

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

DECISIONS ABOUT WORKPLACE FAVOR REQUESTS

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Friday, April 28, 2017

2:00 pm

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Today most organizations define job responsibilities less clearly than they did in the past. Additionally, increasing emphasis on personal initiative, empowerment, and self-management places a higher burden on workers to control their own activities. As such, decisions about whether to perform discretionary helping tasks, such as requested favors, is an important issue that faces all working professionals as they try to balance the many divergent demands on their time. This dissertation focuses on how individuals make decisions regarding whether to agree to favor requests, defined as “discretionary, prosocial behavior that is performed in response to a specific, explicit request from one person to another,” in the workplace. I show favors—because they are externally requested—are phenomenologically distinct from in-role behaviors and voluntary helping behaviors. I examine favor requests from the perspective of the performer to identify the motivations that influence responses to favor requests. I consider how favor decision-making—both the factors that people consider as well as the decision outcome—changes across individuals and situations. The dissertation contains three papers that contribute to this goal. Paper 1 defines favors and favor requests, distinguishes them from other workplace helping behaviors, and proposes a framework of the motivational processes of favor request decisions. Paper 2 provides an empirical test of the motivational framework proposed in Paper 1. Paper 3 examines the relationship among helping context, comparing favors versus volunteerism, gender, and guilt proneness. Overall, this stream of research is intended to develop an understanding of how people behave when confronted with favor requests.