As public and private sector organizations continue to undergo transformational change, it is important to identify organizational factors that impact employee behaviors and attitudes to change. One such organizational factor is subordinate trust in the direct leader. Trust can be defined as an attitude held by subordinates toward their managers based upon their perceptions, beliefs, and attributions about their managers’ benevolence, reliability, openness, and loyalty derived from their observations of their supervisors’ behavior (Butler, 1991).

Several researchers have made claim to the importance of trust. For instance, Rotter (1967) concluded that the adaptability of all social groups is dependent upon trust because it affects efficiency and adjustment. Additionally, Brockner, Siegel, Daly, Martin, and Tyler (1997) concluded that a manager’s effectiveness depends on the ability to gain the trust of subordinates. In fact, the significance of trust in leadership has been recognized by researchers for at least five decades (e.g., Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Rotter, 1967; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Zand, 1972). In addition, trust is moving from a “bit player to center stage in contemporary organization theory and research” (Kramer & Tyler 1999, p. 594) which can be evidenced by the large number of special issues of journals devoted to the topic of trust (e.g., Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998).

More importantly, trust has been related to a number of organizational variables. For example, Frost, Stimpson, and Maughan (1978), found trust significantly related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment as well as organizational justice. A recent meta-analysis by Dirks and Ferrin (2002) confirmed the previously mentioned relationships and additionally found trust significantly related to organizational citizenship behaviors, attrition, leader satisfaction, belief in information provided by the leader, and decision commitment. Further research by Clegg, Unsworth, Epitropaki, and Parker (2002) confirmed that trust was a significant determinant of successful implementation of ideas. Clegg et al. (2002) developed two subscales of trust and administered the subscales to 250 design engineers. The trust subscales measured two independent but related dimensions of trust: a measure of organizational receptivity labeled as “trust that is heard” and a measure of leader’s willingness to share the benefits of change with subordi-

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Influence of Leader Trust on Policy Agreement

Organizations need to know the basis on which new policies are evaluated by employees and the variables that influence the adoption of policies and ideas. Based upon prior research, one factor that may play a significant role in this evaluation is subordinate/leader trust. The present study attempted to ascertain the influence of trust on evaluation of an organizational policy based upon message support. Ninety-three participants (teachers) read a memo indicating support or nonsupport for an organizational policy (new teacher certification) by their direct supervisor (school principal) with accompanying rationale for the position. In addition, participants self-reported their level of trust in their direct supervisor using the Behavioral Trust Inventory (BTI). Results indicate the higher the level of trust in the direct supervisor, the higher the extent of subordinate agreement, regardless of the position taken by the principal. No other variables studied such as length of relationship, years teaching, age, and gender were related to subordinate agreement.

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*Faculty supervisor
nates labeled as “trust that benefit” (p. 410). In addition, innovation was defined and measured in two related ways: the number of ideas suggested and the number of ideas implemented. The data confirmed that both dimensions of trust were significantly related to support for innovation and implementation of ideas (Clegg, et al.).

Surprisingly, little research has focused on illustrating how or if leader trust affects subordinate agreement with organizational policy. Understanding the influence of leader trust in these decision-making processes is important in both theory and practice. Persuasion research provides a basis for better understanding the effect of leader trust on subordinate agreement. Priester and Petty (1995, 2003) found that trust influences message elaboration and persuasion. Specifically, their results indicated that low trustworthy endorsers elicit greater elaboration and conversely, while high trustworthy endorsers are more likely to persuade without message elaboration on the part of the recipient (Priester & Petty, 1995).

Subsequent research has demonstrated the effect is generalizable to familiar product endorsers for both relevant and irrelevant products (Priester & Petty, 2003). In short, if one trusts the source of the message, one is less likely to carefully evaluate the merit of the message and is more likely to be persuaded; whereas if one does not trust the source of the message, one is more likely to carefully evaluate the message and instead will base the decision on the message content. Applying these findings to organizations would help in understanding attitude change of employees regarding new organizational policy agreement.

One dimension of trust that is hypothesized to influence organizational functioning is whether trust in a direct leader influences the decision to agree with an organizational policy. The present research attempted to determine the relationship between subordinate trust in a direct leader and policy agreement. Our hypothesis was based on a previous meta-analysis (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) which supports the idea that trust in a leader is related to belief in information provided by the leader, and Priester and Petty’s (1995) research indicates that trust in a source leads to little analysis of message merit. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the greater the trust in a direct leader, the greater the decision agreement with the direct leader on an important organizational policy.

**Method**

**Participants**

Ninety-three school teachers (28 men, 55 women, 10 not reporting gender) at a midwestern medium-sized school district were randomly selected from six schools (four high schools and two middle schools) whose principals volunteered to be included in the study. Principals were defined as the direct leaders of the teachers. Teacher demographics including length of relationship with the principal, age, and years teaching, were all collected and analyzed (see Table 1).
Materials

Policy memorandum. To gauge influence of leader trust on policy agreement, a scenario was devised either supporting or not supporting a change in school policy. These scenarios were presented in the form of a memorandum with a response scale at the bottom. The memos were created to be parallel, with a strong attempt to mirror the opposite version of the same terminology. Because of this method of creation, the length and strength of the arguments were comparable. For instance, in the support memo the main supporting line reads, in part: “[Praxis II Users] have reported higher satisfaction, higher student performance (above Iowa and the national average).” Whereas in the nonsupport memo the main supporting line reads: “[Praxis II Users] have reported lower satisfaction, lower salaries (compared to the national average), and lower student performance (below Iowa and the national average).” To verify the comparability of the memos, a professor of organizational psychology, the director of human resources, and a former principal of 10+ years (now a professor of education) assisted with the creation of the memos and the finished forms prior to experimentation. Their inter-rater agreement that the memos were equally compelling provides rudimentary evidence of content validity.

Teacher certification has been a salient issue in the Iowa School System. Both support and nonsupport positions for new teacher certification were espoused by the principals to control for initial positions of the teachers because an actual policy issue under consideration was used, and teachers may have positions prior to the study. Each participant was randomly asked to read a memo from his or her principal either supporting or not supporting (both with rationale) required certification of new teachers (see Appendix A and B). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with their principal on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). This scale was presented on the bottom of both memos and was termed extent of agreement.

Behavioral Trust Inventory. In the present study, trust was measured using the Behavioral Trust Inventory (BTI; Gillespie, 2003). The Behavioral Trust Inventory is a new, 10-item measure of trusting behavior in interpersonal work relationships (see Appendix C). On the bottom of the BTI, demographics were asked of participants, including age, gender, how long they have known their principal, and years teaching. Gillespie reports that the BTI demonstrates content and convergent validity using both cross-sectional and longitudinal data. The BTI was designed to measure two dimensions of trust: subordinates’ willingness to rely on their direct leader and disclose information to their direct leader.

Gillespie (2003) defines reliance as: “relying on another’s skills, knowledge, judgments or actions, including delegating and giving autonomy, and disclosure as: sharing work-related or personal information of a sensitive nature” (Gillespie, 2003, n.p.). These categories overlap with Zand’s (1972) domains of accepting influence and interdependence, and sharing information (Gillespie). The inventory was selected because it offers a brief, valid, and multidimensional measure that assesses trust and is applicable to leader-subordinate work relationships.

Procedure

Following all APA guidelines concerning the ethical treatments of human participants, a local school district administrator was contacted and provided a full research prospectus, including the specific experimental manipulation that included a small, but necessary degree of deception and the specifics of the debriefing process. Following this, the Human Resource Director of the school district sent out a district-wide email to school principals asking for volunteers. The research prospectus along with the Human Resource Director’s comments was passed on to all possible participating principals. Four high school and two middle school principals volunteered for the study. Envelopes containing a cover letter, a policy memorandum, the BTI, and a return envelope addressed directly to the experimenters’ college were given to each school. The cover letter asked for participation, outlined a bogus rationale for filling out both the memorandum and BTI, and presented instructions. The order of presentation in all cases was the cover letter first, the policy memorandum second, and the BTI last. Half the envelopes contained a memorandum supporting adopting new teacher certification in Iowa with accompanying rationale, and half contained a memorandum not supporting adopting the new teacher certification policy for Iowa with accompanying rationale. This response was classified as extent of agreement during analyses. School administrators were instructed to place an envelope, which contained the cover letter, memorandum, and BTI, in every other teacher mailbox.

Principals were asked not to discuss related school policy or any aspect of the experiment until the responses were collected. The school administrators were given the envelopes on a Friday and were to place the envelopes in the teacher mailboxes by Monday. Participants were then given a deadline of one school week, with a requested mailby day of Friday. Lastly, all teachers were debriefed by email (principals also
of support (to develop a composite trust score. A t-test comparison time frame). All 10 questions on the BTI were summed 38% (93 out of 242 participants responded within the collected by the response date for a response rate of tables as the independent variables.

and the trust composite score, and demographic vari-

ables are entered. Only variables that account for a

significant portion of the unaccountable variance (F

differences in extent of agreement between the groups,

t(91) = -.92, p > .05. Therefore, subsequent analyses

were collapsed over memo type. Utilizing a forward

step-wise multiple regression procedure, age, years

teaching, length of relationship, gender, and the trust

composite score were all entered as predictors for the

dependent variable, extent of agreement. The trust

composite score was the only variable that significantly

related to extent of agreement (β = .22, p = .02; see

Table 2). Thus, as hypothesized, the greater the trust

in a direct leader (trust composite score on the BTI),

the greater the decision agreement (extent of agree-

ment) with the leader on the proposed organizational

policy (new teacher certification).

**Discussion**

Findings for the present study indicate the signi-

ficant effect that trust, as measured by the BTI, has

on extent of agreement, as measured by the agree-

ment selection on the memorandum. No demographic

variables were significantly related to either trust, or

extent of agreement with a leader. The present research

lends support to Brockner et al’s. (1997) conclusion

that a manager’s effectiveness depends partly on his or

her ability to gain the trust of subordinates. Clearly

trust is related to decision-agreement, which is a com-

ponent of decision making. Decision making is a para-

mount component that impacts organizational success,

stability, and change. Because trust in leaders has a

direct relationship with decision making regarding

organizational policy, trust may affect the bottom line.

This study holds many positive implications because

of its external validity. The scenario was an actual pol-

icy under consideration in which individuals had opin-

ions before the study. The scenario could have been

a neutral policy that would have likely yielded greater

magnitude in the influence of trust and extent of

agreement relationship. However, by using a real issue,

the study helps illuminate the influence of trust in an

actual organizational setting. The results lend credi-

bility to the idea that a leader can influence subordi-

nate agreement even in situations where subordinates

are likely to have already formed opinions.

Although the present study was concerned with

the consequences of trust, antecedent variables (e.g.,

length of relationship with the principal, amount of

years teaching) were also measured. Trust was not sig-

nificantly related to any of these antecedent variables.

Specifically, length of relationship with a leader and

length of employment in the organization had no sig-

nificant relationship with trust. These findings mir-

or previous research. Levin, Whitener, and Cross

(2004) conducted a replication study of Levin, Cross,

and Abrams (2003) to help identify relationships with

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust Score on BTI</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memo Type</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years teaching</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Relationship</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Trust Score on BTI variable was created by adding responses on all 10-items on the BTI, values were the output from the SPSS multiple regression program using a forward stepwise solution.

Analysis

In order to determine the relative contribution

of age, years teaching, length of relationship, gender,

and the trust composite score in predicting extent of

agreement, a multiple regression statistical procedure

was used to analyze the data. A forward stepwise mul-

tiple regression procedure enters one predictor vari-

able at a time using the variable with the strongest

correlation first. Subsequent steps add the variables

with the strongest partial correlations until all vari-

ables are entered. Only variables that account for a

significant portion of the unaccountable variance (F

probability < .05) in the predictor variables are used

in the final equation. The forward stepwise regression

procedure was used to find the "best" linear model:

with extent of agreement as the dependent variable,

and the trust composite score, and demographic vari-

ables as the independent variables.

Forty-five support and 48 nonsupport memos were

collected by the response date for a response rate of

38% (93 out of 242 participants responded within the
time frame). All 10 questions on the BTI were summed
to develop a composite trust score. A t-test comparison
of support (M = 4.82, SD = 1.68) and nonsupport (M =
5.19, SD = 2.10) memo type revealed no significant

received a copy). Based upon school policy, all teach-

ers must check email periodically. Additionally, emails

deeded important by anyone are printed and redis-

tributed in the teacher’s lounge. Therefore, this means

of communication ensured all participants were

debriefed appropriately.

Results

Analysis

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to develop a composite trust score. A t-test comparison
of support (M = 4.82, SD = 1.68) and nonsupport (M =
5.19, SD = 2.10) memo type revealed no significant

trust. The studies found that perceived trustworthiness had no significant relationship with the subordinate’s age, education level, gender, or relationship length, but did significantly correlate with shared perspective. As previously mentioned, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of five studies that reported a correlation between length of relationship with a leader and trust. The average corrected correlation between trust and relationship length was not significant. The data indicate that trust does not increase over the course of a relationship. This finding has important implications. If trust can create a significant influence on the decision-making process, and trust is not related to tenure or length of relationship with a leader, then it may be possible for managers to develop trust in a short period of time. The end result may be to increase an organization’s ability to change efficiently and effectively by focusing on building trust.

Extent of agreement with the leader in the present study was not significantly related to age, years teaching, or length of relationship. Under conditions of higher trust in a direct leader, there is a higher agreement regardless of age. This finding may indicate that older workers are just as willing to adapt to change as younger workers. As a result, organizations may not want to use age as a criterion when predicting perceived attitudes toward policy acceptance and organizational change.

The BTI is a relatively new instrument with limited investigation of its validity. To date, validity data for the BTI are comprised of one validation sample and one cross-validation sample. The present study helps support the validity of the instrument. Because trust has been shown to be related to belief in information, the next logical link would be that trust influences decision making. Although, the purpose of the present study was not to validate the BTI, the current results indirectly support the construct that the BTI measures some dimension(s) of trust. The researchers conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of the BTI, which revealed that willingness to engage in trusting behavior formed two distinct factors, characterized by reliance and disclosure. The results of this factor analysis mirrored findings from Gillespie’s (2003) research.

This experiment, as like others, is not without concerns in both design and procedure. A possible source of concern is that teachers may have already been aware of their principal’s view regarding new teacher certification. In addition, it is not certain the extent to which the teachers believed the content or source of the memorandum. Moreover, some respondents may have responded to the BTI first, and the memorandum second, even though this is the reverse order in which they were presented. This reverse ordering could have caused the trust instrument to influence the extent of agreement with the memorandum. Additionally, without knowing the teachers’ initial view on the policy of new teacher testing, it is difficult to identify the depth that trust influenced decision-agreement.

A sampling bias could have also been created by the selection of the schools. Only principals who volunteered were used, and the volunteers may have different characteristics from the nonvolunteers. To investigate this potential bias, the mean composite trust score of this sample was compared to the standardization sample of the instrument. The composite trust score, while not normally distributed, is distributed as expected and skewed slightly positive with the average trust of 48.8, which is close to Gillespie’s (2003) reported mean of 52.7. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that although trust levels would vary between participants who were rating different principals, the respondents do not appear to have been biased in their trust ratings.

Although limitations exist, the present research extends the understanding of the leader trust/subordinate agreement relationship. It may be beneficial to extend the study into the private sector. Additionally, increased understanding of the leader trust/subordinate agreement relationship may help organizations anticipate employee reactions to policy change and plan initiatives that will have a higher probability of acceptance and success. Based on the results, future studies should explore more in-depth the magnitude of the leader trust/subordinate agreement relationship and the relationship between leader trust and the sleeper effect (i.e., if the change in extent of agreement is permanent or temporary). Researching antecedents of trust (e.g., handling subordinate requests, providing greater subordinate latitude in the performance of work, analyzing the way the subordinate sees his/her role within the organization) and other factors that may significantly influence decision-making (e.g., time allotted for decision-making, stress levels, seriousness of error, and whether the decision affects the subordinate directly) would also provide a greater understanding of this area. Finally, this research reveals that trust may be a double-edged sword. While this research supports that trust can positively influence subordinate policy agreement, it also shows that subordinates may minimize message merit and agree to a policy when trust is high. This nonelaborated agreement could lead subordinates to blindly follow and support a disastrous policy.
References


Memorandum

Date: 2/17/2004
To: Teachers, Staff, Administration
From: Principal
RE: RE: Praxis II Assessment

Recent press (including our own Sioux City Journal) and attention have been given to Iowa and its teaching standards. In wake of this media surge it is important to explore the issue of mandatory testing. Mandatory testing for new teachers is not a new concept; however Iowa has recently completed the ‘norming’ for the Praxis II, which means that in this next year Iowa legislature will decide whether or not to institute mandatory testing for new teachers. I felt it my duty to convey to you some of the reasoning why this is a great program and should definitely be used. This testing will support our goals of improving education for all children, uniformly across the state of Iowa.

All new teachers and only new teachers should be required to take the Praxis II Subject Assessment Test. The Praxis II is a standardized test to assess a new teacher’s proficiency in the areas of content and pedagogy. The individual would be given a choice as to which content test to take. For example, if an individual wants to teach American History and American Government, the individual would take the 7-12 pedagogy and choose either American History content or American Government content. All other requirements for new Iowa teachers would remain the same. This should take effect for the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers prior to this date should be grandfathered in and not required to test. To say that the national trend is utilizing the Praxis II would be a gross understatement; the Praxis II is used in 38 other states and these states’ administration, teachers, parents, and students (where applicable) have reported higher satisfaction, higher student performance (above IA and the national average), a more specialized education, and higher accountability. In addition, recent test takers report having starting salaries above the national average, feeling better prepared, and feeling more valuable as teachers.

Please indicate to me your view on requiring the Praxis II for new teachers, so that I may gauge where our building stands on this issue. Finish the beginning of this sentence by circling 1 choice from the group below. I ___________ that we should support the Praxis II as a mandatory requirement for new Iowa teachers.

| Strongly Agree | Somewhat Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
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To: Teachers, Staff, Administration
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No teachers should be forced to take the Praxis II Subject Assessment Test. The Praxis II is a standardized test to assess a new teacher’s proficiency in the areas of content and pedagogy. The individual would be given a choice as to which content test to take. For example, if an individual wants to teach American History and American Government, the individual would take the 7-12 pedagogy and choose either American History content or American Government content. This would take effect for the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers prior to this date would be grandfathered in and NOT required to test. The Praxis II is just another unnecessary barrier in the already bureaucratic process for new teacher licensure. To think that Iowa teachers don’t know enough about the subjects they teach is absurd. The Praxis II is used in several other states and these states’ administration, teachers, parents, and students (where applicable) have reported lower satisfaction, lower salaries (compared to the national average), and lower student performance (below IA and the national average). In addition, recent test takers feel ill-prepared and less confident as teachers. Moreover, no research exists that teachers who pass tests perform well in the classroom.

Please indicate to me your view on the Praxis II, so that I may gauge where our building stands on this issue. Finish the beginning of this sentence by circling 1 choice from the group below. I __________ that we should not support the Praxis II as a mandatory requirement for new Iowa teachers.

| Strongly Agree | | Neutral | | Somewhat Agree | | Somewhat Disagree | | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Agree          | Agree           | Disagree        | Disagree        | Disagree        | Disagree        | Disagree        |
### APPENDIX C

#### The Behavioral Trust Inventory Principal Version

Please indicate how willing you are to engage in each of the following behaviors with your Principal, by circling a number from 1 to 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How willing you are to do the following with your Principal?</th>
<th>Not at all willing</th>
<th>Completely willing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rely on your principal’s task related skills and abilities.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Depend on your principal to handle an important issue on your behalf.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rely on your principal to represent your work accurately to others.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Depend on your principal to back you up in difficult situations.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rely on your principal’s work-related judgements.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Share your personal feelings with your principal.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Discuss work-related problems or difficulties with your principal that could potentially be used to disadvantage you.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Confide in your principal about personal issues that are affecting your work.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Discuss how you honestly feel about your work, even negative feelings and frustration.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Share your personal beliefs with your principal.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Optional: Please take a moment and complete sample descriptions. This information is used in describing our sample only, and is not intended, nor will it be used to identify any participants, buildings or for any other reason then to describe relevant demographics.

Circle one of the following:

Gender: Male Female

Age: 20s 30s 40s 50s 60s 70s

How many years have you been teaching? 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 20+

How long have you known your current principal? 0-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9-10 11+