

GP | GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Multidisciplinary Approach to the Contemporary Cross-Cultural Challenges

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ABSTRACT SUBMISSION TEMPLATE

**Trust repair across high- and low-context workplaces:
a mixed-methods study of eleven European sites**

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1. Context/Background

Cross-border teams in European service firms now routinely combine high- and low-context communication norms, and post-merger integration has made the repair of damaged workplace trust an operational rather than a symbolic concern. Trust repair research, however, remains anchored in single-country samples.

2. Problem

It is unclear which repair actions restore co-operation when the offended party and the offender read the same apology through different contextual conventions. Managers in multinational sites must choose a response within days, under conditions in which a mis-read apology can entrench the breach.

3. Literature Gap/Knowledge Gap

Established work explains repair through apology, denial and substantive amends, and shows that competence-based and integrity-based violations respond differently (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017). What remains untested is whether the relative weight of verbal and substantive components shifts with the communicative context of the site, and whether that shift survives controls for national wealth and organisational tenure. The gap follows from the sampling frames of prior work, not from an absence of studies.

4. Motive/Purpose/Aim/Goal/Objective/Research Questions

This study asks whether contextual communication norms moderate the effectiveness of verbal versus substantive trust-repair actions after integrity-based violations in multinational service teams.

5. Novelty/Originality

The contribution is an explicit cross-context comparison using a common violation scenario, a harmonised measurement model across eleven sites, and a repair typology that separates the timing of amends from their magnitude – distinctions that earlier single-country designs could not identify.

6. Research Design/Method/Analytical Approach

A convergent mixed-methods design combined a pre-registered vignette experiment (2 repair type $\times$ 2 context) with semi-structured interviews, fielded between March and November 2025. Trust was measured with a seven-item scale ($\alpha = 0.91$) invariant across sites at the scalar level. Repair effectiveness was modelled as

$$T_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 R_{ij} + \beta_2 C_j + \beta_3 (R_{ij} \times C_j) + u_j + \varepsilon_{ij},$$

with u_j a site-level random intercept. Interviews were coded by two analysts ($\kappa = 0.82$) and integrated with the quantitative results in a joint display.

7. Data/Sample

The sample comprised 1,184 employees across eleven sites in six countries (mean tenure 6.3 years; 54% women), with 38 interviews drawn purposively from the extremes of the trust distribution. Response rate was 71%; retention at the four-week follow-up was 88%.

8. Key Findings/Results

Substantive amends outperformed verbal apology overall ($\Delta M = 0.62$, 95% CI [0.48, 0.76]), but the advantage was concentrated in low-context sites; in high-context sites a timely apology preceding amends was equally effective (Table 1). The interaction term was significant ($\beta_3 = -0.41$, $p < .001$), and the interviews located the mechanism in whether the apology was read as an admission of responsibility or as a procedural formality.

Table 1: Trust recovery by repair type and communicative context.

	Low context	High context
Verbal apology only	0.21	0.58
Substantive amends only	0.74	0.61
Apology, then amends	0.79	0.83

9. Conclusion with Central Answer

Trust repair is not uniformly a matter of substantive amends: in high-context settings the sequence of the response carries as much weight as its magnitude. The conclusion holds for integrity-based violations in service teams and is transferable to comparable European multinational settings.

10. Implications/Contribution

The findings refine trust-repair theory by making communicative context a moderator rather than a control, and give integration managers a defensible ordering for their first response. The evidence is bounded to integrity-based violations; competence-based breaches may follow a different ordering.

Keywords: trust repair; cross-cultural communication; high-context cultures; mixed methods; multinational teams; organisational justice

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