
The essential ingredient of collaborative effort is trust. High performance teams are characterized by high mutual trust among members. Leaders succeed in bringing about change because they are trusted by constituents to reflect their values and aspirations. An organizational climate of trust enables employees to surface their ideas and feelings, use each other as resources, and learn together. Without trust people assume self-protective, defensive postures that inhibit learning.

Handy (1996) notes that "distributed leadership," where the leadership role shifts from person to person depending on the stage of the task and nature of the skill set required, has replaced the "follow-me" type of leadership typical of the past. Similarly, De Pree (1989) refers to "roving leadership" and "abandoning oneself to the strengths of others" as strategies for successfully completing work assignments and accomplishing organizational objectives. Underlying these practices is faith in the integrity and belief in the ability of others whom an individual deems trustworthy.

The practice of empowerment evidenced by organizations’ reliance on self-managed teams requires management to entrust the work force with responsibility and authority. Conversely, employees express trust in managers and in co-workers by accepting these additional elements of their work roles. Team-based organizations are anticipated to outperform traditional bureaucratic structures when it comes to producing quantity and quality, making adaptive changes, and developing employees. In a longitudinal study, Banker et al. (1996) found support for the effectiveness of team-based work settings. More specifically, they reported that a company's shift from a traditional work environment to a team-based work environment (i.e., quality circles with some decision-making authority) resulted in substantial quality and productivity improvements.

Trust has historically been viewed by scholars as a fundamental lubricant of social interaction but not really worthy of investigation (Gambetta, 1988). With the recent emergence of collaborative problem-solving teams in organizations, empirical evidence showing the importance of trust is needed. The present study looks at workplace trust from a horizontal perspective (i.e., co-worker trust) as well as from a vertical perspective (i.e., trust of both the supervisor and top management). Thus, a multi-dimensional approach to the study of trust in organizations is presented. The scope of this study is limited primarily to the psychological processes of the trustor (see Wekselberg, 1996). However, the broader social context in which a relationship between a trustor and a trustee exists is given some attention as well.

Two dimensions of interpersonal trust (i.e., cognitive-based trust and affect-based trust) and their relationship to key workplace behaviors (e.g., risk taking) are examined. Trust of top management and its relationship to key variables, such as desire-to-leave the organization, is looked at as well. Using a sample of 35 full-time employees, we test five hypotheses about trust between focal employees and their co-workers, supervisors, and top management. Reciprocal measures of cognitive-based and affect-based trust were gathered for each focal employee-supervisor dyad as well as focal employee-co-worker dyad. Due to the size of the sample, we consider our research a preliminary investigation of organizational trust.

Literature Review

McCauley and Kuhnert (1992) pointed out that trust in the workplace is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of lateral and vertical elements. Lateral trust refers to "trusting" relationships between the focal employee and co-workers while vertical trust concerns employee trust of his or her immediate supervisor, subordinates, and top management. Both usually reflect an interpersonal or dyadic form of trust, with one exception being trust of top management. For most employees, the decision to trust top management is based more on the outcomes of organizational decisions made by these top managers and less on direct personal experience of their character, words, and actions.
Dyadic Trust

Early human relations theorists (e.g., McGregor, 1967) noted the importance of a supervisor's trust of subordinates. McGregor's Theory X manager believes that employees are not to be trusted while Theory Y involves delegation of decision-making authority to the subordinate. Theory Y supervisors are the ones taking risks by increasing their dependence on others; that is, empowerment requires supervisory trust. Thus, historically, supervisory trust rather than subordinate trust was the focus of attention. In contrast, the reversal of McGregor's trust perspective (i.e., subordinate trust of the supervisor) is investigated in our study.

One reason why trust of co-workers has taken on more importance in today's work environment is the widespread...