

## MANAGER COMPETENCE MODEL IN THE CONTEXT OF EMPLOYEE TRUST

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**Purpose:** The aim of the research conducted was to try to identify the competences of managers that positively influence employee trust. The relationship identified between managers' competences and employees' trust seems extremely interesting. It became the inspiration for the considerations presented in this article.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The survey was conducted using the CAWI method, based on the author's survey questionnaire with a total of 14 questions. A Likert scale was used in the research process.

**Findings:** The collected factual material exposes the special role in the process of building intra-organisational trust of such groups of competences as communication or human capital management. In addition, the studied influence of personality traits and trust determinants made it apparent that, for employees, one of the most important characteristics of a manager is emotional maturity.

**Research limitations/implications:** The analysis of the survey results was carried out on the basis of 216 correctly completed questionnaires. Further research should be carried out on a larger number of respondents, taking into account industries and professional groups.

**Originality/value:** This article is based on a thorough analysis of the literature on the topic and the authors' own research. It presents a model of managers' competences positively influencing employees' trust, developed on the basis of factual material. It is addressed to researchers dealing with the subject and managers seeking solutions in building intra-organisational trust.

**Keywords:** human capital management, trust, manager competences, trust management.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

### 1. Introduction

The content of the report published by Edelman (2023) shows that the overall trust level of the Trust Index was 56% in 2023, which indicates a global lack of general trust. Invariably, it is business that records the highest results, and as many as 78% of respondents believe that

they can trust their employer the most (Edelman, 2023). At the same time, the study highlighted a global problem in the area of employment, as 89% of respondents were concerned about losing their jobs. This fear results from automation and/or other innovations that take away work, relocation of company positions/branches to countries where employment costs are lower, the existence of international conflicts, recession, constant replacement of jobs by freelancers (Edelman, 2023). Current technological development is so intensified that it may cause confusion among employees. This is indicated, for example, by the fact that humanoid robots occupy managerial positions. Mika, as we are talking about it, is the first humanoid robot in Poland equipped with artificial intelligence (AI), who holds the position of general director at Dictador.

Every organization including the smallest one is created by people who are behind its success. M. Szafranski (2020) emphasizes that people are the most valuable resource of every organization, due to their knowledge (including procedural, declarative, tacit and explicit knowledge), abilities, talents, norms, as well as attitudes and behaviours towards organization (Mikuła, 2019). Human capital is part of the intellectual capital of an organization (Miżejewska, 2016) and includes everything that an employee “takes with them” when coming to and leaving work (Roos, Roos, 1997). In light of the above, the “competencies” category becomes crucial, especially in relation to the managerial staff and its role in the process of creating the level of employee trust.

Studies of the literature on the subject indicate that employee trust has a real impact on the quality of work, which translates into financial results, the company's image and cooperation between organizations. The relationship identified between managerial competence and employee trust seems extremely interesting. It became the inspiration for the considerations presented in this article. While reviewing the literature, the authors pointed out the lack of explicit studies containing a model of managers' competences positively influencing employees' trust, which was treated as a theoretical and cognitive gap.

## **2. Competencies – multidimensionality of the concept**

The process of defining competencies as a research category seems to be a very significant challenge. The main reason for the identified difficulty is the interdisciplinary nature of the concept, referring to many different scientific disciplines including sociology, pedagogy, psychology and management. The pioneer in the behavioural approach to competencies is D. McClelland (1973, p. 6), who, based on his research, concluded that competencies should be treated as a determinant of professional success and the quality of functioning in the workplace. This approach to competencies can be treated as a starting point for a more detailed definition of the concept. One of them is the definition indicating that competencies are “basic features of

a given person that demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship with work efficiency and above-average results achieved during the implementation of a task or in a given situation” (Spencer, Spencer, 1993, p. 12). Competencies are also defined as a component of personality traits, knowledge, values, motivation, skills, social behaviour or talents (Rostkowski, 2002, p. 66; Spencer, Spencer, 1993, p. 11), and are verified in the work process. Moreover, competencies can be considered on three levels (Szafranski, 2020, pp. 23-30):

- qualitative – competencies are treated as a human characteristic, which include not only skills, abilities and knowledge, but also experience, internal motivation, values and ethical principles;
- resource-based – competencies are treated as a valuable resource of the organization and therefore relate to the employee as an individual, a team of employees and the organization as a whole. Interestingly, in this approach to competencies, they are interchangeable with objects, products, relationships, money, activities, etc.;
- marketing – competencies are treated as a product related to the process of exchanging competencies and building a personal brand. In order to acquire specific competencies, organizations undertake various activities (appropriate remuneration of competence “suppliers”, distribution of benefits, valuation of benefits), which are reflected in marketing activities.

M. Szafranski (2020, p. 31) also emphasizes that the multidimensional approach to competencies makes employees aware of their complexity, allows employees to discover both their potential and limitations, determines the direction and role they play in the organization, and, above all, integrates all levels of the organizational hierarchy and its departments.

The competencies of the management staff are closely related to the functions of the management process (planning and decision-making, organizing, leading, controlling) (Griffin, 2017, p. 14) and the roles played by the manager (interpersonal – visionary, leader, representative, liaison; information role and decision-making role – entrepreneur, rescuer, negotiator, reflector) (Kieltyka, 2016, p. 7). The author emphasizes the fact that for effective human capital management it is important to combine all the above-mentioned roles. Managerial competencies are the basis for good functioning of the organization and the implementing goals, mission and vision (Wziątek-Staśko, 2022, p. 15; Unnikrishnan, 2020, p. 31), and also have a real impact on material and non-material motivation, employee evaluation and employee development (Stańczyk, 2018, p. 48). The literature on the subject also indicates that managerial competencies include the manager's features (personality traits, knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience) that “determine efficient and ethical management” (Tyrańska, 2017, p. 62; Ahmadovna, 2023, p. 17) and preparation that will allow for the fulfilment of the management functions already mentioned. A. Rakowska and A. Sitko-Lutek (Stańczyk, 2018, p. 53) developed a set of ten skills of management staff and assigned them the following appropriate behaviours: technical skills (knowledge), increasing personal

effectiveness, stress management, conceptual skills, communication skills, motivating, introducing changes, resolving conflicts and gaining power and influence.

The competencies of both first line and middle- or high-level managers must be identical with the management process, because this guarantees the efficient implementation of goals and tasks. Competencies are a determinant not only of good management of the entire organization as such, but above all of human capital (Tyrańska, 2017, p. 65), which guarantees the success of the enterprise.

### 3. Trust – an attempt to operationalize the concept

Trust is a pillar that supports every organization. Trust is defined as a component of the expectations and acceptance of the behaviour of the trustee (Bugdol, 2015, p. 80). Like competencies, trust is also one of the most valuable resources of any organization. Research on trust is conducted in fields such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, management and economics, which makes it an interdisciplinary concept. In different fields, it is defined differently. Trust is treated, among others, as a belief, expectation, faith, assumption or calculation (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Interdisciplinarity of the concept of trust*

Field	Definition
Philosophy	<b>Belief</b> that we believe a person from whom we expect good things. The amount of trust depends on the amount of risk taken.
Psychology	<b>Expectation</b> that a trusted person will keep their promise and be guided by positive motives in action.
Sociology	<b>Faith</b> in the goodness of the trustee despite the possibility of betraying and deceiving the trustor. <b>Assumption</b> that members of a given community are honest and based on shared norms. <b>Bet</b> that is made on the future, uncertain actions of trustees.
Management	<b>Belief</b> that the actions people take lead to achieving the intended goals and obtaining benefits. <b>Readiness</b> based on an assessment of the other party's credibility. <b>Resource</b> that contributes to achieving appropriate economic results.
Economy	<b>Calculation</b> of relationships between entities.

Source: own elaboration based on the literature on the subject: Zieliński, 2019, p. 43; Giddens, 2018, p. 30; Józefowicz, 2015, p. 124; Kapuścik, 2015, p. 141; Lewicka, Krot, Książek, 2016, p. 42.

A. Rudzewicz (2016, p. 30) defines trust in an organization as a concept that is based on values and norms resulting from competence, honesty and kindness. Trust is visible in every activity of the organization regardless of the level. It should also be emphasized that this type of trust is based on relationships and obligations between the organization-employee and employee-organization. Trust is a relationship related to both the actions of colleagues and the organization itself. J. Paliszkiwicz (2013, p. 22) and Graebner, Lumineau, Kamal (2018, p. 7) point to several attributes of trust:

- acceptance of mutual behaviour and dependencies;
- synergy of risk of loss and opportunity for gain;
- voluntariness as a subjective choice of the trustee;
- lack of permanence;
- expectations and belief in the trustor's pure intentions.

Trust is a very delicate and fragile construct, so management staff at every level should pay special attention to building and maintaining it at an appropriate level, which requires action to determine trust. The behaviours of managers that affect trust include primarily: respect, honesty, reliability, loyalty, keeping commitments, specifying expectations (Covey, Merrill, 2021, p. 120), as well as credibility, communication, taking responsibility for actions, intentions, kindness and specific competencies and skills (Paliszkiewicz, 2013, p. 56; Zak, 2017, p. 86). In addition to actions undertaken by managers, factors that support building trust are also important, such as the organizational climate, remuneration system, delegating and authorizing employees, shaping interpersonal relationships and creating spaces necessary for establishing relationships and cooperation among employees (Lewicka, 2019, p. 99; Doeze Jager, Born, van der Molen, 2022, p. 440).

#### **4. Competencies are a determinant of trust in an organization**

In building trust by the management staff, the following aspects are very important: abilities (competencies and skills specific to the position held), kindness (adjustment by the management staff to changing conditions with the well-being of all employees in mind) and honesty (keeping promises made and taking responsibility for actions) (Paliszkiewicz, 2013, p. 83; Abun et al., 2023, p. 24).

Analysing the literature on the subject, the authors noticed a relationship between manager's competencies and trust. The leading areas that have a significant impact on trust include streamlining activities, revitalizing relationships, reducing risk, shaping a positive image, unleashing creativity, and economic results (Młokosiewicz, 2015, p. 63; Abun et al., 2023, p. 27). In light of the above, the aim of the research was to try to determine the competencies of managers that have a positive impact on employee trust. The author's model, taking into account the relationship described above, is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A manager competence model in the context of employee trust.

Source: own elaboration.

## 5. Research methodology

The research was conducted by method of CAWI in March/April 2023 and 231 people were involved. The survey included three questions determining further participation in the research, so the final number of people whose answers were taken into account in the analysis were 216 – 153 women (70.83 %) and 63 men (29.17 %). 131 (60.65%) management staff and 85 (39.35 %) subordinates took part in the research. Most people – 112 (51.85 %) declared that they had a Master's degree. Almost half of the respondents – 95 people (44.19 %) work for international companies.

The research was conducted using the diagnostic survey method, using an original questionnaire, which was divided into two parts containing a total of fourteen questions. In the research process, a Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used, assuming that “1” means that a given parameter has no effect at all, and “5” means that a given parameter has a very large effect. Grades “2-4” were intermediate grades. Statistical analysis of the results was done using MS Excel 365.

## 6. Research results

Our own research showed that for 151 people (69.90 %) the most important group of competencies that determine trust in the manager are communication competencies. In turn, for 92 people (42.60 %), competencies in the field of human capital management are the most important. The least important competencies include organizational strategy – 16 people (21.30%), change management – 11.57 %, and planning and organization – 38 people (17.59 %). Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Groups of competencies determining the level of trust in the manager as assessed by employees*

Competence group	In total (n = 216)		Managers (n = 131)		Subordinates (n = 85)	
Self-awareness and development	50	23.15 %	32	24.43 %	18	21.17 %
Communication	151	69.90 %	92	70.23 %	59	69.41 %
Planning and organization	38	17.59 %	21	16.03 %	17	20.00 %
Organizational strategy	16	7.41 %	8	6.10 %	8	9.41 %
Ethics	46	21.30 %	21	16.03 %	25	29.41 %
Change management	25	11.57 %	20	15.27 %	5	5.88 %
Human capital management	92	42.60 %	60	45.80 %	32	37.65 %

Source: own elaboration.

Then, respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of specific competencies that affect their trust in the manager. The research results indicated that the greatest impact had the “Ability to cooperate with employees and advisors” competence – the arithmetic average answer was 4.66, as well as the “Ability to share knowledge and experience” competence – 4.63 %. The table below presents the competencies with the highest level of significance (Table 3).

**Table 1.**

*Average assessment of the level of importance of managers competencies in the opinion of surveyed respondents*

Competence	Competence group	Average
Ability to cooperate with employees and advisors.	Human capital management (Cooperation)	4.66
Ability to share knowledge and experience.	Ethics	4.63
Ability to create an appropriate plane, surface and atmosphere for a conversation (e.g. place, tone, focused attention, manner of conversation).	Communication	4.58
Ability to solve problems and conflicts and the ability to empathize with the situation of each side of the conflict and remain objective.	Human capital management (Solving problems and conflicts)	4.56
Ability to delegate responsibilities and execute assigned tasks.	Human capital management (Control and influence)	4.46
Ability to build a path to achieve set goals (knows what and how he wants to achieve).	Planning and organization	4.43

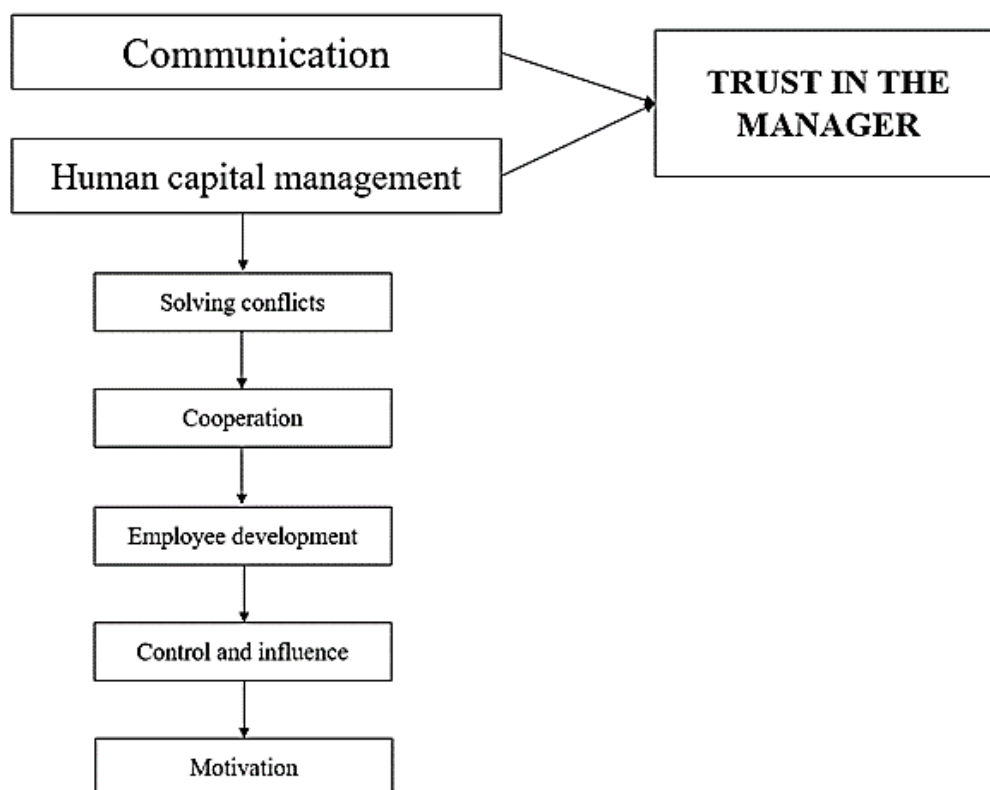
Cont. table 3.

Ability to listen to criticism from an employee.	Communication	4.38
Ability to quickly adapt to the changing environment and necessary changes.	Change management	4.38
Ability to take responsibility for employees and their actions.	Human capital management (Cooperation)	4.38

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents were also asked to assess the importance of individual personality traits that positively influence their trust in managers. The highest scores were given to the following personality traits: honesty (4.86), communication skills (4.68), impartiality (4.59) and commitment (4.56). For respondents, the most important personality traits of a manager include emotional maturity (n = 138) and justice (n = 142).

In light of the above, the competencies of managers that have a positive impact on employee trust (Figure 2) are competencies in the field of communication and human capital management: the ability to cooperate with employees and advisors, the ability to share knowledge and experience, the ability to create an appropriate platform, surface and atmosphere for conversation, as well as the ability to solve problems and conflicts and the ability to empathize with the situation of each side of the conflict and remain objective. The highest rated personality traits of a manager include emotional maturity, honesty, justice, impartiality, communicativeness and commitment.



**Figure 2.** A model of manager competencies that have a positive impact on employee trust.

Source: own elaboration.



## 7. Summary and discussion of the results

Abdun et al. (2023, p. 34) conducted research that showed a significant correlation of competencies in the field of human resources management, professional development of employees, cooperation and leadership skills with employee trust. In turn, P.J. Zak (2017, p. 85) conducted many years of research on the relationship between the level of oxytocin (generating trust) and the management behaviour of managers. This research allowed us to identify eight management behaviours that affect the level of employee trust. These include showing appreciation to the employee, giving them freedom in actions, enabling work creation, providing appropriate feedback, clearly defining the goal, building a collaborative relationship, enabling development and showing sensitivity. In the research conducted by the authors, similar competencies were identified that have a positive impact on employee trust: cooperation, sharing knowledge and experience, appropriate transfer of information, solving conflicts and problems and remaining objective.

After analysing the research results, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The style and method of communication used by a manager are, for employees, one of the most important competencies that a superior can demonstrate. Employees expect clear and precisely formulated answers from their superiors and conversations conducted in an appropriate place and atmosphere.
2. Competencies in human capital management are the most important for employees in the context of trust. The employee expects the manager to enable independent work, help in self-development and impartiality in resolving conflicts.
3. Research has shown that trust is positively influenced by: treating employees fairly and with respect, meeting deadlines and taking responsibility for their actions.

Strengthening and striving to achieve an appropriate level of competence and developing behaviours that have a positive impact on employee trust should be very important for management staff at every level in the organization. Without employee trust, it is difficult to achieve success, which is what every organization strives for. Further research, according to the authors, should be extended to include individual industries and professional groups. It is also worth conducting a more thorough exploration of the identified relationship, taking into account the gender and age of research participants, both working in managerial and non-managerial positions.

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