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sorry
matrix

sorry matrix

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What is it about:

- strategies for apologizing as part of boosting interpersonal communication
- components of apologies
- identifying competence- and integrity based violations of trust

source: Structure of Effective Apologies by Roy Lewicki, Beth Polin, Robert Lount

domains: effective apologies, interpersonal communication

approach description:

In conflict or negotiations, trust or fairness violations can lead to unexpected behaviors and escalated tensions. Victims, sensitive to these violations, seek information from the violator to restore their judgment, often in the form of apologies. Researchers from Ohio State University studied the components and effectiveness of apologies. They answered a question: *“Are some apologies more effective than others?”*

They defined six components of an apology (in the handout part you will find the description of the six components):

- explanation
- offer of repair
- acknowledgement of responsibility
- declaration of repentance
- expression of regret
- request for forgiveness.

The researchers examined reactions to apologies for two main types of trust-violation contexts:

- **competence-based violation** (occurs when the victim misjudges the actor's competence, often resulting from a mistake that may or may not be controllable. An explanation can help restore confidence);
- **integrity-based violations** (happens when the victim misjudges the actor's integrity. Misinterpretations of character and honesty are harder to mend, as explanations alone may not restore trust.)



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The outcomes of their research can be translated in those tips for effective apologies:

- **use more components of apologies than less** (as the bigger the number of components in an apology, the more effective it was perceived to be);
- in case you can make only one statement of apology: **acknowledge your responsibility, rather than ask for forgiveness** (as request for forgiveness was evaluated as significantly less effective than each of the other five components)
- **use especially 3 components** (as the presence of three particular components included in a single apology is particularly valuable):
 - **explanation** for why the violation may have occurred, it aims to help the victim understand it, making it seem more justifiable, less intentional, or reducing dissonance for them;
 - **offer of repair** can restore tangible or economic damage from a violation. Even a verbal commitment to repair damage is seen as an important apology component for the victim, but clearly would have to be followed by actual repair-restoration to assure full credibility;
 - **acknowledgement of responsibility** in which the violator assumes responsibility for having created the violation, reducing alternative explanations. Victims seek recognition from the violator, even if it may harm the violator's perceived integrity.

Other findings to keep in mind:

- apologies for lack of competence are more effective (as apologies for competence-based offenses were perceived as significantly more effective than apologies for integrity-based offenses);
- victim looks for certain specific assurances in the statements that will serve to reduce the distress and uncertainty created by the violation;
- the research puts in question the effectiveness of "denial" or "silence" in addressing integrity-based trust violations.

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aim of use:

This canva can serve to get competence on effective strategies of apologies, getting familiar with various components of apology, and can also be a guide on understanding mechanisms behind broken trust.

educational method:

- **Step 1: Situations requiring apologies**

Present to the learners the aim of the canva. Open a short discussion whether the group finds apologising easy or difficult. Ask to give examples of the common situations from their everyday life for which they would like to receive apologies (ask to name situations at a level 1-2 on the scale from 1-10, for the purpose of learning). Ask the group to choose one situation to which they would like to prepare a scene with apologies.

- **Step 2: Acting out the components of apologies**

Divide participants in 6 groups. Hand to each group a different description of the 6 components of apologies. Invite each group to prepare a short performance in which they will act out apologies to the situation they have defined in Step 1. The performance needs to aim to present the component of apology they were assigned to. While each group presents, other group members guess the strategy they got. After the performances of each group, put all 6 components of apologies on the flipchart and make sure to sum up each strategy in the plenary.

- **Step 3: Present the findings**

Present the findings of the research on strategies of effective communication. Ensure space for questions and answers on the research.

- **Step 4: Debriefing**

Invite participants for a reflection by asking:

- How do you feel?
- How was the process of preparing the performances about various components of apologies?
- Are there any components of apologies which you encounter more often than the others? Which ones? Why?
- Was there anything in the research outcomes that surprised you?
- What are the learnings you take with you after this session?
- How could you implement your learnings in everyday life situations?

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read more:

- **Book:** Roy Lewicki, Beth Polin, Robert Lount, Lount, An Exploration of the Structure of Effective Apologies [in] Negotiation and Conflict Management Research (2016)
- **Book:** Mikael Krogerus, Roman Tschäppeler, “The communication book. 44 ideas for better conversations every day” (2019)

handout:

Component Apology Definitions

- **REPAIR**

Offer of Repair: a statement proposing a method for the violator to rebuild trust.

Apology example: I attempted to repair the damage by offering to redo the work and handle all issues that would come about it.

- **USE “I” SENTENCES**

Acknowledgement of Responsibility: a statement showing the violator understands their role in the offense.

Apology example: I was wrong in what I did, and I accepted responsibility for my actions.

- **EXPLAIN, DO NOT JUSTIFY**

Explanation: a statement detailing the reasons for the offense to the victim, distinguishing it from justifications, which would sound like “My mistake was not that bad”.

*Apology example (for the competence-based violation):
I made the mistake because I was unfamiliar with the correct procedures.*

*Apology example (for the integrity-based violation):
I made the mistake because I was short on time and knew the deadline was approaching.*

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- **SAY SORRY**

Expression of Regret: a statement in which the violator expresses how sorry they are for the offense.

Apology example: I felt terrible when the mistake became known, and I immediately expressed how sorry I was.

- **COMMIT TO CHANGE**

Declaration of Repentance: a statement in which the violator expresses their promise to not repeat the offense.

Apology example (for the competence-based violation): I regret that this occurred and have learned my lesson. I now understand the procedure and I know where to find this sort of information.

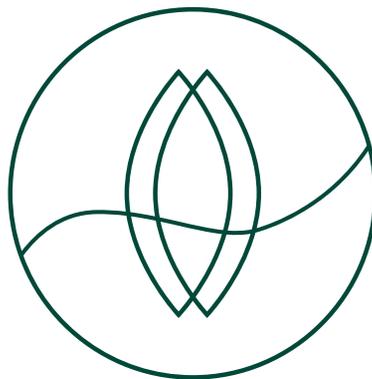
Apology example (for the integrity-based violation): I regret that this occurred and have learned my lesson. I now understand that it is not acceptable to do something I know is not completely accurate.

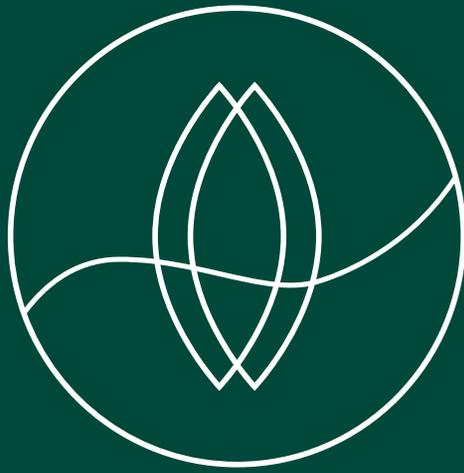
- **ASK FOR FORGIVENESS**

Request for Forgiveness: a statement asking for the victim to pardon the violator's actions.

Apology example: I asked to forgive my mistake.

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