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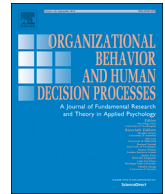
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Antecedents of leaders' power sharing: The roles of power instability and distrust[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Although previous research has identified various beneficial consequences of power sharing, less research has examined antecedents of leaders' power sharing. To address this gap, across five studies, the present research identifies important social and psychological barriers to leaders' power sharing. Studies 1a, 1b, and 2 demonstrate that the instability of a leader's power position undermines his or her power sharing. Study 3 then demonstrates that distrust acts as a key psychological mechanism that can explain this relationship. Then, in Study 4, we distinguish between two dimensions of distrust and examine the moderating role of subordinates' seniority. We show that subordinates' seniority moderates the indirect association between power instability and power sharing, via benevolence and ability distrust, such that this indirect relationship is more pronounced for relatively senior (compared to junior) subordinates. Overall, our findings provide valuable insights into *when, why, and with whom* leaders are more or less willing to share their power.

1. Introduction

Rapidly changing and increasingly competitive working environments have encouraged many of today's organizations to adopt participative processes and work procedures (Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). In such systems, leaders are urged to share power with their subordinates by delegating responsibility and authority and by incorporating subordinates' ideas into their decisions (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011; Seibert et al., 2004). The increasing popularity of this style of leadership is unsurprising, considering the wealth of beneficial outcomes associated with power sharing – both for individual subordinates (e.g., improved job attitudes; Miller & Monge, 1986; Spector, 1986; Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010) and for organizations as wholes (e.g., higher performance; Auh, Menguc, & Jung, 2014; Bradford & Cohen, 1997; Huang, Iun, Liu, & Gong, 2010).

Although the leadership literature has devoted considerable attention to power sharing and associated leadership styles (e.g., delegation, empowering, participative, and distributed leadership), the existing research has almost exclusively focused on identifying the outcomes of such behavior (e.g., Biemann, Kearney, & Marggraf, 2015; Huang et al.,

2010; Vecchio et al., 2010). In contrast, research has paid less attention to examining the antecedents of leaders' power sharing (for exceptions, see Leana, 1986; Vroom & Jago, 1974). Hence, leadership theory and research offer little understanding of when and why leaders are more or less likely to share their power with their subordinates. Given the well-known benefits of this type of leadership behavior, we believe this is an important oversight that deserves attention.

To address this issue and advance new insights into the origins of leaders' power sharing (or lack thereof), the present research focuses on a fundamental element of leadership, namely leaders' power (i.e., their asymmetric control over valued resources; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Jordan, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2011; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Although one can have power without being a leader, leaders typically possess some degree of power due to their formal hierarchical positioning within the organization (Galinsky, Jordan, & Sivanathan, 2008; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Hence, the psychological experience of power is central to leadership and may provide key insights to understanding leaders' behavior (Flynn, Gruenfeld, Molm, & Polzer, 2011).

Social psychological research has shown, in particular, that having power brings about many individual benefits (e.g., access to important resources, freedom, and prestige; Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky

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et al., 2003). Therefore, powerholders exhibit a strong tendency toward protecting their privileged position, especially when they feel that their power is unstable (i.e., when they feel their power could deteriorate in the foreseeable future; Jordan et al., 2011; Williams, 2014). In an effort to avert potential power threats, for example, the instability of a powerholder's position has been shown to motivate him or her to sabotage team members' performance (Case & Maner, 2014; Maner & Mead, 2010). Building on this motivational perspective on power protection (see also Sligte, de Dreu, & Nijstad, 2011), the current research proposes that a leader is less willing to share power with subordinates when the leader feels that his or her power is unstable rather than stable. After all, power sharing requires a leader to relinquish authority and control, which may be perceived as a further threat to one's power position (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Ratcliff, Vescio, & Dahl, 2015).

Moreover, beyond directly examining power instability as a contextual antecedent of leaders' (un)willingness to share their power, a full understanding of this important relationship requires consideration of its underlying psychological mechanisms. Prior research has shown that leaders in unstable power positions are less likely than those in stable positions to trust individuals around them (Mooijman, van Dijk, van Dijk, & Ellemers, 2019). Moreover, although not examining the role of power instability, other studies have shown that trust is an important prerequisite for power sharing (e.g., Leana, 1986). Building on these insights, we cast leaders' distrust as a key mediating mechanism in the relationship between power instability and power sharing.

In this regard, it is important to note that scholars have emphasized the multi-dimensional (rather than unidimensional) nature of distrust, identifying benevolence distrust (i.e., an individual's perception that others only think about themselves and try to take advantage of the focal individual) and ability distrust (i.e., the perception that others are incompetent and do not have the abilities required for task accomplishment) as distinct facets (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). We believe that considering these different dimensions of distrust is crucial for understanding leaders' (lack of) power sharing with different groups of subordinates. Specifically, for relatively senior (vs. junior) subordinates, due to their more advanced position in the organizational hierarchy and greater experience, we propose that benevolence distrust is a key explanatory mechanism for the relationship between leaders' power instability and reduced power sharing (Coleman, 2004; Khan, Moss, Quratulain, & Hameed, 2018). Given relatively junior (vs. senior) subordinates' lack of tacit knowledge, expertise, and experience, by contrast, we hypothesize that ability distrust will serve as a key mediating variable in the linkage between leaders' power instability and power sharing with these subordinates (Georgesens & Harris, 2006; Leana, 1986).

The present research employs five studies to examine these propositions. In doing so, it aims to make several contributions to theory advancement. First, this set of studies complements previous research on the consequences of power sharing with an antecedent-oriented perspective, addressing scholars' repeated calls for a better understanding of how power dynamics shape leadership, in general, and power sharing, in particular (e.g., Gordon, 2010; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). As Bolden (2011, pp. 260–261) noted, for example, "it is important to remain alert to the dynamics of power and influence and how they enable or constrain particular forms of engagement in leadership practice." Second, this investigation adds to the growing body of social psychological research on how leaders protect and maintain their power positions (e.g., Maner & Mead, 2010; Williams, 2014). Although this line of inquiry has illustrated that power instability undermines individuals' trust (Mooijman et al., 2019), it has not yet examined the behavioral consequences of these processes. By empirically examining leaders' distrust as a mediating mechanism for such behavioral consequences, we provide a fuller understanding of the detrimental leadership implications of power instability in organizations. Finally, by distinguishing different forms of distrust and examining the moderating role of subordinate seniority, we shine greater light on how different

psychological mechanisms can explain leader's (lack of) power sharing with regard to different groups of subordinates. Hence, our investigation advances a more nuanced, context-specific understanding of the power instability – power sharing linkage. All in all, we thus aim to identify key social and psychological barriers to leaders' power sharing, thereby explaining why power sharing, despite its potential benefits, remains so elusive in many of today's organizations (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015).

2. Leaders' power instability and power sharing

Being in a position of power brings about many benefits for individuals. Relative to those with less power, for example, more powerful individuals are less dependent on others, and they can pursue their own goals and desires to a greater extent (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, 2007). Moreover, the powerful have greater autonomy (Lammers, Stoker, Rink, & Galinsky, 2016) and control over their surroundings (Fast, Gruenfeld, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2009), and they are often respected and admired for their privileged positions (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Accordingly, studies have linked power to increased well-being (Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013), self-esteem (Wojciszke & Struzynska-Kujalowicz, 2007), and optimism (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Fast, Sivanathan, Mayer, & Galinsky, 2012), as well as reduced feelings of stress (Schmid & Schmid Mast, 2013; Sherman et al., 2012) and loneliness (Waytz, Chou, Magee, & Galinsky, 2015).

Given these potential benefits, being in a position that puts these advantages at risk is stressful for powerholders (Feenstra, Jordan, Walter, Yan, & Stoker, 2017; Jordan et al., 2011). Consequently, when powerful individuals fear they could lose their power, they typically focus on defending their privileged position, such that "retaining a hold on power will jump to the top priority" (Williams, 2014, p. 1370). Consistent with this reasoning, theory and research on threat-rigidity effects suggest that, "there may be general tendency for individuals to behave rigidly in threatening situations" (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981, p. 502), with people becoming less flexible and aiming for more control over their social environment (see also D'Aunno & Sutton, 1992).

In accordance with this reasoning, several studies have empirically investigated the role of power instability for diverse behavioral outcomes. In an effort to preserve their power, for example, individuals in unstable (rather than stable) power positions more strongly derogate their working partners (Georgesens & Harris, 1998, 2006), sabotage the functioning of high-performing group members (Case & Maner, 2014; Maner & Mead, 2010), make more conservative decisions (Jordan et al., 2011; Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007), and seek greater physical proximity to potentially threatening others (Mead & Maner, 2012).

Building on these insights, we propose that a leader who feels that his or her power is unstable (versus stable) will share less power with his or her subordinates. After all, power sharing entails relinquishing at least part of one's power and delegating some of one's decision-making authority (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Ratcliff et al., 2015). Rather than preserving the existing power distribution, such behavior transfers important resources toward subordinates and, thus, potentially reduces leaders' power and further threatens their positions (Coleman, 2004; Tjosvold & Sun, 2006). As illustrated above, however, power preservation is a key behavioral motive for powerful individuals – particularly when they perceive their power positions to be under threat (Williams, 2014). Therefore, we predict:

Hypothesis 1. *The instability of leaders' power decreases leaders' power sharing.*

3. The mediating role of leaders' distrust

As outlined before, powerful individuals generally have a strong

motivation to protect their power, and this tendency is particularly pronounced when they perceive their power to be unstable (Case & Maner, 2014; Williams, 2014). On this basis, we propose that power instability critically shapes leaders' social perceptions, which in turn directs their behaviors to be consistent with their motivation toward power protection. Specifically, we suggest that leaders in relatively unstable power positions exhibit greater distrust toward their subordinates because of the potential threat that these subordinates may pose. Such distrust, in turn, is proposed to serve as a key mediator in the power instability-power sharing relationship.

Scholars have argued that distrust contains two critical elements (Bijlsma-Frankema, Sitkin, & Weibel, 2015; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). First, distrust comprises negative expectations toward others' intentions and behaviors (i.e., the anticipation that other persons are unwilling and/or unable to act in one's best interest, Lount & Pettit, 2012; McKnight & Chervany, 2001; Rousseau et al., 1998). And second, these negative expectations form the basis for an individual's unwillingness to make him- or herself vulnerable to the respective others (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

Building on this conceptualization, scholars have described distrust as a possible "resource-protection strategy" (Mooijman, van Dijk, Ellemers, & van Dijk, 2015, p. 2) for powerholders, because trusting others could damage one's power position and, thus, distrust shields high-power individuals against actual or perceived power threats. When occupying an unstable power position, a leader might thus sense an acute risk that his or her subordinates may act against the leader's best interests, consequently reducing the leader's willingness to make him or herself vulnerable towards his or her subordinates – the sheer definition of distrust (Mooijman et al., 2019; Williams, 2014). By contrast, a leader who feels that his or her power is secure will view others' intentions and behaviors with less suspicion, because his or her position is less precarious. Accordingly, compared to leaders who are at risk of losing their power, power-stable leaders should hold more positive expectations toward others and, consequently, should be more willing to accept vulnerability (i.e., have less distrust toward subordinates).

Corroborating this reasoning, empirical research has shown that powerholders' thinking becomes more vigilant and threat oriented when their power is unstable (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Scheepers, Röell, & Ellemers, 2015). In an effort to preempt potential hazards to their position, powerful individuals who worry about losing their power therefore devote greater attention to others who potentially endanger their power position (Stamkou, Kleef, Fischer, & Kret, 2016). On this basis, we predict that the instability of leaders' power increases leaders' distrust (Mooijman et al., 2019).

Moreover, we anticipate that a leader's distrust, in turn, will be negatively associated with his or her power sharing. As outlined above, distrust involves an individual's negative expectations toward others and, thus, a pronounced unwillingness to make oneself vulnerable (Bigley & Pearce, 1998; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Importantly, power sharing has the potential to critically enhance a leader's vulnerability and to put him or her at greater risk of others' exploitation. That is, power sharing entails granting authority and decision-making responsibility to subordinates, increasing a leader's dependency on subordinates' willingness and ability to act on the leader's behalf and adequately handle important issues (Das & Teng, 2004; Mayer et al., 1995; Smith & Barclay, 1997). It is therefore likely that leaders experiencing stronger distrust, as a result of their unstable power, will be motivated to avoid the risks and uncertainty associated with such behavior and to retain tight control over key decisions and actions (Das & Teng, 2004; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007; Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007). Hence, as compared with more trusting leaders, less trusting leaders are more likely to preserve decision-making authority for themselves, rather than delegating important tasks and responsibilities to their subordinates (Colquitt, Scott, &

LePine, 2007; Leana, 1986; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2016; Yukl & Fu, 1999).

The above theorizing suggests that power instability enhances a leaders' distrust in others – with such distrust diminishing the respective leader's power-sharing behavior. Taken together, this conceptual rationale positions leaders' distrust as a core mediating mechanism to explain the relationship between power instability and power sharing. To formally examine this indirect association, we propose:

Hypothesis 2. *Leaders' distrust mediates the negative relationship between leaders' power instability and power sharing.*

4. The moderating role of subordinates' seniority

Thus far, we have hypothesized that in an effort to protect their power, leaders who perceive that their power is unstable will distrust their subordinates and, therefore, will be less willing to involve them in decision-making processes and delegate important tasks. Importantly, however, research suggest that distrust is not a unidimensional construct, but instead, a multi-dimensional one including benevolence and ability perceptions (Bhattacharjee, 2002; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Benevolence distrust refers to an emotional assessment of another person's ill will (Dimoka, 2010; McKnight & Chervany, 2001), whereas ability distrust is based on a negative cognitive assessment of another person's capabilities (Dimoka, 2010; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). We propose that these different dimensions of distrust explain leaders' (lack of) power sharing with different groups of subordinates. In other words, although we believe that leaders in unstable power positions are generally unwilling to share power with their subordinates, we suggest that the *reasons* underlying these consequences of power instability differ, depending on a subordinate's seniority.

Prior research suggests that the role of subordinates' seniority for leaders' power sharing is likely to be ambiguous. On the one hand, leaders may be more likely to depend on, and share power with, their more senior subordinates, due to these subordinates' superior knowledge and experience (Yukl & Fu, 1999). On the other hand, relatively senior subordinates (compared to more junior subordinates) generally occupy higher-level positions and are entitled to numerous benefits (e.g., higher salaries, job security, and advancement opportunities; Gordon & Johnson, 1982). Leaders who worry about losing their power might therefore perceive more senior subordinates as representing a greater threat because these subordinates could deliberately utilize their elevated position to topple the leader's power and usurp his or her role (Khan et al., 2018). Hence, when placed in an unstable power position, a leader may sense an acute risk that senior subordinates could self-servingly act against his or her best interests and, therefore, the leader may be unwilling to share power with these senior subordinates. In accordance, we propose that when considering senior (but not junior) subordinates, leaders' benevolence distrust will serve as a key explanatory mechanism underlying the negative link between power instability and power sharing.

Hypothesis 3a. *Subordinates' seniority moderates the indirect association between power instability and power sharing via leaders' benevolence distrust, such that benevolence distrust only mediates this indirect linkage for relatively senior (as opposed to junior) subordinates.*

Sharing power with relatively junior subordinates, by contrast, may pose a different type of threat towards a leader's power position. Such subordinates have little working experience, and they typically hold a relatively low hierarchical position within their team (Gordon & Johnson, 1982). Hence, junior subordinates are less likely to directly challenge their leader's power and usurp his or her position. Importantly, however, leaders typically bear final accountability for their team's outcomes (Yukl & Fu, 1999). Hence, sharing power with, and delegating decisions towards, more junior subordinates may pose

substantial risks for leaders as well, because these subordinates' relative inexperience and incompetence (as compared to more senior subordinates) could result in inferior team outcomes that, eventually, reflect poorly on the leader him or herself (Mayer et al., 1995) – with potential repercussions for the leader's own standing within the organization. When placed in an unstable power position, a leader may therefore fear that junior subordinates could undermine his or her power by failing to adequately handle important tasks and decisions (Leana, 1986), thus diminishing the leader's tendency to share power with these junior subordinates. Taken together, we therefore argue that when considering junior (rather than senior) subordinates, leaders' ability distrust represents a key mediating mechanism that accounts for the negative power instability-power sharing linkage.

Hypothesis 3b. *Subordinates' seniority moderates the indirect association between power instability and power sharing via leaders' ability distrust, such that ability distrust only mediates this indirect linkage for relatively junior (as opposed to senior) subordinates.*

5. Studies 1a and 1b

Studies 1a and 1b tested Hypothesis 1 using experimental research designs. Specifically, Study 1a examined if participants in unstable power positions would be less willing to share power, compared to participants in stable power positions. In an effort to illustrate that the effects uncovered in Study 1a were driven by reduced power sharing in the unstable power condition (as suggested by Hypothesis 1) rather than enhanced power sharing for participants with stable power, Study 1b extended this design by including a control condition (see also Case & Maner, 2014).

5.1. Methods

5.1.1. Participants and design

Studies 1a and 1b used experimental scenario designs. In Study 1a, we recruited 100 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk; <https://www.mturk.com/>). In Study 1b, we recruited 230 participants from Prolific Academic (<https://prolific.ac>). All participants in Study 1a were located in the United States and all participants in Study 1b were located in the United Kingdom. We invited participants to partake in a study on workplace behavior in exchange for a monetary compensation. Prior validation studies have shown such online data collection methods to be as reliable as data collected in research labs or field settings (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013; Mason & Suri, 2012; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010; Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). To further ensure data quality, we included comprehension and instructional manipulation checks (see below).

In Study 1a, we excluded nine participants because they had identical IP addresses. We also excluded 11 participants because they failed the comprehension check, whereas no participants failed the instructional manipulation check. Hence, we conducted the analyses using 80 participants (response rate = 80%; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.38$, $SD = 9.85$; 51% female). Sixty-five percent of these participants worked in an organization at the time of the study. We randomly assigned participants to either an unstable or stable power condition.

In Study 1b, we excluded 19 participants because they failed the comprehension check and 29 participants because they failed the instructional manipulation check. Hence, we conducted the analyses using 182 participants (response rate = 79%; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.55$, $SD = 9.76$; 55% female). Ninety-seven percent of these participants worked in an organization at the time of the study and 55% of them supervised at least one subordinate. We randomly assigned participants to an unstable power, stable power, or control condition.

5.1.2. Manipulations, procedures, and measures

Participants responded to all items on a scale from 1 (*highly unlikely*) to 7 (*highly likely*). We further note that we have reported all manipulations and measured variables in the sections that follow.

5.1.2.1. Power instability. To manipulate power instability, we first asked participants in both studies to imagine that they were a senior manager of a large company, responsible for supervising more than twenty employees. Moreover, they were told that their position in the organization gave them great power to make independent decisions and placed them at the higher end of the hierarchy (Bowles & Gelfand, 2009; Karelaiia & Keck, 2013). On this basis, we subsequently implemented the stable power and unstable power manipulations (Studies 1a and 1b), as well as the control condition (Study 1b only). In the stable power condition, participants read that after a talk with a representative from the Human Resources department, they felt that their position in the organizational hierarchy was quite stable and that they would remain in the same position in the near future. In the unstable power condition, participants read that after a talk with a representative from the Human Resources department, they felt that their position in the organizational hierarchy was quite unstable and that they feared being demoted to a lower position in the near future. In the control condition (Study 1b only), participants received no information about the (in)stability of their position.

5.1.2.2. Power sharing. After the manipulations, all participants read a scenario in which they had to decide on a suitable location for a new branch for their company (adapted from Vroom & Jago, 1974). We asked the participants to imagine that they had recently attained a large amount of funding in order to open a new branch. Participants further read that the success of this new branch was very important for their company, and, to a large extent, depended on finding a suitable location. We then used four items referring to this scenario to measure power sharing (adapted from Kalshoven et al., 2011). Specifically, we asked the participants to indicate whether they would: "Allow my employees to influence the location of the new branch"; "Delegate the problem of finding a location for the new branch to my employees"; "Reconsider my decision of a suitable location on the basis of recommendations made by my employees"; and "Give my employees the responsibility of finding a suitable location for the new branch" (Study 1a, $\alpha = 0.80$; Study 1b, $\alpha = 0.76$).

5.1.2.3. Comprehension and (instructional) manipulation checks. Following Oppenheimer et al. (2009), we included an instructional manipulation check to detect careless responding. That is, we showed participants a paragraph of wordy instructions that eventually told them to ignore the question that appeared in boldface at the bottom of the screen. Additionally, as a comprehension check, we asked the following open-ended question: "For the opening of a new branch for your company; what did you have to decide on?" As indicated before, we only included participants in our final data analyses if (a) they correctly followed the instructional manipulation check and (b) their answer to the comprehension check indicated that they had understood that they had to decide on the new branch's location.

Further, as a manipulation check, after the measurement of the dependent variable, participants in both studies rated the instability of their power with the following two items: "My position in the organization is quite unstable" and, "I think I will be demoted to a lower position in the near future". The two items were highly correlated (Study 1a: $r = 0.94$, $p < .001$, $\alpha = 0.97$; Study 1b: $r = 0.94$, $p < .001$, $\alpha = 0.97$).

Table 1
Means (and Standard Deviations) per Condition for Studies 1a (top) and 1b (bottom).

	Unstable power condition	Stable power condition	Control condition
Study 1a; <i>n</i> per cell	38	42	–
Power instability	6.07 (1.16) _a	1.40 (0.99) _b	–
Power sharing	3.51 (1.11) _a	4.07 (1.20) _b	–
Study 1b; <i>n</i> per cell	59	61	62
Power instability	6.07 (0.91) _a	1.35 (0.60) _b	1.77 (0.88) _c
Power sharing	3.12 (0.97) _a	3.85 (1.14) _b	3.61 (1.04) _b

Notes. Within rows, means with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$ level based on independent-samples *t*-test (for comparisons of two conditions), Games-Howell post-hoc tests (for comparison of power instability among three conditions) or Tukey's honest significance difference test (for comparison of power sharing among three conditions).

5.2. Results

5.2.1. Manipulation check

Table 1 depicts descriptive statistics for Studies 1a and 1b. The manipulation check for Study 1a demonstrated that participants in the unstable power condition perceived more power instability ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 1.16$), compared to participants in the stable power condition ($M = 1.40$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(78) = -19.41$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.35$.

Similarly, in Study 1b, participants reported different levels of power instability across the three conditions, $F(2,114.22) = 627.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.88$.¹ Games-Howell post-hoc tests further revealed that participants in the unstable power condition perceived more power instability ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 0.91$), compared to participants in the stable power ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 0.60$; 95% CI [4.38, 5.05]), $p < .001$ and control conditions ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.88$; 95% CI [3.92, 4.69]), $p < .001$. Furthermore, participants in the stable power condition reported lower power instability than participants in the control condition (95% CI [-0.74, -0.09], $p = .008$). Hence, our manipulation of power instability was successful in both studies.

5.2.2. Hypothesis test

In line with Hypothesis 1, an independent-samples *t*-test in Study 1a showed that participants in the unstable power condition ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.11$) reported lower willingness to share power than participants in the stable power condition ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(78) = 2.13$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.48$. Similarly, for Study 1b, a one-way ANOVA showed that participants across the three conditions differed in their willingness to share power, $F(2,179) = 7.46$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$. Tukey's honest significance difference test showed that participants in the unstable power condition ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.97$) reported lower power sharing, compared to participants in both the stable power ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.14$; 95% CI [-1.18, -0.28], $p = .001$) and control conditions ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.04$; 95% CI [-0.94, -0.03]), $p = .03$). There was no significant difference, however, between power sharing in the stable power and control conditions (95% CI [-0.20, 0.69], $p = .41$). Parenthetically, we note that both in Studies 1a and 1b, participants' age and gender did not influence the pattern of the results or alter our conclusions when included as covariates.

5.3. Discussion

Supporting Hypothesis 1, both Studies 1a and 1b demonstrated an effect of power instability on power sharing, such that participants

¹ Levene's test of homogeneity rejected the null hypothesis that variances are equal across conditions, $F(2,179) = 3.13$, $p = .046$. Therefore, we report Welch's adjusted ANOVA results and Games-Howell post-hoc tests (Games & Howell, 1976; Welch, 1951).

reported lower willingness to share power with their subordinates when their own power was unstable rather than stable. The experimental setup of these studies has noteworthy strengths, allowing us to make causal attributions for the relationship between power instability and power sharing. At the same time, our manipulation of power instability may contain potential confounds between participants' feelings of power instability, as such, and their feelings of job instability and/or incompetence beliefs. As these confounds represent potential alternative explanations for the present effects (cf. Fast & Chen, 2009), it is important to disentangle our manipulation of power instability from such related constructs. Hence, in Study 2, we adopted a manipulation of power instability that exhibited no relation with either job instability or participants' (in)competence. Moreover, Studies 1a and 1b used a measure of self-reported power sharing as outcome variables. As such, questions remain regarding the generalizability of these findings towards individuals' actual behavior. In Study 2, we therefore employed a behavioral outcome measure to assess participants' power sharing.

6. Study 2

6.1. Methods

6.1.1. Participants and design

Study 2 aimed to replicate the findings of Studies 1a and 1b in a more concise and robust manner, using (1) an alternative, more specific manipulation of power instability and (2) a behavioral measure of power sharing. In doing so, this study adopted an online experimental research design. We invited 170 participants from Amazon's Mturk to take part in a study on workplace behavior in exchange for a monetary compensation of \$1. We told participants that they were going to make a business decision and that based on their decision, they could earn an additional bonus payment of \$0.50.

We excluded 20 participants because they had identical IP addresses and seven participants because they failed the instructional manipulation check (see below). Furthermore, two participants did not complete the power sharing measure. Hence, we conducted the main analyses using 141 participants (response rate = 83%; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.09$, $SD = 9.93$; 67% male). Most participants were from the United States (80%) or India (14%), and 86% worked in an organization at the time of the study.² We randomly assigned participants to either an unstable or a stable power condition.

6.1.2. Manipulations, procedures, and measures

Unless indicated otherwise, participants responded to all items on a scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). We note that we have reported all manipulations and measured variables in the sections that follow.

6.1.2.1. Power instability. Following previous research (Mooijman et al., 2019), we manipulated power instability by asking participants to take on the role of a vice-president of sales at a medium-sized firm. We told participants that as a manager, they were recognized as one of the most powerful individuals within the company, and that their division was widely recognized as one of the most important divisions company wide. We also told them that as a result, their division was allocated with one of the largest budgets in the firm, and they had control over an unusually large amount of resources, compared with their colleagues in other divisions. In the unstable (*stable*) power condition, the instructions further read that to stimulate productivity across the entire firm, managers regularly (*almost never*) changed divisions within the firm, and that other managers could thus (*not*) take their place.

² Testing our hypothesis among only US participants did not meaningfully change our results or conclusions.

6.1.2.2. *Power sharing.* After the power instability manipulation, participants were tasked with selecting one of four projects in which they would invest their resources (and, thus, potentially earn their bonus payment; this procedure was adapted from Dominguez-Martinez & Sloof, 2016). We told participants that as a manager, they could freely decide on whether they would like to make this decision themselves (coded as “0”), or whether they would like to delegate this decision to one of their subordinates (coded as “1”). Following prior research (Bartling, Fehr, & Herz, 2014; Dominguez-Martinez & Sloof, 2016; Fehr, Herz, & Wilkening, 2012), we used the latter choice (i.e., delegation) as an indicator of power sharing.

It is important to note that the four projects had different pay-off rates, such that a respective investment decision could yield no bonus payment at all, a bonus payment of \$0.50 for both the participant and the subordinate, a bonus payment of \$0.50 for the participant and \$0.00 for the subordinate, or a bonus payment of \$0.00 for the participant and \$0.50 for the subordinate. Participants were informed about these differing pay-off rates, but they did not know which project was attached to which rate. Moreover, we informed the participants that their subordinate did know which pay-off rate belonged to which project. By sharing decision-making power with the subordinate, participants could therefore avoid inadvertently selecting the project with no payoffs at all – although the subordinate retained the option of selecting the project that only yielded a bonus payment for him- or herself but not the participant. At the end of the experiment, all participants received a bonus payment of \$0.50 regardless of their actual choice.

6.1.2.3. *(Instructional) manipulation checks.* Following Oppenheimer et al. (2009), we included an instructional manipulation check to detect careless responding. That is, we again showed participants a paragraph of wordy instructions that eventually told them to ignore the question that appeared in boldface at the bottom of the screen.

Further, as a manipulation check, participants rated the instability of their power with the following two items (after the measurement of the dependent variable): “My management position at the firm is stable” (reverse-coded) and, “I could lose my powerful management position at the firm”. The two items were positively correlated, $r = 0.63, p < .001, \alpha = 0.77$.

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Manipulation check

The manipulation check demonstrated that participants in the unstable power condition perceived more power instability ($M = 3.01, SD = 1.13$), compared to participants in the stable power condition ($M = 1.91, SD = 0.93$), $t(134) = -6.20, p < .001$.

6.2.2. Hypothesis test

Confirming Hypothesis 1, a X^2 test showed a significant relationship between power instability and power sharing, $X^2(1,141) = 4.11, p = .04$. As expected, a substantively smaller portion of the participants shared decision-making power with their subordinate in the unstable power condition (31.1%), compared to the stable (47.8%; see Table 2)

Table 2
Percentage of Power Sharing in Study 2.

	Unstable power condition		Stable power condition		Overall	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Decision Manager	51	68.9	35	52.2	86	61
Decision Subordinate	23	31.1	32	47.8	55	39
Overall	74	100	67	100	141	100

power condition.

6.3. Discussion

Study 2 replicated the findings of Studies 1a and 1b, illustrating that participants shared less power when their power position was unstable rather than stable. Overall, Studies 1a, 1b, and 2 thus collectively support the causal relationship between power instability and power sharing, as predicted in Hypothesis 1. We note, however, that the experimental research designs adopted in these studies lack generalizability to organizational settings. Moreover, these studies did not examine why power instability hindered leaders’ power sharing. To address these issues, we conducted Study 3 in an organizational field setting, using a correlational research design. Beyond aiming to constructively replicate the previous studies in a more naturalistic context, this study examined leaders’ distrust as a potential mediator to explain the psychological processes linking power instability and power sharing (i.e., Hypothesis 2).

7. Study 3

7.1. Method

7.1.1. Participants and procedure

We approached potential participants via the newsletter and website of a popular management magazine in The Netherlands. This invitation included a link to an online leadership questionnaire that contained measures of power instability, distrust, power sharing, and paranoia (see supplementary analysis described below).³ We guaranteed participants that their responses were anonymous and confidential. In exchange for their participation, we entered all participants into a raffle for a book gift certificate.

Only individuals who indicated that they currently worked in an organization and supervised other employees could complete the questionnaire. In total, 402 individuals participated in the study. We excluded two participants because they had identical IP addresses. Hence, we conducted the below analyses using 400 participants ($M_{age} = 51.01, SD = 8.47$; 35% female). Participants’ average organizational tenure was 13.81 years ($SD = 11.45$) and they were all Dutch. Of the participants, 37.8% supervised between 1 and 10 subordinates, 21.8% supervised between 11 and 20 subordinates, and 40.5% supervised more than 20 subordinates. Finally, participants occupied substantial positions of power in their organizations, with most of the participants representing either top-management (50%) or middle-management positions (42.8%).

7.1.2. Measures

All measures were translated from English to Dutch using a back-translation procedure. Unless indicated otherwise, participants rated all measures on a scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*).

7.1.2.1. *Power instability.* To measure power instability, we asked participants to rate the extent to which they felt that six characteristics of their power in the organization were “THREATENED - a possibility that they get worse in the future” (Chandler, Kennedy, & Sandhu, 2007; Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008; Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012). Specifically, we asked the participants to indicate their threat perceptions with regard to their position, control, influence, power, authority, and status in the organization (1 = *not at all threatened*, 5 = *threatened to a great extent*; $\alpha = .94$).

³ This questionnaire was part of a larger research project. We note that our measures were included at the start of this overall survey. Hence, only after the measures of interest for this study, measures of constructs unrelated to the current research were administered.

7.1.2.2. Distrust. We measured leaders' distrust with eight items (Carvalho et al., 2015; Fenigstein & Vanable, 1992). We slightly adapted these items such that they applied to an organizational context. Example items were, "In my organization, it is safer to trust no one" and, "I often wonder what hidden reason another person in my organization may have for doing something nice for you" ($\alpha = 0.87$).

7.1.2.3. Power sharing. We measured leaders' power sharing with six items from Kalshoven and colleagues (2011). Example items were, "I allow my employees to influence critical decisions" and, "I delegate challenging responsibilities to my employees" ($\alpha = 0.79$).

7.1.2.4. Control variables. We considered leaders' age (in years), gender (0 = female, 1 = male), organizational tenure (in years), hierarchical power (on a 0–100 slider scale, with 0 = bottom and 100 = top of the organizational hierarchy), management level (1 = non-managerial position; 2 = lower management; 3 = middle management; 4 = top management), and the number of subordinates a leader supervised (1 = between 1 and 5; 2 = between 6 and 10, 3 = between 11 and 15; 4 = between 16 and 20; and 5 = more than 20 (Lammers, Stoker, & Stapel, 2010)⁴ as potential control variables. Previous research has shown that they are associated with (some of) our outcome variables (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Jago & Vroom, 1982; Mooijman et al., 2015; Somech, 2003).

7.2. Results

7.2.1. Factor structure

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to examine how the data fit our proposed three-factor model, with power instability, distrust, and power sharing as correlated latent factors and no indicator cross-loadings permitted. This model showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2[167] = 293.66$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.044, TLI = 0.96), and all of the respective items loaded significantly on their latent variables (all $p < .001$). Furthermore, the three-factor model had a better fit to the data than a one-factor model (in which all items loaded on one latent variable; $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 1384.38$, $p < .001$), as well as the best fitting two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2[2] = 491.39$, $p < .001$). These findings corroborate our measures' convergent and discriminant validity.

7.2.2. Hypotheses tests

Table 3 depicts descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all Study 3 variables and Table 4 depicts the regression results conducted to test our hypotheses. Again corroborating Hypothesis 1, regression analyses revealed that power instability was negatively associated with power sharing ($B = -0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .04$, $R^2 = 0.01$). Moreover, regarding Hypothesis 2, regression analysis revealed that power instability was positively associated with distrust ($B = 0.30$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.20$) and that distrust, in turn, was negatively associated with power sharing (controlling for power instability; $B = -0.19$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.06$). To formally assess Hypothesis 2, we employed the SPSS macro 'PROCESS' (Hayes, 2012), using a bootstrapping procedure (with 10,000 resamples), as proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). In accordance with Hypothesis 2, this analysis revealed a significant negative indirect association between power instability and power sharing through distrust (*estimate* = -0.06 , 95% CI [-0.09 , -0.03]).

Of the potential control variables, leaders' management position was positively associated with power sharing ($r = 0.16$, $p = .001$) and negatively associated with distrust ($r = -0.26$, $p < .001$). Also,

⁴ Consistent with previous research (Lammers & Imhoff, 2016; Lammers et al., 2010), we treated the latter two measures as continuous (both here and in Study 4).

leaders' hierarchical power level was positively associated with power sharing ($r = 0.14$, $p = .006$) and negatively associated with distrust ($r = -0.24$, $p < .001$; see Table 2). Hence, we repeated all regression analyses with these variables included as covariates. Results showed that, with one exception, all hypothesized coefficients remained significant at the 0.05 level (the total effect of power instability for leaders' power sharing reduced to non-significance, $B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .28$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.003$)⁵ and the direction of all coefficients remained unchanged. Similarly, controlling for other potential control variables (i.e., leaders' age, gender, organizational tenure and/or number of subordinates leaders supervised) did not meaningfully change the pattern or significance of the reported results.

7.2.3. Supplementary analyses

To further increase confidence in our proposed conceptual model and to examine the generalizability of our theorizing, we explored the possible mediating role of a more severe form of distrust, namely leaders' paranoia. Prior research has typically described paranoia as a "heightened and exaggerated form of distrust" (Kramer, 2001, p. 1) that includes individuals' suspicion that others intend to exploit or harm them (see also Chan & McAllister, 2013; Kong, 2016). Whereas general distrust typically draws from a factual, rational basis (e.g., prior experience), paranoid beliefs also include strong irrational or even delusional aspects (Deutsch, 1973; Fenigstein, 1984; Kramer, 2001). We expected that, similar to distrust, power instability is associated with increased paranoia among leaders. Such paranoia, in turn, is suggested to diminish leaders' power sharing.

We measured leaders' paranoia using eight scenario items adapted from Fenigstein (1984; see Appendix). Each of these scenarios asked participants to imagine themselves in a specific situation (e.g., "You are walking down the hallway at your office when one of your employees walks right by without saying 'hello' to you"). After reading a scenario, participants indicated how they would interpret the respective situation. Answer options included both relatively neutral interpretations (e.g., "Your employee was preoccupied and didn't notice you") and interpretations indicating paranoid tendencies (e.g., "Your employee wanted to avoid a conversation with you"). Participants assessed the likelihood of either interpretation being valid on a scale from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*). Following prior research (e.g., Fenigstein, 1984), we used the mean score of the "paranoid" response options as the measure of paranoia ($\alpha = 0.69$).

As shown in Table 5, regression analyses demonstrated that power instability was positively associated with paranoia ($B = 0.19$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.16$) and that paranoia, in turn, was negatively associated with power sharing (controlling for power instability; $B = -0.30$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.08$). To formally assess the mediating role of paranoia in the relationship between power instability and power sharing, we again used the bootstrapping procedure proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008; with 10,000 resamples). Supporting our expectations, this analysis revealed a significant negative indirect relationship between power instability and power sharing, through paranoia ($B = -0.06$, 95% CI [-0.09 , -0.04]). Hence, these supplementary findings indicated that a more extreme form of distrust also serves as a mediating mechanism in the power instability to power sharing relationship.

7.3. Discussion

Study 3 extended the findings of the preceding studies by examining the relationship between power instability and power sharing in an organizational field setting and by demonstrating the mediating role of

⁵ We note that it is quite common to detect mediation effects without observing a significant total effect between the independent and dependent variable (Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for Study 3.

Variables	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	51.01 (8.47)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Gender	0.66 (0.48)	0.27**	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. Management level	3.41 (0.67)	0.23**	0.20**	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
4. Number of subordinates	4.31 (1.61)	0.09	-0.01	0.15**	–	–	–	–	–	–
5. Hierarchical power	82.90 (18.66)	0.21**	0.09	0.60**	0.11*	–	–	–	–	–
6. Org. tenure	13.81 (11.45)	0.42**	0.16**	-0.00	0.03	-0.04	–	–	–	–
7. Power instability	2.06 (0.88)	-0.05	-0.06	-0.31**	0.01	-0.32**	0.02	–	–	–
8. Distrust	2.10 (0.67)	-0.08	-0.06	-0.26**	0.05	-0.24**	0.04	0.44**	–	–
9. Paranoia	1.77 (0.50)	-0.09	-0.00	-0.22**	-0.03	-0.18**	-0.01	0.40**	0.55**	–
10. Power sharing	4.03 (0.53)	0.06	-0.06	0.16**	0.08	0.14**	-0.04	-0.10*	-0.24**	-0.28**

Notes. *N* = 400. * *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01. For gender, 0 = female and 1 = male. For management level, 1 = no management, 2 = lower management, 3 = middle management, and 4 = top management. For number of subordinates, 1 = between 1 and 5, 2 = between 6 and 10, 3 = between 11 and 15, 4 = between 16 and 20, and 5 = more than 20 employees.

Table 4
Results for the Mediation Analysis of Distrust in the Relationship between Power Instability and Power Sharing for Study 3.

	<i>B (SE)</i>	95% CI	<i>R</i> ²
<i>Outcome variable: Distrust</i>			0.20***
Power instability	0.30 (0.03)	0.24, 0.36	
<i>Outcome variable: Power sharing</i>			0.06***
Power instability	0.00 (0.03)	-0.05, 0.06	
Distrust	-0.19 (0.04)	-0.27, -0.11	
Indirect effect	-0.06 (0.01)	-0.09, -0.03	

Notes. *N* = 400. Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients. The indirect relationship is based on bootstrapping procedure (10,000 samples) proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). *** *p* < .001.

Table 5
Results for the Mediation Analysis of Paranoia in the Relationship between Power Instability and Power Sharing for Study 3.

	<i>B (SE)</i>	95% CI	<i>R</i> ²
<i>Outcome variable: Paranoia</i>			0.16***
Power instability	0.19 (0.02)	0.15, 0.24	
<i>Outcome variable: Power sharing</i>			0.08***
Power instability	0.01 (0.03)	-0.05, 0.06	
Paranoia	-0.30 (0.06)	-0.41, -0.19	
Indirect effect	-0.06 (0.01)	-0.09, -0.04	

Notes. *N* = 400. Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients. The indirect relationship is based on bootstrapping procedure (10,000 samples) proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). *** *p* < .001.

distrust (and paranoia) in this regard. By doing so, we shined greater light on a key underlying mechanism that explains why leaders in relatively unstable positions share less power with their subordinates than do leaders in more stable power positions. As noted before, however, research suggests that due to subordinates’ specific qualities and characteristics, power instability might hinder leaders’ power sharing with different subordinates for different reasons (Coleman, 2004; Georgesen & Harris, 1998; Leana, 1986). In Study 4, we therefore examine the moderating role of subordinates’ seniority to determine if the mechanisms underlying the power instability to power sharing relationship differ depending on this possible contingency factor.

8. Study 4

Study 4 empirically tested Hypotheses 3a and 3b (i.e., the conditional mediating roles of benevolence and ability distrust in the linkage between power instability and power sharing) using an online sample of organizational leaders. Beyond examining these distinct types of distrust as mediating mechanisms, we therefore examined the moderating role of subordinates’ seniority levels for these indirect associations.

8.1. Method

8.1.1. Participants and procedure

As we were interested in leaders’ power sharing with different subordinates, individuals were only eligible to partake in this study if they supervised more than one employee. We contacted possible participants via Qualtrics Online Panel (<https://www.qualtrics.com/online-sample>; Bartneck, Duenser, Moltchanova, & Zawieska, 2015). We first verified whether all respondents held a formal organizational leadership position. In total, 257 eligible participants completed our study. We excluded 23 of them because they failed the instructional manipulation check (see below). There were no identical IP addresses and no participants failed our attention checks (see below). Hence, we conducted our final analyses using 234 participants (response rate = 91%; *M*_{age} = 43.48, *SD* = 12.38; 62% female). All participants were located in the United States, and they worked in a wide variety of sectors (e.g., manufacturing, retail, public, business). Their organizational tenure was, on average, 10.93 years (*SD* = 7.56). All participants occupied a formal leadership position (27% lower management, 64% middle management, and 9% top management). Furthermore, 60% of the final sample directly supervised between 2 and 10 subordinates, 22% between 11 and 20, and 18% more than 20 subordinates.

All participants received an e-mail containing a link to a secure online questionnaire that asked them to take part in a study about their experiences in the workplace and with their subordinates. We randomly asked half of the participants to think about either a very junior or a very senior subordinate (i.e., an employee with very little/a lot of experience who occupies a relatively low/high position within the team), and to report the first name of this subordinate. Subsequently, the participants answered several questions about this focal subordinate.

8.1.2. Measures

Unless indicated otherwise, all measures were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). We note that we have reported all measured variables in the sections that follow.

8.1.2.1. Power instability. As in Study 3, we measured power instability by asking leaders to rate the extent to which they felt that five aspects of their power (i.e., control, position, influence, power, and authority) were threatened, using a scale from 1 (*not at all threatened*) to 7 (*threatened to a great extent*; $\alpha = 0.95$).⁶

⁶ In Study 3, we had additionally included an item about “status in my organization”. As we are interested only in leaders’ perceptions of their power position, and not their status position, we did not measure this item in Study 3. We note that excluding this item in Study 2’s analyses did not meaningfully change the results.

8.1.2.2. Subordinates' seniority. We asked leaders to indicate the seniority level of the focal subordinate on a scale from 1 (*very junior – low position*) to 10 (*very senior – high position*).

8.1.2.3. Benevolence/ability distrust. We measured participants' benevolence distrust and ability distrust toward the focal subordinate with four items each (adapted from Mayer & Davis, 1999). Example items for benevolence distrust were, "I am concerned that [name of focal subordinate] does not care about me" and, "I would be concerned that [name of focal subordinate] tries to take advantage of me" ($\alpha = 0.93$). Example items for ability distrust were, "I am concerned that [name of focal subordinate] is incapable of handling important tasks" and, "I am concerned that [name of focal subordinate] lacks knowledge about critical decisions" ($\alpha = 0.94$).

8.1.2.4. Power sharing. As in Study 3, we measured leaders' power sharing with the focal subordinate with six items adapted from Kalshoven et al. (2011; $\alpha = 0.86$).

8.1.2.5. Control variables. We considered leaders' age (in years), gender (0 = female, 1 = male), organizational tenure (in years), and relationship tenure with the focal subordinate (in years) as well as leader's management level [1 = *no management*; 2 = *lower management*; 3 = *middle management*; 4 = *top management*], hierarchical power [measured on a 0–100 slider], and the number of subordinates the leader supervised [1 = *between 1 and 5*; 2 = *between 6 and 10*; 3 = *between 11 and 15*; 4 = *between 16 and 20*; and 5 = *more than 20*]; Lammers et al., 2010) as possible controls. Previous research showed that these variables were associated with (some of) our outcome variables (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Jago & Vroom, 1982; Leana, 1986; Mooijman et al., 2015; Somech, 2003).

8.1.2.6. Instructional manipulation and attention checks. As in Studies 1a, 1b, and 2, we included an instructional manipulation check to detect careless responding (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). That is, we again showed participants a paragraph of wordy instructions that eventually told them to ignore the question that appeared in boldface at the bottom of the screen. Furthermore, we included two attention checks that asked participants to indicate that they were paying attention by clicking answer option 3 (5).

8.2. Results

8.2.1. Measurement model

We used CFAs to examine the factor structure of our measured variables. A four-factor model (with power instability, benevolence distrust, ability distrust, and power sharing as correlated latent factors, all items loading on their suggested latent factors, and no item cross-loadings allowed) showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 [1\ 4\ 6] = 236.67$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.05, TLI = 0.97), and all items loaded significantly on their latent variables ($p < .001$). Furthermore, the four-factor model had a better fit to data than a one-factor model (in which all items loaded on the same latent variable; $\Delta\chi^2 [6] = 1954.15$, $p < .001$) as well as the best fitting two-factor model (i.e., with the items of power instability loading on one latent factor and all other items loading on a second latent factor; $\Delta\chi^2 [5] = 848.79$, $p < .001$) and the best fitting three-factor model (i.e., with the items of ability distrust and power sharing loading on one latent factor, the items of power instability loading on a second latent factor, and the items of distrust benevolence loading on a third latent factor; $\Delta\chi^2 [3] = 306.59$, $p < .001$).

8.2.2. Hypotheses tests

Table 6 depicts descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for Study 4's variables. As shown, power instability was not associated with power sharing ($r = -0.03$, $p = .62$). This likely results from the fact

that we tested a quite complex model and that our power sharing measure explicitly referred to leader's power sharing with a focal subordinate with either higher or lower seniority, which might have diminished the association. Bivariate results further showed that subordinates' seniority was negatively related with leaders' benevolence distrust ($r = -0.20$, $p = .002$) as well as ability distrust ($r = -0.47$, $p < .001$), whereas subordinates' seniority was positively related with power sharing ($r = 0.58$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, there was a relatively high correlation between benevolence and ability distrust ($r = 0.60$, $p < .001$). Hence, we tested our hypotheses regarding benevolence and ability distrust in separate regression analyses to avoid multicollinearity concerns.

We used Model 7 of the SPSS macro 'PROCESS' to test our moderated mediation hypotheses (based on 10,000 bootstrap samples; Hayes, 2012; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). As shown in Table 7, subordinates' seniority moderated the relationship between power instability and benevolence distrust ($B = 0.23$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .01$). Moreover, after controlling for power instability, benevolence distrust was negatively related with leaders' power sharing ($B = -0.30$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.12$). Accordingly, the index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2012) showed that the indirect relationship between power instability and power sharing, via benevolence distrust, was moderated by subordinates' seniority ($index = -0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI = $[-0.14, -0.02]$). Supporting Hypothesis 3a, this negative indirect relationship was only significant for relatively senior subordinates (+1 SD; $estimate = -0.20$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI = $-0.31, -0.11$), but not for relatively junior subordinates (-1 SD; $estimate = -0.07$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.18, 0.01]$).

Similarly, as shown in Table 8, subordinates' seniority moderated the relationship between power instability and ability distrust ($B = 0.19$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .04$). Moreover, after controlling for power instability, ability distrust was negatively related with leaders' power sharing ($B = -0.44$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.36$). Accordingly, the index of moderated mediation showed that the indirect relationship between power instability and power sharing, via ability distrust, was also moderated by subordinates' seniority ($index = -0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI = $[-0.17, -0.003]$). Contrary to Hypothesis 3b, however, the negative indirect effect was significant only with regards to relatively senior subordinates (+1 SD; $B = -0.22$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI = $-0.35, -0.12$), but not with regards to relatively junior subordinates (-1 SD; $B = -0.07$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.18, 0.06]$). Hence, Hypothesis 3b was not supported.⁷

As shown in Table 6, of the potential control variables, only leaders' age (in years), the number of subordinates that leaders supervise, and leaders' relationship tenure with the focal subordinate correlated with some, or all, of the outcome variables. Hence, we repeated all regression analyses with these variables as covariates. Results showed that for benevolence distrust, none of the reported results or conclusions were meaningfully affected by the inclusion of these covariates. For ability distrust, however, the respective (unexpected) index of moderated mediation was no longer significant when including these controls ($index = -0.06$, $SE = 0.04$; 95% CI $[-0.14, 0.008]$). Moreover, we note that inclusion of the other potential control variables did not alter the pattern of the results or influence our substantive conclusions.

⁷We note that we obtained a similar pattern of findings (such that Hypothesis 3a was supported and Hypothesis 3b was not) when using a binary conceptualization of subordinates' seniority (i.e., based on whether a participant was asked to think about a junior or a senior subordinate; 0 = junior, 1 = senior) rather than the continuous seniority measure. We further note that the association between benevolence distrust and power sharing, and hence, the moderated mediation index with benevolence distrust, is no longer significant when examining benevolence and ability distrust in a single regression analysis. There are no meaningful changes in the significance levels or patterns of the reported results for ability distrust when including benevolence distrust.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for Study 4.

Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	43.48 (12.38)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Gender	0.38 (0.49)	0.15*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. Management level	2.82 (0.57)	0.11	–0.03	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
4. Number of subordinates	2.50 (1.53)	–0.03	–0.06	0.22**	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
5. Hierarchical power	59.38 (24.32)	0.09	–0.09	0.60**	0.26**	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
6. Organizational tenure	10.93 (7.56)	0.52**	0.13*	0.04	0.14*	0.09	–	–	–	–	–	–
7. Supervisor-subordinate tenure	4.86 (5.67)	0.31**	0.07	0.10	0.09	0.10	0.56**	–	–	–	–	–
8. Power instability	2.34 (1.28)	0.08	0.14*	0.06	–0.01	–0.02	0.02	–0.04	–	–	–	–
9. Subordinates' seniority	5.16 (3.23)	0.06	0.13*	–0.02	0.07	0.10	0.13*	0.56**	–0.03	–	–	–
10. Benevolence distrust	2.68 (1.49)	–0.07	0.02	0.02	0.14*	0.01	–0.08	–0.15*	0.30**	–0.20**	–	–
11. Ability distrust	2.97 (1.66)	–0.15*	–0.04	0.03	0.07	0.02	–0.11	–0.30**	0.19**	–0.47**	0.60**	–
12. Power sharing	4.43 (1.21)	0.09	0.05	0.03	–0.08	0.07	0.09	0.36**	–0.03	0.58**	–0.34**	–0.59**

Notes. N ranges from 233 to 234. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. For gender, 0 = female and 1 = male. For management level, 1 = no management, 2 = lower management, 3 = middle management, and 4 = top management. For number of subordinates, 1 = between 1 and 5, 2 = between 6 and 10, 3 = between 11 and 15, 4 = between 16 and 20, and 5 = more than 20 employees.

Table 7
Results for Moderation Mediation Analysis with Benevolence Distrust as Mediator for Study 4.

	B (SE)	95% CI	R ²
<i>Outcome variable: Benevolence distrust</i>			0.15***
Power instability	0.45 (0.09)	0.27, 0.62	
Subordinates' seniority	–0.27 (0.09)	–0.45, –0.09	
Power instability × subordinates' seniority	0.23 (0.09)	0.05, 0.41	
<i>Outcome variable: Power sharing</i>			0.12**
Power instability	0.09 (0.08)	–0.06, 0.25	
Benevolence distrust	–0.30 (0.05)	–0.40, –0.19	
Index of moderated mediation	–0.07 (0.03)	–0.14, –0.02	

Notes. N = 234. Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients. Results are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples proposed by Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 8
Results for Moderation Mediation Analysis with Ability Distrust as Mediator for Study 4.

	B (SE)	95% CI	R ²
<i>Outcome variable: Ability distrust</i>			0.27***
Power instability	0.31 (0.09)	0.13, 0.50	
Subordinates' seniority	–0.76 (0.09)	–0.94, –0.57	
Power instability × subordinates' seniority	0.19 (0.09)	0.01, 0.38	
<i>Outcome variable: Power sharing</i>			0.36**
Power instability	0.10 (0.07)	–0.03, 0.23	
Ability distrust	–0.44 (0.04)	–0.52, –0.36	
Index of moderated mediation	–0.09 (0.04)	–0.17, –0.003	

Notes. N = 234. Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients. Results are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples proposed by Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

8.3. Discussion

Study 4 examined our full moderated mediation model. Analyses revealed that subordinates' seniority moderated the indirect relationship between power instability and power sharing, via benevolence distrust, such that benevolence distrust only mediated this indirect relationship for relatively senior subordinates. Analysis further revealed that subordinates' seniority also moderated the indirect relationship between power instability and power sharing via ability distrust.

Noteworthy, however, the pattern of this moderation was contrary our expectations, showing that, similar to benevolence distrust, ability distrust only mediated the power instability to power sharing relationship for relatively senior subordinates. This pattern of findings should, however, be interpreted with caution considering that these later results were not robust and reduced to non-significance when including relevant control variables. Overall, the findings of this study provide initial understanding of the psychological processes linking power instability to power sharing and the boundary conditions that shape such indirect effects. This study, however, also has some noteworthy limitations. Most importantly, the cross-sectional research design prevents causal inferences and raises possible concerns about common method bias. We note, however, that common method variance is unlikely to account for the interactive pattern of relationships we have obtained (Evans, 1985; Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010) and that our previous experimental studies ameliorate some of these concerns.

9. General discussion

The present research employed five studies to examine the role of leaders' power instability for their power sharing. The first three studies (Studies 1a-2) showed that the instability of leaders' power was related to reduced power sharing. In an additional study (Study 3), we then examined the underlying mechanism for the association between power instability and power sharing, and we showed the crucial role of distrust in this regard. Finally, in Study 4, we further examined the mediating role of distrust for leader's power sharing with different groups of subordinates. Our results revealed subordinates' seniority as a key boundary condition, such that we found an indirect association between power instability and power sharing, via benevolence and ability distrust, among relatively senior (but not among more junior) subordinates, although the findings regarding ability distrust were not robust.

9.1. Theoretical contributions

These findings make several important theoretical contributions. First, the present investigation extends previous research on the outcomes of leaders' power sharing (e.g., Biemann et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2010; Vecchio et al., 2010) by examining important predictors of such behavior. Particularly, our studies identify power instability and distrust as important contextual and psychological barriers of leaders' power sharing. By doing so, we provide a better understanding of when and why leaders are more or less willing to share their power

Second, this study contributes to the development of a coherent body of evidence demonstrating that power instability critically shapes

leaders' perceptions and behaviors to be consistent with their motivation to protect their power (cf. Maner & Mead, 2010; Williams, 2014). Previous research has demonstrated that power instability reduced leaders' trust in others (Mooijman et al., 2019), but, to our knowledge, no previous studies have identified the implications of such processes for how leaders interact with their subordinates. The current research indicates that power instability, and its resulting distrust, undermine a critical type of leadership behavior, namely leaders' power sharing.

Furthermore, our findings on the moderating role of subordinates' seniority provide initial steps toward a more dyadic understanding of leaders' (lack of) power sharing. Our findings suggest that to fully understand why leaders in unstable power positions are less willing to share their power, one should take into account characteristics of leaders' subordinates as well. Particularly, our results show that for more senior subordinates, power instability hinders leaders' power sharing because leaders worry that senior subordinates might take advantage of them and topple their privileged power-positions. Furthermore, although we expected that ability distrust would operate as an important mediator primarily for more junior subordinates, results showed that ability distrust was actually an important mediator for the linkage between power instability and power sharing with more senior subordinates (but not with more junior subordinates). This finding perhaps underscores the mindset of threat in which leaders in unstable positions are operating. Considering its lack of robustness, this latter finding, however, should be interpreted with caution and more research is needed to further corroborate the mediating role of ability distrust in this regard.

Lastly, our findings have important implications for organizational research on trust and distrust. To date, this line of inquiry has predominantly examined how trust can be developed and sustained (e.g., Mayer et al., 1995). This focus on trust (instead of distrust) is likely the result of the fact that most research has implicitly assumed that trust and distrust are opposite ends of the same conceptual spectrum (Cho, 2006). A growing body of work suggests, however that trust and distrust are two distinct constructs with different predictors (e.g., Bijlsma-Frankema et al., 2015; Dimoka, 2010). In light of these findings, researchers have called for more research on the development of distrust (Cho, 2006). Our findings shine greater light on this important issue by showing the impact of power instability for shaping leaders' distrust, in general, and benevolence-distrust as well as ability-based distrust, in particular.

9.2. Practical contributions

The current findings offer relevant practical implications for organizations. In particular, when striving to empower their workforce, our findings suggest that organizations should pay specific attention to the instability of leaders' power positions. Although complete positional security is virtually impossible, and could potentially induce feelings of entitlement and evoke related problems (e.g., misuse of power and moral hypocrisy; Jongenelen & Vonk, 2007; Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010), organizations that strive to encourage more power sharing among their leaders should enhance leaders' feelings of security and stability with regards to their future within the organization. Organizations could increase such perceptions of security and stability, for example, by utilizing longer employment contract times (Cuyper & Witte, 2006), offering support for internal career opportunities, and/or by ensuring that organizational processes and procedures (e.g., promotion and demotion decisions) are fair and transparent (García-Izquierdo, Moscoso, & Ramos-Villagrasa, 2012; Loi, Lam, & Chan, 2012).

Moreover, organizations aiming to promote their leaders' power sharing should reduce an atmosphere of distrust, by, for example, coaching their leaders to trust their subordinates (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). Furthermore, to increase leaders' power sharing with more senior subordinates, in particular, organizations should tackle leaders'

perceptions that their subordinates are selfish and out to hurt the leader (i.e., benevolence distrust). Also, organizations could strengthen leaders' perceptions of their senior subordinates' benevolence, by, for example, fostering cohesion among leaders and these subordinates (Gilbert & Tang, 1998).

9.3. Limitations and future research directions

The current research is not without limitations. First, in Studies 1a and 1b, we asked participants to imagine themselves in a more or less stable power position and to indicate how they *would* act. While this experimental approach allowed us draw causal conclusions and was thus beneficial in terms of internal validity, this methodology raised external validity concerns, as it was unknown if participants could sufficiently imagine themselves in the respective situation and assess their actual behavioral reactions. Study 2 aimed to address these concerns by adopting a behavioral outcome measure. Notably, Study 3 and 4's replication of the experimental findings in survey-based field settings, using online samples of organizational leaders, further attenuated these concerns. Given their cross-sectional, single-source designs, however, Study 3 and 4 were unable to warrant causal claims by themselves (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We thus took a multi-study design approach, because it counterbalanced many of the weaknesses associated with each of the individual studies. Nevertheless, we believe that longitudinal field studies with multiple measurement sources and/or experimental field studies would be worthwhile to further corroborate our conclusions.

Second, although the present research examined the mediating role of two dimensions of distrust (i.e., benevolence and ability), future research could expand on the present model by examining other types of mediators for the power instability-power sharing relationship. In addition to distrust, a leader's motivation to demonstrate competence could, for instance, mediate this relationship, with leaders who fear that they might lose their power positions being particularly eager to demonstrate their own competence, and hence, preferring to handle important tasks and decisions themselves (Harter, 1978; Kanfer, 1990).

Similarly, while the present research examined the moderating role of subordinates' seniority, future research could expand the current model by examining additional moderating variables. The organizational context in which leaders and subordinates find themselves, for instance, might prove to be particularly important in this regard (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). It is possible that in a competitive working environment in which leaders are learned to see their subordinates as competitors (Tjosvold, 1988, 1998), leaders perceive power sharing as a zero-sum phenomenon (i.e., if you share power with others, you lose power yourself; Coleman, 2004). Hence, in such competitive contexts, power instability might contribute to an atmosphere of distrust, consequently diminishing a leader's power sharing to a particularly large extent. In more cooperative work settings, by contrast, power sharing might be perceived as more beneficial to leaders' power positions, and hence, power instability might have less of a negative influence on leaders' power sharing.

Moreover, our studies exclusively focused on negative forms of power instability (i.e., expected power losses or threats). This construct also includes the opportunity to gain power, however, and future research could expand our theorizing by investigating such positive forms of power instability (cf. Jordan et al., 2011). On the one hand, it is possible that providing leaders with opportunities for power advancement could reduce power sharing – but for reasons other than the ones examined in the present research (i.e., distrust). For example, leaders in such situations might fear that organizational decision-makers perceive power sharing as a sign of weakness, which could limit their upward mobility (Coleman, 2004). Rather than sharing power, leaders might be particularly motivated, then, to demonstrate that they can independently handle their responsibilities and task assignments. On the other hand, one might anticipate that leaders in situations of positive

power instability may exhibit greater risk-taking inclinations (Jordan et al., 2011), which could enhance their tendencies toward power sharing (Schoorman et al., 2016). In sum, it is clear that additional research on this complex issue is warranted.

Furthermore, we note that leaders may experience power instability for various reasons, including factors related to themselves (e.g., perceptions of one's own incompetence), their subordinates (e.g., sabotage attempts), or their broader organizational contexts (e.g., an impending downsizing initiative). Based on the existing research, it is unclear whether such differences in the source of a leader's power instability may differentially affect his or her power sharing (see, e.g., Chattopadhyay, Glick, & Huber, 2001; D'Aunno & Sutton, 1992; Maner & Mead, 2010; Stoker, Garretsen, & Soudis, 2019). Future research could benefit from systematically examining this possibility, thus advancing a finer-grained perspective on the power instability to power sharing linkage and its underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions.

Finally, future research could examine the long-term consequences of leaders' reluctance towards sharing power. Although our theorizing and results suggest that leaders do not delegate authority and responsibilities because they want to protect their (fragile) power positions, it remains to be seen whether this is indeed a fruitful strategy. Many scholars have argued that leaders must involve lower-level subordinates in the decision-making process and harvest their talents and knowledge in order to remain effective and successful (e.g., Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Thus, even though a leader's lack of power sharing is aimed at protecting his or her privileged power position, in the long haul, it might actually contribute to the leader's downfall.

10. Conclusion

Research has demonstrated the many positive individual and organizational benefits of power sharing. But in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world in which many leaders currently find themselves, the instability of their power is likely to become increasingly salient. At the same time, there is evidence that future generations expect greater empowerment from their leaders in order to maintain job satisfaction and reduce turnover. We presented five studies that shed light on not only *if* instability reduces power sharing but also *why* and *under what conditions*, with the hope that this knowledge can arm organizations with a greater ability to encourage this important leadership behavior and reduce leaders' need to "cling to their power".

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sanne Feenstra: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Project administration. **Jennifer Jordan:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Frank Walter:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision. **Janka I. Stoker:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

A.1 Paranoia scenarios (adapted from Fenigstein, 1984)

On the following pages, eight hypothetical, everyday working situations are described. For each situation, two responses are depicted.

Please carefully read each situation, and imagine yourself being in such a situation. When you have a good sense of the situation, please

indicate how likely you are to respond in the described ways on a scale from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*).

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. Also, the two responses are *not* dependent on each other – meaning that you can think that both are likely, both are unlikely, or that one response is likely, while the other response is unlikely.

1. You are walking down the hallway at your office when one of your employees walks right by without saying "hello" to you. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your subordinate was preoccupied and didn't notice you?
 - (b) your subordinate wanted to avoid a conversation with you?*
2. You notice that your colleagues are having a meeting without you about one of the projects you're involved in. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your colleagues forgot to invite you to the meeting?
 - (b) your colleagues actively decided to exclude you from the meeting?*
3. You've sent an email to one of your employees a couple of days ago about an important issue that you are in charge delivering for a client. You need this person's response to proceed and the deadline is quickly approaching. Your subordinate has not yet responded to your email. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your subordinate is busy and did not yet have time to respond to you?
 - (b) your subordinate is trying to sabotage your success?*
4. While you are working, your boss unexpectedly stops by and asks what you are working on. He seems quite interested and wants to know the details. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your boss was curious to see what you're working on?
 - (b) your boss was there to see how productive you're being?*
5. A meeting with your colleagues and boss has ended. When you have left the room, you hear your colleagues and boss laughing. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your colleagues and boss were mocking something you said?*
 - (b) your colleagues and boss were laughing at a joke one of them told?
6. Two of your colleagues are standing at the coffee machine. They notice you, and their conversation stops. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your colleagues were talking negatively about you?*
 - (b) your colleagues were talking about work, in general?
7. You are working one day when your boss asks you to come to his office straight away. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your boss is going to give you bad news about your performance?*
 - (b) your boss wants to ask you something about one of your projects?
8. You are very busy and therefore one of your employees offers to help you with your work. How likely is it that:
 - (a) your subordinate has a hidden motive and wants something from you?*
 - (b) your subordinate wants to help you finish in time?

* is the paranoid response.

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