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Knowing When and How to Trust Superiors' Decisions: Toward a Conceptual Model of Subordinate Managers' Behavior

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Background/Purpose: The study explores subordinate managers' propensity to trust superiors' decisions. Its purpose is twofold: first, to provide lower-level managers with a tool to know when and how to trust superiors' decisions for a better organizational performance, and second, to lay the foundations for the development of a conceptual model of subordinate managers' behavior.
Methods: The research philosophy adopts an inductive content analysis perspective. A mixed-methods research design is applied, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data is collected through questionnaire, focus groups, interviews, and literature review. A total number of 219 managers from eight Bulgarian business organizations filled the questionnaire and 92 of them participated in group discussions and interviews.
Results: The majority of the managers surveyed tend to trust their immediate superiors. As a result of group discussions, the main advantages and disadvantages of managers with opposing attitudes toward trust are identified. A decision tree model of subordinate manager's appropriate behaviors is proposed.
Conclusion: Inferior managers can have an active role in managing trust in their superiors' decisions. Several situational factors, including superior's competence and integrity, and organizational culture, determine the degree of trust that the subordinate manager should observe concerning the decisions and requests of the immediate superior.

Keywords: *Trust, Distrust, Subordinate manager, Immediate superior, Managerial behavior*

1 Introduction

1.1 Scope of the subject

For more than a century, scholars have been studying managers and their behavior. So far, research focus has been mainly put on the work of managers as superiors and much has been written about them as decision-makers and team leaders. Remarkably, their activity as subordinates stands in the shadows, nevertheless it is apparent at all levels of management (even CEOs have to report to a board of directors). As Bhawuk & Ferris (2000) put it, managers have to switch their roles all the time: they are bosses one moment and subordinates the next. However, the way they deal with the two roles remains unexplored (Alvehus et al., 2016).

The limited research on the role of managers as followers and subordinates can be explained with its contradictory and heterogeneous nature. The perception of their active role in the management process at first glance contradicts the understanding that subordinates (regardless of their position) are passive executors of decisions made by superiors. As a matter of fact, managers are not regular executors – they do the operational planning, organize the implementation process, exercise control, and are responsible for the outcome.

As a result of neglecting this role, there is a shortage

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of concepts in the modern scientific literature that describe and explain the behavior of the manager as a subordinate. This shortage is even more noticeable in terms of guiding models that recommend certain behaviors of subordinate managers regarding the specifics of the situation (as opposed to the literature on leadership, in which these models abound). To fill this gap, it is time for scholars to consider the main challenges faced by inferior managers, analyze them systematically, and focus their efforts on developing more comprehensive models of subordinate managers' behavior.

As one of these challenges, the issue of interpersonal trust can serve as a starting point for future debates on the subject. Many researchers and practitioners perceive trust as a key organizational factor that can build competitive advantages and increase the efficiency and ability to develop (Bieńkowska et al., 2018), defining its role as critical and crucial (Agnihotri, 2017). It has already been proven that trust influences important organizational aspects, such as managerial effectiveness (McGregor, 1967), employee involvement (Thomas et al., 2009), individual performance (Colquitt et al., 2007), team performance (De Jong et al., 2016), commitment (Chow et al., 2015), job satisfaction (Guinot et al., 2014), decision-making (Natorski & Pomorska, 2017) and dyadic cooperation (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013). At the same time, over-trusting can have negative consequences (Möllering & Sydow; 2019; Maciejovsky & Budescu, 2020), especially if it affects the performance of responsible tasks, as is usually the case with most managers.

The rich research material gathered over the years provides favorable opportunities for a more detailed insight into this issue through the prism of managers as subordinates. The effectiveness of their work as implementers of higher managers' decisions is a function of the trust between superiors and inferiors (Vecchiotti, 2018). It is important to study interpersonal trust in the organization (Hasche et al., 2020) and even more important to investigate the vertical relationships of managers particularly, because they can exert influence downwards and upwards (Kotsev, 2021).

In this respect, the present study can be seen as an attempt to contribute to the filling of three significant gaps in existing research. First, contemporary theories on trust and leadership/followership often view the different streams as overall constructs instead of multifaceted phenomena (Hasel & Grover, 2017). Although there are some studies trying to integrate leadership, followership and trust theories (e.g. Han & Harold, 2019; Khan et al., 2020), present research continues to be predominantly focused on leadership practices for building trust of followers (e.g. Le & Tran, 2021, Dirks et al., 2021). This paper might be considered a first of its kind as it combines modern followership and trust theories to develop a functional tool for subordinate managers.

Second, unlike most previous studies, here both parties (the trustor and the trustee) hold managerial positions. This implies a better assessment of the situation by the subordinate manager, due to the opportunity to use her (or his) experience as a team leader in the relationship with the superior. However, scholars are not unanimous on whether this assessment favors superior's decisions trustworthiness. According to Hurley (2006), roughly half of all managers in the USA don't trust their superiors, while Andersen & Kovač (2012) report different results in Europe. A contribution of this paper is the provision of additional data on trust between management levels. Trying to provide further clarification, trust propensity of Bulgarian inferior managers is studied.

Finally, unlike contemporary trust research as conducted by organizational science, which is interested mainly in trust determinants (e.g. Lleo et al., 2016; Bencsik & Juhasz, 2020), trust formation (e.g. Valenti et al., 2020; Zidane, 2021), and trust impact (e.g. Burke et al., 2007; Cho & Ringquist, 2011), this paper attempts to provide an answer to questions "when" and "how". The study assumes that subjective trust is a personal choice (Srinivas et al., 2018) and it can vary depending on the person and the situation (Yin et al., 2020). However, I refuse to accept that the ultimate trust is a cure-all for every organizational ill and try to recommend a "dosage of the drug" according to the specific situation. As a result, the paper suggests a decision tree model, recommending when and how lower-level managers can trust their superiors.

1.2 Literature review and conceptual framework

Scholars' interest in followership and subordination has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the 21st century (Bligh, 2011). A growing number of academic and business publications recognize that it is the followers rather than the traditional leaders who make things happen in today's organizations (Mullen, 2016). Even so, research on followership still lags behind leadership studies: only 8% of all articles published in The Leadership Quarterly at the end of 2017 used the term "follower" (or a derivative) in their title, compared to 83% that used the term "leader" (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019).

Interpersonal trust has also generated considerable interest in the organizational sciences in recent years (Ma et al., 2019). It is found important especially in situations that demand collaborative effort (Coletti et al., 2005) and even more important in supervisor-subordinate relationships, as trust improves cooperation and mitigates agency problems by enhancing information exchange and reducing subordinates' perceived need to engage in short term opportunistic behavior (Hartmann & Slapničar, 2009). Moreover, employees' trust in supervisors is positively linked to all

forms of organizational commitment: affective, continuous, and normative (Akkaya, 2020).

These undeniable advantages have led many studies to focus on interpersonal trust between managers and subordinates. Regrettably, most of them do not go beyond identifying leadership behaviors (e.g. Whitener et al., 1998; Biljsma & Van de Bunt, 2003) and other trust-building factors (e.g. McKnight & Chervany, 2006; Tomaževič & Aristovnik, 2019), omitting the possibility of a wrong or malicious decision by the superior. Knowing that people (including higher-level managers) are not perfect, such optimism seems out of place. The unconditional readiness to adopt and implement a decision that does not contribute to the achievement of organizational goals calls into question the concept of generalized trust as a panacea for everything, embraced by many scholars since the 1990s (Reeskens, 2009).

Fortunately, subordinates do not always demonstrate such conformity. Exploration practice shows that they tend to resist superiors, perceived as incompetent (Darioly & Schmid, 2011). It appears that distrust is not the opposite of trust (Van De Walle & Six, 2014) and sometimes it could be the better option. Recent studies confirm that when distrust is present, organizations remain alert and are prepared for unexpected adversities (Raza-Ullah & Kostos, 2020). In fact, any reasonable doubt in the trustworthiness of the potential trustee can make distrust rational (Ziegler, 1998).

Building on the work of Mayer et al. (1995), recent studies have confirmed that trust cannot be maintained or developed when the levels of superior's competence (ability) and fairness (integrity) are low (Poon, 2013; Bugdol, 2018), or the organizational culture does not support it (Jabeen & Isakovic, 2018; Jeong & Chun, 2019). Furthermore, the level of inferior managers' certainty in their subjective trustworthiness evaluation is an additional variable that has to be considered (Holtz et al., 2020). Under the diverse influence of suchlike factors, superior managers are trusted to different degrees (Andersen, 2019).

To date, no model has been developed (at least to my knowledge) to suggest the proper degree to which inferior managers can trust and comply with their superiors' decisions and requests. However, the potential application of the model proposed here is not limited to this function. It can also serve as a basis for creating a broader conceptual model of the overall behavior of the manager as a subordinate. In addition to trust propensity, a future broader concept may include other important personal characteristics that affect the superior-inferior relationship.

It should be clearly stated that the present study focuses on 'inferior-superior' relationships and not on the 'follower-leader' connection, where trust is a determinant (Balcerzyk, 2020). Furthermore, it only applies to immediate levels in the organization. In this regard, the terms 'subordinate manager', 'inferior manager', and 'lower-level manager' are used interchangeably, as are the terms 'superior', 'senior manager', and 'higher-level manager'.

1.3 Aim, objectives, and research questions

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to provide lower-level managers with a tool to know when and how to trust superiors' decisions for a better organizational performance, and second, to lay the foundations for the development of a conceptual model of lower-level managers' behavior.

The main objectives are as follows:

O1. To explore in eight Bulgarian business organizations inferior managers' propensity to trust superiors' decisions or to trust their own judgment.

O2. To identify and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of managers with a propensity to trust or distrust their superiors.

O3. To build a decision tree model to recommend when and how lower-level managers can trust their superiors.

Taking into account the conceptual framework and objectives of the study, the following research questions are addressed in this paper:

Q1. Do Bulgarian managers as subordinates tend to trust the decisions of their immediate superiors or tend to trust their own judgment?

Q2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of managers who tend to doubt superiors' decisions?

Q3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of managers who tend to trust superiors' decisions?

Q4. When is it advisable for inferior managers to trust the decision of a superior and when to doubt?

The paper is organized into four sections. The next section describes the methods used in the study. The third section is the review of research findings and is the heart of the paper. It is split into two sub sections, one entitled 'Analysis' (referring to empirical results), and the other 'Modeling' (dedicated to the transformation of the results into a decision-tree model). Finally, an interpretation of results is provided, conclusions, limitations, and future research directions are outlined.

2 Methods

2.1 Research design

The research philosophy of this study adopts an inductive content analysis perspective.

The study applied a mixed-methods research design, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore a complex phenomenon such as trust in detail (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015) and to provide a better understanding of managers' trust propensity and behavior. A combination of two research strategies was used to obtain empirical data. Since the study aims to lay the foundations for the development of a new conceptual model, explora-

tory research was involved. It also aims to survey inferior managers' trust propensity, defined as "a dispositional willingness to rely on others" (Colquitt et al., 2007), and to describe its impact on task performance, which implied descriptive research strategy.

In the first phase of the study, taking advantage of a questionnaire approach already developed to study leadership styles (Myers, 1970), I developed a ten-item questionnaire, designed to measure managers' trust propensity relating research question Q1. Expert reviews and a pilot study with 17 graduate students were conducted for content and face validity of the questionnaire. Reliability was tested by test-retest of the same respondents two weeks later (P=.71). Moreover, being a part-time leadership trainer, I had the opportunity to involve trainees in my research. During an open training session, the cognitive interviewing method was entailed as a second step to validate the questionnaire. Ten lower and middle-level managers gave their feedback by two well-recognized techniques: thinking aloud and verbal probing (Priede & Farrall, 2011). As a result of the pretesting procedure, four items were removed from the questionnaire, three items were modified and reliability was raised to 0.86.

In its final version, the questionnaire includes only six items, shown in Table 1. Each item consists of a pair of two statements. Respondents have to assign a score from 0 to 10 to each statement to show how strongly they agree ("0" indicating strong disagreement and "10" – strong agreement). The points assigned for each pair have to total ten. The degree of individual propensity to trust superiors (PTS) is calculated by the formula PTS = (a) + (d) + (e) + (h) + (i) + (k). The gravity of the result to 0 testifies to a propensity not to trust superiors. As the result approaches 60, the propensity to trust superiors gradually prevails.

Table 1: Trust in superiors questionnaire

Statement	***Score***
(a) Usually the goals set by the boss and the paths for their achievement coincide with your own views.	.....
(b) You often have the feeling that the goals and objectives assigned to you are contradictory and mutually exclusive.	.....
	(10)
(c) Before accepting a superior's decision, you prefer to check it out.	.....
(d) You always accept superiors' decisions without questioning them.	.....
	(10)
(e) You can easily trust your boss's judgment when problems arise.	.....
(f) You don't agree quickly with your boss's judgment in ambiguous situations.	.....
	(10)
(g) If superiors' decisions and actions are inexplicable to you, you begin to doubt their adequacy.	.....
(h) If you don't see the point in superiors' decisions, you tend to assume that their position allows them to take into account things invisible to you.	.....
	(10)
(i) You think people are too suspicious of superiors in general.	.....
(j) You personally often have doubts about superiors' motives or competence.	.....
	(10)
(k) The boss always knows what has to be done, because he/she sees the "big picture".	.....
(l) Even if the boss is competent, he/she has no idea of the details of my work.	.....
	(10)

As a measure of central tendency of a set of quantitative observations with different importance, weighted arithmetic mean is used (Pulamolu et al., 2017). The individual PTSs are divided into four class intervals (0 to 15, 16 to 30, 31 to 45, and 46 to 60), calculating the weighted arithmetic mean $\bar{x}$ defined by

$$\overline{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} x_i f_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} f_i} \quad (1),$$

where x_iare the data values to be averaged and f_i is the number of managers (the weight) in the i-th interval.

Regarding research questions Q2, Q3 and Q4, a qualitative approach is followed to gain an in-depth knowledge of the topic. Each of the three complex questions is decomposed into simple sub questions (Table 2):

Table 2: Research questions Q2-Q4 and sub questions

Research questionS	**Sub questions**
Q2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of managers who tend *to doubt* superiors' decisions?	Q2.1. What are the advantages of managers who tend to doubt superiors' decisions"? Q.2.2. What supporting arguments can you provide? Q2.3. What are the disadvantages of managers who tend to doubt superiors' decisions? Q.2.4. What supporting arguments can you provide?
Q3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of managers who tend *to trust* superiors' decisions?	Q.3.1. What are the advantages of managers who tend to trust superiors' decisions? Q.3.2. What supporting arguments can you provide? Q.3.3. What are the disadvantages of managers who tend to trust superiors' decisions? Q.3.4. What supporting arguments can you provide?
Q4. When is it advisable for inferior managers to trust the decision of a superior and when to doubt?	Q.4.1. Can you describe a situation in which *lack of questioning* superior's decisions resulted in better organizational performance? Q.4.2. Why did you trust the superior's decision? Q.4.3. Can you describe a situation in which *lack of questioning* superior's instructions resulted in worse organizational performance? Q.4.4. What you could do differently? Q.4.5. Can you describe a situation in which *questioning* superior's instructions resulted in better performance? Q.4.6. Why and how exactly did you express your distrust? Q.4.7. Can you describe a situation in which *questioning* superior's instructions resulted in worse performance? Q.4.8. What you could do differently?

2.2 Data collection

Alongside the survey questionnaire, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used for primary data collection (Saunders et al., 2019). These were conducted as a part of in-company training programs in eight Bulgarian clothing (garment and apparel) manufacturers – two large enterprises (250 employees and more) and six medium-sized businesses (50 to 249 employees). Eleven focus groups were formed, each comprising of five to seven

managers. The duration of group discussions ranged from one hour to one hour and twenty minutes. Minutes were taken during the events for both data sources (focus groups and interviews).

Participants in the qualitative data collection were lower and middle-level managers (N = 92). All of them filled in the questionnaire and discussed issues related to questions Q2, Q3, and Q4. The homogeneity of the focus groups was ensured by division of participants: the lower-level managers (N=71) expressed their opinion in group discussions, while the middle-level managers (N=21) were interviewed individually. The interviews lasted an average of about an hour: the first half gathering information on the specifics of the organization (needed for the training assignment), and the second half of this time was dedicated to discussion of questions Q2, Q3 and Q4 in an open-ended manner based on semi-structured conversation. Departures from the guiding questions were encouraged (Silverman, 2013).

An inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze both group discussions and interviews. Following Lester et al. (2020) earlier work, the analysis process included seven phases: preparing and organizing the data, transcribing the data, becoming familiar with the data corpus, memoing the data, coding the data, producing themes and categories from underlying coded passages, and making the analysis process transparent. A 15-point checklist (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to assess the quality of the thematic analysis.

In addition, 127 lower managers from the same companies, who did not attend the training courses, filled in the questionnaire, too. As a result, a total number of 219 questionnaires were received. Survey respondents were predominantly female (81.2%), aged 25-45 (57%), and had up to 3 years of work experience as managers (53.4%).

3 Results

3.1 Analysis

Results of the survey show that 75 managers (34.2%) tend to doubt the decisions of their superiors (the first two intervals), as 17 of them with scores from 0 to 15 express high distrust to superiors and a strong preference to trust primarily on their own judgment (Table 2). The remaining 144 managers (65.8%) from the third and fourth intervals tend to trust the decisions of their superiors, and 35 of them (16% of the sample) indicate a high degree of trust.

Table 3: Distinctive features and number of respondents in each interval, and data values to be averaged

Interval		Feature		
0 ÷ 15	7.5	High distrust	17	127.5
16 ÷ 30	22.5	Moderate distrust	58	1308.0
31 ÷ 45	37.5	Moderate trust	109	4087.5
46 ÷ 60	52.5	High trust	35	1837.5
		Total	**219**	**7360.5**

By substitution in the formula (1), arithmetic mean value of 33.61 is obtained. Thus the answer to the first research question is provided: the majority of the managers surveyed tend to trust their immediate superiors. Is this good or bad news?

To answer this question, it is necessary to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the two extremes (high distrust versus high trust). Basically, this implies answering the second and third research questions – a task performed during the focus group discussions and interviews. The ideas presented by the participants regarding the answer to Q2 (What are the advantages and disadvantages of managers who tend to doubt superiors' decisions?) are summarized below.

A. Advantages of managers who tend to doubt superiors' decisions:

• They do not automatically follow the decisions and requests of the superior. This is probably due to their belief that there are always ways to get a job done better. Based on the information at their disposal, they try to understand the meaning of the decisions and modify them depending on the conditions of the specific situation.

• They make the most of their knowledge and skills. As a result of their efforts, the organization receives reliable information from the "firing line". Their expert judgment is difficult to manipulate by a superior.

• These managers warn of problems and identify opportunities. They often play the role of devil's advocate, which allows them to identify flaws and weaknesses on time.

• Often these managers prove to be an inexhaustible source of unconventional ideas. They do not hesitate to take radical approaches if they are convinced of their benefits. Hence, they support and maintain the innovative spirit in the organization.

• Skeptical managers unintentionally improve the individual results of their superiors. As senior managers expect resistance from their doubtful subordinates (explicit

or implicit), they pay more attention to the quality of the decisions they make, devoting additional time to gathering detailed information, analyzing alternative approaches, and refining their arguments. Thus, higher-level managers maintain consistently high standards in their work, which benefits the organization as a whole.

B. Disadvantages of managers who tend to doubt superiors' decisions:

• They are often lousy team players. Their doubts can undermine team spirit, bring a split and reduce the motivation for achievement of others.

• Constant doubts are a serious prerequisite for the corrosion of relationships. Consequently, lower-level managers risk not only their careers but also the effectiveness of their joint, not particularly synergistic, activities.

• In organizations with a large number of skeptical managers, the likelihood of losing focus and coordination increases. The lack of trust between the different management levels leads to a waste of time for explanations and inspections. It becomes difficult to reach an agreement even on the main goals and direction. In such cases, Boccialetti (1995) notes that if the differences are very large, the organization becomes a chessboard, a jungle, or even a battlefield.

• The information exchange between them and the superior is not particularly intense. Communication between the two levels is rarely sincere and open. Each of the parties seeks to attract more allies – an aspiration that takes a lot of energy from both sides, and at its extreme can affect the effectiveness of the entire organization.

During the focus group discussions, it was pointed out that it is possible to observe significant fluctuations in the levels of trust and distrust of a lower-level manager towards different higher-level managers because the trust of the subordinate largely depends on the qualities of the senior manager. Other studies confirm this assumption – subordinates who feel that the superior cares about them and helps them, have a higher degree of trust in her (McAllister, 1995). The same subordinates may show a weaker tendency to trust another manager.

Participants in the focus groups and interviews also have identified the advantages and disadvantages of managers who tend to trust their superiors' decisions. Thus, they have provided the answer to Q3:

C. Advantages of managers who tend to trust superiors' decisions:

• These managers are good team players, ready to regard organizational goals as personal goals. Superiors generally approve when subordinates leave it to them to set important goals and priorities.

• Seeing that subordinate managers share their goals and tasks, superiors tend to consult with them more often and delegate more responsibilities to them. In addition, because they are confident that the set goals and tasks will be followed, they do not emphasize tight control of subordinate performance. Thus, paradoxically, lower-level managers increase their influence and become more independent.

• Favorable "superior-inferior" relationships are maintained. The level of conflict between the two parties is kept low without much effort. This significantly reduces the level of stress in the overall work and increases the likelihood of lower-level managers receiving support from the higher level.

• Enhanced communication between inferior and superior managers is observed. The level of information exchange is high and on this basis, the management decisions taken by both parties timely reflect situational adversities.

• As an advantage, which personally affects inferior managers and not the organization, one can take into account the fact that usually trustful subordinates are offered favorable career opportunities (Marineau, 2017). This is easy to explain – superiors tend to promote those subordinates who support and follow them.

D. Disadvantages of managers who tend to trust superiors' decisions:

• Trustful managers do not want to confront their superiors. Too little conflict may encourage stagnancy and mediocracy. Superiors are likely to cultivate faith in their own infallibility and to ignore some warning signs of impending danger.

• The conceptual skills of these managers are missing or poorly developed. Constant compliance with superiors leads to impairment of these skills. In the case of promotion to a higher position, where abstract thinking and creativity are needed, this can be especially negative.

• Conflicting objectives and tasks terrify trustful managers, as it is difficult for them to decide which one to follow. This is due to their blind faith in superiors and lack of anticipation of possible complications.

• Trustful managers lose their sense of personal responsibility. They are likely to make external attributions and blame outside forces (e.g. other employees, unfavorable external environment, or bad luck) for their failures.

The analysis of the advantages and disadvantages presented above sends a clear message: there are plenty of situations in which lower-level managers have to trust superiors' decisions, but in other cases, a certain amount of distrust may be more useful. Based on this very general inference and the concrete answers to Q.4 sub questions of the managers surveyed, a model has been developed that gives some guidance to subordinate managers in deciding what these "other cases" are and what exactly "a certain amount" means.

3.2 Modelling

Figure 1 shows a product of the group discussions and individual interviews on the subject – a behavior chain that covers all possible nuances of the behavior of subordinate managers in the distrust-trust continuum. It was developed

through inductive thematic analysis of the responses received to Q.4.4, Q.4.6 and Q.4.8. The chain comprises a series of behaviors classified according to the predominant orientation of the subordinate to resist or comply with the ideas of the superior.

The chain is composed of five basic managerial behaviors:

• The manager confronts the superior, trying to prove the inappropriateness of the assigned task;

• The manager checks the appropriateness of the task before proceeding to its implementation or to express careful disagreement;

• The manager weighs the request of the superior, without expressing open consent or disagreement with it;

• The manager agrees with the superior, adapting her/his own opinion to the senior manager's point of view;

• The manager accepts the ideas of the superior as her/his own, without questioning their appropriateness.

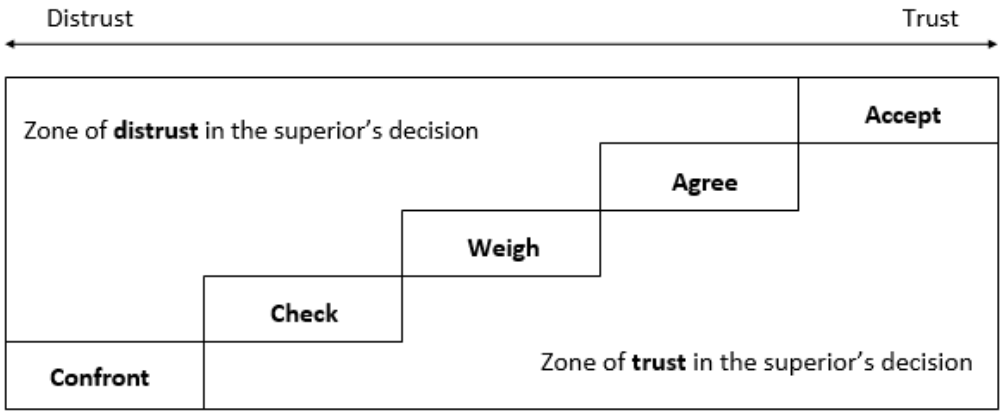


Figure 1: Behavior chain

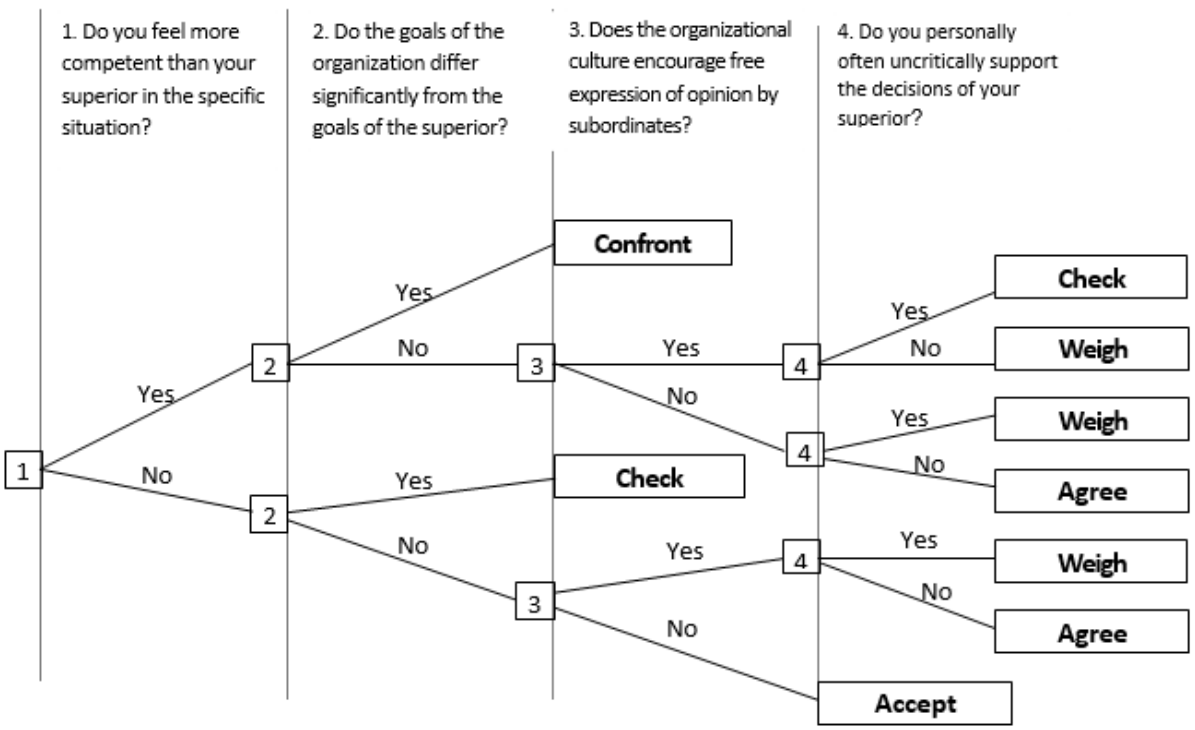


Figure 2: Decision tree model of subordinate manager's appropriate behaviors

The chain does not include the ultimate degree of resistance – rejection because managers with such an orientation would make the interaction between the two levels impossible. Their readiness to reject superior's decisions and requests would violate the basic principles of subordination in the organization.

Adopting a well-known leadership decision tree approach (Vroom & Yetton, 1973), the model of self-management presented in Figure 2 enables the manager as a subordinate to independently look over and determine the behavior that is appropriate and adequate to the situation.

The model is limited to four questions, the first three of which reflect influencing factors already mentioned in the literature review section – superior's competence and integrity, and organizational culture. The answers form a tree of alternative decisions recommending appropriate behavior from the distrust-trust continuum. The decision tree analysis highlights the most important factors that influence subordinate managers' judgment when and how to trust superior's decisions and requests.

The first question inferiors have to answer is particularly important because it affects the superior's ability to make the right decisions: "Do you feel more competent than your superior in the specific situation?" The answer to this question (as well as to the rest) requires absolute certainty on the part of subordinates regarding their adequate assessment of the situation. They can only confront the views of the immediate superior if they have sufficiently reliable and objective information about some particular competence shortcomings. Sometimes, however, reliability and objectivity of information are difficult to determine, as the subordinates do not have the big picture and may not have a clue about the existence of additional information. A positive answer to this question can be considered a necessary but not sufficient condition for a manifestation of resistance. A negative answer indicates that the subordinate does not have the competence needed to judge the decisions of the higher-level manager and should exhibit more conformity behavior.

The second question concerns the motives of the senior manager: "Do the goals of the organization differ significantly from the goals of the superior?" It is clear that if higher-level managers pursue their own (possibly selfish) objectives, it is necessary to counteract them in order to support the organizational goals. Subordinates must be careful in answering this question, as they may have been left with the wrong impression of the true motives and goals of the superior. It is advisable to choose a negative answer in case of uncertainty. If the answers to the first and second questions are positive, there is no need to consider the other questions – undoubtedly, subordinates must be ready to resist if they do not agree with the decision and they are convinced that organizational interests are not being served, while the superior pursues personal goals.

The third question is related to the norms adopted by the organizational members: "Does the organizational culture encourage free expression of opinion by subordinates?" This question examines the extent to which subordinates' different opinions are supported or condemned by other members of the organization. If the answer is "Yes", expressing disagreement with the opinion of the superior can be justified by others (including the immediate superior) and perceived as a manifestation of commitment to organizational problem solving – a situation that favors orientation towards resistance. On the other hand, if the answer is "No", i.e. the affinity for new ideas and employee involvement is minimal, if any, asserting a different opinion may be perceived as an attempt to compromise hierarchical authority and subordination. Although recent research shows that in the event of difference of opinion, superiors are prone to cooperation and negotiation with subordinates (Ruskova & Ruseva, 2018), conformity-oriented behavior is recommended in this case.

The last question indirectly reflects the expectations of the higher-level manager: "Do you personally often uncritically support the decisions of your superior?" The need for this clarifying question stems from the fact that the quality of superiors' decisions to some extent depends on their expectations regarding the reaction of subordinates – an issue addressed during the focus groups discussions, regarding Q.4.6. If superiors are accustomed to receiving full support from their subordinates, they may not make enough effort to formulate the problem and generate alternatives to solve it. This adversely affects the quality of decisions made by superiors. Therefore, a subordinate who plays the role of a skeptic in the implementation of teamwork can be especially useful as a corrective tool to neutralize superior's unneeded relaxation and to improve the decision-making process. In most cases, this answer does not significantly affect the choice of inferior's appropriate behavior. If the answer is "Yes", the orientation of the subordinate manager should be less conformal in order to counteract the inclination of the superior described above. If the answer is "No", more conformity behavior is recommended, which does not harm the organization but allows to achieve a certain balance in subordinate's reactions.

4 Discussion and conclusion

The considered model of self-management reveals opportunities for improving the work of subordinate managers and can be a useful tool for determining appropriate situational behaviors. This provides opportunities to overcome the negatives inherent in each of the two continuum extremes. Following the model, inferior managers can reduce their resistance if teamwork and uncritical execution of instructions received are required. In other cases, the model may recommend a more skeptical approach to superior's opinion and, if necessary, taking on the role of the boy, who announces to the public that the king is naked.

Superior manager's benevolence is deliberately not

considered in the decision tree so as not to affect inferiors' objective judgment. Subordinate managers need to appreciate the logic of the model before they start answering questions. This increases the probability of understanding questions accurately and retrieving correct answers. In addition, only if inferior managers appreciate the questions and are convinced of their soundness they will have the necessary willpower to change their behavior in the direction recommended by the model.

It should be noted that both trusting and distrusting inferiors have their place and importance in the organizational hierarchy. Lower-level managers can strengthen their active role in managing relationships with superiors by overcoming the extremes in their orientations towards trust or distrust. This will help them maintain an appropriate dynamic balance between the two propensities. Without underestimating the risk of straining the relationship with a superior in case of doubt, they should keep in mind the danger of reducing organizational effectiveness and competitiveness due to the implementation of a series of inadequate management decisions made from above. By adopting such a balanced approach, they will be able to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the proposed model of self-management.

A question may arise whether there is any chance or possibility for subordinate managers to express their doubt in superiors. Some could argue that no matter whether they feel distrust inside, inferiors still have to follow the instructions given and carry out the orders received. They could realistically support their statement with arguments related to organizational hierarchy and compulsory subordination. However, this would not be entirely true. As said earlier, subordinate managers can exert influence downwards and upwards. Of course, this does not mean that they can refuse to complete the task, but they may check the appropriateness of the task before proceeding to its implementation, just as the model suggests. There are various ways to do this depending on the situation, for example to gather additional information, or to express careful disagreement by asking for a written order. In some cases inferior managers may even choose to confront the superior and try to prove the inappropriateness of the assigned task. For instance, to propose an alternative decision and cautiously explain its advantages. Even if the superior does not accept it, the inferior would be released (at least to some extent) from responsibility for any possible damages.

Most likely it would be easier for a subordinate manager to keep quiet and comply. However, the model is not about the inferior's convenience and mood, but for higher managerial effectiveness and better organizational performance. Sometimes the inferior is the only one left before a wrong decision is implemented. And sometimes the inferior may have to act as a fuse to keep the whole installation from burning.

This paper is not the first to study managerial trust-building. Past work, however, has focused mainly on the role of the superior (e.g. Sitkin & George, 2005; Lapierre, 2007). Analyzing the possibility for the manager as a subordinate to choose when and how to trust superior's decisions, the study reinforces and extends prior work on trust management. Nevertheless, it does not support the trust decision tree as proposed by Klein (2001). In contrast with Klein's assumption that when deciding not to trust, the result cannot be positive, the current study assumes the existence of situations in which displaying a certain amount of distrust could be more practical. Moreover, it shows that in some cases the manifestation of trust can have a negative impact on the achievement of organizational goals.

The carefully designed and tested questionnaire, as well as the qualitative analysis of the interviews and group discussions conducted, can be considered as strengths of this study. They reveal the predominant propensity of subordinates to superior's decisions – the majority of the managers surveyed tend to trust their immediate superiors (thus answering Q1). The paper also identifies the main advantages and disadvantages of managers with opposing attitudes toward trust (thus answering Q2 and Q3). On this basis, a behavior chain and a decision tree model of subordinate manager's appropriate behaviors are proposed. The model could provide some useful insights for managers on when to trust superiors' decisions and when to doubt (thus answering Q4).

Compared to most previous attempts for modeling managerial behavior, the model proposed here has two significant differences. First, it focuses on modeling just one behavioral characteristic (readiness to trust) and does not have the ambitions of some previous research to fully understand (e.g. Sterman, 1989) and explain (e.g. Stewart, 2019) the overall behavior of managers. Second, and perhaps more important, I believe that no other authors have tried to adapt Vroom and Yetton's leadership decision tree to components of subordinate managers followership.

The model developed may facilitate the development of similar approaches to modeling managerial behavior and organizational subordination that can be used for other important behavioral challenges of lower-level managers, such as decision-making on how close or distant should they be to a superior. A series of decision trees similar to the present one would be a valuable tool for inexperienced managers and could be used as a guide in managing relationships with superiors.

However, the study is not without limitations. First, it covers only garment and apparel companies. It is unclear whether the survey would yield a similar result in other manufacturing industries, commercial businesses, public institutions, and NGOs. Second, it disregards the impact of individual diversity (age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) on trust propensity of managers. Third, too much reliance is placed on the objectivity of subordinate managers in answering questions from the decision tree.

Fourth, the proposed theoretical model has not been tested in practice and its reliability has not been properly proven.

Finally, subordinate manager's behaviors need to be considered in a more systematic approach. How do the temperament, needs, and other individual differences affect manager's decision on how much to trust a superior? How does this decision correspond to other challenging questions that inferior managers face, for example, what relational distance to keep from the senior management person? How does the decision to follow instructions or take the initiative relate to trust propensity and how it affects both, career growth and organizational performance? These and many other complex questions wait to be answered.

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