Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

European Management Journal

What makes an effective team? The role of trust (dis)confirmation in team development

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A B S T R A C T

Most newly formed teams manage to function in spite of the fact that their members do not know each other. Over time, teams progress into successful units; however, sometimes, they regress into a situation where morale is worse than when the team was created. We explain how such opposing group outcomes can arise by examining team members' (dis)confirmation of expectations in line with the development of trust. We argue that the process of (dis)confirmation of expectations created based on early swift trust is crucial in defining the direction of team development (progression or regression) because it gives rise to emotions which further underpin (dis)trust. We present six sets of propositions which taken together construct a framework for understanding the role of (dis)confirmation and subsequent emotions during the process of trust updating and of team development. We provide a conceptual view of individuals' experiences within a team and their impact on team dynamics in a way which could form the basis of future empirical testing.

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Introduction

Team members desire assurance that each other's actions will enable their interdependent objectives to be met, and such assurance can be provided either through control mechanisms or through trust (Barber, 1983). On the other hand, increased dependency may increase conflict (McCann & Galbraith, 1981) as interdependence in terms of the amount of resources and coordination necessary within a team means that one cannot realize expected outcomes without cooperation from another colleague (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). The traditional emphasis on bureaucratic structures and control systems in organizations has been shifting toward more fluid team and project-based team in the face of business environment turbulence (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Here trust is crucial in defining group dynamics and is associated with effective work teams (e.g. Bedwell et al., 2012) as it allows individuals to justify their decision to contribute (Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna, 1996). However, how or why individual members decide to trust within a team is not always clear. For example, how can individuals in a newly formed team learn to trust each other when there is no history of interactions and therefore no prior knowledge of each other? Furthermore, after these group members engage in some level of interaction, how and why do some groups lapse into noncooperation or even into conflict-ridden chaos?

To explain how such positive or negative team outcomes arise, our paper looks at individual team member's psychological experience during the process of team development. Team interactions give rise to affective reactions and cognitive judgments for each team member. We take the view that there is some level of trust even at the beginning of team formation (i.e. swift trust) based on which team members form expectations of future interactions. We further argue that (dis)confirmation of an individual's initial expectations about interaction among team members causes affective or emotional reactions (i.e. cognitive appraisal; Ellsworth, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These emotional reactions are critical in updating trust information and defining the direction of team outcomes either positively or negatively. A framework which takes into account the role of (dis)confirmation in line with development of trust allows us to understand the bidirectional development of teams. We adapt the input-mediator-output (IMO) model (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005) to illustrate how the development of trust occurs hand in hand with team development.

Our paper presents contributions to the literatures of trust, conflict, team development, and diversity. This paper contributes to trust literature by illustrating the changing nature of trust in a newly formed team. Acknowledgement of swift trust rather than zero trust at the early stage of team formation allows us to shed light on the role of (dis)confirmation of expectation based on swift trust during the process of trust updating (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). This paper also contributes to conflict literature as disconfirmation of expectations could be an important cause of conflicts. As conflicts occur from disagreement of values and ideas (Jehn, 1997), disconfirmation of expectations could explain

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how conflicts are perceived in the first place. Moreover, by looking at trust as an input and not just a mediator toward output of a team, this paper contributes toward understanding of dynamics of team development. While most teams function at the early stage of team formation, not all teams evolve into effective teams. The intervention of (dis)confirmation of expectations and subsequent emotions could explain why that may be the case. Finally, this paper contributes to the literature of diverse teams. In line with caution against deep level diversity within a team (cf. Zander, Mockaitis, & Butler, 2012), this article draws attention to the possible differences in expectations or assumptions of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The overall outline of the paper is the following: in the first part of the paper, we review the concept of trust as well as trust evolution. In the second part of the paper, we present sets of propositions in line with the group development (IMO model) but also boundary conditions which might influence proposed relationships. Finally, implications and future research are discussed. Note that we define a team as two or more socially interacting individuals who are interdependent as regards workflow, goals, and outcomes (cf. Bunderson, 2003; Kozlowski, Gully, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1996). We also adapt an overall process of team development which all team members go through together from the creation of the team, rather than the case of one single individual joining an existing team. The type of team we consider here is a traditional team with a designated leader (e.g. De Souza & Klein, 1995), including project teams, although our ideas may be applicable to other types.

Considering trust

Trust is a micro level phenomenon that has its basis in individuals (Dyer & Chu, 2003). However, the definitions of trust can be confusing (cf. Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Shapiro, 1987) and even inconsistent (cf. Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008) as the debate on the topic is widely divergent (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). Trust may be defined as a positive willingness of one to be vulnerable to another (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998); positive expectations of another (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007); a perceived belief (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) of the trustworthiness of another in conditions of interdependence and risk (Shapiro, 1987). Core characteristics of trustworthiness are said to include *ability*, or domain-specific competence of a trustee; *benevolence*, or that the trustee would do good to the trustor; and *integrity*, that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable (e.g. Colquitt et al., 2007; Mayer & Davis, 1999).

Trust may be based on various foundations. The behavioral tradition of research views trust as rational choice (Hardin, 1993) while the psychological tradition attempts to understand the complex intrapersonal states associated with trust, including expectations, intentions, affect, and dispositions (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). For example, at various times it has been suggested that trust is process based, characteristic based, institution based (Zucker, 1986), situation based (Kiffin-Petersen & Cordery, 2003), cognition and affect based (McAllister, 1995), deterrence based (DBT) (Shapiro, Sheppard, & Cheraskin, 1992), cognitive based (CBT), knowledge (behavioral) based (KBT), and affect (identification) based (ABT) (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

For the notion of distrust, there are also two competing views. One school of thought considers distrust as the bipolar opposite of trust (Kramer, 1999), meaning that low trust expectations are equivalent to high distrust (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). However, others look at distrust as confident negative expectations, which is a distinct construct from trust (e.g. Lewicki et al., 1998; Mesquita, 2007).

Discussing the implications and subtle differences of each notion of trust or distrust is beyond the scope of this paper. For the simplicity of our argument, we adapt the view of trust as *positive expectations* that others' conduct is helpful or at least not harmful (e.g. Gambetta, 1988). We also do not differentiate between high distrust and negative expectations. In addition, from an affective perspective (which is the core interest of our paper), both negative expectation and distrust are based on negative emotions such as suspicion, wariness, and fear (e.g. Golub, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2009; Lewicki et al., 1998).

Trust evolution over time

Since trust can be been viewed as a feature of interactions (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Schoorman et al., 2007), it is argued that trust develops within relationships (McAllister, Lewicki, & Chaturvedi, 2006). Both cognition (CBT) and deterrence (DBT) suggest that trust begins at zero (Deutsch, 1958) or even below zero (Shapiro et al., 1992), and these approaches assume that trust develops gradually (e.g. Blau, 1964; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). Contrary to this view, however, other researchers find that trust may form very quickly. For example, people who have no interaction history may nevertheless demonstrate (swift) trust for each other (cf. Robert, Dennis, & Hung, 2009; Zucker, 1986). Studies identify predispositions, categorical assumptions, and situations that are critical to the creation of '*swift trust*' (cf. Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; McKnight et al., 1998; Robert et al., 2009).

Despite the disagreement on the level of initial trust (zero baseline or swift trust), most researchers believe that further trust develops based on observation and perception of others' behavior over time (cf. Lewicki et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 1992). Process-based trust (PBT) or trust based on history occurs when repeated interactions and multifaceted relationships enhance understanding of others (Muethel & Hoegl, 2013; Robert et al., 2009; Zucker, 1986). During this stage, *reciprocation* occurs as a conscious decision process. For example, an individual who observes another's cooperative behavior develops a conclusion about the other's trustworthiness based on that observation, and then performs a reciprocation behavior (cf. Ferrin et al., 2008). Individuals devote time to consider each other's trustworthiness to build a high level of trust in the partner (cf. Ferrin et al., 2008). Information is gathered about specific characteristics of the trustee including ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995).

While reciprocity in exchange relations enhances trust, the absence or violation of reciprocity erodes it (Deutsch, 1958; Kramer, 1996). Subsequently, distrust could arise through the evolving attitude developed toward the other party (Jones & George, 1998) when the absence or violation of reciprocity occurs. In relation to initial trust, we believe that the concept of swift trust is more suited to explaining some level of cooperation at the beginning of group formation. This perspective allows us to gain insight into how emotions are generated and intervene as team members' positive expectations based on initial swift trust has been confirmed or disconfirmed during the team development. We will discuss this point later when we are developing our propositions.

Team formation, team member exchange and team cohesion

Marks, Mathieu, and Zaccaro (2001) define team processes as the team member's interdependent acts that convert inputs to outcomes. Ilgen et al.'s (2005) 'input-mediator-output (IMO)' model extends the conventional input-process-output (IPO) model (Hackman, 1987; McGrath, 1984). The term mediator is intended to capture a broader range of critical mediating variables including both processes and emergent states (cf. Mathieu et al., 2008) and trust can be considered one of its mediating variables (Wildman