

Give, take, or match? Styles of reciprocity, job satisfaction, and work motivation

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Abstract

In four online experiments involving 16,461 public professionals, we examined the causal effects of reciprocity styles at work on colleagues' expected job satisfaction and motivation. Our findings indicate that giving, which involves helping others when the benefit outweighs personal cost, is the supervisory reciprocity style that maximizes expected satisfaction among subordinates (Study 1). Additionally, it is expected that public employee motivation will be highest when their supervisor or colleagues exhibit a giving reciprocity style. Interestingly, the positive motivational effect of a giving peer is found to be relatively larger than that of a giving supervisor (Study 2). Furthermore, the expected motivation of current team members is enhanced by the prospect of a giver joining their unit, while the arrival of a taker (someone who only helps if the benefits exceed personal costs) reduces colleagues' motivation compared to the departure of a taker (Study 3).

Evidence for practice

- The reciprocity style of a public employee, whether they are a supervisor or a peer, has a causal impact on the expected satisfaction and motivation of coworkers, independent of leadership style and communication focus.
- Giving, which entails helping at work whenever the benefits to others are greater than personal costs, is the reciprocity style that maximizes the expected job satisfaction and motivation among subordinates and peers.
- In the realm of human resource management, public organizations should recognize reciprocity styles as a separate factor to consider alongside other elements like leadership styles and communication focus.
- The study of reciprocity styles at work contributes to the field of public administration by aligning with a growing body of research that focuses on various other-oriented motives and behaviors.

Every time we interact with another person at work, we have a choice to make: do we try to claim as much value as we can, or contribute value without worrying about what we receive in return?

(Grant, 2013, p. 4)

INTRODUCTION

A few years back, an article in *The New York Times Magazine* titled “Is Giving the Secret to Getting Ahead?”

popularized the benefits of a giving attitude at work. The article featured Adam Grant's book *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success* (Grant, 2013), which portrays three types of individuals based on their primary reciprocity style, that is, how they approach work interactions with most people most of the time (Grant, 2013). As of August 2023, the book has more than 650 citations on Google Scholar and has received awards from Amazon, Apple, the *Financial Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, Oprah's riveting reads, *Fortune*, *Harvard Business Review*, and the *Washington Post* (<https://adamgrant.net/book/give-and-take/>). Building on equity sensitivity theory (Huseman

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et al., 1987), relational models (Fiske, 1992), and social value orientations (Van Lange, 1999)—which are not new to public administration scholars—Grant's typology features a bipartition between givers and takers, alongside a mid-category he calls matchers. A giver is someone who is willing to help at work whenever the benefit to others is greater than the personal cost. Takers, on the other hand, only engage in helping behaviors if the benefits to them exceed the personal costs. Finally, matchers tend to operate on the principle of reciprocity and seek even exchanges of giving and taking in the workplace. It is important to note that, although these three types are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, the same worker may engage in different reciprocity styles depending on the context of the interaction. Nevertheless, Grant (2013) argues that most individuals tend to exhibit a predominant reciprocity style in the workplace, which captures their general approach toward most of the people most of the time.

Give and Take has generated unprecedented attention to the topic of other-oriented behaviors in the workplace, which has drawn scholarship from both mainstream management and public administration (Grant, 2008; Wright & Grant, 2010). More specifically, Grant's typology—and the broader study of reciprocity styles—did not go unnoticed in public administration, where the prospects for research that is meaningful to both scholars and practitioners seem worth exploring (Bellé, 2013). In recent years, the study of other-oriented motives and behaviors has experienced remarkable growth within our field. As the most notable example, “scholarly interest in public service motivation has increased enormously” (p. 424) becoming at the same time multidisciplinary (Ritz et al., 2016). Cognate constructs have similarly garnered increased attention among public administration scholars (Esteve et al., 2016; Ritz et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2019). For example, Steijn and Van der Voet (2019) provide insights into the relationship between prosocial motivation and red tape among Dutch child welfare professionals. Tepe and Vanhuyse (2017) demonstrate that public administration students behave more altruistically and cooperatively than business and law students, after controlling for their levels of public service motivation. Resh et al. (2018) found that workers' identification with the mission of the public and nonprofit organizations they belong to enhances their persistence in prosocial tasks. Vogel and Willems (2020) show that a micro-intervention that emphasizes employees' prosocial or societal impact can positively affect their well-being, intention to stay in the job and willingness to recommend their jobs to others. Borry and Henderson (2020) demonstrate that aspects of ethical climate are significantly related to prosocial rule-breaking among emergency medical service professionals. Work by Weißmüller et al. (2022) suggests that individuals who score higher on public service motivation are more likely to engage in prosocial rule-breaking behavior. Moynihan et al. (2015) demonstrate

that work-related prosocial motivation predicts higher subjective well-being, with the perceived social impact being more important for happiness than the prosocial desire to help. Bro et al. (2017) find that employees experience higher perceived impact on others and are more user oriented in contexts with high citizen contact and that the association between transformational leadership and employee motivation depends on employees' perceived impact. Piatak and Holt (2020) provide evidence that both public service motivation and altruism have separate predictive powers for prosocial behaviors, with public service motivation displaying stronger consistency as a predictor for specific prosocial behaviors when compared to altruism. Despite the considerable growth in this field, the study of reciprocity styles has been disregarded by scholars in public administration. Addressing this research gap is crucial, considering the significant role reciprocity styles play in social interactions within government services and organizations. Public workers, who regularly engage with a diverse range of stakeholders including colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, and the public, can greatly benefit from an examination of how other-orientation influences these interactions.

Considering this, our research endeavors to make a significant contribution to the investigation of reciprocity styles both theoretically and empirically. Through our efforts, not only we hope to generate new and innovative insights within the realm of other-orientation in public administration but we also attempt to have a broader impact on the advancement of social science and related disciplines. Our contribution may help bridge the trade gap that typically exists between public administration studies and other disciplines, such as mainstream management and psychology, by promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange of ideas.

With a few exceptions (Mäthner & Lanwehr, 2017), there is a lack of work that integrates Grant's typology into well-established theories of altruistic behavior (see Bolino & Grant, 2016). What is particularly surprising is that, to our knowledge, no previous studies have explicitly linked Grant's framework to Simon's work on the positive selection of purely altruistic behavior (Simon, 1990, 1992, 1993). In general, empirical evidence for the validity of Grant's framework is scant. Exceptions include the study of the relationship between Grant's reciprocity styles and information sharing (Utz et al., 2014). To advance the scholarly debate in this area, we put the styles of reciprocity portrayed in *Give and Take* to an unprecedented experimental test that aims at gauging the causal impact that a public employee's reciprocity style has on their colleagues' expected satisfaction and motivation. This study may be especially valuable for scholars and practitioners in public administration and management, where the reliance on other-oriented behaviors is of primary relevance in sustaining job satisfaction and work motivation (Cantarelli et al., 2016; Jensen et al., 2019), as well as performance (Andersen et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2019; Moynihan et al., 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Grant's perspective on reciprocity styles is grounded in three streams of theory and research, namely equity sensitivity theory (Huseman et al., 1987), relational models (Fiske, 1992), and social value orientations (Van Lange, 1999). As to equity sensitivity theory, Huseman et al. (1987) portray three types of individuals who differ based on their relative equity preferences. Benevolents, that is, givers, prefer giving more in inputs than they receive in outcomes. Equity sensitives, who mirror Grant's matchers, prefer a proportionate balance of inputs to outcomes, in line with traditional equity theory predictions. Entitleds, that is, takers, prefer receiving more in outcomes than they give in inputs. In the relational models, communal sharing, which entails that people treat all members of a category as equivalent, corresponds to giving. Equality matching, a model in which individuals keep track of the imbalances among them, mirrors Grant's matching. Both market pricing, which is based on rational calculations of expected utility, and authority ranking, which entails linearly ordering people along some hierarchical social dimension, feature elements of taking (Fiske, 1992). In the literature about social value orientations (Van Lange, 1999), prosocial contains aspects of both giving and matching, and individualist and competitor capture different modes of taking.

It is worth noting that the three theoretical pillars of Grant's (2013) typology are not new to public administration scholarship. For instance, large-scale surveys among government employees routinely feature questions eliciting respondents' perceptions with regard to equity and fairness in the workplace (Fernandez et al., 2015). Similarly, scholars in our field have experimentally investigated the causal mechanisms linking contingent pay, fairness perceptions, and effort in administrative tasks (Belardinelli et al., 2023). Then, Monazam Tabrizi (2021) studied the association between relational models and the motivation to share knowledge among public hospitalists. The study found that communal sharing and authority ranking nurtured intraprofessional sharing of knowledge, while equality matching fostered interprofessional sharing of knowledge. Moving to social value orientation, Cohen and Hertz (2020) have adopted this theoretical lens to demonstrate that Israeli police officers display greater prosocial inclinations, in the form of willingness to sacrifice their own self-interest, when off-duty rather than on-duty.

Grant's work on successful altruism also speaks to Simon's research on the mechanisms for selecting other-oriented behavior. Scholars have made a case for the applicability of Simon's logic—which laid solid ground for the foundation and development of public administration—to the study of economics and economic organization in light of its roots in social learning mechanisms (Knudsen, 2007; Korsgaard et al., 1997; McMillan, 2016). Questioning the Neo-Darwinism

framework, which can account only for reciprocal altruism, that is, a form of self-interest driven by an expectation of reciprocation, Simon theorizes the positive selection of genuinely altruistic behavior. In Simon's model, pure altruism is an inevitable by-product or side effect of human docility, alternatively referred to as socializability (Knudsen, 2003), which is the tendency to accept social influence and learn from others. In his perspective, docile individuals cannot help engaging in purely altruistic behavior due to their bounded rationality. In Simon's terms, genuine altruism is a "tax" that society imposes "on the gross benefits gained by individuals from docility" (Simon, 1990, p. 1665). Whereas docility receptivity to social influence is advantageous to evolution because it contributes to fitness in the human species, pure altruism per se is evolutionarily disadvantageous because it decreases fitness. As a result, docile altruists will be positively selected as long as their gains in fitness that derive from human docility outweigh their losses in fitness from altruism. In other words, Simon's mechanism posits the selection of genuinely altruistic behavior that penalizes the altruist's fitness while benefiting society's average fitness. This is conceptually consistent with Grant's definition of a giver as someone who helps "whenever the benefits to others exceed the personal costs" (Grant, 2013, p. 4). In line with Simon's (1990, 1993) approach to altruism, Grant (2013) posits a bipartition between otherish givers, who are altruists with a healthy self-preservation instinct, and selfless givers, who lack any ability to set boundaries or limitations to their altruism. Whereas otherish givers can thrive and tend to rise to the top of their organizations, selfless givers are doomed to fail and tend to sink to the bottom of the success ladder. The bipartition between otherish and selfless givers resonates well with Simon's distinction between intelligent and unintelligent altruists, respectively (Simon, 1990, 1993).

Despite some noteworthy differences, Simon's (1990, 1993) mechanism for social selection and Grant's (2013) model appear fundamentally consistent. Whereas population genetics and economics studies that move from the first principles of natural selection posit that people are necessarily and consistently selfish, both Simon and Grant propose the existence of a genuine form of altruism that goes beyond close kin and is driven neither by expected reciprocity nor by social enforcement. This has clear implications for how governmental and private organizations can motivate their employees (Høstrup & Andersen, 2022; Perry et al., 2009). However, whereas Simon focuses on biological fitness, which is the expected number of progeny, Grant is mainly concerned with organizational fitness, that is, the ability to thrive and succeed in a corporate environment. On the one hand, givers are at a disadvantage in the fight for business success because their purely altruistic behavior may reduce their competitiveness in the race for power, at least in the short term. In the long run, institutions have an incentive to retain

givers because of the benefits they bring to the whole organization. We posit and experimentally test that givers benefit their public organizations by increasing the satisfaction and motivation of their colleagues.

In addition to givers, Grant portrays two additional reciprocity styles. Takers are on the opposite side of the spectrum compared to givers because they strategically approach their interactions with others. Specifically, takers engage in helping only when the personal benefits outweigh the personal costs. Between givers and takers, matchers “operate on the principle of fairness: when they help others, they protect themselves by seeking reciprocity” (Grant, 2013, p. 4). Thus, the interactions of matchers with others on the job are characterized by an even exchange of giving and taking.

Although, to the best of our knowledge, a rigorous application of Grant’s reciprocity styles to empirical research is still missing (see Mäthner & Lanwehr, 2017; Utz et al., 2014 for exceptions), extant scholarship shows that other-oriented behaviors in the workplace may have a positive impact on employees’ attitudes and outcomes. Three lines of work seem to naturally resonate with the givers, matchers, and takers framework. One stream of research explores how employees’ positive energy toward others may influence colleagues by generating desirable reactions and preventing undesirable effects. For example, Cross et al. (2003) and Cross and Parker (2004) asked employees across industries and organizations to rate their interactions with others from strongly de-energizing to strongly energizing (Cross et al., 2003; Cross & Parker, 2004). Unlike de-energizing relations with colleagues, energizing interactions mattered for outcomes such as higher job satisfaction and motivation to exert effort. Adopting the norms of reciprocity depicted by Grant (2013), de-energizing supervisors and peers qualify as takers who absorb energy from colleagues around them, whereas energizing coworkers are givers who create opportunities for their colleagues to contribute. Public administration research by Linos et al. (2022) provides evidence that other-oriented behavior, in the form of sharing advice between coworkers, reduces burnout and resignations.

The second line of scholarship investigates whether there is a cause–effect link between expecting the best out of coworkers, which givers typically do, and coworkers’ improved performance. The impact of this type of other-oriented behavior is known as the Pygmalion effect (McNatt, 2000) and has been tested across professions. Pioneering work in this field began with Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1966) study, in which an average of 20 percent of students in each of 18 classrooms were identified by their teachers as displaying exceptional potential for intellectual growth. Despite the fact that these students had been selected randomly, they exhibited significantly greater IQ gains relative to their peers in a control group 8 months later. In a later study conducted by Eden (1990), 29 platoons in the Israel Defense Forces

were randomly assigned to either Pygmalion or control conditions. Leaders of the Pygmalion platoons were informed that their subordinates, on average, possessed unusually high command potential. The Pygmalion platoons significantly outperformed the control platoons, further supporting the Pygmalion hypothesis.

The third stream of scholarship focuses on leader–follower interactions and explores whose giving style—that of the supervisor or that of the subordinates—is associated with desirable job outcomes. A meta-analysis of public administration scholarship shows that organizational citizenship behavior and positive relationships with coworkers are positively associated with job satisfaction (Cantarelli et al., 2016). In a survey with employees’ self-reported measures, perceptions of leaders’ other-orientation were positively correlated with followers’ desirable work outcomes, such as availability to expend discretionary effort and intent to stay (Egan et al., 2019). Zhang et al. (2020) find that leaders’ helping behavior is positively associated with employees’ thriving at work and that this relationship is mediated by employees’ helping conduct. Rubenstein et al. (2020) find that newcomers’ helping in the workplace during socialization is positively associated with supervisors’ other-orientation (i.e., giving style) and negatively associated with supervisors’ self-orientation (i.e., taking style). Based on the above theorizing and empirical evidence, we formulate the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1a. Givers will cause greater expected job satisfaction/work motivation among their peers/subordinates relative to matchers.

Hypothesis 1b. Matchers will cause greater expected job satisfaction/work motivation among their peers/subordinates relative to takers.

Hypothesis 2a. The arrival of a giver in a work unit will increase colleagues’ expected motivation relative to the departure of a giver.

Hypothesis 2b. The arrival of a taker in a work unit will decrease colleagues’ expected motivation relative to the departure of a taker.

STUDIES OVERVIEW

We conducted four large-scale experiments involving 16,461 public health care professionals. The subjects were recruited from the participants in routine employee viewpoint surveys that were administered to the health care employees of three Italian regional governments between March and December 2019 and in March 2023. Upon completing the employee viewpoint surveys, respondents

were invited to participate in an experimental survey by clicking on a link that redirected them to a separate Qualtrics questionnaire. Participation in the experimental survey was voluntary, and responses were anonymous. Table 1 reports the subjects' demographics, separately for each of the experimental surveys that we conducted as part of our study.

Study 1

Study 1 estimates the causal impact of a supervisor's reciprocity style on their subordinates' expected satisfaction through two discrete choice experiments (DCEs), namely Study 1a and Study 1b. A DCE allows estimating the relative importance of factors—called attributes or features—that simultaneously and independently affect people's

preferences when making decisions between alternatives. In its simplest form, a DCE entails presenting respondents with a pair of options (i.e., a choice set) that vary with respect to specific attributes and asking subjects to pick their preferred alternative. The nature of the dependent variable, thus, is binary. We chose this design in light of scholarship demonstrating that it “fares better than traditional survey experiments in terms of external validity” (Hainmueller et al., 2015, p. 27). This methodology is rapidly gaining ground among public administration and management scholars to investigate a wide variety of issues ranging from human resource management (Jankowski et al., 2020; Mele et al., 2021; Meyer-Sahling et al., 2021) and accountability (Aleksavska et al., 2022), to citizens' preferences toward alternative policy solutions (Belle & Cantarelli, 2022).

Across both DCEs, our target attribute of interest is the supervisor's reciprocity style, which can take three mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive levels, that is, giving, matching, or taking. In addition to our target attribute of interest, our DCEs feature the leadership and communication styles of the supervisor as additional features. The rationale for including these two control attributes is to isolate the reciprocity style's effect from other supervisor behaviors that might have an impact on subordinates' job satisfaction (Cantarelli et al., 2016).

Study 1a: Methods

Study 1a was in the form of a paired conjoint with forced choice (Hainmueller et al., 2015). We defined the leadership style attribute and corresponding levels by drawing on the full-range leadership model (Avolio et al., 1999) that has long enjoyed hegemonic status in leadership studies in general (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013) and also in public leadership research (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022). More precisely, we operationalized the leadership feature into three behaviors: contingent reward, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Contingent reward is a behavior associated with a transactional leadership style, which aims to maintain organizational stability through regular social exchanges between leaders and followers to satisfy their respective self-interests. Inspirational motivation and idealized influence are two types of behavior associated with transformational leadership. Whereas inspirational motivation entails articulating a vision of the future that can inspire followers, transformational leaders who exhibit idealized influence act as role models and lead by example by “walking the talk” (Arenas et al., 2017). Of the larger set of constructs encompassed in the full-range leadership model, these three behaviors maximize field relevance on the one hand and meaningfully connect to previous public administration empirical work in the same area (Bellé, 2014, 2015; Høstrup & Andersen, 2022; Nielsen et al., 2019). In light of criticisms of the transformational

TABLE 1 Respondents' demographics, by study.

Study	1a	1b	2	3
<i>N</i> respondents	5652	3303	1140	6366
Regional government	A and B	C	B	C
Gender				
Female	57%	70%	54%	68%
Male	37%	24%	42%	30%
N/A	6%	6%	4%	2%
Age group				
25–34	11%		8%	
35–44	18%		21%	
45–54	33%		34%	
>54	33%		33%	
N/A	5%		4%	
<30		4%		2%
30–39		18%		15%
40–49		27%		29%
50–59		37%		40%
>59		14%		12%
N/A		0%		2%
Job family				
Administrative staff	12%	9%	12%	12%
Nurses	42%	42%	48%	47%
Medical doctors	30%	18%	20%	17%
Allied health professionals	7%	18%	12%	14%
Other	3%	13%	4%	10%
N/A	6%	0%	4%	0%
Type of organization				
Hospital	61%	48%	74%	47%
Ambulatory care	17%	21%	0%	30%
Teaching hospital	17%	30%	20%	18%
Administrative agency	0%	1%	0%	3%
N/A	5%	0%	6%	2%

leadership model by van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) for being content free, we also control the content of the supervisor's communication. We do so by drawing on work on the communication side of leadership by Sinek (2009), who provides a comprehensive communication framework and distinguishes the "Why," the "How," and the "What" of communication. The "Why" refers to communicating the rationale for acting, that is, the reasons behind the request. In other words, the "Why" is the source of inspiration for people to act. The "How" portion of communication discloses expectations about the process. Communicating the "What" clarifies the content of the action.

As a result, the sample of 5652 public employees in our Study 1a were presented with a pair of work units that differed from each other with respect to three attributes of the unit's director: reciprocity style (i.e., giving, matching, taking), leadership behavior (i.e., idealized influence, inspirational motivation, contingent rewards), and communication style (i.e., focused on the "Why," the "How," the "What"). It is worth mentioning that the levels of the leadership style attribute are not ordinal but rather different behaviors. In other words, they do not differ in intensity but in typology. The combinations of the three experimental attributes—each with three levels—generated 27 (i.e., 3^3) unique work unit profiles. Using a cyclical fold-over approach (Street et al., 2005), we built 27 choice sets by pairing each unique work unit with its mirror profile, obtained by moving each attribute to its next level. We developed our conjoint model adopting the fold-over technique, as described in established guidelines for conducting discrete choice

experiments with health workers (Ryan et al., 2012). The fold-over technique ensures orthogonality, that is, minimal correlation between different attribute levels, level balance, with each attribute level appearing an equal number of times, and minimal overlap because the same choice set does not have the same attribute levels. Choice sets in our experiments include all possible combinations of the attribute levels, with each combination paired against its mirror image. Respondents were asked to indicate in which of the two work units they would expect to find a larger percentage of satisfied employees. This formulation was adopted to reduce the risks of social desirability bias. To limit cognitive fatigue, each participant was presented with one choice set, randomly selected from the 27 possible choice sets. As an example, Table A1 in the Appendix reports 2 of those 27 choice sets.

Study 1a: Findings

Table 2 presents estimates generated by a conditional logit model that aims to predict the likelihood of subjects in Study 1a selecting the work unit in which they expect a higher proportion of satisfied employees. The changes in this likelihood are attributed to variations in the three experimental attributes: the director's style of reciprocity, type of leadership, and focus of communication. Established guidelines for conducting discrete choice experiments with health workers indicate conditional logit models as appropriate for a dataset with two observations per choice set (Ryan et al., 2012). For each of the

TABLE 2 Estimates from a conditional logit model predicting the change in odds that public employees pick a work unit as the one in which they expect to find the largest proportion of satisfied employees due to changes in director styles of reciprocity, type of leadership, and focus of communication (Study 1a).

	β	OR	SE	Δ odds	z	$p > z$
Style of reciprocity						
Giving	.98	2.67	.12	167%	22.05	.000
Matching	.59	1.81	.08	81%	13.71	.000
Taking (ref.)						
Type of leadership						
Idealized influence	.76	2.15	.09	115%	17.61	.000
Inspirational motivation	-.18	.83	.04	-17%	-4.38	.000
Contingent rewards (ref.)						
Focus of communication						
Why	.76	2.14	.09	114%	17.46	.000
How	.04	1.04	.04	-4%	1.03	.303
What (ref.)						
Const		.84	.03		-5.61	.000
n		5652				
LR χ^2		1415.91				
Prob > χ^2		.000				

Note: Italic indicates significance level.

levels under our three attributes (i.e., style of reciprocity, type of leadership, and focus of communication), Table 2 displays the coefficients (β), odd ratios (OR), the associated standard errors (SE), the factor changes in odds (Δ Odds), the z-scores (z), and p -values ($p > z$). An OR greater than one indicates that the corresponding attribute level, relative to the reference level, increases the likelihood that respondents will choose a work unit as the one with a higher expected percentage of satisfied employees. An OR smaller than one indicates the opposite. Figure A1a in the Appendix provides a graphical representation of the coefficients (β) and corresponding confidence intervals reported in Table 2.

Our data reveal that professionals in Study 1a expected to find the largest proportion of satisfied employees in work units in which the director is a giver, leading through idealized influence, and focused on communicating why things should be done. Other things being equal, the odds of selecting a work unit as the one with a higher percentage of expected satisfied employees go up by 167 percent when the director is a giver rather than a taker and by 81 percent when the director is a matcher rather than a taker. These results provide support to Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Additionally, the estimates for our control attributes reveal results that might be of interest although peripheral to our research question. Relative to a transactional leader, that is, one who uses contingent rewards, a director leading by example increases the odds that employees pick that unit as the one with the larger expected share of satisfied members by 115 percent and a leader who leverages inspirational motivation reduces the odds by 17 percent. Finally, the odds are 114 percent higher for units led by directors who focus their communication on why things should be done rather than on what has to be done; no significant difference emerges between directors' communications that center on the "How" rather than the "What."

Study 1b: Methods

The findings of Study 1a appear to resonate with the growing body of literature on servant leadership in the context of public administration (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022; Miao et al., 2014; Schwarz et al., 2016). This underscores the necessity for further research to delve into the theoretical and conceptual links between reciprocity styles and the servant leadership framework. Such studies can contribute to a deeper comprehension of how reciprocity behaviors and servant leadership practices facilitate constructive and enduring relationships between leaders and followers, resulting in positive outcomes, including job satisfaction. To advance research in this direction, we preregistered (<https://osf.io/s7h9n>) and conducted Study 1b, which aimed to experimentally examine the distinctiveness of constructs between a giving reciprocity style and servant

leadership. Building upon the design of Study 1a, we included an additional level for the leadership attribute, namely servant leadership. Moreover, to assess the external validity of Study 1a's findings, we modified the outcome question of the DCE by asking participants to indicate which of the two presented work units would result in higher job satisfaction for them. Study 1b employed the Qualtrics proprietary conjoint analysis software tool (Qualtrics 2023) and involved 3303 public health care professionals. Participants were assigned to 1 of 260 question sets, each involving two forced choices between a pair of alternatives. Table A2 in the Appendix reports one example of a question set with its two pairs of alternatives.

Study 1b: Findings

Table 3 presents the results derived from a conditional logit model, which aims to estimate how variations in the three experimental attributes (director's style of reciprocity, type of leadership, and focus of communication) influence the likelihood of subjects in Study 1b selecting a work unit that would provide them with an expected greater sense of job satisfaction. Figure A1b in the Appendix provides a graphical representation of the coefficients (β) and corresponding confidence intervals.

Building on the results of Study 1a, our data from Study 1b consistently show that professionals expect increased job satisfaction in work units where the director displays giving behavior, demonstrates idealized influence, and emphasizes task justifications. Controlling for other variables, the probability of public professionals expecting a work unit will offer higher satisfaction rises by 150 percent when the director exhibits giver behavior compared to taker behavior and by 66 percent when the director adopts matcher behavior instead of taker behavior. These findings provide further support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Additionally, the estimates for our control attributes reveal results that might be of interest although peripheral to our research question. Compared to a transactional leader who employs contingent rewards, a director who leads by example increases the likelihood of employees selecting that unit for greater expected job satisfaction by 294 percent. Similarly, a leader who inspires motivation enhances the odds by 125 percent, while a servant leader achieves a 130 percent increase. Furthermore, unit heads who prioritize communication around the "Why" or the "How" amplify the odds by 44 percent and 20 percent, respectively, compared to directors who primarily focus on the "What."

We now move to Study 2, designed to disentangle the relative strengths of a supervisor's giving approach and peers' giving approach on workers' motivation. Study 2 provides evidence for the question of whose reciprocity style matters more.

TABLE 3 Estimates from a conditional logit model predicting the change in odds that public employees pick a work unit as the one in which they expect to be more satisfied due to changes in director styles of reciprocity, type of leadership, and focus of communication (Study 1b).

	β	OR	SE	Δ odds	z	p > z
Style of reciprocity						
Giving	.92	2.50	.11	150%	20.61	.000
Matching	.51	1.66	.07	66%	11.66	.000
Taking (ref.)						
Type of leadership						
Idealized influence	1.37	3.94	.20	294%	27.19	.000
Inspirational motivation	.81	2.25	.11	125%	16.77	.000
Serving	.83	2.30	.11	130%	17.10	.000
Contingent rewards (ref.)						
Focus of communication						
Why	.37	1.44	.06	44%	8.48	.000
How	.18	1.20	.05	20%	4.30	.000
What (ref.)						
Const	.08	1.08	.03		2.76	.006
n		3303				
LR χ^2		1368.47				
Prob > χ^2		.000				

Note: Italic indicates significance level.

Study 2: Methods

Study 2 is a DCE—in the form of a paired conjoint with forced choice as before—meant to test whose reciprocity style—one’s supervisor or coworkers—is a stronger determinant of professionals’ motivation. Public health care employees in Study 2 were presented with a pair of work units that varied along two attributes: the norm of reciprocity of the unit’s director (i.e., giver, matcher, taker) and the norm of reciprocity of coworkers in the unit (i.e., giver, matcher, taker). The combinations of the two experimental attributes—each with three levels—generated a total of 9 (i.e., 3²) unique work unit profiles. As in Study 1a, we used a cyclical fold-over approach to create nine choice sets in which each unique profile was paired with its mirror image, obtained by moving each attribute to its next level. Respondents—1140 public professionals—were asked to indicate in which of the two work units they would expect to be more motivated. As an example, Table A3 in the Appendix reports two of those nine choice sets. To limit cognitive overload, each subject was presented with one choice set, randomly selected from the nine possible choice sets.

Study 2: Findings

Table 4 shows that subjects in Study 2 would be more motivated in work units where the director and peers abide by a norm of giving. Figure A2 in the Appendix

provides a graphical representation of the coefficients (β) and corresponding confidence intervals. Keeping everything else equal, the odds of expecting a higher work motivation go up by 84 percent when the director adopts a giving reciprocity style and by 23 percent when the director uses a matching style, with the taking style being the reference point. Relative to peers engaging in a norm of taking, peers behaving like givers or matchers increase the odds of being motivated by

TABLE 4 Estimates from a conditional logit model predicting the change in odds that public employees pick a work unit as the one in which they expect to be more motivated due to changes in director and peer styles of reciprocity (Study 2).

	β	OR	SE	Δ odds	z	p > z
Supervisor style of reciprocity						
Giving	.61	1.84	.17	84%	6.70	.000
Matching	.21	1.23	.11	23%	2.30	.022
Taking (ref.)						
Peer style of reciprocity						
Giving	1.01	2.73	.26	173%	10.50	.000
Matching	.37	1.44	.13	44%	4.06	.000
Taking (ref.)						
Const		1.17	.08		.17	.014
n		1140				
LR χ^2		177.79				
Prob > χ^2		.000				

Note: Italic indicates significance level.

173 percent and 44 percent, respectively. A pairwise test of equality shows that the positive motivational impact of having a giver rather than a taker among one's colleagues is about twice as large when the giver is a peer rather than the supervisor ($p = .002$). In other words, peers' giving seems to matter more than that of supervisors. Moreover, the motivational benefit of a supervisor being a giver is larger than that of a supervisor being a matcher ($p < .0005$) and marginally greater than peers being matchers ($p = .051$). Furthermore, the peer-givers OR is larger than the peer-matchers ($p < .0005$) and supervisor-matcher ($p < .0005$) ORs. The ORs associated with a director being a matcher and peers being matchers are not statistically different. This pattern of results tends to align nicely with Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

By investigating whose reciprocity style matters more, Study 2 shows that employees' motivation can be boosted if either the supervisor or peers are givers, with the positive motivational effect of a giving peer being relatively larger. We now transition to Study 3 and estimate the impact of the reciprocity style of an incoming or outgoing coworkers on the motivation of team members.

Study 3: Methods

Study 3 is a 2×2 factorial survey experiment with 6366 public employees aimed at testing whether and how the motivation of a public health care professional can be impacted by the reciprocity style of a coworker leaving or joining one's unit. To this end, we manipulated two factors at two levels each: the coworker's reciprocity style (i.e., giving vs. taking) and the direction of the coworker's move (i.e., joining vs. leaving one's unit). This resulted in four experimental conditions: a giver joining, a giver leaving, a taker inbound, and a taker outbound. Table A4 in the Appendix discloses the experimental manipulations. For each experimental arm, subjects are asked what their work motivation would be in that situation on a 0–100-point continuous scale.

Study 3: Findings

Subjects' motivation is highest with the prospect of a giving coworker joining the team ($n = 1608$; $M = 74.78$; $SD = 25.29$), followed by a taker leaving ($n = 1556$; $M = 58.58$; $SD = 31.88$), a giver departing ($n = 1623$; $M = 53.20$; $SD = 30.90$), and a taker joining one's unit ($n = 1579$; $M = 37.49$; $SD = 30.47$; Figure 1). The convergence of lines in Figure 1 indicates an interaction between our two experimental manipulations ($p < .0005$). The loss in motivation when a giver leaves one's team rather than joining it is statistically equal to the gain in motivation caused by an outbound rather than inbound taker ($p = .747$). Hence, both Hypotheses 2a and 2b seem to find empirical support in Study 3.

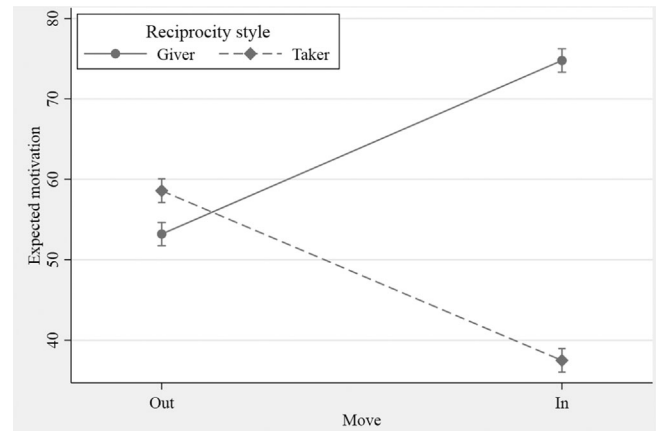


FIGURE 1 Interaction of a coworker reciprocity style and coworker move on the expected work motivation of public employees (Study 3).

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our experimental work provides three main pieces of evidence. First, the supervisor's reciprocity style consistently affects subordinates' expected job satisfaction. More precisely, in all studies, the positive effect of a norm of giving is remarkably larger than that of taking and outperforms a matching reciprocity style. Second, working in a context where either the supervisor or peers are givers matters for boosting motivation, with the impact of peers abiding by norms of giving being relatively stronger. Third, the prospect that a giver will join the unit enhances the motivation of current members of a work team relative to the prospect of a departing giver. Symmetrically, the arrival of a taker reduces colleagues' motivation compared to a taker's departure.

In terms of its contribution to public administration theory, our study aligns with a rapidly expanding body of research that examines various other-oriented motives and behaviors. This includes research on public service motivation (Esteve et al., 2016; Ritz et al., 2016, 2020; Schott et al., 2019; Steijn & van der Voet, 2019), altruism (Piatak & Holt, 2020; Tepe & Vanhuysse, 2017), and prosociality (Borry & Henderson, 2020; Bro et al., 2017; Moynihan et al., 2015; Resh et al., 2018; Vogel & Willems, 2020; Weißmüller et al., 2022). Despite the considerable expansion of research in this domain, the exploration of reciprocity styles at work has been disregarded by public administration scholars. It is of utmost importance to address this gap to comprehend the essential role that reciprocity styles play in social interactions within government services and organizations. Importantly, our study represents a theoretical contribution that extends beyond the realm of public administration scholarship. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to reconnect Herbert Simon's reasoning on the positive selection of genuinely altruistic behavior and the distinction between intelligent and unintelligent altruists with

Adam Grant's ideas on the organizational success granted to givers and the differentiation between otherish and selfless givers. This effort is valuable in identifying a concise set of mechanisms that govern interactions in the workplace, particularly in organizations that are inherently oriented toward engaging a diverse range of stakeholders.

From a methodological standpoint, as far as we know, this study provides the first test of operations for experimental research into the reciprocity styles in the workplace. Previous empirical work that measures giving, matching, or taking has adopted scenarios with outcome distribution tasks and context-specific behavioral simulations. Such existing studies employ cross-sectional methodologies. Our study makes a notable contribution by specifically examining the causal impact of reciprocity styles on expected job satisfaction, while also taking measures to experimentally control for the supervisor's leadership and communication styles. Through the use of different conjoint designs, we were able to estimate the independent and relative causal impacts of each of these three constructs. This approach strengthens the construct validity of our findings, as it helps to avoid conflating the effects of constructs that may overlap and be correlated. Of course, although our experimental findings provide novel empirical evidence about the conceptual distinctiveness of reciprocity, leadership, and communication, the last two constructs are not the core of our research endeavor. Therefore, future work is needed to explore more in-depth the correlation and overlap between our attributes and attribute levels, for instance, between a giving reciprocity style and servant leadership. In addition, our results from Study 2 provide further evidence that reciprocity and leadership are distinct constructs that should not be confused. We found that an individual's motivation is causally impacted by the reciprocity style of their peers, which was shown to have a stronger effect than the reciprocity style of their supervisor. This underscores the importance of considering the impact of different social factors on workplace outcomes and supports the value of our approach in disentangling these complex constructs.

Our study carries scientific and practical implications. As far as research is concerned, experimentally isolating the supervisor's reciprocity style as a construct that influences employee satisfaction and motivation simultaneously and independently of leadership and communication styles paves the way for theoretical advances in the study of public workers' attitudes and behaviors. First, the analysis of the two outcome constructs—job satisfaction and motivation—cannot disregard the reciprocity style of superiors and colleagues. From a broader perspective, our study paves the way for a theoretical reflection on the conceptual relationships between leadership traits and norms of reciprocity. In terms of empirical research, our findings suggest that—at a minimum—reciprocity style should be included as a control in any

study of the relationship between leadership and employee satisfaction and motivation.

Additionally, from a research viewpoint, our work could speak to organizational citizenship behavior scholarship (Podsakoff et al., 2000, 2009) by shedding light on the impact that other-orientation has on colleagues at an individual level. Relatedly, our findings could potentially nurture organizational citizenship behavior work claiming that employees may engage in helping because they are good soldiers rather than good actors (Grant & Mayer, 2009; Vigoda-Gadot & Beerli, 2012). Indeed, research on organizational citizenship behavior in the public domain has been primarily focused on how employees' prosocial behavior benefits themselves or their teams and organizations (Molines et al., 2022). More in general, with an exclusive eye to our discipline, this contribution of our work seems to be particularly timely in light of a recent systematic literature review of organizational citizenship behavior in the public sector that pinpoints the norm of reciprocity as a relevant variable to consider (de Geus et al., 2020). Understanding the causal connections between the styles of reciprocity at work and organizational citizenship behaviors might be a valuable avenue for future research.

As to practical implications, public sector executive training programs can be informed and incorporate insights from our study. These could range from making trainees aware of the consequences that different leadership styles have on employee satisfaction and motivation to interventions aimed at discussing giving styles of reciprocity (Jensen et al., 2019; Moynihan et al., 2012). As a potentially valuable by-product, our results provide experimental evidence on the relative strength of different leadership behaviors and different communication styles. Whereas research on leadership is consolidated, public administration studies on the relevance of communication for work satisfaction and motivation or related job attitudes are rare. One exception includes investigating whether different communication frames and cues—centered on the coherence between a public intervention and professional norms, service to end users, evidence, or established practice—affect the attitudes of street-level bureaucrats and middle managers toward the policy (Andersen & Jakobsen, 2017). Another exception lies in the study of how different communication modes—one or two ways, written or oral—moderate the relationship between leadership and employees' mission valence (Jensen et al., 2018). Overall, public organizations and their managers can also benefit from these results, along the same lines we suggested above.

A final reflection, which paves the way for future research, pertains to the strong preference of our participants to have givers both as peers and as supervisors. This might be potentially consistent with a prevalence of takers among respondents because takers could strategically prefer giving coworkers so as to exploit them opportunistically. Although current evidence suggests that

matchers tend to be the majority of individuals across various cultures, professions, and types of organizations (Grant, 2013), future work is definitely needed to empirically investigate the cross-preferences between givers, takers, and matchers.

Limitations

The results of our work should be interpreted in light of several limitations, most of which are inherent in conjoint studies of the same type. In particular, potential threats pertain to the construct validity of inference. Although we have done our best to operationalize the constructs as accurately as possible based on the theoretical framework of reference and field understandability, we cannot rule out that a choice of different operations may produce different results. Therefore, future research should test whether our results are robust to using alternative operations for the features and levels in our conjoint study. As to reciprocity styles, for instance, future study may adopt different words to characterize different styles. Also, novel work may include more levels for the types of leadership, for instance, by including operations for behaviors that were excluded from our designs. Similarly, future studies should test the construct validity of our inference by varying the operations for the outcome variable. For instance, in Study 1a, we asked participants about their expectation with regard to the percentage of satisfied employees working at different units, whereas in Study 1b, we asked about respondents' own satisfaction. Considering the strong correlation between job satisfaction and work motivation (Cantarelli et al., 2016; Ritz et al., 2016), these construct validity concerns are somewhat mitigated by the consistency of results between studies 1a and 1b, on the one hand, and Study 2, in which respondents were asked about their own motivation.

Compared to other experimental studies, we are confident that our research demonstrates stronger ecological and external validity, thanks to the unique characteristics of our sample. Specifically, our sample comprises a significant number of genuine public health care workers, representing a diverse range of job functions and professional roles within the regional public health care sectors in Italy. As noted by Harrison and List's (2004) typology, our experiments qualify as framed field experiments, as they employ actual health care workers and involve a task and information set that participants can apply in a field context. Moreover, potential threats to external validity in our study have been effectively mitigated by the convergence and consistency of our results, which have been replicated across various regional health care systems in Italy. Furthermore, the large size of our sample of real-world participants strengthens the robustness of our findings and supports their generalizability within similar health care contexts in Italy. However, it is crucial to

acknowledge that cross-cultural and contextual variations may pose challenges to the external validity of experimental studies like ours, particularly when extending our conclusions to other countries. Despite the valuable insights generated by our study, it is essential to recognize the uncertainty in generalizing our results to other settings. Hence, further research utilizing diverse samples and methodologies is needed to attain a comprehensive understanding of the generalizability of our findings beyond the specific context of our study. The use of field experimental evidence may be necessary before scaling-up training initiatives based on our results.

As an additional limitation, we utilized the fold-over design for our conjoint analysis in Study 1a and Study 2 and the Qualtrics proprietary tool for our conjoint analysis in Study 1b. While these designs were chosen for their specific advantages and produced consistent findings, it is important to note that there are several alternative design options that could have also been considered (Bansak et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Research on other-oriented behaviors at work is one of the most vibrant areas of study in contemporary social science and is of great interest to managers and employees in real organizations. It is therefore particularly surprising that the giving, matching, and taking reciprocity styles portrayed by Grant (2013) are still under-theorized and under-investigated empirically. This is even more surprising in a public administration context, where specific calls have been made to better understand the consequences of these styles of reciprocity (Bellé, 2013).

Our study aimed to bridge this gap in the understanding of other-orientation at work in public organizations by connecting Grant's work on successful altruism to its theoretical roots, spanning from Simon's (1990) research into the mechanisms for selecting other-oriented behavior to equity sensitivity theory (Huseman et al., 1987), relational models (Fiske, 1992), and social value orientations (Van Lange, 1999). Additionally, through four large-scale online experiments with public professionals, we aimed to estimate the causal impact that an employee's reciprocity style (either supervisor or coworker) has on their colleagues' satisfaction and motivation, net of types of leadership, and focus of communication. Overall, our novel experimental evidence paves the way for future scholarship on supervisor-subordinate interactions at work, which should recognize and incorporate the unique impact of reciprocity styles on satisfaction and motivation.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Example of 2 of the 27 possible choice sets in Study 1a.

Sample choice set: In which of these two work units, A or B, do you think there is a higher percentage of satisfied employees?	
Work unit A	Work unit B
The Head of the Unit supports employees if he expects to receive back more than he gives them.	The Head of the Unit supports employees if he expects to receive back as much as he gives them.
The Head of the Unit motivates employees by using rewards and punishments.	The Head of the Unit motivates employees by communicating an exciting vision of the future.
When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates why it makes sense to do it.	When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates what to do.
Sample choice set: In which of these two work units, A or B, do you think there is a higher percentage of satisfied employees?	
Work unit A	Work unit B
The Head of the Unit supports employees if he expects to receive back as much as he gives them.	The Head of the Unit supports employees without expecting to receive anything back.
The Head of the Unit motivates employees by communicating an exciting vision of the future.	The Head of the Unit motivates employees by example.
When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates what to do.	When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates how to do it.

TABLE A2 Example of the two pairs of alternatives in 1 of the 260 question sets in Study 1b.

Choice set (1/2) in a sample question set: In which of these two work units, A or B, would your job satisfaction be higher?	
Work unit A	Work unit B
The Head of the Unit supports employees if he expects to receive back as much as he gives them.	The Head of the Unit supports employees if he expects to receive back more than he gives them.
The Head of the Unit motivates employees by serving them.	The Head of the Unit motivates employees by communicating an exciting vision of the future.
When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates how to do it.	When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates why it makes sense to do it.
Choice set (2/2) in a sample question set: In which of these two work units, A or B, would your job satisfaction be higher?	
Work unit A	Work unit B
The Head of the Unit supports employees without expecting to receive anything back.	The Head of the Unit supports employees if he expects to receive back as much as he gives them.
The Head of the Unit motivates employees by example.	The Head of the Unit motivates employees by using rewards and punishments.
When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates what to do.	When the Head of the Unit presents a new activity, he first of all communicates what to do.

TABLE A3 Example of two of the nine possible choice sets in Study 2.

Sample choice set: In which of these two work units, X or Y, would you be more motivated?	
Work unit X	Work unit Y
Your Head of Unit supports you if he expects to receive back more than he gives you.	Your Head of Unit supports you if he expects to receive back as much as he gives you.
Within your team, colleagues support you only if they expect to receive back as much as they give you.	Within your team, colleagues support you without expecting to receive anything back from you.
Sample choice set: In which of these two work units, X or Y, would you be more motivated?	
Work unit X	Work unit Y
Your Head of Unit supports you if he expects to receive back as much as he gives you.	Your Head of Unit supports you without expecting to receive anything back from you.
Within your team, colleagues support you without expecting to receive anything back from you.	Within your team, colleagues support you only if they expect to receive back more than they give you.

TABLE A4 Experimental manipulations in Study 3.

One person, who currently works in *your (another) unit*, is known to everyone for being an *opportunist: he is ready to help colleagues only if he expects to receive back more than he gives them (altruist: he is ready to help colleagues without expecting to receive anything back)*. You just heard that this person will shortly *leave from your unit and will no longer work with you (move into your unit and will work with you)*. By moving the slider below, indicate how motivated you would be, on a scale from 0 to 100, after hearing the news.

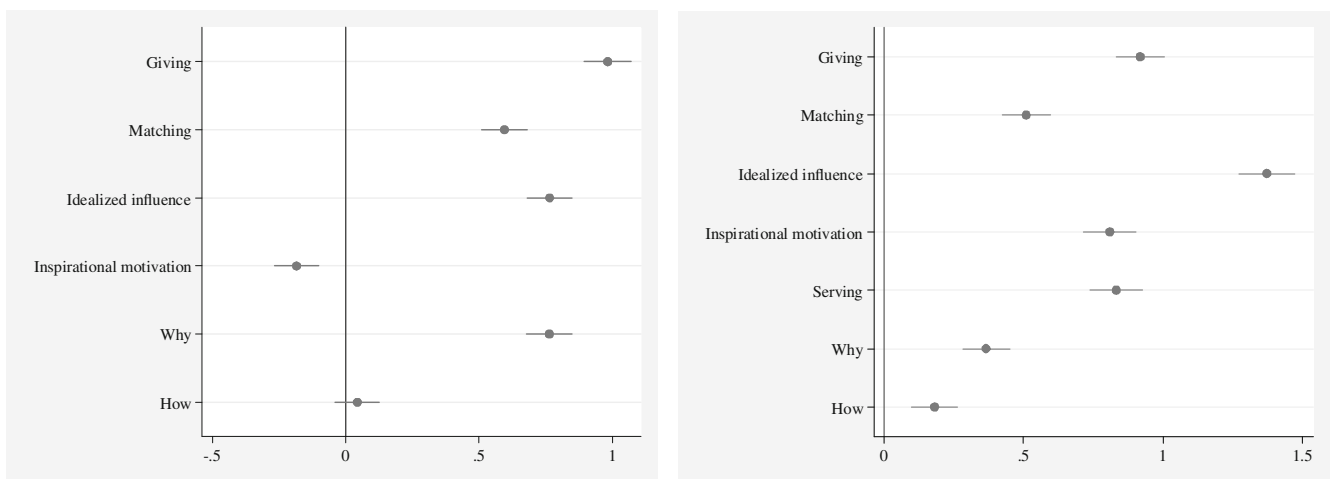


FIGURE A1 Point estimates (β) and confidence intervals from a conditional logit model. (a) Study 1a. (b) Study 1b.

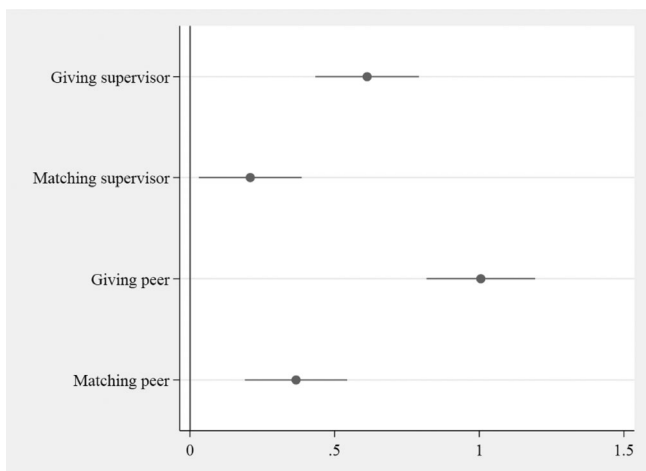


FIGURE A2 Point estimates (β) and confidence intervals from a conditional logit model, Study 2.