STIVEN CATALYST

THIRD SERIES · NOVEMBER 2026

MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.



ROLE

ASKING FOR ADVICE: THE FEAR THAT MISLEADS

Why people avoid asking, what the person asked actually thinks, when a question makes you look more able and when less, why more people say yes than we expect, and a card for asking well.

73.5% of students asked a partner for advice when paid for their score; 32.7% when paid for how able they seemed.

BROOKS, GINO & SCHWEITZER, 2015

INSIDE

COVER STORY
Why people do not ask
PAGE 03

THE MODEL
When asking helps
PAGE 05

TOOL OF THE ISSUE
The advice card
PAGE 08

NO. 91 · ROLE

In this issue

Many managers treat a question as an admission of a gap, and keep it to themselves. A team that never sees its manager ask learns that it should not ask either. This issue reads two research papers that tested the fear behind the silence: what people expect when they ask, and what the person asked actually thinks.

Adults imagining a problem at work expected a coworker to rate them less able if they asked for advice. Students paid for the impression they made asked less than half as often as students paid for their score. Yet the people asked rated askers as more capable, as long as the task was hard, the request came to them and they knew the subject. And strangers said yes far more often than askers predicted. Three conditions and a card close the issue.

Stiven Janaqi EDITOR · STIVEN CATALYST

03 COVER STORY
Why people do not ask

04 THE NUMBERS
What the asked actually think

05 THE MODEL
When asking helps

06 WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS
More say yes than we expect

07 HOW IT IS MEASURED
Able, in whose eyes?

08 TOOL OF THE ISSUE
The advice card

09 SOURCES
Sources and method

HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Figure
Every figure has its source and year at the foot of its page.

Our reading
Where the editor interprets rather than the research, it says so.

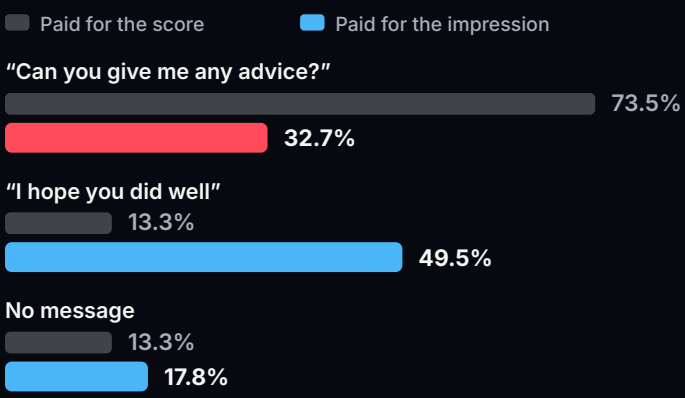
Practice
The steps and the card are proposals to try, not research results.

COVER STORY

Why people do not ask

Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino and Maurice Schweitzer began with the fear itself. They asked 302 adults to imagine a problem on an important project. Those who pictured asking a coworker for advice expected to be rated less capable: 4.50 against 5.69 on a scale of 1 to 7.

199 STUDENTS BEFORE A HARD PUZZLE: THE MESSAGE THEY CHOSE TO SEND (2015)



The partner had already done the puzzle. Students paid a dollar per right answer mostly asked for advice. Students paid by how able the partner would rate them mostly sent a friendly greeting instead.

OUR READING

Worrying about looking able did not make anyone know more. It only made them ask less.

Source: Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino & Maurice E. Schweitzer, Management Science 61(6), 2015

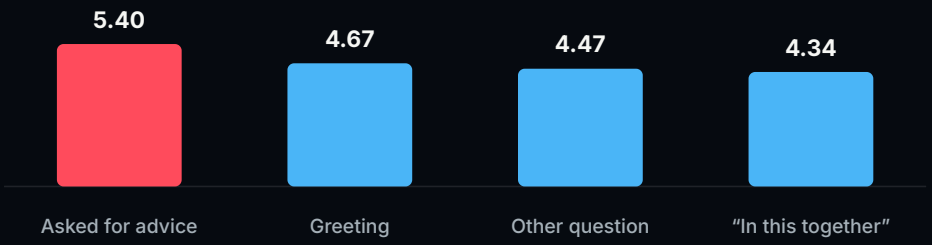
Pilot studies A and B of Brooks, Gino & Schweitzer (2015): A, adults online, a scenario; B, students in a laboratory, with a partner simulated by computer. The bars are shares of each payment group.

THE NUMBERS

What the asked actually think

In the next studies the authors turned to the person asked. After a task, a partner simulated by computer sent one short message. When it asked for advice, the person who received it rated the partner as more capable.

HOW CAPABLE THE PARTNER SEEMED, 1 TO 7, BY THE MESSAGE RECEIVED (STUDY 2A, 2015)



3.62 vs 3.40
competence of a partner who asked, and one who did not; 170 students (Study 1)

4.82 vs 4.49
score out of 10 expected next round for the one who asked, and the one who did not (Study 2b)

OUR READING

Asking did not make the partner seem warmer or more likeable. It made them seem more able.

Source: Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino & Maurice E. Schweitzer, Management Science 61(6), 2015

Means of three statements such as “My partner is well qualified”, from 1 to 7. Study 2a: 191 students; the partner had scored 6 of 10 in the first round. Study 2b: 226 students; no effect on warmth or liking.

THE MODEL

When asking helps

Asking did not help in every case. Three studies looked for the limits: how hard the task was, who was asked, and whether the person asked knew the subject.

01	**The task is hard**	Hard number grids: 3.57 against 3.28 for those not asked. Simple sums: no difference, and no harm (Study 3).
02	**The request comes to you**	Asked themselves: 4.83. Saw the partner ask someone else: 4.08. No request: 4.18 (Study 4).
03	**You know the subject**	Asked on their strongest subject, people rated the asker higher; on their weakest, lower (Study 5).

HOW CAPABLE THE ASKER SEEMED, 1 TO 7 (STUDY 5, 2015)



OUR READING

A request for advice flatters the person asked. It works only if they believe they can answer it.

Source: Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino & Maurice E. Schweitzer, Management Science 61(6), 2015

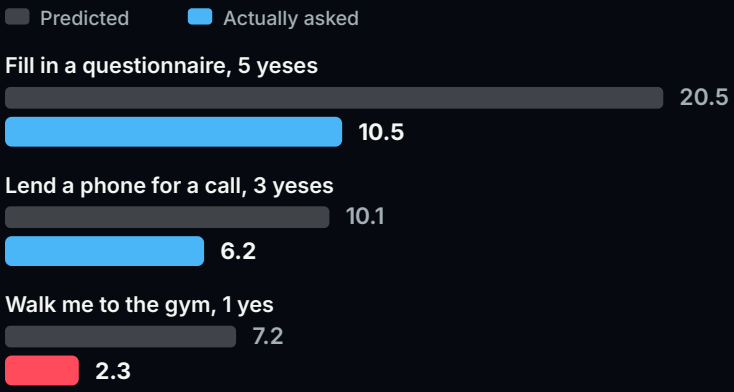
Means on the same scale. Study 3: 213 students; Study 4: 114 students and staff, where the asked person's own self-confidence carried part of the effect; Study 5: 250 adults online. Feedback on past work is in No. 19.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

More say yes than we expect

A second fear stops the question: the answer will be no. In 2008 Francis Flynn and Vanessa Lake, now Bohns, had people predict how many strangers they would need to ask, then sent them out to ask.

STRANGERS APPROACHED TO GET THE YESES NEEDED (2008)



Charity volunteers expected to approach 210 people; they needed 122. Asking face to face took 2.3 people per yes, handing out a flyer 15.3. The askers' predictions followed the size of the favour, which made no difference to the answers.

OUR READING

Saying no to someone's face is hard. That is why direct requests work, and why a request from a manager is rarely a free one.

Source: Francis J. Flynn & Vanessa K. B. Lake, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 95(1), 2008

Means of people approached. Studies 1, 2 and 6: 42, 29 and 79 students asking strangers on a New York campus; Study 3: 127 charity volunteers, who also asked people they knew. Read in the authors' accepted version.

HOW IT IS MEASURED

Able, in whose eyes?

In every study the person asked rated the asker on the same three statements, from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree. Their average is the competence score in the charts of this issue.

01	**Solves problems**	“My partner is very capable of solving problems.”
02	**Skills**	“I feel very confident about my partner's skills.”
03	**Qualified**	“My partner is well qualified.”

What was tested	What was not
Eight studies, 1,665 people	Asking face to face
Students, staff and adults online	Boss and team, power between them
One typed message after one task	Asking again and again

OUR READING

The evidence is clean but narrow. Whether it holds between a manager and a team has not been measured.

Source: Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino & Maurice E. Schweitzer, Management Science 61(6), 2015

Statements adapted by the authors from Mayer and Davis (1999). The right-hand list follows the authors' own section on limits and further research. The total of participants is the editors' sum of the eight studies.

TOOL OF THE ISSUE

The advice card

One card before a question that matters. The Skills Matrix shows who on the team is rated able to train others in a task: often the right person to ask.

01 The question one sentence; hard enough that a good answer changes what you do

02 What I have tried what I know, what I did, where I am stuck

03 Who knows this someone strong in exactly this, not only someone senior

04 How I ask directly, in my own words, and with room to say no

05 What I will decide the decision stays mine; by when

06 Back to them what I did with the advice, and thanks

Sources: Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino & Maurice E. Schweitzer, Management Science 61(6), 2015; Francis J. Flynn & Vanessa K. B. Lake, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 95(1), 2008

The card is the editors' proposal, built on the three conditions and on the direct request; telling the advisor what you did is the editors' addition. The coach is in No. 11, self-awareness in No. 31, managing up in No. 52.

More in the essay — When to solve it yourself and when to take it higher

Open the tool: Skills Matrix — stivencatalyst.com/tools/skills-matrix/

SOURCES AND METHOD

Every figure has a source.

The figures in this issue come from the sources below. The year shows how recent each one is.

Smart People Ask for (My) Advice: Seeking Advice Boosts Perceptions of Competence
Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino & Maurice E. Schweitzer, Management Science 61(6), 2015
https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2014.2054

If You Need Help, Just Ask: Underestimating Compliance With Direct Requests for Help
Francis J. Flynn & Vanessa K. B. Lake, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 95(1), 2008
https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.1.128

EDITORIAL METHOD

Each figure was checked for its year, its publisher and what it measures, in the full text where it could be opened. A source read only in a summary, an abstract or excerpts is marked “via”. A figure not confirmed in what was read is marked so on its page, or left out. The editor's interpretation is marked “Our reading”.



MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.

Every issue, one management question, checked against the best research.

ALL ISSUES

stivencatalyst.com/magazine/management-review.html

Management Review · No. 91 · November 2026 · Stiven Catalyst
Edited by Stiven Janaqi, who answers for it; “the editors” in this publication means him. Its texts, translations, layout and the checking of figures against their sources are done in working sessions with Claude, an AI model by Anthropic.
stivencatalyst.com/how-this-is-made.html