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**IT DOESN'T HURT TO ASK (FOR MORE TIME): EMPLOYEES OFTEN  
OVERESTIMATE THE INTERPERSONAL COSTS OF EXTENSION REQUESTS**

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## ABSTRACT

Setting deadlines can improve productivity. Yet, miscalibrated deadlines are a major source of stress, undermining employees' health and happiness. An effective strategy to maximize the benefits of deadlines while minimizing the costs could be to set task deadlines and adjust them as needed. However, results from six studies ( $N = 4,297$ ) show that employees frequently avoid requesting extensions on adjustable deadlines, instead submitting suboptimal work. Employees' reluctance to ask for deadline extensions is driven by self-presentation concerns: employees believe that their supervisors will view them as incompetent if they request a deadline extension. In contrast to these beliefs, supervisors actually perceive extension requests as a sign of greater motivation (vs. incompetence). These findings suggest that employees often underutilize a proactive behavior at work—making extension requests on adjustable deadlines—due to incorrect perspective taking and suffer from unnecessary time stress as a result. (143 words)

*Keywords:* extensions; deadlines; impression management; proactive behavior; time stress;

Deadline setting is a widely used project management tool, and for good reason: deadlines help employees overcome procrastination and prioritize important tasks, increasing productivity and team coordination (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Ballard, Vancouver, & Neal, 2018; Ballard et al., 2018; Zhu, Yang, & Hsee, 2018). Despite these well-documented benefits, deadlines also have adverse effects. Deadlines are a major source of time stress (Perlow, 1999) and feeling pressed for time can undermine employees' productivity, creativity, and even their mental health (e.g., Amabile et al., 1976; Karau & Kelly, 1992). One way to alleviate the time stress that is often associated with deadlines is to adjust a task's due date. While many work-related deadlines are strict (i.e., violating the original date is impossible or extremely costly), many others are adjustable. In this paper, we argue that employees underutilize extension requests—even for deadlines they recognize as adjustable—due to self-presentation concerns.

### **Extension Requests as a Proactive Behavior at Work**

To move projects forward, organizations frequently utilize deadlines—a designated time for task completion. Deadlines can be set by organizations (e.g., a fiscal deadline), other people (e.g., a direct manager or client), or self-imposed by employees themselves as a commitment device. Some deadlines are strict: once the original deadline has passed, taking any action related to the task is impossible or extremely costly. For example, if an organization submitted tax forms past the fiscal year deadline, they would incur large fines. However, many tasks that are assigned in organizations are subordinate tasks, or smaller actions employees must complete to achieve a larger goal (Cropanzano, James, & Citera, 1993). These tasks are less likely to incur deadline adjustment costs. For example, a supervisor may ask an employee to submit an initial draft of a proposal for an event happening *next year* by the end of *this week*, to ensure they have a draft to

start working on before the final deadline. Adjusting the deadline for the initial draft by a few days is less costly compared to submitting tax forms after a fiscal deadline.

Empirical evidence suggests that employees also understand that many of their work-related deadlines are adjustable. In a pilot survey we conducted ( $N=191$ ), employees across a wide range of occupations recognized that over one-third of their “stressful deadlines” would have been open to adjustment (Appendix A). Extending stressful-yet-adjustable deadlines may help employees gain time, reduce stress, and improve work quality. Thus, extension requests may be an important yet overlooked proactive workplace behavior. However, we argue that most employees do not take advantage of the adjustability of workplace deadlines due to their desire to maintain a positive impression to their colleagues and managers.

Adjusting deadlines often involves communicating one’s need for more time to other people (e.g. a supervisor, coworker, or client; see Appendix B). Employees often fail to communicate their needs at work because they aspire to appear competent and motivated (Morrison & Bies, 1991). In a seminal study on this topic, employees who were working on a challenging work task (i.e. responding to a complicated office memorandum) avoided asking for feedback when their feedback seeking was visible to others (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). By not asking for feedback, these employees failed to capitalize on a valuable opportunity to improve their performance. In a more recent field experiment with over 1,200 participants, advisees avoided asking advisors for hints on a task that would enhance their likelihood of gaining a monetary reward, because they worried it might signal low ability (Chandrasekhar, Golub, & Yang, 2018). Building on these findings, we propose that employees’ motivation to maintain a positive impression will prevent them from utilizing extension requests.

### **Extension Requests as a Signal of Incompetence**

Prior research has identified the desire to appear competent and motivated as a key deterrent for other proactive behaviors at work such as asking for feedback or help (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Lee, 2002). In the workplace, employees are motivated to appear in a positive light across many traits. In their influential review, Jones and Pittman (1982) outlined seven positive impressions that employees strive to maintain at work: competence, motivation, pitiability, authenticity, likeability, power, and morality. Among these various impression motives, we argue that the motive most relevant for deadline requests is the desire to appear competent.

In workplaces today, using time efficiently is highly valued as a signal of competence, ability, and social status (Keinan, Bellezza, & Paharia, 2019). Time management skills are recognized as the most important and defining skill of top performers (Maxfield, Grenny, Hale, & Hoffman, 2017). Given the perceived importance of efficient time management, we argue that employees are likely to believe that their coworkers perceive extension requests as a sign of incompetence. Consistent with this idea, in a pilot study that we conducted on this topic, the fear of appearing incompetent was the most frequently mentioned reason for not requesting an extension on a stressful yet adjustable deadline (66.7%; Appendix C).

Based on these initial observations, we predict that employees' desire to appear competent toward their coworkers, coupled with the belief that extension requests signal incompetence (i.e. an inability to use time efficiently), will deter employees from proactively adjusting deadlines, even when it is possible do so and will clearly benefit their performance.

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** *When an extension request is visible to observers they are motivated to impress (e.g. supervisors who are responsible for workplace evaluation and rewards),*

*employees will avoid making extension requests, even for deadlines where adjustment is possible and perceived as helpful.*

**HYPOTHESIS 2:** *Employees will avoid making extension requests that are observable to people they would like to impress (e.g. supervisor), because they believe asking for more time will signal incompetence.*

### **Overestimating Impression Costs of Extension Requests**

We propose that employees will avoid requesting extensions because of the belief that they will be judged as incompetent. A vast literature on meta-perception suggests that individuals often overestimate how incompetent they will appear for behaviors that may reveal their imperfection. Individuals who are forced to admit their own shortcomings when they make mistakes (Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001), seek advice (Brooks, Gino, & Schweitzer, 2015), or solicit help (Lee, 1997; Thompson & Bolino, 2018) often anchor on their own disappointment in themselves and overestimate others' disappointment. As a result, employees' impression management strategies are often counterproductive to the outcomes they are trying to achieve. For instance, although employees avoid seeking advice because they believe it will signal incompetence, in a series of lab studies, advice givers perceived people who sought their advice as *more competent* than those who did not (Brooks et al., 2015). Similarly, we predict that although employees avoid requesting extensions for adjustable deadlines (fearing it will signal their incompetence), observers will not judge these requests as harshly as employees expect.

**HYPOTHESIS 3:** *Employees will overestimate how incompetent observers perceive them to be when making extension requests for adjustable deadlines.*

### **Extension Request as a Signal of Task Commitment**

How we spend our time is seen as more reflective of our personal values and commitments compared to the allocation of other resources (Donnelly, Wilson, Whillans, & Norton, 2018; Gino & Mogilner, 2014; Shaddy & Shah, 2018). For instance, people judge friends who decline social invitations due to lack of time (vs. money) less favorably, because time is seen as a more personally controllable resource (Donnelly et al., 2018). Building on this research, we predict that observers will likely interpret deadline extensions as employees' expression of greater willingness to invest more time in a task, thus perceiving employees who make deadline extensions as more motivated than employees who do not ask for extensions.

***HYPOTHESIS 4:** Observers will perceive employees who make extension requests for adjustable deadlines as more motivated than employees who do not make extension requests.*

### **When and Why Extension Requests Can Backfire**

It is possible that asking for more time does not *always* benefit employees' competence. Thus, we also explored two potential interpersonal costs of extension requests. First, because deadline extensions imply greater effort invested in the task, requesting a deadline extension may heighten an observer's expectations of the quality of the submitted work. As a result, observers might be more likely to be disappointed at an output submitted after a deadline extension relative to comparable quality work submitted without an extension request (Oliver, 1977). It is also possible that observers might perceive an objectively identical task output to be higher quality if it was submitted after an extension request because people often conflate the amount of input someone invested with the quality of the outcome (Chinander & Schweitzer, 2003). Thus, we explored how extension requests impact observers' evaluation of employees' performance.

Second, we explored a boundary condition: the length of the deadline extension request. When employees ask for an extension that is shorter than the originally assigned timeline,

observers will most likely infer that the employee is incorporating final touches to their largely completed output. As a result, observers may attribute these short extension requests to employees' desire to perfect their work (Feldman, 1981). Yet, when the requested time is longer than the originally assigned timeline, observers might make alternative attributions—for instance, that the employee needs more time due to procrastinating on the task or a lack of task-relevant skills. These attributions, in turn, may cause extension requests to negatively impact the observers' evaluations.

### **Overview of the Current Research**

In a preliminary study, we first establish whether employees' willingness to ask for an extension on adjustable workplace deadlines predicts their time stress and wellbeing. Building on these descriptive findings, across six studies ( $N=4,297$ ) we then explore why employees do not request deadline extensions, how these extension requests are perceived, and the boundary conditions of our observed results. In Study 1, we conduct a survey of a nationally representative sample of full-time employees to examine the frequency of deadline extension requests. Following these descriptive findings, in Study 2, we formally test H1. Specifically, we examine whether employees are less likely to ask for more time to complete a paid work task when the request is visible to a supervisor who determines their compensation. In Study 3, we explore our proposed mechanism: that employees avoid requesting a deadline extension because they are concerned about appearing incompetent (H2). In Study 4, we compare employees' predictions to observers' reactions, to assess whether employees accurately predict observers' perceptions of their competence (H3) and motivation (H4) when making a deadline extension. In Study 5, we explore whether an extension request leads observers to hold a higher standard in evaluating

employees' performance. Finally, in Study 6, we evaluate the moderating role of extension request length in influencing observers' evaluation of employees and quality expectations.

All data, stimuli, analysis code, and preregistration documents for all our studies are available on Open Science Framework

([https://osf.io/rsp8g/?view\\_only=5b2b48a056bc48cabb6a8421a3ccec7](https://osf.io/rsp8g/?view_only=5b2b48a056bc48cabb6a8421a3ccec7)).

### **Preliminary Study:**

#### **Does Attitude Towards Extension Request Predict Employee Wellbeing?**

Although anecdotal evidence suggests that extension requests should have a positive impact on employee wellbeing, no existing empirical data has directly examined this question. Thus, in this preliminary study, we aim to establish whether employees' attitudes toward extension requests predicts their level of time stress and wellbeing.

#### **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 599 adults (54.26% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.42$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.94$ ) who worked at least 21 hours a week on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The final sample represented employees from 22 industries including Business and Finance (14.7%), Information and Technology (12.0%), Sales (10.9%), and Education (10.5%). We excluded two participants from our final analysis due to low quality responses; results hold upon including these participants.

#### **Measures**

***Time Stress.*** We measured how time stressed the respondents felt using a two-item measure (e.g. "There have not been enough minutes in the day") adapted from Kasser and Sheldon (2009). (See Appendix D for a full description of all measures.)

***Employee Wellbeing.*** We measured respondents' general happiness (Fordyce, 1977) and their positive and negative affect during the past four weeks (SPANE; Diener et al., 2009).

***Attitude Toward Requesting an Extension for Adjustable Deadlines.*** We defined adjustable deadlines for respondents as the following: “Some task deadlines in the workplace are adjustable. For these deadlines, people may ask for more time to work on their task. That is, people make extension requests.” We measured how comfortable respondents felt in general about making extension requests for adjustable deadlines at work on scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely).

***Covariates.*** We measured critical covariates that could impact employee wellbeing and time stress such as how good respondents were at delegating their tasks at work (Akinola, Martin, & Phillips, 2018), self-reported work-life conflict (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996), gender, age, tenure, and industry.

## **Results and Discussion**

***Time Stress.*** We fit an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with discomfort toward making extension requests for adjustable deadlines as the independent variable and experienced time stress as a dependent variable. As shown in Table 1, how uncomfortable employees felt about making extension requests predicted how time stressed they felt,  $b = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ . This effect was robust when controlling for covariates such as proficiency in task delegation, work-life conflict, gender, age, tenure, industry,  $b = 0.09$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p = .003$ . (See Appendix D for the correlations of all of the variables used in our analyses.)

***Wellbeing.*** Respondents’ discomfort in making extension requests negatively predicted their general happiness,  $b = -0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , as well as experienced positive affect,  $b = -0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results were robust to differences in our key covariates (Happiness:  $b = -0.29$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Positive Affect:  $b = -0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

This preliminary study provides evidence employees who feel more comfortable asking for extensions on adjustable deadlines feel less stressed for time and happier at work, even after controlling for covariates such as effectiveness in task delegation, tenure, and industry. These results add support to our claim that extension requests for adjustable deadlines can be considered as a proactive workplace behavior that could benefit employee wellbeing. Building on these findings, in the experiments that follow, we focus on uncovering how misguided impression concerns might compromise employees' utilization of extension requests.

### **Study 1: Descriptive Investigation of Deadlines in the Workplace**

To examine how prevalent adjustable deadlines are in the workplace, we surveyed working adults about the deadline that they most recently experienced at work.

#### **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 496 full-time workers (55.41% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.40$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.93$ ) through a nationally representative panel. We excluded 17 respondents from our analyses due to low-quality responses<sup>1</sup> leaving a final sample of 479 adults (50.33% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 43.53$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.69$ ).<sup>2</sup> Participants reflected on a recently assigned workplace task that had a deadline. Participants described the task, who assigned it, and who determined the deadline. Participants then indicated whether they thought they could have requested a deadline extension, and if so, how they would have requested one by writing down the role of the person in the organization who they would have made the request to (e.g. supervisor, coworker, client, themselves).

***Perceived Benefits of Extending a Deadline.*** Participants reported how much they would have benefitted from extending the deadline by indicating the extent to which they agreed with

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. copied and pasted random texts for free response portions of the survey.

<sup>2</sup> This survey was included in a bundle of surveys assessing employee's experiences with workplace deadlines. We report only the measures that were relevant to the investigation of this paper. The full survey can be found in our OSF repository.

three statements (e.g., “The deadline was too tight for me to do a good job on the task”).

Responses were recorded on a -3 (Strongly Disagree) to +3 (Strongly Agree) scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

***Perceived Adjustability of a Deadline.*** Participants reported the extent to which they perceived the deadline to be adjustable by indicating how much they agreed with three statements (e.g., “[The person] would have felt uncomfortable giving me extra time to work on the task”). Responses were recorded on a -3 (Strongly Disagree) to +3 (Strongly Agree) scale ( $\alpha = .91$ ). See Appendix B for a detailed description of our measures and analytic approach.

## **Results and Discussion**

***Who Sets Deadlines at Work?*** Most deadlines (401 out of 479; 83.7%) were set by someone other than the respondent, and were most frequently set by the respondent’s direct supervisor (44.3%), company rules or conventions such as annual events (21.1%), clients (9.0%), (non-supervising) co-workers (6.3%), and external factors such as fiscal deadlines (3.1%).

***How are Extensions Requested at Work?*** Most deadlines (455 out of 479; 95%) were perceived to be adjustable. Among adjustable deadlines, 82.4% of respondents reported that they would have needed to request an extension to someone else (e.g., a supervisor). Most participants indicated that they would have made their extension request to their direct supervisor (57.8%) or another managerial figure such as the CEO (12.5%) or a client (4.8%). A smaller proportion of extension requests would have been made to coworkers of a similar status (3.3%).

***How Frequent Are Tight and Adjustable Deadlines at Work?*** 189 out of 479 participants (39.5%) indicated that it would have been helpful to push back their most recent deadline. Among these participants, 36.1% perceived the deadlines as non-costly to adjust.

These results provide initial evidence that deadlines for work tasks are extremely prevalent, are frequently enforced by a supervising body, and a non-trivial number of deadlines

are perceived as helpful and possible to adjust. Building on these findings, in our subsequent studies, we explored whether employees avoided making extension requests to a supervisor figure when working under stressful deadlines that they perceived as adjustable.

### **Study 2: Self-Presentational Concern and Deadline Extension Requests**

In this study, we examined whether self-presentation concerns influenced employees' tendencies to request a deadline extension. We created a work task in which a deadline extension would alleviate time stress (as the task required high output in a short period of time). We focused on a conservative setting to test our hypothesis where employees would clearly benefit from an extension and were informed that the deadline was flexible. We evaluated whether employees were less likely to request an extension when the request was visible to a participant who would decide how they should be compensated. This study was pre-registered (<https://aspredicted.org/blind2.php>).

### **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 901 online workers (52.72% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.25$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}}=12.29$ ) from MTurk to complete a work task for a fictional publishing company in exchange for \$0.50 and an opportunity to earn a \$0.30 bonus based on their task performance. Seventy-six participants were excluded from our analyses because they did not meet our pre-registered inclusion criteria<sup>3</sup>, leaving a final sample size 825 adults (54.42% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.51$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}}=12.36$ ).

Participants created descriptions of events captured in a complex image for two minutes with the goal of describing as many events in as much detail as possible (see Appendix F for a

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<sup>3</sup> Including these excluded participants did not change the pattern of results outlined below. The analysis codes for all studies both including and excluding participants who failed our attention/manipulation/data quality check can be found in our OSF repository.

screenshot of the task). We chose this task because it involved a tight deadline that induced a lot of time stress in previous pilot studies.

Participants were told that another participant would act as their supervisor by evaluating their performance, that this person would evaluate their perceived competence and motivation, and that these evaluations would ultimately determine the amount of final compensation they would receive. We chose this manipulation to mirror employees' concerns about their supervisors' evaluations in the workplace.<sup>4</sup>

All participants were then provided with two opportunities to ask for more time. First, during the two-minute task, participants could click on a button labeled "I need more time". Those who asked for more time were instantly granted an additional minute to work on the task. Once three minutes had passed, these participants were directed to a survey about the task that assessed how stressed for time they felt during the task.

Participants who did not ask for an extension during the two-minute task had another opportunity to request an extension immediately after the two minutes passed. If participants clicked on the button labeled "I need more time" they were given an additional minute to complete the task. We manipulated whether participants were told that their supervisor (another participant that would determine their bonus) would (*extension-visible*) or would not (*extension-not visible*) be notified of their decision to ask for more time.

We also evaluated participants' objective task performance, as measured by the word count of the description, to understand if their performance improved when they had requested a deadline extension.

## Results

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<sup>4</sup> To ensure fairness in compensation, at the end of the study all participants received the full bonus payment, regardless of how their performance was evaluated.

**Extension Request.** When the extension request was not visible to the rater, most participants asked for an extension (68.8%), indicating that participants viewed the extension as valuable. Yet, when the request was visible to their supervisor, as predicted, participants were significantly less likely to ask for an extension (52.1%),  $b = -0.71$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ , 95% CI [-0.99, -0.42],  $p < .001$  (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

**Performance.** As predicted, participants who were randomly assigned to the *extension-visible* condition created shorter descriptions ( $M = 73.88$  words,  $SD = 34.88$ ) than participants who were randomly assigned in the *extension-not visible* condition ( $M = 80.46$  words,  $SD = 34.37$ ),  $t(823) = -2.73$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $d = -0.19$ . We ran a bootstrap mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013; Revelle, 2017) that estimated the direct effect of condition (1 = *extension-not visible*) on the length of image description, and the indirect effect of requesting an extension. Participants in the *extension-visible condition* were less likely to ask for more time, which partially explained their image descriptions being shorter than the descriptions created by the participants in the *extension-not visible condition* (IDE = -3.73, 95% CI [-5.44, -2.14]; Figure 2). Thus, requesting an extension successfully improved task performance.

## Discussion

Consistent with H1, employees avoided requesting a deadline extension when the request was visible to their supervisor, suggesting that self-presentation deterred employees from asking for more time. Not asking for more time hurt objective performance. In Study 2, we further

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to a binary measure of whether the employee asked for more time, we were able to compare the rate at which the employee asked for more time before and after the two-minute deadline. The decrease in extension requests when the request was visible was driven by the decrease in the rate of asking for more time during the task,  $b = -0.52$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ , 95% CI [-0.83, -0.21],  $p = .001$ , rather than after the deadline had passed,  $b = -0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ , 95% CI [-0.47, 0.11],  $p = .215$  (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). This result suggests that preemptive extension requests were more strongly deterred by impression concerns than post-deadline extension requests.

evaluated the perceived impression costs of asking for more time—specifically, the concern of appearing incompetent—and its influence on employees’ deadline extension requests.

### **Study 3: Impression Management Concern and Extension Requests<sup>6</sup>**

In Study 3, we assessed working adults’ responses to a scenario-based simulated experience, which resemble employees responses to actual workplace interactions (see Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Greenberg & Eskew, 1993). To manipulate impression concerns, instead of varying the visibility of the extension request, we varied how much influence the supervisor had on the employee’s future compensation (see also: Hur, Lee-Yoon, & Whillans, 2018).

Based on H1, we predicted that employees would be less likely to ask for an extension when the supervisor determined more of the employees’ future compensation. Based on H2, we predicted that employees’ avoidance of the extension request would be driven by the fear that the request would hurt their perceived competence (vs. other impression management concerns).

This study was pre-registered (see: <http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=2fh9ew>).

#### **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 602 adults (54.49% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.40$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.17$ ) from MTurk. We excluded 49 participants from our analyses as they did not meet our pre-registered inclusion criteria, resulting in a total sample of 553 (55.15% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.54$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.16$ ).

Participants imagined a scenario in which they interacted with a supervisor, and were then randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: high impression concern or low impression concern. In the high impression concern condition, participants imagined that they worked closely with a single direct supervisor, whom they would continue to work with during the next few years, and who would determine the pay raise they would receive at the end of the

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<sup>6</sup> Two extended replications of this study can be found in our OSF repository.

year. In the low impression concern condition, the participant imagined that their supervisor changed every few weeks, that they would be assigned a new supervisor soon, and that the supervisor's evaluation would not affect their pay in any way. All participants also imagined that their supervisor assigned them to complete a task that was due the next day, related to an event that would happen in the upcoming year (see

Table 3 for a full description of the scenarios).<sup>7</sup>

### Measures

***Willingness to Request Extension.*** To assess participants' willingness to ask for a deadline extension, we asked participants how likely they would be to ask their supervisor for more time to work on the task on a scale from 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) to 7 (*Extremely Likely*).

***Predicted Impression Cost of Deadline Extension Request.*** Next, participants completed four questions that measured the perceived impression costs of asking for more time: "*I am worried that if I ask for more time to work on the task, my supervisor will see me as less competent [motivated] [authentic] [moral]*" (presented in a random order) on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*).<sup>8</sup>

***Perception of Supervisor.*** Because our experimental conditions could shape participants' perceptions of their supervisor, which could directly influence participants' willingness to ask for more time, we included items that were designed to control for the perceived fairness and likeability of the supervisor (adapted from Ilgen, Peterson, Martin, & Boesch, 1981).

### Results

***Willingness to Request Extension.*** As predicted, participants who were randomly assigned to the high impression concern condition were less willing to ask for more time ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ) than participants who were assigned to the low impression concern condition ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ),  $t(551) = -3.09$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = -0.26$ .

***Predicted Impression Cost of Time Ask.*** As predicted, participants in the high impression concern condition were more concerned about appearing incompetent due to the extension

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<sup>7</sup> The length of the requested extension in the scenario (one day) was determined based on our pilot survey of the most common lengths of deadline and extension (Appendix A).

<sup>8</sup> The impression concern questions were derived from a pilot survey (See Appendix E).

request ( $M = 5.32, SD = 1.51$ ) than those in the low impression concern condition ( $M = 4.94, SD = 1.61$ ),  $t(551) = 2.91, p = .004, d = 0.25$ . They were also more concerned about appearing unmotivated ( $M = 4.97, SD = 1.64$  vs.  $M = 4.60, SD = 1.76$ ),  $t(551) = 2.59, p = .010, d = 0.22$ , and inauthentic ( $M = 3.57, SD = 1.70$  vs.  $M = 3.07, SD = 1.72$ ),  $t(551) = 3.44, p < .001, d = 0.29$ . However, they were no more or less concerned about appearing immoral ( $M = 2.65, SD = 1.70$  vs.  $M = 2.49, SD = 1.61$ ),  $t(551) = 1.11, p = .267, d = 0.09$  (

Table 2).

We performed a bootstrap mediation analysis to understand which impression concerns drove avoidance of extension requests. We estimated the direct effect of condition (1= high impression concern) on the likelihood of making an extension request, and the indirect effects of heightened concern of appearing less competent, motivated, authentic, and moral. As predicted by H2, heightened competence concern helped to explain why people who were assigned to the high impression concern condition were less willing to ask for an extension (IDE = -0.10, 95% CI [-0.19, -0.03]). We also found that motivation concern partially explained why people assigned to the high impression concern were less willing to ask for an extension (IDE = -0.08, 95% CI [-0.16, -0.01]). Authenticity concern (IDE = 0.04, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.10]), and moral concern (IDE = 0.03, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.10]) were not significant mediators (Figure 3).

***Perception of Supervisor.*** Participants in the high impression concern condition perceived their supervisor as more fair and likeable. The critical results held controlling for these differences (

Table 2).

## **Discussion**

Study 3 provided a conceptual replication of Study 2 by demonstrating that employees were less willing to request a deadline extension from a supervisor under high impression management concerns. As predicted, these results were driven by employees' concerns that asking for more time would signal their incompetence. Employees also worried that extension requests would signal a lack of motivation, which partially explained their unwillingness to request a deadline extension. In Studies 4-6, we evaluated how supervisors' perceptions of the employee compared with employees' predictions following an extension request.

### **Study 4: Supervisor Impressions of Employees Requesting Deadline Extensions**

In Study 4, we compared employees' predictions and supervisors' actual responses to an employee's extension request. Given people's well-documented tendency to overestimate their perceived incompetence (e.g. Brooks et al., 2015), we predicted that employees would overestimate how incompetent they would appear when making extension requests (H3). Because investing more time in an issue signals how much the actor values it (Shaddy & Shah, 2018), we also predicted that supervisors would perceive employees' extension requests as a sign of motivation (H4).

## **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 203 working adults through Prolific to complete a workplace scenario survey, where they were assigned to take on the role of "employee" (48.77% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 33.35$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.33$ ). We also recruited 401 working adults through Prolific who worked

with at least three supervisees to complete a similar survey, where they were assigned to take on the role of a “supervisor”<sup>9</sup> (46.63% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34.94$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.20$ ).

Participants who completed the “employee” survey wrote down the initials of their current supervisor. Participants who completed the “supervisor” survey listed the initials of three colleagues at their current workplace (1) who were lower in rank than them and (2) they had never worked on a project with. We selected these criteria to ensure that the participants who completed the supervisor survey had little other information about the target employee other than their extension request. We expected that this would allow the extension request to have a stronger impact on their impression of the employee, allowing a conservative test of whether employees overestimate the negative impact of extension requests on their self-image.

All participants answered questions about their co-worker[s] reporting their age[s], gender[s], and relational closeness. After completing these questions, all participants then imagined an interaction with the target co-worker similar to Study 3, in which they assigned (or were assigned) a work task that was due the next day (

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<sup>9</sup> We recruited more supervisors than employees to explore whether the gender of the employee moderated the impact of extension requests on the supervisor’s evaluation of the employee. In this study, we find no evidence of such employee gender effect.

Table 3).

### Measures<sup>10</sup>

**Manipulation Check.** To evaluate how adjustable they perceived the deadline to be, we asked employees whether they thought their supervisor would give them more time using a -3 (*Extremely Unlikely*) to +3 (*Extremely Likely*) scale. We asked supervisors whether they would give the employee more time using the identical scale.

**(Predicted) Impact of Deadline Extension Request on Employee Image.** To predict their supervisors' perception of their extension requests, employees completed the statement "My asking for more time to work on the task, compared to not asking for more time, would make my supervisor see me as..." using a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (*Much less competent*), 0 (*About the same*), to +3 (*Much more competent*). Employees also completed a similar scale to predict how motivated they would appear to their supervisor due to their extension requests. Supervisors completed an analogous scale to indicate their perception of the employees' extension requests (See Appendix G for a full description of our key measures).

### Results

**Manipulation Check.** Employees' estimate of how likely their supervisor would be to grant an extension ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) did not significantly differ from supervisors' ratings of how likely they would be to give the employee an extension ( $M = 0.97$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ),  $t(391.84) = 0.62$ ,  $p = .534$ ,  $d = 0.05$ . These findings suggest that employees' avoidance of deadline extension requests was not driven by differences in the perceived adjustability of workplace deadlines.

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<sup>10</sup> To explore what attributions supervisors may be making about the employee's extension request as well as to document the downstream behavioral consequences (e.g. recommending employee to upcoming team project), we also asked the supervisor participants why they thought the employee was asking for more time using direct and indirect measures. As these data are not relevant to our hypotheses, we do not discuss them further in this paper. The measures and data can be found in our OSF repository.

***(Predicted) Impact of Extension Request on Perceived Employee Competence.***

Consistent with H3, employees significantly overestimated how incompetent supervisors would perceive them if they asked for more time ( $M_E = -0.17$ ,  $SD_E = 1.25$  vs.  $M_S = 0.07$ ,  $SD_S = 1.21$ ),  $t(395.13) = -2.23$ ,  $p = .026$ ,  $d = -0.19$  (See

Table 4 for a full description of the results).

***(Predicted) Impact of Extension Request on Perceived Employee Motivation.***

Consistent with H4, supervisors perceived their employees as more motivated in response to their extension request ( $M = 0.27$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ),  $t(400) = 4.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.23$ . Diverging from Study 3, employees did not predict that asking for more time would negatively impact their supervisors' perceptions of motivation ( $M = -0.09$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ),  $t(202) = 0.94$ ,  $p = .347$ ,  $d = 0.07$ .

## **Discussion**

In contrast to employees' predictions, and in line with our hypotheses, supervisors did not perceive employees who asked for more time as incompetent. Instead, supervisors perceived employees who asked for more time as more motivated. Employees accurately predicted that supervisors would be quite willing to give an extension, supporting our hypothesis that employees avoid extension requests even for deadlines that they acknowledge are adjustable.

## **Study 5**

Thus far, we have evaluated how supervisors perceive extension requests in the immediate moment, without considering the downstream consequences. By requesting an extension, employees can invest more time and effort in their tasks with less stress, which may improve the quality of their work. In turn, improved work quality may boost the supervisors' evaluation of employee performance. Yet, extension requests could lead supervisors to hold higher standards when evaluating task output. Thus, supervisors may evaluate the performance

of an employee who asks for an extension less favorably compared to the performance of an employee who does not ask for an extension and submits identical quality work.

In Study 5, we also examined whether receiving a deadline extension would increase employees' performance on the work task, in turn leading to supervisors evaluating employees who asked for an extension more favorably.

### **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 1,414 adults (54.42% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.62$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.70$ ) from MTurk to simulate working as a “supervisor” for the participants who produced the image descriptions in Study 2.

Each supervisor was randomly assigned to evaluate a single employees' work from Study 2. The supervisor evaluated their employee based on a description of their performance. This description included 1) the image descriptions submitted by the employee 2) a rating of how detailed the image description was (as rated by blind coders), and 3) information about whether the employee requested an extension or not (Figure 4). To evaluate the employee, supervisors answered the following question on a scale from 1 (*much less than the average employee*) to 7 (*much more than the average employee*): “Compared to the average employee, how competent [motivated] do you think the employee who created the image description above is?”

We randomly assigned half of the supervisors to employees who had asked for an extension in Study 2, and the other half to employees who had not. Each employee was evaluated by two supervisors: one who was told that the employee had asked for an extension (independent of whether they actually did), and one who was not told the employee had asked for an extension (even if they actually did).

Overall, the study followed a 2 (supervisors were told that the employee asked for more time vs. not)  $\times$  2 (employee actually had asked for more time vs. not) factorial design (see Figure 5). This design allowed us to disentangle the distinct effects of two predictors that could otherwise influence supervisors' evaluations of the employees' performance: whether employees actually gained an extension—which could have improved the quality of their task output—and whether supervisors believed that employees had requested an extension—which would have only shaped supervisors' perceptions of the task, but not the actual quality of the task output. Furthermore, while our prior studies only allowed us to assess supervisors' immediate reaction to the employees' request for more time, the current study enabled us to simulate how supervisors incorporated extension request information into their evaluation of the employees' performance.

### Results

**Competence.** We conducted a 2 (supervisors told employee asked for more time vs. not)  $\times$  2 (employee asked for more time vs. not) ANOVA predicting supervisors competence ratings. We observed a significant main effect of employees' extension requests,  $F(1, 1410) = 19.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .014$ , such that supervisors rated employees who had received extra time as more competent ( $M = 4.39, SD = 1.43$ ) compared to employees who did not ( $M = 4.03, SD = 1.52$ ).

However, we found no effect for perceived extension requests (i.e. whether the supervisor was told the participant received more time or not),  $F(1, 1410) = 0.007, p = .934, \eta^2 = .000005$ . Consistent with our findings in Studies 4 and 5, supervisors did not perceive the employee as less competent when they were told that the employee asked for more time to work on the task ( $M = 4.21, SD = 1.50$  vs.  $M = 4.21, SD = 1.48$ ). This was true even when controlling for measures of objective performance quality (i.e., the number of topics in the image description),  $F(1, 1410) = 0.24, p = .621$ . These findings suggest that knowing that the employee

asked for an extension neither positively nor negatively impacted supervisors' subjective assessment of the task quality. The interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 1410) = 0.38, p = .536, \eta^2 = .0003$ . Supervisors evaluated employees who received an extension more favorably, whether or not they knew about the employee's extension request.

Next, we simulated how supervisors would have evaluated employees in the extension-visible condition in Study 1. To do so, we compared the competence ratings in the two groups where supervisors had accurate information about the employee's extension request: 1) the employee did, and the supervisor was told that the employee asked for an extension vs. 2) the employee did not, and the supervisor was not told that the employee asked for an extension. Even when they knew that the employee had asked for an extension, supervisors evaluated employees who asked for more time as more competent ( $M = 4.41, SD = 1.43$ ) compared to employees who did not ( $M = 4.06, SD = 1.50$ ),  $t(711) = 3.15, p = .002, d = 0.24$ .

**Motivation.** A two-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of employees' extension request,  $F(1, 1410) = 33.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .023$ . As with the competence ratings, supervisors rated employees who received an extension as more motivated ( $M = 4.76, SD = 1.66$ ) compared to those who had not ( $M = 4.05, SD = 1.71$ ). We also observed a significant main effect of informing supervisors that the employee asked for an extension,  $F(1, 1410) = 7.80, p = .005, \eta^2 = .005$ . When we told supervisors that their employee asked for more time they rated their employee as more motivated ( $M = 4.43, SD = 1.71$ ) compared to supervisors who had no information about the employee's extension request ( $M = 4.17, SD = 1.68$ ). The interaction effect was not significant,  $F(1, 1410) = 0.12, p = .733, \eta^2 = .00008$ . Even when the extension request was visible, supervisors rated employees who asked for more time as more motivated ( $M = 4.69,$

$SD = 1.65$ ) compared to those who did not ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ),  $t(711) = 6.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.46$ .

***Mediation of Output Quality.*** We hypothesized that employees who asked for an extension would submit higher quality output, and would receive more positive evaluations from their supervisors. To examine this hypothesis, we performed a bootstrap mediation analysis. Focusing on the two groups where supervisors had accurate information about the employee's extension request (i.e. the employee did, and the supervisor was told that the employee asked for an extension vs. the employee did not, and the supervisor was not told that the employee asked for an extension), we estimated the direct effect of asking for more time (1 = extension request made) on supervisors' competence ratings and the indirect effect of output quality. The improvement of output quality—as measured by number of events described—partially explained the positive relationship between asking for more time and supervisor-rated competence (IDE = 0.16, 95% CI [0.09, 0.24]). Thus, supervisors perceived employees who asked for an extension as more competent—even when they knew the employee had asked for more time—in part because they produced better output. The mediation analysis on the motivation ratings yielded similar results (IDE = 0.21, 95% CI [0.13, 0.30]).

## **Discussion**

In Study 5, supervisors did not evaluate employees who asked for extensions less favorably, even if they did not perform better than employees who did not ask for an extension. Rather, in support of H4, supervisors rated employees who they thought asked for an extension as *more motivated*. Thus, we found no evidence that extension requests led supervisors to hold the employee's performance to a higher standard. Extension requests provided employees with

the opportunity to improve their performance, which in turn led to more favorable impressions overall, even when the supervisor knew that the employee had asked for an extension.

Studies 4 and 5 support our hypotheses that employees overestimate how much extension requests signal incompetence to their supervisors (H3) and that supervisors perceive extension requests as a signal of greater motivation (H4). Study 5 also offers preliminary evidence that extension requests may not lead supervisors to be more disappointed at a task output due to higher expectations about its quality. However, Study 5 does not directly assess the change in supervisors' output quality expectation following the extension request. Thus, in Study 6, we directly measure supervisors' expectations of work quality due to extension requests.

In Study 6, we also explore whether the length of the requested extension moderates supervisors' reactions. Our studies thus far focus on supervisor's reactions to requests for short extensions: extensions that are shorter than the original timeline (e.g. a one-day extension for a three-day assignment). Although we chose this experimental context based on the most frequent pattern of extension requests documented in a pilot study (Appendix A), extension requests can be significantly longer, and supervisor evaluations may differ as a function of requested length. In some cases, employees may ask for an extension that is longer than the original assignment. Thus, in Study 6, we examined whether supervisor perceptions of employees varied as a function of whether the requested extension was shorter or longer than the originally assigned timeline.

### **Study 6**

In Study 6, we assessed supervisor's evaluation of the employee following an extension request that was shorter or longer than the originally assigned timeline. We hypothesized that supervisors would make different attributions for why the employee needed more time when the

requested additional time was long (i.e. greater than the originally assigned timeline), and thus react more negatively to the extension request.

When the length of the requested extension exceeded the length of the original timeline, we predicted that supervisors would be less likely to attribute the extension request to the employee's motivation to improve. Rather, they would be more likely attribute the request to the employees' shortcomings (e.g. lack of competence, time management ability, or commitment). As a result, they would react more negatively to requests for long (vs. short) extensions.

### **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 302 working adults (44.0% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.24$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.39$ ) from MTurk. All participants took on the role of a supervisor and imagined a workplace scenario in which they had assigned an event proposal task to an employee with a three-day deadline (

Table 3). Participants were assigned to one of three experimental conditions and were asked to further imagine that their employee asked for a one-day (*short*), five-day (*long*), or two-week (*longer*) extension. Participants then answered a survey about how they would react.

We chose the one-day and five-day conditions based on the mean and third quantile of the regular extension length in our pilot surveys (Appendix A). We hypothesized that supervisors would evaluate the employee more negatively when they requested a five-day-extension (vs. one-day-extension), as five-days was longer than the originally assigned timeline. We also included a longer extension period—a two-week extension—to explore whether supervisors reacted even more negatively toward longer extensions.

### Measures

***Expected Quality of Work.*** To evaluate whether extension request length altered supervisor expectations of work quality, participants completed three statements about anticipated output quality (e.g., “I expect the proposal to be of excellent quality”) using a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (*Much less*), 0 (*About the same*), to +3 (*Much more*) ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ; adapted from Besser, Flett, Hewitt, & Guez (2008)).

***Impact of Extension Request on Employee Image.*** Supervisors also rated the employee on dimensions of competence ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ; adapted from Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu (2002)) and motivation (e.g. “motivated to do their job well”;  $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

***Attributions for Extension Request.*** To measure supervisors’ attributions, we asked supervisors “Why do you think the employee asked for more time to work on the task?” using an open-response format. Two researchers blind to condition coded the responses on whether the supervisors referred to the employees’ concerns about quality (e.g. “they wanted to get it perfect”), the employees’ shortcomings (e.g. failure to prioritize tasks), or something external to

the employee (e.g. “either the time I gave them was unreasonable or they ran into unforeseen problems”, “other work commitments got in the way and they simply didn't have the time they needed”). We resolved all disagreements through discussions (Mandler & Johnson, 1977).<sup>11</sup>

## Results

***Expected Output Quality.*** Extension request length did not impact supervisors' expected quality of the employees' work,  $F(2, 299) = 0.49, p = .613, \eta^2 = 0.00$  (Figure 6).

### ***Predicted Impression Cost of Extension Request.***

***Competence.*** A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition,  $F(2, 299) = 16.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.10$ . A post-hoc comparison revealed that long extension requests ( $M_{5\text{ days}} = -0.15, SD = 1.66$ ) had a greater negative impact on supervisors perceptions of employees' competence relative to a short extension request ( $M_{1\text{ day}} = 0.77, SD = 1.36, p < .001, d = 0.61$ ). There was no difference between the two-week and 5 day extension request ( $p = .480, d = 0.10$ ).

***Motivation.*** A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition,  $F(2, 299) = 17.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.11$ . As predicted, long extension requests ( $M_{5\text{ days}} = -0.06, SD = 1.69$ ) had a greater negative impact on how motivated supervisors perceived employees relative to a short extension request ( $M_{1\text{ day}} = 0.93, SD = 1.29, p < .001, d = 0.61$ ). There was no difference between the two-week and 5 day extension request.

***Attribution.*** We ran a logistic regression predicting supervisors' attributions for employees extension requests. Supervisors were less likely to believe that employees asked for more time to do a better job on their tasks when the requested extension was five-days (40.2%) as opposed to one-day (68.9%),  $b = -1.19, SE = 0.31, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.81, -0.59], p < .001$ .

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<sup>11</sup> In the following page, participants answered the same question in a different format (i.e. choosing from a list of possible reasons). The findings from this alternative measure converged with what we found in the free-response measure. See Appendix H.

In the short extension request condition, supervisors believed employees were striving for high quality work, which predicted managers' perceptions of employees' competence ( $IDE_{\text{Perfection}} = 0.13$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.29])<sup>12</sup>. The mediation analysis on the motivation ratings yielded similar results ( $IDE_{\text{Perfection}} = 0.15$ , 95% CI [0.009, 0.32]; Table 5). For extensions longer than the originally assigned timeline (five-days or two-weeks), supervisors were less likely to attribute the extension request to the employees' motivation to do better on the task. Thus, supervisors were more likely to evaluate employees as lacking in competence and motivation.

### Discussion

In Study 6, asking for a short (one-day) extension did not undermine supervisors' perceptions of employees' competence and motivation. Yet, the relative length of the extension request moderated this effect: asking for an extension that was longer than the originally assigned timeline (five-days or two-weeks) negatively affected supervisors' perceptions of their employees' competence and motivation. Study 6 highlights a critical determining factor of supervisors' reactions to employees' extension requests: when supervisors believe the employee is asking for more time to do a better job on the task, extension requests reflect positively on the employees' image. However, when supervisors do not attribute employees' extension requests to their motivation to do a better job, extension requests reflect poorly on the employees' image.

### General Discussion

Although a vast literature has explored workers' reactions to externally imposed deadlines (Amabile et al., 1976; Andrews & Farris, 1972; Demerouti et al., 2001; Karau & Kelly,

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<sup>12</sup> Supervisors were also more likely to attribute extensions that were five-days long to the employees' shortcomings (e.g. procrastination) (43.5%) than for one-day extensions (24.4%),  $b = 0.87$ ,  $SE = 0.32$ , 95% CI [0.24, 1.51],  $p = .007$ . However, the increase in supervisors' likelihood of attributing the request to the employee's shortcoming ( $IDE_{\text{Shortcoming}} = -0.08$ , 95% CI [-0.24, 0.03]) did not significantly mediate the greater negative impact of long (vs. short) extension request on perceived employee performance.

1992; Teuchmann et al., 1999), no research has examined how workers directly interact with an imminent deadline. Across one survey and five experimental studies (two pre-registered), we find consistent evidence that employees working under tight—yet adjustable deadlines—often fail to make extension requests because they overestimate the reputational costs.

Across two studies, employees were less likely to ask for an extension when their request was visible to a supervisor whose evaluation determined their compensation (Studies 2 and 3). These results were driven by employees believing that requesting a deadline extension would signal incompetence (Studies 3 and 4). Contrary to these beliefs, supervisors believed that employees who made extension requests were more motivated than those who did not (Studies 3-5). Together, these studies demonstrate the idea that employees overestimate the interpersonal costs of extension requests. In turn, these inaccurate predictions prevent employees from making extension requests, even when deadlines are adjustable and the adjustments would be beneficial.

We also highlight a boundary condition to these benefits: when employees asked for an extension that was longer than the originally assigned timeline, supervisors no longer attributed employees' need for more time to employees' desire to do the task well. Rather, they blamed employees' lack of commitment and inability to manage their time as the key reason for why employees needed more time, perceiving the employee as incompetent. Extension requests increased supervisors' performance expectations (Study 6); yet, supervisors did not evaluate identical work more harshly when employees had more time to complete the task (Study 5).

***Theoretical Contributions.*** Our findings make several theoretical contributions to the literature on deadlines and proactive behavior. Prior work has primarily focused on reactive responses to deadlines such as the impact of deadlines on affective experiences (e.g. Amabile et al., 1976) or performance (Amabile et al., 2002). However, we provide the first empirical

investigation examining employees proactive responses to deadlines. Using a multimethod approach, we find that employees recognize that many deadlines at work are adjustable. Yet, employees avoid asking for more time due to impression management concerns. We replicate these results under experimentally-induced deadlines that are unambiguously malleable.

Second, our work challenges conventional wisdom and previous research (e.g. Sheldon, Thomas-Hunt, & Proell, 2006), which presumes that task delays are interpersonally costly. Past research suggests that time delays in organizations (e.g. delays in flight schedules or in meetings) often evokes anger (Blount & Janicik, 2001; Weiner, 1985), impatience (Blount & Janicik, 2001), and frustration (Amsel, 1992; Spector, 1978). In the domain of collaboration, studies suggest that task delays can come at the cost of worker's competence, particularly if they are in low-status positions (Sheldon et al., 2006). However, across our experiments, supervisors did not react negatively to lower status employees' expressing their need for more time (Studies 4-6). In contrast, supervisors perceived employees who asked for extensions as more motivated.

One key attribute of our experiments that may drive this difference is that employees in our studies preemptively announced their need for more time before the deadline passed. In contrast, in prior experiments, employees violated the observer's expectations without warning (e.g. they submitted the task ten minutes late without notice; Sheldon et al., 2006). Thus, our results provide preliminary evidence that *proactive and preemptive* extension requests, relative to missing deadlines, could be an effective strategy to minimize interpersonal costs when task delays are necessary. Considering our findings from Study 2, where employees were unlikely to ask for more time because of impression management concerns (e.g., looking bad in front of their supervisor), alleviating employees' image concerns in extension requests could be a powerful and cost-effective way to reduce interpersonal friction during task delays.

Third, we add to the vast literature on proactive behavior at work by exploring an underexamined type of proactive behavior: making requests to adjust task deadlines. Taking the initiative to adjust one's deadlines is not a behavior that is often expected to be part of an employee's role. However, for deadlines that cause excessive time pressure and that are open to adjustments, extension requests have the potential to advance personal effectiveness. Prior research has shown that employees often fail to engage in proactive behaviors such as advice seeking (Gino, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2012), feedback-seeking (Morrison & Bies, 1991), and help requests (Lee, 2002), because they worry how these behaviors shape others' impressions. Building on this work, we shed light on a novel domain—extension requests—where impression management concerns hinder optimal employee performance and undermine wellbeing.

***Practical Implications.*** Employees' who fail to ask for more time when they need it may perform worse and enjoy their tasks less. Our findings in Study 1 and 2 indicate that asking and receiving more time may lead to reduced task stress and improved performance. How can managers encourage employees to ask for more time when they need it? In an exploratory analysis of Study 4, when employees felt interpersonally close to their supervisors, they were less likely to overestimate the interpersonal costs of extension requests. Specifically, employees who felt close to their supervisors, compared to employees who felt distant from their supervisors, predicted that their supervisors would rate them as more competent,  $b = 0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% CI [0.16, 0.39],  $p < .001$  and motivated,  $b = 0.29$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% CI [0.16, 0.42],  $p < .001$  in response to their extension requests. We speculate that employees who feel interpersonally close to their supervisors may feel greater psychological safety while interacting with their supervisors (Edmondson, 1999), which in turn protects them from overestimating the interpersonal costs of extension requests. Thus, actively building personal relationships could be

one way that supervisors might help create an environment in which employees actively optimize their time and resources for improved task performance without fear of judgment.

***Future Directions.*** Our findings also provide exciting new opportunities for future research. In our studies, we only examined one-time interactions and did not explore how observers would react to repeated extension requests. In a pilot study ( $N = 177$ ), we asked working adults how frequently their supervisors missed their work deadlines during the past four weeks. In this study, employees perceived supervisors who failed to meet deadlines four or more times during the past four weeks as less competent than supervisors who failed to meet deadlines one to three times,  $t(176) = 2.41$   $p = .017$ ,  $d = 0.36$ . These results suggest that frequently adjusting deadlines may signal greater incompetence relative to less frequently asking for more time. As this evidence is correlational, additional research that experimentally assigns extension request frequency would help shed light on how request frequency moderates observer reaction.

In the current paper, we focused on deadlines that were assigned by a third-party (i.e. supervisor). However, as our preliminary study suggests, people often set deadlines themselves (16.3%) and communicate these deadlines to other people to hold themselves accountable. According to cognitive dissonance theory, people have a strong desire to behave consistently with their preset intentions (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Festinger, 1962), and an even a stronger desire to appear consistent to others (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971). Therefore, we expect employees to feel even more ashamed when having to request an extension for a deadline that they themselves committed to. Supervisors, on the other hand, may feel less invested in the original deadline if it was set by the employee as opposed to by themselves. Thus, when the deadline is set by the employee, supervisors' evaluation may be even less affected by the extension request. Given that people prefer others who maintain consistency in as opposed to

change their intentions (John, Jeong, Gino, & Huang, 2019), supervisors may find employees who request extensions for self-set deadlines as more hypocritical and incompetent.

Another interesting avenue for future research is to compare the use of help requests and extension requests as a coping strategy for working under stressful deadlines. Compared to help-seeking, extension requests are less likely to require the requestee to expend extra resources (e.g. mental effort, time, money) to benefit the seeker (Lee, 2002). In our survey of working employees, requesters and requestees recognized that extension requests require less investment compared to help requests (Appendix I). Given that requesters expect deadline extensions to be less effortful as compared to giving help, they might feel more comfortable asking for deadline extensions than asking for help on a task. Second, once the extension is granted, the requestee is much less involved in the process of completing the task. As a result, we speculate that people who ask for extensions, unlike people who ask for help, may, feel a greater sense of autonomy while completing tasks, increasing their task satisfaction. Given the interchangeability of help and extension requests as a strategy to deal with stressful deadlines, future research would benefit from empirically exploring the comparative advantages of these two strategies.

### **Conclusion**

While deadlines are useful for productivity and coordination, they can also be a major source of stress at work. Employees regularly push their limits to meet deadlines by multitasking and working overtime (Waller, Giambatista, & Zellmer-Bruhn, 1999). In the current paper, we offer a novel factor that contributes to the excessive stress associated with deadlines: employees' unwillingness to ask for an extension. Taken together, our research expands the literature on deadlines and impression management, while highlighting a promising point of intervention for time stress at work: reducing employees' perceived interpersonal costs of asking for more time.

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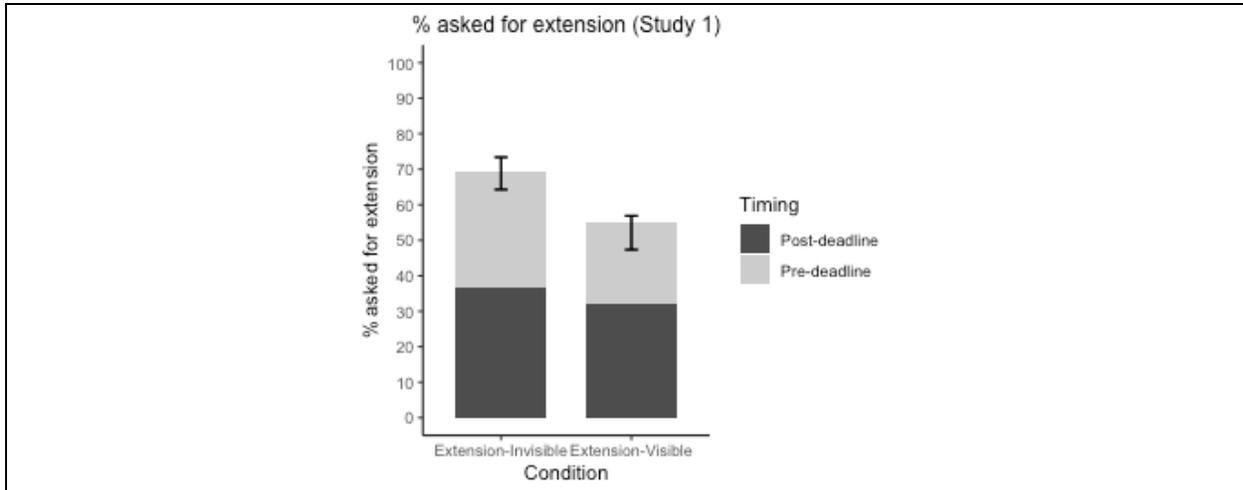
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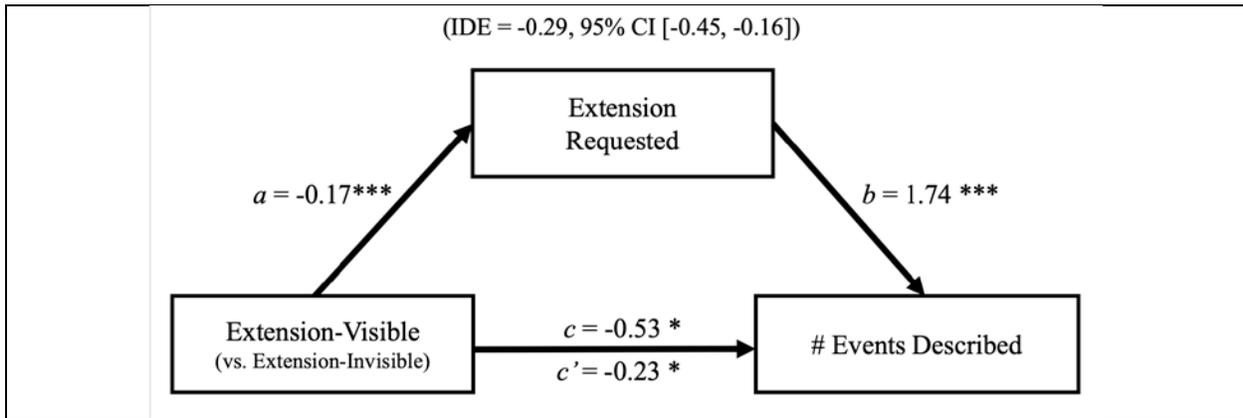
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**FIGURES**

**Figure 1: Rate of Extension Request (Studies 2)**

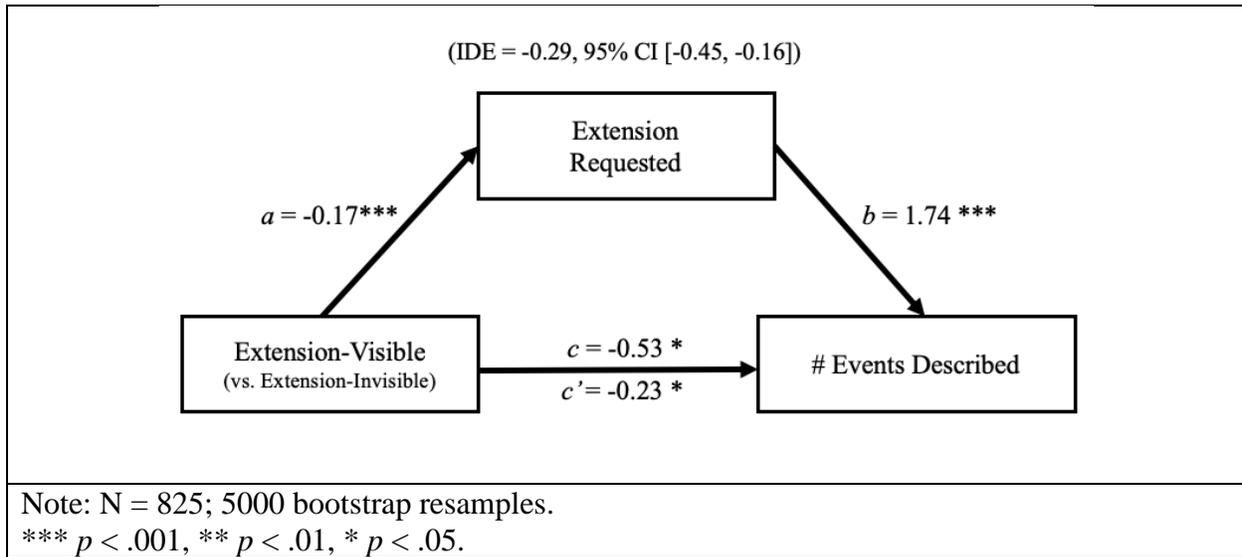


Extension visibility decreased participants' likelihood of making an extension. Error bars indicate 95% Confidence Interval.

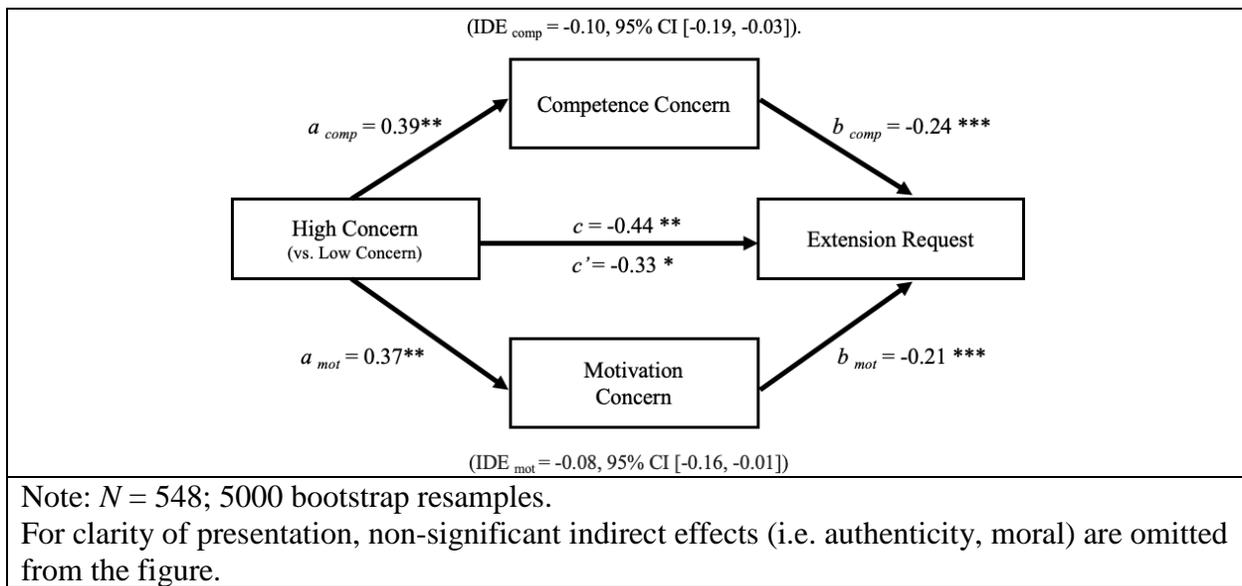


Note:  $N = 825$ ; 5000 bootstrap resamples.

**Figure 2: Impact of Extension Visibility on Performance (Study 2)**



**Figure 3: Mediation Path Model (Study 3)**



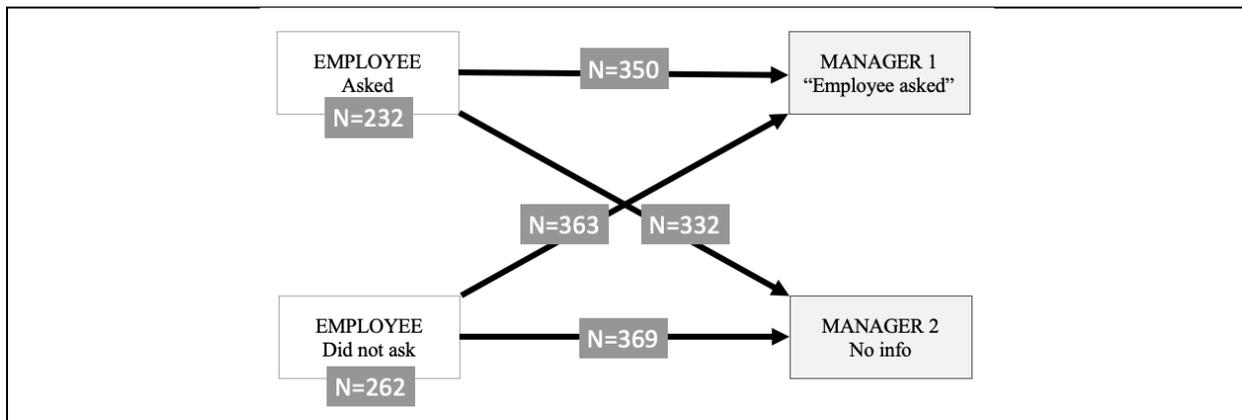
**Figure 4: Performance Information Given to Supervisors (Study 5)**

Below is how your employee performed on the image description task.

**NOTE: The employee asked for one more minute to complete the task.**

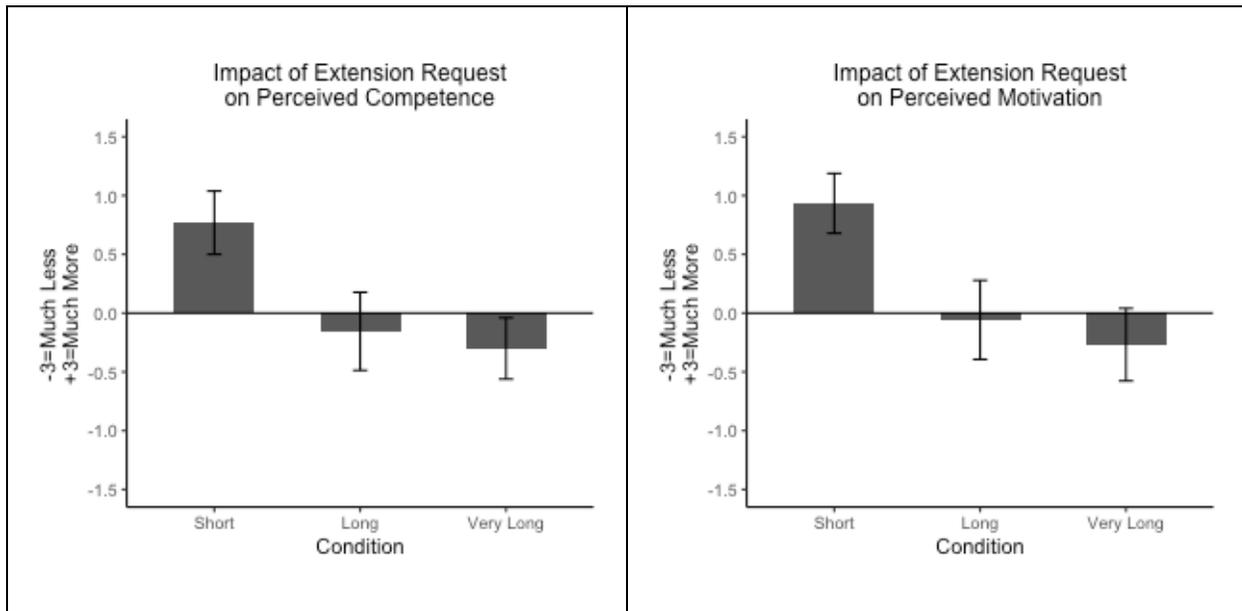
Number of events described: 6 Detail Score: 3 out of 4
The scene is of a city block with a park inside. There is a yellow trolley car running on a track through the street on the side of the park. The park has a big round fountain in the middle of it, and there is another fountain at the bottom of the image. The park is also filled with people sitting on benches, talking and walking around. At the corner of the park there are people riding bikes, getting onto the trolley car and crossing the street. At the top corner of the image there are cars parked on the edge of the park, one yellow and one blue.

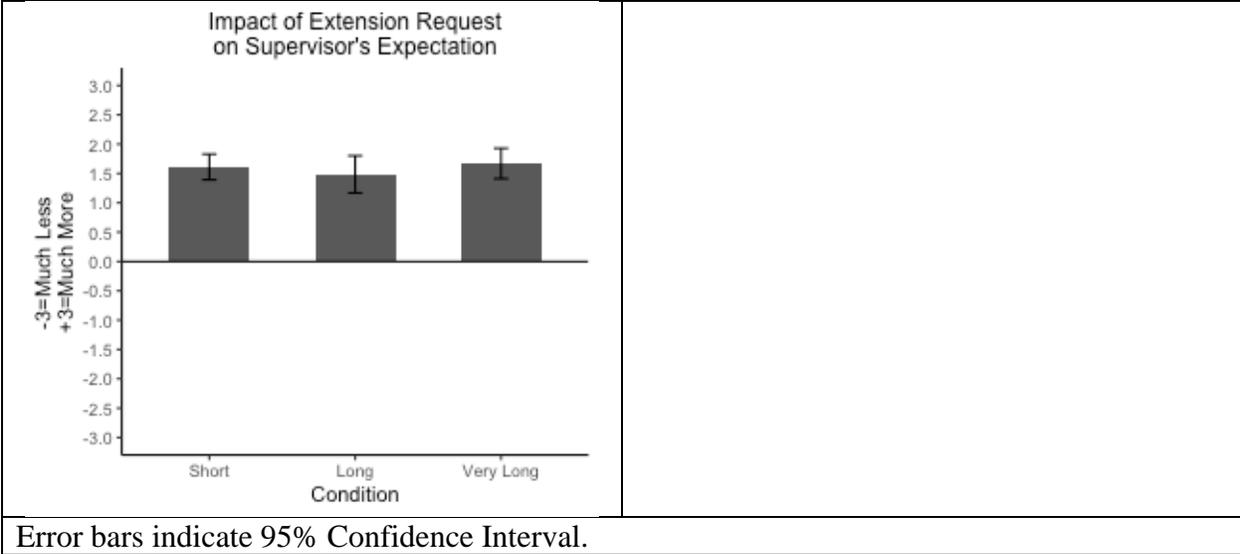
**Figure 5: Condition Assignment (Study 5)**



In Study 4, 1,414 participants were randomly matched with one of the 825 participants in Study 1 (sampled with replacement). As a result of the random matching, the performance of 494 “employees” from Study 1, were each reviewed by at least two “supervisors” from Study 4. These supervisors were told that the employee asked for more time or given no information about the employee’s extension request. Of these 494 employees, 232 actually had asked for more time and 262 had not.

**Figure 6: Supervisor Reaction by Extension Length (Study 6)**





## TABLES

Table 1: Regression Output (Preliminary Study)

Variable	Time Stress			Happiness			Positive Affect		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Extension Request	0.13***	0.17***	0.09**	-0.34***	-0.31***	-0.28***	-0.16***	-0.15***	-0.12***
Delegation		0.21***	0.02		0.18**	0.25***		0.06	0.12***
Work-life Conflict			0.59***			-0.27***			-0.17***
Female			0.41***			0.07			-0.01
Age			-0.0004			0.004			-0.005
Tenure			-0.006			0.008			0.01
Industry Dummy			YES			YES			YES
F Statistic	F(1, 597) = 12.05	F(2, 596) = 14.91	F(27, 569) = 17.9	F(1, 597) = 72.87	F(2, 596) = 42.39	F(27, 569) = 6.79	F(1, 597) = 46.9	F(2, 596) = 25.35	F(27, 569) = 5.39
p-value	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.05	0.46	0.11	0.12	0.24	0.07	0.08	0.20
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.03	0.41					0.01	0.12

Preliminary Study regression estimating level of time stress, happiness, and positive affect.

Note: N = 599; Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.

Extension Request: Level of discomfort in making extension request

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2: Results (Study 3)**

	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	<i>df</i>	<b>Statistics</b>	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		<i>t/F-value</i>	<i>d / η</i>
<b>Extension Request</b>	3.16 (1.68)	3.59 (1.66)	551	3.09	0.26**
			1, 547	9.65 <sup>1</sup>	0.17**
<b>Competent</b>	4.94 (1.61)	5.32 (1.51)	551	2.91	0.25**
<b>Motivated</b>	4.60 (1.76)	4.97 (1.64)	551	2.59	0.22**
<b>Authentic</b>	3.07 (1.72)	3.57 (1.70)	551	3.44	0.29***
<b>Moral</b>	2.49 (1.61)	2.65 (1.70)	551	1.11	0.09
<b>Fairness</b>	4.75 (1.19)	5.04 (1.19)	551	-2.93	-0.24**
<b>Likeability</b>	4.74 (1.18)	5.01 (1.11)	551	-2.88	-0.24**

Note:  $N = 553$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

1. ANCOVA controlling for perceived supervisor fairness and likeability

**Table 3: Manipulation Scenarios**


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	(Employee condition script. Word changes in the supervisor condition are shown in brackets)
	<i>Imagine you work at a firm where you work closely with a single direct supervisor [your supervisor changes every few weeks]. You have been working with your current supervisor for the past two-weeks, and will continue to work with him/her for the next few years [will be assigned a new supervisor soon]. The supervisor's evaluation of you determines the pay raise you will receive at the end of the year [does not affect your pay in any way]."</i>
<b>Study 3</b>	Then, all participants imagined that they were assigned a task from this supervisor that is due tomorrow, related to an event that will be happening the next year. The length of the requested extension in the scenario (one day) was determined based on our pilot survey of 191 employees about their extension requesting experience (Appendix A). <i>"Today, your supervisor assigned you to review your department's past fundraiser events and draft an event proposal for next year. Hosting the event is one of the most important projects of your department, so you want to do a good job. This is your second time planning the event. He/She wants you to submit the proposal by the end of tomorrow, just as he/she did last year.</i>
	(Employee condition script. Word changes in the supervisor condition are shown in brackets)
<b>Study 4</b>	<i>Imagine you work at a firm where you work closely with a direct supervisor [work closely with an employee who you directly supervise]. You have been working with this supervisor [this employee] for the past two-weeks, and will continue to work with him/her for the next few years. This supervisor's evaluation of you [Your evaluation of the employee] will determine the pay raise you [he/she] will receive at the end of the year. Today, your supervisor assigned you [you assigned the employee] to draft a proposal for a fundraising event that your department will host this year. Hosting the event is one of the most important projects of your department. This is your [the employee's] second time planning the event. Your supervisor wants you [You asked the employee]to submit the proposal by the end of tomorrow.</i>
<b>Study 6</b>	<i>Imagine you work at a firm where you work closely with an employee that you directly supervise. Your evaluation of the employee determines the pay raise they will receive at the end of the year. At the beginning of the month, you assigned the employee to review your department's past fundraising events and draft an event proposal for next year. Hosting the event is one of the most important projects of your department. This was the employee's second time planning the event. You gave the employee 3 days to work on the task. Further imagine that on the day the proposal was due, the employee asked you for [1 more day / 5 more days / 2 more weeks] to work on the task. That is, they asked you for a [1-day / 5-day / 2-week]-extension.</i>

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**Table 4: (Predicted) Supervisor Reaction to Employee's Extension Request (Study 4)**

	Employee		Manager		Diff
	Mean (SD)	$d^a$	Mean (SD)	$d^a$	$d^b$
<b>Likelihood of Extension</b>	1.04 (1.40)	0.72***	0.97 (1.35)	0.74***	0.05
<b>Competence</b>	-0.17 (1.25)	-0.13*	0.07 (1.21)	0.06	-0.19*
<b>Motivation</b>	-0.09 (1.34)	0.07	0.27 (1.19)	0.23***	-0.15†

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

a. One-sided t-test testing mean difference from 0

b. Paired t-test comparing mean employee and manager rating

**Table 5: Written Attributions (Study 6)**

Attribution	1 day	5 day	$b^a$	95% CI	IDE	2 week	$b^b$	95% CI
<b>Employee's Striving for Perfection</b>	68.9%	40.2%	-1.19 *** (0.31)	[-1.81, -0.59]	0.13* [0.01, 0.29]	37.1%	-0.13 (0.31)	[-0.73, 0.47]
<b>Employee's Shortcoming</b>	24.4%	43.5%	0.87 ** (0.32)	[0.24, 1.51]	-0.08 [-0.24, 0.03]	46.1%	0.10 (0.30)	[-0.48, 0.69]
<b>External</b>	30%	27.2%	-0.14 (0.33)	[-0.79, 0.51]	0.04 [-0.07, 0.17]	32.6%	0.26 (0.33)	[-0.38, 0.90]

Note: N = 271 (After excluding low quality comments such as "I don't know". Results outlined above are robust to including these excluded participants.)

IDE: indirect effect of asking for a 5 day (vs. 1 day) extension via the attribution on rated employee competence (5000 bootstrap resamples)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

a. Non-standardized coefficient of the logistic regression estimating the effect of the employee asking for 5-day (vs. 1-day) extension on the likelihood of the focal attribution included in the written description.

b. Non-standardized coefficient of the logistic regression estimating the effect of the employee asking for 2-week (5-day) extension on the likelihood of the focal attribution included in the written description.