

## **Managing Employee Trust Perceptions for Sustained Workplace Harmony in the Nigerian Banking Industry**

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**Abstract:** *The issue of workplace harmony has for decades prevailed as a central factor with regard to organizational performance, member cooperation and success. This study examines using empirical methods the association between employee trust perceptions and workplace harmony in the Nigeria banking industry. The study being quasi-experimental is carried out using the cross sectional survey design and data is generated from a sample of 214 participants drawn from an accessible population of 637 staff of 10 selected banks in Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings support significant associations between the empirical referents of employee trust perceptions namely; perception of ability, perception of benevolence and perception of integrity; and the criterion variable, workplace harmony. In conclusion we propose a more transparent, consistent and representative system of management which not only recognizes employees within the organization but also allows for participation, feedback and member support.*

**Keywords:** *Employee trust, workplace harmony, participation, ability, integrity, benevolence.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Research on interpersonal bonds and harmony at the workplace draws upon two long standing and different schools of thought namely: the alienation theory in which Marx, one of the first to propound the theory, brought to light certain issues such as the atomization and isolation of workers at the workplace; a consequence of recent technological advancements, secondly, the theory of social anomie; propounded by Durkheim in which he argues that social disintegration is an effect of industrial development, resulting further into a weakened moral and cultural value systems well as instances of poor social control(Hirszowicz, 1981).

Walker and Guest (1952) argue that interpersonal relationships; as observed between workers on the shop floor; was as a result of the nature of the functional interdependence of the work performed. Isolation; the authors argue; was due to a disconnect between workers who had no opportunity to interact with their colleagues except during short breaks which as pointed out, are highly superficial, but as Hirszowicz (1981) opines, good interpersonal relations among workers is not restricted to only task structures and implementation but is an outcome of various factors such as the nature of organizational goals and objectives, the expression of power within the organization, workers participation as well as the perception of management and its control measures which according to Etzioni (1961), can further be sub-divided into coercive or physical power, material rewards, and symbolic interactions. In the opinion of Etzioni (1961), organizations which are coercive rely on the use and application of physical force or sanctions. Such organizations include the military and prison service. Organizations which rely on material of remunerative control tend towards the use of monetary rewards and fringe benefits in harnessing and controlling workers behaviour, while organizations which are normative rely on the use and manipulation of symbolic representations and rewards in the control of workplace behaviour such as found in most profit-oriented organizations which usually adopt a mix of the remunerative and symbolic control.

Much has been achieved with decades of research on workplace harmony, development and interpersonal relations, but there is little empirical evidence of studies relating workplace harmony as an outcome of workers trust perceptions with regard to the activities of management. This paper as a

point of departure from previous studies on workplace harmony, empirically examines the association between managing employee trust perceptions and a more harmonious workplace in the Nigerian banking industry. The following research questions are hereby proffered:

- Does employee trust perception of ability lead to a more harmonious workplace?
- Does employee trust perception of benevolence lead to a more harmonious workplace?
- Does employee trust perception of integrity lead to a more harmonious workplace?

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Managing Employee Trust Perceptions**

Axelrod (1984) describes trust as an important factor in achieving cooperation and long-term relationships based on constructive behaviour; defining it as the actor's expectation of the other parties competence, goodwill and behaviour especially under circumstances of risk, uncertainty or unexpected change (Blomqvist & Stahle, 2000). This is as Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis and Winograd (2000) opine that trust relates to the positive expectations individuals hold towards organizational roles, relationships, experiences and interdependencies of the various members of intentions and behaviours. In their argument, Mosavi, Abedi and Ghaedi (2013) go further by delineating trust into two major factors, first; the individuals experiences within the organization in which they work. Here trust dwells on perceived fair treatment, equity and justice within the workplace and the fulfilment of promises or obligations. Secondly; the dependence and competence of management to undertake and accomplish futuristic objectives or goals based on past experiences as regards past objectives or goals.

In managing employee trust perceptions, research identifies several formal and informal control measures as adopted by management, such as devices, systems, information-based routines, reward systems, procedures and policies aimed at maintaining or altering employee behaviour such that individual goals are consistent and in unison with organizational goals or objectives (Merchant & Vander Stede, 2007). Managing employee trust perceptions would therefore stem from the control and manipulation of employee perceptions of organizational trustworthiness; bringing into focus factors such as organizational ability, benevolence and integrity (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995), as such, in achieving employee trust, the organization or its representatives, through policies, values, norms, strategies and goals, must be seen or presented as being benevolent, competent, fair, reliable and transparent.

Tzafrir (2005) in his study argues that trust is reciprocal and for managers to obtain trust from their subordinates, they must first recognize, trust and treat same subordinates with respect and fairness but as Malhotra and Murnighan (2002) opine; trust within the organization stems as a result of organizational trustworthiness rather than as the result of any given or particular situation or event. This argument corroborates with that of Mayer et al, (1995) in which trust is vested in the perceptions of ability, benevolence and integrity; although Seok & Chiew (2013) relate this from the perspective of employers and their trust in the ability, benevolence and integrity of employees; this study evaluates these factors as ingredients of a trustworthy organization and the effect of such in enhancing and facilitating trust from the employees or subordinates.

### **2.2. Sustained Workplace Harmony**

Harmony at the workplace has been described as the state of relative peace and stability in an organization which involves trust amongst groups, employee-management understanding and an absence of expressions of discontent between members within the organization (Bassegy, Ojua, Achibong, & Bassegy, 2012; Yesufu, 1984). It is considered to be the outcome of good interpersonal relations at the workplace entailing employee-management understanding and agreement on terms of working conditions, remuneration, promotion, job security, and safety as well as ethical and professional conduct (Eno, 1996). Onasanya (1999) in his definition, argues in favour of the role of the government as an intervening factor in effectively sustaining the smooth relationship between unions and the management of the organization; evaluating the problem of conflict or lack of harmony as not just that between management and staff but also that between co-workers, trade unions and other unions, as well as worker and supervisor.

In their opinion, Akume and Abdullahi (2013) argue that workplace harmony comprises of the process of interest accommodation by the parties involved in such a manner that allows for

understanding and compromise in the fixing of working conditions, regulations and in the sharing of power. Processes which according to the authors, can be used to describe various activities which; formally or informally; contribute to the structure and nature of the relationship between management and their subordinates (Cordova, 1980; Cole, 2006). Conflict which is an outcome of poor or a lack of harmony at the workplace usually occurs when employees perceive management as being exploitative, nonchalant about their work conditions and also without regard for their opinion or efforts (Donnelly, Gibson & Ivancevich, 1984).

### **2.3. Managing Employee Trust Perceptions and Sustained Workplace Harmony**

Employee trust plays a major role in workplace interpersonal relations; it is a panacea for issues related to workplace cooperation and collaboration considering the ever changing nature of organizational structure, work processes as well as the employment contract as a result of globalization and the unprecedented trail of change it “drags along” (Basse et al., 2012). Studies (Seok & Chiew, 2013; Akume & Abdullahi, 2013) indicate a growing recognition for the role factors such as transparency, communication, trust and participation contribute towards organizational performance, productivity and management-labour relations; especially when a concept such as the “organization” relies heavily on the understanding and collaboration of members to achieve set goals; the effective and successful integration of different personality types, motives, temperamental dispensations, personal aspirations, ambitions and behavioural tendencies; becomes a most sort after characteristic by organization as not only does it determine survival but improved performance through a harmonization of various individual, group and party interests (Akume & Abdullahi, 2013).

#### *2.3.1. Employee Trust Perception of Ability and Sustained Workplace Harmony*

Employee perceptions of organizational ability; within this context, is expressed through a sense a reliance and believe in the competency of the management to “sail” the organization successfully even through uncertainties and unforeseen circumstances. It entails employee perceptions of trust in the experience, skill and knowledge of the managerial staff to actually deliver desired results and to meet with certain expectations (Mayer et al, 1995). Effective managers are also characterized by the level of trust vested upon them by their subordinates; such a relationship fosters loyalty, confidence and identification between interested parties (manager-subordinate) thus promoting good interpersonal relationships (Gabriel & Kpakol, 2014). Thus we hypothesize that:

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** Employee trust perception of ability is not significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony

#### *2.3.2. Employee Trust Perception of Benevolence and Sustained Workplace Harmony*

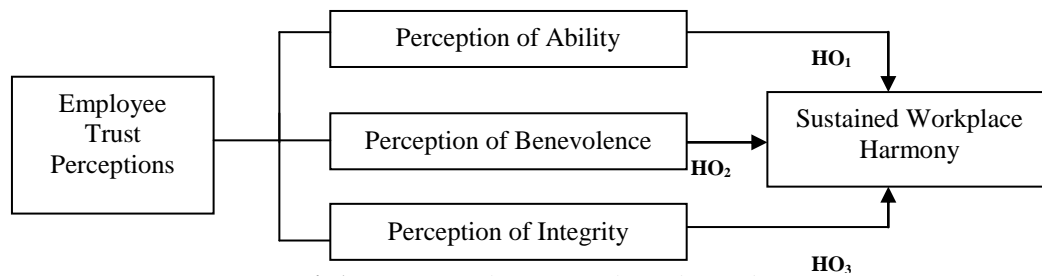
Jones and George (1998) opine that in any trust oriented relationship; moods and emotions necessitate the evaluation of the interested parties; whether favourable or not, positive or negative, trust building results from accumulated experience and personal opinion about the individual concerned. Mental accounts and records regarding perceptions of trust related behaviour involving self and others are usually maintained and form a major determinant of futuristic trust intentions; thereby proposing that parties in any emerging relationship on a consistent basis, consciously or unconsciously evaluate the signs of trustworthiness as expressed by the other party through behaviour, speech, mannerisms and also perceptions of benevolence. Therefore we hypothesize that:

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** Employee trust perception of benevolence is not significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony

#### *2.3.3. Employee Trust Perception of Integrity and Sustained Workplace Harmony*

The theory of structuration, as postulated by Giddens (1989) illustrates the exchange between structure (character) and action (process or practice); implying that action is a product of structure and is enabled by structure. According to Blomqvist & Stahle (2000) trust from this view point is a product of observed characteristics of reliability and dependability signalled through actions which are evaluated as signs of trustworthiness. When an agent is perceived as having integrity and reputation, it serves as a guarantee or assurance of safety and security especially as regards the vulnerability of trust actions and the risk of betrayal; thus trust is seen as an investment in relationships with the integrity and reputation of the parties serving first as assurance and then secondly; as observed in most cases; as collateral (Blomqvist & Stahle, 2000). We therefore hypothesize that:

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** Employee trust perception of integrity is not significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony



**Fig1.** Operational Framework for the Study

**3. METHODS**

The study is quasi-experimental and adopts a cross sectional survey approach in data generation. Study settings are non-contrived based on the social characteristics peculiar to studies of this nature which draws upon social relationships. The accessible population for the study comprises of 637 staff obtained from the headquarters of 10 selected banks within Port Harcourt while a sample size of 246 participants was acquired using the Taro Yamane sampling formula given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size; N = population; e = level of precision (error measurement)

Based on the homogeneity of the organizations involved (banking) there was no need for sample stratification, therefore the simple random sampling method was used in the selection of participants for the study (Baridam, 2001).

The questionnaire instrument adopted for the study is structured into two sections, the demographic section (A); in which the sample characteristics considered relative to the study is examined. Characteristics such as respondents’ gender, age, Union membership and educational qualification, and section (B) which captures data about the variables (predictor and criterion). Employee trust perceptions; the predictor variable; is operationally measured on three empirical referents namely; perception of ability, perception of benevolence and perception of integrity (Mayer et al. 1995); all three empirical referents of the predictor variable are each measured on a 3 – item instrument, giving a total of a 9 – item scale for Employee trust perceptions. Workplace harmony; the criterion variable; is measured on a 9 – item instrument. Both instruments are scaled on a 5 – item Likert scale ranked from (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) undecided (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree with indicators ranked accordingly from non-affirmative to neutral and then to affirmative based on the opinions of the participants with respect to characteristics of the manifest variables (Sekaran 2003).

**Table1.** Reliability of the Instruments

Variables	Cronbach alpha	No. of Items
Perceived Organizational Ability (POA)	.778	3
Perceived Organizational Benevolence (POB)	.864	3
Perceived Organizational Integrity (POI)	.958	3
Workplace Harmony	.887	9

**Source:** Research Data, 2015

The survey and data collection process had a success rate of 221 (90%) retrieved questionnaire copies out of the 246 (100%) personally administered questionnaire. Retrieved questionnaire copies were then processed for invalid responses, blank questionnaire and double entries; leaving 214 (87%) copies of the questionnaire as valid and useable for the study. Table 1 below illustrates the reliability coefficients (Cronbach alpha) for the study.

**4. RESULTS**

**4.1. Demographic Analysis**

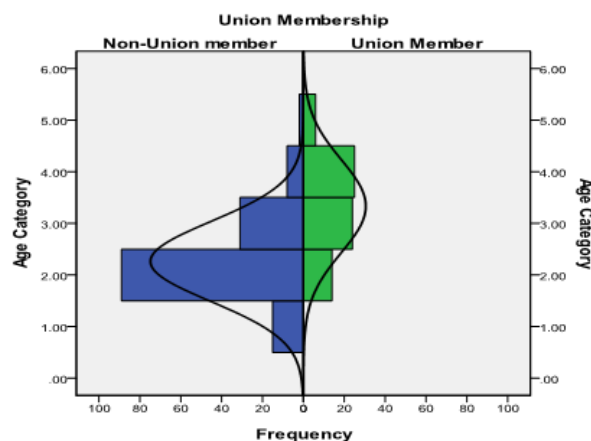
The sample characteristics are described using frequencies and percentages. The results are presented below.

**Table2.** Demographic Analysis

Characteristic	Categorization	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender of Respondents	Male	115	54
	Female	99	46
Age of Respondents	25 years and less	15	7
	26 – 35 years	103	48
	36 – 45 years	55	26
	46 – 55 years	33	15
	56 years and above	8	4
Qualification of Respondents	Diploma	35	16
	First Degree	125	58
	Master Degree	54	25
Union Membership of Respondents	Non-Union Member	145	68
	Union Member	69	32

Source: Research Data, 2015

Table 2 above illustrates the descriptive statistics for the sample characteristics. The figures indicate that the male participants of the study exceed their female counterparts by 54% to 46% implying a male dominated industry. The figures also indicate that most of the participants are in their mid-thirties with a majority falling within the 26 to 35 years age bracket (48%) followed by the 36 to 45 years age bracket (26%), next is the 46 to 33 years age bracket (15%) and then the 25 years and less (7%). This implies a possible reliance on a young and enthusiastic labour force especially as can be inferred from the nature of the job and industry (banking) peculiar for its innovative and competitive characteristics. As shown on the table; most of the respondents have obtained only first degrees comprising of BSc, Btech and BEng degrees (58%), followed by participants who have also obtained their Master degrees alongside their first degrees (25%) and then those with only Diploma degrees (16%). For the membership of unions; non-member participants account for a frequency of 145 (68%) while participants who are members account for a frequency of 69 (32%); implying a moderate level of union membership based on the total number of participants which is 214 (100%).



**Fig1.** Population pyramid for age of respondents and membership of unions

Figure1. Illustrates a comparison of participants' age categories with union membership; where age category of 1 = 25 years and less; 2 = 26 to 35 years; 3 = 36 to 45 years; 4 = 46 to 55 years and 5 = 56 years and above. The table shows a rise in membership from age group 2 and a decline at age group 5 with a greater percentage of union membership by participants in their mid-thirties and mid-fifties (age group 3 and 4).

#### 4.2. Univariate Analysis

In this section, descriptive statistics centred on central tendency and dispersion of response values is illustrated using a contingency table and dot diagrams. The predictor variable; employee trust perceptions; is operationally defined using three empirical referents namely: employee trust perception of ability, employee trust perception of benevolence and employee trust perception of integrity. Table 3 illustrates the summary result for the descriptive statistics on the empirical referents

**Managing Employee Trust Perceptions for Sustained Workplace Harmony in the Nigerian Banking Industry**

of employee trust perceptions. Based on the nature of the scale adopted (5-point), descriptive interpretation will be based on the following criterion: Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and Standard deviation ( $S$ ) where  $\bar{X} \leq 2.5$  and  $S \leq 2.0$  = poor or weak level of affirmation; where  $2.5 < \bar{X} \leq 3.5$  and  $S \leq 2.0$  = substantial level of affirmation; where  $3.5 < \bar{X} \leq 5$  and  $S \leq 2.0$  = very high level of affirmation

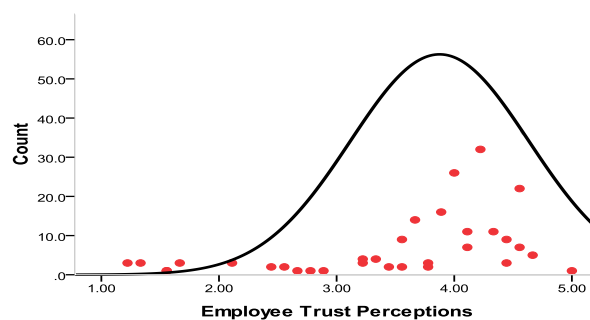
**Table3.** Empirical Referents of Employee Trust Perceptions

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
POA	214	1.33	5.00	3.8069	.83424
POB	214	1.33	5.00	3.8224	.82390
POI	214	1.00	5.00	3.9969	.99240
Valid N (listwise)	214				

**Source:** Research Data, 2015

As presented in Table 3 above, all three empirical referents bear significant values indicating very high levels of affirmation. POA (perception of ability) is an average summary of three manifest variables ( $POA_1$ ,  $POA_2$ , and  $POA_3$ ) which served as indicators for the latent construct; employee trust perception of ability where  $\bar{x} = 3.8089$  and  $s = 0.83424$ ; values imply an average response of high agreement and affirmation level with respect to the overall concept of employee trust perceptions of ability within the organization. POB (perception of benevolence) is summarized using the average of three of its manifest variables ( $POB_1$ ,  $POB_2$  and  $POB_3$ ) which operationally defined the latent construct; employee perception of benevolence where  $\bar{x} = 3.8224$  and  $s = 0.82390$ ; values signify an average response of high agreement and affirmation as concerns employee trust perceptions of benevolence within the target organizations. POI (perception of integrity) is summarized using the average value of its three indicators ( $POI_1$ ,  $POI_2$  and  $POI_3$ ) through which the latent construct of employee trust perception of integrity is operationally defined with  $\bar{x} = 3.9969$  and  $s = 0.99240$ ; values imply an average of high agreement and affirmation levels as relates to the construct of employee trust perceptions of integrity within the organization.

From the mean scores; the central tendency indicates a strong and significant presence of the empirical referents of the predictor variable; employee trust perceptions within the target organizations as observed by the participants. This is further supported by the low level of dispersion to the average score. The implication of this is that a majority of the employees within these organizations believe and trust in the ability and competency of their leaders, as well as the benevolence and integrity of these leaders.



**Fig3.** Dot Diagram for Distribution of Employee Trust Perceptions

Figure 3 above depicts the data distribution for the predictor variable; employee trust perceptions using the dot diagram where mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) = 3.8754 and standard deviation ( $s$ ) = 0.75692



**Fig4.** Dot Diagram for Distribution of Workplace Harmony

Figure 4 illustrates the data distribution for the criterion variable; workplace harmony using the dot diagram where mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) = 3.9019 and standard deviation ( $s$ ) = 0.76694.

The figures (3 and 4) for the study variables as illustrated depict left skewed data for both variables (predictor and criterion) with mean scores ( $\bar{x}$ ) implying high tendencies for agreement and affirmation to variable presence as observed by the participants within the target organizations.

### 4.3. Bivariate Analysis

In this section previously stated hypothetical assumptions of bivariate relations are tested using the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient. Analysis is carried out at a 95% confidence interval implying a 0.05 level of significance which hence serves as criterion for the rejection or acceptance of the hypotheses.

**Table 4.** Tests for Hypotheses

			Harmony	POA	POB	POI
Spearman's rho	Harmony	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.266**	.167*	.497**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.015	.000
		N	214	214	214	214

Source: Research data, 2015

Table 4 above illustrates the findings for the tests for hypotheses  $HO_1$ ,  $HO_2$  and  $HO_3$

**Hypothesis  $HO_1$ : Employee trust perception of ability is not significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony (rho: .266; p-value: .000).** where  $p < 0.05$  signifies significant association with strength of correlation (rho) significant at a 99% confidence interval indicating significance even at a 0.01 level; the null hypothesis of no relationship is therefore rejected as the findings reveal that employee trust perception of ability is significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony.

**Hypothesis  $HO_2$ : Employee trust perception of benevolence is not significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony (rho: .167; p-value: .015).** where  $p < 0.05$  signifies significant association with strength of correlation (rho) significant at a 95% confidence interval indicating significance at 0.05 level; the null hypothesis of no relationship is therefore rejected as the findings reveal that employee trust perception of benevolence is significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony.

**Hypothesis  $HO_3$ : Employee trust perception of integrity is not significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony (rho: .497; p-value: .000).** where  $p < 0.05$  signifies significant association with strength of correlation (rho) significant at a 99% confidence interval indicating significance even at a 0.01 level; the null hypothesis of no relationship is therefore rejected as the findings reveal that employee trust perception of ability is significantly associated with sustained workplace harmony.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study using descriptive and inferential statistical tools empirically examined the association between employee trust perceptions and sustained workplace harmony. Three hypotheses; all stated in the null form; were tested and rejected based on the  $p < 0.05$  criterion implying that employee trust perceptions through its empirical referents (perception of ability, perception of benevolence and perception of integrity) significantly correlates with workplace harmony. The implications of the findings relative to the previously asked research questions are as follows:

### 5.1. Employee Trust Perception of Ability and a more Harmonious Workplace

The findings support the argument that employee trust perception of ability correlates with a more harmonious workplace; corroborating the argument of previous studies (Mosavi et al., 2013) in which perceptions of leader or management ability is viewed as pacifying and encouraging especially in times of dramatic change as a result of socio-economic and socio-political contextual factors or work-related issues. Managerial or leader competency plays an integral role in sustaining employee trust and cooperation as most employees are more inclined to follow the leader "who knows where he is going" and whose experience and track record "speaks for him or her" (Gabriel & Kpakol, 2014).

### 5.2. Employee Trust Perception of Benevolence and a more Harmonious Workplace

The findings from the study reveal that employee trust perception of benevolence correlates with a more harmonious workplace; this is in line with argument of Donnelly et al, (1984) in which workers

expect management and leaders to be considerate and supportive; Akume & Abdullahi, (2013) in which workers expect their opinions are regarded through participation and involvement mechanisms which allow for their contribution in the affairs of the organization. Benevolence allows for understanding; a prerequisite for compromise as regards workers' demands in terms of compensation and working conditions. Acts of benevolence further lend credence to management and leader claims of employee support, welfare and well-being thus endearing employee trust, confidence and collaboration.

### **5.3. Employee Trust Perception of Integrity and a more Harmonious Workplace**

The findings from the study show a significant relationship between employee trust perception of integrity and a more harmonious workplace. Integrity which translates into a reputation for principle and uprightness (Blomqvist & Stahle, 2000) is; based on the findings; revealed as a factor in enhancing interpersonal relations (employee-management) within the workplace which as opined (Axelrod, 1984; Blomqvist & Stahle, 2000) relies a great deal on trust; described herein as risk related expectations based on character, competence and behaviour.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, the study reveals that employee trust perceptions play a significant role in enhancing and sustaining a more harmonious workplace relation. The findings reveal that employees are more attuned to trust and cooperate with management and their leaders when (1) such leadership is perceived as competent and having the required skills, experience and expertise in dealing with both internal and external factors (2) such leadership is perceived as being benevolent, understanding and considerate as regards employees well-being, welfare and work entitlements, and (3) such leadership is perceived as having good integrity and a reputation for uprightness and responsibility. It is therefore imperative for management to structure relationships within the organization in such a way that allows for employee recognition, involvement and work-related issue feedback. Managerial actions are also to be communicated transparently and using clear and consistent methods to avoid any form of misinterpretation of intent or plan.

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