THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN STIMULATING THE GROWTH OF VERTICAL TRUST IN COMPANIES

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Purpose: Trust is an important factor in supporting the management of employee teams. It plays a special role in developing interpersonal relations, leadership, and goal setting. The most important person who stimulates trust is the leader, who takes steps to build organizational trust. The aim of the paper was to identify the role of leadership in stimulating trust between managers and subordinates as an important factor in business development. The following research questions were addressed to achieve this aim: What relationships exist between vertical trust and intra-organizational processes in companies? To what extent do leadership attributes affect building vertical trust? To what extent do leadership attributes related to building trust influence enterprise growth?

Design/methodology/approach: The research used a one-time survey method with the unweighted sample design, using mixed techniques: CATI telephone interviewing and CAWI web interviewing. The survey operator was a database of the 500 largest companies in Poland (according to the ranking of the Rzeczpospolita website). Based on the random sampling method, a research sample of 179 companies was collected.

Findings: The study showed the impact of leadership attributes, i.e. attitudes of acceptance of others and open-mindedness, honesty and adherence to the rules, consistency in making decisions, compassion and empathy, on the process of building employees' trust in managers. Significant relationships between vertical trust and intra-organizational processes have also been identified. The results of the study confirmed the impact of vertical trust on both intra-organizational processes and the development of enterprises.

Research limitations: Due to their quantitative nature (survey research), the study results lead to limited conclusions.

Practical implications: The results provide insights into the use of leadership attributes in building organizational trust, which can support a trust-based organizational culture in modern companies.

Social implications: The research results presented in this paper point to the important role of the manager in stimulating organizational trust in large companies.

Originality/value: In a cognitive sense, the results contribute to understanding the role of leadership in building vertical trust and its impact on intra-organizational processes.

Keywords: organizational trust, vertical trust, leadership, manager, company.

Category of the paper: Research article.

1. Introduction

Changing market conditions are forcing companies to adapt quickly and effectively to their requirements. One of the factors supporting the adjustment process is trust, as it provides a sense of security under conditions of uncertainty and complexity. Trust is the basis for social interactions and a valuable resource positioned in organizational and interpersonal relationships. It involves expecting favorable behavior from someone in a socially precarious situation, based on knowledge of their inclinations (including their feelings toward another person) (Yamagishi, 2002). In an organization, trust affects various areas. It improves flexibility, increases cooperation and learning, and reduces coordination costs (Nielsen, and Gudergan, 2012). With trust, the level of commitment grows while employee productivity increases (Bakiev, 2013). It affects the stimulation of innovation (Paliszkiewicz, 2013, 2019). Trust positively affects cooperation, productivity, quality of life in the workplace, and economic performance (Bugdol, 2010). It helps explore new ideas because it inspires employees' willingness to take risks. Therefore, if employees find their colleagues trustworthy, they are willing to share their knowledge with them.

Trust is a process that requires the commitment and responsibility of both managers and employees. It emerges only when values, mission, and goals are shared by all employees. An important determinant of its design is a trusted leader who, among other things, keeps his or her promises and tells the truth to their subordinates (Jones, and George, 1998), looks after the interests of all employees, and shows interest in them (Nelson, and Cooprider, 1996). It can be stated that a company's success in the market will be more likely when trust elements are implemented by both managers and employees.

This paper develops new theoretical and empirical insights concerning the impact of leadership on building vertical trust in a company. The study sought to make two major contributions to understanding the role of leadership in stimulating organizational trust. Firstly, the study helped highlight the impact of vertical trust on internal processes within companies. Secondly, the study identified the importance of leadership attributes in stimulating trust between managers and employees in an organization.

2. Organizational trust and leadership

Organizational trust is of interest to many researchers, who have analyzed its dimensions and functions in organizations from different research perspectives. Organizational trust can be defined as a set of interdependent beliefs about ethical standards, trustworthiness in communication, the economic strength of the organization, and its ability to reward employee

performance, both financially and in professional terms (Ramos, Ferreira, and Martins, 2021). This trust depends on support for the development of employees; organizational reliability manifested in financial stability, the ability to overcome internal crises, ways to meet commitments; rules for redundancy, a fair incentive system, and ethical standards (fairness, equality, transparency, and sustainability of commitments) (Ramos, Ferreira, and Martins, 2021).

To clarify the essence of organizational trust, Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis (2007) built an integrative model of trust in organizations according to which trust depends on the tendency to trust people in general along with the perception of their trustworthiness, benevolence, and honesty, which in turn leads to trust viewed as a risk of entering into a relationship with another person or persons. In other words, it assumes that trust mediates the relationships between the propensity to trust, perceptions of trustworthiness, and trusting behavior. The presence of feedback between trust and perceived trustworthiness of the trustee is also highlighted.

A review of the literature on organizational trust makes it possible to distinguish between its various types (Table 1).

Table 1.
Selected typologies of organizational trust

Type of trust	Author	Main findings
Inter-organizational and intra-organizational trust	Vanneste (2016)	Trust between organizations occurs when A and B as individuals of both organizations trust each other. It follows that Alice (Organization A member) trusts Bob (Organization B member), and Ammy (another A member) trusts Brad (another B member).
	Cummings, and Broomiley (1996)	Intra-organizational trust between employees (horizontal trust) is the belief that other members or other groups: make every effort to meet the commitments they have accepted; act honestly during negotiations preceding the acceptance of commitments; do not take advantage of opportunities to gain an advantage over others when the opportunity arises.
	McCauley, and Kuhnert (1992)	Intra-organizational trust between employees and managers (vertical trust) stems from the roles, rules, and ordering of relationships in the organization.
	Ozyilmaz, Erdogan, and Karaeminogullari (2017)	Intra-organizational trust between employees and the organization (institutional trust) determines the employee's expectations of the organization and influences how he or she assesses the organization's future behavior in exchange relations.

Cont. table 1.

Interpersonal and impersonal trust	Ellonen, Blomqvist, and Puumalainen (2006)	Interpersonal trust is based on competence, kindness, and reliability. It occurs in relationships between employees and between employees and managers. Impersonal trust is based on the organization's roles and systems, particularly the perception of the other person's competence to perform an organizational role or task.
Trust is based on the criterion of emotion, competence, and honesty	Guinot, Chiva, and Mallén (2013)	Affective trust is based on emotional connections between individuals. Competency-based trust emphasizes the importance of skills or expertise in the trust-building process. Trust based on the other person's honesty increases willingness to take risks to share valuable knowledge with others.
Reputation-based and experience-based trust	Kenning (2002)	Trust built on reputation is based on publicly available information about individuals or companies that are market participants. Experience-based trust depends on previous positive relationships with social relationship partners, which influence expectations of new partners about their ability to be trusted.
Contractual trust, goodwill-based trust	Ryciuk (2017)	Contractual trust is based on formal safeguards and is tantamount to adherence to the terms of the contract concluded. Trust that stems from goodwill is based on good intentions and manifests itself in the willingness of the partners to take action beyond the contractual arrangements.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The typologies of organizational trust presented above indicate the variety of approaches to the analysis of organizational trust. They are helpful in creating indicators for research.

Among determinants of organizational trust within an organization, leadership can be considered one of the most important factors. Sudoł (2006, p. 228) defines leadership as a set of natural qualities of a person ("natural leadership", charisma) by which a person inspires trust, wins followers, and has a strong influence on the surroundings, a social group, and attitudes of others who willingly submit to his or her will. The leader first establishes directions consistent with his or her vision and then communicates and encourages employees to overcome obstacles and work together to create innovation (Duffy et al., 2012). Many types of leadership can be found in the literature, such as transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1990), charismatic leadership, autocratic leadership, inspirational leadership, and transactional-transformational leadership (Dzwigoł-Barosz, 2014). From the standpoint of stimulating trust between the manager and subordinates, it is important to divide leadership into ethical, transformational, paternalistic, and inclusive leadership. Ethical leadership is based on moral and ethical practices. An ethical leader is a role model and inspires positive attitudes and behavior in employees. Sehrish, Ghulam, and Fouzia (2020), showed that ethical leadership increases employees' organizational trust, which in turn improves their commitment in the workplace. Furthermore, the impact of ethical leadership on employee commitment was found to be stronger for individuals with low than high overall effectiveness.

Transformational leadership inspires employees to implement the change strategy and motivates them to achieve goals through its positive impact on employees' trust in the manager (Islam, Furuoka, and Idris, 2021). Employee trust in a transformational leader plays a key role in efforts to make changes because of the potential risks and uncertainties involved in the process of implementing new ideas and plans for changes in an organization (Lei, Phouvong, and Le, 2019).

Paternalistic leadership includes three dimensions: authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral character. Leader's authoritarianism is characterized by hierarchical relationships of the control, power, and authority of leaders with the obedience, submission, and respect of subordinates. A leader's benevolence involves investing in social relationships with subordinates while providing individual and holistic care when subordinates encounter personal and family problems. The moral dimension requires the leader to act as a role model (Cheng, et al., 2013). Research by Tian and Sanchez (2017) demonstrated the relationship between the interaction of benevolent and authoritarian leadership and employee trust, innovative behavior, and knowledge sharing.

Inclusive leadership emphasizes accepting employees as they are, allowing them to contribute their unique abilities and views, and encouraging their involvement in organizational activities by demonstrating behaviors that support employees and inspire their activity. Inclusive leaders can influence employees' perceptions of organizational resources. Research suggests that inclusive leaders play a key role in improving employees' perceptions of fairness and trust, which in turn positively impacts perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the organization's resources (Bennett, 2017).

Leadership in an organization has a significant impact on building intra-organizational trust. The literature offers many suggestions for methods of building trust in an organization. Some of them relate to specific actions that can be taken by leaders to improve trust in the company such as initiating and accepting changes in their decisions, keeping promises and telling the truth to their subordinates (Ryan, and Oestereich, 1998), showing loyalty and job satisfaction (Bigley, and Pearce, 1998), looking after the interests of all stakeholders and showing interest in them (Nelson, and Cooprider,1996).

The choice of trust-building method depends on the type of organization, its goals, the organization's mission, and its leadership. When building trust in an organization, it is important to remember that it is a long-term process that can increase productivity and save costs, but only if it is used effectively because building trust also generates costs (Blomqvist, and Stahle, 2000).

3. Research methodology

The research on the effect of leadership on vertical trust focused on finding answers to the following research questions: What relationships exist between vertical trust and intra-organizational processes in companies? To what extent do leadership attributes affect building vertical trust? To what extent do leadership attributes related to building trust influence enterprise growth? To answer these questions, a one-time survey method with an unweighted sample was employed, based on mixed interviewing techniques: CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) and CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview). The research tool was a standardized questionnaire, with items developed based on tools designed by Paliszkiewicz, Gołuchowski, and Koohang (2015) and Krot and Lewicka (2016).

The survey operator was a database of the 500 largest companies in Poland in 2019 (according to the ranking of the Rzeczpospolita website). The criterion was the revenue received by the company in a given year. Based on the random sampling method, a research sample of 179 companies was collected. The sampling yielded a representative group of companies with a general population of 500 entities, an estimation error of 6%, and a confidence interval of 95%. Seventy-four manufacturing companies, 35 trading companies, 25 service providers, 20 manufacturing-service companies, and 25 manufacturing-trading companies participated in the survey. The respondents were representatives of these companies, including HR directors, heads of HR departments, and HR specialists.

Results

A research construct was built based on the scales proposed by Krot and Lewicka (2016) to identify employee trust in managers. An important entity that stimulates trust in an enterprise is the manager. His commitment and level of trust in employees can attract the best employees and influence the creation of knowledge and innovation. In the surveyed companies, the overall level of employee trust in managers was at an average level (51% of positive opinions) (Table 2). This trust is primarily based on an atmosphere of genuine mutual trust between employees and supervisors (50.5% of positive opinions) and loyalty to the supervisor (53.7% of positive opinions). The level of trust is further influenced by the feeling of being able to talk about one's problems and concerns with a supervisor without restraint (49.3% of positive opinions) and the belief that the manager's motivations and intentions are good (48.2% of positive opinions). On the other hand, vertical trust is deteriorated by the accuracy of the decisions a manager makes (36.8% of negative opinions), interest in the needs of subordinates if they arise (36.2% of negative opinions), keeping promises by managers (35.1% of negative opinions) and the belief that the supervisor evaluates employees fairly (33.7%).

Table 2.
Evaluation of employee trust in managers in percentage terms

Indicators of vertical trust	Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
(ZW1) I trust the manager	15.6	11.1	22.3	27.3	23.7
(ZW2) In the company, employee motivation is high because supervisors trust them	11.1	13.4	26.2	27.3	22.0
(ZW3) In the company, supervisors primarily act as advisors and intellectual partners to subordinates	12.8	18.4	23.4	25.6	19.8
(ZW4) In my company, there is an atmosphere of genuine mutual trust between employees and supervisors	15.0	12.2	22.3	24.5	26.0
(ZW5) I think my boss makes good decisions	16.2	20.6	18.4	21.7	23.1
(ZW6) If I had trouble with anything regarding work, I could discuss my concerns with my supervisor without restraint	12.2	14.5	24.0	25.6	23.7
(ZW7) I am loyal to my boss	12.8	16.2	17.3	27.9	25.8
(ZW8) I believe that my supervisor evaluates employees fairly	11.7	21.2	20.6	28.4	18.1
(ZW9) My boss is interested in my needs if they arise	17.3	18.9	20.6	24.0	19.2
(ZW10) I think my supervisor makes good decisions	15.0	14.5	26.8	26.8	16.9
(ZW11) In general, managers in the company keep their promises	15.0	20.1	20.1	27.9	16.9
(ZW12) I believe that my boss's motivations and intentions are good	14.5	16.7	20.6	21.7	26.5

Rating scale: 1 – I strongly disagree, 2 – I disagree, 3 – I neither agree nor disagree, 4 – I agree, 5 – I strongly agree.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The competitiveness of a company in the market depends on many internal processes. The survey identified the most important of them (Table 3). Among the processes studied, the highest ratings were given to the quality of performing knowledge creation tasks in cooperation with employees of other teams and departments (48.7% of positive ratings), the flow of information between employee teams and departments (48.7% of positive ratings), and cooperation between employee teams and departments to create knowledge (47.1% of positive ratings). The lowest ratings were given to the flow of knowledge in the company (37.9% of negative ratings), the speed of tasks that require cooperation with employees from other teams and departments (38.4% of negative ratings), and the creation of innovations in companies (31.7% of negative ratings). In conclusion, in large enterprises in Poland, the main emphasis is on cooperation with other teams in the organization, which is based on the flow of information between each other. This process is limited by the relatively small flow of knowledge.

Table 3.
Evaluation of processes in companies in percentage terms

Item	Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
(OC1) Information flow between employee teams and departments	13.9	14.5	22.9	26.8	21.9
(OC2) Creating innovation in the company	12.2	19.5	25.1	25.1	18.1
(OC3) Flow and creation of knowledge in the company	19.5	18.4	25.1	19.5	17.5
(OC4) Cooperation between employee teams and departments in the company	13.9	12.8	26.2	30.7	16.4

Cont. table 3

(OC5) Speed of performing tasks that require cooperation with employees of other teams and departments in the company	15.0	23.4	24.0	24.0	13.9
(OC6) Quality of performing tasks of cooperation with employees of other teams and departments in the company	11.1	13.4	26.8	29.6	19.1

Rating scale: 1 – very low, 2 – low, 3 – medium, 4 – high, 5 – very high.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Internal processes in companies are influenced by organizational trust, including employees' trust in supervisors. Spearman's rank correlation was used to test the size of the effect of vertical trust on processes (Table 4). The research shows that vertical trust indicators have the greatest effect on the process of innovation creation in companies, with the strongest positive impact being primarily the belief that the manager is making the right decisions, the manager's interest in the needs of employees, and the belief that the manager has good motivations and intentions towards the employee. Furthermore, the speed of performing tasks that require cooperation with employees from other teams and departments of the company is positively influenced primarily by the belief that managers keep their promises, managers are interested in the employees' needs if they arise, and that the motivations and intentions of the boss are good. Other organizational processes, i.e., the flow of information between employee teams and departments, the process of creating innovations in companies, cooperation between employee teams and departments, and the quality of performing cooperation tasks with employees of other teams and departments of the company were less influenced by vertical trust indicators.

In conclusion, the trust of employees in managers is of great importance in the creation of internal processes in companies. It fosters knowledge creation processes and strengthens the speed of performing tasks that require cooperation with employees of other teams and departments in the company.

Table 4.
Correlation between vertical trust indicators and organizational processes

	ZW1	ZW2	ZW3	ZW5	ZW6	ZW8	ZW9	ZW10	ZW11	ZW12
OC1			0.219 $p = 0.003$			0.272 $p = 0.000$				
OC2	0.213 $p = 0.004$			0.243 $p = 0.001$		0.227 $p = 0.002$				
OC3		0.218 $p = 0.003$		0.289 $p = 0.000$			0.216 $p = 0.004$		0.306 $p = 0.000$	0.215 $p = 0.004$
OC4	0.204 $p = 0.006$							0.222 $p = 0.002$		
OC5					0.319 $p = 0.000$		0.248 $p = 0.001$	0.261 $p = 0.000$	0.295 $p = 0.000$	0.210 $p = 0.005$
OC6		0.240 $p = 0.001$					0.241 $p = 0.001$			

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Leadership plays an important role in building trust. A tool developed by Paliszkiewicz, Gołuchowski, and Koohang (2015) was employed to measure leadership attributes used in building trust. The results of the study presented in Table 5 show that the most important leadership attributes in building trust are: the attitude of acceptance of others and open-

mindedness demonstrated by the manager (65% of positive ratings), honesty, and adherence to the rules by the manager (61% of positive ratings), consistency in decision-making by the manager (58.3% of positive ratings), and compassion and empathy demonstrated by the manager (57.2% of positive ratings). Leadership attributes sometimes have a negative impact on building trust in an organization. These include transparency of the manager's actions (36.5% of negative ratings), demonstrating reliability in actions by the manager (34.5% of negative ratings), displaying integrity and ethics by the manager (33.4% of negative ratings), and an attitude of partnership and understanding demonstrated by the manager (32.3% of negative ratings).

Table 5.
Leadership attributes used in building trust in percentage terms

Item	Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
(LO1) Manager's skills and competencies lead to improved trust in the organization	19.5	10.0	13.9	17.8	38.8
(LO2) Compassion and empathy demonstrated by a manager build trust among employees	18.9	10.0	13.9	17.3	39.9
(LO3) Manager's tone of voice and proper communication (verbal, non-verbal, written, and visual) build trust among employees	18.9	10.6	16.7	16.7	37.1
(LO4) The attitude of partnership and understanding demonstrated by the manager builds trust	22.9	9.4	10.6	17.8	39.3
(LO5) Consistency in manager's decision-making creates trust between employees	19.5	8.3	13.9	16.2	42.1
(LO6) Displaying integrity and ethics by a manager develops and stimulates trust among people	20.6	12.8	11.7	11.1	43.8
(LO7) Manager's honesty and adherence to the rules increase trust between employees	18.5	12.2	8.3	13.9	47.1
(LO8) The attitude of acceptance of others and open-mindedness demonstrated by the manager influence the growth of trust	16.7	8.3	10.0	22.9	42.1
(LO9) Manager's reliability in actions develops and stimulates trust among employees	24.5	10.0	17.8	17.8	29.9
(LO10) Transparency of the manager's actions is key to building trust among employees	22.3	13.9	13.4	16.7	33.1

Rating scale: 1 – I strongly disagree, 2 – I disagree, 3 – I neither agree nor disagree, 4 – I agree, 5 – I strongly agree.
Source: Author's own elaboration.

From the perspective of building trust by managers, it seems reasonable to examine the impact of leadership attributes that are important for trust on organizational development. The study found that introducing new products were most influenced by: LO1 ($r_s = 0.195$, $p = 0.008$) and LO2 ($r_s = 0.244$, $p = 0.000$). The emergence of new investments is influenced by all leadership attributes, with the strongest effect noted for LO7 ($r_s = 0.305$, $p = 0.000$), LO1 ($r_s = 0.262$, $p = 0.000$), LO3 ($r_s = 0.244$, $p = 0.000$), LO5 ($r_s = 0.209$, $p = 0.005$), and LO8 ($r_s = 0.207$, $p = 0.005$). The implementation of new technologies was influenced mostly by attributes such as LO7 ($r_s = 0.227$, $p = 0.002$) and LO8 ($r_s = 0.248$, $p = 0.000$). Sales growth was influenced by LO4 ($r_s = 0.290$, $p = 0.001$). The attributes LO3 ($r_s = 0.245$, $p = 0.001$) and LO4 ($r_s = 0.214$, $p = 0.001$) were influenced by the increase in company resources. Customer portfolio growth was influenced by LO3 ($r_s = 0.241$, $p = 0.001$), LO6 ($r_s = 0.217$, $p = 0.003$),

and LO8 (r_s = 252, p = 0.001). The increase in intensification of activities in markets was influenced by LO5 (r_s = 0.212, p = 0.004). Sourcing new markets was influenced by LO2 (r_s = 0.322, p = 0.000). The increase in R&D activity was influenced by LO2 (r_s = 0.258, p = 0.000).

In conclusion, the compassion and empathy demonstrated by the manager, the attitude of partnership and understanding demonstrated by the manager, and the manager's honesty and adherence to the rules significantly support the development of enterprises, especially the emergence of new investments, the increase in enterprise resources and the implementation of new technologies.

Discussion and Summary

Trust is an important factor in improving a company's competitiveness in the market, as it allows for the effective use of employee potential in creating innovations. A large role is played by vertical trust, i.e. the trust of employees in managers. Managers can build trust by influencing employees' behavior on a daily basis, e.g., through the way they give orders, convey information, and their attitude toward subordinates. The present study showed that trust between managers and employees based on an atmosphere of genuine mutual trust between employees and supervisors and on loyalty to the supervisor significantly affects intra-organizational processes, i.e. the quality of performing knowledge creation tasks in cooperation with employees of other teams and departments, the flow of information between employee teams and departments, and cooperation between employee teams and departments in the company to create knowledge. The ability to talk about one's problems and concerns with a supervisor without restraint and the belief that the manager's motivations and intentions are good also have a positive impact on these processes.

Most leadership attributes in the companies surveyed had a significant impact on vertical trust with varying strengths. Leadership attributes such as the attitude of acceptance of others and open-mindedness demonstrated by managers, honesty and adherence to the rules by managers, consistency in the manager's decision-making, and compassion and empathy demonstrated by managers supported the process of building employee trust in managers. These attributes are close to inclusive leadership. In particular, this concerns its dimensions such as tolerating the views and failures of employees and supporting them if they make mistakes, focusing on training employees and praising achievements rather than showing jealousy, treating them fairly, and taking into account their needs and interests (Qi et al., 2019). As role models, inclusive leaders reinforce employee behavior i.e. creativity and productivity and help reduce employee turnover (Randel, 2018).

The results of the research confirmed the effect of vertical trust on both intra-organizational processes and the development of companies. Therefore, in modern companies, it is worth building a trust-based organizational culture.

The results of the study confirmed the impact of vertical trust on both intra-organizational processes and the development of enterprises.

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