

A Qualitative Study of Organizational Trust: Leaders' Perceptions in Organizations in Poland and Russia

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Abstract: Based on the assumption that trust is important to organizations across countries and cultures, this study examined what organizational leaders, in two post-communist countries, think about organizational trust. The researchers conducted nine personal interviews with leaders in organizations in Warsaw, Poland, and St. Petersburg and Moscow, Russia. Using an organizational trust model the researchers had developed earlier to guide the qualitative interviews, constructivist grounded theory was utilized to analyze the results. Leaders in both countries provided descriptions of trust and distrust in their organizations. They emphasized the importance of relationships to trust-building and the impact of culture, history, and change on trust in their organizations.

Keywords: Organizations, trust, distrust, leaders, post-communist countries

1. Introduction

Trust is critical to organizational excellence in the 21st century (Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale & Hackman, 2010). Organizational trust often is linked to improved economic performance and the achievement of organizational goals (Covey & Merrill, 2008). A broad range of studies, conducted in different contexts, cultures, and disciplines, argue that trust is essential for successful cooperation and effectiveness in organizations (Paliszkiewicz, 2011). We know that both non-profit and for-profit organizations experience more success, if they have high trust profiles. Conversely, distrust comes at a high cost (Braun, 1997). "We versus them" behaviors occur, and distrust lowers employees' desires to contribute to organizational goals. Even rewards, such as pay raises or promotions, will not easily restore trust (Tourish, Paulsen & Bordia, 2004).

We also know that trust in organizations is influenced by the organization's own culture and by the dominant culture in which the organization exists (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede's original theory about culture proposed four dimensions along which cultural values, such as trust, can be analyzed: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance (strength of social hierarchy) and masculinity-femininity (task orientation versus person-orientation). A fifth dimension, namely long-term versus short-term orientation, was added in 1991 based on research by Michael Bond and supported by Hofstede (Hofstede Center, n.d.). A more recent model specifically related to organizations and leadership, the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Project (GLOBE), identifies nine cultural dimensions: performance orientation, uncertainty avoidance, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, future orientation,

and power distance (House, Hangest & Javidan, 2004). While not identified as a specific dimension of culture in the Hofstede or GLOBE work, trust in organizations nonetheless has been conceptualized as impacted by the varying dimensions of culture (Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale & Hackman, 2010).

Indeed, recent studies have examined the relationship and impact of culture on organizational trust. For example, one study compared the impact of affect-based trust on enterprising behaviors among coworkers in high power-distance cultures, Turkey and Russia, and low power-distance cultures, the United States and Poland (Costigan, Insinga, Berman, Kranas & Kureshov, 2011). The study's findings indicate that increases in trust result in higher ratings of enterprising behaviors among coworkers in higher power-distance cultures, more so than in lower power-distance cultures. In a study in Lithuania, a post-socialist context and culture, researchers studied the effect of an increased work ethic of employees on the development of organizational trust (Pucetaite & Lamsa, 2008). The use of best practices for "people management" enhanced employees' work ethic and thereby increased trust in the organizations. Bjornskov and Meon (2013) offer a general argument for the importance of organizational trust across cultures. They point to trust as the "missing root" in many cultures. The presence of more trust in any culture increases educational opportunities and improves the quality of legal and bureaucratic institutions, which in turn, affects the culture and spurs economic development.

Clearly, trust is important to organizations across countries and cultures, which suggests we should know yet more about what organizational leaders think about trust. In particular, little is known about what leaders of organizations in countries that have undergone significant political and social change during the emergence of the global economy, post-socialist cultures in particular, think about trust and how it impacts their organizations. Globalization brings with it the potential, if not the reality, for organizational leaders to interact with other leaders whose perceptions of trust may be quite different from their own (Friedman, 2006; Handy, 1995; Shockley-Zalabak, 2002). Their approaches to leadership within their organizations, and externally with organizations in other cultures, may be affected by how they perceive trust.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine perceptions of organizational trust held by leaders in organizations in two post-socialist countries, Poland and Russia. Guided by a model of organizational trust developed by Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, and Cesaria (2000) and extended by Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010), the present study sought to learn how leaders in these two countries and cultures conceptualize trust and its impact on their organizations. Access to organizations in Poland and Russia was not possible at the time the trust model used in this study was developed internationally, thus, the researchers' interest in organizations in these two countries. To accomplish the study's purpose, the researchers conducted personal interviews with leaders in organizations in Warsaw, Poland, St. Petersburg Russia, and Moscow, Russia. Following a review of related readings, the study's method and the results of nine qualitative interviews are presented, along with recommendations to extend this research effort to other regions, countries, and cultures.

2. Literature Review

As background to this study, we now review scholarly writings related to: (1) organizational trust and the trust model used in this study; (2) the general geographical context for this study, including a discussion of research efforts on trust in organizations in Poland and Russia; (3) and, the method used for conducting the interviews and analyzing the study's results.

2.1. Background on Organizational Trust

While there is considerable agreement that trust in organizations is vital to their success, there is less agreement about what trust is. The concept of organizational trust has been approached and defined varyingly, depending on the interests of the scholars and their disciplinary foci (Anheier & Kendall, 2002). Trust studies appear in disciplines such as communication, economics, business and management, philosophy, psychology, social psychology, and sociology (Paliszkiewicz, 2011). Some researchers are interested in interpersonal trust among members of an organization. Other researchers study trust between employees and their leaders or managers within an organization. Still others are interested in the nature of generalized organizational trust, or institutional trust in a particular culture.

Certainly, descriptions of trust are numerous and varied. However, based on our research and professional experiences, the following research-developed definition of trust informed this study. "Organizational trust is the overarching belief that an organization in its communication and behaviors is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable, and worthy of identification with its goals, norms, and values" (Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale & Hackman 2010, p. 12).

This definition synthesizes a trust a model based on five drivers of organizational trust—competence, openness and honesty, concern for employees/stakeholders, reliability, and identification. The model and definition were developed during an investigative project sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators (Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis & Cesaria, 2000). The project, conducted in multiple languages, involved respondents in fifty-three organizations in eight countries on four continents, not including Poland and Russia. The results of the research effort indicated the five identified drivers were strong and stable predictors of organizational trust across cultures, languages, industries, and types and sizes of organizations. The more positive the trust scores for an organization, the more effective the organization was perceived to be and the more satisfied employees were with their jobs. Low trust scores had the opposite effects (Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis & Cesaria, 2000; Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale & Hackman 2010). Figure 1 illustrates the impact of the five drivers of trust on both perceived effectiveness and job satisfaction in organizations. Each of the five drivers is described briefly in Table 1. Based on the diverse cultures, organizational types, countries, and sizes of organizations represented in the initial study, the five drivers of trust were utilized to inform the interviews and analysis in the present study.

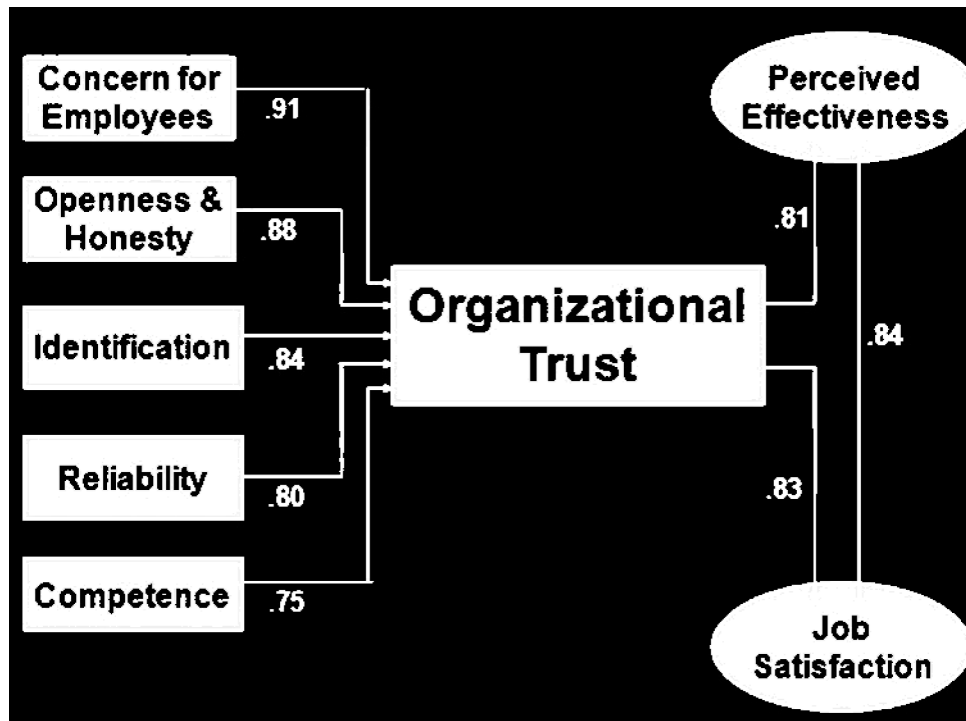


Figure 1. These Five Drivers of Trust Predict Overall Organizational Trust and Perceptions of Organizational Effectiveness and Employees' Perceptions of Job Satisfaction.

Note: The numbers indicate statistical significance ($p < .01$) and the higher the number, the stronger the driver is as a predictor. These statistics are based on over 4000 survey responses in 53 organizations, administered as part of the development and testing of the organizational trust model used in the present study.

SOURCE: Shockley-Zalabak, P., Morreale, S. & Hackman, M. (2010). *Building the high-trust organization* (p. 172).

Table 1. These are Five Drivers of Organizational Trust Derived from an International Study Conducted in Fifty-Three Organizations in Eight Countries on Four Continents

Trust Drivers	Description of the Drivers
Competence	The competence driver represents the ability of an organization through its leaders, strategy, decisions, quality, and capabilities to meet the challenges of its environment. Competence relates to the overall efficiency of the organization as well as to the quality of its products or services.

Openness and Honesty	The openness and honesty driver is reflected in how organizations communicate about problems, engage in constructive disagreements, and provide input into job-related decisions. Openness and honesty are positively evaluated when leaders, managers, and supervisors keep confidences and provide information about job performance and evaluation of performance.
Concern for Employees and Others	The concern driver is about communication and employment policies, processes, and practices. Trust is higher when leaders bring full information to those affected by decisions. Organization is concerned for its employees and others.
Reliability	The reliability driver is about keeping commitments and basic follow-through. It is about leaders doing what they say they are going to do, for example, responding and behaving consistently whether the situation is positive or negative.
Identification	The identification driver is the connection between the organization and all those involved in it, most often based on core values. Identification is high when employees and other stakeholders believe their values are reflected in the values the organization and its leaders exhibit.

Source: Shockley-Zalabak, P., Ellis, K. & Cesaria, R. (2000) *Measuring organizational trust: A diagnostic survey and international indicator*. San Francisco: International Association of Business Communicators.

2.2. Geographical Context for the Study

Given this study's purpose is to better understand organizational trust in Poland and Russia, we now provide background about trust research in the general geographical area, and then in the two countries of particular interest.

In a cross-country comparison of generalized trust, Bjornskov (2007) found that post-communist countries are less trusting than comparable countries. Bjornskov attributes the lower trust, in part, to disruptions caused by the dismantling of important institutions, organizations, and other parts of society. Relatedly, the trust decline in post-Communist countries in the 1990s is also explained based on the fact that Communism, as a political system, may have already destroyed generalized trust (Paldam & Svendsen, 2001).

Bjornskov's notion about low trust in post-communist countries is reinforced in a study about change and social trust by Growiec and Growiec (2013). These two researchers point to what they describe as a "low-trust trap" in Central and Eastern European countries. This vicious cycle results from "trusting only whom you know, and knowing only whom you trust." In this cyclical situation, "bridging social capital" (social ties with dissimilar others) decreases and

“bonding social capital” (social ties with similar others”) increases (Putnam, 2000).

Kubbe (2013) provides a similar explanation of the low levels of institutional trust in Central and Eastern European countries that still exist 20 years after the collapse of Communism. Put simply, in the post-Communist countries, a lack of interpersonal trust is omnipresent; that lack of interpersonal trust encourages perceptions of political corruption, and those perceptions encourage distrust of political institutions. Kubbe states that governments and other institutions and organizations can gain public confidence only when and if they are deemed trustworthy.

2.2.1. Trust Studies in Poland and Russia

Given the foregoing observations about trust in post-communist countries, the question then emerges: What about trust in today’s organizations in Poland and Russia? Studies in these two countries tend to mirror the findings of the studies about interpersonal and institutional trust in the general region. In a study of the development of interpersonal/inter-organizational trust in east-west enterprises in Russia, Ayios (2003) found that westerners need to better understand and manage the process of building trust in Russia. Westerners need to realize that the long-term, personal trust that characterizes family relationships and friendships in Russia is preferred for trust building, rather than formal contacts and contracts. A similar study examined the effects of dyadic ties and interpersonal trust on referrals and investment decisions of venture capitalists in Russia and in China (Batjargal, 2007). In Russia, interpersonal trust had a positive impact on investors’ decisions, while the same impact was not observed in China.

In addition to studies pointing to the importance of interpersonal communication and trust, other researchers have examined trust in Russian institutions. According to Rock and Solodkov (2001), Russia’s transition in the 1990s to a decentralized market economy resulted in the failure to create a sound monetary system and the loss of citizen trust in almost all financial institutions. On a somewhat brighter note, while acknowledging that levels of institutional trust in Russia are among the lowest in the world, another researcher still points to three institutions that are more trusted than distrusted in Russia – the church, hospitals, and the president (Stickley et al., 2009).

Several other studies provide counsel about how to build and maintain organizational trust in these countries. Barton and Barton (2011) state that for Russian organizations to compete successfully, appropriate forms of leadership are necessary, and trust is key to such leadership. In order for leaders to empower their managers to achieve organizational goals, the managers must first trust their leaders. In another study of managers in Polish companies, Paliszkiewicz (2011), found that the culture, working atmosphere, and relationships were characterized by a high level of trust. Accordingly, Paliszkiewicz used the study’s results to provide three recommendations for promoting interpersonal trust in Polish organizations: create a culture in which relationships are important and show care and concern for people’s needs; use normative control rather than bureaucratic control; and, socialize newcomers to understand the values and principles of the organization.

This scholarship on trust in organizations in Poland and Russia provides useful insights. Interpersonal trust remains highly important; however, trust in most institutions is limited and often problematic. These findings provide rationale for the present study’s investigation of

leaders' perceptions of trust in their organizations. Theories that inform the methods for the research are now discussed.

2.3. Theoretical Background for the Study's Method and Procedure

One of the more popular methods in qualitative communication research is the *qualitative interview* (Reinard, 2008). Using this unstructured interview method, the aim is to discuss the topic of interest in depth in order to generate rich responses from interviewees to be used later for interpretive analysis by coders. The interviews may be informed by a set of research questions, as in this study, but the interviewer interacts with the interviewees by asking for more details, examples, and clarifications. The interviewer does not guide the interviewees to any type of response on particular variables. Rather, the interview often resembles a conversation between friends, and the questions asked of the interviewee are phrased to fit with the flow of the interview. In the present study, the researchers determined that the most useful method for probing leaders' perceptions of organizational trust would be qualitative interviewing, the guiding questions for which are described in the Method section.

The procedure used to analyze the results of the interviews in this study was based on *Constructivist Grounded Theory*, an analytical method in which trained coders examine the results of interviews or focus groups (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constructivist Grounded Theory assumes that findings or results are "constructed" by the researchers, after the fact, as they analyze their interactions with the interviewees (Charmaz, 2008). Experts (e.g., trained coders) examine the raw data, interpret and organize it thematically, and report their impressions in a suitable form to serve the needs of the researcher. We describe the application of this procedure further in the Method section. Using qualitative interviews for gaining greater understanding of leaders' perceptions of organizational trust and Constructivist Grounded Theory to analyze the interviews, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do leaders of organizations in Poland describe organizational trust and how it impacts their particular organizations?
2. How do leaders of organizations in Russia describe organizational trust and how it impacts their particular organizations?
3. Do perceptions of organizational trust held by organizational leaders in Poland reflect any or all of the five drivers of organizational trust evidenced in the previously described model?
4. Do perceptions of organizational trust held by organizational leaders in Russia reflect any or all of the five drivers of organizational trust evidenced in the previously described model?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

As previously noted, the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of trust held by

leaders in organizations in Poland and Russia, using, as background, a model of organizational trust developed by Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis and Cesaria (2000) and expanded by Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale and Hackman (2010). The model's five drivers of organizational trust informed the individual interviews: competence, openness and honesty, concern for employees and others, reliability, and identification, but the interviews focused on research questions one and two (above). Questions three and four were answered through determining whether the interview data evidenced any or all of the model's drivers. The model did not directly shape or influence the nature or content of the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio recorded for later analysis by two trained coders.

3.2. Interviewees

Nine leaders from organizations in Warsaw, Poland (4), St. Petersburg, Russia (2), and Moscow, Russia (3), participated in this study. Of the nine participants, four were female and five were male. The leadership positions attained by the participants represent differing levels of management, as well as different professional sectors in Poland and Russia. This pool of participants allowed the researchers a cross-section of differing positions and organizational types across Poland and Russia. The official titles of the leaders were financial and tax consultant, CEOs and founders of communications and software companies, human relations director, insurance executive, manufacturing executive, software engineer, and vice president for consulting and training. Participants had been in the workforce from twenty to more than forty years. These individuals represented a particular generation with a particular set of experiences in the two countries. The organizational sectors included companies in information technology, insurance, finance, consulting, and telecommunications. The participants were pre-selected by two colleagues of the researchers, one who lives in Poland and one in Russia, and both of whom have worked on organizational communication studies in the past.

3.3. The Interview Process

Prior to the interviews, all interviewees were assured of complete anonymity. Confidentiality is particularly important in this study, as cultural and societal norms could have resulted in concern about disclosing information to outsiders. They were also provided a chapter on organizational trust from a book authored by the researchers that was intended to establish the credibility of the researchers on the topic. None of the interviewees read the chapter prior to the interviews, a point that is explored later in the Discussion of Results. Each interviewee received an informed consent form, approved by the institutional review board at the researchers' academic institution and translated into Polish or Russian. The purpose of the informed consent form, as an institutional requirement, is to inform and advise the interviewees of their rights as participants in the study and the risks and benefits of their participation. Translators were present at each interview to ensure that all questions were clear to the interviewee; however, most of the participants were conversant in English and the interviews proceeded accordingly. After initial introductions, the interviewers asked for permission to audiotape the interview, which was granted in each case. The questions that informed the interview process are outlined

in Table 2. During the interviews, the interviewer did not specifically identify the five drivers of organizational trust, articulated in the researchers' model. Rather the flow of the interview was guided by the interviewees' comments. Each interview concluded with the presentation of a small gift as a token of appreciation for participation.

Table 2. These Seven Questions Guided the Interview Process for Leaders in Poland and Russia

Initial Instruction: Please think about the organization in which you are now a leader or manager and respond to the following questions.

1. How important do you think trust is to your organization?
2. Describe how you think about trust.
3. What influences trust in your organization? Give examples.
4. Describe how you see trust working in your organization.
5. What should we know about trust in your organization?
6. What should we know about trust in most organizations in Poland or Russia?
7. What are we not talking about that is important?

3.4. Analysis and Coding of the Interviews

After the interviews were concluded, transcriptions of each interview were imported into NVivo 10 (2012), a qualitative data analysis program that allows researchers to identify themes and code the comments and answers contained in each interview. Coding is a systematic approach for categorizing each of the comments individually, assigning it to a specific theme or code. In order to avoid biases in the analysis of the interviews, two graduate students, one male and one female, were used as coders and were trained by the researchers and provided conceptual background on the trust model that guided the interviews.

First, each of the students coded the nine interviews separately to identify general themes in the data. Then, they met and discussed the commonalities and differences in the results of their individual coding processes. Next, the students collaborated with the researchers to create a codebook containing a set of specific codes or themes for a second round of coding. Each coder then separately coded all of the comments in all nine interviews. At that point, Cohen's *kappa* (1960) was used to calculate inter-coder reliability. The kappa statistic (or kappa coefficient) is the most commonly used statistic for this purpose. A kappa of "1" indicates perfect agreement, whereas a kappa of "0" indicates agreement equivalent to chance. The two coders achieved substantial agreement on each of the codes in the codebook. The average kappa for the ten codes in the codebook was 0.96, with a lowest agreement of 0.92, and highest agreement of "1."

The results of the second coding and categorization processes were then examined to confirm the presence or absence of the five drivers of trust. In addition to the drivers, other

relevant themes emerged that are included in the following overview of the results, as they relate to the study's research questions.

4. Overview of the Results

First, we answer Research Questions One and Two by outlining the nine Polish and Russian leaders' descriptions of trust and its impact in their organizations. Then, we address Research Questions Three and Four by examining the leaders' perceptions of the five drivers of trust identified in our previous research and utilized in our overall definitional construct of trust. It should be noted that the interviewer did not specifically list or inquire about each of the drivers; rather, the interviewees voluntarily introduced examples or concerns that appeared to be related to the five drivers. In the general descriptions of trust and the descriptions of the five drivers, we provide overarching impressions or themes, illustrated by verbatim linguistic exemplars from the interviews.

4.1. Research Questions One and Two: Trust Descriptions

Leaders in both countries provided similar descriptions of trust and its impact in their organizations. Organization-wide trust was described as lacking in all types of institutions, including government and both profit and non-profit sectors. All nine leaders considered trust important for their individual organizations. Most described distrust at the organization-wide level and interpersonal trust as the most important dimension of trust in organizational life. Trust was frequently described as related to tangible results, such as product or service quality, and it was verified based on interpersonal and individual experiences. While trust was considered important, distrust was described as part of the history and culture of both countries. Leaders in both countries described generational differences between individuals who began work at the beginning of the more entrepreneurial post-communist era (described as 20 to 25 years ago) and younger workers. Older workers were depicted as more dedicated to organizational success than younger workers who were described as more concerned with self, salaries, and benefits. Distrust between generations was discussed as prevalent in the contemporary workplace with that perception most pronounced for the Polish leaders who were interviewed. Leaders interviewed in both countries expressed awareness that innovation, trust, and empowerment were related.

4.1.1. General Descriptions of Trust in Polish Organizations

The Polish leaders in this study described trust as important, and as one executive noted, "Trust is the foundation of our activity. They (customers) need to trust us that there is really something that we can do to help in their business. The average time of our cooperation between our clients and our company is ten to 20 years." While acknowledging the importance of trust in a specific company, the Polish leaders described general distrust in corporations and groups. One head of a large technology company explained, "Polish people don't believe in corporate trust or group trust. Culturally, in Poland, if you trust, you had better trust yourself. I know

someone; I can trust you because we have been through a difficult time. But the corporate or group trust is something that we do not naturally have.” Another financial executive suggested, “I don’t think people trust the leaders. They do not trust the managers. The history of Poland is very difficult, the war caused it. They (Polish people) do not trust each other, they do not trust organizations, they do not trust the government.” Throughout the interviews, the Polish leaders we interviewed described complex paradoxes where trust was important, difficult, based on verifiable experiences, and not easily attained due to history and culture. Trust was more individual than organizational, although trust in organizations, translated as product quality and service, was deemed critical for retaining clients and for business in general.

4.1.2. General Descriptions of Trust in Russian Organizations

The Russian leaders in this study also characterized trust as important and based on relationships, not on institutions or institutional messages. As in Poland, trust was described as more individual and related to history, dating back to pre-Russian revolution days. A president of a start-up technology firm stated, “As far as I am concerned, trust is confidence in a certain person—knowing how he or she will behave under certain circumstances.” Another executive with a technology company suggested, “When we talk about trust, I want to emphasize that it is not in the marketing and the advertising that trust is made, but word of mouth and personal recommendations.” One of the first communications entrepreneurs in Russia put trust in the context of history, “Traditionally in Russia, even before the revolution, I would say trust is in relationships. Relations mean a lot. Like you can make the deal just by shaking hands, the way it was traditional in history for merchants in Russia.” Another CEO described trust as internal to the organization, “As CEO, I am not involved in organizational trust, because my mandate is to work with the outer world and someone else must work with the internal workings of the company and deal with trust.”

4.1.3. Trust Descriptions and Generational Differences

Both the Polish and Russian leaders expressed distrust of new workers, based on their perceptions that new workers lacked an appreciation of what was required to build organizations and what would be required for the future. Descriptions of generational differences reflected the leaders’ perceptions of younger workers as well as their experiences in the post-communist era. The interviewees in this study all had been in the work force a minimum of 20 years with four having worked more than 40 years. No questions were asked specifically about generational differences. Rather, leader comments emerged, when questions about trust descriptions and the importance of trust were discussed. Seven of the nine respondents provided examples of trust issues between older and younger workers.

One Polish president of a technology company suggested, “And those guys who worked like hell for 20 years and had to earn their CEO or CFO positions have real mental problems to understand that you need to care for people. They say, ‘No one took care of me. I had to take my risks’.” Another long-time Polish consultant contextualized the change, “Twenty years ago when the Communist times were over, entrepreneurship was something—so people could

do what they liked. You just had to work hard, be pretty smart to navigate through a vague environment, and you made a career. You moved quickly. It is less and less possible as we have matured.” A Polish technology executive described the generational divide in terms of history and perceptions, “In Communist times, we had the saying, you lie on the bed and do nothing, you had your pay, and you paid bills every month. So you could do nothing and you got paid, the social care was very big. With the new times you work like hell, you get some money over time, you need to earn it through your work commitment, engagement. People who started right after the Communist time think the younger people do not understand what it takes.” Some of the Russian leaders expressed concerns about the status-seeking attitudes of younger workers. One communications professional explained, “The emphasis now is on benefits packages and status. Appearances are very important to new workers.” This generational divide also was demonstrated by this comment by the president of a Russian communications company, “Seventy percent of the young people I interview cannot be trusted to do what is right.”

4.1.4. Trust Descriptions and Culture and History

As with the emergence of discussions of generational differences, no specific questions were asked about trust as it relates to culture and history. However, the literature described earlier suggests that both Poland and Russia are low trust cultures, based in part on their history. Relationships among history, culture, and trust did emerge during the interviews. Both the Polish and Russian leaders in this study related trust to culture and history, while suggesting that emerging global involvement was bringing changes in perceptions of trust. Tables 3 and 4 contain verbatim examples of leaders’ statements about the impact of culture and history on trust in Poland (Table 3) and in Russia (Table 4).

Table 3. Leaders’ Perceptions of Culture and History’s Impact on Trust in Poland

“Trust is a very interesting issue--important, even after the Communist time, we don’t have trust in each other. We don’t trust our government, we don’t trust politicians, and we don’t trust authorities as much as other countries do.” (Technology executive)

“The authorities like to control us, and they have power and they like to know everything.” (Tax executive)

“So historically, Poland for hundreds of years, did not have its identity because it was taken over, partially by Germans, Russians, Austrians. We’ve been taken over several times.... we had to fight for independence. And it created certain kinds of behaviors or, let’s say, cultural behaviors within us. Words, you can say all of the beautiful words and we’ve been hearing those beautiful words for ages. The Communist times as well. But the reality was very different. So, experienced the schizophrenia of the word is beautiful, but we don’t have money to buy bread and there is nothing in the shop nearby. ” (Human relations executive)

“We are hierarchical. It is difficult to crack the structure. We are very much judgmental and everybody has an opinion about anything. Disagreement is really part of us. It is embedded in our language. We state from the negative, we would say something is not negative. We

don't recognize it unless we are exposed to other cultures that are different in the way they perceive the world. Global organizations are bringing about some change." (Insurance executive)

"I am thinking about the context of trust in a society, which suffers from a lack of trust in institutions, media, government, and companies. But it is also beyond Poland where this distrust occurs." (Consultant)

"Trust is something we need to work on. It is going to be years to make a change, travel helps. It makes a huge impact on lives to see that people can be trusted." (Communications executive)

Table 4. Leaders' Perceptions of Culture and History's Impact on Trust in Russia

"Trust is very important, because it is related to truth or support for the homeland. Support for the homeland has not always been truth." (CEO of communications company)

"When I interview young people, I use a variety of situations, and I ask them what they would do. Most support the status quo and I want them to support doing what is right. But we have not been expected to do that over history." (Communications executive)

"Many are afraid to trust the use of new technologies because — from our history — we are afraid of being recorded, like spying on them. Communicating face-to-face is much better especially for people outside of Moscow, the big city." (CEO of technology company)

"Maybe it is a distinct characteristic of the Russian mentality, but we do not trust what is written." (Technology executive)

"In our culture, we believe for Western people, the surface is open but below is closed. For both U.S. and U.K. people, there is a lot of general 'openness' and much real personal discussion. The opposite is true in Russia. We will stay together the whole night drinking, discussing things, and being very personal, really open. Leaving early is not polite....If you look out on the street, you would not see many smiles on the faces. They say that Americans are very surface—being kind to people in their roles, but then when you try to start to deal with relationships and there is something personal, they become very closed." (Telecommunications executive)

4.2. Research Questions Three and Four: Perceptions of Five Drivers of Trust

All five drivers from the model were reflected in the interviews with both Polish and Russian leaders, although not with equal relevance. As described earlier, all nine interviewees had been provided a copy of a book chapter describing the five drivers of trust, prior to the interviews. None of the interviewees had read the chapter, although several indicated at the end of the interviews that they now wished to do so. Interview questions did not specifically address the five drivers described in Table 2. Nevertheless, leaders in both Poland and Russia provided examples of each of the five drivers when talking about how trust was "thought about" or conceptualized and what influenced trust in their organizations.

The competence driver was clearly articulated by the leaders in both countries. Competence was depicted as results-driven and verifiable. Communication competence was specifically identified by one interviewee. Openness and honesty were valued as contributors to positive organizational results. Problems with openness and honesty were related to government regulations, the lack of trained managers capable of fostering a supportive environment for openness and honesty, and the danger for individuals of voicing positions that might be negatively perceived. Concern for employees/stakeholders was not as frequently or directly mentioned by comparison to competence and openness and honesty. Concern for employees was articulated in terms of establishing interpersonal relationships and offering good compensation and benefits plans to attract and retain employees. Concern for stakeholders was described as excellence in service and products to both attract and retain clients or customers. Finally, both reliability and identification examples emerged in the interviews, but with less overall exemplars than the other drivers. Discussions of reliability and trust were the most similar to previous intercultural research, as the interviewed leaders related predictable behaviors and continuous quality service and products to trust building. Identification was described as important in long-term relationships and in individuals thinking about their personal opportunities in their organizations.

4.2.1. Trust and Competence

In the interviews in both Poland and Russia, competence was described as tangible and verifiable results based on known relationships. The Polish leaders described competence as the quality of products contributing to customer loyalty, results produced by employees, survival in the marketplace over years, and the ability to make needed change. One Polish CEO, in describing relationships among trust, quality, employee results, and customer support declared, "Trust is at the center of all of this." A Polish entrepreneur suggested, "The reputation of a company reflects its competence and how it is trusted." Another Polish executive concluded, "To be trusted and truly competent, we have to deliver excellence to our customers."

The Russian leaders tended to focus on market reputation and relationships as keys to trust and competence. Returning to the importance of known relationships, a Russian telecommunications executive claimed, "Trust in Russia works best by word-of-mouth recommendation." A Russian communications executive added, "First of all, talking about trust, I want to emphasize again that it is not in the marketing and the advertising that trust is made, but word-of-mouth and personal recommendations." A Russian human relations executive related training and communication to trust when she offered, "Trust is very important. The more the person is good, the better the person is trained professionally, the more trust he has. Although, there are people who do not know very much, but they can communicate perfectly. Well, trust appears here as well because they know how to communicate." A Russian consultant, in describing caring relationships and quality work offered, "If I work for the bureaucracy (government or large organizations), I see that no one really cares about quality. I care if the ones around me care and do quality work."

4.2.2. Trust and Openness and Honesty

Openness and honesty emerged in diverse examples from the interviews. One Polish technology executive charged with overseeing a virtual work environment reported, “I think we are different from other companies, we trust our employees and they work virtually. I know they are honest because the work gets done.” A Polish technology leader offered another perspective, “Openness and honesty are tough for us, because we are a stock exchange company and the stock exchange authorities don’t like to communicate too openly with companies. They don’t like employees to know something the market does not know.” Several Polish leaders provided examples of giving employees information about their performance and managers presenting year-end performance results in face-to-face meetings. One human relations executive described such meetings in this way, “We call them dialogue meetings, but there is a mix of what we want to communicate and what they want to bring to us—it is usually people-related.” An insurance executive described the relationship between open and honest communication and trust during difficult times, “There have been a lot of layoffs. Openness and honesty are huge problems during layoffs. You have to communicate that this is not what we want to do, but this is the economic crisis and we want to prepare and we want to be honest with you. This lack of communication is the key reason why people don’t trust managers.”

The Russian leaders tended to think about honesty as a basis for trust. A technology executive said, “To be a good person in an organization, first, and foremost, you have to be honest, then professional.” A Russian technology entrepreneur described the potential for negative results from openness and honesty, “Some believe that too much openness might drive something negative. In Russia, some people do not talk up because they are afraid that what they say might be used against them. And it is true that that happens.”

4.2.3. Trust and Concern for Employees and Stakeholders

Five descriptions of concern for employees and stakeholders were evident in the nine interviews: four in Poland and one in Russia. In Poland, two executives explained that their organizations support trust through positive treatment of workers and promoting good work/life balance. Employee benefits and time for family were mentioned as important to retaining talented employees. Regarding concern for stakeholders and employees, a Polish software executive suggested, “We will do anything to express concern for our customers—customers are the most important asset we have. We have to earn trust of our customers and trust of our employees who, in my opinion, have to believe that the direction we have in business is the right direction. The relationship is more important than the competence or the quality of the product.” On a less positive note, a Polish human relations executive contended, “I think we have been too generous (referring to pay and benefits for employees) and with tough times coming squeezing will be really painful.”

A Russian CEO, who talked about concern for employees, described trust building as inclusion of multiple voices in decision making and problem solving. He went on to describe, “Any problem, including a technical one, is solved in the following way. I meet with the partners and with those who are responsible in this area, and I trust their opinions; listen to

their opinions; and trust their opinions. I try to find a useful grain in everything and then come to a decision for the solution.”

4.2.4. Trust and Reliability

The Polish and Russian leaders described reliability as important for relationships with customers, employees, and other leaders. The Polish tax executive explained, “I think trust is an absolutely crucial element of every relationship between the company and customer, the company and employees, managers and employees, and conversely employees to managers. Our reputation is based on being reliable in all of our relationships.” Two Polish leaders went on to describe reliability and trust as ongoing processes because customers expect quality services all of the time.

In general, the Russian executives suggested trust was built on confidence in knowing how individuals will behave in all types of circumstances. The Russian communications CEO, in discussing his trust in the people who work for him (about 70 employees), told a story of the history of reliable relationships, “We have stayed together through two crises in Russia and the global crisis. Even though some have left, we kept the key skills and knowledge within the company and transferred them from one worker to the next. The core team stayed and that is the most important thing that helped us. Most of the leading people here in this company, they are from the very beginning of the company. And the new ones, who were invited to work here, they were trained by the ones who started from the very beginning and who know everything precisely.”

4.2.5. Trust and Identification

Six identification and trust examples were provided in the interviews, five in Poland and one from Russia. The examples were diverse focusing on relationships and trusting in the organizations’ present and future goals. A Polish human relations executive described the education necessary for employees to understand vision, corporate values, and employee relationships to the company. She further suggested, “Reliability and identification and trust come with time. We had to make sure everyone understood that the sum of all was greater than the parts.” A Polish entrepreneur stressed the importance of his managers believing in the direction of the company in order to trust the future. He concluded, “I think our managers have strong identification with this company.” A Polish telecommunications executive contended, “If people do not trust the leaders, they will not identify with their managers or the organization. If you have no trust, you do not know what is going to happen the next day.” A Polish software executive, in referencing overall distrust in Poland and generational differences, offered, “There is a huge population that does not want to identify with a company but only with themselves and their opportunities.” In Russia, the technology CEO talked about trust and identification with his business partners, “We identify with each other—we met in college and have worked together ever since. We have been faithful partners.”

5. Discussion of Results

The comments of the leaders interviewed in Poland and Russia generally supported the relevance of prior trust work reported earlier in the literature review about trust in their regions of the world. This discussion of the present study's results will utilize prior research findings to more deeply probe the significance of the nine interviews. The trust model that served as a guide for this study was supported although with nuances of distrust not apparent in earlier work. Trust was described as important for organizations by all interviewees. However, the emphasis on its importance centered more on interpersonal relationships and relationships with customers/clients/stakeholders rather than organization-wide and institutional trust, identified as most important in our earlier work.

The emphasis on quality of relationships in the interviews is consistent with other work on trust in post-communist countries (Growiec & Growiec, 2013). These previous findings and findings in this study consider interpersonal trust as resulting from known relationships and verifiable experiences overtime. Relatedly, it is interesting to note that the CEOs in this study all formed or staffed their companies with individuals they either knew in their home communities or met during their university days. The leaders' relationships with customers/clients/stakeholders also emphasized interpersonal connections. Although traditional advertising and marketing occurred, customers/clients/stakeholders often were secured through networks of recommendations based on "word-of-mouth" relationships. In turn, these relationships were maintained through excellence in service and product quality that then promoted trust in the organizations.

While the emphasis on quality relationships, services, and products is not unique to Poland and Russia, the influence of distrust on individuals and organizations, as a function of the culture and history of such post-Communist countries, is an important insight (Paldam & Svendsen, 2001). In both Poland and Russia, all interviewees referenced a history and culture in which institutions of all types were not trusted. The norm of not trusting was described as appropriate, based again on verifiable experiences from the past. But although distrust was considered a norm in both Poland and Russia, the differing histories of the countries produced nuanced variances in what constituted distrust. For example, in Poland, three interviewees were pleased their companies had no international relationships or customers, who perhaps could not be trusted. Another Polish interviewee described the numerous invasions his country had suffered and the resulting lack of trust in relationships beyond the Polish borders including distrust of neighboring Russia. In Russia, even the use of advanced communications technologies in organizations was characterized by distrust and described as suspect based on prior government surveillance. One Russian interviewee claimed there is still widespread surveillance of communications. It is noteworthy that none of the interviewees had ever traveled for business or pleasure to the other country despite their borders being immediately adjacent, perhaps another indicator of distrust.

Poland and Russia both have undergone significant structural, political, social, and economic changes in the last twenty-five years (Bjornskov, 2007). The leaders in both countries in this study justified the norm of distrust based on the impossibility of extending trust beyond the known and verifiable. All nine of the leaders were in the workforce when the most recent

historic changes occurred, and they all referenced history, culture, and change as the basis of their perceptions of trust. To our thinking, one of the most important contributions of this study is that trust comes from this connecting of trust to history, culture, and significant change. While most would acknowledge that trust and distrust are not polar opposites, the Polish and Russian leaders in this study provide a rich description of distrust (a cultural norm), based on the unknown (change) and verifiable experiences (history). By contrast to this distrust, they base their ability to trust on verifiable experiences in which they are personally involved, including relationships and product or service quality. History, culture, and change, of course, occur in all parts of the world. Nevertheless, what was striking about these interviews was the awareness of the leaders of the critical relationships among history, culture, and change as significant influences on organizational processes and, in particular, organizational trust. Undoubtedly, history, culture, and change may account for the general distrust of newer workers expressed by the leaders in both countries.

Moving on, while the five drivers of trust were described with varying degrees of importance, their descriptions shared the common theme of personal experiences and verifiable, tangible results. Competence most often was related to the tangible quality of products and services. Openness and honesty was described as the bedrock of interpersonal relationships and not to be expected in the broader social environment. Concern for employees and stakeholders again was tangible with pay and benefits described as important to attract and retain talented workers and excellent products and services as important to customers/clients/stakeholders. Reliability, although not frequently mentioned, was described most similarly to our research in other parts of the world including predictable behaviors and reliable products and service quality. Identification was most often described as occurring in the long-term relationships of individuals working together. Interestingly, no descriptions of customer identification with a company or organization surfaced in any of the interviews.

6. Conclusion and Looking Forward

Taken as a whole, the nine leaders' descriptions of organizational trust suggest the importance of further examining the impact of personal experiences and verifiable, tangible results, as they may relate to a distrust-to-trust continuum in a more global context. Personal experiences and tangible results could be examined in relation to organizational trust in other regions such as Asian Russia, in other countries, and in other organizational circumstances.

When examining the interviews in their entirety, they suggest a renewed need to understand leaders' personal experiences, as they affect "framing trust" (and distrust) in organizations across cultures. The relationships among culture, history, and change, so distinctively articulated by the Polish and Russian leaders, could help to explore further leadership and cultural norms around the world. While work such as *The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* (House, Hangest & Javidan, 2004) has contributed significantly to this area of inquiry, few studies have been informed by leaders who have been in the workforce during massive political and societal changes.

Specifically, this study provides guidance for seeking to better understand the foundational assumptions of any culture, history, or change that may have occurred in a culture and may

have shaped trust and distrust norms, expectations, and beliefs. The likelihood of many organizations working across broad cultural, historic, and change boundaries increases the importance of considering a more nuanced view of trust and a host of other organizational processes, including but not limited to culture and communication. Rising distrust in all types of institutions (organizations, government, education, religion, and so forth) is presently reported throughout the world. If distrust grows as reported, often based on mediated communication and indirect experiences, this study points to a need to further explore distrust and trust as simultaneously occurring perceptions or as a singular construct with multi-faceted dimensions related to culture, history, and change.

Obviously, the nine interviews do not fully describe organizational trust perceptions in either Poland or Russia. But they are a beginning. The open-ended and non-directive methodology used in the interviews did result in the emergence of the strong themes of trust in relationships and shaped by verifiable results and culture, history, and change. The fact that these themes were so strongly evidenced in the leader interviews in both countries gives support to the importance of expanding our understanding of trust internationally, across organizations, and across cultures.

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