

Accountability for the future

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1 Abstract

Intergenerational sustainability is compromised because the current generation affects future generations, but the opposite is not true. This one-way nature tends to prevent the current and future generations from communicating and take accountability for their actions one another. While communication is known to mitigate some problems between parties, little is known about how intergenerational communication resolves some problems between the current and future generations. This research addresses how accountability among generations as a communication device promotes intergenerational sustainability, hypothesizing that being accountable for future generations positively influences individuals in the current generation to take intergenerationally sustainable actions. We institute online intergenerational goods game (IGG) experiments via oTree with Python programming. In baseline IGG, we prepare a sequence of generations, each consists of five individuals, and they are asked to choose their individual harvests where the resource is exhausted when the individual harvests sum in the current generation exceeds some threshold, otherwise, the resource is replenished for the next generation. In intergenerational accountability (IA) treatment, individuals are additionally asked to be accountable by explaining their reason and advice for harvest decisions and passing the account to the next generation in the same sequence. We find that IA induces individuals to choose their harvests for being both intragenerationally and intergenerationally fair as well as for being intergenerationally sustainable.