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Building Resilience Through Fair Leadership and Organizational Support in Education and Health Sectors

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the significant predictors and outcomes of interpersonal trust within organizational settings. Specifically, it investigates whether transformational leadership, procedural justice, and perceived organizational support predict trust in managers, and whether this trust subsequently leads to organizational identification and continuous improvement efforts. A survey methodology was employed, distributing 400 questionnaires among employees in Pakistan's banking, higher education, telecom, and health sectors. After removing incomplete responses, 282 usable questionnaires were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via AMOS 16. The empirical results supported all five hypotheses. Transformational leadership ($\beta=0.07$, $p<.001$), procedural justice ($\beta=0.10$, $p=.002$), and perceived organizational support ($\beta=0.06$, $p=.019$) were found to be significant, positive predictors of trust in managers. Furthermore, trust in managers had strong, positive relationships with both

organizational identification ($\beta=0.77$, $p<.001$) and continuous improvement efforts ($\beta=0.87$, $p<.001$). The study confirms that managers can foster trust by demonstrating transformational leadership behaviors, ensuring fair procedures, and showing organizational support. In turn, cultivated trust significantly enhances employees' sense of belonging and their proactive efforts towards incremental innovation. The findings offer practical guidance for HR professionals and leaders aiming to build a high-trust climate for competitive advantage.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Procedural Justice, Perceived Organizational Support, Trust, Organizational Identification, Continuous Improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal trust is a cornerstone of effective and sustainable organizational performance. It fosters environments where communication flourishes, discretionary effort increases, and conflict diminishes, directly impacting productivity and competitive edge (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Jones & George, 1998). In an era where hierarchical structures are giving way to lateral networks and alliances, trust becomes not merely beneficial but essential for coordination and implementation (Creed & Miles, 1996). Fairholm (1998) succinctly captures its necessity: "no organization can take place without interpersonal trust."

Trust, defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party" (Mayer et al., 1995), is a delicate social construct. It takes considerable time to build, can be shattered easily, and is challenging to regain (Robbins, 1999). Its significance is reflected in outcomes such as enhanced organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), greater commitment, lower turnover intentions, and improved quality of decision-making (Katinka & Gerhard, 2003; Tyler, 1998).

Despite extensive research, gaps remain in comprehensively modeling the specific antecedents and consequences of trust in managerial relationships within diverse organizational contexts. Prior studies have individually linked constructs like leadership and justice to trust, but an integrated examination is warranted. Furthermore, while trust is hypothesized to motivate extra-role behaviors, its direct link to systematic, ongoing initiatives like continuous improvement requires further empirical validation.

Problem Identification & Research Objectives

Global competition necessitates strategic focus on continuous improvement and employee engagement. However, employees often perceive quality improvement activities as beyond their formal job requirements (Morrison, 1997). Trust and organizational identification are posited as "soft determinants" that can motivate such voluntary, discretionary efforts (Lee, 2004). Responding to calls for further research (e.g., Connell et al., 2003), this study aims to integrate key relational and perceptual constructs into a coherent model.

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the relationship of procedural justice, perceived organizational support, and transformational leadership with employees' trust in their managers.
2. To determine if trust in managers leads to significant outcomes, specifically organizational identification and continuous improvement efforts.

Rationale and Scope

This research is vital because human capital is the primary driver of organizational success. In the pursuit of shareholder profitability and competitive advantage, understanding how to elicit employee commitment and extra-role behavior is paramount. Trust acts as the lubricant that reduces transactional costs and fosters harmonious relations (Creed & Miles, 1996). By identifying actionable predictors of trust, this study provides managers with a blueprint for cultivating a high-trust climate. The scope encompasses service-sector organizations, with implications for management at all levels, particularly HR specialists and top management tasked with policy formulation.

Introduction, Problem Statement, and Research Hypotheses

Background of study: The indispensable nature of interpersonal trust.

Interpersonal trust is not merely a desirable organizational attribute; it is the fundamental bedrock upon which sustainable team and organizational performance is built. Its positive and long-lasting impact is a critical determinant of whether organizations merely function or truly flourish (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). At its core, employees' trust in their leader catalyzes a cascade of beneficial outcomes, including enhanced communication, superior problem-solving capabilities, the voluntary exertion of discretionary effort, the exhibition of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), heightened organizational commitment, and a significant reduction in employee turnover. These factors collectively represent the very levers of enhanced organizational productivity and competitive resilience (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). A firm that successfully cultivates a climate of trust secures a potent competitive edge, as such a climate is inherently difficult to imitate or replicate by competitors, thus becoming a source of sustainable advantage (Jones & George, 1998). Fairholm (1998) captures this imperative succinctly: "no organization can take place without interpersonal trust and no organizational leader can ignore the powerful element of trust."

The significance of trust has been magnified in the modern organizational landscape, earning sustained attention from researchers due to its "cosmic role" in economic and social activities (McEvily et al., 2003). In environments characterized by increasing uncertainty and complexity, trust evolves from a social nicety to a critical strategic resource and a buffer against risk, providing a foundation for cooperative action where formal controls are insufficient (Barney & Hansen, 1994). As social beings, humans are intrinsically driven to establish relationships—be they familial, romantic, civic, educational, or professional. The quality and stability of every one of these relationships, including the pivotal dynamic between employees and their managers, are profoundly mediated by the presence or absence of trust (De Furia, 1996). However, this vital resource is remarkably fragile. As Robbins (1999)

observed, trust is arduous and time-consuming to build, can be shattered in an instant, and is exceedingly difficult to rebuild once broken. This delicate nature mandates that management devote continuous and deliberate attention to nurturing and maintaining trust within their organizations (Nico, 2002).

The contemporary shift from rigid hierarchical structures towards more fluid lateral relationships, alliances, and networks further elevates the necessity of trust. The effective implementation of these new organizational forms, which rely on collaboration beyond traditional authority lines, demands a high degree of mutual reliance and confidence among parties (Creed & Miles, 1996). Within teams, a climate of trust among members is a prerequisite for effective team processes, fostering open dialogue, risk-taking in sharing ideas, and cohesive action (Griffin & Hauser, 1996). For the individual employee, trust in leadership yields a powerful portfolio of outcomes: heightened commitment to the organization, greater acceptance of authority decisions, authentic information sharing, enhanced leader-member exchange (LMX), increased loyalty, and a stronger intention to remain with the organization (Katinka & Gerhard, 2003).

The development of this crucial trust is heavily influenced by relational factors. Subordinates' perceptions that their managers are trustworthy are fundamentally shaped by the fairness, equity, dignity, and respect inherent in their day-to-day treatment (Dolan & Garcia, 2002). Consequently, a substantial body of literature champions trust as a desirable organizational attribute, prompting many firms to actively strive to establish environments of mutual trust (Gambetta, 1988; McKnight et al., 1998). Trust is often considered the cornerstone of prosperous organizations, as it underpins the harmonious relationships essential for collective achievement (Lane, 1998). By fostering an environment of openness, trust directly enhances the quality and quantity of information exchange and improves decision-making processes (Tyler, 1998; Bartolme, 1989; Mishra & Morrissey, 1990). This, in turn, enhances management effectiveness through greater employee involvement, which itself is born from the positive interaction of trust between management and staff (Karen & Stewart, 2007). Effective employee participation in decision-making, a key driver of innovation and commitment, is itself contingent upon a foundation of mutual trust (Wilsey, 1995).

The construct of trust is complex and multifaceted. McAllister (1995) offers a comprehensive definition of interpersonal trust as "the extent to which a person is confident in and willing to act on the basis of the words, actions and decisions of others." However, building and sustaining this confidence is a formidable challenge. Individual, organizational, and societal forces often act as barriers to trust development, requiring deliberate leadership to overcome them (Fairholm & Fairholm, 1999). Accurate and honest communication from leaders is non-negotiable for fostering employee commitment to organizational norms and for developing trust within groups. Trusting others invariably involves an element of risk (Luke, 1998), and the dynamics of trust can be paradoxical; for instance, those who extend trust from a humanistic perspective may sometimes be perceived by the recipients as less

capable or easily deceived (Fairholm & Fairholm, 1999). Ultimately, the actions of those in authority set the tone for the entire organization; the internal climate is a direct reflection of their cumulative behaviors (Fairholm & Fairholm, 1999).

The empirical benefits of trust are compelling and well-documented. Research consistently shows that high-trust environments diminish dysfunctional conflict, enhance commitment, promote cooperation, and extend the longevity of business relationships (Andaleeb & Charless, 1996). The type of psychological contract in place—transactional versus relational (Rousseau, 1995)—also interacts with trust, with authentic trust thriving primarily within relational contracts that go beyond mere economic exchange. The business case is stark: a Watson Wyatt (2000) survey found that companies with high levels of trust delivered a total return to shareholders three times greater than those with low trust. Furthermore, organizations rich in internal trust demonstrate greater innovativeness and adaptability compared to their low-trust counterparts (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2000). In essence, mutual trust among employees constitutes a vital form of social capital, fostering productive human associations that are invaluable to organizational health and performance (Cohen & Prusak, 2000).

Problem identification: Mapping the antecedents and consequences of managerial trust.

While the importance of trust is universally acknowledged, a precise understanding of its key drivers (predictors) and its most impactful results (outcomes) in the specific context of trust in managers remains an area requiring further integrated investigation. Prior research has provided valuable but often fragmented insights.

On the antecedent side, leadership style is a predominant factor. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been strongly implicated as a significant predictor of trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). While some studies, like that of Podsakoff et al., have presented mixed results, the broader consensus suggests that the core attributes of transformational leadership—such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration—positively influence employees' trust in their leaders (Butler et al., 1999). Beyond leadership, organizational systems and perceptions play a crucial role. Evidence strongly indicates that **Procedural Justice** (the fairness of processes) and **Perceived Organizational Support** (POS—the belief that the organization values and cares for the employee) are powerful determinants of a high-trust climate (Connell et al., 2003). An integrated model simultaneously examining these three key predictors—Transformational Leadership, Procedural Justice, and POS—in relation to trust in managers is necessary to assess their relative importance and confirm their combined effect.

On the outcome side, the demands of the global competitive landscape have made **Continuous Improvement (CI)**—the organization-wide process of sustained, incremental innovation—a strategic imperative. CI directly links higher quality to lower cost and increased market share (Deming, 1986). Its success, however, is

critically dependent on the voluntary, extra-role efforts of employees, particularly those on the front lines (Lee, 2004; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Such discretionary behaviors are closely aligned with Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and employees often hesitate to engage in them if they are perceived as falling outside formal job duties (Morrison, 1997). This is where trust, as a facilitator of social exchange (Blau, 1964), becomes pivotal. Trust may motivate employees to go "above and beyond" their contractual obligations. However, Lee (2004) posits that trust alone may be insufficient and that **Organizational Identification (OI)**—"the perception of oneness with, or belongingness to the organization" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989)—may act as a key moderator or even a direct outcome that subsequently drives CI efforts. The direct relationship between trust in managers and these two critical outcomes (OI and CI) requires clearer empirical validation.

This research gap was explicitly highlighted by Connell et al. (2003), who directed future scholars to "explore some other determinants and consequences which may help in the development of harmonious and trustworthy relationships between managers and non-managers." This study directly addresses that call. The core problem it tackles is the need for a comprehensive, empirically tested model that clarifies: (1) to what extent Procedural Justice, Perceived Organizational Support, and Transformational Leadership collectively contribute to the development of trust in managers, and (2) whether this accrued trust reliably leads to the vital organizational outcomes of Continuous Improvement efforts and strengthened Organizational Identification.

Statement of the study/ Research problem.

To address the identified gap, this research is guided by the following overarching questions:

1. **Predictors/Antecedents:** What are the significant predictors of Trust in Managers? Specifically, do Transformational Leadership (TL), Procedural Justice (PJ), and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) have a significant positive relationship with Trust in Managers?
2. **Outcomes/Consequences:** Does Trust in Managers lead to significant positive outcomes? Specifically, does it result in (a) increased Continuous Improvement (CI) efforts and (b) stronger Organizational Identification (OI) among employees?

Objectives of the study.

Derived from the research problem, the specific objectives of this study are:

1. To empirically investigate and understand the nature of the relationships between three key independent variables—Procedural Justice (PJ), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), and Transformational Leadership (TL)—and the dependent variable, Trust in Managers.
2. To determine whether Trust in Managers serves as a significant antecedent to two critical outcome variables: employees' Continuous Improvement (CI) efforts and their level of Organizational Identification (OI).

Rationale and significance of the study.

The rationale for this study is rooted in the paramount importance of human

capital as the ultimate driver of organizational development, prosperity, and competitive advantage. Employees possess the power to elevate or diminish an organization's standing. In today's hyper-competitive global marketplace, organizations increasingly depend on the extra-role, discretionary behaviors of their employees—those actions that go beyond formal job descriptions—to innovate, adapt, and excel.

Trust has been extensively dissected in organizational literature and is consistently affirmed as a critical ingredient for performance. A robust correlation exists between interpersonal trust, particularly between subordinates and managers, and enhanced organizational outcomes. The practical significance of this research lies in its potential to provide managers and leaders with an evidence-based roadmap. By identifying and quantifying the key levers (TL, PJ, POS) that predict trust, the study empowers leaders with actionable knowledge. Understanding that cultivating trust is not an abstract endeavor but one achievable through specific, measurable behaviors and fair systems is a powerful managerial insight. When leaders successfully foster trust, they unlock a cascade of benefits, including the very outcomes this study measures: employees who deeply identify with the organization and proactively engage in continuous improvement. Thus, this research translates the abstract concept of trust into a manageable leadership strategy for achieving superior performance.

Scope of the study.

Trust remains a topic of intense and general interest across all fields of management. Its relevance spans lower, middle, and upper levels of management. While the empirical data for this study was collected specifically from service-sector organizations (Banking, Higher Education, Telecom, and Health), the findings, within acknowledged limitations, offer insights that can be cautiously generalized to a wider managerial population. The research is designed to be particularly salient for service organizations but carries implications for all organizational types. It provides actionable implications for top management and Human Resource specialists, offering guidance on how to structure policies, leadership development, and procedural systems to foster and maintain trust within the critical subordinate-manager relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trust

Trust is a multidimensional phenomenon central to organizational relationships. Mayer et al. (1995) define it as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectations that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party”. It can be rationality or emotion-based (Erden & Ozen, 2003; Alam & Khan, 2025), with literature distinguishing between cognitive (rational) and affective (emotional) trust (McAlister, 1995). The development of cognitive trust often precedes the deeper, affective-based trust

(McAlister, 1995).

The performance of a team is highly dependent on mutual trust. Attitudinal commitment has a positive association with intra-team trust, while continuous commitment shows a negative association (McAlister, 1995). Trust also positively relates to team satisfaction (Costa, 2003; Arooj, Iqbal, & Khan, 2025). Employee vulnerability underscores the importance of trust, which encourages extra-role behaviors beyond contractual obligations (Sharkie, 2009; Aurangzeb et al., 2024). In specific functions like accounting, honest communication fostered by trust enhances productivity and comfort (Smith, 2005). In contemporary studies, Schilke et al. (2021) emphasize trust's role as a dynamic capability in complex social relations.

Organizational Identification

Organizational Identification (OI) is defined as "the perception of oneness with, or belongingness to the organization" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), or "the degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization" (Dutton et al., 1994). Rooted in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Beenish et al., 2025), OI is associated with organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), cooperation, and commitment (Abrams et al., 1998).

OI not only has a direct relationship with continuous improvement efforts but also positively moderates the trust-continuous improvement relationship (Lee, 2004). Trust alone may be insufficient to motivate cooperative behaviors; other contextual factors are influential (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Lee, 2004). Employees with high OI internalize organizational goals and seek a profound connection with their organization (Lee, 2004; Bhutto, Uddin, & Hussain, 2025). Recent research by Samad et al. (2019) confirms OI as a critical mediator between leadership and discretionary performance.

Procedural Justice

Procedural Justice (PJ) concerns the fairness of the processes used to determine outcomes (Alexander & Ruderman, 1987; Folger & Konovsky, 1989). When employees perceive fair application of policies (e.g., performance appraisals), it signifies high trust in management (Korsgaard et al., 1995; McCauley & Kuhnert, 1992).

PJ strongly relates to OCB and organizational commitment. The norm of reciprocity suggests that fair treatment from managers motivates employees to reciprocate with extra-role efforts (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; Alexander & Ruderman, 1987). Colquitt et al. (2013), in their meta-analytic update, reinforce that PJ is a more potent predictor of trust and system-referenced outcomes than distributive justice, especially in non-Western contexts.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is "the extent to which employees perceive that they are valued by their organization and that the organization cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1990). POS is a strong predictor of trust in management (Tan & Tan, 2000; Haq & Khan, 2024) and is positively linked to

affective commitment while negatively related to turnover intentions (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Wayne et al., 1997).

According to social exchange theory, POS creates a reciprocal obligation, leading to favorable employee attitudes and behaviors (Wayne et al., 1997). A meta-analysis by Kurtessis et al. (2017) consolidates evidence that POS is a foundational construct influencing a wide range of work outcomes, including trust and performance (Imran, Khan, & Zaidi, 2024; Kanwal & Tasleem, 2025).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational Leadership (TL) involves motivating followers to exceed expectations by emphasizing collective goals and higher-order needs (Bass, 1985). Dirks and Ferrin's (2002) meta-analysis confirms TL as a significant antecedent of trust. Bass and Avolio (1997) describe its practices: Attributed Charisma, Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration.

TL transforms followers' values and fosters a shared vision within a climate of trust (Bass, 1985). It is positively linked to empowerment, team effectiveness, satisfaction, and cooperative behaviors (Ozaralli, 2002; Bass & Avolio, 1993). Modern research by Banks et al. (2016) highlights the ethical component of TL as vital for sustaining trust, distinguishing it from purely charismatic leadership.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous Improvement (CI) is "an organization-wide process focused on sustained incremental innovation" (Bessant & Caffyn, 1997), essential for Total Quality Management (TQM) and often reliant on employee empowerment (Gatchalian, 1997).

Successful CI depends on voluntary, extra-role employee efforts, behaviors akin to OCB (Morrison, 1997; Lee, 2004). Trust facilitates the social exchange that motivates these discretionary efforts (Blau, 1964). However, Lee (2004) argues that trust alone may not suffice and that OI is a crucial moderator (Iqbal, Shah, & Abid, 2025; Kayani et al., 2023). Contemporary studies link trust and psychological safety—a climate where employees feel safe to take interpersonal risks—to proactive improvement behaviors (Parker et al., 2010; Newman et al., 2014; Khan & Khan, 2020).

Transformational leadership is significantly associated with organizational outcomes, including in non-business settings like education (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Koh et al., 1995). Its dimensions—Charisma, Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, and Inspiration—are key (Bass, 1995). TL also correlates with emotional intelligence, which predicts behaviors like Individualized Consideration and Inspirational Motivation (Barling et al., 2000; Goleman, 1998).

The relationship between TL and OCB is mediated by empowerment and trust (Bartram & Casimir, 2006). TL enhances affective commitment and emotional attachment to organizational goals (Barling et al., 1996; Arnold et al., 2001).

Synthesis of Relationships

Perceived Organizational Support is significantly related to affective

commitment and OCB (Liu, 2008; Shabbir et al., 2021). The social exchange framework explains that fair treatment and valued contributions foster POS, leading to reciprocal employee commitment and citizenship (Wayne et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 2001). POS is linked to higher job performance, OCB, and reduced turnover (Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Loi et al., 2006). Supervisor integrity is a key predictor of trust (Ristig, 2009), and POS strengthens affective attachment and performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Procedural Justice theory details how decision-making procedures affect stakeholders. Leventhal's (1980) principles—consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality—promote fairness perceptions. PJ is linked to trust as it demonstrates leader respect and fairness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Shah et al., 2025). Factors like equity sensitivity influence PJ perceptions, mediated by organizational trust (Kickul et al., 2005; Shah, Ali, & Khan, 2025). Fair procedures can mitigate dissatisfaction even when outcomes are unfavorable (Lind & Tyler, 1988) and are crucial in domains like data privacy (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999).

Trust in management acts as a social lubricant, reducing transaction costs and fostering harmony (Creed & Miles, 1996; Sheikh, Akhtar, & Hussain, 2022). It is influenced by employee involvement, POS, TL, and met expectations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Shehzad, Khan, & Khan, 2024). Past positive experiences and the expectation of future interactions build trust and cooperation (Buskens, 1999; Taqi, Mohsin, & Khan, 2022). Trust creates a reinforcing cycle ("trust begets trust") and can reduce the need for costly monitoring (Bijlsma & Bunt, 2003), though some argue control and trust jointly promote cooperation (Das & Teng, 1998).

Determinants of managerial trust include fair performance evaluation, supportiveness, openness to ideas, and collaborative problem-solving (Bijlsma & Bunt, 2003). Consequences include cooperative relationships, open communication, effective decision-making, and enhanced crisis capability (Tyler, 1998; Mishra & Morrissey, 1990). Empowerment, communication, and PJ are key trust antecedents (Tzafrir et al., 2003).

From a Resource-Based View, trust is an intangible resource for competitive advantage (Barney, 1986, 1994). HRM practices that promote open communication and justice can enhance trust (Gould-Williams, 2003). Empowerment and participation increase trust in managers (Moye & Henkin, 2005; Cook & Wall, 1980). Conversely, organizational politics can erode trust and cooperation (Poon, 2006; Uddin, Hussain, & Ali, 2025).

Continuous Improvement drives innovation and competitive advantage (Anderson et al., 1994). It is a proactive, employee-driven activity central to TQM, requiring empowerment for effective problem-solving (Gatchalian, 1997; Bessant & Caffyn, 1997; Rao et al., 2025). Successful CI involves customer focus, management commitment, strategic deployment, process improvement, employee empowerment, long-term orientation, data-driven decisions, market responsiveness, continuous learning, and partnerships (Chang, 1995).

Management commitment, empowerment, rewards, and feedback encourage

environmental performance (Govindarajulu & Daily, 2004). A CI culture fosters innovation, especially in SMEs (McAdam et al., 2000). Core CI principles are customer orientation, process orientation, and continuous improvement of both products and processes (Hill & Wilkinson, 1995). TQM practices strengthen these cultural elements, and their decline jeopardizes long-term performance (Gore Jr., 1999; Longenecker & Scazzero, 1996).

Organizational Identification, a form of social identification, leads individuals to act in congruence with organizational identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Lee, 2004). It correlates with extra-role behaviors, cooperation, and retention (Abrams et al., 1998). Fair procedures signal respect, fostering trust, commitment, and identification (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Trust in benevolent authorities increases work motivation (Tyler, 1999). High OI benefits both organizational objectives (performance, retention) and personal objectives (motivation, satisfaction) (Dick et al., 2005; Chan, 2005).

Supportive organizational practices that help balance work and family reduce stress and turnover (Gutek et al., 1988; Glass & Estes, 1996). Employees identify more strongly with organizations having distinctive, positive attributes, which boosts self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hassan et al., 2025). High OI leads to greater commitment and lower turnover due to the "psychic loss" of leaving (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Knippenberg & Schie, 2000)

Research Model and Hypotheses
Based on the literature, the proposed research model positions Transformational Leadership, Procedural Justice, and Perceived Organizational Support as independent variables predicting the dependent variable, Trust in Managers. Trust, in turn, leads to the outcomes of Organizational Identification and Continuous Improvement efforts.

H1: Procedural justice has a positive relation with trust in management.

H2: Perceived organizational support (POS) has a positive significant relation with trust in management.

H3: Transformational leadership has a positive significant relation with trust in management.

H4: When employees trust in their management, they make efforts for continuous improvement.

H5: When employees trust in their management, they identify themselves with the organization.

These hypotheses are integrated into the following research model, which visually represents the proposed relationships between the constructs:

Research Model

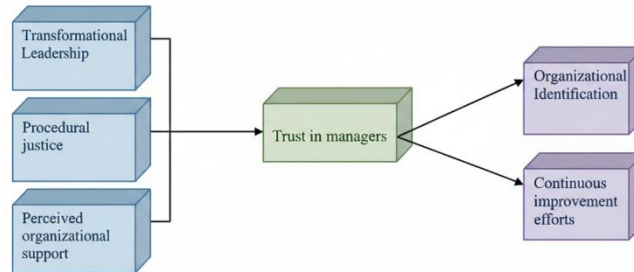


Figure 1: Schematic Diagram of the Theoretical Framework

This model posits that three key organizational and leadership factors (TL, PJ, POS) are significant antecedents of trust in managers. This trust, once established, is then hypothesized to be a significant driver of two critical outcomes: a deeper psychological bond with the organization (OI) and a behavioral manifestation of extra-role contribution (CI efforts). The subsequent chapters will detail the literature supporting these links, the methodology for testing them, and the analysis of the results.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect quantitative data for hypothesis testing. The target population consisted of employees working in service-sector organizations within Pakistan, a context where interpersonal dynamics and trust are critical to performance. To ensure diversity and enhance the generalizability of findings within the sector, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select organizations from four key industries: Banking, Higher Education, Telecom, and Health. This selection provided a mix of public and private sector entities, capturing a range of organizational cultures and managerial practices.

A total of 400 survey questionnaires were distributed personally to potential respondents across eight different organizations. The decision to distribute questionnaires in person was strategic, aimed at achieving a higher response rate and allowing for brief verbal explanations to clarify the purpose of the study, thereby reducing ambiguity. Each questionnaire packet included a cover letter (Appendix I) that explained the academic purpose of the research, assured respondents of complete confidentiality and anonymity, and emphasized that participation was voluntary.

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, all were returned—a 100% return rate facilitated by the personal distribution method. However, upon screening for

completeness and response quality, 118 questionnaires were excluded from the final analysis. These were either substantially incomplete or exhibited patterns of careless rating (e.g., straight-line responses). Consequently, the final usable sample for analysis comprised 282 complete responses, yielding a valid response rate of 70.5%.

The demographic profile of the final sample (N=282) is as follows:

- **Gender:** 56% male, 44% female.
- **Position:** 45% held management positions, 55% were in non-management roles.
- **Age:** Respondents ranged from 25 to 48 years old.
- **Tenure:** 58% had organizational tenure between six months and ten years, while 42% had been employed for more than ten years.
- **Education:** The highest concentration of respondents (227 individuals) held a Master's degree, with the overall qualification range spanning from Intermediate to PhD.

This sample profile indicates a representation of experienced, educated employees from various levels within service organizations, which is appropriate for a study investigating perceptions of management, procedures, and organizational support.

Procedure

The data collection procedure was designed to maximize data integrity and ethical standards. Following the personal distribution of questionnaires, respondents were given a period of one to two weeks to complete the survey at their convenience. The attached cover letter was instrumental in establishing the study's credibility, stating the research objectives and guaranteeing that no individual or organizational data would be disclosed in any report. Participation was strictly voluntary, and no incentives, monetary or otherwise, were offered to respondents, ensuring that motivation to participate was not biased by external rewards.

Completed questionnaires were collected in sealed envelopes or directly by the researcher to further reinforce the assurance of confidentiality. This process helped mitigate social desirability bias, encouraging more honest responses regarding perceptions of leadership, justice, and trust.

Questionnaire Measures

All constructs in the proposed research model were measured using established, previously validated scales from the organizational behavior literature. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a standard five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree." The reliability of each scale for the current study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency.

The specific measures are detailed below:

Trust in Managers.

This dependent variable was measured using a four-item scale adapted from the seminal work of Cook and Wall (1980). This scale assesses the employee's faith in the integrity and fairness of management. An example item is: "I feel quite confident

that my manager will always try to treat me fairly.” The original scale demonstrated a reliability of 0.70. For the current study, the Cronbach’s alpha was a robust 0.80.

Organizational Identification (OI).

The sense of oneness with the organization was measured using a four-item scale. Items were adopted from the works of Cook and Wall (1980) and Mael and Ashforth (1992), as cited by Lee (2004). The original scale reliability was 0.82. In this study, the scale showed excellent reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.94.

Continuous Improvement (CI) Efforts.

This outcome variable was measured using a four-item scale developed by Peccei and Rosenthal (1997), which captures proactive, discretionary behaviors aimed at enhancing work processes and quality. The original scale had a reliability of 0.77. The scale proved to be highly reliable in this context, with an alpha of 0.95.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS).

The independent variable POS was measured using a three-item scale. These items were extracted from the short version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986). The original SPOS is renowned for its high reliability. The short version used here maintained very high internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.95 for the current study.

Procedural Justice (PJ).

This independent variable was measured using a six-item scale adopted from the instrument developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993). This scale assesses perceptions of fairness in organizational procedures (e.g., consistency, bias suppression, opportunity for appeal). The original scale reliability was 0.75. In this study, the scale demonstrated exceptional reliability with an alpha of 0.96.

Transformational Leadership (TL).

This independent variable was measured using a twenty-item scale representing a short version of the widely recognized Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5X (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The MLQ measures key dimensions of transformational leadership, including Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. The original scale’s reliability is well-established. For this study, the adapted short version showed good reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.83.

Data Analysis Strategy

The primary analytical technique employed to test the hypothesized relationships and the overall research model was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), conducted using AMOS version 16 software. SEM is a powerful multivariate technique that allows for the simultaneous testing of all relationships in the model, including both the measurement model (linking items to constructs) and the structural model (linking constructs to each other). This provides a comprehensive assessment of how well the proposed theoretical framework fits the observed data.

The analysis proceeded in two key stages:

1. **Assessment of Model Fit:** Before interpreting the path coefficients, the overall fit

of the hypothesized structural model to the data was evaluated using multiple fit indices. While the Chi-square statistic (χ^2) was reported, its sensitivity to sample size was acknowledged. Therefore, the model's acceptability was based on a combination of criteria, including the significance of paths and the interpretability of the structural relationships within the theoretical context.

2. **Hypotheses Testing:** The standardized regression weights (beta coefficients, β) within the SEM output were examined to test each hypothesis. The significance of each path was determined by the critical ratio (C.R., akin to a t-statistic) and its associated p-value. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant, providing evidence to support or reject the hypothesized relationships.

This methodological approach—combining a robust sample from relevant industries, validated measurement instruments with high reliability, and advanced SEM analysis—provided a solid foundation for rigorously testing the proposed predictors and outcomes of trust in managers.

RESULTS

Structural Equation Model (SEM) Analysis

The hypothesized relationships between Transformational Leadership (TL), Procedural Justice (PJ), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Trust in Managers, Organizational Identification (OI), and Continuous Improvement (CI) efforts were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS 16. The full structural model is presented in Figure 4.1, which illustrates the standardized path coefficients between the constructs. The model specifies TL, PJ, and POS as exogenous (independent) variables predicting the endogenous (dependent) variable, Trust in Managers. Trust in Managers, in turn, is modeled as a predictor of the two endogenous outcome variables, OI and CI.

Figure 4.1: Structural Equation Model Results of the Trust in Managers Framework

The model results indicate positive paths from all three predictors to Trust in Managers. Furthermore, strong positive paths are shown from Trust in Managers to both Organizational Identification and Continuous Improvement efforts. The error terms (e1–e6) account for unexplained variance in each latent construct.

Model Fit Indices

Prior to interpreting the path coefficients, the overall fit of the proposed structural model to the observed data was assessed. The chi-square (χ^2) statistic is a common measure of fit, but it is highly sensitive to sample size. The model summary is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Index of Fit for the Structural Model

Fit Statistic	Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value
Chi-Square (χ^2)	850.669	10	0.000

The significant χ^2 value ($p < 0.001$) suggests a discrepancy between the

proposed model and the data. However, given the known sensitivity of χ^2 to sample size (N=282 in this study) and model complexity, this statistic alone is not a definitive indicator of poor fit. The primary focus of the analysis therefore shifts to the evaluation of the specific hypothesized paths and the strength of the relationships within the theoretically grounded model.

Hypotheses Testing Results

The results of the hypotheses testing, based on the regression weights (path coefficients) from the SEM analysis, are summarized in Table 4.3. The table presents the standardized estimates (β), standard errors (S.E.), critical ratios (C.R.), and corresponding p-values for each hypothesized path.

Table 4.3: Hypotheses Testing Based on Regression Weights

Hypothesis	Path (Dependent ← Independent)	Std. Estimate (β)	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Result
H1	Trust ← Procedural Justice (PJ)	0.098	0.032	3.038	.002	Supported
H2	Trust ← Perceived Org. Support (POS)	0.063	0.027	2.341	.019	Supported
H3	Trust ← Transformational Leadership (TL)	0.066	0.009	6.964	<.001	Supported
H4	Organizational Identification (OI) ← Trust	0.771	0.096	8.067	<.001	Supported
H5	Continuous Improvement (CI) ← Trust	0.871	0.097	9.008	<.001	Supported

Note: C.R. = Critical Ratio (approximately equivalent to a t-statistic); p-values in bold (<.001) indicate significance at the 0.001 level.

Analysis of Predictor Paths (H1, H2, H3)

All three hypotheses concerning the antecedents of Trust in Managers were supported by statistically significant path coefficients ($p < .05$).

- **H1: Procedural Justice → Trust.** The path from Procedural Justice to Trust was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = .002$). This indicates that a one-unit increase in perceived procedural justice is associated with a 0.10 standard deviation increase in trust in managers, holding other variables constant. PJ emerged as the strongest predictor among the three antecedents in this model.
- **H2: Perceived Organizational Support → Trust.** The relationship between POS and Trust was also positive and significant ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = .019$). This supports the hypothesis that employees who feel more supported by their organization are more

likely to trust their immediate managers.

- **H3: Transformational Leadership → Trust.** The path from Transformational Leadership to Trust was positive and highly significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < .001$). This confirms that leaders who exhibit transformational behaviors are more likely to be trusted by their subordinates.

Analysis of Outcome Paths (H4, H5)

The hypotheses regarding the outcomes of Trust in Managers were strongly supported, with both path coefficients being large, positive, and highly significant ($p < .001$).

- **H4: Trust → Organizational Identification.** A very strong positive relationship was found between Trust and Organizational Identification ($\beta = 0.77$, $p < .001$). This suggests that a one-unit increase in trust is associated with a substantial 0.77 standard deviation increase in an employee's sense of oneness with the organization.
- **H5: Trust → Continuous Improvement Efforts.** The strongest relationship in the entire model was between Trust and Continuous Improvement efforts ($\beta = 0.87$, $p < .001$). This indicates that trust in managers is a powerful driver of employees' voluntary, discretionary behaviors aimed at incrementally improving work processes and quality.

Summary of Findings

The SEM results provide clear and consistent empirical support for the entire hypothesized research model. **All five proposed hypotheses were accepted.** The analysis reveals that:

1. **Trust in Managers is significantly predicted by** Transformational Leadership, Procedural Justice, and Perceived Organizational Support. While all are significant, Procedural Justice ($\beta=0.10$) shows the strongest standardized effect among the three predictors in this sample.
2. **Trust in Managers is a potent antecedent of critical organizational outcomes.** It has a very strong, direct relationship with both Organizational Identification ($\beta=0.77$) and, even more powerfully, with Continuous Improvement efforts ($\beta=0.87$).

These results confirm the central role of trust as a pivotal mediating variable, translating specific managerial and organizational qualities (TL, PJ, POS) into enhanced employee psychology (OI) and proactive, beneficial work behavior (CI).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide robust empirical support for the proposed integrated model of trust in managers. All five hypotheses were confirmed, offering significant insights into the mechanisms through which managerial trust is built and the powerful consequences it yields. The findings both reinforce and extend existing literature, while also presenting some nuanced contrasts that warrant deeper examination.

Interpreting the Antecedents of Trust

The confirmation of H1, H2, and H3 validates a multi-faceted approach to building trust. Trust is not the product of a single factor but emerges from a

confluence of leadership behavior, systemic fairness, and organizational care.

The finding that Procedural Justice ($\beta = 0.10$) was the strongest predictor in this model offers a critical insight, particularly within the studied context of Pakistani service-sector organizations. This aligns with the foundational work of Tyler and Lind (1992), whose relational model posits that fair procedures communicate respect and value to employees, thereby legitimizing authority and building trust. In environments where formal hierarchies and power distances may be pronounced, as can be the case in many non-Western contexts, the fairness of systems—such as promotions, appraisals, and grievance redress—may be a more tangible and reliable indicator of managerial integrity than charismatic leadership alone. Employees may perceive fair procedures as a more dependable guarantee of equitable treatment than the personal attributes of a leader, which can be variable. This result nuances the findings of Connell et al. (2003), who identified Perceived Organizational Support as the strongest predictor. This divergence highlights the potential contextual and cultural specificity of trust drivers; in certain environments, systemic justice may take precedence over generalized organizational benevolence as the primary foundation for trust in immediate authority figures.

The significant relationship for Transformational Leadership ($\beta = 0.07$) strongly supports the extensive body of literature linking this leadership style to trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders, through idealized influence and inspirational motivation, project a vision that subordinates can believe in, while individualized consideration fosters personal loyalty. This leadership approach reduces the psychological distance between manager and subordinate, creating the conditions for vulnerability-based trust (Mayer et al., 1995) to flourish. The result confirms that how a leader behaves—by inspiring, stimulating, and caring—is a direct input into the trust equation.

Similarly, the support for Perceived Organizational Support ($\beta = 0.06$) confirms the role of social exchange (Blau, 1964). When employees feel the organization values them, they tend to attribute this supportive intent to its agents—their managers (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Tan & Tan, 2000). This creates a "spillover effect" where positive feelings toward the organization bolster trust in its local leadership. This finding directly addresses the call by Connell et al. (2003) for further research on the POS-Trust link, solidifying it as a reliable, albeit in this case slightly less potent, predictor.

Interpreting the Powerful Outcomes of Trust

The exceptionally strong support for H4 and H5 underscores the transformative potential of trust. It acts not just as a social lubricant but as a powerful catalyst for psychological attachment and proactive performance.

The confirmation of H4 (Trust \rightarrow OI, $\beta = 0.77$) offers strong empirical backing for the social identity and relational models. When employees trust their managers, they are more likely to view the organization, which the managers represent, as legitimate and worthy of affiliation (Tyler & Lind, 1992; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Trust reduces "us vs. them" dichotomies, enabling employees to

incorporate organizational identity into their self-concept. This finding is practically vital; it suggests that managers are not just directors of tasks but are the primary architects of their employees' psychological connection to the firm. A trusted manager becomes a bridge that strengthens the employee-organization bond.

The most striking finding of this study is the powerful path supporting H5 (Trust → CI, $\beta = 0.87$). This demonstrates that trust in managers is a direct and potent motivator of discretionary, improvement-oriented behavior. This finding contrasts with Lee's (2004) conclusion that trust alone may not be sufficient and requires the moderating effect of organizational identification. In the present sample, trust appears to be a sufficient condition to propel continuous improvement efforts. This can be explained through the lens of social exchange and psychological safety. When employees trust their manager, they perceive less risk in engaging in extra-role, innovative behaviors. They believe that suggestions will be received fairly, that failed improvements will not be punished, and that their proactive efforts will be recognized (Edmondson, 1999). Trust, therefore, creates a "safe space" for the vulnerability inherent in trying to change and improve processes. The strength of this relationship suggests that for fostering a culture of incremental innovation, building trust may be the single most impactful managerial lever.

Synthesis and Practical Implications

This study successfully integrates isolated strands of research into a coherent pathway: specific, actionable managerial and organizational inputs (TL, PJ, POS) build Trust, which in turn drives two highly desirable outputs: deepened Identification and vigorous Improvement efforts.

The practical implications are clear and actionable for leaders and HR professionals:

1. **Invest in Systemic Fairness:** Organizations must rigorously audit and design HR and operational procedures for consistency, transparency, and voice. Training managers on implementing processes fairly is as crucial as the policies themselves.
2. **Develop Transformational Leadership Capabilities:** Leadership development programs should move beyond transactional skills to cultivate the "Four I's" of transformational leadership. Mentoring and 360-degree feedback can be valuable tools in this development.
3. **Cultivate a Culture of Support:** Policies and actions that demonstrate care for employee well-being—from equitable benefits to supportive management during personal crises—pay dividends by building the POS that underpins trust.
4. **Recognize Trust as a Performance Driver:** Managers must be made aware that trust-building is not a "soft" HR issue but a core strategic competency. The high path coefficients to OI and CI provide a compelling business case: trust translates directly into a more committed and innovatively engaged workforce.

In conclusion, this research confirms that trust in managers is a pivotal linchpin in the organizational machinery. It is systematically built through just procedures, supportive environments, and inspirational leadership. Once established, it unlocks profound employee resources: a powerful sense of belonging and a

relentless drive to make things better. In an era demanding agility and continuous adaptation, these are not optional outcomes but essential ingredients for sustainable success.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to demystify the architecture of interpersonal trust within the manager-subordinate relationship, seeking to identify its key building blocks and its most significant organizational yields. In an era defined by volatility, rapid change, and intense competition, the findings offer both a reaffirmation and a refinement of trust's central role as a critical strategic asset.

The study conclusively demonstrates that trust in managers is not an enigmatic or amorphous quality, but rather a construct that can be systematically cultivated through specific, actionable inputs. The empirical results validate a clear pathway: the adoption of Transformational Leadership behaviors, the unwavering application of Procedural Justice, and the demonstration of Perceived Organizational Support are statistically significant and positive predictors of subordinate trust. Among these, the prominence of procedural justice as the strongest predictor in this specific context offers a vital lesson—that in the eyes of employees, the fairness of the system often speaks louder than charismatic appeals or generalized support. It is the consistent, unbiased application of rules that most robustly assures employees of managerial integrity and goodwill.

Furthermore, the research powerfully confirms that this cultivated trust is far from an end in itself; it is the catalyst for two profoundly important organizational outcomes. Trust acts as the essential psychological bridge that fosters deep Organizational Identification, transforming employees from hired labor into psychologically invested members who see their own fate as intertwined with that of the organization. Even more significantly, trust proves to be a direct and potent driver of Continuous Improvement efforts. Contrary to some prior suggestions that trust alone may be insufficient, this study finds it to be a overwhelmingly powerful motivator for the discretionary, proactive, and innovative behaviors that fuel incremental innovation and operational excellence. The strength of this relationship ($\beta = 0.87$) underscores that when employees trust their leaders, they feel psychologically safe to take the risks inherent in suggesting and implementing improvements.

Therefore, the ultimate conclusion of this research is that building and maintaining trust is a fundamental managerial imperative with direct performance implications. It is a linchpin that connects leadership ethics and organizational systems to employee psychology and proactive behavior. For practitioners, the message is unambiguous: investments in fair processes, supportive cultures, and transformational leadership development are not merely ethical choices but strategic ones. They are investments in creating a workforce that is not only loyal but also relentlessly engaged in making the organization better. For scholars, this study provides an integrated, empirically validated model that can serve as a foundation

for further exploration in diverse cultural and industrial settings, perhaps investigating moderators like national culture or industry type, or incorporating additional outcomes such as innovation radicality or team resilience.

In sum, this research reinforces that in the complex human ecosystem of an organization, trust is the vital nutrient. It is carefully grown through just systems, supportive environments, and inspirational leadership, and it, in turn, nourishes the roots of belonging and the fruits of ceaseless improvement essential for long-term vitality and success.

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