

# Trust Repair by Public Kindergartens: Mediating Role of Positive Emotions: A case of kindergartens in Anhui Province, China

Fouzia Atlas Zhang Xuehe Kashif Ullah Khan Farhan Khan Salman Khan. School of Public Affairs, USTC China

#### Abstract

The trust of the public for public organizations is greatly damaged because of the repeated occurrence of violations of trust events, which has an outcome in the form of serious trust deficit. This paper examines the post-trust of parents in kindergarten that extends apology with an internal or external attribution after a competence or integrity-based trust violation. We asked about 855 parents to respond to a scenario in which they read about violation of competence with apology internal or about violation of integrity with apology external. After reading a scenario based hypothetical situation they respond to a questionnaire. Each participant was presented with one of the scenarios. The results revealed a significant interaction whereby parent's leads to post trust more successfully when kindergarten apologized with an internal attribution in matters of violation concerned matters of competence but apologized with an external attribution when the trust violation concerned matters of integrity. Positive emotions mediate the relationship between apology with internal attribution in matters of competence violation or apology with external attribution in matters of integrity violation and post trust.

Keywords: Trust Repair, Trust Violation, Competence, Integrity, Apology, Attribution, Kindergarten, Emotions.

#### Introduction

Trust is an important element in the development of relations between public and public organizations and trust is an issue that continues to attract considerable interest from researchers of almost all disciplines including organizational theory. A large number of organizations has been going through from an extensive range of violations because of the increasingly complex societies which emerged from economic and social development in which they operate. In fact, violations related to trust of the public in public organizations are not the exception but a norm (Zemke, R., 2002, Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Recently, with the fast developing economy and society of China, several events of violations of public trust has occurred at brief intervals. These public trust violating events includes Violent Law- enforcement by a City Inspector, Sanlu Milk Powder Incident, forced relocation from lands, use of Virustat (antiviral drug) by Kindergartens in different cities damaged the trust of public badly (Peng, Gong & Peng, 2016). Among all these events of violations, the most ironic have been the events that happened in kindergartens. When the trust of the public in educational public organizations has been declined, then negative effects will not only brought about harm to the social system but also to economic development and authenticity of public organizations will be questioned. Therefore, repairing trust with the public by public kindergartens school must have been an important issue. This paper explained the mechanism of post trust with the help of Causal Attribution theory of Weiner 1986 and established a conceptual foundation for our arguments; we thoroughly evaluate and assess the literature on both types of trust violations and trust restoration along with positive emotions. We conclude by proposing some directions that future research might fruitfully consider.

### Literature review

## Trust and trust violation

Trust has theoretical as well as practical importance in the public organization's studies (Hassan & Ali, 2007). Trust is a social phenomenon and it has been acknowledged empirically as a key property of economic development (Fukuyuma, 2005), public engagement (Putman, 2000,2003) organizational efficiency, and, in more recent times, effectiveness of schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard et al., 2001; Forsyth et al., 2006, Tarter et al., 1995).

Mayer et al. (1995) conceptualized trust in terms of "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (p. 712). Baier (1986) stated that "trust is a dependence on other's willingness and their abilities to be responsible for, instead of inflicting any harm what is assigned to their care".

In fact, the things we care about may include tangible things, such as our wealth or our children, or it may include something such as the ideology of democracy, or norms and values of respect and culture of patience which are all intangible.

Though past research has considered organizational trust with main stakeholders, including employers and employees, comparatively little research has analyzed how organizations can repair trust with the public who are stakeholders. This kind of Public trust in an organization is important to ensuring legitimacy and firm survival. It is true that parents are important educational partners (Epstein, 2001) of the kindergarten schools.



Based on that study, recent research has inclined to examine trust as separate types, including competence-based, benevolence-based, and integrity-based trust (Kim et al., 2004).

Competence refers to the ability to fulfill promises, which establishes when the organization holds sufficient knowledge, skills, expertise, leadership, and other characteristics in the concerned field. Benevolence is an honest concern for customers' interests and the inspiration to do good for them. Integrity is the loyalty to a series of sound principles.

Some recent studies explained benevolent trust at an aggregate level: the care for the wellbeing of particular stakeholders (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009). While this kind of trust is possibly essential for an intimate group of stakeholders, for example, employees (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009), it is less likely to be a crucial aspect of public trust towards an organization. Thus this type of trust is beyond the scope of this research study. We will consider only competence and integrity based trust types and a violation related to them.

Trust violation takes place when a person or group has established certain expectations which are positive with respect to the behavior or intentions of another individual, group or organization, but only to receive evidence which disconfirming those expectations (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). A violation of trust is troublesome for organizations as trust has been shown to strengthen and support organizational dealings and participation, successful stakeholder relationships, and effectiveness of organization and development (e.g. Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Fukuyama, 1995; Dyer & Chu, 2003; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). Although it is an essential relational resource, trust is vulnerable to numerous damaging threats. Trust repair would consider those activities in which party 2 has taken advantage of party 1's vulnerability, and wants to restore the compliance of that party to be vulnerable in the upcoming period. Logically, therefore, it is all about broken expectations' repairing when we talk about the repair of trust. In an assessment of the present status of research, theory and research on repair of relationship (of which a critical element is trust), Dirks et al. (2009) explained that "relationship repair takes place when a violator causes the positive state(s) that comprise(s) the relationship to fade away and/or negative situation to arise, as assumed by one or both parties, and actions by one or both parties considerably return the relationship to a positive state" (p. 69), perspectives on repair of trust, a considerable amount of work has been conducted. These research papers is concerned with the use of apology which is included in verbal accounts to repair trust by the kindergarten after the event of a violation. Apologies refer to messages containing acknowledgments of blameworthiness for negative events, which can include expressions of remorse (Fehr and Gelfand 2010). Emotion refers to "a mental state of preparedness that emerges from the cognitive evaluation of event or thoughts and may lead to certain actions to affirm or deal with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the individual experiencing it" (Bagozzi, et al., 1999, p. 184). The violations of trust and repair efforts by the kindergartens generate certain emotions in victims and this paper is concerned with those positive emotions which ultimately lead to post trust for a short term by the people. A conceptual model of this paper is explained with the help of Weiner's Causal Attribution theory, 1986.

## An attributional theory of Weiner:

Trust repair literature also gained insight from organizational crisis research into studies of violations of trust. Trust repair efforts should first choose a particular strategy as researchers identified and analyzed response strategies used in particular crises (e.g., Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1995) including apologies, excuses, accounts, responses to embarrassment, image restoration, and impression management (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). Next scholars divert their attention to exploring the characteristic of violation events that forecast the selection of suitable response strategies (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996,2001). Although useful, most extant research has not adopted a public orientation approach nor has it determined how communication after violation takes place in non-Western cultures. An audience orientation should provide important insights into how individuals recognize and react to an organizational violation of trust event. Weiner (1986) argued that when an event is negative, unexpected, or important, people are likely to engage in causal attribution processing. Scholars have noted the relevancy of Weiner's perspective for understanding organizational violation events. Weiner's (1986) notion of locus and controllability is particularly applicable to the violations of trust context. Locus, in a violation context, designates the location of the source of a violation as external or internal to the organization. Controllability explains whether the avoidance of a violation is within the organization's control. A cause for a violation that is assumed to be within the borders of an organization is referred as internal and such kind of violation is generally assumed as controllable. Similarly, a cause for a violation that is assumed to be outside the field of an organization is referred as external and is generally considered as uncontrollable. Actually, a cause for violation of trust could be considered to exist somewhere along a range of internal/controllable and external/uncontrollable. For the purpose of convenience and simplification, this the article uses the terms of external and internal to deal with the two situations of causal attribution.

Based on the assessment of provided information it is assumed that apology internal for competence-based trust violation is better (Kim et al, 2004) in interpersonal professional relationships. Similarly, an apology with internal attributions for competence violations by kindergarten is better than apology with external attributions.



Competence is someone's ability to execute as expected and in line with standards appropriate to task, and is a vital ingredient of trust. An apology with internal attribution for violations based on competence by kindergarten schools will be more effective and reduce any negative feelings in public as a stakeholder. This is an important effort to reduce the mistrust after violation because it shows acceptance of injustice against the injured party and the desire to restore trust or justice (Greenberg, 1990). An apology with Internal attributions in the case of competence violation may be more useful because the public organization is admitting personal responsibility for the breach/violation rather than trying to blame others for her mistakes. Commitment to assume the full responsibility of public organization (kindergarten schools) for their trust violations in the eyes of others (parents) establish their own reputation and character and Parents will be more willing to trust again the kindergarten. On the basis of above discussion, it is hypothesized that

**H1:** Apology with internal attributions in matters of competence violations by kindergarten school leads to post trust by parents more successfully than apology with external attributions.

Based on previous studies on information assessment, it is argued that apology with external attribution delivered by the organizations in matters of integrity violations is effective to repair trust, as usually, people give more attention to negative information about integrity than positive information (Kim., 2004 for review). An apology with external attribution in a case of integrity violation by kindergarten schools is better because there is a need to mitigating blame with external attribution. Researchers have asserted that external attributions are usually better for those who have done something wrong (shaw, wild, &Colquitt, 2003).) For integrity-based violations, several studies have found higher levels of trust after violator instead denied responsibility for the event (Ferin et al., 2007; Kim et al, 2013) and blaming some external account. When public organizations (kindergartens) apologize with external attribution in matters of integrity violations, it would lead to reducing anger in the public and they would show more sympathetic and cooperative behavior, which, in turn, would help in restoring trust relationship between both partners.

On the basis of above discussion, it is hypothesized that

**H2:** Apology with external attributions in matters of integrity violations by kindergarten school leads to post trust by parents more successfully than apology with internal attributions.

Lazarus (1991) defined emotion as "organized cognitive-motivational-relational configurations whose status changes with changes in the person–environment relationship as this is perceived and evaluated (appraisal)" (p. 38).

Emotion refers to "a mental state of preparedness that emerges from the cognitive evaluation of event or thoughts and may lead to certain actions to affirm or deal with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the individual experiencing it" (Bagozzi, et al., 1999, p. 184). Emotions are mental states that arise from personal assessments of the world that stimulate the will to act for one's well-being (Damasio, 2000; Oatley and Jenkins, 1996). Events of emotion, such as fear when seeing a snake, are usually generated by a certain event, person or thing and lasts for a comparatively short period ranging from seconds to hours.

These emotions can generate immediate reactions without deliberate thought but aim at the clear motive of survival (Frijda, 2004; LeDoux, 1989, 2000; Plutchik, 1980; Lahikainen, Kirmanen, Kraav, & Taimalu, 2003). Lazarus (1991) argued that when any personal failure is attributed to as controllable or internal, the reaction of anger is produced. On the contrary, when any personal failure is attributed to causes which are considered as uncontrollable the reaction of pity is aroused. Similarly, an internal attribution for a cause of a violation should generate more unpleasant feelings toward the organization than in the case of an attribution which is external to the violation's cause (Weiner, Amirkan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987). However, we are concerned with positive emotions that are aroused from the repair strategy of apology with attributions in face of violations of competence and integrity.

In organization's crisis communication studies, emotional responses of both practitioners (Jin & Cameron, 2007) and publics (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007, 2008) were recently investigated. Previous research studies on emotions in the communication of crisis were based on the impacts of generally positive and negative affective reactions on decisions making processes. This research can be used by the public organization in trust repair after violation event.

One of the basic claims of cognitive appraisal theory is that people cope with tense conditions such as violations differently (Lazarus, 1991) and their emotional demonstrations in different situations are different as well (Duhachek, 2005). Perceptions of Individuals of a violation are not only a function of the violation of trust event stimulus itself, but also include their own understanding of the event. Publics do not receive passively and respond to information provided by the or to responses of the organization in face of certain violation events. On the contrary, they actively take part in multiple coping approaches to help themselves by making a judgment of the crisis, soothe themselves emotionally, or regulate their own way of thinking to decrease the stress, thus grow more positive emotions.

The existing literature provides numerous approaches for drafting hypotheses about the effect of certain emotions on trust. Political scientists regularly wish to check hypotheses about the impacts of certain particular



emotions on political behavior (Myers & Tingley, 2016). Building on a framework of an appraisal-tendency (Smith and Ellsworth 1985; Lerner and Keltner 2000), Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) stated that the effect of a certain emotion on trust will rely on two factors: the valence of emotion (as it is positive or negative) and then, whether the cognitive appraisal of the emotion leads the trustor to relate this valence to the decision of trust. They further explained that control appraisal of an emotion will be the most important factor of whether a valence of emotion will affect the decision to trust. Control appraisals decide whether the emotion leads to a judgment that oneself is in control of the event (self-control appraisal) or another one is in control of the situation (other-control appraisal). Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) established that an emotion identified by other control appraisals will boost or diminish trust relying on the negative or positive valence of that emotion. Albertson and Gadarian (2015) studied trust in institutions rather than dyadic trust, findings from their study propose that certainty appraisals coupled with control appraisals, might direct people to include the valence of their emotional state into a decision about dyadic trust.

An apology with external attribution for integrity violation by public kindergarten school will be more effective and reduce negative feelings in public as a stakeholder. When the impact of liability (blame) needs to be minimized, external ownership (attribution) will be effective than repairing trust with internal ownership (attribution) (Kim et al., 2004). In general, people pay more attention to negative information than honest information about integrity explains that it is better to apologize with external attributions in matters of integrity as a shift of blame to external attribution is effective than assuming full responsibility. Whitesell and Harter (1996) found in their study that when reading an apology scene, the teenagers showed an initial reduction in anger. The failure of the customer (the public) in the (public) organization when recognized will experience emotional healing, feel less aggressive (Baron 1990; McCullough et al. 1998).

In the attribution model of emotion and motivation, Weiner (1986, 1995) argues that a person's causal attribution may cause emotional reactions, which in turn may affect behavior or behavioral intentions. This process leads to a compassionate emotional reaction (i.e., incremental positive emotions that reduce negative emotions). These emotional reactions increase the likelihood of forgiveness. Publics do not receive passively and respond to information provided by the or to responses of the organization in face of certain violation events. On the contrary, they actively take part in multiple coping approaches to help themselves by making a judgment of the crisis, soothe themselves emotionally, or regulate their own way of thinking to decrease the stress, thus grow more positive emotions. Thus people evaluate violation's attributions and responses of the organization positively which leads to positive emotions. those positive emotions which are other control emotions lead to post trust of the public. On the basis of above discussion, it is hypothesized

**H3**: if public organizations apologize with external attributions for integrity based trust violations, it will lead to positive emotions and post trust of public more effectively than when public organization apologizes with internal attributions.

Competence is someone's ability to execute as expected and in line with standards appropriate to task, and is a vital ingredient of trust. An apology with internal attribution for violations based on competence by the public organization (kindergarten schools) will be more effective and reduce any negative feelings in public as a stakeholder. An apology with Internal attributions in the case of competence violation may be more useful because the public organization is admitting personal responsibility for the breach/violation rather than trying to blame others for her mistakes. Commitment to assume the full responsibility by public kindergarten schools for their trust violations in the eyes of concerned parents establish their own reputation and character (Schlenker, Christopher, & Pontari, 2001). accepting responsibility by kindergartens also create positive emotions in public who are stakeholders, as those kindergartens are assumed to correct these actions in the future. The honesty of the offender (public organization) is a key variable that affects the negative response of the victim (the public). thus by accepting responsibility and providing an apology, the public will consider the kindergarten as trustable which create positive emotions in public. Those positive emotions, in turn, lead to post trust of the public.

On the basis of above discussion, it is hypothesized

**H4:** if public organizations apologize with internal attributions for competence-based trust violations, it will lead to positive emotions and post trust of public more effectively than when public organization apologizes with external attributions.



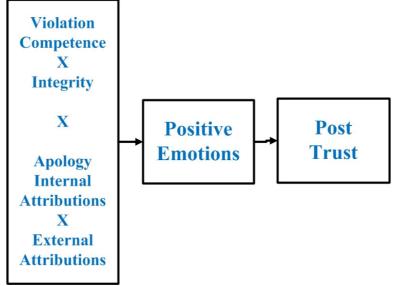


Figure 1 Theoretical Model

#### **Research Design and Data Collection**

The target sample for this study consists of 855 respondents (parents of students) at public sector schools (kindergartens) in Anhui province China. The data for this study was obtained through different scenarios from the respondents through structured questionnaire.

To ensure that a maximum number of participants participate in this research study principals at different kindergarten were initially contacted with prior appointment. With the cooperation of the principals (head) of the schools, maximum number of parents was contacted sent one part of a questionnaire to each parent to fill. In order to facilitate parents, a questionnaire was initially formulated in English and subsequently translated into Chinese by Chinese professor at School of Public Affairs, USTC China who are proficient both in Chinese as well as English and possess rich research experience in the same area of research related to trust in China. In order to prevent cultural bias and ensure the effectiveness (validity), the Chinese version of translated questionnaire was once again translated into English paying special attention to avoid significant misunderstanding due to translation. In order to ensure that sample of this study effectively represent overall research population, this study chose stratified sampling method randomly selecting schools at different locations. This study used one factor (a type of violation and apology with attribution) between subjects (parents).

It is assumed by subjects that recently their child's kindergarten has been criticized that more children are injured in the kindergarten while playing, although their child is not hurt they are concerned about the matter. The kindergarten's response in matters of competence internal and competence external was as follows:

Scenario 1: After the trust violation incident, in meeting with the parents the principal apologized to the parents that kindergartens have a large number of teachers who do not have early childhood education qualification certificate but the kindergarten developed a strategy that there will be two teachers in the class and another teacher will be an experienced and qualified one, so, that such kind of incident not happen again (Apology with internal attribution for competence violation).

Scenario 2: After the incident of trust violation, the principal of the kindergartens held a meeting with parents and deeply apologized for the occurrence of such incident and said that all our teachers are trained and they did not leave the children while playing. The incident happened as few children are a bit naughty .in the future we will strengthen communication with parents and also provide personality based training programs to children.(apology with external attribution for integrity violation).

#### Measures

This study used the post-trust as the dependent variable. This study adopted and modified post trust items from (Chen, Wu, & Chang, 2013). The trust violation for this study was designed as either based on integrity or (ability) competence-related issues. In this study, violations were described in accordance with the conceptual interpretation of both competence and integrity as mentioned earlier in this study. Kindergarten, in both situations, were accused of injuring or hurting students (children). Perceived Competence was measured by 5 items adopted and modified from (Xie & Peng, 2009). For Perceived integrity, this study adapted items from (Xie & Peng, 2009) and modified it. A 7 point Likert scale was adopted from 1 indicating strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree. This study used two scenarios apologizing with internal attribution for (competence-based) trust violation, apologizing with external



attribution for integrity based violations of trust. Only one condition was randomly provided to the parents who were participants.

## **Mediating Variable:**

Positive emotions are used as mediating variable in this study. This study uses positive emotions items from (Myers & Tingley, 2016), such as happiness, from (Richins, 1997) hopeful and contented and 1 item from (Davis & Gold, 2011) which is sympathy. These items were modified according to the research needs of this study, 7 point scale was used ranging from 1 indicates strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree

#### **Control variables**

This study also used the age of the parents, their education level as well as the gender of the parents as control variables. Because of this factor especially education and gender play a key role in trust. Respondent was asked questions about their gender i.e. male or female, the level of their education i.e., "junior high school, senior high school, college, bachelor, master or doctor (Ph.D.) degree", about age respondents were simply asked the question about their age.

## Conclusion

The effective recovery and repair of trust breaches (violations) are important for kindergartens, especially when distrust is so rapid and widespread. The first step in effective recovery is to understand the various ways in which the public can respond. When a trust violation occurs, the kindergartens needs to initiate verbal communication with public specifically extending an apology with attributions of internal and external in matters of competence and integrity violations. This act by kindergartens shows considerable effort and care for the public. Such efforts will create a soft corner in public's hearts and generate more positive emotions. These positive emotions leads to post trust.

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlations

Variables		Std.				
	Mean	Deviation	Post Trust	Emotions	Integrity	Competence
Post Trust	4.3404	1.18481	1			•
Emotions	4.2175	1.17652	.743**	1		
Integrity	4.3254	1.22444	.742**	.707**	1	
Competence	4.1901	1.40386	.641**	.656**	.871**	1

<sup>\*\*.</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N=426

Table 2 Hypotheses testing using Regression Analysis

Table 2 Hypotheses testing using Regression Analysis							
<u>Variables</u>	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	<u>Model 4</u>			
Age (Parents)	-0.006	0.009	-0.015	008			
Gender	0.043	-0.014	0.067	0.131			
Education	0.013	-0.011	0.003	015			
Positive Emotions			0.607***	0.681***			
Integrity		0.426***		-0.006*			
Competence	0.491***		001*				
Integrity X Initial Trust							
Competence X Initial Trust							
Constant	2.204***	2.139***	2.138***	1.420***			
$\mathbb{R}^2$	0.324***	0.313***	0.385***	0.447***			
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.320***	0.310***	0.382***	0.443***			

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the usefulness of apologizing with an internal and external attribution for post trust after a competence and integrity based trust violation by a kindergarten in short term. Our study reveals that trust was repaired more successfully when the kindergarten apologized with an internal attribution when the violation concerned matters of competence but apologized with an external attribution when the violation concerned matters of integrity. Positive emotions mediate the relationship between apology with internal or external attribution in matters of competence and integrity related matters of violation of kindergartens and post trust of the public. All the dependent measures as whole support hypotheses of the model. This study also empirically test the mediating role of positive emotions which was largely ignored by previous research as most of the trust literature discussed negative emotions. Thus this research paper contributes to previous research in several ways.



First, this paper has conducted research in the educational public organization regarding trust violation and repair mechanism which is the first initiative in this direction.

Secondly, this study empirically tested the mediating role of positive emotions in trust repair mechanism. Third, this study use apology with attributions as a trust repair strategy by kindergarten. Fourth, this paper has conducted research in the Chinese context, as China is rapidly developing economy and society.

#### Limitations and future recommendations

Future research studies on trust repair should focus on real cases and parental responses as this study use scenario based hypothetical situation which can affect the validity of the result to some extent. Future research should also consider few more factors which are concerned with public trust orientation. For example, Effects of values, culture, and norms etc. Future research should also use more trust restoration strategies or make a comparison of them in the educational public organizations.

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