The Burden of Unfinished Work: How Regulatory Focus Influences Rumination

in the Face of Unfinished Tasks

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Abstract

Unfinished tasks are a common feature of modern work life, often intruding on employees' time off and leaving them mentally preoccupied. This study examines why some people engage in more affective rumination than others in response to unfinished tasks, focusing on individual motivation styles—specifically, whether they are driven more by hopes and growth (promotion focus) or by duties and safety (prevention focus). Drawing on theories of goal pursuit and self-regulation, we hypothesized that regulatory focus moderates the relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination—such that individuals high in prevention focus would experience more affective rumination, while those high in promotion focus would be less affected. To test this, we conducted a survey among 98 working adults using validated questionnaires. Participants reported how many unfinished tasks they had and how much they engaged in affective rumination, defined as emotionally preoccupied thoughts about work during off-hours. We also assessed their motivational tendencies in terms of regulatory focus (promotion and prevention focus). The results confirmed that unfinished tasks were linked to greater affective rumination. However, contrary to our expectations, individual differences in promotion and prevention focus did not moderate this relationship. Regardless of regulatory focus, people with more unfinished tasks experienced more affective rumination. These findings suggest that unfinished tasks are powerful triggers for affective rumination, cutting across personality differences. While motivational traits may influence how people work, they may matter less once work is left unfinished. This has practical implications: instead of relying on individual resilience, organizations can support well-being by helping employees finish their work or mentally detach after work.

Keywords: unfinished tasks, rumination, regulatory focus, work stress, recovery

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Unfinished tasks are a prevalent aspect of modern work life, often leaving employees with lingering thoughts about work during off-job time (Syrek et al., 2017). Struggling to mentally detach from work during off-job time can lead to a persistent cognitive load, negatively affecting individuals' mental health and overall well-being (Syrek & Antoni, 2014). Unfinished tasks have been linked to work-related rumination (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011), a repetitive thought process where individuals continuously focus on work-related issues outside of working hours (Weigelt et al., 2019). Among the different types of rumination, affective rumination is understood as a form of repetitive thinking that centers on one's emotional experiences, particularly negative emotions (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011). This type of rumination has been identified as particularly detrimental, contributing to heightened stress levels, burnout, and impaired recovery (Kinnunen et al., 2017). Given that empirical evidence linking unfinished tasks and work-related thoughts has accumulated, it becomes increasingly relevant to investigate variables that may serve as leverage points for intervention.

Although there is strong evidence linking unfinished tasks to affective rumination, less is known about when and for whom this link is stronger or weaker. In particular, the contingencies or psychological mechanisms that moderate this relationship remain underexplored. Understanding these moderating factors is crucial, as they can help explain individual variation in employees' responses to unfinished work. One promising direction is to better understand individual differences in responses to unfinished tasks. Researchers have turned to theories of self-regulation, which offer insight into how people manage goals and react to goal disruption (Martin & Tesser, 1996). One such framework is Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT), which explains how individuals approach goal pursuit and cope with tasks

(Brockner & Higgins, 2001). According to RFT, individuals operate under two self-regulatory orientations: promotion focus and prevention focus.

Promotion-focused individuals are driven by aspirations, ideals, and a desire for growth and advancement. They tend to adopt an eager strategy in goal pursuit, seeking positive outcomes and embracing change and innovation (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). In the context of unfinished tasks, this orientation may lead individuals to interpret incomplete work as opportunities for future success or personal development. As a result, they may be less likely to dwell on the negative aspects of incompletion and, therefore, less prone to engage in affective rumination (Higgins, 1998). Prevention-focused individuals, in contrast, are motivated by duties, responsibilities, and a need to avoid negative outcomes. They tend to adopt a vigilant strategy in goal pursuit, emphasizing safety, obligation, and the avoidance of failure (Higgins, 1998). When confronted with unfinished tasks, prevention-focused individuals may perceive them as failures to meet obligations or fulfill responsibilities. This orientation can intensify negative emotional responses to task incompletion, making them more vulnerable to affective rumination (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). This distinction suggests that regulatory focus may shape how people react to unfinished tasks and determine whether they engage in affective rumination. This study aims to address this gap by investigating whether individuals' regulatory focus influences the extent to which unfinished tasks trigger affective rumination.

Linking Unfinished Tasks to Affective Rumination

Affective rumination refers to persistent, emotionally charged thoughts about work-related issues that are experienced during non-work time, which can prevent psychological detachment and recovery (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011). Conceptually, unfinished tasks maintain cognitive activation because they represent a discrepancy between current progress and goal completion, making it difficult for individuals to mentally disengage from

work (Weigelt & Syrek, 2017). This ongoing mental engagement aligns with the Zeigarnik effect, which suggests that people remember incomplete tasks more vividly, leading to continued focus until closure is reached (Zeigarnik, 1927). Similarly, Control Theory (Carver & Scheier, 1990) explains that people monitor discrepancies between their current state and their goals, and unfinished tasks keep this discrepancy active in cognition, promoting continued mental engagement.

Given these conceptual links, it is understandable why unfinished tasks are associated with affective rumination, which involves repeated negative emotional thoughts about work (Weigelt et al., 2019). More generally, unfinished tasks have been shown to relate not only to affective rumination but also to other forms of work-related thinking, such as reduced psychological detachment (Smit, 2016; Weigelt & Syrek, 2017) and problem-solving pondering (Syrek et al., 2017), illustrating the broader tendency for unfinished work to maintain work-related cognitive activity during off-job time.

Empirical evidence supports a positive association between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. For instance, Syrek et al. (2017) found that employees who reported more unfinished tasks at the end of the workday experienced increased affective rumination during the evening. Similarly, Weigelt et al. (2019a, 2019b) demonstrated that unfinished tasks were a significant predictor of affective rumination across multiple workdays. Based on this body of research, we hypothesize that the presence of unfinished work acts as a cognitive antecedent for work-related affective rumination.

H1: Unfinished tasks at work are positively associated with work-related affective rumination.

Regulatory Focus as a Moderating Variable

While evidence consistently supports the link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination, it remains unclear why some individuals are more prone to ruminate in the face of

unfinished work than others. Understanding the contingencies that strengthen or weaken this relationship is essential for both theoretical development and practical application. One promising framework to explain such individual differences is Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT).

Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) distinguishes between two self-regulatory orientations: promotion focus and prevention focus (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). According to RFT, promotion focus is "a self-regulation system concerned with hopes, accomplishments, and aspirations, oriented toward achieving positive outcomes" (Higgins, 1997). Prevention focus, by contrast, is "a self-regulation system concerned with safety, responsibilities, and the avoidance of negative outcomes or losses" (Higgins, 1997). These orientations are not opposite ends of a single continuum but represent distinct, coexisting motivational tendencies (Higgins, 1997). Research shows that individuals higher in prevention focus are more susceptible to anxiety and emotional exhaustion in response to unresolved work challenges (Brockner & Higgins, 2001), whereas those with higher promotion focus report lower levels of stress and intrusive thoughts under similar conditions (Higgins, 1998; Jimenez et al., 2021). These general associations suggest that regulatory focus shapes how people respond emotionally and cognitively to workplace demands.

Individuals with higher levels of prevention focus are more likely to view unfinished tasks as failures that jeopardize their sense of responsibility and job security (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Due to their heightened sensitivity to potential risks and losses, they may find it challenging to disengage from unfinished tasks. This difficulty can lead to persistent, distressing thoughts about unfinished responsibilities, as the perceived discrepancy between current and desired goal states makes affective rumination in the face of unfinished tasks more likely (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Martin & Tesser, 1996).

H2a: Prevention focus strengthens the positive relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination.

Individuals reporting higher levels of promotion focus tend to be forward-thinking and inclined to see unfinished tasks as temporary setbacks rather than sources of persistent concern. They often engage in cognitive reappraisal, reframing unfinished work as an opportunity for growth and future improvement (Wytykowska & Gabińska, 2015). Because they are motivated by advancement and progress, they may experience less distress when tasks are incomplete and more readily shift their attention to upcoming goals. This adaptability can reduce the tendency to engage in affective rumination in the face of unfinished tasks (Jimenez et al., 2021).

H2b: Promotion focus weakens the positive relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination.

Methods

Procedure

The research project, conducted collaboratively by students from the University of Groningen, explores the connection between unfinished tasks and a range of outcome variables as well as potential moderating factors. This study used a cross-sectional correlational design to investigate the association between unfinished tasks and affective rumination, with the individual's regulatory focus serving as a moderating factor. The study was exempt from formal examination by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen. Participants were recruited by students, where they were asked to refer the participation link to their social network.

The study consisted of an online questionnaire administered on the web-based platform Qualtrics, comprising four parts and an expected duration of 7 to 12 minutes. Participants first provided consent after reading a form outlining the study's focus on

unfinished tasks and detachment from work. It assured confidentiality, anonymity, use for research only, and explained they could exit the survey at any time. The survey began with demographic questions, followed by items about participants' education. Next, participants provided details about their current work, including their position and average working hours. The second section explored their work experiences, assessing expectations, unfinished tasks, performance, and work approach. The third section focused on general beliefs and behaviors, such as stress beliefs, reflection habits, task approach, and self-perception. The final section addressed how participants spent and experienced time after work, including work's interference with leisure and recovery.

Upon completion, participants were thanked, informed about the study's purpose, and reminded their responses were anonymous. They received researcher contact details for questions, could request a summary of the findings, and were invited to leave any remarks or feedback about the survey.

Sample

Participants were required to be employed full time or part time, to be proficient in English, Dutch or German and to be above 18 years old. All participants needed to provide informed consent before their data could be used. Participants were recruited through third year psychology students enrolled in the course Bachelor Thesis (PSB3E-BT15) from the University of Groningen. This ended up providing a sample of 98 participants with age ranging from 21 to 68 years old ($M = 39$, $SD = 13$). Most participants were from Germany (34%), followed by The Netherlands (30%). There were slightly more female participants (55%) than male participants (45%) in the study. The distribution showed that most participants worked between 31 and 40 hours per week, followed by those working more than 40 hours, indicating a majority with substantial weekly work commitments.

Measures

We employed established scales from previous studies in our research. Each scale was accessible in English, Dutch, and German, and all demonstrated excellent reliability. The variables of our study were unfinished tasks, affective rumination and regulatory focus— specifically, promotion focus and prevention focus.

Unfinished Tasks

Unfinished tasks were measured using 6 items from Syrek et al. (2017), rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" ($\alpha = .93$). Participants were asked to refer to a typical work week when responding. Examples of such items included "*At the end of the workweek, I have not finished a large amount of due tasks*" and "*At the end of the workweek, I need to carry many tasks into the next week*".

Affective Rumination

Work-related rumination was measured using five items from the Work-Related Rumination Questionnaire (Cropley et al., 2012), rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" ($\alpha = .90$). Examples of such items included "*I get annoyed by thinking about work-related issues when not a*t work" and "*I become tense when I think about work-related issues during my free time*".

Regulatory Focus

The Regulatory Focus Scale for Work Settings (RFSS; Ouschan et al., 2007) was used for this variable. It consists of 16 items, with eight items representing the promotion strategies subscale and eight items representing the prevention strategies subscale. In the present study, only a subset of items was selected from each subscale for brevity and clarity. Specifically, items with the highest factor loadings were chosen to ensure the scales' validity while maintaining a concise and clear measurement.

Promotion Focus. This construct was measured using three items from the promotion subscale of the RFSS (Ouschan et al., 2007). Participants rated their agreement on a 5-point

Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" ($\alpha = .73$). The items included statements such as "*You have to take risks if you want to avoid failing*" and "*The worst thing you can do when trying to achieve a goal is to worry about making mistakes*".

Prevention Focus. Similarly, prevention focus was measured using three items from the prevention subscale of the RFSS (Ouschan et al., 2007), rated on the same 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha = .78$). The items included statements such as "*Being cautious is the best policy for success*" and "*To achieve something, one must be cautious*".

Analytical Strategy

We conducted our data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28), employing multiple linear regression to test our hypotheses. Before proceeding with the regression, we evaluated the reliability of our measures by examining Cronbach's alpha and the intercorrelations among variables. We also generated descriptive statistics to gain an initial understanding of the data. Composite scores were calculated for each variable, after which we assessed the assumptions for regression analysis. Specifically, we used a residual plot to evaluate linearity and homoscedasticity, a P-P plot to assess normality, and the variance inflation factor to check for multicollinearity. To test our hypotheses, we modeled affective rumination as an outcome of unfinished tasks, regulatory focus, and their interaction. Additionally, we analyzed the significance of the correlations, allowing us to explore both the main effect (H1) and the moderating effect (H2).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

To check our two hypotheses, whether unfinished tasks are linked to affective rumination (H1) and if promotion and prevention focus moderates that relationship (H2), we conducted a multiple linear regression and a moderation analysis. We verified the assumptions for the regression analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to check the internal

consistency reliability. The reliability of our scales ranged from poor to good: unfinished tasks (α = .85), affective rumination (α = .89), and prevention focus (α = .82) all showed good reliability, while promotion focus demonstrated poor reliability (α = .56; see Discussion for implications).

Participants reported few unfinished tasks during a typical working week (M = 2.2, SD = 0.7; see Table 1) and occasional affective rumination during their leisure time (M = 2.8, SD = 0.9). On average, participants exhibited a relatively high promotion focus (M = 3.5, SD = 0.7), indicating a strong tendency to pursue aspirations and gains, whereas their prevention focus was somewhat lower (M = 2.9, SD = 0.9), reflecting a lesser emphasis on security and obligation.

The residual plot (see Figure A1) shows that the residuals were scattered randomly around zero. Therefore, the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were met. In the P-P plot (see Figure A2), no points deviated systematically, assuming normality. As depicted in Table 2 & 3, the variance inflation factor for all variables lay below four, ruling out multicollinearity. Therefore, we met all assumptions for our regression analysis.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients

	Mean	SD	UT	AR	Promotion	Prevention
Unfinished tasks	2.252	.697	-			
Affective rumination	2.831	.943	0.30**	-		
Promotion focus	3.503	.736	0.10	0.09	-	
Prevention focus	2.918	.876	0.03	0.03	0.15	-

Note. n = 98; **p < .001.

Table 2

Regression analysis (Promotion Focus)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.846	.092		30.94	<.001		
Unfinished tasks	.431	.135	.319	3.192	.002	.950	1.053
Promotion focus	.030	.129	.023	.234	.816	.937	1.068
Unfinished tasks × Promotion focus	-.285	.207	-.140	-1.37	.173	.919	1.089

Note. Dependent Variable: Affective_Rum

Table 3

Regression analysis (Prevention Focus)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.830	.092		30.64	<.001		
Unfinished tasks	.402	.133	.297	3.01	.003	.999	1.001
Prevention focus	.027	.106	.025	.251	.802	.997	1.003
Unfinished tasks × Prevention focus	.046	.149	.030	.308	.759	.997	1.003

Note. Dependent Variable: Affective_Rum

Unfinished Tasks and Affective Rumination and Regulatory Focus

As shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3, a moderate positive relation between unfinished tasks and affective rumination exists, $r(98) = .31$, $p < .01$ (also see Figure A3). This is in line with our first hypothesis. In contrast, we found no support for our second hypothesis. The results presented in Table 2 indicate that promotion focus did not moderate the association between unfinished tasks and affective rumination ($\beta = -.14$, $SE = .21$, $p = .17$). Similarly, the results presented in Table 3 indicate that prevention focus did not moderate the association between unfinished tasks and affective rumination ($\beta = .03$, $SE = .15$, $p = .76$). Our regression model

for promotion explains 9 percent of the variance in the data ($R^2 = .09$). Our regression model for prevention explains 10.9 percent of the variance in the data ($R^2 = .10$).

Discussion

The present study examined whether individual differences in regulatory focus (Higher promotion vs. higher prevention focus) moderate the well‑established positive association between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. Consistent with Control Theory and the Zeigarnik effect, employees carrying more unfinished tasks reported greater affective rumination during nonwork time. Contrary to expectations, neither prevention focus nor promotion focus significantly moderated this relationship, suggesting that trait regulatory orientations may play a less pivotal role in shaping after‑hours rumination than previously theorized.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings reinforce the notion that unfinished tasks remain cognitively active and elicit maladaptive, emotionally charged thoughts outside work (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Zeigarnik, 1927). Importantly, the absence of moderation by regulatory focus nuances existing self‑regulation models in several ways.

First, the presumed boundary conditions for Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT; Higgins, 1997) warrant refinement. RFT posits that individuals with high levels of prevention focus are particularly sensitive to unmet obligations and should therefore exhibit stronger rumination (Higgins, 1997). The null moderation observed here suggests that, in contexts where goal discrepancies are highly salient—such as carrying over unfinished work—situational intensity may override trait‑based motivational differences. In such high-salience situations, individual differences in regulatory focus may be overshadowed by the intensity of the task-related cues (Wang et al., 2020). That is, when unfinished tasks loom large, even individuals with a promotion focus may experience affective rumination, because the situational demands are

too strong to buffer against. Future theorizing should thus incorporate task salience or complexity as potential moderators of regulatory focus effects on rumination. Notably, workplace factors such as high job demands, low autonomy, and complex task structures may further exacerbate this tendency, making it difficult for employees to disengage from work-related concerns (Syrek et al., 2017).

Second, our results speak to the distinction between affective and problem‑solving rumination. Although individuals with high levels of promotion focus are argued to reframe setbacks as growth opportunities (Jimenez et al., 2021), they did not report lower affective rumination about incomplete tasks. This implies that affective rumination may be less susceptible to cognitive reappraisal strategies than problem‑solving rumination. Theoretical accounts should more clearly specify when and why different rumination types differentially respond to self‑regulatory strategies.

Third, the ambiguous findings regarding regulatory focus moderation may partly reflect methodological constraints such as low reliability of the promotion focus measure (α = .56) and limited sample size (n = 98; Murphy, 2021). These issues highlight challenges in capturing complex motivational traits and detecting subtle interaction effects. Future research should seek to replicate these findings using longer, validated scales and larger samples to clarify the role of regulatory focus as a potential moderator (RFSS; Ouschan et al., 2007).

Rather than drawing firm conclusions, our findings call for more nuanced models that account for situational intensity, distinguish rumination types, and ensure reliable measurement of trait constructs. Nonetheless, the basic correlational link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination was clear, and this may offer preliminary guidance for practice. Strategies that reduce the cognitive burden of unfinished tasks—such as end‑of‑day checklists, brief "closure rituals," or clear task‑completion protocols—could help reduce

affective rumination, independent of individual regulatory tendencies (Agolli & Holtz, 2023; Karabinski et al., 2021; Smit, 2015).

Strengths and Limitations

A primary strength of this study is its theoretically grounded test of regulatory focus as a moderator within a validated model of affective rumination. The measures for unfinished tasks and affective rumination demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$ and $\alpha = .89$, respectively), bolstering confidence in those findings. The study also contributes to the literature by replicating the well-established link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination, while simultaneously examining individual differences in self-regulation.

However, several limitations warrant consideration. First, the cross‑sectional, self‑report design precludes causal inference. Although theory suggests that unfinished tasks trigger rumination, it is equally plausible that individuals predisposed to rumination perceive more tasks as incomplete (Johnson et al., 2014). Longitudinal or experimental designs are therefore needed to establish temporal precedence.

Second, the promotion focus scale exhibited low internal consistency ($\alpha = .56$), raising concerns about the reliability of this construct in the present study. A shortened version of the Regulatory Focus Scale for Work Settings (RFSS; Ouschan et al., 2007) was employed to reduce participant burden. While reducing item count is a common strategy in field research to limit participant fatigue, shortening validated scales without rigorous psychometric validation can compromise reliability and construct validity (Heggestad et al., 2019). Items were selected based on their factor loadings in prior validation studies to preserve construct validity. However, despite this data-driven selection approach, reliability remained low. This suggests that factor loadings alone may not be sufficient to ensure adequate internal consistency when abbreviating established scales. It is possible that the selected items failed to capture the full conceptual breadth of promotion focus, leading to increased measurement

error and attenuated statistical relationships. Given that longer versions of the RFSS have demonstrated stronger psychometric properties (Ouschan et al., 2007), future research should consider using the full scale or apply more comprehensive item-reduction techniques—such as confirmatory factor analysis or item response theory—followed by revalidation in the target population.

Third, the relatively modest sample size may have limited statistical power to detect interaction effects. Therefore, while the present findings suggest that regulatory focus may not serve as a strong moderator in the relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination, this conclusion should be interpreted with caution. Null effects may reflect true theoretical boundaries—or alternatively—methodological limitations, such as insufficient power and measurement error (Murphy, 2021).

Finally, reliance on a convenience sample of student-recruited workers may limit generalizability to occupations characterized by high complexity or tight deadlines. Replication in more diverse occupational contexts is recommended to assess the robustness of these findings across job types.

Despite these limitations, the study's direct test of regulatory focus theory (RFT) as a moderator and the replication of the main effect between unfinished tasks and rumination provide a solid foundation for subsequent investigations into the antecedents of work-related rumination.

Scope for Future Research

Several directions emerge from our findings. First, diary and experimental studies could elucidate causal dynamics. Diary designs measuring unfinished tasks and rumination multiple times per day would clarify within‑person processes. However, future research should carefully consider the timing of these measurements. Tasks left unfinished at midday, for instance, may not evoke rumination, as there is still a clear opportunity for completion.

Capturing the cognitive impact of truly unresolved tasks—such as those at the end of the workday—would provide a more accurate understanding of when unfinished tasks become problematic. Experimental manipulations (e.g., assigning participants to complete vs. leave tasks unfinished) could further isolate causal effects and examine the short‑term impact of regulatory focus priming.

Second, researchers should explore alternative moderators and mediators. Individual differences such as trait rumination, need for closure, or conscientiousness, as well as situational factors like workload or leader expectations, may better predict vulnerability to rumination (Grant & Beck, 2010). Mediational models could also test whether unfinished tasks evoke negative affect, which in turn drives affective rumination.

Third, the development of a work‑context‑specific regulatory focus measure with stronger psychometric properties is essential. Differentiating stable orientations from within‑person fluctuations may reveal whether temporary shifts in focus influence rumination episodes (Hjartarson et al., 2021).

Finally, intervention studies should evaluate the efficacy of "closure rituals" (e.g., structured end‑of‑day planning, Karabinski et al., 2021) in reducing rumination and examine whether such interventions are equally beneficial across regulatory focus orientations.

Conclusion

In sum, this study confirms the robust link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination, while challenging the assumption that trait regulatory focus meaningfully moderates this relationship. By highlighting the primacy of task closure over individual differences in self‑regulation, our findings inform both organizational practices and theoretical models of work‑related rumination.

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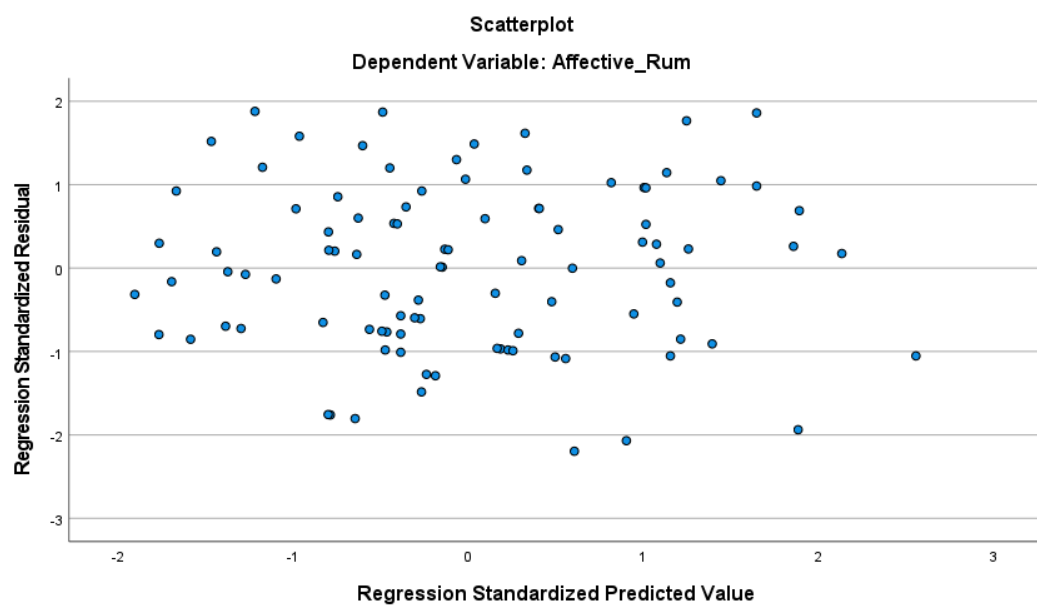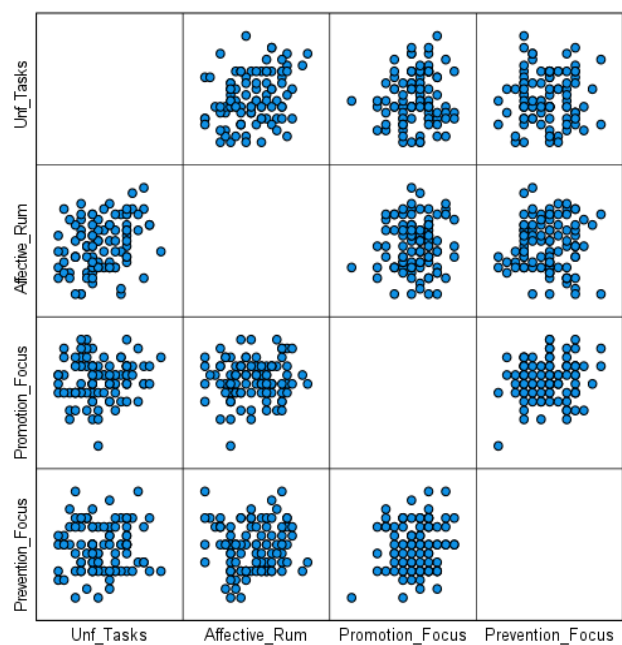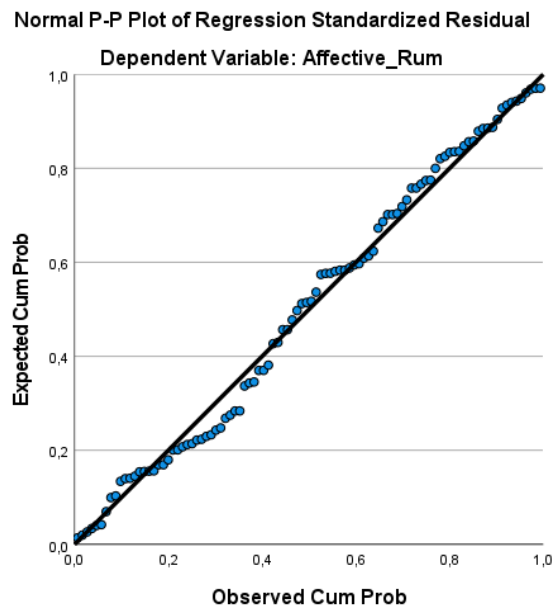
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Appendix A

Figure 1

Figure 2

2.1 Promotion Focus

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: Affective_Rum

2.2 Prevention Focus

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Dependent Variable: Affective_Rum
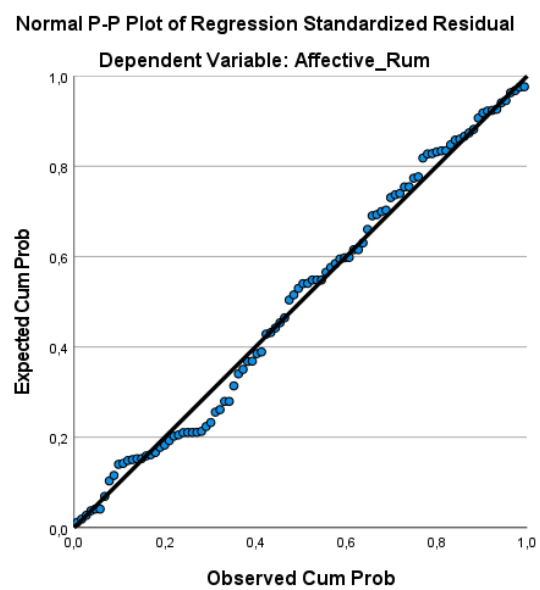
Appendix B

Survey Instrument

Introduction

This survey explored how employees deal with unfinished tasks and manage to switch off during off-job time. The aim of this research is to identify which strategies work best and detect ways to improve employee well-being. The survey consisted of four parts: demographic information, work-related experiences, general beliefs and behaviors, and work-life balance / sleep / recovery.

Part 1: Demographic Information

Participants were asked to provide basic demographic information and general information about their work.

- What is your gender? (Woman / Man / Non-binary / Prefer not to say)

- What is your age? (open-ended)

- What is your nationality? (open-ended)

- What is your highest level of formal education you have completed? (Primary school / High school / Vocational training / Bachelor's degree / Master's degree / Ph.D.)

- What is your occupation or job title? (open-ended)

- How many professional working years do you have? (open-ended)

- How many hours do you work per week on average? (0-10 hours / 11-20 hours / 21-30 hours / 31-40 hours / More than 40 hours)

Part 2: Work-Related Experiences

Performance Expectations

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)

- My team leader expects me to perform at my highest level.

- My team leader encourages me to go above and beyond what is normally expected of one (e.g., extra effort).

- My team leader expects me to give 100% all of the time.

Unfinished Tasks

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- At the end of the workweek, I have not finished important tasks that I had planned to do.

- At the end of the workweek, I have not finished a large amount of due tasks.

- At the end of the workweek, I have not completed urgent tasks.

- At the end of the workweek, I have not even started with important tasks, I wanted to complete

- At the end of the workweek, I need to carry many tasks into the next week.

- At the end of the workweek, I have not started working on urgent tasks that were due.

Taking Charge

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I try to bring about improved procedures for the work unit or department.

- I try to institute new work methods that are more effective for the company.

- I try to change how the job is executed to be more effective.

- I try to introduce new structures, technologies, or approaches to improve efficiency.

- I try to implement solutions to pressing organizational problems.

- I try to make constructive suggestions for improving how things operate within the organization.

- I try to correct faulty procedures or practices.

- I try to make innovative suggestions to improve what the organization does.

- I try to change organizational rules or policies that are nonproductive or counterproductive.

- I try to adopt improved procedures for doing my job.

Professional Self-efficacy

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I can remain calm when facing difficulties in my job because I can rely on my abilities.

- When I am confronted with a problem in my job, I can usually find several solutions.

- Whatever comes my way in my job, I can usually handle it.

- My past experiences in my job have prepared me well for my occupational future.

- I meet the goals that I set for myself in my job.

- I feel prepared for most of the demands in my job.

Work Competence Need Satisfaction

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I really master my tasks at my job.

- I feel competent at my job.

- I have the feeling that I can even accomplish the most difficult tasks at work.

- I am good at the things I do in my job.

- I doubt whether I am able to execute my job properly.

- I don't really feel competent in my job.

Part 3: General Beliefs and Behaviors

Stress Mindset

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- The effects of stress are negative and should be avoided.

- Experiencing stress facilitates my learning and growth.

- Experiencing stress depletes my health and vitality.

- Experiencing stress enhances my performance and productivity.

- Experiencing stress inhibits my learning and growth.

- Experiencing stress improves my health and vitality.

- Experiencing stress debilitates my performance and productivity.

- The effects of stress are positive and should be utilized.

Regulatory Focus

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- To achieve something, one must be cautious.

- To avoid failure, one has to be careful.

- Being cautious is the best policy for success.

- You have to take risks if you want to avoid failing.

- The worst thing you can do when trying to achieve a goal is to worry about

  making mistakes.

- Taking risks is essential for success.

Executive Functioning

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I do risky things without considering the consequences.

- I can hold multiple things in my mind at once.

- I am good at multitasking.

- I am an impulsive person.

- I am good at solving math problems in my head.

- I am good at getting back on task after a distraction.

- I do things without thinking them through.

- I am good at working through problems in my head.

- I can shift my focus between different things.

Cognitive Flexibility

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I consider multiple options before making a decision.

- When in difficult situations, I consider multiple options before deciding how to behave.

- When I encounter difficult situations, I stop and try to think of several ways to resolve it.

- I often look at a situation from different viewpoints.

- I like to look at difficult situations from many different angles.

- I seek additional information not immediately available before attributing causes to behavior.

- When I encounter difficult situations, I feel like I am losing control.

- When encountering difficult situations, I become so stressed that I can not think of a way to resolve the situation.

- When I encounter difficult situations, I just don't know what to do.

- I feel I have no power to change things in difficult situations.

Part 4: Work-Life Balance, Sleep, and Recovery

Affective Rumination

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I become tense when I think about work-related issues during my free time.

- I get annoyed by thinking about work-related issues when not at work.

- I become irritated by work issues when not at work.

- I become fatigued by thinking about work-related issues during my free time.

- I am troubled by work-related issues when not at work.

Problem-Solving Pondering

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- After work, I tend to think of how I can improve my work-related performance.

- In my free time, I find myself re-evaluating something I have done at work.

- I think about tasks that need to be done at work the next day.

- I find thinking about work during my free time helps me to be creative.

- I find solutions to work-related problems in my free time.

Positive Affective Work Prospection

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I am enthusiastic about the work I still have to do.

- I am looking forward to the workdays ahead of me.

- I feel good when I think about upcoming work events.

- I have positive expectations about the workdays ahead of me.

Detachment

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I forget about work.

- I don't think about work at all.

- I distance myself from work.

- I get a break from the demands of work.

Sleep

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I have trouble falling asleep after turning off the lights.

- Once asleep, I have difficulty staying asleep.

- My final awakening is earlier than desired.

- My total sleep duration is sufficient.

- My overall quality of sleep is satisfactory.

<u>Recovery Activities</u>

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

During off-job time, to what extent do you engage in activities that…

- Require you to be physically active.

- Include vigorous physical activity.

- Include social interaction.

- Involve spending time with others.

- Allow you to be creative.

- Are creative.

- Require you to be mentally active.

- Require you to concentrate.

- Involve spirituality.

- Involve meditation, prayer, or taking time in other ways to find inner peace.

- Occur through digital devices (such as smartphone, computer, tablet).

- Include using the internet.

- Are in fresh air.

- Are performed in a natural environment (e.g., among plants and trees).

<u>Relaxation</u>

(Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale)

- I typically feel calm during the day.

- I typically feel relaxed during the day.

- I typically feel at ease in my daily life.

- I typically feel peaceful throughout the day.

- I typically feel content with how things are going.

- I typically feel satisfied emotionally on an average day.