

Trust In Co-Workers and Employee Behaviours At Work

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Research on interpersonal trust within organizational contexts tends to focus on managers as the trust referent, largely ignoring the topic of trust amongst co-workers. Investigations of co-worker trust focus on a different referent, and are expected to have unique effects on employee behaviours at work. In this paper, the researcher first reviews the extant literature on trust in co-workers, trustworthiness, social undermining, organizational citizenship behaviour and counterproductive work behaviour. Then, a model is presented to better understand the role of co-workers in shaping focal employee trust in co-workers, which in turn may affect his or her organizational citizenship behaviour and counterproductive work behaviour. Finally, this paper explains how the propositions derived from the proposed model.

Field of Research: Human Resource Management

1.0 Introduction

Many of today's workplace draws on flatter organizational structure and have more team-based work. These trends translate into fewer managers and more frequent lateral interactions in the organization. Research found that co-workers can provide a focal employee with a sense of identity, support, and friendship (Bowler & Brass, 2006). In a meta-analysis by Chiaburu and Harrison (2008), co-worker actions were found matter for their colleagues. For example, co-workers support can affect individual employees' presence at work (Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998) and intention to quit (Cox, 1999). Research on trust in co-workers has tended to focus on co-workers trustworthiness factors (ability, benevolence & integrity) or co-workers positive behaviour as the predictor of trust in co-workers. Largely absent from the trust in co-workers literature is an in-depth study that combine the entire range of positive and negative behaviours originating from co-workers, and the resulting effect on employee trust in co-workers .

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Dar

Focal employee has little, if any, power or control over co-workers' actions (Tan & Lim, 2009). Therefore, trust is important in lateral relationships. Several studies have investigated the influence of trust in co-worker on important organizational and individual outcomes. For example, co-worker trust is found related to individual willingness to share resources with a co-worker (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009), perceived organizational support, turnover intention, and affective commitment (Ferres, Connell, & Travaglione, 2004). However, no study has examined the effect of trust in co-workers on both focal employee's organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), directed at the co-workers and organization as a whole. This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents literature review on trust in co-workers, trustworthiness, social undermining behaviour, OCB, and CWB. Subsequently, Section 3 describes the proposed model and explains how the propositions derived from the model.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Trust In Co-Workers

Following the definition that Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) provided, Tan and Lim (2009) defined trust in co-workers as "the willingness of a person to be vulnerable to the actions of fellow co-workers whose behaviour and actions that person cannot control" (p. 46). Leader-follower relationships are commonly associated with authority ranking, whereas co-worker relationships are most likely to entail equality matching (Fiske, 1992). Since lateral interactions involve obligations that are unspecified and in which there is no guarantee of fulfilment of those expectations, trust is central to co-worker exchanges in the organization. Tan and Lim (2009) observed that trust in co-workers is positively related to trust in organizations, and trust in organizations fully mediated the relations between trust in co-workers and organizational commitment, and between trust in co-workers and performance.

2.2 Trustworthiness

Most of the past literature has recognized that the interpersonal behaviour of the trustee or also known as trustworthiness factors (ability, benevolence, and integrity) as an important predictor of trust. Ability refers to the relevant knowledge and skills needed to do a specific job along with the interpersonal skills and general wisdom needed to succeed in an organization (Gabarro, 1978). As noted by Colquitt, Scott, and LePine (2007), the facet of ability captures "can-do" element of trustworthiness. Benevolence is the extent to which the trustee is believed to want to do good for the trustor, without any profit motives, and its synonyms comprise loyalty, openness, caring, or supportiveness (Mayer et al., 1995). Benevolence represents the "will-do" element of trustworthiness (Colquitt

Dar

et al., 2007). This means individuals can choose whether or not to use their abilities for the interest of the trustor.

Integrity refers to the extent to which a trustor perceives the trustee adheres to a set of principles that trustor finds acceptable to him or her (Mayer et al., 1995). The facet of integrity also signifies the “will-do” element and its synonyms include fairness, justice, consistency, and promise fulfillment (Colquitt et al., 2007).

A number of studies provide support for the importance of three components of trustworthiness in trust relationship. For example, Tan and Tan (2000) found that trust in supervisor correlated significantly with ability (.75), benevolence (.83), and integrity (.85). Tan and Tan reported that these factors accounted for 80% of the variance in trust in supervisor.

2.3 Social Undermining Behaviour

Vinokur and van Ryn (1993) defined social undermining as those behaviours directed at a target that exhibit (1) negative emotions (e.g., anger and dislike); (2) negative evaluation of the target’s attributes, actions, and efforts (e.g., criticism); and/or (3) other behaviours deliberate to hinder the target’s accomplishment of instrumental goals. Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (2002) refined the concept and extend it to the workplace context. They defined social undermining as intentional behaviours that are aimed at holding back employees’ ability to build and uphold positive interpersonal relationships, achieve success, and maintain positive reputation at work.

Previous research suggests that social undermining behaviours have negative organizational consequences such as increased counterproductive work behaviours, reciprocated social undermining, and decreased job satisfaction. These behaviours can also cause negative personal outcomes such as depression, decreased self-esteem, and psychosomatic symptoms (Duffy et al., 2006).

Although social undermining is perceived as negative and social support as positive workplace behaviours, these two constructs are distinct in conceptual dimensions (Vinokur & van Ryn, 1993; 1997; Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996; Abbey, Andrews, & Halman, 1995). As noted by O’Leary-Kelly et al. (2000), low level of social undermining refers to the absence of negative behaviours, but it does not denote the existence of positive behaviours. In addition, Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (2002) found people who experience social undermining at the workplace react more strongly than they do to positive behaviours by others..

2.4 Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)

OCB has been defined as “individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate

Dar

promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p.4). It has been labelled as extra-role behaviours (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006) and contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Scholars have expanded the concept of OCB to include several components. One of the major conceptualization of OCBs is that proposed by Williams and Anderson (1991). They organize OCBs into categories on the basis of the target or direction of the behaviour. They call behaviours directed toward the benefit of other individuals *OCBI*, whereas behaviours directed toward the benefit of the organization are called *OCBO*.

In a recent meta-analysis by Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Blume (2009), OCBs are found related to a number of individual and organizational-level outcomes. They found that OCBs have impact on individual employees via managerial evaluations of employee performance and reward allocation decisions. In addition, Podsakoff and associates showed that OCBs are negatively related to employee withdrawal behaviours, such as turnover intentions, actual turnover, and absenteeism. Besides, they reported that OCBs can be related to a number of organizational-level outcomes, such as productivity, efficiency, reduced costs, customer satisfaction, and unit-level turnover.

2.5 Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB)

Organizational members engage in CWB when they harm or intent to harm the organization and/or other organizational stakeholders (Spector & Fox, 2005). Robinson and Bennett (1995) defined CWB as “voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms, and in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organization and/or its members” (p. 556). CWB include negative employee behaviours such as not following the manager’s instructions, intentionally slowing down the work cycle, arriving late, committing petty theft and not treating co-workers with respect and/or acting rudely with co-workers.

Similar to OCB, CWB is hypothesized to have two factors, based on whether the target of the CWB is the organization (CWB-O) or the target is other individuals within the organization (CWB-I; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Although the literature has suggested that OCB and CWB are related (e.g., Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997), models testing their relationship have been developed only in recent years (e.g., Kelloway, Loughlin, Barling, & Nault 2002). These studies support the notion that OCB and CWB are two distinct constructs.

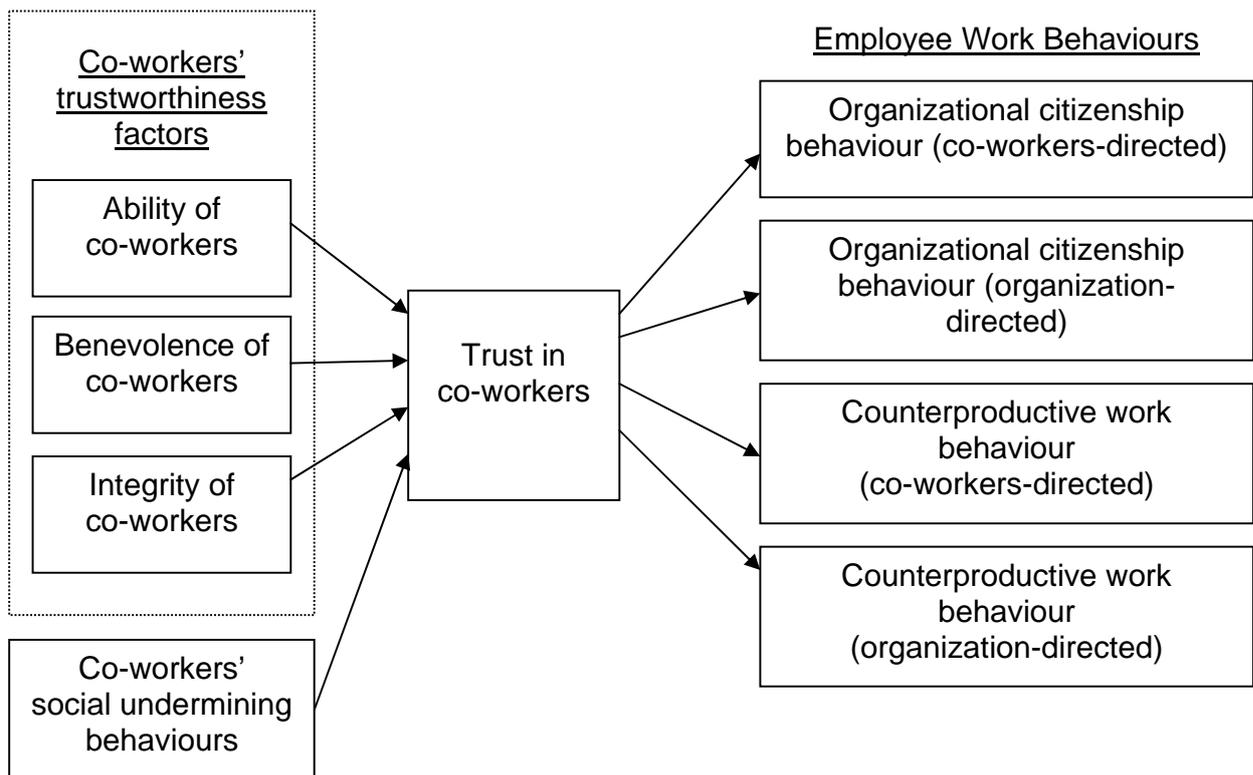
3.0 Research Model

Few studies have examined the mechanisms that underpin the relationship between co-workers influence and its effects on focal employee. As an indicator of the quality of the relationships with co-workers, trust is proximal to the employee work behaviours, and therefore should mediate the relationship

Dar

between co-workers' trustworthiness and employee work behaviours; and between co-workers' social undermining behaviours and employee work behaviours. Figure 3.1 outlines the proposed research model.

Figure 3.1
The Research Model



3.1 Co-Workers' Trustworthiness and Trust in Co-Workers

Using Singaporean Chinese as sample, Tan and Lim (2009) found that only benevolence and integrity of co-workers were significantly and positively related to trust in co-workers. They argued that ability of co-workers was not related to trust in co-workers because Chinese people tend to emphasize on positive attitudes toward others instead of mastery. The sample also solely consists of insurance agents, which have low degrees of task complexity. Thus, Tan and Lim highlighted this can be the reason why they found ability of co-workers was not crucial in predicting trust in co-workers.

In a study by Dirks and Skarlicki (2009) in Canada, capability and integrity interacted to affect the willingness to share resources with the co-worker because they inspire trust. They reported trust mediated the relationship between perceptions of trustworthiness factors (capability and integrity) and individuals'

Dar

willingness to share resources with a co-worker. In Tan and Lim's (2009) study, benevolence is the most significant factor of trustworthiness, but Dirks and Skarlicki found capability and integrity are integrative factors that influence trust in co-workers. This shows the support for the importance of the three trustworthiness factors has not been absolute.

As a further test of the Mayer et al.'s (1995) model, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: The perceived ability of co-workers is positively related to trust in co-workers.

Hypothesis 1b: The perceived benevolence of co-workers is positively related to trust in co-workers.

Hypothesis 1c: The perceived integrity of co-workers is positively related to trust in co-workers.

3.2 Co-Workers' Social Undermining Behaviour and Trust in Co-Workers

Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (2002), supervisor undermining was found negatively related to self-efficacy, organizational commitment, active and passive counterproductive behaviours as well as somatic complaints. In addition, co-worker undermining was found positively related to active counterproductive behaviours and somatic complaints. They even found victims react more strongly to social undermining behaviours compared to positive behaviours. Prior research indicated that competitive and self-serving behaviours are not likely to be considered diagnostic of trustworthiness (e.g., Butler, 1995). Thus, co-workers' social undermining behaviours are expected to result in lower levels of trust in co-workers.

Hypothesis 2a: Co-workers' social undermining behaviours are negatively related to trust in co-workers.

Hypothesis 2b: Co-workers' social undermining behaviours have unique effect on trust in co-workers, beyond that of co-workers' trustworthiness.

3.3 Trust in Co-Workers and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

Several studies suggested that trust in co-workers was linked to OCB-I. For example, Settoon and Mossholder's (2002) field data from two organizations showed positive relationships between trust in co-workers and interpersonal citizenship behaviour (ICB) directed at peers. Settoon and Mossholder stated that ICB and OCB-I are conceptually similar in which they involve cooperative assistance for individuals in need. Many studies found trust in organization was positively related to OCB (e.g., Aryee, Buhwar, & Chen, 2002). As Tan and Lim (2009) reported trust in co-workers led to trust in organization, it is expected that trust in co-workers may also affect employee's OCB directed at the organization

Dar

(OCB-O).

Hypothesis 3a: Trust in co-workers is positively related to OCB directed at the co-workers (OCB-I).

Hypothesis 3b: Trust in co-workers is positively related to OCB directed at the organization (OCB-O).

3.4 Trust in Co-Workers and Counterproductive Work Behaviour

Low trust may be manifested in resistance behaviours, such as the deliberate withholding of information (Zand, 1972), refusal to cooperate, and frequent monitoring of co-workers (Strickland, 1958). Extending this research to exchange relationships among co-workers, it is reasonable to believe that when a focal employee trusts his or her co-workers, he or she will unlikely engage in CWB. This is based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) which predicts that when individuals are dissatisfied with their co-workers, they may reciprocate with CWBs, such as playing mean pranks, cursing at co-workers, or even sabotaging their work. As noted by Bruk-Lee and Spector (2006), an employee who is involved in interpersonal conflict with co-workers and supervisor is likely to engage in harmful behaviours directed at other employees and the organization. It would be interesting to explore whether levels of trust in co-workers can directly influence focal employee's CWBs at the workplace.

Hypothesis 4a: Trust in co-workers is negatively related to CWB directed at the co-workers (CWB-I).

Hypothesis 4b: Trust in co-workers is negatively related to CWB directed at the organization (CWB-O).

3.5 The Mediating Role of Trust in Co-Workers

Chen, Aryee, and Lee (2005) reported trust in organization partially mediated the perceived organizational support and OCB relationship. Besides, Aryee, Budhwar, and Zhen (2002) found that trust in supervisor fully mediated the relationship between interactional justice and the interpersonally- and organizationally-directed dimensions of OCB. When one receives social support, one feels an obligation to provide something in return and therefore provides social support to the individual who initially provided one with social support (Buunk et al., 1993).

Given that a social exchange relationship is characterized by mutual loyalty, goodwill and support, and trust is a manifestation of social exchange, trust in co-workers is expected to mediate the relationship between co-workers' trustworthiness (ability, benevolence and integrity, ABI) and employee work behaviours; and between co-workers' social undermining behaviours and employee work behaviours.

Dar

Hypothesis 5: Trust in co-workers mediates the relationship between co-workers' trustworthiness and (a) OCB directed at co-workers (OCB-I), (b) OCB directed at the organization (OCB-O), (c) CWB directed at co-workers (CWB-I), and (d) CWB directed at the organization (CWB-O).

Repeated reception of negative inputs from co-workers leads to reciprocation and the formation of climates encouraging focal employees to display negative interpersonal actions (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). When co-workers intentionally engaged in undermining behaviours directed at a focal employee, he or she will not likely engage in exchange relations, which ultimately influence their individual job performance, whether directed at the co-workers and the organization.

Hypothesis 6: Trust in co-workers mediates the relationship between co-workers' social undermining and (a) OCB directed at co-workers (OCB-I), (b) OCB directed at the organization (OCB-O), (c) CWB directed at co-workers (CWB-I), and (d) CWB directed at the organization (CWB-O).

4.0 Conclusion

This paper aims to examine the relationships between co-workers' trustworthiness, co-workers' social undermining behaviour, trust in co-workers, OCB and CWB. Besides, this study provides a new conceptual framework to better understand organizational lateral relationship. The proposed model shows that co-workers' trustworthiness factors and social undermining behaviours can play a critical role in shaping a focal employee' trust in co-workers, which in turn, may influence his or her behaviours at work. This study will help explain why employees trust their co-workers and how trust in co-workers can influence their positive and negative behaviours toward co-workers as well as the organization as a whole.

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