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# Illegitimate Tasks and Psychological Strain: The Role of Appreciation by Supervisor

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# Illegitimate tasks as a new stressor

## Theoretical background

### Two facets of illegitimate tasks:

- **unnecessary tasks:** are tasks that should not have to be carried out at all, because
  - they do not make sense,
  - they could have been avoided,
  - they could be carried out with less effort, if things were organized more efficiently.
- **unreasonable tasks:** are tasks that are not appropriate to ask from a specific person, because
  - they may be outside of the range of one's occupation,
  - they may also be incompatible with one's occupational status.
- **unnecessary tasks:** the lack of legitimacy does not refer to who is responsible for executing them, but rather to the way they came into existence  
**they are illegitimate for just everyone**
- **unreasonable tasks:** exist legitimately *as such*, but are part of someone else's specific role  
**they are illegitimate for specific employees**
- Previous research has shown illegitimate tasks to be related to several indicators of strain, controlling for other stressors.

Semmer, N. K., & Jacobshagen, N. (under Review). *Illegitimate tasks as a source of stress*.

Semmer, N. K., Tschan, F., Meier, L. L., Faccin, S., & Jacobshagen, N. (2010). Illegitimate tasks and counterproductive work behavior. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 59, 70-96.

# Appreciation at work as a resource

## Theoretical background

### Appreciation at work

- refers to specific behaviors that explicitly signal **acknowledgment** and **recognition** of one's work behavior.
  - Experiencing appreciation increases job satisfaction and decreases feelings of resentments, over and above the effects of job control, social support, and interactional justice.
- The effort-reward theory suggests that appreciation is one of the reward-factors, and is therefore regarded as an important resource in the context of psychological strain.
- **Does the appreciation by supervisor buffer the association between illegitimate tasks and psychological strain?**



Jacobshagen, N., Stocker, D., Liechti, S., Stettler, E. & Semmer, N.K. (May, 2009). Appreciation at work and its effect on strain and job attitudes. Paper presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Work and Organizational Psychology in Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

Stocker, D., Jacobshagen, N., Annen, H., & Semmer, N. K., (in press). *Appreciation at Work in the Swiss Military Forces*.

# Illegitimate tasks and appreciation by supervisor: Sample and measures

## Sample

- $N = 266$  employees of five information technology (IT) organizations
- Age: range 15-66 years, with an average age of 37 years ( $SD = 10$ )
- 57% male and 39% female

## Measures (self-report questionnaires)

### Illegitimate tasks

*BITS – Bern Illegitimate Task Scale (Semmer et al., u.r.): 8 Items*

- **unnecessary tasks ( $M = 2.56$ ;  $SD = .77$ ;  $\alpha = .85$ ):**

*“Do you have to carry out tasks where you keep wondering if they have to be done at all?” (1 = never, 5 = frequently).*

- **unreasonable tasks ( $M = 2.12$ ;  $SD = .72$ ;  $\alpha = .82$ ):**

*“Do you have to carry out tasks of which you believe they are going too far, and should not be expected from you?” (1 = never, 5 = frequently).*

### Appreciation by supervisor

*Personal Recognition Scale (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004; 2006): 3 Items ( $M = 3.92$ ;  $SD = 1.36$ ;  $\alpha = .93$ ):*

*„My supervisor acknowledges improvement in my quality of work“*

*(1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree)*

### Psychological strain

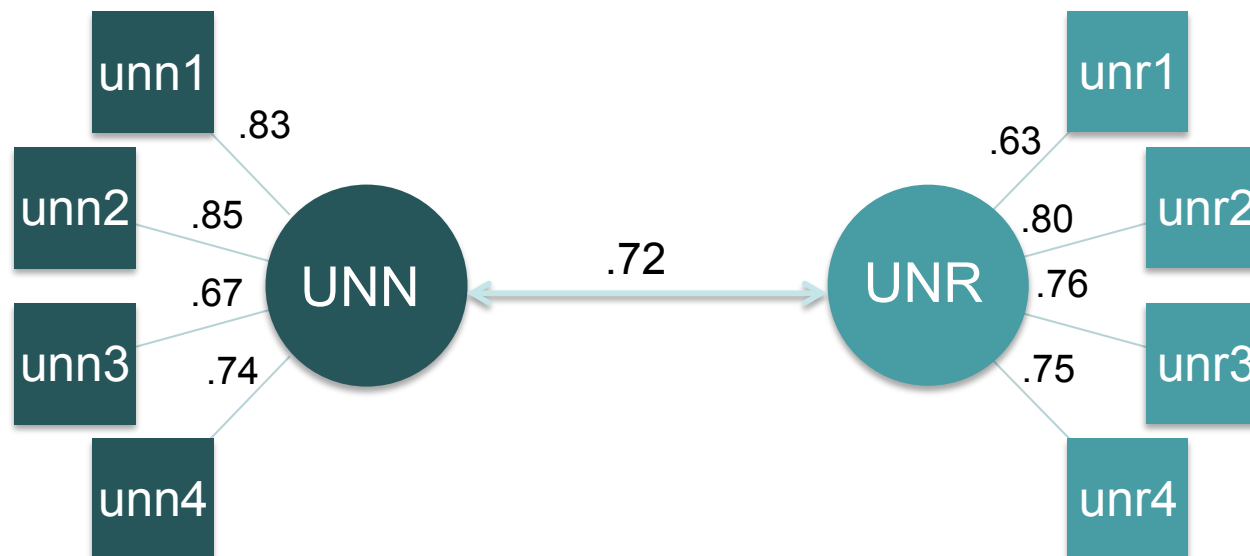
*Emotional Irritation Scale (Mohr, Rigotti & Müller, 2005): 5 Items ( $M = 2.48$ ;  $SD = 1.19$ ;  $\alpha = .85$ ):*

*„From time to time I feel like a bundle of nerves “ (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)*

# Illegitimate tasks and appreciation by supervisor: Results I

## Illegitimate tasks: two facets or one?

	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2/df$	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
<b>1 Factor</b>	174.7	20	.001	8.7	.72	.84	.17 (CI: .15-.20)
<b>2 Factors</b>	65.4	19	.001	3.4	.91	.95	.10 (CI: .07-.12)



# Illegitimate tasks and appreciation by supervisor: Results II

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min-Max	1.	2.	3.	4.
<b>1. Unnecessary Tasks</b>	2.56	.77	1-5	(.85)			
<b>2. Unreasonable Tasks</b>	2.12	.72	1-4.7	<b>.63***</b>	(.82)		
<b>3. Appreciation by Supervisor</b>	3.92	1.36	1-6	<b>-.28***</b>	<b>-.31***</b>	(.93)	
<b>4. Emotional Irritation</b>	2.48	1.19	1-6.8	<b>.34***</b>	<b>.44***</b>	<b>-.24***</b>	(.85)

Note:  $N = 265$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed); internal consistencies in the diagonal (Cronbach's alpha)



# Unnecessary tasks and appreciation by supervisor: **allwiss** Results III



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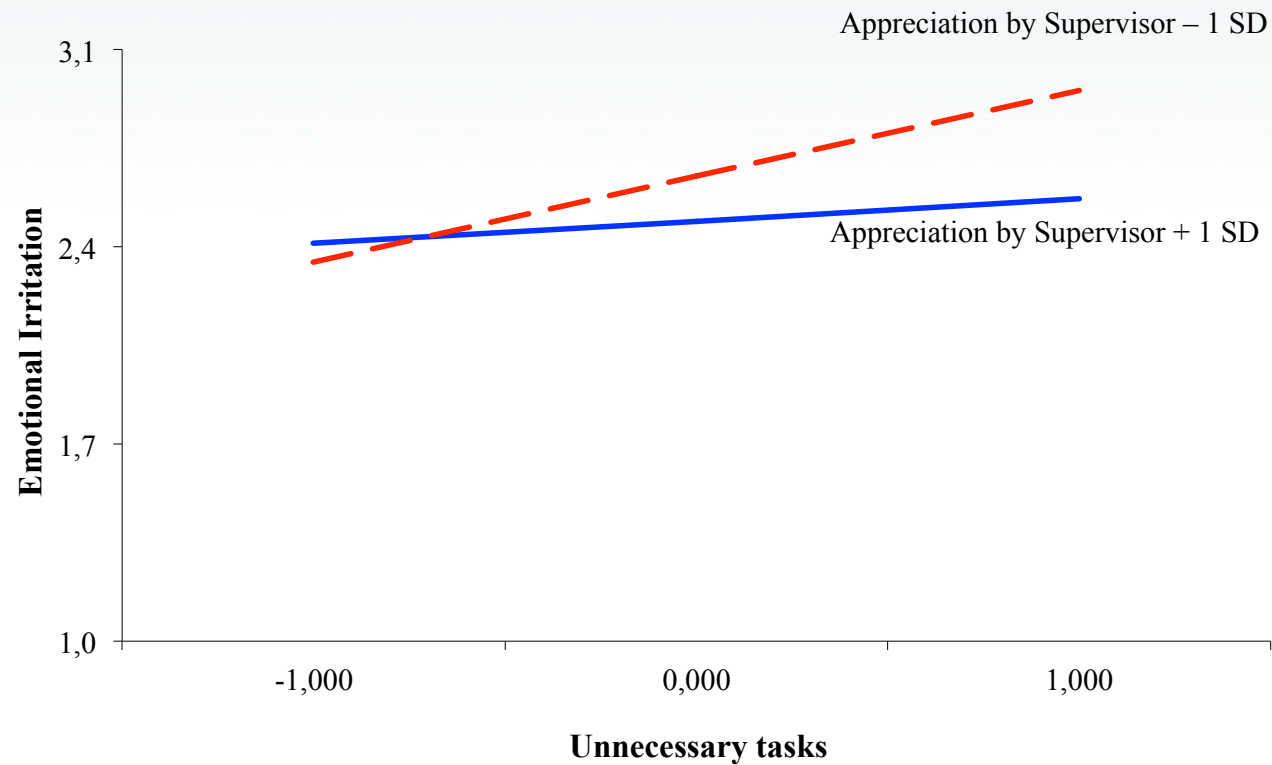
## Does the appreciation by supervisor buffer the association between illegitimate tasks and psychological strain?

	Emotional Irritation			
	B	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>			.01*	
age		-.10*		
<b>Step 2</b>			.16***	.15***
Dysfunctional Social Support		.22***		
Distributive Justice		-.07		
<b>Step 3</b>			.19*	.03*
<b>Unnecessary Tasks</b>	.19*			
<b>Appreciation by Supervisor</b>	-.08			
<b>Step 4</b>			.20*	.01*
Interaction: z_unnecessary tasks and z_appreciation by supervisor	-.11*			

Note:  $N = 240-266$ ; all coefficients are taken from the final step.  
\* $p < .05$  (one-tailed); \*\* $p < .01$  (one-tailed); \*\*\* $p < .001$  (one-tailed).



# Appreciation by supervisor as a buffer



*simple slope (Aiken & West, 1991):*

*Appreciation by Supervisor -1SD  $t_{EI} = 3.05, p < .01$*

*Appreciation by Supervisor +1SD  $t_{EI} = .61, p > .05$*



# Unreasonable tasks and appreciation by supervisor: allwiss

## Results IV



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		Emotional Irritation			
		B	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>				.01*	
	age		-.06		
<b>Step 2</b>				.16***	.15***
	Dysfunctional Social Support		.17***		
	Distributive Justice		-.02		
<b>Step 3</b>				.24***	.07***
	<b>Unreasonable Tasks</b>	.37***			
	<b>Appreciation by Supervisor</b>	-.07			
<b>Step 4</b>				.24***	.00
	Interaction: z_unreasonable tasks x z_appreciation by supervisor	-.07			

Note:  $N = 240-266$ ; all coefficients are taken from the final step.

\* $p < .05$  (one-tailed); \*\*  $p < .01$  (one-tailed); \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (one-tailed).



# Illegitimate tasks and appreciation by supervisor: Theoretical and practical implications

- Illegitimate tasks are two facets, representing tasks that are unnecessary and unreasonable.
- they are differentially associated with psychological strain, if appreciation by supervisor considered.
  - ➔ It is not an unidimensional construct.
- Conceptually, unnecessary tasks violate almost everyone's professional roles, whereas unreasonable tasks can be seen as more specific, referring to tasks that belong to other people's professional roles (Semmer et al. u.r.).
- Appreciation and recognition are important for the employee and buffer the association between unnecessary task and psychological strain
  - ➔ Communicate appreciation and recognition in daily interactions!
- The present study concentrates on more affective measures of psychological strain
  - ➔ Future studies should consider other outcomes as well (cognitive measures of psychological strain, motivation, performance etc.)



# Thank you!

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