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ABSTRACT

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The Factor Structure of
Source Credibility Scales for
Immediate Superiors in the
Organizational Context

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on two investigations designed to determine the generalizability of source credibility scales for immediate superiors across organizational contexts. Semantic differential-type scales that have been found to load on factors of course credibility in previous studies were combined to provide an item pool for this investigation. In the first investigation, three groups of subjects were asked to respond to these scales as they referred to their immediate superior. Subjects were drawn from private industry, the Civil Service Commission, and the Department of the Navy. In the second investigation, 40 scale items were drawn from the original item pool and submitted to subjects across four organizations: private industry, Civil Service Commission, Navy Department, and retail outlets. The results of the study indicate that there are four meaningful and statistically independent dimensions for the measurement of the source credibility of immediate superiors in an organizational setting.

For many years, behavioral scientists have been concerned about perceived source credibility. According to McCroskey, "an extensive body of literature has developed over the past two decades indicating that source credibility may be the single most important variable in determining persuasive effects of communication."¹ The early research of Hovland, Janis and Kelley suggested that perceived source credibility appears to consist of two components: expertness and trustworthiness.²

Since this early research, there has been an apparent increase in the recognition of the importance of source credibility. Much of the research has been designed to develop a measuring instrument which can reliably determine its components. McCroskey found two credibility factors: authoritativeness and character.³ More recently, Berlo, Lemert and Mertz, in their factor analytic studies, found three factors: safety, qualification and dynamism.⁴ Fulton⁵ hypothesized that the factors of source credibility may have Norman's⁶ five factors of personality underlying them. Norman's personality factors were: agreeableness, conscientiousness, culture, extroversion, and emotional stability. Using "attraction" as the dependent variable, Fulton performed a multiple correlation analysis on the five factors. The results suggest that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and culture are related to perceived credibility.

The scales developed by Berlo, Lemert and Mertz, and McCroskey appear to be the ones chosen by researchers in communication to measure the variable. It should be noted that the Berlo research was the only one which did not use undergraduate students exclusively. The scales were developed from a sample of adults in Lansing, Michigan. It should also be noted that both McCroskey's

and Berlo's scales were based on subjects' responses to public figures. Because of the similarity of these two scales which used different subject populations, researchers have assumed their generalizability across contexts.

Tucker⁷ suggests that factors found in previous studies may not provide an underlying structure which will remain stable across contexts, and that it would be an error to assume that prior scales are universal. Variability in subjects or sources may cause credibility dimensions to change. A recent investigation by Applebaum and Anatol suggests further that dimensions of credibility may vary according to the situation.⁸

Essentially, the research designed to develop source credibility instruments has been limited to student populations, often responding to only one source. McCroskey suggests that the development of source credibility instruments which have any generalizability at all must be based upon specific source-types and subjects other than students.⁹ Thus far, McCroskey has developed credibility scales for organization sources, peers and spouses, mass media sources, and public figures.¹⁰

It is the purpose of this study to determine the factor structure of source credibility for immediate superiors in an organizational setting which may be generalizable across contexts.

Procedure

Sixty-one bi-polar semantic differential-type scales representing the dimensions of source credibility reported by Norman, McCroskey, and Berlo, Lemert and Mertz were selected. Two separate studies were conducted. The first sample included subjects from private industry (49), Civil Service Commission (53), and the Navy Department (56) who responded to

these scale. as they related to their specific immediate superior. All 158 respondents were salaried personnel who were responsible to a superior according to the formal chain of command. All respondents had a minimum of twelve years formal education and an average income of \$12,000 annually. None of the respondents performed supervisory functions.

The data were submitted to an alpha factor analysis utilizing a principal-component solution followed by an orthogonal rotation of the factor matrix with the varimax criterion. An eigenvalue of 1.0 was established as the criterion for termination of factor extraction, and squared multiple R's were placed in the diagonals. For an item to be considered loaded on a resulting factor, a loading of .60 or higher was required with no loading of .35 or higher on any other factor. At least two scales must be loaded on a factor for it to be meaningful, and each factor should contribute five percent or greater to the total variance.

Results of First Investigation

The results of this study are presented in Table I. Although eight factors emerged, only four factors met the a priori criteria stated above. These four factors: safety, extroversion, competence, and emotional stability accounted for 55% of the total variance. The other four factors combined accounted for 12.5% of the total variance, but do not appear to be independently meaningful dimensions. A four factor solution was then run using the same criteria as above, and only 3% was added to the total variance of the first four factors. It is suggested then, that there may only be four statistically independent and meaningful dimensions.

A second study was later conducted. Using the same a priori criteria as established above, 40 of the original 61 scales were selected. They were chosen on the basis of their high loadings in the first study.

In an attempt to further test the generalizability of the scales, four organizations were selected. Samples were taken from the following four organizational types: private industry (62 subjects), Civil Service Commission (67), Navy Department (68), retail outlets (58).

The subjects from private industry were salaried personnel who performed various production oriented functions in an industrial products division. The subjects from both Civil Service Commission and the Navy Department were also predominately non-military, salaried personnel working in Research and Development. The subjects from the retail outlets were paid on hourly wage and performed various clerical duties in a large grocery chain.

All respondents in the first three organizations had a minimum of twelve years formal education, and an average income of \$14,000 annually. None of the respondents in these organizations were female, nor did they perform any formal supervisory functions.

The subjects from the retail outlets had a minimum of eleven years formal education, and an average income of \$9,000 annually. Twenty-two of the respondents from the organization were female, and none of the subjects performed any formal supervisory functions.

Results of the Second Investigation

It was felt that the second study would produce similar factor loadings as the first study. This was supported conclusively. Five factors emerged, but only four factors met the a priori criteria. The five factors combined accounted for 70.6% of the total variance, with the fifth factor explaining only 3%.

Again, a four factor solution was run using the same criteria, and the four factors accounted for 67.6% of the total variance.

It appears quite conclusive that there are only four statistically independent and meaningful dimensions.

Discussion

This factor analytic study produced four meaningful and statistically independent dimensions for measurement of the source credibility of immediate superiors in an organizational setting.

Safety appears to include both intentionality as well as the "affiliative" relationship between the superior and subordinate and is very similar to McCroskey's character/sociability factor.

Extroversion appears very similar to Berlo, Lemert and Mertz' dynamism factor except for the adventurous-cautious scale. It might be suggested that this factor may relate to the superior who is perceived as a risk-taker who boldly tries out new ideas, or is not afraid to support his subordinates in the organization.

Competence is similar to McCroskey's factor of the same name, but the scales seem to be more limited to context-relevant terms pertaining to the superior's competence in the work environment.

Emotional stability might first appear to be incongruent with extroversion, but it is suggested that an immediate superior could be perceived by subordinate as active or bold, but still poised or composed.

It should be emphasized that the scales recommended in Table 2 are recommended only for the measurement of subordinate perceptions of their immediate superior and should not be reversed in their usage. While it is suggested that these scales may be generalizable across organizational contexts; it should

be remembered that these findings should not be necessarily considered representative of all potential subject populations. If a researcher has available subjects, he would be better off to conduct his own factor analysis. This study may be characterized as being part of the on-going effort to establish the generalizability of credibility scales across populations and source types.

TABLE 1
Rotated Factor Matrix for Subordinate Perceptions
of Immediate Superior

Scales	Factors							h ²	
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII		VIII
safe-dangerous	.64	-.03	-.18	.26	.05	-.31	.01	.5	.63
just-unjust	.76	.11	-.19	-.33	-.02	.04	-.22	-.08	.79
calm-upset	.40	-.11	-.04	-.71	.07	-.01	-.00	.05	.69
objective-subjective	.55	.17	-.21	-.36	.07	-.14	-.18	.02	.56
unselfish-selfish	.72	.10	-.07	-.30	-.05	-.11	-.22	.09	.70
patient-impatient	.62	-.11	-.05	-.46	.01	-.00	-.05	.20	.66
fair-unfair	.75	.25	-.21	-.30	.03	-.03	-.21	.00	.80
ethical-unethical	.68	.04	-.33	-.19	.07	-.17	-.19	.05	.69
trained-untrained	.10	.28	-.64	-.14	.09	.02	-.16	.16	.58
experienced-inexperienced	.18	.11	-.74	-.09	.00	.06	.02	.09	.61
authoritative-unauthoritative	-.10	.48	-.38	-.08	.07	-.04	-.21	-.08	.44
skilled-unskilled	.22	.31	-.74	-.05	.17	-.04	.06	.18	.75
informed-uninformed	.29	.25	-.70	-.09	.06	.07	-.02	.18	.69
intelligent-unintelligent	.31	.30	-.54	-.23	.27	.03	-.05	-.09	.61
qualified-unqualified	.41	.25	-.71	-.21	.15	.00	-.01	-.09	.82
able-inept	.46	.28	-.63	-.18	.12	.00	-.04	-.22	.79
frank-reserved	.41	.49	-.19	-.11	-.12	-.17	-.15	-.25	.58
fast-slow	.04	.64	-.27	.12	.11	-.09	-.29	-.05	.61
energetic-tired	.08	.60	-.38	-.06	.04	-.17	.00	-.19	.59
bold-timid	-.10	.81	-.11	-.04	-.09	-.08	.17	.00	.73
active-passive	.09	.76	-.31	-.05	-.04	-.14	-.06	-.10	.72
aggressive-meek	-.12	.82	-.22	-.11	-.01	-.14	.09	-.07	.78
emphatic-hesitant	.11	.75	-.24	-.09	.02	-.03	-.18	.04	.67
forceful-forceless	-.01	.78	-.33	-.13	.01	-.04	.02	.01	.74
reliable-unreliable	.64	.35	-.40	-.15	-.07	-.10	-.15	-.06	.76
valuable-worthless	.48	.37	-.58	-.12	-.00	-.12	.00	.04	.73
expert-inexpert	.30	.26	-.74	-.08	.11	-.03	.17	.11	.76
honest-dishonest	.74	.06	-.26	-.16	.18	-.18	-.07	-.20	.76
friendly-unfriendly	.74	.10	-.02	-.21	.21	.06	.20	.02	.70

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TABLE 1 (cont.)

Scales	Factors								h ²
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	
pleasant-unpleasant	.77	.04	-.08	-.28	.26	-.06	.15	-.02	.77
nice-awful	.81	.05	-.09	-.20	.22	-.09	.06	.04	.77
virtuous-sinful	.63	.04	-.26	-.03	.19	-.32	.01	-.06	.60
responsible-undependable	.58	.26	-.52	-.14	-.05	-.23	-.02	-.11	.77
scrupulous-unscrupulous	.55	.07	-.40	-.17	.05	.27	.04	-.03	.58
perservering-quitting	.16	.47	-.16	-.13	-.07	-.60	.02	.07	.67
perservering-fickle	.43	.38	-.12	-.26	-.01	-.44	-.07	.21	.65
fussy-careless	.07	.14	-.13	.05	.27	-.66	.06	.04	.55
tidy-careless	.29	.22	-.14	-.24	.31	-.49	-.14	-.13	.58
good-natured-irritable	.74	-.01	.04	-.24	.22	.09	-.09	.13	.69
not jealous-jealous	.70	-.03	-.14	-.30	.09	-.18	-.27	.08	.73
mild-headstrong	.66	-.26	.03	-.22	.23	.03	-.03	.14	.63
cooperative-negativistic	.72	.22	-.17	-.20	.16	-.04	.01	.08	.67
intellectual-unreflective	.39	.44	-.36	-.10	.36	-.13	-.04	.05	.63
intellectual-narrow	.46	.37	-.29	-.15	.40	-.13	-.14	.11	.66
polished-crude	.44	.27	-.21	-.20	.66	-.11	-.03	-.01	.80
polished-boorish	.43	.28	-.19	-.23	.68	-.03	-.05	.06	.83
refined-crude	.48	.21	-.21	-.15	.64	-.21	-.05	-.01	.79
refined-boorish	.50	.18	-.30	-.21	.62	-.13	-.04	.06	.82
imaginative-simple	.32	.48	-.30	-.06	.28	-.09	-.02	.40	.68
imaginative-direct	.31	.36	-.07	.04	.26	-.04	.06	.48	.53
artistically sensitive-artistically insensitive	.31	.33	-.06	-.07	.48	-.19	.12	.18	.53
talkative-silent	.16	.49	-.01	.05	.08	-.00	.51	-.05	.54
frank-secretive	.58	.45	-.19	-.01	.12	.10	.08	-.19	.65
open-secretive	.66	.35	-.11	-.07	.12	.16	.19	-.09	.66
adventurous-cautious	.15	.64	-.02	-.17	.00	.13	.04	.27	.55
sociable-reclusive	.40	.43	-.06	-.21	.14	.03	.36	.01	.54
poised-nervous	.20	.23	-.16	-.69	.21	.18	.25	.04	.73
poised-tense	.34	.09	-.13	-.70	.14	-.10	.26	.02	.73

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TABLE 1 (cont.)

Scales	Factors								h ²
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	
Comp-anxious	.22	-.06	-.14	-.83	-.01	-.05	.01	.08	.78
Comp-posed-excitable	.30	-.05	-.10	-.77	.17	-.02	-.10	.07	.74
Non-hypochondriacal-hypochondriacal	.29	.26	-.03	-.39	.19	.08	-.13	-.22	.41
Total Variance	22.2	13.5	10.8	7.9	5.4	3.5	2.2	1.9	57.5
Common Variance	32.9	20.0	16.0	11.8	8.0	5.1	3.3	2.9	100.0

Factor I was labeled Safety and accounted for 22.2% of the variance.
 Factor II was labeled Extroversion and accounted for 13.5% of the variance.
 Factor III was labeled Competence and accounted for 10.8% of the variance.
 Factor IV was labeled Emotional Stability and accounted for 7.9% of the variance.

TABLE 2
Four Factor Solution for Subordinate Perceptions
of Immediate Superior (N=158)

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Scales	Factors			
	I	II	III	h ²
safe-dangerous	.58	-.01	-.22	-.36
just-unjust	.59	-.01	-.34	-.48
calm-upset	.37	-.09	.02	-.72
objective-subjective	.49	.14	-.27	-.44
unselfish-selfish	.58	.01	-.21	-.45
patient-impatient	.54	-.13	-.07	-.55
fair-unfair	.62	.15	-.35	-.45
ethical-unethical	.63	.01	-.41	-.31
trained-untrained	.12	.27	-.62	-.15
experienced-inexperienced	.14	.10	-.69	-.13
authoritative-unauthoritative	-.09	.44	-.42	-.07
skilled-unskilled	.26	.36	-.65	-.61
informed-uninformed	.26	.23	-.68	-.64
intelligent-unintelligent	.36	.32	-.51	-.23
qualified-unqualified	.39	.24	-.70	-.27
able-inept	.40	.24	-.67	-.26
frank-reserved	.24	.38	-.36	-.25
fast-slow	.04	.58	-.39	.09
energetic-tired	.04	.59	-.43	.11
bold-timid	-.19	.79	-.16	-.09
active-passive	-.01	.70	-.41	-.13
aggressive-meek	-.17	.81	-.25	-.14
emphatic-hesitant	.04	.67	-.34	.49
forceful-forceless	-.07	.75	-.37	.31
reliable-unreliable	.47	.25	-.55	.48
valuable-worthless	.39	.33	-.62	.46
expert-inexpert	.30	.29	-.67	.40
honest-dishonest	.71	.05	-.34	.42
friendly-unfriendly	.71	.11	-.03	.61
				.64

TABLE 2 (cont.)

Scales	Factors			h ²
	I	II	III	
pleasant-unpleasant	.78	.07	-.07	.52
nice-awful	.80	.06	-.13	.69
virtuous-sinful	.65	.09	-.29	.67
responsible-undependable	.46	.22	-.60	.53
scrupulous-unscrupulous	.51	.09	-.42	.59
perservering-quitting	.14	.53	-.20	.61
perservering-fickle	.38	.41	-.18	.72
fussy-careless	.28	.32	-.05	.66
tidy-careless	.43	.32	-.13	.49
good-natured-irritable	.73	-.04	-.02	.53
not jealous-jealous	.66	-.06	-.23	.38
mild-headstrong	.70	-.24	.04	.64
cooperative-negotivistic	.67	.20	-.23	.60
intellectual-unreflective	.49	.49	-.35	.54
intellectual-narrow	.58	.42	-.29	.77
polished-crude	.69	.40	-.13	.74
polished-boorish	.70	.41	-.10	.40
refined-crude	.74	.35	-.14	.50
refined-boorish	.74	.35	-.21	.55
imaginative-simple	.41	.54	-.28	.69
imaginative-direct	.40	.42	-.04	.68
artistically sensitive-artificially insensitive	.52	.47	.02	.77
talkative-silent	.13	.54	.03	.59
frank-secretive	.48	.38	-.30	.73
open-secretive	.55	.29	-.19	.69
adventurous-cautious	.07	.59	-.07	.71
social-reclusive	.36	.46	-.04	.63
poised-nervous	.27	.34	.00	.69
poised-tense	.34	.18	.01	.61

TABLE 2 (cont.)

Scales	Factors				h ²
	I	II	III	IIII	
calm-anxious	.19	-.03	-.04	-.83	.72
composed-excitable	.33	-.01	-.01	-.73	.65
non-hypochondriacal-hypochondriacal	.29	.23	-.07	-.39	.29
Total Variance	22.2	13.7	12.0	10.1	58.0
Common Variance	38.2	23.6	20.7	17.5	100.0

Factor I (Safety) accounted for 22.2% of the variance
 Factor II (Extroversion) accounted for 13.7% of the variance.
 Factor III (Competence) accounted for 12.0% of the variance.
 Factor IV (Emotional Stability) accounted for 10.1% of the variance.

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TABLE 3
Rotated Factor Matrix for Subordinate Perceptions
of Immediate Superior (N=255)

Scales	Factors					h ²
	I	II	III	IV	V	
safe-dangerous	.67	.02	.17	.11	.04	.50
just-unjust	.79	.15	.21	.19	.03	.73
objective-subjective	.61	.17	.31	.22	-.13	.56
unselfish-selfish	.80	.07	.12	.14	-.03	.67
patient-impatient	.64	-.16	.15	.38	.04	.61
fair-unfair	.78	.21	.26	.20	.03	.75
ethical-unethical	.73	.04	.39	.18	-.02	.70
trained-untrained	.19	.27	.70	.10	.03	.61
experienced-inexperienced	.21	.18	.75	.08	.04	.64
skilled-unskilled	.22	.28	.81	.10	.03	.80
informed-uninformed	.27	.23	.73	.13	.02	.67
intelligent-unintelligent	.35	.26	.60	.21	.08	.60
qualified-unqualified	.38	.27	.75	.17	.10	.82
able-inept	.48	.32	.62	.15	.03	.74
frank-reserved	.39	.58	.14	.06	.03	.51
fast-slow	.10	.63	.24	-.10	.02	.47
energetic-tired	.10	-.66	.23	-.06	-.00	.50
bold-timid	-.12	.84	.08	.06	.05	.73
active-passive	.09	.83	.24	.01	.06	.75
aggressive-meek	-.12	.85	.20	.10	-.01	.79
emphatic-hesitant	.08	.76	.19	.05	-.02	.62
forceful-forceless	.02	.81	.25	.08	-.05	.73
reliable-unreliable	.66	.32	.36	.09	.00	.68
valuable-worthless	.48	.37	.56	.13	.16	.72
expert-inexpert	.27	.24	.77	.10	.11	.75
honest-dishonest	.74	.07	.34	.07	.12	.68
friendly-unfriendly	.59	.10	.19	.18	.64	.83

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TABLE 3 (cont.)

Scales	Factors					h ²
	I	II	III	IV	V	
pleasant-unpleasant	.67	.05	.21	.22	.54	.83
nice-awful	.75	.02	.24	.14	.42	.83
virtuous-sinful	.65	.11	.26	-.00	.17	.53
good-natured-irritable	.71	.04	.09	.19	.39	.71
not jealous-jealous	.80	.05	.16	.15	.05	.70
mild-headstrong	.60	-.27	.04	.25	.11	.51
cooperative-negativistic	.71	.19	.25	.14	.18	.65
adventurous-cautious	.09	.55	.11	.17	.15	.37
sociable-reclusive	.27	.44	.05	.24	.39	.47
poised-nervous	.18	.26	.16	.73	.26	.72
poised-tense	.27	.19	.23	.75	.23	.77
calm-anxious	.33	.01	.17	.78	-.04	.75
composed-excitable	.39	-.06	.14	.73	-.05	.70
Total Variance	42.1	14.6	5.8	5.1	3.0	70.6
Common Variance	61.9	20.6	7.5	6.5	3.5	100.0

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Factor I (Safety) accounted for 42.1% of the variance.
 Factor II (Extroversion) accounted for 14.6% of the variance.
 Factor III (Competence) accounted for 5.8% of the variance.
 Factor IV (Emotional Stability) accounted for 5.1% of the variance.

TABLE 4
Four Factor Solution for Subordinate Perceptions
of Immediate Superior (N=255)

Scales	I	II	Factors III	IV	h ²
safe-dangerous	.67	.01	.18	.09	.49
just-unjust	.78	.14	.22	.16	.71
objective-subjective	.56	.15	.34	.17	.48
unselfish-selfish	.76	.06	.15	.11	.62
patient-impatient	.64	-.17	.17	.36	.59
fair-unfair	.76	.20	.28	.17	.73
ethical-unethical	.70	.03	.41	.09	.67
trained-untrained	.20	.27	.70	.11	.61
experienced-inexperienced	.21	.18	.74	.08	.63
skilled-unskilled	.22	.29	.81	.10	.79
informed-uninformed	.27	.23	.73	.13	.67
intelligent-unintelligent	.37	.26	.60	.21	.60
qualified-unqualified	.39	.28	.74	.18	.81
able-inept	.47	.32	.63	.14	.74
frank-reserved	.38	.57	.16	.05	.50
fast-slow	.10	.63	.24	-.11	.48
energetic-tired	.09	.66	.23	-.07	.50
bold-timid	-.11	.84	.08	.07	.73
active-passive	.09	.83	.24	.01	.76
aggressive-meek	-.13	.85	.21	.11	.79
emphatic-hesitant	.07	.75	.20	.05	.62
forceful-forceless	.00	.80	.26	.08	.72
reliable-unreliable	.64	.32	.38	.07	.66
valuable-worthless	.50	.38	.55	.14	.71
expert-inexpert	.29	.25	.75	-.12	.73
honest-dishonest	.75	.07	.34	.06	.68
friendly-unfriendly	.70	.15	.13	.25	.59

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TABLE 4 (cont.)

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Scales	Factors				R ²
	I	II	III	IV	
pleasant-unpleasant	.76	.09	.16	.27	.69
nice-awful	.83	.05	.20	.18	.76
virtuous-sinful	.67	.12	.25	-.00	.53
good-natured-irritable	.78	.07	.06	.22	.67
not jealous-jealous	.79	.05	.17	.13	.68
mild-headstrong	.62	-.27	.03	.24	.51
cooperative-negative	.74	.20	.24	.14	.65
adventurous-cautious	.12	.56	.10	.18	.37
social-reclusive	.34	.46	.02	.28	.41
poised-nervous	.23	.28	.13	.76	.72
poised-tense	.31	.21	.21	.77	.78
calm-anxious	.32	-.00	.19	.74	.68
composed-excitable	.37	-.08	.16	.68	.64
Total Variance	42.1	14.6	5.8	5.1	67.6
Common Variance	64.2	21.4	7.8	6.7	100.0

Factor I (Safety) accounted for 42.1% of the variance.
 Factor II (Extroversion) accounted for 14.6% of the variance.
 Factor III (Competence) accounted for 5.8% of the variance.
 Factor IV (Emotional Stability) accounted for 5.1% of the variance.

TABLE 5

Suggested Scales for the Measurement of
Source Credibility of Immediate Superiors

Dimension	Scales
Safety	honest - dishonest friendly - unfriendly pleasant - unpleasant nice - awful good-natured - irritable cooperative - negativistic safe - dangerous just - unjust unselfish - selfish fair - unfair mild - headstrong virtuous - sinful not jealous - jealous
Competence	trained - untrained experienced - inexperienced informed - uninformed expert - inexpert skilled - unskilled
Extroversion	fast - slow bold - timid aggressive - meek emphatic - hesitant adventurous - cautious forceful - forceless active - passive energetic - tired
Emotional Maturity	poised - nervous calm - anxious composed - excitable poised - tense

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