 ; Su et al., 2022). Employees' retained in the organisations subsequently experience stretching role-tasks and are highly likely to experience greater illegitimate tasks, as less employees in the organisations are required to fulfil more tasks and duties. The global economic and geopolitically driven trends coupled with the shift from more traditional roles-based to more fluid, skills-based jobs make employees' work experience and their work roles now more than ever a flexible-skills based portfolio. These trends are driving employees to perform an increasing number of tasks beyond their defined roles (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Overall Pattern of Relationships Between Illegitimate Tasks and Employee Outcomes

The data confirms the expected direction and impact of the variables by demonstrating that illegitimate tasks are negatively correlated with all the outcomes. Therefore, supporting the view that the more illegitimate tasks employees experience the worse they feel, the less engaged at work they are and the less organisational commitment they experience (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). These findings support H1, H2 and H3 which state that illegitimate work tasks have a negative relationship with employee well-being, work engagement and organisational commitment.

Several studies support these findings, however there is no one study that combines these three dependent variables. Semmer's study supports the findings that illegitimate tasks reduce work engagement and overall well-being by increasing stress and burnout (Semmer et al., 2015).

Similarly, Omansky et al.'s study supports the findings that illegitimate tasks were significantly related to lower job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, both directly and through effort-reward imbalance, supporting that illegitimate tasks are detrimental to work-related well-being (Omansky et al., 2016). Additionally, Fältén et al.'s findings support the view that illegitimate tasks are significantly associated with lower work engagement, increased stress and higher turnover intention (Fältén et al., 2025).

There are limited studies conducted in Australia that support the interpretation that illegitimate tasks deplete employees' well-being, work engagement and organisational commitment. One such study is Fein and McKenna's which found that illegitimate tasks threatened police officers' dedication and lowered their organisational citizenship behaviour (Fein & McKenna, 2022). Additional broader support is found in Farley's study, results showed that illegitimate tasks made employees more cynical which is a characteristic of burnout and more exhausted and less satisfied with work (Farley & Milllear, 2018). There is no evidence of research conducted in New Zealand on the effects of illegitimate tasks on employees.

Ego Depletion is the Mechanism Linking Illegitimate Tasks to Outcomes.

Ego depletion theory suggests ego is a self-regulatory psychological resource that is limited, it posits that this resource is depleted through effortful demands such as illegitimate tasks and stress, when individuals are required to repeatedly exert self-control their capacity for self-regulation is eroded (Baumeister et al., 1998). There are however studies that cast doubt on the ego depletion theory, one such study was the replica multi-site study conducted by Hagger et al., that yielded results supporting the view that there is no ego depletion effect, despite these findings the authors did caution against rejecting the ego depletion theory entirely (Hagger et al., 2016). Despite their caution not to reject ego depletion theory, it is important to note that Hagger et al. conducted a robust piece of research. It was a 23-lab multi-site study, making it methodologically rigorous and the findings crucial to this field of study. A difference between

this current study and Hagger et al.'s is that their research took place in a laboratory, testing ego depletion in a laboratory setting, while this study relied on self-report methods using the BITS (The Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale) measure which linked to organisational settings. It may be possible that ego depletion displays differently in a laboratory setting, thus accounting for Hagger et al.'s findings, that there is no ego depletion effect.

It is important to note that ego depletion theory has extended beyond acceptance or rejection, there are alternative understandings of ego depletion offered by research. For example, ego depletion is positioned as a shift in attention and motivation rather than a depletion of resources. Inzlicht and Schmeichel's (2012) research reframes the phenomenon as a motivational shift, where self-regulation becomes less of a priority relative to competing impulses, the resulting downstream effects of lower well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement remain the same (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012).

This research paper provides supporting evidence that ego depletion in organisational settings (not laboratory settings) explains the effect of illegitimate tasks on all three outcomes, higher levels of ego depletion are associated with lower work engagement, organisational commitment and well-being. These findings are the same irrespective of ego depletion being labelled as a depleting psychological resource or a shift in motivation (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012). Higher ego depletion indicates lowered self-control resources, triggering emotional strain leading to reduced self-control and therefore worse outcomes (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Schulte-Braucks et al. (2019) elaborate on this point, stating that exposure to illegitimate tasks contributes to depleted resources leading to disengagement in addition to employees exhibiting retaliatory behaviour at work.

The current research results indicate that the direct effects of illegitimate tasks on well-being and engagement are not significant, suggesting that illegitimate tasks alone do not directly

affect well-being or work engagement once ego depletion is included. However, the indirect effects of illegitimate tasks on outcomes through ego depletion are significant, supporting the idea that ego depletion is the mechanism through which well-being and work engagement are reduced. These findings support H4, H5 and H6 which state ego depletion mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and well-being, work engagement and organisational commitment. These findings align with Zong et al.'s descriptions of ego depletion as the mechanism through which disengagement occurs (Zong et al., 2022).

These findings align with the JD-R model which states that work engagement requires available psychological resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Further support for this view is provided by Lanaj et al. (2016) and Thun et al.'s, (2018) research, which state that diminished work engagement occurs indirectly through ego depletion and the loss of self-regulatory resources, while stressors threaten identity and drain resources. In summary, both findings support the view that illegitimate tasks drain employees' psychological resources resulting in negative outcomes. The research further supports that illegitimate tasks deplete the individual's professional identity and are emotional strains, this view is supported by the SOS model that posits; workplace stress can arise when employees perceive work related experiences as a threat to their self-worth (Opstrup & Pihl-Thingvad, 2016). This study identifies the SOS model as a vital way to describe the impact of illegitimate tasks on employees, as both acknowledge the depleting nature of work-related experiences on employees. This study particularly relates to illegitimate tasks as a depleting factor. Not all dependant variables are affected by illegitimate tasks equally, the data indicates that organisational commitment is the only dependant variable that has both an indirect effect, through ego depletion and a direct relationship with the independent variable. A possible explanation for this direct effect is the depletion of the sense of fairness and justice that is connected to organisational commitment (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996, Meyer & Allen, 1991). Organisational commitment can be understood as an outcome of social

exchange relationship between the employees and the organisation; when employees feel that the organisation values them, they are more likely to reciprocate through stronger commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) . When employees are exposed to illegitimate tasks their sense of fairness and equitable treatment is violated, and thus their sense of self in the role, subsequently depleting their sense of organisational commitment (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This result is strongly linked to the SOS theory as there is a strong sense of self that is embedded in the role and tasks assigned to an employee and when this is violated it erodes the employees' sense of self (Opstrup & Pihl-Thingvad, 2016). Diminished organisational commitment may also be attributed to a protective mechanism that employees activate, this perspective is backed by the resources theory which proposes that people strive to retain and protect resources in the presence of stress, stress in the context of this theory occurs when resources are threatened or lost (Hobfoll, 1989).

Co-worker Support.

Past studies, including Zong et al.'s (2022) have supported the view that co-worker support moderates the effects of illegitimate tasks on the employee. However, a key and contrary finding from this study is that there is no evidence to substantiate that co-worker support moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and ego depletion. Meaning that, irrespective of the level of co-worker support; high, medium or low, no evidence was found that co-worker support buffers the effects of unreasonable and unnecessary tasks on an employee's ego depletion. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is not supported. Hence the findings can be interpreted as: the impact of illegitimate tasks on employees is of significant detriment to their professional identity, this interpretation is supported by Schulte-Braucks et al.'s (2019) study which concludes that illegitimate tasks are a threat to identity. Both findings additionally align with the SOS model, which states that some work tasks have an eroding effect on the employees' sense of self.

This study offers no evidence that co-worker support provides a resource or buffer to ego depletion, and the moderated mediation was not supported. The findings indicate that co-worker emotional support did not moderate the indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on well-being, work engagement, or organisational commitment through ego depletion. These findings support that the mediating role of ego depletion was not conditional on the employees' level of co-worker emotional support. These findings are empirically supported by Halbesleben's (2006) meta-analysis, which states that co-worker support does not safeguard against depersonalisation which includes pulling away from work tasks, emotionally distancing yourself from work and feeling detached or indifferent, these are all aspects of identity-related burnout. Methot et al. (2016) further supports this view, stating that identity-relevant stressors drain self-regulatory resources (ego-depletion), additionally mentioning that support does not buffer this strenuous effect.

Zong et al.'s (2022) findings relating to the moderating properties of co-worker support are contrary to this research study's findings. A possible explanation for these different observations could be the cultural context and historical context that the data was drawn from. Zong et al.'s conducted his research in China, based on the available dates and assuming that there were no delays or impediments to the research we can assume that the data collection was most likely conducted in late 2020 or early-to-mid 2021 (based on the article submission dates). This timing coincides with the WHO's declaration of a global COVID pandemic in March 2020 until May 2023. The COVID pandemic elicited many strong feelings in individuals. Culturally China is considered a collectivistic society, the individuals interact and hold different belief systems to those individuals within individualistic societies. Hofstede's individualism–collectivism dimensions, explains how these societies engage, he describes connections in individualistic societies as “looser” and in these societies people are expected to look after themselves and their family. In contrast in

collectivistic societies people are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups which have a protective element in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 2011). The dimensions perspective supports the idea that in collectivistic societies stronger emphasis is placed on cohesion and in-groups and mutual protection, therefore co-worker support could have been interpreted by the employee in Zong et al.'s study as being expected, meaningful or more influential than in individualistic societies (Hofstede, 2011). It is important to mention however, that not every individual in a collectivistic society would share this same understanding. Further research supports the view of group cohesion identified in collectivistic China during COVID, the research states that group interests, responsibility, obligation, obedience, social connection, belonging and protection efficacy help buffer stress during the pandemic and directly linked collectivism with more social support (Dong et al., 2022). These findings could therefore offer an explanation for Zong's study finding co-worker support to have a buffering effect, because the study was conducted both in a collectivistic society and during the pandemic, both aspects providing more weight to the buffering effects of co-worker support in the context of illegitimate tasks at work, it is possible that the employees researched by Zong interpreted the illegitimate tasks as part of their obligation and as acts of citizenship obedience during the pandemic COVID in China, therefore diminishing the generalisability of Zong et al.'s findings.

This research paper's two most significant findings to the existing body of theory are: Firstly, the null moderation findings challenge the generalisability of co-worker support as a moderator for work stressors. This suggests that social support may function differently when the stressor is identity-threatening rather than just demanding, and that the moderating effect of co-worker support may also be dependent on cultural context. These findings have far-reaching practical implications, which will be discussed further in the implications section. Additionally, this research paper's contribution differs from Zong et al.'s (2022) study, whose

findings indicate that the strength of co-worker support weakens the effects of illegitimate tasks on ego depletion, thus having a moderating effect (Zong et al., 2022). Secondly, this study extends the generalisability of ego depletion as a psychological mechanism linking illegitimate tasks to employee negative outcomes beyond the Chinese context established by Zong et al.'s (2022) study, to Western individualistic organisational settings.

Practical Implications

Supporting Leaders to Identify Illegitimate Tasks

Research supports the view that illegitimate tasks are detrimental to employee well-being, work engagement and organisational commitment all of which can have a destabilising effect on the organisation. Considering the detrimental effect of illegitimate tasks on employees and aligning with the Human Capital Theory (Awu et al., 2025) which states that employees are the most important resource that an organisation has, it stands to reason that looking after employees is critical to the organisation and not merely beneficial to employees. Such initiatives are demonstrated through the practical implementation of employee support programmes within organisations, which are crucial to organisational effectiveness. The imperative to support employees is heightened in the current global context, characterised by geopolitical and economic volatility, the shift to AI and technological enablement, cumulatively resulting in an increase in unemployment, employee retention and employment are also impacted by the organisational shift from role-based to skills-based jobs (World Economic Forum, 2025). Workplaces need to be ever more vigilant of, and accurate in, identifying illegitimate tasks as they strive to retain employees in the current global context. A practical implication in this climate is the establishment of illegitimate tasks identification systems. If an organisation is better able to identify the illegitimate tasks, then they are better able to establish a means to eradicate them. The most direct manner to enable this system is an employee self-report method. If employees can identify and report these tasks, the

organisation is better placed to eradicate them. This self-report method is only successful however, in contexts where employees experience psychological safety, therefore ensuring a psychologically safe environment becomes the prerequisite to employees reporting unnecessary and unreasonable tasks at work (APA, 2024).

An additional option for organisations is to incorporate the BITS (The Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale) in their pulse survey. Pulse surveys are disseminated in organisations to determine the culture component of the organisation; they are used to gather real-time employee feedback and sentiment. These surveys keep the respondent's identities protected, it is thus an anonymous opportunity for the organisation to gauge employee sentiment and an opportunity to determine if their employees are experiencing illegitimate tasks, identify a baseline and a way to monitor fluctuations in illegitimate tasks being reported.

A further opportunity for organisations exists to enlist AI to support in the identification and monitoring of tasks that could be considered illegitimate tasks in the flow of employees' work. Perhaps using tools like Viva Insights, while still being mindful of employee privacy, would offer organisations insights on where and when employees experience illegitimate tasks.

In addition to the identification of illegitimate tasks, organisations could upskill their leadership in several areas; namely better work allocation to their employees with a view to reducing illegitimate task allocation and improving workload while keeping to job role requirements. Leaders could be upskilled on how to identify and name illegitimate tasks in their workstream context and how to support employees who encounter illegitimate tasks and provide meaning and motivation to support their employees' well-being and maintain work engagement and organisational commitment (Fältén et al., 2025).

Organisations Need to Restore Employees' Resources While Eliminating Illegitimate Tasks

Monitoring and working towards eliminating illegitimate tasks are not enough. Organisations would be best placed to implement restorative measures to address the current state of ego depletion experienced by their workforce, which may have resulted from experiencing illegitimate tasks in addition to other depleting factors. All future initiatives by organisations should be guided by the research-backed view that relying on co-worker support alone as a resource and buffer for illegitimate tasks is unrealistic. Instead, organisations need to be proactive in this restorative attempt and implement research-backed initiatives. One such initiative that is highly recommended is job crafting. This is an avenue for supporting employees to engage more with work through their self-driven and leadership supported crafting of their jobs to better align with their strengths, their timing and their interests (Wong, 2026).

Additionally, organisations should offer mindfulness-based practices. Vonderlin et al.'s study found that mindfulness-based practices increased employee well-being, life satisfaction, emotional health and to a lesser extent increased work engagement (Vonderlin et al., 2020). These practices should be offered in a habitual manner through in-person or online sessions that focus on breathwork, meditation, yoga and relaxation techniques. Ideally, this would be an organisation-wide engagement but practically implemented as an opt-in session, ensuring that these offerings are done regularly and are accessible to all would boost employee participation.

Workplace Buffers

Recent research has found that appreciation from colleagues is a direct buffer for employees experiencing illegitimate tasks (Michailidis et al., 2025). Based on these findings, a practical initiative that organisations could implement is a colleague appreciation platform

to recognise and reinforce employee contributions. This system would allow employees to recognise and appreciate their colleagues for their contributions and achievements. Within the platform, employees could assign points alongside their appreciation messages. Over time, these points could accumulate and be converted into tangible rewards, such as gift cards or monetary equivalents, which employees can use to purchase items they value. This type of platform could offer a buffering effect and allow for recognition and rewards while additionally strengthening employees' sense of value.

Limitations to This Research

Although the sample size was adequate for thesis purposes, future research should be conducted using a broader participant base, ensuring equal representation of both New Zealand and Australian participants. Equal representation across the two-country cohorts would strengthen the study by reducing the risk that the findings are primarily driven by one group. A more balanced sample would also ensure that one country's data did not disproportionately dominate the overall results. Additionally, an equal sample set from each country would improve comparability between the two countries and the data sets, beneficial to cross-cultural research and comparisons, in addition to supporting generalisability across the two countries. Future research should therefore strive to achieve equal representation from both countries.

This research employs a cross-sectional design, with data collected from participants at a single point in time. As a result, the findings reflect participants' sentiments only at that specific moment. This approach imposes certain limitations, as it does not capture changes over time and therefore cannot provide longitudinal insights. Consequently, the study is unable to establish causal relationships, restricting conclusions to associations rather than cause-and-effect interpretations. This design further eliminates the possibility of establishing temporal precedence between illegitimate tasks, ego depletion and the dependent variables.

Future research ought to consider a longitudinal or daily diary method of data collection, better positioning the research in establishing the causal sequence of these variables.

Common method variance is an additional current limitation, as all data was collected using an online platform during the same sitting, meaning that the correlations between variables may be inflated due to the method, rather than exclusively reflecting the negative aspects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Common method variance may inflate or deflate correlations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although the online survey method may reduce interviewer-related, social desirability bias, it does not eliminate common method bias. Future research should consider multi-wave or a multi-source data collection approach to control for common method variance and facilitate the collection of more nuanced data collected.

All data was collected via a self-report method, and all respondents provided data for all the variables, the study is therefore vulnerable to the participants' current mood and common rater effect, which is a type of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Common rater effect occurs when the respondent provides data for both the predictor variable, in this case illegitimate tasks and the criterion variables in this case well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement. As a result, some relationships observed may partially reflect respondents' general answering tendencies rather than being a true reflection of the constructs being measured. Future research should therefore adopt alternative data collection methods. One potential approach would be to obtain measures of work engagement and organisational commitment from different sources within a longitudinal research design. This process would support a more robust understanding of these constructs over time and further examine the effect of illegitimate tasks on these dependant variables. A longitudinal approach would also be better positioned to identify both correlational and causal relationships that exist for these constructs.

The online questionnaire used in this research paper consisted of sixty-two items over six different measures arranged sequentially one after another, forming a single lengthy questionnaire. This construction may have led respondents to interpret the questionnaires as having related constructs, resulting in the respondents answering the questionnaire consistently across all the sections, thereby answering consistently across all constructs resulting in illusory correlations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Illusory correlations highlight the respondents desire to seem consistent across all their responses. This tendency may lead to inflated correlation results between variables, resulting in inaccurately reflected in final data. Therefore, future research may choose to administer the questionnaires in separate segments and at different intervals to control for illusory correlation bias.

Contextualising the required research in the global response to developing trends in employment, shifting job roles and technological advancements alongside greater variability in the job market (World Economic Forum, 2025). These shifting trends result in broader job roles, and this may result in varied illegitimate tasks across industries, it would therefore stand to reason that with developing technology researchers and organisations should be better positioned to identify new and innovative forms of illegitimate tasks identification. Once identified, organisations would be better positioned to support the reduction of illegitimate tasks across sectors and organisations, thereby benefiting employees by protecting their psychological resources. Future research should therefore explore both the identification of illegitimate tasks and their subsequent reduction as an extension of this study. These types of initiatives alongside these complementary research opportunities should be conducted as a matter of urgency, as organisations globally face an increasingly accelerating pace of change. These initiatives and the substantiating research should be completed to safeguard employees, as they are the most vulnerable and valuable resource that organisations have.

Future Research

Future research should expand on the current research in addition to supporting it.

There are several areas future research should address.

Sampling

Larger and more diverse research populations would increase the statistical base and extend generalisability of the findings. Equal sampling from Australia and New Zealand would encourage cross-cultural comparability of results at the country level.

Research Design Improvements

A longitudinal research design would enable the study to explain the temporal ordering of variables and support the establishment of causal relationships. The use of diverse data collection methods would enable future research to increase its efficiency by examining the cumulative effects of ego depletion over the course of a work week. For example, when using experience sampling methodology (ESM), researchers are equipped to evaluate how the impact of illegitimate tasks on ego depletion fluctuates within the same person across days for the individuals, allowing for temporal inferences and evaluation of restorative actions like sleep and exercise for the individuals (Yang et al., 2025). Exploring biological markers of illegitimate tasks in real-time, through the implementation of wearable devices that can continuously and non-invasively monitor physiological biomarkers including heart rate variability, cortisol, skin conductance, and body temperature in the presence of illegitimate tasks would also be beneficial. This real-time evaluation and data gathering technique would expand the research by exploring how illegitimate tasks impact individuals' physiology in real-time and in the presence of illegitimate tasks and would enable a clearer linkage between these physiological markers, illegitimate tasks, and ego depletion (Morales et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Illegitimate tasks deplete employees' psychological resources, leading to diminished well-being, organisational commitment and work engagement. Critically, ego depletion was supported as the mediating mechanism across all three outcomes, extending Zong et al.'s (2022) findings into an Australian and New Zealand context, strengthening the cross-cultural generalisability of ego depletion theory in occupational settings (Zong et al., 2022). Perhaps the most theoretically significant finding is the failure of co-worker support to moderate this relationship, suggesting that when stressors are identity-threatening rather than merely demanding, co-worker social support may be insufficient as a protective resource.

Employers should not rely on resources alone; instead, efforts should be directed at reducing the prevalence and normalisation of illegitimate tasks in workflows. Proactive measures are critical given the contemporary challenges facing employees, including the increased cost-of-living, ongoing organisational changes, resulting from current geopolitical uncertainty, workplace AI adoption, increasing unemployment rates and labour market instability (World Economic Forum, 2025). Collectively these factors have increased the pressure that employees experience. As employees represent an organisation's most valuable resource (Awu et al., 2025), these findings emphasise the importance of proactively managing employees' work tasks and environment to safeguard their overall functioning and manage their well-being, work engagement and organisational commitment.

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Appendix A

Ethics Approval Letter



11/02/2025

Dear: Dominique Reis De Paula-Reis

Re: Low Risk Notification - 4000028916 - Effects of Illegitimate tasks (IT) on employees' work engagement, organisational commitment, and well-being.

Thank you for submitting a low risk notification for your research/teaching/evaluation.

This email is to acknowledge receipt of the low risk notification and to inform you that the details of your project have been recorded in our database for inclusion in the annual reports to the Health Research Council Ethics Committee (HRECEC) and the Massey University Research Committee (URC).

You may proceed with your research, though it is advisable to provide a couple of weeks before commencing, as all low risk notifications are checked for completeness and clarity by a Research Ethics Advisor. You may be contacted if your application is incomplete and/or further clarification is required.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis.

If a sponsoring organisation, funding authority (e.g., the Health Research Council) or a journal require evidence of ethical approval from a Human Ethics Committee (with an approval number), you need to complete a full Massey University Human Ethics application to be reviewed and approved by one of our Human Ethics Committees. Applications must be submitted and approved prior to the commencement of the research.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Research Ethics Office, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz. "

Please include the following statement on all public documents (e.g., information sheet, consent form) related to your project:

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Massey University Human Ethics by email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

I wish you all the best in your research, teaching or evaluation activities and appreciate your thoughtful consideration of ethics principles and practices.

Ngā mihi nui,

Professor Tracy Riley
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Chair's Committee

Research Ethics, Graduate Research School and Ethics
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz
www.massey.ac.nz/research/ethics

Appendix B

Survey Information & Consent Form

The impact of work tasks on employees – a study.

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for showing interest in being part of this research study. The study is conducted by Dominique Reis completing her master's at the School of Psychology at Massey University, New Zealand supervised by Dr Anja Roemer from the School of Psychology at Massey University, New Zealand

What is involved?

We are conducting a research study to understand how different types of workplace tasks affect employees' overall work experiences. Should you choose to continue, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire about how you see yourself and your work environment. Study completion will take about 10 minutes.

Confidentiality/ Anonymity

The data we collect does not contain any identifying information about you. All your responses go directly to the researchers via the survey software Qualtrics provided by Massey University. You will be directed to the survey through Prolific. The researchers will keep all electronic study records with demographic data protected by a password for a period of five years after the publication of results. Only members of the principal investigator's research team will have access to the original data. At the conclusion of this study, the researchers might publish findings in an aggregated or anonymous form as part of a master's thesis which will be published as part of the Massey Journal data base or in an aggregated or anonymous form in academic journals or at conferences.

Potential risks and questions

This study does not involve any known risks.

Statement of rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. Completion and submission of the questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question. You can quit the survey any time prior to survey completion.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Massey University Human Ethics by email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Contact details

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with the principal investigator Dominique Reis if you require further information about this project (DominiqueReis.DePaula-Reis.1@uni.massey.ac.nz).

Summary

By proceeding with the online survey, you are agreeing that: you have read and understood this information. Questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily and that you are aware of the potential risks in taking part in this research study and you are doing so voluntarily.

- ☐ Yes, I agree
- ☐ No, do not agree

Appendix C

Survey Measures

Separate measures were used to compile a singular lengthy survey, where possible the measured used have been shared below, those which do not require registration or engagement with the governing entity. In addition to these measure, demographic questions were included in the survey. These have been shared below.

Demographic Questions

Age

Please select which age bracket you fall into

- ☐ 18 - 24 years
- ☐ 25 - 34 years
- ☐ 35 - 44 years
- ☐ 45 - 54 years
- ☐ 55 - 64 years
- ☐ 65 + years

Gender

What gender do you identify with

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Country

Which country are you currently working in

☐ New Zealand

☐ Australia

☐ Other

Employment status

What is your current employment status?

☐ Full-time

☐ Part-time

☐ Other

The Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale

(Semmer et al., 2010)

The next two questions relate to work tasks. Please read each question carefully and indicate how often you have experienced what is described in the statement.

1. Do you have work tasks to take care of, which keep you wondering if ...

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Once in a while (3)	Often (4)	Frequently (5)
1)...they make sense at all? (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2) they have to be done at all? (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3) They would not exist (or could be done with less effort) if it were organized differently? (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4) ...they just exist because some people simply demand it this way? (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Do you have work tasks to take care of, which you believe ...

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Once in a while (3)	Often (4)	Frequently (5)
1) ...are going too far, which should not be expected from you? (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2) ...are unfair that you should have to deal with them? (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3) ... should be done by someone else? (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4) ...put you in an awkward position? (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Perceived Co-worker Support Scale

(Ladd & Henry, 2000)

Using the scale below, rate how much you agree or disagree with the statements relating to how you experience your co-workers.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
1. My coworkers are supportive of my goals and values. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Help is available from my coworkers when I have a problem (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. My coworkers really care about my well-being (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. My coworkers are willing to offer assistance to help me perform my job to the best of my ability. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Even if I did the best job possible, my coworkers would fail to notice (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. My coworkers care about my general satisfaction at work. (6)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. My coworkers show very little concern for me (7)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. My coworkers care about my opinions (8)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. My coworkers are complimentary of my accomplishments at work (9)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Ego Depletion Scale

(Lanaj, Johnson, & Barnes, 2014)

Rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
1. I feel drained. (1)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. My mind feels unfocused. (2)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. My mental energy is running low. (3)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I feel like my willpower is gone. (4)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. It would take a lot of effort for me to concentrate on something. (5)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

