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A holistic overview on the antecedents of organizational trust: Aggregated theoretical framework

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Abstract

The recent interest of management researchers in the issue of organizational trust is mainly based on its indispensable role in efficient and effective management focused on human capital. Organizational trust is thus a phenomenon of uncertainty minimization, and the embodiment of a work climate that is worthy of the name. While organizational trust is understood as central to any exchange relationship, it has not been studied in a pre-birth approach to understand how it occurs in an organizational context.
This paper aims to clarify the concept of organizational trust through different dimensions and forms, and to present a holistic overview of its antecedents levels taking into consideration all the variables that can directly or indirectly lead to organizational trust. The enrichment of the understanding of organizational trust is achieved by drawing on the affective and cognitive dimension of trust to clearly identify all the potential elements that can lead to organizational trust. Obviously, the theory mobilized in this research work is the theory of the social exchange which has been greatly shaken to study the exchange relations between the organization and its employees. For this purpose, various backgrounds are examined in this paper, including individual-level antecedents (Personality traits, propensity to trust), organizational-level antecedents (Organizational support, organizational effectiveness and Human resources policy), and cultural-level antecedents (Values, power distance, individualism/collectivism).
The discussion and analysis of the different relationships with various antecedent levels of organizational trust has allowed us to propose a global theoretical framework in order to fundamentally identify multiple areas of future research and to contribute to the knowledge of the topic.

Keywords: Organizational trust, Trust, Social exchange theory, Antecedents of organizational trust.
JEL Classification : M10, M14
Paper type: Theoretical Research

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the world is facing several economic, political and social changes, which have been affecting the management of organizations. Over the past few decades, the organizational trust has been playing a substantial role in the behaviorism field, human resources, and management sciences, which is the reason of many studies exploring the subject from various points of view.

In the same vision, this subject could be considered as an interesting background to develop new ideas, by combining multiple perceptions heading toward a unique approach, based mainly on the social exchange theory.

Furthermore, to conduct this research, a systematic literature review has been used, starting with the proper scientific method of searching for bibliographic references, i.e., old and new research in organizational trust, the most cited references, and any other contributions to the field that could be considered as an interesting data. Nevertheless, we gave importance to the most cited articles in the field (El Hajjaji et al., 2021). We have been collecting a wide range of references (articles, books, book chapters, conference papers...).

In addition to theoretical references, empirical studies results have been collected to understand all the dimensions, forms, and aspects of organizational trust in different context.

As a matter of fact, conceptualizing organizational trust as a multidimensional construct implies identifying the dimensions of trust that have been used as indicators of this construct (Neveu, 2004). Any current developments in trust research practices must be understood in the context of several decades of trust research (Lyon et al., 2015).

In this paper, we consider that organizational trust is a relationship which cannot be established only by individual's rational evaluation in an organization. It is based on collective beliefs, social practices and rules that are themselves embedded in institutions. In this way, our work constitutes a deepening analyze in order to shed light on how trust is born in a purely organizational context, and what are the various antecedents through which organizational trust can take place.

Thus, organizational trust defines a configuration in which rules, because of their application, generate implicit commitments. The latter, caught in a dynamic of path dependency, create their own irreversibility, which allows organizational trust to be achieved.

Considering the increasing importance of organizational trust in the literature, it seems important, for the sake of clarification, to take stock of the current knowledge, both on the concept and on the measurement, in order to understand and to draw up a model of antecedents. Our approach includes several steps.

First of all, it is necessary to show to what extent the concept has acquired legitimacy in management sciences, after having been the focus of several studies in psychology and sociology. Secondly, we discussed the overview of the different theoretical approaches, conceptual definitions of organizational trust, as well as the different dimensions, measures and typologies of previous researches.

Lastly, we highlighted an array of its different antecedents and proposed a theoretical framework, and we drafted some thoughts for the next research. Thereby, this overview aims to contribute to the enrichment of the state of knowledge of organizational trust through a social exchange theory.

2. Theoretical and conceptual approaches of the organizational trust

2.1 Overview of the concept of organizational trust

The concept of trust has been the object of considerable attention in various fields. Despite the value of trust, there is still disagreement about its conceptualization (Makaoui, 2014); In order to find a definition of trust that fits our theoretical perspective, and in this paper we are

interested in organizational trust. Beyond the diversity of definitions of organizational trust, we can notice a few similarities.

In order to conceptualize the concept of organizational trust, we have been able to draw up a conceptual panorama through which trust has been studied and analyzed in different fields of research. In psychology (Rotter, 1967), sociology (Shapiro et al., 1992), economics (Williamson, 1993) and management science (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Tremblay et al., 2010). These multidisciplinary researchers emphasize trust among the parties as a cornerstone of the stability and sustainability of the relationships.

In the socio-economic literature, trust is rooted in Fukuyama's (1995) logic that nations are more competitive when they are socially united (Coleman, 1986). For Coleman (1986) trust is based on four principles: first, trust allows actions to be taken that would not otherwise be possible; second, if the first party is trustworthy, the second party will be better off; third, trust involves a voluntary transfer of assets without an explicit reciprocal commitment from the party "the trustor"; and fourth, there is a time lag between trust and the outcome of that behavior. Therefore, for Coleman (1986) trust is a logical action involving a calculated risk. He claims in his paper Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action, that "*The placement of trust by one actor in another is one such relation, which allows the flow of influence*" (Coleman, 1986).

For this paper, we have decided to adopt a broad and well-known definition of organizational trust as a point of reference, specifically: Expression of faith and assurance that a person or institution will be fair, reliable, ethical, competent and non-threatening (Caldwell et Clapham, 2003)

As a reminder, let us mention the more recent contribution of Coleman (1990) who includes trust in the social capital of agents in a relationship: trust finds its source not in the qualities of individuals (human capital) or from physical places of production (physical capital), but from the inherent structure of relations between individuals (Harrisson, 1999).

In fact, trust is an essential source of social capital in social systems (Fukuyama, 1995) and, consequently, a key element of organizational functioning. Looking at trust from a social capital perspective has produced three main streams of analysis, which have important implications for organizations. These three strands have examined the link between trust as a form of social capital, reducing transaction costs within organizations, and increasing spontaneous sociability among organizational members and facilitating appropriate forms of deference to organizational authorities. Trust has been considered both as a psychological state and also as a choice behavior (Neveu, 2004).

Among the antecedents, authors who favor the following variables: perceived fairness, organizational support, organizational justice and trust (Chen et al., 2005 ; Cook & Wall, 1980 ; Eisenberger et al., 1990 ; Meyer et al., 2002 ; Rupp et al., 2006). The relationship between perceived organizational support and the affective dimension of commitment has been extensively demonstrated in previous research (Eisenberger et al., 1990).

2.2 Dimensions of organizational trust

Therefore, there are several overlapping dimensions of trust in the literature, such as integrity, trustworthiness, dependence, commitment, responsibility, benevolence, altruism, (Chathoth et al., 2011). These reflect a comprehensive framework for identifying two broad distinct dimensions of trust namely affective and cognitive. The most widely recognized dimensions of organizational trust are proposed by McAllister (1995).

The **affective dimension** stipulates that trust is based on affects, which reflects an emotional attachment that stems from the worries and concerns that exist between individuals. Although a relationship based on social exchange is characterized by affective trust, it involves a feeling of emotional security. the belief that the concern of others is reciprocated (Ferrin & Dirks, 2002

; McAllister, 1995). Thus, affective trust represents a willingness to be vulnerable to the other party that is based primarily on beliefs about benevolence, altruism (Mayer et al., 1995). According to McAllister (1995) the **cognitive dimension** of trust describes the rational evaluation of the ability of a person to fulfill his or her obligations and, therefore, reflects his or her beliefs about the reliability, and competence of the other party. Cognitive dimension consists of a willingness to be vulnerable to the other person, and to do so relies primarily on individual beliefs about the reliability, integrity, dependability and ability of that party (Mayer et al., 1995 ; McAllister, 1995 ; Neveu, 2004).

2.3 Typology of OT

The main typology regularly used in the literature was established initially by Shapiro et al (1992). It was then taken up by Lewicki & Bunker (1996), Sheppard & Tyler (1996), Shapiro et al. (1992) and later by Rousseau et al. (1998). It distinguishes four types of trust: Deterrence-based trust, Calculative-based trust, Knowledge-based trust, Identification-based trust[1] :

Deterrence-based trust : We refer to deterrence-based trust according to Shapiro et al. (1992) or calculative-based trust according to Lewicki & Bunker (1996), when one of the parties believes that the other is trustworthy because the cost of sanctions for trust violations is higher than the potential gains from opportunistic behavior (Shapiro et al., 1992).

Calculative-based trust : Trust can also be computationally based, according to Rousseau et al. (1998), or knowledge-based trust for Shapiro et al. (1992) and Lewicki & Bunker (1996), when the trustor perceives that the other intends to carry out an action that is favorable to him or her (rational choice). Such trust is based on credible information about the other's intentions or competence.

Knowledge-based trust : This typology is compared to "gardening," in which individuals deepen their knowledge of the other party by holding meetings, collecting data, and recording the other party's behavior over time (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). At this point, trust is stronger and the trusting person is more likely to forgive and forget incidents where trust is temporarily broken (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

Identification-based trust: At this level, Lewicki & Bunker (1996) consider that the sides develop a deep understanding of what is required of them to maintain the trust of the other. Identification-based trust, which occurs when *"each party has fully assimilated the other party's preferences, so that one party can serve the other party with confidence that its interests will be fully protected."* (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

Furthermore, Rousseau et al. (1998) made the point that trust is neither an act (as cooperation) not a selection (as a calculated risk), but rather a psychological condition, an attitude, causing or resulting from specific actions in the life of an organization.

In the other hand, another typology has been well discussed, it resides in whether we can trust in someone's competence or in his or her intentions (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1999; Lazaric & Lorenz, 1998). We refer to this process as "**trust in competence**" or "**trust in intentions**". In the first case, an individual's ability to accomplish a task is recognized (which is not without consequences on the organizational level, since this trust will authorize forms of autonomy). Confidence in intentions can in turn be declined in several ways. Reynaud (1998) distinguishes three forms of trust: tacit, organizational and contractual, which can be which can be combined with each other. The first is based on social norms or conventions; The second is based on explicit rules and implicit commitments, while the third is related to agreement.

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[1] *Lewicki and Bunker (1996) separate trust into types similar to Shapiro et al. (1992) but deterrence-based trust is replaced by calculation-based trust. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) relate the three types to the developmental stages of trust; it begins with computational-based trust, moves to knowledge-based trust, and finally reaches identification-based trust.*

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2.4 Measuring OT

Since trust is an intangible concept that can be defined in different ways. The process of measuring the level of trust within an organization can be a difficult task. However, some research has focused on finding ways to concretize the role of trust in organizations, resulting in a set of models, theories and measures. The most noteworthy measures are provided by Butler (1991), Mayer et al. (1995), Mishra (1996), Gillespie (2003). The common thread in all the measures that will be presented is that they are composed of several main components that together from of trust. Butler (1991) concluded a model based on 10 conditions of trust: availability, competence, consistency, discretion, fairness, integrity, loyalty, openness, promise-keeping, and responsiveness.

According to Butler, it is essential to investigate all of these conditions in order to measure the level of trust within an organization (Butler, 1991). Meanwhile, Mishra (1996) attempted to summarize the previous definitions of trust into a short and concise definition covering most of the important factors. At the same time, she identified four critical beliefs about the trustor that should be used to define the level of trust: competence, openness, attentiveness, and reliability.

All of these beliefs form a set of factors that can be used to estimate the level of trust within an organization (Mishra, 1996). Mayer et al. (1995) introduced a model of trust in organizational relationships that the authors believed covered most of the conditions estimated by Butler (1991). The model focuses on the relationship between one party "the trustor" and the other party "the trustee" not within the organization as a whole (Mayer et al., 1995). They argue that the level of trust in a working relationship depends on two fundamental factors: the propensity of the trustor to trust and the level of capacity, caring and integrity of the trustee.

In his article "Measuring Trust in Work Relationships," Gillespie (2003) criticizes the authors discussed above and their attempts to measure trust. He argues that such studies are based on conditions and factors that describe only a person's trustworthiness and do not take into account the great importance of risk, interdependence and vulnerability.

Gillespie (2003) developed a new framework and measure of trust called the Behavioral Trust Inventory (BTI). The purpose of this measure was to include the impact of vulnerability and trust behavior in the measurement of trust. The BTI includes ten variables: dependence, disclosure, trustworthiness, task interdependence, risk in the relationship, common values, common goals, performance satisfaction, relationship effectiveness, trustfulness, and overall trust (Gillespie, 2003).

Nevertheless, Dietz & Den Hartog (2006) provided an overview of 14 measures of trust. Of all the constituent elements of trust that could be found, they chose to highlight benevolence, integrity, capability, and predictability as the most salient and essential elements for measuring trust. Broadly, integrity and benevolence receive a great deal of attention, while competence and predictability are overshadowed.

Dietz & Den Hartog (2006) argue that the use of components in a survey should depend on the situation. They support this argument by pointing to the fact that previous research has shown that the degree of trust differs across situations and levels in a company and, therefore, the importance of components also varies (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006).

In fact, we have focused on the organizational trust measure, as mentioned above, these measurement variables consist of identification elements and antecedents related either to the organization or to the personality or even to the culture. Without these antecedents, there will be no trust.

3. Organizational trust as a core element of exchange theory

Social exchange theory, in its utilitarian form, was conceptualized by Homans (1958) to explain relationships between individuals. In his conceptualization of social exchange, Homans (1958) emphasizes the universal motivations of actors as a springboard for action. Such an approach clearly excludes the influence of society and context.

Broadly speaking, the theorization of social exchange can be separated into two approaches. Although scholars such as Blau (1964) have attempted an eclectic approach. While adopting similar underlying assumptions as Homans (1958) and Blau (1964), this theory manages to treat more complex situations beyond direct dyad relationships.

According to Schoorman et al. (2007) trust provides many benefits in organizational life. Thus, an atmosphere of trust plays an important role in the creation and development of effective communication and high organizational performance (Salamon & Robinson, 2008). Moreover, Management science researchers have acknowledged the powerful role that organizational trust plays in innovation (Armenakis et al., 1993), in performance (Mayer & Gavin, 2005), in organizational change, and in organizational commitment (D. Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). This perspective is consistent with social exchange theory, which explains the crucial role of organizational trust.

4. Antecedents of Organizational Trust

As a matter of fact, the literature review of organizational trust concluded its relationship with several concepts, in a context of social exchange in the organization. We have analyzed these various elements that antecede organizational trust, and we have highlighted a categorization (illustrated below in the figure): Individual level, organizational level, cultural level.

4.1 Organizational antecedents

At the global level, Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that employees form an aggregate conviction about how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. However, they labeled this conviction with perceived organizational support. These researchers think that high levels of organizational support create obligations in employees to reciprocate the organization.

In addition, perceived organizational support is associated with trust that the organization will complete exchange obligations (e.g., by rewarding employees). In fact, recognizing employees' positive attitudes and contributions at work, going beyond their contractually prescribed or enforceable roles as the source of an organization's competitive advantage, has been of particular interest to organizational researchers in understanding and explaining the motivational basis of attitudes and contributions at work (Aryee et al., 2002). The relationship between organizational trust and many other organizational factors is examined by various theoretical and empirical studies (Chen et al., 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ruppel & Harrington, 2000; Schoorman et al., 2007). Such as: job satisfaction (Cook & Wall, 1980); organizational citizenship behavior (Campoy & Neveu, 2007; McAllister, 1995), organizational support (Chen et al., 2005; Celep & Yilmazturk, 2012; DeConinck, 2010; Tremblay et al., 2010; Whitener et al., 1998), organizational justice (Aryee et al., 2002 ; DeConinck 2010), organizational effectiveness (Mishra & Morrissey, 1990), organizational climate and culture (Ruppel & Harrington, 2000), and organizational commitment and involvement (Cook & Wall, 1980; Campoy & Neveu, 2007; Ferrin & Dirks, 2002).

As part of his research work, Guerrero & Herrbach (2009) specifically invoke organizational trust to explain employees' affective commitment. They note that employee trust is able to create a strong attachment to the organization. Additionally, and as mentioned previously, many studies have examined the positive impact of organizational support on organizational trust. According to social exchange theory, key human resource management practices have two

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characteristics: First, discretionary practices that involve a voluntary investment by the organization for the benefit of its employee. Secondly, they are practices that allow the organization to recognize individual achievements.

In this way, organizational support is the result of the different development and communication practices that are deployed in favor of the employees. In this perspective, the sharing of information within the organization implies the building of organizational trust, through organizational support.

This organizational climate takes place through the normative system, its guidelines and its operating principles, which more or less encourage the benevolence of the stakeholders. The current conception of good governance based on ever higher objectives to be reached, indicators at the service of shareholders and individual evaluation processes runs counter to the establishment of a climate of organizational trust.

4.2 Cultural antecedents

It seems impossible to us to identify practices that are sources of trust or not as such without inserting them in a particular socio-cultural context and taking into account how this context is influenced. Therefore, the cultural level of the antecedents of organizational trust has been extensively researched in different periods and contexts.

Culture, values and environment influence trust through the norms established as the prevailing culture in the organization and in subgroups influences the mental patterns of individuals, what they will expect and how they will interpret what they see (Lindenberg, 2000). All organizations act according to the dominant cultural standards. In contrast, people from cultures where power distance is important tend to value fairness over equality and to employ and value rules (Fischer, 2016). Furthermore, a decision-making system that encourages and promotes empathetic and benevolent behaviors in relationships allows its ecosystem to develop the emotional security necessary to generate the trust that is essential to collaboration and innovation.

According to Roy & Rivard (2014) knowledge management: is the creation and organized use of knowledge of the knowledge held by the members of an organization in order to help the organization to achieve its strategic objectives and to innovate.

In this context, organizational practices organizational practices, culture and processes are as crucial as the technological tools and means of tools and technological means of information management. The human element is at the heart of its of its implementation. Individualism and collectivism are two significant culturally derived traits that can impact whether or not people develop organizational trust in a work environment. In contrast to individualists, collectivists generally seem to tolerate blame from the hierarchy and show less negative reflexes towards perceptions of organizational trust and interpersonal justice (Leung et al., 2001).

Organizational culture can actually promote or deteriorate the social climate; it can be beneficial to the mobilization of personnel and to their effectiveness. The most important point is that the culture is shared by all employees and should not be an obstacle to progress.

4.3 Individual antecedents

In order to build organizational trust in, employees must "understand" their organizations, have confidence in its leaders, perceive that the processes are reliable because they are based on a sharing information, and finally, "feel spontaneously confident" with certain members of the organization with whom they share an important characteristic (Guerrero & Herrbach, 2009).

Concerning the individual level of antecedents, we obviously refer to the research of Jarvenpaa et al. (1998) who concluded that the propensity to trust is a general personality trait that reflects a general expectation of how much trust one should have. In the same sense, this

personality trait is meant to be stable in the relationship as well as from one situation to another. It is strongly influenced by the cultural, social, and developmental experiences of the trustor, as well as the personality type of the trustor (Jarvenpaa et al., 1998).

The propensity to trust is a general personality trait that reflects a basic expectation of how one person can trust within the organization. It has often been found that not everyone is equal when it comes to trust. Some people are more likely to trust, while others are more distrustful by nature.

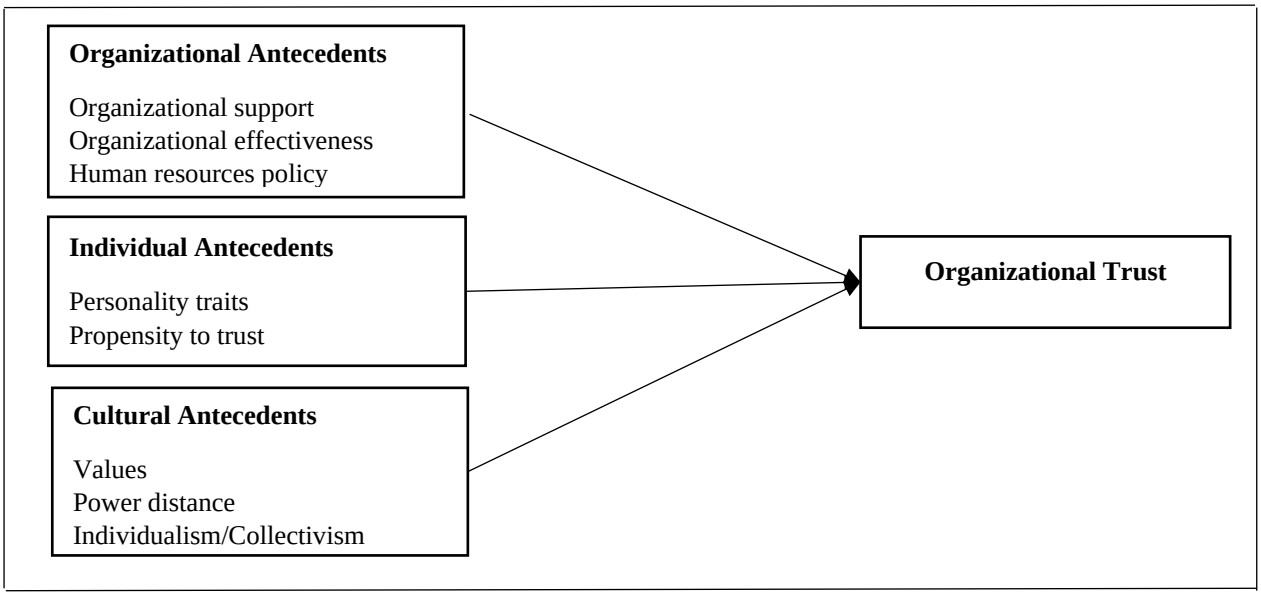
Thus, it can be inferred that personality traits are a crucial component of the antecedents of organizational trust. According to several researchers (Bigley & Pearce, 1998; Sztompka, 1999), the origins of this trust or distrust are to be found in the individual's past history of relationships within the family and other socialization groups (school, associations, organizations). It is the mark of personal history of past experiences of trust that is rooted and internalized in the individual's personality.

Conversely, practices that would use material resources, such as money, are not likely to be effective in developing perceptions of organizational trust, as they lead to an explicit, economical and identical exchange for all employees.

Globally, organizational trust is the employee's willingness to make himself or herself vulnerable to the employer's actions. In this approach, the organization is represented by its senior leaders and the procedures and options they implement, as well as how it can build trust.

In fine, as the schema represented below highlights (Figure 1) Organizational trust can be perceived through many levels by referring to antecedents, including organizational antecedents (Human resource policy, organizational support and organizational effectiveness), individual antecedents (Personality traits and propensity to trust), and cultural antecedents (Values, power distance, individualism/collectivism).

Figure 1 : ***Aggregated theoretical model of the antecedents of organizational trust :***



Source: *Authors*

5. Conclusion

The relevancy of organizational trust, is based on at least two sets of justifications: the characteristics of human action and social life in general, and the specific characteristics of the new social and economic context (Sztompka, 1999). We mainly have borrowed the concepts of organizational trust, therefore, the role of trust in the social exchange process is crucial. The trust accorded by the employee to each of his or her exchange partners is determined by the fairness of behaviors and attitudes. In essence, the exchange that is social in nature is based on

trust that indications of willingness will be reciprocated within a reciprocal and mutually trusting organizational context.

From the above, the perceptions related to the organization are the most treated in the literature, which proves the importance of understanding the organizational factors related to the perception of organizational trust. We have the investment in human capital that builds a feeling of support, encouragement and benevolence for the employee towards his organization.

While acknowledging these constructs' contributions, this research is sensitive to the pivotal nature of trust in the articulation of social exchange and Blau's (1964) formulation and insufficient studies supporting its role in the social exchange process in human resource management. Ultimately our conceptualization of overall organizational trust reflects each of the affective and cognitive dimensions that have been suggested to additively influence an individual's trustworthiness in an individual-organization social exchange relationship.

In this direction Human Resource Management practices that demonstrate that employees are highly valued and that their well-being is important indicate that the organization cares about its employees.

Going forward, to the extent that the present theoretical framework is useful, it is no longer a question of identifying organizational practices or individual characteristics that are sources of organizational trust in a result or cause-consequence approach. It is about understanding how individuals construct the perception of practices seen as trustworthy and the suspension of uncertainty, to figure out how these perceptions and this suspension emerge from the practices as well as understanding how practices emerge from the process. This work will advance the research on the antecedents of the concept of organizational trust in any human organization. We believe that this advance will be made in the more in-depth approach, which allows us to test the proposed model in different contexts.

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