
Research Digest

Break the Trust? At Least Say Something!

When political or business leaders are accused of wrongdoing, we hear one of three responses: apology (rarely), denial (often), and “no comment” (surprisingly often).

A recent study suggests that trust is best restored by apology when the charge relates to competence. In turn, denial may be best where integrity is in question. “No comment” works in neither situation. In this article, the authors examine the effectiveness of reticence. They define reticence as a “statement in which the accused party explains that he or she cannot or will not confirm or disconfirm the veracity of an allegation.”

People who use the reticence (or “no comment”) response expect it to be somewhat effective. But the authors found that it ranks below apology *and* denial as an accepted response to a trust violation. They also argue that further research on the use and effectiveness of reticence is needed, despite its suboptimal reaction, to better understand belief formation and acceptance.

Source: Ferrin, D. L., P. H. Kim, C. D. Cooper, and K. T. Dirks. 2007. Silence speaks volumes: The effectiveness of reticence in comparison to apology and denial for responding to integrity- and competence-based trust violations. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92(4): 893-908.

How Will Your First Offer Work? Depends on Where You Are

Most studies of the effect of making first offers have looked only at single-issue cases. Moreover they have typically examined only behavior in the United States. By contrast, a recent article by Wendi Adair, Laurie Weingart, and Jeanne Brett compared the effect of offers in multi-issue, interactive cases by examining such offers in U.S. and Japanese negotiations. Their results were consistent with their theories: Japanese negotiators use early offers in a negotiation to gather information, and U.S. negotiators use later offers in the negotiation to consolidate information.

Their discussion also addresses the elements of first offers in integrative bargaining. It discusses how U.S. negotiators (direct communication culture) may use the first offer as an anchor, while Japanese negotiators (indirect communication culture) use a pattern of offers as a source of information.

Source: Adair, W. L., L. Weingart, and J. Brett. 2007. The timing and function of offers in U.S. and Japanese negotiations. *American Psychological Association* 92(4): 1056–1068.

When in Rome . . . Your Ethics or Mine?

An old adage advises, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” But adapting to foreign cultures is seldom easy, especially when ethical norms diverge.

In their article, “Lying, Cheating Foreigners! Negotiation Ethics across Cultures,” Cheryl Rivers and Anne Louise Lytle propose a model that shows how culture influences a negotiator’s ethical decisions. They propose an interactionist model where culture is shown to have a central effect on a negotiators’ consideration of an ethical decision. Their model shows how culture directly influences four types of situational variables (organizational goals, organizational codes of ethics, legal environment, and perceptions of the other party) that negotiators take into account when making ethical decisions.

The model can be used to help explain cultural differences in what is regarded as ethical. It helps practitioners to better understand actions they deem inappropriate. This will help minimize feelings of anger and distrust, as well as avoid the use of tactics that may jeopardize negotiations.

Source: Rivers, C. and A. L. Lytle. 2007. Lying, cheating foreigners!! Negotiation ethics across cultures. *International Negotiation* 12: 1–28.

Preparing for Surprises

Years ago, Donald Schön, in *The Reflective Practitioner*, distinguished professionals’ “espoused theory” (their self-described principles and techniques) from their “theory in use,” that is, what they really did. In the same spirit, a trio of researchers recently studied how facilitators (novice and veteran) design collaborative processes. They used a questionnaire to uncover their strategies and techniques, as well as which aspects of these tasks they find challenging.

The respondents were placed into three categories: novice, experienced, and expert. Some of the results were not surprising — they found that, on average, novices have six techniques they use regularly, while experts have twenty-three, allowing them more flexibility when problems arise. They also found that while 82 percent of experts document their design process, only 52 percent of novices do.

The researchers concluded that novice facilitators are more likely to encounter surprises and are less equipped to handle these surprises. They suggest that support for collaborative process design should contain more than a general approach and should provide specific guidelines “for design and choice among facilitation techniques and contain a library of proven facilitation techniques and best practices.”

Source: Kolfshoten, G. L., M. Hengst-Bruggeling, and G. de Vreede. 2007. Issues in the design of facilitated collaboration processes. *Group Decision and Negotiation* 16: 347-361.

We're Still Not Ready for Virtual Meetings

Everyone complains about the ordeal of traveling to business meetings and academic conferences, so why is it that people have not embraced electronic meeting systems as a more efficient venue for collaboration?

A recent study of experiences and attitudes in four countries reveals fourteen barriers to the use of virtual meetings. The researchers focused on the adoption and use of Electronic Meeting Systems (EMS) in the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, and Norway. EMS was developed to support meetings that focus on problem solving without the influence of personalities or political power and it has been around for nearly two decades.

Their research found that the adoption and use of EMS is quite limited. Some of the barriers include cost, resistance to change, organizational incentives, complexity, and training. The authors suggest that further research might be conducted of organizations where EMS has successfully been adopted. They also conclude that managers who are considering virtual collaboration with organizations around the world be sensitive to these (and other) barriers. Not everyone is ready to be virtually connected.

Source: Lewis, F. L., D. S. Bajwa, G. Pervan, V. King, and B. Munkvold. 2007. A cross-regional exploration of barriers to the adoption and use of electronic meeting systems. *Group Decision and Negotiation* 16: 381-398.

Some Practical Benefits of Trust

"Trust me." Do those two words assure or alarm you?

Jason A. Colquit, Brent A. Scott, and Jeffery A. LePine recently conducted a meta-analysis of studies that examined the interplay between one person's trustworthiness and another's willingness to trust in a range of contexts. They argue that although the trust literature distinguishes trustworthiness and trust propensity from trust, critical questions still remain: What are the unique effects of competence, benevolence, and integrity on trust? What is the mediating role of trust in explaining the relationships between trustworthiness, trust and trust propensity, and behavioral outcomes, and the effects of trust measurement and trust referent on relationships?

The study also examined specific behaviors that trust can be used to predict. The results revealed moderately strong relationships between trust and risk taking, and trust and job performance, reinforcing the view that

trust is a vital part of effective work relationships. The research also reinforces the benefits of fostering trust in the workplace.

Source: Colquitt, J. A., B. A. Scott, and J. A. LePine. 2007. Trust, trustworthiness, and trust propensity: A meta-analytic test of their unique relationships with risk taking and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92(4): 909–927.