

Vulnerability and trust in leader-follower relationships

Nienaber, A-M. , Hofeditz, M. and Romeike, P.D.

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Nienaber, A./ Hofeditz, M./Romeike, P.

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VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

ANN-MARIE NIENABER

Reader in Business Management,
Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations,
Coventry University, United Kingdom

MARCEL HOFEDITZ

Phd student at Chair of Business Management, Personnel and Innovation
Munster University, Munster, Germany

PHILIPP D. ROMEIKE

Phd student at Centre for Trust and Communication in a Digitized World
Munster University, Munster, Germany

Abstract

We introduce a theoretical framework which allows structuring the rather fuzzy discussed concept of vulnerability. We distinguish between trusting beliefs and actual trusting behaviour in order to separate the constructs of willingness-to-be-vulnerable and actual vulnerability. With the help of the framework developed, we point to the need for more work on vulnerability in order to take the study of trust to the next level. In this respect, we formulate several propositions that should be tested by future research.

Introduction

Vulnerability and trust are distinct concepts but often times mentioned together in regard to leader-follower relationships. Although trust topics recently became of major public interest, scholars in the field of Human Resource Management have still paid less attention to the term vulnerability in leader-follower relationships. Only a few examples can be identified that focus on vulnerability. One prominent example can be found by Lapidot, Kart and Shamir (2007). Their analysis in a military training context shows impressively the cadets' vulnerability to the actions of their team commanders since their judgments have an influence whether the cadets survive or not. The study concludes that vulnerability is essential for trust but needs further attention by scholars and business managers in the Human Resource field, since an exact understanding of how trust and vulnerability are interrelated is still missing.

Regarding the Human Resource and Psychology literature, scholars agree on two key issues concerning trust. First, trust is seen as the willingness to rely on a key partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman *et al.*, 1992; Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Second, trust is defined as an expectation held by an individual that his partner will behave in a mutually acceptable manner (Sako and Helper, 1998). Thus, scholars define trust as the willingness of a party (the trustor) to be *vulnerable* to the actions of another party (the trustee) based on the *expectation* that the trustee will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor and control the other party (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998).

A wealth of literature now exists which has used such vulnerability-based conceptualisations of interpersonal trust when studying its antecedents and consequences (e.g., Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012; McEvily and Tortoriello, 2010; Poon, 2013; Robertson *et al.*, 2013; Schoorman *et al.*, 2007), often using the terms willingness to be vulnerable and vulnerability interchangeable. Such a tendency to conflate the two terms constitutes a major shortcoming which needs to be addressed. Accordingly, the intention of this paper is to provide a holistic conceptualisation of trust and vulnerability that clearly distinguishes

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

between trusting beliefs (i.e. the willingness to be vulnerable) and trusting behavior (i.e. actual vulnerability).

In order to do so, we firstly review the literature and illustrate which factors lead to trusting beliefs and explain how these can lead to actual trusting behavior while taking into account the role of different moderating factors. Secondly, we connect the vulnerability or trusting behavior of one person to the level of trust an interpersonal referent holds. Throughout the paper we apply our argumentation to the leader-follower relationship which is an example for a situation with an imbalance of power and therefore a particularly interesting area to study vulnerability and trust (Suff and Williams, 2004).

To the best of our knowledge, this appears to be the first literature review focussing specifically on vulnerability as the key manifestation of trust between individuals. We build this bridge with the use of sense-making theory (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Weick *et al.*, 2005). Sense-making theory provides a useful approach to this topic because of its focus on the role of emotions (Weick *et al.* 2005; Maitlis *et al.*, 2013). Very limited conceptual or empirical work so far exists that is explicitly directed to understand vulnerability itself (e.g. Sheffi, 2005; Tsui-Auch and Moellering, 2010). In the present study, we analyse 49 studies (conceptual and empirical) that deal with vulnerability and its connection to the overarching concept of interpersonal trust.

We are able to make the following contributions: *First*, this literature review provides a holistic understanding of the concept of vulnerability. The intention is to show the different understandings and interpretations of this term within the literature and identify which antecedents and consequences are related to the concept of vulnerability. *Second*, we introduce a theoretical framework which allows us to structure this rather fuzzy discussed concept of vulnerability. The development of such a theoretical framework allows us to distinguish between trusting beliefs and actual trusting behaviour so that it is possible to

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

separate the constructs of willingness-to-be-vulnerable and actual vulnerability. *Third*, based on this framework we are able to derive further research implications in the form of testable propositions and provide practical implications for building trustful leader-follower relationships based on actual vulnerability.

Theory

Vulnerability is typically mentioned in relation to trust in the management and psychological literature since scholars in these fields see the willingness to be vulnerable as one core aspect when defining trust. In the case of trust between leader and followers, trust both Mayer *et al.* (1995) and Rousseau *et al.* (1998) define trust as the follower's willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations that his leader will not take advantage of this vulnerability. However, while most scholars refer to the "willingness to be vulnerable", the interpretation of vulnerability itself being either an intention to trust (e.g. Chow *et al.*, 2012) or an actual trusting behaviour (e.g. Graebner, 2009) is rather unclear. As mentioned before, Lapidot *et al.* (2007) were one of the first to study the impact of vulnerability on trust. Their content analysis of critical incidents in a cadets' officer training course revealed that higher feelings of vulnerability on the side of the follower increased the importance of the perceived leader's trustworthiness.

To provide a broad understanding of the concept vulnerability, we start by outlining different conceptualisations of this construct across different disciplines. *Second*, we explore the exact relationship between vulnerability and trust. *Finally*, we get even more specific and explore vulnerability in leader-follower relationships with the use of sense-making theory.

The United Nations (ISDR, 2002) propose a macroeconomic perspective on vulnerability describing how general categories of factors determine a community's level of vulnerability. One of the most dominant streams of research on vulnerability can be found in medical sciences. Here, vulnerability describes an individual's inability to protect and maintain her/his interests (CIOMS, 2002). Just taking into account relevant sociological

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

factors, Chambers (2006) explains vulnerability in terms of arising from two sources: external threats and a lack of internal coping mechanisms.

Turner *et al.*'s (2003) conceptualisation of vulnerability has originally been used for models of human-environment systems and is one of the most prevalent in the literature that has been widely quoted in other disciplines, too. The authors argue that vulnerability can be observed not only in situations of stress or perturbations (hazards), but also in the system's resilience and sensitivity when being exposed to such hazards. Table 1 includes a list of the most frequently used definitions of vulnerability from different disciplinary backgrounds.

[Insert table 1 around here]

Focussing on the widely accepted definition of trust from Mayer *et al.* (1995) we can say that trust in general is based on two core elements: (a) the *positive expectations* that the other party will behave not in an opportunistic way and (b) *the willingness to be vulnerable* because we trust someone. Regarding the relationship between positive expectations and vulnerability, two different opinions can be identified in the literature. The first perspective relies on the view offered by Mayer *et al.* (1995) who see the willingness to be vulnerability as a consequence of positive expectations. An individuals' willingness to accept vulnerability is based on an assessment of the partner's trustworthiness and thus, on the positive expectations that the partner will behave in goodwill. Following Luhmann (1988) vulnerability itself is seen as an antecedent for trusting someone and thus having positive expectations towards his behavior. Luhmann states that "trust presupposes a situation of risk" (Luhmann, 1988, p. 97). These two references already suggest that it is important to distinguish clearly between the willingness to be vulnerable and actual vulnerability.

Most researchers nowadays agree on the fact that trust has to be distinguished into two dimensions: *cognitive trust* and *affective trust* (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995).

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

While cognitive trust is usually related to a rational assessment whether a party (e.g. the leader) is seen as trustworthy or not, the affective dimension of trust is based on emotions. The perceived trustworthiness of a party (e.g. the leader) is mainly determined by a perception of the other party's ability, benevolence and integrity (Mayer *et al.*, 1995) while affective trust is mainly developed through the interpersonal interactions (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). This suggests that positive expectations are more strongly related to cognitive trust while the willingness to be vulnerable has stronger associations with affective trust. We elaborate on that in our results section.

To address the affective side of trust in terms of willingness to be vulnerable, we have to think about an adequate theoretical stream of research. Two main theories in terms of trust between individuals (e.g. leader and follower) are social exchange theory and transaction cost economic theory. While the latter theory may be useful to address the cognitive part of trust (i.e. positive expectations), social exchange theory focuses on the affective part of trust (i.e. willingness to be vulnerable). Social exchange theory advocates that trust decreases with a perceived imbalance in the exchange (Khazanchi and Masterson, 2011). However, social exchange theory does not reach far enough to explore the affective side of trust. Sense-making theory puts emotions in the centre of its interest (Weick *et al.* 2005) which is why this lens to explore the matter of affective trust and vulnerability. Sense-making theory suggests that risky experiences such as unfamiliar situations are characterized by negative feelings in the form of disorientation or foreignness (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Louis, 1980). The key question related to sense-making is "same or different?" (Weick *et al.*, 2005). The majority of research in this area focuses on how awareness of a specific situation or event is formed and categorized, and how these processes influence individual's actions. While a lot of researchers focused on the cognitive side of sense-making theory, we also have to consider that Maitlis and colleagues (2013) pointed out which role individual emotions in the sense-

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

making process have and how these emotions are able to influence the final individual decision making.

With the help of sense-making theory, we introduce a theoretical framework to demonstrate the different relationships between antecedents, dimensions, intentions and behaviours of trust, in particular of vulnerability and enhance our understanding of the underlying relations and differences especially between willingness to be vulnerable and vulnerability in regards to trust.

Method

Data collection

This study applies the guidelines for a systematic literature review as provided by Pittaway *et al.* (2004). First, we identified clear and precise aims and objectives for our literature search. Thus, we checked the search categories dealing with vulnerability and trust between leaders and followers. These categories are management, psychology and behavioural science. A comprehensive search of the following databases was conducted, EbscoHost and ScienceDirect.

Second, we defined the following exclusion and inclusion criteria based on Tranfield *et al.* (2003): 1) academic rigour (peer-reviewed journals); 2) interpersonal trust in business contexts (we excluded non-business and organizational trust contexts); 3) sufficient scope for generalizability (no single person interviews); and 4) a definition of trust that includes vulnerability (e.g. Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998).

Third, we applied the following search terms for our electronic search in combination with trust (search hits in brackets): vulnerability (167), vulnerable (177), sensitivity (244), susceptibility (25), vulnerableness (0), violability (0), unprotectedness (0). To ensure that we focussed on the relationship between leader and follower, we also combined the search term

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

vulnerability with leader (84), supervisor (14), subordinate (37), follower (310) and employee (310). In total, we were able to generate 1053 hits with the help of our search strategy.

Data filtering and description

We discarded more than three quarters of the studies due to duplication or because they did not fit the general topic after a quick check of title and abstract, leaving 223 studies for closer examination. Second, we excluded half of these studies after closer inspection of the entire text document as they did not fit our inclusion criteria (1-3) leaving 132 studies for examination. Finally, we excluded 84 studies since they did not define vulnerability as part of trust (exclusion criteria 4). As a final step to ensure comprehensive coverage, we manually undertook a forward and backward search of the identified studies which yielded the removal of one additional study.

Overall, 49 articles (see appendix) were identified that met our criteria, spanning a ten year period from 2002 and 2012. This is a comparable number to similar qualitative reviews (e.g. Oreg *et al.*, 2011). Two of the authors individually read and coded the final set of 49 studies following an inductive approach (Oreg *et al.*, 2011). Where there was disagreement, the coders reached consensus by re-visiting previously coded papers in the light of these problems. Amongst these relevant articles, 33 are quantitative studies, eight are qualitative studies and another eight are pure conceptual articles. Of the quantitative studies, 24 are survey studies, two are case studies, one is a simulation study, three are interview studies, eight are experiments and two are quantitative meta-analyses. 34 of the 49 studies used Mayer *et al.* (1995) and/or Rousseau *et al.* (1998) for their definition of trust. From the entire set of 49 studies only 34 studies make an assertion about vulnerability beyond including the term in their definition of trust. Strikingly, most of the assertions appear to be rather brief and to remain on the concept's surface. Only a very few articles put vulnerability into the centre of

interest (e.g. Sheffi, 2005; Tsui-Auch and Moellering, 2010); 14 studies explicitly cover a leader-follower situation. In total, 11 of the 49 studies have empirically measured vulnerability.

Results and Discussion

In presenting our results we develop a comprehensive model that distinguishes vulnerability from trust. We outline how, *trust antecedents*, *cognitive and affective bases of trust*, *trust intentions* (i.e. willingness to be vulnerable) and *trustful behaviour* (i.e. actual vulnerability) are interrelated. We describe how trust bases result into the *trusting intention* a person holds and discuss how trusting intentions are finally manifested in *trusting, vulnerable behaviour* such as disclosing sensible information to the supervisor. We also outline a number of moderating factors. As last step of our model we link trusting behaviour of one person to the level of trust his referent holds.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the theoretical model for this study which will be discussed in a step by step in the following sections. Step 1 will describe the relationship between trust antecedents, bases of trust and trusting intention. Step 2 explains the relationship between the trusting intentions and the manifestation of trust and finally, step 3 refers to the trusting referent.

---- Insert Figure 1 around here ----

Step 1: Trust antecedents, bases of trust and trusting intentions:

Research on trust has typically distinguished between two classes of *trust antecedents*. One is more strongly related to the formation of cognitive trust and the other has stronger associations with the development of affective trust (McAllister, 1995).

The perceptions of a person's character (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002) in terms of his ability, integrity and benevolence (Mayer *et al.* 1995) fall into this first category which means

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

the formation of cognitive trust. Regarding the relationship to vulnerability, of these three dimensions benevolence has received most attention by researchers. Some researchers actually refer to benevolence as not taking advantage of the trustee's vulnerability (Bews and Rossouw, 2002). That means a leader should behave in a benevolent way towards his followers and should not take advantage of a follower's vulnerability due to hierarchical issues or other dependencies. In a similar vein, others propose that fair treatment (Johnson and Lord, 2010; Yang and Mossholder, 2010) and perceived justice (Colquitt and Rodell, 2011) are particularly relevant concepts to benevolence as the presence of such perceptions increases a person's perceived trustworthiness and leads to a greater willingness to be vulnerable. Apart from benevolence, integrity in the form of honest and truthful justifications may lead to a higher willingness to be vulnerable (Colquitt and Rodell, 2011). Scholars have noted that this assessment of the trust referent's character is a rather cognitive process. Indeed, Colquitt and Rodell (2011) state that the deliberate, careful consideration of the supervisor's or leader's trustworthiness drives employee's or follower's intentions to be vulnerable while Yang *et al.* (2009) argue that "subordinates [followers] become cognitively assured about their vulnerability in interactions with their supervisors [leaders]." (p. 145).

Interactions between a trustor and trustee play an important role in the development of *affective trust*. Research observes that personal interactions lead to more willingness to be vulnerable (Mislin *et al.*, 2011). In other words the more a leader and a follower interact with each other the more willingness to be vulnerable they are to each other. Having a shared interest is associated with both affective trust and a higher willingness to be emotionally vulnerable (Jiang *et al.*, 2011). Our results clearly demonstrate that the affective dimension of trust needs further research as only a handful of the studies found within this review really analysed affective trust. In support of such assertions, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) decided to exclude affective trust from their meta-analysis because of too few studies in that field.

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to note that the development of trust bases as built on these trust antecedents is not the same for everyone. Instead, in line with sense-making theory (Weick *et al.*, 2005), individual characteristics do play a role: People with low self-esteem are expected to show less willingness to be vulnerable (Premeaux and Bedeian, 2003), whereas strong interdependent identities show greater willingness to be vulnerable (Johnson and Lord, 2010; 2012).

The two bases of trust – cognitive and affective – form the *trusting intention* a person holds. Most researchers conceptualised this trusting intention as consisting of two elements: Positive expectations and the willingness to be vulnerable (Bird and Osland, 2005; Olsen, 2012). Particularly the intention to accept vulnerability has been named as the core element of a trusting intention (Chow *et al.*, 2012; Colquitt and Rodell, 2011) whereas Graebner (2009) only refers to the “aspect of positive expectation in a situation involving vulnerability” (p. 436). Regarding the interrelationship of positive expectations and the willingness to be vulnerable, Olsen (2012) for example notes that the intention to accept vulnerability is based upon positive expectations.

Step 2: From trusting intentions to actual trusting behaviour

To fully understand the concept of interpersonal trust, the *trusting intention or beliefs* consisting in positive expectations and the willingness to be vulnerable must be considered with *trusting behaviour* that is manifested in actual vulnerability. Gundlach and Cannon (2010, p. 400) for example note that trust is manifested by actually increasing one’s vulnerability to the actions of another and Deb and Chavali (2010) argue that “without vulnerability of the trustor upon the trustee, trust becomes irrelevant” (p. 44) which means that both, the leader and the follower, have to express vulnerability otherwise trust is not relevant in their relationship.

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

As trusting intention and trusting behaviour appear to go hand in hand, it is vital to clearly distinguish between these two concepts. Lin *et al.* (2003) for example state that vulnerability means taking a risk whereas the trusting intention does not yet comprise risk but only the willingness to take risk. Similarly, Mayer and Gavin (2005) note that trust is a generalized behavioural intention to take risk, whereas its outcome is actually taking risk. Colquitt *et al.* (2007) state that “the distinction between trust and risk taking reflects the distinction between a willingness to be vulnerable and actually becoming vulnerable.” (p. 910). Hence, trust is manifested in actual behaviour that allows vulnerability to the trustee (Mayer and Gavin, 2005).

Regarding the relationship between trusting intentions and actual trusting behaviour one can see a clear complementary relationship: Higher levels of trusting intentions are associated with higher levels of vulnerable behaviour: Confident expectations lead to a higher willingness to be vulnerable which leads to higher levels of actual behavioural trust (Gillespie and Mann, 2004) such as higher levels of dependence Svensson (2004). The more leaders trust their followers, the more power they will delegate (Tzafrir, 2005). Furthermore, Gundlach and Cannon (2010) note that relationships with the highest level of trust (close relationships) may also be the relationships with the highest level of vulnerability. This result is in line with Scandura and Pellegrini’s (2008) observation that high-quality relationships are characterized by high levels of vulnerability.

Trusting behaviour itself can be distinguished between *active vulnerability* for example characterized by deliberately disclosing sensible, potentially damaging information (Mayer and Gavin, 2005) and *passive vulnerability* for example consisting in merely relying on another person (Gillespie and Mann, 2004). In a similar vein, Child and Moellering (2003) distinguish institution-based trust from active trust development that is more risky because it requires a leap of faith and investment. In the leader-follower relationship, followers express disclosure-based trust by actively sharing potentially damaging information and reliance-

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

based trust by passively accepting the influence of the leader (Mayer and Gavin, 2005).

Contrary, an unwillingness to be vulnerable leads to less reliance-based and disclosure-based behavioural trust that becomes apparent in verification strategies, monitoring, assurances, and corroboration (Gundlach and Cannon, 2010).

Proposition 1: The trusting behaviour of a person will be manifested in active vulnerability (disclosure-based trust) and passive vulnerability (reliance-based trust).

Most research on trust focuses on the passive manifestation of vulnerability in the form of reliance-based behaviour. This may take the form of help-seeking (Hofmann *et al.*, 2009), feedback seeking (Hays and Williams, 2011), and acceptance of risks (Bidault *et al.* 2007). In addition, a high degree of reliance-based trust becomes apparent when employees or followers are free to focus their full attention on job tasks (Colquitt *et al.*, 2007) and allow the leader to have significant influence over their working lives (Colquitt and Rodell, 2011). Reliance-based trust (i.e. passive vulnerability) may not only be expressed by followers towards their leader but also vice versa: The trust a leader holds towards his followers is manifested in sharing his power with them (Tzafrir, 2005). Reliance-based trust is also relevant in international business where foreign investors may express behavioural trust by relying on local leaders rather than sending in expatriates which increases their vulnerability (Child and Moellering, 2003). As can be seen from our results, most research on trusting behaviour (i.e. actual vulnerability) concentrated on reliance-based trust (i.e. passive vulnerability). We therefore encourage future work to address this imbalance and direct their research efforts towards disclosure-based behavioural manifestations of trust (i.e. active vulnerability).

Proposition 2: Reliance-based passive trust is more strongly related to the cognitive trust building process and the positive expectation a person holds whereas disclosure-based active vulnerability is more strongly related to the affective process of trust building and the willingness to be vulnerable a person holds.

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

Similarly to our conclusion that the strength of the relationship between trust antecedents and the formation of trust bases depends on certain individual differences, the connection between trusting intention (i.e. willingness to be vulnerable) and trusting behaviour (i.e. actual vulnerability) appears to be contingent on a number of situational factors as well as on the trust referent (Mayer and Gavin, 2005; Kickul *et al.*, 2005). Research has articulated that less behavioural trust (i.e. actual vulnerability) will be expressed in situations with higher levels of uncertainty (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002), that are for example characterized by an absence of formal contracts (Colquitt *et al.*, 2007). Virtuality is said to have a negative effect on trusting behaviour (Hill *et al.*, 2009) that may be caused by the increase in distance between trustee and trustor, here leader and follower, that makes face-to-face meetings less likely which reduces vulnerability and hence behavioural trust (Yakovleva *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, a number of studies pointed out that the higher the power or status difference between trustee and trustor, the higher the level of vulnerability of the trustor will be (de Jong *et al.*, 2007; Mayer and Gavin, 2005; Yang *et al.*, 2009) and accordingly the more behavioural trust expressed by relying on the trustee and by disclosing information, the higher is the level of vulnerability of the trustor. The same applies to situations that are characterized by a high degree of asymmetrical task dependence (de Jong *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, we are able to make the following propositions:

Proposition 3: Situational characteristics moderate the strength of the connection between trusting intentions (i.e. willingness to be vulnerable) and trusting behaviour (i.e. actual vulnerability).

Step 3: From trusting vulnerable behaviour of one person to the level of trust his referent holds

Trust generally develops from the iterative reciprocation of the parties' trusting acts. The process begins with one party trusting another enough to act on that trust (Weber *et al.* 2004).

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

The higher the vulnerability expressed by the trustor (e.g. the follower), the higher will be the trust reciprocated by the trust referent (e.g. leader): Malhotra and Murningham (2002) argue that “trusted parties were less likely to honour trust when trustors had taken small rather than large risks as they attributed such actions to a lack of trust, which was viewed negatively” (p. 555). In the leadership context Gillespie and Mann (2004) note that trust building leadership practises put the leader in a position of vulnerability and may be reciprocated by the followers. This also applies to the international business context where Child and Moellering (2003) report that for international investors who made themselves vulnerable by relying on local leaders/managers instead of expatriates this might pay off as local leaders/managers appreciate such signals of trust and reciprocate this to the advantage of the investor.

Proposition 4: The higher the level of vulnerability expressed by the trustor, the higher will be the reciprocal trust of the trust referent.

Implications for Research on Human Resource Management

Based on our results, we can conclude, that the current state of research does clearly not satisfy the increasing relevance of vulnerability in interpersonal relationships in organisations. Our results demonstrate that there are only a few studies that take the concept of vulnerability into account but none of these studies explicitly addresses the role vulnerability plays exactly. Furthermore, we found that the cognitive dimension of trust together with its antecedents (ability, benevolence and integrity) appears relatively well researched. Contrary, the affective dimension of trust needs further attention. Researchers should also be more sensitive when conceptualizing the different components of trusting intentions which are positive expectations and the willingness to be vulnerable. In particular they should differentiate these underlying bases of trust from trustful behaviour which is actual vulnerability (either in active

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

or passive form). Finally, researchers should be more sensitive when conceptualizing the different components of trust itself: positive expectations and willingness to be vulnerable and in particular differentiate these underlying concepts of trust from trustful behaviour which is the actual vulnerability (either in active or passive form).

Implications for Human Resource Management practise

Trust building through leaders' expression of vulnerability

Our results demonstrate that the key issue for leaders' perceived trustworthiness is the expression of actual vulnerability. Thus, leaders should avoid showing themselves as distanced and inaccessible to their followers. Instead they should demonstrate their own vulnerability. Only when they present themselves as vulnerable they are able to build strong emotional based relationships to their followers and thus, real trust relationships. Leaders may express vulnerability in two regards: one being passive in the form of reliance-based trustful behaviour, the other being active in the form of disclosure-based trustful behaviour. Reliance-based trustful behaviour may in particular take the form of reducing control mechanisms or monitoring systems. In terms of disclosure-based trust leaders may for example share important strategic information with their followers.

Trust-building through followers' expression of vulnerability

Our review clearly underlines that actual vulnerability expressed by the follower is essential for trust to develop reciprocally in the relationship with the leader. Due to the hierarchical nature of the leader-follower relationship, followers are typically per se in the more vulnerable position. Nevertheless, in order to actually express vulnerability, the follower must also hold some willingness to be vulnerable. To stimulate that willness leaders should avoid any behaviour that might be perceived as opportunistic by the followers. Taking further into account, that our review suggests that the willingness to be vulnerable (i.e. the intention to

VULNERABILITY AND TRUST IN LEADER-FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS

trust) is mainly driven by the affective base of trust, two antecedents appear particularly relevant: Emotional bonds between leader and follower as well as personal interactions between the two. Hence in order to drive reciprocal trust, leaders should build an emotional bond with their followers and secure regular personal meetings with the follower.

Conclusion

With this literature review, we are able to contribute to Human Resource Management and Psychology in three regards. *First*, we show that there are only few studies that take the concept of vulnerability into account while no single study explicitly addresses the role vulnerability plays. This observation is striking as obviously a considerable amount of studies rely on the concept of vulnerability when defining trust but apparently these studies lack a deeper understanding of the concept of vulnerability and its relationship with trust. *Second*, we introduce a comprehensive theoretical framework which allows us to distinguish between the willingness-to-be-vulnerable and the actual vulnerability. *Third*, we provide clear implications how leaders are able to build trustful relationships to their followers by being willingly to be vulnerable and showing actual vulnerability

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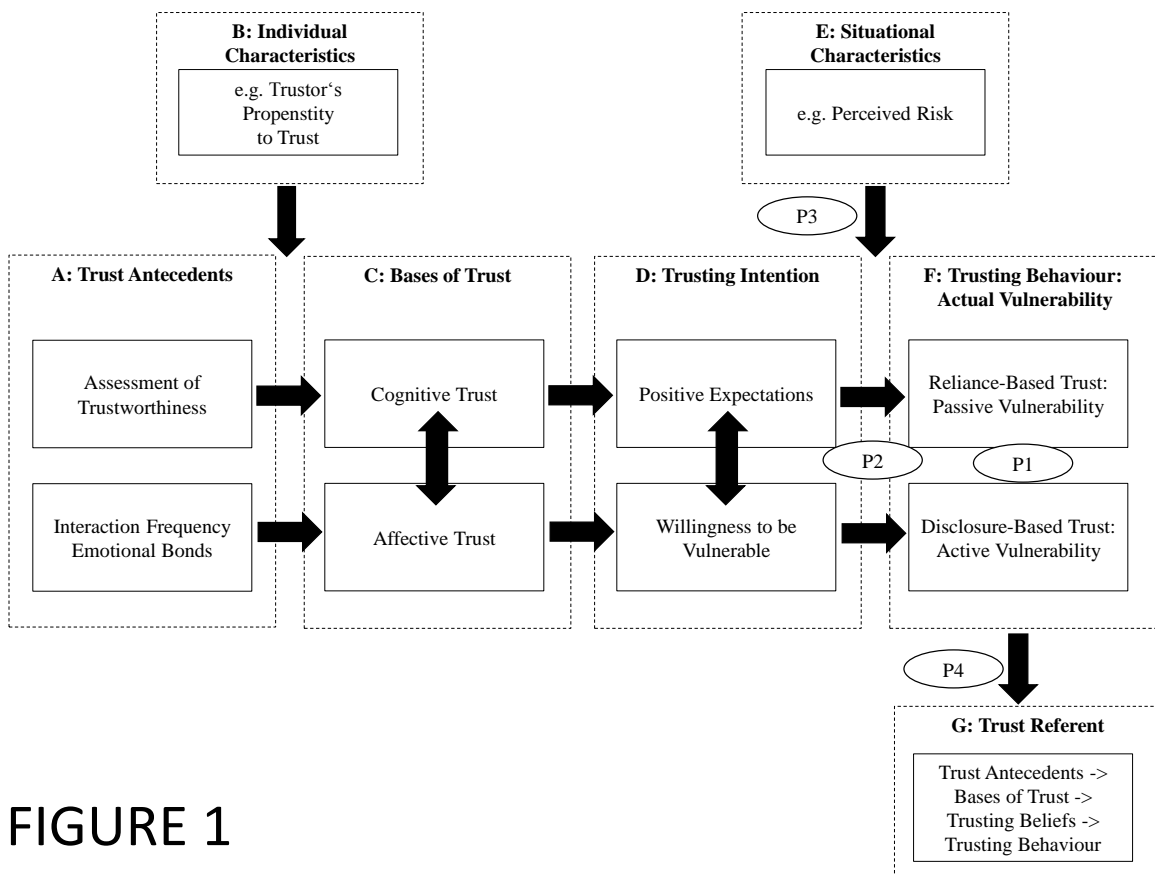


FIGURE 1