

Distrusted? – Criticize Carefully!

Jana Niemann*, Barbara Wisse*, Diana Rus*, Nico W. Van Yperen*, Kai Sassenberg**
 *University of Groningen **University of Tübingen

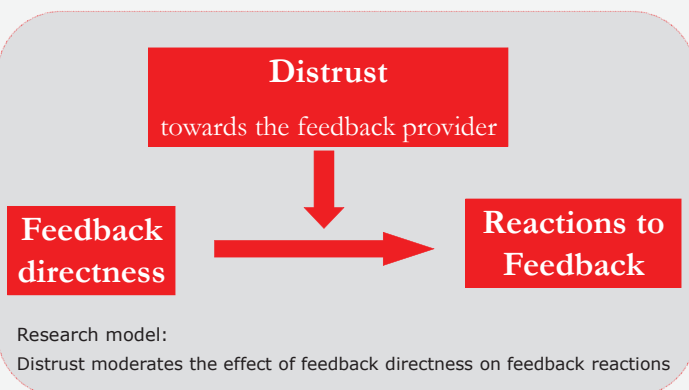
Theoretical background

Negative feedback is essential in organizations to promote learning but it can also elicit undesirable reactions. To attenuate undesirable reactions to negative feedback, the feedback may be phrased in a less direct manner (i.e., less bluntly and in a more roundabout manner), particularly when the relationship between the feedback receiver and the provider is characterized by distrust. **Distrusting** individuals vigilantly pay attention to cues indicating potential threats in another's behavior and therefore, are more likely to pay attention to and be affected by the framing of negative feedback.



Hypothesis

Negative feedback directness is positively associated with undesirable feedback reactions, but only if the feedback receiver experiences stronger distrust towards the feedback provider.



Method

Teachers (N = 38; M_{age} = 48.22) and students (N = 308; M_{age} = 24.85) from a vocational training institute filled out questionnaires.

At the **teacher**-level we assessed *teachers' negative feedback directness*. At the **student**-level we assessed *students' distrust towards their teachers* and *students' feedback reactions*.

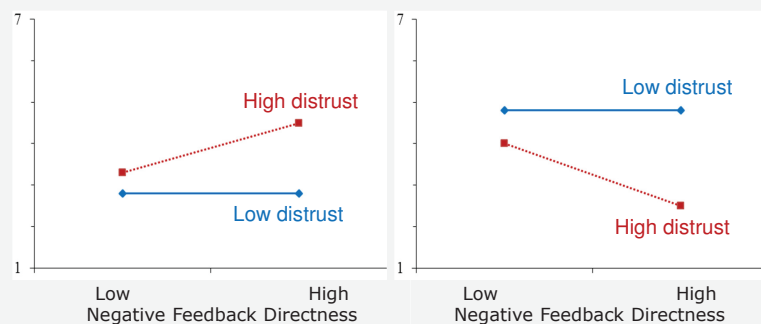
Because students were nested within classes and teachers, we analyzed the data using multilevel analysis.

Multilevel results

Feedback reactions

Anger & Shame

Motivation to Improve, Perceived Autonomy & Positive Feedback to Teacher



Conclusion

If the relationship is burdened by distrust, framing negative feedback in a less direct manner is an effective tool to attenuate undesirable feedback reactions, including negative emotions of anger and shame and low levels of motivation to improve, perceived autonomy and positive feedback to teachers.