Unfinished tasks and Employee Well-Being: Does Taking Charge Make a Difference?

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Abstract

In today's dynamic and demanding work environment, unfinished tasks have become a common job stressor that may impact employees' psychological well-being. Grounded in the Self-Determination Theory, this study investigated how unfinished tasks relate to competence need satisfaction, one of the core psychological needs essential for optimal functioning. In addition, it examines whether taking charge, a form of proactive work behavior, can lessen the negative psychological effects of unfinished tasks. Data was collected through an online survey from 103 working individuals across various nationalities and professions. Participants completed validated questionnaires to assess their experiences with unfinished tasks, competence need satisfaction, and taking charge. Multiple regression analysis of the results revealed a significant negative relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction, supporting the first hypothesis. Although taking charge was positively associated with competence need satisfaction, it did not significantly moderate the relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction, failing to support the second hypothesis. These findings suggest that while proactive behavior contributes to feelings of competence in general, it may not be sufficient to offset the negative effects of unfinished tasks. This study contributes to the literature by replicating and building on prior work on unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction. It highlights the limitations of an individual's proactive behavior in buffering workplace stressors. It also offers insights for workplace practices and suggestions for potential future research.

Key words. unfinished tasks, competence need satisfaction, taking charge

Unfinished tasks and Employee Well-Being: Does Taking Charge Make a Difference?

Recent studies indicate that workplace stress has been on the rise in the last few decades and that this increase is linked to psychological demands (Rigó et al., 2020). Modern work environments are increasingly complex and require employees to operate in a more dynamic environment and handle less well-defined tasks. Organizations often demand a high degree of commitment (Grant & Parker, 2009; Kanfer et al., 2017) and employees are required to display considerable flexibility in their daily activities (Allvin et al., 2011; Jett & George, 2003; Parke et al., 2018). Problems affecting individuals range from incompatible or competing demands within their job role, a lack of clear deadlines and role ambiguity (Antón, 2008) to changes in leadership and a lack of ownership (Hulpia et al., 2009). Furthermore, changing availability norms, also as a result of hybrid working, have made it increasingly challenging to draw a clear line between work and private life. This erosion of boundaries can lead to work tasks affecting personal time, especially in job roles where employees work on more complex and longer term projects (Eichberger et al., 2022; Mohr et al., 2006).

Employees who are unable to finish tasks at work may experience a number of psychological, emotional, and behavioral effects, including burnout and impaired performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Research suggests that unfinished tasks act as a unique job stressor, influencing well-being, motivation, and work-related outcomes (Syrek & Antoni, 2014), while meta-analytic findings show that negative work-related thoughts can be associated with negative health issues (Jimenez et al., 2021). The Zeigarnik effect suggests that unfinished tasks create cognitive tension and a persistent need for completion, making individuals more likely to remember incomplete or interrupted tasks rather than those that have been successfully finished (Syrek & Antoni, 2014).

A heightened focus on these unfinished tasks can lead individuals to question their own effectiveness. People have a fundamental need to feel competent in their work, so when goals or tasks remain incomplete, this triggers feelings of incompetence, reducing well-being and causing rumination about work outside working hours. Satisfying competence needs is essential for emotional regulation and recovery from job stress (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When individuals are unable to complete their goals, they may experience a sense of failure or inadequacy that undermines their motivation and focus (Peifer et al., 2019). Substitute tasks can alleviate the strain by fulfilling similar psychological needs, such as the need for competence (Lissner, 1933; Mahler, 1933). Employees may try to compensate for the negative effects of unfinished tasks by being more proactive in their work. These behaviors involve anticipating what is needed and taking initiative to change the approach (Bindl & Parker, 2010). Taking charge can help employees regain control and fulfill psychological needs like competence. This prototypical form of proactive work behavior allows employees to maintain a sense of progress even when tasks are incomplete (Weigelt et al., 2019) and involves taking initiative to improve work processes and solve problems. This study examines whether taking charge helps individuals, by allowing them to regain a sense of control and actively shape their work environment when facing unfinished tasks. Specifically, it looks at how taking charge acts as a moderator that alleviates the negative effects of unfinished tasks on competence need satisfaction. As only a limited number of studies have addressed this interaction, replication is crucial to further explore the link between unfinished tasks and reduced competence need satisfaction.

Our study builds on their framework but uses a new sample and setting, allowing us to examine whether the effects generalize beyond the original study. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of how proactive work behaviors, specifically taking charge, influence employees'

ability to maintain a sense of competence grounded in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000), despite challenges posed by unfinished tasks. It will contribute to existing research on workplace well-being by highlighting the role of taking charge in buffering job stressors. By replicating the findings and reinforcing the evidence-based link between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction, we aim to confirm the reliability of this relationship. Our findings could help organizations develop strategies to maintain a sense of competence even if tasks remain incomplete, and promote a work environment that supports psychological needs and proactive behavior (Nahrgang et al., 2010).

Unfinished tasks and Competence Need Satisfaction

Unfinished tasks refer to work activities that an employee intended to complete but could not finish, leaving them in an incomplete or unresolved state (Syrek et al., 2017). Unfinished tasks are seen as an important job stressor (Syrek & Antoni, 2014) and can impair an individual's basic psychological needs, particularly by diminishing their sense of competence. A feeling of competence is an important element for optimal psychological growth (Coxen et al., 2021). According to the SDT, fulfilling basic psychological needs is crucial for fostering autonomous motivation, well-being, and maximizing work performance (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2019). The SDT gives context to the concept of competence need satisfaction and explains how individuals seek to fulfill their basic psychological needs to maintain motivation and well-being. Unfinished tasks may threaten competence need satisfaction because they leave employees feeling ineffective, as if they have no control over their work (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Overall, we will expand on prior research by replicating the link between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction reported by Weigelt et al. (2019). In their week-level study, they found that unfinished tasks were weakly to moderately linked to competence need

satisfaction at both within-person (r = -.14) and between-person (r = -.21) levels. Our study aligns with the between-person level, examining how different individuals' perceptions of unfinished tasks relate to competence need satisfaction. Consequently, given the theoretical background and evidence linking unfinished tasks to competence need satisfaction we suspect: Hypothesis 1: Unfinished tasks are negatively associated with competence need satisfaction.

The Moderating Role of Taking Charge

Previous research had found that the link between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction is contingent on proactive work behavior. *Taking charge* is one form of such behavior, initiated by employees to bring about positive changes in the workplace, and is especially relevant because it can help restore a sense of competence when tasks are left unfinished. It is defined as a voluntary and constructive effort to bring about organizational change, and it plays a critical role in moderating workplace stressors and fostering personal growth (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Employees demonstrate greater resilience to the negative effects of job stressors if they engage in proactive behavior, such as taking charge, and actively seek to shape their work environment to align with their needs (Parker et al., 2010). Taking charge gives employees a sense of control and accomplishment, thereby potentially reducing the negative emotional impact of unresolved tasks (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). It enables individuals to redirect their energy and focus on meaningful changes, thus enhancing job satisfaction and overall performance (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). Due to its strong focus on initiating change, taking charge is particularly effective in fast-changing organizational environments, where employees are encouraged to proactively improve work processes and contribute to ongoing development (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker et al., 2010).

Previous research has shown that forms of proactive work behavior like taking charge reduce the negative effects of unfinished tasks on competence need satisfaction. The within-person study of Weigelt et al. (2018) found that on days when employees engaged in taking charge by initiating improvements and solving problems at work, they maintained a stronger sense of competence, even when tasks remained unfinished. Specifically, their results showed that the negative relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction was significant on days when taking charge was low, but non-significant on days when taking charge was high. The interaction plot illustrated that both lines trended downward, but the slope was much less steep when employees were more proactive, suggesting that taking charge buffers the relationship.

Our study builds on the work of Weigelt et al. (2018) but takes a different angle. While their study tracked how individuals felt from day to day based on their proactivity, we investigate whether people who generally perceive more tasks to be unfinished feel less competent at work and whether this depends on how much they typically take charge. Building on this, we expect: Hypothesis 2: The relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction is moderated by taking charge.

Research Question and Hypothesis

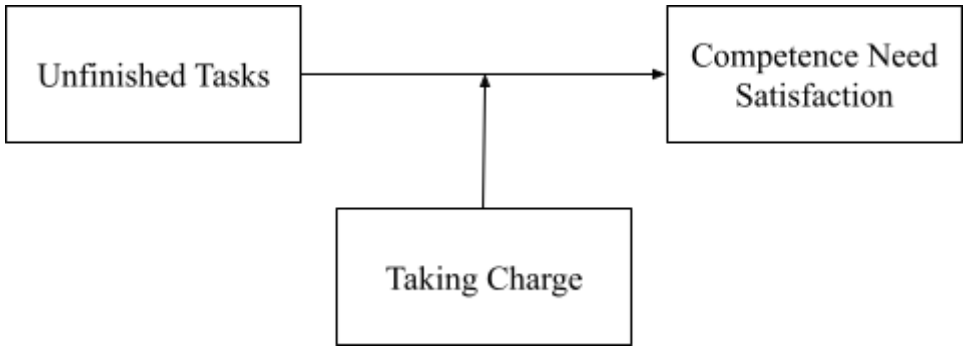
In summary, this study examines the moderating (M) effect of taking charge on the relationship between unfinished tasks (predictor variable) and competence need satisfaction (criterion variable) (Figure 1). It uses the SDT as a starting point, as this underscores the significance of fulfilling competence needs to enhance motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). By investigating this, the study will contribute to a better understanding of how individuals navigate workplace demands while maintaining psychological well-being. When

tasks remain incomplete, employees may experience a diminished sense of competence. This theoretical reasoning supports Hypothesis 1.

Proactive behaviors such as taking charge can improve work processes and empower individuals to restore control and actively address challenges in their environment. By adopting such behaviors, employees may maintain or even enhance their competence perceptions despite the presence of unfinished tasks. This rationale underpins Hypothesis 2.

Figure 1

The effect of Unfinished Tasks (predictor variable) on the Competence Need Satisfaction (criterion variable) moderated by Taking Charge (M)



Method

Procedure

To examine our hypotheses, we administered a digital questionnaire through Qualtrics using validated scales to explore how employees manage unfinished tasks. The survey used in this study was part of a broader research initiative and included a total of 15 distinct scales. However, for the purposes of this thesis, only the scales relevant to the investigation of unfinished tasks, competence need satisfaction, and taking charge were analyzed. Ethical approval for this study was not required, as it was deemed exempt by the Ethics Committee of

Psychology at the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences, University of Groningen. We used convenience sampling to recruit participants. The survey was distributed through personal networks, including friends and family and was also shared on social media platforms to reach a broader audience. An information page explaining the purpose and structure of the study was provided and participants were requested to complete a consent form. They were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they were free to withdraw at any point, and that their data would be treated confidentially and anonymously. The survey took approximately 7-12 minutes and participants were given two weeks to complete it. To ensure accessibility, all study materials, including the survey, recruitment messages, information page, and consent form were provided in English, Dutch and German, allowing respondents to select their preferred language. No incentives or compensation were offered for participation, and there were no deception or debriefing procedures.

Participants

In total, we had 135 responses, 32 of which were excluded because the data was incomplete. Of these 32 participants, 19 were excluded because they gave consent but did not fill out the questionnaire further, 12 stopped the survey after consenting and filling in demographic details, and 1 was removed because they forgot to fill out at least one item relating to our core variables of interest. This resulted in a final sample size of 103 participants.

Of this final sample of 103 participants, 52 identified as female (50.5%) and 51 as male (49.5%). Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 68 years, with a mean age of 42.32 years (*SD* = 14.98). In terms of nationality, 31 participants were Dutch (30.1%), 30 participants were German (29.1%), 22 participants were Indian (21.4%), and 20 (19.4%) represented other nationalities,

highlighting the diversity of the study population (see Appendix Table 1). The highest level of completed education was a master's degree (44.1%), followed by a bachelor's degree (29.4%), and vocational training (13.7%). The largest group of respondents worked between 31 and 40 hours per week (36.9%), followed by those who worked over 40 hours (32.0%).

Materials and Measures

All of the materials associated with the survey were created in English, Dutch and German. Furthermore, all items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicated greater levels of agreement and lower scores reflected less agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Participants had the option to leave a comment after filling out the survey.

Unfinished tasks

How participants experienced unfinished tasks was measured using six items adapted from Syrek et al. (2017). This scale captured the frequency with which employees failed to complete important, urgent, or planned tasks over the course of a typical work week. Sample items include: "At the end of the work week, I have not finished important tasks that I had planned to do." and "At the end of the work week, I need to carry many tasks into the next week." To calculate overall unfinished tasks, responses were averaged across all items, with higher scores indicating a greater number of tasks left incomplete. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Competence Need Satisfaction

Competence need satisfaction was assessed using six items from the Work-related Basic Need Satisfaction scale developed by Van den Broeck et al. (2010). This scale is designed to

measure how employees perceive their own effectiveness and sense of mastery at work. It includes both positively and negatively worded statements, such as “I feel competent at my job” and the reverse-coded “I don’t really feel competent in my job.” To calculate overall competence satisfaction, responses were averaged across all items, with higher scores reflecting a stronger sense of competence. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$).

Taking charge

Taking charge was assessed using ten items adapted from Morrison and Phelps (1999), which evaluate how individuals work to create positive change in their workplace. The scale reflects proactive behaviors such as improving processes, introducing new ideas, and tackling organizational issues. Sample items include: “I try to bring about improved procedures for the work unit or department” and “I try to correct faulty procedures or practices.” Responses were averaged to produce a total score, where higher scores reflect a stronger inclination to take initiative and promote improvements. The scale showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = .95$).

Data Analysis

We conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to test our hypotheses. First, we assessed the reliability of our measurements and provided descriptive statistics along with the correlations between our variables to gain an understanding of the data and to explore patterns relevant to our hypotheses. We then tested the assumptions underlying regression analysis: we used a residual plot to assess linearity and homoscedasticity, a P-P plot to check the assumption of normality, and variance inflation factors (VIF) to examine multicollinearity. Following these preliminary checks, we tested our main hypotheses. We tested whether unfinished tasks predict competence need satisfaction using regression analysis. Additionally, we conducted a moderator analysis by including an interaction term between unfinished tasks and taking charge to test

whether taking charge buffers the negative relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction. All data analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

We assessed the internal consistency of the scales using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. All scales demonstrated good reliability, with $\alpha = .83$ for unfinished tasks, $\alpha = .88$ for competence need satisfaction, and $\alpha = .91$ for taking charge (see Appendix, Table 2). Before calculating these reliability estimates, reverse coding was applied to negatively worded items within the competence need satisfaction scale to ensure consistency in item direction. Additionally, item-total correlations were examined for each scale and no items were removed. In conclusion, all of the scales used in this study are reliable.

Descriptive statistics revealed that participants reported relatively low to moderate levels of unfinished tasks during a typical work week ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.66$; see Appendix, Table 3). On average, participants experienced a generally high level of competence need satisfaction ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.71$; see Appendix, Table 3). In terms of the moderator, participants also reported a high tendency to take charge ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.71$; see Appendix, Table 3). These findings suggest that while unfinished tasks were generally not highly prevalent, there was meaningful variability in both competence need satisfaction and taking charge, justifying further analysis of how these variables interact.

Correlation analyses showed that unfinished tasks were moderately and negatively correlated with competence need satisfaction ($r = -.342$, $p < .001$; Table 3), suggesting that

employees who reported more unfinished tasks tended to feel less competent in their work. In contrast, taking charge was not significantly correlated with unfinished tasks (r = -.062, p = .533; Table 3) indicating no meaningful relationship between the extent of unfinished tasks and employees' proactive behavior. Finally, competence need satisfaction was moderately and positively correlated to taking charge (r = 0.472, p < .001; Table 3). This suggests that employees who feel more competent at work are also more likely to engage in proactive behaviors. These findings indicate that while unfinished tasks are significantly related to lower competence need satisfaction, taking charge is positively associated with competence but shows no direct relationship with unfinished tasks at the bivariate level.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations Between Unfinished Tasks, Competence Need Satisfaction, and Taking Charge

	Unfinished Tasks	Competence Need Satisfaction	Taking Charge
Unfinished Tasks	1	-.342 <.001	-.062 .533
Competence Need Satisfaction	-.342 <.001	1	.473 <.001
Taking Charge	-.062 .533	.473 <.001	1

Note. Sample size (n) = 103; Correlation type = Pearson Correlation (2-tailed)

Before running the analyses, we assessed the assumptions for linear regression, including linearity, homoscedasticity, normality, and multicollinearity. The residual plot showed no clear patterns, indicating that the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were met (see Appendix, Figure 1). The P-P plot suggested that the data was approximately normally

distributed (see Appendix, Figure 2). Multicollinearity was not an issue, as all variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below the accepted threshold of 4 (VIF = 1.00; Table 4)

Main Analysis

To examine the first hypothesis, we conducted a linear regression analysis (Table 4). The results showed a significant negative relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction (β = -0.34, t = -3.652, $p < .001$). The standardized regression coefficient was identical to the Pearson correlation (r = -.342), as expected in a bivariate model. Including this regression helps illustrate both the size and direction of the effect within a predictive model, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1.

Table 4

Regression Coefficients Predicting Competence Need Satisfaction on Unfinished Tasks

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Coefficients Std. Error	Beta	t		VIF
Constant	4.736	.226		20.992	< .001	
Unfinished Tasks	-.347	.095	-.342	-3.652	< .001	1.000

To test our second hypothesis, that taking charge moderates the relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction, we included the interaction term between unfinished tasks and taking charge in the model (Table 5). However, the interaction effect was not significant (t = 1.222, p = .225, β = 0.10, SE = 0.13), suggesting that taking charge did not significantly buffer the negative effect of unfinished tasks on competence need satisfaction. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 5

Regression Coefficients Predicting Competence Need Satisfaction on Unfinished Tasks, Taking Charge, and Their Interaction

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Coefficients Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	VIF
Constant	3.953	.058		68.239	< .001	
Unfinished Tasks	-.317	.084	-.311	-3.781	< .001	1.004
Taking Charge	.453	.082	.456	5.538	< .001	1.004
TC*UT	.153	.125	0.100	1.222	.225	1.001

Note. The outcome variable was competence need satisfaction. TC*UT is the interaction term of taking charge and unfinished tasks.

One key aim of this analysis was to examine how much additional variance in competence need satisfaction could be explained by taking charge and its interaction with unfinished tasks. In the first model (Table 6), unfinished tasks alone accounted for 11.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .117$, $F(1, 101) = 13.34$, $p < .001$). Adding taking charge as a second predictor in Model 2 significantly increased the explained variance by 20.5% to 32.2% ($\Delta R^2 = .205$, $F(1, 100) = 30.28$, $p < .001$). In Model 3, we added the interaction term between unfinished tasks and taking charge to test for moderation. This addition increased the explained variance by only 1.0%, which was not statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .010$, $F(1, 99) = 1.49$, $p = .225$). These results suggest that while taking charge contributes meaningfully to competence need satisfaction, it does not moderate the relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction.

Table 6

Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.342[a]	.117	.108	.668	.117	13.335	1	101	< .001
2	.567[b]	.322	.308	.588	.205	30.278	1	100	< .001
3	.576[c]	.332	.312	.587	.010	1.494	1	99	.225

Note. a. Predictors (Constant), unfinished tasks

b. Predictors (Constant), unfinished tasks, taking charge

c. Predictors (Constant), unfinished tasks, taking charge, interaction

Discussion

The present study aimed to deepen the understanding of how unfinished tasks relate to competence need satisfaction in the workplace. This is grounded in the SDT, which identifies competence, autonomy, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). We focused specifically on competence, as it is most directly tied to employees' sense of effectiveness, mastery, and task completion and therefore essential for optimal functioning and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). We proposed that unfinished tasks may hinder employees' sense of effectiveness and mastery. Consistent with our first hypothesis, we found a moderate negative association between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction, supporting the view that unfinished tasks can undermine well-being. Additionally, we examined whether taking charge, a form of proactive work behavior, could buffer this relationship. Although taking charge was positively associated with competence need satisfaction

overall, it did not significantly moderate the negative effects of unfinished tasks. These findings suggest that while taking charge may contribute to a general sense of competence, it may not be sufficient to counteract the negative effects of unfinished tasks.

Theoretical Implications

Our study revealed a negative association between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction. The findings align with the SDT which emphasizes the key role that competence need satisfaction plays in optimal functioning and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). It also builds on research on basic need thwarting, which shows that job stressors can actively frustrate basic psychological needs and negatively affect well-being (Bartholomew et al., 2011). Consistent with recent research in organizational psychology, our findings replicate and extend those of Weigelt et al. (2019) by shifting the focus from affective rumination to competence need satisfaction. We found a significant negative relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction and the high degree of similarity in effect sizes further underscored the robustness and reliability of this association.

We examined taking charge as a potential moderator, given its relevance as a proactive work behavior that helps individuals cope with workplace demands (Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Parker et al., 2010). However, taking charge did not significantly moderate the relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction. The strong correlation between competence need satisfaction and taking charge may have limited our ability to detect a moderation effect, a common issue when predictor variables are interrelated (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen et al., 2003). Moreover, the small sample size likely reduced the statistical power needed to identify interaction effects (McClelland & Judd, 1993).

Despite the non-significant interaction, taking charge explained a substantial proportion of variance in competence need satisfaction. This suggests that while it may not buffer the negative impact of unfinished tasks, it remains a meaningful predictor of competence need satisfaction. This aligns with research showing that proactive behaviors can enhance competence-related outcomes. For instance, Parker et al. (2010) highlight that beliefs like self-efficacy and perceived control support proactivity, which in turn may foster feelings of competence. By incorporating a moderator analysis, our research adds to the theoretical understanding of the extent to which unfinished tasks undermine competence need satisfaction.

Additionally, the findings contribute to the literature on proactive work behavior, specifically taking charge, by showing how it can help employees cope with setbacks arising from goal disruption.

Practical Implications

The relationship between unfinished tasks and competence need satisfaction is highly relevant in the context of workplace well-being, given that a diminished sense of competence can negatively impact motivation, recovery, and overall mental health (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Syrek et al., 2017). Although our findings do not establish causal explanations for what leads to unfinished tasks, they suggest that encouraging employees to take charge may help buffer the negative effects. While taking charge does not eliminate the strain associated with unfinished tasks, it does appear to contribute positively to competence need satisfaction. This finding aligns with the dynamic model proposed by Urbach and Weigelt (2019), who found that employees often respond to time pressure with proactive behavior to regain control over their work environment. In addition to serving as an immediate coping strategy, their study also shows that

taking charge can be a longer-term preventive measure through more effective planning and task management. This complements our suggestion that fostering proactive behavior could be a key organizational strategy to address the competence-related strain associated with unfinished tasks.

Although taking charge was positively associated with competence need satisfaction and showed potential as a psychological resource, it did not significantly buffer the negative impact of unfinished tasks. This suggests that while proactive behaviors like taking charge can support general feelings of competence, they may not be sufficient to buffer the effects of unfinished tasks. Therefore, it is important for organizations to develop and implement interventions that promote proactive behavior. Parker et al. (2010) provide a framework for such interventions in their model of proactive motivation. They highlight competence-related beliefs, like self-efficacy and perceived control in motivating people to take initiative. Supporting these beliefs through constructive feedback, mastery experiences, or thoughtful job design may help employees become more proactive. Since taking charge can also enhance feelings of competence over time, this may create a positive cycle. Strengthening this dynamic could help employees stay on top of their work and reduce the build-up or strain of unfinished tasks.

Strengths and Limitations

This study yielded interesting results and demonstrates several noticeable strengths. All core variables were measured using well-validated and reliable scales, enhancing the internal consistency of the findings. Additionally, the sample included participants from various nationalities, age ranges, and educational levels. This diversity strengthens the ecological validity of the study and suggests that the results may be relevant for different types of people and workplace settings. Finally, by building on the work of Weigelt et al. (2019), the study supports

the previous findings while adding a new perspective by showing that, at the between-person level, taking charge independently contributes to feelings of competence at work. While the Weigelt et al. (2019) study captured taking charge as a more dynamic, within-person process, our results suggest that employees who generally take more initiative tend to feel more competent at work.

Nevertheless, limitations should also be addressed. The sample was recruited using convenience sampling, mainly through personal networks and social media. This approach increases the risk of sampling bias, as the participants may share similar backgrounds or characteristics. As a result, the findings may not be fully representative of the broader working population, which limits the generalizability of the results to other workplace settings or demographic groups. Another limitation of our study is the inability to establish causal relationships between the variables (Spector, 2019). The study has a cross-sectional design, indicating no causal inferences can be made and it is unclear whether unfinished tasks cause reduced competence or whether other factors are at play as well. Furthermore, the non-significant interaction effect may partly reflect the small sample size, which limits the power to detect moderation (McClelland & Judd, 1993). A larger and more diverse sample might yield different results.

Future Research

To begin with, future research could use stratified or random sampling across different industries, countries, and organizational roles to enhance representativeness and test whether the observed patterns are similar in diverse work environments (Aguinis & Vandenberg, 2014). Furthermore, given the cross-sectional design, longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to

assess causal relationships between unfinished tasks, competence need satisfaction, and taking charge. For instance, experimental studies could simulate workplace situations with different scenarios for task completion and opportunities to take charge, enabling researchers to examine how these factors influence competence-related outcomes (Frese et al., 1997). This would help clarify whether unfinished tasks lead to diminished competence, or whether individuals who feel less competent are more likely to leave tasks unfinished (Spector, 2019; Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Third, the non-significant interaction may have been due to limited statistical power. Replicating this study with a larger and more diverse sample may more effectively determine whether taking charge has a moderating effect under different conditions or within specific industries or job types (McClelland & Judd, 1993; Aiken & West, 1991). Fourth, although taking charge did not moderate the effect of unfinished tasks in this study, future research should examine other potential moderators that might buffer the negative impact of unfinished tasks on well-being. For example, variables such as job autonomy, managerial support, or mindfulness may influence how employees respond to unfinished work (Parker et al., 2010; Hülsheger et al., 2013). And finally, since taking charge still explained a significant portion of variance in competence need satisfaction, future studies could explore how different types of proactive behaviors, such as voice, feedback-seeking and job crafting contribute to competence need satisfaction. It is possible that combinations of proactive strategies would be more effective than individual behaviors alone (Parker & Collins, 2008; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

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Statement of AI

This document was developed by me, the author, with AI assistance used solely for language correction and refinement. In accordance with academic guidelines, AI tools, specifically ChatGPT- 4, were employed to improve grammar, clarity, and readability. The substantive content, analysis, and conclusions remain the original work of the author. AI tools were not used for generating ideas, conducting research, or formulating arguments. The use of AI aligns with permitted functionalities, such as language correction and assistance, as outlined in the UG policy.

Appendix

Table 1

Nationality of Participants

	Frequency	Percent
American	7	6,8
Austrian	1	1
British	1	1
Canadian	1	1
Cypriot	1	1
Dutch	31	30,1
Egyptian	1	1
German	30	29,1
Indian	22	21,4
Kenyan	1	1
Norwegian	1	1
Pakistani	1	1
Polish	1	1
Romanian	1	1
Singaporean	1	1
Turkish	1	1
Total	103	100

Figure 1

Scatterplot of residuals to test for linearity and homoscedasticity for hypothesis 1

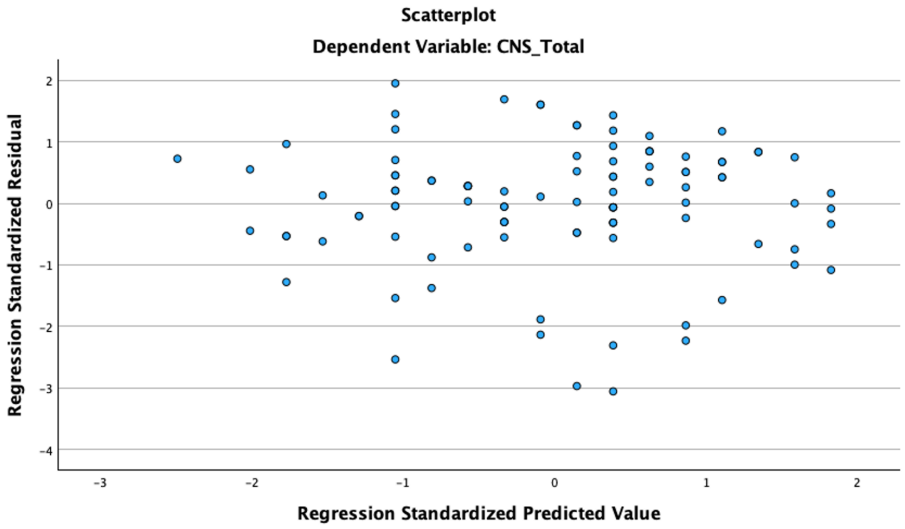

Figure 2

P-P plot to check for normality in hypothesis 1 - Regression analysis between Unfinished Tasks and Competence Need Satisfaction

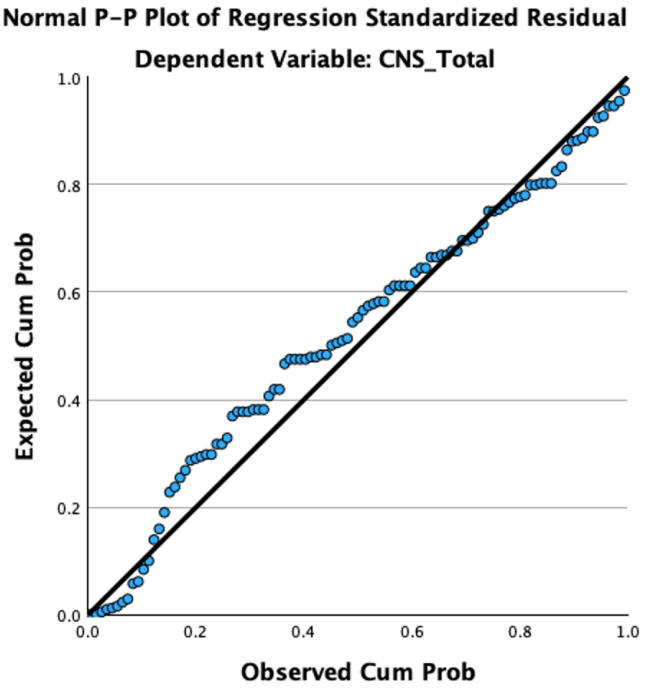

Table 2

Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Unfinished Tasks	.83
Competence Need Satisfaction	.88
Taking Charge	.91

Table 3

Descriptives

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Unfinished Tasks	2.27	0.66	103
Competence Need Satisfaction	3.95	0.71	103
Taking Charge	3.75	0.71	103