



Journal Article

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Publication Date:

2014-08

Permanent Link:

<https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000075686> →

Originally published in:

Voluntas 25(4), <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-013-9375-4> →

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How Dare to Demand This from Volunteers! The Impact of Illegitimate Tasks

Susan van Schie · Stefan T. Güntert · Theo Wehner

Published online: 20 April 2013

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Abstract The present study examined the effect of illegitimate tasks (Semmer et al. *Appl Psychol Int Rev* 59:70–96, 2010) within the volunteer context. A total of 191 Red Cross volunteers were surveyed to reveal the impact of unreasonable and unnecessary tasks on the volunteers' work engagement and intent to remain at the non-profit organization (NPO). To shed light on the process through which illegitimate tasks affect outcomes, the mediating role of self-determined motivation was explored. Furthermore, the volunteers' role orientation was assumed to moderate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and outcomes. The results showed that unreasonable tasks directly decreased the volunteers' intent to remain. Unnecessary tasks, in contrast, had a more subtle effect in that they reduced the self-determined motivation of volunteers. Also, evidence was found for the moderating influence of the volunteers' role orientation: Whereas unreasonable tasks were equally harmful for both groups, unnecessary tasks more strongly affected those volunteers who expressed more organizational ownership.

Résumé La présente étude examine l'effet des tâches illégitimes (Semmer et al. 2010) dans le contexte du bénévolat. Un total de 191 bénévoles de la Croix Rouge ont été interrogés afin de révéler l'impact des tâches excessives ou superflues sur leur investissement personnel dans leur travail et leur intention de rester dans l'organisation à but non lucratif (OBNL). Pour mettre en lumière le processus par lequel les tâches illégitimes affectent les résultats, nous nous sommes intéressés au rôle modérateur que joue la motivation personnelle. De plus, on a supposé que la préférence des bénévoles pour certains rôles influençait la relation entre tâches illégitimes et résultats. Les résultats de notre étude démontrent que les tâches excessives ont un impact direct et négatif sur l'intention des volontaires de rester au

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sein de l'organisation. Les tâches superflues, au contraire, ont un effet plus subtil en ce qu'elles réduisent la motivation personnelle des bénévoles. On a également apporté des preuves de l'influence modératrice des préférences des bénévoles pour certains rôles au sein de l'organisation : alors que les tâches excessives ont un impact négatif égal pour les deux groupes, les tâches superflues affectent plus fortement les bénévoles plus portés sur les rôles organisationnels.

Zusammenfassung Die vorliegende Studie untersuchte die Auswirkungen illegitimer Arbeitsaufgaben (Semmer et al. 2010) im Kontext ehrenamtlicher Tätigkeiten. Es wurden insgesamt 191 ehrenamtliche Mitarbeiter des Roten Kreuzes befragt, um darzulegen, wie sich unangemessene und unnötige Aufgaben auf das Arbeitsengagement der ehrenamtlich Tätigen und ihre Absicht, weiterhin für die Nonprofit-Organisation tätig zu sein, auswirken. Zur Veranschaulichung des Prozesses, im Rahmen dessen illegitime Arbeitsaufgaben Endresultate beeinflussen, wurde die Vermittlerrolle der selbstbestimmten Motivation untersucht. Weiter wurde davon ausgegangen, dass die Rollenorientierung der ehrenamtlichen Mitarbeiter einen mäßigen Einfluss auf die Beziehung zwischen illegitimen Arbeitsaufgaben und den Endresultaten ausübte. Die Ergebnisse zeigten, dass sich unangemessenen Aufgaben direkt negativ auf eine beabsichtigte Fortführung einer ehrenamtlichen Tätigkeit auswirkten. Unnötige Arbeitsaufgaben dagegen hatten insofern eine subtilere Auswirkung, als sie die selbstbestimmte Motivation der ehrenamtlichen Mitarbeiter verringerten. Es gab des Weiteren Anhaltspunkte für einen mäßigen Einfluss der Rollenorientierung der ehrenamtlichen Mitarbeiter: Während unangemessene Arbeitsaufgaben für beide Gruppen gleichermaßen von Nachteil waren, wirkten sich unnötige Aufgaben stärker auf die ehrenamtlichen Mitarbeiter aus, die eine größere organisatorische Eigenverantwortung ausdrückten.

Resumen El presente estudio examinó el efecto de las tareas ilegítimas (Semmer et al. 2010) en el contexto del voluntariado. Se encuestó a un total de 191 voluntarios de la Cruz Roja para descubrir el impacto de tareas irrazonables e innecesarias en el compromiso y la determinación del trabajo de los voluntarios para permanecer en la organización sin ánimo de lucro (NPO, del inglés non-profit organization). Para arrojar luz sobre el proceso mediante el cual las tareas ilegítimas afectan a los resultados, se exploró el papel mediador de la motivación autodeterminada. Asimismo, se asumió que la orientación del papel de los voluntarios modera la relación entre las tareas ilegítimas y los resultados. Los resultados mostraron que las tareas irrazonables disminuían directamente la determinación de los voluntarios de permanecer. Las tareas innecesarias, en cambio, tenían un efecto más sutil en el sentido de que reducían la motivación autodeterminada de los voluntarios. Igualmente, se encontraron pruebas de la influencia moderadora de la orientación del papel de los voluntarios. Mientras que las tareas irrazonables eran igualmente dañinas para ambos grupos, las tareas innecesarias afectaban más fuertemente a aquellos voluntarios que expresaban más dominio organizativo.

Keywords Illegitimate tasks · Volunteers · Self-determination theory · (Flexible) role orientation · Role breadth

Introduction

Research has long focused on the antecedents of volunteering, but recent decades have seen an increase in the discussion around the management of volunteers (Grube and Piliavin 2000; Haivas et al. 2012; Haski-Leventhal and Bargal 2008; Millette and Gagné 2008; Pearce 1993; Penner et al. 2005; Wilson 2012). In this discussion, psychological contracts (PCs), which are defined as “individual beliefs in mutual obligations between a person and another party such as an employer” (Rousseau and Tijoriwala 1998, p. 679), have become a growing interest (Nichols 2012; Vantilborgh et al. 2011) for at least two reasons: First, volunteers are less likely to have a written contract with the organization they work for (Nichols 2012). Second, the volunteer context is affected by an imbalance regarding liability of the two parties. Although the functioning of non-profit organizations (NPOs) heavily depends on the voluntary workforce (Musick and Wilson 2008), the NPOs lack the instrumental means, such as money and job security, which are used in paid-work settings, to control the volunteer spirit (Boezeman and Ellemers 2008; Grube and Piliavin 2000; Millette and Gagné 2008; Nichols 2012; Pearce 1993; Vantilborgh et al. 2011). Consequently, the avoidance of a so-called *psychological contract violation* (PC violation; Morrison and Robinson 1997), which describes the employees’ “feelings of anger and betrayal that are often experienced when an employee believes that the organization has failed to fulfill one or more of those obligations” (p. 226) is of particular relevance to successful volunteer management. However, empirical studies on the process of PC violation within the volunteer context are rare. Vantilborgh et al. (2011) therefore called for quantitative research to examine volunteers’ reactions to PC breach.

One concept that is strongly related to the idea of PC violation, but that is rooted in stress research, is that of *illegitimate tasks*. This concept, which was recently introduced by Semmer et al. (2010), focuses on the individuals’ appraisal of assigned tasks and their perceived legitimacy. Illegitimate tasks are defined as “tasks that are perceived as unreasonable or unnecessary, as not being part of one’s professional role, thus violating expectations about what can reasonably be required of a given person” (Stocker, Jacobshagen, Semmer and Annen 2010, p. 117). As such, illegitimate tasks can be regarded as a breach of PC (Semmer et al. 2010). However, the authors noted that even though illegitimate tasks are related to PC theories, they are not the same thing. In contrast to PC theories, not all (perceived) promises by an organization are taken into consideration, but rather the concrete violation of role expectations in daily tasks is essential. Nevertheless, we believe that the concept of illegitimate tasks is suitable as a precise and simple, yet limited approach to address the broad topic of PC violation. Exploring if and how illegitimate tasks affect volunteers may therefore help to gain new empirical insight and add to a deeper understanding of volunteer-NPO interactions.

In the present study, we illuminated the concept of illegitimate tasks from three different perspectives: First, the effect of illegitimate tasks on practically relevant volunteer outcomes of work engagement and intent to remain is explored. Second, in order to shed light on the process through which illegitimate tasks affect the outcomes, the mediating role of self-determined motivation is tested. It is assumed

that illegitimate tasks may evoke feelings of heteronomy, which may thwart the self-determined motivation of volunteers, and in turn affect their work engagement and intent to remain. Third, as the impact of illegitimate tasks depends on how people conceive their own roles, it is tested if the breadth of the volunteers' role orientation moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and outcomes. However, before further addressing these research questions, the concept of illegitimate tasks is briefly introduced.

The Concept of Illegitimate Tasks

According to Semmer et al. (2010), "A task is legitimate to the extent that it conforms to norms about what can reasonably be expected from a given person, and it is illegitimate to the extent that it violates such norms" (p. 72). As such, the concept of illegitimate tasks focuses on feelings of being offended at one's role identity (and thus at the self) by assigned tasks. However, it is important to note that it is not the task *per se* that is illegitimate (Semmer et al. 2010). Just like PC violation is inherently perceptual, thus not reflecting the "objective reality," but rather the employee's mind (Morrison and Robinson 1997), the legitimacy of tasks also depends on the subjective appraisal of what is appropriate. The same task can be legitimate for one person and illegitimate for another. Furthermore, Semmer et al. (2010) differentiated between two facets of illegitimate tasks: unnecessary and unreasonable tasks.¹ Whereas it is not appropriate to demand unreasonable tasks from a specific person and such tasks are incompatible with the status or range of workers (i.e., volunteers for the purposes of the present study), unnecessary tasks are pointless and can be avoided through better organization. Both facets are considered as stressors.

As stated in the introduction, the avoidance of PC violation seems highly relevant for volunteer management, as the experience of violation is known to have serious organizational implications (cf. Morrison and Robinson 1997). For example, PC violation can result in decreased work satisfaction, commitment, individual effectiveness, and increased turnover intentions of employees (Zhao et al. 2007). Consequently, also the concept of illegitimate tasks seems of high practical relevance to NPOs. As volunteers feel less affiliated to the organization than paid workers (Haski-Leventhal and Bargal 2008), their feelings of being offended may have an immediate effect on their willingness to work for the NPO. Therefore, we first explored the effect that illegitimate tasks have on work engagement and intent to remain of volunteer.

Illegitimate Tasks and Their Effect on Outcomes

Within the paid-work context, previous research has shown that illegitimate tasks are related to various work outcomes, such as strain, reduced well-being, counterproductive work behavior, lower job satisfaction, and feelings of resentment

¹ Please note that whenever the term "illegitimate tasks" is referred to, we are also referring to the two facets.

(Semmer et al. 2010; Stocker et al. 2010). In addition, illegitimate tasks were found to have a negative impact on work engagement (Otto et al. 2011). Also for the volunteer context, it is known that tasks are relevant for work outcomes. For example, the motivational potential of tasks positively affects volunteer satisfaction (Millette and Gagné 2008). Consequently, it is assumed that tasks that are perceived as illegitimate will influence the volunteers' work outcomes. Therefore, for the present study, (a) work engagement and (b) intent to remain were chosen as outcome variables:

(a) Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, absorption, and dedication (Schaufeli et al. 2002). We favored work engagement over other measures, such as satisfaction, as we expected satisfaction to be more sensitive to ceiling effects than work engagement. Whereas it may be hard to find unsatisfied volunteers, presumably not all volunteers experience the same amount of work engagement. In addition, work engagement has a stronger emphasis on the emotional experience of volunteer activities in contrast to the cognitive-evaluative focus of satisfaction. Previous research has shown that work engagement is an appropriate outcome within the volunteer context (cf. Vecina et al. 2012).

(b) Intent to remain in turn describes the willingness of a volunteer to remain active for the organization and has also traditionally been applied to the volunteer context (cf. Boezeman and Ellemers 2009; Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley 2001; Millette and Gagné 2008).

These two outcomes, which are both important for the NPO, have different emphases. Whereas work engagement covers the emotional experience of the volunteers, intent to remain reflects their behavioral intentions. Both outcomes are expected to be affected when a volunteer experiences illegitimacy in his/her tasks. Therefore, the first hypothesis for the present study is as follows:

H1a Illegitimate tasks (both unreasonable and unnecessary tasks) have a negative effect on volunteers' work engagement.

H1b Illegitimate tasks (both unreasonable and unnecessary tasks) have a negative effect on volunteers' intent to remain.

Self-Determined Motivation as a Mediator

In order to shed light on the process through which illegitimate tasks affect the outcomes, we tested for the mediating role of the volunteers' motivation. To address volunteer motivation, self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan 1985) was applied. SDT is a theory of human motivation that distinguishes between various regulatory processes through which desired outcomes are achieved (Deci and Ryan 2000). In contrast to other motivation theories, self-determination theory describes the *quality* of the motivation rather than its quantity or strength. SDT distinguishes between self-determined and controlled motivation (Deci and Ryan 2000; Gagné and Deci 2005). Self-determined motivation is defined as "acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice," whereas controlled motivation is

described as “acting with a sense of pressure, a sense of having to engage in actions” (Gagné and Deci 2005, p. 334).

Some studies have successfully applied self-determination theory to the volunteer context (Bidee et al. 2012; Haivas et al. 2012; Millette and Gagné 2008). However, the results regarding the controlled forms of motivation could not replicate findings from paid-work settings and revealed inconsistencies: While Millette and Gagné (2008), as well as Bidee et al. (2012), reported zero correlations with work design and work effort, respectively, Haivas et al. (2012) found positive correlations with work climate. Therefore, the focus of the present study was on self-determined motivation, as Millette and Gagné (2008) recommended for the volunteer context.

To our knowledge, the impact that illegitimate tasks may have on self-determined motivation has never been explored. However, Stocker et al. (2010), who analyzed the effects of illegitimate tasks and appreciation on outcomes, suggested that future studies should take into account motivational aspects. As task characteristics are known to predict self-determined motivation depending on their autonomy supportiveness (Gagné and Deci 2005), it is assumed that illegitimate tasks influence volunteer motivation in a similar way. Indeed, illegitimate tasks have been found to mainly thwart the need for autonomy, which in turn is known to reduce feelings of self-determined motivation (Gagné and Deci 2005). Consequently, we assume that illegitimate tasks thwart the self-determined motivation of volunteers. Moreover, various studies in the paid-work context have shown that self-determined motivation predicts outcomes, such as job satisfaction, commitment, organizational trust, psychological well-being, or citizenship behavior (Gagné and Deci 2005). In the volunteer context, self-determined motivation has been shown to mediate the effects of task characteristics on satisfaction (Millette and Gagné 2008). Therefore, our mediation hypothesis is as follows:

H2 Self-determined motivation mediates the effect of illegitimate tasks on outcomes.

Role Orientation as a Moderator

As the impact of illegitimate tasks depends on how people conceive their own roles, we tested if role orientation moderates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and outcomes. Based on Semmer et al. (2010), it is assumed that the breadth of the volunteers' role orientation would moderate the *strength* of the negative effect of illegitimate tasks on outcomes. According to Semmer et al. (2010), “What is regarded as legitimate by one individual (or in one organization) may be regarded as illegitimate by another one” (p. 88). Therefore, whether tasks are perceived as legitimate depends on how individuals define their role (Fay and Sonnentag 2010; Semmer et al. 2010). For this reason, Semmer et al. (2010) suggested testing for the breadth of people's role definition and using this personal characteristic as a moderator. It is logical to assume this reasoning regarding the moderating influence of role breadth is true not only for paid workers but also for volunteers, although the professional roles, and the norms of what can and what cannot be expected from volunteers, is less explicit in comparison to paid workers. Nevertheless, Grube and

Piliavin (2000) showed that volunteers do reflect their own role within the organization as they differentiate between a general volunteer role and an organization-specific role. Consequently, for the present study, it is assumed that the concept of role orientation is applicable to the volunteer context as well.

Further to the preceding point, the concept of flexible role orientation, as developed by Parker et al. (1997), is as follows: “Individuals with flexible role orientation define their roles broadly and, as such, feel ownership of goals and problems beyond their immediate set of technical tasks, seeing them as ‘my job’ rather than as ‘not my job’” (Parker et al. 2006, p. 639). As Parker et al. (2006) commented, this concept is similar to experienced responsibility for outcomes at work. The word “flexible” might therefore be misleading in that a broad role orientation does not mean that people are flexible in the sense of “adaptable” to changing work situations, but that they are more “involved” in organizational matters. For this reason, the terms “role orientation” and “role breadth” are used as synonyms in the following section.

A “broad role orientation” means that volunteers have responsibilities for diverse organizational concerns, such as the maintenance of equipment, the work effort of colleagues, the efficiency of team coordination or the use of funds. As the organizational involvement of people that define their role broadly is therefore supposed to be higher (Parker et al. 2006), broadly oriented volunteers should also be more involved and more sensitive to demands by the organization (regardless of whether these appeals are legitimate or illegitimate). Volunteers with a narrow understanding of their own role should not feel as concerned about further organizational problems, as they more strictly separate their own tasks.

Thus, illegitimate tasks are expected to be more harmful for those volunteers who feel more responsible for organizational matters of the NPO. In other words, volunteers who encircle their own role very clearly and do not feel as strongly involved in organizational matters (narrow role orientation) will be less affected by illegitimate tasks than volunteers who experience more organizational ownership (broad role orientation). Therefore, our moderation hypothesis is as follows:

H3 The negative effect of illegitimate tasks on outcomes is moderated by role orientation: Volunteers with a broad role orientation are stronger affected by illegitimate tasks than volunteers with a narrow role orientation.

Methods

Procedure and Participants

In order to test the hypotheses, we addressed 360 volunteers of the Red Cross, who were engaged in various projects, such as a driving service for disabled, a visiting service, palliative care, or youth services. Surveys could be completed either online or in paper–pencil form by choice. Both forms were equal in terms of structure and content. All surveys were returned to the investigators directly. The paper forms included a postage-paid envelope.

The results are based on the data of 191 volunteers (155 online and 36 paper forms), which corresponds to a response rate of 53 %. The mean age was 63.71 years ($SD = 14.88$); 46.1 % of the sample was female. Participants worked on average 5.96 h per week ($SD = 5.54$) and stayed at the Red Cross for 5.64 years ($SD = 6.84$), which insured that the surveyed volunteers had some substantial knowledge about their organization. Moreover, 95 % reported that their last assignment was no longer than one month ago.

Measures

Illegitimate tasks. We measured illegitimate tasks with the Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS; Semmer et al. 2010), which distinguishes between two types of illegitimate tasks: unreasonable and unnecessary. Each subscale contains 4 items. Sample items are: “Do you have work tasks to take care of, which you believe are going too far, which should not be expected from you?” (unreasonable tasks); “Do you have work tasks to take care of, which keep you wondering if they make sense at all?” (unnecessary tasks). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently*).

Self-determined motivation. Self-determined motivation was measured with an adapted version of the revised Motivation at Work Scale (MAWS-R; Gagné et al. 2010). The scale consists of 12 items, which in turn are equally divided into the two subscales of intrinsic motivation (2×3 items) and identified regulation (2×3 items). Participants were asked: “Why do you put effort in activities that particularly concern your clients?” and “Why do you put effort in activities that particularly concern your organization?”. Two identical item blocks with 3 intrinsic and 3 identified items each followed. Sample items are “Because I enjoy it” (intrinsic) or “Because personally, I find it important” (identified). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not agree*) to 5 (*agree*).

Role orientation. The role breadth of the volunteers was assessed with an adjusted version of the 9-item scale “Flexible Role Orientation” of Parker et al. (2006). Participants were asked to indicate if various problems would lie within their own scope of responsibilities or in the scope of someone else. Sample items are: “Your customers were dissatisfied with what they received” or “Different people in your area were not coordinating their efforts.” Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 to 5, indicating a broad role orientation for participants with higher scores.

Work engagement. We measured the work engagement of the volunteers with the short 9-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli and Bakker 2003). Each subscale consists of 3 items. Sample items are: “At my volunteer activity, I feel strong and vigorous “(vigor), “I am enthusiastic about my volunteer activity“(dedication) and “I get carried away with my volunteer activity” (absorption). Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*).

Intent to remain. The volunteers’ intent to remain was measured with two items: “If it is up to me, I’ll still be working for the Red Cross in three years from now”

and “I often think about ending my volunteer activity” (reversed). Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not agree*) to 5 (*agree*).

All scales mentioned above were adapted to the volunteering context in that “job” or “work” was replaced with “volunteer activity” and the term “colleagues” was replaced with “other people at the Red Cross” (to include both voluntary and paid staff). Moreover, we pre-tested the role-orientation scale in the volunteer context ($N = 25$). Thereafter, the term “production targets” was shortened to “targets” and the item “costs in your area were higher than budget” was replaced with “resources were not utilized well”. Furthermore, the anchors were adjusted.² Reliability values of the scales are reported in Table 1.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations are shown in Table 1.

The Direct Effect of Illegitimate Tasks on Outcomes

As the bivariate correlations illustrate, intent to remain was negatively correlated to both unreasonable tasks ($r = -.37, p < .001$) and unnecessary tasks ($r = -.31, p < .001$). In turn, work engagement showed lower, but significant bivariate correlations with unreasonable tasks ($r = -.16, p < .05$) and unnecessary tasks ($r = -.18, p < .05$). These findings support H1a and H1b.

Self-Determined Motivation as Mediator for Illegitimate Tasks

Next, we calculated a path model as implemented by AMOS 19.0 to test for mediation of self-determined motivation. Participants with missing data in the requested variables were eliminated listwise, reducing the N for the test of H2 to a total of 171 participants. Due to a relatively small sample size ($N = 171$) and multicollinearity between unreasonable and unnecessary tasks ($r = .61, p < .001$), the path model accentuated the patterns found in the correlation matrix.³

We tested our initially hypothesized model, which did not fit the data: $\chi^2 (N = 171, df = 4) = 5.36, p < .001$, as indicated by the goodness-of-fit statistics displayed in Table 2. Based on theoretical assumptions and modification indices, we additionally allowed for the direct effect from unreasonable tasks on intent to

² For the volunteer context, we adapted the anchors, from 1 (*to no extent/of no concern to me*) to 1 (*does not lie within my scope of responsibilities*) and from 5 (*very large extent/most certainly of concern to me*) to 5 (*lies completely within my scope of responsibilities*).

³ In contrast to the bivariate correlations, the path model simultaneously considers the influence of both antecedents (i.e., unnecessary and unreasonable tasks) on subsequent variables (i.e., motivation and outcomes). The impact of each antecedent is therefore controlled for the parallel impact of the other antecedent. Because the antecedents are correlated ($r = .61, p < .001$), thus share common variance, one antecedent can only add to the prediction of the subsequent variable beyond the variance already accounted for by the other parallel antecedent. Therefore, beyond their common variance, the unique aspect of each antecedent with the subsequent variable becomes more crystallized in path models as compared to bivariate correlations.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and intercorrelations among variables

Measure	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Unreasonable tasks	1.45	.52	(.79)					
2. Unnecessary tasks	1.78	.76	.61**	(.89)				
3. Self-determined motivation	4.23	.54	-.19**	-.18**	(.88)			
4. Role orientation	2.38	.92	.16*	.14	-.05	(.89)		
5. Work engagement	5.24	1.16	-.16*	-.18*	.46**	.04	(.93)	
6. Intent to remain	4.41	.78	-.37**	-.31**	.36**	.00	.40**	(.76)

Note. $N = 191$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

remain. This adjusted model fit was very good $\chi^2 (N = 171, df = 3) = .82$; $p = .482$, but still included one insignificant path. After removing the path from unreasonable tasks on self-determined motivation, the final model fit the data very well: $\chi^2 (N = 171, df = 7) = .88$; $p = .475$ (Fig. 1). Unreasonable tasks directly affected the volunteers' intent to remain ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$). In contrast, unnecessary tasks showed no direct effect on outcomes, but affected the self-determined motivation ($\beta = -.23, p < .01$). Self-determined motivation in turn predicted both the volunteers' intent to remain ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) and work engagement ($\beta = .47, p < .001$). We concluded that Hypothesis 2 was partially supported as self-determined motivation only mediated the effect of unnecessary tasks on the outcomes.

Role Orientation as Moderator

Finally, we tested for the moderating effect of role orientation using hierarchical regression analyses. Role orientation showed a bimodal distribution on the scale with approximately one-third of the participants (32.9 %) rating below 2 (*not within scope of responsibilities*) and two-thirds (67.1 %) between 2 and 5 (*little to completely within scope of responsibilities*). As the portrayed organizational problems were quite extensive (e.g., it is not necessarily expected that volunteers would feel responsible for the work effort of their colleagues), it appeared that the distribution was skewed with an accumulation below 2. Therefore, we categorized role orientation and separated the participants into a group with a broad orientation ($N = 114$), who indicated some ownership for the portrayed organizational problems, and a group with a narrow orientation ($N = 56$), who expressed no responsibility for the problematic situations. Volunteers with a broad role

Table 2 Summary of fit statistics

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	TLI
1. Hypothesized model	21.42	4	5.36	.160	.911	.896	.778
2. Adjusted model	2.46	3	.82	.000	1.000	.988	1.009
3. Final model	3.52	4	.88	.000	1.000	.983	1.006

Note $N = 171$

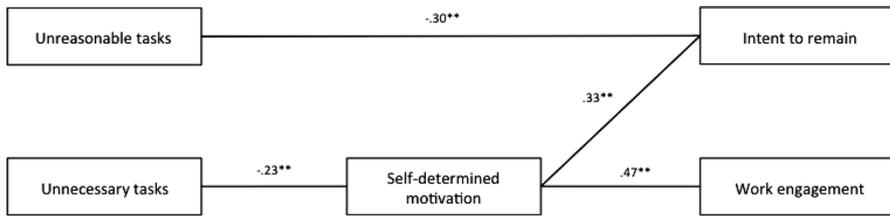


Fig. 1 Final model ($N = 171$)

orientation experienced significantly more unreasonable tasks, $t(167) = -2.70$, $p < .01$, and unnecessary tasks, $t(167) = -2.90$, $p < .01$, than volunteers with a narrow role orientation. Before calculating the interaction term, we centered unnecessary and unreasonable tasks (Aiken and West 1991).

The Effect of Unreasonable Tasks on Outcomes

The first hierarchical regression analysis tested whether role orientation moderated the relationship between unreasonable tasks and the outcomes (Table 3). In step 1, intent to remain and work engagement were each regressed on unreasonable tasks and role orientation to examine the main effects. For intent to remain, the main effect for unreasonable tasks was significant, $\beta = -.36$, $t(161) = -4.77$, $p < .001$, whereas the main effect for role orientation was not, $\beta = -.08$, $t(161) = -1.07$, $p = .286$. In addition, for work engagement, the main effect for unreasonable tasks was significant, $\beta = -.17$, $t(161) = -2.14$, $p < .05$, and the main effect for role orientation was not, $\beta = .03$, $t(161) = .42$, $p = .674$. Adding the interaction term in step 2 did not result in significant increases in explained variance for intent to remain or work engagement. Role orientation did not moderate the relationship between unreasonable tasks and intent to remain, nor between unreasonable tasks and work engagement.

The Effect of Unnecessary Tasks on Outcomes

The second hierarchical regression analysis tested whether role orientation moderated the relationship between unnecessary tasks and the outcomes (Table 3). In step 1, intent to remain and work engagement were each regressed on unnecessary tasks and role orientation to examine the main effects. For intent to remain, the main effect for unnecessary tasks was significant, $\beta = -.30$, $t(161) = -3.86$, $p < .001$, whereas the main effect for role orientation was not, $\beta = -.09$, $t(161) = -1.21$, $p = .229$. In addition, for work engagement, the main effect for unnecessary tasks was significant, $\beta = -.19$, $t(161) = -2.31$, $p < .05$, and the main effect for role orientation was not, $\beta = .04$, $t(161) = .46$, $p = .646$. Adding the interaction term in step 2 resulted in a significant increase in explained variance for intent to remain, $\Delta R^2 = .029$, $p < .05$. The full regression model accounted for 13.7 % of the variance of intent to remain. For work engagement, the

Table 3 Hierarchical multiple regression analyses predicting work engagement and intent to remain

Predictor	Outcomes			
	Work engagement		Intent to remain	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Unreasonable tasks				
Step 1	.028		.147***	
Unreasonable tasks		-.17*		-.36***
Role orientation		.03		-.08
Step 2	.001		.000	
Unreasonable tasks x Role Orientation		.05		.00
Total R^2	.029		.147***	
Unnecessary tasks				
Step 1	.033		.109***	
Unnecessary tasks		-.19*		-.30***
Role orientation		.04		-.09
Step 2	.000		.029*	
Unnecessary tasks x Role Orientation		-.03		-.29*
Total R^2	.033		.137***	

Note $N = 161$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

interaction term was not significant, showing that role orientation did not moderate the relationship between unnecessary tasks and work engagement.

In summary, Hypothesis 3 was only partially supported, as role orientation did not moderate the effect of illegitimate tasks (neither of unreasonable nor unnecessary tasks) on work engagement. With respect to intent to remain, only the effect of unnecessary tasks was moderated, but not that of unreasonable tasks. To illustrate our findings, we therefore solely graphed the effect of illegitimate tasks on intent to remain (for both the insignificant effect of unreasonable tasks and the significant interaction effect of unnecessary tasks): For unreasonable tasks, the negative effect on intent to remain was equally strong for both volunteers with a broad role orientation and volunteers with a narrow role orientation (Fig. 2). As Fig. 3 shows, the negative relationship between unnecessary tasks and intent to remain was stronger for volunteers with a broad role orientation ($r = -.37$, $p < .001$) compared to volunteers with a narrow role orientation ($r = -.09$, $p = .53$), whose intent to remain stayed rather unaffected.

Discussion

The first aim of the present study was to examine the effect of illegitimate tasks on the volunteer outcomes of work engagement and intent to remain. Second, we hypothesized that this effect was mediated by self-determined motivation. Third, we

Fig. 2 Effect of unreasonable tasks and role orientation on intent to remain

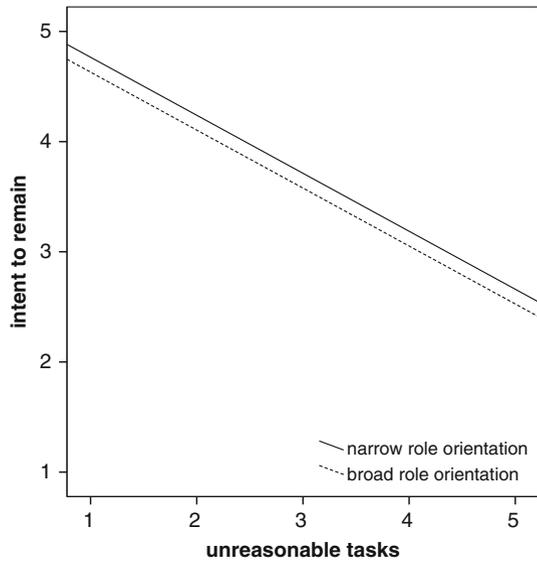
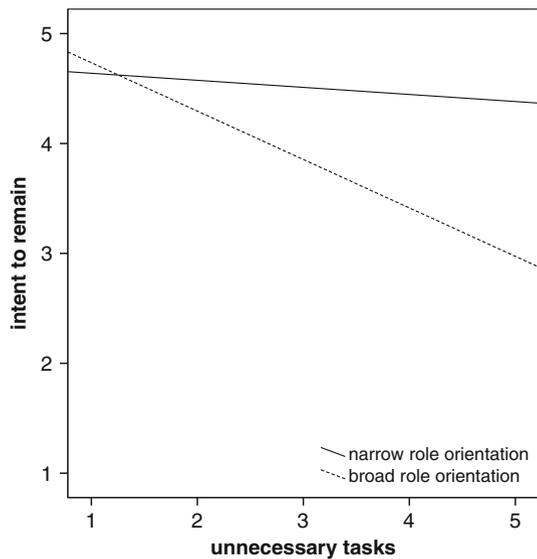


Fig. 3 Effect of unnecessary tasks and role orientation on intent to remain



tested if the breadth of the volunteers’ role orientation moderated the relationship between illegitimate tasks and outcomes.

In summary, we found that illegitimate tasks—demands that volunteers perceive as either unnecessary or unreasonable—have a negative effect on their work engagement and intent to remain at the NPO. Whereas unnecessary tasks reduced the self-determined motivation of volunteers, unreasonable tasks directly reduced the volunteers’ intent to remain at the NPO. Moreover, when volunteers were confronted with unnecessary tasks, the intent to remain of those expressing more

organizational ownership (broad role orientation) decreased, while the intent to remain of those expressing a clearly encircled understanding of their own responsibilities within the organization (narrow role orientation) were unaffected. In contrast, unreasonable tasks equally harmed the intent to remain of both groups, regardless of their feelings of organizational ownership.

Self-Determined Motivation as a Mediating Process

The fact that unreasonable demands directly decreased the volunteers' intent to remain at the NPO (without influencing the motivation first) leaves us to reason that an unreasonable task is an even stronger offense to the volunteer identity than an unnecessary task. Indeed, Semmer et al. (2010) stated that unreasonable tasks are inappropriate for one specific person, while unnecessary tasks concern everyone. It seems reasonable that unreasonable tasks, which are perceived as a targeted offense to one's own person, have a stronger impact than tasks that are perceived as tedious for everyone. However, although unnecessary tasks did not have a direct effect on work outcomes, their negative effect was just as remarkable in that it reduced the volunteers' self-determined motivation. Thus, volunteers experienced less volition and choice during their volunteer activity and, as a consequence, they expressed less work engagement (i.e., vigor, absorption, and dedication) and intent to remain a volunteer for the Red Cross.

Moderating Influence of the Volunteers' Role Orientation

Unreasonable tasks offended the volunteers and had a negative effect on the intent to remain regardless of the volunteers' role orientation. As they are perceived as a specific offense to the self, unreasonable tasks equally concerned all volunteers. In contrast, unnecessary tasks were only influential for the intent to remain of volunteers with a broad role orientation (i.e., those who experienced more ownership and felt more responsible). These volunteers suffered more from useless and poorly organized demands. A person who is involved in the efficient functioning of the NPO and who feels as a part of the whole may be bothered by the fact that tasks do not make sense and could be avoided. However, the intent to remain of volunteers with a narrow role orientation was unaffected. Our interpretation of this is that those volunteers have set clear boundaries and are more successful in protecting themselves from feeling too involved in organizational demands that they perceive as unnecessary. A person, who feels like giving time and energy to a voluntary engagement, but not like having to assure the effective functioning of the NPO, may easier maintain a natural distance from organizational lapses. Interestingly, the volunteers' work engagement was not affected by different role orientations. Whether or not a volunteer experienced organizational ownership, the effect of illegitimate tasks on their work engagement remained the same.

What Demands are Illegitimate for Volunteers?

Illegitimate tasks are defined as an offense to the professional self in that they violate norms about what can reasonably be expected from a given person (Semmer et al. 2010). But what exactly is the self of a volunteer? And what can reasonably be expected? An ethnographic study by Bloom and Kilgore (2003), for example, portrayed the frustrations of volunteers, who were engaged in a one-on-one support for families in poverty. In contrast to relational support (e.g., listening and talking through problems), instrumental support (e.g., housecleaning) caused frustrations that are reminiscent of reactions to illegitimate tasks. These volunteers may have perceived instrumental support as an activity that is not necessarily a volunteer task because it does not tackle the problem at its roots, but only alleviates the problem for a short period of time. Vantilborgh et al. (2012) previously stated that “It is important to understand which obligations employees or volunteers report as being breached or fulfilled” (p. 1074). In addition to the quantitative part of the questionnaire, we therefore asked our participants to give examples of unnecessary and unreasonable tasks they had experienced. We found that poorly organized tasks and procedures or insufficient coordination on the part of the NPO were often criticized, for example, in the case of the driving service, situations such as not being informed in time about patients in a wheelchair (for whom a special car is needed), unclear destination addresses (thus uncertainty of where to drive), having to drive two patients to the same address subsequently (who could have been combined into one trip) or unfair distribution of rides among volunteers were described. Moreover, the predominance of administrative tasks, bureaucracy and statistics over patients were frequent examples. In addition, however, situations that depend on the patients themselves were mentioned, such as having to dress patients first (when the volunteer is only supposed to drive the patient to an appointment), encountering a family member when picking up a patient (who could have driven the patient just as well) or meeting a patient in a bus, who utilized the driving service earlier that day for a doctor appointment due to immobility. Notably these last examples lively illustrate that certain tasks are perceived as an offense to the self and may thwart motivation and intent to remain.

Practical Implications

We conclude that the concept of illegitimate tasks qualifies as one form of PC breach that is relevant within the volunteer context. However, when it comes to practical implications, it would not be possible for NPOs to prohibit illegitimate tasks at all times, as it is not the task itself that is illegitimate, but the individuals’ interpretation of a task that makes it illegitimate. However, there are some things that an organization can do to minimize tasks perceived as illegitimate:

- Particularly in the case of unnecessary demands, NPOs might attempt to identify the respective tasks and address them accordingly by reorganization (Semmer et al. 2010). For those (perceived) unnecessary tasks that cannot be reorganized, giving a rationale may be crucial. Whether tasks are sensed as unnecessary or

not may also depend on the supervisor's talent in translating the organizational needs. It is essential to communicate why a task or an activity is necessary for the success of the NPO.

- Of course, reorganization is not the right solution for encountering unreasonable tasks, which are defined as an offense to a *specific* person. In this case, regular coaching of volunteers may help to detect and buffer their personal feelings of being offended. Therefore, communication on why a volunteer is “the right person for the job” could be insightful and relieving information.
- These implications may also be transferred to small community-based organizations that do not have full time staff available to tackle these problems, as perceived illegitimacy can challenge any sort of organized work. In this case, volunteers may agree on collective rules of communication in the assignment of tasks (e.g., always ask if someone is willing to accept a responsibility) to avoid negative effects. Moreover, as inappropriate demands may have to be settled with colleagues or beneficiaries in person, occasionally provided trainings in non-violent communication by Rosenberg (2003), for example, might be helpful. Another option is to let volunteers deliberately choose the tasks they want to address themselves to whenever possible, as self-assigned tasks should not be experienced as illegitimate.
- Other than in the paid-work context, where the role breadth of employees is positively related to commitment and job satisfaction (Morrison 1994), organizational ownership is not quite as simple for the volunteering context. For an NPO, too much ownership of the volunteers for organizational problems appears to be a risk factor. Volunteers are more strongly affected by illegitimate tasks precisely *because* of their higher involvement. For this group, the supervisor may therefore help to narrow down the volunteer role and explain its boundaries. Once a volunteer feels less responsible, at least those demands that are perceived as unnecessary are no longer harmful, but remain the NPO manager's duty.

Limitations and Future Research

Inevitably, there are limitations to the present study. First of all, the sample size was small and should be increased and extended to include volunteer organizations in addition to the Red Cross in order to further explore the reported results. However, the field sample used for this study did assure some ecological validity. Second, the study was cross-sectional, which did not allow for causal conclusions. Third, the moderation of role orientation revealed only one significant interaction. Although its reliability was good, the scale used for the measurement of (flexible) role orientation stems from paid-work research (Parker et al. 1997), and its applicability to the volunteer context might need further adaptation. Fourth, personal characteristics other than role orientation could be taken into consideration in future research. For example, according to Semmer et al. (2010), justice-related attitudes, such as justice sensitivity, might be of interest for future research. Illegitimate tasks were not only conceived as stressors but also as “a special construct within the general domain of

justice.” In the context of volunteering, organizational justice (mainly procedural justice) has been found to be related to various work attitudes and intentions, depending on the volunteers’ motives (Kurth and Otto 2012): The satisfaction and commitment of volunteers who expressed more social motives was more strongly affected by organizational justice than volunteers who expressed more self-related motives. Likewise, the work outcomes of volunteers may be negatively affected by illegitimate tasks depending on their justice sensitivity.

Conclusion

In summary, in this paper it is illustrated that the impact of illegitimate tasks is important for volunteer management. Although these findings may also be true for paid workers, we find them particularly noteworthy for NPOs as they heavily depend on volunteer volition while at the same time they lack the instrumental means to retain their workforce (Boezeman and Ellemers 2008; Grube and Piliavin 2000; Millette and Gagné 2008; Nichols 2012; Pearce 1993). For successful and sustainable volunteer management, the perceived legitimacy of demands should therefore be taken into consideration.

Acknowledgments We wish to thank Lea Zwicky for her dedicated help and assistance in gathering the data.

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