

TRUST MEASUREMENT IN AN ENTERPRISE. A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper presents the meaning of trust in the operation of enterprises and presents three original research tools to measure three areas of trust (internal, inter-organizational and consumer), which the author uses to form a complete construction of trust at the enterprise level.

Measurement assumptions are based on literature studies. The proposed division trust into three areas is justified by the fact that the process of trust development involves various entities and different factors determine specific areas of trust. The author tried to organize and demonstrate the most relevant contemporary dimensions of trust, including employee care, concern for stakeholders, competence, reliability, honesty and openness. The diagnosed dimensions of trust at the general level were then developed into an operational and measurement form, which should best describe the proposed areas of trust.

In the process of measurement of trust within the classification proposed was assessed and appropriate research model were developed. Examples of empirical allowed to determine the usefulness of the proposed measurement tools. The research tools used for this purpose are comprehensible and suitable for management practice, they do not oversimplify reality. The concept of systemic trust analysis satisfies the reliability criterion and it can be hoped that it reflects, to the highest possible degree, the reality in which enterprises operate.

POMIAR ZAUFANIA W PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWIE. PODEJŚCIE KONCEPCYJNE

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Słowa kluczowe: zaufanie, przedsiębiorstwo, interesariusze, model pomiarowy.

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie znaczenia zaufania w funkcjonowaniu przedsiębiorstwa, a następnie przedstawienie trzech autorskich narzędzi badawczych zastosowanych do pomiaru zaufania wewnętrznego, międzyorganizacyjnego i konsumentckiego, które w zamierzeniu autora tworzą kompletny konstrukt zaufania na poziomie przedsiębiorstwa.

Założenia pomiarowe oparto na studiach literaturowych. Zaproponowany podział na trzy obszary był zasadny, ponieważ różne podmioty biorą udział w procesie kształtowania zaufania i inne czynniki determinują określony obszar zaufania. Autor starał się uporządkować i wykazać najbardziej istotne współcześnie wymiary zaufania, zaliczając do nich troskę o pracowników, troskę o interesariuszy, kompetencje, niezawodność, uczciwość i otwartość. Zdiagnozowano wymiary zaufania na poziomie ogólnym, a następnie rozwinięto je do postaci operacyjnej i pomiarowej, które powinny jak najlepiej opisywać zaproponowane obszary zaufania.

Podczas pomiaru zaufania w ramach zaproponowanego podziału opracowano odpowiedni model badawczy. W celu określenia jego przydatności przeprowadzono badania empiryczne, które pozwoliły na określenie przydatności zaproponowanych narzędzi pomiarowych. Narzędzia badawcze, które w tym celu wykorzystano, są zrozumiałe i możliwe do zastosowania w praktyce zarządzania, nie upraszczają nadmiernie rzeczywistości. Koncepcja systemowej analizy zaufania spełnia kryterium wiarygodności i można mieć nadzieję, że odzwierciedla w jak największym stopniu rzeczywistość, w jakiej funkcjonuje przedsiębiorstwo.

Introduction

In 2009, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, declared that Americans suffered from a lack of trust towards public organizations and private institutions. This is not only a problem of Americans. In the last decade, a deficit of trust has had a negative effect on economic and social development all over the world. Numerous studies have documented the lack of trust among the public towards contemporary organizations and their leaders (KRAMER, LEWICKI 2010, p. 246)

Trust is a highly complex process, depending on various non-binding elements which occur in contacts between enterprises and in relations between the enterprise and the customer. Enterprises, in their everyday activities, should avoid a lack of transparency, anonymity, casualness, excessive avarice, demanding advance payments from customers, tax frauds, financial pyramids, insurance frauds, aggressive loan offers or unfair and misleading advertisement (SZTOMPKA 2008, p. 238, 239, MRÓZ 2009, p. 488).

The aim of this paper is to present the meaning of trust in the operation of enterprises, followed by the presentation of three original research tools applied for the measurement of internal, intra-organizational and consumer trust which, in the author's concept, form a complete construction of trust. Measurement assumptions have been based on literature studies in the field of sociology, economics and management sciences. In the next stage, the theoretical concept is verified through empirical studies and the obtained results are statistically analysed to enable verification of the usefulness of the proposed research tools.

In the existing literature of the subject matter trust is analysed only partially. A gap in the area of complex and systemic approach to trust in company was noticed, which must be completed.

The nature of trust and its constituents at the enterprise level

Trust is a central point of all market relations. Customer trust towards a given company, its products and employees, leads to the profitability of the company and supports its existence in the market (KOZŁOWSKI et al. 2014, p. 177–179). This was confirmed by empirical studies (HEJDUK et al. 2009, p. 59, 60). Polish enterprises in various market sectors were quite consistent in their opinions, since even 80% of respondents believe that trust in the environment towards the market leader is important or very important, and 77% respondents attribute the same importance to the trust inside an organization.

Mutual support of the parties and sharing necessary information are very important elements of trust. This allows a more reliable and fuller integration between partners, which brings them closer to shared values (BRONIEWSKA 2012, p. 71–84), as well as convergent aims and visions. Trust builds the reputation of the enterprise, brings about competitive advantage and attracts investors, customers and employees. A higher level of trust ensures many other advantages as well (DYER, CHU 2003, p. 60, ZYGAN 2014, p. 49–53, DOBIEGAŁA-KORONA 2007, p. 19, GRYCZKA 2013, p. 85–97):

- reducing transaction costs,
- supporting innovation,
- enhancing competitiveness,
- improving customer satisfaction,
- increasing customer loyalty.

Trust as an intangible phenomenon requires more operational, measurable dimensions. Researchers (ŻADŁO 2014, p. 82–84, SANKOWSKA 2011, p. 39, 40, CLARO, CLARO 2008, p. 291, 192, SEPPÄNEN et al. 2007, p. 249–265, BUGDOL 2010, p. 23–30) attempting to describe attributes (dimensions) of trust, most often use such notions as: competence, honesty and benevolence. Very frequently, trust is earned through expert knowledge, ensuring safety, openness and honest intentions. Currently, the main focus as regards the shaping of trust is put on such factors as reputation, reliability and shared social values, demonstrated in the concern for employees and customers (RUDZEWICZ 2016, p. 36–38). On the basis of the quoted literature, four basic elements of trust can be distinguished, shown in Figure 1.

These four dimensions of trust should be placed in the appropriate area of the company's operation and then subjected to reliable measurement.

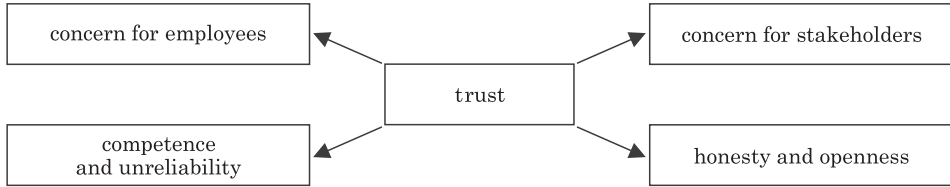


Fig. 1. Basic dimension of trust

Source: own elaboration.

A model approach to trust measurement in the enterprise

The company is a complex system, with all elements of its market operations related to trust. An enterprise should develop positive relations with its employees, customers, suppliers and vendors. Trust occurs in all those aspects (Fig. 2):

- internal relations concerning employees of a given organization,
- external relations focused on individual customers, and
- external relations concerning other entities and companies cooperating with a given organization. This can include suppliers, vendors and the institutional environment.

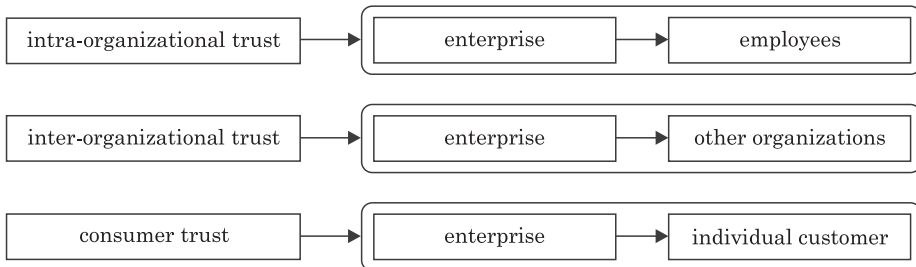


Fig. 2. Areas of trust in the enterprise

Source: own elaboration

The company is responsible for all its stakeholders (STRUMIŃSKA-KUTRA 2011, p. 69–83), with which it creates the right relationship. The essence and significance of each of the three relationships (areas of trust) will be described from the point of view of the company and verified by appropriate measuring tools.

The objective of the enterprise is to acquire and to retain employees who identify with the company and who are involved in the implementation of assumed objectives. Trust affects the loyalty and efficiency of employees and its absence reduces productivity and turnover of the company (WINCH 2011, p. 102–113). Trust emerges when the leaders are honest, trustful and keep their

promises (LEVIN et al. 2002, p. 8) and do not use their advantage or reporting line relationship, particularly in a crisis situation (PUCETAITE et al. 2010, p. 320). As a result of that, employees can be sure that they have equal rights, access to information and clear career path. This involves reduction of supervision rate and acceptance of risk. Proper relations inside the organization provide a foundation for developed trust.

In an attempt to operationalize the dimensions of intra-organizational trust, six elements making up trust components were distinguished (Fig. 3). Employees should know the core values of the organization included in its mission and vision, as well as its strategic aims. In addition, the wage and incentive policy (development, career path) should be known to employees and accepted by them. The atmosphere at work (organizational climate) is an important factor in building the culture of trust. An efficient enterprise requires competent employees and managers. All of the above-mentioned measurement areas determine the final element – the internal image of the organization.

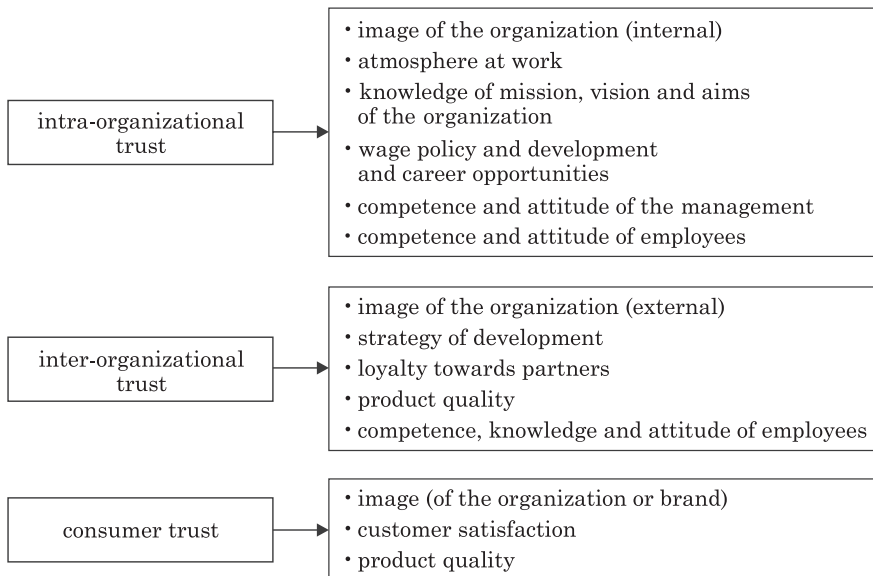


Fig. 3. Comprehensive model of trust dimensions

Source: own elaboration

In relations between organizations, trust building is a cyclical process based on negotiation and the involvement of parties. A supplier and a vendor, aiming at achievement of shared benefits, perceive that the success of one entity is conditioned by the success of the other (MITRĘGA 2009, p. 463–474). By combining forces with other stakeholders, partners gain greater bargaining power, they learn each other and complement (CHRUPEŁA-PNIAK et al. 2016, p. 127–143).

In this area of inter-organizational trust, the quality of products is important. What is also worth noting is the possibility to develop future cooperation, which is assured by the adopted development strategy, which is convergent with the expectations of suppliers and vendors. Entities operating in the market should rely on honest and ethical operations carried out by competent employees, which is reflected in the image of the organization, i.e. its real market strength. Business partners will also appreciate the loyalty of their contracting party. The concept concerning the operational measurement of interorganisational trust is presented in Figure. 3.

A significant aspect in the functioning of the enterprise is also consumer trust measurement. The customer is the most valuable asset of the enterprise, generating its income, determining financial liquidity, profitability and, additionally, providing crucial information about his needs and wishes (DOBIEGAŁA KORONA 2006, p. 85–95). Customer satisfaction affects the opinion of the company and its products (HINNER 2016, p. 54–73).

In this area of consumer trust, three dimensions have been distinguished, as presented in Figure 3. These are: image of the organization (or product brand), customer satisfaction and product quality. A positive image of the organization proves its high reliability and honesty. The products offered by the company should demonstrate high quality. This will help meet customer expectations and ensure satisfaction.

The division into three areas proposed in this study is justified by the fact that various entities participate in the process of shaping trust and different factors determine a specific trust area. Therefore, a need exists to adjust trust dimensions to relevant relations between the enterprise and its stakeholders. The measurement dimensions proposed in the model (Fig. 3) are an expansion of basic dimensions of trust at the general level, presented in Figure 1.

Methodological assumptions

In order to verify the concept proposed, it was advisable to carry out three different studies. The studies used three survey questionnaires (referring to three areas of trust). All respondents evaluated a positive aspect of relevant dimensions of trust. Each dimension was determined using the set of perception indicators, i.e. more detailed statements (typically 3–4) on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means total disagreement and 10 – total agreement with a given statement.

The basic aim of the first study was to estimate the level of intra-organizational trust. The study was carried out in January 2015 among employees of the production and trade company from the food sector. The study used a direct survey questionnaire. The employees were informed about the aim of the study and the process of its conduction. The employees were given a survey, which was later on collected in a manner ensuring full anonymity. The directors had

no access to individual questionnaires. The company employed 40 employees. These were production employees, salesmen, drivers, warehouse workers and three managers. All of them participated in the study.

The basic aim of the second study was to estimate the level of inter-organizational trust. The study was carried out in the period between December 2014 and January 2015 among enterprises cooperating with a given entity. The entity in question was a consulting company, specialising in strategic management, business and economic consulting. The study used an online survey questionnaire. The link to the survey was sent via e-mail to all partners (customers) of the examined company. The study was completely anonymous. The study involved 43 respondents (completed surveys). The response rate was achieved at the level of 40%. A respondent represented the management of the company providing the answer.

The basic aim of the third study was estimation of consumer trust. The study was conducted from January to March 2015 among young consumers (up to 26 years old) using a survey given to the respondents to be individually completed. The sample was selected using the convenience sampling method (MYNARSKI 2000, p. 32–34, CHURCHILL 2002, p. 497, 498). The survey was anonymous. Respondents evaluated the level of trust towards the brand of the sportswear they used most frequently (Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Puma). In total, 181 persons who correctly and completely filled in the questionnaire participated in the study. Women made up a prevailing number of the respondents (59%). The results were presented as aggregates. Differences in the evaluation of individual brands were noticeable.

The studies identified the perceived reality, opinions and attitudes of respondents with regard to the examined phenomenon, in an aggregated and generalized manner. The results obtained are not the essence of this research procedure, but only an illustration of the research concept. The research was based on three different groups of respondents, various entities, with the application of various techniques of gathering information to present the universal nature of the concept proposed. This will be evidence that verifies the effectiveness of the construct developed.

Verification of measurement tools concerning trust

The results of the Cronbach alpha test used for determining the reliability of measurement tools proposed in the previous section are high. The first measurement tool (intra-organizational trust) reached the reliability indicator of 0.968 (Tab. 1). The reliability indicator of the tool used for measurement of the inter-organizational trust reached a value close to one (0.989). A very high Cronbach alpha indicator at the level of 0.951 was also found for the tool

applied for measurement of consumer trust. Similarly, the high parameters of the Cronbach alpha index have obtained particular dimensions of trust within the relevant areas.

Table 1

Statistical reliability of the trust measurement tool

Trust area	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items (statements in the questionnaire)
Intra-organizational trust	0.968	20
Image of the organization	0.793	2
Knowledge of mission, vision and aims of the organization	0.929	2
Competence and attitude of the management	0.952	4
Competence and attitude of employees	0.685	4
Atmosphere at work	0.947	5
Wage policy and development and career opportunities	0.888	3
Inter-organizational trust	0.989	18
Image of the organization	0.959	4
Competence and attitude of employees	0.957	5
Quality of products and services	0.976	3
Loyalty towards partners	0.972	3
Strategy of development	0.965	3
Consumer trust	0.951	11
Image of brand (the organization)	0.903	3
Customer satisfaction	0.932	4
Product quality	0.902	4

Source: own elaboration.

Analysing the intra-organizational trust (Tab. 2) it can be observed that a given entity had larger problems with wage policy and employee development opportunities (4.82 points). Other trust dimensions were evaluated at the level of 6 points. The employees slightly higher evaluated the image of the organization (above 7 points). These are the results which, in the opinion of the author, provide a good base for improvement of the reputation of the organization. Despite a low score obtained for wage policy and development and career opportunities, the internal image of the enterprise was quite high. Generally, the trust of employees towards their employer was at the level of 6.12 points.

As regards trust, the examined entity received both the maximum – 10 points and a very low score – 2 points. The divergences in scores are significant. The standard deviation ranges from 1.52 to 2.64. The median ranges from 5 to 7 points in individual dimensions of trust. The mode was similar, with one exception. The attitude of employees towards wage policy was very critical. The prevailing score was 2 points.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the estimated intra-organizational trust

Trust dimensions	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mode
Image	7.27	1.52	5	10	7	6.5
Knowledge of mission, vision and aims of the organization	5.92	2.46	2	10	5	5
Competence and attitude of the management	6.13	2.64	2	10	7	7
Competence and attitude of employees	6.67	1.58	5	10	6.5	6.5
Atmosphere at work	6.06	2.20	2	10	6	5
Wage policy and development and career opportunities	4.82	2.19	2	9	5	2
Trust	6.12					

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of the evaluated inter-organisational trust

Trust dimensions	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mode
Image	8.67	2.32	1	10	10	10
Competence and attitude of employees	8.58	2.33	1	10	10	10
Product quality	8.62	2.49	1	10	10	10
Loyalty towards partners	8.54	2.33	1	10	10	10
Strategy of development	8.79	2.32	1	10	10	10
Trust	8.64					

Source: own elaboration.

Five dimensions of inter-organizational trust in the analysed case study (Tab. 3) received a high score. All dimensions exceeded the level of 8.5 points. The highest value of the dimension was found for the company development strategy (8.79). Such an evaluation of the examined entity in terms of trust (8.64 points) is advantageous and certainly satisfying, particularly in view of the fact that the observed median and mode are characterized by the maximum score – 10 points. However, it should be emphasized that the research process also revealed respondents who evaluated their contractor in a very critical manner, at the level of 1 point. Therefore, the standard deviation is high, i.e. 2.3–2.5 points.

As regards consumer trust, it should be noted that, based on the example of the investigated market, sportswear brands are ranked very high in the awareness of the surveyed sample. They are evaluated as very good. The obtained scores

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of the evaluated consumer trust

Trust dimensions	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mode
Brand image	8.98	1.19	5	10	9	10
Customer satisfaction	8.81	1.16	5	10	9	10
Product quality	8.23	1.38	5	10	8	9
Trust	8.63					

Source: own elaboration.

for dimensions of consumer trust for brand image and customer satisfaction are close to 9 points (Tab. 4). Slightly lower scores were obtained for the quality of products (probably in relation to their relatively high prices). The respondents were quite unanimous in their evaluation. The standard deviation was at the level of 1.16 – 1.38 points only, while for the previously examined areas of trust (intra-organizational and inter-organizational) it was generally well over 2 points. The respondents did not assign scores below 5 points for any of the trust dimensions. High scores can be seen also when examining the median or the mode, which generally amounted to 9 or 10 points.

The research conducted aimed at verifying the usefulness of the proposed tools derived from the research concept presented. The research tools used for this purpose are, on one hand, comprehensible and suitable for management practice while, on the other, they do not oversimplify reality. The concept of systemic trust analysis satisfies the reliability criterion and it can be hoped that it reflects, to the highest possible degree, the reality in which enterprises operate.

Summary

An increase in the importance of trust results from mutual, complex relationships, which concern each contemporary organization. Managers should make every effort to understand the nature and the essence of trust, to be able to develop it in a competent manner and prevent its loss. The process is more efficient if the enterprise demonstrates such features as competence and reliability, honesty, openness and concern for (internal and external) stakeholders.

This paper proposes a concept facilitating trust measurement in a comprehensive manner from the perspective of the enterprise. In view of the complex and multifaceted nature of trust, the research approach was based on three pillars: employees, consumers and business partners. The division into three areas, as proposed in the study, is justified by the fact that various entities participate in the process of shaping trust and different factors determine specific trust areas.

The proposed measurement dimensions satisfy reliability requirements. The studies carried out with the application of suggested dimensions make it possible to formulate relevant conclusions and to take appropriate managerial decisions. Managers using the tools to measure trust in a comprehensive manner, referring to the majority of stakeholders, may have knowledge that, if properly used, will improve the competitiveness and market position of enterprises.

In future, the tools developed can be used on larger research samples and the obtained results could be compared with the economic results achieved by enterprises, such as income, profits and customer loyalty.

A significant limitation of the presented research concept is its modest verification on one-off and small research trials. It is based mainly on enterprises, that is commercial entities cooperating with many partners and consumers. It should also be noted that the service sector has been omitted from the analyzes.

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