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THE IMPACT OF VERTICAL TRUST ON THE PRO-INNOVATION ATTITUDE OF EMPLOYEES

Summary. The aim of the study was to determine the impact of vertical trust on the proinnovation attitude of employees. Huge interest in trust in interpersonal relations and relations between organizations, even at the macro level, underlines the significance of this phenomenon in the modern world. This article presents the results based on a group of 262 respondents. It was assumed that a higher level of trust in the relations with superior stimulate pro-innovation attitudes in knowledge-based enterprises. The results obtained confirm the argument set out.

Key words: organisational trust, vertical trust, innovative culture, innovative attitudes

WPLYW ZAUFANIA WERYKALNEGO NA PROINNOWACYJNE POSTAWY PRACOWNIKÓW

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest zidentyfikowanie wpływu zaufania wertykalnego na proinnowacyjne postawy pracowników. Duże zainteresowanie zaufaniem zarówno w relacjach interpersonalnych, relacjach pomiędzy organizacjami jak i w skali makro podkreśla jego znaczenia we współczesnym świecie. Artykuł prezentuje rezultaty badań na podstawie 262 respondentów. Założono, że im wyższy poziom zaufania w relacjach przełożony – podwładny tym bardziej stymulująco działa na postawy proinnowacyjne podwładnych. Uzyskane rezultaty potwierdziły założona tezę.

Słowa kluczowe: zaufanie organizacyjne, zaufanie wertykalne, kultura innowacyjna, postawy proinnowacyjne

1.Introduction

Trust is the foundation of all business relationships. When there is a necessity to take an action, despite uncertainty and risk, trust becomes the key strategy of handling the uncertainty and impossibility of controlling the future. Trust means a belief in particular actions or properties of a subject being trusted, “a bet on uncertain future actions of other people” (Sztompka 2007 p. 69). The notion of trust is defined in the context of many disciplines, such as: economy, organization and management theory, sociology, political sciences, and psychology. It is a multidimensional construct which involves interpersonal trust (Gomez, Rosen 2001), trust between organizations, the so-called interorganizational trust (Joseph, Winston 2005) political trust (Hetherington 1998), social trust (Oxendine et al.2003), and intra-organizational trust in co-workers – the so-called horizontal trust (Holton 2001), trust between supervisors and subordinates – the so-called vertical trust (Dirks, T. K., Ferrin2002 as well as trust in organizations (Shockley-Zalabak et al.2000).

According to the definition of Zaheer et al. (1998), trust is an expectation that a partner is a reliable person who fulfills obligations in a predictable way and acts honestly in the face of various situations. Similarly, Whitener et al. (1998) emphasize the aspects of expectation and confidence that a partner will act in common interest; it is connected with a certain level of dependence and risk concerning this behavior. As Tzafrir and Eitam-Meilik (2005) claim, trust is willingness to invest one’s efforts in relations with others which results from positive expectations being a consequence of previous mutual interactions. Meyer et al. (1995) highlight the aspect of voluntary dependence which underlies trust. The same is claimed by Grudzewski et al.(2009) who show that trust is a conviction on the basis of which unit A agrees to be dependent on unit B (person, object, organization) in a given situation and has a sense of relative security, even though negative consequences are possible. In literature, trust is encapsulated as: a set of specific expectations towards a partner, agreement to be in a relation of interdependence or dependence, a bridge between past and future experiences, a dynamic and temporary value which is developing or may be lost. Trust is closely connected with a wider context of social capital. Putnam (2000, p. 258) emphasizes that trust is its basic component and defines social capital as “such features of society as trust, norms and links which may increase efficiency of a society by means of facilitating coordinated activities”. The significance of trust for success of organizations is essential, both from the internal and external perspectives of the organizations. At present “organizations are not built on power, but on trust” (Drucker 1999, p. 65). The company's standing mainly consists of immaterial elements based on trust (reputation, goodwill), the so-called credibility or trust capital(McElroy 2002). The growth in the significance of trust in business relations is connected with a wider access to information concerning products and services, a bigger possibility of choice, and faster and cheaper communication with rival companies. Due to its properties, trust may create a constant competitive advantage in organizations based on knowledge. The atmosphere of trust is an additional value and a key factor in information flow and knowledge management (Wang, Rubenstein- Montano 2003), allows for controlling hidden knowledge which cannot be controlled by formal mechanisms because of its uniqueness and small codification. It also stimulates the processes of knowledge-sharing (Loon Hoe 2007) as well as processes of learning through triggering social relations that are informal communication channels. Research confirmed (Herting 2002) a statistically significant correlation between trust and organizational innovation. Moreover, the research shows that managers who show big trust in their employees, at the same time invest in them more willingly, encourage them to develop and promote them as well as involve employees more often into the process of management (Tzafrir, Eitam-Meilik 2005).

Trust-based cooperation makes it possible to trigger creativity, generate innovative solutions but also successfully implement innovations (Paliszkiwicz 2011). Moreover, trust reduces transactional costs as long-term business partners do not need to control each other or sign detailed contracts any more. It has a particular impact on reducing the ex-post transactional costs, that is, the costs of monitoring and enforcement (Williamson 1985) Trust of clients, employees or suppliers lowers the costs of winning them over.

2. The purpose and method of the research

The main objective of the research was to find out whether and how trust on the part of supervisors influences the proinnovative attitudes of employees. The objective required empirical examination in the form of a survey among workers employed in knowledge-based enterprises. The respondents were asked to answer five groups of questions including demographic ones. Three of them referred to level of trust in: the whole organisation, supervisors and co-workers. Each kind of trust was examined using the scale prepared on the basis of Trust Assessment Scale verified by Wichita State University and Tzafrir and Dolan's trust scale (Tzafrir and Gur, 2007). Each scale has been adjusted to the Polish conditions and included the following dimensions: ability, benevolence, and integrity. It could also be reasonably suggested that studies applying the same theoretical approach should share at least common conceptualisation and components of trust, although measurement may differ according to the context (i.e., industry, vertical or horizontal relationship type). All items are fashioned in a five-point Likert format, with a combination of positively and negatively worded questions.

259 people participated in the research, 63% of which were women and 37% men. The most numerous group – 41% – comprised people aged 25-35, 31% were people aged 36-45, and 18% were respondents over 45 years. As regards education, most informants (55%) completed higher education, 39% – secondary education and only 5% – lower than secondary. Most informants worked in dolnoslaskie voivodship (49%) whereas 32% – in malopolskie voivodship. 61% of respondents lived in municipalities with a population of up to 50 thousand residents, cities with a population between 50 and 500 thousand were inhabited by 25% of informants, and the remaining ones lived in big cities with 500 thousand residents and more. The majority of those surveyed had employment contracts for an indefinite period of time, while 355 for a definite time. Others had contracts of a different type, e.g. temporary work, part-time work or probationary employment contracts. A large majority of those questioned were employed in the services and industrial sectors, 54% and 45%, respectively. Most of the participating employees had seniority below 3 years (42%), seniority of 9-13 years was declared by 18% of informants, whereas the remaining ones had seniority above 14 years. In the vast majority of cases, the companies in which the informants are employed represent the private sector (87%), other are public sector or self-government administration companies. As much as 50% of the enterprises which took part in the research are well present on the market for over 15 years. 19% of the enterprises examined are small entities, 20% – entities which employ 50-200 people, 28% – entities with 201-500 workers, and 33% – companies with more than 500 employees. The business entities which participated in the research were selected in such a way as to show sector diversity and diversity by size and length of operation on the market.

The following statistical methods were applied in the research: Chi-Square Test of Independence, Mann-Whitney's U test, Kruskal-Wallis's multiple (both-sided) comparison test.

3. Empirical research results

The level of trust in individual dimensions was researched in two ways. At first, the informants participated in a scale-based test. The scale measured general trust in three dimensions and involved from 14 to 24 statements. Next the respondents again determined their own general attitude within the area of a given dimension of trust, this time by means of only one question. It turns out that the respondents rated highest the trust in the supervisor-subordinate relation, vertical trust (mean: 3.78) as well as in relations between workers, horizontal trust (mean: 3.76). Institutional trust was graded lowest (mean: 3.46).

3.1. Vertical trust

The tables below present Spearman's rank correlation analysis results (R)¹ that verify which of the assessed statements are most connected with the total mean in individual areas. The higher the correlation coefficient is, the greater impact an individual question has on the general coefficient. It needs to be noted though that almost all coefficients were very high and statistically important. It means that almost all studied aspects have an influence on the general level of trust in the given area.

Table 1

Table of statements which determine trust in supervisor-subordinate relation

Statements concerning vertical trust	R	t(N-2)
1. In my organization, there is an atmosphere of true mutual trust between employees and managers.	0.72	16.4
2. My boss is a competent and skilled team manager.	0.74	17.7
3. I think that my supervisor takes good decisions.	0.79	20.7
4. If I had a problem with anything concerning my work, I could safely talk to my supervisors about my fears.	0.73	17.1
5. My supervisor is a moral authority for me.	0.75	18.3
6. I think that my boss is fair about employees.	0.80	21.3
7. My boss has well-developed interpersonal skills.	0.77	19.1
8. My boss openly talks with me about matters which are important for me.	0.70	15.8
9. My boss is interested in my needs and problems, if they arise.	0.77	19.0
10. Generally speaking, my boss keeps his/her word.	0.71	16.0
11. Everyday business meetings with my boss are a pleasant experience.	0.79	19.3

Source: Author's own study

¹ **Spearman's rank correlation** – a rank correlation which takes values from an interval [-1, 1]. The higher value of the correlation, the greater dependence there is between variables. If the value is close to 0, then there is no dependence between the variables. In some cases, the correlation coefficient is interpreted; so if the correlation coefficient is:

- smaller than 0.2, there is practically no relationship between variables
- 0.2 – 0.4 – explicit dependence, but low
- 0.4 – 0.7 – moderate dependence
- 0.7 – 0.9 – significant dependence
- above 0.9 – very high dependence.

Trust of employees in their managers is influenced by such factors as the sense of fair rewarding, belief about manager's competences and manager's interest in employee's problems. The results show that apart from the above-mentioned interpersonal and relational trust, there are also other types of trust that matter in the supervisor-subordinate relation; these are:

- trust based on norms, values (Lane 2000) and a conviction that a confidant who has greater power observes social obligations,
- competence trust related to a tendency to keep one's word (Sako 2006),
- trust based on knowledge which develops thanks to previous interactions and guarantees communication combined with an exchange of needs, preferences and opinions (Lewicki, Bunker 1996),
- trust based on passion (McAllister 1995) conditioned by reciprocated emotional bonds.

The questions referring to vertical trust were grouped together and the areas which provided for concise information were selected. These were:

- generalized trust in management – a conviction that supervisors can be trusted as they act in good interests of employees,
- fulfilling the obligation of managers to provide information to employees,
- professional competence,
- interpersonal competence,
- mutual relations (whether a supervisor is liked),
- loyalty towards a supervisor.

It turns out that within the scope of the area concerned, the informants assessed their loyalty towards supervisors highest (mean: 4.29). It seems though that the high result may be partially dependent on the aspiration (quite often a subconscious one) for maintaining a high level of self-assessment. The area of professional competence of supervisors (3.88) was assessed considerably lower; while the following areas obtained the highest rates: generalized trust in management (3.79), interpersonal competence (3.73), fulfilling the information obligation towards employees (3.68), and mutual relations (3.67).

The analysis of statistical dependences within the area of factors concerned shows that, statistically, men more often declare higher generalized trust in management ($p=0,0042$) and they like their supervisors more ($p=0,0042$). Statistically, the information obligations are significantly lower assessed by staff employed under employment contracts (both for a definite and indefinite period) than staff employed under other types of contracts (which do not bind employees with a company so much). It seems to be an effect of higher expectations of employees strongly bound with a company who are probably more engaged in comparison to those whose contracts do not bind them with the company to such an extent ($p=0.0464$). The generalized trust in management is evaluated higher by employees from the agricultural as well as service and commercial sectors, and it is lower by staff from the industrial sector (0.0013). The supervisor's competence is assessed highest in the service and commercial sector, slightly lower - in the industrial sector, and lowest - in the agricultural sector ($p=0.0020$). Interpersonal competence is rated highest by employees from the agricultural sector, and lowest – from the industrial sector ($p=0.0397$). Similarly, workers from the service and commercial as well as agricultural sectors more often declare that they like their supervisors than employees from the industrial sector. The length of operation of a company has an impact on all the aspects of trust in supervisors. It transpires that it is highest in companies with up to 5-year experience in operation and then it decreases but reveals an upward tendency in the case of companies which are on the market for more than 15 years.

Could it result from a crisis of trust between the 5th and 15th year of operation of a company? Unfortunately, the results do not provide the answer. Still, it needs further research. It also appears that the smaller a company is, the greater trust is placed in it. Trust is decreasing along with the increasing size of a company. This regularity concerns the generalized trust in management ($p=0.0000$), interpersonal trust ($p=0.0000$) and the declaration of sympathy towards supervisors ($p=0.0014$).

3.2. Innovative climate

Innovation of enterprises is connected with a specific corporate culture. It is assigned a series of formal and structural features such as: hierarchy, degree of formality, procedures, specific behaviour of organisation members, which reflect their convictions, values, attitudes, and impressions concerning corporate reality. The elements of an innovative corporate culture mainly involve: transparent communication concerning the value of innovation, rewarding and supporting innovation, free access to knowledge and sharing knowledge, free information circulation, team work, freedom of action, trust in employees, triggering involvement and participation, as well as organisational support for innovative activities. It was assumed that an innovative climate is a prerequisite for shaping proinnovative attitudes. An innovative climate is a sort of external layer of the corporate culture which is clearly perceived by employees as it influences their behaviour and decisions. The climate of trust is considered by some authors as one of the dimensions of organizational climate (Spitzer 2007), indicating that clearly affects the behavior of members of the organization.

This research presents a relatively low evaluation of the innovative climate – mean: 3.47. The next step involved answering the question of which statements influenced the result most profoundly, that is, which of them showed whether the innovative climate was present in a company or not. Table 2 below presents the results obtained.

Table 2

Factors which strongly influence a conviction that the innovative climate is present in a company.

Statements concerning the innovative culture	R	t(N-2)
1. My company has consistent developmental goals of innovative enterprises which are known to employees.	0.72	15.6
2. Innovations are a key value in my company.	0.70	14.7
3. In my company, the resources are transferred to innovative activities as required.	0.74	16.5
4. My company transforms ideas into profitable enterprises.	0.72	15.7
5. My company provides free access to information and knowledge.	0.73	16.2
6. The working environment is optimal for cooperation also between departments.	0.78	19.1
7. In my company, all employees can propose their ideas.	0.73	16.3
8. I am encouraged to take challenges if they may be profitable, in my opinion.	0.73	16.2
9. People employed in my company are believed to act in the interests of the company and are under the minimum control of supervisors.	0.69	14.6
10. My company appreciates new ideas.	0.74	16.7
11. My company expects creativity in thinking and acting in an inventive and original way.	0.70	14.9
12. Our managers help us to overcome obstacles encountered when implementing innovations.	0.72	15.6
13. In my company, a manager is a mentor.	0.71	15.4

14. Managers from my company have features of a leader supporting innovation.	0.73	16.0
15. If employees want to look for innovative solutions, managers support them in doing so.	0.72	15.5
16. My company has consistent developmental goals of innovative enterprises which are known to employees.	0.72	15.6

Source: Author's own study

It appears that the strongest influence on a conviction that there is the innovative climate in the company is connected with a conviction that there are good conditions for cooperation between departments and the organisation of work is flexible enough to support innovation by proper work organisation. Also, a motivating impact is of importance, it involves: accepting new ideas, encouraging taking new challenges, providing conditions for suggesting ideas, access to knowledge and support from supervisors. The significant influence of supervisors' trust in subordinates is worth attention since it is a precondition for challenge-taking as well as taking moderate risk in the fundamental interest of the company. It can be said then that the description agrees with the description of an innovative enterprise found in literature.

The next analysis grouped statements concerning particular aspects of the innovative climate as before. The factors that influence it are as follows:

- access to knowledge (mean: 3.34),
- proinnovative work organisation (mean 3.44),
- consent to risk-taking (mean: 3.14),
- emphasis on client orientation (mean: 3.34),
- emphasis on long-term (strategic) thinking (mean: 2.98),
- team work (mean: 3.54),
- motivation for innovation (mean: 3.53),
- supporting innovation by managers (mean 3.37),
- innovative climate (mean: 3.14).

In the next step, it was verified whether there were statistically important dependences between particular areas and demographics. It turns out that women tend to assess the following areas lower than men: client orientation, motivation for innovation and the innovative climate ($p=0.0464$). It may mean that women need (especially in these aspects) more explicit incentives and signals than men. It also appears that the youngest employees, up to 25 years old, as well as those between 25 and 35 years of age evaluate access to knowledge higher than older staff members ($p=0.0238$). The higher the education the informants had, the higher the analysed factors were rated; they involved: access to knowledge ($p=0.0158$), proinnovative work organisation ($p=0.0158$), and client orientation (0.0331).

Employees working in the service and commercial as well as industrial sectors are more prone to accepting risk in comparison to employees from the agricultural sector, and they also assess higher team work and managers' actions aimed at supporting innovation. Whereas client orientation is rated higher in the agricultural as well as service and commercial sectors than in the industrial one.

Interestingly, the longer time of operation on the market, the lower the following aspects under research are evaluated: access to knowledge, proinnovative work organisation, client orientation, team work, motivation for innovation, and manager's actions supporting innovation. Business entities which have been on the market for less than 5 years are rated highest. Moreover, workers in companies which employ up to 200 people evaluate the innovative climate higher than workers from enterprises with over 200 employees. The smaller a company is, the higher the following actions are assessed: aimed at motivating for

innovation, client orientation and access to knowledge. Also, employees of companies with up to 49 people are more inclined to admit that their supervisors support innovation. The bigger a company is, the weaker a conviction of the informants that work organisation in a given business entity supports innovation.

3.3. Relations between vertical trust and the innovative culture

The aim of the next step of the research was to determine relations between the aspects of vertical trust and the aspects of the innovative climate. The results obtained are presented below.

Table3

Spearman's rank correlation: areas of vertical trust vs. innovation areas

	R Spearman	t(N-2)
Trust in management & Motivation for innovation	0.69	0.0000
Trust in management & Manager who supports innovation	0.62	0.0000
Information & Access to knowledge	0.60	0.0000
Information & Motivation for innovation	0.59	0.0000
Supervisor's competence & Team work	0.51	0.0000
Supervisor's competence & Motivation for innovation	0.55	0.0000
Interpersonal competence & Proinnovative work organisation	0.63	0.0000
Interpersonal competence & Team work	0.61	0.0000
Interpersonal competence & Motivation for innovation	0.74	0.0000
Interpersonal competence & Manager who supports innovation	0.60	0.0000
Liking & Motivation for innovation	0.62	0.0000
Liking & Manager who supports innovation	0.57	0.0000

Source: Author's own study

The results of the analysis prove that significant relations exist but they are of various intensity when it comes to vertical trust and the innovative climate. It appears that trust in management greatly influences such aspects as: motivation for innovation and a conviction that a supervisor supports innovative activities. According to the respondents, access to information is connected with access to knowledge as well as influences the level of motivation to take up innovative challenges.

Managerial competence of supervisors, such as, effective team management and taking right decisions have an influence on the assessment of team work conditions in the process of developing innovative solutions and motivation for innovation.

Interpersonal competence of a supervisor influences as many as four areas: motivation for innovation (significant dependence), team work, proinnovative work organisation, and a conviction that a supervisor supports innovation.

Positive relations with a supervisor (liking supervisors) refer to the level of motivation for innovation and a conviction that a supervisor supports innovation.

Therefore, it is not surprising that most factors do not affect a conviction (or the dependence is very weak) that people in an enterprise think and act in strategic terms. While it may be surprising that these factors only slightly (explicit but low dependence) influence a tendency to take risk; interpersonal competence of a supervisor has the strongest influence ($R=0.40$). Thus it might be concluded that keeping promises, fair assessment, showing interest in needs and problems, as well as speaking openly about problems are factors which build up the basis for risk taking.

All the aspects of vertical trust have an impact on the level of motivation for innovation that employees observe. Is this the aspect of the most profound influence on creating the

innovative climate then? It seems that receiving support of various types from a supervisor in the process of creating innovation is the second most important factor.

Furthermore, in order to confirm the dependences, another analysis was conducted using the Anova Kruskal-Wallis test. An answer to a question concerning the level of trust in a supervisor was compared with specific aspects of the innovative climate. In all cases there is a statistically significant dependence $p < \alpha$ ($p = 0.00000$). The higher the relations with supervisors are rated, the higher specific parameters of the innovative climate are evaluated.

The research allows to formulate a statement that the innovative climate (culture) which supports proinnovative attitudes is mostly influenced by trust in supervisors (Sperman rank correlation $R = 0,74$). The higher level of vertical trust causes higher evaluation of an innovative culture (figure1)

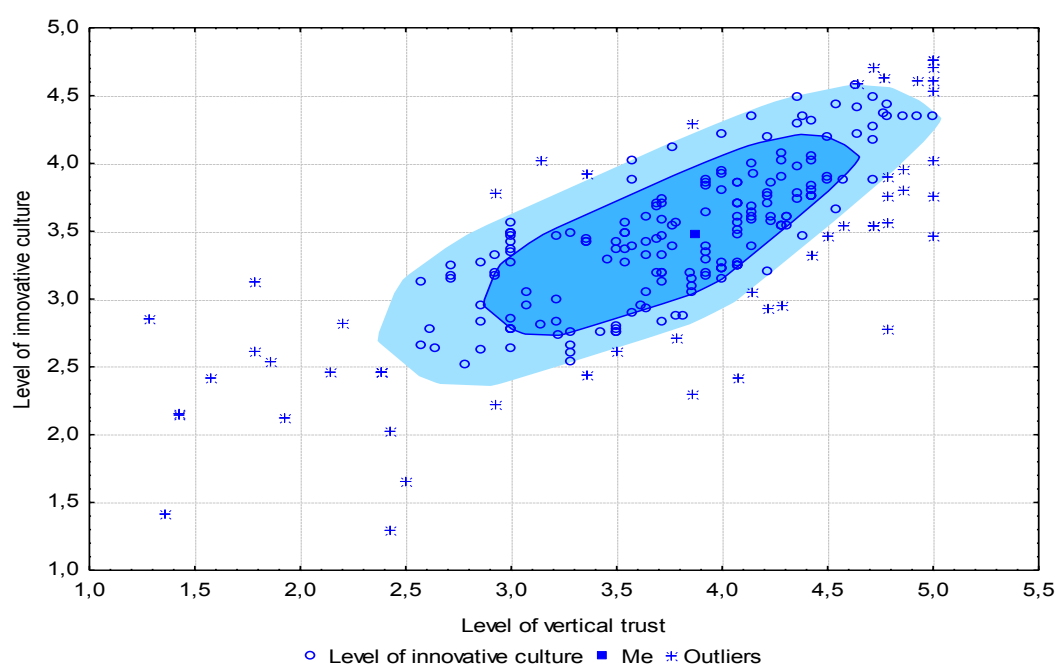


Fig. 1. Relations between vertical trust and an innovative culture

Rys1. Związki pomiędzy zaufaniem wertykalnym a innowacyjną kulturą

Source: Author's own study

It was also supported by other authors' research (Zhang et al., 2008; Tzafrir and Eitam-Meilik, 2005). Employee-manager relations are the main area of change in enterprises that are going to improve their competitiveness by the increase in innovativeness.

Conclusions

The article attempts to analyse the sources of competitiveness of the enterprises based on knowledge. Strong and medium-sized level of trust can be a source of competitive advantage (Ciancutti Steding 2001). Trust seems to be a critical success factor on most accounts inside and outside the organization. As indicated by Aburdene (2005), trust and honesty, translate directly into revenue, profit and prosperity.

The results obtained confirm that a relation between vertical trust and the innovative culture (climate) does exist in an enterprise. The research results suggest that supervisor's actions play a significant role in motivating others to take innovative actions and support them.

Managers are seen as creators of changes in companies and the most important role models. Their main task is to build up a creative climate within an organisation. In the case of supporting innovation by supervisors it is not only a management style that is essential but also their personal features such as, creativity, tolerating uncertainty and cognitive passion. One of the features of effective managers is the so-called "openness to innovation".

Moreover, the results show that vertical trust is connected with a conviction that a supervisor is fair and honest towards subordinates, makes right decisions, is a likeable person and has well developed interpersonal skills. Vertical trust is highest in companies which are relatively short on the market - up to 5 years - and in small companies. The level of trust decays with the company's size. What is more, it can also be stated that men are more prone to trusting their supervisors in some aspects than women. What is more, employees from the industrial sector rate lowest the different aspects of trust in supervisors as compared to workers from other sectors.

The most essential factors which influence a conviction that there is the innovative culture (climate) in a company is a conviction that there are good conditions for cooperation between departments and the organisation of work is flexible enough to support innovation by proper work organisation. Many authors emphasise the significance of cooperation in the sense of sharing information and providing support when fulfilling tasks (Wojtczuk- Turek 2009). Competition and conflict are also mentioned as factors which trigger innovation (Sułkowski 2002). However, it is hard to imagine an innovative company where every department strives to pursue their own narrow interests. Cooperation and trust are conditions for free knowledge sharing, which is known to influence innovations since they are created as a result of solving real problems of various types. The innovative adhocracy culture identified and described by Quinn and Cameron, is characterized by a fast adjustment to changing conditions and flexibility, emphasis on non-stereotypical solutions, and it assumes flexible work organisation and putting all efforts to innovative activities. There is also a tendency according to which the smaller a company is and the shorter on the market it operates, the more often it is perceived by workers as developing the innovative climate in comparison to larger business entities with longer experience.

The results achieved are not representative in statistical terms but they allow for a general diagnosis and to find out what tendencies there are in the area under research. The conclusions drawn from the collected statistical materials may constitute a basis for more comprehensive research. A possible direction of such research is to determine the correlation between vertical trust, involvement and innovation achievements of employees, as well as the relation between style of leadership and vertical trust. The results may also provide guidelines on how to build trust in business, and directions for managerial skills development.

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