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## Integrating Distrust Antecedents and Consequences in Organizational Life

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### ABSTRACT

This research on the experience of distrust within organizational life is aimed firstly at drawing an integrated framework of distrust antecedents linked to behavioral consequences as perceived by naive people; and, secondly, at comparing differences between two foci, individuals and organizations. A mixed qualitative to quantitative exploratory study uses the Delphi method with 38 participants from diverse countries working for a variety of organizations. Their opinions are classified and quantitatively compared. Antecedents depict a broader map than classical trust/distrust models while they organize the extant specific antecedents reported in the literature. Consequences on behavior intentions span over the full range of job dissatisfaction levels. These results highlight areas that organizations should watch for in order to build and sustain the appropriate level of trust. Finally, the integrated framework found reveals a meaningful internal structure and differences between the two foci.

### Integración de antecedentes y consecuencias de la desconfianza en la vida organizacional

### RESUMEN

Esta investigación sobre la experiencia de la desconfianza en la vida organizacional busca dibujar un marco integrado de los antecedentes de la desconfianza relacionados con sus consecuencias conductuales percibidas por personas legas; adicionalmente, compara las diferencias entre dos focos, personas y organizaciones. El estudio exploratorio cualitativo y cuantitativo aplica el método Delphi con 38 participantes procedentes de diversos países que trabajan en diferentes organizaciones. Sus opiniones se han clasificado y comparado cuantitativamente. Los antecedentes describen un mapa más amplio que los modelos clásicos de confianza y desconfianza, al tiempo que organizan la mirada de antecedentes específicos reportados en la literatura. Las consecuencias en los planes de conducta abarcan toda la gama de grados de insatisfacción laboral. Estos resultados resaltan áreas que las organizaciones deben cuidar para construir y mantener el nivel apropiado de confianza. Por último, el marco integrado encontrado revela una importante estructura interna y diferencias entre ambos focos.

Trust has been a major focus of organizational research accumulating evidence of the substantial and varied benefits it entails as a form of social capital with constructive consequences (Kramer, 1999). For instance, trust in organizations increases employees' job satisfaction, organizational identification, and intention to stay (Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia, & Esposito, 2008) while employees who trust their supervisors have higher job satisfaction, higher job performance, and lower turnover intentions (Krasman, 2014). On the contrary, distrust has for long been considered a problem in daily organizational life (Sitkin & Roth, 1993), the dark or undesirable side of trust. It accounts for low levels of employee engagement due to the use of resources for control purposes, which reduces work efficiencies and leads to lack of cooperation and information distortion (Bromiley

& Cummings, 1995) and unwillingness to take risks and to refrain sharing perspectives and knowledge (Bijlsma-Frankema, 2004).

Experimental studies are drawing a different picture with some beneficial consequences of distrust and some harms of trust. Under distrust, individuals activate incongruent and remote associations that increase cognitive flexibility and creativity (Mayer & Mussweiler, 2011). Also on the positive side, attitudes of distrust have been found to be better predictors of safety performance compared to attitudes of trust (Conchie & Donald, 2006). On the other hand, unconditional trust appears to be an extremely dangerous strategy for managing social relations and an "excess" of trust explains the mechanisms that open the door for abusive conducts by a party and defenselessness by the other (Akerlof & Schiller, 2009; Stevens, MacDuffie, & Helper,

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2015). When a healthy dose of distrust is considered, one is more watchful to find solutions to problems and, therefore, a balance of trust and distrust is important to be more attentive to problems so they can be solved (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Understanding distrust is also appealing because it is associated to more emotional reactions than trust (Keyton & Smith, 2009) and to the need for thinking in order to determine safety strategies (Luhmann, 1979). Trust reduces – and helps manage – the complexity of the social system and is considered the default state (Schul, Mayo, & Burnstein 2008) where people perceive there is no need to worry. Contrarily, distrust by itself does not reduce this complexity and the untrusting must use other strategies to reduce it. Luhmann (1979) considers that “these negative strategies give distrust that emotionally tense and often frantic character which distinguishes it from trust” (p. 72).

In this paper we first review the current conceptual framework of distrust that supports our research questions on the antecedents and consequences of distrust for individuals and organizations as referents (foci). We then outline our study methodology with a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. After presenting our results, we discuss the contributions of the research and some implications for organizations to avoid building undesirable distrust. Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research.

### Theoretical Background and Research Questions

Despite its relevance, distrust has received much less scholar attention than trust and there is very limited knowledge of how it operates in organizational contexts. Moreover, the “optimal trust” concept proposed by Wicks, Berman, and Jones (1999) has recently found empirical support in Stevens et al.'s (2015) studies pointing out very relevant practical consequences. Considering trust as an ongoing process, the decision to trust or not to trust is taken upon a dynamic ground of interactions, commitments, and experiences that continuously authenticate trust (Flores & Solomon, 1988), thus building, eroding, or repairing it. Stevens et al. (2015) show that an organization can identify and quickly address optimal trust deviations and explore strategies to achieve it. Therefore trust cannot be properly understood without understanding distrust at the same time.

### On the Concept of Distrust

The nature of trust has been intensely debated. Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) clarify this question considering trust as the sum of three constituent elements: it is a belief of one party about another one that assumes that the other party's likely actions will be beneficial for oneself; it is a decision to “render oneself vulnerable” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998) to potential detrimental actions of the other party; and it is an intention to act by engaging in risk-taking behaviors on the basis that such outcomes are unlikely.

A consolidated body of research supports trust has three core “attitudinal” components (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017; McAllister, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998): a cognitive component (beliefs and expectations), an affective component (the emotional “connectivity” that who trusts, the *trustor*, establishes with the trusted referent, the *trustee*), and a behavioral component (repertoire of behaviors that the *trustor* displays toward the *trustee*). Thus, since trust is an interactive and mutual process, “‘complete’ trust judgments are the product of a complex interaction between the assessments of the *trustor* making the trust judgment and the qualities of the *trustee* as the other displays them” (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017, p. 289).

Though there seems to be a general agreement on the definition of trust, distrust conceptualization is far from it (Saunders, Dietz, & Thornhill, 2014). An interesting debate has been going on as whether

trust and distrust are opposite concepts along a single continuum, and thus mutually exclusive, or they are rather different concepts. Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis (2007) consider distrust is the lack of trust; with trust being the willingness to assume risks, the lowest level of trust, i.e., distrust, would be not to assume risks at all. For Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998) trust and distrust are independent constructs and can coexist in the same relationship. Hardin (2004) clarified that both trust and distrust are a three part relationship: A trusts B with respect to subject X but might distrust B with regard to other subjects, so trust and distrust might coexist upon the same referent but for different matters.

Saunders et al.'s (2014) empirical research found considerable support to Schoorman et al.'s (2007) proposition that trust and distrust are unlikely to occur simultaneously upon a referent within organizational relationships with regard to a single subject. At the same time, their findings also support Lewicki et al.'s (1998) theorizing that trust and distrust are separate rather than symmetrical constructs, with an absence of trust not being the same as distrust and vice versa. Low distrust seems associated with low expectations of unfavorable treatment (no fear, low monitoring, absence of wariness, non-vigilance), and low trust seems associated with uncertainty as to whether the outcomes will be favorable or unfavorable (no hope, no faith, passivity, hesitance).

Based on the pervasiveness of this controversy, our empirical research does not include any preexisting definition or conceptualization of distrust. Instead, we asked lay people for their distrusting experiences to grasp what they meant to them. As the ultimate purpose of this research is to find new best practices towards optimal trust for leaders, top management, and HRM, an exploration of lay people's distrust experiences in work settings has been carried out because their representations enable the utilization of “cause-and-effect relationships” (Kinman & Jones, 2005).

### On the Antecedents and Consequences of Distrust

There is no integrated framework that facilitates the interpretation of the extant empirical data about trust and distrust based on its nature, contents, processes, antecedents, and consequences (Dietz & Dan Herzog, 2006; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006). Mayer et al. (1995) mention that one of the difficulties in the study of trust is the lack of clear differentiation among the factors contributing to trust, trust itself, and its consequences. They proposed a renowned dyadic model organizing its fundamental aspects; this model operates in organizational contexts considering three antecedents, namely competence, benevolence, and integrity.

From Lewicki et al.'s (1998) perspective of the potential coexistence of trust and distrust upon the same referent focus, it would be misleading to assume that positive predictors of trust would necessarily be negative predictors of distrust. On their side, McKnight and Chervany (2001) compile distrust antecedents upon their thorough analysis of sixty-five articles coming up to the conclusion that distrust antecedents are opposites of trust antecedents in Mayer et al.'s (1995) classical model. Distrusting competence is the lack of ability to do what needs to be done, the technical knowledge and skills; distrusting benevolence means the opposite of caring and being motivated to do good for the other party and act in its interest rather than opportunistically; and distrusting integrity labels the opposite of making good faith agreements, telling the truth, and fulfilling promises. According to Saunders et al. (2014), their findings emphasize the need to explore the reasons behind employees feeling trusting and distrustful. As a comprehensive framework of distrust antecedents, consequences and their linkage is still missing, the following research questions explore this issue:

RQ1: What factors do individuals take into account as antecedents of distrust?

RQ2: What consequences does each antecedent have on individuals' behavior intentions?

RQ3: How are antecedents and consequences related?

### On the Referents (Foci) of Distrust

Trust and distrust always have a referent (the *trustee*), who is either trusted or distrusted by the *trustor* and can be a person, a team, an organization, an institution, and more abstract ideas, like humankind. Antecedents and consequences can be different for each referent because the relational dynamics among trustor and trustee are different, as for instance, between the trustor and a colleague, her manager or the organization where she works. A social exchange perspective explains how individuals trust a referent based on what they give and what they get in a relationship; a perception of imbalance in the exchange decreases trust (Khazanchi & Masterson, 2011). Studies on the psychological contract concerning expectations of work outcomes draw on this perspective (Alcover, Rico, Turnley, & Bolino, 2017; Restubog et al., 2008; Robinson, 1996). On the other hand, from a sense-making perspective (Caldwell & Hansen, 2010), individuals form beliefs and attitudes partially through information provided by others (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), which explains communication as a relevant antecedent of trust and the role of face-to-face interactions (Hill, Bartol, Tesluk, & Langa, 2009).

According to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), the study of trust (and, thus, of distrust) similarities and differences related to the referent is still in an emergent phase and there is a need to explore if different referents (foci), for instance, individuals and organizations, have different antecedents and consequences due to their relationships being different. Researchers in both the organizational behavior and social exchange fields have identified that employees simultaneously hold distinct perceptions about multiple-foci social exchange relationships, referring to several organizational agents (CEO, general manager, etc.), direct supervisors, and coworkers (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2008). Organizational members typically engage in exchange relationships with a multiplicity of organizational agents, obtaining different benefits from each exchange. Consequently, employees identify these multiple agents as relevant foci of commitment, trust, psychological contract, and support. Importantly, each exchange relationship may differentially affect their behaviors and attitudes (Alcover et al., 2017; Bentein, Stinglhamber, & Vandenberghe, 2002). Individuals trust (or distrust) upon a referent depends on their expected reciprocity in the exchange between what they put and what they receive in the relationship, according to Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory. If the experience is unbalanced, trust diminishes, as mentioned (Khazanchi & Masterson, 2011). This leads to the multi-foci approach in this study in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ4: How do antecedents differ when the referent is an individual compared to an organization?

RQ5: How do consequences on behavior intentions differ when the referent is an individual compared to an organization?

RQ6: How do relationships between antecedents and consequences differ when the referent is an individual compared to an organization?

## Method

### Participants

Participants in this study worked in three selected professional sectors (14 in humanitarian, 11 in information and telecommunications technology, and 13 in health technology). Their average age was 41.9 years and had 18.2 years of average work experience; 58% were female and 100% had received higher

education. Their nationalities were Spanish (20), French (6), U.S. (5), Indian (2), others were from Palestine, Guinea Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mexico, and the remaining one was from unknown origin. Their work roles were department or regional managers, team or project managers or specialists. Thus participants held a variety of backgrounds in different contexts providing a diversity of situations.

### Procedure

To accomplish the research goal, and in line with Lewicki et al.'s (2006) advice encouraging researchers to capitalize on "promising qualitative methods" (p. 1015), a qualitative exploratory study was conducted using the Delphi method as a structured communication technique for data gathering. In a second phase, participants' responses were quantitatively compared to examine the differences between individuals and organizations as referents, so a mixed techniques approach has been adopted to capture the complexity of organizational experience.

An invitation to participate was sent to seventy people representing a variety of cultures on board. Invitees were requested to extend the invitation to additional colleagues in their respective professional sectors. The 38 participants who enrolled for the study were not experts in trust or distrust but professionals willing to explore their own experiences involving distrust. They provided their opinions via e-mail answering open-ended questions in three successive and anonymous contact rounds. They were asked to recall personal distrust experiences and to link antecedents for and consequences on their behavior. Their responses were classified by means of the Glaser and Strauss's (1967) Constant Comparative Method (CCM) by grouping them according to their semantic similarities instead of assigning them to classes predefined by an existing theoretical model. As an example, the following responses indicate "exit" from the organization with different nuances: they speak about leaving right away ("abandonment of position"; "I stop relating to that organization: give up"; "I resign"; "I leave or finish my mission but won't work again with her"; "I separate from the organization"; "I quit..."); about doing in the long run ("exit in the long term"; "disgruntled and leave at some point"; "frustration and leave at some point..."), about looking for other options ("look for a job in another company or department"; "would look for another organization"; "I look for a new job...") and about doing so if possible ("it's not my company style and, if I can, I move away"; "I could look for a new job"; "I do not identify myself with the organization I would try to leave it...").

Following the Delphi method, once categorized, the classified responses were shared with the participants for further elaboration. Finally, categories of antecedents and consequences were analyzed statistically by comparing the responses for the two foci and by linking antecedents with consequences to uncover a potential structure. The questions were available in English, French, and Spanish for participants to use the language they felt more comfortable with.

Each round was open for answers for as long as participants needed (two and a half, two, and one month, respectively), with a total time span of eight months. After 32 participants had responded to the second round, more participants were invited to provide additional responses in order to ensure that classes were saturated according to the Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and to check for the stability of results. Six additional participants provided responses that were taken into account for this saturation and stability check; the final results shown include these additional responses.

### Data Gathering

In round 1, participants were asked to think about actual situations of distrust in organizations and individuals they had experienced at

work and were requested to list “causes of distrust in the workplace as well as the consequence each cause has on your behavior (any action you have decided to take or not to take)”. They were instructed to use a line for each antecedent and consequence pair and to list as many pairs as they deemed important. For half of the participants the question on individuals was asked first whilst the other half was first asked about organizations to avoid the effect of precedence.

In round 2, reported antecedent and consequence classes were provided back to the participants and they were asked to add antecedents that depend on oneself as few of them had been indicated (“my feelings, uncertainty generated in me”). They were also asked to provide more antecedent and consequence pairs and to clarify the conditions under which the same antecedent generates constructive, defensive, or destructive behaviors.

In round 3 participants were asked to provide more antecedent and consequence pairs. No more rounds were needed because the antecedent and consequence classes were saturated and the consensus the Delphi method seeks was achieved.

### Data Analysis

The CCM was applied to extract the various antecedent and consequence subclasses (Charmaz, 2005). For example, answers like “does not value my work”, “does not recognize my effort”, “does not take into account employee’s opinions/ideas”, “does not invest in my education”, etc. were grouped under antecedent subclass Does Not Value. “Talks behind people’s back”, “criticizes the people in their team”, etc., were grouped under Talks behind People’s Back. Both subclasses were then grouped together as Lack of Humanism. The participants’ responses were first translated into Spanish, then the authors did the coding and classification independently and the differences in classification were discussed and solved.

Two statistical analyses were carried on by means of Pearson’s chi-squared ( $\chi^2$ ) tests. Contingency table analysis checked the null hypothesis of no association between types of antecedents and of consequences against foci (individuals and organizations), thus showing classes with statistically significant differences. Correspondence analysis is a useful tool to uncover relationships among categorical variables and is conceptually similar to principal

component analysis. Each antecedent and consequence pair was assigned to the appropriate box in a frequency table, analyzing separately the pairs referring to individuals and those referring to organizations. The average of the square differences between the observed value and the expected value is similar to the variance of quantitative variables and is called inertia; this value is decomposed by identifying a small number of dimensions in which the deviations from the expected values can be represented, showing the internal structure of antecedent and consequence pairs along several dimensions.

## Results

### Distrust Antecedents Map

A total of 380 antecedent responses were gathered and classified into eight antecedent classes, all of them populated for individuals and organizations as foci. The distribution of antecedents (see Table 1) is spread from a total of 7.1% for Does Not Fulfill to 17.7% for Lack of Humanism. Next paragraphs contain a detailed description of each antecedent class with illustrative participant responses between parentheses; then some additional factors are indicated.

Insufficient Capability contains incompetence (lack of knowledge, of professionalism, of creativity, of resources, makes errors, does not solve problems, roles not well defined, poor performance, negligent) and inappropriate work control (excessive or insufficient autonomy, too much control, disorganized, complex procedures, inconsistent procedures, lack of continuity, does not follow the procedures, indulgent promotions, bad use of resources, reluctant to change, generates risks, too theoretical, insufficient planning).

Conflicts of Interest contain personal goals (focuses on personal goals, looks for its own benefit, subjective matters are more important than objective ones, salary is too important, not aligned with the organization objectives), shows off (boasts, exhibits her triumphs, opportunistic, too ambitious, oriented to internal politics rather than to actual work, takes over my achievements, favoritism) and hidden agenda (has a hidden agenda).

Not Transparent Communication says communication is ambiguous, not clear, contradictory; does not explain things, does not

**Table 1.** Contingency Table Analysis of Distrust Antecedents and Consequences on Behavior Intentions with Foci Comparisons, Individuals (I), and Organizations (O)

Antecedents of distrust		$p < .001$	
Class label	Class contents (380 responses)	I (%)	O (%)
Insufficient capability	Incompetence, inappropriate work control	6.8	8.2
Conflicts of interests	Personal goals, shows off, hidden agenda	8.9	5.3
Not transparent communication	Ambiguous, contradictory; doesn’t explain, misunderstands...	5.5	6.3
Lies	Lies, hides information; manipulates, cheats...	<b>8.7<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>2.4<sup>2</sup></b>
Does not give support	Does not support the team, the individuals; no teamwork, works in isolation, does not involve herself; blames others...	5.5	2.9
Does not fulfill	Commitments, expectations, agreements, promises; does not deliver on time...	4.5	2.6
Lack of humanism	Does not value, talks behind other’s backs, lack of respect	9.5	8.2
Issues with values and goals	Lack of integrity, lack of vision, incoherence of values	<b>3.2<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>11.6<sup>3</sup></b>
Consequences on behavior intentions of distrust		$p < .001$	
Class label	Class contents (304 responses)	I (%)	O (%)
Loyalty	Look for information, find out motives, clarify, help, improve, look for alternatives	14.8	13.5
Voice	Question, complain, denounce, confront, do not tolerate	8.9	3.6
Silence	Become defensive, take preventive measures	8.9	5.3
Weaker relationships	Reduced communication, estrangement	<b>16.1<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>1.6<sup>3</sup></b>
Minor involvement	Reduced commitment, less proactivity, work my way	<b>1.6<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>9.5<sup>3</sup></b>
Exit	Do not collaborate, dissociate myself	<b>6.9<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>9.2<sup>1</sup></b>

Note. Values in bold differ from the expected ones if antecedents were independent, all responses included; values underscored show differences where the responses from some individuals are removed.

<sup>1</sup>Adjusted residuals between 1.96 and 3 or between -1.96 and -3.

<sup>2</sup>Adjusted residuals between 3 and 4 or between -3 and -4.

<sup>3</sup>Adjusted residuals between 4 and 5 or between -4 and -5.

share information, does not share her opinions, does not listen, does not understand, I do not understand her, does not show empathy; misinterprets.

Lies contains lies, hides information; manipulates information, cheats, demagogue.

Does Not Give Support contains does not support the team, the individuals, employees facing issues, others; no teamwork, works in isolation, works on her own, does not involve herself in solving the difficulties, does not want to collaborate, raises excuses, blames others.

Does Not Fulfill contains does not fulfill her commitments, agreements, promises; does not deliver on time, announces a plan to do something but does not execute it.

Lack of Humanism contains does not value (does not value my work, does not recognize my effort, does not appreciate people value, does not count on me, does not take employees' opinions or ideas into account, does not invest in my education, devotes little time to me, takes decisions without consulting us, does not share her opinions with me), talks behind other's backs (talks behind other's backs, talks negatively about others, criticizes people in her team, discredits my actions or opinions in front of others) and lack of respect (lack of respect towards me, towards others, laughs at people, makes sexist or racist comments, creates an insane environment, does not care the work environment, creates an atmosphere of fear, abuses her power).

Issues with Values and Goals contains lack of integrity (lack of ethics, unethical behaviors, dishonest, unfair), lack of vision (does not have a vision, strategy, paradigm, model; goals are not set, goals are not clear; not ambitious) and incoherence of values (has different values than mine, her values are inappropriate, values are not respected; constantly changes her vision, never changes her vision).

Some additional factors showed up when participants explained why certain antecedents could be related to constructive, defensive, or destructive behaviors: factors related to the solution (if I can come up with a solution; if the other party is not going to provide a solution.); the relationship (if I am interested, or not, in the relationship with the other party); the consequences (if it generates personal conflicts); oneself (being constructive, solution oriented, having a tendency to trust, feeling inferior for lack of knowledge); and to other antecedents (the power balance among the parties). Nevertheless, direct responses did not populate this type of tacit antecedents not depending solely on the characteristics of the other party.

### **Distrust Consequences on Behavior Map**

A total of 304 consequence responses referring to participants' behavior intentions were gathered and classified into six consequence classes, all of them populated for individuals and organizations as foci. Non-behavioral responses reported feelings (mainly sadness, frustration, anger and fear) and uncertainty. An initial classification of the consequence subclasses in aggregates of Constructive, Defensive and Destructive was too restrictive and misleading. Confronting, quarrelling, denouncing, penalizing, and the like, grouped as Voice, are very different from counseling, educating, working better and looking for motives, more logically grouped together under Loyalty for non-conflicting constructive behaviors. The labels for this classification come from [Hirschman \(1977\)](#), who explained that members of an organization perceiving that its benefits decrease could exit (withdraw from the relationship, leave the enterprise) or voice (attempt to repair or improve the relationship through communication of the complaint, grievance or proposal for change). The distribution of behavior intentions (see [Table 1](#)) is spread from a total of 11.1% for Minor Involvement to 28.3% for Loyalty. Next paragraphs contain a detailed description of each class of behavioral consequences with illustrative participant responses.

Loyalty contains behaviors to help and solve the issues seamlessly: look for information (from other sources, verify, investigate, check), find out motives (why is she doing that, discuss to learn causes or concerns, analyze), clarify (specify expectations, review them, propose goals, communicate better), help (train, educate, counsel, animate people to make their achievements visible, review, fix, negotiate, share), improve (work better, make more efforts, add protocols, more verifications), look for alternatives.

Voice also contains constructive behaviors aimed at helping and solving the issues but the path to solutions is not seamless and requires question (express doubts about the individual, the organization, the options), complain (reject, oppose, resist), denounce (to make progress, to advance, to inform), confront (ask for explanations, express my own opinion), do not tolerate (do not accept excuses, penalize, press).

Silence contains become defensive (be alert, careful, watch for incoherences, detect lies) and take preventive measures (take care of who I talk to, be watchful for what I say, take precautions).

Weaker Relationships contains reduced communication (provide only the indispensable information, avoid telling certain things, do not tell personal information, watch my mouth, stop sharing) and estrangement (take distance, avoid the relationship, move away, stop caring, do not accept her in my circle). These behaviors are different than becoming defensive or taking preventive measures; relationships are breaking apart.

Minor Involvement contains reduced commitment (work with less engagement, less enthusiasm, less interest), less proactivity (do not take the initiative, stop asking for support, relax my responsibility, do not invest my effort, respond only upon request, automatic and not creative work), and work my way (create my own direction, look for resources beyond the organization, work according with my criteria and values).

Exit contains do not collaborate (do not cooperate, stop the relationship, do not give them more work, do not work with them, avoid working with them, set aside, do not count on them) and dissociate myself (exit, leave, try to leave, detach, abandon, resign, look for another job, change manager).

A number of participants explained how they go through the consequence classes over time when things do not work out despite their efforts. For instance, a participant indicated: "Along this order: dialogue, clarify and solve; take precautions; take decisions". Another one said: "I first try to find out if there is a misunderstanding or an explanation and then approach positions; if there is no response, then I take a defensive attitude". Yet another participant argued: "I try to dialogue in order to find a solution; if he persists, then I take defensive actions and even destructive ones, like take distances or speak to whomever might be necessary".

Some consequence responses provide additional interesting information that explain why Minor Involvement develops: "It is hard to work when you are not taken into account; I work less because I am very concerned and centered in my own feelings; I do not invest much until there is a stable and secure strategy; I do not tell them what I think because they do not take action; it is difficult to trust when decisions are not mutually agreed, there should be an understanding of the other person perspective before taking a decision".

### **Structure of Antecedents and Consequences**

Paradoxically, some antecedents of distrust are reported to produce different, even opposite, consequences that might be explained in line with last paragraph comments. For instance, "makes mistakes" (Insufficient Capability) is paired with "review" (Loyalty) and with "do not count on her" (Exit); "does not recognize individual's value" (Lack of Humanism) is paired with "encourage staff to make their

**Table 2.** Correspondence Analysis of Antecedents and Consequences of Distrust in Individuals

Dimension	Contribution of point to inertia of dimensions <sup>1</sup>			<i>p</i> < .001	
	1	2	3		
Explained inertia (%)	43.7	31.4	14.8		
Antecedents				<i>N</i> = 168	%
Insufficient capability		.125		22	13.1
Conflicts of interest		.316		29	17.3
Not transparent communication				20	11.9
Lies			.128	24	14.3
Does not give support			.354	13	7.7
Does not fulfill			.351	14	8.3
Lack of humanism	.407			32	19.0
Issues with values and goals		.330		14	8.3
Consequences on behavior intentions					
Loyalty		.560	.151	44	26.2
Voice		.108		25	14.9
Silence	.120	.226	.220	24	14.3
Weaker relationships	.460			41	24.4
Minor involvement			.302	4	2.4
Exit	.389		.270	30	17.9

Note. <sup>1</sup>For the sake of readability, contributions less than 0.1 are not displayed.

achievements more visible" (Loyalty), with "I relax my functions" (Minor Involvement) and with "detach and, in the long term, leave" (Exit). Thus, the potential relationships between antecedents and consequences are not evident. The correspondence analysis of antecedent and consequence pairs sheds some light, as shown in Table 2 for distrust in individuals and Table 3 for distrust in organizations.

Two dimensions appear to account for around 70% of the inertia (percentage of variance explained by the dimensions). The contribution of points to the inertia of the dimensions is the proportion of inertia of a particular dimension explained by the antecedent or consequence class and indicates how much the class contributes to the dimension; these numbers are similar to factor loadings in factor analysis. For instance, the first dimension of distrust in individuals is explained by Lack of Humanism as antecedent with a factor loading of .407 and is linked to Weaker Relationships and Exit as consequences with factor loadings of .460 and .389, respectively. The horizontal correspondence contributions of each antecedent or consequence to the dimensions are not spread among dimensions, i.e., dimensions are uncoupled. Finally, if antecedent and consequence pairs obtained

in second part of round by the six additional participants are excluded (14% responses) results are very similar.

Due to the small number of participants, the stability of results was checked in several ways. When disregarding the responses from the participant providing more of them in each professional sector, results were statistically equivalent, keeping the same significance and size of adjusted residuals, which indicates stability. When the responses from the six additional participants in round 2 were added the frequency percentages slightly changed while the more mentioned antecedents and those showing substantial differences between foci were reinforced.

## Discussion

The major findings in this study show firstly a broader map of distrust antecedents than has been reported in the trust/distrust literature; secondly, a rich picture of behavioral intent consequences; thirdly, a meaningful structure; and finally, significant frequency differences depending on the referent.

**Table 3.** Correspondence Analysis of Antecedents and Consequences of Distrust in Organizations

Dimension	Contribution of point to inertia of dimensions <sup>1</sup>			<i>p</i> = .005	
	1	2	3		
Explained inertia (%)	48.2	23.3	12.6		
Antecedents				<i>N</i> = 126	%
Insufficient capability	.106	.274		22	17.5
Conflicts of interests			.675	15	11.9
Not transparent communication	.453			18	14.3
Lies		.156		5	4.0
Does not give support	.127	.299		7	5.6
Does not fulfill		.149		9	7.1
Lack of humanism				24	19.0
Issues with values and goals			.277	26	20.6
Consequences on behavior intentions					
Loyalty	.382			42	33.3
Voice				11	8.7
Silence	.122	.537		12	9.5
Weaker relationships				5	4.0
Minor involvement			.135	26	20.6
Exit	.217		.110	29	23.0

Note. <sup>1</sup>For the sake of readability, contributions less than .100 are not displayed.

## On the Antecedents of Distrust

Related to RQ1, the antecedents of distrust found depict a broader map than those McKnight and Chervany (2001) compiled upon their thorough analysis of sixty-five articles, including the classical trust model by Mayer et al. (1995). There is an exact opposite match between Competence and Insufficient Capability; Lies and Does Not Fulfill fit in the opposite of Integrity and Does Not give Support fit in the opposite of Benevolence. The other antecedents participants mentioned do not find a clear match within McKnight and Chervany (2001) analysis.

Some Conflicts of Interest can be in the opposite of Benevolence (ego-oriented behaviors in Personal Goals like “looks only for his own interests”); others would rather fit in the opposite of Integrity (has a hidden agenda); yet others would neither be the opposite of Benevolence nor Integrity, like Shows Off (exhibits her triumphs, opportunistic, oriented to internal politics rather than to actual work). Some Issues with Values and Goals may be Integrity's opposites but claiming for clarity and consistency in vision and strategy can hardly be considered Lack of Integrity.

The biggest class in this study, Lack of Humanism, is somehow different from the opposite of Benevolence as it includes Does Not Value (employees contributions, opinions/ideas...). This subclass matches negatively with Perceived Organizational Support, a strong predictor of trust in leaders according to Dirks and Ferrin's (2002) meta-analysis of leadership trust antecedents. On the other hand and related to Issues with Values and Goals, Chalutz Ben-Gal, Tzafir, and Dolan (2015) have found empirically that high levels of fit in values within an organization result in high levels of trusting actions, while Edwards and Cable (2009) have explained the processes by which value congruence relates to job satisfaction, organizational identification, and intent to stay in the organization.

Despite our attempts to make sense of participants' antecedents of distrust in terms of Competence, Benevolence and Integrity, it seems we need more specific antecedent classes to match their opinions around distrust in organizational settings.

Undoubtedly, responses grouped in Not Transparent Communication require a class on its own as a distrust antecedent. It can lead to uncertainty and suspicion around motives, in line with Norman, Avolio, and Luthans' (2010) experiments showing that leaders who engage in positive and transparent communication have high levels of trust from followers. According to Schul et al. (2008), distrust is associated with the concealment of truth and lack of transparency; those who distrust try to ascertain the other's attempts at deception by searching for signs of changes that depart from routine. To the participants in this study, transparency in communications is as important for organizational foci as it is for individuals'. Moreover, the first dimension in the structure of distrust antecedents and consequences at the organizational level is mainly driven by Not Transparent Communication. When communication is not transparent, uncertainty and suspicion around motives increase distrust.

A noticeable result in this study is the lack of reference to context factors affecting distrust. While Krasman (2014) has demonstrated the influence of organizational structure like formalization on employee perceptions of supervisor trustworthiness, context factors are not evident for lay people, who concentrate on focus (trustee) characteristics. Nienaber, Romeike, Searle, and Schewe (2015) also highlight organizational factors affecting trust in supervisors like organizational climate, ethical norms, and structural factors like, for instance, the organization of the workplace, technical conditions at work, and workflows.

The antecedents of distrust categorized in this study match almost exactly the negative formulation of antecedents of trust in Cambor and Alcover's (2012) work on the concept of trust, except for Conflicts of Interest. Also, trust antecedents in Fulmer and Gelfand's (2012) compilation can be organized according to

the opposite distrust antecedent classes in this study. Going back to Lewicki et al.'s (1998) warning that it would be misleading to assume that positive predictors of trust would necessarily be negative predictors of distrust, we notice that for the participants in this study they are rather opposite.

## On the Consequences of Distrust

Related to RQ2, participants in this study recognize distrust impacts on a full range of behavior intentions in work settings that expand in a grading series of different job dissatisfaction levels, from active collaborative responses to resignation.

Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, and Mainous (1988) showed a relationship between job satisfaction and four types of general responses (Loyalty, Voice, Neglect, and Exit) the contents of which are different from the categories in this study. They have two classification criteria: any employee response is either active or passive and either constructive or destructive. This way, their Voice is constructive and active (verbalizing to discover solutions, taking action to solve problems...) while their Loyalty is constructive and passive (waiting for conditions to improve...). In this classification, both Loyalty and Voice are active and constructive while passive behaviors are contained in Silence, a class on its own under distrust, as it gathers passive neutral behaviors like taking preventive measures.

The Loyalty class in this study, similar to Hirschman's (1977), encompasses constructive behaviors such as making more effort, proposing goals, reflecting on how to improve, reviewing expectations, and many other reported consequences that cannot be considered but active and constructive. These behaviors are in line with positive outcomes from distrust that have been found to be better safety performance predictors than attitudes of trust (Conchie & Donald, 2006).

Morrison (2011) offers an integrated conceptualization of employee voice and silence. Voice is the deliberate “communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns or opinions about work-related issues” (p. 375) meant to improve work functioning even if not always pleasant (denouncing to move things, not accepting excuses...). On the contrary, silence is a conscious withholding of this information under conditions in which individuals do not assume the costs of raising their voice (working with suspicion, paying attention to what I say...). These results align with Morrison's (2011) conceptualization and point out that leaders and organizations should carefully watch for Voice and Silence in order to take action to avoid undesired consequences of unhealthy distrust.

Finally, Neglect appears split in two classes: Minor Involvement (I relax my responsibility, stop asking for support, less creativity, more automatic work...) and Weaker Relationships (minimum communication, stop sharing, take distance, move away from his influence...).

Big classes as constructive, defensive, and destructive behaviors do not show foci differences. These results suggest that a more finely grained range of responses uncovers meaningful responses for each referent.

## On the Relationship between Antecedents and Consequences

Related to RQ3, correspondence analysis show a relationship between antecedents and consequences along three different dimensions suggesting three perspectives of distrust.

The first dimension of distrust in organizations is based in Not Transparent Communication, which can be supported by sense-making processes built on an attempt to achieve goals in complex and confusing situations (Weick, 1979). According to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), those processes are based upon information processing and attribution theory, which require communication. Not Transparent

Communication is linked to both Loyalty and Exit, as participants explain, because not having clear enough information moves them to look for it while, if there is uncertainty and doubts about the intentions, they cannot assume certain risks, thus deciding to distrust. This result is relevant as [Shantz and Alfes' \(2015\)](#) empirical findings show a moderating role of organizational trust that ameliorates the negative effects of relatively low levels of engagement on voluntary absence, a phenomenon with high organizational costs.

The first dimension for distrust in individuals and second for distrust in organizations links task competences and people orientation, essential factors to collaboratively achieve work goals. Lack of Humanism might possibly relate to Insufficient Capability (individuals) through recognition, a major subclass within Lack of Humanism. Participants want to be valued and appreciated by their work as well as to be taken into account and counted upon, whilst failing to provide recognition breaches a major expectation at work. Altogether, this dimension refers to the tasks as it brings together the capability of doing them with being given recognition in return, a sense of reciprocity. This evokes [Blau's \(1964\)](#) social exchange for trust is a necessary pre-condition for voluntary actions motivated by their expected returns. Lack of Humanism, Does Not Give Support and Insufficient Capability can play a role in predictability for task oriented, short-term matters.

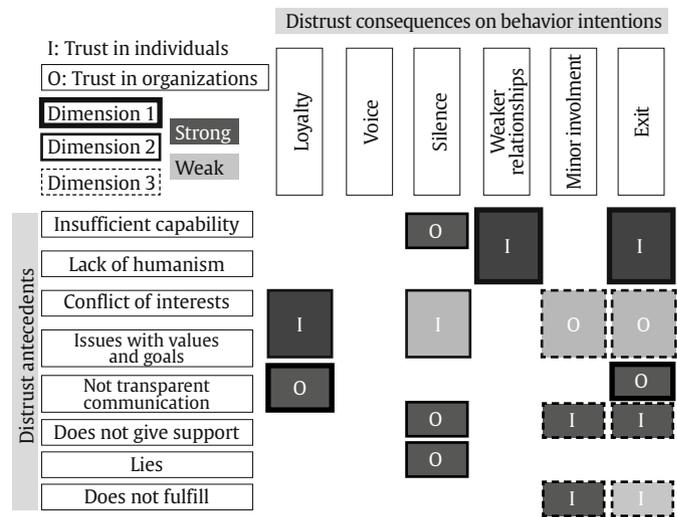
The second dimension of distrust in individuals and third of distrust in organizations link Issues with Values and goals and Conflicts of Interest. This is compatible with a social identity perspective because the groups people belong to, as the organization they work for, are an important source of pride and self-esteem ([Tajfel & Turner, 1979](#)). When people perceive those they trust have similarities with them, this identification acts as a mechanism increasing trust so they make efforts to keep a positive view of themselves ([Gillespie & Mann, 2004](#)). On the other hand, Issues with Values and Goals can play a role in predictability for long-term matters.

**On the Differences between Foci**

With regard to RQ4 and RQ5, antecedent and consequence classes are similar with different frequencies for individuals and organizations. The statistical comparison between antecedents ([Table 1](#)) shows significant differences in Lies, more important for individuals, and Issues with Values and Goals, more important for organizations. Lies have been found to reduce trust in colleagues who lie and to deteriorate relationships ([Sánchez, Suárez, & Caballero, 2011](#)), particularly when there is benefit for the liar and harm for the trustor. According to [Caldwell and Hansen \(2010\)](#), the decision to trust is taken in a thoughtful way based on a number of cognitive and affective perceptions that affect the assessment of the probability that the referent will undertake a certain behavior. These results can be understood based on the relational dynamics with the focus as needs and concerns might be different depending on the referent ([Alcover et al., 2017](#)), for instance, between employers and their coworkers, their leaders, and their organizations ([Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012](#)). Face-to-face communication with a person facilitates greater trust compared with online or phone communication ([Hill et al., 2009](#)) because it might provide clearer clues to detect lies than interactions with an organization, in which case observing values and goals could give hints in anticipating future behaviors.

The statistical comparison between consequences shows significant differences in Weaker Relationships, greater for individuals, and Minor Involvement, greater for organizations. This result can be understood under the same vein that explains antecedents due to the differences in relational dynamics.

Related to RQ6, we have found different relationships between antecedents and consequences on behavior intentions for individuals and organizations as referents, that are depicted in [Figure 1](#).



**Figure 1.** Diagram Showing the Relationships of Distrust Antecedents and Consequences with Behavior Intentions for Individuals and Organizations.

One of main antecedents of distrust for the participants in this study is Lack of Humanism for both individuals and organizations as foci but with different consequences. For individuals, it is linked to Insufficient Capability and relates to Weaker Relationships and Exit, while for organizations only Insufficient Capability shows a relationship, with Silence. As some participants explained, if a person fails to respond according to expectations, a replacement might be found within the organization whilst leaving the organization is less easy. The potential negative consequences of a certain antecedent can lead to different relationships because there are other factors playing a role in the distrusting decision process.

Lies is another main antecedent of distrust in individuals and is not as relevant for organizations as Not Transparent Communications probably because lies or hiding information are more easily identified in individuals. On the other hand, ambiguity might first trigger Loyalty in search for clarification and understanding. Again, the focus is easier to replace if it is an individual with respect to organizations.

Conflicts of Interest (second antecedent for individuals and fifth for organizations) go together with Issues with Values and Goals (small antecedent for individuals and the main one for organizations) and are both related to the more disengaging consequences for organizations and to less destructive ones for individuals. This might mean that the impact of those antecedents is perceived as more negative for the expectations around organizations.

These dimensions are in line with [Hardin's \(2004\)](#) encapsulated-interest view of trust depending on two quite different factors: the motivation of the potentially trusted person to attend to the trustor's interests and his or her competence to do so; in work settings there is a need for both skill and will. This approach enlightens the phenomena of distrust (as well as trust) the way participants in this study experience it. Moreover, the study on the concept of trust by [Cambor and Alcover \(2012\)](#) showed similar antecedent and consequence dimensions for trust in individuals, the first one associated with competence and the second one with values and goals, which suggests trust and distrust could be understood as opposite concepts.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has several limitations. Its qualitative approach, aimed at understanding the daily experience of distrust, encompasses a small number of participants. Thus, results cannot be generalized but considered as indications to be submitted to further specific

quantitative tests. Nevertheless, those indications are important as they show stability. The variety of contexts included (participant countries and organizations) provides a rich set of opinions but does not allow for deep comparisons that could nurture leadership and organizational practices to achieve a healthy or optimal trust/distrust level. In order to make progress along this line, broader samples should be explored including richer contexts as well as narrower ones targeted to watch more specific differences.

Participants have provided abundant and sound antecedents of distrust related to the foci, 99% of which are related to the other party. This limited view would hinder the opportunity to build trust constructively following Hardin's (1993) advice to understand that others will be trustworthy when their incentives are taken into account. More work is needed to determine how to raise this constructive awareness on tacit factors.

Additionally, longitudinal studies are a must to explore the actual consequences of distrust on behavior and to observe the outcomes of managerial best practices discussed. For this purpose, diary studies would be most interesting to provide contextual information together with real life experiences.

## Practical Implications

Distrust growing situations might be initially signposted by voices being raised that can be inappropriately understood as conflictive instead of constructive. On the contrary, silence or voices not being raised could be an elusive leading indicator of disengagement.

Our findings are relevant for organizational and leadership development practices that Top Management and HRM should watch for in order to build and sustain the appropriate level of trust. Firstly, paying attention to organizational communication is not commonplace. Real open communication cannot be unidirectional and has to reflect followers' opinions, thoughts, and feelings, while holding information sets the scene for workers to wonder about the reasons for holding it and to come up to the conclusion that they cannot assume risks nor keep commitment. Secondly, showing coherence of values and resolving conflicts constructively pave the way to demonstrate motivation towards workers, the willingness to collaborate and benefit them. Finally, responding to individuals' contributions and opinions and praising their work as a reward for their effort would be a must for the participants in this study to develop trust.

## Conclusions

Counting upon a common distrust antecedent and consequence framework for multiple foci facilitates the comparison of what is important depending on the referent as well as a deeper understanding of how it operates. All antecedent and consequence classes found in this study are populated for the two foci showing significant differences in some of them. Altogether the antecedent map depicted by participants is broad enough to cover the major ones influencing distrust found in the literature for both individuals and organizations in a comprehensive, yet integrated way. The consequence map spans over the full range of job dissatisfaction levels. Referent differences found can be explained in terms of the relationship dynamics for different referent types.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

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