

Pointless work tasks driving employees to switch off and burn out, new research finds

Unfair or pointless work tasks are pushing employees to switch off and turn online to cope with stress, sleepless nights, and burnout, new research shows.

DARWIN , AUSTRALIA, October 9, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Unfair or pointless work tasks are driving more employees to mentally check out, turning to the internet to cope with stress, sleepless nights, and next-day burnout, new research shows.

The study, led by Hainan University in collaboration with Charles Darwin University (CDU), explored how so-called “illegitimate tasks” (or “i-tasks”) influence workers’ thoughts and behaviour long after they clock off.

“I-tasks are duties that fall outside someone’s job role or seem pointless, like asking a nurse to handle maintenance requests or a software engineer to organise office parties,” lead author and Hainan University Associate Professor Zhao Lijing, said.

“These assignments can leave people feeling undervalued, frustrated, and mentally drained.”

Researchers tracked more than 200 Chinese employees three times a day over a working week to examine how i-tasks affected their after-hours rumination, and what that meant for their performance the next day.

They found that when employees stewed on feelings of unfairness and frustration after hours, they were more likely to “cyberloaf” the next day - browsing social media, shopping, or gaming online to mentally disengage.

But when employees instead reflected on how to solve the problem, they often “task crafted,”



CDU Senior Lecturer in Business and the paper’s co-author Dr Tianyi Long.

reshaping or reprioritising their work in constructive ways.

CDU Senior Lecturer in Business and the paper's co-author [Dr Tianyi Long](#) said the research challenges assumptions that i-tasks are purely negative.

"Frustration can lead to disengagement, but it can also spark innovation," Dr Long said.

"The difference lies in resilience - employees who can adapt and recover quickly from stress are better at turning frustration into problem-solving rather than avoidance."

The research highlights the need for organisations to recognise both sides of i-tasks, suggesting that while employers should avoid assigning staff unreasonable or meaningless work, they can also help employees reframe these tasks as opportunities for growth.

"Providing clear communication, autonomy and resilience-building support can help employees manage challenging workloads more effectively," Dr Long said.

"By investing in resilience programs and flexible job design, employers can further reduce stress, boost engagement and build a healthier, more productive workplace.

"In today's 'do-more-with-less' workplaces, resilience isn't just a personal trait - it's a performance strategy."

The research was published in the [Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology](#).

Troy Kippen

Charles Darwin University (CDU)

+61 403009337

[email us here](#)

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