It Doesn’t Hurt to Ask (for More Time): Employees Overestimate the Interpersonal Costs of Extension Requests

Jaewon Yoon¹, Grant Donnelly², & Ashley Whillans³

Abstract

Five studies (N=3220) demonstrate that employees avoid asking for more time to work on their tasks because they overestimate its image costs. Results suggest that this perspective gap may lead employees to forgo the opportunity to enhance their performance and image through asking for more time.

Survey & Archival Data Analysis

Employees don’t communicate their need for more time.

Even when managers willingly give more time.

% ask for more time

Performance

Study 1A

• Task: describe events happening in an image, as many & detailed as possible
• "A manager will evaluate how competent/motivated you are based on your performance, which will determine your payment."
• Worked on task for 2 minutes + opportunity to ask for more time (1 min)
• 2 conditions: extension request visible vs. invisible to manager

Study 1B

• Manager perspective.
• 2 (Employees asked vs. did not ask for more time) x 2 (Manager thought employee asked for more time vs. not)

Study 2

2 (Role: Employee vs. Manager) x 3 (Task Urgency: Ambiguous, High, Low)

Sample Scenario: Employee / Urgent

Imagine you work at a firm where you work closely with a direct supervisor. (...) This supervisor’s evaluation of you will determine the pay raise you will receive at the end of the year. (...) Today, your supervisor assigned you to draft a proposal for a fundraising event that your department will host this year. (...) Your supervisor wants you to submit the proposal by the end of tomorrow. The event will be happening soon, so planning the event is a time sensitive task.

The employee’s asking for more time to work on the task, compared to not asking for more time, [would make / makes] the manager perceive the employee as...

Employee

Manager

Statistical results are not shown here for the sake of brevity.