

HORIZONTAL TRUST AMONG LECTURERS AT THE UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Abstract

Purpose: Horizontal trust among lecturers at universities seems to be particularly unexplored in the literature. The main purpose of this paper is to fill in this gap and is an attempt to answer the question: how lecturers perceive, address and reconstruct trust in their teaching.

Methodology: The data; narratives of lecturers, consists of told and written stories (N=23) collected in Finland, Hungary and the United Kingdom. Collecting multinational dataset is based on the European attempt of the harmonisation and internationalisation of education and on the cooperation of educational institutions. The narratives were analysed in two stages: first by narrative analysis and then by condensing textual data.

Findings: The results argue that trust creates trusting atmosphere between lecturers. Without trust cooperation between lecturers creates tension and difficulties. Trust creates welfare and good results for teaching. Without trust the lecturers cannot give their best to the students, colleagues and all in all to the university of the applied sciences. Trust makes it possible to change teaching methods and organisational structures at the universities of the applied sciences. Without trust working methods are difficult to develop. Trust contributes to good cooperation between lecturers and more positive results to develop academic education in Europe.

Originality/value: The results of this paper are consistent with previous research, however they shed light in much more detail on horizontal trust at universities emphasizing, among others, the fact that trust impacts the organization's success, and strengthens intra- and inter-organizational relationships.

Keywords: horizontal trust, university of applied sciences, intra-organisational relationships, lecturer

Paper type: Research paper

1. Introduction

Trust is a compound and multidimensional construct. Diverse studies on trust in multiple aspects of life using cross-disciplinary research approaches are numerous. Trust or a lack thereof has received recently considerate attention both in business

and academic environment. There is little systematic research regarding the nature of trust and how it is developed in academic communities (Daly and Chrispeels, 2008). Presumably trust in organizations has received the most interest of the researchers (Mayer and Gavin, 2005; Connell et al., 2003; Mayer and Davis, 1999; Clark and Payne, 1997), therefore it can be stated that the latest increase of literature on trust indicates that both practitioners and researchers recognise the significance of trust in determining the success of each organisation as it has been proven that trust reinforces inter- and intra-organisational relationships (Svensson, 2005). Research suggests that interpersonal trust is linked to cooperation, performance, and communication in organizations. According to Reed (2001 and 2003) universities became just like any other organisation (where managerial tools derived from industrial sector have been introduced), and for that reason trust is the core of every relationship also at the universities of applied sciences (Judaeh, 2012). Bearing in mind trust is earned slowly and destroyed quickly (Lewicka and Krot, 2012) building trust in day-to-day academic life belongs to the main lecturers' skills (Yukl, 2010). Researchers claim that the organisations' leaders develop workplace-related trust (Fairholm, 1994; Shaw, 1997). Hence, leaders in particular should initiate this process and set a good example in building high quality relationships that promote trust with and among their colleagues. With this regards educational trust is a perception of how a lecturer is trusted by the students and how lecturers trust each other.

Day-to-day social exchange within a university is a key factor for transforming teaching and achieving organisational success. This approach leads to the idea of social trust. In this way human behaviour, such as respect, listening, courage, being knowledgeable and skilled, supportive working environment are of greater importance in the daily academic work than any organisational structure. Summarizing it seems to be legitimate to explore the nature of social trust and its meaning in the context of the universities of applied sciences and lecturers. This paper aims to study those research questions. The main purpose of this paper, however, is an attempt to answer the question: how lecturers perceive, address and reconstruct trust in their teaching. The order of this paper is as follows: theoretical background, methodological solutions, empirical findings and results.

2. Theory

According to Hardy and McGrath (1989) trust is multidimensional, where each dimension alters depending on the situational and time-bound background, emotions, relations, parties and tasks concerned. Grudzewski and his colleagues (2009) present an opinion that trust occurs when trustee becomes voluntarily dependent on trustor feeling safe at the same time and not fearing negative consequences. Trust "may be a 'meso' concept, integrating microlevel psychological processes and group dynamics with macrolevel institutional

arrangements” (House et al., 1995). Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer (1998) argue, that “trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another”. Conceivably the definition of trust that is used the most widely is the one from Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995); that is: “trust is 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”. Whilst in the literature no omnipresent definition of trust can be found, the concept of trust by Mayer et al., (1995) as a willingness to be vulnerable, seems to be to most common, based upon trustee’s belief regarding the trustor’s competence, reliability, honesty and benevolence (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000, p. 556). Tschannen-Moran (2004) argues also that a supervisor should be considerate and sensitive with regards to employees needs and interests, furthermore should protect employees’ rights, and not exploit trustees for his/her personal gain. Therefore, in order to establish trust with subordinates a supervisor needs to prove to be competent. Bryk and Schneider (2002) present a similar approach to trust, which they define as an engagement in a relationship and willingness to be vulnerable provided that a trustor possesses particular personal characteristics, such as openness, respect and competence.

For the purposes of this paper the certain definitions of trust with regards to universities of applied sciences have been chosen. The concepts of trust used in business environment are not particularly suitable in the context of academic organisations. The relationships at universities vary significantly from those in organizations as the former occur between two specialists (lecturer-lecturer/ lecturer-supervisor) who are experts in their fields, and the latter rather between employee and his/her manager, where hierarchy is vital and where employee relies on his/her manager for promotions, performance evaluations and work assignments (Knoll and Gill, 2011). The relations between colleagues at universities are rarely hierarchic and vertical. They are mainly based on cooperation, exchange of experiences where leadership is not such a significant and strong feature (especially on certain career levels). That is why, the following terms have been selected:

Whilst speaking about relational trust, one means relationships between all stakeholders which are present in the daily work at a university. At universities which, as mentioned above, are specific kinds of organisations, three types of trust can be identified: institutional (impersonal), vertical and horizontal trust. According to Mayer and his colleagues (1995) the former is trust between stakeholders and a whole organisation (university in this case), vertical trust emerges between superiors and subordinates, and the latter refers to relations between all parties. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue that relational trust “is

forged in daily social exchanges”. It is an interaction over time between trustor and trustee. Interaction, emotion, reliability and dependability are integral parts of trust. In the trust-based relations trustee as well as trustor take risk to be rejected. Relational trust is characterised by mutual loyalty and support. This means increasing acceptance of new opportunities without fear. Failure is not taken personal but is more a learning point for develop and improving cooperation.

For the purpose of this paper, the authors chose to research horizontal trust at universities, which means focusing mainly on relational trust among lecturers. However, relational trust between lectures cannot be omitted. A high level of relational trust requires development of academic culture among many studies (Harris et al., 2013; Lovat, 2009; Scandura et al., 2008). This means that the relationships are anchored in the social behaviour. Every lecturer, supervisor and student have their own understanding of relational trust and its influence on a daily work. Every stakeholder at a university has his/her own expectations, obligations and demands. Understanding personal needs and hopes creates or destroys relational trust. Trust in academic relationships is an intriguing topic. Effective communication and high level of relational trust create successful teaching (Chapman, 2011). However, developing relational trust demands time and acceptance of the culture of the educational organisation. Lecturers are bound by the overall principles of administrative procedures. The lecturers’ work is limited by mental and material resources. It is difficult to create relational trust if a lecturer feels unfair and underestimated against her/his teaching subject and teaching style from her/his colleagues. As a common observable fact in academic environment lecturers often cooperate and get support from their colleagues in their daily work (Harris et al., 2013).

2.1. Mutual respect

Unesco (2014) has developed curricular framework named “Teaching Respect for All”. The reason for this is increasing racism, xenophobia and intolerance. The aim is to cultivate respect for all people regardless of colour, gender, nationality, ethnical or religious background. In academic working environment it means cooperation without racism and promoting tolerance. The core of horizontal trust is to openly share knowledge, exchange experiences, and transfer information between colleagues. Horizontal trust is vital for knowledge acquisition (Loon and Hoe, 2007), therefore a lecturer should not fear to express different opinions. Respecting the expertise and knowledge that other lecturers brought to the academic environment is fundamental in trust.

Students of universities of applied sciences are mainly adults, who sometimes study for their second or third profession. Working with adults requires different teaching approach than whilst working with young students. Every lecturer has his/her own teaching style, but lecturers’ professionalism and approach to teaching

is always under control of both their supervisors and students. Understanding this creates opportunities but also obstacles for cooperation among lecturers, supervisors and students. Without mutual respect or trust, social communication is difficult especially at universities, where all staff are highly educated individuals. Open-minded and active listening is more important than speaking when creating mutual respect and trust. Learning active listening is difficult, especially when the discussion topics and values are different. However active listening is essential for building trust and mutual respect.

2.2. Ethical solutions and trust

The values, ethical choices and the concept of lecturers and their supervisors are the starting points for the promotion of importance of trust in increasingly multicultural academic environment. The moral and religious values of the individuals are diverse in the multicultural teaching environment. Sometimes, different views could be seen as a lack of commitment to the lectures and student's welfare. The lack of welfare can negatively impact the confidence toward trust.

2.3. Individual trust

Trust-based working environment enhances professional teaching approaches. Trust becomes then a form of capital; intellectual, social, spiritual and financial capital which is interrelated and underpinned (Harris et al., 2013). Intellectual capital refers to the level of knowledge in the taught subject and teaching skills. Social capital refers to the formal and informal partnership and networks between lecturers supported by the university administration. Spiritual capital refers to the moral purposes among values, beliefs and attitudes. Financial capital refers to the material availability to support the lecturers' teaching. University authorities have important role in developing trust and promoting a trustful culture. Individual trust impacts the cooperation between lecturers. Mutual encouragement is a key concept in developing trust. In this context, all members of university tend to accept greater responsibility for the role that they play in students' education. The relationship between lecturers is linked to increasing effectiveness and trust at universities (Harris et al., 2013).

2.4. Benefits of trust

With trust among lecturers of academic education enables promotion of desired outcomes. Trust also creates equality between lecturers as well as between lecturers and students. Lecturers highly appreciate working environment where communication is open and university administration supports lecturers work without heavy bureaucratic rules. By that way, it is possible to promote non-discrimination and non-educational segregation (Harris et al., 2013). When

teachers trust each other it enhances sharing decision-making processes. It results in increased satisfaction, engagement and morale. Horizontal trust-based relationship between lecturers is dependent upon individual characteristics like openness, compassion, respect, honesty, confidentiality, integrity and commitment (O'Brian, 2011).

3. Methodology

The core of this article is a horizontal trust among lecturers at universities of applied sciences. The purpose of this research is to answer a question how lecturers perceive vertical trust, address and reconstruct it in their teaching. The data; narratives of lecturers, consists of told and written stories (N=23) collected in Finland (N=15), Hungary (N=5) and United Kingdom (N=3). Finland represents the northern dimension, Hungary a country of the European Union with market economy, and the United Kingdom a multicultural society. The selection of these three countries as research entities was mainly due to their diversity and complexity. Hungary is a developing economy where a gender pay gap can be noted, which means that there are enduring inequalities between women and men in the labour market (Whitehouse, 2003). The United Kingdom on the other hand has the most culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse society in the whole Europe. Finland was a primary choice of the authors due to the accessibility of the sample. Collecting multinational dataset is based on the European attempt of the harmonisation and internationalisation of education and on the cooperation of academic institutions. Although respondents come from the European cultural circle, it was expected that due to the specific socio-cultural conditions of individual countries, respondents will report slightly differentiated problems. The purpose of such sample selection was to obtain the fullest picture of the studied phenomena from different perspectives from various countries. The narratives were analysed in two stages: first by narrative analysis and then by condensing textual data. The interviews in Finland and Hungary have been conducted face-to-face, where the interviews in the United Kingdom were collected in a written form. The sample comes from various universities of applied sciences (N=5) in those three countries. The interviewees are of different age and both natives and foreigners from different countries. The participants were assured about the confidentiality of their responses and that their identities would not be revealed. The outcome of the interviews were 800 pages of written stories. The chosen examples argue the importance of trust in the universities of applied sciences.

The first methodological stage of this study was a narrative analysis. The aim was to identify the kinds of stories told about the research phenomenon and the kinds of story representing the phenomenon in culture and society. Evaluation concerning condensing textual data by Teun A. van Dijk (1976, 1980, 1993)

has been adopted in this research. Every approach to data is problem-oriented and interdisciplinary. This kind of viewpoint is characterized by the common interest in demystifying ideologies and power through systematic investigation of spoken and written data. The main idea is to understand how trust is seen in the interviews.

4. Results

4.1. Relational trust in horizontal relationships

According to empirical findings it is argued by authors that:

Relational trust (horizontal trust) is created in the everyday work at the universities of applied sciences. It is built by lecturers, supervisors and students by understanding, empathy, commitment to work, encouragements and forgiveness. It is a social exchange between colleagues, supervisors and students. It is based on mutual respect.

Harris et al. (2013; cf. Hargreaves et al., 2007) argue that “Finland is a ‘high trust’ country as far as school are concerned. High levels of achievements for students from Finland have been an outcome of strategies that have been in place for several decades. These strategies include relational trust, cooperation and responsibility at all levels of the education system”.

4.2. Mutual respect

Universities of applied sciences are more and more multicultural even in the Northern Europe. The staff have different cultural and religious background. Teaching language may be English, which is not everyone’s native language. One example tells that...

...we have students and staff from China, Iran, Ethiopia, Vietnam and of course from Finland. Our teaching language is English. Religions and cultural backgrounds impose some tensions. We need to tolerate different kinds of behaviour. The starting point is to respect each other.

Hungarian respondent

A woman from the department of physiotherapy said:

This teaching subject demands polite behaviour. Both lecturers and students have different understanding of human body. We have patients and when we exam their body we need to protect women and men cultural understanding of body. This means sometimes difficulties in how to teach different parts of human body

... so we need to be very sensitive what we are saying and how we exam female and male bodies.

Respondent from the United Kingdom

It has been clearly stated that mutual respect is a starting point in building horizontal and vertical trust between lecturers, students and their patients.

4.3. Ethical solutions and trust

A lecturer said that at her university there is an ethical committee, which handles all issues that occur in the classrooms. For example, if a student has proclaimed that s/he has been evaluated in a wrong way due to her/his religious background, the ethical committee asks both the teacher and the student to discuss this issue. The aim is to create a solution that would be good to everyone.

Ethical solutions are important especially in the nursing department. We discuss how to treat a human being who has for example cancer and is dying or having baby. So, we face all parts of human life from cradle to grave. That is why we need to understand ethical solutions. We need to respect life, disabled people, sickness and health.

Another lecturer said that if a student cannot be ethical in his/her work, s/he is not suitable for care work as s/he cannot be trusted.

4.4. Individual trust

A principal lecturer in the technical sciences shared her experiences of individual trust:

I have studied and worked abroad. I speak 5 different languages, I have not faced any prejudices when I worked abroad, but when I entered back to Finland I did. For example, my male colleagues did not believe in what I said. Always they wanted to re-evaluate my word. Even my boss – a man – behaved in the same way. When they noticed that I was right they did not say anything ... They did not believe me, because I was an only woman in this department.

Respondent from Finland

Another example from man's perspective from nursing department tells the same story:

I was very young and honestly speaking, I did not know much about my work. Still my female colleagues believed me... Perhaps the reason was that I am a young man who just graduated and my colleagues were older women...

Respondent from Hungary

A woman said that in her department of physiotherapy, they have meetings where they have discussed trust. This has inclined more confidence between colleagues and managers. According to her story, atmosphere in her organisation is good and trustful. If there are problems it will immediately be a subject of the meetings of the staff.

These three samples show how difficult it is to trust. These examples argue the importance of developing trust at workplace.

4.5. Benefit of trust

All interviews as well as the literature used in this article argue the benefits of trust. Trust creates a trusting atmosphere between lecturers and supervisors. Without trust, co-operation between lecturers and supervisors creates tension and difficulties. Trust creates welfare and good results at work. Without trust the staff cannot give their best to the students, colleagues and all in all to the university of the applied sciences. Trust is essential to success of students and universities. Trust facilitates changing working methods and organisational structures.

5. Conclusions and implications

The literature emphasizes the complexity and multiple dimension of trust, and as per Khodyakov (2007) the researchers present numerous definitions, characteristics and nature of trust. The participants of this study seem to be aware of the importance of the trust at universities amongst all academic staff. Regarding the horizontal trust at universities, organizations that focus on the education and training of highly-qualified employees and academic staff, the interviewees saw a strong relationship between trust and gender. Historical and cultural factors in some countries make women's position in the workplace very limited and sometimes the differences between the position of a man and a woman are evident. Even though organizations aim to reduce the discrimination towards women in the workplace, the problem seems to be still existing (Reszke, 1990). The above-mentioned statement from a Hungarian respondent proves that in some countries the gender-related issues still occur and impact both vertical and horizontal trust at universities. Therefore, in some countries men are in a better position regarding trust than women. The following research proved that trust is highly correlated with gender in some countries, research has not yet determined the exact cause and the paths to overcome the moments of gender-related issues to establish a strong trusting environment. The interviewees highlight the role of respect towards the cultural standards and values of other cultures (such as for example, with regards to examining the human body) as a significant factor in building trust. Despite the fact that according to the literature, demonstrating competence should build trust, in some countries, especially with patriarchal cultures, it can come to gender-based stereotypes and prejudices in terms of competences and

trust. Mutual respect regarding the knowledge, skills and beliefs was emphasized in many of the respondents' stories. Benefits of horizontal trust at universities of applied sciences are undeniable: trust enhances trusting atmosphere at workplace, limits tensions and issues. Horizontal trust among lecturers contributes to strengthening cooperation, support, exchange of experiences, knowledge and expertise transfer, and information transfer between colleagues. Both a trustee and trustor are responsible for trust and benefit from it. The reciprocity of trust is of high importance. Manson (1986), Daniel and West (2006) stresses that the main ethical issues that include distrust/trust implications are accuracy, property and consistency of the information which is strictly combined with the knowledge and experience sharing. However, the insufficiency of those two constructs, trust and ethics, in conjunction seems to be less explored in literature and therefore could be an objective for further research. The following research indicates that trust is a core factor at universities and building and enhancing trust amongst lecturers and other academic staff seem to be of high value. Such knowledge is vital for such organizations as universities to be able to educate and train highly-qualified academics and enable the proper performance. It is a significant challenge for the contemporary organizations, such as universities, and the people managing them.

6. Research limitations and further research directions

The following research has limitation that is a relatively small research sample, that makes it impossible to formulate conclusions of general nature. The obtained results impose the need for further in-depth research on trust and they could be treated as a starting point for conducting quantitative research on a representative sample. It would be worthwhile to extend the research in the future to address the key issue, which is trust at universities. It would also be interesting to conduct research on trust at universities from various, diverse countries. It would be of high value to focus on longitudinal research on trust to observe the dynamics of trust development and at the same time to identify the factors influencing the formation and erosion of trust. Limited research on the topic of intra-organizational trust at universities can be noted as the vast majority of research on this kind of trust has been conducted in typical organizations. Intra-organisational trust at universities is a very complex and multidimensional construct and appears to be an interesting research field.

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