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Citizens prosocial behavior in times of crisis

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# Citizens prosocial behavior in times of crisis.

By Jurgen Willems

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<https://www.wwtf.at/>

## Abstract:

Austrians felt they could help others less in the corona-lock down, compared to one year before the crisis, but still feel helped by others. This is the output of a quantitative comparison of survey data collected in 2019 and 2020. Further qualitative exploration suggests that the social distancing is a major reason for not being able to help others, as social contact is often seen as a condition to help others. However, having the feeling of being helped by others – and thus be more dependent on others – relates negative with how people help others themselves, and with prosocial intentions and public service motivation. Moreover, people that feel more helped by others are also less satisfied about the corona measures and how other citizens (do not) comply with these measures.



***Presentation – 9 December 2020 – “WWTF lecture series:  
Vienna researchers Corona”***

## Original idea,... and the Covid / WWTF 'serendipity'...



1. **April 2019:** "can a **boost** (i.e. an active reflection task) trigger higher prosocial motivation and behavior among citizens?"
    1. Follow-up study from: *Vogel & Willems (2020) The Effects of Making Public Service Employees Aware of Their Prosocial and Societal Impact: A Microintervention - Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*
    2. Online survey / 'big scale'
    3. Representative sample ( $n = 1,500$ ) Austrians
  2. **April 2020:** Corona + WWTF "rapid response" call.
    1. Exact same study, one year later (at the 'top' of first lock down;  $n = 1,798$ ).  
**Before/After**
    2. With extra questions; direct policy relevance
  3. **Now:** Follow up studies – data collection going on / planned.
- MAIN VARIABLES**
1. Reflection task
  2. Prosocial behavior: helping other / helped by others
  3. Satisfaction on Government Measures
  4. Qualitative 'Open answers' on Personal and societal challenges

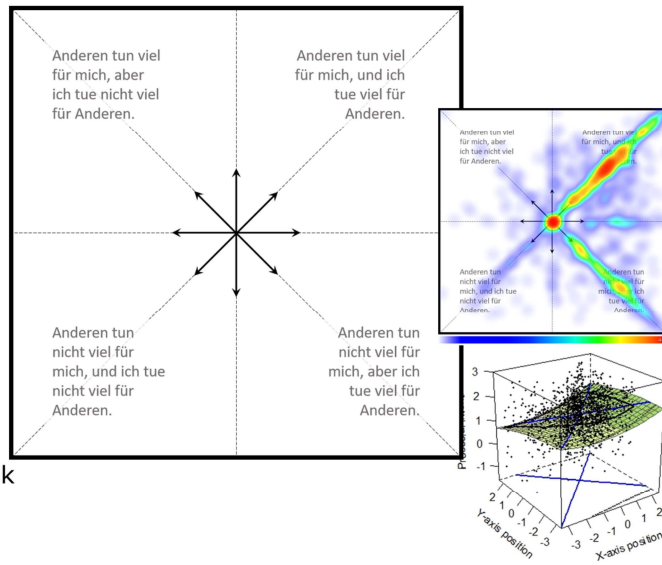
A boost is thus not about "nudging" people in certain choices, but "push" them to THINK longer about choices...

Nice example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfttcTO8enI>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNOZoYrOHxk>

For more information, read: Hertwig, R., & Grüne-Yanoff, T. (2017). Nudging and Boosting: Steering or Empowering Good Decisions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(6), 973–986.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617702496>

## Reflection task (regardless Covid)

1. Based on Psychological Contract Theory
  1. Expectations about own and others' mutual commitment
  2. 'continuously' evaluate a balance / unbalance in this mutual commitment
  3. Update own behavior based on this evaluation
2. Initiate active reflection on that
  1. 'boost'
  2. Micro-intervention
3. Experimental design
  1. With or without reflection task
  2. Intention to help others



### Based on:

Vantilborgh, T., Bidee, J., Pepermans, R., Willems, J., Huybrechts, G., & Jegers, M. 2014. Effects of ideological and relational psychological contract breach and fulfillment on volunteers' work effort. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 23(2): 217–230. DOI:

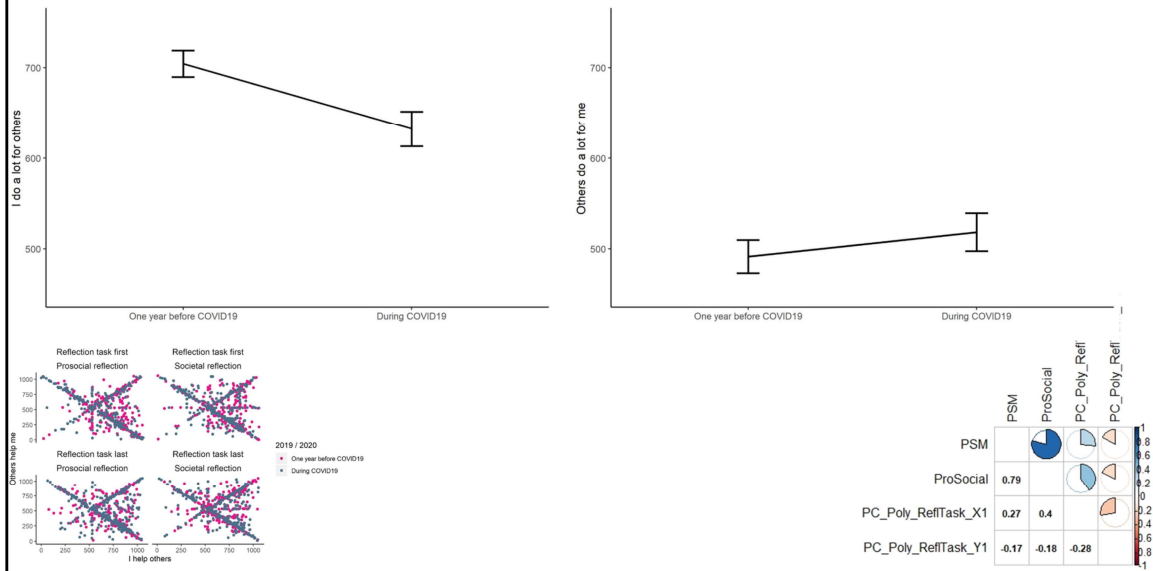
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2012.740170>

Vantilborgh, T., Bidee, J., Pepermans, R., Willems, J., Huybrechts, G., & Jegers, M. 2013. Revisiting the relationship between personality and psychological contracts: A moderated mediation model explaining volunteer performance. *Social Service Review*. 87(1): 158–186. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/669825>

Vantilborgh, T., Bidee, J., Pepermans, R., Willems, J., Huybrechts, G., & Jegers, M. 2013. From "getting" to "giving": Exploring age-related differences in perceptions of and reactions to psychological contract balance. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*. 22(3): 293–305. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2012.721354>

## Some main findings (I)



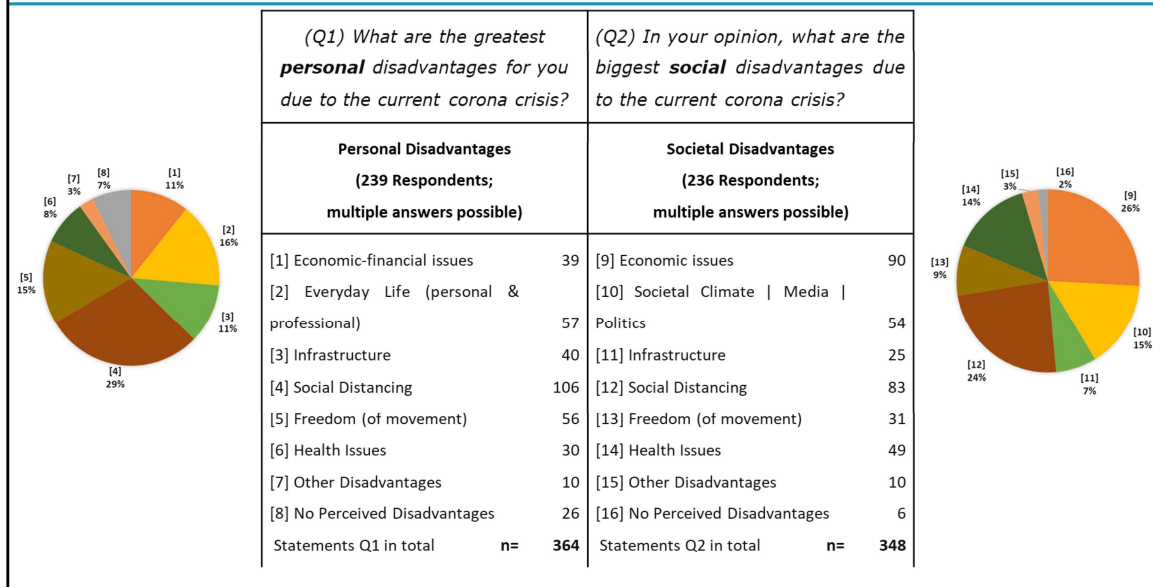
**Left upper panel:** Negative change in helping others (before and after Corona crisis)

**Right upper panel:** no significant change in feeling helped by others (before and after corona crises)

**Left down panel:** scatter plot

**Right down panel:** correlations between helping others and feeling of being helped by others, also with Publish series Motivation and Prosocial attitudes.

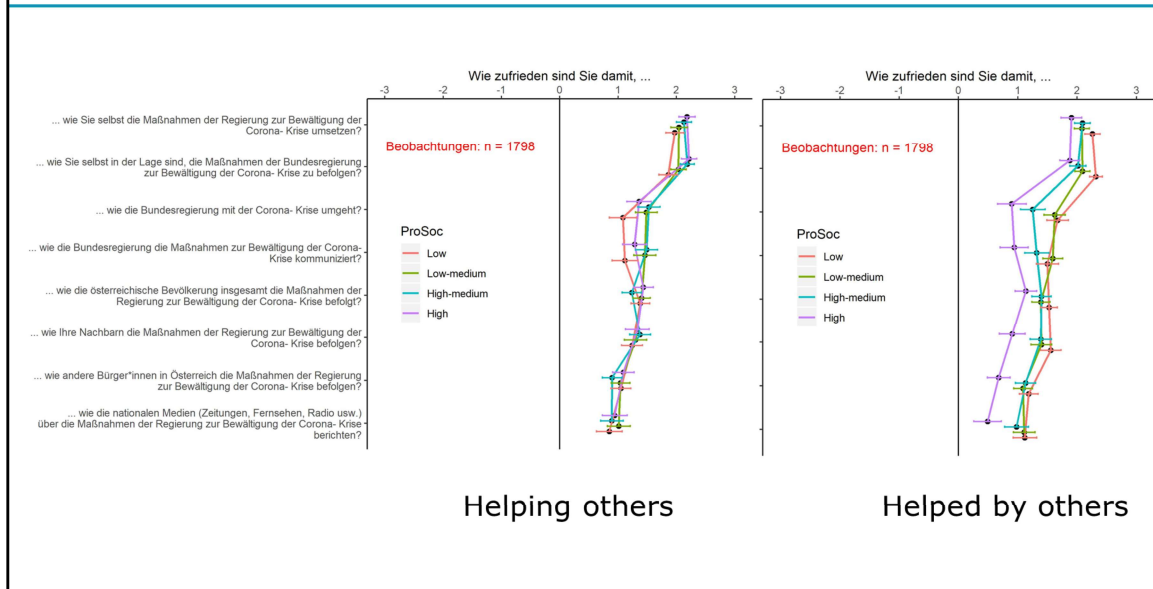
## Some main findings (II)



The survey (482 persons living in Austria) focused on the personal and social disadvantages during the COVID-19 shutdown in the form of two open questions. The data have been analyzed in terms of content and frequency for the whole group and stratified by age and gender. This analysis aimed to identify the direct social, economic, ecological, and political consequences of the crisis and the government measures taken to overcome it. The results show a certain divergence between the perceived individual disadvantages and the social disadvantages: While the three most important personal disadvantages mentioned are social distancing, everyday life in the new situation, and restricted freedom of movement, the economic turndown, social distancing and the areas of politics, media, and society are primarily mentioned at the social level (Willems et al, 2020b).

Full report and data (in German):  
<https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/m7r4h>

## Some main findings (III)



We assess satisfaction about various aspects of the 2020 COVID-19 crisis for a representative sample of 1798 respondents living in Austria. Overall, people living in Austria are satisfied with the various crisis management elements of the COVID-19 pandemic, as answers are mainly at the positive side of the response scale that ranges from -3 (Very unsatisfied) to +3 (Very satisfied). Citizens are most satisfied with how well they implement the measures of the federal government themselves (and/or their employer) to overcome the Corona crisis, and about how they are able to comply with these measures. In contrast, they are least satisfied with how national media report on the measures (Newspapers, TV, etc.). Splitting-up satisfaction evaluations for gender, age, region, level of education, occupation, or sector of employment does show no or some small (but no substantial) differences for particular subgroups. We can observe an age effect for satisfaction on how others deal with the government's COVID-19 measures. This means: the older people are, the more satisfied they are about how others comply with the COVID-19 measures. Self-employed respondents are least satisfied with how the government is dealing with the crisis and communicating the measures. Students are most satisfied about that. However, it has to be noted that this data is from 17 April to 29 April (2020), which is just before loosening, in a second round,



many of the restrictions on small businesses. (Willems et al. 2020a)

Full report and data: <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/y37s>

## Further steps

### Catalyst for new (ongoing) projects

- Input in Austrian Corona Panel
- Study at ERSTE Bank Group
- American University, in Washington (Just started)

### Further research

- Implement reflection tasks in education, trainings, campaigns` ?
- Effects over a range of attitudinal and behavioral variables
- Short and long term effects?

### Further info

<https://www.wu.ac.at/pubmgt/research/prosocial-and-societal-behavior>



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