

Sustainable Relationships within Organisations in an Age of Transition of Economy: Focus on Employees' Trust in Organisations

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Abstract:

This exploratory research aims to provide an overview of employees' current views regarding their organisations, with a focus on evaluating their trust in their workplace. A quantitative approach was applied to a dataset collected from Japanese businesspeople. From the analysis, it was found that the respondents' perspectives differed depending on three demographic variables: gender, education, and annual income. Descriptive analysis results indicate that males express more positivity and support for the organisational directions in the new lifestyle phase resulting from the COVID-19 impact, that more highly educated respondents are more positive than other cohorts, and that higher-income respondents are more positive than others. These findings imply that organisations need to design different communicative approaches with different employee groups if they are to establish sustainable relationships with employers and cope with the disruptive environment.

Keywords:

trust; disruptive environment; transition of economy; COVID-19; organisational communication; conceptual model

I. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all businesses have been under pressure to implement work from home (WFH) arrangements, and it has been considered that the emergence of various digital technologies has enabled organisations to support employee safety while they work remotely (Dubey and Tripathi, 2020). Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have contributed to decreasing barriers to work, including those linked with geography and time, but have also revealed the impact of the digital divide and the lack of technological preparedness (Wang et al., 2020). Long before the current pandemic overwhelmed our socio-economic activities, the dawn and merging of remote work was first proposed and discussed by Olson and Olson (2000); since then, scholars have advocated for a new style of remote work that integrates the concept of work-life balance (Daniels et al., 2001). At the same time, it has been also discussed that the enabling factors of working online contribute to inviting different values and opinions from external stakeholders in a way that could both enhance a collaborative working ethos and foster entrepreneurial innovation (Nambisan, 2017). Waizenegger et al. (2020) further discussed the factors enabling productive team collaboration in the WFH environment.

Rationale and Aim of the Study

While the introduction of remote measurements in WFH has been an undisputedly effective measure, it is difficult to conclude that the drivers have been thoroughly researched since the recent COVID-19. While WFH is at its peak, research on the critical factors that determine its success or failure must be conducted. The goal of the present research is to increase the acceptability of WFH by making full use of online technologies, enabling businesspeople to transition smoothly and achieve results. We aim to model and present the agenda and key themes necessary for the pandemic era by conducting an empirical study of the indispensable factors for this purpose. In so doing, as an experimental pilot study, the present research focuses on the factor of trustworthiness, and presents an overview of businesspeople's perspectives and attitudes; this will enable their organisations to develop implications that could be useful in fostering further discussion around designing organisational strategies that establish sustainable relationships between employees and organisations. That is the purpose and significance of this research.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Organisational Communication

Cox et al. (2017) discussed the drivers for enhancing organisational capability with a focus on internal strategic communication. In this context, Oe and Vo (2020:26) discussed the value chain based on innovation, which requires open communication and shared values within the organisation. Gloss (2019) contended in a more focused manner that strategic organisational communication is critical to establishing competitive advantage in the marketplace. Scholars also emphasised enhancing collaboration among employees, stating that it is indispensable to communication based on mutual respect (Oe and Vo, 2020).

Sánchez-Gutiérrez et al. (2019) argued that value creation through relationships with consumers is the core element of establishing organisational capabilities that lead to marketing innovations (Oe and Vo, 2020). For their part, Pargar et al. (2019) contended that value creation dynamics should be evaluated from a scope of strategic alliance; in so doing, moreover, creating value to share within the organisations is essential (Porter and Kramer, 2019), particularly when organisations seek pathways towards increasing innovativeness to sustain their businesses (Oe and Vo, 2020; Siam 2017).

2.2 Business Model with Drivers and Key Supporting Factors of Sustainable Business Performance

Oe and Yamaoka (2020) discussed and proposed an analytical model for the analysis of business performance based on entrepreneurial orientation (EO) dimensions, specifically proactiveness, autonomy, risk-taking, innovativeness, and competitive aggressiveness. In addition to these five established EO dimensions, these authors empirically developed a new dimension, 'value co-creation'. The present study will adapt an analytical framework modified from that first presented by Oe and Yamaoka (2020), following the findings from the literature review (Figure 1).

Organisational culture and its impact on the implementation of EO values has been discussed in the context of developing actionable implications for the relevant business bodies (Kreiser & Davis, 2010; Brettel et al., 2015). Three of the five dimensions – innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking - have been highlighted as key factors in entrepreneurial research; it has further been suggested that these three key dimensions should be disaggregated to enable the development of robust recommendations for use in designing

strategies to enhance business performance, complete with practical guideposts to follow (Kreiser et al., 2013).

Among the most recent discussions on this topic, the work of Khedhaouria et al. (2020) analysed the relationship between organisational culture and small-sized enterprise, focusing on their roles as mediators. Jung et al. (2020) focused on leadership in risk-taking direction in the context of employees' commitment to organisational change. Moreover, business performance has been discussed in the context of relationships with organisational culture: for instance, based on internal business systems (Cadden et al., 2020; Sinha and Dhall, 2020) or financial outcomes (Reino et al., 2020). An analytical model with relevant key themes is demonstrated in Figure 1.

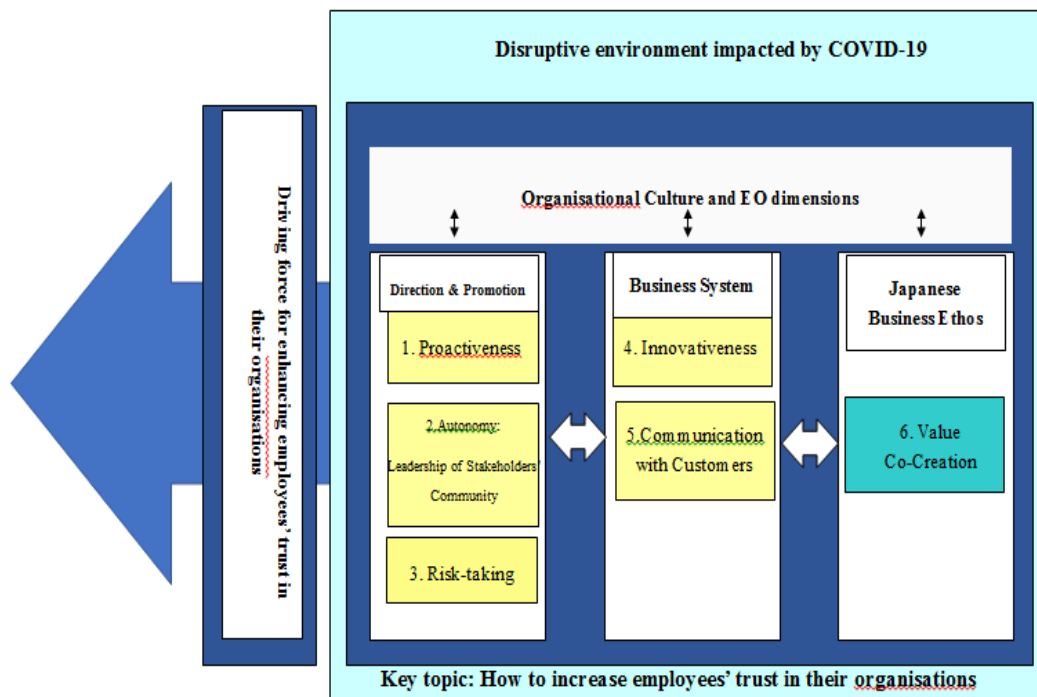


Figure 1. Analytical Framework for the Study (Adapted from Oe & Yamaoka, 2020)

III. Research Methods

3.1 Approach

This study applies a quantitative approach, since its aim was to test and validate a conceptual model using measurements related to a dataset attained from Thailand in view of examining the hypotheses developed from the literature review (Saunders et al., 2009). The study involves the use of the survey method, specifically collecting data via questionnaire. This method is widely used, since it allows for collecting a large amount of data from various sample groups (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2009).

3.2 Survey Design and Data Collection

In total, 50 items were developed related to the key themes developed from the literature review; all questions included in the survey are presented in the Appendix. The final questions were completed with some modification of the wording and the format following a pilot test carried out with 12 volunteers. The survey was conducted using a web-monitors via

marketing survey company based in Japan. The questions and corresponding options used in the survey were carefully defined based on the key themes identified in the academic sources. The original survey questions were prepared in English before being translated into Japanese by a bilingual individual. A second bilingual individual, who had not seen the originals, subsequently back-translated the items into English before a third bilingual individual checked the translations. Throughout this process, certain inconsistencies were identified and resolved in order to finalise the questionnaire. This procedure was carried out in line with Ruvio and Shoham (2007) to ensure the cultural and language equivalency of the scales employed.

3.3 Data Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed by web-based monitor service provided MyVoicecom (Tokyo, Japan). A dataset of 300 participants was obtained through balanced selection of demographic attributes. Accordingly, the sample encompassed a wide range of age groups and an even gender distribution, with all participants residing in Japan. The sample size was deemed suitable for conducting statistical analysis (Karem Kolkailah et al., 2012). SPSS version 26 was used for the data analysis, which was based on a descriptive analysis aimed at providing an overview of the dataset profile. As an experimental pilot study, this study focuses on Question 22 and relevant descriptive analysis was conducted based on demographic items. This first step of analysis was followed by a regression analysis using a multi-linear stepwise method to validate which factors are most significant in estimating the dependent variable of Q22. Nine observed variables were incorporated that evaluated participants' perspectives on organisational culture and information sharing within the team.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents an overview of the responses to the question 'I trust the company to support me in the new lifestyle', depending on several demographic variables as indicated.

Table 1. Overview of Survey Results for Q 22: 'I Trust the Company to Support me in the New Lifestyle'

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------|-----|------|----------------|
| Gender | | | |
| Male | 150 | 3.10 | 1.145 |
| Female | 150 | 2.71 | 1.233 |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |
| Age | | | |
| 20s | 76 | 3.00 | 1.254 |
| 30s | 74 | 2.78 | 1.208 |
| 40s | 76 | 2.88 | 1.200 |
| 50s | 74 | 2.96 | 1.164 |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |

Education

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----|------|-------|
| Graduated | 32 | 2.97 | 0.999 |
| Bachelor | 151 | 3.09 | 1.240 |
| Collage | 22 | 2.45 | 1.184 |
| Vocational school | 36 | 3.00 | 1.069 |
| Highschool | 55 | 2.47 | 1.184 |
| Junior High | 3 | 2.67 | 1.528 |
| Other | 1 | 4.00 | |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |

Business type

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----|------|-------|
| Manufacturer | 103 | 2.87 | 1.177 |
| Wholesaler or Retails | 34 | 2.94 | 1.179 |
| Information & Services | 87 | 2.85 | 1.290 |
| Professional services | 66 | 3.02 | 1.157 |
| Others | 10 | 2.90 | 1.287 |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |

Job position

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----|------|-------|
| Employee ranks | 214 | 2.80 | 1.203 |
| Staff manager | 41 | 3.05 | 1.182 |
| Manager | 17 | 3.53 | 1.007 |
| Upper Manager | 11 | 3.27 | 0.905 |
| Executive officer | 6 | 3.83 | 1.472 |
| Others | 11 | 2.64 | 1.286 |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |

Annual income (JPY)*

| | | | |
|-------------------------|----|------|------|
| None | 2 | 4.00 | 1.41 |
| ~1,000,000 JPY | 4 | 3.25 | 1.50 |
| 1,000,000~2,000,000 JPY | 27 | 1.89 | 1.12 |
| 2,000,000~3,000,000 JPY | 58 | 2.84 | 1.21 |
| 3,000,000~4,000,000 JPY | 60 | 2.65 | 1.13 |
| 4,000,000~5,000,000 JPY | 49 | 3.14 | 1.19 |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----|------|------|
| 5,000,000~6,000,000 JPY | 37 | 2.89 | 1.02 |
| 6,000,000~7,000,000 JPY | 17 | 3.53 | 1.01 |
| 7,000,000~8,000,000JPY | 12 | 3.25 | 1.06 |
| 8,000,000~9,000,000 JPY | 11 | 3.00 | 1.41 |
| 9,000,000~10,000,000 JPY | 9 | 3.44 | 1.33 |
| 10,000,000~15,000,000 JPY | 10 | 3.60 | 0.70 |
| 15,000,001 JPY and over | 4 | 4.00 | 0.82 |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.20 |

4.2 Comparative Study Based on Demographic Attributes

After the overview of the results was completed, Kruskal-Wallis Tests were conducted with the dataset according to five demographic variables. All data was the answer to the question ‘I trust the company to support me in the new lifestyle’. Table 2 presents three attributes indicating different tendencies among the categories of gender, education, and income.

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis Test Result Depending on All Demographic Variables

| | Gender | Age | Education | Business type | Job position | Individual income |
|------------------|--------|-------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Kruskal-Wallis H | 11.038 | 1.823 | 13.768 | 5.091 | 8.407 | 20.961 |
| Df | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Asymp. Sig. | 0.026 | 0.768 | 0.008 | 0.278 | 0.078 | 0.000 |

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Q22 ‘I trust the company to support me in the new lifestyle’.

Based on the preliminary analysis, comparative analyses will be conducted to visualise the businesspeople’s perspectives for three demographics, gender, education, and income will be critically discussed.

a. Gender

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics (Gender)

| Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------|-----|------|----------------|
| Male | 150 | 3.10 | 1.145 |
| Female | 150 | 2.71 | 1.233 |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |

From tables 1 and 3, it can be observed that the responses to question Q22 differ significantly between male and female participants: specifically, it is found that the male respondents exhibit more positive attitudes than the female respondents.

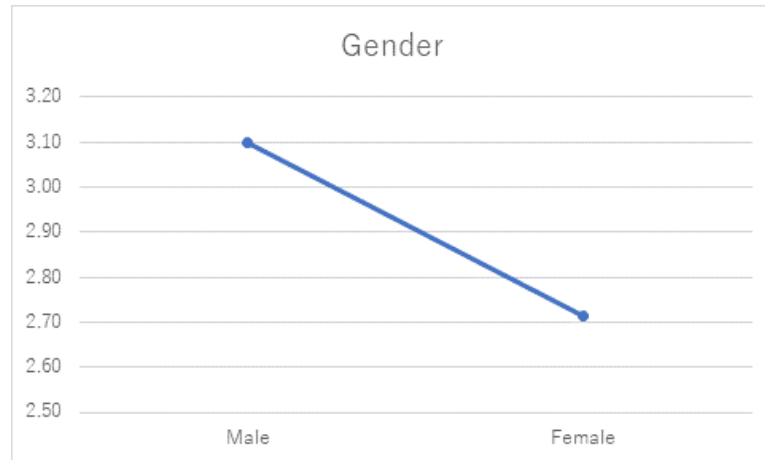


Figure 2. Diagram (Gender)

These results indicate that female workers are more cautious and less ready to accept the new lifestyle brought about by COVID-19.

b. Education

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics (Education)

| Education | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|-----|------|----------------|
| PG or PhD | 32 | 2.97 | 0.999 |
| Under Graduated | 151 | 3.09 | 1.240 |
| College | 22 | 2.45 | 1.184 |
| Junior college | 36 | 3.00 | 1.069 |
| High school | 55 | 2.47 | 1.184 |
| Junior high school | 3 | 2.67 | 1.528 |
| Other | 1 | 4.00 | |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |

From Tables 1 and 2, it is observed that the attitudes expressed in response to Q22 differ significantly among the seven groups of different levels of education levels. It is found that university graduates express the most positive attitudes, followed by graduates of colleges and higher education institutions, who all similarly indicate a level of moderate agreement ranging between 2.45 and 3.00. Figure 3 below plots the overall tendencies.

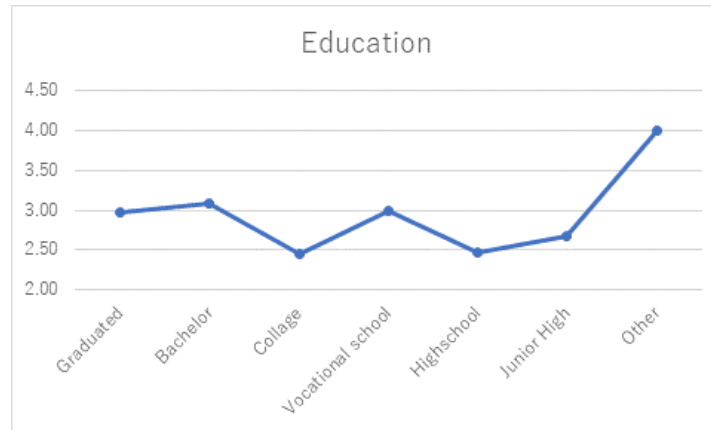


Figure 3. Diagram (Education)

c. Income

Regarding the last demographic variable, annual income, it is found that the higher income earners are in higher agreement with the statement ‘I trust the company in the "new lifestyle"’ (Table 5 and Figure 4).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics (Income)

| Individual annual income | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------|-----|------|----------------|
| 0JPY | 2 | 4.00 | 1.414 |
| ~1,000,000 JPY | 4 | 3.25 | 1.500 |
| 1,000,000~2,000,000 JPY | 27 | 1.89 | 1.121 |
| 2,000,000~3,000,000 JPY | 58 | 2.84 | 1.211 |
| 3,000,000~4,000,000 JPY | 60 | 2.65 | 1.132 |
| 4,000,000~5,000,000 JPY | 49 | 3.14 | 1.190 |
| 5,000,000~6,000,000 JPY | 37 | 2.89 | 1.022 |
| 6,000,000~7,000,000 JPY | 17 | 3.53 | 1.007 |
| 7,000,000~8,000,000 JPY | 12 | 3.25 | 1.055 |
| 8,000,000~9,000,000 JPY | 11 | 3.00 | 1.414 |
| 9,000,000~10,000,000 JPY | 9 | 3.44 | 1.333 |
| 10,000,000~15,000,000 JPY | 10 | 3.60 | 0.699 |
| 15,000,001 JPY and over | 4 | 4.00 | 0.816 |
| Total | 300 | 2.91 | 1.204 |



Figure 4. Diagram (Income)

Based on the cross-analyses centred on demographic attributes with significances among groups, a regression analysis will be conducted to construct an estimation formula of Q22, with relevant observed questions covering all six factors developed from the literature review (see Figure 1).

4.4 Regression Analysis

To estimate the potential antecedents leading to employees' trust in their organisations, a prediction model was constructed with 12 observation variables from six dimensions of the analytical model presented in Figure 1. Q22 was a dependent variable, and a stepwise method was utilised for a regression analysis. From the results, five antecedent variables were found to be effective in estimating a dependent variable: one observed variable for each dimension, apart from the factor of Innovation, was found to be a significant antecedent in estimating the dependent variable; these are Q9, 12, 36, 19, and 26.

The input variables are presented below. Out of these, five variables were found to be significant in estimating the dependent variable.

<Innovativeness>

- (1) ICT is utilised as a communication tool
- (2) The corporate culture is open-minded

<Autonomy & Leadership>

- (6) Goals are shared within the team
- (9) Each employee understands and acts on the internal culture

<Value Co-creation>

- (12) You can talk openly about new ideas
- (13) When aiming to achieve a goal, the synchronisation of employee awareness is required

<Pro-activeness>

- (36) I am ready to change positively
- (37) It is indispensable for our company to change its structure and organisation "after the coronavirus"

<Communication with customers>

- (19) We grasp customer needs in collaboration with related departments
- (20) Market trends and important information are provided in collaboration with related departments

<Risk taking>

(24) In the "new lifestyle", the risk level is higher than before

(26) Risks are shared between affiliated companies and departments

A model summary and the ANOVA results are presented in Tables 6 and 7 respectively; both imply that the model is both reliable and compatible with the dataset. The adjusted R square = .711, indicating that 71.1% of the dataset is explained by this model, while the Durbin-Watson value is 2.031, which also indicates that the model is applicable (Kenton, 2019).

Table 6. Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 5 | .846 ^e | .716 | .711 | .647 | 2.031 |

**Table 7. ANOVA Result
ANOVA^a**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 5 | Regression | 310.349 | 5 | 62.070 | 148.316 | .000 ^f |
| | Residual | 123.038 | 294 | .418 | | |
| | Total | 433.387 | 299 | | | |

Table 8. Coefficients of the Model

| Model | Unstandardised Coefficients | | Standardised Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (19) We grasp customer needs in collaboration with related departments | .232 | .060 | .224 | 3.869 | .000 |
| (9) Each employee understands and acts on the internal culture | .238 | .056 | .238 | 4.218 | .000 |
| (26) Sharing risks with affiliated companies and departments | .195 | .059 | .183 | 3.296 | .001 |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|-------|------|
| (12) You can talk openly about new ideas | .172 | .058 | .176 | 2.953 | .003 |
| (36) I am ready to change positively | .140 | .051 | .130 | 2.748 | .006 |

Dependent Variable: (22) I trust the company to support me in the new lifestyle

As demonstrated in Table 8, Q19 ('We grasp customer needs in collaboration with related departments'; 'Communication with customers') and Q9 ('Each employee understands and acts on the internal culture'; 'Autonomy and leadership') have relatively high impacts on the dependent variable. This implies that, in the disruptive environment, collaborating with customers based on close communication and autonomous business behaviour should be the basis for enhancing employees' trust in their organisations.

V. Conclusion

5.1 Contributions

This study was originally inspired by the question 'how might we enhance and switch the ordinary working pattern to working from home, responding to the requirements of the COVID-19 situation?'. As noted, it has been discussed that enabling factors that support online working with better productivity should be investigated in an attempt to provide practical suggestions for remote working during a lockdown situation (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Based on this fundamental research interest, we conducted a survey that collected data from businesspeople in order to develop actionable implications that enhance collaborative teamwork, thereby increasing employees' trust in their organisations and supporting business sustainability during the lockdown situation.

The study has established an analytical model, presented in Figure 1, with six potential dimensions that fall under the umbrella theme of organisational culture with EO dimensions. Adopting a quantitative approach to the collected dataset that follows the six key dimensions has revealed that five of these dimensions have significant impacts on employees' trust in their organisations: autonomy and leadership, value co-creation, pro-activeness, communication with customers, and risk-taking. Although ICT implementation and innovative attitudes were expected to be one of the key drivers of enhancing remote work based on ICT measures, the dimension of Innovativeness was not found to be a significant antecedent to employees' trust in their organisations.

5.2 Limitations and Further Research Opportunities

This study remains an exploratory examination; therefore, it should be enhanced in future through the application of a more holistic approach, such as that of using Structural Equation Modelling to analyse the impacts of all six factors on employees' trust in their organisations. Another potential further step could be that of collecting additional datasets from other countries for use in a comparative study; such research could yield more actionable implications for use by businesses in coping with a disruptive environment, as some guidelines are required to enhance employees' support for business performance and realise future business sustainability.

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