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Trust from Employees' Perspective in Polish Companies:
A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate dependencies between the levels of trust in Polish companies and employment and organization structures. To measure trust in organizations from employee's perspective, we applied a multifaceted approach to trust that included survey measurement of the key content components of trust beliefs such as integrity, reliability, and dependability. The respondents were part-time undergraduate students who filled in the Trust Measurement Questionnaire. The results revealed that the most trusted organizations were small-sized companies as opposed to large-sized enterprises, which retained the least trust. Overall, our pilot analysis of trust beliefs suggests that the population of young adults in Poland is more willing to trust smaller-scale entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Trust, Trust Management, Organizations, Polish Companies.

Introduction

Trust as a vital category of management in organizations, particularly in the business sphere, has been a recurrent issue of academic discussion since at least 1970s (e.g. Zand 1972), assuming various different conceptualizations (see Dietz and Den Hartog 2006, pp. 557-566), along with different empirical approaches to its measuring and monitoring (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006, pp. 566-571; Shockley-Zalabak and Ellis 2006, p. 52-53). In Poland, especially after its transformation from the socialist system to the liberal one, the question of trust became more and more important both on the sociological level – which was manifested for example in Sztompka's work (see Sztompka 2003; Żółkowska 2014) – and on the specifically managerial level (e.g. Bugdol 2010; Trembaczewski 2016; Paliszkiewicz 2011; 2014). However, in the researches having been hitherto undertaken the main stress has been placed on the top and middle managers' perspective on trust in their doing business (e.g. Trembaczewski 2016; Paliszkiewicz 2011), while the employees' perception of organizations with respect to trust has gained relatively little attention. Accordingly, our study focuses primarily on the employees' experience of trust inside organizations in Poland.

Trust Manifested in Organizations

Trust, as referred to organizations, is a manifold phenomenon which may be approached on at least several different levels as well as placed in different contexts. Despite the variety of theoretical views on it (Shockeley-Zalabak and Ellis 2006), its significance both in successful dealing with crises (Mishra

1996; Kramer and Cook 2004) and in an organization's "business as usual" is nowadays widely acknowledged: "*it saves the organization money by reducing the costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, pressure campaigns, boycotts, or lost revenue that results from bad relationships*" (Paine 2003, 80), but it also – at the bottom level – favours employees' efficiency at work. And conversely, the detrimental long-run effects of lack of trust are clearly identified and counteracted (Kutsyuruba and Walker 2016).

As to the conceptualization of trust, it is usually accepted that (1) trust may be treated as a *multi-level relation* established between: co-workers, teams, organizations, as well as between an organization and its clients or the public. It is also held that (2) trust is *culturally rooted* and thus, on the large part, stems from values, norms and beliefs that are intrinsic in particular cultural background. Besides, it is believed that (3) it is *communication-based*, which means that it can be taken as a result of successful and fair communication: i.e. "providing accurate information, giving explanations for decisions and demonstrating sincere and appropriate openness" (Paine 2003, 5). Next, it is thought (4) to be *dynamic*, being changeable, possible to be built, rebuilt, sustained, but also undermined or dissolved. And finally, it is usually taken (5) to be *multi-dimensional* while also having three aspects: cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural (Shockeley-Zalabak and Ellis 2006, 45-46; Dietz and Den Hartog 2006, 558-560; Paine 2003, 5). The multi-dimensionality ramifies into a number of spheres that overall constitute the concept trust: competence, integrity, dependability/reliability, openness and honesty, vulnerability, concern for employees, identification, control mutuality, satisfaction and commitment (after Paine 2003, 5-6).

Measurments of Trust

The question of how one should measure trust has been the subject of several studies (see Dietz and Den Hartog 2006; Mishra 1996; Paine 2003). There is no simple all-encompassing research instrument or methodology to indicate levels of trust in organizations. Usually, a combination of variety of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, such as surveys, focus groups, before-and-after polls, ethnographic studies, experimental and quasi-experimental designs, or multivariate analysis are used (Paine 2003). In fact, Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) have identified several criteria for choosing an adequate measure of trust. In particular, their analysis of the most-quoted definitions of trust has indicated three crucial elements to be measured: *trust as a belief*, *trust as a decision*, and *trust as an action*. Because trust is based on working relationships in organizations, all these elements may be involved in the process of party A (employee/manager-as the trustor) interacting with a trusting party "B" (manager/organization as the trustor). In fact, some measures of trust in the process are focused on the analysis of the content of the trust belief while other methodologies deal with either the output of this process (decision-making) or input (a specific source of the trust beliefs) (for more details see Dietz and Den Hartog 2006).

Objective of The Study

Our conceptualization of trust in this work was understood as a compilation of subjective judgments presented by employees on different characteristics of the organization. A similar way of measuring trust was presented in Mayer et al. (1995), who pointed out ability, benevolence and integrity as the key factors of trust. In other work, Mishra (1996) has presented arguments that characteristics of an organization (the trustee) should include also dependability/reliability as an important factor describing business's predictability. According to Paine (2003), the key elements needed to form trust inside an organization should embrace integrity, competence, and dependability (reliability).

Following the above mentioned multi-faceted approach to trust, it can be said that a key aspect of working relationships in an organization is employees' perceptions of these components in organizations (Mishra 1996). Our study adapted definitions by Dietz and Den Hartog (2006), claiming the component of integrity to be an "adherence to a set of principles acceptable to the other party, encompassing honesty and fair treatment" (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006). The second component, i.e. competence, describes skills and knowledge indicating organization's capabilities to carry out its

obligations. And the last component, i.e. dependability/reliability, is related to the consistency and regularity displayed in behaviour.

In spite of a large body of research on knowledge-based trust there are other research streams indicating how the formation of trust in the organisation proceeds (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998). For instance, McKnight and colleagues (1988) emphasize a role of situational variables (institution-based approach) that determine one's feelings of the security in the organization that is linked with structural safeguards including (i) guarantees, (ii) regulations and (iii) legal recourse. In other words, institution-based trust is associated with expectations that there is an impersonal structure in the organization that enables individuals to expect that their efforts and commitment will pay off in the future (Shapiro, 1987). According to McKnight, Cummings and Chervany (1998) guarantees may reduce the perceived risk of uncertainty in terms of trust building in the organization and contribute to an increase of one's positive interpersonal trust. Moreover, contracts or promises (legal recourse) make the employee's (the trustor) comfortable in believing that the employer (the trusted party) make every effort to fulfill promises and will be acting according to social norms in order to secure such promises (Sitkin, 1995). In addition, a high-trust organization should stimulate interpersonal trust via corporate practices and procedures (regulations) that assure people's beliefs about their expectations of future institution's behaviour (Sitkin, 1995). Thus, safeguards such as regulations, guarantees and contracts build sort of system trust that is based on the efficiency of social norms in diminishing uncertainty and providing secure feelings about the individuals' future (Luhmann, 1991).

Shapiro (1987) claims that above-mentioned institutional safeguards form a sort of structural assurance belief that most likely have the effects on the formation of initial trust towards an organization. Therefore, the process of believing that the situation of an individual is connected with the institutional safeguards makes possible for an individual to believe that his or her situation is trustworthy (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998). Here, we therefore investigated the effects of institution-based trust on trusting beliefs (see Figure 1). Since structural assurance beliefs are not directly measurable constructs, we operationalized these variables by linking structural assurances with the size of an organization and the form of employment respectively. As indicated above, the variable such as the form of employment is indicative of legal recourse and therefore might be influential on trusting beliefs. Blunsdon and Reed (2003) indicated that organizational factors linked with size, location and type of industry have an impact on generation and its maintenance of interpersonal trust. For example, Dasgupta (1988) claims that trust which an individual has in other's party to fulfil a contract is strictly dependent on the power of an agency. Therefore, we linked the contextual condition such as the company size with one's beliefs about a combination of regulations and guarantees reflecting trust on a group- or organizational-level (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998).

Taking the above perspective on trust in organization, the main research question in this study was identified as follows: *Does institution-based trust linked with contextual conditions of the organization (company size and the form of employment) affect employees' trusting beliefs*? With regard to this research problem the following hypotheses relating institution-based trust and knowledge-based trust as specified by Paine (2003) were formulated:

1) *Institution-based trust, i.e. the size of an organisation and the form of employment, will affect the component of integrity.*
2) *Institution-based trust, i.e. the size of an organization and the form of employment, will affect the component of dependability.*
3) *Institution-based trust, i.e. the size of an organization and the form of employment, the size of an organization and the form of employment, will affect the component of competence.*
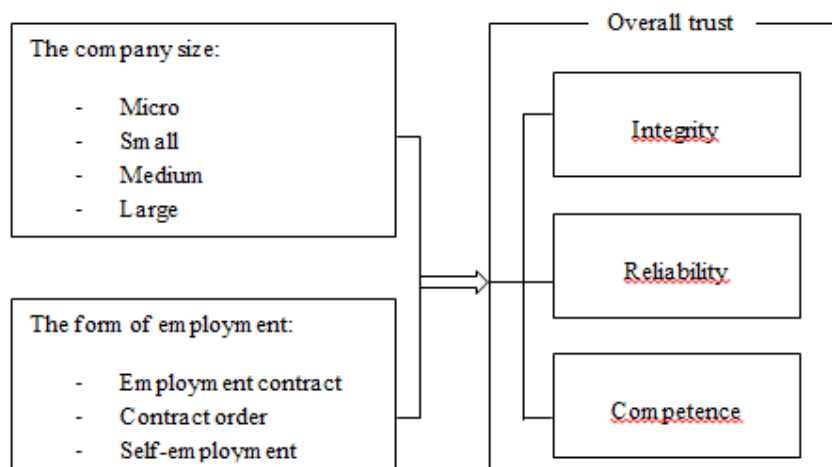
Figure 1: Theoretical model of Formation of Trust in Organization. The contextual conditions of the organizations such as the company size and the form of employment were the independent variables (on the right side). The trusting beliefs of integrity, reliability and competence were dependent variables.

Method

Respondents

One hundred twenty-eight part-time students of psychology at University of Lower Silesia took part in the study. A total of 110 usable questionnaires was further analysed (72 women and 38 men). Selected participants ranged in age from 19 to 50, yet the vast majority in the sample were young people under 30 (84%). All participants completed informed consent forms before the study. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław, Poland. The survey was conducted in 2020.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Woman	72	65.5
	Man	38	34.5
Education	Secondary	78	70.9
	Higher incomplete	26	23.6
	Higher	6	5.5
Place of residence	Village	18	1.4
	A city of up to 50,000 residents	16	14.5
	A city from 50,000 to 100,000 residents	24	21.8
	A city of over 100,000 residents	52	47.3

Sociodemographic and structures of employment and organization

The study included employees of micro-sized enterprises, small-sized enterprises, medium-sized enterprises and large-sized enterprise in the population of part-time undergraduates. The criteria for the inclusion in the study considered individuals who worked in various forms of employment: (i) employment contract, (ii) contract order; (iii) a contract of work, (iv) self-employment, (v) managerial, contract. In addition, to address our research questions, we also gathered information on employee population with regard to working time system, a period of employment in the company, position held.

Table 2: The respondents' characteristics as to their employment structure

		Frequency	Percent
The company size	Micro (up to 10 employees)	40	36.4
	Small (up to 50 employees)	18	16.4
	Medium (up to 250 employees)	14	12.7
	Large	38	34.5
The form of employment	Employment contract	72	65.5
	Contract order	34	30.9
	Self-employment	4	3.6
The position held	Managerial	7	6.4
	Specialist	39	35.5
	Worker	36	32.7
	Other	28	25.5
The level of monthly net income*	Up to 1000 PLN	10	9.1
	(1000 – 2000 > PLN	24	21.8
	(2000 – 3000 > PLN	42	38.2
	(3000 – 4000 > PLN	20	18.2
	Over 4000 PLN	14	12.7

*1 PLN equals to 0.23 EURO

The Questionnaire

The measurement of trust was based on the Trust Measurement Questionnaire (TMQ) (Paine 2003, 9-10). To measure trust, we used 11 items from TMQ survey (see Table 3 for particular items). The items come from three subscales of the original TMQ (Paine 2003, 9-10); in the present study the dimensions of *Integrity*, *Competence* and *Dependability* (*Reliability*) have been applied. The subscale of Integrity measured beliefs that an organization is fair and just. Dependability (Reliability) subscale indicated beliefs that an organization acts in a consistent and dependable manner, while the last subscale of Competence was relevant to measures of beliefs that an organization manifests its competence as being effective, able to compete on the market.

The Polish version of the TMQ was adapted following a back-translation procedure. First, we involved a team of two translators with a psychological and ethical background (one of them was living in English-speaking countries in the past), who were fluent in English and native in Polish, in translating the original version into a single Polish version of the tool. Then, the team of two researchers with deep knowledge in organizational psychology and ethical philosophy and a specialist in the English language being familiar with British and American culture, evaluated all aspects of the translation and reached the agreed version of the items. After the positive evaluation, two bilingual translators made two back-

translations. Next, the team involved in preparing the Polish version of the instrument and evaluated its compatibility with the original. As a result, the content of the back-translations did not depart from the original version.

Table 3: Items to measure Trust including Dimensions of Integrity, Competence, and Dependability/Reliability (Paine 2003)

	Dimension	Item
1.	Integrity	This organization treats people like me fairly and justly.
2.	Integrity	Whenever this organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.
3.	Integrity	Sound principles seem to guide this organization's behavior.
4.	Integrity	This organization does not mislead people like me.
5.	Dependability	This organization can be relied on to keep its promises.
6.	Dependability	I believe that this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.
7.	Dependability	I am very willing to let this organization make decisions for people like me.
8.	Dependability (Reversed)	I think it is important to watch this organization closely so that it does not take advantage of people like me.
9.	Competence	I feel very confident about this organization's skills.
10.	Competence	This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
11.	Competence	This organization is known to be successful at the things it tries to do.

The instructions and procedure were slightly modified as compared to previous studies investigating trust in organizations (see Paine 2003). Participants in the present study indicated their responses on a five-point Likert scale from (0) „Strongly disagree" to (5) „Strongly agree". The five categories were worded as follows "strongly disagree, ... disagree, ... undecided, ... agree," and "strongly agree." The respondents were asked to respond to the items based on the statement "*what you can tell about the company/organization/institution which you work in or cooperate with*".

The reliability of the Polish version of TMQ subscales for Integrity and Dependability was at the satisfactory levels, yielding Cronbach's Alfas of 0.793 and 0.700. In the case of Competence component, the Cronbach's alpha was of 0.274. The items of Competence with the lowest reliability were therefore removed from the data.

Statistical Analysis

The independent variables were groups of respondents categorized on the ordinal scale with the grouping variables such as (i) size of the company, (ii) the form of employment, and (iii) the position held. Separate analyses were conducted for dependent variables which constituted the overall measure of trust as well as each content component of trust measured on TMQ sub-scales. Since the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data did not comply with normality assumption, hypotheses testing was examined using a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis method. All calculations were done with SPSS software and the significance level of 0.05 was established.

Results

First, we calculated mean ranks based on individual observations for overall trust as well as for two trust components of Integrity and Dependability given the enterprise size, the form of employment, and the position held by the respondents.

Table 4: Effects of the company's size on the employees' perceived trust – Kruskal-Wallis analysis

	Overall trust Mean Rank	Integrity Mean Rank	Dependability Mean Rank
Micro	69.25	70.25	66.73
Small	71.61	68.78	74.33
Medium	34.50	38.36	31.07
Large	41.13	40.00	43.76
	p < 0.0001	p < 0.0001	p < 0.0001

In the next step, we started investigating dependencies between company size and overall employee's trust with the Kruskal-Wallis statistics. The results are presented in Table 4. In particular, for company size, the non-parametric K-W test showed a significant difference in overall trust across all groups ($p < 0.05$) (Figure 1).
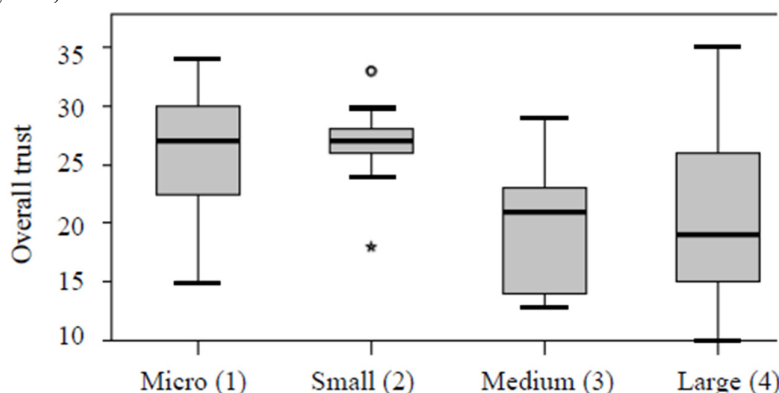
Figure 1: Boxplots with the effects of company size on overall trust perceived in organizations, Kruskal Wallis $p<0.0001$. Not significant difference between Groups 3–4 and 1–2. Significant difference between Groups 3–1, $p=0.003$. Significant difference between Groups 3–2, $p=0.006$. Significant difference between Groups 4–1, $p=0.001$. Significant difference between Groups 4–2, $p=0.005$.

Then, we analysed trust belief components of Integrity and Dependability, separately. For Integrity sub-scale, there was a significant difference between the groups overall (Kruskal Wallis, $p <.0001$). In the boxplots (Figure 2, 3) it can be seen that the most trusted organizations was the micro-sized enterprises (Group 1), and the least trusted organizations were those of a large size (Group 4).
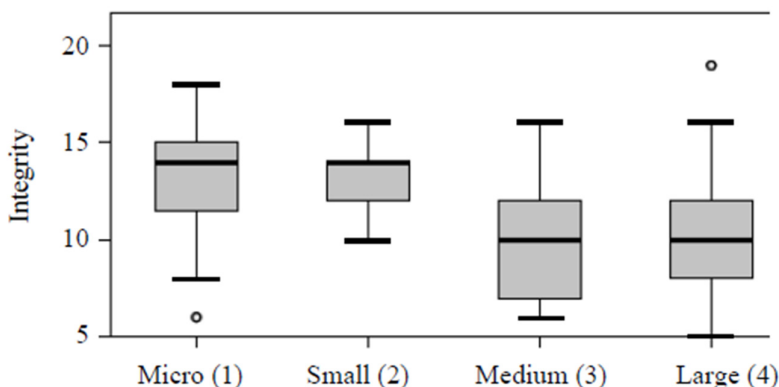

Figure 2: Boxplots with effects of company size on perceived integrity in organization (Kruskal Wallis, $p=0.000$). Not significant difference between Groups 3–4 and 1–2. Significant difference between Groups 2–3, $p=0.042$. Significant difference between Groups 1–3, $p=0.007$. Significant difference between Groups 2–4, $p=0.009$. Significant difference between Groups 1–4, $p=0.000$.

For Dependability sub-scale, there were also significant differences among all groups (Kruskal Wallis, $p < 0.0001$). Again, the boxplots (see Figure 3) suggested a similar course of the measured trust component, because the highest reliability was declared in micro-sized organizations as opposed to the least trusted organizations, i.e. the large size ones (see difference between Groups 1-3 on figure).
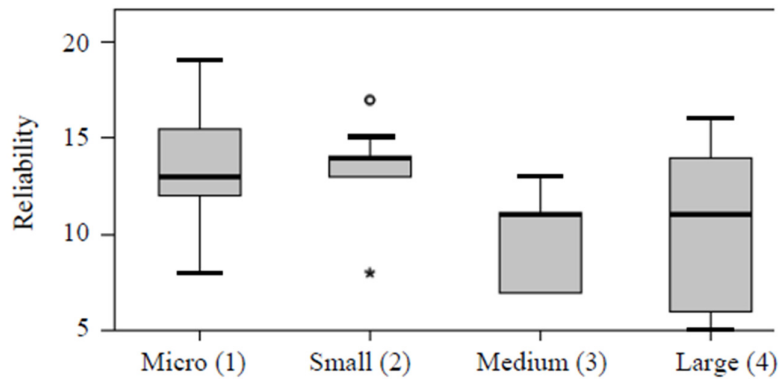

Figure 3: Boxplots with effects of company size on perceived reliability in organization, Kruskal Wallis $p=0.000$. Not significant difference between Groups 3–4 and 1–2. Significant difference between Groups 1–3 and, $p=0.002$. Significant between Groups 2–3, $p=0.001$. Significant difference between Groups 1–4, $p=0.008$. Significant difference between Groups 2–4, $p=0.005$.

Table 5: Effects of employment form on the perceived trust - Kruskal-Wallis analysis

	Overall trust Mean Rank	Integrity Mean Rank	Reliability Mean Rank
Employment contract	50.75	50.43	51.72
Contract order	61.44	62.00	60.38
Self-employment	90.50	91.50	82.00
	p = 0.022	**p = 0.015**	**p = 0.099**

Then, we analysed how the form of employment in an organization might affect trust in the organization. The results are presented in Table 5. There were significant differences for overall trust (K-W $p < 0.05$) and for the single component of integrity ($p<.05$), respectively. For both measures of trust presented in boxplots (Figure 4 and 6), post-hoc analyses indicated that employees trusted companies less when the employment was in the form of a contract as opposed to self-employment (Kruskal Wallis $p=.045$). The analyses of other factors on trust in organizations showed no effect (K-W, $p > 0.05$).
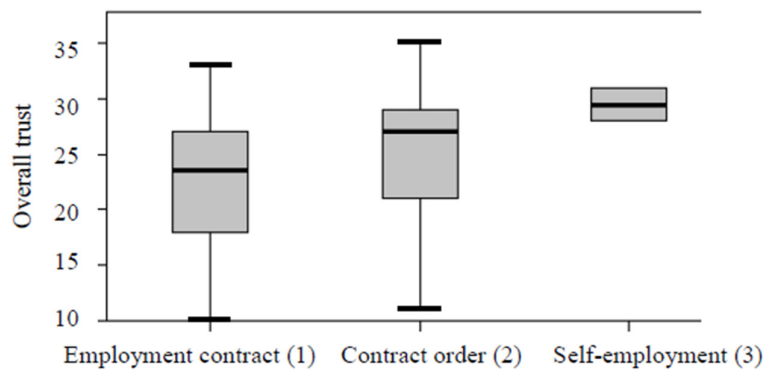
Figure 4: Boxplots with effects of employment forms on perceived overall trust in organization (Kruskal Wallis p=0.022). Not significant difference between Groups 1–2 and 2–3. Significant difference between Groups 1–3, *p*=0.045.
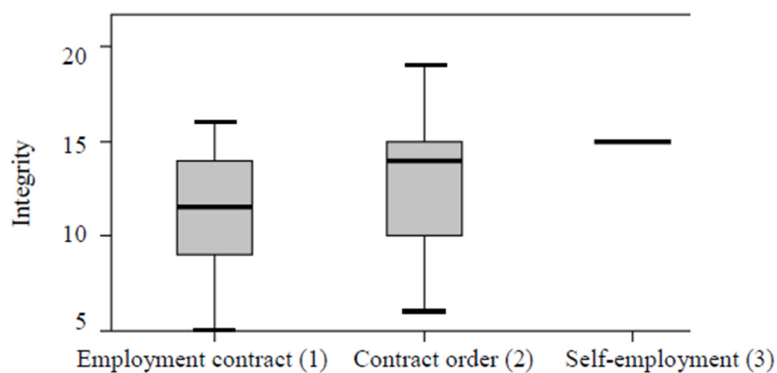

Figure 5: Boxplots with effects of employment forms on perceived integrity in organizations, Kruskal Wallis statistics, *p*=0.006. Not significant between all groups, except of significant between Groups 1–3, *p*=0.035.

Discussion

The present research confirmed the effects of institution-based trust on trusting beliefs. We indicated that institution-based trust affected the components of integrity and dependability. In terms of the organization size, the post-hoc analyses showed that the highest level of trust was displayed by the employees of small-size companies, while the lowest one was a characteristic feature of the large ones: the bigger the company the less trust in it. For the contextual condition of the form of employment, the study showed that the highest level was declared by the self-employed as opposed to contract orders and employment contracts.

The focus of our study was on intra-organizational trust and aimed at identifying "bottom-up" direction of it: at stating and measuring trust exhibited by employees towards the organization, whose structure and actions are, in turn, shaped by the leaders. We accepted trust's culture-rootedness, though it we have not set ourselves the task of relating the results of our research to any specific factors/values of Polish culture. We also admitted both the belief that trust is communication based and the conviction that is dynamic. Similarly, we share the stance that the dynamics of trust largely depends on the actual communication in organization. As to the issue of three-aspect/dimension understanding of trust, our research attempted to access this phenomenon – via survey that explored the employee's trust beliefs of cognitive and emotional aspects as declared in the survey's responses. The dimensions of trust that we employed in order to measure its level and that are relevant to relate it with the organization's size

and the form of employment (the categories that we have distinguished to inspect) are: "competence", "integrity" and "dependability/reliability".

Our study included the contextual factors of the company size and forms of employment to manipulate system trust that is based on beliefs about the effectiveness of social structures in reducing uncertainty and securing feelings about employee's future (Luhman, 1991). The results showed that the efforts of Polish companies in building system trust do not bring expected results in increasing trust in the organization. On the contrary, it seems that for the companies of larger size there is a lack of trust among employees who more likely start to rely on their own dispositional trust within the organization. These effects of institution-based trust on trusting beliefs could be explained at some point by a participant sample that mainly consisted of young adults who in fact have little or no work experience (young adults under 30 age represented 84% of our sample). It seems plausible that young adults usually have no sufficient access to information about company policies and regulations. Therefore, they use their own's distrusting beliefs about the functioning of company and their role in the organisation (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998), indicating that social structures implemented into the organization to enable an employee to be successful are not possibly in a place. Since young people seem to be feeling relatively unsecure with companies of larger size, entrepreneurs who want to reach a higher stage of trust in their organization should implement set of policies to stimulate interpersonal trust for young employees, for instance, via relationship-oriented culture, consistent induction training, creating opportunities for meeting informally (Six and Sorge, 2008).

Limitations of the study

It should be noted that the Polish version of TMQ questionnaire was applied to population of part-time undergraduates. The authors claim that this was a reason of getting low reliability values of items measuring beliefs of competence in organization as opposed to the American version of the survey. For that reasons, the competence data was removed from further analysis as being uninterpretable. Further research needs to be taken to validate the Polish version of TMQ in broader samples of adult employees.

Acknowledgements

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