

Building Trust at Workplace as a Construct of an Enhanced Organizational Culture: A Conceptual Framework

Aicha DIF^{1,*}

¹ Institute of Applied Sciences and Technologies, University of Oran1 Ahmed Ben Bella., (Algeria);

* Correspondence: dif.aicha@univ-oran1.dz

Abstract

This paper offers a critical review of the literature exploring the building and development of trust in the workplace as a factor affecting human resource management in the organization. Trust is a construct built over time; thus, it depends essentially on the nature of the trusting relationship, which entails a double challenge: earning and winning trust. Our contribution highlights the linkage between HRM and trust in the Workplace. This paper aims to respond to the following question: How can trust in the workplace be a significant factor affecting human resource management?

In this paper, the author uses a critical review method to provide a deep analytical evaluation of the concept of trust in the workplace as a real tool for human resource management. Then the author provides a conceptual framework.

Keywords: *trust in the workplace, human resources management, organizational behavior, human risk*

JEL Classification : D23, M12, D81

Introduction

Building trust in different areas (economic, social, cultural, etc.) becomes vital for development, especially in a world of doubt and uncertainty. Trust is a concept that depends on human behavior and experience of safety and reliability; it does not depend on an automatic process. It is a construct of successive experiences, combined with mutual respect, between two humans or between a human and an organization. Trust is essential for business effectiveness, mainly when organizations operate in a global market fraught with danger and instability.

Trust can be measured within the organization, giving the leaders a brief view of the anticipation of worker behaviors and their loyalty in the workplace context. Maiolo & Zuffo (2018) [1] study trust within Italian organizations using the trust measurement WTS (Workplace Trust Survey) tool that measures trust between co-workers, supervisors, and the organization. Thus, measuring workplace trust has a significant impact (internal and external) on the success of an organization. Furthermore, it can lead to better communication, collaboration, and productivity at the internal level. Secondly, the external level can help reduce risk and uncertainty in the global market [2].

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This paper aims to respond to the following question, *how the trust in the workplace could be an excellent factor affecting human resource management? Why trust is important for organization?*

Based on this perspective, the study proposes that trust in the workplace contributes to improving both individual and organizational outcomes. It supports employee motivation, encourages cooperation, and reinforces a culture of integrity and fairness. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Workplace trust enhances employee performance and engagement.

H2: Workplace trust fosters employee creativity and productivity.

H3: Workplace trust strengthens human resource strategy by promoting organizational integrity and fairness.

In a competitive and uncertain environment, organization needs to optimize their human capital in order to foster productivity and innovation. Thus, human resource management as a major strategic lever for competitiveness allow organization to attract, train and retrain talent, aligning individual skills with the organization's strategy, and strengthening its sustainable performance. The importance of human resource management for competitiveness is measured by the degree of trust that boosts employee engagement and commitment to achieve organizational objectives.

Consequently, trust is an important tool of human resource management that fosters professional relationships, a key to employee engagement, and drives sustainable performance.

In order to highlight the importance of trust building in a sustainable HRM, this study aim to present a comprehensive analysis of the role of building trust at workplace through an enhanced organizational culture developed within organization which promotes the use of sustainable human resource management practices. Trust is a construct that shapes human relationships and determines the quality of interaction within an organization. It is also an indicator of an enhanced organizational culture based on sustainable human resource management practices that foster competence development and equity.

1. Theoretical framework and previous studies

1.1. Trust at workplace as a critical organizational managerial construct

Trust is a composition of the ability to be willing and vulnerable to the actions of others, (a) the optimistic expectation of future outcomes, (b) and (c) interdependence between the trusted and trustee [3]. At the organizational level, trust results from an effective strategy of justice. Organizational justice is an essential factor of an effective human resource management strategy; it determines employee behavior in the workplace, and adopting this strategy by implementing justice procedures for employees impacts their organization's trust [4]. Trusted collaboration helps employees maximize and utilize their knowledge, skills and experience to achieve a common shared goal. Hence, the shorter the distance of collaboration, the higher the trust and the more confidence it brings at the individual level of the collaboration. This fact depends on the interfaces between employees and the organization, which can benefit both of them.

Workplace collaboration is a deep relationship based on trust that means combining knowledge and skills and bringing varied talents together. This collaboration involves an organizational behavior in which employees share their skills and ideas to

achieve a common objective which is the organization's performance outcomes. However, the organization seeks more stability in the workplace by building organizational justice that leads to a trusted relationship. A healthy collaboration enhances the generation of value and achieving the organization's objectives, but failing to create a trusted workplace can push the organization to achieve its goals. A study conducted by Schulz et al. (2022) [5] characterized the relationship between employees and managers as an organizational-relational complex, situated within the workplace context. Organizational trust is a notion that refers to employees' level of confidence and dependence on their organization. Working conditions, job security, communication between management and employees, and other components of the workplace environment can all have an impact on it.

Organizations may be able to create an environment where employees feel more comfortable and confident about their job by understanding how specific measures of control in employment relationships influence individuals' disposition to trust others. Fulfilled employees feel more confidence and reliance in their organizations; personal and organizational trusts are different but complementary. Furthermore, organizational trust is more than a simple feeling of an optimistic expectation of others; it is a natural mechanism that guarantees the optimum working conditions, job security and effective communication between managers and employees, creating a better workplace environment [6].

Trust in the workplace is an optimistic individual's expectations of others' actions, and it has two components: trustworthiness and trust propensity, which are explained by the trustee and their ability and disposition to trust others [7]. Indeed, an organization needs to recognize how to foster a trust relationship between its employees, which in turn could lead to improved job performance outcomes and reduce risk-taking behavior. The multidisciplinary trust concept contributes to its definition and conceptualization and has created confusion to give an exact universal definition. For some researchers, trust is related to human behavioral intention or action of making choices depending on the others' degree of loyalty; these personal characteristics of human behavior can complicate the definition of trust in the workplace as a concept used in the human resource management field, such as managing appraisal systems, time working and autonomy of work organization. Trust in the workplace is also seen as a cooperative behavior within a trusted context. The human resource management practice views employees as valuable assets and called intellectual capital, which needs to be effectively enhanced and invested in [8]. This approach is based on trust and collaboration of the employees considered as internal partners, its contributes by the way to development of the organization.

According to Ehnert (2009) [9], sustainable human resources management (SHRM) is a strategic approach to human resources management (HRM); it helps to achieve long-term objectives within an organization. This field highlights the importance of a vibrant social, human, and economic environment for human resource performance. Hence, SHRM seeks creatively to reproduce the HR bases over the long term; it builds an ideology based on a sustainable employment relationship [10]. Thus, a trusted relationship is fundamental in linking organization strategies and practices and expected employee behavior.

1.2. Central impact of trust management at workplace

Understanding an organization and its values for success is the primary mission of organizational culture, which improves methods for leading and enhancing innovation [11]. Thus, it is a crucial concept that helps to understand how companies are developed and its

influence on their performance and resilience [11], and it impacts the recourse management style by enhancing job satisfaction culture and commitment and communication efficiency. Moreover, a positive organizational culture enhances job satisfaction and commitment, while a lack of communication creates feelings of alienation [12]. This influence is based on the type of organizational culture which impacts employee readiness for change dimensions [13]. The common point among organizations is a change that strives to establish an organizational culture with a long-term effect and creates resistance when established [14], thereby exhibiting the organization's potential stability or flexibility [15]. The point is to deepen understanding of the utility of trust for the organization and the synergy created through a trusted relationship in an individual-organization combination.

Indeed, the literature review on workplace trust links it to working conditions, human behavior, and the employee-employer interface. Trust advantage helps to create an open environment where employees feel comfortable sharing critical information about the company's vulnerabilities. [16]. For example, trust is essential to conducting a fraud risk assessment, as it fosters confidence in the person leading the assessment [16]. Trusting is also sharing honest insights about the company's culture, operation and potential fraud risks. [16]. Trust is a composition of the ability to be willing and vulnerable to the actions of others, (a) the optimistic expectation of future outcomes, (b) and (c) interdependence between the trusted and trustee [3].

Wells (2014) [16] highlights the human factor in explaining the link between trust and fraud. Human failings lead trusted people to violate that trust and the act of stealing made by employees is related to the position of trust. The relationship between employees and employers can face trust issues, such as in a fiduciary relationship, which is based on a legal requirement to act in the best interest of the company rather than personal gain. Thus, fiduciaries impose an integration of honesty, integrity, and loyalty when managing other people's interests. Finally, trust cannot be imposed by authority, but it must be earned through consistent words and actions of those who are conducting the assessment in order to build rapport with employees. This leads us to the conclusion that trust is a relationship built in time by an organization, and it is the pillar of the organizational culture.

Trust, as a human value, embodies confidence and fairness; it is fundamental to building strong human relationships. Cressey [17] hypothesized that trusted people facing financial problems would become trust violators. The author qualifies the psychological process through which a trusted person turns into a fraudster showing that fraud does not happen randomly but follows patterns of rationalization and opportunity.

According to Wells(2014) [16, p. 220], employees who commit trust violations and misappropriate company assets are the most trusted within the organization. They pursue this behavior because their position of trust gives them access to restricted areas, secure supply rooms, or even keys to the business.

In the workplace context, trust relationships are translated into material configurations, such as in networked environments like cybersecurity and IT infrastructure [18]. In which devices and users can trust each other, this trust can also be restricted based on specific criteria. Trust in a network is controlled and limited to ensure security. Companies define trust rules to protect data and prevent unauthorized access, ensuring only approved devices and users can interact within the network. Adopting a sustainable human resource management practice.

1.3. Building a culture of trust

McKee(2017) [19] highlights reliability and consistency as two key aspects of building trust in professional relationships. Indeed, workplace trust concerns competence, stability, work performance, and behavior dependability. Consequently, consistent and reliable employees foster stronger relationships and a healthier work environment. Trust in the workplace goes beyond just providing employees with basic necessities like office space, tools, and accessibility. A culture of trust is built when leaders and employees demonstrate competence, honesty, and empathy in their interactions [20]. The trust-building process is related to the nature of social exchange [21], which is based on the quality of others' reactions to our intentions and predictions. The gap between behavior reaction and behavior prediction could be explained by a lack of trust exchange within a social relationship. Moreover, workplace relationships that are not well developed from the outset cause distrust or stem from a previous experience of a trust violation.

Employees who trust their employer feel more secure, valued, and motivated in their work, which leads them to be engaged, satisfied, and committed. Building a strong trust relationship decreases problems and conflicts [22], such as high turnover and resistance to change in the workplace. It helps employees communicate openly, follow company policies, and cooperate.

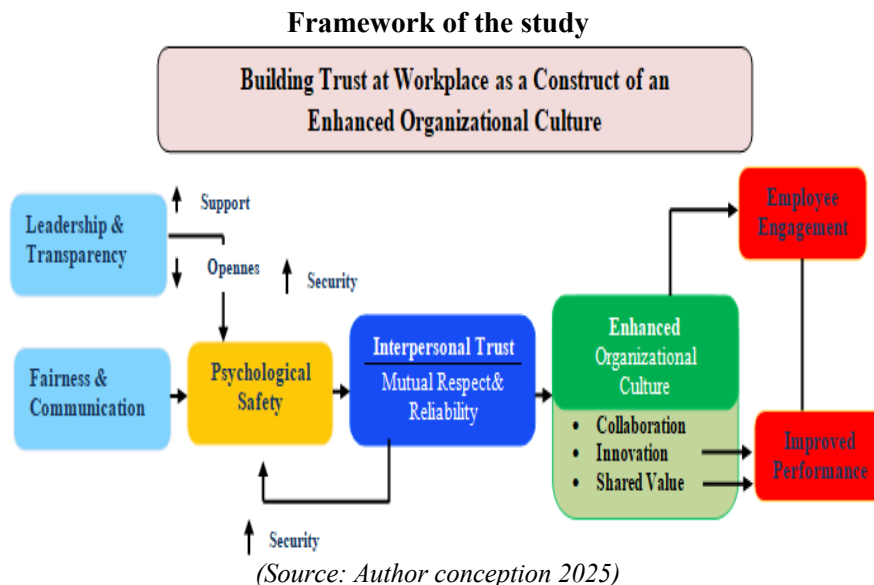
Mutual trust is a crucial factor in workplace relationships between employees and employers; this relationship can endure even the most demanding challenges, conflicts, or changes. This factor acts as a stabilizing force that helps to reduce disagreements and external pressures. Conversely, when this factor is lacking, relationships become fragile, leading to a high-conflict climate. According to Reina et al. [23], trust can be cultivated and reinforced through leadership, communication, and organizational practices. Trust is a crucial factor in the workplace, as it is linked to employee engagement, which enables employees to put their full energy and commitment into their work, even in difficult times; they are aware of the importance of their contributions, talents, and energy to the company [24].

According to Macey et al. (2011) [24], trust is part of organizational culture that individuals can feel through their organization's values, which are promoted, endorsed, and upheld. From this perspective, the authors suggest that this trust culture is experienced primarily through the level of employee engagement. The management of trust culture should be based on trust building within the organization and among employees. Then, building a strong trust relationship between employees and their organization reduces their feelings of vulnerability when facing uncertain situations or ambiguity.

2. Conceptual framework of the study

As illustrated in Figure 1, the study's conceptual framework is based on a sequential, causally structured model in which trust, as a construct, is developed through leadership behaviors and organizational practices within a progressive shaping culture that influences engagement and performance. The model reflects the logic of an enhanced organizational culture using conditions that foster psychological states capable of generating relational and collective cultural outcomes. Each construct of this conceptual framework operates either as an antecedent, mediator, or outcome variable within a coherent Building trust process.

Figure 1.



2.1. Independent variable

2.1.1. Leadership and transparency

Leadership and transparency represent the primary independent variable in the framework. This construct refers to the impact of leaders' behaviors on trust building. Leadership style should combine skills such as openness [25], [26], clear communication, ethical consistency, accessibility, and a visible decision-making process. Indeed, leadership transparency reduces uncertainty and signals integrity. If well applied, it fosters in the employee the perception of organizational support. Moreover, the leaders who demonstrate the ability of openness by providing clear guidance help employees to experience a greater perceived support in their work environment. Then, leadership transparency is evident through the leader's openness. According to Figure 1, leadership and transparency directly influence employees' psychological safety. This interaction is a basic element of the relationship between employees and leaders, enhanced by perceptions of support and openness. The direction of the arrows indicates increased support and openness on the part of the leader, creating the necessary psychological conditions for employees to feel secure.

2.1.2. Fairness and communication

Fairness and communication reflect the organization's structural justice dimension of the organization [27], [28]. This second independent variable encompasses procedural fairness, equitable treatment, consistent policies, and transparent two-way communication. Hence, fairness is a signal of respect and legitimacy, and effective communication reduces ambiguity and strengthens shared understanding. According to Figure 1, fairness and communication directly influence psychological safety. An organization using fair communication reinforces employees' sense of security. Indeed, fair communication is deeply related to psychological safety, which appears in the perception of justice. Therefore, employees feel safe and express their needs without fear of retaliation.

As an independent variable, it complements leadership transparency, and they are the antecedent variables that shape the psychological infrastructure of the workplace. These variables provide employees an institutional reinforcement of trust-building signals.

2.2. Mediator variable

2.2.1. Psychological safety

Psychological safety is the degree of safety of a shared perception of the work environment regarding interpersonal risk-taking [29], [30], [31]. According to Figure 1 Psychological safety functions as the first mediator variable in the model. Hence, this variable is an indication on the feelings of security, openness, and confidence that speaking up will not lead employees to punishment or humiliation. This variable is directly influenced by leadership transparency and fairness. As part of the trust-building process, psychological safety influences interpersonal trust. This mediator serves as the emotional and cognitive bridge between structural organizational practices and relational trust formation. Indeed, without the articulation of psychological safety, supportive leadership behaviors and fair procedures would not translate into deeper relational bonds.

2.2.2. Interpersonal trust

Interpersonal trust represents a mutual respect, reliability, and confidence in colleagues' intentions and behaviors. It is the relational outcome of psychological safety and a second mediator variable of the model. In interpersonal safety, individuals feel safe and are fostered by a truly trusted relationship [32], [33]. Their actions are not calculated; they act naturally, without any frustration, to complete their daily tasks in a solid work environment. Through interpersonal trust, employees share mutual respect and reliability.

According to Figure 1, interpersonal trust mediates the psychological safety and enhanced organizational culture. For psychological safety, interpersonal trust is based at the individual level as a condition for moving toward collective cultural outcomes, as named in the study, enhanced organizational culture. Indeed, interpersonal trust served as a bridge between individual and collective levels of trust at the workplace. Trust had several benefits, such as enhancing the cooperation between employees and leaders, reducing defensive behaviors, and contributing to strengthening social cohesion within teams. It enables shared norms and collaborative practices, leading to social performance and internal organizational efficiency through innovative practices. This dynamic of interpersonal trust helps an organization adopt a flexible approach to uncertainty and competition.

Finally, interpersonal trust converts psychological safety into tangible collective dynamics that shape organizational culture.

2.2.3. Enhanced organizational culture

Enhanced organizational culture presents the collective dimension of a sustained built trust at workplace. As a sustainable practice, it operates within the organization to reinforce a sense of integration and has a positive effect on sharing behaviour and values, based on trust in organizational culture [34], [35], [36]. According to Figure 1, Enhanced organizational culture is a third mediator, following psychological safety and interpersonal trust. Its role is to mediate the effect of interpersonal trust, as a collective outcome of a culture of trust-building, on employee engagement and organizational performance. Thus,

enhancing organizational culture entails fostering collaboration, innovation, and the adoption of shared values as internal practices.

Furthermore, if trust is embedded in the daily interactions, it influences decision-making patterns. The organization adopts trust-building as a sustainable practice in its human resource strategy. In this framework, enhanced organisational culture comprises knowledge sharing, human resource adaptability, and alignment with shared organizational goals. As a consequence, it connects relational trust with broader organizational outcomes. Ending with an institutionalization of trust into a pivot element of organizational behavior.

2.3. Dependent variable

2.3.1. Employee engagement

Employee engagement reflects the motivational and emotional responses to an enhanced organizational culture [37], [38]. According to Figure 1, employee engagement is a dependent variable influenced by an enhanced, trust-based organizational culture. In this situation, employees are engaged when the organization encourages collective collaboration and shared values. They perceive organizational support that helps them invest discretionary effort and demonstrate commitment. Within the supported framework, the relationship between enhanced organizational culture and employee engagement suggests that building a culture of trust is a proximal driver of motivational states. Consequently, Employee engagement becomes an individual-level outcome derived from collective cultural conditions.

2.3.2. Improved performance

Improved performance is the outcome of a strategy of building trust among employees. There is a strong link between trust in organisation and management and improving employee performance [39], [40]. According to Figure 1, improved performance is a second dependent variable of the model, which represents the ultimate aim of a process of building trust through enhanced organizational culture. It covers the axes of productivity, effectiveness, and innovation output that companies need to adopt through the expected behaviour of their human capital.

According to this framework, improved performance is the level of social performance of human capital enhanced by organisational culture through a process of trust building after winning employee engagement. The model shows that improved performance is influenced by this articulation of organisational trust and individual trust. This fact suggests that organisational culture-based trust shapes global performance and leads to expected outcomes. Furthermore, global performance emerges from the application of leadership and fairness, and from creating psychological safety that fosters trust and stimulates employee engagement in successive steps.

However, this framework conceptualizes trust as a developmental construct embedded within organizational systems, in which all variables are interconnected and considered as a succession of steps in the process. Indeed, leadership and fairness operate as independent antecedents of psychological safety and interpersonal trust functions as a mediating mechanism; an enhanced organizational culture serves as a collective mediator; and engagement and performance constitute the dependent outcomes. The articulation of the interface between each variable is sequential and interdependent. Thus, the model illustrates a systematic relationship in which organizational structures shape psychological

states, psychological states shape relationships, relationships shape culture, and culture shapes performance.

3. Analysis and discussion

The conceptual model of this study is based on the idea of trust as a fundamental construct of the organizational system. This cornerstone is well systematic construct that is built and developed inside the organization in a continuous process. It is a deep relationship between decision-makers and employees that enables collaboration and boosts the organization's global performance. This conceptual framework aims to address three major areas through a theatrical lens: trust in the workplace, human resource management, and organizational behavior. Those three dimensions had implications regarding the human risk within the organization.

3.1. Trust in the workplace as a strategic organizational construct

Effectively, the conceptualization of the area of trust in the workplace is considered it as a process that evolves structural conditions to psychological states and collectively ultimate and global performance outcomes. Indeed, it is a process that respects a succession of conditions, from leadership and fairness to psychological safety, and moves to interpersonal trust as a condition for performance. According to this point of view, each step is well calculated and contributes to the next stage of the process. Nothing is accidental; it is purely rational, an acculturation of the internal organizational culture of trust. From a trust theory perspective, the study integrates the following sub-levels of trust in the workplace, such as:

- *Institutional trust appears in the leadership practices and fairness mechanisms variables.*
- *Interpersonal trust is developed through mutual respect and reliability among employees and with the organization.*
- *Collective trust is institutionalized within a human resource strategy based on enhance organizational culture.*

This multilevel integration reflects a perspective that considers trust as both a cognitive evaluation and a social resource. It is important to indicate that trust reduces uncertainty and mitigates vulnerabilities at an organizational dimension. Therefore, trust becomes a tool for stabilizing expectations and a facilitator of cooperation and collaboration. The trust-building, as seen in this conceptual framework, is perceived as a mechanism that reduces human risk. Why is human risk related to trust building? Employee engagement is a human output, intangible and perceived as a latent variable. Indeed, a risk employee is experienced when engaging in interpersonal exposure, voicing concerns, or participating in innovation. The process of building trust gives the employee a continuous sense of self-assessment, enabling them to evaluate the potential consequences of their behavior within the organization through initiative. Consequently, trust helps an organization to build strong professional relationships and anticipate behavioral risk.

3.2. Implications for human resource management

From a human resource management perspective, the conceptual study has a strong implication for strategic human capital management. The framework considers trust as an ethical and relational value for social performance. It is at the core of human resources

outcomes, shaped by policies and practices that combine the leadership system and communication. Firstly, leadership and fairness practices reflect human resource-driven systems, such as transparent performance appraisal, equitable reward distribution, and inclusive communication channels. This is what an institutionalized trust is as an organizational procedures instauration by the human resource management function to build trust conditions within the organization. Secondly, psychological safety and interpersonal trust highlight the importance of human resource interventions to ensure and anticipate employee well-being and to manage conflict. The orientation of training programs should be based on ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, and communication competence. By this orientation, a well-defined program directly contributes to strengthening the trust pathway described in the framework. Thirdly, the alignment of enhanced organizational culture with strategic human resource management appears in high-commitment work systems and knowledge-sharing climates. Especially when trust is embedded in human resource strategies, it becomes an effective practice of a sustainable organizational capability

Human resource management plays a preventive role regarding the human risk dimension. A human risk refers to potential losses driven by employees' behavior, such as disengagement, turnover, and resistance to change. Other risks are estimated at the collective level, such as internal conflict and reduced innovation. Building a culture of trust through structured human resources policies strengthens the company's position and reduces potential risks, whether at the interpersonal or collective level. A lack of trust in strategy leads to weakness of organizational resilience. Thus, human resource management is an effective tool for attenuating relational and psychological risks.

3.3. Organizational behavior perspective

The organizational behavior connects the three levels: individual perceptions, dyadic relationships, and collective phenomena to organizational outcomes (engagement and performance). Consequently, the organizational behavior perspective highlights several key behavioral dynamics:

- *At the individual level: psychological safety influences voice behavior, learning orientation, and adaptive performance.*
- *At the dyadic relationships level: interpersonal trust facilitates cooperation, reduces defensive routines, and strengthens team cohesion.*
- *At the collective level: enhanced organizational culture shapes shared norms, values, and informal governance mechanisms.*

Behavioral climates are formed in a dynamic of sequential interdependence as illustrated in the framework. This logic follows a diagram that outlines steps: organizational structures shape perceptions; perceptions influence interactions; interactions consolidate into norms; norms determine performance patterns.

3.4. Trust and human risk mitigation

This contribution to the framework is relevant because it shows that the implicit treatment of human risk is important for the performance outcome of the trust-building process. When an organization faces an uncertain environmental challenge, it must also manage internal complexity to align the internal and external environments effectively. Therefore, human risk occurs when employees perceive vulnerability without adequate relational safeguards from the leaders or the managers. The model suggests that:

- *Leadership transparency reduces uncertainty risk.*
- *Fairness and communication reduce injustice risk.*
- *Psychological safety reduces interpersonal exposure risk.*
- *Interpersonal trust reduces relational conflict risk.*
- *Enhanced organizational culture reduces the risk of coordination and misalignment.*

This approach of trust and human risk mitigation is a stabilizing mechanism that transforms vulnerabilities into fruitful cooperation. Through this approach trust the framework is reframing trust as a strategic risk management tool, and it ensures that human capital functions cohesively under uncertainty and change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the framework considers trust in the workplace as a multi-level phenomenon that needs coordination between human resource management and organizational behavior in order to improve organizational performance and reduce human risk and relational dynamics. This process of trust building enables organizations to transform trust into a sustainable competitive advantage. As practical recommendations based on these findings, several actions are recommended, such as:

- *The institutionalization of fairness and transparency through a strong procedure of organizational justice, transparent communication and equitable performance management systems.*
- *The development of leadership integrity by establishing programs focusing on behavioral integrity, and ethical decision-making that leads to accelerated trust formation.*
- *The adaptation of a suitable and sustainable environment to psychological safety, where employees are free to communicate and admit their mistakes without fear of disproportionate sanction.*
- *The alignments of human resource management practices with trust in all actions as a signal of reliability and respect.*
- *Monitoring trust as a strategic indicator by integrating trust metrics into organizational health dashboards alongside engagement and performance indicators.*

As a foundational limitation, this conceptual model has not yet been empirically validated. Despite this framework integrating well-established constructs from the existing literature, the sequential relationships still required statistical testing to confirm causality and mediation effects.

This theoretical research has as prospects of future research the following that need a deeper inquiry:

- *Examining trust development during crises or organizational change in a longitudinal studies type.*
- *The complexity of variable implicated in trust building through multi level modeling.*
- *Adoption of remote work technologies and how trusts should operate as a function in this context.*

In summary, trust at workplace is construct that emerges as a central organizing principle which covers human risk management, employee engagement, and sustainable strategic performance. This study provides a comprehensive and structured framework for

understanding the role of trust as an excellent factor affecting human resource management and its importance for organization.

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