2-13-2019

To Excuse or Not to Excuse: Effect of Explanation Type and Provision on Reactions to a Workplace Behavioral Transgression

Joseph Mroz
University of Nebraska at Omaha, jmroz@unomaha.edu

Recommended Citation

Mroz, J.E. & Allen, J.A. J Bus Psychol (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-019-09622-1

Journal of Business and Psychology
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-019-09622-1

ORIGINAL PAPER

To Excuse or Not to Excuse: Effect of Explanation Type and Provision on Reactions to a Workplace Behavioral Transgression

Joseph E. Mroz[1] · Joseph A. Allen[1]

Abstract
People often offer an excuse or an apology after they do something wrong. In this paper, we examine how giving an excuse, an apology, or no explanation after arriving late to a meeting influences the attitudes and behavioral intentions others form toward the late arrival. Additionally, we examined how a group-related factor (complaining) and the late arrival's history with coming late affected participant judgments. Across two studies using complementary experimental and survey methods, we found that an excuse is better than no explanation, but that the difference between apology and no explanation and apology and excuse is not always clear. Furthermore, we found that common distinctions between explanation types used in the literature may not fully exist in non-laboratory social interactions. Implications of these findings and future directions are discussed.

Keywords Explanations · Attributions · Excuses · Meetings · Interpersonal relationships

People often commit social transgressions in the work environment, and the consequences can range from degraded interpersonal relationships to impaired work performance (Shaw, Wild, & Colquitt, 2003). A social transgression need not be a dramatic, abusive behavior such as yelling or stealing. Indeed, some social transgressions are quite mundane and common, yet nonetheless provoke negative responses from others. Lateness to workplace meetings is one such common social transgression that is associated with interpersonal conflict, and previous work suggests that the type of explanation a late arrival provides—whether it implicates a controllable or an uncontrollable cause—can greatly affect how others respond to the transgression (Mroz & Allen, 2017; Rogelberg et al., 2014).

Although there is much literature on the different types of explanations, no research, to our knowledge, has pitted types of explanations against the outcomes that occur when the transgressing individual simply does not acknowledge the behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, in the meeting lateness context, we examine how on-time attendees respond when someone arrives late and: (a) provides an excuse (b) provides an apology, or (c) does not acknowledge arriving late. The findings related to this purpose contribute to the literature by providing additional clarity as to the type of explanation most effective in reducing negative responses. Second, we explore how a group factor (whether the group complains or does not complain) and the individual's history with lateness to meetings affects participant responses. The second purpose seeks to integrate group and other contextual factors that can provide a more nuanced understanding of when explanations are useful in social settings.

Purpose and Types of Explanations

When an individual breaks a social rule governing appropriate behavior, that individual typically offers an apology, excuse, or justification—collectively referred to as explanations—to anyone affected by the transgressive behavior (Bies & Sitkin, 1992; Schlenker, 1997; Tyler & Feldman, 2007). An *apology* includes expressing sorrow, acknowledging the wrongfulness of the act, and accepting responsibility for it, while promoting a sense of remorse, repentance, and humility (Fisher & Exline, 2006; Tavuchis, 1991). An *excuse* lacks the moral component of an apology, and in the scientific literature, excuses are self-

✉ Joseph E. Mroz
jmroz@unomaha.edu

Joseph A. Allen
josephallen@unomaha.edu

[1] Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 6001 Dodge Street, ASH 407, Omaha, NE 68182, USA

Published online: 13 February 2019

serving accounts of a behavior with the goal of reducing perceptions of personal responsibility for the event (Schlenker, Pontari, & Christopher, 2001). Excuses work by shifting the cause of the behavior to an uncontrollable, external, or mitigating source (Sitkin & Bies, 1993). When people provide *justifications* for their behavior, they accept full responsibility, but they dispute that the behavior was inappropriate by explaining that it was necessary for achieving a morally superior purpose (Shaw et al., 2003; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Scott and Lyman (1968) provided the example of a soldier who kills others in battle (normally, killing is a behavioral transgression), accepts responsibility for the behavior, but justifies it by claiming that the behavior was necessary to protect the country and fellow soldiers.

Of the three types of explanations—apology, excuse, or justification—excuses tend to be the most prevalent, although not as much research has focused on apologies as excuses (Schlenker, 1997). One reason for this motivation to offer an excuse is the general consensus that an excuse can effectively distance the transgressor from any or all detrimental consequences of their behavior (Pontari, Schlenker, & Christopher, 2002). Additionally, providing an effective excuse has benefits intra-personally. For instance, Snyder and Higgins (1988) found that offering an effective excuse can benefit an individual's self-esteem level, lessen anxiety, and reduce depression and negative affect. From an intra- and interpersonal perspective, effective excuses exonerate the transgressor for causing the negative outcome by negating or refocusing culpability for the behavior, which distances the individual from the negative action (Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1988; Crant & Bateman, 1993).

Workplace Meetings and Explanations

The average employee in the USA spends about 6 h per week attending or preparing for meetings (Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006), and about 75% of managers' working hours relate to preparing for, attending, or leading meetings (Allen, Beck, Scott, & Rogelberg, 2014). Despite the amount of time that employees spend in meetings, researchers and practitioners have only recently directed attention toward the systematic study of meetings (e.g., Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Rogelberg, 2015). Meetings exist in nearly every organization regardless of industry, size, culture, or organizational level, and meetings therefore provide a gateway or window into the social dynamics of organizations. Thus, the topic of meeting science, the study of what takes place prior to, during, and after a meeting, is growing in importance. Past studies indicate that it is incredibly common for people to arrive late to meetings (Rogelberg et al., 2014) and that lateness to meetings is a sufficiently powerful social transgression that can lead to anger and a desire to punish the person who comes late (Mroz & Allen, 2017). As such, by pairing the two areas of study, the goal of the current paper is to extend knowledge in the explanations literature *and* in meeting science.

The Current Study

Relative Effects of Explanation Type

Attribution theory, and specifically Weiner's theory of interpersonal behavior (Weiner, 2006), informs this study. In order for an individual to make an attribution of a personal characteristic from a behavior, the person must first engage in a causal search. People use causal reasoning everyday—to make decisions (Sloman & Hagmayer, 2006), solve problems (Cheng & Holyoak, 1985), and interpret the behavior of others (Cushman, 2013; Cushman & Young, 2011; Lagnado & Channon, 2008; Weiner, Graham, & Reyna, 1997). Despite the frequency with which people encounter events with non-agentic causes (e.g., natural phenomena), people prefer to assign causal responsibility to human actors over non-human causes (Alicke, 1992; Hilton, McClure, & Sutton, 2010; Lagnado & Channon, 2008).

The theory holds that once individuals encounter a behavioral transgression, they seek to identify, via causal reasoning, *why* the transgression occurred. Then, how the identified cause is cognitively evaluated affects consequent affective and behavioral responses. Causes are assessed across a variety of dimensions such as stability, intentionality, locus of causality, and controllability (Weiner, 2001), although a cause is unlikely to be evaluated across all dimensions concurrently (Wickens, Wisenthal, Flora, & Flett, 2011). Excuses, which shift the cause of the behavior to an uncontrollable, external, or mitigating source (Sitkin & Bies, 1993), primarily operate at this stage of the attributional model. An excuse influences what the victim perceives to be the cause for an event, and, if successful, results in a judgment of non-responsibility via minimized controllability and intentionality perceptions, for instance.

Next, based on the constellation of causal dimensions, such as high intentionality or controllability, the victim of the transgression determines the transgressor as personally responsible or non-responsible for the event. Responsibility is a judgment that reflects whether the transgressor should have done something differently with respect to the behavior that prompted the transgression (Weiner, 1985, 1995). Once judged as responsible, there are few mitigating circumstances that can decrease negative affect and behavioral intentions (Weiner, 2006). Rather, mitigating circumstances must occur *before* responsibility for the event is assigned, which is one factor that may explain why excuses tend to be so effective. For example, assuming the actor has control over the outcome, achieving a higher moral goal is an example of a common mitigating

factor between causal controllability and assignment of responsibility (Weiner, 1995). Someone may be late to a meeting because he or she was tending to an unexpectedly sick parent or child. The cause is internal in that the actor's behavior (i.e., caring for the sick person) affected the outcome, and the cause is controllable because the actor could have left the sick person to fend for him or herself. Assuming the late person offered an excuse suggesting that caring for the unexpectedly sick person led to the lateness, negative reactions should be minimized. In most other conditions, the observer would deem the actor morally responsible for coming late to the meeting. However, because tending to the sick is a high moral goal (Weiner, 1995) that is likely above punctuality to most meetings, the observer would not judge the actor as responsible because the behavior was morally justified.

In contrast to excuses, apologies primarily operate *after* a cause is identified and responsibility is assigned, and they may work to mitigate negative affective and behavioral responses. After responsibility judgments, the attributional theory proposes that victims experience negative or positive moral emotions (Weiner, Graham, & Chandler, 1982). Moral emotions are affective responses that arise after a consideration of right and wrong, good and bad, or thoughts about how someone should have acted (Weiner, 2006). Someone deemed responsible for a transgression spurs a negative moral emotion (commonly anger), whereas those considered non-responsible garner a positive emotion, such as sympathy. The dominant valence of the moral emotion then influences the victim's behavioral intentions toward the transgressor—to forgive and act prosocially or to punish, as examples (Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004; Weiner et al., 1982).

An apology requires the individual to take full responsibility for the transgression, repent, and express remorse (Fisher & Exline, 2006). Because apologies include a self-expression of responsibility, it is unlikely that apologies influence assessments of causal dimensions. Rather, from a theoretical perspective and evidenced by research findings, apologies yield interpersonal benefits because they alter the affective response to the transgression. Previous work indicates that apologies spur forgiveness (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Exline, Baumeister, Zell, Kraft, & Witvliet, 2008), decrease aggression (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989), decrease anger (Eaton & Struthers, 2006), and increase sympathy (Eaton & Struthers, 2006). Decreased anger and increased sympathy should result in more positive behavioral intentions toward the transgressor (Weiner, 1995).

The lack of an excuse leaves the outcome of the causal search completely to the victim, which could be influenced by the fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967), various biases, previous interactions with the transgressor, and a variety of other factors ultimately leading to a judgment of responsibility. Given that excuses occur at the very beginning of the attributional process, they can influence all subsequent stages of the model, whereas an apology can reduce negative affective and behavioral responses. Reactions to transgressions unaccompanied by an apology or an excuse, therefore, will occur without a consideration of any mitigating factors that may provoke a less negative (or even positive) response.

When considering the effects of no explanation following a behavioral transgression, *two* transgressions must be considered. The first, in the case of this paper, is arriving late to a meeting. The second is the transgressor not acknowledging that his or her behavior was inappropriate, as one normative behavior is to provide an acknowledgment of some variety of transgressive behavior (Schlenker, 1997). Not only is arriving late a social norm violation, by not acknowledging the behavior, the late arrival commits a *second* norm violation. By not providing an explanation, the late arrival signals that his or her behavior was not transgressive enough to warrant an excuse or apology. A "compounding effect" created by two simultaneous transgression may occur following no explanation, which could then exacerbate negative responses. By offering an excuse or apology, individuals can reduce negative reactions to their poor behavior, but they also avoid violating the norm of acknowledging improper behavior.

We explore the effects of apologies, excuses, and no explanations in two dependent variables of interest relevant to the work context. The first, prosocial intentions, is a common outcome of attribution- and explanation-focused studies (e.g., Rudolph et al., 2004; Wickens et al., 2011; Mroz & Allen, 2017; Weiner, 1995) because it represents a behavioral intention theorized to be greatly affected by preceding moral emotions of anger and sympathy. In the workplace, prosocial behaviors can be components of organizational citizenship behaviors, which have been linked to enhanced individual, unit, and firm performance (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). We expect participants will have greater prosocial intentions toward those who provide an apology or excuse, compared to those with no explanation. The second, expected work performance is a work-focused attitudinal measure of other people's likely performance on the job in the future (Hagger, Rentzelas, & Koch, 2014). Theoretically speaking, Lepine and Van Dyne (2001) explored the potential responses to peers who are low performers suggesting that negative attributions toward these low performers influences the form of helping that may occur or not occur. Building upon this concern related to low performer attribution, the focus of the current study is upon how employees view the potential work behavior and outputs of persons (e.g., peers) who violate the norm of acknowledging improper behavior. Specifically, we anticipated that the offense taken for the improper behavior of arriving late (e.g., Mroz & Allen, 2017) would impact how participants viewed the future behavior of the transgressor.

Given the possible consequences of not acknowledging a behavioral transgression, and then not providing an excuse or

apology to those affected, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- *Hypotheses 1a-1b*: Participants who view someone arriving late to a work meeting who does not provide an explanation, compared to participants who receive an *excuse*, will rate the late arrival less favorably in terms of (a) expected work performance and (b) will express greater prosocial intentions toward the explanation-provider.
- *Hypotheses 2a-2b*: Participants who view someone arriving late to a work meeting who does not provide an explanation, compared to participants who receive an *apology*, will rate the late arrival less favorably in terms of (a) expected work performance and (b) will express greater prosocial intentions toward the explanation-provider.

Although previous theorizing suggests that any explanation may be better than no explanation following a behavioral transgression (Shaw et al., 2003), the relative strength of an excuse versus an apology on ameliorating the negative effects of a transgression is less clear. Shaw et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of the explanations literature through the lens of fairness theory and justice, and they found that excuses tended to be more beneficial than justifications. However, dependent variables in the study were largely related to organizational justice perceptions so it is not entirely clear how interpersonal perceptions and behavioral intentions might be affected by either explanation type. Furthermore, they did not examine apologies.

From the attributional perspective, an excuse could offer a mitigating circumstance that minimizes assignment of responsibility for the actor's behavior. As such, the theory predicts that negative reactions would be minimized. On the other hand, an apology, wherein the actor fully accepts responsibility and controllability for the event, offers little avenue to reduce negative reactions at that point of the model, but it may promote more positive affective and behavioral reactions such as forgiveness (Schumann, 2018). Given the competing predictions that can be drawn from attribution theory and work on apologies, we ask the following research question:

- *Research Question 1a-b*: Compared to apology-providers, will participants (a) rate excuse-providers higher in expected work performance and (b) express a greater willingness to help?

The Role of Group Emotion

One limitation of existing literature on explanations (Bies & Sitkin, 1992; Pontari et al., 2002; Scott & Lyman, 1968, etc.) is that researchers have largely examined the effect of explanations in a tacitly dyadic situation: an actor engages in a transgressive behavior and then provides or does not provide some sort of explanation and one observer who was affected by the behavior then responds. Although such situations do occur, there are many instances wherein the transgressive behavior affects a group of individuals, and how any one of those individuals responds can influence the responses of others. Individual behavior is not isolated from contextual factors, and much of what people do depends on the social context and the behavior of others (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012).

From a group dynamics and performance perspective, there are several reasons why arriving late to a meeting, followed by an excuse, apology, or no explanation, might have consequences for the group. Some research indicates that the first communication-based event that occurs in a group setting can play a significant role in determining the tone for subsequent interactions and in creating a foundation for additional interactions during the same meeting (Feldman, 1984). What occurs later in the event sequence or conversation is oftentimes related back to the initial statements (Taylor, 2006), even if the initial statements are only several seconds long (Gersick, 1988). Importantly, some group outcomes are affected by what happens *before* a group officially starts working on a task such that how well a group engages in productive, positive conversation before the task can determine the group's performance (Eriksen & Dyer, 2004).

One common behavior that occurs in groups is complaining. Complaining in this context reflects "killer phrases and statements" that suggest futility, disinterest, or negative affect (Kauffeld & Meyers, 2009). Kauffeld and Meyers (2009) as well as Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2011) examined communicative patterns in group interactions. They found that when one group member begins to complain, other members tend to join in, which subsequently results in poor performance outcomes and greater negative affect within the group. In terms of attribution theory, a group complaining about a transgression may indicate to individuals within the group that the behavior is unacceptable (increasing a judgment of responsibility), thus limiting the effect that any explanation might have on reducing negative responses. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

- *Hypotheses 3a-3b*: There will be a main effect of group complaining such that participants who view a complaining group compared to a non-complaining group will (a) rate the late arrival's work performance more negatively and (b) express fewer prosocial intentions toward the late arrival.

Individual History with Transgressive Behavior

A further limitation of the extant literature on explanations and attributions is that the transgressor's behavioral history with

respect to a given transgression is rarely considered (Mroz & Allen, 2017). For example, how others respond when someone comes to a meeting late may differ depending on whether the late arrival is a "late person" (i.e., someone who is habitually late) or a rarely late person. From the attributional perspective, observers may be more likely to interpret a late person's vs. a rarely late person's behavior as controllable, and judge the person as responsible, regardless of the explanation the person offers for the lateness, if any. A "late person," whom others view as continuously arriving late and making no effort to correct the behavior, may be viewed especially poorly. As such, we hypothesize:

- *Hypotheses 4a-4b*: There will be main effect of habitual lateness such that participants who encounter a late arrival who is always late versus rarely late will (a) rate the late arrival's work performance more negatively and (b) express fewer prosocial intentions toward the late arrival.

Study 1 Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) service, an online panel of workers who complete small tasks for nominal pay. Some studies indicate that users of the service are more representative and diverse than typical student samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Landers & Behrend, 2015; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Participants were compensated $0.70. The study was advertised as an investigation of attitudes toward workplace meetings, and participants were required to be at least part-time employees who regularly attend meetings for 1 h or more per week. Forty-two participants failed at least one of the validation items (instructional items such as "select agree" to gauge whether participants were reading survey items) and were removed for subsequent analyses. We also conducted analyses with all participants included, and conclusions were similar, although we do point out differences in the results section. The final sample consisted of 558 respondents between the ages of 19 and 73 ($M = 37.28$, SD = 10.57) who worked an average of 39.41 h each week (SD = 9.01). The majority (59.4%) of participants were women.

Measures and Materials

Video Vignettes Participants viewed one of 12 video vignettes. Each vignette was a short, 1 min 30 s video depicting a workplace meeting. The videos showed meeting attendees arriving to a meeting, discussing the time the meeting was scheduled to start (1 p.m.), mentioning who was not there yet, and then waiting for 8 min. Meeting attendees consisted of three women and one man, and the late arrival was a woman. After the 8-min waiting period, there was a short discussion about the person who was late, and then the late person came to the meeting at 1:10 p.m. During the waiting period, meeting attendees used their cell phones, reviewed papers, or made very minimal small talk. The waiting period was shown at approximately 16× speed, such that the 8-min waiting period took 30 s in real time. We increased video speed for the waiting period to reduce participant fatigue and dropout, both of which may be more likely if the participants are not actively engaged (or interested) in the study (Hoerger, 2010; Galesic, 2006; Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009). A clock was evident as an overlay on the bottom, right-hand corner of the video and within the meeting room itself. A professional videographer recorded all videos, and videos were edited such that, aside from the manipulated factors, all other material remained constant (e.g., every video used the same recording of the waiting period and lines that did not change across conditions).

Performance Expectation Performance expectation was evaluated using a five-item measure developed by Hagger et al. (2014). Participants considered the late arrival and rated how they thought that person would perform at work in a variety of areas when compared to other employees (1 = *one of the worst*, 5 = *one of the best*) across five dimensions. Sample items include "quality of work" and "dependability."

Prosocial Intentions Prosocial intentions were measured using a three-item scale developed by Mroz and Allen (2017). Participants read three situations that described the person who arrived late to the meeting asking for help in a work situation (e.g., "The late arrival asks to review your meeting notes with you so she can get caught up on what she missed in the meeting"), and then indicated how likely they would be to help the late person from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*).

Design and Procedure

A 2 (group complaining: yes, no) × 2 (habitually late arrival: yes, no) × 3 (explanation type: apology, excuse, or none) between-participants design was used. Upon entering the survey and providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of the 12 experimental conditions. In each condition, the participant watched a video depicting a workplace meeting with the following instructions: "As you watch, try to imagine that you are an attendee at this meeting. Later on, you will be asked to think about how you would respond in the situation shown in the video. Remember, we want to know how you might behave if you were in this scenario so don't worry about providing the 'right' answer—there is no right or wrong answer!" The opening

lines and the waiting period in the videos were the same across all conditions, and all manipulations occurred after the waiting section. Manipulated portions of the vignettes are described in the appendix.

Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics, correlations, and internal consistency estimates, where appropriate, for all focal variables. A series of 2 (group complaining: yes, no) × 2 (late arrival habitually late: yes, no) × 3 (explanation for lateness: none, excuse, apology) between-participants ANOVAs were conducted on expected work performance and prosocial intentions to test study hypotheses. Planned contrasts were also estimated to test group differences hypothesized in Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. Table 2 includes descriptive statistics for each of the experimental conditions, whereas Tables 3 and 4 display results of the hypothesis testing.

Expected Work Performance

The test of the overall model was significant, $F(11, 546) = 11.64$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.19$; no main effects and planned comparisons were examined. Hypotheses 1a and 2a predicted that participants would rate excuse-providers as higher in expected work performance than late arrivals who provided no explanation (H1a), whereas H2a predicted the same effect for apology-providers for those who gave no explanation. The main effect of explanation type was significant, $F(2, 546) = 8.27$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$. Planned comparison tests revealed that participants rated individuals who provided an excuse more highly ($M = 2.84$, SD = 0.73) than those who provided no explanation ($M = 2.61$, SD = 0.57), $b = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.37], Cohen's $d = 0.35$, which supported Hypothesis 1a. On the other hand, late arrivals who provided an apology ($M = 2.73$, SD = 0.66) were not rated more highly than those who gave no explanation ($M = 2.61$, SD = 0.57), $b = 0.12$, $p = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.24], Cohen's $d = 0.19$, meaning that Hypothesis 2a was not supported. In the analysis with all participants included, this difference was significant. Research question 1a asked whether excuse-providers would be more highly rated than apology-providers. The excuse-provider ($M = 2.84$, SD = 0.73) was rated more highly than the apology-providers ($M = 2.73$, SD = 0.66), $b = 0.13$, $p = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.26], Cohen's $d = 0.16$.

Hypothesis 3a was supported, which predicted a main effect for group complaining such that participants rated late arrivals more favorably when other members in the group did not complain ($M = 2.78$, SD = 0.69) compared to when others did complain ($M = 2.67$, SD = 0.62), $F(1, 546) = 5.30$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$. Hypothesis 4a predicted a main effect of habitual lateness, such that participants would rate the habitually late arrival as a significantly worse employee ($M = 2.48$, SD = 0.56) than the person who was rarely late ($M = 2.99$, SD = 0.66). Hypothesis 4a was supported, $F(1, 546) = 103.67$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$. All interactive effects were also tested, and none were significant (see Table 3).

Prosocial intentions

The test of the overall model was significant, $F(11, 545) = 3.82$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$. Hypotheses 1b and 2b proposed that participants express a greater willingness to help late arrivals who provided either an excuse (H1b) or apology (H2b) compared to late arrivals who offered no explanation. The main effect of explanation type was significant, $F(2, 545) = 7.35$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$, and planned comparison tests indicated that participants would be more likely to help excuse-providers ($M = 3.75$, SD = 0.98) compared to late arrivals who provided no explanation ($M = 3.40$, SD = 1.00), $b = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.57], Cohen's $d = 0.35$, which

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables in Study 1

Variable	*M*	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	37.28	10.57	–							
2. Gender	1.60	0.49	0.04	–						
3. Complaining	1.48	0.50	0.03	−0.01	–					
4. Habitually late	1.47	0.50	−0.06	0.07	−0.01	–				
5. No explanation vs. any	0.28	0.96	−0.01	0.01	<0.01	0.01	–			
6. Apology vs. excuse	0.05	0.80	0.05	0.02	0.02	−0.03	0.05	–		
7. Performance expectation	2.73	0.66	0.08	0.09*	0.09*	0.39***	0.13**	0.07	(0.92)	
8. Prosocial intentions	3.55	1.00	0.08	0.08	0.04	0.19***	0.11**	0.11**	0.41***	(0.87)

$N = 557$. Estimates of internal consistency displayed on diagonal where appropriate. For gender, 1 = male, 2 = female. For complaining, 1 = yes, 2 = no. For habitually late, 1 = yes, 2 = no. For explanation type, no explanation versus any explanation coded as none = −1, excuse = 1, apology = 1. For apology vs. excuse, explanation coded as none = 0, excuse = 1, apology = −1

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for each of the 12 conditions in Study 1

Condition	Expected performance			Prosocial intentions		
	M	SD	*n*	*M*	SD	*n*
Excuse						
1. Habitually late, complaining	2.60	0.65	53	3.36	1.07	53
2. Habitually late, no complaining	2.61	0.64	53	3.69	0.95	53
3. Rarely late, complaining	3.01	0.63	45	4.07	0.92	45
4. Rarely late, no complaining	3.26	0.80	42	3.99	0.76	42
Apology						
5. Habitually late, complaining	2.42	0.60	43	3.35	0.93	43
6. Habitually late, no complaining	2.43	0.45	41	3.31	1.08	41
7. Rarely late, complaining	2.99	0.60	45	3.61	0.95	45
8. Rarely late, no complaining	3.10	0.67	36	3.70	1.02	36
No explanation						
9. Habitually late, complaining	2.37	0.45	58	3.30	0.96	58
10. Habitually late, no complaining	2.46	0.48	49	3.18	1.04	49
11. Rarely late, complaining	2.71	0.52	46	3.42	1.06	45
12. Rarely late, no complaining	2.94	0.65	47	3.70	0.90	47

provides support for Hypothesis 1b. On the other hand, participants were not more likely to want to help a late arrival who provided an apology ($M = 3.49$, SD = 1.00) compared to someone who gave no explanation ($M = 3.40$, SD = 1.00), $b = 0.09$, $p = 0.38$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.29], Cohen's $d = 0.09$, such that Hypothesis 2b was not supported. However, participants indicated a greater willingness to help excuse-providers ($M = 3.75$, SD = 0.98) compared to apology-providers ($M = 3.49$, SD = 1.00), $b = 0.29$, $p = 0.006$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.49], Cohen's $d = 0.26$, thereby answering research question 1b.

Hypothesis 4b was not supported, as the main effect of group complaining on prosocial intentions was not significant, $F(1, 545) = 0.85$, $p = 0.36$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$. Hypothesis 5b predicted that participants would be more willing to help the rarely late person compared to the habitually late person. This hypothesis was supported, $F(1, 545) = 19.87$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, as participants indicated they would be less willing to help the habitually late person ($M = 3.37$, SD = 1.00) compared to the rarely late person ($M = 3.74$, SD = 0.96). Interaction effects, reported in Table 4, were not significant.

Study 2

Despite the strong pattern of results observed in Study 1, experimental methods are artificial in nature and can suffer from a lack of generalizability to applied settings (Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982; Falk & Heckman, 2009). To extend this paper, we conducted an online survey in order to replicate earlier findings and extend them to real work settings. Specifically, we could not consider two primary factors in Study 1 that may have influenced the results: how familiar the participant was with the late arrival and the relevance of the meeting to which the individual arrived late. In Study 1,

Table 3 ANOVA results of expected work performance in Study 1

Source	SS	df	MS	*F*	η_p^2
Overall	46.06	11	4.19	11.64***	0.19
Complaining	1.91	1	1.91	5.30*	0.01
Habitually late	37.29	1	37.29	103.67***	0.16
Explanation type	5.95	2	2.98	8.27***	0.03
Complain × habitual	0.92	1	0.92	2.57	0.01
Complain × explanation	0.26	2	0.13	0.37	0.00
Habitual × explanation	1.05	2	0.53	1.47	0.01
Complain × habitual × explanation	0.10	2	0.05	0.14	0.00
Error	196.40	546	0.36		
Total	242.46	557			

$N = 558$. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 4 ANOVA results of prosocial intentions in Study 1

Source	SS	df	MS	F	η_p^2
Overall	39.98	11	3.64	3.82***	0.07
Complaining	0.81	1	0.81	0.85	0.00
Habitually late	19.87	1	19.87	20.88***	0.04
Explanation type	14.71	2	7.35	7.73***	0.03
Complain × habitual	0.08	1	0.08	0.08	0.00
Complain × explanation	0.23	2	0.11	0.12	0.00
Habitual × explanation	1.02	2	0.51	0.54	0.00
Complain × habitual × explanation	4.04	2	2.02	2.12	0.01
Error	518.45	545	0.95		
Total	558.43	556			

$N = 558$. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

given that it was a video vignette depicting a contrived group to which the participant ostensibly belonged, we could not examine whether how well the participant knew the late arriver affected how the participant responded to the lateness. In Study 2, because we focus on actual situations in which someone arrived late to a meeting, we seek to replicate Study 1's findings while controlling for how well the participant knows the late arrival. Likewise, meeting relevance is a factor that previous work (Mroz & Allen, 2017) suggests influences the reactions individuals have when someone arrives late to a meeting such that more personally relevant meetings lead to more strongly negative reactions. Study 2 also seeks to control for the effects of meeting relevance.

Study 2 Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited via MTurk and were paid $0.50 for completing the study, which was described as a survey of experiences with workplace meetings. Participants were required to be full- or part-time employees who regularly attend meetings. Upon entering the survey, participants read the definition of a workplace meeting and were instructed to think of their last work meeting. Then, participants provided information on the meeting such as whether someone arrived late. Of the 553 total participants, 223 (40%) reported that someone arrived late so these participants completed the rest of the study. Remaining participants were transferred to a different study. Participants who indicated that someone arrived late then provided some information about the late person and completed several measures. Regarding the late arrival, participants reported whether the person provided an excuse (or not), an apology (or not), and the content of the excuse and/or apology.

Although an important purpose of Study 2 was to replicate and extend the results from Study 1, excuses and apologies did not occur independently of one another in the real work setting. That is, when someone offered an excuse, an apology followed 71% of the time. Additionally, only 16% of late arrivals who did not give an excuse did give an apology. Overall, cell sizes were relatively unequal and sometimes small (apology only: $n = 38$; excuse only: $n = 15$; no excuse, no apology: $n = 81$; excuse, apology: $n = 89$). The final sample consisted of 223 employees (57% of whom were women) who worked an average of 38.51 h per week (SD = 9.31). Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 70 ($M = 36.00$, SD = 12.05). Example job titles of participants included nurse, package handler, credit analyst, certified public accountant (CPA), data analyst, engineer, teacher, and sales manager.

Measures

Control Variables: Familiarity with Late Arrival and Meeting Relevance We included two control variables in our study, as each is theoretically relevant and were related to the outcome variables of interest. In previous work, meeting relevance, represented as a component of the overall degree of a behavioral transgression, was demonstrated to influence the attributional process associated with reactions to meeting lateness (Mroz & Allen, 2017). As such, we argue that meeting relevance, as an indicator of the severity of the transgression (more severe in the observer's eye if the meeting is relevant versus non-relevant) is a potential third variable that must be accounted for. Likewise, a participant's familiarity and quality of relationship with the late arrival would theoretically impact whether they intend to behave prosocially toward that person in the future, as well as the participants' estimation of the late arrival's work performance. This treatment of control variables is consistent with best practice recommendations in the field regarding statistical control (Becker, 2005; Becker et al., 2016).

Familiarity with the person who arrived late was assessed with six items we developed for the purposes of this study. Using a five-point *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* scale, participants indicated how well they knew the person who was late. Sample items included "I know the individual well," "I often see the individual outside of work," and "I work often with the individual."

Meeting relevance was assessed via Sawyer's (1992) goal and process clarity scale. A similar version has been adapted to meetings (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013). Participants thought of their last workplace meeting and responded to seven items such as "The meeting was relevant to my job" and "The meeting helped me accomplish my duties and responsibilities" from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Performance Expectation and Prosocial Intentions The measures included in Study 1 were re-used.

Results

Table 5 includes the descriptive statistics and correlations of study variables. The goal of Study 2 was to explore whether differences between explanation types in how individuals view and intend to behave toward late arrivals persist in actual work settings, while accounting for more contextual factors to enhance external validity. To extend the findings from Study 1, we estimated two ANCOVAs to examine whether providing an apology or an excuse (or both) versus no explanation affected (a) how employees perceive the late arrival's work performance and (b) how likely employees are to engage in helping behaviors toward the late arrival. Models used a 2 (excuse: provided, not provided) × 2 (apology: provided, not provided) factorial design with meeting relevance and familiarity with late arrival as covariates.

In the test of performance expectations, the overall model was significant, $F(5, 217) = 18.52$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.30$. Meeting relevance [$F(1, 217) = 4.35$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$] and familiarity with late arrival [$F(1, 217) = 51.03$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.19$] were significant effects. Consistent with Study 1 results, participants rated their co-workers who provided an excuse ($M = 3.68$, SD = 0.72) more highly than those who provided no excuse ($M = 3.28$, SD = 0.67), $F(1, 217) = 4.44$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. There was no effect of apology versus no apology, and the excuse × apology interaction was not significant.

For prosocial behavioral intentions, the overall model was also significant, $F(5, 213) = 12.44$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.23$. The familiarity covariate was significant [$F(1, 213) = 44.19$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.17$], but the effect of meeting relevance was not. Neither the excuse [$F(1, 213) = 0.20$, $p = 0.67$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$] nor the apology [$F(1, 213) = 3.33$, $p = 0.07$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$] effects reached significance, but there was a significant excuse × apology interaction, $F(1, 213) = 4.86$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. The interaction indicated that providing an apology was most beneficial when coupled with an excuse ($M = 3.84$, SE = 0.12), whereas offering an apology without an excuse made no difference. When no covariates were included in the model, the interaction was not significant, but there was a significant main effect of excuse provision such that participants were more likely to help the late arrival when provided with an excuse compared to when no excuse was given. Table 6 displays the condition means. The interaction is graphed in Fig. 1.

To help explore the interaction further, we questioned why including familiarity as a control variable (much more so than meeting relevance) influenced the interactive effect. One reason may have been that transgressors were more likely to apologize or offer an excuse when they had a pre-existing relationship with the victim. To that end, we conducted an ANOVA on familiarity with the late arrival with excuse

Table 5 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables in Study 2

Variable	*M*	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	36.02	11.89	–							
2. Gender	1.57	0.50	0.03	–						
3. Meeting relevance	3.58	1.02	−0.06	−0.03	(0.93)					
4. Familiarity with late arrival	3.18	0.84	−0.05	−0.02	0.25***	–				
5. Excuse given	0.57	0.49	−0.02	0.19**	−0.19**	−0.23**	–			
6. Apology given	0.46	0.50	0.07	−0.13	−0.26***	−0.28***	0.54***	(0.79)		
7. Performance expectation	3.45	0.72	0.11	−0.01	0.27***	0.51***	0.18***	0.26***	(0.91)	
8. Prosocial intentions	3.65	1.13	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.45***	0.16*	0.21***	0.36***	(0.87)

$N = 223$. Estimates of internal consistency displayed on diagonal where appropriate. For gender, 1 = male, 2 = female. For apology and excuse, 0 = not present, 1 = present

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for each of the four conditions in Study 2

Condition	*M*	SD	Number
DV: expected work performance			
1. Apology only	3.47	0.62	38
2. Excuse only	3.56	0.47	15
3. Apology and excuse	3.70	0.75	81
4. No apology nor excuse	3.20	0.67	89
DV: prosocial intentions			
1. Apology only	3.60	1.22	38
2. Excuse only	3.11	1.14	15
3. Apology and excuse	3.99	1.04	80
4. No apology nor excuse	3.44	1.10	86

provision (yes, no) and apology provision (yes, no) as fixed factors. The model was significant [$F(3, 219) = 6.99$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$]; there was no effect of excuse provision and there was no interaction between apology and excuse provision, but results did demonstrate that victims reported greater previous interactions with people who provided an apology ($M = 3.39$, SD = 0.77) compared to transgressors who provided no apology ($M = 2.93$, SD = 0.84) [$F(1, 219) = 7.03$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$].

Discussion

The purpose of the studies reported in this paper was to bring the explanations literature to bear on an all-too-common workplace phenomenon, that of lateness to workplace meetings. In the explanations area, results from Study 1 indicated that, for both expected work performance and prosocial intentions, no explanation for a transgressive behavior (i.e., why one showed up late to a meeting) engendered more negative responses than providing an excuse. We also found in Study 1 that participants considered the habitually late person as being a worse performer at work than the rarely late person. Furthermore, participants were more likely to consider helping the rarely late person than the habitually late person. Regarding our research questions, we found that excuses compared to apologies produced higher expectations of work performance and prosocial intentions.

Participants who viewed a non-complaining group in Study 1 rated the late arrival (regardless of explanation type) more positively in terms of work performance, but complaining did not affect participants' prosocial intentions. The complaining of the group may have "infected" the participant with a generally negative attitude toward the late arrival, but the complaining did not have a strong enough effect to markedly influence behavioral intentions. In many group settings, emotional responses from one or more members can extend to other group members. Emotional contagion may explain these findings, as it is a process whereby people automatically tend to synchronize and mimic their verbal and nonverbal cues and behavior with another person, which results in the two people, or a group of people, sharing the same emotions and reactions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994).

In Study 2, results from Study 1 were largely replicated, although one key difference must be considered when relating the two studies. In Study 1, explanation type was a three-level factor comprised of apology, excuse, or no explanation, whereas in Study 2 there was a separate factor each for apology and excuse (both of which included two levels of provided, not provided). Therefore, although several conditions in Study 2 were the same as in Study 1, we also had one new condition of apology paired with an excuse. In terms of results, we first found that participants believed their co-workers who arrived late to a meeting and provided an excuse were higher-performing employees than late people who did not provide an excuse. This effect was significant when controlling for meeting relevance and familiarity with the late arrival, both of which are theoretically relevant control variables that have been demonstrated in previous work to affect reactions to behavioral transgressions. As in Study 1, there was no effect of apology provision.

Further in Study 2, we found that excuse and apology provision interacted on ratings of prosocial intentions, such that

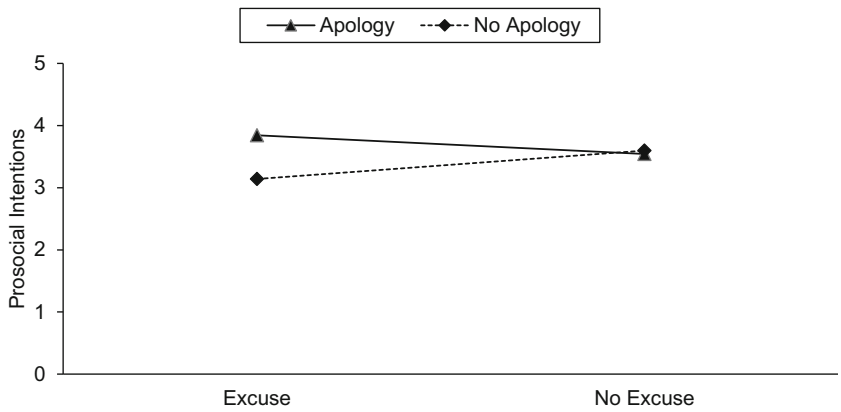

Fig. 1 The excuse × apology interaction found in Study 2. Offering an excuse and an apology produced the most benefit, whereas an excuse with no apology was detrimental. Without an excuse, apologies had no effect

apologies were most beneficial when paired with an excuse, and, indeed, an excuse was only effective when combined with an apology. Although the interactive results are encouraging, we are hesitant to draw any firm conclusions given the unequal cell sizes, modest effect, and the finding that the interaction was not significant without the control variables of meeting relevance and familiarity with the late arrival included in the model. Theoretically, people are more likely to help others with whom they already share a history of interactions or the prospect of continued interactions compared to strangers or individuals they may interact with only once (Greitemeyer, Rudolph, & Weiner, 2003). This theoretical proposition was supported by the strong correlation between familiarity with the late arrival and prosocial intentions (r = 0.45) in Study 2. As such, without accounting for the strong connection between pre-existing relationship and potential helping behaviors, it is possible that the interactive effect between apologies and excuses was obscured simply from a statistical standpoint. From a behavioral perspective, victim's expectations of an explanation and a transgressor's likelihood to explain might be influenced by their relationship prior to the transgression. In Study 2, victims indicated more familiarity with transgressors who apologized (M = 3.40) compared to those who did not (M = 2.93). Additional experimental studies that examine the interplay between apologies and excuses are needed that focus on situations in which the two co-occur, as the control offered by such designs could allow for more extensive control of the issue of pre-existing relationships.

In sum and with respect to explanations, we established that, in most cases, offering an excuse that shifts perceived responsibility for the cause of an event to an external force appears to produce more positive reactions among victims when compared to not offering an explanation or only apologizing. This effect persisted when accounting for a group's complaining behaviors and an individual's history with the transgression in question (Study 1) as well as the importance of the meeting and a victim's prior relationship with the transgressor (Study 2). Interestingly, we found no evidence to suggest that offering an apology provided any benefit over ignoring the transgression.

Although the power of an excuse was fairly consistent in the studies we reported on, other effects were less clear and raise an additional question: to what extent does the nature of the transgression influence responses to an explanation? We focused our studies on one specific transgression—lateness to a workplace meeting—yet perhaps more severe or personally significant transgressions could lead to a different pattern of results. Many studies in this research area use a critical incident technique to prompt participants to think of the last time someone did something that offended them at work and then to write the explanation offered by the transgressor (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Tata, 2002; Zheng, van Dijke, Leunissen, Giurge, & De Cremer, 2016). Much attention has been focused on the *explanation* but fairly little work has explored the properties of the event that is being explained.

Considering the nature of the transgression may shed some light on why apologies seemed to have no effect over ignoring arriving late. Specifically, lateness to a meeting may not be enough of a personal transgression—one in which the victim feels personally attacked or offended—for the transgressor to offer an effective, complete apology or for the victim to care if they received an apology. An effective apology must typically include an expression of remorse, an offer to repair the situation, and an acceptance of responsibility (Anderson, Linden, & Habra, 2006; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Förster, & Montada, 2004; Schumann, 2014). Transgressors could be less likely to dedicate the effort to crafting a full apology if they believe that their behavior was not severe or that the apology would provide little benefit (Schumann, 2018). Future work in this area could take a "flipped" approach wherein properties of the transgression are manipulated while the explanation is held constant (whereas usually the reverse is examined), and the results of which could help contribute to the question of how the transgression itself affects how people respond, regardless of the explanation.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

While our studies certainly prompt new questions and areas of investigation, our pattern of results expands on the existing literature in several ways. First, our findings suggest that how individuals behave in the meeting context can influence interpersonal relationships throughout the organization. Whereas earlier studies (e.g., Mroz & Allen, 2017; Rogelberg et al., 2014) examined the effects of arriving late versus not arriving late on experiences in the meeting, the present investigation extends to what individuals should do if they are late or otherwise engage in a transgressive meeting behavior. Consistent with findings reported by Luksyte, Waite, Avery, and Roy (2013), lateness behaviors can influence career-relevant outcomes such as advancement. In the current studies, habitual lateness was an exceptionally strong predictor of expected work performance. And, although the participants were not exclusively managers, additional research should extend these findings within a managerial sample. From a practical perspective, people who arrive late to meetings should take special care to offer an excuse or an apology if the situation presents itself.

Second, these findings have important implications for the explanations literature. Very few studies, if any, have examined how explanations function in a context involving groups. By focusing on group complaining, we provided one of many possible group-related factors that could influence how people respond to given explanations following a behavioral transgression. Explanations that are most effective in dyadic settings may not necessarily translate to group environments, and though not studied in the current paper, differences may be particularly prevalent with apologies. For instance, a central

component of an apology is to offer to repair to the situation and to behave better in the future (Schumann, 2018), yet that may be more difficult—and potentially less likely to be seen as sincere—when applied to an entire group of victims in a meeting context. Additionally, no study, to our knowledge, has explored the relative strength of apologies versus excuses versus no explanations in terms of mitigating the negative effects of a behavioral transgression. Despite finding near-consistent support that no explanation tended to produce the worst reactions, there may still be some situations and transgressions when not explaining the behavior could have benefits for the transgressor. We discuss some of these possibilities in the following section. We also demonstrated that an individual's history with transgressive behavior was an important factor in how people responded both attitudinally and, potentially, behaviorally to the transgressor.

Third, the findings from Study 2 raise some important questions concerning the applicability of the explanations literature to real social interactions. The literature includes quite clear, delineated definitions of excuses, apologies, and justifications. Although the current series of studies did not focus on justifications, in Study 2, we found that each explanation type in terms of apologies and excuses was not entirely independent of the other types. Participants very rarely reported that someone late to a meeting provided *only* an excuse or *only* an apology. Overwhelmingly (71% of all cases when an explanation was given), late arrivals gave an apology and an excuse—meaning that the actor initially accepted responsibility, and then subsequently attempted to shift responsibility for the event to an external force. This finding suggests that people may use explanations differently in actual social interactions (i.e., combine multiple explanations with seemingly contradictory functions) compared to isolated lab situations.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with all studies, there are number of limitations that must be considered before drawing solid conclusions. The first limitation of this paper is that the effect sizes we observed regarding the influence of explanations on post-transgression reactions were modest even when the effect was significant. In Study 1, as an example, the overall model of work performance explained approximately 19% of the variability, yet only 3% was accounted for by explanation type (compared to 16% by habitual lateness). Similarly, in Study 2, the one model predicted 30% of the variance in anticipated performance of a co-worker, but only 1–2% was accounted for by the explanation following arriving late to a meeting. Because these are relatively small effects, challenges may emerge in replicating the findings, particularly in more complex models, those that include fewer data points, or models that have greater nuance than those presented here.

That said, in the models tested here, intended helping behaviors and a colleague's expected performance at work are variables that can be affected by *many* factors, some of which were accounted for in these studies, and it is somewhat surprising that offering a very simple explanation after arriving late to a single meeting could have such a large effect on these more global outcomes, especially in Study 2 when participants rated a work colleague. Examining dependent variables more proximal to the transgression, such as ratings of the individual meeting or state affect at the time, would likely lead to stronger effect sizes and more shared variance between explanation types and dependent variable scores. Future research might take this approach to gauge the immediate effects of excuses as compared to apologies or no explanations. Additionally, given the prevalence of meeting lateness in organizations (i.e., about 40% of meetings, Rogelberg et al., 2014), any improvement in courteous behavior in relation to this very common workplace practice may prove meaningful in other ways.

Second, vignette studies such as Study 1, even video vignettes, suffer from a level of artificiality that is common across many experimental designs. We asked participants in Study 1 to report how they would behave in a given situation, not how they actually behaved in a lateness scenario. Although this design did allow a high level of control, thus eliminating many potentially confounding variables, the applicability of the findings to work environments is somewhat limited as a result. However, we addressed the limitations of Study 1 by conducting a survey in Study 2 wherein participants reported actual lateness scenarios. We largely replicated the primary findings of the experimental study in the survey. Additionally, we established other, difficult-to-manipulate factors (i.e., meeting relevance and familiarity with the late arrival) that affected how people responded to meeting lateness.

Third, to control for the effect of gender, the late arrival depicted in Study 1 was consistent across all conditions and was a woman. This control allows for the effects of gender to be ruled out as a potential confounding variable, but there is evidence to suggest that people respond differently to the same apology and context depending on whether a man or women offers the apology (e.g., Walfisch, Van Dijk, & Kark, 2013; Wei & Ran, 2017). It is possible that the pattern of results could be different if the late arrival were a man, or if the gender composition of the group were altered. For instance, Walfisch et al. (2013) reported that apologies were more effective for male versus female transgressors, and especially so when a man apologized to a woman. Despite that finding, we did not observe an effect of gender. In Study 2, participants reported the gender of the late arrival and that factor did not appear to influence how participants' reacted to meeting lateness, regardless of the gender of the participant. Nonetheless, future research should attempt to integrate work on gender and the explanations literature to provide a more complete picture of the interplay between these factors.

Fourth, previous work on meeting lateness suggests that how late someone is has a large effect on how individuals react to the late arrival, with stronger reactions following greater lateness (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Rogelberg, 2018; Mroz & Allen, 2017; Rogelberg et al., 2014). In Study 1, we held lateness across all conditions constant at 10 min for two main reasons. First, if we had varied lateness with even two levels (perhaps 5 min and 10 min), the design may have been too cumbersome to interpret with at least 24 conditions. Second, past research indicates that most negative effects of lateness begin at around 10 min and increases as lateness increases so, to ensure a strong enough effect, we set lateness to 10 min. Likewise, Rogelberg et al. (2014) found that when someone is late to a meeting, the meeting leader typically waits to begin the meeting until the late person arrives, which is why we included that component in our experiment. In Study 2, the survey of actual work experiences, participants reported whether someone other than themselves arrived late, and then they attempted to estimate how late (in minutes). Of participants who recalled how late someone arrived, the average degree of lateness was 8 min. Participants did not report if the meeting had already started when the late person arrived. Future research should explore if the type of explanation that best minimizes negative responses to lateness varies depending on whether the meeting has started. For example, it is possible that providing no explanation may be preferable to an excuse or an apology when a meeting has already started because providing an explanation could draw attention to the lateness. Concurrently, no work, to our knowledge, has explored the effects of arriving late to an already-started meeting, and it is possible that the negative effects observed for late-starting meetings could be diminished.

Conclusion

Given the ubiquity of meetings in organizations as well as the prevalence of lateness to those meetings, the forgoing studies are a timely treatment of the attitudinal and attributional effects of others toward the late arrivers. Theoretically speaking, the studies demonstrate that commonplace mundane interactions in organizations appear to create changes in intentions toward others, extending the attribution theory. Practically speaking, the studies demonstrate that individuals in organizations should not overlook or underestimate the importance of timeliness and the behaviors associated with excuses given for lateness. Our hope is that these studies further inspire others to investigate the nuances of the prevalent workplace activity of the meeting.

Acknowledgements We thank Molly Grant-Leanna for her work and assistance in recording the videos used in this paper.

Appendix

Underlined text was varied to change group complaining, bold indicates whether the arrival is habitually or rarely late, and italicized text represents what the late arrival said after arriving.

Example: Complaining × habitually late × excuse

Attendee 2_1: This is ridiculous. I can't believe we're still waiting on Kathleen.
Attendee 1: **That's just Kathleen. She is always late to stuff like this.**
Attendee 2_2: Really? I think people should try to be on-time. I hope she gets here soon.
Attendee 3: This meeting is a waste of time anyway.
Late arrival: *Okay, I made it. My boss gave me something to do right before the meeting was scheduled to start, and I had to finish it before coming. Thanks for waiting. Ready to get started?*

Alternative lines for complaining (underlined): $A2_1$: I wonder if Kathleen will get here soon. We really should start; $A2_2$: Oh, maybe she will get here soon; A3: We might not need all the time during the meeting anyway.

Alternative lines for lateness (italicized): *None*: Okay, I made it. Thanks for waiting. Ready to get started? *Apology*: Okay, I made it. I am so sorry that I am late. It's completely my fault. I just lost track of time. Thanks for waiting. Ready to get started?

Alternative lines for habitual lateness (bolded): A1: It's unlike Kathleen to be late. She is usually on-time.

References

Alicke, M. D. (1992). Culpable causation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*, 368–378. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.63.3.368.

Allen, J. A., & Rogelberg, S. G. (2013). Manager-led group meetings: A context for promoting employee engagement. *Group and Organization Management, 38*, 543–569. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601113503040.

Allen, J. A., Beck, T., Scott, C. W., & Rogelberg, S. G. (2014). Understanding workplace meetings: A qualitative taxonomy of meeting purposes. *Management Research Review, 37*, 791–814. https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-03-2013-0067.

Allen, J. A., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., & Rogelberg, S. G. (2015). *The Cambridge handbook of meeting science*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Allen, J. A., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., & Rogelberg, S. G. (2018). Let's get this meeting started: Meeting lateness and actual meeting outcomes. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, advance online publication, 39*, 1008–1021. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2276.

Anderson, J. C., Linden, W., & Habra, M. E. (2006). Influence of apologies and trait hostility on recovery from anger. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 29*, 347–358. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-006-9062-7.

Aquino, K., Tripp, T. M., & Bies, R. J. (2006). Getting even or moving on? Power, procedural justice, and types of offense as predictors of revenge, forgiveness, reconciliation, and avoidance in organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 653–668. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.3.653.

Bachman, G. F., & Guerrero, L. K. (2006). Forgiveness, apology, and communicative responses to hurtful events. *Communication Reports, 19*, 45–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/08934210600586357.

Becker, T. E. (2005). Potential problems in the statistical control of variables in organizational research: A qualitative analysis with recommendations. *Organizational Research Methods, 8*, 274–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428105278021.

Becker, T. E., Atinc, G., Breaugh, J. A., Carlson, K. D., Edwards, J. R., & Spector, P. E. (2016). Statistical control in correlational studies: 10 essential recommendations for organizational researchers. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 37*, 157–167. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2053.

Berkowitz, L., & Donnerstein, E. (1982). External validity is more than skin deep: Some answers to criticisms of laboratory experiments. *American Psychologist, 37*, 245–257. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.37.3.245.

Bies, R. J., & Shapiro, D. L. (1987). Interactional fairness judgments: The influence of causal accounts. *Social Justice Research, 1*, 199–218. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01048016.

Bies, R. J., & Sitkin, S. B. (1992). Explanation as legitimization: Excuse-making in organizations. In M. L. McLaughin, M. J. Cody, & S. Read (Eds.), *Explaining one's self to others: Reason giving in a social context* (pp. 183–198). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Bies, R. J., Shapiro, D. L., & Cummings, L. L. (1988). Causal accounts and managing organizational conflict: Is it enough to say it's not my fault? *Communication Research, 15*, 381–399. https://doi.org/10.1177/009365088015004003.

Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's mechanical Turk: A new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data? *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 6*, 3–5. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691610393980.

Cheng, P. W., & Holyoak, K. J. (1985). Pragmatic reasoning schemas. *Cognitive Psychology, 17*, 391–416. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(85)90014-3.

Crant, J. M., & Bateman, T. S. (1993). Assignment of credit and blame for performance outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal, 36*, 7–22. https://doi.org/10.2307/256510.

Cushman, F. (2013). Action, outcome, and value: A dual-system framework for morality. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 17*, 273–292. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868313495594.

Cushman, F., & Young, L. (2011). Patterns of moral judgment derive from nonmoral psychological representations. *Cognitive Science, 35*(6), 1052–1075. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1551-6709.2010.01167.x.

Eaton, J., & Struthers, C. W. (2006). The reduction of psychological aggression across varied interpersonal contexts through repentance and forgiveness. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*, 195–206. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20119.

Eriksen, J., & Dyer, L. (2004). Right from the start: Exploring the effects of early team events on subsequent project team development and performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 49*, 438–471. https://doi.org/10.2307/4131442.

Exline, J. J., Baumeister, R. F., Zell, A. L., Kraft, A. J., & Witvliet, C. V. O. (2008). Not so innocent: Does seeing one's own capability for wrongdoing predict forgiveness? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 496–515. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.3.495.

Falk, A., & Heckman, J. J. (2009). Lab experiments are a major source of knowledge in the social sciences. *Science, 326*, 535–538. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1168244.

Feldman, D. C. (1984). The development and enforcement of group norms. *Academy of Management Review, 9*, 47–53. https://doi.org/10.2307/258231.

Fisher, M. L., & Exline, J. J. (2006). Self-forgiveness versus excusing: The roles of remorse, effort, and acceptance of responsibility. *Self and Identity, 5*, 127–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860600586123.

Galesic, M. (2006). Dropouts on the web: Effects of interest and burden experienced during an online survey. *Journal of Official Statistics, 22*, 313–328.

Galesic, M., & Bosnjak, M. (2009). Effects of questionnaire length on participation and indicators of response quality in a web survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 73*, 349–360. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfp031.

Gersick, C. J. (1988). Time and transition in work teams: Toward a new model of group development. *Academy of Management Journal, 31*, 9–41. https://doi.org/10.2307/256496.

Greitemeyer, T., Rudolph, U., & Weiner, B. (2003). Whom would you rather help: An acquaintance not responsible for her plight or a responsible sibling? *The Journal of Social Psychology, 143*, 331–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224540309598448.

Hagger, M. S., Rentzelas, P., & Koch, S. (2014). Evaluating group member behaviour under individualist and collectivist norms. *Small Group Research, 45*, 217–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496414525479.

Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J., & Rapson, R. L. (1994). *Emotional contagion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hilton, D. J., McClure, J., & Sutton, R. M. (2010). Selecting explanations from causal chains: Do statistical principles explain preferences for voluntary causes? *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*, 383–400.

Hoerger, M. (2010). Participant dropout as a function of survey length in internet-mediated university studies: Implications for study design and voluntary participation in psychological research. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking, 13*, 697–700. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0445.

Jones, E. E., & Harris, V. A. (1967). The attribution of attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 3*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(67)90034-0.

Kauffeld, S., & Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2011). Meetings matter. *Small Group Research, 43*, 130–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496411429599.

Kauffeld, S., & Meyers, R. A. (2009). Complaint and solution-oriented circles: Interaction patterns in work group discussions. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 18*, 267–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320701693209.

Lagnado, D. A., & Channon, S. (2008). Judgments of cause and blame: The effects of intentionality and foreseeability. *Cognition, 108*, 754–770. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2008.06.009.

Landers, R. N., & Behrend, T. S. (2015). An inconvenient truth: Arbitrary distinctions between organizational, mechanical Turk, and other convenience samples. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 8*, 142–164. https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2015.13.

Lepine, J. A., & Van Dyne, L. (2001). Peer responses to low performers: An attributional model of helping in the context of groups. *Academy of Management Review, 26*, 67–84. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2001.4011953.

Luksyte, A., Waite, E., Avery, D. R., & Roy, R. (2013). Held to a different standard: Racial differences in the impact of lateness on advancement opportunity. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 86*, 142–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12010.

Mroz, J. E., & Allen, J. A. (2017). An experimental investigation of the interpersonal ramifications of lateness to workplace meetings. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 90*, 508–534. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12183.

Ohbuchi, K., Kameda, M., & Agarie, N. (1989). Apology as aggression control: Its role in mediating appraisal of and response to harm. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56*, 219–227. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.56.2.219.

Paolacci, G., Chandler, J., & Ipeirotis, P. G. (2010). Running experiments on Amazon mechanical Turk. *Judgment and Decision making, 5*, 411–419.

Podsakoff, N. P., Whiting, S. W., Podsakoff, P. M., & Blume, B. D. (2009). Individual- and organizational-level consequences of organizational citizenship behaviors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 94*, 122–141. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013079.

Pontari, B. A., Schlenker, B. R., & Christopher, A. N. (2002). Excuses and character: Identifying the problematic aspects of excuses. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 21*, 497–516. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.21.5.497.22621.

Rogelberg, S. G., Leach, D. J., Warr, P. B., & Burnfield, J. L. (2006). "Not another meeting!" Are meeting time demands related to employee well-being? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 86–96. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.1.83.

Rogelberg, S. G., Scott, C. W., Agypt, B., Williams, J., Kello, J. E., McCausland, T., & Olien, J. L. (2014). Lateness to meetings: Examination of an unexplored temporal phenomenon. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 23*, 323–341. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2012.745988.

Rudolph, U., Roesch, S., Greitemeyer, T., & Weiner, B. (2004). A meta-analytic review of help giving and aggression from an attributional perspective: Contributions to a general theory of motivation. *Cognition & Emotion, 18*, 815–848. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930341000248.

Sawyer, J. E. (1992). Goal and process clarity: Specification of multiple constructs of role ambiguity and a structural equation model of their antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 77*, 130–143.

Schlenker, B. R. (1997). Personal responsibility: Applications of the triangle model. In L. L. Cummings & B. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 19, pp. 241–301). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Schlenker, B. R., Pontari, B. A., & Christopher, A. N. (2001). Excuses and character: Personal and social implications of excuses. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5*, 15–32. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0501_2.

Schmitt, M., Gollwitzer, M., Förster, N., & Montada, L. (2004). Effects of objective and subjective account components on forgiving. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 144*, 465–486. https://doi.org/10.3200/socp.144.5.465-486.

Schumann, K. (2014). An affirmed self and a better apology: The effect of self-affirmation on transgressors' responses to victims. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 54*, 89–96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.04.013.

Schumann, K. (2018). The psychology of offering an apology: Understanding the barriers to apologizing and how to overcome them. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 27*, 74–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417741709.

Scott, M. B., & Lyman, S. M. (1968). Accounts. *American Sociological Review, 33*, 46–62. https://doi.org/10.2307/2092239.

Shaw, J. C., Wild, E., & Colquitt, J. A. (2003). To justify or excuse?: A meta-analytic review of the effects of explanations. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*, 444–458. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.3.444.

Sitkin, S. B., & Bies, R. J. (1993). Social accounts in conflict situations: Using explanations to manage conflict. *Human Relations, 46*, 349–370. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872679304600303.

Sloman, S. A., & Hagmayer, Y. (2006). The causal psycho-logic of choice. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 10*, 407412. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2006.07.001.

Snyder, C. R., & Higgins, R. L. (1988). Excuses: Their effective role in the negotiation of reality. *Psychological Bulletin, 104*, 23–35. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.104.1.23.

Tata, J. (2002). The influence of managerial accounts on employees' reactions to negative feedback. *Group & Organization Management, 27*(4), 480–503. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601102238358.

Tavuchis, N. (1991). Mea culpa: A sociology of apology and reconciliation. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Taylor, J. R. (2006). Coorientation: A conceptual framework. In F. Cooren, J. R. Taylor, & E.J. van Every (Eds.), *Communication as organizing. Empirical and theoretical explorations in the dynamic of text and conversation* (pp. 141–156.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tedeschi, J. T., & Reiss, M. (1981). Verbal strategies in impression management. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *The psychology of ordinary explanations of social behavior* (pp. 271–309). London: Academic.

Tyler, J. M., & Feldman, R. S. (2007). The double-edged sword of excuses: When do they help, when do they hurt. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 26*, 659–688. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2007.26.6.659.

Van Lange, P. A. M., & Rusbult, C. E. (2012). Interdependence theory. In P. A. M. van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 251–272). Los Angeles: Sage.

Walfisch, T., Van Dijk, D., & Kark, R. (2013). Do you really expect me to apologize? The impact of status and gender on the effectiveness of an apology in the workplace. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43*, 1446–1458. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12101.

Wei, H., & Ran, Y. (2017). Male versus female: How the gender of apologizers influences consumer forgiveness. *Journal of Business Ethics*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3440-7.

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review, 92*, 548–573. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.92.4.548.

Weiner, B. (1995). *Judgments of responsibility*. New York: Guilford Press.

Weiner, B. (2001). Responsibility for social transgressions: An attributional analysis. In B. F. Malle, L. J. Moses, & D. A. Baldwin (Eds.), *Intentions and intentionality: Foundations of social cognition* (pp. 331–344). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Weiner, B. (2006). *Social motivation, justice, and the moral emotions: An attributional approach*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Weiner, B., Graham, S., & Chandler, C. (1982). Pity, anger, and guilt: An attributional analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 8*, 226–232. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167282082007.

Weiner, B., Graham, S., & Reyna, C. (1997). An attributional examination of retributive versus utilitarian philosophies of punishment. *Social Justice Research, 10*, 431–452. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02683293.

Wickens, C. M., Wisenthal, D. L., Flora, D. B., & Flett, G. L. (2011). Understanding driver anger and aggression: Attributional theory in the driving environment. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied, 17*, 354–370. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025815.

Zheng, X., van Dijke, M., Leunissen, J. M., Giurge, L. M., & De Cremer, D. (2016). When saying sorry may not help: Transgressor power moderates the effect of an apology on forgiveness in the workplace. *Human Relations, 69*, 1387–1418. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715611236.