

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN CREATION OF ORGANISATIONAL TRUST

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research paper introduces with the empirical results of a study exploring the relationships between the concepts of leadership and organizational trust. The sample used in the analysis (N = 215) was selected in Latvian companies, both of Latvian and foreign capital. This paper argues that trust in organizational life is a necessary foundation of working relationship and it can be enhanced due to the leadership behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach: The empirical part of the study shows the relationship between cognitive and emotional components of trust and ethical leadership, which was measured by leader – member exchange (LMX) scale. Statistical analysis (using SPSS 22) based on a survey of employees of 4 different organisations within Latvian business context was applied.

Findings: The results of the study indicate that relationship – oriented leadership, which implies an ethical connotation, has a positive correlation with trust, and organisations as to leadership – trust relationship differ statistically.

Research implications: This study contributes both to the literature on organisational trust, as well as to the emerging theory on leadership and ethical leadership, adding data of Latvian business context.

Practical implications: It is suggested that organisational trust should be addressed as a strategic question for the companies. Moreover, leaders should take responsibility for the quality of the leader-member relationship in order to develop organisational trust.

Originality: This article makes a theoretical contribution by examining the linkages between organisational trust and leadership, and also adds Latvian data to the field of study of interrelationship between the phenomena.

Keywords: *Leadership, Trust, LMX, Latvian business context.*

1.INTRODUCTION

Organisation foremost is the people. As stated by Drucker (Drucker, 2005 In: Forands, 2007, p. 162) organisation is based upon “human, its social and moral phenomena”. A major part of the leader’s work, as it continues to be highlighted in managerial literature, is dealing with people. When leadership relationships induce organisational trust, the overall organisational context gives spontaneous sociability (Fukuyama, 1995), which means willingness and ability of participants to form co-operation within the terms of reference partners. Organisational trust is a positive attitude held by one organisational member towards another assuming that the other party will act honestly and will not take advantage of one’s vulnerability and dependence in a risky situation (Das & Teng, 1998).

As stated by Nyhan and Marlowe (1997), in order to lead successfully a leader has to have an access to the information. Trust forms the effectiveness of co-operation with followers providing such access to information. It is argued that trust in a leader is a basis for effective functioning of the organization and it is the level of confidence that employees have in their leader’s competence. When followers trust a leader, they are ready to sense the visions and objectives, being confident that their rights, interests and energy will not be neglected (Nyhan and Marlowe, 1997).

Morris (2014) defines a leader as someone who looks ahead and visualises the future. Zaleznik (1992) states that leaders directly work with values, they define the contexts and meanings to others. In literature we also find that the leader has an important role as a catalyst of change in the organisation (Trevino, & Brown, 2004). The attitudes and decision-making of top leadership influence an organisational culture and resonate throughout the entire organisation. The research by Mayer (2011), Ciulla (2005), Trevino et al. (2003) demonstrate that executive leaders play an important role in communicating ethical standards. Values of leaders get transformed into organisational values. If the leader works for building trustful dyadic relationship with the subordinates, it gradually gets transformed throughout the entire organisation (Fukujama, 1995). Research indicates that ethical leadership positively affects developing of a strong organisational culture (Trevino et al., 2003), and contributes to strengthening of the organisational trust (Lamsa & Pucetaite, 2006). Although the exact meaning of ‘ethical leadership’ is still a matter of discussion in theoretical and practical terms (Ciulla, 2005; Maak & Pless, 2006), this research is concerned with the impact of leadership’s ‘ethicality’ on such outcome as organisational trust in Latvian business context. Theoretical background further will introduce with the main arguments, which served as a theoretical basis of this research. Methodology part will briefly discuss the methods used; results part will demonstrate the

results gained in the research, followed by conclusion and discussion parts.

2.THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Trust has been defined in many different ways; already Stack (1978) and Wrightsman (1991) in the field of social psychology have reviewed trust as an individual predisposition, it was also observed as a psychological state (Lewicki et al, 2006; Rousseau et al, 1998) and as a behavioural response (Mayer et al, 1995). Often the definition of trust by Mayer et al. (1995) is provided in leadership research: trust is „the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the outcomes of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). This confidence in the other party’s benevolent behaviour develops from the experience and belief that the trustee has earlier followed the same values and principles (Connell, Ferres, & Travaglione, 2003). As to Sako (2000), trust cannot be formed without a prior basis for it. It usually develops when two parties regularly comply with the same ethical or/and social norms and regulations (Fukuyama, 1995). Trust therefore, depends on organizational members’ work morale and competence (Lamsa & Pucetaite, 2006), and it includes perception, interpretation and belief, resulting in a high intention for further collaboration (Kuan and Bock, 2007).

As the vast body of literature suggests, trust is a multifaceted construct comprising cognitive, affective, behavioural, economical and ethical components. Trust may bring positive or negative results and it can be manifested at the individual, group, organisational or societal levels (Pucetaite, Novelskaite, 2014). Trust may be felt towards individuals and organisations alike (Luoma-aho et al., 2012), and, once established, it builds a certain context, which enhances ‘communities of practice’ (Brown & Duguid, 1998). Such ‘communities of practice’ are characteristics of so called ‘learning organisations’, where openness, knowledge sharing and emotional support take place (Easterby-Smith, Crossan & Nicolini, 2000).

The study by McEvily and Tortoriello (2011) has revealed that there exist 42 different instruments to measure trust in the organisational context. Among the trust measurement instruments (e.g. Gillespie, 2003, Cummings and Bromily, 1996), the instrument by McAllister (1995) was chosen for the purposes of this study. According to McAllister (1995) trust is divided into cognitive and affective components, where affective trust is connected to psychological and emotional aspects, which make people to wish to share their feelings, hopes, and fundamental believes. Cognition-based trust tackles evaluative dimension, based on critical attitude towards one’s performance, decision-making and consistency. The cognitive component of organisational trust refers to a certain experience based on the fact that a partner has been acting in a competent way in the past and can be expected to do so in the future (Gulati & Sytch, 2008). Cognition-based trust works in short-term affairs, meanwhile in sustaining the long-term relationship, an affect-based trust is required. Affect-based trust can be found in reliable, mutually-rewarding and effective relationships (Gulati & Sytch, 2008; Lamsa & Pucetaite, 2006).

The LMX theory (primarily was called as Vertical Dyad linkage theory by Graen & Cashman, 1975) is focused on the development of relationship between the leader and subordinates, and it has its roots in the theory of social interrelations - e.g. in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). According to this approach, there exists an exchange of information and emotions between the parties involved, and it can be referred to as low and high LMX (Anand et al., 2011). High – exchange relationship (high LMX) imply high quality of informational exchange, trust, loyalty, emotional comfort. Such relationships are getting formed by a leader (Dansereau et al., 1975) with the subordinates who constitute the „in-group” circle. In- group followers are empowered with greater responsibilities, they receive more attention of the leader, are given more freedom for performing their roles, and they get more rewards. The influence has a two-way direction, parties are willing to contribute to the emotional well-being of each other, and relationships exit the boundaries of the formal contract. In the case of „out-group members”, the exchange of quality of information and emotional support is low, the influence goes the direction from the leader towards the subordinate, there is lower level of trust, more control is used from the part of the leader and less initiative from the part of subordinate. Such relationship can be characterised as formal and emotionally neutral or rather cold and indicate on low LMX (Graen & Uhl – Bien, 1995).

As discussed, values of leader, gradually are getting spread throughout the working environment and can start to form an affect-based organizational trust, as participants start to feel that their values are accepted and partners perceive the congruence between own and organisational values (in-group employees). As demonstrated in a recent studies (Ellemers et al, 2013), value congruence contributes to the increase of intrinsic motivation, which in turns serves as a base for co-operation, creativity and sustainability of the organisation (e.g. Liao et al., 2010) satisfaction and commitment (Gerstner and Day, 1997; Podsakoff et al.,

1996). Interestingly that in the case of low LMX a cognitive trust may be present, and although it rests on contractual commitments, the reliance on other party's professionalism may result in high effectiveness as well, especially if it concerns short-term relationship (Pucetaite, 2014).

The academic discourse on leadership has related the concepts of LMX and that of ethical leadership (Hansen, 2011, Pucetaite, 2014), arguing that the characteristics of high LMX such as respect, trust, reciprocity, and empowering of followers indicate on ethical dimension of leadership. Indeed, transformational leadership idea (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) which gave rise to the discussion of leadership ethicality (Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2012) draws a particular attention to such characteristics of leadership as encouragement of employees, risks-taking, creativity, sharing of visions (Brown, 2006). Transformational and, further, ethical leadership is often associated with sharing the visions, values, empowering of the subordinates, sharing of responsibility, leaders' servant-ship (Greenleaf, 2003). Ethical leadership often speaks of integrity and character. Indeed, high LMX indicates on such qualities of the leader and subordinates' reliance upon leaders' integrity (Wilson et al, 2010). Although there are arguments against attributing LMX theory to ethical leadership (Yukl et al, 2009), moreover, the studies demonstrate that LMX have another conceptual platform than that of ethical and transformational leadership (O'Donnell et al, 2012), it is not contradictory for the purposes of this study. The aim of this research was to observe what role the behaviour of a leader plays in the formation of organisational trust. Leaving apart the discussion as to what degree the LMX can or cannot be attributed to ethical leadership theory, the LMX measurement allows one to understand how the quality of relationship between the followers and the leaders are perceived by followers. The moral responsibility of a leader for forming relationship with subordinates and within the organisation was discussed above.

Therefore, two research questions were established:

- Is there a link between the behaviour of leader and organisational trust?
- Do organisations differ in their levels of organisational trust? If so, can the differences be attributed to leaders' behaviour?

3.METHODOLOGY

The survey for the present study was administered in 2014 by author in four different organisations of different industries. They were chosen in order to represent service and production organisations, which, using statistical data are representing Latvian business context most, by the number of people involved in these industries. Organisations were deliberately chosen of different industries, as studied phenomena rather than the industry were in the focus of the research, which is argued to be a valid and applicable approach for social science (Schwab, 2005).

Participants (N =215) were aged 24 – 63, medium age 42. Men – 62%, women – 38%, both, Latvian and Russian nationals, high management position – 9%, middle management – 15%, and 76% employees – specialists. Data were collected using printed questionnaire version. Confidentiality was guaranteed to respondents.

In order to study the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational trust, the seven-item LMX measure (Graen & Uhl – Bien, 1995), and McAllister's (1995) organisational trust test (11 questions which are subdivided in 2 scales: emotional and cognitive trust) were used, applying a translation and back – translation method, which is stated to be a valid procedure in social science research (Brislin, 1970). Five – point Likert scale for LMX (1 - strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree) and a seven – point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree and 7 – strongly agree) for measuring organisational trust were statistically analysed applying SPSS 22 version.

4.RESULTS

Descriptive statistics has revealed that Cronbach's alpha for LMX were 0.82, and 0.68 for the Trust questionnaire, which are acceptable results for the socio – psychological research (Kaplan, 2004). Spearman coefficient was chosen to be applied in order to calculate the correlations of the scales, as there was no normal distribution found. Table1 below demonstrates the correlations between the LMX statements and those of trust. Table 2 shows the results of total LMX scale in relation to emotional and cognitive trust.

Based upon the data of all four companies a moderate correlation has been established between the leader – member exchange and organisational trust; It was found though that in organisation A, B and C the correlation among the scales is high (summary result of three organisations = 0.877).

The organisation D had low indexes of LMX, which did not correlate with the organisational trust; some

of the LMX scales in the answers of the respondents of this organisation even had negative correlation with the scales of organisational trust, paradoxically, organisational trust scales were of high results. It seems that relationship among colleagues revealed cognition-based trust although the majority of the people did not correspond to the 'in-group' profile as to their relationship with the leader. This organisation belongs to a banking industry. After the banking sector organisation data was extracted from the analysis, the remaining data of three other organisations demonstrated that there exists the link between the leaders' behaviour and organisational trust (a positive correlation of 0,87 was established).

In another organisation, which belongs to Fashion and model industry, just 11 employees have participated in the survey and this organisation has demonstrated highest standard deviation of results, which can be explained by the small amount of people and the specifics of their sphere, where employees are encouraged to perform as independent professionals who focus more on building relationships with partners outside of the organisation rather than within.

Interestingly that organisation of cosmetics production industry, despite of the fact that it is a production company with a long history of more than hundred years, has demonstrated high LMX and high organisational trust, particularly of emotion-based trust, indicating on 'family-like' leadership approach within this organisation.

Table 1

The correlations among the scales of LMX and Organisational Trust							
	LMX 1	LMX 2	LMX 3	LMX 4	LMX 5	LMX 6	LMX 7
Trust 1	0.612	0.628	0.683	0.607	0.552	0.562	0.772
Trust 2	0.565	0.465	0.693	0.547	0.578	0.503	0.756
Trust 3	0.451	0.465	0.629	0.572	0.562	0.485	0.660
Trust 4	0.418	0.573	0.662	0.604	0.535	0.479	0.717
Trust 5	0.539	0.510	0.628	0.560	0.545	0.475	0.726
Trust 6	0.480	0.569	0.539	0.498	0.544	0.435	0.631
Trust 7	0.408	0.564	0.535	0.582	0.527	0.423	0.617
Trust 8	0.417	0.480	0.433	0.539	0.487	0.378	0.612
Trust 9	0.426	0.430	0.494	0.526	0.432	0.432	0.574
Trust 10	0.414	0.492	0.564	0.538	0.432	0.414	0.587
Trust 11	0.324	0.447	0.540	0.509	0.566	0.363	0.663

Table 2

Correlation among total LMX and Emotional and Cognition – based trust

	Emotional trust	Cognition- based trust
LMX	,629**	,686**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5.CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This study has demonstrated that organisations differ statistically among themselves in their evaluation of organisational trust, and differences can be attributed to the followers' perceptions of leadership in their organisations.

The object of LMX theory is the independent relationship between the leader and each of the subordinates. The quality of each relationship is different in different dyads. It means with some subordinates the leader has poor interaction, and LMX results will have lower values, compared to those employees with whom the leader has trustful and open relationship. The objective of the theory is that a leader should try to involve more members into in-group relationship and build high-quality relationship with many subordinates, such that whole working unit works as an in-group 'community'.

The results have revealed that this actually *can* take place, and it was the case of the production

organisation of the cosmetics industry. As follows from the literature review, low LMX often is related to the low job satisfaction. LMX speaks of realisation of leaders' responsibility in terms of projecting own biases on the followers, which permits to build long-term relationship (Yukl et al, 2009). Current work demonstrates that some leaders are not viewed as reliable partners, and the links between the leaders and employees are emotionally weak. Employees do not feel their leaders as somebody they would refer to in moral terms. Especially this concerns the banking and casino sector. This also corresponds to Boddy (2011) observation of the banking sector leadership.

Current research is a work in progress. Further qualitative method would permit to specify which aspects of leadership are particularly important for Latvian business context, as well as to see closely the reasons of why different organisations had different relationship as to LMX – trust.

Similar research took place in Lithuania in 2013 – 2014, where employees of the public organisation (sample size, n=757) and six private organizations (n=316) were tested (Pucetaite & Novelskaite, 2014). Comparing the results from a cross – cultural perspective, it is interesting to learn that in Lithuania and in Finland (Pucetaite, 2015) trust was studied as a mediator between the LMX and organisational innovativeness, and although its mediating role was found to be rather weak ($R^2=0.3$ $B=0.538$), it was argued to be a necessary foundation for such important organisational outcome as innovativeness. In their studies LMX and trust were also found to be related.

Overall, the current research demonstrates that a leader plays a significant role in formation of organisational trust, and this study has confirmed that in order to establish high organisational trust the leaders should pay attention to their behavioural standards.

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