An Investigatory Research on Organizational Trust and its Relationship with Job Satisfaction and Psychological Contract Breach

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Abstract

Trust in the work environment often has been associated with being a positive antecedent to many desirable organizational outcomes. Developing favorable organizational relationships builds trust, which might lead to an increase in job satisfaction and a positive attitude toward honoring psychological contracts. Using a quantitative research design, the present study explored the relationship between organizational trust and the related variables of job satisfaction and psychological contracts. An online survey was administered across various regions of the United States and information from 144 participants was collected. A Pearson's correlation technique was utilized to analyze the data collected and two significant findings emerged. First, there is a strong positive correlation between organizational trust and psychological contracts (employer obligations). This finding indicates employees who perceive their employer has fulfilled organizational obligations and commitment and honored all psychological contracts, both perceived and implied, have greater perceptions of organizational trust. The second finding showed a positive, moderate relationship exists between organizational trust and job satisfaction. Therefore, increases in organizational trust are associated with increases in job satisfaction and vice versa.

Keywords: trust, organizational trust, job satisfaction, psychological contracts.

Categories: Research, Quantitative, Organizational Behavior

"**Trust is a psychological state** comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intention or behavior of another" (Rousseau, Stikin, Burt, & Cammerer, 1998, p. 395). Trust is not a behavior or a choice, but an underlying psychological condition that can cause or result from such actions and is important to organizational life and success (Caldwell, 2012). High levels of organizational trust increase job satisfaction, organizational citizenship and commitment (Noble-Nkrumah & Anyigba, 2022; Akar, 2018) and relate positively to job satisfaction (Aygun, 2021). Organizational trust has been correlated with increases in job satisfaction impacting the effectiveness and motivation of workers to perform in their job environment (Lambert, Qureshi, Nalla, Holbrook & Frank, 2022) and is a significant predictor of job satisfaction (Sarikaya & Kara, 2020). Conversely, mistrust may lead to behaviors grounded in self-interest (Caldwell, 2012) and may lead to increased turnover intentions (Ababneh, 2020). In addition, the lack of organizational trust may influence workplace deviant behavior (Azim, Hassan, Zaid & Daud, 2020). Further, trust is necessary before psychological contracts can be determined; as such, contracts are informal by nature (Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1989). A psychological contract is an unwritten set of expectations between the employee and the employer. It includes informal arrangements, mutual beliefs, common ground, and perceptions between the two parties. Psychological contracts may have a positive impact on the level of organizational trust (Ahmad & Zafar, 2018; Robinson, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

The issue addressed in this research study relates to the implications of trust within organizations pertaining to job satisfaction and employee-employer psychological contract fulfillment. Empirical research has shown that trust within organizations is often a difficult endeavor to develop and sustain (Lilly, 2020), but can be viewed as a fundamental building block for increasing a positive employee-employer relationship (Liu & Ren, 2022; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Lamsa & Pucetaite, 2006; Schoorman, Mayer & Davis, 2007). As a social phenomenon, trust is also a strong construct for managing human capital and is a positive antecedent for increasing/decreasing the overall performance levels of an organization's workforce (Liu & Ren, 2022; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

In addition to organizational trust, organizations should be mindful of job satisfaction as it has been proven to increase both performance and commitment within organizations (Noble-Nkrumah & Anyigba, 2022; Wang & Bower, 2019; Akar, 2018). The negative antecedents of job satisfaction can manifest into job dissatisfaction which increases turnover intentions, absenteeism, stress, and reduces the performance levels of firms, costing firms both valuable time and money (Wang & Bower, 2019). Many organizations have struggled to maintain a workforce capable of long-term commitment, and dissatisfaction with an employee's job often results from lack of pay, promotion opportunities, poor management, or negative experiences in the workplace (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Wang & Bower, 2019; Locke, 1995; Locke & Latham, 1990).

A third component of this research includes an examination of the relationship between organizational trust and psychological contract violation. Psychological contracts are both mutual and reciprocal (Tufan & Wendt, 2020; Li & Chen, 2018; Dabos & Rousseau, 2004). Psychological contract breaches in the employment relationship often cause perceptions to manifest negatively into unhealthy emotional states as contracts are broken or obligations left unfulfilled (Liang, 2019; Paille & Raineri, 2016; Dabos & Rousseau, 2004; Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1989). Psychological contracts are a valuable component in the employee-employer relationship; however, what is missing from research is to understand the relationship or role between trust and psychological contract violation or fulfillment. Therefore, this

study may contribute to the working body of knowledge of organizational trust by understanding its relationships with job satisfaction and psychological contract violation.

Methods

Research Design

A quantitative research method was used to determine if a relationship existed between organizational trust, job satisfaction, and psychological contract violation. The survey population for this study consisted of volunteer survey participants in the United States (U.S.) who were recruited by SurveyMonkey to participate. The target population for this research included U.S. business professionals with various backgrounds in consideration of gender, race, age, income, and employment levels (supervisory and non-supervisory). The SurveyMonkey market research team provided survey takers (i.e., panelists) through the selected demographic criteria.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question for this study is: How does organizational trust relate to job satisfaction and psychological contracts within an organization's work environment? A review of the literature provided valuable insight regarding the relationship between leadership and organizational trust, psychological contracts and organizational trust, and organizational trust and job satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed. Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between organizational trust and job satisfaction. Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between organizational trust and psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employer obligations). Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employee obligations). Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between organizational trust and psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employee obligations).

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study comprises four sections. The first section (Organizational Trust Scale) was used to measure three dimensions of the variable of organizational trust. The second section (Brayfield and Rothe Job Satisfaction Index) was used to measure the variable of job satisfaction. The third section (Psychological Contract Inventory) was used to measure the variable of psychological contract fulfillment/violation. Lastly, the fourth section included biographical data.

The Organizational Trust Scale (OTS) was created to measure the variable of organizational trust. The OTS questionnaire consists of 22 questions on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – Absolutely not agree to 5 – Absolutely agree. The instrument was found to be valid (Bastug, Pala, Kumartasli, Gunel, & Duyan, 2016) and the current questionnaire components were tested for reliability using the Cronbach alpha procedure with a resulting reliability score of $a = .86$ (trust to supervision), $a = .81$ (trust to colleagues), and, $a = .90$ (trust with employer).

This study also employed the use of Brayfield and Rothe's Job Satisfaction Index (BRJSI) to measure job satisfaction. The BRJSI questionnaire itemizes 20 Likert scale responses on a five-point agreement scale that ranges from "strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, strongly agree" (Asadi, Fadakar, Khoshnodifar, Hashemi, & Hosseininia, 2008). The BRJSI research instrument scales have acceptable validity and using the Cronbach alpha test, the researchers found the instrument to be reliable with $a = .84$.

The Psychological Contract Inventory (PSI) (Rousseau, 2000) contains four sets of psychological contract scales which include employee obligations, employer obligations, fulfillment, and contract transition indicators. The PSI instrument uses a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (To a great extent). The 32-item questionnaire focused on three types of contracts: transactional, relational, and balanced. The instrument was found to be valid (Rousseau, 2000) and the adapted questionnaire components were tested for reliability using the Cronbach alpha procedure with resulting reliability scores of a = .67 (employee obligations and fulfillment), and a = .80 (employer obligations and fulfillment).

The fourth section of the questionnaire consists of biographical data, such as age, gender, and geographical regions. These single-item measures are assessed using multiple-choice questions.

Data Collection Process and Quantitative Data Analysis

This study used a quantitative electronic survey (e-survey) to collect data. For each survey sent via SurveyMonkey, a cover letter was included explaining the nature and importance of the study, detailed instructions to respondents, and a statement of appreciation in advance for their participation. A participation letter and promise of confidentiality also was included as well as a consent form for each respondent to complete and return. The password-protected survey, along with the cover letter, was distributed via SurveyMonkey. Confidentiality was maintained to protect the answers and the identity of all respondents. According to SurveyMonkey®.com's website, within 7 days of emailing a survey 80% of the responses can be collected. Thereafter, week two generally will result in 11% of data collected and on the third week only 4% of data collected. Once the data collection period expired, the data from the survey questionnaire were transferred into SPSS Statistics to run a Pearson's correlation analysis to test the proposed relationships.

Survey Administration and Response Rate

An online survey was the primary data collection technique used for this research and was distributed by SurveyMonkey through its survey audience. The population was derived from a panel of 500 volunteer survey participants from various regions in the United States. Even though demographic data were collected, using SurveyMonkey's survey audience allowed for complete anonymous responses to be collected as no personally identifiable information or internet protocol addresses were extrapolated and the researcher did not have access to this information.

The targeted number of responses for this study was 100. The survey was distributed by SurveyMonkey and closed within one week of the survey distribution. Within this time frame, 144 respondents completed the survey in full, which provided for a response rate of 28.8%.

In the last section of the survey, information on demographics was collected regarding gender, age, and organizational tenure. This information provided a demographic profile of the surveyed participants in the study. The results show that 61.81% of the surveyed participants were female, 36.81 percent of the participants were male, and 1.39% chose other as their gender profile. Of the 144 surveyed participants for the study 13.19% were between the ages of 18-24; 24.31% were between the ages of 25-34; 15.97% were between the ages of 35-44; 22.92% were between the ages of 45-54; 16.67% were between the ages of 55-64; and lastly, 6.94% were age 65 or over.

The results show that 13.89% have been with their organization for less than one year; 24.31% indicated they have been with their organization for one to two years; 29.17% have served with their organization

for three to five years; 9.72% indicated they have been with their organization for six to nine years, and 22.92% revealed an organizational tenure of 10 or more years.

Hypothesis Testing: Pearson's Correlation Results

In order to test the proposed relationships between the variables, Pearson's correlation model was employed to analyze the data collected. By employing a Pearson's correlation technique this study set out to investigate the relationships between organizational trust and job satisfaction and psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employer obligations), and additionally to investigate the relationship between psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employee obligations) and job satisfaction and organizational trust. Upon verifying that all the assumptions were satisfied for this study design, a Pearson's correlation technique was conducted using the SPSS bivariate procedure.

First, the relationship between employee perceptions of organizational trust and job satisfaction was analyzed. There was a significant, strong, positive correlation between the two variables, $r(142) = .62$, $p < .0005$. Further, organizational trust explained 38% of the variability in job satisfaction (r^2, equal to .62 = .38 X 100% = 38%). Thus, increases in organizational trust were correlated with increases in job satisfaction. This finding suggests organizations with higher levels of organizational trust can in turn expect to see greater levels of employee job satisfaction.

Further, the relationship between employee perceptions of organizational trust and perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment/violation by the employer was tested. There was a significant, moderate, positive correlation between the two variables, $r(142) = .42$, $p < .0005$. Organizational trust explained 18% of the variability in psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employer obligations) (r^2, equal to .42 = .18 X 100% = 18%). Thus, increases in organizational trust were correlated with increases in psychological contract fulfillment (employer obligations). Therefore, it can be inferred that when employees trust their organization on more positive levels they will have greater perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, but when contract violations occur employees' trust in the organization will suffer.

Two of the proposed hypotheses were not significant. The relationship between employee perceptions of job satisfaction and perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment/violation by the employee was tested and this relationship was not statistically significant, $r(142) = .13$, $p = .12$). The relationship between employee perceptions of organizational trust and perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment/violation by the employee also was not statistically significant ($r(142) = .097$, $p = .249$).

Evaluation of Findings

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between organizational trust and the related variables of job satisfaction and psychological contract fulfillment/violation. The findings of this study can be summarized as follows: Organizational trust had a positive relationship with psychological fulfillment/violation (employee obligations); organizational trust had a positive relationship with job satisfaction; job satisfaction had a positive relationship with psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employee obligations), however, this relationship was not statistically significant showing an indirect relationship; and lastly, organizational trust had a positive relationship with psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employee obligations), however, again this relationship also was not statistically significant showing a more indirect relationship.

Of the four relationships examined in this study, organizational trust had a strong positive correlation with psychological contract fulfillment/violation (employer obligations). The correlation coefficient (.624) demonstrates this relationship and the findings of this study suggest that higher levels of organizational trust will be associated with higher levels of psychological contract fulfillment. Therefore, it can be inferred that when employees trust their organization on more positive levels they will have greater perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, but when contract violations occur employees' trust in the organization will suffer.

A correlation coefficient of .421 provides supportive evidence of a moderate positive relationship between organizational trust and job satisfaction. Therefore, it can be stated there is a meaningful relationship between organizational trust and job satisfaction of the employee; this means with increasing organizational trust, job satisfaction increases and vice versa. This finding suggests organizations with higher levels of organizational trust can in turn expect to see greater levels of employee job satisfaction. Increases in organizational trust correspond with increases in job satisfaction, and when employees perceive higher levels of trust in the employment relationship the expected outcome results in greater levels of job satisfaction and vice versa. Two of the four hypotheses (Hypotheses 3 and 4) were only partially supported by this research, which basically indicated a positive relationship between the variables were present. However, perceptions of the employees' obligations to fulfill the psychological contract were not significantly associated with organizational trust or job satisfaction.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

Implications

In today's competitive business environment, developing trust within an organization's business culture, increasing perceptions of employee job satisfaction, and ensuring psychological contracts are fulfilled within the employment relationship are often difficult courses of action for organizations to pursue. The significance of trust within the organizational context of the employment relationship can be increased when firms develop trust strength through leadership, build ethical business climates, and develop policies and procedures conducive for building trust as a part of the business culture of firms (Alraqhas, 2015; Blanchard & Hodges, 2005; Currall & Epstein, 2003; Schoorman et al., 2007). When trust fails, it can bleed over to job dissatisfaction causing negative consequences for organizations and leaders by increased turnover intentions, less employee commitment, absenteeism, and increased work conflict (Aziri, 2011; Lund, 2003; Wang & Bower, 2019). Of equal importance for firms is recognizing organizational trust and psychological contracts suffer as a result of an employer's inability to make good on employee perceptions of the obligations and commitments their employer should perform (Guest, 2004; Liu, Huang, Huang, & Chen, 2013). This research study has provided some research implications to the aforementioned relationships between organizational trust, job satisfaction, and psychological contract fulfillment/violation.

In this sense, this research validates the importance of the role and influence organizational trust plays within the employment relationship. Firms with higher levels of organizational trust can be recognized to have greater positive outcomes for both job satisfaction and perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment and vice versa. The findings of this research suggest that factors impacting organizational trust negatively such as poor leadership or neglected work environments could lead to employee distrust of the organization. Therefore, a firm's structure, policies or procedures, and firm cultures,

employee-employer relationships, and trust between co-workers could affect employee trust perceptions.

A second implication stems from the relationship between organizational trust and psychological contracts. It can be rationalized that psychological contract violation or the inability of an employer to make good on their perceived commitments or obligations could result in increased organizational distrust. This also suggests that trust between managers/organizations and employees is impacted by psychological contracts, thus trustworthiness in the fulfillment of psychological contracts plays a vital role in the employment relationship resulting in both perceptually based positive and negative outcomes (employee viewpoint).

A third implication and finding of this study demonstrated that higher levels of organizational trust positively impact employee job satisfaction, and vice versa. Thus, increasing trust in the organization, albeit the overall trust of an organization (leadership trust, co-worker trust, and employer trust), is a factor that would improve the overall perceptions of employee job satisfaction. Therefore, employee job dissatisfaction and lack of trust can lead to negative outcomes for firms and employees such as increased turnover intentions, lack of employee commitment, or even employees seeking employment salvation through job searching among other firms.

Suggestions for Application of the Research Results

The ability to build and maintain trust within organizations is an important value-driven activity for organizations as they strive to compete as employers of choice. The results of this study have shown that organizational trust is a key ingredient for increasing job satisfaction and positive perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Therefore, to build trust in the employment relationship organizations need to develop positive work environments that are supportive, develop internal processes that increase communication between the employees and organization, and introduce stimuli that increase perceptions of employee trust in the organization.

Empirical research on the subject of organizational trust has shown trust can increase over time and organizations can benefit from this by investing in long-term relationships with their employees, allowing workers to have a vested interest in the organization's performance. This would mean developing a business culture that absorbs failure rather than pointing blame, and encourages high expectations allowing the workforce to contribute new ideas, methods, procedures, and processes that promote positive cognitive/innovative behaviors without fear of reprisal. Organizations should have the right structures in place, enabling an organization to develop a culture of trust that demonstrates committedness to its workforce, realizes employees are the greatest assets to the firm, and provides a vision of openness and honesty, and develops trust and respect in the employment relationship. Therefore, it is recommended that organizations create a culture that values interpersonal relationships and formulate the structure to support a relationship-oriented business culture.

Human resource (HR) professionals can utilize this research to assist with establishing organizational policies and procedures that would positively increase employee perceptions of trust. The HR professional would need to develop strategies exposing trust on positive levels while minimizing barriers to trust in order to facilitate a climate of trust in the organization. Once trust is damaged it is often difficult to repair, and HR professionals need to develop practices that intercede quickly to resolve conflict that is trust damaging and provide remedies that build trust between the employee and the organization or managers by not letting conflict go unnoticed or untouched. It takes time to develop

trust and only one instance to destroy it. HR professionals need to provide for more advocacy for employees, hold supervisors accountable for their actions, reduce negative perceptions of HR by applying practices that build trust mutuality that are aligned with the organizational vision, and provide for practices that are more solution oriented rather than disciplined focused.

Thirdly, organizations need to improve upon interpersonal relationship trust between employees and their managers in order for leaders to facilitate trust-building relationships through managerial practices. Managers can benefit from the findings in this study by learning to build, maintain, and repair trust as distrust can have negative consequences for organizational outcomes (Gibson & Petrosko, 2014). The focus for managers needs to be on the climate of trust for the organization such as showing more empathy in the workplace, being honest and supportive, consistent and predictable, and modeling a behavior that is trustworthy. Leaders need to value the concept of leadership being shared by all rather than absorbed by one individual. Therefore, to build upon a culture of organizational trust leaders need to serve rather than direct, allow for employee autonomy and empowerment, deal with misplaced benevolence swiftly, and share in a vision of trust innovation.

Conclusions

This study focused on understanding organizational trust as an antecedent impacting other related variables, as well as investigating organizational trust and its relationship with job satisfaction and psychological contract fulfillment/violation. The major findings of the present study showed that organizational trust had a positive strong relationship with psychological contracts (employer obligations), meaning that organizational trust was associated with higher levels of employee perceptions that their employer fulfilled obligations and commitments in the employment relationship. Second, organizational trust has a positive moderate correlation with job satisfaction and increases in organizational trust are associated with increases in job satisfaction and vice versa.

The limitations to this study should be considered when understanding the analysis of findings for this study. However, the findings of this study were consistent with past research on the relationship between the variables, but what may be of most importance for this research are the strength of association between the variables and a deeper understanding of the practical implications that organizations, managers, and HR professionals may consider to maintain and sustain trust in the work environment. Future directions in this research should consider the recommendations of this research as they may provide continued research and possibly increase the research knowledge on the topics of organizational trust, job satisfaction, and psychological contracts. Research on organizational trust is far from exhaustion and this study adds to the rich body of knowledge from both a theoretical and contributory perspective in understanding trust in the workplace.

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