

# The Influence Mechanism of Illegitimate Tasks on New Employee Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Organizational Identity

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## ABSTRACT

Illegitimate tasks proposed based on the stress-as-offence-to-self theory have gradually attracted the attention of scholars at home and abroad in recent years. Studies have found that illegitimate tasks have negative impact on employees' cognition, attitude, motivation and behavior, but the current research on illegitimate tasks is not comprehensive and sufficient. As the group most vulnerable to illegitimate tasks, the turnover intention of new employees is closely related to the arrangement of illegitimate tasks, but the existing studies have not empirically tested the impact of illegitimate tasks on the turnover intention of new employees. Therefore, in order to enrich illegitimate tasks related research, this study adopts Amos22.0 and SPSS26.0 to conduct empirical research to explore the relationship between illegitimate tasks and new employees' turnover intention. The research results show that illegitimate tasks are negatively correlated with new employees' turnover intention, and organizational identity plays a mediating role in the relationship between the two.

**Keywords:** *Illegitimate tasks; Organizational identity; Turnover intention of new employees;*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Do you often see this picture inside the TV, some new staff entry will always be “bullied” by a colleague or leadership, the leadership or colleagues will let them to buy coffee for yourself, or do some shouldn't be done by their tasks. This situation is more common in reality, these TV series that is the picture of reality. According to this phenomenon, researchers put forward a new concept—Illegitimate tasks. Illegitimate tasks refer to those tasks that are outside the scope of an employee's expected work role [15], Studies have shown that illegitimate tasks not only lead to deviating workplace behaviors of employees [17], but also hinder proactive behaviors of employees [11]. Although scholars have made some achievements in their research on illegitimate task, the current research on illegitimate task is limited and the research on its results and mechanism of action is not sufficient and comprehensive. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the research on illegitimate task.

According to statistics, the voluntary turnover rate of new employees is much higher than that of old employees [3], and the high turnover rate of new employees often means that the organization has almost no chance to

recover its investment in employees. Therefore, how to reduce the turnover rate of new employees has always been an urgent problem to be solved by enterprises and academic circles. Scholars have confirmed that turnover intention is the best predictive variable of turnover behavior [7], some scholars even put forward that turnover intention can directly replace turnover behavior in research [14]. Based on this, this study focused the outcome variable on the turnover intention of new employees, and explored and tested the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intention of new employees.

Organizational identity refers to the cognitive process of employees' sense of belonging to organization members [5]. In this paper, the mediating variable focuses on organizational identity, not only because it is the main factor affecting employees' turnover intention, but also because illegitimate tasks will affect employees' organizational identity by threatening their professional identity. However, existing studies have not tested the relationship between illegitimate tasks and organizational identity. Based on social identity theory, the following model is proposed (Figure 1) to test whether organizational identity can play a mediating role

in the relationship between illegitimate tasks and new employees' turnover intention.

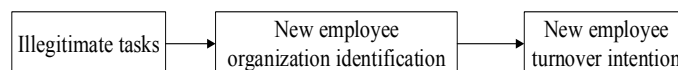


Figure 1 Theoretical model

## 2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

### 2.1 *Illegitimate tasks and turnover intention of new employees*

Illegitimate tasks refer to those tasks that go beyond the expected work role scope of employees and violate their professional identity, including unreasonable tasks and unnecessary tasks, that is should not be completed by themselves or are unnecessary [17]. Specifically, each job contains a set of role expectations for its in-service staff, which constitute the boundaries of reasonable and appropriate expectations of employees [15]. It become illegitimate when they exceed the boundaries of employees' reasonable and appropriate expectations [17]. Previous studies have shown that illegitimate tasks pose a threat to employees' professional identity [11], and have a negative impact on employees' happiness, task performance, and innovative behavior [9] [11], is an important workplace stressor.

New employees refer to employees who have no work experience or are new to the company [6]. New employees can bring new ideas and vitality to the enterprise, is the fresh blood of the enterprise, but also the power source of enterprise development. However, if the voluntary turnover rate of new employees is too high, it will raise the operating cost of enterprises and increase the difficulty of operation. Therefore, both academia and enterprises should pay attention to the problem of new employee turnover and reduce the loss caused by new employee turnover. Turnover intention refers to the intention of employees to leave their jobs after thinking about it [13], which can effectively predict the occurrence of employee turnover behavior [8]. Therefore, in order to avoid the turnover behavior of new employees, we must pay attention to what factors affect the turnover intention of new employees.

Studies have shown that illegitimate tasks, as identification-based stressors, will threaten individual self-esteem [9], and employees may quit their jobs to avoid self-esteem damage [4], which to some extent depicts the self-protection strategies that new employees may adopt. Specifically, illegitimate tasks convey messages of unfairness and demeaning social status of employees [16], such information can pose a threat to employees' self-esteem [9]. According to social identity theory, individuals tend to maintain self-esteem [18],

when employees perceive the threat of illegitimate tasks to their self-esteem, they will have turnover intention in order to protect themselves from the threat. In addition, existing studies have shown that workplace stress has a positive impact on employees' resignation intention. As a new workplace stressors, illegitimate tasks will have negative effects on employees' emotional and physical health [1] [9]. When new employees suffer long-term physical and mental harm, their intention to leave will be enhanced. Based on this, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H1: illegitimate tasks have a positive impact on the turnover intention of new employees.

### 2.2 *The mediating role of organizational identity*

Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined organizational identity as employees' sense of identity and belonging to their organization, and emphasized that organizational identity is a process of dynamic change. By means of "meaning", organizations can convey to employees the details about the organization and the meaning of organization membership, and complete the construction of organizational identity by influencing how they see themselves. When new employees enter the organization, in order to develop in the organization, they will have identification motivation, and under the impetus of identification motivation, they will build membership. However, in practice, there are many factors that hinder the formation of organizational identity of new employees, among which the most typical is illegitimate tasks.

When new employees join their new organizations, they often find themselves in professional positions but doing "errands," which are typically illegitimate tasks. To be specific, the construction of employee organization membership is a process of interaction between individuals and the environment. When employees are subjected to illegitimate tasks in the organization, their self-esteem will be threatened [9]. According to the social identity theory, when an employee feels disrespected, disrespected or offended in an organization [19], they will be unwilling to become a member of the organization, and the construction of organizational membership will be hindered, which affects the formation of their organizational identity. Thus, hypothesis 2 can be obtained:

H2: Illegitimate tasks negatively affect organizational identity of new employees.

According to the social identity theory, if the social identity is unsatisfactory, people will take measures to leave the current group and join a more favorable group. Therefore, when the organizational identity of new employees is low and the organizational membership is unsatisfactory, they will have a higher intention to leave. Specifically, when individual organization identity is low, they have lower sense of belonging and emotional commitment to the organization, and the intention of leaving the job will be stronger. In addition, when employees' organizational identity is low, their job satisfaction is lower [2]. Scholars have proved that the lower the job satisfaction is, the stronger the employees' turnover intention will be [10]. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be obtained based on the above inference:

H3: Organizational identity plays a mediating role in the impact of illegitimate tasks on new employees' turnover intention.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.1 Samples and procedures

This study used questionnaire to collect relevant data, which was divided into two time points. At time point 1, the basic information of the subjects and their perception of illegitimate tasks were measured. Two weeks later, the organizational identity and turnover intention of these subjects were measured, and a total of 206 valid questionnaires were generated through the matching and screening of two questionnaires.

#### 3.2 Measurement

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of measurement tools, this study selected relatively mature scales at home and abroad and adopted likert 5-point scoring method, with 1 being completely inconsistent and 5 being completely consistent.

Illegitimate tasks are measured by the eight-item scale prepared by Semmer (2010), Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  was 0.927. The scale of organizational identification was developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992) [12], with 6 items in total. Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  was 0.883. The turnover intention of new employees adopts the one-dimensional scale developed by Mobley (1978), consisting of four items. Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  was 0.804.

Control variables: According to the literature, gender, age, education background and rank of employees were selected as control variables in this paper to avoid possible influence of such factors on research results.

### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

#### 4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this study, AMOS22.0 was used for confirmatory factor analysis. As shown in Table 1, the fitting of the three-factor model was significantly better than that of other models, so the three variables involved in this study had good discriminative validity.

Table 1 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	IFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Three-Factor Model	224.338	132	1.700	0.959	0.959	0.058	0.0531
Two-factor model (organizational identity and turnover intention)	533.801	134	3.984	0.822	0.824	0.084	0.121
Single factor model	796.005	135	5.896	0.706	0.708	0.155	0.1367

#### 4.2 Descriptive statistical analysis

In this study, SPSS 26 was used for descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis of the data.

The mean standard deviation and correlation coefficient of the variables involved are shown in Table 2

Table 2 The mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of each variable

variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
gender	1.60	0.492	1					
age	2.45	0.880	-0.146*	1				
Degree	2.90	0.701	-0.0070	.161*	1			

Post	1.58	0.861	-0.192**	0.395***	0.107	1		
Illegitimate tasks	3.408	0.942	0.008	0.208**	0.006	.082	1	
Organizational identity	3.045	0.886	-0.062	0.054	0.057	.135	-0.360***	1
Turnover intention	3.341	1.040	0.120	0.113	-0.052	-0.070	0.648***	-0.0453***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

### 4.3 Hypothesis Testing

In this study, the method of hierarchical regression was used to test the hypothesis, and the test results are shown in Table 3. The results of Model 4 in Table 3 show that after controlling the interference variables, illegitimate tasks have a significant positive impact on new employees' turnover intention ( $\beta=0.772$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), H1 Supported by model 2 results show that illegitimate tasks have a significant negative impact on organizational

identity of new employees ( $\beta= -0.369$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), H2 was supported by model 5, which showed that new employee's organizational identity had a significant positive effect on turnover intention ( $\beta= -0.271$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and the results of the mediation effect analysis show that the indirect effect of illegitimate tasks on new employees' turnover intention through organizational identity is 0.1004, and its 95% confidence interval is [0.0486, 0.1688], excluding 0. H3 is supported.

Table 3 Hierarchical regression results

Variable	Organizational identity		Turnover intention		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Constant	2.810	3.834	2.895	0.893	1.932
Gander	-0.071	-0.38	0.264	0.199	0.189
Age	-0.008	0.070	0.220*	0.067	0.086
degree	0.057	0.041	-0.103	-0.073	-0.062
post	0.129	0.152*	-0.136	-0.180*	-0.139*
Illegitimate tasks		-0.369***		0.722***	0.622***
Organizational identity					-0.271***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.021	0.168	0.048	0.455	0.499
$\Delta R^2$	0.021	0.147***	0.48**	0.407***	0.044***
F	1.102	8.082***	2.506***	33.363***	33.056***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on social identity theory, this study explores the relationship between illegitimate tasks and new employees' turnover intention. The study shows that illegitimate tasks will promote new employees' turnover intention, and organizational identity plays an intermediary role.

### 5.1 Theoretical significance

First, this article about illegitimate tasks and new employee turnover intention to discuss the relationship between the enriched the relevant literature. Specifically, although illegitimate tasks is new employee turnover is one of the most main reason, but previous studies did not empirically on the relationship between them. In addition, previous research on the consequences of illegitimate

tasks not enough. The research results of this paper responded to the call of previous scholars and enriched the outcome variables related to illegitimate tasks. Finally, the results of this study also enriched the antecedent variables of new employees' turnover intention, which has a certain theoretical guidance role for enterprise human resource management to reduce the turnover rate of new employees.

Secondly, this paper takes organizational identity as an intermediary variable to enrich the mechanism of illegitimate tasks and employee attitude behavior. Existing studies have shown that illegitimate tasks will have some negative effects, but the current research on the mechanism of illegitimate tasks is not complete. Therefore, based on the social identity theory, the mediating role of organizational identity supplements the mechanism of illegitimate tasks to some extent.

## 5.2 Practical Significance

First of all, according to the results of this study and previous studies, illegitimate tasks can have a negative impact on employees and organizations, so managers should try to avoid assigning employees tasks that are beyond their scope of responsibility. Illegitimate tasks arrangement may be institutional inefficiency of high-level decision-making error or improper task design results. Organization's senior managers, therefore, need to play their part, the recognition task of the compliance, set appropriate work and non-work boundaries, reducing the occurrence of illegitimate tasks.

Secondly, the turnover of new employees has always been a concern of the enterprise, because it will bring financial and resource losses to the enterprise. The lack of organizational identity of employees is not only one of the main reasons for the turnover of new employees, but also the reason for the low performance of employees. Therefore, in order to effectively solve the turnover of new employees, enterprises should take measures to help new employees complete the construction of organizational membership and form organizational identity. For example, enterprises should pay attention to team building and cultural construction, build a harmonious working environment and atmosphere, so that employees can become part of the company as soon as possible.

## 5.3 Research deficiencies and prospects

Though, this research has certain theoretical contribution and management, but there are still some shortcomings. First of all, the results of this study can't prove causality. Therefore, future research could reverse the test and examine whether it is possible that employees' inability to identify with the organization leads to their heightened perception of the threat of illegitimate tasks. Second, at present, the default research on illegitimate tasks is that the tasks come from employees' immediate superiors. Future research can explore whether illegitimate tasks arranged by colleagues or higher-level leaders will bring different impacts, and compare employees' responses to the illegitimate tasks arranged by which group. Finally, at present, researches on illegitimate tasks focus on its dark side. Future researches can explore whether illegitimate tasks will bring positive effects, for example, whether the arrangement of illegitimate tasks will promote employees' job crafting.

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