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The Impact of Employees' Working Relations in Creating and Retaining Trust: The Case of The Bahrain Olympic Committee (BOC)

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Summary

The research will be conducted in the Bahrain Olympic Committee (BOC), Kingdom of Bahrain and it aims to enrich the literature concerning trust from the perspective of the Arab region by surveying employees and interviewing managers. It will also seek to measure the organisational trust of employees, determining the existing working relations in the organisation that influence the employees' trust both positively and negatively. It will also provide recommendations to the organisation for it to create, maintain and strengthen employees' organisational trust; similar cases will benefit from this research.

Word Count
1991

Introduction

The study of the impact of employees' working relations in creating and maintaining trust stems from interactions among many social factors and processes within relationships. Organisations deem trust to be a vital element since it is a basic predictor of an organisation's citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Yu *et al.,* 2018; CIPD, 2012). Thus, the researcher will concentrate on three specific social factors: *employee involvement, organisational justice* and *employees' perception of corporate social responsibility* (Jung and Ali, 2017) in order to understand their impact in creating and maintaining trust within organisations, especially in relation to third-party gossip. These social factors have been chosen because of their significant impact on employees' work-related behaviour and attitude also (Yu *et al.*, 2018). As mentioned, this research will also consider third-party gossip and its effect on shaping the overall trust (Krot and Lewicka, 2012).

Contrary to prior research which focused mainly on the causes and consequences of trust in a western context. This research will shed light on the meaning of trust within the Arabian Gulf. Currently, there is a significant interest in studying trust across different national/societal cultures because of its positive contributions, both economically and in terms of the well-being of employees (Redman *et al.*, 2011; Ferrin and Gillespie, 2010; Chang and Chi, 2007).

The research will be held in the Bahrain Olympic Committee (BOC). The committee was founded in 1979 by the King, Hamad Al Khalifa, and made its first global appearance in the1984 Olympics (BOC, 2018). In September 2010, Sheikh Nasser Al Khalifa was selected as President of the BOC and will remain so until 2020 (Pavitt, 2017); the Committee, under the supervision of the Bahrain's Sports Federation, is an independent civil body and a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The research's specific objectives are outlined below:
1. To evaluate the existing working relations of employees in BOC by measuring employee involvement, organisational justice and corporate social responsibility (via a questionnaire and a semi-structured face to face interview);
2. To propose ways how BOC can create, maintain and strengthen their employees' trust;
3. To produce a new theoretical framework that adds to the current field of organisational trust.

Research Questions

The over-arching question of this research is:
How do social systems and third-party gossip in working relationships affect employees' trust in the organisation and promote organisational citizenship behaviour?

The above will be further addressed through the following supplementary questions:

1. ***How is trust perceived in an Arabian Gulf context?***
2. ***How do the three social system elements (employee involvement, organisational justice and corporate social responsibility) affect employees' trust within the organisation?***
3. ***How does third-party gossip affect employees' trust within the organisation?***
4. ***How does employees' trust in organisations determine their overall organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB)?***

Literature Review

Rousseau *et al.* (1998) defined trust as a psychological state involving positive expectations of the behaviour or intentions of another party so that he/she is willing to be open to this other party (Skinner *et al.,* 2013). Two possible outcomes result from this: first, if party B does not exploit A's vulnerability and fulfils his/her part of the obligation, trust is enhanced, and more interaction welcomed. However, if party B takes advantage of A's vulnerability and does not fulfil his/her obligation, trust is diminished which creates possible resistance to further interaction (CIPD, 2012; Skinner *et al.*, 2013).

Muller *et al.* (2014) suggested that trust is a three-dimensional process where involved parties first assess each other on the basis of credibility (*belief*); then, where involved parties have positive expectations and accept the behaviours of each other (*decision*); and finally, where these parties feel able to carry out mutual risk-taking activities (*action*) (Schnakenberg and Tomlinson, 2016). In stage two of the above-mentioned theory, the factors surrounding trustworthiness determine whether or not an action will be taken. Mayer *et al.'s* (1995) three factors are used to develop and measure trust between employees and the organisation. These three factors are *ability:* the skills that one person can perform in a specific domain; *benevolence:* the attachment and positive feelings the employee has towards the organisation; and *integrity:* the similar principles that are shared between the employee and the organisation (Mayer *et al.,* 1995).

Since the study will be conducted in the Kingdom of Bahrain, cultural differences might affect the meaning of trust, as mentioned above. Based on Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions (1980), cultural theorists have concluded that countries within the Arabian Gulf are "collectivists" (Redman *et al.*, 2011) who prefer to work in groups that take care of each other's social interests; they believe that group harmony is important. Therefore, within the Gulf region, certain cultural differences are likely to impact on the expectations/meaning of trust; this, in turn, will affect the trust of employees in their working relationships.

Organisational trust is the basis for moral interactions with stakeholders (Krot and Lewicka, 2012; Singh and Srivastva, 2016). Lamertz and Bhave (2017) identified a dimension of an organisation's trustworthiness, emphasising that organisational legitimacy and trust are determined by employees' perceptions of its procedures and social activities, as well as their own involvement in decision-making processes. Employees' perspective of trust in the organisation entails their willingness to take risks in their work relationships and social networks with the expectation of beneficial outcomes (Rekabdar, 2015). Yu (2018) also stated that factors of trust indicate employees' perceptions regarding their autonomy in the organisation (Yu *et al.,* 2018).

First, employee involvement, which is inspired by trust, relates to their inclination to fulfil their work tasks with dedication and devotion (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). In fact, Colquitt *et al.* (2007) posited that involving employees in collaborative decision-making boosts the abilities of employees, while their involvement in decision-making also boosts their performance and thus raises organisational trust. Second, with regard to organisational justice, Colquitt *et al.* (2011) showed that the procedural, distributive, informational and interpersonal dimensions of organisational justice determined employee's perceptions of the trustworthiness of the organisation since such trust is tempered by the organisation's fairness to its employees (Poon, 2013). Third, an employee's perspective of corporate social responsibility is high if the organisation's integrity is high, as Jung and Ali (2017) asserted. Kim *et al.* (2010) added that positive perspectives regarding corporate social responsibility add to perceptions of an organisation's integrity.

In addition, certain external factors, such as third-party gossip from friends, media and internal organisational gossip, can affect organisational trust (Grosser *et al.,* 2010; Michelson *et al.*, 2010). Third-party gossiping refers to the informal communication (external or internal) about the reputation of an organisation or its social environment. It is interactional as employees are surrounded by others who can affect relationships positively or negatively (Williams, 2016); such interactions can influence the level of trust in an organisation (Gupta *et al.*, 2016).

Singh and Srivastva (2016) identified many positive outcomes of organisational trust such as employee satisfaction, low employee turnover and OCB being predominant (Colquitt *et al.,* 2007). According to Organ (1988), OCB is behaviour that is not part of an employee's contractual requirements, but instead, it is behaviour that stems from goodwill. This improves the effectiveness of an organisation's work flow and increases its efficiency (MacKenzie *et al.,* 1991). A high level of trust entails compliance to ethics and norms, positive behaviour in terms of helping others, virtue, conscientiousness and altruism (Chiu and Ng, 2015). Conversely, Skinner *et al.* (2014) highlighted counterproductive behaviour scenarios that lead to high absenteeism and employee turnover where poor judgement resulted in employees misplacing their trust in the organisation.

The brief discussion of the above literature points towards the theoretical framework in Figure 1, below. The framework is an interactive model that illustrates the systemic interaction of the three social elements and the three factors of trustworthiness mentioned above. The framework includes the effect of third-party gossip on organisational trust and OCB. The framework of the study will allow us to appreciate whether the social system elements relate to the organisational trustworthiness, and whether OCB is achieved through organisational trust. Hence, understanding and stressing on the significant impact of working relationships in creating and maintaining organisational trust.
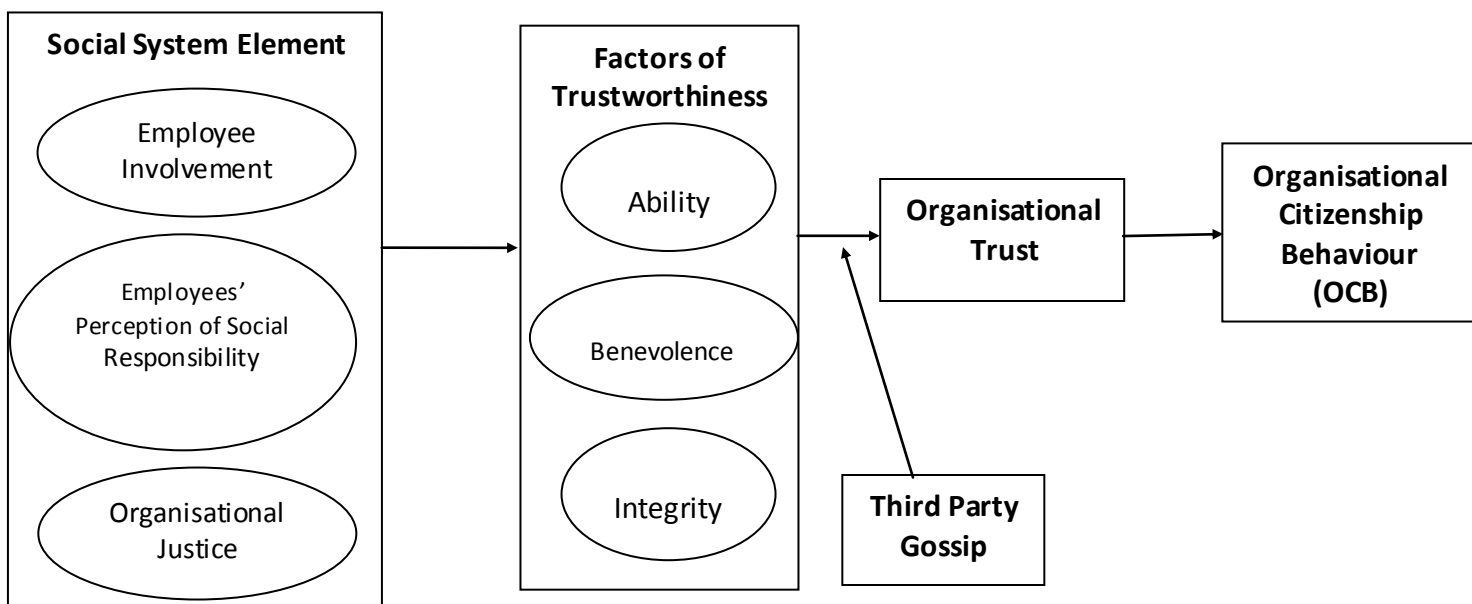
Figure 1: Conceptual framework for this research

Methodology

The main aim of the research is to contribute to organisational practice in two ways: first, by exploring trust within an eastern context and, second, by introducing a theoretical framework that

measures specifically the three social elements highlighted in Figure 1 and their relation in gaining and retaining trust. Hence, a mixed-method pragmatic approach is deemed most appropriate for this study (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). In order to make this possible, data will be collected from observable reality and findings will be corroborated with prior research theories to make analytic generalisations that can serve similar case studies in the future (Yanow *et al.,* 2006; Yin, 2018). Therefore, this study will serve as a stepping stone in exploring the three social elements and their relation to trust within the eastern context.

An exploratory case study method will enable the underlying dynamics prevailing in a single setting to be assessed, allowing a holistic view of real-life aspects of organisational trustworthiness, and consequent employee working relations based on trust, to be explored (Yin, 2018). Selecting a case study helps in two ways: firstly, by modifying or rejecting previous theories and concepts within the field; and secondly, by shedding light on new concepts and principles that can be of use in a similar situation (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Yin, 2018).

This research will comprise a single case study and thus considerable time will be spent in understanding the detailed social processes of one organisation, and in analysing in depth the factors of trustworthiness, as well as the impact of creating and maintaining trust (Yin, 2018).

Measuring trust will be achieved, firstly, by survey questions. These will be sent via email to employees and will be used to measure the relationships shown in Figure 1. Secondly, face to face semi-structured interviews will be conducted to measure managers' perceptions of their employees' trust in themselves and in BOC. The point of view of managers is significant because they are considered to be the middlemen in the communication channels between the employees and the organisation. Hence, their point of view will give a view in understanding the impact of trust. Thirdly, company data that is found relevant to the variables of the study (factors of trustworthiness and social system elements), will be collected through annual reports and internal databases (access has been granted).

Sampling

The researcher will conduct a pilot study prior the conference consisting of ten survey questionnaires and three face-to-face semi-structured interviews to assess their feasibility. The researcher will then share a summary of these findings at the BAM conference.

Once the questionnaires and interview questions have been finalised, the researcher will send a link for the online survey to the HR department which will then send the survey link via email to all departments and related centres of the BOC. The researcher is hoping for at least a 50% response rate (150 employees). The researcher will also aim to complete ten face-to-face interviews with managers, depending on their availability. Their answers will be recorded provided permission is granted; otherwise notes will be taken. Hence, the researcher's main aim from contributing with a developmental paper to BAM is to further develop the research design and methods used within the study with the feedback received.

Contribution of the Study

Contributions to the literature will be three-fold. First, this research will shed light on the concept and meaning of trust within the Arabian Gulf and enrich the trust literature within the region. Second, the research will examine how certain factors of trustworthiness, including employee social factors (Freeman, 1984), shape overall organisational trust and employees' organisational citizenship behaviour. Third, this study will make obvious the importance of investing time, effort and money in

the three social factors to improve trust because of their positive outcomes. For example, trust-building activities/exercises could be included in team-building workshops/programmes.

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