Helicopter helping in the organization: its conceptualization, key characteristics and possible antecedents and consequences

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Abstract

Purpose – Since its inception, helping behavior has been viewed as a cooperative and affiliative behavior with prudent employee involvement. The paradox of employee involvement, however, implies that helping behavior can be intrusive and obstructive. The primary purpose of this article is to conceptualize helicopter helping as an intrusive and obstructive type of discretionary workplace behavior. In addition, the authors discuss possible antecedents and consequences of helicopter helping.

Design/methodology/approach – To conceptualize helicopter helping, the authors utilized the ABI/INFORM Global, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES and JSTOR Archive Collection databases focusing on the helping behavior and helicopter parenting research. In particular, the authors applied the hovering nature of helicopter parenting to the conceptualization of helicopter helping exhibited by an employee in the organization. Additionally, the authors discuss antecedents and consequences of helicopter helping by integrating the bright and dark side of helping behavior research.

Findings – The authors conceptualize helicopter helping as an employee's excessive involvement in and interference with coworkers' task environment. Based upon the conceptualization of helicopter helping, the authors further propose that the need for achievement, Type-A personality, group rewards, high-performance group norms, a hierarchy organizational culture and strong social ties are possible antecedents of helicopter helping. Furthermore, the authors suggest that helicopter helping can result in reduced organization-based self-esteem, general self-efficacy, group creativity and innovation, quality of social-exchange relationships, learning and development and increased organizational vulnerability.

Originality/value – This article is one of the few studies exploring helping behavior from an intrusive and invasive perspective. Theoretically, the authors advance the dark side of helping behavior literature. Drawing upon the propositions, the authors offer some managerial recommendations that help managers mitigate the intrusive and obstructive type of helping in the organization.

Keywords Helicopter helping, Helping behavior, Hovering behaviors

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As competition continues to intensify, organizations have long been recognizing the value of employees' discretionary action aimed at helping coworkers with their tasks. Such a behavior has often been referred to as helping behavior. According to Dalal and Sheng (2019), helping

behavior is an individual's behavior that directly and intentionally attempts to help a coworker with task-related problems. Helping behavior is important because it provides an additional resource to the organization's task environment. Additionally, helping behavior is predictive of positive outcomes such as job performance (Klotz *et al.*, 2018) and individual well-being (Lee *et al.*, 2019). It is important to note that helping behavior can generate positive outcomes because of employee involvement (Organ, 1988). In particular, helping behavior results from employees' active involvement (Kim *et al.*, 2013; Lemmon and Wayne, 2015). Such an active involvement may stem from self-directed goals (impression management) or other-directed functions (concern for others) (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, employees' passive involvement may also lead to helping behavior. For instance, employees may feel the pressure of engaging in helping behavior resulting from the group and/or managerial expectations (Lin *et al.*, 2019; Somech and Bogler, 2019; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007).

Whether helping behavior results from employee active or passive involvement, helping behavior is generally considered affiliative and cooperative (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2017; Grant and Mayer, 2009). Hence, helping behavior has been treated as a gentle, prudent, unobtrusive act by prior research. Nonetheless, helping behavior can sometimes be damaging. For instance, when help is given without any evidence indicating the target's need for help, it can threaten the target's freedom of action and, therefore, leads to adverse emotions (Nadler, 2015). Hence, helping behavior, even with good intentions, may become particularly detrimental when it is overly and deliberately demonstrated (Human *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, helping behavior can become dysfunctional when the actor's involvement in the target's performance context results from a desire to gain control and influence the work environment (Sun *et al.*, 2021). When observing various organizational practices, one can notice some possible contexts where helping behavior becomes intrusive and obstructive. For example, many organizations utilize institutionalized socialization to facilitate newcomer adjustment and adaption (Fang *et al.*, 2011). Institutionalized socialization, however, involves using tactics and norms to reinforce conformity and maintain the status quo (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, organizational socialization processes, especially highly institutionalized ones, can provide a platform for organizational insiders to be overly and deliberately involved in newcomers' performance context. In addition to institutionalized socialization, mentoring as an intense interpersonal relationship (Kram, 1985) can potentially result in a mentor's overinvolvement in, overprotection of and hovering over a protégé (Eby *et al.*, 2000).

The above examples offer some insight into conditions where helping behavior can become intrusive and obstructive due to the paradox of employee involvement. Although the literature has provided some illustrations of how helping behavior can generate adverse outcomes such as role overload, job strain and work-family conflict (Bolino *et al.*, 2010, 2015; Bolino and Turnley, 2005), it is comparatively less known about helping behavior as an unhelpful act (Dalal and Sheng, 2019). We argue that a distinction between helpful and unhelpful helping may be that the actor who has good intentions does not comprehend the proper degree of involvement in a particular situation of the target. As such, our overarching purpose in this article is to introduce a new concept called helicopter helping that describes an employee's well-intended yet overly involved helping. Understanding helicopter helping as an unhelpful act is vital because unhelpful help is a cause for concern in many organizational contexts (Dalal and Sheng, 2019). More importantly, as overall organizational performance often depends on employees' helping behavior, the concept of helicopter helping introduced in this article offers managers insights into preventing unhelpful help that may jeopardize organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Literature review
Before discussing helicopter helping in the organization, we provide a brief review of the helping behavior and helicopter parenting literature. When reviewing the literature, we placed an

emphasis on what helping behavior and helicopter parenting are because this allowed us to synergize and formulate the concept of helicopter helping. Moreover, we focused on reviewing the functional and exchange-based theoretical underpinnings of helping behavior because helping behavior typically occurs when one seeks to fulfill an underlying motive in an exchange relationship (Rioux and Penner, 2001). Furthermore, we reviewed different types of helping behavior as it enabled us to understand how helping may be exhibited.

To conduct the review of the literature, we utilized the ABI/INFORM Global, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, PsycARTICLES and JSTOR Archive Collection databases with the following keywords: helping behavior, altruism, extra-role behavior, organizational citizenship behaviors, contextual performance, helicopter parenting and parental control. Although our database search focused on peer-reviewed articles without specifying publication date ranges, our goal was not to provide a comprehensive review of all the relevant research. Instead, our goal was to highlight critical research areas that help us formulate helicopter helping in the organizational setting. Hence, we excluded prior studies focusing on helping behavior in a non-employment context. Additionally, because we viewed helping behavior as a discretionary behavior aimed at helping a coworker with task-related problems (Dalal and Sheng, 2019), we excluded prior research that examined helping behavior through the lens of volunteering and social work. It is also noteworthy that our database search did not yield any prior study that discusses concepts related to helicopter helping.

Helping behavior: the functional and exchange-based theoretical underpinnings
Conceptually speaking, helping behavior refers to an individual's direct and intentional contributions to a coworker's organizational task performance (Dalal and Sheng, 2019). Helping behavior is vital to organizational effectiveness and efficiency because many organizations are unable to foresee the scope of resources needed for attaining organizational goals (Chou *et al.*, 2021). As such, helping behavior serves as an additional vital organizational resource that fosters efficient and effective organizational functioning (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019). Because the voluntary deployment of personal resources used to benefit others is embedded in the process of helping others, the self-sacrificing nature of helping behavior has intrigued scholars' searching for the motives for helping. Perhaps due to its voluntarism, helping behavior has been understood from a functional perspective (Clary *et al.*, 1992, 1998), which focuses on identifying the underlying reasons, purposes, plans and goals that motivate individuals to exhibit and sustain specific actions (Snyder, 1993). For instance, it has been shown that self-directed motivations, such as impression management (Westphal *et al.*, 2012), love for money (Tang *et al.*, 2008) and organizational reward (Bamberger and Levi, 2009), are responsible for the occurrence of helping behavior. Additionally, demonstrating helping behavior may allow an actor to fulfill certain other-directed motivations such as empathic concern (Wilhelm and Bekkers, 2010), prosocial motives (Jia *et al.*, 2021) and prosocial personality traits (Ruci *et al.*, 2018). Clearly, the functional perspective of helping behavior allows us to understand how individuals' underlying goals and reasons partly determine helping behavior. This perspective, therefore, can be useful for understanding the underlying motives for helicopter helping.

Another prominent theoretical underpinning for helping behavior research is social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). The social exchange perspective of helping behavior research draws upon the notion of the norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and demonstrates that individuals' helping behavior is determined by how much help they have received from others in the past and/or whether they will receive help from coworkers in the future (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2016; Deckop *et al.*, 2003; Jiang and Law, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2017; Yin, 2018). Due to its ability to explain social phenomena from the perspective of sequential behavioral exchanges (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017), a few exchange-based theories that were built upon

social exchange principles have also been utilized by prior helping behavior research. For example, Seers' (1989) team-member exchange has been employed by prior helping behavior research, which has consistently shown that the perceived quality of reciprocal exchange between an individual and other members in the team is predictive of overall helping behavior in the team (Banks *et al.*, 2014; Farmer *et al.*, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2011). Like team-member exchange, leader-member exchange (Graen and Cashman, 1975) provides a solid base for prior research, which has demonstrated that the quality of the relationship between a leader and subordinate affects the subordinate's helping behavior (Erdogan *et al.*, 2015; Tse *et al.*, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2017). In sum, the exchange-based helping behavior research focuses heavily on exploring the quality of exchange relationship between two individuals and how such a relationship determines helping behavior. Consequently, the exchange perspective of helping behavior enables us to explore if certain interpersonal interactions may result in one's constant demonstration of an intrusive type of helping, such as helicopter helping.

Types of helping behavior
Regardless of what motivates helping behavior, helping behavior can be demonstrated in various types. For instance, when help is given by the actor to the target without an explicit request, the actor assumes that the target needs help. This type of helping has been labeled as assumptive help (Schneider *et al.*, 1996), which may hinder the target's freedom of action (Nadler, 2015). Nadler (1997) suggested that one can offer a complete task-related solution to a coworker (dependent help) or allow a coworker to help him- or herself by only providing guidance (autonomous help). Vigoda-Gadot (2006) focused on a dark and destructive perspective and proposed compulsory organizational citizenship behavior, which encompasses an involuntary type of helping behavior due to coercive or compulsory forces within the organization. Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) classified helping behavior into proactive and reactive helping. Extending Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) work, Chou and Stauffer (2016) categorized helping behavior into unsolicited proactive helping behavior, unsolicited reactive helping behavior and solicited reactive helping.

Although our review of the helping behavior literature shows that helping behavior can be exhibited in different types, helping behavior essentially requires employee involvement, whether it is active or passive. Additionally, the concept of assumptive help seems to be relevant to helicopter helping. Nonetheless, extant literature has continuously maintained the view that helping behavior is a gentle and prudent act. In this article, we propose that helping behavior in an exchange and dyadic relationship may become intrusive and obstructive when an actor's involvement becomes excessive, which we label as helicopter helping. To further discuss helicopter helping, we draw upon the helicopter parenting literature.

Helicopter parenting
In a parent-child dynamic, parental involvement plays a vital role in the emerging adults' subsequent life outcomes. When parents are overly involved in their children's lives, they are often viewed as engaging in helicopter parenting. According to Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012), helicopter parenting refers to the parenting behavior characterized by being overinvolved and overprotective. Some behavioral examples of helicopter parenting include, but are not limited to, providing substantial financial, physical and emotional support, intervening in the child's affairs and making decisions for the child (Cline and Fay, 1990; LeMoyne and Buchanan, 2011; Odenweller *et al.*, 2014; Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2012). Although helicopter parenting involves being overinvolved and overprotective, an important characteristic is that parents engaging in helicopter parenting often have good intentions (Reed *et al.*, 2016). These good intentions often prevent helicopter parents from viewing over-parenting negatively (Segrin *et al.*, 2015). Even with the good intentions, helicopter parenting

is associated with several negative outcomes experienced by the emerging adult such as increased depression (Schiffrin *et al.*, 2014), reduced life satisfaction (Reed *et al.*, 2016), lowered self-efficacy (Darlow *et al.*, 2017) and decreased well-being (Kouros *et al.*, 2017).

As helicopter parenting reflects an over-involving and over-controlling type of parental support and assistance in situations that do not warrant involvement (Kouros *et al.*, 2017), it offers conceptual relevance to an intrusive and obstructive type of helping behavior in the organization. In the next section, we provide a conceptualization of helicopter helping by integrating and synergizing the helping behavior and helicopter parenting literature. Additionally, we discuss some key characteristics of helicopter helping. Finally, we seek to identify possible antecedents and consequences of helicopter helping in the organization.

Conceptualizing helicopter helping in the organization

Conceptually, helping behavior is an intentional act that directly contributes to a coworker's task-related performance (Dalal and Sheng, 2019). While the types of help provided may differ across different helping contexts, helping behavior requires an employee to go out of his or her way intentionally to contribute to a coworker's task performance (De Clercq *et al.*, 2020). Hence, a helping context provides an underlying opportunity for one to be involved in others' work context. Meanwhile, the scope of employee involvement at work may range from a mild to strong intent to influence (Markey and Townsend, 2013). When a strong involvement is exerted, it signifies an employee's strong and active desire to influence a certain task environment (Morgan and Zeffane, 2003). On the basis of strong employee involvement, it is likely that an employee becomes excessively and overly involved in the completion of coworkers' tasks consistently, which we label as helicopter helping. Similar to the concept of helicopter parenting, which is characterized as overinvolved and overprotective parenting behaviors (Cui *et al.*, 2019a), helicopter helping refers to a discretionary yet overinvolved workplace behavior aimed at assisting a coworker with task completion. In other words, helicopter helping is an overly proactive behavior that focuses on taking charge of others' tasks constantly, solving task-related problems for coworkers regularly, intervening in coworkers' work processes persistently and/or influencing coworkers' work-related decisions routinely.

Key characteristics of helicopter helping

Given the conceptualization of helicopter helping, there are several noticeable key characteristics of helicopter helping that align well with the characteristics of helicopter parenting. First, although helicopter parenting often has a negative connotation (Kwon *et al.*, 2017), it does not indicate harmful parenting intentions. In fact, helicopter parenting is often triggered by benevolent intentions (Kwon *et al.*, 2016) and a genuine and caring impetus (Kouros *et al.*, 2017). Similar to parents engaging in helicopter parenting, employees who engage in helicopter helping have positive intentions to provide interpersonal support for others and protect others from possible harm and destruction. As such, the first prominent characteristic of helicopter helping is the actor's altruistic and prosocial intentions. That is, helicopter helping is not dependent upon the exchange of favor and contingency rewards. Instead, helicopter helping is triggered by pure paternalism, which is an individual's innate tendency to care more about a target than does the target him- or herself (Doepke and Zilibotti, 2017). In other words, helicopter helping is exhibited based on a strong desire and enduring intention to contribute as an organizational citizen. It is, however, this strong desire and enduring intention to contribute that entices an actor into becoming overinvolved in others' performance context.

Oftentimes, parents engaging in helicopter parenting utilize this type of behavior to ensure psychological control, parental warmth and child compliance (Padilla-Walker *et al.*, 2021). Thus, helicopter parenting is manifested by the parents' continued influence (Reed

et al., 2016). Like helicopter parenting, helicopter helping is manifested by an employee's direct and intentional influence or even control of the behaviors of other organizational members. Hence, the second characteristic of helicopter helping is its direct and intentional involvement in others' task environment that does not differ much in strength across various individual and contextual settings. Said differently, employees who engage in helicopter helping consistently get involved in others' task performance without considering differences in the target and appropriateness of the context. Although the need to intervene and render help may result from a positive intention, the actor's lack of consideration placed on individual differences and contextual appropriateness can be perceived as being intrusive, obstructive and hindering by others.

Much like helicopter parenting, helicopter helping often can lead to undesirable consequences even with positive intentions. As mentioned previously, helicopter parenting describes a parent's overattentive and overinvolved caring practices (Peluchette *et al.*, 2013). The overattentive and overinvolved caring style can further cause several developmental issues, such as a reduced sense of autonomy and competence (Schiffrin *et al.*, 2019), feelings of academic burnout (Love *et al.*, 2020) and decreased well-being (Cui *et al.*, 2019b). Much like helicopter parents, employees engaging in helicopter helping neglect using their help to enable others to learn, grow and develop regardless of whether help is solicited. Hence, the third characteristic of helicopter helping is that it may result in undesirable outcomes due to its intrusive, obstructive and hindering nature.

Given the above key characteristics of helicopter helping, consider the following hypothetical example. Dr. Jane is a faculty member with several years of teaching experience in the current school. She is passionate about teaching her students, as well as providing assistance and support to her colleagues with and without solicitations due to her caring and altruistic nature (1st characteristic of helicopter helping). Whenever a new faculty joins the school, Dr. Jane's strong desire and impetus to be an organizational citizen reinforces her to provide assistance and support to other faculty members even without solicitations, intervene in other faculty's decision-making processes consistently and offer recommendations proactively that prevent other faculty members from learning by themselves (2nd characteristic of helicopter helping). Dr. Jane continues to be involved in other faculty's performance contexts even after those new faculty members have gained meaningful experience throughout their tenure. Hence, some faculty members even feel that Dr. Jane can sometimes be too involved in others' performance and, therefore, often view Dr. Jane's help as intrusive, obstructive and hindering (3rd characteristic of helicopter helping).

Possible antecedents of helicopter helping
Individual-level antecedents
Even though helping behavior can be found in various situations, it seems to be relatively consistent with certain personality traits (Lefevor and Fowers, 2016; Ruci *et al.*, 2018). As such, helicopter helping may also be related to certain personality traits. In particular, because helicopter helping takes place when an employee is excessively and overly involved in completing coworkers' tasks consistently, it seems relevant to one's need for achievement. Conceptually, the need for achievement describes an individual's aspiration to accomplish challenging tasks and willingness to put effort forth to attain excellence (Moneta, 2011). Additionally, individuals who have the need for achievement tend to experience more positive affect and motivation when facing challenging issues and challenging tasks (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2005). The need for achievement, therefore, may reinforce individuals to seek personal fulfillment, progress and responsibilities constantly due to a need to experience confidence in their abilities and capacity in producing desired outcomes (Hart and Albarracin, 2009). Moreover, from a cognitive-affective perspective (Mischel and Shoda, 1995), the need for

achievement may trigger high-need-for-achievement individuals' cognitive and affective desires to understand their achievement-related outcomes (Thibault-Landry *et al.*, 2017). The desire for satisfying achievement needs can then motivate high-need-for-achievement individuals to not only perform personal tasks at higher levels, but also hover over others' task performance.

According to Vergès *et al.* (2021), individuals with a Type-A personality are characterized by having time urgency, displaying a competitive nature, possessing a strong drive and seeking fulfilling achievement needs. In other words, individuals who have a Type-A personality are naturally ambitious and competitive. Because the Type-A personality is often related to one's strong ambition for success and competitiveness, individuals with this personality are more likely to take on an extra workload due to their competitiveness and achievement orientation (Bruck and Allen, 2003). The Type-A personality, therefore, is likely to activate an individual's desire to handle different tasks and resolve issues on a regular basis even if they are not directly responsible for completing the tasks and resolving the issues. For example, if an individual with a Type-A personality works in a grocery store with another individual who conducts a daily inventory count at a slower pace due to task mentality, the Type-A individual may hover over the other individual's task performance by helping the other individual speed up the pace. Meanwhile, if hovering over the other individual's task performance does not speed up the task performance, the Type-A individual may even take over and perform the inventory count for the other individual who is originally assigned to the task. Clearly, the above examples demonstrate how the Type-A personality can resemble helicopter helping. Given the above discussion, we propose the following:

P1. The greater need for achievement an individual has, the more likely the individual engages in helicopter helping.

P2. The greater the Type-A personality an individual has, the more likely the individual engages in helicopter helping.

Group-level antecedents
As competition intensifies, the use of groups to accomplish organizational tasks has become popular (Chou and Chang, 2016). Indeed, groups play a crucial role in the decision-making process (Super *et al.*, 2016), organizational innovation (Gibson and Gibbs, 2006) and overall organizational performance (Cohen and Bailey, 1997). Given the advantages associated with the use of groups, organizations are often prone to utilize group rewards to motivate group performance and productivity (Super *et al.*, 2016). Hence, group rewards provide a basis for a group to exert increased task-related effort, including prosocial behaviors. For example, group performance-based pay is a group reward system that helps facilitate the engagement of prosocial behaviors within the group. This is because group rewards serve as an interdependent outcome that can only be achieved through collective outcomes (De Dreu, 2007). As such, group rewards may trigger an individual's desire to maintain tight control over others' task performance and be overinvolved in others' task contexts without allowing other group members to exert task-related effort. In other words, individuals, especially those who are more capable in a group that pursues desirable group rewards, are prone to exhibit obtrusive hovering behaviors in order to ensure the attainment of the rewards.

In general, group norms refer to a set of implicit and explicit standards for individual performance-related behaviors within the group (Patterson *et al.*, 2005). Essentially, when group norms are developed, they help guide and regulate intragroup relations and group-level performance. This ultimately increases the pressure on a group to meet overall group performance expectations set by the organization. Hence, when there are high-performance group norms, it becomes likely that individuals, especially those who are more capable in the group, will display helicopter helping. This is because high group performance expectations can trigger capable individuals' discretionary productive behaviors that help attain high group

performance, such as taking over the task of someone who struggles and making decisions directly for someone indecisive. That is, high-performance group norms may inadvertently provide a basis for individuals in a group to demonstrate hovering behaviors needed to meet group performance expectations. Consequently, we propose the following:

P3. The more desirable the group rewards are, the more likely individuals in the group engage in helicopter helping.

P4. The higher group performance norms are, the more likely individuals in the group engage in helicopter helping.

Organizational-level antecedents
Organizational culture, defined as the underlying philosophies, values and assumptions that determine the ways to behave in the organization (Elsbach and Stigliani, 2018), is essential to the functioning of an organization (Xie *et al.*, 2020). Compared to other types of organizational culture, a hierarchy culture is characterized by stability, control and uniformity that helps foster smooth operations internally (Gupta, 2011). As such, a hierarchy culture promotes order, control and aggressiveness (Lund, 2003). This could further transpire to individuals, especially those with more task-related capabilities, displaying hovering behaviors to ensure smooth operations as a manifestation of their commitment and loyalty to the smooth organizational operations. That is, an individual who adheres to a hierarchy culture may feel the urge to exert strong controlling and intervening behaviors (helicopter helping) geared toward organizational task accomplishment.

To accomplish organizational tasks, organizations often need to mobilize resources embedded in the social capital of the organization (Bolino *et al.*, 2002). According to Lin (2001), social capital refers to resources embedded in a social structure of the organization that can be used to facilitate purposeful behavioral engagements needed for attaining organizational goals. As such, social capital consists of a set of linkages and ties that stabilize behavioral patterns and corrects behavioral inconsistencies in a social network (Katz and Kahn, 1966). Among various characteristics embedded in a social network, social tie strength determines much of the nature of a social relationship and interactions between two actors in a social network (Sparrowe *et al.*, 2001). According to Granovetter (1973), the strength of a social tie defines the closeness and frequency of interaction in a social relationship. Hence, strong ties create intensive emotional and sentimental responses (Perry-Smith, 2014). More importantly, strong ties serve as a mechanism that enhances individuals' transfer of knowledge and diffusion of information (Tortoriello *et al.*, 2012). With strong ties, it is plausible that individuals, especially those with higher capability, develop a sense of constant care for others in a performance setting. In addition, with strong social ties, individuals may feel that there are readily available resources needed for generating positive organizational outcomes. Strong ties in a social network, ultimately, can result in individuals' hovering behaviors due to a desire to utilize resources within a social network to produce desirable outcomes. Consequently, we propose the following:

P5. The stronger the organization is geared toward a hierarchy culture, the more likely an individual in the organization engages in helicopter helping.

P6. The stronger the strength of social ties within an organization, the more likely an individual in the organization engages in helicopter helping.

Possible consequences of helicopter helping
Although helping behavior is typically a desirable discretionary workplace behavior, it has its dark side (Chou *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, helicopter helping can have adverse effects and

numerous unwanted outcomes, especially due to its intervening and intrusive nature. In the next section, we discuss some possible consequences of helicopter helping.

Individual-level consequences
Even with its positive intentions, helicopter helping is characterized by an individual's desire to control and influence others' task environments. This implies that when helicopter helping is exhibited by an individual, it prevents others from contributing via their own effort and competency. Additionally, because of its hovering nature, helicopter helping can block the target from understanding how his or her personal adequacy as an organizational member is judged by others. In other words, when more helicopter helping is directed to a target, it minimizes the target's personal task control, autonomy and performance feedback. Loss of personal task control, autonomy and performance feedback, subsequently, may then affect the target's organization-based self-esteem (Kim and Beehr, 2018), which refers to an individual's own appraisal of personal worthiness and adequacy as an organizational member (Gardner and Pierce, 1998).

In addition to affecting a target's organization-based self-esteem, helicopter helping may have a detrimental effect on the target's general self-efficacy, which refers to one's evaluation of personal competence and ability to perform in various situations successfully (Judge *et al.*, 1997). In particular, the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she can fully execute and complete organizational tasks is essential to building a positive self-evaluation (Fleming and Daw, 2017). Hence, if an individual is able to accomplish organizational tasks, the individual is likely to develop a positive self-assessment. On the contrary, if an individual's tasks are constantly intervened upon and/or even accomplished by another individual's help, it can lead to a sense of inability to contribute experienced by the target of helicopter helping. In other words, when more helicopter helping is directed to a target, it prevents the target from experiencing personal achievement and performance needed for developing positive general self-efficacy. Given the above, we propose the following:

P7. The more helicopter helping is directed to a target, the less organization-based self-esteem is experienced by the target.

P8. The more helicopter helping is directed to a target, the less general self-efficacy is perceived by the target.

Group-level consequences
As pointed out previously, helicopter helping involves constantly taking charge of and intervening in others' tasks. Consequently, one potential group-level consequence of helicopter helping is that it hinders an atmosphere needed for fostering group creativity and innovativeness. In particular, because creativity and innovation require group members to explore new and unknown knowledge in conjunction with the exploitation of past and current knowledge (Bodla *et al.*, 2018), one's hovering behaviors in a group can impede other group members' full exploration of knowledge. Additionally, because helicopter helping can obstruct group members' self-learning and impede the active search for solutions, it diminishes group members' spontaneous cognitive processes, which subsequently can burst group creativity and innovation (Khedhaouria *et al.*, 2017; Marron and Faust, 2019).

Another possible group-level consequence resulting from helicopter helping is decreased quality of a social-exchange relationship. In particular, the quality of a social exchange relationship is dependent heavily on meaningful cooperation and contribution between individuals (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). Helicopter helping, however, features mostly a one-way contribution and engagement in a social exchange relationship. Ultimately, the target of helicopter helping in a social-exchange relationship may experience reduced meaningfulness

of the relationship due to the lack of two-way cooperation and contribution. Given the above, we propose the following:

P9. The more helicopter helping is exhibited in a group, the less creativity and innovation the group has.

P10. The more helicopter helping is exhibited in a group, the lower the quality of social-exchange relationships found in the group.

Organizational-level consequences

Regardless of the industry, all organizations remain subject to a competitive environment making the need for fully utilizing human capital within the organization (Kryscynski *et al.*, 2021). As such, strengthening human capital allows organizations to possess valuable resources that competitors lack. Meanwhile, human capital development generally requires teamwork, worker involvement and training (Barton and Delbridge, 2001). In other words, having proper opportunities to learn, be involved and work as a team are essential to equipping employees with task-related knowledge and skills. More importantly, during the process of human capital development, organizational learning and development occur, especially when employees have the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills to the performance of their tasks (Wang *et al.*, 2018). As noted previously, when helicopter helping occurs, an actor takes charge of others' tasks constantly, solves task-related problems for coworkers regularly, intervenes in coworkers' work processes persistently and/or interferes with coworkers' work-related decisions routinely. That is, helicopter helping not only restrains the opportunity to work as a team and learn from one another, but also diminishes the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills to task performance. Therefore, when helicopter helping is exhibited at a higher level within the organization, it minimizes the opportunity for individuals to learn and develop continuously. Overall organizational learning and development subsequently reduce.

In addition to reduced organizational learning and development, consistent hovering over others' task environments may eventually increase organizational vulnerability. Helicopter helping, as mentioned previously, indicates an employee's excessive involvement in others' tasks. Not only does helicopter helping diminish the target's opportunity to contribute to and participate in overall organizational performance, but also it makes the actor integral to organizational functioning. As such, high levels of helicopter helping in the organization may increase organizational vulnerability due to the actor's exclusive and essential role in organizational performance. Subsequently, when turnover in an organization involves loss of intangible knowledge and skills due to the departure of an integral performer, it inevitably leaves the organization in a vulnerable state (Cho and Song, 2017). Altogether, we propose the following:

P11. The more helicopter helping is exhibited within an organization, the less the learning and development the organization undergoes.

P12. The more helicopter helping is exhibited within an organization, the higher the vulnerability the organization experiences.

In the previous sections, we have presented the conceptualization, key characteristics and possible antecedents and consequences of helicopter helping. Figure 1 provides a summary of the discussion.

Discussion
Theoretical contributions

Since its inception, helping behavior has retained its popularity because it has strong implications for effective organizational functioning (Chou and Stauffer, 2016). As such,
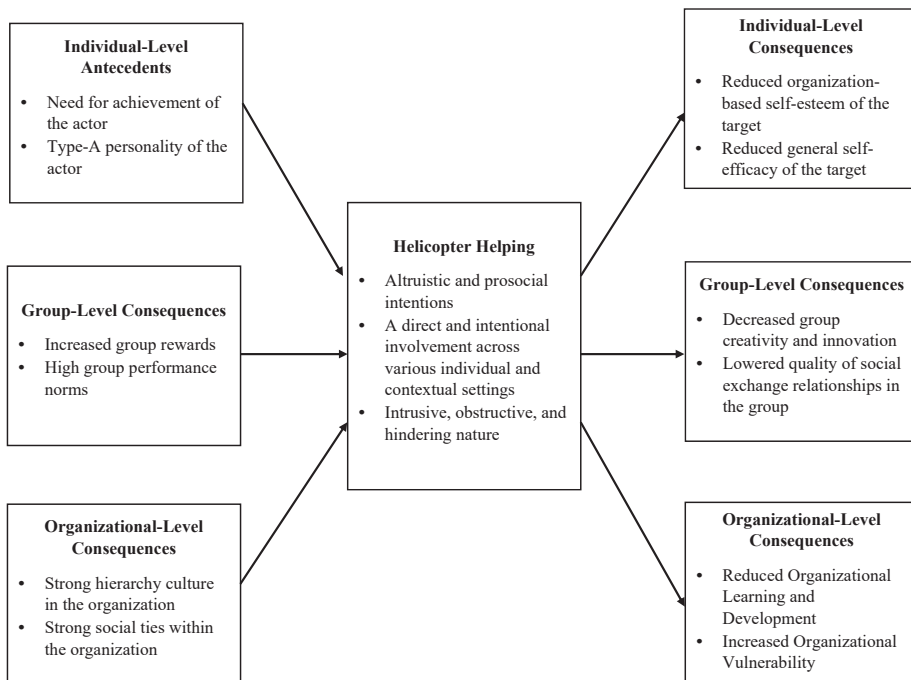
Figure 1.
Key characteristics,
antecedents and
consequences of
helicopter helping

various theoretical underpinnings have been utilized to explain why helping behavior is demonstrated. Perhaps one of the most prominent theoretical bases for helping behavior is social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which views helping behavior as a product of a series of interpersonal interactions that generate obligations and guide reciprocity (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Hence, helping behavior is demonstrated as a reciprocated favor or with an expectation of a future reciprocation (Deckop *et al.*, 2003; Jiang and Law, 2013). Another important theoretical base for helping behavior is conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), which contends that the demonstration of helping behavior is contingent upon the extent of resource loss and/or resource replenishment (Chou *et al.*, 2020). Although social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory, along with other rationality-based theories such as social network theory and social cognitive theory, offer relevant theoretical bases for helping behavior, they heavily draw upon the perspective of rationality. Thus, under the theoretical assumption of rationality, helping behavior may only be offered conditionally upon an individual's cognitive assessment. In this article, we highlight that the rationality perspective may fall short of explaining an unconditional type of helping (helicopter helping). Additionally, we provide some possible conditions where helicopter helping can become an apparent individual phenomenon from a dispositional perspective. As such, we contribute to the literature by showing that the dispositional perspective may be a better theoretical underpinning for explaining an unconditional yet intrusive type of helping behavior at the individual level.

As mentioned previously, social exchange theory offers an exchange-based perspective of human behavior. One of the basic premises of social exchange theory is that norms of reciprocity guide a series of sequential behavior transactions between two individuals (Mitchell *et al.*, 2012). The social exchange perspective of human behavior, therefore, emphasizes an individual's repayment of the good deeds of another individual. Through the

lens of social exchange theory, prior research has viewed helping behavior as a resource that is exchanged through a process of reciprocity between two individuals (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, the social exchange perspective of helping behavior makes an implicit assumption that helping behavior is a valuable resource wanted by individuals within a social context. In other words, helping behavior can be used to strengthen the quality of social exchange relationships (Grant and Mayer, 2009). While we recognize the value of helping behavior, we advance the existing body of knowledge by taking a different approach and proposing how the quality of social exchange relationships can be harmed and damaged when the actor is hovering over rather than helping the target.

Although prior research has been examining helping behavior at the individual level, studying helping behavior at the group and organization levels may provide a better understanding of the overall impact of helping behavior (Choi and Sy, 2010). Indeed, ample evidence has shown that helping behavior is related to group performance and effectiveness (Nielsen *et al.*, 2009; Wong *et al.*, 2009) and organizational profitability and performance (Koys, 2001; Lin and Peng, 2010). Although we recognize the positive outcomes generated by helping behavior, it seems that prior research has been relating helping behavior to positive group- and organizational-level outcomes due to the altruistic nature of helping behavior. In this article, we offer a different theoretical view and argue that helping behavior maybe more than just being altruistic. Specifically, helicopter helping, as proposed in this article, maybe a mechanism that allows the actor to exert control over the environment. As noted by Leotti *et al.* (2010), individuals often exert control over the environment by selecting behaviors that are conducive to achieving desirable outcomes and avoiding undesirable outcomes. Since helping behavior generally occurs when the actor provides assistance to the target in order to avoid undesirable outcomes, our proposed concept of helicopter helping that embeds a controlling nature, therefore, provides a possible theoretical foundation for viewing helping behavior from the lens of the need for control and power.

Another theoretical contribution of this article is that it advances the understanding of different types of helping behavior. Although helping behavior generally refers to behaviors that directly and intentionally attempt to help a person with task-related problems (Dalal and Sheng, 2019), several scholars have sought to classify helping behavior. For instance, Nadler (1997, 2002) suggest that an actor can offer the target a dependency-oriented help with a full solution to a task-related issue or an autonomy-oriented help with tools or instructions allowing the target to help him or herself. Spitzmuller and Van Dyne (2013) classify helping behavior into proactive and reactive helping based on different helping motives of the actor. Chou and Stauffer (2016) extend Spitzmuller and Van Dyne's (2013) work and categorize helping behavior into unsolicited proactive helping behavior, unsolicited reactive helping behavior and solicited reactive helping behavior. Even with the existing classifications of helping behavior, they assume helping behavior to be gentle and lubricating, which further fosters interpersonal relationships (Choi, 2007; Grant and Mayer, 2009). This article takes a different theoretical assumption and develops a controlling and intrusive type of helping labeled as helicopter helping. Therefore, future research that seeks to understand the destructiveness of helping behavior in the organization may find the concept of helicopter helping particularly applicable.

Managerial implications

Even though giving others a helping hand is generally considered a productive behavior in the organization, we contend that helicopter helping is detrimental. Hence, we provide the following managerial implications that help managers avoid the occurrence of helicopter helping. First, managers may consider utilizing a 360-degree evaluation system. The 360-degree evaluation has been regarded since the 1990s as the optimal choice of evaluation for organizations mainly due to the quality results the evaluation produces (Sadeghi and Loripoor, 2016). The most notable

difference between a 360-degree evaluation and other evaluation systems is the mindset of utilizing multiple evaluation sources to provide feedback (Massagli and Carline, 2007). Through the use of a 360-degree evaluation, managers are able to obtain employees' perceptions of receipt of help. As such, the occurrence of helicopter helping can be pinpointed and subsequently corrected early in its emergence. It is noteworthy that early identifications of helicopter helping can minimize short-term and long-term detrimental consequences. Thus, managers may consider implementing a 360-degree evaluation with a variable timeframe.

Next, managers need to ensure that all employees are exposed to training where job-related knowledge and skills are acquired. Effective and timely training further develops employees' knowledge and skill base and, more importantly, strengthens employees' leadership qualities. When employees develop more job-related knowledge and skills along with leadership qualities through training and development, they may be able to provide a helping hand without hovering over others' task environments.

Finally, we recommend managers establish an organizational culture that is conducive to cooperative behaviors. This can be done by, for instance, ensuring task interdependence, which helps facilitate employees' exchange behaviors at work (Bachrach et al., 2006). When cooperative behaviors through task interdependence are consistently demonstrated, it signifies the importance of each of the organizational members. When each of the organizational members values the importance of others' contribution to overall organizational performance, hovering behaviors may subsequently be weakened.

Limitations and directions for future research

In this article, we propose that helicopter helping, which represents a well-intended form of helping behavior in the organization, is intrusive and obstructive. Even though this article integrates and synergizes the helping behavior and helicopter parenting literature and proposes a novel concept of helicopter helping, it is not without limitations and can be extended in the following directions. The first limitation of this article is that although we provide a conceptualization and identify key characteristics of helicopter helping, the proposed concept of helicopter helping remains a theoretical interpretation. Hence, an important direction for future research seeking to advance our understanding of helicopter helping is to explore the dimensionality of helicopter helping. This can be done by, for instance, conducting in-depth or focus-group interviews to obtain possible dimensions of helicopter helping. Once the dimensionality of helicopter helping is established, future research can further develop a valid and reliable scale for measuring helicopter helping.

Even with the conceptual novelty of helicopter helping, we draw on the literature of helicopter parenting. This leads to the second limitation of this article. Specifically, an important feature of helicopter parenting is the parent-child relationship that is based upon parenting power and status asymmetry. This particular feature may not be completely relevant in an organizational setting, which is largely based on symbiotic relationships. Nonetheless, status asymmetry may still be a basis for employees to exhibit helicopter helping. For instance, longer-tenure employees are likely to possess more organizational knowledge and know-how than shorter-tenure employees (Chou, 2018). Similarly, older employees may have more institutional wisdom than younger employees (Chou et al., 2014). Organizational status asymmetry, therefore, provides a legitimate basis for the demonstration of helicopter helping. Hence, an interesting future research direction can be examining if status differences, such as generations, organizational tenure and organizational positions, facilitate or inhibit helicopter helping in the organization.

When discussing the concept of helicopter helping, we make an implicit theoretical assumption that helicopter helping is an individual-level behavioral phenomenon. Although we attempt to identify possible antecedents and consequences of helicopter helping at the individual, group and organizational levels, we make a clear micro-macro divide. Behaviors in

the organization, however, are inherently dynamic and interactive in nature (Klein *et al.*, 1999). As such, the third limitation of this article is that the construct levels are presented in static rather than dynamic and interactive terms. For instance, organizational culture as a dynamic and interactive construct can significantly determine how individuals think and behave in the organization (Warrick *et al.*, 2016) while individuals can attain influence over organizational culture via their personalities (Anderson *et al.*, 2008). Given the dynamic nature of behaviors in the organization, a specific future research direction may be examining the antecedents and consequences of helicopter helping from a dynamic and longitudinal lens. By doing so, future research can continue to broaden our understanding of the effect of the interplay of cross-level antecedents on helicopter helping, as well as the multilevel outcomes of helicopter helping.

Although we identify some possible antecedents of helicopter helping at the individual, group and organizational levels, we also acknowledge that certain contextual and spontaneous organizational events may shape the extent of helicopter helping in the organization. For instance, institutionalized socialization tactics are often utilized by an organization once a newcomer joins the organization. The primary goal of institutionalized socialization is to help a newcomer transform from an outsider into an organizational insider by using systematic and structured steps to shape the newcomer's work-related attitudes and behaviors (Woodrow and Guest, 2020). As such, it is plausible that organizational insiders may direct higher levels of helicopter helping to newcomers in the early institutionalized socialization process in order to help these newcomers adjust to the existing organizational norms and expectations more efficiently. The extent of helicopter helping during the institutionalized socialization process may then reduce as newcomers successfully acquire work-related attitudes and behaviors. The above example highlights the fourth limitation of this article, which is that it does not account for the effect of temporal contextual and spontaneous organizational events on helicopter helping. Consequently, future research may broaden the understanding of when and how helicopter helping emerges in the organization by investigating some contextual factors in the organization such as learning, development, mentoring, training and even organizational crises such as COVID-19.

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