

TRUST AMONG EMPLOYEES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Numerous studies highlight the important role of trust in the operation of a successful organization. The existence of trust between management and employees is essential for competitiveness, just as it is also important that colleagues have sufficient trust in each other. The aim of our study is to map the extent and form of trust in higher education institutions dealing with economic education in Hungary. We examined three forms of the existence and level of trust - towards management, towards colleagues and towards different organizations. Based on the results obtained, we came to the conclusion that the respondents trusted their colleagues to the greatest extent. No significant relations can be shown between the answers according to gender, but there is a correlation between the location of the institution. Overall, employees in capital institutions trust their superiors significantly more, than employees working in rural higher education institutions. Those, who trust their superiors to a greater extent feel motivated, trust organizations to a greater extent. They feel that they are treated fairly, they are proud of the organization, feel recognized and appreciated, and are committed to the institution.

Key words: human capital, higher education, workplace trust, effects of trust, motivation

JEL Code: M54, I23, O15

Introduction

In our own working conditions, in many cases we are faced with situations where a lack of trust or excessive trust between manager-subordinate or subordinate-subordinate causes problems and misunderstandings. Moreover, it causes extra work, new inspections, unnecessary expenses (time and money) in a visible and tangible way. Several publications have been presented on the topic in recent years, but the focus of the investigations is mostly on functioning organizations or social relations. In our case, higher education staff were the focus. The national culture of the examined country is relatively closed. The reasons for this are rooted in our past and history. Since Central and Eastern Europe suffered two world wars and people lived under

the ideas of socialism and communism for a long time, the behavior and way of thinking are influenced by those ideologies. The countries know that they have to catch up, that they have to open up to Western thinking, behavior, and economic organization, but this is a difficult and long process. Currently, due to our historical roots, our cultures are still defined by individualism, knowledge retention, distance and hidden fears. Since the current corporate operation and economic conditions in our country are based on these historical and cultural foundations, human relations do not support the establishment of trusting relationships in the workplace. Having experienced and reflected on the organizational problems caused by this behavior, the following research questions were formulated: Who do colleagues working in higher education trust the most? Is there a significant difference between male and female respondents? Does the location of the institution (capital city, countryside) influence the answers to the questions?

1 The importance of trust

The presence of trust in an organisation has many other benefits. It enhances employee collaboration, knowledge sharing and effective problem solving. All stakeholders, whether business partners, managers, consumers, employees or customers, are affected by trust (Covey, 2013). Increasing trust among employees also reduces the cost of control and thus has a demonstrable economic impact (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

Trust and similar values such as loyalty, appreciation and pride in the organisation are also referred to by economists as 'external economic effects'. The term represents goods and commodities that have a quantifiable economic value. They increase the efficiency of the system, but they are not goods that can reasonably be sold on the free market (Hamori, 2004). The degree of trust an employee has in his or her superior is influenced by the personality of the superior himself or herself and, most importantly, by his or her communication.

In a previous study examining the influence of managers' communication strategy as a function of subordinates' trust levels, it was found that the most effective interpersonal communication strategy (Porumbescu et al. 2013).

Other research confirms that the diversity of peer interactions in the community is positively related to trust in the workplace and that there is no significant difference between Western and Eastern, i.e. individualistic and collectivistic societies (Cui et al. 2018).

2 Methodology

Our study aims to explore trust and its different levels in institutions of higher education in the field of economics in Hungary. Higher education in Hungary has undergone radical changes in the last decade. This includes the way in which higher education is governed, funded and prioritised. Changes in organisation, ownership and structure have been coupled with instability in student numbers, leading to uncertainty. Today, there is intense competition for students between universities. This is a global phenomenon, occurring in every country in the world.

Human resources (HR) is a key concern for organisations. It is important to provide an atmosphere and a working environment that meets the needs of employees, because a satisfied employee is more productive and more loyal to the organisation. This applies to all organisations without exception, irrespective of their field of activity. For employees to feel secure at work, trust is essential, and this is the subject of our research.

Our research was carried out using a validated questionnaire, which was sent electronically to the dean of the institution/faculty concerned. We asked them to forward it to their staff. We examined three forms of the existence and level of trust:

- towards management,
- towards staff,
- and to the various committees and bodies.

We used Likert-type scale questions, except for questions on demographics and the location of the institution. Participants in the survey were asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 5 to how much they agreed with the statements (1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree). The following research questions were asked:

Q1 Who do staff in higher education trust the most?

Q2 Is there a significant difference between male and female respondents?

Q3 Does the location of the institution (Budapest, rural) influence the answers to the questions?
Is there a significant difference between the responses of those working in Budapest and those working in rural areas?

We also looked at other factors associated with the existence of trust in superiors. The results of our research are presented in the next chapter.

3 Results

The questionnaires were sent out in phases in 2020 and 2021. A representative sample was sought, so it was sent to all business education institutions in the country. In total, 239

questionnaires were collected. We received 60 responses from institutions in Budapest and 179 from rural institutions. Female respondents (142) outnumbered male respondents (97). A total of 61 faculties/institutions participated in our survey. From rural institutions, 109 female and 70 male respondents completed our questionnaire. From the capital city institutions, 24 men and 36 women participated in the survey. Most of the respondents had a university and/or college associate professor degree (63).

3.1 Examining research questions

Q1 - Who do colleagues in higher education trust the most?

The mean and standard deviation of the sample surveyed shows that university staff have the highest level of trust in their colleagues. Trust in colleagues has the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation. Respondents have the least trust in committees. This shows the lowest mean and the highest variance (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Examination of the level of confidence in the total sample

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
trust in superiors	1	5	3,81	0,949
trust in colleagues	2	5	3,99	0,703
trust in committees	1	5	3,72	1,004

Source: Authors' own research

The data were also analysed by gender of respondents. The values obtained are summarised in Table 2. The data show that there is no major difference between male and female respondents. Both genders have the highest level of trust in their colleagues, followed by their superiors and the least in boards and committees.

Tab. 2: Responses by gender in the total sample

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
trust in superiors	Male	94	3,79	0,971
	Female	142	3,83	0,938
trust in colleagues	Male	94	4,04	0,775
	Female	142	3,96	0,651
trust in committees	Male	94	3,72	1,062
	Female	142	3,73	0,969

Source: Authors' own research

The sample was analysed by the location of the institution and the gender of the respondents. Respondents working in institutions in the capital city (Table 3) were most likely to trust their superiors and least likely to trust the boards of the institutions.

Tab. 3: Responses from employees in the capital's institutions

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
trust in superiors	Budapest	60	4,1	0,824
	Male	24	3,87	1,014
	Female	36	4,25	0,649
trust in colleagues	Budapest	60	4,14	0,392
	Male	24	4,13	0,344
	Female	36	4,14	0,424
trust in committees	Budapest	60	3,9	0,923
	Male	24	3,96	0,976
	Female	36	3,86	0,899

Source: Authors' own research

However, there are already differences in the gender distribution. Female respondents have more trust in their superiors and colleagues. They also trust boards the least. Male respondents, on the other hand, will trust their colleagues most in the boards and, surprisingly, least in their superiors. The responses from rural-based institutions are presented in Table 4.

Tab. 4: Responses from employees in institutions based in rural areas

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
trust in superiors	Rural	179	3,72	0,971
	Male	71	3,76	0,963
	Female	106	3,69	0,979
trust in colleagues	Rural	179	3,94	0,784
	Male	71	4,01	0,870
	Female	106	3,89	0,721
trust in committees	Rural	179	3,68	1,006
	Male	71	3,65	1,084
	Female	106	3,71	0,956

Source: Authors' own research

For the rural population, trust in colleagues predominates and trust in bodies is the least trusted. This is true for both male and female respondents.

Q2 Is there a significant difference between male and female respondents?

Our second research question asked whether there was a significant difference between the responses and the gender of the respondents (Table 5).

Tab. 5: Total sample responses - by gender

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
trust in superiors	0,173	0,678	-0,346	234	0,73
			-0,343	194,334	0,732
trust in colleagues	1,863	0,174	0,908	234	0,365
			0,876	175,011	0,382
trust in committees	0,557	0,456	-0,015	234	0,988
			-0,014	186,408	0,989

Source: Authors' own research

The ANOVA test for the whole sample did not show a significant relationship for any of the questions on trust. For all three questions, the significance level was greater than the cut-off value. When looking at the whole sample, there was no significant difference between the gender of the respondents.

Q3 Does the location of the institution (Budapest, rural) influence the answers to the questions? Is there a significant difference between the responses of staff in Budapest and those in rural areas?

Next, we examined whether there was a significant difference between the responses for each trust and the location of the institution (Budapest, rural) (Table 6). A two-sample T-test was used. The assumptions are that the two samples are normally distributed and that homogeneity of variance is satisfied.

Tab. 6: Results of two-sample T test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
trust in superiors	5,01	0,026	2,563	234	0,011
			2,76	114,048	0,007
trust in colleagues	4,488	0,035	1,61	234	0,109
			2,131	185,148	0,034
trust in committees	0,577	0,448	1,085	234	0,279
			1,091	100,303	0,278

Source: Authors' own research

The F-test was significant for the first two criteria tested, so the Welch test data were used. Welch's test was significant for trust in superiors ($\text{sign.}0.007 < 0.05$) and for trust in co-workers ($\text{sign.}0.034 < 0.05$). This means that for these two types of trust, there is a significant difference between the location of the institutions of the participants in the study.

For the third confidence tested (between boards and committees), the F test is not significant ($\text{Sign. } 0.557 > 0.005$), i.e. the homogeneity of variance condition is met. The corresponding value is higher than the threshold ($\text{Sign.}0.448 > 0.005$). The results therefore show that the degree of confidence in boards and committees does not depend on the location of the institution.

The results obtained indicate that the degree of trust towards superiors and colleagues is significantly affected by the location of the respondents' institution. This means that respondents working in institutions in Budapest have significantly more trust in supervisors and colleagues than respondents working in institutions in rural areas..

Tab. 7: Correlation analyses

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
trust in the committee/board	,580**	0,000	236
motivation from superiors	,568**	0,000	236
a feeling of being treated with respect	,539**	0,000	236
pride in the institution	,509**	0,000	236
recommending the institution to acquaintances	,508**	0,000	236
a feeling of recognition and appreciation	,496**	0,000	236

Source: Authors' own research

In the next phase of our research, we wanted to find out what other factors are associated with trust in superiors. The strength of the relationship between the variables was subjected to correlation tests (Table 7). Several factors were identified and listed according to their strength.

The strongest relationship is for trust in boards ($p=0.58$). The results show that those who trust their superiors have significantly higher levels of trust in committees and boards. The reverse is also true. There is also a relationship with motivation from superiors, feeling treated fairly, pride in the institution, recommending the institution to acquaintances, and feeling recognized and appreciated as an educator.

Overall, those who trust their superiors also trust their boards and committees. They are regularly motivated by their superiors, they feel they are treated fairly, they feel appreciated for their work, they are proud of the institution and would recommend it to their acquaintances.

4 Discussions

Examining trust in an organization can mean both trust in the members of that organization and trust in the organization as an institution (Kováts, 2018), as we examined in our research. Trust in organizations mediates the relationship between trust in employees and organizational outcomes (Tan, H. H., & Lim, A. K. 2009) This relationship was not examined in our research.

However, previous findings confirm that employees who trust their organisation are more committed and loyal to it (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2000, Weibel et al., 2016), which is also evident from the results of the present study. Bilginoğlu et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between respect and trust in organisations and employees' job satisfaction. They pointed out that trust in organizations fully mediates the relationship between respect for organizations and job satisfaction. These previous research findings are both confirmed and complemented by the results of our own research. We believe that the development of human relations in the workplace is a complex process, influenced by the interaction of many factors, but our research and previous studies have shown that trust plays a crucial role in shaping culture and thus the success of an organisation.

5 Conclusions

Workplace relationships based on trust are closely linked to organisational culture. Trust can be seen as a kind of "glue". The trust that employees have in each other and in their superiors has a major impact on the workplace atmosphere, team spirit and, indirectly, on the success and competitiveness of the company. A lack of trust can have serious consequences.

For example, unduly strict internal rules, frequent disagreements leading to a complete lack of cooperation and flexibility. Openness to innovation is reduced, and (because everything is regulated) an independent approach is compromised. Ultimately, all these factors have a negative impact on organisational effectiveness.

If employees do not trust each other, instead of cooperation, rivalry and competition arise, and sooner or later the organisation suffers. In our research, we investigated 3 levels of trust among faculty members in higher education institutions: trust in superiors, trust in colleagues, and trust in the organisations that operate in the institutions. Our findings suggest that lecturers have the highest levels of trust in their colleagues. This is true for both genders. When examining responses by the location of the institution, statistically significant differences were found. Those working in metropolitan institutions have significantly more trust in superiors and colleagues than those working in rural institutions. We also wanted to explore what other factors might be associated with the presence/absence of trust. Correlation calculations showed how important motivation and fair treatment from superiors, recognition and appreciation are in terms of trust. If the employee feels that he or she has all these things, he or she will also have more trust in the boards, take pride in the institution and spread its reputation and recommend it to his or her friends.

A limitation of our research is that we only charted one country. Although the organisations surveyed are a representative sample, the same cannot be said for the distribution of respondents. Thus, it is not possible to generalise the conclusions as our results are only valid for the sample. With a different sample content in a different country, different results may be obtained. However, we agree with the view that further research on the topic is needed (Guinot, J. & Chiva, R. 2019, Weibel et. al. 2016).

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