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TRUST - AN INSTRUMENT FOR IMPROVEING HIERARCHIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: The complex and competitive economic and social contexts are increasingly stimulating companies towards performance. An organization's success and positioning depend on a few parameters: its capacity to organize, the quality of its internal and external relations and the human resource creating this reality. The people's involvement encourages the taking on of responsibilities and it allows for building resources that bring optimum results and generate trust. Considering the quality of intra-organizational as essential to the organization's effectiveness, we may assert that trust is the source for their functioning and for consolidating cohesion, an indispensable element in a hierarchical relation.

Keywords: trust, credibility, trust capital, vulnerability, risk

1. INTRODUCTION

Trust, as a polysemous and multidimensional concept, is defined through a person's intentions and expectations in a given exchange situation (communicational or relational), a person's positive anticipation of a third party's capacity and intention to carry out a given activity, the anticipation being accompanied by a presumed risk (Krieger, 2001). Trust is having faith that the other person will behave in a predictable manner and will respect their promises, and it starts with self-confidence that can be perceived and related to by others. Trust is a rational choice, it is a rational analysis made from a prescribed perspective, and it also is authentication (Prax, 2003).

Studies on the distribution of trust in relation to authority, carried out by Breton and Wintrobe (1986) are displaying two types of trust: *vertical trust* (which includes ascending *trust* - from the subordinate to the hierarchical superior and *descending trust* - from the

hierarchical superior to the subordinate) and *horizontal trust*. The first type is met between persons that are on different hierarchical levels, while the second one addresses the same hierarchical level and it refers to persons that are found on similar positions. According to the authors, trust is a source of efficiency for the organization. When inappropriately managed, the distribution of trust creates organizational contexts where an increase in horizontal trust contributes to the weakening or deterioration of vertical trust (Bornarel, 2004). It seems that the absence or weak presence of reciprocity brings difficulties in relations and it redirects the vertical trust capital to horizontal trust.

2. THE DYNAMICS OF TRUST

Van den Bulke (2003) considers that, for subordinates, trust is equivalent to freedom of action, it is very validating. To trust is to leave a bit of authority behind. A temporary and controlled abandon of formal authority (that comes with statute) or of functional authority

(given by competence) have effects that increase reciprocity. It is a risk assumed with the other party. The hierarchical superior must be credible, must have the capacity to inspire trust. Their credibility, a success factor, is dependent on the impact they have on subordinates. The trust that they are generating is undertaken and it influences future interactions.

Various literature dedicated to aspects related to trust emphasizes significant differences in the means by which trust is born, the contents and the role it plays in the stability of relationships. Trust is created through an emotional component - self esteem, emotional involvement in an activity, involvement/motivation and a social component: recognition, reputation, support (Prax, 2003). It requires reliability, communication, and coherence between speech, action and decision making. It is a developing process and its evolution depends largely on the communication aspect of the decision-making process:
- involving the people in the process of taking decisions that refer to them (Zara, 2005),
- explaining the decision from the perspective of organizational welfare;
- explaining the effects and new rules that follow the decision.

Trusting the hierarchical superior is based either on expertise or perceived competence (the technical aspect) and the perception on the nature of intentions (the moral aspect) (Giffin, 1967). Therefore, there are two sources that may or may not grant trust: technical competence and ethical competence (Landowski, 1989). Trust exists when moral values are present, when the hierarchical superior shows a certain moral profile, certain moral qualities. In other words, „a person's character ensures people's trust" and trust ensures the leadership position, according to Maxwell (2005). The perceived quality brings forth an amount of trust that the subordinates attribute to the hierarchical superior, and, according to its degree, they involve themselves in the activity. The hierarchical superior may ensure an amount of trust as a manager or by demonstrating expertise in the field of competence. Trust is partial, limited when the subordinate trusts management capacities without trusting the manager's moral quality, his professional competence, or vice versa. It depends on the presence or absence of moral values and competences that bring the feeling of reliability. Credibility in one of these aspects may determine a transfer of trust to the other (the trust given to the expert shifts towards the manager). This shift will be verified, and the actual contexts will ensure the maintaining and strengthening of the trust capital in the hierarchical superior or the other way round. A hierarchical superior that doesn't have credibility allows the subordinates to turn towards a person they trust, thus losing ground in relations and image.

Offering and inspiring trust is a delicate process for the hierarchical superior and it depends on a series of factors and variables required for establishing trust: the accordance between intention and action, personality traits, the source of control, degree of similarity, assumed role behaviors, self assertion and feed-back, adaptability to circumstances, interdependence, organizational politics, staff coordination and the working environment within the organization (Rusaw, 2001). If the hierarchical superior offers trust, the subordinates feel obligated to return it. The principle of reciprocity ensues: the subordinates give credit that has to be returned. Offering mistrust affects the relationship. If the manager doesn't trust his collaborators with anything other than operational tasks, they will trust the collaborators if they accomplish the tasks successfully, according to Van den Bulke (2003). The level of trust rises when future plans are declared. Other degrees of trust between the manager and the managed exist between these two extremes, the writer states.

A trust relationship is built through cognition, proximity and interaction. It is „independent interaction" (Orléan, 1994), that depends on the time factor, it is a balance between proximity and quality. Interacting produces communicational behaviors and both the subordinate and the hierarchical superior become sources of interaction. Trust has

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different grounds to be built on and it favors the paths of relationships in a different manner. Producing the trust relationship is associated to a context that can influence the path of the relationship. Often, trust is determined by uncertainty. Uncertainty brings vulnerability, thus generating a particular form of solidarity, which helps overcoming the uncertainty. The hierarchical superior doesn't order to be trusted, he earns it. Involvement, attention offered to the others and openness towards them, coherence, a fair behavior, acknowledging the others' value and frequent communication are only a few elements that ensure the investment of trust in the hierarchical superior. Competence, results, the solutions brought by the subordinate participate in the hierarchical superior's trust being born and maintained. This investment is done over time and it is periodically evaluated, in various contexts. As hard as it is to gain trust, as easy it is to lose it. The absence of trust is manifested through fear, relationship tension, stress, cynical behavior etc. When subordinates are disappointed by the hierarchical superior, they withdraw, they avoid communication, they stop offering their support, they become indifferent, are superficial or they stop being involved. Loss of trust gives way to conflictual tendencies and to the refusal of authority.

Research in the field of knowledge management (Rolland & Chauvel, 2000, Davenport & Prusak, 1998) is showing that trust is the most important condition in the exchange of knowledge. A person doesn't share his knowledge with another person unless they trust them (Connelly & Kelloway, 2000). The processes of transmitting and sharing knowledge follow a set of formal and informal rules and procedures that include the communicational aspects and they result in trust. The elements that constitute trust (Servet, 1997): faith, which is determined by the legitimization of rules, the faith in others and transparency (a minimum amount of shared knowledge between those involved); elements of trial and validation; memory, which is involved in the learning process of trust and which is based on common experiences and routine - all enrich the contents of the hierarchical relation as it offers the circumstances for securing and optimizing the environment within the organization.

Vertical trust favors hierarchical communication. Trust is credit that may be awarded for the other person's words. Trusting the words of the hierarchical superior (respecting things that were said, clarity, fairness, the quality of listening) is the ground for a durable professional relationship. When communication is frequent, when the roles, tasks and responsibilities are well defined and where there is positive feedback and permanent encouragement and mutual trust, when the same degree of involvement is shared, trust is consolidated (Prax 2003).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Trust gets built, tested and updated. It is contagious, interactive; it brings forth and maintains hierarchical communication. Or, in De Rochefocauld terms, "trust offers more conversation material than intelligence". Trust makes the difference in a working environment and it is an important motivational feature. If its presence in intra-organizational relationships secures, optimizes and brings benefits, its absence produces disruptions and instability. When consolidated and exploited, it is a powerful aspect in the success of the organization.

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