



The Downside of Delegation: Interpersonal Consequences of Decision Support Choices

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Abstract

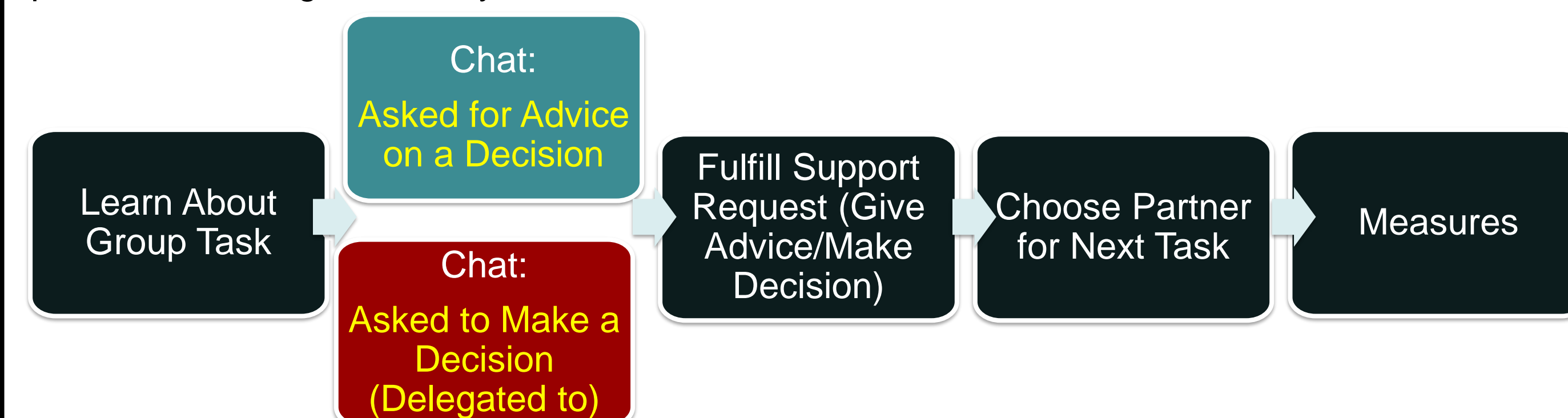
People seeking decision support may elicit it in one of two ways: they may ask for advice (autonomy-oriented help-seeking), or they may delegate the decision (dependency-oriented help-seeking) (Nadler 2002). Prior work on these forms of decision support has largely pursued them independently, with a focus on decision accuracy (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006). We broaden this focus to consider an important consequence: interpersonal reactions to those requesting decision support. Although research in the management domain has emphasized the importance of delegating to foster employee buy in (suggesting delegators would be positively perceived) (Drescher, 2016), recent decision-making work has highlighted an aversion to bearing responsibility (Steffel, Williams, & Permann-Graham, 2016), which could result in negative views of delegators relative to advice seekers. In a series of seven experiments, we find that those who provide decision support interpersonally penalize those who seek support through delegation versus advice seeking, judging them as more manipulative, and choosing not to work with them or provide them with additional decision support. This effect is mediated by perceptions that the help requester is shirking their responsibilities. Moreover, requesters do not anticipate these consequences. By focusing on interpersonal rather than informational, effort-based, or accuracy-centered outcomes, this work advances a more holistic view of the relative tradeoffs decision makers face when they seek the help of others.

Study 1

Do decision support providers interpersonally penalize those who seek decision support via delegation versus advice seeking?

Interactive Experiment:

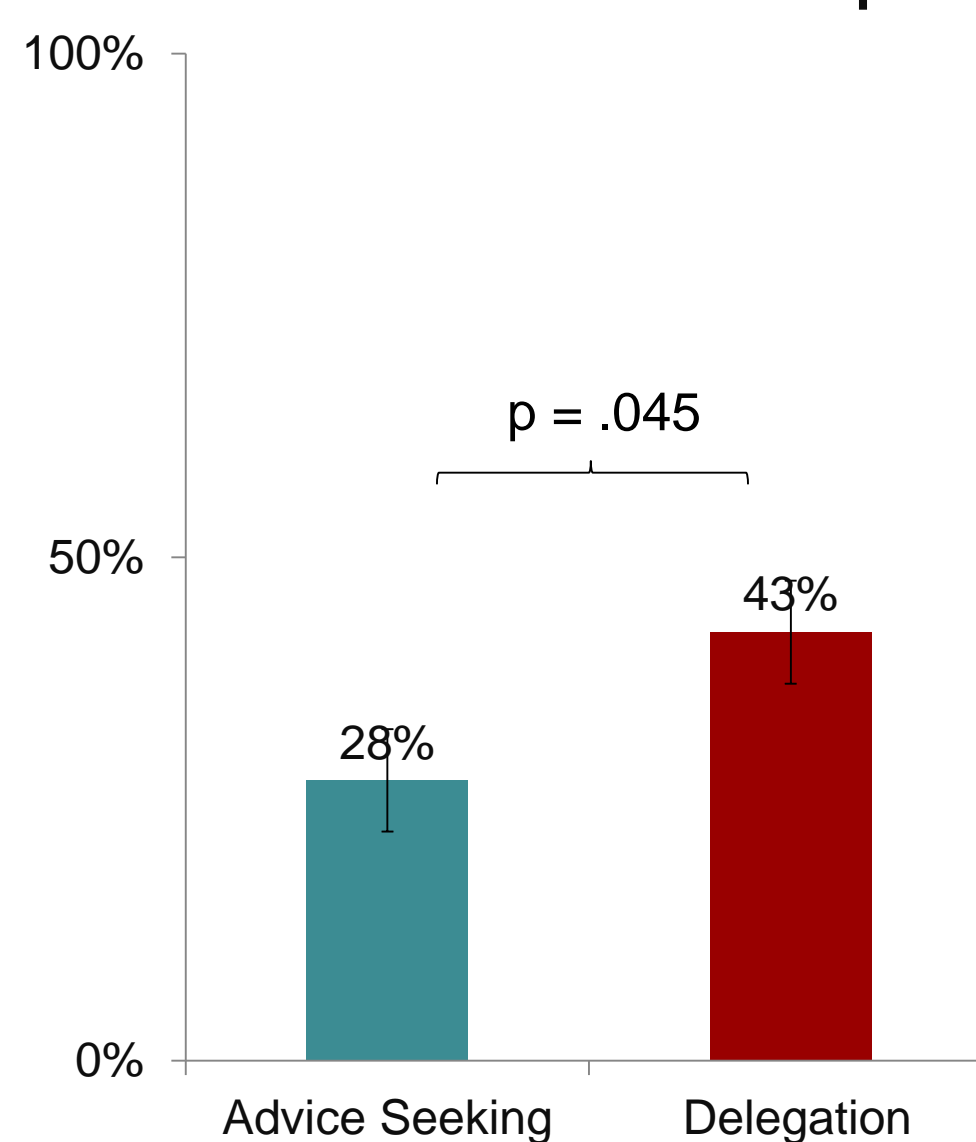
Participants were paired with each other and told one of them (Teammate A) was tasked with making a decision. Then, we instructed those in the Teammate A role to **ask for advice** or **delegate** that decision to their partner (Teammate B) in a live chat session. Those who were asked for advice or delegated to (those in the Teammate B role) were our focal participants. They proceeded through the study as below:



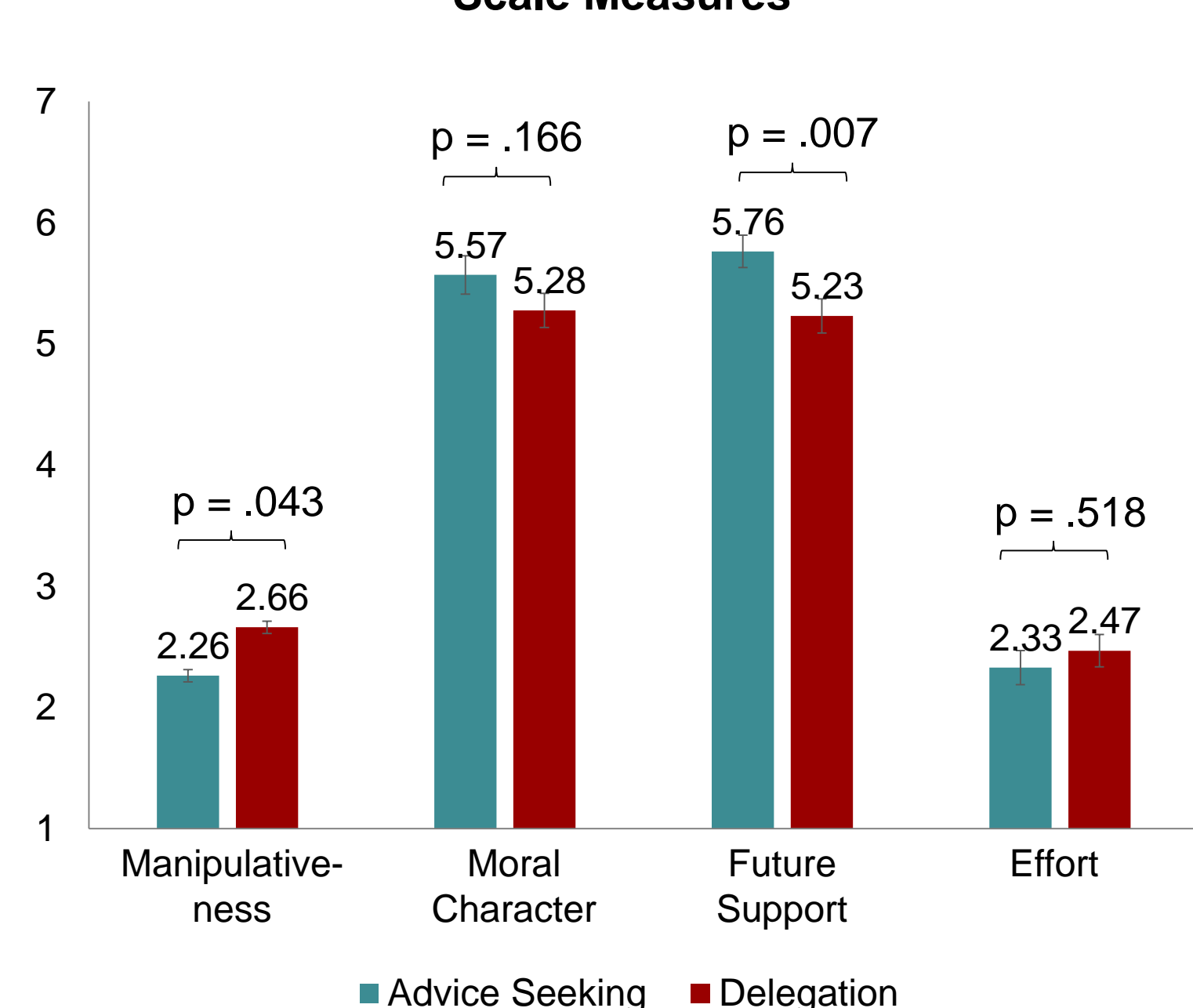
Measures:

- Decision to continue working with requester
- Requester manipulateness ($\alpha=.93$, IPIP)
- Requester moral character ($\alpha=.88$, Shnabel & Nadler, 2008)
- Willingness to provide additional decision support to requester ($\alpha=.87$, Blunden, Logg, Brooks, John, & Gino, 2019)
- Effort ($\alpha=.91$, Speer, King, & Grossenbacher, 2016)

Ended Partner Relationship



Scale Measures



Decision support providers interpersonally penalize requesters who seek decision support via delegation rather than advice seeking.

Study 2

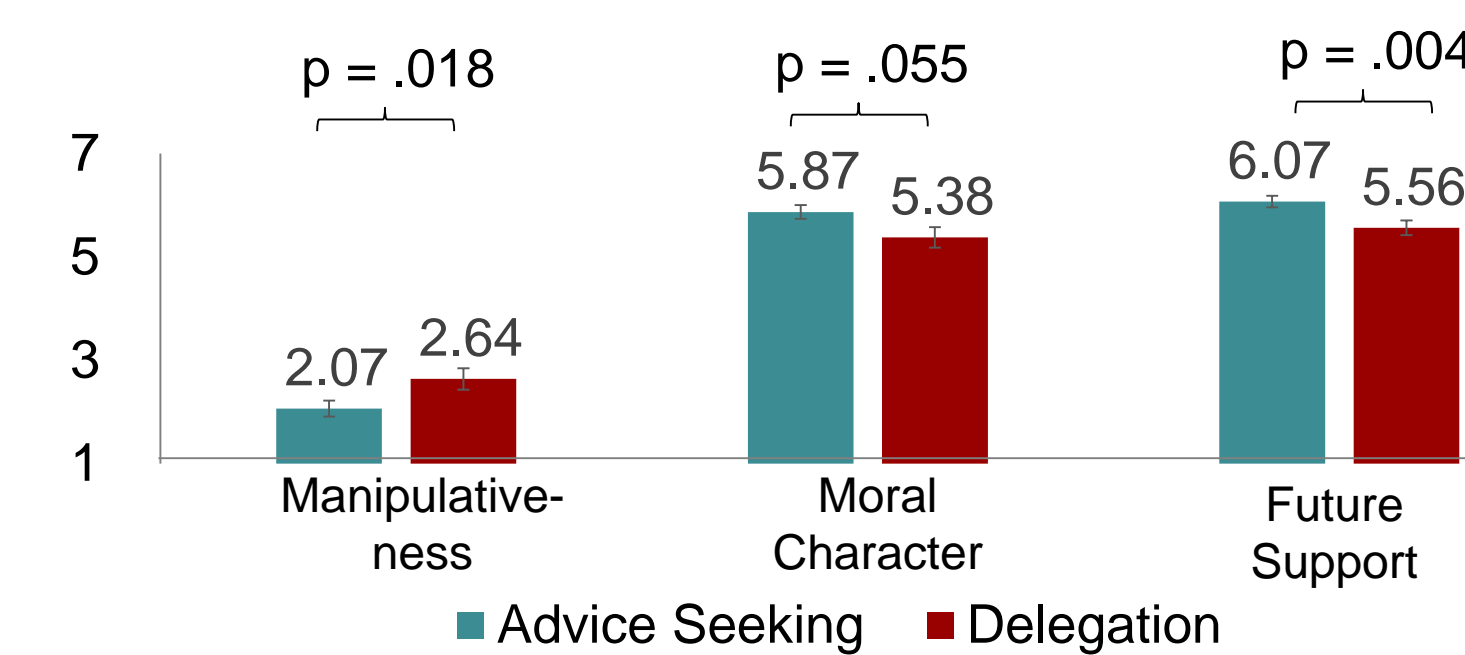
Do decision supporter providers interpersonally penalize delegators across a variety of contexts?

Recall Task:

Please recall and write about a time a coworker **asked you for advice on a decision** [delegated a decision to you].

Measures:

- Requester manipulateness ($\alpha=.97$)
- Requester moral character ($\alpha=.94$)
- Willingness to provide additional decision support to requester ($\alpha=.81$)
- Event characteristics (control variables in below regression)



Analysis of Willingness to Provide Additional Decision Support			
Condition	Manipulateness	Moral Character	Future Support
Delegation	-.508 **	-.533 **	-.477 *
Characteristics of Situation			
In Helper's Job Scope		-.075	-.067
In Seeker's Job Scope		-.087	-.089
Importance		.069	.071
Helper Relative Power		-.252	-.277
Affected: Helper		-.149	-.093
Affected: Seeker		.341	.374
Affected: Boss		-.283	-.311
Affected: Coworkers		.037	.048
Affected: Others Outside Org		.510 *	.485 *
Characteristics of Advisor & Seeker			
Helper Male		-.010	
Seeker Male		-.465 *	
Same Gender		-.031	
Helper Age		.001	
Constant	6.073 **	6.055 **	6.173 **
R ²	.044	.132	.170
Adjusted R ²	.039	.081	.100
n	180	180	180

[†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Decision support providers interpersonally penalize those who delegate controlling for a variety of situational and individual characteristics.

Study 3

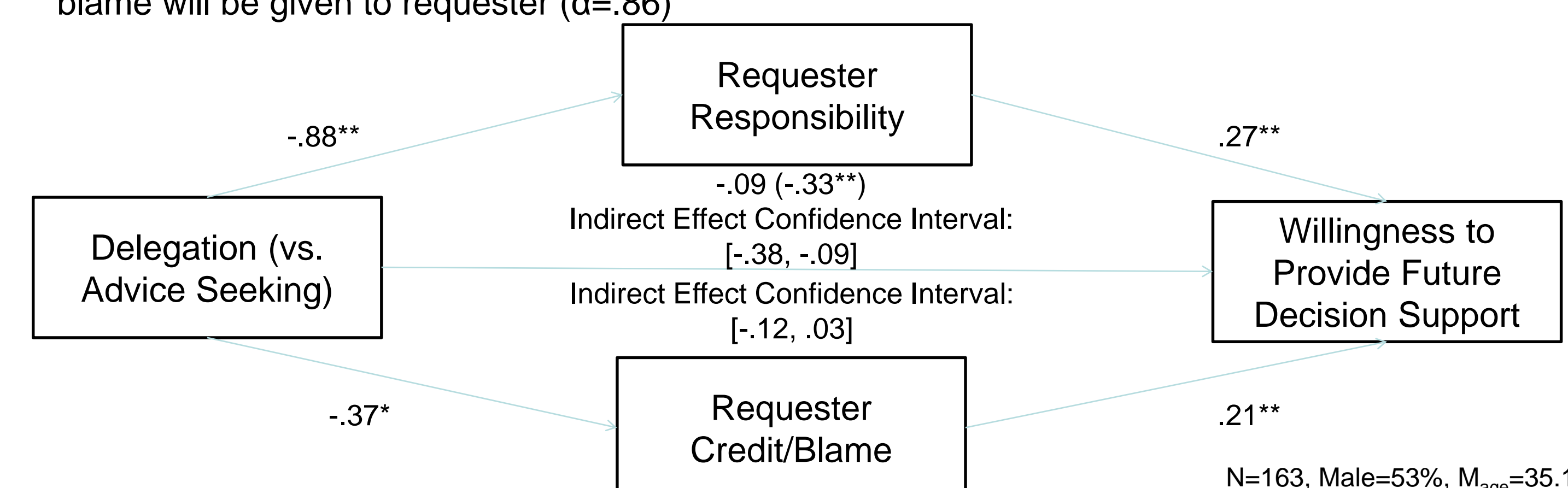
Why do decision supporter providers interpersonally penalize delegators?

Scenario:

Imagine a colleague tasked with choosing between two hotels for your Executive Team's upcoming stay **asks you for advice** [delegates the decision to you].

Measures:

- Main dependent variables (manipulateness, moral character, willingness to provide future support)
- Self-focused: (1) felt responsibility ($\alpha=.84$) & (2) beliefs credit & blame will be given to self ($\alpha=.83$)
- Requester-focused: (3) perceptions of requester's felt responsibility ($\alpha=.91$) & (4) beliefs credit & blame will be given to requester ($\alpha=.86$)



Decision supporters' negative interpersonal reactions to requesters are mediated by perceptions that the requester is shirking his or her responsibilities. Neither of the self-focused measures mediated any of the effects.

Study 4

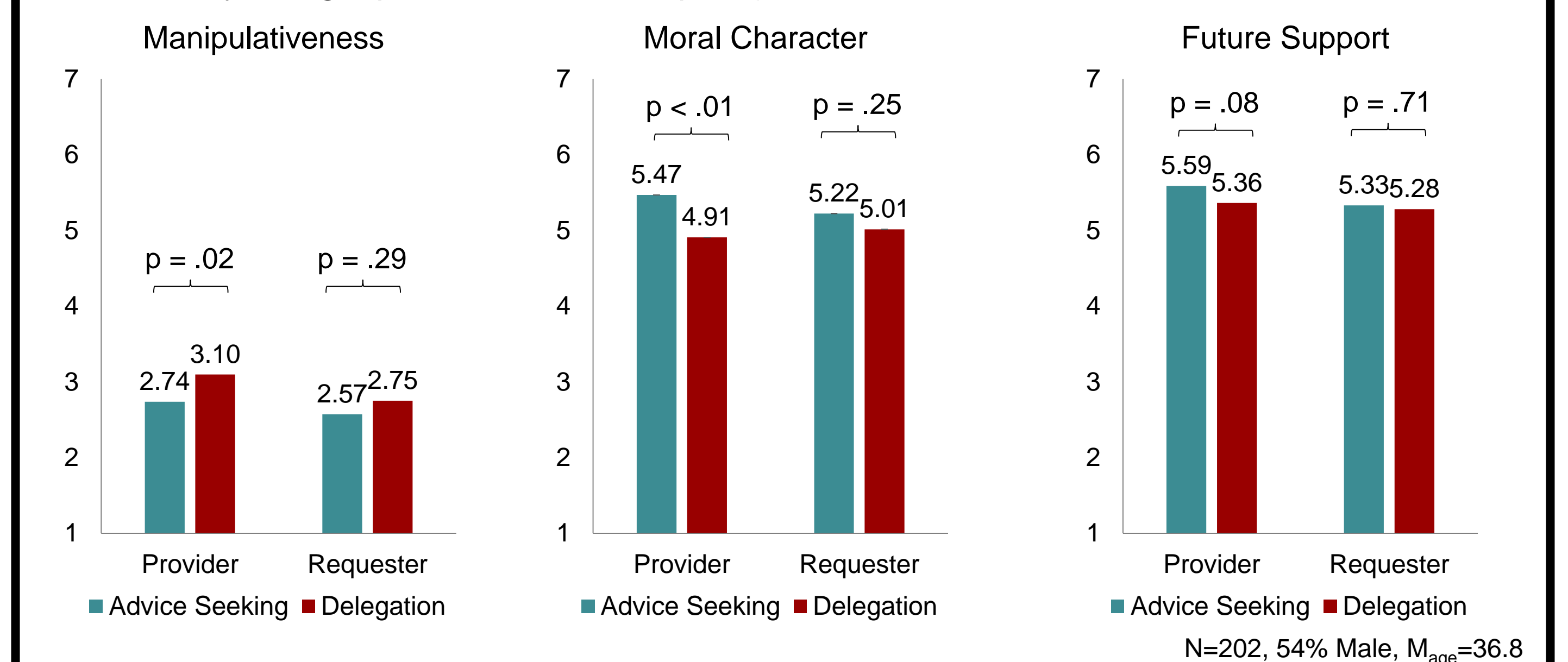
Are decision support requesters aware of these interpersonal consequences?

Scenario:

Hotel decision scenario from Study 3:
2 (advice seeking vs. delegation) X 2 (decision support provider (i.e. advisor or surrogate) vs. requester (i.e. advice seeker or delegator))

Measures:

- Main dependent variables (manipulateness, moral character, willingness to provide future decision support)
- (Providers indicated perceptions of the requester, and requesters indicated meta-perceptions, how they thought providers would respond)



Help requesters do not anticipate differences in interpersonal consequences stemming from their decision support method.

Conclusions

At the heart of our investigation lies a fundamental question: will the transfer of choice responsibility reflect positively or negatively on the support requester? Whereas work in the management domain has emphasized the positive effects that empowerment via decision transfer can yield, research in the decision-making domain suggests support providers may resent being asked to take on choice responsibility. We find evidence of the latter perspective: those asked for decision support via delegation rather than advice seeking interpersonally penalized the requester, an effect mediated by perceptions that the requester was shirking their responsibilities.

Beyond resolving these conflicting viewpoints, our findings offer a new perspective on the consequences of seeking help with our choices by focusing on interpersonal outcomes. This more holistic view of the downstream effects of decision support requests could enable support requesters to more consciously consider potential trade-offs they face between their desired outcomes, such as making the most accurate choice, and establishing a positive relationship with help providers.

Shedding light on the interpersonal consequences of decision support interactions may also prove valuable for decision support providers, who often have benevolent intentions towards those they help. Highlighting differences in interpersonal consequences between these two forms of decisions support requests may enable help givers to identify and counteract unintentional negative reactions they have towards help requesters.

This work also contributes to a nascent body of research focusing on the recipients of decision support requests. Whereas a large body of research has been dedicated to understanding the thought processes of decision support seekers, less work has explored the help provider's perspective. Gaining insight into the other half of the interaction – delving into the minds of those who provide decision support - can uncover valuable insights expanding the collective understanding of these interactions.

Questions & feedback welcome! Contact Hayley Blunden at hblunden@hbs.edu