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UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS OF TRUST IN VIRTUAL WORKSPACES ACROSS IT DEPARTMENTS

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Date of submission: 18.3.2023

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ABSTRACT OF
BACHELOR'S THESIS

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Title of Thesis: Understanding Perceptions of Trust in Virtual Workspaces across IT departments

Date: 18. March 2023

Degree: Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration

Supervisor: Russell Warhurst

Objectives

The principal objective of this research is to determine the perceptions of trust in IT employees working remotely and to discover the most prominent features of trust and trust-building in online settings.

Summary

The research explores dimensions of trust with employees in management and subordinates positions across IT departments. The qualitative research identifies definitions of trust, characteristics of trust in online workspaces and features of trust-building by examining the relationships of participants with coworkers and management. Consequently, common disruptors and outcomes of trust are derived from the interview data.

Conclusions

Identification-based trust has the most significant results in corporations, identifying trust as commitment, accountability and collaboration. Trust was viewed as a distinct concept, requiring flexibility, reputation, mutual effort and openness to form the different bases of trust-building. It was recognised that the creation of identification-based trust generates confidence, inclusiveness and efficiency across employees and managers in a corporation.

Keywords: Trust, Online Work, Commitment, Accountability, Collaboration Flexibility, Confidence.

Language: English

Grade:

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Trust is a valuable concept embedded within all of us, and it determines the fundamental core of any relationship, whether it is personal or professional. Understanding the perceptions of trust can enhance our awareness of the current phenomenon of online work. In IT departments, remote work has been in place for longer, thus exploring their knowledge of the concept can reveal unique perspectives of trust. The importance of exploring trust in our current society, derives from a sensation of diminished trust that has been remarked due to increased individualism and transactionalism.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite trust being acknowledged as the fundamental instrument to the success of business relationships and organisations, after Covid-19 and the increase in remoteness within work, trust has become more repressed. The challenges of the pandemic forced virtual office spaces and contactless working to become the new norm. Consequently, businesses had to adapt to new methods of trust, as workplace surveillance was not physically achievable anymore. Many organisations lacked the understanding of trust and its significance online, which led to many situations of mistrust among employees and managers.

As in IT departments, remote work has been operating even before Covid-19, it may be presumed that their understanding and application of trust may be more progressive than in other departments, where the shift to remoteness has been made more recently. What are the unique approaches to trust in IT departments and how could these be applied to businesses that face challenges associated with trust?

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is understood by the concept of trust in remote workplaces across IT departments?

2. What are the implications of the level of trust to performance in companies?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to examine perceptions of trust in virtual workspaces across IT departments. It is conducted to gain a deeper understanding of organisations that have established trust within remote employees and determine how the concept of trust can influence work performance and organisational culture. Additionally, by understanding trust more profoundly, we can aim to address challenges faced by the lack of trust and discover new trust-building methods within employees and management in online settings.

1.5 Introduction to IT Departments

Information Technology departments are an integral part of any organisation, where employees perform crucial operations that allow the company's divisions to communicate, collaborate and automate routine tasks, along with upgrading software and repairing technological appliances. IT employees tend to work independently from other divisions, which allows them in many cases to work remotely with their laptops and devices. IT departments have three major operations: governance, infrastructure and functionality.

The following sections will explore secondary data about definitions of trust, its challenges and foundations. Through reviewing literature, methods of trust-building in organisations will be discovered and how these can be implemented in remote settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is conducted to discover and evaluate former research completed on the topic of trust. The objective of this literature review is to understand the phenomenon of trust in remote settings through its definition, origin, diversified layers, and perspectives. By distinguishing the different components of trust, it will enable a solid foundation for the research.

Trust has been extensively researched throughout history, however, the relevance for further analysis arises from the changes observed in society, especially in work environments over the past few years.

Due to Covid-19 and the development of technology, remote work has seen a rise in becoming more feasible for organisations. Although working from home has become popular, a precarious trend of online distrust and monitoring has emerged, which is studied to cause decreased performance and relentlessness among employees. These events emphasise the significance of acquiring an augmented understanding of trust, to establish it in organisations and eliminate distrust.

2.2 Introduction to Trust

2.2.1 What is Trust?

Regardless of the domain, most definitions of trust recognise the main concept as the reliance on the actions between parties that occur in the future (Luhmann, 1979; Currall, Judge, 1995). This reliance is based in a context where there is uncertainty of actions and a need to have confidence in someone (Doney, Cannon, Mullen, 1998). Luhmann (1979) states that “the fundamental condition of trust is that it must be possible for the partner to abuse the trust”, which demonstrates the fragility and vulnerability of trust. Luhmann, (1979) also emphasises that uncertainty or risk has a connection to the state of vulnerability, which refers to trustworthy environments as

places where one can willinglessly feel vulnerable and safe (Mayer, Davis, Schoorman, 2007; Sinek, 2019). Accordingly, the trustor must develop confidence in the trusted individual and rely on the future outcome without complete certitude of knowledge for the desired outcome to happen (Doney, Cannon, Mullen, 1998). Tyler and Kramer (1996) have segmented trust into three levels: macro, meso and micro, which provide a practical definition of the elements that determine the foundations of trust, explored in further sections of this thesis.

It is fundamental to recognise trust as a feeling, not an order, therefore, managers cannot force employees to trust (Sinek, 2014). In organisations, trust prevails when its stakeholders firmly believe that they can rely on the corporation to perform its actions appropriately, without fear of failure (Hurley, 2012). Professor Hurley (2012) states that trust is difficult to create in situations of high risk, uncertainty and change (Tyler, Degoey, 1995). Consequently, the most effective method for companies to maintain trust, is by securing it into their foundations of organisational culture and behaviour.

2.2.2. Significance of Trust in Organisations

Exploring the foundations of trust is vital to understand its significance in professional relationships. Identifying the core elements that form trust will enable the discovery of appropriate methods of trust-building in organisations, especially in remote settings.

2.2.2.1 Contemporary Challenges to Trust

Research has presented that managerial practices have started to compress to more classical approaches to management and the supervision of employees is increasing, a consequence of diminished trust (Parker, Knight, Keller, 2020).

Before the 21st century, societal networks were more local (Friedman, 2005). Individuals depended on direct face-to-face interactions with familiar people (Hurley, 2012) and breaking the norms of trust resulted in a definite and abrupt punishment by the community (Tyler, Kramer, 1996). Professional settings before the 2000s did not have an online presence, companies used manual formats of communication and

employees were expected to come to the office daily. Despite managerial shifts towards the implementation of more trusting environments, the physical presence of employees and managers influenced the ease of trust.

Today, our societies are larger, more globalised, and fragmented social networks (Hurley, 2012). Professional settings have a heavy online presence, where employees, managers, business partners and customers may not be physically in the same geographic location or ever have the opportunity to meet face-to-face. Individuals are required to depend on people and groups of people that they do not know well, which results in increased chances of betrayal and loss of trust (Hurley, 2012). This decrease in trust can be especially observed in online circumstances, where interactions through a screen make it more difficult for parties to trust each other (Parker, Knight, Keller, 2020). The doubt about trust arises as there is no physical presence or supervision possible, to personally witness the reality of the actions of the person trusted. As companies work in online settings, employees and managers spend less time together and there are no recurring interactions where trust can be shown in natural ways, such as observance of tasks at the office. As managers do not have the opportunity to physically check the work of their employees, signs of micromanaging start emerging, and trust begins to disintegrate.

2.2.2.2 Trust for Employee Confidence

According to Hurley (2012), when organisations ingrain trust into the core of their organisational culture and behaviour, employees are confident to act upon the needs of the organisation. Employees form a powerful bond of identity with their colleagues and mutual benevolence is established, which translates to less monitoring, micromanaging, and enforcing agreements (Zaheer, McEvily, Perron 1998).

Employees that feel trusted, believe to be fairly supported and can express their decisions sincerely, by taking risks without the fear of consequences or achievement. Employees in high-trust organisations describe their environment as “successful” and “productive”, attributes that profitable businesses tend to possess (Hurley, 2012).

2.2.2.3 Trust for Conflict Resolution

Additionally, author Sinek (2014) recognises that creating an environment where workers can be trusted, reflects on diminished conflicts and confrontations. Trust reduces the tendency to defend against opportunistic behaviour because individuals have similar underlying assumptions of their colleagues, therefore, there is increased tolerance and willingness to understand (Zaheer, McEvily, Perrone 1998; Hurley, 2012).

2.2.2.4 Trust for Increased Performance

Another reason for implementing trust is to increase performance in corporations. Zaheer, Mc Evily and Perrone (1998) suggest that increased performance is achieved by reduced “negotiation costs”, which refer to the time and effort spent on reaching a mutual understanding, associated with conflict resolution (Hurley, 2012). With increased trust among members, actions are taken faster and more efficiently, without the need for additional verifications or speculations (Currall, Judge, 1995).

2.3 Levels of trust

2.3.1 Macro Level: Evolution of Organisational Trust

Understanding trust on a macro level determines how the evolution of management philosophies and organisational dynamics have shaped the nature of trust and distrust in corporations (Tyler, Kramer 1996). It is significant to discover the causality of trust to further understand the importance of trust within organisations and obtain a solid foundation for my research.

Between late 19th and early 20th century, the classical approach to management was thriving (Sarker, Khan, 2013). During that time, the strongest aspiration of managers was the improvement of productivity in workers, disregarding the importance of trust (Grey, 2005). A key feature for distrust was the traditional model of authority, which believed that employees had low self-reliance and work ethic; and assumed that the

only motivation would be by monetary or instrumental methods (Tyler, Kramer 1996). The organisational culture in workplaces was hierarchical and placed more emphasis on supervision which made employees voiceless (Walton, 1985). The main objective was how to enforce better productivity through control (Walton, 1985), rather than how to create an atmosphere that would enhance performance (Sarker, Khan, 2013).

The popularity of hierarchy and large power distance were contributors to greater issues of vertical trust between employees and managers (Hosftede, 2010). Although these practices have been losing recognition in recent decades, many nations still apply hierarchy and power distance in professional settings as they are engrained in their national culture (Hofstede, 2010). Nations with high power distance, tend to have organisational cultures that accept inequalities of power, which result in weaker relationships and lower trust (Hofstede, 2010).

Nowadays, the flaws of classical management have been profoundly analysed. For instance, Dr Pardeep Kumar's research (2017) on the influence of the classical perspective has shown issues such as labour turnovers, slow pace of corporation growth and most notably, low productivity. Employees who experienced this type of management did not feel respected nor trusted by their managers who ignored the appropriate methods of stimulating employee performance.

Despite its problems, it is significant to appraise that the classical perspective brought substantial development to management theories. Regarding the topic of interest, the classical approach contributed to the development of trust in organisations by emphasising the need for mutual collaboration between employees and management (Sarker, Khan, 2013), a meaningful component of trust (Hurley, 2012).

From the mid-20th century onwards, human resource models detached from the classical view by granting more trust and freedom (Sarker, Khan, 2013). This shift was made by recognising the human aspect of workers (Sarker, Khan, 2013) and paying attention to their self-direction, motivation and overall interest to pursue duties (Tyler, Kramer, 1996). Managerial practices changed the compulsion for high productivity to the creation of an environment where workers could be trusted. This demonstrated the

first signs of trust in organisations, and showed increased satisfaction with better performance of employees (Sarker, Khan, 2013).

2.3.2 Meso Level: Trust in Social Networks

On a meso level, trust is referred to the basis of why individuals trust each other, and their social networks (Tyler, Kramer 1996). Sociologist Walter Powell suggests four types of social networks which build the foundations of trust. These refer to place and personal affiliation, common belonging in an organisation, shared historical experiences and mutual dependencies (Powell, 1990). These networks are significant for my research to understand the context in which trust is built and its influence on the willingness to trust.

2.3.2.1 Collectiveness: Social Identity Theory

The social networks of Powell (1990) have a common connotation to collectiveness and reliance which are keys to trust-building (Webster, Wong, 2008). Collectiveness can be interpreted with the social identity theory introduced by Tajfel and Turner (1979) to understand the underlying dependency to build trusted social connections.

The theory brings to light the need for individuals to form a collective identity to reduce of uncertainty and build trust. When people belong to a social network, they tend to construct feelings of trust faster as they share similarities (Tajfel, Turner 1979). Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin (1992) named this type of foundation for trust “identification-based trust”. This similarity is often related to a common background, such as ethnic, geographic, ideological or professional, where social networks and trust are higher when similarities are present (Powell, 1990).

This collective affiliation has also been presented by Hofstede in its cultural dimensions, where he identified that in collective societies individuals from an ingroup expect care and unconditional loyalty from each other (Hofstede, 2010; Webster, Wong 2008). This translates to the preservation of trust due to deeper relationships,

which can be further strengthened if there is a low power distance culture present (Hosftede, 2010).

2.3.2.2. Place and Personal Affiliation

Research bodies have shown that in relationships, duration, frequency and emotional proximity are determinants of a higher or lower degree of trust (Tyler, Kramer 1996). Although in professional settings emotional closeness or strong historical experiences may not be in place, cooperation and solidarity arise when colleagues and managers work together for recurring hours. This cooperation contributes to increased trust and a greater willingness to work together in the future (Powell, 1990).

2.3.2.3 Reputation

Powell recognises that a positive reputation has the greatest influence on the reliability of a party, hence significant for trust-building in social networks (Powell, 1990). It is essential to recognise that reputation through past behaviours may alter certain aspects of trust (Bet-David, Dinkin, 2020). A person may trust their colleague for task a, however, due to their reputation, they may not trust them for task b, which makes trust characteristic to specific actions (Bet-David, Dinkin, 2020). According to researchers, benevolence and integrity (Doney, Cannon, Mullen 1998; Larzelere, Huston, 1980; Dore, 1987) and an ability to perform actions with consistency are fundamental for a trustworthy reputation (Mayer, Davis, 1999; Tyler, Kramer, 1996).

2.3.2.4. Benevolence and Integrity

Perceptions of trust will be subjected to change if benevolence and integrity are not in place because the extent to which someone is willing to do the right action for a good cause influences the sensation of trust (Mayer, Davis, 1999).

When an individual demonstrates benevolence, it is perceived as a willingness to care about other's interests, which constructs trust (Mayer, Davis, 1999). Additionally, consistency in abilities is the second factor for the creation of a trustworthy reputation.

For instance, managers who demonstrate competence to resolve matters that are significant to the employee will positively influence the perception of how management handles the issues, thus developing trust (Mayer, Davis, 1999).

2.3.2.5 Alignment of Interests and Mutual Benefits

Considering the last social network, it is important to acknowledge the alignment of interests and mutual benefits between parties for trust (Tyler, Kramer 1996). Hurley (2006; 2012) recognises that in organisations, if co-workers interests tend to be well aligned, it will result in ease to trust for both parties. However, if there are no similarities in the interests gained in the exchange, it will complicate the formation a bond due to a lack of mutual benefit.

Tyler and Kramer (1996) identify that trust can be built through sharing similar goals with the organisation, connected to the social identity theory presented earlier. As a result of this, group members build stronger willingness to cooperate and increase the frequency of interactions, to meet goals together (Tyler, Kramer 1996).

2.3.3. Micro Level: The Psychological Tendency To Trust

Trust can also be recognised on a micro level, through exploring the psychology of the tendency of individuals to trust and what results in an approved decision to trust (Tyler, Kramer 1996). Hurley (2012), identifies that each individual has different inclinations that affect their decision to trust, divided into three factors: personality, culture and experience. These factors are fundamental to understand the depth of trust from a psychological perspective.

2.3.3.1 Personality

Hurley (2012) states that there is a psychological adjustment that evaluates how much time individuals require to build trust. People who are mentally stable and well-adjusted, tend to have more self-confidence and feel comfortable with their environment (Hurley, 2012). These individuals gravitate towards building trust faster

as they view their surroundings more positively. This is contrary to poorly adjusted people, who may even have neurotic inclinations that induce them to be more distrustful, which demonstrates an inability to trust rapidly (Hurley, 2006).

Another factor affecting the personal decision to trust is risk tolerance, a fundamental element connected to trust (Hurley, 2006; Luhmann, 1979). It is identifiable that lower positions of risk and uncertainty increase the tendency of individuals to confide in each other (Hurley, 2012). However, in situations of uncertainty, our personal adjustment to risk can significantly alter our decision to trust (Schoormann, Mayer, Davis, 2007). The explanation for why individuals have different inclinations for risk tolerance can be due to distinctive cultural and societal upbringings (Hurley, 2006; Hofstede, 2010).

2.3.3.2. Culture

Personal culture is a significant part that influences the decision to trust (Hurley, 2006; Hofstede, 2010). To understand trust with the concept of culture, we may focus on Schein's third level of culture which addresses basic assumptions. These consist of beliefs, perceptions and feelings which are unconsciously held by the individual from a specific culture (Schein, 2004; Hatch, 1993).

Despite the extensive merging of cultures, individuals still hold unconscious assumptions about the world that are characteristic of their culture learned through childhood (Hatch,1993). The basic assumptions presented by Schein (2004) are the causality for distinct personality traits, and therefore, form their inclination of risk tolerance and trust (Hofstede, 2010). For instance, individuals from societies that have a culture of high tolerance for uncertainty, often form a character that is more susceptible to trust with ease (Hofstede, 2010), which increases the chances of collective identity (Sung, Kang, 2012). This is contrasting with societies that strongly avoid situations of uncertainty and tend to view the world as more hostile, thus becoming more cautious and distrustful (Hofstede, 2010).

Basic assumptions can also be affected by the cultural dimension of power distance, which influences the way individuals build relationships and trust (Hofstede, 2010). As mentioned at the macro level of trust (section 2.2.1), high power distance cultures,

tend to accept inequalities of power, which on the individual level can subconsciously affect the quality of relationships and weaken the individual tendency to trust.

2.3.3.3. Experience

When recognising the decision to trust, the element of the experience is also closely associated with personality and culture. Experiences build specific characteristics (Sung, Kang, 2012), that are unconsciously created and held to aid in the learning of whether to trust or not. For example, people with past experiences of distrust with their partners, tend to become more cautious in future relationships (Hurley, 2012). Alternatively, individuals who spend time with same people, tend to gain experience in each other's behaviour, thus lowering or ascending the barriers of trust-building.

2.4 Building Trust in Organisations

2.4.1 Understanding Trust-Building

After identifying the foundations of trust, it is discovered that trust is multidimensional and can be constructed gradually at the micro, meso, and macro levels. These perspectives provide the causality for the need to trust social networks and how individual behaviour alters the decision to trust (Tyler, Kramer 1996).

Nevertheless, trust is still complicated to establish and maintain in professional settings. Subsequently, it is critical that, after recognising the depth of trust, the bases for trust-building must be investigated to embed trust in the foundations of organisational culture (Hurley, 2012; Tyler, Degoey, 1995; Galford, Drapeau, 2003)

Creating an atmosphere of trust is necessary because if employees do not feel trust, they will only accomplish the strict minimum to finish their tasks, limiting performance (Forbes Coaches Council, 2022). Author Simon Sinek (2014) presents the problem of low employee performance and failure of achieving trust with the question "how do we get the most out of people?" which some managers tend to apply to resolve issues of unproductivity. According to Sinek (2014), managers should not address

complications with the previous question, as it is linked to classical management practices and displays distrust, hence they should contemplate the problem from a more trustworthy perspective by asking the question “how do we create an environment in which our people can work at their natural best?”. With this approach Sinek (2014) demonstrates the importance of creating an environment of trust where employees can feel safe and comfortable by creating a trustworthy organisational culture (Hurley, 2012).

Tyler and Kramer (1996) explain that trust extends from calculus-based to knowledge-based, and, eventually, to identification-based trust. It is useful to apply this model in the development of trust in professional relationships, however, it is important to recognise that not all relationships can accomplish complete trust (Tyler, Kramer, 1996). As the concepts of the bases of trust are uncovered, it is possible to understand trust-building within a company and ingrain trust in the organisational culture.

2.4.1 Bases of Trust-Building

2.4.1.1. Calculus-based Trust

In calculus-based trust, relationships are built with activities that validate the trust, the consistency of behaviour and the mindset of feeling rewarded when being trustworthy (Tyler, Kramer, 1996; Rousseau, 1998). Also, this shall include deterrence-based trust where consistency is guaranteed due to the fear of punishment, or a loss of reputation (Shapiro, Sheppard, Cheraskin, 1992).

Managers and organisations can develop calculus-based trust by creating a favourable reputation and demonstrating benevolence to validate trust (Rousseau, 1996). In corporations, the primary concept to build trust shall begin with establishing fairness through support and benevolent communication to gain a valuable reputation and a sensation of approachability (Carnevale, Wechsler, 1992; Galford, Drapeau, 2003; Hurley, 2006). This can be constructed, for instance, by devising a mechanism of socialisation for new employees, as pursued by MITRE (Hurley. 2012). The company MITRE, presented by Hurley (2012), welcomes their new employees with

good communication, provides complete onboarding and truly emphasises commitment and care. This example of trust-building is significant to create the preliminary foundations for trust as it gives a favourable trustworthy impression of the organisation to embed confidence in its employees (Hurley, 2012).

2.4.1.1.1 Achieving fairness: Social Justice Theory

Additionally, it is significant for organisations to maintain trust with a system of fairness, by rewarding superior commitment and punishing incompetent behaviour (Galford, Drapeau, 2003; Carnevale, Wechsler, 1992).

Fairness can be effectively explained with the social justice theory of Rawls, where the aim is to achieve righteousness through equal resources, equity, participation, diversity and rights (Jost, Kay, 2010). Employees should be given fair recognition and feedback, through performance appraisals and peer reviews where results are returned to the appraisees for enhanced trust (Mayer, Davis, 1999). Neuroscientist Zak (2017) acknowledges that public recognition for rewarding behaviour is more successful as it utilises the influence of a group for celebrating achievements and provides inspiration for others to strive (Pathak, 2021). Also, according to Galford and Drapeau (2003), it is essential for organisations to give notice when an individual is not performing up to standards, as this can rapidly destroy overall organisational trust.

2.4.1.2. Knowledge-based Trust

After building the base of calculus, the parties will develop an understanding of the needs, priorities and desires of each other (Tyler, Kramer, 1996; Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin, 1992). Knowledge-based trust refers to the predicted behaviour of the trusted individual, constructed through past interactions which demonstrates they are worthy of trust (Rousseau, 1998). This form of trust generates when managers and employees spend time working together and develop knowledge about each other's behaviour and abilities, which strengthens their trust or distrust (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin, 1992).

In corporations, knowledge-based trust can be established by a sequence of actions. Firstly, as co-workers begin to understand each other's needs, managers shall be more inclined to delegate goals, rather than specific tasks, to demonstrate that trust in abilities is established (Badaracco, O'Hara, Bonchek, 2016 Garvin, 2022).

As workers notice that their corporation is granting them more autonomy and freedom, this will result in a perceived sense of confidence and responsibility to perform well and meet goals (Badaracco, O'Hara, Bonchek, 2016; Garvin, 2022; Zak, 2017). When members place trust in their colleagues, it will also translate to more confident risk-taking and faster decision-making (Hurley, 2012), due to increased organisational trust and accountability (Carnevale, Wechsler, 1992; Tan, Tan, 2000).

Researchers Badaracco, O'Hara and Bonchek (2016) presented the traditional motto used by many leaders that state "observe, coach and trust. And then verify". This is a significant statement in this research as it summarises the appropriate method of management through emphasising trust, without the need for constant monitoring and regulation (Badaracco, O'Hara, Bonchek, 2016).

According to research published by *Harvard Business Review* (2020), many online managers tend to deviate more towards close monitoring, rather than providing autonomy (Parker, Knight, Keller 2020). This practice in management is relevant to the research as, in contrast to constructing a knowledge base, it dismantles the foundations of trust employees have towards the corporation (Parker, Knight, Keller 2020). Supervision, especially in terms of micromanagement can be very fatal, as it displays distrust and drives employees towards a less motivating work atmosphere (Sinek, 2014; Forbes Coaches Council 2022).

Knowing what employees are engaging in is fundamental, but there are many methods to follow if targets are met, such as coaching, verification and intervenience, when reviewing results (Garvin, 2022). Employees who are given more autonomy, feel trusted in their abilities, and can confidently pursue tasks, being able to move further towards the final trust base.

2.4.1.3 Identification-based Trust

Identification-based trust is recognised as the strongest ladder of trust, connected to the social identity theory discussed earlier (Shapiro, Sheppard, Cheraskin, 1992; Tajfel, Turner, 1979). In this base, members learn to understand each other better which contributes to the recognition of similarities in preferences, needs and priorities (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin, 1992). This results in the creation of a joint identity in the corporation, developing a trust-embedded organisational culture with aligned interests and mutual benefits (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin, 1992; Zak, 2017).

This base of trust is perceived when employees and managers characterise themselves as “we” and “us” in the corporation (Rousseau, 1998). This provides psychological benefits such as higher confidence and a cognitive sense of belonging (Webster, Wong 2008; Tajfel, Turner, 1979). To emphasise belongingness, some researchers recommend organisations to grant their employees shares as a method to increase commitment, responsibility and trust (Bet-David, Dinkin, 2020). When the organisation feels united, there is greater cooperation, communication and performance (Hurley, 2006; Tan, Tan, 2000; Webster, Wong 2008).

To approach identification-based trust, managers must invest effort and time to form a stronger bond with their employees (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin, 1992). This is done by maintaining all the former trust-building methods and demonstrating a personal desire and genuine interest towards constructing close relationships (Forbes Coaches Council, 2022; Zak, 2017). For companies to strive for identification-based trust, genuine socialisation methods can be implemented to bond teams together, such as team-building sessions, sponsored meals and after-work social gatherings (Zak, 2017). This may result in the formation of relationships, engagement of organisational commitment, and greater trust in the organisational culture (Hurley, 2012; Tan, Tan, 2000). It must be emphasised, that team-bonding sessions should be developed for the greatest interest of employees, for them to not appear deceptive.

2.4.2 Trust in Remote Settings

To identify the perceptions of trust in remote settings, it shall be acknowledged that trust is far more complicated to build and maintain online (Parker, Knight, Keller, 2020). During COVID-19, Parker, Knight and Keller (2020) researched the area of trust in remote work and discovered distrust and micromanagement among a large number of people, resulting in low performance and distress.

In online circumstances, risk and suspicion become more pertinent to individuals' tendency to trust (Pathak, 2021). According to Parker, Knight and Keller (2020), 41% of managers in their research felt sceptical as to whether online workers could stay motivated in the long term. This idea is widely spread since employees are not physically supervised and colleagues have limited cues to understand and predict each other's behaviour (Webster, Wong, 2008). As a result of this, micromanagement and distrust among colleagues appear, consequently, weakening performance and collectiveness (Pathak, 2021).

When constructing trust in remote settings, it is fundamental to understand that not everything can be monitored (Pathak, 2021). Remote managers are required to acknowledge the prerequisite to trust the motivation and expertise of the employees, thus granting more flexibility and increased autonomy with expectations (Chan, 2022). For instance, setting goals in reverse to tasks demonstrates trust as it drives workers to tackle problems creatively and imposes accountability (Pathak, 2021).

Autonomy and accountability are frequently seen as conjoint subjects, but it shall be emphasised that autonomy does not translate to abandonment. There are often cases where employees are granted decision-making power for accountability, but if mistakes are made, they are left with no support and full liability for their decision (Timms, 2022). It is essential for employees to realise that they have a manager or a colleague available when they need mentoring, support or have issues to discuss. Managers who expect accountability must take responsibility for the errors of their subordinates because blame destructs relationships and dismantles trust (Timms, 2022).

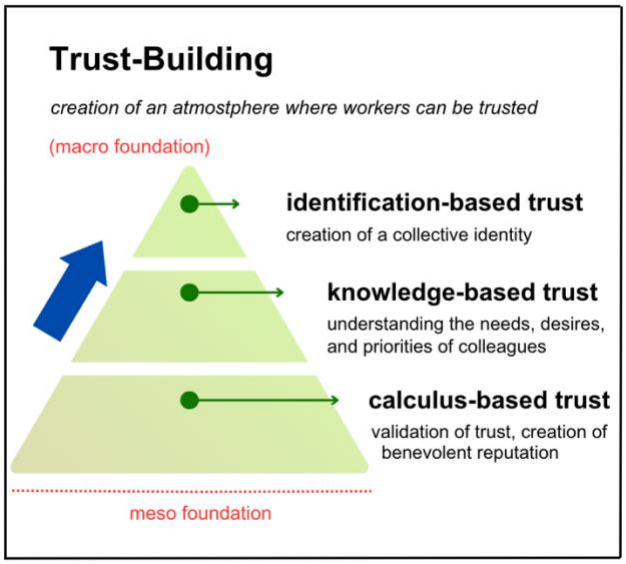
Online work should have the same aim of creating identification-based trust through transparent relationships and improved collaboration (Pathak, 2021). Regardless of having members in remote locations, team-building and communication are essential aspects to increase trust between colleagues (Webster, Wong, 2008). Webster and Wong (2008) identify that informal communication is more recurrent in physical employment than online. Pathak (2021) suggests that to engage remote workers, there shall be different types of communication, such as video calls for remote check-ins and a shared virtual space for colleagues to have small talks and coffee breaks, which enhance collaboration and increase trust-building.

Another essential aspect of remote trust-building is the recognition of achievements, as in physical employment. In remote settings, it is necessary to emphasise the meaningfulness of the rewards, for instance by recognising accomplishments publicly and frequently for all colleagues. This ensures that all members are connected and appreciated on time, thus individuals realise that everyone's efforts are valued regardless of remoteness (Pathak, 2021).

2.5 Conclusion and Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework builds a connection between the foundations of trust to the stages of trust-building to further understand the perceptions of trust in virtual workspaces. The preliminary link between trust-building and the levels of foundation can be identified by defining trust-building as the creation of an atmosphere where workers can be trusted, which is an indication of the macro level of trust.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



In the conceptual framework (Figure 1) it is recognisable that the lowest stage of trust-building is through calculus, for the validation of trust. In online circumstances, this can be presented through truthful communication with colleagues, virtual performance appraisals and the construction of a benevolent reputation, linked to the meso level.

The following stage is to establish knowledge-based trust by understanding the needs, priorities, and desires of colleagues. This is also affiliated with the meso level, as it demonstrates the importance of frequency of contact, the ability to rely on colleagues' abilities, and increased accountability through delegation. In virtual settings, more autonomy can be granted to demonstrate trust, as well as setting goals for remote workers to accomplish freely.

The last stage of the conceptual framework pyramid is the identification-based trust, which is the most complicated phase to accomplish, associated with the creation of a collective identity of the corporation and the meso level. This form of trust is the most significant to ensure engraving it in the foundations of its organisational culture. This can be achieved through demonstrating genuine interest and benevolence for colleagues recurringly by the maintenance of honest, frequent communication, keeping track of the well-being of employees and caring about their aspirations regardless of remoteness.

3. METHODOLOGY

This primary research is designed to collect data and draw new perspectives of the research questions:

1. *What is understood by the concept of trust in remote workplaces across IT departments?*

2. *What are the implications of the level of trust to performance in companies?*

3.1 Research Methodology and Data Collection

This research was conducted through a qualitative interview to developers and managers of IT departments in different industries. These two different participant profiles were chosen to compare similarities and differences in perceptions of trust.

A qualitative approach was adopted to gain a more profound understanding of the topic and acquire specific explanations for the explored themes. This method enables participants to explore new ideas and explain their thoughts on what is understood about trust, and its different perceptions in remote settings.

The interviews were designed in a semi-structure format to assist the outflow of ideas and allow participants to provide distinct answers with an opportunity to elaborate them appropriately. The interviews consisted from a set of demographic questions and qualitative questions about trust. The discussions ranged from 30 minutes to 60 minutes and were carried out in English for the comfort of communication as it is the professional language among most of the participants.

All interviews were recorded with the IOS Dictaphone application and later on transcribed from audio format to a Word document by a software application called Trint.

3.2 Sampling

The participants of the interview were selected from both managerial and employee positions from different IT sectors where remote work was allowed. The interviewees belonged to companies from different industries but worked in the information technology department.

The eligible participants were contacted in person, via e-mail and text message. Twelve interviewees, representing IT departments were selected and interviews dates were accorded for January. The interviews were held face-to-face and remotely, in accordance to the requests and availability of participants. Two participants worked in Switzerland with a Swiss nationality, whereas the rest of the participants were residents from Finland working remotely for different multinationals, two for the US, and the rest for Finnish companies. Table 1 displays general information of the participants: the nationality and country of employment, industry in which they work, position, years in the company and years working remotely.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Interview Number	Nationality and Employment	Industry	Position	Years in company	Years remotely
1	Swiss, Switzerland	Banking	Soft. Dev	2	2
2	Peruvian, US / Finland	Telecommunication	Manager	15	10
3	Bengali, US	Application Design	Soft. Dev	7	6
4	Finnish, Finland	Consulting	Manager	3	3
5	Finnish, Finland	Media	Soft. Dev.	4	3
6	Swiss, Switzerland	Banking	Manager	4	3
7	French, Finland	Health Software	Soft. Dev.	2	2

All of the interviewed participants were male due to the unequal gender distribution in IT. According to research, women currently hold 26.7% of IT related work, and the percentage has declined in the last two years (Josh Howarth, 2022).

Three out of seven participants work in managerial positions that require leading a team, whereas four of the candidates were subordinates. Five candidates have been working in the company for over three years and all have been working remotely for two years or more.

3.3. Interview Design

The aim of the interviews was to understand if the explored themes in the literature were recognisable by participants. The main emerging topics were the significance of trust in remote settings; the bases of trust building (section 2.3.1), through calculus-knowledge- and identification-based trust; and the social and psychological reasons for individuals to trust, presented in meso (section 2.2.2) and micro levels (section 2.2.3). The participants were heavily encouraged to present work-related examples that reflected different perspectives on trust, to uncover new concepts.

Each interviews was divided into three sections. The first part included demographic questions, the second consisted of perceptions about trust, and the last section covered deeper analytical questions through relationships with coworkers.

3.3.1 Demographic questions

The first section of the interview included demographic questions to become acquiented with the interviewee. The questions were the following:

1. What is your role in your company?
2. How long have you worked for your company?
3. Do you work in a team or individually?
4. How long have you worked remotely?
   *Complementary question: Do you prefer this form of working? Why?

3.3.2 Trust in the Organisation

The second section covered a set of different questions to understand the perceptions of trust, along with their expectations and attitudes towards trust in their workplace.

This section was associated to the micro-level (section 2.2.3) which recognised individual psychological tendencies to trust; and building trust in organisations (section 2.3), through calculus-, knowledge- and identification-based trust (section 2.3.1). This part was composed of introductory questions about the topic of trust, followed by complementary questions to elaborate answers. All of the complementary questions have not been indicated as they varied between participants.

1. How would you define trust?
2. When you started working, did you have to prove your trust to your employer? How did you build trust?
3. To what extent do you feel trusted by your company? What makes you feel that way?
4. What form of trust do you expect in your online workplace and how is this established?
5. Do you feel a difference in trust when working remotely?
   *Complementary question: How is it different to establish or maintain trust in remote settings?

3.3.3 Trust and Relationships

The third section explored trust through the attitude held by interviewees towards colleagues and managers. This part contributed to the most significant answers, as the questions brought out concepts of the literature without direct referral to the topic. The literature affiliated with this part explores the meso level of trust (section 2.2.2), knowledge- (section 2.3.1.2.), and identification-based trust-building methods (section 2.3.1.3). These parts of the literature focused on the creation of meaningful social connections in the work environment. All of the complementary questions have not been indicated as they varied between participants.

1. How is your relationship with your online colleagues and managers?
2. To what extent do you trust your colleagues and managers?
   *Complementary question: What specific actions have you or your colleagues done to earn trust between each other?

3. Do you feel that you can easily talk to your colleagues and managers in difficult situations?
4. Do you feel that your manager (boss) is present in your work?
   *Complementary question: to what extent does commitment and presence relate to trust with your experience?
5. Are there specific activities performed by your company to build trust with your online colleagues?
6. Have you ever experienced signs of distrust in your company?
7. Do you believe that trust can be earned back?

3.4 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed from the IOS dictaphone app to separate Word documents with an Artificial Intelligence transcribing software called Trint.

After processing and reading the transcriptions, each interview was analysed with a color-coding method, where each color represented a different theme or concept. Later on, the color-coded data from each interview was grouped by categories determined by each theme to accentuate similarities and differencies between interviews. The most prominent definitions, characteristics and concepts discovered are featured in the “Findings and analysis” section.

3.5 Ethics of Research

Participants discussed their relationship with their colleagues and the company very honestly. Due to some sensitive content and senior positions of some candidates, it was required to maintain participant anonymity. To ensure anonymity, no company or individual names are mentioned in this research, and the raw secured interview data in MP3 and Word files will be destroyed after the release of the grade of this thesis.

The purpose of this research is to obtain results on trust and methods of trust-building, which shall not cause detriment for partipants. The sole liability encountered is the loss of participants’ time which may be outweighed by the benefits of this research, such

as the reflection on different perspectives of their work, as well as the conclusions that this research will draw.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The following section presents the most significant concepts about trust discovered in the interviews. An analysis of the data across different participant groups is effected and findings are further on correlated with the literature review.

4.1 Summary of Findings from the Interview Data

This section provides a summary of the most prominent definitions, characteristics and concepts discovered in the interview data.

In the interviews, all participants implicitly recognised trust as the key contributor to successful remote work. This perception was affirmed with different quotes such as:

"*It is important that you're building connection, relationship, so you will dare easily asking questions. Better you know your colleagues, the better the communication and easier and smoother work"*
Participant 1, D

Appendices 1 to 5 summarise different themes of trust that emerged in the interview data. These aspects consisted of the definitions of trust, characteristics of trust in remote settings, characteristics of trust-building, disruptors and outcomes of trust.

The following sections, present valuable codes from appendices 1 to 5, illustrated against the decisive variables of seniority: software developer and manager. The tables in the sections present the differences of participant groups in percentages. Percentages refer to the total participant number of the variable that displayed the code. 100% in managers is equal to three participants and in developers the number is four. The shaded areas present significant difference between percentages.

4.1.1 Differences in Definitions of Trust

Appendix 1 provides a summary of the main definitions of trust discovered in the interviews. All participants defined trust as commitment, accountability, collaboration and experience.

The key difference between managers and developers with definitions was identified in the concept of trust as presence and reputation. Regarding presence, one out of three managers identified presence as trust, in contrast to three developers out of four. In consideration to reputation, all managers recognised trust as reputation in contrast to three out of four developers.

Definition	Manager	Developer
Trust as presence	30%	75%
Trust as reputation	100%	75%

4.1.2 Differences in Characteristics of Trust in Remote Settings

Appendix 2 summarises the characteristics of trust in remote settings from the interviews. All participants implicitly or explicitly stated that trust is maintained with consistency, trust needs differ and trust requires flexibility. The key difference highlighted between managers and developers is the difficulty of building trust online. According to the data, only 1 out of 3 managers presented that trust was difficult to build remotely, whereas the number of developers holding this view was 2 out of four.

Characteristic	Manager	Developer
Trust is difficult to build remotely	30%	50%

4.1.3 Differences in Characteristics of Trust Building

Appendix 3 refers to the main characteristics of trust-building, corresponding to the views of participants. All interviewees recognised that trust has to be earned and requires flexibility, openness and mutual effort. The main difference in variables was

the aspect of providing responsibility, where only three out of four developers presented this view, in contrast to all managers.

Characteristic	Manager	Developer
Providing responsibility	100%	75%

4.1.4 Differences in Disruptors of Trust

Appendix 4 summarises the main disruptors of trust recognised by participants which were monitoring, high power distance, competition and instability. The percentages across participant groups varied noticeably. The biggest difference was related to high power distance where no developer mentioned it, in contrast to three out of four managers who found the issue significant.

Disruptor	Manager	Developer
Monitoring	70%	50%
High Power Distance	70%	0%
Competition	0%	25%
Instability	70%	50%

4.1.5 Differences in Outcomes of Trust

Appendix 5 summarises the outcomes of trust discovered in the interviews. The outcome presented by all participants was the generation of efficiency. The other categories recognised differences and consisted of the generation of confidence and generation of inclusiveness. Regarding confidence, only one out of three managers identified this outcome, in contrast to all developers. In consideration to inclusiveness, two out of three managers, and three out of four developers identified this outcome.

Outcome	Manager	Developer
Trust generates confidence	30%	100%
Trust generates inclusiveness	70%	75%

4.2. Correlation of Interview Data and Literature Review

The emerging themes of the interview data correlate significantly with the literature review. The literature topics help explain the foundations and arguments for the perceptions and examples of the participants. Participant quotations are presented to show evidence of the themes. At the end of each quote, the participant number and variable are added. M refers to Manager and D to Developer.

4.2.1 Definitions of Trust

Correlating to Appendix 1, this section analyses the definitions of trust discovered by participants. Appendix 1 summarises the main definitions which cover commitment, accountability, collaboration, presence, reputation and experience. Each definition is analysed in the following segments.

4.2.1.1 Commitment and Accountability

Trust as commitment and accountability were two occurring themes in the participants' interpretations for trust. Both topics were presented by 100% of candidates and were formerly discussed in the literature as essential foundations in the creation of identification based trust (section 2.3.1.3.).

Each participant perceived trust as a manner of showing commitment, which was demonstrated through the completion of the assigned tasks. Many responses suggested this clearly:

"I just have to make sure that the things that need to be done get done and when there are meetings, that I attend them." – 2, M

This statement also displays accountability and responsibility met through the completion of tasks and presence at corresponding meetings.
Accountability was a factor that was implicitly stated in many interviews as a method of demonstrating commitment with trust. An implicit way of holding this view was said by Participant 5, D, who referred to a personal experience where he had broken a

laptop's screen and despite the shameful circumstance, decided to explain the incident to his manager.

"I was feeling very ashamed, but the manager laughed and said, "I understand you". And that built trust and openness to be vulnerable, because people trust you when you see that you are a normal human being and not super woman".

This quotation despite displaying the willingness to accept responsibility of one's actions, demonstrates the significance of honesty and openness, discussed in further sections.

4.2.1.1.1 Managers and Accountability

Regarding the participant profiles, all managers considered accountability as the principal condition of high-performing subordinates. Relative to trust, they viewed accountability as the main factor for trusting an employee or a colleague. For instance, this was described by Participant 2, M:

"It does not matter if a guy solves his task in one hour and browses the internet the rest seven hours of the day, he still did what was supposed to do"

This quote reflects the most indisputable responsibility of an employee which is the ability to deliver; with accountability, as the fundamental purpose for which an employee is hired. If these two are aspects accomplished, it shall prove that the individual deserves to be trusted.

4.2.1.1.2 Developers and Accountability

With developers, accountability was not as explicitly shown since they were more focused in commitment, through delivering.

"It's not words, its deeds. I decided that everything I do, I'll to do it as well as possible. I do it on time to show that, I care about things. And if I say something, I keep it, if I make a mistake, I admit it."

– 5, D

Participant 5 stated this as an explicit method of commitment, when the complimentary question *"How do you personally show commitment in your workplace?"* was asked. This answer is significant in understanding the terminology of commitment, as it presents the idea of dedication to your work and maintaining a position of integrity.

Despite commitment, this quote implicitly demonstrates accountability a feeling of responsibility for one's actions and a willingness to perform at their best. Accountability is closely associated with commitment as both rely on the values of responsibility and integrity, which result in trustworthiness.

4.2.1.2 Collaboration and Presence

All participants identified collaboration as an integral part of trust among co-workers. This theme was recognised at the macro level at the end of the classical management period (section 2.2.1) and at the meso-level of trust (section 2.2.2).

At the meso level, collaboration was specified as an aligment of interests and mutual benefits (section 2.2.2.5) to achieve calculus-based trust. Juniors believed collaboration was more significant when it was together with presence to build initial calculus-based trust. Developers felt more trustworthy when they were diligently demonstrating collaboration and presence, as it would be perceived as commitment by their peers, as quoted by Participant 1 and 7:

"At the start, you want to be close to your colleagues for help, you want to be as much as possible in the office"
– 1, D

"One aspect with remote work, it's those basic, simple details. In meetings you turn on the camera, you try to be proactive"
– 7, D

The literature considered presence essential in the meso level of trust, (section 2.2.2.2, *Place and Personal Affiliation*) for building calculus-based trust (section 2.3.1.1). This view was presented by all four participants in developer positions, displaying negativity towards absence.

"Remote meetings are never going to be the same. You don't have that kind of physical close presence. One person speaks at a time and others are tuned off. You're looking at a screen with lots of people doing whatever on the side".
–5, D

In contrast, managers valued collaboration regardless of presence, as they knew that collaboration would happen with or without explicit attendance.

"A person calls for a meeting and invites everybody but requires feedback from only team leaders. I'm okay if only leaders are talking and the rest are listening or not, I don't care. The leaders are the ones responsible of understanding, then they would tell their team individually what they have to do".
-2, M

As observed in the statement of Participant 2, there is a perception of accountability that surpasses the value of presence, as the established trust will guarantee the completion of tasks. This contrasts the view of the literature, as in sections 2.3.1.2 and 2.3.1.3 presence is emphasised through socialisation methods, which were not recognised by participants in manager roles.

4.2.1.3 Reputation and Experience

Trust as reputation and experience, were two topics which correlated to the literature review in multiple sections. In total six out of seven participants identified reputation as trust, whereas experience was recognised by all seven.

Both topics were explored at calculus-based trust-building to establish initial trust, and experience was further emphasised with knowledge-based trust. Trust as reputation was explicitly introduced by Participant 2, M, with fifteen years of experience, and

provides a significant visualisation of calculus-based trust to (section 2.3.1.1) build initial trust, followed by knowledge-based trust (section 2.3.1.2).

"If people say that they can work, they can do all of this but then the employer see from where they have graduated, or if they have actually graduated at all, that makes a difference"
– 2, M.

This displays the value of reputation, which emphasises the psychology of not relying only on spoken words, but factual evidence or references. This aspect was explored at micro level, (section 2.2.3.3) which provides the tendency of an individual to trust; and in the meso level which relates to historical experiences (section 2.2.2.2).

In reference to experience, four participants described implicitly its value in a work relationship. Many participants relied on historical experiences with colleagues to distinguish a person's trustworthiness. This correlates to the meso level (section 2.2.2.2) where frequency and duration of a relationship were identified to be determinants in the decision to trust. Historical experiences are closely associated with reputation, as they create mental representations of specific individuals' habits, which result in the construction of reputation.

"(With time) It becomes easier to know who to trust, you learn who will do what he is supposed to do and who you're not sure will deliver or who will postpone deadlines"
–5, D

4.2.2. Characteristics of Trust in Remote Settings

This section refers to Appendix 2, and analyses the main characteristics of trust discovered in the interviews. Appendix 2 summarises four identified affirmations that are implicitly and explicitly stated by participants. These affirmations are subsequently analysed and correlate with the literature as follows.

4.2.2.1. Trust is difficult to build remotely

This concept was presented in the literature (section 2.3.2) and was further emphasised by participants who explained that conventional methods of trust-building, such as physical presence (section 5.1.2), caused complications in online settings.
Three out of seven participants identified that trust is difficult to build online. All participants were developers and referred to difficulties in presence and engagement, especially in remote meetings.

"I used to do knowledge sharing sessions online where everyone shares their points of view on a weekly basis for more team engagement and knowledge-sharing, but it was hard to have people involved sharing or asking questions"
– 1, D

This view presents trust as engagement, presence, and collaboration, where Participant 1 was not able to achieve in online settings. This was also introduced by Participant 5, where he described that online meetings did not accomplish the same level of engagement as physical meetings.

"It tends to sound like one person speaks at a time and others are tuned off and you're looking at a screen with lots of people doing whatever on the side"
– 5, D

This contradicted the view of managers, who explained that trust-building online does not present challenges. In the following quotation, Participant 4, M, identifies that regardless of remoteness, tasks are delivered, there will be trust.

"We didn't have to prove anything, people didn't seem to care how things were done if they were done"
– 4, M

4.2.2.2 Trust is maintained with consistency

As revealed in previous sections, trust is perceived as accountability and commitment, which must be maintained with consistency in online settings. This was indicated by all participants, both in manager and developer positions.

"I proved that I am capable, so when I started working remotely it was obvious that I would continue the way I would"
– 3, D

The statement of Participant 3 reveals that initial calculus-based trust had to be earned, in this case, through reputation and expertise, to ensure its proper maintenance online. In the literature review, consistency was not explicitly stated, but was observed in multiple sections of the literature, relative to experience, reputation (section 2.2.2.3) and calculus-based trust (section 2.3.1.1).

4.2.2.3. Trust needs differ

The difference of trust between individuals was firstly introduced at the micro level in the literature (section 2.2.3). This section provided similar evidence as discovered in the interviews relating to the psychological tendencies of individuals to trust and how trust varies by participant.

All participants identified differences in perceptions of trust amongst them and their coworkers. For instance, Participant 6 presented an experience relative to cultural views about high power distance, which affected his subordinates' decision to trust:

"They were Ukrainians, and I was from Geneva, so there may be a hierarchical issue, being afraid of saying something that could impact their work"
– 6, M

This concept is presented as a disruptor of trust, but it also conveys the influence of personal culture (section 2.2.3.2) towards an individual's tendency to build trust. In the former quotation, Participant 6 explained the situation, but could not understand why

his subordinates were not adapting their cultural difference. This aspect is significant, as it projects the distinct perspectives individuals can have on trust in remote settings. As presented earlier, some believed that online trust can be established with more ease, for instance, managers who rely on completed tasks, whereas others may require more engagement and presence with their online team.

"Some people will always want to text and chat, some people just have a call for direct discussions. There are two profiles, some prefer texting some prefer calling"
– 1, D

4.2.2.4. Trust requires flexibility

All seven participants stated that flexibility is among the fundamental requirements in online work. This theme was crucial in the literature for preventing monitoring and strictness and increase accountability (section 2.3.2).

In the interview data, it was discovered that flexibility had a strong connection to trust by ensuring confidence and accountability in employees, which directly correlates with *Trust in Remote Settings* (section 2.3.2). In the following quote, Participant 1 shares why flexibility should be a requirement online, as close monitoring of hours would cause unproductivity and a misuse of working time.

"I expect flexible hours and goals, not specific tasks, I don't want someone behind my back. Also, no hour tracking. Because at the end, we spend time in tracking, which could be used for real work"
– 1, D

Developers and managers firmly believed in flexibility in IT as specific schedules of productivity would be complicated to design.

"Well, things need to get done. I can be working less than the full working hours but there is a trade-off where sometimes I need to work late"
– 2, M

Participant 2 stated that rigid schedules cannot be implemented in IT, as work can reach to free time when there is commitment. As this happens, flexibility is fundamental to ensure compensation for the lost time. This approach of flexibility for trust can be adopted in other industries, where general goals and deadlines can be given, without an exact time-frame to when specifically work should be carried out.

4.2.3 Characteristics of Trust Building

In correlation with Appendix 3, this section examines the characteristics of trust-building from the interview data. Appendix 3 summarises five identified affirmations which refer to trust being earned, responsibility, flexibility, openness and mutual effort. These assertions correlate with the literature as follows.

4.2.3.1 Trust has to be earned

All participants implicitly stated how trust has to be earned, through methods such as reputation, experience and commitment. These areas were discussed earlier, and identified in multiple sections of the literature (section 2.2.2.3, 2.3.1.1, 2.2.2.2, 2.2.3.3).

“People see you’re committed, motivated, you bring ideas. I took the leadership of my team and when we had feedback reviews, I got good feedback from my colleagues; people liked me. I had not been elected, but I earned it, naturally. It was more a mindset of: I will follow this person, but not because I have to follow”
- 1, D

Commitment was the most discussed method for earning trust by both participant groups, as observed in the previous quote. Participant 1 stated explicitly that trust cannot be forced, which emphasises the value of good reputation (section 2.2.2.3) through dedication and abilities to build calculus-based trust (2.3.1.1); and, consequently, develop deeper bases of trust (section 2.3.1). Validation of trust was also represented in the literature (section 2.3.1.1) and identified with Participant 3:

“People trusted me because I demonstrated that I could deliver tasks”
-3, D

Additionally, managers, relied more on references for good reputation and initial earning of trust, as shown at the meso level (section 2.2.2.2, 2.2.2.3) and for building calculus-based trust (section 2.3.1.1).

"If you want to trust someone and you don't know the person, you need to get some references"
-2, M

4.2.3.2 Providing responsibility and flexibility

Responsibility and flexibility were recognised in both participant groups. In the literature, responsibility was introduced as a result of knowledge-based trust (section 2.3.1.2) and flexibility as fundamental for trust in remote settings (section 2.3.2).

"Trusting that you will deliver the tasks, and giving responsibility to deliver on"
– 5, D

This quotation reveals the reciprocity of responsibility, and that subordinates and colleagues should be given delegated tasks to establish mutual dependencies, as viewed in the literature at the meso level (section 2.2.2.5). All managers recognised the importance of giving responsibility, whereas only 75% of developers found it valuable.

"You've been hired for competence, so the giving flexibility to the employee ensures reaching the goal in their own way"
– 6, M

Participant 6 described flexibility in the form of delegation which encourages creativity and deepens trust and motivation by *"reaching the goal in their own way".* This demonstrates the influence of flexibility, both in time management and facilitation of goals to ensure that employees are given importance and feel trusted.
Delegation was briefly introduced as a method to build knowledge-based trust (section 2.3.1.2) which correlates to multiple aspects encountered in the interviews. In the

following quote, Participant 1 introduced delegation as a tool of providing responsibility and accountability. In his argument, he also stated that an inability to delegate obstructs the formation of trust due to an impression of high-power hierarchy.

"If I delegate a task, it is not mine anymore, not my responsibility. Some people don't know how to delegate, these people are overloaded. And some people want to keep feeling important by not delegating essential things, to maintain their importance"
– 1, D

4.2.3.3 Trust requires openness and mutual effort

All participants presented the importance of openness and mutual effort in the creation of trust in the workplace. These views were explored in building identification-based trust by improving relationships and collaboration (section 2.3.1.3, 2.3.2).

"Trust means admitting when you make mistakes, and taking responsibility"
- 5, D

The way this quote was expressed displayed the effort one must put to establish openness through vulnerability and integrity. Vulnerability was presented as a core element of trust in the introduction of the literature (section 2.1.1). For Participant 5, vulnerability is valuable since it demonstrates that one can rely showing their profound feelings.

"I could be vulnerable. People trust when they see that you're a normal human and not super woman"
– 5, D

To facilitate openness, mutual effort was discovered to be essential, in both the literature (section 2.2.2.5) and the interview data. The literature further inquired into this aspect by exploring the effort of displaying trustworthiness, which was effected through benevolence and integrity (section 2.2.2.4). The interview data, cited a significant concept, which is that trust is reciprocal, uncovered in the following quotes:

“People shared deep personal details, which humanises everyone. It’s just not a colleague, it’s a person”
– 3, D

“You want to get a flavor of how the person is outside of work, you do things together, you create laughter”
– 5, D

The former quotes introduce the value of showing openness to colleagues. According to developers, displaying one’s individual personality besides the professional façade, results in the creation of identification-based trust (section 2.3.1.3).

“I once had a manager who was behaving with people the same way he's behaving with task and code, quite rigid. It's not fun to go to work when you have this tension”
– 7, D

Participant 7 shared an experience where he could not build a relationship of trust and felt uncomfortable with his manager, who lead the team without sensibility. This demonstrates that people have to be treated humanly and effort must be put from both parties for trust to develop.

4.2.4 Disruptors of Trust

This section refers to Appendix 4 and examines the disruptors of trust identified in interviews. The main disruptors recognised were monitoring, high power distance, competition and instability. These correlate with the literature as follows.

4.2.4.1 Monitoring

Monitoring was the most recurring disruptor, shown by both participant groups and the literature (section 1.3.1.2, 2.3.2). Four out of seven participants, especially developers, found monitoring hasardous for their ability to trust.

“There was unhappiness and lack of trust. When it was very strict, there was a lack of motivation and it got confirmed when people were leaving”
– 1, D

Participant 1 presented the influence of monitoring, which resulted in discouraged employees. This view is further emphasised in previous sections of the analysis (5.2.4,5.3.2) where the significance of flexibility, contrary to strictness, is investigated.

Nevertheless, Participant 7 presented monitoring as a form of collaboration to enhance performance. In the following quote, the importance of reviewing work and feedback are highlighted as methods of constructive monitoring. This perspective was introduced in the literature for knowledge-based trust (section. 2.3.1.2).

“For us, (Monitoring) is not negative, it’s more constructive, which is helpful for me and for the team. When I need to configure something that I don't know, my colleagues share their screen to help me learn. Once I understand the method I do it myself, I screen share for them to see what I'm doing”
– 7, D

4.2.4.2 High Power Distance

As presented by two interviewees and the macro level of trust (section 2.2.1), high power distance can negatively impact trust. The following quotation by Participant 6 represents fear and insecurity to share opinions by lower-positioned individuals.

“They were Ukrainians, and I was from Geneva, so there may be a hierarchical issue, being afraid of saying something that could impact their work”
– 6, M

As discussed in section 5.3.3. of the analysis, openness and vulnerability are key elements for trust but can be damaged by high power distance, driven by insecurity and fear. At the micro level (section 2.2.3.2), it was identified that cultural differences can impact the way individuals perceive their surroundings and reflects basic assumptions such as believing in inequalities, observed in the previous quotation.

Participant 6 was the only one with personal experience on this topic which can be due being the single participant who has subordinates from a high power distance culture (Hofstede Insights, 2023). This view was additionally presented as a secondary experience by Participant 4, whose colleagues worked with Italians.

"I heard in some other cultures it can be different. People don't want to talk if they have problems since they want to appear more professional than what they are. That's very common when hiring people from different countries remotely, like Italy. It's different when you are not allowed to accept that you are not the best"
– 4, M

This quote affirms how personality through culture influences the way individuals feel about collaboration, which impacts the quality of trust. In this statement, high power culture can be identified through insecurity "*appear more professional than what they are"* and pride, "*you are not allowed to accept that you are not the best",* which correlate with sections 2.2.3.1 and 2.2.3.2 of the literature.

4.2.4.3 Competition

Competiton was a view presented by Participant 5, a developer, which was not observed in other interviews or explored in the literature. The reason why this perspective did not occur in other interviews is presumed to be that the experience of Participant 5 was encountered in his last employment, which was not in the field of IT.

"If the environment is competitive, then it becomes a dog-eat-dog world. One expectation is that you can trust that your coworkers are not there to run over you"
- 5, D

The quote reveals insecurity and rivalry, which contributes to increased sensations of distrust. As mentioned in previous sections, insecurity is an attribute that obstructs vulnerability, which hinders the creation of trust. When trust is not established, there is conflict and disunion among teams; and individuals would need to fight for their position. Competition is not directly connected to the literature, however, indication of

implicit correlation is found with the sensations and outcomes derived from competition. These are vulnerability (section 2.1.1), safety and confidence (section 2.3.1, 2.3.1.3), contradictory aspects to what competition generates.

4.2.4.4 Instability

Another factor identified in the interviews was instability, explored by two developers. Instability was not explicitly recognised in the literature but its consequences of insecurity and lack of motivation are recognised as disruptors of trust (section 2.3.2).

"You build trust with time, but if you have people moving constantly, it is more difficult" – 1, D

Participant 1 stated that changing workers and managers brings more difficulties in building trust. This lack of consistent coworkers can be correlated with a complication of building calculus-based trust, as duration and frequency of contact are fundamental for initial trust (section 2.2.2.2, 2.3.1.1).

4.2.5 Outcomes of Trust

In the interview data, three main outcomes of trust were identified which correlate with Appendix 5. These indicate the generation of confidence, inclusiveness and efficiency which are directly connected to the explored topics in the literature.

4.2.5.1 Trust Generates Confidence

In the literature, confidence was formed with collective identity, contributing to stronger feelings of security (2.1.2.2). This was implicitly observed in five out of seven participants, from which only one was from a management position.

"If you trust your manager, they can push you in the right direction, maybe a direction you didn't even consider yourself, but you can trust that they are doing the right thing," – 5, D

This quote presents trust for self-improvement, as Participant 5 can rely that his manager will act with benevolence and the appropriate abilities to provide the best for his subordinate. This view correlates with section 2.2.2.4 *"Benevolence and Integrity",* as the willingness to care for the other party; to establish knowledge-based (section 2.3.1.2) and identification-based trust (section 2.3.1.3). Additionally, we can clearly observe that Participant 2 has built a joint identity with his manager, where both parties can sincerely trust each other correlating to the social identity theory. (2.2.2.1).

4.2.5.2 Trust Generates Inclusiveness

This perspective was identified by six participants, as a result of identification-based trust. In the literature, identification-based trust (section 2.3.1.3) forms a joint collective identity, similar to the social identity theory (section 2.2.2.1), and brings an unconditional sensation of inclusiveness.

"People shared deep personal details, which humanises everyone. It's not a colleague, it's a person. I hate calling a company a family, but we tried to cultivate that"
– 3, D

Participant 3 discussed the idea of his company as a "family", which signifies the utmost bond between individuals, for a pure collective identity. This view brings into light that mutual openness can create an authentic connection in a relationship, and cultivate inclusiveness. A similar perception was presented by Participant 7, where developing inclusiveness for uniting colleagues was recognised:

"If you can give the conviction to the person that you're not working for the company only, but you work for them or with them; that increases trust radically"
– 7, D

4.2.5.3 Trust Generates Efficiency

In the literature, (section 2.1.2.2) efficiency was introduced as an outcome of confident and committed employees; as there would be fluency when tackling problems and taking risks, as well as a reduction in negotiation costs (section 2.3.2.4). In the

interview data, all participants described how trust is related to efficiency. For instance, it is implicitly referred to as commitment by Participant 1:

"If there's no trust, its more like: time to finish work, I'm gone"
-1, D

This statement displays a contrary situation, where distrust is a reflection of ineffectiveness. Participant 1 presented work as the hours spent on-site, regardless of working due to the lack of commitment; whereas with trust, Participant 6 recognises collaboration and unity.

"You're building connection, you will dare asking easily work questions. Better you know your colleagues, the better the communication and easier and smoother work"
– 6, M

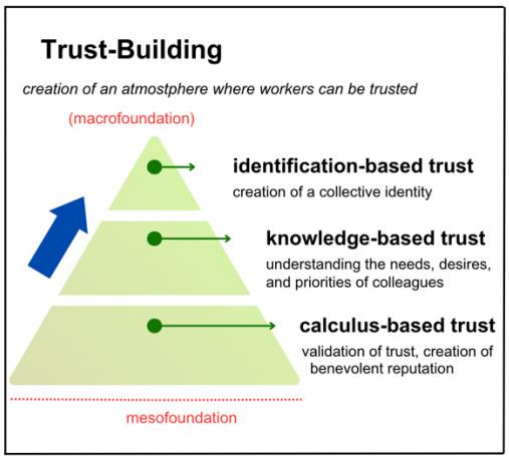
This quote displays how identification-based trust (section 2.3.1.3) contributes to collaboration, with fluidity in communication; correlated with reduced negotiation costs and more confidence to ask for help. As this form of trust is established, Participant 6 stated that it results in "smoother work", correspondent with efficiency.

The outcomes of trust are fundamental to acknowledge the benefits of reaching identification-based trust. Additionally, the definitions and characteristics discussed earlier bring further value on how to establish each level of trust in online settings. Following this section, conclusions of the research are derived by restructuring the conceptual framework of the literature review.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The previous section concludes the analysis of the interview data, from which conclusions are derived as follows. This section summarises the data and draws conclusions supported by the conceptual framework of the literature review. Additionally, it addresses the implications of this research for international business, its limitations, and suggestions for further research.

Figure 2, Conceptual Framework of the Literature Review



5.1 Main Findings

The main findings of the research correlate significantly with the literature and its conceptual pyramid of the bases of trust-building. The findings about trust consisted of its definitions and characteristics in remote settings, characteristics of trust-building, and its disruptors and outcomes. The elements in each group of findings are valuable for interpreting the bases of trust-building and draw conclusions from the research.

5.1.1 Building Calculus-based Trust

By interpreting the interview data, it is viable to recognise the value of the calculus-base to earn and validate trust. It is critical to erase the assumption that building trust remotely is difficult, and to acknowledge that presence is not always required. This is because collaboration as trust can be demonstrated in other ways, such as consistency of actions. Understanding how calculus trust is built with commitment, collaboration, experience, and reputation is essential for initiating trust online.

5.1.2 Building Knowledge-based Trust

For knowledge-based trust, it was discovered that accountability, responsibility, and flexibility were fundamental. These characteristics coincided with delegation, which is relevant for understanding the needs, desires and priorities of colleagues. The importance of understanding your co-workers was explored in the definition of *trust needs differ*, as each person has distinct a psychological reasoning, which needs to be appreciated to form trust. This definition can also explain why for some individuals and in some cultures, it may be more difficult to build calculus-based trust.

In online trust, flexibility was shown to be most treasured when associated with schedules and tasks, with thorough resistance to disruptors of trust such as instability and monitoring. Regarding other disruptors, competition was a singular view which was not present in IT, since it was perceived that in the industry there is more collaboration and mutual effort, which builds unity and trust. Additionally, high power distance was identified to obstruct trust due to individuals' distinct cultures causing fear and insecurity. This derives from the lack of unity and similarities, which obstructs the formation of the next base of trust-building, which is identification-based trust.

5.1.3 Building Identification-based Trust

The highest segment of the conceptual pyramid refers to the identification-based trust. A superior understanding of this base is achieved by identifying two significant characteristics expressed by participants: openness and mutual effort. These elements were recognised to increase unity between co-workers and establish mutual goals. Vulnerability was the essence to achieve genuine openness, as it would display the effort of demonstrating who one truly is, regardless of the work environment.

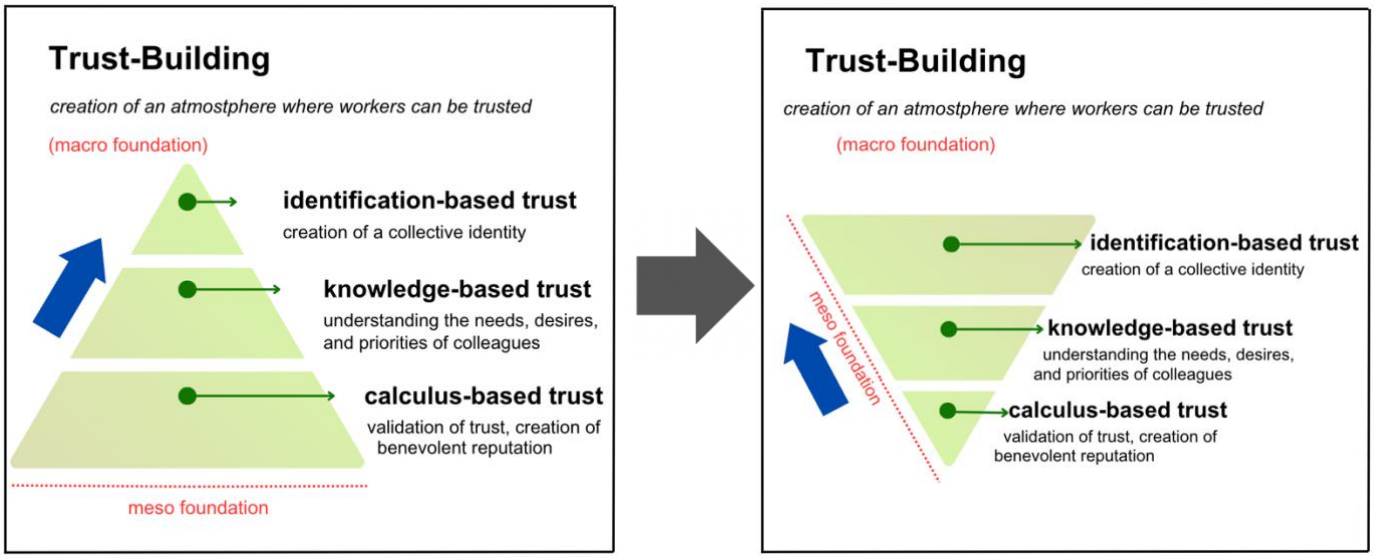
5.1.4 Restructuring the Conceptual Framework

The interview data conveys the significance of each level of the conceptual pyramid, but places the greatest importance in the highest level, due to the benefits of creating identification-based trust. The three main outcomes for trust were the generation of confidence, inclusiveness and efficiency. These contribute to self-improvement, unity

and better relationships among colleagues, as well as facilitating collaboration and increasing commitment in corporations.

Due to the outcomes derived from the research, it is beneficial to invert the shape of the conceptual pyramid to further emphasise the importance of identification-based trust, as observed in Figure 2. By inverting the shape, it is possible to better understand the magnitude of trust in each base, since advancing higher up the pyramid establishes greater trust. Additionally, it is noticeable that all bases are formed with the meso level, therefore, the meso foundation should be applied to all levels of the pyramid, not only calculus.

Figure 3, Reconstructured Conceptual Framework



5.1 Implications for International Business

Political changes and instability are gradually disuniting nations around the world, which justifies the significance of building trust in global business relationships. Work environments are constantly evolving towards more virtual, automated and less office-dependent spaces. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand how trust is formed in these new settings to not have repercussions in development.

Especially for global enterprises, it is substantial to research the practicalities of trust-building in new online and cultural settings, to ensure that quality work is maintained and an trustworthy organisational culture is established, regardless of remoteness.

5.2 Limitations

This research was performed with participants from distinct nationalities and organisational cultures, however, there was gender homogeneity in the sample. All participants were male, which can influence the identified perceptions of trust.

Additionally, the number of interviews was low due constraints of time and length of thesis. This limitation influenced the depth of the analysis and length of each section of the findings, and could be improved with more interviews and a longer, more profound analysis of the topic. Additionally, the analysis did not explore in depth all the variables of the sample, such as the age groups or nationalities of participants, which may influence some understanding of the concepts of trust.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Additional research can be carried out to understand the differences in perceptions of trust between variables such as gender, nationality, level of seniority and age. Trust can be further explored with more interviews to employees from different industries, for the recognition of patterns in online trust across sectors.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1: Definitions of Trust, from Interview Data

Definition	**Example quotation and participant number**	**Participants with aligned views**
Trust as commitment	*“It's not words, its deeds. I decided that everything I do, I'll to do it as well as possible. I do it on time to show that, I care about things. And if I say something, I keep it, if I make a mistake, I admit it.” – 5, D*	7/7
Trust as accountability	*“It does not matter if a guy solves his task in one hour and browses the internet the rest seven hours of the day, he still did what was supposed to do” – 2, M*	7/7
Trust as collaboration	*“Better you know your colleagues, the better the communication and easier and smoother work” - 1, D*	7/7
Trust as presence	*“You have some (online) meetings with many without camera, or some where people are not active. If you*	4/7

	compare with meeting in a room, you might see some listening, active listening, participating, but when you're in a call and have no camera, no talking, you don't know if they're away or are they actively listening." -1, D	N: 6,5,7,3,
Trust as reputation	*"when a developer has troubles to finish a task, usually he has troubles finishing tasks very often" – 2, M*	6/7
Trust as experience	*"My colleagues have worked for many years so there is no distrust that they don't know enough" – 2, M*	7/7

7.2 Appendix 2: Characteristics of Trust in Remote Settings, from Interview Data

Characteristics in remote settings	***Example quotation and participant number***	**Participants with aligned views**
Trust is difficult to build remotely	*"Online, you don't have the physical closeness and that affects the way you speak with people" – 5, D*	3/7
Trust is maintained with consistency	*"I proved that I am a capable engineer, so when I started working remotely it was obvious that I would continue the way I would" – 3, D*	7/7
Trust needs differ	*"Some people will always want to text and chat, some people just have a call for direct discussions. There are two profiles, some prefer texting some prefer calling" – 1, D*	7/7
Trust requires flexibility	*"I don't need someone to be behind me. The work will be done despite starting at 8:30 or at 9:00" – 1, D*	7/7

7.3 Appendix 3: Characteristics of Trust Building, from Interview Data

Characteristics of trust building	Example quotation and participant number	Participants with aligned views
Trust has to be earned	*"People trusted me because I demonstrated that I could deliver tasks" – 3, D*	7/7
Providing responsibility	*"It's trusting that you will deliver the tasks, and giving responsibility to deliver on" – 5, D*	6/7
Giving flexibility	*"you've been hired for competence, so giving flexibility to the employee ensures reaching the goal in their own way" – 6, M*	7/7
Trust requires openness	*"Trust means admitting when you make mistakes, and taking responsibility" – 5, D*	7/7
Trust requires mutual effort	*"People shared deep personal details, which humanizes everyone. It's just not a colleague, it's a person" – 3, D*	7/7

7.4 Appendix 4: Disruptors of Trust, from Interview Data

Disruptors of Trust	Example quotation and participant number	Participants with aligned views
Monitoring	*"There was unhappiness and lack of trust. When it was very strict, there was a lack of motivation and it got confirmed when people were leaving" – 1, D*	4/7
High Power Distance	*"They were Ukrainians, and I was from Geneva, so there may be a hierarchical issue, being afraid of saying something that could impact their work" – 6, M*	2/7
Competition	*"If the environment is competitive, then it becomes a dog-eat-dog world. One expectation is that you can trust that your coworkers are not there to run over you" – 5, D*	1/7 N: 5

Instability	*"You must build trust with time, but if you have people moving constantly, it is more difficult" – 1, D*	4/7

7.5. Appendix 5: Outcomes of Trust, from Interview Data

Outcomes of Trust	**Example quotation and participant number**	**Participants with aligned views**
Trust generates confidence	*"If you trust your manager, they can push you in the right direction, maybe a direction you didn't even consider yourself, but you can trust that they are doing the right thing," - 5, D*	5/7
Trust generates inclusiveness	*"I hate calling a company a family, because it isn't, but we tried to cultivate that" – 3, D*	6/7
Trust generates efficiency	*"If there's no trust, its more like: time to finish work, I'm gone" – 1, D*	7/7