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Trust congruence among integrative negotiators as a predictor of joint-behavioral outcomes

Trust congruence
among
negotiators

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe why trust congruence is important to negotiation, illustrate potential types of trust congruence in negotiating dyads, and link those types of congruence to joint-behavioral outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – Studies pertinent to negotiators' trust in one another are reviewed, and based on prior theoretical and empirical work, propositions are developed to posit how different types of trust congruence or incongruence can predict joint-behavioral outcomes in an integrative negotiation context.

Findings – This analysis offers a potentially valuable framework for deepening the understanding of how trust affects interpersonal relationships and the negotiations that occur within them.

Originality/value – This paper extends prior work on trust that has linked unilateral trust in one's negotiating partner to behavioral outcomes by considering how a bilateral measure of trust (trust congruence) will affect these outcomes.

Keywords Trust, Negotiating

Paper type Conceptual paper

Scholars have emphasized that trust is a vital component of effective negotiations (Kelley, 1966; Lewicki *et al.*, 2007), particularly when the parties to the negotiation have an ongoing relationship with one another (Lewicki and Stevenson, 1997). In fact, research supports the view that trust is both an antecedent (Kimmel *et al.*, 1980; Schoorman *et al.*, 1996; Zand, 1972) and consequence (Butler, 1991; Gulati, 1995) of behaviors that are linked to effective negotiations. Trust is viewed as especially critical to producing high-joint-behavioral outcomes in integrative (or value-creating) negotiations (Lewicki *et al.*, 2007). For our purposes, we refer to trust as:

[...] the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (Mayer *et al.*, 1995, p. 712).



However, despite the increasingly prevalent recognition that many negotiations are embedded in ongoing interpersonal relationships, much of the current theorizing and research on the role of trust in a negotiation context has been drawn from a unilateral, or individual, perspective of trust. Such a unilateral perspective limits our ability to fully understand how trust between the parties affects negotiation dynamics, as it only captures one side of what is essentially a two-sided phenomenon (Sheppard and Tuchinsky, 1996). This paper proposes to explore the predictive role of bilateral trust (Brower *et al.*, 2008; Schoorman *et al.*, 2007) within negotiating dyads. More specifically, we define trust congruence as a bilateral indicator of the extent to which two individuals trust each other. Trust congruence may range from being completely incongruent (i.e. asymmetric, in that one party's trust is high and the other party's trust is low) to being completely congruent (i.e. symmetric, in that both parties experience a relatively similar level of trust in each other). Moreover, if trust is highly congruent, this congruence may reflect that both parties have low, moderate, or high trust in each other. Thus, trust congruence reflects a relationship calibration of the level of A's trust in B relative to B's trust in A. A general expression of the various combinations of trust congruence between dyadic parties is shown in Figure 1. Although we have expressed the levels of trust in this figure as only low, moderate, and high for ease of explication, the level of trust of each party for the other is in fact a continuous variable.

High	(1) High incongruence	(2) Moderate incongruence	(3) Congruence: High trust
Moderate	(4) Moderate incongruence	(5) Congruence: Moderate trust	(6) Moderate incongruence
Low	(7) Congruence: Low trust	(8) Moderate incongruence	(9) High incongruence
A's trust in B B's trust in A	Low	Moderate	High

Figure 1.
Possible combinations
of dyadic trust

Note: Shaded cells represent high trust congruence; unshaded cells represent lower trust congruence (i.e. greater asymmetry)

We contend that the trust congruence construct is important to more fully understand in order to advance our knowledge of how trust operates in the relational context of an integrative negotiation. Accordingly, our purpose in this paper is to describe in more detail why trust congruence is important, illustrate potential levels of trust congruence in negotiating dyads, and demonstrate how those levels of congruence can be tied to various joint-behavioral outcomes.

The importance of trust congruence

We believe that trust congruence between negotiators is essential to a deeper understanding of dynamics within interpersonal bargaining relationships. We begin our explication of this construct by clarifying how trust congruence is related to, yet distinct from other similar constructs in the extant literature. Following Serva *et al.* (2005), we first distinguish trust congruence from reciprocal trust and mutual trust. Reciprocal trust refers to how the actions of one party lead to the degree to which he/she is trusted by another, and does not necessarily entail or result in equivalence (Serva *et al.*, 2005). Mutual trust occurs when two parties trust one another at a roughly equivalent level, and this level of trust is jointly perceived by both parties (i.e. shared expectations: Deutsch, 1958; Zucker, 1986). While mutual trust may occur in dyadic relationships, it appears to be more common for trust to not be mutual; yet these instances of non-mutuality are seldom recognized or studied (Brower *et al.*, 2008). For example, one party with high trust may attempt to initiate an integrative process, while the other party, with low trust, either does not recognize or mistrusts the initiative. We posit that trust congruence is a broader construct, related to but distinct from reciprocal trust and mutual trust. At the relationship level, trust congruence reflects the degree of symmetry of the two individuals' trust levels, ranging from highly incongruent (or asymmetric) to highly congruent (or symmetric). Unlike mutual trust, there is no explicit requirement that the level of trust is jointly perceived by both parties. Therefore, there are several possible levels of incongruence in relationships, in which Party A's trust in B could be relatively higher or lower than B's trust in A and vice versa. If trust is highly congruent, this congruence may be at a level such that the parties both have low, moderate, or high trust in each other.

With these distinctions in mind, we proceed to review prior research on relational trust in order to lay the foundation for how trust congruence is important in integrative negotiation. The traditional paradigm of studying trust in the negotiation literature has been a unilateral view: to examine one individual's trust in her negotiating counterpart, and to then examine the actions that this individual takes on the basis of her trust in the other, despite the fact that the negotiating relationship is dyadic, and both parties face the dilemma of trust (Kelley, 1966). The assumption, similar to that in other literatures (e.g. leader member exchange (LMX), Graen and Cashman, 1975), is that trust is a mirror-image, so that A's trust in B is a proxy for B's trust in A.

However, trust is not always a mirror-image (Brower *et al.*, 2000; Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Even in the LMX literature where congruent trust is presumed to exist between the subordinate and the leader, empirical research has failed to support this assertion (Gerstner and Day, 1997; Graen and Scandura, 1982; Liden *et al.*, 1997). This is not surprising when one considers that different levels of trust within a dyad can arise due to individual differences in perception, context, past experiences, propensity to trust, and elements of the other's trustworthiness (Brower *et al.*, 2008). In fact, recent

empirical evidence suggests that congruent trust may actually be quite uncommon (Brower *et al.*, 2008)[1]. This means that A's trust in B may not be a reasonable proxy for B's trust in A. Thus, we would expect that a calibration of both the degree of trust congruence (i.e. extent to which trust is congruent) and level of trust (i.e. low, moderate, and high) would be more predictive of integrative negotiation outcomes than any unilateral measure. For example, A might have very little trust in B and engender B's high trust for purely exploitative purposes (Ross and LaCroix, 1996). Insofar as integrative agreements depend on mutual sharing of information to discover respective interests and the joint creation of innovative options to fully meet those interests (Fisher *et al.*, 1991; Lewicki *et al.*, 2007), a high degree of trust congruence at a high level of trust may be particularly beneficial.

Furthermore, trust is not always reciprocated. Pillutla *et al.* (2003) examined dyads in a trust game and found that trustors only benefited from the trustees' reciprocation when trustors sent all or almost all of their endowment. This result suggests that A's efforts to build trust with B, beginning with a low-initial trust in B (as rational models of trust development prescribe) are regarded by B as a lack of trust that fails to invoke a perceived obligation to reciprocate unless A's initial offer is extreme (or unless the parties can extensively communicate about the meaning of the initial offer). Follow-up work by Malhotra (2004) noted that trust may fail to be reciprocated due to B's acting out of self-interest to maximize personal gains, or for B to protect against A's anticipated exploitation even when this exploitation would not in fact be intended. In a study to further clarify failed reciprocity, Malhotra suggests that these results are due to the differing perspectives regarding trustor and trustee roles in interactions, such that trustors (As) make choices based on their perceived risk (favoring smaller acts of trust) and trustees (Bs) make choices based on their level of benefit (favoring larger acts of trust). In this manner, neither party appears to be sensitive to (or empathetic of) the considerations that drive the other's behavior, which suggests in these instances that trust is incongruent.

Therefore, we argue that there is significant value in considering the simultaneous trust levels of both parties in a negotiating dyad. Specifically, we propose to examine the existence of various levels of trust congruence, ranging from low congruence (i.e. asymmetric trust) to high congruence (i.e. symmetric trust) and also considering the differential effects of congruent trust that is at a high, moderate, and low level. Moreover, in assessing the enhanced outcomes that might be achieved through integrative negotiation (a strategy preferred in many ongoing, relational contexts), we examine whether the degree of trust congruence of the negotiators and the level of congruent trust predicts the joint-behavioral outcomes achieved (a proximal variable that represents a vital process in value creation, Lewicki *et al.*, 2007).

Numerous studies support the argument that trust is a vital component of effective negotiations, particularly with respect to integrative negotiations (Lewicki *et al.*, 2007). When trust is present, negotiators are more likely to accurately communicate their needs, positions, and share more complete information about their view of the negotiation issues (Kimmel *et al.*, 1980). Negotiations proceed more easily when trust is high than when it is low (Lewicki *et al.*, 2007). When negotiators trust their counterpart, they are likely to engage in a more integrative, value-creating strategy to resolve the issues (Lewicki and Stevenson, 1997). This approach involves sharing more information (Butler, 1999; Mellinger, 1956; O'Reilly and Roberts, 1979; Read, 1962),

and providing the other party with assistance in achieving their interests (Bouty, 2000; McAllister, 1995).

Negotiators who have high trust in their counterpart are more cooperative when they negotiate (Butler, 1995, 1999; Gulati, 1995; Ross and LaCroix, 1996; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Zand, 1972), and once a cooperative orientation is established, it is likely to persist (Pilisuk and Skolnick, 1978). In fact, research evidence suggests that one's trust in a negotiating counterpart may initiate reciprocated trust under some circumstances. For example, Rotter (1967) found that high trustors were more likely to be viewed as trustworthy by others. Osgood's (1962) graduated and reciprocated initiatives in tension reduction (GRIT) model is an attempt to articulate how reciprocal trust can form to overcome initial distrust and stimulate cooperation, and empirical evidence generally supports the model (Lindsfold, 1978). Zand's (1972) model of trust spirals directly posits that one's trust in another causes the other to respond in like manner, and this process may proceed in a virtuous cycle of trust building. More recently, Brower *et al.* (2008) found that subordinate trust in a manager was more strongly related to subordinate organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) when manager trust in the subordinate was higher. Conversely, subordinate trust in the manager was unrelated to OCBs when manager trust in the subordinate was lower.

Taken together, this research reinforces the traditional notion that higher levels of trust are generally more beneficial. However, it also suggests additional benefits associated with a higher degree of trust congruence. We contend that the beneficial effects of higher degrees of trust congruence can be understood by mental model theory (Cannon-Bowers *et al.*, 1993; Rouse and Morris, 1986). Mental models are organized knowledge structures that:

[...] allow people to predict and explain the behavior of the world around them, to recognize and remember relationships among components of the environment, and to construct explanations for what is likely to occur next (Mathieu *et al.*, 2000, p. 274).

Higher degrees of trust congruence result in greater mental model similarity among parties to a relationship (Marks *et al.*, 2000). Unlike mutual trust, which stipulates that both parties perceive that they trust each other at the same level, trust congruence allows for the possibility that A trusts B to the same extent that B trusts A without the negotiators being consciously aware of this match. Nonetheless, because the parties have a similar perspective on the relationship and the value it is capable of producing, their mental models allow them to synchronize communication signals and more directly influence joint-behavioral outcomes. Considerable research has suggested the benefits of mental model similarity (Klimoski and Mohammed, 1994; Mathieu *et al.*, 2000). For example, Marks *et al.* (2000) compared mental models of individual team members for a team task (rather than having team members report their perceptions of other members' mental models), and found that higher similarity was associated with more optimal team communication and performance. We expect that similar benefits would accrue to negotiating dyads.

In discussing the trust-building process among negotiators, Lewicki *et al.* (2007, pp. 289, 291) assert that:

[...] this process cannot be [...] one-sided. While one party can initiate actions that may move the trust development process forward, the strongest trust must be mutually developed at a pace acceptable to both parties.

When trust is highly congruent but at a low level, the parties will recognize that effort must be first directed toward activities that will build trust, such as getting to know one another, sharing information about interests and perspectives, and reducing the perceived risks of inventing various options. When trust is highly congruent and at a moderate to high level, the parties can more readily engage in an integrative process that is both efficient and productive.

Therefore, a higher degree of trust congruence, along with a higher level of trust, should enhance the effectiveness of integrative negotiation via its effect on how the negotiators behave toward one another. As trust between negotiators forms and grows, it initiates and sustains a pattern of social exchanges (Blau, 1964). Having a higher degree of congruent trust at a higher level (e.g. Cell 3 of Figure 1) would be expected to lead both parties to engage in more collaborative behaviors. Since integrative negotiation is a bilateral process, trust congruence forms a foundation from which value-creating behaviors can generate synergistic effects (Brower *et al.*, 2008). Specifically, a risky yet trusting disclosure of information by one negotiator can provide the other negotiator with new insight into how an integrative deal might be structured by relating it to a disclosure of one of his own pieces of information. This option may be further reinforced and enhanced by the first negotiator, and thus this virtuous spiral continues as the parties communicate to develop an optimal deal. This process is similar to the impact that positive synergy can have within a team (Cohen and Bailey, 1997).

Therefore, in contrast to prior studies that have focused on the effects of unilateral trust on negotiator disclosure of information and other such behaviors, we suggest, based on the research on successful integrative negotiation, that it is the bilateral congruence of trust between the negotiators that determines value creation. Accordingly, trust congruence should be a better predictor of joint-behavioral outcomes than a measure of unilateral trust alone:

- P1.* Trust congruence between negotiators will be a stronger predictor of joint-behavioral outcomes in an integrative negotiation than either negotiator's unilateral trust for the other.

Joint-behavioral outcomes

Several behavioral outcomes might be expected to arise as a function of the degree of trust congruence and level of trust among negotiators[2]. Here, we examine two primary categories of behavioral outcomes. First, we examine information exchange among the parties. Although the sharing of information can leave negotiators vulnerable to exploitation by the other, mutual information sharing is vital to creating value in an integrative negotiation (Roth and Murnighan, 1982). When negotiators have higher trust in one another, they are more willing to engage in the risks associated with greater information sharing because they expect to realize the benefits from value creation (Butler, 1995, 1999).

Second, we consider the exchange of benefits in the negotiation (Schriesheim and Hinkin, 1990). Similar to exchanging information, exchanging benefits in a negotiation is associated with integrative bargaining situations, as the parties are interested in creating value in the outcomes associated with the relationship. An example of an exchanged benefit might involve logrolling. In an integrative negotiation where logrolling is employed, the two parties have identified two issues where they have

differing priorities such that the first negotiator strongly prefers A and does not care about B, while the second negotiator strongly prefers B and does not care about A. Discovering these respective interests allows the negotiators to create an agreement where both of them win (Lewicki *et al.*, 2007). The trust that the negotiators have in one another makes it possible for them to assume the risk associated with exchanging priorities on issues and deriving the benefits. Having explained the meaning and importance of trust congruence and the types of joint-behavioral outcomes that are likely to be affected by this congruence, we proceed to generate specific propositions regarding how different types of trust congruence relate to joint-behavioral outcomes.

Types of trust congruence

As stated earlier, trust congruence among negotiators ranges from low congruence (i.e. incongruence) to high congruence. High-trust congruence describes a situation where party A's trust in B is very similar to party B's trust in A. Furthermore, high-trust congruence can exist at a high level (both negotiators have a high level of trust in one another), moderate level (both negotiators have a moderate level of trust in one another), or low level (both negotiators have a low level of trust in one another).

In a high-trust congruence situation, as the level of bilateral trust increases from low to high, the parties are expected to share more information and exchange more benefits. It is expected that a high level of trust will produce a greater degree of joint-behavioral outcomes than a moderate level of trust, as greater trust can enable greater benefit. Finally, a low level of bilateral trust conveys a relative absence of trust, and therefore, less-information sharing and benefits exchange. A field study by Tjosvold and Sasaki (1996) showed that the degree to which new product engineers trusted their colleagues was associated with their own information sharing, as well as the degree of information shared by the colleague (presumably because the colleagues had generated comparable trust in the engineers). Similarly, in a laboratory study, Oesch *et al.* (2001) randomly assigned subjects to one of three dyad conditions (trust-trust, trust-distrust, and distrust-distrust) in an online integrative negotiation. Dyads where both subjects were primed to trust one another created more joint value than the other dyads:

P2. Joint-behavioral outcomes will be:

P2(a). Highest when high-trust congruence exists with a high level of trust.

P2(b). Moderate when high-trust congruence exists with a moderate level of trust.

P2(c). Lowest when high-trust congruence exists with a low level of trust.

Conversely, trust between negotiators can also be incongruent. This means that there is a difference in the level of trust each party has for the other. Incongruence can be high, as when party A has high trust in party B, but party B has low trust in party A (Cells 1 and 9 in Figure 1). Incongruence can also exist at a more moderate level, as when one party has a very high or very low level of trust in the other, and the other party has a moderate level of trust (Cells 2, 4, 6 and 8 in Figure 1).

Incongruence, by definition, means that the parties have a view of one another that is discrepant. When trust is incongruent, prior trust does not begin at the same level, or parallel levels of trust have not developed at the same rate, perhaps because the pace is

too quick for one of the parties (Lewicki *et al.*, 2007) or trust is not being reciprocated (Malhotra, 2004). The parties have not developed a similar mental model or trust paradigm of each other that will assist them in creating value in an integrative manner. This is problematic in that the efficacy of integrative techniques in creating win-win agreements lies in the premise that both parties trust one another at the same level/rate, and can collaborate with one another to find a mutually satisfactory solution (Lewicki *et al.*, 2007; Thompson, 2001). Commenting on incongruent trust within dyads, Brower *et al.* (2008, pp. 22-3) state, "If either member of the dyad lacks trust, it is difficult to maximize the potential outcomes evolving from this relationship." Since one of the negotiating parties has less trust in the other, that party will be less open to actively pursuing an integrative strategy (such as exchanging information and/or benefits) than when both parties have high or moderate trust in one another:

P3. Joint-behavioral outcomes will be higher under trust congruence characterized by a high level of trust than when trust is incongruent.

P4. Joint-behavioral outcomes will be higher under trust congruence characterized by a moderate level of trust than when trust is incongruent.

It is also important to consider the difference between a relationship where there is high-trust congruence but a low level of bilateral trust versus a relationship where there is incongruence in levels of trust. For example, one dyad may consist of parties who both have low trust in the other, whereas another dyad may consist of one party (A) who has a low level of trust in the other (B), but party B has a moderate or high level of trust in party A. We believe that dyads in which trust congruence is high but the level of bilateral trust is low are more likely to experience superior joint outcomes in comparison to a dyad with incongruent trust levels. In a low-low trust dyad, the parties are likely to be mutually cautious yet understanding of where the other is coming from. For example, in a dating situation, parties are often somewhat distant and formal at first, slowly getting to know the other without disclosing very much that is personal and private about themselves (Larzelere and Huston, 1980). Self-disclosure of highly personal information is often withheld until the relationship gains momentum (Lawson and Leck, 2006). However, in an interaction involving moderately incongruent trust, the moderate trusting party may exhibit an inappropriate level of trust in the low-trusting party (because the low-trusting party remains cautious). Specifically, a moderate trustor may go too far out on a limb with personal disclosure, leaving herself vulnerable and subject to exploitation by the low trustor (either due to misinterpretation or opportunism) or convey prematurely excessive expectations for the relationship (Holmes and Rempel, 1989). In turn, the low trustor may misinterpret the appropriateness of the moderate trustor's actions (e.g. "forwardness"), whereas the moderate trustor may not understand the low-trustor's reticence or cautiousness. This might permanently damage or curtail the relationship (Holmes and Rempel, 1989). These dynamics, readily applicable to a negotiation situation, are likely to be similar but even more dramatically deleterious in a low-high trustor interaction (i.e. high incongruence). This leads us to posit that the low-low trustor situation is likely to be more optimal than either low-moderate or low-high combinations of dyadic trust, because at least when trust is congruent at a low level, it will allow for whatever information or benefits that do emerge to be properly understood instead of being misconstrued and/or used to exploit the other:

P5. Joint-behavioral outcomes will be higher under trust congruence characterized by a low level of trust than when trust is incongruent.

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Finally, high incongruence should result in lower joint-behavioral outcomes than moderate incongruence. Since the disparity in trust is lower when incongruence is moderate, any disruption caused to the negotiation between these parties is likely to be less damaging than a larger difference in trust among the parties:

P6. Joint-behavioral outcomes will be higher under moderate trust incongruence (Cells 2, 4, 6 and 8) than under high-trust incongruence (Cells 1 and 9).

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Discussion

To place the propositions presented here in their proper perspective, it is necessary to recall the foundation earlier scholars have already established. First, prior studies on the role of trust in negotiation have emphasized the role of trust, yet most have only studied its unilateral effects. The implicit assumption is that such trust will be both congruent and mutual. Second, despite this assumption, trust is sometimes not reciprocated (Malhotra, 2004) and is often not congruent or mutual (Brower *et al.*, 2008) due to differences in propensity to trust (Mayer *et al.*, 1995), differences in negotiators' perceptions of the same events (Cole and Flint, 2005; Lind *et al.*, 1998; Roberson, 2006), and differences in levels of risk between negotiators (Korsgaard and Sapienza, 2002).

Against this backdrop, calibration of trust congruence represents a bilateral, relationship-level measure of the trust that is regarded as so critical to creating value in integrative negotiations. Insofar as trust between negotiators is essential to exchanging information and benefits that allow for an integrative agreement, it becomes critical to examine the extent to which negotiators trust one another. Unilateral measures of trust are not sufficient to adequately capture the important behavioral indicators of effective negotiation at the relationship level. Moreover, the occasionally studied concept of mutual trust typically refers to the notion that negotiators trust one another to the same extent and are cognitively aware of this similarity. Trust congruence, on the other hand, is a broader construct which recognizes that trust may or may not be mutual; and when congruence is high, the parties may trust each other at a high, medium or low level. This more finely grained conceptualization allows for more refined propositions for researchers interested in exploring how interpersonal trust affects negotiation processes and outcomes.

In addition to the specific propositions outlined above, we envision a number of promising ways in which the pursuit of trust congruence can be useful. First, trust is a dynamic phenomenon that can grow and decline over time (Lewicki and Bunker, 1995). In a dyad where trust is incongruent (e.g. a high/low or moderate/low combination), the more trusting party may subsequently decrease his trust if he finds out that his counterpart's actions signals low trust. Or a low/low or moderate/moderate combination may evolve into a high/high combination over time. Accordingly, the trust congruence construct offers unique and valuable explanatory power in understanding the dynamic nature of interpersonal relationships. Specifically, calibrating trust in this manner may allow researchers to detect cues that negotiators send to one another that represent their trust in the other at time 1 to predict trust congruence (and subsequent behavioral outcomes) at time 2. Thus, it is

important for researchers to account for the potential time horizon of the negotiation relationship in question.

Another promising prospect for future research relates to final outcomes in integrative negotiation, such as the structure of a deal or financial payoffs. In this paper, we developed our propositions around joint behaviors, as they are likely to be the most proximal outcomes of trust (insofar as trust leads to risk taking in a relationship: Mayer *et al.*, 1995). However, in most integrative negotiation studies, the dependent variable is some measure of actual joint gain that represents value creation. The joint-behavioral outcomes of information sharing and benefits exchange that we examined here are posited to lead to higher actual joint gain in an integrative agreement (Lewicki *et al.*, 2007). In this manner, it is expected that joint-behavioral outcomes will mediate the relationship between trust congruence and actual joint gain. Researchers could also explore whether trust congruence affects joint gain through other negotiator behaviors, and/or whether it has direct effects on joint gain.

Finally, the most beneficial effects of a high degree of trust congruence on joint-behavioral outcomes are expected to occur when such congruence is at a high level. This raises several interesting research questions. For example:

RQ. Are there boundary conditions for this relationship?

In some cases, empirical studies have indicated that too much trust can actually be detrimental (Jeffries and Reed, 2000; Langfred, 2004; Lewicki *et al.*, 1998; Wicks *et al.*, 1999); thus too much trust (even if highly congruent) might also be harmful under some circumstances. Another issue relates to how incongruence might be resolved. Third-party assistance in the form of a mediator, conciliator, or consultant might be helpful to the negotiators in diagnosing their trust in one another, coming to perceive how they are trusted by the other, and working toward greater congruence. Of course, this line of inquiry itself may raise new issues in terms of the degree to which each negotiator trusts the third party (and how much the third party trusts each negotiator, and so on). Despite the greater complexity involved, such research may offer additional insight into possible obstacles in reaching integrative agreements and how to remove or mitigate those obstacles.

It is also useful to consider how researchers might go about studying trust congruence. To test the propositions presented above, polynomial regression analysis could be employed. Separate tests could be conducted using each of the various joint-behavioral outcomes as the dependent variables. Polynomial regression has been used in prior work on other types of congruence or “fit” (Edwards, 1996; Edwards and Rothbard, 2000), and is suitable here because it allows specific investigation into how dependent measures change in relation to the magnitude and level of differences in the independent variables. Thus, this technique is able to go beyond the simple analysis of difference scores, allowing the researcher to test hypotheses regarding high, moderate, and low-trust conditions. For example, with a difference score approach, the components of the difference are constrained, disallowing the analysis of differing combinations of dyad member trust levels. That is, congruent scores of 7 and 7 (a high level of bilateral trust) would be treated the same as 1 and 1 (low-bilateral trust). Similarly, scores such as 7 and 5 are treated the same as 5 and 3, or 3 and 1. Polynomial regression relaxes constraints placed on traditional difference score analyses, instead assigning a unique coefficient to each component of the difference and allowing for

an analysis of their joint effects on dependent variables (Edwards, 1996). A notable challenge associated with this approach is that it demands a high number of participants in order to generate adequate statistical power to detect effects.

Conclusion

Recognizing the interpersonal nature of trust and the bilateral efforts that go into creating an integrative negotiated agreement, we have proposed trust congruence as a potentially critical construct that we expect will be a stronger predictor of joint-behavioral outcomes than unilateral measures alone. We believe the study of trust congruence represents a welcome new signpost along the well-trodden quest to advance our understanding of negotiation processes and outcomes, and hope other researchers will join us on this path.

Notes

1. Despite this lack of empirical evidence, this flawed assumption appears in multiple places in the literature (e.g. both within the trust literature and the LMX literature). We thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation.
2. We specify behavioral outcomes rather than financial outcomes in order to more carefully examine the “black box” of negotiated outcomes. That is, financial outcomes are considered to be more distal outcomes that flow from various negotiator behaviors (i.e. proximal variables). These more proximal behaviors are likely determined in part by the degree of trust congruence among negotiating parties and can be more directly observed as a result of trust.

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