

## ***OPENNESS AND HONESTY FOR BUILDING HIGH-TRUST ORGANIZATION***

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*Abstract: This paper is part of a large-scale and complex project developed by the authors in various companies from Transylvania (Romania), with focus on organizational trust. In this research phase we will present an overview of some findings of a sociological survey into the opinions of 751 students from two Transylvanian universities (Romania), on the level of trust in the organizations which they run or where they work.*

*The paper reveals the situation in the surveyed companies as reflected through a model inspired from the devoted literature, which was designed and tested by the authors in a previous research phase. In addition, it explores students' opinions on the improvement opportunities of the educational process, to provide better training with a view to creating organizational trust to the highest extent. The sample is structured by three groups of students, enrolled in different academic programmes (Economics and Business, Geography of Tourism and Management), and also by the criterion of capital source in the employing company (Romanian or foreign capital).*

*The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the communication process in the students' employing companies, and on the manner in which employers provide, based thereupon, the development of professional competence, the efficiency and effectiveness of the work, the improvement of the relationship with the end beneficiary and the internal customer – the employee, so that each company may become a "high-trust organization".*

*According to the opinions of the surveyed subjects, the areas where they would need (for this purpose) theoretical and practical skills, underdeveloped during their university studies, are: labour organization, resource usage and work efficiency, communication with peers / company employees and customers, negotiation and social dialogue.*

Keywords: competence; concern for customer / employees; identification with the organization; managerial communication; Romanian / foreign capital.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational trust is a notion in a very strong connection with the essence of the company culture. In the context of globalisation, when good management should cope with the requirements of multinational corporations or the organizational needs of virtual companies, organizational trust becomes more and more important.

The concept is approached at individual level (Lewis and Weigert, 1985, p. 971; Arrow, 1994; Hollis, 1998; Robinson, 1996, p. 576), at group, organization and nation level (Barber, 1983, p. 164-165) or at multinational enterprise level (Garfinkel, 1963; Luhmann, 1988).

The concept of *organizational trust* was approached from a psychological point of view (Hardin, 2002, apud Kramer 2009, p. 3), a sociological one (Coleman, 1990), philosophical (Hosmer, 1995, p. 399) and political (Burt and Knez, 1996, p. 70; Hardin, 1991; 2002), but it also presents clear *economic* connotations (Schelling, 1960; Williamson, 1993) and it is extremely important for the management process, for the proper functioning, development and even existence of a company (Hollis, 1998; March, 1994). The devoted literature approaches belong to the theory regarding this concept as well as to the cognitive models (Fine & Holyfield, 1996, p. 25) created in order to emphasise the content, structure and evolution of organizational trust.

## 2. AUTHORS VISION AND METHOD USED

One of the organizational trust models that we adapted from the specialty literature is the one conceived by Pamela Shockley-Zalabak and collaborators in 2000, which was later modified and applied to a larger sample of subjects (Shockley-Zalabak, et al, 2010): the model of “high-trust organization” (HTO).

Building on the *model* from the bibliography and on our previous experience, we conceived a questionnaire, applied within a sociological survey, which contained the following indicators.

**To** (organizational trust) and the five “key drivers”:

Q1 - Employees’ and managers’ competence;

Q2 - Openness and honesty;

Q3 - Concern for the company employees;

Q4 - Reliability – safety and stability;

Q5 - Identification with the organization.

**Tr**, the global result of the organizational trust:

Q6 - Concern for the customers and the other stakeholders;

Q7 - Efficiency and effectiveness and

Q8 – Employee’s job satisfaction (see: Sonea, 2014; Sonea, 2015).

Of the five key-drivers defining for **To**, we chose to detail here the findings related to Q2 (Openness and honesty), which express the most directly and explicitly the relationship with communication, given that a HTO is fully based on the organizational communication process and on the quality of corporate management in this respect.

*The questionnaire* was conceived by the authors, following the study of the basic concepts and some bibliography examples and was applied to a number of 751 students (from some universities in Transylvania - Romania), who work in different companies during their studies. The responses of the subjects, regarding the indicators of the “high-trust” model are measured on a Likert scale, from 5 to 0 and *the answers of the subjects were processed with SPSS software*.

The total *survey sample* (**T** – 751 subjects) is structured by three groups: Economics and Business students (**E** - 554 subjects), Geography of Tourism students (**G** – 119 subjects) and Management students (**M** – 78 subjects), enrolled in different academic programmes, and also by the criterion of capital source for building the companies, where the students are integrated (Romanian or foreign capital).

*The purpose* of this study is to determine the overall image: on the communication process in the companies where the students work, and also regarding the ways used in order to achieve, (on this base) professional competence development, effectiveness and efficiency of companies activity, the relationship improvement to the customer and to the intern client – employee, so as each company to become a „high-trust organization”.

The *hypotheses* we started from were: (1) the existence of a different level of trust in the Romanian capital companies compared to the foreign or mixed capital companies; and (2) the existence of significant differences between the opinions of the students of the three surveyed faculties, regarding the level of trust in the organizations where they belong.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to respondents' opinions, the key drivers and To codes obtained higher scores in the case of foreign capital companies (**F**), except for the scores of Q3 – **G** and Q5 – **E**; **G** and **T**. Identification with the organization is stronger in the companies where the management is physically closer to employees (in the same country or even in the same building) (table 1).

Table 1. Sample structure according to answer Q1 – Q5 by faculties and sources of capital – Romanian (R) and foreign (F) (codes average)

Faculties	Source of capital	Size of sample (N)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	To
<b>E</b>	R	222 – 40.1%	3.95	3.77	3.52	3.79	3.71	3.77
	F	310 - 55.9%	4.18	3.86	3.65	3.94	3.62	3.88
	TOTAL	554 - 100%	4.09	3.82	3.61	3.89	3.67	3.84
<b>G</b>	R	73 – 62.9%	4.25	4.03	3.83	3.98	3.95	4.01
	F	43 – 37.0%	4.39	4.18	3.82	4.02	3.80	4.04
	TOTAL	119 – 100%	4.28	4.07	3.78	3.97	3.88	4.02
<b>M</b>	R	40 – 51.3%	3.91	3.73	3.48	3.68	3.50	3.69
	F	33 – 42.3%	4.06	3.77	3.50	3.84	3.62	3.78
	TOTAL	78 – 100%	3.96	3.74	3.48	3.76	3.55	3.72
<b>T</b>	R	335 – 44.6%	4.01	3.82	3.58	3.82	3.74	3.81
	F	386 – 51.4%	4.20	3.89	3.65	3.94	3.64	3.89
	TOTAL	751 – 100%	4.10	3.85	3.62	3.89	3.69	3.85

The effects of To (Q6 – Q8 and Tr) obtained higher scores for the Romanian companies, with the exceptions of **M** and Q8 – **E** (table 2). The same findings have been reported in other stages of this project: in foreign companies, employees’ information as to the efficiency of the business and the relationship with customers is rather poor. As regards work satisfaction, employees’ opinions in foreign-owned companies are somewhat better, for **E** and **M** (see table 2).

Table 2. Sample structure according to answer Q6 – Q8 by faculties and sources of capital– Romanian (R) and foreign (F) (codes average)

Faculties	Source of capital	Size of sample (N)	Q6	Q7	Q8	Tr
<b>E</b>	R	222 – 40.1%	3.62	3.69	3.52	3.61
	F	310 – 55.9%	3.57	3.61	3.55	3.57
	TOTAL	554 – 100%	3.58	3.64	3.54	3.58
<b>G</b>	R	73 – 62.9%	3.67	3.90	3.70	3.76
	F	43 – 37.0%	3.63	3.72	3.55	3.63
	TOTAL	119 – 100%	3.63	3.81	3.61	3.69
<b>M</b>	R	40 – 51.3%	3.55	3.58	3.46	3.54
	F	33 – 42.3%	3.92	3.90	3.52	3.80
	TOTAL	78 – 100%	3.70	3.71	3.51	3.65
<b>T</b>	R	335 – 44.6%	3.62	3.73	3.55	3.64
	F	386 – 51.4%	3.60	3.64	3.53	3.59
	TOTAL	751 – 100%	3.60	3.68	3.55	3.61

Table 3. Correlations between „key drivers” and the global result of organizational trust (Tr) by faculties and sources of capital

Tr. Average of Q6-Q8	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
<b>E - R</b> N = 222	0.637**	0.612**	0.600**	0.653**	0.585**
<b>E - F</b> N = 310	0.470**	0.502**	0.408**	0.567**	0.529**
<b>TOTAL</b> N = 554	0.524**	0.545**	0.485**	0.590**	0.535**
<b>G - R</b> N = 73	0.564**	0.682**	0.619**	0.753**	0.649**
<b>G - F</b> N = 43	0.479**	0.462**	0.490**	0.563**	0.384*
<b>TOTAL</b> N = 119	0.577**	0.626**	0.602**	0.700**	0.566**
<b>M - R</b> N = 40	0.636**	0.415**	0.586**	0.629**	0.389**
<b>M - F</b> N = 33	0.712**	0.693**	0.612**	0.600**	0.613**
<b>TOTAL</b> N = 78	0.674**	0.542**	0.596**	0.624**	0.500**
<b>T - R</b> N = 335	0.621**	0.602**	0.602**	0.672**	0.575**
<b>T - F</b> N = 386	0.480**	0.504**	0.427**	0.563**	0.516**
<b>TOTAL</b> N = 751	0.545**	0.555**	0.514**	0.609**	0.535**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.0 level (1-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.00 level (2-tailed)

The correlations between the model indicators are stronger for the Romanian-owned companies, which proves greater consistency of opinion and reliability in completing the questionnaire on the part of these employees (exceptions: **M - Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q8** and **Tr**, see tables 3 and 4).

Table 4. Correlations between the level of organizational trust (To) and the results by faculties and sources of capital

To. Average of Q1-Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Tr
<b>E - R</b> N = 222	0.645**	0.575**	0.693**	0.716**
<b>E - F</b> N = 310	0.469**	0.484**	0.681**	0.563**
<b>TOTAL</b> N = 554	0.533**	0.509**	0.688**	0.616**
<b>G - R</b> N = 73	0.657**	0.548**	0.789**	0.749**

<b>G – F</b>	N = 43	0.331*	0.449**	0.645**	0.550**
<b>TOTAL</b>	N = 119	0.579**	0.557**	0.762**	0.704**
<b>M – R</b>	N = 40	0.625**	0.581**	0.526**	0.615**
<b>M – F</b>	N = 33	0.609**	0.556**	0.732**	0.736**
<b>TOTAL</b>	N = 78	0.633**	0.582**	0.613**	0.671**
<b>T – R</b>	N = 335	0.640**	0.577**	0.688**	0.710**
<b>T – F</b>	N = 386	0.455**	0.483**	0.679**	0.566**
<b>TOTAL</b>	N = 751	0.545**	0.524**	0.688**	0.633**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.0 level (1-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.00 level (2-tailed)

Based on tables 3 and 4 we designed the models of organizational trust for the employing companies of the three groups of respondents, but also for the overall situation, based on the total score of the survey sample (figure 1).

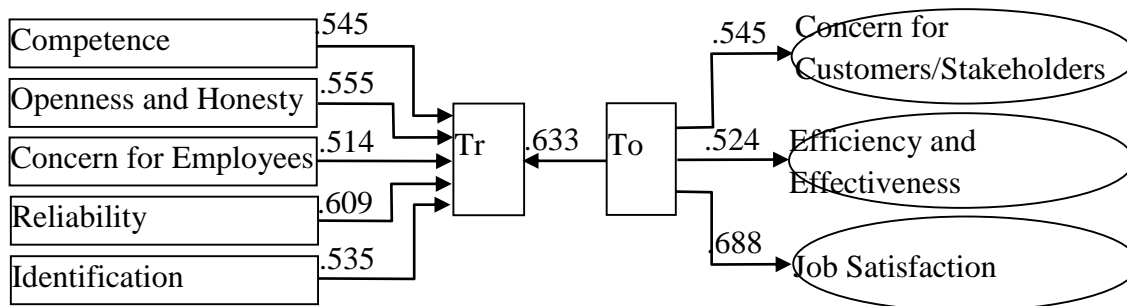


Figure 1. Model of Organizational Trust (To) and the global result (Tr) based on the students' opinions from the sample in the whole (T)

The *general model* (figure 1) of the relationship between organizational trust (To) and Tr (its global result) presents a balanced overview of the surveyed companies and mirrors, in the main, the situation of the companies based in Romania (93.0%), the influence of foreign companies on the sample being of 5.6%. The majority of the companies based in Romania are

from Transylvania (85.6%) and *the conclusions of our study apply exclusively to this area*, but the model bears certain influences from the rest of the country as well (2.2%).

As suggested in the title, we analysed in more detail the findings related to **Q2** (Openness and honesty), in relation to organizational trust (To) and its global effect (Tr) – see table 5.

Tables 3 and 4 highlight the existence of Pearson correlations, of good intensity (0.389 – 0.693) and very good intensity (0.700-0.789), which shows seriousness while filling in the questionnaire, from the respondents, for the entire sample. These correlations prove the receptivity of the subjects and their understanding of the purpose of research.

According to table 5, Q2 correlates well (coefficients ranging from 0.401 to 0.601) and very well (coefficients ranging from 0.601 to 0.803), with two exceptions (Q6 - **G** – F, and Q8 - **M** – R).

Pearson’s correlations are validated with 99% probability, (correlation is significant at the 0.00 level, 2-tailed), with four exceptions: Q5 – **G** – F (table 3), Q6 – **G** – F (table 4), Q7 – **M** – R (table 5), where the correlation is validated with 95% probability, 1-tailed and Q8 – **M** – R (table 5), where the coefficient is very low – 0.290, and the correlation is not validated by the Sig significance threshold.

Table 5. Correlations between the Openness and Honesty (**Q2**), the other “key-drivers”, and the results, by faculties and sources of capital (Romanian and foreign)

Types of companies	Size of sample (N)	Q1	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
<b>E</b> - R	222	0.681**	0.726**	0.728**	0.697**	0.558**	0.499**	0.577**
<b>E</b> - F	310	0.644**	0.646**	0.739**	0.697**	0.430**	0.446**	0.577**
TOTAL	554	0.666**	0.689**	0.733**	0.688**	0.478**	0.460**	0.580**
<b>G</b> – R	73	0.694**	0.797**	0.681**	0.738**	0.579**	0.499**	0.738**
<b>G</b> - F	43	0.688**	0.715**	0.696**	0.594**	0.308*	0.427**	0.502**
TOTAL	119	0.719**	0.758**	0.693**	0.681**	0.519**	0.494**	0.675**
<b>M</b> - R	40	0.601**	0.543**	0.704**	0.654**	0.481**	0.401*	0.290
<b>M</b> - F	33	0.621**	0.743**	0.790**	0.803**	0.614**	0.526**	0.643**



TOTAL	78	0.629**	0.658**	0.739**	0.744**	0.555**	0.469**	0.449**
T - R	335	0.683**	0.726**	0.720**	0.705**	0.549**	0.496**	0.569**
T - F	386	0.651**	0.663**	0.735**	0.699**	0.422**	0.440**	0.571**
TOTAL	751	0.675**	0.698**	0.727**	0.697**	0.487**	0.467**	0.575**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.0 level (1-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.00 level (2-tailed)

Of the correlations shown in table 5, we would like to highlight some interesting facts, in our opinion:

- both Economics and Business students and the Geography of Tourism students obtained higher correlations in Romanian companies rather than foreign ones;
- the exception is Q4 (Reliability) in both cases (with E, we have a slightly better average score for foreign-owned companies, which offer employees more safety and stability than Romanian ones – see table 1);
- the correlations with the four key-drivers of To are much stronger than those with the effects of organizational trust Q6 – Q8 and with Tr (global effect);
- an exception is the value of the Q8 coefficient (G - R) for the correlation with Job satisfaction;
- the ratings of Geography of Tourism subjects prove more commitment and consistency on their part as opposed to E, where the critical approach is stronger (as it also results from tables 1 and 2);
- the situation is completely different with the Management students, where correlations are very good, in particular in the companies with foreign capital, including for the values of the Tr components; the highest correlation is for Q5 (Identification with the organization).

In order to highlight the importance of the strong correlations with Q2 (whose scores are close to 4, therefore it is better rated by respondents – see table 1), we considered the coefficients of some of the statements based on which we calculated the four key drivers (Q1, Q3, Q4 și Q5), in relation to the entire sample (N=751).

Table 6. Correlations between Q2 (Openness and Honesty) and some statements of the other “key-drivers” (Q1, Q3, Q4 and Q5) at the level of whole sample

	Q2. Openness and Honesty
Q1.7. The management is concerned to find the best learning methods for employees	0.521**
Q1.8. Our leaders guide us and help us to improve our performance	0.566**
Q1.9. Our organization focuses on innovation and development	0.490**
Q3.1. Our organization uses transparent performance evaluation systems.	0.419**
Q3.2. The reward for group achievements is fair.	0.517**
Q3.3. The reward for individual achievements is fair.	0.507**
Q3.4. In our organization we listen to and consider others’ opinions.	0.616**
Q3.5. In our organization decisions concerning employees are impartial and fair.	0.608**
Q4.4. In our organization people invest time in building trust relationships	0.549**
Q4.7. In our organization there are available resources for training and development	0.521**
Q4.8. People are rewarded to facilitate the training and development process	0.504**
Q4.9. Our organization encourages people to think ahead	0.595**
Q5.2. Our organization is connected through people’s loyalty and mutual trust	0.622**
Q5.3. In our organization, people treat colleagues with respect	0.541**
Q5.4. Groups are confident about how the organization will react to their suggestions	0.567**
Q5.5. Peoples’ devotion to the organization is very strong	0.533**

N = 751	
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\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.00 level (2-tailed)

As such, the correlation coefficients with **Q2** with the highest significance are presented in the table 6. The good intensity link with these answers leads to:

- an image of organizations where the communication of the management with the employees is well appreciated and the management is preoccupied about solving the problems of the employees in the company (the scores of Q2 have values between 3.73 and 4.18 – table 1);
- but also an image of the management interested in performance, professional development and creativity (Q1.7; Q1.8; Q1.9; Q4.7; Q4.8; Q4.9);
- the general image of the faire and transparent reward system (Q3.1; Q3.2; Q3.3);
- good level of trust of the employees in the organization (Q3.4; Q3.5; Q4.4), the loyalty (Q5.2), the respect (Q5.3), the spirit of collaboration and attachment (Q5.4, Q5.5), through which the employees identify themselves with the company.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Our underlying hypotheses are, in general, *validated*. There are great rating differences between the Economics and Business students and the Management students, although both faculties specialise in Economics, but belong to two different universities. The opinions of the Economics and Business students are more similar to those of the Geography of Tourism subjects, who belong to the same university, although the areas of specialisation vary greatly.

Also, in the surveyed companies there is a very close relationship between Openness and honesty (Q2) and communication for professional development and competency improvement (Q1), Concern for employees (Q3), Reliability (Q4) and Identification with the organization (Q5). All these are facets of *communication management* in companies and lay the foundation for high-level organizational trust.

Table 7. Sample structure according to answer **Q9** and **Q10** by source of companies' capital (Romanian or foreign) (answers' frequency - %)

To enhance the level of <b>To</b> in organisation do you need knowledge and skills, not provided in school?	R N=335	F N=386	TOTAL N=751
<b>Q9</b> - theoretical information / notions related to:			
Q9.1 - labour organisation;	31.24	42.75	37.55
Q9.2 - production organisation;	17.31	24.61	20.77
Q9.3 - the use of resources and work efficiency;	28.96	30.57	29.96
Q9.4 - the relationship with colleagues and employees;	30.75	30.31	30.09
Q9.5 - the relationship / communication with customers;	34.63	36.01	35.15
Q9.6 - negotiations and social dialogue;	36.72	36.27	36.35
Q9.7 - modern computer technologies;	20.00	22.02	21.30
Q9.8 - the study and use of foreign languages.	21.79	27.98	24.77
<b>Q10</b> – practical skills and abilities related to:			
Q10.1 - labour organisation;	29.85	35.75	32.76
Q10.2 - production organisation;	21.19	24.61	22.90
Q10.3 – the use of resources and work efficiency;	28.96	31.87	30.23
Q10.4 - the relationship with colleagues and employees;	30.15	30.31	29.83
Q10.5 - the relationship / communication with customers;	30.75	33.42	32.09
Q10.6 - negotiations and social dialogue;	29.85	30.57	30.36
Q10.7 - modern computer technologies;	21.19	22.54	21.57
Q10.8 - the study and use of foreign languages.	18.51	20.73	19.57

Table 7 provides a general overview of respondents' opinions regarding the areas of improvement in their academic training, to be able to support proactively the increase of organizational trust in their companies.

According to the opinions of surveyed subjects, the main domains where (with this aim) they need theoretical knowledge, practical skills and abilities, which the school don't provide to the adequate extent, are: labour organization, resources' used and activity's efficiency, communication with the colleagues / employees and clients, negotiation and social dialogue.

### ***Extensions of the research***

The conclusions are also corroborated with the findings of previous projects on the same topic, and will be reviewed and used in the attempt to propose the necessary improvements to the existing academic programmes and processes in the surveyed universities.

### ***Limits of the research***

The size of the analysed sample was not established based on an devoted mathematical relation, as there is no clear evidence on the number of students who are employed or own their own business. The questionnaires were processed with the consent of the students and according to their statements that they are employees or owners and they want to answer the questionnaire.

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