

Vindictiveness doesn't pay

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Vindictiveness doesn't pay. This has been demonstrated by a current study at Bonn and Maastricht Universities. According to this study, a person inclined to deal with inequity on a tit-for-tat basis tends to experience more unemployment than other people. Vindictive people also have less friends and are less satisfied with their lives. The study appears in the current edition of the *Economic Journal*.

We tend to live by the motto "tit for tat". We repay an invitation to dinner with a counter-invitation; when a friend helps us to move house, we help to move his furniture a few months later. On the other hand, we repay meanness in the same coin. Scientists speak here of reciprocity. A person who repays friendly actions in a like manner is said to behave with positive reciprocity, and one who avenges unfairness acts with [negative reciprocity](#).

Positive and negative reciprocity are interdependent traits: many people incline to positive reciprocity, others more to negative; others, again, incline to both. The researchers from Bonn and Maastricht wanted to discover what influence these traits of character have on parameters such as "success" or "satisfaction with life". For this, they resorted to data from the so-called "socio-economic panel". This contains information gathered by the Deutsche Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (German Institute for economic Research) in its annual surveys. These involve around 20,000 respondents from all over Germany and cover a diversity of topics.

The researchers in Bonn used this instrument to discover something

about the attitudes to reciprocity of the participants in the study. They were to state, for example, to what extent they would repay a favour or, on the other hand, an insult on a tit-for-tat basis. "Both positive and negative reciprocity are widespread in Germany", declares Professor Dr. [Armin Falk](#) of [Bonn University](#), summarising the results.

Positively reciprocal People perform more Overtime

The researchers then related these data to other results of the survey, whereby they stumbled upon a number of interesting correlations: "Thus, positively [reciprocal people](#) tend on average to perform more overtime, but only when they find the remuneration fair", declares Professor Dr. Thomas Dohmen of Maastricht University. "As they are very sensitive to incentives, they also tend to earn more money".

This is in stark contrast to vindictive people. With these people, the equation "more money = more work" does not always apply. Even pay cuts are not an effective means of bringing [negatively reciprocal](#) people back into line. Ultimately the danger arises that they will take revenge - for example, by refusing to work, or by sabotage. "On the basis of these theoretical considerations it would be natural to expect that negatively reciprocal people are more likely to lose their jobs", Falk explains: "A supposition which coincides with our results. Consequently, negatively reciprocal people experience a significantly higher rate of [unemployment](#)".

And in other respects, too, vindictiveness is not a maxim to be recommended. Anyone who prefers to act according to the Old Testament motto of "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" has on average less friends - and is clearly less than satisfied with his or her life.

Source: University of Bonn ([news](#) : [web](#))

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