Communicating Trust in Multicultural Teams: A case Study of International Organisations in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: Trust among team members is a critical factor in increasing the team performance and productivity of multicultural teams. Multinational companies operating in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia, attract a workforce from various countries, such as the U.S, Europe, Asia, and Arab countries. Such companies can struggle to cope with establishing trust within team members belonging to different socio-cultural backgrounds, which may lead to conflict and deteriorating relations. This theoretical paper embarks upon these issues in multicultural teams and presents a model of perceived trust among multicultural teams in Saudi Arabia. The present paper used a qualitative approach to build the perception of trust framework; the interviews were carried out with 38 participants. The study concludes that there are differences in trust perception and development, such as those found present in European culture and Arabian culture. Europeans tend to emphasise perceptions such as ability and reliability, which focus more on their experience, but those from an Arabian culture tend to stress security, openness, and loyalty perceptions, focusing more on their cultural traditions or social backgrounds. Thus, the differences in the perceptions of trust have a major influence on the overall performance of multicultural organisations. These differences may have major implications in leading to divisions within the workforce, and it is important to find ways of dealing with these differences.

Keywords: Perception of trust, personality characteristics, teamwork, multicultural teams

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INTRODUCTION

Trust plays a fundamental role in enhancing the competitiveness of companies (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Pucetaite, Lämsä, & Novelskaite, 2010; Seppänen, Blomqvist, & Sundqvist, 2007). When employees trust each other, they are more likely to share knowledge, to be open in their communication, and to deal with conflicts more effectively (Blomqvist et al., 2002; Berry, 2002; Creed, Miles, Kramer, & Tyler, 1996; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Kramer, 1999; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; Muethel & Hoegl, 2012). Despite the importance of trust, companies can often find it difficult to develop a culture of trust among their employees (Buvik & Rolfsen, 2015; Tenzer, Pudelko, & Harzing, 2014). This problem may be compounded within multi-cultural settings. Indeed, team members from different communities may have fundamentally different expectations about the appropriate way to conduct business or to build relationships, creating a genuine potential for conflict (Rashid & Ho, 2003). A lack of cross-cultural understanding among members of multicultural teams can, therefore, lead to a climate in which members are unable to communicate as effectively as they could, which in turn has implications for the broader competitiveness of their companies. Despite this importance, there is a prevailing theoretical gap in the literature on the role of cultural differences on developing trust between team members in multicultural teams (see (Golesorkhi, 2005; Rashid & Ho, 2003; Tenzer et al., 2014)).

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This paper significantly expands the current literature on trust within multicultural teams by analyzing a unique dataset of 38 interviews with members of multicultural business teams in Saudi Arabia. It also has significant resources and opportunities for business development that outstrip the capacity of the local population, multinational companies thus attract a very diverse workforce from across the world. Such companies can therefore, struggle to cope with the issue of establishing trust within team members belonging to different socio-cultural backgrounds (see also (Tenzer et al., 2014)). Moreover, the opportunities for training and education for employees for cultural assimilation can be limited in these companies. This data set of interviews and existing literature on trust and perception of trust is used by this paper to develop a theoretical model of perception of trust that can be empirically tested in future studies.

Furthermore, this paper goes beyond only offering theoretical analyses of differences in cultural ideas about trust-building and instead raises a more fundamental question: does the understanding of what trust means differ between colleagues of different cultures? In so doing, this paper develops a 'conception of trust' framework, a system for evaluating whether different groups understand what trust means in consistent ways within the multicultural workplace environment. Further the proposed framework defines consistency or inconsistency in the understanding of the nature of trust between different team members. Companies may legitimately seek to enhance the level of intra-company trust, yet while there exist a literature and a range of techniques that putatively will deliver on such desires (see (Coppola, Hiltz, & Rotter, 2004; Gibson & Manuel, 2003; Drescher, Korsgaard, Welpe, Picot, & Wigand, 2014; Buvik & Rolfsen, 2015; Rijal, 2016; Reza, Rusidah, & Forasidah, 2017) trust enhancing activities will only be successful if there is agreement between different team members about the fundamental meaning of 'trust'. However, to date, there have been no detailed investigations of the meaning of trust in multi-national companies, and there is a lack of agreed-upon perception of trust framework. To fill these knowledge gaps the paper proceeds as follows,

First, it reviews existing literature on perception of trust. Secondly, it builds upon the gaps in the literature by highlighting themes from field data, thirdly it proposes a model of perception of trust based on theoretical gaps and emerged themes and finally concludes with a discussion of model and propositions for future empirical research.

Trust and Perception of Trust Framework

The theoretical literature on perception of trust informs that trust is influenced by factors such as education, ability, loyalty, reliability, integrity, etc. These factors carry cultural meanings, e.g., loyalty for Asian and Middle Eastern culture has different meanings as compared to Europe and other parts of the world, and that we would not necessarily expect standards to map the differences among diverse team members, even if the same overarching categories are the same. Keeping this in mind, this study thus develops a 'conception of trust, including the measurement model validation and report that, whether participants have a consistent idea, such that significant differences on that scale indicate systematic differences on the likelihood of following the concept that is inherently reflected in that model.

There are five key personality associated characteristics of the trustee which influenced the decision whether to trust: honesty and trustfulness, ability in terms of education and skills, reliability and credibility of the trustee in the context of solving the issues faced by the trustor, loyalty of the trustee to the trustor in times of need, and dependability. Ten key factors were also identified by the paper through interviews, which constituted the basis of the perception of trust within a multicultural team environment. These ten factors, regarded as the pillar of the perception of trust for members of multicultural teams in Saudi Arabia, are honesty/truthfulness, reciprocity, ability, reliability, credibility, support, shared understanding, openness, loyalty, and dependability. Furthermore, the importance of these factors varied among different members belonging to different cultures. For example, this study revealed that Arabs valued security and openness more compared to other factors.

Similarly, Asian people in the multicultural teams placed more value in reliability and credibility than the other factors. However, all members of multicultural teams, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, showed the more value in the following three factors: ability, reciprocity, and reliability; while the pattern of the following five factors: honesty, support, shared understanding, loyalty and dependability were also considered important by all members of multicultural teams. This also suggests that similarities in the conception of trust among multicultural teams influence positively, while the differences in the conception of trust based on differences in the cultural background impact negatively on communication and teamwork. The Perception of trust between team members is shown to be influenced by personality characteristics of the trustee, such as ability, honesty, reciprocation, security, dependability, loyalty, openness, credibility, and reliability. These characteristics are elaborated below.

Ability and Education

The ability of the trustee is an important determinant for increasing and sustaining the trust of the trustor within multicultural teams in multinational companies. The study proposes that the 'highly skilled' characteristic of the trustee is regarded as a critical factor for trusting the accomplishment of tasks being completed by the team. Similarly, the ability and competencies of the trustee enabled them to accept vulnerability in building trust-based relationships. The past experience of group members with each other also enabled them to make informed decisions about assessing and trusting the skills and competencies in a particular domain. This further indicates that the ability and competencies of the trustee in the particular domain influences the perceived trust of the trustor. The results of this study seem to suggest that a trustor is not willing to accept vulnerability about skills and competencies unknown to the trustor. These outcomes are logical because the trustee may hold expertise in some technical domain of the issue, but not about the other areas of the task. Therefore, the trustee may be trusted to perform an analytical task, but would not be trusted to execute other aspects of the task. For instance, a scientist may be trusted to complete the research work, but would not be trusted to deliver the lectures to students, as his/her competencies in research are excellent, but in the teaching domain are insufficient. Thus it can be argued that trust is domain-specific, as argued by Zand (1972). Several other studies have supported the above finding, and have used similar or several synonyms to show a positive relationship between ability and trust (Bo Shing & P.J., 2017; Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007; Jarvenpaa, Knoll, & Leidner, 1998; Jones & George, 1998; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). For instance, Garbarro (1978) used a survey questionnaire containing nine items leading to trust, including functional competence, business sense, judgment, and interpersonal competence, which are all related to the ability of the trustee. Furthermore, competency may denote skills related to a specific domain, while ability may represent the situation/task-related construct. In this sense, ability contains a set of skills, expertise, and competencies that are required to complete a task (Zand, 1972); ability is attained through training and education. In short, it can be argued that the ability of the trustee in multinational teams in multinational companies serves as an important basis for establishing trust among the team members. There is an integrative relationship between the ability of the individuals and the education and training acquired by them.

The outcomes of the study also suggest that the education level of the trustee plays an important role in increasing trustworthiness. As ability can be gained through education and it shows a broader picture presenting important themes such as skills/competencies, the degree-awarding institution's reputation, and the location of universities as being measures of perceived trust that are important factors conditioning the perception of trust placed in a person. These factors can then be discussed with reference to the ability of the trustee, one of three important characteristics of the trustee (ability, integrity, and benevolence). The purpose of education, according to Kehm (2010), is to increase the abilities and skills required to execute the task. A high-quality education can ensure the right set of skills and competencies needed by employers. Quality has no universal definition, so it varies with employers and educational institutions, and so understandings will inherently be subjective. However, if the educational institution offers graduates the right set of skills and knowledge required by employers, this would increase the perceived trustworthiness of both educators and graduates in the eyes of employers.

Consistent with the argument of this study, a person with higher education should come up to the expectations of his/her employer to perform the job effectively and efficiently. The educational institutions in developing countries such as India, Philippines, Pakistan, and Middle Eastern countries seem to pay lesser attention to employers' needs while designing the curriculum for graduates, which can lead to poor quality education. Consequently, the perception of the trustworthiness of educational institutions in such countries decreases in the estimation of employers (De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012). Similarly, Madhi and Barrientos (2003) posit that Saudi Arabian employers value graduates from America and Britain due to quality skills and knowledge delivered to students. In addition, the confidence and practical knowledge and experience delivered by European and American higher education institutions enable students to handle issues encountered in a job and troubleshoot them effectively. However, the higher educational institutions may place emphasis on the theoretical aspects of education, due to a lack of resources or because of its importance. Therefore, employers value foreign qualifications rather than ones earned from Saudi Arabia, India, or some other developing country's universities.

In short, education serves the purpose of increasing an individual's skills, competencies, and knowledge, which in turn increases the ability of the person to perform the task in the workplace. The higher the ability of the individual, the greater the level of trustworthiness, according to Mayer et al. (1995), as an ability is an important determinant of trust

and contributes to trust. Thus education indirectly contributes to trust by increasing the trustworthiness of the trustee in the eyes of the trustor.

Loyalty, Dependability, & Production

Research undertaken in this study has found that loyalty and dependability (defined as the reliance on an individual to complete the task that is set, regardless of any problems they face) are the characteristics of the trustee, and without which trust cannot exist. The study argues that the perception of the trustor is increased as a result of finding the trustee to be loyal to his words and able to put his/her words into actions (production). Similarly, the perception of trust was increased as a result of putting actions into words, on behalf of the trustee. In this view-point, it seems logical to suggest that loyalty and production are prerequisites for increasing the trustworthiness of the trustee and simultaneously for increasing the willingness to accept vulnerability on behalf of the trustor.

Further, Mayer et al. (1995) used the term 'benevolence' referring to the ability of the trustee to be motivated to do good for the trustor, besides self-interest and egocentric motives. Furthermore, they asserted that doing good for the trustor may not be done by the trustee unless he/she holds some specific attachment to the trustor, which has been defined as the loyalty of the trustee to the trustor in this study. They explained the relationship of loyalty with trust by giving an example of protégé and mentor. The mentor's sole motive to help the protégé is considered enough for the protégé to trust him, apart from the skills and competencies and knowledge of the mentor to offer good quality help. The positive orientation of the mentor (trustee), also called his willingness to do good and loyalty, is sufficient for the protégé (trustor) to trust him. This theory strengthens the argument of this study that positive orientation–loyalty and a goodwill gesture–towards the trustor is important to increase the willingness of the trustor to accept the vulnerability (trust) (Smith & Barclay, 1997; Young-Ybarra & Wiersema, 1999).

In a similar vein, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) used a similar term, the trustee motive to lie. If the trustee is loyal to the trustor, his motive to lie will decrease, which will consequently increase the trustworthiness of the trustor. Several other researchers have emphasised the intentions and motives, rather than the orientation of the trustor, as they include a wider implication for the trustor (Gibson & Manuel, 2003; P. W., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Lowry, Zhang, Zhou, & Fu, 2007; Wood, 2012) and they also reflected that positive motives and intentions of the trustee to trustor are critical for increasing the willingness of the trustee to accept vulnerability in relationship. This corroborates the finding of the current study showing a positive association between loyalty and dependability with trust.

Similarly, Butler Jr and Cantrell (1984) also showed that loyalty and goodwill motives contribute to trust, which is consistent with the findings of this study. Likewise, Straight (2004) empirically showed that altruism and loyalty are important determinants to increase the level of trustworthiness of the trustor. In addition, Adler and Gundersen (2007) and Fischlmayr and Auer-Rizzi (2008) also provided results in line with the current study that goodwill gesture and loyalty of the trustee contribute to building trust between trustor and trustee. These cases suggest that loyalty, a goodwill motive, and orientation towards positive actions rather than mere words contribute to trust, thereby increasing the team performance and commitment to the organisational goals.

Reliability, Credibility, and Integrity

Reliability and credibility are important characteristics of the trustee, which contribute positively to the development of trust between the trustor and trustee (Seppänen et al., 2007). In line with outcomes reviewed by Seppänen et al. (2007), it is further argued that reliability and credibility are positive contributors to the development of trust within multicultural teams in multi-national organisations in Saudi Arabia. These results have been supported by several other studies conducted in the domain of trust in multicultural teams (Mayer et al., 1995; Seppänen et al., 2007; Yoon, 2002; Yousafzai, Pallister, & Foxall, 2003).

Mayer et al. (1995) used the term 'integrity' to denote the features of one's character, such as reliability and credibility, and reinforced in their trust model that reliability and credibility of the trustee contribute to trust. Similarly, Lieberman (1981) found that the integrity of the trustee increases the trustworthiness of the trustee, which is consistent with the results of this study. Sitkin and Roth (1993) used a similar term, such as 'value congruence', to show that when compatibility of values observed by the trustee as being compatible with those of the trustor increases, the level of the trust also increases. This means that congruence between a trustee and a trustor increases or decreases the reliability of the trustee, which consequently increases the trustworthiness of the trustor. Likewise, different terms

such as consistency, integrity, and fairness are used in the study conducted by Butler Jr (1991), as being important antecedents of trust. Yousafzai et al. (2003) showed in their study that adherence of the trustee to his or her own promises increased the level of the trust between the trustor and the trustee. Yoon (2002) argues that reliability is related to the consistency of the actions and promises made and delivered by the trustee to the trustor. They further discovered that consistency increases trust; if the consistency in actions is compatible with the values of the trustor, then it increases trust. However, if the trustee continues exercising consistency in a self-serving manner, and damages the interests of the trustor, the level of mistrust increases between the trustee and trustor.

Aristotle's theory of ethos also included the element of reliability and credibility as part of the character of the trustee to establish a high perception of trust with the trustor (Rapp, 2011). Similarly, one of the three characteristics described by Garbarro (1978) in his study was the character, and he argued that character involves reliability and credibility as part of the integrity of character. Hart, Capps, Cangemi, and Caillouet (1986) survey consisting of 24 items revealed that reliability was an important antecedent of trust. Ganesan (1994) conducted a similar survey to measure credibility and benevolence and found that credibility as a trust dimension increases trust and confidence of the trustor.

Taken together, these researches further support the argument of this study, relating to credibility and reliability being important factors affecting trust between the trustor and the trustee; although these are necessary elements of trust, they are not essential. In addition, this shows that reliability and credibility, which are found by this study as important antecedents of trust, are well-grounded in the previous literature pertaining to trust.

Honesty and Truthfulness

Honesty and truthfulness have been found to be the most important characteristics of the trustee in this study in both quantitative and qualitative results. The interviews conducted by research showed an honest and open person was found to be more trustable among team members, showing that both characteristics contribute to trust. Similarly, these results were supported by the results obtained from both the questionnaire survey and metaphor analysis, which further indicates the strength of these features of the trustee and their role in establishing trust between the trustee and the trustor. In Aristotle's Rhetorics, the trustor perceives that honesty and reliability are at the base of trust (Mayer et al., 1995), which further supports the central thesis of the current study.

Similarly, Larzelere and Huston (1980) measured benevolence and honesty as important features of the trustee and discovered that honesty in the partnerships and exchange relationships strengthens the trust between the transacting parties. Relational exchange theory and theories of inter-firm exchange also place great emphasis on the honesty and truthfulness of the transacting parties to establish a significant level of trust, thereby showing honesty and truthfulness as critical factors in establishing and fostering trust between the transacting parties, a similar argument is proposed by (Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998), who used the similar term of 'fairness' to represent honesty.

Likewise, Kollingbaum and Norman (2002) discovered that goodwill trust could be fostered by increasing honesty and truthfulness in abiding by the alliance agreement and sharing information with the concerned parties. Coote, Forrest, and Tam (2003) analysed the influence of honesty, integrity, and reliability on the perception of trust between two transacting parties. The respondents in their study stated that they trusted their suppliers when they were honest and truthful. Furthermore, (Smith & Barclay, 1997) used a 23-item survey to measure trustworthiness, and found that honesty and truthfulness can increase the perception of trust between transacting parties. In agreement with the outcomes of the study conducted by (Chow & Holden, 1997; Smith & Barclay, 1997) used 3-items to measure trust in a salesperson, and showed that buyers' trust in the salesperson was increased by honesty and truthfulness.

Taken together, it is suggested that the honesty and truthfulness of the team members increases the perception of trust in multicultural teams working in multinational organisations in Saudi Arabia. The management should ensure that team members are truthful and honest in carrying out the team work in an efficient and effective way.

DATA COLLECTION

The present paper used a qualitative approach to build the perception of trust framework; the interviews were carried out with 38 participants. The participants included in the sample were Arabian, Europeans, Asians, and participants from others cultures, and were aged in the range of 20 to 60. This sample was balanced with respect to the participants' demographic characteristics and backgrounds. The selection of these employees offered a variety of occupational levels and hierarchy levels. Such diversity was crucial as it allowed for a broader consideration of the role of organisational

position regardless of age. In addition, the companies selected were from different sectors: a private company for industrial chemicals, employing 35.750 workers, 42% foreign; a food company employing 18,701 workers, 21% foreign; a defense and security company with 36% foreign employees in their 5,200 workforce; and an insurance company of 1,267 employees with 26% being foreign.

Data from the interviews were colour-coded, based on the research questions, and divided into four columns. The first column provided the identification code used for the interviewee, and the second column noted the responses. Key points were identified in the third column, and the fourth column referred to the themes. The transcripts were then scrutinised to find any other common themes.

Using a mixed-methods framework, this study adopted an innovative approach by using questionnaires, interviews, and metaphor analysis. The first phase of data collection was through a survey questionnaire, which resulted in 482 respondents from members of multicultural teams across four international companies. In the second phase, interviews were carried out with 38 participants. The participants included in the sample were Indians, Arabian, Europeans, Asians, and participants from other cultures and were aged in the range of 20 to 60. This sample was balanced with respect to the participants' demographic characteristics and backgrounds. The respondents within multicultural teams belonged to a variety of nationalities. The selection of these employees offered a variety of occupational levels and hierarchy levels. Such diversity was crucial as it allowed for a broader consideration of the role of organisational position regardless of age. In addition, the companies selected were from different sectors: a private company for industrial chemicals, employing 35.750 workers, 42% foreign; a food company employing 18,701 workers, 21% foreign; a defense and security company with 36% foreign employees in their 5,200 workforces; and an insurance company of 1,267 employees with 26% being foreign.

The survey questionnaire was administered electronically for three main reasons: it was easier to distribute, there are high response rates, and it speeds up the collection process. Distribution was through Survey Monkey, and managers from the companies involved were sent the link so that they could email to their employees. The email provided details of the aims of the research and how their responses would be used, plus asked for their consent. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate perceptions of trust, similarities, and differences between members of multicultural teams, determinants of trust, and functions of trust in communication. Responses were analysed through SPSS. Descriptive statistics, principal components analysis, and regression analysis were then used. Regression analysis was performed to evaluate the strength of associations between the dependent variables of the concept of trust, determinants of perceptions of trust, similarities, and differences in the concept of trust, and trust in communication and the independent variables of gender, age, job title, nationality, religion, and educational level.

Within the questionnaire, there were open questions asking participants to describe their perceptions of trust in a metaphorical manner. This was designed to strengthen the qualitative and quantitative findings as these responses gave a more in-depth insight into the feelings of the participants. Metaphors are important within social contexts as they provide information about how individuals understand complex concepts. The interviewees were also asked to provide two words or an image related to the perception of trust and explain why they had chosen these. In total, 494 metaphors with entailments were used for the data analysis; these were classified into predetermined categories, based on participants' perceptions of trust, using an Excel spreadsheet. This was a complex process.

As the surveys had revealed a low perception of trust and a lack of communication among team members, often resulting in significant losses and issues in projects, it was important to have a further understanding of this problem, and interviews allowed these areas to be probed. For the interviews, a semi-structured approach was taken with team members from different nationalities and with different ranks in their company, such as manager, team leader, and worker. Interviews were conducted via telephone and lasted no longer than 60 minutes. These were recorded and later transcribed; the transcripts of responses from native Arabic speakers then had to be translated into English, and this was accomplished by a professional translation service.

Data from the interviews were colour-coded, based on the research questions, and divided into four columns. The first column provided the identification code used for the interviewee, and the second column noted the responses. Key points were identified in the third column, and the fourth column referred to the themes. The transcripts were then scrutinised to find any other common themes.

The reliability of the data from the questionnaire was measured through Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency, and the interviews were validated by ensuring that the semi-structured interview questions met the research objectives; this was by conducting a short pilot study, which led to some of the questions being modified. Feedback was

used as a validity measurement for the metaphors, as the intended meanings needed to be checked by the participants for accuracy.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The qualitative data showed a certain pattern of similarities and differences in the perception of trust among different members working in multicultural teams, which may have resulted from their different cultures and nationalities. Through multicultural team analysis, four categories of nationalities were established, including Arabs, Asians, Europeans, and other cultures. Therefore, this study revealed a similar pattern in the perception of trust among team members belonging to these nationalities. This takes into account that each culture and nationality is determined by unique characteristics, values, symbols, rituals, and manners, which are guiding rules used to identify the appropriate or inappropriate attitude/behaviours (Gerhart, 2009).

Characteristics of trustee valued by Arabs: The Arabs working in multicultural teams gave honesty, reciprocation, ability, and security, openness, support, shared understanding, dependability, and loyalty to the highest importance. However, reliability was the least important characteristic for Arabs.

Characteristics of trustee valued by Europeans: The Europeans workers working in a multicultural team put a high emphasis on honesty and truthfulness, reciprocation, ability, reliability, support, shared understanding, and dependability loyalty as the key characteristics of the trustee. However, they placed the least importance on security and openness.

Characteristics of trustee valued by Asians: Asian workers in the multicultural teams in the multinational or-ganisations in Saudi Arabia considered honesty and truthfulness, reciprocation, ability, reliability, support, shared understanding, dependability and loyalty the key elements for trusting the trustee. Nevertheless, they attached the least importance to security and openness.

Characteristics of trustee valued by other cultural groups: The multicultural teams also contained some other cultural groups such as African, American, and Australian; they preferred honesty and truthfulness, ability, reliability, support, openness, shared understanding, and loyalty as characteristics of a trustee, while they gave the least importance to reciprocation and security. The differences across cultures in terms of the perception of trust is revealed in Figure 1.

Perception of Trust Framework: Similarities and Differences

The personality characteristics of the trustee, learnt through upbringing and cultural effects, determine the decision of the trustor on whether to trust others. People with the same or similar cultural values share similar personality characteristics; thus, the comparison of personality characteristics of the trustee can enable one to assess the propensity of the trustor from a specific nationality to trust other nationalities. Therefore, from the above categorisation of different nationalities, it can be concluded that honesty, reciprocation, ability, shared understanding, dependability and loyalty are important and widely accepted traits of trustworthiness, which are commonly valued by all cultural groups working in multicultural teams. However, reliability, security and openness are trustees' traits, which vary in terms of their preference and priority across different cultures existing in multicultural teams. Interestingly, it can be noted that patterns of perception of trust among Asian and European nationals are the same. Both of them scored high on honesty, ability, reciprocation, reliability, shared understanding, dependability and loyalty for putting their trust in the other partner, and gave security and openness the least importance.

The same pattern of perception of trust among Asian and European cultures may be justified by taking the dominance of European culture over the Asian culture, due to the centuries-old rule of European nations over the Asian ones (Fischer, Hanke, & Sibley, 2012). This identical pattern of perception of trust between European and Asian nationals may contribute to a greater perception of trust between them while working in multicultural teams. This finding can enable the management to make informed decisions regarding designing multicultural teams with greater cohesion and trust.

Similarly, Arabs differ from European or Asian culture in terms of putting the least importance on 'reliability' as a characteristic of the trustee. Arabs scored high on the collectivistic scale, designed by Hofstede (1983). In such cultures, the people are very close to each other, live in groups and perform tasks collectively. Therefore, the actions and motives of the individuals are automatically revealed to the interacting parties during communication or while performing tasks. Consequently, a high level of openness is necessary or important for the interacting parties. In addition, information about the trustee is gained by the trustor through families, friends and relatives which enables the trustor to make an informed decision to trust the trustee, which further emphasises the 'openness' of the trustee in establishing strong

bonds. To conclude, the management of multinational organisations should take into consideration the similarities and differences in the pattern of perception of trust among members of multicultural teams, in order to build and foster cohesion and trust among them. Consequently, the teams with a high perception of trust can generate improved productivity and performance for multicultural organisations. This relationship is further depicted in a model below, which can be treated as a first step in developing a universal framework of perceptions of trust among multicultural teams.
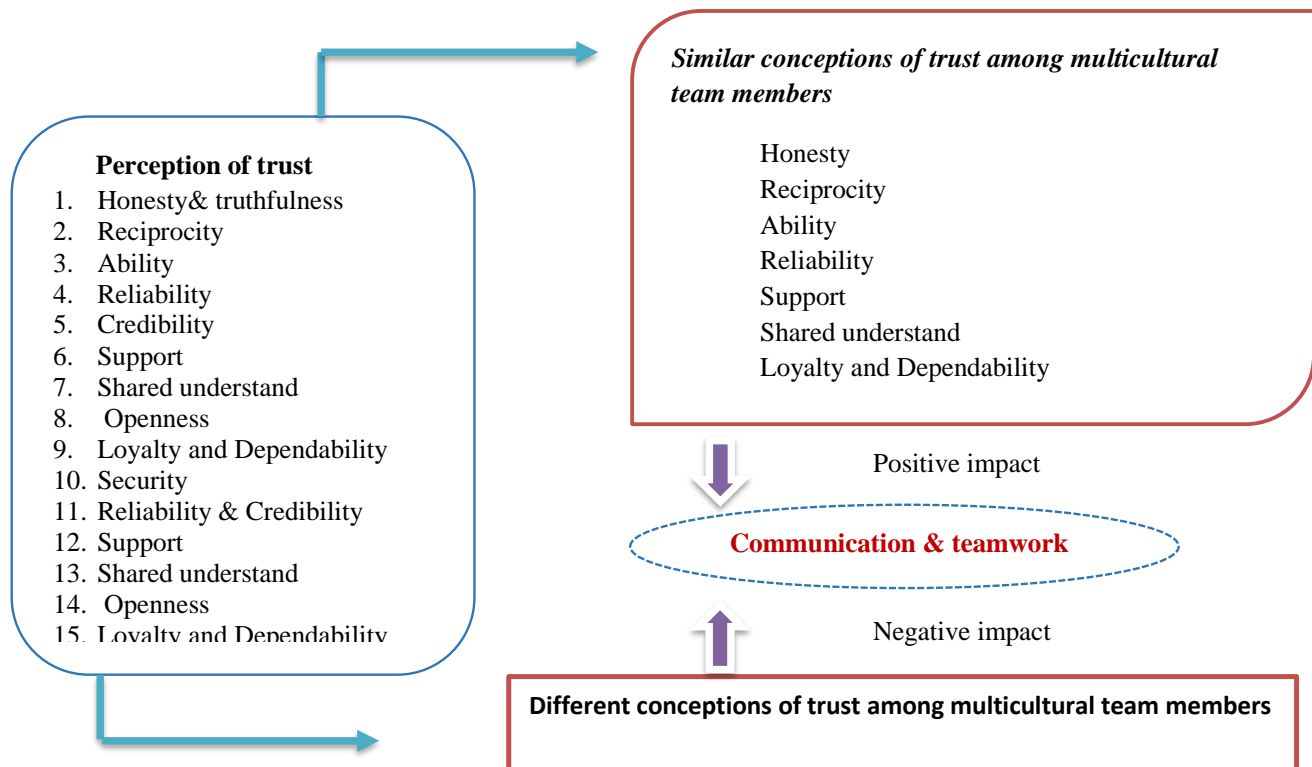

Figure 1 *Model Representing the Similarities and Differences of Perception of Trust Among Multicultural Teams*

Discussion of Model: A Socio-Psychological Frame

So far, the discussion on the results has established that different people have different understandings of the nature of trust. While some variation is expected, these differences also vary systematically by age, nationality, education level, experience, social status, and culture. Nonetheless, it is possible to question the substantive importance of such differences. Indeed, it is possible that different conceptions about the nature of trust have little practical significance within multi-cultural teams, and instead, the organisation's rules and norms facilitate easy working in spite of different conceptions of the nature of trust. Now the question arises as to what are the benefits or consequences of these similarities and differences. Interview participants were asked about the benefits of team members sharing a consistent view of the nature of trust, and the challenges associated with team members having different concepts of trust. Also, the similarities cause communication and negotiations among team members to be much easier. On the other hand, a difference in these perceptions results in quite the opposite; it results in the hindrance and difficulty in communication and negotiation, as well as damaging trust-building in the long term.

Nowadays, individuals have a wide range of perceptions on the concept of trust and these differ from one individual to the other based on different cultural values and social impacts. However, these individuals work alongside one another under one organisation and similarities and differences in their perception of trust can cause a great problem in building as well as developing trust in these organisations. Thus, this issue highlights the importance of this study, as these similarities and differences need to be known in these multinational organisations and to develop mechanism as to how to deal with them. In accordance with Giddens (1984), institutions play a role in social life. However, Scott (2007) argues that institutions are more of a cultural-cognitive as well as a regulative element, which gives stability to social life'. These cases suggest that institutional role in the establishment and promotion of trust through the social

psychological and cultural avenues. This is because the institutions impose strict regulations and disciplines on their adherents, through which they train them to follow the pre-determined norms for socialization within institutional boundaries. Through the well-disciplined and regulated approach, the institutions bring their members closer to each other, promote a learning environment for knowledge sharing and communication, help discover the different patterns in the conception of trust, and ultimately develop the sound strategies to overcome these differences for enhancement of the perception of trust among the organisational members. Thus, the relevance of institutional role in fostering trust is not only important from the point of view of this study as it is conducted on the multinational organisational, but it also involves the people working in these organisations.

Moreover, Kostova (1997, 1999) puts forward the idea that the country's institutional profile, which is comprised of normative, cognitive, and regulative institutions, describes a country's social environment. Kostova (1997, 1999) also argues this institutional profile is largely dependent on the social and cultural context. For instance, some institutions may be more relevant in explaining the concept of trust than other institutes. Moreover, Kostova (1997, 1999) describes that culture and institutes partly overlap, despite reflecting different approaches to conceptualise social context. In accordance with Dietz, Gillespie, and Chao (2010), the lack of understanding and comprehension of another culture's concept of trust may cause an individual to become isolated into their own culture. Having different conceptualisation of trust may cause each individual's identity to be reaffirmed as well as belittling that of the other (Gibson & Manuel, 2003). In agreement with this, Kramer (2010) also suggests that self-categorisation on both sides can further escalate this issue. As a norm, individuals will tend to have a positive outlook on their group, however, they may have a tendency to hold less positive views of that of the other group, as described by Brewer and Silver (1978).

Deutsch (1958), describes people with a few similarities present between individuals, there will be limited sharing of information and knowledge amongst them, regardless of the presence of unifying elements. As a result, it is plausible to assume cultural differences in the concept of trust hindering trust development as well as reducing perception of similarities. Strong negative consequences can be as a result of dissimilarities and two individuals not comprehending the fact that others may have different concepts of trust, as described by Muethel and Hoegl (2012). Furthermore, conflicts may arise as a result of not taking into account the cross-cultural perspective, thereby causing distrust amongst team members (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998). On the other hand, if cross-cultural perspective is taken into account it may not only minimise the negative effects caused by the concept of trust differences but also help develop trust. As supported by Ferrin and Gillespie (2010), they argue that taking into account cross-cultural perspectives allows for an increase in trust development, as it is a sign for a long-term relationship. Education and teaching have a role in developing the concepts of trust and understanding the importance as well as usefulness in the concept of trust similarities and how they can be used to build trust amongst a multicultural team in the long term. A study carried out by Muethel and Hoegl (2012) has highlighted that "differences in cultural aspects in the concept of trust can put the trust development at risk, if the favoured trust-building mechanisms are contradictory".

Therefore, international organisations require educating and training its employees, making them understand that there are similarities as well as differences when speaking about the concept of trust. Also, highlighting the important similarities in the perception of trust to multicultural team members within these organisations is vital as well as the relationships of the employees with one another; and more importantly culture along with religion, especially Islam, can both play a major role in building these trust perceptions, as indicated from the results of this study. Also, the Asian nationality in particular is found to have a significant importance on the concept of trust. In terms of religion, Christians take into consideration the ten characteristics of a trustworthy person more than any other religion. There is no study published yet that highlights the importance of these differences and similarities on the concept of trust amongst multicultural teams. In addition, researchers have assumed that partners in a business setting have compatible conceptualisations of trust (Child, Chung, & Davies, 2003). On the other hand, researchers such as Dietz et al. (2010) and Wasti and Tan (2010) have highlighted the significant dangers associated with differences on perception of trust and their negative impact on trust building among multicultural teams and no trust models exists in the literature capturing these dissimilarities.

CONCLUSION

Exploring trust issues in multinational companies is an emerging field, with limited literature, yet interest is increasing due to the interest in the relationship between trust and communication (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005; Rode, 2010) and between communication and team performance (Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004; Urban,

Bowers, Monday, & Morgan Jr, 1995). The expansion of companies beyond their national borders has also stirred up a plethora of trust related issues due to employees from different nationalities working side by side in the companies. This scenario can, at various times, result in feuds, conflicts and misinterpreting the intention of team members. It would benefit multinational companies if they could know which determinants of trust were more frequent among particular individuals; in this way they may be able to find a more universal definition of trust, thereby reducing both time and costs in dealing with misinterpretations. By understanding the nature of trust, companies can improve communication, leading to an increase in productivity and performance of the multicultural teams.

Due to limited evidence regarding the factors affecting trust and determinants of trust in multinational companies in developing countries, there is a call for empirical research to enhance a deeper understanding about the issues and causes of trust arising from the multi-ethnicity within teams in multinational organisations (Hughes, McCoy, Johnston, & Hughes, 2009; Starnes, Truhon, & McCarthy, 2010; Vanhala & Ritala, 2016; Zakaria, Amelinckx, & Wilemon, 2004). This paper has sought to make a contribution to these discussions by revealing some vital and novel characteristics of the trustee; these allow a judgement on trustworthiness to be made, based on the presence of these characteristics. These characteristics include ability, honesty, reliability, openness, security, credibility, loyalty, shared understanding, dependability, and support. Strikingly, this study showed that while all these 10 characteristics play a role in establishing the trust between the trustor and trustee, these characteristics are not equally important in the establishment of trust. The findings of this study put three characteristics of the trustee in the limelight: ability, honesty, reciprocity. In other words, the data from this study highlight that the foregoing three characteristics must be present in the personality of the trustee, and are essentially evaluated by the trustor before placing trust on the trustee in a Saudi context. This leads to a conceptual understanding of trust in a Saudi context, while addressing the establishment of trust in multicultural teams.

However, other characteristics in the trustee's personality may be assessed by the trustor, depending on the situation. For instance, the blend of two or more of these features and attributes of the trustee may be required by the trustor at single periods of time, depending on the demands of the situation; ability and honesty may be required to execute the task effectively. Openness and loyalty may be required to unfold the details of errors within the executed task and concerns about the functioning of the processes. Therefore, these trustee characteristics play a critical role in establishing trust between the trustor and the trustee.

Another significant finding of this study was that similarities and differences in the perception of trust are strong indicators of the establishment of trust between two transacting members within multicultural teams at multinational companies in Saudi Arabia. Arabs, Europeans and Asians were found to be similar in trusting others based on their abilities, honesty and reciprocation. However, Arabs differ from Europeans and Asians in the sense that they expected security as an essential trait in a trustworthy person, while other nationalities ranked it low in the preferential scale for trusting other people. Nonetheless, Asians and Europeans were very similar in terms of valuing honesty, ability, reciprocation and reliability while they ranked openness and security low; this indicates potential good working relationships and greater trust in teams containing these nationalities.

The perception of trust similarities among multicultural teams, where it is agreed that they are of high importance, include honesty, reciprocation and ability. This is in accordance with the similarity attraction theory (Byrne, 1971). suggesting that similarities in day-to-day interactions are often preferred by individuals. Similarities in these perceptions in cultures such as European, Arab, and Asian etc. should be considered by organisations and implemented into practice among multicultural teams to increase performance and productivity, as people tend to have a natural bias towards those who they perceive to be similar to themselves (Audebert, Beyer, & Hacki, 2016).

The study concludes that there are differences in the perception and development of trust, such as those found present in European culture and Arabian culture. Europeans tend to emphasise perceptions such as ability and reliability, which focus more on their experience, but those from an Arabian culture tends to stress security, openness, and loyalty perceptions, which focus more on their cultural traditions or social backgrounds. Thus, the differences in the perceptions of trust have a major influence on the overall performance of multicultural organisations. These differences may have major implications in terms of leading to divisions within the workforce, and it is therefore important to find ways of dealing with these differences. One way these can be addressed is through the integration of training programmes that make employees more aware and conscious in regard to working with a diverse team that may share different perceptions of trust. These training programmes should explicitly address cultural approaches to trust, aiming to build connections, trust, and develop a common understanding between people.

The quantitative results of this study, through the implementation of a questionnaire, revealed the ten characteristics

of a trustworthy person. However, the questionnaire did not include measurements of the absolute levels of trust people had in their co-workers. To overcome this, this study employed a qualitative method in which interviews and metaphor analysis were conducted to further discover dimensions other than those mentioned. The three methods proved to be effective tools for measuring the extent of perception of trust among members of multicultural teams in multinational companies in Saudi Arabia.

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