Trust as a Leadership Determinant

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Abstract:

Purpose: The main scientific purpose of the article is to present the results and analysis of research relating to the issue of identifying trust as a determinant in leadership formation. The first section presents an analysis of the foundations of the theory of trust in the context of shaping leadership. The second part describes the research methodology and presents the results of the research representing the issues discussed. Next, the author presents conclusions from the research that emphasize the importance of trust in the development of contemporary leadership facing the challenge of constant change and uncertainty.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The aim of the article was achieved by carrying out an argumentative review of the literature, which was the basis for designing methodological assumptions for further research. A diagnostic survey was chosen as the main research method. Such targeted research made it possible to learn about the respondents' position on the subject of the research problem and to compare them with the analysis of desk research. Thus, they made it possible to draw conclusions.

Findings: Contemporary changes and uncertainty affecting society and organizations favor relationships based on distrust and upset the sense of security. The research analysis presented in this article will indicate trust as a key factor that underpins the relationship between the leader and his followers. At the same time, it is a basis for further empirical research.

Practical Implications: Building the leadership of the future must be based on trust, which is open to new ways of thinking, facilitates the release of the team's energy, shortens decision-making time, thereby allowing for the quick action and thus change.

Originality/value: The research perspective allows for a conclusion at the core of leadership is the ability to instill trust and the leader's credibility. Based on the elements identifying trust in leadership proposed in the article, it is proposed to change the perspective recognition of leadership. A leader who can build a high level of trust may count on gaining in his/her employees more energy to act and take up new challenges, which are the strength of the organization and push it forward. A high level of trust makes it easier to manage risk and change, makes structures and procedures no longer a brake on development, and decisions made based on trust bring the expected results faster.

Keywords: Trust, leadership, leadership determinants, trust management.

JEL classification: M12, M54, J53.

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1. Introduction

In a variety of literary terms, the reflections on trust describe this concept as socially acceptable, related to the universal moral norms and principles created by the community. Trust is defined through the prism of individual expectations, social interaction, exchange, and even social capital. When addressing the issue of leadership, examining the relationship between the leader and his/her supporters, the question of trust cannot be overlooked. The article analyzes selected aspects of the issues underlying the formation of leadership. The considerations were presented based on the literature and the author's research. The study aimed to identify trust as a critical determinant in leadership shaping. Particular attention was paid to the importance of trust in leading a team in an organization that has to cope with an ever-changing environment. The refined atmosphere of trust eliminates the need to verify the credibility of a partner in each case, which makes it possible for employees to offer the organization more valuable resources. The conclusions of the research confirmed the thesis that a manager identifying himself/herself with a leader in a modern organization must consciously invest in building trust.

2. The Essence of Trust

The concept of trust is interdisciplinary and is of interest to researchers in philosophy, sociology, psychology, economics, organization, and management. Already Socrates or Plato (2003) undertook considerations on trust. Socrates referred to trust in the power and pointed to factors of trust, such as truth and justice (Plato, 1997). In the concept of the ideal state of Plato (1997), ideal rulers were to provide guarantees of the rule of law and justice.

Following Luhmann (2007), it can be assumed that trust is the most universal social fact. Moreover, Luhmann (2000) believes that the functioning of modern society is based on taking the risk, and it is the trust that allows it to be taken. The development of trust and distrust depends on the local environment and personal experience. Trust is inseparable from the existence of social relationships. Sztompka (2012) assumes that human activities are oriented towards the future, its anticipation. Thus, their effects depend to a significant extent on circumstances beyond our control. In addition to natural events independent of human activities, we are surrounded by events resulting from the actions of other people, communities, institutions, and organizations. When interacting with others, we have to take a game, bet on the results of these relations. In Sztompka's opinion (2012, p. 129), trust is based on betting on others' future uncertain actions. The critical assumption is that in a betting operation - trust - other people's actions are expected to be beneficial or at least neutral. Otherwise, we deal with mistrust, which becomes a barrier, a source of distance, and constant vigilance to prevent action.

According to Fukuyama (1997, p. 38), trust is a mechanism based on the assumption that ethical and cooperative behavior that relies upon shared standards characterizes

other community members. Mayer *et al.* (1995, p.712) describe trust as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions 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. Robinson (1996, p. 576) defines trust as expectations, assumptions or beliefs about the likelihood that another's future actions will be beneficial, favorable or at least not detrimental. As Chrisidu-Budnik (2016, p. 75) writes, a trust is based on calculation, it takes risk into account, it allows failure.

The above definitions include identifying trust as a social relationship and expectation of the outcome of an interaction. In literature, trust is also defined as an element of social capital (Prusak and Cohen, 2001; Fazlagić 2004; Rudzewicz, 2016). Romaniszyn, (2016), Fukuyama (1997), and Coleman (1988) consider social capital as a set of social relationships that can lead to social success. Fukuyama (1997) defines social capital as people's ability to work together for common goals, which is conditioned by the existence of a specific set of informal norms or values shared between group members. Fukuyama's social capital is related to the understanding of social trust. According to him, social trust is relational, which means that it is created when people who adhere to the universe of standards of honesty and reciprocity work together.

Bugdol (2010) recognizes trust as one of the organization's values because it meets the basic requirements assigned to them. Above all, it is a conviction that the specific actions of the participants in the organization will bring precise results. Secondly, it is associated with faith, which is one of the dimensions of values. Thirdly, it can be an object of desire. Fourthly, it determines the sustainability of the organization. He believes that trust, as a fundamental value of the organization, should have its place in the mission, vision, management programs, and quality policy.

Trust, or its lack, is considered as one of the essential cultural determinants of society in the context of economic success. The principles of trust and credibility are firmly anchored in highly developed countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Japan, and Norway. Underdeveloped countries, mainly African and South American countries, are defined by the low degree of trust. Countries with a low level of trust include post-communist countries, and unfortunately, Poland is among them (Herman, 2009; Rudzewicz, 2016).

Undoubtedly, trust is a powerful force supporting the success of the team and organization (Eikenberry and Turmel, 2019; Rudzewicz, 2016; Simerson and Venn, 2010). A high level of trust fosters a sense of job satisfaction. Besides, trust brings out optimal commitment and potentially above-average performance from employees. Trust as such a significant factor building optimal relations in society must be taken into account in the relationship between the leader and the team.

3. Leadership Determinants

Many researchers point out the importance of trust as a factor underpinning leadership (Bennis, 1985; Brower *et al.,* 2000; Burke *et al.,* 2007; Covey, 2004; Maxwell, 2013; Setyaningrum *et al.,* 2020). One cannot fail to agree with that statement by reviewing the various approaches to the term leadership. According to Blanchard (2007), leadership is addressed as the ability to effectively influence people by releasing strength and potential in order to enable them to pursue the greater good. Eikenberry and Turmel (2019) believe that leadership can be said to be when people voluntarily follow the person who will lead them to the desired result in the future. Gordon (2018) points out the fundamental principles of effective leadership. According to him, leaders who are concerned about effectiveness should set out a vision, a path to follow. Then they ought to communicate it and share it with others. Another principle is the continuous formation of a positive culture. A leader should lead with optimism, faith, and a positive attitude, but fight against negativism, which is a factor detrimental to teams and organizations. A leader must devote all his/her energy to building teams based on ties, thus investing in relationships that are the foundation of outstanding teams. At the same time, a leader must possess continuing determination and faith in striving for excellence.

Adair (2007) represents the view that a leader should be a person with specific traits (personality and character) and should have relevant expertise, and all this combined will enable him/her to manage the group in such a way as to carry out tasks effectively. In their deliberations on leaders, Balcerzyk and Zapala (2020), apart from their features, emphasize the importance of competencies possessed by the leader, which are the determinant of his/her position. Eikenberry and Turmel (2019) point out the paradox in leadership, i.e., that it is primarily about results and people doing the job, but not about leaders. To achieve maximum effectiveness in leadership, they propose the "3 x O" model, which includes ourselves - the leader next to the outcomes, i.e., the final results, and others - the people doing the work. However, the leader is not in the center of the environment, but only a leadership axis.

Desiring to sum up the researchers' considerations briefly: without followers, there is no leader. Followers' trust is what sustains a leader's authority (Mishra and Mishra, 2013). It is understood as faith and loyalty to a leader (Podsakoff *et al.,* 1990). A leader must build his or her leadership through a team because it is his or her potential. Lencioni (2005) finds five dysfunctions in teamwork and the role of a leader in overcoming problems: trust, fear of conflict, no commitment, avoidance of responsibility, and lack of focus on results. Among them, a lack of trust is at the root of the problems. The deficit of trust means that teams lose time and energy to gain control over their behavior and relations within the group. Such employees usually draw hasty conclusions about the intentions of others, do not recognize or use others' skills, and not only offer help to others reluctantly but also do not use the help of others. Moreover, lack of trust causes that team members neither make constructive

comments nor report problems, and they camouflage their weaknesses and mistakes. Achieving trust in a team is not easy and requires the leader to take steps to show mutual interdependence and lack of need for caution towards the group.

When addressing leadership, Maxwell (2003) notes that the term should be considered not as a noun but as a verb. Leadership is an action, not a position. One cannot talk about leadership if it is static if there is no movement forward. Leaders always lead people in some direction. Maxwell emphasizes that leadership is about people and ever-changing dynamics. In proposing the concept of five levels (Maxwell, 2013), he stresses that moving from lower levels to higher levels is the key to creating change by a leader. The first lowest level is "position". At this stage, the leader controls people on the basis of the reporting line and regulations. We cannot talk here about a leader and a team, but about functions and subordinates.

The second level of "acquiescence" is based on interpersonal relationships. An essential task of a second-level leader involves getting to know the team, respecting individual values, building bonds, and establishing good trust-based relations. This level is significant for creating a pleasant atmosphere and culture of trust. However, full leadership can be said to be effective if the team and the leader experience the effectiveness of their actions by entering the third level. The leader is the initiator of change here; he or she is able to face problems, confront troublesome issues, and make difficult decisions. Thanks to the trust gained earlier, he/she leads people through successful completion of tasks, an increase in income, and, consequently, the achievement of goals.

According to Maxwell, the fourth level - "development of subordinates" – indicates the leader's greatness. For they are reaching the stage where they should reach the level of "master", and thus invest in people so that they can develop and perfect themselves by following him. When we analyze Maxwell's considerations about the fourth level, it should be stated that it is impossible to achieve it without trust. Hesitating leaders who do not trust anybody, in consequence, do not invest in people. So a leader who wants to educate others must trust people and enjoy their trust. The last highest level five involves building "personal authority". From level four, where he or she works to develop people, leaders go to the mentor level, passing on their heritage and values to others. People reaching the fifth level are successful wherever the action is taken, lift and advance the organization, thereby creating a thriving environment for all. They undertake the training of leaders and often expand their positive influence beyond their home organizations. The fifth level of development is the highest not only for leadership but also for trust and total elimination of the uncertainty that leaders have to excel in their role as masters.

When analyzing leadership issues, it should be noted that trust manifests itself as the basis of a special relationship between a leader and his/her followers. If the leader wants to think about the development of the organization, he or she must not forget to take care of the coherence of the group that should function as a team, also

meeting the individual needs of its members. The need to build a high level of trust should be seen as an appropriate starting point for guiding the rules of proper conduct or ways for a leader to act effectively in a world of complexity and uncertainty.

4. Research Methodology

The paper presents the results of research on the issue of trust in leadership. The presented analysis is a fragment of broader research on leadership. In the research using the questionnaire, opinions were obtained on the following aspects: the researcher's understanding of trust, factors that instill trust in the relationship between the leader and the team, and the benefits that result from the high level of trust built by the leader. The research sample consisted of 340 people. The characteristics of the sample took into account gender, age, residence location, size of the company, and the respondents' positions.

The division of the sample was distributed evenly according to gender. Women constituted 51% and men 49% of the surveyed group. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) were very young people from the 19 - 25 age range. About one third (28%) of the respondents were between 26 and 35 years old. People aged 36 - 45 constituted 15% of the research sample. The lowest percentage (4%) of the surveyed was between 46 and 55 years old. The oldest age group, i.e., people over 55, was 6% of the respondents.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents live in cities: 43% live in cities with 26 - 50 thousand inhabitants, 14% live in cities with 11 - 25 thousand inhabitants, 6% live in cities with 6 - 10 thousand inhabitants, and 8% live in cities with 5 thousand and fewer inhabitants. The remaining third (29%) live in rural areas.

Nearly half of the respondents (49%) work in a company with more than 100 employees. The rest of them are employed in smaller companies with 51 - 100 people - 12%, 21 - 50 people - 11%, 11 - 20 people - 7%, 6 - 10 people - 10%, and up to 5 employees - 11% of the respondents.

The characteristics of the research sample allow us to assess that the respondents are mainly young people at the beginning of their professional careers, and few of them are senior managers. Only 5% of the respondents hold the position of a senior manager, 22% indicate the position of a middle manager, and 12% - a lower manager. A large group of respondents, as many as 61%, are people occupying different posts than the ones mentioned above. It can be assumed that they are supporters rather than leaders.

5. Trust in Leadership: Research Results

The literature review has revealed various approaches to the term trust. The

leadership context may give a specific attitude to the term. From the researcher's point of view, it seemed important to learn how respondents understand trust in a leadership context. Therefore, the surveyed were asked to state their positions and choose the closest understanding of the definition of trust from those cited in the cafeteria (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Understanding trust in a leadership context*
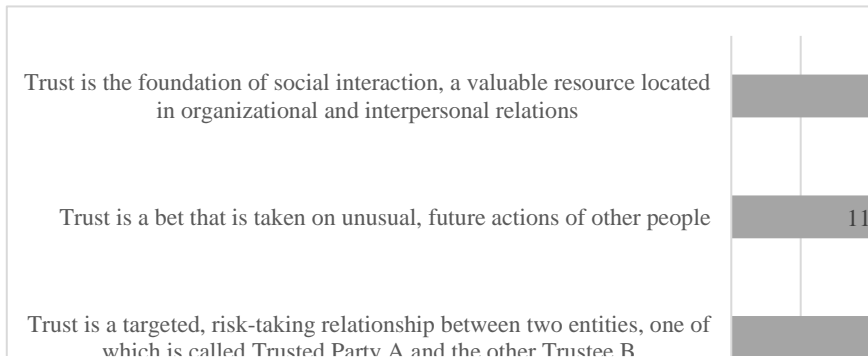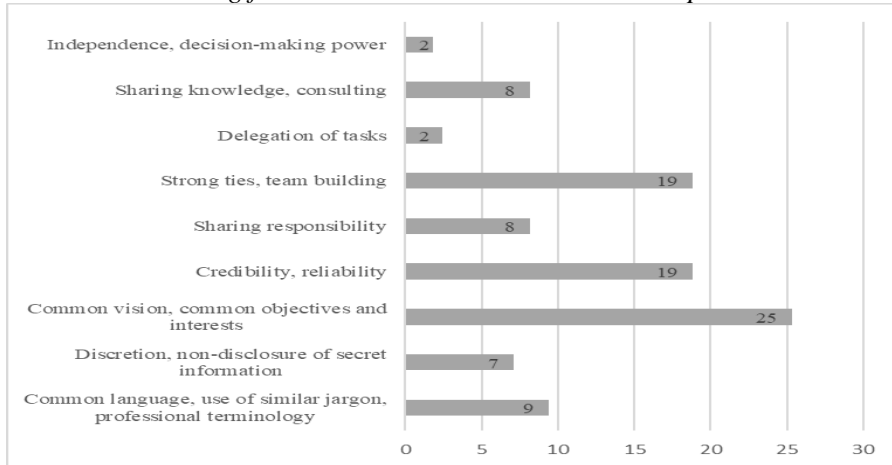

Source: *Own elaboration.*

The research results indicate that the highest percentage (44%) of the respondents consider trust to be the foundation of social interaction and a valuable resource located in organizational and interpersonal relations (Weber et al., 2005). Nearly a quarter of the respondents (24%) are convinced that trust is the belief that neither party will use the other (Tomkins, 2001). A similar proportion (22%) tend to regard trust as a targeted, risk-taking relationship between two individuals, one of whom is called Trusted Party A and the other Trustee B (Grudzewski et al., 2009). The lowest percentage of the respondents (11%) understands trust as betting on unusual, future actions of other people (Sztompka, 2012).

The research on trust in leadership commenced with recognizing the respondents' views and their understanding of trust in the leadership context. It also seemed crucial to know which factors, according to the respondents, influence creating trust in the relationship between the leader and the team. Figure 2 displays the opinions of respondents.

A quarter of the respondents (25%) consider having a shared vision, common goals, and interests as a trust-building factor in the leader-team relationship. Strong ties and team building are vital elements for 19% of them. The same proportion (19%) of the surveyed indicates that credibility and reliability are a critical factor in the relationship. In their statements identifying trust-building factors in relations, the respondents further mentioned the following ones: common language, using similar jargon, professional terminology (9%), sharing responsibility (8%), sharing knowledge, and consulting (8%). Discretion and non-disclosure of secret information were indicated by 7% of the surveyed. The smallest percentage of them

believe that delegation of tasks (2%), independence, and the power to make decisions (2%) are significant in instilling trust in the relationship between the leader and the team.
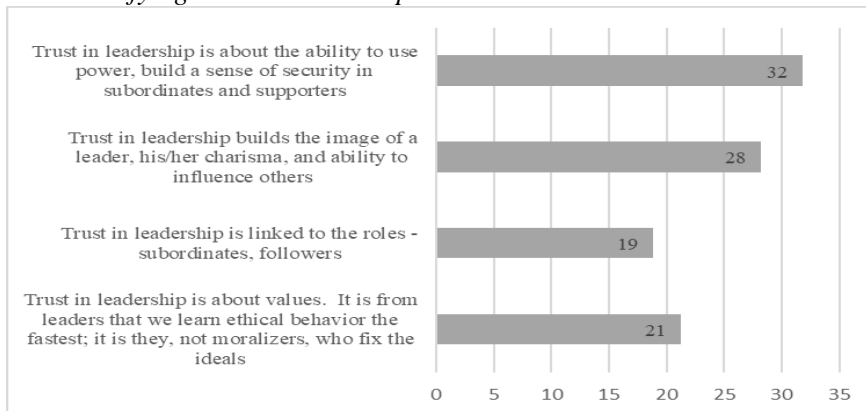
Figure 2. *Trust-building factors in the leader-team relationship*

Source: *Own elaboration.*

Another issue addressed during the researcher's investigation was to identify the importance of trust in leadership (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Identifying trust in leadership*

Source: *Own elaboration.*

According to 32% of the surveyed, the ability to use power and build a sense of security in subordinates and supporters is essential in trust and leadership. As many as 28% present the view that trust in leadership builds the leader's image, his/her charisma, and the ability to influence others. For 21% of the respondents, trust in leadership is related to values. It is from leaders that we learn fast how to behave ethically and perpetuate ideals. The lowest percentage of respondents (19%)

identifies trust in leadership with the roles they perform: subordinates or supporters.

Many management theorists see the benefits brought about by trust in the functioning of organizations (Chadam, 2016; Levin et al., 2002; Rudzewicz, 2017). They pay attention to matters ranging from employee motivation to changing the organizational culture and, as a result, the organization's measurable successes. It was decided to learn the opinion and feelings of the respondents. They were asked about the advantages of the high level of trust created by the leader. They were to choose the most critical answer for them from the proposed cafeteria. Figure 4 presents the results.

Figure 4. *Benefits of the high level of trust built by the leader*

Source: Own elaboration.

The most considerable number of respondents - nearly one third - chose "feeling of security" as the significant indicator of benefits resulting from the high level of trust built by the leader. This choice means that safety is still a crucial human need, which is the foundation of others. It was followed by 16% of indications that the advantage of the high-level trust is "the ease of change." This statement is connected in a way with another one, which is the "ability to survive the crisis" chosen by 15% of the respondents.

Modern organizations often operate in a changing environment and are subject to adaptation, which translates into intra-organizational relations. In such a case, a high level of trust seems to give the examined person a guarantee of survival in challenging situations, i.e., changes and crises. Also, 15% of the respondents indicated "better coordination of work" as an advantage resulting from the high level of trust. A slightly smaller percentage (11%) indicated the benefit of "launching creative thinking, innovation." The "increase in effectiveness" was chosen by 10% of the surveyed people. The smallest percentage (5%) of the respondents considered "promotion of information exchange and cooperation" as a benefit resulting from the high-level trust.

6. Conclusion

Modern society is marked by constant change and uncertainty. Unfortunately, these phenomena foster relationships based on mistrust and insecurity. The environment where it has come to managing and leading people implies difficulties in forming relationships based on trust. However, carried-out research proves that people need trust and believe it is the foundation of interpersonal and organizational relationships. A significant implication of this study is that it is the leader who can influence the atmosphere of trust in which his/her team works. The study results clearly show that people identify leadership with trust and consider trust as a significant element of leadership. They maintain that the ability to use power and build a sense of security for supporters or subordinates is essential in trust and leadership. The perspective of looking at leadership is changing. In modern leadership, the approach that has been highlighted over the years only having regard to the leader's qualities and personality is not valid. It gives way to a leadership, which functions as many elements coexisting and interacting with each other.

Thus, it moves from self-management to the management of those around the leader, namely his or her supporters. At the core of leadership is the ability to instill trust and the leader's credibility. The leadership determinants include having a vision and mission that binds and motivates supporters. The significant determinants of creating trust in team - leader relationships are the leader's reliability and credibility as well as bonds and team building. It should be emphasized that the respondents' answers combine trust with a sense of security both in terms of identifying trust and the benefits stemming from high - level trust.

It can be concluded that the results of the conducted research are consistent with the outcomes of studies covering the issues of trust in organizations published in the scientific literature. Many researchers have demonstrated the positive impact of increased trust on the effectiveness of an organization, including through the development of organizational capital (Pypłacz and Mizera, 2019), knowledge worker management (Levin *et al.,* 2002), and talent management (Zhang *et al.,* 2008). Besides, trust significantly influences other levels of the manager's activities, among others, motivating employees or innovativeness (Aronowska, 2016; Krot and Lewicka, 2015). Levin *et al.* (2002) think that the increase in trust in the organization brings the shortening of decision-making time, gains in the quality of implemented processes, and reduces the company's operating costs. On the other hand, a decrease in trust results in the exact opposite.

A leader who can build a high level of trust may count on gaining in his/her employees more energy to act and take up new challenges, which are the strength of the organization and push it forward. A high level of trust makes it easier to manage risk and change, makes structures and procedures no longer a brake on development, and decisions made based on trust bring the expected results faster. It is worthwhile to consider these critical implications fin building the leadership of the future.

Nurturing and shaping trust should be the primary goal of a leader who thinks about the effectiveness of the organization. The considerations presented in the article are a starting point for constructing tools for broader empirical research, and moreover, they join the discussion on the importance of soft factors.

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