

THE ROLE OF CIVILITY IN DECISION MAKING UNDER RISK

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1. Descriptive Summary:

This research studies the role of civility in decision making under risk by attempting to clarify the relationships among civility, trust and risk. Particularly, this research purports to explain, from a practical matter, why nice and gentle people or good customer services tend to attract more friends, colleagues, or customers. I tentatively claim in this proposal that civility leads to the perception of trustworthiness, which thereafter leads to the perception of lower risk for transaction. This hypothesis requires excursions into detailed explications of civility, trust, and their relationships to risk.

The hypothesis above can be more schematically stretched. A person who is kind, nice, and decent is more likely to be perceived as trustworthy by others than who is rude, vulgar, and boorish (Gill and Sypher, 2009). The decent person perceived as trustworthy is likely to be perceived as dependable. If risk is roughly defined as the potential that a chosen action will lead to a loss, then the decent person is likely to be perceived less risky. Rational human beings, all other things considered equal, desire to have less risky transactions. Therefore, the rational decision maker is more likely to have transactions with the decent person than the boorish person. If the perception of trustworthiness is proven as false at the first interaction however, then the rational person will cease to transact with the seemingly decent person. If the first transaction confirms the validity of the perception of dependability, then the rational decision maker will continue to transact with the decent. The cumulative effect will be that the decent person will have more friends, colleagues, and customers, whereas the boorish person will be isolated in the social and economic market.

The hypothesis consists in two parts: civility leads to trust and trust leads to the lesser risk. It is arguably less risky, when other things equal, to choose the trustworthy person than the undependable person. But it is unclear whether the first part of the hypothesis—civility leads to the perception of trustworthiness—is true. My primary concern in this proposal is the first phase of the hypothesis that the civil person is more likely to be perceived as trustworthy. After clarifying the connection between civility and trust, I will develop the connection between trust and rational transaction. For simplicity's sake, in this proposal, I focus on the primary concern, which requires brief clarification of civility and trust.

Incivility involves acting rudely or discourteously, without regard for others, in violation of norms for respect in social interactions. In contrast, civility is the expressive aspect of respectful act. I develop elsewhere (in my dissertation proposal) that civility is a kind of ritual and that ritual is expressive of message. I suspect that the message of respectful act in civility is the sense of community or solidarity. The message invoking aspect of civility will be more developed in this research.

Trust is another notion that must be clarified. Many accounts of trust are focused on what anticipates trust rather than what trust is. For the purpose of this research, I turn to the research on what trust is. In particular, my tentative plan is to compare two different views and judge which view is suited to explaining the hypothesis above. First, Russell Hardin defends what he calls “encapsulated interest view of trust,” which holds that A justifiably trusts B to X when A believes that B has interest in A's interest in X. Second, Annette Baier provides a so-called “goodwill-based view of trust,” which maintains that A trusts B to X not because A believes that B has interest in A's interest in X, but because A believes that B has *goodwill* toward A, so that A believes that B will *care* A directly from the goodwill.

I tentatively claim that Hardin's notion of trust has some difficulties to explain how incivility damages trust. Interactants may trust each other *even if* they treat each other with rude behaviors. “He's very rude, but I know he has interest in my interest! So I trust him.” Secondly, interest-based trust does not explain the damaged trust among uncivil strangers, who do not share important interests. I find goodwill-based trust is better in explaining the hypothesis. Ritual is a communal endeavor, hence so, the message of civility is, for instance: “I would like to engage with you. I am open to mingle with you. I am ready to care you.” In contrast, the message of incivility is: “I don't want to mingle with you. I don't care whatever you do. I don't want to work with you.”

Civility and incivility are message-invoking actions and these messages provide information with interactants concerning what attitudes they should take toward each other. If the message is hostile, then you are likely to believe that your interactant does not have goodwill toward you. Believing that your interactant has goodwill toward you is an essential ingredient for you to trust him.

2. Future Direction

This research will further develop a detailed account of the relationship between civility and the perception of trustworthiness and connect the developed account to show its implications on decision-makings under risk. This project will lay the groundwork for engendering academic discussion on the role of civility in transactions under risk. I will write two different papers that I will present at Business Ethics and Management conferences and publish in academic journals. One paper, which I propose now, will examine theoretical contours and provide hypotheses. A second paper that I hope to develop in collaboration with another will empirically or experimentally investigate the validity of the hypotheses.

3. Budget of Estimated Expenses

██████████ for purchasing books

There is no other source of research funding for this project.

4. Reason for Application

Good research requires access to good materials. Civility is not yet widely studied in academic journals, but many good first-hand observations can be found in popular books and etiquette experts' books (e.g., Miss Manners' books). Recently, many good quality edited books on trust were published. Van Pelt Library already has many of them, but the topic is currently widely studied by many different disciplines, so it is practically challenging to borrow the books for more than two weeks. Hence so, it is essential for me to purchase the books for the quality of the research. So, I apply for the Russell Ackoff fellowship.

References

Gill, M.J. & B.D. Sypher (2009). "Workplace incivility and organizational trust," In P. Lutgen-Sandvik & B.D. Sypher (Eds.). *Destructive Organizational Communication* (New York: Routledge).

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