

Proactive and reactive helping: Contrasting the positive consequences of different forms of helping[†]

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Summary

Research on helping has identified positive consequences of helping for the helper, beneficiary, group, and organization. Recent research, however, raises concerns about contingencies that influence the outcomes of helping and suggests the need for a more nuanced perspective on the positive outcomes of helping. In this paper, we develop a novel theoretical perspective to address these contingencies by differentiating between proactive helping and reactive helping. Drawing from the two main theoretical frameworks, which have been used as the basis for studying helping—social exchange theory and functional motives theory—we discuss differences in the positive consequences of reactive and proactive helping for helpers, dyads, groups, and organizations. We submit that reactive helping facilitates heedful relationships, such that it creates and perpetuates social exchange norms that *benefit others* in the group. Conversely, we posit that proactive helping is often based on fulfilling personal needs, such that it *benefits the self* in terms of reputational benefits, well-being, favorable self-evaluations, need satisfaction, and self-development. We discuss theoretical implications of this framework for future research on the positive consequences of helping. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Helping behaviors are a form of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006) that “immediately benefit specific individuals and indirectly through this means contribute to the organization” (Williams & Anderson, 1991, p. 602). Since early research on helping behaviors, scholars have introduced numerous related constructs including altruism, prosocial behavior, OCB-I, courtesy, cooperative work behaviors, personal support, volunteering, interpersonal facilitation, and civic virtue. In an effort to clarify similarities and differences in positively intended citizenship behaviors, Van Dyne, Cummings, and McLean Parks (1995) developed a conceptual framework of four generic types of extra-role behavior. Specifically, they differentiated between promotive and prohibitive citizenship behaviors, and between affiliative and challenging citizenship behaviors. According to their framework, affiliative promotive OCBs, such as helping, are consistent with social norms and expectations of peers and supervisors. These behaviors have a promotion orientation because they work toward goal accomplishment. In contrast, prohibitive citizenship behaviors are prevention-focused and aim to avert specific incidents or outcomes. Challenging citizenship behaviors aim to change the status quo and are not always welcomed by peers and supervisors.

Van Dyne et al. (1995) noted more than 15 years ago that affiliative promotive extra-role behaviors encompass the majority of research on OCBs. Interestingly, this tendency continues unabated (Organ et al., 2006). Given the large volume of research on helping and other affiliative promotive behaviors, however, it is surprising that very little research has focused on more refined conceptualizations that differentiate types of helping. Even though some research has identified different types of helping (Bowler & Brass, 2006; McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Rioux & Penner, 2001), this research tends to be descriptive rather than driven by theoretical similarities and differences in types of behavior. For example, McNeely and Meglino (1994) focused on prosocial organizational behavior,

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role-prescribed prosocial behavior, and prosocial individual behavior, but they did not offer a theoretical rationale for why they focused on these three types of prosocial behavior. Another limitation of existing research is the limited consideration of how different causal mechanisms trigger different types of helping or how consequences of helping differ on the basis of the type of helping. In sum, the field lacks a theoretical framework that organizes different helping constructs and structures the research domain.

Not only would a clearer distinction between different types of helping clarify the nature of helping in organizations, but it would also facilitate more nuanced consideration of the consequences of helping behaviors. Even though consensus is emerging in the research domain that helping in organizations is predominantly a desirable behavior with positive consequences for the helper, beneficiary, and the groups in which helping is performed, the empirical literature is less clear. For example, some research shows negative effects of helping for well-being and career progression, and identifies important contingencies that constrain the positive effects of helping (Bergeron, Shipp, Rosen, & Furs, in press; Bolino & Turnley, 2005). We suggest that focusing on different consequences for different types of helping is one way to address these contingencies. Moreover, individuals often have fundamentally different reasons for why they engage in helping. Thus, any discussion of the consequences of helping should address the extent to which helping is instrumental in accomplishing the goals that initially motivated helping in the first place.

Extant research on the consequences of helping behaviors has drawn from different research traditions and does not always explain why a specific research tradition was selected, rather than another. Moreover, as we develop in more detail later in the paper, different theoretical perspectives make implicit assumptions about the nature of helping, which often go unnoticed and which have not been the focus of systematic academic discourse. Of the different theoretical frameworks, which have been used to study helping behaviors, two frameworks are most prominent: social exchange theory and functional motives theory.

Most OCB research has invoked social exchange as a theoretical foundation for thinking about helping (Blau, 1964). Drawing from social exchange theory, scholars have argued that individuals engage in helping behaviors to reciprocate positive treatment they have received from coworkers (LePine, Piccolo, Jackson, Mathieu, & Saul, 2008), supervisors (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), or the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Meta-analytic findings provide strong support for the hypothesized relationships between positive organizational experiences and helping behaviors. Specifically, quantitative reviews of the helping literature demonstrate that helping increases in response to high-quality leader–follower relationships (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), job satisfaction (Ilies, Fulmer, Spitzmuller, & Johnson, 2009), and perceived organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The key assumption in this research tradition is that helping behaviors are performed *in response* to positive experiences that individuals have in the organization. As such, social exchange theory arguments can be construed to imply that this sort of helping constitutes a reactive behavior.

A second prominent, albeit less influential research tradition invoked as the basis for studying helping, is functional motives theory (Penner, Midili, & Kegelmeyer, 1997). Functional approaches emphasize fulfillment of individual needs as a primary driver of helping. Recent research supports the functional approach to helping and demonstrates that helping can serve different motives in individuals. For example, helping can fulfill prosocial motives, impression management motives, or organizational concern motives (Rioux & Penner, 2001). Research demonstrates that these different motives have important implications for job outcomes. For example, individuals with a prosocial motivation exhibit higher persistence, job performance, and productivity across a variety of jobs and tasks (Brewer & Selden, 1998; Grant et al., 2007; Korsgaard, Meglino, & Lester, 1997). The positive relationship between prosocial motives to engage in helping and job outcomes is especially strong when individuals are intrinsically motivated (Grant, 2008).

In contrast to the social exchange perspective on helping, the functional perspective can be interpreted to imply that helping is a proactive behavior that is initiated by the self, on the basis of personal needs (Penner et al., 1997) instead of in response to having been treated well by others in the organization. Interestingly, this perspective and the notion of proactive helping are consistent with early definitions of OCB that described citizenship as extra-role and discretionary behaviors (Organ, 1988).

In sum, helping research that draws from social exchange theory implies that helping behaviors are reactive because they occur primarily in response to positive experiences. In contrast, helping research that draws on the functional motives approach posits that helping behaviors are proactive because they are initiated by employees and aim to satisfy personal needs. The implications of this contrast in the two perspectives are far reaching and can be better understood by considering the deeper meaning of proactive and reactive work behaviors. By definition, proactive behaviors emphasize the notion of foresight where an individual initiates actions in anticipation of future outcomes. Moreover, proactive behaviors emphasize taking control or causing change (Parker & Collins, 2010). By contrast, reactive behaviors do not depend on intentionality and foresight. Instead, they occur in response to a situation or incident.

On the basis of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), research generally assumes that proactive behaviors are desirable and preferable over reactive behaviors, which tend to position the individual as a mere recipient of and responder to environmental influences. For example, Bandura (2001) asserted that conceptualizations of reactive human behavior essentially reduce consciousness to an “epiphenomenal by-product of activities at the subpersonal level” (p. 3). Bandura also noted that “without a phenomenal and functional consciousness people are essentially higher-level automatons undergoing actions devoid of any subjectivity or conscious control. Nor do such beings possess a meaningful phenomenal life or a continuing self-identity derived from how they live their life and reflect upon it” (p. 3). Overall, this contrast in the fundamental assumptions implied by social exchange theory versus functional motives theory presents an interesting paradox for helping research.

Recognizing fundamental differences between arguments rooted in social exchange theory and the functional approach to helping, we introduce a novel conceptualization of helping that contrasts proactive and reactive helping. We exemplify the value of this integrative framework by proposing critical differences in the positive outcomes of helping on the basis of the type of helping being performed—proactive or reactive. Using our framework, we develop an agenda for research on helping for the next decade.

A Brief Overview of Helping Research

Helping research has a long history, dating back to the beginnings of organization science. In fact, the important role of cooperative work behaviors and prosocial work behaviors was emphasized by Barnard in 1938. Specifically, Barnard (1938) posited that cooperation in organizational settings “means genuine restraint of self in many directions, it means actual service for no reward, it means courage to fight for principles rather than for things, it means genuine subjection of destructive personal interest to social interests” (Scott, 1992, p. 119). Building on the work of Barnard, other research in the then-emerging discipline of organization science also emphasized the importance of cooperative work behaviors. For example, Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) argued that a system of informal group relations ultimately determines the productivity of workers. As such, positive relationships at work and cooperative work behaviors take on an important role in organizational life as predictors of effectiveness.

Katz and Kahn (1966) continued this tradition by emphasizing unique aspects of social structure. According to them, social structures require more maintenance inputs than physical structures. Katz submitted that “an organization which depends solely upon its blueprints of prescribed behavior is a very fragile social system. If the system were to follow the letter of the law according to job descriptions and protocol, it would soon grind to a halt [. . .]. The resources of people in innovation, in spontaneous cooperation, in protective and creative behavior, are vital to organizational survival and effectiveness” (Katz, 1964, pp. 132–133). Parsons (1951) reinforced this idea by explaining that maintenance inputs sustain the social system, by reinforcing interpersonal bonds and interpersonal behaviors, which facilitate the development of social bonds. In sum, Katz and Kahn viewed prosocial behaviors as an important nutrient that sustains social systems without which they could not function effectively over extended periods.

As evidenced by the preceding brief summary, early research in the emerging field of organization science implicitly invoked helping behaviors as key to effective organizational functioning. More recent research introduced the concept of OCB (Organ, 1988; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983) and argued that employee performance should be

evaluated not only on the basis of established task requirements but also on the basis of the extent to which behavior lubricates the social machinery of the organization (Organ, 1977, 1997). From the early beginnings of research on OCBs, Organ emphasized the important role of helping behaviors as a key example of OCB. For example, the first measure of OCB contained altruism (i.e., helping behaviors) and conscientiousness (i.e., in-role behaviors; Smith et al., 1983).

The last 20 years has seen a great proliferation of constructs that are related to OCB. These include prosocial individual behavior (McNeely & Meglino, 1994), helping behavior (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), task-focused interpersonal citizenship behavior, person-focused interpersonal citizenship behavior (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002), interpersonal facilitation (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996), helping co-workers (George & Brief, 1992), and social participation (Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994), all of which describe helping activities at work. Moreover, research in social psychology has discussed additional related constructs, including volunteering, prosocial behaviors, and cooperation (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006). A literature search for articles on the topic of helping in the management and applied psychology literatures on Web of Science shows that research on helping is at an all-time high, with 1556 articles published on helping in 2010, compared with 1239 in 2007, 579 in 2004, and 461 in 2001.

Does Helping Help?

A fundamental assumption in the helping literature is that helping behaviors are associated with positive benefits—both for those who perform helping and for beneficiaries of helping. Indeed, a vast tradition of research has established that helping behaviors are positively related to performance of beneficiaries, groups, and organizations (George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997; Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Moreover, helping behaviors are associated with interpersonal benefits such that they increase trust and team cohesiveness (Andersen & Williams, 1996; McAllister, 1995). Similarly, helping has positive effects for those who engage in helping because it enhances their well-being (Glomb, Bhave, Miner, & Wall, 2011; Sonnentag & Grant, 2012), self-evaluations (Van Willigen, 1998), physical and mental health (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003), and personal development (Hanson, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003).

Interestingly, however, recent evidence also shows that performance of discretionary work behaviors such as helping can, in some cases, have negative consequences for those who engage in helping. For example, Bergeron proposed and demonstrated in a sample of consultants from a large U.S.-based professional service firm that those who engaged in OCB receive lower performance evaluations and experienced slower career progression than those who were less helpful (Bergeron, 2007; Bergeron et al., in press). Similarly, Bolino and Turnley (2005) demonstrated that engaging in extra-role behaviors such as individual initiative can be associated with overload, stress, and work–family conflict. These findings raise questions about when helping is associated with positive outcomes for the self and others, and when helping is associated with negative consequences for the self and others. In summary, evidence supports the notion that important contingencies qualify the extent to which helping leads to positive, negative, or mixed consequences.

One way of addressing these contingencies would be to differentiate between the consequences of helping at work and outside work, testing whether helping at work reduces the resources which are required to maintain a healthy private life. Similarly, research could differentiate between different criteria of performance, such as more narrow conceptualizations of job performance (i.e., task performance), which should suffer when individuals engage in discretionary work behaviors, and broader conceptualizations of job performance (i.e., contributions to team effectiveness), which should improve when individuals help others at work. The inconsistent nature of the research findings on consequences of helping at work, however, could be viewed as making the search for contingencies a lost cause. Specifically, the finding that OCBs can lead to role overload, stress, and work–family conflict is in direct conflict with the finding that helping can increase subjective well-being. Similarly, the finding that the performance

of OCBs slows career progression and leads to lower evaluations of job performance (Bergeron et al., in press) is at odds with the finding that supervisors tend to evaluate the job performance of employees who engage in OCBs more favorably (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1993; Organ et al., 2006). Finally, the significant and large negative relationships of helping with sales performance (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994) and product quality (Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997) call into question the finding that helping behaviors are generally associated with positive work outcomes.

Acknowledging these discrepancies, we propose a different approach. Specifically, we submit that one promising way to consider the contingency effects of helping on outcomes at work is based on differentiating proactive and reactive types of helping. In the following section, we expand upon differences in these two forms of helping at work. We then discuss how the two types of helping are associated with different positive consequences, on the basis of the primary beneficiary of the helping: the individual, dyad, team, and larger collective.

A Theoretical Framework for Thinking about Positive Consequences of Helping: Proactive and Reactive Perspectives in Organization Science

One of the most fundamental debates in psychology is the question of how much agency we have as humans. March and Simon (1958) argued that human behavior is driven by habits, which are influenced by past behaviors and a repertoire of choices that is largely determined by the environment. Lewin (1936) argued that human behavior can best be conceptualized as a function of personalities and environmental experiences. This perspective ultimately depicts the human mind as a passive recipient of genetic and environmental influences, which are largely beyond control. Indeed, there is strong empirical support for the powerful role of environmental influences on cognitions and behaviors. For example, humans are hardwired to experience compassion when they witness suffering and to experience anger when they experience injustice. Additionally, people tend to respond positively when others treat them well—usually by reciprocating in kind. Research on trait activation also supports the powerful influence that the environment has on behavior, such that strong situations can overpower personal inclinations to act in one way or another in a specific situation (Tett & Burnett, 2003).

Others, however, have rejected this perspective on the human mind because it is overly deterministic. In one of the most vigorous defenses of human agency, Bandura (2001) argued that intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness are core human characteristics and that people have the fundamental capacity to conceive, initiate, and execute independent actions. According to Bandura, an agentic perspective of the human mind is essential to capture the complexity of human cognition and behavior, and any attempt to negate human agency renders the notion of a meaningful phenomenal life meaningless.

In sum, the proactive versus reactive framework offers two fundamentally different perspectives on human nature. One emphasizes the situation and the primarily reactive nature of behavior, whereas the other emphasizes a more proactive, forward-looking view of the agentic capacity of the human mind. By and large, psychological research in the last decade has highlighted an agentic perspective of the self, focusing on the “best of the human condition” (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 4). In fact, Fredrickson (2003) challenged individuals in organizations to cultivate “positive emotions in themselves and others, not as end-states in themselves, but as a means to achieving individual and organizational transformation and optimal functioning over time” (p. 164). This quote reflects the *zeitgeist* to emphasize agentic aspects of the human mind and the belief that individuals can adopt a proactive stance in their lives.

Organizational behavior research also emphasizes proactive and forward-thinking actions. For example, Bateman and Crant (1993) introduced proactive personality as a key to success in the changing world of work and argued that the individual disposition to adopt a self-starting approach creates competitive advantages for organizations. Frese and Fay (2001) emphasized the importance of personal initiative at work, and Parker (1998) posited that those who define their work roles broadly and persevere with self-starting efforts even in the face of obstacles are a critical resource for today’s organizations. Others have emphasized the importance of proactive feedback seeking

(Ashford & Cummings, 1985), socialization (Ashford & Black, 1996), and the readiness to change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). Overall, this emphasis on agentic aspects of the self has introduced a normative component to the study of proactive work behaviors, suggesting that employees *should* strive to be more proactive and that organizations *should* attract, select, and retain proactive employees (Fuller & Marler, 2009). In sum, these approaches all share a common focus on individuals as relatively unconstrained by the environment.

This recent emphasis on initiative and agency is in stark contrast to more traditional approaches to work motivation that emphasize the reactive nature of human behavior. For example, most of the early theories of work motivation emphasized a reactive perspective and conceptualized work behavior as determined by job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Hollenbeck & Spitzmuller, 2012). Other influential perspectives within the organization sciences emphasize the reactive nature of work behaviors, including power dependence theory (Emerson, 1962), social constructivist perspectives (Burr, 2003; Grint, 2005), social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and new institutional theory (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Proactive and reactive accounts of helping

Given that proactive and reactive perspectives permeate the organization sciences, it is not surprising that the two perspectives are popular explanations for why helping behavior occurs in organizational contexts. Reactive helping behaviors are performed in response to the needs of others and in response to prior positive treatment provided by colleagues, supervisors, or the organization as a whole. Conversely, proactive helping behaviors originate from within the helper on the basis of active efforts to satisfy personal needs. Restated, reactive helping is induced by the situation, whereas proactive helping is motivated by needs which originate from inside the helper.

The early research on helping in organizations drew on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and described helping as predominantly reactive behavior that reciprocates positive treatment experienced at work. Indeed, in the first meta-analysis of OCBs, Organ and Ryan (1995) reported positive relationships between feeling treated well (i.e., job satisfaction, fairness perceptions, and leader consideration) and reciprocating by engaging in OCBs. Subsequent meta-analyses support this view of helping as reactive and occurring in response to positive treatment at work as represented by job satisfaction (Ilies et al., 2009), perceived organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), justice (Colquitt et al., 2001), and high-quality relationships with supervisors (Ilies et al., 2007).

Interestingly, however, despite the prominence of research that implies a reactive view of helping, some of the first investigations into helping behaviors in organizational contexts focused on proactive aspects of helping. For example, Organ (1988) emphasized the volitional nature of OCB and defined it as discretionary behaviors that are not explicitly enforced by the organization. More recently, Penner and colleagues expanded this line of reasoning by proposing a functional approach to helping where employees initiate helping to serve their own psychological motives (Penner et al., 1997; Rioux & Penner, 2001). In parallel fashion, Clary and Snyder (1991) identified a range of functional motives in volunteers—an activity that also has a strong prosocial component—including the desire to express personal values, adjust socially, develop knowledge and skills, or defend one's ego. Each of these motives is introspective and arises from within the person rather than externally from the environment.

A more refined perspective on differences in proactive and reactive helping

We submit that research could benefit from more systematic and nuanced conceptualizations of reactive and proactive helping behaviors. Drawing on fundamental differences in the social exchange and functional motive perspectives on helping, we start by contrasting proactive helping as primarily based on self-interested motives and reactive helping as primarily based on other-interested motives. We view these two dominant motives as ideal types in a Weberian sense (Weber, 1946). We recognize that helping behavior is rarely driven by pure self-interest or pure other-interest. Instead, both motives are typically present but vary in strength or importance. To highlight

differences in ideal types of proactive and reactive helping, we assume that the two motives are not equally strong in most situations, such that one motive becomes dominant and more influential, and the other is less influential.

By focusing on ideal types, we increase the theoretical precision of our arguments and delineate seven dimensions that refine differences in the conceptualizations of proactive and reactive helping: (i) the primary theoretical orientation with which proactive and reactive accounts of helping are usually discussed (social exchange versus functional motives), (ii) the primary focus of the helper (self-interested vs. other-interested), (iii) the primary driver of helping (satisfaction of functional motives vs. reciprocation and compassion for others), (iv) the dominant identity orientation of the helper (personal vs. relational/collective identities), (v) the preferred type of social exchange (predominantly negotiated vs. predominantly generalized), (vi) the stability of helping over time (high vs. low), and (vii) the primary level of intended consequences (individual vs. dyad, group, or collective). We discuss the differences between proactive helping and reactive helping in terms of the following seven dimensions (Table 1).

First, as described earlier, scholars have relied on two primary theoretical models to explain helping in work organizations and most organizational research on helping has drawn on social exchange frameworks (Blau, 1964), implying that helping is a reciprocal response to being treated well by others. We refer to this as reactive helping because it occurs primarily in response to others in the environment. In contrast, more recent research has complemented the social exchange perspective with a functional motive perspective where the motivation to help originates from within the helper and is primarily a function of the helper's personal motives.

The second dimension that differentiates proactive and reactive helping is the primary focus of the helper. In the case of reactive helping, helpers focus largely on the needs of the beneficiary such that the helper's focus is on others and not on the self. In contrast, proactive helping is primarily focused on the self and efforts to fulfill personal functional motives. From this perspective, proactive helping can be viewed as largely self-oriented.

Third, and consistent with point 2, reactive helping is based on reciprocity and compassion for others, whereas proactive helping is based on personal need satisfaction of the helper. Thus, reactive helping is driven by conditions in the environment, whereas proactive helping is driven by psychological states and needs of the helper.

Fourth, we propose that the two types of helping are driven by different identity orientations. Given the self-interested focus of proactive helping, it is likely that those who engage in proactive helping have a personal identity orientation. A personal identity orientation represents a differentiated, individuated self-concept (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Thus, it is compatible with the desire to satisfy personal needs in the process of helping others (Flynn, 2005). In comparison, reactive helping, with its other-interested focus on benefiting others, should be associated with a relational or collective identity orientation. A relational identity orientation is derived from connections and role relationships with others, whereas a collective identity orientation originates from membership in a social group or collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Accordingly, those who define themselves as interrelated and connected with others should be more likely to engage in reactive helping.

Table 1. Contrasting proactive and reactive helping.

	Proactive helping	Reactive helping
Primary theoretical orientation	Functional motives to engage in helping	Social exchange theory and reciprocity
Primary focus of helper	Self-interest	Other-interest
Primary driver of helping	Satisfaction of personal functional motives	Reciprocation to and compassion for others
Dominant identity orientation of helper	Personal identity orientation	Relational or collective identity orientation
Preferred type of exchange	Predominantly negotiated	Predominantly generalized
Temporal stability of helping	High—motive to helping continues to exist irrespective of beneficiary and context	Low—motive to helping ceases to exist when beneficiary or context no longer needs help
Primary level of intended consequences	Focus on consequences for the individual helper	Focus on consequences for others—the dyad, group, collective

Fifth, we propose that proactive and reactive helping are based on different types of social exchange. Proactive helpers most likely place more emphasis on direct, reciprocal, and negotiated social exchanges where helping is rewarded directly. Thus, they have a more instrumental focus on the returns that they expect from helping others. Conversely, reactive helping should thrive in social systems in which generalized social exchange norms are practiced. Willer, Flynn, and Zak (2012) defined generalized exchanges as “a form of exchange typified by unilateral rather than directly reciprocal resource sharing” (p. 2). In generalized exchanges, individuals do not have the expectation that there will be an instrumental benefit for helping others. Instead, helping is viewed as a valuable investment in group norms that perpetuates collective welfare.

Sixth, we further submit that proactive helping behaviors will be relatively stable such that the helper perseveres in efforts to benefit others. This is because the motivation to help is primarily a function of the personal need to help and less influenced by the situation or needs of the beneficiary. Thus, even in situations in which the beneficiary does not perceive a strong need for help, helpers may provide help to satisfy their own needs. Given that reciprocity and the needs of others are the core of reactive helping, it should be less stable and occur more sporadically than proactive helping. This is because reactive helping is initiated and performed when there is a specific need. Accordingly, high-intensity reactive helping may be followed by periods without helping.

The seventh and last point of comparison is the primary level or focus of the intended consequences. Consistent with points 1–6, proactive helping focuses primarily on positive consequences to the self. Thus, the focus is at the individual level, and the individual helper should be the main focus when investigating the positive consequences of proactive helping. Given that reactive helping focuses on benefiting others, including groups and collectives, research on reactive helping requires more complex research designs. Indeed, the success of reactive helping cannot be evaluated in terms of the psychological benefits to helpers, but instead should focus on the effects of helping on others. Thus, we propose an expansion of levels when examining reactive helping to include the individual level, the dyad, and the group and larger collective in which helping is performed.

The Positive Consequences of Reactive Helping

Reactive helping creates and perpetuates reciprocity norms

At its core, reactive helping is a *response* to others. As such, reactive helping cannot be understood in isolation, but should be considered in the context of the dyad or system of relationships where helpers and beneficiaries interact. Individuals in organizations are constantly faced with the question of how to respond to others. On an abstract level, two options are generally available. The first option is to reciprocate treatment by others. For example, favorable treatment would be returned by engaging in cooperative behaviors or by helping others when they have needs. Conversely, the second option is to remain independent and refrain from reciprocating favors and positive treatment (Nowak, 2006). In some frameworks, this is referred to as a strategy of defection (Axelrod, 1984; Trivers, 1971).

In unordered social systems where individuals do not know each other, defection is a superior strategy because it reduces personal costs for those who choose not to reciprocate positive treatment, while still providing defectors with the possibility of benefiting from random acts of helping offered by others. This, however, does not apply to ordered social systems where members have ongoing exchanges and their actions become known to others.

Cooperating across time in a sequence of exchanges bestows benefits on those who cooperate and also increases the value of cooperation in the group. Those who reciprocate positive treatment form a network cluster open only to others who endorse cooperative reciprocity norms. This sort of group provides members with advantages because there is little uncertainty about how others will respond during exchange, and mutually beneficial relationships are more likely (Nowak & May, 1992).

Thus, reciprocity norms benefit the group as a whole and have important implications for the ability of the group to compete successfully against other groups. Yet, the success of cooperation versus defection strategies depends on

individuals and on the success with which the group competes against other groups. For example, Traulsen and Nowak (2006) showed that a strategy of defection may be optimal for individuals in groups which contain both cooperators and defectors. Nevertheless, groups that contain only cooperators tend to outperform other groups. In sum, we argue that research on the consequences of reactive helping requires an extension in levels to include the dyad and group.

Endorsement of cooperative social exchange norms not only increases the competitive strength of cooperative groups in intergroup comparisons but also has consequences for the attractiveness of the group to members of other groups where cooperative norms are not endorsed. For example, Guerek, Irlenbusch, and Rockenbach (2006) demonstrated that individuals in groups which have a high proportion of defectors prefer to switch to groups where cooperative norms are enforced. Thus, cooperative reciprocity norms create positive, predictable relationships that are attractive to non-group members.

Endorsement of cooperative reciprocity norms also facilitates development of generalized exchange norms in groups. In generalized exchanges, individuals do not return acts of cooperation directly to helpers, but instead “pay it forward” to third parties who have needs at a different point of time (Malinowski, 1922; Willer et al., 2012). Thus, generalized exchange reflects a system of indirect exchange. In generalized exchange systems, people in the group help group members with the highest needs, without incurring an immediate obligation for the beneficiary to reciprocate. As such, generalized exchanges are highly efficient—help is provided when it is needed. Moreover, the need-based nature of reactive helping in generalized exchanges increases the overall flexibility of the system by creating a currency for helping behaviors that allows group members to expect cooperation when they need it.

As an analogy, whereas reciprocal exchanges are similar to barter exchanges where each actor names a price for an act that has to be reciprocated in kind by the receiver, generalized exchange systems are not source specific. Instead, acts of kindness and cooperation create a reserve within the group that assures future help will be available to any group member who needs it, regardless of that person’s balance of exchange with specific members of the group (Nowak & Sigmund, 1998).

Moreover, once generalized exchange norms are established, members who benefit from generalized exchange systems tend to identify particularly strongly with their respective group. Indeed, the positive identification with a group in which generalized exchange norms are endorsed exceeds the level of identification that individuals experience in a system of direct and reciprocal exchanges (Willer et al., 2012).

To summarize, reactive helping has numerous positive consequences. And yet, contemporary research seems to focus on the positive consequences of proactive behavior, and overlooks or downplays the positive consequences of behaviors that are reactive. In contrast to proactive helping that focuses primarily on fulfillment of personal functional motives, reactive helping focuses on benefiting others and is more likely to facilitate an overall system of cooperative reciprocity norms that benefit the group as a whole. Reactive helping facilitates the development of generalized social exchanges and creates network structures on the basis of the norm of reciprocity, which enhance the overall competitiveness of groups in intergroup comparisons.

Reactive helping develops heedful relationships

Reactive helping occurs in response to the needs of others. It is based on deliberate decision-making where helpers assess the needs of others and their own ability as a helper to meet those needs. Thus, reactive helping requires active and purposeful engagement of the helper with the social context. Ryle (1949) and Weick and Roberts (1993) referred to this state of mindfulness as heedful acting where individuals act “carefully, critically, consistently, purposefully, attentively, studiously, vigilantly, conscientiously, pertinaciously” (Ryle, 1949, p. 151).

Heedful acting has important positive consequences for the actor. First, the activation and arousal that accompany heedful acting enhance helpers’ work engagement and task focus (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Second, the deliberative decision-making process that leads to heedful acting provides helpers a heightened sense of control at work. When a helper deliberately decides to invest in social relationships at work, reactive

helping becomes agentic. Restated, even though the notion of reactive helping emphasizes the employee as *responding* to the needs of others, the decision of whether and how to respond to others ultimately rests with the individual. Thus, we argue that it would be inappropriate and unduly narrow to conceptualize reactive helping as a passive work behavior. Instead, it is an other-oriented response to the situation.

By acting heedfully, individuals who engage in reactive helping contribute to the development of a system of heedful relationships and collective mind in the overall group (Wegner, 1987; Weick & Roberts, 1993). Reactive helping ensures that individuals “act as if they are a group” (Weick & Roberts, 1993, p. 360) and not as a collection of individuals who function independently and fail to respond to the needs of others in their social environment. Thus, reactive helping represents a form of heedful relating where individuals incorporate their social environment into their thoughts and actions.

Citing Ash’s (1952) work on mutually shared fields, Weick and Roberts (1993) described the development of collective mind as a process where individual actions converge and start to pull in the same direction. We posit that reactive helping, which responds to the needs of other group members, should facilitate this process because it requires that individuals develop a shared understanding of the situation, goals, and means to attain these goals (Wegner, 1987). This causes individuals to subordinate personal interests to the interests of the group. As a by-product, individuals connect their own fate with the fate of their group and develop feelings of possession for the group, a phenomenon that Van Dyne and Pearce (2004) termed psychological ownership.

It would be wrong, however, to equate reactive helping in heedful relationships with interpersonal relationships in tightly coupled social systems, which are based on precise and binding expectations for how interfaces with other group members should be enacted. In contrast to the deliberate decision-making that precedes heedful acting, norms in tightly coupled systems specify role behaviors and allow little individual discretion on how to enact work roles and interrelations with other group members (Hollenbeck & Spitzmuller, 2012). Thus, reactive helping emphasizes the interrelatedness of individual actions, while also maintaining a healthy degree of personal independence and discretion, resulting in a set of relationships that Weick (1976) has referred to as loosely coupled system.

Moreover, reactive helping in heedful relationships contributes to the flexibility and adaptiveness of the group because it is not based on replicating past performance and instead stimulates a critical reflection process that allows the group to choose whether to modify existing routines or initiate a different course of action. When individuals are responsive in their reactions to others and to the situation, this helps not only to solve temporary imbalances in the distribution of work but also to identify structural problems and consideration of revised workflow and task allocation procedures.

It is important to note that the need-based nature of reactive helping does not seek to patronize beneficiaries. Thus, it does not create or perpetuate a system of dependencies where group members delegate responsibilities to other group members who may be more adept at performing them. Such delegation would be counterproductive because it would overload some group members and create an inefficient distribution of work with bottlenecks that would slow the performance of the group as a whole. Instead, reactive helping is an opportunity to pass on knowledge and decrease the need for similar help in the future. In sum, the positive consequences of reactive helping include the creation of sustainable, high-quality, effective relationships between mindful individuals at work, and increased cohesiveness, flexibility, and adaptiveness of the group.

The Positive Consequences of Proactive Helping

Proactive helping creates reputational benefits

To reiterate an earlier point, satisfaction of functional needs drives proactive helping. Thus, it is primarily a function of the helper and should generally persist across beneficiaries, situations, and time. Application of attribution theory would suggest that persistent patterns of helping will cause observers to make internal attributions and give helpers

personal credit for their helping behavior (Kelley, 1967). Thus, proactive helping should generate positive reputational benefits for helpers.

In turn, having a positive reputation as a helper should confer additional benefits to helpers. On the basis of norms of indirect reciprocity, the reputational benefits of being seen as a proactive helper means that these employees are more likely to receive help from their peers because they will be viewed as having prosocial and altruistic values (Nowak, 2006). Those with positive reputations as proactive helpers should also gain idiosyncratic credits, such that coworkers give them the benefit of the doubt if they make a mistake on a group project or encounter problems with a new task. These reputational benefits, however, may be directly contingent on the number of coworkers who are aware of the helping. Thus, helper benefits may increase when proactive helping is highly visible, such that the more people who see or become aware of the helping, the more pronounced the benefits. In these cases, the benefits to the helper may exceed the personal costs of engaging in helping (Nowak, 2006).

Employees with reputations as proactive helpers should also receive special or preferential treatment from their supervisors. Given that proactive helping contributes to smooth work flow, timely completion of group tasks with tight deadlines, and reduction of interpersonal conflict, it seems likely that supervisors will overlook occasional absences or work problems, and they may also delay giving negative feedback or taking disciplinary actions. This is because subordinate proactive helping makes the supervisor's job easier. Moreover, the positive benefits of proactive helping should be especially beneficial in ambiguous situations where there are no explicit criteria for performance reviews, in politically charged settings, or in situations where there is no direct performance feedback (Bolino, 1999).

Although the aforementioned ideas about the reputational benefits of proactive helping seem reasonable, we note that little empirical research has examined these relationships. Instead, most of the work on the reputational benefits of helping is conceptual (Bolino, 1999) or computational (Nowak, 2006). Thus, there is a need for empirical research on how helping in general and proactive helping in particular influence the reputations of employees in organizational settings.

Proactive helping enhances well-being and self-evaluations

Proactive helping can enhance helpers' well-being. For example, research demonstrates positive effects on positive affect and negative effects on negative affect (Glomb et al., 2011; Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981). Likewise, a recent study by Sonnentag and Grant (2012) demonstrated that helping at work has positive spillover effects on positive affect at home. This suggests that these well-being enhancing effects of helping may generalize to other contexts and are not limited to immediate, short-term benefits.

Research findings also support the Negative State Relief Model of Helping (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976) and show that self-initiated, proactive helping provides personal benefits to helpers by reducing negative feelings and negative mood. For example, Harris, Benson, and Hall's (1975) research suggests that people are more helpful before they confess in church (presumably when guilt and negative feelings are stronger) than after confession. Helping also reduces the effects of being in a bad mood, but this occurs only when people believe that helping will change their current mood state (Manucia, Baumann, & Cialdini, 1984). For example, when subjects were told that a drug (placebo) would prolong their current mood, they were less helpful than those in the control condition, presumably because they believed that there were no instrumental effects associated with helping in the given situation. Finally, Weyant (1978) demonstrated that subjects in a negative mood were more inclined to help than those with neutral or positive moods, again supporting the finding that helping can be used to manage personal mood states. Together, these studies provide strong evidence that people proactively engage in helping to fulfill personal functional needs and that their efforts are often successful.

Research also indicates that proactively helping others can lead to more favorable self-evaluations. Specifically, helping increases life satisfaction and the sense of personal control (Van Willigen, 1998). Helping also increases self-esteem (Yogev & Ronen, 1982) and determination. For example, volunteer studies demonstrate that elderly

volunteers show a stronger will to live and have more positive feelings of self-respect compared with nonvolunteers (Hunter & Linn, 1981). Likewise, research shows positive effects of helping on personal efficacy, self-esteem, and confidence (Giles & Eyster, 1994; Yates & Youniss, 1996).

Proactive helping contributes to need satisfaction

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) highlights the importance of need fulfillment and need satisfaction. Specifically, this theory identifies three critical needs for healthy functioning: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. A large and growing literature supports their predictions and shows positive effects on need satisfaction. For example, need satisfaction mediates the effects of helping on employee well-being (Wagner, 2009). Likewise, a recent experience sampling study by Sonnentag and Grant (2012) suggests that helping others increases positive affect at home because helping gives employees the sense that they are competent.

Wagner (2009) argued that helping constitutes self-initiated, discretionary work behavior. Thus, employees who engage in helping experience a sense of autonomy, and this allows them to fulfill their autonomy needs at work. Wagner's arguments are especially relevant to proactive helping where the impetus to help originates from within the person. Thus, even though reactive helping may also contribute to a sense of autonomy, the role of the environment in triggering the helping behavior should reduce the effects on fulfillment of autonomy needs. In comparison, proactive helping has more direct relevance to fulfillment of need for autonomy because it is more fully self-initiated behavior.

Moreover, Wagner (2009) argued that helping others facilitates interpersonal contact between employees and enhances the quality of their personal relationships. This is likely to happen because helping, by definition, constitutes an asymmetrical relationship in which a knowledgeable or competent helper assists a less knowledgeable or competent recipient. Such dependencies in helper–helped relationships may facilitate the development of trust between individuals (Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2005).

In addition to fulfilling self-determination needs, proactive helping may also play an important role in the satisfaction of other needs. For example, group members can create a positive sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness by assisting others with their work, thereby differentiating their group from less cooperative groups (Brewer, 1991; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Thus, proactive helping contributes to feelings of belongingness within the group, while enhancing distinctiveness with those in other groups (Brewer, 1991).

Proactive helping contributes to self-development

Proactive helping also has positive implications for the self-development of helpers. For example, social psychological research on volunteering (i.e., a behavior which is similar to proactive helping in the sense that it is also self-initiated) demonstrates that helping has positive consequences for subsequent life stage development. This includes positive habits (not smoking marijuana, abusing alcohol, or engaging in activities that result in being arrested later in life) as well as positive performance (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Moore & Allen, 1996; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005; Uggem & Janikula, 1999; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997). Even though the precise mechanisms that account for these effects are unclear, these findings provide powerful evidence that helping enhances helpers' quality of life, even over many years and developmental stages.

Other social psychological research on volunteering provides additional support. Specifically, Clary and Snyder (1999) identified a range of different functions and benefits from volunteering and highlighted six objectives that individuals may pursue when volunteering: expressing personal values (i.e., humanitarianism; “I feel it is important to help others”), improving their understanding of a subject (i.e., learn about the world; develop and exercise skills; “volunteering lets me learn through direct and hand-on experience”), facilitating growth and positive self-concept (i.e., personal growth and psychological development; “volunteering makes me feel better about myself”), enhancing career success (i.e., gaining career-related experience; “volunteering can help me get my foot in the door at a

place where I would like to work”), establishing social connections (i.e., strengthen social relationships; “people I know share an interest in community service”), and protecting the self (i.e., reduce negative feelings such as guilt or shame; “volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles”). In sum, there is strong research evidence that individuals engage in proactive helping in anticipation of instrumental benefits associated with helping.

Discussion

In this manuscript, we developed a conceptual framework that distinguishes between proactive and reactive helping, and elucidates differences in the positive consequences of proactive and reactive helping. We conceptualized reactive helping as driven by social exchange theory where helping occurs primarily in response to the needs and interests of others. Conversely, we conceptualized proactive helping as based on functional motive theory where helping occurs primarily based on self-interest and is driven by efforts to fulfill personal functional needs. Drawing on conceptual differences in the two types of helping (Table 1), we have discussed differences in the positive consequences of reactive and proactive helping.

For reactive helping, we acknowledge positive consequences for the helper, but place more emphasis on positive consequences for the dyad, the group, and the larger collective. This is because reactive helping establishes and maintains reciprocity norms that make interpersonal behavior predictable and provide the basis for effective and sustainable group functioning. Furthermore, reactive helping facilitates the development of heedful relationships where individuals deliberately consider the situation and other’s needs, and help with the intention of enabling others to enhance their personal capabilities.

Conversely, we emphasized the more narrow positive consequences of proactive helping as focused primarily on the individual helper. This was based on the functional motives perspective, which argues that individuals are motivated to fulfill their own personal needs. Thus, proactive helping is self-generated and has more of a self-focus compared with reactive helping. Although proactive helping typically benefits the target, the key focus, according to functional motives theory, is personal benefits to the helper. These include the functional objectives of creating a positive reputation, enhancing well-being, and learning new things that aid self-development. Our framework with the contrasting outcomes for proactive and reactive helping has a number of important theoretical and practical implications.

Implications for theory

This manuscript makes five key theoretical contributions to the helping literature. First, by contrasting perspectives on helping rooted in social exchange theory and functional motive theory, we have differentiated between reactive and proactive helping. This represents an important extension of existing research because most research implicitly assumes that helping is generally affiliative and promotive (Van Dyne et al., 1995). We provide a more refined and nuanced perspective on helping and the positive consequences of helping on the basis of whether the helping is predominantly proactive (originating from within the helper) or reactive (originating largely from outside the person). Previous research has implicitly implied differences in reactive and proactive helping, but has not made these differences and their consequences explicit. By explicating different motivations, types, and consequences of helping, we uncovered hidden assumptions about the proactive and reactive nature of helping that have guided the helping literature over the last three decades.

Second, by specifying differences in the positive consequences of reactive and proactive helping, we highlight the importance of more precise conceptualizations of helping. Reactive helping is driven primarily by compassion and fulfilling the needs of others. As such, we recommend future research on the consequences of reactive helping for the development of social capital in work groups and organizations. In contrast, proactive helping is driven

predominantly by personal needs of the helper. Thus, we recommend additional research on the consequences of proactive helping for psychological states of the helper. Our framework can guide future research on positive consequences of helping in organizations by pointing to different mechanisms and motives that drive reactive and proactive helping.

Third, recent research on helping in organizations has moved away from an exclusive focus on performance-related outcomes to a more holistic perspective, which has started to consider consequences of helping for well-being and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Glomb et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Grant, 2012; Spitzmuller, Van Dyne, & Ilies, 2008). Our paper adds to this perspective by discussing positive outcomes of helping, which go beyond performance implications. Indeed, our discussion of the positive consequences of reactive helping for heedful relationships and reciprocity norms in collectives and on the positive consequences of proactive helping for personal well-being and self-development should supplement past recommendations for research on non-traditional consequences of helping behaviors. This should help to expand our understanding of the scope of the positive consequences of helping.

Fourth, our paper represents an extension of existing research on helping because it emphasizes differences in the primary intended beneficiaries of reactive and proactive helping. This has important implications for levels of analysis and complexity of future research designs. Existing research on the positive consequences of helping has focused primarily on individual level effects, with relatively few studies at the dyadic or group level. Additionally, existing research that goes beyond the individual level tends to focus on dyadic or group level *performance* outcomes. Although performance is a critically important outcome in all work organizations, the health and well-being of individuals and groups in work organizations are also important and relatively under-researched. We have proposed that reactive helping has important consequences for the quality of dyadic and group relationships, and that proactive helping has special consequences for the well-being of those who help.

Fifth, we challenge the prevailing *zeitgeist* that seems to imply that agentic and proactive work behaviors are desirable and superior to more reactive ways of engaging with the social environment at work. Just as proactive helping has important positive consequences for helpers, reactive helping has its own set of distinct benefits. Importantly, these benefits are not restricted to individual helpers, but extend to the dyad, group, and organization. One of the more important insights of this paper is the identification of the reactive nature of social exchange perspectives on helping compared with the more proactive nature of functional motive perspectives on helping. Thus, we have proposed that reactive helping is based on genuine concern for others and leads to sustainable, effective work relationships that allow both personal and professional growth for helpers and beneficiaries. Conversely, even though proactive helping has positive consequences for the helper, it has the danger of creating prolonged dependency of beneficiaries on helpers, which may detract from individual and group learning.

Implications for practice

Our research also has important implications for practitioners who desire a more nuanced understanding of helping and differences in the positive consequences of different types of helping. Our discussion of reactive helping suggests that organizations can create a climate that allows employees and groups to leverage the positive consequences of reactive helping. Organizations should create a work climate that honors psychological contracts and sets a positive example of how the organization deals with its employees. For example, the extent to which an organization values social exchange norms and psychological contracts with its employees will directly influence the extent to which employees can trust their coworkers to value social exchanges and thus will increase reactive helping in general. The same applies to decision-making processes and the way in which important decisions are communicated to employees. When employees are involved in decision-making processes of their organization, they should develop feelings of psychological ownership for their organization, which will increase the likelihood that they will endorse generalized social exchanges in which helping others does not create an immediate obligation on the side of the beneficiary to reciprocate.

Similarly, organizations can enhance the positive consequences of reactive helping by emphasizing the importance of group goals and organizational goals over individual goals. If employees are rewarded for the success of their respective work teams, they will shift their attention from individual goals to team goals. In the process, employees should become more sensitive to the needs and demands of other team members (Deutsch, 1949). Indeed, the shift to a team-based goal and reward system is a prerequisite for heedful relationships in which employees develop each other over time. In sum, organizations should create conditions that are amenable to trusting and positive relationships so that the positive consequences of reactive helping can materialize.

Creating conditions that are amenable to reactive helping is especially important for teams in which the quality of interpersonal relationships at work is critical, as is the case in high reliability organizations or in teams with high task interdependence between team members. Similarly, teams that require collective learning or teams that work on creative tasks can benefit from managerial interventions that provide a foundation that facilitates reactive helping. As with many other positive work behaviors, the positive consequences of reactive helping can only materialize in an organizational context which supports the innate desire of employees to relate with other employees and create mutually empowering relationships.

Despite the self-focused nature of proactive helping, there are also many situations in which organizations may wish to enhance the positive consequences of proactive helping. Most notably, because of the positive consequences of proactive helping for helpers, proactive helping can be utilized as a means of developing employees' psychological and social constitution at work. As such, it may function as nutrition for a state of mindfulness that may ultimately lay the ground for reactive helping to occur. Organizations can increase the instrumental value of proactive helping by providing rewards for employees who engage in such behaviors. By defining work roles more broadly and by rewarding employees for the help that they provide to others, employees can learn to associate helping with instrumental benefits at work. Moreover, organizations can institutionalize specific forms of proactive helping, for example, by creating mentoring programs in which senior employees mentor more junior employees. Such programs would provide an arena in which proactive helping is recognized and rewarded. Organizations can also increase the attractiveness of such programs by emphasizing their developmental function for both mentors and mentees. In sum, by emphasizing the instrumental value of proactive helping, organizations can create conditions that maximize the return on investment that employees accrue by proactively helping others.

Apart from leveraging the positive benefits associated with proactive helping, however, organizations should also be mindful of the risks associated with proactive helping. As such, any initiative to promote proactive helping should also counteract the potential downfalls of proactive helping. Most notably, proactive helping comes with the risk of creating dysfunctional dependencies between employees, such that more knowledgeable employees perform the tasks and responsibilities of other employees. Such dependencies create bottlenecks in teams and impede learning. Preventing these problems without reducing the incentives for proactive helping is a key responsibility of managers. By ensuring that all employees meet minimum work qualifications and have similar workloads, managers can reduce the likelihood of such dependencies. Moreover, managers should coach employees on how to provide help most effectively, that is, by ensuring that helping develops the beneficiary, instead of making the beneficiary dependent on the helper.

Future research

First and foremost, subsequent research should develop measures of helping that differentiate reactive and proactive helping. This will require demonstration of discriminant validity, as well as cross validation on different samples and evidence that the new measures enhance predictive validity of models above and beyond existing measures of helping—especially when predicting non-performance outcomes of helping. Our discussion of the positive consequences of reactive and proactive helping should help to guide testing of the different nomological networks for reactive and proactive helping. If, as we have argued, proactive and reactive helping are driven by different motives

and have different foci, new measures will need to capture these different motivational orientations. It will also be important to make sure new measures are distinct from existing constructs, which tap motivational orientations to engage in helping—such as prosocial values, organizational concern, and impression management motives (Rioux & Penner, 2001).

Investigating the nature of reactive and proactive work behaviors also requires a discussion of the extent to which the two behaviors might covary in the same person. Restated, can reactive helping be proactive in nature, and can proactive helping be reactive? In this manuscript, we discussed reactive helping and proactive helping as ideal types to highlight the contrasts in their positive outcomes. Future research can relax this assumption and consider more complex conceptualizations. For example, most helping typically represents a mix of proactive and reactive motives. This also raises the question of whether reactive and proactive motives interact to influence individual, group, and organizational outcomes. For example, reactive helping could also be proactive if employees respond to the needs of others (reactive helping) by developing proactive approaches for how specific individuals could be helped. Perhaps the combination of reactive and proactive motives is another ideal type where employees are sensitive to the needs of others (e.g., typical of reactive helping) and also experience a sense of control and autonomy (e.g., typical of proactive helping).

Proactive helping can to some extent be driven by the needs of others. In the total absence of personal needs, proactive helping would simply constitute gift giving in which helpers invent needs for beneficiaries. Furthermore, proactive helping shapes the social reality at work, which has important implications for the helper's environment. Proactively engaging in helping at one point in time can cause others to expect future help and may even trigger felt needs for help (Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004). Thus, just as proactive helping can adopt more reactive elements over time, reactive helping can adopt a similar trajectory, adopting more proactive elements over time. Once helpers respond to the needs of others in a reactive manner, they may define their identity through such acts of helping, changing what used to be an externally driven and reactive behavior to an internally driven behavior that satisfies the personal need to help others.

The preceding discussion illustrates ways that the boundary between proactive helping and reactive helping can blur. This suggests that empirical investigations of proactive helping should consider the extent to which the behavior is proactive (ranging from low to high) and the extent to which reactive helping ranges from low to high. In addition, future research could investigate whether proactive and reactive helping tend to converge and represent combined elements of both types of helping. Recent empirical research suggests that a combination of proactive and reactive helping is possible. For example, Grant (2008) discussed prosocial motives as originating from within the person (i.e., a proactive motivation) and also as being driven by work design features (i.e., a reactive motivation). Clearly, more research is needed on the interplay of proactive and reactive helping behaviors at work.

We further encourage additional research on the negative consequences of proactive and reactive helping. In this paper, we have focused only on positive consequences. We realize that this treatment is incomplete. Given the need-based nature of reactive helping, it is possible that individuals may not align the needs of others with their own capabilities. When this happens, reactive helping may produce negative outcomes (i.e., poor quality help or misdirected efforts to help). Given the other-oriented nature of reactive helping, future research should also investigate the consequences of reactive helping for the well-being of the helper, the personal development of the helper over time, and the costs of reactive helping for the helper.

Just as reactive helping comes with risks, proactive helping has liabilities and risks as well. Most notably, proactive helping can create dangerous dependencies between helpers and beneficiaries that may lead to dysfunctional relationships that prevent the beneficiary from learning the tasks that the helper is performing for them.

Moreover, recent research indicates that the line between positive and negative consequences of helping in organizations may blur at times. For example, Morrison (2006) investigated prosocial rule-breaking in organizations—a construct related to our treatment of proactive helping in organizations. By definition, prosocial rule breaking constitutes a violation of organizational norms, and also a positive behavior that seeks to enhance work efficiency, help a colleague or supervisor, or provide good customer service. Thus, instead of restricting the focus to positive

consequences of helping (as we have in this article) or to an exclusive focus on the negative consequences of helping, future research could also consider the positive and negative consequences of helping simultaneously.

Finally, there is the possibility that the positive and negative consequences of helping in organizations may depend on the status of the beneficiary. For example, Kulik, Bainbridge, and Cregan's (2008) conceptual article posited that there are stigmas associated with helping some groups, such as handicapped people. This suggests that the positive consequences of helping may depend not only on the type of helping performed but also on characteristics of the beneficiary. Overall, this highlights the need for an expanded and more integrated discussion of the consequences of helping that addresses types of helping (proactive and reactive helping), characteristics of the helper (e.g., does the helper have a personal identity, relational identity, or collective identity orientation?), characteristics of the beneficiary (low status vs. high status), and the context in which helping is performed (e.g., in communal or exchange relationships). Such an integrative discussion can better capture the complexity surrounding helping behaviors in organizations.

Conclusion

Much of the prior research on helping in work organizations has treated helping as a general affiliative and promotive behavior that is relatively invariant across situations and time. We challenge this implicit assumption by developing a framework that differentiates between two forms of helping—reactive helping and proactive helping. Moving beyond past conceptualizations, we present a more nuanced perspective of different motivations for engaging in helping behaviors at work. Drawing on these differences in motivation, we have emphasized differences in the positive consequences of reactive and proactive helping, with special attention to the individual level helper benefits of proactive helping compared with the higher level collective benefits to dyads and groups of reactive helping. Overall, we hope our theorizing contributes to the emerging research on non-traditional consequences of helping, stimulates theoretical refinement and expansion of the contrasts between proactive and reactive helping, and triggers empirical research on the consequences of reactive and proactive helping at work.

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