

Running head: APOLOGIES, DELAYS, AND TRUST REPAIR

The Impact of Decision Timing on the Effectiveness of Leaders' Apologies to Repair  
Followers' Trust in the Aftermath of Leader Failure

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The Impact of Decision Timing on the Effectiveness of Leaders' Apologies to Repair  
Followers' Trust in the Aftermath of Leader Failure

## Abstract

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3 **Purpose** – The aim of the present research was to investigate how a negative decision  
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5 outcome generated by a leader in a hasty, timely, or delayed manner impacts upon the need  
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7 for, and the effectiveness of apologies to restore followers' trust.  
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10 **Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected using five studies in which the effects  
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12 of timing of an incorrect decision on the trust repair process were investigated.  
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15 **Findings** – In the aftermath of a leader's failure, followers experienced a delayed incorrect  
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17 decision as a more severe transgression than a hasty or a timely incorrect decision. This effect  
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19 was mediated by procedural fairness concerns (Study 1). The present findings also revealed  
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21 an interesting paradox. Specifically, in the delayed condition followers expressed the highest  
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23 need for an apology (Studies 2 and 3), but at the same time expected an apology to be less  
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25 effective for enhancing trustworthiness than in the timely and the hasty condition (Study 3).  
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27 Moreover, we also showed that the actual provision of an apology was effective for restoring  
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29 both trustworthiness (Study 4) and trust (Studies 4 and 5) in the timely and the hasty  
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31 condition, but ineffective in the delayed condition.  
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35 **Implications** – The present research shows that when the outcome of a decision is uncertain,  
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37 it is better to make a decision (too) soon rather than (too) late.  
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41 **Originality/value** – Despite the ubiquity of timing errors in daily life, our studies are the first  
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43 to focus on the role of timeliness of decisions in the trust repair process.  
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47 **Keywords:** decision timing; delays; trust; apologies; leader failure; leader-follower  
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49 relationships; fairness  
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## The Impact of Decision Timing on the Effectiveness of Leaders' Apologies to Repair Followers' Trust in the Aftermath of Leader Failure

On almost a daily basis leaders have to make decisions that can either benefit or harm their organization, their employees, and themselves (Messick & Bazerman, 1996). When leaders make inadequate decisions a host of negative consequences may arise, which can hamper followers' future collaboration and compliance (De Cremer, 2013). Importantly, prior research has also indicated that leader failure decreases followers' confidence and trust in this leader (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Trust is an important element of organizational functioning and influences leadership effectiveness considerably (see Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), and for that reason leaders need to be able to restore trust once it is violated. One relevant way to address trust violations in an effective way is through the delivery of an apology (Lazare, 2004).

In the present paper, we investigated the type of transgressions that can be restored through the use of apologies in the context of dyadic leader-follower relationships. We aim to show that, in the case of an incorrect decision by a leader, the timing of *when* the decision was made can influence how much a trust repair strategy (by means of delivering an apology) is needed. Did the leader make the incorrect decision in a hasty, timely, or delayed fashion? Leaders can quickly make decisions but can also miss deadlines for those same decisions. Although not much research attention has been devoted to the issue of timeliness in explaining leadership effectiveness, prior research has revealed that delayed decisions lead to negative consequences in terms of organizational performance and leadership perceptions (e.g., Cha & Edmonston, 2006; Gilliland, 1993; Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2002). The present research aimed to show that the timing of a leader's incorrect decision also influences the effectiveness of an apology for enhancing trust repair.

### **Trust in Leader-Follower Relationships**

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Almost any decision or exchange that we engage in includes some sort of trust evaluation, either towards a person, an organization, or even society as a whole. As such, trust represents a fundamental ingredient to coordinate and facilitate social relationships (Bohnet & Croson, 2004). In this regard, the integrative model of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) makes an important conceptual distinction between trustworthiness and trust. *Trustworthiness* is a multidimensional construct that comprises the ability, benevolence, and integrity of the trustee (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Mayer et al., 1995). These three facets are viewed as antecedents of *trust*, which has been defined as the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the actions of another person (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). In the current contribution, we take trustworthiness and trust into account when investigating the reconciliation process in the aftermath of leader failure, because the leader-member exchange theory describes both these concepts as crucial elements of effective relationships between leaders and their followers (see Liden & Graen, 1980).

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Indeed, researchers have identified the presence of trust as a critical prerequisite for leaders to empower their followers (see Gómez & Rosen, 2001; Mayer et al., 1995). Because of high trust employees effectively complete their jobs and go above and beyond the call of duty in their work without clear compensation (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004). In addition, a meta-analysis of Dirks and Ferrin (2002) revealed that trust in leadership also has significant positive relationships with employees' outcomes, including organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and commitment to the leader's decisions. Yet, in everyday life leaders are confronted with many challenging situations which offer numerous opportunities for violating their followers' trust. One way in which leaders may violate trust is by making decisions that fail to reach desired goals and subsequently produce unfavorable outcomes for their followers. Acknowledging the ubiquity of such leaders' failures, a vital question that arises is how followers' trust can be regained in the aftermath of leader failure.

### Trust Repair: The Use of Apologies

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3 The trust repair strategy that received by far the most research attention is the provision  
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5 of an apology (De Cremer, 2010). An apology is generally defined as a combined statement of  
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7 an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and an expression of guilt (Lazare, 2004). Another crucial  
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9 element of a persuasive apology is an explicit promise of future trustworthy behavior (Scher &  
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11 Darley, 1997). In the aftermath of a trust violation, an apology can thus be seen as an adequate  
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13 response because it implies that the transgressor distances him- or herself from prior actions.  
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18 A considerable body of research has shown that offering a sincere apology might indeed  
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20 be an effective strategy to enhance trust (e.g., Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Schwartz,  
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22 1978; Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004). Specifically, these studies found that transgressors  
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24 who apologize are rated more favorably and as less culpable than transgressors who do not  
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26 apologize. However, evidence is growing that apologies do not always facilitate the repair of  
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28 trust (De Cremer & Desmet, 2012). The theory of impression management suggests that  
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30 apologies can be ineffective due to the acknowledgment of guilt (Schlenker, 1980). In line with  
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32 this theory, Sigal, Hsu, Foodim, and Betman (1988) found that a denial of misconduct is a more  
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34 effective strategy to obtain votes for a political candidate than the provision of an apology.  
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39 Moreover, prior research revealed that the type of violation plays a crucial role in determining  
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41 whether apologies are effective to repair broken trust (e.g., Ferrin, Kim, Cooper, & Dirks, 2007;  
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43 Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006; Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004). Specifically,  
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45 apologies are effective to enhance trust after a competence-based trust violation. However, when  
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47 the transgression reflects a lack of integrity (such as the sexual or financial misconduct in the  
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49 study of Sigal and colleagues) apologies are ineffective to repair broken trust. A similar result  
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51 was obtained by Leunissen, De Cremer, Reinders Folmer, and van Dijke (2013), who found that  
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53 an apology leads to more forgiveness after unintentional than after intentional transgressions.  
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58 However, apologies may not only be ineffective, but even counterproductive. In this regard,  
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1 Kellogg (2007) has referred to apologies as “highly risky strategies” that can make “a bad  
2 situation worse” (p. 21). Empirical research supports the idea that apologies can backfire and  
3 lead to a further decline of trust (Skarlicki, Folger, & Gee, 2004).  
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7 How can the mixed results of these prior studies be explained? Previous research has  
8 shown that the effectiveness of an apology as a means to repair broken trust is dependent on  
9 whether people are willing to rebuild their relationship with the transgressor (Tomlinson et al.,  
10 2004). This willingness strongly depends on *how* the trust violation occurred. Although much is  
11 known about how the type of violation (for instance in terms of competence versus integrity or  
12 unintentional versus intentional violations) influences the trust repair process, a crucial category  
13 of organizational trust violations – that is, delayed decisions and missed deadlines – has not yet  
14 been examined. In the present research, we argue that a leader’s decision timing, another  
15 important dimension of transgression, is a crucial antecedent of whether apologies will be able to  
16 positively influence trustworthiness and trust.  
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### 32 **The Role of Decision Timing**

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35 There is some prior research that indicated the importance of the role of timing for the  
36 trust repair process. In this venture, Lount, Zhong, Sivanathan, and Murnighan (2008) found that  
37 the timing of a trust breach (i.e., whether the breach occurred at an early or later phase of the  
38 relationship) influences the restoration process. Investigating another aspect of timing, Frantz  
39 and Benningson (2005) reported that whether an apology was offered at the beginning or the end  
40 of a conversation impacts its effectiveness to enhance recovery. Specifically, these studies  
41 revealed that getting off on the wrong foot has especially devastating long-term consequences for  
42 trust and that later apologies are more effective to restore trust than earlier ones. However, no  
43 previous studies investigated how the *timing of an incorrect decision* influences the need for and  
44 the effectiveness of apologies as a trust repair strategy. This lack in the literature is regretful  
45 because leaders are regularly confronted with deadlines. Delays thus appear to be a ubiquitous  
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problem for organizations (De Cremer, 2013; Tukul & Rom, 1998), making attempts to repair trust under such circumstances highly relevant. With regard to the timing dimension, leaders' decisions can either be generated *hasty* (when the decision is made too early, without considering all relevant information), *timely* (when the decision is made at the appropriate or opportune moment in time), or *delayed* (when the decision is made too late, for example after the passing of a predefined deadline).

What happens when decisions are delivered in a timely fashion, too soon, or too late? Hogan and Kaiser (2005) have argued that “good leaders make good decisions in a timely way” (p. 173). In line with this statement, timeliness has been associated with positive outcomes in terms of leadership effectiveness and organizational performance (see Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988; Jacobs, 2005; Snowden & Boone, 2007). With regard to the outcomes of decisions, from this literature it is not clear whether these positive consequences are only applicable to timely decisions that had positive outcomes, or also when the outcome of the decision process was negative. With regard to the consequences of *hasty* decisions the results are more mixed. On the one hand, some studies have shown that an overly fast decision-making style may reflect negatively upon leaders (e.g., Gavin & Roberto, 2001). On the other hand, there are also studies which have indicated that a fast decision-making style is positively related to organizational performance, as fast decisions are associated with efficiency and effectiveness (e.g., Bluedorn, 2002). With respect to *delayed* decisions, the results of previous studies are more straightforward. People have a strong aversion for delays, especially when a delay affects desired outcomes and incur costs (Blount & Janicik, 2001). Postponing a decision can lead to important deadlines being missed, which can have severe consequences for team processes and outcomes (Mohammed, Hamilton, & Lim, 2009). Moreover, leaders who employ a delayed decision-making style are perceived as ineffective, lazy, and even hypocritical (Cha & Edmonston, 2006).



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2 Taken together, these studies show that particularly a *delayed* decision-making style is  
3 harmful for leadership effectiveness and social reputation. What is interesting to note, however,  
4 is that timing of a decision in most studies refers to the process of making decisions, and does not  
5 necessarily imply positive or negative outcomes. Below, we argue that the timing dimension will  
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7 be highly relevant to followers in cases where they suffer negative outcomes due to a leader's  
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9 (hasty, timely, or delayed) erroneous decision.  
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### 15 **Being Wrong *and* Too Late: Implications for Trust Repair**

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17 From a purely instrumental perspective, followers should not care about the leader's  
18 decision timing when this decision failed to reach a desired outcome. Indeed, in such instances  
19 the leader's decision generated a negative outcome, regardless of the timing of this decision.  
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21 However, people are not only influenced by the outcomes of a decision, but also by the way the  
22 decision has been reached. The distinction between distributive and procedural fairness helps to  
23 understand why decisions that are incorrect *and* delayed are not well received. Distributive  
24 fairness refers to the perception of fairness of received outcomes and allocations (Cropanzano &  
25 Ambrose, 2001). Yet, people's satisfaction with tangible outcomes is also determined by the  
26 degree to which fair procedures are applied in order to arrive at this outcome. Procedures are  
27 considered fair when, for example, they are free from bias and when accurate information is  
28 collected and used in the decision process (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980).  
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45 Rutte and Messick (1995) suggested that when people's outcomes are unfavorable, they  
46 start to "search for one or more rules that were violated" (p. 247). Particularly relevant in the  
47 present context is the finding that when outcomes are negative and distributive fairness is at a  
48 low level, people are especially influenced by and concerned with procedural fairness (Brockner  
49 & Wiesenfeld, 1996). Hence, when a leader's decision hurts the interests of his or her followers,  
50 followers will pay special attention to the way in which the decision was made. In this respect,  
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timeliness can be considered as an important dimension for evaluating procedural fairness (e.g., Bies & Moag, 1986; Sapienza & Korsgaard, 1996).

Indeed, recent justice research investigating the speed of decision-making as a procedural fairness principle found that overly slow decision-making processes trigger perceptions of unfairness (see Valkeapää & Seppälä, 2014; see also Gilliland, 1993; Truxillo et al., 2002). When decisions last much longer than expected, uncertainty increases and people may start looking for parties at fault and possible reasons for the delays (Lind, 2001). Similarly, a fast decision process might also be perceived as unfair as it indicates that there might be problems in the adherence of proper decision-making procedures, as full adherence to procedural fairness principles takes time (Scott, Colquitt, & Paddock, 2009). Consequently, fast decision-making processes could also be negatively related to perceived fairness. Yet, the study of Valkeapää and Seppälä provides initial evidence that the negative effects of delayed decisions, in terms of lowered procedural fairness concerns, are more pronounced than the negative effects of hasty decisions. This finding can be explained when taking the concept of uncertainty into account. Indeed, a slow decision creates both uncertainty in the short-term (greater time spent under uncertainty) and long-term (concerns about the quality of the decision-making process), while a fast decision creates only concerns about the quality of the decision-making process as it minimalizes short-term uncertainty (see Valkeapää & Seppälä, 2014). In sum, it can thus be expected that, compared to timely decisions, especially delayed decisions will lead to low procedural fairness perceptions.

A range of studies found that negative reactions are most prominent when low distributive fairness is accompanied by unfair procedures (for an overview, see Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). Put otherwise, the combination of low procedural fairness and low outcome favorability engenders the most negative reactions. Hence, in the aftermath of a leader failure which results in a negative decision outcome, followers will react most negatively when the

1 procedural aspects of the decision-making process have not been well secured, like when a  
2 decision is not reached in a timely fashion. These negative reactions occur because unfair  
3 procedures convey information about one's poor reputation and social standing in the group (see  
4 De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Lind, 1992). In the present research we solely focused on  
5 timing effects in the case of incorrect decisions.  
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## 11 **Hypotheses**

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15 Based on the theoretical framework presented above, it can be argued that when a  
16 delayed decision results in a negative outcome, this can be seen as especially harmful as not only  
17 outcome-related concerns, but also procedural fairness concerns are violated. Hence, in case of a  
18 delayed incorrect decision a double transgression has occurred, while in case of a timely  
19 incorrect decision solely outcome-related concerns are violated (i.e., a single transgression). Note  
20 that in case of a hasty incorrect decision procedural fairness concerns might also be violated, but  
21 to a lesser extent than after a delayed incorrect decision (cf. Valkeapää & Seppälä, 2014). This  
22 reasoning led us to the following hypotheses:  
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36 *Hypothesis 1a:* A delayed incorrect decision is perceived as a more severe transgression  
37 than when the same incorrect decision is generated in a timely or a hasty manner.  
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42 *Hypothesis 1b:* Procedural fairness concerns mediate the effect of a delayed incorrect  
43 decision (versus a timely and a hasty one) on harm severity.  
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48 With regard to the trust repair process, an apology communicates that the transgressor  
49 feels remorse and is willing to take responsibility for maintaining the relationship (Scher &  
50 Darley, 1997). Apologies are therefore considered a very effective mitigating account, which  
51 makes wrongs look a bit more right by working on relational needs (Bobocel & Zdaniuk, 2005).  
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57 Moreover, in the forgiveness literature it is reported that harm severity strengthens the need for  
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and relevance of actions that promote forgiveness (Pronk, Karremans, Overbeek, Vermulst, & Wigboldus, 2010). Based on this literature, we formulated the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* In the aftermath of a leader's failure, followers have a higher need for an apology when the leader made the incorrect decision that led to a negative outcome in a delayed way, than when this same negative outcome was generated in a timely or a hasty manner.

Regarding the effectiveness of apologies as a trust repair strategy, two competing hypotheses can be formulated. A first explanation is based on need satisfaction. When people experience a high need for an apology, it can be reasonably expected that the offer of an apology satisfies this need, which should lead to a host of positive reactions. Indeed, need satisfaction increases well-being, engagement, and self-esteem; an effect that can certainly be expected in the context of social relationships and social needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This explanation leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3a:* In the aftermath of a leader's failure, an apology is *more* effective for enhancing trustworthiness and trust repair after a delayed decision than after a timely decision or a hasty decision.

A second possibility, however, is that even though people express a high need for an apology after an incorrect and delayed decision, an apology will not be very effective under these circumstances. In this vein, studies on forgiveness have shown that harm severity lessens the effectiveness of apologies as a reconciliation strategy (Schlenker, 1985; Schoenbach, 1990). Here also, the need for trust restoration is at its highest level, but the effectiveness of an apology is hampered. Moreover, research of Ohbuchi and colleagues (1989) revealed that when the harm is more severe, the effectiveness of apologies was attenuated.

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Additionally, prior research has revealed that the presence versus absence of an apology is strongly linked to individuals' perceptions of interactional fairness (see Clemmer & Schneider, 1996; Goodwin & Ross, 1992; Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999). Interactional fairness reflects the degree to which the people who are affected by certain decisions are treated with dignity and respect (Bies & Moag 1986; Goodwin & Ross, 1992). In this regard, previous studies which focused on the different fairness dimensions (i.e., distributive, procedural, and interactional) in the context of service recovery demonstrated that a financial compensation (which often enhances distributive fairness) is less effective for enhancing recovery when the other two dimensions of fairness are evaluated poorly (e.g., Blodgett, Hill, & Tax, 1997; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998). In the context of the present research in which the leader's incorrect decision violated followers' outcome-related concerns (i.e., distributive fairness is thus low), it can similarly be expected that the provision of an apology (which can be seen as a recovery tool that aims to improve interactional fairness) is less effective as a means to repair trust when combined with low levels of procedural fairness (like when the decision is generated in a delayed manner) than when combined with moderate or high levels of procedural fairness (like in the case of a hasty and a timely decision). The following hypothesis can thus be formulated:

*Hypothesis 3b:* In the aftermath of a leader's failure, an apology is *less* effective for enhancing trustworthiness and trust repair after a delayed decision than after a timely decision or a hasty decision.

### **The Present Studies**

We conducted five empirical studies that investigated how a negative decision outcome generated by a leader in a hasty, timely, or delayed manner impacts upon the trust repair process. More precisely, Study 1 was set up with the goal to investigate if a delayed incorrect decision is indeed perceived as a more severe transgression than a timely or a hasty incorrect decision. In

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this study, we also explored the mediating role of procedural fairness concerns. Next, in Studies 2 and 3, we examined in which decision timing condition followers had the highest need for an apology. Additionally, in Study 3 we examined differences among timing conditions in when followers expected an apology to be the most effective for enhancing trustworthiness. Finally, in Studies 4 and 5 the effectiveness of an actual apology (versus no apology) was investigated.

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants and design.** A sample of 82 US employees (53 men, 29 women,  $M_{age} = 31.55$ ,  $SD = 8.88$ ), which were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, completed an online scenario study in exchange for payment (\$0.50). This platform has been demonstrated to be an appropriate method for recruiting subjects (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling 2011; Hauser & Schwarz, 2015). To safeguard data quality, we implemented multiple response reliability checks spread throughout the study (see Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). All participants answered these check questions correctly. The participants worked at least 12 hours per week and had a direct supervisor at work. On average, the participants worked for 4.30 years ( $SD = 4.23$ ) in their current organization. They were randomly assigned to one condition of a 3-level (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed) between-subjects design.

**Procedure.** Participants were presented with a scenario about their supervisor at work. In this scenario, participants were asked to imagine as vividly as possible that the following situation happened to them: “Your supervisor made an incorrect decision which resulted in a negative outcome for you. As a result of this incorrect decision by your supervisor you received an unfavorable outcome.”

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**Manipulation of decision timing.** In the *hasty* condition, participants subsequently read the following text: “This incorrect decision was generated by your supervisor in a hasty manner. That is, the decision was made very fast and you hardly had to wait before the decision was reached.” For participants in the *timely* condition, it was stated that: “This incorrect decision was generated by your supervisor in a timely manner. That is, the decision was made at the appropriate moment in time and you only had to wait for a little while before the decision was reached.” Finally, in the *delayed* condition, participants learned that: “This incorrect decision was generated by your supervisor in a delayed manner. That is, the decision was made very slow and you had to wait for a long time before the decision was reached.” It is hard to investigate the effects of delays in the context of a scenario study because participants do not actually experience the delay. Therefore, in the delayed decision condition we added the following sentences in order to strengthen our timing manipulation: “Hence, it took your supervisor a very long time before he or she finally made a decision. Moreover, your supervisor was urged several times to make a decision, but he or she kept postponing the decision.”

### 37 **Measures.**

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**Procedural fairness.** Participants were asked to evaluate the decision-making procedures employed in the leader’s decision with the procedural fairness scale of Valkeapää and Seppälä (2014). This scale consists of ten items, but one item (i.e., “Decisions are made in cabinets”) was excluded because it is not applicable to our study context. Before answering the scale participants were provided with the following information: “Your supervisor made an incorrect decision that negatively affected you. However, this decision might also have had consequences for other people who were also affected by this decision. To what extent do you think that your supervisor has made this incorrect decision so that” followed by the items. Sample items are: “All parties were treated equally in the decision-making process” and

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“Everyone concerned had the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The items were aggregated into a general measure of procedural fairness ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Harm severity.** Next, the degree to which participants perceived the supervisor’s incorrect decision as a severe transgression was measured with a self-developed scale that consists of six items. Specifically, we asked participants: “To what extent do you find your supervisor’s decision a severe / harsh / serious / mild / soft / weak transgression” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The latter three items were reverse coded and subsequently the six items were combined into a general measure of harm severity ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .84$ ).

**Manipulation check.** Finally, we checked the effectiveness of the decision timing manipulation with the following manipulation check: “How did your supervisor reach the decision?” (1 = *in a fast manner*, 7 = *in a slow manner*;  $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ).

## Results

**Manipulation check.** We tested the effectiveness of our decision timing manipulation using a 3-level (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed) analysis of variance (ANOVA). The main effect of decision timing was significant,  $F(2, 79) = 225.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .85$ . A post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 6.78$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) considered the decision as generated more slowly ( $ps < .001$ ) than participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). Moreover, participants in the *timely* condition considered the decision to be reached more slowly than participants in the *hasty* condition ( $p < .001$ ). These results indicate that our decision timing manipulation was effective.



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**Procedural fairness.** A 3-level (decision timing) ANOVA on perceived procedural fairness showed a significant main effect of decision timing,  $F(2, 79) = 6.17, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .14$ . A post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 2.65, SD = 0.95$ ) perceived the decision as less procedural fair ( $ps < .05$ ) than participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 3.76, SD = 1.48$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 3.30, SD = 1.04$ ). Participants in the *hasty* and the *timely* condition did not differ significantly from each other ( $p = .160$ ).

**Harm severity.** A 3-level (decision timing) ANOVA on perceived harm severity also showed a significant main effect of decision timing,  $F(2, 79) = 7.09, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ . In agreement with *Hypothesis 1a*, a post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 5.15, SD = 1.04$ ) experienced the incorrect decision as a more severe transgression ( $ps < .007$ ) than participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 4.27, SD = 1.33$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 3.97, SD = 1.16$ ). Again, participants in the *hasty* and the *timely* condition did not differ significantly from each other ( $p = .359$ ).

**Mediating role of procedural fairness.** Because the correlation between procedural fairness and harm severity was high ( $r = -.56, p < .001$ ), we first checked whether these scales could be distinguished from each other by extracting two components from the inter-correlations among the items of both scales. The two extracted factors had an eigenvalue of 7.31 and 1.87 (explained variance of 48.76% and 12.49%, respectively). As expected, all nine procedural fairness items loaded on a first component (all component weights  $> .65$ , except one item which had a weight of .35), while the six harm severity items constituted a second, distinctive component (all component weights  $> .53$ ).

To test whether procedural fairness mediates the effects of decision timing on harm severity, we followed Hayes and Preacher's (2014) analysis strategy to calculate direct and indirect effects using a multicategorical predictor (by employing the SPSS macro

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MEDIATE). For the dummy that contrasted the *delayed* condition with the *timely* condition the mediation analysis confirmed that the indirect effect of decision timing on harm severity via procedural fairness was significant ( $b = -0.58$ ,  $SE = 0.18$ , 95% CI: [-0.94, -0.22]). The direct effect of decision timing on harm severity became non-significant for this dummy ( $b = -0.30$ ,  $SE = 0.29$ ,  $p = .308$ ). Moreover, the mediation analysis confirmed that for the dummy that contrasted the *delayed* condition with the *hasty* condition the indirect effect of decision timing on harm severity through procedural fairness was also significant ( $b = -0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ , 95% CI: [-0.68, -0.06]). Here, however, the direct effect of decision timing on harm severity remained significant ( $b = -0.83$ ,  $SE = 0.29$ ,  $p = .005$ ). The present results thus provide evidence for *Hypothesis 1b*, which states that procedural fairness mediates the effect of a delayed decision (versus a timely and a hasty decision) on harm severity.

## Discussion

The findings of the present study provide evidence for our first hypothesis. That is, in line with *Hypothesis 1a*, a delayed incorrect decision is indeed perceived as a more severe transgression than when the same incorrect decision was generated in a hasty or timely manner. Moreover, in agreement with *Hypothesis 1b*, the results also confirmed our expectation that a delayed incorrect decision is perceived as more severe because it also violates procedural fairness concerns, in addition to outcome-related ones. In the Introduction we additionally argued that a hasty incorrect decision might also be seen as a more severe transgression than a timely incorrect decision (but still less severe than a delayed incorrect decision). However, in the present study the differences between these two timing conditions failed to reach statistical significance. The next study was designed to examine how timing impacts victims' need for the restoration of such incidents, by investigating whether the need for an apology is higher after a delayed incorrect decision than after a timely or hasty incorrect decision (*Hypothesis 2*).

## Study 2

### Method

**Participants and design.** A sample of 59 US employees (38 men, 21 women,  $M_{age} = 33.81$ ,  $SD = 10.29$ ) recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk completed an online questionnaire study in exchange for payment (\$0.50). All participants worked at least 12 hours per week and had a direct supervisor at work. Participants worked on average 5.73 years ( $SD = 4.25$ ) in their current organization. Four participants (6.8%) were excluded from the analyses because they failed on our check questions. We employed a 3-level (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed) within-subjects design.

**Procedure.** Participants were presented with a questionnaire study. We used the same scenario as in Study 1 in which participants were asked to imagine as vividly as possible that their own supervisor made an incorrect decision which resulted in a negative decision outcome for them.

**Manipulation of decision timing.** Next, participants were asked to evaluate three situations (i.e., *hasty*, *timely*, and *delayed*) in which this incorrect decision could have been reached by their supervisor. These three decision timing conditions were framed in the same way as in Study 1. An important difference, however, is that in the present study decision timing was manipulated within instead of between subjects. In order to avoid sequential effects, the three decision timing conditions were presented to participants in a random order.

### Measures.

**Need for apology.** For each of the three decision timing conditions, we probed participants' need for an apology with three items (based on Leunissen et al., 2013): "To what extent does your supervisor need to apologize?", "To what extent do you desire an apology from your supervisor?", and "To what extent is it necessary that your supervisor offers his or

her apologies?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). For each decision timing condition these items were combined into a need for apology measure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86, .89$ , and  $.84$ , for the hasty, timely, and delayed condition, respectively). The correlations among these three need for apology measures were rather high (all  $r_s > .41$ ,  $p_s < .002$ ).

**Manipulation check.** We checked the effectiveness of the decision timing manipulation with the following manipulation check: "To what extent was your supervisor's decision delayed?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Participants rated this question for each of the three decision timing conditions.

## Results

**Manipulation check.** We conducted a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA), in which we included the manipulation check for each of the three decision timing conditions as within-subjects variables. The results of this analysis revealed a significant difference between the timing conditions on the manipulation check,  $F(2, 108) = 83.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .61$ . As expected, the *delayed* decision ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) was perceived by participants as more delayed than the *timely* decision ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ),  $F(1, 54) = 80.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .60$ , and the *hasty* decision ( $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ),  $F(1, 54) = 116.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .68$ . Furthermore, the *timely* decision was also perceived as more delayed than the *hasty* decision,  $F(1, 54) = 7.57$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .12$ . These findings thus indicate that our decision timing manipulation was effective.

**Need for apology.** Next, a repeated measures ANOVA with the three need for apology measures as within-subjects variables was conducted. The results of this analysis revealed a significant difference between the decision timing conditions on the need for apology measure,  $F(2, 108) = 8.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .14$ . The contrasts were planned in accordance with *Hypothesis 2*. As predicted, after the *delayed* decision ( $M = 5.37$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) participants had a

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higher need for an apology than after the *timely* decision ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ),  $F(1, 54) = 13.18$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .20$ , and the *hasty* decision ( $M = 4.99$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ),  $F(1, 54) = 4.04$ ,  $p = .049$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ . In addition, after the *hasty* decision participants also indicated a higher need for an apology than after the *timely* decision,  $F(1, 54) = 8.26$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ .

## Discussion

In line with *Hypothesis 2*, our results showed that after the delayed incorrect decision the need for an apology was higher than after both the hasty and the timely decision. Moreover, in the present study this need was also significantly greater after the hasty than after the timely decision, thus indicating that a hasty decision might be seen as a more severe transgression than a timely decision. Study 3 aims to replicate the present findings using a lab experiment instead of a questionnaire study. Moreover, we also measured the expected effectiveness of an apology in Study 3 in order to investigate whether participants anticipated an apology to be *more* effective (*Hypothesis 3a*) or *less* effective (*Hypothesis 3b*) as a means to enhance trustworthiness after a delayed incorrect decision than after a timely or hasty incorrect decision.

## Study 3

### Method

**Participants and design.** A sample of 95 undergraduate college students (12 men, 83 women,  $M_{age} = 19.68$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) participated in this experiment for course credit. One of these participants was not included in the analyses due to a data storage error. Participants were randomly assigned to one condition of a 3-level (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed) between-subjects design.

**Procedure.** Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were each seated in front of a computer. They were informed that they would work together with other participants present in the lab on several tasks, and that one participant was assigned as their leader (in fact,

1 unbeknownst to participants, the leader and his or her actions during the experiment were  
2 programmed). Their group was called 'Team Green'. Participants were then informed that the  
3 task would consist of two stages. In the first stage, participants would perform an individual  
4 task, in which they could earn money for the group. In the second stage, the simulated leader  
5 would make an investment decision with the group's earnings from the first stage.  
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12 After receiving this information, the first stage of the group task started. Participants  
13 learned that they should solve as many anagrams (e.g., 'ixat' = 'taxi') as possible in six  
14 minutes. Each anagram they solved earned money for their group, thereby increasing its  
15 chance of winning cinema tickets. On average, participants solved 19.44 anagrams ( $SD =$   
16 5.31). Upon completion of this task, participants were informed that the number of anagrams  
17 solved by each individual were pooled together to represent a group score, and that this group  
18 score was converted into a group-revenue.  
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30 In the second stage of the task, participants were told that the leader (whose behavior  
31 was simulated) would perform an investment task on behalf of the group, in which he or she  
32 would decide how the group's revenue from the first stage would be invested. Participants  
33 learned that to this end, the leader had to compare two possible investment options (i.e.,  
34 'research and development' and 'marketing'), and decide in which of these options the money  
35 would be invested. If the leader selected the correct alternative, the revenue that the group had  
36 earned would be multiplied, and the participants would be certain to earn the prize. However,  
37 if the leader selected the incorrect alternative, the group's revenue would be lost, and their  
38 chance of winning the prize would be squandered.  
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52 Although in this stage only the leader performed a task, participants could observe the  
53 leader while making this decision. As such, participants were able to observe on their screen  
54 which information the leader was consulting while performing the investment task, and could  
55 monitor at which time the leader made his or her decision. Through this procedure, we could  
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1 administer our manipulation of decision timing. Importantly, in all three decision timing  
2 conditions, the leader consulted the information regarding the two investment options in a  
3 fixed, consistent order.  
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7 **Manipulation of decision timing.** Before the start of the second stage, we explained  
8 participants that the leader received six minutes to complete the investment task, and that it  
9 was crucial that the leader made his or her decision before the deadline. We provided such an  
10 explicit standard because in real-life leaders are often confronted with predefined deadlines.  
11 The first three minutes (i.e., the ‘reading phase’) were intended for the leader to carefully read  
12 the description of the two investments, whereas the final three minutes (i.e., the ‘decision  
13 phase’) were intended for the leader to decide between the two investment options. Our  
14 manipulation of decision timing varied how much time the leader took to make his or her  
15 decision. Participants could follow this time course by a clock that was displayed on the  
16 middle of their screen.  
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32 In the *hasty* condition, the leader was preprogrammed to decide already after 45  
33 seconds, long before the reading phase had concluded and the decision phase had  
34 commenced. In the *timely* condition and the *delayed* condition, after exactly 3:00 minutes a  
35 message was displayed which informed the leader that the reading phase was over and the  
36 decision phase would start. Subsequently, in the *timely* condition, the leader decided after  
37 3:45 minutes. Yet, in the *delayed* condition the leader kept further postponing his or her  
38 decision. After 5:45 minutes a last warning message appeared on the screen which informed  
39 the leader that time was running out and that he or she immediately had to make a decision.  
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However, in this condition the leader decided just after six minutes, the moment that the decision deadline passed.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the outcomes of the task were revealed. In all three decision timing conditions, the leader selected the incorrect investment option, which yielded an unfavorable outcome as it caused the participants to lose all the money that they had earned in stage 1.

### Measures.

*Need for apology.* We measured participants' need for an apology with the same three items as in Study 2 ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Effectiveness of apology.* To probe the extent to which participants expected an apology to be an effective strategy to enhance the trustworthiness of their leader, we used an abridged version (nine items) of the trustworthiness scale of Mayer and Davis (1999) that was adapted to the context of the offer of an apology. Sample items are: "To what extent would an apology be effective to restore your faith in your leader's competence?" and "To what extent would an apology be effective to restore your faith that your leader is concerned about the welfare of his or her followers?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The items were aggregated into a general measure of the perceived effectiveness of an apology ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ).

*Manipulation check.* The effectiveness of the decision timing manipulation was measured with the same manipulation check as in Study 2 ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 2.33$ ).

### Results

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<sup>1</sup> To provide an additional point of reference for the timeliness of the leader's decision, in all three decision timing conditions, we also displayed a notice when the leader of 'Team Red' – another group that simultaneously performed the study – had made his or her decision. This message was shown after 3:45 minutes (on average; the program randomly selected a value between 3:43 and 3:47). Although both groups performed the task individually and were not in competition for the prize, highlighting the timing of 'Team Red' provides a useful reference point for participants to judge the timeliness of their leader's decision.



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**Manipulation check.** We tested the effectiveness of our decision timing manipulation using a 3-level (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed) ANOVA. The main effect of decision timing was significant,  $F(2, 91) = 162.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .78$ . A post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 6.83, SD = 0.60$ ) considered the decision as more delayed ( $ps < .001$ ) than participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 3.91, SD = 1.33$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 1.79, SD = 1.19$ ). Furthermore, participants in the *timely* condition considered the decision more delayed than those in the *hasty* condition ( $p < .001$ ). The decision timing manipulation was thus effective.

**Need for apology.** A 3-level (decision timing) ANOVA on participants' need for an apology showed a significant main effect of decision timing,  $F(2, 91) = 20.08, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$ . In agreement with *Hypothesis 2*, a post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 5.86, SD = 0.90$ ) had a higher need for an apology ( $ps < .001$ ) than participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 3.67, SD = 1.62$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 4.16, SD = 1.55$ ). In the present study, participants in the *hasty* and the *timely* condition did not differ significantly from each other ( $p = .160$ ).

**Effectiveness of apology.** A 3-level (decision timing) ANOVA on participant's perceived effectiveness of an apology showed a significant main effect of decision timing,  $F(2, 91) = 4.91, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .10$ . As predicted by *Hypothesis 3b*, a post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 3.78, SD = 1.41$ ) expected an apology to be *less* (instead of more) effective ( $ps < .05$ ) to enhance their trustworthiness of the leader compared to participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 4.61, SD = 0.98$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 4.37, SD = 0.74$ ). Here too, the difference between the *hasty* and the *timely* condition was non-significant ( $p = .356$ ).

## Discussion

1 The present results provide further evidence for *Hypothesis 2*, by showing that  
2 participants have a higher need for an apology when they experience a negative outcome  
3 generated by their leader in a delayed way than when this same outcome was produced in a  
4 timely or hasty manner. At the same time, participants expected an apology to be *less*  
5 effective to enhance trustworthiness of their leader after a delayed decision than after a timely  
6 or hasty decision (*Hypothesis 3b*). These findings thus show a remarkable paradox: The need  
7 for an apology is highest when a decision is delayed, but at the same time an apology is  
8 expected to be the least effective strategy under such circumstances. This is also reflected in  
9 the negative correlation between the need for an apology and the effectiveness of an apology  
10 in the delayed decision timing condition ( $r = -.34, p = .07$ ). Note that in the previous study  
11 participants in the hasty condition reported a higher need for an apology than participants in  
12 the timely condition. In the present study this difference was non-significant. However, the  
13 present study only informs us about the expected effectiveness of an apology but not about the  
14 actual effectiveness of such an apology. Therefore, in the next study we explicitly tested the  
15 effectiveness of an apology (versus no apology).  
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#### 36 Study 4

#### 37 Method

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43 **Participants and design.** A sample of 146 undergraduate university students (31 men,  
44 109 women,  $M_{age} = 19.09, SD = 1.87$ ) participated in this study for course credit. Gender and  
45 age of six participants were not recorded due to a programming error. We employed a 3  
46 (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed)  $\times$  2 (apology: no apology vs. apology)  
47 between-subjects design.  
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55 **Procedure.** We adopted the same procedure and the same decision timing  
56 manipulation as in Study 3, only now, the leader either did or did not provide an apology for  
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1 his or her incorrect decision. On average, participants solved 18.86 anagrams ( $SD = 5.98$ ) in  
2 the first stage of the group task.  
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5 **Manipulation of apology.** After the negative outcome of the investment task had been  
6 revealed, participants were informed that the leader had the opportunity to send them a  
7 message. In the *no apology* condition, participants were told that the leader had not taken up  
8 the possibility to send them a message. In the *apology* condition, the leader stated: “I want to  
9 apologize to everyone. I made a mistake. I promise you that this will never happen again.”  
10 Note that the apology message was targeted at all group members and contained the  
11 acceptance of responsibility, admittance of wrongdoing, and a promise of forbearance, three  
12 essential components of a persuasive apology (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Scher & Darley,  
13 1997).  
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#### 27 **Measures.**

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30 **Trustworthiness.** To assess perceived trustworthiness of the leader, we employed the  
31 full ability, benevolence, and integrity subscales of the trustworthiness measure (17 items)  
32 developed by Mayer and Davis (1999). Sample items are: “I have faith in the qualities of the  
33 leader (ability)”, “The leader places importance on the welfare of me and the team  
34 (benevolence)”, and “The leader’s actions and behaviors are not very consistent (integrity)” (1  
35 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; negative item reverse-coded). Because of the high  
36 correlations between the three facet scales (all  $r_s > .65$ ,  $p_s < .001$ ), the 17 items were  
37 aggregated into a general scale measure of trustworthiness ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ , Cronbach’s  
38  $\alpha = .94$ ).  
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53 **Trust.** To probe participants’ trusting intentions towards the leader we employed the  
54 six item trust scale of Desmet, De Cremer, and van Dijk (2011). Sample items are: “I trust the  
55 leader” and “I think that the leader would deceive me if he or she would benefit from it” (1 =  
56 *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; negative items reverse-coded). The six trust items were  
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aggregated into a scale measure of participants' trusting intentions ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Manipulation check.** The effectiveness of the decision timing manipulation was checked with the same manipulation check as in Study 2 ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ).

## Results

**Manipulation check.** We tested the effectiveness of our decision timing manipulation using a 3 (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed)  $\times$  2 (apology: no apology vs. apology) ANOVA. The results showed a significant main effect of decision timing,  $F(2, 140) = 98.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .59$ . As expected, a post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 6.35$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) considered the decision as more delayed ( $ps < .001$ ) than participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ). Furthermore, participants in the *timely* condition considered the decision more delayed than those in the *hasty* condition ( $p = .001$ ). The main effect of apology and the interaction effect were non-significant (both  $F$ s  $< 0.67$ ,  $ps > .414$ ). Again, the results indicate that our decision timing manipulation was effective.

**Trustworthiness.** A 3 (decision timing)  $\times$  2 (apology) ANOVA on trustworthiness<sup>2</sup> showed significant main effects of decision timing,  $F(2, 140) = 5.96$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ , and apology,  $F(1, 140) = 16.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ . The results showed that these effects were qualified by a significant interaction between decision timing and apology,  $F(2, 140) = 4.17$ ,  $p = .017$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . We conducted simple effects tests to further analyze this interaction. Means and standard deviations for the corresponding conditions are presented in Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup> ANOVAs and subsequent simple effects tests for the trustworthiness facet scales of ability, benevolence, and integrity led to similar conclusions as the ones reported here for the total scale.

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In line with the predictions made in *Hypothesis 3b*, an apology was *less* effective in enhancing trustworthiness in the *delayed* condition than in the *timely* condition ( $p < .001$ ) and the *hasty* condition ( $p = .006$ ). Moreover, an apology was slightly more effective in the *timely* condition than in the *hasty* condition ( $p = .091$ ). When participants did not receive an apology, there was no significant difference between the *hasty*, *timely*, and *delayed* conditions ( $ps > .536$ ). Whereas these results indicate that an apology is less effective in enhancing trustworthiness after a delayed decision than after a timely and a hasty one, it does not inform us about how effective an apology exactly is in each of the three decision timing conditions. We therefore performed additional simple effects tests which revealed that an apology is more effective to enhance trustworthiness than no apology after both a *hasty* decision ( $p = .018$ ) and a *timely* decision ( $p < .001$ ). After a *delayed* decision, however, an apology is not more effective than no apology to increase trustworthiness ( $p = .803$ ).

**Trust.** A 3 (decision timing)  $\times$  2 (apology) ANOVA on trust showed significant main effects of decision timing,  $F(2, 140) = 4.79, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$ , and apology,  $F(1, 140) = 15.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ . The interaction effect of decision timing and apology, however, revealed a tendency towards statistical significance,  $F(2, 140) = 2.86, p = .060, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . We further analyzed this almost significant interaction with simple effects tests in order to explore whether we could replicate the results reported for trustworthiness for actual trust. Because the interaction failed to reach statistical significance at the .05 level, the results presented below should be interpreted with caution. Means and standard deviations for the corresponding conditions are presented in Table 1.

In agreement with *Hypothesis 3b*, an apology was *less* effective to repair trust in the *delayed* condition than in the *timely* condition ( $p < .001$ ) and the *hasty* condition ( $p = .017$ ); while there was no significant difference between the *hasty* condition and the *timely* condition ( $p = .153$ ). Moreover, when participants did not receive an apology, the three timing

1 conditions did not differ significantly from each other ( $ps > .493$ ). Additional simple effects  
2 tests showed that an apology is more effective to repair trust than no apology in both the *hasty*  
3 condition ( $p = .023$ ) and the *timely* condition ( $p < .001$ ). After a *delayed* decision, an apology  
4 is not more effective than no apology in restoring trust ( $p = .566$ ). Hence, the analyses  
5 revealed similar results for trustworthiness and trust, which can be ascribed to the high  
6 correlation between these two concepts ( $r = .79, p < .001$ ).  
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## 19 **Discussion**

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21 In support of *Hypothesis 3b*, the current study demonstrates that in the aftermath of a  
22 leader failure, the provision of an apology is *less* effective in restoring trustworthiness and  
23 trust after a delayed incorrect decision compared to a timely and a hasty incorrect decision.  
24 Moreover, the difference between the hasty and timely condition was marginally significant  
25 for trustworthiness, but non-significant for trust. It should, however, be noted that the decision  
26 timing by apology interaction revealed only a tendency towards statistical significance for the  
27 trust scale, and the results of the simple effects tests should therefore be interpreted with  
28 caution. In order to replicate the present results we conducted an additional study in which we  
29 used an employee sample to investigate the effectiveness of an apology in restoring trust.  
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## 44 **Study 5**

### 45 **Method**

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47 **Participants and design.** A sample of 151 US employees (87 men, 64 women,  $M_{age} =$   
48 34.92,  $SD = 10.48$ ) was recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. They completed an  
49 online scenario study in exchange for payment (\$0.50). All participants worked at least 12  
50 hours per week and had a direct supervisor at work. Participants worked on average 5.97  
51 years ( $SD = 5.13$ ) in their current organization. Twelve participants (7.9%) were excluded  
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1 from further analyses because they failed on our check questions. As in the previous study, we  
2 employed a 3 (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed)  $\times$  2 (apology: no apology vs.  
3 apology) between-subjects design.  
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7 **Procedure.** As in Study 1, participants were presented with a short scenario in which  
8 they were asked to imagine as vividly as possible that their supervisor made an incorrect  
9 decision which resulted in a negative decision outcome for them.  
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13 **Manipulation of decision timing.** Similar to the first study, in the *hasty* condition  
14 participants read that the incorrect decision by their supervisor was made in a hasty manner,  
15 in the *timely* condition the incorrect decision was generated in a timely fashion, and in the  
16 *delayed* condition the incorrect decision was described as being delayed (for the precise  
17 formulations, see the Method section of Study 1).  
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21 **Manipulation of apology.** In the *no apology* condition, it was stated that no further  
22 communication regarding this incidence took place. In the *apology* condition, participants  
23 were told that their supervisor apologized for what happened by stating: “I want to apologize  
24 to you. I made a mistake. I promise you that this will never happen again.” As in the previous  
25 study, the apology message contained the three essential components of a persuasive apology.  
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#### 28 **Measures.**

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30 **Trust.** We measured participants trust in their leader with the same six items as in  
31 Study 4 ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .95$ ).  
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35 **Manipulation check.** The effectiveness of the decision timing manipulation was  
36 probed with the same manipulation check as in Study 2 ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 2.35$ ).  
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## 39 **Results**

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41 **Manipulation check.** The effectiveness of our decision timing manipulation was  
42 tested using a 3 (decision timing: hasty vs. timely vs. delayed)  $\times$  2 (apology: no apology vs.  
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apology) ANOVA. The results showed a significant main effect of decision timing,  $F(2, 133) = 128.23, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .66$ . As expected, a post hoc test (LSD) showed that participants in the *delayed* condition ( $M = 6.27, SD = 1.14$ ) considered the decision as more delayed ( $ps < .001$ ) than participants in the *timely* condition ( $M = 2.47, SD = 1.63$ ) and those in the *hasty* condition ( $M = 2.04, SD = 1.37$ ). Although the difference is in the expected direction, the *timely* and the *hasty* condition did not differ significantly from each other ( $p = .145$ ). The main effect of apology and the interaction effect were non-significant (both  $F_s < 2.14, ps > .146$ ).

**Trust.** A 3 (decision timing)  $\times$  2 (apology) ANOVA on trust showed significant main effects of decision timing,  $F(2, 133) = 11.39, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ , and apology,  $F(1, 133) = 19.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . The results showed that these effects were qualified by a significant interaction between decision timing and apology,  $F(2, 133) = 3.57, p = .031, \eta_p^2 = .05$ . We conducted simple effects tests to further analyze this interaction. Means and standard deviations for the corresponding conditions are presented in Table 2.

In agreement with *Hypothesis 3b*, an apology was *less* effective to repair trust in the *delayed* condition than in the *timely* condition ( $p < .001$ ) and the *hasty* condition ( $p = .012$ ). Moreover, in the *hasty* condition an apology was less effective than in the *timely* condition ( $p = .007$ ). As in the previous study, when participants did not receive an apology, the three decision timing conditions did not differ significantly from each other ( $ps > .129$ ). Additional simple effects tests showed that an apology is more effective to repair trust than no apology in both the *hasty* condition ( $p = .016$ ) and the *timely* condition ( $p < .001$ ). After a *delayed* decision, an apology is not more effective than no apology for restoring trust ( $p = .463$ ).

*Insert Table 2 about here*

## Discussion



1 The present study replicates the findings of Study 4. That is, in agreement with  
2 *Hypothesis 3b*, the results showed that an apology is *less* effective in restoring trust after a  
3 delayed incorrect decision compared to a timely and a hasty incorrect decision. Here, the  
4 difference between the hasty and the timely condition was significant, once again indicating  
5 that a hasty decision might be seen as a more severe transgression than a timely decision.  
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### 11 **Summary and Concluding Discussion**

12 Although trust is a vital ingredient of effective leader-follower relationships, it is not  
13 uncommon that leaders violate their followers' trust by making decisions that result in a  
14 negative outcome. When the failure to reach a desired outcome is ascribed to the leader,  
15 followers' trust in the leader will subsequently decline. One way in which leaders can repair  
16 broken trust is by apologizing for their mistakes. Importantly, however, restoration of trust  
17 may depend not only on the negative outcomes that result from such decisions, but also on the  
18 timing of those decisions. In spite of the ubiquity of timing errors in daily life, such  
19 transgressions have received only scant attention in research. To the best of our knowledge,  
20 no research has focused on the role of timeliness of decisions in trust repair yet. We therefore  
21 investigated decision timing as an important feature of decision style that may influence the  
22 effectiveness of apologies as a trust repair strategy in leader-follower relationships.  
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### 42 **Main Conclusions**

43 In accordance with *Hypothesis 1a*, the results of Study 1 revealed that when a negative  
44 outcome is generated by a leader in a delayed manner, this is perceived by followers as a  
45 more severe transgression than when the same negative outcome is generated in a timely or  
46 hasty fashion. Moreover, our findings revealed that procedural fairness mediates the effect of  
47 a delayed decision on harm severity (*Hypothesis 1b*). Hence, our findings indicate that a  
48 delayed incorrect decision can be seen as a more severe transgression as it violates both  
49 outcome-related and procedural fairness concerns. The present findings thus corroborate  
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1 recent research by Valkeapää and Seppälä (2014), who also reported that especially slow  
2 decision-making styles violate procedural fairness concerns.  
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5 Moreover, as predicted in *Hypothesis 2*, the results of Studies 2 and 3 showed that the  
6 need for an apology is higher after a delayed incorrect decision than after a timely and a hasty  
7 incorrect decision. This result supports findings done in fairness research, which have  
8 convincingly showed that negative decision outcomes prompt people to be more sensitive for  
9 unfair procedures (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). A combination of low procedural fairness  
10 and low outcome favorability—like in the case of a delayed incorrect decision—can thus be  
11 expected to elicit a high need for actions that reestablish the social relationship, such as the  
12 offer of an apology (see De Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Tyler & Lind, 1992). The results of our  
13 studies also corroborate prior forgiveness research, which has shown that the need for actions  
14 that promote reconciliation is strengthened by harm severity (Pronk et al., 2010).  
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30 Finally, in accordance with *Hypothesis 3b* (and opposite to the predictions made by the  
31 competing *Hypothesis 3a*) Study 3 also revealed that followers expected an apology to be *less*  
32 (instead of more) effective to increase trustworthiness when the negative decision outcome  
33 was delayed relative to timely or hasty. In Study 4, we replicated this effect for actual  
34 apologies on trustworthiness and trust. Although in this instance the effect on trust was only  
35 marginally significant, and therefore should be interpreted with caution, this effect was  
36 replicated with statistical significance in Study 5. These results thus corroborate forgiveness  
37 research, which has demonstrated that after severe transgressions, when the need for trust  
38 restoration is at a high level, apologies are ineffective to enhance reconciliation (e.g., see  
39 Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Schlenker, 1985; Schoenbach, 1990). Moreover, the finding that in the  
40 aftermath of an incorrect decision (which results in low distributive fairness) the provision of  
41 an apology (which aims to enhance interactional fairness) was ineffective to repair trust when  
42 procedural fairness concerns were also violated (like in the case of a delay) is also in line with  
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1 previous research that focused on the different fairness dimensions in the context of service  
2 recovery efforts. Specifically, this prior research has demonstrated that the effectiveness of a  
3 recovery strategy that enhances one specific fairness dimension is lessened when the other  
4 two fairness dimensions are not well secured (see Blodgett et al., 1997; Tax et al., 1998).  
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10 Taken together, the present findings thus present us with an interesting paradox: Even  
11 though the need for an apology is highest when a decision is delayed (compared to timely or  
12 hasty), an apology proved to be the least effective to enhance trustworthiness and repair actual  
13 trust in the delayed decision timing condition.  
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20 In the remainder of the discussion, we first elaborate on the differences between hasty  
21 and timely decisions. Secondly, we focus on the theoretical and practical implications that can  
22 be derived from the current research. Next, we address the question whether trust can be  
23 repaired after a delayed decision. Finally, we describe some strengths and limitations of the  
24 present studies, and formulate some recommendations for future research.  
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### 33 **Differences between Hasty and Timely Decisions**

34 Note that the present research mainly focused on delayed decisions, which were  
35 contrasted with hasty and timely decisions. However, as argued in the introduction, it is  
36 possible that hasty decisions might also differ from timely ones. Based on prior research of  
37 Valkeapää and Seppälä (2014), it can be predicted that in the case of a hasty decision  
38 procedural fairness concerns will also be violated (but to a lesser extent than after a delay). As  
39 a result, a hasty incorrect decision might be seen as a more severe transgression, which  
40 engenders a higher need for an apology, than a timely incorrect decision. Our results partially  
41 confirmed these predictions.  
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56 That is, although no significant differences between the hasty and the timely condition  
57 emerged in terms of perceived procedural fairness and harm severity (Study 1), need for and  
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1 expected effectiveness of an apology (Study 3), and enhanced trust and trustworthiness after  
2 receiving an apology (Study 4); we obtained significant results for need for an apology in  
3 Study 2 and for trust in Study 5. This inconsistency between Studies 2 and 3 can possibly be  
4 ascribed to the fact that the second study employed a within-subjects design to manipulate  
5 decision timing. Such a design results in substantially more sensitivity to a manipulation than  
6 a between-subjects design that contains approximate the same number of observations  
7 (Greenwald, 1976).  
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12 To conclude, based on our findings it thus seems plausible that hasty and timely  
13 decisions are also experienced differently. It might be interesting for future research to further  
14 investigate the difference between hasty and timely decisions, and, more specifically, when  
15 hasty and timely decisions exactly differ and when they do not.  
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### 17 **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

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20 The first important contribution of the present research is that it shows that a lack of  
21 timeliness is a crucial transgression dimension that has powerful effects on trust and  
22 trustworthiness. Prior research has focused heavily on trust violations as being either  
23 competence- or integrity-based (for an overview on this matter, see Kim, Dirks, & Cooper,  
24 2009). However, our results show that while an apology (compared to no apology) was  
25 effective in enhancing trustworthiness and trust repair following a leader's incorrect hasty and  
26 timely responses, this was no longer the case after a delay. Our findings thus suggest that,  
27 besides competence and integrity violations, delays can be considered a distinct type of trust  
28 violation. Based on our findings, it can be concluded that timeliness represents an important  
29 extension for literature on trust repair.  
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34 This research also highlights an additional issue that deserves particular attention of  
35 leaders who in everyday life must make numerous decisions that can affect their followers.  
36 Specifically, in our studies we examined timing errors in a context in which followers  
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1 depended on the actions of their leader, and the leader's delay constituted a clear threat to  
2 their interests. Such situations frequently occur in organizations, where leaders are regularly  
3 faced with deadlines. Prior work on timing in organizations has suggested that subordinates  
4 develop strong temporal expectations, which often get violated in the form of delays (Blount  
5 & Janick, 2001; Tukul & Rom, 1998). Moreover, ample research has shown that delayed  
6 decisions can have severe consequences in terms of negative leadership perceptions, lowered  
7 team effectiveness, and decreased organizational performance (e.g., Cha & Edmonston, 2006;  
8 Jacobs, 2005; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Mohammed et al., 2009).

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20 Our findings supplement the adverse consequences of delays by showing its negative  
21 effects on trustworthiness and trust. Together these findings show that even when leaders are  
22 overwhelmed by the large number of decisions they have to address, it is better for them to  
23 give preference to fast over delayed actions. This view is congruent with literature on action  
24 bias (e.g., Bar-Eli, Azar, Ritov, Keidar-Levin, & Shein, 2007), which states that people tend  
25 to evaluate others more positively if they take action rather than do nothing, regardless of  
26 whether this action proves optimal relative to the outcome. From the above, we can thus  
27 conclude that leaders should be informed that missing a deadline can have severe  
28 ramifications, which can be hard to reconcile by usual means such as the offer of an apology.

### 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 **Can Trust be Repaired After a Delayed Incorrect Decision?**

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45 The question that arises is whether trust can be repaired in the aftermath of a delayed  
46 incorrect decision. While in the present research apologies were ineffective for restoring trust  
47 after delays (despite containing the three essential components, see Scher & Darley, 1997), it  
48 is possible that more elaborated, complex, or intense apologies might be more effective.  
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50 Schlenker and Darby (1981), for example, suggested that people tend to use more complex  
51 apologies involving a larger number of components as the harm done gets more serious. For  
52 instance, a more explicit promise of future trustworthy behavior may be necessary in order to  
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1 restore trust after a delayed incorrect decision. Moreover, after a delayed incorrect decision an  
2 apology might be seen as only a first and necessary step that subsequently needs to be backed  
3 up with more reliable behavior in order to successfully repair trust. The process of trust repair  
4 in response to a delayed decision may thus be a process of longer duration, in which trust can  
5 only be rebuilt gradually over time.  
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12 In addition, prior trust repair research has revealed that, besides apologies, there are  
13 many other strategies that can repair broken trust. For instance, because in the present  
14 research the leader's decision resulted in a negative decision outcome, strategies that address  
15 violated outcome-related concerns might be necessary to repair broken trust. The offer of a  
16 financial compensation is an example of such a strategy (see Haesevoets, Reinders Folmer,  
17 De Cremer, & Van Hiel, 2013; Desmet et al., 2011). It is thus possible that the 'cheap talk' of  
18 an apology should be substantiated with at least some sort of tangibility in order to initiate the  
19 recovery process.  
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### 31 **Strengths and Limitations**

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33 Evidence for our hypotheses was obtained using five empirical studies in which we  
34 manipulated decision timing (in Studies 1 through 5) and apology (in Studies 4 and 5). An  
35 advantage of studying human behavior using experimental manipulations is that it allows us  
36 to investigate the processes of decision timing and trust repair in a controlled environment. In  
37 the experimental studies, we thus gave priority to the goals of precision, controllability, and  
38 consistency. However, these priorities were emphasized at the expense of generalizability. In  
39 order to enlarge the generalizability of our findings, three of our studies (i.e., Studies 1, 2, and  
40 5) were conducted among followers who answered our study questions for their own leader.  
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1 Secondly, despite the conceptual differences between trustworthiness and trust (see  
2 Colquitt et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 1995), our results revealed that an apology was effective to  
3 enhance both trustworthiness and actual trust after a hasty and a timely decision, but  
4 ineffective after a delayed decision. The observation that we could replicate this effect across  
5 both trust concepts further underlines the robustness of our findings. However, this result is  
6 not too surprising because despite their differences these two concepts are also closely related  
7 to each other (i.e., “one trusts someone because she is trustworthy, and one’s trustworthiness  
8 inspires trust”; see Flores & Solomon, 1998, p. 209). This is also reflected by the high  
9 correlation ( $r = .79$ ) between trustworthiness and trust in our fourth study.  
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22 A major limitation of the present research, however, is that in our studies the concepts  
23 of trust and trustworthiness were both measured using a snapshot approach. In real-life trust is  
24 a more dynamic construct that fluctuates over time (Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer, 2009). The  
25 investigation of trust as a dynamic construct thus requires multiple measurements over time.  
26 A vital recommendation for further research is therefore to take the dynamic nature of trust  
27 into consideration when investigating the trust repair process.  
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37 Moreover, a specific restriction of our Mechanical Turk studies (i.e., Studies 1, 2, and  
38 5) is that the scenarios that we employed were all framed in rather general terms. That is, in  
39 these studies no specific information regarding the decision-making process was provided  
40 because this would make it increasingly likely that certain parts of the scenario would diverge  
41 from what participants actually experience in their daily life. Nonetheless, we should  
42 acknowledge that the use of context free scenarios may have led to a decreased intensity of  
43 the participants’ experiences. This methodological choice may also threaten the ecological  
44 validity of our findings, as in real-life situations many different factors—such as for instance  
45 the intensity of the trust violation and the history of the relationship between the leader and  
46 his or her followers—may also influence the trust repair process. We believe that it would be  
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1 interesting for further studies to discover important contextual factors that might influence the  
2 trust restoration process in actual business settings and encourage future research to take these  
3 different elements into account.  
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### 6 7 **Directions for Future Research** 8

9  
10 The present research provides only an overall test of the effects of decision timing on  
11 trust repair in the aftermath of leader failure. As argued above, future studies should aim to  
12 understand which contextual factors may impact the effect of timing on trust, and the  
13 processes that may explain this effect.  
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20 First of all, future studies should examine the impact of timing errors in the context of  
21 correct decisions (instead of incorrect ones). In order to be able to investigate the trust repair  
22 process, we solely focused on situations in which the failure of the leader resulted in an  
23 equivalent negative outcome for followers. Based on the present results, it is unclear which  
24 consequences may arise when a leader makes a decision that results in favorable outcomes in  
25 a delayed manner. It is possible that the adverse effects of delays, which we noted in the  
26 present studies, will be less pronounced when the output of the decision is positive (cf.  
27 Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). Additional research is needed to examine this prediction.  
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41 Moreover, to investigate the effectiveness of apologies as a means to repair trust in the  
42 aftermath of leader failure, in our studies decision timing was manipulated in such a way that  
43 it was clear to participants that the leader him- or herself was responsible for the negative  
44 decision outcome. If the cause of a delay can be attributed to factors other than the leader, it  
45 can be expected that the leader will not be seen as the prime responsible, which might alter  
46 the effectiveness of the provision of an apology to establish trust repair. The investigation of  
47 the role of such attributions is an important avenue for future research.  
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Additional research should also examine the social context in which the timing violation occurred. In this regard, future studies can, for instance, investigate the role of leader-member exchanges (LMX) in the trust repair process after different timing transgressions (see Gómez & Rosen, 2001; Liden & Graen, 1980), as the quality of these leader-member exchange relationships might influence the effectiveness of apologies. It is possible that an apology will be more effective to enhance trust after a delayed incorrect decision when the quality of the relationship between the leader and his or her follower is rated highly. This prediction should also be validated in future research.

Finally, the present research has primarily understood the effect of timing in terms of its violation of fairness concerns. Although our results revealed that fairness can (partially) explain the effects of delayed decision making, it must be acknowledged that in the present research we only took the mediating role of procedural fairness into account. Yet, it is possible that timing violations do not only violate norms of fair treatment, but also norms of politeness and respect (i.e., interactional fairness). Therefore, it is important that future timing research also includes a measurement of interactional fairness in addition to procedural fairness.

## Conclusion

The present research was the first to systematically study how the timing of an incorrect decision influences the need for, and the effectiveness of an apology as a trust repair strategy. The results of our studies revealed that the need for an apology was highest when an incorrect decision was preceded by delay, whereas apologies in fact were ineffective for repairing trust in this context. Leaders would thus be wise to bear in mind that even when the outcome of a decision is uncertain, it is better to decide (too) soon rather than (too) late, as negative outcomes are particularly difficult to restore in the context of delays.

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APOLOGIES, DELAYS, AND TRUST REPAIR

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Trustworthiness and Trust (Study 4)*

Dependent variable	Decision timing condition	Apology condition								
		No apology			Apology			Total		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Trustworthiness	Hasty	3.60	0.66	23	4.12	0.56	26	3.87	0.66	49
	Timely	3.53	0.82	24	4.48	0.71	25	4.02	0.90	49
	Delayed	3.46	0.94	25	3.51	0.85	23	3.49	0.89	48
	Total	3.53	0.81	72	4.05	0.81	74	3.79	0.85	146
Trust	Hasty	3.83	0.63	23	4.42	0.81	26	4.14	0.78	49
	Timely	3.76	1.12	24	4.79	0.97	25	4.28	1.16	49
	Delayed	3.65	0.95	25	3.80	0.87	23	3.72	0.90	48
	Total	3.74	0.91	72	4.35	0.96	74	4.05	0.98	146

*Note.* Higher mean scores indicate greater trust(worthiness).

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APOLOGIES, DELAYS, AND TRUST REPAIR

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Trust (Study 5)*

Decision timing condition	Apology condition								
	No apology			Apology			Total		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Hasty	3.57	1.36	25	4.52	1.22	24	4.04	1.37	49
Timely	3.80	1.82	23	5.61	1.08	22	4.69	1.75	45
Delayed	3.19	1.42	24	3.49	1.01	21	3.33	1.24	45
Total	3.52	1.54	72	4.56	1.39	67	4.02	1.55	139

*Note.* Higher mean scores indicate greater trust.