

13. Multi-route models of trust in risk communicators: An empirical test of the final common pathway assumption.

Good risk communication is essential to managing the social impacts of change. Multi-route models of trust in risk communicators all contain a final common pathway assumption. According to this assumption, affective, motivational, cognitive and other possible components of trust all converge on a final common pathway that determines trusting intentions and behavior. Thus all indicators of trust should vary together. If people say that they trust one source more than another (stated trust), they should act as if they trust that source more (revealed trust). If they say that they have lost trust in a source, they should act as if they trust it less than before.

Participants in our simulation used advice from consumer organizations and government agencies to assess risks. When advisors were of fairly high quality, stated and revealed trust measures both showed greater trust in government sources but there was no correlation between them. Stated trust correlated both with the judges' assessments of how similar the advisors' values were to their own and with advisors' accuracy levels; revealed trust correlated only with advisor accuracy. We make suggestions for how current multi-route models of trust can be modified to accommodate data from this and two other experiments.

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