

**Trust Breach Dynamics: Exploring the Cognitive Affective  
Processing System in Active and Passive Responses to Breach**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Rumi

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It is in that field beyond wrongdoing and rightdoing that understanding, connection, and repair become possible. One way to that field is through four powerful words: How can I help? Here's to seeing that field, asking the question, and continuing toward it together.

## **Abstract**

# **Trust Breach Dynamics: Exploring the Cognitive Affective Processing System in Active and Passive Responses to Breach**

**Cara Driscoll**

Leadership trust breaches have attracted considerable attention in recent decades; however, the literature remains fragmented regarding the classification of trust breach events and their perceived severity from the follower's perspective. While Social Exchange Theory, the dominant framework in trust research, explains post-breach behaviours such as reciprocity, it does not fully account for the nuanced dynamics underlying divergent responses, such as why some followers pursue reconciliation while others engage in avoidance or revenge.

To address these gaps, this research program applies the Cognitive-Affective Personality System (CAPS) framework (Mischel & Shoda, 1995) as a meta-theoretical lens to investigate trust breaches and post-breach behaviours. CAPS integrates traits, motivations, contexts, and self-regulatory processes, offering a comprehensive lens to understand how these factors shape responses such as reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge.

The program comprises three interrelated studies. Study 1 explores alignment of trust breach events, and types with the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI). Study 2 investigates the perceived severity of trust breaches and the influence of ABI dimensionality, finding that Integrity and ABI-combined breaches are perceived as more

severe than those associated with Benevolence or Ability. Together, Studies 1 and 2 highlight the subjectivity of breach evaluations with findings regarding perceived severity broadly aligning with previous research. Study 3 examines how propensity to trust, perceived severity, and relational motivation, influence post-breach responses, through the examination of a moderated mediation model, highlighting the central role of self-regulatory processes in shaping reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge.

This research employs subject matter expertise and cross-sectional survey design to test hypotheses, including a moderated mediation model. It advances understanding of trust breach dynamics by revealing the interplay of motivations, cognitions, and affect in follower experiences of breaches.

# **Chapter 1:**

## **Introduction and Overview**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Trust is a cornerstone of human interactions, particularly in workplace settings where relationships between leaders and followers significantly shape organisational outcomes (Qui et al., 2022). Despite its critical role, trust is inherently fragile and susceptible to breaches that can undermine both individual relationships and broader organisational dynamics (Bies et al., 2018). When trust is broken, individuals often respond in diverse ways, ranging from passive behaviours such as avoidance to active responses such as reconciliation or revenge (Carmody & Gordon, 2011). Understanding the cognitive and affective mechanisms underlying these responses is essential for developing strategies to repair trust and foster resilience within organisations (Williams et al., 2020).

As outlined by Hamm et al. (2024a) trust is inherently relational and as relational figures leaders play a central role in trust dynamics and are considered critical actors in the violation of trust (Fischer et al., 2023). Studying leader transgressions is therefore essential, and they have garnered significant scholarly attention due to their profound impact on organisational outcomes, with a primary focus on repair (Epitropaki et al., 2020; Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017). Research has highlighted that the type of breach influences the repair process, with distinct strategies needed depending on the nature of the trustworthiness dimension—Ability, Benevolence, or Integrity—implicated in the violation (Dirks et al., 2011; Ferrin et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2013). While breaches are assumed

to align neatly with specific dimensions, the allocation of trust breach events has been proposed but not validated (Kramer & Lewicki, 2010). Furthermore, trust breach severity, a critical factor shaping the experience of breach (Tomlinson, 2011), remains unexplored, particularly from the follower's perspective (Chen et al., 2011).

While research has focused on integrity- or competence-based violations (Kähkönen et al., 2021), less attention has been given to how trustworthiness dimensions interact to shape perceptions and responses to trust breaches (Chen et al., 2011). Recent findings by Sondern and Hertel (2024) highlight the need to consider interactions within context. This study explores how breaches involving Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity are perceived using the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework to guide analysis. This exploratory approach offers a psychologically informed perspective on trust breach dynamics, with potential relevant for theory and leadership practice.

## **1.2 Research Significance**

This research contributes to the organisational trust literature by examining how followers experience and respond to trust breaches by leaders. In contrast to studies that conceptualise trust as a primarily cognitive judgment, this programme explores the subjective nature of breach perception and the motivational factors that shape behavioural responses. While previous research has established that breaches of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) have distinct implications (e.g., Kim et al., 2006; 2009; 2013), there has been limited empirical investigation into how individuals interpret and assign dimensional meaning to trust breaches in real-world contexts.

By exploring relational motivations, this research builds on the work of scholars such as van der Werff et al. (2019) who propose a model that emphasises the motivational and self-

regulatory processes underlying trust decisions. Their work highlights that trust is not merely a cognitive evaluation of trustworthiness but is influenced by relational motivations and self-regulatory mechanisms that drive individuals to maintain or restore trust, even in the face of breaches.

By applying the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, this research offers an exploratory lens through which to understand how cognitive, affective, and motivational mechanisms shape post-breach responses. CAPS allows for the examination of trust dynamics as context-dependent and individually processed, rather than as fixed reactions to objectively defined violations. The incorporation of relational motivations—such as the desire to maintain the relationship—adds further insight into how trust breach responses may vary based on internal goals and perceptions rather than solely on the characteristics of the breach itself.

This work does not seek to validate CAPS as a definitive model of trust breach but offers a conceptual foundation for future empirical testing. It contributes to the literature by identifying patterns in how breach severity, dimensional alignment, and motivational factors interact, while recognising that findings are situated within the exploratory and context-bound nature of the study. The research invites further examination of these dynamics using diverse methodological and applied approaches.

### **1.3 Research Aims**

The overarching aim of this research is to explore the subjective nature of trust breaches and the mechanisms that shape behavioural responses to these events. Central to this aim is an examination of how trust breaches are perceived and categorised across the dimensions of

Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity, highlighting the variability and complexity inherent in these interpretations. Furthermore, the research investigates the cognitive, affective, and motivational elements that underpin behavioural responses to trust breaches, specifically focusing on factors such as propensity to trust, perceived severity, and relational motivation. These elements are examined in relation to active responses such as reconciliation and revenge, as well as passive responses like avoidance, identifying how trust breach responses differ based on perceived severity, relational motivation, and dimension alignment—highlighting the subjective and context-sensitive nature of trust dynamics. The findings contribute to the conceptual understanding of trust breach dynamics, particularly the interaction of cognitive-affective mechanisms and motivational processes in shaping follower responses to leader breach, thereby enriching the conceptual frameworks used to study trust breach dynamics

### ***1.3.1 Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS)***

The CAPS framework provides a theoretical foundation for this research, emphasising the dynamic interplay between cognitive and affective units in shaping responses to specific situations. It highlights how individual differences, past experiences, and situational cues interact to shape behavioural responses (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). This meta-theoretical framework is particularly relevant for understanding trust dynamics, as it accounts for the variability in perceptions and behaviours observed in response to similar trust violations. Central to CAPS is its recognition of the role of motivation as a key driver of behaviour. By integrating motivational processes, CAPS moves beyond static conceptualisations of behaviour, providing a lens through which the complexity of trust dynamics can be explored (Kammrath et al., 2012). Relational motivations, such as the desire to maintain or sever a

relationship, are pivotal in shaping behaviours that influence relationship maintenance following a breach (Donovan & Priester, 2017). As van der Werff et al., (2019) emphasise, motivation is likely to play a critical role in trust dynamics. Supporting this, Lalot et al. (2025) found that motivational orientations influence generalised trust: individuals with a promotion focus were more trusting, whereas those with a prevention focus exhibited lower trust. These findings reinforce the importance of self-regulatory mechanisms in shaping trust attitudes and align with CAPS' emphasis on motivation as a central organising construct.

By applying CAPS to trust breaches, this research explores how motivational processes interact with cognitive and affective factors to shape behavioural responses following trust violations. Specifically, the research explores how contextual and relational factors, such as the desire to maintain a relationship, may mediate the impact of trust breaches on behavioural outcomes. These outcomes are further influenced by the perceived severity of the breach (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017). Recent work by Schoorman et al. (2025) reinforces this approach, highlighting how trustors continuously process cues related to a trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity during periods of uncertainty- an ongoing appraisal process that aligns with the dynamic, self-regulatory mechanism emphasised in the CAPS framework. By incorporating these dimensions, the research advances understanding of how trust breaches are perceived and the factors that influence post-breach response.

### ***1.3.2 Classification of Trust Breach across ABI dimensions***

This research addresses critical gaps in the trust literature, particularly the underexplored nuances of how trust breaches are classified and experienced across multiple dimensions. While the ABI framework, grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), has been instrumental in categorising breaches into Ability (competence), Benevolence (care for



others), and Integrity (adherence to ethical principles), much of the existing work has examined these dimensions in isolation (Kim et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2013). Extant experimental research found integrity breaches resulted in a stronger reaction than ability breaches (Van der Werff et al., 2023). Earlier work by Chen et al. (2011) proposed that benevolence breaches may evoke the strongest affective reactions due to their implications for the trustee's motives and intentions, and that the total affective response may depend on the specific combination of trustworthiness dimensions involved. What remains unclear is how these dynamics play out in real-world settings, where the complexities of interpersonal relationships and contexts may shape perceptions and responses to trust breaches. This highlights the need to explore these interactions in practical organisational contexts.

### ***1.3.3 Passive and Active Responses***

This study provides an initial exploration of passive and active self-regulatory responses to trust breaches. Prior research has identified a range of behavioural reactions, including social withdrawal, avoidance, revenge, and reconciliation (Aquino et al., 2001; Bies & Tripp, 1996), with much of this work situated within the broader context of trust repair. However, less attention has been given to how these responses unfold in the immediate aftermath of a breach, independent of formal repair efforts (Wildman et al., 2022).

This study focuses on avoidance, reconciliation, and revenge as illustrative responses, framed within the CAPS model as self-regulatory mechanisms activated in response to relational threat. Drawing on Mishra and Spreitzer (1998), avoidance is considered a passive response involving psychological and behavioural withdrawal, whereas reconciliation and

revenge represent more active attempts to re-establish or rebalance the disrupted relationship.

While the study does not offer a comprehensive account of all possible responses, it contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of the factors that shape how followers respond to perceived violations. In particular, it examines how relational motivations (e.g., the desire to maintain the relationship), dispositional factors (e.g., propensity to trust), and situational appraisals (e.g., perceived severity) may interact to guide these self-regulatory behaviours in specific breach contexts.

#### **1.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This research investigates critical aspects of leader trust breaches and their impact on followers' behavioural responses within organisational settings, with a focus on the subjective and multidimensional nature of trust dynamics. Specifically, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. **RQ1 Alignment with ABI Dimensionality:** To what extent do trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?
2. **RQ2 Perceived Severity of Breaches:** Which trust breach events are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity influence these perceptions?
3. **RQ3 The Role of Relational Motivation and Propensity to Trust:** How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active (reconciliation, revenge) and passive (avoidance) responses to trust breaches? Furthermore, how does perceived severity moderate these relationships?

To address these research questions, the programme was structured into three distinct studies, each with a specific aim. The first study examines trust breach events, and types and their alignment with ABI dimensions. This study lays a foundational framework aimed at, providing clarity on how trust violations are conceptualised and linked to dimensions of trustworthiness. Building on this foundation, the second study investigates the perceived severity of trust breaches and its relationship with ABI dimensions, addressing the need to understand the subjective nature of breach perceptions and the contextual variability that influences them. Finally, the third study explores the self-regulatory responses to trust breaches, focusing on how relational motivations and propensity to trust interact with perceived severity to shape active (reconciliation, revenge) and passive (avoidance) responses.

The study builds on existing theoretical frameworks by hypothesising the following:

- Breaches of benevolence expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of integrity expectations.
- Breaches of integrity expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of ability expectations.
- Breaches involving a combination of ABI dimensions will be perceived as more severe than breaches involving individual dimensions.

Two core hypotheses guide the analysis of responses to trust breaches:

- Mediating Role of Desire to Maintain the Relationship:

The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and breach responses to trust breaches. This mediation effect occurs for both passive responses (e.g., avoidance) and active responses (e.g., reconciliation, revenge).

- Moderated Mediation Effect of Perceived Severity:

Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on breach responses via the desire to maintain the relationship. Specifically, the mediating role of the desire to maintain the relationship strengthens at higher levels of perceived severity, particularly in shaping reconciliation and revenge responses.

By addressing these research questions and testing these hypotheses, this exploratory study offers preliminary insights into the cognitive, affective, and motivational mechanisms that may shape responses to trust breaches. While findings should be interpreted within the study's contextual and methodological limitations, the research highlights potential implications for leadership and relational dynamics in organisational contexts.

## **1.5 Thesis Structure and Outline**

This thesis is organised into eight chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive exploration of follower experienced trust breaches. This Introduction chapter has established the foundation for the research, outlining its significance and presenting the aims, research questions, and hypotheses. The Literature review chapters critically examine theoretical frameworks, including trust theories, and the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS), to provide a conceptual underpinning for the study. The Methodology chapter then describes the research design in detail, addressing the data collection methods, sample characteristics, and analytical techniques employed across each study in the research

program. The presentation of the research methodology deviates from traditional formats by presenting each study in a separate chapter. Each chapter will comprehensively discuss the study's overview, methodology, results, and key findings. This approach ensures a clear and focused exploration of each study's unique contributions to the overarching research programme. After presenting all three studies, the findings will be synthesised and discussed collectively in a final discussion chapter, integrating the findings within the broader theoretical frameworks, emphasising their implications for understanding trust dynamics and evaluating the contributions to the field. This final chapter synthesises the research contributions, highlights its practical and theoretical implications, and identifies avenues for future exploration, thereby bringing the thesis to a close.

## **1.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the significance, aims, and contributions of the research, providing a roadmap for the thesis. By applying CAPS to trust dynamics, the research takes an exploratory approach to understanding the subjective and multidimensional nature of trust breaches. While the integration of CAPS with trust theories offers a novel perspective, the framework is used here primarily to guide inquiry rather than to assert comprehensive theoretical claims. The next chapter will review the relevant literature, setting the foundation for the empirical studies that follow.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Trust – Definition, Conceptualisation and Theoretical Framework: Toward a New Framework**

The chapter will:

- *Define and present key conceptualisations of Trust.*
- *Critically evaluate the extant meta-theoretical framework in trust research, specifically Social Exchange Theory (SET).*
- *Identify the limitations and boundary conditions of SET.*
- *Introduce the Cognitive Affective Processing System (CAPS) as a comprehensive and integrative meta-theoretical framework.*

#### **2.1 Overview**

Trust is a psychological state in which one is willing to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about another's intentions or behaviour (Rousseau et al., 1998). It is inherently relational, requiring a trustor (party making judgement about trust) and trustee (party being trusted), while also encompassing a dispositional component (McEvily et al., 2003). This duality highlights trust as both a product of interpersonal interactions and individual predispositions, with vulnerability central to its formation. Trust entails positive expectations about safeguarding interests, even in the absence of oversight, and relies on evaluations of intentions, motivations, reliability, and integrity (Butler, 1991; Dirks, 2000; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Schoorman & Mayer, 1996; Schoorman et al., 2007). The dynamic and relational nature is reinforced through reciprocal interactions over

time (Lewicki et al., 1998). Beyond the micro-level, trust is foundational to societal functioning (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), as it reduces complexity and helps with managing uncertainty in a highly differentiated world (Möllering et al. (2004). Within organisations, research highlights the role of trust in inter-organisational (between organisations) and intra-organisational relationships (within an organisation), encompassing trust between employees and managers, colleagues, teams and the organisation itself (Dietz et al., 2006). Trust facilitates efficient operations and success in workplace partnerships (Gill et al., 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

The significance of trust within organisations is evident across its levels and referents, as delineated by Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), who distinguish trust at the individual, team, and organisational levels. Empirical research consistently underscores its impact on critical outcomes, including employee performance (Baer et al., 2021), team performance (De Jong et al., 2016), network performance (Svare et al., 2020), client consulting relationships (Nikolova et al., 2015), group conflict (Ferguson & Peterson, 2015), engagement (Chughtai & Buckley, 2013), knowledge transfer and information sharing (Alexopoulos & Buckley, 2013), individual and team attitudes (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), improved job satisfaction and greater organisational commitment (Colquitt et al., 2007), turnover intention (Ward et al., 2021), newcomer learning (Baer et al., 2018), organisational citizenship behaviour (Aryee et al., 2002), job, team and organisational performance (Burke et al., 2007), and most recently integration of Artificial Intelligence (Li & Bitterly, 2024). Conversely, low trust undermines cooperation, depletes cognitive resources, and fosters defensive behaviours (Mayer & Gavin, 2005; van der Werff et al., 2019, 2023). Despite its fundamental role, trust remains a fragile and elusive construct (Kramer & Cook, 2004). Its prominence in organisational research reflects its importance in enhancing team effectiveness, fostering

supportive workplaces, and addressing contemporary challenges (Dirks & De Jong, 2022). Trust, therefore, is not only a critical enabler of organisational functioning, fundamental to workplace relationships (Ferris et al., 2009), but a construct with profound implications at individual, team, group and organisational levels (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

Given the broad-ranging implications of trust on various organisational outcomes, this chapter provides an overview of conceptualisations of trust and introduces the dominant meta-theoretical paradigm that has framed extant research on trust. As the current research programme focuses on intra-organisational trust between employees and immediate supervisors at the individual level, emphasis will be placed on the meta-theoretical paradigm of interpersonal relationships, rather than those related to teams, groups or organisations. Specifically, the chapter examines Social Exchange Theory as the dominant paradigm of interpersonal trust, evaluating the theory's contribution and broad applicability. While acknowledging the theory's impressive scope in describing trust build, breach, and repair, the chapter also considers challenges to the theory's theoretical utility within the context of trust breach research.

Following the delineation of critical issues, the chapter will introduce the Cognitive-Affective Processing Systems (CAPS) model. This meta-theoretical framework has been instrumental in various disciplines since its development in 1995. While CAPS is well-established in psychology and behavioural sciences, its application to trust research offers a distinct theoretical contribution. By employing CAPS, this study offers an exploratory conceptual lens through which to examine trust dynamics, aiming to advance theoretical understanding of trust breaches. Rather than providing a comprehensive account, it contributes to bridging gaps in the trust literature by highlighting the complex interplay of



cognitive, affective and motivational-regulatory processes that shape responses to trust breach.

By setting the stage with a review and critical analysis of the existing meta-theoretical paradigm and culminating in introducing a complimentary meta-theoretical approach, this chapter will contribute to the scholarly discourse on trust, providing a foundation for theoretical advancement in organisational contexts. This approach broadens the conceptualisation of trust and enhances our understanding of its complex mechanisms in a way that could inform both theory and practice within organisational settings.

## **2.2 Definition of Trust**

Trust has been the subject of multidisciplinary inquiry, with early research highlighting difficulties in establishing a universally accepted definition (Kramer, 1999). The challenge arises from its examination across diverse fields- sociological, psychological, organisational, and economics, each shaping distinct definitions and theoretical perspectives (Bachmann, 2011; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Hamm et al. (2024b) highlight that these disciplines bring unique lenses, epistemologies, and focal relationships to the study of trust, reflecting its inherent multifaceted nature. However, this diversity has historically resulted in fragmentation, complicating efforts to develop coherent frameworks that unify the conceptual and analytical approaches of trust research (Bachmann, 2011).

To address these challenges, scholars have sought to balance definitional clarity with conceptual flexibility. McKnight and Chervany (2001) emphasise the importance of precise definitions to enhance coherence and empirical rigor in trust research. Conversely, Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla (1998) cautioned that overly rigid definitions risk constraining the concept's inherent richness and depth, potentially limiting its applicability

across diverse contexts. This tension underscores the necessity for definitions that provide analytical clarity while accommodating trust's complexity and multidimensionality, thus enriching broader understandings of the phenomenon (Fink et al., 2010).

This multidimensionality encompasses key aspects such as vulnerability, expectation, and reciprocal engagement, reflected in influential definitions (Butler, 1991; Schoorman et al., 2007). Mayer et al. (1995) conceptualise trust as the willingness to be vulnerable based on specific performance expectations, emphasising the trustor's reliance on identifiable actions. Rousseau et al. (1998) provide a broader perspective, defining trust as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (p. 395). This definition, widely recognised in the literature (Sharma et al., 2023), has been instrumental in capturing trust's psychological and relational dimensions.

Building on this, Möllering (2001), drawing from Simmel, conceptualises trust as a "leap" facilitated by suspension—the temporary setting aside of uncertainty and ignorance to bridge the gap between interpretation (rational or emotional reasoning) and expectation (positive anticipation of another's behaviour). This perspective underscores the dynamic and reflexive nature of trust, enriching its conceptualisation by integrating the dualities of rationality and faith. Such insights are particularly relevant for examining the complexities of trust breaches and their repair, where both dynamics are at play.

For this research, Rousseau et al. (1988) definition is adopted due to its strong emphasis on the trustor's subjective experience and internal decision-making processes. While Mayer et al. (1995) focus on trust as a function of specific, identifiable actions, Rousseau et al.'s broader framing, captures general intentions and behaviours. This makes it more flexible

for exploring diverse scenarios, particularly relational and non-transactional contexts. Rousseau et al.'s definition accommodates a comprehensive examination of trust dynamics, encompassing emotions, motivations, and expectations while extending beyond rational calculations or specific transactions.

### **2.3 Controversies regarding Trust Conceptualisations**

As previously outlined, trust has been conceptualised in diverse and multifaceted ways, shaped by the disciplinary lens through which it is examined. In sociology, for instance, trust is often viewed as a vital element of social structures, functioning as a property of collective units such as dyads or groups (McKnight & Chervany, 1996). Developmental psychology, by contrast, examines trust as an individual trait, emphasising dispositional tendencies such as propensity to trust (Rotter, 1967). Social psychologists emphasise trust as an outcome of interpersonal interactions, while economic perspectives frame trust within rational choice models, focusing on calculated risk and expected utility. These diverse disciplinary perspectives highlight the complexity of defining and operationalising trust within and across contexts.

However, such divergent conceptualisations have also drawn criticism for contributing to definitional ambiguity and measurement challenges in trust research (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). For instance, sociological perspectives emphasise trust as a collective and state-like property, exemplified by Lewis and Weigert (1985), describe of trust as “a property of collective units (ongoing dyads, groups, and collectivities)” (p. 968). This contrasts with developmental psychology's emphasis on trust as an individual level trait, where Rotter (1967) defines trust as “an expectancy held by an individual or a group” (p.651), reinforcing the dispositional view. Adding further complexity, scholars have also conceptualised trust

as a dynamic process, embedded in social exchanges, involving expectations, willingness to be vulnerable, and risk-taking behaviours (McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003). Together, these perspectives reflect the multidimensional nature of trust as simultaneously dispositional, relational and interactional, underscoring trust's multidisciplinary and context-dependent nature.

## **2.4 Trust Referent and Levels**

In their comprehensive review, Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) delineate trust into distinct levels—individual, team, and organisational—each associated with specific trust referents. The "level" refers to the scope of analysis (individual, team, or organisational), while the "referent" specifies the target of trust. At the individual level, referents may include leaders, supervisors or colleagues, with research highlighting systematic differences in the antecedents and outcomes of trust directed at various referents (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). For example, trust in a direct supervisor may have immediate relational impacts on team performance and individual well-being, while trust in senior leadership could influence broader organisational commitment and strategic alignment (Colquitt et al., 2007).

## **2.5 Trust Conceptualisations: Trait, State, and Process**

Building on the focus of this research program—trust breaches at the individual level involving direct leaders—it is essential to explore the broader conceptual foundations of trust. Trust has been widely studied across disciplines, leading to three dominant conceptualisations that frame trust as a dispositional trait, a situational state, and a dynamic process. These perspectives provide distinct yet interrelated insights into how trust is formed, sustained, and repaired in interpersonal relationships.

### ***2.5.1 Trust as a Trait***

Trait trust, also referred to as dispositional trust or propensity to trust, represents an individual's relatively stable inclination to trust others across various contexts. Defined as a "general willingness to trust others" (Mayer et al., 1995, p.716), it is conceptualised as a personality-like characteristic that influences how individuals approach trust-related situations. Colquitt et al. (2007) describe it as "the stable individual difference that affects the likelihood that a person will trust" (p.910), i.e. the tendency that a person will trust others (Chughtai, 2020). While traditionally considered a static characteristic, recent research highlights its relevance beyond initial or novel relationships, demonstrating its dynamic and context-sensitive nature (van der Werff, et al., 2019).

The origins of propensity to trust are rooted in early life experiences, particularly the consistency of caregiving and interpersonal interactions during developmental periods (McKnight et al., 1998). These early interactions contribute to a general tendency to trust, which is subsequently shaped by cultural norms and social influences (Huff & Kelley, 2003; Baer et al., 2018; Becerra & Gupta, 2003). Dispositional trust propensity is also associated with personality traits, particularly agreeableness, as a lower-level trait it is considered specific and context-dependent, having proximal influences on behaviour (van der Werff et al., 2019).

Research highlights that propensity to trust is particularly critical in situations characterised by ambiguity or novel relationships. In such contexts, where the trustor (party making trust judgement) has limited information about a trustee (party being trusted), trait trust provides the foundation for trust-related decisions (Colquitt et al., 2007a; Gill et al., 2005; Jarvenpaa et al., 1997; Jones & Shah, 2016; McKnight et al., 1998; van der Werff & Buckley, 2014).

However, trust propensity extends beyond initial encounters and continues to shape how individuals interpret behaviours and assign trustworthiness in ongoing relationships.

Baer et al. (2018) argue that propensity to trust is malleable, fluctuating in response to changing social contexts. They demonstrate that such changes can occur within short timeframes and persist beyond the immediate circumstances. Similarly, van der Werff et al. (2019) highlight that trust propensity (TP) is not fixed; but can undergo significant changes, with fluctuations persisting even after the immediate circumstances driving the change have subsided. These findings emphasise the dynamic interplay between stable individual differences and situational influences, underscoring the contextual sensitivity of trait trust.

### ***2.5.2 Trust as a State***

In contrast to trait trust, which reflects individual differences, state trust is dynamic, arising from specific interactions and contextual factors. It emerges as trustors evaluate the trustworthiness of trustees based on accumulated interactions, experiences, or incidents (McAllister, 1995; Mishra, 1996). These evaluations are shaped by perceptions of the trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity, which collectively influence the trustor's willingness to accept vulnerability (Mayer et al., 1995). Additionally, state and trait trust are not independent; they can interact, with trait information in specific contexts (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008).

State trust can emerge rapidly, particularly in contexts requiring swift decision-making or collaboration, such as temporary teams or virtual groups. For example, "swift trust" describes the rapid formation of trust in such scenarios, often based on surface-level cues and minimal information (Jarvenpaa et al., 1997; Meyerson et al., 2012). Wildman et al. (2012) highlight that trait trust plays a critical role in activating state trust in these situations.

They propose that surface-level cues and imported information are processed through trust-related schemas, which they define as “cognitive structures that organise related knowledge and concepts about some aspect of the world” (Wildman et al., 2012, p.146). These schemas, stored in long-term memory, link past experiences with present circumstances, enabling individuals to interpret new information effectively (Rumelhart, 1980; Williams, 2001).

Trust related schemas also play a central role in this process, linking prior experiences with present interactions while remaining responsive to new contextual cues. For example, trustor’s may draw on previous interactions to assess a trustee’s perceived benevolence, integrity, or ability, influencing their current state of trust (Wildman et al., 2012). This interpretive process underscores how state trust is shaped not only by situational factors but also by the trustor’s pre-existing cognitive frameworks. Resultingly, state trust refers to dynamic cognitive, motivational or affective situational states that varies due to contextual elements and associated antecedents and consequences (Burke et al., 2007).

Although state trust shares affective, behavioural, and cognitive attributes with trait trust, it is inherently transient and persists for a shorter period of time (Fleeson & Gallagher, 2009). Baer et al. (2018) contend that state and trait trust occupy the same conceptual domain, with trait trust representing between-person differences and state trust reflecting within-person variations over time. This conceptual overlap illustrates the fluidity of trust judgments as they are influenced by both stable dispositions and situational dynamics.

Importantly, state trust extends beyond the initial stages of trust development to influence ongoing relationships. While trait trust provides the foundation for initial trust judgments, state trust reflects real-time evaluations that ebb and flow in response to relational dynamics, breaches, or repair efforts. This aligns with findings that trust propensity can adapt to

contextual changes (Baer et al., 2018; van der Werff et al., 2019). Together, these insights emphasise the interplay between dispositions and dynamic situational evaluations, highlighting the relevance of state trust in capturing the evolving nature of leader-follower interactions. This interplay underscores the need to consider both stable and transient elements of trust in examining trust dynamics.

### ***2.5.3 Trust as a Process***

Interpersonal trust is increasingly recognised not merely as a static trait or state but as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by context, relational interactions, and individual adaptations over time (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; Mayer et al., 1995). Trust is differentiated into distinct aspects such as building, sustaining, breach and repair (Rousseau et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). These aspects reflect the ‘ebb and flow’ of trust, and a process view provides a richer framework for understanding the mechanisms that underpin trust’s formation, maintenance, disruption, and repair, thus offering deeper insights into interpersonal workplace relationships (Lewicki et al., 2006).

A shift in perspective from trust as a static noun to “trusting” as a dynamic activity, underscores its continuous adjustment and negotiation. As Möllering (2013) contends, trusting reflects how individuals generate, sustain, and sometimes lose trust in response to changing circumstances. This perspective underscores trust as an unfinished and evolving phenomenon, influenced by both past experiences and future expectations. Central to this dynamic are trust-related schemas, which provide continuity in trust evaluations by integrating prior experiences while adapting to new contextual cues and interactions (Wildman et al., 2012). This interplay between stable cognitive frameworks and the fluid nature of relational dynamics captures the evolving nature of trust over time.

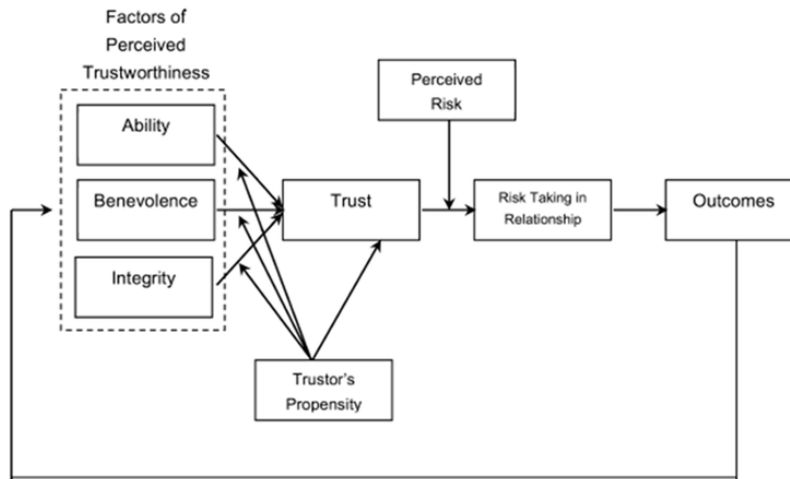


Mayer et al.'s (1995) integrative model of trust offers a foundational framework for conceptualising trust as a multifaceted process. The model posits that trust is influenced by three dimensions of the trustee's perceived trustworthiness-ability, benevolence, and integrity-as well as the trustor's propensity to trust, thus highlighting the interaction of trait-based and contextual factors (Alarcon et al., 2016; Rotter, 1967; Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998).

Consistent positive interactions can deepen trust, while breaches trigger re-evaluations of trustworthiness, potentially altering relational dynamics, guiding willingness to take risks (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Schoorman et al., 1996; 2007). Such fluctuations underscore the processual nature of trust as it ebbs and flows through stages of development, disruption, and potential repair. Figure 1 demonstrates this dynamic interplay, highlighting how trust is influenced by the trustor's risk tolerance, the trustee's perceived trustworthiness, and contextual factors.

**Figure 1.**

*Integrated Model of Trust*



*Note:* Integrative Model of Trust. Reprinted from "An Integrative Model Of Organizational Trust" by Mayer et al. (1995). *Academy of Management Review*. 20 (3), p.715. Copyright [1995] by Academy of Management Review.

The model reinforces the conceptualisation of trust as a dynamic process that evolves through ongoing assessments of trustworthiness that are informed by the actions of both parties and the broader situational context (Schoorman et al., 2007a). Trust, therefore, operates as an adaptive mechanism, responsive to relational and contextual shifts over time.

Understanding trust as a process of ebb and flow is particularly relevant for studying leader-follower relationships, where breaches of trust may cause shocks, drifts and signal fracture in relationships with significant consequences (Olekalns et al., 2020). This dynamic perspective highlights that while trust can deteriorate, relational repair remains possible through specific trust repair strategies (Olekalns & Caza, 2024). Crucially, this approach emphasises that trust is not static but a dynamic and adaptive process, requiring ongoing effort, intentional strategies, and adaptation to navigate fluctuations and sustain over time (Williams, 2014).

### **2.5.6 Summary Trust as State, Trait, and Process**

The previous section synthesised the conceptualisation of trust as a trait, state, and process, presenting it as a foundational lens for understanding the complexities of trust dynamics. This integrative perspective acknowledges that trust functions across temporal dimensions—rooted in stable individual dispositions (trait), influenced by situational contexts and interactions (state), and continually renegotiated through adaptive processes (process).

Recognising these interconnections is central to understanding trust breaches, as they illuminate how trust evolves, deteriorates, and may repair over time. While trait trust underpins trust judgments, state trust reflects real-time evaluations shaped by interactions and context. The process perspective ties these elements together, highlighting the ongoing negotiation and recalibration of trust in response to breaches or affirmations.

This conceptualisation is particularly significant for studying trust breaches in leader-follower relationships, where trust is not only foundational but also fragile (Schweitzer et al., 2006). The next section builds on this foundation, examining the extant meta-theoretical paradigm in trust research and proposing a more comprehensive meta-theoretical framework to explore trust dynamics, particularly the dynamics of trust breaches.

## **2.6 Extant Meta-Theoretical Paradigm**

As previously discussed, trust research spans multiple levels of analysis and referents, each underpinned by distinct theoretical paradigms. At each level—individual, team, and organisational—specific theoretical perspectives provide frameworks for conceptualising trust and its dynamics, offering insights into the antecedents, processes, and outcomes associated with trust-related phenomena.

This section outlines the dominant meta-theoretical paradigms identified by Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) for different trust referents. These paradigms are critical for situating trust breaches within the broader theoretical landscape, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of trust's role across relational and organisational contexts. Table 1 summarises the trust referents and the corresponding dominant paradigms.

**Table 1.**

*Trust Referents and Dominant Theoretical Paradigms*

Referent	Dominant Theoretical Paradigm
Individual	Social Exchange Theory
	Social Information Processing Theory
	Attribution Theory
	Social Identity Theory
Team	Social Exchange Theory
	Social Information Processing Theory
	Social Identity Theory
	Media Richness Theory
Organisation	Conflict Management Theory
	Social Exchange Theory
	Transactional Cost Economics Theory
	Attribution Theory

*Note.* Based on information provided in Fulmer & Gelfand (2012)

As illustrated in Table 1, Social Exchange Theory (SET) has emerged as a dominant theoretical framework in trust research, despite the considerable pluralism that characterises the field (Dirks & De Jong, 2022). Widely regarded as a meta-theory, SET provides overarching principles for understanding human interactions and relationships, emphasising reciprocal exchanges and mutual dependencies (Cervone et al., 2006). Its influence spans numerous research domains, demonstrating its versatility in explaining diverse aspects of human behaviour and relationships.

In the domain of organisational behaviour, SET has been instrumental in understanding workplace dynamics, including trust-building, leadership, and employee engagement (Colquitt et al., 2014; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Beyond organisational settings, its principles have been applied in anthropology to examine cultural practices and societal structures (Harrison-Buck, 2021; Nettle, 1997), and in social psychology to analyse interpersonal relationships and social norms (Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1961). SET's theoretical scope extends to business studies (Dutta & Packard, 2024), sociology (Lawler, 2001; Lawler & Thye, 1999), and economics (Dekkers et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2014), offering insights into both transactional and relational exchanges.

Recent advances in neuroscience have further enhanced the relevance of SET, applying its principles to explore the neurological basis of reciprocity and trust (Rilling & Sanfey, 2011; Sanfey, 2007). Additionally, SET has informed research across various disciplines, including education (Wong & Oh, 2023; Zhang et al., 2018), geography (DeDecker et al., 2022; Fischer et al., 2019), health (Prizer et al., 2017; Ren & Ma, 2021) and tourism studies (Lee & Back, 2006; Ward & Berno, 2011). This broad application underscores SET's utility in understanding human behaviour and relationships across diverse contexts.

In particular, SET's emphasis on reciprocal exchanges and relational dynamics makes it particularly valuable for exploring trust processes, including breaches and repair, within interpersonal and organisational contexts. The following section will outline the key principles and provide a foundation for its application to trust dynamics and the identification of its boundary conditions.

### ***2.6.1 Social Exchange Theory Overview***

Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that social interactions are transactional exchanges involving both tangible and intangible rewards and resources. Developed by foundational scholars George Homans and Peter Blau, SET provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals and groups establish and maintain social relationships through reciprocal and interdependent exchanges (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). Within organisational research, SET has become a pivotal framework for analysing employee-organisation relationships (EOR), offering insights into behavioural patterns and the mechanisms that sustain workplace interactions (Ahmad et al., 2023; Coyle-Shapiro & Diehl, 2018; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Homans (1961) originally defined social exchange as “the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons” (p.13). He highlighted that individuals evaluate the costs and rewards of behaviours, repeating those that elicit positive outcomes from others. SET distinguishes between economic exchanges, characterised by explicit, tangible rewards such as pay and benefits, and social exchanges, which involve intangible socioemotional rewards like support, respect, and recognition (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Both types of exchanges are integral to the EOR, though they operate through different mechanisms and yield distinct outcomes (Shore et al., 2009).

Building on Homans’ foundation, Blau (1964) advanced the theory by introducing the concept of social exchange relationships, characterised by ongoing interactions that create mutual obligations and expectations of reciprocity among interdependent parties. These relationships occur both with the organisation as a collective entity, and also with specific individuals or groups within it (Wayne et al., 1997). Unlike formal contractual relationships,

social exchanges are defined by ongoing reciprocal exchanges of resources and governed by specific rules, including rationality, altruism, status consistency, and most notably reciprocity (Emerson, 1976).

Reciprocity emerges as a central tenet of SET, shaping both interpersonal and organisational relationships. A significant portion of management research focuses on expectations of reciprocity, underscoring its fundamental role in the dynamics of social exchanges within organisational contexts (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Gouldner (1960) defined reciprocity as a universal norm encapsulated by two principles:

1. People should help those who have helped them.
2. People should not harm those who have helped them. (p.171).

These principles underscore the ethical and social underpinnings of reciprocity, governing expectations of mutual exchange in social and workplace relationships (Ahmad et al., 2023; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Shore et al., 2009). Reciprocity is fundamental to relationship development, fostering trust and mutual dependence across diverse contexts (Gouldner, 1960; Shore et al., 2009). In summary, SET underscores reciprocity as the cornerstone of social and economic exchanges, offering a lens through which trust dynamics can be explored. The following section will highlight the application of SET to trust processes, emphasising the conditions under which trust is built, sustained, and repaired.

### ***2.6.2 Application of Social Exchange Theory to Trust Research***

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a foundational framework for understanding trust as a key mechanism facilitating reciprocal interactions in social and organisational relationships (Kong et al., 2014). Trust within SET is conceptualised as a rational choice,

wherein individuals aim to maximise rewards and minimise costs in their social exchanges. This perspective has been applied extensively to explore the processes of trust building, maintenance, breach, and repair. It is argued that trust, developed through social exchanges, significantly influences broader organisational outcomes such as citizenship behaviours (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994).

#### ***2.6.2.1 Trust Building and Trust Maintenance***

SET posits that reciprocity is central to trust development and sustenance. While economic considerations drive the formal or contractual relationships in employment, exchange relationships frequently develop a significant social component with unspecified obligations (Dutta & Packard, 2024). These iterative cycles of reciprocal interactions create obligations and foster trust over time (Peng et al., 2023).

Blau (1964) identifies two primary mechanisms for trust-building: fulfilling obligations consistently and gradually expanding the scope of exchanges. Trust develops incrementally, beginning with low-risk interactions and escalating as parties demonstrate reliability (Rempel et al., 1985). Das and Teng (1998) note that reciprocal trust deepens as individuals recognise the risks taken by others in trusting them, motivating trustworthy behaviour in return. This dynamic, where trust begets trust (Bijlsma & van de Bunt, 2003), highlights reciprocity as both a catalyst for trust formation and a stabilising mechanism for its maintenance (Coyle-Shapiro & Diehl, 2017).

In leader-follower relationships, reciprocity is considered pivotal. Followers often reciprocate considerate leader behaviours, such as support and fairness, with increased discretionary effort and organisational citizenship behaviours, reinforcing trust and enhancing performance outcomes (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004). Furthermore, these behaviours



often influence performance and other outcomes to a degree that matches or surpasses key attitudinal variables such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and procedural justice.

#### ***2.6.2.2 Trust Breach and Trust Repair***

Within SET, trust breaches are viewed as critical disruption to the equilibrium of social exchanges. Defined as failures to meet the trustor's positive expectations of the trustee (Chen et al., 2011), breaches challenge the principles of reciprocity that underpin trust relationships. Consequences often include negative emotional and behavioural responses such as withdrawal or reduced resource investment (Peng et al., 2023; Shapiro et al., 2011; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Trust breaches in one relationship can also cascade into others, creating a "trickle-down" effect of trust violations across organisational networks (Bordia et al., 2010). This interconnectedness highlights the systemic nature of trust, where a trust breach in one relationship can precipitate breaches in others, mirroring the principle that "breach begets breach," as "trust begets trust" (Bijlsma-Frankema & van de Bunt, 2003; Bordia et al., 2010).

Research suggests that breaches are not uncommon in workplace settings, with employees reporting trust violations as a routine aspect of their weekly experiences (Conway & Briner, 2002). These violations often serve as anchoring events, profoundly influencing the perception and evaluation of subsequent interactions (Ballinger and Rockmann, (2010). Anchoring events, marked by their emotional and functional intensity, reshape relationship dynamics and are embedded in autobiographical memory, exerting substantial influences on the individual, their relationships, and work-related outcomes (Epitropaki et al., 2020). Olekalns et al. (2020) characterise these events as shocks-abrupt, emotionally salient

breaches that disrupt trust in a single moment- and drifts, which involve the cumulative effect of repeated, minor transgression that gradually erode the relational foundation.

Restoring trust after a breach requires navigating these fractures. Outcomes depend on congruent perceptions of the breach (Bottom et al., 2002) and the timing and nature of synchronous repair actions, i.e. both parties engage in positive reframing to avoid negative reciprocity (Parzefall & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011). Positive repair actions such as apologies, compensatory gestures, or efforts to reframe the relationship-can facilitate trust repair by re-establishing conditions for mutual exchange (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Sitkin & Roth, 1993). According to Olekalns et al. (2020), post breach relationships follow one of three trajectories: relational decline, restoration to the previous state, or positive relational progression.

### ***2.6.3 SET Contributions to Trust Research: Insights and Emerging Issues***

Social Exchange Theory (SET) has significantly advanced our understanding of trust development, maintenance, and breach in organisational settings. While its versatility is evident across diverse domains, its application to trust rebuilding and repair reveals utility issues that warrant critical examination. This section outlines five key contributions of SET while addressing extant issues that limit its theoretical utility in capturing the complexities of trust dynamics.

Firstly, SET provides a robust framework for examining reciprocity as a central mechanism in trust development. The theory posits that trust emerges through reciprocal exchanges, where positive interactions reinforce mutual trust. This framework has been instrumental in explaining how trust is universally developed and maintained (Shore et al., 2009). Similarly, negative reciprocity—where adverse behaviours provoke retaliatory actions—is a well-

documented dynamic in organisational contexts (Greco et al., 2019). However, not all trust-related behaviours adhere strictly to reciprocal norms. For instance, individuals may choose not to reciprocate positive actions, while others may reframe or overlook breaches to preserve relationships. These variations highlight the need for a more differentiated understanding of reciprocity beyond its traditional framing in SET.

Secondly, SET conceptualises trust as a dynamic, evolving construct shaped by ongoing exchanges. This perspective offers valuable insights into how trust fluctuates over time (Serva et al., 2005). The theory assumes that trust evolves predictably through reciprocal exchanges, yet deviations from reciprocal patterns challenge this assumption. Trust repair processes, for instance, often involve non-linear processes or unilateral actions, which SET struggles to accommodate. This constraint underscores the need to account for trust dynamics beyond strict reciprocity.

Thirdly, SET's inclusion of socioeconomic resources-such as support, respect, and recognition- offers a valuable framework for understanding how intangible benefits contribute to the formation and repair in organisational contexts (Coyle-Shapiro & Diehl, 2018). These elements are central to many workplace exchanges and help explain why individuals may continue to invest in a relationship even after a breach. However, the focus on socioemotional resources often overlooks broader structural and cultural factors that shape trust dynamics, leaving room for further theoretical development.

Fourthly, SET underscores the interdependent nature of relationships, illustrating how trust in one relationship can influence others within organisational and social networks (Gillespie et al., 2021; Nienaber et al., 2023; Tan & Lim, Augustine, 2009). While this focus on interdependence underscores the systemic nature of trust, SET's emphasis on dyadic

relationships limits its applicability to more complex, multi-level organisational settings. This limitation underscores the need to extend SET to better capture the cascading effects of trust dynamics within intricate organisational systems.

Finally, SET addresses the role of expectations and perceptions in trust-related behaviours, particularly through the alignment of expected and received outcomes and perceptions of fairness (Bhattacharya et al., 1998; Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017). However, expectations and perceptions are shaped by a range of factors- including individual traits, cultural norms, organisational structures, and past experiences- that extend beyond SET's reciprocity based framework. For instance, a perceived breach may be influenced by trait entitlement and resultant misaligned expectations (Grubbs & Exline, 2016) rather than a violation of reciprocity, thus reflecting complexities that SET does not fully explain underscoring the need for broader theoretical integration.

In summary, SET provides a refined and flexible framework for examining trust dynamics in organisational contexts, offering valuable perspectives on the role of reciprocity in trust development and maintenance. However, its predominant focus on the role of reciprocity and its generalisation of trust behaviours across diverse contexts highlight critical boundary conditions. Specifically, not all positive initiating actions in a social exchange process elicit positive responses, thus trust-related exchanges may deviate from expected norms. Such nuances highlight the potential limitations of Social Exchange Theory in capturing the full spectrum of trust dynamics.

#### ***2.6.4 Reassessing the Theoretical Utility of Social Exchange Theory***

Social Exchange Theory has significantly advanced our understanding of trust dynamics in organisational contexts, providing a robust framework for examining trust breaches and

repair. Its emphasis on reciprocity- where trust violations are expected to elicit proportional responses in a "tit-for-tat" dynamic offers valuable insights into normative behaviours. However, SET's explanatory power is constrained by limitations and inherent boundary conditions, which define the extent to which its propositions can be generalised (Whetten, 1989). Specifically, SET's utility is challenged by five key issues: its treatment of individual differences, its oversimplification of contextual influence, its limited incorporation of self-regulation, its neglect of motivational dynamics, and its inability to fully explain post-breach behaviours.

These boundary conditions are particularly evident when addressing the complexity of trust dynamics, where complexity of relationships and the nuances of human behaviour challenge SET's core assumptions (Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010). While SET assumes that trust can be restored through a sequence of reciprocal exchanges, it provides limited insight into the specific mechanisms involved in such practices (Pratt and Dirks (2017). For instance, it often overlooks self-regulatory mechanisms, such as selective attention, reframing, and sense-making, which can mitigate the impact of a breach without necessitating retaliatory actions (Parzefall & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011). These mechanisms illustrate how responses to trust violations are shaped by factors beyond reciprocal norms.

Furthermore, SET's focus on normative and reciprocal behaviours has been critiqued for its inability to fully account for how individuals actually behave has been questioned (Kramer, 1999). While it remains a valuable framework for examining trust within structured, predictable exchanges, its efficacy as a descriptive model diminishes when applied to complex, real-world dynamics. It falls short in accounting for individual differences, contextual intricacies, motivational and self-regulatory behaviours that are critical to

understanding the multifaceted nature of trust. Below, key issues that limit SET's explanatory scope are identified and discussed.

The first critical issue lies in SET assumption of rational reciprocity, which emphasises deliberate, controlled exchanges aimed at maximising personal benefit, engaging in reciprocal behaviour regardless of social and emotional contexts (Wischniewski et al., 2009). This assumption underestimates the significant role of individual differences, including personality traits, emotions, and neurobiological influences, which often deviate from rational, calculated behaviours. For example, research has shown evidence of individual differences in negative reciprocity norms, with certain individuals responding strongly to unfavourable treatment with anger and retribution, and showing reduced anxiety and increased positive social engagement following favourable treatment (Eisenberger et al., 2004). This variability in behavioural responses underscores how individual attributes influence trust dynamics beyond SET's focus on reciprocity norms. Moreover, Coyle-Shapiro and Diehl (2018) note that the emphasis on behaviour strictly adhering to reciprocal exchanges or norms may overlook how other inherent individual differences affect trust dynamics. This focus can obscure the influence of personal attributes that independently shape trust behaviours within and outside reciprocal norms. Empirical evidence supports this assertion and has shown that human behaviour often deviates from rational reciprocity norms.

Neurobiological and emotional factors further complicate SET's assumptions. For example, Kosfeld et al. (2005) demonstrated the biological underpinnings of trust by administering oxytocin to participants in a Trust Game, revealing that those who received oxytocin were significantly more likely to exhibit trusting behaviours. This finding suggests that trust can be influenced by neurobiological factors rather than being solely based on rational

calculations, indicating a biological underpinning for trust. Similarly, Harlé & Sanfey (2007) showed that inducing sadness as a transient state influenced decisions to accept or reject offers in economic tasks, while induced amusement did not significantly bias decision-making. The researchers concluded that incidental emotions can significantly affect socioeconomic decision-making even when unrelated to the task. Suggesting that behaviour deemed irrational by economic models, like rejecting monetary gains, may be driven by more profound, adaptive mechanisms influenced by these emotional states—an aspect not accounted for by social exchange theory. These findings suggest that trust is sometimes shaped by non-cognitive processes that SET does not fully account for.

Personality traits and genetic predispositions also contribute to trust variability. Studies have shown that traits like agreeableness and genetic factors influence trust tendencies, leading to behaviours that range from cooperative to self-serving depending on the scenario (Reimann et al., 2017; Scheres & Sanfey, 2006; Solnick, 2001; Wallace et al., 2007). These studies highlight that SET does not fully account for individual differences and the influence of momentary emotions. Thus, while SET provides a valuable framework to examine trust, it falls short in explaining some complexities of human behaviour influenced by individual differences and emotional states.

Contextual influences present a second major challenge to SET's theoretical utility. Context plays a pivotal role in shaping organisational behaviour, as emphasised by Johns (2001). Understanding the intricacies of situational and environmental factors is essential for grasping person-situation interactions. Context encompasses task-related elements, social dynamics, and environmental conditions such as interdependence, workplace relationships, and work design (Johns, 2024). Effective theories must specify the mechanisms through which context influences behaviour Johns (2017). However, SET often generalises trust

behaviours across diverse organisational settings without addressing the unique characteristics of specific contexts Dirks and Skarlicki (2004). This generalisation limits the theory's capacity to capture the situationally contingent ways in which situational and relational dynamics influence trust processes. For instance, trust behaviours in high-interdependence tasks differ significantly from those in low-interdependence environments. Moreover, trust in organisational settings often extends beyond dyadic exchanges to include third-party influences. Ferrin et al. (2006) illustrate that trust can develop through a network of workplace relationships, where trustworthiness information shared by coworkers informs perceptions of trust, even in the absence of direct interaction. In ambiguous situations or when information is incomplete, individuals frequently rely on third-party input to supplement their assessments of trustworthiness. Furthermore, Belmi and Pfeffer (2015) have shown that the norm of reciprocity operates with diminished strength in organisational settings due to a myriad of contextual factors. This interconnectedness of trust relationships underscores the complexity of organisational trust dynamics, which SET's direct reciprocity framework struggles to capture.

Additionally, Lewicki et al. (1998) highlight the concept of relational bandwidth, which challenges SET's linear reciprocity framework by emphasising the multidimensional nature of trust. Relationships often encompass multiple facets, allowing trust and distrust to coexist across different domains. For example, an employee may trust their manager to approve leave requests but distrust their ability to provide timely feedback or to avoid claiming credit for others' work. This domain specific approach shifts the question from "How much do I trust?" to "In what areas and in what ways do I trust" (p.442)- a perspective that SET fails to fully encompass. Recognising trust as domain-specific and shaped by relational bandwidth acknowledges that interactions in one context may foster trust, while others may introduce



distrust. This differentiated perspective challenges the unidimensional reciprocity framework of SET and underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to trust.

The third critique of SET concerns its oversimplification of self-regulation, which refers to the mechanisms by which individuals consciously or unconsciously adjust their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours to align with internal standards or external demands (Vohs & Baumeister, 2016). These processes are governed by both a conscious executive system and automatic mechanisms within the frontal lobes and midbrain, which collaboratively manage goal maintenance, knowledge access, and attentional regulation (Lord et al., 2010a). Effective self-regulation in real-world settings requires the integration of multiple systems operating across varying time scales and neural networks (Heatherton, 2011; Lopez, 2024). In this context, Carver and Scheier's control theory could offer valuable insights. Control theory posits that individuals use feedback loops to regulate their behaviour towards achieving goals. It highlights how individuals continuously monitor their progress and adjust their behaviours in response to feedback from their environment. These adjustments involve both conscious decisions and automatic processes- elements that SET fails to adequately address (Carver & Scheier, 1982).

Research highlights that substantial work-related activities are often guided by standards beyond conscious, assigned goals. Lord et al. (2010a) identify several unconscious influences on self-regulation, including:

- Emotional Biases: Unconscious emotional states can shape goal selection and behavioural responses.
- External Constraints: Social and environmental factors, often operating unconsciously, exert significant influence on behaviour.

- **Habitual Behaviours:** Routine actions driven by established patterns rather than deliberate calculations.

These factors challenge SET's assumption that self-regulation is solely rational and driven by cost-benefit analysis. O'Shea et al. (2017) argue that understanding self-regulation requires examining the interplay between cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioural regulation. They stress that these elements collectively drive human behaviour, often in ways that cannot be fully explained by the reciprocity-focused framework of SET.

Empirical findings underscore the complexity of self-regulation and the necessity of accounting for both conscious and automatic processes in understanding workplace behaviour. For example, Fitzsimons & Bargh (2004) demonstrate that much of human behaviour is influenced by implicit goals and subconscious triggers, which SET's rationalist paradigm does not capture. Furthermore, self-regulation is affected by stable personal traits and contextual variables, highlighting the importance of cross-level interactions in shaping trust and relational dynamics (Lord et al., 2010). By focusing narrowly on rational, economic exchanges, SET overlooks the multifaceted nature of self-regulation. This critical issue limits SET's explanatory power in capturing the complexities of human behaviour, particularly in trust dynamics where subconscious and emotional factors often play a significant role. Integrating self-regulatory mechanisms—spanning both conscious and automatic dimensions—into theoretical frameworks is essential for advancing trust research and addressing this limitation.

Motivational dynamics represent that fourth area where SET theoretical utility is limited (Weber et al., 2004). SET posits that trust develops through the gradual accumulation of positive interactions, assuming shared expectations and interpretations of exchanges

(Rempel et al., 1985). However, individual motivations often diverge due to asymmetric relational dependence, goals, preferences, context, and perspectives (Weber et al., 2004). For instance, in dependent relationships, trustors may discount breaches to preserve relational stability, even when evidence contradicts this response (Tomlinson, 2011). Motivated attributions, such as those observed in Stockholm Syndrome, further challenge SET's assumptions. In this phenomenon, hostages under extreme stress begin to perceive their captors as trustworthy, driven by psychological dependency, rather than rational reciprocity (Weber et al., 2004).

Moreover, relationship dependence can significantly influence how trustors respond to breaches. In dependent relationships trustors are more likely to make benevolent attributions following a trust breach, often discounting evidence to the contrary and giving the benefit of the doubt to preserve the relationship. This idea is further supported by Luchies et al. (2013), who found that individuals with high trust in romantic partners exhibit a relationship promoting memory bias, recalling past transgressions as less severe and impactful. This selective memory allows trustors to prioritise relational stability over self-protection. Conversely, individuals with lower trust displayed a self-protective bias, vividly recalling transgressions to safeguard themselves. Notably, these trust-related memory biases were independent of other factors like relationship satisfaction or commitment, underscoring trust's unique role in shaping perceptions and recollections—beyond what SET's reciprocity norms can explain.

More recently, van der Werff et al. (2019) have called for empirical research adopting a motivational self-regulatory lens to explore trust dynamics. They contend that motivation plays a crucial role in the initiation and evolution of trust, offering a richer framework for understanding trust-related decisions. These scholars suggest that SET's focus on reciprocity

and rational exchanges overlooks critical motivational dimensions, leaving gaps in its ability to explain deviations from expected behaviour. Collectively, these perspectives point to the need for a broader theoretical framework that incorporates motivational factors to more comprehensively capture the complexities of trust dynamics.

Finally, SET struggles to explain the breadth and complexity of post-breach behaviours. While the theory assumes proportional ‘tit for tat’ responses to breaches evidence suggests more varied outcomes. Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro (2011) found that some employees rely on self-regulatory mechanisms such as reframing, sense-making, or selectively attending to particular aspects of the breach. Similarly, Brodt and Neville (2013) proposed that group-based motivations significantly shape responses to breaches within dyadic trust. They highlighted how interpersonal motives within a workgroup can lead to behaviours and attitudes aligned with group norms rather than those that may emerge in the “isolation” of a dyadic relationship. For example, trustors may rationalise breaches to preserve group harmony by searching for benevolent attributions or trivialising the severity of the breach (Elangovan et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2006). These findings illustrate the influence of group dynamics and self-regulation on trust breach responses, areas that SET does not fully address.

Additionally, SET’s assumptions regarding the trajectory of trust breaches face empirical challenges. The theory posits that relationships begin with minimal trust and build through positive reciprocal exchanges, implying that early breaches should have a lesser impact due to the absence of significant trust. Conversely, later breaches, after trust has accumulated, should theoretically be more damaging. However, findings by Lount et al. (2008) contradict this assumption, demonstrating that early breaches occurring disproportionately hinder trust restoration compared to those occurring later in a relationship. These results support the

notion encapsulated by the phrase “getting off on the wrong foot,” highlighting the profound and lasting negative effects of initial trust violations. Pratt and Dirks (2017) critique SET for its lack of specificity regarding mechanisms underlying trust repair. This gap underscores the need to incorporate additional frameworks to capture the complexity of trust breach dynamics. Factors such as individual differences, group-level influences, and self-regulatory behaviours significantly shape post-breach outcomes and lie beyond the explanatory reach of SET.

In conclusion, while SET provides a foundational understanding of trust breaches, its narrow focus on reciprocity and rational exchanges limits its capacity to fully explain the complexities of trust breach in organisational contexts. Addressing the challenges posed by individual differences, contextual influences, self-regulation, motivational dynamics, and post-breach behaviours requires expanding beyond SET’s boundaries. A more integrative theoretical approach is essential for capturing the multifaceted nature of trust and advancing its theoretical understanding.

#### ***2.6.5 Summary of Theoretical Utility of SET***

This section critically examined the theoretical utility of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and identified several limitations in its application to trust research. While SET has provided a robust foundation for understanding trust as a function of reciprocal exchanges and mutual obligation, its explanatory power is constrained in contexts involving complexity, subjectivity, and emotional salience—particularly those associated with trust breach and repair. The theory assumes rational, tit-for-tat exchanges, which do not sufficiently account for individual differences, emotional responses, motivational dynamics, or self-regulatory processes that shape how trust violations are experienced and responded to.

Furthermore, SET's dyadic focus and generalised assumptions about reciprocity often overlook the domain-specific, context-sensitive nature of trust in organisational life. Trust behaviours are not always symmetrical or predictable; instead, they may be shaped by attributional interpretations, dependence, social identity, and a range of unconscious influences that SET does not fully address.

This critique does not dismiss the contribution of SET but clarifies the boundary conditions of its applicability. Within the scope of this research—examining trust breach from the perspective of the trustor—a more dynamic and psychologically attuned framework is needed to capture the complexity of post-breach responses.

To this end, the following chapter introduces the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) as a complementary meta-theoretical framework. CAPS offers an alternative lens that incorporates affective, motivational, and contextual dimensions of behaviour, aligning with calls from scholars for more dynamic, integrated approaches in trust research (Searle et al., 2018). The use of CAPS in this study is exploratory, intended to deepen understanding of individual trust breach experiences rather than to offer a definitive resolution.

## **Chapter 3:**

# **Cognitive Affective Processing System Framework: A Comprehensive Lens**

The chapter will:

- *Provide an overview of CAPS framework*
- *Identify influence of CAPS framework to date*
- *Identify Interdisciplinary application of CAPS*
- *Identify critique of CAPS*

### **3.1 Overview: The Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) Framework**

Chapter 2 has examined the conceptualisation of trust and the dominant meta-theoretical framework, Social Exchange Theory (SET) that has shaped much of the existing research on trust dynamics. While SET has provided valuable insights into reciprocal behaviours and normative exchanges in organisational contexts, five main issues constrain its theoretical utility in relation to trust dynamics. These issues—rooted in its assumptions about rational reciprocity, its underrepresentation of individual differences, contextual variables, self-regulation, motivational influences, and inability to explain post breach response—underscore the need for a more comprehensive theoretical approach to understanding trust breaches.

By deconstructing SET's explanatory power, the chapter highlighted how its focus on dyadic exchanges and structured, predictable interactions fails to account for the complexity and

variability of trust development, maintenance, breach, and repair in organisational settings. These issues not only constrain SET's generalisability but also its capacity to address the dynamic, context-sensitive, and emotionally charged nature of trust-violating events. To bridge these gaps, the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework was introduced as a promising alternative. CAPS provides a meta-theoretical perspective capable of integrating cognitive, affective, motivational, and contextual factors, aligning with calls for more dynamic approaches to trust research (Searle et al., 2018).

Chapter 2 has thus set the stage for a pivotal shift in focus. It moves from reassessing SET's theoretical utility to explain trust breaches to positioning CAPS as a more robust and comprehensive framework for examining the interplay of factors that shape trust dynamics. This transition underscores the importance of adopting a dynamic, context-sensitive lens to address unresolved complexities in trust research. Chapter 3 will build on this foundation by outlining the CAPS framework in detail and demonstrating its applicability to intra-organisational trust breaches in leader-follower relationships. In doing so, it aims to deepen our understanding of trust breach and repair processes and provide a framework that more effectively captures the interdependent interplay of cognitive, emotional, and situational factors influencing trust in organisational contexts.

This research program examines intra-organisational trust breaches experienced by employees and their immediate supervisors through the lens of the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) meta-theoretical framework, developed by Mischel and Shoda in 1995. Widely regarded as a seminal contribution to psychology and the behavioural sciences, the CAPS framework integrates social-cognitive and affective processing approaches, offering an integrative method for studying interpersonal dynamics (Lee et al., 2024). This chapter will position the relevance of CAPS in understanding trust breaches,



arguing that it provides a comprehensive framework to analyse the complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and motivational processes that underlie trust dynamics in organisational settings. Recent developments, emphasise that trust-violating events are contextually situated and emotionally charged experiences (Williams et al., 2020) . By applying the CAPS framework, this chapter seeks to advance our understanding of how cognitive, affective, and motivational processes interact with situational and interpersonal factors to influence employee behaviour and trust dynamics.

The chapter is presented in three sections. The first section introduces the foundational principles of the CAPS framework, explaining its capacity to account for intra-individual variability in social behaviour across different situations and over time. The origins of CAPS are contextualised within the debate between trait theorists and situationists, highlighting how CAPS introduced a dynamic, context-sensitive view of personality. This perspective highlights the continuous interaction of cognitive and emotional responses with situational features, marking a significant departure from traditional trait-based approaches. Further, this section elaborates on the flexibility and empirical support of CAPS as a meta-theoretical framework, demonstrating its ability to integrate relevant theories and address domain-specific predictions. The concept of IF-THEN behavioural profiles is introduced, explaining how specific cognitive-affective units are activated by situational triggers, resulting in patterned responses. The five analytical levels within the CAPS framework—Cognitive-Affective System, Behavioural Responses, Observers' Perceptions, Situational Features, and Contextual Factors—are outlined, with examples illustrating the framework's interdisciplinary application and its potential to address limitations of the dominant meta-theoretical framework, Social Exchange Theory (SET), in trust research.

The second section applies the CAPS framework to trust research focusing on trust breaches in leader-follower relationships. It introduces a CAPS-informed model of trust breach, trust repair, and associated outcomes, emphasising cognitive affective units such as encodings, expectations and beliefs, affects, goals, and competencies. Different types of trust breaches, their situational features, and corresponding behavioural expressions are examined. By applying CAPS to trust breaches, this research aims to enhance the theoretical conceptualisation of trust breach in leader-follower relationships, offering practical insights to inform both theory and practice within organisational settings.

The third section builds upon the foundational principles and applied insights of the CAPS framework to address critical gaps in the trust breach literature. It critiques the limitations of existing theoretical approaches, particularly their inability to account for the subjective categorisation of breaches, perceptions of severity, and the interplay of cognitive-affective mechanisms in shaping post-breach responses. This section introduces the research program developed to bridge these gaps, articulating specific research questions and hypotheses that guide the empirical investigation. By framing the research aims within the CAPS framework, this section lays a foundation for the exploration of trust breach dynamics, advancing both theoretical understanding and practical applications in organisational contexts.

In summary, the first section establishes CAPS's as an integrated approach for understanding the dynamic interplay between individual traits and situational contexts in interpersonal relationships. The second section demonstrates the applicability of CAPS to trust breaches, showcasing its capacity to extend and enhance current theoretical foundations through a dyadic-sensitive approach. The final section addresses critical gaps in trust breach literature, presenting a research programme that frames empirical inquiries with the CAPS framework to explore the interplay of cognitive-affective mechanisms. Collectively, this chapter sets the

stage for introducing a research model on follower-experienced trust breach dynamics, underscoring the CAPS meta-theoretical framework's potential to deepen and enrich insights into trust breach and repair processes. This aligns with broader calls within the field to embrace dynamic approaches that address complexities in trust research (Searle et al., 2018, Dirks & De Jong, 2022).

### **3.2 Section 1 Cognitive- Affective Processing System (CAPS)**

#### ***3.2.1 CAPS Overview: A Contextualised Framework***

The Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS), developed by Mischel and Shoda (1995), is a metatheoretical framework integrating social-cognitive and affective processing approaches to examine how individuals respond to different situations. By advancing a contextualised view of personality, CAPS portrays individuals as proactive, goal-oriented agents whose behaviours emerge through a complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and biological processes shaped by contextual factors.

Drawing on foundational theories of goal-oriented behaviour and the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environments (Lewin, 1951), CAPS challenges the traditional Western emphasis on decontextualised traits, which has often been critiqued as essentialism error (Kammrath et al., 2012; Mischel & Shoda, 2010). In contrast, CAPS posits that behaviours are best understood within specific interpersonal contexts (Zayas et al., 2002), emphasising the role of situational contingencies in shaping behaviour.

The CAPS framework introduces a state-specific aspect to traits, conceptualising personality “as a system of interconnect[ed] psychological processes” (Shoda et al., 2015, p.493). This dynamic view accommodates both trait consistency and situational variability, illustrating

how cognitive and affective units interact with contextual factors to produce consistent yet contextually variable behavioural patterns. This dynamicity also aligns with recent advances in trust theory, which emphasise how trustors continuously process both observed and imagined cues related to a trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity- particularly during vulnerable phases marked by uncertainty and emotional tension whereby cue-driven appraisals are considered to shape trust-related emotions such as hope and fear (Schoorman et al., 2025).

As a meta-theoretical framework, CAPS provides researchers with the flexibility to selectively apply relevant theories and explore domain-specific predictions, without prescribing specific, testable predictions about behaviour in distinct content areas (Ayduk & Gyurak, 2008; Mendoza-Denton & Goldman-Flythe, 2009; Miller et al., 1996). Empirical research validates CAPS capacity to depict personality as a dynamic construct that adapts to situational contexts (Bleidorn et al., 2022; Boyce et al., 2015; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008; Wright & Jackson, 2023).

In summarising CAPS, Mischel and Shoda (1995) emphasised its dual role in facilitating the concurrent examination of both personality dispositions and processes-structure and dynamics-as integral aspects of a unified system. This integrative perspective portrays individuals as proactive and goal-oriented, forming plans and strategies influenced by their cognitive and social learning history, affective states, biological foundations and contextual factors (Lee et al., 2024). This integrative approach positions CAPS as a valuable framework for advancing the study of trust breach in diverse workplace settings.

### ***3.2.2 The Dynamic Interaction Between Person and Situation***

Shoda and Mischel (2000) argue that the dynamic interplay between person and situation is mediated by internal cognitive and emotional responses shaped by past experiences with similar situational features. These responses lead to consistent patterns of behaviour, referred to as 'behavioural signatures'. As situational features change, distinct cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses are activated, resulting in predictive variability in behaviour across contexts. This principle underscores that behavioural variability is influenced by both different situations and the individual's cognitive and affective processes (Gardner & Quigley, 2015).

The CAPS framework conceptualises this dynamic interaction through an IF–THEN system, where "IF" represents a situational triggering cue, and "THEN" represents the individual's response. This response encompasses both psychological experiences and observable behaviours (Andersen & Thorpe, 2009). This IF-THEN approach enables a context-sensitive understanding of how specific situations elicit consistent patterns of response, which are influenced by the individual's past experiences and internal processes (Zayas et al, 2021).

To illustrate the practical application of the CAPS framework, Table 2 provides examples of how differences in personality traits such as rejection sensitivity, agreeableness, and honesty manifest in distinct IF-THEN behavioural patterns in the workplace. These examples demonstrate the dynamic interplay between individual characteristics and situational contexts, highlighting how CAPS can be used to predict and understand behaviour in organisational settings

**Table 2.**

*Examples of IF-THEN behaviour profiles*

Situation	Characteristic	Example Person A (High Rejection Sensitivity) response to someone not responding to their greeting
<b>Colleagues doesn't respond to greeting</b>	Person A- High Rejection sensitivity	<b>IF</b> they perceive rejection <b>THEN</b> they experience anxiety and may withdraw or lash out defensively.
	Person B- Low Rejection Sensitivity	<b>IF</b> they perceive rejection <b>THEN</b> they remain calm and interpret the situation as inconsequential or unrelated to them, maintaining usual behaviour
<b>Disagreement in a meeting</b>	Person A- High Agreeableness	<b>IF</b> they are in a conflict situation <b>THEN</b> they seek compromise and harmony
	Person B- Low Agreeableness	<b>IF</b> they are in a conflict situation <b>THEN</b> they respond with assertiveness, standing firmly by their position with little attention to compromise and harmony.
<b>Opportunity to take credit for a colleague's work</b>	Person A- High Honesty	<b>IF</b> they are in a situation where they might gain an advantage by omitting the truth <b>THEN</b> they experience discomfort and choose to act truthfully.
	Person B- Low Honesty	<b>IF</b> they are in a situation where they might gain an advantage by lying <b>THEN</b> they may feel little discomfort and choose to deceive if it benefits them.

Note: These examples illustrate typical responses for each trait to specific situations

These examples illustrate how the CAPS framework accounts for both behavioural variability and consistency across contexts by capturing distinct IF-THEN profiles. The interplay between personality traits- such as rejection sensitivity, agreeableness, and honesty-and situational factors demonstrates the utility of CAPS in predicting and explaining behaviour into complex workplace dynamics.

### ***3.2.3 Five Levels of CAPS Analysis***

The CAPS framework identifies five levels of analysis, which collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding interpersonal behaviour:

Level 1: Cognitive-Affective System

Level 2: Behavioural expressions

Level 3: Observers' perceptions

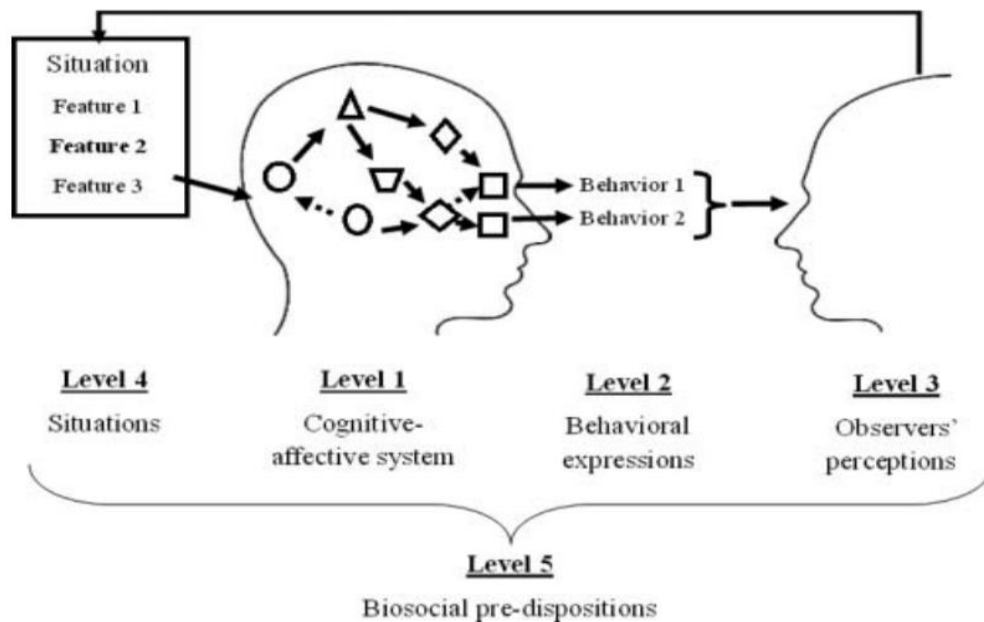
Level 4: Situational features

Level 5: Contextual factors (e.g., culture, relationship etc)

These levels are visually represented in Figure 2, providing a structured approach to analysing the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments.

**Figure 2.**

*Levels of Analysis of Cognitive Affective Processing System (CAPS) Model*



*Note.* From “Advancing the Assessment of Personality Pathology with the Cognitive Affective Processing System”, by S.K. Huprich and S.M. Nelson, 2015, *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 97 (5), p.469.

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At the core of the CAPS framework is the Cognitive Affective System (Level 1), which encompasses interconnected Cognitive-Affective Units (CAUs), including mental representations and schemas (encodings), expectations and beliefs, emotions, goals, and self-regulatory plans. These CAUs interact dynamically, producing distinct patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour in response to situational cues (Kell, 2018). This dynamic interaction accounts for both individual differences and the variability of responses across contexts,



effectively capturing the interplay of 'cool' cognitions and 'hot' emotions (Mischel & Ayduk, 2011).

Empirical research demonstrates that individuals actively manage their cognitive and emotional states by selectively attending to or reinterpreting situations (Miller et al., 1996). This ability shows that individuals are not passive recipients of their environments, but actively select, structure, and transform situations cognitively and emotionally (Elfenbein, 2023). This adaptability highlights the CAPS framework's strength in explaining how behaviour emerges from the interaction of cognitive-affective units and contextual influences.

#### *3.2.3.1 Practical Application of CAPS levels*

To illustrate the practical application of these levels, Table 3 describes each level and provides an example of Person A, who exhibits high rejection sensitivity, responding to a perceived slight (e.g., a colleague not responding to their greeting). The example elucidates how CAPS levels operate cohesively to predict and explain individual responses to social situations.

**Table 3.**

*Description of the five levels of Cognitive Affective Processing System*

Levels	Description	Example Person A with High Rejection Sensitivity responding to someone who ignored their greeting
<b>Level 1:</b> <b>Cognitive-Affective System</b>	Includes Cognitive-Affective Units (CAUs); mental representations and schemas (encodings), expectations and beliefs, affect, goals, and self-regulatory plans.	Person A's system includes schemas related to rejection, making them sensitive to social rejection cues.  CAUS:  Encodings: Interprets being ignored as rejection  Expectations: Anticipates further negative outcomes  Affect: Experiences negative valence characterised by anxiety and fear  Goals: Desires to minimise further negative outcomes  Self- Regulatory plans: Implements coping strategies, avoids engagement
<b>Level 2:</b> <b>Behavioural responses</b>	Interaction of CAUs triggers behavioural responses	Person A withdraws from the situation to avoid further perceived rejection.

Levels	Description	Example Person A with High Rejection Sensitivity responding to someone who ignored their greeting
		May exhibit defensive behaviours, such as curt responses or reticence.
<b>Level 3:</b> <b>Observers perceptions</b>	The behavioural responses are observed by others, triggering the activation of their own CAPS.	Observers perceive Person A's withdrawal or defensiveness and make an interpretation e.g. unfriendliness or hostility (depending on their own internal CAU activation).
<b>Level 4:</b> <b>Situational features</b>	Specific situational features activate or inhibit certain CAUs	The specific situational feature is the social setting where Person A perceives a lack of response to their greeting.
<b>Level 5:</b> <b>Contextual factors</b>	Broader factors such as gender, genetics, and cultural norms influence responses	Person A's response to perceived rejection is also influenced by their genetic predisposition to anxiety, cultural norms around social interactions, and gender-related expectations regarding emotional expression.

*Note.* This example illustrates how each level of the CAPS model contributes to Person A's overall response to a social situation involving potential rejection. The activation of specific CAUs at Level 1 serve as behavioural signatures representing the interplay between context, self-regulatory goals, motivation, beliefs and affect.

By integrating these five levels, the CAPS framework captures both behavioural variability and consistency across contexts. It highlights how cognitive-affective units (Level 1) interact with situational features (Level 4) and contextual factors (Level 5) to shape observable behaviours (Level 2) and influence observers' perceptions (Level 3). This multilevel perspective provides a comprehensive and dynamic framework for understanding interpersonal behaviour, particularly in complex organisational and social contexts.

### ***3.2.4 Influence of CAPS to date***

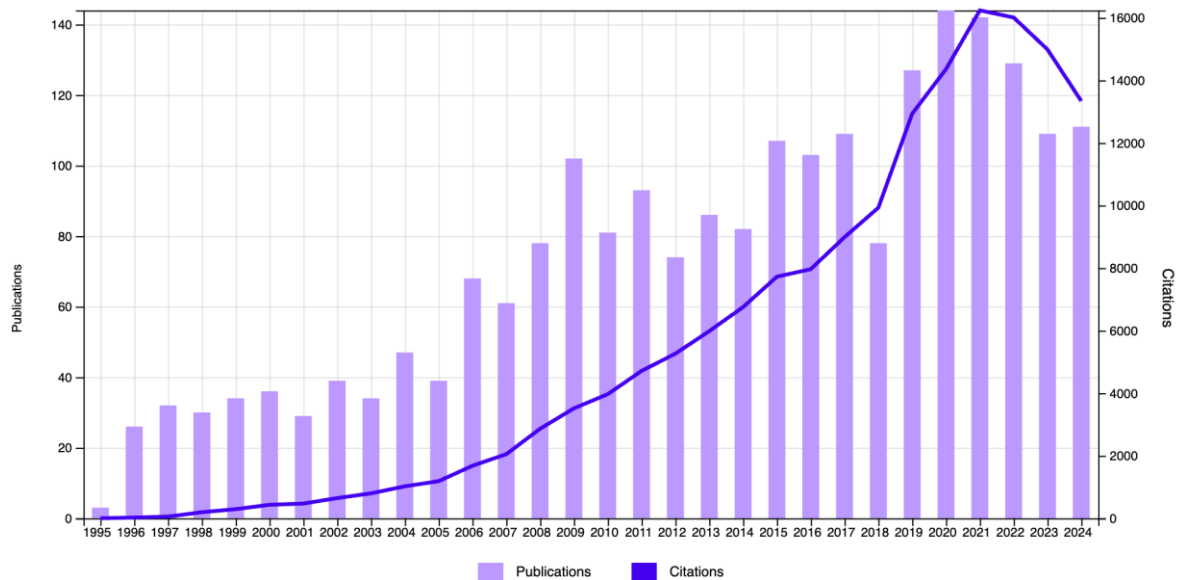
Rooted in personality psychology, the CAPS framework has significantly influenced the fields of personality and social psychology since its introduction by Mischel and Shoda (1995). Its interdisciplinary impact, as evidenced by its citation trajectory across Web of Science categories, underscores its sustained relevance and applicability. Initially focused on personality psychology, CAPS has expanded its reach to diverse disciplines such as management, business, law, and environmental studies, demonstrating its versatility as a meta-theoretical framework. This enduring influence highlights CAPS's capacity to address complex behavioural phenomena across contexts.

CAPS citations reflect a consistent growth over nearly three decades, with 2,233 citations to date and 566 occurring since 2020, signifying its ongoing importance in contemporary research. Social psychology accounts for the largest share of CAPS citations 31%, followed closely by multidisciplinary psychology and applied psychology (30%), and notable contributions in management (12%) and business (5%). Additional fields such as clinical psychology (8%), developmental psychology (4%), general (5%), experimental psychology (4%) and psychiatry 4%, further highlight CAPS's broad interdisciplinary relevance. Recent

applications, in the areas of psychological contract (Liao et al., 2024) and trust (Williams et al. 2020), breach illustrate how CAPS *IF-THEN* behavioural signatures inform schema-related processing in breach dynamics, emphasising cognitive flexibility as a pivotal antecedent in responding to breaches. These findings underscore the framework’s capacity to enrich both theoretical and applied research in the field of trust research.

**Figure 3.**

*Citations of Mischel and Shoda (1995) since publication*



**Note:** Data from Web of Science, provided by Clarivate. Web of Science and Clarivate are trademarks of their respective owners and used herein with permission.

The versatility of CAPS is particularly evident in interdisciplinary disciplines to explain applications. It has been employed to explain situational variations in behaviour across fields as diverse as information science (Taylor et al., 2024), hospitality (Li et al., 2023), environmental studies (Wang et al., 2023), philosophy (Mejia & Skorborg, 2022), management (Yao et al., 2020), general psychology (Kell, 2018), gender studies (Best,

2009), sport psychology (Smith, 2006), prejudice and interracial interactions (Butz & Plant, 2009; Mendoza-Denton & Goldman-Flythe, 2009), social psychology (Sherman et al., 2015), clinical psychology (Cavicchioli & Maffei, 2020), and psychiatry (Shoda & Smith, 2004). This broad applicability underscores CAPS's role as a meta-theory capable of bridging diverse domains to explain complex behavioural phenomena.

At the micro-level, CAPS has been employed to examine individual differences in emotions and behaviours in varying contexts. Applications include anger, aggression and forgiveness (Wilkowski et al., 2010), development of stress management interventions (Shoda et al., 2013), exploration of normal and abnormal personality functioning (Eaton et al., 2009; Huprich & Nelson, 2015b; Roche et al., 2013), and provision of a guiding framework for clinical assessment (Huprich & Nelson, 2015a; Rhadigan & Huprich, 2012). In organisational contexts, CAPS has been utilised to explain employee knowledge hiding (Zhang et al., 2024), employee withdrawal behaviours (Zimmerman et al., 2016), organisational citizenship behaviour (Koopman et al., 2016), the influence of personality patterns of citizenship behaviour (Ilies et al., 2006), contextual variations in transformational leadership behaviours (Dóci and Hofmans, 2015), theories of team personality (Gardner & Quigley, 2015), and examine the effects of coaching on performance (Sue-Chan et al., 2012). This empirical evidence underscores CAPS ability to integrate complementary theories, providing a robust meta-theoretical lens for understanding behavioural patterns and contextual determinants.

Despite its influence, CAPS has not been without criticism. Hogan (2009), argued that the person-situation debate, central to CAPS development, was overstated, claiming that it

lacked practical significance and served as an academic exercise rather than a substantive contribution to personality psychology. He remarked that “young researchers need to publish papers to advance their careers, and this topic seems to generate interest despite deserving only a footnote in the history of personality psychology” (p.249). However, this critique has been challenged by proponents such as Fraley & Shaver (2008), who highlight empirical evidence validating the importance of situational variables in behavioural expression (Sherman et al., 2015). CAPS continues to offer substantial value for advancing theoretical insights and practical applications, particularly by capturing the interplay of self-regulation, motivation, traits, and behaviour within specific environments (Kammrath et al., 2012).

### ***3.2.5 Addressing Theoretical Utility Issues of Social Exchange Theory (SET) using Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS)***

The CAPS framework builds upon its interdisciplinary versatility to address theoretical limitations in trust research, particularly those inherent in Social Exchange Theory (SET). While SET provides valuable insights into interpersonal exchanges via reciprocity norms, it inadequately addresses key complexities such as individual differences, contextual variability, and the multifaceted nature of self-regulation and motivation. CAPS addresses these gaps by integrating cognitive-affective units (CAUs) and situational variables, presenting a more dynamic and integrative understanding of trust dynamics.

The CAPS framework advances a more comprehensive understanding of trust dynamics, particularly in leader-follower interactions, by addressing SET’s boundary conditions. Unlike SET’s static view of reciprocity, CAPS integrates cognitive-affective units and contextual variables into its analysis, offering a more comprehensive and broader analysis

of behaviour. These distinctions are outlined in Table 4, which demonstrates CAPS's effectiveness in addressing the theoretical limitations of SET. It is important to note that CAPS is not presented as a superior replacement for SET, but rather as a flexible framework that can better accommodate the emotional, motivational, and contextual complexities of trust breach events-particularly where SET's assumptions about rational reciprocity fall short.



**Table 4.***Addressing Theoretical Utility Issues using CAPS*

Theoretical Utility Issue	Social Exchange Theory	Cognitive Affective Processing System
Individual Differences	Limited to reciprocity norms and underemphasised	Individual differences integrated into the theory at cognitive-affective level (Level 1) and contextual level (Level 5).
Contextual considerations	Does not sufficiently address the contextual factors that significantly influence trust	Inclusion of situational factors (Level 4) within the theory, accounting for the impact of context on behaviour.
Oversimplification of Self-Regulation	Assumes that individuals' self-regulatory processes aim solely to maximise benefits and minimise costs in inter-individual interactions.	Incorporates a broad understanding of self-regulation as a cognitive-affective unit (Level 1), recognising its complexity and variability beyond rational choice theory.
Motivational Dynamics	Does not account for motivations that may be contrary to rational choice, e.g. motivated attribution of trust repair	Includes motivation as a cognitive-affective Unit (Level 1), allowing for the exploration of motivational dynamics, including non-rational behaviours and responses.

Theoretical Utility Issue	Social Exchange Theory	Cognitive Affective Processing System
Post-Breach Behaviours	Predicts ‘Tit -for Tat’ behaviour in response to breaches	Scope of broader post-breach behaviours, e.g. ‘Tit -for tat’, reframing, avoiding and selective attention.

*Note:* Citations for the boundary conditions include; individual differences (Coyle-Shapiro & Diehl, 2018); contextual considerations (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004) ; Self-regulation (Deng et al., 2018); Motivational dynamics (Weber et al., 2004); Post-Breach behaviours(Gervasi et al., 2022)

CAPS emerges as a robust alternative to Social Exchange Theory, particularly in the context of organisational behaviour and trust dynamics, by addressing variability in individual responses and integrating broader contextual and cognitive-affective influences. By capturing the interplay between individual traits, situational features, and broader contextual factors, CAPS provides a richer, more dynamic account of the interplay between individual traits and workplace relationships, addressing the complexity and variability of trust processes in leader-follower interactions.

Further, CAPS enables a multi-dimensional exploration of trust processes by combining cognitive-affective processing, behavioural responses, and situational and contextual influences, offering a meta-theoretical approach that accommodates various theoretical perspectives, effectively integrating individual differences, context, motivation, and self-regulation, thereby surpassing SET's explanatory scope. This multi-faceted approach provides a novel theoretical framework to enhance our understanding of trust development, breach, and repair processes, and the capacity to capture the complexity and variability of trust processes within organisational settings

Moreover, the CAPS model offers potential for practical applications. By deepening our understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes underlying trust, leaders can develop more effective strategies to build, maintain, breach, and repair trust, thereby fostering more resilient and productive relationships with their followers. This comprehensive approach highlights the framework's promise in both theoretical and practical domains, making it a valuable tool for advancing studies in trust and organisational behaviour.

### ***3.2.6 CAPS limitations***

The CAPS framework offers a sophisticated and integrative lens for examining the dynamic interplay between personality and situational contexts. However, like any meta-theoretical framework, CAPS is not without its limitations. One challenge lies in its methodological application, particularly in identifying active situational features that are relevant to specific behavioural domains and elucidating the psychological processes underlying individual differences in situation-behaviour profiles (Vansteelandt and Van Mechelen, 2006). Addressing these challenges requires interdisciplinary methodologies that incorporate advanced tools and theories from related fields; for example, leveraging insights from neuroscience to illuminate the neural mechanisms that underpin cognitive-affective processes and their interaction with situational variables.

A notable limitation of CAPS is the paucity of studies integrating Organisational Neuroscience (ON) into its framework. By employing tools such as neuroimaging, researchers could enhance CAPS's empirical robustness and gain detailed insights into the neural correlates of cognitive-affective processes and their interactions with situational triggers. For example, neuroimaging methods could help reveal the biological underpinnings of CAUs including how these units are activated in varying contexts. Pessoa (2023) notes that understanding the cognitive-emotional brain requires dissolving traditional boundaries, integrating disciplines biology, psychology, ecology, and computational methods. While this critique extends beyond CAPS, it underscores a broader challenge within the psychological sciences to incorporate neuroscientific insights effectively (Haslam et al., 2022; Waldman et al., 2019). The integration of neuroscientific methodologies into behavioural frameworks represents a pressing need for advancing the empirical precision of psychological models.

Another frequently cited criticism of CAPS is its broad generalisability and the perceived lack of specific, testable predictions about individual behaviours (Roche et al., 2013). This breadth, while a potential limitation in certain applied contexts, underscores CAP's strength as a meta-theoretical framework. Analogous to the DNA meta-theory in biology, CAPS provides a flexible structure for exploring complex interactions among cognition, affect, and behaviour without being constrained by narrowly defined variables (Shoda & Mischel, 2006). This flexibility is a strength, enabling the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives under a unified framework, fostering a comprehensive understanding of trait-situation-behaviour dynamics (Kammrath et al., 2012).

Despite these limitations, the generalisability of CAPS enhances its interdisciplinary applicability, making it particularly well-suited for exploring multifaceted behavioural phenomena, such as those in organisational and interpersonal trust dynamics. By accommodating a wide range of theoretical and empirical insights, CAPS offers researchers a cohesive yet adaptable model that can be tailored to address specific research questions while maintaining its broader theoretical integrity.

### ***3.2.7 Conclusion of CAPS Overview***

The CAPS framework offers an integrative and context-sensitive perspective on the dynamic interplay between individual traits and situational contexts. Developed to address the trait-versus-situation debate, CAPS moves beyond traditional trait theories by emphasising the roles of cognition, emotion, motivation, context, and self-regulatory processes in shaping behaviour. Its process-oriented approach extends the exploration of trust dynamics beyond the limitations of reciprocity-focused frameworks, offering insights into the complexity of trust breach experience and response.

As a flexible meta-theoretical framework, CAPS accommodates context-specific theories and enables researchers to investigate behaviour within complex and variable environments. Empirical evidence supports CAPS's dynamic conceptualisation of personality, which considers behaviour as the product of both stable personality traits and context-dependent influences. This dual perspective aligns with contemporary psychology's recognition of the interplay between individual differences and environmental factors, offering valuable insights into organisational behaviour and interpersonal trust dynamics (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020).

The next section will apply the CAPS framework to trust dynamics, with particular attention to interpersonal and organisational settings. By examining how cognitive-affective units and situational variables shape trust-related behaviours, this discussion aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underpinning trust development, breach, and repair. The discussion will culminate in the presentation of the central research model, demonstrating CAPS's potential to advance theoretical and practical insights into trust dynamics.

### **3.3 Section 2 Application of CAPS to Trust Research**

#### ***3.3.1 Overview of Trust under the CAPS framework***

Trust in relationships encompasses distinct yet interconnected processes, including building, sustaining, breach, and repair (Rousseau et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). These processes represent the ebb and flow of interpersonal trust, and can be examined across various levels of analysis, including individual, group, and organisational referents. Given the central focus of this research on leader-follower trust breaches, this section

explores trust dynamics at the individual level, with particular emphasis on breaches experienced by followers in their interactions with immediate supervisors.

The CAPS framework provides a processual and integrative lens for examining trust breach dynamics, offering a integrative perspective that captures the interaction of traits, states, contexts, and self-regulatory processes. This comprehensive approach positions trust as a dynamic phenomenon, shaped by the interplay of cognitive, affective, motivational, and regulatory mechanisms. By addressing the inherent ebb and flow of trust in relationships and responding to calls for more dynamic perspectives in trust research (Lewicki et al., 2006; Searle et al., 2018), CAPS enriches theoretical understanding by transcending the reciprocity-focused limitations of Social Exchange Theory. Specifically, CAPS incorporates individual cognitive and emotional processes to explain variations in trust-related behaviours, extending beyond the explanatory scope of this traditional model.

This section presents an applied overview of the CAPS framework as a meta-theoretical lens for examining trust breach dynamics. Using illustrative leader-follower scenarios, the discussion elucidates processes involved in trust breach and repair from the follower's perspective. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of processual mechanisms underpinning trust breach dynamics at the individual level, particularly within the context of follower- leader interactions.

Unlike traditional literature reviews, this section departs from the standard format to demonstrate the practical application of CAPS to trust research. By focusing on its utility, this section underscores CAPS's superiority as a framework for understanding trust breaches, highlighting its capacity to integrate and extend other theoretical perspectives. This adaptability positions CAPS as a versatile and expansive framework, offering novel insights

into trust breach phenomena and advancing both theoretical and practical understanding within the field.

### ***3.3.2 Application of CAPS framework to Trust Breach in Leader Follower Relationships***

This section applies the CAPS framework to understanding trust breach in leader follower relationships. By integrating cognitive, affective, motivational and self-regulatory processes, the CAPS framework offers an integrative perspective on how trust breaches are experienced and how they influence subsequent behaviours in these relationships. The goal is to demonstrate the framework's applicability within the specific context of trust breaches, illustrating the relevance of each CAPS level to trust breach and post-breach behaviours. Rather than proposing a novel theory of trust breach, this application of CAPS demonstrates how existing constructs-such as trustworthiness perceptions, emotional reactions, and self-regulation-can be coherently interpreted within a psychologically informed, context-sensitive framework. Each subsection focuses on a specific level of the CAPS framework. While this section presents each CAPS level sequentially for structural clarity, it is important to note these levels operate concurrently across multiple dimensions of automaticity and awareness, rather than as a deliberate sequential linear process (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). This interconnectedness underscores CAPS's strength in capturing the complex and dynamic interplay of factors that shape trust dynamics in leader-follower relationships.

#### **Level 1 Cognitive Affective Units**

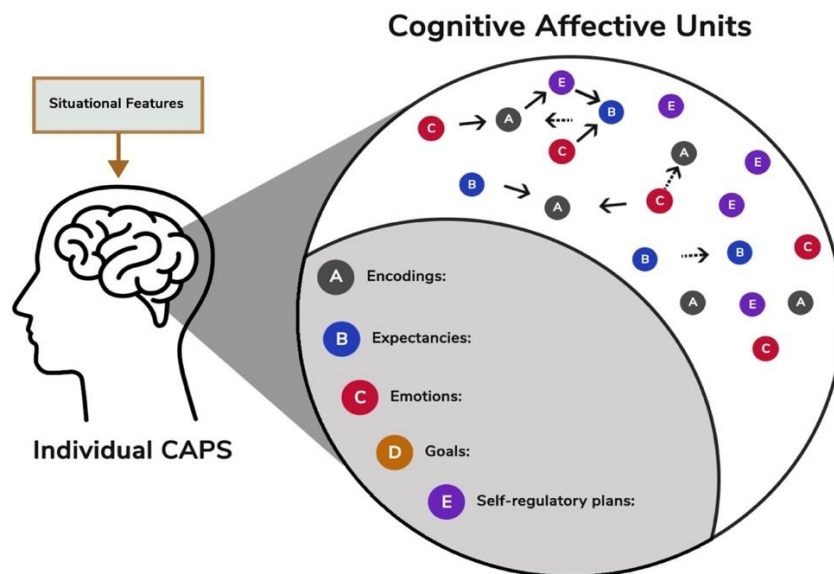
Cognitive Affective Units (CAUs) encompass encodings, expectations and beliefs, affects, goals, and self-regulatory plans that interact dynamically as individuals interpret situations (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). These CAUs influence goals and generate behaviours, they are not isolated, discrete units merely elicited as responses; rather, they interact and reciprocally



influence each other (Mischel & Shoda, 1998). Figure 4 illustrates this dynamic interaction among CAUs.

**Figure 4.**

*Cognitive Affective Units (CAUs)*



Notes Adapted from “Histopathological Features of Parkinson's Disease and Alzheimer's Disease”, by BioRender.com (2024). Retrieved from <https://app.biorender.com/biorender-templates>

### **Encodings: The research context: Dyadic Trust Leader Follower Relationships.**

Encodings refer to the mental representations and interpretations individuals use to categorise and make sense of their environment (Bellana et al., 2021; Weick et al., 2014) . These mental categorisations -whether for oneself, others, situations, or events (Mischel & Shoda, 1995), help simplify complex environments by serving as automatic cognitions, conserving limited conscious attentional capacity (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Encodings are shaped by past experiences and personal traits, which influence how individuals perceive and react to various situations (Heslin et al., 2019). As with other cognitive affective units,

encodings vary among individuals, influencing behaviour uniquely (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015). Memories of significant others and relationships are stored in our minds and can be triggered unconsciously when new individuals remind us of those significant others, influencing our thoughts, evaluations, motivations, and behaviours, and can also lead to shifts in self-perception and self-regulation (Andersen & Przybylinski, 2018). These processes are closely related to schemas, which are overarching knowledge structures that capture common patterns from various experiences and significantly shaping how we perceive, interpret, and remember events (Gilboa & Marlatte, 2017).

In trust dynamics, trust schemas are categorisations that enable quick, automatic judgments about trustworthiness, often based on past experiences and operating below the level of conscious awareness (McEvily, 2011). These trust related encodings are activated in contextually relevant situations (Wildman et al., 2012). For example, research has shown that trusting behaviour can be primed through relational schemas (Huang & Murnighan, 2010), and that causal schemas play a role in shaping the attributions made about individuals (Ferrin & Dirks, 2003). As Nooteboom (2021) highlights, trust encompasses an emotional and intuitive dimension, underscoring the affective components that accompany schema based processes.

In leader-follower relationships followers' encoding processes influence leader evaluation (Gruda & Kafetsios, 2020). This can explain why attitudes toward direct leaders, such as supervisors often differ from those toward broader organisational leadership, like executive teams (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Direct leaders, through ongoing interactions, influence subordinate behaviour and attitudes by acting as interpretive filters, creating shared schemas and encodings within their teams (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016). Leaders themselves have

situation encoding schemas, which are essential elements for understanding how they perceive and respond to the situations they face (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020).

Extending this understanding to trust breach research, trust violations are negative affective events with schema-based processing (Williams et al., 2020). The triggering event typically activates attributional processes, where followers' past experiences with trustworthy or untrustworthy leaders influence their current perceptions and evaluations of their leader's trust-related behaviours (Williams et al., 2020). For example, a follower who has previously encountered untrustworthy leaders may be more inclined to interpret a current leader's actions through a lens of suspicion, based on pre-existing schemas. As trust is subjective and trust violation can be interpreted and responded to differently (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2015) the cognitive sensemaking that follows a breach is important to trust repair (Tomlinson et al., 2021). Encodings influence sensemaking, and, as highlighted by Fehr et al. (2010), attributions of intent, responsibility and severity influence perceptions and post breach behaviour.

### **Expectations and beliefs: Interpersonal Trust trustworthiness and P2T.**

Expectations and beliefs are fundamental components in shaping trust within leader-follower relationships. They serve as the basis for forming predictive assessments about the likely outcomes of behaviours in specific situations, including the perceived likelihood of achieving desired goals or encountering negative consequences (Heslin et al., 2019). In the context of trust, these expectations and beliefs are closely tied to perceptions of trustworthiness, which are influenced by beliefs about a leader's ability, benevolence and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995).

Trust is conceptualised as a mental process involving expectation, interpretation and suspension Möllering (2001) where individuals “make a leap of faith toward positive expectations” that often exceed rational justification (Dirks & De Jong, 2022, p.250). This leap underscores the inherently evaluative nature of trust, where perceptions of trustworthiness are formed based on the belief that the leader will act in a way that aligns with the follower’s expectations (Holtz et al., 2020). These expectations and beliefs, not only influence trust formation, but also play a role in maintaining trust and determining how trust is affected by breaches (Jones & Shah, 2016). Furthermore, dyadic relationships also involve dyadic meta perception- individuals belief about how another person perceives them (Kenny, 1988). This concept encompasses felt trust, which is the individual’s belief about the extent to which they are trusted by another group or person (Salamon & Robinson, 2008). Felt trust is linked to citizenship behaviour and can also incur personal costs (Baer et al., 2015). More recent research has emphasised the significance of the meta-accuracy in felt trust perceptions and its impact on conflict between leaders and followers (Campagna et al., 2020). Meta-perceptions influence an individual’s thoughts, emotions, behaviours and interpersonal relationships (de Jong et al., 2024; Grutterink & Meister, 2022).

Trust breaches are linked to unmet or violated expectations, and can profoundly impact relationships (Dirks & De Jong, 2022; Haselhuhn et al., 2015; Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017). The type, causality and domain of trust breaches significantly influence the trustor’s perception and response to the breach (Chen et al., 2011; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). For instance, a breach related to a leader’s integrity might evoke a stronger negative response compared to a breach involving competence, due to the fundamental nature of integrity in trust dynamics (Kim et al., 2013). Understanding these distinctions is essential for effectively addressing and repairing trust breaches (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017).

Research indicates that expectations and beliefs about trust and trustworthiness are critical due to their relationships with various organisational outcomes such as organisational commitment to turnover intent (Mölders et al., 2019). The processing of trust breaches involves complex beliefs and expectations regarding trust, trustworthiness, and perceived intentionality behind the breach (Kähkönen et al., 2021). It is proposed that followers' subjective interpretations of these breaches are shaped by their prior experiences, the interplay with encodings and the specific expectations they hold. For example, if a follower previously viewed a leader as highly competent and benevolent, a breach might be perceived as an anomaly rather than a pattern of untrustworthiness, potentially facilitating trust repair (Sharma et al., 2023). Moreover, recent studies suggest that different types of trust breaches—those involving ability, integrity, or benevolence—engage distinct neural mechanisms (van der Werff et al., 2023). Trust repair is considered successful when the trustor once again holds confident, positive expectations of the trustee (Sharma et al., 2023).

In summary, expectations and beliefs are central to the formation, maintenance, and repair of trust. They shape how trust is established, how breaches are perceived, and processes of trust repair unfold. CAPS suggests that when these expectations are disrupted, resulting trust violations activate a dynamic relationship between cognitive evaluations, affective response influenced by expectations, beliefs and self-regulatory drive.

### **Affect: Emotional Responses to Stimuli**

Affect encompasses the emotional responses, both positive and negative, that individuals experience in reaction to internal or external stimuli. These emotional reactions play a crucial role in shaping goals, self-regulation and behaviours (Olekals & Caza, 2024; Williams, 2015). Significant events trigger emotional goals, which in turn drive individuals

to regulate emotions through social interaction (Williams et al., 2018). This process of emotion goal pursuit through social interaction is referred to as interpersonal emotion regulation (IER), wherein individuals alter their own or others' emotions through social processes (Zaki & Williams, 2013). Affect, which is frequently operationalised in terms of valence- defined as “the hedonic tone of emotional experience ranging from unpleasant (bad) to pleasant (good)” (Kragel & LaBar, 2016, p.446) is a key component in this regulatory process.

In the context of trust dynamics, affect plays a crucial role, particularly when trust is breached. Interpersonal trust breach events are typically experienced as negative affective events, which can impact post transgression response (Eghbali et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2020). Chen et al. (2011) propose that different affective experiences exist for each dimension of trustworthiness, with benevolence proposed to generate the highest positive affect, followed by integrity, and then ability. They propose similar affective experiences for breach attributions, i.e. breaches of integrity provoking stronger negative affect compared to breaches of ability expectations and violations of benevolence proposed to elicit more intense negative affect than breaches of integrity. Van der Werff et al., (2023) provide support for breaches of integrity provoking stronger negative affect compared to breaches of ability but did not provide support for benevolence breaches eliciting more negative affect than integrity or ability breaches.

Sharma et al. (2023) highlight that the importance of affect in understanding trust breaches, noting that negative affect can hinder trust repair by influencing the cognitive processing of social information. Furthermore, they highlight that as affect and expectancy are main drivers of action (Weiner, 1988) specific verbal and behavioural repair actions can reduce negative affect and influence trust restoration.

Despite the recognised importance of affect in trust dynamics, much of the existing literature has focused predominantly on cognitive factors, often relegating emotion and affect to a tangential role (Dirks & De Jong, 2022). Consequently, reviews have consistently identified emotion and affect as under-studied areas, highlighting their significant potential for future research (Lee et al., 2023). The CAPS framework provides a valuable lens through which the interplay between cognitive and affective processes can be better understood, offering a more comprehensive approach to examining trust breach dynamics.

### **Goals: Desire to Maintain Relationship.**

Internally represented desired states, goals serving as guiding forces that individuals strive to attain and maintain through self-regulation processes (Vancouver & Day, 2005). Hierarchically structured and intrinsically linked to affect, goals enable individuals to monitor their progress towards these desired states (Carver, 2004, Carver & Scheier, 2000). They may be consciously set or subconsciously primed, often triggered by situational cues outside conscious awareness (Chen et al., 2021). As fundamental drivers of human motivation, both consciously set and subconsciously primed goals can exert similar effects on behaviour (Latham et al., 2017; Locke & Latham, 2019). Additionally, goals also influence attitudes by focusing attention on the positive or negatives aspect of a target or by interpreting features of an event in a specific way that is aligned with higher-order objectives (Melnikoff et al., 2020).

In the context of trust research, conceptual work suggests that goals play a crucial role in the initiation, development, and maintenance of trust, and trust motivation, alongside trustworthiness and trust propensity, is considered a critical antecedent of trust (van der Werff, et al., 2019). It is suggested that individuals continuously monitor and adjust their

actions- such as cognitive restructuring and selective attention-to reduce discrepancies between their current state and their trust related goals (Carver & Scheier, 1982). They argue that motivational forces determine the stability and resilience of trust. When a trust breach occurs, the trustor's motivational drivers-whether intrinsic, such as the enjoyment of the relationship, or extrinsic, such as career dependency- will influence how they regulate their cognition, affect, and behaviour to attend to maintain alignment with their trust goals (van der Werff et al., 2019).

Furthermore, relationship dependence significantly influences trust motivation and attribution (Weber et al., 2004). Tomlinson (2011) suggests that relationship dependence may trigger a 'transformation of motivation', whereby the dependent party responds to trust breach through behaviours that are oriented towards preservation of the relationship. This concept aligns with the idea that the motivation to trust, shaped by affect, plays a significant role in influencing trust through the mechanism of motivated reasoning (Williams, 2001). Motivated reasoning, as defined by (Kunda, 1990), occurs when individuals' goals bias their cognitive processes, leading to skewed beliefs about the nature, causes and likelihood of various events. This cognitive bias can distort attributions and influence how events are perceived. For example, Luchies et al. (2013) found that individuals with higher levels of trust in their partners recalled fewer transgressions and experienced fewer negative emotions related to the transgressions than those with lower trust levels. These findings suggests that goals, motivations, cognitions and affect interact to shape how trust breaches are perceived and managed. As previously noted in Chapter 1, research by Lalot et al. (2025) supports this view, demonstrating that motivational orientations influence trust-related appraisals, aligning with CAPS's emphasis on goal driven processing.



### **Self-regulatory plans; Avoidance, Revenge and Reconciliation.**

Self-regulation involves the process of goal selection, planning, and pursuit by guiding behaviour, thoughts and emotions, while continuously monitoring progress (Lord et al., 2010b). Central to this process are self-regulatory plans, which encompass potential behaviours and strategies that are shaped by situational cues, and attentional mechanisms (Mischel & Ayduk, 2002). These plans guide how individuals navigate their environments and pursue their goals (Mischel & Ayduk, 2011). A specific aspect ‘Understanding of self-regulation’ necessitates a comprehension of the interactive dynamics between traits and the reciprocal influence of cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioural processes (O’Shea et al., 2017). There are considered to be two distinct motivational systems that guide the pursuit of the goals – promotion focus and prevention focus – both representing a regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997). Regulatory focus determines different actions, a focus on promotion emphasises achieving accomplishments and aspirations, often involving risk taking for potential gains, while a prevention focus prioritises safety and responsibilities, aiming to avoid losses and maintain security (Righetti et al., 2022).

Although self-regulation has been explored to a limited extent in trust research, insights can be drawn from findings in the social psychology and organisational literatures. Research in social psychology has shown that regulatory focus influences conflict strategies: relationship promotion is linked to more constructive accommodation, while relationship prevention is associated with greater negotiation (Rodrigues et al., 2019). Additionally, trust has been shown to drive forgiveness, particularly in promotion focused individuals, while commitment is a key motivator for forgiveness in prevention-focused individuals (Molden & Finkel, 2010).

Revenge, willingness to reconcile and avoidance are recognised as employee reactions to harm and wrongdoing in the workplace (Aquino et al., 2006). Revenge, workplace retaliation, is considered to be driven by dual regulatory processes of cognition and affective reactions (Long & Christian, 2015). As a common form of aggression, revenge has been positioned as both the absence of self-control and as a form of effortful self-control (Chester, 2024). Power influences the likelihood of revenge: people are less likely to seek revenge against more powerful individuals and employees will seek revenge when they hold a higher position than the offender, whereas low power individuals may fantasise about revenge (Jackson et al., 2019). Conversely, avoidance is a recognised form of emotion regulation, experiential avoidance refers to avoiding internal stimuli e.g. thoughts or emotions whereas behavioural avoidance is avoiding external stimuli e.g. situations or people (Naragon-Gainey et al., 2017). In interpersonal conflict behavioural avoidance requires few cognitive resources and is considered helpful in regulating high-intensity emotions (Sheppes et al., 2014). Finally, the willingness to reconcile has been described as increasing the possibility of restoring trust (Tomlinson et al., 2004).

## **Level 2 Behavioural Expression: Outcomes**

As outlined previously, CAPS activation involves self-regulatory processes and these processes influence behavioural expression. However, in the context of trust breaches, followers' behavioural responses have often been examined within the broader scope of trust repair rather than focusing on the independent experience of trust violation (Wildman et al., 2022). The gap in the literature has resulted in the absence of a dedicated taxonomy specifically addressing responses to trust breaches. To address this gap, insights can be drawn from related fields. For example, Bies & Tripp (1996) identified a range of individual responses to perceived injustices, including revenge fantasies, inaction, private

confrontation, identity restoration, social withdrawal, feuding, and forgiveness. Building on these categories, Aquino et al. (2006) expanded the scope to include reconciliation-extending acts of goodwill toward the trustee and avoidance, characterised by withdrawing from the relationship. Other studies have further distinguished responses such as punishment and leniency (Zipay et al., 2021), the pacification and aggravation effects of speaking with colleagues (Baer et al., 2018) and gossip, which can serve as either a conflict management behaviour (Dijkstra et al., 2014) or as information signalling about the conflict (Sun et al., 2023).

Insights into responses to trust breaches can also be effectively informed by the psychological contract breach literature, particularly through the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (EVLN) framework originally proposed by Hirschman (1970) and further refined by Farrell (1983). The EVLN framework categorises responses to dissatisfaction or psychological contract breaches into four types:

- Exit, which involves leaving the situation.
- Voice, entailing efforts to change the situation.
- Loyalty, characterised by enduring challenges without complaint.
- Neglect, marked by disengagement or inattentiveness, such as lateness or absenteeism (Farrell, 1983).

Subsequent research has refined these categories, differentiating between aggressive and passive voice (Hagedoorn et al., 1999) and classifying responses along destructive-constructive and active -passive dimensions (Rusbult et al., 1982), further enhancing the understanding of behavioural responses to breaches.

In their review of literature on leader follower transgressions, Epitropaki et al. (2020) highlight the dimensionality of EVLN response, specifically distinguishing between active versus passive and destructive versus constructive reactions. They classify exit behaviours, such as seeking revenge or ending the relationship, as actively destructive, while voice reactions are considered actively constructive, focusing on problem-solving and dialogue. Loyalty reactions, including patience and issue minimisation, are deemed as passively constructive, whereas neglect behaviours, such as stonewalling, are viewed as passively destructive. While these distinctions offer a valuable framework, they may not fully capture the complexity and variability of behavioural responses. The delayed nature of revenge noted by Jackson et al. (2019), for example, underscores the need for a broader understanding of how temporal factors and individual motivations influence behavioural expressions.

In summary, behavioural responses to trust breaches are diverse, encompassing active and passive, constructive and destructive dimensions. The application of the CAPS framework offers the potential to explore cognitive-affective and self-regulatory processes that influence diverse behavioural expressions following trust violations.

### **Level 3 Observer Perceptions**

The CAPS framework extends beyond individual behaviours to include the reactions and interpretations of observers, highlighting the broader social context within which trust dynamics unfold. Trust exchanges in the workplace rarely occur in isolation; rather, they are embedded within teams or workgroups, where both trustor and trustee are embedded in a social network (Brodts & Neville, 2013). These observers can be significantly affected by workplace trust breaches, as witnessing such events often triggers sensemaking processes that influence attitudes and behaviours (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; Reich et al., 2021). For

instance, research has demonstrated that observing a leader's use of aggressive humour towards a coworker diminishes the observers' trust in the leader (Wang et al., 2024).

Observers' perceptions are further shaped by their awareness of psychological contract violations involving colleagues. Costa & Coyle-Shapiro (2021) argue that such observations prompt sensemaking processes that reshape observers' own psychological contracts over time. Moreover, third-party observers can actively participate in trust repair. Yu et al. (2017) found that third party observers, although not directly involved in the trust breach, can mediate communication and understanding between the transgressor and the victim, thereby contributing to the restoration of trust.

At the dyadic level, recognition of trust violations varies between leaders and followers, with each party interpreting breaches differently (Epitropaki et al., 2020). Leaders may fail to detect incidents, downplay their significance, or misattribute their causes due to relational attributions, personality traits, or other mediating factors (Kluemper et al., 2019). Attributions play a pivotal role in shaping responses to transgressions, influencing not only how victims respond but also how transgressors interpret victims' motives and behaviours following a breach (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Gollwitzer & Okimoto, 2021). These attributions are often conveyed through verbal and non-verbal actions (Six & Skinner, 2010), representing cues that activate cognitive affective units within the leader i.e. the leaders own cognitive affective processing system (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020).

CAPS activation in leaders results in behavioural expressions, which have been categorised as verbal responses (e.g. apologies; denials, promises, explanations, excuses, constructive voice, emotional support) or substantive actions (e.g. offering penance, financial compensation, investigations, regulation, renegotiating psychological contracts) (Kähkönen

et al., 2021). These behaviours, in turn, are interpreted by followers, triggering further activation of cognitive-affective units (CAU). This dynamic interplay between trustor and trustee is well-represented in Epitropaki et al.'s (2020) model of leader follower transgressions, as shown in Figure 5. This model aligns with the CAPS framework, integrating cognition, affective reactions, situational cues, attributions, and behaviours, though it does not explicitly include self-regulatory behaviours or goals.

**Figure 5.**

*Representation of Leader Follower Transgressions*

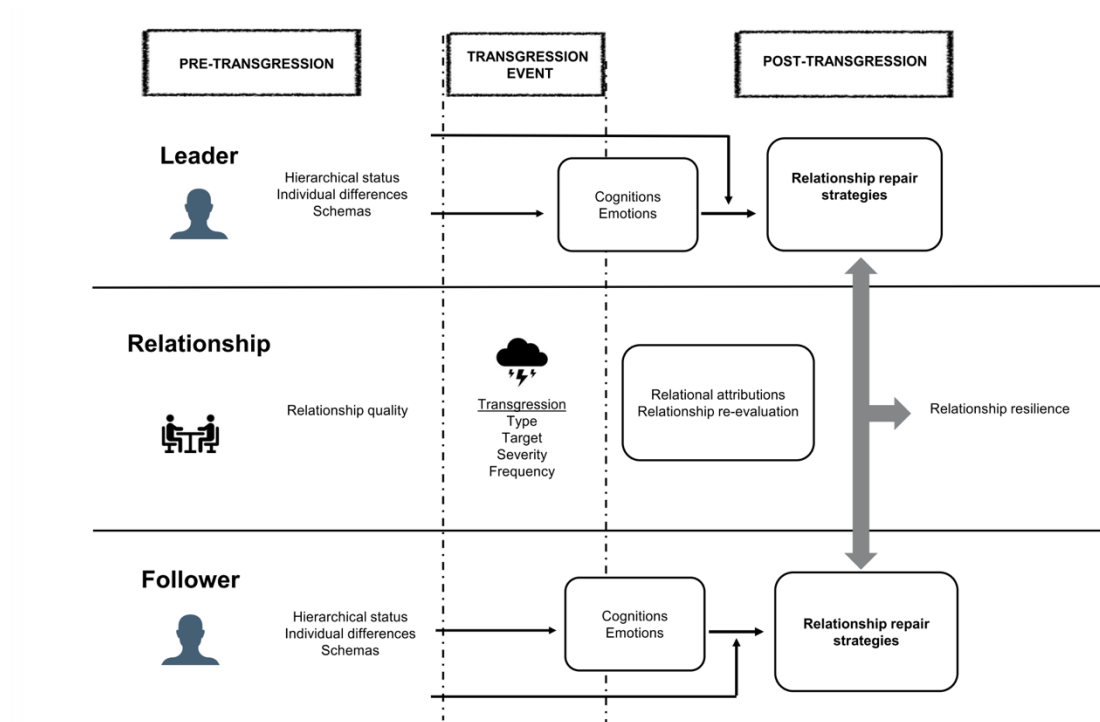


Fig. 3. An integrative process model of leader-follower transgressions, relationship repair strategies and outcomes.

*Note:* The cognitive affective elements of CAU's are displayed as cognitions and emotions. Epitropaki, O., Radulovic, A. B., Ete, Z., Thomas, G., & Martin, R. (2020). Leader-follower transgressions, relationship repair strategies and outcomes: A state-of-the-science review and a way forward. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 31(1), Article 101376 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101376>

#### **Level 4 Situation Features: Types of Trust Breach**

The CAPS framework emphasises the role of situational features in shaping behavioural responses, highlighting how specific environmental cues activate latent traits and cognitive-affective units (CAUs). Trust breaches can be understood as critical situational triggers that disrupt established relational dynamics, influencing trustor responses. These breaches are considered to vary in type and severity, reflecting differences in the trustworthiness dimensions violated (Lewicki et al., 2006; Chen et al., 2011). This section integrates key insights from trust and leadership research, including Fraser (2010) and Grover et al. (2014), to explore how situational features influence trust dynamics in leader-follower relationships.

#### **Breaches as Situational Triggers**

The psychological contract literature provides valuable insights, emphasising how certain triggers prompt employees to reassess their relationship with the organisation. Research has shown that these triggers, which can be direct, indirect, or slow, shift cognitive processing from automatic to conscious reflection on the contract's terms. Over time, the accumulation and interconnectedness of these triggers, particularly negative ones, intensify scrutiny of the relationship, heightening sensitivity to potential breaches. This process ultimately leads to perceptions of psychological contract violations, as repeated triggers surpass an individual's tolerance, solidifying the perception of a breached psychological contract (Wiechers et al., 2022). For instance, events that damage an individual's sense of self, such as through public humiliation or ridicule, are likely to increase the desire for revenge (Restubog et al., 2011). In a similar manner, trust breaches can be conceptualised as situational features.

Trait Activation Theory, proposed by Tett and Burnett (2003), suggests that traits, such as propensity to trust, remain latent until activated by trait-relevant cues. For example, a breach

of trust may act as a trigger for propensity to trust activation. This interactionist approach fits with the CAPS framework's emphasis on personality-context interplay, where situational factors press latent traits into expression, influencing behavioural outcomes.

### **Categorising Trust Breaches: Task, Person, and Ethics Focused**

Epitropaki et al. (2020) propose a tripartite framework for categorising leader-follower transgressions: task-focused, person-focused, and ethics-focused breaches, incorporating trustworthiness dimensions. Specifically, task-focused breaches correspond to the leader's ability, while ethics focused transgressions align with integrity. This framework incorporates trust breach events highlighted in research by Fraser (2010) and leader specific breaches highlighted by Grover et al. (2014). Fraser (2010) highlights eight trust breach events; disrespectful behaviours; communication issues; unmet expectations; ineffective leadership; unwillingness to acknowledge; performance issues; incongruence; and structural issues. Grover et al. (2014) proposed a model of recoverable and unrecoverable breaches, however, as Epitropaki et al. (2020) note, it is not the type of breach alone that determines recoverability but the attributions made by the trustor regarding the breach's intent and severity. It is the attributions that influence whether the breach is perceived as recoverable.

Research highlights that trust violations are not uniform but vary based on the type of trustworthiness that has been compromised—be it the leader's ability, integrity, or benevolence (Lewicki et al., 2006). These distinctions underscore the importance of situational triggers, which activate CAUs, and shape trust related behaviours in leader-follower relationships. This context-sensitive understanding reinforces the significance of exploring trust breaches through both categorical frameworks and the trustor's subjective attributions to comprehensively capture their impact.



The tripartite framework of task, person, and ethics-focused breaches offers a valuable lens for understanding trust violations in leader-follower relationships, demonstrating alignment with trustworthiness dimensions. It is important to explore whether, as Epitropaki et al. (2020) emphasise, it is the attributional processes—rather than the type of breach itself—that most significantly determine trust repair potential. By integrating these insights with the CAPS framework and Trait Activation Theory, trust breaches can be understood as dynamic, context-dependent triggers that activate specific traits like propensity to trust, shaping the interplay of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses in followers.

### **Level 5 Bio Social Cultural Context**

Mischel (1973) emphasises the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments, asserting that “the person continuously influences the "situations" of his life as well as being affected by them in a mutual, organic two-way interaction” (p. 278). This dynamic underscores the importance of context in understanding person-situation interactions and organisational behaviour (Johns, 2001). Context plays a pivotal role in the development of trust (Child & Möllering, 2003), shaping how followers appraise leaders and influencing reactions, particularly in high-stress situations that demand interpersonal emotion regulation (Bradley et al., 2024; Thiel et al., 2015) .

Context, defined as the surrounding factors that influence phenomena under investigation at both proximal and distal levels of analysis (Mowday & Sutton, 1993), has long been recognised as central to understanding behaviour. Early CAPS researchers highlighted proximal situational elements and distal cultural factors as critical influences on the activation and interaction of individual CAU’s (Mendoza-Denton & Mischel, 2007). For example, research has shown that HR policies- an example of organisational context- can

shape how employees interpret managerial behaviour, especially in conflict situations (Korsgaard et al., 2002).

In the context of leader-follower trust breaches, several key considerations emerge. Distal influences, such as broader organisational culture and societal norms, shape the general framework within which trust unfolds, while proximal influences such as the leader-follower relationship, characterised by power asymmetry, influence direct consequences of breach (Epitropaki et al., 2020).

### ***3.3.3 Application of CAPS model to Trust Breach Dynamics***

This section illustrates how the CAPS model can be applied to understand trust breach experiences within leader-follower relationships. Using a scenario-based approach, it demonstrates the dynamic interplay between cognitive, affective, motivational, and contextual processes that shape follower responses. The aim is to show how these interconnected mechanisms operate in real time, influencing immediate reactions and longer-term behavioural outcomes.

#### **Scenario: Application of CAPS Framework to Trust Breach and Post-Breach Response**

To illustrate this application, the following scenario presents a trust breach from the follower's perspective within the context of a leader-follower relationship. Sam, a follower, learns that Alex, their supervisor, inadvertently shared confidential information about them. This trust breach triggers a sequence of responses. The scenario is structured using the five levels of the CAPS framework and is visually represented in Figure 6 ,which follows the scenario box.

## Scenario

**Level 1: Sam's Cognitive-Affective System** Sam's cognitive-affective system includes schemas related to trust, such as expectations of transparency, reliability, and support. The breach activates negative emotional and cognitive responses. Sam interprets the breach as a significant adverse event but attributes it to a mistake rather than intentional harm. Nonetheless this incident shakes Sam's belief in Alex's reliability and trustworthiness. Sam feels betrayed, anxious, and disappointed. Consequently, Sam's goals shift from collaboration to self-protection and re-evaluation of the relationship, leading to a plan to reduce information sharing and adopt a cautious approach in future interactions with Alex.

**Level 2: Behavioural Responses** As a result, Sam withdraws from interactions, reduces openness, and avoids collaboration with Alex. Sam also discusses the concerns with colleagues, influencing their perception of Alex.

**Level 3: Observers' Perceptions** Alex notices Sam's withdrawal and receives feedback from colleagues about Sam's concerns. This prompts Alex to attempt to repair the trust and rectify the situation.

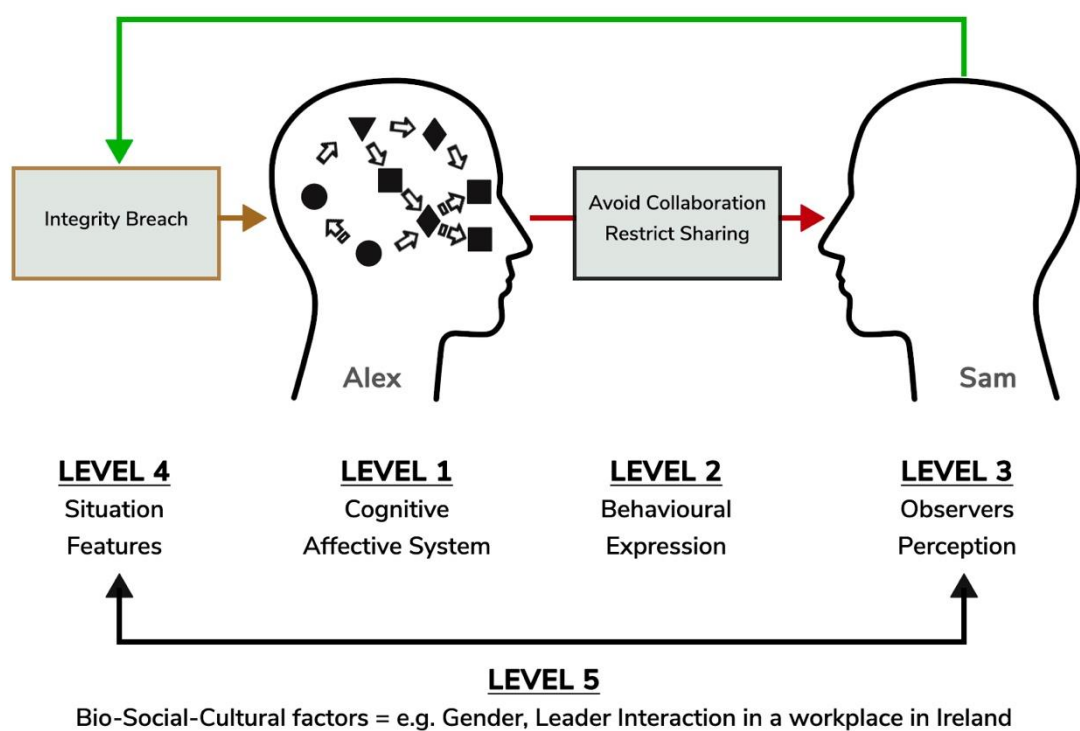
**Level 4: Situational Features** The breach involves a private personal issue, exacerbating its impact. Sam's cognitive-affective units (CAUs) related to betrayal and privacy are activated, leading to heightened emotional responses and cautious behaviour.

**Level 5: Contextual Factors** Broader cultural norms and past experiences with trust in leadership influence Sam's reaction, shaping the intensity of the response and approach to managing the breach.

Figure 6 visually represents the CAPS framework applied to this trust breach, illustrating the cascading effects across five levels of analysis: cognitive-affective system, behavioural responses, observer’s perceptions, situational features, and contextual factors.

**Figure 6.**

*CAPS framework applied to leader-follower Trust Breach from a follower’s perspective*



*Note.* Alex is the follower and Sam is the leader. Adapted from “Advancing the Assessment of Personality Pathology with the Cognitive Affective Processing System”, by S.K. Huprich and S.M. Nelson, 2015, *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 97 (5), p.469. Copyright 2015 Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2015.1058806>.

This figure demonstrates how the CAPS framework captures Sam’s (the follower) and Alex’s (the leader) perspectives on a trust breach. It visualises the sequential and interactive processes that influence trust dynamics at various levels. The levels of the cognitive processing system from both leader and follower perspectives are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.**

*Application of CAPS framework to follower Trust Breach and post-breach response*

<b>CAPS Framework</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Sam's (Followers ) Perspective</b>	<b>Alex's (Leaders) Perspective</b>
<b>Cognitive-Affective System</b>	Level 1	Sam's schemas of trust (transparency, reliability, support) are disrupted. Interprets breach as a mistake, but trust in Alex is shaken. Feels betrayed, anxious, and disappointed. Goals shift from collaboration to self-protection and caution.	Alex's schemas of leadership (discretion, trust, reliability) are disrupted. Feels guilt and anxiety, knowing it was a mistake. Goals shift to repairing trust. Plans to address mistake with Sam.
<b>Behavioural Responses</b>	Level 2	Withdraws from interactions, reduces openness, avoids collaboration, and discusses concerns with colleagues, affecting their perception of Alex.	Reaches out to apologise and explain, expresses a commitment to future confidentiality and support for current situation.
<b>Observers' Perceptions</b>	Level 3	Alex notices Sam's withdrawal and receives feedback from colleagues, prompting an attempt to repair trust.	Notices Sam's withdrawal and receives feedback, prompting further efforts to repair the relationship and demonstrate accountability.
<b>Situational Features</b>	Level 4	Breach involves a private personal issue, intensifying its impact. Sam's CAUs related to	Private issue heightens impact. Alex's empathy and responsibility are

CAPS Framework	Level	Sam's (Followers ) Perspective	Alex's (Leaders) Perspective
		betrayal and privacy are activated, leading to cautious behaviour.	activated, leading to proactive behaviour to mitigate damage.
<b>Contextual Factors</b>	Level 5	Broader cultural norms and past experiences with leadership influence Sam's reaction, shaping the response's intensity and approach.	Cultural norms and past experiences with conflict influence Alex's approach, emphasising transparency, empathy, and accountability.

*Note.* Example Alex shared confidential personal information about Sam inappropriately at a meeting. The breach triggers a post-breach response. The example illustrates how each level of the CAPS model relates to Sam's response to a breach by Alex. As a dyadic model post-breach responses are also identified through the CAPS framework for Alex.

The detailed application of the CAPS framework in Table 5 demonstrates how trust dynamics evolve following a breach. By outlining the perspectives of both the follower and leader, the table captures the interplay between emotional, cognitive, and situational factors, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms of trust breach and repair within organisational contexts.

- **Level 1: Cognitive-Affective System** - Highlights the activation of trust-related schemas and emotions, shaping initial interpretations of the breach and subsequent goals.
- **Level 2: Behavioural Responses** - Explores observable actions stemming from the breach, such as withdrawal or reparative behaviours, reflecting cognitive and emotional disruptions.
- **Level 3: Observers' Perceptions** - Describes how third-party observations influence perceptions of the breach and drive accountability or further actions to repair trust.
- **Level 4: Situational Features** - Examines how the breach's nature, particularly its sensitive context, intensifies emotional and behavioural responses.
- **Level 5: Contextual Factors** - Considers broader cultural norms and past experiences that shape individual responses to the breach and the trust repair process.

## **Post-Breach Behaviours**

As the process continues, Alex could decide to make good with Sam by enquiring about what they have noticed behaviourally and heard from others. Alex could reframe the breach as an anomaly and emphasise corrective actions. For example, Alex could acknowledge the mistake, provide a genuine apology, express empathy and understanding of Sam's feelings of betrayal, and outline steps to prevent future breaches. If Alex's goal is to rebuild the trust and the collaborative relationship (Level 2), Alex must work to restore Sam's belief in their reliability and trustworthiness through consistent and transparent observable actions (Level 3). For instance, Alex might schedule regular follow-up meetings to discuss progress and address any lingering concerns. Alex could provide accommodation for the personal issue (Level 4). All of these activities are influenced by cultural norms around conflict resolution and personal experiences with trust repair (Level 5), which guide the approach to rebuilding trust and managing the situation effectively.

As can be seen, the CAPS framework provides an enhanced framework for understanding and exploring trust dynamics between a leader and a follower, extending beyond norms of reciprocity and other insights offered by Social Exchange Theory.

### ***3.3.4 Trust Breach CAPS Model***

The application of the CAPS framework to trust breaches in leader-follower relationships is presented in Figure 7. This adapted model demonstrates how followers interpret and respond to trust breaches through interconnected Cognitive-Affective Units (CAUs). CAUs serve as mental representations that mediate the interpretation of situational features and guide behavioural responses. This dynamic model highlights the intricate processes that occur



when a trust breach activates schemas, expectations, emotions, goals, and self-regulatory plans.

The model emphasises the role of situational features, such as the type of trustworthiness violated (integrity, ability, or benevolence), which serve as triggers for activating individual CAUs. These situational cues initiate cognitive and emotional processes within the individual's CAPS, influencing their perception of the breach and shaping subsequent behaviours. By focusing on this dynamic interplay, the model captures both the variability in individual reactions to similar breaches and the consistency of behavioural patterns across different contexts.

The five key CAUs depicted in the model are as follows:

- **Encodings:** These represent schemas related to leadership and trust breaches, which guide how individuals interpret the breach event.
- **Expectancies:** Encompassing perceptions of trustworthiness and propensity to trust, these shape the individual's predictions and judgments about the trustee's future behaviour.
- **Affect:** Valence (positive or negative emotional states) influences how the breach is experienced and contributes to the intensity of the individual's reaction.
- **Goals:** Including the desire to maintain or terminate the relationship, goals guide the individual's motivational drive in response to the breach.
- **Self-Regulatory Plans:** These encompass specific behavioural strategies such as avoidance, revenge, or reconciliation, reflecting the individual's approach to managing the aftermath of the breach.

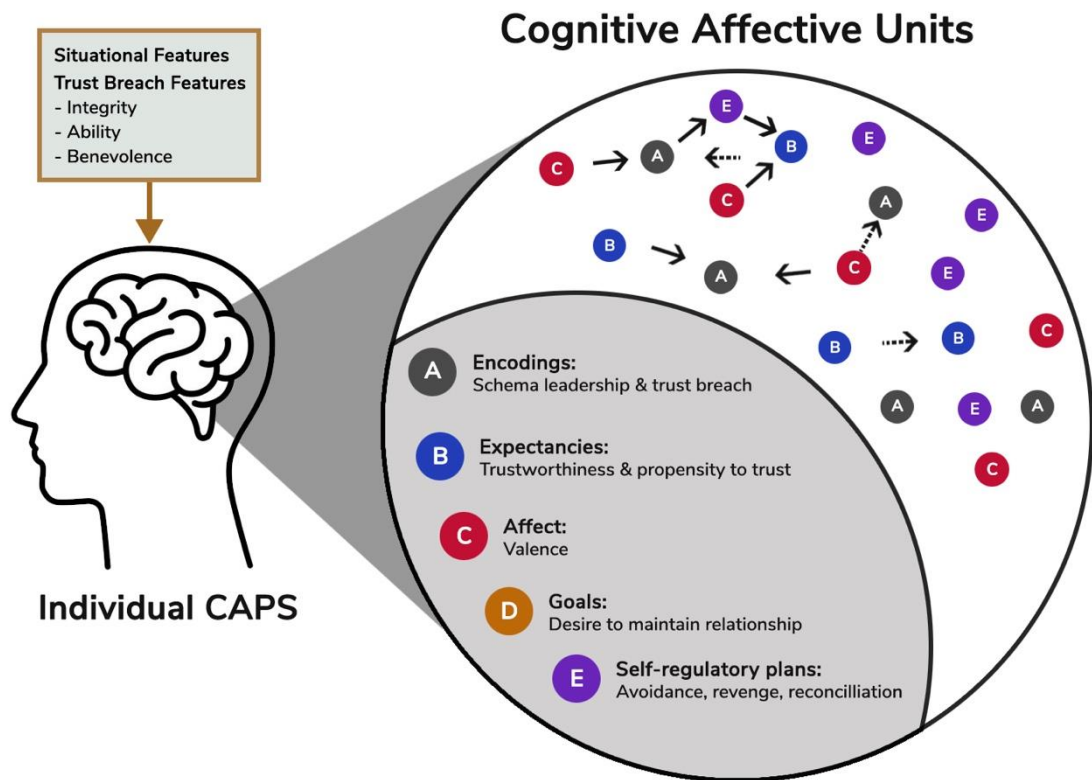
This model underscores the dynamic interplay between cognitive and affective processes, situational features, and broader contextual influences, providing a comprehensive lens for understanding how trust breaches are interpreted. By linking situational triggers to individual responses through CAUs, the model captures both the variability in individual reactions to similar breaches and the consistency within behavioural patterns across different contexts. This theoretically informed approach advances our understanding of trust breach dynamics and offers a robust conceptual foundation for examining trust repair processes within organisational relationships.

To align with the study's objective of simplifying the analysis of trust breach dynamics, the focus will be exclusively on the follower's interpretation of the breach. As Ballinger et al. (2024) emphasise, analysing one party's behaviours without considering reactions of the other party allows for a more focused exploration by reducing the complexity inherent in modelling the full dyadic process. Similarly, this study prioritises understanding the impact of breach events from the follower's perspective, acknowledging that incorporating the trustee's reactions would introduce additional layers of complexity beyond the study's intended scope. By narrowing the lens to the follower's interpretation, this approach provides a clearer understanding of how trust breaches are experienced and processed at the individual level, setting the foundation for further investigation into broader trust dynamics.

Figure 7 illustrates the CAPS model applied to immediate supervisor trust breaches from a follower's perspective. The model outlines the dynamic interplay of situational features, CAUs, and behavioural responses, emphasising the mechanisms that mediate trust breach interpretations and reactions. It provides a visual representation of the interconnected cognitive and emotional processes that underpin trust breach dynamics, showcasing the cognitive-affective interaction.

**Figure 7.**

*Cognitive Affective Processing System Model of Immediate Supervisor Trust Breach from a Follower's Perspective*



Notes Adapted from “Histopathological Features of Parkinson's Disease and Alzheimer's Disease”, by BioRender.com (2024). Retrieved from <https://app.biorender.com/biorender-templates>

Figure 7 provides a visual representation of how the CAPS framework operates in the context of trust breaches within leader-follower relationships. The model demonstrates the sequential activation of CAUs—encodings, expectancies, affect, goals, and self-regulatory plans—in response to situational triggers, such as a breach of integrity, ability, or benevolence. These CAUs mediate the follower’s interpretation of the breach and influence their behavioural responses, including withdrawal, avoidance, or reconciliation.

The figure highlights the dynamic interplay between situational features and individual cognitive and emotional processes. It also underscores the broader contextual factors—such as cultural norms or past experiences—that shape the intensity and type of responses. By isolating the follower's perspective, the model allows for a focused examination of the psychological mechanisms underlying trust breaches, providing a foundational framework for understanding the processes of trust disruption and potential repair.

### **Summary of CAPS Sections**

This chapter has explored the Cognitive-Affective Processing System framework, offering a comprehensive analysis of its application to trust breach dynamics within leader-follower relationships. Structured into two key sections, the chapter first provided a foundational understanding of CAPS and its theoretical underpinnings before delving into its practical application in trust research, specifically within organisational contexts, with a particular focus on follower-leader interactions.

Section 1: The initial section outlined the theoretical basis of CAPS, highlighting its development in response to the trait-versus-situation debate in personality psychology. By emphasising the interplay between individual traits, cognitive-affective units (CAUs), and situational features, CAPS challenges static trait theories, instead presenting personality as dynamic and context-sensitive. The section reviewed the five levels of CAPS—cognitive-affective units, behavioural responses, observer perceptions, situational features, and bio-social-cultural context—demonstrating how each level interacts to shape behaviour. Notably, CAPS integrates cognitive, emotional, motivational, and regulatory processes, offering an integrative framework that extends beyond traditional approaches such as Social Exchange Theory (SET). This section also discussed the methodological flexibility of CAPS,

enabling integration with other theories to address domain-specific phenomena. The ability of CAPS to account for individual differences, self-regulation, motivation, and contextual variability positions it as a robust meta-theoretical framework for studying complex interpersonal and organisational behaviours, including trust dynamics.

Section 2: The second section applied the CAPS framework to explore trust breach dynamics in leader-follower relationships, providing illustrative scenarios to demonstrate its practical utility. Using a scenario-based approach, the chapter examined how trust breaches, such as the mishandling of confidential information by a leader, can activate followers' cognitive-affective units, influencing their behavioural responses, emotional reactions, and future trust evaluations. Each level of the CAPS model was applied sequentially, illustrating how trust breaches and post-breach behaviours are shaped by interactions between cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors.

The section also introduced trust breach typologies, aligning them with leader-specific transgressions categorised into task-focused, person-focused, and ethics-focused breaches (Epitropaki et al., 2020). The analysis highlighted how attributional processes, rather than the type of breach itself, determine the recoverability of trust. Furthermore, the CAPS model extends beyond reciprocity dynamics, addressing the limitations of SET by incorporating individual traits (e.g., propensity to trust), situational triggers, and broader cultural and relational contexts.

In summary, the preceding sections have demonstrated the unique capacity of the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework to provide a comprehensive lens for examining the complexity and variability of trust breach dynamics. By integrating cognitive, affective, and situational factors, CAPS offers a multi-dimensional perspective on how trust

breaches unfold and how individuals navigate these emotionally charged and context-sensitive events. This discussion highlighted CAPS's capacity to extend beyond the limitations of Social Exchange Theory by capturing the interplay between motivations, emotions, and cognitions. Building on this foundation, the next section turns to unresolved issues in the trust breach literature, highlighting the limitations of existing theoretical frameworks and identifying opportunities for further exploration. It introduces the research program, outlining how CAPS can be applied to examine key dimensions of trust breaches, including perceived severity, relational motivations, and self-regulatory processes.

### **3.4 Section 3 – Framing the research. Addressing the gaps in trust breach literature**

#### ***3.4.1 Overview of the Research Programme: Bridging Gaps in Trust Breach Understanding***

The previous sections explored the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, demonstrating its unique capacity to capture the complexity and variability of trust breach dynamics. By integrating cognitive, affective, and situational factors, CAPS provides a comprehensive lens for examining how trust breaches unfold and how individuals navigate these emotionally charged and context-sensitive events. This discussion emphasised CAPS's ability to address the limitations of Social Exchange Theory (SET), particularly in capturing the interplay between motivations, emotions, and cognitions in trust breach processes.

Building on this foundation, the final section focuses on addressing critical gaps in the trust breach literature and introduces the research program developed to address these gaps. It highlights unresolved issues in trust breach research, particularly the limitations of existing theoretical approaches, and provides an overview of how the CAPS framework can be applied to explore key dimensions of trust breaches. The section also identifies the specific research questions and hypotheses that guide the empirical investigation. By framing the study's aims and objectives, this section establishes the groundwork for a rigorous exploration of trust breach dynamics, advancing both theoretical understanding and practical applications in organisational settings.

### ***3.4.2 Gap in literature***

The literature on trust breaches reveals several critical gaps that this research seeks to address. Social Exchange Theory (SET), as the dominant framework for understanding trust dynamics, has been instrumental in advancing our understanding of reciprocity-based exchanges. However, its transactional focus and reliance on rational reciprocity often fall short in capturing the complexity of trust breaches, particularly their emotional, motivational, and contextual dimensions. These limitations underscore the need for a more comprehensive and dynamic framework to explore trust breach and repair processes.

SET's theoretical utility for explaining trust breach dynamics is constrained by five main issues: its limited ability to account for individual differences, its oversimplification of contextual influences, its neglect of self-regulatory processes, its inadequate consideration of motivational dynamics, and its inability to fully explain the range of post-breach behavioural responses. While SET provides valuable insights into normative behaviours, its transactional lens lacks the flexibility required to address the deeply personal and context-sensitive nature of trust breach experiences.

The Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework offers a promising alternative to address these gaps. CAPS provides a meta-theoretical foundation that conceptualises responses to trust breaches as arising from the interaction of contextual factors, situational triggers, and cognitive-affective mechanisms. By incorporating cognitive-affective units (CAUs), CAPS captures the dynamic interplay between individual perceptions, emotions, motivations, and situational influences, providing a more psychologically grounded and context-sensitive understanding of trust breach dynamics that extends beyond the more transactional lens of SET. CAPS's capacity to address the



variability and complexity of trust breaches makes it an ideal framework for examining the emotional and motivational underpinnings of these events.

A further critical gap in the literature relates to the affective valence of trust breaches across trustworthiness dimensions—Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI). Severity, representing the emotional impact of a breach, serves as a pivotal factor influencing post-breach response. However, the existing literature has yet to empirically test how perceived severity varies across these dimensions or how breaches involving one or multiple dimensions affect subsequent behaviour. This research program directly addresses these gaps by investigating how ABI dimensions influence perceived severity and, in turn, shape responses to trust breach.

Relational motivations and self-regulatory processes also remain underexplored in trust breach literature. Trust breaches elicit a spectrum of responses, ranging from passive responses like avoidance to active ones such as reconciliation or revenge. CAPS offers a theoretical lens to examine how relational motivations, such as the desire to maintain the relationship, and self-regulatory strategies influence these behaviours. The interplay between perceived severity, relational motivations, and self-regulation introduces an essential dimension of variability that static frameworks like SET cannot adequately capture.

Finally, the literature has largely overlooked how self-regulation and motivation shape responses to trust breaches within organisational contexts. CAPS provides a robust framework for examining how these factors interact with contextual and emotional variables to influence trust breach dynamics. By situating this research within supervisor-subordinate relationships—where breaches of trust are particularly salient—this study captures the

multifaceted nature of trust breach experiences. The mixed-method approach employed in this program further strengthens its ability to address these gaps comprehensively.

This research program addresses these critical gaps by adopting CAPS as a guiding framework for investigating trust breach dynamics. Specifically, it explores how the dimensionality of trust breaches within the ABI framework, the perceived severity of breaches, and the interaction of relational motivations, and self-regulatory processes shape follower responses to leader trust violations. By situating its inquiry within organisational contexts-particularly supervisor-subordinate relationships, this research takes an exploratory approach to examining the personal, affective, and situational complexity of trust breach experiences.

At the core of this research is the examination of moderated mediation processes. It explores how relational motivation—operationalised as the desire to maintain the relationship—mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and self-regulatory responses to trust breaches. This mediation pathway is, in turn, moderated by the perceived severity of the breach, highlighting the interplay between emotional salience and motivational factors. By examining these mechanisms, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how severity interacts with cognitive and motivational processes to shape behavioural outcomes.

### ***3.4.3 Cognitive Affective Processing System in Active and Passive Responses to Breach***

This research programme aims to present an alternative meta-theoretical framework for understanding trust breaches, moving beyond the dominant Social Exchange Theory (SET) paradigm, which primarily emphasises rational and logical reciprocity. Employing the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) as the guiding lens, the programme integrates cognitive, affective, self-regulatory, and contextual dimensions to examine the

complex interplay of psychological and situational factors influencing trust dynamics. The research focuses on two central areas: follower perceptions of trust breaches, with particular attention to trustworthiness dimensions—Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI)—and perceived severity; and the role of relational motivations, perceived severity, self-regulatory processes, and contextual factors in influencing passive and active responses to leader trust breaches.

By adopting a CAPS perspective, this research seeks to enhance both theoretical and practical understanding of trust breach categorisation, perceptions, and behavioural outcomes within organisational settings. This approach enables a more integrative and psychologically informed exploration of trust dynamics, addressing key boundary conditions of SET. Specifically, the CAPS framework provides a more comprehensive basis for investigating emotionally charged and contextually layered trust breaches, offering an alternative paradigm that better reflects the multifaceted nature of trust breach.

The CAPS framework, a broad meta-theoretical model, conceptualises individual responses as arising from the interaction of five distinct levels: contextual factors (level 5), situational features (level 4), cognitive-affective systems (level 1), behavioural responses (level 2), and observers perceptions (level 3). For this research programme, three levels were operationalised: contextual factors (level 5), situational features (level 4), and cognitive-affective systems (level 1).

Organisational contexts (level 5) were defined by a focus on supervisor-subordinate relationships. This context provided the setting for examination of trust breaches. Situational features (level 4) was considered by addressing the situational feature of the trust breach itself—specifically the trigger of immediate supervisor trust breach. These triggers for

activated cognitive-affective units (CAU's) at level 1, providing the immediate situational event within which trust breaches were evaluated.

The central focus of the research programme was at Level 1, where cognitive-affective units (CAUs) were operationalised to understand how followers perceived and responded to trust breaches. Encodings (intent), captured how breaches were interpreted, such as whether they were perceived as intentional or accidental. Affect (Severity) examined the perceived emotional impact of the trust breach, emphasising its negative valence. Expectations and Beliefs were operationalised through propensity to trust, reflecting followers' general trust expectations. Goals, specifically the desire to maintain the relationship, explored how relational motivations influenced both active and passive responses to trust breaches. Finally, self-regulatory plans encompassed strategies employed by followers to manage breaches, such as avoidance (passive) or reconciliation and revenge (active).

### **Perceived Severity and Trust Breach Dynamics**

The concept of perceived severity is integral to understanding responses to trust breaches, shaping how individuals evaluate and react to transgressions. Severity refers to the extent to which a breach is perceived as emotionally impactful and damaging to the trust relationship (Kim et al., 2006; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). Factors such as the nature of the breach, its implications for the trustor, and the broader relational context influence these perceptions (Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer, 2009). Due to their impact on goals and relationships, interpersonal trust breach events are experienced as negative affective events and trigger specific actions such as revenge or withdrawal (Williams et al., 2020). Exploring the perceived severity of trust breach events offers an insight into the associated affect and impact on behaviours within the cognitive affective system.

Perceived severity is conceptualised as the valence of the affective state serving as a situational input that activates cognitive-affective units (CAUs), including attributions, emotional states, and relational goals. High perceived severity heightens negative emotions such as anger and disappointment, increasing the cognitive salience of the breach and making retaliatory responses, such as revenge or avoidance, more likely (Beattie & Griffin, 2014). Conversely, low perceived severity enables relational motivations, such as the desire to maintain the relationship, to dominate, fostering reconciliation over retaliation (Restubog et al., 2015; Woodyatt et al., 2022).

### **ABI Dimensionality and Perceived Severity**

In trust research, perceived severity is often considered to be influenced by the dimensionality of the trust breach, with specific trustworthiness dimensions—Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI)—playing a pivotal role in shaping emotional and behavioural responses. Chen et al. (2011) propose that distinct affective experiences are associated with each trustworthiness dimension, suggesting that breaches of integrity provoke stronger negative affect than breaches of ability expectations, while violations of benevolence are hypothesised to elicit the most intense negative reactions. Empirical research by Van der Werff et al. (2023) supports the heightened negative affect associated with integrity breaches compared to ability breaches, but does not confirm the assumption that benevolence breaches evoke more severe affective responses than integrity or ability breaches.

Building on this foundation, the current research posits that perceived severity is influenced by the type of trust breach and its alignment with trustworthiness dimensions—Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI). Moreover, recent findings suggest that these dimensions

may not operate independently but can interact in shaping trust-related perceptions (Sondern & Hertel, 2024), underscoring the importance of examining both individual and combined effects of ABI breaches. Drawing on this literature, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Breaches of Benevolence expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of Integrity expectations.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Breaches of Integrity expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of Ability expectations.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Breaches involving a combination of ABI dimensions will be perceived as more severe than breaches involving individual dimensions.

These hypotheses aim to capture the differential and interactive effects of ABI dimensions on perceived severity and to explore their implications for behavioural responses to trust breaches.

### **Relational Motivation and Trust Breach Dynamics**

Goals, as conceptualised in the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, are pivotal in determining the direction and intensity of behavioural outcomes, providing a motivational basis for behaviour. These goals, considered a key cognitive-affective unit (CAU), dynamically interact with situational inputs, cognitive appraisals, and emotional states to shape behavioural responses. Relational motivation, reflecting the desire to maintain or restore a relationship, is a critical motivational factor within relational contexts, shown to direct individual behaviour but also influences how situational events, such as negative relational events are appraised and responded (Donovan & Priester, 2017).

Van der Werff et al. (2023) argue that trust motivation is relationship-specific, with individuals experiencing varying levels of motivation depending on the unique dynamics of each working relationship. This trust motivation drives the ongoing regulation of trust-related cognition, emotion, and behaviour, facilitating the pursuit of an effective and enduring trusting relationship. These insights align with the CAPS framework, where relational motivation—operationalised as a goal—dynamically interacts with situational inputs, cognitive appraisals, and emotional states to shape behavioural outcomes. By sustaining relational goals, trust motivation underpins adaptive responses to relational dynamics and highlights the interplay between motivation and self-regulation in fostering trust resilience.

Theoretical insights from established models further contextualise the role of relational motivation. The investment model (Rusbult, 1980) highlights how factors such as time, effort, and satisfaction in a relationship influence commitment and drive reconciliation behaviours. Additionally, research on trust-biased memory demonstrates that relational motivations shape how breaches are interpreted and influence recall of transgressions (Luchies et al., 2013). These findings underscore the complex interplay between motivation and trust dynamics, emphasising the necessity of exploring how relational motivations influence responses to trust breaches. Within CAPS, these elements converge, offering an integrative lens for understanding the multifaceted role of relational motivation in shaping both passive and active breach responses.

Building on these theoretical foundations, the study posits that the desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and responses to trust breaches. This mediation effect extends to both passive responses (e.g., avoidance) and active responses (e.g., reconciliation, revenge). Specifically:

- Hypothesis 4a: Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation, such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain, which, in turn, is positively associated with reconciliation.
- Hypothesis 4b: Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and revenge, such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain, which, in turn, is negatively associated with revenge.
- Hypothesis 4c: Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance, such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain, which, in turn, is negatively associated with avoidance.

### **Moderation Effect of Perceived Severity**

In addition to examining the direct impact of ABI dimensionality on perceived severity, the research investigates the role of severity as a moderator in the relationship between relational motivations and post-breach behaviours. The perceived severity of a trust breach is pivotal in shaping how individuals evaluate the event, assign attributions, and determine subsequent responses. As Olekalns et al. (2020) emphasise, severity influences the emotional and cognitive salience of the breach, guiding the trustor's decision-making about whether to prioritise relational repair or engage in retaliatory or avoidant behaviours. High severity magnifies the emotional impact, leading to heightened negative affect, such as anger or disappointment, and intensifying the cognitive salience of the breach. This can prompt attributions of blame, re-evaluation of the relationship, and retaliatory responses such as revenge or avoidance.



The significance of perceived severity lies not only in its immediate impact but also in how it shapes the broader relational context. In the aftermath of a trust breach, individuals engage in attributional and sensemaking processes to evaluate the event's severity, its implications for the relationship, and what constitutes a fair response (Aquino et al., 2004; Bies & Tripp, 1996; Boon & Holmes, 1999). These processes enable individuals and dyads to construct a narrative framework for understanding the breach, which is essential for moving forward (Weick et al., 2014). However, unresolved differences in perceptions of severity and fairness can impede relational repair, highlighting the critical need for alignment and mutual understanding in the repair process (Bottom et al., 2002; Okimoto & Wenzel, 2014).

This research positions severity as a dynamic moderator that shapes the pathways to passive and active responses to breach. High perceived severity may weaken the influence of relational motivations, such as the desire to maintain the relationship, on reconciliation efforts, while amplifying motivations for revenge or avoidance. Conversely, low severity may enhance the role of relational motivations, fostering reconciliation and relational repair. By incorporating these dynamics into the CAPS framework, the study advances understanding of how perceived severity interacts with cognitive-affective units to influence trust repair strategies and outcomes.

The interplay between relational motivation and perceived severity is critical to understanding trust breach dynamics. While relational motivation fosters reconciliation, perceived severity acts as a dynamic moderator that can amplify or weaken these effects. Moderated mediation describes a process in which the indirect effect of relational motivation on behavioural responses-operating through desire to maintain the relationship-is influenced by the level of perceived severity, such that the strength and direction of this indirect effect change depending on how severe the breach is perceived to be.

High perceived severity may weaken the mediation effect for reconciliation by diminishing the desire to maintain the relationship, while simultaneously strengthening the mediation effect for revenge and avoidance. Conversely, low perceived severity may enhance the positive influence of relational motivations on reconciliation. These dynamics underpin the following hypotheses:

- **H5a:** Perceived severity moderates the relationship between the desire to maintain the relationship and reconciliation, such that the relationship is weaker when severity is high.
- **H5b:** Perceived severity moderates the relationship between the desire to maintain the relationship and revenge, such that the relationship is stronger when severity is high.
- **H5c:** Perceived severity moderates the relationship between the desire to maintain the relationship and avoidance, such that the relationship is stronger when severity is high.

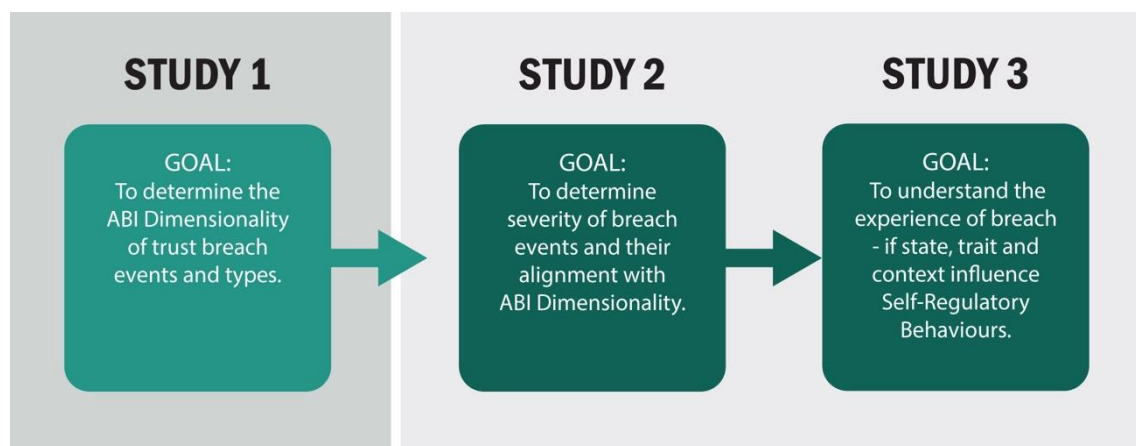
By integrating ABI dimensionality, relational motivation, and perceived severity within the CAPS framework, this research advances understanding of trust breach dynamics. These insights contribute to a more detailed understanding of trust breach processes, while remaining within the scope of this study's theoretical and empirical boundaries.

### 3.4.4 Research Programme Overview

The research adopted a mixed-method approach. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) were engaged to align trust breach events and types with ABI trustworthiness dimensions in Study 1. This initial analysis informed two subsequent studies conducted with an international online participant pool from diverse industries and roles. This dual-method approach enabled a structured investigation of the research questions and related hypotheses. An overview of the research programme is provided in Figure 8.

**Figure 8.**

*Overview of the Research Programme*



Research Goal	To explore the multifaceted dynamics of follower-experienced trust breaches, focusing on perceived severity and trustworthiness dimensions (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity—ABI), as well as relational motivations, self-regulatory processes, and contextual factors influencing passive and active responses to leader trust breaches.
Sample	The research involved Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to refine the trust breach framework, followed by a diverse international participant pool representing multiple industries and roles to examine trust breach perceptions and responses.

Methodology	A mixed-method approach combining SME panel tasks to categorise trust breaches and align them with ABI dimensions, along with self-report questionnaires to analyse follower perceptions, severity ratings, and behavioural responses to trust breaches.
Research Questions	<p><b>RQ1:</b> <i>To what extent do the identified trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?</i></p> <p><b>RQ2:</b> <i>Which trust breach events by leaders are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) influence these perceptions?</i></p> <p><b>RQ3:</b> <i>How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active and passive responses to a trust breach, and how is this effect moderated by severity?</i></p>
Hypotheses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Breaches of benevolence expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of integrity expectations.</li> <li>- Breaches of integrity expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of ability expectations.</li> <li>- Breaches involving a combination of ABI dimensions will be perceived as more severe than breaches involving individual dimensions.</li> <li>- Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and passive (avoidance) and active (reconciliation, revenge) responses, moderated by severity.</li> </ul>

Figure 8 above provides a concise summary of the research programme, highlighting its overarching goal, methodology, and key focus areas. The inclusion of research questions and hypotheses offers a clear framework for understanding how the study addressed core objectives and tested specific propositions related to trust breaches through the CAPS lens. This structured presentation aids in situating the research findings within the broader context

of trust literature, guiding the discussion of contributions, implications, and future research directions.

The programme addressed four key research questions, examining how trust breaches align with ABI dimensions, the perceived severity of breaches both independently and in relation to their dimensional alignment, and the combined influence of perceived severity and relational motivations on active and passive post-breach responses. The hypotheses were distributed across two studies:

Study 2: This study focused on Level 1 CAUs, particularly the relationship between the categorisation of breaches (encodings), their alignment with ABI dimensions (expectations and beliefs), and the perceived severity (affect). The hypotheses examined the relationship between trust breach dimensionality and severity. Specifically, it was hypothesised that breaches of benevolence expectations would be perceived as more severe than breaches of integrity or ability, breaches of integrity more severe than those of ability, and breaches involving a combination of ABI dimensions would evoke the highest severity ratings. This study explored how breaches across ABI dimensions and their combinations influenced followers' perceptions of severity.

Study 3: This study extended the focus on Level 1 CAUs by examining how severity (affect) and relational motivations (goals) interacted to shape behavioural responses, aligning with Level 2 of the CAPS framework. Specifically, the desire to maintain the relationship was tested as a mediator between propensity to trust (expectations and beliefs) and behavioural responses, while severity served as a key moderator. Behavioural responses included passive strategies, such as avoidance, and active strategies, including reconciliation and revenge. The study hypothesised that relational motivation, moderated by perceived severity, would

mediate the relationship between propensity to trust and these behavioural responses. Variations were expected across passive (avoidance) and active (reconciliation, revenge) responses, illustrating the interplay of self-regulatory strategies within the CAPS framework.

This operationalisation of the CAPS framework provided a theoretically grounded approach for understanding trust dynamics, capturing the interplay between cognitive-affective processes, contextual factors, and behavioural responses. By grounding the hypotheses in CAPS, the research addressed the multifaceted and context-sensitive nature of trust breaches, moving beyond static frameworks to reflect the dynamic processes underpinning trust repair and breach responses.

The following chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted for this research programme, detailing the operationalisation of CAPS, the selection of participants, and the design of studies aimed at addressing the identified gaps in the literature. By grounding the investigation in CAPS and organisational contexts, the research aims to advance understanding of the deeply personal and context-dependent nature of trust breaches, offering a dynamic perspective that extends beyond static assumptions of Social Exchange Theory.

The presentation of the research methodology deviates from traditional formats, with each study detailed in its own chapter. Each chapter will include the study's overview, methodology, results, and preliminary discussion. This structure facilitates a focused examination of each study's contributions. After presenting all three studies, the findings will be synthesised and discussed collectively in a final discussion chapter, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research outcomes.

## Chapter 4:

### Research Methodology

The chapter aims to:

- *Outline the philosophical paradigms underpinning the research programme.*
- *Introduce the research design and methodological approach.*
- *Detail the alignment between the methodological approaches with study objectives.*

#### 4.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology employed in the three-study programme, emphasising the philosophical paradigms underpinning the research programme and the influence on methodological choices. These paradigms provide foundational frameworks for understanding and investigating the complexities of trust breaches

The chapter begins by exploring key paradigms and their ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, providing the rationale for the adoption of a positivist perspective. It discusses the influence of research philosophy on methodological decisions, illustrated using the research 'onion' model (Saunders, et al., 2023). The discussion then narrows to the specific context of trust research, highlighting the dominance of positivism and its implications for quantitative methodologies.

Subsequently, the chapter details the research design, justifying the use of a cross-sectional quantitative approach across the three studies. It addresses key methodological

considerations, including the use of online participant panels and strategies to mitigate potential biases.

Finally, the chapter outlines the overarching research programme, demonstrating how methodological decisions align with the study's objectives and contribute to generating reliable, generalisable insights into trust breaches within organisational settings.

## **4.2 Research Philosophy**

### ***4.2.1 Social Scientific Paradigms***

Social scientific research is guided by philosophical paradigms, which reflect different worldviews regarding the nature of reality (ontology), how knowledge is acquired (epistemology), and the influence of values (axiology). These paradigms – positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, critical realism, and pragmatism – directly inform theoretical frameworks and methodological choices.

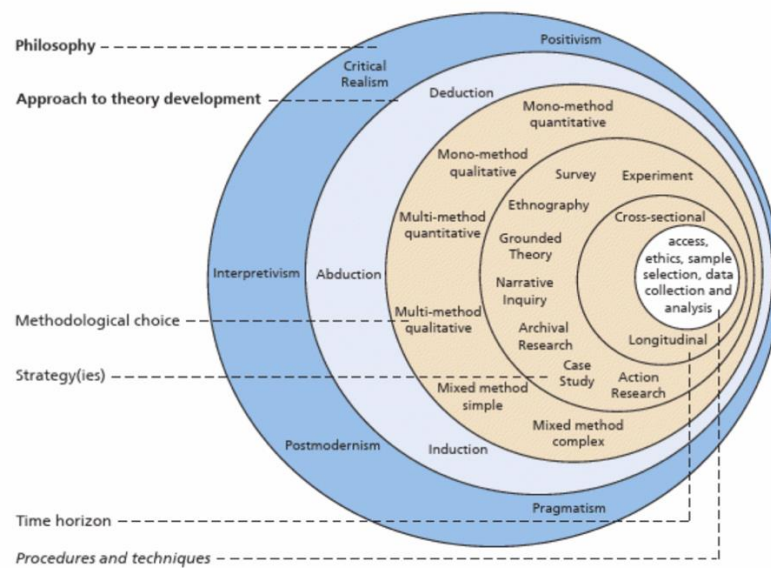
Positivism, the philosophical foundation of this research programme, assumes an objective reality that can be systematically observed and measured through empirical methods (Firestone, 1987). It emphasises hypothesis testing, replicability, and generalisability, making it the predominant paradigm in organisational and management research (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). In contrast, interpretivism and critical realism focus on subjective interpretations and contextual variability, which, while suited to the objectives of this research programme, this programme aims to build on findings from qualitative research and explore them for wider generalisability. Positivism typically leads to quantitative methods used for theory testing, while interpretivism favours qualitative methods suited for theory building.



The “research onion” model, shown in Figure 9 (Saunders et al., 2023), provides a conceptual framework for understanding how research philosophy informs methodological decisions, from theoretical development to data collection and analysis strategies.

**Figure 9.**

*Research Onion- Development of Effective Methodology*



*Note:* Research Onion. Reprinted from *Research Methods for Business Students*. (9th ed.), by M.N.K.Saunders et al., 2023 Pearson.

As outlined, the five philosophical underpinnings in business and management offer distinct perspectives on reality, knowledge, and values, shaping the approach to research. Positivism emphasises objective measurement and generalisability, while Post-Positivism acknowledges the complexity of reality and the evolving nature of knowledge. Critical Realism and Interpretivism focus on the social and historical construction of reality, highlighting the importance of context and subjective interpretation. Postmodernism challenges traditional notions of truth, emphasising the role of power and marginalised

voices. Pragmatism, on the other hand, is oriented towards practical outcomes and problem-solving.

Understanding these paradigms was crucial in guiding the methodological for the research programme, ensuring alignment with the research objectives and the nature of the inquiry. Before detailing the specific methodological decisions, it is important to contextualise them within the dominant philosophical paradigms in trust research. This approach provides a framework for aligning the research design with prevailing approaches in the field, thereby justifying the selection of methods as the most suitable for addressing the research objectives.

#### ***4.2.2 Trust Research***

Epistemological approaches play a crucial role in shaping both theoretical and methodological frameworks in trust research. Research into epistemological approaches of trust researchers highlighted that positivism is the predominant epistemology among leading trust researchers with 30% of scholars aligning with this perspective, while 39% are either not being influenced by a specific epistemology or are unaware of such influences (Isaeva et al., 2014). There is a geopolitical variation, with positivism prevailing in the USA while critical realism has a greater influence among European researchers.

This preference for positivism aligns with broader trends in organisational and management research, where quantitative methods like experiments and surveys are commonly used due to their emphasis on objectivity, replicability, and generalisability. However, given the multifaceted nature of trust, no single methodological approach can fully capture its complexities. Therefore, the methodological choices in this research programme were carefully balanced to ensure alignment with the research question, considering existing

theoretical and empirical frameworks, and the type of data to be collected as suggested in the literature (Gibson, 2017)

#### **4.3 Research Programme Epistemological and Ontological Considerations**

A broadly positivistic approach was selected as the most suitable framework for this research programme, aligning with the objective of systematically exploring and quantifying social phenomena such as trust breaches. This approach is grounded in the belief that trust dynamics can be observed and measured, allowing for the production of reliable, generalisable, and replicable data. By emphasising hypothesis testing through rigorous statistical methods, this approach ensures that empirical evidence is robustly used to support or challenge theoretical propositions, making it an appropriate and methodologically coherent choice for addressing the research questions posed.

Although the researcher's broader philosophical orientation acknowledges interpretivist perspectives, the adoption of a positivist paradigm in this programme ensures methodological alignment with the research aims. Trust breaches and responses are conceptualised as phenomena that can be systematically examined through objective measurement and analysis, providing insights into generalisable patterns of behaviour. This research programme builds on foundational qualitative studies, such as those by Fraser (2010) and Grover et al. (2014), which explored trust breaches and typologies in depth. By extending this work through quantitative methods, the study enhances generalisability, offering insights that can be applied to a broader population across diverse organisational contexts.

In considering the epistemological and ontological foundations, methodological rationale, and research design of this research programme, a number of key factors were taken into

account. These considerations are outlined below to provide an understanding of how these elements informed the study's design and execution.

### **Epistemological and Ontological Foundations**

This research is underpinned by a positivistic paradigm, which views trust as a dynamic yet measurable construct that can be systematically studied to identify causal relationships and generalisable patterns. This research is examining the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, investigating the interplay of cognitive, affective, and motivational processes on responses to trust breaches. The ontological stance assumes that trust breaches are observable phenomena influenced by both relational and situational factors and that these influences can be quantified and systematically analysed.

Firstly, the adoption of a positivistic approach reflects the need for hypothesis testing through deductive reasoning, a hallmark of this paradigm (Bryman, 2012). This approach ensures that the research strategy is designed to test a priori hypotheses using hypothetico-deductive reasoning (Saunders et. al., 2023). In this programme, the CAPS framework provided a robust meta-theoretical foundation for systematically testing redefined hypotheses derived from existing trust breach typologies. By focusing on measurable constructs, the research ensures reliability and replicability, hallmarks of positivistic inquiry.

Secondly, building on prior qualitative work, this research seeks to extend the generalisability of findings beyond specific organisational or contextual settings. The positivistic paradigm facilitates the empirical testing of theoretical models that predict trust behaviours and outcomes in the workplace, strengthening the theoretical foundation of trust research. This approach ensures that findings are not only contextually relevant but also

applicable across diverse organisational contexts, addressing the need for universal patterns and relationships in understanding trust breaches (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017).

Thirdly, the reliance on a positivistic approach is consistent with the dominant epistemological trends in trust research, particularly within psychology and organisational behaviour. This paradigm has been instrumental in advancing research frameworks and understanding trust in workplace contexts (Siebert et al., 2016). Its emphasis on producing objective, generalisable, and value-free insights ensures that the study contributes to evidence-based strategies for mitigating the effects of trust breaches and fostering effective trust repair mechanisms.

Finally, while recognising the value of processual exploration in understanding the dynamics of trust breaches, this research prioritised the empirical testing of the CAPS framework. Such testing lays the groundwork for future exploration by establishing a robust, empirically grounded foundation. This sequence—testing theoretical models before exploring processual aspects—ensures that subsequent research is informed by rigorously validated constructs and relationships.

In summary, the epistemological and ontological considerations for this research are rooted in a positivistic paradigm, enabling the systematic exploration and quantification of trust breach dynamics. This approach not only supports the objectives of the research programme but also aligns with established practices in trust research, ensuring that the findings are both rigorous and generalisable.

## **Methodological Rationale**

The methodological approach for this research was shaped by the need for systematic and replicable findings to advance both theoretical and practical understandings of trust breaches. This rationale will be addressed through the following considerations: the alignment of the deductive approach with the study's epistemological underpinnings, the justification for employing quantitative methods, and the positioning of this research within the context of mature theory development.

Firstly, the deductive approach adopted in this study reflects the positivistic emphasis on hypothesis testing and empirical validation. Grounded in the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, this approach facilitated the exploration of predefined hypotheses about the interplay of cognitive-affective processes and relational motivations in shaping responses to trust breaches. The alignment between the research questions and the deductive methodology ensured that the study systematically tested theoretical propositions, providing a robust foundation for understanding trust breach dynamics.

Secondly, the decision to employ quantitative methods was driven by the need for generalisability. While qualitative research, such as that conducted by Fraser (2010) and Grover et al. (2014), has provided critical insights into context-specific dynamics of trust breaches, this research extends these findings through quantitative validation across a larger and more diverse population. The ability to generalise findings is crucial in trust research, as it enhances the applicability of results across different organisational contexts. Quantitative methods also enable the identification of causal relationships, allowing for the exploration of specific factors that influence trust breaches and the development of effective trust repair strategies. This is particularly important given the significant organisational implications of

leader transgressions, including withdrawal, retaliation, and diminished performance (Epitropaki, et al., 2020).

Thirdly, the exploration of CAPS and associated established constructs quantitatively is an appropriate approach within the domain of mature theory development. As it builds on well-established bodies of literature by integrating insights from distinct bodies of literature, thereby refining and extending the theoretical understanding, a hallmark of mature theory exploration (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Edmondson & McManus (2007) emphasise that mature theory research requires the generation of precise, reliable data to rigorously test and clarify the boundaries of existing models. Quantitative methods are especially suited for this purpose, as they allow for the logical rigor and complexity necessary to advance theoretical frameworks. By adopting this approach, the research not only builds on established literature but also provides empirically grounded contributions to the study of trust breaches.

Finally, while qualitative methods could offer further exploration of processual aspects, the prioritisation of quantitative methods ensures the exploration of causality of findings. Quantitative methodology is well-suited for this task as it employs research methods to establish relationships between causal factors and their outcomes (Park et al., 2020). By exploring causality this programme lays the groundwork for future research into the dynamic and evolving nature of trust breaches.

In summary, the methodological rationale for this research integrates the need for deductive reasoning, the advantages of quantitative methods for generalisability, and the alignment with mature theory development. This structured approach ensures that the study not only

addresses critical gaps in trust research but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors shaping trust breach dynamics in organisational contexts.

## **Research Design**

This research programme was designed to systematically investigate trust breaches, ensuring rigor and relevance through careful consideration of practical, ethical, and methodological factors. The primary objectives were to enhance the generalisability of findings, maintain data integrity, and align the research design with the theoretical underpinnings of the CAPS framework. Specifically, the study focused on leveraging online participant panels for diverse sampling, implementing rigorous data quality measures, and addressing ethical concerns associated with the sensitive nature of trust breaches.

## **Diverse and Representative Sampling**

To achieve generalisability and mitigate potential biases associated with single organisational samples, an online participant panel was employed as the primary data collection method. This approach enabled the inclusion of a geographically dispersed and demographically diverse sample, ensuring representativeness across different industries and cultural contexts. The decision to use an online participant panel (OPP) as the data collection method in this research program was informed by two considerations: first, the choice to use an online panel, and second, the selection of the specific panel to be utilised.

The decision to use an online panel was driven by the need for generalisability, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. A single organisational sample could introduce potential organisational effects and the risk of non-independence in the data, for example multiple employees might report on the same supervisor, thereby limiting the generalisability of the



findings (Haggard & Park, 2018). In contrast, self-selected online samples are more diverse than traditional organisational or student samples, enhancing the potential for generalisation (Buhrmester et al., 2018). OPPs also offer the unique advantage of gathering data from a geographically dispersed and demographically diverse sample further improving the representativeness of the study (Porter et al., 2019). The efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the approach was crucial, as the research program operated under tight timelines and required quick, reliable data collection. As prior research has demonstrated, online panel data, supported by quality checks, is a reliable method for gathering data (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2022).

The second aspect of the decision-making process was selecting the specific online panel to use. Qualtrics was chosen due to its capability to meet targeted sampling requirements, support survey administration and its endorsement as a university-approved research tool. The platform offers access to a large, diverse participant pool, along with advanced survey design features aligned with best practice recommendations for online panel research. Furthermore, the study incorporated guidelines for planning and implementing empirical studies using OPP, as outlined by Aguinis et al. (2021), to enhance methodological rigour.

In conclusion, the decision to use an online participant panel, specifically Qualtrics, was driven by the dual needs of efficiency and broad, diverse participant access. By adopting best practices highlighted in the literature a balance was sought between effectively executing the research programme within time and budget constraints while maintaining the rigor and quality of the data collected.

## **Data Quality Assurance**

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, rigorous measures were implemented, addressing both careless and insufficient effort (C/IE) responding and minimising common method variance (CMV). These measures were crucial in maintaining the integrity of the dataset and ensuring the robustness of the study's conclusions.

Given the potentially sensitive nature of questions related to trust breaches by leaders, the research design required careful consideration of ethical considerations and potential biases, particularly social desirability bias. This well-documented issue in sensitive research (King et al., 2013) underscores the importance of anonymity to encourage candid responses. An online research panel was identified as an effective solution, enabling participants to respond anonymously. This approach reduced the likelihood of biased responses and upheld the ethical integrity of the study (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2022).

Scientifically rigorous measures were adopted to enhance data validity and mitigate insincere responses, aligning with best practices (Aguinis et al., 2021; Wessling et al., 2017). To address C/IE responding, the study incorporated C/IE infrequency and frequency scales, following recommendations by Kay & Saucier (2023). Three items designed to detect insufficient effort responding (IER), as outlined by MacInnis et al. (2020), were embedded in the survey. Participants flagged as C/IE responders were removed to maintain the dataset's integrity. Compensation management adhered to Qualtrics' quality control policies, ensuring that incomplete or inaccurate submissions were excluded from analysis.

Self-report measures were deemed the most appropriate method for capturing latent constructs central to this research, i.e. attitudes, personality traits, and self-regulatory motivations and behaviours. Given the nature of these constructs, self-report questionnaires

were deemed the most direct and appropriate method for gathering data (Götz et al., 2023). While self-reports have faced criticism in comparison to behavioural observation methods (Baumeister et al., 2007), the specific focus on trust breaches rendered observational methods impractical and unethical. Additionally, self-report measures have been shown to be highly reliable in trust research (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Consequently, online surveys were selected as the primary data collection tool, balancing methodological appropriateness with ethical considerations.

A particular challenge in quantitative self-report methodology is common method variance (CMV) (Aguinis et al., 2018). CMV happens when differences in survey or test results are due more to the way questions are asked than to what is being measured and is problematic because it can distort the true relationships between variables, leading to incorrect conclusions (Podsakoff et al., 2003). There are several identified sources of CMV, such as using the same person to answer both the predictor and outcome questions, the way questions are worded, the setting in which data is collected, and how the items are presented (Podsakoff et al., 2012). For example, if someone feels the need to answer in a socially acceptable way, then the results may not reflect their true opinions (Steenkamp et al., 2010). In this manner, self-report surveys can be viewed as a common source of CMV (Brannick et al., 2010). Procedural controls are considered an effective way to alleviate the effects of CMV (Kock et al., 2021). For example, researchers can use different methods for different variables, change the order or context of questions, and carefully design the survey to minimise biases (Conway & Lance, 2010).

To mitigate CMV, several procedural strategies were implemented. Items were presented in randomised order across sections to reduce consistency bias, and scale endpoints and anchors were varied to discourage uniform response patterns. Participants were assured of

confidentiality and informed that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers, reducing the risk of socially desirable responses. These measures aligned with established practices for minimising biases associated with self-report data (Podsakoff et al., 2024) thereby enhancing the study's validity and reliability. The consideration and application of CMV programme design minimised the likelihood of its occurrence, resultant common method variance is not considered to be a factor of concern.

By integrating these epistemological, methodological, and practical considerations, and building on the insights from qualitative research, this programme is well-positioned to advance the understanding of trust breaches and their implications for organisational behaviour. These rigorous steps underscore a commitment to data integrity and reliability, upholding best practice standards in survey research methodology.

#### **4.4 Research Programme**

This research program is firmly nested at the individual level, specifically investigating leader—follower trust breaches from a follower's perspective. Specifically, it investigates trust breaches by direct leaders (e.g., supervisor), emphasising the unique dynamics and outcomes of these interpersonal relationships. Direct leader-employee trust is particularly significant due to its proximity to employees' day-to-day experiences, making it a critical focus for understanding trust dynamics and their practical implications. By exploring breaches in this relational context, the research contributes to both theoretical insights and actionable strategies to improve supervisor-employee relationships, ultimately benefiting organisational trust-building efforts.

The research programme is guided by four key research questions that address specific dimensions of leader-follower trust breaches. These questions reflect the programme's systematic exploration of trust breach dynamics across three distinct studies.

#### ***4.4.1 Formulation of research questions***

This research programme seeks to advance the understanding of trust breaches by employing the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) as an alternative meta-theoretical lens. CAPS extends beyond the rational and transactional focus of Social Exchange Theory (SET) by integrating cognitive, affective, self-regulatory, and contextual dimensions, offering a integrative perspective on the interplay of psychological and situational factors shaping trust dynamics.

This research draws on the application of the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensions in categorising trust breaches as presented in Epitropaki et al. (2020). Specifically, it examines how specific trust breach events and types align with ABI-based conceptualisations of trustworthiness as conceptualised by Kramer and Lewicki (2010) and Epitropaki et al., (2020). The breaches are Fraser's (2010) general trust breach events—specific instances where trust has been violated, and Grover et al.'s (2014) leader-specific types- broader classifications of these events. By incorporating this distinction, the study provides a systematic framework for examining trust violations within organisational contexts. Additionally, the dimensional alignment of breach types is examined with associated perceived severity.

The programme also seeks to examine how relational motivations, such as the desire to maintain a relationship, influence post-breach responses. It explores how motivational dynamics interact with perceived severity and propensity to trust to shape active behaviours,

such as reconciliation and revenge, as well as passive behaviours, such as avoidance. By investigating the cognitive, affective, and motivational processes underlying these responses, the research provides a more holistic understanding of trust dynamics.

This integrated approach establishes a foundation for the research questions, enabling a systematic investigation of trust breach dynamics and their implications for organisational behaviour.

#### ***4.4.2 Research Programme Questions***

The research questions informing the research programme were:

**RQ1:** *To what extent do the identified trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?*

**RQ2:** *Which trust breach events by leaders are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) influence these perceptions?*

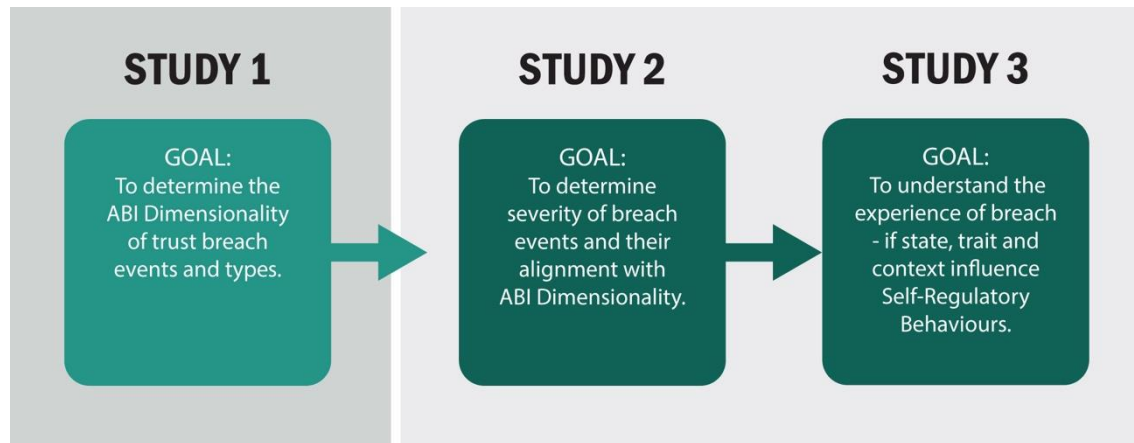
**RQ3:** *How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active and passive responses to a trust breach, and how is this effect moderated by severity?*

#### ***4.4.3 Research Programme Design***

In order to address these research questions, a three-study quantitative cross-sectional research programme was designed, informed by methodological considerations aligned with the research objectives. Before delving into the specifics of the methodological approach an overview of the research studies is shown in Figure 10.

**Figure 10.**

*Overview of Research Programme*



The research programme adopted a structured and systematic approach to investigating trust breaches, using a three-study quantitative cross-sectional design to address the identified research questions. Research Question 1 was examined in Study 1 through the use of a subject matter expert (SME) panel, which assessed the alignment of trust breach events with the dimensions of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI). Study 1 provided a foundational framework for understanding trust breach event dimensionality, serving as a basis for the subsequent studies. Study 2 investigated Research Question 2, employing an online panel to examine the perceived severity of trust breach events and the role of ABI dimensions in shaping these perceptions. Finally, Study 3 focused on Research Question 3, also using an online panel to explore individuals' post-breach responses, specifically examining how relational motivations, propensity to trust, and perceived severity influence active and passive behaviours such as avoidance, reconciliation, and revenge.

The integration of SME expertise in Study 1 and data from diverse and representative online samples in Studies 2 and 3 ensured a comprehensive exploration of trust breach dynamics. Study 1 informed the dimensionality of trust breaches, while Study 2 expanded this

understanding by investigating the subjective perceptions of severity and their relationship to trustworthiness dimensions. Study 3 extended this inquiry further by examining behavioural responses to trust breaches, focusing on the moderating role of perceived severity and the mediating influence of relational motivations.

Ethical considerations were central to the research design, ensuring adherence to rigorous standards. Measures such as maintaining participant anonymity and reducing social desirability bias were implemented to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. Ethical approval for all three studies was obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, reflecting a commitment to ethical research practices and responsible data collection (Aguinis et al., 2021).

This research programme's design demonstrates a commitment to advancing both theoretical understanding and practical insights into trust breach dynamics. By systematically addressing the research questions across the three studies, the programme provides a comprehensive examination of how trust breaches are categorised, perceived, and responded to in workplace contexts. The emphasis on leader-follower relationships offers critical insights into the relational processes that underpin organisational trust, making the findings both theoretically significant and practically relevant.

The subsequent sections detail the methodological approach employed in each study, outlining the data collection and analytical strategies used to address the research questions and generate meaningful insights into trust breach dynamics.



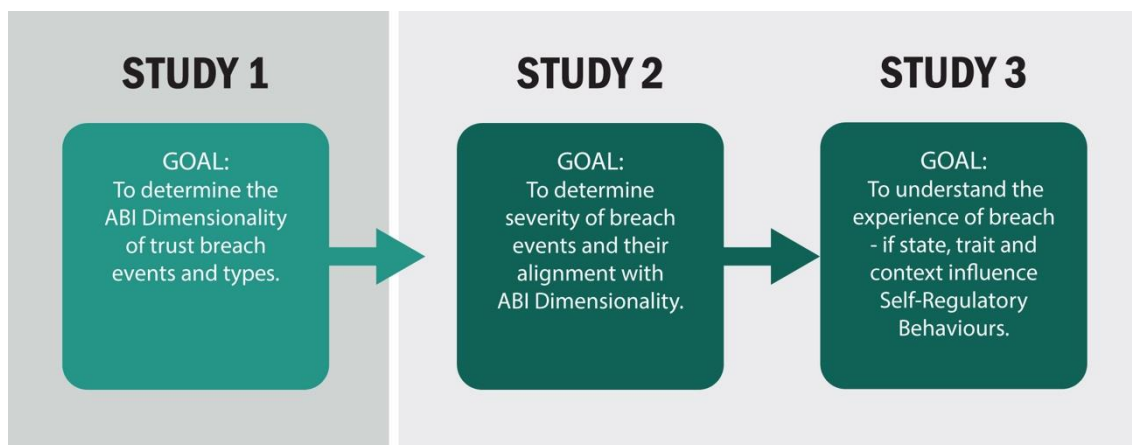
## **4.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the philosophical and methodological foundations of the research program. A positivist approach was adopted to support the systematic exploration and quantification of trust breaches. Key methodological considerations-such as the use of an online participant panel, strategies to ensure validity and generalisability, and ethical safeguards around anonymity and bias-were discussed in alignment with this approach. Together these elements support the generation of reliable insights into leader-follower trust breaches in organisational settings. The following sections describe the specific research designs and methodologies employed in each of the three studies.

## Chapter 5:

### Study 1- Trust Breach Dimensionality

#### 5.1 Research Programme Overview



#### Study 1

Research Goal	To determine the ABI dimensionality of both trust breach events and types.
Sample	A panel of 11 Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) with expertise in organisational psychology and trust research, selected for their academic credentials and professional experience.
Methodology	SMEs to assigned trust breach events and types to ABI trustworthiness dimensions.

## 5.2 Study Overview

The primary aim of this study was to determine how specific trust breach events and types align with the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity as presented in Epitropaki et al. (2020). To achieve this, a panel of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) was engaged to evaluate the dimensional alignment of these breach types and events. By establishing these alignments, the study sought to clarify the dimensionality of these breaches and set the stage for subsequent investigations into the perceived severity of trust breaches and ABI dimensionality.

*Trust breach events, as defined in this context, refer to specific examples of trust violations by a leader-actual instances where trust has been compromised. Trust breach types, by contrast, represent broader classifications that these events fit into.* The study's research question reflect the focus on ABI dimensionality of trust breach types and events:

**RQ1:** *To what extent do the identified trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?*

The question aims to provide foundational insights into how trust breaches are categorised and interpreted, laying the groundwork for investigating their perceived severity and impacts on leader-follower relationships in future research.

## 5.3 Methodology

To address RQ1, the study implemented a Subject Matter Expert (SME) panel to assess their dimensional alignment. The methodology employed involves a structured process, engaging experts in assigning both trust breach events and types to trustworthiness dimensions. The

following section details the panel composition, procedural steps, and measures used to examine the research questions.

### ***5.3.1 Panel Composition***

The panel for Study 1 comprised 11 subject matter experts (SMEs), selected for their recognised expertise in trust research all involved in First International Network on Trust (FINT). The selection criteria prioritised both academic credentials and professional accomplishments, including publication records and conference presentations, with collective experience ranging up to 40 years. Representing institutions in the USA, UK, and Europe, the panel included seasoned academic scholars as well as three PhD candidates specialising in organisational psychology or management research, none of the SMEs had prior involvement with this study, helping reduce potential bias in the evaluation process.

### ***5.3.2 Procedure***

A total of 13 subject matter experts (SMEs) were invited, either in person or via email, to participate in the categorisation tasks for the panel. Each participant received a detailed invitation, emphasising that the tasks would require no more than five minutes to complete. All invitees were provided with a personalised link to an online folder, which contained details of the task which was accompanied by specific instructions presented on a slide. Two SMEs did not respond to the invitation, resulting in a final panel of 11 participants.

- **Trust Dimension Assignment Task:** The task required SMEs to assign each trust breach event type to an appropriate trust dimension. The objective was to evaluate the alignment between the SMEs' categorisation of trust breaches and the dimensionality allocation established by Grover et al. (2014) and Kramer & Lewicki

(2010). Specifically, SMEs were asked to determine which trust dimension best corresponded with each trust breach type and event. To support their decisions, SMEs were provided with examples from the original sources (Fraser, 2010; Grover et al., 2014), along with definitions of the trust dimensions. This guidance was designed to ensure consistency with the foundational categorisations. Upon task completion, the results were automatically saved and organised into individual folders for each SME, ensuring secure storage and easy access for subsequent analysis.

### **Measures - Trust Breach Types, Events and Dimensions**

As outlined, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) received examples of general trust breach events and leader trust breach types, accompanied by definitions and examples from key sources (Fraser, 2010; Grover et al., 2014). Definitions of trust dimensions were also provided to maintain consistency with established descriptions. The description of Trust Dimensions provided to SME panel are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.**

*Description of each Trust Dimension as provided to SME panel*

Trust Dimension	Definition
Ability	e.g. ‘group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain’ (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 717).
Benevolence	e.g. ‘is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an ego-centric profit motive’ (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 718).
Integrity	e.g. defined as ‘the extent to which a trustee is believed to adhere to sound moral and ethical principles, with synonyms including fairness, justice, consistency, and promise’ (Colquitt, Scott & LePine, 2007, p.910)

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*Trust Breach Types*

The examples for Leader Trust Breach types were directly taken from the research by Grover et al. (2014). Table 7 presents the examples of each type as provided to SME panel.

**Table 7.**

*Examples of Leader Trust Breach Type*

Trust Breach Type	Examples
Supervisory Incompetence	Issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making
Lack of Caring	Lack of support or disrespect for work
Interference	Micromanaging; excessive monitoring
Abuse of Power	Favouritism; exploitation or denigration
Deception	Unkept promises; lies or information retention

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*Note:* Trust breach types are broader categories that group events

*Trust Breach Events*

The examples for General Trust Breach events were taken from research by Fraser (2010). "Structure Issues," noted as an eighth type by Fraser (2010), pertains to organisational-level breaches (Kramer & Lewicki (2010), and was excluded from the study. Table 8 presents the examples of each event, as provided to SME panel.

**Table 8.**

*Examples of General Trust Breach Event*

Trust Breach Event	Examples
Ineffective Leadership	Poor decisions or unwillingness to address major issues
Communication Issues	Not listening to others, not working to understand the other party, and breakdown in communication around major changes
Incongruence	Acting without integrity, unfair practice, actions do not match words
Unmet Expectations	Broken promises, breach of confidentiality, and breach of rules
Disrespectful Behaviours	Discounting people, blaming people, disregarding feelings and input, rude and unkind behaviour
Performance issues	Unwilling or unable to perform basic job duties, making mistakes, issues of general competence
Unwillingness to Acknowledge	Taking no responsibility for mistake, high regard for self and disregard of others

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*Note:* Trust breach events are specific instances of leader trust violations



## 5.4 Results

### 5.4.1 Trust Breach alignment with ABI Dimensionality

**RQ1:** *To what extent do the identified trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?*

As outlined, participants categorised 12 Trust Breaches into the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability, Benevolence and Integrity. An 80% consensus threshold was set, and achieved for all but two types: “Communication Issues” and “Unwillingness to Acknowledge,” which showed greater distribution across dimensions:

- Communication: Ability (73%), Benevolence (46%) and Integrity (18%)
- Unwillingness to Acknowledge: Benevolence (64%) and Integrity (73%)

“Lack of Caring”, was unanimously allocated by all panellists to a single dimension, Benevolence.

The SME allocations were broadly consistent with the dimension assignments suggested by Kramer & Lewicki (2010), except for “Unwillingness to Acknowledge”, which SMEs assigned mainly to Integrity and Benevolence rather than Ability. Similarly, trust breach types proposed by Grover et al. (2014) were consistently categorised; however, “Interference” diverged, with 80% of SMEs attributing it to Ability rather than Grover’s interpretation of it reflecting a leader’s lack of trust in followers.

Two panellists provided additional comments on categorisation challenges. One noted that assigning categories required an attributional interpretation of behaviours, with “Ineffective Leadership” examples adding ambiguity. Another found that “Deception” examples lacked

clarity, noting that categorisation was influenced by situational context and the identity of the trustor, especially for “Deception”, “Incongruence”, “Disrespectful Behaviours”, and “Unwillingness to Acknowledge”.

Table 9 presents the categorisation of trust breaches to one of the three trustworthiness dimensions (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity). Notably, “Unwillingness to Acknowledge” and “Communication Issues” did not meet the consensus threshold, leaving their placement undetermined within the framework.

**Table 9.***Trust Breach classification to ABI dimensionality*

<b>Trust Breach</b>	<b>Dimension</b>
Supervisory Incompetence	Ability *
Performance Issues	Ability
Interference	Ability
Ineffective Leadership	Ability
Disrespectful Behaviours	Benevolence
Lack of Caring	Benevolence
Abuse of Power	Integrity
Deception	Integrity
Incongruence	Integrity
Unmet Expectations	Integrity
Unwillingness to Acknowledge	Did not meet threshold
Communication Issues	Did not meet threshold

*Note* N-11. \*Supervisory Incompetence was not addressed by 36% of respondents, but among those who did respond, it met the threshold with 100% agreement.

## 5.5 Study 1 Preliminary Discussion

This section provides a preliminary discussion of the findings of Study 1, which aimed to map trust breach events and types onto the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI). The findings reveal both areas of alignment and interpretive variability, offering foundational insights into the subjective and context-dependent nature of trust breach categorisation. These insights provide a basis for further investigation in subsequent studies, particularly into the perceived severity of trust breaches and their dimensional alignment.

**RQ1:** *To what extent do the identified trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?*

### 5.5.1 Key Findings

The findings highlight that, while many trust breach events align with established ABI dimensions, some are characterised by interpretive variability. This underscores the interpretive complexity of breach categorisation and the potential influence of attributional and contextual factors. These insights inform the need for further exploration of how breach type and dimensionality shape follower perceptions and outcomes.

#### **ABI Dimensionality of Trust Breaches:**

Trust breach types, and five of the eight specific breach events, reached the 80% consensus threshold among SMEs, demonstrating strong alignment with ABI dimensions. Notably, “Lack of Caring” was unanimously categorised under Benevolence, reflecting clear dimensional attribution.

However, two events, namely “Communication Issues” and “Unwillingness to Acknowledge,” did not meet the consensus threshold, indicating more diffuse attribution. “Communication Issues” was primarily attributed to Ability, but also associated with Benevolence, while “Unwillingness to Acknowledge” showed overlapping attribution across Benevolence and Integrity, diverging from the primary Ability-based categorisation suggested in prior frameworks. These patterns are consistent with the possibility of dimensional combinations, as proposed by Chen et al. (2011), and will be explored further in subsequent analysis.

SME commentary further underscored the subjective and context-dependent nature of the categorisation process. One SME noted the influence of attributional reasoning, particularly for events linked to “Ineffective Leadership.” Another highlighted that contextual factors and trustor identity shaped interpretations of breaches such as “Deception,” “Incongruence,” “Disrespectful Behaviours,” and “Unwillingness to Acknowledge.”

This interpretive variability reflects broader findings in trust research. For example, Tomlinson et al. (2021) found that despite framing a trust violation as a competence-related, some respondents categorised it as an integrity breach, necessitating the exclusion of their data. This suggests that even clearly positioned breaches can evoke diverse interpretations, and reinforces the need for frameworks that account for attributional complexity in breach perception.

## **5.6 Implications for Study 2:**

This study addresses the gap in understanding how trust breaches are categorised within existing frameworks and dimensions, specifically examining the alignment of general trust breach events with leader-specific types and their mapping onto the trustworthiness

dimensions of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI). Key findings reveal that trust breach categorisation is highly subjective, shaped by cognitive-affective processes and situational triggers rather than the objective nature of the breach. This subjectivity highlights the interpretive flexibility in categorising trust breaches and the limitations of rigid classifications in capturing the complexity of trust dynamics. These findings support advancing with a more adaptable classification framework, such as the tripartite model.

To address this complexity, the next study will further explore these diverse interpretations by allowing trust breach events to be mapped onto multiple ABI dimensions rather than being confined to predetermined categories. This approach recognises the subjective and differentiated nature of trust breach perceptions, reflecting the variability observed in this study. By adopting a more flexible categorisation system, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these events are perceived and classified. This refinement builds on current findings while laying the groundwork for investigating the role of context, subjective interpretation, and attribution processes in shaping trust breach perceptions, aligning with the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework.

Study 2 will expand on these insights by examining both the dimensionality of trust breach types and the role of perceived severity, as proposed by Chen et al. (2011), to deepen understanding of the cognitive and affective elements involved in trust breaches. The study design will allow trust breach events to be associated with multiple ABI dimensions, ensuring findings reflect the complexity and subjectivity of breach interpretations. This flexible approach will enhance the generalisability of results and ensure broader applicability beyond reliance on subject matter experts.

The findings also emphasise the importance of revisiting all trust breach events to explore their dimensional alignment and classification. While supporting the use of trust breach types, this study highlights the need to investigate:

- The extent of subjective interpretation in categorising trust breach events.
- How this subjective interpretation influences cognitive affective aspects of trust breach experience.

By addressing these questions, future research can enhance understanding of some of the subjective and contextual factors shaping trust breach perceptions and provide support for the CAPS framework as a useful lens for interpreting trust dynamics in organisational settings.

## **5.7 Limitations**

- **SME Panel Representation:**

While the SME panel included diverse and experienced trust researchers, potential biases stemming from their academic or professional backgrounds may have influenced the categorisation process. To minimise this, the study recruited panellists from multiple regions and ensured no prior involvement with the research. Expanding future panels to include practitioners or individuals from varied cultural and organisational contexts could provide additional perspectives and enhance the generalisability of findings.

- **Limited Exploration of Overlapping Dimensional Alignments:**

Certain trust breach events, such as “Communication Issues” and “Unwillingness to Acknowledge,” did not meet the 80% consensus threshold, indicating potential overlaps across multiple dimensions (e.g., Ability and Benevolence). While the study addressed this by allowing for multiple dimensional assignments and providing clear definitions to SMEs, a deeper exploration of these overlaps was beyond the scope of this phase. Future studies could employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative categorisation tasks with qualitative methods like interviews or open-ended surveys. This approach could uncover deeper nuances in how individuals interpret breaches and provide a richer understanding of the factors influencing these judgments, such as power dynamics, role expectations, or organisational norms.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

Study 1 offers insights into the dimensional classification of trust breach events and types in relation to ABI dimensionality. While several events showed clear alignment with a single dimension-such as "Lack of Caring" with Benevolence-others reflected more interpretative variability and dimensional overlap even among subject matter experts. In some cases, this variation may reflect the potential for certain breaches to legitimately span more than one ABI dimension, rather than solely resulting from attributional differences or contextual interpretation.

The findings affirm the relevance of the ABI framework for trust breach categorisation, while also underscoring the limitations of singular classification schemes in capturing the complexity of trust breach perception. Specifically, events such as “Communication Issues”



and “Unwillingness to Acknowledge” resisted singular dimensional assignment, suggesting the need to accommodate multi-dimensional interpretations in future frameworks.

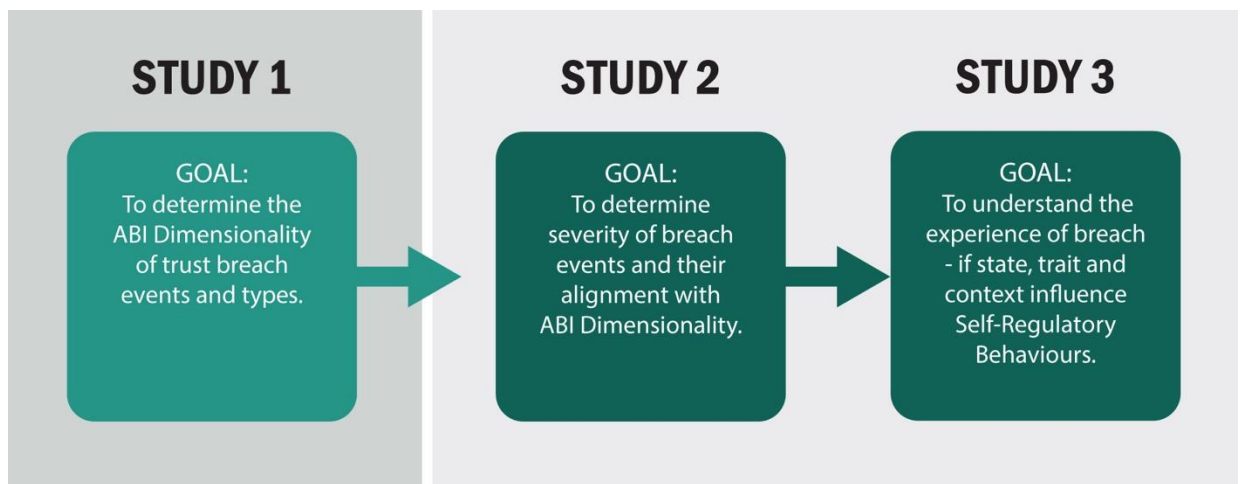
Building on these findings, Study 2 will explore the perceived severity of breaches in conjunction with their ABI dimensionality, as proposed by Chen et al. (2011). This next phase will investigate how trust breaches, once categorised by dimension, differentially evoke affective responses.

In summary, Study 1, offers preliminary insights into the dimensional structure of trust breaches using the ABI framework, informing the next phase of analysis exploring how these dimensions may relate to perceived severity and subsequent behavioural responses.

## Chapter 6:

### Study 2- Trust Breach Severity and Dimensionality

#### 6.1 Research Programme Overview



#### Study 2

**Research Goal** To determine which trust breaches by leaders are perceived as the most severe by followers and to examine how trustworthiness dimensions (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity-ABI) influence these perceptions.

**Sample** An online international participant pool (N=425) with representation across different industries and roles.

**Methodology** Self-report questionnaire.

## 6.2 Study Overview

The primary goal of this study is to examine perceptions of severity and trustworthiness dimensions in relation to trust breaches from Study 1. Additionally, this study explores which type of breaches are perceived as most severe and how trustworthiness dimensions-ability, benevolence, and integrity (ABI)- influence these perceptions. The research question guiding this study was:

**Research Question 3 (RQ3):** *Which trust breach events by leaders are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) influence these perceptions?*

To address RQ3, the study examined severity ratings and dimensional attributions to evaluate how trustworthiness dimensions shape perceptions of trust breach severity. This study empirically tested Chen et al.'s (2011) propositions by examining how breaches attributed to different ABI dimensions influence perceived severity through the testing of three hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1:** *Breaches of Benevolence will be perceived as more severe than breaches of Integrity.*
- **Hypothesis 2:** *Breaches of Integrity will be rated as more severe than breaches of Ability.*
- **Hypothesis 3:** *Breaches involving a combination of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity will be perceived as more severe than those involving individual ABI dimensions.*

These hypotheses are grounded in Chen et al.'s (2011) conceptualisation that breaches of benevolence, being closely tied to relational and identity-based trust, will provoke stronger perceptions of severity than integrity or ability breaches. Integrity breaches, related to adherence to core principles accepted by parties involved, are hypothesised to evoke moderate severity, while breaches of ability, typically task-specific and more controllable, are anticipated to be perceived with the least severity.

## **6.3 Methodology**

### ***6.3.1 Survey Design and Testing***

The survey was designed to present respondents with trust breach events, and facilitate the categorisation of these events to preferred trust breach types. Participants were asked to rate the same events for perceived severity, ensuring consistency in evaluating trust breaches. The structured format enabled the systematic collection of data for demographic, event categorisation, and severity rating purposes. Prior to data collection, the research design was submitted for approval to the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). Data collections and storage procedures met the requirements of Data Protection Law i.e. the General Data Protection Regulation (No 2016/679) (“GDPR”) and the [Data Protection Act 2018] and any other laws which apply to the University in relation to the Processing of Personal Data. See Appendix 1.

### ***6.3.2 Sample***

An online panel (OP) of 425 participants was recruited via Qualtrics, an online panel platform (OPP). The use of OPP for data collection is particularly suitable for research on sensitive topics, as it enhances participant anonymity and minimises concerns about

retaliation or breaches of confidentiality (Porter et al., 2019). Compensation management followed Qualtrics' quality control policies, with clear guidelines that incomplete or incorrect submissions would not be accepted. Screening criteria required participants to (1) have a geographical IP address located in the USA, UK, or Ireland with equal representation from each location, (2) be employed full-time, and (3) be over 18 years of age. Additionally, participants provided informed consent, confirmed that they had read and understood the Plain Language Statement, acknowledged the opportunity to ask questions, and demonstrated an understanding of the data protection and confidentiality measures. Data collections and storage procedures met the requirements of Data Protection Law i.e. the General Data Protection Regulation (No 2016/679) ("GDPR") and the [Data Protection Act 2018] and any other laws which apply to the University in relation to the Processing of Personal Data.

#### Online Research Panel Participants

Four hundred twenty-five participants who met the screening criteria completed the survey through the Qualtrics platform. The sample was evenly distributed across the United Kingdom (n = 140, 34%), the United States (n = 144, 33%), and Ireland (n = 141, 33%). All participants were compensated for their participation. All participants were full-time employees, with a mean age of 39 years, ranging from 20 to 81 years. Gender distribution included 57% females (n = 243) and 43% males (n = 181).

The respondents worked in diverse sectors, with the most significant proportion employed in healthcare and social services (n = 53, 12.5%), followed by educational services (n = 47, 11%), information and telecommunication (n = 40, 9.4%), finance and insurance (n = 38, 8.9%), retail trade (n = 33, 7.8%), manufacturing (n = 31, 7.3%), and construction (n = 29,

6.8%). Participants had substantial work experience, with 64% having ten or more years of experience (n = 271), 12 % with 7-9 years (n = 49), 13% with 4-6 years (n = 53), 8% with 1-3 years (n = 33), 2% with six months to one year (n = 8) and 3% with less than six months experience (n = 11). The majority of respondents were employees (n = 197, 46%), followed by senior managers (n = 97, 23%), middle managers (n = 81, 19%), junior managers (n = 40, 9.4%), and 2.4% who identified other roles such as president, researcher, owner, or business owner (n = 10).

The ethnic composition was predominantly White (n = 382, 90%), with smaller percentages identifying as Black or African American (n = 17, 4%), Asian (n = 9, 2%), Hispanic or Latino (n = 8, 2%), and other ethnic groups (n = 9, 2%). In terms of educational attainment, 22% of the sample had a high school diploma (n = 94), 13% had an associate degree (n = 54), 36% held a bachelor's degree (n = 154), 25% had a master's degree (n = 108), and 4% completed a doctorate (n = 15).

### ***6.3.3 Proactive Common Method Bias Management***

To address common method bias, several procedural strategies were implemented in the survey. Items were presented in randomised order across sections to reduce consistency bias, and varied scale endpoints and anchors were used to discourage uniform response patterns. To mitigate social desirability bias, participants were assured of their confidentiality and informed there were no "right" or "wrong" answers. These measures aimed to minimise biases associated with self-report data, thus enhancing data reliability and supporting the validity of the study's findings (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Additionally, to manage careless or insufficient effort (C/IE) responding, completion times were monitored to meet platform thresholds, and infrequency and frequency scales were used to identify inconsistent

responses ((Bowling et al., 2021; Kay & Saucier, 2023; Wessling et al., 2017). These design strategies were adopted to ensure data quality, consistent with current best practices in online survey methodology (Aguinis et al., 2021)

#### **6.3.4 Survey Pre-Test**

Prior to the main data collection, a pre-test of the survey instrument was conducted with a representative sample (N=45) to ensure clarity, functionality, and identify potential issues. Participants completed the survey under conditions identical to the main study, allowing for a thorough review of responses to detect any ambiguities, unclear items, or technical issues impacting data quality or participant experience. Based on this feedback, the following revisions were implemented:

- **Required Response:** Participants were required to fully complete each question before advancing to minimise missing data and enhance dataset completeness.
- Speed Check:** A speed check excluded participants who completed the survey in less than 50% of the median completion time, ensuring responses reflected attention and consideration, thus improving data quality (Smith et al., 2016).

#### **6.3.5 Power Analysis**

To ensure sample size was adequate to test the hypotheses via a one-way ANOVA with 4 groups, an a priori power analysis was conducted using *G\*Power* version 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007) to determine the minimum sample size required. The input parameters were set to Cohen's  $f = .18$  (small to medium effect size), a significance level of .05, and 80% power. The results of the power analysis indicated that a total of sample size of 344 participants would be required to achieve sufficient statistical power.

### **6.3.6 Procedure**

Participants received detailed information about the study, including its purpose, voluntary nature, and assurances of strict confidentiality. They were informed that the survey aimed to explore the influence of employee attitudes on workplace behaviours and events. Informed consent was secured, emphasising that participation was voluntary, anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was upheld throughout data collection and analysis. The survey was deemed to involve minimal risk. Participants were assured that the research posed minimal risk; however, in alignment with ethics committee recommendations, resources were made available for support in the unlikely event of participant distress (see Appendix 2 for the informed consent form).

The survey consisted of three primary tasks: categorising trust breach events, identifying additional transgressions, and rating perceived severity. Trust breach events refer to specific examples of trust violations by a leader-actual instances where trust has been compromised. Trust breach types on the other hand, are broader classifications that these events fit into. Initially, participants completed demographic information and items related to propensity to trust. They then categorised 20 leader-follower trust breach events into six established types (Supervisor Incompetence, Lack of Caring, Interference, Abuse of Power and Deception and Other), drawn from Grover et al. (2014), and Epitropaki et al. (2020). Building on findings from Study 1, participants could apply multiple categorical types if applicable or suggest new categories if the options were insufficient (see Appendix 3 for full survey).

Each of the 20 predefined trust breach events was accompanied by detailed examples to ensure clarity and consistency in interpretation. To address the possibility that the provided list might not fully capture the range of trust breaches experienced, participants were asked



to reflect on whether additional trust breaches should be included. If participants identified events not represented in the list, they were invited to describe these breaches in detail and, where possible, suggest an appropriate category. This approach allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, enhancing the comprehensiveness and validity of the dataset while maintaining the methodological rigor of the research. In the final task, participants rated the severity of these breaches by imagining each behaviour as enacted by their immediate supervisor. Breaches were presented independently in three sections, with instructions to assess each without context or sequence, ensuring unbiased and honest responses.

### **Survey Instrument and Measures**

The survey instrument for Study 2 was divided into three key sections designed to gather data on participants' demographic information, their propensity to trust, and their perceptions of trust breaches in the workplace. The measures used in Study 2 are outlined below, along with reliability statistics compared to previous studies, with the complete set of items available in the full questionnaire (see Appendix 2).

*Propensity to Trust* Propensity to trust was measured using the 10-item IPIP NEO A1 scale (Goldberg, 1999), which demonstrates strong reliability, validity and psychometric robustness (Donnellan et al., 2006). Respondents rated statements on a 5-point scale (1 = Very Inaccurate to 5 = Very Accurate), with example items such as 'Trust Others,' and 'Suspect hidden motives in others.' Scores were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater propensity to trust items.

*Trust Breach Types and Events* This study utilised 20 trust breach events, drawn directly from the foundational research by Fraser (2010) and Grover et al. (2014), consistent with those used in Study 1. Specifically, seven events were sourced from Fraser's work (e.g.

ineffective leadership, disrespectful behaviours), while 13 were taken from Grover's research (e.g. lies, unkept promises). Participants were tasked with categorising these events based on the five trust breach types outlined by Grover and referenced in Epitropaki et al. (2020): Supervisor Incompetence, Lack of Caring, Interference, Abuse of Power and Deception.

In this context, each trust breach event represents a specific instance of a leader's action that undermines trust, while trust breach types serve as broader categories that group similar events under a shared classification. To provide participants flexibility, a sixth category, 'Other,' was included, allowing respondents to suggest new categories or classify events under a different heading if they felt the existing options were insufficient.

*Perceived Severity* The Greco et al. (2019) severity rating scale was employed. Participants were asked to, 'imagine that your immediate supervisor engaged in the following hypothetical behaviours (i.e. trust breach events)'. Severity was defined as "how intense, harsh, or harmful it would be to you". Participants rated the perceived severity of each event on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not severe) to 7 (very severe).

### *Careless and Insufficient Effort Responding (C/IE)*

In addition to the primary survey measures, Careless and Insufficient Effort Responding (C/IE) items were incorporated into the survey as a management strategy to ensure data quality and respondent attentiveness. Unlike traditional measurement scales, these items function as attention checks, identifying inattentive respondents whose responses could compromise the validity of the data collected. C/IE was assessed using two items from Huang et al. (2015) and one item from DeSimone et al. (2020).

The following C/IE items were used:

- (1) “I have never used a computer” and
- (2) “I work twenty-eight hours in a typical work day” (Huang et al., 2015), and
- (3) “I am able to breathe” (DeSimone et al., 2020)

These items are widely accepted as attention checks for online surveys, providing an effective method to identify inattentive respondents and ensure data quality (Kay & Saucier, 2023). Participants who failed these tests were flagged as C/IE responders and removed from the study.

### **Data Preparation**

Two steps were taken to prepare the data: Initial Data Review and Categorisation Task Processing. These steps ensured data integrity, suitability for analysis, and alignment with the study’s objectives.

The initial data review followed best practices outlined by Aguinis et al. (2021) and involved review for missing values and assessing response distributions through descriptive statistics. Frequencies and descriptive statistics, (means, medians, standard deviations, and minimum

and maximum scores) were calculated for all study variables to assess response distributions and sample characteristics (Desimone et al., 2015). Data entry errors were checked by identifying outliers and verifying that all values fell within the expected range. A total of 58 responses were excluded due to issues identified during screening such as implausible birth years, unclear free-text entries, duplicate IP address, or missing data. To preserve the sample size of 425, an additional 58 responses were sourced and retained after data review.

To ensure the dataset met the assumptions required for one-way ANOVA analyses, the data were inspected for normality, skewness, and kurtosis. Although ANOVA assumes that the residuals of the dependent variable are normally distributed within each group, research suggests that the F-test is robust to moderate deviations from normality when group sizes are reasonably large and variances are homogeneous (Blanca et al., 2017). Normality was assessed through both visual inspections of histograms and the calculation of skewness and kurtosis values, following the guidelines of Tabachnick & Fidell (2013). Skewness values within a  $\pm 2.0$  and kurtosis values within  $\pm 4.0$  indicate acceptable univariate normality, providing a benchmark for assessing normality violations (Karantzas et al., 2014).

Descriptive analysis of severity ratings revealed generally high perceived severity across all trust breach events, with means ranging from 5.03 to 5.88 on a 7-point scale, moderate variability, and full use of the full response range. Skewness values for the severity items ranged from -0.44 (task expectation ambiguity) to -1.44 (lies), indicating that participants perceived these breaches as severe, with ratings clustering toward the higher end of the scale. This tendency was particularly pronounced for items like deception and denigration. Kurtosis values ranged from -0.36 (excessive monitoring) to 1.72 (denigration), reflecting that most items were tightly clustered around their means, with no extreme outliers.

For the Propensity to Trust measure, the mean score was moderate ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), with minimal outlier influence and a slight negative skew, aligning with the overall trends observed in other variables. Additional analyses, including factor loadings, confirmed a two-factor structure with negatively worded items loading onto a separate factor- a common effect noted in psychometric research (Dalal & Carter, 2014).

Across all variables, skewness and kurtosis fell within acceptable ranges, supporting the suitability of the dataset for parametric analyses.

Outliers were identified and addressed following best practice guidelines (Aguinis et al., 2013). Trimmed means and interquartile ranges confirmed a limited impact from outliers, supporting data integrity. Together with visual inspection and skewness and kurtosis assessments, these findings underscore the reliability of the severity ratings, ensuring robustness for subsequent analysis.

The final step in data preparation involved recoding the results from the categorisation task. Participants classified trust breach events into as many of the six predefined categories- Supervisory Incompetence, Lack of Caring, Interference, Abuse of Power, Deception, and Other -as they felt were appropriate. These categories were mapped to the trustworthiness dimensions defined by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in Study 1 as follows:

- **Ability (coded as 1):** Supervisory Incompetence and Interference
- **Benevolence (coded as 2):** Lack of Caring
- **Integrity (coded as 3):** Abuse of Power and Deception
- **ABI (Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity, coded as 4):** Any combination of events encompassing all three dimensions.

For example, if participant A categorised Follower Exploitation as Lack of Caring it would be coded as 2, if participant B categorised Follower Exploitation as either Supervisory Incompetence or Interference or both it would be coded as 1. Participant C's categorisation of Follower Exploitation as Ability (Supervisory Incompetence and/or Interference), Benevolence (Lack of Caring), and Integrity (Abuse of Power and/or Deception) would be coded as 4.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

The methodology employed to examine these hypotheses involves a structured analysis using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the perceived severity across trustworthiness dimensions and breach types. This statistical approach will enable the identification of significant differences in perceived severity across trustworthiness dimensions and provide insights into how combinations of breaches influence trust erosion. Consistent with Cohen (1988) guidelines, effect sizes for ANOVA are classified as small ( $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ), medium ( $\eta^2 = 0.06$ ), and large ( $\eta^2 = 0.14$ ), where  $\eta^2$  denotes the proportion of variance accounted for by the independent variable. The following section details the specific measures, sampling strategies, and analytical techniques used to evaluate RQ3 and the associated hypotheses. Preliminary statistical analyses were conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 29.0.1.

## **6.4 Results**

***RQ3:** Which trust breach events by leaders are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) influence these perceptions?*

To address RQ3, descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses examined the perceived severity of trust breach events across demographic and experiential groups, forming the basis for hypothesis testing and inferential analyses (correlation, regression, and ANOVA) to explore relationships between trustworthiness dimensions (ABI) and perceived severity

#### ***6.4.1 Descriptive Statistics***

The means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and correlations of propensity to trust and perceived severity of 10 trust breach events variables are summarised in Table 10. The means and standard deviations were within the expected range, indicating normal response patterns across the sample. All breach events were significantly correlated with each other, showing consistent positive relationships between the trust breach events. Propensity to trust was not significantly correlated with any trust breach event severity rating, suggesting that follower's general tendency to trust did not influence their perception of the severity of these events. This highlights that, while perceived severity of trust breach events is interrelated, propensity to trust operates independently in this context.

**Table 10.***Descriptive statistics and correlations for Study Variables*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	1.43	0.50												
2. PTT	3.51	0.67	0.03	(.86)										
3. Lies	5.88	1.45	-.05	.02										
4. Denigration	5.72	1.48	-.14**	.02	.65**									
5. Disrespectful Behaviours	5.63	1.54	-.10*	.04	.65**	.63**								
6. DIR	5.53	1.54	-.07	.05	.65**	.60**	.62**							
7. Follower Exploitation	5.53	1.49	-.15**	.05	.64**	.64**	.66**	.62**						
8. Disrespect for FW	5.47	1.47	-.09	.05	.61**	.66**	.65**	.56**	.66**					
9. Unkept Promises	5.46	1.52	-.12*	-.01	.59**	.58**	.53**	.59**	.54**	.54**				
10. Unfair Favouritism	5.44	1.49	-.16**	.05	.60**	.65**	.58**	.61**	.58**	.58**	.53**			
11. Unmet Expectations	5.40	1.39	-.12*	.04	.54**	.57**	.57**	.55**	.59**	.61**	.59**	.55**		
12. Ineff Leadership	5.34	1.48	0	.06	.50**	.52**	.55**	.50**	.49**	.52**	.46**	.54**	.49**	

Note: 2. PTT= Propensity to Trust; 6. DIR= Deliberate Information Retention; 8. Disrespect for FW = Disrespect for Followers Work 12. Ineff Leadership= Ineffective Leadership. Coefficient alpha reliability estimates are in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$



#### 6.4.2 Research Question and Hypothesis Testing

*RQ3: a. Which types of trust breaches are perceived as the most severe by individuals, and b. how do trustworthiness dimensions influence these perceptions?*

##### Trust Breach Severity

This section addresses the research question by identifying which trust breaches were perceived as the most severe. The analysis focuses on the top 10 trust breach events ranked by their severity ratings across the full sample. Table 11 presents these rankings, presenting the mean severity ratings, standard deviations, and the associated trustworthiness dimension (Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity).

**Table 11.**

*Top 10 Trust Breach Events by Severity Rating*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	ABI Dimensionality
Lies	5.88	1.45	Integrity
Denigration	5.72	1.48	Integrity
Disrespectful Behaviours*	5.63	1.54	Benevolence
Deliberate Information Retention	5.53	1.54	Integrity
Follower Exploitation	5.53	1.48	Integrity
Disrespect for followers Work	5.47	1.47	Benevolence
Unkept Promises	5.46	1.52	Integrity
Unfair Favouritism	5.44	1.49	Integrity
Unmet Expectations*	5.40	1.39	Integrity
Ineffective Leadership*	5.34	1.48	Ability

*Note:* Full Sample N= 425. \* Categories by Subject Matter Experts. All others are those classified by (Grover et al., 2014).

The findings indicate that the top three breach events included Integrity and Benevolence breaches. Specifically, events such as Lies, Denigration and Disrespectful Behaviours make up the top three ratings.

### **Differences in Perceptions of Trust Breach Severity**

To assess differences in perceived severity of trust breaches across personal experience, propensity to trust, employment grade, education level and gender independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted, and broadly no significant differences were found except for gender. Female participants rated several breaches as more severe, including "Denigration" ( $t(422) = 2.98, p = 0.003, d = 0.29$ ), "Disrespectful Behaviours" ( $t(422) = 2.14, p = 0.033, d = 0.21$ ), "Follower Exploitation" ( $t(422) = 3.01, p = 0.003, d = 0.30$ ), "Unkept Promises" ( $t(422) = 2.42, p = 0.016, d = 0.24$ ), "Unfair Favouritism" ( $t(422) = 3.42, p < 0.001, d = 0.34$ ), and "Unmet Expectations" ( $t(422) = 2.43, p = 0.016, d = 0.24$ ). Other breach events showed no significant gender differences ( $p > 0.05$ ). These results are presented in Table 12.

**Table 12.***Independent Samples t-Tests for Perceived Severity of Trust Breaches by Gender*

Trust Breach Type	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> (Two- tailed)	Mean Difference	95% CI for Mean Difference	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Lies	0.94	422	0.349	0.13	[-0.15, 0.41]	0.09
<b>Denigration</b>	2.98	422	0.003	0.43	[0.15, 0.71]	0.29
<b>Disrespectful</b>						
<b>Behaviours</b>	2.14	422	0.033	0.32	[0.03, 0.62]	0.21
DIR	1.45	422	0.149	0.22	[-0.08, 0.51]	0.14
<b>Follower Exploitation</b>	3.01	422	0.003	0.44	[0.15, 0.72]	0.30
Disrespect for FW	1.88	422	0.061	0.27	[-0.01, 0.55]	0.18
<b>Unkept Promises</b>	2.42	422	0.016	0.36	[0.07, 0.65]	0.24
<b>Unfair Favouritism</b>	3.42	422	<.001	0.50	[0.21, 0.78]	0.34
<b>Unmet Expectations</b>	2.43	422	0.016	0.33	[0.06, 0.60]	0.24
Ineff Leadership	0.003	422	0.998	0	[-0.29, 0.29]	0

*Note.* DIR= Deliberate Information Retention; Disrespect for FW = Disrespect for Followers Work; Ineff Leadership= Ineffective Leadership. Significant findings are indicate in **bold**, and non-significant results are provided for completeness.

Overall, these findings indicate largely consistent perceptions of trust breach severity, with notable exceptions for gender, where female followers rated certain breach events as more severe than male participants.

### *Categorisation: Trustworthiness Dimensions and Trust Breach Event*

The findings indicated that none of the breach events reached the 80% consensus threshold for classification under a single trustworthiness dimension. Instead, the classification exhibited diffuse agreement across dimensions, consistent with Study 1 findings, which emphasised the subjective and multidimensional nature of trust breach categorisations. For example, Disrespectful Behaviours was categorised as Integrity (32%), Ability (25%), Benevolence (23%), and ABI (15%). Similarly, Unmet Expectations was categorised as Integrity (41%), Ability (25%), ABI (18%), and Benevolence (16%). Denigration and Lies were predominantly classified as Integrity breaches (54.2% and 63.7%, respectively), yet both events also had notable allocations to other dimensions, such as Ability (20.3% and 12.4%, respectively). These overlaps suggest that even events typically associated with a single trustworthiness dimension, such as Lies, are subject to subjective categorisation. Table 13 displays the frequency and percentage distribution of trust breach events by trustworthiness dimensions, highlighting the subjective categorisation of all trust events.

**Table 13.**

*Frequencies and Percentages of Trust Breach Events Categorised by Trustworthiness Dimensions*

Trust Breach Event	Ability N (%)	Benevolence N (%)	Integrity N (%)	ABI N (%)	Total (N)
Lies	40 (12.4%)	29 (9.0%)	205 (63.7%)	48 (14.9%)	322
Denigration	63 (20.3%)	31 (10.0%)	168 (54.2%)	48 (15.5%)	310
Disrespectful Behaviours	74 (24.8%)	69 (23.2%)	94 (31.5%)	61 (20.5%)	298
Deliberate Information Retention	56 (18.4%)	28 (9.2%)	173 (56.7%)	48 (15.7%)	305
Follower Exploitation	47 (14.5%)	42 (13.0%)	197 (60.8%)	38 (11.7%)	324
Disrespect for Followers' Work	79 (26.1%)	101 (33.3%)	70 (23.1%)	53 (17.5%)	303
Unkept Promises	43 (13.4%)	32 (10.0%)	205 (64.1%)	40 (12.5%)	320
Unfair Favouritism	59 (18.2%)	20 (6.2%)	203 (62.7%)	42 (13.0%)	324
Unmet Expectations	77 (25.4%)	47 (15.5%)	125 (41.3%)	54 (17.8%)	303
Ineffective Leadership	195 (60.4%)	27 (8.4%)	58 (18.0%)	43 (13.3%)	323

Note. Percentages represent the proportion of valid responses for each trust breach event. N = 425. The difference between sample size of 425 and the N for the breach event was made up of other combinations.

These results reinforce Study 1's finding that trust breaches rarely map neatly onto one dimension, highlighting the multifaceted nature of trust breach perceptions, where the same event (e.g., Lies) can be attributed to different dimensions depending on individual interpretations. Such variability underscores the complexity of trust breach perception and the importance of understanding these nuances when considering experience of trust breach.

#### ***6.4.3 Hypothesis Testing: Trustworthiness Dimensions and Perceived Severity of Trust Breaches***

This section examines the relationship between trustworthiness dimensions (Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity) and the perceived severity of trust breach events through the testing of three hypotheses. These hypotheses examine whether followers differentiate the severity of trust breach events based on the trustworthiness dimensions violated. Specifically:

- **Hypothesis 1** breaches of Benevolence will be perceived as more severe than breaches of Integrity.
- **Hypothesis 2** breaches of Integrity will be rated as more severe than breaches of Ability.
- **Hypothesis 3** breaches involving a combination of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity will be perceived as more severe than those involving individual ABI dimensions.

The hypotheses were evaluated using one-way ANOVA analyses to evaluate differences in perceived severity ratings across the top ten trust breach events. Significant differences were identified for eight of out 10 trust breach events. There were no significant difference in the perceived severity for Disrespect for Followers work and Ineffective Leadership. Integrity

and ABI's combined categorisations consistently received the highest severity ratings. The exception to this was for Disrespectful Behaviours in which Benevolence was rated higher than Integrity. Table 14 presents the means, standard deviations, and results of the ANOVA testing, including effect sizes and significance levels.

**Table 14.**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Perceived Severity Ratings for Different Trustworthiness Dimensions*

Event	Ability M (SD)	Benevolence M (SD)	Integrity M (SD)	ABI M (SD)	F(df1, df2)	p	$\eta^2$
<b>Lies</b>	5.05 (1.63)	5.07 (2.12)	6.05 (1.27)	6.19 (1.36)	9.35 (3, 318)	< .001	.08
<b>Denigration</b>	5.43 (1.48)	5.26 (1.59)	5.85 (1.39)	6.06 (1.28)	3.37 (3, 306)	.019	.03
<b>Disrespectful Behaviours</b>	5.20 (1.63=5)	5.84 (1.37)	5.40 (1.71)	6.09 (1.08)	4.49 (3, 299)	.004	.04
<b>Deliberate Information Retention</b>	5.32 (1.44)	4.64 (1.37)	5.74 (1.47)	5.75 (1.48)	5.33 (3, 301)	.001	.05
<b>Follower Exploitation</b>	5.11 (1.63)	4.93 (1.44)	5.66 (1.44)	5.87 (1.44)	4.87 (3, 320)	.003	.04
Disrespect for Followers' Work	5.38 (1.43)	5.79 (1.15)	5.33 (1.61)	5.75 (1.40)	2.39 (3, 299)	.069	.02
<b>Unkept Promises</b>	5.19 (1.55)	4.47 (1.50)	5.69 (1.37)	5.8 (1.56)	8.02 (3, 316)	< .001	.07
<b>Unfair Favouritism</b>	4.98 (1.69)	4.65 (1.35)	5.62 (1.34)	5.64 (1.17)	5.75 (3, 320)	< .001	.05
<b>Unmet Expectations</b>	5.05 (1.56)	5.04 (1.33)	5.52 (1.33)	5.80 (1.47)	4.23 (3, 299)	.006	.04
Ineffective Leadership	5.31 (1.46)	4.81 (1.67)	5.28 (1.69)	5.77 (1.13)	2.35 (3, 319)	.072	.02

**Note.** *p* values indicate the significance of differences across groups based on one-way ANOVA. Effect sizes are represented by  $\eta^2$ , indicating the proportion of variance explained by group differences. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Tukey's HSD test to identify specific pairwise differences. Significant findings are indicate in **bold**, and non-significant results are provided for completeness.



Post hoc Tukey's HSD test was conducted to identify specific pairwise differences following significant ANOVA results. These tests enabled the examination of perceived severity across trustworthiness dimensions (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity, and their combination, ABI). Where Levene's test indicated unequal variances, additional robustness checks, including Welch's and Brown-Forsythe tests, were conducted to confirm ANOVA results. The next section provides detailed results for each hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 1:** *Breaches of Benevolence will be perceived as more severe than breaches of Integrity.*

To test whether perceived severity of trust breach is higher when the breach is classified as a Benevolence rather than as an Integrity breach a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted. The expected pattern of breaches being perceived as more severe when categorised as a Benevolence breach rather than as an Integrity breach was observed in two of the top 10 trust breach events- Disrespectful Behaviours and Disrespect for followers' work. However, the difference was not statistically significant. Full descriptive statistics, ANOVA results, post hoc comparisons, and effect sizes are presented in Table 15.

The following significant differences between breaches categorised as Integrity perceived more severely than breaches categorised as Benevolence were observed (Note: this is opposite to the hypothesised relationship):

- **Lies:** The results showed the effect of classification for Lies across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 318) = 9.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ , indicating a medium effect. Levene's test indicated unequal variances among groups ( $p < .001$ ), so

additional robustness checks were conducted. Both Welch's,  $F(3, 71.05) = 6.50, p < .001$ , and Brown-Forsythe,  $F(3, 93.12) = 6.62, p < .001$ , confirmed the ANOVA findings. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Lies classified as an Integrity and Benevolence breach. However, examination of descriptive statistics showed that when Lies were classified as Integrity ( $M = 6.05, SD = 1.27$ ) they were rated significantly higher in severity than when they were classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 5.07, SD = 2.12$ ).

- **Deliberate Information Retention (DIR):** The results showed the effect of classification for DIR across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 301) = 5.33, p = .001, \eta^2 = .05$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .944$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between DIR classified as an Integrity and Benevolence breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that when DIR was classified as an Integrity breach ( $M = 5.74, SD = 1.47$ ) it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.64, SD = 1.37$ ).
- **Follower Exploitation:** The results showed the effect of classification for Follower Exploitation across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 320) = 4.87, p = .003, \eta^2 = .04$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .741$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Follower Exploitation

classified as an Integrity and Benevolence breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Follower Exploitation was classified as an Integrity breach ( $M = 5.66$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ).

- **Unkept Promises:** The results showed the effect of classification for Unkept Promises across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 316) = 8.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ , indicating a medium effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .727$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Unkept Promises classified as an Integrity and Benevolence breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Unkept Promises was classified as an Integrity breach ( $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ).
- **Unfair Favouritism:** The results showed the effect of classification for Unfair Favouritism across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 320) = 5.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .170$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Unfair Favouritism classified as an Integrity and Benevolence breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Unfair Favouritism was classified as an Integrity breach

( $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ).

**Hypothesis 1 is not supported.** Contrary to the hypothesis, breaches categorised as Integrity breaches were rated as more severe than when they were categorised as breaches of Benevolence. Results were significant for five breach events; Lies, Deliberate Information Retention, Follower Exploitation, Unkept Promises, and Unfair Favouritism.

Full descriptive statistics, ANOVA results, post hoc comparisons, and effect sizes are presented in Table 15.

**Table 15.**

*Descriptive Statistics, Post Hoc Comparisons, and Effect Sizes for Benevolence and Integrity Classifications*

<b>Breach Event</b>	<b>ABI Dimension</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Std. Dev. (SD)</b>	<b>Significant Pairwise Comparisons</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Effect Size (<math>\eta^2</math>)</b>
<b>Lies</b>	B	5.07	2.12	I > B	0.98	.003	.08
	I	6.05	1.27				
<b>DIR</b>	B	4.64	1.37	I > B	1.10	.002	.05
	I	5.74	1.47				
<b>Follower Exploitation</b>	B	4.93	1.44	I > B	0.74	.018	.04
	I	5.66	1.44				
<b>Unkept Promises</b>	B	4.47	1.50	I > B	1.22	<.001	.07
	I	5.69	1.37				
<b>Unfair Favouritism</b>	B	4.65	1.35	I > B	.971	.016	.05
	I	5.62	1.34				

**Note:** DIR = Deliberate Information Retention; B = Benevolence; I = Integrity.  $\eta^2$  = eta-squared. Pairwise comparisons were conducted using Tukey's HSD test. Levene's test for Lies indicated unequal variances ( $p < .05$ ), and Welch's and Brown-Forsythe tests confirmed the ANOVA findings. For all others equal variances were assumed ( $p > .05$ ).

As outlined, when categorised as Integrity violations Lies, Deliberate Information Retention, Follower Exploitation, Unkept Promises, and Unfair Favouritism were consistently rated as more severe than when categorised as Benevolence breaches. The largest mean differences

were found for Lies and Unkept Promises, underscoring the heightened emotional and ethical impact of these violations.

These findings indicate that when Lies, Deliberate Information Retention, Follower Exploitation, Unkept Promises, and Unfair Favouritism are classified in the Integrity dimension they are perceived more severely than when they are classified as Benevolence breaches. This outcome is in the opposite direction to Hypothesis 1, which posited that Benevolence breaches would be perceived as more severe than those of Integrity.

**Hypothesis 2:** *Breaches of Integrity will be rated as more severe than breaches of Ability.*

To test whether perceived severity of trust breach is higher when the breach is classified as an Integrity rather than as an Ability breach, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted. The expected result of breaches being perceived as significantly more severe when categorised as an Integrity breach rather than as an Ability breach was observed in two of the top 10 trust breach events. Full descriptive statistics, ANOVA results, post hoc comparisons, and effect sizes are presented in Table 16.

The following significant results were observed, which show differences between breaches categorised as Integrity perceived more severely than breaches categorised as Ability. This supports the hypothesised relationship:

- **Lies:** The results showed the effect of classification for Lies across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 318) = 9.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ , indicating a medium effect. Levene's test indicated unequal variances among groups ( $p < .001$ ), so additional robustness checks were conducted. Both Welch's,  $F(3, 71.05) = 6.50, p <$

.001, and Brown-Forsythe,  $F(3, 93.12) = 6.62, p < .001$ , confirmed the ANOVA findings. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Lies classified as an ABI combination and Lies categorised as Integrity or Benevolence breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Lies were classified as Integrity ( $M = 6.05, SD = 1.27$ ), they were rated significantly higher in severity than when they were classified as an Ability breach ( $M = 5.05, SD = 1.63$ ).

- **Unfair Favouritism:** The results showed the effect of classification for Unfair Favouritism across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 320) = 5.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .170$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Unfair Favouritism classified as an Integrity and Ability breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Unfair Favouritism was classified as an Integrity breach ( $M = 5.62, SD = 1.34$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as an Ability breach ( $M = 4.98, SD = 1.69$ ).

No other significant pairwise comparisons were found between Integrity and Ability for the remaining breaches. **Hypothesis 2 is partially supported**, whereby two breaches categorised as Integrity breaches were rated as more severe than when they were categorised as breaches of Ability. Results were significant for two breach events: Lies and Unfair Favouritism. Full descriptive statistics, ANOVA results, post hoc comparisons, and effect sizes are presented in Table 16.

**Table 16.**

*Descriptive Statistics, Post Hoc Comparisons, and Effect Sizes for Ability and Integrity Classifications*

<b>Breach Event</b>	<b>ABI Dimension</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Std. Dev. (SD)</b>	<b>Significant Pairwise Comparisons</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Effect Size (<math>\eta^2</math>)</b>
<b>Lies</b>	A	5.05	1.63	I > A	.999	< .001	.08
	I	6.05	1.27				
<b>Unfair Favouritism</b>	A	4.98	1.69	I > A	0.64	.011	.05
	I	5.62	1.34				

**Note:** A= Ability; I= Integrity  $\eta^2$  = eta-squared. Pairwise comparisons were conducted using Tukey's HSD test. Levene's test for Lies indicated unequal variances ( $p < .05$ ), and Welch's and Brown-Forsythe tests confirmed the ANOVA findings. For other events, equal variances were assumed ( $p > .05$ ).

As outlined, when categorised as Integrity Violations, Lies and Unfair Favouritism were consistently rated as more severe than when categorised as Ability breaches. The largest mean difference was observed for Lies. These findings indicate that, when Lies and Unfair Favouritism are classified as Integrity breaches, they are perceived more severely than when they are classified as Ability breaches, supporting Hypothesis 2.

**Hypothesis 3:** *Breaches involving a combination of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity will be perceived as more severe than those involving individual ABI dimensions.*

To test whether perceived severity of trust breach is higher when the breach is classified as a combination of ABI (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity) dimensions rather than individual



dimensions, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted. The expected pattern of ABI combination being perceived as significantly more severe than Ability, Benevolence or Integrity alone was observed in seven of the top 10 trust breach events. Full descriptive statistics, ANOVA results, post hoc comparisons, and effect sizes are presented in Table 17.

The following significant results were observed, which show differences between breaches categorised as a combination of ABI dimensions perceived more severely than breaches categorised as individual dimensions. This supports the hypothesised relationship:

- **Lies:** The results showed the effect of classification for Lies across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 318) = 9.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ , indicating a medium effect. Levene's test indicated unequal variances among groups ( $p < .001$ ), so additional robustness checks were conducted. Both Welch's,  $F(3, 71.05) = 6.50, p < .001$ , and Brown-Forsythe,  $F(3, 93.12) = 6.62, p < .001$ , confirmed the ANOVA findings. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Lies classified as an Ability and an Integrity breach. However, examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Lies were classified as ABI combination ( $M = 6.19, SD = 1.36$ ), they were rated significantly higher in severity for both Ability ( $M = 5.05, SD = 1.63$ ) and Benevolence ( $M = 5.07, SD = 2.12$ ).
- **Disrespectful Behaviours:** The results showed the effect of classification for Disrespectful Behaviours across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 294) = 5.78, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$ , indicating a medium effect. Levene's test indicated unequal variances among groups ( $p < .001$ ), so additional robustness checks were conducted. Both Welch's,  $F(3, 160.16) = 6.52, p < .001$ , and Brown-Forsythe,  $F(3, 289.52) =$

6.06,  $p < .001$ , confirmed the ANOVA findings. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Disrespectful Behaviours classified as an ABI combination and both Ability and Integrity breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Disrespectful Behaviours were classified as ABI combination ( $M = 6.20$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ), they were rated significantly higher in severity for both Ability ( $M = 5.20$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) and Integrity ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ).

- **Deliberate Information Retention (DIR):** The results showed the effect of classification for DIR across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 301) = 5.33$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .944$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between DIR classified as an ABI combination and a Benevolence breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when DIR was classified as an ABI combination breach ( $M = 5.75$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ).
- **Follower Exploitation:** The results showed the effect of classification for Follower Exploitation across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 320) = 4.87$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .741$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Follower Exploitation classified as an ABI combination and a Benevolence breach. Examination of

descriptive statistics showed that, when Follower Exploitation was classified as an ABI combination breach ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ).

- **Unkept Promises:** The results showed the effect of classification for Unkept Promises across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 316) = 8.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ , indicating a medium effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .727$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Unkept Promises classified as an ABI combination and Benevolence breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Unkept Promises was classified as an ABI combination breach ( $M = 5.80$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ).
- **Unfair Favouritism:** The results showed the effect of classification for Unfair Favouritism across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 320) = 5.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .170$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Unfair Favouritism classified as an Integrity and Ability breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Unfair Favouritism was classified as an ABI combination breach ( $M = 5.64$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as a Benevolence breach ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ).

- **Unmet Expectations:** The results showed the effect of classification for Unfair Favouritism across different ABI dimensions was significant  $F(3, 299) = 4.23, p = .006, \eta^2 = .04$ , indicating a small effect. There was homogeneity of variances between groups, as assessed by the Levene's test for equal variances ( $p = .871$ ), confirming the ANOVA tests were reliable without further adjustments. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated significant differences between Unmet Expectations classified as an Integrity and Ability breach. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that, when Unfair Favouritism was classified as an ABI combination breach ( $M = 5.80, SD = 1.47$ ), it was rated significantly higher in severity than when it was classified as an Ability ( $M = 5.05, SD = 1.56$ ) or a Benevolence breach ( $M = 5.04, SD = 1.33$ ).

No other significant pairwise comparisons were found between the ABI combination and individual dimensions for the remaining breaches. **Hypothesis 3 is partially supported**, as the ABI combination was rated significantly more severe than ratings of individual dimensions for seven out of 10 breach events; Ability- Lies, Disrespectful Behaviours and Unmet Expectations; Benevolence - Lies, Disrespectful Behaviours, Deliberate Information Retention, Follower Exploitation, Unkept Promises, Unfair Favouritism, and Unmet Expectations; Integrity- Lies and Unfair Favouritism. Full descriptive statistics, post hoc comparisons, and effect sizes are shown in Table 17.

**Table 17.**

*Descriptive Statistics, Post Hoc Comparisons, and Effect Sizes for ABI Combination and Individual Classifications*

Event	Dimension	Mean (SD)	Significant Pairwise Comparisons	Mean Difference	p-value	Effect Size ( $\eta^2$ )
Lies	ABI	6.19 (1.36)				.08
	A	5.05 (1.63)	ABI > A	1.14	.001	
	B	5.07 (2.12)	ABI > B	1.12	.005	
Disrespectful Behaviours	ABI	6.20 (1.26)				.06
	A	5.20 (1.65)	ABI > A	.994	.001	
	I	5.40 (1.71)	ABI > I	.792	.010	
DIR	ABI	5.75 (1.48)				.05
	B	4.64 (1.37)	ABI > B			
Follower Exploitation	ABI	5.87 (1.44)				.04
	B	4.93 (1.44)	ABI > B	0.94	.023	
Unkept Promises	ABI	5.80 (1.56)	ABI > B	1.33	< .001	.07
	B	4.47 (1.50)				
Unfair Favouritism	ABI	5.64 (1.17)				.05
	B	4.65 (1.35)	ABI > B	0.99	.043	
Unmet Expectations	ABI	5.80 (1.47)				.04
	A	5.05 (1.56)	ABI > A	.744	.017	

Event	Dimension	Mean (SD)	Significant Pairwise Comparisons	Mean Difference	p-value	Effect Size ( $\eta^2$ )
	B	5.04 (1.33)	ABI > B	.754	.040	

**Note:** DIR = Deliberate Information Retention; A = Ability; B = Benevolence; I = Integrity; ABI = Combination of A,B, and I.  $\eta^2$  = eta-squared. Pairwise comparisons were conducted using Tukey's HSD test. Levene's test for Lies and Disrespectful Behaviours indicated unequal variances ( $p < .05$ ), and Welch's and Brown-Forsythe tests confirmed the ANOVA findings. For other events, equal variances were assumed ( $p > .05$ ).

As outlined, when categorised as a combination of ABI (Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity combined), events such as Lies, Disrespectful Behaviours, Deliberate Information Retention, Follower Exploitation, Unkept Promises, Unfair Favouritism, and Unmet Expectations were perceived significantly more severely than when categorised under individual dimensions. The largest mean difference was observed for Lies and Disrespectful Behaviours.

### **Summary:**

The results support Hypothesis 3, indicating that breaches involving the combination of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) are perceived as significantly more severe than breaches involving individual dimensions of Ability or Benevolence or Integrity. Significant differences were consistently found, with ABI-rated breaches perceived as more severe than individual dimensions in seven out of the ten breach events, particularly when compared to Benevolence. These findings suggest that breaches categorised as multiple trustworthiness dimensions carry greater perceived severity than breaches categorised as a single dimension.

## 6.5 Study 2 Preliminary Discussion

This section summarises the key findings from Study 2, which focused on the perceived severity of trust breaches and the influence of trustworthiness dimensions (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity, and their combination, ABI). The findings reveal the subjective and differentiated nature of trust breach categorisations, highlighting variability in severity perceptions across different breaches. The attribution of breaches to specific trustworthiness dimensions emerged as a significant factor shaping follower evaluations, offering insights into how perceptions of severity are influenced by the interplay between dimensional alignment and contextual factors. These findings provide a foundation for further exploration of the relational and motivational factors driving behavioural responses to trust breaches in Study 3.

**RQ3:** *Which trust breach events by leaders are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) influence these perceptions?*

### 6.5.1 Key Findings of Hypotheses

These results suggest that CAPS framework may offer insight into the understanding of the variability in trust breach experience and highlights the need to account for subjective interpretations in empirical investigations. Researchers studying specific dimensions of breaches, such as Integrity violations, should consider ensuring that all respondents consistently assign the breach to the intended dimension. As illustrated in the study by Tomlinson et al. (2021), even when a trust violation was explicitly framed as a competence

issue, not all respondents categorised the violation in that manner. This underscores the necessity of verifying participants understanding and exploring subjective and affective dimensions in the study of trust breaches to fully capture their complexity. A summary of findings is presented in Table 18.

**Table 18.**

*Summary of Hypothesis Testing for Perceived Severity of Trust Breaches across Trustworthiness Dimensions*

Hypothesis	Description	Support
Hyp 1	Breaches of Benevolence will be perceived as more severe than breaches of Integrity.	Not
Hyp 2	Breaches of Integrity will be rated as more severe than breaches of Ability.	Partial
Hyp 3	Breaches involving a combination of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity will be perceived as more severe than those involving Partial individual ABI dimensions.	Partial

**Note.** For Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 as there was not universal support across all ten it could not be fully supported.

The findings demonstrate the differentiated perceptions of trust breach severity across different trustworthiness dimensions, revealing partial support for the hypothesised relationships. The partial support for Hypotheses 2 and 3 underscores the complexity of



evaluating breaches involving overlapping dimensions such as Integrity and ABI. These results highlight the importance of incorporating contextual and subjective interpretations in future research to better understand how individuals evaluate and respond to trust breaches.

In the following sections, the findings, along with the methodological limitations, will be reviewed to provide a foundation for the more in-depth discussion in the next chapter, where the broader implications of this research will be explored.

- **Trust Breach Severity Findings**

The analysis revealed that Lies ( $M = 5.88$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) and Denigration ( $M = 5.72$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) were rated as the most severe breaches, followed by Disrespectful Behaviours ( $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) and Deliberate Information Retention ( $M = 5.53$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ). Independent samples t-tests and ANOVA indicated largely consistent perceptions of trust breach severity across demographic groups, with no significant differences based on personal experience or levels of propensity to trust. Female participants rated certain breaches—e.g. Denigration, Disrespectful Behaviours, and Unfair Favouritism—as significantly more severe than male participants, with small-to-moderate effect sizes.

All breaches had a mean severity rating of  $> 5$ , indicating that there is a general consistency in how severely trust breaches are rated but the differences in gender indicate the influence of bio-social factors on ratings of perceived severity.

Previous research has indicated that transgression severity plays a critical role in shaping emotional and cognitive responses (Epitropaki et al., 2020). The severity of a transgression can act as a pivotal factor, influencing emotional and cognitive evaluations, thus serving as

an anchor for future relational judgments and outcomes (Olekalns et al., 2020). Severe breaches have been shown to moderate the effectiveness of leader apologies and affect decisions regarding punitive actions (Karelaia & Keck, 2013; Byrne et al., 2014; Grover et al., 2019). These results underscore the importance of accounting for transgression severity in empirical investigations of trust dynamics, whilst also recognising the impact of bio-social factors-level 5 in the CAPS framework.

- **Subjectivity in Classification of Trust Breach Events**

A consistent finding across Study 1 and 2, is the subjective nature of trust breach classification. Guided by CAPS theory, which explains individual and situational variability, these results demonstrate that trust breaches are interpreted through personal perceptions and attribution processes. For instance, Lies was primarily attributed to Integrity (63.7%), but was also classified under Ability (12.4%), Benevolence (9.0%), and the ABI combination (14.9%). Similarly, Disrespectful Behaviours exhibited diffuse allocation across dimensions, emphasising the multifaceted nature of trust breach perceptions. These findings reinforce the challenges of creating a typology for trust breaches, even events with defined parameters were interpreted differently, highlighting the importance of subjective appraisals and attributional complexity in breach experiences. This variability underscores the complexity of trust-breach experiences and the importance of acknowledging individual differences in perception.

- **Subjectivity in Perceived Severity Across Dimensions**

The perceived severity of a number of trust breaches varied significantly depending on their attribution to trustworthiness dimensions. Events, such as Lies and Unkept Promises, were

consistently rated as more severe when associated with the Integrity dimension or the ABI combination, compared to Ability or Benevolence. Chen et al.'s (2011) proposition that relational breaches (e.g., Benevolence violations) are inherently more severe than Integrity breaches was not supported. However, the proposition that breaches involving combinations would be perceived as more severe than those tied to individual dimensions was supported for seven of the ten breach events, reflecting the complexity of multi-dimensional trust violations.

Importantly, the findings emphasise that the affective response to a breach, reflected in its perceived severity, is more critical than the objective nature of the event itself. The meaning ascribed to the event and its emotional and relational implications are pivotal in shaping perceptions. Indeed, it is not the objective nature of the breach but how it is subjectively interpreted that determines its severity, reinforcing the role of perception as a critical factor in assessing the impact of trust breaches.

## **6.6 Implications of Study 2 Results for Study 3**

Study 2 highlighted the complexity of trust breach categorisation, revealing that participants frequently attributed breaches to multiple dimensions. This diffusion in categorisation underscores the limitations of relying solely on breach types to understand responses and emphasises the importance of focusing on affective and relational dimensions. These findings suggest that subjective interpretations, rather than rigid classifications, are central to understanding how individuals process and respond to trust breaches.

Building on the insights from Study 2, Study 3 shifts from hypothetical categorisations to lived experiences, examining how perceived severity interacts with relational motivations to predict behavioural responses. Study 2 highlighted the subjectivity in how breaches are perceived and demonstrated that affective responses can arise across all types of breaches. Grounded in this insight, Study 3 examines perceived severity as a consistent factor shaping emotional and behavioural outcomes.

Additionally, Study 3 introduces relational motivation—specifically, the desire to maintain the relationship—as a self-regulatory component within the CAPS framework. Examined alongside perceived severity and propensity to trust, this construct will help clarify how affective, cognitive, and motivational factors jointly influence both active (e.g., reconciliation, revenge) and passive (e.g., avoidance) behaviours. By integrating these elements, Study 3 seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying trust breach responses through the lens of the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework. This approach highlights the interplay between situational triggers, cognitive interpretations, and affective responses, aligning with the CAPS framework's emphasis on individual variability and the interconnected influence of personal and contextual factors in shaping behavioural outcomes.

Study 3 represents a progression from Study 2, shifting the lens from categorisation to the interplay of cognitive-affective and motivational dynamics. By focusing on real-world experiences, relational motivation, and the centrality of perceived severity, Study 3 aims to deepen insights into trust breach dynamics and their behavioural outcomes.

## **6.7 Limitations**

The study provides valuable insights into the perceived severity of trust breaches and their attribution to trustworthiness dimensions, though some limitations should be noted. Self-reported data may have introduced the potential for social desirability biases, but validated measures and anonymity helped mitigate these risks. Asking participants to imagine trust breach examples ensured alignment with prior research, though it may not fully capture real-world leader-follower interactions, which will be explored in the next study. Additionally, the small number of participants attributing breaches to combinations of trustworthiness dimensions other than ABI was too small to enable statistical analysis of these groups. Future research could design scenarios to elicit broader combination of dimensional attributions. Despite these constraints, the study offered important insights into how Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity shape trust breach perceptions.

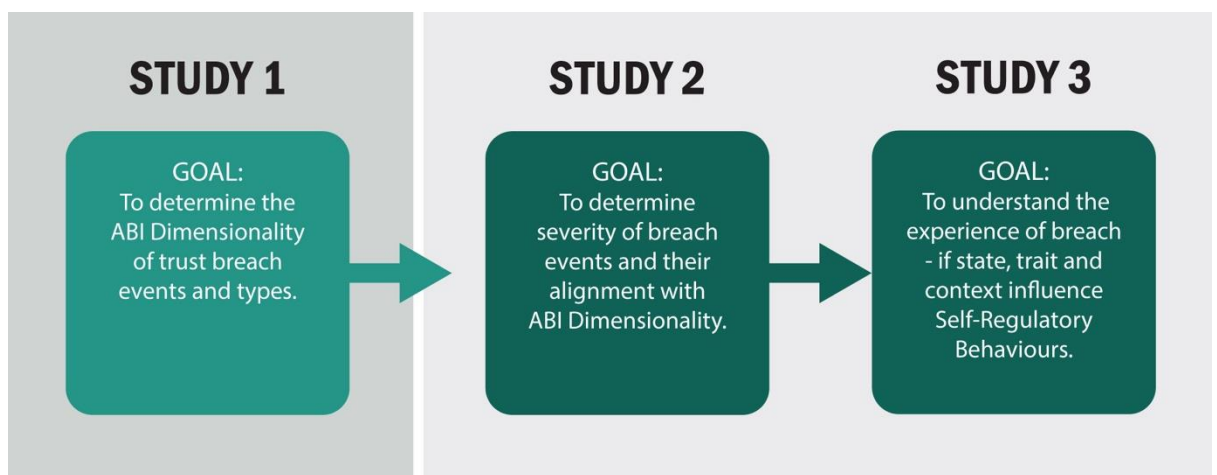
## **6.8 Conclusion**

The findings from Study 2 highlight the complexity of trust breach perceptions, revealing that individuals interpret trust events in diverse ways rather than strictly adhering to predefined research categories. These results underscore the importance of understanding the affective and cognitive processes individuals engage in when experiencing trust breaches. It is these subjective interpretations—how the event is cognitively appraised and emotionally experienced—rather than the objective nature of the event itself, which influence relational outcomes and behavioural responses. Overall, the study reinforces the idea that it is not solely the breach itself, but its emotional impact on the individual, that shapes their perceptions and actions.

## Chapter 7:

### Study 3- Trust Breach Experience and Self-Regulatory Processes

#### 7.1 Research Programme Overview



#### Study 3

Research Goal	To investigate the role of state, trait, and contextual factors in shaping self-regulatory behaviours following a trust breach.
Sample	An online international participant pool (N=231) consisting of individuals who had experienced a trust breach by an immediate supervisor.
Methodology	Self-report questionnaire.

The chapter begins with a study overview, highlighting the research question and the study's hypotheses. This is followed by a detailed methodology section covering the study design, sample, and procedure. The results section presents the key findings of the analyses. Finally, the key findings are presented, offering insights into the cognitive and affective mechanisms underlying passive and active trust breach responses. Limitations and implications for future research are then considered.

## **7.2 Study Overview**

Building on the findings from Study 2, which emphasised the variability in trust breach perceptions, Study 3 explores how state, trait, and contextual factors influence self-regulatory behaviours i.e. the cognitive affective units identified in the CAPS framework. Study 2 highlighted that, while perceived severity varied based on attribution to trustworthiness dimensions for approximately 80-90% of the top 10 breach events, severity perceptions were consistent across breach types, suggesting that the affective weight of a breach operates as a stable factor, independent of specific trustworthiness dimensions.

Study 3 investigates how perceived severity, relational motivation (desire to maintain the relationship), and propensity to trust influence both active (e.g., reconciliation, revenge) and passive (e.g., avoidance) responses to trust breaches. Specifically, this study examines how followers' propensity to trust shapes their responses to trust breaches by their immediate supervisor, with desire to maintain the relationship mediating these responses and perceived severity moderating the strength of these relationships.

Framed within the CAPS framework, the study addresses the following research question:

**RQ4:** *How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active and passive responses to a trust breach, and how is this effect moderated by severity?*

Each component in the research question reflects cognitive-affective aspects of the CAPS framework-trait-based (propensity to trust), motivational (desire to maintain), and affective (perceived severity) factors to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of trust breach responses. Specifically, it examines how the desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and breach responses, while perceived severity moderates this mediation by amplifying or attenuating the influence of relational motivations. To address RQ4, the research programme tests two overarching hypotheses, each operationalised into specific hypotheses for active (reconciliation, revenge) and passive (avoidance) responses to breach:

- **Hypothesis 4:** Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and passive (avoidance) and active (reconciliation, revenge) responses to trust breach.
- **Hypotheses 5:** Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on post- breach responses via the desire to maintain the relationship, such that the indirect effect is stronger at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically on the path between desire to maintain the relationship and subsequent responses.

The overarching relationships, and hypotheses, are further specified as follows:



- **Reconciliation (Active):** Desire to maintain the relationship is posited to positively mediate reconciliation (H4a), with the mediation effect attenuated at higher levels of perceived severity (H5a).
- **Revenge (Active):** Desire to maintain the relationship is posited to negatively mediate revenge (H4b), with the mediation effect attenuated at higher levels of perceived severity (H5b).
- **Avoidance (Passive):** Desire to maintain the relationship is posited to negatively mediate avoidance (H4c), with the mediation effect attenuated at higher levels of perceived severity (H5c).

The next section outlines the specific hypotheses related to both active and passive responses to trust breaches.

### 7.3 Passive and Active Responses

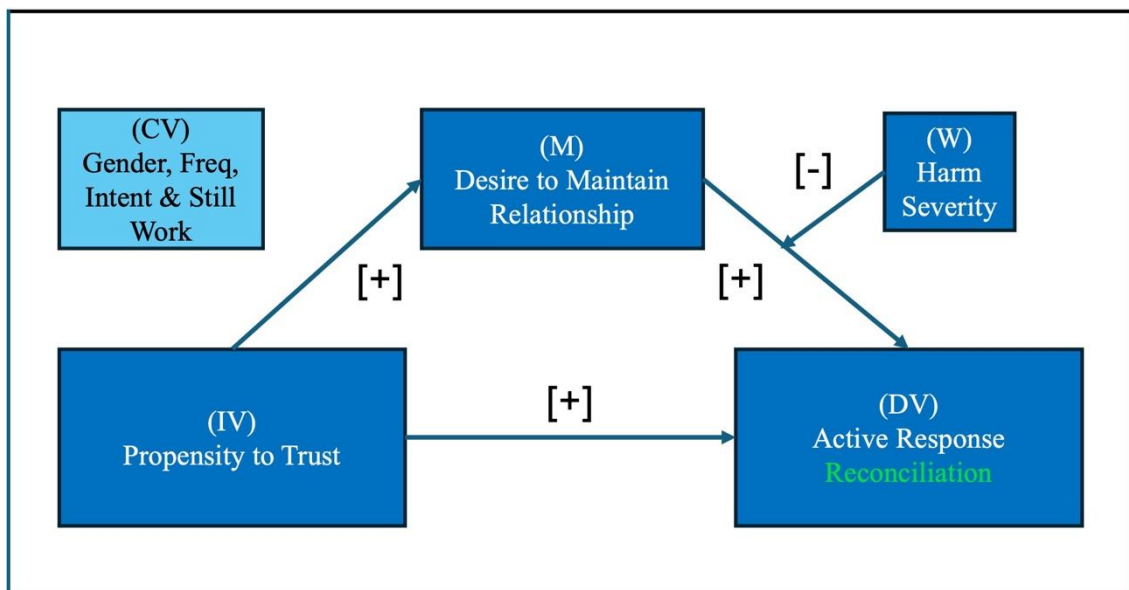
In the first section, each active response type – reconciliation and revenge – will be discussed sequentially, detailing their hypothesised relationships with propensity to trust, desire to maintain the relationship, and perceived severity. Supporting figures illustrate the moderated mediation models for each response type. The same format will be applied to avoidance, which will be addressed in the subsequent section as the passive response type.

### 7.3.1 Active Responses- Reconciliation & Revenge

Reconciliation is hypothesised to be positively influenced by propensity to trust via desire to maintain, with perceived severity moderating the mediation effect. Figure 11 presents the moderated mediation model for reconciliation.

**Figure 11.**

*Moderated Mediation Model of Propensity to Trust on Active -Reconciliation responses to breach via Desire to Maintain, Moderated by Harm Severity*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor).

The hypothesised model for reconciliation integrates individual traits, relational motivations, and affective factors on self-regulatory active response to breach, reflecting the principles of the CAPS framework. The following hypotheses delineate these relationships:

- **Hypothesis 4a:** *Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation, such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain, which, in turn, is positively associated with reconciliation.*
- **Hypothesis 5a:** *Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation through desire to maintain, such that the mediation effect is weaker at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically on the path between desire to maintain and reconciliation.*

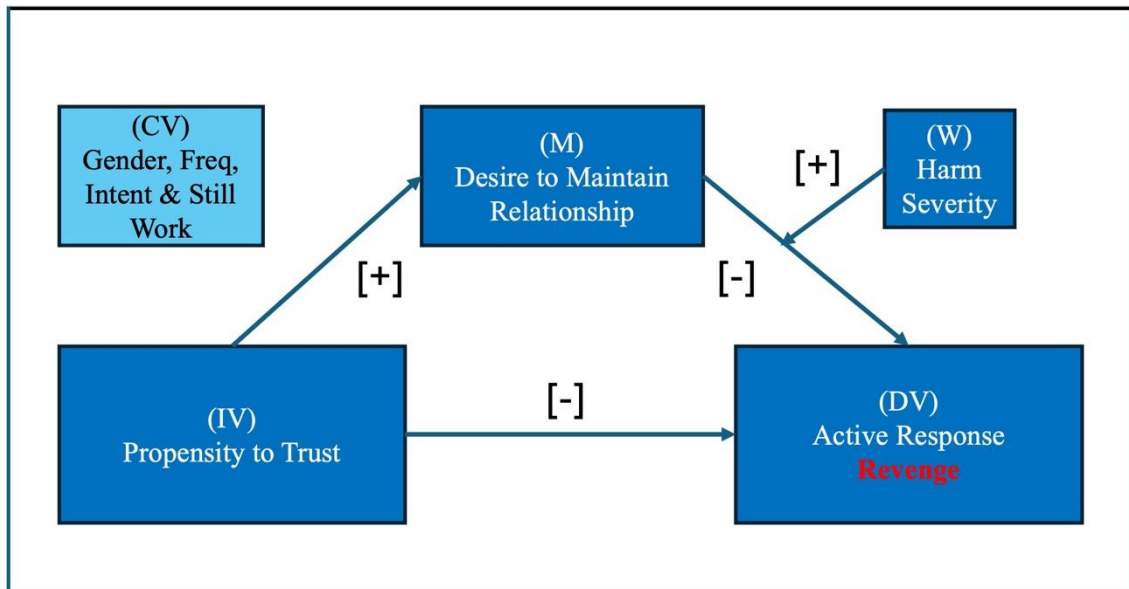
The hypotheses emphasise the role of relational motivation and affective perception in shaping reconciliation behaviours. By situating reconciliation within the broader framework of CAPS, the model captures how self-regulatory processes mediate the effects of individual trust propensity, particularly under varying levels of perceived harm. This conceptualisation, not only advances the theoretical understanding of trust breach dynamics, but may also provide a basis for exploring practical implications for trust repair strategies in organisational settings.

## **Revenge**

Revenge is hypothesised to decrease with higher desire to maintain, with perceived severity intensifying the mediation effect. Figure 12 depicts the moderated mediation model for revenge, where propensity to trust affects revenge via the desire to maintain the relationship, with perceived severity as a moderator.

**Figure 12.**

*Moderated Mediation Model of Propensity to Trust on Active – Revenge- responses to breach via Desire to Maintain, Moderated by Harm Severity*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor).

The hypothesised moderated mediation model for revenge integrates individual traits, relational motivations, and affective factors on self-regulatory active response to breach, reflecting the principles of the CAPS framework. The following hypotheses delineate these relationships:

- **Hypothesis 4b:** *The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and revenge, such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain, which, in turn, is negatively associated with revenge.*

- **Hypothesis 5b:** *Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on revenge through desire to maintain, such that the mediation effect is stronger at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically on the path between desire to maintain and revenge.*

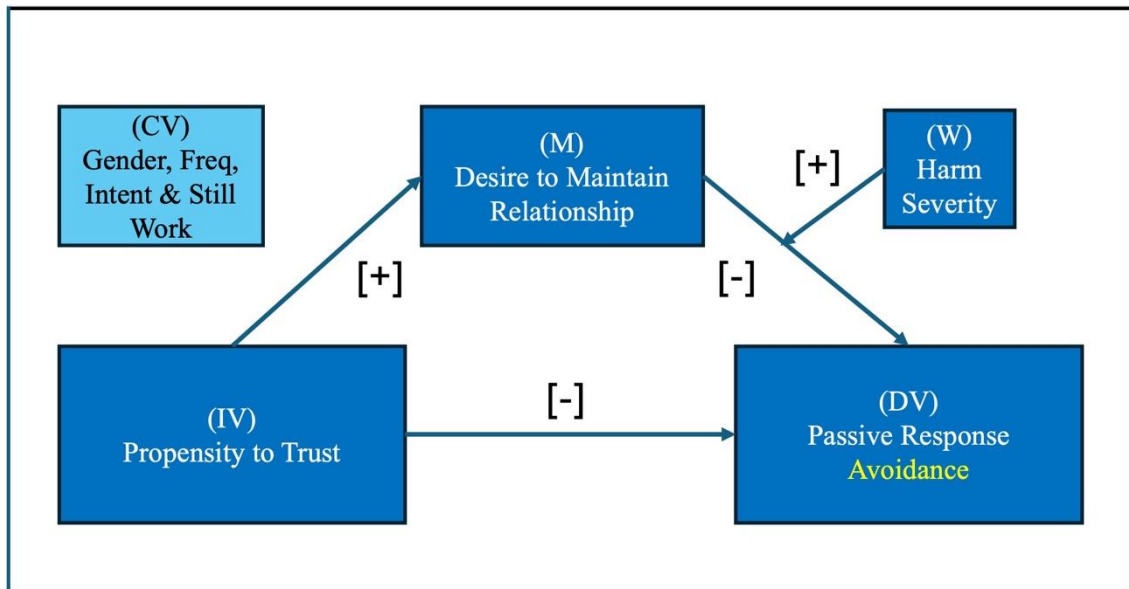
The hypotheses emphasise the role of relational motivation and affective perception in shaping revenge behaviours. By situating revenge within the broader framework of CAPS, the model captures how self-regulatory processes mediate the effects of individual trust propensity, particularly under varying levels of perceived harm.

### ***7.3.2 Passive Response - Avoidance***

Avoidance is hypothesised to be reduced by higher desire to maintain, moderated by perceived severity. Figure 13 outlines the moderated mediation model for avoidance, where propensity to trust influences avoidance behaviours through the desire to maintain the relationship, with perceived severity as a moderator.

**Figure 13.**

*Moderated Mediation Model of Propensity to Trust on Passive – Avoidance- responses to breach via Desire to Maintain, Moderated by Harm Severity*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor).

The hypothesised moderated mediation model for avoidance integrates individual traits, relational motivations, and affective factors on self-regulatory active response to breach, reflecting the principles of the CAPS framework. The following hypotheses delineate these relationships:

- **Hypothesis 4c:** *The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance, such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain, which, in turn, is negatively associated with avoidance.*

- **Hypothesis 5c:** *Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on avoidance through desire to maintain, such that the mediation effect is stronger at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically on the path between desire to maintain and avoidance.*

The hypotheses highlight the influence of relational motivation and affective perception in influencing avoidance following a breach. Within the CAPS framework, the model illustrates how self-regulatory mechanisms mediate the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance, particularly as the perception of harm varies.

#### **7.4 Methodology**

Building on the findings from Study 2, this study applies the Cognitive-Affective Personality System (CAPS) framework, which highlights the interplay between trait-based, motivational, and contextual factors in shaping behavioural responses. The purpose of study 3 is to examine whether self-regulatory processes mediate the effects of individual trust propensity under varying levels of perceived harm.

To address RQ4, the study tests the following overarching hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 4:** Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and passive (avoidance) and active (reconciliation, revenge) responses to trust breach.
- **Hypotheses 5:** Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on post- breach responses via the desire to maintain the relationship, such that

the indirect effect is stronger at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically on the path between desire to maintain the relationship and subsequent responses.

These hypotheses explore the roles of propensity to trust, desire to maintain the relationship, and perceived severity in shaping self-regulatory behaviours following a trust breach. The moderated mediation model provides an integrated framework for understanding the interaction between these variables.

#### ***7.4.1 Survey Design and Testing***

The survey was designed to explore experience of trust breach by an immediate supervisor. Participants were asked to provide information about the breach, including its perceived severity, timing, and frequency. They were also asked about their relationship with their immediate supervisor, specifically their desire to maintain the relationship and its current status. Additionally, participants reported on their responses to the breach, focusing on reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance. The structured format enabled the systematic collection of data for demographic, event categorisation, and severity rating purposes. Prior to data collection, the research design was submitted for approval to the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). Data collections and storage procedures met the requirements of Data Protection Law i.e. the General Data Protection Regulation (No 2016/679) (“GDPR”) and the [Data Protection Act 2018]] and any other laws which apply to the university in relation to the processing of personal data.



### ***7.4.2 Sample***

#### **Online Panel**

Following Study 2, a sample of respondents that fulfilled the criteria of having experienced a trust breach by an immediate supervisor were identified for involvement in Study 3. This subset of 231 participants were engaged via Qualtrics. The subpanel maintained the balanced geographic representation (USA, UK, and Ireland) and demographic criteria established in Study 2, ensuring consistency and comparability across studies. All participants provided informed consent, confirmed comprehension of the Plain Language Statement, and acknowledged the data protection and confidentiality measures.

#### **Online Research Panel Participants**

An online panel (OP), of 231 participants who met the screening criteria of having experienced a trust breach by an immediate manager, completed the survey via Qualtrics. The sample was evenly distributed across the United Kingdom ( $n = 63$ , 27%), the United States ( $n = 83$ , 36%), and Ireland ( $n = 85$ , 37%). All participants were compensated for their participation. All participants were full-time employees, with a mean age of 39 years, ranging from 20 to 81 years. The sample comprised 57% females ( $n = 132$ ) and 43% males ( $n = 99$ ).

Participants represented diverse sectors, including healthcare and social services ( $n = 30$ , 13%), educational services ( $n = 26$ , 11%), information and telecommunication ( $n = 28$ , 12%), government ( $n = 23$ , 10%), finance and insurance ( $n = 19$ , 8%), retail trade ( $n = 18$ , 8%), professional, scientific, and technical services ( $n = 18$ , 8%). Participants had substantial

work experience, with 61% having ten or more years of experience (n = 140), 13 % with 7-9 years (n = 30), 15% with 4-6 years (n = 34), 12% with less than 3 years' experience (n = 27). The majority of respondents were employees (n = 104, 45%), followed by senior managers (n = 54, 23%), middle managers (n = 50, 22%), junior managers (n = 16, 7%), and 3% who identified other roles such as president, researcher, owner, or business owner (n = 7).

The ethnic composition was predominantly White (n = 205, 89%), with smaller percentages identifying as Black or African American (n = 8, 4%) or other ethnic groups (n = 18, 8%). In terms of educational attainment, 19% of the sample had a high school diploma (n = 44), 13% had an associate degree (n = 30), 39% held a bachelor's degree (n = 90), and 29% had a master's degree (n = 67).

Regarding their relationship with the immediate supervisor before the breach, 27% had been in a relationship with the immediate supervisor for less than a year (N=63), 49% for 1-3 years (N=112), and 24% for 4 or more years (N=56). Participants described their supervisors as acquaintances or distant colleagues 29% (N=67), friendly colleague 46% (N=107), and close/very close colleague 25% (N=57). Communication frequency prior to the breach varied, with 32% communicating several times a year to several times a month (N=33%), 30% several times a week (N=70), and 37% daily (N=85). The timing of the breach was reported as occurring less than 6 months ago for 33% (N=76), between 6 months and a year ago for 21% (N=48), and over a year ago for 46% (N=107).

### ***7.4.3 Proactive Common Method Bias Management***

To minimise common method bias, survey items were randomised across sections, and varied scale endpoints and anchors were employed to prevent uniform response patterns. Confidentiality assurances and clear instructions emphasised that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers, reducing social desirability bias. These steps were designed to enhance the validity and reliability of the self-report data (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

### ***7.4.4 Survey Pre-Test***

The pre-test conducted in Study 2 confirmed the clarity and functionality of the survey instrument, with additional adjustments implemented for Study 3 to ensure sufficient responses for statistical analysis and maintain data quality:

- **Minimum Sample Size Adjustment:** Pre-screening showed fewer participants than expected reported trust breaches by their immediate supervisor, prompting an increase in the minimum required sample size to 200.
- **Definition Refinement:** The definition of a trust breach was broadened to include minor reductions in trust, capturing a wider range of experiences. The updated definition described trust breaches as events damaging or reducing trust, from minor incidents to larger-scale transgressions, affecting thoughts and feelings toward the offender.
- **Response Quality Controls:** Measures included requiring all survey questions to be answered, implementing a speed check to exclude responses completed

in less than 50% of the median time, and maintaining consistency with Study 2's robust quality controls.

#### **7.4.5 Power Analysis**

An a priori power analysis was conducted using *G\*Power* version 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007) and determined a minimum sample size of 191 participants to test the hypotheses with sufficient statistical power. The analysis assumed a small to medium effect size (Cohen's  $f = .27$ ), 80% power, and an alpha level .05.

#### **7.4.6 Procedure**

Following Study 2, a sample of respondents that fulfilled the criteria of having experienced a trust breach by an immediate supervisor were identified for involvement in Study 3. Participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the strict confidentiality of their responses, and the minimal risk posed by the research. Informed consent was obtained, and resources for support were made available, as recommended by the ethics committee (see Appendix 2).

For Study 3, the screened participants were asked to complete three primary tasks: (1) recall a transgression by an immediate supervisor, (2) provide details about the transgression and their relationship with the supervisor, and (3) report on their current beliefs and behaviours. They were prompted to recall any instance, regardless of its severity, where their trust in an immediate supervisor had been reduced or damaged, using the following instructions:

*“Please call to mind an experience that you have had of a transgression by an **immediate supervisor** at any time in your work experience. This includes any behaviours or acts in which your trust in that immediate supervisor was **reduced or damaged by even the smallest amount**. Have you ever experienced a transgression by an **immediate supervisor** at work? i.e. **any** behaviours or acts in which your trust in that immediate supervisor was **reduced or damaged by even the smallest amount**.”*

Participants then provided specific details about the trust breach and their relationship with the supervisor, followed by responses regarding post-breach behaviours (see Appendix 4).

#### 7.4.6.1 Survey Instrument and Measures

The survey instrument for Study 3 consisted of three sections: trust breach details, relationship details, and passive and active post-breach behaviours. Below is an overview of the measures used, with reliability statistics provided where applicable (see Appendix 4).

*Propensity to Trust* Propensity to trust was measured using the 10-item IPIP NEO A1 (Goldberg, 1999) scale, as utilised in Study 2.

*Perceived Severity* The Haesevoets et al., (2016) Harm Severity scale was used to measure perceived harm severity. Participants rated three items on a 7-point scale (“To what extent did you find you that immediate supervisor’s action a severe/harsh/serious breach” 1 = not at all to 7 = very much). The items were combined into an overall severity score.

*Desire to Maintain the Relationship (D2M)* Desire to Maintain the Relationship was measured using three items (Donovan & Priester, 2017), reflecting different components;

motivational (“How motivated were you to restore your relationship with this person”), emotional (“I would have been really sad if I stopped spending time with this person”), and intentional (“I intended to continue interacting with this person”). The components were rated on 11-point scales (motivational and intentional; 0 =not at all to 10 = completely, and the intentional item 0=strongly disagree to ten = strongly agree). These items were combined to create a measure for desire to maintain the relationship.

*Passive and Active Post-Transgression Responses* Post-transgression responses were measured using the Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivational Inventory Scale (TRIM-18; McCullough et al., 2006). This measure is a well-established and validated measure, widely used to assess avoidance, revenge, and reconciliation motivations in response to transgressions. The overall scale is composed of three dimensions, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (TRIM-18).

1. Avoidance - Seven items measuring avoidance of the transgressor (e.g. “I am trying to keep as much distance between us as possible.”
2. Revenge - Five items measuring motivation to seek revenge (e.g. “I’ll make him/her pay.”
3. Reconciliation - Six-items measuring reconciliation motivation (e.g. “Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again.”

### *Control Variables*

Based on theory and previous research, several control variables were included. Specifically, the analysis controlled for gender, whether participants still worked with the manager, frequency of transgression (Radulovic et al., 2019), and intent (Tomlinson et al., 2021).

#### ***7.4.7 Data Preparation***

##### **Initial Data Review**

Prior to analysis, data preparation followed best practices, as outlined by Aguinis et al. (2021). The dataset was reviewed for missing values, with frequencies and descriptive statistics (means, medians, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores) calculated for all study variables in order to assess response distributions and sample characteristics (Desimone et al., 2015). No missing data were identified. Outliers were reviewed to distinguish legitimate observations from potential data entry errors, ensuring data integrity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Normality was assessed through Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) tests, which indicated significant results, suggesting violations of normality. However, visual inspections of histograms and skewness and kurtosis calculations revealed no extreme deviations, allowing the data to meet the assumptions for statistical analyses. Revenge exhibited slight positive skewness and negative kurtosis remained within an acceptable range for analysis, as outlined by Tabachnick & Fidell (2013) underestimates of variance associated with negative kurtosis “disappear with samples of 200 or more” (p. 70).

Outliers were identified and addressed following best practice guidelines (Aguinis et al., 2013). Univariate outliers were identified using box plots and Z-scores. Three potential outliers were detected for propensity to trust and four for Harm severity; however, these were retained, as comparisons between the original means and 5% trimmed means showed very small differences, indicating that the univariate outliers did not substantially influence

the overall distribution (Pallant, 2020). Multivariate outlier analysis was conducted using Mahalanobis Distance, Cook's Distance, and Centered Leverage Value tests. Outliers were assessed to distinguish legitimate observations from potential data entry errors. Given the theoretical relevance of extreme cases in this study, particularly concerning harm severity and desire to maintain the relationship, all identified outliers were retained in alignment with best practice recommendations.

### **Multicollinearity**

Multicollinearity was assessed to ensure the independence of study variables. A correlation matrix was inspected to identify any high correlations between variables, which could indicate multicollinearity. Thresholds of .90 were used as guidelines (Saunders et al., 2023). No correlations exceeding .90 were detected, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern for the current dataset. Once these processes were completed, the dataset was deemed ready for further statistical analysis.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

Preliminary statistical analyses were conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 29.0.1. The moderated mediation models and hypothesis testing were performed with Hayes' PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022).



## 7.5 Results

**RQ4:** *How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active and passive responses to a trust breach, and how is this effect moderated by severity?*

To address RQ4, descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of the central tendencies and variability for all study variables, including means, standard deviations, and internal consistencies. These analyses offered an initial understanding of the relationships between the key variables: propensity to trust, desire to maintain the relationship, perceived severity, and the three response types—reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge.

Correlations were examined to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between variables, laying the foundation for the subsequent moderated mediation analyses. The analysis also investigated whether key demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, tenure, and job grade) were significantly associated with the primary study variables to determine if they warranted inclusion as covariates.

### 7.5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and correlations between study variables are presented in Table 19. The results indicated acceptable internal consistency for all scales, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The means and standard deviations for the primary variables (propensity to trust, desire to maintain, perceived severity, reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge) were within the expected range, suggesting no unusual response patterns in the data.

Correlational analyses revealed significant positive relationships between the desire to maintain the relationship and reconciliation, as well as significant negative relationships between desire to maintain and avoidance. Unexpectedly, a significant positive correlation was found between desire to maintain and revenge, suggesting complex dynamics in post-breach responses. Perceived severity was negatively associated with reconciliation, positively associated with avoidance but showed no significant relationship with revenge. Propensity to trust was significantly correlated with desire to maintain but also showed significant associations with the response variables, reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge.

**Table 19.***Descriptive statistics and Correlations for Study Variables*

	M	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	1.43	0.50	231	-									
2. Frequency	3.29	1.59	231	-0.12	-								
3. Still Work	1.40	0.49	231	-.25**	0.08	-							
4. HS	5.14	1.48	231	-0.05	.29**	0.11	(.88)						
5. DTM	5.06	3.23	231	.34**	-.18*	-.54**	-.21**	(.89)					
6. PTT	3.54	0.70	231	0.08	-0.04	-.19**	0.04	.23**	(.86)				
7. Intent	6.12	2.19	231	-0.13	0.11	0.12	.30**	-.20**	0.06	(.90)			
8. Reconcile	3.23	1.06	231	.23**	-.31**	-.37**	-.26**	.72**	.25**	-.17**	(.88)		
9. Revenge	1.96	1.08	231	.20**	.32**	-0.10	0.01	.14*	-.21**	-0.06	-0.07	(.91)	
10. Avoid	3.19	1.15	231	-.22**	.35**	.44**	.34**	-.70**	-.25**	.24**	-.61**	.24**	(.88)

Note: 4. HS= Harm Severity; 5. DTM= Desire to Maintain the Relationship; 6. PTT= Propensity to Trust; 8. Reconcile= Reconciliation. Coefficient alpha reliability estimates are in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

These descriptive results provide preliminary support for the hypotheses, particularly the mediating role of the desire to maintain the relationship and the moderating role of perceived severity. The findings set the stage for the inferential analysis to test the proposed moderated mediation models.

### ***7.5.2 Research Question and Hypothesis Testing***

#### **Mediation Analysis**

The mediation analysis investigates the role of the desire to maintain the relationship as a mechanism linking propensity to trust with passive (avoidance) and active (reconciliation, revenge) responses to trust breaches. Within the CAPS framework, this relational motivation operates as a cognitive-affective unit, shaping behavioural outcomes by prioritising either relational repair or self-protective strategies. This underscores the critical mediating function of relational goals in determining trust breach responses.

**Hypothesis 4:** Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and passive (avoidance) and active (reconciliation, revenge) responses to trust breach.

To address this hypothesis, mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022). The analysis examined whether the desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and both active (reconciliation, revenge) and passive (avoidance) responses to a trust breach. Covariates included gender, frequency of transgression, whether the participant still worked with the supervisor, and intent.

A detailed exploration of the mediation models for each behavioural outcome is presented, highlighting key findings and their implications for reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance behaviours. The results of the mediation analysis are summarised at the end of the section in Table 23, which provides an overview of hypothesis testing outcomes, detailing the relationships tested, statistical findings, and support for each hypothesis.

#### **4a. Mediation Analysis for Reconciliation**

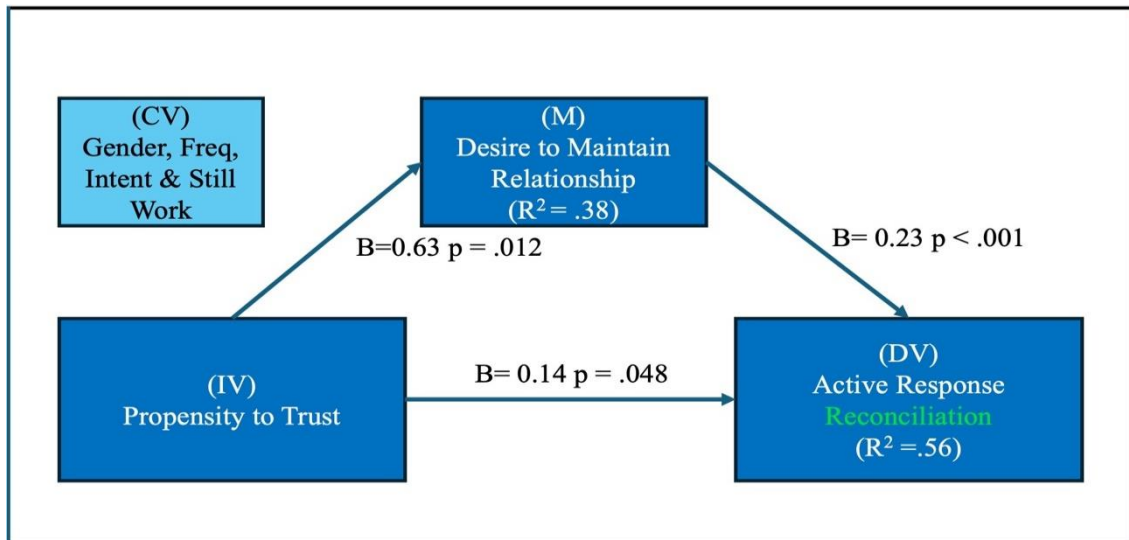
##### **Hypothesis 4a:**

*The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation; such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain the relationship, which, in turn, is positively associated with reconciliation.*

The hypothesised mediating model is shown in Figure 14, indicating the effect of desire to maintain the relationship on the link between propensity to trust and reconciliation, with key control variables indicated.

**Figure 14.**

*Mediating Model of the Effect of Propensity to Trust on Reconciliation via Desire to Maintain Relationship*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor).

The mediation analysis revealed that propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain the relationship ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $\beta = .14$ ,  $p = .012$ ), explaining 37.74% of the variance in desire to maintain the relationship ( $R^2 = .38$ ,  $F(5, 225) = 27.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, desire to maintain significantly predicted reconciliation behaviours ( $B = 0.23$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $\beta = .69$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The total indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation behaviours through desire to maintain was significant  $B = 0.14$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.27]. However, the direct effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation was marginally significant ( $B = 0.14$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $p = .048$ ), suggesting partial mediation and supporting Hypothesis 4a. The results are shown in Table 20.

**Table 20.***Results of Mediation Analysis for Reconciliation*

	Unstandardised	Standard		
	Coefficient	Error	Standardised	
Predictor	(B)	(SE)	Coefficient (β)	p-value
Model 1: Desire to Maintain				
Propensity to Trust	.63	.25	.14	.012
R²	.38			
F- statistic	F(5,225) =27.27 , p <.001			
Model 2: Reconciliation				
Propensity to Trust	.14	.07	.09	.048
Desire to Maintain	.23	.02	.69	<.001
R²	.56			
F- statistic	F(6,224) = 47.83, p <.001			

**Note:** Covariates included gender, frequency of transgression, supervisor status, and intent. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The mediation analysis demonstrated that the desire to maintain the relationship partially mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation. Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain, which in turn strongly predicted reconciliation behaviours. The indirect effect was significant, supporting Hypothesis 4a, and highlighting the central role of relational motivation in fostering reconciliation behaviours after a trust breach.

**Hypothesis 4a Supported.** The results indicate that the desire to maintain the relationship partially mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation.

#### 4b. Mediation Analysis for Revenge

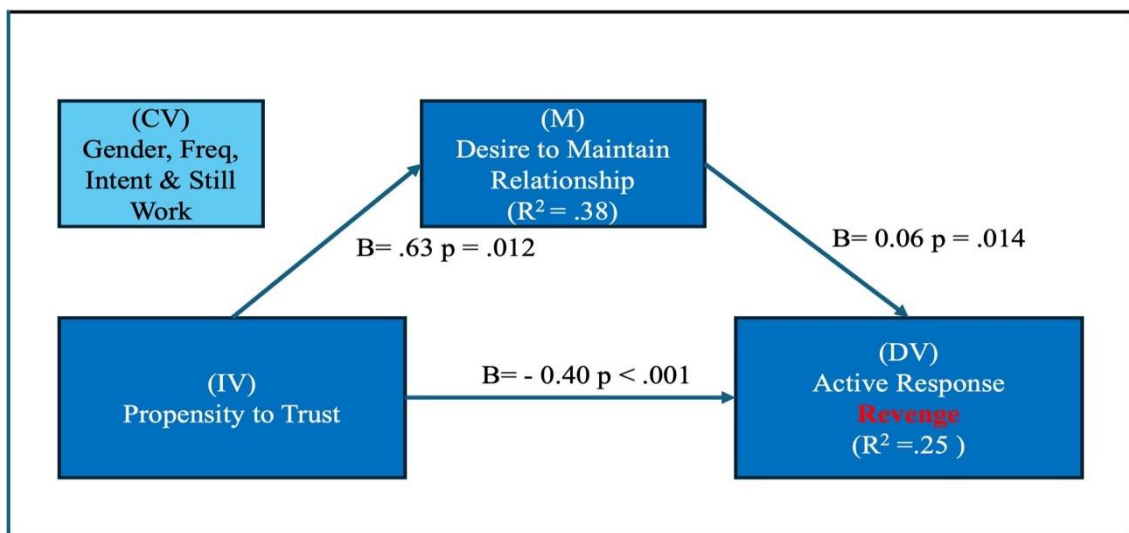
##### Hypothesis 4b:

*The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and revenge, such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain the relationship, which is in turn associated with revenge.*

The hypothesised mediating model is shown in Figure 15, indicating the effect of desire to maintain the relationship on the link between propensity to trust and revenge, with key control variables indicated.

**Figure 15.**

*Mediating Model of the Effect of Propensity to Trust on Revenge via Desire to Maintain Relationship*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor).



The mediation analysis revealed that propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain the relationship ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $p = .012$ ), with 37.74% of the variance explained ( $R^2 = .38$ ,  $F(5, 225) = 27.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In turn, desire to maintain significantly predicted desired revenge ( $B = 0.06$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .014$ ). The indirect effect of propensity to trust on revenge through desire to maintain was significant ( $B = 0.04$ , 95% CI [0.003, 0.09]), indicating a mediation effect. The direct effect of propensity to trust on revenge was negative and significant ( $B = -0.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting partial mediation. The results are shown in Table 21.

**Table 21.**

*Results of Mediation analysis for Revenge*

	Unstandardised	Standard		
	Coefficient	Error	Standardised	
Predictor	(B)	(SE)	Coefficient (β)	p-value
Model 1: Desire to Maintain				
Propensity to Trust	.63	.25	.14	.012
R <sup>2</sup>	.38			
F- statistic	F(5,225) =27.27 , p <.001			
Model 2: Revenge				
Propensity to Trust	-0.40	0.09	-.26	< .001
Desire to Maintain	0.06	0.02	0.18	.014
R <sup>2</sup>	.25			
F- statistic	F(6,224) = 12.13, p <.001			

**Note:** Covariates included gender, frequency of transgression, supervisor status, and intent. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The mediation analysis demonstrated that the desire to maintain the relationship partially mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and revenge. Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain, which in turn predicted revenge motivations. The indirect effect was significant, but the direction of the effect was opposite to that hypothesised. This suggests that a stronger desire to maintain relationship may, in some cases, be associated with stronger reactions such as desired for revenge. Such findings point to a more complex and potentially ambivalent role of relational motivation in the context of trust breach than previously anticipated.

**Hypothesis 4b Partially supported.** The mediation pathway was significant, however the direction of the relationship between desire to maintain and revenge was positive, which is different than the hypothesised relationship i.e. a stronger desire to maintain the relationship would lead to less revenge.

#### **4c. Mediation Analysis for Avoidance**

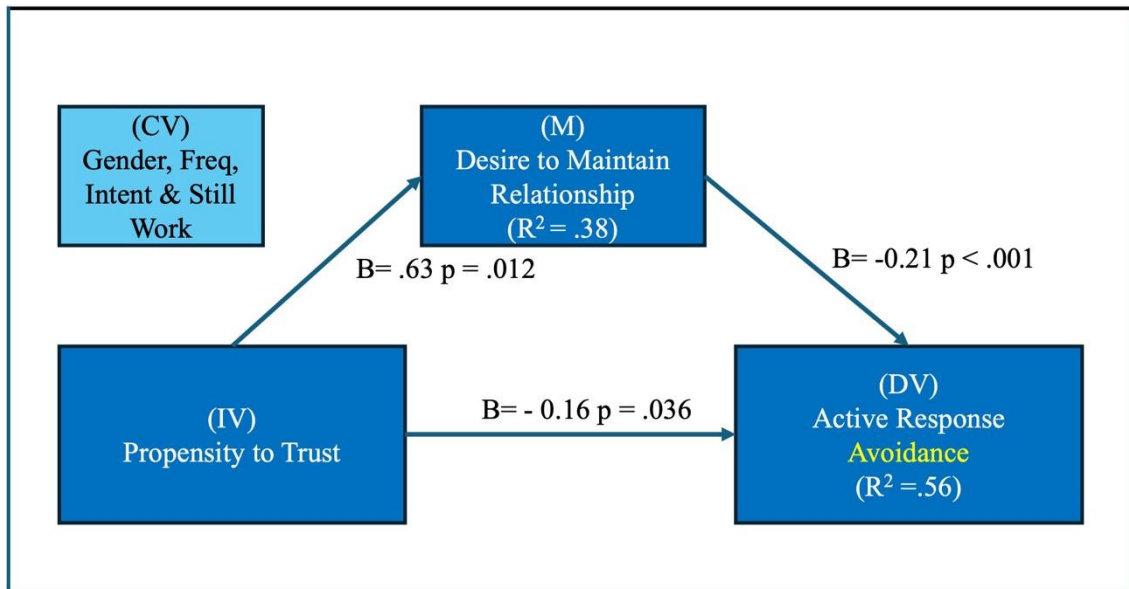
##### **Hypothesis 4c:**

*The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance; such that propensity to trust is positively associated with desire to maintain the relationship, which, in turn, is negatively associated with avoidance.*

The following figure illustrates the hypothesised mediating effect of desire to maintain the relationship on the link between propensity to trust and avoidance, with key control variables included.

**Figure 16.**

*Mediating Model of the Effect of Propensity to Trust on Avoidance via Desire to Maintain Relationship*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor).

The results indicated that propensity to trust was a significant predictor of desire to maintain the relationship ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $p = .012$ ), explaining 37.74% of the variance in desire to maintain relationship ( $R^2 = 0.38$ ,  $F(5, 225) = 27.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In turn, desire to maintain significantly predicted avoidance behaviours ( $B = -0.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indirect effect of propensity to trust on avoidance through desire to maintain was also significant ( $B = -0.13$ , 95% CI  $[-0.25, -0.03]$ ), supporting the mediation hypothesis. The direct effect of propensity to trust on avoidance remained significant ( $B = -0.16$ ,  $p = .036$ ), indicating partial mediation. The results are shown in Table 22.

**Table 22.***Results of Mediation analysis for Avoidance*

	Unstandardised	Standard	Standardised	
	Coefficient	Error	Coefficient	
Predictor	(B)	(SE)	(β)	<i>p</i> -value
Model 1: Desire to Maintain				
Propensity to Trust	0.63	0.25	0.14	.012
R <sup>2</sup>	.38			
F- statistic	F(5,225) =27.27 , p <.001			
Model 2: Avoidance				
Propensity to Trust	-0.16	0.08	-0.10	.04
Desire to Maintain	-0.20	0.02	-0.58	<.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.56			
F- statistic	F(6,224) = 47.67, p <.001			

**Note: Covariates included gender, frequency of transgression, supervisor status, and intent. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .**

The mediation analysis demonstrated that the desire to maintain the relationship partially mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance. Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain, which in turn significantly reduced avoidance motivations. The indirect effect was significant, supporting Hypothesis 4c and highlighting the role of relational motivation in reducing avoidance motivations after a trust breach.

**Hypothesis 4c Supported.** Desire to maintain the relationship partially mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance, with a higher propensity to trust associated with less avoidance via desire to maintain the relationship.

The findings provide support for the role of desire to maintain the relationship as a mediating mechanism linking propensity to trust with post-breach behaviours. The mediation was supported for reconciliation and avoidance, indicating that relational motivation may contribute to constructive responses. For revenge, although the mediation pathway was statistically significant, the direction of the association was contrary to expectations, suggesting a more complex dynamic. Taken together, these results offer preliminary insight into the motivational processes that may underpin varied follower responses to trust breaches.

The summary of the hypothesis testing results for the mediation effect of desire to maintain on both passive and active responses to trust breaches is presented in Table 23.

**Table 23.**

*Summary of Hypothesis Testing for the Mediation Effect of Desire to Maintain on Passive and Active Responses to Trust Breach*

Hypothesis	Description	Significant Result	Supported
H4a	The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation.	Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain ( $B = 0.63, p = .012$ ), and desire to maintain significantly predicted reconciliation ( $B = 0.23, p < .001$ ). The indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation via desire to maintain was significant ( $B = 0.14, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.27]$ ). The direct effect was marginally significant ( $B = 0.14, p = .048$ ).	Yes
H4b	The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and revenge.	Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain ( $B = 0.63, p = .012$ ), and desire to maintain significantly predicted revenge ( $B = 0.06, p = .014$ ). The indirect effect was significant ( $B = 0.04, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.003, 0.09]$ ). The direct effect of propensity to trust on revenge was negative and significant ( $B = -0.40, p < .001$ ).	Partially
H4c	The desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance.	Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain ( $B = 0.63, p = .012$ ), and desire to maintain significantly predicted avoidance ( $B = -0.21, p < .001$ ). The indirect effect was significant ( $B = -0.13, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.25, -0.03]$ ). The direct effect remained significant ( $B = -0.16, p = .036$ ).	Yes

## **Moderated Mediation Analysis**

Moderated mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 14 (Hayes, 2022) to examine whether perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on passive and active responses to breach through desire to maintain the relationship. Covariates included gender, frequency of transgression, whether the participant still worked with the supervisor, and intent. Bootstrapping with 5,000 samples were employed to estimate indirect effects and confidence intervals. Given the directional hypotheses, results are interpreted using a one-tailed test (Cho & Abe, 2013). PROCESS provides two-sided confidence intervals, and the results are presented in the context of a one-tailed test without adjusting the bounds.

### **5a. Moderated Mediation Analysis for Reconciliation**

#### **Hypothesis 5a:**

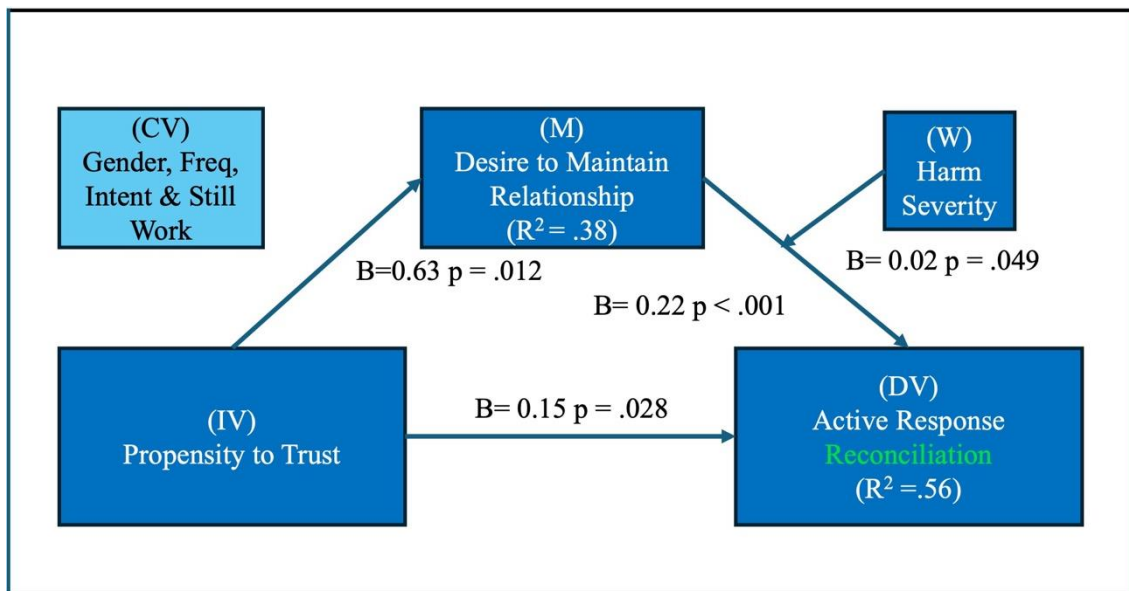
*Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation behaviours through the desire to maintain the relationship, such that this indirect effect is weaker at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically moderating the path between desire to maintain the relationship and reconciliation.*

The following figure illustrates the moderated mediation model, where perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation behaviours via the desire to maintain the relationship. Specifically, the hypothesised model posits that the strength of

the mediation effect diminishes at higher levels of perceived severity, with moderation occurring on the path between desire to maintain the relationship and reconciliation.

**Figure 17.**

*Moderated Mediation Model of Propensity to Trust on Reconciliation via Desire to Maintain Relationship, Moderated by Harm Severity*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor).

The results shown in the figure are detailed below.

### Mediation Effect

Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $p = .012$ ), explaining 37.74% of the variance ( $R^2 = .38$ ,  $F(5, 225) = 27.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In turn, desire to maintain significantly predicted reconciliation ( $B = 0.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation through desire to maintain was significant at both low ( $B = 0.12$ ,



95% CI [0.03, 0.23]) and high ( $B = 0.16$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.29]) levels of perceived severity. This indicates a consistent mediating role of desire to maintain, with a slightly stronger effect observed at higher levels of perceived harm severity.

### **Moderation Effect**

The interaction between desire to maintain and perceived severity was significant ( $B = 0.02$ ,  $p = .049$ ), suggesting that the strength of the relationship between desire to maintain and reconciliation increased as perceived severity rose. The index of moderated mediation was also significant (Index = 0.012, SE = 0.009, 95% CI [0.0001, 0.0323]), confirming that perceived severity moderates the mediation effect (see Figure 17).

### **Model Fit**

- The model explains 57.39% of the variance in reconciliation behaviours ( $R^2 = 0.57$ ,  $F(8, 222) = 37.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- For the mediator desire to maintain, the model explains 37.74% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.38$ ,  $F(5, 225) = 27.27$ ,  $p < .001$ )

**Hypothesis 5a Partially Supported.** The results found a significant interaction effect between perceived severity and desire to maintain, indicating that perceived severity significantly moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation behaviours. Specifically, the mediation effect of desire to maintain was stronger at higher levels of perceived severity, suggesting that when perceived harm is greater, the influence of desire to maintain on reconciliation behaviours becomes more pronounced.

The mediation effect of desire to maintain remained significant across all levels of harm severity but in opposite direction than hypothesised.

## **5b. Moderated Mediation for Revenge**

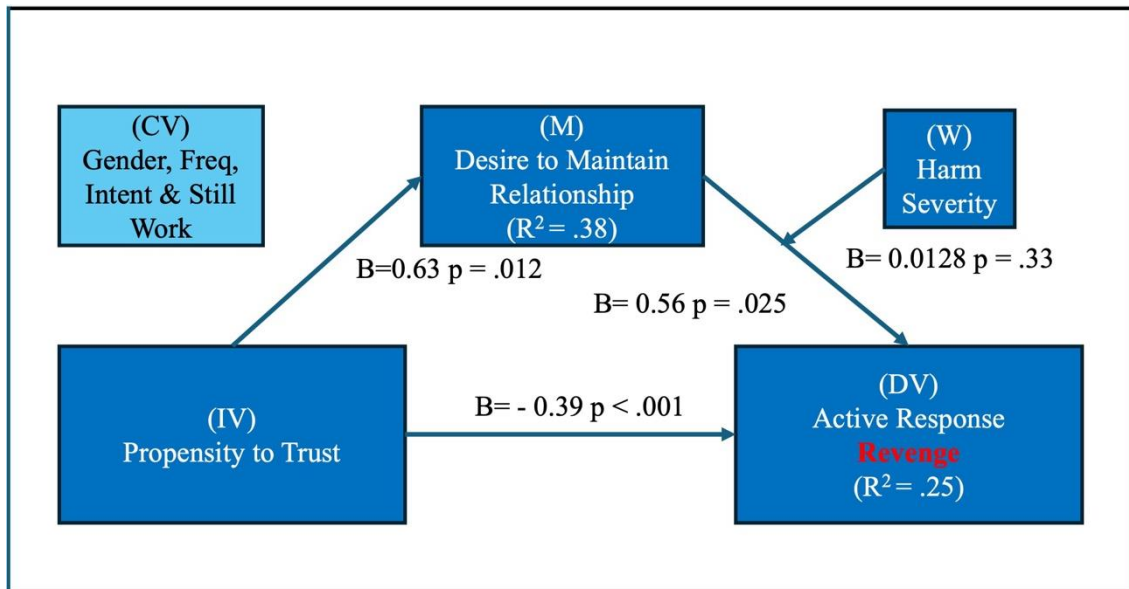
### **Hypothesis 5b:**

*Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on revenge behaviours through the desire to maintain the relationship, such that this indirect effect is stronger at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically moderating the path between desire to maintain the relationship and revenge.*

The following figure illustrates the moderated mediation model, where perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on revenge motivations via the desire to maintain the relationship. Specifically, the hypothesised model posits that the strength of the mediation effect diminishes at higher levels of perceived severity, with moderation occurring on the path between desire to maintain the relationship and revenge.

**Figure 18.**

*Moderated Mediation Model of Propensity to Trust on Revenge via Desire to Maintain Relationship, Moderated by Harm Severity*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor). The interaction effect between Desire to Maintain and Harm Severity was not significant ( $B = 0.0128$ ,  $p = .33$ ).

The results shown in the figure are detailed below.

### **Mediation Effect**

Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $R^2 = .38$ ).

Desire to maintain significantly predicted revenge ( $B = 0.06$ ,  $p = .025$ ). The indirect effect was significant at both mean ( $B = 0.04$ , 95% CI [0.001, 0.09]) and high ( $B = 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.004, 0.12]) levels of perceived severity.

### **Moderation Effect**

The interaction between desire to maintain and perceived severity was not significant ( $B = 0.013$ ,  $p = .33$ ). The index of moderated mediation was also non-significant (Index = 0.008,  $SE = 0.009$ , 95% CI [-0.007, 0.029]), as shown in Figure 18.

### **Model Fit**

- The model explained 24.96% of the variance in revenge behaviours ( $R^2 = .25$ ,  $F(8, 222) = 9.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- For the mediator desire to maintain, the model explained 37.74% of the variance ( $R^2 = .38$ ,  $F(5, 225) = 27.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Hypothesis 5b Not Supported.** The results indicate that perceived severity does not consistently moderate the indirect effect of propensity to trust on revenge through desire to maintain as evidenced by a non-significant moderated mediation index. However, the indirect effect of propensity to trust on revenge through desire to maintain is significant at higher levels of perceived severity. This finding suggests that while the overall moderation effect is not significant, the mediation pathway is stronger when perceived severity is high, indicating that desire to indirect effect plays a role in increasing revenge at higher levels of perceived severity.

### **5c. Moderated Mediation for Avoidance**

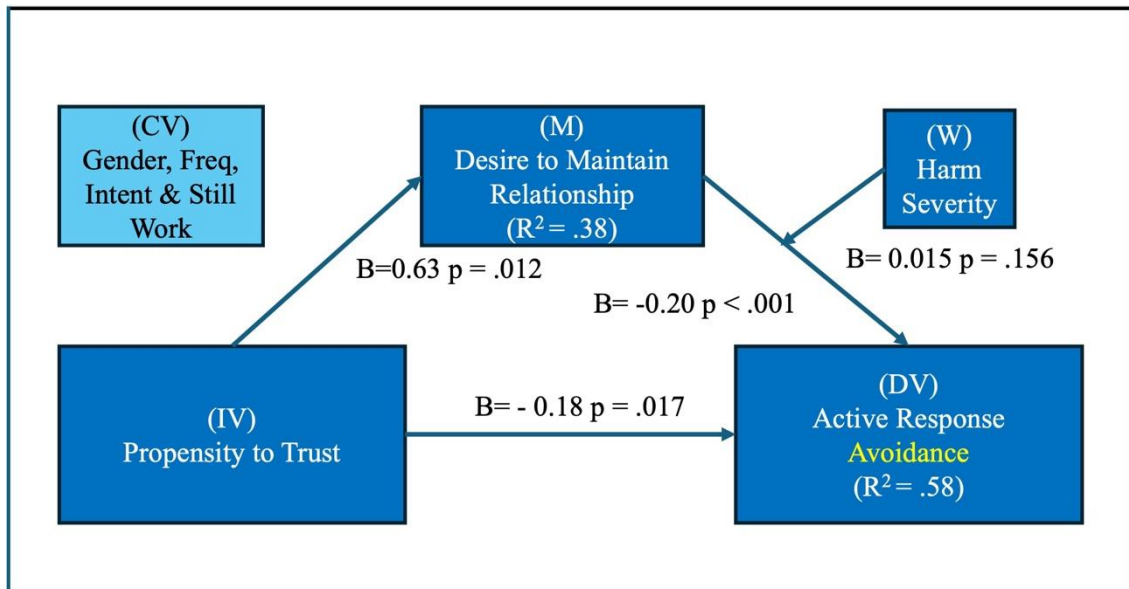
#### **Hypothesis 5c:**

*Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on avoidance behaviours through the desire to maintain the relationship, such that this indirect effect is stronger at higher levels of perceived severity, specifically moderating the path between desire to maintain the relationship and avoidance.*

The following figure illustrates the moderated mediation model, where perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on avoidance via the desire to maintain the relationship. Specifically, the hypothesised model posits that the strength of the mediation effect would increase at higher levels of perceived severity, with moderation occurring on the path between desire to maintain the relationship and avoidance.

**Figure 19.**

*Moderated Mediation Model of Propensity to Trust on Avoidance via Desire to Maintain Relationship, Moderated by Harm Severity*



*Note:* Control Variables (CV) include Gender, Freq (frequency of breach), Intent (intentionality of breach), and Still Work (whether the individual still works with the immediate supervisor). The interaction effect between Desire to Maintain and Harm Severity was not significant ( $B = 0.015$ ,  $p = .156$ ).

The results shown in the figure are detailed below.

### **Mediation Effect**

Propensity to trust significantly predicted desire to maintain ( $B = 0.63$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $R^2 = .38$ ). Desire to maintain significantly predicted avoidance ( $B = -0.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indirect effect was significant at both low ( $B = -0.11$ , 95% CI  $[-0.22, -0.01]$ ) and high ( $B = -0.14$ , 95% CI  $[-0.26, -0.03]$ ) levels of perceived severity.

### **Moderation Effect**

The interaction between desire to maintain and perceived severity was not significant ( $B = -0.015$ ,  $p = .156$ ). The index of moderated mediation was also non-significant (Index =  $-0.009$ , 95% CI  $[-0.028, 0.003]$ ), as shown in Figure 19.

### **Model Fit**

- The model explained 58.10% of the variance in avoidance behaviours ( $R^2 = 0.58$ ,  $F(8, 222) = 38.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- For the mediator desire to maintain, the model explained 37.74% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.38$ ,  $F(5, 225) = 27.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Hypothesis 5c Not supported.** The non-significant interaction between perceived severity and desire to maintain the relationship suggests that perceived severity does not moderate the indirect effect of propensity to trust on avoidance. The means that, although the indirect effect of propensity to trust on avoidance through desire to maintain remains significant across all levels of harm severity, the strength of this effect does not change significantly based on how severe the harm is perceived. Therefore, the hypothesis that perceived severity moderates this relationship was not supported.

### **Summary**

The results, summarised in Table 24, support the mediating role of desire to maintain the relationship in the association between propensity to trust and passive and active responses to trust breaches: reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance. Desire to maintain significantly mediated the effect of propensity to trust on all three outcomes. However, an unexpected

finding emerged for revenge: a stronger desire to maintain the relationship was associated with increased revenge behaviours, contrary to the original hypothesis. This suggests that individuals with a high desire to maintain the relationship may still engage in revenge, potentially reflecting complex emotional dynamics.

The moderating role of perceived severity was significant only for reconciliation. Higher perceived severity strengthened the indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation through desire to maintain. In contrast, perceived severity did not significantly moderate the relationship for revenge or avoidance.

These findings suggest that perceived severity is more influential in shaping reconciliation behaviours, while revenge and avoidance responses appear less sensitive to variations in perceived harm severity. The unexpected positive association between desire to maintain and revenge highlights the need for further investigation into the role of emotional, relational, and self-regulatory processes following trust breaches.



**Table 244.**

*Summary of Moderated Mediation Analysis of the Impact of Perceived Severity on the Relationship between Propensity to Trust, Desire to Maintain, and Active and Passive Responses to Breach*

Hypothesis	Pathway	Interaction Effect	Indirect Effect at Low Severity	Indirect Effect at High Severity	Moderation	Decision
<b>H5a</b>	Propensity to Trust → DTMT → Reconciliation	Significant ( $\beta = 0.02, p = .049$ )	Significant (0.12, BootCI [0.03, 0.22])	Significant (0.16, BootCI [0.03, 0.29])	Moderation	Supported
<b>H5b</b>	Propensity to Trust → DTMT → Revenge	Non-significant ( $\beta = 0.0128, p = .33$ )	Non-significant	Significant (0.05, BootCI [0.005, 0.11])	No Moderation	Not Supported
<b>H5c</b>	Propensity to Trust → DTMT → Avoidance	Non-significant ( $\beta = -0.02, p = .16$ )	Significant (-0.11, BootCI [-0.21, -0.02])	Significant (-0.14, BootCI [-0.26, -0.03])	No Moderation	Not Supported

### ***7.5.3 Summary***

In summary, the findings suggest that the desire to maintain the relationship plays a key mediating role between propensity to trust and the three outcome variables—reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge—though the strength and direction of these relationships vary. The mediation effect is fully supported in the case of reconciliation, where a higher propensity to trust leads to a stronger desire to maintain the relationship, which in turn promotes reconciliation. For avoidance, the mediation is partial, suggesting that while the desire to maintain the relationship reduces avoidance, a direct negative relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance remains. In the case of revenge, the mediation is also partial, but with an unexpected positive relationship between desire to maintain the relationship and revenge behaviours, indicating a more complex dynamic.

Moreover, perceived severity was examined as a moderator. It significantly moderated the indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation behaviours, enhancing the effect at higher levels of perceived severity. However, no significant moderation was found in the relationship between desire to maintain and avoidance behaviours, though the indirect effect remained significant across all levels of perceived severity. For revenge behaviours, perceived severity did not moderate the relationship.

These results highlight the differentiated roles of desire to maintain the relationship and perceived severity in influencing reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge behaviours following a trust breach.

**Table 25.**

*Summary of Hypothesis Testing for the Mediating Role of Desire to Maintain and the Moderating Role of Perceived Severity*

Hypothesis #	Hypothesis Statement	Predicted Effect	Support	Outcome Summary
H4a	Desire to maintain mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation, positively.	Positive	Yes	Significant mediation effect; desire to maintain positively predicted reconciliation ( $B = 0.22$ , $p < .001$ ).
H5a	Perceived severity moderates the mediation in H1a, weakening the indirect effect at higher severity levels.	Negative Interaction	Yes	Significant moderation; indirect effect weaker at higher levels of perceived severity ( $B = 0.02$ , $p = .049$ ).
H4b	Desire to maintain mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and revenge, negatively.	Negative	Partially	Mediation effect was significant, but in the opposite direction; desire to maintain increased revenge ( $B = 0.56$ , $p = .025$ ).
H5b	Perceived severity moderates the mediation in H1b, strengthening the indirect effect at higher severity levels.	Positive Interaction	No	No significant interaction effect; perceived severity did not moderate the relationship ( $B = 0.01$ , $p = .33$ ).
H4c	Desire to maintain mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance, negatively.	Negative	Yes	Significant mediation effect; desire to maintain reduced avoidance ( $B = -0.20$ , $p < .001$ ).
H5c	Perceived severity moderates the mediation in H1c, strengthening the indirect effect at higher severity levels.	Positive Interaction	No	No significant interaction effect; perceived severity did not moderate the relationship ( $B = -0.015$ , $p = .16$ ).

## 7.6 Study 3 Preliminary Discussion

This section outlines the primary findings from Study 3, focusing on the mediating role of desire to maintain the relationship and the moderating influence of perceived severity on reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge behaviours following trust breaches. These findings provide a foundation for a deeper examination of the trust breach process in the subsequent discussion chapter.

**RQ4:** How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active and passive responses to a trust breach, and how is this effect moderated by severity?

### *7.6.1 Key Findings of Hypotheses Testing*

These findings demonstrate that CAPS offers a useful framework for examination of the relational and contextual variables jointly shape responses to trust breach. Desire to maintain the relationship emerged as a significant mediator, influencing reconciliation, avoidance, and revenge behaviours. An unexpected positive association between desire to maintain and revenge highlights the co-occurrence of both motivation to preserve the relationship with a seemingly contradictory desire to retaliate following a breach.

The results highlight the specific and variable role of perceived severity in trust dynamics. While severity significantly shapes the influence of desire to maintain the relationship on reconciliation, its impact on avoidance and revenge behaviours is not significant. It is possible that revenge and avoidance are less tied to relational goals and are self-regulatory or protective mechanisms. However, severity may still play a broader role in trust breach

contexts, interacting with emotions such as anger to influence revenge or avoidance outcomes as suggested by Crossley (2009).

These findings emphasise the need to move beyond traditional frameworks like Social Exchange Theory to more comprehensive models such as CAPS, which account for individual interpretations and emotional processes. CAPS allows for a richer understanding of the variability in trust dynamics and breach responses, highlighting the interplay of subjective perceptions, relational motivations, and contextual factors.

### **Desire to Maintain the Relationship Findings**

- **Reconciliation:**

The desire to maintain the relationship fully mediated the relationship between propensity to trust and reconciliation. This indicates that individuals with a stronger desire to preserve relationships are more likely to engage in reconciliation behaviours after a trust breach.

- **Revenge:**

Contrary to the hypothesis, desire to maintain showed a positive relationship with revenge. This unexpected finding suggests that individuals may simultaneously harbour a desire to maintain the relationship and seek revenge, reflecting complex emotional and cognitive dynamics. This dual response may indicate an attempt to self-regulate or assert control within the relationship while striving to preserve relational ties.

- **Avoidance:**

Desire to maintain partially mediated the relationship between propensity to trust and avoidance. However, the significant direct effect suggests that individuals with a higher propensity to trust may still engage in avoidance behaviours, even when they have a desire to maintain the relationship, reflecting a dual motivation in navigating trust breaches.

### **Perceived Severity Findings**

- **Reconciliation:**

Perceived severity significantly moderated the indirect effect of propensity to trust on reconciliation through desire to maintain. Specifically, higher levels of perceived severity strengthened the influence of desire to maintain on reconciliation behaviours, suggesting that individuals are more motivated to repair relationships as the perceived harm intensifies.

- **Revenge:**

Perceived severity did not significantly moderate the relationship between desire to maintain and revenge. However, the mediation analysis revealed an unexpected positive relationship between desire to maintain and revenge, indicating that individuals with a strong desire to maintain the relationship may still pursue revenge behaviours. This suggests a complex dynamic between relational motivations and retaliatory desires, which may be amplified under conditions of heightened perceived harm.

- **Avoidance:**

Perceived severity did not significantly moderate the relationship between desire to maintain and avoidance. Regardless of the perceived severity of the breach, individuals with a strong desire to maintain the relationship were consistently less likely to engage in avoidance behaviours, suggesting that other factors may play a more pivotal role in influencing avoidance responses.

## **7.7 Limitations**

This study focused on participants' recall of personal experiences with trust breaches, which, while providing contextually relevant data, may be subject to memory biases. Participants' recollections might have been influenced by the passage of time, selective memory, or the emotional salience of the event, potentially impacting the accuracy and completeness of their responses. However, using real-life experiences offers ecological validity and deeper insights into trust dynamics that hypothetical scenarios may not fully capture.

Future research could complement this approach with methodologies such as longitudinal designs or real-time assessments to reduce reliance on retrospective accounts and enhance the robustness of findings.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This section presented the results of Study 3, shedding light on how propensity to trust, desire to maintain the relationship, and perceived severity shape responses to leader-follower trust breaches. Guided by the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework,

these findings underscore the interplay between individual motivations, self-regulation, and subjective interpretations in shaping trust breach responses.

Desire to maintain the relationship emerged as a consistent mediator across reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance, highlighting a central role in guiding behavioural responses following a trust breach. Perceived severity significantly moderated the relationship between desire to maintain and reconciliation, suggesting that reconciliation behaviours are particularly sensitive to the perceived gravity of harm. Individuals with strong relational motivations appear more likely to reconcile when breaches are deemed severe, emphasising the role of self-regulation in repairing trust.

In contrast, perceived severity did not moderate avoidance or revenge. Avoidance behaviours appeared less influenced by harm perception, while the unexpected positive relationship between desire to maintain and revenge suggests a complex dynamic. This finding points to competing motivations, where individuals may simultaneously seek to preserve relational ties and desire retribution, further emphasising the importance of self-regulation in managing conflicting impulses.

These findings provide a differentiated understanding of the cognitive and emotional mechanisms driving responses to trust breaches, particularly from a follower's perspective. By applying CAPS theory and its emphasis on motivational and self-regulatory processes, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of trust repair dynamics. The implications for organisational trust repair and leader-follower dynamics will be discussed in the next section.



**Table 26.**

*Summary of Research Questions and Hypotheses with Support Status*

Research Question (RQ)	Hypothesis (H)	Description	Support Status
<b>RQ1:</b> To what extent do the identified trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?		Trust breach events displayed varied alignment with ABI dimensions; some breach events spanned multiple dimensions. Trust Breach Types aligned	<b>Partially Supported</b>
<b>RQ2:</b> Which trust breach events by leaders are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of ABI influence these perceptions?	<b>H1:</b> Benevolence breaches will be perceived as more severe than integrity breaches.	Integrity breaches were perceived as more severe than benevolence breaches (e.g., Lies, Follower Exploitation).	<b>Not Supported</b>
	<b>H2:</b> Integrity breaches will be perceived as more severe than ability breaches.	Only two Integrity breaches were rated significantly higher in severity than ability breaches (e.g., Lies, Unkept Promises).	<b>Not Supported</b>
	<b>H3:</b> Breaches involving a combination of ABI will be perceived as	ABI breaches were perceived as more severe than ability or benevolence breaches	<b>Not Supported</b>

Research Question (RQ)	Hypothesis (H)	Description	Support Status
	more severe than individual dimensions.	in seven out of 10 breaches.	
<b>RQ3:</b> How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active and passive responses to a trust breach, and how is this effect moderated by severity?	<b>H4:</b> Desire to maintain mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and active/passive responses (reconciliation, revenge, avoidance).  <b>H5:</b> Perceived severity moderates the indirect effect of propensity to trust on post-breach responses via desire to maintain.	Desire to maintain significantly mediated reconciliation and avoidance, with partial mediation for revenge.	<b>Supported</b>
		Moderation significant for reconciliation; not significant for revenge or avoidance.	<b>Partially Supported</b>

**Notes:** Partially Supported: Indicates that results were mixed or only partially aligned with the hypothesis or research question. Significance thresholds: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## **7.9 Summary of Findings across Studies**

The three studies collectively advance the understanding of trust breaches by integrating individual traits, relational motivations, and contextual factors. Guided by the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, these studies offer a theoretically grounded exploration of the mechanisms underpinning trust repair. An overview of key findings from each study is presented in Table 27.

### **Study 1: The Nature and Dimensionality of Trust Breaches**

The findings from Study 1 underscore the complexity and subjectivity involved in categorising trust breach events, even among experts in trust research. While certain events, such as "Lack of Caring," aligned consistently with Benevolence, other events demonstrated diffuse alignment across multiple trustworthiness dimensions. This variability highlights the critical role of cognitive-affective processes, situational context, and individual interpretation in shaping how trust breaches are classified and understood.

These insights establish a foundation for Study 2, which built on the dimensionality allocations identified in Study 1 to examine how trust breaches evoke cognitive and affective responses. By focusing on perceived severity and its relationship with trustworthiness dimensions, Study 2 provided understanding of how trust breaches are experienced and processed, further illuminating the trust breach dynamics.

In summary, Study 1 advanced the understanding of trust breach dynamics by illustrating the interpretive flexibility and context sensitivity of breach classifications. The findings provide a basis for further exploration into the emotional, cognitive, and relational

consequences of trust breaches, contributing to theoretical developments and practical applications in organisational trust management.

### **Study 2: The Role of Perceived Severity and Dimensionality**

The findings from Study 2 underscored the complexity of trust breach perceptions, demonstrating that individuals interpret trust events in diverse ways rather than adhering strictly to predefined research categories. This variability highlights the role of subjective interpretations—how individuals cognitively and affectively process breaches—in shaping relational outcomes and behavioural responses.

The study highlighted that it is not the objective nature of the trust breach itself but its emotional impact on the individual that significantly influences their perceptions. These results aligned with the premise that individual affective and cognitive processes influence how breaches are evaluated and responded to.

By emphasising the variability in trust breach perceptions, Study 2 builds on Study 1's findings by exploring how individuals perceive the severity of trust breaches and how these perceptions align with trustworthiness dimensions. These findings provide a foundation for further research into the affective and cognitive mechanisms underpinning trust dynamics and responses to breaches.

### **Study 3: Relational Motivation and Passive and Active Responses to Trust Breach**

Study 3 delves into the mechanisms underlying follower responses to trust breaches, focusing on the roles of propensity to trust, relational motivations, and perceived severity. Guided by the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, this study

highlights the interplay between individual traits, motivations, and contextual factors in shaping reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance behaviours.

The desire to maintain the relationship emerged as a critical mediator across all behavioural outcomes, demonstrating its centrality in guiding follower responses to trust breaches. For reconciliation, perceived severity significantly moderated the relationship, with reconciliation behaviours intensifying as the perceived severity of harm increased. This suggests that individuals with strong relational motivations are particularly attuned to the gravity of a breach when deciding to pursue reconciliation, underscoring the role of self-regulation in repairing trust.

In contrast, perceived severity did not moderate the relationships involving avoidance or revenge. Avoidance behaviours appeared relatively stable across varying levels of perceived harm, suggesting that other factors may drive these responses. Notably, the unexpected positive relationship between desire to maintain and revenge revealed a complex interplay of motivations, where individuals might simultaneously seek retribution while striving to preserve relational ties. This finding underscores the interplay of competing cognitive-affective units suggesting that self-regulation may play a role in managing these tensions.

Overall, Study 3 enriches our understanding of trust breach dynamics by demonstrating how relational motivations, contextual factors, and subjective interpretations interact to influence behavioural responses. Through the application of the CAPS framework, the study offers a theoretically grounded lens for examining how individuals navigate trust breaches, emphasising the variability in follower responses and the significance of self-regulatory processes. These findings offer both theoretical and practical insights into follower

behaviour following trust violations, setting the stage for a more comprehensive discussion in the following chapter.

**Table 27.***Overview of Key Findings across Studies*

Study	Research Focus	Key Findings	Framework Contributions
Study 1	Alignment of Trust breaches with Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity dimensions	Classification by Trust SMEs showed variability in ABI dimensionality, suggesting the subjective nature of trust breaches classification.	Highlights limitations of static trust theories and points to the potential utility of broader meta-theoretical frameworks like CAPS in addressing contextual and subjective variability.
Study 2	Perceived Severity and ABI dimensionality	Hypothesised relationships were not consistently supported across all 10 events but were more evident at the individual level, particularly where integrity and ABI combinations were involved.	Offers preliminary support for CAPS as a framework that may explain individual variability and contextual influences in trust breach perceptions and severity evaluations.
Study 3	Relational motivation and behavioural responses	Desire to maintain the relationship mediates responses; perceived severity moderates reconciliation but not revenge or avoidance; unexpected positive relationship between desire to maintain and revenge.	Suggests that motivational and self-regulatory processes may play a role in shaping trust breach responses. Further research needed to explore these relationships more fully.

## **7.10 Conclusion Insights from the Research Programme**

The research programme explored the multifaceted dynamics of trust breaches in organisational contexts, focusing on categorisation, perceived severity, relational motivations, and behavioural responses. Guided by the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, the three studies collectively highlight the complex interplay of individual traits, motivations, and contextual factors in shaping responses to leader-follower trust breaches.

Study 1 emphasised the subjective and context-dependent nature of trust breach categorisation, illustrating the interpretive flexibility in aligning breach events with trustworthiness dimensions. This foundational work established the need for dynamic frameworks to account for the variability in breach interpretations.

Study 2 expanded on these insights by demonstrating the significance of perceived severity in shaping trust breach perceptions. The findings revealed that subjective evaluations, influenced by affective and cognitive processes, strongly influence how breaches are experienced and processed. These results underscored the commonality of emotional impact over the objective characteristics of the breach.

Study 3 delved into relational motivations and behavioural responses, identifying the desire to maintain the relationship as a key mediator across reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance behaviours. The findings underscored the conditional role of perceived severity, particularly in moderating reconciliation behaviours, while revealing unexpected complexities, such as the positive association between relational motivations and revenge.



Taken together, these exploratory findings offer initial support for applying CAPS to the context of leader-follower trust breach. They illustrate how trait-level trust propensity, relational motivation, and perceived harm severity influence post-breach behaviours. The CAPS framework offers a theoretically grounded understanding of this interplay, as it accounts for the variability in follower responses through integration of individual dispositions, relational motivations, and the dynamic interaction between cognition and affect.

The next chapter will discuss these findings in greater depth, integrating theoretical insights and practical implications for trust repair and leader-follower dynamics in organisational contexts.

## **Chapter 8:**

### **Discussion**

This chapter will:

- Discuss the findings of this research programme.
- Highlight the research contribution.
- Discuss the implications for practice.
- Identify the study's limitations.
- Propose directions for future research.

#### **8.1 Overview**

This chapter discusses the findings of the research programme, integrating them with existing literature on Trust breach. It highlights the contributions of the research to theoretical and practical understanding, through the lens of Cognitive-Affective Processing, while identifying implications for organisations and individual relationships.

The chapter begins by summarising the key findings across the studies, situating them within the broader context of trust research. It then explores the theoretical contributions of the programme, emphasising how these findings extend current frameworks and address existing gaps in trust research. Particular attention is given to the implications for practice, offering actionable insights to enhance trust dynamics in organisational settings.

The chapter also provides detail on the limitations of the research programme, acknowledging constraints in design, methodology, and generalisability. These limitations

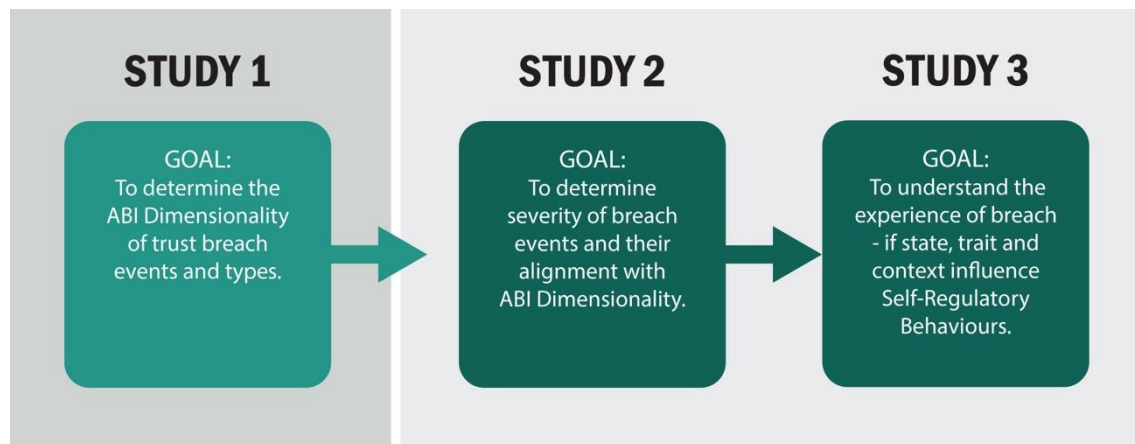
are discussed alongside proposed directions for future research to build on the foundation laid by this programme.

In doing so, this chapter not only concludes the research programme but also provides a roadmap for advancing the study of trust breach and repair in leader-follower relationships.

## 8.2 Research Programme Overview

**Figure 20.**

*Overview of the Research Programme*



Research Goal	To explore the multifaceted dynamics of follower-experienced trust breaches, focusing on perceived severity and trustworthiness dimensions (Ability, Benevolence, Integrity—ABI), as well as relational motivations, self-regulatory processes, and contextual factors influencing passive and active responses to leader trust breaches.
Sample	The research involved Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to refine the trust breach framework, followed by a diverse international participant pool representing multiple industries and roles to examine trust breach perceptions and responses.

Methodology	A mixed-method approach combining SME panel tasks to categorise trust breaches and align them with ABI dimensions, along with self-report questionnaires to analyse follower perceptions, severity ratings, and behavioural responses to trust breaches.
Research Questions	<p>RQ1: <i>To what extent do the identified trust breaches align with the Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality?</i></p> <p>RQ2: <i>Which trust breach events by leaders are perceived as most severe by followers, and how do the trustworthiness dimensions of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) influence these perceptions?</i></p> <p>RQ3: <i>How do relational motivation and an individual's propensity to trust jointly influence active and passive responses to a trust breach, and how is this effect moderated by severity?</i></p>
Hypotheses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Breaches of benevolence expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of integrity expectations.</li> <li>- Breaches of integrity expectations will be perceived as more severe than breaches of ability expectations</li> <li>- Breaches involving a combination of ABI dimensions will be perceived as more severe than breaches involving individual dimensions.</li> <li>- Desire to maintain the relationship mediates the relationship between propensity to trust and passive (avoidance) and active (reconciliation, revenge) responses, moderated by severity.</li> </ul>

Figure 20 above provides a concise summary of the research programme, highlighting its overarching goal, methodology, and key focus areas. The inclusion of research questions

and hypotheses offers a clear framework for understanding how the study addressed core objectives and tested specific propositions related to trust breaches through the CAPS lens. This structured presentation aids in situating the research findings within the broader context of trust literature, guiding the discussion of contributions, implications, and future research directions.

### **8.3 Research Findings**

The research findings offer insight how trust breach events may be conceptualised, perceived, and responded to, highlighting some of the psychological and relational processes that underpin these responses. While exploratory in scope, the findings suggest that responses to breaches are shaped by more than reciprocity-driven assumptions, pointing to the potential relevance of cognitive, affective, and contextual factors. In doing so, the research contributes to a broader perspective on trust breach experiences, one that moves beyond transactional assumptions to consider the subjective and situational elements shaping behaviour.

Key findings and implications across Studies 1, 2, and 3, as presented previously in Table 28, reflecting an evolving understanding of trust breach dynamics. Perceived severity featured prominently in Studies 2 and 3, influencing how breaches were evaluated and how individuals reported responding to them. These findings offer preliminary insight into the role of severity in shaping trust breach perceptions and behaviours, particularly when considered alongside relational motivations and contextual influences.

Study 1, examined the alignment of trust breach events with trustworthiness dimensions, highlighting the variability and subjectivity involved in dimensional categorisation. These findings informed the design for Study 2, which explored the role of perceived severity and

ABI dimensionality in understanding how trust breaches are evaluated. The study suggested that trust breach events may be categorised differently depending on individual and contextual factors, indicating that the subjective impact of a breach, rather than its objective characteristics, can shape its perceived significance.

Building on these insights, Study 3 approached perceived severity as a useful and relatively stable construct, shifting the focus from specific breach events to understanding relational motivations and behavioural responses. By keeping severity constant, the study enabled a more focused exploration of reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance behaviours, offering insight into the emotional and cognitive processes that may influence trust breach dynamics.

The findings across these studies offer preliminary support for the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) as a theoretically integrative framework for examining trust breach. CAPS facilitates an understanding of the interplay between individual traits, cognitive-affective factors, relational motivations, and self-regulatory processes in shaping how trust breach are interpreted and responded to. Rather than offering a singular explanation, CAPS provides a flexible lens for exploring the subjective meaning-making processes that influence behavioural responses, complementing and extending existing theories such as Social Exchange Theory.

This progression highlights the potential value of motivation as a construct in trust breach research, suggesting avenues for both theoretical advancement and practical application in managing trust dynamics in organisational contexts.

### ***8.3.1 Discussion of Findings***

This section synthesises the overarching insights from the research program, integrating findings across studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of trust breach dynamics. While individual study results have been discussed sequentially within the research methodology chapter, this discussion focuses on broader themes and theoretical implications. Key contributions include an evaluation of the limitations of the Ability-Benevolence-Integrity (ABI) framework, the distinctiveness and perceived severity of integrity breaches, and the role of motivation and self-regulatory processes in shaping responses to trust violations.

An important contribution of this research is the application of the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework to trust breach dynamics. While exploratory in nature, this application highlights the potential of CAPS to account for the subjective, and context-dependent features of trust breaches, by accounting for the interplay of cognitive-affective mechanisms, relational motivations, and situational variables in influencing individual responses. This framework offers a way to extend existing knowledge by exploring how individuals' propensity to trust interacts with cognitive-affective processes, including relational goals and self-regulatory mechanisms to shape behaviours and outcomes following breaches.

Through the CAPS lens, the section underscores the implications of these dynamics for leadership and organisational contexts, particularly in understanding how individuals' relational motivations influence their responses to breaches. This perspective provides a deeper theoretical understanding of the variability in individuals' trust-related motivations and behaviours within the context of organisational relationships.

### ***8.3.1.1 Limitations of ABI Dimensionality as a framework for understanding Trust Breach***

The Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity (ABI) dimensionality proposed by Mayer et al. (1995) remains a foundational model in trust research. However, its explanatory power has faced increasing scrutiny in recent years. Scholars such as Nooteboom (2021), have highlighted ABI's inability to fully capture the subjective, context-dependent, and multi-faceted nature of trust dynamics. Trust decisions, as Dietz (2011) notes, often extend beyond ABI dimensions, incorporating relational and institutional factors that influence trust dynamics in real-world scenarios. Sondern & Hertel (2024) have questioned the model's reliance on additive, independent effects of its components, advocating instead for an interactive and contextually dependent perspective.

Findings from this research programme align with these critiques, revealing significant variability in how trust breaches are perceived and categorised. Study 1, engaged trust experts to evaluate trust breaches, revealing variability in how these were aligned with ABI dimensions. While some events, such as "Lack of Caring," were consistently aligned with a single dimension, others showed diffuse alignment across multiple ABI dimensions. Study 2 reinforced this observation, showing similar variation in participants' categorisations. For example, Lies was categorised by 64% of participants as an integrity breach. Other participants categorised it as ability (12%), or benevolence (9%) or as a combination of all three (15%). These findings underscore the limitations of static frameworks like ABI in accounting for the dynamic interplay of cognitive and affective mechanisms underlying perceptions of trust breaches. As Dietz (2011) suggests, trust decisions are influenced by interdependent factors such as cultural norms, institutional safeguards, and interactional cues. These same factors likely also influence how trust breaches are perceived and



categorised, suggesting that breaches may not always fit neatly within predefined ABI dimensions.

Despite these critiques, the ABI framework remains widely validated and influential model in trust breach research. Additional research supports its utility in guiding trust repair strategies. For instance, Dirks et al. (2011) and Kim et al. (2013) demonstrate how breaches categorised as ability, benevolence, or integrity influence trust repair dynamics and perceptions in organisational settings. Collectively, these studies reinforce the acceptance of ABI as a dominant lens for examining the core elements of trust violations and their consequences. Moreover, Kim et al. (2004) showed that integrity breaches often lead to more profound trust damage than ability breaches, given their association with moral violations, while Kim et al. (2006) underscored the critical role of blame attribution in shaping responses to breaches. Ferrin et al. (2007) further underscored the unique challenges of integrity breaches, showing how responses like reticence exacerbate mistrust and reveal the moral and relational complexities of these events. These studies exemplify the enduring relevance of the ABI framework in understanding violations.

The conceptual work of Chen et al. (2011) further expanded the ABI model by proposing the possibility of overlapping dimensions in trust breached. Chen suggested that some breaches may involve combined dimensions, each with distinct implications for perceived severity. While their propositions did not challenge the foundational validity of ABI, they introduced the possibility that trust breaches may not always fit neatly within single-dimensional categories. Chen and colleagues work informed the hypotheses for this research programme. Grounded in the widely accepted ABI model, this research programme hypothesised that trust breaches could be primarily structured around ability, benevolence, and integrity dimensions. Consequently, the findings from Studies 1 and 2 were unexpected,

revealing that the same event could be categorised in multiple ways depending on individual perceptions and contextual factors.

The findings raise questions about the sufficiency of the ABI dimensionality in capturing the complex and multifaceted nature of transgressions in organisational relationships. While ABI remains a valuable foundation, its simplicity does not fully account for the dynamic interplay of subjective interpretations, relational motivations, and situational contexts. This aligns with critiques by Epitropaki et al. (2020), who argue that existing typologies, including ABI, often fail to address the complex theoretical and dynamic phenomena inherent in leader-follower transgressions. Although Epitropaki et al. proposed an overarching tripartite framework, their model also does not fully account for the diffusion and overlapping nature of trust breaches observed in this research.

In summary, while ABI continues to serve as a foundational framework, this research highlights potential limitations in its ability to fully account for the subjective, contextual, and relational factors that influence trust breach assessment. Findings from this research programme suggest that trust breaches are shaped by a dynamic interplay of subjective interpretations, relational motivations, and contextual influences. The variability in perceptions reinforces the notion that it is not the objective event itself, but how it is experienced and contextualised, that defines the breach.

This variability highlights the critical role of subjective interpretations—how individuals cognitively and affectively process breaches—in shaping relational outcomes and behavioural responses. Ultimately, trust breach research must embrace the principle that it is not the event itself that defines the breach, but how it is experienced and interpreted within

its context- a perspective that underscores the deeply personal nature of trust breach dynamics.

#### ***8.3.1.2 Cognitive Affective Processing System (CAPS)- An alternative meta-theoretical framework***

The findings from this research program underscore the differentiated, context-specific, and emotionally driven nature of trust breaches, challenging the adequacy of Social Exchange Theory as a framework for understanding such phenomena. While SET has long provided a valuable lens for examining relational dynamics, its emphasis on rational cost-benefit analyses fails to account for the subjective, context-specific, and emotionally charged nature of trust breaches. Research has shown that behaviour is different at work, and that work context influences mind-sets (Belmi & Schroeder, 2021). CAPS offers an alternative framework that addresses these limitations by integrating individual variability, situational influences, and affective processes.

As a meta-theoretical framework, CAPS provides the flexibility to selectively integrate relevant theories and explore domain-specific predictions (Ayduk & Gyurak, 2008; Mendoza-Denton & Goldman-Flythe, 2009). Its capacity to depict personality as a dynamic construct adapting to situational contexts (Bleidorn et al., 2022; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008) makes it especially suited for examining the multifaceted nature of trust breaches. Mischel and Shoda (1995) highlighted CAPS's dual role in facilitating the concurrent study of personality dispositions and processes—integrating structure and dynamics into a unified system. This positioning establishes CAPS as a valuable lens for understanding trust breaches, portraying individuals as proactive and goal-oriented, shaped by their cognitive

and social learning history, affective states, biological foundations, and contextual environments.

The findings suggest that trust breaches are not merely transactional violations, but are significantly shaped by cognitive and affective interpretations. Perceived severity—a critical factor influencing emotional and behavioural responses to transgressions (Carmody & Gordon, 2011) —is determined by the trustor's subjective perception to the breach rather than the objective characteristics of the breach. For example, when the breach "Lies" was classified as an Integrity violation, it was rated significantly higher in severity compared to when it was classified as a Benevolence breach. These differences in perceived severity for the same event underscore the subjective nature of trust breach evaluations and illustrate the limitations of Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET reduces trust breaches to transactional dynamics, focusing on rational exchanges and reciprocal equity while overlooking the complex interplay of cognitive-affective mechanisms, situational cues, the trustor's individual perspective and broader relational motivations.

In contrast, CAPS provides a framework that incorporates these complexities. Trust breaches, as demonstrated by the findings, are deeply tied to the trustor's cognitive and emotional processing of the event, including the meanings ascribed to the breach and its broader relational implications. These insights challenge SET's explanatory adequacy and underscore the necessity of frameworks like CAPS, which integrate individual variability, emotional processing, and situational influences. CAPS offers a more promising framework for understanding the self-regulatory and interpretive dynamics of trust breaches, emphasising that subjective perceptions and emotional experiences are central to shaping responses.

The findings from Studies 1 and 2 further reinforce the relevancy of CAPS by highlighting the inherent subjectivity in categorising trust breaches. This interpretive variability aligns with CAPS emphasis on the role of cognitive-affective mechanisms in shaping individual interpretations. CAPS posits that trust breach responses are influenced not only by objective characteristics of the event but also by situational variables and personal perceptions. The variability in categorisation, even among trust experts, underscores the influence of attributional processes, contextual cues, and individual biases on classification decisions.

Study 3 exemplifies the applicability of CAPS to self-regulatory behaviours, examining the mechanisms driving follower responses to trust breaches with a focus on relational motivations and perceived severity. The desire to maintain the relationship emerged as a central mediator across behavioural responses, including reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance. These findings point to the relevance of self-regulatory processes in trust breach responses and provide preliminary support for the applicability of CAPS as a framework to understand trust breaches in organisational settings.

In summary, CAPS integrates the cognitive-affective mechanisms and relational motivations, capturing the self-regulatory and interpretive dynamics of trust breaches. Trust is not merely a calculation of relational exchanges but a complex process involving subjective interpretations, emotional processing, and self-regulation. CAPS accommodates the psychologically embedded dynamics of trust breaches, allowing the incorporation of commonly used perspectives such as attribution theory, a theory highlighted by Dirks and De Cremer (2011) as commonly used to explain trust repair. By integrating these elements, CAPS provides a promising framework for exploring trust breach and its underlying mechanisms, extending beyond the transactional focus of SET.

### ***8.3.1.3 The Role of Integrity and ABI Combined in Trust Breach Events***

Integrity breaches and those involving combined Ability-Benevolence-Integrity (ABI) dimensions evoked highest severity ratings for many trust breach events. This finding highlights the critical role of moral and ethical considerations in shaping perceptions of trust breaches. While prior research, such as the conceptual framework proposed by Chen et al. (2011), suggested that relational breaches tied to Benevolence might be perceived as more severe due to their interpersonal nature, the current findings emphasise the heightened emotional and cognitive impact of Integrity violations. Study Two provided indicative evidence for this pattern, suggesting that trust events categorised as Integrity breaches, or as involving multiple ABI dimensions, tended to be rated as more severe. These results align with the findings of van der Werff et al. (2023), who found that Integrity violations evoke the strongest reaction in the Default Mode Network (DMN), reflecting heightened social cognitive processing associated with moral and ethical breaches.

The heightened severity of integrity breaches can be understood through the lens of Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt, 2007) which posits that moral intuitions, such as those related to fairness and justice, are deeply rooted in evolutionary processes. Integrity violations, such as lying or breaking promises, transgress the fairness foundation by undermining expectations of justice and reciprocal treatment. Furthermore, Haidt (2001) further explains that moral judgments are primarily driven by quick, automatic intuitions, with reasoning playing a secondary, post hoc role. This suggests that Integrity breaches, which strike at core moral values like honesty and fairness, trigger immediate, emotion-laden responses that shape judgments of severity even before conscious deliberation occurs.

The meta-theoretical framework of CAPS further contextualises these findings. CAPS emphasises the interplay between cognitive and affective units in shaping individual responses to specific situations. Integrity breaches, viewed through Malle's (2021) framework of wrongness judgments, are interpreted as deliberate violations of moral norms. Within CAPS, these judgments reflect an interaction of situational cues and cognitive-affective units, framing integrity breaches as intentional and unjustifiable acts. Furthermore, Malle's concept of blame judgments, which integrates evaluations of causality, justification, and preventability, aligns with CAPS by integrating multiple streams of cognitive and affective information, amplifying perceptions of severity and moral responsibility.

The multidimensional nature of integrity breaches may further explain their perceived severity. Violations of integrity often engage multiple moral foundations simultaneously, as demonstrated by Graham et al. (2013). For instance, an act of dishonesty can simultaneously undermine fairness (violating justice), harm relationships (betraying trust), and damage perceptions of loyalty (eroding relational bonds). It is possible that the involvement of multiple moral dimensions may magnify the psychological salience of such breaches, making them particularly impactful. Day et al. (2014) also highlighted that moral framing intensifies attitudes by activating foundational moral values. This suggests that when violations are perceived through a moral lens, they may become salient and emotionally charged. It is possible that the framing of such breaches as integrity violations may intensify their perceived severity, as they strike at the core of shared values that are both universal and shaped by cultural context.

These dynamics are particularly salient in leader-follower contexts. Integrity breaches by leaders represent not only a moral failure but also a profound disruption of norms associated with leadership expectations. Leaders are often held to higher ethical standards, expected to

embody moral courage, uphold ethical principles, and set an example that shapes the moral climate of their workplace (Lindebaum et al., 2017). The perceived severity of Integrity breaches in this study may reflect the centrality of these expectations, as participants consistently rated such events as the most severe. These findings suggest that Integrity violations, by undermining trust and moral leadership, may elicit heightened emotional and cognitive responses.

In summary, the findings point to the potentially heightened severity of Integrity breaches and their intersections with other ABI dimensions. By engaging foundational moral values, triggering immediate emotional responses, and often implicating multiple moral dimensions, Integrity breaches exemplify the complex interplay of cognitive and affective processes in trust breach evaluations. Situated within CAPS, these insights highlight the need for frameworks that account for the subjective, emotional, and contextual dimensions of trust breaches, particularly in the ethically charged context of leader-follower relationships.

#### *8.3.1.4. The Role of Relational Motivation in Trust Breach Responses*

This research explores the role of relational motivation as a potential mediating factor in responses to trust breaches, with findings indicating its influence across avoidance, reconciliation, and revenge. These findings align with van der Werff et al. (2019) trust motivation framework, which situates trust as a dynamic, self-regulatory process shaped by intraindividual motivational drivers. Relational motivation represents the underlying desire to sustain or restore interpersonal connections, even amidst transgressions, revealing its importance in navigating the complexities of trust dynamics.

Relational motivation's role in mediating avoidance underscores its function as a protective mechanism. Avoidance, a frequently used strategy for dealing with workplace mistreatment



allows individuals to distance themselves and manage the emotions from the event (Hershcovis et al., 2018). As van der Werff et al. argue, trust regulation processes involve aligning trust-related goals with situational realities, and relational motivation can guide individuals to avoid further interaction without entirely severing the relationship. This dynamic highlights avoidance as not merely a defensive response but a calculated step within a broader trust regulation strategy.

Reconciliation, as a behavioural outcome, reflects the strongest alignment with relational motivation, given its focus on repairing and preserving relationships. The findings demonstrate that relational motivation may enable individuals to prioritise the long-term benefits of reconciliation, even when a breach of trust has taken place. This supports van der Werff et al.'s contention that intrinsic and autonomous extrinsic motivational forces—such as a genuine investment in the relationship or shared goals—can drive trust-related behaviours. Relational motivation, therefore, emerges as a central force that fosters reconciliation by aligning individual efforts with broader relational objectives.

In contrast, the interplay between relational motivation and revenge illustrates the complexity of trust dynamics. While revenge may appear antithetical to relationship repair, it can serve as an attempt to reassert fairness and relational balance (Jackson et al., 2019). Van der Werff et al.'s model of trust regulation posits that motivational forces can shape how individuals manage negative emotions and behaviours following breaches. It is possible that relational motivation may channel revenge as a way of addressing perceived injustices, particularly in emotionally charged relationships. Over time, trust regulation processes may temper this initial reaction, redirecting individuals toward more constructive pathways, such as reconciliation or avoidance. This would be a worthwhile area of future research.

These findings underscore the broader theoretical significance of relational motivation within trust dynamics. By highlighting its mediating role, this research aligns with van der Werff et al.'s emphasis on the motivational and self-regulatory underpinnings of trust. Trust is not solely a response to perceived trustworthiness but is also influenced by motivational drivers that guide individuals' interpretations and behaviours following breaches. This perspective extends beyond traditional cognitive models of trust, illustrating how motivational forces interact with trust regulation processes to shape diverse behavioural outcomes.

In summary, relational motivation appears to play an important role in shaping responses to trust breaches, influencing the likelihood of avoidance, reconciliation, or revenge. These findings offer insight into trust as a dynamic, motivationally driven process. By situating relational motivation within the broader context of self-regulation and trust dynamics, this research enhances theoretical perspectives and offers actionable insights. These insights directly inform the practical considerations that follow, particularly for leaders, organisations, and employees navigating trust breaches in workplace relationships.

#### **8.4 Practical Implications for Leaders, Organisations, and Employees**

Building on these insights, this section outlines practical strategies for leaders and organisations to effectively respond to trust breaches. It highlights the value of recognising subjective perceptions, promoting ethical leadership, supporting relational repair, and incorporating perspective-taking to restore and maintain trust.

## **Implications for Leaders**

Firstly, leaders must engage with the subjective perceptions of employees following a trust breach. Objectivation-treating employees as interchangeable resources rather than individuals with emotions and agency- is a prevalent phenomenon at work (Belmi & Schroeder, 2021). Employees evaluate breaches differently based on the interplay of individual characteristics, underlying motivations and the relational context in which the breach occurs. To address these dynamics effectively, leaders must seek to understand how the breach has been experienced by the employee, avoiding presumptions about its impact or interpretations.

Demonstrating perspective-taking—the ability to imagine the employee’s point of view and validating their experiences—is crucial. Perspective-taking enables leaders to foster empathy, demonstrate benevolence, and respond to breaches in a way that aligns with the employee’s needs and perceptions (Davis, 1983; Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005). By engaging in perspective-taking, leaders can facilitate open dialogue and demonstrate active listening, which collectively signal care and empathy (Williams, 2007). Effective perspective-taking not only aids in addressing employees’ concerns but also strengthens perceptions of benevolence and fosters social bonds, both of which are essential for trust repair (Batson et al., 1995; Williams, 2012)

Secondly, leaders should recognise that integrity breaches are perceived as particularly severe and prioritise ethical leadership practices to mitigate their impact. The finding that integrity breaches were perceived as more severe for certain trust events highlights the critical role of ethics in leadership effective leadership (Mayer et al., 2012). To address this, leaders should model ethical behaviour and demonstrate moral courage, establishing

themselves as both moral individuals and moral managers. This dual reputation enhances their ability to influence organisational values and behaviours (Treviño et al., 2000). Practical actions include aligning actions with words- behavioural integrity- this alignment has been shown to influence trust, employee performance and commitment (Simons et al., 2015). Leaders should foster relational maintenance motivations, as the desire to maintain relationships plays a role in mitigating the effects of breaches. Leaders can cultivate such motivations through known personal, relational and contextual leadership behaviours that enhance the leader follower relationship (Hernandez et al., 2014). Additionally, perspective-taking further supports these efforts by enabling leaders to anticipate how their actions will be perceived by employees, helping them avoid behaviours that may unintentionally breach trust (Galinsky et al., 2008).

### **Implications for Organisations**

Organisations should adopt flexible and context-sensitive trust repair strategies, which incorporate the subjective nature of breach experiences, dyadic focus and co-engagement of parties in repair initiatives (Woodyatt et al., 2022). Recognising that trust repair is inherently relational, organisations can adopt structured mediation and restorative practices that actively include both parties. These approaches provide a platform to explore subjective experiences and collaboratively address breaches with an emphasis on restoring relationships and repairing harm (Neale et al., 2020).

Perspective-taking plays a critical role here, as it encourages both leaders and employees to collaboratively explore breach experiences and seek mutual understanding. These approaches emphasise repairing harm and restoring relationships, fostering reconciliation over revenge. Promoting reconciliation over the desire for revenge is particularly important,

as research indicates revenge motivation can drive workplace deviant behaviours, underscoring the importance of addressing such motivations proactively (Restubog et al., 2015).

Additionally, organisations must strategically invest in the development of ethical and competent leaders. Leadership that combines competence with moral integrity, fosters trust and commitment among followers (Treviño et al., 2000). As Newstead et al. (2021) succinctly put it ‘we don’t need more leaders-we need more good leaders’ (p.1). Good leadership and ethical leaders not only set an example through their behaviour but also shape the moral climate of the workplace, encouraging trust and accountability among employees. Organisational initiatives should include leadership development programs that integrate ethical decision-making, emotional intelligence, and relational skills, ensuring leaders are equipped to navigate complex trust dynamics. Prioritising the development of such leaders facilitates the positive influence on work attitudes and employee performance (Liden et al., 2025).

Leadership development programs should integrate perspective-taking as a core competency, alongside ethical decision-making, emotional intelligence, and relational skills. Training leaders in perspective-taking equips them to pre-emptively address trust risks and respond effectively to breaches, enhancing their ability to navigate complex trust dynamics (Parker & Axtell, 2001; Galinsky et al., 2011). By fostering interpersonal understanding and goal alignment, perspective-taking further enhances leaders’ capacity to rebuild trust and maintain positive leader-follower relationships (Williams, 2012).

Organisations should provide platforms for employees to express their concerns safely and engage in structured trust repair initiatives. Perspective-taking exercises and training for

employees can further enhance interpersonal understanding and promote a culture of mutual accountability (Parker & Axtell, 2001). This collective approach reinforces the organisation's commitment to fostering trust at all levels.

### **Implications for Employees**

Employees also have a vital role in mitigating the effects of objectification and repairing trust. Perspective-taking allows employees to consider contextual factors and constraints that may have influenced a leader's actions, fostering a more empathetic and constructive approach to resolving breaches (Galinsky et al., 2005; Grant & Berry, 2011). This process can reduce the desire for retaliation and encourage collaborative solutions, reinforcing relational trust and cohesion.

To support this, organisations could provide training and platforms for employees to engage in perspective-taking exercises and engage in consultation with employees on changes that affect them. These initiatives not only enhance interpersonal understanding but also create a culture of mutual respect, accountability and inclusivity reducing the likelihood of misaligned attributions.

In summary, this research highlights the need to prioritise subjective perceptions, address integrity breaches proactively, foster relational maintenance, and promote reconciliation. Incorporating perspective-taking as a practical tool enhances these efforts by facilitating interpersonal understanding, empathy, and proactive trust repair. Practical strategies that align with these findings can enable leaders, organisations, and employees to navigate trust breaches effectively and cultivate a culture of trust and accountability.

## **8.5 Limitations of the Research**

The studies collectively offer valuable insights into the experience of trust breaches from a follower's perspective; however, as with any research project several limitations merit consideration. These limitations relate to methodology, sampling, categorisation, generalisability, and highlight areas for refinement in future research.

The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as social desirability and response tendencies, which may affect the validity of findings. Participants may provide socially acceptable answers or underreport undesirable behaviours, especially in sensitive contexts involving trust breaches. While anonymity and validated survey instruments were employed to mitigate these biases, the inherent subjectivity of self-reports cannot be entirely eliminated (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research could complement self-reported data with objective measures, such as dyadic measurement or observer assessments.

Furthermore, retrospective accounts of trust breaches, may be subject to memory biases, including selective recall and emotional salience (Luchies et al., 2013). These factors could compromise the accuracy and completeness of participants' recollections. Although real-life retrospective experiences provide ecological validity, longitudinal or real-time data collection methods could capture trust breach events as they unfold, minimising reliance on potentially unreliable retrospective data (Taris & Kompier, 2014). Alternatively, future studies might integrate experimental designs with real-world data or use qualitative approaches to better reflect the dynamism of leader-follower interactions (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

Sampling and representation issues further constrain the generalisability of the findings. The reliance on a relatively small pool of subject matter expert (SME) panels to classify trust

breaches in Study 1 limits the diversity of perspectives. While the panel included researchers with recognised expertise in the field of trust research, following the sampling method as established by Isaeva et al. (2015) which includes a balanced threshold of citations to capture both foundational and contemporary contributors-would have yielded a larger more diverse sample to draw from. Additionally, the limited representation of participants attributing breaches to non-ABI trustworthiness dimensions in Study 2 constrained statistical analyses of these subgroups. Future research could address this by specifically designing scenarios that reflect a more balanced distribution of attributions across all trust dimensions.

Categorisation challenges were evident in the classification of trust breach events. Subjectivity played a role in dimensional classifications, with certain events, such as "Communication Issues" and "Unwillingness to Acknowledge," exhibiting ambiguity in their alignment with specific dimensions. Although an 80% consensus threshold was implemented to ensure reliability, overlaps between dimensions such as Ability and Benevolence suggest the need for further exploration of these intersections. Future studies could adopt mixed-method approaches, combining quantitative categorisation tasks with qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups. Qualitative research is considered of value for thorough and thoughtful engagement when revisiting exiting theories (Wilhelmy & Köhler, 2022) and is called for in trust repair research (Sharma et al., 2023).

Finally, statistical and analytical constraints must be acknowledged. The absence of longitudinal data precluded the examination of temporal shifts in perceptions of trustworthiness following breaches. Longitudinal methodologies could offer valuable insights into the evolution of trust breach processes and the exploration of dynamics over time (Korsgaard et al., 2018).



In conclusion, the identified limitations offer valuable directions for refining future research on trust breach experience. By addressing these challenges through methodological advancements and broader sampling strategies, future studies can develop a more process-oriented and comprehensive understanding of trust breach dynamics and their organisational implications. While these limitations highlight areas for development, the current studies make significant contributions to the understanding of trust breach dynamics and the influence of trustworthiness dimensions on perceptions of breaches. Future research should focus on incorporating diverse sampling techniques, mixed-method approaches, and real-time longitudinal data collection. These efforts would enhance the robustness of findings and provide deeper insights into the complex, multifaceted nature of trust breach. Such advancements would support the continued refinement and application of theoretical frameworks, including the Cognitive-Affective Processing System, across varied and dynamic contexts.

## **8.6 Future Research Directions**

Future research directions informed by this study present several opportunities to address theoretical gaps and methodological limitations, enhancing our understanding of trust breach dynamics and repair processes. One critical area involves investigating the role of moral framing in shaping perceptions of trust breaches, particularly Integrity violations. Moral framing, as discussed by Day et al. (2014) and Haidt (2007, 2012), activates deeply held values such as fairness and harm, which are central to judgments of Integrity breaches. Future studies could explore how cultural and organisational contexts influence moral framing, shedding light on the variability in responses to breaches across diverse environments. Experimental designs manipulating moral framing could provide valuable

insights into the perception of violations when explicitly tied to ethical principles or societal norms.

The complexity of breaches spanning multiple trustworthiness dimensions, such as the ABI combination, warrants further exploration. Neuroscientific research by van der Werff et al. (2022) highlights overlapping cognitive and emotional processing for ABI breaches, suggesting compounded effects on trust dynamics. Future studies could investigate these compounded breaches using fMRI and longitudinal methodologies to track how trust is eroded and repaired over time. Additionally, qualitative approaches could uncover subjective interpretations of multi-dimensional breaches, enriching our understanding of their relational and emotional consequences.

Given the limitations of retrospective accounts, adopting longitudinal or real-time methodologies presents a promising avenue for capturing trust dynamics as they unfold. These approaches could examine how perceptions of trustworthiness dimensions evolve post-breach and how contextual factors such as organisational culture or power dynamics shape these perceptions. Real-time assessments using digital tools or diary methods could provide detailed insights into the immediate and evolving impacts of breaches, offering a more time-sensitive understanding of the cognitive-affective mechanisms at play.

Cross-cultural comparisons are another vital area for future exploration. Trustworthiness dimensions and the perceived severity of breaches may vary across cultural contexts due to differences in moral values and social norms. Research incorporating cross-cultural comparisons could examine how Integrity, Ability, and Benevolence breaches are perceived and addressed in different regions or organisational cultures. This could be achieved through

comparative studies or mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to identify cultural patterns in trust breach dynamics.

Leadership and power dynamics represent additional key dimensions for future inquiry. Leaders, often seen as moral exemplars, are typically held to higher ethical standards, and their breaches may be perceived as more severe than those of peers or subordinates. Future studies could explore how leadership roles influence trust breach perceptions and repair strategies. For example, do followers respond differently to breaches based on the perpetrator's power and position? Experimental designs could investigate these nuances, examining the effectiveness of leaders' responses, such as apologies or corrective actions, in rebuilding trust.

The interplay of emotional and cognitive mechanisms in shaping responses to breaches also merits further research. For instance, Integrity and ABI breaches often elicit strong affective responses, as highlighted by the CAPS framework. Understanding how individuals reconcile conflicting motivations, such as the desire for revenge versus maintaining relationships, could provide deeper insights into trust repair. Experimental and neuroscientific methods could examine the role of self-regulation and emotional processing in these dynamics, offering practical implications for trust restoration.

Tailored trust repair strategies are another critical area for future study. Given the heightened severity of Integrity and ABI breaches, research could explore specific approaches to addressing the unique emotional and relational harm caused by such breaches. Studies might investigate the relative effectiveness of strategies such as public apologies, transparency initiatives, or structural changes in rebuilding trust. Longitudinal research could assess the sustainability of these efforts, identifying approaches that are most effective over time.

Finally, future research should integrate organisational and societal contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of trust dynamics. Organisational culture, societal expectations, and industry-specific norms likely influence how trust breaches are perceived and managed. Comparative studies across sectors or organisational types could identify unique patterns, offering practical insights into managing trust within varied contexts. By addressing these areas, future research can significantly enhance the theoretical and practical understanding of trust breaches and their repair.

In summary, future research should adopt a multifaceted approach. By combining longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparisons, and advanced neuroscientific techniques, future studies can provide deeper insights into the cognitive-affective mechanisms underlying trust breaches and repair. This comprehensive perspective will enhance both theoretical understanding and practical applications in organisational settings, contributing to more effective trust management and leadership practices.

## **8.7 Conclusion**

The research programme explored the multifaceted dynamics of trust breaches in organisational contexts, examining how breaches are perceived, their alignment with trustworthiness dimensions, associated severity, and the relational and behavioural responses they evoke. Guided by the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) framework, the studies collectively illustrate the complex interplay of individual traits, motivations, and contextual factors in shaping responses to leader-follower trust breaches. Study 1 found some variability in how subject matter experts aligned trust breaches with ABI dimensions. These foundational findings suggested that while ABI framework provided a useful lens, subjective and contextual factors may influence how breaches are perceived.

Study 2 expanded on these insights by exploring the significance of perceived severity in shaping trust breach perceptions. The findings suggested that subjective evaluations, rooted in affective and cognitive processes, influence how breaches are experienced and processed. These results pointed to the emotional impact of breaches as potentially more salient than their objective characteristics. Study 3 examined relational motivations and behavioural responses, identifying the desire to maintain the relationship as a key mediator across reconciliation, revenge, and avoidance behaviours. The findings indicated a conditional role of perceived severity, particularly in moderating reconciliation behaviours, and revealed complexities such as the unexpected positive association between relational motivations and revenge. Taken together, these studies offer preliminary support for CAPS as a promising framework for examining trust breach dynamics. CAPS provides a theoretically grounded lens for exploring the interplay between motivations, self-regulation, and contextual factors. The findings contribute to an expanded understanding of the variability in follower responses, shaped by subjective interpretations, and motivational processes, and support the utility of CAPS as an integrative meta-theory for investigating trust breach in organisational contexts.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A - Ethics Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



Ms. Cara Driscoll  
DCU Business School

Prof. Finian Buckley  
DCU Business School

15<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**REC Reference:** DCUREC/2020/154

**Proposal Title:** TRUST BREACH, TRUST REPAIR AND FORGIVENESS IN LMX RELATIONSHIPS- An individual difference perspective

**Applicant(s):** Ms. Cara Driscoll and Prof. Finian Buckley

Dear Colleagues,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Geraldine Scanlon**  
Chairperson  
DCU Research Ethics Committee



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## **Appendix B - Informed Consent Plain Language Statement**

This study aims to understand the influence of employees' attitudes on behaviors and events at work.

This study is conducted by Cara Driscoll, and supervised by Professor Finian Buckley at DCU Business School, Dublin City University, Ireland

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in the survey, you will be required to complete an online survey which on average, takes 30 minutes to complete. The survey is comprised of 3 sections and each section asks several different questions. You are asked to complete the survey in isolation and one sitting.

You will be required to answer these different questions regarding your views on workplace relationships and your attitudes and to classify behaviors into headings. **If you complete the study satisfactorily, you will receive payment to compensate you for your participation. You will be paid via your panel's payment system.** In our past survey work, we found that a few respondents answered the questions carelessly. In this survey, we have employed several methods to assess whether a respondent answered the questions carefully so as to ensure the quality of survey data. ***In accordance with the policies set by your panel provider,*** we may reject your work if you do not complete the survey correctly or if you do not follow the relevant instructions.

### **Risks and benefits of being in this study:**

There are low risks associated with this research. The survey includes several different questions on your personal views regarding work, relationships, your categorization of trust breach behaviors into headings, and your recall of behaviors and attitudes about a relationship with your immediate supervisor in which your trust was impacted. Should you consider that the categorization or recall may cause you any level of distress, you are encouraged not to participate in the study. Should you wish to speak to someone about this distress, please find some contact details for support below.

- USA [American Psychological Association](#)
- UK & NI [NHS](#)
- Ireland. [Psychological Society of Ireland](#)

By completing this survey, you are helping researchers gain a deeper insight into relationships between employees and immediate supervisors at work.

### **Confidentiality:**

The researcher will collect this data for academic research purposes and help understand the factors that influence relationships between employees and supervisors/managers. The questionnaires are anonymous, and the data collected will be summarized and presented in the study findings. The data may also be used for anonymized publication in journals or reports. Information will be stored for a maximum of 3 years or deleted upon a request of withdrawal from participation.

No individually identifiable information about you or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others. The data will be collected via Qualtrics software and stored securely on the DCU-protected Google Drive in compliance with DCU Data

Privacy Policy. The records of this study will only be accessible by the researcher and her supervisors- Professor Finian Buckley and Dr. Melrona Kirrane.

The records will be disposed of in a safe and confidential manner, in line with DCU Data Retention policy, and will be kept for a maximum of three years from data

collection. The data will be treated in compliance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679:

Data Controller: Dublin City University. DCU

Data Protection Officer: Mr. Martin Ward ([data.protection@dcu.ie](mailto:data.protection@dcu.ie)) Tel: 7005118 / 7008257)

It must be noted that the protection of this data is subject to legal limitations. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claims, or mandated reporting by some professions.

### **Voluntary Nature of the study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the survey. **You would need to reach out to your panel provider and provide your panel-specific ID to permit the removal of your survey should you wish to withdraw consent at any stage.**

**Researcher contact information:**

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Cara Driscoll ([cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie)).

If you have any concerns about this research, please contact the research supervisor Professor Finian Buckley ([finian.buckley@dcu.ie](mailto:finian.buckley@dcu.ie)).

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9, Ireland. Tel +353 1-7008000, e-mail: [rec@dcu.ie](mailto:rec@dcu.ie)

Q2 In order to take part please indicate your agreement with each statement.

- ☐ I have read the Plain Language Statement
- ☐ I understand the information in the Plain Language Statement
- ☐ I understand the information in the Plain Language Statement
- ☐ I have been offered the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study
- ☐ I have received satisfactory answers to any questions I have asked
- ☐ I understand the information in relation to Data Protection
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw from the research study at any point
- ☐ I have read and understood the arrangements made to protect the confidentiality of data, including the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

**By clicking on the “consent to participate” button below I am providing my informed consent.**

- ☐ I consent to participate (you will proceed to survey)
- ☐ I do not wish to participate in the study (you will exit the survey)

## Appendix C - Study 2

Workplace Event Survey Invitation Thank you for connecting with this survey. This research study is being conducted by a Ph.D. student in the Business School at Dublin City University, Ireland.

Before you proceed with the survey you are required to read the Plain Language statement and provide informed consent.

Informed Consent Plain Language Statement (See Appendix 2)

This study aims to understand the influence of employees attitudes on behaviors and events at work.

This study is conducted by Cara Driscoll, and supervised by Professor Finian Buckley at DCU Business School, Dublin City University, Ireland.

Q1 What best describes your current employment status?

- ☐ Working full-time
- ☐ Working part-time
- ☐ Unemployed and looking for work
- ☐ A homemaker or stay-at-home parent
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Other

Q2 I currently identify my gender as

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ I prefer to identify as (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Q3 What age in years were you on your last birthday?

Age in years \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 How many years have you been in employment?

	Less than 6 months	6 months to 1 year	1-3 years	4-6 years	7-9 years	10 or more years
I have been in employment						

Q5 Which of the following best describes most of your duties within your company or organization?

- ☐ Employee
- ☐ Junior Manager
- ☐ Middle Manager
- ☐ Senior Manager
- ☐ Other (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent
- ☐ Associates Degree or equivalent
- ☐ Bachelor's degree or equivalent
- ☐ Master's degree or equivalent
- ☐ Doctorate degree (e.g., EdD, PhD)
- ☐ Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Q7 What is your ethnic background:

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic and Latino
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q8 What is your job title?



---

Q9 Which of the following industries most closely matches the one in which you are employed?

- ☐ Accommodation and Food Services
- ☐ Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services
- ☐ Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting
- ☐ Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
- ☐ Construction
- ☐ Educational Services
- ☐ Finance and Insurance
- ☐ Government
- ☐ Health Care and Social Assistance
- ☐ Information, Telecommunication
- ☐ Management of Companies and Enterprises
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction
- ☐ Other Services (Except Public Administration)
- ☐ Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- ☐ Real Estate and Rental and Leasing
- ☐ Retail Trade
- ☐ Transportation and Warehousing
- ☐ Utilities
- ☐ Wholesale Trade

- ☐ Q10 Please use the rating scale next to each phrase to describe how accurately each statement describes you. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same gender you identify as, and roughly your same age.

	Very Inaccurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neither Accurate/nor Inaccurate	Moderately Accurate	Very Accurate
Trust others					
Believe that others have good intentions					
Trust what people say					
Believe that people are basically moral					
Believe in human goodness					
Think that all will be well					
Distrust people					
Suspect hidden motives in others					
Am wary of others					
Believe that people are essentially evil					

Q11 Please indicate your agreement with the statement below.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I have never used a computer							

In this next section, we are interested in your personal views on relationships **at work**.

Q12 Please indicate your agreement with the statement below.

	Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree
I work twenty-eight hours in a typical work day.							

**Trust Breach intro** This next part of the survey is focused on types of '*trust breach*' in the workplace. A "*trust breach*" refers to an event that results in damage or reduction of trust between two people. Typically, it impacts how the victim thinks about the relationship and how they feel toward the offender. A trust breach can happen after a single incident or several incidents, ranging from small events between people to more large-scale events that occur in relationships.

Different types of behaviors can be the source of a trust breach. In this next section, you will be presented with examples of workplace behaviors that can be the source of a trust breach between a leader and a follower. You are required to classify the workplace behaviors into specific categories. For this task, we are interested in finding out which *trust breach events* are similar and different and belong in various categories.

We'd like you to sort them into categories representing your best judgments about which are similar to each other and different from each other. There is no correct way to sort the events. Place the trust breach event in as few or as many categories as you wish. If a trust breach event does not fit into the categories provided, please select the category 'Other.' Then propose a category heading in the connected text box.

There are 20 trust breaches to categorize.

Q13 Note: You may have to scroll to the left using the arrows on your desktop to read all categories.

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions
<b>Unkept promises,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor doesn't pay promised bonus or withdraws support for promised promotion, or simply a leader didn't keep a promise they made						
<b>Lies,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor lies or does not support a follower's work						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions
despite agreeing to do so.						
<b>Deliberate information retention,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor deliberately hides important information or refuses to provide information requested by the follower.						
<b>Unfair favoritism,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor exhibits favoritism to specific communities (gender-driven, origin-driven,						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions
etc.) or offers a job promotion based on opaque criteria.						
<b>Follower exploitation</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor uses the follower for selfish interests or takes all the credit for the follower's work.						
<b>Denigration</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor complains unfairly about the follower behind their back with peers or uses them as a scapegoat						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions
<b>Task expectation Ambiguity</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor not giving explanations, instructions, and goals or not providing clear expectations.						
<b>Lack of Legitimacy,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor often makes mistakes or makes poor technical and managerial decisions						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions
<b>Unpredictable Behavior,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor often changes mind or does not make firm decisions.						
<b>Lack of support,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor doesn't defend the follower, diminishes the follower's work or career, or shows no interest for the follower as a person.						



Q14 Note: You may have to scroll to the left using the arrows on your desktop to read all categories.

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making) (1)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration) (2)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work) (3)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring) (4)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention) (5)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions (6)
<b>Disrespect for follower's work</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor is never satisfied with the follower's work or speaks negatively about the follower's work or behavior.						
<b>Excessive monitoring</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor watches too closely or spies.						
<b>Micromanaging</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor being overly concerned with details of a follower's work						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making) (1)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration) (2)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work) (3)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring) (4)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention) (5)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions (6)
or substantially modifies the follower's work behind their back.						
<b>Ineffective leadership</b> , e.g., immediate supervisor makes poor decisions or is unwilling to address performance or behavioural issues.						
<b>Communication issues e.g.</b> immediate supervisor not listening to others, not working to understand the other party, and not communicating when major changes are happening.						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making) (1)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration) (2)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work) (3)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring) (4)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention) (5)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions (6)
<b>Incongruence</b> , e.g., immediate supervisor acting without integrity, engaging in unfair practices, or actions that do not match words.						
<b>Disrespectful behaviors</b> e.g. immediate supervisor discounting people personally or their contributions, blaming others for problems, disregarding feelings or input offered, and generally rude and unkind behaviors.						
<b>Performance issues</b> , e.g., immediate supervisor being						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making) (1)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration) (2)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work) (3)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring) (4)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention) (5)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions (6)
unwilling or unable to perform basic job requirements, making mistakes, and issues of general competence.						
<b>Unwillingness to acknowledge</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor who takes no responsibility for issues or mistakes, no ownership for the situation, and selfish acts like high regard for self and personal abilities while disregarding others.						
<b>Unmet expectations</b> , e.g., broken promises, breach of confidentiality						

	<b>Supervisory incompetence-</b> (e.g. issues with supervisor ability, mistake/s; ambiguity about tasks or poor decision making) (1)	<b>Abuse of Power</b> (e.g. favoritism; exploitation or denigration) (2)	<b>Lack of Caring</b> -(e.g. lack of support or disrespect for work) (3)	<b>Interference-</b> (e.g. micromanaging or excessive monitoring) (4)	<b>Deception</b> (e.g. unkept promises; lies or information retention) (5)	<b>Other-</b> Please describe in the text box in the next set of questions (6)
agreements, and disregard for rules or other agreements made.						

Q15 You selected 'Other' as the category for the trust breaches (listed below). Please describe/propose a category heading in the text box next to the trust breach event.

**Unkept promises**, e.g., an immediate supervisor doesn't pay promised bonus or withdraws support for promised promotion, or simply a leader didn't keep a promise they made

---

**Lies**, e.g., an immediate supervisor lies or does not support a follower's work despite agreeing to do so.

---

**Deliberate information retention**, e.g., an immediate supervisor deliberately hides important information or refuses to provide information requested by the follower.

---

**Unfair favoritism**, e.g., an immediate supervisor exhibits favoritism to specific communities (gender-driven, origin-driven, etc.) or offers a job promotion based on opaque criteria.

---

**Follower exploitation**, e.g., an immediate supervisor uses the follower for selfish interests or takes all the credit for the follower's work.

---

**Denigration**, e.g., an immediate supervisor complains unfairly about the follower behind their back with peers or uses them as a scapegoat.

---

**Task expectation Ambiguity** e.g., an immediate supervisor not giving explanations, instructions, and goals or not providing clear expectations.

---

**Lack of Legitimacy**, e.g., an immediate supervisor often makes mistakes or makes poor technical and managerial decisions

---

**Unpredictable Behavior**, e.g., an immediate supervisor often changes mind or does not make firm decisions.

---

**Lack of support**, e.g., an immediate supervisor doesn't defend the follower, diminishes the follower's work or career, or shows no interest for the follower as a person.

---

**Disrespect for follower's work**, e.g., an immediate supervisor is never satisfied with the follower's work or speaks negatively about the follower's work or behavior.

---

**Excessive monitoring**, e.g., an immediate supervisor watches too closely or spies.

---

**Micromanaging**, e.g., an immediate supervisor being overly concerned with details of a follower's work or substantially modifies the follower's work behind their back.

---

**Ineffective leadership**, e.g., immediate supervisor makes poor decisions or is unwilling to address performance or behavioural issues.

---

**Communication issues** e.g. immediate supervisor not listening to others, not working to understand the other party, and not communicating when major changes are happening.

---

**Incongruence**, e.g., immediate supervisor acting without integrity, engaging in unfair practices, or actions that do not match words. \_\_\_\_\_

**Disrespectful behaviors** e.g. immediate supervisor discounting people personally or their contributions, blaming others for problems, disregarding feelings or input offered, and generally rude and unkind behaviors. \_\_\_\_\_

**Performance issues**, e.g., immediate supervisor being unwilling or unable to perform basic job requirements, making mistakes, and issues of general competence.

---

**Unwillingness to acknowledge**, e.g., an immediate supervisor who takes no responsibility for issues or mistakes, no ownership for the situation, and selfish acts like high regard for self and personal abilities while disregarding others.

---

**Unmet expectations**, e.g., broken promises, breach of confidentiality agreements, and disregard for rules or other agreements made. \_\_\_\_\_

Q16 In the previous section, we asked which *trust breach events* were similar, different, and belonged in various categories. We provided you with a list of 20 trust breach events. We recognise this list may not be exhaustive, and we invite you to describe or list additional trust breaches that people can experience by an immediate manager here.

Please provide details and also a suggested category for the trust breach event you describe.

- ☐ There are no additional breaches
- ☐ There are additional breaches. Please describe, or provide, a category (as fully as possible) below. \_\_\_\_\_

In this task we are interested in the severity of particular transgressions i.e. how intense, harsh, or harmful, particular behaviors are experienced.

Please imagine that your immediate supervisor engaged in the following hypothetical behaviors. Please rate how intense, harsh, or harmful it would be to you. You will be presented with 20 behaviors divided into 3 sections. Treat each situation separately. Do not consider them as occurring in any particular order or being connected with each other in any way. There are no right or wrong answers

Q17 Please imagine that your immediate supervisor engaged in the following hypothetical behaviors. Please rate how severe i.e. how intense, harsh, or harmful it would be to you.

	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
<b>Ineffective leadership,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor making poor decisions or being unwilling to address performance or behavioural issues.							
<b>Communication issues,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor not listening to others, not working to understand the other party, and not communicating when major changes are happening.							
<b>Incongruence,</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor acting without integrity, engaging in unfair							



	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
practices, or actions that do not match words.							
<b>Disrespectful behaviors</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor discounting people personally or their contributions, blaming others for problems, disregarding feelings or input offered, and generally rude and unkind behaviors.							
<b>Performance issues</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor being unwilling or unable to perform basic job requirements, making mistakes, and issues of general competence.							

	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
<b>Unwillingness to acknowledge</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor who takes no responsibility for issues or mistakes, no ownership for the situation, and high regard for self and personal abilities while disregarding others.							
<b>Unmet expectations</b> , e.g., broken promises, breach of confidentiality agreements, and disregard for rules.							
<b>Task Expectation Ambiguity</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor not giving explanations, instructions, and goals							

	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
or not providing clear expectations.							
<b>Lack of Legitimacy</b> e.g., an immediate supervisor often makes mistakes or makes poor technical and managerial decisions.							
<b>Unpredictable Behavior</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor often changes mind or does not make firm decisions.							
<b>Lack of support</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor doesn't defend the follower, diminishes the follower's work or career, or shows no							

	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
interest in the follower as a person.							
<b>Disrespect for follower's work</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor is never satisfied with the follower's work or speaks negatively about the follower's work or behavior.							
<b>Excessive monitoring</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor watches too closely or spies.							
<b>Micromanaging</b> , e.g., an immediate supervisor being overly concerned with details of a follower's work or substantially modifies							

	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
the follower's work behind their back.							
<b>Unkept promises</b> ,e.g., your immediate supervisor doesn't pay promised bonus or withdraws support for promised promotion, or simply didn't keep a promise they made.							
<b>Lies</b> , e.g., your immediate supervisor lies or does not support your work despite agreeing to do so.							
<b>Deliberate information retention</b> ,e.g., your immediate supervisor deliberately hides important information or refuses to provide							

	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
information requested by you.							
<b>Unfair favoritism</b> , e.g., your immediate supervisor exhibits favoritism to specific communities (gender-driven, origin-driven, etc.) or offers a job promotion based on opaque criteria.							
<b>Follower exploitation</b> , e.g., your immediate supervisor uses you for selfish interests or takes all the credit for your work							
<b>Denigration</b> , e.g., your immediate supervisor complains unfairly about you behind their							

	Not Severe	2	3	4	5	6	Very Severe
back with peers or uses you as a scapegoat.							

Q19 Please indicate your agreement with the statement below.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I am able to breathe					

**Thank you for taking part in this research on workplace relationships**

In this study, you were asked to complete a questionnaire to help the researchers understand the impact of trust breach events on relationships between leaders and followers.

**If You Have Any Questions or Concerns**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study and the research procedures, you may contact me, Cara Driscoll at [cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie), or my DCU faculty supervisor, Prof Finian Buckley, at [finian.buckley@dcu.ie](mailto:finian.buckley@dcu.ie).

**Additional Support**

Should you consider that any part of this study caused you any level of distress, please find some contact details for support below.

USA <https://locator.apa.org/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/get-help>

UK & NI <https://www.bps.org.uk/lists/ropsip>

Ireland. [https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/pd/?pd\\_s=&pd\\_d=](https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/pd/?pd_s=&pd_d=)

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/national-counselling-service/nationalcounsellingservicebranches.pdf>

**Withdraw**

If you would like to withdraw your data from the study at this time or any time in the future, please reach out through your panel.

**Results**

If you would like to receive a summary of research findings, please contact me, Cara Driscoll at [cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie), or my DCU faculty supervisor, Prof Finian Buckley, at [finian.buckley@dcu.ie](mailto:finian.buckley@dcu.ie).



## Appendix D - Study 3

### Demographic Information as Captured Q1-Q10

Q11 As described previously, a “*trust breach*” refers to an event that results in damage or reduction of trust between two people. Typically, it impacts how the victim thinks about the relationship and how they feel toward the offender. A trust breach can happen after a single incident or several incidents, ranging from small events between people to more large-scale events that occur in relationships. In this next section, we will use the term *transgression* to represent all trust breaches regardless of size.

Please call to mind an experience that you have had of a transgression by an **immediate supervisor** at any time in your work experience.

This includes any behaviors or acts in which your trust in that immediate supervisor was *reduced or damaged by even the smallest amount*.

Have you ever experienced a transgression by an *immediate supervisor* at work? i.e. **any** behaviors or acts in which your trust in that immediate supervisor was *reduced or damaged by even the smallest amount*.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q12 Thinking of **that immediate supervisor** please indicate how many years your relationship with **that immediate supervisor** was in existence before the transgression.

	Less than one year	1-3 years	4-6 years	7-9 years	10 or more years
How many years was the relationship in existence before the transgression?					

Q13 Thinking of the transgression that you experienced. Please indicate when the transgression happened.

	Less than 1 week ago	1 week to 1 month ago	2-3 months ago	4-5 months ago	6 months to a year ago	Over a year ago
How long ago did the transgression happen?						

Q14 Thinking now of the time **prior** to the transgression, please answer the following question.

	Acquaintance	Distant colleague	Friendly colleague	Close colleague	Very close colleague
How close were you with that immediate supervisor?					

Q15 Thinking now of the time **prior** to the transgression, please answer the following question.

	Several times a year	Once a month	Several times a month	Several times a week	Daily
On average, how frequently did you communicate with that immediate supervisor?					

Q16 Now thinking of the transgression that you experienced by that immediate supervisor please respond to the following statements about that transgression.

	1. Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7. Very much
To what extent did you find that immediate supervisors action a <b>severe</b> breach							
To what extent did you find that immediate supervisors action a <b>harsh</b> breach							
To what extent did you find that immediate supervisor's action a <b>serious</b> breach							
To what extent did you find that							

	1. Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7. Very much
immediate supervisor's action a <b>mild</b> breach							
To what extent did you find that immediate supervisor's action a <b>soft</b> breach							
To what extent did you find that immediate supervisor's action a <b>weak</b> breach							

Q17 Think about the reasons for the transgression by that immediate supervisor. With these in mind, please answer the following statements

The cause of that immediate supervisor's behavior was something:	1. Temporary	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9. Permanent
The cause of that immediate supervisor's behavior was something:	1. Changeable	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9. Unchangeable

The cause of that immediate supervisor's behavior was something:	1. Unintentional	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9. Intentional
The cause of that immediate supervisor's behavior was something:	1. Accidental	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9. On purpose
The cause of that immediate supervisor's behavior was something:	1. Inadvertent	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9. Deliberate

Right Now Thank you for your responses in the previous section. For this next, and final, section you will be presented with some statements that you have answered before however, we would like you to answer these as you feel about that immediate supervisor **right now even if you no longer work with them.**

Q18 For the following statements, please indicate your current thoughts and feelings about that immediate supervisor; that is, we want to know how you feel about that person **right now-even if you no longer work with them.** Next to each statement, select the number that best describes your current thoughts and feelings.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I'll make him/her pay.					
I am trying to keep as much distance between us as possible.					



	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Even though his/her actions hurt me, I have goodwill for him/her.					
I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.					
I am living as if he/she doesn't exist, isn't around.					
I want us to bury the hatchet and move forward with our relationship.					
I don't trust him /her.					

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again.					
I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.					
I am finding it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.					
I am avoiding him/her.					
Although he/she hurt me, I am putting the hurts aside so we can resume our relationship.					

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I'm going to get even.					
I have given up my hurt and resentment.					
I cut off the relationship with him/her.					
I have released my anger so I can work on restoring our relationship to health.					
I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.					
I withdraw from him/her.					

Q19 Thinking about that immediate supervisor **right now**, please consider the following statement and question.

	0 Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Completely	N/A
I would be really sad if I stopped spending time with that immediate supervisor												
How motivated are you to restore your relationship with that immediate supervisor?												

Q20 Still thinking about that immediate supervisor **right now**, please consider the following statement and question.

	0 Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Strongly Agree	N/A
I intend to continue interacting with that immediate supervisor												

Q21 Thinking about that immediate supervisor please answer the following question

	Almost never, it happened only once	2	3	4	5	Very Frequently
How often did/does that immediate supervisor commit transgressions against you?						

Q22 Finally, do you still work with that immediate supervisor?

- ☐ Yes, they are still my immediate supervisor
- ☐ I work with them but they are no longer my immediate supervisor
- ☐ I no longer work with them

**Thank you for taking part in this research on workplace relationships**

In this study, you were asked to complete a questionnaire to help the researchers understand the impact of trust breach events on relationships between leaders and followers.

**If You Have Any Questions or Concerns**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study and the research procedures, you may contact me, Cara Driscoll at [cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie), or my DCU faculty supervisor, Prof Finian Buckley, at [finian.buckley@dcu.ie](mailto:finian.buckley@dcu.ie).

**Additional Support**

Should you consider that any part of this study caused you any level of distress, please find some contact details for support below.

USA <https://locator.apa.org/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/get-help>

UK & NI <https://www.bps.org.uk/lists/ropsip>

Ireland. [https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/pd/?pd\\_s=&pd\\_d=](https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/pd/?pd_s=&pd_d=)

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/national-counselling-service/nationalcounsellingservicebranches.pdf>

**Withdraw**

If you would like to withdraw your data from the study at this time or any time in the future, please reach out through your panel.

**Results**

If you would like to receive a summary of research findings, please contact me, Cara Driscoll at [cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:cara.driscoll2@mail.dcu.ie), or my DCU faculty supervisor, Prof Finian Buckley, at [finian.buckley@dcu.ie](mailto:finian.buckley@dcu.ie).