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## Identifying the Trust Relationship between Employers and Employees: In the Context of Chinese Organizations

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### Abstract

Confronting with changeable and volatile business environment, organization entails a rapid growth of the trust relation. In the research of intra-organizational trust, it has become an increasingly remarkable trend to focus on the development of active trust, which marks an effective strategy to strengthen the awareness of trust. In this connection, organization and individual should make its ambition to establish and develop trust instead of recognizing trust process as a passive development as a accumulative result of passing time. This paper, from the dual perspectives of individual behavior characteristics and organizational risk control, makes endeavors to vindicate the inter-level model of trust development within an organization through comprehensive exploration and empirical analysis at the individual and organizational levels so as to promote the initiative of both individuals and organizations to enhance organizational trust atmosphere, and press ahead with the active trust development via confirmed measures.

*Keywords: Interpersonal Trust, Trust Establishment, Organization Culture*

### 1.0 Introduction

The largest host of research results implies that interpersonal trust in an organization is of great significance to the organization and can improve the effectiveness of the organization and its members as well (Kramer, 1999). Trust-based and involvement-oriented management is an important source of the competitive advantage of an organization (Lawler, 1992). Organizational behaviorists have generated a lot of research on the factors influencing the development of interpersonal trust in an organization, and have brought about different sparkles on the research of the antecedent variables of trust development. As we can see, trust is featured with many merits, for instance, trust is conducive to save the cost of organization management and supervision (Rousseau et al., 1998); trust makes contributions to stimulate positive attitudes of employees, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002); trust is beneficial to enhance employee performance and behavior, including task performance and organizational citizenship behavior, simultaneously trust also helps to reduce negative work attitudes and behaviors, to cite examples, turnover intention and anti-productive behavior (Colquitt et al., 2007). However, it toils a lot of endeavors to create and maintain trust in an organization (Kramer, 1999; Sitkin and Roth, 1993; Sitkin and Stickel, 1996). As a result, researchers have paid immense attention to trust, especially the factors that influence the development of interpersonal trust in organizations.

As a cultural phenomenon, what are the main factors that influence the development of trust in China? A popularity belief has gone around that there is a relationship-oriented culture in China, in which includes a unique phenomenon: relationship and

humanity (Yang Zhong Fang and Peng Si Qing, 1999). Mayer et al. (1995) held the views that the elements affecting the development of interpersonal trust include ability, benevolence, and integrity. Schindler and Thomas (1993) argued that those factors such as integrity, promise, and openness and ability have impact on interpersonal trust.

Zheng Bo Rang (1999) paid much attention to the trust relationship between superiors and subordinates within the organization, reckoning that subordinates mean loyalty, relationship, and capability to their superiors, while superiors represent benevolence, authority and virtue to subordinates. Are there differences in the main factors affecting the development of trust in different relational situations, such as superior versus subordinate, subordinate to superior, and subordinate to superior? To put it simply, it is of measurable theoretical and practical value to delve into these problems and to further deepen the understanding of trust between superior and subordinate.

It is beneficial to the individual to give full play to the initiative and actively promote the positive development of trust between the superior and the subordinate in the organization. The trust development model put forward by Mayer et al. (1995) proposed that ability, benevolence, and integrity are crucial to trust development. As a complementary theory, Schoorman et al. (2007) suggested that these three elements can be fully leveraged in different situations to advancing the development of trust. However, ability, benevolence and integrity, as internal characteristics of an individual, may present different forms of expression in various organizational contexts, that is, specific external characteristics of individual behavior, such as different forms of trust situation between superior and subordinate mutually.

Emphasis is also paid on that the active development of individual behavior promoting trust is becoming a new focus of trust research (Williams, 2007). There are few researches to explore the specific behavior patterns of individual trust development. From the perspective of individual behavior characteristics, this paper discusses the development model of trust between superior and subordinate in the organization, which is especially valuable to the Chinese society with low level of trust.

On the incarnational side, China is a country of low confidence (Wang FeiXue and Junnan Yamashita, 1999). Amid this social landscape, it is of valuable realistic significance for the organization to take effective measures to avoid the trust risk and improve the level of trust in the organization. That is to say, the research on the development model of interpersonal trust underpinned by the perspective of organizational control will contribute to achieve this goal, and play the initiative of organization and manager in the process of interpersonal trust construction and evolution. Although there have been many studies on trust outcome variables, inconsistencies also can be found in some research findings, such as the relationship between the trust of subordinate on superior and subordinate performance; the relationship between the subordinate trust for superior, and the superior's authorized behavior given the superior's authorization behavior as a kind of trust behavior. "Trust" mentioned here is not equated with trust behavior, which is greatly influenced by situation factors (Schoorman et al., 2007). In this connection, it is necessary to further explore the mechanism of superior trust of subordinate on subordinate performance, as well as the contingency relationship between superior subordinates'

trust and superior delegated behavior to promote the theoretical understanding and practical application of the relationship between trust and outcome variables.

As a result, this paper, with the core theme of the trust between superior and subordinate in an organization, starts with the trust-oriented superior and subordinate behavior characteristics, and comprehensively expedites the inter-level model of trust development between superior and subordinate in an organization by combining with the factors of organizational control system, to have a deep understanding and research on the dependent variables of trust. Such being the case, the relationship between trust and outcome variables is further discussed, including the contingency relationship between superior subordinates' trust and superior authorized behavior, the relationship mechanism between subordinates' superior trust and subordinates' behavior and performance for a greater understanding of the impact of trust results.

## 2.0 Literature Review

The research on the structure of superior behavior and individual belonging behavior based on trust development direction will contribute to enrich and develop the existing organizational trust theory. Trust, embedded in the social and cultural background, divides the vertical trust in the organization into two classifications: superior trust and subordinate trust, separately illustrates the behavior characteristic structure of superior and subordinate, which is more in line with the reality of the emphasis on power distance. Based on this background and perspective, the theory of individual behavior characteristic structure of vertical trust development within an organization will be helpful to provide some enlightenment for further research on trust in China. The inter-level model of individual behavior characteristics and organizational control system for vertical trust development within an organization will present a new perspective for the study of factors affecting trust. To a certain extent, it enriches and develops the influential factors of trust, and the theory of active trust development. From the perspective of hierarchical relationship, it will be of beneficial to study the relationship between trust and outcome variables in terms of contingency model. Based on the analysis of hierarchical relationship, it is more suitable for Chinese culture to pay attention to the characteristics of role orientation and power distance and expand the theory of trust effect research to a certain extent.

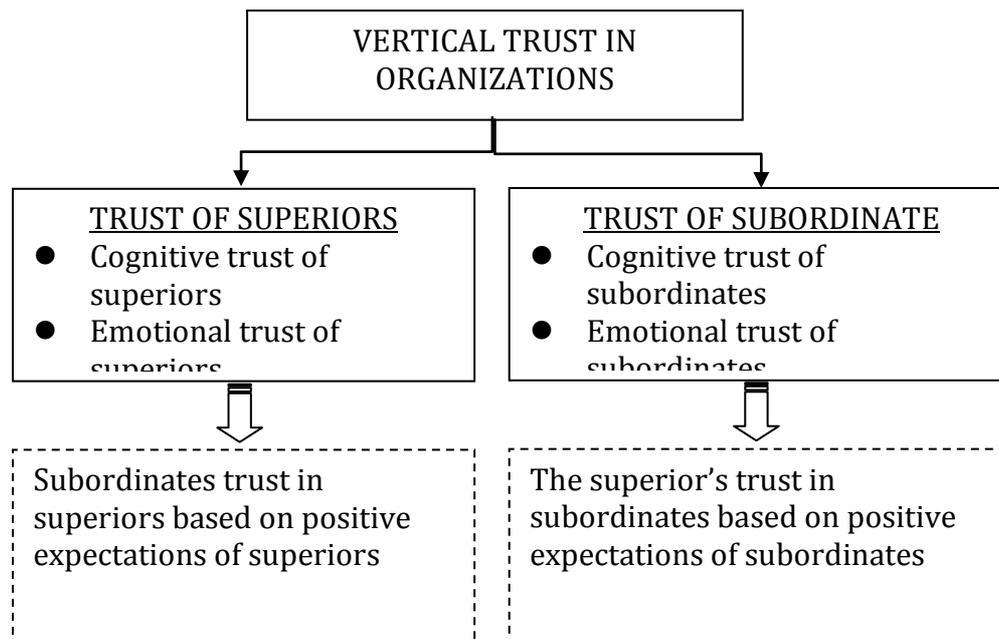
## 2.1 Applied Research

The study of individual behavioral characteristics of vertical trust development in an organization based on hierarchical context will contribute to a deeper understanding of interpersonal trust within an organization and more targeted promotion of understanding and improvement of interpersonal trust within an organization, and lays a good underpinning for the sustainable development of the organization. Furthermore, the trust development with the core of individual behavior characteristics has a strong management significance for guiding the active development of trust between superior and subordinate in the organization.

The impact of organizational control systems (including formal institutional control and social control) on the one hand, on vertical trust development within an organization contributes to an organization's understanding of interpersonal trust generation mechanisms. On the other hand, it will give a direct guidance to the organization to take effective measures to enhance the trust atmosphere within the organization, embark on and promote the development of active trust. The study of the

relationship between trust and outcome variables in different hierarchical relationships will help organizations, and their managers better understand the impact of trust.

In view of the fact that the relationship between trust and positive outcome variables is not simple, the study of contingency influence mechanism can better guide the organization to adopt relevant strategies to promote the implementation of positive impact results of trust.



**Table 2-1 Definitions of trust among different researchers**

Researcher	Definition	Core connotation
Deutsch (1958)	A person's trust in the occurrence of something means that he expects it to happen and acts accordingly, although he knows that if it does not happen as expected, the harm it may bring to him is greater than the good it may bring if it happens as expected.	Expectations, actions
Rotter (1967)	Trust is an individual's general expectation that another person's words, promises and oral or written statements are reliable.	Reliability and generalization
Deutsch (1973)	The belief and expectation of the trusted party about the possibility of the trusted party's consensual behavior.	Expect
Lewis and Weigert (1985)	Trust is the willingness to take risks in action out of the expectation that the parties in the action will act confidently and competently and responsibly.	Faith, expectation
Chen Jiexuan and Gao Chengshu	The trust between employees is a kind of interpersonal trust derived from interpersonal relationship, that is, a kind of trust derived from	Employees, Interpersonal Relations, Human

(1991)	the intimacy and familiarity with a particular individual. It is based on personal connections and acquired achievements. It has both the emotional characteristics of traditional "human feelings" and the rational calculation based on acquired achievements.	Relations and Rational Computing in Enterprises
Wrightsmann (1992)	Trust is a belief that constitutes one part of an individual's personality. It is believed that ordinary people have sincerity, kindness and trust in others.	Personal traits, beliefs
Sabel (1993)	Trust is shared by both parties, and confidence that neither of them will take advantage of the other's weaknesses.	Weakness, Confidence
Hosmer (1995)	Trust is an irrational choice when an individual is faced with an unpredictable event in which the expected loss is greater than the expected benefit.	Expectation and irrational choice
McAllister (1995)	Interpersonal trust is the degree to which a person is confident and willing to act on the other person's words, actions and decisions.	Confidence, Willingness
Mayer, Davis and Scholan (1995)	Trust refers to the degree of willingness of the trusted party to accept the influence of the trusted party's behavior on itself, based on the expectation that the trusted party will perform specific acts that are important to the trusted party.	Expectation, Vulnerability Willingness
Robinson (1996)	Trust is the expectation, hypothesis or belief that an individual will be beneficial, beneficial or at least not harmful to his or her own interests in the future.	Expectations, beliefs
Rousseau et al. (1998)	Trust is a psychological state that accepts the influence of the other party on itself based on the positive expectation of the other party's intention or behavior.	Expectation, vulnerability
Yang Zhongfang, Peng Siqing (1999)	Trust is a sense of assurance that the other party can fulfill the duties and responsibilities entrusted to him in interpersonal communication.	wish
Zhang Jianxin, Zhang Miaoqing, Liang Jue (2000)	Trust is the psychological expectation that one party in interpersonal communication expects the other party to make cooperative behavior under the uncertain condition of "or cooperation or competition".	Interpersonal communication and sense of security
Yang Zhongfang, Peng Siqing(1999)	The trust between employees is a kind of interpersonal trust derived from interpersonal relationship, that is, a kind of trust derived from the intimacy and familiarity with a particular individual. It is based on personal connections and acquired achievements. It has both the emotional characteristics of traditional "human feelings" and the rational calculation based on acquired achievements.	Interpersonal Communication and Psychological Expectation

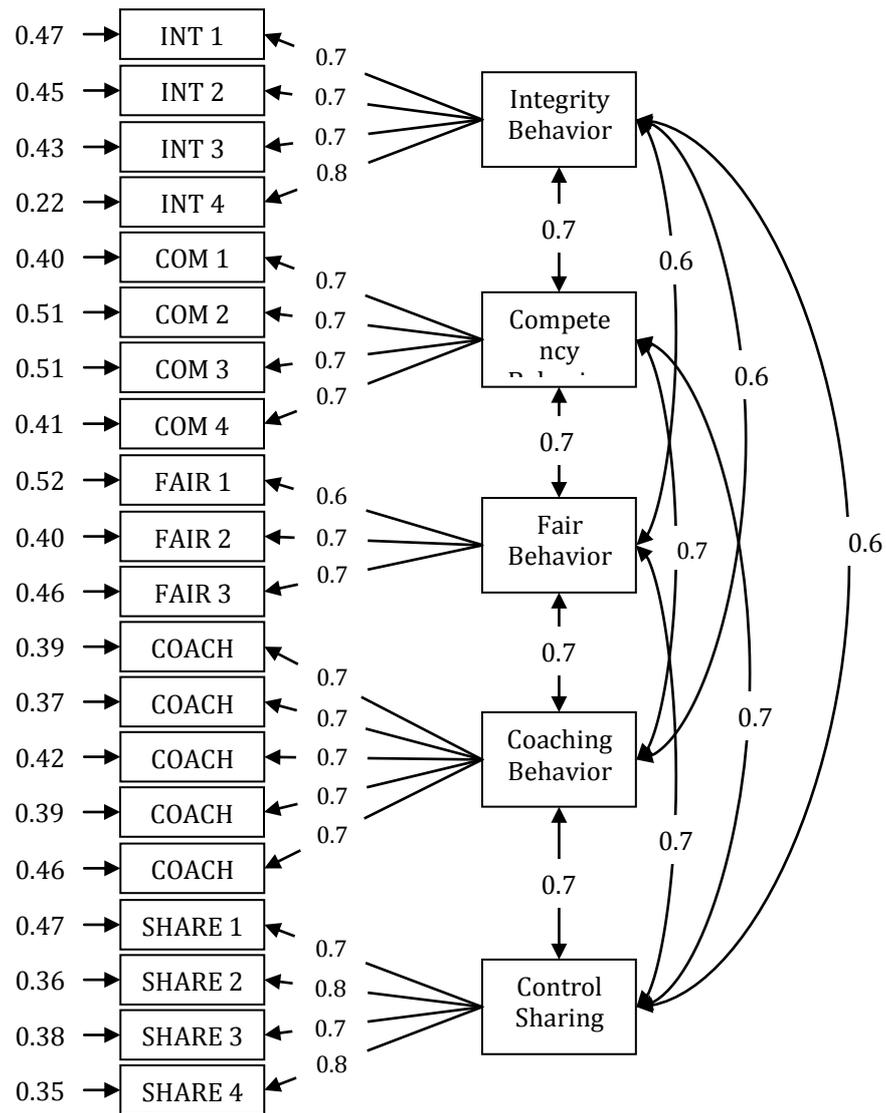
### 3.0 Research Methodology

Trust as a multidisciplinary concept, different researchers have different definitions. To sum it up, it is mainly reflected in the following four aspects: (1) that trust is a behavioral intention (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998; Rousseau et al., 1998); (2) that trust is equivalent to credibility (Butler and Cantrell). (1984); (3) that trust is a personality that remains relatively stable after the initial development of life (Rotter, 1967; Webb and Worchel, 1986); (4) that trust is equivalent to cooperation or risk taking (Kee and Knox), 1970; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Zand, 1972; Colquitt, 2007).

Despite the differences in the concept of trust, there is no universally accepted definition of trust to date, but most trust scholars agree that trust is fundamentally a state of mind (Kramer, 1999). Trust involves vulnerability or risk perception, which stems from the uncertainty of the individual's motivations, intentions, and future behaviors of the actors he relies on. In summary, Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), Rousseau, and Sitkin et al. (1998) define trust in the most common use of organizational research. Their concept of trust includes two main components: Intention to accept vulnerability and Positive expectation. According to the concept of this study and the above analysis of the definition of trust, this study locates the interpersonal trust between individuals in the organization, and regards trust as a state of mind rather than an individual's tendency factor. Interpersonal trust is based on positive expectations of the other party's intentions and behaviors, willing to expose their weaknesses to the other party and not to worry about a mental state of being used (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Among them, risk and interdependence are two essential conditions for trust. Risk is considered to be the most important in the study of trust in psychology, sociology, economics, and management (Coleman, 1990; Rotter, 1967), and risk is considered a possibility of loss (Chiles et al., 1996; Ma Crimmon et al., 1986), risk creates a need for trust that leads to risk taking, and when the expected behavior becomes a reality, risk taking supports the feeling of trust (Coleman, 1990). Trust is not required when the conduct is completely determined and there is no risk (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). When the interests of one party need to depend on the other, there is a need for trust. Risk and interdependence are necessary conditions for trust, and change with the relationship between the two parties, thereby changing the level and form of trust.

Researchers have a lot of classification criteria for trust, mainly the scope of trust objects, the causes of trust, the content of trust, and the level of trust, thus creating different trust categories. But in terms of interpersonal trust within the organization, including rational calculations and emotional contributions, in the end, it can basically be summarized as cognitive trust and emotional trust. In order to ensure the effectiveness of trust research, trust measurement tools are an important issue that cannot be ignored. One important point to note about trust measurement is that trust measurement should be consistent with the trust definition of the research choice.

#### 4.0 Data Analysis



Through open questionnaire, personal interview and group interview, managers can understand the main content of subordinates' behavior characteristics that affect the development of subordinates' trust, construct the framework of subordinates' behavior characteristics oriented by trust development, collect and compile items, and form the initial questionnaire of subordinates' behavior characteristics. The organization toils to realize its vision and strategy without an group of authorized employees.”(Argyris,1998) With many challenges being posed such as the increasing uncertainty of the organization’s business environment, the surging competition in the global economy, the transformation of the production-oriented economy to the service-driven economy, the managers of the organization managers urge the employees to be highly involved in the organization through the behavior of authorization, which can reduce the cost of the organization and at the same time help to improve the speed and efficiency of the organization to deal with the market. This research has generated enlightenment to the organization management practice.

In order to promote the empowerment of managers at all levels of the organization, the organization must establish a trust and inclusive environment to encourage

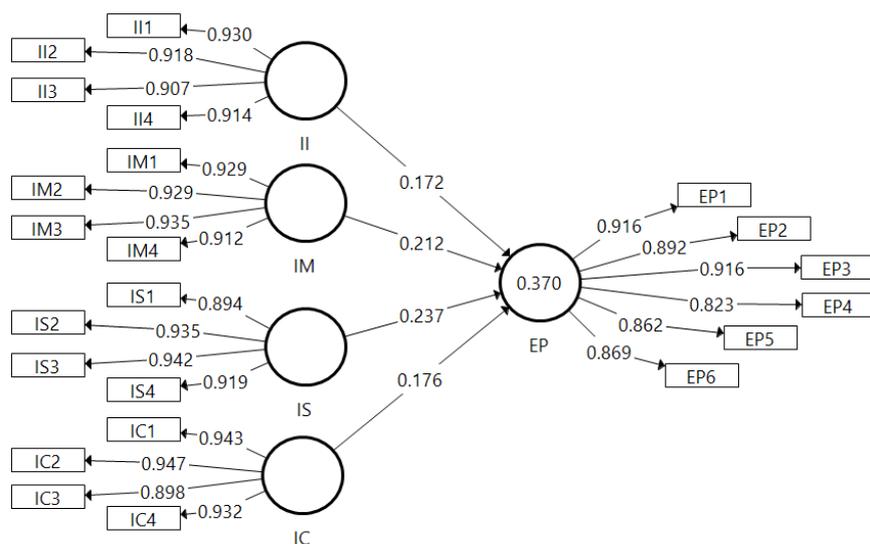
employees to take risks to a certain extent. On the other aspect, efforts should be made to develop manager’s trust in their employees, and it is necessary for employees to improve their managers’ trust in themselves, including competence and responsibility. When the manager is unwilling to delegate, importance should be attached to the construction of the authorization system for the enterprise, who can improve the quality of employees, including ability and responsibility awareness, such as the establishment of performance appraisal, pay attention to the performance of subordinates should assume responsibility after receiving authorization. The establishment of a system to ease the manager's doubts and concerns about delegation, including fear of losing control, their position to be lost. In addition, managers should be given authorization training, and the content of authorization should be properly delegated excluding the forbidden zone. For managers with high power distances, rethinking of power can be implemented, illustrating respect and reverence obtained from subordinates through sharing information and guiding them personal informal power other than formal power resulting from the enhancement of personal attractiveness. Therefore, the recognition of power helps to improve the will to increase the authorized behavior from the intrinsic motivation.

### 3) Relationship between superior trust and subordinate behavior and performance

This is explicated into the effect of managers' cognitive trust on task performance and organizational citizenship behavior. It suggests that human resource management can improve the staff's level of cognitive trust and encourage them to devote themselves to their work. Cognitive trust stems from the employee's assessment of personal characteristics such as managerial competence, integrity and fairness. It is believed that the high level of management ability, handling ability, adherence to principles, fairness and so on will benefit to improve the staff's cognitive trust, improve the staff's psychological sense of security, focus on the work, and also are willing to show more organizational citizenship behavior and better organizational development.

#### Structural Model Assessment

The structural model can be tested by computing beta ( $\beta$ ),  $R^2$ , and the corresponding  $t$ -values via a bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5,000 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).



Key: II: Idealized Influence, IM: Inspirational Motivation, IS: Intellectual Stimulation, IC: Individualized Consideration, EP: Employee Performance.

Figure 2: PLS algorithm results

Figure 2 and Table 4 depict the structural model assessment, showing the result of the hypothesis tests, with 4 out of the 4 hypotheses are supported. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration significantly predict employee performance. Hence, H1, H2, H3 and H4 are accepted with ( $\beta = 0.172, t = 2.694, p < 0.01$ ), ( $\beta = 0.212, t = 3.152, p < 0.001$ ), ( $\beta = 0.237, t = 4.078, p < 0.001$ ), and ( $\beta = 0.176, t = 2.970, p < 0.01$ ) respectively.

The strength of the relationship between exogenous and endogenous constructs are measured by the standardised path coefficients, which in this case show that the direct effects of intellectual stimulation on employee performance is much stronger than the influence of other variables.

Thirty-seven percent of the variance in employee performance is explained by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The values of  $R^2$  have an acceptable level of explanatory power, indicating a substantial model (Cohen, 1988; Chin, 1998).

Table 4: *Structural assessment results*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-value	p-value	Decision	$R^2$
H1	II→EP	0.172	0.064	2.694	0.004	Supported	0.37
H2	IM→EP	0.212	0.067	3.152	0.001	Supported	
H3	IS→EP	0.237	0.058	4.078	0.000	Supported	
H4	IC→EP	0.176	0.059	2.970	0.002	Supported	

Key: II: Idealized Influence, IM: Inspirational Motivation, IS: Intellectual Stimulation, IC: Individualized Consideration, EP: Employee Performance.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The study of the factors affecting the development of interpersonal trust is a focus of many trust researchers. At present, a research trend in this field is to further refine the research and seek an adaptive model of interpersonal trust development in specific situations. The research shows that the cognitive trust to the superior is different from the emotional trust, and the two kinds of trust affect the employee's behavior and performance. To put it profoundly, trust comes from different sources, including the characteristics of personal credibility and the emotional intensity of mutual interaction, bring about different types of trust. Manager trust is divided into cognitive trust and emotional trust, which influence employee's behavior and result through a variety of mechanisms. Superior cognitive trust affects employee's task performance and organizational citizenship behavior through the complete intermediary of attention focus. On the one hand, the superior emotional trust indirectly promotes the task performance and organizational citizenship behavior of employees through emotional commitment; on the other hand, it directly gives a strong boost to the task performance and individual directed citizenship behavior of employees. In particular, employee trust in managers can be obtained from two different sources, and generate a greater positive impact on employees in a coordinated way. Managers, on the one hand, emphasize their own fairness and high-level of management ability through the way of moral superior to complete the goal of identification to their own personality characteristics for subordinates, and enhancement of their own cognitive trust; on the other hand, out of benevolent superior methods such as taking care of subordinates, a good emotional relationship between the two sides can be formulated, and a better emotional trust can be increased to superiors. In this connection, the combination of the two types of trust will have a strong positive impact on employee behavior and performance. Apart from that, superior affective trust has more effect on employee's task performance and organizational citizenship behavior than cognitive trust. The

results of this study suggest that managers should pay more attention to the role of emotional trust, actively strengthen emotional contact and communication with employees, and improve the level of emotional trust of subordinates, which may be more conducive to the development of management work and achieve better results.

Previous studies on the factors affecting the development of interpersonal trust in organizations have focused on general models, such as the power, kindness, and integrity proposed by Mayer et al. (1995). However, the factors influencing the development of interpersonal trust are influenced by the relationship between the two parties (Schoorman et al., 2007). It is an insufficiency of previous researches to explore the factors affecting the development of interpersonal trust based on the perspective of different relationships in organizational context, and thus has important theoretical significance. The meta-analysis by Colquitt et al. (2007) shows that integrity is more relevant to trust than superiors than to colleagues' trust. This may be due to the fact that there are obvious differences in power, and the issues of fairness, consistency, and promised fulfillment are more prominent. The meta-analysis also shows that the correlation between competence and kindness and trust is higher than the correlation between integrity and trust.

However, this conclusion does not distinguish between different trust objects. Schoorman et al. (2007) also believe that the power distance between levels in an organization affects trust. The trust between the superior and the subordinate may be different from the trust at the same level, and the specific influence factors of the development of trust may also be different.

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