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Employee perceptions of trust in managers of different gender

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ABSTRACT

Trust is a central component in leadership and has been shown to be associated with employee commitment, motivation and performance. The phenomenon has been investigated at the organisational level and there have been previous studies of trust within the manager/subordinate relationship. However, research in this area within the South African environment has been limited.

The present research investigates the trust displayed by employees in relation to their immediate managers and explores this relationship from a gender perspective. As women are still not well represented at management level and as perceptions of male and female managers tend to differ, the purpose of this study is to determine whether perceptions of male and female managers differ in terms of trust. The aims of the study are to assess whether there are differences with regard to the trust that employees place in managers of differing gender, as well as to assess whether there are differences in the trust displayed by employees of differing gender.

The methodology of the study is based on analysis of questionnaires distributed within a large company in the retail environment. The instrument used is a Trust measure developed by Daniel McAllister (1995). Initial analyses were undertaken to establish Cronbach Alphas on both sub-scales of the Trust measure. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to establish whether responses to the questionnaire loaded on the same subscales identified in the original McAllister study. The main analyses were then carried out using t-tests and Analysis of Covariance, in order to control for a number of potentially confounding variables in the study. The results indicate that males and females display an equal propensity to trust. In addition, male and female managers are viewed no differently in terms of trustworthiness. There are also no significant trust differences when same gender relationships were compared to cross gender relationships between managers and employees. However, manager age and the length of time that the employee knows a manager were found to be significant covariates.