

# Task and Relationship-Oriented Trust In Leaders

Arthur Lloyd Sherwood  
Concetta A. DePaolo  
Indiana State University

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*This study examines the relative influence of competence, consistency and motivational intention upon the defined task and relationship dimensions of trust in leaders. A sample of 345 part- and full-time employees provided survey responses regarding their perceptions of their direct supervisors. Results indicate that competence and consistency explain more variance in task than in relationship-oriented trust. Motivational intention explained more variance in relationship than in task-oriented trust. The results, practical implications, limitations and future research opportunities are discussed.*

Uncertainty, complexity and change are forces punctuating today's fast-paced global business environment (Ahn, Adamson, & Dornbusch, 2004; Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). Within this environment, the strategic impact of trusting relationships upon competitiveness is increasingly recognized. As Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998) state, "the trusting qualities of the relations between parties—through cross-functional teams, temporary groups, strategic alliances, and socially embedded partnerships—are critical for successful collaboration" (p. 438).

Trust has received extensive academic attention over the last four decades, ranging over many intellectual disciplines and levels of analysis (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Its importance is emphasized in a variety of strategic and managerial areas including developing competitive advantage (Barney & Hansen, 1994; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, Audrey, & Werner, 1998), enhancing the effectiveness of strategic implementation (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998), increasing the success of international strategic alliances (Parkhe, 1998), achieving greater managerial

coordination (McAllister, 1995) and assigning more effective work teams (Lawler, 1992).

In this uncertain, complex and changing business environment, leaders play a vital role and the leader's ability to develop trusting relationships has been pinpointed as a key success factor (Bennis, 1999). As organizations cope with significant breaches of trust as occurred with Enron, the role of building a trusting climate is further accentuated and scholars argue it is a central responsibility of the leadership (Gini, 2004).

Multiple studies have focused on outcomes resulting from subordinates' trust in their leaders. These studies support that a worker's trust in a leader leads to important positive outcomes including improved individual and organizational performance (Dwivedi, 1983; Earley, 1986; Rich, 1997), perceived accuracy and fairness in performance evaluation (Fulk, Brief, & Barr, 1985), enhanced cooperation (Lindsfold, 1978) and increased employee trust in top management and the CEO (Costigan, Insignga, Kranas, Kureshov, & Ilter, 2004). Other outcomes include increased fairness perceptions (Wech, 2002), reduced perceived psychological contract breach (Robinson, 1996), subordinate satisfaction (Driscoll, 1978; Wech, 2002), organizational citizenship behaviors (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001), and the disclosure of important information, the willingness to accept interdependence, and increased receptiveness to influence regarding goals and methods of execution (Zand, 1972).

To date, scholars have focused extensive theoretical and empirical attention upon antecedents to trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Theory regarding antecedents of interpersonal trust can be broken into three categories. The first, and the main focus of this study, are the

cognitive antecedents (e.g. Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Butler, 1991; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; McAllister, 1995). These include the trustor's cognitive evaluations of the trustee as antecedents to trust. Relatively recent empirical examinations of cognitive antecedents as significant predictors of trust in leaders include contingent reward and transformational leader behaviors (MacKenzie et al., 2001) and interactional justice (Aryee, Gudhwar, & Chen, 2002). It has also been proposed that employee perceptions of ethical leadership behavior impacts psychological empowerment leading to trust in leaders (Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004).

The second category includes affective antecedents or the trustor's emotional feelings as antecedents to trust (e.g. Holmes, 1991; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995; Rempel, Homes, & Zanna, 1985). The third category focuses upon the trustor's dispositions toward trust: i.e. the trustor has some degree of a trusting personality (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998; Whitener, et al. 1998).

While much has been learned about trust in leaders, important gaps in our knowledge remain. There has been little theoretical or empirical advancement in (a) exploring different definitions of trust relevant to the worker-leader context and (b) understanding how potential antecedents influence the magnitude of differentially defined trust. It is possible trust defined in one context may at a high level, while in another, trust may be at a low level. In an early effort in this area, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) state, "To date, research has provided almost no evidence on the implications of using alternative definitions" (p. 616).

Our contribution is to theoretically and empirically address these gaps by defining trust in context and examining the differential influence of worker-leader cognitive trust antecedents. This study is different from prior research in that the focus is upon the relative importance of cognitive antecedents to explaining trust levels defined relative to a task or relationship-oriented context. Knowing the differences will allow practitioners better understand why an individual may trust them in one situation but not in another. In turn, this will allow them to maintain the trust gained and

work to build the trust yet to be gained in a way that is appropriate to the situation.

Leaders work within at least two contexts including the task and relationship contexts. These contexts provide the basis for different dimensional definitions of trust that are consistent at the core, but vary depending upon the contextual situation. Our purpose is to explore how the importance of antecedents to worker-leader trust may vary between different context-related dimensions/orientations of trust.

For the purposes of this study, the specific referent for trust is the formal leader of the respondent, specifically their direct supervisor or manager. Direct supervisors/managers have been the focus of considerable trust and leadership research (e.g. MacKenzie, et al., 2001; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974; Pillai, Schriesheim & Williams, 1999; Podsakoff, et al., 1990). Throughout this paper, we will use the label 'manager' to refer to this person.

We offer the results of our empirical study of 345 part- and full-time workers and their reported interpersonal level perceptions of their manager's competence, consistency and motivational intention, as well as worker task- and relationship-oriented trust in their managers. We provide theoretical background and development regarding trust and how it may be differentially defined depending upon the context in which it takes place. Building upon this foundation, we offer hypotheses predicting varying magnitudes of effects of antecedents on task- and relationship-oriented trust. Following the presentations of results, we offer our discussion and conclusions.

## Theoretical Background

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) indicate that definitions abound for trust and that multiple perceptual antecedents have been found to be related to trust in leaders. The authors also discuss the importance of this issue, citing the possibility that both antecedents and outcomes may vary depending upon the definition of trust being used. We begin by reviewing the literature regarding trust definitions and identifying a trust definition that captures the core of prior literature, which at the same time, allows us to orient it toward different leadership contexts. We further advance the boundaries of

the theory by identifying and developing important contextual components that influence the magnitude of importance of various antecedents to trust.

We are explicitly studying interpersonal trust as opposed to levels such as trust between departments (e.g. Cummings & Bromiley, 1996) or societal trust (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995). While there have been a variety of definitions for interpersonal trust, a review across the last four decades reveals some definitional similarities. Discussing whether scholars fundamentally agree on the definition of trust, Rousseau et al. (1998) conclude "Trust, as the willingness to be vulnerable under conditions of risk and interdependence, is a psychological state that researchers in various disciplines interpret in terms of 'perceived probabilities', 'confidence', and 'positive expectations'—all variations on the same theme" (p. 395).

Thus, it appears that generally accepted elements of the definition applicable to the worker-manager relationship include trust as a psychological state of the worker that includes a willingness to be vulnerable to the manager. Workers assess the situation, making a subjective probability assessment that willingly placing themselves in this vulnerable position will result in greater benefits than costs.

Following from this assessment, a question arises as to what aspects of the definitions may vary regarding a worker's trust in the manager. The answer lies in the context of the trusting situation that impacts the assessments of antecedents to trust (Mayer, et al., 1995). Specifically, leadership theory encourages us to consider the worker-leader context as including the task context and the relationship context upon which scholars have focused for over half a century. Examples of variations on this theme include the Ohio Leadership studies of the 1940s and 1950s (Korman, 1968), Blake and Moulton's Managerial Grid in the 1960s (1964) and Mishra's work in the 1980s (Bass, 1990).

The task context includes situations that involve how the manager will accomplish tasks through people and in which attention is given by both the worker and manager to the task at hand. These situations may involve planning, task coordination and execution. The relationship context includes situations that involve showing concern for the worker or

providing support for the worker and the worker-manager relationship. This context may include open lines of communication, discussion of personal concerns and providing socio-emotional support.

As managers and workers interact through task coordination and communication, assessments of trust and its antecedents can be made by the worker. These situations can in turn be used as context for a worker's trust in their leader; i.e., these are contexts in which interdependence and risk can arise between the worker and manager and as such they can be used to separate the dimensional definitions of trust. Task-oriented trust is trust found in the task context. Relationship-oriented trust is trust found in the relationship context.

Building upon Rousseau et al. (1998), we define task-oriented trust as a psychological state entailing the willingness to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of others in the task-based context. We also define relationship-oriented trust as a psychological state entailing the willingness to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of others in the relationship based context. These definitions maintain the generally accepted aspects of the trust definitions, while differentiating between the contexts in which the level of trust is determined.

In each of these contexts, where differing trust dimensions may be at work, the worker is making an assessment as to whether or not they would be willing to be vulnerable to the manager. This assessment is similar to the idea of a trustor having perceived probabilities (Bhattacharya, Devinney, & Pillutla, 1998) regarding the cost/benefit of placing themselves at risk. In agreement with Dirks and Ferrin (2002), it is our contention that the significance of the factors upon which the worker is making the assessment will vary depending upon the dimensional definition of trust.

It is important to note that past empirical evidence supports that each of these antecedents is important to trust in general; we do not expect this to change and do not offer replicated predictions. Our predictions are not meant to imply that the antecedents will have no relationship with the non-focal dependent

variable; rather, they focus upon the expected magnitude of influence an antecedent has on trust as either more oriented toward the task context or the relationship context.

## Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study, we examine cognitive antecedents to trust including competence, consistency and motivational intention. These antecedents have received considerable examination in the literature as predictors of uni-dimensionally defined trust (e.g. Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000; Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998; Whitener et al., 1998). We desired to test our hypotheses regarding the multi-dimensionally defined trust with antecedents that had received considerable scholarly review. These cognitive antecedents have the potential to vary independently, potentially leading to trust in some situations and not in others. Each will be examined in turn by first discussing how the antecedent has been linked theoretically and empirically to trust in general, and then exploring how it may vary in its explanatory power depending upon the trust context being studied.

### Competence

Competence is defined as *having requisite or adequate ability or quality*. This definition is consistent with other conceptualizations of competence that focus on whether or not the trustee has the abilities to perform their tasks (Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Butler, 1991; Gabarro, 1978; Mayer et al., 1995). Many researchers investigating interpersonal trust have highlighted a trustor's perceptions of competence as an essential antecedent to trust (e.g. Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Butler, 1991; Fulk et al., 1985; Mishra 1996; Rosen & Jerdee, 1977). Other researchers have discussed very similar constructs such as ability (Cook & Wall, 1980; Deutsch, 1960; Jones, James, & Bruni, 1975; Mayer et al., 1995; Sitkin & Roth, 1993) and expertise (Giffin, 1967). Building upon past literature, Whitener et al. (1998) conclude, "without the judgment that one's manager possesses the competence or ability to fulfill the managerial role, an employee is unlikely to develop trust in that manager" (p. 526).

In the cases above, the relationship between competence and trust is focused upon task-oriented trust rather than relationship-oriented trust. As discussed, the worker will make assessments of whether or not they are willing to be vulnerable to the manager in the given context. If prospective followers do not believe the manager is competent, it is unlikely the manager will gain their support and the risk for failure is high (Bass, 1990). Since the task-based context focuses on the work to be done, skills and abilities are the predominant criteria on which workers base their willingness to be vulnerable. Abilities are a clear requirement for accomplishing tasks in a specific domain (Mayer et al., 1995), and therefore should be linked to task-oriented trust. The greater the confidence in the manager's competence, the more likely the worker will choose to be influenced by the manager and transact with the manager in terms of committing to the task (Bass, 1990). The stream of theoretical logic is that a follower's perception of a manager's competence is linked to trust in the task-based context.

**H1:** A follower's perception of a manager's competence will be more strongly related to task-oriented trust than to relationship-oriented trust.

### Consistency

Consistency is defined as *the reliability of a person's actions*. Here, reliability is similar to statistical reliability as one looks for the same result (behavior) from one time to another, making it a priority in the task context. This definition does not differentiate as to whether the actions are consistently positive or consistently negative, only whether the behavior the same.

As defined, consistency has received considerable support in the literature (e.g. Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Butler, 1991; Gabarro, 1978; Lindsold, 1978; Mishra, 1996; Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). Authors have described this as predictability (Mayer et al., 1995) and behavioral consistency (Whitener et al., 1998). The latter authors argue "If a manager behaves consistently over time and across situations, employees can better predict manager's future behavior, and their confidence in their ability to make such predictions should increase."

(Whitener et al., p. 516). Consistent behavior should enhance trust between the worker and manager (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Whitener et al., 1998).

If a manager generally acts in a highly unpredictable way with workers in a task situation, it is unlikely a worker would feel comfortable making themselves vulnerable, since predictability or reliability is important to task completion. If workers assess the manager to be unreliable, they will be less likely to depend upon the manager and will do the task themselves. Workers will look to the past to make their assessments of the reliability and in turn their willingness to be vulnerable to the manager.

**H2:** A follower's perception of a manager's consistency will be more strongly related to task-oriented trust than to relationship-oriented trust.

### Motivational Intention

Motivational intention is defined as the reason/s a person performs an action. As an antecedent to trusting another, motivational intention has received extensive emphasis in the trust literature (e.g. Cook & Wall, 1980; Lindsold & Bennett, 1973; Rempel et al., 1985). It differs from consistency and competence in that it reflects the interpersonal nature of the work relationship. It is also distinct from cooperation in that there is not an implication that the two parties are cooperating on a task, but rather it is an assessment of the reasons one party is acting in a certain way. It is possible to cooperate while believing the other party does not have positive intentions (Mayer et al., 1995).

Based on the work of Deutsch (1960), Lindsold (1978) and Whitener et al. (1998), motivational intention can be separated into two dimensions: benevolence and exploitation. Each dimension is discussed below and is hypothesized to be more strongly related to relationship-oriented trust.

### Benevolence

Benevolence is defined "as the extent to which the trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor aside from an ego-centric profit

motive" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 718) and has received substantial emphasis in the trust literature (e.g. Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Lindsold, 1978; Mayer et al., 1995; McAllister, 1995; Strickland, 1958). Whitener et al. (1998) described this concept as "demonstration of concern" (p. 517). The authors indicate this includes acting in a way that protects employee interests and showing consideration and sensitivity. Mishra (1996) reasons that employees will trust their superiors if they believe their superiors are concerned about the employees' interests (p. 267).

This construct overlaps conceptually with perceived organizational support (see Rhodes & Eisenberger, 2002), yet is distinct from it in level of analysis. With benevolence, a worker is assessing the leader as an individual. On the other hand, when an employee is assessing perceived organizational support, the perception is of the organization as a whole. In this case, the supervisor is an agent of the organization.

### Exploitation

Exploitation is defined as the improper use of another person for one's own profit or advantage (Merriam-Webster, 1986) and has received emphasis from scholars as an important antecedent to trust (e.g. Deutsch, 1960; Lindsold, 1978; Whitener et al., 1998). It follows that exploitive intentions are present when a person's reason for interacting with another is to improperly use the other for one's own profit or advantage. The key to perception of exploitation is the improper use and one's own advantage or profit. As Lindsold (1978) states, "If one party perceives the other as having no interest in their relationships beyond improving his own welfare-- even at the expense of the perceiver's interests-- the perceiver is likely not to trust the other" (p. 180).

Exploitation is distinct from the construct abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000). Whereas exploitation focuses upon perceptions of improper use of the employee to gain advantage, abusive supervision concerns sustained displays of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors to include, for example, yelling, intimidating, and the use of derogatory names (Zellars, Tepper & Duffy, 2002: p. 1068).

A worker's assessment of both benevolence and exploitation should weigh heavily toward

relationship-oriented trust. To be willing to have open and honest communication and share personal concerns, a worker will likely need to perceive that a manager has positive motivational intentions. As an example, Mayer et al. (1995) argue "If the manager were also benevolent toward the employee, he or she may try to protect the employee from the possible ramifications of mistakes. A manager who is less benevolent to the focal employee may be more disposed to use the information in a way that helps the company most, even at the possible expense of the employee." (p. 721). If this employee assessed that the manager's intentions were such that the employee would be exploited or taken advantage of, or that the manager would act in the interest of the organization rather than the worker, it is unlikely that the worker would communicate or share mistakes or problems with the manager.

**H3a:** A follower's perception of a manager's benevolence will be more strongly related to relationship-oriented trust than to task-oriented trust.

**H3b:** A follower's perception of a manager's exploitation will be more strongly related to relationship-oriented trust than to task-oriented trust.

## Methods

We reviewed existing measures of trust and the explanatory variables. The literature offered many variations of measurements for trust. While these variations were found to be generally valid for their purposes in prior research, we concluded they would not be valid measures of task and relationship-oriented trust. As a result, we developed a new measure, pre-tested according to Spector (1992).

Additionally, with modest modification of multiple measures available in the literature, we were able to select measures of the explanatory variables. The exception was benevolence where we combined items from the literature to accurately measure the construct. We included these measures in the pre-test.

## Dependent Variables

Multiple attempts have been made to measure trust and to develop trust scales. We narrowed our search to perceptual measures held by the worker, as trust is a belief or perception of the follower regarding the leader and should be measured accordingly (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Building upon Spector's (1992) construct validation steps, we reviewed the trust scales available in the current literature to determine if they were appropriate for measuring task and relationship-oriented trust. Certain scale evaluation questions are appropriate. Is the scale measuring trust at the proposed study's level of analysis? Does it measure trust as defined or in terms of its antecedents? Is the word trust overused in the items? Are the items poorly worded? Is the scale available in the literature? As discussed below, when the available trust scales are put to these questions, none are appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Some scales are inappropriate due to differing levels of analysis. These include scales measuring dispositions toward trust (e.g. Rosenberg, 1957; Rotter, 1967; Shure & Meeker, 1967; Wrightsman, 1964) and several measuring interorganizational trust including Cummings & Bromiley's (1996) Organizational Trust Inventory and Currall and Judge's (1995) work relating to organizational boundary role persons.

Other scales are inappropriate because they measure trust in terms of its antecedents rather than trust itself, overuse the word 'trust' in the items, and have inappropriate wording for our definitions. They include scales by Cook & Wall (1980), Larzelere & Huston (1980), Johnson-George & Swap (1982), Rempel et al. (1985), Roberts and O'Reilly (1974), Pillai, Schriesheim and Williams (1999) and Podsakoff et al. (1990).

Based upon our review, we concluded that in order to validly measure task and relationship-oriented trust, a new scale was needed. Because there were very few items in past scales tapping our trust definitions, an initial pool of 22 items was written by the authors after an exhaustive review of the literature to build content and face validity. Each item was written to correspond in the task or relationship definitional context. We

submitted this initial pool to a panel of management professors and Ph.D. candidates and performed a q-sort. Each panel member was given the definition of task and relationship-oriented trust and 22 cards with a single item typed on each. The members were asked to sort the items according to the appropriate definition. The result was a pool of 15 items (nine task and six relationship) that each of the panel members had sorted correctly, providing strong inter-rater reliability and early evidence of discriminant validity. Additionally, we asked for critical feedback regarding item wording, giving the panel the guidelines for creating valid items.

Writing instructions for the trust instrument covered two main issues as advised by Spector (1992), including directions for using the scale and instructions regarding the trust construct that specifically stated the target of the survey as the direct superior. We used a 7-point Likert-type scale to provide a numerical response with the anchors of Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (7).

To complete the validation process, we submitted the completed self-administered questionnaire to 205 workers taking a management course at a major AACSB accredited business school. Subsequently we conducted a statistical item analysis on the task and relationship-oriented constructs. The purpose of the item analysis was to find items that form an internally consistent (i.e. reliable) construct scale and to remove those that do not (Spector, 1992).

After appropriately recoding negatively worded items, a factor analysis was conducted on the 15 items on the pre-test (nine task items and six relationship items). While nine of the items clearly loaded on either the task or the relationship trust factor, six of the items (three task and three relationship) did not behave as expected. When these items were removed, the subsequent exploratory factor analysis using a varimax rotation indicated the presence of two factors with eigenvalues over 1 that explained almost 67% of the variance. These factors were interpretable as the intended task and relationship factors and were reliable with alphas of 0.857 and 0.734, respectively, providing additional support for discriminant validity. Three items remained for the relationship measure. While three items have

served as adequate measures in management research, we made the decision to create an additional four items to help ensure content validity in the main study. The 13 items included in the final trust scale are shown in Appendix A."

### **Explanatory Variables**

Our approach to measuring the explanatory variables was to identify measures and items in the existing literature that were consistent with our established definitions. For each, we borrowed, modified and/or combined measures and items to fit within our definitions and the workplace environment, resulting in a face-valid and ultimately a statistically valid measure. In particular, Butler's (1991) Conditions of Trust Inventory proved useful. The measures were included in the pre-test to assess their internal consistency in modified form. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale with 7 being Strongly Agree, and all negatively worded items were recoded appropriately.

### **Competence**

This construct was measured as in Butler (1991) with one additional item from Larzelere & Huston (1980). The items included: my boss does his/her job well, my boss does things poorly, my boss performs his/her tasks with skill, and my boss does things in a capable manner. The mean score of the items was used as the competence index, with higher mean scores indicating a greater degree of competence. The resulting reliability for the measure in the pre-test was .91.

### **Consistency**

To measure consistency, we used Butler's (1991) consistency measure. Items included: my boss does things the same from one time to the next, I seldom know what my boss will do next, my boss behaves in a uniform manner, and my boss does the same thing every time the situation is the same. The mean score of the items was used as the consistency index, with higher mean scores indicating a greater degree of consistency. The resulting reliability for the measure in the pre-test was .70.

### **Benevolence**

A search of the literature led us to conclude there were no acceptable measures of benevolence for our purposes. Therefore, we combined items from a variety of scholars (Giffin, 1967; Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Rempel et al., 1985). The items included: my boss is unconcerned about my well-being, my boss cares about what happens to me, my boss is concerned about my welfare, and my boss shows me too little consideration. The mean score of the items was used as the benevolence index, with higher mean scores indicating a greater degree of benevolence. The resulting reliability for the measure in the pre-test was .80.

### **Exploitation**

We used Butler's (1991) loyalty measure plus one item from Lazerle and Huston (1980) to measure exploitation. The items included: my boss does not care if he/she makes me look bad, my boss has taken advantage of me, when I make mistakes my boss uses it against me, I have discussed problems with my boss without having the information used against me, and my boss is primarily interested in his/her own welfare. The mean score of the items was used as the exploitation index, with higher mean scores indicating a greater degree of exploitation. The resulting reliability for the measure in the pre-test was .75.

### **Sample and Data Collection**

We collected data regarding the dependent trust measure and the explanatory variables from adults with work experience with a direct supervisor. The questionnaires were submitted to students currently taking courses at a university that draws a significant portion of their student body from the working population.

We used paper and pencil self-administered questionnaires to collect the data from respondents in 27 classes. Self-report data has the potential to suffer from common method variance. A preferred approach may be to collect objectively observed data relating to the assessments of the managers. Yet, scholars are challenged to gain access to such observations and have relied upon using various approaches to mitigating the potential problems of common method variance. Recognizing the prominence of self-reports in organizational and management research, Podsakoff and Organ

(1986) offered guidance for mitigating common method variance including both procedural and post-hoc remedies. Our procedural approach is described here and our post-hoc statistical analysis is described in the Analysis and Results section.

To procedurally minimize common method variance, we administered them with a time lag between the independent and dependent variables thereby reducing the threat of consistency motif (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Respondents were administered a first questionnaire containing the trust items and demographic questions, as well as the procedure explanation for how their responses would remain anonymous. Each respondent was given a card to write the name of the target manager and was asked to seal it in an envelope with the respondent's name on it. Two to three weeks later, this envelope and reminder card was returned to respondents for the second administration of the survey measuring the independent variables.

The resulting sample consisted of 420 responses that were usable for validity checks on the trust measures. We screened the data to ensure all respondents had work experience and had accurately filled out the questionnaires, resulting in 345 responses containing both dependent and independent data that were usable for testing hypotheses about the effects of the antecedents. The demographics for the responses used in hypothesis testing are as follows: 57% male; average age of 22 years; 70% currently working and 40% working 30 or more hours per week; average years in job 1.93 years; job level included 74% non-managerial, 22% managers, 4% executives; industry sectors were 56% private service, 23% public service, 16% manufacturing and 5% not-for-profit; average education level was 2.63 years of higher education.

### **Control Variables**

Six control variables were employed in the research: gender, age, hours worked per week, length of employment, and two binary variables indicating whether the evaluation was being done for a current manager and whether the respondent held a managerial position. Additionally, we controlled for country of origin through including only U.S. participants.

## Analysis and Results

After appropriately recoding the negatively worded items on the final trust items (see Appendix A), a factor analysis was conducted following methods discussed in Tabachnick & Fidell (2001). Using a varimax rotation, two factors explaining 51% of the variance emerged clearly and reliably ( $n = 420$ ). Examination of the items indicated that the factors consisted of the six task-oriented items and seven relationship items, as expected.

Given this two-factor solution, we conducted parallel hypotheses testing using the two measures – task-oriented trust and relationship-oriented trust. In each case, negatively worded items were recoded as appropriate and the mean score of the items was used as the trust index, with higher mean scores indicating a greater degree of trust.

Before using regression to test the hypotheses regarding these trust measures, a preliminary correlation analysis was done on the explanatory and control variables. A strong negative correlation was found between benevolence and exploitation ( $r = -.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that these two measures actually represent opposite ends of a motivational intention continuum. A factor analysis on the five exploitation and four benevolence items verified that only one factor existed. For all nine items, factor loadings were quite strong, ranging from .64 to .85 with the exception of one exploitation item with a loading of .43. For this reason, the exploitation items were recoded so that a larger number represented a smaller amount of exploitation, and the nine benevolence and exploitation items were averaged into a single “motivational intention” factor that is used in the following analyses.

Table 1 shows the summary statistics and the alpha coefficients for all of the multi-item scales. Since alphas meet the .70 value recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), the multi-item scales exhibit acceptable inter-item reliability.

The correlation matrix is shown in Table 2. All of the antecedents are significantly correlated with the trust measures, and the

majority of the correlations between independent variables are weak to moderate.

The hypotheses were tested with correlations and multiple regression analysis using as independent variables the control variables and the hypothesized predictor variables (antecedents), with models being run for both task-oriented and relationship-oriented trust. Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analyses based on the  $n = 345$  responses for which complete data for all dependent and independent variables were present. The first model uses task-oriented trust as the dependent variable, while the second uses relationship-oriented trust. Of the control variables, length of employment and the current manager binary variable were found to have a positive and significant effect in the relationship model. None of the control variables appeared significant in the task-oriented trust model.

In both models, the regression assumptions appear to be met. There is little evidence of multicollinearity: all but two tolerances exceed .74 and all are above .49, while the criteria for detecting multicollinearity suggested by Belsely, Kuh, & Welsch (1980) show that the conditioning indices are all below .30.

TABLE 1  
Summary Statistics and Reliability Measures

	N	Mean	SD	# Items	$\alpha$
Overall Trust	417	3.44	0.69	13	0.77
Task-oriented trust	420	3.81	0.84	6	0.80
Relationship-oriented trust	420	3.13	0.9	7	0.73
Competence	387	5.7	1.21	4	0.91
Predictability/Consistency	388	4.47	1.13	4	0.70
Motivational Intention	409	5.14	1.24	9	0.89
Control Variables					
Male	388	0.57	0.5	n.a.	n.a.
Hours Worked*	384	24.49	9.55	n.a.	n.a.
Length of Employment	378	1.98	1.99	n.a.	n.a.
Age	378	21.85	4.37	n.a.	n.a.
Managerial	451	0.37	0.48	n.a.	n.a.
Current Manager	431	0.55	0.5	n.a.	n.a.

\* mean and s.d. are estimates based upon the distribution

The results of the correlation and multiple regression analyses support hypotheses H1 and H2, which state, respectively, that a follower's perception of a manager's competence and consistency will be more strongly related to task-oriented trust than to relationship-oriented trust. The correlation between competence and task-oriented trust is .62 compared to a .17 correlation with relationship-oriented trust, whereas consistency shows correlations of .43 vs. .15 with the task and relationship factors (all  $p < .005$ ). Additionally, competence and consistency both appeared significant ( $p < .005$ ) in the multiple regression model for task, while neither was significant in the relationship model.

The results for hypotheses H3a and H3b, which assert that a follower's perception of a manager's benevolence and exploitation will be more strongly related to relationship-oriented trust than to task-oriented trust, are tested by measuring the effects of the motivational intention variable. The bivariate correlations do not support the hypotheses, as the correlation between motivational intention and task-oriented trust ( $r = .53$ ,  $p < .005$ ) is greater than the correlation between motivational intention and relationship-oriented trust ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .005$ ). Although motivational intention was found to be significant in both multiple regression models ( $p < .005$ ), the relative importance of the motivational intention variable in each model, when taking into account the control variables, can be determined by examining several measures (see Table 4). These measures include

the ordinary least squares beta weights, squared semi-partial correlations, and the product measure suggested by Hoffman (1960, 1962), which is the product of the zero-order correlation and the standardized regression coefficient. All of these measures indicate that motivational intention is of greater importance in the relationship model than in the task model, supporting the hypotheses. In addition, these measures further support hypotheses H1 and H2 by illustrating that competence and consistency are of higher importance in the task model than the relationship model.

## Discussion and Conclusions

In this study we examined the relative magnitude of trust antecedents when considering the differing context related dimensional definitions of trust. We found strong evidence that antecedents do explain differential levels of variation in trust depending upon the dimension/orientation being considered.

First, we hypothesized and found evidence that competence was more strongly related to task-oriented than to relationship-oriented trust. If a worker perceives the manager to be competent, the worker is more likely to trust the manager within a task context than in a relationship context. This result shows consistency with prior literature previously discussed and expands the boundary of trust

TABLE 2  
Correlation Matrix

	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Overall Trust	423	1										
2 Task Trust	423	0.67 ***	1									
3 Relationship Trust	423	0.81 ***	0.23 ***	1								
4 Competence	361	0.49 ***	0.62 ***	0.17 ***	1							
5 Consistency	361	0.36 ***	0.43 ***	0.15 ***	0.44 ***	1						
6 Motivational Intention	361	0.58 ***	0.53 ***	0.32 ***	0.68 ***	0.46 ***	1					
7 Male	360	-0.02	-0.10 *	0.08	-0.07	-0.03	-0.03	1				
8 Hours Worked	359	-0.06	0.00	-0.05	-0.09	-0.05	-0.11 **	0.05	1			
9 Length of Employment	353	0.13 *	-0.06	0.19 ***	-0.07	0.04	0.01	0.06	0.14 **	1		
10 Age	351	0.01	-0.06	0.12 *	-0.13 *	-0.07	-0.13 **	-0.01	0.18 ***	0.36 ***	1	
11 Managerial	423	0.00	-0.13 ***	0.07	-0.08	-0.01	-0.02	0.06	0.13 **	0.16 ***	0.12 **	1
12 Current Manager	417	0.19 ***	0.12 **	0.13 **	0.01	0.07	0.08	-0.16 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.02	-0.01	-0.03

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 \*\*  $p < 0.01$   
 \*\*\*  $p < 0.005$

theory through supporting the hypothesis that the trust context matters.

Second, we hypothesized and found support for consistency being more strongly related to task-oriented trust than relationship-oriented trust. If the worker's perception is that the manager acts in a consistent manner, the worker is more likely to be willing to rely upon the manager in the task context than the relationship context. Here again, a well-known antecedent to trust was found to differ in its explanatory ability depending upon the dimension of trust being examined.

Third, we hypothesized that benevolence and exploitation would be more strongly related to relationship-oriented trust than task-oriented trust. Subsequent analysis of these two constructs indicated they were the ends of a continuum of motivational intention, rather than sub-dimensions. We found that motivational intention was more strongly related to relationship-oriented trust than task-oriented trust. Thus, in these cases, the worker will be more willing to rely upon the manager in the relational environment if the worker holds positive perceptions of the manager's motivational intention.

This research expands the boundaries of theory related to trust in leaders. Previously, the focus of nearly all trust in leader work has been on a uni-dimensional definition of trust. For example, Davis et al. (2000) examined similar antecedents and found each to significantly relate to their uni-dimensional definition of trust in the general manager. This was also true of the theoretical models offered by McKnight et al. (1998) and Whitener et al. (1998). These definitional approaches to trust leave an important gap in the literature regarding how certain antecedents may have more or less influence upon trust given different work related contexts. The present work remains consistent with this prior scholarship in that the core of the trust definition, a willingness to be vulnerable, is maintained. The added contribution of our work is to specifically address the gap in knowledge related to the uni-dimensional definition by providing a multi-dimensional definition of trust and an empirical examination based upon the task and relationship oriented contexts.

The findings in this study are an also an extension of the work of Dirks and Ferrin (2002)

in their examination of relationship and character based definitions of trust. The authors examined how cognitive and affective antecedents may differentially influence their two definitions of trust. The present study focused upon cognitive antecedents, finding that these too differentially influenced task and relationship-oriented trust definitions.

The above discussion allows us to address the overall question of whether or not certain antecedents have more impact in one trust context than in another. The evidence in this study supports a positive conclusion and provides an extended understanding of the complex nature of trust in a directly supervising manager. While all of the explanatory variables are significantly related to both orientations of trust, competence and consistency are more strongly related to task-oriented trust and motivational intention is more strongly related to relationship-oriented trust.

### **Practical Implications**

The above conclusions have multiple practical implications. The first is that building trust is more complex than one might expect from previous literature. As noted by Galford and Seibold Drapeau in their 2003 Harvard Business Review article, some managers may be honest, straightforward and competent and yet, there are times when they are still clearly not trusted. Our study supports that the trust context should be considered in trust building.

When leaders are in positions where relationship-oriented trust is needed, they should clearly consider their actions regarding how benevolent or exploitative they act towards their colleagues and subordinates. If workers perceive leaders to be out for themselves or willing to use information against the worker, it is unlikely they will engage in open communication or personal revelation because they will be unwilling to make themselves vulnerable to the leader. The unfortunate result of this unwillingness might be unclear and perhaps untrue information delivered from the workers. The behavioral implications are that leaders attempting to develop relationship-oriented trust should refrain from activities that

**TABLE 3**  
**Multiple Regression Results**

Independent Variable	<i>Dependent Variable</i>			
	Task-Oriented Trust		Relationship-Oriented	
(Constant)	b <sub>i</sub>	Std Err	b <sub>i</sub>	Std Err
Control Variables				
Male	-0.084	0.071	0.170	0.089
Hours Worked	0.070	0.036	-0.040	0.045
Length of Employment	-0.020	0.020	0.068 **	0.025
Age	0.008	0.009	0.018	0.011
Managerial	-0.150	0.081	0.172	0.102
Current Manager	0.090	0.073	0.189 *	0.092
Competence	0.302 ***	0.042	-0.019	0.053
Consistency	0.122 ***	0.036	-0.013	0.045
Motivational Intention	0.122 ***	0.040	0.240 ***	0.051
R <sup>2</sup>	0.440		0.170	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.425		0.147	
N	345		345	

\*  $p < 0.05$   
 \*\*  $p < 0.01$   
 \*\*\*  $p < 0.005$

**Table 4**  
**Relative Importance Measures**

	Task Model				Relationship Model			
	Zero-order Correlation *	Beta	Squared Semipartial	Product Measure	Zero-order Correlation *	Beta	Squared Semipartial	Product Measure
Competence	0.62	0.42	0.09	0.26	0.17	-0.03	0.00	0.00
Consistency	0.43	0.16	0.02	0.07	0.14	-0.02	0.00	0.00
Motivational Intention	0.53	0.18	0.02	0.09	0.31	0.34	0.05	0.11

\*All  $p < 0.005$

may lead workers to question their motivational intentions.

On the other hand, if the situation between the leader and worker is predominantly task-oriented, these results indicate that the leader should make it a priority to demonstrate their competence and consistency in order to create trust related to the task situation. Doing so is likely to create willingness of the workers to make themselves vulnerable to the leader's task-related directives, assurances and plans of action. A lack of development of this trust may lead to questioning the leader's suggested approaches to task completion and appropriateness of goals set. Leaders should engage in activities that enhance their followers'

perceptions that they are competent and consistent.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations of this research should be recognized. First, we were able to draw conclusions about the relationship between the worker's task and relationship-oriented trust and the worker's perceptions of the manager's competence, consistency and motivational intention. Yet, these results do not allow us to draw conclusions about worker trust and actual levels of manager competence, consistency and motivational intentions. It is possible (and perhaps probable) that workers' perceptions are

not objectively accurate in their assessments of their managers. This leads to interesting questions regarding linkages between worker perception and reality, and potential intervening variables that may exist at the interpersonal level (e.g. diversity between the worker and manager) and sociological levels (e.g. organizational culture and systems). Further research is warranted.

Second, our choice regarding the use of a self-administered questionnaire using a single source allows for the possibility of common method variance. Our choice rested upon our desire to understand the worker perceptions rather than actual manager behaviors. Recognizing this, we took recommended steps to separate the collection of the dependent and independent variables as recommended in the literature (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). We also took recommended post-hoc steps to assess and address common method variance. Given the challenges of the research objective, our method and analysis employed significant means to address and mitigate this issue.

Third, we are limited in our ability to conclude about cause-and-effect by the cross-sectional nature of the research. While logic and theory dictate that the antecedents studied would be related to trust in the given contexts, longitudinal research measuring dependent and independent variables over time are needed.

This observation also leads to another interesting possibility that the magnitude of difference may vary over time between antecedents and the different trust-orientations. It is possible that the magnitude of antecedents' relationships exist at one level early in the relationship, only to vary up or down depending upon multiple interactions with the manager. Our data does not allow us to examine this possibility that deserves further attention.

We also recognize that our choices regarding sample demographics limit our ability to strongly generalize to significantly different populations. We cannot conclude that these results are generalizable to workers with a large number of years working for the same manager. While our respondents have significant work experience, they may not be similar to workers with extended years of experience with complete or advanced degrees. Additionally, our population was relatively young (average age 22

years) and although our range included older workers, the results may not hold with a significantly older population average. Finally, we are unable to conclude if these results are generalizable cross-culturally as the sample was limited to U.S. participants. Each of the limitations of the current work provides important opportunities for replication with varied sample populations to better understand the potential importance of these demographic factors.

We also decided to focus on the cognitive rather than dispositional and affective antecedents. We are unable to conclude how these may impact the results. Since our work explained between 17% and 44% of variance in the dependent variables, there are clearly other variables at work. These may include other known and yet to be examined antecedents, again opening the opportunity for further research.

Our study also considered the antecedents to trust independently from one another in order to investigate the relative independent impacts upon task and relationship-oriented trust. It is possible that there are interaction effects that may influence whether or not the antecedent is positively related to the predicted trust dimension. For example, it is possible that one may be considered high in consistency, but low in competency and therefore low in task-oriented trust. This also deserves additional theoretical and empirical examination.

Finally, new questions regarding the trust-to-outcomes relationship can now be raised. It may be possible that differing levels of one type of trust orientation vs. another may lead to different outcome levels in areas such as organizational citizenship behaviors, job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and goal commitment. Examining these issues will be important practical and theoretical steps in the ongoing pursuit of our understanding of worker trust in leaders.

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