

## Vicarious Reciprocity: Inheriting the Social Debts of Valued Others

Noah J. Goldstein

UCLA Anderson School of Management

The norm of reciprocity—the rule obligating individuals to return favors performed for them—has been traditionally studied in the context of dyadic (i.e., two-party) interpersonal exchanges. However, this traditional view of reciprocity is unnecessarily restrictive, leading scholars and practitioners alike to overlook influence strategies based on a more expansive interpretation of the reciprocity norm. I argue that individuals vicariously inherit the social debts incurred by a valued third party when that party receives a favor from a benefactor, which obligates them to “return” the favor to that benefactor, despite never having personally benefitted from the favor. I will present several laboratory experiments and one field experiment that support this hypothesis, reveal the underlying psychological mechanism, and demonstrate boundary conditions for the effect.