

## Trust Violations and Positive Emotions: Moderating Role of Initial Trust: A Case of Kindergartens in China

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### Abstract

This paper examines the moderating role of initial trust of parents between positive emotions of parents and apology with an internal or external attribution after a competence or integrity-based trust violation by the Kindergarten for the purpose of trust repair. 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 positive emotions were produced 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. Initial trust positively moderates the relationship between apology with internal and external attributions in matters concerning competence and integrity and positive emotions.

**Keywords:** Trust Violation, Competence, Integrity, Apology, Attribution, Kindergarten, Emotions, Initial Trust, Public Organization.

### Introduction

Trust has theoretical as well as practical importance in the public organization's studies (Hassan & Rostamy, 2007). With the fast developing economy and society of China, several events of violations of public trust have occurred at brief intervals. For example, use of Virustat (antiviral drug) by Kindergartens in different cities damaged the trust of public badly (Peng, Gong & Peng, 2016). Among all 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.

This paper researches empirically that in face of different types of violations the kindergarten use of the strategy of apology with attributions leads to positive emotions in public and the relation between types of violations, an apology with attributions and positive emotions is moderated by the initial trust. This mechanism is explained with the help of 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 and initial trust. We conclude by proposing some directions that future research might fruitfully consider.

### Literature review:

#### Trust and trust violation:

Trust is a social phenomenon and it has been acknowledged empirically as a key property of economic development (Fukuyama, 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). include, trust is essentially a psychological state identified by numerous components, the most significant of which is some kind of positive expectation with respect to others' behavior.

As an early and significant contribution, for instance, Barber (1983) identified trust in terms of a collection of socially learned and socially established expectations that people develop of each 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.

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).

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. It must also be noted that although this paper is related to organizational trust, most of the studies in research has been carried out at the

level of interpersonal and absorbed to the dynamics of repair trust at the level of organizations. The research studies on trust itself and more specifically on trust repair is highly uneven and deficient. Despite the incomplete and fragmented character of theoretical perspectives on repair of trust, a considerable amount of work has been conducted. The major emphasis of this work has been in four important areas: factors affecting the manners that trust is damaged; the role of different verbal accounts including apologies, explanations and other accounts for recovery from trust violations; the effects of reparations or compensation incurring a trust violation; and the introduction of structural solutions, which reduce the possibility of future trust-destructing events and allow trust to be restored by decreasing future vulnerability.

These research papers are 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). In psychological terms, apologies can be viewed as a remedial strategy to re-establish the desirability that others engage in a relationship with oneself in the aftermath of an undesired event (Leary 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.

The trusting decisions are also influenced by the initial trust level of the people. *Initial* trust can be described as trusts between parties that will not arise from any sort of experience with, or knowledge that is firsthand about the other party. Some scholars are of the view that trust gets strength with the passage of time (Zand, 1972; Blau, 1964; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). However, empirical research gives a different type of viewpoint and thus creates an interesting paradoxical research direction. It is established that there are many reasons and the basis for initial trust including dispositions and particularly in the case of organizations the institutional cues such as formal and legal structures or reputations serves as the basis for the growth of initial trust. To this end, a conceptual model for trust repair by kindergarten will be explained with the help of the attributional theory of Weiner 1986.

#### **Causal Attributions theory of Weiner 1986:**

Weiner (1986) argued that when an event is negative, unexpected, or important, people are likely to engage in causal attribution processing and he examined subsequent emotional reactions after causal attribution in an interpersonal context. Locus, in violations, designate responsibility to internal and external factors. 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. He established that when personal failure is attributed as internal, anger is evoked. On the other hand, when personal failure is attributed to causes considered as uncontrollable, pity is aroused. The trust repairing response strategies are attempting to make stakeholders think about the event more mildly and make the judgment more positively about the organization (Allen & Caillouet. 1991). Organizations must try to shift the spotlight from the violation of social norms in the event to efforts intended to repair the damage from the violation. By apologizing with external and internal attributions in matters of different violations if an event of violation cannot be proved to be minor, at least it can convey the message that the kindergarten has returned to the norms held by the public which will, in turn, produce positive feelings in concerned public and would lead to repair the damaged association between them.

An apology with attributions that are internal for competence regarding matters by kindergarten schools is better than apology with external attributions as it shows a realization of the harm done to the public and its regret for the victims by the kindergarten. An apology with internal attribution for competence violation by kindergarten school will be more effective as apologizing with internal attribution for competence violation as the communication after the violation can have an effect on the emotions produced by the attributions (Weiner et al., 1988). Those kindergarten schools who assume full responsibility for apology internal for competence-based trust violations; their act speaks for their credibility and character. This is an important step towards reducing the mistrust of violation because it shows recognition of the injustice of the injured party and the desire to restore justice (Greenberg, 1990). An apology with internal attributions creates a better image of a kindergarten and as a rule, the repair strategies after the violation of trust aimed to make the stakeholders think more positively about the image of the kindergarten. Accepting responsibility by public kindergartens also create positive emotions in public (parents) by reducing negative feelings of fear as they are assumed to correct these actions in the future. This understanding of belonging perceived by public organizations is an important variable that affects the negative responses of victims. An apology with internal attribution by the school will generate more positive emotions regarding the ongoing matter and about future prospect in public (parents) which ultimately leads to restore the damaged trust.

Above discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

**H1:** When kindergarten apologizes with internal attributions for trust violations that are competence based, it will

create more positive emotions in public.

An apology with external attributions for integrity violation by kindergarten schools will be more effective and reduce unpleasant feelings in public as external attributions shift the blame from the violator towards some other account. By apology public organization accepts responsibility but with an effort to mitigate this blame by the use of external attribution. By shifting blame to some other account public organization, the kindergarten, also improve its impression in the eyes of public who are important stakeholders and gain the sympathy for them. The sympathy of stakeholder can help to build a more positive view of the public organization (Benoit, 1992). The strategy of apology with external attributions, in matters of violations that are integrity based, emphasized at sharing suffering with the public. Low personal control and locus for the event of violation of trust in the situation cultivate perceptions of unplanned action, thereby not only alter the public's perception of violation responsibility, but also the feelings and deliberate behaviors toward an organization (Claeys et al., 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Lee, 2004). Thus growing more positive emotions towards the kindergarten and these positive emotions of the public, in turn, lead to better repair the damaged relationship between parties, kindergarten, and the public.

The above discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

**H2:** When kindergarten school apologizes with external attributions for trust violations that are integrity based, it will create more positive emotions in public.

Initial trust history with the public organization is connected with a greater willingness by the public to reconcile the relationship in the face of a trust violation. Research on services reveals that a customer's history of relationship with the service organization helps to determine his or her intentions to continue a relationship (Hess, Ganesan and Klein 2003). Research on services reveals that a customer's history of relationship with the service organization helps to determine his or her intentions to continue a relationship (Hess, Ganesan and Klein 2003). The degree of initial trust has its influence on trust repair process. Several researchers found that the degree of greater initial trust is better than low initial trust for the growth of positive emotions which in turn leads to trust repair process. If the initial trust of the parents towards public kindergarten tends to be high, then their expectations towards this public organization or kindergarten would be also high. When an event of trust violation of integrity in such a situation occurs it may lead to unpleasant feelings. However when kindergarten apologizes with external attribution for integrity violation public may assume that kindergarten is not responsible for this event rather an external cause is responsible, it may produce positive emotions in public. If kindergarten has a good initial relationship with the parents, any possibility of deviating from this point is more probably to be taken as an exception and isolated events. In a complaint handling literature, a study explains that For customers whose previous experiences have been very positive, one poor recovery should not affect their commitment or trust (Tax, Brown and Chandraashekar 1998) as their initial trust generate positive emotions for a future relationship. Above discussion lead to the following hypothesis:

**H3:** Initial trust will positively moderate the relationship between apology with external attributions for integrity regarding violations of trust by kindergarten and positive emotions of parents.

Before the incident of trust violation, individuals start a relationship with a certain trust level, which is influenced by the violation event. The perceived severity of the violation and the starting degree of trust influence the trust level in later stages. An apology with internal attribution for competence violation by public kindergarten will be more effective and reduce tension in public as a customer. An apology with Internal attributions in the case of competence violation may be more useful because the kindergarten schools are recognizing greater responsibility for the breach instead of trying to blame others.

Those who bear full responsibility have established their own reputation and character in the eyes of others and reduce annoyance and other negative feelings in victims and accepting responsibility by kindergarten schools also create positive emotions in general public as they are assumed to settle these mistakes in the future. However, for people whose previous experiences have been very positive, one incident of competence violation should not affect their belief in organization's competence. The apologetic response shows regret on the part of kindergarten and shows that it's not the true image of the organization which portrayed him as a transgressor, this also creates soft feelings in hearts of parents. Therefore, apologize with internal attribution in cases of competence violation by kindergarten generate more positive feelings in public as public kindergarten accept greater responsibility rather than shifting the burden of blame to someone else.

Above discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

**H4:** initial trust will positively moderate the relationship between apology with internal attribution for trust violation that is competence based by public kindergarten and positive emotions of the public.

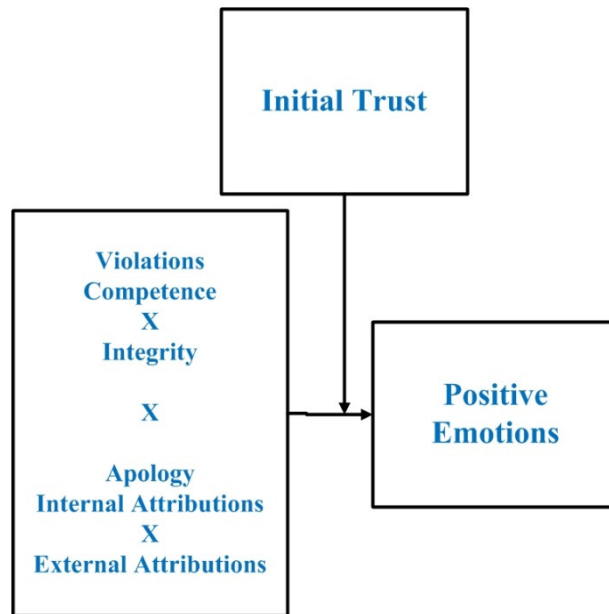


Figure 1 Theoretical Model

**Method:**

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. In order to ensure that sample of this study effectively represent overall research population, this study chose stratified sampling method randomly by 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.

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. In independent variables, 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 used for the mentioned variables 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. In this study, initial trust items were adapted from (Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004) and (Wang & Huff, 2007). These items were modified according to the research needs of this study, A Likert scale comprised of 7 points is used to collect the response ranged from 1 indicates totally disagree to 7 totally agree. Age, gender, and education of the participants are used as control variables.

**Table 1** Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Emotions	Integrity	Initial trust	Competence
Emotions	3.9728	1.07701	1			
Integrity	4.1245	1.18617	.817**	1		
initial trust	4.2886	1.18384	.637**	.584**	1	
Competence	3.8974	1.35126	.852**	.730**	.554**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N=429

**Table 2 Hypotheses testing using Regression Analysis**

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>
Age (Parents)	0.009	-0.007	0.015	0.021
Gender	0.007	0.021	-0.038	-0.030
Education	0.018	-0.014	0.025	0.003
Initial Trust			0.223***	0.138***
Integrity		0.468***	0.379***	
Competence	0.499***			0.344***
Integrity X Initial Trust			.260***	
Competence X Initial Trust				.071***
Constant	1.621***	2.681***	0.419***	1.178***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.371***	0.286***	0.454***	0.476***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.368***	0.283***	0.450***	0.472***

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the usefulness of apologizing with an internal and external attribution for creating positive emotions in parents after a competence and integrity based trust violation by a kindergarten in short term. Our study reveals that positive emotions arise 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 violations. Initial trust positively moderates the relationship between apology with internal and external attribution in matters of competence and integrity violations and positive emotions. All proposed hypothesis were validated empirically.

### Conclusions

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. Initial trust in kindergartens by parents has its effects on the emotions when an incident of trust violation happens and kindergarten apologizes with internal or external attribution depending on the kind of violation. Initial trust has successfully moderated the relationship between different kind of violations along with apology with attributions by Kidergartens and positive emotions of the public.

### Limitations and recommendations

Future research should also use more trust restoration strategies or make a comparison of them in the educational public organizations. 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.

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