You do it! Examining the role of age, gender, and OCB in illegitimate task assignment

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Introduction

Illegitimate tasks (ILTs)

Employees' perceptions that certain tasks fall outside of their responsibilities and should not be assigned to them (Semmer et al., 2010).







Literature review and research problem

- Literature of ILTs predominantly focused on the employees' subjective experiences (Sharma &Pandey 2026;Schaefer & Bormann 2026).
- Research on the role of supervisors/leadership focused on
  - Supervisory/leadership style (Ilyas et al., 2025)
  - Leader-member exchange quality (Duncan et al., 2021)
  - How supervisors justify ILTs (semmer et al., 2015)
- Research considers ILTs as a byproduct of poor leadership and organizational inefficiency (Pindek et al., 2019). This view neglects the possibility that supervisors may assign such tasks systematically.

Social judgments | biases | Organizational norms

How do supervisors decide who receive these task?

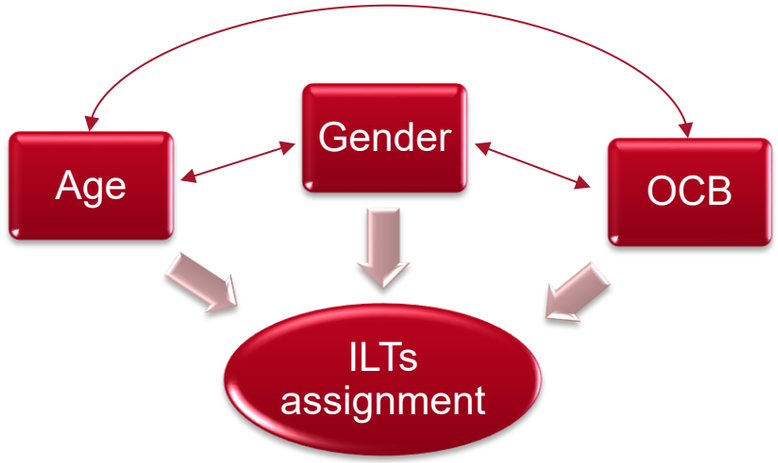
Theoretical background

The Continuum Model of Impression Formation (Fisk & Neuberg, 1990), states that individuals begin with category-based processing—relying on observable behaviours and readily available social cues—to make quick, heuristic judgments.



Subordinate gender, age and OCBs will influence ILT assignment by supervisors; such that

- Women will be more likely to be assigned ILTs than men.
- Older workers will be more likely to be assigned ILTs than younger workers.
- Subordinates who engage in high (vs. low) OCBs will more likely be assigned ILTs.



There will be a two-way interaction between a) age/gender, 2)age/OCB and 3) gender/OCB

There will be a three-way interaction between age, gender, and OCBs

Theoretical background

In **the stereotype content model** (Fiske et al., 2002), two fundamental dimensions describe clusters of apparently universal categories for interpersonal and intergroup perception.

Competence

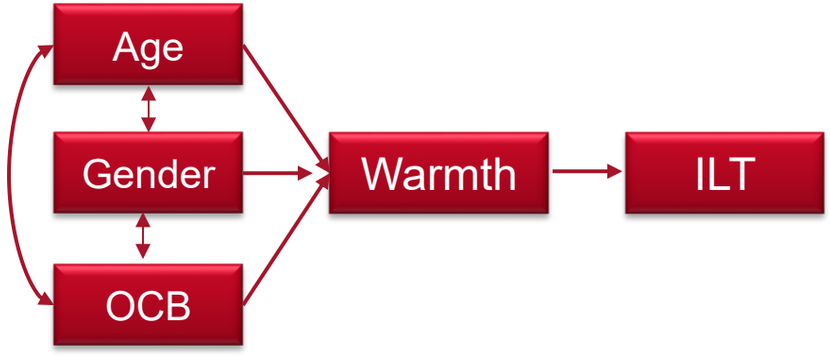
- Intelligence
- Effectiveness
- Confidence

Warmth

- Friendliness
- Trustworthiness and Kindness
- Cooperation and communal



Perceived warmth mediates the relationship between employee characteristics and ILT assignment, such that



- Women will be more likely to be perceived warm than men.
- Older workers will be more likely to be perceived warm than younger workers.
- Subordinates who engage in high (vs. low) OCBs will be more likely to be perceived warm.

Perception of warmth will mediate the two-way and three-way interactions between age, gender and OCB.

Research design

VIGNETTE SCENARIO

Imagine that you are working as a **manager** in an accounting firm, where your team of employees is engaged in activities such as attending meetings, working on reports, and communicating with clients. An ongoing **strike by the cleaning-service personnel began two days ago**. There is uncertainty about how long the strike will last—some believe it will end within the next 24 hours, while others think it could continue for up to five more days.

Despite the inconvenience, your team continues to carry out their regular duties. Due to the special situation, you must decide how to handle the cleaning tasks that are normally assigned to the janitorial staff, who are now no longer available to complete them. **These tasks include cleaning the shared office kitchen, tidying exterior areas, and emptying small rubbish bins. These tasks do not align with the responsibilities of any team member,** but given the current circumstances, you have no other option but to assign them. You have several employees on your team, each with different characteristics.

Name: Sam
Age:54-year-old
Gender: Female

"Sam is a 54-year-old female who frequently helps colleagues with their tasks. She is known for her readiness to take on additional work and her commitment to assisting teammates beyond her formal responsibilities."

The tasks that need to be assigned are: cleaning the shared office kitchen, tidying exterior areas, and emptying small rubbish bins. How likely are you to assign these tasks to this employee?

Extremely unlikely……. Extremely likely

Sample of measures

Warmth and Competence (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske et al., 2002)

Please indicate the extent to which you believe Sam (54-year-old) possesses the following characteristics. Please base your judgments only on the information provided in the employee profile that you read.					
	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Quite	Extremely
Warm					
Friendly					
Good-natured					
Competent					
Capable					
Intelligent					

Sample of measures

ILLEGITIMATE TASK MANIPULATION CHECK (BERN ILLEGITIMATE TASKS SCALE, BITS (SEMMER ET AL., 2010))

In this scenario, do you think the cleaning tasks that you are assigning to your employees to do…					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
are more than what can be expected from them?					
should be done by someone else?					
put them in awkward position?					
are unfair and in appropriate for employees?					

OCB MANIPULATION CHECK (ORGAN (1988))

According to the definition **of organisational citizenship behaviour**, employees exhibit voluntary, discretionary behaviours that go beyond formal job requirements and contribute to the overall effectiveness of an organisation….

Mary is a 23-year-old female who rarely helps colleagues with their tasks. She prefers to focus on her own tasks and seldom offers to help with non-required duties.	Extremely low	Low	Neither low nor high	High	Extremely high
To what extent do you rate this person's organizational citizenship behaviour?					

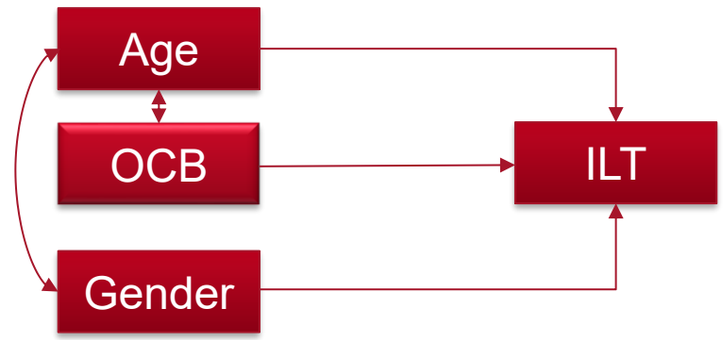
Participant and procedure

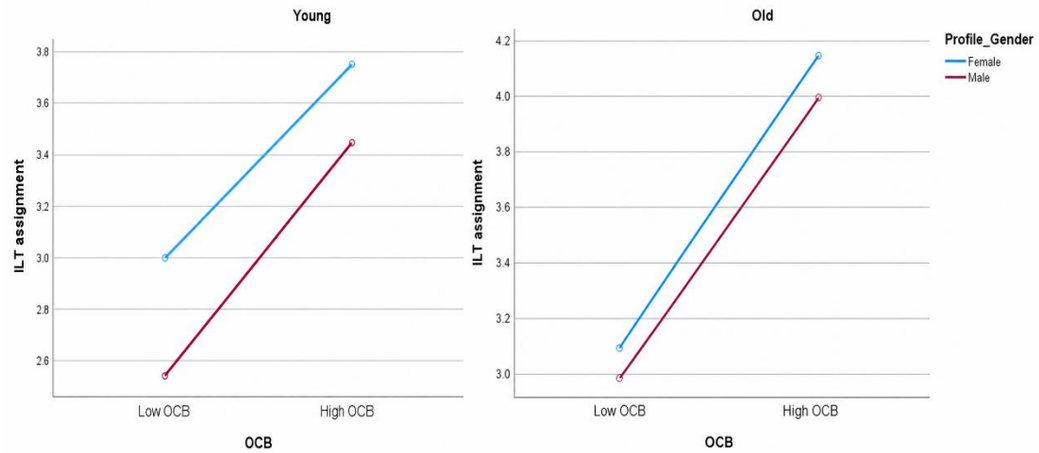
- Prolific platform
  (UK)
- Fair compensation based on Prolific's payment criteria
- 503 participants
  (448 were eligible)
- Age rate:
  (20 to 77 years)
- Gender;
  (Female 54.9%)
- Employment condition
  (Full-time 79.0%)
- Controlled for Participants **power distance**, **managerial role**, **age** and **gender**

Result

MAIN EFFECT

Linear Mixed Model: Effects of Employee Profile Characteristics on Illegitimate Task Assignment			
Predictor	F	p	
Gender	**73.92**	**< .001**	✓
Age	**153.23**	**< .001**	✓
OCB	**902.81**	**< .001**	✓
Gender × Age	**22.16**	**< .001**	✓
Gender × OCB	1.67	.19	✗
Age × OCB	**10.35**	**.001**	✓
Gender × Age × OCB	**5.16**	**.02**	✓
Participant Age Group	**39.28**	**< .001**	
Participant Gender Group	1.74	.18	
Mean Power Distance	.01	.92	
Managerial Level	.03	.86	





Result

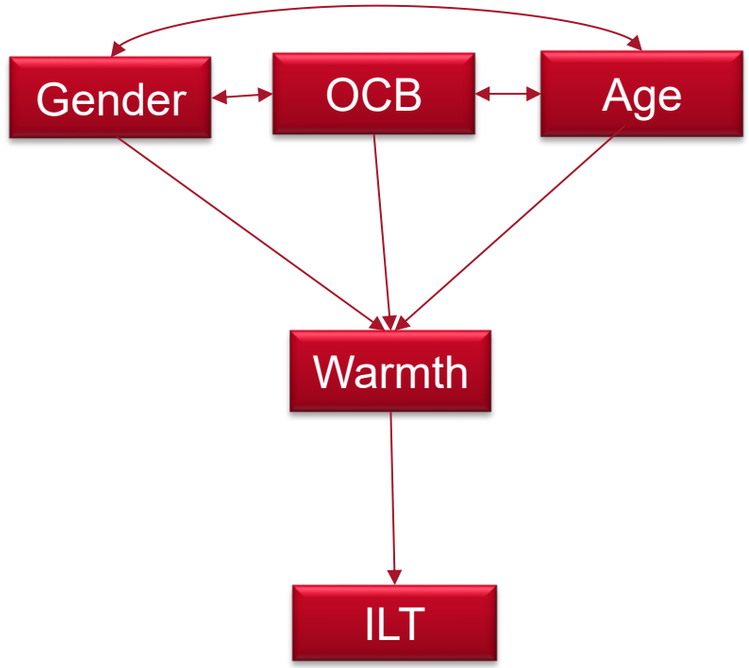
INDIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS IN THE MULTILEVEL MEDIATION MODEL

Effect	B	SE	95 % CI	p	β	
Indirect Effects via Perceived Warmth						
Gender → Warmth → ILT (a1×b1)	**-.01**	**.005**	**[-0.027, -0.007]**	**<.001**	**-.008**	✓
Age → Warmth → ILT (a2×b1)	**.01**	**.004**	**[0.003, 0.018]**	**.009**	**.005**	✓
OCB → Warmth → ILT (a3×b1)	**.39**	**.10**	**[0.191, 0.592]**	**< .001**	**.18**	✓
Indirect Effects via Perceived Competence						
Gender → Competence → ILT (a4×b2)	.002	.002	[-0.002, 0.007]	.253	.001	
Age → Competence → ILT (a5×b2)	.001	.001	[-0.001, 0.003]	.613	.00	
OCB → Competence → ILT (a6×b2)	.05	.04	[-0.028, 0.143]	.189	.02	
Total Effects						
Total Effect of Gender on ILT	**-.26**	**.03**	**[-0.332, -0.204]**	**< .001**	**-.12**	✓
Total Effect of Age on ILT	**.39**	**.03**	**[0.318, 0.461]**	**< .001**	**.18**	✓
Total Effect of OCB on ILT	**.93**	**.06**	**[0.806, 1.067]**	**< .001**	**.43**	✓

Result

INDIRECT EFFECT OF PROFILE GENDER, AGE, AND OCB INTERACTIONS ON ILT ASSIGNMENT

Effect	Path	b	SE	95% CI	p	β	
Indirectly through Warmth	**Gender × Age → Warmth → ILT**	-.16	.02	[-.199,-.121]	**<.001**	-.06	✓
Indirect via Competence	Gender × Age → Competence → ILT	-.02	.01	[-.o40,.000]	.102	-.009	
Indirectly through Warmth	**Gender × OCB → Warmth → ILT**	.41	.05	[.302,.508]	**<.001**	.16	✓
Indirect via Competence	Gender × OCB → Competence → ILT	.06	.04	[-.018,.138]	.103	.026	
Indirectly through Warmth	**Age × OCB → Warmth → ILT**	.49	.06	[.372,.608]	**<.001**	.19	✓
Indirect via Competence	Age × OCB → Competence → ILT	.05	.03	[.-.009,.109]	.103	.02	
Indirectly through Warmth	**Gender × Age × OCB → Warmth → ILT**	-.28	.03	[-.339,-.221]	**<.001**	-.08	✓
Indirect via Competence	Gender × Age × OCB → Competence → ILT	-.03	.02	[-.069,.009]	.111	-.01	



Contribution

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL

- ✓ This study shifted the perspective from employees to supervisors' underlying decision making process in terms of ILT assignment.

- ✓ By integrating the Stereotype Content Model and the Continuum Model of Impression Formation, this study provides a social-perceptual explanation of supervisor decision making.

- ✓ Rather than relying on the subjective impressions, managers should allocate work based on employees' roles, competencies, workload, and legitimate job requirements to reduce the adverse effects of illegitimate tasks on workplace fairness and organisational culture.

- ✓ Organizations should establish clear task allocation guidelines, provide bias-awareness training, and implement accountability mechanisms that encourage objective and equitable decision-making (Cuddy et al., 2011).

Limitation and future research

- The use of a general participant sample rather than individuals with formal supervisory or managerial responsibilities.
- It is not a causal relationship. Our research just predict the likelihood of tasks assignment based on mentioned characteristics and behaviour.
- In-depth interviews with supervisors can provide a valuable avenue for future research by capturing the reasoning, contextual considerations, and competing demands that shape task assignment decisions.
- Future research can explore other factors, such as negative work behaviours and employee's other characteristics, that may influence supervisors' task assignment decisions.

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Thank you for your time!

