

Leader power, power stability, and interpersonal trust

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ABSTRACT

We examine the conditions under which power decreases trust and the process by which this occurs. Three experiments and a field study revealed that occupying an unstable power position decreases trust as it raises power holders' concerns about losing power. We replicate this finding across studies differing in measures and design, using different samples, and using different measurements and manipulations of power, power stability, and trust. We discuss the organizational and theoretical implications of this work for current insights on power and trust.

1. Introduction

Trusting can be essential for leaders. Teams perform better (e.g., team members engage in more OCB behaviors), organizations experience fewer struggles (e.g., employees are less likely to quit), and governments collect more taxes when people feel trusted by their leaders (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009; Feld & Frey, 2002; Lau & Lam, 2008). Yet, leaders do not always trust. Recent research suggests that due to their power, leaders at times distrust those they interact with, and engage in behaviors that signal this distrust to these interaction partners (e.g., by trying to control them; Inesi, Gruenfeld, & Galinsky, 2012; Mooijman, Van Dijk, Ellemers, & Van Dijk, 2015; Mooijman, Van Dijk, Van Dijk, & Ellemers, 2017; Mooijman & Graham, 2018; Schilke, Reimann, & Cook, 2015). But when and why does leaders' power decrease their trust in their interaction partners? And how can this be prevented? In the present research, we examine the conditions under which power decreases trust and the process by which this occurs. We propose that occupying an unstable power position decreases leaders' trust through raising power-loss concerns. We further propose that alleviating these concerns attenuates the extent to which power decreases trust.

Understanding how having power affects trusting attitudes and behaviors is important, as trust is vital in hierarchical contexts. For instance, managers must trust employees' willingness to comply with their instructions and do what is best for the company (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980) without resorting to punitive systems for enforcing cooperation (Kirchler, Kogler, & Muelbacher, 2014). Without

leaders' trust, productivity, reciprocity, and cooperation break down (Brown, Gray, McHardy, & Taylor, 2015). Leaders who develop trusting relationships with employees (and others in the organization) are more effective but these leaders are often more powerful than others (De Jong, Van der Vegt, & Molleman, 2007). Explaining when and why power undermines trust is thus important because it helps understand when and why leaders' lack of trust may proliferate in hierarchical contexts and how this can be prevented.

2. Trust

Trust can be defined as: "the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). Central to this definition of trust is that the willingness to be vulnerable to others is based on the expectation that these others have benevolent intentions (see for similar definitions, Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; Zand, 1997). Trust thus has two components: (a) an expectation of goodwill (benevolence) from others, and (b) the willingness to open oneself up for potential exploitation based on this expectation of goodwill. For instance, expecting others to further one's interest (i.e., goodwill) increases the likelihood that individuals make themselves vulnerable to others (i.e., trust; Lount & Pettit, 2012). Trust can be distinguished from assurance, which is a willingness to be vulnerable to others that is not based on an expectation of benevolence (e.g., when one believes others will cooperate in

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fear of punishment; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). In contrast to assurance, trust entails the expectation that others will act in one's interest, even though this is not in their own self-interest (e.g., trust in social-dilemma situations; Mulder, Van Dijk, De Cremer, & Wilke, 2006). We similarly operationalize trust as an expectation of goodwill resulting in an increased willingness to be vulnerable to others in situations with conflicting interests: for instance, managers have to trust subordinates to use organizational resources to pursue workplace goals and be productive instead of use these resources for selfish goals (e.g., take office supplies home).

Previous research has demonstrated that trust can be affected by one's position in the power hierarchy. Using U.S. president Johnson's office conversations, telephone calls, and interviews with personal friends, Kramer and Gavrieli (2004) suggested that president Johnson was suspicious of others—and suggested that this was in part due to his position of power. Mooijman et al. (2015) and Schilke et al. (2015) demonstrated experimentally that being assigned a position of power (versus powerlessness) in itself can be sufficient to decrease an individual's trust in others. Although these studies are informative (for effects of status on trust, see Lount & Pettit, 2012), they do not delineate the specific conditions under which power does and does not undermine trust, nor do they elucidate whether or how this might be prevented. Thus, it is unclear *when* power decreases trust and why this occurs. The current research extends prior findings and addresses this issue by investigating the role of power stability and power-loss concerns.

3. Power-loss concerns

Power can be defined as having asymmetric control over valuable resources (Anderson & Brion, 2014; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). These resources can be monetary (e.g., ability to grant salaries, bonuses), social (e.g., ability to grant inclusion in respected teams), or physical (e.g., ability to grant office spaces). Power is inherently a relational construct, as one party (leader) controls what the other party in the relationship (subordinate) desires. Being the more powerful party in a relationship is beneficial. For instance, power holders can disregard others' desires and feelings (Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; Van Kleef et al., 2008, and focus on pursuing their own instead of others' goals (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Guinote, 2007; Lammers, Stoker, Jordan, Pollmann, & Stapel, 2011). Power boosts individuals' self-esteem (Wojciszke & Kujalowicz-Struzynska, 2007) and leads them to express more positive—approach related—emotions (e.g., amusement and happiness) and sometimes less negative—inhibition related—emotions (e.g., embarrassment and anger; Bombari, Schmid, & Bachmann, 2017; Keltner, Anderson, & Gruenfeld, 2003).

Given the benefits of power, individuals in organizations often do not like to lose power once it is gained. Research suggests that when individuals obtain a position that enables them to make group decisions (i.e., power), the majority chooses to maintain their power position, even when delegating this position to others would be in their economic self-interest (Fehr, Herz, & Wilkening, 2013). The prospect of losing power also raises individuals' physiological responses indicating the experience of threat (e.g., as expressed through heart rate and blood pressure; Scheepers, Röell, & Ellemers, 2015) and when powerful leaders perceive their power to be threatened they are more likely to create divisions among less powerful individuals in such a way that it prevents them from forming alliances (e.g., divide and conquer; Case & Maner, 2014). Moreover, the finding that powerful individuals pay more attention (and seek proximity) to individuals whom they perceive as a threat to their power (Maner & Mead, 2010) suggests that the potential of losing power is perceived as threatening and aversive.

4. Power-loss concerns and trust

One way in which leaders can lose their power is by trusting

individuals who can take power away from them or gain power relative to them. Opening oneself up for potential exploitation can be expressed in resource sharing (i.e., power sharing within a relational context) that entails a risk of losing resource control (Kramer, 1999; Mayer et al., 1995; Zand, 1997). The Trust Game nicely illustrates this in an economic exchange context. In the Trust Game, trusting others means giving away control over a monetary resource to others, while expecting these others to give this control back at the end of the game. When one's trust is vindicated, one keeps control over the money; when it is violated, one loses control over the money (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995). Within the context of power in a relationship, trust in the Trust Game means giving away your power to the other party (as the other party now has more control over resources than before). Expecting not-so-benevolent intentions from others may lead people to protect their control over resources to a greater degree—as expecting others to be untrustworthy makes one less willing to give up resource-control and thus less likely to potentially undermine one's power (Mayer et al., 1995). This reasoning suggests that those who are more concerned about losing their power are less inclined to place trust in individuals who potentially compete with them for resources, as this would make them vulnerable to power loss.

Importantly, power is not always stable in real life, with salient opportunities for power loss (Kim, Shin, & Lee, 2015). The stability of a power hierarchy is an important determinant of potential power loss (Jordan, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2011): leaders such as managers can experience feelings of instability with regard to their own position (e.g., being demoted to a less powerful role) and with regard to the organizational resources they control (e.g., shrinking organizational budgets). Leaders can also experience stability, such that leaders feel secure in their position (e.g., unlikely to be fired or demoted) and the organizational resources that they control (e.g., secure organizational budgets). As such, leaders are likely to be concerned about power loss, and trust less, when they perceive the power hierarchy as unstable. Unstable power hierarchies may decrease the extent to which power holders are willing to trust individuals who can potentially take resources away from them and, in doing so, improve their power position relative to the leader. For instance, within organizations, power is often manifested in control of vital resources such as organizational budgets. Sharing those resources with others within the organization can sometimes lead to relative power loss (e.g., when these others become less dependent on the leader). If having an unstable power position evokes power-loss concerns and not trusting individuals who can threaten one's power is (perceived as) a way to avoid losing power to these individuals, then unstable power should decrease trust through raising these power-loss concerns.

These predictions connect the trust literature with the literature on how unstable power can increase physiological threat responses (Scheepers et al., 2015) and moves theorizing beyond a simple main effect of power on trust (Mooijman et al., 2015; Schilke et al., 2015). Specifically, Scheepers et al. (2015) demonstrated the impact of unstable power on cardiovascular response patterns (e.g., heart rate, blood pressure), consistent with the idea that unstable power triggers a concern for power loss and a subsequent decrease in trust. Our theorizing also suggests that unstable power has different effects on trust than on other forms of non-social risk-taking (e.g., unstable power can make people more risk-taking in economic contexts; Jordan et al., 2011). Specifically, trust indicates the willingness to take social risks and can be distinguished from non-social risk-taking in for instance a financial decision-making context (Houser, Schunk, & Winter, 2010). Trust is based on your interaction partner's potential decisions and intentions, whereas economic risk-taking typically relies on the likelihood of outcomes that do not involve another person (e.g., investing money with a certain probability of return on this investment). Indeed, a person's likelihood of trusting others is not always (tightly) connected to a person's economic risk attitudes (see Fetchenhauer & Dunning, 2012; Houser et al., 2010) and the outcomes of (unwarranted) risks might be

different in social versus non-social contexts: those who take social risks are more likely to jeopardize their standing and relations with others (e.g., lose power to these others) compared to non-social economic risk-taking where people might be relatively free to take risks again (e.g., after a bankruptcy). The current theorizing is thus primarily relevant to trust but not necessarily economic risk-taking, as other people are less likely to take away power holders' resources (and thus power) when engaging in economic risk-taking.

5. Overview of current research

We tested our central prediction in three experiments and a field study. These studies were conducted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Studies 1 and 3), in the laboratory (Study 2), or in the field using samples of supervisors and subordinates (Study 4). Unless indicated otherwise, all measured variables were assessed on seven-point scales on which participants could indicate their level of agreement (1 = *disagree completely*, 7 = *agree completely*). All participants provided informed consent and were debriefed, compensated, and thanked for their participation. In each study we indicate any data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures. Studies 1 and 3 also included an attention check but results did not differ significantly regardless of whether participants who failed the attention check were included or excluded from the analysis. We, therefore, report the analyses that were conducted on the full sample, including participants who failed the attention check¹. No other studies were conducted on the impact of unstable power on trust that are not reported in the current manuscript².

5.1. Study 1

In Study 1, we manipulated both the extent to which participants controlled a large (high power) compared to a small proportion (low power) of resources—consistent with the conceptualization of power as asymmetric control over valuable resources (Magee & Galinsky, 2008)—and the stability of this resource control, and measured trust. As such, we directly tested our main prediction that occupying an unstable power position decreases an individual's trust in others. In addition, unstable power and the illegitimacy of power can have similar behavioral effects (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008; Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007), with power illegitimacy defined as the perception that one's power is not fairly earned (Lanski, 1966; Mills, 1956). We therefore also measured perceived legitimacy of one's power to rule out the possibility that an observed effect of unstable power on trust could be explained by a decrease in its perceived legitimacy (e.g., Lammers et al., 2008).

5.2. Method

5.2.1. Participants and design

A total of 206 Mechanical Turk participants (124 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.28$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.38$; see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Buhrmester, Talafair, & Gosling, 2018; Hauser & Schwarz, 2016, for a discussion of Mechanical Turk as a research tool) participated for \$0.50 and were randomly assigned to a 2 (high power vs. low power) \times (stable power vs. unstable power) between-participants design. We aimed to recruit 50 participants per condition, consistent with previous recommendations (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011, 2013). A power analysis using G*Power 7 shows that this sample size

¹ A total of eight (Study 1) participants failed the attention check and were excluded from the analyses. However, the pattern of results was the same, and still significant, when these participants were included in the analyses.

² For data and syntax for all four studies, see the first author's OSF page at https://osf.io/4psv7/?view_only=8c57d9eb22b84099aa307d7e14bbaf43.

provided 80% power to detect a medium sized two-way interaction effect ($f = 0.25$).

5.3. Procedure

5.3.1. Power manipulation

The power manipulation was based on prior power research (Blader & Chen, 2012). Participants were asked to place themselves in the role of a vice-president of sales at a medium-sized firm. In the high power [low power] condition participants read: "*You are a manager who is recognized as one of the most [least] powerful individuals within the company, and your division is widely recognized as one of the most [least] important divisions company-wide. As a result, your division is allocated one of the largest [smallest] budgets in the firm, and you have control over an unusually large [small] amount of resources, compared with your colleagues in other divisions*". Participants in both the high-power and low-power condition thus had control over resources and could be concerned about losing those resources.

5.3.2. Power stability manipulation

For participants in the unstable [stable] power condition, the power manipulation also included a sentence that stated: "*To stimulate productivity across the entire firm, managers regularly change divisions within the firm so that other managers can take their place [to stimulate productivity across the entire firm, managers almost never change divisions within the firm]*". This manipulation is consistent with previous manipulations of power position stability (Case & Maner, 2014; Jordan et al., 2011).

5.3.3. Trust

Participants then indicated the extent to which they trusted other managers of the firm: "I think that I can fully trust other managers at the firm", "Other managers at the firm can be trusted", and "Other managers at the firm always take my interests into account", Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$).

5.3.4. Manipulation checks

Perceived stability of one's power position was measured with one item on a seven-point scale: "My position at the firm is unstable". To check whether the effect of the power stability manipulation was independent of participants' overall sense of power (and to exclude this as an alternative explanation for observed effects), we also measured perceived power with a three-item scale: "As a manager I feel powerful", "As a manager, I feel influential", and "As a manager, I feel in power" ($\alpha = 0.97$). Lastly, we measured perceived legitimacy: "I feel like my position as a manager is legitimate".

5.4. Results

5.4.1. Manipulation checks

A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) with power and power stability as independent variables and perceived power as dependent variable yielded a main effect of power, $F(1, 202) = 251.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .55$. Participants in the high-power condition ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 0.87$) felt more powerful than participants in the low-power condition ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.76$). We observed no main effect of power stability ($F[1, 202] = 0.49$, $p = 0.83$, $\eta^2_p = .00$) and no interaction effect between power and power stability, $F(3, 202) = 0.21$, $p = .65$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

In addition, an ANOVA with power and power stability as independent variables and perceived stability as dependent variable yielded a main effect of power stability, $F(1, 202) = 6.60$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2_p = .03$. Participants in the unstable-power condition ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.67$) felt more unstable in their power than participants in the stable-power condition ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.99$). We observed no main effect of power ($F[1, 202] = 0.22$, $p = 0.79$, $\eta^2_p = .00$) and no

interaction effect between power and power stability, $F(1, 202) = 2.23$, $p = .14$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. We observed no main effects of interaction effects on power legitimacy, $F_s < 1.39$, $p_s > 0.28$. These results confirm the validity of our manipulations.

5.4.2. Trust

An ANOVA with power and power stability as independent variables and trust as dependent variable yielded a main effect of power, $F(1, 202) = 21.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Participants in the high-power condition ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.57$) trusted less than those in the low-power condition ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.56$). Results also yielded a main effect of power stability, $F(1, 202) = 4.70$, $p = .031$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Participants in the unstable condition ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.64$) trusted less than those in the stable ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.62$). More important and consistent with our predictions, results showed an interaction effect between power and power stability, $F(1, 202) = 5.11$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Trust was lower in the unstable high-power condition ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.40$) as compared to the stable high-power condition ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.61$; $t[102] = 3.21$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.64$), unstable low-power condition ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.54$; $t[102] = 5.13$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.03$) and stable low-power condition ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.59$), $t(102) = 4.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.97$). Trust did not differ significantly between the stable high-power condition and the stable low-power condition ($t[102] = 1.64$, $p = .11$, $d = 0.32$; see Fig. 1). Trust did also not differ significantly between the unstable low-power condition and the stable low-power condition ($t[102] = 0.12$, $p = 0.90$, $d = 0.02$; see Fig. 1).

5.5. Discussion

Study 1 supports the hypothesis that unstable (but not stable) power decreases the extent to which individuals trust others. Legitimacy did not explain this effect. In Study 2, we aimed to assess the generalizability of these findings, by studying whether unstable power decreases the willingness to share resource with others (i.e., trust). Part of the definition of trust is the willingness to open oneself up for potential exploitation, for instance by making one's resources available to others (e.g., Berg et al., 1995).

5.6. Studies 2a and 2b

In studies 2a and 2b, we had two aims. First, as trusting others entails the risk of making oneself vulnerable to potential exploitation (i.e., managers trusting subordinates or other managers; Kramer, 1999), we measured, using a Trust Game, in studies 2a and 2b the willingness to share with others the resources that form the basis of one's power. This allowed us to extend our self-reported assessment of trust to the measurement of trust behavior (Berg et al., 1995). Thus, an interaction partner could gain control over participants' valuable resources (and gain more power relative to the participant). If concerns about losing

power decrease trusting behavior, then we should observe a decrease in trusting behavior when power is unstable. Second, in addition to trust behavior, we also assessed economic risk-taking behavior in an Investment Game. Instead of sharing resources with others, participants could invest their resources without others potentially benefitting from resource loss (such that resource loss would not be an interpersonal power loss). If power-loss concerns are uniquely and negatively related to trust, then we should not observe a decrease in risk-taking behavior in the Investment Game when power is unstable; as losing resources is not necessarily about losing power in this context. We ran two versions of this paradigm. In Study 2a, participants imagined having the choice to share their organizational budgets with an interaction partner and in Study 2b, participants were given \$10 and they could share this \$10 with an interaction partner.

5.7. Method

5.7.1. Participants and design

In Study 2a, a total of 406 US college students (303 females; $M_{age} = 20.46$ years, $SD_{age} = 2.14$) were randomly assigned to a 2 (high power vs. low power) \times 2 (stable power vs. unstable power) between-participants design, with trust vs. risk-taking as an additional within-participants factor. In Study 2b, a total of 202 US college students (130 males; $M_{age} = 20.82$ years, $SD_{age} = 2.37$) were randomly assigned to a 2 (high power vs. low power) \times 2 (stable power vs. unstable power) between-participants design, with trust vs. risk-taking as an additional within-participants factor. For both studies, we aimed to recruit as many participants as possible within a specific time frame (e.g., 2 weeks). A power analysis using G*Power 7 shows that the combined sample size of 608 participants provided 99% power to detect a medium sized two-way interaction effect ($f = 0.25$).

5.8. Procedure

5.8.1. Power manipulation

For both studies, we used the same power manipulation as in Study 1.

5.8.2. Power stability manipulation

For both studies, we used the same power stability manipulation as in Study 1.

5.8.3. Trust Game behavior

In Study 2a, consistent with previous work on the Trust Game (Berg et al., 1995), participants were asked to imagine that they could send any percentage of their budget to a subordinate who could then return any amount of this budget to the participant. The budget participants sent, however, would be tripled, whereas the money that would be sent back would not. Playing by these rules, the participant sending 100% of the budget would yield the subordinate 300% of the budget. The subordinate could then decide to send back to the participant any amount of the tripled budget. Trust Games like these are frequently used to measure behavioral displays of trust, because sending money to others makes the participant vulnerable to potential exploitation (consistent with the definition of trust; Johnson & Mislin, 2011; Pillutla, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003). To assess this behavior, participants were asked to indicate what percentage of the budget they would send to the subordinate—higher percentages of budget sent reflect higher trust. In Study 2b, participants were told to imagine having \$10 that they could share with the other player: similar as in Study 2a, the money they would give would be tripled and the other player could give back any amount. Thus, the more money participants give in Study 2b, the more they trust.

5.8.4. Investment Game behavior

Participants were also presented with an adapted version of the

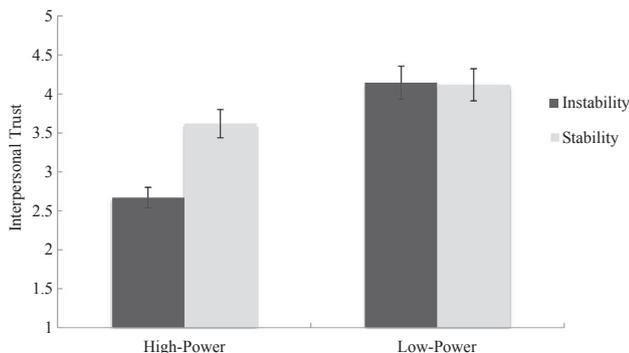


Fig. 1. Interpersonal trust as a function of power and stability for Study 1.

Trust Game: the Investment Game. The order in which participants completed the Trust Game and Investment Game was counterbalanced. In this version in Study 2a, the budget that participants sent to the subordinate would still be tripled. It would be randomly determined, however, which amount the participants would get back from the subordinate and the subordinate would not receive the budget that was “lost” by the participant. Thus, in Study 2a, the participant could invest between 0 and 100% of budget, and receive back 300%. In Study 2b, the same was the case except with participants being able to invest \$10 and potentially getting back between \$0 and \$30.

5.8.5. Manipulation checks

We used the same item to measure perceived stability of one’s power position and the same three-item scale ($\alpha = 0.77$; $\alpha = 0.92$, respectively) to measure perceived power as in Study 1.

5.9. Results

5.9.1. Manipulation checks

An ANOVA with power and power stability as independent variables and perceived power as dependent variable yielded a main effect of power, $F(1, 602) = 60.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .10$. Participants in the high-power condition ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.73$) felt more powerful than participants in the low-power condition ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.39$). We observed no main effect of power stability, $F(1, 602) = 0.95$, $p = 0.76$, $\eta^2_p = .00$, and no interaction effect between power and power stability on perceived power, $F(1, 602) = 0.32$, $p = .57$, $\eta^2_p = .00$.

In addition, an ANOVA with power and power stability as independent variables and perceived stability as dependent variable yielded a main effect of power stability, $F(1, 604) = 39.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .06$. Participants in the unstable power condition ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.34$) felt more unstable in their power than participants in the stable condition ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.70$). We observed no main effect of power, $F(1, 604) = 0.31$, $p = .58$, $\eta^2_p = .00$, and no interaction effect between power and power stability on perceived power stability, $F(1, 604) = 1.50$, $p = .22$, $\eta^2_p = .01$.

5.9.2. Trust Game and Investment Game behaviors

We combined both studies into one analysis, recoding the amount between \$0 and \$10 given to the other player by participants in Study 2a as between 0% and 100% of their “budget”. We used a repeated-measures ANOVA with power, stability, and study (i.e., Study 2a or 2b) as an additional factor. This repeated-measures ANOVA with power, stability, and study as independent variables and trust and risk-taking as dependent variables, yielded the predicted three-way interaction between power, stability, and the within-factor of trust or risk-taking, $F(1, 592) = 16.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$. The analysis did not yield a four-way interaction between power, stability, trust vs. risk-taking and study type ($F[1, 592] = 0.33$, $p = .56$, $\eta^2_p = .00$), showing that study type did not moderate the observed effects. See Table 1 for all other main effects and interaction effects.

For our follow-up analyses, we first conducted an ANOVA with power and stability as independent variables and trust as dependent variable. Overall, participants in the high-power conditions ($M = 60.53$, $SD = 15.14$) trusted less than those in the low-power conditions ($M = 65.18$, $SD = 15.17$; $F[1, 604] = 14.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$) and participants in the unstable conditions ($M = 60.81$, $SD = 14.91$) trusted less than those in the stable conditions ($M = 64.90$, $SD = 15.47$; $F[1, 604] = 11.69$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .02$). In addition, an interaction effect between power and stability on trust ($F[1, 604] = 18.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$) demonstrated that trust was lower in the unstable high-power condition ($M = 55.90$, $SD = 12.39$) as compared to the stable high-power condition ($M = 65.17$, $SD = 16.22$; $t[300] = 5.58$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.65$), unstable low-power condition ($M = 65.70$, $SD = 15.63$; $t[301] = 6.05$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$), and stable low-power condition ($M = 64.66$, $SD = 14.73$), $t[303] = 5.61$,

Table 1

Main effects and interaction effects for combined studies 2a and 2b.

| | df | F | p | η^2_p |
|---|---------|-------|---------|------------|
| Trust/risk | 1 (592) | 1.14 | 0.29 | 0.00 |
| Power | 1 (592) | 1.74 | 0.19 | 0.00 |
| Power stability | 1 (592) | 12.55 | < 0.001 | 0.02 |
| Study | 1 (592) | 0.02 | 0.89 | 0.00 |
| Trust/risk \times power | 1 (592) | 10.15 | 0.002 | 0.02 |
| Trust/risk \times stability | 1 (592) | 4.94 | 0.027 | 0.01 |
| Power \times stability | 1 (592) | 3.86 | 0.050 | 0.01 |
| Trust/risk \times study | 1 (592) | 2.74 | 0.098 | 0.01 |
| Power \times study | 1 (592) | 0.05 | 0.82 | 0.00 |
| Stability \times study | 1 (592) | 13.47 | < 0.001 | 0.02 |
| Trust/risk \times power \times stability | 1 (592) | 16.74 | < 0.001 | 0.03 |
| Trust/risk \times power \times study | 1 (592) | 4.62 | 0.032 | 0.01 |
| Trust/risk \times stability \times study | 1 (592) | 0.15 | 0.70 | 0.00 |
| Trust/risk \times power \times stability \times study | 1 (592) | 0.33 | 0.56 | 0.00 |

$p < .001$, $d = 0.65$. Trust did not differ significantly between the stable high-power condition and the stable low-power condition, $t(301) = 0.29$, $p = .77$, $d = 0.03$, and between the stable high-power condition and the unstable low-power condition, $t(303) = 0.29$, $p = .77$, $d = 0.03$. Trust did not differ between the stable low-power condition and the unstable low-power condition, $t(304) = 0.60$, $p = .55$, $d = 0.07$.

Second, we conducted an ANOVA with power and stability as independent variables and economic risk-taking as dependent variable. Participants in the high-power condition ($M = 64.56$, $SD = 14.59$) took slightly more economic risks than those in the low-power condition ($M = 62.28$, $SD = 12.56$), $F(1, 602) = 4.29$, $p = .039$, $\eta^2_p = .01$. Participants in the unstable condition took as many risks ($M = 63.32$, $SD = 13.88$) as those in the stable condition ($M = 63.39$, $SD = 13.41$), $F(1, 602) = 0.02$, $p = .90$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. An interaction effect between power and stability on trust ($F[1, 602] = 4.67$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2_p = .01$) was observed but with only one significant contrast: participants took more economic risks when comparing the unstable high-power condition ($M = 65.69$, $SD = 15.05$) to the unstable low-power condition ($M = 61.01$, $SD = 12.25$), $t(296) = 2.96$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.34$. Risk-taking did not significantly differ between the other conditions (stable high-power position; $M = 65.17$, $SD = 16.22$; stable low-power position; $M = 64.66$, $SD = 14.73$, all contrasts $ts < 1.76$, $ps > 0.10$, $d < 0.17$).

5.10. Discussion

These findings replicated the results from Study 1 in a different setting. Unstable power decreased the willingness to give away control over one’s resources to others (interpersonal trust) but it—although somewhat unreliably—increased the willingness to take economic risks in the Investment Game (consistent with findings from Jordan et al., 2011). These findings provide additional evidence for the notion that unstable power decreases trust because it raises concerns about losing power to others. Yet, in studies 1 and 2, we assumed that unstable power raises power-loss concerns. In studies 3 and 4, we directly tested this assumption by explicitly assessing power-loss concerns.

5.11. Study 3

Study 3 had two goals. First, in addition to assessing expectations about others to indicate trust (cf. Study 1), in this study we also examined trust displayed in behavior towards these others (cf. Study 2). We aimed to demonstrate that the power-loss concerns that are raised by the lack of power stability impact Trust Game behavior through decreasing benevolent trust expectations (cf. studies 1 and 2). Second, we compared stable and unstable high-power conditions to a high-power condition in which no information was given about power

stability. This allowed us to investigate whether the stable or unstable high-power conditions deviate from the default effects of power on trust (see also Brion, Mo, & Lount, 2019).

5.12. Method

5.12.1. Participants and design

A total of 156 Mechanical Turk participants (97 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.56$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 8.53$) participated for \$1 and were randomly assigned to one of three high-power conditions: stable high-power, unstable high-power, or control. A power analysis using G*Power 7 shows that this sample size provided 99% power to detect the smallest effect size that we observed in Studies 1 and 2 ($d = 0.65$).

5.13. Procedure

5.13.1. Power stability manipulation

Participants were informed that they would be working together on a task with another participant, either as leader or subordinate. Participants were informed that the leader could evaluate the subordinate at the end of the experiment and that this evaluation would influence the amount of money the subordinate would get for participating in the experiment (Lammers et al., 2008; Mooijman et al., 2015). Participants were also informed that the subordinate did not have this opportunity. All participants filled out a ten-item “Leadership Assessment Questionnaire”, allegedly to determine whether they would be assigned the role of leader or subordinate (e.g., to what extent do you agree with the statement: “A leader should always seek input from others”). Although participants were not given feedback on their scores, all participants were informed that, on the basis of their scores, they were assigned to the leadership position (cf. Lount & Pettit, 2012; Mooijman et al., 2015; Stouten, De Cremer, & Van Dijk, 2005).

Participants in the control condition were provided with no further information. Participants in the unstable high-power condition were informed that position could change during the experiment, such that they might end up being a subordinate. Participants in the stable high-power condition were informed that their position could not change during the experiment.

5.13.2. Trust Game behavior

Participants were given the same instructions about the Trust Game as in Study 2b. We then also assessed their expectations of the trustworthiness of the subordinate with a seven-point, three-item scale: “I think the subordinate cannot be fully trusted to give the money back to me”, “I distrust the subordinate a little bit”, and “I think the subordinate is inclined to keep the money for him/herself” ($\alpha = 0.83$).

5.13.3. Power-loss concerns

Power-loss concerns were measured with a three-item scale: “I fear losing my power position”, “I dread the possibility of being a subordinate”, and “I don’t like losing my position” ($\alpha = 0.94$).

5.13.4. Manipulation checks

Perceived stability of power was measured with a three-item scale: “I might lose my leadership position”, “I may become a subordinate”, and “My leadership position is somewhat unstable” ($\alpha = 0.98$; higher scores indicated more power instability). To check whether the power stability manipulation affected participants’ sense of power, we also measured perceived power with a three-item scale: “I feel powerful”, “I occupy a position of power”, and “I have power over the subordinate” ($\alpha = 0.88$).

5.14. Results

5.14.1. Manipulation checks

An ANOVA with the three high-power conditions as independent

variable and perceived stability of power as dependent variable yielded a main effect of our power manipulation, $F(2, 153) = 61.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .45$. Participants perceived their power as more unstable in the unstable high-power condition ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.54$) compared to the stable high-power condition ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.85$; $t[101] = 10.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.17$) as well as the control condition ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.77$; $t[101] = 8.13$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.62$). Furthermore, participants in the stable high-power condition perceived their position as less unstable than participants in the control condition, $t(104) = 2.88$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.56$. These results confirm the validity of our power manipulation. Additional checks indicated, as intended, that participants in the stable high-power condition ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.43$), unstable high-power condition ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.35$), and control condition ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.14$) felt equally powerful, $F(2, 153) = 0.38$, $p = .69$, $\eta^2_p = .00$; $t_s < 1$, $p_s > 0.43$, $d_s < 0.15$.

5.14.2. Power-loss concerns

An ANOVA with high-power condition as independent variable and power-loss concerns as dependent variable yielded a main effect of condition, $F(2, 153) = 7.50$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .09$. Power-loss concerns were stronger in the unstable high-power condition ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.94$) compared to the stable high-power condition ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.83$; $t[101] = 3.46$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.69$) and high-power control condition ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.58$; $t[101] = 3.04$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.60$). Power-loss concerns did not differ between the stable high-power condition and the control condition, $t(104) = 0.68$, $p = .49$, $d = 0.13$.

5.14.3. Trust Game behavior

An ANOVA with power condition as independent variable and trust as dependent variable yielded a main effect of condition, $F(2, 151) = 3.13$, $p = .047$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. Trust was lower in the unstable high-power condition ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 3.08$) compared to the stable high-power condition ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 3.55$; $t[101] = 2.36$, $p = .020$, $d = 0.047$) and control condition ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 3.77$; $t[101] = 2.09$, $p = .038$, $d = 0.042$). Trust did not differ between the stable high-power condition and the control condition, $t(101) = 0.17$, $p = .86$, $d = 0.00$.

A similar analysis with expectations of the subordinate’s perceived trustworthiness as the dependent variable also yielded a main effect of condition, $F(2, 153) = 3.16$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2_p = .04$. Participants in the unstable high-power condition expected more untrustworthy behavior ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.37$) than participants in the stable high-power condition ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.73$; $t[101] = 2.28$, $p = .025$, $d = 0.45$) and control condition ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.78$; $t[101] = 2.27$, $p = .025$, $d = 0.45$). Expectations of trustworthiness did not differ between the stable high-power condition and control condition, $t(104) = 0.04$, $p = .97$, $d = 0.00$.

5.14.4. Mediation analysis

Confirming our reasoning that the effect of power stability on the amount of money sent in the Trust Game should be due to decreased expectations of trustworthiness when power is unstable, a bootstrapping analysis using 10,000 resamples (Hayes, Preacher, & Myers, 2011) demonstrated that trustful expectations mediated the effect of the power position stability manipulation on the amount of money sent, 95% CI = $[-0.72, -0.13]$. If the decreased trust in the unstable high-power condition was due to an increase in power-loss concerns, then this should mediate the effect of power stability on expectations of trustworthiness predicting Trust Game behavior (power stability power-loss concerns expectations of trustworthiness Trust Game behavior). We tested this multiple-step model using a macro developed by Hayes et al. (2011). As expected, power-loss concerns correlated negatively with the amount of money sent in the Trust Game ($r = -0.31$, $p < .001$) and correlated negatively with having trust expectations ($r = -0.29$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the combined effect of power-loss concerns through expectations of trustworthiness on Trust Game

behavior was significant, 95% CI = [−0.35, −0.06].

5.15. Discussion

Study 3 supports the hypothesis that unstable power decreases trust, and that this impacts interpersonal behavior. Specifically, occupying an unstable power position increased concerns about power loss, which, in turn, undermined the expected trustworthiness of others, as well as trusting behavior towards others. Importantly, trust in the unstable high-power condition was lower than in the control condition, but the stable high-power position did not increase trust compared to the control condition. This is consistent with the finding that the crucial underlying variable (i.e., power-loss concerns) did not differ between the stable high-power condition and the control condition (participants in both conditions were relatively unconcerned about losing their power), whereas power-loss concerns were increased for participants in the unstable high-power condition. In addition, these findings further corroborate and extend the findings from studies 1 and 2, showing that power did not undermine trust when power was stable. Study 3 thus provides further support for the argument that power-loss concerns explain (in part) why power instability undermines trust. The results also suggest, however, that the default response to high power is not to raise concerns with position loss or distrust. Instead, these responses to high power only seem to emerge when people are explicitly reminded that their position might be unstable.

5.16. Study 4

So far, all our previous studies have been experimental studies. In Study 4, we aimed to demonstrate the relation of unstable power with trust in a field study, using organizationally relevant measures. Specifically, we measured the degree to which managers' control over valuable resources in their organization, and the perceived stability of this resource control, were related to their trust towards others in the organization.

5.17. Method

5.17.1. Participants and design

We recruited working professionals. They were informed that we conducted a study on everyday work experiences and that we were interested in exploring the relationships between managers and their subordinates. We thus asked for manager-employee pairs who were employed full-time to participate in our study. When interested, they were directed to provide us with contact information (work e-mail) for their subordinate (when they were a manager) or manager (when they were a subordinate). A total of 96 supervisors (58 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 40.51$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.35$) with a corresponding subordinate (56 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.40$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.08$) were successfully recruited. Our sample size was determined, and constrained by, research funds; we aimed to recruit 100 supervisor-subordinate pairs. All supervisors worked for (a variety of) moderate to large firms at the time of the survey. The supervisors had been with the organization, on average, for 8.91 years ($SD = 7.93$) and in their position, on average, for 5.69 years ($SD = 6.83$). The survey contained scales measuring supervisors' sense of power and perceived power stability, and included several demographic questions. Subordinates were asked to rate the extent to which their corresponding manager tended to trust others in the organization. We used such supervisor-subordinate dyads to eliminate common method bias and to be able to establish the link between power, stability, and trust in situations with real-life power and trust differences.

5.18. Procedure

5.18.1. Power measurement

Consistent with the notion that power entails control over scarce resources, supervisors indicated on a seven-point scale the degree to which they had personal control over (1) organizational resources, (2) budgets, and (3) flows of information (1 = *very little control*, 7 = *a lot of control*; $\alpha = 0.95$).

5.18.2. Power stability

Supervisors indicated on a three-item scale to what extent they perceived their control over resources, budgets, and information to be stable or unstable (1 = *very unstable*, 7 = *very stable*; $\alpha = 0.85$).

5.18.3. Power-loss concerns

Supervisors indicated on a three-item scale to what extent they were concerned about losing control over resources, budgets, and information (1 = *not concerned at all*, 7 = *very concerned*; $\alpha = 0.91$).

5.18.4. Trust

Consistent with the notion that trust entails the willingness to be vulnerable to others, in particular the willingness to share resources with others (Berg et al., 1995; Kramer, 1999), the subordinates indicated on a three-item scale to what extent their manager was willing to share organizational resources, budgets, and information with them (1 = *very unwilling*, 7 = *very willing*; $\alpha = 0.75$).³

5.19. Results

See Table 2 for table with relevant correlations.

5.19.1. Power-loss concerns

Regression analyses were used to test the interactive effect of power and stability with power-loss concerns. For the first step, power and stability were added. For the second step, the interaction between power and power stability was added. Results demonstrated that more power was associated with higher power-loss concerns ($\beta = 0.24$, $t[96] = 2.43$, $p = .006$) and that stability was, overall, negatively related to power-loss concerns ($\beta = -0.17$, $t[96] = 1.71$, $p = .091$). Crucially, we observed an interaction between power and stability, $\beta = -0.44$, $t[96] = 3.83$, $p < .001$. Power was stronger related to power-loss concerns when power was unstable (+1 SD; $\beta = 0.36$, $t[96] = 2.89$, $p = .005$) compared to when power was stable (−1 SD; $\beta = 0.06$, $t[96] = 0.44$, $p = .66$).

5.19.2. Trust

Results from a similar regression with trust as dependent variable demonstrated that power was negatively related to trust behavior ($\beta = -0.25$, $t[96] = -2.49$, $p = .014$) but that stability was unrelated to trust behavior ($\beta = -0.04$, $t[96] = -0.43$, $p = .66$). Crucially, we observed an interaction between power and stability, $\beta = 0.22$, $t(96) = 2.65$, $p = .009$. Power decreased trusting behavior when power was unstable (+1 SD; $\beta = -0.43$, $t[96] = -3.37$, $p = .001$) but not when power was stable (−1 SD; $\beta = -.01$, $t[98] = -0.05$, $p = .97$).

5.19.3. Mediation analysis

Replicating the previous three studies, power-loss concerns were negatively correlated with trust, $r = -0.29$, $p = .003$. We used Model 8 with 5000 bootstraps in PROCESS (Hayes et al., 2011) to test the degree to which power-loss concerns mediated the relationship between power

³ We also added a scale that directly measured trust expectations (e.g., my supervisor trusts me; 1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *completely agree*; $\alpha = 0.92$). Unstable power also undermined this measure of trust and mediated the impact of unstable power on the behavioral indicator of trust (95% CI [−0.64, −0.13]).

Table 2
Correlation table for Study 4.

| | Power | Power stability | Power-loss concerns | Trust |
|---------------------|--------|-----------------|---------------------|-------|
| Power | – | | | |
| Power stability | 0.01 | – | | |
| Power-loss concerns | 0.23* | –0.20* | – | |
| Trust | –0.25* | 0.19 | –0.30** | – |

Note. *** $p < .001$.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$.

and trust expectations and trust behavior when we allow stability to moderate the relationship between power and trust (as demonstrated earlier). Results yielded a significant moderated mediation effect, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.17]. Power-loss concerns mediated the negative relationship between power and trust only when power was unstable (-1 SD; 95% CI = [–0.31, –0.03]), but not when power was stable (1 SD; 95% CI = [–0.03, 0.11]).⁴

5.20. Discussion

Study 4 replicated in a field study the findings from the previous three experimental studies and demonstrates the impact of unstable power on trust in a supervisor-subordinate dyadic sample. These findings provide additional evidence for the notion that occupying an unstable power position decreases a power holder's trust through raising power-loss concerns, although it is also possible in Study 4 that managers with unstable power are less willing to share resources because they think it's not their place to share those resources with others (because someone else might take over their position). We discuss this possibility further in the next section.

6. General discussion

Trusting others is vital for leaders. In the present research, we examined conditions under which power decreases trust and the process by which this occurs. We demonstrated in four studies that making salient the lack of stability in high-power positions decreases trust as it raises individuals' concerns about losing power. By contrast, occupying a stable power position attenuates the extent to which power decreases trust as it alleviates individuals' concerns about losing power. Indeed, unstable power decreased trust regardless of whether we provided participants with a justification for their unstable power position—the results of Study 3 (where we did not provide a reason for why participants' power was unstable) matched the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in which we provided an explicit rationale for why power was unstable (i.e., the firm wants managers to change divisions in order to stimulate productivity). Moreover, the fact that we replicated the effect of unstable power on trust in a field study of managers and subordinates (Study 4), suggests that the effect of unstable power on trust is not just an experimental methodological artifact. Together, these studies provide converging support for the hypothesis that emphasizing the instability of high-power positions undermines trust in other people's good intentions and reduces the willingness to engage in trusting behavior. These findings are important as they add insights to the literature on power, trust, and risk-taking, as detailed next.

6.1. Implications and Future directions

The present research makes several contributions to the literature

⁴ Please note that we also measured supervisor power from the perspective of the subordinate and found similar effects as reported in the results section of Study 4.

on power and trust. First, it elucidates when and why power undermines trust. Previous research has demonstrated that having power can decrease an individual's trust in others (Kramer & Gavrieli, 2004; Mooijman et al., 2015; Schilke et al., 2015), but has provided little evidence as to the conditions under which this does (not) happen. The current research indicates that power decreases trust when power-loss concerns are salient due to a lack of power stability, but this is not a default response, as power does not always decrease trust when power is stable and power-loss concerns are not salient, compared to high-power control conditions. This is consistent with the proposed argument that people are reluctant to make themselves vulnerable to others when there is a potential danger of losing one's power. Indeed, since many leader-follower interactions take place in a hierarchical context, with leaders (e.g., managers or governmental officials) having power over others (e.g., employees or citizens), this suggests that low trust proliferates when leaders are reminded of the possibility of losing their power to others.

It seems common practice for organizations to reposition their employees from one division to another in order to reduce costs and to survive in a continuously transforming environment (Amabile & Conti, 1999). Although this is commonly assumed to stimulate productivity through making employees expend more effort and reflect on their own practices, we demonstrate that this may also undermine the extent to which power holders trust others in the organization. Indeed, while the threat of position loss is often used as an incentive in organizations—intended to increase motivation and performance of those in leadership roles—this research documents the potentially adverse effects of this motivation strategy, as it undermines trust. Interestingly, recent research has demonstrated that feeling distrusted by leaders undermines people's motivation to stick to the rules, thereby stimulating unethical behavior (Mooijman et al., 2017). The current research thus identifies power instability as a relevant moderator of high-power effects, as it raises power-loss concerns. Specifically, our findings demonstrate that having power can be associated with a concern for power loss and that this, in turn, undermines trust (even though this effect is attenuated when power is stable).

Future research might investigate additional moderators of high-power effects and alternative concerns that might be relevant to trust and cooperative behavior in organizations. These might include individual difference variables (e.g., power motivation) as well as other situational characteristics that define the power role (e.g., accountability, feelings of responsibility, and legitimacy; Tost, 2015). Our results (in particular the additional checks in Study 1) demonstrate that the effect of power stability can be distinguished from power legitimacy. Legitimacy, however, tends to moderate the effects of power, with illegitimate power making individuals more instead of less inhibited (Lammers et al., 2008) and less instead of more corrupt (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010). An interesting avenue for future research might be to investigate the impact of power legitimacy on interpersonal trust. Possibly, power decreases trust especially when power is illegitimate. Illegitimate power hierarchies are characterized by forced compliance by power holders and resistance from the less powerful (Lanski, 1966; Mills, 1956). Indeed, power holders may anxiously try to protect their positions of power in such hierarchies (and become inhibited instead of action-oriented; Lammers et al., 2008), possibly lowering their trust in others. In addition, previous research has suggested that unstable power can increase non-social (economic) forms of risk-taking (Jordan et al., 2011). Yet, our research suggests that power-loss concerns play an important role when resources can be lost that form the basis of one's power and that this can decrease the degree to which power holders become trusting. Our findings thus show that unstable power does not always foster social forms of risk-taking.

Second, the current research broadens the understanding of the determinants of trust. Trust is a key variable in social interactions, and has been a much-studied topic in social hierarchies. Nevertheless, few studies to date have demonstrated empirically when and why power

differences within social hierarchies affect interpersonal trust and distrust. We demonstrate a psychological mechanism that can explain when and why power affects trust. Given the influence of leaders in setting exemplary behavior (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009) and the negative effects associated with low levels of trust (e.g., decreased liking, increased tendency for unethical behavior; Mulder et al., 2006), any condition that lowers trust is potentially problematic as it communicates and spreads low trust within an organization or society. Indeed, initial trust between people tends to be considerable (see Kramer & Lewicki, 2010, for a review), but unstable power hierarchies seem to undermine this trust—at least from the part of the power holder. This can have important implications for attempts to promote interpersonal trust in organizations. These attempts may fail when organizations reposition employees and create positional instability. This is consistent with previous research that has suggested that unstable work group membership makes it less likely that people value and accept constructive task contributions offered by newcomers (Rink & Ellemers, 2015). As workgroup instability can undermine (rather than foster) change and innovation, instability of power positions can undermine (rather than foster) trust in work teams. Promoting interpersonal trust may be especially effective when organizations provide a stable basis of power.

Trust is likely to decrease when power-loss concerns are salient, whereas trust may increase when leaders feel like they have status within the hierarchy (i.e., feel respected and admired; Blader & Chen, 2012; Lount & Pettit, 2012). Making leaders feel respected and admired indeed has the potential to offset the negative effects of leaders' power on trust (Lount & Pettit, 2012). Given that both power and status differences are ever present in organizational hierarchies, we argue it would be fruitful to investigate how leaders' power and status interact to influence trust in others, and to investigate to what extent subordinates trust leaders with power and/or status. For instance, due to the status-conferral process, status tends to focus attention outward, increasing the realization that others are sensitive to the treatment they receive and increasing the expectation that those who confer status on you will treat you well (e.g., trusting behavior; Blader & Chen, 2012; Blader, Shirako, & Chen, 2016). In contrast, the impact of power on trust may depend on how individuals have gained their power and how they construe their power. For instance, power can be construed as providing an individual with increased opportunity to pursue personal goals or with increased responsibility for others (e.g., De Wit, Scheepers, Ellemers, Sassenberg, & Scholl, 2017; Sassenberg, Ellemers, Scheepers, & Scholl, 2014). When power is construed as providing the opportunity to fulfill personal goals, it may draw an individual's attention inwards towards personal goals (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Guinote, 2017), with concerns about personal gain and potential loss weighing heavier than others' needs (Blader & Chen, 2012). Since trusting others can lead to direct loss over resource-control, whereas trusting others is more likely to increase respect from others (Tyler, Jackson, & Mentovich, 2015), power construed as opportunity may have a different effect on trust than status, especially when power is unstable. When, however, power is construed as responsibility for others (e.g., managers that are responsible for subordinates' needs), it may draw an individual's attention outward towards others' needs and concerns, thereby possibly fostering trust. Following this line of reasoning, gaining power by taking it away from others may highlight the personal opportunities of power (thereby decreasing trust), whereas being granted power by others may highlight the responsibilities of power (thereby increasing trust). Future research could investigate these interesting propositions further.

It is worth noting that the set-up of the current research somewhat restricts the generalizability of our findings. That is, other variables may also play a role in organizations. For instance, we have operationalized trust mainly as expectations about the (benevolent or malicious) intentions of others, but power could also affect trust as an expectation of competency instead of integrity (Mayer et al., 1995). It is

unclear how power would affect such competency-based trust, although power holders' illusion of control or belief in meritocracy may increase the belief that others' work is in part due to the power holder (Fast, Gruenfeld, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2009), thereby decreasing perceptions of competency-based trust. Moreover, in the current studies, power holders were relatively independent from others (cf. the definition of power; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). In many instances of real life, power holders are also dependent on their subordinates (e.g., politicians relying on citizens' votes). Future research could investigate how this form of dependence interacts with leaders' power-loss concerns to predict low trust towards subordinates. Being dependent on subordinates for maintaining one's power may, for instance, foster trust towards subordinates, especially for those individuals who are highly motivated to maintain power—because the only way to maintain power is through their subordinates. Future research could investigate these issues further. Lastly, we might have observed some of the trust behaviors in the current research because power holders may think they do not have the legitimacy to share resources when their power is unstable (a potential newcomer might be given that right). That said, studies 1 and 3 explicitly measured trust expectations instead of sharing behavior; we also observed the effects of unstable power on trust expectations in those studies. In addition, trust expectations mediated the effect of unstable power on sharing behavior in our studies, and feelings of legitimacy did not mediate the effects of unstable power on trust in Study 1. As such, we are confident that we provide convergent evidence for the idea that unstable power reduces trust and that the observed reduction in sharing behavior is at least partly due to a reduction in trust (and not completely due to legitimacy concerns), consistent with our theorizing.

7. Conclusion

We presented four studies examining when and why power undermines trust and how this can be prevented. Using different manipulations of power, different samples of participants, and different indicators of trust, we consistently observed that trust depended on leaders' concerns about losing power, raised by the instability of high-power. Power-loss concerns can thus explain when power decreases trust in others and how—through decreasing these concerns—this can be attenuated. In doing so, the current work broadens knowledge about the effects of power and the determinants of trust. It also suggests practical implications for managers, leaders, and policy-makers about why their power can make them less trusting and how to prevent this.

Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.03.009>.

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