

## RECIPROCIITY AND COMPLIANCE TO A REQUEST: AN EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION IN A NATURAL SETTING

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*Confederates asked 600 smokers taken at random in the street to give them a cigarette. In exchange, the caller proposed to them a sum of money of 0 (control), 0.5, 1, 2 and 5 French Francs. Results showed that, when money is proposed, in exchange, subjects agree more easily to accept the request though they refuse the money. The influence of the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) is used to explain these results.*

The power of the reciprocity principle has been known for a long time in literature (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is perhaps the most widely accepted social rule in our societies. This norm implies that when a person receives a favor, he frequently feels that he ought to perform a favor in return. We know that the rules trading of this norm are culturally different (Befu, 1980) but the norm of reciprocity seems to have a universal character in human societies (Mauss, 1966) and some authors go even so far as to speak of Homo Reciprocus (Becker, 1956). The respect of the reciprocity principle by a person is generally associated with a positive evaluation (Burger et al., 1997).

Of course, this reciprocity principle makes people more vulnerable to manipulations. Since we feel obliged to return a favor to those who have done one to us, even when the initial favor was not searched for or expected (Regan, 1971). The same is true, sometimes, when the favor was almost imposed on us (Cialdini, 1990). Furthermore, we feel obliged to grant more than we received (Mauss, op. cit.), which implies that the initial donor is more widely favored.

This norm of reciprocity is clearly different from the norm of equity (Adams, 1965) that rests on the cost and benefits analysis of an exchange. Indeed, we know that it is not necessary that costs balance on either side, and that the adoption of the reciprocity principle alone or some initial intentions of gifts or helping are sufficient enough to create the feeling of reciprocate. This obligation to reciprocate is clearly illustrated in the "door-in-the-face" procedure (Cialdini et al., 1975). This technique consists in presenting subjects with a request which sounds so extravagant that nearly all of them are bound to refuse. Then the solicitor responds to this refusal with a second more reasonable request. In this way, subjects are more likely to agree to the last request than subjects in a control group who receive the second

request only. In the "door-in-the-face" procedure, nothing is proposed by the requester but this technique proves to be quite effective.

An experiment was carried out in which the principle of reciprocity for a common request (asking for cigarette) was manipulated by the solicitor. We expected that this solicitation, which seems badly perceived by the smokers, would lead them to accept this request more favorably, if it was accompanied by a counterpart satisfying the principles of the norm of reciprocity. More exactly, we expected the demand of a cigarette matched with a financial compensation to lead people to accept the request more easily. Once this request was accepted by effect of reciprocity, the subject would be led to make a concession in return: namely, refusing the financial compensation proposed by the requester.

### Method

#### Subjects

Subjects were 426 men and 174 women (estimated age ranging from 20 to 30) who were smoking when the solicitation was made. They were walking alone in the pedestrian streets of two medium size cities (more than 100,000 inhabitants) in France (Bordeaux and Vannes).

#### Procedure

Thirty business students (16 men and 14 women), aged between 19 to 22 acted as confederates in this experiment. They were dressed neatly and in a casual way for young people of their age (clean jeans and a tee-shirt, common standard shoes). Confederates were instructed to approach a subject, smoking a cigarette in the street. In control condition, the confederate approached the subject by formulating the following request: "excuse me, would you give me a cigarette please?" In the experimental condition, the confederate politely added: "I'll pay you X franc(s) for it." Depending on the case, this sum corresponded to 0.5, 1, 2 or 5 Franc(s). At the time when the experimentation was held, 1 franc was the average price of a cigarette. A preliminary training phase had taken place for each confederate so that a similar behavior could be adopted by the two groups. Those training sessions had been held in groups of five to six confederates but each confederate found himself in only one condition and groups of training worked on one type of request only. After having solicited the subject, the confederate noted if the subject accepted or not to give him/her the cigarette. In the event of a positive answer, the confederate waited and saw if the subject acted by actually looking into his or her pocket, bag... to give the cigarette solicited. The confederate then put an end to the experiment and proceeded to a complete debriefing.

### Results

Because none of the subjects in the experimental conditions had accepted the money of the confederates, no decomposition of data was possible. In addition, no differences related to gender were found between confederates and subjects. Hence,

data were combined and the compliance rate to the subjects' request are presented below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Compliance rates in the difference conditions (in %)**

Control	0.5 franc	1 franc	2 francs	5 francs
31.7	43.3	64.2	63.3	77.5

The table analysis confirms a general effect of compliance between the 5 groups ( $X^2(1, N = 600) = 65.03, p < .000$ ). Comparisons by pairs show that compliance in the control condition is lower than in the condition where 1, 2, and 5 francs were used to influence the subject's decision. The difference between control group and the 0.5 Fr condition was nearly significant ( $X^2(1, N = 240) = 3.48, p = .06$ ). So, it seems that proposing money in exchange for a cigarette leads the subject to accept the request more favorably even though this money is eventually refused. Complementary analyses between the 5 groups show that the 5 Fr condition leads to a rate of compliance which is significantly larger than in any other condition. As regards, the 0.5 Fr condition was by far the lowest. We can see, then, that the level of reciprocity influences the compliance rate in a linear way. Nonetheless, the compliance is significantly higher than in the control condition when the exchange level becomes fair (1 Fr = 1 cigarette).

The results of the present experiment showed that when money is proposed in exchange for the solicited cigarette, subjects feel more inclined to accept the request but refuse the money. It also seems that this exchange does not work on a norm of equity (1 coin = 1 cigarette) but on a norm of reciprocity. We know that the respect of this reciprocity principle, which leads to an effect of obligation, is as important as the balance of exchange values (Bell et al., 1996). Furthermore, we know that this norm of reciprocity increases the rates of compliance to a request because we cannot refuse anything to somebody who applies this rule (Regan, 1971). This norm of reciprocity generally leads us to give more than we have received (Cialdini, 1980). Here, the money refusal would be the counterpart of the type of exchange the norm of reciprocity imposes: to give something in return of something. The confederate makes a concession by matching his demand with a financial counterpart. So, the subject, having agreed to supply the cigarette, would make a concession in return by refusing the money proposed in exchange. This process certainly explains why people who were given a flower by members of the Hare Krishna did not feel reluctant at all, after they had walked a few steps, to give money to this sect even though the flower was thrown away afterward (Cialdini, 1990). Under the pressure exerted by the norm of reciprocity, a concession which is made for us by somebody would lead us to make a concession in return in order to respect the principles of balance of the exchange imposed by this norm.

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