# Unfinished Tasks and Rumination: Exploring the Role of Occupational Self Efficacy

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**Abstract**

Dealing with unfinished task is an experience that is common amongst employees of different occupations and years of experience. There is a significant research done in the field of occupational psychology that identifies unfinished tasks as a stressor that can impact us during off-work time. Research also presents empirical evidence for a positive link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. This study aims to replicate the findings made on this positive relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination ($H_1$). We also aim to explore how occupational self-efficacy may moderate this effect. Specifically, we argue that higher levels of occupational self-efficacy will lead to less affective rumination in the face of unfinished tasks ($H_2$). In order to investigate this, we used a cross-sectional survey (N=99) that measured unfinished tasks, affective rumination and occupational self-efficacy amongst a diverse population of employees. With a multiple regression analysis, we found support for our first hypothesis with a positive association between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. On the other hand, we did not find significant results for our second hypothesis and concluded that occupational self-efficacy does not moderate the relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. This study contributes to previous research by replicating prior evidence on the link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination while attempting to explore the potential moderation of occupational self-efficacy.

*Keywords:* Unfinished Tasks, Affective Rumination, Occupational self-efficacy

**Unfinished Tasks and Rumination: Exploring the Role of Occupational Self Efficacy**

Work has always been a significant part of our lives, and in recent years, work has become more intertwined with what is traditionally our recreational time, blurring boundaries between what is 'work' and what is 'off-time' (Reinke et al, 2023). This can be marked by the pandemic and how we adapted to be able to work while following restrictions that required changes to be made in the workplace itself (Kausto et al, 2024). With the introduction, integration and normalisation of remote work, flexibility, non-traditional working hours, and hybrid working environments, the workplace culture has seen a notable shift in these years (McCallon, 2023). With these changes to our workplace culture, there are a set of challenges that we have to learn how to deal with, such as managing boundaries between work and off-work time (Innstrand et al, 2024), and dealing with unfinished tasks (Kerman et al, 2022). Due to the general organisation of workplace projects taking longer than a few days or weeks to complete rather than hours, it is somewhat inevitable that one would have incomplete tasks at the end of a workday. Due to this organization, prevalence of unfinished tasks, and boundaries between work and off-time blurring, it is especially important to research the effects that unfinished tasks have on an employee's off-time to ensure good well-being**.**

Unfinished tasks are tasks that one is unable to complete during working hours - this could be due to a variety of reasons, such as not having enough time to complete it, putting it on hold for a more urgent task, not having the resources to complete it, etc. Unfinished tasks during working hours may lead to negative cognitive and affective states such as rumination (Weigelt et al, 2019). The Zeigarnik effect explains that we tend to remember or think of unfinished or interrupted tasks substantially more than we remember tasks that we have finished (Zeigarnik, 1938). Studies also suggest that unfinished tasks remain easily accessible in our working memory and may be remembered with more frequency (Macleod, 2020). While thinking about a task itself is not necessarily a bad thing and can sometimes lead to

moments of revelation and problem solving thinking, it can also lead to negative thoughts and affective rumination that interferes with the purpose of using recreational time as a mode of recovery from the work week (Syrek et al, 2017; Kerman et al, 2022).

Work-related rumination can be defined as repetitive and continuous dwelling or negative thoughts about unresolved work related issues (Weigelt et al., 2019). The negative consequences of work-related rumination may include sleep impairment (Syrek et al., 2017), feelings of guilt, burnout, negative affect (Wang et al., 2013) and may even contribute to the development of psychopathological symptoms for disorders such as anxiety or depression (Wu et al., 2023).

Unfinished tasks at the end of the week may contribute to ruminating on these tasks through the weekend - a time which is typically important to mental and physical restoration (Kinnunen et al, 2017). There are multiple studies that explore the relationship between these two variables which also outline the implications that this has on the health and wellbeing of people. Weiher et al (2022) found a relationship between unfinished tasks and fatigue. Weigelt et al (2019) found that higher levels of unfinished tasks were related to lower levels of competence need satisfaction, which was then related to higher levels of work-related rumination. While the link between unfinished tasks and rumination may be well established in previous studies (Syrek & Antoni, 2014; Weigelt et al., 2019), we know relatively little about the many situational and dispositional factors that can moderate the strength of this link. These moderators can act as either risk factors or protective factors when facing unfinished tasks. There are two aims of this research paper. The first aim of this paper is to replicate the link found between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. The second aim of this paper is to further explore this link between unfinished tasks and rumination from the perspective of boundary conditions, specifically the boundaries of this link when it comes to occupational self-efficacy. The scope of this research will also cover the gap in literature when it comes to

dispositional factors as moderators of this relationship, while also being important for the practical application of this model in the workplace. Among multiple dispositional and personal factors that may affect how we cope with job stressors, occupational self-efficacy is something that has attracted the interest of scholars (Dianat et al., 2021; Ghani et al., 2024). This is an important variable to study when it comes to occupational wellbeing as occupational self-efficacy can be seen as a potential protective factor (Binnewies et al, 2009). If we study how occupational self-efficacy acts as a boundary condition in the relationship between these two variables, it may set a foundation for further research on occupation self-efficacy acting as protective factor when coping with workplace or general stressors on well-being.

**Unfinished tasks and Affective Rumination**

In the workplace, employees usually have some sort of tangible goal that they need to work towards within a given timeframe. Pursuing these work-related goals tend to be the foundation of organisations and direct employee behaviour (Gagné, 2018). Completing work related tasks fall under goal directed behaviours – which are behaviours that entail have a desired end product (the goal), and the ability to act in ways in which will bring one closer to attaining these goals (Carver, 2018). The control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982) suggests that if there is a discrepancy between the ‘state’ or ‘goal’ we want to achieve and our current status, it can lead to distress and discomfort. Martin and Tesser (1996) argue that this discrepancy between our desired goals and current standing can increase the likelihood of ruminative thoughts.

These theories form the foundation of explaining why unfinished tasks lead to affective rumination amongst employees. It can be understood as a goal or task being currently unattained and reflecting discrepancy between our goals and current state (Carver & Scheier, 1982). The intrusive nature of these thoughts can be explained by the Zeigarnik

effect (Zeigarnik, 1938) which suggests that incomplete tasks are a cognitive burden and thus are result in more intrusive and repetitive thoughts – some of the features of ruminative thoughts. Affective rumination can be defined as intrusive, pervasive and recurrent thoughts about work, which have a negative affects (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011, p. 10). As mentioned above, constant and prolonged rumination is not good for employee wellbeing (Syrek et al., 2017; Weigelt et al., 2019). While there are multiple studies that establish a link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination (Weigelt et al., 2019; Syrek & Antoni, 2014), we aim to replicate this link through our study. Furthermore, this replication will provide a foundation for studying the effect that the moderator of occupational self-efficacy may have on this relationship. The first hypothesis that will be tested is as follows:

$H_1$: Unfinished tasks are positively associated with affective rumination.

**Occupational Self Efficacy As a Moderator**

As mentioned above, it has been established by previous studies (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Martin & Tesser, 1996; Weigelt et al, 2019) how unfinished tasks lead to work-related rumination. We would like to include the variable of 'self-efficacy' as a potential moderator between these variables. When looking into the validated scale of occupational self-efficacy by Rigotti et al (2008), we find that this trait has to do with the confidence of being able to meet goals set in the workplace and the ability to remain calm when faced with certain difficulties (Rigotti et al, 2008). This scale references remaining 'calm' in the face of job difficulties and thus suggests it is an important component of occupational self-efficacy. While it is typical to become tense in the face of stressors like unfinished tasks, occupational self-efficacy can help employees remain calm in the face of unfinished tasks. Similarly another item statement on the scale (Rigotti et a, 2008) is '*When I am confronted with a problem in my job, I can usually find several solutions'.* This refers to being able to find solutions to problems as a component of occupational self-efficacy, which supports the notion

that self-efficacy can act as a protective trait in the face of stressors. ‘Self-efficacy’ can also be considered a component of perceived behavioural control. While they have their distinctions, they can be regarded as related concepts (Bortne et al, 2025). Specifically, Bortne et al (2025) argues that self-efficacy is the internal component of perceived behavioural control, the former measuring task confidence while the latter is a measure of the perceived difficulty of the behaviour. Thus, we suggest that that occupational self-efficacy is a possible reflection of behavioural control. If one has a high occupational self-efficacy, they are more likely to believe that they can implement the behavioural changes (Bandura, 1977) to convert their current state of having unfinished tasks to their ideal state and deal with setbacks (Bandura, 1977; Judge & Bono, 2001). Similarly, if they have low occupational self-efficacy, they are less likely to believe that they have the means to reach their ideal goal of completing their tasks, leading to more rumination. Hence, occupational self-efficacy acts as a protective factor against this state of distress that is associated with rumination (Ghani et al, 2024). Therefore, on a conceptual level, we argue that individuals who have greater levels of occupational self-efficacy might see workplace stressors as less stressful (Rigotti et al, 2008) and less threatening to the self (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Due to this lack of threat to self, it would also be less likely to cause affective rumination in the individual.

With this study, we aim to explore if and how occupational self-efficacy acts as a moderating factor between unfinished tasks and rumination. The second hypothesis is as follows:

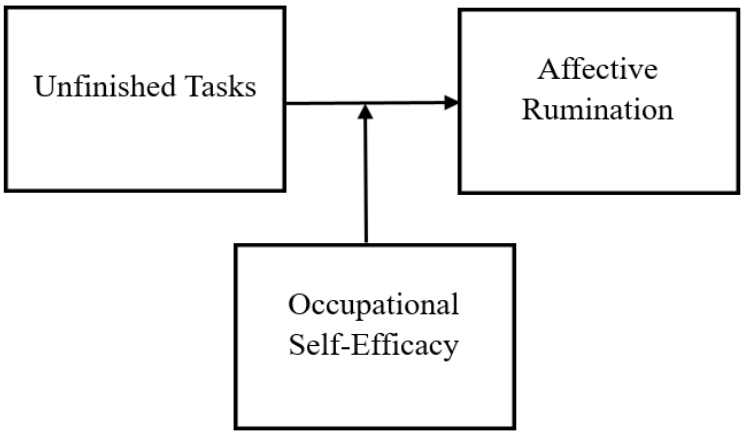
$H_2$: Occupational self-efficacy moderates the correlation between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. The link between these variables will be weak when occupational self-efficacy is high.

In summary, when looking at Control Theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982), negative feelings due to unfinished tasks can be explained by the discrepancy between our current and

goal state. This is further explained by Martin and Tesser (1996) wherein it is proposed that these negative feelings are what contributes to affective rumination. This line of reasoning is supported by other empirical studies (Zeigarnik, 1938; Weigelt et al, 2019). We theorise that occupational self-efficacy can be a moderator between these two variables based on its definition of being an individual's belief of their ability to execute behaviours that lead them to a goal (Bandura, 1977) and accordingly increase their belief to be able to tackle the unfinished tasks - and hence decreasing affective rumination. Essentially, our model proposes that there is a positive correlation between unfinished tasks and affective rumination and this is moderated by the trait of occupational self-efficacy.

**Figure 1**

*'Unfinished tasks' as the predictor variable having a positive relationship with 'affective rumination', the criterion variable. We propose that 'Occupational self-efficacy' acts as the moderator between these two variables and has a negative correlation with affective rumination.*




## Methods

### Procedure

This thesis is a part of a larger study project that focuses on the consequences of dealing with unfinished tasks at work relate to experiences during off-job time. This specific

research paper will be focusing on the predictor variable of ‘unfinished tasks’, criterion variable of ‘affective rumination’ and the moderator of ‘occupational self-efficacy.’ To measure these variables, we have created an online questionnaire on Qualtrics which is estimated to take around 10 minutes to complete. This questionnaire is made using a Likert scale – both for standardization purposes and to make it more user friendly. This survey was exempt from examination by the Ethics Committee of Psychology within the University of Groningen.

To recruit participants, we created an online ‘advertisement’ or ‘poster’ with the goal of posting on social media, WhatsApp, and personal channels to gain a sample. Due to the nature of the study and specific needs of the sample in terms of employment, we also used snowball sampling to widen our scope. This sampling technique relies on participants that we initially reached out to pass on the survey to other individuals that they believe match the criteria for the study (Zickar & Keith, 2023). In this case, we expected participants to pass this on to people who fit the employment criteria. The survey is available in English, Dutch and German so that the participants can choose their language of choice before completing the survey. They are also provided with information about the research and a consent form before they start. There was no compensation for the participants of the survey and no deception was used, therefore no debriefing was necessary. This survey was available to the participants from the 28th of April to the 12th of May 2025.

**Sample**

We received responses from a total of 135 participants. After screening the data for general incomplete answers, incomplete surveys or missing information from core variables of interest, the number of participants came down to a final sample of 99. Our pool of participants have a wide variability of demographics. In terms of nationalities, most of our participants were from Germany (n=28), from the Netherlands (n=26), India (n=19), and

America (n=7). Ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 68 years, with the majority of them being 26 years old (n=7). 49.5% of our sample were women (n=49) and 50.5 percent were male (n=50). The occupations listed by the participants were diverse and the work experienced ranged from 2 months (n=1) to 45 years (n=1). Most participants worked 31 - 40 hours a week (n=38). Participation was optional and no compensation was offered.

**Measures**

***Unfinished Tasks***

To measure unfinished tasks, we used the scale developed and used in Syrek et al. (2017). This scale has been developed and adapted from previous versions of their studies. The questions were expected to measure employees unfished tasks at the end of the week using simple questions. Therefore, we requested participants to reflect on their perceptions of unfinished tasks at the end of a typical workweek. An example of a statement is '*have not finished important tasks that I had planned to do this week.*' The scale used for this measurement was a 5 point Likert scale that ranges from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. The reliability of this scale is relatively high as our Cronbach's alpha is 0.830.

***Affective Rumination***

To measure affective rumination in our participants, we used the scale that is developed by Cropley et al. (2012). These questions are aimed at measuring the emotions that are associated with rumination – specifically repetitive (negative) thoughts about their unfinished tasks. An example for a question is '*Do you become tense when you think about work-related issues during your free time?'* While the original study uses a Likert scale where (1 = very seldom or never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = very often or always), we adapted it to our use of a 5 point Likert scale that ranges from 'strongly disagree' to

'strongly agree' for standardization and participant comfort. The Cronbach's alpha for these items are 0.882, which is quite high and supports our use of them.

***Occupational Self-Efficacy***

In order to measure the construct of occupational self-efficacy, we used an adaptation of a shortened version of a 'Occupational Self-efficacy Scale' which was validated by Rigotti et al. (2008) and adapted from a longer 20 items occupational self-efficacy questionnaire that includes 4 scales, (Schyns & von Collani, 2002). This shortened version of the scale involves statements such as *'I can remain calm when facing difficulties in my job because I can rely on my abilities'.* The version of the scale that we used has been thoroughly validated in different languages by Rigotti et al. (2008). In the original paper (Rigotti et al, 2008) the responses are measured with a 6 point scale that ranges from 1= not at all true to 6 = completely true. In order to be coherent with the rest of the scales in the questionnaire, we have decided to change this to a 5 point Likert scale ranging from '1 = strongly disagree' to '5 = strongly agree'. This was done to make sure that all of the responses were consistent and standardized. This change also aids user experience as participants will be using a consistent Likert scale for every part of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha for our scale is 0.847, which reflects sufficient reliability within the questions and supports our use of it.

**Analysis**

Analysis on the data is done by IBM SPSS statistics (Version 28). The analysis will be divided into two parts – preliminary analysis and main analysis. Firstly, we will examine the reliability of the different scales with Cronbach's alpha to ensure that they are adequately reliable scales. After this, we will obtain descriptive statistics of the data with the SPSS software, this will include means, standard deviations and correlations between variables to allow for data visualization and a summary of the data.

For the main analysis, we will be conducting a linear regression analysis and focus on the correlations between the different variables. For $H_1$ we will look at the criterion variable of affective rumination and predictor variable of unfinished tasks. For $H_2$ we will look at the relationship of affective rumination with the predictor variables of unfinished tasks, moderator variable of occupational self-efficacy, and the interaction between unfinished tasks and occupational self-efficacy. We will use the composite scores of each of the variables in our analysis. These scores will be centered to reduce multicollinearity. We will also be able to see how well our predictor variable of 'unfinished tasks' is able to explain some of the variability of the criterion variable or 'affective rumination'. To analyze the effect of the moderator of 'occupational self-efficacy' on the relationship between 'unfinished tasks' and 'affective rumination', we will conduct a moderation analysis. To test assumptions of our regression analysis, we will use a Q-Q plot for normality, a residual plot for linearity and homoscedasticity and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to check for multicollinearity.

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

#### *Reliability*

The three variables of focus have shown to have good composite reliability when tested for the Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha for our three variables are unfinished tasks ($\alpha$=0.830), affective rumination ($\alpha$=0.882), and occupational self-efficacy ($\alpha$=0.847). These results indicate that the scales used have a good reliability and are suitable to be used for our study. Consequently, no items were removed and the composite scores for all three variables and the interaction term were used for the further steps of this analysis.

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

**Table 1**

*Mean, standard deviation and correlation between the variables of unfinished tasks, affective rumination and occupational self-efficacy.*

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | Unfinished Tasks | Affective Rumination | Occupational Self-Efficacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unfinished Tasks | 2.24 | 0.70 | 1 | | |
| Affective Rumination | 2.81 | 0.96 | 0.321* | 1 | |
| Occupational Self-Efficacy | 3.91 | 0.61 | -0.225** | -0.234* | 1 |

*Note: n=99, * correlation is significant at 0.01 level, ** correlation is significant at 0.05 level One tailed test of significance levels*

Table 1 is a table of the descriptive statistics and correlations between the variables of 'unfinished tasks', 'affective rumination' and 'occupational self-efficacy'. Between our three focal variables, we can see a positive correlation between unfinished tasks and affective rumination ($r(97)=0.321$, $p<0.001$). This correlation is in support of $H_1$, which proposes that unfinished tasks has a positive association with affective rumination. The correlations between occupational self-efficacy with unfinished tasks and affective rumination are both negative. The correlation between unfinished tasks and occupational self-efficacy is ($r(97)= -0.225$, $p=0.013$). This would mean that low amounts of unfinished tasks are associated with higher levels of occupational self-efficacy and vice versa. The correlation between occupational self-efficacy and affective rumination is ($r(97)= -0.234$, $p=0.010$). This indicates that people with higher self-efficacy have to deal with relatively lower levels of affective rumination. It is interesting to note that occupational self-efficacy and affective rumination have a negative correlation that is significant at the 0.01 level.

***Assumptions***

Before moving ahead with the main analysis, we checked the basic assumptions of multiple linear regression of linearity, homoscedasticity, normality and multicollinearity. The

residual plot that was used to check for linearity and homoscedasticity showed no clear pattern, indicating that these assumptions were met (see Appendix Figure 1a and 1b). Similarly, we inferred that assumption of normality was also met from the distribution on the P-P plot (see Appendix Figure 2a and 2b). The only area of concern was among multicollinearity. The VIF scores for the composite variables were quite above the threshold of acceptable values and displayed significant multicollinearity. However, when all of these variables were centered – the VIF scores reduced significantly and fell under the threshold for multicollinearity (Table 2). Due to this reason, we will continue to use the centered composite versions of all of the variables during the main analysis.

**Main Analysis**

***Link Between Unfinished Tasks and Affective Rumination***

When examining the relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination, table 1 states that higher amounts of unfinished tasks are associated with higher levels of affective rumination. We can make interpretations about the first hypothesis from the correlations of table 1 as well. The results showed a significant positive relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination ($r(97)=0.321$, $p<0.001$) which can be translated to significant results ($t=3.34$, $p<0.001$). This reflects a positive and significant association between unfinished tasks and affective rumination.

***The Role of Occupational Self-Efficacy***

**Table 2**

*Regression model regressing affective rumination on unfinished tasks, occupational self-efficacy and the interaction between unfinished tasks and occupational self-efficacy.*

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Coefficients Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | VIF |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 2.82 | 0.09 | | 29.96 | <0.001 | |
| Unfinished Tasks | 0.38 | 0.13 | 0.28 | 2.87 | 0.005 | 1.06 |
| Occupational Self-Efficacy | -0.25 | 0.16 | -0.16 | -1.58 | 0.117 | 1.12 |
| UT*OSE | 0.11 | 0.26 | 0.04 | 0.41 | 0.682 | 1.08 |

*Note: Variables above have been centered.* UT*OSE *in the interaction term of unfinished tasks and occupational self-efficacy.*

Table 2 includes a regression analysis which is based on the centered variables of unfinished tasks, occupational self-efficacy and an interaction term of these two variables in order to predict the criterion variable of affective rumination. When testing for our second hypothesis, which has to do with the moderating effects of occupational self-efficacy, we found insignificant results ($t$=0.41, $p$=0.682). As our second hypothesis was not supported, this means that occupational self-efficacy does not have a moderating role between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. It is interesting to observe how the significance of unfinished tasks in this model changes from ($t$=3.34, $p$>0.001), to ($t$=2.87, $p$=0.005). This could be caused by the other variables having some effect on the variance of 'affective rumination' that used to be explained by 'unfinished tasks' alone – making unfinished tasks seem slightly less, but still significant as a predictor.

**Table 3**

*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 | 0.32[a] | 0.103 | 0.09 | 0.91 | 0.103 | 11.16 | 1 | 97 | 0.001 |
| 2 | 0.36[b] | 0.131 | 0.11 | 0.90 | 0.028 | 7.23 | 1 | 96 | 0.001 |
| 3 | 0.36[c] | 0.132 | 0.11 | 0.90 | 0.001 | 4.835 | 1 | 95 | 0.004 |

*Note*: a. Predictors: (Constant), unfinished tasks

b. Predictors: (Constant), unfinished tasks, occupational self-efficacy

c. Predictors: (Constant), unfinished tasks, occupational self-efficacy, interaction

From table 3, the unfinished tasks as a single predictor accounts for 10.3% of the explained variance ($R^2$=0.103, $F$(1,97)=11.16, $p$=0.001). With the predictors of unfinished tasks and occupational self-efficacy, the above model accounts for 13.1% of the variance ($R^2$=0.131, $F$(1,96)=7.23, $p$=0.001). With both predictors and the interaction term included in model 3, the explained variances increases slightly to 13.2% ($R^2$=0.132, $F$(1,95)=4.84, $p$=0.004). These results suggest that occupational self-efficacy contributes to explaining affective rumination. From our analysis, we can also conclude that there is no moderating effect of occupational self-efficacy on the relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination.

## Discussion

This study has aimed to explore the boundary conditions between the variables of unfinished tasks and affective rumination. Specifically, we focused on studying occupational self-efficacy and how it may act as a potential moderator between the two variables above. We proposed that, from a conceptual understanding (Rigotti et al, 2008), occupational-self efficacy could moderate the relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. The results of our study suggest that there is a positive relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination in employees. We did not find support for occupational self-efficacy moderating the link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. These findings suggest that higher amounts of unfinished tasks will lead to more affective rumination, regardless of the individual's levels of occupational self-efficacy.

### Theoretical Implications

The results of our first hypothesis are in line with the previous research done on affective rumination and unfinished tasks. These results show support of the theoretical

arguments made that explain this link with the Control theory and Zeigarnik effect (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Zeigarnik, 1938). Our findings of a significant positive link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination are in line with the findings of multiple recent studies in the field of occupational psychology (Syrek et al., 2017; Weigelt et al., 2019). This replication of previous findings add to the current literature on this topic and suggest that the positive link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination is robust in terms of the different contexts and methodological approaches used to study it.

Our results did not support the second hypothesis which predicts occupational self-efficacy as a moderator for the relationship between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. Our results did support for our control related perspective of self-efficacy, in which we argued that this construct may be related to how much perceived behavioural control we have (Bortne et al, 2025) and thus can moderate how much we ruminate over unfinished tasks (Houston, 1972). It also did not support our conceptual explanation of how occupational self-efficacy may act as a protective factor against negative affect with its construct including staying calm in stressful situations (Rigotti et al., 2008). An explanation for our results may be found in literature by Folkman (1984) that argue that occupational self-efficacy and perceived behavioural control are two distinct constructs that measure different things. By using these terms somewhat synonymously and finding a connection, we may have misplaced the construct of occupational self-efficacy during this study. The lack of moderation effect of occupational self-efficacy onto this relationship also reflects how robust the negative effects of unfinished tasks are to employees in terms of affective rumination.

While our second hypothesis was rejected, occupational self-efficacy can still act as a protective factor against general workplace stressors (Valizadeh et al, 2016; Ghani et al, 2024). From our results, we can see that occupational self-efficacy has a negative correlation with affective rumination. This significant link can also explain the lack of moderation found

in our study. Murphy, (2021) explains how to be careful when interpreting moderation as when the moderator variable is has a relationship with the criterion variable, finding a moderation effect becomes unlikely. As this was the case in our study, the link between occupational self-efficacy and may be a reason for the lack of significant moderation. However, these results can also lead to future investigation about occupational self-efficacy. People who have higher levels of occupational self-efficacy may feel more confident in their abilities to carry out tasks to reach their goals (Bandura, 1977). Higher self-efficacy can also lead to people having more coping mechanisms despite dealing with affective rumination (Salanova et al, 2006). Despite our non-significant results for the second hypothesis, the results indicate that occupational self-efficacy does play a role as a potential protective factor from workplace stress in general and can make affective rumination less likely, independent from unfinished tasks.

**Practical Implications**

Our replication on the first hypothesis confirmed what various studies have also found, the link between unfinished tasks in the workplace and affective rumination is very valuable when considering employees wellbeing and motivation (Syrek et al., 2017; Weigelt et al, 2019). This adds to the growing evidence in the field of occupational psychology on the link between unfinished tasks and affective rumination. Evidence from our study specifically suggests that this relationship is rather robust across different contexts. These findings can be used in implementing organizational changes to the nature of work projects – perhaps restructuring tasks to avoid an abundance of incomplete tasks at the end of the work. They can also be used to build a foundation for organization-based research on particular workplace interventions. While the results of occupational self-efficacy as a moderator came as non-significant, we found that it does have a significant negative correlation to affective rumination. Therefore, it can be used to promote employee wellbeing and mental health

(Dianat et al, 2021). Due to this link, workplace interventions can focus on increasing occupational self-efficacy within employees to combat affective rumination and potentially other workplace stressors.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This study has several strengths. Firstly, our questionnaire was translated into English, German and Dutch: widening the scope of participants and ensuring that they could have a good understanding of what was asked of them. Another strength was our diverse sample. Our sample includes people from many parts of the world with many different occupations. Because we did not have a strictly Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) sample, the generalizability of our findings were strengthened accordingly (Chandra, 2012). Of course, we can assume that our sample were people who were privileged enough to be able to complete electronic surveys for no monetary compensation due to our use of snowball sampling (Emerson, 2015), we have a relatively diverse sample in terms of age, gender, nationality and occupation. Our study was also cross sectional in nature, which are an efficient tool to study human behaviour when we have time or monetary constraints from using more elaborate or longitudinal measures. A strength that is specific to our scale on occupational self-efficacy (Rigotti et al, 2008), is that this scale has been validated with a population of working employees instead of students, as is with other scales that focus on this construct (Koumoundourou, 2004). This is a strength as we can assume this makes the scale compatible with our own working population.

Our study also has some limitations that are important to discuss. Our sample size, while seemingly a large number initially, decreased significantly after the process of screening – which reduces our confidence in the results. The sample size may also be too small to observe a significant moderation effect (Murphy, 2021). Another limitation is the length of the survey, some participants may have felt survey fatigue, affecting the quality of

data collected nearing the end of the survey (Bowling et al., 2022). This could also have had a negative effect on their motivation or how prone they were to making errors that impact results (Ziegler et al, 2014). Another limitation that was briefly touched upon is the correlation between the criterion variable of affective rumination and the moderator of occupational self-efficacy. When there is a correlation between these two variables, it becomes difficult to observe a moderation effect (Murphy, 2021). While our use of a cross sectional design for this study is appropriate, it also provides some limitations. Such designs may lead to recall biases which questions the validity of our data (Coughlin, 1990; Spector, 2019). This is specifically relevant to our study as we are explicitly asking participants to recall their experiences and emotions in the context of their professional experiences and combine their experiences across time to their answers. Even though we instructed them to think of a *typical* workweek, recall bias may still have had an effect on their answers. One last limitation comes from the scale on occupational self-efficacy (Rigotti et al, 2008). This version of the scale was validated with a largely European sample, which when compared to our relatively more diverse sample, may not be compatible due to the differing sociocultural demographics surrounding work.

**Further Research**

While our study adds to the existing research in the field of occupational psychology, it also opens possibilities for future research. Drawing from the limitations on this study that are due to its cross-sectional design and smaller sample (Spector, 2019; Murphy, 2021), we could also replicate this study using a longitudinal design or a larger sample size to observe the potential effects of occupational self-efficacy acting as a moderator over time. Based on our findings that occupational self-efficacy has a negative correlation with affective rumination, more research can be done on this relationship and how occupational self-efficacy may act as a predictor to affective rumination or a protective factor for a wider range of

workplaces stressors, not only unfinished tasks. It would also be interesting to explore occupational self-efficacy in different contexts of wellbeing or work satisfaction to add to the field of occupational psychology (Chamani et al, 2023; Peng et al, 2023).

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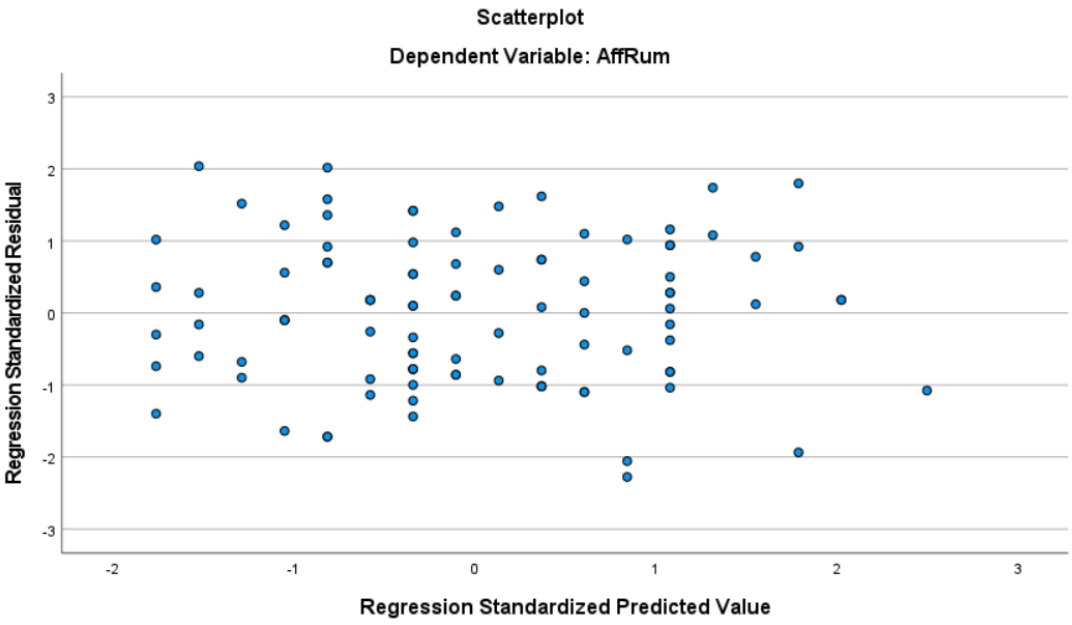
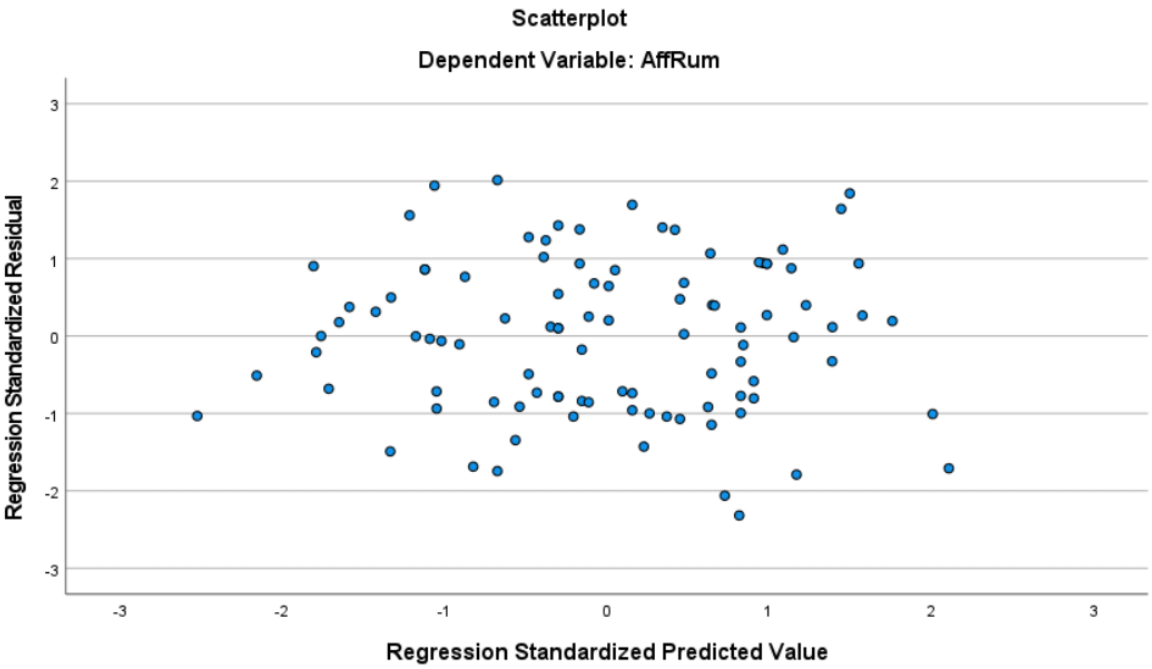
# Appendix

## Figure 1

**a)** *Residual scatterplot to test for linearity and homoscedasticity for $H_1$*

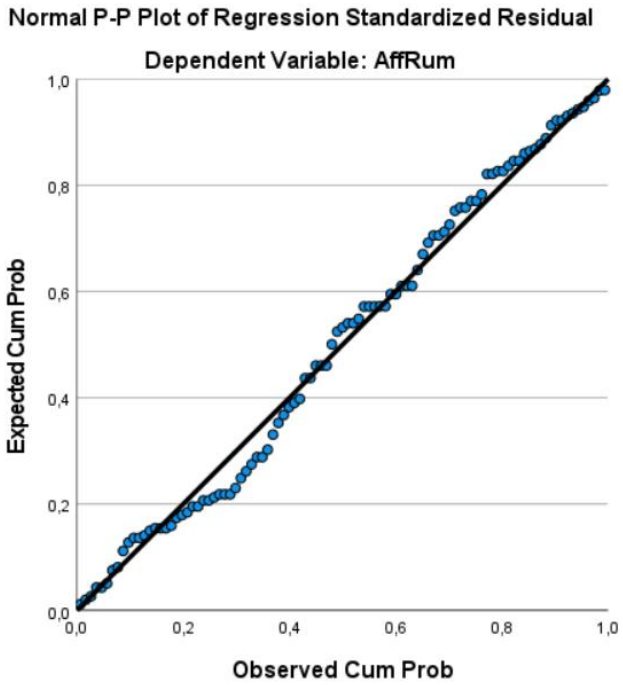



**b)** *Residual scatterplot to test for linearity and homoscedasticity in $H_2$*




## Figure 2

**a.** *P-P plot to check for normality in $H_1$*




**b.** *P-P plot to check for normality in $H_2$*