

## **Leader Apologies: How Content and Delivery Influence Sincerity Appraisals**

**Tessa E. Basford, PhD**

Department of Organizational Sciences & Communication  
The George Washington University  
1756 Corcoran St. NW #3B, Washington, DC 20009, USA

### **Abstract**

*How can organizational leaders repair their images following a wrongdoing? While research highlights the general effectiveness of apology as a remedial self-presentation strategy, investigation into follower perceptions of leader apology is lacking. The present study offers the first formal, comprehensive examination into how the content and delivery of leader apologies influence follower appraisals of sincerity. Findings reveal eight components of apology content, nine elements of apology delivery, and two post apology actions that followers attend to in forming attributions of leader apology sincerity and insincerity. Important implications and future directions are discussed.*

**Keywords:** apology, sincerity, leadership, followership

### ***1. Impression Management and Self-Presentation***

All the world's a stage, or so believe many psychologists and sociologists (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Snyder, 1995). Subscribing to this dramaturgical perspective, theorists and researchers contend that people actively manage their actions, words, and expressions to convey different messages to others. In this sense, individuals are considered to be actors presenting before a social audience within a greater context, or stage (Goffman, 1959).

Organizational leaders are not removed from these social stages; rather, they may experience an even greater need than most to intentionally manage their public images. Whether the supervisor of a small work team or the CEO of an international conglomerate, leaders are singled out from the other individuals in the groups they oversee. As consequence of their unique position, leaders may find themselves being watched and evaluated to a greater extent than the others that surround them. Just like the actor who lands the "lead role" in a play, these organizational leaders are put on display. They are constantly and critically being observed, assessed, and re-assessed by their followers. The impressions that observers form likely depend heavily on how effectively these leaders manage their images.

Impression management describes the process by which individuals work to create certain images of themselves and transmit them to others (Arkin, 1981). Impressions can be managed in various ways. For instance, a businesswoman might choose to use a firmer handshake than normal when greeting a potential client in order to convey an image of strength and competence. Along with modifying her own behavior, she could adjust the situation, perhaps setting up the business meeting at an exclusive, upscale restaurant to send the impression that her company is highly profitable.

The notion that people modify their behavior and situations to convey different impressions is not new. Even so far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, James (1890) wrote about how the social selves people present differ depending on the settings they are in and the individuals that surround them. For instance, the selves we allow children to see are not identical to the selves that we present to friends, nor are those selves exactly the same as those we exhibit to employers (James, 1980). The fact that these manipulations of our social images are so widespread and frequent has led Snyder (1995) to assert, "impression management is a basic fact of social life" (p. 88).

In managing impressions, people frequently consider the manner in which they present themselves to others. Self-presentation, defined as "the use of behavior to communicate some information about oneself to others," occurs when actors alter their words, expressions, purposive behaviors, and artifactual displays (Baumeister, 1982, p. 2). Of these different tools available for individuals to use in constructing their images, research has focused most heavily on verbal forms of self-presentation.

Through their words, leaders have the opportunity to create different impressions. The image that a leader attempts to convey to followers differs depending on the goal behind the person's self-presentation. Leaders may wish to accomplish different objectives, which in turn affect the image they attempt to create in the eyes of followers and the words they select in order to do so (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, depending on their objective, leaders may employ different self-presentation strategies.

## **2. Remedial Self-Presentation and Apology**

When people, such as our organizational leaders, face identity-threatening situations, they tend to adopt a remedial self-presentation strategy (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). Attempting to reduce the damage their mistakes impart on their images, leaders also hope to avoid experiencing negative reactions from their followers. To do so, Tedeschi (1981) contends that they may choose to either minimize responsibility or reduce the perceived gravity of their wrongdoing. To negate or reduce the extent to which their followers attribute culpability to them, leaders may employ excuses (Tedeschi, 1981). Excuses are designed to deny intentionality behind an action (e.g., "I did not mean to release an unsafe product on the market"). When attempting to minimize the perceived negativity of the consequences of their actions, leaders may justify their actions (Tedeschi, 1981). In doing so, they might acknowledge responsibility but refute claims that the outcome was inappropriate (e.g., "The product helped more people than it hurt").

In addition to these excuses and justifications, leaders can also use apologies to help recover in an identity-threatening situation (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). Apologies can be considered a strategic self-presentation technique by which an actor attempts to convince the audience that a mistake, bad decision, or offense is not representative of the actor's true self (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). In this sense, apologies have been conceptualized as a tactic designed to split the self (Goffman, 1971). In censuring his or her "bad self" for the transgression, the apologizer also attempts to disassociate the incident from his or her "good self" (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). It is hoped that by recognizing and apologizing for one's offenses others will witness the offender's good self and be persuaded that the "event should not be considered a fair representation of what the actor is 'really like' as a person" (Schlenker, 1980, p. 154).

Apologizing for an offense tends to be a helpful image-repair technique. Through apology, people and groups can often communicate impressions that improve their images and show their good self to others. For instance, Philpot and Hornsey (2008) found that ingroup members who were told that an outgroup had apologized perceived that outgroup as more remorseful than when the outgroup was not said to have apologized. Further, Tucker, Turner, Barling, Reid, and Elving's (2006) research has found that leaders who apologize for their mistakes are perceived by their followers as more transformational. As these studies and many others indicate, apologizing tends to be a beneficial remedial self-presentation strategy (e.g., Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Levine & West, 1976; Ohbuchi, Kameda & Agarie, 1989).

### **2.1 Apology Sincerity**

Though generally effective (De Cremer & Schouten, 2008), not all apologies are received favorably. Knowing that people engage in strategic self-presentation to improve their images, followers may sometimes suspect that a leader's apology is more motivated by the leader's desire to save face than by the person's honest concern for their well-being (Regehr & Gutheil, 2002). As Smith (2008) notes, "Many apologies lie" (p. 17).

Stamato (2008) advises receivers to be alert for the "non-apology" (p.1). Some apologies may be insincere attempts to influence the audience or amend the apologizer's self-concept and have little to do with the victim's well-being. Followers may have reason to be especially concerned about receiving such apologies from their leaders. Snyder's (1995) work has shown that leaders may be particularly adept at self-monitoring and modifying their behavior to meet situational demands. Thus, leaders may be more skilled at communicating an apology they do not mean in a way that appears sincere to the victim. Further, leaders' status as authority figures may make them appear especially trustworthy (Chaldini, 2008). However, when insincerity is perceived, apology effectiveness may be compromised. Research indicates that targets may respond more positively to apologies perceived to be sincere, as opposed to those perceived to be insincere or intentionally manipulative (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, in press). For instance, Anderson, Linden, and Habra (2006) found that people high in trait hostility showed faster recovery in systolic blood pressure when a transgression was followed by a genuine apology, as compared to a pseudo-apology or no apology.

What influences appraisals of apology sincerity? Research on this topic is limited and virtually non-existent within organizational scholarship. Examining the factors that enhance and reduce perceptions of leader apology sincerity is important, as research suggests that messages perceived to be manipulative can diminish perceptions of fairness and reduce acceptance of an outcome (Skarlickici, Folger, & Gee, 2004).

### **3. Message Content and Delivery**

In this investigation two key elements of leader apologies – message content and message delivery – were examined to add to our understanding of follower perceptions of leader apology sincerity. In so doing, this research aims to help leaders recognize how the content and delivery of their apologies influence follower attributions of sincerity and insincerity.

#### **3.1 Message Content**

Elements of apology content emerge in theoretical frameworks of apology. Lazare (2004) contends that an apology consists of four components: acknowledgement of offense, remorse, explanations, and reparation. According to Lazare (2004), a complete apology involves the apologizer recognizing the harm, showing remorse, providing rationale for the incident, and resolving to refrain from such actions in the future. Drawing upon several of these themes, Kador (2009) offers another framework, proposing five dimensions of effective apology: 1) recognition, 2) responsibility, 3) remorse, 4) restitution, and 5) repetition. For an apology to be effective, Kador (2009) theorizes that the apologizer must acknowledge the incident, accept responsibility, express contrition, attempt to restore the relationship, and promise the event will not reoccur.

While interesting and informative, these frameworks have yet to undergo sufficient empirical investigation in the realm of organizational leadership and followership. Elements of apology content have received little empirical attention in psychology, with many studies treating apology as a dichotomous variable (i.e., apology vs. no apology) rather than measure its nuances (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). However, the limited research conducted on this topic suggests that apologies often contain different elements, such as a statement of remorse, description of damage, compensation offer, and promise not to repeat the offense (Sugimoto, 1997). Further, previous scholarship indicates that the content of an apology likely affects how it is appraised (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). As Schlenker and Darby's (1981) research has shown, people tend to use more elaborate apologies when they perceive the consequences of an event to be more negative, perhaps assuming that targets in such situations would respond less positively to perfunctory expressions of remorse.

Though minimal, research to have specifically studied different aspects of apologies highlights the importance of message content. Fehr and Gelfand's (2010) examination of three components of apologies – offers of compensation, expressions of empathy, and acknowledgements of violated norms – revealed that the effectiveness of apologies depended upon how well these dimensions aligned with recipients' self-construals. This work highlights the importance of teasing out different aspects of apology content, rather than treating apology as a dichotomous construct. Similarly, research on organizational apologies indicates that elements of apology content, such as acceptance of responsibility and expressions of regret, play a role in receiver reactions (Pace, Fediuk, & Botero, 2010). However, additional research is needed to determine the components of apology content that followers attend to when forming appraisals of their leaders' apologies. Thus, the present study seeks to provide insight into this domain, examining the elements of apology content that followers use to form judgments about leader apology sincerity and insincerity.

#### **3.2 Message Delivery**

While less apparent than aspects of apology content, elements of apology delivery also appear in apology frameworks. For instance, remorse emerges as a key theme in both Lazare's (2004) and Kador's (2009) work, as well as that of other scholars (e.g., Smith, 2008). While remorse might involve a verbal or written expression, such as "I feel so bad this happened to you," it might also be conveyed without words. Body language and voice tone can express remorse (Ten Brinke, MacDonald, Porter, & O'Connor, 2012), which followers may attend to in forming appraisals of leader apology sincerity. In addition to these apology frameworks, theoretical exploration into apology offers additional insight into how the delivery of an apology may impact its effectiveness. Theoretical discussion highlights the role of several message delivery factors. Scholars note the importance of timeliness, with tardy apologies believed to be less well received than more timely ones (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

In contrast to delayed apologies, timely apologies may better signal that the apologizer is aware of the wrongdoing and concerned about the damaged relationship (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Also, in considering the “performance of the apology,” Smith (2008) contemplates the importance of the apology audience and contends that the meaningfulness of an apology may depend on who is present to receive the message (p. 74). Additionally, Smith (2008) discusses how initiation may affect recipient reactions, proposing that apologies initiated by the apologizer, rather than prompted by another party, likely generate the most favorable results. Finally, the role of apology medium has been explored, with the relative benefits of oral and written apologies considered (Smith, 2008).

Despite such discussions surrounding the importance of apology delivery, its impact on target reactions has undergone little formal investigation. Studies to have investigated aspects of apology delivery suggest it impacts recipient reactions, indicating that apology delivery merits additional research attention. For example, Tomlinson, Dineen, and Lewicki’s (2004) investigation into precursors of victim reconciliation willingness highlights the critical role of timeliness. Though such findings are promising, more research is needed. To date, investigators have yet to examine the impact of organizational leaders’ apology delivery on follower appraisals of apology sincerity. Entering into such research is needed to help leaders better understand how best to convey sincerity to their followers after a transgression.

## **4. Method**

### **4.1 Sample**

A sample of participants was obtained from Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT), an online marketplace allowing researchers to post studies and interested participants to respond for small monetary compensation. AMT participants tend to be demographically diverse, varying widely in terms of gender, age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, occupational industry, and work experience (Behrend, Sharek, Meade, & Wiebe, 2011). This study was restricted on MTurk to U.S. residents possessing a minimum of six months work experience in the U.S.

After data cleaning, the sample consisted of 339 participants. The sample represented both genders: 50.6% female ( $n = 175$ ), 47.4% male ( $n = 164$ ), and 2.0% non-response ( $n = 7$ ). The sample was also diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, with participants classifying themselves as: Caucasian/White (48.0%;  $n = 166$ ), Asian/Pacific Islander (34.7%;  $n = 120$ ), African American/Black (6.1%;  $n = 21$ ), Hispanic/Latino (2.6%;  $n = 9$ ), mixed-race (2.3%;  $n = 8$ ), other (4.0%,  $n = 14$ ), and non-response 2.3% ( $n = 8$ ). Respondents ranged widely in age (19-64 years), averaging 33.57 years ( $SD = 10.48$ ), and total work experience (less than a year-52 years), averaging 12.82 years ( $SD = 10.80$ ). Participants held a wide variety of job titles at the time of the incident, including: teacher, graphic designer, waitress, accountant, software engineer, human resources manager, nurse, investment analyst, and truck driver, amongst many others. Likewise, participants worked in various industries, such as: health care, sales, finance, media, information technology, food service, retail, hospitality, and construction, and numerous others.

The leaders participants described were also diverse. In terms of gender, 66.5% ( $n = 230$ ) of participants reported instances involving male leaders, 30.3% ( $n = 105$ ) recounted instances involving female leaders, and 3.2% ( $n = 11$ ) did not specify their leader’s gender. Leaders were described as Caucasian/White (49.1%;  $n = 170$ ), Asian/Pacific Islander (32.9%;  $n = 114$ ), African American/Black (7.5%;  $n = 26$ ), Hispanic/Latino (3.5%;  $n = 12$ ), other (3.2%;  $n = 11$ ), mixed-race (1.7%;  $n = 6$ ), and non-response 2.0% ( $n = 7$ ). Leaders held various job titles, including: project manager, vice president of operations, plant foreman, director of special education, marketing director, partner, chief financial officer, as well as many others.

### **4.2 Procedure**

A critical incident technique was employed, with participants responding to a prompt adapted from Aquino, Tripp, and Bies’ (2001) research:

Think back over the last 6 months as an employee to recall an incident where your supervisor offended you or made a mistake that negatively impacted you. Please write a two or three sentence description of the incident below explaining what your supervisor said or did. Be as specific as possible. If you have not been offended by your supervisor or negatively impacted by a mistake your supervisor made within the last 6 months, think about the last time you were offended or negatively impacted by a supervisor.

After reading and responding to the prompt, participants were asked whether or not their supervisor apologized to them for the incident. Participants who indicated that they received an apology responded to the following qualitative items: 1) "Describe how your supervisor conveyed sincerity or insincerity in his/her apology" and 2) "Describe what you supervisor said or did (or could have said or done) to show you his/her apology was sincere."

## 5. Analysis

Responses were analyzed by three subject matter experts (SMEs) using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open coding technique. As defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), open coding is, "...the analytical process through which the components are identified and their properties and dimensions discovered in the data" (p. 101). Open coding techniques are frequently employed to uncover thematic trends in qualitative data addressing a wide range of topics, such as e-learning (Nettleland, Wasson, & Morch, 2007), emotional labor (Julien & Genuis, 2009), and day labor (Harwood, Ward, & Chapman, 2009).

According to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open coding guidelines, themes emerged from the data. Themes were not chosen prior to qualitative analysis; rather, themes materialized out of participant responses. Every response was read independently by each SME and assigned a descriptive category label, with complex transgressions receiving multiple category labels as appropriate (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These category labels were then compared and contrasted by SMEs. Discussions resulted in the reduction of the original category labels into a smaller set of broad themes. All SMEs agreed on these themes, considering them to best represent the key recurring themes in participant responses, and defined them according to their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

## 6. Results

Altogether, nineteen themes emerged. Upon reviewing these themes and their corresponding definitions, it became evident that they could be further classified into three main factors: 1) message content, 2) message delivery, and 3) post-apology action. The first factor, message content, encompassed the following eight themes: 1) admission of responsibility, 2) acknowledgement of severity, 3) rationale, 4) personalization, 5) appreciation, 6) future intention, 7) number of apologies, and 8) opportunity to contribute. The second factor, message delivery, included an additional nine themes: 1) timeliness, 2) initiation, 3) motivation, 4) directness, 5) attention, 6) body language, 7) tone, and 8) gift, and 9) audience. Third, the post-apology action factor, contained two themes: 1) resolution and 2) follow-up. Tables 1-3 present an overview of these factors and themes.

### 6.1 Message Content

**Admission of Responsibility.** The extent to which followers perceived their leader admitted or accepted responsibility for the wrongdoing arose as a reoccurring theme impacting sincerity perceptions. Followers who appraised their leader's apology as sincere often noted that their leader's admission of responsibility contributed to their perception of sincerity. The following responses highlight this trend:

"She admitted she was wrong, which she almost never does. She seems to view admitting mistakes as a kind of weakness and usually falls back on 'forgetting' things. Apparently it's easier to say 'Oh, I forgot' than 'Oh, I was wrong,' even though the former actually conveys slightly less competence, in my opinion."<sup>1</sup>

"She took responsibility for not being more aware of what was going on in the lab."

In contrast, followers who viewed their leader's apology as insincere frequently recounted that their leader failed to admit responsibility or accept blame for the incident. Some even noted that their leader denied responsibility or tried to blame them for the issue. As the following responses illustrate, followers often described how this failure to admit responsibility impacted their attributions of insincerity:

"He said he was sorry and walked out of the office. That was it. No, gee, I was really off the wall yesterday. No, wow, what a jerk I was. Nothing except, 'sorry about yesterday,' and then poof, gone. Do people really think they can just smooth things over without saying what was really wrong and what they did wrong? Sheesh."

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<sup>1</sup>Occasional minor spelling and grammatical edits were made to participant responses for clarity.

“He said he was sorry IF he had offended me or hurt my feelings in any way. I felt like his apology still excused his behavior because he did not take responsibility for what he actually said only what he MIGHT have said.”

“Well to me he seemed to realize that it was in fact not my fault, however when he gave me his apology for some reason I got the impression that he did not take responsibility and own up to the fact that it was his mistake. To me an apology must not only relieve the accused of the burden of being told it was his/her mistake but must also contain the idea of whose mistake it was!”

Also, when describing how their leader could have better conveyed sincerity, followers often drew from this theme. They emphasized that their leader should have admitted responsibility for his or her role in the incident. Examples below portray this sentiment:

“...I think he should have made the apology and then said something along the lines of ‘I know it wasn’t your fault. It was up to me to make the purchase order.’ I feel that if it would have been done something like that, the ill feeling I still hold towards him would have dissipated a long time ago. As I said a person must own his/her mistakes if they don’t then the apology is hollow!”

“She should have taken credit for offending me instead of saying, ‘If I offended you...’ because she knew that she did. I could see through the apology.”

**Acknowledgement of Severity.** The next theme to arise pertaining to message content involves an acknowledgement of severity. While the first theme centered upon admission of guilt, this second theme revolves around recognition of the gravity of the situation. When leaders acknowledged the gravity of the wrongdoing, followers were more likely to appraise their apologies as sincere. The following response encapsulates this theme:

“After offending me in that incident, he called me back and conveyed his sincere apology. He explained to me about the seriousness of the mistake.”

Conversely, when leaders failed to acknowledge the severity of the situation or downplayed the gravity of the incident, followers frequently formed attributions of insincerity. Followers that appraised their leader’s apology as insincere often noted that their leader should have acknowledged the seriousness of the situation and detailed the nature of the incident, believing this acknowledgment would have positively influenced their perceptions of sincerity. Respondents explained:

“Even just a regular plain old ‘I do apologize for putting you on the spot’ would have worked just fine for me. I didn’t need a long drawn out apology but just an acknowledgment of the situation would have been sufficient.”

“An acknowledgment that this was a recurring problem would have been very welcome...I would have been happier if I thought her apology was sincere.”

**Rationale.** Rationale emerged as a recurring theme, describing the degree to which followers felt they received sufficient and believable explanations, often specific in nature, for the cause of the incident. Followers who were provided with rationale and accepted these explanations were generally less apt to doubt their leader’s sincerity. The following examples illustrate this trend:

“She explained that since she was a relatively new supervisor in my sub-specialty unit, she was still learning the ins and outs of staff interactions and had completely misjudged this particular situation. She finished with an apology that seemed heartfelt and genuinely sorry.”

“He went through what a bad night he had and how he was frustrated. He then said that was still no excuse for his behavior and apologized again. He seemed very sincere in his apology and I believe it did bother him that he behaved that way.”

However, when leaders provided insufficient, invalid, or vague explanations, followers often arrived at attributions of insincerity. The following response represents this theme:

“He could have told me a reason why he would say something so horrible to begin with, like my parents were racist and I need to work on being a better person or something like that. He could have at least told me why he would say something like that.”

When perceiving rationale as an excuse rather than explanation, followers frequently formed insincere appraisals. These followers stated that their leaders should not have attempted to excuse away their behavior. Many noted that they would have perceived their leader's apology as more sincere had their leader not employed excuses. Below are examples:

"Instead of excusing his behavior by saying he was busy he could have said I was busy but that's no excuse for the way I talked to you."

"Her apology was not sincere. It may have been sincere if she would have not made up excuses for what she said...Saying sorry with multiple excuses is not an apology in my opinion."

"She kept saying 'I didn't know' or 'you didn't tell me it was that bad.' She used not knowing the details as an excuse for her actions."

**Personalization.** Personalization was another frequently cited message content theme. Followers tended to react favorably when their leader delivered a personalized apology. Followers who considered their leader's apology to be personalized, rather than generic, scripted, or pre-prepared, generally formed sincere appraisals. For example, in reflecting upon the factors that influenced his or her perceptions of apology sincerity, one follower noted:

"...it was all very spontaneous, instead of prepared."

Conversely, a lack of personalization appeared as a common theme impacting insincere appraisals. Followers frequently mentioned how their leader's apology seemed generic, scripted, or pre-planned. These apologies tended to garner attributions of insincerity, as demonstrated in the following responses:

"When he apologized it seemed more like a rehearsed script than an apology. He did not sound sincere..."

"His apology sounded like he was reading a script. It was probably from a manager handbook. When he was making accusations, he sounded very sincere."

"She couched her apology in terms of agreeing with the district level curriculum coordinator rather than in personal terms."

**Appreciation.** The next message content theme, appreciation, describes the extent to which leaders expressed appreciation and recognized follower performance. Leaders who emphasized the contributions of their followers and stressed the value of their work were often afforded more favorable attributions. Followers who appraised their leader's apology as sincere often described how appreciation influenced their attributions. The response below serves as example of this theme:

"She started by telling me how much she valued me as a member of the team, and appreciated how I had gone above and beyond what anyone had ever asked of me. She went over my accomplishments, and all that I had done for her in the past. Finally, she apologized for our meeting the week prior...I felt she was sincere..."

However, when leaders failed to recognize and appreciate their followers, followers tended to react less positively. In fact, when asked what their leaders could have done to make their apology seem more sincere, followers frequently responded by drawing upon this theme. The following responses represent this sentiment:

"She could have thanked me for taking the initiative to help my new colleague when she was unavailable. She could have recognized that I was not trying to usurp her authority, but help my new colleague get something done when our supervisor was unavailable."

"He could have told me I still did a good job even though it wasn't quite what he wanted."

**Future Intention.** Future intention describes the extent to which leaders expressed a desire to help resolve the incident and prevent it from reoccurring in the future. Followers frequently noted how this theme impacted their perceptions of apology sincerity. When leaders offered to help and convincingly expressed that the incident would not happen again, followers were generally more likely to form sincere attributions. Additionally, followers tended to respond with more sincere appraisals when their leaders described how they would change their behavior to prevent a similar incident in the future.

The following responses offer examples of this theme in action:

“He called me in and stated that he was sorry. He said this would never happen again. He stated that he would use the proper resources first before acting. He said if he had then this would not have happened.”

“My supervisor explained his actions and then assured me that nothing like that would ever happen again going forward. The apology was thoughtful and seemed very deeply considered on their part...a plan to better avoid anything similar was presented during the apology.”

“He offered me any help he can give me.”

In contrast, when leaders failed to offer help or reassure their followers that they intended to avoid committing the same transgression in the future, their apologies came across as less sincere. Examples below express this sentiment:

“She wasn’t sincere at all! She did tell me that she was sorry and that she didn’t know what was going on with me at home. But she didn’t offer to help me in any way, or even ask if there was anything she could do for me.”

“My supervisor could have promised that such an outburst would not happen again. He did not do so, which is why I could not strongly agree that his apology was sincere...his reluctance to promise to monitor his reactions in the future didn’t convince me that he wouldn’t do it again. If someone cannot learn from their mistakes, you can’t help but question their sincerity when they apologize for offending you.”

Therefore, followers often noted that they would have perceived their leader’s apology as more sincere had their leader stressed future intentions to help resolve the incident and prevent it from reoccurring. Asked how their leaders might have conveyed more sincerity, followers often drew upon this theme. Below are a few examples:

“He could have given us some sort of assurance that this wouldn’t happen again or at least that it would be handled more professionally in the future.”

“He could have sincerely said Ms [name] I am so sorry about what happened and I will try to better in the future. He could have said that he will make an attempt to consider everyone before assigning projects.”

**Number of Apologies.** The number of apologies leaders offered also arose as a reoccurring message content theme. As the subsequent responses show, many followers appeared to use the number of apologies they received as an indicator of sincerity, with more apologies generating greater attributions of sincerity:

“I could tell she was sincere and embarrassed because she kept apologizing.”

“After the whole pizza incident, he said he was sorry many times...He was really sorry.”

“He also apologized a bazillion times. He wanted to be positive that I had accepted his apology.”

Other followers, however, felt they received an inadequate number of apologies. When asked how their leader might have conveyed greater sincerity in his or her apology, these followers commented that multiple apologies might have helped. The below example encapsulates this perspective:

“He should have said he was sorry several times.”

**Opportunity to Contribute.** Follower opportunity to contribute was found to be another important message content theme. Leaders who solicited followers’ opinions, thoughts, and feelings tended to be perceived as more sincere in their apology than those who did not ask for followers’ contributions. Followers who received an opportunity to contribute generally described sincere apologies, as in the following statements:

“[She] had us all say how her speech made us feel. She then apologized for making us feel unimportant and unappreciated.”



“In order to make sure I was okay with the situation my supervisor also allowed me to express my thoughts on the subject and listened intently.”

“He asked me how I felt before and after the apology.”

Conversely, when leaders did not ask for followers’ opinions, ideas, or thoughts, they often garnered insincere appraisals. Followers noted how their leader’s failure to provide them with an opportunity to contribute negatively impacted their perceptions of the leader’s apology sincerity. Asked how their leader could have better conveyed sincerity in his/her apology, these followers often drew from this theme:

“She should have stopped what she was doing...and invited me to express myself.

“Could of asked more about my feelings.”

## **6.2 Message Delivery**

**Timeliness.** The timeliness of a leader’s apology emerged as a recurring message delivery theme. Followers often commented about how the timeliness of the apology affected their perceptions of sincerity, with apologies delivered immediately or just shortly following a transgression viewed as more sincere. As the below examples depict, timeliness was frequently described as a factor that positively influenced attributions of sincerity:

“Upon realizing he had forgotten to announce me, he came right over. There were people that wanted his time and had questions for them, but he told them he would connect with them later. He first came over to apologize; he did not wait until the next day.”

“My supervisor had big shock of his life and felt very bad and he immediately called me and told me everything and regretted not quoting the price of my choice and felt very sorry and he apologized for the same.”

When leaders failed to apologize in a timely matter, followers also noticed. Leaders whose apologies were considered tardy received less favorable appraisals. As the subsequent response illustrates, followers often described timeliness issues when explaining the factors that influenced their perceptions of insincerity:

“It took my principal a month to apologize after I brought it up.”

**Initiation.** Initiation arose as another key message delivery theme. Followers noted when their leaders initiated apologies on their own accord, as opposed to when the apology was prompted by another party. Leaders who initiated the apology, approaching the follower to make amends without being asked, tended to be viewed as more sincere. The following responses highlight this theme:

“She contacted me directly...when she realized the oversight. In fact, she contacted me within a day before I had a chance to reach out to her.”

“My supervisor came to me and said sorry for the incident.”

Conversely, when leaders did not initiate the apology, followers often viewed their apologies as insincere. As opposed to leader-initiated apologies, apologies that were prompted by the follower or another individual were perceived less favorably.

As the examples below illustrate, followers drew upon this theme in forming attributions of insincerity:

“I think my supervisor could have approached me to apologize or talk about the incident instead of me having to do it... His apology seemed more like a reaction than a response.”

“I continued to be upset and angry about the incident. The supervisor acted as if nothing had happened. One of my co-workers advised him that he should apologize. He waited until the next day and then said ‘I’m sorry I shoved you.’ He did not sound sincere at all.”

**Motivation.** Leaders’ motivation for apologizing also emerged as a message delivery theme. When leaders conveyed that their apology was voluntary and motivated out of true remorse and concern, followers generally responded positively. Belief that the apology stemmed from sincere remorse, rather than a self-serving motivation, influenced many followers to form sincere appraisals.

Like the following example, followers often touched upon this theme in their responses:

“He wanted to talk about the incident and make amends instead of us both holding a grudge. He said he was concerned that I was upset and did not want it to continue.”

However, if followers perceived that a leader’s motivation for apologizing was self-centered, they formed insincere appraisals. Followers tended to react negatively to apologies they thought were motivated more out of the leader’s concern for him or herself than the leader’s concern for the follower. The following examples highlight the key role that perceived leader motivation often played in appraisals of apology insincerity:

“She did apologize to me when the [senior manager] was there...I think that was the only reason she did was to look better in front of the [senior manager]...her apology definitely didn't seem sincere and was just to show face at the time.”

“I could tell through her apology that she was mainly concerned with how the project and her hiring decisions would affect her job. She was not truly concerned with my work load.”

“I think he only apologized because he knew people have been sued for assault for less.”

“She was sorry more for herself than for me.”

**Directness.** Directness, another commonly cited message delivery theme, involves the modality of the apology. Apologies considered to be upfront and direct were generally those delivered in person. When leaders were viewed as directly apologizing, rather than relying upon some indirect communication tool or avoiding the apology altogether, they earned favorable attributions. As indicated in the example below, followers who viewed their leader’s apology as sincere frequently noted directness as a factor influencing this perception:

“...he did call me in, reviewed my notes, heard my side of the story and agreed with my course of actions. Then he apologized in person. It wasn’t an email or voice mail and it wasn’t just passing through the hall.”

On the flip side, followers who received indirect apologies tended to form insincere appraisals. Asked what their leader could have done to convey greater sincerity, these followers frequently mentioned the importance of direct, in-person communication. Examples of such responses are provided below:

“My supervisor should have verbally apologized in addition to giving me a letter of apology. She never verbally apologized. I only received an enclosed letter in my mailbox at work.”

“While she did email me, she could have apologized to me in-person.”

“He could have apologized in person instead of by telephone.”

**Attention.** The next message delivery theme to emerge, attention, involves the degree to which leaders devoted sufficient time and attention to the apology. In forming perceptions of sincerity, followers often used this theme to gauge whether their leader was truly apologetic and remorseful.

Leaders who devoted uninterrupted time and attention to the apology and closely listened to the follower tended to be viewed as sincere. In particular, when describing how they judged sincerity, followers often noted that their leader took time out of his or her day to dedicate specifically to the apology. The important role this theme played in many sincerity appraisals is depicted in the examples below:

“I believe she was sincere because she carved out time for me, and stayed until we were ‘right’ again.”

“I believe he showed his apology was sincere by the amount of time he spent in my office discussing it.”

In contrast, followers who felt they received insufficient time or divided attention often formed attributions of insincerity. They frequently drew upon this theme when describing how their leader conveyed insincerity, as the following responses illustrate:

“She casually said she was sorry, and did not look at me or pause in what she was doing...I seldom get angry over slights or social silliness, but I would have loved to have turned the desk over on her.”

“...her apology was very off-hand and she even seemed distracted while she was apologizing to me. I would have been happier if I thought her apology was sincere.”

“It was too brief. It was given like the apology and the incident were no big deal.”

**Body Language.** Body language surfaced as another important message delivery theme. Followers described how they often looked to their leader’s body language for clues about their leader’s sincerity. Physical expressions of remorse tended to generate greater perceptions of sincerity. Though the exact nature of these expressions varied widely, eye contact was the aspect most frequently emphasized by followers. As the following responses indicate, body language influenced sincerity appraisals:

“In his apology, he had a very sad and empathetic face. This conveyed to me that he was genuinely sorry and I felt that he was truly sorry for the mistake. Another way that he conveyed his apology was using his hands. By this I mean that he moved his hands towards me in a way that conveyed connection and empathy. His eye contact was rarely broken during this entire time.”

“...he sat down next to me so we were at eye level. This made me feel more comfortable and like he was ‘humbling’ himself. He also appeared worried, his eyes looked concerned. Finally, touching his hand to his brow as if he had a headache made me realize there was a lot on his mind and made it easier for me to forgive him.”

Just as body language affected sincerity perceptions, it also influenced insincerity attributions. Followers seemed to use their leader’s body language to provide information about whether their leader was truly sorry for his or her wrongdoing. Also, when asked how their leader might have better conveyed sincerity, followers frequently commented on their leader’s body language, as evidenced in the following responses:

“He could also have had a sincere look on his face and not a smirk.”

“He never made eye contact with me during his apology.”

**Tone.** The sixth message delivery theme, tone, focuses on the voice tone of the leader. Asked about factors that impacted their perceptions of apology sincerity, followers frequently mentioned their leader’s tone of voice. Though followers were not very descriptive about the specific aspects of their leader’s tone that influenced their appraisals of sincerity, many emphasized that it conveyed emotion. The following examples represent responses drawing from this theme:

“The tone of his voice conveyed that he was being sincere.”

“The tone of her voice was full of emotion.”

“I could tell [she was sincere] by the tone of her voice.”

Voice tone was also a recurring theme in the responses of followers who appraised their leader’s apology as insincere. As illustrated below, followers often explained how tone impacted their attributions of insincerity:

“She blandly said she was sorry when I told her I had had it and was quitting. She had no remorse or sincerity in her statement. She sounded sarcastic and annoyed. It made the situation worse to hear her say it in such a horrible tone. I wanted to punch her.”

“If he had said the apology with less attitude and more emotion then it would have come over as being more sincere.”

“His tone was always condescending when he said he was sorry. I knew he didn’t mean it...He also smiled when he said it and then would follow it up by saying: ‘what? I really mean it’ in the same tone.”

**Gift.** Gift, another commonly noted message delivery theme, involves gifts or gestures given by the leader to the follower to express remorse. These gifts served as presents or tokens of atonement, not as a means of directly resolving the incident. The nature of these gifts varied greatly, including everything from complementary lunch to a free iPad. Many followers, like those featured below, mentioned how these gifts positively influenced their perceptions of sincerity:

“To show that she was truly sorry she gave me a keyring that I always wanted.”

“She even went so far as to send a card to my home, expressing her sorrow for her mistake.”

Though gifts tended to be mentioned by followers who appraised their leader’s apology as sincere, they were occasionally also described as a factor influencing perceptions of insincerity. The following example illustrates:

“The five dollar gift cards didn’t come out of his pocket, so I would assume that it was a policy to buy us off. Five dollars isn’t really enough to buy anything in our store. It felt like an insult.”

**Audience.** The audience to whom the leader delivered the apology emerged as another important message delivery theme. When multiple individuals observed or were involved in a transgression, followers generally responded most favorably to leaders who apologized to all individuals. The subsequent examples depict the importance of this theme in apology sincerity appraisals:

“To prove it was not just lip service since she had insulted me in front of my team after making her apologies personally to me in private, she made a point of apologizing to me again in front of my team.”

Conversely, if followers felt that their leader failed to apologize to all necessary individuals, they tended to generate insincere appraisals. In such instances, followers’ negative reactions may have stemmed from perceptions that their leader did not clear their name or that their leader was unwilling to face a public admission of wrongdoing. The following example shows how a leader’s failure to apologize to all desired parties affected perceptions of insincerity:

“When I pulled out the laptop, he looked surprised. I explained what happened and why the computer was where it was. He said ‘Oh, my bad, guess you can still work here then, sorry about that’...That was the extent of the apology. He should have announced it the way he apparently announced to the whole department in my absence that I was a thief.”

Asked what their leader could have done to convey greater sincerity in his or her apology, followers again drew from this theme:

“He should have apologized in front of our staff meeting since that is where he let my personal information become public knowledge.”

“He could have apologized in front of my peers (he scolded me in front of them).”

“I also think he should have apologized in front of his superior to show that he was indeed sincere.”

### 6.3 Post-Apology Action

**Resolution.** Another reoccurring theme, resolution, centers upon actions taken by a leader after the apology to resolve the incident. Leaders who worked to fix the situation and mend the damage imparted from their transgression tended to receive greater attributions of sincerity. Followers often described how their leader’s actions to repair the situation influenced their perceptions of apology sincerity. The following examples portray cases in which leaders acted to resolve the incident and, consequently, received sincere appraisals:

“She was truly sincere in her apology and has made sure our area’s results appear in all subsequent reports and measurements.”

“Since then he has been diligent in making sure I am included in every meeting and every email concerning this matter.”

However, when leaders did not attempt to resolve the incident, followers reacted less favorably. Rather than accept their leader's apology as sincere, these followers seemed more prone to assess the apology as insincere. The following response highlights this trend:

"After the apology he could have acted more professional and kept to his word that the hostile environment would change. He could have also stopped using derogatory terms when referring to my co-worker."

**Follow-up.** Follow-up also emerged as a post-apology action that played a key role in sincerity appraisals. Follow-up, defined as leader attempts to check on follower recovery, was frequently included in follower responses. Upon responding to questions regarding factors that influenced their appraisals of sincerity, followers often mentioned follow-up:

"After my review, I was very upset, and she came to make sure that I was alright...She continued to check on me the next few days..."

"He checked on me a little after the apology."

However, when leaders did not follow-up after the incident, followers tended to form perceptions of insincerity. Followers who generated these insincere attributions, like those in the examples below, often mentioned lack of follow-up as a factor influencing their appraisals and noted that follow-up could have improved their perceptions of sincerity:

"...nothing else was said after the apology. I felt like the apology was not enough."

"Could have followed up another time with me."

#### **6.4 Multiple Themes**

In sum, eight message content, nine message delivery, and two post-apology action themes emerged. While a few followers only drew from one theme, the vast majority of responses included multiple themes. For instance, the following response offers a good illustration of how multiple themes (i.e., timeliness, rationale, number of apologies) may work in conjunction to convey an impression of sincerity:

"He immediately responded by saying 'No, of COURSE you are still part of the marketing team! I am so sorry, it was truly unintentional that you were not at the last meetings!' He went on to explain that he had been very preoccupied with another matter at the time and that the decision for some reason had to be made quickly. He then came back two more times to apologize again, until I told him, 'It's really okay. No worries.'"

Similarly, this next example also shows multiple themes (i.e., directness, attention, acknowledgement of gravity) involved in a follower's appraisal of insincerity:

"She responded to me via email after I had pointed out how all of this was not my fault. She briefly apologized and moved on with business. The incident blew over without much notice. From her standpoint it was not a big deal, but from mine it was a much more significant event."

### **7. Discussion**

Organizational leaders assume the "lead role" in the workplace, put on display before an audience of watchful followers. As followers observe and evaluate their leaders, certain "critical moments" may carry particular weight (Tucker et al., 2006, p. 197). Tucker et al. (2006) contend that leader wrongdoings may act as such critical moments in which followers are especially attuned to their leader's response.

How a leader behaves following a transgression is of vital importance. To enhance follower impressions, leaders must often engage in remedial self-presentation and attempt to repair damage to their image (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). Apologies are one frequently effective technique, being that they may serve to dissociate the part of the apologizer that committed the transgression from the apologizer's true, moral self (Goffman, 1971). The effectiveness of an apology at splitting a leader's self likely depends on followers' appraisals of sincerity. When perceiving a leader's apology as sincere, a follower may be more likely to disassociate the negative event from the leader, find forgiveness, and seek to advance in the relationship than when viewing it as insincere.

However, despite research highlighting the importance of apology sincerity perceptions (e.g., Anderson, Linden, & Habra, 2006; Tomilson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004; Schelien, Ross, & Ross, 2010), little formal investigation has been conducted on the topic within an organizational context. The present study addresses this research gap by studying the aspect of leader apology content and delivery that followers use in evaluating sincerity.

### **Findings and Implications**

Findings support Lazare's (2004) assertion: "apologies, like human beings, are both simple and complex, fundamentally the same but also individually unique" (p. 43). No two followers reported identical perceptions of leader apologies. However, far more striking than these differences in individual perceptions were the common threads running throughout follower responses. Eight message content, nine message delivery, and two post-apology action themes encapsulated these commonalities.

The content of a leader's apology matters, with followers drawing upon eight different elements of apology wording in forming sincerity appraisals. Leaders who admitted responsibility, acknowledged the severity of the offense, provided sufficient rationale for the incident, personalized their apology, expressed appreciation for the follower, noted a future intention to resolve the wrongdoing, delivered an appropriate number of apologies, and requested the follower's contribution tended to be appraised as sincere. In contrast, when leaders failed to admit blame, downplayed the gravity of the situation, offered insufficient excuses for the transgression, delivered scripted apologies, showed a lack of appreciation for the follower, expressed too little intention to resolve the incident, offered an insufficient number of apologies, and failed to ask for the follower's input, they tended to be viewed as insincere.

In addition to the content of a leader's apology, followers attended to how it is delivered. Followers used nine nonverbal cues in forming appraisals of leader apology sincerity, including factors of timeliness, initiation, motivation, directness, attention, body language, tone, gifts, and audience. Followers were more apt to view leaders as sincere when they offered timely apologies, initiated the apology, apologized out of concern for the follower, delivered the apology in a direct manner, devoted full attention to the apology, showed physical expressions of remorse, used a regretful tone, offered gifts of atonement, and delivered the apology before all desired parties. In contrast, followers generally formed insincere appraisals when leaders offered tardy apologies, failed to initiate the apology, apologized out of a self-serving motive, expressed the apology in an indirect way, gave insufficient attention to the apology, expressed little remorse though physical gestures or tone, offered no gifts, and did not apologize before all desired individuals.

Also, followers used their leaders' post-apology actions in assessing leader apology sincerity. Just as the content and delivery of an apology were important, so too was what the leader did. For many followers, sincerity was about more than "talking the talk;" it also involved taking action to resolve the incident and following-up on follower recovery. When leaders failed to help repair the situation or to check in on the follower, their apologies tended to be described as insincere. Altogether, these findings corroborate with existing work on apology, while also advancing current understanding of follower appraisals of leader apologies.

This research supports much of the scholarly discussion about message content and delivery factors contributing to apology effectiveness, such as remorse, explanation, repetition, admission of responsibility, acknowledgement of offense, timing, and initiation (e.g., Lazare, 2004; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Kador, 2009; Smith, 2008). Moreover, the results of this study specifically identify the elements of apology content, apology delivery, and post-apology action critical to follower assessments of leader apology sincerity. In so doing, this investigation provides the first comprehensive overview of how followers appraise the sincerity of their organizational leaders' apologies, shedding light into a largely unexplored area.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite its contributions, limitations of this research must be noted. Because this study required participants to reflect upon past incidents, concerns may arise about memory errors. While research has uncovered limits to human memory, rare and important events are less subject to retrospective bias (Schwartz, 1999). Since leader mistakes and offenses tend to be relatively rare violations of the norm and are of importance to their followers, these events are likely more accurately stored in memory and less at risk of biased recall.

Even so, additional investigation into these themes using alternative methodologies, such as a vignette design, is recommended to help alleviate retrospective bias concerns. Future efforts at triangulation are also encouraged. Triangulation, defined by Denzin (1978) as, “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon,” could help finesse our current understanding of follower appraisals of leader apology sincerity. In particular, additional quantitative study of these message content, message delivery, and post-apology action themes would provide important convergent validation evidence (Jick, 1979). Investigation into whether experimental manipulations of these themes impact leader apology sincerity in a more controlled laboratory environment could help corroborate this study’s qualitative findings.

Future research should also be designed to enhance our knowledge of the functioning of different themes. Might some themes be more important than others? Additionally, the combined and interactive effects of these themes deserve further attention. Is the presence of a single theme sufficient to generate attributions of sincerity or are multiple ones necessary? How might these themes interact to influence sincerity perceptions? Such questions merely scratch the surface. Nearly endless opportunities exist for improvement of our present understanding about follower perceptions of leader apology sincerity.

Once refined, investigators should explore how to apply this work in practice. Reports suggest that organizational leaders may often be hesitant to apologize (Tucker et al., 2006), perhaps stemming in part from uncertainty about how best to apologize. Learning about factors that impact follower apology sincerity perceptions may reduce this reluctance by helping leaders understand how to sincerely apologize. However, efforts to translate this research into practical initiatives will be met with challenges. Scholars and practitioners will need to tackle many questions. How can these findings be effectively implemented in the workplace? What ethical concerns might arise when doing so, and how can they be avoided?

Finally, the generalizability of this work outside of the U.S. requires further study, being that research has uncovered cultural differences in apology (e.g., Barnlund, 1990; Guan, Park, & Lee, 2009; Sugimoto, 1997). This investigation was intended to better understand how followers react to leaders’ apologies in U.S. organizations, since apology has yet to be adequately examined within a Western leadership context. Future investigation should extend upon this work, examining cross-cultural similarities and differences in follower appraisals of leader apology sincerity. With such exciting opportunities for future study, research on leader apology is just beginning. Continued investigation will help to refine our understanding of the phenomena and promote more positive leader-follower relationships.

**Table 1: Message content themes**

<b>Message Content</b>		
Perceived verbal or written aspects of leader apology content impacting follower sincerity perceptions		
Theme	Sincere	Insincere
<b>Admission of Responsibility</b>	Admission and/or acceptance of responsibility for the transgression	No admission or acceptance of responsibility for the transgression; sometimes involving denial of responsibility or blaming the follower
<b>Acknowledgement of Severity</b>	Acknowledgement of the gravity and severity of the transgression; often involving detailing the nature of the incident	Downplaying of the gravity and severity of the transgression
<b>Rationale</b>	Sufficient explanations for transgression in quality and/or quantity; generally specific in nature	Insufficient excuses for transgression in quality and/or quantity; often vague in nature
<b>Personalization</b>	Personalized apology	Scripted, generic apology
<b>Appreciation</b>	Appreciation and recognition of follower's value and performance	Lack of appreciation and recognition of follower's value and performance
<b>Future Intention</b>	Emphasis on future intentions to help resolve the incident and/or prevent the incident from reoccurring	Lack of emphasis on future intentions to help resolve the incident and/or prevent the incident from reoccurring
<b>Number of Apologies</b>	Appropriate number of apologies; often multiple apologies	Inappropriate number of apologies; either too few apologies or excessive apologies
<b>Opportunity to Contribute</b>	Opportunity provided for follower to contribute opinions, thoughts, and/or feelings	No opportunity provided for follower to contribute opinions, thoughts, and/or feelings

**Table 2: Message delivery themes**

<b>Message Delivery</b>		
Perceived non-verbal or non-written aspects of leader apology delivery impacting follower sincerity perceptions		
Theme	Sincere	Insincere
<b>Timeliness</b>	Timely, immediate apology	Delayed, late apology
<b>Initiation</b>	Apology initiated by leader	Apology not initiated by leader; initiated by follower or another party
<b>Motivation</b>	Motivated out of concern for the follower	Motivated out of self-serving concern
<b>Directness</b>	Direct apology; often face-to-face	Indirect apology; often via non face-to-face communication channels (e.g., email, phone)
<b>Attention</b>	Undistracted, uninterrupted, and sufficient time and attention devoted to apology; time specifically dedicated to apology; attentive listening	Interrupted, distracted, and/or insufficient time and attention devoted to apology; time not specifically dedicated to apology, often determined by convenience; inattentive listening
<b>Body Language</b>	Physical expressions of sincere remorse (e.g., eye contact, hand wringing, hug, face-to-face body positioning)	Insufficient physical expressions of sincere remorse (e.g., no eye contact, smirk)
<b>Tone</b>	Tone conveying emotions associated with sincere regret (e.g., guilt, shame, embarrassment, concern)	Tone conveying insincerity and lack of sincere regret (e.g., cold, defensive, argumentative, dismissive, mocking)
<b>Gift</b>	Gift, token or gesture of atonement (e.g., card, flowers, meal, bonus); serves as a present, not as a means of directly resolving the incident	Inadequate gift, token or gesture of atonement
<b>Audience</b>	All desired parties involved and/or aware of apology; often public apology	Not all desired parties involved and/or aware of apology



**Table 3: Post-apology action themes**

<b>Post-Apology Action</b>		
Perceived post-apology leader actions impacting follower sincerity perceptions		
Theme	Sincere	Insincere
<b>Resolution</b>	Actions taken to resolve incident and repair damage to follower	No actions taken to resolve incident and repair damage to follower
<b>Follow-up</b>	Attempt following apology to check in on follower recovery	No attempt following apology to check in on follower recovery

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