Supplementary material

Regulatory adaptations for delivering information: The case of confession.

Study 1

1. Situation prompt

1.1 Confession

Think of a situation where somebody incurred costs as a result of your actions (or lack of action). The costs imposed on that person may be material, emotional, reputational, or other such costs.

The kind of situation we want you to consider is a situation with ALL of the following features:

1. The cost was imposed on a single individual.
2. At least initially, the person who incurred the cost DID NOT know that you were the one who imposed that cost (or even that they incurred that cost at all).
3. Eventually, you chose to go to the person you imposed the cost on and confessed to them that you had imposed that cost on them.
4. Nobody forced you to make that confession.
5. You remember the situation well.

1.2 No-confession

Think of a situation where somebody incurred costs as a result of your actions (or lack of action). The costs imposed on that person may be material, emotional, reputational, or other such costs.

The kind of situation we want you to consider is a situation with ALL of the following features:

1. The cost was imposed on a single individual.
2. At least initially, the person who incurred the cost DID NOT know that you were the one who imposed that cost (or even that they incurred that cost at all).
3. You have NOT gone to that person to confess to them that you imposed that cost on them.
4. You remember the situation well.

2. Cost of the offense to the victim. 11 items; Cronbach’s α: 0.93.

1. How large was the cost you imposed on [target]?
2. How much harm did you cause to [target]?
3. How much better off would [target] have been if you had not committed your offense?
4. How bad was your offense for [target]?
5. How much damage did your actions cause to [target]?
6. How much would [target] have suffered if they had directly witnessed what you did?
7. How much worse off was [target] as a result of your behavior?
8. From [target]'s perspective, how costly was what you did?
9. From [target]'s perspective, how wrong was your action?
10. From [target]'s perspective, how upsetting was what you did?
11. How annoying would it have been for [target] if they had seen you doing what you did?

3. Benefit of the offense to the offender. 11 items; Cronbach’s α: 0.83.

1. Leaving aside the harm suffered by [target], how much benefit did you get from your actions?
2. How costly would it have been for you to not take your actions?
3. Regardless of how much [target] would have suffered if they had seen you doing what you did, how much enjoyment did you get at that time?
4. Irrespective of the damage [target] sustained, how much better off were you as a result of your actions?
5. Disregarding [target]'s perspective on the matter, how much worse off would you have been personally if you had not taken your actions?
6. Leaving aside the cost incurred by [target], how much did you gain from what you did?
7. Leaving aside the cost incurred by [target], how much fun did you have when you took that particular action?
8. How negative for you would have been the consequences of not taking that action?
9. If you could have done it without [target] incurring costs, how beneficial would it have been for you?
10. How high was *your* need of that back then?
11. How pressing was it *for you* to take that action back then?

4. Likelihood of information leakage. 9 items; Cronbach’s α: 0.91.

4.1 Confession

1. If you had not confessed to [target] what you had done, how likely would [target] have been to find out what you had done anyway?
2. If you had not confessed to [target], what would have been the odds that [target] remained forever ignorant about what you had done? (Reverse Coded)
3. What were the odds that [target] eventually discovered what you had done from a source other than your confession?
4. How many clues were there in the situation that could have made [target] suspicious of you?
5. Before you confessed to [target], how many people other than yourself knew that you did what you did?
6. If you had not confessed to [target], how likely would [target] have been to eventually learn about your actions from gossip?
7. Right before you confessed to [target], how likely was it that [target] had already discovered what you had done?
8. How many people saw you doing what harmed [target]?
9. Before confessing to [target], how many people had you told what you had done to?

4.2 No-confession

1. If you never confessed to [target], how likely would [target] be to find out what you did anyway?
2. If you never confessed to [target], what are the odds that [target] remains forever ignorant about what you did? (Reverse Coded)
3. What are the odds that [target] eventually discovers what you did from a source other than your confession?
4. How many clues were there in the situation that could have made [target] suspicious of you?
5. How many people other than yourself know that you did what you did?
6. How likely would [target] be to eventually learn about your actions from gossip?
7. How likely is it that [target] discovers what you did?
8. How many people saw you doing what harmed [target]?
9. How many people have you told what you did to?

5. Benefit of the confession to the offender. 11 items; Cronbach’s α: 0.81.
[H] = Honesty items. 8 items; Cronbach’s α: 0.79.
[R] = Remediability items. 3 items; Cronbach’s α: 0.77.

5.1 Confession

1. [H] How much appreciation did [target] express about the fact that you were honest enough to confess?
2. [H] How much gratitude did [target] express about the fact that you were sincere enough to confess?
3. [H] How much appreciation did [target] express about the fact that at least you were brave enough to tell them what you did?
4. [H] If [target] had found out what you had done from sources other than your confession, how angry at you would [target] have been about the fact that you didn’t confess it?
5. [H] If [target] had found out what you had done from sources other than your confession, how annoyed at you would [target] have been about the fact that you didn’t tell them?
6. [R] My confession allowed [target] to take a beneficial course of action [target] could not have taken without knowledge of what I had done.
7. [R] My confession helped [target] take corrective measures to minimize the negative consequences of my earlier action.
8. [H] Relative to other virtues, how much does [target] value other people’s honesty?
9. [H] To what extend does [target] particularly like sincerity in others?
10. [R] My confession allowed [target] to change [target]’s plans for the better.
11. [H] To what extend does [target] specifically dislike dishonest people?

5.2 No-confession

1. [H] If you confessed, how much appreciation would [target] express about the fact that you were honest enough to confess?
2. [H] If you confessed, how much gratitude would [target] express about the fact that you were sincere enough to confess?
3. [H] If you confessed, how much appreciation would [target] express about the fact that at least you were brave enough to tell them what you did?
4. [H] If [target] found out what you did from sources other than your confession, how angry at you would [target] be about the fact that you didn’t confess it?
5. [H] If [target] found out what you did from sources other than your confession, how annoyed with you would [target] be about the fact that you didn’t tell them?
7. [R] My confession would help [target] take corrective measures to minimize the negative consequences of my action.
8. [H] Relative to other virtues, how much does [target] value other people’s honesty?
9. [H] To what extend does [target] particularly like sincerity in others?
10. [R] My confession would allow [target] to change [target]’s plans for the better.
11. [H] To what extend does [target] specifically dislike dishonest people?

Study 2

Note: Except for the personal names and the pronouns, the female versions of the scenarios are identical to the male versions.

1. Sweater scenario

Some time ago, on a Sunday night, you and your classmate met at his house to eat pizza and watch movies. You both stayed up late watching a documentary so you ended up sleeping over there. The next day your classmate left for school before you woke up. When you woke up it was chilly and you were cold so you borrowed one of his sweaters—without him knowing. While you had the sweater it was damaged beyond repair. Now the sweater is useless.

1.1 Cost of the offense to the victim

1.1.1 Low. You remember that your classmate had paid $20 for that sweater.

1.1.2 High. You remember that your classmate had paid $150 for that sweater.
1.2 Benefit of the offense to the offender

1.2.1 Low. You used your classmate’s sweater to clean your tub—it was the only thing within reach.

1.2.2 High. You used your classmate’s sweater to stop the bleeding from a gash on your head caused by a car crash—it was the only thing within reach.

1.3 Likelihood of information leakage

1.3.1 Low. Your classmate does not know that you borrowed his sweater or that you ruined it. None of your classmate’s acquaintances have seen you wearing your classmate’s sweater.

1.3.2 High. Your classmate does not know that you borrowed his sweater or that you ruined it. At some point some of your classmate’s acquaintances have seen you wearing your classmate’s sweater.

1.4 Benefit of the confession to the offender

1.4.1 Low. Your classmate thinks that creativity is the best virtue a person can have.

1.4.2 High. Your classmate thinks that honesty is the best virtue a person can have.

2. Sandwich scenario

You are at work. For the past couple of days and all morning you have been working on an urgent project which has kept you very busy. You know you will not be able to take a break later on, so you take a rest from work briefly before lunch. You go to the break room. Nobody else is in the break room and you’re glad it’s quiet in there. You were hoping to relax for a few minutes but you find yourself thinking about all the work you still need to do. Distractedly, you grab some food from the fridge, where you usually keep your lunch, and eat it. Then you realize that you didn’t bring any food today; what you ate was the lunch-sandwich of your workmate Michael. After your short break you walk out of the break room. You don’t see Michael around—he must be at work in his cubicle.

2.1 Cost of the offense to the victim

2.1.1 Low. At lunchtime you hear Michael say that he has been snacking all morning—he’s full now.

2.1.2 High. At lunchtime you hear Michael say that he hasn’t eaten since the night before—he’s very hungry now.

2.2 Benefit of the offense to the offender
2.2.1 Low. You had been snacking for a long time and when you took the break—before eating Michael’s sandwich—you were already quite full.

2.2.2 High. You had nothing to eat for a long time and when you took the break—before eating Michael’s sandwich—you were starving.

2.3 Likelihood of information leakage

2.3.1 Low. Your pen broke and some black ink landed on your white t-shirt so now your t-shirt has a black stain.

2.3.2 High. A dollop of the guacamole in Michael’s sandwich landed on your white t-shirt so now your t-shirt has a green stain.

2.4 Benefit of the confession to the offender

2.4.1 Low. Michael, who also has been working on an urgent project, is now taking his only break of the day, spending his free time sitting back and playing a game on his computer. As usual, he plans on eating his sandwich later in the day, probably sometime in the middle of the afternoon while working. He has hardly any time left before resuming work, so even if he knew that his sandwich was gone he could not go out and get something else to eat.

2.4.2 High. Michael, who also has been working on an urgent project, is now taking his only break of the day, spending his free time sitting back and playing a game on his computer. As usual, he plans on eating his sandwich later in the day, probably sometime in the middle of the afternoon while working. He has some time left before resuming work, so if he knew that his sandwich was gone he could use his remaining break time to go out and get something else to eat.

3. Lottery ticket scenario

You met with one of your classmates at his place to study for an exam. After studying for two hours in the living room you and your classmate take a break. You both go to the kitchen and have a few snacks. Then your classmate goes back to the living room to continue studying. You have a mild headache so you stay in the kitchen for a while longer. At some point you grab a piece of paper that’s lying on the countertop and write something on it. Then you look closer and realize that what you thought was scrap paper was in fact your classmate’s winning lottery ticket. Now the lottery ticket is unredeemable.

3.1 Cost of the offense to the victim

3.1.1 Low. You see that the redemption value of your classmate’s lottery ticket was $10.

3.1.2 High. You see that the redemption value of your classmate’s lottery ticket was
$1,000.

3.2 Benefit of the offense to the offender

3.2.1 Low. You used your classmate’s lottery ticket for doodling on and writing random phrases, as a way to kill time.

3.2.2 High. While in the kitchen, you got a call from a company telling you that you were selected for the job you had applied to, a job you really wanted. They said they would hire you on condition that within the following three days you appear at the company headquarters to fill out some hiring forms. You used your classmate’s lottery ticket to write down the address of the company headquarters.

3.3 Likelihood of information leakage

3.3.1 Low. You realize that while you were in the kitchen writing on the ticket your classmate remained in the living room the whole time.

3.3.2 High. You realize that while you were in the kitchen writing on the ticket your classmate walked by the kitchen on his way to the bathroom.

3.4 Benefit of the confession to the offender

3.4.1 Low. The thing your classmate dislikes most is when people have no sense of humor.

3.4.2 High. The thing your classmate dislikes most is when people are dishonest.

Study 3

Note: The name of the target was a unisex name and the target was referred to with the gender-neutral pronoun they / them.

1. Sweater scenario

Some time ago, on a Sunday night, you and your classmate met at their house to eat pizza and watch movies. You both stayed up late watching a documentary so you ended up sleeping over there. The next day your classmate left for school before you woke up. When you woke up it was chilly and you were cold so you borrowed one of their sweaters—without them knowing. While you had the sweater it was damaged beyond repair. Now the sweater is useless.

1.1 Cost of the offense to the victim

1.1.1 Low. You remember that your classmate had paid 5 dollars for that sweater.

1.1.2 High. You remember that your classmate had paid 150 dollars for that sweater.
1.2 Benefit of the offense to the offender

1.2.1 Low. You used your classmate’s sweater to clean your tub—it was the only thing within reach.

1.2.2 High. You used your classmate’s sweater to stop the bleeding from a gash on your head caused by a car crash—it was the only thing within reach.

1.3 Likelihood of information leakage

1.3.1 Low. Your classmate does not know that you borrowed their sweater or that you ruined it. None of your classmate’s acquaintances have seen you wearing your classmate’s sweater.

1.3.2 High. Your classmate does not know that you borrowed their sweater or that you ruined it. At some point, some of your classmate’s acquaintances have seen you wearing your classmate’s sweater.

1.4 Benefit of the confession to the offender

1.4.1 Low. Your classmate thinks that creativity is the best virtue a person can have.

1.4.2 High. Your classmate thinks that honesty is the best virtue a person can have.

2. Sandwich scenario

You are at work. For the past couple of days and all morning you have been working on an urgent project which has kept you very busy. You know you will not be able to take a break later on, so you take a rest from work briefly before lunch. You go to the break room. Nobody else is in the break room and you’re glad it’s quiet in there. You were hoping to relax for a few minutes but you find yourself thinking about all the work you still need to do. Distractedly, you grab some food from the fridge, where you usually keep your lunch, and eat it. Then you realize that you didn’t bring any food today; what you ate was the lunch-sandwich of your workmate Alex. After your short break you walk out of the break room. You don’t see Alex around—they must be at work in their cubicle.

2.1 Cost of the offense to the victim

2.1.1 Low. At lunchtime you hear Alex say that they have been snacking all morning—they’re full now.

2.1.2 High. At lunchtime you hear Alex say that they haven’t eaten since the night before—they’re very hungry now.

2.2 Benefit of the offense to the offender
2.2.1 Low. You had been snacking for a long time and when you took the break—before eating Alex’s sandwich—you were already quite full.

2.2.2 High. You had nothing to eat for a long time and when you took the break—before eating Alex’s sandwich—you were starving.

2.3 Likelihood of information leakage

2.3.1 Low. Your pen broke and some black ink landed on your white t-shirt so now your t-shirt has a black stain.

2.3.2 High. A dollop of the guacamole in Alex’s sandwich landed on your white t-shirt so now your t-shirt has a green stain.

2.4 Benefit of the confession to the offender

2.4.1 Low. Alex, who also has been working on an urgent project, is now taking their only break of the day, spending their free time sitting back and playing a game on their computer. As usual, they plan on eating their sandwich later in the day, probably sometime in the middle of the afternoon while working. They have hardly any time left before resuming work, so even if they knew that their sandwich is gone they could not go out and get something else to eat.

2.4.2 High. Alex, who also has been working on an urgent project, is now taking their only break of the day, spending their free time sitting back and playing a game on their computer. As usual, they plan on eating their sandwich later in the day, probably sometime in the middle of the afternoon while working. They have some time left before resuming work, so if they knew that their sandwich is gone they could use their remaining break time to go out and get something else to eat.

3. Lottery ticket scenario

You met with one of your classmates at their place to study for an exam. After studying for two hours in the living room, you and your classmate take a break. You both go to the kitchen and have a few snacks. Then your classmate goes back to the living room to continue studying. You have a mild headache so you stay in the kitchen for a while longer. At some point you grab a piece of paper that’s lying on the countertop and write something on it. Then you look closer and realize that what you thought was scrap paper was in fact your classmate’s winning lottery ticket. Now the lottery ticket is unredeemable.

3.1 Cost of the offense to the victim

3.1.1 Low. You see that the redemption value of your classmate’s lottery ticket was 2 dollars.

3.1.2 High. You see that the redemption value of your classmate’s lottery ticket was 500
dollars.

3.2 Benefit of the offense to the offender

3.2.1 Low. You used your classmate’s lottery ticket for doodling on and writing random phrases, as a way to kill time.

3.2.2 High. While in the kitchen, you got a call from a company telling you that you were selected for the job you had applied to, a job you really wanted. They said they would hire you on condition that within the following three days you appear at the company headquarters to fill out some hiring forms. You used your classmate’s lottery ticket to write down the address of the company headquarters.

3.3 Likelihood of information leakage

3.3.1 Low. You realize that while you were in the kitchen writing on the ticket your classmate remained in the living room the whole time.

3.3.2 High. You realize that while you were in the kitchen writing on the ticket your classmate walked by the kitchen on their way to the bathroom.

3.4 Benefit of the confession to the offender

3.4.1 Low. The thing your classmate dislikes most is when people have no sense of humor.

3.4.2 High. The thing your classmate dislikes most is when people are dishonest.