



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

ELIZABETH HERTEL
DIRECTOR

April 29, 2024

Dr. Joe Hamm
Faculty Supervisor, TRUSST Lab
Michigan State University

Dear Dr. Hamm,

Thank you for the opportunity to support your efforts to guide and further study on trust within the Teaching, Researching, and Understanding the Social Science of Trust (TRUSST) Lab incubator.

As an employee of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), I have experienced firsthand the detrimental effects that the loss of trust can have on critical institutional and community relationships that help support public health actions. It is with this lens that I have reviewed your 2023 Strategic Plan and Annual Report and the projects presented by your students in April 2024.

As I noted during the presentation session, this work of examining the underlying mechanisms belying institutional trust is extremely important, particularly to public health in a post-Flint Water Crisis and COVID-19 pandemic world. These two events demonstrated the importance of clear, concise messaging and the importance of a trusted delivery source. While these concepts are not foreign to health and risk communication practice, when implemented at a large scale, the trust in institution overrides the trust in messenger.

Thus said, the practical focus of the work your students are undertaking is much appreciated – as they are examining the role of trust and institution, trust and community – as it allows for interpretation and adoption into the world beyond Academia. As a health communication practitioner and government employee, I very much appreciate the novel insight they are providing with regard to trusting relationships between institution and person as this work will be able to inform the role of MDHHS in future public health intervention efforts.

I would like to reiterate that my comments on the following pages are reflective of my opinion solely and have not been vetted by MDHHS as an authority.

LAB PROJECTS

LP6. Disentangling Trust and Risk as Drivers of Compliance with a Governance Agency

As a member of a governing non-regulatory body who frequently is required to provide advice and non-enforceable recommendations to a public body, I find this project particularly enticing. My comment/question related to this project is related to framing and future recommendations – currently, based on the brief write-ups provided and our discussion, it appears that you are treating the National Hurricane Center as a people-less entity – which is how they present as an authority, true; but if you were open to expanding in future surveys, it may be interesting to see if you humanized the people behind the entity to see if that affects trust – eg: *The workers at the National Hurricane Center care about me.* vs *The National Hurricane Center cares about me.* In my years of work, it seems like people are a lot more willing to distrust an organization than a person – eg: me standing on stage saying something on behalf of MDHHS vs me standing in front of a small group of people having a conversation on behalf of MDHHS. COVID-19 did somewhat challenge that theory, as health directors were being run off the road as humans in a professional role, but I do think it'd be interesting follow-up.

LP 12. Students Experienced Harm at Higher Education Institutions: A Qualitative Study

While we didn't discuss this project during our session, similar to another project that I inquired about: are there plans to survey students from other universities to address for any biases /community groupthink that may be occurring from such a homogenous population?

LP13. Examining the Intersection of Generational (Dis)Trust and Cultural Betrayal in Flint, Michigan

If open to expansion in study scope, I would consider adding Benton Harbor to your study population - and then a control community where there is a population predominantly made up of Biracial/Persons of Color - but in a community where there hasn't been strong public/media outcry related to environmental justice concerns to identify impact of long term institutional biases and social injustices without outside (e.g. media) influences. Another concept for consideration is the access to media – TV vs internet journalism, particularly between the generations, and the effects of perception on the population.

LP? The Role of Religious Faith on Trust in Public Institutions

I believe this project may overlap or have replaced the Synergistic Project #7 *(Dis)Trust, Community Health, and Subjective Well-Being* cited in the 2023 Lab Report. However, as was discussed related to that project during our discussion, I wanted to pose for your consideration - are you also accounting for non-governmental agencies - such as employers when measuring trust? And consideration as to why or why not they may have greater trust levels than other non-local agencies within the public arena? I believe, especially in the Midland-Bay City-Saginaw region, there to be a strong social identity and loyalty to employers in the area that may even supersede the societal impact of religion – although likely implicitly.

LP? Blue Normativity: How Police Conformity to Social Norms Influences Citizens Attitudes

This issue with 'problem police' is not going away and training and administrative leaves do not seem to have a huge impact on outcomes overall. Per my understanding, this study is looking at the layer below the headlines and examining the elements of the people behind the uniform and looking to identify the culture and traits that lead people into this line of work. It also seems to be seeking to answer if more diverse police forces are the answer or if there are other elements at play. I am excited to hear the outcomes as this project moves forward. One potential consideration – you may want to assess if there has been any highly publicized “bad actor” police activity in the area – because direct impact vs indirect impact of police actions and subsequent media coverage will affect viewpoints. In addition, you may want to consider morality of the humans while not in uniform and identify if that impacts people’s perceptions. In small towns, everyone knows everyone – it’s likely that the police have direct personal interrelationships with many of the people in the community; that’s less likely in larger communities.

SYNERGISTIC PROJECTS

SP7. (Dis)Trust, Community Health, and Subjective Well-Being


I believe this project may overlap with The Role of Religious Faith on Trust in Public Institutions that was discussed during our meeting. As was discussed related to that project, I wanted to pose for your consideration - are you also accounting for non-governmental agencies - such as employers when measuring trust? And consideration as to why or why not they may have greater trust levels than other non-local agencies within the public arena?

SP9. Assessing Research University Stakeholder’s Trust in and Acceptance of AI Technology

This look into the ethical and acceptable and accepted use of AI within higher education will be highly informative for other agencies as the race to adopt AI supports is implemented as a means to provide a more user-centric experience with websites, ordering, etc. The topics listed in the conversation: Adaptive Organizational Challenge; automated leadership; trustworthiness; ability, integrity, benevolence; transparency; relationship between information-based and affective AI vulnerabilities; ethics; financial; performance/time loss; privacy; and psychological effects are all at play in AI and the findings this research uncovers will be timely and expandable to the world stage. I have no comments or suggestions at this time other than it’s a worthwhile topic.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in such an important effort. The work the TRUSST Lab is undertaking is highly valuable, especially in our current political culture.

Sincerely,



Michelle Chambers

Bill McEvily
Professor of Strategic Management
Jim Fisher Professorship in Leadership Development



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April 10, 2024

Dr. Joe Hamm
Faculty Supervisor, TRUSST Lab

Dear Dr. Hamm,

It was a pleasure to read the 2023 Strategic Plan and Annual Report for the TRUSST Lab and to have the opportunity to discuss the activities of the Lab with you during the External Advisory Board (EAB) meeting on April 5, 2024. As requested, I am providing feedback on the materials you shared with the EAB and on the student presentations during the meeting. The comments below are organized following the format of the Annual Report.

Before doing so, let me first state that I wholeheartedly endorse the activities and work that you and the PhD students of TRUSST Lab have done in 2023. You are clearly executing on your vision to advance understanding of the social science of trust through PhD-student led research that has impact both from a scholarly and practical standpoint. With eight current PhD students, three alumni students, and a host of collaborators inside and outside of MSU, the scale and scope of the research activities is truly impressive. The immediate tangible impact of the Lab is evident in the number of dissertations, PhD student placements, working papers, conference papers, published papers, and reports that have been produced. And, this does not even account for the lagged effects of the research (e.g., citations) that will accrue in the coming years. The Lab has also been successful in attracting additional external financial support for its activities in the form of grants, fellowships, and other awards. In toto, the Lab really hit its stride in 2023 and delivered on its vision and mission across the board – keep up the great work!

VISION

I continue to see the Lab's focus on advancing PhD-student led research to be highly distinctive, generative, and valuable. The Lab has made progress in elevating its profile and I encourage it to continue to leverage opportunities to let others know about the great work it is doing. Likewise, I continue to appreciate the Lab's dual impact (scholarly and practitioner) focus and I want to further encourage the Lab to consider ways that it may broaden its impact (e.g., translations, toolkits, infographics, datasets, methodologies, workshops).

STRUCTURE

The Lab's structure is nicely aligned with the interdisciplinary nature of trust research, in terms of drawing students, and now collaborating faculty, from a number of different academic disciplines and academic institutions. The Lab appears to be well served at the moment by the gradual expansion of its engagement with new PhD students and faculty and will likely want to maintain that trajectory in the near term. At the same time, as the Lab evolves it would be

worthwhile to periodically review the scale and scope of its involvements with its vision and mission in mind.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Similar to the Lab's distinctive vision centered on PhD-student led research, its theoretical emphasis on a concentrated set of topics at the forefront of trust research is another way that it sets itself apart from other similar centers. Chief among the Lab's primary foci is its sustained and deep interest the concept of *vulnerability*. While the concept has long been recognized as core to understanding of trust, things like its dimensionality, forms, and locus had been overlooked. In this regard, the Lab's emerging views of vulnerability hold considerable potential to garner scholarly attention and alter the trajectory of future research. Previously, the Lab has also emphasized the topics of *power* and *motivation* as they relate to trust. This past year saw less research in both of these areas, which is not surprising given that the interests of PhD students will vary from year to year. Going forward it will be worthwhile for the lab to periodically assess its overall portfolio of research with an eye toward maintaining some balance between 'exploration and exploitation.' That is, both some degree of consistency and some degree of novelty in the Lab's activity are beneficial and it is important to be mindful of any trending toward the extremes.

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The Lab continues to partner with an impressive set of organizations to address the practical questions of who, what, when, where, why and how trust matters. Anecdotally my sense is there has been a trend over the past several years in terms of a heightened interest in trust in the broader public and, concomitantly, a thirst for actionable knowledge. If correct, the Lab's approach of partnering with organization on the front lines of grand challenges is all the more important, both in terms of guiding inquiry with carefully designed research and in terms of informing practice with robust evidence. I applaud the Lab's efforts in this regard and encourage it to continue to make this a priority.

LAB PROJECTS

- **LP6. Disentangling Trust and Risk as Drivers of Compliance with a Governance Agency:**
I continue to see this as an interesting and important topic, with the potential to advance our understanding of institutional trust and the relationship between trust and risk. Additionally, given the heightened concerns about climate change, the practical implications are noteworthy. To further strengthen the project, I would recommend that the research question be clearly and explicitly articulated upfront. Related, I think it is important to position the paper in the existing literature and state how and where it aims to advance this literature. For instance, there may be an opportunity for the project to contribute to, and draw upon, research on emergencies and first responders which often emphasizes a distinction between harm/loss of property vs harm/loss of life (e.g., Horwitz & McGann 2014 Strategic Management Journal). Another opportunity is to dig into the results indicating asymmetric effects. Lastly, I saw the emerging insight that how risk is

perceived as being an important theme to emphasize more heavily as a key contribution of the paper.

- **LP13. Examining the Intersection of Generational (Dis)Trust and Cultural Betrayal in Flint, Michigan**

This is a fascinating study of government betrayal history. What I found most interesting in this research are the concepts of intra-cultural betrayal and inter-generational (dis)trust. The research questions were nicely presented and framed to identify the intended contribution to the literature on institutional trust. The idea that the consequences of betrayal for (dis)trust extend across generations is intriguing because it resonates with the view that trust is a form of social learning. Given the qualitative approach, which I see as highly relevant, it will be particularly important to work towards generating novel theoretical concepts and claims.

- **LP? The Role of Religious Faith on Trust in Public Institutions**

This is a very novel and creative lens on trust in public institutions. I was intrigued with the idea that how we perceive environmental injustice may be shaped by race and by the notion that religion may be a way of dealing with vulnerability. As the work moves forward, I think it will be helpful to clarify its intended contribution. The implications for the literature on institutional trust strike me as one obvious opportunity. Related, it was not clear to me if or how the paper would disentangle the race vs religion effects on trust. The research design does present an attractive opportunity to leverage a ‘natural experiment’ for teasing apart potentially different reactions to the same trust violation, but it also requires some thought on how to deal with the lack of random assignment.

- **LP? Blue Normativity: How Police Conformity to Social Norms Influences Citizens Attitudes**

Also a very creative and novel topic that holds the potential to provide insights into role of normative conformity and social identification on perceived trustworthiness of government/institutions. The paper is still at an early stage, so clearly articulating the research question will be a priority for moving ahead as well as situating the paper in the relevant literature(s). The multi-method research design is very appealing, especially the use of experiments as a way to isolate the effects of identification relative to other plausible effects. At the same time, considering how to limit confounding effects such as media coverage will be important for establishing the external validity of the research.

SYNERGISTIC PROJECTS

- **SP9. Assessing Research University Stakeholder’s Trust in and Acceptance of AI Technology**

This is a very interesting and timely topic with the recent emergence, rapid evolution, and widespread use of generative artificial intelligence (AI). I liked the way the research was framed in terms of asking when does it become ‘creepy’, who do stakeholders hold responsible, and what are the perceptions around AI? Additionally, I was impressed with the research design and data collection plan. Moving forward I see some areas to consider further. One is to be consistent in how AI is characterized, especially relative to automation. As noted during the presentation, what makes AI so novel is its ability to learn and evolve on its own. Given this, the issues around trust are fundamentally

different relative to other for more static technologies. Crystalizing these points will be critical for the development of the paper. Related, it raises a question of what does vulnerability mean in this situation. To the vulnerabilities already identified, you may wish to consider whether there are also unique relational and organizational vulnerabilities. On the latter, questions of governance loom large since no one individual or group of individuals is deciding or controlling what AI tools do.

I hope you find my comments helpful as you continue your important work at the Lab.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill McEvily Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bill McEvily