

## DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

### **“Will you do me a favor? The decision making processes of discretionary work requests”**

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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 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 “explicit requests to perform discretionary, prosocial behavior,” in the workplace.

In this research, 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 and emotions 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 will be comprised of three sections that present empirical contributions to the literature on favor decision making processes and outcomes in the workplace. First, I build a novel definition for favors and use that definition to theoretically and empirically distinguish favors from in-role and volunteer behaviors. One study (Study 1A) provides preliminary evidence that decision making outcomes about requested behaviors (favors) can be distinguished from decisions about other workplace behaviors. Building upon this study, three new studies are proposed to specify the role of the performer in distinguishing between favors and volunteerism (Study 1B) and examine the individual (Study 2A) and situational (Studies 2B and 2C) antecedents that separate favors from volunteerism. Second, I propose and test a framework for describing the motivational and emotional processes experienced while deliberating about whether to agree to favor requests. One completed study (Study 3) provides empirical evidence to support this framework. In the final section, I focus specifically on the role of guilt in favor decision making processes and outcomes by demonstrating differences in the role of guilt across individuals and situations. This section is supported by one proposed study (Study 4), which manipulates situational guilt.

Overall, this proposed stream of research is intended to develop an understanding of how people feel and behave when confronted with favor requests. Furthermore, this research strives to examine an aspect of managers’ jobs—responding to favor requests from others—that has been underspecified thus far in the organizational behavior research but that plays an important role in individual and organizational performance.

**Keywords:** favors, decision making, emotion, guilt, fear