Master's thesis

The Dark and Bright Side of Perceived Distrust: A Latent Profile Analysis

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Abstract

Distrust seems a formative characteristic of today's world, with far-reaching consequences for many life domains, including the workplace. By using a person-centred approach, we will investigate the experience of the person feeling distrusted by others, a largely neglected aspect of distrust. A latent profile analysis (n= 472) extracted four profiles based on three variables of perceived distrust – co-worker distrust, supervisor's close monitoring and supervisor distrust. These profiles were characterised by "Low Distrust", "High Monitoring", "Medium/High Distrust", and "Supervisor Distrust". Additionally, we conducted an ANOVA to investigate the association between latent profile membership and predictor (work location and conspiracy mentality) and outcome variables (individual task proficiency and proactivity). While conspiracy mentality and task proficiency were significantly associated with latent profile membership, this was not the case for work location and task proactivity. Latent profile analysis presents as a helpful tool to increase understanding of a complex and multi-layered variable, like distrust.

Keywords: distrust, latent profile analysis, conspiracy mentality, work location, work performance

The Dark and Bright Side of Perceived Distrust: A Latent Profile Analysis

Current society seems characterised by a worldwide decline in social trust and, furthermore, by a zeitgeist of distrust (Yglesias, 2021; Zuckerman, 2021). For instance, distrust in political institutions increased during the last years, and we observed the emergence of many contemporary conspiracy beliefs (Edelman Intelligence, 2022; Horáková, 2020; European Commission, 2020). General distrust in the mainstream narrative plays a considerable role in these beliefs (Wood et al., 2012). Even more concerning, distrust has become the default for many in numerous life sectors, such as professional services, telecommunications and technology. In the Edelman Trust Barometer, an annual online survey in 28 countries with over 33,000 respondents, the majority indicated that they tend to distrust until they acquire evidence of trustworthiness (Edelman Intelligence, 2022). Moreover, distrust infiltrates various aspects of our lives, including the workplace. Distrust is a multifaceted variable; for instance, consider the experience of feeling distrusted. In the work context, perceptions of others distrusting oneself can come in multiple shapes: supervisors expressing a lack of confidence in employees' work skills, co-workers questioning work integrity, or supervisors keeping close tabs on employees.

Trust appears essential for various organisational outcomes, such as employee morale, productivity and turnover (Wichtner-Zoia, 2014). However, current research failed to establish such organisation-specific outcomes for distrust, a related but distinct concept from trust (Lewicki et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2014; Min, 2018). Moreso, the perspective of the person that feels distrusted by others is overwhelmingly ignored (Lanaj et al., 2018). Nevertheless, perceived distrust seems a relevant concept for employees and the workplace. To make this more concrete, consider the following example of the complexity of perceived distrust in the workplace. In a recently leaked company email, Elon Musk announced that remote work is no longer an option for his

employees (Taylor, 2022). This email not only further sparked the current debate about the effectiveness of remote work, but Musk also seemed to imply that he does not trust employees to be able to fulfil the job duties while working from home. Which nicely illustrates how easily one email by a manager could spark feelings of distrust.

Further research on the topic seems needed as current literature lacks the necessary understanding of perceived distrust in the workplace. The contribution to the literature of the current research is three-fold. First, to our knowledge, this is the only study combining conspiracy mentality (CM), work performance, and work location in a latent profile analysis (LPA) of distrust sources. In particular, by including two facets of work performance - individual task proficiency and proactivity, a positive organisational outcome, we hope to shed light on the under-investigated bright side of distrust. Moreso, increasing knowledge of CM, the individual tendency to engage in conspiratorial thinking (Bruder et al., 2013), a consequential (Douglas & Leite, 2017; van Prooijen & de Vries, 2016) but rarely considered variable in organisational research. Furthermore, the inclusion of work location seems vital, as current times have shown its necessity but also its potential advantages, such as time and money efficiency or access to a broader pool of talents (Baikulova, 2021).

Second, we aim to narrow the gap in the distrust literature by investigating the experience of employees feeling distrusted by others and by using a bidimensional view on distrust, with a distinct conceptualisation that is not solely based on the absence of trust. Third, by using a person-centred analysis, which offers a novel way to cluster employees, we might gain better knowledge of how distrust sources relate to each other within a sample of employees and how these profiles are associated with a selection of predictor and outcome variables.

Distrust in the Workplace

Distrust is commonly experienced by employees, with 25-66% of US on-site employees indicating to experience distrust at the workplace (APA, 2014; Atkins, 2014). Interpersonal relationships are essential to employees' daily working routine, as they interact with co-workers, supervisors and customers. Thus, it comes as no surprise that distrust can adversely impact organisational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intention (for an overview, see Min, 2018). In addition, previous research illustrated that distrust in interpersonal relationships can lead to scepticism, suspicion, and even deception (Deutsch, 1958). This is troublesome in the work context, since it hinders collaboration and effective teamwork (Cahill et al., 2003) and further diminishes organisational productivity (Levi et al., 2004). Less research has been done on the consequences of employees' perception of distrust by others (e.g., co-workers, supervisors). Lanaj and colleagues (2018) showed that perceived distrust correlated with an increase in employees' emotional exhaustion. It was subsequently linked to withdrawal behaviour at work and conflict toward their significant other at home.

The traditional view of distrust is unidimensional (Deutsch, 1958; Ou & Sia, 2009; Min, 2018). Distrust treated simply as a lack of trust resulted in a substantial research imbalance on trust versus distrust (Min, 2018). However, more recent research established distrust as a distinct concept (Lewicki et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2014; Min, 2018). Neuroimaging research provided another layer to this distinction, as trust and distrust activate different brain areas (Dimoka, 2010), giving rationale to differentiate between these concepts. Following a bidimensional perspective, we define distrust as "an expectation of harmful, hostile, or other negative consequences based on previous experience, and is accompanied by negative emotions and intention to avoid those consequences" (Min, 2018; p. 11).

Perceived Distrust in the Workplace

With contemporary literature's focus on the person whose trust is violated, there is a considerable research gap regarding the distrusted person (Lanaj et al., 2018). Therefore, for this study, we will focus on the employee's experience as the person who perceives feelings of being distrusted by others. Here, we distinguish between three sources of distrust: supervisor, close monitoring and co-worker.

Supervisor Distrust. There are multiple ways an employee can feel distrusted by their supervisor. Potential domains are employees' knowledge, skill, ability, work values and integrity (Lanaj et al., 2018). Supervisor distrust applies to an overall level of perceived distrust and not one specific behaviour the employee perceives to be displayed by a supervisor.

Close Monitoring. Supervisors engage in close monitoring if they keep close tabs on their subordinates to ensure that subordinates complete tasks in a way that they were instructed to do or do not engage in any activities that the supervisor might disapprove of (George & Zhou, 2001). In contrast to the aforementioned construct, close monitoring refers to the perceived display of supervisors' specific behaviours that produce feelings of being distrusted in the employee. Nevertheless, both constructs of supervisor distrust and close monitoring occur on a perceptional level.

Co-worker Distrust. Unlike perceived distrust by supervisors, for perceived co-worker distrust, there is less power imbalance involved in the relationship between co-workers. The domains in which an employee can feel mistrusted by their co-workers are the same as for supervisor distrust (i.e., employees' knowledge, skill, ability, work values and integrity; Lanaj et al., 2018).

We predict that different profiles of perceived distrust can be extracted. Regarding expectations of specific clusters, we predict that higher levels of different distrust sources cluster together, and we will also explore if other profiles exist (e.g.,

profiles characterised by co-worker distrust only). Moreover, we expect that a range of combinations of the perceived distrust variables is possible, but with the currently limited literature on perceived distrust, we do not formulate further hypotheses. Therefore, this study's first research aim is the following:

> *Research Question 1:* Can combinations of perceived distrust sources be found using close monitoring, supervisors and co-worker distrust as indicators, and how many? Moreover, how can these combinations be characterised?

Latent Profile Analysis

Perceived distrust can take different forms. It can, for example, have different sources (e.g., co-workers vs supervisor) and different content (e.g., integrity vs competence). Based on these different forms of distrust, we may be able to distinguish meaningful profiles. In various scientific fields, cluster analysis is used to find clusters (groups, profiles) in complex data (Hennig et al., 2016; Jain, 2010; Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 1990). As a person-centred approach, cluster analysis has become an increasingly applied statistical method in organisational research (Woo et al., 2018). LPA assumes that employees can be sorted into different categories based on varying degrees of probability, resulting in different profiles of these attributes (Spurk et al., 2020). For this study, we will investigate sources of perceived workplace distrust, namely supervisor distrust, co-worker distrust and close monitoring, aiming to identify subgroups of employees with similar patterns for these three variables. After investigating what different profiles exist, we will look into potential outcome and predictor variables to understand these profiles better.

Examining whether there are meaningful and different constellations of distrust sources can be beneficial for a better understanding of this unique set of variables' consequences in the workplace. Instead of examining individual variables, LPA offers the possibility to investigate how the three perceived distrust variables interact with

each other to make a potential difference. Additionally, by using a LPA, we will be able to investigate how the estimated profile solutions will relate to specific predictor and outcome variables. On the one side, this can be seen as a form of validation of the clusters. On the other side, by investigating profiles of employees that score similarly on these perceived distrust variables, we might be able to get a more distinguished picture of the predictor and consequences of a certain set of perceived distrust variables. Concretely, it could help to identify whether certain profiles of employees (for instance, profiles that only display high levels of supervisor but not co-worker perceived distrust) are linked to certain predictors or outcomes.

Predictor: Conspiracy Mentality

As the second research aim, we will investigate two predictors of latent profile memberships - starting with CM, the individual tendency to engage in conspiratorial thinking (Bruder et al., 2013). Conspiracy beliefs at the workplace can take various forms, from customers outraging about face mask requirements to co-workers believing in some secret plot behind the new strategic plan implemented by the management. By using a variable aimed at the underlying tendency to believe and engage in conspiracy beliefs, we aim to capture a more general trend.

While, to our knowledge, there has been no research done so far investigating the relation between CM and perceived distrust of others, previous studies could establish a connection between distrust and conspiracy beliefs about the Covid-19 pandemic (Freeman et al., 2020) and different contexts, such as HIV/AIDS-related conspiracy beliefs (Bogart et al., 2010; Hoyt et al., 2012). More general, conspiracy beliefs have been linked to low levels of trust (Abalakina-Paap et al., 1999) and distrust in authority (Swami et al., 2010). There appears to be a general link between distrust and the belief in conspiracy narratives. Moreover, with negative emotions and irrational deliberations as a basic principle of conspiracy beliefs (van Prooijen &

Douglas, 2018), we also deem a connection to feelings of others distrusting oneself. Thus, we anticipate CM to be a valuable predictor for latent profile membership of perceived distrust. As a general prediction, we believe higher levels of CM relate to overall higher levels of distrust sources. CM might predict profile membership characterised by distrust from supervisors but not necessarily from co-workers or close monitoring. Therefore, different combinations also seem feasible, suggesting the following research question:

> *Research Question 2a:* Is conspiracy mentality associated with latent profile membership of perceived distrust?

Predictor: Work Location

The second investigated predictor for latent profile membership is work location. Recent times have proven the necessity for flexible work. This includes the option for remote, hybrid and on-site work, adjusted to the employees' needs or external circumstances, outside the employees' and employers' control, such as comprehensive lockdowns. Recent research showed that remote managers commonly experience distrust (Parker et al., 2020). Furthermore, managers' distrust might create downward spirals into micromanagement and negatively impact employees' behaviour towards organisational goals (Parker et al., 2020). Moreover, the aforementioned example on Elon Musk's leaked email illustrates how work location can also be linked to perceived distrust, in this case by one's manager.

We include work location in the form of remote, hybrid and on-site employees in this study to examine whether it associates with latent profile membership of perceived distrust. To our knowledge, there is no previous research on this. However, we expect to find most remote employees for profiles with the overall highest perceived distrust values as a result of delayed responsiveness, risks of miscommunication and risks of freewheeling from online communication (Thorgeirsdottir & Kelliher, 2017;

Brewer, 2010). Additionally, we base this hypothesis on previous findings from the trust literature, which, although distinct, is still a related concept to distrust (Lewicki et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2014; Min, 2018). First, building trust in a remote work setting differs from forming a trusting relationship in offline work settings (Greenberg et al., 2007; Soomar, 2020). Second, this is based on findings indicating that establishing and maintaining trust in the workplace is challenging when working remotely (Owens & Khazanchi, 2018).

Research Question 2b: Is work location associated with latent profile membership of perceived distrust?

Outcome: Work Performance

The third research goal is to expand insight into distrust-specific workplace outcomes based on the employee profiles of distrust sources identified in the LPA. Work performance has many facets. We will focus on two - individual task proficiency and proactivity. We include work performance to capture the effect of different distrust profiles on beneficial organisational outcomes. Although distrust is negatively connotated, there has been more recent research investigating the bright side of distrust (Raza-Ullah & Kostis, 2020). More concretely, on an inter-organisational relationship level, it has been reasoned that there is also a beneficial side to distrust as it could trigger healthy scepticism, encourage vigilance, and provoke firms to be on their guards (Guo et al., 2017; Raza-Ullah & Kostis, 2020). However, most research has investigated the experience of the distrusted person and not the person feeling distrusted by others (Lanaj et al., 2018). This is also the case for the limited investigations into the positive side of distrust. By investigating two facets of work performance individually, we aim to shed light on the bright side of perceived distrust. Although the aforementioned examples indicate the potential of distrust positive outcomes, the current literature overwhelmingly focuses on the adverse outcomes of

distrust (Deutsch, 1958; Lewicki et al., 1998). Thus, we explore the possibility that both directions of outcomes are possible.

Individual Task Proficiency. Griffin and colleagues (2007; p. 329) defined this as "the extent to which an individual meets role requirements that can be formalised". This includes behaviour, such as ensuring that core tasks are correctly completed. The following research question is examined:

Research Question 3a: Is latent profile membership of perceived distrust associated with individual task proficiency?

Individual Task Proactivity. This facet of work performance describes the employee's individual and self-initiative to anticipate or initiate change in their work role or environment (Griffin et al., 2007). Task proactivity becomes crucial if the work context involves uncertainty or work roles cannot be formalised (Griffin et al., 2007). For instance, initiating change, being future-directed and being self-starting would be classified as individual task proactivity. While not yet investigated, proactivity could follow from the perceived feeling of distrust. A potential mechanism could, for instance, be employees self-initiating tasks to impress supervisors or to help co-workers with an aim to decrease the negative perceived feeling. Thus, we will explore the following:

Research Question 3b: Is latent profile membership of perceived distrust associated with individual task proactivity?

Method

Participants

We are using the last wave of data from a larger longitudinal study among full-time employees that was collected at the end of June 2021. Previous waves did not include the variables relevant to this thesis. Employees were recruited via a panel company in Germany and received monetary incentives for participation. A total of 520 responses were recorded for this last wave. Participants that failed to fill out all the

items of interest (n = 10) or failed the careless responding check (n = 4) were removed. Participants who reduced their work hours (e.g., due to sick leave) for this last wave were excluded from the analysis. Thus, removing 19 responses that indicated to work less than 30h a week. As one of the measured constructs asked for supervisor distrust, participants without a supervisor (n = 15) were excluded.

Finally, the sample used for the analysis consists of 472 participants, with slightly fewer females (n = 213, 45.1%) than males (n = 259, 54.9%). This sample's ages ranged from 20 to 69 years (M = 45.5, SD = 11.8). Most participants indicated high school diplomas (31.9%) as their highest educational qualification. Followed by secondary school diplomas (25.4%), master's degrees (17.4%) and bachelor's degrees (13.1%). Employees indicated to work between 30 and 80 hours per week (M = 39.6, SD = 4.7). Moreover, the sample consists of employees from different industrial backgrounds including public administration and defense (n = 75, 15.9%), manufacturing (n = 63, 13.3%), human health and social activities (n = 53, 11.2%), information and communication (n = 32, 6.8%), and construction (n = 21, 4.4%). The sample indicated occupational tenure between 0 and 48 years (M = 17.6, SD = 11.9).

Materials and Procedure

If not otherwise stated, the scale's items were translated from English to German by a native speaker. Moreover, items were then back-translated by a second native speaker. The study received ethical approval from the Behavioral and Social Science faculty's ethical committee of the University of Groningen prior to data collection. After giving informed consent, participants filled out various questions on different constructs. The scale's Cronbach's alpha was estimated in RStudio (R version 4.1.1; RStudio Team, 2020) with the psych package (version 2.0.8; Revelle, 2021).

Distrust

All variables consider the employee's perceived distrust of others towards the employee themselves (i.e., from co-workers and supervisors). When answering the items, participants are instructed to think about the past month and respond on a five-point scale (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree) for all distrust items.

Supervisor Distrust. Perceived distrust from supervisors was assessed with three items from Lanaj and colleagues (2018). An exemplary item is “Over the past month, my supervisor doubted my ability to perform my job” (Lanaj et al., 2018). One additional item was created for the study (“…said things that suggested she or he did not trust that I was working hard”). Internal consistency was estimated with a Cronbach’s alpha of .96.

Close Monitoring. Three items by George and Zhou (2001), like “It sometimes feels like my supervisor is always looking over my shoulder”, assessed close monitoring. These items showed a Cronbach’s alpha value of $\alpha = .84$.

Co-worker Distrust. Perceived distrust from co-workers was assessed by six items (Lanaj et al., 2018). An exemplary item is “This month, one or more co-worker(s) …doubted my work values” (Lanaj et al., 2018). Internal consistency of this distrust measure was estimated with Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .98$).

Conspiracy mentality

The predictor variable CM was measured using the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire by Bruder and colleagues (2013). The items were available in three languages, including German. Participants are asked to indicate the degree to which they believe in five statements, such as "many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about", and "politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions". The answer options were adjusted to a five-point

scale (1=Never, 2=Infrequently, 3=Sometimes, 4=Frequently, 5=Always) to fit the layout of the survey. Cronbach's alpha for the scale indicated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$).

Work Location

The employee's location was assessed with a single item created for the study by instructing participants to recall how often they worked from home over the past month. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale (0=Not at all; 1=<1 day per week; 2=1 or 2 days per week; 3=Most days per week; 4=Every day) and grouped into employees working completely remote (n = 88, 18.6%), or entirely on-site (n = 231, 48.9%). The third group included employees working hybrid, so either working most days per week (n = 73, 15.5%), one or two days per week (n = 53, 11.2%) and less than one day per week (n = 27, 5.7%) from home.

Work Performance

The outcome variables asked participants to think about their job over the past month when answering items on a five-point scale (1=Very little; 2=Sometimes; 3=A moderate amount; 4=Often; 5=A great deal). Different facets of work performance were assessed and will be considered separately.

Individual Task Proficiency. Three items measured task proficiency (Griffin et al., 2007). An example item is “I ensured my tasks were completed properly”. Cronbach’s alpha for these items was $\alpha = .91$.

Individual Task Proactivity. Moreover, three items assessed task proactivity (Griffin et al., 2007). For instance, the item “I initiated better ways of doing my core tasks”. Internal consistency was estimated with a Cronbach’s alpha of .93.

Statistical analyses

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the lavaan package (version 0.6-11; Rosseel, 2012) in RStudio. Listwise deletion was applied to missing data. Model

fit was assessed using CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR. The normed fit index CFI ranges between 0 and 1, where higher values indicate a better fit (Shi et al., 2018). Therefore, a good fit is assumed for CFI ≥. 95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; West et al., 2012). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), a badness-of-fit measure, indicates a better fit with lower values (Shi et al., 2018). Thus, according to Hu and Bentler (1999), RMSEA ≤ .06 will be considered acceptable. Values for the standardised root mean square residuals (SRMR) of ≤ .10 are treated as acceptable; for values lower than 0.05, a good model fit is assumed (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Next, using LPA, profiles of distrust are investigated. The profile solution models were estimated using maximum likelihood estimator in LatentGOLD (version 5.0; Vermunt & Magidson, 2005). Here, latent subpopulations of employees are identified based on the three perceived distrust variables. Employees with similar answer patterns are clustered into profiles. Thus, profile analysis reduces variance between people who are in the same profile.

We will extract profiles until the fit indicators do not show further improvements and all profiles are theoretically meaningful (Spurk et al., 2020). Then, the optimal number of profiles will be decided on Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC; Schwarz, 1978), Consistent Akaike's Information Criterion (CAIC; Bozdogan, 1987), and corresponding classification error (Nylund et al., 2007; Schreiber, 2017). A better fit is indicated by lower values on BIC and CAIC (Aho et al., 2014). Moreover, we also stated the loglikelihood (LL) value, the number of parameters (Npar), Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC; Akaike, 1974), the entropy R-squared, and the standard R-squared (coefficient of determination) to follow the best practice for reporting model fit (Schreiber, 2017).

Lastly, we investigated the association between estimated profile membership, the predictor (CM and work location), and outcome variables (task proficiency and task

proactivity). To do this, we ran a one-way analysis of variance for each outcome and predictor variable for the estimated profile solutions. For each analysis of variance, we calculated the partial eta squared statistic to quantify the strength of association (see, e.g., Field, 2013). According to Cohen (1988, 1992), (partial) eta squared values of .01, .06, and .14 indicate low, medium, and high effects.

Results

Univariate Descriptives and Bivariate Correlations

For information on mean values (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*), as well as examined correlations of the continuous variables, see Table 1.

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlations of the Main Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Supervisor Distrust	1.34	1.04	1					
2. Close Monitoring	2.23	0.97	.69**	1				
3. Co-worker Distrust	1.72	0.95	.72**	.61**	1			
4. Task Proficiency	4.24	0.80	-.41**	-.23**	-.46**	1		
5. Task Proactivity	3.04	1.12	.12*	.04	.10*	.12*	1	
6. Conspiracy Mentality	4.17	1.44	.14**	.14**	.14**	-.03	.08	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Model

To test the assumed underlying factor structure, a CFA was conducted, including all main variables of the study (supervisor and co-worker distrust, close monitoring, task proficiency and proactivity, and conspiracy mentality). Results indicate good model fit (RMSEA = .07; 90% CI = .06 to .07; CFI = .99; SRMR = .07). The factor loadings range between .48 and .96. For an overview of all factor loadings

see Table A6 (Appendix A). The correlations between the perceived distrust variables are relatively high, indicating that they are potentially not distinct from each other. Thus, another confirmatory factor analysis was estimated with only one latent factor for the three distrust variables. Results do not indicate a better fit (RMSEA = 0.14; 90% CI = .14 to .15; CFI = .99; SRMR = .09), thus we will assume these variables to be distinct from each other.

Extracting Latent Profiles of the Three Distrust Sources

We used LPA to identify latent profiles based on the three distrust measures. LPA, a form of model-based clustering, assumes data to be generated from a mixture of underlying probability distributions (Fraley & Raftery, 2002; Hennig et al., 2016). Thus, it was assumed that the probability distributions are mixtures of normal distributions. Table 2 shows the fit indicators (BIC, CAIC, classification error) for models with an increasing number of extracted profiles. To ensure that potential later improvements of fit indicators were not missed, we estimated three models with subsequent declining indicators. Thus, profile solutions were estimated for up to and including eight models. Both the four-profile model with the lowest BIC value and the five-profile model with the lowest CAIC value indicate a good fit. Moreover, the corresponding classification errors for the four- and five-profile models are very similar. Surprisingly, in the five-profile solution, the size of the fourth cluster is larger than that of the corresponding fourth cluster for the estimated four-profile solution. Although the data seems to favour the four- and the five-profile model, model fit only increases meaningfully until a three-profile solution (see Figure 1). Considering this, it seems reasonable to concentrate on the four-profile model for further investigation.

Table 2

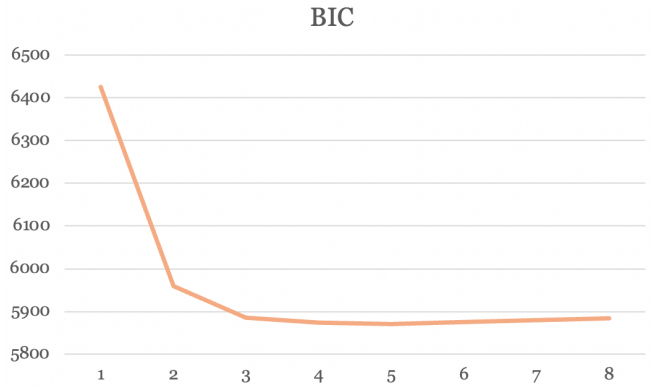
LPA Model Fit Evaluation Information

Nprof	LL	Npar	BIC	AIC	CAIC	Classification error	Entropy R^2	R^2
1	-3043.45	55	6425.53	6196.89	6480.53	0.00	1.00	1.00
2	-2798.45	59	5960.16	5714.9	6019.16	0.05	.84	.86
3	-2748.89	63	5885.66	5623.77	5948.66	0.09	.78	.79
4	**-2730.42**	**67**	**5873.35**	**5594.83**	**5940.35**	**0.10**	**.78**	**.77**
5	-2717.15	71	5871.44	5576.29	5942.44	0.11	.79	.78
6	-2706.60	75	5874.96	5563.19	5949.96	0.16	.74	.69
7	-2696.44	79	5879.28	5550.88	5958.28	0.16	.75	.70
8	-2686.86	83	5884.76	5539.73	5967.76	0.14	.79	.74

Note. Nprof = Number of profiles. LL = Value of the loglikelihood. Npar = Number of parameters. BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. AIC = Akaike's Information Criterion. CAIC = Consistent Akaike's Information Criterion.

Figure 1

Plotting BIC Values for Different Profile Solutions

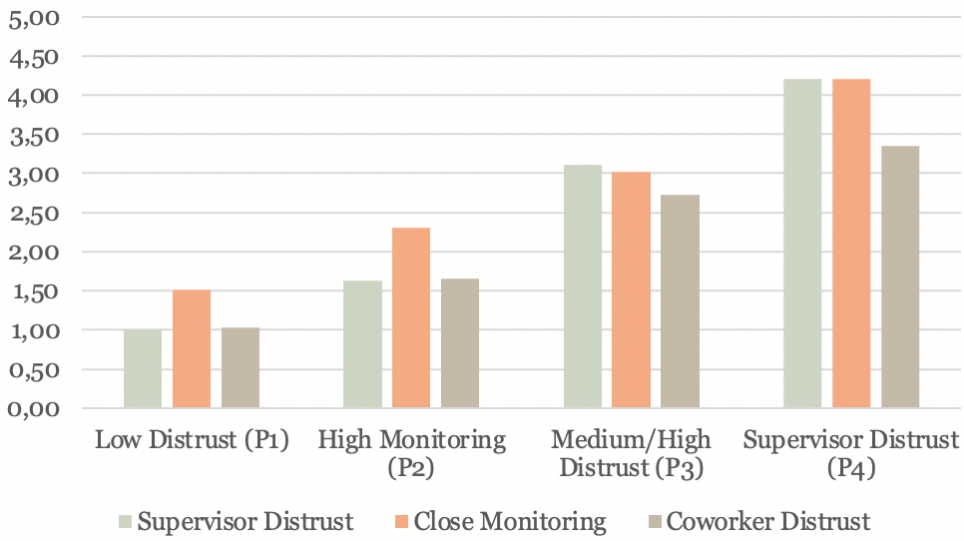


Note. The X-axis shows the increasing number of extracted profiles.

Looking now at the individual clusters of the four-profile model solution (see Figure 2). The first profile (39.9%) combines relatively low levels for all distrust measures. Thus, we labelled this profile "Low Distrust". Moreover, the values for supervisor and co-worker distrust are closely followed by slightly higher values on close monitoring. For the second profile (31.9%), values on all variables increase by approximately 0.6-0.8 scale points per distrust variable. The biggest increase and highest value can be found for close monitoring. For employees clustered in this profile, distrust seems to be characterised by close monitoring; thus, this profile was labelled "High Monitoring". For the third profile (22.4%), values across the supervisor distrust and close monitoring measure are comparable but somewhat smaller for co-worker distrust. As this profile seemed to have grouped employees with medium to high distrust values, we labelled this profile "Medium/High Distrust". Here, distrust levels for supervisors and close monitoring are close to each other, with slightly lower levels for co-worker distrust.

Figure 2

Distrust Variables Across the Clusters of the Four-Profile Solution



The fourth profile (5.8%) is the overall smallest profile and combines the highest distrust values across this estimated solution. Employees with high levels of co-worker distrust and even higher values of distrust relating to employees' supervisors (supervisor distrust, close monitoring) were grouped together. Accordingly, this profile was termed “Supervisor Distrust”. In particular, the “Medium/High Distrust” Profile (P3) and the “Supervisor Distrust” Profile (P4) are in line with the hypothesis of the first research aim, that higher levels of different distrust sources cluster together. Moreover, in line with the prediction, it seems that there are different combinations of the perceived distrust variables possible, such as the “High Monitoring” Profile (P2) characterised by in particular high levels of close monitoring. Table 3 further displays information on the profiles for the four-profile model.

Table 3

Sizes and Mean Values of the Profiles for the Four-Profile Solution

Construct	Profile 1 Low Distrust	Profile 2 High Monitoring	Profile 3 Medium/High Distrust	Profile 4 Supervisor Distrust
Size	39.9%	31.9%	22.4%	5.8%
Supervisor Distrust	1	1.63	3.11	4.2
Close Monitoring	1.52	2.3	3.02	4.2
Co-worker Distrust	1.03	1.65	2.72	3.35

Association Between Predictor Variables and Profile Membership

Next, to investigate the second research aim, we conducted an ANOVA with the predictor variables as the independent and cluster membership as the dependent variable. Tables 4 and 5 contain predictor and outcome variables’ mean levels and frequencies for the four-profile solution. Figure 3 shows the frequencies of the three

work locations (on-site, hybrid, and remote) across the four profiles. Moreover, Figure 4 visualises the means for the continuous outcome and predictor variables across all profiles of the estimated four-profile solution. We estimated partial eta squared as a measure of the strength of association.

Assumption Checks

A Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to check the assumption of normality. Results indicate a significant departure from normality for individual task proficiency (W = 0.84, p-value < .001), task proactivity (W = 0.94, p-value < .001), CM (W = 0.98, p-value < .001), and work location (W = 0.77, p-value < .001). However, values for skewness range from -1.34 to 0.43, and kurtosis values between -1.5 to 2.21, indicating the deviation from normality to be relatively small. Thus, we can proceed with the analysis as planned. The assumption of homogeneity of variance, checked with Levene's test, was not met for individual task proficiency ($F = 7.86$, $p < .001$), task proactivity ($F = 6.02$, $p < .001$), and CM ($F = 2.35$, $p < .001$). Thus, for these variables, we conducted a Welch's ANOVA with a robust test of equality means. For work location, this assumption was met.

Conspiracy Mentality

The one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a significant association between CM and latent profile membership ($F_{Welch}(3,104) = 3.11$, $p = .03$). The mean CM value in the “Low Distrust” Profile (P1) is somewhat smaller than for the “High Monitoring” Profile (P2). However, the overall lowest values on CM are found for the “Medium/High Distrust” Profile (P3). This comes as a surprise as aligned with P1 and P2; we would expect an increase in CM for the profiles that display higher perceived distrust values, respectively, to the profiles displaying lower perceived distrust values. The highest mean value for CM is found in the “Supervisor Distrust” Profile (P4). During the multiple comparisons, no significant differences across the profiles were

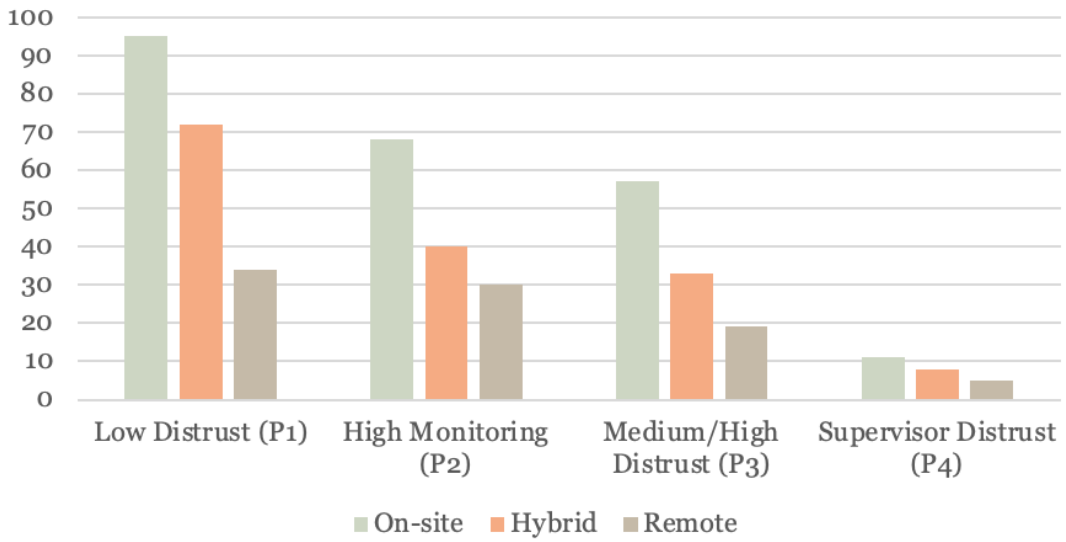
detected (see Table 4). However, for the "Low Distrust" Profile (P1) and the "Supervisor Distrust" Profile (P4), CM's mean value is nearing significance differentiation (p = .06). Moreso, we detected an overall medium effect (η2 = .17).

Work Location

Work location did not yield any significant results ($F(3, 471) = 0.23$, p = .88). Concretely, the work location categories were somewhat equally distributed over the four estimated profiles (see percentages in Table 5). Thus, this variable does not appear to associate with the estimated employee profiles (η2 < .01).

Figure 3

Frequency of Work Location for the Profiles in the Four-Profile Solution



Note. Bars refer to employees working on-site, hybrid or remote. Y-axis is given in full numbers.

Table 4

Predictors and Outcome's Mean Levels and Differences Across the Profiles

Construct	Profile 1 Low Distrust	Profile 2 High Monitoring	Profile 3 Medium/High Distrust	Profile 4 Supervisor Distrust
Predictor				
Conspiracy Mentality	4.01 (1.59)	4.17 (1.43)	3.36 (1.15)	4.73 (1.24)
Outcome				
Task Proficiency	$4.56\ (0.71)_{P2,P3,P4}$	$4.32\ (0.59)_{P1,P3}$	$3.57\ (0.83)_{P1,P2,P3}$	$4.13\ (0.50)_{P1,P3}$
Task Proactivity	2.93 (1.26)	3.05 (1.04)	3.17 (0.94)	3.40 (1.01)

Note. SD = Standard deviations. Values in parentheses refer to standard deviations.

Subscripts indicate that profiles were significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 5

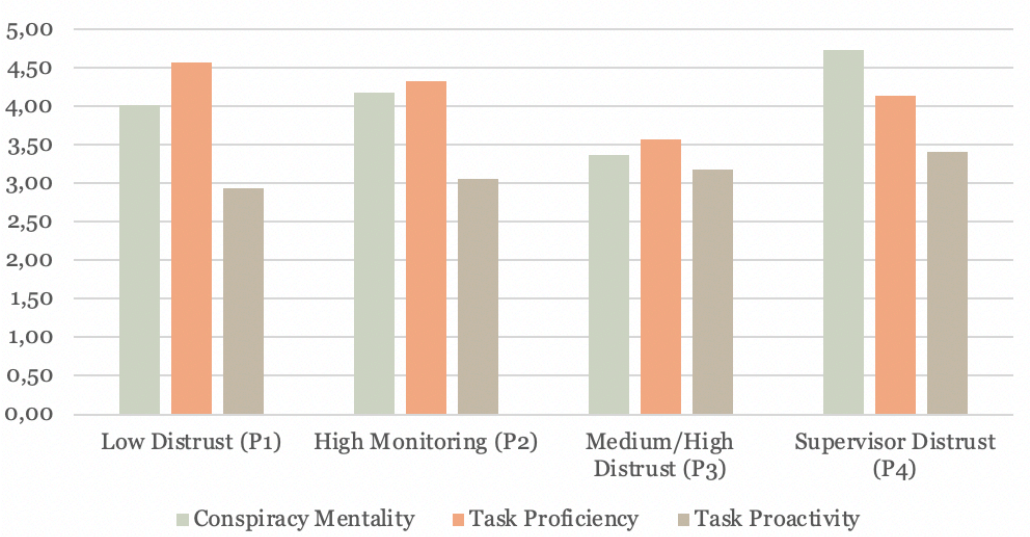
Frequency and Proportions Across the Profiles of the Categorical Predictor Variable

Construct	Profile 1 Low Distrust	Profile 2 High Monitoring	Profile 3 Medium/High Distrust	Profile 4 Supervisor Distrust
Predictor	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Work Location	201	138	109	24
On-site	95 (48.9%)	68 (49.3%)	57 (52.3%)	11 (45.8%)
Hybrid	72 (35.8%)	40 (29.0%)	33 (30.3%)	8 (33.3%)
Remote	34 (16.9%)	30 (21.7%)	19 (17.4%)	5 (20.8%)

Note. N = Frequency of employees. Values in parentheses refer to proportions

Figure 4

Mean Levels of Predictor and Outcome Variables for the Four-Profile Solution



Association Between Outcome Variables and Profile Membership

In an aim to answer the third research question, we used an ANOVA to investigate the association of estimated profile membership with the work performance variables. Outcome variables were entered as the independent variables and cluster membership as the dependent variable in the analysis. Employees score higher on task proficiencies than on task proactivity across all profiles. Moreover, whether the work performance measure increased or decreased in mean value across the profiles differed. For task proficiency, we noticed an overall decrease; for task proactivity, there was an overall increase. Estimated distrust profile membership seems to be stronger associated with some forms of work performance (task proficiency; $\eta 2 = .271$) than others (task proactivity; $\eta 2 = .01$).

Individual Task Proficiency

The analysis of variance revealed significant results for task proficiency ($F_{\text{Welch}}(3, 106) = 37.17$, $p < .001$). Moreso, only for this outcome variable did we find significant mean differences between the estimated profiles of the four-profile solution (see Table 4). For the “Low Distrust” Profile (P1), we can observe the highest overall

mean value of task proficiency. This profile is significantly different to the "High Monitoring" (P2) and the "Medium/High Distrust" Profile (P3). The "High Monitoring" (P2) Profile's mean for task proficiency is somewhat smaller and significantly different to the mean for the "Low Distrust" Profile (P1) and the "Medium/High Distrust" Profile (P3). For the "Medium/High Distrust" Profile (P3), we can observe the overall lowest mean on task proficiency. Moreover, the mean of task proficiency in the "Medium/High Distrust" Profile (P3) is significantly different from the means in all the other profiles (P1, P2, and P3). Thus, for task proficiency, an overall decline is observed from P1 to P4. This would align with the idea that work performance decreases with increasing perceived distrust.

Surprisingly, the mean for the "Supervisor Distrust" Profile (P4) is significantly higher than the mean for the "Medium/High Distrust" Profile (P3). As we can observe the overall highest values for perceived distrust for this profile, we would have expected the overall lowest values on task proficiency. The means for the "Low Distrust" Profile (P1) and the "High Monitoring" Profile (P2) are still higher. However, only the difference between P4 and P1 is significant. This might indicate that depending on the most prominent distrust variable in a given cluster, the effects on task proficiency differ. So, for instance, the "Supervisor Distrust" Profile (P4) indicates that the highest values on perceived distrust by supervisors are not necessarily the best predictor for overall lowest values on the work performance measure of task proficiency.

Individual Task Proactivity

The analysis of variance on task proactivity and estimated profile membership did not yield any significant results ($F_{\text{Welch}}(3,103) = 2.12$, $p = .1$). The mean for task proactivity slightly but steadily increases between the "Low Distrust" Profile (P1) and the "Supervisor Distrust" Profile (P4). Thus, we find lower values of proactivity for profiles with lower perceived distrust and higher values of proactivity for profiles with

higher perceived distrust. This finding is unexpected as most current literature assumes negative consequences from increased distrust. Thus, this finding could give the indication that perceived distrust might have a positive effect on task proactivity as a work performance measure. However, the differences between the means of the different profiles (P1-P4) are not significant (Table 4). Thus, interpretation should be made with caution.

Discussion

This paper examined employee clusters based on three variables assessing perceived distrust. The first aim was to identify meaningful constellations of distrust sources. We found that a four-profile solution fitted the data best, resulting in the following four clusters: “Low Distrust” Profile (P1), “High Monitoring” Profile (P2), “Medium/High Distrust” Profile (P3), and “Supervisor Distrust” Profile (P4). In the second aim, we looked into predictors of the estimated four profile-solution. CM was significantly associated with latent profile membership, with a medium effect size. In line with our prediction, we observed a general tendency of higher CM scores for clusters consisting of higher values in distrust sources. However, CM did not significantly differ between the four estimated profiles (P1-P4). For the predictor work location, we hypothesised that employees working remotely would be most prominent in clusters with overall high distrust levels. However, we could not confirm this, as work location did not significantly differ across latent profile membership in the data. For the third research aim, we looked into two facets of work performance as an outcome of perceived distrust. The analysis of variance with estimated cluster membership showed significant results for individual task proficiency but not for proactivity. However, an exciting observation is that the direction of the two work performance measures’ means across the profiles is contrasting. On the one side, we found that task proficiency mean values were smaller among profiles that contain

higher values of perceived distrust sources. On the other side, for task proactivity, smaller values on this variable were more common for profiles that have lower values of distrust sources.

Theoretical Implications

Estimating Profiles of Perceived Distrust

When interpreting the findings of the first research aim, it seems possible to cluster employees' distrust sources meaningfully. With only 40% of employees clustered into the "Low Distrust" Profile (P1), it becomes apparent that perceived distrust is a potent variable for the work context. Additionally, it appears that there is a certain group of employees, those clustered in the "High Monitoring" Profile (P2), which predominantly experience only one of the perceived distrust sources. Moreso, for overall higher values on all perceived distrust sources we observe a general tendency to cluster together (e.g., the "Medium/High Distrust" Profile (P3) and the "Supervisor Distrust" Profile (P4)). Thus, the estimated profiles across the four-profile solution offer a novel way to make sense of perceived distrust and a new way to investigate important predictors and outcomes for a set of perceived distrust sources.

Investigating Predictor Variables

Next, the second research aim's findings appear a bit mixed. On the one hand, we found CM significantly associated with the estimated four profile-solution, indicating that CM does not only relate to distrusting others (Freeman et al., 2020) but also to perceived distrust by others in oneself. Moreover, these significant results indicate that CM is a potentially meaningful variable in organisational research. Concretely, as we observed the highest CM values for the profile with the overall highest values on perceived supervisor distrust and close monitoring, it seems feasible that in particular relationships involving a power imbalance relate to CM. Thus, making CM an exciting variable for research into dyadic supervisor relations.

On the other hand, we could not find a significant association for the predictor of work location. Regarding these non-significant results, there seem to be several possible explanations. Here, we mention the two most obvious in the studied context. First, the assessment of work location might miss some relevant aspects for the association with latent profile membership. For instance, whether the employee has power (or to which extent) over the decision on where to work might be more relevant for the association with perceived distrust. Second, it could also be that work location is not an appropriate variable for the type of analysis used. Concretely, it could be that work location does not associate with latent profile membership. Nevertheless, work location could yield valuable information when used in different analyses.

Investigating Outcome Variables

Lastly, interpreting the findings of the third research aim. Only one work performance outcome– task proficiency was significantly associated with latent profile membership. Thus, the means for this variable significantly differed between the four estimated profiles of perceived distrust. Partial eta squared values were distinct for the two work performance measures, with a large effect size for task proficiency and a small effect size for proactivity. To recap, we observed that smaller task proficiency values seemed to match more with profiles consisting of higher distrust source values. While for task proactivity, this was the other way around. This is an exciting finding as it indicates that perceived distrust can have both adverse and positive outcomes when differentiating between facets of work performance. Notably, we did not find significant results for both work performance measures, so these findings need to be interpreted with caution.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study made use of cross-sectional data. Thus, we cannot make any inferences about causality. Moreover, data collection has been limited to self-reports in

the form of online questionnaires. However, as the primary focus of the study was on the estimation of profiles of perceived distrust, the use of self-report data seems reasonable. Nevertheless, it would be crucial to validate the estimated profiles found in this study. This could be done by a latent profile analysis on a different sample or by further cluster validation. More concretely, it would be interesting for future research to investigate cluster validation by using a lab-based study to, for instance, manipulate the predictor variables in the lab setting and then measure perceived distrust by means of a self-assessment. On a different note, as the assumption of normality and homogeneity of variance was not met for various variables, results should be interpreted with caution.

Additional Variables

Although we incorporated a well-chosen selection of predictor and outcome variables, we also recognise that there are many other variables that go beyond the scope of this study that would offer a great potential to benefit current research. For future research, we also offer two exciting variables, one predictor – organisational conspiracy beliefs and one outcome variable - counterproductive work behaviour.

Organisational Conspiracy Beliefs. While we aimed to account for a more general tendency to believe in conspiracy beliefs, it would be interesting to investigate organisational conspiracy beliefs. These conspiracy narratives are more directed at the workplace, for instance, the belief in managers or supervisors acting to achieve some secret scheme for their own gain (Douglas & Leite, 2017). Furthermore, Douglas and Leite (2017) found conspiracy beliefs about the workplace to associate with increased turnover intentions and decreased organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Thus, making it a valuable variable for organisational-specific outcomes.

Counterproductive Work Behaviour. Moreover, future research could broaden the picture by simultaneously investigating positive and negative outcomes of

distrust, for instance, by including counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) next to performance indicators. CWB refers to dysfunctional and harmful work behaviour directed at the organisation or members of the organisation (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). Previous research has investigated the connection between CWB and low trust (Zheng et al., 2017) as well as between CWB and psychological contract breach (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018). However, as trust and distrust should be viewed as related but distinct concepts (Lewicki et al., 1998), it is not reasonable to convey these results one to one for distrust. Thus, current literature could benefit from investigating this relation.

Conclusions

The tendency to dismiss distrust simply as the absence of trust has led to a considerable research imbalance (Min, 2018). Moreso, current literature overwhelmingly overlooks the perspective of the person feeling distrusted by others (Lanaj et al., 2018). LPA seems beneficial to help close this gap. Based on three perceived distrust sources, we could identify meaningful clusters of employees for a range of predictor and outcome variables. Estimated profiles of perceived distrust were only significantly associated with a negative predictor and outcome variables (CM, decreased task proficiency). For work location and task proactivity, there was no association to latent profile membership. Future research is vital to validate estimated profiles with the aim of advancing understanding of perceived distrust in the workplace. Remarkably, the direction of the mean values for task proactivity across the estimated profiles indicate that perceived distrust could potentially also have positive outcomes in the workplace–which too could be an exciting direction for future research.

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Appendix A

Table A6

Factor Loadings of the Model

Item	Factor Loadings					
	Supervisor Distrust	Close Monitoring	Co-worker Distrust	Task Proficiency	Task Proactivity	Conspiracy Mentality
Supervisor Distrust						
OVER THE PAST MONTH my supervisor…						
…doubted my ability to perform my job	0.879					
… questioned my knowledge about the work that needed to be done	0.855		0.107			
…expressed lack of confidence in my work skills	0.928					
… said things that suggested she or he did not trust that I was working hard	0.815					
Close Monitoring						
It sometimes feels like my supervisor is always looking over my shoulder.	0.182	0.738		-0.111		
I'm careful not to do things that my supervisor might disapprove of.		0.478		0.190	-0.101	
My supervisor kept pretty close tabs on me.		0.894		-0.113	0.105	
I was monitored too much.	0.125	0.730		-0.115		

Co-worker Distrust						
This month, one or more co-worker (s) …						
…doubted my ability to perform my job			0.926			
… questioned my knowledge about the work that needed to be done			0.959			
… expressed lack of confidence in my work skills			0.951			
… doubted my work values			0.959			
… was displeased with the principles that guide my work behavior			0.819			
… questioned my work integrity			0.872			
Task Proficiency						
I ensured my tasks were completed properly.				0.792		
I carried out the core parts of my job well.				0.936		
I completed core tasks well using the standard procedures.				0.904		
Task Proactivity						
I initiated better ways of doing my core tasks.					0.900	
I came up with ideas to improve the way in which I do my core tasks.					0.928	
I made changes to the way I do my core tasks.					0.875	

Conspiracy Mentality						
I think that…						
…many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about.						0.796
…politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions.				0.103	-0.102	0.821
…government agencies closely monitor all citizens.						0.762
…events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities.				-0.104	0.121	0.866
…there are secret organisations that greatly influence political decisions.						0.819