TRUST TESTS: AN ACTIVE APPROACH TO EVALUATING TRUSTWORTHINESS

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ABSTRACT

How trust develops between two individuals has received much scholarly attention but typically embodies the assumption that trustworthiness judgements are based on observation of naturally occurring interactions. We argue that a supplemental, hands-on approach to assessing trustworthiness involves an interpersonal naïve experiment or *trust test* designed to determine if another individual can be trusted. These trust tests are intentional, proactive, and not a part of organizational policy or process. Using established dimensions of trustworthiness, e.g., ability, benevolence and integrity, we define what a trust test is and distinguish it from other trust related attributions and behaviors. We develop theoretical propositions for antecedents of trust tests that may be directed upward towards leaders, laterally to co-workers, or downward to subordinates. The boundary conditions and potential consequences of trust tests for relationships in the workplace are developed. Our theorizing starts with the realization that trust tests are an active component of workplace activity and then establishes conditions by which this phenomenon can be further investigated.

Key words: trust, trustworthiness, theory, employment relationships

Trust between individuals in organizations is an important indicator of the quality of their relationship, is related to their productivity at the individual and collective level, and can be a source of competitive advantage (Colquitt, Scott & LePine, 2007; De Jong, Dirks & Gillespie, 2016; Sousa-Lima, Michel & Caetano, 2013). Interpersonal trust, defined as a willingness to be vulnerable in combination with positive expectations of another, has been viewed as based on an evaluation of an individual's trustworthiness (Colquitt, et al., 2007; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Trustworthiness has been conceptualized as resting on the three factors of ability (e.g., skills and competencies), benevolence (e.g., positive intentions) and integrity (e.g., strong ethical principles) (Mayer et al., 1995).

While an excellent treatise on the components of trustworthiness, Mayer et al.'s model did not define the methods by which individuals determined the extent of another's trustworthiness. Subsequent treatments of trustworthiness have explicitly or implicitly assumed that individuals passively monitor the characteristics, decisions and behavior of an individual to gain relevant knowledge (Brower, Schoorman, & Hwee Hoon, 2000; Colquitt et al., 2007; De Cremer, van Dijke, Schminke, De Schutter, & Stouten, 2018; Holtz, 2013; McAllister, 1995). For example, employees assessed changes in managers' performance appraisal system as indicators of trustworthiness (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Moreover, various conceptualizations of how trust develops, i.e., stage models (progressing from calculative trust, to knowledge based, then to identification-based trust) (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), shifts over time in relative effects of characteristics of the trustor, trustee or dyad (Jones & Shah, 2016), or reciprocal spirals of trust and cooperative interaction (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008), embody the prevailing idea that naturally occurring interactions and observations serve as the basis for assessing trustworthiness.

We challenge this assumption by suggesting that individuals may not only seek information relevant to assessing trustworthiness, but may, at times, actively construct situations, or tests, that reveal behavior relevant to assessing ability, benevolence and integrity. By dropping the assumption that individuals exclusively pursue a passive approach by monitoring for information regarding trustworthiness, we introduce what we call *trust tests*.

> *A platoon sergeant, doubting his new platoon leader's technical ability, asked him to demonstrate the disassembly, cleaning and re-assembly of his rifle to the soldiers in his platoon while his soldiers were waiting in line to receive their evening meal. The platoon leader, accompanied by his platoon sergeant, sat on the ground near the dinner line and repeatedly took apart, cleaned and assembled his rifle while blindfolded. The platoon leader's sergeant and soldiers watched the situation as they waited in line and noted the leader's demonstration of skill.*

As in the example above, trust tests are actively created or devised, in this instance, to expose the extent to which a supervisor possessed the required technical ability for trustworthiness.

We define *trust tests as an intentional effort to construct an event, situation, or task devised to obtain information relevant to the trustworthiness of another individual.* Briefly, trust tests are *interpersonal* such that one individual is evaluating the trustworthiness of another individual. The use of trust tests is *intentional*, meaning that an individual has devoted some effort to planning how to contrive a situation that would yield information regarding trustworthiness. Trust tests are not embedded in organizational policy nor do they stem from routinized or specified evaluations, including performance evaluations; instead we focus on individuals' proactive efforts to pursue trustworthiness information from their own efforts to manage a situation. Trust tests may be used to assess dimensions of trustworthiness (e.g. ability, benevolence, or integrity) either singly or in any combination.

By yielding important knowledge about aspects of ability, benevolence or integrity, trust tests offer individuals a means to gain a measure of certainty and control in relationships.

Individuals may use the resulting information to accept increased vulnerability in the relationship or to take steps to alleviate potential risks.

Trust tests used by employees seeking to evaluate the trustworthiness of their supervisors or leaders are what we will refer to as directed *upwards*. Trust tests may also be directed *laterally* to ascertain the trustworthiness of peers and team members. Relatedly, trust tests may be used by supervisors or leaders directed *downward* to assess trustworthiness of subordinates. We provide examples in Appendix A of each direction (upwards, lateral, and downward) and focus on the antecedents of trust test usage.

We caution that using trust tests may not be related to increases in trustworthiness. In short, trust tests may reveal failure, e.g., the supervisor may demonstrate a lack of benevolence, the co-worker a lack of integrity, or the subordinate a lack of ability. Regardless of the trustee's success or failure, the trust test generated useful information that may help individuals mitigate risk and uncertainty when judging trustworthiness. It is also important to note that trust tests may be well and properly constructed for a specific person, occupation or context, or may be poorly devised in that they test behavior, performance or characteristics that are irrelevant or inappropriate.

In contrast to assumptions that individuals passively interpret and judge the behavior of, and their experiences with, others to assess trustworthiness, we introduce a dynamic approach to gauging trustworthiness, the trust test. In this manuscript, we define and articulate the nature of trust tests, establishing that trust tests can supplement passive approaches and may be used to evaluate trustworthiness upward, laterally or downward in organizational settings. Furthermore, we develop the theoretical relationships with the antecedents and consequences of trust tests and theorize about issues related to the expected success and utility of trust tests. Our work

contributes to trust research by filling in a portion of the largely blank space on how individuals obtain the information necessary for evaluating trustworthiness.

DEFINING A TRUST TEST

Humans pay special attention to why people do what they do - focusing on understanding the causes of outcomes that are important to them (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Weiner, 2008). Because humans are social creatures and their relationships with others are an important feature of individuals' lives, the decision to trust, or not to trust, another person is critical. Relationships with others entail the possibility of benefits but also entail risk and vulnerability, underscoring how important it is to correctly determine another's trustworthiness. The assumption, with some evidence, is that perceptions of ability, benevolence and integrity form as individuals gather thin slices of information over time through interactions with others or through observation (Baer, van der Werff, et al., 2018). Regardless of whether trust is conceptualized as either cognitive or affective in nature, it is still assumed that individuals gather information from interactions, evaluations of similarity, and assessments of context to determine trustworthiness (McAllister, 1995). Undoubtedly individuals use this passive approach but assessing trustworthiness is important enough that some individuals, at some times, take the active approach of creating trust tests.

What a Trust Test is

Trust tests may be conceptualized as an experiment whereby an individual deliberately attempts to manipulate the environment to create an experiment, perhaps quasi- or pseudo-experimental, that is intended to reveal information regarding the trustworthiness of another person. Individuals are primed to examine cause and effect relationships, to understand why and how things occur (Weiner, 1985). Accordingly, individuals can also seek to create experiments

(Cook & Campbell, 1979). Individuals vary in their ability to understand causal relationships and, of course, in their ability to create experiments, but the idea of creating experiments to obtain information is a fundamentally human characteristic.

Researchers know that the gold standard for evidence regarding a possible causal relationship is gained from conducting a well-designed experiment (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Although there is an abundance of advice written on how to design experiments, we should not overlook that individuals act as naïve experimenters to obtain their own evidence about cause and effect relationships. When naïve experimentation is applied to assessing trustworthiness, we call it a trust test.

A trust test resembles what is sometimes refers to as an "N of one test" in the medical field. Medical science has long recognized that conducting a series of experiments on a single patient, e.g., to determine which migraine medication works better, may be an effective approach for determining appropriate care for that specific patient and may lead to ideas relevant to other patients (Kravitz, Duan, Eslick, Gabler & Kaplan, 2014). Small sample studies with a single individual in a sample have also been used informally, but with intention, in many contexts, e.g. to determine the effectiveness of a behavioral system for managing a child's tantrums, or which diet is more effective for weight loss. When implemented by an individual, with or without scientific training, the larger objective is to conduct a planned, intentional effort to gain information relevant to a specific purpose by manipulating aspects of the situation.

Trust tests exemplify a cognitive approach to assessing trustworthiness when individuals find it necessary to obtain knowledge for making trust judgements (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; McAllister, 1995). We want to point out that a cognitive approach to assessing trustworthiness overlaps with, but is different from, cognition-based trust. Cognition based trust, as opposed to

affective trust, is based on reliability, dependability, and other cues related to competence and responsibility (McAllister, 1995). Although trust tests can be used to assess ability, they can also be used to test benevolence and integrity. The idea inherent in our description of trust tests as a cognitive approach is that individuals are attending to what they believe they know, and don't know, about another's trustworthiness. That is, individuals engaging in trust tests possess some amount of self-awareness of their knowledge of trustworthiness establishing trust tests as a cognitive approach.

Trust tests are intentional and not an accidental opportunity. They are constructed or designed to purposefully generate useful information about trustworthiness. To that end, trust tests involve active manipulation or creation of the circumstances of a situation that is intended to test whether a trustee possesses a desirable attribute of trustworthiness.

What a Trust Test is Not

To further clarify what a trust test is, we identify what is not a trust test. Observing an individual, perhaps engaged in a job task or behaving in some work relevant context, is not a trust test. Observation, unaccompanied by individuals' intentional efforts to manipulate the environment in some fashion, is a passive approach to gathering information. While passive approaches may also yield much useful knowledge about trustworthiness, a trust test is an active effort to purposefully create an opportunity to obtain information relevant to trustworthiness. Trust tests are not an embedded component of performance management systems. Performance management has been typically focused on performance appraisals but may also include routine systems for providing feedback, setting goals, crafting training and development plans, and monitoring the effectiveness of reward systems (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). These performance management activities may yield information relevant to trustworthiness or be influenced by

trust in trustees, but are not trust tests. Nor would a leaders' administration of a performance test, for example a scored role-play with a pretend customer to evaluate customer relations skills, be a trust test when that role play is an embedded part of performance evaluation and is routinely administered to all employees in a given role. We propose that trust tests may complement performance management systems for evaluating ability, benevolence, and integrity but that trust tests are not systemic events.

Trust tests are not leadership behavior. Leaders are typically charged with guiding, monitoring, supporting, persuading, inspiring and motivating employees' work behavior to meet performance standards (Bass & Bass, 2008; Fleishman, 1953). Although these behaviors may generate information relevant to followers' and peers' assessments of ability, benevolence and integrity, these behaviors are not trust tests because there is no individual conducting an experiment.

Quality of the Trust Test

Intentionally creating an experiment to expose the trustworthiness characteristics of another individual doesn't mean that the test will be well designed, useful or appropriate. Just as some employers wrongly view certain characteristics and attributes as job qualifications (e.g., males are better at computer coding, older applicants are incapable of learning new skills), individuals may embed inaccurate or irrelevant standards into their trust tests. Employees may design an upward test of a leader that reveals technical facility, or lack of it, on a skill that is not related to effective leadership. A leader may construct a downward test of an employee's benevolence that involves a test of improper personal, rather than role-based work-related, loyalty. A peer may conduct a trust test intended to reveal integrity in the work place by designing an experiment to determine if the trustee cheats at cards. Likewise, the design of the

trust test itself may be poor, fail outright or simply be clumsy. Just as individuals vary in their skills for every other task, some will be especially adept at designing trust tests that effectively reveal trustworthiness characteristics while others lack the wherewithal to manage the details of creating a trust test.

PLACING TRUST TESTS IN THE CONTEXT OF TRUST DEVELOPMENT

Trust tests are a tactic that individuals may use to inform their trust in others, but trust test usage may not be equally likely in all phases of a work place relationship. Process models view trust and distrust as a recurring series of events that typically lead to increased trust (or distrust), sometimes with reversions to earlier stages (Lewicki & Buncker, 1996: Sitken & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2018). Trust process models vary, and while some individuals may proceed differently through supposed stages, trust derived from imperfect knowledge of another's experience, abilities or intentions is often positioned as a starting point. For example, calculus based trust is an assessment that the trustee is sufficiently deterred from negative behavior and sufficiently rewarded for behaving positively (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Likewise, cognitive trust, based in knowledge about another's reliability and worthiness, has been found to precede affective trust, which is based on shared positive feelings emotional investments (McAllister, 1995; Schaubroeck et al, 2013). Trust based on familiarity and knowledge typically precedes trust that is rooted in close identification, and congruent values and motives (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). If trust grows over time, becoming more affective and identification-based, individuals may find trust tests unnecessary. Of course, as a relationship proceeds there may be changes in circumstances, events or in individuals themselves, that cause individuals to re-evaluate their trust in another. At these critical time points, trust tests may again be employed.

When the basis for trust is knowledge based, calculative or cognitive in nature rather than affective, trust tests may be useful. Specifically, trust tests designed for ability and integrity may generate information relevant to calculations about the likelihood of another acting reliably and professionally. Trust tests intended to assess benevolence may reveal information about shared values and intentions toward the trustor; therefore, these may be more useful for determining affective and identification based trust. Taking into account our two streams of reasoning, we propose:

P1: Trust tests intended to assess ability and integrity may be more useful for determining cognitive, calculative and knowledge based trust and distrust. Benevolence focused trust tests may be more useful for assessing affective types of trust.

P2: Trust tests may be used more in the early phases of a relationship.

ANTECEDENTS OF TRUST TESTS

We make no claim that individuals frequently conduct trust tests because, at this point, we have no empirical evidence. Nor do we claim that any one direction of trust tests, referring to lateral, downward and upward tests, is more common or effective than any other. We do assert that at least some individuals conduct trust tests at least some of the time and we develop theory about the nature of, antecedents and consequences of trust tests.

Individual Differences Associated with Trust Tests

Individual differences can greatly affect the extent to which a person acknowledges the existence of trust tests and then chooses to use them to one degree or another. In part, attribution theory can help understand how trust decisions are made. Attribution theory attempts to explain the process by which one makes judgments about the causes of another person's behavior and why certain events, like the development of trusting relationships, occur (Heider, 1976; Kelley,

1967; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Witt, Broach, Hilton, & Heiman, 1995). Weiner (1995) posited that when explanations are sought about the cause of specific events, they can create emotional reactions to these events as well as subsequent behaviors. This is significant in that these emotional reactions can influence how trust decisions are made (Htzakis, 2009). Collections of individual differences, termed attributional styles, demonstrate personality-directed attributional tendencies or ways in which individual attribution expression can, by application, affect trust decisions (Peterson, Semmel, Von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky, & Seligman, 1982). Practical connections between attribution theory and trust, e.g., Tyler and Degoey's (1996) research on individual willingness to trust authority figures as well as Castelfranchi and Falcon's (2000) investigation on judgment related to ability and competence have been chronicled in trust research. In a landmark study, Htzakis (2009) proposed a direct link between trust attribution and style through two major evidence types, those being: trust states – positive effect and distrust states – negative effect. Because of these various applications of attribution style, we surmise that individuals likely vary in their propensity to use trust tests. Therefore, we articulate four types of differences that should be related to trust test use.

Proactivity. Individuals who are high in proactivity have a relatively high and stable dispositional tendencies to influence and manipulate their environment versus those who passively react to circumstances (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Individuals who are proactive tend to establish higher quality exchange relationships resulting in higher satisfaction and contributing more extra-role performance (Li, Jian, & Crant, 2010), tend to socialize themselves (Ashford & Black, 1996; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005), are more successful at creating social capital and building their networks (Thompson, 2005), tend to set higher goals not only for themselves but for others (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013), and tend to be rated more highly in

performance (Grant & Sumanth, 2009). We reason that individuals who are proactive are more likely to actively seek information critical to their work role (Ashford & Black, 1996).

Given the prominent need to know if others in the work environment can be trusted, individuals who tend to take a proactive approach to managing other aspects of their work life are likely to apply these same tendencies to obtaining information related to trustworthiness. Moreover, given that proactive tendencies are relatively stable (Bateman & Crant, 1993), these individuals have likely, over time, built a somewhat greater repertoire of skills and techniques for manipulating their environment that can be applied to constructing trust tests. In contrast, those who are low in proactivity, while also needing and prioritizing information regarding trustworthiness, have weaker tendencies to actively engage with their environment and, as a result, likely have less experience and skill that is relevant to creating trust tests. Low proactive individuals are less likely to possess or marshal the resources necessary to construct a trust test. For these reasons, individuals low in proactivity are more likely to take a passive, perhaps observational, approach to assessing trustworthiness. Summarizing our reasoning, we suggest:

> P3: Individuals who are high in proactivity are more likely to use trust tests than those who are low in proactivity.

Propensity to trust. Mayer et al. (1995) introduced the notion of the propensity to trust "as a trait that leads to a generalized expectation about the trustworthiness of others" (pg. 715). Individuals vary in their own cognitive proclivities and propensity to trust others and individuals with a high propensity to trust are more likely to trust others, especially in the early stages of a relationship (Baer, Matta, Kim, Welsh, & Garud, 2018; Jones & Shah, 2016). Those low in trust propensity lack the generalized expectancy that others, across situations, will act in trustworthy ways (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007). A low propensity to trust has been conceptualized as

being equivalent to the absence of trust or an indication of a condition of distrust (Hardin, 2004; Mayer et al.,1995). Research in distrust has mainly progressed in two distinct areas, those being variance and process models. Variance models investigate how distrust can differ amongst various determinants. Key determinants are seen to be either perceived value incongruence, that is, when distrust is brought on by perceptions of an incompatibility in personal values, or negative attributions of motives, seen when personal motives or values are perceived to be fundamental to one's character or worldview (Sitkin & Roth, 1993; Sitkin & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2018). Individuals who are more distrusting or are low in trust propensity are more likely to withhold their trust in the absence of evidence of trustworthiness, we argue that they will be more inclined to obtain relevant evidence through the use of trust tests than will those who are high in trust propensity.

P4: Individuals with low trust propensity will engage in using trust tests more than those who have high trust propensity.

Need for control. Individuals who hold strong beliefs that they can control their own lives, e.g., high locus of control, may be more likely to use trust tests than those who believe that their lives are controlled more by fate or the decisions of others. Individuals with a high locus of control tend to be more invested in and satisfied with their jobs, perform at higher levels, and have stronger skills in social relationships and problem-solving (Wang, Bowling, & Eschleman, 2010). Individuals facing greater uncertainty about their performance were more likely to seek feedback (Ashford, 1986) and employees with a greater desire for control tended to seek more information, socialize and network, and take the proactive step of negotiating for job changes (Ashford & Black, 1996). For these reasons, individuals with a high locus of control may especially feel the absence of information regarding the trustworthiness of others. Likewise,

these individuals may be more inclined, and because of stronger social skills, perhaps more capable of staging trust tests than those who have a lower, external locus of control.

P5: Individuals with a higher need for control will engage in using trust tests more than those who have a low need for control.

Experience and success. Experience on the job, whether measured in terms of job tenure, the amount of experiences or the type of work, is related to higher levels of both technical performance and soft skills performance (Quinones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995). Similarly, managers with greater experience on the job generated more profits (McEnrue, 1988). Work experiences, both successes and failures, provide opportunities for individuals to learn, develop and hone their skills and performance on the job is a combination of explicit expertise and tacit knowledge about how to accomplish tasks. Because trust tests are not embedded in organizational systems, their use is not regulated, taught, or formally transmitted. Yet as individuals' gain experience they develop skills for navigating their way through an organization including the abilities necessary to design and implement trust tests. For these reasons, we suggest that, in general, as individuals gain greater knowledge and skills in their jobs they will be more likely to successfully use trust tests.

P6: Individuals with greater relevant experience and success in their role are more likely to use trust tests than those with less relevant experience and success.

Situational Antecedents of Trust Tests

Neither personality nor situations alone determine individuals' behavior (Mischel & Shoda, 2008). Just as individual differences may predispose the use of trusts tests, we anticipate that trust tests will be more common in some situations.

Situational risk. Similar to our argument for asserting that individuals with a higher need for control will use trust tests, we suggest that when a work environment entails risk and uncertainty, individuals may be more likely to use trust tests. For instance, in the military example opening this paper, the necessity of trust is critical because of the uncertainty and risk associated with possible involvement in combat situations. Similarly, individuals acting in a first responder capacity (e.g. police, paramedics, emergency medical workers) perform in contexts where there may be a great deal of novelty and uncertainty. Jobs and work environments vary in the extent to which risk and vulnerability is present, whether that risk is from the environment in which the job takes place or when the risk results from less defined procedures and a lack of role clarity (Alison, Power, van den Heuvel, & Waring, 2015). Moreover, the lack of trust itself among colleagues increases perceptions of risk. As job risk increases, the increased confusion may amplify individuals' concerns about trustworthiness of supervisors, direct reports or colleagues. When information about the trustworthiness of relevant others is absent, uncertainty and risk may further increase in a spiraling pattern.

Another factor that may increase situational risk is the degree of change in an organization. Both the frequency of organizational change and the extent to which change is perceived as a normal part of planned operations is related to employees' perceptions of uncertainty, decreasing their job satisfaction and increasing their intentions to leave their jobs (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). These negative effects were lessened as employees felt supported by their leaders (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Given that support, socio-emotional or task support, is related to trustworthiness and findings that trust in leaders and the organization mitigates the negative effects of organizational change (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999), it is plausible that individuals may be motivated to assess trustworthiness in times of organizational change.

Because trusting in others has the effect of reducing uncertainty and unpredictability (Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata, & Rich, 2012), individuals may engage in trust tests to reduce that risk. Risky work environments have the potential to affect everyone in a work place, and the effects of trust trickle down and trickle up (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2017), we think the likelihood of trust tests will increase regardless of whether they are directed upward to leaders, downward to followers, or laterally to co-workers. The information from a trust test, whether it leads to information increasing or decreasing trustworthiness, may enable individuals to gain at least a modicum of certainty in an uncertain work situation.

P7: The greater the risk and potential for harm in a situation, the more likely that individuals will use trust tests.

Dependence on the trustee. Using logic similar to that described above, we reason that as a trustor's dependence on a trustee increases, the more likely the trustor will conduct a trust test. Individuals who highly depend on the ability, benevolence and integrity of another for rewards and resources, and will suffer from their deprivation, may not only monitor trustworthiness information but may seek to obtain the information they need from trust tests.

Employees monitor untrustworthy managers closely and they incur costs, in the form of reduced attention to job tasks and in behaviors to protect themselves from those managers (Mayer & Gavin, 2005). Passive monitoring requires employees' time, attention and focus. But when managers are trusted these efforts are unnecessary and can be directed to other pursuits including performance. Employees who depend on their managers may be willing to invest in the effort to construct a trust test to obtain the information necessary to determine whether their managers are trustworthy. Conversely, when employees have low dependence, perhaps when

work rules and organizational policies constrain managers' discretion over rewards given to employees, they may be less inclined to use trust tests.

Individuals also have varying levels of dependence on their co-workers. Individuals whose work roles are interdependent with colleagues' roles or perhaps are engaged in team projects, may depend on their co-workers for their own task accomplishment. When co-workers do not honor their commitments and uphold performance standards, then individuals' own performance may be subpar threatening their own contingent rewards and resources. For these reasons, individuals who are highly dependent on co-workers may be more likely to engage in trust tests than those whose work roles are more solitary and independent.

It is also important to recognize the extent to which supervisors may depend on their employees. Supervisors and employees are engaged in an exchange relationship that has both economic and socio-emotional components. Supervisors, acting as organizational agents, hire employees for their labor to accomplish organizational goals (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Simon, 1951). When employees' labor is essential to organizational success and is rare (i.e., hard to find in the labor market), employers' dependence on employees' labor is high (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Likewise, supervisors may depend on employees' labor, bundled with their own or other employees, for their own contingent rewards from organizations. Moreover, supervisors participate in socio-emotional exchanges (e.g., pleasant conversations, jokes, and general support) with employees and may depend on these resources for their own well-being on the job (Marcus & House, 1973). Accordingly, supervisors may receive rewards and resources from employees but their dependence likely varies. As with employees and co-workers, supervisors may choose to engage in trust tests when they have high dependence on another.

P8: Trustees who have high dependence on the trustor, are more likely to use trust tests than those with less dependence.

Length of the relationship between trustor and trustee. A passive, observational approach to assessing trustworthiness allows time for relationships to develop organically over a series of exchanges, regardless of whether the valence of the exchanges is positive or negative. In contrast, using a trust test is a shortcut to obtaining knowledge about trustworthiness. Trust tests may be a more knowledge-based, analytical approach to assessing trustworthiness (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Engaging in trust tests means that individuals have determined that some degree of speediness is necessary implying that they have given some consideration to what knowledge is missing and perhaps why it is needed. Where trust in others is critical, individuals may "need" to get the knowledge necessary to cognitive assess trust before relationships develop an affective component (Schaubroeck, Peng, & Hannah, 2013; Wang, Tomlinson, & Noe, 2010). Accordingly, trust tests may be a technique for determining whether cognitive trust is warranted. Our reasoning suggests that trust tests may be used most, and perhaps be most useful, earlier in the tenure of relationships. Early in the relationship is when individuals likely have had the weakest or fewest opportunities to assess trustworthiness. In contrast, waiting till later in the relationship allows the time for more exchanges to occur and more opportunities to observe behaviors that signal trustworthiness making trust tests less necessary.

P9: Trust tests are more likely to be used earlier in the tenure of a relationship rather than later.

UPWARD, DOWNWARD, AND LATERAL TRUST TESTS

The individual and situational factors that we have identified should generally influence the use of trust tests regardless of whether the trust test is directed upwards (e.g., to test supervisors, leaders), downwards (e.g., to test subordinates, followers), or laterally (e.g., to test peers, teammates). Yet we see reasons for the components of trustworthiness (i.e., ability, benevolence, integrity) that is, the focus of the trust test, to vary somewhat systematically depending on the target of the test.

Upward tests may be more likely to focus on benevolence than on ability or integrity. Consistent with an avalanche of research, individuals face risks, uncertainties, and difficulties of all kinds in the workplace. Individuals benefit when believe they have a supportive and fair supervisor who considers their interests, offers guidance and help, and feels favorably disposed to them. These perceptions of benevolence can both strengthen the affective relationship between employee and supervisor and can mitigate the unpredictability and risk in a hierarchical relationship (Colquitt et al., 2012).

Ability is less likely to be the focus of upward trust tests because individuals are both rarely in a position to evaluate ability, but also a supervisors' competence on the job may count for little if the supervisor is not favorably inclined to support the employee. Likewise, information about the integrity of a supervisor may matter less without knowledge of the supervisor's benevolence.

P10: Upward directed trust tests are more likely to focus on benevolence and less on ability and integrity.

Downward tests, by definition, involve an individual higher in the organizational hierarchy than the individual being tested. The higher hierarchical position generally conveys better access to resources and information and, specifically in western economies, perhaps less

reliance on socio-emotional support from direct reports. Those with higher power tend to be more focused on their own interests, rather than those of their subordinates (Balliet, Mulder, & Van Lange, 2011). Moreover, the primary self-interest of those higher in the hierarchy is likely to be associated with their own role requirements (Guinote, 2017); supervisors are frequently and explicitly charged with monitoring, directing and evaluating the performance of their direct reports (Dierdorff, Rubin, & Morgeson, 2009; Yukl, 2002). Ability is an obvious focus for downward trust tests because it concerns the competence, skills and aptitudes necessary for effective job performance. We also anticipate that downward trust tests will focus on integrity. An individual who possesses ability, but not integrity, must be monitored closely in all respects and may cause more damage to organizational interests than an individual with low ability.

P11: Downward directed trust tests are more likely to focus on ability and integrity and less on benevolence.

The nature of work with co-workers may require knowledge of ability, benevolence and integrity perhaps in equal measure (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Interdependent work roles require individuals to be able to trust that co-workers possess the skills and abilities necessary to accomplish joint tasks. Co-workers are an important source of support including socio-emotional (e.g., friendship), and task (help in mastering skills and navigating the organization) both of which rest on the affective attachment that is the root of benevolence. Integrity is also essential for co-worker relationships especially when work products involve interdependent activity.

P12: Lateral trust tests may focus on any of the three characteristics of ability, benevolence or integrity.

APPROPRIATENESS AND ETHICALITY OF TRUST TESTS

The target of a trust test might detect that he/she is being tested. Those who have been tested might feel deceived, and angry that they have been subjected to an experiment intended to assess their ability, benevolence or integrity. In a version of a trust game, laboratory participants shared more money when they were monitored by their partner than in rounds where they were not monitored (Schweitzer, Ho, & Zhang, 2018). Their results suggested individuals may resented being monitored, or trust tested as we describe in this paper, and may revert to self-centered behavior when not monitored.

We suggest that anger or other negative emotions and repercussions from trust tests may not be common. We think that Schweitzer et al.s' (2018) results do not apply to trust tests because we focus on organizational relationships where both trustor and trustee have been hired to pursue organizational goals. Employees have entered a negotiated exchange relationship where they give their labor in return for rewards (Simon, 1951) and part of the deal inherent in a job is that employees' efforts and accomplishments are scrutinized (Arvey & Murphy, 1998). Thus, employees may not be surprised when their supervisors look for ways to test their trustworthiness. Peers, especially when new to a group, are likely conscious that others are evaluating them and deciding if they can be trusted. Leaders know that their effectiveness as leaders is compromised unless they have the consent and trust of their followers (Bass & Bass, 2008). Indeed, leaders have been encouraged to signal trustworthiness in their personal behavior and in their choices for organizational policies (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). So it is reasonable to assume that leaders may not be surprised to find that their followers are actively determining their trustworthiness. Regardless of whether trust tests are common or not in a specific work place, using trust tests may be an acceptable option. For this reason, learning

that one is a target of a trust test may not be surprising or damaging to relationships with others in the work place.

Like any social behavior, it is possible that a trust test can be devised in a way that is insulting, derogatory, or even cruel. Trust tests may violate principles of treating other humans with dignity and respect. Trust tests can be illegitimate in that they are designed to test a behavior that is not justifiably related to trustworthiness at work. To the extent that trust tests depart from norms of collegiality and ethical conduct they will be received badly, likely damaging the relationship. Trust tests will be more accepted when conducted ethically and legitimately.

DISCUSSION

The beneficial effects of trust in workplace relationships are strong and undeniable. Achieving organizational goals requires collaborative and interdependent activities are eased when individuals trust each other. The assumption embedded in scholarly discussions of how trust develops is that trustworthiness is assessed based on observations from naturally occuring interactions. Yet knowing whether another individual is trustworthy or not can be so important that individuals may act to gain that information with a *trust test*. We identify and name the phenemon of a trust test as a proactive engagement in naïve experimentation to obtain evidence about anothers' trustworthiness. We contribute to trust theory by developing a conceptual explanation of how individuals gain trustworthiness information, suggesting that passive observations can be supplemented by an active, engaged approach. In our theroetical development we defined trust tests, and developed propositions regarding the antecedents of their use.

Practical Implications

If empirical evidence reveals that trust test usage is a short cut to obtaining necessary information about trustworthiness then it may become important to better train individuals on how to use them. First, individuals should be trained in scientific experimental methods generally but, secondly, on how to use this information to develop appropriate and ethical work place trust tests. The increased use of trust tests might improve leadership effectiveness, reduce employees' vulnerability to devious leaders, and strengthen relationships among peers. The ability to design effective trust tests might be a core "soft" or relationship-based skill that has remained hidden in plain sight because we have not had the language to identify it. To further elaborate on the practical implications of trust tests and to assist the reader in understanding our ideas surrounding this concept, we have provided several illustrative scenarios in Appendix A.

Limitations

We rooted our ideas of trust tests using the three parts of trustworthiness as codified by Mayer et al. We could have used other approaches, perhaps focusing on behavioral consistency and behavioral integrity (Whitener et al., 1998), or on cognition based and affective based trust (McAllister, 1995). We focused on the Mayer et. al conception of trustworthiness as ability, benevolence and integrity because of its prominence, widespread usage, and because the three components seemed to well-represent three distinctly different attributes that are broadly relevant to workplace relationships.

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APPENDIX A

This appendix offers examples of various types of trust tests. As has been defined, trust tests are:

- Interpersonal, in that they exist between two persons,
- Intentional, or are planned to be used in a specific situation or are contrived to create a situation,
- Not part of organizational policy, such as a routine performance evaluation,
- Designed to measure ability, benevolence, and/or integrity, either singly or in combination,
- Proactive, in that the originator of a trust test is aware of the use of trust tests and chooses to employ it,
- Initiated between a supervisor and their employee (downward towards the employee), two persons at the same organizational level (laterally-peer to peer), and between an employee and a supervisor (upward towards the supervisor),
- Conducted in an ethical manner.

Upward

Ability:

The strategic planning department of an internationally based consumer products company has been informed that the department will have a new director within the next few weeks. After learning of the new director and researching his experience, one of the employees is concerned about the new director's ability to lead and manage the strategic planning responsibilities of the company. Two weeks after the new director starts work, in an individual meeting between the new director and the employee, the employee asks the new director to teach her a marketing analysis technique (which the director should easily be able to do) and pays close attention to the quality of the director's knowledge. The market analysis area in question is a primary responsibility of the employee.

Benevolence:

An employee has elderly parents who have been experiencing health issues. With the parents living out of state, it's been difficult for the employee to assist her parents when health issues occur. There are other siblings who can help the parents, but they aren't always reliable. Her supervisor is aware of the situation and has generally been supportive and allowed the employee

to take scheduled vacation time to assist her parents. At this point, the employee has exhausted all of her available vacation time but needs to travel to help one of her parents with an upcoming surgery. Because of Federal law requirements, the employee can't take advantage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) at this time. The employee has asked the supervisor if she can take the necessary time to help manage her parent's situation and then use future earned vacation time to compensate for the additional vacation request. The employee requests the added vacation period, offers to pledge future earned vacation time to the current request, and waits to see if the supervisor will approve her vacation.

Integrity:

An employee is planning on retiring from a company within the next twelve months. The employee is concerned about providing this information but decides to unofficially confide in his supervisor. He directly states that this information should remain confidential and the supervisor "gives his word" that he won't announce the employee's decision at the next department meeting. The employee then notes if the supervisor mentions the upcoming retirement during the meeting.

Lateral

Ability:

A high school teacher has been asked by the school principal to collaborate with a teacher from another school regarding a "best practices" report to the district superintendent. The teacher wants to determine what the other teacher knows and understands about specific "best practice" pedagogy subjects that could be summarized in the report. The teacher contacts the other teacher via email, offers some, not all of his suggestions and mentions that when they meet in person the two teachers can discuss more ideas. When both teachers meet, the first waits to see if the other teacher can comment on or add anything of significance during the meeting.

Benevolence:

A professor who teaches in a PhD program at a well-known university has recently learned that she has been booked to conduct an executive education seminar by a college in the university. The president of the university has established that interaction with the local business community is a major priority. The confirmed date for the seminar is during a period when the professor is scheduled to teach a human resources management course to the current PhD student group. She knows that the course can be rescheduled but knows that the program director doesn't prefer to alter the schedule with such short notice. She asks another professor in the program if he can teach the course in her place. That professor is already teaching a full schedule but agrees to teach the additional seminar. Granting this favor greatly lessens the burden on the professor.

Integrity:

A software development team is approaching an important client deadline. Every team member has specific tasks related to the project, all of which are interdependent. This is a very critical

project for a new, large client and the beta test software application needs to be accurate. One team member, who is responsible for checking and editing the final product discovers a significant error in the coding provided by another team member. During an internal coordination meeting, the reviewing team member announces the error and notices if the responsible employee admits to it.

Downward

Ability:

In a structural engineering company, a manager asks an employee to lead a team that's developing a new bridge design. The manager assigns the employee to this position to evaluate their leadership and project management potential. The employee has never worked in a leadership or management position for a project of this type. The supervisor offers some basic, limited guidance related to project team direction. A couple hours before a routine project meeting, the manager learns about a significant coordination issue related to the project. During the meeting, the manager presents the problem, then observes how the employee manages its resolution.

Benevolence:

A supervisor has been heavily involved in a local charity which stages a major event each year. Each year the event has difficulty in getting volunteers to help with the event with this year being no exception. After getting approval from the district manager, the supervisor mentions in a department meeting that any employee who would like to volunteer for the event will get a full day off for working at the event for only a half a day. The supervisor then notes who volunteers for the event.

Integrity:

A sales supervisor calls a customer to check on the account. On learning that there has been a problem for nearly five weeks, she obtains specific information about the problems related to the most recent order and then assures the customer that it will be quickly resolved. It is clear to the supervisor that the salesperson was at fault in this situation. The salesperson on this account is new to the company but has experience in sales contract management in the broader industry. The supervisor is concerned about the customer's complaints and decides to ask the salesperson for an update on the customer's account. The sales supervisor is careful to note if the salesperson is complete and truthful, admitting the error, about the status of the account.