The Franklin effect in social and workplace contexts: A qualitative study on how small requests foster interpersonal bonding

Nguyen Quang Anh[1], Nguyen Hoang Phuc[2*]

[1]Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
[2]University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
[*]Corresponding author: phucnguyen.31221023675@st.ueh.edu.vn

ARTICLE INFO

DOI:10.46223/HCMCOUJS.econ.en.16.9.4696.2026

Received: August 12th, 2025

Revised: September 07th, 2025

Accepted: October 07th, 2025

JEL classification code:

M12; Z13; D91

Keywords:

bonding; Franklin effect; small requests; trust; workplace relationships

ABSTRACT

This study explores the Franklin effect, the phenomenon in which granting small requests fosters liking and bonding in personal and workplace relationships. Drawing on cognitive dissonance and self-perception theory, the research adopts a qualitative, exploratory design using semi-structured interviews with 30 participants (15 from personal contexts and 15 from workplace contexts), recruited through professional networks, social media, and snowball sampling. Through thematic analysis, four core themes emerged: (1) psychological proximity - small requests reduce social distance and increase comfort in interactions; (2) reciprocity-driven trust - the act of granting favors enhances perceptions of trust and mutual respect; (3) workplace micro-bonding - minor requests strengthen collaboration and team cohesion; and (4) cultural framing - collectivist and individualist contexts moderate how the Franklin Effect manifests. These findings extend existing theory by revealing how small interpersonal exchanges function as low-cost, high-impact relational mechanisms. The study offers practical implications for managers and individuals seeking to leverage subtle, non-coercive strategies to build stronger social and professional ties.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal relationships form the backbone of both personal and professional life. Whether in friendships, family ties, or workplace collaboration, the ability to establish and sustain social bonds is a critical determinant of individual well-being and organizational success (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, despite the centrality of human connections, building trust and rapport remains a persistent challenge in social and professional contexts, particularly in increasingly complex and culturally diverse environments (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This challenge has prompted scholars to examine subtle mechanisms that foster relationship-building, among which the Franklin Effect has emerged as a particularly intriguing phenomenon.

The Franklin effect, first articulated by Jecker and Landy (1969), posits that individuals tend to like someone more after doing them a favor, even when the request is minor. This counterintuitive finding, grounded in cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and later supported by self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), suggests that helping behaviors trigger internal rationalization: individuals infer that they must like the requester because they acted positively toward them. This psychological reframing transforms small acts of assistance into

a foundation for interpersonal bonding. Initially, the Franklin effect was known only through a famous story by Benjamin Franklin, in which he shared that he made an opponent friendlier by asking for a small favor. However, this phenomenon was later verified through controlled experimental studies (Jecker & Landy, 1969; Niiya, 2016) and continues to attract researchers' attention today.

Despite the increasing interest in the Franklin effect, many gaps remain. First, most previous studies have used experimental or survey designs, in which outcomes such as liking or agreement are often measured directly (Niiya, 2016). More recently, this issue has also been approached by quantitative simulations using large language models (Liu et al., 2024). However, in most studies, people's actual experiences and social factors in everyday life have not been fully considered, especially in situations where relationships form and develop over time. Existing organizational research offers only indirect evidence through advice-seeking and help-seeking, which show that asking colleagues directly can foster competence impressions, trust, and relational closeness (Flynn, 2003; Goei et al., 2003; Methot et al., 2016). Yet these behaviors are not equivalent to Franklin-type favor requests, leaving no direct field evidence of how small, non-role favors operate in organizations. Finally, cultural factors related to how people receive and respond to small requests remain understudied, despite evidence that social norms regarding helping and reciprocity differ significantly between collectivist and individualist societies (Niiya, 2016; Triandis, 1995). Thus, it is still unknown whether small, non-role favors trigger the Franklin Effect in workplaces under which boundary conditions (hierarchical distance, request type, favor cost, communication medium, etc.) and how such favors shape workplace relationships over time, particularly in collectivist, high-power-distance cultures such as Vietnam.

Addressing these gaps is essential for both theory and practice. Theoretically, examining the Franklin Effect through a qualitative lens can deepen our understanding of the psychological mechanisms and social conditions that enable small requests to transform into enduring social bonds. In practice, such an inquiry has essential implications for workplace relationship management, where leaders and employees alike must navigate informal influence, trust-building, and cooperation. In modern organizations characterized by hybrid teams and intercultural interactions, understanding how seemingly minor requests can catalyze collaboration offers a cost-effective, human-centered approach to enhancing organizational cohesion.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how small requests, operationalized as minor, non-coercive favor-seeking behaviors, contribute to interpersonal bonding across personal and workplace contexts. Specifically, it seeks to:

(1) Explore the lived experiences of individuals who have formed or strengthened relationships through small requests.

(2) Identify the psychological and relational mechanisms that underpin the Franklin Effect in both personal and professional settings.

(3) Examine the cultural and contextual factors that shape how the effect operates in real-world interactions.

(4) Derive practical insights for leveraging the Franklin Effect as a relational strategy in social and workplace environments.

In this study, a qualitative approach was chosen to explore the personal meanings, stories, and emotions associated with the Franklin Effect. Data were collected through semi-structured

interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach enabled in-depth, context-specific insights into how small requests can shift the dynamics of social relationships. In doing so, a significant gap in previous research was filled.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1. Theoretical foundations: cognitive dissonance and self-perception

The Franklin Effect is primarily grounded in cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which posits that individuals experience psychological discomfort when their behavior (e.g., doing a favor) contradicts their initial attitude (e.g., disliking the requester). The psychological pain caused by cognitive inconsistencies motivates individuals to reduce this dissonance by adjusting their attitudes or behaviors (Hinojosa et al., 2017).

Complementing this, self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) suggests that when people lack a clear attitude toward someone, they infer it by observing their own behavior. Thus, after granting a small request, they assume positive feelings toward the requester. Mohebi and Bailey (2020) further emphasize that "people are what they do," underscoring the strong link between self-perception and behavior in educational contexts. Supporting this perspective, Niiya (2016) provides cross-cultural evidence that both Japanese and American participants reported greater liking for allies who directly requested help, suggesting that even small supportive acts can promote interpersonal closeness through self-perception mechanisms.

The Franklin effect is more substantial for socially oriented requests, at the early stages of a relationship, and in cultures that value connectedness, indicating that it arises not only from cognitive dissonance reduction but also from social and cultural factors (Niiya, 2016).

2.2. Empirical evidence: classic and contemporary studies

The classic experiment by Jecker and Landy (1969) demonstrated that participants asked directly by the experimenter to return prize money reported greater liking for the experimenter than those who were not asked or who were asked via an intermediary.

Building on this, Niiya (2016) examined cross-cultural samples from the United States and Japan and found that direct requests, not mediated ones, produced the most potent effects. This study highlighted the role of the affiliative motive, where helping behavior satisfies an individual's need for social connection.

Furthermore, recent studies emphasize that the type and timing of the request matter: social or advice-seeking requests are more effective than transactional ones, and early-stage interactions benefit most from this strategy (Burke et al., 2009; Klyver et al., 2018). More recent contributions also caution that some foot-in-the-door effects may reflect pre-existing attitudes rather than genuine change, underscoring the need to investigate how such requests operate in workplace and cultural contexts (Arnold & Kaiser, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2010).

2.3. Relationship-building mechanisms and related constructs

From the perspective of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), small requests create a sense of contribution in the helper, which promotes reciprocity and trust. Even minor favors strengthen perceived trustworthiness and relational warmth, reinforcing collaborative ties and interpersonal cohesion in workplace settings (Chancellor et al., 2018; Molm et al., 2000). More recent reviews confirm that everyday supportive behaviors, such as small acts of help or advice, are crucial for enhancing relationship quality, generating positive affect, and buffering employees against stress (Jolly et al., 2021).

The foot-in-the-door technique (Freedman & Fraser, 1966) also aligns with the Franklin Effect. Compliance with a small request fosters a sense of cooperation, increasing the likelihood of further assistance and interpersonal liking (Burger, 1999). From a trust-building perspective, even minor favors can serve as signals of benevolence and competence, laying a foundation for durable relational ties. Campagna et al. (2021) demonstrated that initial trustworthiness beliefs exert robust and lasting effects on subsequent behaviors and perceptions, persisting even after trust violations and shaping future professional interactions. This suggests that small requests in the workplace may not only foster immediate liking and reciprocity but also generate enduring impressions of trustworthiness that influence long-term collaboration.

2.4. Applications in workplace contexts

Recently, some discussions (Mantell, 2025) have suggested that the Franklin effect may also be relevant in the workplace. Everyday prosocial acts, such as offering small favors, sharing resources, or providing timely assistance, contribute to stronger relational bonds and organizational cohesion (Chancellor et al., 2018; Jolly et al., 2021; Vekaria et al., 2020). In addition, some HR programs that encourage employees to share ideas or support each other with simple tasks have been found to increase engagement and job satisfaction by fostering small connections among members.

While the Franklin Effect highlights the relational benefits of small, well-intentioned requests, recent studies caution that such requests can backfire when perceived as manipulative or self-serving (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2022; Floyd & Ray, 2017). This underscores that the effect is conditional rather than universal, depending on cultural norms, social expectations, and the perceived authenticity of the request.

2.5. Cultural nuances and limitations

Cultural context is considered to influence how people perceive and respond to small requests. According to Triandis (1995), in societies that value community, helping behavior is often encouraged and valued, which may increase the impact of the Franklin effect. Conversely, in cultures that value individuality, autonomy is valued, thereby reducing the impact of this phenomenon (Niiya, 2016). Recent cross-cultural research also suggests that in multicultural organizations, trust is more effectively fostered when members emphasize sharedness rather than differences, drawing on multiple cultural values to bridge interpersonal divides (Zolfaghari & Madjdi, 2022). Thus, simple requests can be a cost-effective yet effective way to build trust and foster collaboration among individuals.

In addition, some researchers have warned that small requests, when overused or used for manipulative purposes, can backfire, causing discomfort or feelings of exploitation of the recipient (El-Alayli & Messé, 2004). This indicates a key limitation: while the Franklin Effect holds potential for relationship building, its effectiveness depends on cultural values, relational context, and the ethical intent behind the request.

2.6. Gaps in the literature

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the Franklin Effect, several critical gaps remain in the current literature. First, most studies rely on laboratory or survey designs, which provide causal insights but oversimplify social dynamics. This leaves little understanding of the lived experiences and emotional processes through which small requests shape trust and liking, highlighting the need for qualitative research to capture these nuances more deeply. Second, much of the previous research has focused on experimental settings or two-person

interactions. While useful, these designs limit our understanding of how the effect operates in organizational contexts, where collaboration, trust, and everyday prosocial acts are constant and directly tied to performance (Chancellor et al., 2018; Jolly et al., 2021; Methot et al., 2017). Finally, cultural influences remain insufficiently examined. Cross-cultural studies show that reciprocity norms and trust-building strategies vary across societies (Niiya, 2016; Zolfaghari & Madjdi, 2022), yet Franklin-type requests have rarely been tested in diverse workplaces, where cultural values, communication channels, and power distance may critically shape their impact.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study used a qualitative exploratory design to examine how small requests help build relationships in personal and professional settings. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' emotions, perceptions, and everyday interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Thematic analysis was applied to identify key patterns and to understand how cultural background shapes how small requests are perceived and acted upon (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.2. Sampling strategy

The study adopted a qualitative exploratory design to understand how small requests foster relationships in both personal and workplace contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility in exploring participants' emotions and perceptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Thirty participants, evenly divided between personal and workplace contexts, were recruited through networking, social media, and referrals using a purposive sampling approach. Each participant was at least 21 years old, had experienced a situation in which a small favor influenced a relationship, and was fluent in English to ensure clear communication, which is essential for capturing emotional and cultural nuances (Reisinger & Turner, 2012). Subjects are selected from many countries, providing cultural diversity. The data collection concluded when information saturation was reached, defined as the point at which no new codes, categories, or themes emerged from additional interviews and the data began to show redundancy (Guest et al., 2006). In this study, saturation was observed at approximately the 27th interview, when participants' accounts consistently reinforced themes already identified. The final three interviews yielded only overlapping insights without introducing new patterns, confirming that the dataset was sufficiently rich and comprehensive to address the research questions.

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility in tapping into personal emotions and memories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Although a pre-planned set of guiding questions helped keep discussions on track, the open-ended approach also allowed for unexpected discoveries (Patton, 2014). The interviews were conducted both offline and online (Zoom/Google Meet), depending on the location of the participants. Each interview lasted 30 - 45 minutes, was audio-recorded (when permitted), and was transcribed. Non-verbal elements such as intonation, hesitation, and emotion were also noted during observation to aid contextual analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The interview guide was structured around five key areas to encourage open reflection: (1) relationship context, (2) perceived changes in trust or closeness, (3) reasons behind the impact, (4) work environment, and (5) cultural influences. The interview guide is presented in the Appendix - online version.

This guide was piloted with three individuals to ensure clarity, coherence, and relevance to the study objectives (Yin, 2018).

3.4. Data analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a widely used qualitative research approach for identifying and interpreting recurring themes in interview data. The analysis process involves an iterative series of steps, starting with the researcher thoroughly reviewing and highlighting the transcripts to gain familiarity with the data. Next, each content segment is coded - like labeling small ideas that appear in the narrative. Following the establishment of initial codes, larger themes emerge as related codes are combined.

Once the themes have been outlined, the research team revisits each theme carefully to adjust, merge, or separate them as needed. The naming of each theme was carefully considered to reflect its content, while remaining understandable and close to how the participants expressed themselves.

Throughout this process, NVivo 15 software was used as a tool to support data management and record the entire coding process. Thanks to this, all decisions in the analysis can be traced transparently and clearly.

3.5. Trustworthiness and rigor

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, we followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework. Credibility was reinforced through member checking, with five participants validating the accuracy of the summaries, confirming that our interpretations aligned with their experiences (Shenton, 2004). To enhance transferability, we provided rich descriptions of the context and participant profiles to help readers assess the applicability of the findings to other settings (Geertz, 1973). Dependability was addressed by keeping a detailed audit trail of coding decisions, analytic notes, and reflections (Miles et al., 2014). Confirmability was supported through the use of reflective journals, which minimized researcher bias and grounded interpretations in participants' perspectives (Berger, 2015; Nowell et al., 2017).

3.6. Ethical considerations

Before conducting the interviews, we made the participants feel comfortable and proactive by clearly explaining the research objectives, data collection methods, and their rights. They were assured that all personal information would be kept strictly confidential and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Adherence to these principles reflects the research team's commitment to ethical standards in qualitative research (Orb et al., 2001).

4. Result and discussion

Thematic analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews, including 15 from personal contexts and 15 from workplace settings, identified four interconnected themes that explain how small requests support relationship building through the Franklin effect. These themes reflect psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms and are supported by participants' narratives.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)
Context	Personal	15
	Workplace	15
Cultural background	Collectivist (e.g., Vietnam, Japan)	21
	Individualist (e.g., US, UK)	9
Gender	Male	14
	Female	16
Age range	21 - 30	10
	31 - 40	12
	41+	8
Profession	Students/Early-career	8
	Professionals (office roles)	12
	Managers/Senior staff	6
	Others	4

Note. The Authors compile

Among the 30 participants, 15 were interviewed in personal contexts and 15 in workplace contexts. Twenty-one participants came from collectivist cultural backgrounds, while 09 represented individualist cultures. The sample included 14 males and 16 females. Regarding age, 10 participants were between 21 and 30 years old, 12 between 31 and 40, and 08 were over 41. In terms of profession, 08 participants were students or early-career employees, 12 were professionals in office roles, 06 were managers or senior staff, and 04 were in other occupations.

4.1. Result

4.1.1. Psychological proximity: reducing social distance

Small requests acted as "social icebreakers," creating a sense of psychological closeness between individuals who were initially distant. Participants described how fulfilling or receiving minor favors increased comfort and reduced interpersonal barriers.

"At first, I barely knew my neighbor, but when she asked me to watch her plants for a weekend, it felt natural. After that, we talked more often and became real friends." (Participant 7, personal context)

This theme highlights the low-risk nature of small requests, which encouraged interaction without the pressure of formal commitment. In workplace contexts, similar dynamics emerged:

"When my manager asked me to review a short document, it wasn't about the task. It showed trust in me, and I felt more comfortable approaching him later." (Participant 21, workplace context)

These narratives support the view that small, non-intrusive interactions create incremental relational closeness, aligning with the micro-level mechanisms proposed by the Franklin Effect.

4.1.2. Reciprocity-driven trust: building mutual respect

Participants consistently linked small requests with the development of trust. Granting favors, even minor ones, created a reciprocity loop in which both parties felt valued and respected.

"When my colleague asked for help fixing a slide deck, it was simple. But after I helped, he supported me on my project without me even asking. That built real trust." (Participant 16, workplace context)

This mutual reinforcement of goodwill aligns with social exchange theory, which holds that even symbolic gestures establish a pattern of cooperation. Participants shared that seemingly simple requests opened up connections and created a sense of ease of sharing between two people:

"*My friend once asked me to pick up a package for her. Then, when I needed help moving, she offered to help. These small requests made our relationship closer and more comfortable."* (Participant 3, personal context)

4.1.3. Workplace micro-bonding: strengthening team cohesion

At work, simple requests help people get closer together. This makes it easier and more comfortable for colleagues to coordinate, even when they are in different positions. Many people said that being asked to do a small task makes them feel that the relationship is more friendly, not too binding or serious.

One person recounted:

"That day, my boss asked me to look over an email before sending it. I was quite surprised, but that made me feel closer to him. Since then, the way I communicate with him has become much more comfortable." (Participant 25)

Another case:

"A colleague invited me to a quick meeting to discuss some ideas. It was not mandatory, but it made me feel that I was also valued in the group." (Participant 18)

These stories show that small actions, such as requests, not only help work go smoothly but also create a sense of connection and mutual support within the group.

4.1.4. Cultural framing: contextual moderation of the Franklin effect

Collectivism and individualism are two fundamental cultural orientations that shape social behavior and organizational life. Cross-cultural organizational studies show that Asian contexts are generally more collectivist than Western ones, and that collectivist employees demonstrate more substantial commitment and longer tenure (Parkes et al., 2001). In Japan, this orientation is expressed as a balance between socio-relational and cognitive traits, fostering expectations of reciprocity within group boundaries rather than beyond them (Yamagishi et al., 1998). By contrast, classic research indicates that Western societies, especially in North America and Western Europe, lean strongly toward individualism. According to Triandis et al. (1988), the United States is considered a typical individualist culture, where values such as self-

reliance, competition, and placing personal goals above the group are emphasized. Similarly, Hofstede (1980) also classified the United Kingdom as an individualist society, characterized by independence, autonomy, and voluntary rather than forced social relationships. Triandis (1995) further emphasized that in Western cultures, the self is perceived as independent, with independence and self-determination given priority. Markus and Kitayama (1991) noted that, in the West, personal identity is often linked to an independent self-construal, in which individuals value distinctiveness and personal achievement over group harmony.

For participants from collectivist cultures (Vietnam, Japan, etc.), small requests were often framed as relational obligations that reinforced a sense of social belonging. This orientation reflects broader cultural values that emphasize interdependence and group harmony. As one Vietnamese participant explained:

"In my culture, even asking for a small favor is a sign of trust. You wouldn't ask if you didn't feel close. So when someone asks me, I feel like we've become part of the same circle." (Participant 12, personal context)

Another Vietnamese participant emphasized the sense of responsibility that comes with such requests:

"In teamwork, trust is essential for cooperation. Therefore, when a group member asks me for help, even with a small task, I naturally feel responsible to support them, as refusing could seem uncaring and potentially weaken the relationship." (Participant 25, collectivist context)

In contrast, participants from individualist cultures (the United States, the United Kingdom, etc.) tended to view small requests not as obligations but as voluntary signals of trust and respect. This reflects values of autonomy and personal choice, where helping behavior strengthens professional recognition rather than group duty. As an American participant shared:

"I don't feel obligated, but when a colleague asks for a small favor, it shows that he respects my expertise. That's why I'm happy to help." (Participant 22, workplace context)

These findings suggest that while the Franklin Effect occurs across cultures, the way we interpret and build relationships through it is different, affecting both the speed and depth of engagement.

4.1.5. Summary of findings

The overall themes analyzed show that the Franklin effect is not just a single psychological phenomenon but also an effective mechanism for connecting in both personal life and the workplace. Small, seemingly ordinary requests can shorten the distance between people. They create a sense of recognition, elicit a natural response, and gradually help form a long-term relationship.

In work, such small interactions can open up opportunities for cooperation and build trust without necessarily depending on position or title. In their personal lives, they are gentle yet meaningful approaches that foster a sense of belonging and connection. However, the way people receive and respond to these small requests is clearly influenced by the cultural background in which they grow up. This means the same action can carry very different meanings and emotions across communities.

These findings not only suggest practical ways to build lasting relationships but also contribute to a richer theoretical understanding of the power of simple interactions in everyday life. Sometimes, it is the little things that truly begin to make genuine connections.

4.2. Discussion

This study examined how small requests, such as asking someone for a simple favor, can lead to closer relationships in both personal and professional life. The results showed that four main factors help this happen: people feel closer, trust each other more, connect better at work, and this behavior is influenced by the culture they live in. These findings suggest that sometimes starting with a small request is enough to build a positive and lasting relationship.

4.2.1. Linking the Franklin effect to cognitive dissonance and self-perception theory

The Franklin Effect suggests that individuals who perform small favors for others develop more favorable attitudes toward them (Jecker & Landy, 1969). This phenomenon has traditionally been explained through cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). After granting a favor, individuals resolve the dissonance between their behavior ("I helped this person") and any neutral or negative feelings by inferring positive attitudes toward the recipient.

Our findings provide qualitative evidence for this mechanism. Participants frequently described a shift in perception after granting small favors, often reinterpreting their relationships more positively:

"We weren't really close, but after I helped him with that small thing, I gradually started to feel like he was someone I could trust." (Participant 9)

This aligns with self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), which posits that individuals infer their attitudes from their own behavior. By observing themselves helping others, participants constructed a relational narrative that reinforced bonding. This finding highlights that small requests not only signal closeness but also initiate mechanisms consistent with self-perception theory, laying the ground for subsequent relational obligations.

4.2.2. Reciprocity and social exchange dynamics

The second theme, reciprocity-driven trust, is consistent with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Even minor favors triggered a "reciprocity loop," in which participants reported increased willingness to support one another, both in personal and workplace contexts. This suggests that small requests serve as low-cost trust accelerators, reducing relational risk and laying the foundation for sustained cooperation.

This finding also clarifies the Franklin Effect by showing that the relationship outcomes are not only cognitive (reduced dissonance) but also transactional. Once a favor is granted, both parties engage in a cycle of reciprocal reinforcement of goodwill. This supports social exchange theory and shows how even symbolic requests can serve as low-cost trust-building tools in both personal and workplace contexts.

4.2.3. Workplace micro-bonding and organizational implications

The third theme of micro-engagement at work extends previous research on informal interactions in workplace settings (Methot et al., 2017). Participants' experiences suggest that small, intrusive requests can promote feelings of approachability and psychological safety, especially in highly hierarchical settings.

"When my manager asked me to help with something urgent, I felt that he trusted me and that made it easier for me to approach and communicate with him later." (Participant 21)

This finding supports the notion that leaders and team members can leverage small

requests as relational entry points that strengthen collaboration without formal interventions. In this sense, the Franklin Effect may function as a micro-level tool for team cohesion, especially in distributed or cross-cultural workplaces where initial trust is often fragile. In organizational workplaces, the Franklin Effect can operate as a micro-level bonding mechanism, complementing existing theories of informal cooperation.

4.2.4. Cultural moderation of the Franklin effect

A final factor that influences how people respond to small requests is culture. In environments that emphasize group spirit, participants often view small requests as a sign of concern and connection between the two parties. Helping each other with small things is natural, close, and familiar in daily life. In contrast, in environments that emphasize individuality, perceptions differ. For them, when someone makes a request, it is not simply a request for help, but also a way to show trust and respect for each other. No one is forced to help, but the trust that is placed in the request makes people willing to open up. This underlines that cultural context moderates the Franklin Effect, reinforcing the importance of considering collectivist and individualist orientations when theorizing relational dynamics.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Conclusion and implications

In everyday life or at work, seemingly simple requests can have a significant impact on how people connect. This study found that even a small request, such as asking for help with a small task, can be the first step in building closeness and trust between two people. The study found four key points. First, small requests open up conversations and make the atmosphere more pleasant. Second, when one person helps, they often feel more connected to the other person, thereby building two-way trust. Third, in the work environment, such small interactions help superiors and subordinates better understand one another, contributing to a positive team spirit. Finally, cultural factors play an important role: in cultures that value community, requests are seen as a sign of belonging. Conversely, in places where individuality is valued, it is understood as a way of showing trust and respect.

This study highlights four key contributions to the academic literature. First, psychological proximity: small requests act as social openers, reducing distance, fostering a friendlier atmosphere, and fostering closeness and trust in both personal and professional contexts. Second, reciprocity-driven trust: assisting strengthens a sense of mutual connection, reinforcing trust and commitment. Theories such as cognitive dissonance, self-perception, and social exchange help explain why even minor acts of support can influence how people view themselves and others, generating a positive spillover effect in relationships. Third, workplace micro-bonding: in organizational settings, small requests encourage superiors and subordinates to understand one another better and enhance team cohesion, showing that such micro-interactions can serve as trust-building tools within formal work structures. Finally, cultural framing: the meaning of small requests depends on cultural orientation. In collectivist contexts, they are often seen as signs of belonging and obligation, whereas in individualist contexts, they are interpreted as gestures of trust and respect. These insights collectively demonstrate that the Franklin Effect is not merely an individual response but a relational process shaped by trust, reciprocity, organizational dynamics, and culture.

The study's findings provide some practical advice for developing relationships in both personal and professional settings. Individuals can bridge the gap and build trust by proactively offering small favours, especially in new or guarded relationships.

In the workplace, managers can proactively foster an environment that encourages frequent, friendly interactions among team members. Instead of merely distributing jobs vertically, they may help employees interact and assist one another by hosting experience-sharing meetings, creating brief group sessions to tackle challenges, and encouraging colleagues to seek guidance in their regular work. Recognizing modest gestures of assistance also helps people feel more psychologically comfortable and eager to seek help when required. When it becomes part of the organizational culture, collaboration and camaraderie will naturally and sustainably form.

In the context of multicultural work, especially in global organizations, leaders need to pay special attention to how each culture interprets the behavior of asking for help. For some groups, it is a sign of closeness and personal connection. For others, it shows trust in abilities and professional prestige. Instead of using a one-size-fits-all communication method, managers should be adaptable and complex in their approach. They may exhibit openness by asking for help and creating a comfortable environment for colleagues to do the same. Simultaneously, they should provide opportunities for members to engage outside of work to understand one another better. When cultural differences are viewed positively and respectfully, even a small request can become the beginning of lasting and meaningful connections.

To conclude, research shows that small things can have a significant impact on helping people understand each other better, work better, and connect more deeply, regardless of their environment. And how people feel about these interactions often reflects the cultural values they grew up with.

5.2. Limitations and future research

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations. First, the qualitative approach emphasizes depth rather than breadth, limiting generalizability. Second, reliance on participants' retrospective experiences may introduce recall bias into the data.

As for further development, future studies could be conducted longitudinally or through field experiments to examine the causal mechanisms of the Franklin effect in both individual and organizational contexts. Additionally, exploring the role of digital communication in remote or hybrid work environments, especially how small favors are interpreted and received, could also provide new insights into this relationship-building process.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

The manuscript clearly identifies a research gap; the manuscript extends or refines existing theories; the manuscript opens new directions for further research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CRediT: **Nguyen Quang Anh**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft, Project Administration, Validation; **Nguyen Hoang Phuc**: Project Administration, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing, Validation.

FUNDING

This research received no external funding.

NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

Arnold, O., & Kaiser, F.G. (2018). Understanding the foot-in-the-door effect as a pseudo-effect from the perspective of the Campbell paradigm. *International Journal of Psychology, 53*(2), 157-165. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12289

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Bem, D. J. (1972). Self-perception theory. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 6, pp. 1-62). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60024-6

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 15*(2), 219-234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

Bicchieri, C., & Dimant, E. (2022). Nudging with care: The risks and benefits of social information. *Public Choice*, *191*(3), 443-464. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-019-00684-6

Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life.* Wiley.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Burger, J. M. (1999). The foot-in-the-door compliance procedure: A multiple-process analysis and review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*(4), 303-325. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0304_2

Burke, M., Kraut, R., & Joyce, E. (2009). Membership claims and requests: Conversation-level newcomer socialization strategies in online groups. *Small Group Research, 41*(1), 4-40. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496409351936

Campagna, R. L., Mislin, A. A., Dirks, K. T., & Elfenbein, H. A. (2021). The (mostly) robust influence of initial trustworthiness beliefs on subsequent behaviors and perceptions. *Human Relations*, *75*(7), 1383-1411. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267211002905

Chancellor, J., Margolis, S., Bao, K. J., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2018). Everyday prosociality in the workplace: The reinforcing benefits of giving, getting and glimpsing. *Emotion, 18*(4), 507-517. https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000321

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.

Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, *31*(6), 874-900. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602

El-Alayli, A., & Messé, L. A. (2004). Reactions toward an unexpected or counternormative favor-giver: Does it matter if we think we can reciprocate? *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 40*(5), 633-641. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2004.01.003

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Stanford University Press.

Floyd, K., & Ray, C. D. (2017). Thanks, but no thanks: Negotiating face threats when rejecting offers of unwanted social support. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 34*(8), 1260-1276. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407516673161

Flynn, F. J. (2003). How much should I give and how often? The effects of generosity and frequency of favor exchange on social status and productivity. *Academy of Management Journal*, *46*(5), 539-553. https://doi.org/10.5465/30040648

Freedman, J. L., & Fraser, S. C. (1966). Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 4*(2), 195-202. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023552

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures.* Basic Books.

Goei, R., Lindsey, L. L. M., Boster, F. J., Skalski, P. D., & Bowman, J. M. (2003). The mediating roles of liking and obligation on the relationship between favors and compliance. *Communication Research*, *30*(2), 178-197. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650202250877

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field methods, 18*(1), 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hinojosa, A. S., Gardner, W. L., Walker, H. J., Cogliser, C., & Gullifor, D. (2017). A review of cognitive dissonance theory in management research: Opportunities for further development. *Journal of Management*, *43*(1), 170-199. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316668236

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values.* Sage.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications.

Jecker, J., & Landy, D. (1969). Liking a person as a function of doing him a favor. *Human Relations, 22*(4), 371-378. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872676902200407

Jolly, P. M., Kong, D. T., & Kim, K. Y. (2021). Social support at work: An integrative review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *42*(2), 229-251. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2485

Kaiser, F. G., Byrka, K., & Hartig, T. (2010). Reviving Campbell's paradigm for attitude research. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *14*(4), 351-367. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868310366452

Klyver, K., Honig, B., & Steffens, P. (2018). Social support timing and persistence in nascent entrepreneurship: Exploring when instrumental and emotional support is most effective. *Small Business Economics*, *51*(3), 709-734. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-017-9964-5

Kramer, R., Tyler, T., Lewicki, R., & Bunker, B. (1996). Developing and maintaining trust in work relationships. In *Developing and maintaining trust in work relationships* (pp. 114-139). Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452243610.n7

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Sage.

Liu, X., Zhang, J., Shang, H., Guo, S., Yang, C., & Zhu, Q. (2024). *Exploring prosocial irrationality for llm agents: A social cognition view*. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2405.14744

Mantell, M. (2025). *The Benjamin Franklin effect: How to be likable (instantly!).* Science of People. https://www.scienceofpeople.com/benjamin-franklin-effect/

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98*(2), 224-253. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224

Methot, J. R., Lepine, J. A., Podsakoff, N. P., & Christian, J. S. (2016). Are workplace friendships a mixed blessing? Exploring tradeoffs of multiplex relationships and their associations with job performance. *Personnel Psychology*, *69*(2), 311-355. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12109

Methot, J. R., Melwani, S., & Rothman, N. B. (2017). The space between us: A social-functional emotions view of ambivalent and indifferent workplace relationships. *Journal of Management*, *43*(6), 1789-1819. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316685853

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Mohebi, L., & Bailey, F. (2020). Exploring Bem's self perception theory in educational context. *Encyclopaideia*, *24*(58), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1825-8670/9891

Molm, L. D., Takahashi, N., & Peterson, G. (2000). Risk and trust in social exchange: An experimental test of a classical proposition. *American Journal of Sociology*, *105*(5), 1396-1427. https://doi.org/10.1086/210434

Nahapiet, J., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital, intellectual capital and the organizational advantage. *Academy of Management Review, 23*(2), 242-266. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1998.533225

Niiya, Y. (2016). Does a favor request increase liking toward the requester? *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *156*(2), 211-221. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2015.1095706

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 33*(1), 93-96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x

Parkes, L., Bochner, S., & Schneider, S. (2001). Person-organisation fit across cultures: An empirical investigation of individualism and collectivism. *Applied Psychology, 50*(1), 81-108. https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00049

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage Publications.

Reisinger, Y., & Turner, L. (2012). *Cross-cultural behaviour in tourism.* Routledge.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*(2), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism.* Westview Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429499845

Triandis, H. C., Bontempo, R., Villareal, M. J., Asai, M., & Lucca, N. (1988). Individualism and collectivism: Cross-cultural perspectives on self-ingroup relationships. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, *54*(2), 323-338. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.2.323

Vekaria, K. M., O'Connell, K., Rhoads, S. A., Brethel-Haurwitz, K. M., Cardinale, E. M., Robertson, E. L., Walitt, B., VanMeter, J. W., & Marsh, A. A. (2020). Activation in Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis (BNST) corresponds to everyday helping. *Cortex*, *127,* 67-77. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2020.02.001

Visser, C. (2024). *The Benjamin Franklin effect: The psychology of favors*. Progress Focused. https://www.progressfocused.com/2024/02/the-benjamin-franklin-effect-psychology.html

Yamagishi, T., Jin, N., & Miller, A. S. (1998). In-group bias and culture of collectivism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *1*(3), 315-328. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-839X.00020

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (Vol. 6). Sage.

Yuki, M., Maddux, W. W., Brewer, M. B., & Takemura, K. (2005). Cross-cultural differences in relationship-and group-based trust. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *31*(1), 48-62. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167204271305

Zolfaghari, B., & Madjdi, F. (2022). Building trusting multicultural organizations: Rethinking the influence of culture on interpersonal trust development in the workplace. *Journal of International Management*, *28*(4), Article 100944. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2022.100944

©The Authors 2026. This is an open access publication under CC BY NC license.