

# How employees react to unsolicited and solicited advice in the workplace: implications for using advice, learning, and performance

## Summary

**What we found:** Employees think that co-workers who give them unsolicited advice are self-serving and flaunting their knowledge, but that co-workers who give them solicited advice are being prosocial and want to help them. Unsolicited advice is seen as less useful than solicited advice.

**Why it matters:** While sharing advice in organizations has been shown to be beneficial, how the advice is shared plays a critical role in whether people listen to the advice.

**What next:** Giving unsolicited advice is tricky and may not lead to any benefits in organizations. Leaders might encourage employees to ask for advice to enable organizations to reap its benefits.

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**How Employees React to Unsolicited and Solicited Advice in the Workplace:  
Implications for Using Advice, Learning, and Performance**

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## Abstract

Employees are often reluctant to ask for advice, despite its potential benefits. Giving employees unsolicited advice may be a way to realize the benefits of advice without relying on them to ask for it. However, for these benefits to surface, it is critical to understand *how* employees react to unsolicited and solicited advice. Here, we suggest that recipients are likely to attribute self-serving motives to those providing unsolicited advice and prosocial motives to those providing solicited advice. These motives shape the extent to which recipients use advice, learn from it, and perform better as a result of receiving it. In an organizational network study of unsolicited and solicited advice ties (Study 1), an experience-sampling study of daily episodes of receiving unsolicited and solicited advice across two workweeks (Study 2), and an experiment where we manipulated advice solicitation and whether the advisor was a friend or a coworker (Study 3), we found general support for our model. Moderation analyses revealed that recipient reactions were not affected by friendship with the advisor, the number of overlapping advice ties between the advisor and recipient, or the position of the advisor in the social network. By showing how perceptions of the advisor's motive can explain variability in the impact of unsolicited and solicited advice on recipients, this research clarifies the recipient reactions that advisors must navigate if their advice is to have impact at work.

*Keywords:* advice; unsolicited advice; social networks; proactive behavior

*“Distrust unsolicited advice.” – Aesop*

The ancient Greek storyteller Aesop warned of the risks of unsolicited advice in “The Fox Without a Tail,” a fable in which a fox was ashamed to have lost his tail to a hunter’s trap. The fox then advises other foxes to cut off their own tails to diminish his embarrassment over his loss. Aesop concludes with the moral of the tale in the epigraph above, implying that individuals who provide advice without being asked are likely to have self-serving motives.

Aesop’s warning is often missing in the organizational advice literature, where scholars commonly regard advice as a valuable but neglected informational resource (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Ghosh & Rosenkopf, 2015; Nebus, 2006). Advice sharing has clear benefits at the individual (e.g., Fang et al., 2015), team (e.g., Balkundi & Harrison, 2006), and organizational (e.g., Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993) levels of analysis, but individuals are often reluctant to ask for it (e.g., Brooks et al., 2015; Van der Vegt et al., 2006). Accordingly, one way for employees to have information without needing to ask for it would be to boost the amount of unsolicited advice sharing that occurs in the workplace. If such a strategy is to be successful, it is critical to understand *how* recipients react to unsolicited and solicited advice.

Gaining a deeper understanding of employee reactions to unsolicited and solicited advice is important for three key reasons. First, empirical research that fails to differentiate between unsolicited and solicited advice may arrive at inaccurate estimates of the extent to which employees use advice, learn from it, and perform better as a result of receiving it. Second, the prevailing theoretical view of recipient reactions to unsolicited *advice* is borrowed from reactions to unsolicited *help* (Nadler & Fisher, 1986; Nadler, 2015), which, as we articulate and show in this paper, is misaligned with the properties of advice and highlights a need for an explanation specifically attuned to how employees respond to advice. Finally, if the benefits of unsolicited advice are to be realized in the workplace, it is important

for practitioners to understand how recipients react to unsolicited advice so that these reactions can be anticipated (and navigated) when offering advice without first being asked for it.

Drawing on attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967), we suggest that, in the workplace, attributions of an advisor's motive play an important role in understanding how employees react to unsolicited and solicited advice. When employees receive solicited advice, the advisor's reason for providing advice is clear -- the recipient asked for it. In contrast, when employees receive unsolicited advice, the advisor's motivation is more ambiguous, prompting recipients to think about why the advisor offered advice. Across three empirical studies, we develop and test theory suggesting that unsolicited advice is likely to appear self-serving and therefore be seen as less useful for learning and improving work performance, whereas solicited advice is likely to appear prosocial and therefore enhance these work-related advice outcomes (see Figure 1 for our conceptual model).

In Study 1, we investigate how unsolicited and solicited advice ties in the social networks of three organizations relate to perceptions of self-enhancing and prosocial motives, which in turn affect perceptions of advice usefulness (Hypotheses 1-5b). In Study 2, we adopt an experience-sampling approach to study how daily instances of receiving unsolicited or solicited advice influence a broader range of perceived advisor motives (ranging from self-serving to prosocial), which in turn affect daily perceptions of advice usefulness, learning opportunities, and task performance. In Study 3, we conduct an experiment to examine causal support for these linkages and to further investigate the moderating role of advisor friendship in how recipients perceive the advisor's motive for providing advice (Hypotheses 6a-6b).

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

### **Unsolicited Advice in the Workplace**

We define unsolicited advice in organizations as work-related information containing

guidance or recommendations about prudent future action *that the recipient did not request*.

We focus only on advice, rather than help, prosocial behavior, or citizenship behavior.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to help, advice does not involve surrendering significant control over the task to the advisor, and allows the recipient to retain “agency in the decision-making process” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 1422). Theoretically, the small amount of research on unsolicited advice that exists (e.g., Goldsmith, 2000; Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997) draws upon the threat-to-self-esteem model of reactions to help (Nadler & Fisher, 1986; see Nadler, 2015, for a review).

Specifically, research on proactive helping (i.e., unsolicited help) shows that providing unsolicited assistance to recipients implies that they are incapable of adequately completing the task on their own, which can strip them of their sense of autonomy and lower their self-esteem (Deelstra et al., 2003; Thompson & Bolino, 2018) because the helper often completes a part of the work on the recipients’ behalf (Spitzmuller & van Dyne, 2013). Similarly, communications researchers have studied how unsolicited advice can be interpreted as “butting in” or implying criticism of the recipient (e.g., Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Paik, 2020; Van Swol et al., 2017; Van Swol et al., 2019), but has stopped short of systematically examining work-related advice outcomes.

Although people experience negative emotional and physiological reactions when someone takes over part of a task without being asked (Deelstra et al., 2003), there are reasons to doubt the suitability of this explanation for unsolicited *advice*. Advice does not deprive recipients of autonomy and control in the way that help does (Brooks et al., 2015)—by definition, recipients are the final decision-makers. In addition, when unsolicited helping

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<sup>1</sup> Advice is also related to but distinct from prosocial behavior (“acts that promote or protect the welfare of individuals”; Bolino & Grant, 2016, p. 602) because advice, for example, can also be seen as a strategic attempt to expose differences between the advisor and the recipient in terms of his or her knowledge, skill, or ability, similar to ‘overhelping’ (Gilbert & Silvera, 1996). It is distinguishable from prosocial behavior because advice can also be interpreted by the recipient as harmful or corrosive to one’s well-being, relationships, or performance, as in the case of social undermining advice (Duffy et al., 2012). Finally, advice is more specific than citizenship behavior, which tends to be broader, encompassing additional behaviors such as compliance, altruism, and sportsmanship (e.g., Organ, 2018; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007).

occurs, helpers assume a degree of involvement in the task (see, for example, Fisher, Pillemer, & Amabile, 2018), whereas when unsolicited advice occurs, the advisor is providing guidance or recommendations as opposed to taking part in the work itself. Thus, the properties of advice are not isomorphic with help and, theoretically, it is crucial to account for specific advice properties to further our understanding how unsolicited and solicited advice affect employee reactions and work outcomes.

### **Attribution Theory and Employees Reactions to Unsolicited and Solicited Advice**

We adopt a perspective grounded in attribution theory, positing that employees seek causal explanations for others' behavior, especially in response to proactive behaviors, such as unsolicited advice, that lack a clear, observable trigger (Grant et al., 2009; Parker et al., 2019). According to attribution theory (Heider, 1958), people try to infer the mental states of others (e.g., motivations) as a way to understand the causes of their intentional behavior (Allen & Rush, 1998; Eastman, 1994; Malle, 2011). In the case of seemingly supportive behaviors like advice, the key question for recipients is whether advisors are *prosocially* motivated (e.g., it is truly intended for their benefit) or whether, like Aesop's fox, advisors have a *self-serving* ulterior motive (Allen & Rush, 1998; Ames et al., 2004; Blau, 1964; Eastman, 1994; Johnson et al., 2002). On the surface, advisors are attempting to aid the recipient in deciding on a particular option or course of action. By framing their information as aid, the advisor maintains at least an appearance of prosocial motivation.

But do recipients accept this altruistic explanation for advisors' behavior, or do they seek another? We argue that this depends on whether advice was solicited. If advice is solicited, the cause of advice is clear -- recipients asked for it. Solicited advice conforms to social and conversational norms in that people make good-faith efforts to comply with or respond clearly to direct requests (Flynn & Lake, 2008). Thus, because solicited advice was triggered by their own request, recipients likely infer the advice was triggered by their need



and is for their benefit. This leads recipients to infer that the advisor has prosocial motives.

However, recipients may infer that unsolicited advice is driven by self-serving motives -- they give advice because they derive utility from doing so. Individuals who give unsolicited advice may be seeking to aggrandize themselves, to show off what they know, or to demonstrate expertise in a certain domain, thereby creating the impression they are interested in impressing the recipient. Unsolicited advice often makes an implicit claim about the expertise of both parties -- the advisor is claiming to know better than the recipient (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997). When the topic at hand is a critical work concern, unsolicited advice may also imply a temporary status hierarchy (Feng & Magen, 2016; van Swol, Prah, MacGeorge, & Branch, 2019), in which the recipient is obligated to acknowledge the advisor's expertise. Because social norms make it difficult for recipients to refuse what, on the surface, seems like a prosocial, generous act, unsolicited advice puts recipients in the position of politely granting advisors' claims of expertise, even if they do not privately accept them. Thus, advisors may be motivated to give unsolicited advice because they gain "face" in the interaction (Goffman, 1967) and feel valued by recipients. However, recipients are likely to feel coerced into these acknowledgements, leading them to attribute self-serving motivations to providers of unsolicited advice. This logic implies that:

*Hypothesis 1:* Unsolicited advice is positively related to the recipient attributing the advice to self-serving motives.

*Hypothesis 2:* Solicited advice is positively related to the recipient attributing the advice to prosocial motives.

### **How Attributions of Advisors' Motives Affect Employees' Reactions to Advice**

The motives that people assign to others' behavior can influence important outcomes, such as evaluations and reward decisions. Seemingly helpful behaviors are rewarded when people perceive them to be triggered by prosocial motives (Allen & Rush, 1998; Eastman, 1994; Johnson et al., 2002; Schnake, 1991). For instance, research has shown that employee

citizenship behaviors are associated with higher performance evaluations, in part because of evaluators' attributions of prosocial motives (Allen & Rush, 1998). Conversely, seemingly helpful behaviors are not rewarded or are even punished when perceived to be motivated by self-serving motives. For example, managers are likely to assign lower performance ratings to subordinates when citizenship behavior appears to be motivated by impression management (a self-serving motive; Halbesleben et al., 2010).

We argue that reactions to advice are also linked to motive attributions: How recipients attribute advice to self-serving or prosocial motives is likely to shape their evaluations of the advice's usefulness, as well as the extent to which it helps them learn and perform their jobs better (which we investigate in Studies 2 and 3). Prosocial motives are likely to match individuals' pre-existing ideas or schemas about what constitutes a "helpful person," and elicit fewer doubts regarding the potential benefits of the advice (Allen & Rush, 1998; Johnson et al., 2002). Thus, people are more likely to use advice perceived as prosocially motivated to inform their decisions and behavior, including learning from it or using it to improve task performance. In contrast, self-serving motives may raise suspicions about the value of the advice and lead recipients to discount it. Advice triggered by self-serving motivations is likely to be seen as merely showing off or insincere (Bolino, 1999; Halbesleben et al., 2010), leading recipients to infer that givers may not have provided accurate information or opinions. Moreover, self-serving motives are often associated with "slimy" work behaviors (e.g., Vonk, 1998). Accordingly, recipients may question the benefit of advice that appears to be motivated by self-serving reasons, such as a desire to show off or impress the recipient, and thus discount it.

*Hypothesis 3:* Perceptions of self-serving motives are negatively related to recipients' perceptions of advice usefulness, learning, and performance.

*Hypothesis 4:* Perceptions of prosocial motives are positively related to recipients' perceptions of advice usefulness, learning, and performance.

Together, the logic above suggests a mediated model in which unsolicited advice is positively related to perceptions of self-serving motives, which in turn negatively affects advice outcomes, and solicited advice is positively related to perceptions of prosocial motives, which in turn positively affects advice outcomes. Thus:

*Hypothesis 5a:* Perceptions of self-serving motives will mediate the relationship between unsolicited advice and perceived usefulness, learning, and performance.

*Hypothesis 5b:* Perceptions of prosocial motives will mediate the relationship between solicited advice and perceived usefulness, learning, and performance.

### **Unsolicited Advice and Friendship**

Our attributional perspective suggests that when it is less clear why someone is offering advice (as it is in the case of unsolicited advice, relative to solicited advice), recipients are more likely to look for explanations regarding the advisor's motive. Although unsolicited advice is usually seen as self-serving, when it comes from someone considered as a friend at work (as opposed to a coworker), it may be interpreted differently. Friendship between advisors and recipients thus stands out as an especially relevant variable that may reduce attributions of self-serving motives (and enhance attributions of prosocial motives) to unsolicited advice.

Research has shown that people are especially likely to seek and take advice from friends (Ingram & Zou, 2008; McDonald & Westphal, 2003). Employees' evaluations of others' behavior are influenced by affective relationships (Sherf & Venkataramani, 2015). According to attribution theory, people make attributions about others' behavior that are consistent with their prior expectations (Eastman 1994; Johnson et al., 2002). Friendship, by definition, is likely to be characterized by communal norms rather than social exchange norms (Clark & Mills, 1979; Goffman, 1967; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), including the expectation that friends will look after each other's affective and relational needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Friends at work, relative to other coworkers, should therefore be perceived

as less likely to provide unsolicited advice that is motivated by self-serving reasons and be perceived as more likely to provide unsolicited advice that is motivated by prosocial reasons.

*Hypothesis 6a:* Friendship will moderate the relationship between advice solicitation and perceptions of self-serving motives, such that recipients will be less likely to attribute self-serving motives to friends (relative to coworkers) who provide unsolicited advice.

*Hypothesis 6b:* Friendship will moderate the relationship between advice solicitation and perceptions of prosocial motives, such that recipients will be more likely to attribute prosocial motives to friends (relative to coworkers) who provide unsolicited advice.

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants.** We collected data from full-time employees ( $N = 131$ ,  $M_{\text{age}} = 33.53$ ,  $SD = 8.18$ , 53.8% women) at three U.K. marketing agencies where advice was critical to the collaborative nature of employees' everyday work (overall response rate = 92.9%).<sup>2</sup> The final sample consisted of a total of 1,421 dyadic observations (our unit of analysis).

**Predictors: Unsolicited and solicited advice networks.** We used the roster method for collecting advice network data (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Each person saw a list of all employees in the organization and was asked who provided them with either unsolicited or solicited advice (or both) over the last six months: "When you ask for it, do they give you advice?" and "Even when you do not ask for it, do they give you advice?" We created binary variables for an advice tie to exist if person  $i$  reported that person  $j$  gave person  $i$  advice, even when person  $i$  did not ask for it (an unsolicited advice tie), and if person  $i$  reported that person  $j$  gave person  $i$  advice when person  $i$  asked for it (a solicited advice tie).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We received approval for this research by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (Protocol #5140/004: "Unsolicited Advice in the Workplace").

<sup>3</sup> We focus on advice that is sufficiently significant to be recalled by the recipient. Research shows that people are generally accurate in recalling their typical interactions with others (Freeman, 1992; Freeman et al., 1987; Freeman & Webster, 1994). An alternative measure could be whether the *advisor* reports providing advice to the recipient, irrespective of whether the recipient remembers the advice being provided. Considering that our

**Mediators: Perceptions of advisor motives.** After the advice network questions, for each advisor listed, we asked participants to answer the following questions on a five-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*): “When this person provides me with advice, I feel he/she is doing so to try to impress me” (reflecting a self-serving motive), and “When this person provides me with advice, I feel he/she is doing so for my own personal benefit” (reflecting a prosocial motive). To ensure that our measures exhibited adequate convergent validity with longer measures (Edwards, 2003), we conducted out-of-sample validation tests (see the Appendix).

**Outcome variable: Perceived usefulness of the advice.** For each person who provided solicited or unsolicited advice, we asked the participant to rate the extent to which they found this person’s advice useful on a five-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a great deal*).

**Control variables.** First, because a recipient’s perception of advice may be influenced by whether the advisor also receives unsolicited or solicited advice, we included binary variables to control for whether the advisor also reported *receiving* unsolicited or solicited advice. Second, two-way exchanges of advice may reflect mutual bonds between people who are less concerned with each other’s motives for providing different forms of advice, so we also included dyad-level binary variables that indicate *reciprocal unsolicited and solicited advice exchanges*. Third, to control for alternative explanations concerning power, demographics, or relative expertise, we controlled for the *age, tenure, hierarchical level, and gender* of the recipient and the advisor, as well as whether the *advisor was the recipient’s supervisor*. Finally, because advice from similar coworkers may be more relevant or threatening (e.g., Nadler & Fisher, 1986, p. 97), we controlled for *similarity between recipients and advisors* on three dimensions: gender, age, and hierarchical level.

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theory is about *recipient* reactions to advice (and the use of such advice), if a recipient does not remember the advice being shared, then they are unlikely to have any significant reactions to it.

**Analytic procedure.** We estimated cross-classified random effects models to account for the non-independence in our data (i.e., clustering due to multiple observations for each recipient, advisor, and dyadic relationship). This type of multilevel model is appropriate for data that do not exhibit a clear hierarchical structure (i.e., observations are not clustered in a single higher-level unit). Intercept-only models showed that 42 percent, 7 percent, and 6 percent of the variance could be attributed to differences between recipients, advisors, and dyads, respectively, indicating that cross-classified multilevel models are appropriate.

## **Results and Discussion**

Employees reported receiving an average of 5.73 unsolicited advice ties and 14.68 solicited advice ties. Tables 1 and 2 present descriptive statistics for study variables.

----- Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here -----

**Hypothesis tests.** As shown in Table 3, employees who received unsolicited advice from work colleagues tended to rate them as being motivated by a desire to impress (a self-serving motivation),  $\gamma = .14$ , 95% CI [.03, .24],  $p = .011$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 1. We also found that employees who received solicited advice from work colleagues tended to rate them as being motivated by a desire to benefit the recipient (a prosocial motivation),  $\gamma = .22$ , 95% CI [.06, .38],  $p = .008$ , supporting Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 predicted a negative relationship between attributions of self-serving motivations and the perceived usefulness of the advice, which was supported,  $\gamma = -.17$ , 95% CI [-.23, -.11],  $p < .001$ . Similarly, Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive relationship between attributions of prosocial motivations and the perceived usefulness of the advice,  $\gamma = .47$ , 95% CI [.42, .53],  $p < .001$ , providing support for Hypothesis 4.

**Tests of exploratory moderators.** As shown in Table A2 (Appendix), supplemental analyses exploring possible network moderators of these relationships were non-significant.

**Tests of indirect effects.** Using a Monte Carlo procedure with 20,000 repetitions to

estimate a confidence interval around each indirect effect (Selig & Preacher, 2008), we found support for Hypotheses 5a and 5b. The link between unsolicited advice and perceived usefulness was mediated, in part, by perceptions of the advisor attempting to impress the recipient, indirect effect =  $-.023$ , 95% CI  $[-.05, -.004]$ . Similarly, the effect of solicited advice on perceived usefulness could be partly explained by perceptions of the advisor attempting to benefit the recipient, indirect effect =  $.102$ , 95% CI  $[.03, .18]$ .

**Discussion.** These results suggest that employees perceive unsolicited advice as motivated by a desire to impress the recipient, which reduces how useful the recipient perceives the advice to be, whereas employees perceive solicited advice as motivated by a desire to benefit them, which enhances evaluations of usefulness. Study 1 thus provides initial support for the notion that attributions of advisor motives help explain how unsolicited and solicited advice affect one important advice outcome (perceived usefulness).

However, Study 1 had several limitations. First, we asked employees to evaluate advice relations in their social networks over six months, which tapped into their chronic perceptions each advisor. In the workplace, however, advice is episodic, and advisors can provide advice for seemingly different reasons across multiple occasions. Second, whereas our initial test used two theoretically grounded perceptions of advisor motives, employees may think others provide advice for numerous reasons, not merely the two under investigation. We therefore developed a broader conceptualization of advisor motives based on exploratory qualitative research, which we test in the next study. Finally, to explore broader consequences resulting from unsolicited and solicited advice, we focus on two additional outcomes—daily perceptions of learning and performance.

## Study 2

### Method

**Participants.** In collaboration with a research agency based in the Netherlands, we

recruited 107 individuals ( $M_{\text{age}} = 39.06$ ,  $SD = 13.04$ , 43% women) from a panel of volunteers who were working full-time in jobs requiring regular interactions with coworkers. Ten participants completed surveys but reported receiving no advice during the study period, so they did not contribute any data to the study (final sample as above).

**Procedure and measures.** Using an experience-sampling design, we sent daily surveys to participants near the end of their workday (approximately 4:00 pm) for 10 consecutive business days, which could be completed until 10:00 pm the same day. We chose this timeframe because it offered a sufficient number of daily measurements to capture advice episodes without fatiguing respondents, consistent with prior research (e.g., Ilies et al., 2009; Judge & Ilies, 2004). We followed Brislin's (1980) forward-and-back translation procedure to convert English survey questions into Dutch. All participants completed at least eight daily surveys, with a total response rate of 92% (1,079 completed surveys/1,179 total possible).

**Predictors: Unsolicited and solicited advice.** Each daily survey contained two initial questions, presented in randomized order, about the advice they received at work that day: "We would like you to think about the people at work who have given you advice today, even when you did not ask for it. In the spaces below, please write the names of the people who gave you advice when you did not ask for it (i.e., unsolicited advice). You may list up to three people." The question for solicited advice was identical, except that we asked them to name the people who gave them advice when they did ask for it (i.e., solicited advice). We used a binary variable to reflect either unsolicited (1) or solicited (0) advice.

**Mediators: Perceptions of advisor motives.** We conducted an exploratory pilot study to develop a broader set of perceived advisor motives (full details are provided in the Appendix). We asked 150 full-time employees to write about receiving unsolicited and solicited advice, including why they thought they received it. The first and second authors then induced seven distinct motives for giving advice (Williamson et al., 1982): (1) expose



differences, (2) flaunt knowledge, (3) hurt or hinder, (4) take control, (5) benefit from output, (6) fulfill obligations, and (7) benefit the recipient. To test the content validity of our motive categories, two experienced research assistants read the original advice descriptions and independently rated the extent to which each description matched each of the seven motives. Ratings showed high *correspondence* (i.e., the descriptions matched the definition of a particular motive) and *distinctiveness* (i.e., ratings were higher for a focal motive than others), supporting the content validity of these perceived motives (Colquitt et al., 2019).

Using these seven motives, we asked participants to report the extent to which they felt the advice was triggered by each motive on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The seven items are shown in Table 4.

----- Insert Table 4 about here -----

**Outcome variables: Daily perceptions of advice usefulness, learning, and task performance.** We asked participants to rate, for each advisor, the extent to which they found this person's advice useful on a five-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a great deal*). We measured learning by asking participants to rate each advisor in terms of how much they have learned from receiving advice from this person today (1 = *nothing at all*, 5 = *a great deal*). We measured daily task performance with the statement, "This person's advice helped me perform the tasks expected of me today" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

**Control variables.** First, we controlled for differences in *relative rank* (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Jungermann & Fischer, 2005) by asking whether the advisor was at a lower rank, the same rank, or a higher rank. Second, employees are more likely to seek advice when the topic or issue is complex (Schrah et al., 2006; Sniezek & Buckley, 1995), so we asked individuals to report, for each advisor, the *complexity of the topic* on which advice was given (1 = *simple*, 5 = *complex*). Third, *advice history* with the advisor may shape attributions, so we coded advice history as "1" if the recipient listed the same person as providing either form

of advice more than once during the study period and “0” otherwise. Fourth, we included variables for the *gender* of the advisor and the recipient (1 = female, 0 = male). Finally, we controlled for the possibility that *advice sharing norms* (e.g., Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004) could affect how people react to and evaluate advice using three items assessed at the study’s onset (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .78$ ). An example item was, “Giving and receiving advice is a normal thing for people to do in my organization.”

**Analytic procedure.** We used cross-classified multilevel models with dyadic advice exchanges (observations) nested within recipients and advisors. Intercept-only models across our three outcomes showed that significant variance could be attributed to differences between recipients (15-37%) and advisors (14-24%), but not across days of the week (< 1%), so we retained random intercepts only for recipients and advisors. We person-mean-centered the perceived advisor motives and advice topic complexity (Level 1) variables at each recipient’s mean (Hofmann et al., 2000; Ohly et al., 2010).

## Results and Discussion

Employees received, on average, unsolicited advice from 3.21 individuals and solicited advice from 6.83 individuals over the two-workweek study period. We present descriptive statistics for study variables in Table 5.

----- Insert Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8 about here -----

**Hypothesis tests.** Table 6 reveals that daily instances of receiving unsolicited advice, relative to solicited advice, were more likely to be attributed to the advisor’s desire to expose differences,  $\gamma = .15$ , 95% CI [.03, .28],  $p = .017$ ; flaunt knowledge,  $\gamma = .24$ , 95% CI [.13, .34],  $p < .001$ ; and hurt or hinder the recipient,  $\gamma = .20$ , 95% CI [.12, .29],  $p < .001$ ; but not to take control,  $\gamma = .09$ , 95% CI [-.04, .21],  $p = .165$ . Unsolicited advice was also linked to perceptions of the advisor attempting to directly benefit from the recipient’s output,  $\gamma = -.12$ , 95% CI [-.23, .00],  $p = .049$ , albeit in the opposite direction from other self-serving motives.

These results provide moderate support for Hypothesis 1. Solicited advice, in contrast to unsolicited advice, was more likely to be attributed to a desire to benefit the recipient,  $\gamma = -.20$ , 95% CI [-.30, -.09],  $p < .001$ , supporting Hypothesis 2.

The overall pattern of results, shown in Table 7, provides partial support for Hypotheses 3 and 4. Self-serving motives for advice, such as flaunting knowledge or taking control, diminished the impact of advice, although one self-serving motive (benefiting from the output) was significant in the opposite direction (which we discuss below). Prosocial motives (a desire to benefit the recipient) enhanced the impact of advice.

**Tests of indirect effects.** Two mediation pathways linking solicitation to all three outcomes were significant, providing partial support for Hypotheses 5a and 5b: Unsolicited advice, relative to solicited advice, was likely to be perceived as an attempt to flaunt knowledge, which reduced perceived usefulness, learning, and task performance. Solicited advice, relative to unsolicited advice, tended to be perceived as motivated by a desire to benefit the recipient, which enhanced perceived usefulness, learning, and task performance.

**Discussion.** We replicated and extended the results of Study 1 in a daily experience-sampling study that assessed receiving unsolicited and solicited advice across two workweeks. The self-serving attributions of a desire to flaunt knowledge and to hurt or hinder largely helped explain why unsolicited advice had less impact than solicited advice, whereas the prosocial attribution of a desire to benefit the recipient largely helped explain why solicited advice had more impact. Other motives—exposing differences, taking control, and benefiting from output—were non-significant or inconsistent mediators of the relationships between advice solicitation and work-related advice outcomes.

To address concerns about the limitations of self-report data and common source bias in Studies 1 and 2, we conducted an experiment (Study 3). In this experiment, we also aimed to test a critical moderator variable—friendship (Hypotheses 6a-6b).

### Study 3

#### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 629 employees ( $M_{\text{age}} = 36.68$ ,  $SD = 10.21$ , 56.6% women, two missing responses) from Amazon Mechanical Turk.<sup>4</sup>

**Procedure and measures.** The experiment featured a 2 (advice: unsolicited or solicited) x 2 (friendship: close personal friend at work or coworker) between-person design. In all conditions, participants received the same hypothetical advice, but the advice was either unsolicited (coded = 1) or solicited (0) and delivered by either a close personal friend at work (coded = 1) or a coworker (0). Participants read the following:

Please imagine you are working in a media agency and you just finished a meeting with a client. After returning to your office, a coworker [a person you consider to be a close personal friend at work] stops by. Without being asked, your coworker [friend] offers you the following unsolicited advice about next steps.

In the solicited advice condition, participants read, “You ask your coworker [friend] for some advice, who offers you the following solicited advice about next steps.” Then all participants read the following:

Hey, when putting together the report for the client, make sure that our recommendations are evidence-based. Show them the market research we've done in these areas. And keep the report streamlined and easy to follow. They won't read it if it's packed with too much text.

**Mediators: Perceptions of self-serving and prosocial motives.** We captured *self-serving motives* with the three items ( $\alpha = .93$ ), “He or she wants to benefit himself/herself rather than me,” “He or she has self-serving motives,” and “He or she is motivated by a desire to benefit himself/herself.” We measured *prosocial motives* with four items ( $\alpha = .84$ ) adapted from Grant’s (2008) prosocial motivation measure, including, “He or she is very conscious of the positive impact his or her advice has on others,” and “He or she is very

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<sup>4</sup> We followed best practice recommendations (Cheung et al., 2017) and excluded individuals who did not satisfy several data quality checks (full details of inclusion criteria are in the Appendix).

aware of the ways in which their advice is benefiting others.” Both measures used seven-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

***Outcome variables: Perceptions of advice usefulness, learning, and performance.***

We asked participants to use a five-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a great deal*) to estimate how much they would find the advice useful, handy, and practical (*usefulness*;  $\alpha = .91$ ); how much the advice would help them learn about their job, increase their knowledge at work, and become a smarter person (*learning*;  $\alpha = .90$ ); and how much the advice would enhance their performance, productivity, and efficiency (*performance*;  $\alpha = .91$ ).

***Manipulation checks.*** At the end of the survey, we asked participants to report whether they received unsolicited advice, solicited advice, or none of the above, and whether a coworker or a friend best describes the person who gave them advice, or none of the above.

## **Results**

**Tests of manipulation checks.** Participants were largely able to recall whether they received unsolicited (266/308; 86%) or solicited advice (236/311; 85%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 619) = 242.36, p < .001$ , as well as being able to recall whether they received advice from a friend (243/316; 77%) or a coworker (299/308, 97%),  $\chi^2(1, N = 624) = 354.54, p < .001$ .<sup>5</sup>

**Hypothesis tests.** Replicating the results of the previous two studies, results from our first-stage moderated mediation analyses (Hayes, 2017) showed that unsolicited advice was perceived as more self-serving than solicited advice, solicited advice was perceived as more prosocial than unsolicited advice, and motives largely affect perceptions of advice outcomes, which in turn help explain the solicitation-outcomes link (see Table 9). However, does friendship moderate the relationship between advice solicitation and perceptions of self-serving motives, such that unsolicited advice from friends is less likely to be attributed to self-serving motives (Hypothesis 6a) and more likely to be attributed to prosocial motives

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<sup>5</sup> Sample size differences are due to missing data.

than coworkers (Hypothesis 6b)? The answer is no: The interaction between advice solicitation and perceptions of self-serving motives was not significant,  $b = -.10$ , 95% CI [- .36, .56],  $p = .673$ . Similarly, the interaction between advice solicitation and perceptions of prosocial motives was also not significant,  $b = .06$ , 95% CI [- .22, .35],  $p = .653$ . Consistent with these results, there was also no evidence involving friendship as a first-stage moderator of the advice solicitation->motives relationship in moderated mediation models testing the effects of advice solicitation on estimates of advice usefulness, learning, and performance via perceptions of self-serving or prosocial motives (Table 10).

----- Insert Tables 9 and 10 about here -----

## Discussion

Even when individuals are presented with *identical advice*, advice solicitation shapes perceptions of advisor motives, which in turn affects estimates of its usefulness and its potential to enhance learning and performance. However, friendship did not moderate these relationships as we had predicted. These results extend the findings from our previous two studies by providing experimental evidence for our model and addressing concerns about common source bias.

### General Discussion

Unsolicited and solicited advice differ in their effects on recipients. In Study 1, social network analyses showed that employees across three organizations attributed unsolicited advice ties to self-serving motives, which reduced the perceived usefulness of advice, whereas employees attributed solicited advice to prosocial motives, which enhanced perceived usefulness. In Study 2, we largely replicated and extended these results in an experience-sampling study of advice, perceived motives, and daily perceptions of usefulness, learning, and performance. Our results clarify the specific motives that link advice solicitation to work-related advice outcomes—unsolicited advice was likely to be perceived

as self-serving (flaunting knowledge), which reduced perceived usefulness, learning, and performance, whereas solicited advice was likely to be perceived as prosocial (benefiting the recipient), which enhanced perceived usefulness, learning, and performance. In Study 3, we provided experimental support for our model and found that friendship did not interact with advice solicitation to influence perceptions of advisor motives.

Our paper offers two important contributions to theory and research. First, *advice solicitation* is a critical determinant of work-related advice outcomes. A key implication of our findings is that neglecting whether advice is solicited may obscure meaningful differences in the impact of advice on recipients and advice flows at work. Although prior research has shown the benefits of advice sharing in organizations (e.g., Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Fang et al., 2015; Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993), we show that advice solicitation shapes whether these benefits are realized. Our findings illustrate that, when employees provide unsolicited advice, recipients discount its value and may fail to fully absorb its information. For advice scholars, this suggests that conflating solicited and unsolicited advice may lead to erroneous conclusions about the effects of advice giving and receiving in organizations. Similarly, focusing only on solicited advice may mask the potentially harmful interpersonal consequences of unsolicited advice. Future research should thus specify whether advice is solicited in both theory and measurement.

Second, our finding that perceived motives matter for our understanding of employee reactions to unsolicited and solicited advice provides a key answer to a longstanding call for theory addressing how people react to unsolicited *advice* (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006, p. 136). By drawing on attribution theory, we highlight a missing theoretical link—how employees react to advice is shaped by perceptions of the advisor's motive. Our theory and research depart from prior research that has explained reactions to unsolicited *help* in terms of threatening the recipient's autonomy (e.g., Deelstra et al., 2003). We find that the motive

most similar to threatening the recipient's autonomy—taking control—predicted the effect of advice but did not explain differences between unsolicited and solicited advice. Thus, the notion that unsolicited *advice* is poorly received because it deprives recipients of autonomy (e.g., Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Paik, 2020; Van Swol et al., 2019) is, at best, incomplete. An important contribution of our work is thus in the attributional perspective attuned to the specific properties of advice. Theoretically, this paper helps shift the focus away from unsolicited advice threatening the recipient's autonomy toward a perspective that is concerned with how the advice affects perceptions of what led the advisor to provide it.

Surprisingly, we did not find that people made more generous attributions to friends, attenuating the negative effects of unsolicited advice (Hypotheses 6a-6b). Nor were those who were members of the same social groups (i.e., more third-party ties in common) viewed more favorably when they offered unsolicited advice (Study 1, Table A2). In fact, no variable we tested significantly reduced the negative attributions associated with unsolicited advice (Study 1, Table A2). These results highlight the surprising robustness of advice solicitation—employees appear suspicious of unsolicited advice even if, for example, the advisor shares advice with the same people as the recipient (Study 1), the advisor is central or a broker in the unsolicited advice network (Study 1), or the advisor is a friend (Study 3). Indeed, because people may need advice at work but be unaware of their need for it, future research should investigate under which conditions unsolicited advice might be positively viewed.

These studies are not without limitations. First, although we provide experimental support for our model in Study 3, Studies 1 and 2 are correlational and rely on self-report data from a common source. Second, unsolicited advice was significantly but negatively related to attributions of the advisor benefiting directly from the recipient's effort or outputs (Study 2), which ran counter to our initial predictions. This attribution benefits the advisor, so we classified it with other self-serving motives. Empirically, however, this motive has more in



common with prosocial motives of benefiting the recipient, as it was also positively related to solicited advice and advice impact. One potential explanation is that solicited advice may be more readily sought from advisors whose outcomes are interdependent with the recipients’.

Organizational research has emphasized the benefits of advice sharing, which implies that unsolicited advice will be beneficial. Yet, it appears that Aesop was prescient in his remarks about how people react to unsolicited advice. Offering advice without being asked for it diminishes its value, even when it comes from close relations. Although our findings present a challenge to common views of advice as an informational resource, they echo the words of the fabled Greek storyteller—employees distrust unsolicited advice.

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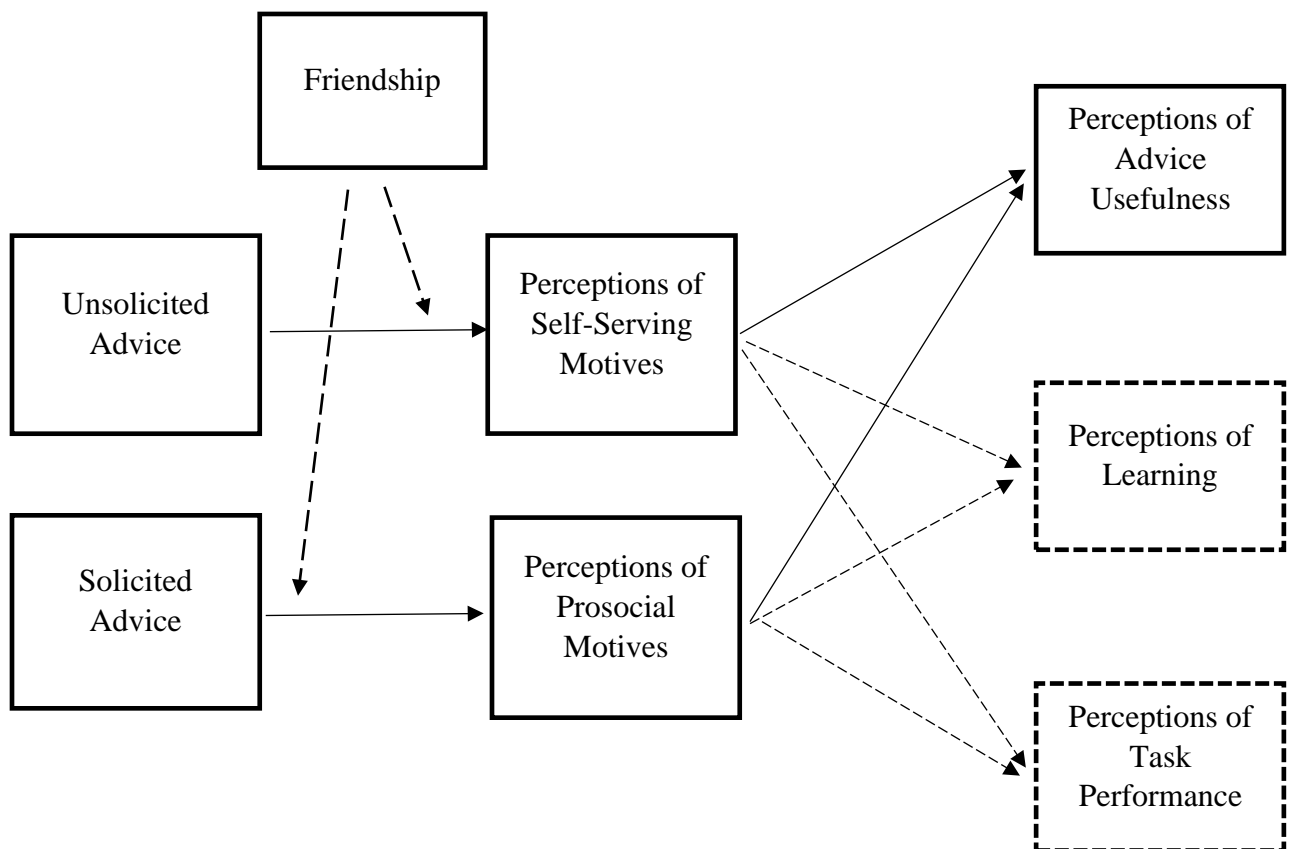
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**Figure 1***Conceptual Model*

*Note.* Solid lines depict the relationships that we test in all studies. Short dashed lines depict extensions of our model to daily perceptions of learning and task performance that we examine in Studies 2 and 3. The longer dashed line depicts friendship as a moderator that we test in Study 3. Hypotheses 5a and 5b (mediation hypotheses linking advice solicitation to outcomes via perceptions of advisor motive) are not shown for stylistic purposes. In Study 1, employees could report receiving both unsolicited and solicited advice from a person over a six-month period (as above), whereas in the advice episodes examined in Studies 2 and 3, advice solicitation is a binary variable capturing whether the advice is unsolicited or solicited (not shown).

**Table 1***Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study 1*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Advisor hierarchical level	2.38	1.17													
2. Advisor gender	.54	.50	-.09												
3. Advisor tenure	3.35	3.48	.47	-.26											
4. Advisor age	33.53	8.18	.58	-.06	.51										
5. Advisor is recipient's supervisor	.02	.13	.28	-.01	.21	.20									
6. Recipient gender	.54	.50	-.07	.06	-.05	-.08	-.02								
7. Recipient hierarchical level	2.37	3.47	.05	-.04	.05	.01	-.05	.04							
8. Recipient tenure	3.35	3.48	.12	-.06	.09	.06	.01	-.30	.40						
9. Recipient age	33.53	8.18	.00	-.03	.03	.08	-.02	.04	.52	.36					
10. Solicited advice	.30	.46	-.07	.00	-.02	-.07	-.03	.07	.06	-.02	.03				
11. Unsolicited advice	.12	.32	.23	.04	.10	.21	.20	-.02	-.04	.02	.00	-.40			
12. Prosocial attributions	4.27	.90	-.05	-.04	-.09	-.10	-.01	.22	-.15	-.11	-.02	.13	-.06		
13. Self-serving attributions	1.37	.74	.00	.04	.00	.01	-.03	-.01	.16	.06	.12	-.13	.18	-.36	
14. Advice usefulness	3.92	1.02	.15	-.06	.07	.08	.12	-.02	-.17	-.02	.00	.09	.09	.46	-.33

*Note.*  $N = 1,421$ . Correlations greater than  $|\text{.04}|$  in absolute magnitude are significant at  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). Advisor gender is coded 1 = female, 0 = male.

**Table 2***Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Dyadic Variables in Study 1*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Dyadic age similarity	25.11	7.14				
2. Dyadic level similarity	2.81	1.07	.36**			
3. Dyadic gender similarity	.50	.50	-.05**	-.05**		
4. Dyadic unsolicited advice reciprocity	.07	.25	.05**	.02	-.05**	
5. Dyadic solicited advice reciprocity	.22	.42	-.00	-.03*	-.04**	.33**

*Note.*  $N = 1,421$ . Dyadic variables are coded such that high scores refer to higher levels of similarity. \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed) \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed)

**Table 3**

*Results of Cross-Classified Multilevel Models Predicting Advisor's Perceived Motives and Usefulness in Study 1*

Predictor	Mediator: Prosocial motives		Mediator: Self-serving motives		Outcome: Perceived usefulness	
	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.
Intercept	4.58	.33	.87	.33	1.85	.37
<i>Control variables</i>						
Recipient hierarchical level	-.09	.06	.05	.06	-.06	.06
Recipient gender	.22*	.11	.01	.11	-.03	.11
Recipient tenure	.01	.02	.03	.02	-.00	.02
Recipient age	-.00	.01	.01	.01	-.00	.01
Advisor is recipient's supervisor	.07	.08	-.07	.08	.17*	.08
Advisor gender	-.11*	.05	.02	.05	-.06	.06
Advisor tenure	-.01	.01	-.00	.01	.00	.01
Advisor hierarchical level	.03	.03	-.02	.03	.08	.03
Advisor age	-.01*	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Dyadic age similarity	.00	.00	-.00	.00	-.00	.00
Dyadic level similarity	.00	.02	.02	.02	.05*	.02
Dyadic gender similarity	-.05	.03	.00	.03	-.02	.03
Unsolicited advice reciprocity	.04	.06	.07	.06	.08	.06
Solicited advice reciprocity	.03	.05	-.02	.05	-.01	.05
Giving solicited advice	.01	.04	.09*	.04	.13**	.04
Giving unsolicited advice	-.00	.05	-.02	.04	-.02	.05
<i>Predictors</i>						
Receiving unsolicited advice	.04	.06	.14*	.05	.28**	.06
Receiving solicited advice	.22*	.08	-.14	.08	.24**	.08
<i>Mediators</i>						
Perceived self-serving					-.17**	.03

motives

Perceived prosocial .47\*\* .03

motives

-2 Restricted Log 3001.96 2876.35 2938.70

Likelihood

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*Note.*  $N = 1,421$ . Unstandardized coefficients and robust standard errors are reported. Dummy variables for company are included (not shown). Gender similarity is a binary variable reflecting whether both members of the dyad are the same gender. Following prior research on similarity (e.g., Klein, Lim, Saltz, & Mayer, 2004), we computed age and hierarchical level similarity as an absolute value of the distance between the recipient and giver's scores on these values, multiplied by -1 so that higher scores indicate greater similarity. \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed)



**Table 4***Perceived Motives for Study 2*

Attribution	Item		Examples		<i>htc</i>	<i>htd</i>	Motive category
Expose differences	“they want to show they have a superior level of knowledge, skill, or expertise to me”	Advisor knows better than the recipient	Advisor wants to show the recipient that they’re better than the recipient	Advisor wants to make the recipient feel inferior	.93	.47	Self-serving
Flaunt knowledge	“they want to flaunt their own knowledge, skill, or expertise for their own self-benefit”	Advisor wants to make themselves look good	Advisor wants to appear knowledgeable	Advisor wants to show recipient that they’re good at their job	.96	.78	Self-serving
Hurt or hinder	“they want to hurt or hinder my confidence, performance, or work relationships”	Advisor wants the recipient to fail	Advisor wants to bully the recipient	Advisor doesn’t want the recipient to succeed	.94	.85	Self-serving and Anti-social
Take control	“they want to take control of the situation and be involved”	Advisor is overbearing	Advisor wants to take charge	Advisor thinks like a manager	.88	.78	Self-serving
Benefit from output	“they benefit directly from my effort or outputs	Advisor wants to finish the job more quickly for	Advisor will be harmed or inconvenienced by the task	Advisor will directly benefit from the task being done well	.59	.41	Self-serving

Fulfill obligations	“they feel obligated to provide it”	their own benefit Advisor was asked for advice and feels he/she has to provide it	being done poorly It is a part of the advisor’s job	It is an organizational norm to provide advice	.85	.78	Role-based obligations
Benefit the recipient	“they want me to benefit from the advice”	Advisor wants the recipient to perform a task better	Advisor wants to protect the recipient	Advisor wants to make the task easier	.92	.87	Prosocial

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*Notes.* *htc* = Hinkin Tracey correspondence statistic capturing the degree to which advice episode descriptions correspond to the given definition. *htd* = Hinkin Tracey distinctiveness statistic capturing the degree to which advice episode descriptions correspond more to the focal definition than to other definitions (see Colquitt et al., 2019, as well as Hinkin & Tracey, 1999, for further details on these content validity statistics). The stem for the items was: “This person gave me advice because...”.

**Table 5***Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study 2*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Age	39.06	13.04																	
2. Gender	.43	.50	-.03																
3. Advisor rank	2.11	.66	-.03	.13															
4. Advisor gender	1.34	.47	-.08	.30	-.09														
5. Advice history	.93	.25	.04	.12	.13	-.08													
6. Topic complexity	2.79	1.22	.00	.00	.19	-.12	.12												
7. Advice sharing norms	4.02	.74	-.11	-.17	-.10	.05	-.16	.00											
8. Unsolicited advice	.49	.50	-.05	-.10	-.4	-.05	-.13	-.15	.00										
9. Expose differences	2.17	1.20	.00	.00	.05	-.06	.04	.05	.00	.07									
10. Flaunt knowledge	1.88	1.09	.00	.00	-.03	-.05	.00	-.07	.00	.15	.54								
11. Hurt or hinder	1.57	.92	.00	.00	-.06	-.03	-.00	-.15	.00	.18	.36	.60							
12. Take control	2.56	1.24	.00	.00	.85	-.03	.09	.07	.00	.04	.25	.31	.25						

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
13. Benefit from output	3.26	1.29	.00	.00	.19	-.04	.09	.21	.00	-.09	.03	-.04	-.10	.27					
14. Fulfill obligations	3.00	1.21	.00	.00	.07	-.04	.03	.11	.00	-.10	.10	.03	.04	.12	.15				
15. Benefit the recipient	4.07	.92	.00	.00	.04	.05	.02	.17	.00	-.14	-.17	-.33	-.41	-.12	.15	.01			
16. Usefulness	3.45	.91	-.14	.00	.93	.06	-.03	.30	.17	-.26	-.14	-.34	-.34	-.15	.16	.05	.33		
17. Learning	2.78	1.02	-.27	-.15	-.00	.00	-.07	.31	.20	-.13	-.06	-.18	-.22	-.06	.12	.08	.18	.62	
18. Task performance	3.43	.96	-.14	-.04	.00	.04	.08	.22	.17	-.24	-.06	-.21	-.22	-.10	.18	.11	.25	.57	.50

*Note.*  $N = 1,075$ . Correlations with absolute values greater than  $|.06|$  are significant at  $p < .05$ . Advisor gender is coded 1 = female, 0 = male. Descriptive statistics for the person-mean-centered variables (perceived motives and topic complexity) are shown.

**Table 6***Results of Cross-Classified Multilevel Models Predicting the Perceptions of the Advisor's Motive in Study 2*

Predictor	Perceptions of the Advisor's Motive													
	Expose differences		Flaunt knowledge		Hurt or hinder		Take control		Benefit from output		Fulfill obligations <sup>a</sup>		Benefit the recipient	
	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.
Intercept	2.97**	.63	2.98**	.57	2.60**	.48	3.39**	.63	2.10**	.70	3.93**	.67	2.86**	.43
Age	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00	.00	.00	.01	.02**	.01	-.01*	.01	-.01	.00
Gender	.07	.16	-.03	.14	-.14	.12	-.06	.16	.41	.18	-.48**	.17	.09	.11
Advisor gender	-.15	.08	-.12	.07	-.10	.06	.01	.08	.01*	.08	-.09	.07	.16*	.06
Advisor relative rank	.09	.06	-.04	.05	-.06	.04	.19**	.06	.34**	.05	.06*	.05	.03	.05
Topic complexity	.03	.03	-.02	.03	-.07**	.02	.04	.03	.11**	.03	.06	.03	.11**	.03
Advice sharing norms	-.34**	.11	-.31**	.10	-.20*	.09	-.38**	.11	-.22	.13	.07	.12	.28**	.08
Advice history	.10	.07	.06	.07	.05	.05	.27**	.08	.19**	.07	-.02	.06	-.04	.06
Unsolicited advice	.15*	.06	.24**	.05	.20**	.04	.09	.06	-.12*	.06	-.15**	.06	-.20**	.05
-2 Restricted Log Likelihood	3008.97		2718.53		2205.88		3039.38		2886.07		2883.49		2586.93	

*Note.*  $N = 1,075$ . <sup>a</sup>This motive is not hypothesized as a mediator because it cannot be categorized as self-serving or prosocial. Unsolicited advice is coded 1 = unsolicited advice, 0 = solicited advice. Each motive was preceded by the stem, "This person gave me advice because...". Unstandardized coefficients and robust standard errors are reported. \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 7***Results of Cross-Classified Multilevel Models Predicting Advice Outcomes in Study 2*

Predictor	Advice Outcomes					
	Usefulness		Learning		Task performance	
	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.	$\gamma$	s.e.
Intercept	2.84**	.40	2.70**	.50	2.86**	.44
<i>Control variables</i>						
Recipient age	-.01*	.00	-.02**	.00	-.01	.00
Recipient gender	.03	.09	-.15	.13	.01	.11
Advisor relative rank	.05	.04	-.00	.04	-.06	.05
Advisor gender	.03	.06	-.02	.06	-.01	.06
Advice history	-.04	.05	.01	.05	.12*	.06
Topic complexity	.21**	.02	.29**	.02	.14**	.03
Advice sharing norms	.20**	.06	.23*	.09	.25**	.08
<i>Predictor</i>						
Unsolicited advice	-.27**	.05	-.19**	.05	-.28**	.05
<i>Mediators</i>						
Expose differences	.04	.03	.01	.03	.06*	.03
Flaunt knowledge	-.23**	.04	-.10*	.04	-.15**	.04
Hurt or hinder	-.11*	.05	-.16**	.05	-.05	.05
Take control	-.10**	.03	-.05	.03	-.12**	.03
Benefit from output	.09**	.03	.05	.03	.14**	.03
Fulfill obligations <sup>a</sup>	.03	.03	.06*	.03	.09**	.03
Benefit the recipient	.20**	.03	.07*	.03	.17**	.03
-2 Restricted Log Likelihood	2396.24		2471.96		2595.48	

*Note.*  $N = 1,075$ . <sup>a</sup>This motive is not hypothesized as a mediator because it cannot be categorized as self-serving or prosocial. Unsolicited advice is coded 1 = unsolicited advice, 0 = solicited advice. Unstandardized coefficients and robust standard errors are reported. \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed)

**Table 8**

*Mediation Results for Unsolicited Advice, Perceptions of the Advisor's Motives, and Daily Perceptions of Usefulness, Learning, and Performance in Study 2*

Mediator	Advice Outcomes		
	Usefulness	Learning	Performance
Expose differences	.005 [-.003, .018]	.002 [-.007, .013]	.01 [.000, .024]
Flaunt knowledge	<b>-.054 [-.088, -.026]</b>	<b>-.022 [-.045, -.004]</b>	<b>-.036 [-.064, -.013]</b>
Hurt or hinder	<b>-.023 [-.048, -.004]</b>	<b>-.033 [-.059, -.012]</b>	-.01 [-.033, .009]
Take control	-.009 [-.025, .004]	-.004 [-.014, .002]	-.011 [-.028, .004]
Benefit from output	-.011 [-.025, .000]	-.006 [-.017, .001]	-.017 [-.036, .000]
Fulfill obligations <sup>a</sup>	-.004 [-.014, .004]	<b>-.009 [-.021, .000]</b>	<b>-.013 [-.028, -.002]</b>
Benefit the recipient	<b>-.04 [-.066, -.018]</b>	<b>-.015 [-.031, -.002]</b>	<b>-.033 [-.057, -.014]</b>

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> This motive is not hypothesized as a mediator because it cannot be categorized as self-serving or prosocial. Mediation is supported when the 95% confidence interval around each indirect effect excludes zero. Confidence intervals are based on 20,000 repetitions. Bold values reflect confidence intervals that exclude zero.

**Table 9**

*Results of Moderated Mediation Models of Friendship as a First-Stage Moderator for Unsolicited Advice, Perceptions of the Advisor's Motives, and Estimates of Advice Usefulness, Learning, and Performance in Study 3*

Predictor	Perceptions of the Advisor's Motive				Advice Outcomes					
	Self-serving motives		Prosocial motives		Perceptions of usefulness		Perceptions of learning potential		Perceptions of performance potential	
	<i>b</i>	s.e.	<i>b</i>	s.e.	<i>b</i>	s.e.	<i>b</i>	s.e.	<i>b</i>	s.e.
Intercept	3.66***	.12	5.52***	.07	1.73***	.20	.17	.28	.50*	.25
Unsolicited advice condition	.50**	.17	-.31**	.10	-.33***	.06	-.29***	.08	-.33***	.07
Friendship condition	-.29	.17	.03	.10						
Unsolicited advice condition x Friendship condition	.10	.24	.06	.14						
Self-serving motives					-.13***	.02	.01	.03	-.05*	.03
Prosocial motives					.52***	.03	.58***	.04	.62***	.04
<i>F</i>	8.76		5.19		147.93		70.93		109.55	
<i>R squared</i>	.04		.02		.42		.25		.34	

*Note.*  $N = 629$ . Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Statistical conclusions remain the same if the three models predicting advice outcomes include the friendship condition and the interaction term. Unsolicited advice is coded as 1 = unsolicited, 0 = solicited. Friendship is coded as 1 = a close personal friend at work, 0 = coworker. \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)



**Table 10**

*First-Stage Moderated Mediation Indices for Friendship as a Moderator of the Relation between Advice Solicitation and Outcomes via Perceptions of Self-Serving and Prosocial Motives*

Outcomes	Moderator: Friendship	Mediator: Self-serving motives		
		Conditional Indirect Effect	CI (Lower)	CI (Upper)
Perceptions of advice usefulness	Close friend at work	-.08	-.13	-.04
	Coworker	-.06	-.12	-.02
Perceptions of learning potential		<i>-.01</i>	<i>-.07</i>	<i>.05</i>
	Close friend at work	.01	-.03	.05
	Coworker	.01	-.02	.04
Perceptions of performance potential		<i>.00</i>	<i>-.01</i>	<i>.02</i>
	Close friend at work	-.03	-.07	-.00
	Coworker	-.02	-.06	-.00
		<i>-.00</i>	<i>-.03</i>	<i>.02</i>
		Mediator: Prosocial motives		
Perceptions of advice usefulness	Close friend at work	-.13	-.23	-.03
	Coworker	-.16	-.28	.04
Perceptions of learning potential		<i>.03</i>	<i>-.11</i>	<i>.18</i>
	Close friend at work	-.13	-.25	-.02
	Coworker	-.18	-.33	-.04
Perceptions of performance potential		<i>.04</i>	<i>-.12</i>	<i>.22</i>
	Close friend at work	-.15	-.28	-.04
	Coworker	-.19	-.34	-.05
		<i>.04</i>	<i>-.14</i>	<i>.22</i>

*Note:*  $N = 415$ . Indices of moderated mediation (difference between the conditional indirect effects) are shown in *italics*. Moderated mediation is supported when the confidence interval excludes zero. Confidence intervals are based on 5,000 repetitions.

## Appendix

### Study 1 Convergent Validity Analyses

In Study 1, due to the effort- and time-intensive nature of requiring participants to rate multiple advice relationships on multiple measures, we used abbreviated measures of our key constructs. To ensure that these measures converged with the scores derived from longer measures, we collected data from 199 participants on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants were asked to identify up to 10 people who provide them with either unsolicited or solicited advice, and then to provide their evaluations of each person's social motives and the usefulness of their advice on the abbreviated measures used in Study 1 and a longer corresponding measure. On each measure, we asked participants to use a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The longer corresponding measure for prosocial motives was an established measure of prosocial intentions (Grant, 2008; Ryan & Connell, 1989). To capture self-serving measures, we adapted four items from the Rioux and Penner (2001) impression management scale. For perceptions of advice usefulness, we adapted Fisher's (2017) measure of intervention usefulness. The items from Study 1 are shown alongside the items from each of these longer corresponding measures in Table A1. In a factor analysis of these items, results showed that each item loaded on their longer corresponding scale.

### Study 1 Supplemental Analyses

We also include a series of exploratory tests that, while not a formal part of our model due to space and model parsimony considerations, may offer meaningful insights into moderators of recipient reactions to unsolicited advice and can inform future theory and research (see Table A2). The first exploratory moderator concerns the social context in which unsolicited and solicited advice are shared. Employees evaluate behaviors in context by considering the base rates of various behaviors (Johns, 2006), so if a recipient receives

unsolicited advice from an advisor who tends to share unsolicited advice with the same set of coworkers as the recipient, the offer of advice is likely to be normalized, and the recipient may be less likely to attribute the unsolicited advice to self-serving motives (as it is seen as a common, socially sanctioned behavior for the advisor). This logic suggests a two-way interaction between receiving unsolicited advice and unsolicited advice network overlap (i.e., the proportion of third-party connections in common) in predicting perceptions of self-serving motives.

The second and third exploratory moderators concern the *structural position* of the advisor in the unsolicited advice network at work, which is relevant because network positions are likely to affect an individual's exposure and access to information in the workplace and may therefore affect recipient reactions to advice. If the advisor is central, he or she is likely to be seen providing unsolicited advice to many others at work (Casciaro, 1998), and in keeping with the logic above, receiving unsolicited advice may be seen as normalized and therefore less indicative of self-serving attributions. We used in-degree as our measure of centrality, which captures the number of ties the advisor had in the unsolicited advice network, divided by total number of possible ties in the company (Freeman, 1979). If the advisor is a broker, he or she offers unsolicited advice to recipients who do not share advice with each other. The broker may therefore suffer from a "multiple insider" problem (Burt, 2005) in which he or she advises multiple social groups, raising the question of whether the advice is suspicious and self-serving. This may lead to stronger attributions of self-serving motives when recipients receive unsolicited advice from brokers. We measured brokerage using Burt's constraint (Burt, 1992). The results of these first three moderator tests are shown in Table A2. In these tests, we added product terms to each of the final models reported in the main body of the paper (see Table 3). However, none was supported.

## **Study 2 Exploratory Pilot Research to Develop List of Perceived Motives (Attributions)**

**Method.** We recruited full-time employees ( $N = 150$ ,  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.33$ ,  $SD = 10.79$ ) from Prolific to participate in this inductive qualitative study about why people provide unsolicited or solicited advice. Our aim in this research was to identify the broad range of reasons why employees think others provide unsolicited or solicited advice, and then distill and organize these reasons (attributions of the advisor's motive) into a comprehensive set of internally coherent but distinguishable attributions that capture the reasons why employees think others provide unsolicited or solicited advice. To begin, we asked employees about occasions when they received either unsolicited or solicited advice, presented in randomized order to minimize order effects. We asked:

Please think about a time at work when someone gave you advice you did not ask for (unsolicited advice) [when you asked for advice and someone gave it to you (solicited advice)]. In the space below, please write 3-5 sentences describing the unsolicited (solicited) advice and the situation.

Then, after writing 3-5 sentences about the advice episode, we asked participants, "Why do you think you received unsolicited (solicited) advice from this person at work? What were their motivations?" This procedure resulted in 300 usable descriptions of why people provided unsolicited advice and solicited advice (i.e., attributions of advisors' motives, which was our unit of analysis).

Second, we followed the coding procedures outlined by Williamson et al. (1982) to derive a set of motives that would capture the reasons for unsolicited or solicited advice described by participants. The first and second authors independently read each participant's description of why they received unsolicited or solicited advice, and then each created a set of motives (attributions). The authors then met to discuss and combine their two sets of attributions into a single list of attributions that were comprehensive (i.e., they captured the full range of reasons why people provide unsolicited or solicited advice described by

participants), yet distinct from each other (i.e., each attribution was meaningfully different from other attributions).

Third, we followed best-practice recommendations described by Hinkin and Tracey (1999) and updated by Colquitt et al. (2019) in assessing the content validity of our attributions. Specifically, we asked two research assistants with backgrounds in organizational behavior to rate the extent to which each participant's description of why they received unsolicited or solicited advice matched the attributions we created. We provided research assistants with the list of attributions we created, along with relevant examples (see Table 4). To account for the possibility that another attribution not included in our list was a better match to the description provided by the participant, we also included the option, "another reason not mentioned here." We then asked the research assistants to read each participant's description of an occasion when they received unsolicited or solicited advice (including why they think the other person provided it) and rate how well the description matches each attribution on a scale from 1-7 (where 1 = description does an *extremely bad* job of capturing the perceived motivations and 7 = description does an *extremely good* job of capturing the perceived motivations).

Finally, to evaluate the content validity of our attributions, we followed Colquitt et al. (2019, p. 7) and calculated two content validity statistics. Recall that the aim of this research was to distill and organize employees' descriptions of why they received unsolicited or solicited advice into a set of comprehensive but distinguishable attributions. First, if our attributions are comprehensive, each of the descriptions that employees provided should match at least one of the attributions provided. To evaluate this aspect of content validity, we calculated a *Hinkin Tracey correspondence (htc)* statistic, which captures definitional correspondence—the extent to which the participant's description matches an attribution. It is measured by taking the average definitional correspondence rating (i.e., the average of the

two research assistants' ratings capturing how well the description matched the attribution) and dividing it by the maximum anchor of the rating scale (7). Second, if our attributions are distinguishable, each of the descriptions that employees provided should match one attribution more strongly than other attributions provided. To evaluate this second aspect of content validity, we calculated a *Hinkin Tracey distinctiveness (htd)* statistic, which captures definitional distinctiveness—the extent to which the participant's description corresponds to a single attribution, relative to the other attributions provided. It is measured by taking the average of the differences between a focal attribution's rating and all other attribution ratings, and then dividing by (the number of anchors – 1).

**Results and Discussion.** Content validity statistics for each attribution are provided in Table 4. In all cases, research assistants rated that the participants' descriptions of why they received unsolicited or solicited advice matched one of the attributions to a high degree (definitional correspondence), with *htc* statistics ranging from .59 to .96. Raters also found that participants' descriptions corresponded more closely to a focal attribution than to other attributions listed (including an exclusion category, “another reason not mentioned here”), with all *htd* statistics in the high range exceeding .41. Taken together, these results provide evidence in support of the content validity of the resulting list of attributions in two ways. First, the *htc* statistics indicate that when judges read participants' descriptions for why they received unsolicited or solicited advice, they found that these descriptions matched one of the attributions provided to a high degree. This finding suggests that our attributions are valid representations of why people are perceived to provide unsolicited or solicited advice. Second, the *htd* statistics indicate participants' descriptions of advice episodes were judged as matching one distinct attribution, relative to the other attributions provided. Thus, this finding provides support for the idea that our list of attributions is distinctive in capturing the key motives for why people are perceived to provide unsolicited or solicited advice at work.

### **Study 3 Inclusion Criteria**

To ensure that our sample met best-practice recommendations for data quality, we set several inclusion rules prior to collecting data. First, we included an attention check at the beginning of the experiment to screen out people who did not read and follow instructions closely, which led to 68 participants being excluded. Second, we examined the IP addresses of all participants to ensure that no responses came from the same individual (no participants were excluded). Third, we included an open-ended question at the end of the experiment where we asked individuals to report whether they experienced any technical difficulties that may have interfered with the quality of their data, and no participants reported technical difficulties that would justify exclusion. Fourth, we inspected the time it took for each participant to complete the experiment to assess whether participants were rushed (taking too little time, as reflected by a completion time with a percentile rank less than 2.5%) or distracted (taking too much time, as reflected by a completion time with a percentile rank higher than 97.5), which led to 30 additional participants being excluded. Together, we excluded 98 cases for failing to meet our inclusion criteria (final sample as reported).

**Table A1***Results from a Factor Analysis of Study 1 Items and Longer Measures*

Item	Factor loading		
	1	2	3
Factor 1: Prosocial motives			
<b>... is doing so for my own personal benefit</b>	<b>.61</b>	-.03	.08
... cares about benefitting others through their work	<b>.91</b>	-.03	.01
... wants to help others through their work	<b>.94</b>	-.03	-.02
... wants to have a positive impact on others	<b>.93</b>	.02	-.02
... feels it is important for them to do good for others through their work	<b>.90</b>	.05	-.01
Factor 2: Self-serving motives			
<b>... is doing so to try to impress me</b>	.02	<b>.63</b>	-.12
... wants to look better than my other coworkers	-.02	<b>.71</b>	-.13
... wants to avoid looking bad in front of others	.03	<b>.94</b>	.02
... wants to avoid looking lazy	.04	<b>.89</b>	.00
... wants to avoid a reprimand from the boss	-.07	<b>.70</b>	.10
Factor 3: Perceptions of advice usefulness			
<b>Do you find this person's advice useful?</b>	.08	-.03	<b>.84</b>
Do you try to implement this person's advice?	-.01	.07	<b>.96</b>
Is this person's advice likely to help you make improvements?	.02	.03	<b>.92</b>
Does this person's advice make something (a task, a problem, an issue) better?	-.03	.01	<b>.92</b>
Do you tend to reject this person's advice? (reverse-scored)	-.00	.09	<b>.72</b>
Does this person's advice not affect you one way or another? (reverse-scored)	.04	-.05	<b>.42</b>

*Note.* The items for self-serving and prosocial motives were preceded with the stem, "This person offers me advice because he or she...". Items from Study 1 are in bold. The extraction method was principal axis factoring with an oblique (Direct oblimin) rotation. Factor loadings above .30 are in bold. Longer measures are the Rioux and Penner (2001) impression management scale and the prosocial motivation measure from Grant (2008). The item-total correlations for prosocial motives, self-serving motives, and usefulness were .66, .65, and .86, respectively.



**Table A2***Supplemental Analyses of Exploratory Moderators for Study 1*

Study	Exploratory moderator	Interaction	Outcome	Estimate	Conclusion
1	Recipients will be less likely to attribute unsolicited advice to self-serving motives when the recipient and advisor have many third-party ties in common	Two-way interaction between unsolicited advice and proportion of unsolicited advice ties the recipient had in common with each advisor (i.e., unsolicited advice network overlap)	Self-serving motives	.19 ( $p = .210$ )	Not supported
1	Recipients will be more likely to attribute solicited advice to prosocial motives when the recipient and advisor have many third-party ties in common	Two-way interaction between unsolicited advice and proportion of solicited advice ties the recipient had in common with each advisor (i.e., solicited advice network overlap)	Prosocial motives	.11 ( $p = .355$ )	Not supported
1	Recipients will be less likely to attribute unsolicited advice to self-serving motives when the advisor is central in the unsolicited advice network	Two-way interaction between unsolicited advice and number of ties the advisor had in the unsolicited advice network, divided by total number of possible ties in the company (i.e., in-degree centrality)	Self-serving motives	.33 ( $p = .195$ )	Not supported
1	Recipients will be more likely to attribute solicited advice to prosocial motives when the advisor	Two-way interaction between unsolicited advice and number of ties the advisor had in the solicited advice network, divided by total number of	Prosocial motives	-.35 ( $p = .346$ )	Not supported

	is central in the solicited advice network	possible ties in the company (i.e., in-degree centrality)			
1	Recipients will be more likely to attribute unsolicited advice to self-serving motives when the advisor is a broker in the unsolicited advice network	Two-way interaction between unsolicited advice and advisor network constraint (Burt, 1992)	Self-serving motives	-.18 ( $p = .200$ )	Not supported
1	Recipients will be less likely to attribute solicited advice to prosocial motives when the advisor is a broker in the solicited advice network	Two-way interaction between unsolicited advice and advisor network constraint (Burt, 1992)	Prosocial motives	.38 ( $p = .491$ )	Not supported

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*Note.* All exploratory tests were conducted by adding interaction terms to the cross-classified models reported in Table 3.

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