Engaging Experts: Overcoming Established Trust in Risky Environments

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Abstract
In business-to-business sales environments, sellers may choose to bring their go-to expert to a customer meeting, even when there is an expert available who may be more skilled in the product being discussed. The purpose of this study is to identify if an intervention of data, trust transference, ingroup identity, or a combination, influence the choice of expert a salesperson engages for a customer meeting. We tested this question through a series of vignettes and hierarchical linear modeling. The sample came from a US-based technology company, and salespeople in the United States.

We find that trust transference influenced both choice in the expert as well as trust in the expert chose. The intervention of data influenced choice in the expert. Ingroup identity was not a factor in either choice or trust in the expert. The findings or lack of findings on the impact of ingroup identity merit additional research as it is contrary to previous findings. Additionally, this study shows that individuals may use the same factors in decision-making as they articulate in other situations about that decision. Academic research like this can reveal true decision-making behavior. Finally, managers should invest in trust-building activities with their teams and encourage them to share knowledge of resources and experts. After building trust between team members, transfer of trust becomes a powerful tool in organizations to influence speed and trust in decision-making.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Stephanie Merritt, Ph.D., Chairperson
James A. Breaugh, Ph.D., Committee Member
John P. Meriac, Ph.D., Committee Member