

**Untangling The Effect of Multiple Communication Errors on Trust in Suspect Interviews**

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### **Abstract**

Trust within suspect interviews is important to elicit information. When suspect interviewers make one error, it can affect trust negatively; however, there is little known about the effect of multiple errors on suspect trust. Therefore, the current study assessed the relationship between trust and multiple errors, using Mayer et al.'s (1995) model of trust (ability, benevolence, integrity). This study employed a between-subject design to test the effect of multiple errors on trust. To do so, participants ( $N = 36$ ) were randomly allocated in three groups: zero-errors, one-errors, five-errors. Participants imagined themselves in a theft-scenario and were shown a first-person video portraying the theft. Afterwards, a mock suspect interview was conducted with corresponding number of errors. Contrary to previous research, one error had no impact on trust or provision of information. Against expectations, trust was not affected by five errors either, there was also no group difference in trust levels. Ability, benevolence, or integrity were not affected by the number of errors as well. The counterintuitive nature of these results suggests reconsideration of errors and their influences on trust. Continued efforts are needed to understand how trust is influenced by errors in suspect interviews, and how errors influence perceptions of trust.

*Keywords:* trust, trustworthiness, suspect interviews, communication errors, multiple errors, investigative interviews, ability, benevolence, integrity

## Introduction

When law enforcements conduct investigations, they often rely on suspect interviews to gather information (Brimbal et al. 2019). The information provided by suspects may be crucial to ensure justice. Thus, the interviews aim at eliciting information from the suspect (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). Ideally, interviewers are working methodically and structured to ensure that information is provided by adhering to their interviewing policies, yet interviewers themselves also emphasises the importance of trust with the suspects to elicit information provision (Roberts, 2010; Oleszkiewicz et al., 2023). Trust also provides opportunities to improve the relationship between interviewer and suspect (Abbe & Brandon, 2012; Vanderhallen & Vervaeke, 2014; Yarbrough et al., 2013). In that context, trust is of pivotal importance, as this may encourage suspects to disclose more information. However, the establishing of trust can be significantly compromised, leading to less information that could be obtained by the interviewer (Thielgen et al., 2022).

Communication errors can significantly compromise trust in suspect interviews (Yarbrough, 2013). The existing body of research suggests that individual communication errors negatively impact trust, however it is unknown whether the suspects' perceptions of the interviewer changes when multiple errors happen. This gap is of significance as suspects' perceptions directly influences their willingness to trust and consequently to share information. At the same time much less is known how multiple errors affect trust compared to individual errors.

When addressing the impact of multiple errors, it may improve understanding of how communication errors affect trust in suspect interviews, thus contributing to more effective interviewing practices. It may also help to understand how suspects' perceptions of trust are influenced by communication errors. Therefore, the present thesis examines the effect of communication errors on trust in suspect interviews. With a specific focus on comparing the effects of single and multiple errors on trust, posing the research questions: "What is the impact of a communication error on the receiver's trust?" and "Is there a difference between the impact of a communication error on the receiver's trust when just one or multiple error are being made?". In the following sections, a quick overview of trust in suspect interview is given, as well as their relation to errors.

## Trust, Suspect Interviews, and Errors

Trust has become a focal point of suspect interview research recently. Researchers and practitioners themselves now agree that building trust is one of the key factors for eliciting information from the suspect (Brimbal et al., 2020; Legood et al., 2022; Oleszkiewicz et al., 2023). Trust is defined as a psychological state, in which the suspect is ready to accept some degree of vulnerability towards the interviewer whose action cannot be controlled, while still expecting positive outcomes of them (Mayer et al., 1995; Oleszkiewicz et al., 2023). A suspect, then, will look for cues to decide whether the interviewer is trustworthy. Mayer et al. (1995) propose that three key factors help an individual in deciding to trust.

First, *ability* would refer to the apparent competencies and skills the interviewer has in their domain. An interviewer who appears as professional and sufficiently skilled, is likely to be trusted. Ability may be demonstrated within suspects interviews by competence and expertise on the case and experiences in interviewing. Demonstrating a lack of knowledge on the case, then consequently undermines trust. Secondly, *benevolence* is the extent to which the interviewer wants to help the suspect when there is no extrinsic reward to do so. Benevolence can be approached by showing empathy and attending to the needs of suspects (Brimbal et al., 2020). This may be undermined when the interviewer fails to understand a situation from the suspect perspective. Thirdly, *integrity* refers to perceiving the interviewer as someone who is authentic, who has a firm set of standards and principles. Interviewers demonstrate integrity when they are non-coercive and do not try to deceive the suspect (Brimbal et al., 2020). All these factors can instigate trust to develop, but they also facilitate positive expectations the suspect has on the interviewer. The suspects' willingness to trust depends on this assessment since it gives them more reasons to be vulnerable. A reduction in their perceived uncertainty will lead suspects to trust more and their willingness to share information improves as well (Alison et al., 2013; Collins & Carthy, 2018; Brimbal et al., 2019). Although perceived ability, benevolence and integrity can lead trust to grow, they are revaluated based on added information present. Naturally there are communication errors that can have a negative impact on trust (Yarbrough et al., 2013).

According to Oostinga et al. (2018a) three types of communication errors can be identified, namely (1) contextual errors, (2) factual errors, and (3) judgement errors. Contextual errors revolve around settings and procedures, they may happen when the interviewer uses investigation jargon which is then not understood by the suspect. Factual errors are mistakes

made about objective facts. Judgement errors are subjective, they happen when the interviewer fails to acknowledge the needs or emotions of the suspect.

While these errors might seem avoidable, during stressful situation they can occur. Upon experiencing an error, suspects may reevaluate the interviewer's trustworthiness. For example, suspects who are addressed by the wrong name (i.e. factual error) could interpret that the interviewer is lacking competence (Ferrin et al., 2007). When suspects experience a judgement error, they might feel like the interviewer treats them unfairly, thus believing the interviewer is lacking both integrity and benevolence (Ferrin et al., 2007; Brimbal et al., 2020). That is substantiated in the fact that judgement errors had a negative effect on trust and the relationship between suspect and interviewer (Oostinga et al., 2018b).

Although a single situation where the interviewer demonstrated lacking competence is often considered less harmful, since people can make mistakes (Haesevoets et al., 2015), situations where integrity or benevolence are questioned reflect more detrimental on the interviewer's trustworthiness. Detriments to trust also cause suspects to engage in rather defensive or aggressive communication (Zeffane et al., 2011). Multiple errors might further instigate negative interview outcomes, especially given that judgement errors involve misinterpreting suspects, and once people make such an error in a conversation, another would likely follow (Clark & Brennan, 1991).

What multiple errors may also signal to the suspect is that their expectations about the interviewer might not be that applicable. The suspects' expectations are detrimental for trust to develop (Mayer et al., 1995). Suspects deciding to share information with the interviewer, expect that the interviewer does not act counterintuitive to those expectations of ability, benevolence, or integrity. Depending on whether or not their willingness to trust was met with a positive demeanour, suspects will reinforce existing positive beliefs about the interviewer's trustworthiness (Lewicki et al., 2006). When the opposite happens, negative beliefs are reinforced, leading to more uncertainty, and giving the suspect more reason not to engage in sharing information (Brimbal et al., 2020). Because communication errors may lead the suspects to infer information on whether or not to trust, it becomes of significance to investigate how trust is influenced by multiple errors. Therefore, to further investigate the effect of multiple errors on suspects' trust, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

**Hypothesis:** Trust towards the interviewer will be negatively affected by errors; however, as the number of errors increases, it is anticipated that trust towards the interviewer

decreases more. The interviewer's ability, benevolence and integrity decrease when an error occurs, and the decrease is anticipated to greater, as the number of errors increases.

## Methods

### Design

This study used a between-subjects design. Participants were sequentially assigned to the conditions. The independent variable was 'Errors' with three levels and the dependent variable was 'Trust' with one level. Participants were instructed to imagine themselves committing shoplifting, by watching a video that showed the theft of a t-shirt inside a clothing store, filmed in point-of-view. Afterwards, they were introduced to a suspect interviewer, who performed a mock suspect interview with the participants.

### Participants

The participants were recruited through convenience sampling, which included reaching out to friends in the researcher's network groups (19 participants), using flyers and approaching students on campus (2 participant), or using the study credit system SONA (15 participants). The sample consisted of 36 university students. Students who participated via SONA received one credit as compensation. Inclusion criteria were formulated as being above 18 years of age, and sufficient English skills, given the international nature of the university.

No reasons or withdrawals were present to remove any participants from the sample set. Therefore, the final sample group consisted of 8 Dutch participants, 18 German participants, and 10 participants from other nations ( $M_{age} = 22.7$ ,  $SD_{age} = 2.36$ ,  $range = 19-28$ ). Exactly half of participants were female.

### Materials

Due to the study's focus on suspect interviews, the experiment took place in face-to-face. Any questionnaires were provided with Qualtrics©2024. The first-person video was shot with an iPhone inside a clothing store, after receiving permission from the owner. Furthermore, the computational and statistical programme R (Version 4.3.2, 2023-10-32) was used to analyse the data set.

**Scenario, Video, and Script.** Participants received a vignette for them to imagine themselves in a shop-lifting scenario. (see Appendix A). The student decides to go shopping on an extremely tight budget. Later, police letter invites them to an interview about a recent shoplifting incident. The vignette contained background information such living situation, financial situation, and the situation in the store. Additionally, their motive was described as

wanting to buy new clothes in order to impress an upcoming date partner. The vignette instructed participants to either attempt to prove their innocence or to confess if they felt that denying would be pointless. A mock crime video was selected following the methodology successfully adapted by Riesthuis et al. (2022). The first-person video pictures the participant inside a clothing store, looking through a clothing rack. After the student spots a t-shirt, the student looks around, ensuring that nobody can spot them. The t-shirt is then put into a bag, and the student walks away. For each condition, an interview script was created (see Appendix B) with corresponding number of errors. The script created authenticity in participant interactions by addressing the participants by their name and by asking personal questions. The script also allowed for the controlled manipulation of errors by including follow up questions after errors occurred, seamlessly integrating them into the conversation flow.

## Manipulation

### Errors in the interview scripts

For each group one script was written. The zero-errors group had no errors. In the one-errors group, one judgement error was included, since judgement errors induce decreases in trust (Oostinga et al., 2018b). Lastly, in the five-errors groups, three factual and two judgement errors were included to investigate the effect of multiple errors on the suspect's trust.

As can be seen in Table 1, the one-errors group received one judgement error which stated: *“So you stole it because you were bored.”*. According to Oostinga et al. (2018) this encompasses a judgement error, alluding to an incorrect statement about the suspects intentions to steal, although the suspect's motive is different. The five-errors group received three factual errors (i.e.: wrong store name, wrong item stolen, wrong living situation), based solely on the definition of Oostinga et al. (2018a), and two judgement errors about the intentions of the theft and a character judgement (i.e.: stealing money out of boredom, not asking for money out of laziness), similarly describing subjective remarks about the suspect's internal qualities.

**Table 1**

### *Interviewer Script Lines, and Communication Errors in Condition Groups*

Interviewer Lines	
Communication errors in the zero-errors group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hello, what is your name?</li> <li>2. Welcome * (correct) name, do you know why you're here?</li> <li>3. Yes, yes. We are just here to clarify a few details. We were informed by the store Zizay of your presence during the last days. Can you tell me what you were doing in the store?</li> <li>4. Did you have any interaction with the employees there?</li> <li>5. Did you hold any conversations with other customers in the shop?</li> </ol>

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	6. On that day, we received intel about a stolen shirt. We got informed by the shop about your presence on the day a shirt got stolen, could you tell/explain what happened?
	7. So, you stole it because you did not have enough money.
	8. Nonetheless, why did you not ask others for money? Were you too ashamed to do so?
	9. Did you notice anything strange that day?
	10. Were you aware of the cameras around the store?
	11. We have looked into your living situation. Seems like you live on campus?
	12. Okay, I have written it down. [pretends to write down things]
	13. How did you get home?
	14. That would be enough for now. We'll be in touch regarding any further steps in the investigation. If you need to talk to a counsellor, the front desk can arrange a meeting for you. Thank you for your time.
Communication errors in one-errors group	7. So, you stole it because you were bored. ( <i>Judgment</i> )
Communication errors in five-errors group	3. Yes. We are just here to clarify a few details. We were informed by the Appel en Ei of your presence during the last days. Can you tell me what you were doing? ( <i>factual - wrong store</i> )
	6. On that day, we received intel about stolen jeans. We got informed by the shop about your presence on the day the jeans got stolen, could you tell/explain what happened? ( <i>factual - wrong item</i> )
	7. So, you stole it because you were bored. ( <i>Judgment</i> )
	8. Nonetheless, why did you not ask others for money? Were you too lazy to do so? ( <i>Judgment</i> )
	11. We have looked into your living situation. Seems like you live with your parents? ( <i>factual - living situation</i> )

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*Note.* The full scripts can be found in Appendix B. The interview lines of the zero-error script served as a foundation for the error scripts. Each line occurred right after participants responded. Lines presented in the one-error and five-error condition are in chronological order.

In the zero-errors script, closed questions were the most prominent to gather information of the participants presence and activities in the store (e.g., lines 4, 9, 10), investigating the participant's involvement (e.g. lines 2, 3, 5), and inquiring about their motivation (e.g. lines 6, 7, 8). The questions in the error groups were kept the same, ranging from clarifying details to making accusations to inquire about actions and motives, but contained either factual or judgement errors (e.g., errors scripts line 3 or 7).

## Trust

The variable trust was measured using 16 items of Mayer & Davis (1999) "Measures of Trust, Trustworthiness, and Performance Appraisal Perceptions" questionnaire. According to Mayer & Davis (1999), the questionnaire measures overall trust and three factors contributing to trustworthiness. Hence, in this study, only the trust items relating to ability (five), benevolence



(five), and integrity (six) were used. The items of this questionnaire were then adjusted to fit a suspect interview, by changing the items towards the suspect interviewer. For example, the items address the “Top management,” which was changed to “The Interviewer”.

As Mayer & Davis (1999) propose, a Likert-Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) was used as indication of participant’s agreement with the presented statements. One item of the integrity scale was reverse coded. The statement ratings were then averaged to create the scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Higher scores on the scale would indicate higher trust levels.

### **Manipulation Check**

A manipulation check was included in the questionnaire to see whether participants noticed the interviewer’s errors. The participants in the one-error and five-errors conditions, received a question asking whether they can remember if the interviewer has made any errors about them or the crime. They were then asked to indicate the number of errors. To understand whether the manipulation worked, it was necessary that a group difference existed in the errors they noticed, and that participants in the five-errors group noticed at least more than one error.

### **Procedure**

Participants received information about the duration, purpose, potential risks, and benefits about the study. Then, their informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and withdrawal was possible anytime. No identifiable information was collected, collected data was secured on servers provided by the Library, ICT Services & Archive (LISA) of the University. After the study, participants were asked how they felt to address any concerns that arose during the study. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee BMS/Domain Humanities & Social Sciences by the University of Twente (240514).

The vignette containing the scenario was presented on a laptop. Ensuring that questions about the procedure and scenario were clarified, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the scenario and then presented with the mock crime video. When participants were ready, the interviewer would enter to conduct the interview. The interview would open with asking about the name, then follow with general questions as to why the participant was invited to the interview. Then questions about the theft were asked to clarify details about the crime. All three conditions had the same number of script lines; the interviewer would purposefully make the errors at their given point of time.

Ending the interview, the interviewer would leave the room, and the instructor entered again. The instructor opened the questionnaire and let the participant fill it out. Lastly, the

instructor checked on the participant and debriefed them on the purpose of the study (for debrief, see appendix D). Ensuring consent again, the experiment was concluded.

### Data Analysis

For the data analysis, no missing values were present. The corresponding items of ability, benevolence, and integrity were then averaged for each participant to get the mean levels of the trustworthiness factors, and then summed and averaged to get a total trust score. Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted to assess the normality of the scales. Then, one-way ANOVA analyses were taken wherein the zero-, one-, and five error-groups run as the independent variable, and trust as the dependent variable. Moreover, three separate ANOVAs were run to evaluate the effects of ability, benevolence, and integrity and the zero-, one-, and five error-groups on the overall trust level.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

In Table 2, descriptive statistics and reliability estimates for the Trust Scale and ability, benevolence and integrity are presented. The table includes the means, standard deviations (*SDs*), and intercorrelations among the variables. It shows that ability, benevolence, and integrity are highly positive and significant correlated with trust.

**Table 2**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability, and Correlations of the Trust Scale, Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity*

Scales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Trust	2.68	0.72			
2. Ability	2.85	1.04	.83*		
3. Benevolence	2.22	0.81	.79*	.48*	
4. Integrity	2.92	0.79	.84*	.53*	.54*

*Note.*  $N = 36$

\*  $p < .05$

Given that the sample size was small, Shapiro-Wilk Tests were conducted to assess the normality of the scales. The results revealed that ability ( $W = 0.95, p = .105$ ), benevolence ( $W = 0.95, p = .149$ ), and integrity ( $W = 0.94, p = .062$ ) are normally distributed, suggesting that these scales are suitable for further analyses in the context of trust assessment within suspect interviews.

### Manipulation Check

To determine whether participants were able to identify the correct number of errors as well as the general perception of errors, it was required to see if there was a difference between the condition groups. Therefore, the zero-, one-, and five-errors groups were used as the independent variable and noticed errors was the dependent variable ('Noticed Errors'). Due to the limited sample size, a Kruskal-Wallis H Test was conducted to examine the differences among the three groups: zero-errors, one-errors, and five-errors groups.

Noticed Errors showed a significant difference between the groups  $\chi^2(2, n = 36) = 14.99$ ,  $p < .001$ . Post hoc pair-wise comparisons using the Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction revealed only statistical significance between the zero-errors group and five-errors group ( $p = .002$ ), and between the one-errors- and five-errors groups ( $p < .001$ ). Although the groups showed different trends to notice errors, still every group noticed errors.

**Table 3**

*Means, Standard Deviations and Interquartile Ranges for Noticed Errors*

Groups	Noticed Errors		Interquartile Ranges		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Lower Quartile</i>	<i>Upper Quartile</i>
Zero-Errors ( $n = 13$ )	1.08	1.26	1	0	2
One-Errors ( $n = 12$ )	0.75	0.75	1	0	1
Five-Errors ( $n = 11$ )	2.55	0.69	3	2	3

*Notes. N = 36*

As can be seen in Table 3, participants in the zero-errors group and one-errors group noticed on average the same number of errors. The zero-errors group showed slightly higher trend to notice an error compared to the one-errors group. Participants in the five-errors groups noticed on average more errors compared to the other errors groups. Though, the five-errors group noticed less errors than were present. Table 4 presents that there was variety in identifying the correct numbers of errors. Six participants in the zero-errors group noticed no error, but one participant noticed four errors. Participants in the one-errors group are evenly distributed between noticing zero or one error. Participants in the five-errors group did not notice more than three errors but at least one error. Not a single participant in that group indicated to zero errors.

**Table 4**

*Number of Errors noticed by Error-Groups*

Number of Noticed Errors	Groups			Total
	Zero-Errors ( <i>n</i> = 13)	One-Errors ( <i>n</i> = 12)	Five-Errors ( <i>n</i> = 11)	
0	6	5	0	11
1	2	5	1	8
2	4	2	3	9
3	0	0	7	7
4	1	0	0	1

*Note.* No participants noticed more than four errors. Participants in the five-errors group always noticed at least one error.

Taken all in, participants were able to easier notice when more than one error occurred. But at the same time, there were difficulties differentiating whether one error occurred, or no error occurred. Particularly, noteworthy is that participant underestimated five-errors. The results of the manipulation check suggest that the manipulation was partially successful. However, comparing different numbers of errors remains relevant to assess how trust is influenced by error frequency.

### Hypothesis Testing

To assess the first part of the hypothesis, trust towards the interviewer is not affected when no error happens but decreases as errors increase, a one-way ANOVA was run. In this, the error groups functioned as the independent variable and the trust as the dependent variable.

Similarly, for the second part of the hypothesis, ability, benevolence, and integrity decrease when an error occurs, decreasing more when five errors occur, three separate ANOVA analyses were run. In this, error groups run as the independent variable and ability, benevolence, and integrity run as the dependent variables. The mean trust scores and ANOVA results can be seen in Table 5.

There is no significant difference of the error groups in the suspect's overall level of trust. This indicates that trust towards the interviewer is not influenced by the presence of errors. The hypothesis that the number of errors cause a decrease in trust towards the interviewer must be rejected. The results of the separate ANOVAs support no significant effects of ability, benevolence, and integrity on the suspect's overall trust. This indicates errors had no effect on

trust across the perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity of the interviewer. The second part of the hypothesis must be rejected.

**Table 5**

*Mean Trust scores, Standard deviations, and One-Way ANOVA Statistics for each Group*

Trust Variable	Group						ANOVA	
	Zero-Errors		One-Errors		Five-Errors		<i>F</i> (2,33)	<i>p</i> value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Trust	2.70	0.70	2.78	0.72	2.56	0.80	0.26	.774
Ability	2.72	0.87	3.30	1.09	2.51	1.09	1.90	.165
Benevolence	2.26	0.92	2.30	0.76	2.09	0.79	0.20	.816
Integrity	3.05	0.77	2.74	0.91	2.98	0.74	0.52	.602

*Note.*  $N = 36$ .

Overall, trust was not influenced when considering the occurrence of (multiple) errors. The number of errors also proved not to change the suspects' trust irrespective of perceived levels of ability, benevolence, and integrity. Perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity appeared also unimportant for overall trust. The number of errors the interviewer committed was not relevant in any changes of trust within a suspect interview.

### **Additional Explorative Analyses**

To assess the relationship whether higher levels of trust are associated with greater willingness to provide information, a Pearson correlation test was conducted. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between trust and willingness to provide information,  $r = 0.45$ , 95% CI [0.15, 0.68],  $t(34) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .005$ .

### **Discussion**

Previous studies evaluated the importance of communication errors within suspect interviews (Oostinga et al., 2018a; 2018b; 2020). The present study was designed to understand the effect of multiple errors in suspect interviews, specifically focusing on examining trust. It was hypothesised that multiple errors decrease trust. Using Mayer et al.'s (1995) construct of trust, it was explored how trust was influenced by multiple errors. Therefore, participants were exposed to varying numbers of errors and their trust towards the interviewer was measured afterwards. The findings suggest that neither the number of errors nor the mere occurrence of errors significantly influence the trust between the suspect and the interviewer.

Inconsistent with both parts of the hypothesis, no meaningful differences in trust levels were found between the error groups, and ability, benevolence, and integrity. Contrary to earlier findings, suggesting that trust may decrease after experiencing an error (Oostinga et al., 2018b), no negative effect of errors on trust was observed in any of the groups.

One explanation could be that participants might have already formed initial trust judgements on the interviewer, which were resistant to be influenced by multiple errors. This is substantiated by Mayer et al.'s (1995) factor of propensity to trust, which describes people's tendency to trust, before any available data is present to inform trustworthiness. Colquitt et al. (2007) describes this trait as the most relevant factor for shaping trust even in the presence of trustworthiness cues. More so, this trait is individual to each participant. Meaning participants are different in their likelihood to trust someone. Campagna et al. (2021) provide evidence that when initial trust is formed, it may delay consequences caused by erroneous behaviour, where that initial trust buffers the effect of errors. So, when participants inform trust towards the interviewer, the errors might have not been influential enough to change their impression. Supported by the finding for no group differences of trust, it shows that trust is not influenced by the mere occurrence of errors but perhaps that their severity also matters.

Another explanation pertains to that very nature of errors. Communication errors are solely about what was said, they might cause a reaction in the conversation (Zeffane et al., 2011), yet not necessarily enough to decrease trust. Truong et al. (2020) explain that it is more about how you say something that matters more than the actual content of the message. For trust in order to see decreases, Druckman et al. (2019) explain that erroneous behaviour may be interpreted as incidental, but trust violations are more severe and may imply deeper flaws with the interviewer. Some participants might have not felt provoked by the design of the judgement or factual errors. When one factual error is passed off as incidental, participants might not think about it much. More so, 'Nonetheless, why did you not ask others for money? Were you too lazy to do so?', although this encompasses the elements of a judgement error (see Oostinga et al., 2018a), it is a directed question towards the participant and may have not caused participants to perceive that as a judgement about them. However, if those errors would have caused an integrity and benevolence violations, there would have been a stronger response on how to interpret the intentions and emotions of the interviewer (Van der Werff et al., 2022). Meaning, participants would have been more prompted to think about whether they are being treated fair or dishonest by the interviewer. They would try to understand whether the interviewer's errors are stemming

out of a negative orientation to them and not due to context. The design of errors might have appeared not severe enough to inflate trust.

Another explanation linked to errors, could be that participants had no clear stakes in the scenario. Compared to Oostinga et al. (2018b), who put the participants in an exam fraud scenario, where prosecution would lead to expulsion from studying, this study instructed participants to defend themselves or admit if they see fit and did not provide any stakes for them in the scenario. Mayer et al. (1995) and Schoorman et al. (2007) explain in order to enter a trusting relationship, a trustworthiness- and risk assessment is made by the suspect. They would then inform their own beliefs and the concurrent context against each other. Participants' unawareness of the errors might indicate that they did not fear any potential consequences arising from the interviewer's mistakes. As Uth et al. (2021) note, the higher participants perceive consequences, the more likely they would question the interviewer. When participants do not have reasons to believe that the situation involves risks, any trust beliefs may not be challenged (Lee et al., 2022). Further, when the judgement errors are not designed in such a way that they provoke reactions, participants might not interpret them as a detriment to themselves and let these errors go unnoticed. Similarly, when the factual errors contain only errors on the name of the store, or item stolen, they might not feel like they are at risk to be persecuted or fear other consequences if the law enforcements had their details wrong.

### **Limitations and future advice**

The researchers alternated between instructor and interviewer. Although this study employed standardized script lines, every researcher still conducted the interview differently in their expressions, their demeanour, their tone, and voice. For trust, this is of concern since contextual factors are commonly considered in making assessments on whom to trust (Hancock et al., 2023). Within suspect interviews, factors such as communication experience, similarity between interactors or subjective biases can influence how and if trust develops (Zeffane et al., 2011; Prevost et al., 2015; Patent, 2022). For example, Oostinga et al. (2018) used online interviews in order to account for individual differences in the interviewer. Although this study provided more realism for suspect through a real interview, future studies still may aim to standardise the interviewer by leaning towards using the same interviewer throughout the study.

Another limiting reason is the small sample size. Unfortunately, there were only a limited participant size for each condition. That leaves room for confounds to influence the trust measures. Oostinga et al. (2018b) used online interviews for accessibility and their effectiveness

in recreating social settings. This study opted for face-to-face interviews for increased immersion and realism. However, recruiting participants for such experiment turned out to be too difficult. Although this was a difficulty, this study still provided interesting looks into how communication errors and trust are something participants seemed able to feel. Nonetheless, future studies may aim to improve the sample size by maybe including the option to consider a mix between online interviews too.

Lastly, the scenario and corresponding errors have flaws. The scenario provided the participant with a lot of information to remember, some easier and some more difficult to remember. Comparing the errors on the item and living situation, these are relatively easier to remember. Decreasing the information for them to remember about their scenario could have helped to avoid overloading the participants. Additionally, the first factual error in the five-errors group contained wrong store names, however, these are not store names typically popular by students. Especially, given that the sample also consisted of non-Dutch students, these are intricate details to consider. Perhaps using brand names that are more familiar and easier to remember could have been better for participants to notice said factual errors and increase even more immersion.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine the impact of multiple communication errors on trust in suspect interviews, building on the trust framework established by Mayer et al. (1995). Contrary to expectations and previous findings by Oostinga et al. (2018b), neither the number of errors nor the occurrence of errors significantly reduced trust levels of suspects. The study indicated that participants often misremembered if an error occurred and consequently struggled to identify the correct number of errors in the conditions. While this study did not support previous research, it still contributed for understanding the interplay between communication errors and trust, pointing to the counterintuitive nature of the findings raising questions whether multiple communication errors do profoundly influence trust as previous research assumed. It highlights the complexity of trust development, and the nuanced approach on how errors and the interviewer making the errors are perceived and processed by suspects. The findings reveal that error design is essential to investigating trust development in suspect interview experiment. The nature and perceived severity of errors may be more nuanced to impact trust within suspect interviews.



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## Appendix A

### Participant Scenario

You are a student and live in a student house. To be able to pay your rent, food, clothes and go out you found work in a restaurant in Enschede. However, the restaurant had to close down because of financial issues after the COVID pandemic so one month ago you were fired. This month you already had to pay your rent and had to buy groceries and other things for the household. Unfortunately, you now are very low on your budget and you cannot spend a lot of money anymore or you will not be able to pay your rent this month.

You met someone at a house party which was organised by a few friends. You liked them a lot and you got along with them very well that evening. You asked this person out for a date. Since you've been single for a while you want this to work out. Therefore, you decide that you need new clothes for this date to give a good impression. However, you do not have the money to buy something nice. You have already borrowed some money from your friends at the last parties and you do not want to ask them again because you are too ashamed of your situation. Nonetheless, you still go to the Zizay in Enschede first thing in the morning to see if they maybe have something which you could buy with the money you have left.

As you walk through the store you notice that the cashier is not focusing on you. Moreover, almost nobody is in the store since you went there shortly after the store had opened. You see a nice shirt that you like and want to wear for this date. Unfortunately, the price is more than you can afford but you remember that the cashier was not attentive to what was happening in the store. You take another look and see that they are still not giving attention to you. You also do not see any cameras which could film you. Quickly, you take the shirt and put it in your bag. Then you leave the store and cycle back to campus.

However, a few days later you get a letter from the local police station. They want to interview you about a shoplifting crime in which you are the suspect. You decide to go there, but you want to convince the police interviewer that you did not do this crime. However, you also decide that you might have to admit what you have done when there is no sense in denying it anymore.

## Appendix B

### Interview Scripts

#### Errors: zero, one, five

1. So you stole it because you were bored? (judgment)
2. Wrong store name, during the interview (factual - wrong store)
3. Wrong clothing item (factual - wrong item)
4. We looked into your living situation. It seems you live with your parents? (factual - wrong living situation)
5. Nonetheless, why did you not ask others for money? Were you too lazy to do so? (judgment)

#### Zero errors script:

Interviewer: Hello, what is your name?

S: ...

Interviewer. Welcome \* (correct) name, do you know why you're here?

S: ...

I: Yes, yes. We are just here to clarify a few details. We were informed by the store Zizay of your presence during the last days. Can you tell me what you were doing in the store?

S: ...

I: Did you have any interaction with the employees there?

S: ...

I: Did you hold any conversations with other customers in the shop?

S: ...

I: On that day, we received intel about a stolen shirt. We got informed by the shop about your presence on the day a shirt got stolen, could you tell/explain what happened?

S: ...

I: So, you stole it because you did not have enough money.

S:..

I: Nonetheless, why did you not ask others for money? Were you too ashamed to do so?

S: ...

I: Did you notice anything strange that day?

S: ...

I: Were you aware of the cameras around the store?

S:...

I: We have looked into your living situation. Seems like you live on campus?

S:...

I: Okay, I have written it down. [pretends to write down things]

S:.....

I: How did you get home?

S:.....

I: That would be enough for now. We'll be in touch regarding any further steps in the investigation. If you need to talk to a counsellor, the front desk can arrange a meeting for you. Thank you for your time.

**One error script:**

Interviewer: Hello, what is your name?

S: ...

Interviewer. Welcome \*(correct) name, do you know why you're here?

S: ...

I: Yes, yes. We are just here to clarify a few details. We were informed by the store Zizay of your presence during the last days. Can you tell me what you were doing in the store?

S: ...

I: Did you have any interaction with the employees there?

S:...

I: Did you hold any conversations with other customers in the shop?

S:...

I: On that day, we received intel about a stolen shirt. We got informed by the shop about your presence on the day the shirt got stolen, could you tell/explain what happened?

S: ...

I: Did you notice anything strange that day?

S:...

I: So, you stole it because you were bored? (*Judgment*)

S:...

I: Nonetheless, why did you not ask others for money? Were you too ashamed to do so?

S: ...

I: Were you aware of the cameras around the store?

S: ...

I: We have looked into your living situation. Seems like you live on campus?

S: ...

I: Ok, I have written it down. [pretends to write down things]

S:...

I: How did you get home?

S:....

I: That would be enough for now. We'll be in touch regarding any further steps in the investigation. If you need to talk to a counselor, the front desk can arrange a meeting for you. Thank you for your time.

**Five error script:**

Interviewer: Hello, what is your name?

S: ...

Interviewer. Welcome \*(correct name), do you know why you're here?

S: ...

I: Yes. We are just here to clarify a few details. We were informed by the Appel en Ei of your presence during the last days. Can you tell me what you were doing? (*factual - wrong store*)

S: ...

I: Did you have any interaction with the employees there?

S: ...

I: Did you hold any conversations with other customers in the shop?

S: ...

I: On that day, we received intel about stolen jeans. We got informed by the shop about your presence on the day the jeans got stolen, could you tell/explain what happened? (*factual - wrong item*)

S: ...

I: Did you notice anything strange that day?

S: ...

I: So you stole it because you were bored. (*Judgment*)



S: ...

I: Nonetheless, why did you not ask others for money? Were you too lazy to do so? (*Judgment*)

S: ...

I: Were you aware of the cameras around the store?

S: ...

I: We have looked into your living situation. Seems like you live with your parents? (*factual - living situation*)

S: ...

I: Oh, I am sorry that I got that wrong

S: ...

I: How did you get home?

S: ...

I: That would be enough for now, thank you for your time \*right name. We'll be in touch regarding any further steps in the investigation. If you need to talk to a counsellor, the front desk can arrange a meeting for you. Thank you for your time.

### Appendix C

#### Questionnaire as adapted from Mayer & Davis (1999):

“Measures of Trust, Trustworthiness, and Performance Appraisal Perceptions” questionnaire, responses were collected on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 – 5.

Participant Instruction: To answer the following statements, please, again, remember how you felt about the interviewer in the interview.

**Ability (5 items)** (*item removed: The interviewer is known to be successful at the things they try to do*)

1. The interviewer is very capable of performing his/her job.
2. The interviewer has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done.
3. I feel very confident about the skills of the interviewer.
4. The interviewer has specialized capabilities that will help the case to be solved.
5. The interviewer is well qualified.

#### **Benevolence (5 items)**

6. The interviewer is very concerned about my welfare.
7. My needs and desires are very important to the interviewer.
8. The interviewer really looks out for what is important to me.
9. The interviewer will go out of their way to help me.
10. The interviewer would not knowingly do anything to hurt me.

#### **Integrity (6 items)**

11. The interviewer has a strong sense of justice.
12. I never have to wonder whether the interviewer will stick to their word.
13. The interviewer tries hard to be fair in dealings with others.
14. The actions and behaviours of the interviewer are not very consistent. \* (reverse coded item)
15. I like the values of the interviewer.
16. Sound principles seem to guide the behaviour of the interviewer.

### **Appendix D**

You have just finished the questionnaire. However, we want you to inform you about the following.

#### **Debrief**

In the information sheet, you were informed that this study aimed to research the effectiveness of different interviewing styles. This was not entirely accurate. This study aimed to research the effect of how the number of errors interviewers make during an interview affects people's judgements of the interviewer and their willingness to provide information, as well as the amount of information actually given. It is important to look at this because errors are common in high stakes conversations such as police interviews. Knowing more about the effects of errors can help us in improving suspect interviewing. We are sorry for not being totally clear about the purpose of the study when we gave you the initial information. It was important that we did not reveal the purpose of the study because the results of this study depend on you not knowing that any errors would be made before they occurred. The validity of this study might be negatively affected when the participants know about the actual goal of the study.

If you click next or close the window you consent that your data still can be used.

I was informed about the actual purpose of this study and still consent that my data can be used.