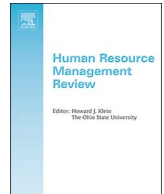




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Team trust over time: Modeling reciprocal and contextual influences in action teams

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A B S T R A C T

Team trust is increasingly being recognized as important for team performance, but little is currently understood about how it develops and evolves over the course of a team's lifespan. Because trust and related team constructs are inherently dynamic, this represents a critical gap in the literature that needs to be addressed before team trust can be fully understood and effectively facilitated in practice. Of particular relevance to these gaps are action teams – those that come together to perform under time-constrained, yet often high-stakes conditions. While scholars have begun to explore how trust develops in these contexts, little is understood about how it evolves over time. As such, we propose a theoretical model of team trust in action teams that incorporates its dynamic nature, models the reciprocal relationship between team trust and team performance, delineates unique mediating pathways based on the team's progression in the multiphase performance cycle, and considers the role of moderating influences that may strengthen or attenuate the impact of performance feedback on subsequent team trust. Specific research implications are discussed, providing a rich foundation for future empirical studies, and ultimately, the generation of evidence-based interventions for facilitating trust as teams cycle through multiple performance episodes over time.

While trust has long been considered an organizational commodity, only in recent years have scholars begun to focus on studying it beyond the individual-level (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). However, with much of today's work being accomplished through team-based structures, and growing evidence suggesting that trust is indeed critical in team contexts (e.g., Hansen, Morrow, & Batista, 2002; Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005), the time is ripe for a greater emphasis to be placed on understanding team trust. In line with this need, two meta-analyses recently compiled the team trust literature, demonstrating moderate relationships between team trust and a variety of team effectiveness criteria (Breuer, Huffmeier, & Hertel, 2016; De Jong, Dirks, & Gillespie, 2016). Another went beyond the trust-performance link alone, examining the role of team trust as a mediator of the relationship between diversity and team performance (Feitosa, Grossman, Kramer, & Salas, 2016). While these studies certainly advance the literature and indicate that researchers are increasingly studying team trust (over 110 independent effect sizes were analyzed), a static snapshot of inputs and outcomes of team trust is no longer sufficient – trust is dynamic in nature, thus needs to be understood and examined over time. Specifically, the role of team trust and its relationship with performance may change as the team cycles through multiple performance episodes and is exposed to various moderating influences over the course of its existence.

Related to this, the cyclical nature of the trust-performance link in teams has not yet been considered. Like other team constructs that demonstrate reciprocal relationships with performance (e.g., cohesion, Mathieu, Kukenberger, D'Innocenzo, & Reilly, 2015), it is

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possible that performance may influence trust, in addition to vice-versa, or that the directionality of this relationship may change in importance for team effectiveness over time. Building on these issues, there is a need to examine what happens when trust evolves, particularly in action teams. Action teams are those in extreme, stressful, and unpredictable situations that are more unstable in regards to team membership than most traditional work teams, yet often facing life and death consequences (Vashdi, Bamberger, & Erez, 2013). While their importance is unquestionable, the role of trust within such contexts remains understudied, particularly from a dynamic perspective. Teams are likely to experience disruptions in trust as the team progresses, and these changes may be more or less detrimental depending on their phase of team performance. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to present a theoretical model that explores the dynamic nature of trust in teams. Specifically, we adopt a multiphasic perspective to model the consequences of team trust in action teams, the mechanisms through which trust influences performance as the team progresses through the phases of team performance (i.e., action and transition phases, Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001), the moderating roles of variables such as a trust violation, and the unique mechanisms through which performance may then influence trust as the team shifts from action to transition phases and vice-versa. This model can provide a deeper understanding of the role of trust in teams, serve as a foundation for future research to move beyond a static examination of team trust, and ultimately, allow for the development of more nuanced interventions for facilitating trust and performance in team settings.

1. Theoretical background

Team trust can be defined as “a shared psychological state among team members comprising willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of a specific other or others” (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012, p. 1174). As indicated, trust in teams is a multi-dimensional construct (Costa, 2003), comprising team members' positive expectations about each other's competence and motivations, as well as a shared acceptance of vulnerability based on the assumption that teammates will act in the best interest of the team. Consequently, trust can play a prominent role in how individuals work together, influencing a range of team processes and emergent states that are critical for team effectiveness (e.g., back-up behavior; Barczak, Lask, & Mulki, 2010), making it a central construct for teams researchers to understand. While trust has traditionally been examined in relation to individuals, leaders, and organizations, scholars have recently begun to explore it within team settings as well. Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), for example, presented a review of the trust literature across levels, including the team level. Others have modeled the development of trust within the specific context of swift-starting action teams (Wildman et al., 2012).

At this point, however, little is known regarding the progression of trust over time, particularly as the team cycles through performance episodes and experiences various contextual cues that can change team members' future interactions (e.g., trust violation). Because trust is critical throughout the duration of a team's existence, an understanding is needed not only of how it develops initially, but also of how it evolves, responds to different team experiences, and is maintained over time. Indeed, scholars have criticized the lack of investigation of emergent states in a more dynamic manner (Kozlowski, Chao, Grand, Braun, & Kuljanin, 2013). We thus draw from research that points to a more fluid and cyclical process, building on Marks et al.'s (2001) team process taxonomy and adapting it to the construct of team trust, whereby trust evolves and relates to team performance in unique ways at different points in the team's action-transition cycle. Our model is characterized by three major components: a focus on trust within *action teams*; exploration of a *reciprocal* relationship between team trust and team performance over time; and consideration of possible *contextual influences* (see Fig. 1).

1.1. Trust in action teams

Effective teams do not start initially with their full capabilities; instead, they form, establish regulatory mechanisms, and evolve over time. This is no different with trust, which has also shown to develop over time (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007; Webber, 2008). For instance, Lewicki, Tomlinson and Gillespie (2006) report differences in trust levels after individuals get to know each

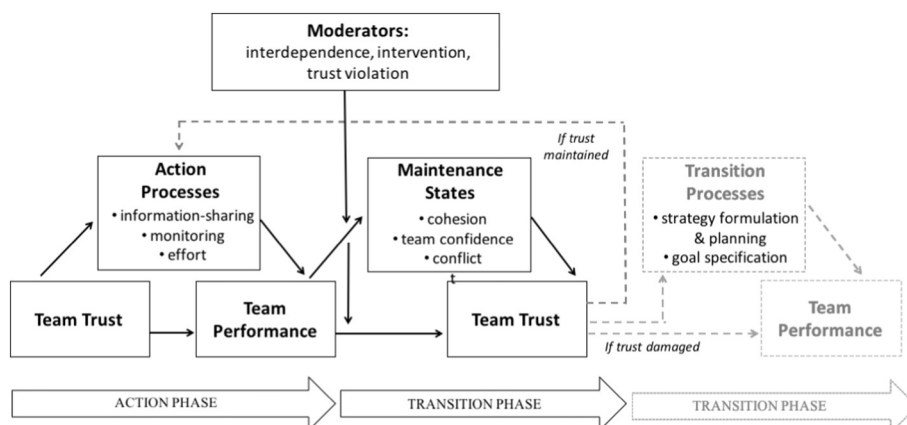


Fig. 1. Theoretical model of team trust over time.

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