Helping as Status Relations: The Role of Envy, Relative Performance Standing and Internal Locus of Control in Influencing the Effects of Receiving Help on Giving Help

By

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Abstract

To date, there is relatively little research in the helping literature that examines both help recipients and help givers in tandem, in particular how help recipients feel about and behave toward help givers. Given that helping behavior does not occur in a social vacuum, help recipients’ perception of the help received can have a significant impact on their reactions towards help givers. Building on the helping as status relations framework, we examine when receiving task-related help elicits envy and in turn triggers positive reciprocal helping directed at the help giver. Across two field studies using a round-robin design, results show that receiving task-related help is more likely to elicit envy towards the help giver when the help recipient performs worse, rather than better, than the help giver. Furthermore, as the help recipient envies the help giver, ironically, he/she may be more likely to pay it back by providing help to the help giver (Study 2). In addition, the positive relationship between envy and help provision towards the help giver is stronger among individuals with higher internal locus of control, compared to those with lower internal locus of control. Our findings also support the overall proposed moderated mediation model. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Dr Kenneth Tai is an Assistant Professor of Organisational Behavior and Human Resources and a Della Suantio Fellow at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business at Singapore Management University. His research interests are in envy, social exclusion and decision-making in the workplace. His work has been published in the Academy of Management Review, Journal of Applied Psychology and Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes. His work has been cited in various media outlets such as The Wall Street Journal, New York Magazine etc.

All interested are welcome.