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**Key words:** Trust, multiple trust foci, social exchange theory, conceptual/cognitive distance

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# **MULTIPLE CONSTITUENCIES OF TRUST: A STUDY OF THE OMAN MILITARY**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents findings from a study of employees' multiple trust foci. Social exchange theory and the notions of conceptual and cognitive distance are used to generate hypotheses on the anticipated effects of specific trust relationships on employees' attitudinal and behavioural outcomes such as intention to quit, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviours. Data from Omani military personnel suggests that employees distinguish between trust in the organization, trust in their direct boss and trust in co-workers. Several important attitudinal and behavioural outcomes are predicted by these specific trust foci.

## **Introduction**

In the last two decades the management literature has witnessed an explosion of interest in the "central, superficially obvious but essentially complex" (Blois, 1999: 197) concept of trust (for comprehensive reviews see Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; 2002; Kramer, 1999; Mayer et al, 1995; Rousseau et al 1998; Schoorman et al, 2007). In part at least, this interest can be explained by the link between organizational trust and performance (Colquitt et al, 2007; Tzafrir, 2005; Gould-Williams, 2003). The level of trust in a particular society has been argued to strongly influence a nation's economic well-being (Fukuyama, 1995) and form the basis for human happiness (Layard, 2005). Given the importance of trust to both economic and employee well-being it is now widely studied across different national societal cultures (e.g. Chang and Chi, 2007) and there is considerable evidence for cross-cultural differences (Ferrin and Gillespie, 2010). Debate over definitions has now converged toward consensus on a variant of Rousseau et al's (1998: 395) definition of trust as being "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another".

Trust has been long been conceptualized (e.g. Fox, 1974) as being target or foci-specific, as one's trust in others varies according to the individual or group with whom they are interacting. Employees can trust one foci, such as their workgroup or union, and distrust another, such as the management or supervisor. Thus, the 'other' in Rousseau et al's (1998) definition can take many forms.

Employees have multiple trust relationships in their working lives, with different intra-organizational parties and entities. The trusted 'other' may be a colleague (McAllister, 1995) or colleagues (Langfred, 2004); one's direct supervisor or manager (Den Hartog, 2003; Dirks, 2000), an organizational constituency such as 'the senior management' (Clark and Payne, 1997; Mayer and Davis, 1999), or another department (Cummings and Bromiley, 1996). Additionally, employees can have a specific trusting relationship with their employing organization as a whole (see Robinson 1996; Shockley-Zalabak et al, 2000). Whitener (1997) distinguishes between two main types of foci, one specific to individuals such as boss and co-workers, and one to generalized representatives such as union and management. In this paper, we follow Whitener (1997) in examining employees trust to both types of foci, namely trust in individuals (i.e. the boss and co-workers), and to the organization as a whole.

We contribute to the literature on trust in three ways. First, despite trust being theorized in terms of multiple-foci there is a dearth of literature that reports empirical studies. The vast majority of published work examines single trust foci, usually trust in leader (Albrecht and Travaglione, 2003; Willemyns, Gallois, and Callan, 2003; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002), and only rarely do studies examine more than one focus. A few studies examine dual trust foci such as union and management (Kalleberg et al, 2004); senior management and immediate supervisor (Clark and Payne, 1997); organization and supervisor (Tan and Tan, 2000; Costigan et al, 1998). Only one study known to us examines more than two foci: Scott (1980) examines trust in three management-related foci – senior management, supervisor, and management consultants employed by the organization. We go beyond these studies in examining a wider range of both generalized and specific foci to provide a more complete test of the multiple-constituencies trust framework.

Second, we examine the consequences of multiple trust-foci for work attitudes and behaviours, examining the extent to which these will be best predicted by trust foci that are proximate to the attitude and behaviour in question. Dirks and Ferrin's (2002) meta-analysis of trust in leadership lends support to this proximate view. They found that trust in supervisor was more strongly related to job-level variables, such as job performance, whilst trust in senior management was more strongly predictive of organizational-level variables, such as organizational commitment. Dirks and Skarlicki (2004) call for further research to explore such findings in primary studies.

Third, we provide the first test of the possible mediating role of generalized organizational trust in the relationship between trust in specific foci and outcomes. Although such mediation has been established in multiple-commitment studies (Hunt and Morgan, 1994; Redman and Snape, 2005), it has yet to be tested in a trust context.

The paper proceeds as follows. We begin by briefly reviewing the multiple foci literature before anchoring the study in the theoretical insights provided by social exchange theory and the concepts of ‘cognitive’ and ‘conceptual distance’. These theoretical frameworks help to explain why certain outcomes may be more linked to some specific trust relationships than others. The paper then explores the potential importance of the mediating role of trust in the organization. From these foundations we generate a series of hypotheses, and test these using data from military employees. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for theory development and practical application.

### **Multiple Constituencies of Trust**

The multiple constituencies approach has been applied to a number of key organizational behaviour constructs, including: ‘commitment’ (Reichers, 1985; Hunt and Morgan, 1994; Redman and Snape, 2005; Snape, Chan and Redman, 2006); ‘justice’ (Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002); psychological contracts (Marks, 2001); and perceived support (Kottke, 1998). A similar treatment of trust is overdue, as the trust literature has been preoccupied with a limited range of referents.

The main emphasis of the small multi-foci trust literature to date has been on management and generalized organizational foci. An early study by Scott (1980) examined the relationship between trust in supervisor, trust in senior management, and trust in management consultants employed by an organization, and measures of perceived success and value of a Management by Objectives programme. Findings suggest that both trust in supervisor and trust in senior management were positively associated with the assessed value of the programme. Ayree, Budhwar and Chen’s (2002) study found trust in organization was positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively associated with quit intent. Trust in supervisor was positively associated with task performance and organizational citizenship behaviours targeted at both the organization and individuals.

Tan and Tan (2000) examined the outcomes of trust in supervisor and trust in the organization, finding that trust in supervisor increased satisfaction with the supervisor and this satisfaction proved to be distinct from ‘global’ job satisfaction. Trust in the organization was positively associated with organizational commitment and negatively with quit intent. Trust in supervisor was also positively associated with innovative employee behaviour such as the production or adoption of useful ideas. A study by Payne and Clark (2003) examined the antecedents of trust (situational and dispositional factors) in immediate manager and “senior managers in the industry”. The study found that trust in both types of manager was best predicted by a combination of dispositional factors, such as a predisposition to trust, and situational factors, such as a difficult and challenging job.

Thus, a relative blind-spot in the trust literature is that by focussing mainly on trust in management, supervision, and organizational referents there is a tendency to neglect other important constituencies. In an era of teamworking, for example, the relationship of an employee to their fellow workers may be more salient than a management/organizational focus. Very few studies have included measures of trust in co-workers alongside other foci, a rare exception being Kiffen-Petersen and Cordery’s (2003) study, which found that trust in co-workers and trust in management predicted employees’ preference for teamwork. There is a body of work that uses the Cook and Wall (1980) measures of ‘faith in peers’ and ‘confidence in management’ but this literature is limited in providing multi-focal insights given different items are used to tap the constructs and hence it is difficult to differentiate foci from item effects (e.g. Gould-Williams, 2003; Laschinger et al, 2001)

Kalleberg et al (2004) examined the relationship between trust in the organization and in the union, and citizenship behaviours targeted at the union and organization. The study found that trust in the organization was positively associated with organizational citizenship behaviour targeted at the company and negatively associated with union citizenship behaviour, and that trust in the union was positively associated with union citizenship behaviours and negatively associated with organizational citizenship behaviour.

In order to reap the full benefits of trust in the workplace there is clearly a need to have a better understanding of which foci are the most relevant in producing desired outcomes such as commitment, extra-role behaviours, and staying behaviour. In the next sections we draw

upon social exchange theory and notions of conceptual and cognitive distance to theorize the relationship between multi-trust foci and attitudinal and behavioural outcomes.

### **Trust and Social Exchange Theory**

According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976; Whitener et al, 1998), when an individual in a relationship with another provides a benefit to that party voluntarily, (s)he invokes an obligation on behalf of the other party to reciprocate by providing some benefit in return. An informal ‘rule of exchange’ is established that can assume the status of a ‘norm’ or ‘cultural mandate’ governing parties’ future behaviours (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005: 877). As the number and frequency of exchanges increases, each party gathers evidence on the trustworthiness of the other party, and their likely future behaviours. This evidence can be used as a heuristic device to facilitate further social exchange. Additionally, the very act of participating in a trust relationship – fulfilling one’s obligations – enhances the social exchange. Trust thus emerges through the repeated exchange of benefits between two parties. Trust is thus a “key determinant” of whether others would be willing to engage in social exchanges with a party (Dirks and Skarlicki, 2008).

Rupp and Cropanzano (2002) argue, that relative to economic exchange, individuals in social exchange relationships tend to identify more strongly with the person or entity with which they are engaged, and hence are more likely to make sacrifices for the benefit of their partner. The nature and quality of parties’ reciprocal arrangements determine to a considerable extent the level of mutual trust attained between them. Put another way, social exchange theory suggests that trust creates obligations that are specific to, and confined by the parameters of, the relationship, and that favourable behaviours associated with trusting are targeted toward the particular referent concerned (McNeely and Meglino, 1994; Redman and Snape, 2005). For example, trust in one’s manager will lead one to behave in ways that are beneficial first and foremost to one’s manager (“I am doing this *for you, because* I trust you...”). It follows that, if employees have distinct and separable trust foci, the various trust foci are likely to have different consequences for employee attitudes and behaviours.

However, in relation to trust in the organization as a whole, social exchange processes might well come about from trust in another party, such as when an employee’s exchanges with a specific leader (e.g. direct boss, or senior management in general) shapes by proxy her/his

trust in colleagues (as was found by Den Hartog, 2003), or trust in their organization. In the former case, effective leaders bring cohesion, and hence reliability, to teams; in the latter case, official leaders are identified as representatives and custodians of the organization. When a leader's vision is in line with organizational goals and (s)he is seen as representative of management, inspirational leadership increases trust in management in general (Den Hartog, 2003: 143). Thus, trust can 'transfer across' relationship boundaries. These interrelations of trust foci in work relationships may add further explanatory power to the effects of trust on working relations.

Social exchange theory posits a "general presumption that [employees] can form distinguishable social exchange relationships, however operationalized, with their immediate supervisor... co-workers... employing organizations... customers... and suppliers" (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005: 883). We can extrapolate from this that employees may also differentiate among focal parties on trust.

### **Trust and 'cognitive'/ 'conceptual' distance**

A further explanatory framework for the differential effects of trust foci on particular outcomes may come from the notions of 'cognitive' or 'conceptual' distance that have been used for this purpose in studies on multiple commitments (see Redman and Snape, 2005). The notion of perceived rather than objective distance is increasingly being recognized in organization studies as having important implications for employee attitudes and behaviours, especially given the increased use of practices such as telework and virtual teams (Wilson et al, 2008).

Mueller and Lawler define cognitive distance as "the degree of cognitive immediacy and salience that the employee associates with an organizational unit [or focus]" (1999:327). It concerns the 'distance', or extent of separation, between the values of a given organizational constituency and an individual employee's own values. The location of the foci in the total organizational structure (i.e. the physical and/or cognitive distance from the employee) plays an important role in determining the employee's level of commitment to the foci, briefly, the greater the distance the weaker the commitment. In this article, we suggest that, given the reciprocal nature of trust, a similar effect might determine employees' level of trust in different foci: the further an employee perceives a party to be cognitively from themselves, the weaker the bond of trust.

The idea of ‘conceptual distance’ is slightly different. It concerns the perceived ‘distance’ between the focal party and the organization: effectively, the extent to which the focal party is identified with the organization (see Redman and Snape, 2005). Some constituencies are seen by employees as more conceptually distant from the organization, and hence are seen as separate and distinct foci; others are associated in employees’ minds as being representatives of, or conduits for, the organization. The obvious example is management being strongly linked to the organization that is conceptually close, and co-workers less so. However, not all managers are seen to be so closely affiliated to the organization: employees working in a vulnerable subsidiary of a large multi-national may see their local management as conceptually distant to the employer faraway in the overseas Head Office, and maybe even cognitively close to themselves in comparison (Dietz, 2004).

The implication here is that, given variance in an employee’s cognitive/conceptual distance from other foci, they will have distinct perceptions about, and different attitudes and behaviours towards, proximate and distal foci. In essence, the key guiding principle from the notion of cognitive and conceptual distance and of social exchange theory is that there is a more precise correspondence between the focus of the exchange and the type of reciprocating behaviour (Redman and Snape, 2005: 302; see also McNeely and Meglino, 1994; Settoon et al., 1996). Lavelle, Rupp and Brockner (2007) conceptualize multi-focal relationships in terms of a “target similarity model” with employees directing their attitudes and behaviours towards the specific foci. Snape, Chan and Redman (2006: 304) express it this way: the relationship between, in our case trust, and outcome should be stronger “where the focus of each variable is similar”.

There is a suggestion in the limited multi-foci trust empirical studies, discussed above, of such a matching process, with Kalleberg et al’s (2004) study finding trust in organization predicting organizational citizenship behaviour and trust in union predicting union citizenship behaviour. Equally Aryee et al’s (2002) findings that trust in supervisor predicted local outcomes of organizational citizenships behaviours targeted at the individual and task performance (and organizational citizenship behaviours targeted at the organization) and trust in organization predicting global outcomes of job satisfaction, quit intent and organizational commitment is also supportive of a compatibility approach.



Such a pattern of targeted social exchange has been found in several commitment studies (Becker, 1992; Becker et al., 1995, 1996; Cohen, 1993; Hunt and Morgan, 1994; Kalleberg et al., 2004; Redman and Snape, 2005; Snape, Chan and Redman, 2006). These studies indicate that proximal commitments (such as to supervisor or co-workers) are more predictive of certain behaviours – such as withdrawal/quit, OCBs and even job performance – than ‘global’ (i.e. organization-focussed) forms of commitment” (Redman and Snape, 2005: 302). For example, commitment to one’s co-workers better predicts supportive behaviours toward them than does a more diffuse sense of commitment to one’s employer (global organizational commitment).

Further, Hunt and Morgan (1994) found that global organizational commitment mediated between constituency-specific commitments (e.g. to supervisor and top management), and organizational outcomes. Redman and Snape (2005) also found this mediating effect, but not when the other foci and the outcomes were more distant from the organization. In other words, global organizational foci as a mediator of other foci provides a better model ‘fit’, but only when the more specific foci are related to, or identifiable with, the organization.

We argue that there are likely to be parallels of such effects for intra-organizational trust. In essence, trust should have a stronger effect on behaviours for cognitively and conceptually proximal foci, due to social exchange specificities and/or regularity of interactions and shared objectives. As we have indicated, the few multi-foci trust studies undertaken to date support the idea of such a matching process (Aryee et al., 2002; Kalleberg et al., 2004). Our study sets out to explore these effects explicitly.

## **HYPOTHESES**

In the light of the principles of social exchange theory, and the empirical evidence on cognitive/conceptual distance, we test a series of hypotheses: first, employees can and do distinguish between multiple foci of trust; second, trust foci are related to different attitudinal and behavioural outcomes and, third, trust in one’s organization plays an influential mediating role for trust in other foci, but only those conceptually close to the organization.

Thus, our first hypothesis is that employees can and do differentiate among relationships based on trust.

*Hypothesis 1: Employees distinguish between multiple foci of trust within the organization: their organization in general; their direct boss, and their co-workers.*

Next drawing on the notion of compatibility between trust foci and outcomes we expect similar effects in relation to trust as have previously been found for commitment. Thus, our second set of hypotheses posits that trust foci are related to foci-specific outcomes: specific employee behaviours will be predicted best by trust in the foci that might be expected to benefit directly from that behaviour:

Hypotheses 2a-i set out predictions concerning general and more specific trust-foci and outcomes. Specifically, quit intentions – a conscious and deliberate wilfulness to leave the organization (Tett and Meyer, 1993) – and overall job satisfaction can be seen as general, organizational outcomes related to trust, and hence may be attributable to trust in one's organization. However, both variables may also be linked to one's direct boss or colleagues, or all of these. Employees may choose to leave because of an untrustworthy boss or colleagues, but are more likely to stay if they enjoy trusting working relationships.

Overall job satisfaction may also be derived from particular benefits, or frustrations, accrued from dealings with specific parties (e.g. an inspiring and supportive, or manipulative and disagreeable, boss or group of colleagues). Affective organizational commitment refers to the way the organization has personal meaning to the employee, and the employee has a sense of belonging (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Again, we expect this outcome to be most closely associated with trust in the organization. However, one's experience of the organization is typically 'refracted' through real-life interactions with people such as one's direct boss, and/or colleagues. We thus expect to find, based on conceptual distance, a 'transfer' effect from trust in any of these two parties becoming manifest in commitment to the organization. In sum:

*Hypothesis 2a-c: Trust in organization will be positively associated with (a) job satisfaction, (b) affective organizational commitment, and (c) negatively associated with quit intentions.*

*Hypothesis 2d -f: Trust in boss will be positively associated with (d) job satisfaction, (e) organizational commitment, and (f) negatively related to quit intentions.*

*Hypothesis 2g-i: Trust in coworker will be positively associated with (g) job satisfaction, h) organizational commitment and i) negatively associated with quit intentions.*

The above-mentioned attitudinal outcomes can be associated with a number of trust relationships – or, put another way, linked to several trust foci. By contrast, organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs), such as conscientiousness and altruism, seem to be linked to more specific trust relationships. Conscientiousness relates to an employee going beyond normal job requirements, and hence is seen as an OCB focused upon, and directed toward, a reciprocal exchange with the organization (Organ, 1988). An employee might, for example, suggest ways to improve organizational quality or work procedures, or suggest ways to reduce waste.

By contrast, altruism is seen more as a citizenship behaviour that focuses on, and is directed toward, a reciprocal exchange with specific individuals within the organization, rather than the organization itself. It implies voluntary and cooperative acts such as, for example, helping others who have heavy workloads and hearing out their problems and worries. Thus:

*Hypothesis 2j: Trust in organization will be positively related to conscientiousness (OCB-O)*

*Hypothesis 2k-l: Trust in direct boss will be positively related to (k): conscientiousness (OCB-O) and to (l) altruism (OCB-I).*

*Hypothesis 2m: Trust in co-workers will be positively related to altruism (OCB-I).*

Finally, the theory of cognitive and conceptual distance informs our hypotheses for the potential mediation effects of ‘trust in the organization’ on behavioural and attitudinal outcomes. The findings from multiple commitment studies suggests that the effects on behavioural outcomes from commitments to foci deemed by employees to be conceptually close to the organization were fully mediated by ‘global’ organizational commitment, but this effect might not materialise for commitment to more conceptually distant foci. Accordingly, we expect this mediating effect for the hypothesized relations between trust foci and outcomes. We expect a strong mediation effect from trust in the organization only for trust in employees’ direct boss; we do not expect this mediation effect to be found for trust in co-workers.

Cognitive and conceptual distance effects can explain why. First, managements' status in the organizational hierarchy (the 'dominant coalition', cf. Reichers, 1985), means that a trustworthy boss will be reflective of the trustworthiness of the organization, in so far as that person's internal status amounts to a tacit endorsement of their conduct and approach by the organization. Employees might therefore be expected – if conceptual distance pertains – to trust the organization, and to reciprocate with organization-focussed behaviours. Conversely, a rogue or inept direct boss who goes unpunished by the employer will reflect badly upon the organization's ability to operate effectively, as well as their benevolence and integrity, and so employees might be expected to trust the organization less, and to reciprocate in kind, by withholding behaviours that are valuable to their negligent or inept employer. By the same token, co-workers ought to be seen as less identifiable with the organization, or – to put it another way – as a distal entity to the organization, and so the mediating effect of trust in the organization for trust in co-workers should be weaker:

*Hypothesis 3 a-d: Trust in the organization will mediate the relationship between trust to specific foci and related outcomes in the case of those foci and outcomes which are relatively close identified with the organization: the direct boss and (a) job satisfaction, (b) quit intentions, (c) organizational commitment, and (d) conscientiousness (OCB-O).*

## **METHOD**

### *Sample*

The study was conducted in Oman. The Gulf counties are often characterised as risk averse, and societies low in propensity to trust others. For example cultural theorists characterize Oman, and other gulf countries as “collectivist” (Hofstede 2001). This predicts a stronger distinction between “in-group” and “out-group” members in such countries and lower propensity to trust others. Experimental data with Western and Oman students in a trust game supports this view, finding lower trust preferences in the latter (Bohnet et al, 2008).

Data were collected from a military technical educational institution in Oman. The institution supplies the Omani Air Force with trained airmen in a variety of fields such as engineering, management, and ground crews. Questionnaires were administered on site. Two hundred and

thirty five respondents were randomly chosen and invited in small groups to a training room to complete the questionnaire and all surveys were returned. All were male (the organization only recruits males), the mean age was 22, 90% of participants had a secondary school certificate (equivalent to school leaver qualifications), and 10% had higher diplomas. Three quarters were single.

### *Measures*

The original questionnaire was produced in English, translated into Arabic by an Omani national fluent in both languages, and then back-translated by a second Omani national following standard procedures into English (Chapman and Carter, 1979). Some adjustments were made to the final Arabic version to remove ambiguities. All measures, with the exception of OCB-I/O and trust, utilized a seven-point Likert scale (from 1 = “Strong disagree” to 7 = “Strongly agree”).

*Trust* in the organization as a whole, the supervisor, and the co-workers were measured with the scales developed by Kalleberg et al. (2004), and adapted for our purposes. Three items for each foci [X] were used: “Overall, how much do you trust [X]?”; “How much do you trust that [X] will treat you fairly and not play favourites?”; “In general, how much do you trust [X] to tell the truth to you and other employees?” Responses were made on a seven-point scale (1 = None at all to 7 = Complete trust).

*Job satisfaction* was measured with three items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (as reported in Spector, 1997). *Withdrawal cognitions* were measured with four items (e.g. “I often think of quitting this job”). *Organizational commitment* was measured with the six item Meyer and Allen (1997) affective commitment scale with all items positively worded (e.g. “I really feel as if this organization’s problems are my own”).

*Organizational citizenship behaviour* (OCB) was measured with eight items. Five items drawn from Podsakoff et al (1990) represented altruism directed toward individuals (e.g., “Help others who have heavy workloads”) termed OCB-I, and another three items drawn from Smith et al's, compliance dimension (1983) represented behaviours targeted at helping the organization (e.g., “Volunteer for things that are not absolutely required”), labelled OCB-

O. Responses for both OCB-O and OCB-I were ranged on a five-point scale, reflecting the frequency of engagement in the activity (from 1 = “never” to 5 = “always”).

We assessed the overall measurement model, including the three dimensions of trust and the dependent variables (job satisfaction, quit intentions, OCB-O, OCB-I, and organizational commitment). Because of the potential complexity of the model with all dependent variables included together, we instead assessed five separate models, with each of the dependent variables included separately. In each case we assessed a four-factor model (three dimensions of trust and one dependent variable) and a single-factor model. The four-factor models generally provided a good fit, and in all cases a significantly better fit than did the single-factor models. This provides support for our hypothesized measurement model, and suggests that our dependent and independent variables show discriminant validity.

## RESULTS

We began by assessing the factor structure of the trust model, estimating three-, two- and single-factor models, with the two-factor models combining the co-worker and boss and company and boss dimensions. The results are shown in table 1. The hypothesized three-factor model is the best-fitting model, with large significant changes in  $\chi^2$  and improvements in each of the fit indices (e.g., the comparative fit index [CFI] and normed fit index [NFI] increased by more than 0.01 at each step) as we move through the nested sequence. Looking at the preferred three-factor model, the fit indices are good, with goodness of fit index (GFI), CFI, and NFI all above .9, and with a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) below .08. Overall, the three-factor model is the best-fitting model, providing support for hypothesis 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

Means, standard deviations, correlations and alphas for the study variables are reported in table 2. All the multi-item scales had alphas greater than .7 with the exception of OCB-O (.67) and job satisfaction (.58), which were marginally below.

INSERT TABLE 2 NEAR HERE

Hypothesis 2 suggests that employee attitudes and behaviours will be predicted by trust in the likely beneficiary or target of the attitude or behaviour, while Hypothesis 3 predicted that trust in the organization will mediate the relationship between trust foci that are identified as conceptually close to the organization, but not for trust foci that are identified as being conceptually distant from the organization.

After the control variables age, education and marital status were entered in the first regression step, we entered ‘trust in direct boss’ and ‘trust in co-workers’ at step 2. In the third step ‘trust in the organization’ was added to examine its potential mediating effect on the two previously entered trust-foci. Table 3 shows the results of the hierarchical regression analysis, used for hypotheses testing. Of the control variables, only education was significantly negatively associated with OCB-I.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The results for Hypothesis 2 are as follows: Trust in organization was positively associated with job satisfaction, affective commitment to the organization, and negatively associated with quit intent confirming hypotheses 2a-c. Trust in direct boss was significantly positively associated with job satisfaction, affective commitment to the organization and negatively associated with quit intent as anticipated in hypotheses 2e-f, confirming each of them. Trust in co-workers was positively associated with affective commitment to the organization and had a negative association with quit intent, providing further support for Hypotheses 2h and 2i respectively. Only hypotheses 2g, which suggested that trust in co-workers would be positively associated with job satisfaction, found no support.

As hypothesized, trust in organization was positively associated with OCB-O, providing support for hypothesis 2j, but trust in the organization was also found to be positively associated with OCB-I. Trust in boss was negatively associated with OCB-I. Trust in co-workers was positively associated with OCB-I, providing support for hypotheses 2m. These results provide some support for the hypothesized relationship between trust and citizenship behaviour.

Hypothesis 3 predicted trust in the organization would mediate between trust in direct boss and outcomes. To test for mediation, we first regressed trust in organization on trust in boss and coworkers, along with the usual control variables. The findings suggested that both trust in boss and trust in co-workers were positively associated with trust in organization, satisfying the first condition for mediation (Baron and Kenny, 1986). The findings reported above on the significant associations between trust in boss and job satisfaction, quit intentions and commitment to organization meets the second condition for mediation, but the lack of such a relationship for OCB-O does not support mediation in that case. Trust in the organization was then entered as the third regression step in the main regressions. Results show that trust in the organization fully mediated the relationship between trust in direct boss and both job satisfaction (3a) and quit intent (3b). Trust in the organization *partially* mediated the relationship between trust in boss and organizational commitment (3c). Overall, these results provide support for hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c (partial mediation), but not for hypothesis 3d.

We did not hypothesize any mediating effects of trust in organization for trust in co-workers. However, trust in co-workers' significant negative impact on intention to quit was fully mediated by trust in the organization. The analysis also suggested *partial* mediation in the case of organizational commitment and OCB-I.

Overall, the findings show full support for hypothesis 1 and partial support for hypothesis 2, with considerable evidence that employee attitudes and behaviours are associated with trust in the likely beneficiary or target of the attitude or behaviour. Furthermore, full or partial mediation by trust in the organization of the trust in boss-outcomes relationship was found for 3 of the 4 hypothesized variables, providing partial support for Hypothesis 3.

## **DISCUSSION**

Previous studies have examined trust inside organizations, how and why employees trust specific trustees within the organization, and how this affects the trustor's attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. This study contributes to the wider trust literature by exploring the distinctiveness of different trust foci and their outcomes, and the idea of trust "transferring" across relationship boundaries. For a theoretical explanation of our findings we return to social exchange theory and cognitive/conceptual distance.



We explored the impact of employees' differentiated trust relationships at work on various attitudes and behaviours, and 'trust transfer' effects among the foci. First, we found that employees did discern distinct trust relationships with their employing organization, their direct boss and their co-workers. Second, we proposed that social exchange theory, and cognitive and conceptual distance, might be able to explain the different impacts on our outcome variables. We did indeed find evidence of *targeted* reciprocal behaviours towards the direct boss, co-workers and the organization. The overall pattern of our findings appears to conform to principles of social exchange *and* conceptual/cognitive distance.

We did not anticipate a mediating effect for trust in the organization on trust in co-workers-outcomes relationships, because we saw co-workers as a relatively distant focus, whose effects would therefore be distinct from those of the organization. Our contrary findings are intriguing. The relationship between trust in co-workers and quit intent was fully mediated by trust in the organization and for OCB-I and commitment to organization, there was partial mediation. This suggests that co-workers *might be* identified as being close to the organization when employees come to interact with each other for altruistic acts; in other words, altruism is not seen as individually-targeted citizenship behaviour, but rather as organizationally targeted citizenship behaviour. However, this finding may be specific to this particular research setting.

The military air force can be seen as a highly dynamic work situation, in which each individual is expected to contribute to the collective group goal (Sonnewald and Pierce, 2000), and group bonding and a high 'cooperation orientation' are essential (see Ahronson and Cameron, 2007). Trust in military settings has been reported as being an interpersonal *and* a collective phenomenon with trust in an individual being a function of the personal qualities and behaviour of that individual and trust in the system that the individual represents (Shamir and Lapidot, 2003). Group cohesion is "reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (Carron et al, 1998, 213). In combat situations a non-cohesive unit could lead to fatalities. As a result, military establishments utilize powerful induction and socialization processes, as well as strict procedural regimes, from which strong group cohesion might be derived. This strong group cohesion will include norms on altruistic behaviours (reciprocal altruism is one of the standard explanations of group cohesion: see

Frank, 1996). Hence, the military employees' assumption could be that behaving altruistically toward colleagues benefits the organization as well; not to do so may threaten group cohesion and effectiveness, and undermine the shared mission. Neglecting a colleague damages the organization.

There are several practical implications of this study. It is apparent that the various trust relationships can bring advantageous attitudes and behaviours, and that several of these outcomes are by-products of trust transfers among the foci. Hence, managers need not fear multiple trust relationships. Nor should they seek to undermine those that might be perceived as 'conceptually distant' from the organization and hence, perhaps, somehow 'disloyal' (e.g. trust among co-workers). It appears that trust in the boss and also in co-workers have their effects on outcomes either wholly or in part through the mediation of trust in organization. In other words, there appear to be positive spillover effects between specific focal trusts and global trust in the organization – trust is a positive- rather than a zero-sum game. Furthermore, as we have suggested, certain altruistic acts on behalf of co-workers might be re-cast as acts on behalf of the organization – though this does, of course, depend upon the nature of the act. Finally, if it is true that intra-organizational relationships are tending toward fragmentation and more transactional rules of exchange (Tsui and Wu, 2005), then we would expect this to have a damaging impact on the kinds of trust transfer effects that we have found in this study, with potentially serious consequences for employee attitudes and behaviour and perhaps also for organizational effectiveness.

The study has a number of limitations. The first is that use of self-report data is vulnerable to common method bias, however, our assessment of the measurement model suggests that our questionnaire items measure distinct constructs, and that common method variance was not a serious problem in our data. Second, due to constraints on survey length we used short-form scales and in particular a single-dimensional measure of trust (see Dietz and Den Hartog, 2005), rather than a measure that captures different factors such as capability, integrity and benevolence (Mayer et al, 1995) or cognitive and emotional (Young and Daniel, 2003). Future studies should consider using a multi-dimensional scale for trust that may permit hypothesising on both foci and bases of trust (see Dirk and Skarlicki, 2008). A final limitation, discussed above, is our military research setting, which may limit generalization to other non-military organizations.

Further studies within other settings (organizational, sectoral, and national) are needed to test the generalizability of our findings. Such studies would shed light on whether the pattern and outcomes of trust foci are influenced by the nature of the job and the work context. One interesting future research direction would be to examine potential moderators of the relationships found in this study. The influence of group cohesion or workplace/workgroup climates may be particularly interesting in this regard. It would also be interesting to develop direct measures of both cognitive and conceptual distance, and to incorporate these into future studies. Studies might usefully extend the range of focal parties to include suppliers, unions and customers, hypothesizing on anticipated cognitive and conceptual distance effects.

Finally, a recent review of the “organizational work climate” literature suggests that work climates have implications for individual attitudes, such as trust (Kuenzi and Schminke 2009). The review covers a wide range of specific climates yet makes no reference to trust climate. The review reports the study of climate variables as being well advanced in other areas with studies of “service climate”, “justice climate”, “and ethical climate” etc and it would be interesting to examine the impact of trust climate as a potential moderator of the relationships found in this paper. However, we have been unable to locate a validated measure of trust climate, and there seems to be a real need to undertake such a research task. The only empirical paper found using trust climate, by Ning and Jan (2009), aggregates trust scores across different foci and thus does not tap the core conceptual construct of an organizational climate as something that refers to individual perceptions of *organizational* attributes (Kuenzi and Schminke, 2009).

To conclude, this study is one of only a handful to have looked into trust’s effects on employees’ attitudes and behaviours according to the recipient of the trust. We have found strong evidence of social exchange effects in direct trustor-trustee relations. We argue that many of the latter results can be interpreted according to notions of conceptual and cognitive distance.

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**Table 1: Model Fit Statistics for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Trust Scales**

Model	$\chi^2$	df	Change in $\chi^2$	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Independence model	1,559.635	36							
1-factor	580.053	27	979.582***	0.619	0.365	0.628	0.516	0.637	0.296
2-factor (co-worker and boss combined)	460.647	26	119.406***	0.687	0.458	0.705	0.605	0.715	0.267
2-factor (company and boss combined)	231.758	26	348.295***	0.802	0.658	0.851	0.813	0.865	0.184
3-factor	57.023	24	174.735***	0.952	0.952	0.963	0.967	0.978	0.077

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

$N = 235$

*Note.* GFI = goodness of fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit index; NFI = normed fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

Change in  $\chi^2$  is relative to the preceding model in the table, except for the 2-factor (company and boss combined) model, which is relative to the 1-factor model.

**Table 2 - Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Correlations Among the Study Variables**

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	21.92	1.41	-						
2. Education	1.19	0.48	0.30***	-					
3 Marital status	1.78	0.42	- 0.14*	0.08	-				
4. Trust in boss	4.36	1.70	- 0.11	- 0.03	- 0.07	0.91			
5. Trust in coworkers	5.34	1.33	- 0.07	- 0.01	0.04	0.46***	0.90		
6. Trust in organization	4.78	1.60	- 0.17**	- 0.10	0.01	0.62***	0.53***	0.85	
7. Jobs satisfaction	5.29	1.32	- 0.09	- 0.03	0.10	0.31***	0.25***	0.50***	0.58
8. Quit intent	3.26	1.72	- 0.01	0.00	- 0.01	- 0.46***	- 0.41**	- 0.67***	- 0.53***
9. OCB-O	3.69	0.77	- 0.06	- 0.04	0.06	0.16*	0.11	0.28***	0.29***
10. OCB-I	4.00	0.80	- 0.10	- 0.16*	- 0.01	0.03	0.18**	0.19**	0.25***
11. Organizational commitment	5.31	1.39	- -0.14*	- 0.12	0.05	0.53***	0.49***	0.70***	0.52***

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

(table continues)

$N = 235$ . Note. Scale reliabilities are on the diagonal.

**Table 1 (continued)**

Variable	8	9	10	11
8. Quit intent	0.86			
9. OCB-O	- 0.12	0.67		
10. OCB-I	- 0.11	0.35**	0.72	
11. Organizational commitment	-0.66***	0.23***	0.20**	0.89

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

$N = 235$ .

Note. Scale reliabilities are on the diagonal.

**Table 3 (1/3) – Results of Hierarchical Regression for the Effects of Trust foci**

Variable	Job satisfaction			Quit intent		
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
<i>Step 1</i>						
Age	-.07	-.03	.01	-.02	-.08	-.13
Education	-.02	-.02	.01	.010	.02	-.02
Marital status	.09	.11	.10	-.02	-.04	-.02
$\Delta R^2$	.02			.00		
<i>Step 2</i>						
Trust in boss		.25***	.01		-.35***	-.06
Trust in co-workers		.13	-.02		-.25***	-.06
$\Delta R^2$		.11***			.27***	
<i>Step 3</i>						
Trust in organization			.50***			-.63***
$\Delta R^2$			.13***			.21***
Final $R^2$			.25			.48
F	1.24	6.41***	13.00***	.03	16.53***	34.40***

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

$N = 235$ . Note. Standardized regression coefficients are shown.

(table continues)

**Table 3 (continued, 2/3) – Results of Hierarchical Regression for the Effects of Trust foci**

Variable	OCB-O			OCB-I		
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
<i>Step 1</i>						
Age	-.04	-.02	.01	-.06	-.05	-.04
Education	-.04	-.04	-.02	-.14*	-.14*	-.13
Marital status.	.05	.060	.06	-.01	-.02	-.02
$\Delta R^2$	.01			.03		
<i>Step 2</i>						
Trust in boss		.14	.00		-.08	-.17*
Trust in co-workers		.04	-.05		.21**	.16*
$\Delta R^2$		.03			.04*	
<i>Step 3</i>						
Trust in organization			.30**			.19*
$\Delta R^2$			.05**			.02*
Final $R^2$			.08			.08
F	.51	1.56	3.34**	2.23	3.17**	3.47**

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

$N = 235$ . Note. Standardized regression coefficients are shown.

(table continues)

**Table 3 (continued, 3/3) – Results of Hierarchical Regression for the Effects of Trust foci**

Variable	Organizational commitment			Trust in organization	
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
<i>Step 1</i>					
Age	-.11	-.04	.02	-.16*	-.08
Education	-.09	-.09	-.06	-.05	-.06
Marital status	.04	.07	.06	-.01	.02
$\Delta R^2$	.03			.03	
<i>Step 2</i>					
Trust in boss		.40***	.14*		.47***
Trust in co-workers		.30***	.14*		.30***
$\Delta R^2$		.35***			.44***
<i>Step 3</i>					
Trust in organization			.53***		
$\Delta R^2$			.15***		
Final $R^2$			.53		.47
F	2.21	27.90***	42.46.61***	2.6	40.88***

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

$N = 235$ . Note. Standardized regression coefficients are shown.

(table continues)